Same Sex Desire and Society in Taiwan, 1970–1987

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ABSTRACT This article presents a comprehensive analysis of the discourses of same-sex desire which predominated in Taiwan in the two decades preceding the lifting of martial law in 1987. Using a poststructuralist, historical approach, it is shown that Taiwan – being on the one hand a society with a strong Chinese cultural heritage, but on the other a society which has developed a strong sense of self-identity as a result of a history very different from that of the Chinese mainland during the last century – can provide valuable insights into the ways in which social developments, global interaction and intercultural influences have changed the discourse of same-sex desire. Within the framework of this approach, it will be shown that these changes, which contributed towards the liberalization and pluralization of Taiwanese society, began to take effect in the period just before the lifting of martial law.

“There are no days in our kingdom, only nights. As soon as the sun comes up, our kingdom goes into hiding, for it is an unlawful nation; we have no government and no constitution, we are neither recognized nor respected by anyone.”¹ This description of “gay life in the 1970s” by the well-known Taiwanese author Bai Xianyong stands in stark contrast to the recent announcement by Taiwan’s president, Chen Shui-bian, that “gay marriage” (tongzhi hunyin) is going to be legalized;² the discourse of same-sex desire in Taiwan has clearly undergone dramatic changes in recent decades.³ The political and social changes which have affected

¹. Pai Hsien-yung (Bai Xianyong), Crystal Boys (San Francisco: Gay Sunshine Press), p. 17 (originally published as Niezi (Taipei: Yuanjing wenxue, 1983)).
². In this article the terms “same-sex desire,” “homosexuality” and “gay and lesbian” are used interchangeably. I would like to remind the reader, however, that “homosexuality” – and the Chinese neologism tongxinglian – although perceived at first sight to be scientific and neutral, are heavily value-ridden terms, and should be used only with great caution within a specific historical context; see Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, Vol. I: The Will to Knowledge (London: Penguin Books, 1990) (1st pub. 1978), p. 43. In the classical Chinese discourse, a differentiation was made between male–male and female–female same-sex desire: “Prior to the formation of the category female same-sex love in the 1910s and 1920s, there had not existed in Chinese a general category of wide currency comparable to nanse (male–male eroticism) demarcating a particular set of female–female relations,” Tze-Ian Deborah Sang, The Emerging Lesbian: Female Same-Sex Desire in Modern China (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 17.
³. Chris Hogg, “Taiwan move to allow gay unions,” BBC News World edition, 28 October 2003, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/3219721.stm. The term tongzhi, “comrade,” translated as “gay/lesbian/queer,” was first created in Hong Kong in 1992 when Mai Ke and Lin Yihua were looking for a translation of “queer cinema.” The term itself derives from Sun Yat-sen: “The revolution has not yet succeeded, comrades, let us give our best efforts” (geming shang wei chenggong, tongzhi reng xu nuli), see Zhou Huashan (Chou Wah-shan), Houzhimin tongzhi (Postcolonial Tongzhi) (Hong Kong: Tongzhi yanjiushe, 1998), p. 360. A localized post-modern ku'er-discourse (ku'erlun) – the name derives from “queer discourse” – gradually took shape in Taiwan in the 1990s; see in particular, Ji Dawei (Chi

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“gay and lesbian” life in Taiwan since 1987, including the influence exerted by the latest post-modern queer and tongzhi-discourses on literature and films, have been the focus of many academic publications. Much less attention, however, has been focused on the events of the preceding years, even though the current discourses can only be fully comprehended in the context of earlier developments. A comparison of very different text sources (in particular, society news, academic publications from many different fields and the yellow press) illustrates the ways in which discourses from one area gradually began to influence other discourses and shows that the developing heterogeneity within Taiwanese society was not only reflected in the knowledge produced in science but also in the content of more widely read publications such as the daily newspapers.

During the first two decades of Kuomintang (KMT) rule, Taiwan experienced steady economic growth but changes to the political system were not permitted; the corporatist model of KMT rule was omni-present. Taiwanese society between the 1950s and 1960s could be described as heterosexualized in terms of discourse; “family values” were regarded as deriving directly from a stable Confucian and Chinese tradition and public discourses of same-sex desire were almost non-existent:

Confucianism was invoked essentially as a set of stripped down ethical values which had a specific role in the service of the state. As a generalized moral philosophy, or a kind of social ethics that could be easily translated into secular action, Confucianism entailed here a devotion to filial piety, respect for social authority, and everyday etiquette.

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Ta-Wei) (ed.), Ku’er qishilu (Queer Archipelago: A Reader of the Queer Discourses in Taiwan) (Taipei: Yuanliu, 1997). For an introduction to queer theory, see Annemarie Jagose, Queer Theory: An Introduction (New York: New York University, 1997).


6. A flood of publications on same-sex desire, supported by post-modern academic theorizing, accompanied the new social movements which arose after 1987, see Tze-lan Deborah Sang, The Emerging Lesbian, p. 227.

7. Discourses, in Foucault’s work, relate to “ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations that inhere in such knowledges and the relations between them,” Chris Weedon, Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), p. 108.

