



China

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China is the only contemporary civilization with written materials dating back some 3500 years. Within this history is a rich, 2500-year-old continuous tradition of male-male love, as well as somewhat less rich traditions of what we would now call lesbianism and gender nonconformity.

The ancient Chinese had no unifying concept such as homosexuality, queer, or *tongzhi* (modern Chinese term meaning alternative love and sex) and did not link such manifestations as the taste for boys, love between ladies-in-waiting, cross dressing, and sex change. But, most significantly, in China *tongzhi* escaped systematic homophobia until the beginning of the twentieth century.

Some aspects of Chinese thought before the tenth century C. E. account for traditional, tolerant attitudes toward male-male love and sapphism. These ways of loving were well integrated into Chinese values before Buddhism influenced Chinese thought after the fourth century C. E. and before the intrusion of Western bourgeois thinking beginning with the May the Fourth movement (1919).

Ancient Chinese thinkers were concerned with practical matters, such as politics and morals; they were suspicious of philosophical systems, being more intent on devising methods of wielding power and attaining wisdom. The Chinese gentleman, or *junzi*, aimed at universal culture, and shunned specialized knowledge and the limitations of technical expertise. On the other hand, the Chinese had an early taste for compiling catalogues and classifying human characters according to moral or psychological criteria.

Chinese morality was not based on religious taboos, but was founded on ideals of temperance, personal cultivation, and virtues such as benevolence, justice, urbanity, wisdom, and trust. The ancient Chinese did not regard sensuality as shameful, and they would have thought the regulation of erotic practices by the state as bizarre. Even a concept of sexual orientation would have seemed foreign to them. After having fulfilled the obligation of siring male heirs for the clan, males were free to pursue their own erotic paths. Same-sex eroticism was not considered a moral problem in itself.

Ancient moralists and philosophers warned against excessive passions, particularly the potential harmful influence of favorites (as well as women and eunuchs) on state affairs or households, but they praised those favorites who had a beneficial influence on rulers.

Sources of the Chinese *tongzhi* Tradition

Countless ancient texts in every literary genre, from history (seen as a guidebook for politics) and philosophy to poetry, anecdotes, and fiction include some queer content. Most of this material concerns male-male relationships rather than lesbian relationships or transgendered experience.

The oldest materials--especially poetry--often prove very difficult to interpret, as classical Chinese has no



Top: China and neighboring countries.
Above: This erotic print from the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) depicts a female voyeur watching two males copulate.

gender and often omits the subject of a sentence. The earliest gay sources tend to be vague, and focus on the moral rather than the sexual features in male-male relationships. However, some examples of pictorial erotica survive from the late Ming (1368-1644) onwards. While works of erotic art often fell victim to puritanical censors during the Qing dynasty (1644-1911) and afterwards, modern archeological finds, such as Han (206 B. C. E.-220 C. E.) bronze dildoes, including double-headed ones for lesbian use, are slowly emerging from the shadows of Communist prudery.

Lesbian and transgender materials prove much more fragmentary than male-male references, and the earliest date back only to the Han, and are found in anecdotes and fiction rather than in official histories. Only from the Ming dynasty are references to alternative sexualities and gender nonconformity more comprehensive.

The Politics of Favor (Seventh Century B. C. E. - 220 C. E.)

A late eighteenth-century anecdote dates pederasty to the legendary Yellow Emperor, who ruled from 2687 to 2599 B. C. E., i. e., back to the remotest period of Chinese history. The oldest surviving literary materials to have been interpreted as gay are some *Songs of Zheng (Zhengfeng)* in the *Book of Odes (Shijing)*, written between the tenth and sixth centuries B. C. E. Some of these poems engage in amorous teasing, celebrate virile brotherhood, and praise warriors' prowess and beauty.

Other ancient texts are historical anecdotes and philosophers' admonitions that provide an image of how widespread and institutionalized male love may have been in feudal China. Words for it, such as *chong* and *bi*, refer to political favor, to the relationship between ruler and courtier, and are found in texts up to the end of the imperial period.

The earliest truly historical material is found in the *Annals According to Zuoqiu Ming (Zuozhuan)*, which refers to Shen Hou, a favorite of a king, then an earl in the seventh century B. C. E., and to the good-looking Zhao of Song, lover of Marquis Ling of Wei and his wife at the end of the sixth century and early fifth century B. C. E.

