

Changing Attitudes: The Male Homoerotic Tradition in Late Imperial China through Present Day

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With an estimated 60 million gays, lesbians and bisexuals in mainland China, the history of homoeroticism in Chinese history becomes increasingly important as efforts to increase awareness and equality spring up throughout the country. As a major aspect of self-identity, many members of queer communities see their place in the collective historical tradition as essential to understanding where they fit within the contemporary picture. For men and women with homoerotic desires in China, this remains true as well. History helps define perceptions of self and others by revealing the continuously changing features of the group in question. Questions of “who am I?” and “what is my role in the history of my identity group” provides individuals with the context for their own experiences. In the history of homoeroticism, the dramatic changes in cultural perceptions may help contemporary gays, lesbians and bisexuals understand how and why things have evolved which may help shape the future efforts for sexual equality.

Prior to the introduction of western influences, male homoeroticism constituted part of the understanding of sexuality in China. This understanding, neither accepting nor disapproving, simply incorporated all of the forms of sexuality understood to naturally occur within the context of a normal life cycle. Being a form of ‘normal’ sexuality, however, does not have any negative or positive connotations. Although some have tried to portray a widely accepted and tolerated ‘homosexual tradition,’ this idealistic view of history does not take into consideration the role of social hierarchy and masculinity as limiting factors in the toleration of homoerotic sexual activity.<sup>1</sup> For example, female homoeroticism, although important, appears significantly less frequently in historical documents. Since men dominated the literate population, scholars can account for the lack of documentation of female homoeroticism as part of the lack of documentation of female experience in general which resulted

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<sup>1</sup> For an example, see Brett Hinsch, *Passion of the Cut Sleeve: The Male Homosexual Tradition in China*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

from the gender bias in education. Without women to write their own stories or the stories of their peers, society often hides their voices. Furthermore, the transgender experience challenged both social hierarchy and masculinity. The levels of acceptance and tolerance, or even understanding, for female homoeroticism or transgender desire do not fall within the broad category of a 'homosexual tradition.'<sup>2</sup> The social hierarchy also played a significant role in whether society accepted different forms of male homoeroticism which prevents scholars from specifying a wide tolerated 'male homosexual tradition.'

While a written account of a homoerotic tradition exists through the end of the imperial age, this account implies that Chinese society accepted some forms of homoeroticism as part of male sexuality, but it does not imply widespread cultural acceptance of a 'homosexual' identity. The transition from this semi-tolerance of the early and middle imperial ages to the outright persecution in the Maoist China began with the introduction of foreign influences in the late imperial age. The Qing rape laws opened the metaphorical door to Western discourse that ultimately introduced concepts such as the hetero-homo dichotomy, Western medical definitions of perversions and the Judeo-Christian ideology of homosexuality as a sin. The late Qing period and the Republican era saw a growth of Chinese discussion of these topics as well as a sudden rise in cultural freedom, but these ideas ultimately led to the persecution of men and women who had sexual desires for members of the same sex under the Maoist government during the twentieth century. Furthermore, this evolution of the history of homoeroticism has led to a silencing of contemporary men and women with homoerotic desires. Due to this long and convoluted history of homoeroticism, current activists working in China for sexual equality should tailor their efforts to the Chinese experience and tradition rather than simply following in the footsteps of earlier Western gay liberation movements. These alterations should include the usage of alternative

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<sup>2</sup> As a consequence, this thesis will primarily focus on the male homoerotic tradition with some consideration of the female perspective in the contemporary age. The question of transgender or of intersexual identity in China also will not appear here since it deserves significantly more attention than possible within the context of this work.

language (both in Chinese and in English), the development of different political strategies and the adoption of Chinese-specific processes for the development of a gay, lesbian or bisexual (LGB) lifestyle.

Before considering the history of homoeroticism in China, insight into fundamental conceptualizations in Chinese philosophy and into some basic problems with translations provides the context in Chinese culture. The differences between American and Chinese understandings of sexuality often make it difficult for Western historians and queer theorists to understand the historical evolution of the Chinese view on same-sex eroticism. For example, the Chinese language lacked a direct equivalent for homosexual, homosexuality, heterosexuality and many other similar terminologies until nineteenth century. Actually, until the introduction by Western scholars of their studies of sexuality, the Chinese language did not even have an independent, non-contextual word for sex. Words for intercourse appeared in terms of marital relations rather than to describe a physical action between two distinct individuals.<sup>3</sup> The words that most resemble a Western view of sexuality or sex mostly referred to carnal pleasure, passions or sentiments. Scholars later reappropriated the term *xing* (性) for translations of Western discourse to mean sex rather than what it originally meant, the nature of an object. Prior to the re-construction of the term *xing* (性), contemporary scholar, Tze-Lan D. Sang, argues that the Confucian use of *xing* to denote “human nature” consisted of “men’s moral capacities and tendencies *beyond* the desire for food and sex,” which may be seen as not only tangential to our understanding of sexuality, but possibly opposite of it.<sup>4</sup>

During the Republican era, the change in definition of *xing* allowed for the introduction of the idea of *tongxing lian'ai*, or same-sex love, as a translation of homosexuality. Sang notes that *tongxing lian'ai* embraces the idea of homosexuality as a romantic notion over other possible translations such as

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<sup>3</sup> Chou Wah-shan, *Tongzhi: Politics of Same Sex Eroticism in Chinese Societies*, (New York: Haworth Press, 2000), 13.

<sup>4</sup> Tze-Lan D. Sang, *The Emerging Lesbian: Female Same-Sex Desire in Modern China*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 103.

*tongxing xingyu* or *tongxing xingjiao* which respectively mean same-sex sexual desire and same-sex sexual intercourse. As a result, contemporary scholarship often purposefully avoids using many of these words for fear of missing important underlying assumptions. For example, words such as 'gay,' 'homosexual,' *tongxinglian*, or *tongzhi* (a modern word for LGB Chinese individuals), have great cultural weight which can be misunderstood or misleading in the wrong context. Homoerotic, same-sex desire, same-sex love and other time-neutral, culture-neutral terminology better encompasses the literal experiences of individuals throughout history.<sup>5</sup>

Western society defines homosexuality as the behavior of a homosexual. Homosexual, as a noun, identifies those that contrast with the identity of heterosexuals. These terms imply much more than simply erotic attraction or desire for people of the same or opposite sex. In Western culture, it is not unusual for the average person to believe he or she represents multiple categories of identification. For example, consider a female, Asian-American and Italian-American from the south, identified as heterosexual, as well as numerous relational identity characteristics such as her role as a daughter or sister. This person's core identity fluctuates based upon the context being discussed but one thing remains consistent- she will almost always identify as a heterosexual, multiethnic female. Her gender, ethnicity and sexuality are major categories of identity that are rarely ignored. Although there are great amounts of scholarship regarding the development of identity in America that question how and why Americans develop their self-image in these ways, for the goal of this thesis, there is a more significant point: American and Chinese concepts of sexuality differ radically which requires a brief explanation of how the Chinese form their self-identity in order to understand the terminology used.

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<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, for the sake of clarity, these terminologies often require genderizing adjectives, such as adding male or female before them to better identify the situation or scenario. While this assumes contemporary categories of gender (such as the female-male binary), deconstructing language too far prevents the greater concepts from emerging in scholarship.

The formation of identity in China depends on the relational aspects of an individual rather than their personal experience. Chinese religion, philosophy and cultural conceptualizations emphasize the role of a person within his or her greater social context. This results in very important distinctions for queer theorists and historians. By using relational identity formation, the Chinese see a man as first a son, father, husband or brother before seeing him as an individual male with individualized desires, needs or requirements. Unlike in the description of the woman's identity above, if she were Chinese, her primary identity as a daughter, sister and future mother imply her gender while emphasizing on her obligations within the family-kinship network. Chinese culture sees my individual desires as significantly inferior to the desires of the family which leads to an absence of sexual identity. As the dominate philosophy, Confucianism supports this emphasis on kinship-networks and filial piety. Confucian culture depends on the Five Relationships: sovereign-subject, father-son, elder-younger, husband-wife, and friend-friend.<sup>6</sup> The importance of hierarchy in four of the five relationships shows how a person's domination or subjugation in relational roles determines their identity. In *Tongzhi: Politics of Same-sex Eroticism in China*, Chou Wah-shan argues that "the self has little meaning outside these social relationship" which thus changes how individuals see themselves.<sup>7</sup> Within this context, terms like homosexual do not make sense. A person's sexual desires do not define their relationship within a social or familial hierarchy. This also means that they are expected to respect the institution of the family and to respect their parent's wishes to marry and have children.

The following paragraph can be found in a small, but incredibly significant work titled *Da Xue*, or *The Great Learning*, one of the fundamental four books canonized during the Sung dynasty:

When things are thoroughly investigated, knowledge will be extended to the utmost. When knowledge is extended to the utmost, our ideas will be made true. When our ideas are made true, our minds will be rectified. When our minds are rectified, our individual character will be

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<sup>6</sup> Wah-shan, *Tongzhi*, 252.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.

improved. When our individual character is improved, our family will be well ordered. When our families are well ordered, the state will be well governed. When the states are well governed, the whole world will be in peace.<sup>8</sup>

As one of the basic Confucian texts in Chinese philosophy until the popularity of the Wang Yangming School during the Mid-Ming period, the civil service exam required all scholars to memorize and adhere to this work. This view not only sums up Chinese methodology of philosophy, it highlights the importance of the individual in the success of the family and, thus, of the state. It hints at the cultural belief that an individual's proper self-cultivation, or lack thereof, greatly influences things outside of herself or himself. Thus, if a person's character is not 'improved,' the whole family and the whole state suffer as well. While this paragraph clearly did not mean to comment on sexuality in China, it further shows how much emphasis Chinese society places on the proper behavior of a Chinese individual as a member of his or her family in relation to greater society.

The connections between individuals and society, *guanxi*, dominate cultural politics in Chinese society. *Guanxi*, defined by Chou Wah-shan as "commonality of shared identification,"<sup>9</sup> also translates as the concept of the relations between people and the amount of respect each party has for the other. This is a very rough explanation of a very complex concept, but it is useful in this context. For the Chinese, maintaining and strengthening *guanxi* is crucial for one's self-evaluated worth as well as for the success of one's social and political endeavors. The giving of favors and the cycle of reciprocity can strengthen the *guanxi* between individuals.<sup>10</sup> In turn, the loss of *guanxi* can directly correlate to a loss of status in the hierarchical order. The family acts as the "most basic and profound social institution" which leads to the emphasis on filial piety. Individuals, then, want to maintain their place with the family hierarchy, and they respect their roles more stringently. This is also a result of the emphasis on 'saving face' in Chinese society. Just as individuals want to maintain the appropriate *guanxi*, they see their

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<sup>8</sup> Hu Shih, *The Development of the Logical Method in Ancient China* (Shanghai: The Oriental Book Club, 1922), 1.

<sup>9</sup> Wah-Shan, *Tongzhi*, 253.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.

families as units within the social hierarchy that strive to remain in their place. Chinese men and women see it as critical to help keep face for their families, especially for their parents. This has many implications for the Sexuality-Equality Movement<sup>11</sup> in contemporary China. This desire to keep face results in the expectations that all individuals will follow social norms. Those who fail to marry or reproduce risk losing their most cherished personal *guanxi* while also losing face for their families.

Although the Chinese and Western experience contrasted in these ways, these differences do not mean that there lacked an understanding of same-sex desire, love or eroticism. A review of Brett Hinsch's breakthrough work, *Passions of the Cut Sleeve: The Male Homosexual Tradition in China*, provides great background information on the 'Male Homosexual Tradition.' Although Hinsch starts with the poetry of the Zhou period (1122-256 BCE) that celebrated male-male friendship, one of the earliest popular stories about what contemporary scholars see as same-sex eroticism can be found in the *Han Fei Zi*.<sup>12</sup> Some scholars call the story of Duke Ling of Wei (534-493 BCE) the "beginning of the homosexual tradition...."<sup>13</sup> A court official, Mizi Xia, now a "catchword for homosexuality," gained favor (*chong*) with Duke Ling through his dedication to his family and his adherence to Confucian values.<sup>14</sup> Their love grew until one day, Mizi Xia, in the middle of eating a peach, stopped and gave the sweet fruit to the Duke. Duke Ling, and readers of the *Han Fei Zi*, viewed this to be a sign of love and admiration. After this story appeared in the *Han Fei Zi*, the phrase "half-eaten peach" became popular slang to mean love between two men. Hinsch determines that the relationship between Duke Ling and Mizi Xia had a

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<sup>11</sup> This thesis will refer to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, and intersexual (LGBTQQI) rights movement in China as the Sexuality-Equality Movement because terms like lesbian or gay refer to identity categories that do not traditionally exist in Chinese culture, as discussed in this section. While some argue there is a growth in the identification with these identity categories, the social movements that aim to achieve equality between people who have sexual desires for the opposite sex and those who have desires for the same sex also include all of the individuals that still follow traditional Chinese identity concepts, or, in other words, people who are not identifiable as homosexual or heterosexual. Basically, it literally makes sense to call these social movements "LGBTQQIA/LGBT rights movements."

<sup>12</sup> For more information on early Zhou poetry or for further support of the same-sex erotic nature of the Half Eaten Peach story, see, Hinsch, *Cut Sleeve*, 15-34.

<sup>13</sup> Hinsch, *Cut Sleeve*, 20.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

sexual component based on the use of the word *chou*. According to Hinsch, *chong* implies “a hierarchical relationship of regular patronage, or favor, bestowed by a superior on a man who happened to be a sexual partner.”<sup>15</sup> This prime example epitomizes the “tendency to describe homosexual acts in terms of social relationships rather than erotic essence” as discussed above.<sup>16</sup>

The story of the Cut Sleeve also holds a significant place in the male same-sex tradition. It describes the love between Emperor Ai and Dong Xian. During the Han dynasty (206 BCE – 220 CE), Emperor Ai fell in love with a beautiful retainer, Dong Xian. One evening, sleeping together, Emperor Ai woke up and realized that Dong Xian had fallen asleep on Emperor Ai’s robe. Rather than wake him, Emperor Ai cut his sleeve, showing his affection for Dong Xian.<sup>17</sup> Interestingly, the practice of cutting one’s sleeve became a popular fashion statement as proof of loyalty to the emperor and as a signal that the individual wanted to become a favorite. Just as ‘half-eaten peach’ became a designator for male same-sex love, ‘the cut sleeve,’ both literally and linguistically, also symbolized Chinese homoeroticism.

These stories make two very important points. First, both stories end rather tragically. Duke Ling ultimately falls out of love with Mizi Xia and even accuses him of treason. Emperor Ai dies and leaves his empire to Dong Xian. Unfortunately, Dong Xian made many enemies as a favorite which leads to Wang Mang, a usurper, forcing Dong Xian to commit suicide so that the throne can be transferred to a child puppet emperor. Secondly, the historian’s view of these tragic endings implies much more about the tradition than what appears at first. In the *Han Fei Zi*, the author warns against the fickle nature of being a ruler’s lover.

If you gain the ruler’s love, your wisdom will be appreciated and you will enjoy his favor as well but if he hates you... you will be regarded as a criminal and thrust aside... The beast called the dragon can be tamed and trained to the point where you may ride its back. But on the underside

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 45.

of its throat it has scales... and anyone who chances to brush against them is sure to die. The ruler of men too has his bristling scales.<sup>18</sup>

This warning, however, is not a judgment on the same-sex erotic nature of the relationship between Duke Ling and Mizi Xia. Wang Mang's usurpation of the throne, also, does not occur because of his personal disapproval of Dong Xian as a male lover of the emperor. Rather, both reactions result from the disapproval of favoritism, regardless of the gender identity of the favored. Favoritism, however, flourished during many of the early imperial dynasties regardless of political theorists and historians negative opinions. Hinsch frequently mentions the popularity of fashion trends and other actions by court officials with the aim of winning the love of the emperor and then also lists a handful of corresponding examples in which historians disapproved of the "pernicious effects of [the] political opportunism."<sup>19</sup> Chinese historians who wrote shortly after the fall of a dynasty often included a distinct chapter on the favorites of the emperors of the dynasty in works such as *Records of Wei*, *Memoirs of the Historian*, *Records of the Liu Song* and *History of the South*.<sup>20</sup> Although these historians often conclude that "favoritism contributes to the speedy fall of a dynasty," Hinsch argues that these historical writings reveal a "distinct awareness of the male homosexual tradition" rather than a social disapproval or intolerance.<sup>21</sup> This historical focus appears to have continued until the Sui dynasty during which historians spent considerably less time writing about male-court officials as favorites and switched to focus on the role of powerful female favorites such as the famous Yang Guifei .<sup>22</sup> Although male favorites feature less in the histories of this time, the prevalence of literature, poetry and scholarly essays with homoerotic themes implies a continuation of the same-sex erotic tradition.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 47, 59.

<sup>20</sup> For further discussion on these records and their discussion of male favorites see, Hinsch, *Cut Sleeve*, 58-59.

<sup>21</sup> Hinsch, *Cut Sleeve*, 60.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 79.

