SEXUALITY IN CHINA

HISTORIES OF POWER & PLEASURE

EDITED BY HOWARD CHIANG

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To Lois
INTRODUCTION

Writing the History of Sexuality in China

HOWARD CHIANG

BORN IN THE 1970S, THE HISTORY OF SEXUALITY HAS BECOME AN established area of critical inquiry, yet the most vibrant body of secondary literature in this field remains primarily concerned with Western Europe and North America. Over time, the field has moved decidedly toward a social constructionist paradigm that distinguishes erotic orientation from reproduction, views categories of sexuality as cultural constructs, and challenges essentialist understandings of sexual desire and practice as universal across time and place. Although studies in the history of sexuality in other regions have begun to mature in the new millennium, historians of Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and South America have engaged in serious conversations with historians of Western sexuality rather late. These dialogues tend to emanate from a more explicit interest in transnational, imperial, postcolonial, or global history. Consequently, the historiography of non-Western sexuality is often broached under the lingering shadow of the theories, categories, themes, and debates derived from European and American historical analyses.

The concept of sexuality poses a pressing problem for scholars of China, not the least because the word itself has no precise literal translation in Chinese. Nonetheless, for a long time, historians of China (and East Asia more generally) have produced in-depth studies on topics that are typically associated with the idea of sexuality in the English-speaking world. In this regard, the landmark contribution of Robert Hans van Gulik, Sexual Life in Ancient China (1961), has been heralded as a groundbreaking work, but it is also often challenged and revised for its Orientalist burdens. Feminist historians of China, such as Charlotte Furth, Gail Hershatter, and Emily
Honig, began to pay more explicit attention to sexuality in the late 1980s and 1990s, primarily in response to the growing influence of cultural theory on the study of women’s history. This arose from the earlier turn to social history, whereby the history of the oppressed subjects (usually absent in grand historical narratives) pushed historians to think deeper about the issues of power, representation, and language.

The focus on discourse, interpretation, and meanings, therefore, has defined an important agenda among historians of sexuality. French philosopher Michel Foucault’s *History of Sexuality*, *Vol. 1* has influenced many of the subsequent explorations of these themes in the history of Western sexuality. This has led some scholars to argue that sexuality itself is a rather recent phenomenon—a decisively modern product of history. Although the Orientalist overtone of Foucault’s work is no less problematic than that of van Gulik’s, the concept of sexuality as a Western invention continues to haunt the investigative thinking of Chinese historians on matters related to erotic pleasure, sexual practices, and the body. Even so, the social constructionist paradigm descending from Foucault’s work offers a useful template for the denaturalization of sexual binary categories that appear as ostensibly immutable and fixed, in the Chinese context or otherwise.

This volume brings together for the first time the perspectives of scholars who have helped shape the field of the history of Chinese sexuality in distinct ways, but who have not previously had the chance to come together and synthesize their varying expertise across different periods of Chinese history. While it does not claim exhaustive coverage, *Sexuality in China* aims to provide a useful tool for teaching, presenting a wide range of perspectives that feature the different temporal, regional, methodological, and theoretical strengths of the contributors. Presented in a loose chronological thread, the following chapters introduce students to some of the major debates, sources, theories, and empirical contours of current historical work on Chinese sexuality, from the ancient times to the present. Centering on the theme of power (an important analytic since Foucault’s impact on the field), the volume argues that despite the difficulty of translating the idea of “sexuality” into Chinese—or precisely because of it—the history of sexuality in China provides a promising platform for stimulating, robust dialogues with a broad interdisciplinary reach. The diverse and contested nature of this field encourages innovative methodologies, critical approaches, and the creative use of different sources in historical research on human sexual experience. As both Chinese history and the history of sexuality are growing fields, this book is the first of its kind to bring the two fields together with an emphasis on methods and historiography, providing rich directions for future research and debates.

**POWER AND PLEASURE**

In the preface to *Gender and Sexuality in Modern Chinese History*, Susan Mann underscores the repressive strictures of the heteronormative state as a central theme in her compelling survey of Chinese people’s modern intimate experience: “The prominent role of the government in defining gender relations and sexuality is a unique, enduring feature of Chinese history that sets the Chinese experience apart from other modern industrial nations.” Through their relation to marriage (or nonmarriage), for instance, men and women earned morally charged social recognitions. Although men and women bore an uneven relationship to the institution of marriage, the state still imposed an entrenched set of regulations on “acceptable” gender conventions. A famous example of changing state regulations occurred in 1950, when the New Marriage Law of the People’s Republic of China catalyzed an unprecedented divorce tide in China, with an estimate of over one million divorce cases in 1953. Although this may suggest a pivotal turning point in the undermining of Chinese patriarchy, many scholars have documented the uneven implementation of the New Marriage Law on the local level, as well as the enduring obstacles and predicaments that thwarted its full realization. Without exceptionalizing the Chinese state, this volume similarly maintains the family as a site intensely regulated by the state, where men’s control over women’s bodies contributed to the social differentiation of female agency and identities.

Chapter 1, by Debby Chih-yen Huang and Paul R. Goldin, treats marriage as a useful lens for viewing the socially imbued hierarchies of men and women. Through the prism of the state-sanctioned practice of polygyny, Huang and Goldin examine the enduring pronouncement of patriarchy and how it shaped Chinese women’s self-understanding and social positioning in subtle ways. Frequently justified as a means to increase fertility, polygyny, as it was practiced in China since the Bronze Age, sometimes indexed the symbolic value of a man’s wealth and status, which the elaborateness of a wedding ceremony would only capture in part. Ultimately, polygyny assured the social mechanisms by which women understood their status in society based on their role in the family. The difference between being a principal wife and a concubine, for example, had direct bearing on a woman’s inheritance rights and her maternal experience with the descendants of...
the family’s patriline. Social motherhood notwithstanding, a wife could secure her status in a polygynous household through a mother-son bond (which in turn shows that a son’s self-perception crucially relied on his unique identification with his biological mother). Yet, as Huang and Goldin also point out, the distinction between a wife and a concubine became increasingly fluid over the course of the Song and Yuan dynasties. As a social unit and organization of power relations, the family defined a realm in which the Chinese state thus exercised a flexible degree of governance. Even though the focus of their analysis is on early to middle-period China, Huang and Goldin remind us of the immense challenges presented by the sex ratio imbalance today despite the fact that polygyny has been banned by the Chinese government since the 1950s.

It is not surprising that surviving documentation of human sexual experience from the past is scattered and incomplete. When people disclose information about their sexual lives in a factual manner or metaphorically, public record—usually censored in one way or another—rarely captures the true extent of what happened in the bedroom (or elsewhere). This poses a significant degree of methodological difficulty for studying the history of sexuality. Furthermore, different social groups leave behind disproportional measures of historical voice, making it a challenge to deduce broader generalizations about erotic desire and sexual practice in a particular region or a given time period. These observations have long been acknowledged by historians of sexuality in the West, but they are equally germane to the field of Chinese history. Meanwhile, scholars of China often carry a double burden. While resisting the temptation to narrate the history of sexuality in China as a variant of Western modernity, they must also avoid romanticizing the cultural difference between China and the rest of the world as the basis for a more “tolerant” Chinese past. Bringing to the fore questions concerning historical evidence and practice, this volume complicates the form of attachments scholars develop to the sources available for their scrutiny and the kind of histories they write.

In chapter 2, Ping Yao provides an authoritative overview of the historiography of sexuality in imperial China, showing that the historian’s pleasure in history writing derives from the power of source discovery and a passion for hermeneutics. Yao surveys scholarship on sexuality in Chinese history through a close examination of how scholars utilize sources in their research, exploring ways that the availability and genre of sources shape key themes and trends in the evolving historiography. Scholarship on sexuality in early medieval China has focused overwhelmingly on Daoist conceptions of sexuality—a result, Yao explains, of the accessibility of a considerable quantity of Daoist texts, such as The Classic of the Plain Girl (Sunûijing), Secret Instructions of the Jade Bedchamber (Yufang mijue), and Liturgy of Passage of the Yellow Writ of Highest Clarity (Shangqing huangshu guodu yi). In the Tang dynasty, as the literati came to dominate the definitions of sexuality and the Buddhist discourse on sexuality staked its influence, an enormous amount of erotic literature developed; as a result, Tang sexuality scholars can cover a much broader scope and draw on a more diverse body of source materials. Research on the Song period, meanwhile, relies on more limited extant textual sources, and historians of the period frequently examine Confucian ideals of gender and sexual relations. Scholarship on sexuality during late imperial China has proven to be most vibrant due to two important factors: the maturation of the field of late imperial Chinese studies, and the period’s rich and engaging source materials, ranging from didactic texts and religious scripts to novels, plays, woodblock prints, court cases, and sex manuals.

In contrast to Yao’s historiographical survey, chapter 3, by Keith McMahon, employs the fine-grained approach of cultural history. It focuses on a single eighteenth-century novel, Preposterous Words (Guwangyan), to illustrate a common theme in pornographic fiction linking social decline and sexual disorder. The novel embodies this theme in the form of the impotent man and the sexually voracious woman, whom it portrays in grotesque and titillating detail. Only a man—ideally a monk—with a herculean penis can outdo her. What is this organ like? It appears in many works, and in Preposterous Words most explicitly: it moves and sucks and bites on its own, and no woman can withstand it. The literal form that Preposterous Words gives this phallus stands for the ideal male self-image cloaked within the pornographic imagination of the late imperial novel. But it is only the supreme monk who need have such an organ; the model man is more refined, never so crude. He is both a literary and sexual talent.

In theoretical terms, the distinction between the monk and the scholar is one between the ideal the man imagines he needs to be (the sexually skilled monk); and the ideal the man envisions in the social context (one who does his best given the pressures of existing in a society of other men and women). The monk never marries; he skips from one woman to the next, conquering them all, never tying himself down. But the man of normative society must marry. In the Ming and Qing novel, he marries the talented woman, but in Preposterous Words the blunt prostitute is his symbolically sightless but sublime female counterpart. Their coupling represents the defeat of the evil and corrupt society. The story of their romantic and sexual superiority provides the formula for the redemption of the social
order, a formula that lasts in literature until at least the end of the Qing dynasty. In a word, *Preposterous Words* interweaves ethics and aesthetics, using pornography—itself a powerful medium for exploiting but also arousing pleasure—as a critique of the sexually decadent world of the late Ming dynasty and a method for conceptualizing an alternative world of social and sexual harmony.

**SEXUAL MODERNISM**

When the Xinhai Revolution established the Republic of China in 1911, its social and cultural impact was immediately reflected in the changing identity of ordinary people. Men's cutting of the queue and women's unbinding of their feet paralleled the new fashions, etiquettes, rituals, and customs adopted in schools, homes, wedding ceremonies, and other public and private venues. Concurrent with the sweeping intellectual transformations of the 1920s and 1930s, natural science began to reauthorize the boundaries of gender, and sexuality emerged as an epistemic mainstay in political and cultural debates. “What emerged was a type of ‘lattice knowledge,’” to quote one of the earliest studies of sexual modernism in Republican China, “a body of knowledge in flux, characterized by interactions, overlaps and echoes, by constant change and endless combinations.” In the last decade or so, an outpouring of scholarship has illuminated the bold and colorful sexual culture of the Republic. This volume includes three chapters that deepen our understanding of Republican-era sexuality by showing how the modernizing rhetoric of the May Fourth period revolutionized the structures of sexual desire and thereby lent historical weight to such new sexual categories as “heterosexuality,” “homosexuality,” and “transsexuality.”

Informed by the social constructionist paradigm, historians of Western sexuality have foregrounded the historicity of heterosexuality and eschewed an understanding of opposite-sex desire as a naturalizing force or an immutable construct. In dialogue with this approach, chapter 4, by Mirela David, analyzes the philosophical debates on free love, eugenics, and individualism in 1920s urban China. These debates liberated heterosexual pleasure from the burdens and constraints of traditional (often Confucian) Chinese culture. In assessing the fascinating hold that British philosopher Bertrand Russell and Swedish feminist author Ellen Key had on the editors and writers of the *Ladies' Journal* (Fūnǐ zazhī), David argues that the reception of Russell and Key in May Fourth China deserves careful scrutiny: it helps outline a historical backdrop against which Chinese public intellectuals promoted a liberal vision with notable eugenic confines, even as they proclaimed an individual's right to love free of social bondage. Key’s articulation of a new morality—in terms of evolutionary humanism and as encapsulated in the unity of body and soul—was the guiding principle for Zhang Xichen’s editorial politics in the *Ladies' Journal*. Zhang and fellow editor Zhou Jianren’s theorizations of a new sexual morality incorporated Key and Havelock Ellis’s belief in the compatibility of humanistic individualism with the social outlook of eugenics. Following Russell, Key, and Ellis, these seminal Chinese male feminists envisaged the imperative of the robust individual as the harbinger of this new modern sexual ethics. In line with ongoing scholarship on the political pluralism of early Republican China, David’s chapter depicts the cultural authority of Western science and eugenic ideas as coconstitutive of May Fourth–era enlightenment, reshaping common attitudes toward proper gender expressions and the fulfillment of heterosexual desire.

Whereas David historicizes heterosexual romance, chapter 5, by Peter J. Carroll, traces a lateral genealogy of female homosexuality. During the Republican period, cities constituted both the site and substance of gender transformation; urban space both accommodated and contributed to the refashioning of modes of maleness and femaleness, including same-sex sexuality. Carroll’s chapter examines a key event in the distillation of Republican ideas regarding female same-sex relations: the murder of Liu Mengying by Tao Sijin and subsequent scandal in Hangzhou. The basic story is rather simple and, although lurid and fatal, not that unusual in terms of police blotted stories. On February 11, 1932, twenty-two-year-old Tao Sijin, a student at the National Hangzhou Art Academy, fatally stabbed her lover, Liu Mingyong, twenty years old, also a student at the academy. Liu was left dead on the ground with several dozen wounds, and Tao, covered in a mixture of Liu’s blood and her own, lay in a semiconscious state near her lover.

The ferocity of the attack was documented in police photos of Liu’s nude corpse, published in the media. The subsequent investigation, trial, and unsuccessful appeal by Tao were prominent news items throughout Jiangnan and beyond for over a year. Drawing on foreign social scientists such as Cesare Lombroso and Edward Carpenter, Chinese researchers such as Pan Guangdan, and a range of received opinion, commentators parsed the Tao-Liu case in a diverse set of popular and academic publications, including educational journals, newspapers, women’s magazines, and fiction. The media coverage captured the growing anxiety about the Xinhai Revolution’s dark side, construing the epidemic of same-sex love among students as a dire consequence of the expansion of women’s public presence. Carroll’s chapter extends the existing historiography of Republican-era homosexuality,
spotlighting the cultural absorption and dissemination of sexological ideas in urban media and revealing the limitations of conceptualizing queerness through the legal framework of sodomy (jijian) alone.21 The Tao-Liu case, meanwhile, imparts greater global historical texture to well-known lesbian love-murder stories in the twentieth century, such as the Alice Mitchell–Freda Ward case in the United States and the Mahin Paddirnazar–Zahra Amin case in Iran.22 

Historians, especially after Foucault’s seminal work, have tended to privilege science and medicine as the epistemic leverage for the formation of modern gender and sexual identities.23 Whereas Carroll’s chapter rethinks this relationship for lesbianism in the context of early-twentieth-century urban China, chapter 6 joins the work of historian Joanne Meyerowitz and traces the historical shaping of transsexual subjectivity in Nationalist mainland China and Taiwan.24 My analysis focuses on two widely publicized episodes of human sex change: the case of female-to-male Yao Jinping in mid-1930s Shanghai and the story of male-to-female Xie Jiashun in early 1950s Taiwan. Originating from different historical contexts, the two examples illuminate the significance of the urban press in influencing popular categorizations of gender and sexuality through its interaction with medical and scientific knowledge. Major urban newspapers and tabloid print media enabled writers with sufficient cultural capital to comment on these rare and fascinating stories of bodily transformation. Meanwhile, these published writings and their circulations provided other intrigued readers with an unusually wide range of perspectives on the topic. The press also became a central vehicle for the agents of elite medicoscientific discourse to engage with the wider public, filtering novel and complicated ideas about sex plasticity for lay readers. This social milieu unveils the underappreciated process whereby common understandings of sexuality were shaped not only by dominant secular discourses of medical science, but also by the participants in the media—a quotidian venue for voicing competing visions for themselves and the nation. In sum, sexual modernism in Republican China coalesced around coeval developments of heteroerotic, homosexual, and transgender identities, reflecting a restructuring of the relationship between scientific knowledge, mass culture, and sexual politics.

