

Chapter Two the History of Male to Male Sex Work

Introduction to the Primary Historical Materials

There is a dearth of primary historical materials dealing with male to male sex workers in China. It is not to be unexpected that discussions of the topic of male to male sexual relations were taboo. But as China opens to the outside world, China's sexualization problems have become more serious in step with economic development, the question of AIDS has come to the forefront, and people have therefore begun to notice the existence of male to male sex work issues. The AIDS situation in China, since the first known case in 1985 at Beijing Union Hospital (of an Argentinian American), under the dual pressures of official Chinese government avoidance and denial, and in spite of the annual 30% increase in the spread of HIV positive carriers, the extent of the seriousness of the problem remains to be uncovered. During the June 2001 UN HIV/AIDS Special Conference, the Chinese Minister of Health Wenkang Zhang, admitted there might be as many as 600,000 HIV positive carriers in China, or tens of times more than the official figures published in 2000 of 22,517 cases, but the actual figure could be still two to three times that amount.

Prostitution has consistently been a primary source for transmission of the AIDS virus. In the Chinese mainland, besides the female sex workers, male sex workers are also a main source of HIV transmission. While the public is aware of the problem of female sex workers, male sex workers face a lack of social support and protection. In China, some social scientists, such as Professor Tuoming Pan, Professor Yinghe Li, and Professor Beichuan Zhang, have conducted some research on male to male sex workers, but their results have been oriented to clinical medicine research or gays in prostitution, rather than focusing on the problems of the male to male sex work trade in society. (An, 1997)

Hence, other than the questions of AIDS and of sexual orientation, the author realized that in China there have only been three extensive research studies on male to male sex work as the theme: Nan Shi's *The Secret History of Chinese Male Prostitutes*,

2.1 Nan Shi' s The Secret History of Chinese Male Prostitutes.

In 1994 Nan Shi' s The Secret History of Chinese Male Prostitutes, became the first work to explore China' s male to male sex work. The entire work is in two parts, and in it Show advances the thesis that China has always had homosexuals, that homosexuality is natural, and that of course there may be some environmental contributions to its development, just the same as one finds among other social groups, among homosexuals too, some engage in selling their bodies, that is, male prostitutes. Moreover the history of male prostitution in China is just as ancient as that of female prostitutes.

The book discusses that as far as the presence of male prostitutes in China is concerned, the sale of one' s body to the opposite sex or the same sex in China has always been an open secret. It is only that because of the persistence of feudalism in China, and the depth of patriarchal notions, that the presence of the male prostitute has been hidden from history, away in the closet, like the proverbial needle in the haystack. In China, the social status of the male prostitute has been beneath even that of the female prostitute. This may be because the existence of males as prostitutes is a sort of declaration of war against the social authority and stature of males in society.

The earliest male prostitutes appear to have been those who sold entertainment services to the royalty (imperial court), that is to say that the earliest male prostitutes were those who provided sexual services to the powerful royal family members and the wealthy family matriarchs. Wealthy matriarchs could compel male prostitution, firstly, because they were close relatives of the Emperor, and secondly through the dual seduction of power and money. During the North South Dynasties the Overcast Mountain Princess said to Ziyue Liu:

“Although the emperor and I have a different gender, but we are both offspring of the former emperor, and should be treated equally. In your court chambers there are thousands of nubile beauties, all singularly at the service of your many pleasures, and I have yet but one husband, surely it is grossly unfair!”

Ziye Liu felt persuaded by these arguments, and personally selected 30 exceedingly handsome males for his younger sister, so that she might enjoy them as she pleased. Zetian Wu, during her machinations in the royal court, in order to seduce the Zhang family brothers and Huaiyi Xue, to serve her pleasures, would resort to every possible strategy. Zetian Wu even specially designed a Parrot Cage Prison where she held as many handsome men as could be found, to serve her pleasures, in a court known as the 3000 Handsome Faces.