Scholars have assumed that "gay" relationships in ancient China were asymmetrical in terms of age and class, with elder social superiors initiating relationships with younger males of lower status. This assumption is somewhat confirmed by a later tradition, but very few early documents mention the lovers' ages or roles. Class difference is often tenuous. In the story of the Prince of Xiangcheng, quoted in the *Garden of Tales (Shuoyuan)*, the grandee Zhuang Xin (who lived under King Xiang of Chu, who ruled from 298 to 263 B. C. E.) cruises him quite unabashedly!

Chapter 12 in the *Book of Han Feizi (Hanfeizi)* tells how Mi Zixia was the favorite of Marquis Ling of Wei (who ruled from 534 to 493 B. C. E.). As the two lovers were strolling in the palace orchard, Mi Zixia plucked an especially sweet peach. He found the fruit so much to his taste that he did not finish it, but gave the remainder to his lord, who praised him: "How much does he love me! That he gives me such a good fruit!" But when Mi Zixia lost his good looks and his lord's love, he was actively resented. This anecdote from the late Warring States period (475 to 221 B. C. E.) provided the phrase "shared peach," or *fentao*, as the earliest "gay" historical allusion.

Lord Longyang's story in the *Intrigues of the Warring States (Zhanguoce)* shows how favorites strengthened their position through artful persuasion. After he had taken a boat to go fishing with his lover, the King of Wei, and caught more than ten fishes, Lord Longyang suddenly began to weep. The King asked why he was weeping, and he answered, "I was happy when I got my first fishes, but I then caught bigger ones. I don't want the smaller ones any more. I fear you will treat me like my first fishes." In response, the King issued an edict forbidding courtiers to introduce handsome men to his court.

The phrase *longyang* became one of the standard allusions to male love as early as the third century C. E.

Under the Ming dynasty, it was a byword for an ephebe or catamite. "To act the longyang" meant to exhibit passivity or to engage in male prostitution. "Longyang's spot" came to signify the anus. Even today the "Longyang Club," an organization of Caucasian gay men and lesbians attracted to Asians, is named after Lord Longyang.

A frequent topic of early essays by political thinkers and moralists, who would later become scholar-officials, is how only worthy people gain office and power. In these works, the authors attack commoners such as sophists, musicians, unprincipled ephebes, and charming women who curry favor with kings. While they worry that a ruler's devotion to male beauty and erotic skills might ruin a state, the writers do not condemn male-male love in itself.

In 221 B. C. E., the first Emperor of Qin reunited China and laid the foundation of a centralized, bureaucratic state. Under the Qin (221 - 206 B. C. E.) and the Han dynasties, beauty and flattery still reaped honors. Most of the emperors had male or eunuch lovers.

Emperor Wen (who ruled from 179 to 157 B. C. E.) fell in love with a page, Deng Tong, and lavished gifts and honors on him. A physiognomist foretold that Deng Tong would starve to death, so the Emperor granted his lover minting privileges, and he consequently became a Chinese Croesus! However, what the ruler had not foreseen was that the heir to the throne grew so jealous of his father's favorite that upon succeeding as emperor his first sovereign act would be to confiscate Deng Tong's estate, so that that the favorite died a poor wretch.

A similar story is that of Emperor Ai's chief favorite Dong Xian (23 B. C. E. - 1 C. E.). A mere gentleman of the Privy Chamber when Ai ascended the throne, Dong Xian was promoted to High Constable at age 22, and the Emperor even thought of handing over the realm to him, showered him with riches, and had a sumptuous palace and mausoleum built for him. But immediately following Emperor Ai's death, Dong Xian was forced to commit suicide.

Despite his unhappy end, Dong Xian provided the Chinese with a well-known historical allusion to male-male love. When taking a nap, Dong Xian lay on the emperor's broad sleeve; the emperor wished to get up without disturbing his lover, so he cut his sleeve. Later writers coined the phrase *duanxiu*, or "the cut sleeve," as a byword for gay love. *Duanxiu zhi pi*, or "the passion of the cut sleeve," is still understood by some contemporary Chinese as a reference to male homosexuality.

Reaction against excessive favoritism led to the virtual disappearance of imperial lovers during the Later Han (25-220 C. E.). The rising bureaucracy attempted to rationalize access to positions of power. In so doing, it eroded the influence of imperial lovers.