A Confucian morality was used to strengthen the power and influence of the KMT and the mainlanders who had come to Taiwan together with the Nationalist troops in 1949.9

In the published opinion, homosexuality was marginalized, very few articles on same-sex desire appeared in the mass media10 and even the regulations governing censorship did not mention same-sex contacts.11 The few that were published often made reference to a discrepancy between sex and gender, citing cases such as that of Zeng Shuwang and Zeng Qiuhuang, who were accused of “violating the natural order” by wearing women’s clothes. These individuals were referred to as renyao – “freaks” or “monsters”12 – and they were regarded as being beyond the pale.13 In the case of the renyao Zeng Qiuhuang, for example, it was pointed out that he was “biologically” a man, that he was a husband and father of five children. The fact, however, that he had been given in

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9. The more liberal urban discourses which could be found in the 1910s and 1920s on the mainland were treated as suspect and leftist; see Tze-lan Deborah Sang, “Translating homosexuality: the discourse of tongxing’ai in Republican China,” in Lydia H. Liu (ed.), Tokens of Exchange: The Problem of Translation in Global Circulations (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), pp. 276–304.

10. Not until the 1980s and 1990s were various interviews carried out and published in popular magazines such as G&L, when attempts were made to present an oral history of the 1950s same-sex discourses, Xin gongyuan koushu lishi xiaozu (The Group for New Park Oral History), “Zhao Ma zuihou de koushu lishi” (“The last oral history of Zhao Ma”), Re’ai zazhi (G&L), No. 7 (June 1997), pp. 32–39.

11. Antonia Yengning Chao described the official opinion regarding homosexuality before the lifting of martial law as follows: “I need to add that homosexuality during this period of time was completely out of the domains of ‘eroticism’ and ‘sex acts’ regarding film censorship. This is not to say that male homosexuality had not been considered a form of sexuality in orthodox thinking, rather that it was so obviously deviant or abnormal that its unrepresentability needed no further elaboration.” Antonia Yengning Chao, “So, who is the stripper? State power pornography and the cultural logic of representability in post-martial law,” Inter-Asia Cultural Studies, Vol. 1, No. 2 (August 2000), pp. 233–248, at p. 236.

12. The translation of the term renyao presents some difficulties: Lin Yutang’s Chinese–English Dictionary of Modern Usage (http://www.arts.cuhk.edu.hk/Lexis/Lindict) offers three translations: (1) a devil in human form, an evil genius; (2) a freak, a person showing abnormal sex characteristics; (3) a person fond of fancy dress and excessive make-up. I refer to renyao as “freaks” when dealing with articles in the mainstream press, in particular from the 1950s to the 1970s, but use “transvestite” to refer to renyao in more recent contexts.

13. “Taizhong jingju buhuo renyao Zeng Shuwang” (“Taizhong police arrest the freak, Zeng Shuwang”), Heping ribao, 19 May 1948, p. 2; “Renyao dangtang zhaogong chengren shi nan’ershen, sui shi wu ge haizi de baba, ta que jiaguo yi ci ren” (“In a statement made before the court, the freak confessed that he was a man and that although he was the father of five children, he had been given in marriage to a man”), Zili wanbao, 18 October 1951, p. 5; “Renyao Zeng Qiuhuang an; gaoyuan shenxun zhongjie” (“In the case of the freak, Zeng Qiuhuang, the High Court has finished hearing the evidence”), Zili wanbao, 18 October 1951, p. 5.
marriage to a man was enough to warrant his being treated as a common criminal.  

**Political and Social Background**

During the 1970s and 1980s, a civil society began to emerge and transformation processes began to gather pace which would eventually lead to dramatic upheavals in Taiwanese society. Although this period continued to be shaped by authoritarian structures, it was now that the first cracks began to appear in the vast control structure of the KMT. In local elections and by-elections political opposition groups began to appear, although this opposition was very limited and the candidates lived under permanent threat of arrest; they were also only permitted to stand for election as independent candidates (that is, dangwai, “candidates outside the party”). Critical publications essential for pluralism and the discussion of “taboo topics” were still not allowed, but a private publishing market without rigorous pre-publication censorship (though with active post-publication censorship) allowed a “grey” market to emerge, so that a wide range of magazines appeared in print, even if only for a limited period.  

There was another crackdown on the opposition during the Formosa Incident (Meilidao shijian) in 1979, but even this turned out to be only a temporary setback to the emergence of a more liberal society.  

By the early 1980s, although life in Taiwan was still legally subject to martial law and authoritarian rule, the forces of change had become so strong that the KMT was no longer in full control of events. As the corporatist model of the KMT grew weaker, independent groups emerged which were able to lead a parallel existence; this contributed to the

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14. The legal situation at that time was as follows: from 1943 to 1991, the “wearing of odd/inappropriate outfits” (qizhuang yifu) was prohibited under Article 66 of the Law for Punishment of Police Offences (weijing fafa). This regulation was not mentioned in any media reports in 1948 or 1951 (see n. 13). It seems that it was only enforced later, in the 1960s, when it was primarily directed against men with long hair or women wearing trousers and minis. Offenders were not accused of cross-dressing, but of offending against “traditional morality” and of being too Americanized. I would doubt that Antonia Yengning Chao’s observation regarding the enforcement of the regulations in the 1960s and 1970s could be applied to the 1950s: “This was when an act against ch’i-chuang i-fu (“wearing ‘odd’ or ‘inappropriate’ outfits,” especially gender-crossing ones) was covered by and strictly enforced under Martial Law”; Antonia Yengning Chao, *Embodying the Invisible*, p. 33. This regulation was applied only in the 1960s and 1970s against women dressed as “tom boys,” when a link was made between “gender-crossing” and “wearing odd/inappropriate dressing.”  

