Quilts and Quivers: Dis/covering Chinese Male Homoeroticism

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ABSTRACT

In the past ten years there has been increasing Western academic interest in male homoeroticism in late imperial China. This paper sets out to assess the strategies through which the issue has become problematized, and to argue that a number of misunderstandings about homoeroticism in Chinese history result from an uncritical and unreflexive application of pre-given Western categories and assumptions. What is often framed in terms of discovery or even "recovery," in recent interpretations of homoerotic sensibilities among the literati in late imperial China, may be read as rather a re-covering, or what we will call a "dis/covering," one that returns as a form of "covering." This inadvertent oscillation originates from, and points to, a form of erotophobia that might be styled as "covering with discourse," and in the absence of ironic reflection it betrays continuities with other expressions of neocolonialism.

KEY WORDS

homoeroticism
interpretation
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erotophobia
neocolonialism

In recent years there has been an expansion in the amount of scholarly attention given to expressions of homoeroticism in late imperial Chinese culture. Each scholar, attempting to understand the growth in discourse treating homoeroticism, appearing first in the late Ming period and evolving through the entirety of the Qing dynasty, has had to overcome a range of interpretive difficulties, struggling with texts that are often in literary Chinese and translating concepts and values that do not readily find expression in contemporary realms of signification. Interpretive and conceptual difficulties in turn have produced contrasting interpretations among those researching and writing on the late imperial period.

We have now reached a position where rigorous and historically informed debate is taking shape around those differences. In some ways the maturity of that debate was signaled by Sophie Volpp's 2001 article in *HJAS*. In a paper rich in rhetorical turns and surveying a range of source genres, Volpp arrives at an argument that challenges two views on seventeenth century homoeroticism that have come to be widely accepted in recent analyses, that is to say, that the seventeenth century was witness to a fashion in homoerotic taste (and behavior), and that this fashion or vogue was accompanied by a new tolerance. The spirit of Volpp's inquiry is to be lauded, for it is unlikely that views on sexual practices were always as unified as they have been made out to seem. There is certainly a need for a more nuanced assessment of the practices of representation found in late Ming descriptions of the homoerotic; nevertheless, we also require a good deal of self-reflexive irony if we are to avoid forcing the material into rhetorical models that hide more than they reveal. In particular, we are slightly suspicious of strategies that avoid the full erotic force that is

present in the sources. And we are also curious as to why it is the homoerotic that is at present most under threat of (semi)erasure.

Perhaps it is also time then for a reading of "our" reading. As we shall see below, Sophie Volpp places Ming readings of homosexual behavior under question, but what happens when we place the *reading(s) of our own time* under question? There is a good chance we will find a nervousness pervading any kind of sexual inquiry emanating from the perspective of the West.[1] Writing about sex is complicated, and in particular it is complicated by the pairing of fascination and aversion, by erotomania and by erotophobia. Writing about the sexuality of other peoples and other times continues to have even greater fascination, and it is also conveniently erotophobic, shifting the trauma of bodily contact outward to other realms. Sex is sexy, it is a perennial hot topic, but we never seem to know how hot or cold our analyses should be. Depending on the cultural climate of the time, anyone who writes about sex has to make a kind of risk assessment: how close do I get to this material? Writing about sex has its own erotics.

History at the end of the twentieth century was gripped by strange fits of passion, gazing upon sex while looking away. Partly this is the fault of Foucault, who re/fashioned the body as a site for intellectual inquiry. Yet he himself became suspicious of much of what had begun to unfold "after-Foucault": "I have the impression of currently hearing an 'anti-sex' grumbling (I am not a prophet, at most a diagnostician), as if an effort were being made, in depth, to shake this great 'sexography' which makes us try to decipher sex as the universal secret."[2] Foucault also engendered something of an impasse, where suddenly we must halt as we approach the boundaries of our own nation and time, and sail out upon seas where our terminologies founder. And when our journey arrives closer to the pole called "homosexuality," our taxonomic (read moral) compass begins to spin as well. As a "becalmed" Leila Rupp has demonstrated brilliantly, when it comes to "same-sex sexuality" no one can be sure how well "same" or "sexuality" translates.[3]

Jeffrey Masten's explorations of "male friendship, individuality

(in the now-obsolete sense of 'indivisibility'), and collaboration"[4] in the plays of early modern England reveal just how "close-to-home" our conceptual schemas can begin to fail us. His chosen tack, however, is salutary:

> Like any historical investigation, mine will not cease to be shaped by contemporary interests, and it will necessarily draw upon discourses that have a sexual charge legible to modernity, but, as Halperin has noted, we must "suspend our projects of identification (or disavowal, as the case may be) long enough to devise an interpretation of erotic experiences . . . that foregrounds the historical and cultural specificity of those experiences.[5]

Masten's analysis is a much warmer, much more sympathetic text than that which has appeared to date in Western academic discussions of Chinese homoerotic desire. And by "sympathetic," we include his concern to suspend the project of identification while at the same time acknowledging his project's "genesis within the modern discourse of homosexuality, which makes possible (or rather, *necessitates*, in an anti-homoerotic culture) this archaeological endeavor."[6] Certainly there has been a lot of concerns to try and arrive at the right terminology in recent writing on late imperial China, but despite such agonizing, or perhaps because of it, homoerotic desire often becomes something that seemingly existed outside the lives of men and women.

It is perhaps time for a warmer and more sympathetic reading of the seventeenth century Chinese literati, and perhaps some reflection on how this is not occurring at present may help in clearing the way. Like Volpp, we will be making use of both fictional narratives (*xiaoshuo* 小說) and notation books (*biji* 筆記), or miscellanies, from the period. While sharing an interest in much the same range of texts, however, we believe that the interpretation of the material on homoeroticism still requires careful and detailed historical elaboration that must either precede, or at least carefully inform, more sophisticated rhetorical analyses. The question of the role played by

homoeroticism during this period is important for a number of reasons, not least perhaps because it is a question that applies from the late Ming, from around 1550, to the close of the Qing dynasty in 1911 and beyond. If, as is our view, homoeroticism was not marginal, nor marginalized, but played an increasingly central role in cultural developments from the mid-sixteenth century to the early twentieth century, its place alongside other aspects of the period needs to be understood. The problems raised promise to shed light on developments in late imperial Chinese culture and society, particularly in the Qing dynasty in the period immediately following the decades thrown into question by Volpp.

Dis/covering a Gay Empire

While there is still not a large amount of Western scholarship addressing homosexuality in imperial China, the amount of attention given to the topic has increased in the last ten years. This appears to have been partly stimulated by developments in gay and lesbian studies, partly a response to Foucauldian methods in history, and partly a result of the groundbreaking effect of Bret Hinsch's 1990 study *The Passion of the Cut Sleeve: The Male Homosexual Tradition in China*, which was the first attempt at a comprehensive survey of male same-sex desire in the wider context of Chinese history and culture. It should be noted that the groundwork for Hinsch's effort was largely provided by a Chinese title that appeared in Hong Kong in 1984, Xiaomingxiong's *Zhongguo tongxing'ai shilu* 中國同性愛史錄 (*A History of Homosexuality in China*), and additionally that both works were concerned with recovering a "gay history" or "gay tradition" from the Chinese historical record. These earliest works, then, were more or less activist in their intention, aiming to use history in support of contemporary same-sex sexuality. While Hinsch's work was closely reliant upon Xiaomingxiong for its source material it went further in assessing the significance of homoerotic desire in terms of cultural history, and it also grappled with the problem of interpreting the material for an English language readership. His introduction set

out a number of key problems relating to homosexuality in China that remain crucial considerations for subsequent studies, including: (a) the importance of the relative social status of lovers, (b) the role of social hierarchy in relation to pleasure and entertainment, (c) the passive/active distinction, and (d) the role of patriarchy in the construction of gender identity. For the majority of western readers this was the first work to comprehensively treat the existence of a homoerotic "culture" developing in China from the earliest years of the imperial period until the Qing dynasty.[7] Hinsch's work (although he does not always make this clear enough) also provides evidence that male-male sexual relationships were an integral part of social and cultural life during a number of dynasties when it was celebrated as (a) fashion, and certainly continued in others, particularly among the elite. It was probably Hinsch who first introduced Western readers to the fact that emperors from almost every dynasty of imperial China had "male favorites" (*xingchen* 倖臣). At the same time, more importantly, Hinsch drew attention to the non-existence of equivalents for the modern concepts of "homosexual" or "homosexuality" in imperial China, as well as other problems of terminology and translation.

Clearly the works of Xiaomingxiong and Hinsch are both written in or within the mode of "identification," the one recovering a suppressed aspect of his own tradition, the other contributing to a global history of same-sex sexuality. Their style is more akin to the descriptive project of folklore studies than cultural history, yet in many ways, despite textual errors and occasional exaggeration, they retain a closer sympathy with the spirit of their sources than many of the analyses that would follow. Giovanni Vitiello's 1992 article "The Dragon's Whim: Ming and Qing Homoerotic Tales from *The Cut Sleeve*" represents one of the earliest advances on Hinsch's work. While his analysis of the tales in Wuxia Ameng's *Duanxiubian* 斷袖編 (*The Cut Sleeve Anthology*) necessarily covers much of the material already covered by Hinsch, Vitiello's paper represents a more scholarly attempt at locating the stories within their cultural and historical context. The final section in particular consists of a wide-

ranging survey of the treatment of homoeroticism in the traditional Chinese literary imagination in an attempt to delimit the terms of its social acceptance. The most important general observation made here is that homoerotic practices in China were shaped by an ideology that indulged male desire: "Homosexuality was more than socially tolerated; it was common and widely accepted in that it was regarded as an option for a male individual to satisfy his sexual desire."[8] Furthermore, "the sexual encounter between two men, is never immoral *per se*; homosexuality does not violate the Confucian ethical system as long as it respects the boundaries of propriety assigned to it—the hierarchies of the social pact."[9] Also important is Vitiello's observation that intense love may be more problematic than sexual object choice, both in stories of homosexual and heterosexual relationships, for passion is far more threatening to the social order, more likely to lead to the transgression of "the hierarchies of the social pact."