Han texts begin to mention lovers of grandees and such officials as the powerful minister Huo Guang (died 68 B. C. E.), who loved his majordomo Feng-the-Fair, and General Liang Ji (died 159 C. E.), who loved one of his slaves.

Boy-loving Aristocrats in a Divided China (220-589 C. E.)

This period known as the Six Dynasties appears as a golden age of male love among aristocrats and scholars. After the long reign of the Han, China was divided into North and South. Short-lived dynasties came and went as the result of plots and coups. At this time, cultured gentlemen enjoyed metaphysical debates, wit, good looks, and expensive clothes. Male beauty and erotic skills could still win office and influence. Fashionable gentlemen wore powder and makeup without being seen as effeminate.

Collections of anecdotes and gossip from this period feature men freely discussing male beauty and, occasionally, male-male love. Love poems, such as those in the anthology *New Songs from a Jade Terrace* (*Yutai xinyong*), include sensuous depictions of ephebes, songs of amorous friendship, and laments on

departed friends. The elaborate poetry fashionable in this period is studded with allusions to historical anecdotes and characters, including Mi Zixia, the shared peach, Lord Longyang's fishes, and the cut sleeve. Other texts refer to "male love" or the "taste for boys" (*nanfeng* or *nanse*), as opposed to the attraction to women (*nüse*).

Low ranking aristocrats, officials, and scholars of equal standing and age, such as the two great poets Ruan Ji (210-263) and Ji Kang (223-262), are also featured in the texts of this period. In addition, male prostitution is mentioned, and poems often describe catamites, or passive ephebes, and their often tragic fate.

During the Six Dynasties, Buddhism deeply influenced Chinese thought, and introduced the idea of carnal sin. From a Buddhist perspective, sensuality is an impediment to spiritual life and is regarded as transgression. Catalogues of erotic practices--much more detailed than taboos on rape, adultery, and endogamy--appeared to imply that certain activities are sinful in themselves. This attitude was new in China, and it proved a basis for home-grown puritanism. However, unlike monotheistic religions, Buddhism is not particularly homophobic, and does not preclude same-sex love between monks or nuns.

A Low Profile?: From the Sui to the Yuan Dynasties (589-1368)

In materials of the period from the Sui to the Yuan Dynasties (589-1368), male-male love is less visible than it was in the earlier periods. While a few emperors and princes are recorded as having favorites, their influence was kept in check by the bureaucracy's increasing grip on power.

During the Tang dynasty (618-907), poets--often social equals--exchanged amorous verse. In a different vein, the end of the *Rhapsody on the Supreme Joy of the Sexual Union of Heaven and Earth and Yin and Yang* (*Tiandi yinyang jiaohuan dalefu*) by Bai Xingjian (died 826) catalogues favorites from Antiquity to the Han, thus indicating an awareness of what we would now call gay history.

During the Song dynasty (960-1279), a prosperous urban society emerged with a highly visible culture of male prostitution that attracted authorities' concern. An edict from the Zhenghe era (1111-1117) called for the arrest and flogging of prostitutes for gross indecency. A local brand of Buddhist-inspired puritanism known as Neo-Confucianism, which emphasized abstinence and the reining in of desires, appeared under the Song.

"Gay" High Culture and Nascent Homophobia (1368-1911)

A tremendous diversity of sources about male-male love survives from the two later imperial dynasties, the Chinese Mings (1368-1644) and the Manchu Qings (1644-1911). In addition to traditional high literature in classical Chinese, a great deal of vernacular literature survives, including popular and urban genres such as fiction, drama, and humor. These works depict every stratum of society with unprecedented realism.

Almost every social or pornographic novel or short story from this period has some gay or lesbian content. Many erotic prints and paintings from the Ming to the early Republic (1911-1949) have survived in spite of their vulnerability to natural disasters and zealous censors.

As a result of the availability of so much material from this period, a dominant model of sex between Chinese men can be surmised. They mostly practiced sodomy and, more rarely, fellatio. Most erotic works deal with adult males loving younger--often teen-aged, effeminate, and sexually passive--males. Relationships between men in this period were sometimes institutionalized, with references to marriage, adoptive fatherhood (*qifuzi*), and sworn brotherhood (*qixiongdì*), especially in Fujian province.

