UNIVERSIDADE
CATÓLICA
PORTUGUESA

A HEAVY LOAD: FILIAL PIETY, MARRIAGE AND INVISIBILITY IN BEIJING STORY

Dissertação apresentada à Universidade Católica Portuguesa para obtenção do grau de Mestre em Estudos Asiáticos

Por

Frederico Duarte Vidal

Faculdade de Ciências Humanas

Abril de 2022

UNIVERSIDADE CATÓLICA PORTUGUESA

A HEAVY LOAD: FILIAL PIETY, MARRIAGE AND INVISIBILITY IN BEIJING STORY

Dissertação apresentada à Universidade Católica Portuguesa para obtenção do grau de Mestre em Estudos Asiáticos

Por

Frederico Duarte Vidal
Bolseiro da Fundação Jorge Álvares

Faculdade de Ciências Humanas

Abril de 2022
Prof. Dra. Beatriz Puertas Hernández
Prof. Dr. Alvin K. Wong

Abstract.

Beijing gushi 北京故事's (1996) controversial depictions of vivid sex scenes between two men bellied this online novel's popularity. Beneath this lurid exterior, however, one can find a vast hinterland of social and political commentary on the lives and experiences of LGBTQ people in China. Even if the novel's plot is encased in the 80s, its themes, namely the weight filial piety has on the lives of gay men, which may result in taxing forms of marriage have certainly surpassed this decade.

Through an analysis of particular plot points within the novel, this thesis will discuss how these topics, which have remained current and relevant to queer people in China, are handled in *Beijing gushi*, by providing a necessary ballast of contextualization and connections to current academic studies in this field.

Keywords: tongzhi Literature; Homoerotic Literature; Chinese Queer studies; Filial Piety; Tradition; Fraudulent Marriage; Cooperative Marriage.

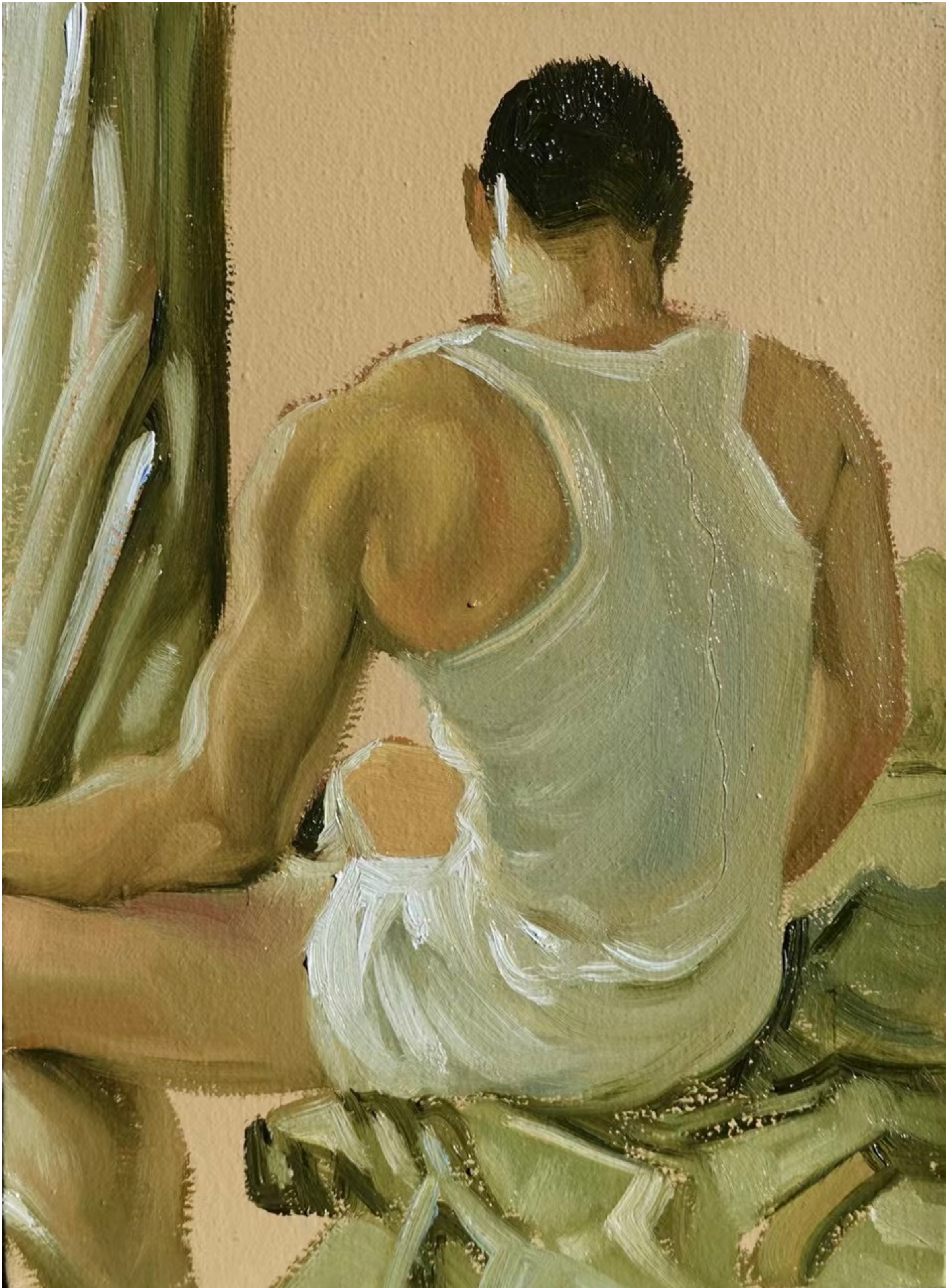

Fig. 1. Guang Ye [WeChat @GY602580]. (2021, Nov 26).

Acknowledgments.

Firstly, I would like to extend a note of gratitude to the Fundação Jorge Álvares, for their investment in my research. The scholarship provided proved to be a valuable aid and a source of motivation, and for that I am thankful. Without their support, this dissertation would not have been possible.

To my supervisors, Dr. Beatriz Puertas Hernández, and Dr. Alvin K. Wong, I would like to express my sincere appreciation for their endless patience and availability. Their insight, incentive and motivation have proved invaluable in broadening my mind and for this I have nothing but esteem and admiration.

My appreciation also extends to Dr. Cláudia Ribeiro, not only for her wonderful memoirs, but also for her words of fiery encouragement; to Professor Tânia Ganito for her endless optimism; and, of course, to the CCCM for their interest in my research. A note of acknowledgment is also due to the Catholic University of Portugal and Dr. Jorge Santos Alves, for welcoming my research with open arms.

This dissertation would not have been possible without the support of my close friends Tomás Almendra, Ana Napoleão, David Rodrigues, Gonçalo Lucas, M.D. Henrique Rodrigues, Dr. Carlos Pinheiro, Hassan Ben Dhiaf and Dr. J. Carlos Teixeira, whose sincere friendship has proved to be haven during these months.

Lastly, I would like to thank Lucia Regola and Guang Ye, for kindly taking the time to answer my questions and to my colleagues at the MA in Asian Studies, for our shared academic endeavours.

Thank you.

Index.

Introduction. 8

a) Research Question and Methodology. 13

b) State of the Art. 14

c) Structure. 20

1. ***Beijing Story*** **(1996).**

1.1. Novel's Summary. 21

1.2. Authorship (and Publication History) 25

1.3. From Homosexual Chinese Literature to Tongzhi Literature: A Brief Socio-political Overview. 26

2. Living Up to (Social) Expectations – The pressures of Filial Piety on Queer Individuals.

2.1. Contextualization. 36

2.2. A Son's Burden – Handong's Balancing Act. 39

3. Hiding in Plain Sight – Invisibility through Marriage and New Forms of Kinship

3.1. Contextualization. 43

3.2. Marrying a Fraud – Handong's Failed Marriage(s). 48

4. Conclusions: ***Beijing gushi*****'s Legacy. 53**

Bibliography. 55

Introduction.

Beijing gushi *北京故事* (1996)[1] – or *Beijing Story* has often been hailed as the pinnacle of *tongzhi wenxue* 同志文学 – commonly known as *tongzhi* literature, a queer literary genre that one can trace back to the 90s, relating to LGBTQ issues in China. In order to appreciate the novel and its extraordinary feat of breaking through its online clandestine origins into a physical, published form, one needs to understand the context in which it came into being and the topicality of the themes addressed by its plot.

Before delving any deeper, it is necessary to define what *tongzhi* 同志 means – only then can one grasp the concepts of *tongzhi* people and their by-products – such as *tongzhi* Literature. The term dates back to a speech by Sun Yat-sen, the first president of the Republic of China (in office from Jan 1, 1912 – Mar 10, 1912), in which he states that "*The Revolution is not yet won, comrades* [tongzhi]*, we must fight together*" (Damm, 2000: 63). This term – comrades, *tongzhi* 同志 – is a composite made from the characters for same, *tong* 同, and ideals, *zhi* 志, so that comrade means "*people of the same will*" (Leng, 2012a; Wong, 2005).

It was used as a politically correct way of addressing all Chinese people, regardless of their gender, social standing or any other indicator that might have been relevant otherwise – it was and is an all-encompassing universal term (Bao, 2018; Wang, 2019). As the years went by, it was progressively adopted and used by the gay community, as it too identified itself with the notion that their struggles were still very much alive and their rights being fought for, even if this was met with a certain degree of hostility and ridicule (Wong, 2005; Wong, 2008). Other terms orbit this reality – namely *tongxinglian* 同性恋, the clinical term for homosexual, which has been repudiated for its overly clinical and perceived derogatory nature (dating back to 3rd Edition of the Chinese Classification of Mental Disorders) - and *ku'er*,酷儿 the phonetic equivalent to the western concept of "queer". Queer has a direct relation to *ku'er*, its translation, but the other way around does not always hold true (Damm, 2000; Leng, 2013). The concept *ku'er* is not only a play on words but also a Western

[1] There is conflicting information regarding the original posting date of the novel. Authors such as Leng (2012a) state that it was published in 1996; but others, such as Beitong & Myers (2016), trace the novel back to 1998. I will use 1996 as the novel's official date, as the majority of sources claim this date as the one pertaining to the novel's first online posting, even if the site where it was originally published is not defunct.

construct and import, which fails to encompass a) the Asian reality[2] b) the irreverence of the usage of the term *tongzhi.* To state that *tongzhi* is simply the Chinese term for homosexual would be reductive, as the term is culturally and politically charged (Liu, 2015; Miles-Johnson & Wang, 2018) and possesses a unique history.

Even though this emblematic novel was written in the 90s, *Beijing gushi* has certainly been shaped to fit a long-standing tradition of homosexual literature in China, often called *nanfeng* 男风. Even if this tradition's appeal has witnessed ebbs and flows of popularity throughout China's vast history, there are recurring motifs, themes, and elements we believe relevant to our analysis of this more contemporary novel. As such, the introductory section will serve its purpose as quick glance through dynasties where homosexuality in China suffered pivotal changes. It is important to understand this, as to better grasp how *Beijing Story* incorporates these elements.

With this in mind, we can delve into the novel. *Beijing gushi* follows the turbulent love affair of Chen Handong – a wealthy businessman – and Lan Yu – a rural China transplant who has moved to the capital to pursue his studies in architecture, against the backdrop of social, economic, and political upheaval of Beijing in the 1980s and early 90s. Surreptitious in nature and controversial in its topics, *Beijing gushi* was an unlikely story to have ever attained international recognition. From its humble origins as an internet circulated story to a cult motion picture – which has seen its 20th anniversary celebrated, through a 4kHD re-release (Liu, 2021) – it is fair to say that this narrative and its characters have permeated Queer China's collective imaginary and shaped a generation of gay men.

When analysing this novel, one also needs to consider the hostile circumstances under which homosexuals in China lived throughout the 80s and 90s, in order to grasp how controversial a novel depicting vivid and lurid descriptions of sex between two males might have been and how it propelled this novel to a status all its own (Leng, 2013).

This abrasive atmosphere manifested itself on three different major levels: legal, social, and medical. From a legal standpoint, even if homosexuality was not directly deemed a crime, as it would imply an acknowledgement of it from the Chinese state, those who practiced homosexual acts were persecuted under the *Hooliganism* Law, or *Liumang zui* 流

[2] *Tongzhi* as a term strives for equality and similarity, whereas *ku'er* has the opposite effect, focusing on what distinguishes LGBTQ people from others (Martin, 2008). It is perceived as an adulteration of queer as a concept and is mostly tied with light-hearted playfulness and "coolness" (Damm, 2000; Martin, 2008).

氓罪 (meaning the crime of hooliganism), which dated back to 1979. *Liumang* 流氓 is a Chinese historical term, linked to society's underachievers, dissident troublemakers and recurring offenders, which imparts those charged under it with a moral and political assessment (Liu, 2015; Worth et al., 2019). Under this broad and generic law, a vast number of acts contrary to social and public order were labelled as offenses and the transgressors brought to justice, as was the case sexual deviant behaviours, including homosexuality. In 1997, after hooliganism was finally removed from Chinese Criminal Law, as legislative efforts were moved from deterring homosexuality to abolishing prostitution, due to the Chinese State's determination to put an end to sex work, it can be said that the lives of homosexuals were subjected to an improvement (Burger, 2012; Kong, 2016; Ye, 2017; Yang, 2018; Bao, 2020).

From a medical viewpoint, homosexuality was deemed an illness up until 2001, a date which marks its removal from the 3rd Edition of the Chinese Classification of Mental Disorders (Bao, 2015; Kong, 2016; Ye, 2017), 11 years after the World Health Organization had taken a stance on the matter. Howard Chiang's (2018) work on the evolution of medical and scientific stances towards sexuality provides a thorough description of the effects Western sexological discourse had on Chinese academia. These two realms alone are testament to how sexual culture in 1980s China was shaped by conservatism (Yang, 2018; Worth et al., 2019).

Lastly, on a social level, one can mention the lack of legislative effort to protect and secure homosexual's interests – as their status was that of a mentally ill dissident – but Deng Xiaoping's (in office from Sep 13, 1982 – Nov 2, 1987) reforms and the country's effort to "open up" allowed for unprecedented social spaces to be created, as control over the citizen's private life loosened up during this period (Kong, 2016). This also allocated some space on matters of sexual research in China, and interesting, daring, and provocative works on Chinese attitudes towards sexuality were produced (namely, Ruan & Tsai, 1987; Hinsch, 1990; and Ruan, 1991).

The major economic reforms lead by Deng Xiaoping in China throughout the 1980s have been harbingers of change for Chinese society. These, evidently, went far beyond the economic realm – the very ballast of Chinese society was being shaken and challenged (Gallo, 2017). Younger generations at the time became the manifestation of this cultural clash. The lifestyle known to them, in the surge of a market-driven economy and a growth

in private property – steps away from the Maoist socialism of the previous decades – was in sharp contrast to the lifestyle of their parents, grandparents and forefathers.

The internet – where the novel posited for analysis stems from - was also a major agent in this revolution, as it provided anonymous, unbound yet "fragmented and fragile" (Miége, 2009: 45) spaces where people could commune and debate matters which had no place to be discussed in open society (Wong, 2011; Leng, 2012a; Bao, 2018; Xie & Peng, 2018; Yang, 2018). Thanks to the advent of the World Wide Web, humanizing tales such as the one presented for further study, where homosexuals' lives and experiences with discrimination were portrayed in detail, were allowed to grow, and brought forth a new literary genre, *tongzhi* Literature, which would be an ally in the fight against otherization and stigmatization of this sexual minority.

The aforementioned societal changes however were not as controlled, organized nor as scheduled as new economic goals. Values, traditions, and morals change at a much slower pace, especially when this shift is perceived by older generations as a decline in the morality of a nation (Miége, 2009; Liu, 2015; Ye, 2017). Such is the case of hetero-normative practices regarding family, marriage and relationships being challenged by homosexuality and every other form of LGBTQ discourse – matters *Beijing gushi* illustrates through clever parallelisms of homosexual and heterosexual relationships.