Hinsch believes that the popularity of works about deeply intense male-male friendships, much like those found during the Zhou dynasty, reveal a cultural support of same-sex relationships. He argues that, although there are nearly no direct references to sexual penetration, the use of phrases such as “passion of the cut-sleeve” or “half eaten peach” imply that the friendships featured in Tang dynasty literature have a sexual or erotic nature. An example of the appearance of homoeroticism in Tang dynasty poetry can be found in the badly damaged work by Bo Xingjian titled the “Poetical Essay on the Supreme Joy of the Sexual Union of Yin and Yang and Heaven and Earth.”<sup>23</sup> In a section on homoeroticism, Bo Xingjian sums up “the high points of the homosexual tradition as known to him” by referencing “cut-sleeve,” and Mizi Xia.<sup>24</sup> Rather than going into detail on the sexual union of the emperors and their favorites in the essay, Hinsch argues that Bo Xingjian believed that the literate and educated reader would be well aware of the imagery he invokes as homoerotic and thus any further explanation or description would be unnecessary.<sup>25</sup> As Hinsch says, “In this way... the most important points are left unsaid.”<sup>26</sup> These unsaid points lead modern historians to believe that the stories of Emperor Ai and Duke Ling of Wei made up part of the popular oral and written tradition.

Importantly, during the Tang and Song dynasties (mid-imperial China), the empire transitioned from homoerotic relationships between men of the same age, though of differing social status, to trans-generational relationships between younger boys and adult men, especially between the elite and boy entertainers. As class structure changed during the Song dynasty, the rising middle class of merchants and officials led to a rise in broad patronage between the wealthy and the lower classes. Prostitution during this time did not limit itself to women of the night.<sup>27</sup> A rise in the number of male prostitutes helped relieve the desires of elite men in the same fashion as female prostitutes. The class differences

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 91-92.

between the customers and the providers allowed for a different social dynamic, and revealed the more important trends in homoeroticism during this time—trends that reinforce Chinese values rather than challenging or contradicting them.

Although historians disapproved of the male lovers because of the negative impact of favoritism, the rise in male prostitution and the lack of protest contribute to a façade of homoerotic acceptance. One of the reasons for such tolerance may stem from the disapproval of romantic love in marriage. The concept of romantic love in marriage did not become popular in China until the twentieth century with the introduction of western literature and discourse. In traditional Chinese society, parents arranged marriages to meet the desires of both families involved. Society treated marital relationship as much more of a contract between larger kinship networks rather than as an emotion connection between individuals. The role of filial piety in marriage prevented individuals from overriding their parent's wishes and marrying for love. To do so would bring shame to the family- it would be a loss of face. As the "bonding of two lineage groups... a husband was free to look elsewhere for romantic love and satisfying sex."<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, Confucians disapproved of romantic love between a husband and a wife because it could lead them to ignore their filial duties.<sup>29</sup> Considering such cultural expectations, it is unsurprising that Chinese culture considered mistresses, concubines and extramarital affairs as part of normal sexuality for men.

Perhaps the close friendships between men allowed for the introduction of sexual experience between men. Hinsch argues that male-male sexual experiences had many advantages over male-female extramarital affairs. For example, he argues that the development of love between two men could fulfill the emotional desires of men in loveless marriages without disrupting the harmony of the

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>29</sup> Wah-Shan, *Tongzhi*, 15.

home.<sup>30</sup> Social climbing, as seen in the stories of the emperor's favorites, also encouraged male-male relationships at all levels of the social hierarchy. Just as the emperor chose favorites, men of high status could give benefits to their male lovers from lower levels of society. For men at lower levels, this was a great advantage for their futures, and thus for their families. Finally, homoerotic experiences did not result in children.<sup>31</sup> Since lineage and family ancestry has always held a central role, Chinese society stigmatized unwed mothers and their children. By avoiding this, men avoided unnecessary drama that could disrupt the harmony of the household.

Another important philosophy, Taosim, had implications unexpected to many Westerners. The lack of the concept of original sin in Chinese philosophy and religion prevented the formation of sexual guilt as seen in Christian societies. By placing such moral weight on sexual acts as sinful, the Judeo-Christian tradition defines homoeroticism as deviant and against the moral good. In Chinese society, however, Taoism, Buddhism and Confuciansim, "support a relaxed and naturalistic attitude towards sex, and have no homophobic hostility towards same-sex eroticism."<sup>32</sup> Taoism, furthermore, can be said to support homoeroticism as a result of the sexual aspects of *chi*.

In Taoism, the exchange or loss of seminal fluids can directly affect one's health. It is believed that excessive loss harms men since they have a limited supply of their own life essence, *chi*. The loss of *chi* during ejaculation and masturbation prompted Taoist scholars to write sophisticated texts outlining sexual behaviors deemed beneficial for health. Most interestingly, Taoism argues the mutual experience during orgasms between two men prevents *chi* from escaping.<sup>33</sup> While not necessarily and outright support or encouragement of homoeroticism as a lifestyle, these texts support the tolerance of same-sex erotic experience as part of individual's overall sexuality. Taoism, much like Buddhism and

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<sup>30</sup> Hinsch, *Cut Sleeve*, 51.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Wah-shan, *Tongzhi*, 19.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 18.

Confucianism, does not set sexual guidelines because of a focus on sex; rather, these philosophical and religious prescriptions exist to support longevity of life.

Chinese history however did not remain stagnant. Trends and vogues caused ebb and flow of the social perception of many cultural traditions. Homoeroticism and sexuality face many challenges as dynasties rose and fell and as philosophies questioned social practices of all sorts. Arguably the height of the male homoerotic tradition, literature, *biji*,<sup>34</sup> diaries and letters from the period from the mid Ming dynasty through the middle of the Qing dynasty include increasing numbers of references to homoerotic relationships, both between fictional characters and in the biographies of the literati. To understand the shift after this era to a period of near silence regarding homoeroticism, the contemporary historian must first understand the nature of Chinese society during this time and how the hierarchy and power structure of the society influenced the acceptance of homoeroticism. With that understanding and an understanding of the political changes occurring during the late imperial age, the power of the literati and the philosophy influencing the literati helps explain the popularity of song boys and young male actors as erotic objects. Furthermore, the cultural power of this scholarly class reveals the sense of danger felt by the foreign Manchu government of the Qing dynasty which helps explain the introduction of the Qing rape laws in 1740.

A major factor of homoeroticism in Chinese history is the role of social hierarchy and power. Hinsch argues that Chinese homoeroticism can be divided into four categories of relationship: trans-generational, trans-genderal, class-structured and egalitarian.<sup>35</sup> In order to understand the role of male same-sex eroticism historically, each of these relationship types provide context for the view of homoeroticism. First, Hinsch's categorization primarily focuses on the role of power. In the first three, one male, through his social dominance, assumes the dominant, or active, role. In trans-generational

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<sup>34</sup> *Biji* are miscellanies and sketchbooks that covered a wide variety of topics such as politics, history, personal stories, sexuality, private observations and gossip.

<sup>35</sup> Hinsch, *Passions of the Cut Sleeve*, 14.

homoeroticism, the older male is the penetrator while the younger male, often significantly younger, is the passive, penetrated. By reinforcing social hierarchy expectations, this form of sexual relations does not transgress and violated social standard significantly less than had those involved switched roles. In trans-genderal relationships, the passive male actually embodies the gender hierarchy by dressing and acting like a female. This can take the form of cross dressing or even by using language that refers to the penetrated as the wife of the penetrator. Again, the feminization of the submissive, penetrated male reinforces social expectations by accepting the gender hierarchy. Class-structured same-sex eroticism respects the class distinctions by designating the partner with a lower class status as the passive sexual role. The most obvious of this form of homoeroticism is prostitution where the lower class male falls within the lower class *because* of his sexual relations. The power of the dominant male in each of these relationships reinforces cultural divisions seen in opposite-sex relationships. This importantly supports the Confucian values of the five-relationship, which are intrinsically based upon the power of the dominant over the submissive. By adhering to these expectations, male same-sex relationships do not transgress cultural norms.

Egalitarian relationships, however, obviously differ from the other three relationship types, and thus appear much less acceptable in Chinese society. Although some literature features male-male friendships as representing the purist form of emotional connection with another individual, the categorization of these relationships as friendships makes it difficult to evaluate the level of sexual intimacy implied in the poems or literature. By the late imperial age the majority of the records regarding egalitarian sexual relationships end in self-degradation and loss of status.<sup>36</sup> The language used to describe these particular relationships implies that they were unusual and considered unconventional by the authors.<sup>37</sup> An important example appears in *biji* and in other writings during this time; Yuan Mei,

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<sup>36</sup> Wu Cuncun, *Homoerotic Sensibilities in Late Imperial China* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), 10.

<sup>37</sup> Cuncun, *Homoerotic*, 10.

a well known scholar, and his student, Liu Xiasheng, exchanged letters and wrote poems that indicate their relationship was more than a mentorship. Yuan Mei's history of having many young male lovers further suggests his homoerotic desires may have extended beyond the socially acceptable class boundaries. Ordinarily, the egalitarian nature of their relationship, regardless of the age difference, would prevent Yuan and Liu from being openly involved. What is more interesting about Yuan Mei is the undertone of some of his works that suggests he supported the blurring of lines between passive and active roles. Yuan may have been "exploring the possibility that *qing* [feeling or love] may override social categories."<sup>38</sup> Other literati, besides Yuan Mei, suggested a "more egalitarian exchange in the context of male-male relationships."<sup>39</sup> Zheng Banqiao (1693-1765), for example, also wrote stories that implied he viewed the switching of roles as acceptable. Although both of these men hold a controversial opinion, their popularity suggests that the literati at least discussed this topic, even if they did not dramatically change Chinese society's view.

Other popular stories also reinforced social power as the determining factor in active/passive sexual roles. For example, a scene in *Dream of the Red Chamber (Honglou meng)* describes a scenario where Xue Pan, a "oafish comic foil," makes sexual advances to Liu Xianglian, a young actor from a good family.<sup>40</sup> Liu Xianglian, who believes he is Xue Pan's social better even though he is an actor, reacts with anger and violently forces Xue Pan to "drink foul ooze from a stagnant pool until he vomits."<sup>41</sup> Although Xue Pan did not know Liu Xianglian held a higher social position, he inadvertently suggested that Liu Xianglian take the passive role thus implying his social inferiority. Liu Xianglian's outrage reflects the strength of social conventions that prohibited men from pursuing all forms of homoeroticism. While the sexual life cycle of a Chinese man may result in the switching of roles as the man went from being a

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Hinsch, *Cut Sleeve*, 148.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

younger, passive boy in a trans-generational relationship to being the older, active man later in his life, there are many social expectations that argue against men playing both roles within the context of one relationship.

Besides the social structures, the political conflicts of the late imperial age contributed to the rise in a male-homoerotic vogue. A significant transition in the history of homosexuality in China occurred during the Qing Empire as a result of Ming philosophy and the conquering by the Manchus. The late imperial age marks the beginning of a shift away from the earlier understanding of homoeroticism as a part of sexuality. As the political power shifted from Ming to Qing in the mid-1600s, conflict and governmental transition began to influence social and cultural trends. While the Ming literati explored the new philosophies of Wang Yangming and his followers, unrest amongst the other classes began to build. High taxes, low wages, unjust rents and political corruption stirred individuals in both urban and rural communities to protest and strike. Court eunuchs grew in power under emperors such as Wanli in the early seventeenth century which led to some scholars and officials to question the direction of the dynasty. As conditions grew worse and as political power became concentrated around eunuchs, some scholars argued that the corruption “sprang from a breakdown of general ethical standards, from flaws in the educational system, and from the growth of unbridled individualism.”<sup>42</sup> According to these scholars, the belief, espoused by the Wang Yangming School, that “the keys to ethical understanding lay in our moral nature... led to the eccentric behavior” would lead to the downfall of the empire.<sup>43</sup> The Donglin Society, an initial backlash against the Ming hedonism that resulted from the Wang Yangming philosophies, marks the beginning of the questioning of Chinese morality. Although the followers of the libertine Wang Yangming School dismissed these opinions, they do help support later efforts by the conquering Manchus to alter Chinese moral philosophy.

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<sup>42</sup> Jonathan Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: W.W.Norton & Company, 1999), 17.

<sup>43</sup> Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, 17-18.

Once the Manchus conquered the greater portion of China, they found themselves in a precarious position. In order to balance peace and violence, the Manchus quickly realized they could more successfully rule China by adopting many traditional aspects of Chinese government and culture. Even though violence continued in the south as smaller rebellious areas fought the conquest, Dorgon enlisted the help of some of the predominate families from the Ming dynasty. By adapting the same traditional government structure, including the use of civil service exams, and by adjusting the power system to include both Han Chinese loyal to the new dynasty as well as Manchu leaders, Dorgon was able to smooth the transition from one dynasty to the next. A significant point of conflict, however, addressed the role of Manchu and Han masculinity and femininity. The queue, a hair style popular amongst Manchu men, became a requirement for all loyal men throughout China. At the same time, the Manchus forbid women from binding their feet, a practice popular throughout all levels of Chinese society by this time. Not received well, the queue and the unbound foot began to represent the oppression by the Manchus of Chinese cultural traditions, especially those related to gender expectations. In order to counter these sentiments, the Manchus needed to gain cultural capital as a means of stabilizing their political power. Before addressing the ways the Manchus attempted to do so, the forms and expectations of homoeroticism during the Ming and Qing dynasties can show how and why things began to change for men engaging in same-sex activities during the Manchu's reign.

Wu Cuncun, in *Homoerotic Sensibilities in Late Imperial China*, identified three main categories of male same-sex relationships: those between upper-class men and boy actors, those between the wealthy and their servants, and those between men of the same social status.<sup>44</sup> Egalitarian relationships in the Ming and Qing dynasties rarely appear as accepted except for the occasional scenario. For the literati of the late imperial age, the most widely discussed form of homoerotic relationships were both trans-generational and class structured. For the first two, the lower class status of the actors and of the

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<sup>44</sup> Cuncun, *Homoerotic*, 9.

servants, as well as their youth, placed them in a submissive role in comparison to their socially dominant partners. Interestingly, the first category also includes elements of trans-genderal eroticism since the boy actors, called *dan*, play female roles. In some cases, even the language used to refer to the lovers of upper class men reflected the trans-genderal nature of their relationship.

For example, in the mid-eighteenth century, two popular stories emerged amongst the literati; Zhuang Benchun and Bi Qiufan and their *zhuangyuan furen*. *Zhuangyuan furen* refers to the wife of a principle graduate. Having passed the highest level of the civil service exam, principle graduates held high ranking positions in the government. Highly sought after by parents hoping to make a match with their daughters, Westerners can consider these stories about principle graduates and fair maidens as “analogous to the ‘Prince Charming’ of Western fairy tales.”<sup>45</sup> Around 1750, the story of two principle graduates and their young male actor lovers intrigued the literati class. While these lover stories reveal a sense of romanticism surrounding male homoerotic relationship, more importantly they also show how the construction of gender roles helped reinforce the hierarchy of male same-sex partnerships. Fang Junguan and Li Guiguan, the lovers of Zhuang Benchun and Bi Qiufang, respectively, the language used to refer to them genderized them, essentially changing their gender from male to female.<sup>46</sup> As ‘wives,’ both actors provided emotional and sexual support for their ‘husbands.’ More importantly, neither couple broke up in order to marry women. Although they could not procreate, the literati saw the two actors as replacements for female wives through their fulfillment of all other duties of a wife. This, along with their lower social status as actors, placed them in a submissive role in relation to their upper-class husbands.

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>46</sup> Gender, of course, is different from biological sex. These individuals were probably not intersexual or even necessarily self-identified as transgender, but rather society and history has viewed them as transgressors of gender.

Unlike historians such as Brett Hinsch, Wu Cuncun and Matthew Sommers, Sophie Volpp, in “Classifying Lust: The Seventeenth-Century Vogue for Male Love,” questions whether stories such as these truly imply a rise in popularity of male homoeroticism during the late imperial age. She argues that the voice of the writers discussing and describing stories of homoeroticism in the Ming and Qing dynasties appears so similar to the “ethnographic voice” of fictional texts from the same time that it implies they were “rhetorically motivated rather than documentary.”<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, she says “those texts that indicate a new level of interest in male love cannot be read as documents of practice, nor do they necessarily signal a new tolerance of male love.”<sup>48</sup> In particular Volpp addresses three issues: the penetration of other males by elite males resulted in the development of a stigma against the upper class men, whether or not men who engaged in homoerotic activities constituted a “character type,” and whether or not an increase in writings actually indicates an increase in tolerance.<sup>49</sup> She argues that only the most secure of the elite males could engage in homoerotic sexual activities without being stigmatized. According to Volpp and Timothy Brook, “it was precisely because sex between men was viewed as transgressive... that a select group among the most stratospheric sector of the elite used the expression of homoerotic desire as a mechanism of social distinction.”<sup>50</sup> While this statement partially makes sense historically, given that homoeroticism *was* a means for expressing social power, Volpp and Brook do not take into consideration that this expression of power was not just for the most elite. The ability to dominate women *and* men proved one’s placement in the social hierarchy above those being penetrated. However, it is arguable that it was seen as a transgression. Homoeroticism prior to the introduction of western medical discourse and Judeo-Christian morality constituted part of the Chinese *understanding* of sexuality. Society saw it as neither abnormal nor as distinct from other forms of sexual

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<sup>47</sup>Sophie Volpp, “Classifying Lust: The Seventeenth-Century Vogue for Male Love,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 61 (Jun., 2001), 80.

<sup>48</sup> Volpp, “Classifying Lust...,” 80.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 82.

desire and expression. Disapproval, therefore, occurred when homoeroticism violated social expectations, but not because of concerns with the actual sexual practices or sexual identity of these men. Penetration of other males did not necessarily stigmatize men. Men of any superior position could engage in homoerotic activity without disapproval as long as it did not prevent them from fulfilling filial obligations to produce children.