Vitiello's essay is insightful. However, by concentrating on a single collection such as the *Duanxiubian* it risked a certain arbitrariness, relying as it did on a short anthology of historical material, consisting in the main of isolated extracts. The Ming and Qing dynasties have left us with a number of fictional works, such as *Longyang yishi* 龍陽逸史, *Bian er chai* 弁而釵, *Yichun xiangzi* 宜春香質, and *Pinhua baojian* 品花寶鑒, that contain rich explorations of homosexual relationships, and in miscellanies from the same period we also have evidence that such stories reflected values and practices current in the social context that produced them. Many of Vitiello's observations in this early paper appear to be preliminary comments requiring further discussion. He does not attempt to address the question as to why homoerotic relationships were so prevalent in the Ming and Qing dynasties, or that of what the social conditions were that favored such a flourishing in late imperial China rather than earlier. And for all that Vitiello says about status as a determinant in sexual relations, there is too little discussion of the variety of homoerotic roles played out in late imperial life; such analysis is especially lacking in his discussion of male same-sex prostitution.

Such questions required that the analysis be taken beyond *The Cut Sleeve*, and Vitiello continued to mine this material and contribute new insights. His 1996 essay "The Fantastic Journey of an Ugly Boy: Homosexuality and Salvation in Late Ming Pornography" addresses homoerotic themes in late Ming writing within the context of a flourishing market for pornography during the same period. He traces both phenomena (homoerotic desire and pornography) to late Ming libertinism, which in turn developed out of the philosophical discourse that followed "the radical critique of Cheng-Zhu orthodoxy developed within the left wing of Wang Yangming's (1472–1602) school, in particular the so-called Taizhou thinkers, and Li Zhi (1527–1602)."[10] In this and subsequent essays, through a careful analysis of homoerotic tales found in *Bian er chai* and other collections, Vitiello has been able to demonstrate the importance of literature and literary tropes as sources of homoeroticism in late Ming culture. In "Exemplary Sodomites: Chivalry and Love in Late Ming Culture" (2000), his main concern was to counter the assumption that homoerotic love was only interesting to a small male elite, "to show that male homoeroticism in late Ming culture can best be appraised when placed within the broader context of male homosociality. By relegating homoeroticism to the elite or isolating it from other discourses on male relations and by stressing its ephemerality, we risk failing to appreciate its place and ramifications within the plot of late Ming culture and beyond."[11] Vitiello's solution has been to hypothesize a "late Ming homoerotic fashion," suggesting ways in which contemporary scholarship might trace its implications within the broader social and cultural order.

Two aspects of Vitiello's work have recently been placed under question in separate essays by Chloe Starr and Sophie Volpp: (1) the "homosexuality" of late imperial Chinese homoerotic fiction, and (2) tolerance of homosexuality in the same period, and by implication the fashion and sensibility that Vitiello and the present authors argue existed in the period. The articles by Starr and Volpp are both fine examples of the new complexity and sophistication entering the analysis of representations of male-love in the Ming and Qing

dynasties. In "Shifting Boundaries: Gender in *Pinhua baojian,*" Chloe Starr seeks to draw our attention to the gender ambiguities of a novel where "the boy actor as companion or sexual partner is most desirable when he has assumed a delicate femininity, no longer manifested in the ideal wife—who is now most admired for her intellectual verve and assertive character."[12] To bring out the truly complex ways in which the novel manipulates gender symbolism and discourse, Starr compares the "life expressions" of the boys in *Pinhua baojian* with the "women of nineteenth-century [Chinese] 'courtesan novels.'" Her conclusion is that the novel is more concerned with an exploration of sexual manners than with sexual identity:

> "Homosexuality" is not a particularly useful label, because the term as we understand it has no equivalence in the situation of the novel; effeminacy also is not linked so much to a homosexual inner nature as to a refined or asexual lifestyle.[13]

How far does this conclusion go in masking over homoerotic desire? *Pinhua baojian* is clearly a novel that anticipates the courtesan novels that would appear in the later half of the nineteenth century, but it is also quite clearly taking part in a wider discourse of male-male relationships, actual social arrangements of the time and that are the sources for the novel's setting, including the emergence of an aesthetics governing the construction of feminized boy actors. Starr has not explained why male bodies have become a vehicle for erotic fantasies enjoyed both through texts and through an erotic commerce surrounding the Beijing theatre. In the end it may not matter greatly whether or not the novel can be categorized as "homosexual," for it remains, when taken together with other forms of writing, one of the most important sources of insight into the sensibilities that structured male-male relationships in the Qing dynasty.

Starr's work is a timely reminder that gender categories and representations should be accorded historically and culturally appropriate readings, but it also smacks of the "substitution thesis" that has also been used on occasion to attempt to "explain"

homosexuality in the Ming and Qing dynasties.[14] Substitution theses argue that homoerotic desires surface through a need to find a surrogate to replace lost access to heteroerotic pleasures, either situationally, for example through isolation on desert campaigns or among pirates on the Southeast China coast, or through legislation, where Qing government bans on prostitution were the most common examples. The argument that Starr develops is somewhat more subtle than earlier examples: he argues that the desire for feminized boys is actually a displaced desire for an idealized (delicate, passive) woman no longer available in the wife or concubine. While elite men had access to numerous women, they had to seek out boy-actors to find the "women" they were looking for. This resolution of the substitution thesis is thus able to coexist with the fact that desire for boy-actors was most prevalent among men who had almost unlimited access to women. On the other hand, it should be remembered that Starr is limiting her analysis to the pages of a novel, and it is not necessarily her intention to take *Pinhua baojian* as being paradigmatic of social practice. *Pinhua baojian* is only mildly erotic, and it is clearly the author's intention to denigrate sensuality (*se* 色) in favor of love (*qing* 情): all this written at a time when boy-actors from the theatres of Beijing provided the basis for elite displays of power, influence and taste.

In "Classifying Lust: The Seventeenth-Century Vogue for Male Love" (2001) Sophie Volpp in fact challenges the whole notion that there was a vogue for male-love in the seventeenth century, and advises us to read the literature of the period "rhetorically." Her reading of Wang Jide's *Nan wanghou* 男王后, Shen Defu's *Wanli yehuobian* 萬曆野獲編, Feng Menglong's *Qingshi* 情史, Xi Langxian's "Pan Wenzi 潘文子," and Li Yu's "Nan Meng mu jiaohe sanqian 男孟母教合三遷" uncovers a polemical discussion of homosexual behavior that:

> polices it, placing spatial, temporal and conceptual limits around it such as those [related to] the use of ethnographic voice and the substitution trope. There is a strange correlation between the fear

> of seventeenth century commentators that male-love has escaped its boundaries, becoming a vogue that is sweeping the land, and their efforts to fix male-love by defining it, pinning it down like a butterfly beneath a lepidopterist's glass.[15]

In a way not dissimilar to that of Starr, Volpp is warning us to read in context, in this case not to mistake an outbreak of writing on homosexual behavior as somehow indicating approval or widespread social acceptance. Such an argument runs the risk of ignoring the remarkable continuity and resiliency of homoerotic themes in the cultural products of the late imperial literati. More problematic than these concerns, however, is Volpp's mobilization of interpretive models that leads to misreadings of the Ming dynasty sources, and we shall provide a detailed criticism of her paper in the following sections of this one.

In our view the most careful and extensive research to date, and as a result the research that best reflects historical attitudes toward sexuality, has been that of Matthew Sommer on the legal status of homosexual behavior, conducted as part of a wider project on law, gender and society in late imperial China.[16] Sommer confirms Hinsch's speculations on the role of penetration,[17] suggesting that it is the key concept in the gender and sexual system of late imperial China. The central contribution of Sommer's work on homosexuality in late imperial Chinese law has been his analysis of how sodomy came to be assimilated to illicit heterosexual intercourse. To do this, he enters an extensive and nuanced examination of legislative history. His analysis includes consideration of relative legal and social status, masculine virtue, coercion, age, and rape. After considering the legal developments Sommer turns to their implications for social practices, finding that the practices and perceptions surrounding penetrated males formed a "parallel hierarchy" with those regarding women, "gendering the penetrated male as female." For the adult male, penetration involved extreme stigma. Men involved in stable homosexual relationships did not so much express a desire to hide the relationship as harbor a fear of the public revelation of their penetrated

role.

The importance of Sommer's work to the question of the moral status of homosexuality lies in his conclusion that the prohibition of homosexual relations between men was not related to a concern with homosexuality as an aberration, but with situations where it is associated with force, excessive licentiousness, or prostitution, and particularly where it threatened "adolescent boys of *good yet humble family*."[18] We would add that this is also the most prevalent response to be found in the writings of those relatively few members of the literati who raised concerns about homosexual behavior. If there is any deficiency at all in Sommer's work it is the absence of references to the cultural role homoeroticism played in the period, but this may be because that was predominantly a concern of the literati: the literati class was rarely touched by the kinds of laws Sommer is concerned with.[19]

Vitiello's remarks on homosociality (see above) alert us to one of the failings in much of the analysis to date: an over-emphasis on the physical and social dimensions of sexuality.[20] As sexuality and sexual cultures/traditions usually also involve deep emotional and aesthetic dimensions, these must lay claim to a more central treatment than they are given at present in formulating an understanding of sexualities as cultural systems. Another common problem in Western and Chinese scholarship, especially the more encyclopedic studies treating male homosexuality in Chinese history, is the limited way in which they deal with the experiences of lower-class men, or in Hinsch's scheme, those adopting the *passive* role. This is to some extent unavoidable given the emphasis found in the historical archive, but for the Qing dynasty there is material enough for those able to uncover it to enable a more adequate treatment of this aspect of homoeroticism in China.[21]

Perhaps the largest problem Western interpretations of the Chinese material on homosexuality face is the presupposition that homosexuality is psychopathological. This is a piece of epistemological baggage that the twentieth century social/cultural historian (especially from the West or operating within a Eurocentric theoretical framework) must somehow discard, before wading too

deep into (and muddying) unfamiliar waters. (While Foucault addresses the problem, he cannot totally ignore or circumvent the presuppositions that come with the territory.) Homosexual behavior in imperial China may have been problematic in terms of preserving a man's dignity and social standing (concerns regarding penetrator and penetrated having existed from the beginning), yet appears never to have become the focus of sustained religious condemnation or medical circumspection.[22] A balance needs to be sought between defining a homoerotic tradition as the object of study (Foucault again, particularly the Foucault of "exclusions") and allowing it to maintain its own continuities with "the rest of life." Perhaps this is the greatest challenge faced by researchers in this area today: escaping the over-determined status of all forms of sexuality and discussion of sexuality and in particular, avoiding the compulsion to *explain* homosexuality. As soon as "other" traditions of homoeroticism are "discovered" they are "covered" again by over-analysis. Indeed, there is a great need now to learn how homosexual relationships were an integral dimension of late imperial Chinese social and cultural life, no more or less problematic than any other element in that tapestry.

