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Claremont McKenna College

Cracking Down on Cutting Sleeves: A Historical Analysis of
“Homosexuality” in China as a Comparison to Present Day
LGBTQ+ Rights

submitted to

Professor Lisa Koch

by

Thomas Falci

for

Senior Thesis, 2022-2023

April 24, 2023

Abstract

Over the past more than a decade of Xi Jinping's leadership, the space for civil society in China has shrunk dramatically. One of the main, yet often overlooked, victims of this shift in policy has been China's LGBTQ+ community. This thesis examines the current crackdown on LGBTQ+ peoples and organizations in China and attempts to place it within a broader context of China's current state in the world order. The lenses of queer International Relations theory and the long history of "homosexuality" in China will both be applied to help contextualize the current state of Chinese LGBTQ+ rights. This analysis will also present a comprehensive timeline of the various events and actions taken by the current Chinese state to suppress this community to demonstrate the *systemic* level nature of this crackdown. Drawing on these two frameworks, this thesis argues that the political deployment of homophobia and associated suppression of LGBTQ+ rights in China is used to consolidate identities, enforce heteronormative forms of behavior, and ultimately to consolidate the power, legitimacy, and control of Xi Jinping and the Communist Party of China.

Acknowledgements

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I would also like to thank Professor Fortner and Professor Selig whose classes have fundamentally changed the way I think and view issues, and heavily influenced the topic and research of this thesis.

Lastly, I would like to thank my family, especially mom and dad for helping and supporting me, both through my thesis as well my entire college experience, I am incredibly grateful.

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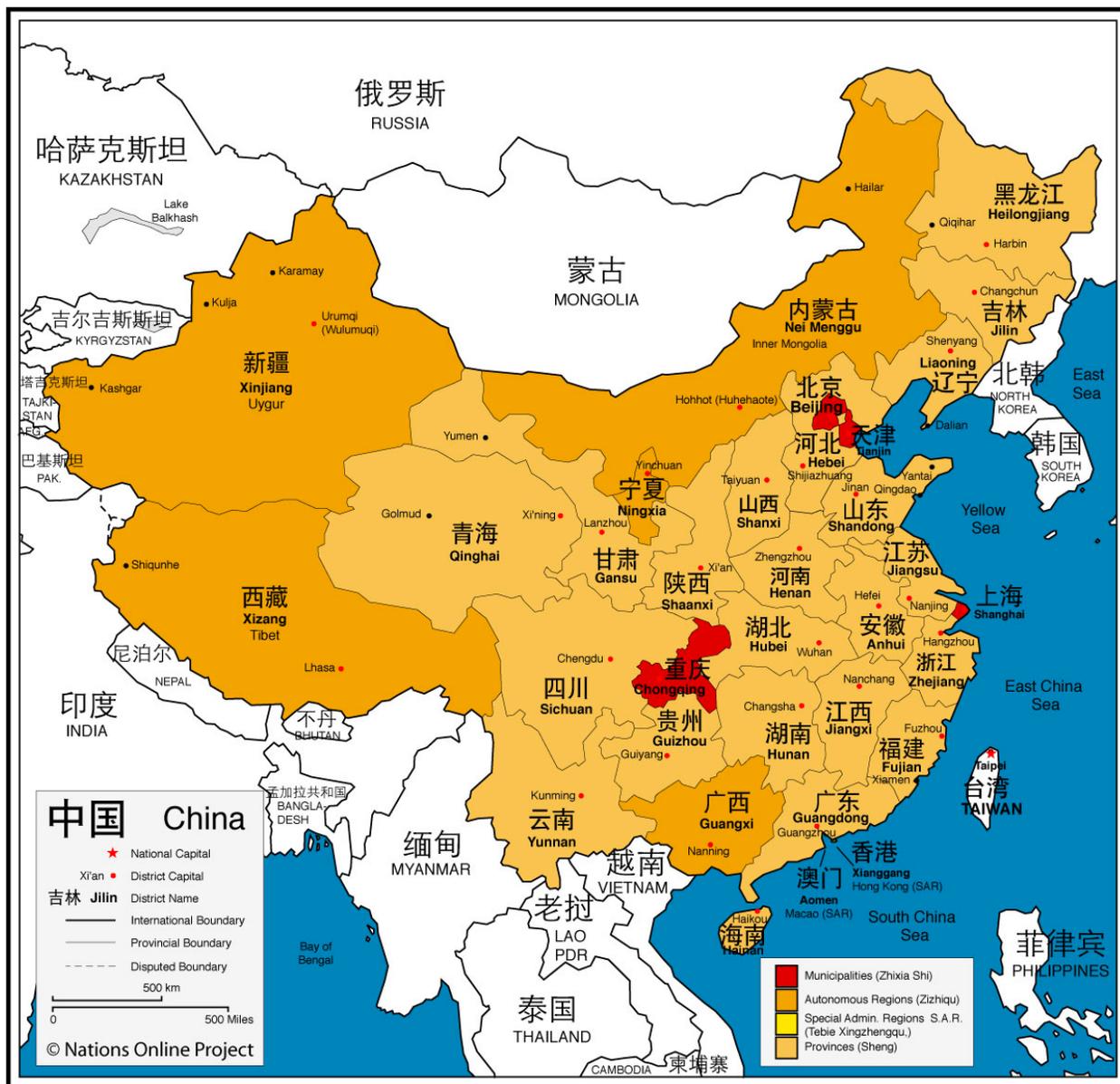
China's Ruling Regimes

Chinese Dynasty or Ruling Government	Dates
Shang	(ca. 1600 - ca. 1050 B.C.E.)
Zhou	(ca. 1050 - 256 B.C.E.)
Qin	(221 - 206 B.C.E.)
Han	(206 B.C.E. - 220 C.E.)
Three Kingdoms	(220 - 265 C.E.)
Six Dynasties	(266 - 589 C.E.)
Sui	(581 - 618 C.E.)
Tang	(618 - 906 C.E.)
Song	(960 - 1279 C.E.)
Yuan	(1279 - 1368 C.E.)
Ming	(1368 - 1644 C.E.)
Qing	(1644 - 1911 C.E.)
Republic of China	(1912 - 1949 C.E.)
People's Republic of China	(1949 - present)

1

¹ "List of Rulers of China." The Met's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, October 2004. https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/chem/hd_chem.htm; During China's dynastic history, there were a number of overlaps of various dynasties' rule as they vied for power and control over "China," thus the dynasties and corresponding dates listed above do not always follow immediately after one another.

Map of China



2

² “Administrative Map of China.” Nations Online Project, n.d.
https://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/china_administrative_map.htm.

CHAPTER I: Introduction

Motivation

With increasing frequency, over the past decade news agencies have reported on instances of repression against members of China's LGBTQ+ community. As a frequent consumer of China-related news, headlines such as "Police 'beat up' women at gay rights rally in Beijing" or "China's censors are quietly deleting WeChat LGBTQ accounts to silence gay rights groups at the country's colleges" have captured my attention.³ This, in addition to my lived experience in China, raised many questions relating to the scale of this social repression, who were actually being impacted, and, most interestingly, *why* these events were occurring. In doing some initial research, I was amazed to find no scholarly work addressing what I have come to understand as a broad and systemic level crackdown on LGBTQ+ peoples in China.

Digging a little deeper, I was also surprised to find that, despite what the incredibly limited discussion on this topic would indicate, China actually has a vast and vibrant history of "homosexuality" dating all the way back to the Zhou and Han dynasties. Historical accounts, poems, novels, paintings, and more, all depict a society that has a radically different understanding of and relationship to "homosexuality" than we have in either China or the United States today. Thus, I was fascinated to learn about China's long and rich history of "homosexuality" where individuals engaging in same-sex acts of love and intimacy were usually not punished or condemned as long as they conformed to certain relationship dynamics including power and

³ Cheryl Teh. "China's Censors Are Quietly Deleting WeChat LGBTQ Accounts to Silence Gay Rights Groups at the Country's Colleges." Insider. Insider, July 7, 2021. <https://www.insider.com/chinese-censors-quietly-deleting-wechat-accounts-run-by-lgbt-groups-2021-7>; Didi Tang. "Police 'Beat up' Women at Gay Rights Rally in Beijing." The Times & The Sunday Times: breaking news & today's latest headlines. The Times, May 14, 2018. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/police-beat-up-women-at-gay-rights-rally-in-beijing-mwg3q79vm>.

gender roles. Additionally, Xi Jinping's consolidation of power and the related rise of China as a global superpower place the nation at an incredibly interesting and pivotal juncture suggesting that the current suppression of LGBTQ+ rights might be part of a larger push by the party to consolidate its power, legitimacy, and control over China and its people.

Finally, although not part of the original outline for this thesis, upon writing what is now Chapter Three, it became incredibly clear that studying the historical background of "homosexuality" in China would not be sufficient to fully understand the key motivations behind the current crackdown on LGBTQ+ rights. Rather, the critical lens and tools of queer International Relations (IR) theory would also be necessary to comprehend how and why states create certain identity categories, how and why they deploy homophobia as a political tool, and in what ways these topics are related to issues of sovereignty, nationalism, and security. Thus, this thesis has also become about expanding the field of queer IR theory and demonstrating its usefulness within the context of past and present-day China.

Background

Beginning around 2012 with Xi Jinping's rapid ascension to power within the Communist Party of China (CPC), a shift started taking place in China surrounding attitudes and policies towards members of China's LGBTQ+ community. This ascent to power has reversed many of the trends from the late 1990s and early 2000s which saw a sharp increase in the visibility of LGBTQ+ peoples in China as organizations and advocacy groups were formed, online communities were established, and former laws and medical definitions that had historically been used to oppress members of this community were removed. As a result, over the past decade it has

become increasingly more difficult for those interested in same-sex relations to form communities and advocate for various political, social, and economic rights.

Clearly, however, the crackdown on LGBTQ+ rights has not occurred solely in China. Over the past few years a number of states in the U.S. have imposed rules and regulations taking aim at America's LGBTQ+ community, including Florida Governor Ron DeSantis' so-called 'Don't Say Gay' bill (which was recently expanded to ban the teaching of "gay" topics all the way up to the 12th grade).⁴ In Uganda, lawmakers recently approved the Anti-Homosexuality Act which fully criminalizes anyone engaging in same-sex relations, and Hungary has imposed harsh restrictions regarding depictions of homosexuality in schools.⁵ Thus, it is tempting to simply sum up what is occurring in China as part of a more globalized crackdown on LGBTQ+ freedom amidst a general push toward the political right as autocracies increase their power and control. However, there are a number of factors that make what is happening in China truly unique. First and foremost, China does not share the same history of Christianity and, relatedly Christian morality, with many of the aforementioned nations. Initiatives to suppress homosexuality over the years have often operated (either very explicitly or more subtly) under the guise of various elements of Christian morality that harshly condemn homosexuality. China, however, is a relatively secular nation and, although Christian missionaries have traveled to China over the years, the religion never took hold the way it did in other Asian countries, such as South Korea. Secondly, the structure of the Chinese state and how it operates makes this a particularly new and interesting

⁴ Kiara Alfonseca. "So-Called 'Don't Say Gay' Rules Expanded through 12th Grade in Florida." ABC News. ABC News Network, April 19, 2023. <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/called-dont-gay-rules-expanded-12th-grade-florida/story?id=98691183>.

⁵ "Why Are Kenya and Uganda Cracking down on LGBTQ Rights?" LGBTQ News | Al Jazeera. Al Jazeera, March 23, 2023. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/3/23/why-are-kenya-and-uganda-cracking-down-on-lgbtq-rights>; Lucy Hough and Ali Rogin. "Hungary's Crackdown on Its LGBTQ Community Prompts Condemnation from European Leaders." PBS. Public Broadcasting Service, August 6, 2021. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/hungarys-crackdown-on-its-lgbtq-community-prompts-condemnation-from-european-leaders>.

case to study. The level of control that the CPC has over the nation and its various instruments, including its news, surveillance, and much more, provide a more sizable array of tools to use when implementing a crackdown, such as what we are seeing now.

In China today, police are arresting individuals participating in peaceful LGBTQ+ rallies, gay dating apps are being banned, and university LGBTQ+ affinity groups are having their WeChat accounts closed down. Movies and TV shows with homosexual themes are being banned and, in very explicit ways, the state is promoting what it views to be the “right” type of Chinese sovereign man, one who is country loving and military serving and clearly does not possess the “effeminate” characteristics stereotypically associated with gay men. But it was not always this way in China. As Chapters Three and Four will demonstrate, Chinese history is replete with examples of same-sex love and intimacy. Emperors often engaged in romantic and sexual relationships with lower male members of their courts, sometimes even inviting their partner’s entire family to move into the royal palace. A number of poems, stories, and paintings were created during dynastic times depicting same-sex romantic and sexual relationships, and, particularly during the Ming and Qing dynasties, there was an incredibly well-established institution of male prostitution that was widely observed by Western visitors to China at the time. Placed in this context, it is fascinating to see Xi Jinping’s rule over China accompanied by incredibly harsh and repressive policies towards LGBTQ+ members of society. As will be introduced below, this deviation is far less related to anti-LGBTQ+ bias amongst China’s leaders, and much more related to a particular vision for China’s global position and future.

Argument

I began this thesis with the belief that the current crackdown is not simply the result of an incredibly bigoted and personally anti-LGBTQ+ ruling elite of China pushing forward an agenda to limit the freedoms and rights of a group that they simply do not like. Due to the breadth and scale of this crackdown, as well as the coincident occurrence of other human rights abuses in China, I initiated my research with the conviction that this crackdown is instead part of a broader push by Xi Jinping and the CPC to solidify their power, legitimacy, and control over and within the Chinese state. In order to test the validity of my argument as well as to answer the related question of why this crackdown is happening *now*, I needed not one, but two anchor points for my thesis to help better explain and understand this situation and the motivations behind it. As previously stated, I have fiercely grounded this thesis in the often overlooked but incredibly long and vibrant history of “homosexuality” in China. This history provides a framework to compare and contrast what is currently happening in the country with the past to place the current environment in proper context. Secondly, queer International Relations theory, which has seen a rapid expansion and growth within the field of IR, and owes a considerable amount of debt to the scholar Cynthia Weber, also offers a number of unique tools to view the current crackdown in China. Using queer IR theory, which will be fully discussed in Chapter Two, I was better able to understand the vast history of “homosexuality” in China as this lens allows for a more socially constructed view of sexuality that fits with conceptions of “homosexuality” during dynastic China. Second, and more relevant to understanding why this is happening in China now, queer IR theory offers different arguments regarding how and why states construct certain national identities and/or deploy homophobia as a political tool. Thus, using the historical context *and* queer IR theory as

the anchor points for my thesis, I am able to gain a more holistic understanding of what is currently occurring and why it is happening now.

After completing all of my research and synthesizing my findings, I identified five central motivating factors behind why Xi Jinping and the CPC are cracking down on LGBTQ+ rights in China now. Three of which queer IR theory help identify and two of which are best illuminated through the lens of historical context. Queer IR theory helps to build the perspective that Xi's recent consolidation of power, China's position as an increasingly revisionist world power, and the country's extremely authoritarian political system which places a premium on constructing a certain type of sovereign Chinese man, all necessitate and are key motivations behind the current actions being taken by Xi and the party toward the homosexual community. In understanding the history of "homosexuality" in China, it also became clearer how and why Xi Jinping and today's CPC tend to associate homosexuality with the West. Additionally, this history also allows for a more concrete understanding of how the party and the state respond when faced with forces of either internal or external challenge and opposition, both elements that are clearly present in contemporary China and thus motivations behind the crackdown on LGBTQ+ rights.

Road Map

Chapter Two will provide a necessary overview of queer IR theory, including where it originates, its key tenets, and how it is used in this thesis. Chapters Three and Four will offer a robust history of "homosexuality" in China, beginning with the Zhou and Han dynasties in early imperial China, progressing all the way to the era of Deng Xiaoping and Hu Jintao up to the rise of Xi Jinping, China's current President and leader of the CPC. These chapters will analyze countless stories, playwrights, and historical accounts to study how notions of sexuality (and,

relatedly, gender) changed and developed over time, and the varying roles of the state and society in general related to these changes. Chapter Five will look at Xi Jinping's rise to power, paying particular attention to his personal background and history as they play a large role in his rule over China and visions for the future of the Chinese state. I will then construct a timeline of key events that have taken place over the past decade, providing a rare comprehensive picture of China's recent crackdown on LGBTQ+ rights. Finally, in the concluding chapter, an in-depth analysis of the key motivations behind this crackdown, relying heavily on both queer IR theory and the historical context, is presented. To end, I offer my thoughts on implications for future research.

CHAPTER II: Queer IR Theory

Introduction

Although I did not originally intend the application of queer International Relations theory to be part of this thesis, going through the history of “homosexuality” in China and reviewing what is happening today necessitated this framework as a vital tool to offer both myself and readers a critical lens through which to view and analyze the evolution of this topic through the many centuries in China that will be studied. Originally, the rich history that will be presented in the next two chapters was meant to anchor this thesis by highlighting the social attitudes and policies towards, and experiences of, those engaging in same-sex sexual acts with the hope that this would help explain what is happening now. However, soon after analyzing this history, the incredibly fluid and oftentimes undefined nature of same-sex relations in China and the need to utilize the pluralized *and/or* logic of French literary theorist Roland Barthes, which will be described later in this chapter, necessitated that this thesis also be simultaneously anchored by queer IR theory.⁶

Queer IR theory has been greatly expanded and developed due to the work of Cynthia Weber. The theories and logics that she developed will be further flushed out in the succeeding pages, but simply put: “queer international theories primarily investigate how queer subjectivities and queer practices – the ‘who’ and the ‘how’ that cannot or will not be made to signify monolithically in relation to gender, sex and/or sexuality – are disciplined, normalized, or capitalized upon by and for states, NGOs, and international corporations.”⁷ While the next two

⁶ Cynthia Weber. *Queer International Relations: Sovereignty, Sexuality and the Will to Knowledge*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016, 24.

⁷ Cynthia Weber. “Queer International Relations: From Queer to Queer IR.” *International Studies Review* 16, no. 4 (December 2014): 596–601. <https://doi.org/10.1111/misr.12160>.

chapters will investigate the history of homosexuality in China and examine the various ways in which those engaging in same-sex acts have been “disciplined” or “normalized” (as well as when they have deliberately *not* been victim to these forces), the last two chapters of this thesis will examine how queer subjectivities in China today have been “capitalized upon” *by* and *for* the Chinese state and CPC. Here, the “queer subjectivities” and “queer practices” refers to those individuals and behaviors that do not conform to dominant norms of gender, sex, and sexuality and instead often operate outside of traditionally constructed binaries, such as the homosexual versus the heterosexual. These individuals and practices are identified by the state (as well as other actors) and “disciplined, normalized, or capitalized upon” through acts meant to either have them conform to existing categories of identity that are seemingly advantageous for the state or, conversely, utilize their “perverseness” to create an “other” category within society to subsequently promote the “normal” sovereign man. Overall, a central element of Weber’s argument for queer IR theory is that it challenges dominant narratives and power structures in international politics by examining how non-normative identities and experiences are constructed, regulated, and co-opted by the state and other actors to achieve certain objectives.

Furthermore, state-led policies that have worked to repress and oppress those engaging in same-sex acts of love and intimacy throughout China’s history are explicitly political acts that tend to be overlooked by traditional IR theory. Thus, queer IR theory works to highlight the political motivations behind and importance of such actions. This lens provides an important framework to better understand how and why homophobia has been deployed by states and other national actors as a political strategy and to preserve a state’s power, legitimacy, and control.⁸

⁸ Anthony J. Langlois. “International Relations Theory and Global Sexuality Politics.” *Political Studies Association | Politics* 36, no. 4 (2016): 385–99. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9256.12108>.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly for this thesis, queer IR theory offers the necessary tools to view gender and sexuality, as well as other identity categories, as inherently socially constructed. As will be examined in the succeeding chapters, for much of Chinese history there was not a clearly defined nor stable homosexual identity. Individuals engaging in homosexual acts might also be in heterosexual marriages, or might switch from engaging in sexual acts primarily with members of the same sex during one portion of their life and then turn to engaging in sexual acts solely with members of the opposite sex during another period. Allowing for such fluid notions of gender and sexuality further allows for the explanation of certain relations through lenses not explicitly bound by sexual orientation, such as power relativity and gender norms.

The following pages will offer an introduction to queer theory followed by a discussion of queer *IR* theory. A central goal of this chapter is to answer the question: how can the lens offered by queer IR theory help us better understand and explain what is happening in China today, and what has occurred in the past? By answering this question, this chapter will demonstrate how, in future chapters, the tools offered by queer IR theory provide an ideal framework for viewing many of the historical events and stories related to “homosexuality” in China, as well as for assessing the current state of this topic in China today.

Queer IR Theory Fundamentals

Although the overall usage and meaning of the term “queer” varies considerably in contemporary society, it is generally accepted that Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s 1993 book *Tendencies* serves as an origin for the current categorization of “queer theory.” In this highly influential piece, Sedgwick offered one definition of queer as “the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent

elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or *can't be* made) to signify monolithically."⁹ In other words, "queer" describes those individuals (and systems) in society that cannot be defined by a simple set of binary choices such as "straight or gay," "man or woman" or even larger categories like Cynthia Weber's "normal or perverse."¹⁰ For much of Chinese history, the sexual actions of many individuals blatantly defied these traditional binary designations, and are almost impossible to fully understand within the confines of these contemporary and heavily Westernized labels.

Queer theory simultaneously blurs the line between identity categories like "masculine or feminine" and "heterosexual or homosexual" while also illuminating other options outside of these binaries by applying Barthes' "and/or" logic, allowing for individuals to be "masculine *and* feminine" or even "heterosexual *and* homosexual." Explaining this frame of reference, Weber writes: "Barthes offers instructions for reading plural figures and logics that signify as normal *and/or* perverse through what can be vast matrices of sexes, gender, and sexualities. I view plural figures and logics that are constructed in relation to (but not necessarily exclusively through) sexes, genders, and sexuality as queer."¹¹ The figures and stories of various individuals throughout Chinese history referenced in the following chapters oftentimes necessitate being viewed as such "plural figures" as they do not conform to any one label or identity and regularly transition between different categorizations.¹² This quote also further emphasizes the definition of "queer" as being deliberately expansive to account for those individuals and logics that cannot be reduced to singular and stagnant categories of gender, sex, and sexuality.

⁹ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. *Tendencies*. London: Routledge, 1994, 8.

¹⁰ Weber. *Queer International Relations*, xi.

¹¹ Weber. *Queer International Relations*, 24.

¹² *Ibid.*

Commenting on Queer IR in the Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics, Melanie Richter-Montpetit and Cynthia Weber highlight how the academic field of queer studies, particularly in opposition to LGBT studies, “is more interested in the political implications of binary and non-binary constructions of identity, by understanding identity as something that is *naturalized* through cultural practices rather than natural in and of itself.”¹³ This perspective illustrates and helps to explain *why* various systems, governments, and even individuals would choose to employ certain terminology (if defined and available) relating to sexuality/sexual orientation and the political intentions and consequences of this usage. In other words, this frame of reference illuminates the process by which states designate a certain group as “other,” thereby constructing some sort of identity-based binary of the “normal” versus the “perverse” in society. This construction can then be used by the state to better organize society and institute various political agendas that work against the “perverse” members of society to achieve certain political aims. Furthermore, this also sheds light on the converse, i.e., the political implications of *not* defining or using any language to explicitly describe same-sex relations.

This distinction matters greatly in the modern day, the focus of Chapters Four and Five, as particularly the United States’ and China’s usage of specific language to categorize individuals engaging in same-sex love and intimacy helps explain broader governmental ambitions and goals. Relatedly, this illustrates the shortcomings of applying LGBT studies as an anchor point for this thesis as the term “LGBT” essentially makes monolithic distinctions for those that fall into the “perverse” category, and can sometimes even *normalize* these groups as well. As Cynthia Weber puts it: “Rather, the ‘LGBT’ is cast as a normal minority human being within a universal

¹³ Melanie Richter-Montpetit and Cynthia Weber. “Queer International Relations.” In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*, 2017. <https://oxfordre.com/politics/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228637-e-265;jsessionid=693ABE0CC173CBFF5C1C1BEEAF9F0BCD>.

population of normal human beings...the ‘LGBT’ with its naturalized ‘homosexual’ desires for same-sex love is normalized and subjected to domestication through gay marriage, gay consumerism, and gay patriotism.”¹⁴ Especially in the case of China, this method of categorization would not be useful given that, as will be shown in the next few chapters, many instances of same-sex love and desire were not tied to notions of domestication and marriage, and instead often existed outside of – and sometimes even *alongside* – these institutions. This reinforces the benefits of utilizing queer theory which allows individuals to be viewed in a myriad of ways and free from many of the identity categories that characterize modern-day discourse.

Relatedly, queer theory is also very much rooted in a social construction of various identity categories where “sexual orientation,” for example, is not a product of anything innate, but instead influenced and even created by a range of socio, cultural, political, and economic factors of the surrounding society. This point is highlighted by another French theorist, Michel Foucault, who in 1980 wrote: “the new persecution of the peripheral sexualities entailed an *incorporation of perversion* and a new *specification of individuals*...homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species.”¹⁵ This describes the process, which took place during the latter part of the 20th century, of creating a stable definition of “homosexual” while simultaneously demonstrating that because this definition necessitated deliberate thought and action, the entire idea of a relatively stable categorization of people engaging in same-sex love and intimacy was a socially constructed one. Or, as Weber writes “because no two performative enactments are ever identical, every repetition and inhabitation introduce some, even tiny, amount of difference. What this means for

¹⁴ Weber. *Queer International Relations*, 20.

¹⁵ Weber. *Queer International Relations*, 18.

figurations of the ‘homosexual’ is they are never completely frozen, for they are always only distilled forms or images that change – even in small ways – through their every iteration and inhabitation.”¹⁶ As will be explored in the next two chapters, this has great relevance in the study of Chinese history as acts of same-sex love and intimacy and the context surrounding these actions *did* change over time, sometimes only slightly and other times quite drastically, producing different versions of what today Cynthia Weber would label the normal *and/or* perverse homosexual.

David Halpern, another influential figure in the field of queer studies and critical theory, noted in 2003 that he “hoped both to make theory queer (that is, to challenge the heterosexist underpinnings and assumptions of what conventionally passed for “theory” in academic circles) and to queer theory (to call attention to everything that is perverse about the project of theorizing sexual desire and sexual pleasure).”¹⁷ That is, queer theory works to illuminate and offer alternative explanations for various events that traditional theory has missed or neglected to acknowledge because of its grounding in heteronormativity – which Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner define as “the institutions, structures of understanding, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality seem not only coherent...but also privileged” – while also working to show how viewing various identity categories like sexuality as inherently fluid and constantly in-flux offers a radically different and more effective framework for understanding many scenarios in global history.¹⁸

Queer theory, then also encompasses the process of “queer subject-making” and why and how systems, states, and individuals decide to “make” or “delineate” certain people as “perverse” instead of “normal.” This is particularly relevant in the field of International Relations as the

¹⁶ Weber. *Queer International Relations*, 33.

¹⁷ Laura Sjoberg. “Queering IR Constructivism.” Essay. In *The Art of World-Making: Nicholas Greenwood Onuf and His Critics*, edited by Harry D. Gould, 68–79. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2017.

¹⁸ Weber. *Queer International Relations*, 47.

process of subject-making, and the reasons and motivations behind such actions are almost always inherently political. Furthermore, particularly in foundational periods of nation-building, states may choose to “queer” certain subjects, or have them viewed as “perverse” in order to provide a clear counter to the image of the “normal” citizen in society. Throughout China’s long history, and particularly today, this is extraordinarily relevant as various challenges to the ruling powers of China have seemed to necessitate the categorizing of certain identities or certain behaviors as “perverse” in order to build what was/is viewed to be a more stable or strong society.

Queer IR theory applies many of the elements of international relations while operating inherently at the intersection of queer theory and traditional IR theory, thereby providing a framework for examining how gender and sexuality interact with issues of power, identity, and security in a global context. Existing IR theories relating to security and sovereignty, among many other topics, often create a natural opportunity to insert the destabilizing nature of queer theory to better understand various mobilizations of power.¹⁹ Security and sovereignty come into immense focus in queer IR theory because these disciplines closely relate to issues of power and power structures within society and therefore are often inextricably linked with identity. Finally, queer IR theory works to destabilize the assumptions of conventional IR theories in that it both challenges binary categories of identity that are viewed as social constructions, but also questions often overlooked consequences of various systems of power in IR that reinforce heteronormativity and often lead to the – either intended or unintended – oppression of queer subjectivities.

Similar to Sedgwick’s frequent recognition as the anchor point for queer theory, IR scholar Cynthia Weber is seen as one of the founding members of the field of queer IR theory, based on

¹⁹ Ananya Sharma. “Cynthia Weber Queer International Relations: Sovereignty, Sexuality and the Will to Knowledge.” *Feminist Theory* 21, no. 2, (March 26, 2020): 258–60. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1464700120909685c>.

her highly influential 2016 publication *Queer International Relations* which delivered an incredibly comprehensive introduction and description of queer IR theory and how it operates. Weber's work enables a better understanding of "how the crafting of sovereign *and* sexualized figures is a tool in domestic and international games of power that confirms as well as contests traditional logics of modern sovereign statecraft as mancraft."²⁰ In other words, there is a deep and interconnected relationship between sovereignty and sexuality in that the former is often utilized to produce/construct the latter. Often the state takes a very deliberate and active role in constructing queer subjectivities within society in order to obtain a desired goal.

Queer IR theory, then, can also closely examine the structure of the state by relying on the idea of the "phantastical yet presumed-to-be-factual 'sovereign man'" that is a similarly fluid construct which serves as the sovereign foundation for the modern state.²¹ The idea of the "sovereign man" originates from postmodernist scholar of International Relations Richard Ashley's idea of "statecraft as mancraft."²² What he argues is that "it is impossible to understand the formation of modern sovereign states and international orders without understanding how a particular version of "sovereign man" is inscribed as the necessary foundation of a sovereign state and how this procedure of "statecraft as mancraft" produces a specific ordering of international relation."²³ In other words, through the process of nation-building, states construct certain national ("sovereign") identities that are deemed to be the foundation of that state and are used to maintain the state's power, legitimacy, and control.

²⁰ Weber. *Queer International Relations*, 4.

²¹ Weber. *Queer International Relations*, 3.

²² Ibid.

²³ Cynthia Weber. "Queer Intellectual Curiosity as International Relations Method: Developing Queer International Relations Theoretical and Methodological Frameworks." *International Studies Quarterly* 60, no. 1 (2016): 11–23. <https://doi.org/10.1111/isqu.12212>.