15. Before the 1970s, critical political magazines such as Ziyou Zhongguo (Free China) and Wensxing (Apollo) were published by liberal mainlanders; after the 1970s, critical magazines focused on Taiwanese consciousness, for example, Taiwan zhenglun (Taiwanese Political Review), founded in 1975, Meilidao (Formosa), founded in 1979, and Shenggen (Cultivate), the most radical journal at the beginning of the 1980s; see A-chin Hsiau, *Contemporary Taiwanese Cultural Nationalism* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 89–90.  

16. A-chin Hsiau argues that the Formosa Incident “set the scene for the radicalization of the opposition movement” and led to increasing “political consciousness and recognition of the autocratic nature of KMT rule,” A-chin Hsiau, *Contemporary Taiwanese Cultural Nationalism*, p. 96.
pluralization and individualization of Taiwanese society. Social differences, only thinly veiled during the years of authoritarian rule under the KMT, started to become increasingly visible.17

**Medical and Psycho-analytical Discourses: From “Discourses of a Heterosexualized East” to a Humanist Approach (1969–1987)**

As early as 1969, an article entitled “Chinese culture, personality formation and mental illness,” which had been written by two Taiwanese physicians, Tseng Wen-Shing and Hsu Jing, appeared in an American journal. This article put forward a line of argument which would be accepted in the future by most so-called medical experts.18 The contention was that although the “abnormal” development of adolescents could lead to homosexuality, the reasons for the different forms and different percentages of homosexuality could be found in socio-collective factors.

The authors described depression, alcoholism and homosexuality as forms of mental illness, and linked these with Chinese culture and personal development, explaining that “there is a practical need to understand different ways of life and the ways in which mental illness is manifested in different cultures in order to enable us to apply knowledge of psychiatry across cultural boundaries.”19 Their interpretation of homosexuality and their assumption of the relatively rare occurrence of homosexuality in Chinese societies are based on stricter adherence to expected social roles: “The fact that family and society frown upon any person who does not dress properly according to his sex tends to eliminate bisexual tendencies, one of the factors which may favor the development of homosexuality.”20

Similar arguments were used by Peng Huaizhen, a psycho-analyst who was granted wide space in the Taiwanese mass media from the middle of the 1970s. He regarded homosexuality as existing independently of social structures and cultures but also concluded that there were fundamental cultural differences between Chinese and American societies. One article by Peng Huaizhen, entitled “Zhen jia tongxinglian” (“Real and pseudo-homosexuality”), is of particular interest: published in 1981, it features all the theories and contradictions which are to be found in his later monographs, for example, *Tongxinglian, zisha, jingshenbing* (Homosexuality, Suicide, Psychosis) (1983) and *Tongxinglianzhe de ai yu xing* (Love and Sex of Homosexuals) (1987).21 In his opinion, not all homosexual

17. See, for example, the emergence of an independent Taiwanese union movement at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, which was aimed against the power of the KMT and the mainlanders; see John Minns and Robert Tierney, “The labour movement in Taiwan,” *Labour History*, No. 85 (November 2003), http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/lab/85/minns.html, accessed 29 February 2004.
phenomena were bound to specific situations: “In the history of mankind, homosexuality has always occurred and will always be a controversial topic.”

He did not seek to contextualize this statement, remarking only that there were great differences between contemporary Chinese and American societies: “In our country, we do not have any homosexual movement which could be compared with those in the United States or Europe; will there be such a movement in the future? … This is rather improbable: sex is still a taboo topic in Chinese societies.”

He did not, however, attempt to analyse the historical and cultural changes within Chinese society which had led to same-sex desire becoming such a taboo topic in contemporary Taiwan. This omission on his part is surprising given his obvious familiarity with Chinese traditions; he referred, for example, to the statement by an “old professor from Shan-dong with an upper class background” who remembered that, at the end of the imperial era, “two ‘book boys’ (shutong) had acted as xianggong and that he himself had been able to experience homosexual acts with the knowledge of his family.”


Two authors in particular, Er Dong and Hu Yiyin, were the first to challenge the prevalent medical discourse. A monograph entitled The Love that Dare not Speak its Name (Bu gan shuo chu kou de ai), by the previously unknown author Er Dong was brought out by the Xinzhi wenku publishing house in 1985. The title, taken from the defence of Oscar Wilde at his trial for “obscene” behaviour, gives a clear indication that the author was familiar with the Western discourse of that time. In his foreword, Er Dong expressed a call for tolerance using the terms “minority” and “majority,” which would later become typical expressions for an “enlightened humanist discourse”:

Homosexuals form a minority in the erotic world, ‘minority,’ however, does not mean abnormal, and we must therefore try to understand them. If some homosexual actions give you a feeling of disgust, you might well try to think of some heterosexual actions which you would not like. … And I hope that after you have read this book you will understand that homosexuals are normal people with all their human feelings and desires.