Historical materials reveal that these male prostitutes were known as male pets, playful kids, and lover kids, that is what is currently referred to as male to male sex workers, or Money Boys, etcetera. In the famous historical story, Shuo Yuan, it is recorded that Je-shar Me favored General Wei, and when Je-shar Me learned his mother was sick he borrowed the General's horse drawn chariot and this display of filial piety greatly impressed the General who promoted Je-shar Me. Later when he was in his orchards, Je-shar Me picked some very sweet peaches as a gift to thank General Wei, General Wei said, so your love for me is so sweet as a peach that it makes you forget your own mother. Now this expression, the pink fleshy peach, has become a famous Chinese proverb or pick-up line. As far as the origin of Chinese euphemisms for homosexuality such as pink peach, broken sleeves, or dragon sun, the historical record also provides similar etymological stories.

Indeed, during the Ming Dynasty, in Fujian, Guangdong, Beijing and the like, there was a popular trend towards homosexuality, with women having "secret friends" and men having "contract guys". In the Ch'ing Dynasty there was law stating that descendants of prostitutes and men who are compelled into sexual intercourse, are ineligible to sit for the imperial civil service exams. From this, one can infer that male homosexuality was commonplace. In Fujian gay people referred to themselves as contract brothers, contract guys (or contractual elder brother, contractual younger brother), and in Peking as Little Singers (little prostitutes).

Fukienese not only engaged in homosexual sexual contact, but even sought to distinguish these ties in emotional terms, and in economic terms in their contracts provided that contract brothers would be "entitled to a lifetime emolument and the costs of getting

married” as part of their homosexual contract. Defu Shen states: in coastal Fujian, there were many pirates during the Ming Dynasty, and maritime taboos forbade the presence of women on ships, so homosexual contact likely arose in that context.

From Nan Shi’s extracts of the historical records one can see that Chinese history from the period of the Warring States to the Ming and Ch’ing Dynasties homosexuality was very common. Nan Shi’s work, *The Secret History of Chinese Male Prostitution*, provides a very thorough overview of the history of male prostitutes. A plethora of historical materials and literature prove the popularity of male homosexuality in China. Unfortunately Nan Shi did not present his arguments as an objective observer of the anguish of the male prostitutes. Nan Shi felt that the coercion involved in the system of male prostitution, was particularly destructive and dangerous to society. He felt that the male prostitutes did not feel ashamed at being prostitutes, but on the contrary were proud, the male prostitutes holding hands and go cross the streets can be seen often ; occasionally there were cases of murder when the male prostitute refused their services or “fell in love” with another ; some pedophiles ended their marriages in separation ; So people stop pursuing fames and all their fortune would be spent on the male prostitutes. Nan Shi thought the male sex workers didn’t know what shameful was and conducted the trend of lust. His work on the *Secret History of Male Prostitutes* was written in the hope of allowing readers to understand the real truth about the history of male prostitution in China, and the hidden ugliness and shame of the feudal system’s ostensible emphasis on social decorum.

The writer feels that Nan Shi’s analysis correctly portrays the wide social consensus of Chinese society with respect to the status of male to male sexuality and such activities, but fails to take into account the actual psychosocial feelings of the Chinese male to male sexual workers. The book provides ample historical resources, to show the presence of male homosexuality throughout Chinese history, proving that this was always an open secret just beneath the surface of the public’s historical consciousness. But the work (unnecessarily) vilifies the role of the male to male sex worker. The work advances the thesis that the male to male sex worker role is one that violates morality and ethics. In the book, Nan Shi defines the male prostitute as one coerced into serving as a tool for

homosexual eroticism, or as the result of a materialistic impulse which leads to prostitution. Stated simply, the men in the book are portrayed as selling their bodies for their own pleasure, to become male pleasure toys for the other sex or for those of their own sex.