Support for this conceptualization of the modern state often takes the form of a process that queer theorist Lisa Duggan has described as “homonormativity” which describes a “politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption.”²⁴ Weber’s fifth chapter painstakingly discusses ‘homonormativity’ within the context of Hilary Clinton’s ‘gay rights are human rights’ speech, a historic event that occurred in 2011 when then Secretary of State Hilary Clinton declared to the world from the podium at the United Nations Office at Geneva that: “gay rights are human rights, and human rights are gay rights.”²⁵ Weber notes, however, that as a consequence of this speech the United States seemingly weaponized homosexuality through the process of homonormativity by espousing on the international stage one *particular* and *correct* way of being part of the LGBTQ+ monolith and defined how various countries should treat those individuals.²⁶ This will come into particular focus in the concluding chapter which seeks to explain *why* Xi Jinping and the CPC are currently engaging in attacks on the LGBTQ+ community in China as part of a larger strategy of opposing the West and what are seen to be (and, utilizing queer IR theory, are sometimes *presented* as) Western “ideas” or “influences.”

Furthermore, queer IR theory, much like queer theory, relies heavily on the *and/or* logic, developed first by Barthes and expanded in this particular context by Weber, by showing that many subjectivities in International Relations, as Lauren Wilcox writes, “defy binary classifications and embrace paradox.”²⁷ This is particularly useful in the case of China’s history of homosexuality in

²⁴ Weber. *Queer International Relations*, 8-9.

²⁵ Hillary Rodham Clinton. “Secretary of State Clinton Human Rights Day Speech – Free and Equal in Dignity and Rights.” U.S. Mission to International Organizations in Geneva. U.S. Mission Geneva, December 6, 2011. <https://geneva.usmission.gov/2011/12/06/free-and-equal/>.

²⁶ Weber. *Queer International Relations*, 9.

²⁷ Sjoberg. “Queering IR Constructivism.”

that many of the instances and examples of same-sex love and intimacy do not at all neatly fit into simple, modern-day definitions of “gay” or “straight” but instead, at varying times, embrace *both* of these labels (as well as neither of them at other times). The countless instances of binary-defying and paradoxical relationships throughout Chinese history require the ability of queer IR theory to break free from traditional thinking about gender and sexuality and analyze the political, economic, and socio-cultural motivations behind certain configurations of identities and attitudes towards certain behaviors.

Queer IR theory also continues the work of queer theory as it relates to allowing for a more critical analysis of how and why states utilize gender and related concepts of femininity and masculinity to achieve their aims, including by imposing policies and initiatives that either constrict or allow more freedom in the realms of gender and sexual expression as a way to support and/or contest various national objectives and priorities. When discussing the Cuban Missile Crisis, for example, Weber aligned with many mainstream IR theorists in that the conflict had much to do with the jeopardization of U.S. hegemony, but she extended this argument to include “that the crisis of hegemony was related to two further U.S. crises – a masculinity crisis (which gender scholars identify) and a heterosexuality crisis (which queer IR scholars identify).”²⁸ Without queer IR theory, it would be difficult to conceptualize these *alternative* and *additional* elements of the Cuban Missile Crisis, which may have some parallels to what is occurring in China under Xi Jinping currently, as the Chinese leader has made a number of comments relating to the “masculinity crisis” and prominence of “sissy” male stars on TV.²⁹

²⁸ Richter-Montpetit and Weber. “Queer International Relations.”

²⁹ Debasish Roy Chowdhury. “After America, It's China's Turn to Worry about Masculinity.” Time. Time, September 10, 2021. <https://time.com/6096701/china-masculinity-gender/>.

Thus, queer IR theory also works to greatly expand what is considered a political development in the realm of IR. The factors that influence, expand, and even create nation-states, sovereignty, and a host of other International Relations factors, extend beyond traditional concepts like military power or economic freedom to also include ideas of gender and sexuality. As Melanie Richter-Montpetit writes: “Rather than adding sexuality as another variable to orthodox IR frameworks, or ‘simply’ studying non-normative sexual practices and identities, and their (lack of) protection through human rights regimes, queer IR investigates how the operations of international power are shaped by sexual norms and logics. Queer analytics have produced insights not only on the *political* character of sexual norms and logics, but also offer a more expansive notion of the political in IR.”³⁰ Topics, such as the masculinity and heterosexuality elements of the Cuban Missile Crisis would likely have been completely ignored if not for the expansiveness that queer IR theory offers and its ability to draw connections between those “perverse” elements in society in contrast to the “normal.”

Adding to its applicability, queer IR theory offers a basis to evaluate the ways in which a nation’s policies at the international level in regards to “LGBT rights” can impact the domestic policies of another nation on this same topic, creating a version of Robert Putnam’s “Two-Level Games” theory.³¹ Oftentimes, and recently with increasing frequency, predominantly Western nations have used *their* conceptualization of an LGBT category to seemingly weaponize their policies toward states who might differ in policy, creating an increased sense of animosity. Discussing *Queer International Relations*, Richter-Montpetit writes: “Weber criticizes that much

³⁰ Melanie Richter-Montpetit. “Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Sex (in IR) but Were Afraid to Ask: The ‘Queer Turn’ in International Relations.” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 46, no. 2 (October 9, 2017): 220–40. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0305829817733131>.

³¹ Robert D. Putnam. “Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games.” *International Organization* 42, no. 3 (1988): 427–60. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315251981-16>.

research about Western and non-Western calls for LGBT rights rests on ‘universalized, reified understandings of neoliberalism and homonormativity.’ She argues that this ‘either/or thinking’ has produced monolithic readings of shifting figurations of (homo)sexuality and queer politics, including in some of the cutting-edge scholarship on homonationalism and ‘the human rights industrial complex.’³² While this carries substantial implications from a discipline perspective, there are also implications for the ways in which different states engage with (or against) each other in relation to this topic.

Oftentimes, predominantly Westernized notions of *who* the homosexual, or rather LGBT, *is*, and what rights they deserve, are used on the international stage to condemn or look down upon the actions of other nations. One great example is Clinton’s aforementioned speech at the United Nations Office at Geneva. Paradoxically, however, this can lead to the perceived internalization of a particular type of LGBT identity that becomes “Western” and thus allows for non-Western nations to take on actions and policies, generally designed to be anti-Western, to become anti-homosexual. Anthony Langlois discusses this phenomenon by commenting on another significant piece of work, writing: “In ‘The Locations of Homophobia’, Rao (2014b) commences by showing how the mobilization of international pro-gay activist sentiment participates in a spatial and narrative imaginary that belies its presumed (and often vigorously asserted) emancipatory intent. ‘Neo-Orientalist LGBT activists’ participate in the same ‘imaginative geography’ as their anti-gay opponents: both mapping sexual practices and freedoms in similarly reductive terms.”³³

While there can be clear negative consequences for the international espousing of particular views and positions when it comes to the topic of homosexuality, queer IR theory also helps better

³² Melanie Richter-Montpetit. “Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Sex (in IR) but Were Afraid to Ask.”

³³ Langlois. “International Relations Theory and Global Sexuality Politics.”

understand the ways in which homophobia is deployed by nations for political and economic purposes. Langlois, commenting on the work of two other prominent scholars, writes: “Weiss and Bosia (2013) develop an analysis of homophobia that focuses on it as a modular political strategy engaged by state actors...political homophobia is purposeful and deliberate, a key tool in the process of state-building...[and] the political deployment of homophobia is used to consolidate identities, enforce heteronormative forms of behavior and ultimately to consolidate political and economic power for certain elites.”³⁴ First and foremost, homophobia is viewed not simply as a phenomenon that operates exclusively within socio-cultural spheres, but instead as something that carries substantial economic, political, and military implications and can thus be utilized by major forces of power, including the state. Relatedly, because it carries these implications, homophobia can be, and is, used by state actors for the purposes of national security and “state-building.”³⁵ Finally, the deployment of homophobia, which often comes on the heels of the state feeling threatened by an external or internal force, allows for the consolidation of identities and enforcing of heteronormative forms of behavior which help strengthen the legitimacy of the state in the eyes of its citizens.

Queer IR theory includes these sub-theories regarding the usage of homophobia and homophobic policies by governments to construct a framework to understand *why* and *how* states use this form of repression and oppression. Oftentimes, homophobic policies are intended to inherently oppose the ‘perverse homosexual,’ or, as Weber writes: “the figure of the ‘perverse homosexual’ in contemporary international relations is a figure whose unruliness and irrationality can be cast as threatening national patriotism and national and international (neo)liberalism.”³⁶ As

³⁴ Langlois. “International Relations Theory and Global Sexuality Politics.”

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Weber. *Queer International Relations*, 106.

will be discussed in Chapter 6, the conclusion, especially in the case of the CPC and Xi Jinping, homophobia has been deployed recently, in part to help “consolidate political and economic power,” as well as to shore up a certain type of Chinese identity that is in diametric opposition to the West.³⁷

Key Takeaways

The above introduction to queer theory and queer IR theory offers researchers of homosexuality in China (both historically and in the contemporary) a unique set of tools to better understand and explain historical and recent developments. Queer IR theory works to destabilize traditional binaries while offering an *and/or* logic when thinking about identity categories and individual sexual activity, offering a tool to understand how constructions of certain identities and policies towards these identities are often catalyzed by the goal of nation-building and other related political processes enacted by states seeking to consolidate and solidify power, legitimacy, and control. Thus, simply put, the motivations behind such actions by states in the realm of gender and sexuality, are better explained by queer IR theory which can simultaneously identify the traditional militaristic, political, and economic motivations that IR theory offers, while *also* acknowledging the identity-based motivations that queer theory illuminates.

Furthermore, queer IR theory is unique in that it can operate on not only the individual level of analysis, but on the state and system levels as well, allowing for a more total and comprehensive understanding of various IR developments. As will be explored in the next few chapters, especially in China (although true in many other nations as well) the lives and experiences of those engaging in same-sex acts can differ drastically from what state-led policies

³⁷ Langlois. “International Relations Theory and Global Sexuality Politics.”

might indicate, and at other times conform to these policies. Thus, to operate simultaneously on these different levels of analysis is of critical importance. Additionally, and particularly in the case of China, the incredibly rich history of same-sex love and intimacy defies almost all modern notions of gender and sexuality, including concepts of masculinity and femininity, but are acutely highlighted by queer IR theory in a way that many existing IR theories tend to overlook.

Finally, and to restate Weber's words from the introduction of this chapter, queer IR theory works to investigate "how queer subjectivities and queer practices...are disciplined, normalized, or capitalized upon by and for states."³⁸ This succinctly summarizes the compelling value proposition that queer IR theory offers in the context of this thesis. This lens allows for the explanation behind certain deployments of homophobia, of certain creations of various sexual identities and gender roles/norms, and the understanding of how and *why* all of these factors have changed over time. The following chapter will provide the second anchor point for this thesis, that is the historical account of "homosexuality" and homosexual acts in China, which will allow for a comprehensive understanding to evaluate current policies and practices in China to many periods from its past.

³⁸ Weber. "Queer International Relations: From Queer to Queer IR."

CHAPTER III: Dynastic China

Introduction

China is often credited with having one of the longest histories of any civilization on the planet as its written history spans over 3,500 years.³⁹ Along with this long and vibrant history there is a relatively unknown but equally long and vibrant sub history of non-heterosexual relations. Through a wide range of stories, legal documents, art, and other sources, a complicated and often overlooked history of same-sex love, relationships, and intimacy emerges. Similar to societal evolution in most civilizations, this subhistory is not at all linearly progressive as there were periods of great openness and acceptance followed by dynasties where all manner and form of identity and relationships were repressed, only to be followed by another period of openness. Furthermore, many of the periods in Chinese history have a number of examples to illustrate both open *and* repressive sexual policies and experiences, as oftentimes what was promoted at the state level did not directly correlate to the types of experiences that various people on the individual level were having. Bret Hinsch, begins his influential book on the “Male Homosexual Tradition in China,” titled *Passions of the Cut Sleeve*, by discussing notable stories of same-sex love and intimacy between Duke Ling of Wei, a famous noble of the Zhou dynasty (which lasted from 1050 to 221 BCE), and a member of his court named Mizi Xia. In a scholarly review of this work, Charlotte Furth from the University of Southern California writes: “A reconstruction of the “male homosexual tradition in China” is displayed against the official and informal homophobia of all

³⁹ “The Oldest Living Civilization.” American Historical Association, n.d. [https://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/aha-history-and-archives/gi-roundtable-series/pamphlets/em-42-our-chinese-ally-\(1944\)/the-oldest-living-civilization#:~:text=An%20old%20missionary%20student%20of,3%2C500%20years%20of%20written%20history.](https://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/aha-history-and-archives/gi-roundtable-series/pamphlets/em-42-our-chinese-ally-(1944)/the-oldest-living-civilization#:~:text=An%20old%20missionary%20student%20of,3%2C500%20years%20of%20written%20history.)

four contemporary Chinas, where state-sponsored ideology, whether Confucian, capitalist, or Communist, identifies same-sex erotic expression most often as a decadent Western import.”⁴⁰

In regards to Duke Ling of Wei and Mizi Xia, there are a number of recorded stories and poems on this relationship that Hirsch interprets, offering an overview of what homosexual relations during the Zhou dynasty looked like. In subsequent chapters, he continues providing stories and poems that shed light on numerous periods in China’s ancient history where there were vibrant love affairs between men in the upper echelons of Chinese society. Many of these stories and poems had words and phrases that developed into neologisms to reference same-sex love in Chinese society, including *duanxiu* (斷袖) which translates to “the cut sleeve” and *fentaoyao* (分桃) which translates to “the split peach.”⁴¹ Hirsch takes his readers all the way to the end of the Qing dynasty (which lasted from 1644 to 1912 C.E.), and will be used as one of the main sources of research on non-heterosexual relations in pre-modern-day China in this chapter, particularly in the early-imperial period. Queer and homosexual relations during China’s late-imperial period (which typically includes the Ming and Qing dynasties, but for this chapter will also include the Yuan dynasty) have received considerably more attention, likely due to an abundance of resources and primary source documents in comparison to the preceding dynasties. This has resulted in a number of books, including Matthew Sommer’s book titled *Sex, Law, and Society in Late Imperial China*, and Dr. Cuncun Wu’s book titled *Homoerotic Sensibilities in Late Imperial China*.

Although Bret Hirsch’s account of non-heterosexual relations in pre-modern China is arguably the most notable book on the topic, his work has received a number of criticisms that are

⁴⁰ Charlotte Furth. “Passions of the Cut Sleeve: The Male Homosexual Tradition in China. By Bret Hirsch.” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 50, no. 4, (March 23, 2011): 911–12.

⁴¹ Rachel Leng. “Gender Relations in Chinese Comrade Literature: Redefining Heterosexual and Homosexual Identity as Essentially the Same Yet Radically Different.” Duke University Libraries, 2012. <https://dukespace.lib.duke.edu/dspace/handle/10161/5751>.

important to note. First, it is widely acknowledged that much of Hinsch's work, which was published in 1990, builds upon or restates research that was done by Wu XiaoMing (吴小明), who wrote under the pen name Xiaomingxiong (小明雄). Xiaomingxiong, a prominent Hong Kong gay rights activist and one of the first authors to study the history of homosexuality in China, published a book in 1984 with Hong Kong: Pink Triangle Press, titled *Zhongguo tongxinng'ai shilu* (中国同性恋爱史录) or "A History of Homosexuality in China." As James D. Seymour notes in his review of *Passions of the Cut Sleeve*: "in part because ["A History of Homosexuality in China"] was written in Chinese, it did not achieve the wide audience it deserved, but it did open up a new field. Now we finally have a work in English, *Passions of the Cut Sleeve*, which is not so much about male homosexuality per se as about what Bret Hinsch calls the 'homosexual tradition' in China."⁴² Thus, it is important to note that much of the information that will be quoted in this paper from Bret Hinsch's work is made possible by the scholarship of Xiaomingxiong (小明雄).

Furthermore, and as less of a critique of Hinsch's argument but more of a broad acknowledgement of the problems one encounters when researching the topic of homosexuality in an ancient historical time period, the stories and accounts of non-heterosexual relations are fairly narrow in terms of who they reference in society. In yet another review of Hinsch's work, Walter Williams from the University of Southern California states: "Hinsch is properly conscious of the limitations of his sources, which are focused mostly on the emperors' courts and the upper class, but he inventively used court records on male prostitution, fiction, poetry, religious tracts, jokes, and philosophical treatises to learn about homosexuality among the common people in pre-modern

⁴² James D. Seymour. "Passions of the Cut Sleeve: The Male Homosexual Tradition in China. By Bret Hinsch." *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 3, no. 1, (July 1992): 141–43.

China.”⁴³ Williams goes on to critique the limited discussion of non-heterosexual relations between women, which was kept to a very brief appendix at the end of the book, but could have also been due to a limitation in sources and information.⁴⁴ Finally, and as is the case with studying almost any foreign language, there are concerns over both Hinsch’s translation of some of the primary sources he uses, as well as his interpretation and understanding of such sources. Accordingly, this paper focuses on the stories, poems, and other sources that Hinsch interprets that have been referenced in numerous other scholarship as being early examples of non-heterosexual relations in China.

This chapter moves mostly chronologically throughout the various Chinese dynasties and, specifically, the ones where there was ample documentation of non-heterosexual relations. Beginning with the Zhou dynasty, which lasted from 1122 to 256 B.C.E, we will move through various examples of queer relationships and experiences in pre-Late-Imperial China, which lasted up until the establishment of the transitory dynasty, the Yuan dynasty, which collapsed in 1368 C.E. Over the course of both the Zhou and Han dynasties some of the most vibrant and expansive evidence of same-sex relations and intimacy was produced to illustrate an incredibly sexually fluid society where sexual relations were much more centered around power dynamics rather than gender. Particularly for the more powerful members of society, extramarital relations were extremely common and often involved some level of same-sex intimacy. Here, it is imperative to be cautious in applying dominant and current, largely Western notions of gender and sexuality on this time period as individuals can often be viewed as homosexual *and/or* heterosexual and feminine *and/or* masculine. Next, the focus will turn to the Late-Imperial period, consisting of the

⁴³ Walter L. Williams. “Homosexuality in China” Review of *Passions of the Cut Sleeve: The Male Homosexual Tradition in China*. *The Journal of Sex Research* 30, no. 3, (1993): 285–87.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Ming and Qing dynasties, the latter ending and being succeeded by the forming of modern-day China including the Republic of China in 1912 and then the People's Republic of China in 1949. During this period, and especially during the short-lived Yuan dynasty where there seems to have been a crackdown on homosexual relations, the desire to begin creating a strong and large population to compete with regional powers may have offered substantial motivation for such anti-same-sex relations policies. Furthermore, while the Ming dynasty allowed for a considerable amount of sexual liberty, the Qing dynasty, in an effort to modernize based largely on Western notions of modernity, instituted a series of policies that resulted in a much more hostile environment for those involved in same-sex acts. However, it was during the Qing dynasty that many legal codes and policies began honing in on gender as the operative force in sexual relations, and not simply the power dynamics involved.⁴⁵ This was of great significance as placing gender in the spotlight during the Qing dynasty served as a precursor to modern-day sexual orientation identities in China that came into existence during the 20th century. Finally, a brief conclusion will establish the foundation for Chapter Four, which will focus on the history of homosexuality in modern-day China, the role that these stories and interpretations play in the forming of a modern-day queer identity in China, and how the institutions and socio-cultural mechanisms of China have been formed to view the topic of homosexuality.

Early-Imperial China

Historians often place the beginning of the Zhou dynasty around 1050 BCE when the leaders of this dynasty overthrew the ruling Shang and established their own dynasty.⁴⁶ The Zhou

⁴⁵ Matthew H. Sommer. *Sex, Law, and Society in Late Imperial China*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005, 5-8.

⁴⁶ "Zhou Dynasty, Ca. 1050–221 BCE." National Museum of Asian Art. Smithsonian Institution, n.d. <https://asia.si.edu/learn/for-educators/teaching-china-with-the-smithsonian/explore-by-dynasty/zhou->

dynasty quickly expanded and came to control more overall territory than its predecessor, while, initially, still maintaining a centralized method of government with the center of power in Western China.⁴⁷ However, this system soon began to wane in power and significance as regional lords and nobles increasingly exerted ultimate control and authority over their citizens. Bret Hinsch, commenting on this reality, writes: “The overall political organization of the Zhou dynasty was characterized by a gradually declining central kingship, matched by a commensurate increase in the autonomy of local nobles...The political and military turbulence that accompanied these continual transitions of power upset the existing social order, allowing commoners to play an increasingly important role in court life.”⁴⁸ This fragmentation of power and openings for “commoners” to become associated with regional nobles not only opened the door for more and different types of romantic and sexual relations, but also likely stimulated official documentation of such relationships as the growing authority and power of these regional nobles warranted a record of their activities.

Although there are some stories and references to commoners during this time period, most of the official documentation on non-heterosexual relations primarily involve members of the nobility. Thus, the only narrative that can be constructed about this time period regarding non-heterosexual relations relate to members of or adjacent to the societal elite.⁴⁹ Furthermore, general notions of family and marriage were quite different during this period than they are in China today. As Bret Hinsch writes: “Our information on Zhou homosexuality comes exclusively from the upper classes, where marriage was subservient to kinship interest. Marriage was seen as the

dynasty/#:~:text=Zhou%20Dynasty%2C%20ca.-,1050%E2%80%93221%20BCE,rulers%20from%20a%20single%20family.

⁴⁷ “Zhou Dynasty, Ca. 1050–221 BCE.” National Museum of Asian Art. Smithsonian Institution.

⁴⁸ Bret Hinsch. *Passions of the Cut Sleeve the Male Homosexual Tradition in China*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992, 19.

⁴⁹ Hinsch. *Passions of the Cut Sleeve the Male Homosexual Tradition in China*, 16.

bonding of two lineage groups, not the romantic union of two individuals. With romance banished from marriage, a husband was free to look elsewhere for romantic love and satisfying sex.”⁵⁰ In other words, romance and marriage operated in separate spheres that could, sometimes, overlap, but often did not and allowed for mostly men – although there were some cases involving the women in marriage as well – to look outside of the traditional marital unit for sexual pleasure and romance, thus creating a basis for non-heterosexual relations.

With this context and overall social norms during the Zhou dynasty in mind we can begin to examine some of the notable stories and poems involving same-sex love and attraction that exist from this time period. Unfortunately, due to the number of years that have elapsed, there are virtually no other sources of information, such as art pieces or artifacts, to offer additional insights and thus the written account is the sole resource available to historians studying this topic.⁵¹ One of the earliest, and also most noted, stories involving same-sex love and attraction during the Zhou dynasty has come to be known by the now-famous euphemism for homosexuality, “split peach” or *fentaο* (分桃). The story has come to light both from the “ancient philosophic work *Han Fei Zi*,” which Bret Hinsch uses in his book, as well as the 17th volume in the work of Han dynasty archivist Liu Xiang, titled *shuoyuan* (说苑) or “Anthology of Illustrative Examples.”⁵²

⁵⁰ Hinsch. *Passions of the Cut Sleeve the Male Homosexual Tradition in China*, 19.

⁵¹ Hinsch. *Passions of the Cut Sleeve the Male Homosexual Tradition in China*, 16.

⁵² Hinsch. *Passions of the Cut Sleeve the Male Homosexual Tradition in China*, 20; The latter source, which will be displayed below, has been translated by Dr. Eric Henry who is a former senior lecturer in the Asian Studies Department at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. While introducing Liu Xiang and his book, Dr. Henry writes: “Liu Xiang began this work at the age of fifty-three in 26 BCE, when, as collator of documents within the palace, he was charged by Emperor Cheng with creating definitive versions of canonic, philosophic, and poetic texts.”(Liu Xiang. “Introduction.” Essay. In *Garden of Eloquence: Shuoyuan*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2022, XIV.) Liu Xiang, with the help of his son who briefly continued the work after the former’s death in 9 BCE, consolidated around “700-odd items of varying length, mostly quasi-historical anecdotes and narratives” into twenty books “that collectively examine all aspects of statecraft and set forth practices of rulers and statesmen that in the compiler’s view will be most conducive to the strength of a dynasty.”(Xiang. “Introduction,” XV.) Although most of the chapters have titles that relate to this intended purpose, such as the title of book 2 “The Craft of an Officer” or book 7 “Principles of Government,” book 17 is simply titled “Miscellaneous Discourses” and, within it, contains one of the most famous stories of non-heterosexual love and attraction in early imperial China.

The specific story that Dr. Henry translates in Book 17 of Liu Xiang's "Anthology of Illustrative Examples" involves the love of Duke Ling of Wei toward a simple courtesan by the name of Mizi Xia. In keeping with the societal norms during this time period involving a separation of marriage from love and intimacy, Duke Ling of Wei, a married man, was free to look elsewhere for romance and intimacy, which he found in Mizi Xia. According to the translation by Dr. Henry, the story goes:

“彌子瑕愛於衛君。衛國之法，竊駕君車罪刑。彌子瑕之母疾，人聞，夜往告之，彌子瑕擅駕君車而出。君聞之，賢之，曰：「孝哉！為母之故，犯刑罪哉！」
君遊果園，彌子瑕食桃而甘，不盡而奉君。君曰：「愛我而忘其口味。」及彌子瑕色衰而愛弛，得罪於君。君曰：「是故嘗矯吾車，又嘗食我以餘桃。」
故子瑕之行，未必變初也。前見賢、後獲罪者，愛憎之生變也。”

“Mizi Xia was a favorite of the ruler of Wei. According to the laws of Wei, the punishment for surreptitiously borrowing and driving the king's carriage was to have one's feet amputated. Mizi Xia's mother fell ill, and a person who had learned of this came at night to inform him. Mizi Xia took the king's carriage without permission and drove it off. When the king heard of this, he felt that Mizi Xia had acted very worthily and exclaimed, "How filial he is! For his mother's sake he committed a crime punishable by amputation of the feet!"

On another occasion, when the ruler was wandering in his garden, Mizi Xia took a bite from a peach and, finding it sweet, offered the remainder to the ruler. The ruler said, "He loves me so much he forgets his own pleasure in the taste."

When Mizi Xia's beauty at length declined and the king's attraction to him grew weaker, he gave the ruler offense. The king said, "This fellow stole and drove my carriage, and he also fed me with the remains of a half-eaten peach."

Thus, we can see that Mizi Xia's behavior did not change from what it was originally. That he was first considered worthy and later gave offense was due to alterations in the king's loves and hates."⁵³

Although the love story between Duke Ling of Wei and Mizi Xia did not end happily, the story, particularly the scene in the peach orchard, serves as a strong and poetic depiction of love between

⁵³ Liu Xiang. "Miscellaneous Discourses." Essay. In *Garden of Eloquence: Shuoyuan*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2022, 974-977; While the vast majority of this thesis will use the simplified form of Chinese characters, there were a few passages, this one included, that I could only find in traditional form.

two men during the Zhou dynasty. An important aspect of this relationship, however, that will present itself in many of the forthcoming instances of non-heterosexual love to be examined is the existence of an almost implicit hierarchy in such relationships. In this and most of the other stories and poems, the love affair is between two individuals of differing social statuses. Duke Ling is clearly the highest ranking official in the province of Wei, whereas Mizi Xia is a low-ranking courtesan, inserting a sharp power dynamic and imbalance into the relationship where one is clearly subservient to the other.

Using modern day terms, such as “gay,” “bisexual,” or even “queer” would not be helpful in describing this relationship as the primary point is not that two men are involved in a romantic and potentially sexual relationship, but that a duke is entering into a romantic/sexual relationship with a member of a lower social class. Authors Jin Cao and Xinlei Lu write on this topic in an article published by the University of Chicago press, stating: “homosexual practice was inextricably bound up with structures of social power. Homosexual relations between emperors and ministers, masters and servants, teachers and students, and scholar-bureaucrats and opera players were articulated within the sharp discrepancies of social rank...the three cardinal guides of Confucianism were reproduced via the active and the passive as well as the insertive and receptive positions in the sexual intercourse of gay men.”⁵⁴ This is not to say that same-sex love and intimacy did not occur between members of similar social statuses, that very well may have been the case for some members of lower socioeconomic classes (and potentially, but rarely, between two members of a high social status), but unfortunately and particularly in early imperial China, there was little recording of the lives of lower socioeconomic people. Instead, it was most

⁵⁴ Jin Cao and Xinlei Lu. “A Preliminary Exploration of the Gay Movement in Mainland China: Legacy, Transition, Opportunity, and the New Media.” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 39, no. 4 (2014): 840–48. <https://doi.org/10.1086/675538>.

often the case that the power imbalance between two men involved in a romantic or sexual relationship was the normalized cultural phenomenon at the time, more so than simply noting that it was two men involved in a relationship. This also played out in the language that was used to describe such relationships during the Zhou dynasty, which Bret Hinsch comments on, writing: “neither Han Fei (the original recorder of the story of the split peach) nor any other Zhou sources mentions any term equivalent to “homosexual.” Instead the term *chong* is used, denoting a hierarchical relationship of regular patronage, or favor, bestowed by a superior on a man who happened to be a sexual partner.”⁵⁵ Not only does the existence of such a word during this time period give credence to the view of a more sexually open society during the Zhou dynasty, but it also reinforces the notion that using modern-day language to describe what members of this time period would likely not even term “sexual orientation” is inaccurate and not useful.

Thus, for high-ranking officials and emperors, the hierarchical and power-bound nature of romantic and sexual relationships with other men was often (although, again not always as we will soon see) the case. These relationships were recorded in official historical records because of the additional governmental and economic privilege that many of the members of lower classes received by nature of being romantically and sexually involved with an emperor or high ranking official, therefore legitimizing their status with the courts and entering them as a relevant player in historical accounts of the time period. Although not true for Mizi Xia, these sorts of relationships were often beneficial and virtuous for both parties involved. The overall depiction of Duke Ling of Wei and Mizi Xia, however, does exemplify a general culture of, if not acceptance, simple acknowledgement of love and intimacy between two men during the Zhou dynasty.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Hinsch. *Passions of the Cut Sleeve the Male Homosexual Tradition in China*, 21.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

Another story that reinforces the idea of a relatively sexually liberal and fluid society during early imperial China is one that actually defies the typical trend of same-sex love outside the confines of marriage. This is the story of the “shared pillow tree” depicting the love between Wang Zhongxian and Pan Zhang. There has been some debate over what time period is referred to in this story, as Bret Hinsch attributes it to the Zhou dynasty, whereas *Zhang Jie* (张杰) in his 2001 book titled *Aimei de Licheng, Zhongguo gudai tongxinglian shi* (暧昧的历程, 中国古代同性恋史) or “An Ambiguous Course, a History of Homosexuality in Ancient China places this story at the Three Kingdoms and Six Dynasties period (220-589 C.E.). Unfortunately, Zhang Jie’s book is unavailable to review today, and since Bret Hinsch only provides his translated versions of the texts that he analyzes and interprets, the original Chinese for this particular story is not available. According to Hinsch, who relies on original text from Wuxia Ameng in *Duanxiu Pian*, the story of the “shared pillow tree” is as follows:

“When Pan Zhang was young he had a beautiful [*mei*] appearance and bearing, and so people of that time were exceedingly fond of him. Wang Zhongxian of the state of Chu heard of his reputation and came to request his writings. Thereafter Wang Zhongxian wanted to study together with him. They fell in love at first sight and were affectionate as husband and wife, sharing the same coverlet and pillow with unbounded intimacy for one another.