Homoerotic Sensibilities and Late Ming Literati Discourse

To what kinds of discourse did the profusion of late Ming and early Qing references to homoerotic desire belong? When, and in which contexts, did they occur? In addressing these questions it would be well to begin with the source of our knowledge, the output of those late imperial Chinese literati, the *shidaifu* 士大夫:

> Chinese literature was created by a specific subgroup within the very small literate population of traditional China: the *literati*. And within this group it was the upper stratum that produced the greatest volume of writings. There were exceptions, but on the whole a writer's success was based on a background of wide reading and study, which was economically feasible only for the few.[23]

As a group the literati were in many ways unrepresentative of Chinese society as a whole, but their importance in social and cultural terms was considerable. In the final century or so of the Ming dynasty their interests seem to have been more diverse than in any other period in Chinese history. As already noted in the discussion of Giovanni Vitiello's work, under the influence of the "left-wing" followers of Wang Yangming's "doctrine of the mind" (*xinxue* 心學) many late Ming scholars were caught up in a reaction against earlier conservative expressions of Neo-Confucianism. One result was a pervasive libertinism that was typically expressed in the growth of the entertainment quarters, as well as in a flowering of pornographic writing. Likewise, the more open expression of male homoerotic sensibilities appears only in the later part of the Ming, following the emergence of libertine and sensualist fashions.[24] There are very few references to homosexual relationships in early or mid-Ming documents and there is no evidence that male same-sex relationships had been widespread before the late Ming. Members of the literati in the late Ming dynasty evidently considered the pursuit of homoerotic pleasure one of many means for transcending traditional norms and rules in the search for ever new, more open and exciting sources of experience. This spirit is summed up in a short poem from the late Ming novel *Bieyouxiang* 別有香 (*An Exotic Fragrance*):

> Everyone's desires are unlimited,
> Each feels excited by sexual indulgence.
> After license in the whorehouse,
> Each experiments with catamites.

The same author also says:

> Once everyone had reached the limit of carnal pleasure their desires turned toward male beauties (*lanshang zhiji, sui hao qi nanse le* 濫觴之極, 遂好起男色了). There is a saying "the beauty of boys is the death of old men." Lately there is no one who would not fall in love with a male beauty like Deng Tong,

> Mi Zixia, or Song Chao. Competition for the best boys (*bi wantong* 比頑童) is stronger now than it has ever been.[25]

Passages such as these shed important light on homoeroticism in the Ming dynasty, placing it within the context of a wider libertinism. While there may have been many other factors influencing the emerging fashion for song-boys, there can be no doubting that the generally liberal (libertine) cultural climate of the period was the major one. (The fact that this was a period of relative peace and prosperity may also have helped). Men in the highest levels of Ming society were unlimited in their search for pleasure, and the pleasures of the soul and the flesh were not always clearly distinguished.[26] They were also unlimited by considerations of gender. Or, perhaps more accurately, they were free to experiment with gender and sexuality with little restraint while exploring the limits of the self (subjectivity, individuality). Indulgence signified freedom of action, of self-expression. In this quest for sensual pleasure two values were given prominence: adventure and refinement. From our perspective today we may say both of these values were an expression of social class, turning upon the tropes of rareness and unconventionality. Many of the leading literary celebrities of the day were engaging in what the French called *épater les bourgeois*.[27] While not exactly "new territory," song-boys became popular with the Ming avant-guard because they signified an alternative, a source of the "different" within a competition among tastes.

That such "scandalous" values (homoerotic and heteroerotic) were expressed in practice (i.e. that they were not simply literary fantasy) is confirmed by the need of the authorities to resort to regulation. Alongside accounts of officials punished for whoring there are a number of cases from the Ming dynasty that record the punishment of officials who cavorted excessively with boy entertainers. In his *Zhishi yuwen* 治世餘聞 (*Words from a Regulated Realm*), Chen Hongmo recorded how the government of the day severely punished a number of officials who partied day after day with boy entertainers at Longfu Si and Chaotian Gong in Beijing.[28] In 1584

Tu Long, a literary celebrity and Secretary of the Ministry of Rites, lost his position after he openly held licentious parties involving young boy entertainers.[29] The year immediately following this incident, another famous dramatist and an Erudite of the Nanjing Directorate of Education, Zang Maoxun, was also dismissed to his hometown for his romantic excesses. Others took offence, or perhaps more accurately were affronted, and notified the emperor when "[Zang Maoxun] and his favorite catamite (*xiaoshi* 小史) donned red gowns and paraded their horses side by side through the Fengtai Gate."[30]

It is important to note that in all such cases the real transgression is not the same-sex relationships *per se* but improper public behavior. The primary concern is with the transgression of ritual boundaries separating persons of different status. Taking the last case as an example, it was an offense to allow a catamite (or a prostitute) to wear red, to pass through a gate without dismounting, or finally, to ride side by side with an official of the empire. Returning to the problem of style, the behavior in these episodes was clearly meant to flaunt public standards and even imperial authority, and it certainly had the effect of attracting public attention. Each case was widely discussed, debated and written about.

While it is useful to refer to legal pronouncements as confirmation of "actual social practice," in accordance with the warnings already given above it is important not to over-privilege such accounts. While we cannot always claim that literature is a faithful mirror of social practice, literary sources do provide evidence of significant practices. There are numerous references in miscellanies and *xiaoshuo* describing the boys who were subject to amorous attention.

Song-boys, Catamites, and Boy Servants

In late Ming Beijing, officials and gentlemen belonging to the literati felt free to pursue relationships with boys of low status, most commonly *menzi* 門子 and *xiaochang* 小唱. The word *menzi*

originally referred to the concierge at a *yamen* or a mandarin's house; however, it acquired an additional sexual connotation in this period: it was very common that the *menzi*—such positions were usually undertaken by young and pretty boys—served as male favorites. There is evidence that this phenomenon was not limited to the capital. Some officials who worked in remote provinces considered it the greatest comfort to have a beautiful *menzi* to relieve their loneliness and sense of isolation. Evidence for this comes from those who were so delighted with their *menzi* that they discussed them in their correspondence with other officials.[31]

This practice is revealed in numerous miscellanies and works of literature from the period. In *Jinpingmei* 金瓶梅, Shutong, the male favorite of the hero Ximen Qing, was first a *menzi* of the county magistrate who sent him to Ximen Qing as a special gift. In the short story *Tongwan zhengqi* 童婉爭奇 ("The Battle of Catamites and Prostitutes"), whores inflicted abuse on the catamites, who were displacing them with taunts such as "Shame on you, why don't you become *menzi* at the mandarin's house?" In Wang Tonggui's *Ertan* 耳談 (*Speaking of Hearsay*), there are three stories about *menzi*. One tells of a *menzi* in the office of the Huzhou Prefect who was good at composing poetry. One of the young man's poems includes the lines: "A man should have a good education in his childhood so that he may be successful in the prime of his life. Sadly, I am not such a man,"[32] revealing his own clear sense of his position. Another story tells of a magistrate from Qinxing whose love for his *menzi* made him extraordinarily suspicious and jealous, so that he forbids his *menzi* from having any communication with other men.[33] Feng Menglong's *Qingshi* (*A History of Passion*) includes a story taken from *Ertan*; it tells of how the censor Che Liang fell in love with a young sedan carrier when he was on an official excursion, later making the boy one of his *menzi*.[34] Can we doubt that the presence of such stories in the record reveals that romance with *menzi* was widely understood to be a part of elite society in the late Ming? It is within this social context that humorous anecdotes such as the following, recorded by the Ming essayist and social commentator Xie Zhaozhe, were published:

> When Zhou Wenxiang was the Prefect of Suzhou someone reported there was a man who gave birth to a baby. Zhou had no response apart from warning all his *menzi*, "You should all take care. Events like these are not uncommon now that the male mode (*nanfeng* 男風) is much more popular than doing it with women."[35]

Such stories reveal the widespread awareness among Ming authors of the importance of sexual "style" in the construction of a public persona. The *menzi* usually served high-level officials, belonging exclusively to their masters. While offering sexual services for their salaries they were not prostitutes in the ordinary sense: rather they were treated as a form of property, a sort of status symbol for their masters.