**MASCULINE ANXIETIES**

If the sexual revolution of the May Fourth period gave birth to such fictional but powerful characters as Ding Ling’s Sophia, a woman who freely expressed her erotic feelings through newfangled vocabularies, the image of a modern sexualized person was virtually demolished in the Maoist period.25 Between the 1950s and 1970s, men and women were encouraged to subsume their erotic subjectivity under the interest of the Chinese Communist Party state, leading many critics to characterize this period in terms of a pervasive “erasure” of gender and sexuality that contrasted sharply with the political heterogeneities of the 1920s and 1930s.26 The gender-neutered Red Guard figure epitomizes the ways in which the alleged Communist Party vision of gender equality was performatively embodied in the self-presentation of Maoist revolutionaries.

More recently, drawing on memoirs, fiction, plays, and scientific publications, scholars such as Harriet Evans, Wendy Larson, Emily Honig, and Rosemary Roberts have tried to “sexualize” the Maoist era.27 As feminist historians continue to debate on the recodings of gender and sexuality and their implications for the feminist cause in early PRC history, recent path-breaking studies have begun evaluating the effects of state transformation on men and their identities in the reform and postsocialist periods.28 The last part of this volume features the work of some of these scholars. In contrast to this, which examines the subjugation of women under patriarchy’s shadow, these final chapters put the spotlight on the evolving configurations of masculinity in the age of China’s rising status as an economic powerhouse and as HIV/AIDS becomes a pressing global health problem.

Chapter 7, by Shana Ye, challenges the dichotomy of socialist state oppression and postsocialist desire that pervades existing historical scholarship on gender and sexuality in the People’s Republic of China.29 Calling for a reparative return to what she calls “queer socialism,” Ye theorizes an alternative genealogy that equips the queer socialist closet with the hefty weight of history. Legal cases of sodomy have attracted a significant measure of critical attention, given sodomy’s centrality in historicizing male homosexuality; Ye instead proposes an approach that highlights the kind of historical injury embedded within these cases, exploring the ethical and affective investments scholars put into constructing historical narratives about Chinese queerness from the perspective of the global neoliberal present.30 By drawing attention to an important source type—the tanbai jiaodai (honest confessions) narrated by men who engaged in same-sex behavior during the Cultural Revolution—Ye delineates these narrative spaces as a queer counterpublic, in which subjects are coerced to speak about the most intimate spheres of their personal lives. Such “evidence” of queerness serves a function beyond the additive nature of representation. While it presents historians a supplementary understanding of queer existence in the Maoist period, it also underscores the value of privileging disruption in the search
for surprises and otherness, giving credence to reparative—rather than recuperative—imaginations of queerer and more diverse pasts.

Based on long-term anthropological fieldwork in Beijing and Chengdu in the 1990s and 2000s, chapter 8, by Everett Yuehong Zhang, explores the complaint of many Chinese men—both in the clinics of men’s medicine and in the general population—about the inadequacy of their sexual organs. Worry about male genital size dates back to ancient times, but China’s modern encounters with Western industrial countries, and the ensuing comparison with white Westerners, ushered in a collective sense of Chinese male sexual inferiority. Men’s exposure to pornography and public showers fostered a sense of penis envy in settings with other men; men’s fragility and anxiety were further elevated by their sense of being unable to fulfill women’s desires.

Instead of attributing this complex sentiment in post-Mao China to China’s semicolonial history, Zhang suggests that the Maoist socialist state, despite its fierce attack on Western imperialism, may be partly to blame, having created a false image of Maoist socialist utopic superiority that—contrary to its intention of strengthening China’s pride—exacerbated Chinese men’s self-doubt. Moreover, the widespread teleological logic of modernity contributed to men’s collective sense of inferiority, despite China’s rapid economic development and rise. Concluding with a proposal encouraging “enlightened confidence,” Zhang’s chapter reveals the ways in which men attributed their masculinity being under siege to China’s global self-repositioning and translated this general social uncertainty into a personal anxiety fixated on a physical organ.

China has a long-celebrated history of courtesanship that eventually led to a demand for prostitution among the merchant class that grew toward the end of the Qing dynasty. Courtesans and prostitutes were a sign of male nobility and an entitlement for men of the noble and merchant classes of imperial China. A change in attitude came with the rise of the Communist Party. Mao outlawed prostitution as a social evil and worked to oppress sexuality in China in general. Prostitution has once again emerged in post-Mao China—but under the global term “sex work,” translated as xing gongzuo. The approach to sex work in China has, likewise, adopted the global paradigms applied to sex work, which are largely framed by the HIV/AIDS movement. Mention of the term “sex work,” globally, automatically invokes images of marginalized women at risk for HIV infection.

Probing the often-overlooked detrimental effects of prostitution on heterosexual male clients, chapter 9, by Elana Uretsky, contends that such a perspective is counterproductive to sex workers and the aims of the sex work movement globally. The term “sex work” was developed to legitimize prostitutes as social contributors through their occupational role. Association with the stigma of AIDS, however, has once again resurrected the image of sex workers as carriers of dirt and disease, thwarting the goal of the sex work movement. In China, women from all classes—and not just the ones typically associated with poverty and marginalization—engage in the transactional exchange of sex often referred to as “sex work.” As Uretsky demonstrates, sex is often an equally relevant part of work for elite Chinese men living inpostsocialist China. These men utilize sex to demonstrate the loyalty necessary to access state-owned and controlled resources in a market economy governed under a Leninist system. For many, it is an unofficial part of their work. The exchange of sex in such contexts typically cements social relations, rather than occurring as individual behavior. Uretsky argues for an approach to sex work in China that applies the term to all people who include sex in the duties they perform as part of their work. This revisionist approach transforms what is normally considered a consumerist act of pleasure into something that ultimately serves an occupational role for men seeking economic and political success in China.

PERVERSE POSSIBILITIES

Covering a wide range of topics—polygamy, pornography, free love, eugenics, sexuality, crime of passion, homosexuality, intersexuality, transsexuality, masculine anxiety, sex work, and HIV/AIDS—this book samples a variety of sources and approaches in order to consider sexuality as a useful category of analysis in the study of Chinese history. Presented here is a snapshot of the state of the field, as well as suggestive points of departure for viewing Chinese history in a sexy, powerful, and pleasurable light. While the following chapters mark the rise of a new era in both Chinese studies and sexuality studies, they present only fragments of the larger history yet to be written. This volume does not claim comprehensive coverage. Rather, it tries to capture a new phase in the way scholars from different disciplines think about the past, showcase new directions in Chinese history and the history of sexuality, and provoke new historical interpretations of a complicated phenomenon. If Foucault was correct in claiming that “the nineteenth-century transformations made sexuality the truth of our identification and the basis of our becoming subjects,” what these chapters accomplish collectively is less turning sexuality into the truth of Chinese historiography than transforming the category of sexuality into an unpredictable, exciting referent for future inquiries into the past.
NOTES

1 For an early set of exemplary anthologies that helped to shape the field, see Snitow et al., Powers of Desire; Vance, Pleasure and Danger; and Duberman et al., Hidden from History. See also D’Emilio, The World Turned.

2 See Stein, Forms of Desire.

3 See, for example, Bleys, The Geography of Perversion; McClintock, Imperial Leather; Murray, Homosexualities; Stoler, Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power; Aldrich, Colonialism and Homosexuality; Crompton, Homosexuality and Civilization; Aldrich, Gay Life and Culture; Canaday, "Thinking Sex in the Transnational Turn"; and Buffington et al., eds., A Global History of Sexuality.

4 See, for example, Hinsch, Passions of the Cut Sleeve; McMahon, Misers, Shrews, and Polygamists; Pfugfelder, Cartographies of Desire; Volpp, "Classifying Lust"; Frühauf, Colonizing Sex; Theiss, Disgraceful Matters; McMahon, Polygamy and Sublime Passion; and Vitiello, The Libertine's Friend.

5 Van Gulik, Sexual Life in Ancient China; Furth, "Rethinking van Gulik Again."

6 See, for example, Furth, "Androgynous Males and Deficient Females"; Honig and Herschatter, Personal Voices; Zeitlin, Historian of the Strange; and Furth, A Flourishing Yin.


8 See Halperin, One Hundred Years of Homosexuality; Halperin et al., Before Sexuality; Sedgwick, Epistemology of the Closet; Davidson, The Emergence of Sexuality; and Traub, Thinking Sex with the Early Moderns.

9 See Murphy and Spear, eds., Historicising Gender and Sexuality; Rupp, Sophistries; Doan, Disturbing Practices; Lanser, The Sexuality of History; and Chiang, "Revisiting Foucault."

10 Mann, Gender and Sexuality in Modern Chinese History, xvii.

11 See Sommer, Sex, Law, and Society in Late Imperial China; and Sommer, "The Gendered Body in the Qing Courtroom."

12 See Diamant, Revolutionizing the Family.

13 See Herschatter, The Gender of Memory; and Santos and Harrell, eds., Transforming Patriarchy.

14 Mann, Gender and Sexuality in Modern Chinese History, xvi.

15 See Harrison, The Making of the Republican Citizen; Glosser, Chinese Visions of Family and State, 1915–1953; and Ko, Cinderella's Sisters.

16 See Wang, Women in the Chinese Enlightenment; Barlow, The Question of Women in Chinese Feminism; Chiang, "Epistemic Modernity and the Emergence of Homosexuality in China"; and Chiang, After Eunuchs.

17 Dikötter, Sex, Culture and Modernity in China, 12.

18 See Herschatter, Dangerous Pleasures; Sang, The Emerging Lesbian; Tsu, Failure, Nationalism, and Literature; Lee, Revolution of the Heart; Kang, Obsession; and Chiang, After Eunuchs.

19 See Katz, The Invention of Heterosexuality.

See Schwarcz, The Chinese Enlightenment; Mitter, A Bitter Revolution; and Leary, "Intellectual Orthodoxy, the Economy of Knowledge, and the Debate over Zhang Jingsheng’s Sex Histories."

21 See, for example, Wang, "Shame, Survival, Satisfaction."

22 Duggan, Sapphic Slashers; Najmabadi, Professing Selves, 75–139.

23 See, for example, Terry, An American Obsession; Oosterhuis, Stepchildren of Nature; and Minton, Departing from Deviance.

24 Meyerowitz, How Sex Changed.

25 Barlow and Bjorge, I Myself Am a Woman, 49–81.

26 See Meng, "Female Images and National Myth"; and Yang, "From Gender Erasure to Gender Difference."

27 Evans, Women and Sexuality in China; Larson, "Never This Wild"; Honig, "Socialist Sex"; and Roberts, Maoist Mode Theatre.

28 On rethinking socialist feminism, see Wang, Finding Women in the State. On the impact of state transformation on men and masculinity in the People’s Republic of China, see Kleinman et al., Deep China, 106–51; Zhang, The Impotence Epidemic; and Uretsky, Occupational Hazards.

29 See, for example, Rofel, Desiring China.

30 On historical approaches to Chinese male homosexuality based on the legal relevance of sodomy, see Sommer, Sex, Law, and Society in Late Imperial China; Kang, "The Decriminalization and Depathologization of Homosexuality in China"; and Wang, "Shame, Survival, Satisfaction."

31 See Henriot, Prostitution and Sexuality in Shanghai.

32 Najmabadi, "Beyond the Americas," 17.
“A PROBLEM OF GLANDS AND SECRETIONS”
Female Criminality, Murder, and Sexuality in Republican China
PETER J. CARROLL

“WHAT TYPE OF CRAZY AM I? I WILL NEVER FORGET LAST NIGHT...”
When I undid the frog buttons on her [Chinese-style] jacket, being next to her body made me feel intoxicated... we kissed and kissed until drunk, and I embraced her tightly. Heaven... made us enjoy such sacred love.” This sensual diary entry was read aloud to an almost empty courtroom at the Hangzhou district court in May 1932, after the judge dismissed the spectators overflowing the gallery due to the remarks’ “lewdness.” The occasion was the spectacular homicide trial of the diarist, Tao Sijin, a twenty-two-year-old female art student specializing in Western-style painting and art criticism at the National Hangzhou Art Academy. Tao was charged with the February 11, 1932, murder of the woman whose jacket she had removed and whose body she had caressed. That woman, twenty-year-old Liu Mengying, had been her girlfriend for more than three years and had also been an art academy student, a prodigy who excelled at all media: sculpture, Chinese ink and Western oil painting, and printmaking. Liu had also gained local renown as a published writer. The killing and the resulting series of trials—the case was appealed twice and eventually tried in China’s highest court—earned headlines such as “Savage Murder Produced by Same-Sex Love” and “The Untoward Result of Girl Student Same-Sex Love.”

Christened “the murdering miss” and, more trenchantly, “a typical Salomé” (after the 1891 Oscar Wilde play, a contemporary cultural sensation performed three years previous in Shanghai and Nanjing), Tao was portrayed in the media as a debauched, mentally ill incarnation of Wilde’s princess: one contemporary illustration depicted her in the guise of Salomé.
with Liu's head on a platter leaking blood. Tao had, in fact, mirrored this allusion in her diary, imagining Liu as Salomé and herself as her hapless prey. Nonetheless, Tao's savage act and her seemingly reckless abandonment to illicit sensuality reversed the roles in the public realm.

Wilde's aestheticism famously critiqued social conventions and aimed to "transform art into life." Yet the liberatory potential of realizing art as life—represented by Salomé and Tao, the art student—was counterbalanced by the violence of sexuality and desire, with actual lived experience outstripping theater: whereas Salomé had desired John the Baptist and had him killed, Tao had loved and lived with Liu and had killed her by her own hand.2

For the next several years, the Tao-Liu affair remained a touchstone for discussions of same-sex love between women, the particular menace it posed to schools and the greater nation, and theories of its origins—including the possible relationship same-sex love, along with criminality and various mental illnesses, bore to female physiology. The murder and subsequent press coverage of the sequence of trials both helped corroborate existing prejudices and establish an ascendant popular perception of same-sex love relations as deviant, tinged with jealousy and insanity, and potentially violent and fatal. Throughout this period, public discussions of same-sex relations often focused more on those between women than those between men. This pattern may be due to the belief that same-sex love was somewhat more prevalent among women due to various physiological and psychological factors, but it also reflects more general social anxieties provoked by the expansion of women's presence, and sphere of autonomous action, in civil society.

LOVE AND MURDER

Tao Sijin and Liu Mengying were unusual in several senses. In addition to being artistically gifted, Liu had graduated from high school at an early age and came from a moneyed, politically prominent Hunan family. Her physician father had served as the head of a Guomindang army hospital and was killed in a 1930 Communist attack on Changhai. Tao came from a less socially prominent Zhejiang family from Shaoxing. Nonetheless, she was familiar with leading artists and writers through her deceased elder brother, Tao Yuanqing. A renowned oil painter and graphic designer best known for his striking abstract modernist designs for the cover of Lu Xun's Call to Arms and assorted other books—he is now celebrated as one of the founders of modern Chinese graphic design—Yuanqing had taught at the National Hangzhou Art Academy.