Afterwards they died together and everyone mourned them. When they were buried together at Lofu Mountain, on the peak a tree with long branches and leafy twigs suddenly grew. All of these embraced one another! At the time people considered this a miracle. It was called the ‘Shared Pillow Tree.’”⁵⁷

In this story, Wang Zhongxian was a notable writer from the state of Chu, and due to his “beautiful appearance and bearing,” became aware of another talented writer by the name of Pan Zhang and

⁵⁷ Hinsch. *Passions of the Cut Sleeve the Male Homosexual Tradition in China*, 24-25.

thus requested his writings and his presence to “study together with him.”⁵⁸ Notable about this particular story and in direct contrast to the story of the “split peach,” is that there does not seem to be an explicit power dynamic in this relationship. There is no obvious dominant or subordinate party. Potentially the two participants viewed each other as absolute or near equals. Additionally, this story is a further anomaly in most of the examples of same-sex intimacy during imperial China as the story might imply a unique type of relationship where neither party was married to a woman, and their own same-sex relationship took on both the functions of a marriage as well as the romance and sexual pleasure one would typically find outside the institution of marriage.⁵⁹

However, Hinsch notes that there are complications within the precise translation of this particular story that muddle any concrete and purely factual interpretation, writing: “the Yuan dynasty edition from which a Ming compiler seems to have taken this story states quite straightforwardly, “they...were as affectionate as husband and wife.” Unfortunately, because an ancient edition of this tale has not survived, we cannot be certain of the original wording; but the overall intent of the story seems indisputable—two men created a sexual and emotional bond so strong that it survived even death.”⁶⁰ As is the case with the story of the split peach – albeit with a much more pleasant outcome – the passion and expressions of pure love present in this story do continue to provide support for what Bret Hinsch calls the “homosexual tradition” in China, and some level of sexual fluidity throughout, at the very least, the upper echelons of early imperial China society. Additionally, the nonchalant attitude present in this story to the fact that both parties involved in this relationship were members of the same sex *and* that it ended in an explicitly

⁵⁸ Hinsch. *Passions of the Cut Sleeve the Male Homosexual Tradition in China*, 24.

⁵⁹ Hinsch. *Passions of the Cut Sleeve the Male Homosexual Tradition in China*, 25.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

positive manner indicates the ambivalence towards same-sex relations (and potentially even marriage, at least temporarily) during either the Zhou or Three Kingdoms dynasties.

Another important aspect of this story noted by Hinsch is the use of the word (or, more precisely, character) *mei* (美), which, for readers of modern Chinese typically refers to “female beauty,” in contrast to the word for handsome, *shuai* (帅).⁶¹ However, according to Qing dynasty literatus, Zhao Yi, who is referenced by Hinsch, in a number of early imperial Chinese texts *mei* (美) is actually used to refer to “handsome man.”⁶² Furthermore, Hinsch importantly notes that a “gender-free means of expressing attractiveness seems consistent...with the surviving records of bisexuality from the Zhou and Han.”⁶³ Thus, Hinsch very likely has a correct interpretation of this story, further supported by the other stories of same-sex love and intimacy during this time period. Despite these stories and tales of immense love and intimacy between men, the Zhou dynasty was not nearly as sexually liberal and fluid as the following dynasty, the Han dynasty.

Although the Zhou dynasty did not completely disintegrate until 256 B.C.E., starting in 221 B.C.E. the Qin dynasty began taking away land and power from its predecessor.⁶⁴ The Qin dynasty quickly began consolidating its control over China, and, as Bret Hinsch aptly states: “for the first time, all under heaven bowed down before a single powerful ruler.”⁶⁵ Although the Zhou attempted to rule with some level of centralization of power, they could not keep in line all of the regional lords and nobles, thus leading to an incredibly fragmented and dispersed system of government. The Qin turned this completely on its head and had all of China following its rules and policies while quickly focusing on developing its architecture and infrastructure, among other

⁶¹ Hinsch. *Passions of the Cut Sleeve the Male Homosexual Tradition in China*, 25.

⁶² Hinsch. *Passions of the Cut Sleeve the Male Homosexual Tradition in China*, 16.

⁶³ Hinsch. *Passions of the Cut Sleeve the Male Homosexual Tradition in China*, 25.

⁶⁴ “Han Dynasty.” Encyclopedia Britannica, inc., March 31, 2023. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Han-dynasty>.

⁶⁵ Hinsch. *Passions of the Cut Sleeve the Male Homosexual Tradition in China*, 34.

things, which resulted in a great number of people being placed into forced labor.⁶⁶ These incredibly repressive social and cultural policies only furthered discontent for the Qin, providing an opening for the early leaders of the Han to establish a new dynasty.⁶⁷ Thus, Li Bang, who in 206 BCE became the first emperor of the Han dynasty, led a revolt and succeeded in overthrowing the Qin. Then began what many historians believe was the longest Chinese empire, lasting over 400 years.⁶⁸ With this came a large trove of stories depicting same-sex love and intimacy that numerous scholars and sinophone studies have relied on to try and piece together a vibrant and flourishing history involving same-sex love and potentially even outright acceptance.

Two of the large sources of information that Bret Hinsch relied on in his chapter on Han dynasty non-heterosexual love and intimacy are from historian Sima Qian, who wrote *shiji* (史记) or “Archivist’s records,” which contained a specific chapter on *ningxing* (佞幸) or “male favorites,” and fellow Han dynasty historian Ban Gu, who wrote *han shu* (汉书) or “the History of the Han.” From the prior work of these two historians, Bret Hinsch was able to produce a table (shown below) of the most notable male favorites of a vast number of Han emperors.

<i>Emperor</i>	<i>Reign</i>	<i>Male Favorite(s)</i>
Gao	206 – 195 B.C.E.	Jiru
Hui	194 – 188 B.C.E.	Hongru
Wen	179 – 157 B.C.E.	Deng Tong, Zhao Tan, Beigong Bozi
Jing	156 – 141 B.C.E.	Zhou Ren

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ “Han Dynasty.” Encyclopedia Britannica.

⁶⁸ “Han Dynasty.” Encyclopedia Britannica.

Wu	140 – 87 B.C.E.	Han Yan, Han Yue, Li Yannian
Zhao	86 – 74 B.C.E.	Jin Shang
Xuan	73 – 49 B.C.E.	Zhang Pengzu
Yuan	48 – 33 B.C.E.	Hong Gong, Shi Xian
Cheng	32 – 7 B.C.E.	Zhang Fang, Chunyu Zhang
Ai	6 BC – 1 C.E.	Dong Xian ⁶⁹

Although many historians and scholars have interpreted the work of these two Han dynasty historians to be critiquing emperors for engaging in male favoritism, recent scholarship from Dr. Luke Waring at the University of Texas at Austin has revealed that: “instead, the focus of both historians was brought to bear squarely on the personal and political repercussions of favoritism that was “excessive” or overly “ardent,” with both men seeking to remind their readers that attractive men were just as liable as women to lead careless, naïve rulers astray.”⁷⁰ In other words, the primary reason behind documenting such instances of same-sex love and intimacy was not to criticize the actual nature of those relationships, but to criticize the potential for distraction and poor leadership when an emperor became involved with a so-called “male favorite.” In the opening section of Sima Qian’s *ningxing* (佞幸) chapter, or section on “male favorites” he writes:

“「力田不如逢年，善仕不如遇合」，固無虛言。非獨女以色媚，而士宦亦有之。”

“Toiling in the fields can’t compare to a fortuitous harvest; excelling in office can’t compare to a chance encounter.” These are certainly not empty words. It isn’t just

⁶⁹ Hinsch. *Passions of the Cut Sleeve the Male Homosexual Tradition in China*, 35-36.

⁷⁰ Luke Waring. “Han Emperors and Their Male Favorites: The ‘Ningxing’ Chapters of Shiji and Hanshu.” *NAN NÜ* 24, no. 2 (November 9, 2022): 187–234. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685268-02410046>.

women who use their looks to charm; ones such as these can also be found among the men of service and the eunuchs.”⁷¹

Interpreting the above quote, Dr. Waring writes: “hard work and professional diligence are contrasted unfavorably with good fortune...with Sima Qian explicitly pointing out that it is not just women who represent potential sources of beguilement or charm.”⁷² As referenced above, *both* women and men must be given equal concern and attention when thinking about potentially corrupting influences to an emperor. This is also not to say that either Sima Qian or Ban Gu were overly critical of all extramarital sexual or romantic relationships, but that these relationships (involving members of any gender) should simply be observed with attentiveness and concern.

But who exactly were these “male favorites” that enjoyed widespread attention during the Han dynasty? As will be observed in the following story, male favorites were individuals (almost always of a lower social status) that emperors, and potentially other high-ranking officials, would develop immense love and attraction for, oftentimes both sexual and romantic in nature. Additionally, these men would oftentimes receive substantial societal and economic benefits as a result of being intimately involved with the emperor. This could take the form of a male favorite’s whole family being relocated inside palace grounds, receiving significant monetary rewards, and even, male favorites being granted official diplomatic/governmental positions.

One of the more notable stories involving same-sex romance and intimacy from the Han dynasty led to the creation of what is likely the *most* famous euphemism for homosexuality in China (still used today) – *duanxiu* (斷袖) or “cut sleeve.” *Duanxiu* (斷

⁷¹ Waring, “Han Emperors and Their Male Favorites: The ‘Ningxing’ Chapters of Shiji and Hanshu.”

⁷² Ibid.

袖) has become so famous in Chinese literature and discourse on LGBTQ+ themes and issues that many articles use this euphemism in their titles, including Ping-Hsuan Wang's article "I'm a 'cut-sleeve': Coming out from a POC perspective," and even the South China Morning Post releasing an article back in 2010 titled "A long history of 'cutting sleeves'."⁷³

The story of *duanxiu* (斷袖) or "the cut sleeve" refers to the relationship between Emperor Ai of Han (who ascended the throne at the age of 20) and Dong Xian who, initially, was a relatively unknown low-level minister of the Han dynasty.⁷⁴ After becoming involved with Emperor Ai, Dong Xian began receiving a number of important considerations from the emperor that substantially benefited both him and his family. Below is Bret Hinsch's translation of the first part of the love story between Emperor Ai and Dong Xian:

"Dong Xian's father, a respected censor, appointed Dong Xian to be a retainer to the Emperor Ai. He was a person whose beauty incited admiration. Emperor Ai gazed at him and spoke of Dong Xian's deportment and appearance. The emperor asked, "What about this retainer Dong Xian?" Because of this Dong Xian spoke with the emperor. Thus began his favor.

Dong Xian's favor and love increased daily. He held high office and each year was granted ten thousand piculs of grain. His honors alarmed the court.

Dong Xian's nature was always gentle, affable, and flattering. He was good at seducing by holding fast. Every time he was granted a leave of absence he turned it down. Instead, he remained constantly at the palace studying medicine. The emperor found it difficult to make Dong Xian return home. He summoned Dong Xian's wife and, like an official, she took up residence in a government estate. The emperor also summoned Dong Xian's sons and daughters, finding them to be bright and well mannered.

The emperor ennobled Dong Xian's father as the marquis of Guannei, with an attendant fief. Dong Xian became the marquis of Gao'an. These fiefs were each worth two thousand piculs of grain annually. Everyone in Dong Xian's household,

⁷³ Ping-Hsuan Wang. "I'm a 'Cut-Sleeve': Coming out from a POC Perspective." Linguistic Society of America, n.d. <https://www.linguisticsociety.org/content/im-cut-sleeve>; "A Long History of 'Cutting Sleeves'." South China Morning Post, January 16, 2010. <https://www.scmp.com/article/703796/long-history-cutting-sleeves>.

⁷⁴ Ulrich Theobald. "Dong Xian 董賢." ChinaKnowledge.de, February 18, 2012. <http://www.chinaknowledge.de/History/Han/personsdongxian.html>; Ireen Dubel, Hielkema André, and Ties van de Werff. "The Struggle of the Tongzhi: Homosexuality in China and the Position of Chinese 'Comrades.'" Essay. In *Urgency Required: Gay and Lesbian Rights Are Human Rights*, 172–80. The Hague: Humanist Institute for Cooperation with Developing Countries (Hivos), 2010.

down to his slaves, received grants from the emperor. The prime minister repeatedly remonstrated that because of Dong Xian the regulations of the state were in Chaos.”⁷⁵

In this story a number of the common trends regarding depictions of non-heterosexual relationships during the Han dynasty are highlighted. Firstly, as was described earlier from the scholarship of Dr. Waring, what worried or “alarmed” the court about this relationship was not its homosexual nature, but that Dong Xian was receiving substantial and undue political and economic rewards as a result of being romantically involved with the emperor. Thus, this story simultaneously serves as a perfect example of the types of benefits that an emperor’s male favorite might receive. Not only were these rewards beneficial to Dong Xian, but his father received a political boost, and his wife and children were brought into an entirely new home. According to some scholars, Emperor Ai even had an entire palace built for Dong Xian.⁷⁶ This particular story ends, turning again to the views of other prominent officials who were concerned about the state of the Han dynasty and Emperor Ai’s relationship with Dong Xian, not because of their romantic intimacy, but because of the obsession Emperor Ai had with Dong Xian.

The story of Emperor Ai and Dong Xian continues with a small passage detailing one of the more intimate moments between the two, and a scene that is the origin of the famous euphemism for same-sex love, *duanxiu* (断袖) or “cut-sleeve.” Bret Hinsch’s translation of this passage is as follows:

“Emperor Ai was sleeping in the daytime with Dong Xian stretched out across his sleeve. When the emperor wanted to get up, Dong Xian was still asleep. Because he did not want to disturb him, the emperor cut off his own sleeve and got up. His love and thoughtfulness went this far!”⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Hinsch. *Passions of the Cut Sleeve the Male Homosexual Tradition in China*, 44-45.

⁷⁶ van de Werff. “The Struggle of the Tongzhi: Homosexuality in China and the Position of Chinese ‘Comrades.’”

⁷⁷ Hinsch. *Passions of the Cut Sleeve the Male Homosexual Tradition in China*, 53.

Here we see one of the most famous depictions of same-sex love, care, and intimacy in all of Chinese history. Emperor Ai's love for Dong Xian went so far, that he ruined his own gown/tunic just so he did not disturb his romantic partner. Furthermore, this story and the other trends noted about the Han dynasty mark what is probably the highest point in Chinese history when discussing a sexuality-fluid and open society and seemingly overt acceptance of the "homosexual tradition."⁷⁸

After the fall of the Han dynasty in 220 C.E., Chinese society was again stricken with internal conflict and turmoil which led to a number of different generals and local nobles assuming regional power, and it was not until 618 C.E. that the Tang dynasty was finally able to quell all of the competing forces within China and create a unified nation once again.⁷⁹ Throughout the Tang and succeeding Song dynasties, there are fewer explicit references to non-heterosexual love and intimacy. There were still occasional mentions of an emperor's "male favorite(s)" and some remaining poems that depict same-sex love, but not nearly as many or as vibrant as during the preceding Han and Zhou dynasties.⁸⁰ However, during the Tang dynasty, Chinese society saw an explosion in sexual erotica tales and poems and there was a general culture of openness and "high regard for sensuality."⁸¹ In Jin Wu's 2003 article, titled "From 'Long Yang' and 'Dui Shi' to Tongzhi: Homosexuality in China," she notes instances of same-sex love and intimacy between Buddhist and Taoist nuns.⁸² Chinese physician and medical historian, Ruan Fangfu's 1991 book *Sex in China* also writes about a famous ancient sex handbook, which gave readers "instructions for a method that not only allowed a man to enjoy two women at once, but simultaneously

⁷⁸ Hinsch. *Passions of the Cut Sleeve the Male Homosexual Tradition in China*, 53.

⁷⁹ Hinsch. *Passions of the Cut Sleeve the Male Homosexual Tradition in China*, 55.

⁸⁰ Hinsch. *Passions of the Cut Sleeve the Male Homosexual Tradition in China*, 78.

⁸¹ Weijing Lu. "Introduction." *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 22, no. 2 (May 2013): 201–6.

<https://doi.org/10.7560/JHS22201>; Hinsch. *Passions of the Cut Sleeve the Male Homosexual Tradition in China*, 78.

⁸² Jing Wu. "From 'Long Yang' and 'Dui Shi' to Tongzhi: Homosexuality in China." *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Psychotherapy* 7, no. 1-2 (2003): 117–43. https://doi.org/10.1300/j236v07n01_08.

permitted pleasurable genital contact between the women.”⁸³ The existence of such “sex handbooks” was not a rare occurrence during the Tang and early Song dynasties, and highlights the continuingly sexually fluid nature of Chinese society during this time period.

It was during these dynasties that the industry of prostitution became more prolific throughout all levels of society, as well as a new term to describe acts of same-sex love and intimacy came into existence, namely *jijian* (鸡奸), which can be translated to mean “sodomy/anal-intercourse/buggery.”⁸⁴ The emergence of this term was especially significant as it appeared in the succeeding Qing dynasty’s laws and edicts cracking down on the practice of non-heterosexual sex.⁸⁵ Finally, it was not until the middle of the Song dynasty that, due to the high presence of prostitution throughout society, the Song government officially decreed the practice of male prostitution illegal, with severe economic and physical punishment.⁸⁶ This is one of the first official instances of the government pushing back against men having sex with other men and was instigated by the pervasiveness of prostitution throughout society, although there is speculation as to how strictly this law was actually enforced by the government and other officials.

During the Tang and Song dynasties, it is clear that there was an incredibly high value placed on sexual pleasure throughout all levels of society, including for those involved in same-sex relations. A byproduct of this level of sexual openness was the rapid expansion of the prostitution industry, which became a focal point for examining same-sex relations in the succeeding Ming and Qing dynasties. Furthermore, the emergence of a term to describe anal intercourse, while likely not used for oppressive methods during this time period, was significant

⁸³ Fangfu Ruan. *Sex in China: Studies in Sexology in Chinese Culture*. New York u.a.: Plenum Press, 1991, 135.

⁸⁴ Hinsch. *Passions of the Cut Sleeve the Male Homosexual Tradition in China*, 88.

⁸⁵ Hinsch. *Passions of the Cut Sleeve the Male Homosexual Tradition in China*, 89.

⁸⁶ Hinsch. *Passions of the Cut Sleeve the Male Homosexual Tradition in China*, 93.

as it gave the terminology to later dynasties to promote policies aimed at punishing those who engaged in same-sex acts. On a broader level as well, it was likely not a pure coincidence that after the Tang dynasty was able to recentralize rule over China, it felt a level of security that made the rulers of this dynasty more comfortable with promoting a sexually fluid society, whereas, and as we will see shortly, the anti-“homosexual” stance targeting those engaging in same-sex acts during the Mongol’s Yuan dynasty may have been correlated with the constant external threats to power and control that occurred over this dynasty’s barely 100 years in power.

From the beginning of the Zhou dynasty to the end of the Song dynasty, the nature of same-sex relations, love, and intimacy varied greatly. The Han dynasty unequivocally serves as the high point for documented examples of same-sex love and intimacy during early imperial China. However, the sexually-minded Tang dynasty, with its growth of male prostitution as an example, definitely serves as another high point for same-sex relations. With the coming of the Song dynasty the non-linear nature of this particular history is illuminated as a law came into existence cracking down on male prostitution and served as a precursor to another time period that hosted many more laws, edicts, and societal norms designed to oppose the prevalence of same-sex romantic and sexual relations, namely the Qing dynasty. But before that, the short-lived Yuan and then longer Ming dynasties each had their own unique relationships to the “homosexual tradition.”

Late-Imperial China

Most historians define the year 1368 C.E. as the beginning of China’s Late-Imperial period, however, there was an 88-year dynasty that existed between the fall of the Song and establishment of the Ming that also served as a precursor to some of the more sexually-restrictive laws that came into existence during the Qing dynasty. The Yuan dynasty, as this period is known, was the result

of Genghis Khan's grandson, Kublai Khan, consolidating control over the vast swaths of land the Mongol nomads had been expanding into for decades prior.⁸⁷ While there is not much explicit information or resources to draw on when assessing notions of gender and sexuality during this time period, reviewing earlier information from the Mongols illuminates what likely would have been attitudes towards the "homosexual tradition" during this time period.

During the time of Genghis Khan, who ruled over the Mongol Empire and died in 1227 C.E., established an oral code of laws which came to be known as the *Great Yassa*. In this code of laws, reporters from Xinhua news claim that Article 48 contained a passage that read "men who commit sodomy shall be put to death."⁸⁸ This passage serves as one of the earliest, most clear-cut, and explicit condemnations of acts of same-sex intimacy. While it is impossible to fully understand the motivations behind this particular law, one likely goal could have been Genghis Khan's strong desire to grow the Mongol population in order to better compete against the much larger Song Dynasty.⁸⁹ Condemning acts of homosexuality on the basis of trying to promote larger population growth may also have links to some of the PRC's anti-homosexual behaviors over its lifetime, which will be discussed further in Chapters Four and Five.

A series of revolts against the Yuan dynasty eventually led to the establishment of the Ming dynasty in 1368 C.E., China's penultimate dynastic period. During the Ming dynasty there was a return to the tradition of emperors having "male favorites," as well as numerous literary works that dwelled on the topic of people having romantic relationships with members of the same gender, one particularly famous author was Li Yu.⁹⁰ There was significant documentation of the

⁸⁷ "Yuan Dynasty." Encyclopedia Britannica, inc., n.d. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Yuan-dynasty>.

⁸⁸ "Genghis Khan: Environmentalist, Homophobe." China Daily, August 31, 2007. http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2007-08/31/content_6070520.htm.

⁸⁹ "Genghis Khan: Environmentalist, Homophobe." China Daily.

⁹⁰ Hinsch. *Passions of the Cut Sleeve the Male Homosexual Tradition in China*, 121.

prevalence of male prostitution and homosexual behavior by foreign religious missionaries, some instances of anti-homosexual rhetoric, and even some of the first examples of marriage between two men.

Although there were anomalies in the structure of homosexual relations during the Ming dynasty – marriage between two members of the same gender being one such anomaly – most conformed to the traditional structure of extramarital relations from previous dynasties. That is, it was most often the power imbalance between two parties in a non-marital sexual relationship that was focused on and normalized, and not the gender of the two individuals involved. During the Ming dynasty most homosexual relationships did involve two people where one was clearly the dominant (penetrator) member of the relationship, and the other was the subordinate (or penetrated).⁹¹ The extremely expansive system of prostitution during this time period also helps to solidify this, as many prostitutes during the Ming dynasty were men, yet were not viewed any differently by most of Chinese society as their role within the power structure of any relationship was clearly defined.

Despite most of Chinese society during the Ming dynasty having been quite comfortable with what Giovanni Vitiello calls a “long tradition of organized prostitution,” and being equally supportive of men and women working in this industry, such views were often not held by some of the foreign, religious missionaries to visit China during this time period.⁹² Matteo Ricci was an Italian Jesuit missionary who was one of the first priests to attempt to spread Christianity to China during the Ming dynasty. Ricci, who died in 1610, documented his perception of male prostitution

⁹¹ Martin W. Huang. “Male-Male Sexual Bonding and Male Friendship in Late Imperial China.” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 22, no. 2 (May 2013): 312–31. <https://doi.org/10.7560/jhs22206>.

⁹² Giovanni Vitiello. “The Dragon's Whim: Ming and Qing Homoerotic Tales from the Cut Sleeve.” *T'oung Pao* 78, no. 4/5 (1992): 341–72. <https://doi.org/10.1163/156853292x00045>.

in China in his book titled “*Della entrata della Compagnia di Giesù e Christianità nella Cina*” or “Of the Entry of the Society of Jesus and Christianity into China.” Here, Ricci wrote:

“But what can be most pitied in this matter, and most reveals this people’s misery, is that among them not only are practiced the natural lusts but also the unnatural ones, which is neither forbidden by law, nor considered illicit, nor even a cause of shame. And therefore, people talk about it in public, and practice it everywhere, without there being anyone to prevent it. And in the towns where this abomination most reigns – as here in the capital – there are public streets full of boys got up like prostitutes, and, similarly, there are people who buy these boys and teach them to play music, sing and dance. And then, very gallantly dressed and made up with rouge like women, they enflame men drawing them to this infamous vice.”⁹³

This passage highlights, not only the extreme prominence of male prostitution during the Ming dynasty, but also Matteo Ricci’s views on the topic of male prostitution, and likely homosexual behavior more broadly. Such negative attitudes towards the subject of male prostitution and the practicing of “unnatural” lusts were common amongst Western missionaries to China during this time, and demonstrate the conflicting views between members of Chinese society and these visitors and others who traveled to China from abroad.⁹⁴ Particularly for the large number of Christian missionaries that came to China during the Ming dynasty, they brought with them a religious tradition where “sex has always been viewed as a temptation, a major obstacle in the path towards God.”⁹⁵ In Taoism, however, sex was not shunned or looked negatively upon, but instead seen “as one of the special fields of self-cultivation,” and thus it is no surprise that during the Ming dynasty, but also during many earlier dynasties, there was a plethora of sexually erotic art and literature.⁹⁶

As previously mentioned, one such famous literary genius from the Ming dynasty who wrote an extensive number of novels and plays depicting homosexual relations was Li Yu. One of

⁹³ Vitiello. “The Dragon's Whim: Ming and Qing Homoerotic Tales from the Cut Sleeve.”

⁹⁴ Vitiello. “The Dragon's Whim: Ming and Qing Homoerotic Tales from the Cut Sleeve.”

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

Li Yu's plays, "Cherishing the Fragrant Companion," not only told a happy story of a homosexual relationship, but, as the two main characters were both women, also serves as one of the earliest and most famous examples of female same sex love and intimacy in Chinese history. The entire play was translated into English by Smith College Professor Jessica Moyer who outlines the plot of this play, writing: "two young women who meet while burning incense in a Buddhist temple and are instantly attracted to one another's beauty, fragrance, and poetic talent. They swear sisterhood, perform an unofficial marriage ceremony, and finally contrive to marry the same man in order to spend their lives together."⁹⁷ In this story, *Cui Jianyun* (who, in other translations, is referred to as *Shih*) is a young woman, recently married to a man named *Fan Jiefu*. *Cui Jianyun*'s plan is to make *Cao Yuhua* (also known as *Yen-hua* in other translations), a younger, unmarried woman, her husband's concubine in order for them to spend the rest of their lives together.⁹⁸ In scene ten of Li Yu's play, *Cui Jianyun* and *Cao Yuhua* meet for the second time and express their desire to bond, not as sisters, or brothers in a future life, but as husband and wife in a future reincarnation.⁹⁹

"MADAM CUI: No, that's no good either. There are so many brothers who don't get along. And even brothers who do get along aren't as close as a husband and wife who don't get along. Let's swear to be husband and wife in our future lives!
(Miss Cao laughs)

Brothers and sisters are well enough,
Yet even those born of one womb,
Sharing the same innate relationship –
Their sentiments are no weighty matter.
Lord and minister are separated by the expanse of the royal hall.

Even with one's father and mother –
This is nothing like husband and wife, with deepest parts united,

⁹⁷ Jessica Moyer. "'Playful Vows,' translation from Li Yu, Lian xiangban [Pitying the fragrant companion]." East Asian Languages & Cultures: Faculty Publications, Smith College, Northampton, MA, (2018). https://scholarworks.smith.edu/eas_facpubs/11.

⁹⁸ Fangfu Ruan and Vern L. Bullough. "Lesbianism in China." *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 21 (1992): 217–26. <https://doi.org/10.1007/bf01542993>.

⁹⁹ Moyer. "'Playful Vows,' translation from Li Yu, Lian xiangban [Pitying the fragrant companion]."

Rejoicing to share pillow and couch,
Only then are hearts at ease.

In life not divided, in death still a pair.

These words are not spoken in vain!

*Haven't you read of the
Butterfly Lovers, who shared a room of old?*

*Then shall we not, in the life to come,
Imitate the phoenix and her mate,
Make a pair of
Butterflies, fluttering and circling,
Pay this lifetime's account in full?*

...

Looking at you, I clap my hands
How marvelously made, this marriage fate!
A seeming hero, a real heroine –
What a novel performance!¹⁰⁰

This passage depicts one of the most romantic and passionate demonstrations of love between two women from the history of Imperial China. Additionally, this serves as yet another fascinating example of the radically different nature of marriages during dynastic China, where sometimes an emperor would move his entire “male favorite’s” family into the palace, as was the case between Emperor Ai and Dong Xian, or, as shown here, a woman would try to have her romantic partner become a part of her relationship with her husband. The institution of marriage and Confucian notions of the family were often not seen as threatened by homosexual activity as these forces often coexisted, and acts of same-sex love and intimacy were taken within the confines of existing relationships dedicated to procreation. It should be noted, however, that the example offered in the story above was likely not a common occurrence given the infrequency of information on this topic, in comparison to the plethora of information provided regarding emperors’ “male favorites.”

¹⁰⁰ Moyer. ““Playful Vows,” translation from Li Yu, Lian xiangban [Pitying the fragrant companion].”

Although, it is difficult to tell for sure as for much of Chinese history male figures dominated written accounts, and even if there were a number of examples similar to the story offered above, they may not have been recorded due to patriarchal and sexist norms.

Li Yu's play, as well as a number of the other primary sources examined here, all work to support the broader idea of radically different constructions of sexual orientation, marriage, and the family unit than exists in China today. Vitiello adds his own thoughts in support of this argument, writing: "Ming and Qing literary sources... convey the image of a society in which a man could have a wife, concubines and children, and be at the same time fond of young men; he might even have had a stable affair with one of them, without feeling he was living a contradiction, or offending a moral sense."¹⁰¹ Particularly during the Ming dynasty and preceding periods, these notions were able to flourish in no small part because of the limited reach and influence of foreign ideas relating to marriage and sexuality, particularly from Christian missionaries. However, it should be noted that although homosexual behavior could often be exercised, "in order to be morally acceptable, homosexuality had to stay within certain boundaries."¹⁰² Namely, procreation and official marriage to a woman also had to be present.

In addition to the numerous literary works of Li Yu, the performing arts theater and opera in Ming and Qing dynasty China (as well as likely in preceding dynasties as well) served as another important observance place of homosexual behavior. This realm of performance art saw the rise of the male *dan* (旦), a unique role where a male actor would play the part of a female character in theatrical and operatic performances. During the Ming dynasty, the rise of neo-Confucianism led to increased separation between males and females throughout society, including within theater

¹⁰¹ Vitiello. "The Dragon's Whim: Ming and Qing Homoerotic Tales from the Cut Sleeve."