During this period, males became particularly visible as prostitutes, as boys replaced courtesans. Zhu Yuanzhang (ruled 1368-1398), founder of the Ming dynasty, established prudish Neo-Confucianism as state

orthodoxy. Officials were, thus, forbidden to patronize female prostitutes or brothels, so many of them turned to young men instead.

Early Manchu emperors forbade women on stage, so female parts were played by transvestite teenagers. This practice so linked the thespian arts with female impersonation and pederasty that it is impossible to understand Qing dynasty theater without knowledge of its gay context.

During the Qing era, brothel culture flourished, with "young gentlemen" (*xianggong*)--high-class male "courtesans"--summoned to noble houses for recitals and banquets, poems, and "flowery honor rolls" (*huabang*), a parody of the lists of examination laureates. For less sophisticated patrons, ordinary hustlers plied their trade around barber shops.

Scholars and the rich often employed boy servants to care for their libraries, paintings, or lutes; and they frequently also provided sexual services. On prints and paintings, catamites are frequently depicted following their masters in mountain strolls. Officials often employed male secretaries, confidantes, or court ushers, who may also have been expected to perform sexually. Some also married "male concubines" or *nanjie*.

At the same time, however, evidence survives that same-sex love among social equals, especially among students or scholars, also flourished.

At the very top of the social ladder, Emperor Qianlong (ruled 1736-1795) famously fell in love when he was 65 with Heshen, a 25-year-old Gentleman of the Guard. The emperor lavished the young man with honors, including an appointment as prime minister. However, Heshen shared the fate of Dong Xian. When Qianlong died in 1799, his reigning son immediately forced his father's favorite to commit suicide, and seized the huge fortune he had embezzled.

Other Qing emperors, such as Xianfeng (ruled 1851-1861) and Tongzhi (ruled 1862-1874), were less extravagant in their love for boys. The Last Emperor, Puyi (ruled 1909-1911), had a very special interest in his pages and eunuchs.

During the late Ming and the Qing dynasties a tradition of "gay" writing developed. In addition to a renewed use of a set of historical allusions and the inclusion of special chapters on male-male love in some collections of historical anecdotes, there began a tradition of "gay"-themed Ming operas, such as *The Shared Tangerine* (*Fengan*, now lost) revolving around Mi Zixia's story, *Lord Longyang Weeps on His Fishes to Gain Favor* (*Longyangjun qi yu gu chong*), and *The Male Empress* (*Nan wanghou*, before 1623), dealing with Han Zigao, catamite to Emperor Wen (ruled 560-566) of the Chen Dynasty.

In addition, three collections of vernacular short stories were printed in the 1630s and 1640s: *Anecdotes about Catamites* (*Longyang yishi*), *Military Cap into Hairpin* (*Bian er chai*), and *Amorous Nature with a Licentious Character* (*Yichun xiangzhi*).

In 1849, Chen Sen published the first "gay" novel: *A Precious Mirror for Ranking Flowers* (*Pinhua baojian*). The book centers on the love of scholars for female impersonators in Beijing under Qianlong.

The earliest work with a historical bent is *The Cut Sleeve* (*Duanxiupian*), a collection of anecdotes from the fifth century B. C. E. to the eighteenth century C. E. It was compiled by a pseudonymous author sometime in the nineteenth century.

If this period appears quite tolerant of male-male love, it also witnesses the advent of a form of homophobia. Part of the elite reacted against a perceived laxity of morals at the end of the Ming dynasty. Consequently, in an effort to win the allegiance of scholars, the Qing pursued a strict moral agenda that attempted to limit sex to marriage. They instituted censorship aimed at suppressing licentious literature.

At this time, there developed a syncretic brand of popular morality, based on the concept of karma and combining elements of Buddhism, Taoism, and popular Confucianism. The result was a puritanism that still dominates Chinese "morality." It condemned, among other "vices," whoring, pederasty, and the keeping of catamites or too many concubines.

Some authors deemed sexual passivity subversive of established gender and social hierarchies, and depicted it as a badge of subservience and prostitution. As a result, passivity and effeminate catamites were subjected to ridicule, gossip, and even blackmail.