Tao and Liu met in the fall of 1928 at Shanghai's Lida Academy, a modernist alternative school that boasted a veritable who's-who of prominent intellectuals and artists, including Tao Yuanqing, as faculty. Yuanqing subsequently moved to the National Hangzhou Art Academy, and his sister and Liu Mengying followed. Tragically, Yuanqing died of typhoid shortly thereafter, on August 6, 1929. His death was one of several personal losses—including the execution of Liu's father by Communists—thathad tested and sustained the women's relationship, which proved romantically passionate and emotionally tempestuous.3

From the spring of 1929 to the summer of 1931, the women lived as dormitory roommates. A court judgment on the case stated, "Their relations were very close, such that they had taken naps together under a quilt, leading them to develop same-sex love relations" and to commence a "sort of long-term association." In order to preserve their romantic attachment, they resolved to not marry men; they swore to refuse any offer of engagement and to remain together their entire lives.4

In addition to Tao Yuanqing, whom both women adulated as an elder brother figure, artistic mentor, and teacher, Tao and Liu were extremely close with another resident of Hangzhou, Xu Qinwen. A celebrated fiction writer and essayist, Xu taught high school literature and lived near the art academy. He and Tao Yuanqing, both thirty-something bachelors (Xu was thirty-four, and Tao died at thirty-seven), had been roommates for many years. The men's affective bond led to Tao Sijin and Liu Mengying both being on intimate terms with Xu, who became a surrogate elder brother and paid Sijin's tuition anonymously when she was short of funds. Following Yuanqing's death, Xu's constancy to his deceased friend materialized in a building that regularly drew comment in the press as "curious" and "unusual," if not "queer" (the latter term used in its original sense as "odd")—though also, perhaps, as a label for same-sex intimacy: a small shrine/memorial gallery space exhibiting Xu's collection of Tao Yuanqing's art.

Bereft of his companion, Xu asked Tao Sijin to marry him. When she refused, he moved on to Liu, who also rejected him. His alacrity in pursuing both women, one after the other, is intriguing, because Xu accurately understood the nature of their relationship. In an interview during the initial trial, he characterized their same-sex love as "developed to an extraordinary degree." In fact, he noted, the ardency of their affection exceeded that normally found between a husband and wife. He knew these things from his friendship with both. He had also read Tao Sijin's diary, which he declared to be so fine and ingenious in describing the women's emotional and carnal intimacy that it surpassed the celebrated book A Young Girl's Diary, which
LOVE AS A SOCIAL PROBLEM

The initial police investigation dragged on for almost two months before the state prosecutor filed criminal charges. Angered at the slow pace of the legal process, Liu Mengying's elder sister, Liu Qingxing, filed suit less than two weeks after the murder against Tao for the killing of her sister, and against Xu Qinwen as an accessory to murder. Her suit propounded a theory—which was adopted by much of the press and the public, not to mention the court—that, the women's longstanding same-sex love relationship notwithstanding, the murder was propelled by a love triangle composed of Tao, Liu, and Xu. The state filed criminal charges in April. In May, the Hangzhou district court found Tao guilty and sentenced her to life in prison, while Xu was found guilty of seduction and sentenced to a year in prison. (The state judged the evidence insufficient to charge Xu; he was convicted as a result of the suit filed by Liu Qingxing.) The verdicts were appealed, and the Zhejiang provincial court upheld their guilt and imposed capital punishment on Tao and a two-year term of incarceration on Xu. A second appeal to the National Supreme Court in Beijing reinstated the original sentences: life imprisonment for Tao and one year in prison for Xu.

Liu Qingxing's contention that her sister's murder was the result of a triangular amorous conflict resonated with the commonly professed notion that love triangles were the most explosive, potentially lethal pitfall associated with love. One editorialist noted that love was inherently dangerous: mutual love, jealousy, and murder constituted a baleful yet common combination. Love triangles were especially fatal because they compounded the awesome power of jealousy. They were invariably heterosexual in nature; the same-sex love component made the Tao-Liu case unique and was greatly responsible for its prominence. Men and women were both known to be capable of jealousy, but women were held to be especially so, for social reasons: given the restricted professional possibilities available to women, they could not help but make marriage, love, and sex the center of their lives. As such, marriage could not be totally free; it was not easy for a woman to snare a suitable man, and she must plot for a long time to land him. The murder could thus be viewed as Tao's strategy (perhaps with Xu Qinwen's encouragement, if not outright assistance) to rid herself of her main rival for Xu. Some popular versions of the murder made Xu the prime instigator: desiring to possess Tao exclusively, he connived to have her kill his main rival for her affections.

Xu's ostensible role in the murder normalized it by introducing male agency into the equation. The murder thus ceased to be solely or even

recorded the adolescent longings of a heterosexual Viennese girl. (The 1919 German original was praised by Freud, who thought it provided evidence for his theory of the transition from infantile to adult sexuality. It was translated into many languages—including, in 1927, Chinese—and read widely.)

Xu was not alone in recognizing the passionate attachment. Tao and Liu's same-sex love was acknowledged widely by their fellow students and teachers, even if they did not condone it. Tao's description of Liu's habitual jealousy suggests that their amorous bond was hard to ignore. "Whenever I had warm feelings toward classmates or friends, she became crazy and quarreled, especially when I would go outside with classmates to sketch from nature. Because of this, classmates avoided becoming friendly with me so as to prevent us from fighting." Both felt pangs of jealousy over suspected infidelity. At the time of the murder, Liu's chronic suspicion had cause. Tao had developed a close relationship with a female painting teacher, Liu Wenru, and planned to later travel with her to Sichuan. Liu had become aware of Tao's intention, and complained that Tao's affections had grown cold. (Tao did want to end things.) In the immediate term, Tao was anxious to visit her ill mother in Shaoxing. Liu Mengying begged her to remain in Hangzhou for one or two more days, to settle matters. Feeling sorry for Liu, Tao maintained there was no cause for a scene because her relationship with Liu Wenru was merely that of student and teacher, and she agreed to stay. They sat down on a sofa to discuss their situation.

The conversation—and subsequent murder—took place at Xu Qinwen's house. Both had stayed there at various times. Liu was there at this juncture because the entire academy, including the dormitories, had been closed due to fighting between Chinese and Japanese troops in and around Shanghai, some 180 kilometers northeast. (The conflict, known as the January 28 Incident, lasted from January 28 to March 3, 1932, and resulted in the demilitarization of Shanghai.) The women were alone in the house. Tao had been accompanied by her serving woman when she came to meet Liu; she had dispatched the woman on an errand to buy some cold cream in town when Liu went to take a shower. What happened next remains open to conjecture and was debated in court. What is incontrovertible is that soon Liu Mengying lay naked and dead on the ground, her body disfigured by knife wounds in some ten places; Tao Sijin, covered in Liu's blood and her own, lay near her lover in a semiconscious state. The gruesome scene was discovered by Tao's maid when she returned. The two women and their relationship thus entered the public realm as a homicide case and same-sex love scandal that prompted widespread debate over the prevalence and harm of same-sex love and the peril of romantic love, in general.
predominantly between two women. Instead, it could be redacted as a more conventional heterosexual crime of passion, or a mixture of same-sex and opposite-sex affection, jealousy, and hate. In fact, the purported love triangle between Tao, Liu, and Xu convinced some that the murder could not have been provoked by same-sex love. One woman from Hangzhou, Xu Meiyu, put this case strongly in the popular women's magazine Linglong:

We shocked people in Hangzhou can see that the ultimate cause behind this murder is sexual jealousy. We currently suspect that it was a love triangle because Tao had been close to Liu and previously proposed to her. Tao's family did not approve, for reasons that remain unclear. Xu then shifted his affections to Liu. It seems that Tao's jealousy and hate engendered this homicide case. His actions are inexcusable. If same-sex love were the cause, she would not have needed to act in this way. Same-sex love was not the cause. The danger here was not same-sex love but a more pedestrian and pervasive animus, jealousy.

Liu's death was therefore tragic but of no particular social significance: it was "lighter than a feather," just run-of-the-mill jealousy. Xu had two young women staying at his house. He was clearly up to no good, and bore some measure of blame along with Tao Sijin.10

During the Republican period, the movement to determine one’s own marriage partner—and a more general amatory discourse that generally exalted love and romance as the supreme fulfillment of human life—pervaded newspapers, literature, journals, plays, and film. The definition(s) of love and discussions regarding whether it promoted or hindered social progress were so vexed that the social debate broke down into broad pro-love and anti-love parties. Whether pro or contra, conservative, progressive, communist, or anarchist, all participants in this societal discussion generally agreed with the maxim that "resolving the problem of love is the first step to solving the problems of women." Much of the scholarship on this "revolution of the heart" has justly emphasized the positive, potentially liberatory effects of this broad social movement. Indeed, these transformations, and the potential of love to effect them, were widely lauded at the time. The Tao-Liu case, by contrast, charts the often-ignored underbelly of this revolution, which bestirred deep and pervasive anxieties about the power of love and other passions to disrupt and harm society and individuals alike.11 The fact that Tao had eviscerated Liu was beyond doubt. Nonetheless, the murder provoked a societal inquest as to whether society or biology were partially or fully culpable for the murder.

Much of the social debate was stimulated by testimony from the two women themselves. Scholars have accurately noted that Republican era newspapers provide tantalizing, although often frustratingly brief, records of same-sex relations among men and women. The Tao-Liu affair is thus rather unique in that the public record preserves a large number of sources, in addition to their diaries, that contain the voices of the two women discussing their intense, fraught relationship.12 In addition, Tao herself testified at length at the trials, gave interviews to the press, and wrote about the predicament of her love for Liu and her prison experience. The diary passages themselves, however, more than allow for other readings. Liu's diary, February 11, 1929: "Love is mysterious and great; same-sex love is especially pure in spirit. Sijin, you are a beautiful, pure girl; your open, enthusiastic character moves me so." Again, Liu's diary, November 22, 1929: "I often find this kind of love painful and I must reluctantly force myself to taste it. When I am more self-confident, however, I can order myself to seize and control it—yet this has no effect! The [incredible] power of emotions conquers me."13 Press commentary emphasized such passages as clear proof of the destructiveness of same-sex love, especially since the diaries and letters made it plain that the two had carried on sexual relations. At the same time, the press and wider public stressed that the diary entries were evidence of the troublingly fearsome power of passion more generally.

Writing in 1932, shortly after the Zhejiang provincial court had sentenced Tao to death, one woman writer noted that the guilty verdict had not resolved the issue of responsibility. Neither the law nor popular social attitudes actually valued life, so why then such a fuss over one, albeit horrific, murder? Should society bear some blame, or was the burden Tao's alone? Tao and Liu, she declared, were members of a "chaotic generation" that ignored their national obligations: "Their prime fault was that they forgot that they are elements of society." Tao's plight could be related to her exultation of love as mysterious, and her lack of understanding regarding sexual matters. Such unknowing zeal characterized youth as a whole but was particularly pronounced among women: enamored of romance, they ignored its dark side. In this aspect, Tao and Liu were hardly exceptional, but emblematic of their cohort. This ordinariness was responsible for the social panic the case bestirred.14
THE EPIDEMIC OF SAME-SEX LOVE IN SCHOOLS

The murder ignited longstanding concerns regarding the moral consequences of the growth of the educational system, especially the plethora of potential problems created by proliferation of educational institutions with same-sex dormitories. The implied naturalness, if not the inevitability, of Tao and Liu’s progression from sororal naps to long-term sexual relations resonates with contemporary concerns regarding the ostensibly “epidemic” of same-sex love in schools. For all of the descriptions of Tao and Liu as anomalous, diseased inverts, the anxieties provoked by their case partly stemmed from the uneasily acknowledged belief that such relations were potentially universally latent and could seemingly develop between any women at any time. The freight of same-sex love relations in education, girls’ schools especially, in early-twentieth-century China is highlighted by the fact that one of the earliest articles to discuss “same-sex love” in the Chinese press is a 1911 article in the Women’s Newspaper (Funanxibao). The pseudonymous male author, “Shanzhai” (an interjection meaning, “Good!”), issued a sharp note of concern that educators must craft means of preventing same-sex relations among young girl students, despite the fact that neither girls’ schools nor it would seem, same-sex love among female students were yet widespread in China. Rather, Shanzhai wrote as an oracle. Although the extent of development of female same-sex educational institutions in China was less than in other countries, in light of foreign experience, it seemed likely that same-sex love in schools (and elsewhere) would emerge as a discrete social phenomenon—and for Shanzhai, generally, a troublesome one—once the number of schools increased. In particular, for reasons of propinquity and cultural similarity, he expected that China would soon resemble neighboring Japan, where same-sex love among girls was said to be so rampant that “there is almost no student who does not partake in it.” In making this comment, Shanzhai was drawing upon a significant body of Japanese literature on the “problem” of same-sex love in girls’ schools that had accumulated since the advent of widespread state and private girls’ education in the latter nineteenth century. In other nations, such as Spain and Italy, social conditions ostensibly made women less prone to the pursuit of same-sex love, while in Arab countries and China sex segregation increased the incidence. Shanzhai did note that same-sex relations among adult women were legal according to the “current laws of civilized nations,” yet same-sex love relations among minors remained a legitimate moral, if not legal, concern.

The Japanese discourse on same-sex love in schools on which Shanzhai drew was, like similar discussions elsewhere, strongly influenced by the analyses of the British social reformers Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis. Their writings helped inform prevailing attitudes toward sexuality in China, as well, with Ellis being the more influential. Their key works, especially Carpenter’s “Affection in Education” (initial Chinese publication, 1923) and Ellis’s “The School-Friendships of Girls” (initial Chinese publication, 1925), significantly shaped debates throughout the 1920s and beyond over single-sex schooling vs. coeducation and the content and importance of sex education.

Carpenter and Ellis both argued that same-sex love was a naturally occurring and (for the most part) harmless phenomenon among adolescents. Both spoke of “love” as constituting a broad sweep of affects. In Ellis’s memorable words, “Passionate friendships among girls [varied] from the most innocent to the most elaborate excursions in the direction of Lesbos.” He also spoke of school same-sex friendship/love as a “love-fiction, a play of sexual love,” most often chaste, that prepared students to express affection in adult romantic and sexual relations with their opposite-sex spouses. Carpenter went further in his endorsement of same-sex love and suggested that it be used as a pedagogical tool for intellectual and general social and moral refinement and improvement. Although laudatory in his treatment of same-sex love in education, Carpenter largely treated same-sex love as a spiritual and/or intellectual orientation. His reluctance to praise or even discuss the physical aspects of same-sex love thus give his argument a surprisingly conservative cast: same-sex love in an educational setting was progressive and civilizing, only as long as it was noncarnal. Any physical aspect, whether between student and teacher or even among students, could thus be labeled problematic. Ellis was famously tolerant of youthful same-sex relations, although he saw a continuing adherence to same-sex relations in later life as a sign of incipient mental disorders and asocial behavior. He and many he influenced, such as the sociologist Pan Guangdan, who is discussed below, emphatically identified adult “inversion” as a psychological deficiency. Liberal acceptance of same-sex relations often contained a discordant note of censure.

SAME-SEX LOVE IN THE PRESS

“Our thinking is very juvenile. Previously we thought same-sex love was like ‘mounting the clouds and riding the mists’ [as immortals legendary for their swordsmanship would do], something concocted by novelists’ pens.
Now, in the wake of the Tao-Liu case, we know it to be real. This archly
disingenuous comment was one of several similar remarks that attested
to the clarion the case sounded in the public realm, accentuating a topic
that had theretofore often been consigned to brief, sometimes cryptic
social dispatches or lurid, hyperventilating reports. Histrionic claims to
the contrary, same-sex love was not absent from the pages of newspapers,
literary journals, or general interest magazines. The Tao-Liu case did, how-
ever, quite literally put "same-sex love" (tongxinglian'ai or tongxing'ai) in
the headlines. In the summer of 1933, the mainstream weekly the Eastern
Miscellany (Dongfang zazhi) declared that the Tao-Liu affair had made "the
problem of same-sex love" a hot topic for the publishing industry and that
authors had analyzed the murder and trial from all manner of legal, psycho-
logical, biological, and sociological perspectives.