Organized Male Prostitution

Ming writers also have much to say about organized male prostitution and male brothels, and there seems little doubt that these existed, and were popular avenues of public display for elite males during the late Ming. The term *xiaochang* (song-boys, literally "little singers") is perhaps the most common term we find referring to those boys who served as entertainers at official feasts, and who as a rule played the passive role in homosexual relationships. Shen Defu records his surprise at the popularity of *xiaochang* in the capital city, comparing the situation to that during the Taikang period of the Western Jin dynasty, famous as an apex of male homoerotic sensibilities.[36] There is also an interesting passage in Shen's work commenting on the ineffectiveness of government prohibitions on the thriving fashion of *xiaochang* in late Ming Beijing:

> In recent years *xiaochang* have become increasingly popular, offending the censor of the city. He petitioned the emperor to expel all of them from the capital. Before long the *xiaochang* had once again gathered in the capital. When teased about where they

> had been for so long they answered, "Everyone in our line of business exercises self-control to avoid immorality. We were driven from the city as punishment because mere gossip embarrassed the new censor in the performance of his duty. Now the affair has been cleared up." The story immediately became a popular joke.[37]

In Beijing during the late Ming, there was a homoerotic entertainment quarter called Lotus Seed Lane (*Lianzi hutong* 蓮子胡同, sometimes "Curtain Lane 簾子胡同," pronunciation unchanged). Because this lane (in fact two lanes, old and new) was the main district for the "after work" entertainment of literati and officials it attracted a concentration of *xiaochang*. *Jiujing yishi* 舊京遺事 (*Anecdotes of the Old Capital*), a sketchbook describing life in late Ming Beijing written in the early Qing period, contains the following reference:

> There were official prostitutes to entertain the guests at feasts in the Tang and Song dynasties. This was not permitted during our dynasty unless the entertainers were song-boys (*getong* 歌童), known as *xiaochang*. However, there was a popular saying in the capital, "song-boys (*xiaochang*) never sing." When entertaining guests they were only required to announce the menus and urge guests to drink. The *xiaochang* who lived in Lotus Seed Lane were the equivalent of prostitutes. Some admirers even slept with them on a regular basis.[38]

Another sketchbook, *Jianhu ji* 堅瓠集 (*Imperishable Calabash Collection*), also refers to the attendance of *xiaochang* at feasts throughout the capital:

> There is such a great number of *xiaochang* in Beijing. When there is a feast, the officials always order the most dashing boy entertainers (*xiaochang*) to ensure it will be a grand occasion.[39]

Taowu xianping 檮杌閒評 (*Observations Concerning a Monster*), a late Ming novel closely based on recorded events, also describes the prevalence of song-boy catamites on Lotus Seed Lane:

> There are two small lanes in the western quarter [of the capital], New Lotus Seed Lane and Old Lotus Seed Lane.
>
> *Xiaochang* sat inside the brothel gates along both sides of the lanes. Made up with rouge and powder like women, the whole street is the same. They made merry and sang songs there.[40]

The late Ming erotic novel *Xiuta yeshi* 繡榻野史 (*Sketches from an Embroidered Divan*) has an episode describing the hero Dongmen Sheng's purchase of a pretty boy as his male favorite. The author alludes to the boy's origin as a *xiaochang* from Old Lotus Seed Lane.[41] Late Ming and early Qing writers have no doubt that young boy lovers were "all the rage" among the well-to-do and influential men of the capital. Because many of the writers are from the same class of men, they are not so much engaging in a form of "prurient disquisition" as participating in a literary celebration. Yes, there are voices that express detached, and perhaps slightly disconcerted, amusement and occasionally even a "scientific" interest, but many more are interested in participating in this *new* expression of style, this "grand occasion." And the humor is usually direct and ribald, rarely disparaging or sarcastic.

Because *xiaochang* were associated with the gentry and aristocracy, their incomes were relatively high. Attractive *xiaochang* who were quick talkers could even purchase an office and change their social status:

> Pretty and bright [song boys] are in a position to make use of their connections. Through their homoerotic adventures [with officials] they acquired both money and opportunities for odd jobs within the bureaucracy. Soon they gained minor situations. Then, after presenting a fee to the government, they became candidates for government staff. All of a sudden they are

> promoted, and before too long they gain an assistant position of some kind and bid their lover farewell. I have witnessed such things several tens of times.[42]

This upward mobility of the song-boys is remarkable in a period so marked by concern for status, and one when entertainers, among the lowest of the *jianmin* 賤民, were forbidden to take the civil service examinations. Yet nonetheless, by using their sexual desirability, catamites could escape their low status and enter the hallowed ranks of imperial service. Clearly for some observers the vogue for male-love threatened the boundaries usually prescribed for passion, a transgression based mainly on the elitist need for a more open space of "sexual performance." But now, as homoerotic sensibilities became pervasive among scholar-officials and the influence of the *xiaochang* class grew, there were also fears that the catamites were playing an increasing role in local and national politics. Some *xiaochang* may have used their proximity to officials to spy on behalf of the *dongchang* 東廠, the Eastern Depot, an agency of eunuchs in charge of the imperial administration:

> They observed all that happened and repeated secret discussions. For this reason the intelligence bureau (*jishi yamen* 緝事衙門) also employed them as secret agents.[43]

These concerns express a fear not unlike that associated with courtesans, the fear that a man of position and status might be influenced by a wayward heart and distracted from his proper duty. To this there is added the concern about infiltration, for while there were clear boundaries preventing women from entering the hallowed spaces of the bureaucracy, such boundaries might be threatened by young men experienced in other forms of "crossing" and "passing." The space of public regulation (*zheng* 政) was in danger of being polluted by private desires (*qing* 情).

Discourses of Spatialization

A number of documents from the period record that the majority of *xiaochang* in the capital were from the Lower Yangtze region, considerably more developed culturally and economically in the late Ming. The *xiaochang* hailing from this region were warmly received by the literati and officials of Beijing, who found them both bright and sensitive. Shen Defu believed that the late Ming male homoerotic sensibility "flourished in the Lower Yangtze (*jiangnan* 江南) and then gradually spread to the Central Plain."[44] This southern origin is also reflected in the common reference to male-male sexual relations in late Ming society as the Southern Mode (*nanfeng* 南風). *Banqiao zaji* 板橋雜記 (*Miscellaneous Notes from a Wooden Bridge*), a sketchbook on life in the brothels of Nanjing written at the beginning of the Qing dynasty by Yu Huai (1616–1696), also provides evidence of a thriving commerce in homosexual prostitution in the Lower Yangtze.[45] In the Lower Yangtze region itself Suzhou catamites were most in demand due to their refined appearance and operatic virtuosity, and several late Ming novels contain episodes where the protagonists journey to Suzhou especially to select a catamite. Among upper-class men the acquisition of a Suzhou catamite was regarded as an important status symbol.[46]

We have already mentioned how Sophie Volpp's 2001 article "Classifying Lust: The Seventeenth-Century Vogue for Male-love" questions the positive valuation of homoeroticism in Ming and Qing discourse. One of the ways she does this is to point out that writers like Shen Defu located homoeroticism in the South, a fact she identifies as a rhetorical strategy that signifies the "otherness" of homoeroticism; this alterity produced forms of writing not unlike those of the "European armchair anthropologists," who deploy familiarizing strategies of comparison while at the same time "relegating male-love to the local and peripheral." It is perhaps inevitable, given the hermeneutic circle operating in the production of knowledge, that commentators will attempt to understand the

unfamiliar in terms of the familiar; however, it is highly unlikely that Ming writers understood the Lower Yangtze, or even Fujian, in such remote terms. As the writings of Shen Defu and others confirm, there was good reason to associate the South with catamites; however, far from being a remote region symbolizing ethnographic otherness for the Ming literati,[47] the great majority of the elite located in the capital had either strong family connections in the region, or identified it with the romantic life of refinement and ease it had come to represent in Chinese literature and art. For the Ming literati the Lower Yangtze was something of a cultural heartland. Thus it is difficult to see how Volpp could argue, regarding the Southern Mode (*Nanfeng*):

> [B]oth notation books and fictional texts commonly speak of homoeroticism as though it took place primarily on the margins of society. Their authors speak as armchair anthropologists, adopting a dispassionate and scholarly tone as they describe the sexual practices of the *far South*.[48]

In reviewing the status of homoeroticism in late imperial China, as well as some of the problems that may be created by the application of contemporary (Western) theory, we would like to examine in detail several other elements of Volpp's argument. She opens her article with Shen Defu's brief disquisition on the male-male marriages of Fujian (how "far South" was Fujian in the Ming imagination?), a passage that has often been used as evidence for the existence of a culture of male-love in the period. The evidence for this practice is in reality not very strong; Ming and later authors were repeating the same elements from stories they had read elsewhere. As Volpp points out, "the anecdote seems closer to the tales of the 'strange' (*qi*) popular in notation books of the late Ming."[49] There is little doubt this *is* what Shen is doing, for in the preface to his *Wanli yehuo xubian*, where the exact same passage also appears, he states that the reason for recording his anecdotes is because "shifts in attitudes (*fengqi*) and the transformations in custom (*sushang*) had gradually become different from in the past."[50] What is not pointed out by Volpp is that

Shen at various times writes about different forms of homoerotic attraction and behavior. Throughout her article Volpp tends to treat male-love as a unified totality, a single topic, whereas the information provided by writers like Shen informs us that there were at least three different geographical regions where homoerotic love was fashionable or widespread, regions where same-sex attraction was associated with different social meanings. Each was to have quite different histories in the late imperial period. Shen is attempting to give a complete picture (a trait of many early armchair anthropologists), and it is one very much in line with the evidence provided by modern historians commenting on the topic.[51]

The three regions where male-love was known to be popular and even fashionable were Beijing (the capital), the Jiang-Zhe area (the Lower Yangtze, surrounding Suzhou and Hangzhou), and the coast of Fujian province. The forms of homoerotic relationships and their cultural expression varied considerably between and among these regions. In Beijing, homoerotic relationships mainly existed between officials and young catamites who, as we have seen, were variously called *xiaochang* (lit. "songboy," catamite) or *menzi* (literally "page," personal servant). In the Jiang-Zhe area male homosexual relationships were also predominantly between members of the upper and lower classes, that is, between literati or merchants and young catamites who were called *xiaoguan* 小官 ("young gentleman," catamite) or *shutong* 書童 ("studio servant," personal servant). Homosexual relationships in both Beijing and Jiang-Zhe were closely related to power, status and money, and to libertine trends among the Ming elite. To claim that Shen Defu's interest in the homosexual marriages of Fujian is part of a tendency to relegate male-love to the "margins" ignores the thrust of the section of the *Wanli yehuobian* that Volpp translates and discusses so fully, "The Degeneracy[52] of Male-love" (*nanse zhi mi* 男色之靡). Apart from situational homoeroticism among prisoners or frontier troops, Shen makes it clear that the appearance of the custom is not limited to Fujian, but occurs in two locations that are closely associated with the literati elite, Beijing and Jiangnan (the lower Yangtze). It was for this reason that anal

intercourse was known during this period not only as "the male/Southern mode," but also "the Academicians' mode," or *Hanlin feng* 翰林風.[53]

While he is treating all forms of male-love as related phenomena, Shen Defu is also interested in its various forms and occurrences. Male-male relationships in the coastal towns and villages of Fujian were interesting not because they represented a "mirror on the margins," but because they appeared to be established on a far more equal and formal basis than in the above examples.[54] The idea that male homosexual marriages were openly accepted by parents, relatives and friends of the couple, and that male same-sex unions were celebrated with wedding ceremonies or other forms of formal recognition, made Fujian something of a curiosity and a "case study," just as would occur today (e.g. Sydney, San Francisco, *Queer as Folk*). Shen classified and commented on most things of his time, and while he often reveals amusement or consternation he is fundamentally engaged in a serious task. There is no evidence to suggest that such seriousness led him to confuse homoerotic desire as something, in its practice or origin, marginal to his own time and class. As pointed out above, he is certainly not saying same-sex love had its origins in an exotic "far South."