Under this new way of thinking, male-male love was regarded as at best a lamentable substitute for heterosexuality in men-only communities; and the taste for boys was characterized as queer, dirty, and verging on the unnatural, especially if one refused to marry because of it. In contrast, heterosexuality was characterized as an obvious union of yin and yang.

For the first time, during the mid-Ming period, sodomy was criminalized. A pre-1526 amendment to the *Ming Code* compared anal penetration to forcing garbage into someone's mouth, and punished sodomy with 100 bamboo cane strokes. The *Qing Code* punished it in its chapter on fornication, under a series of articles dealing with adultery, abduction, and rape with or without violence, resulting in death or not. The same scale of punishments applied to homosexual and heterosexual offences.

The code punished consensual sodomy with 100 strokes and wearing the cangue (a set of two heavy wooden boards fitting around the convict's neck) for one month, though it is not clear that this part of the code was actually enforced; boy lovers do not seem to have lived in fear of the courts. Lesbian activity was not criminalized in either the Ming or Qing codes.

Chinese Sapphism: First Century B. C. E. to the Republic (1911-1949)

The earliest mentions of lesbian love date back to the Former Han (206 B. C. E.-8 C. E.). In the imperial palace, several hundred women, including the empress, court ladies, and servants lived together with only one "whole" man: the Emperor. Empress Chen's biography (Chapter 97a in the *History of the Former Han*) recounts how she, after being rejected by Emperor Wu (ruled 140-87 B. C. E.) for not having borne a son, hires a shamaness to chant incantations and brew love potions to regain the royal favor, and falls in love with her.

The biography of Empress Zhao Feiyan (died 1 C. E., see Chapter 97b in the *History of the Former Han*) uses the term "*duishi*" in describing two ladies-in-waiting, Cao Gong and Dao Fang, who "shared their meals." A second-century commentary explains: "*Duishi* refers to ladies of honor pairing together like husband and wife; they are very jealous of one another." The phrase *duishi* has been interpreted as referring to reciprocal cunnilingus, and has become a standard allusion to Sapphic love.

Double-headed dildoes have been unearthed in Han princely tombs, and confirm the existence of lesbianism in those days. Love between women in the imperial palaces is recorded at least until the Ming, according to chapter 6 of *Events of the Wanli (1573-1619) Era Picked Up in the Wilds (Wanli yehuo bian)* by Shen Defu (1578-1642). A lesbian poem is recorded in *New Songs from a Jade Terrace. The Memoir on the Music Academy (Jiaofangji)*, written between 742 and 907, mentions lesbian unions modeled after marriage or adoptive sisterhood. Tang dynasty Taoist nuns exchanged love poems.

Sapphism was encouraged in the women's quarters to contribute to good relations between wives.

Under the Ming, written and pictorial sources depicting lesbianism multiplied. Many works of pictorial erotica from this period include lesbian or bisexual content; most naughty novels feature young women experimenting with each other.

Women's sexual practices included frottage (which was called "grinding beans [to make] tofu," or *mo doufu*), cunnilingus, and mutual masturbation. They also used bronze, wood, and ivory phallic instruments, which were denoted by such names as "dumb husband" (*bu yu xiansheng*), "Master Horn" (*jiao xiansheng*), or "Cantonese love" (*Guangdong renshi*).

Courtesans, stepmothers, daughters-in-law, and actresses--especially in women-only opera styles like Shaoxing *Yueju*--frequently fell in love. *Pitying the Sweet Companion* (*Lian xiangban*) a play by Li Yu (1611-1679), tells how a wife falls in love with a girl, and has her husband take the younger woman as a concubine to create a happy ménage à trois.

A lesbian group centered around a seraglio's madame was known in early republican Shanghai as the "Mirror polishers' clique" (*mojingdang*). In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, women in the Pearl River delta resorted to an egalitarian form of social organization in order to resist heterosexual marriage. They pooled their assets, swore solemn oaths of sisterhood before gods' altars, and lived together in common homes in groups of as many as ten women or as couples. When forced into marriage, they rejected or left their husbands.

Transgender in Ancient China

The history of the transgendered in China has not yet been adequately researched. Sources do not link such phenomena as cross dressing, whether occasional or customary, sex change, or hermaphroditism. Although there was an integration (and, in the thespian arts, even institutionalization) of transgender into mainstream culture, gender nonconformity was also regarded as subversive of "natural" hierarchies and boundaries. For example, sex change was often seen as an omen of political disorder.