Although the CCP has long held its Triple No Policy - "Not Encouraging, Not Discouraging, Not Promoting"[3] on LGBT issues - (Leng, 2012; Miles-Johnson & Wang, 2018)– it has not been a sufficiently strong deterrent. The pertinence of Queer Studies in contemporary society, alongside Chinese people's increasing acceptance of their own queerness (Liu, 2010; Engebretsen & Schroeder, 2015; Chiang & Wang, 2017 and 2020; Wong, 2018)– resulted in an increase in visibility and are undoubtedly at the core of this growing field.

My contribution to this field will therefore take shape in an analysis and commentary of the main themes within *Beijing gushi*. Aside from the main characters' heavily erotic bond, one can find insight into struggles and hurdles homosexual individuals face in urban China – with special consideration for Beijing in the 80s and 90s, the location where most of the plot takes place. These major themes include the weight and impact of filial duty on their private lives; how this Confucianism-drenched concept entails greater repercussions to one's

---

[3] (*buzhichi, bufandui, butichang* 不支持, 不反对, 不提倡) in Leng, Rachel (2012a: 7)

personal development; what expectations can *tongzhi* have regarding marriage, just to name a few. Although the novel's plot concerns past decades, current studies still present us with a far-from-desirable picture regarding the quality of life for queer people in China (Wu, 2016; Yu & Xiao, 2017; Liu et al., 2018; Wen & Zheng, 2019), with many of the presented issues still playing a pivotal role in their lives, which lead me to believe that many of the subject matters raised within *Beijing gushi* have remained topical for queer individuals beyond the 90s.

In order to create this analysis, my thesis will be divided into two major topics – Filial Piety and Invisibility, via marriage, in this case. These are, in my understanding, two sides of the same coin: on one hand the individual feels the need to fulfil these traditions and expectations regarding lineage and the perpetuation of a family name; on the other hand, by failing to do so, their *real lives and identities* exist covertly: invisible to their families, remote from traditional bonds of kinship or familial integration. Be it as it may, these are both social strategies adopted with one major purpose: blending in.

The novel presents both of these scenarios and invites the reader to inhabit the mind of a conflicted homosexual, Handong. Throughout much of the novel, Handong is haunted by his filial duties – the unmentioned antagonist - so much so that he ends up marrying a woman, Lin Ping, in order to appease his overbearing mother, even though his affections lie with his younger same-sex lover, Lan Yu. As the plot unfurls, we are able to glimpse at the impact these pressures can have on a Chinese gay man's life, as well as some of the prospects related to this: what happens when one plays the expected role, defies it or conforms to it.

To understand the role filial piety occupies in Chen Handong's life and in the novel's plot, we must pull back and understand the manner in which tradition itself is ingrained in Chinese thought, as it is where filial piety stems from. These will shape the main character's vision and the novel's plot.

Family values are at the very core of Confucianist education. The need to respect and be loyal to one's elders are the essence of the *Classic of Family Reverence - Xiaojing* 孝經, a philosophical text dating back to the 4th Century, consisting of a conversation between Confucius and one of his disciples, on matters of family, kinship, respect, propriety, among others. This work is often paired with other classic Confucian texts, whose messages are very much alive and still shape Chinese society to this day (Miége, 2009; Rosemont & Hames, 2009; Hu & Wang, 2013; Gallo, 2017; Engebretsen, 2017: Zhang, 2017; Bao, 2018).

The pivotal role these familial ties – kinship - play in an individual's life is by extent connected to tradition and how it is perceived in Chinese society. It is important to understand that rituals and traditions are not merely the way something should be done, but the correct manner something should be done for oneself and for others (Rosemont & Hames, 2009). In accordance with Confucianist thought, the function of these rituals and traditions is to ensure a change in the individual, which by extension will effect change in social and political orders, as those aim the secure that one's feelings and performance are aligned with the roles they are playing. On par with this behavioral grid, the philosophical teachings of Xunzi (c. 310 BCE – c. 235 BCE), the Confucian philosopher from the Warrying States Period can be brought forth, as Xunzi argued that human nature is inherently selfish, greedy, and driven by sensual pleasures (Xunzi & Hutton, 2014). Consequently, these traditions and duties ought to be practiced and followed to their full extent, as only through propriety can these changes in one's character be effective. It is necessary to bear these notions in order to better grasp the omnipresence of filial piety and how both of these can severely impact marriage prospects, decisions and arrangements.

a) Research Question and Methodology

Summarily said, in this thesis I propose to find out to what extent this novel, written in the 90s about Beijing in the 80s – can still be seen as a window into homosexuality's current status in urban China. In order to do so, I will identify the main themes concerning homosexuality, addressed by *Beijing gushi*. It will then be possible to understand whether these issues have remained in the 80s and 90s or if they have gone beyond these decades, keeping relevancy to this day. As such, my research question can be condensed into the following sentence: How does the novel *Beijing gushi* handle the topics of filial piety and marriage among Chinese queer people?

The methodological approach to tackle this academic endeavour will be mostly comprised of literary analysis, and a fusion of quantitative and qualitative data. The aforementioned academic literature will provide support to our main literary analysis of the novel *Beijing gushi*. I will reflect on the themes, characters and concepts presented therein and aid myself with quantitative data – such as reports, and studies quantifying findings on LGBTQ people in China – and qualitative data – i.e., gathering a corpus of extant literature

and other resources – such as films, interviews, news articles and reports - on the topics of marriage, filial piety and *tongzhi* Literature. By doing so, I believe I will be able to provide support and critical commentary on specific episodes from *Beijing gushi*, and show, with the assistance of selected bibliography, that these literary representations of ersatz experiences of LGBTQ people in China, aim to transform, reshape and further people's understanding of gender and sexuality.

As such, I will also make use of concepts of Chinese queer theory related to marriage and juxtapose them with the Confucian concept of filial piety – *xiao* 孝 – to understand the trials and tribulations that Handong, Lan Yu and Lin Ping go through the novel.

b) State of the Art

With the aim of tackling this endeavour, I had to gather a ballast of extant literature and resources, which would allow me to frame and research the concepts posited for exploration. Queer Chinese Studies presents unique challenges – one needs only but to look at the term *tongzhi* to understand its universal potential (Bao 2018; Wong, 2018) in contrast to the many labels disseminated in the western world. This field in China struggles with the possibility of its engulfment by global Queer Studies (Wong, 2018) while holding on to the uniqueness of its contexts and its agents, showing a dire need to "successfully fend off the encroachments of Western queer theory and its cultural imperialism" (Liu, 2015: 44). This balance and these tendencies require due analysis and therefore it was essential for me to navigate some key works belonging to major voices in this field today – namely Bao Hongwei (2018 & 2020), Travis S. K. Kong (2016), Cui Zi'en (2009) and Petrus Liu (2010 & 2015).

All of these authors have, to some extent, informed me on the topicality of major issues today in Chinese Queer Studies and helped me "understand Chinese queer/tongzhi identities as a social process of discrepant transcultural practices" (Kong, 2016: 11). Even if their views on matters differ, one can state that Chinese Queer Studies, much like queer people in China, are fighting to find their place. Postsocialist Chinese society has been through massive changes – propelled by major economic reforms, which eventually lead to globalization and a freer flow of information (Ho, 2010; Leng, 2012a; Liu, 2015; Kong, 2016; Gallo, 2017; Bao, 2018). Stemming from this upheaval, one can see conservative tradition

severely clashing with progressive modernity, which is in many ways spearheaded by queer individuals - as Chiang & Wong (2017: 4) put it, one of this field's major interests lie in "connecting the global reconfigurations of sexuality to the 'Asian values' debate that [has] punctuated the economic reconfigurations of late twentieth-century Asia".

The aforementioned key authors grant us insight into the current desire of LGBTQ people in China and how these spark controversy, exactly due to the disparity between these new subject matters and what can be perceived as traditional Chinese values. The topic of marriage (Kong, 2016; Miles-Johnson & Wang, 2018), which is one of the most pressing points in *Beijing gushi*, remains one major concern in the field. This issue materializes several ongoing debates, such as critiques to the façade-oriented mindset in Chinese society; sexual freedom; the impact gay marriage (or the lack thereof) might have on core Confucianist values of filial piety; how queer families, including sham/cooperative marriages, are pushing the boundaries of society into new terrain; legal stances and protection of queer individuals; matters of self-affirmation vs. familial expectations; gender roles and the very concept of masculinity; visibility; just to name a few. The vast majority of these are broached in the novel, even if in varying amounts of importance to the plot.

The novel weighs these scenarios of a façade-oriented mindset by having Handong obsess over specific goals – going steady with a girlfriend, marrying a woman, improving his social standing – which are not of his own design, but of his mother. From the selected bibliography, this topic is mainly explored in the works of Gallo (2017), Bao (2018), and Huang & Brower (2018). These delve into matters of heteronormativity and how this concept, which in China is deeply shaped by Confucianism, is affected by homosexuality. In a society which fosters the concept of *mianzi* 面子[4], it is made manifest that there is a need to not disturb social order or negatively stand out. Homosexuals, however, when choosing to live out their lives openly, do just the opposite: they incur the flaw losing social standing for themselves and for those around them.

This is evidently intertwined with matters of self-affirmation (vs. familial expectations). The novels illustrate this clearly by Handong's incessant self-abnegation: his mother's expectations weigh heavily on his mind and constantly sway his decisions and negatively impact his overall well-being and happiness. On this topic, I have found the

[4] A hard-to-summarise multi-layered historical concept, which encompasses notions of morality, respectability, prestige, reputation, and success, closely related to an individual's reputable image within a community (Zhou & Zhang, 2017).

scholarly works of Wong (2005), Hu & Wang (2013), Gallo (2017), and Miége (2009) to be especially informative, as they provide the necessary backdrop of seriousness these situations bear on homosexuals' lives and the complex familial ties they must navigate (and risk lose) in order for their own sexual preferences to cease being a secret or lived in hiding. Yu & Xiao's (2017) research on this subject, which took up the form of a survey[5], makes this very evident: even though 72.1% of respondents had come out, only 10.6% had disclosed their sexual orientation to their parents.

The weight of filial piety undermines Chen Handong and Lan Yu's relationship and cleaves their bond several times throughout the book – which will be explained in detail in the appropriate section. Handong feels the need to fulfil this tradition in order to appease his family's expectations and pressure – materialized in the shape of a *mother and two sisters*. Lan Yu, however, is a manifest break from this traditional viewpoint – blatantly represented by his lack of family members in the novel.

It is therefore essential to understand the role of traditions in China, their overall goal – and, therefore, of filial piety. It is deemed that if individuals are left to their own designs, they will gravitate towards a natural state of stagnation (Xunzi & Hutton, 2014). Tradition overrules this natural state, as it forces them to subject themselves to situations which are outside of their natural propensities and therefore help them develop facets to their personalities and characters – ultimately, turning them into *ren* 仁[6], or consummate, whole human beings (Chan, 2004; Rosemont & Ames, 2009; Bo et al., 2021). The two main characters of materialize this in different manners. Lan Yu lives out his life with little to no regard for other people's considerations over what he ought to be doing; Chen Handong, contrariwise, is deeply tormented by his inner conflict - uphold his filial duty or fulfil his own individual aspirations.

In the case of *tongzhi* people, self-affirmation, and this façade-driven society wrangle over the topic of marriage, as it is the culmination of both these forces. Both of Handong's long-term relationships (with Lan Yu, an ersatz marriage, and with Lin Ping, a traditional one), raise issues on the importance marriage (or the absence of it) still holds for Chinese people. This joining is at the very centre of filial piety and holds a special place in

[5] The sample was collected from the 10th of September to the 31st of December of the year 2014.

[6] A cardinal notion of Confucianism, an idealization of the characteristics a human being should possess, namely, benevolence, love, which ultimately is a definition of their humanity (Chan, 2004). As such, following tradition will consequently aid individuals in attaining their humanity.

Confucianism. The philosophical translation of the Classic of Family Reverence written by Rosemont and Ames (2009) has proved invaluable in providing a better understanding of the centrality of this concept.

Essential hinterland on this topic can be found in the works of Xuan et al. (2019) and Choi & Luo (2016), and Nye (2003) which showcase the delicate negotiations held between parents and their offspring throughout the marriage decision, as well as the performative aspects of it, which seems particularly relevant, when this heteronormativity informs and dictates what queer marriage alternatives look like (Huang & Brower, 2018). This debate is mostly centred around two main types of marriages. On one hand, we will investigate sham marriages – a calculated Chinese phenomenon where a lesbian marries a gay man to deter family pressure. Liu (2013), Gallo (2017), Engebretsen (2017) voice very complementary opinions on this matter, alongside Wang (2019)'s work, which differentiates itself by opting to see these sham marriages as cooperative marriages. Notwithstanding, the issues of marriage, performance, and family pressure are resounding throughout all of the aforementioned authors. On the other hand, we will look into fraudulent marriages – by which I mean the union of a closeted homosexual man and an unknowing heterosexual woman, a topic where I am mostly aided by Zhu (2017) and Shi et al.'s (2020) research, as these delve into the factors behind these unions and the consequences thereof.

I will delve into this topic further ahead in this thesis, but for now it will suffice to say that research on this matter forcibly analyses marriage in China, its weight on the lives of LGBTQ people and how their lives are impacted by filial piety. This is a struggle we see all too well in the novel, as Handong marries Lin Ping, as he sees her as the perfect candidate to appease his mother's aspirations regarding his stability and social standing, as well as the perfect vehicle to tone down the shame brought on by his affair with his young lover, Lan Yu.

By natural extension of the marriage debate, works on the protection of LGBTQ people's interests and their current legal status in China seem extremely pertinent. Van de Werff (2008), Bao (2018), Liu (2015), and Worth et al. (2019) provide particular insight into current struggles being fought for in this field, but one can see that these matters have garnered international attention via reports such as ABC News In-depth (2018) and CGTN (2018a and 2018b).

The lack of visibility LGBTQ people have is a recurring motif in most extant literature on homosexuality in China (Ho, 2010; Tu & Lee, 2014; Bie & Tang, 2016). The novel showcases this by having these two main characters live out their relationship at night-time, in seedy bars, in the privacy of Handong's apartment (later, Lan Yu's) and other such spaces. Even if these characters are not consciously hiding, they are invisible. Consequences and the importance of fighting against it are topics which can be found in Engebretsen et al. (2015), Chang & Ren (2017) and Miles-Johnson & Wang (2018). The backdrop for this comes through the works of Zheng (2015), which deals in the topic of perceptions of homosexuality and Xie & Pang (2018), where the effects of traditional media are opposed to those of new media, on the outlook their respective users have on homosexuality.

Conceptually, I needed to understand more about *tongzhi* Literature before I could provide a proper commentary on *Beijing gushi*. Therefore, I had to delve into the history of homosexuality in China. The works of Ruan & Tsai (1987), Hinsch (1990), Gulik & Goldin (2003) and Wu (2003) have proved invaluable when performing this task. Hinsch's *Passions of the Cut Sleeve: The Male Homosexual Tradition in China* is undoubtedly a staple in this field and one can verify the value of his irreplaceable contribution to Chinese History through the impact it has had on more contemporary authors. Authors such as Sommer (2000), Jeffreys (2006) Wu (2012) and Burger's *Behind the Red Door: Sex in China* (2012), as well as Wu's "Being LGBTI in China" UNDP Report (2016) have endowed me with a more present-day look into homosexuality's evolution and position in postsocialist China.

Last but not least, research on *tongzhi* Literature proper had to be done. This is a very niche subject and extant work on the topic is scant. Rachel Leng (2012a, 2012b, 2013), however, has done extensive research on it and produced ground-breaking work regarding the categorization and cataloguing of this matter. Through her, it is possible to better understand the genre, its key characteristics, and the major role the Internet – and its never-ending vastness - has played in allowing for these homosexual narratives to be told and disseminated– albeit not completely devoid of censorship. It is also clear how these novels, mostly circulated online, have gone on to shape queer identity in China.

This literary genre came into prominence in 1994, with the advent and increasing widespread use of the internet. The founding of the PRC brought along strict regulations prohibiting the possession and dissemination of sexually explicit materials, which were strengthened throughout the 70s and 80s (Burger, 2012; Leng, 2012a). The 90s, saw the rise

of the ever-changing and ever-evolving cyberspace, where anonymity ran rampant. Empowered by it, certain social groups flocked to the internet to take advantage of its ability to circumvent censorship (albeit temporarily), which lead to the creation of online communities focused on LGBTQ+ matters. As Katrien Jacobs put it, “the Internet itself is uncensored while topics of activism and sexual indiscretions are more-or-less-freely discussed amongst scholars and students.” (Jacobs, 2012: 11).