Many of Shen's contemporaries, on the other hand, were prepared to get a laugh out of practices they found curious. A Ming dynasty anthology of jokes, *Xiaolin guangji* 笑林廣記, contains the following anecdote, apparently based on the reported situation in Fujian:

> Once a man had an intimate relationship with a boy. Later, when the boy had grown up, he provided the money for his marriage to a girl. An arrangement was agreed upon where the older man could visit his former lover's bedroom anytime, even if the wife was there. Once when he entered the young couple's bedroom he ran into the boy's mother-in-law. Startled, the old woman called out to ask her daughter who the strange man was. The daughter answered, "Oh, that's my husband's husband."[55]

Gentle titillation was to be found in the confusion of roles within sexual relationships, and this is a feature of much bawdy literature.[56] Volpp sees references to Fujian practices as rendering "homoeroticism more familiar by likening male partnerships to the relations between husbands and wives, but at the same time, distanc[ing] the reader by relegating male-love to the local and peripheral."[57] Yet what is manipulated in the stories so far made available, what is being reconsidered, particularly once we enter the more imaginative end of literary creation, are "familiar" or "traditional" roles and values. The image Volpp eventually uses of mirrors, besides possibly leading to an infinite series, begs the question as to what is originally a reflection? What is being transposed? What is being displaced? Does not the margin, or rather the location of difference, become the place for questioning tradition, rather than an outpost of the condemned?

Comparisons and Condemnations

The work of the great playwright and humorist Li Yu (1611–1679/80) is also employed at a number of places in Volpp's argument. One of the short stories he put together using homoerotic themes is "Nan Mengmu jiaohe sanqian" ("A Male 'Mencius's Mother' Educates his Son by Moving Three Times"), a tale of Confucian morals that adopts the custom of *qi xiongdi* 契兄弟 in the coastal area of Fujian as its background.[58] In this tale Li Yu uses, as he often does, exaggeration to humorous effect. There is no need to retranslate the passage, but a brief discussion of Volpp's interpretation may be instructive:

> The further south you go, the more entrenched the Southern Mode becomes, until not only do the birds and bees do it, but even the plants and trees do it. Li Yu describes the strange practices of trees as a prelude to his description of the practices of men, implying that the Southern Mode is a force of nature. The prologue's description of the prevalence of pederasty among the trees of the south sets the stage for the discussion of a

> community deep in the south in which boys are bought as wives. The terminology of desire, courtship, and marriage that conventionally applies to young women here applies to young boys.[59]

In fact, Fujian and its practices feature very little in the story, and are certainly not what it is "about." To imply that "A male 'Mencius's mother'" is a "description of the practices of men [or the Southern Mode]" or a "discussion of a community deep in the south in which boys are bought as wives" is about as fruitful as claiming Li Yu's *The Carnal Prayer Mat* 肉蒲團 is about dog's penises. In both stories a trope is used to get the story going by providing a structural device, and is not of much further consequence. Li Yu is far more interested in upsetting things closer to home. This is much clearer when we know, as Patrick Hanan explains in his introduction to *Silent Operas* 無聲戲, that the "central ingredient of a Li Yu story is the inversion of a social or literary theme. His inversions, to say nothing of his other surprises, are all in the service of comedy."[60] When all of the stories in *Silent Operas* are "mirrors" of a kind, how useful is "A male 'Mencius's mother'" as evidence that Ming discourses of the homoerotic do not primarily mirror social norms? Is conventional terminology being applied to male-love here, or is male-love being used in an operation carried out upon conventional terms and values?

These last questions bring us to the heart of another problem that is extraordinarily difficult to get around, one that runs right through Volpp's analysis. Most of the rhetorical problems or contradictions she raises are resolved in her paper in part by illustrating how Ming homoerotic discourse establishes homosexual behavior (and relationships) as being somehow secondary to heterosexual norms and practices. This is of course hardly surprising, given the long interrelationship between marriage, birth, family, gender norms, and forms of authority. No one has ever implied that late imperial China was somehow a "homosexual society," a very different question from that of the degree of tolerance of homoerotic behavior in late Ming and early Qing society, or that of the existence or non-existence of a

homoerotic vogue.

Volpp's discussion regarding Feng Menglong's *Qingshi* (*A History of Passion*) is perhaps where this problem becomes most pressing.[61] *A History of Passion*, in which Feng assembled stories of love through Chinese history, contains a chapter dedicated to male-love which bears the title "*qingwai lei* 情外類"; this consists of three characters who are literally "outside of love." What this means exactly is not easy to determine; the best we can do is to examine how Feng uses the term *qingwai*, as well as to consider earlier sources that may have informed his usage. It becomes fairly clear from an examination of his usage throughout the chapter that he is using the term *wai* 外 "outside") for male-love and *nei* 內 ("inside") for heterosexual attraction to women (the terms are unrelated to woman's preference). Because the passages we are concerned with are both difficult and important we retranslate them here. (Significant differences from Volpp's translations are discussed below and in the footnotes.)

> (1) Grand Master Yu, quite the romantic, had an inclination for male-love (*haowai pi* 好外癖, "fondness-of-*wai* inclination"). Once he planned to send a memorial to the Lord-on-High, saying he would like to make boys give birth from their rear courtyard (*houting* 後庭, buttocks) so that women could be discarded.[62]
>
> (2) Mr. Boqi was also fond of male-love (*haowai* 好外), whenever he heard news of an attractive youth he would find any means to have him brought in, personally looking after his every need. Even after he had turned eighty he was in fine health. Someone asked him how after so many affairs with men (*wai shi* 外事) his health had not suffered. Amused, he answered: "In this matter I have consumed more heart [associated with emotion] and less kidney [associated with sexual vitality], and so I have been spared illness [from overindulgence].[63]
>
> (3) The Historian of Passion says: "The gastronomic and the sexual are strong human desires. Damage to the tongue and to longevity [are avoided] by resisting the two attractions. Even Earl

> Xing [of the Warring States period] knew of inner favorites (*neichong* 內寵, female favorites) and outer favorites (*waichong* 外寵, male favorites), and so male (*nan* 男) and female (*nü* 女) [sexual partners] have long been recognized as being on a par (*nan nü bing cheng, suo you lai yi* 男女並稱, 所由來矣). Those with a leaning toward a preference often have arguments but I have never witnessed anyone emerge victorious." I have heard Grand Master Yu say, "Women are for bearing children, men are for providing enjoyment. When it comes to beauty in this world, it is men who win over women. Among bird species like the phoenix, peacock, foul, and pheasant, pattern and color belong to the males; and the sheen of dogs and horses is the same. If men could give birth women could be discarded." Well, the world certainly contains those who have this kind of inclination (*pi* 癖); how can love (*qing* 情) [be thought to] exist only in a man's relationships with women (*nei* 內)? Kong Songzi records that when Zi Shang met the favorite (*xingchen*) of the Duke of Wei he had attractive eyebrows and a beard and stood at the Duke's side. Addressing Zi Shang the Duke of Wei said, "If beard and brows could be lent, I would not begrudge them to you." Even [a man with] beard and brows may become a favorite, I did not know there was love (*qing*) that was so profound as that. [64]

The term *haowai* 好外 appears in ancient texts in two different senses, meaning either "fond of socializing" or "fond of men." It was prevalent in ancient times, as was the corresponding term *haonei* 好內, the latter term appearing in the *Zuozhuan* 左傳, where it refers to a "fondness for women."[65] It is quite clear in such examples, and also from the parallel use of *waichong* 外寵 and *neichong* 內寵, that *wai* and *nei* were long established words for male sexual interest in men and women, respectively. It may be that by *wai* Feng means only to indicate "pleasure with males," or "male homoerotic pleasure," and so the chapter is most accurately translated as "Categories of Homoerotic Passion." Vitiello and Volpp have noted that the chapter appears at the end of Feng's work, together with sections on works related to

"marginal" forms of *qing*, speculating that it may involve connotations of "otherness," heterodoxy, and deviance.[66] The word *wai* can certainly carry connotations of transgression or otherness, but is such a reading of Feng Menglong justified? As we can see in the third example above, Feng displays no hesitation in judging homoeroticism and heteroeroticism to have equal validity, opposing any generalization to the effect that either one could be judged good or bad, normal or abnormal, at least where the relationship was a loving one. Without more solid evidence than the chapter's position in the book, how could we know enough to claim, like Volpp, that "Male-love is a renegade realm, perhaps external even to *qing*"?[67] Clearly, in the third passage above, that is not what Feng intends at all.