The earliest mention of female-to-male cross dressing is probably when Duke Ling (ruled 581-554 B. C. E.) of Qi had his ladies-in-waiting wear men's attire. In imitation, other women in the country followed suit.

Ancient China's best known "drag king" is Mulan, a girl who dressed as a man so she could be drafted in the army instead of her father. After being promoted to general, she came back home and revealed her true gender. The earliest poem on this patriotic hero dates back to the Liang dynasty (502-557), and it has inspired poets, playwrights, and story tellers ever since.

Empress Wu Zetian (624-705, ruled 685-705), proclaimed herself "emperor." She overturned gender conventions of all kinds, wore male regalia, and had her male servants and men in her "harem" dress as women. She may have initiated the prevailing Tang dynasty fashion for women cross dressing.

Since women were excluded from the civil service examinations and careers in government, some of them cross dressed in order to attend school or secure a government position. *The History of the Southern Dynasties* (*Nanshi*) tells how Lou Cheng wore male clothes and became governor of Yangzhou before being exposed as a woman.

Several short stories and plays depict women triumphing in the examinations as First Laureates. The best known Chinese love story, *Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai*, features a young lady, Zhu Yingtai, dressing as a boy in order to attend a renowned college to prepare for the examinations. She falls in love with one of her male classmates, Liang Shanbo, who believes she is a boy until he is disappointed to discover that "he" is actually a girl. The version of this story in Shaoxing *Yueju* opera, in which all the parts are played by women, is the most outstanding tale of gender confusion in Chinese literature.

Male-to-female cross dressing seems to date back to the Northern and Southern dynasties (420-589), and some religious festivals seem to have required transvestism. Male prostitution apparently involved feminization as early as the fifth and sixth centuries; it certainly did so under the Ming, and was closely

associated with the all-male opera in the early days of the Qing. The young men who played the female roles took feminine sounding names, such as "Orchid fragrance" (Mei Lanfang, 1894-1961). In addition, most favorites and catamites were expected to act feminine.

While transvestism was seen as an ambiguous device for women's emancipation and part of the refined culture of upper-class prostitution, it was also fraught with danger, because it was seen as signifying a challenge to norms and hierarchies. It was regarded as a badge of subservience for men and of undue independence for women. Sending a man women's clothing was the gravest of insults.

Ancient documents frequently mention sex change in humans and in animals as fact. These materials include omens and fantastic tales from the Han onwards and Taoist legends about pregnant men. In many of these works, female-to-male transsexuality foretells the advent of usurpers or strong women, while male-to-female sex changes are regarded as omens of power falling into the hands of consorts, eunuchs, or unworthy favorites

An interesting case of religious "sex reassignment" is that of an originally male bodhisattva (or emerging Buddha), Avalokitesvara, turning to female in late Tang China. He ultimately evolved into the son-giving Guanyin, the goddess of Mercy. The transformation may have been influenced by Wu Zetian, a devout Buddhist.

Bourgeois "Morals" and Deafening Silence: 1920s to late 1980s

The incompetent and corrupt Qing dynasty finally collapsed in 1911, and with it went entire areas of traditional Chinese mores and culture. The trauma inflicted by Western and Japanese humiliations since the Opium Wars had intellectuals and politicians clamoring for a thorough "modernization" of China after the European model.

With the fall of the Empire, the May the Fourth movement opened the way to muddle-headed Westernization, as the fetters of tradition were replaced by the yoke of petit-bourgeois puritanism. In the period from the 1930s to the 1990s, China imported Western medical and psychiatric homophobia. As a consequence, there was a deafening silence in regard to queer sexuality and culture.

Nevertheless, flickers of traditional attitudes and customs survived. The world of female impersonators lasted into the 1920s, and male prostitution remained active in Shanghai and Tianjin in the 1930s. Many gay Europeans moved to China in the early twentieth century because they regarded it as more tolerant than their homelands.

The warlord Cao Kun (1862-1938) kept a catamite. Some famous individuals, such as the writers Xu Zhimo (1896-1931) and Guo Moruo (1892-1978), the feminist revolutionary Qiu Jin (1879-1907), and the female spy for Japan Eastern Jewel (executed in 1945), are known to have had homosexual experiences.

