

Androgyny and Gender Identity in Chinese Popular Culture and It's Potential Effect on the Conditions of the Native LGBT Community.

Androgyny is on the rise in contemporaneous Chinese culture, demonstrable by the show *Super Voice Girls* (SVG) originally produced by Hunan Satellite TV in 2005 and its sibling show *Happy Male Voice* (HMV), both having androgynous contestants' rate quite highly. For example, from 2005-2011 at least one androgynous contestant either won or was the runner up of SVG. All displaying tomboyish feminized masculinity to some degree, where traits associated with masculinity such as stoicism were incorporated into their personality. Thus, feminized masculinity is an adaption of masculinity by women rather than a direct replica of its dominant form¹. This assimilation of culturally gendered traits into an individual's personality to achieve an androgynous state is also seen in HMV, with the contestant's coiffing their hair, and donning skinny trousers in line with the aesthetic of "neo-men" in Taiwan, Korea, and Japan. More extreme expressions of gender identity, such as that expressed by Liu Zhu in 2010 where he directly cross-dressed in his performances, are also seen, with the challenge they pose to societal norms of gender expression based on the existing understanding of the gender binary. The feminized masculinity expressed in SVG is not as radical however, as it has been exploited by the show runners into entrenching a Butch/Femme dichotomy, one which lesbian communities use to form their own identities and place themselves under a simulacrum of the dominant societal understanding of heterosexual relationships, with the Butch displaying all the traditional masculine traits and behaviours, whilst the Femme displays the traditional feminine traits.²³ Revisiting the Liu Zhu example, who was given an ultimatum of three conditions by the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television (SARFT) to change his performance in order to continue competing, 1) dress like a man, 2) avoid any "feminine" gestures/behaviour/sexual orientation 3) win 70% audience support. Furthermore, his performance was repeatedly interrupted by the contest adjudicator Annie Rose. Serving as a clear indicator that those who challenge the gender binary are open to repression by those who view feminine masculinity as an illegitimate masculine sub-type, it should be noted however that Annie Rose received heavy criticism towards her behaviour. Despite harbouring a semi-diverse range of gender expressions, contestants still had to be normalized through interviews with family or good friends, and even ambiguity about their sexual orientation, arising from their departure from gender norms, having to be clarified showing both the unaccepted nature of alternative gender expression and the media's potential to normalize through assimilation. Outside of TV, a myriad of other works have tried to explore, challenge or entrench societal gender norms such as books marketed to adolescents, comedians and the music industry. Therefore, could allowing for semi-diverse expressions of gender identity within media, but not allowing for those that could potentially

¹ Huike Wen, "" Diversifying" Masculinity: Super Girls, Happy Boys, Crossdressers, and Real Men on Chinese Media", ASIANetwork Exchange, Vol.21, No.1, 2013.

² Joey Coster, "Butch, Femme or Neither? What Owning These Identities Means", Master's Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, East Tennessee University 2014.

³ This is very simplified as these are open to negotiation and change.

reference and depict LGBT experiences, lead to a more accepting environ for diverse gender expressions, homosexuality and transgender identity?

The Conditions of the LGBT Community:

Most attention within China when dealing with the LGBT community has been on homosexuality rather than the full spectrum, in particular the issues around men who have sex with men (MSM, incorporates homosexuality, bisexuality, and trans) as a public health issue due to the link with HIV. HIV is also 49 times more common to occur in transgender sex workers (3 times the rate of MSM sex workers) and in more general terms the risk of getting HIV is 18 times higher when engaging in penetrative sex involving the anus⁴, due to their precarious economic and social position which leaves them no capacity to enforce the use of contraceptives by their clients, compounded by general discrimination, police abuse and stigma associated with transgenderism. The 2001 version of the 3rd edition of the Chinese Classification of Mental Disorders views “transsexualism” through a behavioural lens, making note of the distress caused through dysphoria, whilst using “gender identity disorder” (GID) as the medical definition these both serve to pathologize transgender people⁵. While this was published 12 years prior to the release of the DSM-5, and the terminological change to gender dysphoria, the current definition still stands and under the 2009 Management Standards for Gender Reassignment Surgery gender affirming or sexual reassignment surgeries GID is a required diagnosis. These operations are incredibly rare, in 2014 data from the Changzheng Hospital and Shanghai Ninth People’s Hospital suggests that less than 800 transgender patients had undergone surgery in the past 30 years⁶ and nationwide estimates place the total number at 1,000 to 2,000, with 100,000-400,000 on the waiting list, this is due to stringent criteria for the acceptance for these surgeries involving being diagnosed with GID, a permit from the Public Security Bureau demonstrating a lack of a criminal record, a notarized report of the request, being unmarried, expressing a desire for the surgery for more than 5 years, and must have undergone psychiatric treatment for more than one year without being dissuaded, notification of the next of kin and family consent. The surgery is also not currently covered by national insurance, which therefore prohibits a group that faces discrimination in employment opportunities leading to some to engage in sex work, which then provides them with a criminal record, among 70 interviewees in Beijing and Shanghai 64% had been arrested by police⁷, others yielding to cultural or familial pressure to reproduce engage in marriages with the opposite sex with further prohibits them from surgery that saves them from incongruence caused by gender dysphoria. These harsh requirements, and a lack of support and doubt of the autonomy of the individual demonstrates the institutional ostracism experienced by trans individuals to say nothing of the wider social context, with reports of some who met the