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in prison”), Shibao zazhi, No. 124 (18 April 1982), p. 34; Tongxing, zisha, jingshenbing (Homosexuality, Suicide, Psychosis) (Taipei: Dongcha, 1983); Tongxinglian zhe de ai yu xing (Love and Sexuality of Homosexuals) (Taipei: Ganlan jijinhui, 1987).
22. Peng Huaizhen, Love and Sexuality of Homosexuals. p. 150; see also Peng Huaizhen, Homosexuality, Suicide, Psychosis, pp. 28–32.
24. Ibid. p. 150.
25. Er Dong, Bu gan shuo chu kou de ai (The Love that Dare Not Speak its Name) (Taipei: Guoji wenhua, 1985); It is possible that the author was writing under a pseudonym.
26. Ibid. foreword.
The book, unusually for that time, featured many references to American scientists who were opposed to the mainstream homophobic discourse of the 1950s; Er Dong did not in fact refer to the well-known homophobic works of Irving Bieber and Charles Socarides, quoting instead George Weinberg, Alfred Kinsey, Judd Marmor and Evelyn Hooker. He also welcomed the decision of the American Psychiatric Association, in 1973, to remove homosexuality from its list of disorders. He concluded: “We assume that homosexuality is not a choice (xuanze) but an orientation (qingxiang) – with the exception of prostitution – and homosexuality should therefore be sympathized with (bei liaojie).”

Hu Yiyun authored a series of articles on homosexuality, entitled “To see through the secret of the glass circle,” which was published in the popular magazine Feicui zhoukan (Jade Weekly) in 1985. He employed a less consistent approach than Er Dong, but his work was much more influential because of the magazine’s popularity. Although Hu Yiyun often based his arguments on information obtained from “experts,” he also held interviews with homosexuals so that “first hand information” was provided. This led to obvious contradictions within the texts and to an often bewildering variety of information, including, for example, calls for more tolerance, descriptions of medical methods for the “cure of homosexuality” and information on how to avoid “homosexuality, which is not accepted by society.” He also wrote that “these people have already been punished enough by their suffering and they do not need derogatory looks from their fellow human beings.”

Hu Yiyun gave very detailed descriptions of famous bar owners, such as Zhao Ma and Taku, which showed that he was familiar with the homosexual scene, and presented lengthy interviews with them. He was critical of the stereotyped image of homosexuals produced by the mass media. Cross-dressing, for example, was presented as one of the essential characteristics of homosexuals, but Hu Yiyun seemed to share Taku’s view that all kinds of cross-dressing could be equated with performances involving gender-identities. “When at that time men dressed as women, then it was on the one hand to attract customers and business, and on the other hand it was a play involving dancing and singing on the stage, and there was certainly no idea of being a ‘transvestite’ (renyao) to ‘make money’”; he then criticized the mass media for changing the meaning of cross-dressing and describing homosexuals as prostitutes by using

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29. Ibid. p. 122.
30. Hu Yiyun, “Toushi boliquan mimi” (“To see through the secret of the glass circle”), Feicui zhoukan, from No. 94 (11 March 1985) to No. 107 (10 June 1985).
31. Ibid. No. 97 (1 April 1985), p. 34.
32. Ibid.
discriminatory expressions such as “freak” (renyao), “pervert” (biantai) or “rabbit” (tuzi).34

Hu Yiyun described the historical aspects of homosexuality in great detail. He mentioned an important gap in Chinese history which he attributed to the beginning of the Republican period.35 The most significant difference between the medical term tongxinglian of the Republican period and the previously used expressions xianggong, luantong and nanyou (which all derived from the world of the theatre), is described as follows:

Taking the end of the Qing Dynasty and the beginning of the Republican period as an example, we can see that the expressions nanyou, xianggong and luantong were still popular and accorded with social tradition. The term tongxinglian had not yet come into existence; a visit to the xianggong was not regarded as more unusual than a visit to a bar (jiujia) or a brothel and there was no feeling of disgust or contempt.36

These two authors made homosexuals themselves the subjects of their articles, creating a “human touch” by quoting “real” persons. Although they had less direct influence on the public discourse than mainstream authors involved in the medical and psycho-analytical discourse, their multi-faceted descriptions of human behaviour patterns exposed the one-sidedness of the medical view and this contributed to the development of a humanist-oriented medical discourse.37

The Mass Media and the Boom in “Gay Crime”

In the 1970s, the discourses diversified and were “trivialized” in the mass media, particularly in the yellow press, that is to say, sensationalist newspapers and magazines which “make unscrupulous use of scandalous, lurid, or sensationalized stories to attract readers.”38 Two glossy magazines, Feicui zhoukan (Jade Weekly) and Shibao zhoukan (Time Weekly), which usually managed to avoid the politically taboo topics of the time by focusing on social scandals, carried features on the topic of homosexuality. Many different expressions relating to same-sex attraction were in common use during this period, each more negative than the next. In addition, the publication of Guang Tai’s novel, The