The meteoric ascension of Chiang Kai-shek (1887-1975) during the last years of Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925) invites questions as to their relationship. Gossip also has Communist Prime Minister Zhou Enlai (1898-1976) loving boys and Mao Zedong (1893-1976) himself adhering to imperial bisexual mores.

However, the introduction of Western medical and psychiatric discourse about sexuality in the 1920s and afterwards led to the wholesale integration of Western categories. Homosexuality (translated as *tongxing'ai* or "same sex love" and *tongxinglian* or "same sex passion") displaced every ancient concept. Moreover, it was deemed a pathological condition, and was regarded as "abnormal" and "inverted."

Any sexuality contrary to the procreative "norm" was deemed worthy only of silence. Indeed, no serious account of homosexuality was published in mainland China from the 1940s to the 1990s and nothing in Taiwan and Hong Kong before the 1980s. Only in 2001 did the Chinese Psychological Association delete

homosexuality from the list of mental disorders.

The general lowering of standards in the teaching of Humanities after World War II, along with the complicity of scholars in denying the *tongzhi* past, has meant that the history of Chinese tolerance for same-sex love was largely obliterated in China. Even today, references to homosexuality are nearly all to Western or Japanese figures and events. Thus, homosexuality can be dubbed "foreign" decadence.

While classical materials have always been available in excellent annotated editions, very few Chinese were--and are--able to understand them. Vernacular erotic literature was--and is--routinely heterosexualized, expurgated, or banned.

Chinese homophobia in the twentieth century in effect branded gay men and lesbians as outcasts. The totalitarian regimes that ruled Nationalist China and still rule the mainland forbade every kind of "deviance," generally enforcing homophobia through ostracism rather than law, using peer pressure, compulsory marriage, and the fear of being outed as a means of discouraging the expression of homosexuality.

Although no modern legislation, on either the mainland or Taiwan, criminalized homosexuality per se, gay men were sometimes charged with "hooliganism" in the People's Republic and with "indecent" in Taiwan. In both, gay and lesbian gathering places were--and still might be--subject to police harassment. The Communist Party's suspicion of any group not under its control effectively prevented the development of any activist organization. In Hong Kong, the British-imposed sodomy laws were repealed only in 1991.

Even so, however, some homoerotic fiction and artwork was published during the Republican era, including some woodblock prints in the collection of political activist and writer Lu Xun (1881-1936). More surprisingly, in the early 1980s, the Communist Party's theoretical journal *Red Flag* (*Hongqi*) had its back inner cover decorated with socialist realist artwork glorifying revolutionary masses in a way that is distinctly if ambiguously homoerotic.

Moreover, in Taiwan and Hong Kong, in the 1970s and 1980s, news from the Western gay and lesbian movements began to filter through conservative and homophobic popular media. Fiction writer Bai Xianyong (b. 1937) described gay Taipei in the early 1970s in *The Bad Boys* (*Niezi*, 1983; translated by Howard Goldblatt as *Crystal Boys*, 1990). In Hong Kong in 1984, Samsasha published *A History of Homosexuality in China* in Chinese to counter the idea that homosexuality was a "foreign vice."

In 1989, the Hong Kong Gay and Lesbian Film Festival was established. Organizer Lin Yihua rejected the pathologizing and negative term for homosexuality in Chinese (*tongxing'ai*) and used instead *tongzhi*. The usual translation of *tongzhi* is "comrade," but in this new context it came to signify the community of alternative lovers. Like *queer*, *tongzhi* is an umbrella term, embracing gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and even those heterosexuals who reject the patriarchal model. *Tongzhi*, which is closely linked to political assertiveness and emancipation, spread into Taiwan in the early 1990s and, more slowly, into the mainland in the late 1990s.

Transsexuality was as stigmatized as homosexuality during most of the twentieth century. The earliest recorded male-to-female sex change surgery in China took place in 1983. The most publicized sexual reassignment surgery was that of Jin Xing, a male ballet dancer who was also a colonel in the People's Liberation Army. In 1995, Jin Xing underwent surgery and is now a world-renowned (female) star of the Shanghai ballet troupe.

"Comrades, Keep Up the Efforts, and the Revolution Shall Triumph!": Late 1980s to the Present

As a result of centuries of autocratic rule, in China the political tradition emphasizes compromise rather than head-on opposition. Hence, the nascent glbtq movement in China has to cooperate with the

establishment. In the late 1990s, the notion of a *tongzhi* movement (as opposed to culture) was still problematic even for activists themselves. Since then, however, real progress has been made, especially in Taiwan and Hong Kong.