Notwithstanding, *Beijing gushi* by no means the first iteration of homosexual narratives in Chinese Literature – even if Scott E. Myers’ 2006 Feminist Press edition has opted to advertise its translation under the guise of it being “the first gay novel from Mainland China”[7], in spite of other studies having shown that that is not the case (Ruan & Tsai, 1987; Wu, 2003). The works of Barabas (2018) on the novel itself, Tong & Myers (2011) and Bie & Tang (2016) have also proved themselves to be useful allies in a pursuit for a clear understanding of this novel and this literary genre.

The last decade has seen a rise in literature regarding topics related to Queer China (Kong, 2016; Chiang & Wong, 2017). This idiosyncratic context and that of its agents have certainly played a role in peaking the academic world’s interest in matters concerning *tongzhi* people. There is, however, still much to be said and explored. From the aforementioned authors, one can gather a collective observation made towards the field of Queer Studies, which is the need for a more rigorously defined academic field. Yet, “the nature of the relationship between the authorities and LGBT people in China remains problematic” (Miles-Johnson & Wang, 2018: 2) and social stigma regarding homosexuality naturally deters people from pursuing this academic field, as it lacks social prestige and recognition of its importance (Leng, 2012a). As such, I believe works such as these to be important, necessary and a valuable step towards *tongzhi* visibility and recognition.

For my thesis, I will use David Fung’s translation of the novel (Beitong, 1996/2016). This is a decision informed by the following aspects:

1) Despite being the most literary version of *Beijing gushi*, at an impressive 373-page count, Scott E. Myers’ English translation of the novel is somewhat distant from the original c.100-page story. Naturally, this makes for far more fleshed out characters and episodes, but

[7] https://www.feministpress.org/books-a-m/beijing-comrades

it is not the story LGBTQ people in China fell in love with. Myers himself remarks on the Translator's Note (Tong & Myers, 2016) that his novel is a compilation of every online published version of the novel, plus allegedly additional material provided to him by the original author of *Beijing gushi*.

2) David Fung's version is a very close translation of the original online published version (almost structuralist), which maintains an untouched structure and dialogue. This English translation is the perfect way to quote the novel without having to constantly translate the original, which will severely enhance the readability of this thesis.

3) David Fung's translation is available gratuitously online, posted on a website dedicated to social storytelling, much like the original novel. It was posted by the user Beline1977 on the website Wattpad, in 2016.

I have strived for balance between literature from Chinese authors and that of foreigners to the context being studied. I believe that by doing so, I will be able to provide a holistic, global glance, which I hope will enrichen my thesis and permeate any taken standpoint with a necessary degree of acuity.

c) Structure

Finally, my thesis will be divided in a manner I believe better provides a logical chain of themes and elements. A first section will be dedicated to *Beijing gushi* proper, in which a plot summary with introductory commentary notes will be provided, alongside a brief discussion of the subject of authorship of the novel; and contextualization of the novel within Chinese homosexual literature and the genre it has come to represent so emblematically. A second section will ensue, dealing in matters of social expectations – heavily focused on filial piety - within the novel, alongside some contextualization on why this concept is important and so deeply rooted in Chinese society. Afterwards, a third part, which concerns matters of homosexuals' invisibility in society will be posited for analysis, mostly focused on the marriage arc within the plot as well as the settings in which the characters interact; once again, it will provide contextualization on these phenomena alongside an analysis of these within the novel. Lastly, a conclusion, which will tie these themes together.

1. *Beijing Story* (1996)

1.1. Novel's Summary

In order for the reader to fully grasp the extent of this analysis, I believe it is necessary and convenient to provide them with a summary of the essential plotlines within the novel, as well as its leading characters. The cast is relatively diminished, and one can say the story is quite simple in nature and in character development arc – which is extremely understandable when one considers its online origins. It bears repeating, that throughout the whole setting of the novel, homosexuality was seen as a mental illness (having only lost this status in 2001) and indirectly deemed a crime, under the category of *Hooliganism* – and it would remain so until 1997, when it was decriminalized. These two certainly shape the fate of our homosexual protagonists.

Starting off in 1987's Beijing, the story is told through the eyes of Chen Handong, our unreliable narrator and main character. This young, urban, wealthy businessman leads a life mostly consumed by his own lascivious thoughts and desires ("At the age of 27, I seemed to have achieved everything I desired in life, and I was very arrogant"; Beitong, 1996/2016: Chapter 1), which he fulfils with partners of both genders, even though there is a much bigger bias towards male partners. Despite this, Handong is reluctant to see himself as a homosexual, as he aspires to marry and settle down. He states that his dalliances with the same sex are just ways to quench his lust.

In his professional and private life, he is aided by Liu Zheng - Handong's employee, long-time friend and confidante. Liu Zheng acts as a procurer for Chen Handong, finding male escorts (also known as money boys[8]) and facilitating necessarily discreet meetings between these and his employer.

Handong drifts from meaningless fling to meaningless fling ("I used to be a sort of playboy", Beitong, 1996/2016: Chapter 1), until he is matched with Lan Yu, a young(er), impoverished boy from rural Northwestern China, who has moved to the city to study Architecture. It is necessary to mention that Lan Yu's transplant status from the country to the city is in itself a portrayal of the phenomenon of migration to metropolitan centres in

[8] A Chinese slang term for a young male who earns money through prostitution (Kong, 2011). This is a recurring, controversial figure in Postsocialist China, carrying "*heavy historic baggage"* (Zheng, 2015: 121), as they are discriminated and marginalized amongst *tongzhi* people and by society as a whole (Wong, 2017).

China, and cases such as these abound on the cusp of Postsocialist Capitalism and Neoliberalism's insurgence. The social inequalities are evident in this pairing – one is the offspring of a communist party official, fully integrated in a family and society, who has amassed a considerable fortune at a young age (very much the outward embodiment of a successful citizen), consumed by the inner demon of his uncertain sexual orientation; the other very much a social outcast, who moved from the country to the city, living out his frugal existence in almost complete disconnect from a network of family or friends; notwithstanding, he has a clear awareness of his own identity and fully embraces his homosexuality.

Their brief, awkward yet passionate sexual encounter leads to a series of quick events in which Handong gradually accepts that his feelings for this young man are unlike any other he has felt before and the candour of Lan Yu's disinterested affection is made clear: their passion becomes all consuming. At a certain point, Lan Yu's youthful idealism (seeing as he is 11 years younger than Handong) takes shape in his participation in a political riot which would later be known as the Tian'anmen Protests of 1989[9]. Albeit politically inclined, this episode is seen through Handong's eyes, who was not present at the riots.

Their relationship grows tighter and turns more significant. Lan Yu is even taken by Handong to his family's house for a New Year's Eve celebration (Beitong, 1996/2016: Chapter 4) – where he meets and is welcomed by Handong's two sisters and his mother. Handong's father is deceased, which greatly adds to the pressure he feels to be an exemplar role model to his sisters and a perpetuator of his family's legacy, as the sole male descendant.

Their love affair blossoms to such an extent that Handong and Lan Yu move in together into a villa – *Scandinavia* – in the northern suburbs of Beijing. In this richly furnished hideout, the two lovers set up what can be seen as a makeshift married life – with Lan Yu fulfilling a traditionally feminine role, as he decorates the house and tends to other housekeeping duties. Through Lan Yu, Handong's views on relationships, material control

[9] This is one of the scant occasions in which the novel exits the sphere of Lan Yu and Handong's relationship to glance at social-political circumstances in which the action takes place. It is also worth mentioning that this reference to the Tian'anmen events of 1989 only furthered the controversy around this novel and hastened censorship. The author somewhat abstains from providing direct social commentary on political matters. There is a whole set of circumstances which are a part of Chinese Contemporary History, such as Deng Xiaoping's reforms in the late 70s alongside China's atmosphere in the decade following Chairman Mao's death, which provide the social backdrop for this plot. That being said, the novel is very focused on the two main protagonists, and the political climate is not deeply scrutinized.

and domination – in themselves tell-tale signs of a growing trend in materialism in China – give way into a more simplistic, humane approach. Through an earnest relationship with someone the protagonist really cares for, he becomes a better version of himself.

Their domestic bliss is rapidly disrupted by the arrival of yet another character, Lin Ping. Handong is beguiled by this woman – or, better said, by what a life alongside her would entail: social acceptance, fulfilment of his filial duties, his mother's bliss, upward social mobility, the end of his inner turmoil. Her mere presence is enough to send Handong and Lan Yu's life into a state of disarray, as she encapsulates a realm of possibilities a relationship between two males at the time would not be able to provide. Soon enough, Handong leads Lan Yu to the care of Dr. Shi, who will treat the young lover for his homosexuality – via medication and electroshock therapy – whereas Handong sees his own as a fleeting matter - "I was a perfectly normal man, with just a little homosexual tendency. All I had to do was to get out of the relationship with the boy, and marriage shouldn't be a problem. It was Lan Yu who had a problem" (Beitong, 1996/2016: Chapter 15). As Handong feels the need to marry, Dr. Shi does not consider him to be as hopeless as Lan Yu, who has no intentions of ever marrying or hiding his sexual orientation. Handong voices his internalized self-loathing by continuously goading Lan Yu to think about girls and see their relationship as an ephemerous affair, goading him to consider marriage in the future. Despite the biased medical doctor's best efforts, the couple realize there is no cure for Lan Yu. They have a bitter break up and Handong gives Lan Yu the villa they lived in, *Scandinavia*.

Handong proposes to Lin Ping whilst she becomes progressively more ingrained in Handong's life – mingling with his mother and the rest of his family[10], accompanying him to social outings and events. On the eve of the wedding day, Handong and Lan Yu's years-long affair comes to light and leaves his mother distraught (Beitong, 1996/2016: Chapter 18), and his wife to-be second guessing her choices, much to his chagrin – the life he wanted seems to be fading before his very eyes.

Handong's family, spearheaded by his mother, equally determined to see her son's social life on the proper path, pull some strings to have Lan Yu fired from his job, by surfacing his homosexual lifestyle to his employers. Lan Yu vanishes from Handong's life, and the marriage takes place, with all the dutiful traditions being performed. Quickly enough,

[10] "Her warm, humble, and courteous behaviour won my mother over. Even my two sisters said she was all right." (Beitong, 1996/2016: Chapter 17).

Handong realizes he made a mistake. Not only does he see another facet of Lin Ping – manipulative, controlling, pampered and profoundly materialistic – but he understands his homosexuality and his affection for Lan Yu will not dwindle. With his wife's façade in shambles – "Her elegance, fashionable dressings, gracefulness and charm were not attractive to me anymore, for I could see through them, and I could see a lot of hypocrisy" (Beitong, 1996/2016: Chapter 20) - and with no Lan Yu in sight, Handong sinks into despair. Lin Ping, on the other hand, is also far from happy, as the material landmarks of a proper married couple were not taking place: no grand house in the suburbs (they live in a flat, in the center of the city), no intimacy, no children, no etc. This is in sharp contrast to the ersatz married life Lan Yu and Handong shared: house in the suburbs, travelling, intimacy, friendship, etc. Neither of them is fulfilled.

After over one year of this fraudulent marriage, Handong files for divorce from Lin Ping – who demands monetary compensation for her silence regarding his homosexuality and wasted time – "One million! That's not too much for you" (Beitong, 1996/2016: Chapter 21). In the wake of yet another massive change in his life, Handong realizes and embraces his own homosexuality.

By happenstance, Lan Yu re-emerges into Handong's life, and after yet another series of ups and downs, the once-jilted lover finally warms up to Handong and they reforge a new bond, albeit more sexual and less emotional in nature.

As Handong's business ventures come under scrutiny, and he is held as a scapegoat for an unspecified coup against corrupt businesses, he loses his fortune. As several of his former business partners are thrown into jail, there is the looming threat that the same thing will happen to Handong. Once he is arrested. Liu Zheng, his employee, Li Ping, by now a successful business owner herself, Handong's mom and Lan Yu come together to bail him out. Lan Yu uses the money attained from the sale of *Scandinavia* to buy his lover's freedom.

A changed man, Handong is free and contemplates what the future holds for a homosexual couple in China. The couple go for a long outing at a public park, where they bask in sunlight and publicly display their affection. Staving off his mother's guilt tripping ways into his fulfilment of his filial duties, Handong manages to gain Lan Yu some acceptance into his household – mostly due to the latter's part in buying out the former's freedom.

Just as everything appears to be bright and hopeful, Lan Yu is abruptly killed off in a car accident. Handong's heart is cleft in twain, and he is left an empty shell of a man. We are then transported 3 years into the future, and Handong, now living in Canada[11], describes how he has never forgotten Lan Yu or the time they spent together, as he contemplates his wife, his young daughter, and his mother, as they all share an outwardly idyllic moment. On the inside, however, Handong shares with the reader how his courage to face the world as a homosexual man died with Lan Yu and he is left unable to love anyone the same way he loved his former partner – "I do not have the kind of courage like Lan Yu had to face my homosexual identity. Besides, the door to my feeling has totally shut a long time ago." (Beitong, 1996/2016: The End).

1.2. Authorship (and Publication History).

The novel was first published – or better said, posted - on the no-longer-active website *Zhongguo nanren nanhai tiantang* 中国男人男孩天堂 (Heaven for Chinese Men and Boys) on the 22nd of September, 1996, under the name of *Dalu gushi* 大陆故事 – meaning a *Story from the Mainland*. Its author used the name Bei Tong, shrouding their identity in necessary mystery. *Bei* from Beijing and *Tong* from the aforementioned term *tongzhi*. The identity of this "Beijing Comrade" has long been a topic of discussion and speculation. There is a myriad of theories – from an inconspicuous *tongqi* 同妻[12]; a closeted homosexual; a queer activist; a celebrated author anonymously publishing work on a controversial topic[13], etc (Beitong & Myers, 2016).

On the *Translator's Note* of Scott E. Myer's translation of *Beijing Story* – which took on the much more enticing title of *Beijing Comrades* (2016), the author compiles much of the extant theories on the identity of the author, which is identified as a female and at a certain point alleges to have established contact with her. It would seem that the author was

[11] A move to North America had always been a plan for Lan Yu throughout the novel. His untimely death and his love for Handong made him stay in China, but it was often regarded a as a place for freedom and idealized as a country where two men would be able to love each other without prejudice.

[12] A Chinese term designating the wife of a homosexual, a concept we will clarify further in section 3.

[13] When contacted over her translation of *Beijing gushi* into Italian for the publisher Nottetempo– Tongzhi & Regola (2009), the translator Lucia Regola voiced her own opinion, by stating she believed the author to be a well-known Chinese writer using anonymity to publish this controversial manuscript, as the poetry, musicality and artistic fingerprint in this work was that of someone who appeared to be experienced in this field.

a Chinese student, who had, at the time, recently moved out to New York and ventured into reading online erotica. Unsatisfied with the quality of the offer at hand, she started writing her own material and publishing, never imagining it would reach so far and cut so deep.

Through this connection and with the alleged original author's support, Scott E. Meyers was able to translate (or rather, create) the most comprehensive version of the novel, as it is an amalgam of all existing online published versions of the novel by Bei Tong (which were posted on different websites with alteration to better fit the target audience) as well as exclusive notes from the author. Having read this version, the original and previous English translation, it can be said that Scott E. Myer's *Beijing Comrades* (2016) is in fact the most extensive and the most book-like: characters are more fleshed out, the novel has better pacing and more depth, making for a very polished version of what was initially published as a much simpler narrative.

Beijing gushi was adapted into Hong Kong-born director Stanley Kwan's 2001 *Lan Yu* – clandestinely shot in Beijing. The movie was critically acclaimed[14] and has received a cult following ever since then. It was, evidently, censored but nonetheless gained some prominence within certain circles, so much so that it was chosen to be shown at the China Queer Film Festival, in 2001 – the country's first LGBTQ film festival. The movie's visibility surged interest in the book and in the following years one can find sporadic translations – such as 2009's *Beijing Story* in Italy.