34. Ibid. p. 37.
35. In the text we find “qing mo ming chu,” but “min chu” is probably meant, ibid. No. 94 (11 March 1985), p. 28.
36. Ibid. no. 94 (11 March 1985), p. 29. Nanyou actually described a male actor, who, according to Chinese classical theatre tradition played a female role; xianggong also originally referred to an actor, but gradually came to be used to describe a high class “callboy”; the meaning of luantong, however, can be rendered by the term “catamite.” For the origins and connotations of the terms tongxinglian and tongxingai, which were used for the first time during the Republican era, see Tze-lan Deborah Sang, “Translating homosexuality.”
37. The term “mainstream” applies to authors who followed a medical and psycho-analytical approach, such as Peng Huaizhen, or unnamed authors in the mass-media. A humanist approach, such as that presented by Hu Yiyun, was an exception.
Man who Shunned Marriage (Taobi hunyin de ren), which presented a realistic description of the problems relating to a gay and urban identity in Taiwanese society, led to intensive discussions in widely-read newspapers such as the Zhongguo shibao (China Times).39

The first press reports on homosexuals were related to raids in New Park (xin gongyuan), which had been the most well-known meeting place for male homosexuals in Taipei since the end of the Japanese time.40 In 1970, the United Daily reported that various raids had taken place in New Park and that there had been more than 60 arrests within the short period of only one month. Those arrested were accused of violating “good mores” (fanghai fengsu).41

Since there was no specific law against homosexual acts, it may be concluded that it was less the presence of the homosexuals themselves which had led to the police raids than their performance in a public place.42 Later on, media reports on two particular murder cases illustrate the ways in which traditional terms and expressions, psychoanalytical and medical theories, and the general lack of knowledge regarding homosexuality were brought together in the public discourse. First, in the “Case of the five bodies found in Cuiling” on 27 April 1974, the principal of the private Donghai Middle School discovered the bodies of five members of his household on his property. Suspicion soon fell on Peng Bicheng, a friend from his army days, and by 5 May 1974, the Zili wanbao was reporting: “The ‘girl friends’ of many years’ hate each other now, raise knives to cut the ‘sleeves’ off for money,” thus hinting at a homosexual relationship between Peng Bicheng and the principal. It was suggested that a quarrel between these two men had led to the murders.43

This article is remarkable for the ways in which classical terms and connotations such as “passion of the cut sleeve” (duanxiu pi) are used in


40. For a detailed analysis of the importance of New Park, see Martin, Situating Sexualities, pp. 45–116.

41. There is also much evidence to suggest that raids had been carried out even before the 1970s, but these were not reported in the media.

42. One of the first reports on a raid was published in 1970, Li Wenbang, “Jing fang saodang duanxiu pi: yue lai chahuo liushi ji” (“The police are cleaning up the passion of the cut sleeve. Within one month more than 60 persons have been arrested”), Lianhebao, 23 April 1970, p. 3. Those arrested were accused of offending against “good mores” (fanghai fengsu), under s. 28 of the criminal law; see also, Wu Jiayuan, “Chengshi huangmo zhong de lu¨zhou: Taibeishi nantongzhi jiuba jingyan fenxi” (“The oasis within the urban desert: analysis of experiences in the tongzhi bars of the city”), Master’s thesis, National Taiwan University, Architecture and Urban Planning 1998, p. 45. Zheng Meili reported that raids had been quite common up until the mid-1980s and mentioned raids on the two famous bars Dahan julebu and Tangjie jiudian; Zheng Meili, The Daughters’ Circle, pp. 213 ff. The media supported these raids, particularly when it was suggested that a connection existed between homosexuality and prostitution; see for example the closing of the “Peacock’s Club” (Jinkongque), Zhang Minzhong, “Kongque duo nan fei” (“Many men fly out of the peacock”), Zhongguo shibao zhokan, No. 268 (17 April 1983), pp. 98–99.

43. “Duonian ‘gu you’ xin cun yan, huidao ‘duanxiu’ zhi wei cai” (“The ‘girl friends’ of many years’ hate each other now, raise knives to cut the ‘sleeves’ off for money”), Zili wanbao, 5 May 1974, p. 5.
combination with modern expressions such as “homosexual” (tongxinglian). Later, in the same newspaper, Chen Wenhe and Du Wenjing focused on the assumed differences between Chinese and Western societies: “Homosexuality, this oddity, has existed since ancient times, but it is impossible to compare the way it has developed in China with the way it has developed abroad.” They described homosexuality in its modern, that is open, lifestyle as being alien to Chinese society, and their statement, “in China, homosexuals exist only in secret, while in the West, they are even offered protection under the law,” is clearly intended as a criticism of Western decadence.