Tabloid (aka mosquito) newspapers often featured stories that promised
to reveal the underbelly of modern urban life. Like their namesake insect,
the gossip rags and scandal sheets of the mosquito press were notorious
for being loud (but small), intrusive nuisances during their often short lives.
They promised to give readers inside intelligence on various mysteries
of big-city life, including advice on subletting rooms or avoiding fake medi-
cines, though all things sexual—e.g., gigolos, concubines, massage, and free
love—were more favored topics, with items on college assignations, student/
teacher romances, and the lifestyle of college coeds being perennial features.
Abetted by innuendo, writers detailed "unimaginable" situations, such as
male brothels or men kept by other men, for readers presumed unfamiliar
with such hidden realities. Female college students—as a recently consti-
tuted genus of young, privileged women able to live semi- or fully inde-
pendent of family constraints in dorms or near their schools, leaving them
free to interact with fellow students and others—were often the subject of
breathless, prurient exposés. One correspondent for Shanghai's Big Secret
(Damini) tabloid reported learning of a Beijing female college student who
had been living only who knew where while her parents and aunt thought
she had been staying with the other. How shocking! A series of articles
described female college students immersed in an existence of sybaritic
license. Living and studying in gorgeously appointed surroundings, these
women had the luxury of focusing exclusively on their studies. As a cohort,
they were lovely, elegant, and attractive, yet the things they learned were
anything but: Their studies often involved smutty books. They even indulged
in romances with teachers and male students.

The press treated homosexuality as so taboo that even generally staid
popular press publications like the Peiyang Pictorial News (Beiyang huabao)
would declare a story about a public row (heated words, a thrown glass, and
a slap) caused by a same-sex love "triangle" of four foreign women who met
unexpectedly in the lobby of a Tianjin hotel a reporting triumph: "The
unknowable is known!" Given the cultural fascination with female stu-
dents and their lives, magazines and newspapers were wont to ballyhoo any
story involving same-sex love between late-adolescent and mature female
students, especially if it involved tragedy or intrigue. One women's maga-
azine trumpeted that the widely reported 1929 Hangzhou suicide of a female
postsecondary student, Zhao Mengnan, was actually due to same-sex love.
When Zhao committed suicide by taking opium, the mainstream press
reported that family conflict and the demands of the school curriculum
had shocked her nerves, causing her to twice attempt suicide previously by
taking a sleeping draught before finally succeeding. However, "the news-
paper reports were incomplete and because we feel this matter is extremely
significant for women, we will report in depth and give you the left-out
bits!" Zhao was involved with a classmate, Cao Bixia, whom she had met in
secondary school. According to a classmate, Cao, "although a woman, had
many male traits and was much like a man." The two were inseparable:
"Otherwise, Mengnan would be despondent, like a cast-off lover." The two
addressed one another in romantic speech characteristic of a love letter
between a man and woman, with Zhao calling Cao "beloved" or "you"
(addressed to a man, with honorific overtones) and Cao dubbing Zhao "little
sister" or "my love." Cao Bixia, bowing to parental pressure, broke her prom-
ise to not marry. Fearing that Cao would be moved to divorce her husband
if she herself did not die, Zhao Mengnan committed suicide to avoid harm-
ing her. "Zhao Mengnan's death was the norm for same-sex love," one report
read. "From this example one can see that same-sex relations between class-
mates are more perilous than coeducational classmate relations!"

Reflecting on the emblazoning effect of the Tao-Liu scandal, a Social
Daily News (Shehui ribao) writer noted that by putting the term "same-sex
love" in the air, people were far more attuned to see this thing that "in real-
ity grows in the shadows, especially schools, barracks, factories, and churches,
places where men and women are separated." As a recent murder-suicide of
two American men in Shanghai, "intimate friends for several years," made
clear, same-sex love was volatile and affected more youths and adults, men
and women, and Chinese and foreigners than one would imagine. These
two murders confirmed that same-sex love moved people to greater levels
of obsession and disappointment than even ardent heterosexual romance:
"Love is virulent, same-sex love especially so. This type of love causes both
parties to give their entire lives, to bleed, to support it. This is especially
common among women. To clarify, same-sex love is the result of nervous morbidity, often with very unfortunate results. . . . Same-sex love is a serious social problem. It not only affects the social order but can interfere with one's career. . . . As a society we need efficacious, extreme measures to save people from it.”

For Tao Sijin, it was too late, although the writer did advocate a reduced sentence: same-sex love was a mental illness, so sufferers could not be held 100 percent accountable for any illegal behavior they committed. Her life sentence was excessive. The more pressing challenge was devising means to save others.26

**A MATTER OF NERVES**

That Tao had slaughtered Liu in a gruesome fashion was not in question. Nonetheless, her lawyers argued, there were mitigating circumstances: Tao suffered from advanced neurasthenia (shenjing shuairuobing), a condition of weakened nerves due to excessive stimulation of the senses by the clamor of modern life. The syndrome left one physically and mentally weak. Symptoms included fatigue, anxiety, headaches, fainting, and depressed mood. It also had more serious potential consequences, such as sexual dysfunction and lack of sexual libido due to the exhaustion of the central nervous system’s energy reserves. As a young woman pursuing higher education—and an art student, at that—she had almost inevitably developed neurasthenia. (Her gender, education, and career were presumed to make her less physically vigorous, more ponderous, and more intellectually and emotionally sensitive than the norm—hence her heightened risk.) Indeed, the press and medical specialists largely agreed that Tao and Liu both had the malady—and perhaps other illnesses—as would be expected of women engaged in same-sex relations. Tao’s condition was clearly the more dire, as evidenced by the murder.

According to Tao’s lawyers, her neurasthenia had left her nerves unable to cope with the strong emotions and mental and physical stress caused by her same-sex romance with Liu. Had she not been so afflicted, her nerves would not have acted in such a disordered fashion as to precipitate the murder. Tao, they argued, should therefore be found not guilty or held to a lower level of culpability and receive a reduced sentence. Evidence of Tao’s longstanding physical weakness was abundant, they maintained. Old letters demonstrated that she had long been prone to colds. This susceptibility to sickness, her lawyers argued, was evidence of the weakened constitution associated with neurasthenia.

If her lawyers could establish that neurasthenia had made her “insane” (xinshen shuaishiti), Tao would then, per article 31 of China’s criminal code, not be liable for the murder, although she might still be subject to restrictions of her liberty. Were she found to have been “feeble-minded” (xinshen haoruo), she would be given a reduced sentence. Should her lawyers only be able to establish that neurasthenia had affected her “state of mind” (xinshu) she could, per article 76, be given a lighter punishment at the judge’s discretion. Were the court to not accept her mental state as a mitigating factor, a homicide conviction would bring extremely severe punishment. The relevant articles of the criminal code addressed murder (article 282) and “taking the life of another . . .” As a result of a premeditated plan [or 2]. By dismembering, disemboweling or any other cruel or ferocious act” (article 284). The specified penalties were death, life imprisonment, or incarceration for more than ten years (seven to twenty years, if a sentence were reduced).27

Having suggested that Tao be found not culpable or guilty but subject to a reduced sentence due to neurasthenia, her legal team changed tack and alleged that she was actually afflicted with psychasthenia (jingshen shuairuobing), a condition marked by weakness of mind and characterized by phobias, obsessions, or compulsions one knows to be irrational. This second diagnosis may have been genuine, or it may have been a tactical move to bolster her defense by claiming that she suffered from a less common, more virulent condition. At first glance, the two could be confused, but they were distinct, her lawyers noted. Tao therefore required immediate medical attention—first, to determine definitively the illness or combination of illnesses that left her physically and mentally susceptible to commit murder. Second, she needed immediate treatment—for psychasthenia, according to her lawyers.

Liu Qingxing dismissed as absurd the notion that either condition could be valid grounds for reduced culpability. Psychasthenia, she declared, was a common condition. According to medical science, it was not an illness that could produce insanity. Neurasthenia, she opined, should provide no better defense. “If one is able to kill someone and receive a lesser sentence due to neurasthenia,” she declared, “then everyone is free to murder others and receive a lesser sentence.”28 Speaking for her family, Liu Qingxing suggested that Tao had developed neurasthenia in the two months since the attack and that she had not been so afflicted when she committed the murder. Liu Qingxing’s skepticism undoubtedly sprang in part from her conviction that Tao’s evident guilt deserved the severe punishment prescribed by the criminal code. (The court would, in the event, reject the neurasthenia/psychasthenia defense of Tao’s lawyers.) Liu’s sophisticated familiarity with
psychiatric diagnoses of psychasthenia and neurasthenia may have reflected knowledge gleaned from her years spent studying in Japan, where psychiatry was far more developed and had permeated popular culture to a greater extent than in China. Neurasthenia had been prevalent there more than a decade before it had attracted widespread alarm in China. Japanese scientific authorities and the general public had recognized it as epidemic in same-sex schools and debated the appropriate means of redressing this "social problem" for more than two decades.29

The possible effects of neurasthenia were debated in the press and in court. Some doubted that neurasthenia itself could be the cause, as Tao seemed to suffer from a mental illness, not just a problem of nerves. Orthodox opinion held that the condition's effects were less pronounced and virulent than hysteria. Neurasthenia often developed over a long period, yet Tao had been a successful art student for several years. How could that be possible? Could an illness develop and manifest in a moment of passion? One could also argue that a confused, weak state of mind was distinct from neurasthenia. A report in the Shanghai Eastern Times (Shibao) explained, "There are many wasting illnesses of the mind and types of hysteria: neurasthenia, brutal debauchery, madness, severe anxiety, hereditary madness, slowly developing madness." To make sure that the "law was applied in accord with twentieth-century science" she would need to be examined by a forensic specialist.30

Neurasthenia was originally described in 1869 by the American neurologist George Beard as an ailment predominantly affecting middle-aged businessmen whose nerves were overwhelmed by the excessive stimulus of urban life and the rough-and-tumble world of US capitalism. As a result of the disease's etiology and Beard's publications, especially his 1881 book American Nervousness, in Chinese and other languages it was commonly known as the "American disease." (Indeed, a 1930 article maintained that Americans continued to suffer the highest incidence of the disease.) Despite its American pedigree, diagnoses of neurasthenia became commonplace throughout Western Europe during the 1880s and by the 1890s were frequent in Japan. Neurasthenia quickly became an index of the "level of civilizational progress," in the words of one Chinese science writer. "As sensations and desires the world over grow ever more complex, competition more virulent, daily there are more neurasthenics." It thus acquired an additional appellation: the "civilization disease."31

For many, Tao's case highlighted the menace neurasthenia posed to Chinese youth. During the course of its global spread, it had transformed into an especial danger for elite intellectual youth (i.e., people who had achieved puberty and continued with their studies). A 1935 analysis warned that some 53 percent of American upper-division students suffered from debilitating neurasthenia. While there were no authoritative statistics on its incidence in China, given the state of the environment, family, schools, nation, and society, its rate among Chinese students was thought likely to be greater. Indeed, a 1934 five-month Tainjin medical study concluded that 75 percent of students had neurasthenia. Of those afflicted, 95 percent were young students, seemingly middle school and high school age. Although not conclusive, these statistics gave a sense of the problem weakened nerves posed for China. Most discussions of neurasthenia focused on its reported harm to male sexual function—masturbation, seminal emissions, premature ejaculation, and erectile dysfunction were putative disorders and symptoms of "sexual neurasthenia"—and, hence, negative effect on human reproduction.32

During the Republican period, Chinese political and social elites—like their counterparts in Europe, North America, Japan, and elsewhere—were obsessed with improving the intelligence, health, and general fitness of the national population via eugenics. This scientific approach to managing human reproduction aimed to prevent national degeneration due to the noxious genetic and cultural influences of the uneducated, the infirm, and others deemed undesirable. The eugenic project therefore required that men and women, especially the healthy and highly educated, contribute to the refinement of "race-culture" by marrying and producing healthy children. Female neurasthenics could, like male sufferers, experience impotence and lack the energy sufficient to produce healthy children. They might also suffer pains in their uterus and be ill due to secretions from the womb, among a host of other maladies. Some authorities warned that women—wealthy young students, in particular—were especially vulnerable to the disease due to anemia linked to unregulated, heavy menses and the alleged feminine propensity for sentimentality, excitability, and excessive empathy with classmates and others. The intimacy of school-life, where all students studied and lived in close proximity, fostered the transmission of nervous contagion, and many, if not most, female secondary and postsecondary students were believed to suffer from neurasthenia.

By diminishing one's appetite for sex, neurasthenia was viewed as threatening a biological imperative. One physician observed, "The desire for food and sex are strong. The former preserves one's own life, the latter the species. Thus the imperative for heterosexual intercourse to produce children can be viewed as hardwired... One can even see the loss of sexual desire as of greater significance than loss of appetite for food." Articulating
a view that might not be uncommon today, he continued that even those
afflicted with temporary sexual dysfunction were deeply affected. Reflect-
ing contemporary truisms of evolutionary biology and psychology (includ-
ing Freud’s emphasis on the libido as life energy), he continued, sexual
dysfunction was “akin to losing the ‘light of human life.’ It is as if one had
committed suicide.” He noted that purportedly more than 90 percent of
the letters sent to the magazine Youthful Health (Qingnian weisheng) com-
plained of neurasthenia.35

Genetic and environmental factors might increase one’s risk of neur-
asthenia, but most cases were attributed to lifestyle. Youthful men and women
the world over were prone to putting themselves at risk of overstimulating
their nerves via thinking morbid or unusual thoughts, visiting prostitutes,
taking opium, drinking too much tea, or, the most pernicious vice, exces-
sively masturbating. Some social commentators argued that the Chinese
population was particularly susceptible to developing both neurasthenia
and same-sex love as a result of the isolation of men and women from one
another in society, especially in schools—most of which were single-sex.
Unable to interact with members of the opposite sex, young men and women
were wont to become sexually frustrated. The consequent “blockage of the
genitals” “caused even a happy life to acquire a gray layer” of psychic pain.
Intemperate masturbation and neurasthenia were the almost inevitable
result. In women, the two were strongly associated with strong fits of suspi-
cion and jealousy, as present in the relationship between Tao Sijin and Liu
Mengying.36

Chinese society had long enforced gender segregation—but, according
to one analyst, “Previously it was the custom in our country to marry early,
which made this malady [of same-sex love] rare. Recently, for a variety of
reasons, the age of marriage has been successively delayed and [same-sex]
group living has increased greatly. If we wish to continue, under these con-
ditions, preserving our traditional separation of the genders, this evil vice
will become extremely prevalent.” A popular advice columnist similarly
maintained, “As for why same-sex love is so common in China and rarely
seen abroad, we think that that this is due to the fact that in European and
American countries social intercourse is open. Men and women are com-
pletely free in their romantic relations. As a result, same-sex love develops
less commonly than in China.”37

Schools, which were generally single-sex institutions, were believed to
be the most significant milieu for the development of same-sex love rela-
tions. Although some might treat the phenomenon as a joke, the prolific
commentator on women’s issues Yan Shi wrote in the early 1920s, “we should
be concerned about the grave harm caused by same-sex love to young men
and women.” Those who developed it strongly purportedly felt revulsion
toward heterosexual love and were unable to bear the prospect of “normal
married life.” Of course, same-sex relations could develop outside the
school environment, as well. Guangdong was famous for “sworn sister-
hoods” in which women “pledge to not marry [but rather live together, and
work to support themselves in] a life of same-sex love,” Yan explained. “If
subjected to extreme pressure to marry, women sometimes kill them-
selves jointly. Although locals have promoted methods to prevent it, they
have been unable to stamp out the practice.” The potential of same-sex love
in secondary schools and institutions of higher education to be similarly
intractable demonstrated that “all parents and teachers cannot ignore this
reality.” Given that youth brought the stirrings of romance, it would be best
to promote coeducation to prevent girls from developing “emotional girl
friends” and boys “comrades.”38

The sociologist Pan Guangdan noted that Tao Sijin demonstrated the
intractable nature of same-sex love as a social problem. Coeducation was no
panacea. Since Tao had continued in her same-sex love relations well after
adolescence, when one might expect and permissively excuse such behav-
ior, there was a good chance that her deviancy was congenital. The fact that
society could allow a person not in full control of her faculties to decline
mentally until she turned, seemingly in an instant, from being a loving part-
ner to murdering her lover with ferocious violence demonstrated a lack of
responsibility on society’s part. Not her own. Thus, while the murder pro-
vided chilling evidence of the pathology of same-sex love in adults, its true
relevance lay in exposing societal complicity in failing to avert the develop-
ment of Tao’s fall into murderous rage—and, via the extension of his logic,
in allowing her to carry out adult same-sex relations.