Volpp also questions whether or not men who had sex with other men constituted a “character type.” According to Volpp, many scholars associate arguments supporting the wide-spread acceptance of homoeroticism with the lack of a developed abnormal identity for men or women who engage in homoerotic activities. She argues that society did associate certain characteristics, or “habits of mind,” with homoerotic desire and thus men who fell into those roles felt stigmatized. However, she conflates stereotyping with identity formation. She also presents the following passage from Xie Zhaozhe that she takes to imply the author desired “to render visible what had been previously invisible and to place it under surveillance in the process:”<sup>51</sup>

This all began in the Ningshao region of Zhejiang, but today half of them [these boys] come from Linqing [in present day Shandong]. For this reason, nowadays we distinguish between northern and southern male singers. But though there are multitudes of them, seldom are they exquisite. If there is one among them that is exquisite, then all the rakes among the gentry do their utmost to engage him to entertain them. The whole country seems to have gone crazy. It is a most ridiculous situation. The gentry who are away from home establish their own literary disciples. These disciples assist them in all things, and use their relationships with officials to curry favor with them. The officials are much misled by them, and this always becomes material for the censors [to attack]. As for their prettiness and wiliness, those [singers] of the Northwest are no match for those of the Southeast.<sup>52</sup>

She further argues that the discussion of homoeroticism by Xie and another scholar, Shen Defu, actually imply that they wanted to police the boundaries of sexuality rather than support or engage in male-male eroticism. While Xie may have disapproved of the “ridiculous situation,” this passage, regardless of the

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 102.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 101.

authors view, *does* imply the existence of a male homoerotic vogue despite Volpps arguments. In order for them to desire to police sexuality, they must believe individuals did practice the form of sexuality they do not agree with. For example, someone would not write an essay disapproving of sexual intercourse between men and trees unless she or he believed men had sex with trees. The person especially would not say that the whole country engaged in this activity, if he or she did not have some reason to believe this was true.

Volpp ultimately makes many interesting arguments against the opinions of some scholars that believe in a rise in the homoerotic tradition during the Ming and Qing dynasties. She says, "It is too easy to assume that the readiness with which our sources discuss male love testify to a new tolerance for, or prevalence of, affairs between men," which implies scholars should not jump to such conclusions.<sup>53</sup> Fundamentally, her conclusions lack coherence since, first, tolerance and prevalence necessarily go together and, second, her arguments do not logically follow from the evidence presented. The fact that the literati wrote about homoeroticism so frequently *does* imply a vogue or trend. While some may not have fully agreed with their fellow literati, their attention does mean they were analyzing practices they witnessed or believed to be prevalent. Furthermore, rather than arguing that prevalence implies tolerance, homoeroticism was part of the understanding of sexuality for Chinese society before the fall of the imperial age and that as an understanding, there was no necessary value judgment placed upon it.

Why is it, then, that homoeroticism became so popular during the late imperial age? Assuming that the homoerotic vogue increased in popularity, what could have influenced the literati in such a way? For the literati class of the late imperial age, their place in the upper ranks of Chinese society allowed for them to maintain the dominant position in all homoerotic relations which thus allowed for

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 117.

the societal acceptance of their desires. Wu Cuncun presents the history of the rise in popularity of homoeroticism amongst the literati and provides an interesting explanation for this trend. Some historians have argued that the promulgation of edicts prohibiting officials from visiting brothels lead to the transition to same-sex relationships. Some of these historians, even including Ming scholars such as Shen Defu (1578-1642) and Xie Zhaozhe (1567-1624) argued that the origins of same-sex desire have roots in the Xuande reign period (1425-35) when the emperor asked the Censor of the Right Capital to prohibit governmental officials from interacting with prostitutes.<sup>54</sup> Shen Defu writes in *Unofficial harvest of the Wanli Years*:

After Gu Zuo's memorial of the Xuande period (1426-1436), the official system of prostitution was strictly prohibited in the capital. The officials had no one to amuse them, so male entertainers became popular, to the point where nowadays the situation resembles that of the Taikang period of the Jin.<sup>55</sup>

In *Fivefold Miscellany*, Xie Zhaozhe similarly writes:

In today's capital there are young male singers who serve the gentry at drinking parties. It must be because official prostitutes [the women enrolled in the government-regulated system of prostitution] are forbidden at these occasions that they have to use these boys.<sup>56</sup>

The government issued these edicts in response to the fear that prostitutes lured officials into houses of vice where they gambled away their money and respect while neglecting their duties.

Sophie Volpp argues that many authors have used excerpts such as these to argue a “substitution trope” to explain the sudden prominence of male-male love. A substitution theory “[decrees] that sex between men is excusable only when women are unavailable.”<sup>57</sup> Several problems with this theory cause scholars to question it. First, Shen Defu refers to a prohibition issued 150 to 200 years before the Wanli period of the Ming dynasty, the period which he claims that the male-

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<sup>54</sup> Cuncun, *Homoerotic*, 30.

<sup>55</sup> Shen Defu quoted in Sophie Volpp, “Classifying Lust...,” 98.

<sup>56</sup> Xie Zhaozhe quoted in Sophie Volpp, “Classifying Lust...,” 98.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

homoerotic vogue became popular.<sup>58</sup> Second, the Chinese government has many difficulties in enforcing legal edicts given the size of the bureaucracy and the empire which leaves many, less important laws neglected. Furthermore, while circumstantial homoeroticism may be the explanation for sex between men in certain societies during certain times, men had other options beyond female prostitution to find sexual satisfaction with women. Unlike scenarios where men have circumstantial sex with other men in the military or in single-sex boarding schools, the prohibition of prostitution did not universally prohibit men from engaging in extramarital affairs. Besides marital sex, men often had concubines and mistresses. Private events such as parties or dinner could also include prostitutes without violating the law.<sup>59</sup> The law only forbid officials from going to visit brothels. To believe men had no other way of finding a female sex partner other than through prostitution seems quite short sighted.

Another common mistake in scholarship ignores the similar edicts that prohibited officials from associating with catamites during the Qing dynasty.<sup>60</sup> For the same reasons that the government prohibited interactions with prostitutes, higher officials worried that the increasing appreciation of catamites distracted lascivious officials. The following passage by the Qianglong emperor in 1769 exemplifies of the opinions issued by the emperors regarding officials and actors:

I have undertaken a reverent reading of my father's imperial edicts where I found an edict strictly prohibiting officials from raising actors...The phrasing of the edicts makes it very clear that [my father] was concerned about the resulting waste of money, neglect of public duties, and corruption and manipulation of officials....<sup>61</sup>

The Qianglong emperor "went on to warn that he would also not tolerate those who were purchasing song-boys...."<sup>62</sup> The appearance of numerous edicts and opinions such as these from nearly every Qing

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., and Matthew Sommer, "The Penetrated Male in Late Imperial China: Judicial Constructions and Social Stigma," *Modern China* 23 (April, 1997): 221.

<sup>60</sup> Cuncun, *Homoerotic*, 31.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

emperor reveals two major points: first, “men continued to seek out boy-actors, despite threats of severe punishments” and, second, that these very men must have violated these edicts visibly enough for the government to recognize the disregard for the edicts and feel compelled to issue more edicts.<sup>63</sup> This implies a paradox of legal restrictions of homoeroticism that coincided with a clear openness and visibility of male same-sex desire.<sup>64</sup> These edicts, importantly, do not represent a transition of social or legal disapproval of homoeroticism. They do not condemn male same-sex sexual activities nor do they even directly address the homoerotic nature of the relationships between catamites and the literati. They simply criticize the irresponsibility of officials who disregard their duties.

The changes in Neo-Confucian philosophy paralleled by a time of relative peace and economic growth since the mid-Ming dynasty lead to the development of a libertinism that embraced all forms of pleasure which could explain the rise in popularity in male same-sex desire amongst the literati. Important schools of Chinese philosophy, such as Wang Yangming’s school, began to explore the role of heart and mind in shaping the desires and actions of the individuals. While most of the early followers of Wang Yangming aimed to understand the relationship between the heart/mind and heavenly peace and which did not believe in the importance of thinking or reason, the over-all opening of Chinese philosophy allowed for other philosophers to explore the role of desire in self-development. One in particular, Li Zhi, questioned the rigid doctrines of orthodox Confucianism and supported a “theory of childlike mind” where minimal learning and carefree living encouraged the true self.<sup>65</sup> Such libertinism greatly influenced the literati of the time and encouraged them to explore their desires, homoerotic or heteroerotic. The appreciation of sensuality and sexual exploration prevailed throughout the late Ming Dynasty as these philosophical movements grew in influence and support. Furthermore, the exploration of homoerotic desires by the literati class reinforced their social status as members of a powerful leisure

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 36

class. Their ability to enjoy such opportunities, and to remain the dominant actor, underscored the fact that they were not members of the working or merchant class.

Although examples of the male homoerotic tradition occurred throughout Ming dynasty works, romantic ideals still focused on beautiful mistresses over young catamites. The Qing dynasty, however, saw the complete transition where song boys and *dan* actors represented a romantic ideal.<sup>66</sup> With the conquest of the Ming dynasty by the Manchus, the literati witnessed a transformation of their lifestyles. Wu Cuncun argues that the increase in popularity of song boys and boy-actors was the result of nostalgia: “for the early Qing Literati the boy-actors were a symbol of past glory.”<sup>67</sup> Even though the Manchus controlled the political power of the empire, the literati’s status as a highly educated leisure class allowed for them to continue controlling the cultural power of Chinese society. Even with the growing merchant class, the traditional respect for education and academic dedication prevented the merchants from attracting “the same command of symbolic power or cultural capital enjoyed by those who achieve recognition as men of letters.”<sup>68</sup> This cultural capital allowed for the literati to continue enjoying the homoerotic tradition even though the Manchus did not directly approve. Thus the influence of the literati provided an outlet for these men to celebrate the openness of the previous dynasty without being challenged by other powerful segments of society.

Qing sexual regulation may have also contributed to the growing popularity of male same-sex desires. The Qing dynasty saw a return to sex segregation that focused heavily on female chastity. Since the sexual morality of the time only cared about the sexual regulation of female behavior, many disregarded the male-male expressions of sexuality as either unimportant or outside the boundaries of

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<sup>66</sup> *Dan* actors play female roles. Directors and theater owners specifically recruited young, attractive boys for these roles.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 67

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 60

the primary sexual discourse.<sup>69</sup> Philosophy further reinforced this through developing the contrast between the concepts of duty and feeling. *Qing*, or feeling, was expected to exist outside relationships with strong social obligations; Society did not permit a man to feel an emotional connection with his wife. Unlike in the substitution theory where edicts limiting access to prostitutes, Manchu sexual morality enforced a total sex-segregation. By limiting the access men had to other women besides their wives during the moral reformation of the Qing dynasty, the extramarital emotional connections may have been necessarily found with other men. Not to say that men could not find any women outside of their homes to engage in extramarital affairs with, rather it is simply to consider the implications of a stricter division of the sexes. Perhaps the idealization of leisure, beauty and boyhood youth appealed more, not because of a lack of women available, but because of the expectation that a man would not be able to combine his filial duties with his emotional desires and thus the return to sex segregation was a coincidence rather than a cause.

The male homoerotic tradition peaked during the Qing dynasty; the beginnings of a transition away from homoeroticism as an understood aspect of sexuality appear in the Qing legal codes. In 1679, the Kangxi emperor began a legislative campaign to control homoeroticism. As a Manchu from a more traditional family, his upbringing contrasted the native Chinese sexual practices and made him significantly less tolerant of homoerotic sexual activities. Although he first suggested the series of rape laws in 1679, the Qing rape laws did not come into effect until 1740. Even without the code enacted during his lifetime, the Kangxi emperor worked to limit male prostitution and to minimize the selling and trading of young male actors. While many ignored his efforts and the popularity of male same-sex desire increased during most of the Qing dynasty, mainly due to the cultural powers of the literati, the promulgation of the Qing rape laws significantly contributed to the understanding the development of Chinese culture as it moved away from semi-tolerance of homoeroticism.

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 74

The male same-sex rape laws consist of nine subsections of the section on illicit sex.<sup>70</sup> None of the subsections address female same-sex or female perpetrators of female-male rape, but the legislators placed this portion of the code amidst the judicial regulation of illicit sex between men and women. Eight of the nine sections deal directly with non-consensual male-male sex; each statute aims to identify the proper punishment for different degrees of severity in rape and murder cases. For example, the penalties range depending on the age of the boy, whether or not the crime resulted in death or injury, whether or not the attacker acted alone or part of a gang and they also took into consideration whether or not the accuser had alternative motives for presenting the accusations. Also important, the sections specifically address only the rape of “sons and younger brothers of decent citizens” and of boys younger than twelve.<sup>71</sup> As a result of this precise wording, the code does not directly ban the sexual intercourse between a man and a man of lower status such as a servant, slave, or hired laborer.<sup>72</sup>

Subsection VIII, however, is unique since it is the one of the first legal considerations of consensual male-male sex under the category of illicit sex. It reads, “If there is sodomy with consent, then as in the case of military or civilian consensual lewdness, there is to be one month in the cangue and 100 heavy blows.”<sup>73</sup> Compared to the other punishments, however, this seems relatively light. For example, in all cases where the rape actually occurred or where the victims sustained injuries during an attempted rape, the legal code requires the attacker(s) be executed. The form of execution varies from strangulation to decapitation and the accused individual(s) can appeal the verdict, but officially designated sanction more severely punishes the guilty than in the cases where the penetrated individual consented. In cases where the attacker only attempted to rape another person but did not succeed and

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<sup>70</sup> This section uses Brett Hinsch’s translation of the code; Hinsch, *Cut Sleeve*, 143-144. M.J Meijer, another scholar who addresses this issue, translates it a 5 sections with subsections, but the translation of the code’s format does not significantly influence scholarly readings of the code.

<sup>71</sup> M.J. Meijer, “Homosexual Offense in Ch’ing Law” *T’oung Pao* 71 (1985): 110.

<sup>72</sup> Sommer, “The Penetrated Male...,” 150.

<sup>73</sup> Hinsch, *Cut Sleeve*, 144; A cangue is a wooden square board collar placed around the criminals’ necks to visibly humiliate him or her.

where the crime did not result in injury or where an accuser intentionally lied in order to blackmail the accused individual(s), penalties include exile at a distance of 3,000 *li* or 4,000 *li*. Although the cangue and the blows may be painful or publically humiliating, criminals viewed exile from one's family as significantly worse considering the emphasis on filial piety.

Prior to the introduction of the Qing rape laws, other legal edicts and statutes attempted to regulate male homoeroticism, but often they did not succeed. Matthew Sommer's 1997 article, "The Penetrated Male in Late Imperial China: Judicial Constructions and Social Stigma," reviews the legislative history of the regulation of sexual relations between men. He distinguishes previous regulation from the Qing legal codes because of their placement under the illicit sex (*jian*) section. He presents examples from the Song dynasty and from the Ming dynasty that prohibit men from acting like prostitutes, from cross-dressing and from doing other things considered to challenge their masculinity.<sup>74</sup> Specifically, in the Jiajing era (1522-1567) of the Ming dynasty, Sommer describes a statute that bans sexual intercourse between men. The translation he uses reads: "Whoever inserts his penis into another man's anus for lascivious play... shall receive 100 blows of the heavy bamboo, in application by analogy of the statute on 'pouring foul material into the mouth of another person....'"<sup>75</sup> Chinese legal code often applied new legislation by connecting it analogously with older statutes. This particular analogy appears in the chapters regarding fighting. Sommer regards this as noteworthy because it suggests "pollution and humiliation were more important than batter to defining the crime of anal penetrations."<sup>76</sup> To clarify, pouring foul matter into another person's mouth does not damage the perpetrator in any way, but he does cause the social denigration of another individual. Furthermore, the action does not necessarily hurt the assaulted individual, but it does thoroughly humiliate him or her in the eyes of other members of society. Status and personal dignity mean more than the actual damage or suffering. Sommer's focus

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<sup>74</sup> Sommer, "The Penetrated Male...", 144.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 145.

on social stigmas and male-male sex as a threat to social hierarchies in this and the Qing legal code resulted from an academic controversy over the reason why the Manchus enacted the Qing code.

In 1985, M.J. Meijer published an article in *T'oung Pao* titled "Homosexual Offenses in Ch'ing Law." Meijer presented a detailed account of the laws regarding homoerotic sex and rape while also providing examples of legal cases related to these statutes. He concluded that the prohibitions of extramarital sex, between men and women and between men and other men, "may have been motivated by the desire to protect existing marriages against adultery..."<sup>77</sup> As an early historian of the study of homoeroticism in China, Meijer focused heavily on presenting the information available rather than presenting a solidified argument. He summarizes many legal cases and tries to analyze the different ways the courts perceived male-male sex. When concluding his paper, he postulates two possible explanations for the appearance of Qing rape laws. He says it *may* have been possible that the laws intended to prohibit homoerotic sex because of a fear that it would prevent men from fulfilling their familial duties by failing to produce offspring at all.<sup>78</sup> He also considers whether the Manchus enacted the bans as a result of a belief that homoeroticism violated nature by disrupting yin and yang balance.<sup>79</sup> Although Meijer does not make definitive claims regarding the motivations of the Qing code, he did spark interest in the matter.