An examination of the articles related to this case shows that, at that time, the various constructs and traditions of same-sex desire were able to lead a parallel existence. Since the classical and traditional view was given in the headings, it may be assumed that expressions such as “passion of the cut sleeve” (duanxiu pi) or “sharing the peach” (fentao) were still in use, but the content of the articles shows that a classical view was gradually being replaced by a Western, psycho-analytical approach. This was, however, being indigenized so that differences between Chinese and Western cultures could still be preserved.

The second murder case occurred in the spring of 1976, when the police found several bodies, mostly of elderly men, near New Park. The New Park “gay scene” was implicated in these deaths; a young male prostitute, Liao Xianzhong, was accused of murdering several older clients. It was reported that Liao Xiangzhong had been lured into the “circle” and that – after contracting a sexually transmitted disease – he had started “to run amok.” This led to a wide range of homophobic and discriminatory articles being featured in all the news media.

Biased reporting was prevalent in the above cases. The opinion of the media is easy to gauge from the terms they favoured: “abnormal contacts” (bu zhengchang jiaowang), “abnormal relations” (bu zhengchang guanxi), “abnormal psychology” (bu zhengchang xinli); homosexuals

44. The expression duanxiu pi refers to a classic tale in which male same-sex desire is mentioned; translated as “Passion of the cut sleeve,” it refers to Emperor Ai (6 BC–1 AD) who was sleeping with Dong Xian, his favourite. When the emperor woke up, Dong Xian was stretched out across his, the emperor’s sleeve, so to avoid disturbing him, the emperor cut off the sleeve. The story “to share the peach” (fentao), is also well-known, this refers to Wei Ling (534–493 BC) and his favourite, Mizi Xia, who shared a specific sweet peach with the emperor. Later on, however, Mizi Xia was executed for allegedly committing a crime against Wei Ling; see Brett Hinsch, Passions of the Cut Sleeve: The Male Homosexual Tradition in China (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990); Xiaomingxing (Samshasha), Zhongguo tongxing’ai shilu (Historical Reports on Homosexuality in China) (Hong Kong: Fenfong sanjiao, 1984, revised edition 1994).

45. Chen Wenhe and Du Wenjing, “Jingu qiguan tongxinglian, Zhong wai shutu bu ke shuo” (“The phenomenon of homosexuality has existed since time began, its development in China is not comparable with its development abroad”), Zili wanbao, 6 May 1974, p. 2.

46. Ibid.

47. I would hesitate to say that the Chinese tradition was really more “tolerant,” as has been claimed by authors such as Bret Hinsch, Fang Fu Ruan and the Hong Kong sociologist Zhou Huashan, preferring to place emphasis on different constructions of gender and desire in different periods and cultures; Ruan Fangfu and Tsai Yung-mei, “Male homosexuality in contemporary mainland China,” Archives of Sexual Behaviour, Vol. 17, No. 2 (1988), pp. 189–199, Bret Hinsch, Passions of the Cut Sleeve, Zhou Huashan, Postcolonial Tongzi.
were described as “perverts” (biántài) with a “degenerate desire” (jiqìng), as “ugly” (chóulòu), “brutal” (xiéxìng) and “to be feared” (kǒngbù). They were said to “act in a disgusting way” (chòutài báichù) and police measures against them were described as necessary to “get rid of the filth” (xiáochù zānglùan). These medical and homophobic reports on homosexual stereotypes reached a peak in the 1970s, and remained almost unchallenged right up to the middle of the 1980s. Homosexuality was considered to be a bad habit for which a pathological explanation was available. Over and over again a moral argument was used to warn against the dangers inherent in the more tolerant attitudes emanating from the West; homosexuality was regarded as a dangerous evil, alien to Chinese culture and society.

The Academic Discourse: Law and Morality (1979–1987)

National Taiwan University was famous for its openly expressed criticism of the authoritarian system; many academics, particularly those belonging to the law department, publicly backed the struggle for social change. In 1979, an article appeared in a prestigious legal journal published by National Taiwan University, in which the author, Chen Qidi, wrote:

48. “Xie jian xin gongyuan, chengxiong dixiadao, qiinyin tongxinglian buhuo Liao Xianzhong, baofu xinli zuosui, niangcheng yi si liang, jiqìng daozi bianxu, beiqi ke wei yìnjin” (“Pools of blood in New Park, murder on the subway, homosexuality is the cause, and now Liao Xianzhong has been arrested; the reason was vengeance, this resulted in one fatality and six injured persons; strange desire causes perversions; this tragedy can serve as a warning”), Zhongguo shibao, 6 March 1975, p. 2.

49. Zeng Ruiqin, “Boli” quan nei tongxing gouda, ‘daihao’ chuanqing choutai baichu, xiaochu ‘zangluan’, lou le zhe de se jiao, xieshou ‘xiangkai’ jian bu de ren de shi” (“The homosexuals of the ‘glass’ circle flock together; in the love-play the ‘pseudonyms’ act disgustingly; while eradicating the ‘dirt and mess’, this blind spot was overlooked; the bloody hand is now, however, showing the things which shy away from the light”), Zhongguo shibao, 6 March 1975, p. 2. Liang Chengjie, “Biantai xingxingwei zuosui, daozhi baofu de xingdong” (“The cause is perverted sexual behaviour and this gives rise to acts of vengeance”), Lianhebao, 6 March 1975, p. 6.