1.3. From Homosexual Chinese Literature to Tongzhi Literature: A Brief Socio-political Overview.

It would be erroneous to state that *Beijing gushi* was the first Chinese literary work concerned with homosexual themes. The presence of homoerotic sensibilities in earlier dynasties – Zhou and Han - is well documented, but the same holds true for later Dynasties, such as the Ming and Qing (Hinsch, 1990; Sommer, 2000; Leng, 2012a and 2012b; Wu, 2012). Even though there are major tonal shifts in attitude regarding homosexuality, one can unabashedly say that there is undoubtedly a tolerance – if not acceptance – of it. The absence

[14] Chinese Film Media Awards (2002) for Favourite Picture, Best Actor for the two leading men; Golden Horse Film Festival (2001) awards for the Director, screenplay; Hong Kong Film Awards (2002), where it was nominated for Best Picture, Best Director, Best Actor, Best Screenplay and nominated for the Un Certain Regard category, at the Cannes Film Festival (2001)

of a word to describe this type of behaviour is deemed by some – such as Wu (2012), Hinsch (1990) Gulik & Goldin (2003), Ruan & Tsai (1987) - as a testament to how it was perceived to be a natural extension of human behaviour. Most of these societal shifts can be felt after the arrival of westerners (Hinsch, 1990; Sommer, 2000; Gulik & Goldin, 2003), but this theory is disputed by some (Liu, 2015).

Even if social stances on homosexuality have swayed throughout the centuries, that is to be expected of any country who boasts a millenary history, which has been through multiple wars and that has seen their borders expand and retract. Even so, we can pinpoint important periods, which will help us further understand homosexual literature's evolution in China[15].

Homosexuality is boldly deemed to be inherently political due to its (well-documented) ties to ruling-power officials and figures, alongside favoritism in China (Hinsch, 1990; Neill, 2009; Liu, 2010). The novel does not shy away from portraying this, by fitting its two main characters within this mold. Lan Yu is a young man of relatively obscure background (or, at least his background is not as important as Handong's) who gains the favor of a rich, politically influent man. Lan Yu plays a predominantly passive role within the relationship, whereas affluent Handong plays the sexually active role. This can either be perceived as an homage to this homosexual tradition, or simply an emulation of a socially recurrent behavior in the form of literature.

The nobility, the *literati* and wealthier merchants were, at certain periods in China's history, expected to have young male lovers, possessors of a delicate (androgynous) beauty, though the relationship was quite different from the one they shared with their wives (Hinsch 1990; Burger, 2012; Wu, 2012). A relationship with a younger man was not so much a matter of love, but one of status and power. For men of privilege, same-sex love was something to be practiced with boys from lower rungs of society, and the boy would invariably play the passive role. It was the wealthier man or aristocrat who held the power. This is not to say that these relationships did not blossom into long-term love affairs. Often, they did, and this, once again, is something present in the novel, as Handong and Lan Yu's affair physically spans a decade and, after the latter's death, continues to fill the former's heart. But usually, as the boy grew older, the patron would discard him and seek a younger man. The term

[15] There is an overlap in the periods presented, as the vast territorial expanse of the country allowed for a different dynasties to coexist.

"homosexuality" regarding most Chinese practitioners of male same-sex love is really something of a misnomer, as their sexual life was by no means limited to boys – something the novel showcases, by having Handong have several flings, with men and women. Men would have their heteronormative family, upholding all the necessary Confucian rituals, and then seek out young men for entertainment outside of their households (Burger, 2012; Wu, 2012). These young lover's backgrounds were not easy to pinpoint (much like Lan Yu's) – these could originate from the poorest family of artisans or leatherworkers, but the majority of them were eunuchs.

Due to Confucianism's family-centric philosophy, it is often deemed that homosexuality was not visible – or known - or that it did not retain social relevance in China (Hinsch, 1990; Neill, 2009), or even that it was a socially decadent behavior brought about by westerners. This is, as I will try to clarify, false, as "China, alone among world cultures, has an unbroken documented history of homosexuality covering nearly three thousand years of its history" (Neill, 2009: 234).

This is made evident by tales such as the story of Mizi Xia, a Zhou Dynasty (c. 1046 – 256 BC) figure whose life has become shrouded in fetishization and mystery. The recounting of Mizi Xia's affair with the Duke Wei Ling, who was infatuated with the former for his allegedly phenomenal beauty, contains two particular episodes worth mentioning. As aforementioned, they fall into the archetypical relationship pattern I mentioned earlier: a beautiful, delicate young man gains the favour of a politically influent man. The episodes linked to this love affair are those of devotion and self-sacrifice. On a first occasion, Mizi Xia usurped the duke's carriage to visit his ailing mother – a matter which would have resulted in amputation of the lower limbs for any other perpetrator, but the duke was moved by Mizi Xia's filial devotion and his love grew deeper. The second episode, on the occasion of a leisurely stroll through an orchard, sees the young lover, after having bitten into a peach and finding it sweet, share it with the duke, who, once again, is moved by Mizi Xia's devotion[16]. The half-eaten peach is a motif still linked to homosexuality. Even if its origins date back to this Zhou Dynasty love affair, its ripples can still be seen in full affect today – consider, for example, Luca Guadagnino's *Call Me By Your Name* (2017), where, once again,

[16] For a more poetic account of these episodes, I would like to redirect the reader to Hinsch (1990, pp. 20-21) who has done extensive and remarkable research on the topic.

two male lovers with a considerable age and power gap share an episode involving a half-eaten peach.

The Han Dynasty 202 BC – 220 AD brings about yet another remarkable tale who went on to shape homosexual tradition in China. Dong Xian, once again, renowned for his youth and enthralling beauty, gained the favour of Emperor Ai. From this well documented love affair, one episode clearly stands out. The story goes that the two lovers were sharing an afternoon nap; the emperor, having awaken, wanted to rise but Dong Xian was sleeping over the ruler's sleeve. Unwilling to disturb his lover's rest, the emperor cut off his sleeve. This is yet another display of care, affection, and devotion. A Cut sleeve – *duanxiuzhipi* 断袖之癖 – or *cutting the sleeve* are also idiomatic expressions that have gone on to shape Chinese discourse on homosexuality to this day, albeit in a more literary register (Gulik & Goldin, 2003; Colville, 2021).

Even if the following periods lack homosexual icons, there is still much to be said on its prevalence within Chinese society. The Three Kingdoms Period (220-280), which marked the end of the Han Dynasty, plunged China in social and political upheaval. Homosexuality was very well present among the elites, deemed by Gulik & Goldin (2003: 160) to be an era "*when male homosexuality was very popular"*. The Jin Dynasty (266-420) witnessed a rise in literature discussing sexual themes, such as prostitution and intercourse.

Shortly thereafter, the Tang Dynasty (618-907), arguably one of the greatest in Chinese History, coincides with the arrival of the first westerners and the beginning of their influence in Sinophone spaces. This period corresponds to a height of cultural sophistication as eastern sensibilities fused with what they perceived to be the best the West had to offer. This also marked a decentralization of power – as more of it granted to regional militant governors, which in turn meant that homosexuality started falling out of favor and favorites did not show as much power as before. This materializes itself into a shift of focus in literary thematic: male friendship – even if riddled with homoerotic undertones – replaces overtly sexual content.

The Five Dynasties & Ten Kingdoms Period (907-979), saw further political turmoil, which lead to a centralization of power. This meant that the Literati – an instructed social class – and yet another more urban social tier were seeing an increase in their importance and affluence. By now, homosexual sex was banned from poetry and literature, and favoritism had fallen out of favor, although homosexuality was arguably more visible than

ever (Hinsch, 1990; Gulik & Goldin, 2003; Neill, 2009), due to a rise in prostitution, in direct correlation to the increase of economic power due to the prosperity of the period. Opting for immediate sexual gratification through resorting to a prostitute certainly outweighed the financial weight of keeping a catamite.

This progressively evolved into an anti-sex period (Burger, 2012) coinciding with the first half of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), where a wave of Neo-Confucianism promoted the abdication of desire in favor of upholding more virtuous traits. The latter half of the period, however, witnesses a sexual reawakening – male lovers of blossoming youth and delicate androgynous frames (often guised in feminine clothing, to generate maximum appeal) were fashionable once again, alongside erotic literature, panting and many other means of extolling this sexual libertinism[17].

Lastly, the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912) was a period of great contradictions: on one hand, there was a great retraction of this sexual freedom, due to a new wave of Neo-Confucianism, seeking to restore morality and propriety to Chinese society (Sommer, 2000); on the other hand, it is one of the most prolific periods concerning (heavily pornographic) homosexual literature[18].The Manchu leadership sought out to promote gender roles and morality, so several laws were issued to ban homosexual acts, especially those with younger men (Hinsch, 1990; Vitiello, 1992; Burguer, 2012; Wu, 2012). This latter period is progressively more influenced by a Western (mostly British) pathologizing of homosexuality (Jacobs, 2012; Liu, 2015; Kong, 2016), until those who identified themselves as homosexuals were finally driven underground in the Maoist Era.

From centuries of depictions of homosexuality in the arts, certain motifs and themes can be gathered. It is common to see mentions and exaltations of the younger man's

---

[17] This period's libertinism and stance towards homosexuality greatly clashed with some Western sensibilities (Wu, 2003). Gaspar da Cruz, a Portuguese Jesuit Missionary wrote of the practice of male prostitution, on the occasion of a visit to Gungzhou, that "*it is spoken of in public and practiced everywhere […] There are public streets full of boys got up as prostitutes. And there are people who buy these prostitutes and teach them to play music and sing and dance. And then, gallantly dressed and made up with rouge like women these miserable men are initiated into this terrible vice*." (Vitiello, 1992; Burger, 2012: 129). This goes to show that the homosexuality was perceived very differently, as Chinese people had not had a Christian filter guiding their views on the matter: were one side saw perversion, the other saw entertainment, but concern over the possibility of production of offspring from men who resorted to male prostitutes.

[18] such as *Yichun xiang zhi 宜春香質*, or *Pleasant Spring and Fragrant Character*, a novel from the first half of the 19th Century, featuring very explicit descriptions of anal intercourse between two men (Hinsch, 1990; Huang, 2001).

immaculate, almost otherworldly beauty: the appeal of his pallor and that of his youth. Their bodies are usually described as willowy. These enthral and lure the older man in. It must be said that these are also traits men would typically seek out in women (Hinsch, 1990; Burger 2012), so there is an aspect of gender dilution. *Beijing Story* follows this trope, as Lan Yu, a young, pallid (even if later in the novel he breaks this convention by becoming very tan, after a hard strenuous summer spent as a construction worker) willowy man captivated Chen Handong, his older lover. Other motifs, such as flowers – these young men would usually be surrounded or be compared to flowers (a traditionally feminine element), due to their delicate beauty and ephemerous nature (of youth); interlinked jade (representative of a lifelong bond, as the highly symbolic jade is deemed to be a very durable gemstone); the phoenix (once again, a feminine element, as it was deeply connected to the empress); and, lastly, bitten peaches and sleeves in clothing. These last two are tied to the aforementioned Zhou and Han tales, but they feature recurringly in other tales.

It can be said that Lan Yu and Handong's bond is a heavily sexualized one. Most of the plot is concerned with their sexual encounters, which are written and explored in vivid, if not lurid, detail. Homosexual stories usually delved into themes of lust and intercourse – see, for example, poems related to men's dalliances in the "*rear courtyard*", *hou ting 后庭* or buttocks, of younger men[19] - and the novel posited for analysis does not break away from this convention. Through the descriptions of these sexual exploits, we are shown different emotional states of the main characters. When Chen Handong realizes his love for Lan Yu, he subverts the couple's unspoken sexual path and assumes a passive role – "I didn't like it at all. But I tolerated it. He could tolerate it for me, why could I not?" (Beitong, 1996/2016: Chapter 1) -; later on, after their breakup and when the businessman is struggling to connect with his young lover, he performs oral sex on him. These episodes are all vividly detailed, but beyond their shock value or entertaining nature, they are manifestations of character development and serve to further the novel's plot.

The novel also deals in the theme of lifelong bonds, which is, as one might guess, another recurring theme in homosexual literary tradition. The protagonists' romance spans

[19] Hinsch (1990: 87) presents us with the translation from an excerpt of a Tang dynasty short story: "*When Wu Sansi saw his beloved's pure whiteness, he was immediately aroused. That night Wu summoned* [*jiao*] him so they could sleep together. Wu played in the "rear courtyard" [*hou ting*] until his desire was completely satisfied."

a decade, and even after Lan Yu's death in the final act of the story, he lives on in Handong's memory for the rest of his days, a reminder of the protagonist's inability to live life as an openly gay man, due to his own inner turmoil and weakness (Beitong, 1996/2016: The End). These would, in some historical periods where censorship over homosexual matters was tighter, be imbued with strong notes of lifelong bonds of friendship between two males (Hinsch, 1990; Wu, 2012).

Lan Yu is brought into Handong's life as a male prostitute, through Liu Zheng, Handong's employee. He falls into the "hooker with a heart of gold" trope - by which I mean, this encounter with Handong was his first and only venture as a *money boy*, he is disease-free (unlike other prostitutes), and is completely uninterested in Handong's money and wealth ("He is pretty pure. Absolutely not from the "circle". Just turned 16. Freshman in college. I guess he needs money really bad"; Beitong, 1996/2016: Chapter 1). There is a running theme of patronage and prostitution, which are so deeply tied to homosexuality's own history in China. It features prominently in the first half of the novel.

The novel, however, goes further than other stories before it. Its characters do not shy away from playing around with gender roles and expectations. Consider, for example, the two long-term relationships Chen Handong, a repressed homosexual, has throughout his arc. On one hand, we have Lan Yu, a masculine young man who possesses delicate and traditional effeminate traits: his youthful beauty (which we have established to be a recurring motif in this type of literature); his long eyelashes, his emotional and sensitive demeanour; his unending devotion to Handong; his passive role in sexual intercourse; his propensity for all things artistic and literary. Lin Ping, on the other hand, Handong's wife for part of the plot, is a beautifully delicate woman who showcases a stereotypical masculine temperament: business-oriented, proactive, decisive, practical, etc. These two characters encompass in them strong masculine and feminine traits. I believe it is this balance that allows these characters to establish successful relationships with the protagonist. Handong, sees in Lin Ping a chance for a successful marriage, as, despite her femininity, she is an equal in terms of masculine temperament; Lan Yu, however, is a complex yet balanced mosaic of female and male energies, which also lures in our closeted main character. This subversion of gender expectations and the dilution of homosexual relationships within heterosexual practices and boundaries are a ploy to present the viewer with a more holistic and humanizing portrayal of homosexual identity (Leng, 2013).

Not only that, but Lin Ping as a character – which deserves to be a case study on her own – plays a grand part in deconstructing gender roles. During the courtship period, Handong is mesmerized but this beauty who "a man couldn't refuse" (Beitong, 1996/2016: Chapter 16), her innocence and her loving, caring nature – and points out how Lan Yu could never give him this female physicality. Despite her exaggerated femininity, Lin Ping is very much the controlling agent[20] of their courtship and their relationship: she is the seducer, and she controls Handong's social circle to the extent of him breaking up with Lan Yu in order to marry her. This is a clear reversal of Handong's relationship pattern, where he sees himself as a "hunter", but we find him in this instance to be Lin Ping's prey. Through her character, we see a dissociation between her outward hyper femininity and her masculine approach to her pursuit of Handong as a suitor, which fuel the discussion of gender dilution and gender roles within the novel. His relationship with Lan Yu also provides fodder for this discussion. In Chapter 10 (Beitong, 1996/2016: 2016), after an evening meal shared between our leading couple and Liu Zheng and his wife, the former states, after witnessing how well his employer and his lover get along, "how nice it would be if [Lan Yu] was a girl". This comment takes place after this couple's dynamic during this dinner episode is likened to that of a heterosexual couple.