¹⁰² Vitiello. "The Dragon's Whim: Ming and Qing Homoerotic Tales from the Cut Sleeve."

and opera troupes.¹⁰³ With women oftentimes being relegated to domestic environments, and even at times throughout the Ming and Qing dynasty women being outright prohibited from participating in or even watching opera performances, troupes tended to be exclusively male.¹⁰⁴ Thus there was a need for, often younger and attractive, males to take on the female parts in various productions. However, Professor of Chinese language and literature at Sun Yat-sen University, Chao Guo, offers another reason for the rise of the male *dan* (旦) characters in Chinese theater and opera. Guo writes: “the predilection for *nanfeng* (南风), or male homoeroticism, among the scholar elite” also contributed to the rise of this particular type of acting, that often also involved actions that took place off the stage as well.¹⁰⁵ The scholar elite were generally the most frequent observers of various theatrical and operatic performances, and also were the ones who would frequently engage in sexual activities with male *dan* (旦) performers.

The overlap of performance and sexual activities of male *dan* (旦) actors was quite profound during the Ming dynasty, due in no small part to the banning of prostitution at the very beginning of this period. “The first Ming emperor, Zhu Yuanzhang issued a decree threatening severe penalties for officials caught having sexual relations with female entertainers.”¹⁰⁶ Although enforcement of this policy did not last very long and was quickly lessened by future rulers, it likely played a role in developing the extremely expansive male prostitution industry throughout China.

¹⁰³ Robert Hans van Gulik and Paul Rakita Goldin. “Ming Dynasty.” Essay. In *Sexual Life in Ancient China: A Preliminary Survey of Chinese Sex and Society from Ca. 1500 B.C. till 1644 A.D.*, 263–336. Leiden: Brill, 2003, 264.

¹⁰⁴ Chen Tian. “What Chinese Opera Can Teach Us about Gender.” Sixth Tone, August 29, 2018. <https://www.sixthtone.com/news/1002838>.

¹⁰⁵ Chao Guo. “Male Dan and Homoeroticism in Beijing during the Ming and Qing Periods.” *Asian Studies Review* 45, no. 2 (2021): 290–305. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357823.2020.1757619>.

¹⁰⁶ Harriet T. Zurndorfer. “Prostitutes and Courtesans in the Confucian Moral Universe of Late Ming China (1550–1644).” *International Review of Social History* 56, no. S19 (2011): 197–216. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0020859011000411>.

Guo goes on to note: “in the late Ming atmosphere of consumption, this focus on individualism finally developed into a sense of libertinism, which led to the politically frustrated scholars' pursuit of sensual or even carnal enjoyment. Young boys, who played a similar role to female prostitutes, provided a type of exotic pleasure for the disenchanted scholar-elite.”¹⁰⁷ This “sense of libertinism” was pervasive throughout much of society during the Ming dynasty and even created a culture of wealthy scholar-official families raising future male *dan* (旦) performers to become part of their family troupes.¹⁰⁸ Well-off scholar officials would raise these young boys, oftentimes due to their presumable preference for *nanfeng* (南风), but also because they would be able to provide ample financial resources to the male *dan* (旦) performer to perfect his theatrical skills.¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, and on the almost opposite end of the spectrum, occasionally scholar-elites would face extreme poverty prior to their civil service examinations and placement within the realms of the governmental elite, while male *dan* (旦) actors would often produce substantial income to support the scholar-elite.¹¹⁰

Within the sexual role of the male *dan* (旦), as in many other instances of sex between men in Chinese society, the professional role of the young boy as impersonating a woman and wearing female clothes on stage and having a generally more feminine appearance, was important in maintaining the clearly defined power dynamics in the relationships. The scholar elite was almost always the dominant and penetrator, while the male *dan* (旦) was the submissive and penetrated. Guo writes: “The Chinese politics of gender and sexuality was a projection of the overall social structure, where an individual’s identity was fluid and relative, and was dynamically redefined

¹⁰⁷ Guo. “Male Dan and Homoeroticism in Beijing during the Ming and Qing Periods.”

¹⁰⁸ Guo. “Male Dan and Homoeroticism in Beijing during the Ming and Qing Periods.”

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

under the discipline of the Neo-Confucian hierarchy. A person's sexual position often reflects, and is primarily determined and constantly reinforced by, his social position."¹¹¹ Thus, due to the preservation of the scholar-elites' social position within sexual relations with male *dan* (旦) actors, his actions did not pose an inherent opposition to neo-Confucian ideas and norms.

The predilection of scholar-officials for male *dan* (旦) and *nanfeng* (南风) in many ways has its roots in a specific region of China, namely the southeastern province of Fujian. *Nanfeng* (南风) which came to be a word used to reference homosexually-inclined men or the "homosexual custom," can be literally translated to "southern wind," which is a nod to the extremely vibrant culture of homoeroticism, male prostitution, and frequency of men engaging intimately with other men that occurred in the Fujian region and throughout southern China, and supports, as is argued by Giovanni Vitiello, the belief among some that homosexuality was an imported custom from the south.¹¹² This region generally served as one of the major artistic hubs of China throughout both the Ming and Qing dynasties, in no small part because of the large number of artists and artisans that chose to stay behind in the eastern city Nanking (the former capital of China during the Ming dynasty until 1403) instead of moving with the rest of the imperial court to establish a new capital in Peking (also known as Beijing).¹¹³ Li Yu, in fact, was born in Jiangsu which is the broader province of which Nanking is now the capital, and it is likely not a coincidence that Li Yu's close proximity to the southern province of Fujian heavily influenced many of his stories and plays.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Vitiello. "The Dragon's Whim: Ming and Qing Homoerotic Tales from the Cut Sleeve."

¹¹³ van Gulik, et al. "Ming Dynasty."

In fact, many of Li Yu's *Wusheng xi* (无声戏), a collection of silent operas, were set in Fujian and the reader was made aware of the unique prevalence of homosexual relations in this region in the prologue to these operas.¹¹⁴ While, as has been already observed, homosexual relations took a wide range of forms throughout place and time in China, Fujian did in fact take it to another. Even news organizations, such as the *South China Morning Post* have acknowledged that actual forms of gay marriage existed in Fujian and were not, for a number of centuries, actively persecuted by the state or the rest of society in this region.¹¹⁵ Qing dynasty painter Yuan Mei wrote in his *Zi bu yu* (子不语), or "What the Master Would not Discuss," that "it is known about Fujianese people having a betrothal among males."¹¹⁶ What we today would describe as "gay marriages" that occurred in Fujian oftentimes took on very different structures from "heterosexual" marriages given that (as was the case with many instances of same-sex love and intimacy throughout Chinese history) these marriages would usually contain two men of differing ages, where terms like "older adoptive brother" and "younger adoptive brother" were used, and these marriages would often fizzle out after a long period of time so that the younger man could go off and find a wife in order to further his family lineage. Thus, a further example of how instances of homosexual relations and even *marriage* existed *alongside* and not in opposition to various "heterosexual" institutions, like marriage or, as Giovanni Vitiello writes, "homosexuality did not constitute an absolute alternative to heterosexuality."¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Vitiello. "The Dragon's Whim: Ming and Qing Homoerotic Tales from the Cut Sleeve."

¹¹⁵ Sarah Ngu. "China Embraced Gay 'Marriage' Long before Taiwan's Law. The West Perverted History." *South China Morning Post*, May 26, 2019. <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3011750/china-embraced-gay-marriage-long-taiwans-law-west-perverted>.

¹¹⁶ Vitiello. "The Dragon's Whim: Ming and Qing Homoerotic Tales from the Cut Sleeve."

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

A final example of the vibrance of the “homosexual tradition” in Fujian was the existence of a patron god/deity of homosexuality. *Hu Tianbao*, as he was known, was a local Fujianese man who fell in love with a Regional Inspector, an official who later had the Fujianese man killed for looking at him inappropriately. Yet, *Hu Tianbao* appeared to the inspector in a dream following his death and told him of his immense love for the inspector and how he had been enshrined with the title of God of the Rabbits and that the inspector should go about and construct a temple in honor of the God of the Rabbits.¹¹⁸ Harvard historian Michael Szonyi has even argued that this developed into a religious sect where “men seeking sexual relations with boys worshiped a patron deity known as *Hu Tianbao*.”¹¹⁹ Fujian's closely associated history with acts of homosexuality and even instances of marriages between two men resulted in a nation-wide stereotype that emerged during the late imperial period that “men of Fujian were unusually prone to sodomy.”¹²⁰

Despite the various stories that emerged from Fujian, the prevalence of male prostitution, and the role of male *dan* (旦) actors, the Ming dynasty was also a time period that began a shift in broader Chinese views, where homosexual relations were increasingly condemned and attacked by a variety of authorities. During the Jiajing reign (1522 - 1567 C.E.) of the Ming dynasty, a public statute was passed which read: “Whoever inserts his penis into another man’s anus for lascivious play (*jing shenjing fang ru ren fenmen nei yin xi*) shall receive 100 blows of the heavy bamboo, in application by analogy of the statue on ‘pouring foul material into the mouth of another person’ (*hui wu guan ru ren kou*).”¹²¹ This edict clearly and explicitly condemns acts of homosexuality, as it does not (as was the case in previous edicts condemning acts of

¹¹⁸ Vitiello. “The Dragon's Whim: Ming and Qing Homoerotic Tales from the Cut Sleeve.”

¹¹⁹ Matthew H. Sommer, “Was China Part of a Global Eighteenth-Century Homosexuality?,” *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques* 33, no. 1 (2007): pp. 117-133, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41299404>.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Matthew H. Sommer, “The Penetrated Male in Late Imperial China,” *Modern China* 23, no. 2 (April 1997): pp. 140-180, <https://doi.org/10.1177/009770049702300202>.

homosexuality) make any sort of acknowledgement of consent or coercion, and blanketly bans all forms and examples of this particular act. Furthermore, there were a number of novels involving men who have sex with men published during the Ming Dynasty that told stories “about students who were expelled from school for having same-sex romantic relations.”¹²² Thus, even in non-governmental or imperial court environments, homosexual acts were still coming under attack during this time period. These examples, however, only served as the precursor to what was to come under the rule of the Qing dynasty.

Around the end of the 1500s the Ming dynasty began showing clear signs of decay and imminent decline. Emperors in Peking increasingly filled high profile and key positions with their personal favorites, leading to an ill-equipped imperial court to address the growing strength of the Manchus in Manchuria as well as the worsening economic situation in the nation.¹²³ When rebel military leader Li Zicheng overtook Peking in 1644, Ming leaders were forced to call on the Manchus for military aid, which they provided and retook the capital, but then installed themselves as the imperial rulers of China and overthrew the Ming government establishing the Qing dynasty.¹²⁴ In doing so, however, early Qing leaders continued the same form of centralized government the Ming had perfected, as well as maintained former Ming officials in a number of key positions to thwart any attempts at rebellion.

With a new ruling dynasty came a new set of cultural norms and practices, social attitudes, and laws/government regulation related to gender and sexuality. Conversely, a number of traditions and cultural practices were carried over from previous dynasties including the continued prevalence of male *dan* (旦) actors, the still relatively non-existence of a stable homosexual

¹²² Wu, “From ‘*Long Yang*’ and ‘*Dui Shi*’ to Tongzhi: Homosexuality in China.”

¹²³ van Gulik. “Ming Dynasty.”

¹²⁴ “Qing Dynasty.” Encyclopedia Britannica, inc., April 7, 2023. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Qing-dynasty>.

identity as defined by either the state or individuals, and the southern regions of China maintaining their status as hotbeds for various forms of homosexual behavior and actions. Starting with the latter, the early days of the Qing dynasty saw the emergence, primarily in southern China, of organizations focused on building communities and social support for women. These female-only organizations would, first and foremost, offer members employment opportunities and sources of social support, but often expanded to offer much more than that.¹²⁵ One such group, the Golden Orchard Society/Association or *Jin-lan hui* (金兰会) was actually more of a collection of organizations that existed throughout Southern China, in some cases lasting all the way until the mid 1900s.¹²⁶ Members of the Golden Orchard Society would be afforded the benefits previously mentioned but also, in a number of cases, became romantically and even sexually involved with each other. Often the women would form silkworm raising communities to support each other financially and engage in either informal or oftentimes formal marriages where one woman would take on the traditional role of husband and the other would take on the role of the wife. The women would also put their hair into a bun which was the sign of a married woman in China during this time, and even perform some marriage-related ceremonies.¹²⁷

There are accounts of a precursor to the Golden Orchard Society called the Ten Sisters, which existed hundreds of years earlier. In this society, which was founded by a Buddhist nun, members vowed to only marry other members of their group and, if a member had a family that forced the woman to marry a man, they would either commit suicide or even murder the potential

¹²⁵ M. P. Lau, and M. L. Ng. "Homosexuality in Chinese Culture." *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* 13, (December 1989): 465–88. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/BF00052053>.

¹²⁶ Harper-Hugo Darling. "The Golden Orchid Society." *Making Queer History*, n.d. <https://www.makingqueerhistory.com/articles/2016/12/20/the-golden-orchid>.

¹²⁷ Wu. "From 'Long Yang' and 'Dui Shi' to Tongzhi: Homosexuality in China."

husband.¹²⁸ The existence of these organizations in both rural communities and Southern cities also illustrates a consistent theme regarding gender and sexuality, namely that official policies of the state or regional governments did not always trickle down to all regions of society, in many cases creating a big divide between local community practices and official state policy.

This dichotomy was evident early during the Qing dynasty (established in 1644), as Bret Hinsch describes a “period of reaction set in against what many perceived as Ming libertinism,” which included numerous examples of a state-led clampdown on homosexual behaviors and tendencies.¹²⁹ The term *ji jian* (鸡奸), which directly translates to “sodomy” but was used to refer to homosexual anal intercourse, was included in a 1679 sub-statute as part of larger statute against illicit sex, known as *jian* (奸).¹³⁰ The sub-statute read:

“If evil rascals (*e gun*) gather in a gang and abduct a son or younger brother of commoner family (*liang jia zi di*) and use coercion to sodomize him (*qiang xing ji jian*), then the ringleader shall be immediately beheaded, and the followers shall all be sentenced to strangulation after the assizes [by analogy to the substatute on “rootless rascals”]. If it is consensual (*he tong zhe*), then the crime shall be punished according to the statute.¹³¹

The significance of the inclusion of this sub-statute was that it marked the first time that *ji jian* (鸡奸) or “sodomy” was compared to and included in the categorization of general *jian* (奸) or “illicit sex” crimes.¹³² Thus, homosexual intercourse and “illicit sex” were inextricably bound. Furthermore, it reinforced the Ming dynasty’s ban on *consensual* homosexual intercourse but still relied on the specific legal definition and consequences of this act, and at this point in the Qing

¹²⁸ Ruan, et al. “Lesbianism in China.

¹²⁹ Hinsch. *Passions of the Cut Sleeve the Male Homosexual Tradition in China*, 139.

¹³⁰ Sommer. *Sex, Law, and Society in Late Imperial China*, 121.

¹³¹ Sommer. *Sex, Law, and Society in Late Imperial China*, 122.

¹³² Sommer. *Sex, Law, and Society in Late Imperial China*, 121.

dynasty the courts did not impose any *new* types of consequences or ramifications for those involved in consensual homosexual intercourse.

The fourth emperor of the Qing dynasty, Emperor Yongzheng, played a large role in the increasingly anti-homosexual laws and constraints that were established during the Qing dynasty. However, these laws and regulations were not necessarily meant as a direct means of opposing those with predilection for engaging in romantic and sexual acts with the same sex, but rather as part of a broader crackdown on what was viewed as sexually immoral behavior. Over the course of his reign from 1723 to 1735 C.E. prostitution was entirely prohibited, masters were no longer able to engage in sexual acts with female slaves, and the “imperial chastity cult” that began emerging towards the end of the Ming dynasty was expanded and strengthened.¹³³

Many of these judicial changes that occurred during the Qing dynasty, Matthew Sommer suggests, should be viewed “against a social background in which, because men outnumbered women, patriarchal stability was perceived as under constant threat from the growing crowd of rogue males at the bottom of the socioeconomic scale.”¹³⁴ Furthermore, relying on Sommer’s analysis and commenting on the reign of Emperor Yongzheng, Chao Guo notes that his reform was “not a projection of puritanical erotophobia or homophobia but was aimed to counter the rise of social mobility and fluidity that came with the development of a money economy. An individual’s fulfillment of familial duties thus shielded him from the potential discredit that might arise from a predilection for *nanfeng* (南风).”¹³⁵ Thus, many Qing emperors and their courts felt a necessity to reign in sexual libertinism as a way to shore up the patriarchal system and preserve masculinity, particularly in regards to what were seen as more vulnerable boys and adolescents.

¹³³ Sommer. *Sex, Law, and Society in Late Imperial China*, 10.

¹³⁴ Sommer. *Sex, Law, and Society in Late Imperial China*, 306.

¹³⁵ Guo. “Male Dan and Homoeroticism in Beijing during the Ming and Qing Periods.”

Despite the increased regulation of sexuality during the Qing dynasty, homosexual behavior and relationships remained commonplace throughout the imperial dynasty. As Sir John Barrows noted in an excerpt from his *Travels in China* book which summarizes his experiences at the end of the 1700s and early in the 1800s:

“The commission of this detestable and unnatural act is attended with so little sense of shame, or feelings of delicacy, that many of the first officers of the state seemed to make no hesitation in publicly avowing it. Each of these officers is constantly attended by his pipe-bearer, who is generally a handsome boy, from fourteen to eighteen years of age, and is always well dressed.”¹³⁶

What is being implicitly referenced here is, of course, officers engaging in homosexual behavior and relations with young boys, including the remaining presence of male *dan* (旦) actors during the Qing dynasty. The extremely negative portrayal of this by Sir John Barrows illuminates the radically differing notions of what was morally – and often relatedly, religiously – acceptable in Britain and the West during this time, as compared to the continued prevalence of these sorts of behaviors across China.

Likely having its origins with the scholar-elite and literati of the South, but making its way up north, an entire genre of poetry and novels on the topic of same-sex love and intimacy emerged during the Qing period and, often more informally, forms of male prostitution through professions like theater and dancing continued to thrive. With all of this, a power-based hierarchy in the bedroom was very much, if not even more, in place and enforced by social and state-led factors that promulgated the idea of the male being the dominant and penetrator in a sexual relationship, while women were expected to assume the more submissive and penetrated roles. Thus, the issue of the “penetrated male” in Qing dynasty China was not at all about any sort of identity, but instead about varying what were seen as typical gender-based roles in society. As Matthew Sommer aptly

¹³⁶ Hinsch. *Passions of the Cut Sleeve the Male Homosexual Tradition in China*, 141.

put it: “sexual relations between men in the late imperial era should be seen, not as constitutive of a stable homosexual identity, but as acts that profoundly destabilized the gendered hierarchy by treating some men (the penetrated) like women.”¹³⁷ The change that took place during this period was not simply reflective of a more negative, morality/religiously-based view of homosexual behavior, but instead a change from an “old paradigm of status performance” to a “new paradigm of gender performance.”¹³⁸

After nearly four millennia of rule by emperors in China, Sun Yatsen’s Nationalist Party established the Republic of China and ended dynastic rule in 1912. This came well after a century of foreign and, especially, Western imperialism and colonialism in China, particularly geared towards the export of opium which led to two wars over foreign involvement and influence in China in the 19th century. Various and often related conflicts, such as the Taiping Rebellion of 1850 to 1864 and the antforeign Boxer Uprising of 1900 which was “crushed by an alliance of foreign armies [causing] the empire [to] never recover” all spelled the end of the Qing dynasty.¹³⁹ Additionally, particularly towards the end of the 19th century, all of the Qing dynasty’s defeats and losses at the hands of Western powers led several generations of Chinese to focus on integrating some of the technologies and identities of the powers that had defeated them into their own society.¹⁴⁰ It was during this period that it was said: let “Chinese doctrine be the foundation and Western knowledge be the tool.”¹⁴¹ A large part of this initial period of Western influence in China heavily involved Western medical and, specifically, psychological ideas taking hold in China, including notions of “homosexuality” as a mental illness/disorder.¹⁴² As will be explored

¹³⁷ Sommer. “The Penetrated Male in Late Imperial China.”

¹³⁸ Sommer. *Sex, Law, and Society in Late Imperial China*, 8.

¹³⁹ Walder, Andrew G. *China under Mao - A Revolution Derailed*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017, 2-3.

¹⁴⁰ Wu. “From ‘Long Yang’ and ‘Dui Shi’ to Tongzhi: Homosexuality in China.”

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

in the next chapter, the influence of these ideas only further expanded during the early part of the 20th century. After the fall of the Qing dynasty, what came next was a period rife with internal (as well as external) struggle for power and control over China, all concluding in 1949 with Mao Zedong's establishment of the People's Republic of China.

Key Takeaways

Over the many centuries of China's imperial dynasties, notions of gender and sexuality fluctuated greatly, offering researchers and those interested in these topics different ways to view and interpret them than is currently offered in the West that traditionally relies heavily on a dichotomic configuration of the homosexual and the heterosexual. In this way, the history of homosexuality during China's many dynasties, along with with the application of queer theory, helps break down many of the binaries that exist in current popular discourse, as well as give credence to Michel Foucault's idea of the socially constructed nature of sexuality across society and time. First, as has been examined across all of China's imperial dynasties, there was never a clearly defined homosexual identity, just as there was no defined heterosexual identity. For most of Chinese history, an individual's sexual behavior was not necessarily viewed through the lens of gender but rather through the lens of power and status. Particularly in China's early dynasties, a male Emperor having sex with a man or woman of a lower status were viewed in exactly the same light. Most importantly, the man of the higher social status had to be the penetrator, otherwise this would greatly upset the hierarchical construction of society. Although this did change drastically during the Qing dynasty where gender took the place of status, acts of homosexuality were still not being challenged because of the acts themselves, *per se*, but rather because they upset the gender and patriarchal based system that situated men as the dominant and strong figures of

society. This coincided with acts of homosexuality generally being tied to other forms of deviant sexual activity, such as prostitution, that some Qing leaders viewed as unstable and ill-suited to the establishment of a strong Chinese empire.

Relatedly, attitudes and official policies towards acts of same-sex love and intimacy often mattered greatly in discussions of national sovereignty and constructions of the “sovereign man.” At times, especially external threats to the power and control of certain dynasties, such as during the Yuan dynasty, led to what were likely more repressive policies and actions towards those engaging in same-sex acts. Similarly, the massive instability and foreign influence that occurred in China during the Qing dynasty, in addition to the emergence of Western notions of gender (as well as sexuality, although Western notions of sexuality were more directly transferred to China during the beginning of the 20th century as we will see in Chapter Four, although of course beginning during the Qing dynasty) played a large role in the sexual repression that occurred during this time period. However, as with all histories, it is important to note that what may be the dominant narrative is not at all the universal narrative. For even during the Qing dynasty, male prostitution was still widely practiced, oftentimes under the guise of theater and opera performance, and there was still evidence of vibrant and romantic relations between members of the same-sex. It was also during the Qing dynasty that, particularly amongst women who were romantic and sexually interested in women, various forms and methods of organizing took place.

As we turn into the development of modern China, with first the establishment of the ROC and then, later, the PRC, it is important to understand how, first and foremost China has always had a rich history of people engaging in same-sex relations and acts of love and intimacy. While “homosexuality” a fully constructed identity may have been a Western import, the notion of people engaging in such acts as also coming from the West is entirely false. Furthermore, this history

illuminates how, for all of dynastic China there was no real homosexual identity, but rather a focus, first on the power relations within sexual relations and then on gender and gender norms. Furthermore, for much of Chinese history marriage and romantic love/sexual intimacy were viewed in separate spheres. Marriage was important as a way of organizing families and growing the population, while sex and intimacy for pleasure could – and did – exist outside the confines of marriage, without any real upset to the institution as procreation still occurred. However, as notions of and the role that marriage as institution played changed, so too did attitudes towards homosexual acts. Finally, it is critical to understand how the political history of different time periods in Chinese history intersected with periods of sexual openness or closeness. More legitimate challenges to the power and control of a ruling Chinese dynasty often seem to have led to more generally restrictive social policies and an attempt to order society in a very deliberate way to shore up the strength of that dynasty. Conversely, in periods of relative stability, such as during the middle of the Han and Ming dynasties, society tended to be ordered in a much more open and fluid way that allowed for greater involvement in acts of same-sex love and intimacy.

Next, Chapter Four will give an overview of the history of homosexuality in modern-day China, starting with the brief rule of the ROC, and then turning to the rise of Mao Zedong and the CPC. The massive societal instability that took place under Mao's Cultural Revolution, and following great openness that occurred under Deng Xiaoping both heavily influenced and changed the lives of those interested in engaging in same-sex relations, oftentimes not in the most obvious of ways. The next chapter will work to complete the historical anchor of this thesis, and provide the necessary background and context for what is happening in China today, which will be discussed in Chapters Five and Six.

CHAPTER IV: Modern-Day China

Introduction

The 20th century was among the most turbulent periods in the history of China as a nation or imperial dynasty. Over this time span China's official government changed three times, from the Qing dynasty to Sun Yat-sen's Republic of China (ROC) to Mao Zedong's People's Republic of China (PRC), and it was not until the end of World War II that the last foreign power relinquished its control over parts of Chinese territory. Yet, the lingering impacts of the Opium Wars and especially Western colonialism, imperialism, and influence in China did not dissipate after World War II. Western influence, particularly in the realms of health and medicine, had already greatly tainted Chinese notions of gender and sexuality at a state and governmental elite level.¹⁴³ However, the vibrant history of homosexual behavior and fluid notions of sexuality evident in prior generations remained present throughout this period, although the emergence of an actual homosexual *identity* during this period did start to change just how *fluid* sexuality was thought to be.¹⁴⁴

There are colorful examples of same-sex love and intimacy from all of the periods of Chinese rule during this century, but in each case the related social, political, and economic contexts and factors varied greatly. During the Republic of China (1912 - 1949 C.E.) the influence of Western medical ideas led to the creation of, for the first time in Chinese history, a relatively stable homosexual identity.¹⁴⁵ This can be partly attributed to the perceived weakness of China as

¹⁴³ Wu. "From 'Long Yang' and 'Dui Shi' to Tongzhi: Homosexuality in China."

¹⁴⁴ Zheng. "Contesting Heteronormality: Recasting Same-Sex Desire in China's Past and Present."

¹⁴⁵ Wu. "From 'Long Yang' and 'Dui Shi' to Tongzhi: Homosexuality in China."

a country, in large part because China's men were weak and effeminate and thus not the "right" type of strong, heterosexual men necessary for the creation and development of a strong Chinese nation.

With the rise of Mao Zedong and the Communist Party of China (CPC) came a period of mass personal repression where forms of sex and sexuality that deviated from what the state deemed as correct were harshly punished at a state-level (although on an individual level this era also constituted a time period of sexual experimentation and freedom for a great number of Chinese people).¹⁴⁶ This was further exacerbated during Mao's Cultural Revolution, which, at an official level, instituted even harsher and stricter crackdowns on a number of personal liberties and really any form of individualism, including sex for pleasure.¹⁴⁷ However, a byproduct of the Cultural Revolution was the displacement of many people from their families and home communities which, in many cases, created opportunities to explore and experiment sexually. Thus, at a state level the Cultural Revolution exhibited a mass crackdown on sex and sexuality, including homosexuality, but at an individual level this period actually allowed for greater expansion in this realm.

Following Mao, the rise of Deng Xiaoping in the PRC represented a continuation of inconsistency and ambiguity regarding the lives and experiences of those, now mostly *identifying* as part of a non-heterosexual community. Under Deng, China became more open to the rest of the world which led to an influx of foreign ideas and knowledge.¹⁴⁸ In many ways this allowed queer communities throughout China to flourish and expand their reach. Yet, Deng's 1979 proposal to "advance the Chinese spiritual civilization" utilized and implemented an anti-hooliganism law

¹⁴⁶ Zheng. "Contesting Heteronormality: Recasting Same-Sex Desire in China's Past and Present."

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Zheng. "Contesting Heteronormality: Recasting Same-Sex Desire in China's Past and Present."

which had adverse impacts on those engaging in homosexual acts or identifying as part of that group.¹⁴⁹

20th century China represented a critical period in the evolution of homosexuality in China as it continued to demonstrate the socially constructed nature of sexuality – in fact it was during this period that the first official term for homosexual was *created* – but was also a time when the state took many actions to crack down on homosexuality as a way to preserve power and control. An immense level of personal freedom – occurring after the death of Mao and opening up of China under Deng Xiaoping – allowed for many, particularly youth, to engage in and experiment with same-sex love and intimacy, which included beginning to form organizations and communities to uplift each other, while conversely the state was harshly condemning “homosexuality” and relating it as a byproduct of Western capitalism and influences.¹⁵⁰ However, at this time China was just beginning to emerge as a power on the world stage, was very much not in diametric opposition to any of the world’s large powers in the way it is today, and the party (at least before the beginning of the Tiananmen Square protests) was not greatly threatened. Following Tiananmen Square, which occurred in 1989, Chinese society again experienced a period of closeness, yet this again began to change during the onset of the 21st century along with China’s rapid growth, industrialization, and entrance as a major power on the world stage. This period was heavily altered, however, with the rise of Xi Jinping in 2012, and his version of and vision for the Communist Party and China as a global superpower, initiating the present-day period of LGBTQ+ repression and oppression in China.

¹⁴⁹ Heather Worth, Jing Jun, Karen McMillan, Su Chunyan, Fu Xiaoxing, Zhang Yuping, Rui Zhao, Angela Kelly-Hanku, Cui Jia, and Zhang Youchun. “‘There Was No Mercy at All’: Hooliganism, Homosexuality and the Opening-up of China.” *International Sociology* 34, no. 1 (2019): 38–57.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580918812265>.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

Republic of China

The Republic of China, which was formally established in 1912 by Sun Yat-sen, lasted only 37 years, ending in 1949 with the formation of Mao Zedong's communist PRC and his forcing of Chiang-Kai Shek, the leader of the ROC at that time, to flee and set up a new government in Taiwan. The short-lived control of the ROC over mainland China and immense instability of China during this time period has contributed to a dearth of information regarding homosexuality during this regime. However, this period saw heavy Western influences in the realm of politics and nation-state building, as well as medicine and identity that likely had dramatic influences on topics relating to homosexuality and same-sex love and intimacy.