The dormitories at the National Hangzhou Art Academy were single-
sex, yet the institution was coeducational—as was the Shanghai school at
which the women met. They nonetheless were drawn to “share the same
pillow and coverlet.” This basic fact refuted theorists who opined that
coeeducational environments would stem the development of same-sex
love. Tao and Liu had studied in such “nondeviant” environments, so their
inversion, Pan argued, was innate and worthy of greater social compassion.
He, however—like his intellectual hero Havelock Ellis, the Austro-German
psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing (author of the twelve-edition Psychop-
athia Sexualis, a foundational forensic study of sexual pathology), and
others—still judged such behavior abnormal. Schools and society as a whole
should provide better supervision of students to identify and arrest—or
isolate—deviance before it led to murder. How many social problems might actually be avoided if authorities knew how many times a week students masturbated? The formative power of sexuality over all aspects of human morphology thus necessitated that school authorities exercise panoptic-like surveillance over their pupils. Pan Guangdan’s charge, at once permissive and patriarchal, if not benevolently authoritarian, revealed the level of social panic regarding the latent possibilities of female same-sex love in schools. Surveillance of students might prevent same-sex love relationships (like that between Tao and Liu) that occurred beyond early to middle adolescence, when they might be permitted as emotional preparation for male/female relations, and threatened to develop into pathological deviancy. If society had demonstrated a serious commitment to bettering itself and preventing its constituents from harming themselves or others, Tao Sijin and Liu Mengying would have been no more than classmates: any congenital tendencies for same-sex love would have remained latent. Pan’s vision of the good society, which exercised custodial care toward all citizens, was at odds with the realities of Republican China.

FEMALE PHYSIOLOGY, SAME-SEX LOVE, AND CRIME

A complementary strain of medical commentary attributed Tao Sijin’s same-sex love feelings and her murderous impulses to female physiology. As such, women in same-sex love relations and female criminals, including Tao herself, deserved greater societal understanding. At the same time, recognizing the physiological basis of “social problems” like crime and same-sex love could allow society to rid itself of them.

Dr. Gu Yin, a well-known commentator on mental and sexual health and a physician at Suzhou’s mental and venereal disease asylum, used the Tao-Liu case to explicate how homosexuality was “a problem of glands and secretions” that began in utero. According to Gu, one begins life with male and female sex cells; “if, during puberty, the female cells within a boy’s glands do not decrease, his male sex cells will atrophy. Although a male, his secondary sexual characteristics and libido will have some female aspects, and he will become a homosexual. The opposite is true for women whose male sex cells do not diminish.” Advanced authorities, he noted, advocated removing the testicles or ovaries of homosexuals and replacing them with those of heterosexuals to cure “this abnormal sexual orientation.” Physiology provided the solution for mental and physiological problems.

The direct link between female reproductive organs and criminality revealed that violence like Tao’s slaying of Liu had physiological roots. “One can see female sexuality as an appendage of the ovaries,” Gu declared. “Indeed, everything that makes a woman a woman is found in her ovaries. Complexion, long beautiful hair, soft manner, light tinkling voice, purity, and more—these are all woman’s beauty, and caused by the sexual hormones secreted by gonads”—as was a propensity for criminality. Drawing on the work of the Italian psychiatrist and criminologist Cesare Lombroso (1835–1909), whose writings on crime argued that criminality was inherited, Gu noted that famous female criminals were found to have unusual menses. It was no coincidence, Gu continued, that many had abnormal reproductive organs. Studies had established that women often committed crimes when they were menstruating: changes in body chemistry and blood pressure affected the brain. “Menstruation can negatively affect every normal woman,” Gu proclaimed. “It is especially deleterious to the undernourished and the mentally ill.” Emotions are magnified; social disturbances, suicide, and theft—and, in the extreme case of Tao, murder—become more prevalent. Yet Tao’s actions were not unprecedented. Gu noted that Richard von Krafft-Ebing told of “a woman with a strong genetic disposition for mental illness who became unusually concupiscent during her menses, inducing same-sex love. Rejected by her girlfriend, she then murdered her.”

Women’s physiology and mental outlook clearly differed from men, he concluded. In particular, the influence their reproductive organs worked on their minds made them relatively easily susceptible to criminal impulses. Should such scientific knowledge be part of the legal calculus when considering criminal culpability? In civil law women generally had an inferior legal status to men, and they possessed fewer property rights. Yet criminal law held them to the same standard as men. “Speaking from a medical perspective,” Gu propounded, “this equality is inappropriate. Should they not be more protected?” Tao Sijin’s sentence might merit reconsideration.

Shortly after the initial trial, Tao’s defense lawyers received a lengthy missive of more than ten pages that was subsequently published in the Eastern Times. The correspondent, an unnamed male “renowned doctor” from Anhui, wrote an impassioned apology. Tao deserved commiseration and a reduced sentence, if not exoneration, for she was a victim of both her physiology and the age—“a transitional state, caught between new and old mores and visions of society.” He counseled the lawyers that she must be examined by a qualified physician like himself, who should be advised to scrutinize her menstrual cycle and hymen: female physiology provided the key to understanding female mentality.

Voicing a common refrain, the doctor characterized the murder and the women’s same-sex love as unusual, even extreme, although their plight was
physiological impulses, environmental influences, and psychological shocks caused by sexually suggestive messages prevalent in urban Chinese society left youth open to indulging in "illusory sexual encounters (such as same-sex love and fantasizing while masturbating)." Such practices were harmful, but anyone afflicted with a similar mental outlook would likely be unable to escape the fate of Tao and Liu. The case therefore deserved careful study, which might revolutionize understanding of psychology and crime and spur legal and/or medical reform.

The doctor justified the necessity of a medical exam by citing foreign forensic practice: "In Western civilized nations, when white female criminals are arrested for instances of arson, assault, and murder, a medical professional gives them a physical and psychiatric evaluation. Physicians' reports demonstrate that 80 to 90 percent are either menstruating or suffering from abnormal pathology associated with menopause." Such results helped clarify how Tao, a highly educated woman whom one would not associate with criminality, became a fearsome murderer: "She was unfortunately afflicted with these biological impulses and stimuli—pathological sexual ones that caused her criminal behavior." In fact, her elite education made her especially pitiful: Despite her learning and breadth of knowledge, she suffered from the lack of courage to jettison the traditional morality of female chastity. Why else would she have confided, "I have already become a broken criminal," in her diary? The doctor addressed an impassioned appeal to Tao herself: "Ah, Tao Sijin, sexual desire is a universal human trait. It is sacred and no bizarre object of shame. . . . However, old morality of human society and custom can make people, when they discover their sexuality, feel forced into enacting aberrant sexuality. . . . Your writings recognize that you both are victims sacrificed to the age, so why be so uncomprehending, so lacking in courage?" Although permissive, the doctor, one of Tao's most sympathetic defenders, assumed that her three-year relationship was aberrant. Given their educational attainment and artistic talent, Tao's and Liu's same-sex attachment ultimately could only be attributed to the dark force of traditional morality. Virginal shame had forced them on the path of same-sex love, which had depleted their bodies and minds, leading to murder.

The physical exam, he specified, must address several key factors. Was Tao's hymen whole, or had it deteriorated so that there was nothing left; or was there light scarring from tearing? Similarly, "do the lips of her vulva show the luster of a virgin, or are the veins somewhat pronounced and the color and luster liver-like? Or are they notably large and elongated, with the opening gaping?" A similar raft of questions followed, regarding the clitoris and other genitals and menstruation, to establish whether excessive masturbation or her unique individual physiology had played a role: were her internal reproductive organs healthy, or might disease or other flaws have affected her state of mind, perhaps precipitating the murder? A similar inspection of Liu's fresh corpse might have provided physiological evidence of her physical and mental state. In the end, a physical exam might demonstrate that Tao's same-sex and murderous passions largely resulted from female hormones and menstruation. Despite his opinion of the aberrant, if not pathological, state of the women's attachment, this physician affirmed their affection as sacred. Tao's plight—that is, her sense of entrapment, shame, and mortal fury—were products of traditional morality. Physiology might provide the basis of human mentality, but social forces could profane even the sacred and make it toxic.39

Writing a couple of weeks after these two self-proclaimed experts, Pan Guangdan noted that Tao had yet to receive any of the urgent medical attention she had long required. Neither the legal system nor the collective of jurists understood their proper obligations. (Pan likely would not have accepted the above two physicians as medically qualified. The Suzhou insane asylum, he wrote, mainly offered palliative care and lacked scientific equipment.) His optimism that the case might spur a more scientifically accurate and humane treatment by the law and greater society of those with abnormal psychology seemed unrealized. Pan decried the fact that only two people in the entire country had the specialized foreign training to be "truly qualified" in the treatment of sexual psychology, let alone sexual criminal matters. Neither participated in the trial. Nor had experts in criminal psychology. Nor were prison authorities required to provide treatment to Tao while in prison. Worse yet, the case had inspired unenlightened pronouncements in the national legislature, the Legislative Yuan. Zhang Mojun, a female revolutionary and Legislative Yuan member (one of only two active women legislators), was offended by the violence of Liu's murder and the lesbian nature of the women's relationship. She proclaimed that she would have imposed death. (The Zhejiang provincial high court agreed with her when the case was appealed.) Pan ironized that Zhang seemed ideally qualified for the present legal system: unenlightened, bombastic, and illogical.40

The bankruptcy of the legal system notwithstanding, how should society as a whole attempt to deal with Tao's mental condition? There were several clear options: pronounce a lighter sentence; provide her with medical therapy in prison; or perhaps place her in isolation, so as to block out noxious stimuli. Pan favored vigorous therapy, although credentialed psychiatric medical treatment was unlikely. It was essential to prevent Tao
from developing new same-sex love relations, since her previous liaison had helped precipitate her insanity. One must also consider whether Tao would be allowed to reenter society, reenroll in school, and frequent public places. "Who," he asked, "would prevent her from again developing same-sex love, engaging in lesbian sexual relations, and again committing murder?" No one. The chance of her being found redeemable and able to live outside the Zhejiang prison seemed nil. In the meantime, she sat in her cell, awaiting her fate.

TAO SIJIN IN PRISON

By the time the Supreme Court in Beijing vacated the capital sentence imposed by the Zhejiang provincial high court and reimposed the original penalty of life imprisonment handed down by the Hangzhou district court, Tao had been in prison for over two years. She was by then a less public figure: her letters to the press and interviews with journalists had become rare. She applied for amnesty and was denied. After a significant period in prison, she started to express remorse. In late 1933, she adopted orthodox Buddhist precepts, abstaining from meat and becoming the disciple of a Buddhist master. She took to chanting Buddhist sutras morning and evening, for the merit of Liu Mengying and her own penance. She also began writing out sutras in a fine calligraphic hand on spirit paper, which she burned to benefit ghosts, release souls from Hell, and to expiate her sins. She became so devout that in early May 1936, she took initial vows as a nun. The Buddhist press reported her religious awakening and wrote that her seeming recovery revealed that her same-sex affection was not so pathological as to make an incorrigible homosexual. She did not display the physiologically disordered brain that would afflict one permanently drawn to same-sex love. If she had, she would not have recovered her sanity. To Tao, the three-year-long episode of same-sex love and the murder seemed like a dream.

Not everyone admired her transformation or thought she might now qualify for amnesty. One popular education magazine editorialized that while her regret and improved mental outlook were laudable, "we hope that she might decide to pen some articles to help common people. Although she is locked up in prison, she could still endeavor to be a useful person. After all, what benefit does chanting sutras from morning until night offer people?" In the end, her supporters, Buddhist and otherwise, were unable to win her release. Nonetheless, she soon left prison.42

Shortly after Hangzhou fell to the Japanese army on December 24, 1937, Tao was freed, as part of a general amnesty. Following her discharge, she worked as a teacher. A year and a half later, on June 28, 1939, she married a man, a county government official in Zhejiang.43 At that point, she disappears from press accounts.

The final denouement of the Tao-Liu murder provides an opportune moment to compare the overall attitude of the courts and the public toward their tragic romance with that afforded Alice Mitchell. In 1892, in Memphis, Tennessee, the nineteen-year-old Mitchell attacked seventeen-year-old Freda Ward with a razor, eventually slitting her throat almost to the point of decapitation. According to the women's mutual understanding, they were affianced and planned to live as husband and wife. Mitchell explained that she butchered Ward because she loved her and feared that she would lose her to a man. Mitchell's trial generated lurid, spectacular press coverage, as did Tao's. The basic premise of the case, that Mitchell had stabbed Ward to death, was also not in doubt. Mitchell was found to be insane and sent to a state asylum. She reportedly died there six years later. Nuanced studies of the case by Lisa Duggan and Lisa J. Lindquist have made the incident a touchstone in the scholarship on the history of gender and sexuality in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century. Their respective arguments, which differ greatly and highlight complementary aspects of the case, are that 1) the press coverage of the case demonstrates that it served as a touchstone for medical experts and the public in the development of the lesbian as a social subject in the late nineteenth century (Duggan) and 2) that despite the same-sex romance at the heart of the case, Mitchell was judged guilty of violating gender roles and behavior, not sexual mores; as such, her act did not challenge Victorian notions of female sexuality and she was reintegrated discursively into society (Lindquist).44

Unlike in late-nineteenth-century America, in Republican Chinese society the "lesbian" (i.e., "female same-sex lover" who went beyond a school romance and permanently eschewed marriage to a man) was already established as a social type, perhaps partly due to the fact that Alice Mitchell became part of the scientific literature that influenced the development of medical, legal, and social opinion in China. Richard Krafft-Ebing incorporated Mitchell as an illustration of the typical invert in the tenth edition of Psychopathia Sexualis. In fact, the Mitchell-Ward case may be the one that Gu Yin referred to in his comment on Tao and Liu. Havelock Ellis also mentioned Mitchell as personifying "a typical invert of a very pronounced kind." People with exclusively same-sex sympathies, especially those for whom the condition was congenital and not acquired due to societal, physiological, and/or mental causes, were held to be very few, as well as being permanently physiologically and mentally abnormal. As discussed by Chinese
medical authorities, social commentators, and journalists, the "lesbian" represented one extreme of a spectrum of women who engaged in same-sex love, generally for a limited period, as preparation for romantic and sexual relations with their future husbands, especially as youths at school. Same-sex love was a precarious and, for many, distasteful affection that had increased with the spread of secondary and postsecondary education. Consequentially, China—along with Japan, the United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, and other nations that figured in the profusion of sexuality-related psychological, sexological, and educational literature by Edward Carpenter, Havelock Ellis, Pan Guangdan, and others—faced a potential crisis of modern affect: alarmists worried that women's same-sex love, if it grew unchecked, could undermine human reproduction and scuttle attempts to improve the "race-culture" of the nation via eugenics.