Other minor characters also play a part in this dilution of gender roles: a male musician Handong shares a quick liaison with, who, aside from being very submissive, enjoyed wearing "velvet-colored eye shadow" and "burgundy-colored lipstick" (Beitong, 1996/2016: Chapter 5) in sexual scenarios; a crossdressing male prostitute, who has a quick affair with Handong, etc. The protagonist's misogyny and homosexuality undoubtedly play a part in his preference for these more masculine traits, as his lovers who display overtly feminine behaviours are quickly dismissed. Although Handong states that "I like a man because he is a man, and I like a woman because she is a woman" (Beitong, 1996/2016: Chapter 5), in other instances he declares himself (as previously mentioned) a "hunter" and women to be "nothing".

[20] Her controlling, competitive and proactive nature encompasses a commentary on the pressure put upon single women in China, who are rushed into marriage and ushered to secure a husband and fulfil their end of their filial duties, by ensuring a way to financially support for their own parents. By failing to achieve this, they are quickly labelled as *sheng nu* 剩女, or leftover women – educated, unmarried women in their 30s, which face stigmatization from family and society (To, 2013). Lin Ping as a character will be further analysed in section 3.

Other themes within *Beijing Story* can be singled out: a pointed critique at materialism and how it defiled Chinese society; political corruption and instability. Although these are never explicitly picked at - but are more of a backdrop for some of the action – they are nonetheless present: Handong's shady business dealings; his arrest as a scapegoat for some major political scandal; the ease with which money and wealth are flaunted; the references to the bloody student riot, in which Lan Yu participates, etc. Lastly, the themes of invisibility and filial piety, but these will be explored ahead in full detail.

As throughout the plot, homosexuality was still deemed a crime in China, under the *Hooliganism* Law, it is noteworthy that Bei Tong went on to defy this by presenting two gay characters who are, in every sense of the word, normal people. Not criminals, not mentally unstable people, just two men expressing their love for one another in physical form.

Even if these themes escape the Chinese tradition of homosexual literature, they are certainly a trademark of the new genre *Beijing Story* epitomizes: *tongzhi* Literature. Due to censorship, writers enjoyed these layers of anonymity and protection by using fiction as a way to tackle sensitive yet pertinent issues to certain communities, and that is exactly what spurred this new genre into existence. It is then possible to define *tongzhi* Literature as the writings produced by and concerning *tongzhi* people. These fictional stories would handle themes of discrimination, acceptance, cultural biases, invisibility and other major struggles and hurdles experienced by LGBTQ+ people in China. As such, they have been divided into three major *core frame types* by Leng (2012a), who has done extensive pioneering work in this field. Through the analysis of countless pieces of work, the author was able to pinpoint these categories, which I believe will endow the reader with a comprehensive understanding of this type of discourse's field of action. Firstly, Leng identifies *diagnostic* novels, in which issues and problems faced by *tongzhi* are looked at with some detail; secondly, *prognostic* novels, more concerned with solutions to the aforementioned diagnosed issues; and lastly, the *motivational* novels, which can be regarded as militant novels, as they urge for mobilization of *tongzhi* people, spurring them into action. There are subgenres within each of these categories, which help to categorize them even further, but I will not go into them at the present time.

In Leng's understanding, *Beijing gushi* falls into the diagnostic novel category, as it is very much an analysis of social issues faced by the *tongzhi*: filial piety's weight on an individual's life; discrimination; pressure to get married; gender expectations, among others.

The author also labels this novel as a narrative embroiled in dystopian imagery – by which we mean settings "inevitably linked to a totalitarian state apparatus, depriving its inhabitants of freedom by exercising strict control over all aspects of their lives" (Pataki, 2017: 426)[21], which is a trend for *tongzhi* stories set in the 80s, as this period coincides with economic and social upheaval brought about by Deng Xiaoping's reforms.

This new stance on behalf of the authoritarian regime clashed with an ongoing societal shift, in which tradition was contending with progress and modernity. This climate would be used as backdrop for the plot of dystopian narratives – economic uncertainty (Handong's literal reversal of fortune; Lan Yu's aspirations to move to the USA; the corrupting power of money); political injustice (Handong's arrest, the Tian'anmen episode, police brutality); repression of homosexuality (Dr. Shi's electroshock therapy; Handong's mother shunning Lan Yu; Lan Yu being fired for being a homosexual) – and shape the characters' arc, where a recurring underlying critique of civil society being neglected by the ruling power can be felt. These stories would usually revolve around a protagonist's development when at odds with a "*paradoxical environment pervaded by Western ideology and rapid socioeconomic changes, yet governed by an anachronistic regime*" (Leng, 2012a: 35).

Tongzhi Literature can be regarded as a natural progression of the homosexual tradition in literature. From this contextualization, one can see how new contemporary novels, such as the one posited for analysis, which incorporate these traditional elements and imbue them with fresh themes and imagery, allow insight into the ongoing struggles and concerns that permeate these people's lives.

This need for LGBTQ awareness and visibility is still a recurring issue. In a 2015 interview[22], Fan Popo, activist, and internationally celebrated LGBTQ Chinese filmmaker[23],

---

[21] Within the diagnostic novel type, Leng (2012a) identifies three major narrative types: dystopian imagery; material injustice (stories revolving around the oppression of homosexual victims at the hands of antagonistic evil forces, manifested as abusive parents, violent police forces, etc.); and abstract injustice (where these antagonistic forces are not necessarily personified, but felt, i.e., hostile social circumstances, a government's sociopolitical suppression of homosexuality).

[22] Wiliam Brougham (2015, Oct 18) *LGBTQI Rights and Censorship in China – Popo Fan* [Video file]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jROBNt4C3zU

[23] Fan Popo has done multifaceted work: not only has he made films and documentaries, but he has also created a website – www.queercomrades.com, 同志亦凡人 – a platform in which people can discuss LGBTQ issues openly. One should bear in mind that the Internet is the most frequently used tool to access information on homosexuality) (Tu & Lee, 2014). Through clever use of wordplay or keywords, content creators are able to dodge censorship on certain platforms and netizens are able to locate platforms catering to their LGBTQ identities.

states that he feels Chinese people do not have enough information on *tongzhi* people - no image of them - and thus they are seen as "*monsters*" (Brougham, 2015, 15:47-16:27). The director – deemed as one of the most resounding voices in LGBTQ Chinese activism – goes on to claim that he was drawn into the filmmaking process in an attempt to build bridges between segments of Chinese society, in a bid to establish dialogue, create imagery and raise awareness and understanding, which he feels are currently lacking, due to censorship enforced upon the media coverage regarding these topics (Lim, 2006). Fan Popo is an example of how powerful the creation of humanizing portraits – such as *Beijing gushi* - can be in a fight for empathy and against otherization.

2. Living Up to (Social) Expectations – The pressures of Filial Piety on Queer Individuals

2.1. Contextualization.

> *Ritual has three roots. Heaven and Earth are the root of life. Forefathers and ancestors are the root of one's kind. Lords and teachers are the root of order. Without Heaven and Earth, how would one live? Without forefathers and ancestors, how would one have come forth? Without lords and teachers, how would there be order***?**
>
> **-** Xunzi & Hutton (2014: 438)

It is no easy feat to describe the range of *ritual propriety – li* 禮, - but one can see it as an amalgamation of rituals, etiquette, morality, and rites. From Rosemont & Ames (2009), who have done thorough work in this field, one can extrapolate that it is of utmost necessity to differentiate Western notions of *rites* from the ritual propriety notion presented to us. Whereas rituals and traditions in the West may latch onto antiquated, impersonal practices one must abide by, Chinese traditions are far from it: they are personal regulatory expressions, mechanisms and paths that allow individuals to not only further themselves, but society as a whole. They are, in essence, social building blocks. Secondly, it is necessary to differentiate these from laws: it can be summarily said that where ritual propriety is personal and moral in nature, whilst law is impersonal and detached from morality (Rosemont & Ames, 2009).

Ritual propriety can take up a myriad of forms: it can be a role, a conduct or simple social etiquette. These guidelines, however, are not mere indications of what type of behavior should be followed, but considerations on what frame of mind the individual should be in when performing them, the degree with which they show this behavior. That is to say that it is not only the outward manifestation of a behavior that matters but the gusto with which it is performed and what state of mind the agent inhabits when doing so. Let us consider filial piety - *xiao* 孝 - and the manner in which elders are owed respect.

This latter concept has been at the heart of family ties in Chinese society, for centuries (Chan, 2004; Chan & Tan, 2004; Ivanhoe, 2004). It is by no means an exclusive reality to the Chinese context, as manifestations of this notion can be found elsewhere around the globe: notwithstanding, it is certainly a staple of Confucianism, which has gone one to shape "*family*" not only as a social unit, but as a manifestation of ideologies, bound and molded by tradition. If on one hand it has strengthened the bonds between younger and older generations, on the other hand it promotes what can only be described as a perpetual chain of gratitude and indebtedness[24]. Much like ritual propriety, the virtue of filial piety is a complex concept whose boundaries are not crystal clear: it ranges from the gratefulness for one's birth, which is owed to the parents, to the appreciation for the education given to them, alongside the duties the child carries to support and revere their parents and their wishes – such as marrying to perpetuate the family lineage, care for their elders (which in turn results in several ramifications, in life and in death[25], such as pursuing a profitable career which will allow them to do so, etc.).

Handong's arc in the novel perfectly showcases that this philosophical concept has not hollowed out throughout the centuries in which it has permeated Chinese society. It has only developed further and still retains enough ideological impact to still play a pivotal role

[24] This duality can be found on interpretations on the character proper - *xiao* 孝. It is standard for some characters in Chinese to be composite, and *xiao* is composed of an upper character – *lao* 老, meaning "old" or "venerable person", when used as a noun, and *zi* 子, meaning "son". This can either be perceived as a elders being supported by the younger generations or older generations stifling the younger ones (Chan & Tan, 2004; Teon, 2016). I believe it is also worth mentioning that *xiao* is also a part of the composite character for *jiao* 教, which means "to teach", where similar notions of older generations instructing new ones, while passing down knowledge, are present.

[25] "When their parents are alive, they are served with love (*ai* 爱) and respect (*jing* 敬) and when they are deceased, they are served with grief and sorrow." (Rosemont & Ames, 2009: 61)

in the lives of younger generations (Miège, 2009; Choi & Luo, 2016; Barabas, 2018; Wang, 2019). This character´s plight is also a rather skillful portrayal of what might be seen and dismissed as a tyrannical oppression of children by their parents through vows of obedience, when, in fact, it is a complex balancing act of tradition, respect, identity and the naturally affectionate bonds between family members. Whilst it holds queer individuals under duress, due to the added strain put upon the aforementioned balance, it can also be argued that filial piety certainly holds a crucial role in the crystallization of family ties, and that can be seen as extremely beneficial, in the sense that it promotes proximity, communication and intimacy.

As such, whether we are in the realm of ritual propriety or, by natural extension, filial piety, it is not sufficient to show reverence out of duty, but it is essential to imbue this show of respect with countenance, *se* 色, which here means the joy one shows when performing such a duty – "Until these three attitudes—arrogance, defiance, and contentiousness—are set aside, even though someone were to fete their parents on beef, mutton, and pork, they still could not be deemed filial" (Rosemont & Ames, 2009: 78). From this small sentence alone, one can understand the many facets of tradition: filial piety is undoubtedly the more observable, outwardly action, but one's motivations, which are often inscrutable, make countenance a harder to detect behavior. Notwithstanding, these are both regarded as part of ritual propriety.

These will endow the individual's actions and shape them into a better person, mold them into a more empathic family member and place them within a familial and social hierarchy. It is the root from which all other behaviors stem. The observance of ritual propriety will provide the agent with 1) a skillset and guidelines to navigate familial environments; and 2) an awareness of where they stand in a hierarchy. If ritual propriety and filial duty are observed within a household, the world outside will benefit immensely from it, as communities and society are an extension of this nucleus and are also shaped by this need for harmony, hierarchy, and respect. The proper behavior must stem from the home[26]. It is clear, then, that the notion of family reverence holds an indisputable centrality in Chinese society.

[26] "The degree of devotion due different kin and the degree of esteem accorded those who are different in character is what gives rise to the observance of ritual propriety" (Rosemont & Ames, 2009: 77).

It is Xunzi's understanding that a human being's untamed nature would ultimately lead to their demise, as the selfish pursuit of one's desires would lead to destructive behavior. However, due to mankind's gift of intelligence, these instincts could be fought against, especially by filtering them through this analytical gift bestowed upon Mankind. Notwithstanding, guidance is necessary, and this is where rituals and traditions come into play.

It is Xunzi's understanding that these elements will counteract one's selfish pursuits, by training individuals to respect others and show gratitude. Through tradition and rites, the individual is dragged away from his inert natural state, where action is only triggered by self-indulgence, and is forced into a role and to undertake tasks that will mold and shape him into a better person (Xunzi & Hutton, 2014). Once again, we can take up filial piety as an example. Consider if you will one's duty to attend to their parents' needs once these grow older: one would have to leave behind their own pursuit for pleasure and look out for their parents' well-being; one would relinquish one's selfish pursuit for self-indulgent pleasures (much as Handong does in the novel) if the family's integrity and priorities are at stake, and so on.

2.2. A Son's Burden – Handong's Balancing Act.

Handong's inner struggles absolutely materialize the delicate weighing of these societal expectations. Throughout most of the novel's plot, Handong is struggling to reconcile his need to be a dutiful son and his love for Lan Yu. On one hand, his role as the family's sole heir – after the premature death of his father – weighs him down tremendously, as he must be an exemplary son, brother and husband and citizen; on the other hand, he is conflicted by the impact the disclosure and pursuit of his sexual preferences and his homosexual liaison with Lan Yu – could have on these. Throughout the novel's ten-year arc, we constantly see Chen Handong's life swaying between these two aforementioned polarizing forces.

It is clear to the reader that Chen Handong's mother is a manifestation of the Confucian ideals - namely filial piety - we have discussed. It is apparent from the very beginning of the novel that her role is to remind Handong of his duties, be it through their direct interactions – "Don't wait any longer. It's time to get settled" (Beitong, 1996/2016: Chapter 6) – or the weight her remarks have on her son – "Should I get married? Mom had

prompted me many times over this, especially after my father died. I felt a kind of invisible pressure." (Beitong, 1996/2016: Chapter 15).

This indoctrination of Handong's duties is done to such an extent that he, on several occasions, replicates his mother's (and, by extent, Confucianist) teachings, in an unfortunate display of assimilation of the very rules that are keeping him and Lan Yu from experiencing a guilt-free relationship. By having the protagonist state that even though "I had Lan Yu as a steady companion, I did not give up entirely on sleeping with women. I went to bed with them not because I liked them or needed them physically. It was a mental need I wanted to prove that I was a normal man" (Beitong, 1996/2016: Chapter 10), the author clearly emphasises how tortured Handong is: he is in a happy, committed relationship that fulfils him, but through his nurturing and upbringing, he perceives that this relationship's traits are not sufficient. That being said, certain factors in the novel serve as agents to sway his deeply-rooted convictions: 1) meeting and dating Lan Yu, which can be seen as a modernizing, progressive force in Handong's life ("How can I fall in love with a boy?", Beitong, 1996/2016: Chapter 6); 2) the death of his father, a reminder that he is an integral part of his family's hierarchy; 3) the Chen's matriarch, as discussed previously; 4) Lin Ping and the promise of a heteronormative-passing marriage; 5) his imprisonment, which removes most of Handong's social distractions and allows him to see himself clearly; 6) and lastly, Lan Yu's death, which ultimately saps Handong's strength to face the world as an openly gay man.

Ultimately, societal pressure triumphs over the protagonist's plight for sexual freedom, as Handong resigns himself to marrying a woman, having a child, and living with his mother. The novel's final idyllic setting and closing lines - "I am sitting on the front of my doorway in the yard, hearing behind me the laughter of my mother, my wife and my daughter" (Beitong, 1996/2016: The End) – are a poignant omen that not all homosexual men are able to overcome their own personal struggles, family hurdles or society's expectations. Even though the setting is one of outward happiness, Handong is haunted by visions of a saddened Lan Yu, a somber reminder of a life he (or rather, they) could not have[27].