50. See, for example, “Jinggang jiu yì quanli: saodang tongxing jilian” (“The police are using all possible means to take action against the perverted love of homosexuality”), Zhongyang ribao (Central Daily), 29 July 1982, p. 6; Qin Dechuan, “Boliquan bingtai bianben jiali, duanxiu pi fengqi ying yu e’zhi” (“The perversion within the ‘glass circle’ is getting stronger and stronger, the custom of the ‘cut sleeve’ has to be stopped”), Zhongguo shibao, 11 April 1983, p. 3.

51. The underlying reasons for the alignment of “evil homosexuality” with the “West” in the 1970s, are not easy to identify. An anonymous reviewer put forward the hypothesis that it might be connected with the rise of anti-American sentiment following the cutting of diplomatic ties between the US and the Republic of China, Taiwan, in 1978. This theory does not seem entirely satisfactory, however, since most of the articles which equated “homosexual perverted desire” with Western influences date from the early 1970s. It could be suggested that the negative alignment resulted from the inherent contradiction in Taiwan’s official policy: the government was promoting a “Confucian society” (for example, by launching the Chinese Cultural Renaissance Movement [Zhongguo wenhuaxiu yundong] in 1966,) while at the same time encouraging modernization through the use of imported “Western values.” This led to a crisis of values within Taiwanese society, which resulted in the conservative media condemning all “negative” influences as deriving from the West; see “The story of Taiwan.”

Qidi, used an American court decision regarding a gay and lesbian student group in Missouri as a precedent to advocate a new legal consciousness and the establishing of a state founded on the rule of law for Taiwan. The attitudes and opinions of the author are clearly revealed in his description of the case, and his reference to the United States could be interpreted as a call for tolerance in Taiwan itself. Chen Qidi talked of “an important and far-reaching historical decision” after “a long and bitter struggle” which the student group had had to endure. He also gave detailed explanations regarding the aims of “gay lib,” for example, the “right to non-discrimination” in relation to “sexual orientation.” In his conclusion, Chen Qidi highlighted the importance of accepting that “a legal system is based on a specific social background” and that “the legal system must reflect the changes which are constantly taking place in society.” These comments were primarily intended to apply to the lesbian and gay group in Missouri, but they could be taken as an indirect reference to the general situation prevailing in Taiwan under martial law.

That this article was published at all is proof enough that the KMT was losing its hold on society at that time; in the same year, however, there was a backlash to the emerging liberalization processes, with the ban on the controversial journal Metlidao (Formosa) and the ensuing wave of arrests. Evidence of the more repressive atmosphere, which lingered on for a few years after these events occurred, can be found in an article entitled “The illegality of homosexuality” by Meng Weishi. This author, in contrast to Chen Qidi, did not accept the existence of free choice regarding sexual orientation in a pluralistic society, but employed an “essentialist and naturalistic view,” according to which men and women have certain typical male and female attributes in addition to a heterosexual orientation. He described homosexuality as “perverted desire” (biantai xingyu), and for him there was no doubt that homosexuality was “illegal” (weifaxing). Meng equated the law with morality: “In our country, homosexuality is always seen as an extremely immoral and abnormal activity … which offends against morality (shanliang fengsu).” In his view, the search for suitable police measures for the prevention of homosexuality should take priority. Meng warned against the concept of homosexuality as a “harmless fashion,” since in his view there was a causal relationship between murder and crime in the homosexual environment. Although he referred to the 1969 Hong Kong debate on the decriminalization of male homosexuality, he only mentioned the arguments of those who were opposed to this, saying for example, that such a step would introduce “homosexuality into Chinese (huaren)
societies, where homosexuality had not yet existed.” He concluded that “in a Chinese society, homosexuality should not be legally permitted under any circumstances” and “the only question which requires discussion is how homosexuals can be punished.” He proposed the introduction of new legislation which would enforce medical treatment for homosexuals because the existing laws, in his opinion, were not stringent enough.

Hurricane AIDS has Come to Taiwan. AIDS and Homophobia in a Heterogenizing Society (1982–1987)

Shortly before the lifting of martial law, the discourse of homosexuality was overshadowed by the emerging AIDS discourse. There was a symbiosis of both discourses within the yellow press: “People are actually not afraid of AIDS, but of homosexuality – both male and female,” as the ethnologist Wang Ruixiang concluded. In many early reports, AIDS was described as an “alien disease” only affecting specific groups: “an individual suffering from AIDS is usually a homosexual, an intravenous drug-user or an inhabitant of Haiti” and this notion would only much later become subject to criticism.