In their diaries and other writings, Tao and Liu recounted the emotional and carnal nature of their bond forthrightly, sometimes poetically. The explicit erotic nature of their prose was ruled obscene, causing the courtroom to be cleared whenever diary evidence was discussed—although newspaper and magazine publishers rushed their words into print. Their transgression against gender and sexual norms was therefore not in question. This testimony and the savagery of Tao's evisceration of Liu led many to presume that her mental state was immature or was otherwise abnormal, leaving her unable to repress the momentary urge to commit murder. Nonetheless, her deportation in prison, especially in light of her demonstrated Buddhist piety and initiation as a nun, convinced some Buddhists and others that she had recovered her right mind. Her behavior was thus understood to have been due to transitory confusion and neurasthenia. If she had developed incorrigible same-sex love, the physiological damage to her brain and other organs would have been permanent, and she would have been unable to recover. Tao had practiced "same-sex love" and had been physically and mentally harmed by it; she had seemingly been vulnerable as a result of temperament, neurasthenia, the school environment, and other factors. Same-sex love had proven so noxious to her body and mind that she, a talented artist and highly educated young woman, had inexplicably gutted her classmate and same-sex lover. Her story thus exemplified the potential risk of same-sex school friendships. Nonetheless, the "typical Salomé" was redeemed: Restored to physical and mental health, she no longer practiced same-sex love. Rather, she was reintegrated into society, ending up the wife of a county government official.

NOTES
1. See "Liang nusheng zhi yimu canju"; Ren, "Tongxing'aisi builang jieguo"; and "Nuxuesheng tongxing'aisi eguo."
4. "Tao Sijin jinmian yisi."
5. "Xu Qinwen fangwenji."
6. "LiuTao'an panju quanshu."
7. "Liang nusheng zhi yimu canju."
8. See Zhang, "Tao'an taolunhui"; Cao, "Sanjiaolian'ai jiejueta"; Cao, "Taolun (weid)"; and Cao, "Taolun (xi)."
10. Xy, "'Tongxinglian'ai yu sanjiaolian'ai.'"
11. See Haiyan Lee's perceptive analysis, The Revolution of the Heart, 152–55. Eugenia Lean's Public Passions, 49–179, contrasts the general approval shown to murderous revenge motivated by filial piety vs. the opprobrium and concern provoked by violence stemming from romantic jealousy.
12. This archive brings to mind Jennifer Robertson's notable article "Dying to Tell: Sexuality and Suicide in Imperial Japan," which examined the lethal nature of social codes: Women in same-sex relations in Taisho Japan essentially had to die or (to apply the same logic to Tao and Liu, die or murder) to have their story publicly told in such detail. See also Sang, The Emerging Lesbian, 127–60; and Kang, Obsession, 90–96.
17. Shanzai, "Funü tongxingzhiqing."
18. Some progressive voices agreed with Carpenter to argue that same-sex love signified society's progress, and even contemplated an erotics of pedagogy between teachers and students of the same sex as central to education. Liu Mengying's murder and the fact that her suspicions regarding Tao's entanglement with Liu Wenru may have precipitated it likely undercut the legitimacy of such theories. See Furuya, "Tongxing'aisai zai nuzi jiaoyushangde xinyi"; 1,064–69; and Ellis, Studies in the Psychology of Sex, 215, 373.
19. Shen, "Tongxing'aisai yu jiaoyu." Regarding Ellis, see Hsu, "The 'Ellis Effect.'"  
20. Ren, "Tongxing'aisi builang jieguo."
21. Jin and Huang, "Funü jiatinglan."  

"A PROBLEM OF GLANDS AND SECRECTIONS"
CHAPTER 6

CHANGING SEX IN THE URBAN PRESS

Scientific Modernity and the Shaping of Transsexual Subjects in Twentieth-Century China

HOWARD CHIANG

IN THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF SEXUALITY, ESPECIALLY AFTER MICHEL FOUCAULT’S SEMINAL WORK, SCHOLARS HAVE TENDED TO PRIVILEGE SCIENCE AND MEDICINE AS THE EPISTEMIC LEVERAGE FOR THE FORMATION OF MODERN GENDER AND SEXUAL IDENTITIES.1 THIS METHOD HAS INFLUENCED THE WRITING OF THE HISTORY OF TRANSEXUALITY IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY CHINA. TWO WIDELY PUBLICIZED EXAMPLES OF THIS INVOLVING HUMAN SEX CHANGE ARE THE CASE OF FEMALE-TO-MALE YAO JINPING IN MID-1930S SHANGHAI AND THE CASE OF MALE-TO-FEMALE XIE JIANSHUN IN EARLY 1950S TAIWAN. THESE EXAMPLES SHED LIGHT ON THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE URBAN PRESS IN INFLUENCING POPULAR CATEGORIZATIONS OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY THROUGH ITS INTERACTION WITH MEDICAL AND SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE. MAJOR URBAN NEWSPAPERS AND TABLOID PRINT MEDIA CONSTITUTED A SPACE THAT ENABLED WRITERS WITH SUFFICIENT CULTURAL CAPITAL TO COMMENT ON THESE RARE YET FASCINATING STORIES OF BODILY TRANSFORMATION. THESE PUBLISHED AND CIRCULATED WRITINGS PROVIDED INTRIGUED READERS WITH AN UNUSUALLY WIDE RANGE OF PERSPECTIVES. THE PRESS ALSO BECAME A CENTRAL VEHICLE FOR THE AGENTS OF ELITE MEDICO-SCIENTIFIC DISCOURSE TO ENGAGE WITH THE WIDER PUBLIC, FILTERING NOVEL AND COMPLICATED IDEAS ABOUT SEX AND ITS PLASTICITY FOR LAY READERS. IN THIS CHAPTER, I ARGUE THAT THIS SOCIAL MILIEU PROVIDES A PROMISING GROUND FOR THE HISTORIAN TO CAPTURE A PROCESS WHEREBY COMMON UNDERSTANDINGS OF SEXUALITY WERE SHAPED NOT ONLY BY DOMINANT SECULAR DISCOURSES OF MEDICAL SCIENCE, BUT ALSO BY THE PARTICIPANTS OF THIS QUOTIDIAN VENUE FOR VOICING COMPETING VISIONS FOR THEMSELVES AND THE NATION.
A REPARATIVE RETURN TO "QUEER SOCIALISM"

Male Same-Sex Desire in the Cultural Revolution

SHANA YE

In a 1993 report on being gay in China in the Toronto Globe and Mail, the awakening of subject Yang Tao's gay identity unfolds amid the 1989 Tiananmen upheaval, a political event that marked the climax of intensified social conflicts resulting from China's economic reform since the late 1970s.

The night of the bloody crackdown at Tiananmen Square was the moment Yang Tao began to face up to his homosexuality. He had gone to the square to demonstrate on that evening in June, 1989, when soldiers suddenly started shooting. He leaped over a fence and ran to safety. . . .

"It was a narrow escape. I could have been killed," said Mr. Yang. . . . "I thought: Why should I live with a mask? This is the way I am."

As the narrative suggests, the precarious queerness of Yang Tao, who was both gay and a political dissident, was threatened by socialist totalitarianism. But it was precisely at his moment of confronting state violence that his queer self was able to fledg

The figures of the "wounded queer" and the "oppressive socialist state" have been central in narrating the emergence of Chinese queer subjectivity and LGBT activism. We often hear stories of communist prosecution of sodomites, police harassment of homosexuals, and governmental crackdowns on LGBT organizations. These stories frame queer subjects as victims par excellence of state socialism, positing a strong link between queer liberation and Western-style political and economic modernity. The Globe and Mail article is one such narrative. As the story continues, we learn that Yang Tao "was enrolled in an elite language school where he learned to speak English fluently." In the "darkness" of "confusion," "despair," and "hard struggle" with himself, Yang Tao "came across the words 'gay' and 'homosexual'" in foreign books. In 1986, he spent a year in the United States, where he discovered a gay subculture, "bought gay magazines, watched gay videos and went to gay bars." Yet it was the 1989 killing that made Yang Tao realize that "the situation was hopeless in China" for both gays and liberal-minded political dissidents. Thus, he decided to break free by escaping to the United States.

This type of "traumatic-dramatic historiography" utilizes historical injuries to justify postsocialist queer liberalism and normalization, a process commonly used to produce knowledge of Chinese queer sexuality. The construction and maintenance of the socialist-oppression/postsocialist-liberation dichotomy has created an epistemological blind spot and methodological dead end that not only "closet" socialist queerness, but also foreclose our ability to imagine radical queer alternatives.

The tanzhai jiaodai, or "honest confessions," narrated by men who engaged in same-sex behavior during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), are an important source type that instead reveals the dynamic interplay between power and pleasure, in which state socialism relies on queer subjects' expression of their sexual selves. The "evidence" of queerness these narratives provide adds new material to the understanding of queer existence in the Maoist era; it also enables an epistemological shift from the question of whether socialism hinders sexuality to the question of whether historical, cultural, and affective processes have sustained knowledge producers' attachment to oppression and injury.

**QUEERING THE SOCIALIST "CLOSET"**

Prevailing accounts of Chinese queer history have understood China's pre-reform years (1949–1978), marked by centralized state socialism and Maoism, as a dark time, wherein shadowy figures of homosexuals, reframing Lord Alfred Douglas's words, "dared not speak their names." Homosexual, gender-variant, and sexually variant individuals have commonly been perceived as living in a "socialist closet," fearful of social stigmatization and political persecution.

The absence of current scholarship on queers in socialism fueled my desire to retrieve and preserve lost histories when I began fieldwork in 2014.
On my way to the National Library in Beijing for my first day of archival digging, I overheard a conversation about selling antiques between two men at the bus station; I asked the dealer whether he by chance had material from the Cultural Revolution. When he replied “Yes,” I inquired about material on homosexuality, which led to my first piece of male same-sex material—and later, to some five hundred pages of documents, including sodomy indictments, court judgments, legal records, personal confessions, and victim testimonies. In contrast to the presumption that homosexuals were hidden, the salacious language and explicit descriptions of male same-sex behavior in these pages reveal pronounced sexual energy and sexual culture in Maoist society and the socialist state system.

The abundance of sexual expression in the Cultural Revolution period has been supported by several recent historical studies. Citing cultural historian Harriet Evans’s work on public education about love, sexual hygiene, and marriage, researchers Elaine Jeffreys and Haiqing Yu argue that despite prevailing conservative attitudes, “public discussions of sex and sexuality were not exactly ‘taboo’ in the Maoist period.” Historian Emily Honig points out that there were no official declarations prohibiting sexual relationships, and that the state never overtly promoted sexual repression in Maoism. In fact, novels and personal memoirs released after the Cultural Revolution indicate that the Cultural Revolution provided previously inconceivable opportunities for youth to explore sex, love, and romance.

Although this evidence has provided a new look at the sexual history of China’s state socialist era, simply recuperating lost history and supplementing it with examples of homosexuality is insufficient. Digging out the amphora of same-sex practices in socialism is nothing queer—on the contrary, the existence of queer sexuality is, for lack of better words, the most ordinary thing throughout history. What is interesting, instead, are two questions: Regardless of the plenitude of sex, what has sustained the repeatedly told story of sexual suppression and loss? And what would Chinese queer theorization of history gain if we let go of our attachments to loss, and instead embraced an epistemological turn to “radical abundance”?

Moving away from the question of whether socialism suppresses sexuality, “queer socialism” asks how our desires and intentions to recover the suppressed queer past—from the standpoint of the postsocialist, neoliberal present—could have “closeted” queer subjects, concealed the ordinary everyday queer practices in socialism, and weakened queer connections across time and space.

The “closeting” practice hinges on the abovementioned practice of “traumatic-dramatic historiography”—a method that characterizes much of the scholarship on historical sexuality in China, in which historical writings utilize injury to fulfill future-oriented narratives of liberation. This dialectic construction has been well captured by many queer historians. As scholar Heather Love sees it, the desire to overcome historical injury and the commitment to “progress” are “at the heart of the collective project of queer studies and integral to the history of gay and lesbian identity” across the twentieth century. Within this narrative, gays and lesbians are marked as heroic norm-resisters who occupied a position to overthrow the tyranny of repressive regimes, respectability, decency, and domesticity. Insofar as this narrative is appealing, it is—as gender and queer theorist Jack Halberstam writes—a “self-congratulatory, feel-good narrative of liberal humanism that celebrates homo-heroism.”

Opposing the liberatory understanding of gay and lesbian identity fostered by progressive enlightenment, Michel Foucault leads us to see the effects of a “reverse discourse.” On one hand, modern homosexual identity is continually seen as a form of damaged or compromised subjectivity; on the other hand, gay freedom is produced in response to the history and discourse of damage. The contradiction of Euro-American queerness as “both abject and exalted,” as Love sees it, explains this impulse to turn the dark side of queer representation to “good use” in both the realm of subject formation and politics. This oxymoronic construction is rooted in the project of Western modernity: “The idea of modernity—with its suggestions of progress, rationality, and technological advance—is intimately bound up with backwardness. The association of progress and regress is a function not only of a failure of so many of modernity’s key projects but also of the reliance of the concept of modernity on excluded, denigrated, or superseded others. . . . If modernization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century aimed to move humanity forward, it did so in part by perfecting techniques for mapping and disciplining subjects considered to be lagging.”

If the abject, “lagging” queers in the past serve as the domestic “others” of Western modernity, the technology to create and discipline backward cultural “others” through racializing “deviant” queer figures facilitates modernity’s imperialist global project. Queer theorist Jasbir Puar uses the term “homonationalism” to describe how—in a post-9/11 and post—Lawrence v. Texas context—the advancement of neoliberal politics and the technologies of biopolitics have created an image of the United States as queer-friendly, through selectively including white homosexual subjects and excluding Muslims as sexual-racial “others” (or even terrorists). This ideology installs an opposition between queers and Muslims, which fortifies US exceptionalism—a political rhetoric that frames the United States as
epitomizing a “higher” level of civilization, whereas the Middle East is understood as backward and uncivilized and therefore a national enemy upon whom to wage war.10

In the context of Chinese socialism, the abject queer repressed by the socialist regime serves as both the temporal and spatial “other” of “proper” modernity. As anthropologist Lisa Rofel shrewdly points out, the postsocialist collective project of neoliberal globalization relies on a revisionist historical account—one that views Maoist socialism as hindering China’s capacity to embrace proper modernity because of its repression of sexuality.11 This sly construction of a socialist sexual past allows a postsocialist allegory—presenting the desire to free one’s gendered and sexual self from the socialist totalitarian state—to emerge. Writing in response to Rofel’s theorization of “desiring China,” the scholar and author David Eng states, “The social stakes of homosexuality’s expressive desire unfold upon a political horizon of becoming, a political horizon of great significance for Chinese modernity and for Chinese citizen-subjects alike”; thus, “the appearance of expressive queer desire promises to mark China’s proper, though belated, place within a cosmopolitan globalized world.”12

The postsocialist queer is discursively and materially produced by queers themselves—activists and scholars—as a cosmopolitan consumer-resister, through the discourse of global capital. The trope of desire has given postsocialist queers the power to refashion the stereotype of socialist blue ants dehumanized by class consciousness and state-controlled economy, fulfilling the national allegory of China’s inevitable transition. In this narrative, queers in the past not only suffer, but suffer for us—if we knew state socialism was hellish, we would feel at ease with the decision we’d made to pursue a neoliberal future, even though neoliberalization also comes with its own violence and erasure. The drama of the inevitable postsocialist transition is made possible by sustaining the trauma narrative of the past.

However, as sociologist Jeffrey C. Alexander reminds us, not all injury, pain, and suffering become social and collective trauma. What trauma narrative wins out is “a matter of performative power.”13 The successful circulation of this trauma-drama, based on a national catastrophe (in this case, violence against homosexuals in an oppressive socialism), relies on the discursive and affective suppression of a less visible trauma (China being “othered” as socialist). To understand this process, a brief overview of Chinese contemporary history is helpful.