⁴ Asia Catalyst, ““My Life is Too Dark to See the Light”, A Survey of the Living Conditions of Transgender Female Sex Workers in Beijing and Shanghai”, January 2015.

⁵ Julia Dahlkemper, Benjamin Diaz, Feyi Lawanson Jeffrey Messina, Ebony Morris, “TRANSGENDER HEALTH CARE IN CHINA Final Report & Recommendations prepared for: Psychological Team for Trans People in China”, Northwestern Access to Healthcare Project, March 2019.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Asia Catalyst, ““My Life is Too Dark to See the Light”, A Survey of the Living Conditions of Transgender Female Sex Workers in Beijing and Shanghai”, January 2015.

requirements, only to be denied through a lack of familial consent, mutilating their own genitals. Conversion therapy is legal in China, and almost 12% of transgender individuals have been forced into it by parents or guardians⁸. Sex reassignment surgery is the only legal means of changing one's identity on ID cards, but not educational certificates, the lack of anti-discrimination law, the difficulties faced in conforming the legal route, and the lack of support all serve to highlight institutional discrimination against trans individuals, but does this line up with public attitudes? In 2011, a survey of 1762 University Students in 5 Universities in Chongqing and Chengdu only 16.8% thought that being trans was acceptable, 12.6% felt comfortable with dating a trans individual with 4.2% feeling their own gender identity did not match their biological sex.⁹ In 2013, a survey of 3,491 individuals indicated that 68.5% of them could not tolerate homosexuality.¹⁰ Whilst the latter survey is only on homosexuals in specific, it is unlikely that an individual who is intolerant of same sex romantic interest would tolerate those who change their gender expression to that opposing their biological sex and whom would be attracted to the then opposite sex. The Aibai Culture and Education Center's survey in 2012 of educational discrimination on both a personal and institutional level had 79% of respondents report encountering bullying based on sexual orientation and gender expression¹¹, domestic abuse and violence are also of concern, with the Common Language 2009 survey revealing that 48.2% of lesbian and bisexual women reported family violence and 42.2% reported intimate partner violence, the Central Southern University in Changsha in a 418 strong survey observed that although 32.8% experienced abuse, 83.9% wouldn't report it due to potential juridical discrimination.¹² As such the LGBT community faces much pressure from a lack of legal protection and support, discrimination in education, employment and judicially due to Confucian family values of filial piety, western Christian values, and a lack of proper sex education. Media representation too contributes to this discrimination through the creation of narratives, with investigations in 2012 of 931 media outlets finding that 50% portrayed the LGBT community negatively, and 17% associated homosexuality with HIV.¹³ Due to the 2008 State Administration of Press, Publications, Radio, Film and Television's list of banned content where homosexuality sits among rape and pornography, there exists a lack of LGBT representation to counter negative narratives in old media. However, that does not mean that individual celebrities don't exist or that they don't have sway, their influence is mostly restricted to the internet, which through online activism has impact on old media, for instance one common form is the condemnation and challenging of media figures over discriminatory comments or attitudes as was the case with Lu Liping in 2011 who shared the post of a Chinese-American Pastor on Weibo condemning growing acceptance of "homosexual sin" following the introduction of same-sex marriage laws in New York, after sharing the post the backlash received frustrated her awarding of Best Actress of the largest

⁸ Julia Dahlkemper, Benjamin Diaz, Feyi Lawanson Jeffrey Messina, Ebony Morris, "TRANSGENDER HEALTH CARE IN CHINA Final Report & Recommendations prepared for: Psychological Team for Trans People in China", Northwestern Access to Healthcare Project, March 2019.