It is obvious that Nan Shi has not given due regard for the social, economic, and cultural influences and obstacles affecting the Chinese male to male sex workers, nor how the social environment of the time resulted in other factors regarding male to male sex workers. Among these, the family backgrounds of the male to male sex workers, the influence of the cultural sensibilities of the society, and the state of national economic development all exercised major impacts on the male to male sex workers. But there is a paucity of historical evidence in these regards. Additionally, because of Nan Shi's perspective on these male to male sex workers, the male to male sex workers in his work are villainized, which is quite a shame.

But the historical research materials provided by the book, clearly analyze the attitudes towards the male to male sex workers in each dynasty, and from the examples provided in the historical materials, the reader is given a very clear idea about the male to male sexual trade by demonstrating the historical origins of the Chinese male to male sex worker.

2.2 Ge Tong

China's first work on the male homosexual community was published in Beijing in 2007; *The Survey of China's Male to Male Sex Trade*. With support from the Ford Foundation, the Beijing Gender Consultancy Center published the 550,000 word text, from the sexological point of view, comprehensively, thoroughly, specifically, and realistically portraying the Chinese society's male to male sex workers and their activities, revealing the Chinese homo-comrades hidden lifestyles and their secretive culture. The report was authored by Ge Tong and has 14 chapters altogether. The work begins by considering the definitions of the concepts of the male to male sex worker and related euphemisms, then proceeds to consider the social backdrop of the traditional Chinese male to male sex trade from feudalism to the contemporary male to male sex trade. Next the work presents the

actual work of the male to male sex workers and the relationships with mamasans and customers. The work finally considers various sexual conducts, the social and legal environment, and a humane (humanities) perspective to conclude.

This book has a total of 550,000 Chinese characters. It is based on intensive field research. There are more than five hundred in-depth true reports included. It reveals the hidden truths, lying just beneath the surface of contemporary Chinese society and the legal framework, of the male to male sexual activities and MSM subculture comparing the exchange of sexual contact in human relations.

Through this research, several questions are raised about the Chinese male to male sex workers, including the following:

1. By comparing the historical sex slave trade in China in its social context and social background of the contemporary male to male sex trade activities, it is clear that there no longer exists the subservience of slavery or involuntary servitude or ownership by the mamamsans and customers as regards today' s male to male sex workers. The vast majority of male to male sex workers appear to be voluntary, independent, knowing actors engaged in consensual activity. Moreover they are the primary beneficiaries from the sex trade. Their relations with the mamasans are a form of joint venture between equal partners in sharing the economic benefits of their enterprise. The book argues that these facts directly impute (implicate) the traditional ethical evaluations and rational critiques, with the full force of a heads-on challenge to the establishment way of thinking.

2. The book shows that after applying the theoretical constructs to the factual circumstances observed, one finds that although the male to male sex workers have to some degree continued the rules of the game from the traditional context, but given the changing times and social development, there is greater respect for the participants basic human rights and personal self-determination.

3. The field research shows that even though there is to some extent a uniform evaluation of GAY/MB sex and human character among the MSM subculture, but this does not represent a stereotypical form of discrimination about male to male sexuality. But according to the book' s findings, there is not a high degree of uniformity between the MSM subculture' s activities and the male to male sex trade activities, in terms of

interpersonal relations, sexual relations etcetera. In terms of their social relationship and interactions, and in terms of the organizational structure, structure, and nature, while there is some criss-cross, each remains within its own unique system.

4. The book shows that there is a plethora of violence in the course of male to male sex trade activities, primarily because society continues to support the traditional ethics (pure ethics in law), and this gives rise to the violent prejudices among the participants, originating from the social discrimination against the sex trade.

5. The book argues from a contemporary humane point of view, to exhibit social concern for the MB subculture. Society should increase humane concern with help, fairness and understanding, rather than coercive moral or legal constraints, to help them establish their social independence and to discharge their proper social responsibility.

As Professor Shuming Pan argued in the book's introduction (preface): "Sexuality should bring us to a brighter future, but with respect to the dual questions of homosexuality and prostitution, it is precisely sexuality which has divided humanity into two camps" . Before we have even attempted to understand these male to male sex workers, should we predestine them to a status of original sin?