Shortly following Meijer, Vivien Ng's 1987 article, "Ideology and Sexuality: Rape Laws in Qing China," focused on both male-female rape as well as male-male rape. She argues that the rape laws responded to Chinese resistance to Manchu conquest and intended to emphasize the cult of chastity as supported by Neo-Confucianism and to ease the transition from Ming to Qing. She claims that the first changes to the code's section on rape intended to make it more difficult for women to prove they were rape victims as "part of the effort to discourage the Chinese from bringing rape charges against Machu

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<sup>77</sup> Meijer, "Homosexual Offenses...", 129.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

soldiers, because such accusations would only damage the pacification process.”<sup>80</sup> The Manchus’ struggled during the early Qing dynasty to maintain power and to integrate themselves within Chinese society, and many Chinese regarded the Manchu forces as a foreign enemy. Ng further argues that, besides their usefulness in preventing excessive litigation against Manchu soldiers, the introduction of Qing rape laws reinforced the Manchu desire to reclaim cultural capital from the literati by renewing Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism in hopes of gaining the support of the upper classes. According to Ng, the Manchus believed that they could collaborate with the minority faction of the literati who believed that the collapse of the Ming dynasty occurred as a result of the “iconoclastic and hedonistic tendencies” of the Wang Yangming School.<sup>81</sup> By emphasizing the “safe’ values as filial piety, fraternal affection, female chastity, obedience and respect for elders,” the Qing government could use Chinese morality as a form of social control.<sup>82</sup>

Ng then considers why the codes addressed consensual sodomy. She suggests the possible comparison between homoerotic sex and female unchaste behavior influenced the lawmakers. Perhaps the Manchus and Neo-Confucian scholars felt that sex between men paralleled extramarital sex between a man and a woman since both violated filial piety and social expectations of chastity. Ng further speculates that Qing China may have gone through an evolution of political power similar to Europe during the middle ages. She uses John Boswell’s study of homosexuality in Europe as a possible scenario that, with some manipulation, could describe late imperial China. Ng summarizes Boswell’s argument: “The onset of homophobia in Europe in the late Middle Ages coincided with the rise of absolute government. Although a direct linkage cannot be made between homophobia and the growth of absolutism, it is clear that the political developments played a large role in the narrowing of social

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<sup>80</sup>Vivien W. Ng, “Ideology and sexuality: rape laws in Qing China,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 46, (1987): 59.

<sup>81</sup> Ng, “Ideology and Sexuality...,” 59.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

tolerance in Europe.”<sup>83</sup> The desire to create “intellectual and institutional uniformity” marginalized all other, non-orthodox philosophies and religious doctrines.<sup>84</sup> Ng considers the possibility that this same desire on the part of the Manchus may have led to the regulation and intolerance of homoeroticism during the late Qing dynasty.

Bret Hinsch’s final chapter of *Passions of the Cut Sleeve: The Male Homosexual Tradition in China* uses both of these articles to support his own analysis of the end of the ‘male homosexual tradition.’ He also limits his focus to the section regulating consensual sodomy. Like Meijer, Hinsch proposes that the regulation supported the “unequivocal stand against all forms of extramarital sexuality as a way of strengthening the Confucian ideal of family, perhaps in reaction to Ming chaos.”<sup>85</sup> More importantly, he argues that it is highly unlikely that the Qing government systematically enforced the subsection on consensual sodomy; rather, he believes the addition of these subsections “performed a necessary service” by appearing to regulate sexuality (especially in the eyes of European visitors) while also providing some means to combat the sexual abuse of the weak (such as younger boys and lower class men). For example, Hinsch cites an account of homoeroticism from a journal by a Westerner in 1835: “[A Chinese gazetteer is] filled with details of a case of this abominable practice, which exists to a great extent, in almost every part of the empire, and particularly in the very officers of the ‘shepherds of the people,’ the guardians of the morals of the celestial empires....” He argues that such accounts imply that some foreigners equated Chinese officials to sodomites and rapists, and, thus, the Chinese responded by directly outlawing male-male rape.<sup>86</sup> They also used this as an opportunity to accuse foreigners of violating these laws, probably in hopes of turning the tables against the non-Chinese visitors. Hinsch concludes that, while both the Europeans and the Chinese believed male-male rape was

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Hinsch, *Cut Sleeve*, 144.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 141.

a “reprehensible crime,” the Europeans “condemned all forms of homosexuality as immoral wickedness,” but the Chinese “concerned themselves mainly with the forceful violations of free men and sex with free minors.”<sup>87</sup> Hirsch’s conclusion at the end of *Passion of the Cut Sleeve* implies that Western missionaries and dignitaries brought this anti-sodomy morality with them towards the end of the imperial age and that the Chinese later subscribed to such beliefs in the twentieth century. According to Hinch, historians, thus, should place emphasis on the spreading of homophobia from west to east which almost idealizes China prior to the corruption by western homosexual hostility.

In 1995, Frank Dikotter specifically disagrees with Brett Hirsch’s view of the western influence on China in *Sex, Culture and Modernity in China: Medical Science and the Construction of Sexual Identities in the Early Republican Period*. Rather, he argues similarly to Meijer and Ng that “homosexuality was never singled out as a particular category of deviant behavior... Rather, he claims it was thrown together with all kinds of extramarital sex... which were undesirable because they did not lead to procreation.”<sup>88</sup> Furthermore he departs from other scholars in his belief that the Chinese did not persecute homosexuality even in the twentieth century. In 1997, however, Matthew H. Sommer challenged these scholars’ view of the fundamental philosophy of the Qing male-male rape laws. Sommer agrees that this section of the code supported a great effort to defend traditional patriarchic marriage. Specifically, like the prohibitions against illicit sex between men and women, the Qing rape laws aimed to reinstitute social values that the Chinese and the Manchus believed necessary for the social stability of the new dynasty. For them, the familial order led to political order by supporting the social hierarchy. Although he supports this explanation, he does not whole-heartedly agree that the ban on homoerotic sex solely meant to support heterosexual marriage. He claims, “The judiciary sought to

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 142.

<sup>88</sup> Susan Brownell and Jeffrey N Wasserstrom, *Chinese Femininities/Chinese Masculinities: A Reader*. (University of California Press, 2002), 21; for more information see, Frank Dikotter, *Sex, Culture, and Modernity in China: Medical Science and the Construction of Sexual Identities in the Early Republican Period* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995).

protect vulnerable masculinity as part of its larger agenda of upholding legitimate social hierarchy,” and lawmakers reacted to a perceived threat to masculinity by passing the code.<sup>89</sup> Rather than seeing the bans on male-male rape as just a disapproval of extramarital sex in all of its forms, he argues that the laws continue a movement against the “gender inversion attributed to the penetrated male.”<sup>90</sup> Sommer, in another essay, defines “*normative masculinity*”<sup>91</sup> in order to strengthen this argument:

The normative male was a married, adult householder with a stake in the familial order so valorized by the Confucian state. He was a commoner, a man of respectable family and occupation. He had survived unsullied the delicate journey to adult masculinity; his masculinity was based... on the sexual roles of husband and father. His centrifugal, penetrative sexuality was disciplined by the filial duty to procreate and by a sober fear of community sanction and imperial authority.<sup>92</sup>

Penetration, therefore, threatened this definition- specifically the requirement to have reached adulthood unsullied. The penetrator, by continuing to fulfill the expected sexual roles of husband or father by being the dominant force, does not lose such status. For example, according to Sommer, the Jiajing era code that compared male-male anal penetration to the pouring of foul matter into another’s mouth implies that there existed a stigma that would only affect the penetrated male since such an action “would stain the [penetrator] no more than foul material would sully one who poured it.”<sup>93</sup> The penetration of another male did not disrupt the penetrator’s masculinity and thus society did not stigmatize the dominant actor. Thus, the masculinity of the vulnerable male being penetrated caused the concern.

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<sup>89</sup> Sommer, “The Penetrated Male...,” 143.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> It is important to note that his argument *only* applies to *normative* males, or males that represent an ideal or a standard that society aims towards. Such expectations do not apply to the lowest classes, especially servants or bondslaves. In order for any of these arguments to hold, there must be a group to be penetrated. In late imperial China, that group included the *dan* actors, serving boys, song boys and other males (often boys or youth adult males) that were not of respectable background so as to not necessitate the protection of their own status. Their masculinity, in effect, did not matter.

<sup>92</sup> Matthew Sommer, “Dangerous Males, Vulnerable Males and Polluted Males: The Regulation of Masculinity in Qing Dynasty Law” in Susan Brownell and Jeffrey N Wasserstrom, *Chinese Femininities/Chinese Masculinities: A Reader* (University of California Press, 2002), 83.

<sup>93</sup> Sommer, “The Penetrated Male...,” 145.

Sommer argues that the weighing of penalties supports his thesis. In heteroerotic rape cases, the experience or emotions of the victim did not dictate the penalties given to a perpetrator. Rather the amount of status lost determined the severity of the punishments. Society considered woman raped a second time less 'damaged' by the assault since she had already lost her chastity. Judges thus sanctioned the rapist less severely. In the early 1700s, the assimilation of male-male rape laws with male-female rape laws included this "hierarchy of penetration."<sup>94</sup> In the same way that the rape of a woman of good status, *liang jia fu nu* or "a wife or daughter of good character/commoner family," appears as more severe in the eyes of the Qing laws, the rape of a male of good character, *liang ren zi di* or "a son or younger brother of a commoner," drew more condemnation. *Liang* in both cases implies both sexual virtue as well as commoner legal status. This shows an emphasis on social status over the actual harm done to the victim.<sup>95</sup> For example, Sommer cites a legal case in 1824 where a gang of men raped two *dan* actors. In this case, the judge felt that the rapists must be punished for their sexual assault of non-consenting individuals, but the victims' low legal status created conflict within the legal code. Since, as actors that impersonate women on stage, the legal code did not place them in the same category as "sons and younger brothers of decent citizens" and did not attribute them possession of *liang*, the full penalty determined by the code cannot apply. As a result, the judges decided to reduce the penalty to "100 blows of the heavy bamboo and life exile at a distance of 3,000 *li*" which equaled a penalty of one degree less severe.<sup>96</sup> Sommer argues this reveals the codes emphasis on social status over the Manchu focus on filial piety, reproduction or extramarital chastity as argued by others.

The academic controversy over the reasons for the establishment of the Qing rape laws included many important misunderstandings while also highlighting many important points. For example, Meijer presents the possibility that the laws were a reaction to a belief that yin and yang philosophies/Taoism

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 152.

disapproved of homoerotic intercourse because of the possible disruption of the balance of masculine and feminine forces in each individual. This second possibility seems highly unlikely since it contradicts Taoist teachings that support male-male eroticism because of the exchange of essential *chi*.

Furthermore, Meijer and Ng's use of the term "immoral" does not seem appropriate considering the relative acceptance of appropriate homoeroticism in Chinese history. Sex between men, as long as it conformed to social hierarchies, the Chinese did not see it as sinful or contrary to Chinese social values.

On the other hand, Meijer, Ng, Hinsch and Sommer all contribute to the development of the contemporary historical understanding of homoeroticism in late imperial china. First of all, scholars should underestimate the role of the Manchu government. The Manchu's cultural conceptualizations regarding sexuality are not nearly as important as Hinsch implies in his summary of the Kangxi Emperor's distaste for homoeroticism, but the transition from the Ming dynasty to the Manchu's Qing dynasty directly influenced Chinese culture away from the more liberal tolerance of homoeroticism seen during those two eras. Although the written accounts of homoerotic love, desire and idealism of the Qing dynasty imply a continuation of the homoerotic tradition regardless of the possible disapproval of the Qing government, the appearance of the Qing rape laws mark the beginning of a cultural exploration of new sexual ideology. Ng's evaluation of the Chinese distrust of the Manchu government, especially its soldiers, shows that the chaos of the transition directly led to alterations in the legal code. The Manchus needed a means of gaining cultural capital from the literati and their return to Neo-Confucian values may have acted as their vehicle. Since the literati have always held such an esteemed position in Chinese society, the Manchus manipulated the nostalgia for the Ming dynasty in their favor. Just as the longing for the libertinism of the Ming dynasty inspired some literati to further the homoerotic romantic tradition, some scholars saw the hedonism as the cause of the downfall of the Han Chinese dynasty. The Manchus used this disapproval to support stricter, orthodox Confucian family values such as chastity.

Although Meijer, Ng and Hinsch's arguments that the Manchu's legal changes resulted from a greater attempt to alter Chinese society to increase political stability through social stability, Sommer argues that the rape laws regarding intercourse between men were not simply part of a ban against *all* extramarital sexuality. Dikotter, in particular, argues that the Manchu's laws were not because of a specific disapproval of homoeroticism, but rather because of a disapproval of non-procreative marital sex. The Qing legal code, however, actually aimed to stabilize society during the chaos of a foreign government. Sex between men did not necessarily have to violate filial piety or family values since men could engage in sexual activities with another man without disrupting the harmony of the family or without endangering his commitment to procreation and the continuation of the family lineage. Female chastity, however, is an essential aspect of filial piety in Chinese society since illicit sex between a man and a woman may result in the sully of the woman (and thus the inability of that woman to continue the family lineage or to hold the role of a proper wife/mother) or the possibility of children out of wedlock. The Qing rape laws regarding non-consensual sex between a woman and a man, therefore, directly result from attempts to maintain family values in hopes of supporting social stability.

Scholars, however, should not group homoeroticism with this group of social values since society did not regard it as threatening to family harmony or filial piety. Sex between men, as Sommer argues, threatened a different aspect of social stability—masculinity. The laws intended to protect the penetrated male, especially if the male came from a good family. The humiliation of losing one's masculinity did not have an impact on the individual alone; it directly harmed the reputation of the entire family. Since saving face and maintaining *guanxi* are essential in Chinese society, the threat to the penetrated male's masculinity also threaten social stability by possibly ruining the reputation of good families. In the same way that extramarital sex between men and women from good families harmed or threatened society because it threatened keystone family values, the penetration of a respectable young man endangered social stability. Importantly, however, the alterations to the Qing legal code do

not imply a total disapproval of all forms of sexuality outside of marriage or between men. This shift of cultural opinion, however, did not occur outright against homoeroticism. Only forms of sexuality that threatened the social hierarchy concerned legalists and moralists. Also significant, there is little proof that the Qing government systematically enforced these subsections. As implied by the abundance of homoerotic writings during the Qing dynasty, a male-male sexual vogue flourished despite legal changes and few literati opinions seemed directly influenced by these alterations.

The controversy over the significance of the Qing rape laws opens the door to many questions for future scholars of the late imperial age. Due to time and resource limitations (as well as language limitations), speculation only provides limited other possible theories of why the Manchus enacted the Qing rape laws. For example, perhaps Hinsch's final chapter hints at an alternative explanation. Is it possible that the Manchus did not react to Chinese social chaos, but rather responded to the gradual increase of foreign visitors, especially the Jesuit missionaries during the Kangxi Emperor's reign? For example, "sexually ambiguous fantasy world of 'physical and psychological transvestism'" appalled Matteo Ricci, one of the most significant Jesuits to dedicate his life to the conversion of the Chinese.<sup>97</sup> Although the prevalence of "unnatural perversion" greatly disturbed Ricci, most likely the public nature of these engagements between elite men and their favorites concerned him more.<sup>98</sup> Perhaps the Qing government saw Judeo-Christian mentalities as a threat to the perception of the masculinity of the Chinese. If so, possibly the laws intended to preserve the masculinity of the men who would ultimately be most in contact with the Westerners (those from good families). Such an explanation would not contradict the discussions above; rather, it would further support the positions that argue that politics

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<sup>97</sup> Giovanni Vitiello quoted in Pi-Chang Hsu, *Beyond Eroticism: A Historian's Reading of Humor in Feng Menglong's Child's Folly* (Boulder: University Press of America, 2006), 115.

<sup>98</sup> Timothy Brook, *The Confusions of Pleasure: Commerce and Culture in Ming China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 231.

and social stability led to the return to Neo-Confucian family values. It would just place the politics in a global context.

Regardless of the reasons for the Qing code, the end of the imperial age influenced the male homoerotic tradition in a dramatic way. While Bret Hinsch sees the Qing dynasty as the end of the tradition, the code reveals the end of the *traditional* Chinese understanding of sexuality and sex. Homoeroticism, after all, does not suddenly stop because of changing social opinions and thus the tradition can be seen as continuing even today. The following sections hope to first show the impact of Western discourse on Chinese perceptions of homoeroticism (and homosexuality as an identity as it is introduced and developed during this time) and then evaluate the implications of the entire Chinese homoerotic tradition on current efforts to establish (or rather re-establish) a contemporary Chinese *tongzhi*/homoerotic/homosexual tradition.

Although the Qing codes mark a legal change in the perception of homoeroticism, the cultural changes in attitude occurred significantly slower. The gradual growth of intolerance parallels the introduction of western influences such as medical texts, religious doctrine and gender/sexuality philosophy. Prior to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the West generally had a favorable view of China due to the writings of Jesuit missionaries who believed the East represented the next great place for the spread of Christianity. As relations deteriorated in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the exchange of many ideas, texts and philosophies played a major role in the changing view of homoeroticism in China.

As traders returned to Europe with new foreign goods, the popularity of Chinese art, silks, teas and cultural artifacts influenced nearly every country. Writers such as Voltaire believed Chinese culture represented a power that paralleled, if not exceeded, western societies. For example, Voltaire

compliments China's long history of education and literacy in his *Philosophical Dictionary*: "China was filled with [books] when we did not know how to read or write..."<sup>99</sup> Furthermore, he says,

But what puts the Chinese above all the peoples of the earth is that neither their laws, nor their customs, nor the language spoken among them by their lettered mandarins has changed for about four thousand years... this nation and the nation of India, the most ancient of all those that exist to-day, which possess the vastest and the most beautiful country, which invented almost all the arts before we had learned any of them...<sup>100</sup>

A cult surrounding Chinese culture blossomed temporarily during the mid-eighteenth century greatly due to the increasing numbers of travelers returning from the Orient with stories of lavish gardens, beautiful scenery and glorious palaces. The return of George Anson, however, rapidly changed the West's view of Chinese hospitality.