One of the underlying themes of the founding of the ROC was its reliance on Western, particularly American, notions of nation building, nationalism, and Christianity. Although American Christian missionaries had been present in China for decades and had sizable influence in the formation of the ROC, one of the biggest conduits of American influence was Sun Yat-sen himself, the founder of the ROC. Sun Yat-sen's father was a convert to Christianity and, when he was just 12 years old, was sent to Hawaii where his older brother lived.¹⁵¹ There he studied first at a British missionary school and then at an American college.¹⁵² Concerned that Sun was becoming too enthralled with and influenced by foreign ideas, his own brother had their parents return Sun back to China where he was later baptized by an American missionary.¹⁵³ This 16-year exile from China influenced Sun heavily and impacted his ideas about the forming of a new Chinese republic.

¹⁵¹ Norman D. Palmer. "Makers of Modern China: III. Father of the Republic: Sun Yat-Sen." *Current History* 15, no. 86 (October 1948): 193–98. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/45307402>.

¹⁵² "Sun Yat-Sen." Encyclopedia Britannica, inc., March 28, 2023. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Sun-Yat-sen>.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

When Sun Yat-sen was finally able to accomplish his goal and establish the ROC in 1912, it was very much grounded in a heteronormative sense of nationalism and ideas about what the “strong men” who would rule this nation should look and act like.¹⁵⁴ As China began to emerge on the world stage, the formerly commercialized sexual appeal of male *dan* (旦) actors within Peking opera had to be substantially underplayed so as to better conform with Westernized notions of the modern state.¹⁵⁵ Furthermore, the educational background of Sun Yat-sen also played a large role in attitudes of the state towards homosexual behavior and the role of men within Chinese society. Interestingly, similar statements could be made of Xi Jinping who, despite having no Western education, is currently obsessed with cultivating the “right” type of man in Chinese society, which is placed in juxtaposition with “sissy” male TV stars and personalities and a broader Chinese “masculinity crisis.”¹⁵⁶ For Sun Yat-sen, much of this likely stemmed from his early development and training in various Western nations, as well as his close association with Christian and foreign missionaries in China, although shortly after he won the revolution and established the ROC his views about what was best for China began to diverge from these missionaries, ending their support of the early Chinese leader.¹⁵⁷

Although China had experienced a wave of Western influence during the end of the Qing dynasty, the early years of the ROC saw a resurgence of interest in Western ideas. Among these was the concept of a relatively stable homosexual *identity*, which, as has been observed, did not exist throughout almost all of China’s dynastic history. Although a number of terms have emerged

¹⁵⁴ Y. Yvon Wang. “Shame, Survival, Satisfaction: Legal Representations of Sex between Men in Early Twentieth-Century Beijing.” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 75, no. 3 (August 2016): 703–24. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0021911816000516>.

¹⁵⁵ Wang. “Shame, Survival, Satisfaction: Legal Representations of Sex between Men in Early Twentieth-Century Beijing.”

¹⁵⁶ Chowdhury. “After America, It's China's Turn to Worry about Masculinity.”

¹⁵⁷ Michael V. Metallo. “American Missionaries, Sun Yat-Sen, and the Chinese Revolution.” *Pacific Historical Review* 47, no. 2 (1978): 261–82. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3637974>.

over China's history to suggest a person's desire to engage in acts of same-sex love and intimacy, many scholars believe that it was during the beginning of the 20th century that the term *tongxinglian* (同性恋), which literally translates to "homosexual(ity)" (*tong* (同) meaning "the same," *xing* (性) "sex, sexual, sexuality" and *lian* (恋) "attachment, romantic love, attraction") came into existence.¹⁵⁸ Although there is disagreement over the precise origin of this term, potentially from a Japanese translation of the German term or possibly from a bilingual Chinese scholar, there is relative consensus that it was adopted, in part, due to the ROC's efforts to Westernize their society.¹⁵⁹ This was incredibly significant as people who used to be described purely in relation to certain actions were now "given" a concrete identity. However, the actual usage of this term, particularly in the early years of the ROC, was likely not very widespread.

The May 4th Movement (1919), and the related New Culture Movement likely had an even greater impact on views toward homosexuality during this time period. Both of these movements were, in part, a continuation of what occurred during the Self-Strengthening Movement of the late-Qing dynasty which primarily attempted to rapidly develop and modernize China's scientific, military, and technological capabilities under the premise of "learn[ing] the superior technique of the barbarians to control the barbarians."¹⁶⁰ The anti-foreign imperialism and desire to modernize largely based on Western notions of modernity that were espoused during the Self-Strengthening Movement were only compounded during the May 4th Movement.

¹⁵⁸ Wu. "From 'Long Yang' and 'Dui Shi' to Tongzhi: Homosexuality in China."

¹⁵⁹ Wu. "From 'Long Yang' and 'Dui Shi' to Tongzhi: Homosexuality in China."

¹⁶⁰ Francis Soo. "China and Modernization: Past and Present a Discussion." *Studies in Soviet Thought* 38, no. 1 (July 1989): 3–54. <https://doi.org/10.1007/bf00838019>.

At its core, this movement was about expelling foreign powers from China and supporting a “national salvation and regeneration” of a specific type of Chinese national identity.¹⁶¹ A large part of this included critiquing past Chinese culture as not constitutive of the strong, modern Chinese nation that the student protestors wanted. As Tiantian Zheng notes: “This cultural critique targeted the debilitating Chinese tradition and attacked male homoeroticism as an epitome of the fundamental flaws of the Chinese culture. Gender was deployed as an allegory for the nation, and Chinese men were attacked as weak and sick, leading to a sick nation.”¹⁶² These ideas were so prevalent during this time that Chen Duxiu, the co-founder of the Chinese Communist Party (which was formed in 1921) scathingly noted about Chinese (male) youth:

“They lack the strength to tie up a chicken in their hand, and they do not have the courage to be a man in their mind. Their faces are pale, and their bodies are as delicate as women’s. As fragile as sick men, they can endure neither heat nor cold. How could a national group with such a weak body and mind shoulder a heavy burden?”¹⁶³

Thus, a Chinese form of heteronormative nationalism and sense of what proper (heterosexual) and strong Chinese men – who were the people to lead the modern Chinese nation – was born and has persisted through the current era.

Yet another byproduct of the May 4th Movement and New Culture Movement (which highly praised a number of Western ideas relating to science and democracy) was the push to “use everyday language to replace the hard-to-understand written language of antiquity.”¹⁶⁴ In practice, this involved the downgrading of classical Chinese as something that was taught and learned by vast swatches of society, and instead promoted more colloquial styles of writing that were easier

¹⁶¹ James Townsend. “Chinese Nationalism.” *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* 27 (January 1992): 97–130. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2950028>.

¹⁶² Tiantian Zheng. “Contesting Heteronormality: Recasting Same-Sex Desire in China’s Past and Present.” *Wagadu* 12 (2014): 15–40. <http://sites.cortland.edu/wagadu/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2014/07/2-TWO-Zheng-.pdf>.

¹⁶³ Wenqing Kang. *Obsession: Male Same-Sex Relations in China, 1900-1950*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009, 5.

¹⁶⁴ Wu. “From ‘*Long Yang*’ and ‘*Dui Shi*’ to Tongzhi: Homosexuality in China.”

to learn and understand.¹⁶⁵ The impact of this change, however, had an incredibly adverse effect on the ability for Chinese people to read and understand the writings from China's dynastic periods, specifically the large swaths of novels, plays, poems, and other texts discussing the long "tradition of the cut sleeve."¹⁶⁶

One of the final Western influences that impacted notions of gender and sexuality in early 20th century China can be found in the medical realm, particularly the specialties of psychology and psychiatry. Some scholars have estimated that between the years of 1922 and 1940, around 370 books on psychology were published in China, and of these, over 40 percent were directly translated from foreign sources, while the remaining were mostly textbooks that were heavily influenced by and based on Western research and materials.¹⁶⁷ In addition, many Chinese psychologists had been trained in the United States.¹⁶⁸ As a result, Western, and particularly American psychological ideas on homosexuality made their way directly into China's medical field. During this time, and although there was some level of disagreement and contestation over the issue with the American psychological community, the dominant position was that of homosexuality being a pathological illness and a mental disorder – in fact, the American Psychological Association had homosexuality classified as a mental disorder until 1973.¹⁶⁹ Thus, and particularly within the medical community, the early 20th century ROC period of China saw significant steps aimed at repressing and redefining now-called "homosexuals."

¹⁶⁵ Ian Buruma. "How the Chinese Language Got Modernized." *The New Yorker*, January 10, 2022. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2022/01/17/how-the-chinese-language-got-modernized>.

¹⁶⁶ Wu. "From 'Long Yang' and 'Dui Shi' to Tongzhi: Homosexuality in China."

¹⁶⁷ Wu. "From 'Long Yang' and 'Dui Shi' to Tongzhi: Homosexuality in China."

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ Sarah Baughey-Gill. "When Gay Was Not Okay with the APA: A Historical Overview of Homosexuality and Its Status as Mental Disorder." *Occam's Razor* 1, no. 2 (2011): 5–16. <https://cedar.wvu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1001&context=orwwu>.

Chinese language used to describe those engaging in acts of same-sex intimacy during this time period also gives credence to the idea that Western notions of homosexuality and its related linking as a mental disorder and pathological illness circulated widely in China during the republican period. One particular character that came to define the concept of homosexuality was *pi* (癖) which literally translates to “obsession.” Although this character had been used in Chinese for a long time prior to Western imperialism in the region, as Wenqing Kang writes “the idea of *pi* (癖) as a conceptual framework for male same-sex relations circulated actively in the first half of the 20th century, providing a fertile ground for the popularization of modern Western sexology in China.”¹⁷⁰ Kang’s argument for this rests on the particular radical of the *pi* (癖) character, which is often used in a medical context, and thus may carry a “connotation of being pathological based.”¹⁷¹ Thus, “homosexuality” as some sort of medical condition, clearly brought in through Western colonialism and imperialism became popularized during this period in China, best exemplified by some of the language used to describe same-sex relations at the time.

However, despite these forces pushing away from acceptance of homosexuality, as in all other periods of Chinese history, there are still countless examples of same sex love and intimacy during this period, and not all of them resulted in the harsh penalties that the above information may suggest. First and foremost, from a legal standpoint, homosexual intercourse was not explicitly banned by the laws of the newly established ROC as it was during previous dynasties.¹⁷² Police in particular did still utilize the term *jijian* (鸡奸) to categorize legal cases involving anal sex between two men, but there was no clear law against it. Furthermore, and while the theater and

¹⁷⁰ Kang. *Obsession: Male Same-Sex Relations in China, 1900-1950*, 29.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Wang. “Shame, Survival, Satisfaction: Legal Representations of Sex between Men in Early Twentieth-Century Beijing.”

opera, particularly in Beijing, had to rein in the various forms of prostitution and sex that were previously performed by their male *dan* (旦) actors as a way to polish what was becoming a defining source of national pride, male prostitution still *did* exist.¹⁷³ This was also partly due to the influx of foreigners that were coming to China during this period, oftentimes creating a demand for prostitution, sometimes specifically male, services. As Y. Yvon Wang writes: “Same-sex relations were a not unusual part of male socialization and were, furthermore, a widespread industry embedded in Beijing’s vast gray-market economy responsive to the tumultuous changes of the period.”¹⁷⁴ While this is very true of Beijing, during the early years of the ROC the government centered in Beijing was constantly facing various regional pressures and did not have the same level of highly centralized and total control over the whole area of modern-day China that previous dynasties like the Ming and Qing had. Thus, the ways in which certain laws were enforced and how certain crimes were being prosecuted, and even what counted as a crime would vary by region.¹⁷⁵

One specific city that was known to also have numerous examples of same-sex love and an overall sexually liberal society was Shanghai. In 1933, writer Yu Muxia published a collection of social commentaries in *Shanghai linzhao* (上海鱗爪) or “Shanghai Tidbits” on the topic of *tongxinglian’ai* (同性恋爱) or “homosexual love” which read:

“Mutual attraction between men and women is called love (*lian’ai* (恋爱)). When love develops into a sexual relationship (*pirou ganxi* (*pirou guanxi* (皮肉關係)), it has reached its end point. Love can also occur between men or between women. Two men together is called “sodomy” (*jijian* (鸡奸)), and two women together is named “mirror rubbing” (*mojingzi* (磨镜子)). This kind of incident can be found in

¹⁷³ Wang. “Shame, Survival, Satisfaction: Legal Representations of Sex between Men in Early Twentieth-Century Beijing.”

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

the newspaper's social news section every year. In short, mutual attraction between men and women is very common, while *tongxinglian 'ai* (同性恋爱), between men or between women, is simply sexual perversion (*xingyu shang de biantan bale* (性欲上的变态罢了)).”¹⁷⁶

Although Yu does end by discussing homosexual behavior as “sexual perversion” he goes on to discuss the long history of acts of same-sex love and intimacy in China, dating back to dynastic times, and uses that to argue why individuals should not blame Shanghai as the place or the reason for increased homosexual behavior. Furthermore, when using the word perversion, he is likely using it in the context of obsession or, as he describes in his next section, “sexual desire has been running rampant.”¹⁷⁷ What is most important here, however, is the analogy he makes between hetero and homosexual love and relationships, placing them on equal footing with each other and also highlighting the frequency of such acts in Shanghai.

Shanghai, however, was not the only place and Yu Muxia was not the only writer during this period in China to touch on such themes as same-sex love and intimacy. Another prominent literary figure during this period who worked in a notably decadent style likely influenced from Western, particularly French, literature was Yu Dafu. The Chinese author, who lived from 1896 to 1945, was born in the Zhejiang province of eastern China, just south of Shanghai, wrote a number of short stories throughout his career, which is part of his rise to fame.¹⁷⁸ Although he explored a number of different topics in these stories, tales of same-sex love, intimacy, and attraction recurred a number of times, as Dafu even dabbled in offering a vision for a “queer” utopian community in Japan. This particular story, called “Boundless Night” and first published in May of 1922, tells the story of a young man named Yu Zhifu who, during the beginning of the

¹⁷⁶ Kang, *Obsession: Male Same-Sex Relations in China, 1900-1950*, 31.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ “Yu Dafu.” Encyclopedia Britannica, inc., n.d. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Yu-Dafu>.

story, was about to set off on a journey to a faraway place, and was incredibly reluctant to leave behind another young man by the name of Wu Chisheng.¹⁷⁹ After the latter character opened up about his illness in a very personal way, through the eyes of Yu Zhifu, Yu Dafu began envisioning a utopic life and place in an incredibly thoughtful and eloquent way. Dafu wrote:

“On the outskirts of Japan where many trees grow, not very far from Tokyo, less than forty-five minutes by the elevated train, I would like to rent a hut where we could live together. Around the hut would be green grass, near the grass would be a creek, and in the creek would be fish swimming. In the late spring, you and I would pick up hoes and plant flowers in the grass. Under the azure sky, caressed by a balmy breeze, you and I would lie down on the soft grass, reading Western songs aloud. At the turn of late summer to early autumn, you and I would wander around at sunset, counting fallen leaves. In winter mornings, before you got up, I would prepare breakfast for you. Or before I rose, you would have the breakfast ready. On Saturday afternoons, you would go to the quiet train station, waiting for me to come back from school.”¹⁸⁰

Not only is this story simply an immensely beautiful depiction of same-sex romance and love, but also Yu Dafu’s works represent a challenge to many of the emerging ideas during this period about “homosexuality” as something that is bad for society and should be prevented.¹⁸¹ Furthermore, it breaks down the traditional and simplified notion that Western imperialism and colonialism only brought modern notions of the “homosexual” as a mental illness to China, as clearly Westernization also gave scholars like Yu Dafu access to language and expression to better depict their vision of a “queer” utopia. Thus, it was Westernization that brought more “homophobic” notions to China during this time period *and* a more vibrant and colorful expression and community of individuals engaging in romantic intimacy with members of the same sex.

During the republican period of China in the early half of the 20th century, the medicalization of “homosexuals” based on Western influence and imperialism, the continuation

¹⁷⁹ Kang. *Obsession: Male Same-Sex Relations in China, 1900-1950*, 64.

¹⁸⁰ Kang. *Obsession: Male Same-Sex Relations in China, 1900-1950*, 65.

¹⁸¹ Kang. *Obsession: Male Same-Sex Relations in China, 1900-1950*, 66.

of male *dan* (旦) actors role in society, the role of tabloids and newspapers in spreading stories and ideas about same-sex activity, and the oftentimes radically different (and generally more open and accepting) views of literary figures all highlights the incredible diversity in public notions of and state led policy towards same sex activity. Clearly an “opening up” to the West brought in a number of different ideas regarding gender and sexuality that were then woven into Chinese society and many fiercely nationalistic figures and leaders in China during this time period were grounded in a particular idea of the “sovereign man” and how to build a new China. Thus, the ROC’s position as an extremely *new* government also heavily influenced many of its attitudes towards “homosexuality,” however, all of this would change radically after Chiang Kai-shek defeated the Japanese and drove them from Chinese lands, presenting Mao Zedong with the opportunity to insight a civil war against the weakened Nationalists and eventually come out as victorious and establish the People’s Republic of China.¹⁸²

Maoist Era

With the fall of the ROC and rise of Mao Zedong, China entered into a period diametrically opposed to its predecessor, essentially completely shutting itself off from the rest of the world, except perhaps the Soviet Union. Unfortunately, research on homosexuality in China during the Maoist years (usually considered between 1949-1976) is limited due to the inaccessibility of government archives on this topic and period.¹⁸³ However, there is still ample, broader information as well as a few more personal accounts of homosexual relations and homosexuality during this time period that help paint a picture of an incredibly repressive and, arguably homophobic period

¹⁸² Walder. *China under Mao - A Revolution Derailed*, 19-31.

¹⁸³ Wenqing Kang. “Male Same-Sex Relations in Socialist China.” *Cleveland State University, History Faculty Publications*, October 2018.
https://engagedscholarship.csuohio.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1110&context=clhist_facpub.

at the state level, but potentially more opportunities to experiment with one's sexual desires on an individual level.

From the onset of the PRC, heavily influenced by a previous sense of Confucian morality, behaviors and actions that could be viewed as self-indulgent or not solely benefiting the progress of the state and the party were considered taboo and heavily disdained, especially at a state and party level. Extramarital, premarital, and homosexual sex, divorce, and prostitution were all heavily criticized and demonized as none of these actions benefited the sole purpose of procreation to help the population of the communist state.¹⁸⁴ Heteronormative institutions like marriage and Confucian ideas relating to the family, whose primary purpose was to reproduce, became heavily promoted throughout Chinese society during this time period, thus creating a deviant view of homosexual behavior.¹⁸⁵ Furthermore, the Great Leap Forward (1958-1962) which, as put by Andrew G. Walder was a “gigantic production drive that failed disastrously,” also led to what Vincent E. Gil described as a “denial of romantic love, and the affirmation of the absolute role of the collective over the individual as a basic tent towards which one should direct any affections.”¹⁸⁶ The individual, and by extension engaging in actions for personal pleasure, was very much sidelined, shunned, and replaced by the unlimited desires and needs of the collective. With respect to homosexuality, what was considered deviant behavior included a wide range of other non-procreative behaviors as noted above, and thus this cannot be simplified as purely a homophobic backlash.

¹⁸⁴ Tiantian Zheng. “Contesting Heteronormality: Recasting Same-Sex Desire in China’s Past and Present.” *Wagadu* 12 (2014): 15–40. <http://sites.cortland.edu/wagadu/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2014/07/2-TWO-Zheng-.pdf>.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Walder. *China under Mao - A Revolution Derailed*, 152; Vincent E. Gil. “The Cut Sleeve Revisited: A Brief Ethnographic Interview with a Male Homosexual in Mainland China.” *Journal of Sex Research* 29, no. 4 (November 1992): 569–77. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499209551668>.

Furthermore, due to Mao's desire to build a perfectly communist state, China was heavily influenced by the Soviet Union during the early years of its founding and beforehand as well. Russian state-level attitudes towards homosexuality during this time were not supportive, in fact homosexuality was fully criminalized from 1934-1993.¹⁸⁷ Although China never officially outlawed or criminalized "homosexuality" *per se* – persecution of homosexuals for much of the PRC's history generally fell under laws against "hooliganism"¹⁸⁸ – the anti-homosexual attitude of the Russian state at this time likely bled into high-level PRC positions on the topic as well.¹⁸⁹

Due to the closeness of the PRC and the Soviet Union during its founding years, and the complete shutoff from the West, homosexuality came to be viewed, at least in some elite circles, as a Western influence on China and a byproduct of capitalism.¹⁹⁰ These ideas became explicitly prevalent and more pronounced during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). Homosexual behavior was sometimes even characterized as a bourgeois and decadent practice and puritanical views towards sex and society began to be more dominant throughout mainstream society.¹⁹¹ Despite its origins in the ROC and end of the Qing dynasty, there was little to no discussion or even knowledge of the long and vibrant history of homosexuality in previous Chinese centuries, and thus it was easy for the state to put forward the idea of homosexuality as a Western import.¹⁹²

From a legal perspective, during the Maoist years there were no laws explicitly banning or condemning homosexual acts. Besides a draft law in 1950 which "included forced sodomy or *jijian*

¹⁸⁷ "The History of Homosexuality in Russia: From Soviet Sex Changes to Gay Gulags." ABC Radio National, December 3, 2013. <https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/rearvision/the-history-of-homosexuality-in-russia/5134412>.

¹⁸⁸ Although "hooliganism" was used to punish those engaging in acts of homosexuality during this period, it was not as explicitly linked with this as it came to be during the Deng era.

¹⁸⁹ Wu. "From 'Long Yang' and 'Dui Shi' to Tongzhi: Homosexuality in China."

¹⁹⁰ Cao, et al. "A Preliminary Exploration of the Gay Movement in Mainland China: Legacy, Transition, Opportunity, and the New Media."

¹⁹¹ Vincent E. Gil. "The Cut Sleeve Revisited: A Brief Ethnographic Interview with a Male Homosexual in Mainland China." *Journal of Sex Research* 29, no. 4 (November 1992): 569–77. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499209551668>.

¹⁹² van de Werff. "The Struggle of the Tongzhi: Homosexuality in China and the Position of Chinese 'Comrades.'"

(鸡奸) between male adults under the category of rape,” it was often up to local law enforcement and regional officials to make decisions over this grey area.¹⁹³ Discussing a notable case that further embedded the state’s ambiguous position over the subject, Kang Wenqing writes: “A 1957 case shows that the National Supreme People’s Court made explicit that the current law carried no clear stipulation on consensual sodomy (鸡奸) between men and suggested that the local government should not criminalize this kind of act.”¹⁹⁴ Despite this ruling, official persecution against people engaging in homosexual behavior still took place across China, oftentimes under the guise of the term “hooliganism.”¹⁹⁵

Despite all of the inconsistencies with policies relating to homosexual activity in China during Mao’s first decade or so in power, one of the great paradoxical time periods with regard to the lives and experiences of homosexuals and people engaging in homosexual acts in China occurred during the Cultural Revolution, which lasted an entire decade from 1966 until Mao’s death in 1976. It is difficult to ascribe one or two specific goals to the Cultural Revolution, particularly because the movement became much more than even Mao initially intended, but at its core it involved a series of leadership purges and establishment of student militias like the Red Guard, to essentially root out any remaining remnants of capitalism and Western ideas within China and thereby support a completed rebuilding of China's party-state system.¹⁹⁶ This led to large swaths of Chinese youth leaving the confines of their families and parental authority to go to the countryside to live and work with farmers, begin working in large factories in cities, or even simply travel around to meet with like-minded revolutionaries and spread ‘Mao Zedong

¹⁹³ Kang. “Male Same-Sex Relations in Socialist China.”

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Zheng. “Contesting Heteronormality: Recasting Same-Sex Desire in China’s Past and Present.”

¹⁹⁶ Walder. *China under Mao - A Revolution Derailed*, 200-201.

Thought'.¹⁹⁷ What resulted was that, although homosexual acts were generally persecuted by members of the Red Guard and local law enforcement including government officials, individuals experienced a considerable amount of freedom during this time period that allowed for creative exploration of sexual desires.¹⁹⁸

A number of scholars, including Heather Worth and a team of nine other researchers, along with Wenqing Kang, have conducted ethnographic and oral interviews over the past few decades to offer a completely new narrative regarding the lives of homosexuals during the Cultural Revolution, augmenting a history that contains minimal specific details or information and has been simplified as a period of general repression. Through these interviews, sexual awakening brought on by the Cultural Revolution can be seen as millions of Chinese people, particularly youths, left their traditional family units to go live and work in various places throughout China, oftentimes in gender segregated spaces. One of the interviewees, Luo Wenhan, told the story of how he fell in love with an attractive (male) peasant when he was sent to the countryside during the Cultural Revolution and developed a sexual relationship with the man.¹⁹⁹ Another man by the name of Yanyuan from Yunnan province, offered his story of the Cultural Revolution, saying:

“At the end of 1968, we were mobilized to the countryside and were sent to a commune. The man who received us was my *Tongzhi* (同志)²⁰⁰ friend later. He and I both were about 17 years old. He and I were good friends for a long time; we cracked jokes and dared to talk about homosexuality after we were familiar with each other. He treated me with special regard; he liked to chat with me; and we had sex finally. Usually, we slept with arms around together.”²⁰¹

¹⁹⁷ Heather Worth, Jing Jing, Karen McMillan, Chunyan Su, Xiaoxing Fu, Zhang Yuping, Rui Zhao, Jia Cui, Angela Kelly-Hanku, and Zhang Youchun. “‘Under the Same Quilt’: The Paradoxes of Sex between Men in the Cultural Revolution.” *Journal of Homosexuality* 64, no. 1 (May 2016): 61–74. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2016.1172879>.

¹⁹⁸ Worth, et al. “‘Under the Same Quilt’: The Paradoxes of Sex between Men in the Cultural Revolution.”

¹⁹⁹ Wenqing Kang. “Seeking Pleasure in Peril: Male Same-Sex Relations during the Cultural Revolution.” *positions: asia critique* 30, no. 1 (2022): 61–84. <https://doi.org/10.1215/10679847-9417955>.

²⁰⁰ *Tongzhi* (同志) at this time likely simply meant “comrade,” however it was later claimed by the LGBTQ+ community in China as another way of saying “homosexual” or “gay.”

²⁰¹ Worth, et al. “‘Under the Same Quilt’: The Paradoxes of Sex between Men in the Cultural Revolution.”

While this is just one anecdote, a number of other individuals interviewed in these projects shared similar stories, both in the countryside and in large cities, particularly in gender-segregated dormitories and living quarters. This anecdote also highlights the sometimes very blurry line between the homosocial and the homosexual in China during this time period. Although the idea of a homosexual identity *did* exist at this time, it was still very much a gray area for many Chinese people who engaged in homosexual activities. As Weqing Kang puts it: “male homosocial camaraderie could become very intimate, and close bodily contacts between men were generally not considered sexual. As a result, men could always deny the sexual nature of their relationship.”²⁰² Thus, the Cultural Revolution was also a time of blurred lines between behavior and identity, and, sometimes out of free will or sometimes out of necessity, a number of the men who engaged in same-sex relations during the Cultural Revolution would go on to marry women and have children, further complicating the nature of sexuality in China during this time.

Furthermore, the Cultural Revolution also spawned *cruising*, a type of behavior often attributed to the gay community where interested people become aware of certain places, such as public parks and restrooms, as locations to seek out members of the same-sex also interested in engaging in a temporary sexual relationship. The dozens of interviews in these studies have all attested to the prevalence of cruising spots throughout China, primarily in big cities, during the Cultural Revolution. However, the existence of cruising as a practice during this time period simultaneously attests to the fact that clearly, people seeking same-sex love and intimacy would not do so openly. Guo Wancai was one such man who had been likely engaging in same-sex acts in secrecy to avoid public scrutiny and state-led punishment, however he was clearly not alone in his actions. Wancai, a 35-year-old physician at the Taiyuan Steel Company Hospital was

²⁰² Kang. “Seeking Pleasure in Peril: Male Same-Sex Relations during the Cultural Revolution.”

interrogated for engaging in acts of homosexuality and was not alone as over 40 people in his work unit were incriminated.²⁰³ Thus, the prevalence of homosexuality and homosexual behavior during the Cultural Revolution seems to have been much wider spread than what the traditional history of the Cultural Revolution, as a time of complete sexual repression, might suggest.

On September 9, 1976 Mao Zedong died after years of poor health and a series of heart attacks. As a result of Mao's death, the CPC was sent into a brief period of internal turmoil. Hua Guofeng, who succeeded Mao after his death, squashed the rival and "Revolutionary Maoist" group called the 'Gang of Four,' allowing for around a two year period of sustained rule to develop a program of "economic recovery and political rehabilitation" to "heal the wounds of the Cultural Revolution."²⁰⁴ At the end of 1978, however, Deng Xiaoping and his 'reformers' incited an opposition against Hua Guofeng, eventually prevailing due to Deng's age, seniority, and incredible reputation for his intellect and ability to lead. This resulted in Hua being ousted from the party and Deng Xiaoping being instilled as China's paramount leader.²⁰⁵ Under Deng, China was permanently transformed through a series of economic reforms, opening up to the rest of the world, and a relaxation of many of Mao's harsh social policies.

For the roughly 30 years that Mao led China, the political instability and weakness of a newly formed state led to the purging of ideologies and even behaviors that were seen to be challenging the party-state system. This included acts of homosexuality, something that was often tied to and associated with Western influence and capitalist tendencies. Yet the massive disruption of society that occurred during the Cultural Revolution placed thousands of individuals in environments that were more conducive to acts of same-sex intimacy and relations. Almost

²⁰³ Kang. "Seeking Pleasure in Peril: Male Same-Sex Relations during the Cultural Revolution."

²⁰⁴ Harry Harding. *China's Second Revolution: Reform after Mao*. Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1987, 49.

²⁰⁵ Harding. *China's Second Revolution: Reform after Mao*, 57.

exclusively based on Western scientific beliefs, a version of a stable “homosexual” category began emerging during this time, but was not used by individuals as a form of self-identification, and instead a way through which people could be punished. While there is little doubt that the state was not tolerant of acts of homosexuality during this period and there was little to no widespread organizing, contrary to the socially and sexually repressive narrative that is often told of this period, many individuals actually found great freedom in being able to experiment with this sexuality and were not directly and systematically targeted in the way they would be in future periods.