The idea that the position of the *qingwai* chapter "implies that heteroerotic love between humans and ghosts, or even between humans and demons, is superior to love between men" ignores the fact that all forms of heteroerotic love involving humans are treated separately from homoerotic love. Feng clearly intended to separate the two in his classification. He does resort to classical typologies; however, the fact that roughly the same treatment, as Volpp notes, is accorded to the chapter on homoerotic love should require us to at least consider that Feng meant to give homoerotic love *equal* status. It is not a mere subcategory, it approaches the status of an entire realm. The "animal stories" that follow the *qingwai* chapter do not involve human participation, and the last chapter is not "The Dharma of *Qing*" as Volpp translates it, but "The Relics (or Traces) of *Qing*" (*qing ji lei* 情跡類); it includes both physical sites and remarkable verses related to some of the most famous cultural figures of Chinese history, including Han Yu, Bai Juyi, and Xin Qiji. This last fact should alert us to the possibility that Feng's work is not strictly normative in the way Volpp argues; instead it seems to be arranged, at least on the primary level, in a manner that makes a clear distinction between heteroerotic encounters involving humans, homoerotic encounters involving humans, erotic encounters in the animal world, and a concluding section that employs stories of eminent men as a final word on the worthiness of *qing*.

Our interpretation of the third passage from *The History of Passion* translated above differs from that of Volpp, and as some of the differences are so vital to the problem at hand, including Feng Menglong's views on homoerotic love, it is worth pointing these out. Firstly, Volpp's version takes no note of the first part of the passage where "the Historian of Passion" states clearly that homoerotic attraction (between men) is both ancient and on a par with men's attraction to women. As this statement is part of a passage that concludes and sums up the chapter on *qingwai*, this oversight seems remarkable. Volpp instead commences further down with Grand Master Yu's views on the superior appearance of the male in most species. This allows her to reflect on the "standard" nature of such tropes "in the polemics regarding male-love" (105), but it means she does not pick up on Feng's own disparagement of those over-codified debates. When she returns to translating the passage (106), a number of serious mistranslations occur. The first is her translation of the word *pi* as "pathological obsession," which we will treat below. The more serious mistake is found in her line "Truly, is it not the case that *qing* is to be found only in relations between men and women?" This is very useful in the construction of an argument where Feng is interpreted as suggesting "*Qing* between men . . . is really *se* [色], attraction to external appearance." But it is simply *not* what Feng says. The phrase *qing qi du zai nei zai* 情豈獨在內哉 is quite unambiguous, and means something more like "How could *qing* be found exclusively in relations between men and women?"[68] This is not unrelated to a problem in the line that concludes the passage (and Feng's chapter on *qingwai*): Volpp interprets Feng to be saying that a man's interest in beard and brows is an "abasement" of *qing*, because it raises physical attraction above the affective. What the passage is saying, however, is the opposite: a man loving a favorite who sports beard and brows (i. e. a manly appearance) takes love to something of a new level.[69] Unless he has suddenly decided to be sarcastic, Feng is concluding his chapter on male-love by citing an example that *transcends appearances*. The character *di* 底 in this context does not mean "the bottom" or "base" in a derogatory sense, but instead refers

to an extreme, extremity or termination point, and if it must be interpreted normatively, it approaches something like "profundity." This, says Feng, is about as impressive as *qing* gets.

To appreciate this last point, it is important to understand the place of manly looks in the Ming topography of desire.[70] In *Longyang yishi* (and similar works from the late Ming dynasty treating homoerotic love) the absence of a beard is important in terms of the erasure of masculinity in young men who are objects of male desire.[71] The presence of eyebrows was also a sign of masculinity, given that women of distinction, as well as prostitutes and courtesans, removed their brows and replaced them with a thin painted line. The absence of beard and manly brows was especially important in young boys working in the entertainment quarters, being a sign of their feminine/passive sexual role. "Beard and brow" (*xumei* 鬚眉) described manliness, masculinity, or even "men." Feng's example is chosen because it illustrates a man of status falling for a young man who no longer looks as young as he "should"; the Duke's love (*qing*) overrides appearances (*se*).

Volpp juxtaposes her analysis of the commentary from the *qingwai* chapter with an analysis of one of the tales included in it, that of a "Master Wan." Story and commentary are compared in order to demonstrate how "the contrast between commentary and story creates a productive tension. . . . The anthology paradoxically casts male-love both as deviant variant that helps constitute the heteroerotic as the center and as an exemplary reproach to the heteroerotic that troubles the norm. As we saw in the relation between the commentary and story, the dual status of male-love as mirror and variant creates a dissonance between affirmation and interdiction" (108–09). But there is no tension between the commentary and the stories, and we can find no example of interdiction. In fact we doubt there is anything included in *A History of Passion* that is singled out for interdiction. Equally, there is no evidence for Volpp's claim that *A History of Passion* "states that *qing* is not to be found in the realm of male-love, where *se* reigns supreme."[72]

Deviant Translations

Volpp makes similar errors in her use of a passage from Zhang Dai (1597–1684). Zhang Dai, an important essayist and social commentator in the late Ming period, is popularly regarded as being a classical exemplar of literati taste, and his collection of miscellaneous notes *Tao'an mengyi* 陶庵夢憶 (*Dream Reminiscences of Tao'an*) contains a wealth of information on late Ming literati lifestyles. In that same work there are some observations, in this case relating to his friend, artist and dramatist Qi Zhixiang, that are extremely valuable for reconstructing a picture of male homosexuality in late Ming literati circles. Because the passage places the fondness for young men and boys within a context of multiple motivations, it is worth quoting in full:

> If someone does not have an obsession (*pi* 癖), they cannot make a good companion, for they cannot possibly have deep passions (*shen qing* 深情). And if a person does not show some flaw (*ci* 疵), they cannot make a good companion, since they have no genuine spirit (*zhenqi* 真氣). For example, my friend Qi Zhixiang has obsessions such as calligraphy and painting, football, drums and cymbals, ghost plays, and opera. In 1642 when I arrived in the southern capital (*nandu* 南都) Zhixiang brought Abao out to show me. I commented, "This is a divine and sweet voiced bird from [the paradise of] the western regions, how did he fall into your hands?"[73] Abao's beauty was as fresh as a pure maiden's. He still had no care for decorum, was haughty and kept others at a distance. The feeling was just like eating an olive, at first bitter and a little rough, but the charm is in the aftertaste. Like wine and tobacco, the first mouthful is a little repulsive, producing a state of tipsy lightness, yet once the initial disgust passes the flavor soon fills your mind. Zhixiang was a master of music and prosody, fastidious in his composition of melodies and lyrics, and personally instructing [his boy-actors]

> phrase by phrase. Those of Abao's ilk were able to realize what he had in mind. In the year of *yiyou* (1645) the southern capital fell and Zhixiang fled from the city to his hometown. On route they ran across some bandits. Face to face with death his own life would have been expendable, but not his treasure, Abao. In the year of *bingxu* (1646) he followed the imperial guards to camp at Taizhou. A lawless rabble plundered the camp and Zhixiang lost all his valuables. Abao supported his master by busking [??] on the roadside. After they had returned only two weeks, Qi again had a mind to take a journey with Abao. Leaving his wife and children was for Zhixiang as easy as removing a shoe, but a young brat was as dear to him as his own life. This sums up his obsession.[74]

This account treats interest in young men or boys as one interest among many that are a sign of a man's refinement. Qi Zhixiang's taste in male lovers is as important as his tastes in other areas of life. But it also shows how the relationship between the unequal parties could still be one of companionship. The couple's romantic ties could survive all manner of hardship. Again, however, Volpp identifies "skeins" of interdiction as well as affirmation. Before demonstrating how the article contains no interdiction whatsoever it may pay to reflect on Zhang Dai's own participation in the vogue for beautiful boys.

Zhang Dai described his early years in his auto-epitaph as follows:

> When I was young, I was a dandy (*wanku zidi* 紈褲子弟). I was addicted to a sophisticated life-style. I was fond of exquisite houses, pretty servant girls, beautiful catamites (*luantong* 孌童), fine and extravagant clothes, gourmet food, thoroughbred horses, brilliant lanterns, fireworks, drama, music, antiques, flowers and birds. In addition, I was addicted to tea arts, choice tangerines, and building up a fine collection of books and poetry.[75]

The young Zhang Dai's interests were typical of the interests of other young intellectuals of his time, and they are very similar to the interests he had attributed to his friend Qi Zhixiang. What also makes this epitaph so interesting is that Zhang Dai openly proclaims his enjoyment of catamites. This is not a particularly courageous or rebellious act, such as we might associate with "coming-out": Zhang Dai clearly feels there is nothing shameful about his pleasures and he is, in fact, boasting. It was in no way uncommon that a literati should express himself in this way in late Ming society. Within the libertine cultural climate that surrounded the late Ming elite, expressions of male homoerotic desire were increasing in popularity and status.

Sophie Volpp's reading of the Abao passage from Zhang Dai's *Tao'an mengyi* admits no recognition of either Zhang Dai's own affirmations of homoerotic pleasure or the role of contemporary libertine sensibilities in his life and writing. Instead she seeks to unravel the "skeins of affirmation and interdiction": (a) Zhang seeks forgiveness for his friend while admiring him; (b) Abao is both distasteful and a luxury object, "a rare bird"; (c) Abao renders men helpless but is a devoted lover; (d) male-lovers cannot exist within the confines of society and irresponsible passions threaten familiar duties; (e) *qing* threatens the social order.