Ge Tong's Survey of China's Male to Male Sex Trade, through real life interviews provides a highly detailed picture of contemporary male to male sexual relations through the sex trade and its development. The work examines the myriad of factors contributing to the development of the male to male sex worker. Moreover the text presents analyzes numerous varied examples to explain and explore the values and social attitudes of the male to male sex work(er).

But the work also contains some theses which seem somewhat doubtful. First of all, Ge Tong argues that because there is no longer an exploitative relationship, so the sexual trade transaction is one of mutual benefit. The idea that their relationship with the mamasans, is one of a shared economic interest through a joint venture, certainly seems suspect. Sexuality should be pleasurable, but when sexuality is exchanged for cash in a market transaction, this does not necessarily mean that this is a win-win situation, this point of view might be errant (quite faulty, mistaken). While, with respect to their mamasans and customers, the modern male to male sex workers no longer labor under the traditional

system of slavery, involuntary servitude or patronage, nevertheless it seems likely that their relations still involve some degree of inequality.

Finally Ge Tong argues that the MB choose to engage in sex work because: 1) they come from the relatively socially disadvantaged economic classes, which is to say that Ge Tong believes they actually hail from among the poorest in society, they are suffering from illness, family disadvantages and so on. And they have no capacity to change their state quo. So they have to sell their bodies for the income in order to improve their financial conditions. 2) they live in constant fear and a need to escape from the anxiety that their own male to male sexual contacts will become public and relegate them to ridicule and prejudice, and 3) their multifaceted approach to values and self-perception with respect to sexuality and body identity. Moreover, Ge Tong feels these motivational factors are powerful enough “decisional impulses” to cause them to engage in the sex trade activities, such that their choices of personal behavior clearly reveal their own voluntariness and self-determination.

Ge Tong’s thesis about their relative socioeconomic disadvantage, certainly seems suspect when describing all of the male to male sex workers. This is because simply being relatively poorer than the wealthiest in society does not seem enough to compel men to engage in sex work. The disparities in the socioeconomic conditions of the rural and urban areas, and the government’s support and societal pressures, would seem to merit some consideration as well. When the writer met with the associated researchers for this project, discussions revealed that many of the researchers in this field are homosexuals, who grew up in the countryside, and were raised within the traditional confines of the patriarchal system, causing the difficulty of the MB trying to find their own place in life, so they leave their hometowns in a search for freedom to be themselves, but then find themselves trapped as it were by the dual pressures of financial realities and unequal social opportunities, so that they cannot but sell their own bodies. The evidence for this point will be explored in greater detail in the later chapters of this thesis.

Ge Tong’s China’s Male to Male Relations- Survey of Sexuality and Personal Identity, provides numerous real life interview examples and a treasure trove of historical materials, but unfortunately the statistical evidence for many of the work’s theses are not

so complete. Moreover the work explores male to male sex workers throughout the Chinese mainland as examples, with many different backgrounds, and many diverse settings, but lacking a focused sensitivity to geosocial influences and differences. But the book is unique for its very realistic portrayal of the male to male sex workers, and through its use of multifaceted human personality analysis, economic values, social relations, and sexual relations, all of which amplify the book's prefatory remarks about the treasure trove of research materials involved.

2.3 Daling Liu (Taling Liu)

China has long suffered under the crucifix of strictures of formal politeness and proper decorum; so that most people think that the Chinese are reticent and reserved about talking about sexuality. The world generally believes that China lacks any sex education, and that sexual knowledge is very primitive. It was therefore only after completely reading the 3 volumes of Professor Taling Liu's *Chinese Ancient Sexual Culture*, that one realized just how varied and lively Chinese sexuality has always been throughout all levels of society. This echoes the comments of Professor Hanwen Yu, Executive Director of the Almond Medical Foundation, in his preface to the work, "sexuality, is a very important aspect of human life, which exerts strong influences on social development and culture, so it is only natural that with a history as distinguished as ancient China's, stretching back five thousand years, that the results should have been plentiful and quite varied... the natural sexual inclinations/demands of the people cannot be suppressed or destroyed." From this one can extrapolate the importance of human sexuality in every society (nation). It is an indivisible aspect of being human. This is all the more so with regard to what the Chinese term to be their five thousand year legacy, as a valuable area for intensive research.