In 1741, George Anson, a commodore in the British Royal Navy, experienced China's less amicable side. During much of this time, China interacted with its neighbors with an air of superiority, and in many ways China held more power than the surrounding nations which created an attitude in the Manchu government of invincibility. Early conflicts with western missionaries, such as the Rites Controversy with the Jesuits in the seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries, made the Qing dynasty weary when dealing with European powers. George Anson discovered this tension when he arrived in Canton Harbor after a severe storm greatly damaged his ship.<sup>101</sup> International laws of the time dictated that China should welcome Anson respectfully and hospitably as a neutral power, but China did not subscribe to such regulations. The local bureaucracy created numerous hoops for him to jump through rather than providing support.<sup>102</sup> For example, the administrator refused to meet with him quickly, charged him exorbitant prices for repair supplies, and over all made his experience frustrating and

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<sup>99</sup> Voltaire, *Voltaire's Philosophical Dictionary* (New York: Carlton House), Project Gutenberg, released June 12, 2006 [EBook #18569] <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/18569/18569-h/18569-h.htm>, 159.

<sup>100</sup> Voltaire, *Voltaire's Philosophical Dictionary*, 159.

<sup>101</sup> Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, 120.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

taxing.<sup>103</sup> Once he returned to Britain, Anson published an account of his experiences in Canton which immediately led to a wave of anti-Chinese sentiments.<sup>104</sup> Lord Macartney's visit to China in 1793 further widened the divide between China and the West, particularly Great Britain. The first edict issued by the Qianlong emperor in response to the Macartney Embassy showed the Chinese believed that they had nothing to gain from relations with Great Britain:

I have perused your memorial: the earnest terms in which is it couched reveal a respectful humility on your part, which is highly praiseworthy... As to your entreaty to send one of your nationals to be accredited to my Celestial Court... this request is contrary to all usage of my dynasty and cannot possibly be entertained... [your envoy] could not possibly transplant our manners and customs to your alien soil. Therefore, however adepts the Envoy might become, nothing would be gained thereby...<sup>105</sup>

From the publication of Anson's report and the failure of the Macartney Mission onward, Europeans questioned whether or not China's cultural differences marked superiority or inferiority. For example, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the Baron de Montesquieu, among others, wondered if Chinese culture regressed as a result of a corrupt educational and legal system.<sup>106</sup> Others only saw China for its trade possibilities. One man, upon returning from a trading expedition, wrote, "Surpassing, in short, the Chinese in every branch of art and science, as well as in capital and machinery, there is scarcely an article... that the manufacturers of England may not supply to them of a quality and at a price that will ensure an almost unlimited demand."<sup>107</sup> The belief in superior goods as well as a superior understanding of the arts and sciences reinforced Britain's desire to interact and influence China. These traders, however, were quite mistaken. The Qianlong emperor continues in his first edict to Macartney to say, "strange and costly objects to do not interest me... I set no value on objects strange or ingenious, and

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 120-121.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>105</sup> Qianlong Emperor, *The First Edict*, September 1793, in *A Search For Modern China: A Documentary Collection*, ed. Pei-Kai Cheng and Michael Lestz with Jonathan D. Spence (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), 105.

<sup>106</sup> Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, 134.

<sup>107</sup> Visitor to China. "Address to the people of Great Britain explanatory of our commercial relations with the empire of China, and of the course of policy by which it may be rendered an almost unbounded field for British commerce." *Hume Tracts*, 1836: 6.

have no use for your country's manufacturers."<sup>108</sup> When Britain quickly realized China would not easily comply with British wishes and when China realized Britain's intent, conflicts such as the Opium wars, the Boxer rebellion and the Taiping rebellion rapidly arose.

While these conflicts may not have necessarily influenced the perception of homoeroticism during the final years of the imperial age, the interactions with the West contributed to dialogue, in both China and in Europe, about the boundaries of acceptable sexuality and the expectations for each gender. For example, in Britain, men and women returning from China often wrote about their experiences at brothels and in the lower class parts of towns. Sidney and Beatrice Webb, for example, visited brothels full of male prostitutes while in China and commented in their diaries on the degeneracy of Chinese sexual morality. They saw this as clear proof that homoeroticism in China directly influenced the national decay of the Qing dynasty during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.<sup>109</sup> On the other hand, the importation of western medical discourse and of philosophies of sexuality into China gave Chinese literati an opportunity to contemplate whether or not ideas such as a heterosexual/homosexual dichotomy applied to all cultures.

Other opportunities for political experimentation arose; the interactions with the West brought in thousands of new translations and new ideas to China's intellectual elite. Prior to the anti-Christian backlash of the May Fourth Movement, the Jesuit missionaries translated thousands of western texts into Chinese for use at their private schools throughout the country. Jesuit professors exposed Chinese students to biographies of prominent Western figures such as Lincoln, Washington, Napoleon and many more.<sup>110</sup> The *Catalogue of Books Published in the Republican Era* lists over 100,000 works published

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<sup>108</sup> Qianlong Emperor, *The First Edict*, September 1793, *ibid.*, 105.

<sup>109</sup> Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain, from the Nineteenth Century to the Present* (London: Quartet Books, 1977), 19.

<sup>110</sup> Frank Dikotter, *The Age of Openness: China Before Mao* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 53.

between 1911 and 1949, many of which reflected the influence of the global world on China.<sup>111</sup> Not only did the Republican Era witness an increase in Westerners in China, Chinese students traveled out of China at rapidly increasing rates. By the 1930s, Chinese students outnumbered all other foreign nationals in American schools.<sup>112</sup> It is estimated that approximately 40,000 Chinese students obtained degrees from foreign schools before returning to China where they shared their experiences with colleagues.<sup>113</sup> For example, Mao Zedong, in a letter from 1920 in Peking, writes about plans to send more students abroad to provide them with experiences that will help with the reform movement at home. He says, “I want to work together with our comrades to form “Free Student Society” (or it could be named Self-Cultivation University). It is foreseen that in one or two years we will be able to have a clear, basic sense of old, new, foreign and Chinese ideas, and will be able to use them as tools for investigation...”<sup>114</sup> Many of the “tools for investigation” that these students acquired while abroad greatly influenced how they viewed the government, the cultural changes of the early twentieth century and the issues of China in a quickly globalizing world. For example, Hu Shih, a Chinese philosopher who contributed to the move for liberalism in China, argues that the reform of language towards a *pai hua*, or vernacular language, originated in a conversation that occurred in the summer term of 1916 while he was abroad.<sup>115</sup> This transition from *wen yen*, the traditional literary language, becomes significant for the history of homoeroticism in contemporary China. Hu Shih’s doctoral thesis, and subsequently his books *Outline of the History of Chinese Philosophy* and *The Development of the Logical Method in Ancient China*, also show how the Chinese compared and contemplated traditional views of Chinese philosophy versus Western understandings.

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<sup>111</sup> Dikotter, *The Age of Openness: China Before Mao*, 61.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> Mao Zedong, Letter from Peking to Tao Yi, 1920, in *A Search for Modern China: A Documentary Collection*, 242.

<sup>115</sup> Chow Tse-Tsung, *The May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1960), 28.

Huh Shih's history of Chinese philosophy discusses an important aspect of Chinese culture: the lack of scientific methodology and the lack of scientific education until the twentieth century. He argues that the humanism of Chinese philosophy which resulted from the adoption of *The Great Learning* as the primary text regarding philosophical methodology confined philosophers to questions of moral and political philosophy.<sup>116</sup> The introduction, therefore, of western science, and scientific methodology, opened an entire new world of philosophy and education to the Chinese. Many of the new ideas and scientific concepts imported from the west directly challenged Chinese understandings of the world around them, especially in regards to medical discourse.<sup>117</sup> Some of the most important leaders in the May Fourth Movement and, later, in the Chinese civil war began their political careers as foreign students hotly debating these concerns with their fellow students in their dormitories abroad. The interactions abroad with the "American Renaissance" of the 1920s instilled a new rigor into Chinese students experiencing the cultural movements of "the new woman, the new humanism, the new art, the new nationalism, the new freedom, the new history."<sup>118</sup> Hu Shih and other reformers who studied abroad aspired to infuse this same spirit into the May Fourth Movement in 1919.

The May Fourth Movement emerged from the student protests on May 4, 1919 as a response to the Treaty of Versailles at the end of World War I. While numerous factors contributed to the growing discontent of the intellectuals, especially students returning from abroad, the resulting changes in

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<sup>116</sup> Hu Shih, *The Development of the Logical Method in Ancient China*, 5; for an excerpt of from *The Great Learning*, see page 9 of this thesis. Hu Shih focuses on the first three lines of the excerpt, whereas I focused on the last few in that portion of the paper. Huh Shih argues that the emphasis on rectifying the mind through investigation of the self prevented, or at minimum discouraged, philosophers from creating a scientific method for the investigation of external objects.

<sup>117</sup> This is not to say that the West's view of the world was superior to the Chinese or to discredit the Chinese understanding of science completely. It is possible that Hu Shih is being too critical of his own culture by saying there is an "absence of scientific learning" in China (Hu Shih, *The Development of the Logical Method in Ancient China*, 5) but he does touch on an important point that Chinese philosophy, and thus Chinese civil servant exams which were based upon intellectualism, often focused on moral considerations over scientific ones. More importantly, this helps explain the importance of science and medical discourse in the May Fourth Movement (which Hu Shih was a major contributor to).

<sup>118</sup> Chow Tse-Tsung, *The May Fourth Movement*, 29.

Chinese society greatly influenced Chinese politics, culture and society for the rest of the twentieth century. While the most obvious, the growth of the support of communism, radically set the path for the future of China, the intellectual undercurrents of the May Fourth Movement, directly resulting from the increase in exposure to western philosophy, had the greatest impact on the treatment of homoeroticism and homosexuality during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Some of the more significant additions to Chinese libraries during this time included texts on western views of sexuality.<sup>119</sup> Chinese activists from the May Fourth Movement began conversing on the role of tradition sexuality in modern society and, more often than not, they argued that the old, traditional ways threatened China's move towards modernity. Examples of the types of conversations occurring during the May Fourth Movement regarding sexuality appear in essays from the magazine, *New Youth*. Lu Xun in particular wrote an essay titled, "My Views on Chastity" in 1918 that berates the cult of chastity from the Qing dynasty. He "affirms that to be chaste is exceedingly difficult and painful, favored by no one, of profit neither to others nor oneself, of no service to the state or society, and of no value at all to posterity."<sup>120</sup> Scholars did not limit these dialogues on sexual propriety to questions of heterosexuality by any means. Unlike many scholars who tended to "read the Maoist state retrospectively into the Republican past," the prevalence of a variety of western texts on all forms of sexuality in China presents a very different view of the early twentieth century.<sup>121</sup>

In the West, sexology scholars struggled to determine the 'correct' medical understanding of homosexuality, its causes and its implications on society. As the hetero-homo dichotomy formed,

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<sup>119</sup> From this point onward, it is acceptable to use the term 'homosexuality' since it reflects the modern understanding of same-sex eroticism as an identity in Western culture (and arguably in Chinese culture in the more recent years).

<sup>120</sup> Lu Xun, "My Views on Chastity," in *The Search for Modern China: A Documentary Collection*, 237.

<sup>121</sup> Sang, *The Emerging Lesbian*, 100.

scholars began to discuss sexuality and all of its facets.<sup>122</sup> The rapidly growing field of discourse surrounding homosexuality in particular began in the end of the nineteenth century with publications such as Richard von Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886), Karl Heinrich Ulrichs' many essays and books regarding 'urning,' Havelock Ellis and John Addington Symond's *Sexual Inversion* (1896), and Edward Carpenter's *The Intermediate Sex* (1908). These well-known authors developed numerous theories to explain why some individuals felt desire for the same sex. Often, the main point of conflict surrounded whether 'sexual inversion' constituted an inherent identity with biological causes or whether it resulted from environmental factors and actions during childhood such as over-protective mothering, masturbation or exposure to illicit sexual practices in adolescence. The question, often dubbed nature versus nurture, consequently influenced how individuals perceived homosexuality in the West.

During the Republican Era, many of these theorists travelled across the world to visit China and to provide a westerner's insight into sexuality for the intellectuals of the May Fourth Movement. For example, Magnus Hirschfield, the founder of the Institute for Sexual Research, visited numerous colleges and universities throughout China to present thirty-five lectures on sexology.<sup>123</sup> The presence of so many different visiting scholars, and subsequently the translations of their works, reveals the exposure of Chinese scholars and students to a "wide spectrum of conceptions of same-sex desire."<sup>124</sup> Importantly, the availability of such a variety of possible interpretations of sexuality means that Chinese scholars, sociologists and doctors could have potentially chosen to duplicate and expand upon theories

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<sup>122</sup> Many historians of the study of sexuality argue that, prior to the nineteenth century, heterosexuality and homosexuality did not exist. That is to say, the distinction between specific identities that revolved around an individual's sexual preference emerged from medical discourse during the nineteenth century and that prior to that discussion, sexual acts, regardless of their social acceptance or lack thereof, did not determine a person's identity.

<sup>123</sup> Sang, *The Emerging Lesbian*, 100.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

that supported the traditional Chinese understanding of sexuality—including the aspects allowing for individuals to have the freedom to choose personal objects of desire.

Contemporary scholars, however, do not necessarily agree on how to 'read' the Republican Era. Brett Hinsch, for example, viewed the rise in scholarship of the May Fourth Movement as the final nail in the coffin for the social tolerance of homoeroticism in China. He says,

Following the humiliation of China at the hands of Western and Japanese imperialist, the Chinese developed a love-hate relationship with the West. Spurred on by the May Fourth Movement, progressives say Western science and technology as China's salvation. But along with modernization of Chinese science came the desire to adopt 'modern' Western ideas in every sphere of existence... It was during this frenzied casting away of the traditional order that the Chinese finally began to heed missionary criticism of their sexual morality.<sup>125</sup>

Of course, it was less of a specific 'tolerance' and more of an 'understanding' of sexuality that incorporated homoeroticism prior to the modern age, so these sweeping generalizations miss the subtleties of Chinese culture. Although the May Fourth Movement did center around the importation and adoption of western science and intellectualism to a degree, the intellectuals themselves created new social ideologies that specifically addressed Chinese culture and history. In other words, they did not wholeheartedly adopt all things western in an attempt to *become* western, per se, but rather, they re-conceptualized Chinese society and politics in hopes of forming their own new version of China.

The West, therefore, only played an external role in the changing perceptions of homosexuality in China during the Republican Era. Rather than supporting Hinsch's view of the corrupting influence of Europe and America, for example, some argue that "it is through the encounter with the West in the mid-nineteenth century, which sparked a series of indigenous efforts to modernize China, that same-sex eroticism was gradually defined as pathological."<sup>126</sup> Chinese scholars internally drove these changes rather than acting as passive receptacles for the opinions of western missionaries or scientists. The

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<sup>125</sup> Hinsch, *Cut Sleeve*, 166.

<sup>126</sup> Wah-shan, *Tongzhi*, 43.

political defeats, intertwined with cultural views of inferiority, motivated Chinese scholars to embrace western science, medicine and culture in hopes of returning China to a place of greatness globally. Some perceived "the lack of Western science and religion... as proof of the inferiority and backwardness of Chinese culture."<sup>127</sup> Furthermore, the return of students from abroad only furthered this discontent with traditional culture; Hu Shih, for example, said "There is only one way out, to recognize that we are inferior in all aspects, not only in the material and technological aspects, not only in the political institutions, but also inferior in morality, in knowledge, in literature, in music, in art and in body."<sup>128</sup> Possibly the Chinese interaction with sexology and medical discourse regarding homosexuality led to the adoption of homophobic beliefs in hopes of molding Chinese society to be more western. Rather than seeing this as a desire to completely escape China's history by adopting all things western, this dissatisfaction should be seen as a drive to reevaluate China's past in order to form a different future. Especially when considering the anti-Christian and anti-imperialism undercurrents of the movement, western science and biological determinism provided activists with a means for *restructuring* Chinese society in order to strengthen it as a nation and as a contender in the global system. They aimed, therefore, to hold on to things that were essentially Chinese such as Confucian and other Chinese philosophies and to use those doctrines to support a new understanding of Chinese values that happened to correlate with some of the major themes in western culture.