Post-Mao, Pre-Xi

With Deng Xiaoping at the helm, the Chinese nation saw a sweeping number of economic and political reforms, oftentimes overlapping with the socio-cultural realm as well, all designed to help grow China into the modern global power that it is today. For those interested and engaging in same-sex love and intimacy, this had a number of important ramifications. To start on the surface level, particularly the economic reforms and “opening up” that occurred under Deng allowed for more cultural exchanges between China and the rest of the world, especially the West, which subsequently led to more knowledge about “homosexuality” and resulted in the forming of “gay” communities throughout major cities in China. However, as will be examined more closely later, a number of scholars have also examined how Deng’s proposal in 1979 to advance Chinese socialist spiritual civilization was operationalized throughout a wide variety of procedures, including the use of the criminal justice system through the newly *official* and on-the-books crime of ‘hooliganism’.²⁰⁶ This term came to be used fairly explicitly to punish those engaging in or

²⁰⁶ Worth, et al. “‘There Was No Mercy at All’: Hooliganism, Homosexuality and the Opening-up of China.”

thought to have engaged in homosexual activity and led to the arrest and forced-labor of a number of Chinese men. However, during the 1990s and early 2000s, the HIV/AIDS crisis throughout China seems to have forced the Chinese government into collaborating with and working alongside many LGBTQ+ advocacy organizations as a way to quell the spread of the virus. With a number of other important ups and downs for those engaging in same-sex intimacy during the period after Mao's death and before Xi Jinping's ascension to power, "homosexuality" in China in the last quarter of the 20th century and early years of the 21st century continued to follow the extremely complicated and non-linear path as it had across all of China's prior history with this topic.

With Mao Zedong dead and Hua Guofeng ousted from power, due to his position as an incredibly respected and admired leader, Deng Xiaoping had almost free rein to implement numerous policies that aligned with his vision for the Chinese state. As Harding puts it: "by the time of Mao's death in 1976, Deng had become a man with a mission: to launch a fundamental restructuring of the Chinese political and economic order...he wanted to relax the Party's controls over social and political life...[and] Deng was strongly committed to a more broad and sustained interaction with the rest of the world, particularly the West."²⁰⁷ In the realm of economics, China began importing and exporting products from and to the rest of the world, initially starting with a large trade deficit, but quickly remedying that by 1979 by designating four specific areas along the southeastern coast, namely Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Xiamen, and Shantou, as "special economic zones" which allowed for further expansion of foreign direct investment in China and greater connectedness with the global economy.²⁰⁸ One of the more significant implications of this openness, which many scholars have termed as Deng's "Open Door Policy" was the beginning of

²⁰⁷ Harding, *China's Second Revolution: Reform after Mao*, 58.

²⁰⁸ Harding, *China's Second Revolution: Reform after Mao*, 164.

a rapid wave of information from largely Western nations.²⁰⁹ As Jing Wu writes: “one of the direct consequences of the open door policy was that information from outside China flooded in, including information about human sexuality,”²¹⁰ interacting with greater amounts of individual freedom in society and an overall more sexually active society that, as Wu goes on to note, allowed the “Chinese gay and lesbian community to [rise] under these conditions.”²¹¹

Furthermore, and more in the realm of politics, there were two (often competing) groups or perspectives about the path that China’s reform should take. The radical reformers wanted an increasingly large role for the market and also, significantly for those interested in engaging in same-sex acts, favored more openness and freedom of expression amongst Chinese citizens.²¹² “They would allow writers, artists, and intellectuals greater freedom to explore hitherto forbidden subjects and to experiment with new styles of expression,” Harding writes.²¹³ Conversely, the moderate reformers wanted a substantially slower pace of reform, were very risk averse, and were against having the party cede too much control and influence over the economy to the market.²¹⁴ Deng Xiaoping, being the smart leader that he was, navigated a path between these two groups, sometimes responding to the demands of one group and on a different occasion to the demands of

²⁰⁹ It is important to note, however, that this is not the best way to describe the reforms that occurred under Deng’s leadership during this period as the term generally indicates an export-led growth model, similar to that of other east Asian nations during this time. However, China had to deal with a large trade deficit for a number of years and never became as strictly export-oriented as some of its neighbors in the region. Furthermore, China did not directly follow the principles of free-trade, and still engaged in a number of very protectionist behaviors. However, it is apt to call the process by which the various economic policies under Deng’ allowed for an “opening of the door” to various Western ideas, sources of information, etc.

²¹⁰ Although China did have substantial prior exposure to Western ideas and information, particularly during the end of the Qing dynasty and during the republican days, the opening up that occurred under Deng resulted in a wave of completely new information entering China. Under Mao Zedong and throughout the Cultural Revolution, China became extremely insulated and did not interact much, if at all, with the outside world. Thus, the significant international development, technologies, and ideas that had occurred elsewhere for the approximately 30 years that China was closed off all flooded into the country at once.

²¹¹ Wu. “From ‘*Long Yang*’ and ‘*Dui Shi*’ to Tongzhi: Homosexuality in China.”

²¹² Harding. *China’s Second Revolution: Reform after Mao*, 78.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Harding. *China’s Second Revolution: Reform after Mao*, 80.

the other. In likely no small part due to the role of the radical reformers and great economic opening up to the West, many scholars view this time period (the early 1980s) “as a time when homosexual men no longer had to hide, gay identities were allowed the freedom to blossom and gay communities came into their own.”²¹⁵

Particularly in many of the larger cities, it was during this time that many of the men that had engaged in same-sex acts during the Cultural Revolution were able to form relatively established communities and meet like-minded individuals.²¹⁶ However, this is not to say that society was completely open and accepting as there were official state-led policies that were used to persecute individuals engaging in acts of homosexuality, however, the continuing prevalence and expansiveness of cruising as an activity for men looking for sexual relationships with other men also indicates that many did not feel comfortable completely “coming out of the closet” per se.²¹⁷ Xidan Park in Beijing, for example, became one very popular place for men interested in clandestine sexual relations with other men could find and meet each other.²¹⁸

While cruising continued to expand during opening up of China to the rest of the world, this likely had less to do with the influence of Western thoughts and ideas or the economic/political policies of Deng Xiaoping, and more to do with the emergence of what one scholar called a “sex revolution” that appeared in China around 1986.²¹⁹ There were two official state-sponsored policies, both of which came into existence in 1980, that helped cause this “revolution.” The first was the 1980 Marriage Act which allowed for divorce in society, but only when there was truly no more affection between the parties involved and mediation had failed.²²⁰ The second was the one-

²¹⁵ Worth, et al. “‘There Was No Mercy at All’: Hooliganism, Homosexuality and the Opening-up of China.”

²¹⁶ Wu. “From ‘*Long Yang*’ and ‘*Dui Shi*’ to Tongzhi: Homosexuality in China.”

²¹⁷ Zheng. “Contesting Heteronormality: Recasting Same-Sex Desire in China’s Past and Present.”

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Wu. “From ‘*Long Yang*’ and ‘*Dui Shi*’ to Tongzhi: Homosexuality in China.”

²²⁰ van de Werff. “The Struggle of the Tongzhi: Homosexuality in China and the Position of Chinese ‘Comrades.’”

child policy which, as the name implies, limited the number of children that any family could have, leading to the unintended consequence of married couples acknowledging sexual pleasure between each other, even after the woman had conceived of their one and only child.²²¹ Thus, there was a great increase in sexual freedom throughout all strata of Chinese society and ‘recreational’ sex became more prevalent, likely increasing the number of men who would go to public places, like parks, bathhouses, opera houses, and elsewhere for the sole purpose of finding other men interested in sex.²²²

However, the two aforementioned policies were not the only ones that involved topics of sex and intimacy in China. In 1979 the crime of “hooliganism” was formally defined in Chinese law, although it had existed in a more informal manner for a number of decades in China.²²³ “Hooliganism” or the “crime of hooliganism,” even after it was defined in Chinese law in 1979, still served as a legal catch-all to reference various acts or behaviors that implicitly or explicitly counter the social order and norms of society.²²⁴ Fairly quickly after the emergence of this term during the early years of the PRC, various “deviant” sexual behaviors, such as prostitution, assaulting women, and homosexuality came to be captured under the term.²²⁵ According to Heather Worth et al., “the development and application of offenses of hooliganism were an explicit demonstration of implicit People’s Republic state policy on same-sex relationships. Homosexuality was positioned as a type of hooliganism and, as such, as a social evil that should be handled by ‘ideological education, administrative disciplinary action, security punishment, and education through labor’.”²²⁶ Under this legal definition many men who were caught having sex

²²¹ Zheng. “Contesting Heteronormality: Recasting Same-Sex Desire in China’s Past and Present.”

²²² van de Werff. “The Struggle of the Tongzhi: Homosexuality in China and the Position of Chinese ‘Comrades.’”

²²³ Worth, et al. “‘There Was No Mercy at All’: Hooliganism, Homosexuality and the Opening-up of China.”

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Worth, et al. “‘There Was No Mercy at All’: Hooliganism, Homosexuality and the Opening-up of China.”

²²⁶ Ibid.

with other men were thrown in prison, forced to do various forms of labor, and scrutinized by society.

According to Jing Wu, by having an official law to arrest people engaging in acts of homosexuality, many police arrested “gay” men particularly due to the economic gain that would be achieved.²²⁷ Lastly, as Heather Worth et al. note: “By the late 1970s, the numbers in re-education through labor had begun to increase dramatically. As part of this expansion, many homosexual men were rounded up in crackdowns that were undertaken in the name of maintaining public order and morality.”²²⁸ Thus, there were state-level policies that emerged under Deng Xiaoping that were utilized to specifically crack down on those engaging in homosexuality which counters part of the narrative of the early Deng Xiaoping period as being a time of great openness and reform for “gay” people in China.

The motivation behind the persecution of “homosexuals” under the crime of “hooliganism” partly had to do with the continued pathologizing of same-sex attracted peoples in China. Originating under influence from Western medical professionals during the Qing dynasty, homosexuality was often seen to be a mental illness in modern Chinese history, at least from an official medical and often state-level. In fact, the first version of the *Chinese Classification of Mental Disorders* (CCMD) was published in 1978 in which “homosexuality was classified as a sexual disorder, regardless of the person’s attitude towards his or her homosexual tendency.”²²⁹ During this time, as the Western gay emancipation movement that originated in the 1960s, was picking up steam in many places in the world, members of Chinese society, particularly those in

²²⁷ Wu. “From ‘*Long Yang*’ and ‘*Dui Shi*’ to Tongzhi: Homosexuality in China.”

²²⁸ Worth, et al. “‘There Was No Mercy at All’: Hooliganism, Homosexuality and the Opening-up of China.”

²²⁹ Wu. “From ‘*Long Yang*’ and ‘*Dui Shi*’ to Tongzhi: Homosexuality in China.”

the medical field, continued to hold this negative view of homosexuality.²³⁰ The second CCMD, called CCMD-2 published in 1989, as well as CCMD-2-R published in 1994, both clearly outlined for physicians and other members of the Chinese medical community that, despite what was happening in the rest of the world, they were to accept the pathologized view of homosexuality in China.²³¹ Although this did not reflect the views of *all* members of the Chinese medical society during this time, and definitely not those of *all* of the Chinese public, they were definitely the dominant views that had substantial influence on much of society and policies, such as the ease by which “gay” people were arrested under the crime of “hooliganism.”

Despite the dominant view of homosexuality as a mental illness in the medical community, it was also around this time that the beginnings of a concrete LBGTQ+²³² identity began forming in China, similar to what was and had been happening in many other parts of the world, predominantly in the West. *Tongzhi* (同志), which literally translates into “comrade” and was used popularly throughout much of the Cultural Revolution and Mao Zedong’s time as head of the PRC, began to take on an additional meaning. *Tongzhi* (同志) became a “hybrid combining the global gay identity and consciousness with Chinese local socio historical reality,” and was coined in 1989 by a gay activist at the first even Lesbian and Gay Film Festival in Hong Kong, but rapidly spread to much of mainland Chinese society.²³³

²³⁰ Cao and Lu. “A Preliminary Exploration of the Gay Movement in Mainland China: Legacy, Transition, Opportunity, and the New Media.”

²³¹ Wu. “From ‘*Long Yang*’ and ‘*Dui Shi*’ to *Tongzhi*: Homosexuality in China”; Although it is true that *tongxingliang* (同性恋) as an identity category did exist prior to the emergence of *tongzhi* (同志), it was not widely used by individuals to self-identify, and was also more of a direct translation of Western terms for “homosexuality,” whereas *tongzhi* (同志) was truly something indigenous to China and the Chinese language.

²³² It is important to note that the actual term “LBGTQ+” would not have all been used in China during this time period, but is used here to demonstrate how there were a range of identities and groups that eventually were able to fall under the category of *tongzhi* (同志).

²³³ Cao and Lu. “A Preliminary Exploration of the Gay Movement in Mainland China: Legacy, Transition, Opportunity, and the New Media”; van de Werff. “The Struggle of the *Tongzhi*: Homosexuality in China and the Position of Chinese ‘Comrades.’”

Importantly, the term *tongzhi* (同志) is not, at all, a synonym for “gay” or “homosexual,” but rather meant to encapsulate a number of different identities and groups, similar to how for much of Chinese history the lives and experiences of a range of individuals with very different relationships to their sexuality could not be defined by just one word or category. This intersected with, was the result of, and likely aided in the forming of many official and unofficial gay and lesbian organizations all around China during this time period. As Wan-Shan Chou writes: “the re-appropriation is widely accepted by the community for its positive cultural references, gender neutrality, de-sexualization 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.”²³⁴ Or, in simpler terms, as Ties van de Werff states: “So *tongzhi* (同志) is a modern Chinese, non-Western name for those who focus on the *passions of the cut-sleeve*” or *duanxiu* (断袖).²³⁵ Finally, during the last quarter-century of the 1900s, a unique and indigenous to China term for sexual behaviors and identities that did not fit the dominant “heterosexual” category was established and helped to spur the growth of such communities and organizations around the country. Despite the mass horrors that occurred in Tiananmen Square in 1989 and the subsequent crackdown on many aspects of Chinese society, it does not seem like this event had a significant effect on the growth of queer communities and their organizing activities.

Although a number of more official groups and organizations were created during this time period, one of the most popular and unofficial places for members of the same-sex to meet and interact with each other was at dance clubs and bars in many of the major cities. This is not

²³⁴ Edmond J. Coleman and Wah-Shan Chou. *Tongzhi: Politics of Same-Sex Eroticism in Chinese Societies*. Florence: Taylor and Francis, 2013, 2.

²³⁵ van de Werff. “The Struggle of the Tongzhi: Homosexuality in China and the Position of Chinese ‘Comrades.’”

referring to explicitly “gay” clubs or bathhouses, but rather the popular and common venues where both men and women would go to dance and meet each other. While most patrons in these establishments were looking for members of the opposite sex, one of the primary ways to signal to others that you were “available” would be to dance with a member of the same sex.²³⁶ Thus it was perfectly within the realm of the socially acceptable for two men to be dancing together at a club, and thus could “mask” two sexually or romantically attracted men who were dancing together.²³⁷ Furthermore, due to the origin of *tongzhi* (同志) as an identity category in Hong Kong, and the sizeable population of same-sex attracted individuals in Taiwan, during the early 1990s many LGBTQ+ advocates traveled to mainland China from these places in an attempt to help establish communities and ways of organizing, and were instrumental in the early formation of Chinese queer communities.²³⁸ However, these informal places of meeting like-minded individuals and finding community with the help of Hong Kong and Taiwanese advocates were not the only options to *tongzhi* (同志) individuals. Paradoxically, the emergence of HIV/AIDS in China during the 1990s led to the Chinese government acknowledging its *tongzhi* (同志) population and taking measures that both officially and, more frequently, unofficially support the forming of various LGBTQ+ advocacy groups.²³⁹

Although there was a fair amount of covering up during the early stages of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in China during the early 1990s, with some parallels to the early stages of China’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic, once China began taking the threat of HIV/AIDS seriously, it led to not only substantial strides in reducing its spread amongst its population, but also to

²³⁶ Gil. “The Cut Sleeve Revisited: A Brief Ethnographic Interview with a Male Homosexual in Mainland China.”

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Wu. “From ‘*Long Yang*’ and ‘*Dui Shi*’ to Tongzhi: Homosexuality in China.”

²³⁹ Wu. “From ‘*Long Yang*’ and ‘*Dui Shi*’ to Tongzhi: Homosexuality in China.”

(unintentionally or not) supporting the creation of LGBTQ+ organizations and advocacy groups.²⁴⁰ As Jin Cao and Xinlei Lu write: “since the Chinese government encountered difficulties in getting in touch with gay communities, which were anonymous in society, it was obliged to cooperate with gay NGOs in its daily practice in order to implement its AIDS prevention strategies.”²⁴¹ One notable figure is Wan Yan Hai of the Institute of Health Education which falls under the Health Ministry of the CPC. Wan eventually became a vocal advocate for those living with HIV/AIDS but, after being ousted from the party in 1993, he was forced to seek refuge in the United States.²⁴² Before that, however, in 1992 he established the first ever HIV/AIDS hotline in Beijing and hosted a number of educational sessions with members of the *tongzhi* (同志) community in places where they were known to frequently meet.²⁴³ During that same year, he even created the first gay men’s club called “Men’s World,” also located in Beijing, that hosted monthly gatherings with members of the *tongzhi* (同志) community to engage in discussions on a variety of topics, including safe sex and HIV/AIDS.²⁴⁴

This also intersected with the emergence of the internet in China which not only allowed for greater connection between members of the *tongzhi* (同志) community in China, but also for LGBTQ+-focused websites to emerge – by 2003 there were over 250 Chinese *tongzhi* (同志) websites in China and around the world – that were able to disseminate information to people about HIV/AIDS.²⁴⁵ Thus, having a more free and open media that allowed for LGBTQ+

²⁴⁰ Annie Sparrow. “The Chinese Government's Cover-up Killed Health Care Workers Worldwide.” *Foreign Policy*, March 18, 2021. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/03/18/china-covid-19-killed-health-care-workers-worldwide/>; Joe Amon. “The Truth of China's Response to HIV/AIDS.” *Los Angeles Times*, July 11, 2010. <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2010-jul-11-la-oe-amon-china-hiv-20100710-story.html>.

²⁴¹ Cao and Lu. “A Preliminary Exploration of the Gay Movement in Mainland China: Legacy, Transition, Opportunity, and the New Media.”

²⁴² Amon. “The Truth of China's Response to HIV/AIDS.”

²⁴³ Wu. “From ‘*Long Yang*’ and ‘*Dui Shi*’ to *Tongzhi*: Homosexuality in China.”

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

organizations to operate online also allowed for expansive, more direct, and accurate spread of information regarding various governmental health concerns, including HIV/AIDS. One such website was Gztz.org which, by 2008, had performed over 11,000 HIV screening tests due in large part to messaging on its website to promote testing using slogans like “One night stand?”²⁴⁶ What is particularly astonishing in the case of Gztz.org is that it had an established partnership with the government, wherein governmental health workers would often administer the tests, while it was the role of the website to get people to the testing facilities in the first place, and then offer counseling services to those with a positive result.²⁴⁷

Governmental support for HIV/AIDS and, relatedly, the *tongzhi* (同志) community did change from time to time. Towards the end of 1993 Wan Yan Hai was forced to stop his advocacy work and shut down Men’s World, and after his refusal was fired from his position – as noted earlier, this club had played a substantial role, particularly towards the beginning of the 21st century, in supporting and working with HIV/AIDS advocacy organizations as well as LGBTQ+ specific groups.²⁴⁸ Amid the emergence of several LGBTQ+-focused organizations around this time was one group called “Beijing Sister” which was a lesbian activist group founded around 1999 following a lesbian conference that had occurred in Beijing.²⁴⁹ In its extremely brief period of activity – the group broke up in 2001 – it published the first ever lesbian publication and also opened the first lesbian hotline.²⁵⁰ Thus, despite the ongoing spread of the disease around the

²⁴⁶ Mara Hvistendahl. “China Partners with Gay Groups on HIV Screening.” *Science* 339, no. 6115 (January 4, 2013): 17–18. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.339.6115.17>.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Wu. “From ‘Long Yang’ and ‘Dui Shi’ to Tongzhi: Homosexuality in China.”

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Guo Yujie. “A History of Lesbians Organizing in China.” China Development Brief, September 2, 2011. <https://chinadevelopmentbrief.org/reports/a-history-of-lesbians-organizing-in-china/>.

country, it was also a very vibrant time of increased visibility and community for the *tongzhi* (同志) members of society.

Unfortunately, however, another consequence of HIV/AIDS in China, paralleling what occurred in a large number of, often Western countries, was the association of those engaging in relations with members of the same sex with the deadly disease.²⁵¹ This led to a massive increase in the stigmatization against the LGBTQ+ community in China. Comments, such as “AIDS is the curse on homosexuals” and “Cherish your life and stay away from homosexuals” were not uncommon to hear in China during the 1990s and give some indication as to the public perception of the *tongzhi* (同志) community in China at this time. Furthermore, the continued view of homosexuality as a mental illness in China added a doubly negative label to *tongzhi* (同志) individuals.

Amidst the dichotomy of ongoing broad public criticism and continually emerging communities of support, two extremely significant events occurred at the end of the 1990s and early 2000s that represented massive progressive strides for those engaging in same-sex relations in China. The first came in 1997 when “hooliganism” was officially removed from the Chinese Criminal Law code.²⁵² While, as previously mentioned, this law never explicitly condemned homosexuality, it was used by the Chinese government and police to arrest those engaged in deviant behavior, which included individuals engaging in same sex relations. This served as a substantial milestone for *tongzhi* (同志) peoples in China as they were no longer able to be persecuted and thrown in jail simply because of their sexual or romantic relations. Secondly, and equally significant, “in 2001 the Chinese Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality as a

²⁵¹ Cao and Lu. “A Preliminary Exploration of the Gay Movement in Mainland China: Legacy, Transition, Opportunity, and the New Media”

²⁵² Worth. “‘There Was No Mercy at All’: Hooliganism, Homosexuality and the Opening-up of China.”

pathology from the *Chinese Classification of Mental Disorders*.²⁵³ While not immediately changing the public perception of homosexuals in China, it allowed for better treatment of the *tongzhi* (同志) population from a medical perspective, which helped to initiate a perception change of these individuals in the public sphere.

These two developments had significant effects on the *tongzhi* (同志) community in China as it opened up a wide range of opportunities to study and research homosexuality in China. The *tongzhi* (同志) community began to receive more attention in the news, oftentimes in relation to HIV/AIDS, and overall discussions about homosexuality increased.²⁵⁴ Although Chinese sociologist, sexologist, and LGBTQ+ rights advocate Li Yinhe published her book *Their World: A Study of Homosexuality in China* in 1992, much of her later work, including advocating for marriage equality and even proposing the “Chinese Same-Sex Marriage Bill” as an amendment to the Chinese marriage law in 2001 were made possible by these developments that occurred in 1997 and 2001.²⁵⁵ However, it still seems as though, despite this relative “opening up” of China to ideas about homosexuality and sexual identity during this time, there was not any real acknowledgement or recognition of the vibrant history of “homosexuality” that had taken place in China for hundreds of years. Regardless, the continued growth of online communities, dating apps, organized communities, and other developments marked an important milestone for the Chinese *tongzhi* (同志). However, and although not immediately, Xi Jinping’s rise to power in 2012 as China’s

²⁵³ Worth. “‘There Was No Mercy at All’: Hooliganism, Homosexuality and the Opening-up of China.”

²⁵⁴ Wu. “From ‘Long Yang’ and ‘Dui Shi’ to Tongzhi: Homosexuality in China.”

²⁵⁵ Vivian Zhang. “Li Yinhe.” Woman is a Rational Animal. The University of Chicago, December 8, 2020. <https://womansrational.uchicago.edu/2020/12/08/li-yinhe>; Susanne YP Choi and Ming Luo. “Performative Family: Homosexuality, Marriage and Intergenerational Dynamics in China.” *The British Journal of Sociology* 67, no. 2 (June 2016): 260–80. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.12196>.

paramount leader did mark a dramatic change for the *tongzhi* (同志) community in China, which will be explored further in Chapter Five.

The opening up of China's economy to the rest of the world under Deng Xiaoping's leadership, the brief period of stability in the Chinese party – up until Tiananmen Square – and the emergence of HIV/AIDS in China during the early 1990s all helped promote a growing and more visible LGBTQ+ population in China. Advocacy and community organizations began being formed, and a relatively stable homosexual *identity* also came into existence, with particularly people in Hong Kong and Macau, although also spreading to the mainland, using the term *tongzhi* (同志) to identify themselves as interested and engaging in romantic and sexual relations with members of the same sex. At the same time, however, it was the official stance of the country all the way until 2001 that homosexuality was a mental illness and there were still instances of people being arrested for the crime of “hooliganism” all the way until its repeal in 1997. The early 2000s, particularly with the growth of the internet and continued growth and stability of the Chinese state and party system saw a real growth in LGBTQ+ rights across China. Organizations continued being formed, communities were established, and while many still did not feel comfortable “coming out” to their employers or even their own families, they were still finding communities elsewhere in their lives. Xi Jinping's rise to power in 2012, however, signaled a massive shift in governmental policy towards and acceptance of LGBTQ+ Chinese citizens.

Key Takeaways

The 20th century was perhaps, one of the most disruptive periods of time in the entire history of China as a region. Three completely different governmental structures asserted control over the Chinese people, starting first with the Qing dynasty which fell in 1912, then moving on

to the Republic of China, which was then overthrown by Mao Zedong in 1949 to establish the People's Republic of China. Throughout the just over a century analyzed in this chapter, same-sex love and intimacy took many different forms and was viewed by the state in a number of different ways. While China at this point was a relatively fully formed nation-state, the country experienced periods of great openness to the rest of the world, as well as periods of immense closure and insularity. Major political events, such as the Japanese invasion and occupation of China during World War II and the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989 had major effects on the leaders of China at the time, and thus trickled down to impact the lives of individuals.

Due to the background of the early leaders of the ROC, China during the first half of the 20th century was generally very open to the West, including substantial knowledge exchange. This was especially true in the realm of health and medicine, as the Westernized pathologized view of homosexuality began to meaningfully take root in China during the time of the ROC. The view of homosexuality as a type of mental illness, and then the origination of a dominant Chinese perspective that homosexuality was a product of the West were cemented allowing for a continuation and expansion of these viewpoints into the second half of this century. When Mao rose to power in 1949, Confucian notions of morality which heavily stressed the importance of the family and also coincided with Mao's vision for a strictly productive and efficient Chinese society, further ostracized those engaging in acts of homosexuality from society. Family units were seen as a way to continue building the strength of the Chinese population, and non-procreative sex was often seen as a form of self-indulgence that ran counter to the objectives of the "collective" and common prosperity that Mao was intent on promoting.

However, and relatively counterintuitively, Mao's Cultural Revolution which aimed to purge all remaining elements of self-indulgence from Chinese society, also led to a sort of micro

sexual awakening amongst Chinese youth who were uprooted from their traditional family units and forced into often gender-segregated environments with little to no parental oversight or supervision, allowing for experimentations with same-sex love, intimacy, and desire. At a broader state-level, acts of “homosexuality” were associated with remnants of capitalist tendencies in society – solidifying an association between homosexuality and the West – and thus were natural targets for party-nationalists in the country. And while there were instances of individuals caught or accused of engaging in “homosexual” acts being severely punished by the state or local law enforcement, a great number of people also (either by chance or through more deliberate acts, such as cruising) began finding others also interested in same-sex relations. While no civil society organizations relating to this community took form during the Cultural Revolution or really anytime during Mao’s reign, much of the informal meeting between those engaging in homosexual acts served as a precursor to a more stable homosexual *identity* and the emergence of real advocacy organizations during the latter part of the 20th century.

Under Deng and the last quarter century of the 1900s the opening up of China’s economy, and therefore much of society, to the rest of the world led to an influx of knowledge and a decrease in social repression. LGBTQ+ organizations began to form in major cities which hosted conferences, meetups and other sorts of events leading to the formation of actual homosexual *identity* during the early 90s. However, the pathologized view of homosexuality still prevailed in most medical communities, as well as throughout society, and individuals engaging in same-sex acts of love and intimacy were often punished under the crime of “hooliganism” which was not officially removed from the law until the later years of the 90s. The emergence of HIV/AIDS also led to more LGBTQ+-related organizations taking form in response to the health crisis, pressuring the government to work alongside these organizations in order to prevent the spread of the deadly

disease. Overall, this period went through a number of changes in attitudes and policies towards those engaging in acts of homosexuality, yet one central theme that has direct relevance to perspectives toward homosexuality in China today is the view of homosexuality as a product of the West that was popularized over different periods of time during the 20th century.

The next chapter will move to analyzing contemporary China and the present-day crackdown on LGBTQ+ rights. First, the rise of Xi Jinping to power in 2012 will be discussed to offer context related to his personal background and current position within the CPC, and then a lengthy and comprehensive timeline will be constructed to take a closer look at this crackdown. This chronology will illustrate the emergence of a *systematic* and seemingly state-led repression of LGBTQ+ rights in China, leading to important questions regarding the motivations behind these policies which will be further explored in the conclusion.

CHAPTER V: The Xi Era

Introduction

The rise of Xi Jinping in China has coincided with other examples of the expansion of authoritarianism around the globe. Since his takeover of the CPC in 2012 as its paramount leader, Xi Jinping has taken incredible steps to solidify his control and power within the CPC, and China more broadly. Over the past decade, Xi Jinping has engaged in sweeping restraints of the technology sector – a phenomenon that *Wall Street Journalist* reporter and chief China correspondent, Lingling Wei, has argued represents a broader moving away from Western-style capitalism – delivering on his promise to fully reunite Hong Kong with the mainland, and becoming the driving force behind of the more than one million Uyghur Muslims that have been forcibly detained in the Xinjiang region of Western China.²⁵⁶ While not nearly as visible or commonly reported, Xi Jinping’s reign over the CPC has also led to a drastic change in the lives and experiences of those identifying as *tongzhi* (同志) in China. However, as has been outlined in the historical account of the lives and experiences of those engaging in “homosexual” acts throughout Chinese history, it is important to note that at many points in time, there was never one dominant narrative relating to acts of same-sex love and intimacy; there have been periods of great expansion in the visibility of “homosexuals” which *simultaneously* included forms of social

²⁵⁶ Lingling Wei. “Xi Jinping Aims to Rein in Chinese Capitalism, Hew to Mao's Socialist Vision.” *The Wall Street Journal*. Dow Jones & Company, September 20, 2021. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/xi-jinping-aims-to-rein-in-chinese-capitalism-hew-to-maos-socialist-vision-11632150725>; “China's Xi Says Full Control over Hong Kong Achieved, Determined on Taiwan.” *Reuters*. Thomson Reuters, October 15, 2022. <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/chinas-xi-says-full-control-over-hong-kong-achieved-determined-taiwan-2022-10-16/>; Lindsay Maizland. “China's Repression of Uyghurs in Xinjiang.” *Council on Foreign Relations*. Council on Foreign Relations, September 22, 2022. <https://www.cfr.org/background/china-xinjiang-uyghurs-muslims-repression-genocide-human-rights>.

repression. Thus, China's current environment as it relates to the *tongzhi* (同志) community is not completely unprecedented, but the *scale* at which this crackdown is happening today and its increasingly large scope designates this moment as an important shift in China's and the CPC's attitudes and policies towards those engaging in acts of "homosexuality."