In the 3 volumes of *Ancient Chinese Sexual Culture* by Professor Taling Liu, Professor Liu begins by defining culture to reveal the importance of sexuality or the sex culture. He argues: "Cultural reality is a unique aspect of human societies, a uniquely clear marker of the evolution from animals to man, from man's biological needs to a

social need. Man's physical and mental labors, when applied to the natural world, as well as the various interpersonal relations which arise in the processes of transforming our natural environs, form our cultures. In cultural terms, sexuality is a natural aspect of humanity, but in terms of the scientific comprehension of sexual behavior, moral concepts, etcetera, the cultural realities of this, have become what is termed sexuality or the sexual culture” .

Additionally, in the *collection works of Engel*, Engels' famous works on two kinds of productive forces, elicits the ideas of materialism, that historical forces determine the forces of production and re-production. Engels also argued that there are two kinds of production: one is of living matter; the other is that of human reproduction, that is the biological reproduction of the human species. From this one can see that the question of racism arises, and sexual matters affect historical and social development, with a deterministic force.

It is precisely for these reasons, that Professor Taling Liu in the 3 volumes of his work *Ancient Chinese Sexual Culture*, outlines the three objectives for his sexological research. First, Professor Liu hopes the work will help the Chinese people better understand how historical influences impact on the present circumstances, and on the future. Professor Liu argues that the five thousand year course of Chinese history is a history of the development of a productive capacity (production), as well as a history of the transformation of sexuality from a maternal society to a paternalistic society, from tribalism to individual marriages, from sexual liberality to sexual prudishness. The Chinese people must understand their past in order to build their own future. Secondly, Professor Liu hopes the research on ancient sexuality will help improve people's daily lives. The story of human history is the continual and unfinished quest for human liberation. Sexuality is a unique need of the human race, and its satisfaction (fulfillment) and the battle therefore not only affect a major impact on human health, but also exercise decisive influences on the processes of human civilization building. When human sexuality remains oppressed, it is impossible for human fulfillment in happiness to be attained. Finally, Professor Liu argues that sexology research must necessarily focus on the proper social control of sexuality, to preserve the social order and provide the bounds for values

judgments about appropriate and inappropriateness, the right and the wrong, in human sexual behavior.

Professor Liu divides his work, *Ancient Chinese Sexual Culture*, into volumes I, II, and III. Volume I discusses the different biological origins of sexuality in humans and animals, from the origins of communities to the feudalistic totalitarianism, to explore the Chinese sexual culture's relations to socioeconomic development. Thus he emphasizes that a society will have a cultural atmosphere that reflects its level of economic development. At the same time, Professor Liu also argues that in a stratified society, sexual culture also bears the imprints of class status, bearing the marks of the battles of social contradictions and class warfare. The hedonism of the ruling classes is one of the means by which their exploitation and oppression of the masses is expressed. But irrespective of how much the ruling classes try to restrict the masses understanding, they can never completely repress the people's desire for sexuality nor the natural resistance to the oppressiveness of feudalistic virtues. In matters of sexuality and love, to resist exploitation and oppression, gives rise to a subculture which stands out against the majority culture, as expressed in many works.

In the second volume of *Ancient Chinese Sexual Culture*, Professor Taling Liu explores from the advanced feudalistic stage of Chinese society, from the unbridled and unrestrained lust of the Emperor to the demand for true love which is the hallmark of the Song and Yuan dynasties. From the beginnings of male prostitution to its end with the social changes wrought by the monogamy system. Professor Liu reveals that although ancient Chinese rulers often oppressed popular sexuality, but the history of Chinese sexuality is filled with ebbs and flows in cycles of openness and repression, depending it seems on whether the dynasty in question was powerful enough to enforce its edicts and on the determination of the rulers. This also reveals that with respect to human sexuality, it is impossible to coercively repress it for long. From the historical perspective, matters of sexuality cannot be resolved by administrative or coercive measures, but must take into account the various factors of mankind and our humanity.