In order to alter Chinese society to parallel Western views of sexual morality without incorporating Judeo-Christian religious doctrines of sexual sin, intellectuals heterosexualized Confucian values. As discussed above, Confucian family values did not require that all sexuality be heterosexual; filial duties did not necessitate monogamy or even that the object of desire be the opposite sex. With the importation of the western view of heterosexuality, Chinese intellectuals used gender discourse to

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>128</sup> Hu Shih, *Bai shi bu ru ren*, quoted in Chou Wah-shan, *Tongzhi*, 44.

justify opposite-sex desire as the primary, normal form of sexuality.<sup>129</sup> Romantic love, for example, became increasingly popular and important in the Chinese understanding of sexuality and marriage. Scholars idealized the relationship between sexuality and love by adopting the Western standards of courtship followed by love, engagement, marriage and, then, sex.<sup>130</sup> While procreation remained the primary function of a marriage, romantic love aided in those endeavors by supporting strong husband-wife relations and by increasing the chances of continued erotic attraction. Wives began to expect men to satisfy their financial, emotional, physical *and* sexual needs as part of proof of their husband's love. Moreover, the scholars saw successful marriage and childrearing as essential for the health of the nation. Strong families continued to hold a central role in Chinese politics just as they had in *The Great Learning*. In order to assume that the default form of sexuality only included relations between men and women, "Chinese intellectuals had to delineate its boundaries and identify relationships that were peripheral to or overlapped with it..."<sup>131</sup> Relationships, therefore, that did not fall within the boundaries of opposite-sex eroticism and love fell into the categories of abnormal or unnatural.

The emergence of heterosexism "allowed same-sex love to be medicalized and pathologized, now being perceived as a mental disorder and psychological essence that requires specific medical-psychological treatment."<sup>132</sup> By placing homosexuality opposite of heterosexuality and by institutionalizing romantic love through new standards for marriage, Chinese intellectuals adopted western understandings of sexuality without having to adopt western religious doctrine as well. Unlike in the west where ideas of sin and vice motivated the increase in medical discourse related to sexuality, Chinese scholars used theories of yin and yang to adapt "biologized gender polarity" to place

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>131</sup> Sang, *The Emerging Lesbian*, 101.

<sup>132</sup> Wah-shan, *Tongzhi*, 47. Heterosexism is a term used to describe the cultural assumption that heterosexuality is, and should be, the natural form of sexuality and that all other expression of sexuality are abnormal.

homosexual relationships in the periphery of acceptable eroticism.<sup>133</sup> The reformation of gender identities during this time, such as the appearance of “The New Woman,” further contributed to an understanding of homosexuality as “sexual inversion.”<sup>134</sup> Considerations of homosexuality as a medical illness, popular in the West for decades before this, slowly penetrated the Chinese mentality over the next half of the century. As such, treatments attempted to alter individuals with homoerotic desires much in the same way as in Europe and America. In some cases, Chinese medical professionals believed homoerotic desires to be natural which, rather than leading to a view accepting homosexuality as a lifestyle, often led to the belief that doctors could not help individuals with these desires.

Frank Dikotter, for example, discusses the negative implications of Western medical discourse in a section of his book, *Sex, Culture, and Modernity in China: Medical Science and the Construction of Sexual Identities in the Early Republican Era*. He argues that during the early Republican era the Chinese believed, “like germs, sodomy could spread rapidly to ‘contaminate’ the social ‘organism.’”<sup>135</sup> Interestingly, this belief stemmed into a twofold problem: they thought sodomy led to mental illness and it corrupted the innocence of the youth. Dikotter translates and analyzes the views of Gui Zhilian, a Republican Era doctor, who argued that same-sex desire naturally occurred as part of the sexual growth of individuals from adolescence to marriage, but that a small part of society occasionally would “‘get blocked’ (*zu’ai*) or ‘bogged down’ (*tingzhi*) in what was described as a form of ‘abnormal homosexuality’ (*bu putong de tongxing lian’ai*).”<sup>136</sup> Gui, as a result, believed that men and women with these tendencies could not be ‘saved’ from their desires through marriage or therapy. Dikotter summarizes his arguments as follows:

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<sup>133</sup> Wah-shan, *Tongzhi*, 49.

<sup>134</sup> Sang, *The Emerging Lesbian*, 102.

<sup>135</sup> Dikotter, *Sex, Culture and Modernity*, 140.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

The homosexual was thought to have strayed from the right 'path' (*tujing*), entered 'wrong ways' (*xietu*), turned his back on 'normal' (*zheng*) intercourse, 'inverted' or 'turned upside down' (*diandao*) the natural order, and developed 'abnormal' desires (*xingyu biantai*). By calling homosexuality a 'diseased state' (*bingtai*) or a 'metamorphosis' (*biantai*), it was implied that a 'normal' heterosexual instinct was originally present even in 'abnormal' bodies. Instead of a radically different type of sexual preference, it was portrayed as a 'bad habit' which led to a waste of precious semen.<sup>137</sup>

Importantly, this passage reinforces the fact that Chinese scholars used Chinese culture to implement Western views without importing Western religious values. The waste of semen, highly frowned upon by traditional beliefs in Taoism, defended medical discourse against homoeroticism, not religious sin or immorality like in the West. This view also adds to the heterosexualizing of Chinese society by implying that all individuals originally and ultimately have heterosexual desires within them as part of the natural path in life.

Other Chinese scholars translated and expanded upon Western theories of inversion. For example, Cheng Hao, in *The sexual life of mankind* (1934), includes a table of features attributed to homosexuality that contrast the masculinity of normal men. The observations support the diagnosis that men with homoerotic desires are actually women trapped in their masculine bodies. He even goes as far to claim that homosexual men have a chest "developed like that of a girl, to the point of secreting milk in the mammary glands," and that homosexual women's voices appear "gruff like men, structure of the larynx similar to men, weak laryngeal nodes."<sup>138</sup> These arguments, of course, appear frequently in Western texts on sexuality and inversion, works that surely greatly influenced Cheng Hao. The question of what depth did these views penetrate Chinese society, however, has led to multiple historical disputes.

Contemporary scholar Chou Wah-shan, for example, calls this adaptation of western beliefs, medical and theoretical, a "half-hearted project" because it occurred as homosexuality continued to

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 142.

flourish during the early twentieth century.<sup>139</sup> Anne-Marie Brady, in “East meets West: Rewi Alley and changing attitudes towards homosexuality,” says that during the Republican era:

Shanghai was a city with an active homosexual scene. Male prostitutes were available in the bars and brothels, and in bathhouses where erotic massage was an optional extra. However it would be a mistake to view this as something separate from the heterosexual sex scene; homosexual activity was simply another option for the sex consumer.<sup>140</sup>

So while scholars debated the relationship between heterosexuality and homosexuality, the actual consumption of sex continued to reflect the more traditional understanding of an almost pan-sexuality. She further argues that the cultural scene in Beijing during the Republican era encouraged a flourishing ‘gay’ community as Westerners visited the capital to participate in the wide variety of cultural attractions while also becoming involved in the local social scene. Their interests, according to Brady, coincided with their homosexual desires and they found local Chinese individuals with similar desires to appease their sexual urges while satisfying their cultural ones.<sup>141</sup> Although Tze-Lan Sang focuses mainly on portrayals of female-same sex desire during the modern age, she argues for a slightly different reading of the attitudes towards homosexuality that explain the coincidence of the significant amount of public conversation about sexuality with the continued large consumption of homosexuality. While Chou argues that the restructuring of sexuality in China led to primarily homophobic discourse, Sang argues that Republican era intellectuals translating western texts not only provided a wide variety of alternative opinions for readers but also chose specific phrasing that would associate homoeroticism with heterosexual love and thus slow the transition to intolerance.

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<sup>139</sup> Wah-shan, *Tongzhi*, 50.

<sup>140</sup> Anne-Marie Brady, “East meets West: Rewi Alley and changing attitudes towards homosexuality in China,” *East Asia History* 9, (June, 1995): 140.

<sup>141</sup> Brady, “East Meets West...,” 105.

The term most often used by Republican era intellectuals to mean ‘homosexuality,’ *tongxing lian’ai*, can otherwise be translated as same-sex love.<sup>142</sup> Sang points out that they could have chosen *tonxing xingyu* (same-sex sexual desire) or *tongxing xingjiao* (same-sex sexual intercourse), but the actual use of *ai* (love) highlights an understanding of “emotional intensity and sympathy.”<sup>143</sup> The intellectuals of this time wanted to combine traditional conceptualizations with modern views in their restructuring of Chinese society since this translation emphasizes the perception of romantic love as “sex plus the basic feelings that one human being has for another,” essentially strong friendship with a sexual component.<sup>144</sup> By potentially viewing homosexuality as opposite of heterosexuality without requiring it to be antithetical to romantic love, this view may explain why some intellectuals “openly protested the construction of male-female free love as the ultimate love...”<sup>145</sup> This also may explain how popular and widely read discourse on sexuality did not immediately create a social stigma for homosexuality. Furthermore, the emphasis on *ai* may signify that *tongxing lian’ai* constituted a “modality of love or an intersubjective rapport rather than [a category] of personhood.”<sup>146</sup> If so, then Brady’s view of the variety of sexual experiences available in Shanghai as part of an overall consumption of sex in all its forms implies that western views of homosexuality as an identity did not permeate society during the Republican era as some other historians may argue.

It is difficult, of course, to determine whether or not the increase in conversation caused direct alterations to Chinese understandings of sexuality, especially in terms of identity formation. At the very least, the translation and discussion of many views of sexuality implies that the Republican era intellectuals hoped to incorporate Chinese culture and western sexology into a new, specifically Chinese view of sexuality. They may have intended to follow western homophobic beliefs or they may have

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<sup>142</sup> Sang, *The Emerging Lesbian*, 104.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

included homosexuality into a new version of romantic love, but it is definite that the controversy was not settled by the time of the rise of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). It is clear, however, that the version of the Chinese understanding of sexuality from establishment of the People's Republic of China onward included "the imposition of an unprecedented social stigma" on men who engaged in homoeroticism.<sup>147</sup>

The years between 1949 and the reformations by Deng Xiaoping in the 1980s do not provide many sources or accounts of the homosexual or homoerotic experience in China. The founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 signified a dramatic drop in public discourse on homosexuality and homoeroticism. Tze-Lan Sang's research found only one book from the communist era, published in 1950, that mentioned homosexuality.<sup>148</sup> Harriet Evans's research revealed that the journals she reviewed from the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s from women's and youth's organizations did not contain a single reference to homosexuality.<sup>149</sup> Such overwhelming silence on the topic speaks volumes of the oppression of homosexuality during the decades before the reforms in the 1980s and 1990s. These reforms began to slowly change the visibility of homosexuality in mainland China.<sup>150</sup> While many scholars argue that sexuality, in general, became taboo, and that "[a]ttention to matters of love and sex was for decades treated either as shamefully illicit or as a manifestation of bourgeois individualism and thus detrimental to collective welfare,"<sup>151</sup> the promulgation of the 1950 Marriage Laws saw an increase in articles and publications related to issues in heterosexual relationships. Harriet Evans, in an article about the construction of sexuality during communist China lists a series of article titles that discuss issues of love, sexual satisfaction in marriage and extramarital affairs before saying,

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> The vast majority of my research discusses mainland China so as to avoid the complexities of dealing with paralleling Chinese identities in Hong Kong and Taiwan. The British influences in Hong Kong and the politically historical differences in Taiwan resulted in a different homoerotic and homosexual tradition in both places.

<sup>151</sup> Harriet Evans, "Defining Difference: The "Scientific" Construction of Sexuality and Gender in the People's Republic of China," *Signs* 20 (Winter, 1995): 358.

Disseminated principally under the auspices of official agencies-official publishing houses and state medical, educational, and legal institutions-these materials transmitted a view of sexuality and sexual difference as a set of biologically determined binary opposites that governed gender behavior.<sup>152</sup>

By supporting the publishing of information that supported a biological view of sexuality, the CCP reclaimed sexuality from the intellectuals and placed it within the control of the government.

“Premarital or extramarital sexual practices like adultery, masturbation and homosexuality were declared to be ‘shameless’ or ‘abnormal’” through these official publications, and heterosexual, romantic love within consensual marriage became the primary goal.<sup>153</sup>

It is likely that communist leaders saw homosexuality as part of the decadence of bourgeois society prior to the civil war. The issue, then, becomes less the object of sexual desire, but rather the conflicts of classism. While it is difficult to find references to actual party politics regarding homosexuality prior to the 1980s, publications from after the 1980s that call homosexuality “a ‘Western social disease’” supports arguments that politicians, if and when they considered the effects of homosexuality on society, probably believed homosexuality contributed to Chinese political weakness by threatening family structures and by supporting western, non-normative sexual practices.<sup>154</sup> By associating it with bourgeois culture, the CCP could use Marxism to defend homophobia. These beliefs may parallel some of the arguments made by Qing scholars against extramarital sexuality and against the indulgences of Ming and Qing literati.

Related to homosexuality, the 1950 Marriage Laws, and discussions surrounding them, greatly influenced the Chinese views of sexuality by strictly placing it within procreative marriage. This, of course, implies a disapproval of homosexuality as a non-procreative, extramarital practice. Evans argues that “as the only legitimate expression of a naturalized construction of heterosexuality, the

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<sup>152</sup> Evans, “Defining Difference...,” 359.

<sup>153</sup> Dikotter, *Sex, Culture and Modernity*, 181.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

monogamous relationship drew clear boundaries of gender behavior, women's transgression of which was represented as a potential threat to female fertility as well as family stability."<sup>155</sup> So, by controlling marriage and sexuality, the state controlled gender boundaries, family stability, and individual behavior in order to ultimately control social and political power. The continued focus on romantic love from the Republican period onward also changes the definition of marriage. No longer a quasi-political contract between families, state publications, in the form of women's magazines in particular, presented a view of marriage as the equal union of two individuals. This created obligations for both the husband and wife to satisfy his or her partner sexually as well as emotionally. Primarily, by creating such expectations, the focus on happy marriages changed how society 'officially' viewed extramarital affairs. The word 'officially,' of course, implies the necessary distinction between how society actually regulated sexuality versus how the state wanted society to believe and support. Throughout these political changes, the underlying belief in Confucian values such as filial duty and necessary procreation also support arguments in favor of strong marriages that meet the new standards for happiness.

This of course does not mean that same-sex intimacy, love, or eroticism disappeared with the establishment of the PRC. In Maoist China, "emotional intimacy and constant physical proximity between those of the same sex may have been common; in fact, same-sex relationships may have been less inhibited than pre-marital male-female intimate relations were."<sup>156</sup> For example, a story, published in 1998 (but supposedly telling of an experience from during Maoist China,) shares about two men, Liu Ying and Jiang Xiaobo. Liu, waking to discover Jiang performing oral sex on him, reports this to his brigade leader. The investigation reveals that Jiang has had anal sex with eighteen other members of the unit.<sup>157</sup> The opening of archives in Shanghai and Beijing from the years between 1949 and 1968 may also provide future scholars with further information on the experiences of actual individuals from this time.

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<sup>155</sup> Evans, "Defining Difference..." 362.

<sup>156</sup> Sang, *The Emerging Lesbian*, 164.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

Neil Diamond's research, for example, found at least one homoerotic story in which a "female worker (who happened to also be a Party member) fashioned a rubber dildo to have sex with a married woman and, furthermore, urged her lover to divorce her husband."<sup>158</sup> One of the most interesting views on homoeroticism from this time appears in the personal memoirs of Mao Zedong's physician, Dr. Li Zhisui. In his interactions with Mao, Li learned that "Mao's sexual activity was not confined to women. The young males who served as his attendants were invariably handsome and strong, and one of their responsibilities was to administer a nightly massage... Mao insisted that his groin be massage, too...."<sup>159</sup> What makes his observations interesting, however, goes beyond popular fascination with political leaders; his view of Mao's sexuality adheres to a more traditional view of sexuality. He further says,

For a while I took such behavior as evidence of a homosexual strain, but later I concluded that it was simply an insatiable appetite for any form of sex. In traditional times young men... played the female roles in Chinese operas, and many were brought into the sexual service of wealthy merchants and officials... Catamites are part of Chinese tradition.<sup>160</sup>

This passage only accounts for one individual's view of homoeroticism, but they also may say many things about Chinese views of sexuality. First, the final line of the passage stands out as fairly significant. Li, a professionally trained doctor, considers sexual engagement with catamites as a part of Chinese history and tradition. He knows of the recent history of homoeroticism which implies that works such as *The Dream of the Red Chamber* and *The Golden Lotus*, which he mentions specifically as favorites of Mao, continued to inform readers of the homoerotic tradition from the height of the literati same-sex vogue. The sexual appetites of officials and merchants from 'traditional times' still existed in the collective memories of Chinese professionals. Second, his dismissal of Mao's homoeroticism as part of a larger desire for sex, regardless of gender, very much complies with traditional understandings of sexuality as described above. Mao's fondling of servant boys and the fondling of him in return did not

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>159</sup> Li Zhisui, *The Private Life of Chairman Mao: The memoirs of Mao's personal physician*, trans. Tai Hung-Chao (New York: Random House, 1994), 358-359.

<sup>160</sup> Li Zhisui, *The Private Life*, 359.

constitute an identity in Li's opinion; rather it fit within Mao's character as a powerful leader with very obvious sexual prowess. In his sixties, according to Li, Mao continued to engage in orgies with many women as part of a belief in Taoist sexual practices, "allegedly in the interest of his longevity and strength."<sup>161</sup> These behaviors fit well within the traditions of the past even with the introduction of western influences.

These few stories have emerged within the past twenty or so years as China becomes more involved in the global community. The increase in demand for greater access to historical documents from the earlier years of the PRC has slowly led to the opening of more archives. Unfortunately, even as more information becomes available, men and women with desires for the same-sex continue to feel stigmatized by society which prevents them from sharing their personal stories from the Mao years. Some of the oppressed groups from the Cultural Revolution, such as the intellectuals, have reemerged in society and reclaimed a place in contemporary China, which encourages them to participate in interviews or to write books about their experiences. Individuals persecuted for illicit sexuality still fear that if they tell their story, they will bring shame to themselves and their families. Their stories, while incredibly important in the continuation of the homoerotic tradition, continue to be silenced by stigmatization and social disapproval. Perhaps over time more stories, about Mao Zedong or other men and women engaging in homoeroticism, will emerge in order to help paint a more thorough picture of homoeroticism during the Maoist years.