Since 2012, a more systematic, official, and organized attempt at disrupting the lives of *tongzhi* (同志) peoples in China, with the goal of establishing a certain type of Chinese identity, has been gaining momentum. This has included the arrests of LGBTQ+ advocates, social media platform WeChat shutting down and deleting dozens of LGBTQ+ university groups' accounts, and entire LGBTQ+ advocacy organizations being forced to disband, all of which clearly represents a new era of repressive policies against *tongzhi* (同志) individuals in China. People identifying as *tongzhi* (同志) have been beaten up by the police, TV shows that depict love between two boys have been banned, and a recent legal case sheds light on the incredibly high number of psychology textbooks in China that *still* – despite the removal of "homosexuality" as a pathology from the *Chinese Classification of Mental Disorders* in 2001 – designate homosexuality as a mental disorder.

In 2022 two events occurred that highlight the large, state-led, systematic approach to erode the rights of *tongzhi* (同志) individuals in China in the name of cultivating a particular type of Chinese identity that is inherently non-Western and true to "traditional" Chinese values. Ironically this objective often involves complete disregard of elements of China's "traditional" past that don't conform to the vision that Xi Jinping and the leaders of the CPC hold for the Chinese identity. The first event occurred in April of 2022 when a *Foreign Policy* article was released detailing how the United States Congress' annual report documenting various human rights violations in China was delayed for six months due to heated debate over a particular section on LGBTQ+ rights in

China.²⁵⁷ While the actual details of this report will be discussed later in the chapter, the debate over whether to include an entirely new section on LGBTQ+ human rights abuses in China highlights the current political sensitivity and importance of this issue. Furthermore, and while perhaps not as widespread in its impact, in October of 2022 Cui Le, a sociologist at the University of Auckland, made a call to Western scholars and academics to pay closer attention to the crackdown on LGBTQ+ rights that is occurring in China under Xi Jinping.²⁵⁸ “Queer issues have become more and more politically sensitive in recent years. Queer visibility is erased by the universities, and queer activism has become increasingly risky,” he said.²⁵⁹ The message from Cui Le, a man who identifies himself as a “gay migrant from China,” holds additional weight because of his lived experience in the country and thus his call on Western academics to focus more on this topic demonstrates the magnitude and unprecedented nature of what is occurring in China now.²⁶⁰

The remainder of this chapter will construct a timeline of pivotal events and actions related to the CPC’s repression of homosexuality since the rise of Xi Jinping, addressing the response of affected individuals and in turn assessing the counter-response of the state. But first, an explanation and close examination of Xi Jinping and how he became the paramount leader of China will be detailed to provide important context behind the man who is currently running the Chinese state. This chapter seeks to fill what appears to be a massive gap in contemporary Chinese literature and reporting by offering the most comprehensive look at what has occurred in the realm of *tongzhi* (同志) rights and policies in China over the past decade.

²⁵⁷ Robbie Gramer and Mary Yang. “Congress Splits over How to Address LGBT Rights in China.” Foreign Policy, April 1, 2022. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/04/01/china-congress-human-rights-lgbtq-repression/>.

²⁵⁸ Pola Lem. “The Plight of China’s Gay Scholars.” Inside Higher Ed, October 19, 2022. <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2022/10/20/scholar-focuses-lgbtq-chinas-universities>.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ “Le Cui Profile.” University of Auckland, n.d. <https://profiles.auckland.ac.nz/l-cui>.

Xi Jinping's Rise to Power

Before analyzing what has occurred in China over the last decade under the rule of paramount leader Xi Jinping, it is important to briefly understand how he amassed such great power and control over the CPC in the first place. Despite Xi's common claim of a meritocratic rise into party leadership, he is often considered a CPC "princeling," that is, the child of a former high-ranking party official who has now risen up the ranks, following in the footsteps of his father.²⁶¹ Born in Beijing in 1953, Xi Jinping's father served as both China's propaganda minister and Vice-Premier at different points throughout his career.²⁶² Ironically, Xi's father faced numerous instances of purging and condemnation during Mao's Cultural Revolution and he was even sent to the countryside to do grueling manual labor himself, yet this did not hinder Xi Jinping's future loyalty to the party.²⁶³ As Kevin Rudd, the former Prime Minister of Australia has said: "The bottom line in any understanding of who Xi Jinping is must begin with his dedication to the Party as an institution—despite the fact that through his personal life, and his political life, he has experienced the best of the Party and the worst of the Party."²⁶⁴

Xi Jinping's career essentially kicked off when he moved to the southern province of Fujian in 1985, initiating what would become a 17-year ascent up the ranks of provincial party leadership, eventually becoming governor of the province in 2000.²⁶⁵ Just seven years later, Xi joined the national leadership of the party as one of nine members on the Politburo Standing Committee and

²⁶¹ "Xi Jinping: From Communist Party Princeling to China's President." BBC News. BBC, October 10, 2022. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-11551399>.

²⁶² Evan Osnos. "Born Red: How Xi Jinping, an Unremarkable Provincial Administrator, Became China's Most Authoritarian Leader since Mao." *The New Yorker*, March 30, 2015. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/04/06/born-red>.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁵ "Timeline: Chinese Leader Xi Jinping's Rise and Rule." AP NEWS. Associated Press, October 23, 2022. <https://apnews.com/article/congress-xi-jinping-beijing-china-government-and-politics-36f8476c2f604282c08178d661111686>.

was named vice president of China in 2008.²⁶⁶ In choosing the party's next generation of leadership, Xi Jinping was actually expected to lose to Li Keqiang who, as Evan Osnos wrote, "had no revolutionary family pedigree, and had postgraduate degrees in law and economics from Peking University."²⁶⁷ However, Xi's ability to avoid upsetting any previously high-ranking party-officials throughout his rise to power and apparent weak appearance – in the sense that he would be easily manipulable – made him a party favorite.²⁶⁸ After that, Xi was further solidified as the choice to take over the party, and on November 15, 2012 became General Secretary of the CPC.²⁶⁹

As Xi took over the helm of the CPC and therefore the PRC, it gradually became clear that he would set China on a different path than the direction envisioned by many of his predecessors. Internationally, Xi was not as concerned with aligning with the "peaceful rise" theory, and instead sought ways to assert Chinese power and dominance in important regions and institutions, such as the South China Sea and Africa, as well as in the United Nation. He also created programs, such as the Belt and Road Initiative and Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank, as alternative institutions to existing Western initiatives.²⁷⁰ Domestically, as a professor friend of Xi noted in a *New Yorker* article, Xi was (and likely still is) "repulsed by the all-encompassing commercialization of Chinese society, with its attendant nouveaux riches, official corruption, loss of values, dignity, and self-respect, and such 'moral evils' as drugs and prostitution," and as head of the party would lead "aggressive attempt[s] to address these evils, perhaps at the expense of the new moneyed class."²⁷¹ Thus Xi Jinping was also centrally focused on cultivating a very particular type of Chinese society, and, by extension, a type of Chinese sovereign man. This has emerged as increasingly relevant as

²⁶⁶ "Timeline: Chinese Leader Xi Jinping's Rise and Rule."

²⁶⁷ Osnos. "Born Red: How Xi Jinping, an Unremarkable Provincial Administrator, Became China's Most Authoritarian Leader since Mao."

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

Xi Jinping has taken measures to promote the “right” type of masculinity in Chinese society, and has publicly condemned “sissy” male stars and others that do not fit his vision of the ideal Chinese man and citizen that are good for society.²⁷²

In a related move, Xi’s rise to power resulted in the “aggressive effort to reassert party ideological controls over art, culture, and higher education that had partially slipped during the more relaxed atmosphere of China’s post-1978 reform era,” as Carl Minzner wrote in an essay for the China Leadership Monitor.²⁷³ This has involved specific party-led policies, speeches, and documents that outline this objective, all of which have made it increasingly difficult for the open expressions of ideas and values, including in the realm of LGBTQ+ topics. Additionally, this helped create a view that “young teachers and students are key targets of infiltration by enemy forces,” as said by former Minister of Education, Yuan Guire, in 2011.²⁷⁴ Thus, schools and universities, around the time of Xi Jinping’s assumption of power in 2012, were already places where the spotlight of state-censorship was intently focused on finding and rooting out any ideas or methods of expression that ran counter to the party’s stated views.

The final critical aspect of Xi’s rise to power that relates to the repression of LGBTQ+ rights today is the intent focus that Xi Jinping has placed, even prior to his elevation to General Secretary in 2012, on examining and understanding the reasons behind the fall of the Soviet Union.²⁷⁵ It is clear that Xi Jinping is paranoid about the prospect of losing control over the CPC and the entirety of the PRC, which may also help explain his actions in Hong Kong and Xinjiang as part of a broader strategy to shore up the borders of the Chinese state. In commenting on

²⁷² Chowdhury. “After America, It’s China’s Turn to Worry about Masculinity.”

²⁷³ Carl Minzner. “Intelligentsia in the Crosshairs: Xi Jinping’s Ideological Rectification of Higher Education in China.” China Leadership Monitor, December 1, 2019. <https://www.prleader.org/carl-minzner>.

²⁷⁴ Osnos. “Born Red: How Xi Jinping, an Unremarkable Provincial Administrator, Became China’s Most Authoritarian Leader since Mao.”

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

Gorbachev's failure to protect the Soviet Union from its eventual demise, Xi Jinping has said that "nobody was man enough to stand up and resist."²⁷⁶ This level of paranoia and concern over maintaining absolute control over the Chinese party and state has also resulted in efforts to suppress big tech, civil society, and any other groups – including, it seems, members of the *tongzhi* (同志) community – that are conceived as potential threats to the party. In 2014 alone, the government arrested nearly a thousand members of civil society, making it the largest action of this type since the mid 1990s and the aftermath of the Tiananmen Square massacre.²⁷⁷ Thus, Xi Jinping, and therefore the CPC, are clearly not willing to risk even the slightest concessions in the realm of civil society or human rights if such actions could lead to a level of group forming that has the ability to criticize the Chinese state or weaken its power, legitimacy, and control over the Chinese people. In other words, part of Xi's vision for the future of China is a relatively homogenous and single-dimensioned population that is easy to control and fits with his vision for China's future. Furthermore, the removal of presidential term limits in 2018 has essentially cleared the way for Xi Jinping to remain the paramount leader of the PRC for life, putting in question when, if ever, the suppression of *tongzhi* (同志) individuals and other groups in society will ever give way to a more socially open and inclusive society.²⁷⁸

Of Xi Jinping's relatively turbulent rise to power, and occasionally negative relationship between Xi's father and the CPC, the most important thing to note about Xi Jinping is that, first and foremost, he is a party man. He has devoted his entire life to supporting and strengthening the party, and that has also become increasingly true since he rose to power in 2012. He is also fiercely

²⁷⁶ Osnos. "Born Red: How Xi Jinping, an Unremarkable Provincial Administrator, Became China's Most Authoritarian Leader since Mao."

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ "China's Xi Allowed to Remain 'President for Life' as Term Limits Removed." BBC News. BBC, March 11, 2018. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-43361276>.

concerned about his legacy and wants to ensure that his reign over China continues to consolidate the party's control of China and its people.

When entering into periods of economic, political, or related uncertainty, Xi is more than willing to take whatever measures he deems necessary to ensure the continued strength of his grip over the party, and the party's grip on the nation. He is deeply steeped in his ideology and vision for the future of China, and wants the rest of China to conform to these visions as closely as possible. Finally, as tensions between China and the West grow, Xi is likely to assert China as a more revisionist power looking to supplement the US-led, liberal world order. As Daniel Drezner noted in a recent interview: "There's definitely evidence that China has tried to become more of a revisionist power...[and] Xi Jinping has tried to elevate himself to the same level as Mao and Deng."²⁷⁹ Thus, in an effort to assert China's revisionist intentions and cement Xi's legacy, he also has taken the approach of combatting essentially anything he deems as "Western" and showing the world that China does everything completely different from the West.

Crackdown on the *Tongzhi* (同志) Community

Despite the spread of HIV/AIDS across China during the 1990s and early 2000s and the related homophobia that members of the *tongzhi* (同志) community faced, this period still included, as outlined in Chapter Four, a relatively open and supportive society and governmental policies towards those engaging in same-sex relations. Starting in 2014, just two years after Xi Jinping was installed as China's paramount leader, a massive shift in governmental attitudes took place.

²⁷⁹ Thomas Falci and Daniel Drezner. Daniel Drezner on the Global Economic Order Amidst Russia's War in Ukraine and Challenges with China. Other. *Asia Experts Forum*, March 22, 2023. <http://asiaexpertsforum.org/daniel-drezner-global-economic-order-amidst-russias-war-ukraine-challenges-china/>.

One of the first major instances marking this change in treatment of LGBTQ+ individuals in China occurred in May of 2014 when nine Chinese LGBTQ+ activists were arrested by police in Beijing.²⁸⁰ Although they were only held for less than a day, they were forced to cancel other events they had planned. Twenty-year old activist Xiang Xiaohan was not at all deterred from continuing to advocate for what he believed in.²⁸¹ “If we don’t do something, then the government will continue to ignore such issues and pretend they don’t exist – I think this is unacceptable. Because the official attitude is one of tacit acquiescence, then people are not willing to stand up or work hard,” Xiang said.²⁸² Remarkably, Xiang was also arrested a year prior and held for 12 days for organizing China’s first public LGBTQ+ march in honor of the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia.²⁸³ Notably, in 2009 Xiang began operating the Same-Sex Love Assistance Network, but recently has filed suit against the provincial government of Hunan due to its refusal to register his organization.²⁸⁴ Thus, by living in Xi Jinping’s China, Xiang has faced a number of governmental and policy barriers as he attempts to advocate for a more open and accepting society in China for members of the *tongzhi* (同志) community.

Two years later in 2016, on a broader, systemic-level, the Chinese government officially banned all TV shows that included depictions of same-sex activity. In its statement, the government said: “no television drama shall show abnormal sexual relationship and behaviors, such as incest, same-sex relationships, sexual perversion, sexual assault, sexual abuse, sexual

²⁸⁰ J. Lester Feder. “Nine LGBT Activists Arrested in China - but Gay Pride March Still Planned.” BuzzFeed News, May 9, 2014. <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/lesterfeder/nine-lgbt-activists-arrested-in-china-but-the-countrys-most>.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

violence, and so on.”²⁸⁵ While these bans on portrayals of same-sex love and intimacy on television and movie screens have become commonplace in current day China, at the time they created a massive shock to the rest of the world and, particularly, those *tongzhi* (同志) members of Chinese society. Earlier that year, in January of 2016, Chinese government censors also removed the popular web drama “Go Princess Go” which told the story of a man who went back in time to be the wife of a crown prince, perhaps a nod to the gender fluidity that occurred throughout much of dynastic China wherein emperors’ male favorites oftentimes took on more feminine attributes and played more submissive sexual roles.²⁸⁶ Particularly fascinating about the ban, however, is that “same-sex relationships” were associated with “sexual perversion, sexual assault, sexual abuse” and other types of abominable sexual behaviors, indicating a possible prevailing view of homosexuality within the upper echelons of Chinese leadership.²⁸⁷ The eight-page document that was released as part of the government’s decision also noted that TV shows should not touch on themes that “exaggerate the dark side of society,” which included explicit references to homosexual relationships, further highlighting the sweeping morality campaign by Xi Jinping and the other leaders of the CPC.²⁸⁸

This negative view of homosexuality among the Chinese elite – although it was clearly shared by other members of the population – coincided with the re-established prevalence of the classification of homosexuality as a mental illness within psychological textbooks in China during this time period. A lawsuit, filed in 2017 against a Chinese-based textbook publisher included the

²⁸⁵ Hannah Ellis-Petersen. “China Bans Depictions of Gay People on Television.” The Guardian. Guardian News and Media, March 4, 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2016/mar/04/china-bans-gay-people-television-clampdown-xi-jinping-censorship>.

²⁸⁶ Fergus Ryan. “China Tightens Censorship of Online Dramas.” China Film Insider, February 27, 2016. <https://chinafilm insider.com/china-tightens-censorship-of-online-dramas/>.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Shen Lu and Katie Hunt. “China Bans Same-Sex Romance from TV Screens.” CNN. Cable News Network, March 3, 2016. <https://www.cnn.com/2016/03/03/asia/china-bans-same-sex-dramas/index.html>.

findings from a 2016/2017 study which found that around half of the 91 psychology textbooks used in Chinese universities today treat homosexuality as a disease.²⁸⁹ While the 2001 official removal of homosexuality as a mental disorder might have influenced the methods of various medical professionals, it did not change the practices and knowledge base of others in the medical community, including those teaching and producing the knowledge for students of psychology. Even more unfortunately still, in September of 2020 the court in Jiangsu ruled in favor of the publisher by saying it did not “contain factual errors.”²⁹⁰ Thus, it appears as though the courts in China are intent on assisting the broader state-wide suppression of those trying to openly advocate for LGBTQ+ rights, in part by sticking to a much narrower definition of what it means to be a “normal” Chinese citizen.

That same year, a repeat of what happened back in 2014 occurred, this time in the northwestern city of Xi’an. In addition to saying publicly that the city did not welcome gay people, Xian police briefly detained nine gay activists who were in the process of organizing an LGBTQ+ rights conference in Xi’an.²⁹¹ This moment was particularly interesting as it occurred around the same time that Taiwan officially legalized same-sex marriage, a first for any country in Asia, and thus the detainment that occurred in Xi’an provided a stark contrast to Taiwan, the reunification with China of which is one of Xi Jinping’s major priorities. What is remarkable about China during this period – and even still today, although the scale of the state’s censorship apparatus has grown to such a remarkably influential level – is that Chinese citizens, particularly those in the *tongzhi* (同志) community, did not always simply sit idly by as their rights were taken away and

²⁸⁹ Sui-Lee Wee. “China’s Stance on Homosexuality Has Changed. Its Textbooks Haven’t.” The New York Times, October 28, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/28/business/international/china-gay-homosexuality-textbooks-lawsuit.html>.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

²⁹¹ “China Police Detain Gay Activists after Xian Event Canceled.” Reuters. Thomson Reuters, May 31, 2017. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-lgbt-idUSKBN18R168>.

communities eroded. One particularly fascinating case occurred in 2018 when one of China's largest microblogging platforms, *xinlang webibo* (新浪微博), which is akin to Twitter, "announced that, in order to create a 'sunny and harmonious' environment, it would remove videos and comics 'with pornographic implications, promoting bloody violence, or related to homosexuality'."²⁹² However, and only three days later, *xinlang webibo* (新浪微博) decided to reverse this policy's implications for *tongzhi* (同志) related content as there was such a vast and public outcry on social media against the policy.²⁹³ Although not unique to China, what companies around the world have realized is that by having a more open and accepting stance towards LGBTQ+ individuals, they are able to tap into an additional market, and oftentimes it is really the converse that has more drastic implications. As of 2019 the LGBTQ+ community in China is estimated to have a purchasing power of around \$640 billion.²⁹⁴ However, Chinese firms have to be incredibly careful about balancing profit incentives with the wills of the Chinese state. Unfortunately, it seems as though the case of *xinlang webibo* (新浪微博) is an anomaly, and more companies are erring on the side of aligning what they view as broader CPC policies and objectives.

One of the largest events held in China with the intention of building a cohesive *tongzhi* (同志) community and bringing together individuals, advocacy groups, businesses, and other stakeholders interested in supporting LGBTQ+ members of Chinese society was ShanghaiPRIDE. As the organizers state on their website: "ShanghaiPRIDE began in 2009 as a small community

²⁹² Siodhbhra Parkin, Steven Jiang, Joanna Chiu, Isabelle Niu, Elizabeth Elizabeth, and Martin Yang. "A Ban on Gay Content, Stopped in Its Tracks." ChinaFile, April 18, 2018. <https://www.chinafile.com/conversation/ban-gay-content-stopped-its-tracks>.

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ "The LGBT Market in China." Daxue Consulting - Market Research China, July 8, 2021. <https://daxueconsulting.com/the-lgbt-market-in-china/>.

event in celebration of acceptance and diversity...we showcased inspired artwork, theater and films; we fosters connections through job fairs and group open days; we offered a platform for individuals to share authentic stories about their lives; we threw parties that brought people together; and we hosted forums to trade wisdom on how to make Shanghai a more vibrant place.”²⁹⁵ For just over 10 years, ShanghaiPRIDE had a vital role in building community for *tongzhi* (同志) individuals in the eastern Chinese city, and was one of the best representations to the outside world of China’s increasingly visible LGBTQ+ community.

Unfortunately however, in 2020, just two years after the *xinlang webibo* (新浪微博) incident, and while not known immediately at the time, the last ShanghaiPRIDE event was held. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic sweeping across China at this time, around 5,000 visitors attended the various events that were taking place in Shanghai over the three month period of job fairs, parties, and other activities – in previous years that number was said to be at least double.²⁹⁶ On August 13th, 2020, ShanghaiPRIDE released a statement on its website that read: “ShanghaiPRIDE regrets to announce that we are canceling all upcoming activities and taking a break from scheduling any future events. We love our community, and we are grateful for the experiences we’ve shared together. No matter what, we will always be proud – and you should be too.”²⁹⁷ While this news came as an incredible surprise to many LGBTQ+ individuals across China, what was equally as surprising was that at this period of time in Shanghai, social distancing restrictions had been largely lifted around the city due to a decrease in nationwide cases, indicating that there was likely other motivating factors not related to COVID-19 behind the decision to shut

²⁹⁵ Team ShanghaiPRIDE. “The End of the Rainbow.” 上海骄傲节 ShanghaiPRIDE, August 13, 2020.

<https://shpride.com/2020/08/13/ending/?lang=en>.

²⁹⁶ Nathan Wei. “Remembering Shanghai Pride, China's Largest LGBTQ Festival.” The China Project, June 16, 2022. <https://thechinaproject.com/2022/06/16/remembering-shanghai-pride-chinas-largest-lgbtq-festival/>.

²⁹⁷ Team ShanghaiPRIDE. “The End of the Rainbow.”

down the organization.²⁹⁸ In a vague and ominous statement in a Facebook group to all of the organizers and sponsors of the event before the official online statement was made, one of the leaders of ShanghaiPRIDE wrote: “The decision was difficult to make but we have to protect the safety of all involved.”²⁹⁹ This was the most detail offered by organizers of the event about the decision to shut down, and the opaqueness associated with the Facebook message and post on their website indicates that it may have been state-level forces that played a role in influencing the shutdown of ShanghaiPRIDE.

In a 2020 article titled “‘End of the Rainbow’: Shanghai Pride shuts down amid shrinking space for China’s LGBTQ+ community,” Steven Jiang from CNN wrote: “A person not associated with Shanghai Pride, but with knowledge to the situation, told CNN on Friday that the all-volunteer team had been facing mounting pressure from local authorities, to the point of where it was disrupting their day jobs and normal lives.”³⁰⁰ Thus, it does seem as though governmental policies and forces were involved, either directly or indirectly, in the shutting down of ShanghaiPRIDE.

Further attacks on the *tongzhi* (同志) community in China occurred in 2021 that also fit into the broader picture of Xi Jinping’s crackdown on civil society over the course of his time as paramount leader. Starting on July 7, 2021 dozens of LGBTQ+ university WeChat accounts, that were used to communicate within universities, foster a sense of community, and host various events, were shut down and removed from the platform without notice.³⁰¹ The groups which had

²⁹⁸ “Chinese LGBT Group ShanghaiPRIDE Halts Work to 'Protect Safety'.” Reuters. Thomson Reuters, August 14, 2020. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-gay-pride-idUSKCN25A141>.

²⁹⁹ Rebecca Kanthor. “Abruptly Canceled, Shanghaipride Could Be Harbinger for China's Civil Society.” The World from PRX, August 27, 2020. <https://theworld.org/stories/2020-08-27/abruptly-canceled-shanghaipride-could-be-harbinger-china-s-civil-society>.

³⁰⁰ Steven Jiang. “‘End of the Rainbow’: Shanghai Pride Shuts down amid Shrinking Space for China's LGBTQ Community.” CNN. Cable News Network, August 16, 2020. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/08/14/asia/shanghai-pride-shutdown-intl-hnk/index.html>.

³⁰¹ Teh. “China's Censors Are Quietly Deleting WeChat LGBTQ Accounts to Silence Gay Rights Groups at the Country's Colleges.”

existed for years and, in some cases, had amassed memberships ranging in the tens of thousands, thus such actions by WeChat and its parent company, Tencent, caused massive disruptions in the lives of tens of thousands of, if not more, university and college students.³⁰² In one *Weibibo* (微博) post, an individual posted the names (along with screenshots of the closed accounts) of some of the universities where this crackdown had taken place, which included at some of China's premier universities, such as Peking University and Tsinghua University in Beijing, and Fudan University in Shanghai.³⁰³ The notice that was received by some of the members of these now closed WeChat accounts as they tried to access them cited violating government regulations on the management of online public accounts, and stated "after receiving relevant complaints, all content has been blocked and the account has been put out of service."³⁰⁴ To date, this event has served as one of the most sweeping and bold examples of China's systemic crackdown on *specifically* LGBTQ+ civil society as it had direct impacts on the lives of tens of thousands of Chinese students around the country.

This particular instance also highlights the beginning and rapid escalation of Xi Jinping's crackdown on LGBTQ+ rights as part of a broader push against anything that can be perceived as a "Western" influence. Hongwei Bao, a professor at the University of Nottingham, has noted how "there is a tendency in China for some people to relate homosexuality and LGBTQ+ people to Western lifestyles or capitalistic, bourgeois decadence, so this was in line with a moral panic."³⁰⁵

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ 知鱼先生-龙亭方. 微博, July 6, 2021. <https://m.weibo.cn/status/4656126677223205>.

³⁰⁴ Nectar Gan and Yong Xiong. "WeChat Deletes Dozens of University LGBT Accounts in China." CNN business. Cable News Network, July 9, 2021. https://www.cnn.com/2021/07/07/business/china-lgbt-wechat-censorship-intl-hnk/index.html?utm_term=PRV-16258074849706d36138fa448&utm_source=cnn_Meanwhile%2Bin%2BChina%2B9.7.2021&utm_medium=email&bt_ee_preview=G9Sx3f1WKILiksMdCXRDAW4bk04go0yVM8xY4p8OIZtBH7mHn5FeDiLhUonHePR3&bt_ts_preview=1625807484985.

³⁰⁵ Maryann Xue. "Chinese LGBT Shutdown 'May Be Result of Backlash against Western Influence'." South China Morning Post, July 11, 2021. <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3140626/chinese-social-media-shutdown-lgbt-student-groups-highlights>.

He went on to state that “especially now, there’s tension between China-West relations, so there is likely to be a heightened sense of nationalism which sees LGBTQ+ issues, feminist issues, as Western, as unfit for China.”³⁰⁶ Clearly, the connection between homosexuality and the West that was prevalent in China during the early Maoist years and during the Cultural Revolution had not completely left China and, under Xi, appears to be getting more promoted in the public sphere and garnering more official legitimacy. Furthermore, by looking at this crackdown as also a push against the West the national security motivations behind many of these repressive policies are also highlighted.

The sweeping crackdown on LGBTQ+ rights in China that really began picking up steam in 2020, however, did not contain itself to the realm of sexual orientation, and also included actions geared at certain forms of gender expression and trying to cultivate and promote a very specific – and narrow – definition of what it means to be a sovereign Chinese man. In September of 2021 the National Radio and Television Administration (NRTA) of China said it will ban “effeminate” aesthetics in entertainment shows and that “vulgar influencers” should be avoided so as to avoid any shows being produced that contain the “unhealthy content” that it is trying to reign in.³⁰⁷ NRTA also mentioned how it is currently working to address the issue of how men are portrayed on the television screen to make them more masculine and crack down on male actors doing things, such as wearing make-up.³⁰⁸ Although these policies are extremely harmful in and of themselves, they are also a part of what Xi Jinping has outlined in his third volume of “Xi Jinping: Governance of China,” namely his call to realize the Chinese dream of “national rejuvenation.”³⁰⁹ Thus, Xi

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

³⁰⁷ Beth Timmins. “China's Media Cracks down on 'Effeminate' Styles.” BBC News. BBC, September 2, 2021. <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-58394906>.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Helen Gao. “China's Ban on 'Sissy Men' Is Bound to Backfire.” The New York Times, December 31, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/31/opinion/china-masculinity.html>; “Xi Focus: Xi Jinping on Rejuvenation of Chinese Nation.” Xinhua, October 11, 2020. http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-10/11/c_139431888.htm.

Jinping's desire to shore up Chinese society and promote a very tailored and specific type of Chinese (male) identity is part of a larger and systematic plan. In a recent *New York Times* article, Helen Gao wrote: "while the prevalence of "effeminate" males was previously a source of general concern, it is now seen as a roadblock for Mr. Xi to clear."³¹⁰ National news outlets, such as *Xinhua News Agency*, have played a large role in supporting Xi's vision by releasing articles condemning the effeminate behaviors of male celebrities and promoting ideas of the hardworking, patriotic, military-serving Chinese sovereign male citizen.

Finally, to close out the year of 2021, LGBTQ+ Rights Advocacy China was forcibly shut down after over 7 years of operations helping advocate for the rights of China's *tongzhi* (同志) community and raising awareness of the various issues that this community faces. Specifically, it advocated for issues, such as same-sex marriage and workplace discrimination to try an increase the rights and freedoms of the marginalized community.³¹¹ "We are deeply regretful to tell everyone, Queer Advocacy Online will stop all of our work indefinitely," LGBTQ+ Rights Advocacy China said to their followers on a WeChat post.³¹² They went on to say that "the future may bring more uncertainties, we await the day when we can lift the clouds and see the daylight," clearly not seeming too optimistic about the immediate future and its ability to create a more safe and inclusive space for LGBTQ+ peoples in China.³¹³ In just one year, the state closed the primary method through which tens of thousands of LGBTQ+ Chinese university students were able to find community, began dictating what appropriate behavior for men in the entertainment industry

³¹⁰ Gao. "China's Ban on 'Sissy Men' Is Bound to Backfire."

³¹¹ Huizhong Wu. "China LGBT Rights Group Shuts down amid Hostile Environment." AP NEWS. Associated Press, November 5, 2021. <https://apnews.com/article/technology-china-media-social-media-taiwan-348cab147964f24ccf83907403d4c84a>.

³¹² Ibid.

³¹³ Ibid.

is, and shut down a large and legitimate LGBTQ+ advocacy organization in China that was previously offering a number of important services to a marginalized community.