The first article on AIDS to be published in Taiwan appeared in the magazine Shibao zazhi in 1982. Entitled “Homosexuality and AIDS,” this article dealt with the high death-rate of homosexuals in the United States as a result of Kaposi sarcoma related illnesses. Further articles on AIDS were published in 1984, when the first case of AIDS was diagnosed in Taiwan, in a tourist from the United States, but the information on this case was withheld by the authorities for three months and even then measures were taken to allay the fears of the Taiwanese population by referring to the illness as originating in a “foreigner.” Not until the first “local” case of AIDS was diagnosed in 1985 did the disease acquire the title of “the plague of the 20th century” (ershi shiji de heisibing)

61. Ibid. p. 42.
62. Ibid. p. 44.
64. Ibid.
66. Cui Gang, “AIDS xuanfeng liuguo Taiwan” (“Hurricane AIDS has now struck Taiwan”), Feicui zhoukan, No. 95 (18 March 1985), pp. 11–12; “Guonei faxian aisibing yisi huanzhe, zicheng tongban yu qian ren, Zhong wai geban” (“A person who was probably suffering from AIDS was discovered within the country; he admitted to having had over 1,000 sex partners, half of these Chinese and half foreigners”), Lianhebao, 30 August 1985, p. 3. According to Wu Ruiyuan (“As a ‘bad’ son,” p. 98), the first AIDS sufferer, an American businessman who was identified as being HIV-positive in 1985, returned to the United States; the Taiwanese media then lost interest and stopped reporting on the case.
after which a flood of articles appeared in which AIDS was linked with the “problem of homosexuality.” In “Aids invades Taiwan,” Zhuang Zheyuan, a medical expert from National Taiwan University, named male homosexuals, female prostitutes and prisoners as “high risk groups.”

In the first reports on AIDS, the term aisi-bing (love-death-illness) was used, so that through the choice of “ai” (love) and “si” (death), love, sexuality and death were connected; AIDS was thus depicted not as a normal viral illness, but as a link between morality and disease. Some years would have to pass before “aizibing” would finally be replaced by “aizibing,” an onomatopoeic translation deriving from Hong Kong.

Conclusions

The 1970s and 1980s were shaped by a wide variety of interwoven discourses on same-sex desire. The medical discourse predominated and was characterized by multiple references to Western discourses, but significant statements on assumed cultural differences were also included. Very gradually, this gave way to a humanist-oriented discourse which placed less emphasis on the “pathological features” of homosexuality, focusing instead on varying patterns of sexual behaviour as part of human nature. Many discussions took place in the booming mass media, particularly in the yellow press, on the connection between same-sex attraction and crime, but homosexuals were later presented in interviews as “normal human beings,” as shown in the series written by Hu Yiyun. The discourse on AIDS acted as an important catalyst for change and led to increased attention being given to homosexuals.

The “agents of the discourse” were also subject to change. In the 1970s, medical experts such as Peng Huaizhen, and also journalists referring to these experts, made frequent use of the sexologist term tongxinglian, and same-sex desire came to be regarded as a scientific and objective discourse. The individuals under discussion – whether or not they could be characterized as having any “homosexual identity” – were not able to take part in the discourse, being objects and not subjects; it

67. See, for example, “AIDS bingli chuabao chuanchu, zhenhan Taibei shi boliquan” (“The news of the spread of AIDS shocks the people of the glass circle in Taipei), Zhongguo shibao, 30 August 1985, p. 3; “AIDS qinxi Taiwan” (“AIDS attacks Taiwan”), Zhongguo shibao, 30 August 1985, p. 3; “Tongxing xiang xi, ai de bianian, remen huatui” (“People of the same sex feel drawn towards each other: the miscarriage of love is becoming a topic of hot debate”), Lianhebao, 11 September 1985, p. 4; “Tongxinglian shi ling yi zhong xingshi xingxingwei: ‘Women zhenxin xiang bangzhu tamen’” (“Homosexuality is another type of sexual behaviour: ‘We honestly want to help them’ ”), Zhongguo shibao, 3 September 1985, p. 3.

68. In 1985, Hu Yiyun suggested – using black humour in rather poor taste – calling the illness not aizibing, but ai-qi-bing (“love-eat-illness”), since it was generally said to be passed on through oral sex. The “official” expression was: houtianxing mianyi quefa zhenghouqun or houtianxing mianyi bu quan zhenghouqun; see Hu Yiyun, “Cong tongxinglian tan AIDS zhi kepa” (“Discussing the horror of AIDS, starting with homosexuality”), Feicui zhoukan, No. 100 (22 April 1985), p. 99–101.
would seem that discussion of homosexuality was only permissible when the heterosexuality of the protagonists was not in doubt.

These discourses do not fit easily within the framework of tradition versus modernity or globalization versus indigenization. Elements of “hybridization,” which are now regarded as the most important markers of “Asian sexualities,” even existed in the 1970s and 1980s. In particular, the widespread claim that “homosexuality” was alien to any Chinese society was frequently thrown into question by the use of expressions such as “to share the peach” or “passion of the cut sleeve.” These were derived from a tradition characterized by a much more relaxed attitude towards same-sex desire than that of the medical discourse on homosexuality (tongxinglian), but it is by no means certain that the authors themselves were aware of this fact.

It was not only after the lifting of martial law that discourses of same sex desire began to flourish; although the 1970s and 1980s were still shaped by authoritarian structures, changes began to take effect which contributed towards the democratization and pluralization of Taiwanese society. The cultural heritage of Taiwan, the increasing embeddedness of Taiwan in global structures and the struggle for the liberalization of society all left their traces in the discourse on same-sex desire.

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