---

[27] One is left to wonder whether this outcome would have been different, had Lan Yu never been killed off. The mentions to his courage and the way the plot was building up to a happy ending for these two characters hints at a different possibility. However, in his absence, we are faced with the fact that Handong prioritized his ingrained need to be a dutiful son over his own wishes (Barabas, 2018). Lan Yu's sudden and unexpected death

The effects these moments and agents have on Handong's well-being, and his own sense of identity are in themselves worthy of mention. As a self-loathing homosexual, Handong struggles to fully embrace his feelings for Lan Yu, which results in several break-ups and dismissals of his ever-loyal companion. It is only towards the very end of the novel – namely Chapter 27, after his imprisonment – that Handong states that he no longer worries about "whether I was a homosexual or heterosexual" (Beitong, 1996/2016). That being said, the acknowledgment of his own sexual orientation can by no means be likened to him openly embracing it, as the novel's fateful ending demonstrates.

Lan Yu and Lin Ping also exist within a family hierarchy, and they too are embroiled in their own personal struggles with filial duty, albeit these are minor events in the plot. Lin Ping's "plain [family] background" (Beitong, 1996/2016: Chapter 17) is commented on by Handong's mother, who would have preferred someone matching her son's and her own illustrious family. Not only that, but through her marriage to Handong, a new set of demands is cast upon the couple. A Chinese proverb by Mencius (372-289 BC) - *buxiaoyousan, wuhouweida* 不孝有三，無後為大, which can be translated as "there are three ways to be unfilial: the worst is not to produce offspring" (Lou, 2020)[28], retains all of its gravitas whenever one considers that filial piety's heavy emphasis on the continuation of the family line through marriage, makes it very difficult for same-sex individuals to find happiness in China (Miège, 2009; Kong, 2016; Barabas, 2018; Huang & Brouwer, 2018). This is pertinent as a point of contention for all three characters, as Handong and Lin Ping's marriage is a failure in many ways, one of them being their inability to have children; and Lan Yu and Handong's relationship is also considered less than desirable as no children could come from their union.

Lan Yu navigates filial piety in a different manner, as he is determined to break society's mould: he is open and unabashedly homosexual and determined to set aside his diminutive family's impositions on what his life should be like. His status as a transplant to Beijing further aids in isolating him from his rural (albeit intellectual) family. His deceased mother had only wished for him to be "independent and a decent man" (Beitong, 1996/2016:

---

also fits in with a trend in *tongzhi* Literature at the time of *Beijing gushi*'s writing of denying happy endings, as a way to emphasize the harshness gay men experienced (Leng, 2012a).

[28] The other ways of being unfilial consist of "deceiving your parents with flattery and leading them to ignore righteousness"; and "not entering public service and making a career when [one's] parents are old and living in poverty" (Teon, 2016).

Chapter 8), which he takes to heart, but in accordance with his own set of values, in stark contrast to Handong.

Filial piety is undoubtedly one of the most crucial foundational ideologies in Confucianism. Through these episodes from the novel, we can see how it absolutely permeates an individual's relationship with their families – with special consideration for their parents – and the effect this can have on their behaviour and psychological well-being. Striving to meet one's parents' expectations alongside the pressure to uphold a family's honor and prosperity certainly force younger generations to equate their needs of those of their parents, with the possibility of these acting as a deterrent in their pursuits for personal happiness (Miège, 2009; Hu & Wang, 2013), as in Handong's case.

For queer people in China, there is added strain as there is unsurmountable inner and outer pressure. The findings of the UNDP report "Being LGBTI in China – A National Survey on Social Attitudes towards Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Gender Expression" (Wu, 2016) showcase a country struggling to recognize and include this minority[29], with most issues being traced back to the family ties. Families as a unit are still seen as a major obstacle for the *tongzhi* and queer people[30] (Wu, 2016; Gallo, 2017; Yu & Xiao, 2017) and remain the driving force that leads these individuals into closeted lives, where they live out their preferences in clandestine underground environments, whereas their outward lives continue to be structured by heteronormative cultural biases and expectations (Miège, 2009; Kong, 2011; Hu & Wang, 2013; Wu, 2016; Yu & Xiao, 2017).

"*Coming out*", or the act of disclosing one sexual orientation to their parents and close family, is perceived as a highly disruptive behaviour and an affront to filial piety. By affirming their social condition as a sexual minority, these individuals fail to appease their parents' wishes and expectations, and therefore, fail their duties. Realities such as marriage, procreation and not disrupting social order, by perpetuating harmony, are severely

[29] The results are far from positive, but it does mention a transition. A country which is deemed to be in a stage where allegedly the majority of the people do not hold negative or even stereotypical views of sexual and gender minorities – even though many of them report discrimination as a cause for loss of job, unease in school and workplace environments and even violence (be it physical or emotional) in familiar contexts. It is, therefore, no wonder that only 5% of the surveyed people opt for a full disclosure of their sexual preference in their social lives, deemed "extremely low visibility" by the UNDP (Wu, 2016: 8).

[30] See Zhang (2017) on the intricacies of authority within family contexts and the PRC's upholding stance regarding the protection of the elderly, such as the 1996 Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of the Elderly (the Elder Law).

complicated due to the inhospitable Chinese social atmosphere queer people face (Wu, 2016; Gallo, 2017; Bao, 2018).

Whether or not a forcefully disruptive change needs to take place (in a family nucleus or in Chinese society as a whole), remains to be seen, but for the time being, queer people have adapted to and mutated these family structures to find a place, leading to a different set of changes.

3. Hiding in Plain Sight – Invisibility through Marriage and New Forms of Kinship

3.1. Contextualization.

China's gay population could be as big as 30 million, most of whom hide their sexuality. It is believed that the pressure to form a traditional marriage is so acute that 80 % of China's gay population enters a marriage with heterosexual partners who are unaware of their sexuality.

- Liu (2013: 495)

In China, marriage remains tacitly mandatory (Gallo, 2017; Yu & Xiao, 2017; Zhu, 2017; Wang, 2019), a fundamental step towards personal and financial independence. Aside from the overt cultural weight and significance this institution holds – as an extension and materialization of the omnipresent filial piety – it is also tied to relevant socioeconomic aspects. Even if marriage has partially evolved beyond its arranged nature (Choi & Luo, 2016; Wang, 2019), it still revolves around skilful negotiation on behalf of those involved, with much of the emphasis being laid upon parents and their offspring: this tie will not be a mere union of two individuals, but a merging of two households, and an instrument of "welfare provision" (Gallo, 2017: 14), as parents need to be taken care of by their children.

Throughout the globe, socioeconomic circumstances have been forcing individuals to leave their parents' homes at later ages (Choi & Luo, 2016; Shi et al., 2020) and this delay certainly shifts the delicate ongoing balancing act younger generations feel between pursuing their own personal desires and fulfilling their filial duties. *Tongzhi* people are not immune to this pressure, in fact, it is exacerbated in queer contexts (Liu, 2013; Choi & Luo, 2016; Huang & Brouwer, 2018; Zhu, 2017; Wang, 2019; Xuan et al., 2019). Even if same-sex

marriage is not allowed in China (Liu, 2013), they are still forced to fit a heteronormative mold and must manage their expectations accordingly, alongside those of their parents (Choi & Luo, 2016; Shi et al., 2020). By not following through with the expected course of action for adulthood, growing stigmatization from society and family can ensue (Wu, 2016; Yu & Xiao, 2017)[31].

As such, one can state that the available options for homosexuals to establish kinship and fulfilling filial piety duties, are forms of invisibility – i.e., finding ways to blend in as to avoid standing out. This debate revolves around the marriage issue, as there is a dire need for these people to fall into the marriage contract. Due to China's "unique cultural landscape" (Liu, 2013: 498), marriage is forced upon *tongzhi* people, as failing to abide by yet another facet of ritual propriety and tradition will ultimately endanger their humanness[32], and foster even further discrimination and marginalization. In order to avoid this, *tongzhi* people must play into their expected gender roles and fulfil their duties, and, even though my focus is male homosexuality, it is pertinent to point out that this burden is different for gays and lesbians, as after marriage, women need to bear and rear children, perform wifely duties, etc., making marriage just the starting point of many of their hardships (Liu, 2013).

In a bid to comply with what is expected of them, a massive percentage of homosexuals marry. However not all marriages are built on the fully informed volition of the bride and groom. These, in China, are known *pianhun* 骗婚, or *fraudulent marriages* and were considered to be the only option for homosexuals (Choi & Luo, 2016; Zhu, 2017) for several decades. These are, by no means, a Chinese-exclusive reality: a scenario in which a homosexual marries an unknowing heterosexual partner, so that their own life can attain a semblance of much-desired normalcy is a recurring one. By doing so, a façade of fulfilment of the requisite filial demands is accomplished: marriage, eventually children, the creation of yet another family unit. However, even if this allowed for *tongzhi* to blend in, it also came at a great cost to their own psychological health and well-being (Yu & Xiao, 2017); and it can be alleged that it overall deters an ongoing issue related to lack of visibility and

[31] These consequences range from abandonment, ostracization, professional obstacles, to violence and several other forms of discrimination.
[32] An understanding that if one were to prioritize their sexual orientation over their families, would imply giving up their kinship and would lead to a dislodging from a familiar nucleus, ultimately making *tongzhi* people a "nonbeing" (Liu, 2013: 499).

representation, making for a circular problem: *tongzhi* are driven underground due to a lack of visibility and the lack of visibility forces *tongzhi* people underground.

These fraudulent marriages are at the heart of a different social phenomenon, known as the *tongqi* 同妻, the wife of the homosexual (Choi & Luo, 2016[33]; Zhu, 2017); and it is these women that make this fraudulent marriage even more particular and are fodder for further studies. The fraud in the fraudulent marriages here occurs when the heterosexual partner's expectations are dashed: the "marriage-love-sex" package, as Zhu (2017: 1077) dubs it, is quickly erased, alongside perspectives of social and financial security. This is most notorious in gay man-straight women marriages, as they are virtually trapped within a *pianhun*, due to an already weakened social position. Once caught within this type of marriage, they see their life prospects dwindle (Bram, 2016): they can live out their lives trapped inside a loveless sham of a marriage; they can attempt to divorce their homosexual spouse (which can be a long, drawn-out process if the spouse refuses to admit to their sexual orientation); but, if successful in this endeavour, they face life under the stigma of a divorced woman, most likely as a *sheng nu* (To, 2013); and under constant suspicion of being carriers of several STDs, which are very much associated which homosexuality in China (Zhu, 2017). Not only that, but it further perpetuates the notion that homosexual men engage in criminal activity - blackmail, swindling, fraud, etc. (Chang & Ren, 2017).

Some of these *tongqi* however, brave through their marginalization and group for change – be it either a sympathetic approach to their life partners, which manifests itself in a struggle for equal rights for LGBTQ individuals; or the condemnation of those who knowingly deceived them into this fraudulent arrangement (Bram, 2016; Choi & Luo, 2016). Whatever their ideological alignment might be, it creates a hard-to-solve matter as their debate is usually centred around the disclosure of one's sexual orientation. This is, naturally, problematic as homosexuals find themselves in unwelcoming, contradictory social contexts, and seem themselves guided by "vectors of a disclosure at once compulsory and forbidden" (Sedgwick, 2005: 70). It is then, clear, why many *tongzhi* opt for opacity in their lives. Notwithstanding, the matter of *tongqi* is one lacking in resources, as few of them opt to disclose their status.

---

[33] Or *homowives* (Choi & Luo, 2016: 261), however I will abstain from using this term, as it feels disparaging.

With this in mind, and aided by a changing cultural landscape (Gallo, 2017; Choi & Luo, 2016; Xie & Peng, 2018) we can see that the contours of the marriage debate have evolved and so have new forms of kinship. An optimal arrangement can be found in an alliance: a gay man, for example, would marry a lesbian – whilst being fully aware of where their own sexual preferences lie. In doing so, they can simultaneously suppress and appease parental and familial pressure over the need and urgency for this moment to occur and conquer this much-needed space for personal freedom (Liu, 2013; Choi & Luo, 2016; Engebretsen, 2017; Wang, 2019). This type of marriage is known as *xinghun* 形婚. There are several translations proposed for this institution: "sham/fake marriage" (Huang, 2018); "contract marriage" (Choi & Luo, 2016); "formality marriage" (Liu, 2013; Gallo, 2017), or even convenience marriage (again, Liu 2013). Wang's (2019) translation of *xinghun* as a cooperative marriage will be followed, as it feels aligned with what it represents and embraces the positive aspect of his type of union.

This negotiated façade of a heterosexual marriage – allows those within it to attain a social status that they otherwise would not have been able to: married; dutiful offspring; and, of course, normal. Even if the fulfilment of this social requisite is accomplished through creative resourcefulness, it is not bereft of heteronormative pressures. It too is subjected to the strain of negotiation, gender roles and stigma. In order to locate a partner, many *tongzhi* place ads online where they profile themselves in accordance with how well they would be able to pass off as heterosexual (Liu, 2013) in a perpetuation of gender roles – and these range from physical traits to financial standing, willingness to have children, etc. In many cases, this haggling is also done with parents: *tongzhi* break down conventional marriage while building up homosexual love and "cooperative marriages" as preferential (Xuan et al., 2019).

These discussions focus on the negative impact a conventional marriage would have on those involved: the homosexual in the couple would be depressed, unfulfilled and trapped, whereas the heterosexual element would be duped and deceived into an immoral situation. The clarification that homosexuality is innate, and therefore, harmless, and unworthy of shame and reproach is poignantly portrayed in the novel. As such, homosexual love is presented as a purer form of affection, one that revolves around uninterested love, rather than the social and materialistic aspects which guide conventional marriage in China. Xuan

et al. (2019) expertly dissected the discursive tactics and arguments employed by *tongzhi* when discussing these topics with their parents and their study is essential in further understanding how sexual minorities advocate for "*the pursuit of the unconventional way of life*" (Xuan et al., 2019: 8). These are certainly testimonies that discourse on filial piety is being contested and a shift from what is perceived as blind allegiance and new forms of legitimate kinship are taking place (Liu, 2013; Gallo, 2017; Santos & Harrel, 2017; Huang & Brouwer, 2018), where bonds between parent and child are being contested, on the basis that there is more to life than marriage and reproduction (Xuan et al., 2019).

Cooperative marriages, a modern approach to this issue, became a highly sought-after alternative to the aforementioned fraudulent marriages, as they represent a solid, victimless compromise between the fulfilment of filial duties and compliance to the demands of a conventional marriage (Choi & Luo, 2016; Gallo, 2017). These granted the couple the necessary degree of independence to then pursue their own interests and relationships outside of their marriage – this is in stark contrast to the previously presented marriage type, where cheating is usually a consequence, due to one of the spouse's sexual and emotional unhappiness. This type of allegiance is also deemed as the best course of action until same-sex unions are recognized in China (Engebretsen, 2014; Gallo, 2017), as the couple starts off with the unique advantage of being totally open and earnest regarding what they expect from their union.

In marriages where a homosexual is included, it is necessary to discuss the notion of dual identity – the dichotomic existence of a private sexual identity, distinct from the public social identity (Shi et al., 2020), which is essential as "while homosexual activities done in private can be tolerated, [an openly] gay identity is unacceptable and will bring unbearable shame on oneself and one's family." (Liu, 2013: 507). Of course, the strain of juggling these two spheres is greatly diminished in a cooperative marriage, where a safe haven for the like-minded couples' private sexual identity is built. The same cannot be said for fraudulent marriages, which leads *tongzhi* further underground.

3.2. Marrying a Fraud – Handong's Failed Marriage(s)

The novel presents us with two major relationships. On one side, we have Handong and Lin Ping, an embodiment of the aforementioned fraudulent marriage: Handong the homosexual and Lin Ping the (not so) unknowing *tongqi*[34]; on the other hand, we have Handong and Lan Yu's ersatz marriage. It cannot be classified as a formal marriage, as the legal aspects of it are not fulfilled, but Bei Tong very much builds upon the idea of their relationship being, in essence, just like a conventional marriage between straight people, in an allusion to the humanization and normalization of homosexuality: "*This was the first time I married, but married life was not strange to me. Although there had never been a page of legal agreement between Lan Yu and me, we had lived a calm and solid life together, just like a married couple"* (Beitong (1996/2016: Chapter 19).