Each of the tangled skeins Volpp discovers in the passage is her own creation through misreading or over-interpretation. (a) Zhang Dai finds no fault whatsoever in his friend's "faults," for as we have seen the two shared many obsessions, including boy actors. Obsession (*pi* 癖), in Zhang Dai's world, is not understood as pathological but, like infatuation (*chi* 癡), it is a condition any self-respecting literati would take pride in.[76] The translation and interpretation of words such as these needs to be handled with great care so as to avoid giving a negative impression where it might be unwarranted. The word Zhang Dai employs for "fault" or "flaw" (*ci*) is likewise a very mild turn of phrase; it should not be read as a stain or blemish upon a person's character, but rather as an imperfection that makes the person all the more likeable, an attitude Zhang describes in the passage itself. (b) It is unlikely that Abao would escape evaluation by the connoisseur eye

of Zhang Dai, since such an "aesthetic" attitude seems to pervade the literati's every experience. The boy actor stands out because he is more aloof than other boys in the same situation. Whether or not he is a *rara avis* is hard to say. The original text compares Abao to a *jialing* 迦陵, heavenly bird of melodious voice from Buddhist mythology (Sanskrit *kalavinka*), hardly a bird to be "procured" on the market. It would seem Volpp is somewhat misled by her own translation,[77] "a rare bird" replacing Zhang Dai's specific reference to a divine bird whose song is second only to the voice of the Buddha, a comment upon the boy actor's singing voice. More importantly, Abao is more interesting than other actors because he has a *personality*, not because he is a commodity. (c) Abao certainly made an impression on Zhang Dai, but from this passage we have no way of knowing that he was an "addictive pleasure" that "renders the consumer of his pleasures helpless." Rather, Zhang Dai is saying that most men would probably not be attracted to Abao's aloofness, which makes his friend's eye for style all the more remarkable. Just as remarkable is the way Abao returns Qi Zhixiang's love with complete devotion. Abao represents no danger at all for his "master." (d) Nevertheless, Abao does seem to represent a danger to Qi Zhixiang's wife and children, although there are numerous examples from the literature of arrangements that avoid a complete abdication of responsibility. Whether others were scandalized by the situation is doubtful; this is not Paris or London and the protagonists are not Verlaine and Rimbaud. (e) Zhang Dai could not be more pleased. We do not understand why Volpp would want to associate an outstanding Ming writer such as Zhang Dai with petty moralizing. Zhang Dai does not suffer from such a guilt complex that he might want to condemn the homoerotic pleasures he and his friends take for granted. There may have been those who wondered what the world was coming to, but they are mostly simple bureaucrats and have little cultural consequence when compared to those in Zhang Dai's league. As with Feng Menglong's *Qingshi*, there is nothing in Zhang Dai that should lead us to discover a single interdiction of homoerotic pleasure.

Homoerotic and Academic Fashions

So what has gone wrong? What kinds of mistakes is Volpp making? Perhaps the first error is her adoption of models of interpretation and critique that are ill adapted to the cultural conditions of the late Ming dynasty. In addition to (perhaps unconsciously) assuming an "ethnographic voice," Volpp seems to force a model of spatialization and deviance onto the material with little regard for the subtleties of Ming literati discourse. Her need to question Ming discourse more closely is ultimately thwarted by the very templates she imports from a quite different cultural and historical discourse, one designed for the critiquing of strategies of representation within Western anthropology. We do need closer readings of the Ming material, but readers must be careful about how they manage the baggage of their own cultural-theoretical presuppositions. One other important piece of baggage we need to approach with a certain amount of Socratic irony is the our 20th-century understanding that the homoerotic is something that stands out, that homosexual behavior is always a problem to be explained.[78]

The homoerotic themes found in Ming literature may stand out *for us*, but were they given particular emphasis in the late Ming period? Does Ming discourse adopt very different attitudes toward homoerotic and heteroerotic themes? Returning to the double attitude that Volpp is exploring in her essay, and which she argues reveals a greater uncertainty about homoerotic themes than acknowledged in previous analyses, it may instead be the case that *all* discourse on sexuality was marked by the same complexity and even contradiction. Ming writing on sexuality, both fictional and non-fictional, does at times seem to reveal a double standard, or double attitude, but a double attitude toward matters of sexuality is not limited to homosexuality, and may even be more prevalent in "heterosexual" discourse. As Keith McMahon says of eroticism in *Rouputuan* and *Jinpingmei*: "These novels have in common a double-edged attitude toward the sexual. They depict these acts both lovingly (also, luridly, titillatingly) and

then scornfully (also, mockingly, farcically)"; and of misogyny in Ming novels: "Of course the sequestration of the woman is also in the name of protecting her; and the binding of her feet is also a way of elevating her beauty and delicacy. This elevation both makes her into a supreme sexual being and contains her as an object for the functions of wife and mother."[79] Volpp's conclusions in relation to this problem are not clear. She acknowledges the contradictory nature of Ming writing on passion, and sees depictions of male-love being treated with the same literary devices as are "commonly used by authors in presenting material that may be considered pornographic." Male-love, however, is "rarely simply praised or disparaged. . . . Rather, affirmation and interdiction of male-love are nearly always inextricably intertwined," a ploy of authors, she says, to render their views "deliberately ambiguous," "designed to intrigue everyone and offend no one" (85–86). Is this really all that different from McMahon's understanding of the pornographic novel in general? One might ask, then, if discourse regarding homoeroticism is always marked with the same "duality" as that regarding pornography, and if, therefore, *all and any* discussion of the homoerotic is always already pornography in Ming writing? This might be a valid conclusion if we could actually find a substantial skein of interdiction running through literati discourse on homoerotic pleasure, but nothing of the sort has been found to exist.

There are thus two problems with Sophie Volpp's use of the contradictions she finds existing in late imperial Chinese discourse on homoerotic behavior. The first is that the "double edged" ambivalence of *qing* and *se* (love and desire), of regulation and indulgence surrounds all forms of sexual behavior and there is thus a need to demonstrate how the same patterns of ambivalence result in the marginalization of homoerotic attraction. The second problem is that Volpp's contradictions only appear, for the most part, through her misinterpretation of Ming and Qing texts. This is particularly the case when she searches for examples of negative judgements ("inter-dictions") from the literati. We have shown, using the same key passages, that very different readings are not only possible, but are

supported by reference to both established and emerging cultural values of the period.

Volpp's argument is wide-ranging and complex. Taking the lead from Foucault, she has raised questions about the relationship between discourse and practice, as well as questions of textual criticism. Was there a vogue for homoerotic relationships in late imperial China, or was there simply a proliferation of discourses?[80] And in what ways was male-love significant in the literati discourse of late imperial China? Volpp's points of departure and conclusions rest most heavily on the exoticization of homoeroticism through discourses of alterity (the ethnographic voice) and deviance ("the mirror on the margins"): two paradigms that flourished in the metropolitan West during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and, we hope to have shown, should only be imported into the analysis of seventeenth century China with the greatest caution, or are perhaps best not imported at all.

Nevertheless, the questions Volpp is raising in the face of a presumed unity of discourse surrounding male-love is an important one, and it introduces a new sophistication into current academic discussion of both the history of sexuality and Chinese cultural history. If there was a fashion for male-love, and we would argue that there clearly was, it was limited to the literati and it operated in ways that enhanced their prestige, predominantly through a discourse of taste. As emerging scholarship continues to interpret late imperial Chinese writing on homoeroticism, we may need to accept the possibility that writers from the period were free to take a wide range of views and approaches toward male-love. Like much else, discourse surrounding male-love was analyzed and classified, but it was also explored, shared, and celebrated.[81]

NOTES

[1] See George Rouseau, "No Sex Please, We're American: Erotophobia, Liberation, and Cultural History" 3–36. Rouseau sees the United States as the center of current erotophobia, but is pessimistic in terms of the general spread of its influence.

[2] Michel Foucault, *Foucault Live* 144. Cited in George Rousseau, "No Sex Please, We're American."

[3] Leila J. Rupp, "Toward a Global History of Same-Sex Sexuality."

[4] Jeffrey Masten, *Textual Intercourse* 5.

[5] Masten 6.

[6] Ibid.

[7] It also gained a wide following among the gay communities of Hong Kong and Taiwan, and was revised and released in a new edition in 1997.

[8] Giovanni Vitiello, "The Dragon's Whim" 361.

[9] Vitiello 364–65.

[10] Vitiello, "The Fantastic Journey of an Ugly Boy" 292.

[11] Vitiello, "Exemplary Sodomites" 256.

[12] Chloe Starr, "Shifting Boundaries: Gender in Pinhua baojian" 300.

[13] Starr 302.

[14] The "substitution" theory appears in a number of early (i.e. pre–1990) analyses: see Vivien Ng, "Ideology and sexuality," and "Homosexuality and the state in late imperial China."

[15] Sophie Volpp, "Classifying Lust" 116.

[16] Mathew Sommer, "The Penetrated Male in Late Imperial China." This paper appeared later in much the same form as Chapter Four of his *Sex, Law and Society in Late Imperial China.*

[17] Hinsch uses the terms active/passive. *Cut Sleeve* 9–10.

[18] Sommer, *Sex, Law and Society* 309; original emphasis.

[19] Sommer 128–9.

[20] Paul Schalow, "Review: Male Colours."

[21] Sommer's analysis of legal documents suggest these may prove a valuable source on the experience of men of subordinate status. Aspects of the lives of dan are revealed (incompletely) in *biji* and *huapu.*

[22] Charlotte Furth, "Androgynous Males and Deficient Females" 7.

[23] Wilt Idema and Lloyd Haft, *A Guide to Chinese Literature* 30.

[24] The libertine consequences of this movement have yet to receive extended analysis in scholarship outside China. Gaining momentum through the sixteenth century, it precedes the libertinism associated with the European Enlightenment by a century. The interrelationship of libertinism, pornography and homoeroticism is also analyzed in Giovanni Vitiello, "The

Fantastic Journey of an Ugly Boy" (ff. 295–98). See also Wu Cuncun, *Ming-Qing shehui xing'ai fengqi* 60–71.

[25] Taoyuan Zuihua Zhuren, *Bieyouxiang* 91–92. The passage lists famous favourites of early emperors, and reveals a consciousness of a homoerotic tradition.

[26] The association of courtesans and prostitutes with romantic and poetic sentiments has had a remarkable duration in Chinese literature.

[27] Similar notions can be found in late imperial connoisseurship. See Craig Clunas, *Superfluous Things.*

[28] Chen Hongmo (1474–1555), *Zhishi yuwen,* Part Two, (3: 53–54).

[29] Tang Xianzu, "Huai Dai Siming xiansheng bing wen Tu Changqing," in *Tang Xianzu shiwen ji*, 202.