The Reform years after Mao's death present the most openly heterosexist official publications in Chinese history. The 1980s saw an increase in public discussions of homosexuality which included the first few accounts of public humiliation and persecution of men and women considered to be "bad

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 358.

elements [*huai fenzi*]."<sup>162</sup> For example, the CCP forced men and women discovered to have participated in homoerotic acts to parade in the streets with humiliating signs or to go to labor camps.<sup>163</sup> After the introduction of reforms under Deng Xiaoping, rather than completely outlawing homosexuality or homoerotic acts, the criminal codes of 1980 include a catchall category outlawing "hooliganism" which officials used to persecute any individuals that threatened social stability, including those engaging in sodomy or male-male rape.<sup>164</sup> These legal changes coincided with a "reemergence of the taxonomy of homosexuality into public discussions" as part of the "sexing of Chinese society and culture after Maoism."<sup>165</sup> Some officials even claimed "besides going against traditional Chinese moral concepts and leading young people astray by luring them to practice it, homosexuality simply constitutes a social perversion."<sup>166</sup> By placing homosexuality in the realm of society rather than biology, these writers, scholars and officials supported views of sexual inversion as a thing nurtured within deviants. Texts translated during the Republican era that debated these very issues became popular and new editions circulated throughout society. Global interactions with homosexuality movements elsewhere also sparked conversations and increased interest in questions of Chinese homoeroticism.

Yet again, language greatly influenced the Chinese perception of homosexuality. Since prior to the repeal of the "hooliganism" law in 1997, many gay men worried about legal prosecution and so positive representations of a homosexual identity or experience in contemporary China often escaped public eye in the 1990s. While some activists in the West in the west pointed to the Greeks and Romans as the origins of the western homosexual tradition, the Chinese have difficulty in accessing their own history in order to do the same. This appeal to a historical tradition, fairly successful in helping with the formation of a 'gay' identity in the West becomes limited by the transition from *wen yen* to *pai hua*—

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<sup>162</sup> Sang, *The Emerging Lesbian*, 167.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>166</sup> "Tongxinglian hefahua jianyi mingjie renshi qunqi fandui" in *Xingdao ribao* (June 9, 1983) quoted in Hinsch, *Cut Sleeve*, 168.

from classical Chinese to the contemporary vernacular. The remaking of the Chinese language and the adoption of simplified characters limits the access historians have to China's records. Furthermore, the average younger Chinese man or woman does not study classical Chinese anymore and thus cannot read original copies of stories and histories. This has provided the Chinese government with an opportunity to essentially re-write the story books-- to write out references to the Cut Sleeve or the Half-eaten peach. Without access to original versions, the average man or woman with erotic desire for the same-sex cannot see their place in the long homoerotic tradition. Fundamentally, the Chinese government "imbued with a new form of sexual morality has projected that morality back into the past."<sup>167</sup> Brett Hinsch argues that "[today,] most Chinese see homosexuality as rare or even nonexistent in China."<sup>168</sup> While things have begun to change since the 1990s when Brett Hinsch published his groundbreaking study of the history of homoeroticism in China, the contemporary men and women with homoerotic desires still struggle to, first, understand their sexual identity and second, to make that identity essentially Chinese.

The appropriation of language helps minority groups formulate their identity. In China, the word *tongzhi* replaced English words such as gay, lesbian, bisexual, homosexual or transgender. The term *tongzhi* originated during the late 1990s when the first Chinese *Tongzhi* Conference inspired the creation of a sexuality equality movement in China. Although the Conference took place in Hong Kong, it gathered leaders from throughout China to discuss issues that concerned Chinese sexual minorities.<sup>169</sup> *Tongzhi*, originally meaning comrade, breaks down into *tong*, meaning same/homo, and *zhi*, meaning goal, spirit or orientation.<sup>170</sup> Reappropriated by the activists fighting for equality for sexual minorities because of its "positive connotations of respect, equality, and resistance," *tongzhi* helps to create a

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<sup>167</sup> Hinsch, *Cut Sleeve*, 169.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

<sup>169</sup> Andrew Wong, "The reappropriation of *tongzhi*," *Language in Society*, 34 (2005): 763.

<sup>170</sup> Wah-shan, *Tongzhi*, 1.

distinctly Chinese 'gay' identity.<sup>171</sup> By using a word with its own history rather than a transliteration that sounds like Western phrases, "activists invoke the voice of Chinese revolutionaries so as to achieve their social and expressive goals, the most prominent of which is to underscore the cultural distinctiveness of same-sex desire in Chinese culture and societies."<sup>172</sup> In the same way that Western LGBTQQIA organizations and scholars hope to reappropriate terms like "queer" to create a uniform identity and to counter negative connotations of terms like "homosexual" which denotes sickness or pathology, *tongzhi* "is widely accepted by the community for its positive cultural references, gender neutrality, desexualization of the stigma of homosexuality, politics beyond the homo-hetero duality, and use as an indigenous cultural identity for integrating the sexual into the social."<sup>173</sup> Importantly, *tongzhi* incorporates much more than *tongxinglian* by not actually referencing sex in the word itself which has allowed it to be adopted by other marginalized sexual minorities such as sadomasochists.<sup>174</sup> It reinforces the unity of the *tongzhi* community over the orientational differences.

Activists in China use other words and phrases besides *tongzhi* in order to distinguish homoerotic experience before and after the introduction of the hetero/homo dichotomy in the twentieth century. When discussing gay men and women from prior to the twentieth century or men and women who do not adopt a *tongzhi* identity, some scholars use the acronym PEPs which refers to "People who are Erotically attracted to People of the Same sex."<sup>175</sup> In many works, scholars will also use the phrase "Men who have Sex with Men" or MSM to describe men that may or may not have adopted a *tongzhi* identity but who still participate in homoerotic acts.<sup>176</sup> In regards to other options for the modern age, scholars sometimes use *Tongren*, for example, as a noun form of *tongzhi* to refer to LGBT

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<sup>171</sup> Wong, "The reappropriation...", 763, 769.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 770.

<sup>173</sup> Wah-shan, *Tongzhi*, 2.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>176</sup> Sun Zhongxin, James Farrer and Choi Kyung-hee, "Sexual Identity Among Men Who Have Sex with Men in Shanghai," *China Perspectives* 64 (March-April, 2006), 2.

individuals. *Tongzhi* is very similar to the word *gay* in that a person can say, “I am *gay/tongzhi*” or “I am a *gay person/tongren*,” since *ren* means person. *Tongren*, however, implies an understood and adopted queer identity. *Tongxinglian*, translated during the Republican era to mean homosexuality, rarely appears in interviews or conversations with PEPs or MSMs as a means for self-identification, but parents and other non-PEPS often use it, but not as a noun; rather they use it to refer to the actions or practices of PEPs rather than as a distinct type of person.<sup>177</sup> This choice may reflect the continuation of some aspects of the traditional understanding of sexuality as less a specific identity and more of a combination of physical practices. These intricacies distinguish the contemporary *tongzhi* experience from the queer experiences in the West. Importantly, the struggle over identity in China continues regardless of the emergence of the equality movement and of Chinese-specific queer language. For example, many PEPs resist self-identification as part of a queer community because of an adherence to more traditional views of sexuality as only a *part* of self-identity.<sup>178</sup>

Part of this resistance stems from the conflict between homoeroticism and filial piety. Marriage continues to be a central expectation for all Chinese men and women, regardless of their personal sexual desires. Parents, for example, often have little concern for their child’s intimate acts with other members of his or her gender; they focus, instead, on the fear that “she or he becomes ‘lesbian’ or ‘gay,’ a sexed category that privileges sexuality at the expense of his or her position in the family-kinship system, thus making the child a nonbeing in Chinese culture.”<sup>179</sup> Because of the extreme pressures to marry, many PEPs do not disclose their sexual preferences to their parents. One interviewee said the following about his mother:

She completely disagrees with it. No mother ever wishes her child to be homosexual. She, herself, got married and had a child, and wishes me to do the same. [My mother] rejects

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<sup>177</sup> Wah-shan, *Tongzhi*, 95.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*

homosexuality on the basis that it precludes the building of a family unit—a duty she, herself, had fulfilled.<sup>180</sup>

Their concerns, however, also result from their own desire to protect their families from shame or pain as well as protect themselves from rejection should their parents disapprove. The fear of causing their families to lose face further increases the pressure. Many believe that revealing their sexual preferences to their parents, neighbors, colleagues and friends may cause their families to be stigmatized out of association.<sup>181</sup> The concerns of the loss of social capital, *guanxi*, places a higher risk of isolation and withdrawal for PEPS—a risk they often do not want to expose their families to.<sup>182</sup>

Unfortunately, many PEPs succumb to these pressures and marry. Sometimes the spouse knows his or her wife or husband feels erotically attracted to members of the same sex. More often, however, married PEPS do not disclose their true feelings to their spouses and, as a result, feel overwhelming feelings of guilt.<sup>183</sup> With the rise in emphasis on the importance of romantic love from the Republican Era onward, the pressure to satisfy one's spouse greatly contributed to the problems facing PEPS. In a study of MSM in Shanghai, many respondents characterized their marriages as unhappy, lacking in communications, and filled with guilt and misgivings.<sup>184</sup> Furthermore, the liberalization of sexual attitudes has increased the emphasis on women's sexual rights so MSM believe their false marriages violate their wives' rights to a healthy sexual life.<sup>185</sup> These concerns, however, do not prevent most PEPS from getting married. One man, in an interview about his experiences as a *tongren*, said "Thirty is an extreme limit, and it's just like that in our [gay] circle. You can go ask anyone over thirty—nine out of ten

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<sup>180</sup> Jenny X. Liu and Kyung Choi, "Experiences of Social Discrimination Among Men Who Have Sex with Men in Shanghai, China," *AIDS Behavior* (2006): S28.

<sup>181</sup> Liu, "Experiences..." S28.

<sup>182</sup> Sun Zhongxin, "Sexual Identity..."

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*

are already married and have kids. That's just the situations in China."<sup>186</sup> Some even purposefully get married with the intention of quickly getting divorced in order to stall criticisms from colleagues and family members, but to also avoid making their spouse suffer for too long. This man went on to say,

We even resort to divorce to try to assure that our private lives won't be upset. I have a friend who divorced six months after he got married... but still had to pretend to all around him that he'd been deeply wounded so that his parents and neighbors wouldn't dare introduce a new prospect.<sup>187</sup>

These decisions, of course, do not only harm the *tongzhi* individual. Li Yinhe, for example, a well know sociologist who focuses on sexuality in contemporary China and who has gained quite a reputation throughout the country for both her controversial opinions and for her high level of scholarship, recently said the following about "homowives" or *tongqi*. She says:

It has been said that China has 20 million male homosexuals, of whom 80 per cent would marry a woman. These women are the 'homowives', and there are 16 million of them.... The 'homowife' phenomenon is a phenomenon unique to China, seldom witnessed in other countries. In other countries, homosexuals would remain single or live together or marry other homosexuals. Very few would enter into a heterosexual marriage. This difference comes about because Chinese culture places such a great emphasis on marriage and reproduction, as to make them compulsory.... The condition for 'homowives' is extremely tragic. At the seminar, there were 'homowives' who burst into tears as they spoke, leading all of them to hug each other for a good cry. Most days, they wash their faces with tears. I heard what I considered the most shocking testimony that from a woman who told of how she even doubted her ability to attract men -- why wouldn't her husband even want to look at her or touch her? Am I really that unworthy as a woman? She assumed that all men would treat her like that, not knowing that this is far from the truth. She did not dream that her husband would be gay. Under the circumstances, even the most beautiful and accomplished woman would not arouse him.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Robert Geyer, "In Love and Gay," in *Popular China: Unofficial Culture in a Globalizing Society*, ed. By Perry Link et al, (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Little, 2002), 256.

<sup>187</sup> Geyer, "In Love and Gay," 256.

<sup>188</sup> Li Yinhe, "Li Yinhe on homowives," trans. By Kenneth Tan, June 24, 2009, *Shanghai List*, <http://shanghaiist.com/2009/06/24/li-yinhe-homowives.php> [accessed April 20, 2010]; The estimated number of individuals in China that have homoerotic sexual desires is incredibly controversial. 20 million is by far, one of the lower estimates in contemporary scholarship.

These experiences for men and women in false marriages threaten the mental health of all individuals involved. Sometimes they also result in children—an issue that has received nearly enough attention by scholars. Interestingly, however, many men interviewed believed that when their relationships lasted long enough to result in children, they were more likely to trust that their children would accept their homosexuality.<sup>189</sup> Perhaps this belief results from the power structure in families and the probability that children exposed to same-sex couples from an early age have less trouble understanding, and thus accepting, homosexuality. Besides silencing concerns from family members and neighbors, marrying and having children helps PEPS gain better housing and employment prospects.

While the housing situation changes rapidly as the Chinese economy becomes more and more capitalistic, many PEPS struggle to find housing that will allow them to live alone. First of all, many respondents in a study on experiences of social discrimination said they believed that the suspicion surrounding their sexual orientation threaten the stability of their employment and that their chances to be hired decreased if they remained single for too long.<sup>190</sup> Without financial stability many PEPS cannot afford apartments on their own and thus fear their roommates and housemates discovering their homoerotic desires or practices. Until private apartments became more common, places like parks and urinals became popular cruising spots in major cities like Shanghai and Beijing, much like in London or New York.<sup>191</sup> Furthermore, with the recent increase in internet access throughout China, 200 to 300 websites catering to *tongren* have helped connect PEPS.<sup>192</sup> Many of these sites have positive and negative implications for the *tongzhi* communities. They provide a place for anonymous communication which can include creating a safe space for the exchange of ideas and advice for PEPS; they also,

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<sup>189</sup> Sun Zhongxin, "Sexual Identity...."

<sup>190</sup> Jenny Liu, "Experiences...", S28.

<sup>191</sup> For more information, see George Chauncy, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940*, Basic Books (1995) and Matt Houlbrook, *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918-1957*, University Of Chicago Press (2006).

<sup>192</sup> Hui Liu, et al, "Men Who Have Sex With Men and Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Sexually Transmitted Disease Control in China," *Sexually Transmitted Diseases* 33 (February, 2006).

however, “promote homosexual prostitution, erotic activity, and the practice of unprotected sex.”<sup>193</sup>

These websites, as a result, often encourage promiscuity and unsafe sexual behaviors which contributes to the rise in sexually transmitted diseases and infections amongst the men who have sex with men.

Many contemporary scholars worry that the spreading of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and Acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) in the *tongzhi* community will further contribute to popular homophobic sentiments in many ways similar to the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s in America. In recent surveys, a high rate of unprotected anal sex and a high rate of syphilis among MSMs have forced the Chinese government to begin collecting data on the risk of HIV/AIDS transmission in order to help with educational efforts.<sup>194</sup> Some MSMs interviewed reported knowledge regarding these diseases and the role of contraceptives in preventing them, but that has not seemed to be enough to convince them of their risks.<sup>195</sup> In one sample, 53.1% of MSM surveyed reported having a high level of knowledge, but the overall survey revealed a substantial number of misconceptions.<sup>196</sup> For example, 65.2% thought that misquitos could transmit HIV and 60.9% believed they could receive it from sitting on a toilet seat.<sup>197</sup> In this same survey, only 3.4% of participants indicated that they thought they had a high risk for HIV.<sup>198</sup> Many of the factors that prevent MSM from identifying as *tongzhi* or from visibly leading a *tongzhi* lifestyle also limit the success of AIDS prevention efforts.

According to the United Nations programme on HIV/AIDS, MSM accounted for 11.1% of the population with HIV/AIDS.<sup>199</sup> This led to the establishment of an extensive program to specifically

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<sup>193</sup> Hui Liu, “Men Who Have Sex With Men...”

<sup>194</sup> Shiman Ruan, et al., “HIV Prevalence and Correlates of Unprotected Anal Intercourse Among Men Who Have Sex with Men, Jinan, China,” *AIDS Behavior* (2008): 471.

<sup>195</sup> Vincent Gil, “The Cut Sleeve Revisited: A Brief Ethnographic Interview With a Male Homosexual in Mainland China,” *The Journal of Sex Research* 29 (1992): 576.

<sup>196</sup> Ruan, “HIV Prevalence...,” 471-472.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 472.

<sup>199</sup> “China to tackle HIV incidence amongst MSM.” 16 January 2009. UNAIDS: Joint United Nations Programme On HIV/AIDS.

address HIV/AIDS amongst the MSM population in 2008. One of the first goals set by the government aims to have 21,000 MSM to be tested which is one of the first and largest efforts of this kind in Asia.<sup>200</sup> These efforts, however, face many struggles since many Chinese individuals believe HIV/AIDS to be a western disease. For example, one study observed that all of the educational pamphlets included men wearing expensive Western style clothing which may reinforce the stereotype that a) only men in contact with the West have AIDS and b) that homosexuality is a “bourgeois Western import.”<sup>201</sup> The lack of a consistent and continuous homoerotic tradition in the collective memory of Chinese society increases these perceptions. One individual interviewed, for example, said that his lover “complained that the white are not only dirty but had AIDS,” and that other men in his circle of *tongzhi* friends spread rumors that he had AIDS from being in contact with an American man.<sup>202</sup> Simply by being in association with a foreigner, the man interviewed gained a reputation, but did not lose the opportunity to have intercourse with his lover. This example also reveals the belief that Westerners better understand HIV/AIDS and, thus, men who engage in homoerotic sexual practices with foreign men do not need to worry since the foreigner should be better able to avoid the disease or to take care of it.<sup>203</sup> By placing homosexuality and sexually transmitted diseases at a distance, these MSM can avoid creating a personal identity around their actions while also ignoring the potential risks involved with that identity.