At a certain point throughout the plot, Handong willingly decides to leave behind years of emotional stability and make-believe conjugal existence with Lan Yu in order to marry Lin Ping and put an end to the marriage issue that for so long had been plaguing his existence. The appeal of guilt-ridden married life - as opposed to the one he shared with Lan Yu, albeit filled with moments of bliss - outweighed the several cons of his shameful homosexual liaison. On one hand, Handong would no longer need to struggle with his own identity, as a beautiful wife by his side would certainly be a testament to his heterosexuality; his mother would be appeased, especially after his "dalliances" with Lan Yu had been uncovered by all; and lastly, to everyone else, he would be a normal, adjusted, successful and married man, about to start a family. By marrying, Handong "was having the blessings of my folks and my friends" (Beitong, 1996/2016: Chapter 19).

The negotiation aspect of Handong's marriage is certainly present – "I told my mother about Lin Ping. She was not happy with Lin's plain background at first" (Beitong, 1996/2016: Chapter 17) – as we see that Handong and Lin Ping have to convince the Chen matriarch of her worth before their marriage can be seen as adequate, which Lin Ping eventually does by winning Handong's mother over with her charm. The mother's omnipresence within this relationship can be felt throughout their short-lived relationship and marriage – "My mother had suggested that Lin Ping and I should marry on the first of

[34] "Lin Ping also knew about Lan Yu, but she pretended otherwise" (Beitong, 2016: Chapter 18)

October" (Beitong, 1996/2016: Chapter 18) and "You and Lin Ping should have a child as soon as possible. What are you waiting for?" (Chapter 20) perfectly encapsulate this; even after her son's divorce, "she said that I must find another suitable woman to marry again" (Chapter 21). Handong also negotiates Lan Yu's existence with his mother, in a desperate attempt to uphold some of his face within his family circle and safeguard his highly sought-after marriage. It is very much the antithesis of what I discussed previously, regarding the discourse techniques (Xuan et al., 2019) used by homosexuals when negotiating their private lives with their parents, as here Handong makes use of them to downplay his affair with Lan Yu, instead of upholding homosexuality. He states to his mother that she does not "realize that nowadays, the rich all play this kind of game (…) Nobody takes [their homosexual affairs] seriously. They just go get a boy to go the rounds. (…) My interest is in horseracing now. It's more or less the same thing" (Beitong, 1996/2016: Chapter 18).

After celebrating their "crowded, extravagant and proud" wedding (Beitong, 1996/2016: Chapter 19), Handong's misogynistic views of his wife start taking over, as we are shown Lin Ping in an increasingly materialistic, façade-oriented light, alongside his decreasing happiness over his social achievement, presented to us through poignant remarks such as "her long, slender and well-manicured fingers should not handle housework" (Beitong, 1996/2016: Chapter 19). As it is customary in fraudulent marriages, the homosexual partner rapidly feels the need to pursue their true sexual inclinations, and as his lust for Lin Ping dwindles – "my sexual desire was far from aroused"; "the stimulation was not there (…) I had to rely on my imagination again to reach my climax". Handong's preferences cannot be suppressed - "Eventually, I decided to find another boy" (Beitong, 1996/2016: Chapter 19) but this eventually gives way to frustration and depression.

As stated in the previous section (3.1), filial duties also weigh heavily on women. As their loveless marriage progresses, added strain is placed upon Lin Ping due to the lack of offspring, as their union will suffice, until she has children with Handong. Even if she is portrayed as a woman in possession of a very masculine skillset, which she uses in a more skilful manner than Handong – "She was now in better terms with [a business partner] than even I, and I had profited a lot from this" (Beitong, 1996/2016: Chapter 20) – in itself a play on gender roles, she feels the strain of not having borne a child, as she cannot escape her feminine duties, even if her talents lie elsewhere. This is further showcased by having Lin

Ping become a successful businesswoman in her own right, of unknown marital status, by the end of the novel. In spite of her husband's obvious shortcomings, she braves their marriage and attempts to make it work, constantly flaunting how normal life can be when in a marriage, by dragging Handong to his mother's house, showing him the easy mother-daughter bond, they had already established, not showing impatience of concern over her husband's growing lack of sexual interest in her, etc. As seen before, this is a recurring motif within fraudulent marriages, as *tongqi* often feel trapped in them, due to the loss of face and social standing a divorce would entail. Only when Handong openly starts to negotiate divorce arrangements with her, does she change her stance. A first round of divorce discussions leads to a change in her demeanour: her materialism greatly recedes, and she takes up a more traditional role – going so far as cooking homemade meals and trying to lure Handong with her feminine charms once again. However, when this fails, her masculine, business-oriented mindset sets in and she starts planning for her life as a divorced woman, by negotiating a high divorce settlement, and moving funds into her own bank account. Once again, she displays a keener sense of business and entrepreneurship when compared to her business mogul husband.

Lin Ping's foiled expectations regarding her short-lived marriage can be summed up by her in a final argument with Handong, in which she asks him "What else have you give me except money? What else have you given me as a man and a husband?" (Beitong, 1996/2016: Chapter 20). As their emotional argument escalates, she once again allows her transactional mindset to take the lead and demands "One million [RMB]! That's not too much for you." to settle for a divorce. Ling Ping is a recurring character by the end of the novel, when she financially assists Lan Yu and Liu Zheng in bailing Handong out of jail, a testament to her economic prowess. Regarding her alignment as a *tongqi*, we can presume she does not hold a grudge against homosexuals and is sympathetic to their plight, as she is a benevolent force at this point.

Bearing in mind the social context in which the novel's plot takes place, it is no surprise that Lan Yu and Chen Handong's relationships, with each other and with other men, are very much lived out in hiding, a fact which is reflected not only in the diminutive amount of characters introduced in the novel, but also in the settings in which most of the action occurs – night-time, bedrooms, apartment hideaways, the "gay underworld" of the city,

materialized in bars or restaurants where they know their homosexuality is welcome or tolerated. This is the type of existence the two characters lead, in stark contrast to Handong's marriage to Lin Ping, where parties, business meetings, and family gatherings are frequently mentioned. This hints at the ease with which a conventionally married couple could build kinship within a family context, whereas Lan Yu and Handong exist mostly for one another, in almost total disconnect from family.

In the period in which the novel takes place (80s and 90s), cooperative marriages were not yet established as an alternative and alternative forms or arrangements of kinship still struggled to see the light of day. In Chapter 4 (Beitong, 1996/2016), Handong takes Lan Yu to his family home to celebrate a New Year's Eve, but dubs this step "risky", presents him as a friend, and although the occasion is one of bliss and merriment, Handong is afflicted by the idea of the true nature of their bond being uncovered by his family – "They would have killed me if they had known my relationship with Lan Yu".

That being said, their marriage simulacrum has many parallels with the one Handong would later share with Lin Ping, although this one is presented in a more positive, earnest light. This contrast between these two relationships is the most militant aspect of the novel. The author makes a very clear effort to portray homosexual love as uninterested and pure. For example, where Lin Ping is materialistic, Lan Yu is detached; although Lan Yu showers both of his lovers with extravagant gifts, only Lin Ping truly basks in them, whereas Lan Yu is uncomfortable and only grudgingly starts accepting them, but only because he wants to please Handong. Another contrast between them, is the ease with which they connect to one another: their homosexual bond is eternal, it lives on in spite of Lan Yu's death, whereas Handong and Lin Ping only experience a short-lived marriage; Lan Yu and Handong communicate over all sorts of matters: business, careers, life goals, intimacy, he shows concern over the latter's family; Handong and Lin Ping barely communicate, only over trivial matters. Another one of these differences can be spotted in their housing accommodations: Handong moves in with Lan Yu into a villa in the northern suburbs of Beijing (Beitong, 1996/2006: Chapter 13), whereas in his marriage with Lin Ping they share a flat in the middle of the city. If, on one hand, Lan Yu encourages Handong to be his true self, changing him into a better, happier, more confident person, willing to brave the world

with his homosexual partner in a hostile context; on the other hand, his bond with Lin Ping represses him and traps him in a universe of repression and meaningless social goals.

It is worth mentioning that these clever parallels can also be found in the breakup sequences. Both of them are subjected to similar negotiating dynamics. Much as he did with Lin Ping, at a later stage of the novel, Handong had to first "divorce" Lan Yu – by presenting his arguments - "I am not living in a vacuum. I have to face a lot of things… I have my career, my mother…" – and establishing the conditions under which it would take place - "although we have agreed to not contact any more, you must come to me if there is any emergency" (Beitong, 1996/2016: Chapter 18). We can see from these main differences that a case is being made in favour of the homosexual couple: their relationship is the one individuals should be aiming for, their intimacy is the one people strive for; and their lifestyle is the one one would expect from a conventionally married couple (married bliss in the suburbs, financial success, etc.).

Lastly, I would like to point out that the duress of enduring his double life – an account of dual identity in action – has left Handong emotionally drained, depressed, and lethargic at several points throughout the novel. The constant fear of being exposed to his family, and of failing to live up to their expectations is certainly another aspect most homosexual readers can relate to.

4. Conclusions: *Beijing gushi*'s Legacy

Although the novel stems from past decades, much of its content's themes are still current and debated in extant literature, as the bibliography used for this thesis showcases. Evidently, the debate has mutated and evolved, as China's moral compass has shown signs of change, but not enough to render *Beijing gushi* obsolete and devoid of relevancy.

It is undoubtedly and in many ways a product of its time, as certain aspects have lost their controversial power – such as the sexual episodes written before the removal of the 1997 Hooliganism Law, or even the fact that it portrayed a homosexual relationship (which is now a more recurring theme (Zhao, 2021) – but many of these, as shown through this work, such as the debates around marriage, filial piety and invisibility, are very much current concerns for *tongzhi* people in China. These characteristics, which were so skilfully presented to us by an anonymous author, have endowed the novel with longevity and allowed it to shape a generation of gay men (Shoemaker, 2016).

While this analysis was focused on just two of the themes within this multi-layered novel, it is possible to explore a myriad of different topics, making for a very rich research subject. Consider, for example, the topic of visibility, which was only lightly broached by me in this thesis, alongside that of representation, and how these are informed by different modernizing cultural factors, which are undoubtedly at the centre of a very prolific and current debate (Tu & Lee, 2014; Engebretsen, 2015; Chang & Ren, 2017; Miles-Johnson & Wang, 2018; Vidal, 2021). As China moves on from an etiological and pathological perspective of homosexuality, which shaped the 80s and 90s, into the "socio psychological and cultural-political discourses" of the 2000s (Kong, 2016: 14), so too is the homosexual individual attaining a new status, as a citizen. The same can be said for the transition from online communities – such as the one where the novel posited for analysis comes from – into offline communities, which seek out to manifest concrete social and political changes.

This type of emergent queer literary discourse is more than just a manifestation of gay culture: it is a serious tool with which awareness and resistance are built. Therefore, it is important to read, translate and study *tongzhi* literature, in order to gain a better comprehension of any discriminatory circumstances and cultural adversities these people face in contemporary China. A Portuguese translation of this book is due[35], as there is no

[35] I have started this endeavour as a side-project, which I will pursue at a PhD level.

representation of this literary genre in this language. At the present time, no findings regarding the study of any of these topics in Portugal has been made –as no national literature on *tongzhi* people or *Beijing gushi* can be found .

In a time where social constructs of relationships are experiencing a process of reconfiguration, and people everywhere are finding new alternative ways of living out their lives, identities and establishing creative forms of kinship, it is important to look back and assess how these struggles are felt – not only in our own country, but in other ones as well, as knowledge and awareness are essential steps towards progress and change.

The study and partial analysis of what an emblematic and relevant piece of literature could certainly help kickstart some interest in this field. Even if "the Chinese government precludes university students in Mainland China from working on topics related to queer studies or homosexuality, discouraging research in these fields" (Leng, 2013: 8), it can still be of great interest to people outside of China, who are conscious of these issues and willing to better understand, and it can prove to be yet another contribution to a larger body of research on these topics.

Bibliography.

- Bao H. (2015). Digital Video Activism: Narrating History and Memory in queer China, 'Comrade' China. In Engebretsen, E. L., Schroeder, W. F., & Bao H. (Eds.). *Queer-Tongzhi China: New perspectives on research, activism and media cultures*. NIAS press.
- Bao H. (2018). *Queer comrades: Gay identity and tongzhi activism in postsocialist China*. NIAS press.
- Bao H. (2020). *Queer China: Lesbian and gay literature and visual culture under postsocialism*. Routledge.
- Barabas, J. (2018). "What do my emotions matter if mother is sad?": Filial Piety and Heteronormative Obligations in "Beijing Story";. *Asia in Focus*, *5*, 41–50
- Beijing Tongzhi (1998) *Beijing gushi* [Beijing Story]. Retrieved Mar 22, 2022, from: http://www.shuku.net:8082/novels/beijing/beijing.html
- Beitong (2016). *Beijing Story* (David Fung, Transl.). Wattapad. (Original work published in 1996). Retrieved 22 March 2022 from: https://www.wattpad.com/story/67282221-beijing-story-lan-yu
- Beitong, & Myers, S. E. (2016). *Beijing comrades* (First Feminist Press Edition). The Feminist Press.
- Bie B., & Tang L. (2016). Chinese gay men's coming out narratives: Connecting social relationship to co-cultural theory. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, *9*(4), 351–367. https://doi.org/10.1080/17513057.2016.1142602
- Bram, Barclay (2016, Dec 14). China's 'Tongqi': The Millions of Straight Women Married to Closeted Gay Men. Vice. https://www.vice.com/en/article/43gdpp/chinas-tongqi-the-millions-of-straight-women-married-to-closeted-gay-men
- Burger, R. (2012). *Behind the red door: Sex in China*. Earnshaw Books.
- Chan A. (2004). Does *xiao* come before *ren*?. In Chan A., Tan, S. (Eds.). *Filial Piety in Chinese Thought and History*. RoutledgeCurzon Publisher.
- Chan A. & Tan S. (2004) *Filial Piety in Chinese Thought and History*. RoutledgeCurzon Publisher.
- Chang J., & Ren H. (2017). Keep Silent, Keep Sinful: Mainstream Newspapers' Representation of Gay Men and Lesbians in Contemporary China. *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, *24*(3), 317–340. https://doi.org/10.1177/0971521517716765

- Chiang H. (2018). *After eunuchs: Science, medicine, and the transformations of sex in modern China*. Columbia University Press.
- Chiang H., & Wong A. K. (2017). Asia is burning: Queer Asia as critique. *Culture, Theory and Critique*, *58*(2), 121–126. https://doi.org/10.1080/14735784.2017.1294839
- Chiang H., & Wong A. K. (Eds.). (2020). *Keywords in queer Sinophone studies*. Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.
- Choi S. Y., & Luo M. (2016). Performative family: Homosexuality, marriage and intergenerational dynamics in China: Performative family. *The British Journal of Sociology*, *67*(2), 260–280. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.12196
- Colville, A. (2021, Apr 19) China's gay emperor known for his "cut sleeve"- SupChina. https://supchina.com/2021/04/19/chinas-gay-emperor-known-for-his-cut-sleeve/
- Damm, J. (2000). Kuer vs tongzhi – Diskurse der Homosexualität und das Entstehen sexueller Identitäten im globalisierten Taiwan und im Postkolonialen Hongkong. *Berliner China-Hefte Nr.18 Mai 2000.*
- Engebretsen, E.L & Schroeder, W.F. (2015) Introduction. In Engebretsen, E. L., Schroeder, W. F., & Bao H. (Eds.). *Queer-Tongzhi China: New perspectives on research, activism and media cultures*. NIAS press.
- Engebretsen, E. L., Schroeder, W. F., & Bao H. (2015). *Queer-Tongzhi China: New perspectives on research, activism and media cultures*. NIAS press.
- Engebretsen, E.L. (2017) Under Pressure: Lesbian-Gay Contract Marriages and their Patriarchal Bargains. In Santos, G. & Harrell, S. (Eds.) *Transforming patriarchy: Chinese families in the twenty-first century*. University of Washington Press.
- Foucault, M. (1978). The history of sexuality. New York, NY: Pantheon.
- Gallo, A. (2017). *LGBT and the Changing Moral System in Contemporary Chinese Society: Formality Marriage and the Strife between Family-centered Values and Self-centered Individual Needs.* Lund University.
- Gulik, R. H. van, & Goldin, P. R. (2003). *Sexual life in ancient China: A preliminary survey of Chinese sex and society from ca. 1500 B.C. till 1644 A.D*. Brill.
- Guo R. (2020, May 24) China's LGBT parents find family and joy through surrogacy. SCMP. https://www.scmp.com/news/china/society/article/3085451/chinas-lgbt-parents-find-family-and-joy-through-surrogacy