Since China’s defeat by Western powers in the First Opium War (1840–1842), nationalist discourse has attributed China’s weakness to its seclusion from the outside world, and sought to strengthen and revive the nation by appropriating Western technology. During the May Fourth Movement in the early twentieth century, nationalist intellectuals and reformers advocated for Western democracy and science to solve pressing crises of the semifeudal, semicolonial society. It is worth noting that China’s condition of not being officially and completely colonized led to its ambivalent relation with colonialism and its later forms in the era of globalization; while it allowed China to seek an alternative path to modernity through communism and socialism, the country’s lack of colonial history cultivated a national feeling of exclusion from the global world marked by capitalism. This sense of seclusion and exclusion was also galvanized by Cold War-era Orientalism, which invariably constructed China as a politically and culturally abnormal “other” in contrast to Western normality. On one hand, desire for becoming “normal” and equivalent to the liberal, modern West has driven China’s economic reform and shifts toward globalization; on the other hand, Orientalized Chinese difference and internalized imperialism have sustained an affective inferiority in the Chinese psyche, strengthening China’s determination to transition from a despotic, planned, and dark past to a democratic, free, and bright future.14

Would the attachment to queer consumer-subjectivity have looked the same if queers in the socialist past refused to be redeemed by the global neoliberal present? Would the liberatory agendas of rights and marriage have achieved their dominant status in LGBT movements if we could learn more creative methods of resistance from our socialist queer forebears who managed to succeed in survival and accretion? Would the allegory of inevitable transition still have taken hold if we could decipher how its power relies on an erasure of queer experience and a perpetuation of different forms of violence? A return to “queer socialism” involves casting a turning-gaze upon queer knowledge production, and fearlessly posing challenging questions—even when those questions might lead to more tensions, ruptures, enmities, and alienations—lest queer intellectual and activist practices become a closet of themselves in their own right.

THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION ARCHIVE OF AFFECT
The disastrous movements of the Great Leap Forward (1958–1962) and the commune program, the withdrawal of Soviet support, and severe food shortages in the 1950s incited intellectual dissidence against Mao Zedong among the top leaders of the Communist Party. Acting on fears of denunciation of his leadership, Mao launched a socialist education campaign in 1962, in the name of rooting out revisionism and capitalism and purging
political dissidents. The Communist Party's internal political conflicts quickly spread to the larger society as Mao called on Chinese citizens to identify and fight class enemies, in order to strengthen class struggles and the proletarian revolution.

In the literary and cultural field, Mao launched a campaign in 1966 to eliminate harmful bourgeois influences and prevent dissident intellectuals from using literature to promote anti-party thoughts and activities. During the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), ideologically unsound literary works were severely criticized and prohibited. In the 1960s, literature and art that depicted the old ruling class, their values and ideologies, and some foreign literary works from capitalist countries were considered "poisonous" and "counterrevolutionary." Works concerned with love and romance were strongly opposed because they were regarded as "bourgeois and revisionist." Sexual immorality—which included premarital and extramarital sex, male same-sex relationships, and sex with children—was framed as political impurity that required severe punishment. Yet as a result, previously unspoken sexual behaviors became highly pronounced and recorded for the purpose of guarding socialism. Cases of "immoral sex" were disclosed and denounced in public, in struggle sessions or on big-character posters (dazi bao), as bad examples that would educate the masses and transform convicts. (This public denouncement of sex, ironically, frequently aroused the masses; one informant I spoke with in 2014 recalled that he got an erection when reading the words "male-male implicit relationship"—nannan guanxi—on a dazi bao in 1973.)

The Cultural Revolution archive discussed herein consists of documents of men who committed the crime of sodomy (jijian zui) or the crime of hooliganism (liumang zui); the collection includes individual dossiers, police indictments, records of crimes and misdeeds (fanzui shishi), court judgments, confessions, and victim testimonies. The men in these archival materials range from peasants and workers to communist cadres whose male same-sex behaviors were disclosed and reported to their local Communist Party committees. Some of them participated in struggle sessions or reported to the police station for arrest, while others were arrested, sentenced, and persecuted. Although China had no laws that criminalized homosexuality, and the attitude of the Supreme Court toward consensual male sexual relationship was ambiguous—even tolerant—prior to the Cultural Revolution, individuals who committed such behaviors were still referred to as criminals and convicts. The penalty for these crimes varied, given the fact that the new socialist law system was not formalized until 1979; also, the power of the Party and the Red Guard during the Cultural Revolution overrode the juridical authority and law. In the archival dossiers, some people were given warnings within the Communist Party, or expelled from the party. Others were sentenced for three to eight years of jail time, without trials. In the worst case, a convict who was involved in sex with minors was sentenced to death with reprieve.

The Cultural Revolution archive is an archive of affect. It contains narratives about intimate life, and the desire and affective labor embedded within its constitution and reception deserve critical analysis. Unlike US lesbian and gay archives that characterize grassroots queer scholars' efforts to preserve erased histories, the Cultural Revolution archive comprises texts from institutionalized documentation and official state records. In documenting and revealing sexuality in the form of crimes, the state and its representatives encountered the sexual and affective lives of queer individuals, allowing the state to be queered and sexualized. Thus, the Cultural Revolution archive is simultaneously an archive of the state's desire to govern and an archive of unexpected erotic interactions of bodies—of the queer individual, the state official, the historian, and the future reader—that take place in the collaborative process of making sexuality in state socialism. This dynamic relation requires new methods of archival work, heeding how subjects are produced in the efforts to document and interpret, as well as noting the process "through which the bodies and desires of others [and of ourselves] . . . enter historicity"—an intimate unraveling and tracing that the following sections explore further.

QUEER SUBJECTIVITY IN TANBAI JIAODAI

This chapter focuses on tanbai jiaodai from Cultural Revolution archival sources. Tanbai jiaodai share many characteristics with the Mao era's diary writings. As with Mao-era diaries, the subjects in tanbai jiaodai have wholeheartedly devoted themselves to the Communist Party, Chairman Mao, and the revolution. They actively engage in self-criticism for the revolution, and show strong commitment to transform themselves under the leadership of the party and through Marxist-Leninist and Maoist thoughts. Distinct from subjects in Maoist diaries who frame themselves as disciplined, ideal revolutionary men and women, the subjects of tanbai jiaodai manuscripts often describe themselves as lacking political consciousness and indulging in a bourgeois lifestyle. As examples of failure, they must confess how bourgeois thoughts corrupted them in detail, in order to conquer the evil forces of the bourgeois class and transform themselves to serve the proletarian revolution.
It is precisely through the state's coercive compulsion to confess these evil deeds that the subject finds a space to speak about an intimate sphere of personal life that is otherwise discouraged, if not completely prohibited. Contrary to the postulation that "private writing that deviates from public discourse is... dangerous and impossible," the confessor in tanbai jiaodai is not only encouraged but required to write about how they deviated from the official discourse and ideology. According the Maoist principle of self-criticism, the more details that a confessor writes about their deviations, the more sincere they become in committing to transforming themselves. As a result, the subject is allowed queer space to construct a sexual self while conforming to a socialist ideology. Apart from historian Yue Meng's understanding of Maoist private and public space as an "absolute hierarchy," these "place-making practices" enabled queer subjects to engage "the new understandings of space" and to produce queer counterpublics. In this sense, tanbai jiaodai confessions are rare autobiographic sources that allow readers to understand the intricate interplay between socialist disciplinary power and a subject's self-making.

It is also important to keep in mind that we ought not to conflate tanbai jiaodai, a specific form of Maoist confession, with Foucault's historicization of confession in Victorian society, despite the similarity that—insofar as the officials who repressed sex ironically became the producer of sexual subjects—seems to confirm Foucault's famous assertion that resistance is internal to power relations, and the exertion of power generates multiple sites of unpredictable subversion. In The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1, Foucault stresses that techniques for regulating sexuality "were formed and, more particularly, applied first, with the greatest intensity, in the economically privileged and politically dominant classes" as "the bourgeoisie began by considering that its own sex was something important, a fragile treasure, a secret that had to be discovered at all costs." For Foucault, sexuality was deployed not to limit the pleasure of others by the "ruling class," but to elaborate and establish the privileged classes through self-affirmation.

The socialist and Maoist tradition of criticism and self-criticism (piping yu ziwu piping) that informed tanbai jiaodai originated as a major mechanism of inner-party decision-making and discipline among Chinese political elites. It emerged as a form of mass mobilization and education during the Cultural Revolution, resulting from a series of structural changes in the Chinese system of communications. Different from Foucauldian confession, which relied on religion and subjugated the subject to medical authority in order to distinguish a bourgeois ruling class, Chinese confession had a clear political purpose: to educate and transform wrongdoers, rather than punish them. This mechanism of confession was supposed to serve a socialist ideology that advocated for eradicating class differences and homogenizing society under the rule of a single proletarian class.

If Foucauldian confession emphasizes constructing class differences and privileges through making distinct sexual subjects, Chinese confession is more ambiguous in terms of class difference and privilege. In China, socialist power operated in a complicated fashion in everyday life—here, the making of sexuality and sexual subject through confession was predicated on interactions of multilayered factors and desiring subjects. This understanding goes beyond the rigid analytic categories so often embedded in the study of Chinese socialism, such as "state" and "society," "party" and "people," and the "ruling class" and the "oppressed."

The protagonist of the tanbai jiaodai analyzed below is Zhang S. P., a thirty-four-year-old inventory worker in the province of Henan. Zhang's writings are from two distinct time periods: from October 12 to 25, 1973, and from July 31 to August 8, 1975, as he was called on to respectively confess and reconfess after his same-sex practices were disclosed.

In the first confession, dated October 12, 1973, Zhang begins with three lines of revolutionary doggerel that were common in Mao-era writings. He spends most of the pages describing how the proletarian revolution has triumphed across the world and how the Communist Party under the leadership of Chairman Mao has led the Chinese people to great victories. In this four-page confession, he only spends six lines in the middle of the second page vaguely describing his same-sex behaviors. He writes,

Because my bourgeois worldview has not been completely transformed, and additionally I did not spend enough effort to study Mao Zedong's thoughts, and I was not well aware of the party's goals and class struggle, I committed such a mistake. One night I came back from the city and I did not go back to my dorm directly. Instead I went to a workmate's dorm. It was late, so I shared a bed with him. Then I started to touch his penis to see whose was longer. At the time, I thought it was just fooling around. I didn't think it was such a severe problem.

A day later, on October 13, Zhang wrote another, supplementary confession. Differing from the first, the majority of the content Zhang details here involves sexual contact with a workmate, Little Wang. In this three-page additional document, Zhang reveals when he went to Little Wang's dorm, what their conversation was like, and how they went to bed together.
The twin-size bed in the dorm was very small, so we were very close to each other. My hand was beside his penis and I felt he had an erection. So I held his penis to see if his was longer than mine. He moved a little and I thought I woke him up. So I stopped and went to sleep.35

Although we do not know what happened between these two initial confessions, the title of the second confession, "Buchong caliulo" (Supplementary material), suggests that the party committee was not satisfied with Zhang’s first confession—it included too much doggerel and too little information about the “crime.” For the party committee, the sparse detail in the first confession would have showed Zhang’s lack of consciousness about his crime’s severity and his limited commitment to redeem his mistake.

Under the name of “completely transforming the bourgeois worldview” and “return[ing] to the correct revolutionary road,” seven days later, on October 20, Zhang turned in another writing, revealing different details about his “crime.” In this version, he does not use the small bed as an excuse for his sexual contact with Little Wang, and he discards the part about comparing penis size. Instead, Zhang writes the following:

At first we slept on opposite sides of the bed. . . . Around 3:00 or 4:00 a.m., I woke up and saw Little Wang was still sleeping soundly. I thought that he must be sleeping heavily because he had drunk so much that day. I sat up and turned to his side of the bed. . . . I put my hand into his underwear and started stroking his penis. I got closer to him and started to put his penis into my anus. I wanted to make him ejaculate.36

In his fourth confession, dated October 25, Zhang revises his story again. This time, Zhang clarifies that the sexual incident was not spontaneous but planned:

Little Wang told me that [Little Wang and five other guys] had drunk about four jin [two kilograms] of liquor today. . . . so I thought Little Wang must sleep very heavily tonight. I could share the bed with him and play with his penis after he fell asleep. . . . Around 11:00 p.m., Little Wang asked me if I had a place to stay. I responded immediately, “No, my place is taken by some guests.”37

Reading these four confessions side by side, we see that Zhang’s narrative of his sexual contact with Little Wang shifts from accidentally “fooling around” to actively planning and pursuing sex. Zhang’s framing changes: from presenting himself as a passive actor who has made a mistake, he shifts toward portraying himself as an agentic subject who has actively carried out his own desires. His narrative’s transition from “fooling around” to searching for the reasons behind his behavior indicates the emergence of agency in forming identity, self-understanding, and subjectivity.

Interestingly, in his fourth confession, Zhang also overtly admits to non-consensual sex, which could be framed by the party committee as a more severe crime than illicit sex between men. It remains unknown if this change was due to Little Wang testifying and depicting Zhang as a rapist in order to sideline his own involvement in the sexual practice and avoid punishments during Zhang’s confession. The change could also represent Zhang’s attempt to protect Little Wang by portraying himself as the sexual initiator. But Little Wang’s question of whether Zhang had a place to stay also offers the possibility that the sexual behavior in this case was consensual—Little Wang may have been alluding to having sex with Zhang as well. In all three readings, Zhang and Little Wang are active sexual subjects.

What is also interesting is that the transformation of Zhang’s sexual self and the possibility for him to articulate that self were both made possible by the mechanism of socialist confession, which was intended to create and patrol proper class subjects at the cost of sexuality and gender. Originally, Zhang did not think it was “a big deal,”38 but it seems likely that the party committee kept pushing, with or without violence, in order to shepherd Zhang back to the “correct revolutionary road.” In his third confession, Zhang caters to such a need, admitting:

When the party first asked me to confess and reflect on my mistake, I did not realize the severity of it. With the help of the party and other comrades, I realized that the occurrence of my mistake was by no means fortuitous. In the winter of two years ago, I played with another workmate’s penis and made him ejaculate. But till today, I have not reported this mistake to the party. It led me to continue making mistakes.39

Regardless of whether he forgot or intentionally withheld the fact of his previous sexual encounter, Zhang’s confession indicates that he had never clearly or thoughtfully reflected on his sexuality—or, at least, he had never
had an opportunity to speak about it. The confession process guided him to remember his past and make a connection with the present. "The act of remembering one's past necessarily calls for interpreting one's old self," theorist Wenying Xu notes, and "illuminates the person's new identity." Zang had to see his past and present behaviors as consistent—a basis for a sense of coherent identity. His formation of identity took place through the process of forced confessions, fostered by both the state's desire to regulate citizen-subjects and the individual desires of representatives of the state—namely, the Communist Party officials, police, and legal functionaries.

Through multiple confessions, Zang reconstructs an old, unconscious self and narrates the transition to an awareness of a new identity. Although the identity has no proper name at that time, it has potential for collective actions and community-building.

In a project that sets out to disrupt queer liberalism, the discussion of identity—a concept rooted in a specific Euro-American Enlightenment tradition—might be risky. Yet identity has held an important role in Chinese queer studies since the late 1980s. In the early study of queer sexuality in China, a central debate featured the conflict between a unique premodern, pre-Western-imperialist sexual culture and a hybridized, globalization-influenced sexual culture. In his influential work on Chinese homosexuality, historian Chou Wah-shan makes a distinction between traditional Chinese homoeroticism and the translation of "homosexuality," emphasizing that "the notion of the homogenous, universal and gender-inclusive 'gay identity' did not exist in China." Chou explains, "Even when sexual activities are categorized, they never refer to a specific minority of people, but to specific behavioral practices that can involve everyone in certain social relations." As Chou suggests, unlike Foucault's homosexuals as a "species," nonnormative sexual subjects were never a "generic personality possessing a unique psycho-sexual essence."