In a further effort to reign in the actions of the Chinese entertainment industry, just one year later in 2022, Chinese authorities began calling for the complete nation-wide ban of a specific subgenre of TV dramas and movies called *dangai* (耽改) or ‘boys’ love’ dramas. A South China Morning Post article characterized *dangai* (耽改) dramas as “used to portray gay relationships by replacing sexual elements with subtext or bromance.”³¹⁴ Yet the lack of any explicit sexual references or scenes in these shows is not enough to keep the Chinese government and relevant regulations and censorship agencies off the backs of the entertainment companies producing these films. Regulators view this sub-genre as contributing to “toxic idol worship” and misleading Chinese society as to what proper male behavior is and should look like.³¹⁵ While the first authority to make an official ban was the Beijing Municipal Radio and Television Bureau saying they were creating “a clean and healthy cyberspace for the capital city,” the ban has likely spread across most of China as contributed to some of the larger, nation-wide policies we have seen implemented in the past.³¹⁶

Later that year, Chinese authorities removed Grindr, one of the most popular gay dating apps around the world, from many of its app stores.³¹⁷ What is particularly fascinating about this case is Grindr had actually gone through a four-year period of Chinese ownership and control, ending in 2020 when, upon heavy pressure from the U.S. Committee on Foreign Investment in the

³¹⁴ Mandy Zuo. “China Moves to Kill Romantic Gay-Themed ‘Boys’ Love’ Dramas amid Wider Crackdown on Entertainment Industry.” South China Morning Post, February 2, 2022. <https://www.scmp.com/news/people-culture/china-personalities/article/3165101/china-moves-kill-romantic-gay-themed-boys>.

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

³¹⁷ Ani. “China Bans Gay Dating App Grindr, Encroaching LGBT Rights: Thinktank.” ThePrint. Printline Media, February 23, 2022. <https://theprint.in/world/china-bans-gay-dating-app-grindr-encroaching-lgbt-rights-thinktank/843240/>.

United States (CFIUS) cited national security concerns with China potentially having access to Grindr's user data, thus leading to the sale of the company to a U.S.-based company, San Vicente Acquisition Partners.³¹⁸ Despite this, in February of 2022 China essentially banned Grindr, further curtailing the ability of LGBTQ+ individuals in China to meet and form communities and safe havens. Unfortunately, this was not the first gay dating app that the Chinese government had banned, as the closing of the app Zank in 2017 demonstrates.

While the ban on Grindr was not included, at the end of March 2022 the Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC) released a 334 page report documenting abuses of human rights and the rule of law in China which included one of the most comprehensive summaries of LGBTQ+ rights violations.³¹⁹ Democratic and Republican lawmakers went back and forth over a six-month period, debating whether or not to construct a standalone chapter devoted to abuses of LGBTQ+ rights, and while the final compromise did not create an entirely new section, the length and detail of the pages on LGBTQ+ rights violations highlights the prominence and scale of this issue today. Throughout the entire report, there were 75 mentions of "LGBT," 20 mentions of "gay," and 7 mentions of "lesbian," mostly underneath the "Civil Society" section of the report where this topic has traditionally been documented in CECC reports.³²⁰ As committee chairman, Democratic Senator Jeff Merkley from Oregon, said: "It was absolutely essential that we fully describe the Chinese government's oppression of LGBTQ+ individuals as an integral part of this report."³²¹

³¹⁸ Zack Whittaker. "Grindr Sold by Chinese Owner after US Raised National Security Concerns." TechCrunch, March 6, 2020. <https://techcrunch.com/2020/03/06/grindr-sold-china-national-security/>.

³¹⁹ Gramer and Yang. "Congress Splits over How to Address LGBT Rights in China."

³²⁰ "Congressional-Executive Commission on China: Annual Report 2021." Congressional-Executive Commission on China, March 2022. <https://www.cecc.gov/sites/chinacommission.house.gov/files/documents/2021%20CECC%20Annual%20Report.pdf>.

³²¹ Gramer and Yang. "Congress Splits over How to Address LGBT Rights in China."

Although, an entirely new section to fully detail the violations of LGBTQ+ rights in China seems to be more warranted in the CECC report, the placing of LGBTQ+ rights abuses under the “Civil Society” section helps highlight how, under Xi Jinping, LGBTQ+ and other civil society organizations have suffered from incredibly limited breathing room to organize and operate. The report’s executive summary notes how: “the space for civil society, already tightly restricted, narrowed even further. New limitations imposed the activities of non-governmental organizations [and] rights advocates...a crackdown on ‘illegal social organizations’ marked a particularly severe stifling of civil society.”³²² Due to the close, almost inherent link between LGBTQ+ organizations and civil society, this report allows one to see how the crackdown on LGBTQ+ rights in China is both systematic in and of itself, but also part of a larger move by Xi Jinping to crack down on any potential sources and methods of organizing that have even the slightest potential to be a threat to the power, legitimacy, and control of the CPC.

As a final and most recent demonstration of Xi Jinping’s desire to promote *his* vision of the “right” type of Chinese sovereign man, in February of this year (2023) yet again a new set of national standards regarding what is considered appropriate online content was released. In these standards, online content that references either “sexual orientation” or “gender identities” that are “different from most people” is designated as being “harmful” to youth.³²³ As of February 1st, 2023, the “Classification and codes of unhealthy Internet content for minors” is in full effect and

³²² “Congressional-Executive Commission on China: 2021 Annual Report - Executive Summary.” Congressional-Executive Commission on China, March 2022. <https://www.cecc.gov/>.

³²³ Zhijun Hu. “‘Don’t Say Gay’ Is Happening in China Too, but It Can’t Turn Back the Clock.” *The Diplomat*, December 3, 2022. <https://thediplomat.com/2022/12/dont-say-gay-is-happening-in-china-too-but-it-cant-turn-back-the-clock/>.

severely hampering the ability for any information about LGBTQ+ issues to be disseminated online.³²⁴

One of the many common themes that link almost all of these instances of repression and oppression together is the continued prevailing view of homosexuality as a Western influence. This is critically important to recognize in order to begin thinking about some of the motivations behind Xi Jinping's and the CPC's policies in this area as they continue to assert Chinese dominance on the international stage. As a recent *Diplomat* article stated: "keyboard warriors in China have declared that 'capitalist decadence' and U.S. imperialism 'cannot be allowed to influence our youth' by exposing them to LGBTQ+-related information."³²⁵ By associating "homosexuality" and more effeminate behaviors of men as being an influence from the West, and simultaneously trying to promote a Chinese society that is inherently anti-Western, it becomes incredibly easy to justify the targeting of LGBTQ+ people and organizations. Furthermore, the large number of almost exclusively Western embassies in Beijing that play a large role in publicly highlighting LGBTQ+ rights add to the view that "homosexuality" is something imported from the West. Even outside of the public sector, private and Western companies, like Microsoft, who previously had large presences in China would sponsor banners at pride events, further solidifying the notion of homosexuality was not indigenous to China and rather a product of the West.³²⁶

³²⁴ “未成年人互联网不健康内容分类与代码。” 国家标准 - 全国标准信息公共服务平台, n.d.

<https://std.samr.gov.cn/gb/search/gbDetailed?id=E3C42FB7AC6E2086E05397BE0A0A19F0>.

³²⁵ Hu. "Don't Say Gay' Is Happening in China Too. but It Can't Turn Back the Clock."

³²⁶ "Chinese LGBT Group ShanghaiPRIDE Halts Work to 'Protect Safety'."

Key Takeaways

The above timeline clearly illustrates that the current situation in China cannot be reduced to just one or two isolated events, but rather a collection of instances of social repression targeting the LGBTQ+ community. The tools being used to carry out this mission include the party's control over the police, media companies such as WeChat, and the press through public messages disseminated via outlets such as *Xinhua News*. Although what is occurring is clearly larger than simply negative societal attitudes towards members of the LGBTQ+ community, it is also important to note that this timeline excludes countless examples of workplace or family discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals taking place across China (and, of course, throughout the world). In a 2016 United Nations Development Program report, only 5% of the 28,454 individuals surveyed, of which $\frac{2}{3}$ identified as a sexual minority, had come out to people outside their families, and less than 15% had told their families.³²⁷ Clearly, being a member of the LGBTQ+ community in China, particularly if you are out, is very difficult. The above timeline illustrates that in addition to potential non-supportive treatment from family and in the workplace, members of the *tongzhi* (同志) community also need to be concerned about repression from the state.

As demonstrated in the description of Xi Jinping's background and rise to power within the CPC, he also has a very clearly defined and explicit vision for the future of China which includes a very specific point of view for the composition of the sovereign Chinese man and also how and where the country spends its capital. This includes promoting a "strongman" culture

³²⁷ "China's LGBTQ+ Community Seize Census Chance to Stand up and Be Counted." The Guardian. Guardian News and Media, November 26, 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/nov/27/chinas-lgbtq-community-seize-census-chance-to-stand-up-and-be-counted>; Being LGBTI in China – A National Survey on Social Attitudes towards Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Gender Expression § (2016). <https://www.undp.org/china/publications/being-lgbti-china>.

amongst Chinese men that make them more willing to do things, such as serve in the military or join the party, and also decreasing funding from elements of mass media that “promote” more effeminate behavior of men, as well as allocating these resources toward building up critical national industries such as the military and high technology. Thus, this chapter has demonstrated how Xi Jinping’s rise to power and his personal objectives have led to the current crackdown on LGBTQ+ peoples in China *and* how this crackdown is part of a broader set of systemic level actions and goals that are reducing the breathing room for civil society and civil society organizations throughout the country. In the next chapter, the Conclusion, the five key identified motivations behind this crackdown will be fully examined in order to explore why China has arrived at its current state regarding policies and perspectives toward the *tongzhi* (同志) community.

CHAPTER VI: Conclusion

Synthesis

The goal of this thesis was twofold; first to shed light on and explore the incredibly rich history of “homosexuality” in China which has often been overlooked by International Relations and Queer Studies scholars, and secondly, applying this historical context and the tools offered by queer International Relations theory, to explain the rationale behind Xi Jinping’s crackdown on the LGBTQ+ community in China *today*. Although the theory and historical context help identify different motivations underpinning the current environment in China, they also overlap in a number of ways, including the way in which the lens of viewing gender and sexuality as social constructions offered by queer International Relations theory is critical to a more accurate understanding of formations of identity throughout most of dynastic China, and is even relevant in the contemporary context. Furthermore, the vibrant history of same-sex relations in China, and how these relations were viewed through lenses of power and gender norms, and their intersections with Confucian ideas of morality in a relatively secular society allows for an expansion of what queer International Relations theory can do and help to understand.

Chapter Two began with an introduction and overview of queer International Relations theory, creating a framework to be applied in future chapters. This is followed by a comprehensive history of “homosexuality” in China, beginning with the early dynastic period, and ending right before the rise of Xi Jinping, which establishes the basis for the Chapter Five, a far-reaching account of Xi Jinping’s background and ascension to power in the CPC as well as a timeline that chronicles the progression of policies and actions related to the crackdown on LGBTQ+ individuals in China.

Specifically, Chapter Three analyzes the history of homosexuality during dynastic China demonstrating how, particularly in pre-Qing dynasty China, extramarital sexual relations were often viewed from the perspective of power and status, where the penetrator needed to be of a higher status than the penetrated. Although the stories from early dynastic China, particularly during the Zhou and Han dynasties focused mostly on the upper echelons of society and thus it is difficult to say with any certainty that attitudes towards “homosexual” relations extended past the societal elite, starting around the Tang dynasty the massive increase in poems and stories depicting same-sex love and intimacy indicates that these attitudes likely did extend beyond the dynastic court. Furthermore, starting especially around the time of the Ming dynasty, the emergence of male *dan* (旦) actors and the industry of male prostitution offers some level of certainty regarding the widespread nature of “homosexual” relations. Although it would be easy to reduce the emergence of anti-”homosexual” policies and attitudes in China to simply being a byproduct of Western imperialism and colonialism, Chinese history demonstrates that this phenomenon is far more complex. As seen during the Yuan dynasty (and even during the Qing dynasty, although less explicitly) sexually repressive policies were oftentimes related to a dynasty’s power being challenged by either internal or external forces and thus implementing policies aimed at tightening the space for those engaging in actions and behaviors that deviated from the norm were used to create a more stable and organized population.

Chapter Four describes how Western, Christian, morality and scientific influences in the fields of medicine and psychology did *also* contribute to an increase in “homophobic” policies and attitudes in China, particularly during the end of the Qing dynasty and throughout various periods of modern China. Ironically, while there were some links between sexually repressive policies in late-imperial China and early modern China, much of what is occurring in China today stem in

part from a desire to create a Chinese society that is inherently non-Western, as “homosexuality” is depicted as deriving from “Western influence” or a byproduct of capitalism.

While Chapter Five introduced the topic, what remains to be fully answered and explained is why Xi Jinping is cracking down on this community *now* and what are the CPC’s main motivations behind these actions. In order to answer these questions, it is critical to consider both the lens of queer IR theory, as well as the historical context particularly focusing on areas of overlap across these two perspectives

What Queer IR Theory Helps Explain

Queer IR theory illuminates a number of reasons for and motivations behind the current crackdown on LGBTQ+ rights and people in China. Among these are Xi’s recent consolidation of power, China’s increasingly revisionist nature as a global power, and the country’s authoritarian political system.

As explained in the previous chapter, over the past decade Xi Jinping has worked to consolidate his power within the CPC, surrounding himself with close allies and “yes men” which has also allowed his visions for China’s future (and his greatest fears) to become top of mind for Chinese governmental officials. Xi has become increasingly focused on his personal legacy and contribution to the future of the Chinese state and the CPC, and as a result has a vision for the ideal future Chinese society which centers around a relatively unified sense of a Chinese identity. In other words, this vision defines characteristics of the “right” type of Chinese sovereign man and how he should carry himself. To Xi, this means being country loving, military serving, and always subservient to the party. In practice, this takes the form of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA)

soldier that has long been popularized in Chinese art and society.³²⁸ It is not at all surprising that this would be a large part of Xi's vision given his difficult upbringing where he spent a number of years in the Chinese countryside to learn various lessons that Mao deemed necessary for a healthy Chinese citizenry.³²⁹

Furthermore, as noted in Chapter Five, Xi Jinping has spent much time thinking about the fall of the Soviet Union and was even quoted as saying: "in the end nobody was a real man, nobody came out to resist."³³⁰ Thus, for Xi it is a national imperative to promote a strongman, PLA type of Chinese citizen that will create the bedrock of Chinese society to weather any internal or external conflicts. This has taken the form of national education policies to make boys more "manly," Xi Jinping explicitly condemning "sissy men," and even Xi's large (yet failed) attempt to promote a vibrant soccer culture in China.³³¹ In a recent interview I conducted with the journalist Lingling Wei, commenting on Xi, she said: "he really wants to build up an army, wants to be strong in high tech and semiconductors, and he just has this bias against spending money on Hollywood-type celebrities and "sissy men," etc., and not diverting resources to what [he] wants to develop, which is the military [and] high tech manufacturing. He doesn't understand and he doesn't care."³³² While there is obviously no inherent link between "effeminate" behavior and homosexuality, there is definitely a common association between the two. Therefore, the current climate in China related

³²⁸ Steven Jiang. "Under Xi's Rule, What Is China's Image of the 'Ideal' Man?" CNN Style. Cable News Network, October 25, 2019. <https://www.cnn.com/style/article/china-masculinity-intl-hnk/index.html>.

³²⁹ Ibid.

³³⁰ Ibid.

³³¹ Allen, Kerry. "China Promotes Education Drive to Make Boys More 'Manly'." BBC News. BBC, February 4, 2021. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-55926248>; Chowdhury. "After America, It's China's Turn to Worry about Masculinity." Time. Time, September 10, 2021. <https://time.com/6096701/china-masculinity-gender/>; Andrew McNicol and Andrew Raine. "Xi Jinping Wanted China to Be a Global Soccer Power. What Went Wrong?" CNN. Cable News Network, April 7, 2023. <https://www.cnn.com/2023/04/07/china/xi-jinping-china-football-dream-fail-intl-hnk-dst/index.html>.

³³² Lingling Wei, Interview by Author, April 11, 2023.

to homosexuality can be partly understood as an element of a broader push to simply consolidate the Chinese population into a more narrow and unified “strongman” identity.

Secondly, and in addition to Xi’s consolidation of power, as many scholars have commented on in recent years, China is increasingly becoming a more revisionist global power that seeks to upset the US-based liberal world order and offer a radically different alternative. Daniel Drezner has written and spoken extensively about China’s more revisionist behaviors, including the rise of the wolf-warrior diplomacy that emerged under Xi which marked a dramatic shift away from the “peaceful rise” rhetoric and actions during the Deng Xiaoping and Hu Jintao eras.³³³ Policies, such as the Belt and Road Initiative, as well as broader strategies and categorizations of Chinese policies, like the Beijing consensus, are all indicative of the increasingly revisionist nature of this world power.

In attempting to upset the global world order and offer an alternative, Xi Jinping needs to create a society that is in diametric opposition to the construction of many Western societies. The prevailing myth of homosexuality as being established by a Western influence in China thus necessitates policies and actions geared towards countering this “Western” behavior. China’s motivations in this realm, then, are not that different from another major revisionist world power, Putin’s Russia. Recently in a widely broadcasted speech during September of 2022, Russian President Vladimir Putin suggested the West was “satanic,” rejected “moral norms,” and was turning away from “traditional” and “religious” values, largely in reference to its more liberal attitudes towards gender and sexuality.³³⁴ China’s current crackdown on LGBTQ+ rights parallels

³³³ Falci and Drezner. Daniel Drezner on the Global Economic Order Amidst Russia’s War in Ukraine and Challenges with China.

³³⁴ “Putin Attacks West as 'Satanic', Hails Russian 'Traditional' Values.” Reuters. Thomson Reuters, September 30, 2022. <https://www.reuters.com/article/ukraine-crisis-putin-values/putin-attacks-west-as-satanic-hails-russian-traditional-values-idUSS8N2Z80G1>; *In Full: Vladimir Putin Officially Annexing Four Ukrainian Regions at Moscow Ceremony*. YouTube. The Telegraph, 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XDdHRGcbffo&t=3170s>.

this speech based on the common motivation to be inherently anti-Western. As Lingling Wei said: “what [Xi Jinping] is trying to do now is to present the China model as a global alternative. He wants to very clearly distinguish what Chinese governance is from Western capitalism.”³³⁵

Through this crackdown, China is directly challenging largely Western notions of human rights, or at least what Xi perceives to be Western notions, and is asserting itself as a power that does not conform to the same social attitudes and policies. In Beijing, especially, the large number of Western embassies that visibly and actively work to promote LGBTQ+ rights, as well as similar actions taken by Western multinational corporations, furthers the narrative that homosexuality is a byproduct of the West and Western capitalism, and thus China must work against these initiatives to establish its own identity. Reports that assess human rights in China, such as the one published by Congress in 2022, which inflict Western views towards LGBTQ+ rights, might be working counter to their intentions by necessitating China to move further away from the West in an attempt to offer an alternative global model. As Linling Wei went on to mention in her interview: “From Xi’s perspective, what is driving him is this great competition with the United States, that is really a key driver for him and influences his policies.”³³⁶

Finally, the authoritarian political system under which China has operated for many years and which has been further expanded under Xi Jinping has its own reasons for inducing the current crackdown. In a rigidly authoritarian system where the party is the most supreme governing body and institution in the country, maintaining strict social order and control is required in order to maintain power, legitimacy, and control over the Chinese people and the country. The increasingly restricted space for LGBTQ+ people and organizations to live and operate can then be understood within a larger context of the CPC’s consistent suppression of all social groups and organizations

³³⁵ Lingling Wei, Interview by Author, April 11, 2023.

³³⁶ Ibid.

that are perceived as a potential threat to the party. Under Xi, China has been accused of genocide due to its forced detainment and sending to “re-education camps” of more than one million Uyghurs in the Xinjiang region.³³⁷ China has also essentially fully swept Hong Kong into the mainland network, including squashing any potential for future large demonstrations of dissent.³³⁸ Although on a less deliberate level than the previous two examples, the crackdown on the LGBTQ+ community is another example of Xi working to stamp out any potential for resistance and activism against the CPC from within the country.

The current position toward homosexuals is in part happening, ironically enough, because of the increasing visibility and prominence of the LGBTQ+ community in China that occurred during the end of the 20th century and beginning of the 21st. Particularly with the emergence of the internet in China and the HIV/AIDS crisis, the LGBTQ+ community substantially increased its visibility and presence throughout Chinese society, thus putting it in greater jeopardy as this increased prominence position it to be perceived as a more legitimate threat to the CPC. One example of this, as mentioned in the previous chapter, was the banning of the gay dating app Grindr in 2022. While there were likely a number of motivating factors behind this decision, considering that the app was back in U.S. hands during that time, the CPC would have had increased difficulty accessing the application’s data and asserting control over its functions. Thus, if Grindr were to become a place of social organizing and protesting against the CPC, it would be incredibly difficult to curtail. The consistent fear among CPC leaders of losing control and influence thus likely dictated this potential too great of a risk which led to the app being banned in a similar fashion to how Facebook was banned in China back in 2009 based on its ability to enable protestors to

³³⁷ “Who Are the Uyghurs and Why Is China Being Accused of Genocide?” BBC News. BBC, May 24, 2022. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-22278037>.

³³⁸ “China’s Xi Says Full Control over Hong Kong Achieved, Determined on Taiwan.”

organize and communicate.³³⁹ At the end of the day in China, stability and control always trump human rights considerations or increased social freedoms. When asked about the motivations behind China’s current crackdown on LGBTQ+ rights, Lingling Wei said: “Unfortunately, the biggest motivation is really control. There are no human rights to speak of in China, be you gay, lesbian, or heterosexual. The whole concept of human rights doesn’t exist in China the way it does here, in the United States.”³⁴⁰

The above three motivating factors behind Xi Jinping’s efforts to suppress LGBTQ+ rights can be explicitly linked to queer IR theory which posits that homophobia has been and is deployed by governments as a political tool to achieve various economic, political, and national security aims. Without queer IR theory, it would be difficult to trace all of the forces behind the current crackdown as well as pinpoint what *are* and *can be* political tools, such as homophobia, to achieve a state’s aims. However, the above motivations and reasons that this theory offers are not the only ones behind Xi Jinping’s recent actions. The historical context of “homosexuality” in China helps illuminate other – both related and unrelated – motivations and demonstrates the necessity to have this thesis grounded in *both* theory *and* history.

What The Historical Context Helps Explain

The history of “homosexuality” in China is a particularly interesting frame of reference to use in understanding the current state of LGBTQ+ rights in China. For one, this history both confirms and contests the messaging put out by the CPC that homosexuality is a product of Western imperialism and colonialism. Secondly, China’s incredibly long history also provides

³³⁹ Kristina Zucchi. “Why Facebook Is Banned in China & How to Access It.” Investopedia, December 31, 2021. <https://www.investopedia.com/articles/investing/042915/why-facebook-banned-china.asp>.

³⁴⁰ Lingling Wei, Interview by Author, April 11, 2023.

further explanations and predictions as to what the state might do when faced with significant external pressures or a need to grow the economy and secure the nation.

In contemporary China, it is clear that the Chinese state, predominantly through party-run media organizations such as *Xinhua News*, is pushing a narrative that associates homosexuality with Western influence and capitalism, similar to what was done by Mao during the Cultural Revolution. However, going back in time throughout Chinese history, particularly to its dynastic period, an incredibly rich and vibrant history of same-sex love and intimacy, that is unique and thus *indigenous* to China, emerges. Whether that be a relationship between an Emperor and a male lover of the Han dynasty, or an incredibly homoerotic poem or novel from the Tang dynasty, or the prevalence of male *dan* (旦) actors and prostitutes during the Ming and Qing dynasties, same-sex relations and acts of love and intimacy are not at all something that *just* emerged from the West, as today's CPC's messaging attempts to convey.

But of course, while this history contextualizes the CPC's current messaging, it does not completely explain some of the motivations behind these actions. Expanding the pluralized and/or logic discussed in Chapter Two, homosexuality – and then, relatedly, homophobia – can be seen as both an indigenized force in China *and/or* a product of Western imperialism and colonialism. While the first half of the previous statement was just explained, the second portion requires a study of the true impacts of Western imperialism in China to be fully understood. Starting towards the end of the Qing dynasty, a number of Western nations, including the United States, Great Britain, and others descended on China and began exerting considerable power and influence over the Qing rulers. One of the main areas of this influence, which only further expanded during the Republic of China, was the introduction of Western medical and psychological education and attitudes towards sexual orientation.

These perspectives viewed acts of homosexuality as a mental illness and thus individuals engaging in such acts were generally punished, as there was little to no support or resources for those designated with a “mental illness” during this time. Fast-forwarding to the opening up of China under Deng Xiaoping, the establishment of a foreign and concrete homosexuality *identity* had substantial impacts on individuals in China feeling it necessary to create their own, albeit more indigenized, category of non-heterosexuality, leading to the designation of the *tongzhi* (同志). However, and while it is difficult to find real scholarship on this topic, the process of “othering” by the state through condemning “deviant” or “perverse” acts and putting them in contrast to what was considered to be “normal” behavior likely also played a role in the formation of a relatively stable homosexuality identity in China. Thus, the West’s influence in China can alternatively be viewed as supporting homosexuality *and* homophobia, and thus, particularly for the former identity category, it has been easy – and even a necessity – for Xi and the CPC to crackdown on the LGBTQ+ community in China as there is clear historical precedence indicating that this community is a byproduct of the West, and China as a revisionist world power must root it out.

The second key area where the historical context helps explain some of the key motivations of Xi Jinping and the CPC relates to China’s actions and behavior during periods of external pressure. Throughout Chinese history, when the state has been faced with particularly contentious external threats to its power and authority, there has often followed a period of shoring up Chinese society, attempts to push harsh, nationalistic policies, and relatedly, limit free and open sexuality and gender expression. This occurred during the incredibly short-lived Yuan dynasty which enforced increasingly strict controls over the sex lives of individuals in an effort to bolster and grow the Chinese population to secure the nation (evidently unsuccessfully) against external (and internal) forces seeking to overthrow the dynasty. Furthermore, during the Qing dynasty where

emperors were desperately attempting to hold on to power and control amid an onslaught of Western influence, the relatively more fluid and open history of homosexuality in previous times seemed to turn a corner with more sexual repression and consequences for those that transgressed certain boundaries and sexual norms. Thus, given China's large swath of domestic issues as well as the increased potential for more direct conflict with the West, and particularly the United States, it is not surprising that Xi Jinping would be taking actions to attempt to secure the Chinese nation and, especially, the CPC against any other groups that aren't viewed as adding strength to China.

On a related note, as witnessed during the reform and opening-up period of Deng Xiaoping, there actually turned out to be a more repressive government attitude towards homosexuality as the country was trying to massively grow and reform its economy after decades of disastrous policies under Mao Zedong. Therefore, while China often implements sexually repressive policies when the country is facing external oppositional forces, this phenomenon can also occur when there are internal concerns related to economic growth and, relatedly, the population. Over the past few years, China's year-on-year GDP has fallen to its lowest point since 1992 – growing at only 6.2% in 2019 in comparison to 15% in 1992 – *and* China's annual growth rate for its population is now negative (at -0.1%), meaning its population is (albeit, incredibly slowly) shrinking.³⁴¹ These factors have caused Xi Jinping and the rest of the CPC to become increasingly concerned about the security of the state and party apparatus. Thus, confirming Lingling Wei's comments about where Xi believes the state should be focusing its resources, a small motivation behind some of these policies may relate to a drive by the party to improve its economic and population stability and thereby secure China's future growth. The historical context of China's rich history of

³⁴¹ "China's Economy Grows at Slowest Pace since 1990s." BBC News. BBC, July 15, 2019. <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-48985789>; Katharina Buchholz. "Infographic: Chinese Population Shrinks after Decades of Growth." Statista Infographics, January 17, 2023. <https://www.statista.com/chart/24837/population-and-growth-rate-in-chinas-census/>.

homosexuality, its simultaneously strong history of Western influences that brought in notions of both homophobia and homosexuality, and the way in which the Chinese state has responded in the past to both internal and external challenges and threats, all help shed light on why Xi Jinping is cracking down on LGBTQ+ rights now.

Final Conclusion

Through the above two lenses used to anchor this thesis, a total of five key motivating factors explaining Xi Jinping's crackdown on LGBTQ+ rights in the PRC emerges. First, Xi's consolidation of power and personalization of rule has driven his vision for a more "strongman" China to essentially become a national policy implemented and enforced by all levels of the party system. This includes Xi's attitudes towards what he calls "sissy" men and more effeminate men in society that are not focused on his plan of "national rejuvenation."³⁴² Secondly, China's increasing nature as a revisionist world power has pitted the party and the country in diametric opposition to anything that can be deemed Western. Third, and relatedly, Chinese history demonstrates that there is a precedent for homosexuality being associated with the West which provides a narrative for Xi to follow when condemning homosexuality as something that is a product of Western capitalism and influence. Fourth, the country's authoritarian political system and supremacy of the party necessitates taking aggressive actions against any individuals or, especially, groups that are perceived as organizing outside of the party system, and thus pose a threat to the party apparatus. Fifth and finally, the state and, especially the party, when faced with either internal or external challenges to its power, legitimacy, and control has a history of pursuing the most extreme lengths to ensure its continued supremacy. Across all of these motivations, we

³⁴² Chowdhury. "After America, It's China's Turn to Worry about Masculinity."

see how and why homophobia has been deployed to achieve various political ends, but also how and why states take actions to construct particular sovereign identities under the guise of national security. While there may or may not be personally adverse opinions on the LGBTQ+ community amongst the members of the CPC's upper echelons, what is illuminated here is that this crackdown is not just fueled by personal factors, but instead part of a broader and systemic level push by the party and the state to continue preserving its ultimate control over China.

Contribution to the Literature and Implications for Future Research

Despite the magnitude of what is occurring in China currently, there has been little to no true scholarship on the scale of what is presented in this thesis to not only present what is happening, but also try to explain and understand it. Thus, this thesis fills an important gap in the literature by answering these questions. My hope is that the information and insights offered by this thesis can then be used to begin asking a series of other questions, including how queer IR theory can help explain, not only the current crackdown on LGBTQ+ rights, but Xi Jinping's broader crackdown on civil society and other human rights abuses currently occurring in the country. Research can (and should) be conducted into how, predominantly Western states, can and do weaponize homosexuality under their framework of human rights, and also what this looks like for how Western corporations operate in the country. China's long history of "homosexuality" also requires more thorough examination by Queer Studies scholars as the idea of the socially constructed nature of sexuality is too often rooted in Western societies, such as ancient Greece, but what has occurred in China offers a completely new perspective for viewing sexuality. International Relations questions relating to why and how states construct certain forms of national identities under the guise of national security (or not) and how and why homophobia is deployed

are also areas for more in-depth research. As I continue paying close attention to many of these issues going forward, I look forward to seeing scholarly advances and an expansion of what the field of IR seeks and hopes to do related to this important topic.

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