- Hinsch, B. (1990). *Passions of the cut sleeve: The male homosexual tradition in China*. University of California Press.
- Ho L. W. W. (2010). *Gay and lesbian subculture in urban China*. Routledge.
- Ho P. S. Y., Jackson, S., Cao S., & Kwok C. (2018). Sex With Chinese Characteristics: Sexuality Research in/on 21st-Century China. *The Journal of Sex Research*, *55*(4–5), 486–521. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2018.1437593
- Hu K., & Li X. (2019). The Effects of Media Use and Traditional Gender Role Beliefs on Tolerance of Homosexuality in China. *Chinese Sociological Review*, *51*(2), 147–172. https://doi.org/10.1080/21620555.2019.1595567
- Hu X., & Wang Y. (2013). LGB Identity Among Young Chinese: The Influence of Traditional Culture. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *60*(5), 667–684. https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2013.773815
- Huang, M. W. (2001). *Desire and fictional narrative in late imperial China*. Harvard University Asia Center: Distributed by Harvard University Press. http://catalog.hathitrust.org/api/volumes/oclc/45821092.html
- Huang S., & Brouwer, D. C. (2018). Negotiating Performances of "Real" Marriage in Chinese Queer *Xinghun*. *Women's Studies in Communication*, *41*(2), 140–158. https://doi.org/10.1080/07491409.2018.1463581
- Ivanhoe, P. (2004) Filial Piety as a virtue. In Chan A., Tan, S. (Eds.). *Filial Piety in Chinese Thought and History*. RoutledgeCurzon Publisher.
- Jacobs, K. (2012). *People's pornography: Sex and surveillance on the Chinese internet*. Intellect.
- Jeffreys, E. (Ed.). (2006). *Sex and sexuality in China*. Routledge.
- Kong T. (2011). *Chinese male homosexualities: Memba, tongzhi and golden boy*. Routledge. https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/e/9781136953729
- Kong T. S. (2012). A fading *Tongzhi* heterotopia: Hong Kong older gay men's use of spaces. *Sexualities*, *15*(8), 896–916. https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460712459308
- Kong T. S. K. (2016). The Sexual in Chinese Sociology: Homosexuality Studies in Contemporary China. *The Sociological Review*, *64*(3), 495–514. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-954X.12372

- Leng R. (2012a) *Chinese Comrade Literature, Queer Political Reality, and the Tongzhi Movement in Mainland China* (Undergraduate Honors Thesis). Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.
- Leng R. (2012b) “Gender Relations in Chinese Comrade Literature: Redefining Heterosexual and Homosexual Identity as Essentially the Same yet Radically Different”, *DukeSpace Publications and Repository for the Scholarly Output of the Duke Research Community*.
- Leng R. (2013) *Tongzhi Tales in Mainland China: Chinese Gay Male Subjectivities in Online Comrade Literature* (Undergraduate Honors Thesis). Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.
- Lim S. H. (2006). *Celluloid comrades: Representations of male homosexuality in contemporary Chinese cinemas*. University of Hawai’i Press.
- Liu M. (2013). Two Gay Men Seeking Two Lesbians: An Analysis of Xinghun (Formality Marriage) Ads on China’s Tianya.cn. *Sexuality & Culture*, *17*(3), 494–511. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-012-9164-z
- Liu P. (2010). Why Does Queer Theory Need China? *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique*, *18*(2), 291–320. https://doi.org/10.1215/10679847-2010-002
- Liu P. (2015). *Queer Marxism in two Chinas*. Duke University Press.
- Liu W. (2021, Sep 7) 20 years on, Lan Yu remains the pinnacle of Chinese queer Cinema. Little White Lies. https://lwlies.com/articles/lan-yu-stanley-kwan-chinese-queer-culture/
- Liu X., Jiang D., Chen X., Tan A., Hou Y., He M., Lu Y., & Mao Z. (2018). Mental Health Status and Associated Contributing Factors among Gay Men in China. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, *15*(6), 1065. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph15061065
- Lu J. (2007). *Erkenntnisse zur Sexualität—Eine vergleichende Darstellung über Sexualeinstellungen und Sexualverhalten bei Chinesen und Deutschen*. Philosophischen Fakultät der Westfälischen Wilhelms - Universität.
- Luo J. (2020, Apr 14) How to Talk About LGBTQ+ in China in 2020. Jing Daily. https://jingdaily.com/how-to-talk-about-lgbtq-in-china-in-2020/
- Luo J. (2021, Aug 26) Forget Gender-Neutral Fashion. Chinese Men Want Women’s Clothes. Jing Daily. https://jingdaily.com/chinese-men-womens-clothes-chanel/
- Martin, F. (Ed.). (2008). *AsiaPacifiQueer: Rethinking genders and sexualities*. University of Illinois Press.

- Miége, P. (2009). In my Opinion, most Tongzhi are Dutiful Sons! *China Perspectives*, *2009*(1), 40–53.
- Miles-Johnson, T., & Wang, Y. (2018). 'Hidden identities': Perceptions of sexual identity in Beijing: Hidden identities. *The British Journal of Sociology*, *69*(2), 323–351. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.12279
- Neill, J. (2009). *The origins and role of same-sex relations in human societies*. McFarland & Co.
- Ni V. (2021, Aug 29) Chinese University appears to ask for lists of LGBTQ+ students for "investigation". SCMP. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/aug/29/chinese-university-appears-to-ask-for-lists-of-lgbtq-students-for-investigation
- Nye, R. A. (2000). Kinship, Male Bonds, and Masculinity in Comparative Perspective. *The American Historical Review*, 1656–1666. https://doi.org/10.1086/ahr/105.5.1656
- Pataki, J. (2017). To Read and Learn: The Necessity for a New Definition of Dystopia and Bridging the Gap between the Old and Contemporary Dystopias. *Anafora*, *4*(2). https://doi.org/10.29162/ANAFORA.v4i2.16
- Qian J. (2017). Beyond heteronormativity? Gay cruising, closeted experiences and self-disciplining subject in People's Park, Guangzhou. *Urban Geography*, *38*(5), 771–794. https://doi.org/10.1080/02723638.2016.1139408
- Ribeiro, C. (2001). *No dorso do dragão: Aventuras e desventuras de uma portuguesa na China*. Publicações Europa-América.
- Rosemont, H., & Ames, R. T. (2009). *The Chinese classic of family reverence: A philosophical translation of the Xiaojing*. University of Hawai'i Press.
- Ruan F. F. (1991). *Sex in China: Studies in Sexology in Chinese Culture*. Springer US. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4899-0609-0
- Ruan F., & Tsai Y. (1987). Male Homosexuality in Traditional Chinese Literature. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *14*(3–4), 21–34. https://doi.org/10.1300/J082v14n03_02
- Santos, G. D. D. (2006). The Anthropology of Chinese Kinship. A Critical Overview. *European Journal of East Asian Studies*, *5*(2), 275–333. https://doi.org/10.1163/157006106778869298
- Santos, G. D., & Harrell, S. (Eds.). (2017). *Transforming patriarchy: Chinese families in the twenty-first century*. University of Washington Press.
- Sedgwick, E. K. (2005). *Epistemology of the closet* (Nachdr.). Univ. of California Pr.

- Shi X., Xu W., & Zheng Y. (2020). Heterosexual Marital Intention: Effects of Internalized Homophobia, Homosexual Identity, Perceived Family Support, and Disclosure Among Chinese Gay and Bisexual Men. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *67*(4), 452–467. https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2018.1547558
- Shoemaker, B.B. (2016, November 16) *Beijing Comrades, An Illicit Book That Defined a Generation of Gay Men in China. Out*. https://www.out.com/art-books/2016/11/16/beijing-comrades-illicit-book-defined-generation-gay-men-china
- Smith, T. (2018, Jun 27) The $900 Billion Missed Opportunity: China's LGBTQ+ Market. Jing Daily. https://jingdaily.com/luxury-brands-lgbtq/
- Sommer, M. H. (2000). *Sex, law, and society in late imperial China*. Stanford University Press.
- Teon, A. (2016, March 14). Filial Piety (孝) in Chinese Culture. *The Greatert China Journal*. https://china-journal.org/2016/03/14/filial-piety-in-chinese-culture/
- To S. (2013). Understanding *Sheng Nu* ("Leftover Women"): The Phenomenon of Late Marriage among Chinese Professional Women: *Understanding* Sheng Nu *(" Leftover Women "). Symbolic Interaction*, *36*(1), 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1002/symb.46
- Tong B., & Myers, S. E. (2011). Beijing Comrades: A Gay Chinese Love Story. *Amerasia Journal*, *37*(2), 74–94. https://doi.org/10.17953/amer.37.2.jt64312457x57710
- Tongzhi, & Regola, L. (2009). *Beijing story*. Nottetempo.
- Tu J.-W., & Lee T.-T. (2014). The Effects of Media Usage and Interpersonal Contacts on the Stereotyping of Lesbians and Gay Men in China. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *61*(7), 980–1002. https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2014.871904
- Van de Werff, T. (2008). The Struggle of the Tongzhi: Homosexuality in China and the Position of Chinese 'Comrades'.
- Vidal, F. D. (2021). Tongzhi visibility and representation in China: New media and online spaces as allies to change. *Daxiyangguo - Revista Portuguesa De Estudos Asiáticos / Portuguese Journal Of Asian Studies*, *26*, 89–102.
- Vitiello, G. (1992). The Dragon's Whim: Ming and Qing Homoerotic Tales From the Cut Sleeve, *T'oung Pao*, *78*(4), 341-372. doi: https://doi.org/10.1163/156853292X00045
- Wang S. Y. (2019). When Tongzhi Marry: Experiments of Cooperative Marriage between Lalas and Gay Men in Urban China. *Feminist Studies*, *45*(1), 13. https://doi.org/10.15767/feministstudies.45.1.0013

- Wen G., & Zheng L. (2019). The Influence of Internalized Homophobia on Health-Related Quality of Life and Life Satisfaction Among Gay and Bisexual Men in China. *American Journal of Men's Health*, *13*(4), 155798831986477. https://doi.org/10.1177/1557988319864775
- Williams, S. (2020, Jan 25) Why China's LGBT hide their identities at Lunar New Year. BBC News. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-51199309
- Wong A. D. (2005). The reappropriation of tongzhi. *Language in Society*, *34*(05). https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047404505050281
- Wong A. D. (2008). The trouble with *tongzhi*: The politics of labelling among gay and lesbian Hongkongers. *Pragmatics. Quarterly Publication of the International Pragmatics Association (IPrA)*, *18*(2), 277–301. https://doi.org/10.1075/prag.18.2.05won
- Wong A. K. (2017). Queering the quality of desire: Perverse use-values in transnational Chinese cultures. *Culture, Theory and Critique*, *58*(2), 209–225. https://doi.org/10.1080/14735784.2017.1288581
- Wong A. K. (2018). When Queer Theory Meets Tongzhi in "China". *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly*, *5*(3), 507–513. https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-6901356
- Wong D. (2011). Hybridization and the Emergence of "Gay" Identities in Hong Kong and in China. *Visual Anthropology*, *24*(1–2), 152–170. https://doi.org/10.1080/08949468.2011.527810
- Worth, H., Jun J., McMillan, K., Chunyan S., Xiaoxing F., Yuping Z., Zhao R., Kelly-Hanku, A., Jia C., & Youchun Z. (2019). 'There was no mercy at all': Hooliganism, homosexuality and the opening-up of China. *International Sociology*, *34*(1), 38–57. https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580918812265
- Wu C. (2012). *Homoerotic sensibilities in late Imperial China*. Routledge.
- Wu J. (2003). From "*Long Yang* " and " *Dui Shi* " to Tongzhi: Homosexuality in China. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Psychotherapy*, *7*(1–2), 117–143. https://doi.org/10.1300/J236v07n01_08
- Wu L. (2016) *Being LGBTI in China – A National Survey on Social Attitudes towards Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Gender Expression*. United Nations Development Programme. Retrieved March 22, 2022 from: https://www.cn.undp.org/content/china/en/home/library/democratic_governance/being-lgbt-in-china.html

- Xie Y., & Peng, M. (2018). Attitudes Toward Homosexuality in China: Exploring the Effects of Religion, Modernizing Factors, and Traditional Culture. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *65*(13), 1758–1787. https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2017.1386025
- Xuan N., Kiu C. C., & Sijia G. (2019). Negotiations Between Chinese Gay Men and Lesbians and Their Parents About Marriage. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *18*, 160940691986273. https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406919862732
- Xunzi, & Hutton, E. L. (2014). *Xunzi: The complete text*. Princeton University Press.
- Yang Y. (2018). Bargaining with the State: The Empowerment of Chinese Sexual Minorities/LGBT in the Social Media Era. *Journal of Contemporary China*, *28*(118), 662–677. https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2018.1557943
- Ye, S. (2017). *Red Father, Pink Son: Queer Socialism and Post -socialist Queer Critiques* (Doctorate in Philosophy). University of Minnesota. Minnesota.
- Yu Y. & Xiao S. (2017). Health and life satisfaction for Chinese gay men in Guangzhou, China. Zhong nan da xue xue bao. Yi xue ban = Journal of Central South University. Medical sciences. 42. 1407-1416. 10.11817/j.issn.1672-7347.2017.12.009.
- Zhang Hong (2017) Recalibrating Filial Piety: Realigning the State, Family, and Market Interests in China. In Santos, G. & Harrell, S. (Eds.) *Transforming patriarchy: Chinese families in the twenty-first century*. University of Washington Press.
- Zhao J. (2021, Nov 4) The wild, wonderful (and very queer) world of Chinese radio dramas. SupChina. https://supchina.com/2021/11/04/the-wild-wonderful-queer-world-of-chinese-radio-dramas/
- Zheng T. (2015). *Tongzhi living: Men attracted to men in postsocialist China*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Zhou L., & Zhang S. (2017). How face as a system of value-constructs operates through the interplay of mianzi and lian in Chinese: A corpus-based study. *Language Sciences*, *64*, 152–166. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.langsci.2017.08.001
- Zhu J. (2017). ‘Unqueer’ kinship? Critical reflections on ‘marriage fraud’ in mainland China. *Sexualities*, *21*(7), 1075–1091. https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460717719240

Audiovisual Media References

- ABC News In-depth (2018, Jan 19) *Being Gay In Deeply Conservative China | Foreign Correspondent* [Video file]. Retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IoGYl_m5EYw&ab_channel=ABCNewsIn-depth
- Asian Boss (2018, May 10) *Chinese React to Social Media Ban on Gay Content* [Video file]. Retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sTzgE1nvxZs&ab_channel=AsianBoss
- Brougham, William (2015, Oct 18) *LGBTQI Rights and Censorship in China – Popo Fan* [Video file]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jROBNt4C3zU
- CGTN (2018, Jan 7) *Gay Leap Forward: LGBT in China* [Video file]. Retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=doAh4ZhGhsY&ab_channel=CGTN
- CGTN (2018, Feb 4) *LGBT in China: Coming out with Chinese Characteristics* [Video file]. Retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C7hy1EOGjrM&ab_channel=CGTN
- Cui, Z (Director). (2009). *Zhi tongzhi* 志同志 [Film].Cui Zi DV Studio
- Global Journalist (2017, Feb 16) *Global Journalist: Gay Rights in China* [Video file]. Retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y6BnkNWw0Pg&ab_channel=GlobalJournalist
- Guang Ye [@GY602580]. (2021, Nov 26). [WeChat Photograph]. Retrieved 22 Mar 2022 from: weixin://dl/chat?GY602580
- Kawn S. (Director). (2001) *Lan Yu* [Film]. Kwan's Creation Workshop & Yongning Creation Workshop.
- Unreported World (2017, Dec 27) *Gay shock therapy still in use in China | Unreported World* [Video file]. Retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CH552xLZNp0&ab_channel=UnreportedWorld