
Covering the years from the late Qing until the end of the Republican period, Kang provides a fascinating insight into the various, often contradictory and hybrid discourses of same-sex relations with a strong focus on urban areas. Kang dismisses the traditional periodization (for example, 1911), but by breaking off in 1950, he also loses the opportunity to assess how deeply the hostile stance of the Chinese Communist Party in the 1950s towards various forms of extramarital sexuality, that is, the number of harsh measures instituted against any form of prostitution and the denial of same-sex desire, was rooted in the developments that occurred during the late Republican period.

The author describes his work in specific terms as part of queer theory (pp. 6-7). It seems to me, however, that this is more a calculated ruse to ensure that his book can be included in the 'Queer Asia series' of Hong Kong University Press. Unlike many books dealing with contemporary queer issues, Kang's is certainly a historical work but it is strongly influenced by poststructuralist and discourse-analytical approaches that allow the author to include a wide variety of different sorts of texts, ranging from short stories to reports found in the popular press and translated works on Western sexology.

The book is divided into five chapters in addition to the introduction and conclusion. In the introduction, Kang provides a useful overview of other works on same-sex relations from the imperial era until 1949 in China, summarizing the various stances with regard to the degree of “tolerance” shown by China towards same-sex relations, the shifts in these stances and the underlying reasons for the changes, thus also highlighting the huge discrepancies found among the various authors.

In Chapter 1, “The Language of Male Same-Sex Relations in China,” Kang offers an in-depth analysis of the more traditional terms and concepts used to describe male and female same-sex relations. At this point, he also gives his reasons for choosing the title “Obsession” (*pi* 鬱), but these do not suffice to explain why this term should play such a central role in his analysis, since the term, *pi*, does not seem to have any particular significance; the term *renyao* 人妖 (freak) could be used much more effectively to show the link between traditional and modern understandings of same-sex desire in the period covered by Kang’s research (pp. 33-39).

In Chapter 2, “Sexology,” Kang examines the impact of Western sexologist writings that entered China partly via Japan, how translations were rendered, and to what extent the indigenization of the related discourses took place. By focusing on writings found in urban tabloid newspapers, Kang is able to show how a medical discourse, perceived as a scientific discourse, entered the urban centers and
was taken up by the newly developing middle class at the time. Persuasive Social Darwinist ideas linked with the threat of China's being colonized, led to increasing stigmatization of same-sex desire, and Kang thus demonstrates that the Western science of sexology should not be seen as the primary cause of the increasingly hostile attitudes being shown towards same-sex relations.

An excellent analysis of the more indigenized discourses is then provided in the following chapters. In Chapter 3, “Literary Intimacies,” Kang examines the work of authors such as Yu Dafu 郁達夫 (1896-1945), Huang Shenzhi 黃慎之 (?), Ye Dingluo 叶鼎洛 (1897-1958), Guo Moruo 郭沫若 (1892-1978), and Ye Lingfeng 叶靈鳳 (1905-75), who, at certain times during their creative periods and often autobiographically inspired, described same-sex desire and love at length. Kang is thus able to demonstrate that same-sex relations played a certain role within the larger discourse of free heterosexual love, which was, however, generally restricted to monogamous heterosexual relations between equals. From the perspective of the abovementioned authors, these same-sex relations were seen as being able to offer a more utopian vision of an equal society, but the majority of the now well-known authors of the 1920s and 1930s described same-sex relations in negative terms, as representing the old (“feudal”) lifestyles. Most of the authors dealt with by Kang belonged to the Japan-influenced Creation Society; same-sex love was aestheticized in their short stories, but in contrast to the West, there was no hint of the “love that dare not speak its name” (p. 63). It would have been interesting to have a look at other authors who were influenced by social realism and to hear of their reactions to these writings. In addition, some of the authors belonging to the Creation Society (Chuangzaoshe 創造社), such as Guo Moruo, later became prominent individuals within the People's Republic of China, and it would also have been of great interest to see how, during the PRC period, these important personages referred to their earlier writings, since sexuality in general, not to mention same-sex relations, had become a strictly taboo topic within the context of socialist prudery.

Chapter 4, “Tabloid Sex and Cultural Conservatives,” offers new insights into previously little-researched topics by looking at Shanghai’s Jingbao 晶報 (Crystal) and Tianjin’s Tianfengbao 天風報 (Heavenly Wind) newspapers. The writers of these periodicals, conservatives (culturally) who wanted China to become modernized without giving up its traditional culture, regarded same-sex desire and same-sex relations as the cause of moral confusion and a symptom of political corruption. Not surprisingly, same-sex relations were embedded in their criticism of foreign powers and Japan. They used various stories to increase the sales of their papers, mixing conservative attitudes taken from traditional China, such as the warning against women's education, with Western conservative ideas such as Darwinism and the fear of “gender disorder.”

Chapter 5, “Actors and Patrons,” presents a fascinating insight into the question of how the traditional opera, where female actors were played by men and where, for a long time, “gender confusion” was seen as positive, became the object of ever-increasing criticism in the public discourse. At the same time, the strong