⁹ Asia Catalyst, "'My Life is Too Dark to See the Light'", A Survey of the Living Conditions of Transgender Female Sex Workers in Beijing and Shanghai", January 2015.

¹⁰ UNDP, UNSAID, "Being LGBT In Asia: China Country Report, A Participatory Review and Analysis of the Legal and Social Environment for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Persons and Civil Society", 2014

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ UNDP, UNSAID, "Being LGBT In Asia: China Country Report, A Participatory Review and Analysis of the Legal and Social Environment for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Persons and Civil Society", 2014.

film festival in Taiwan, along with public denouncement by CCTV-13, a state television channel, that condemned discrimination¹⁴.

Depictions of Androgyny:

According to Dwight E. Brooks and Lisa P. Hebert individuals construct their social identities, how they understand what it means to be Male, Female, Black, White, Asian, Latino, Native American, based on and shaped by commodified texts produced by media for segregated audiences, and thus media is central to social reality¹⁵, this is certainly true for the construction of the identities of the LGBT community too who use new media to negotiate and reconcile their identities with supportive peers, and who are exposed to the stories of similar individuals through activities such as Taobao's organised wedding tournaments, Taobao did this due to the commercial viability of the Pink Market in China. Whilst shows cannot directly show homosexual content they can still engage with the Pink Market through a process known as queerbaiting. Queerbaiting is the practice of incorporating or referencing fan constructed narratives around a character 's or individual 's sexuality but can also be imposed by producers to expand the audience of the show to include the Pink Market whilst not alienating those who would object to LGBT representation/avoiding state censorship. Western TV shows like *Supernatural* employ this tactic. This profit motive around trying to engage the Pink Market, has led to a "queer" celebrity culture on reality TV where celebrities and viewers explore gender and negotiate the identities that garnered them fame offstage, some opt to reject them, returning to more feminine expressions and personas, other's embrace them either because it was their authentic self to begin with, like Li Yuchun, or because it suits them. SVG was cancelled in 2008 after condemnation by the SARFT for promoting unhealthy star chasing and vulgar content and was restarted in 2009, renamed Happy Voice Girls, and included a section of auto-biographical narrations that according to Jamie J. Zhao further serve to normalize the contestant's gender non-conformity¹⁶. The introduction of Girl Academy in 2016, also serves this end but the hybrid live-streaming event is where the queerbaiting aspect of the show manifests, instead of the prior occasionality such as the 2009 kiss shared between Zeng Yike and Pan Chen. Instead, Girl Academy, through the pairing of contestants into official couples assigned on the basis of their gender expressions into simulacrum of heterosexual couples, with tomboyish contestants paired with femme to perform and practice love songs, to create a homosocial narrative that appeases fan's interpretations of relationships through queerbaiting. instances such as when Wang Jinjin sat on the androgynous persona Poision's lap and kissed her on the lips in an online video, or in 2016 with the on-camera unrestrained hugging and kissing. Fan content is also produced to solidify fan theories to the actions of the official couples celebrating their close relationships, such as editing love songs over footage of homoerotic expressions. When questioned on these actions outside of the show, contestants often give vague

¹⁴ Tao Hong, and Lucas Monteil, "LGBT: Chinese and Online", within Susannah Dale (trans. Ed.) *Laviedesidees*, Florence Gould Foundation, booksandideas, October 2018.

¹⁵ Dwight E. Brooks, Lisa P. Hebert, "Gender, Race and Media Representation", within Bonnie J. Dow, Julia T. Wood, *The SAGE Handbook of Gender and Communication*, SAGE Publications 2006, Chapter 16, pp.297-317.

¹⁶ amie J. Zhao, "Queer Yet Never Lesbian: A Ten-Year Look Back at the Reality TV Singing Competition Show Super Voice Girl", *Celebrity Studies*, Routledge, 2018, published online.