Finally in the third tome of his *Ancient Chinese Sexual Culture*, Professor Liu discusses the decline of the feudal dynastic period's rampant sexuality licentiousness and

the imperial court's homosexual trend, to the fall of the feudal system and death of the homosexual trend. Professor Liu feels that the sexual mores hold a special place in the sexual culture, because ideas and values are formed in the heart under cultural influences, and directly affect the manner in which human sexual behavior will be expressed. Thus, different conceptions of human sexual mores across the different dynasties could result in various forms of sexual repression, and the history of Chinese sexuality is indeed a history of the battle of competing concepts of sexual mores.

Additionally, Professor Liu argues that in Chinese history, the homosexual trend plays an important role. Homosexuality appears to have penetrated (permeated) every Chinese dynasty. This work, *Ancient Chinese Sexual Culture*, proves that the MB has existed throughout Chinese history. The work proves that from ancient days Chinese society has had males who in desperate circumstances because of the rule of the feudal system had become relegated to serving as the playthings of the upper echelons of society. From the Spring and Autumn Warring States period to the Qin and Han dynasties, the homosexual trend existed amongst the princelings and aristocratic classes, as evidence of their lascivious lifestyles, until the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern dynasties, when the homosexual trend extended to the general public, eventually becoming a hobby of sorts for some of the populace.

Until the Tang dynasty's social openness and the public's sexuality was also opened to exploration and liberation, and slavery was widespread, and these factors combine to see the rise of houses of male prostitution. In the Tang Dynasty work "Different Remembrances of the Clearness" Tao Ke writes: "among the males of Chang-An, they all engage in the sex trade, as if it were the most natural of phenomenon." Refers to the capital Chang-An (present day Xi'an), where men would sell their own bodies as products in the marketplace, working as prostitutes. Until the Ming dynasty, when sexual novels and pornographic art books, can show the popularity of the homosexual trend (or maybe, gigolo). From Professor Taling Liu's proof one can learn about the harsh torture of the Ming dynasty, and the culpability of the extended family of the guilty, which resulted in the sources of and formation of the catamite. Because at the time there was no legal stricture against male prostitution, and it was more expensive to

engage in prostitution with females, and because wives could not enquire about their husband's sexual intimacy, the rise of the homosexual gigolo became an instant trend. Until the Ch'ing Dynasty governed all of China, and the Manchurian while governing the Han nevertheless feared their own signification under Han culture, and the mandarins feared that female prostitution related lasciviousness would ruin the nation, so the system of male prostitution became an accepted form of sexuality with the quiet assent of the ruling classes. Until the middle of the 19th century, when foreign invaders brought colonialism, and homosexuality was the proof needed to make the Chinese the laughingstock of the West for their supposed moral depravity. The Chinese homosexual trend entered a new historical phase along with the rest of Chinese society.

Professor Taling Liu advances the thesis in his work that while on the surface the homosexual movement appears to be some sort of popular social trend, but this seems to be contradicted by the popular disparagement of prostitution? Professor Liu believes there must be many deep influences such as politics, economics, society and culture, as well as class oppression, and ethnic or national oppression, which may well be worthy serving as the focal points for more in-depth research studies.

Professor Taling Liu in *Ancient Chinese Sexual Culture* describes the history of sexual culture in China from ancient times to the present in a very systematic fashion. Moreover he provides a detailed look at the Chinese concepts of sexuality and the historical pulses of sexual oppression. Besides relying on the written historical record for evidence, Taling Liu, he also culled numerous examples of physical evidence for his historical arguments. This affords us ample materials from which to rebut the common misperceptions of people towards Chinese sexual history. We can certainly say that the greater the oppressiveness of the governmental regime, the more varied will be their sexual expressiveness.