[30] Qian Qianyi (1582–1664), "Tu yibu Long," *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan* (Brief biographical notes relating to the poetry anthologies of the Ming dynasty) Part Four, Vol. 1 (dingji, shang), 465.

[31] For example, Xie Zhaozhe, *Wu zazu* 185.

[32] Wang Tonggui, *Ertan* 19: 6b.

[33] Tonggui 5: 3a–3b.

[34] Feng Menglong, *Qingshi*, Vol. 21, 841. Feng attributes the source of the story to Ertan, but we have not been able to locate it in available versions of the work.

[35] Xie, *Wuzazu* 120.

[36] Shen, *Wanli yehuo bian* 621.

[37] Shen 677.

[38] Shi Xuan, *Jiujing yishi* 25.

[39] Chu Renhuo (fl. 1675–1695), "Nanfeng" (The southern sensibility), in *Jianhu ji*, Vol. 3.

[40] Anonymous, *Taowu Xianping*, Chapter 7, 75.

[41] Qingyuan zhuren, *Xiuta yeshi* 22.

[42] Shen Defu, *Wanli yehuo bian* 621. This passage is translated quite differently by Volpp, see "Classifying Lust," 101, n. 50. Shen is not saying officials were so venal as to be selling positions for sexual favors, but rather is pointing out how persistent and mercenary the catamites were in seeking personal advantage.

[43] Shen 621.

[44] Shen 622.

[45] Yu Huai, *Banqiao zaji*. Vitiello notes that this work has been translated by Howard S. Levy as *A Feast of Mist and Flowers: The Gay Quarters of Nanking at the End of the Ming* (Yokohama, 1966). See Giovanni Vitiello, "The Fantastic Journey," 317 n. 25.

[46] Most homoerotic fictions are set in the region of Gusu (Suzhou). See *Longyang yishi*, *Bianerchai*, and *Yichun xiangzhi*.

[47] In her article, Volpp tends to treat the Lower Yangtze and Fujian together in her argument for the ethnologizing mode of discourse relating to the "Southern Mode." See 'Classifying Lust,' 94, n. 34.

[48] Volpp 95. Our emphasis.

[49] Volpp 78.

[50] Shen Defu, "Xubian Xiaoying," in *Wanli yehuobian*, 4.

[51] It is possible that these conclusions, Ming and twentieth century, are a result of the greater availability of sources on these three regions. However, writers from the period also refer to the same locations as being particularly associated with male-male relationships. That these different forms of male-male relationships were being treated "as a piece" would also suggest that a discursive category of homoerotic desire (or "homosexuality") was either taking shape, or evolving from earlier configurations.

[52] Volpp's translation of the section's title is one of many examples in her article where a negatively normative connotation is chosen over other possible interpretations that are less negative, neutral or even positive. Given that Shen is providing a potted history of the spread and distribution of homoerotic desire, *mi* might also have been translated as "spread," or "vogue."

[53] See R. H. Van Gulik's *Erotic Colour Prints of the Ming Period* (Chinese edition). In part three of this book ("Huaying jinzhen, annotated translation"), there is a poem (No 4) titled "Hanlin feng" with an illustration of a man engaging in sexual intercourse with his page (the page's gender is signified by the exposure of his unbound feet). All the allusions in the poem relate to male beauty and male homosexuality. Although van Gulik indicated that these allusions related to male homosexuality, he insisted the scene described a man enjoying anal intercourse not with a page, but with a girl (237–38).

[54] It is for this reason that Volpp should not sound so surprised when she writes, "When seventeenth-century authors spoke of male couples exclusively devoted to each other, they frequently located them in the South" (94). (South in Volpp's usage means primarily Fujian, which she conflates somewhat with the Lower Yangtze, the region Ming authors usually associated with the Southern Mode).

[55] *Xiaolin guangji* 6a.

[56] See "Introduction" in Mark Stevenson and Wu Cuncun trans. "A Tale of an Infatuated Woman." As well as being a central erotic theme in *Chipozi zhuan*, the confusion of relationships is also central to works such as *Ruyijun zhuan*, *Langshi*, and *Xiuta yeshi*.

[57] Volpp, "Classifying Love" 78.

[58] This story is discussed in Sophie Volpp's article "The Discourse on Male Marriage." The main concern in the article is an analysis of tropes of familiarity and unfamiliarity in the treatment of homosexuality found in late imperial Chinese literature. There, as here, one of her major contentions is that tales of homoerotic practices in Fujian serve a marginalizing function.

[59] Volpp, "Classifying Love" 95.

[60] Patrick Hanan, "Introduction," in Li Yu, *Silent Operas*, viii, xi. This mirroring effect is also augmented through the use of parallel titles for adjacent stories.

[61] Volpp, "Classifying Love," 102–09. It is perhaps unfortunate that the accepted translation of this title, *The Anatomy of Passion*, has connotations of medicalization.

[62] Feng Menglong, *Qingshi* 836. Volpp interprets this passage as speaking of a petition to the throne, and asking that boys be raised in the rear courtyard (105). Our translation sees a physical change being requested through the interference of Heaven (Lord-on-High), rather than a social change through the power of the emperor.

[63] Feng 854.

[64] Feng 860. Our emphasis. The passages are presented here in the order in which they appear in Feng's chapter, although in the original they are each separated by several pages.

[65] See the respective entries in Chen Fuhua ed., *Gudai hanyu cidian: haonei, haowai* (552); *neibi/neichong* (1108); *waichong* (1590). See also

Vitiello, "The Dragon's Whim" 349.

[66] Sophie Volpp, "The Male Queen" (45) and Sophie Volpp, "Classifying Lust" (102–06); Giovanni Vitiello, "The Dragon's Whim" (349). Vitiello does interpret *wai* as distinguishing love for men from love for women, and the sense of deviance he introduces is milder than that implied by Volpp.

[67] Volpp, "Classifying Lust" 104.

[68] Grammatically *qi* introduces an opposing or contrary view, and so our translation in the passage contains the interpolation of "thought to be" in square brackets, indicating that Feng is arguing against an opposing statement.

[69] It is because of this misunderstanding that on the same page Volpp (un)happily notes that "the fourteenth story of the chapter . . . contradicts the view of the commentary" (106). It is precisely because such (supposed) self-contradiction in Ming authors is also a mainstay in her argument that accurate interpretation of these passages is important.

[70] A more extended discussion of this theme can be found in Wu Cuncun, "'Beautiful Boys Made Up As Beautiful Girls.'"

[71] Zuizhu jushi, *Longyang yishi*, Chapter 5.

[72] "Classifying Lust" 109. We are not saying here that there is not tension between *se* and *qing*, a problem that pervades homoerotic and heteroerotic love. Because homoerotic love was closely associated with the entertainment quarters and with male entertainers, the love of beauty was in some ways fundamentally bound up with male-love. But Feng does not have the kind of problems with this that Volpp claims he has. The homoerotic is not singled out for condemnation.

[73] The reference to western origins is omitted in Volpp's translation.

[74] Zhang Dai, *Tao'an mengyi* 35–36. On the idea of obsession in late imperial China, see Judith Zeitlin, "Obsession," *Historian of the Strange: Pu Songling and the Chinese Classical Tale* 61–97. Zeitlin cites only the first lines of this passage and does not comment on the role of obsession in late Ming homoeroticism.

[75] Zhang Dai, *Langhuan wenji* (Langhuan anthology) 3a.

[76] Volpp should be aware of this through her reading of Judith Zeitlin's *Historian of the Strange*, but instead consistently insists on a pathological

reading, at one point even distorting Feng Menglong's use of the term as "pathological obsession," a translation that completely ignores the spirit in which the term was used in the Ming dynasty. For an example of a "milder" reading, see Tze-lan D. Sang, *The Emerging Lesbian: Female Same-Sex Desire in Modern China,* where she translates *pi* as "personal taste" (17).

[77] The problem of translations taking precedence over original passages may be a result of working with classical Chinese, occasionally compounded by erotophobic biases. An instructive example can be found in Charles Stone's recent book *The Fountainhead of Chinese Erotica: The Lord of Perfect Satisfaction.* In his chapter "Pornography and the West," Stone argues that the erotic ambiance in *Ruyijun zhuan* is deflated and undermined by, among other things, "ironic references and odd observations." He illustrates this by referring to the first passage of graphic description in the tale, wherein he finds the line, "The cervix is the innermost recess of a woman and its flesh is like a pistil enveloped by a calyx beginning to frondesce," commenting that "it is as if the author is conducting a gynecological examination." There are a number of problems here. The first is the question as to whether or not the original passage is as clinical and cold as Stone renders it in his translation. Words such as "cervix," "pistil," "calyx," and "frondesce" are well removed from everyday experience, and even further removed from sensual pleasure. The problem here is that it is impossible to translate, in the space of a sentence, a whole system of sensual resonances that link the natural and human worlds. The choice of a "warm" or "cold" translation is Stone's, but he could have opted for language closer to everyday speech, something in the order of: "The 'female chamber' is the innermost part of a woman, shaped like a flower bud that has just begun to open." Indeed "female chamber" (*pinwu*) is the only word in the passage that lies outside everyday familiarity, and in the context of *Ruyijun zhuan*, it is a word that is meant to be provocatively erotic, not medical. A second problem, beyond that of translation, is Stone's elision of a whole tradition of erotica that is predicated upon "anatomical" curiosity. Contrary to its suggestive title, Stone's book registers little interest in how the "erotic" may have been constructed in sixteenth century China, not even in his chapter on "Desire in the Ming Dynasty."

[78] See also Geng Song (Song Geng), "Jasper-like Face and Rosy Lips,"

particularly the section "Homophobia: East and West."

[79] Keith McMahon, "Eroticism in Late Ming, Early Qing Fiction" 220, 244.

[80] As has already been noted above, proliferation of discourse on a subject may of course stem from panic as much as attraction.

[81] See Sophie Volpp, "The Literary Circulation of Actors in Seventeenth-century China."

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