The question of whether Chinese nonnormative sexual subjects are a "species" with self-identification has been important to the history of queer emergence and politics. In the scholarship on nonnormative sexuality in China from the 1990s onward—either defined by sociological, medical, or psychological approaches, or occurring within the transnational study of sexuality emphasizing the globalization of LGBT status through capitalism, intellectual institutions, or international NGO networks—the process of "naming" homosexual, LGBT, tongzhi ("comrade"), queer, and other categories of identity is crucial. It seems that only through naming is the queer subject able to become tangible, and therefore a political subject entitled to protection and rights.

This process of naming and identity politics is believed to be the basis for collective resistance. At the same time, the process raises a number of questions and problems—foremost among them, the problem of identity and colonialism. Historian Petrus Liu points out that "Chinese tongzhi studies often results in what Johannes Fabien has described as the 'allocronism' of racial time.". Liu notices that "a good way to denaturalize heterosexuality is to historicize the invention of the homosexual/heterosexual distinction, but the historicizing effort inevitably provokes debates about whether some human cultures are prehomosexual, prequeer and altogether different from the West." In this light, if a distinct sense of gay identity came to shape in the late 1980s and early 1990s in China as the country started to integrate itself into the global economy, we could conclude that Chinese gayness is belated, therefore trapping ourselves in the colonialist logic of progressive linear time. If an identity of sexually variant and gender-variant people existed before China's reform, on the other hand, we would argue for a unique and independent gay culture in China. This would then counter the import-export model of global gayness. Both ends of the spectrum are highly charged with the affects of either desire for global queering or Chinese exceptionalism.

Looking at how Cultural Revolution-era queers, such as our protagonist Zhang S. P., come to understand their sexual and political identity sheds new light on the dilemma of historicizing homosexuality. Zhang's construction of identity complicates the binary stance between Western importation identity and exceptionalist understanding of Chinese same-sex practices as solely behavioral. Cultural theorist Stuart Hall points out that identity is a linchpin for understanding the interplay of agency and structure in the social world; Hall conceptualizes identity and identification as a contextual, conditional process that responds to the changing material situations and discourses nonnormative subjects face. "I use 'identity to refer to the meeting point, the point of suture, between on the one hand the discourse and practices which attempt to 'interpellate,' speak to us or hail us into places as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand, the processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be 'spoken,'" he writes. "Identities are thus points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us." As Zhang's confessions suggest, his sense of identity was constructed through the affective experience of being "interpellated" as a sodomite; but this discursive construction also formed a sense of a recognizable individual and collective subject position, resisting the reductionist, discursive naming of the "sodomy criminal."
Perhaps more intriguing is Hall’s stress on “a radical historicization” in theorizing identity in order to capture the constantly transforming process of identity. He pushes queer historians and critics to think about questions of how to use “the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being.” What holds more currency is “not who we are” or ‘where we came from,” but “what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves.” Hall connects the subject of history and the viewer of that history; he asks for a historically specific understanding of changing processes of identity, while also asking for what purpose, and to whom, the question of identity matters. This is a valuable vantage point for post-socialist queer scholars, critics, and activists to attain when producing knowledge of queer history.

REPARATIVE READING OF SOCIALIST BODIES AND DESIRES

In one of his 1973 confessions, Zhang details how he attempted to convince another workmate, Little Li, to have sex with him. Zhang tells Little Li that “anal penetration is better than the New Year celebration” and that “ejaculation feels better than all other things.” He writes,

I asked him, “Have you ejaculated before?” He said, “No.” Then I asked, “Are you able to ejaculate?” He said, “I don’t know.” . . . Then he stroked his penis for a while, and he said he was too tired because of work and he was unable to ejaculate."

That Zhang frames his question as “Are you able to ejaculate?” (Ni huibuhui liuqing?) may seem odd to present readers, as we generally assume that the ability to ejaculate is a natural bodily function of a potent adult man. Scholar Everett Zhang tells us, however, that since male bodily function was highly politicized and moralized during the Maoist period (and particularly in the Cultural Revolution), nonlaboring functions such as ejaculation, with the exception of involuntary nocturnal emission, were considered indulgent, immoral, and shameful. Admitting the ability to ejaculate could put Little Li at risk of contravening Communist Party ideology.

At first glance, Zhang’s question and Li’s response about losing sexual function because of work could indicate that bodies and sexualities disappeared within the Cultural Revolution as—that the official ideology sublimated all desires into desire to work for the revolution, desexualizing the actual body as a mere implement of socialist labor. However, this reading might risk reinforcing what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls “paranoid reading”—a practice that aims to expose the already-known systemic oppression but does not necessarily follow what needs to be done about those hegemonic relations. Sedgwick further tells us that other forms of reading—for example, one involving a reparative motive and possibility—while rendered “invisible and illegible under a paranoid optic,” are “not only important but also possible,” and already well evident in queer experience. To practice other-than-paranoid forms of knowing is to nurture an affective culture around the texts, histories, and subjects we engage that could facilitate plentitude, accretion, interruptive richness, and surprise. Such an affective culture would allow us to enjoy the pleasure and erotic fulfillment of such labor. The following pages experiment with such reparative methods through a rereading of Zhang’s confessions.

As the confession unfolds, we learn that before Zhang entered Li’s dorm, he peeked inside Li’s window and caught Li playing with his own penis. Instead of exhaustion from work, the real explanation for Li’s inability to ejaculate might lie in his having just masturbated. Both Zhang and Li are well aware of each other’s indulgence in sexual pleasure—but instead of directly talking about sex, they engage in a conversational and sexual exchange made possible (and also conditioned by) the socialist ideology of work. By appropriating the official ideology, Zhang and Li insist on reinserting bodies and sexualities into the socialist discourse, resexualizing the desexualized socialist male body.

Historians Horacio Ramirez and Nan Boyd argue that “the sexuality of the body (or bodily desires) is an important, indeed material, aspect of the practice of doing oral history work,” since “the body, and how and what it remembers . . . are particularly significant for narrators drawn to discussions of sexual consciousness, erotic desire, and gender expression.” The inseparable link between the body and oral history sheds light on how the subject in archival texts narrates, as well as how the historical subject and its readers interact. Zhang’s first encounter with another queer body, when he spots his workmate’s masturbation, can be seen as a site for potential productive knowledge about sex and communities; in fact, such knowledge production did happen, through a dance between a coding of unspeakable sexuality and the highly pronounced ideology of class. It is not sex that subjugates itself to class; instead, the language of class becomes a medium for the articulation of sex.

In late 1975, two years after Zhang’s initial confession and at the final stage of the Cultural Revolution, he was caught again committing sodomy and called on to write tanbai jiaodai. Compared to his confessions in 1973,
in 1975 Zhang's writing style changes significantly: he is able to exercise the skill of self-writing, and has become increasingly blatant about his sexuality. In all of his seven confessions from July 31 to August 8, 1975, Zhang barely talks about the Communist Party, his bourgeois thoughts, or the revolutionary road. He begins with a brief quote from Mao Zedong and ends his confessions with two lines at most thanking the party's education and other comrades' support. In the content, Zhang enumerates basic information about his sexual encounters with other workers, with minimal narrative. Words such as "penis," "anus," "erection," and "ejaculation" appear repeatedly in these pages. This change—his willingness only to provide abstract words, rather than details—may signal Zhang's indifference toward his crime and his resistance toward authority.

Yet a more dynamic reading is also possible: Zhang caters to the libidinal curiosity of the party committee members by teasing them with arousing words, but not fully fulfilling their desire to know, therefore leaving imaginary space for fantasy. In Zhang's 1973 writings, the "root cause" of his mistake was "bourgeois pornographic material and texts." From this clue, we can guess that Zhang was well aware that the unpublished stories that he claimed had corrupted him had originated in past sexual criminal confessions. He could also be aware that his own confessions might become the source of unpublished copies that would be circulated to arouse other individuals.

If we understand Zhang anticipating that his confession would be read by his work unit's cadres, officials, and other potential audiences, we could view Zhang's changing style as his intention to produce pornographic texts, thus allowing him to be a pleasure producer rather than a denigrated criminal and repressed victim. We could also read Zhang's confession as opening up space, in scholar Françoise Lionet's words, for "the subject of history and the agent of discourse" to "engage in dialogue with each other" about sexuality, violence, and power across past and future. This silent but potent call for connection, a complex interplay of agency and conformity, is not something current vocabularies of visibility and empowerment would capture. Refusal or inability to see the "opacity" of Zhang's invitation to communicate about sex, desire, and pleasure with others through his tanbai jiaodai embodies the unfortunate myopia of theorizing socialist queerness from the perspective of global neoliberal desire.

As we can see from the above sections, beneath the surface of an individual who was supposed to sublimate himself to the party and the revolution—as well as to a coercive culture that forced the private into the public—there was also a mixture of fear, deviation, desire, and pleasure. The oppressive apparatus and space where self-making was carried out led to unexpected outcomes, rendering the sexuality of state socialism queer. Marked by passion and tensions, the Chinese queer self was at odds not only with the official discourse of the revolution at the time, but also with the present representation of the past. Such an oddity, or queerness, leads back to political questions: How do we do queer history without simplifying historical injury? What are ethical relations that we, as queer historians, researchers, activists, and policymakers, could develop? And how do we imagine a radical queer politics that simultaneously attends to violence, damage, and homophobia as well as epistemological, affective, and methodological limitations of our own that closet ways of conceptualizing and being "queer"?

**POWER AND PLEASURE IN "QUEER SOCIALISM"**

I was surprised to learn recently that Zhang S. P. was still alive. I wanted to know what exactly had happened to him, how he felt when forced to confess, and how his life had turned out. Knowing that the pain, suffering, and pleasure of queer historical forebears mirror the pain, suffering, and pleasure of queers in the present could strengthen our queer community across time and place, and the touch of historical figures could reaffirm that no matter how difficult life was or is, "We're here. We're queer. Get (fucking) used to it!" But I also feared what Zhang might tell me. His tanbai jiaodai could have been read many ways by his coevals, historians, and future readers—he could be seen as a failed socialist man who seduced and corrupted his workmates, a desiring subject who pursued his sexual self and aroused others, a queer antihero whose coyness sexualized the party and the state, et cetera. The juiciness of these texts and the richness of their constitution and interpretations resist a prescriptive method that diminishes queer life to agendas organized around neoliberal values of consumer citizenship and homonationalist liberatory rhetoric. But what if the "real" Zhang was nothing like the one depicted in my readings and projections? Would the impulse to know resurrect the paranoid reading that these texts resist? Would "facts" from his own mouth obfuscate the imaginative close readings? Would my resistance to know in order to fertilize agentic reading of the past undermine the subject's own agency and desire in the present?

When I shared these concerns with a queer friend, he commented, "I've been wondering how come we haven't seen much BDSM-playing based on
socialist plots, if socialism has impacted our culture and behaviors so deeply. When you were talking about Zhang and Little Li’s conversation about being unable to ejaculate, I thought it could be a good source for an orgasm-denial play." As Zhang had surprised me by his writings, this remark surprised me by showing how historiography can be erotic, as bodies in historical encounters clash and become tools to "effect, figure, or perform that encounter."* There is never a set boundary between felt history and understood history. Cognitive and rational modes of apprehending history are often intertwined with the sensory and the emotional, opening space for inserting desires, pleasures, and surprises. The dichotomous construction of socialist oppression and post-socialist liberation has left us only one version of socialist sensory disposition: exalted abjection. If this disposition has disabled our erotic imagination and ability to feel pleasure in learning about the past, a reparative return to "queer socialism" then allows us to revive our bodily and epistemological ability to be surprised, to explore pleasure and eroticism in imaginative reading of historical encounters. For this very reason, I decided not to meet Zhang, so that other readers could be surprised and be encouraged to retell socialist history, presenting it in varied and surprisingly queerer ways.

NOTES
1 Wong, "I Lived in Darkness."
2 Ibid.
3 Jeffreys and Yu, Sex in China, 5.
4 Honig, "Socialist Sex," 145.
5 See also Honig and Zhao, "Sent-down Youth and Rural Economic Development in Maoist China"; and Min, Red Azalea.
6 Arondekar, "In the Absence of Reliable Ghosts," 99.
7 Love, Feeling Backward, 3.
8 Halberstam, In a Queer Time and Place, 143.
10 Love, Feeling Backward, 3.
11 Ibid., 5.
12 Puur, Terrorist Assemblages.
13 Rofel, Desiring China, 13.
15 Alexander, Trauma, 2.
16 Wang, China’s New Order, 4–5.
17 Du, "From Taboo to Open Discussion," 134.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
20 Historically speaking, China has no law against homosexuality, since homosexuality was not officially recognized by the state authority until 2004 (Guo, Zhongguo fashiyixia de tongxingli, 65; Zhou, Aiyou yu guixun, 209; and Kang, "The Decriminalization and Depathologization of Homosexuality in China," 232). Jiujian (sodomy) was criminalized under Qing dynasty laws as an illicit behavior (Sommer, Sex, Law, and Society in Late Imperial China, 119–30), a designation that continued in the state socialist era. "Hooliganism" is a broad category of illicit, punishable behaviors that include loitering, public indecency, and gang fights (Guo, Zhongguo fashiyixia de tongxingli, 65; and Kang, "The Decriminalization and Depathologization of Homosexuality in China," 233). Male same-sex behavior was criminalized under the provisions of "disruption of social order," rather than as a sex crime (Kang, "The Decriminalization and Depathologization of Homosexuality in China," 233). During the Cultural Revolution, individuals who engaged in male same-sex practices were classified as huai fenzi (bad elements) in the revolutionary lexicon.
21 Alongside the archival sources discussed here, which I collected in the course of my fieldwork, a small number of similar archival sources have also been previously found and analyzed by legal scholars such as Xiaofei Guo and Dan Zhou as evidence for studying socialist laws. See Guo, Zhongguo fashiyixia de tongxingli; and Zhou, Aiyou yu guixun.
22 See the 1957 Heilongjiang province Supreme Court case in Kang, "The Decriminalization and Depathologization of Homosexuality in China," 235–36.
23 In original material I collected.
24 Kang, "The Decriminalization and Depathologization of Homosexuality."
25 For example, the Lesbian Herstory Archives in Brooklyn, New York, and the GLBT Historical Society archives in San Francisco.
26 Cvetkovich, An Archive of Feelings, 8.
27 Marshall et al., Queering Archives, 2.
28 Windscript, "Hopes and Collisions."
29 Ye, "Keeping a Diary in China."
31 Halberstam, In a Queer Time and Place, 6.
41 Chou, Tongzhi, 22–23.
THE IRONY OF SIZE
Male Smallness and the Rise of China
EVERETT YUEHONG ZHANG

In outpatient clinics in both Beijing and Chengdu, where I was conducting fieldwork on the “epidemic of impotence,” I often heard men worry about the small size of their penises. The intensity of this worry extended far beyond the clinic. One evening in the early 2000s, I attended the live broadcast of Whispering (Qiaoqiao hua), a well-known sex-education radio call-in show in Tianjin that featured a male doctor of Chinese medicine. Such call-in shows had become popular since the 1990s. I was unexpectedly asked by Ms. Liu, the host of the show, to join the doctor in taking listeners’ questions. One of the questions was about penis size. An eighteen-year-old man thought, on the basis of his observations in the public shower room, that his penis was abnormally small compared to those of other men. As a result, he no longer dared to go to the shower room, as he could not bear to have others see his genitals. Without thinking too carefully, I said:

This is a rather common anxiety. In my current fieldwork, I’ve been in contact with many patients who were worried about their small penises. In general, the worry was unnecessary. Many men became aware of the length of their penises by comparing them with other people’s penises. But the way they made these comparisons was not accurate.

First, what matters about the penis is its length in erection. If a penis can become long enough to penetrate after erection, its length is fine. Science has emphasized time and time again that