Other misconceptions of homosexuality by Chinese society further contribute to the fact that many MSM do not want to be HIV/AIDS tested. Although in the most recent years, “more than two-thirds (77.2%) of the health care providers and 86% of students in the survey thought that homosexual individuals deserved sympathy and understanding,” the internalized stigmatization in the *tongzhi*

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[http://www.unaids.org/en/KnowledgeCentre/Resources/FeatureStories/archive/2009/20090116\\_MSMAsia.asp](http://www.unaids.org/en/KnowledgeCentre/Resources/FeatureStories/archive/2009/20090116_MSMAsia.asp) [accessed April 19, 2010].

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> Rodney Jones, “Mediated Action and Sexual Risk: Searching for ‘Culture’ in Discourses of Homosexuality and AIDS Prevention in China,” *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 1 (Apr.-Jun., 1999): 169.

<sup>202</sup> Jones, “Mediated Action...,” 172.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 173.

community, however, prevents many men from admitting their personal desires or actions, even to medical professionals. One reason stems from the portrayal of HIV/AIDS as a hidden social evil. In one study, the medical discourse used to inform individuals about the risks of sexual transmitted diseases and infections created an identity surrounding the “AIDS infected person” that emphasized the invisibility of the disease.<sup>204</sup> By constructing the “AIDS Infected people” as fundamentally ill but with healthy appearances, the testing for AIDS seems like a “tool to aid medical treatment as one whose primary purpose is to uncover the ‘true’ identity of the ‘AIDS infected person’ for the protection of society as a whole.”<sup>205</sup> Arguably, the “AIDS infected people” in these medical pamphlets appear as devious for their misrepresentation of themselves to their ‘trusting’ sexual partner. Rather than encouraging MSMs to get tested, this creates a fear that discovering one’s status limits one’s participation in “moral society” by making the individuals feel like if they learn that they are infected then they must take on the identity of diseased malicious threat to society.<sup>206</sup> This implies that being HIV-positive reveals a character flaw since the infection results from “the consequences of a violation of trust by one or both partners.”<sup>207</sup> This parallels many MSM’s fears that their colleagues, families, and, especially, wives will discover their hidden homoerotic desires. Many researchers worry about the high rates of bisexuality, especially in the form of heterosexual marriage with homoerotic illicit affairs, amongst MSM because of the increasing possibility that these men will pass on the disease to their wives and possibly then to their children. In one study, the researchers found that approximately half of those surveyed had sexual encounters with women as well as men and about a third married or were married.<sup>208</sup> Another major concern regarding this portion of the MSM population stems from the illicit nature of many sexual affairs. As married men, many MSM often cannot enter into stable, long-term

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>208</sup> “Men Who Have Sex With Men....”

relationships with other men for fear of being discovered by their wives. This encourages promiscuous and dangerous behavior such as sex in public places, one night stands, sex with multiple partners in short periods of time and sex with prostitutes. In particular, men who look for casual sex in public places have more sexual partners, show higher rates of being the penetrated partner which increase the risk of transmission, and have higher rates of sexual abuse.<sup>209</sup> By continuing to stigmatize homoeroticism and by continuing to pressure PEPs into marrying, Chinese society hinders efforts to prevent an AIDS epidemic.

*Tongzhi* activists have approached these social concerns from multiple standpoints. The most globally visible attempts at change come in the form of Western-style confrontational politics. Confrontational politics are political strategies that directly challenge the system, especially legally, through very visible means. In the West, for example, pride parades, pride weeks, protests, rallies and kiss-ins all bring media attention to the inequality of sexual minorities. First, they empower individuals to accept their identity and to engage in a lifestyle that uniquely fits their desires. The emphasis on pride and the usage of very brightly colored signs, clothing and flags declare that members of the LGBTQIA movement have embraced their differences as wonderful, personal attributes that do not make them any less socially worthy. Second, the events loudly tell the majority that the group wants equality and is not afraid to challenge the status quo to get it. They make the greater public realize that the issue is not perversion or deviance, but rather political and social equality for a group of people who want to love freely. Although confrontational, these strategies focus on exercising one's political rights in order to gain rights naturally granted to them. Concepts such as universal human rights, first amendment rights in the United States, freedom and self-identity, many of which are very Western, underlie the LGBTQIA movements in America and Europe. These strategies also confront the stereotypes present in Western societies by embracing some and rejecting others in order to show that same-sex desire is not deviant or

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<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

immoral. For example, many pride parades feature floats with men and women in sadomasochistic clothing or floats with men and women dressed as their opposite sex. By participating in these subcultures, individuals part of sexual minorities argue that their lifestyle choices do not prevent them from deserving happiness and equality. On the other hand, confrontational politics also try to show the majority culture that negative stereotypes such as the view of gay men as pedophiles are not justified. This is done through the process of 'coming out' to neighbors to show them that most members of the majority group know one or more LGBTQI individuals. The equality movement centers on this practice as a way to show majority group members that they know someone who defies these negative stereotype in hopes that they will question if it is right to deny all members of the sexual minority their rights based upon misconceptions.

Recently, efforts to implement some of these strategies in China reveal the many differences between Chinese and Western society. In spring of 2009, Shanghai Pride, a team of foreigners and local *tongzhi* Chinese, began to plan for the first pride week in Shanghai. Immediately, the differences between Western and Chinese politics emerged. First, the two team leaders, Tiffany Lemay and Hannah Miller, are both American-born residents of Shanghai.<sup>210</sup> Their experiences in America inspired them to begin the movement abroad. One of the first major hurdles they faced forced them to plan a week of private events without the traditional parade. Rather than creating a week of visible protest and celebration, as seen in most pride events in the West, Shanghai Pride decided to cater to the Western LGBTQIA visitors and hope to draw in some of the locals as well. In an interview with the BBC, Hannah Miller explained their decision:

Our lawyer suggested we publish all our promotional literature only in English... The advantage of that is that it doesn't draw so much attention, or make it sound like we are trying to get

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<sup>210</sup> Chris Hogg, "Shanghai to show pride with gay festival," *BBC News*, June 6, 2009. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8083672.stm> [accessed April 19, 2010].

people involved in gay rights or in any sort of protest. Basically we were told that if we framed it as a party for foreigners, as entertainment, then we would have more chance of success.<sup>211</sup>

The concern that officials would view the events as confrontational shows the ways that organizers must approach China with a unique, Chinese-specific perspective. Ultimately, the pride festival faced a few challenges, but Xinhua News, China's State News Agency, reported the week as a "as a milestone and a success."<sup>212</sup> One event, an academic debate, even had an estimated 70% Chinese turn out which surprised many since the week initially appeared to be heavily Western and foreign driven.<sup>213</sup> The local government mainly reacted by, what appeared to be randomly, cancelling some of the film screenings and a staging of a play, but many of the other events, especially the ones dedicated to just having fun and socializing, occurred without interference.

These political techniques, however, do not completely translate from Western society to Chinese society smoothly. The obvious problems with public protest or parades directly remind organizers of the lack of a bill of constitutional rights in China. The arguments for universal human rights and freedom of speech, expression or love do not have as much historical weight in China as they do in the West. Furthermore, the fundamental goals of pride festivals contradict Chinese values. Chinese culture, for example, looks down upon pride and individualism because of Confucian values. An individual's place within the family and within greater society determines the value of his or her experiences. Individualism, a much beloved trait in Western society, disconnects a person from his or her obligations and responsibilities which directly threatens values such as filial piety and the five relationships. Confrontational politics, regardless of the goals of the group, struggle in China because of these issues. The western models, often seen as a universal prototype, "are actually generated by a

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<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> "Gay festival in Shanghai teaches tolerance," *Xinhua*, June 6, 2009, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-06/16/content\\_11548886.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-06/16/content_11548886.htm) [accessed April 19, 2010].

<sup>213</sup> Duncan Hewitt and Melinda Liu, "Pride Without a Parade," *Newsweek*, June 13, 2009, <http://www.newsweek.com/id/201981> [accessed April 19, 2010].

specific socioeconomic and cultural history of possessive individualism, industrial capitalism, urbanization, a framework of psychoanalysis, and a discourse of rights.”<sup>214</sup> Without these features and cultural values, Chinese activists must alter their strategies to adapt to their own homoerotic history as well as the rapidly changing global climate that continues to introduce new ideas and concepts that can help and hinder their efforts.

Conversations about sexuality in Chinese academia and in popular culture provide interesting insight into the cultural developments that accompany these political strategies. Issues about personal identity, sexual orientation and romance have sparked an interest in many Chinese sociologists. The questions, of course, address both how to incorporate *tongzhi* lifestyle choices into greater Chinese society. Li Yinhe, in a survey of 400 individuals, recently found that, “20% of Chinese people think there is nothing wrong with [homosexuality]. 30% think that it is “a little wrong” but not completely wrong, and 40% think it’s completely wrong.”<sup>215</sup> Significantly for the *tongzhi* community, the survey also found that, if a family member is homosexual, 10% would be totally accepting, 10% would be totally rejecting and approximately 75% of the people said “would tolerate but hope that they would change.”<sup>216</sup> These opinions shape how *tongren* chose to reveal their sexual orientation to their families.

An example of a uniquely Chinese approach to inspiring cultural changes comes from the adaptation of ‘coming out.’ Rather than encouraging a highly visible, confrontational, aggressive process of revealing an individual’s sexual identity to all of her or his friends, family members, colleague and neighbors, many *tongren* have begun to “come home.”<sup>217</sup> Coming out, as the epitome of confrontational politics, allows for LGBTQQIA individuals to transition to an openly queer lifestyle; many see it as “a

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<sup>214</sup> Wah-shan, *Tongzhi*, 6.

<sup>215</sup> “Li Yinhe on Chinese attitudes towards homosexuality: ten questions,” June 18, 2008, <http://peijinchen.com/blog/2008/06/18/li-yinhe-on-chinese-attitudes-towards-homosexuality-ten-questions/> [accessed April 20, 2010].

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, 249.

developmental and lifelong process, starting from self-recognition and acceptance to the ultimate goal of becoming a full person in society.”<sup>218</sup> In America, coming out “is not only a political project of the lesbian movement, but is often a cultural project of affirming the American value of individualism.”<sup>219</sup> In China, however, telling one’s parents, neighbors or colleagues has a high risk of danger. While physical harm is unlikely, emotional damage and fears of being ostracized prevent many *tongren* from ‘coming out.’ Furthermore, the more relational concepts of identity makes coming out seem like the individual admits he or she does not fit the expectations of society. It reaffirms that non-heterosexual sexual identity deviates from Chinese identity and places more weight on aspects of one’s identity that usually constitute only a minor part of the person. One woman, for example, said, “It is problematic to demand that all PEPS come out with the same identity... I tend to prioritize Hong Kong Chinese identity (cultural), Buddhism (religion), daughter (family-kin), and vegetarian (ecological-political) no less than my sexuality. So, come out as what?”<sup>220</sup> This view of the coming out process occurs in many minority groups within the sexual minority in other cultures and countries. For example, LGBTQQIA individuals in the Asian American community view coming out to their parents as “the implication is that not only is the child rejecting the traditional role of a wife-mother or son-father, but also that the parents have failed in their role and that the child is rejecting the importance of family and Asian culture.”<sup>221</sup> Coming out, therefore, defines more aspects of one’s identity and culture beyond their sexual preference. An alternative process in China, known as ‘coming home,’ works within Chinese social values to help reaffirm *tongzhi* individuals of their place within Chinese culture and within the family-kinship system so as to avoid distinguishing themselves from all of their Chinese identity.

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<sup>218</sup> Ibid., 250.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 251.

<sup>220</sup> Interviewee Eliza quoted in Wah-shan, *Tongzhi*, 261.

<sup>221</sup> Connie Chan, quoted in Wah-shan, *Tongzhi*, 262.

Rather than forcing their parents to discuss and accept their sexual preferences, many *tongzhi* individuals choose to use fundamental experiences to help their parent tacitly understand. For example, one man, James, managed to incorporate his boyfriend, Xiao-Liu, into his family through a slow process of bringing him home for dinner. By initially bringing him home as a friend, James did not need to outright tell his parents that Xiao-Liu was his boyfriend; rather, he allowed them to interact first and realize that Xiao-Liu cares for James very much. For his family, the implicit sexual relationship means significantly less if the outward friendship can persuade them that this situation is good for James. Through time, James' parents began to invite Xiao-Liu to stay the night or to attend all family dinners. James says,

My parents treat him as their son, and never say a word about sex. I think it is better to come out by action than by words or arguments. I can't expect my parents to understand the concepts if *tongxinglian*, The terms *gay* and *tongxinglian* could be very scary for my parents as they would be associated with perversity and Western corruption. But they understand intimate *ganqing* and *guanxi*, they accept Xiao-Liu fully, not as a gay man, but as my intimate friend.<sup>222</sup>

The fears of negative connotations of homosexuality and homoeroticism stem from many of the misconceptions of Western cultural and medical discourse as discussed above. Men and women hoping to introduce their partners to their families hope to present it in such a way that does not remind their parents of these misconceptions while showing that their relationships are beneficial and healthy. Another example, a Chinese man called Richard in his interview, accidentally revealed his sexual preference when his parents found his *tongzhi* magazines. The incident immediately turned painful when his father nearly disowned him. After a year of struggling to find his place within his family, Richard introduced his partner, A-Keung, to his family as a friend. A-Keung's lively and warm personality greatly changed how his parents saw *tongzhi* individuals. Richard says, "A-Keung simply has the capacity to make my parents forget his sexual orientation."<sup>223</sup> By allowing his family to get to know A-Keung as a

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<sup>222</sup> Wah-shan, *Tongzhi*, 117-118.

<sup>223</sup> Interviewee Richard, quoted in Wah-shan, *Tongzhi*, 265.

person before knowing him as Richard's partner, Richard found acceptance through a process that transformed the kinship system to include partners as adopted sons. Essentially, this prevents the *tongzhi* individual from creating a new identity as a *tongren*, but it allows for the person to have their relationships and desires without violating primary Chinese values. A final example, of a woman named Ching, sums up this perspective. Her relationship with Yee became quite apparent to her mother, but her mother does not accept it. Rather, she says

How can a Chinese mother accept her daughter or son being *tongxinglian*? It is suicidal to them! You do not confront your parents, you build up a harmonious relationship in order to let things go. My parents are doing their best in the Chinese way—tacit recognition without mentioning it. I want to be their daughter, not a different person called a lesbian.<sup>224</sup>

The development of quasi-kin categories allows for Chinese PEPS to find comfort in their identity without disturbing the system. These experiences contribute to a growing Chinese-specific movement to maintain cultural values while expressing individual desires. This form of coming home instead of coming out bypasses questions of illness or perversion by visibly showing heterosexual family members that the *tongzhi* individual can hold the place of daughter/son or brother/sister and still desire members of their same sex without having lost inherent qualities or characteristics. While this may not directly challenge social misconceptions of heterosexism, it provides a unique starting point for *tongzhi* individuals to find their place within society without alienating themselves or forcibly creating an us/them dichotomy.

The introduction of Western influences greatly changed the course of history for the homoerotic tradition. The continued interaction between Western styles of scholarship, politics and culture forces the contemporary Sexual Equality Movement to consider not only the history of homoeroticism in China but the relationship of that history to the West-China dichotomy. The average *tongzhi* individuals, MSMs and PEPS's ignorance of the history of homoeroticism in China prevents them from creating a collective

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<sup>224</sup> Interviewee Ching quoted in Wah-shan, *Tongzhi*, 266.

memory to inspire future efforts. Most importantly, the differences between Western and Chinese queer theory and scholarship shows that there is no global gay experience which forces sexual minority groups to adapt strategies to their own culture. Cultural values that carry on throughout history guide the story for sexual minorities. The early years of a traditional Chinese understanding of sex that incorporated homoeroticism stemmed from the emphasis on Confucian values that dictated the social hierarchy. The introduction of foreign influences in the late imperial age, such as the Manchus and the Western missionaries and traders, contrasted against those values and, thus, reaffirmed their Chinese-ness. The power of the literati and the role of Chinese philosophy during this time greatly contributed to the backlash against the very values seen as superior during the imperial times but inferior during the clashes with the West in the twentieth century. Transitioning to a completely different government and politic system radically changed how Chinese society defined sexuality resulting in a new definition that continues to grow and flux with the reintroduction of a homoerotic tradition. Besides providing a unique insight into a culture's sexual history, the changes in the views of homoeroticism from the ancient times onward may be the key to creating a successful Sexual Equality Movement both in China and abroad. It proves that sexuality can have many different forms of expression and that the perceptions and receptions of these experiences do not necessarily have to conform to what has appeared as an oppressive heterosexual dominance over sexual minorities. Men and women with desires for their same sex have the opportunity to find a personal identity within their communities and within the global context that can reflect these historical differences. In order to do so, however, they must uncover the history of their counterparts and use that knowledge to inspire acceptance and tolerance. There is a place within Chinese culture for *tongzhi* individuals to thrive without rebelling against personal values or traditions. It is within the framework of Chinese history that these individuals can determine their own identity as part of the greater Chinese community.

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