In both Taiwan and Hong Kong, a commercial gay scene developed early. In addition, gay groups have successfully organized, and gay media have been established.

Democratization in Taiwan, especially the election of opposition president Chen Shubian in 2000, has made possible an out and proud *tongzhi* political movement struggling for marriage rights and against homophobia.

In Hong Kong, numerous activist organizations have developed, some devoted to AIDS prevention, others to religious, cultural, and political interests. In addition, a bookstore and a publishing house were established in the mid 1990s, but both have now closed.

Hong Kong's leading activist Zhou Huashan (Chou Wah-shan, b.1962) attempted to adapt the *tongzhi* movement to Chinese culture and realities. He advocated a strategy that is open to compromise, but also devoted to "queering the mainstream."

However, the movement in Hong Kong has suffered some setbacks. Zhou Huashan has abandoned activism, as has gay publisher Lu Jianxiong (John Loo). In Hong Kong, Beijing's heavy paw is felt more every day.

Taiwan--the only democracy in the Chinese world--has overtaken Hong Kong as a center of gay activism. A vogue for *tongzhi* culture, including theory, literature, and film thrived in the 1990s. In the new century, rainbow flags fly at the Official Hostel, or *Gongguan*, Taipei's gay district, and same-sex marriage has been debated in 2003 and 2004. More ominously, a new brand of homophobic American-style Christian fundamentalism now asserts itself in Taiwanese politics.

Although the People's Republic lags behind Hong Kong and Taiwan in activism, a certain openness has prevailed since the death of Deng Xiaoping in 1997. The first three books on homosexuality to be published under Communist rule appeared only in the early 1990s and reporting on homosexuality in the official printed media dates only from the late 1990s. In 2004, however, official channels began running programs devoted to homosexuality and AIDS prevention. These developments are evidence of a gradually increasing openness to tolerance in the ruling circles.

The new era began in 1997 under Jiang Zemin (ruled 1997-2003), when the meaning of the law repressing "hooliganism" was clarified: it could no longer be used to penalize private homosexual conduct between two consenting adults. This breakthrough was followed by another in 2001, when the Chinese Psychiatric Association deleted homosexuality from its list of mental disorders.

In the 1990s, a gay commercial scene evolved in large cities. It continues to expand and can be now be found even in some county towns in the more developed coastal provinces. Now provincial capitals may have several large bars, discotheques, or saunas catering to a gay clientele. The first openly queer magazine, *Homoheart (Tongxin)*, began publishing in 2003.

In addition, a new consciousness and activist spirit has been sparked by the Internet. There are now around 300 *tongzhi* websites in China that provide "comrades" a national communications network on which they can find personals, queer news from around the world, fiction, advertisements for gay venues, and AIDS prevention messages.

Communist authorities will not tolerate political opposition or any endeavor aimed at undermining its power. But the government seems to have finally renounced ostrich politics vis-à-vis AIDS. It has realized grassroots groups are necessary in order to educate sex workers, gay men, and lesbians about safe-sex

practices. Thus, a space for cooperation exists between local AIDS prevention efforts and *tongzhi* groups.

The second half of 2005 has seen the Government actually reach out to the *tongzhi* community as a matter of public health policy in the face of the substantial increase of HIV infection among gays. The government now grants official status as "popular organizations" to *tongzhi* groups that have cultivated good working relations with local officials, government agencies, and foreign NGOs (Non-Government Organizations).

However, in China relative tolerance always demands political subservience. Moreover, social homophobia has certainly not disappeared, either on the mainland or in other parts of the Chinese world. Perhaps the most oppressive aspect of Chinese life for *tongzhi* is the pressure to engage in compulsory heterosexual marriage. Most glbtq Chinese are married and live unhappy double lives.

The future of the *tongzhi* movement in China appears bright. But challenges remain, such as the persistence of the procreative imperative (if two men could sire sons, there might be no problem) and the government's uncertain reactions to political demands. The increasing influence of Christian "morality" in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and even on the mainland, where it percolates quite unchecked, is also potentially dangerous to the aspirations of Chinese glbtq people.

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