responses perpetuating this queerbaiting. The pairings reproduce heteronormative relationships, whilst also defying traditional gender norms, by incorporating traits considered masculine into their personality and being paired with those who express more feminine traits. Books also explore this feminized masculinity/feminine masculinity, such as the book, *A Beautiful Heart* by Yu Liji published in Mainland China which features a young boy whose expression of transsexuality and homosexual tendencies are treated as a pathology and by the end of the book, he can express his true gender onstage as a performer this has troubling implications as it suggests that the only way in which to legitimize one's actual gender is to perform it on stage and not offstage, to avoid external controversy, which is perhaps why some reality TV celebrities engage in androgynous behaviour on screen as an expression of a repressed real. Comedy is another potential avenue of alternative gender expression, as shown by Xiaoshen yang, who performs in femme attire in a satirical manner, however the media still deems it a requirement to establish his heterosexuality outside of his performances, and his gender compliance by emphasising his role as a father and husband. These alternative gender expressions are presented as individual choices, in comedy routines, in books, in reality TV, and the need to legitimize these in the broader lens of socially acceptable gender norms and avenues of expression plus either the doubt of sexuality in order to engage with the Pink Market through queerbaiting, or the establishment of heterosexuality through biographical works means that androgynous expression in old media does not constitute a challenge to gender norms. Although the legitimization may lead to wider social acceptance of those who do within the LGBT community. Representations of alternative sexualities might improve visibility, empathy towards LGBT individuals and challenge stereotypes, however without the removal of homosexuality and the rewording of the vague sexual deviancy to eliminate the possibility of the inclusion of LGBT sexuality under it from the SARFT regulations, full representation that does not include the internet is not possible which limits any positive effects displays of alternative gender identities or sexualities might have.

Conclusion:

Androgyny is unlikely to have an impact on the conditions of the LGBT community by offering alternative gender expressions, as it fails to challenge the dominant heterosexual norms and cultural expressions of masculinity. For women in society, it is simply an absorption of traits connected to masculinity into their personality (rather than conforming fully to feminine traits), instead of questioning the link between these traits and masculinity furthermore even when androgyny is exploited by producers to create a pseudo-homosexual homosocial environ for fans, the relationship displayed still mirrors that of heterosexual relationships due to the pairing of partners on butch/femme expressions. However, as direct media representation has been directed under the "no encouragement, no discouragement, no promoting" policy attitude androgynous gender expressions still don't fully conform to societal ideals, which may serve to normalise such expressions, which could then be extrapolated to those who more directly challenge the gender binary such as trans individuals. The sharing of stories which serve to humanise LGBT individuals over the internet, despite censorship, is far more likely to have an impact on perceptions which are demonstrably changing, with those in close proximity to the community, the young and the

educated being more accepting¹⁷. In addition to the Internet, better education (sex ed and public relations), LGBT Legislative representation, the strengthening and co-ordination of LGBT organisations, and international pressure are more likely candidates for growing acceptance, and subsequent legal protections, for the LGBT community. Juristic or societal trans acceptance in specific may lag behind, if developments in the UK and the US are considered. However, the construction of homosocial relations and the incorporation of queerbaiting into reality TV effectively allows homoerotic acts to dodge censorship and these depictions of celebrities' alternative gender expressions and possible homosexual romances could allow for the construction of identity in fans and through copycat actions, challenge gender norms, although old media does not produce as authentic LGBT representations as the Internet. Increasingly homoerotic depictions in celebrity queer culture could also be used as an interesting mirror to societal attitudes to LGBT expression.

Bibliography:

- Asia Catalyst, ""My Life is Too Dark to See the Light", A Survey of the Living Conditions of Transgender Female Sex Workers in Beijing and Shanghai", January 2015.
- Dwight E.Brooks, Lisa P.Hebert, "Gender, Race and Media Representation", within Bonnie J.Dow, Julia T.Wood, The SAGE Handbook of Gender and Communication, SAGE Publications 2006, Chapter 16, pp.297-317.
- Micheal Cart, "Young Adult Literature: From Adult Literature: From Romance to Realism", American Library Association (3rd ed) 2016.
- Cassandra M.Collier, "The Love that Refuses to Speak its Name: Examining Queerbaiting and Fan-producer Interactions in Fan Cultures", Master's Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville 2012.
- Joey Coster, "Butch, Femme or Neither? What Owning These Identities Means", Master's Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, East Tennessee University 2014.
- Li Cui, "Stardom from the Perspective of Media Power: Reproducing Media Power in the Reception of Li Yuchun's Stardom", International Journal of Cultural Studies 2017, Vol.20, No.5, pp.509-525.
- Elreich Fursich, "Media and the Representation of Others", UNESCO, Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2010.
- Boya Hua, Vickie F.Yang, Karen Friedriksen Goldsen, "LGBT Older Adults at a Crossroads in Mainland China: The Intersections of Stigma, Cultural Values, and Structural Changes Within a Shifting Context", The International Journal of Aging and Human Development, Vol.88, No.4, 2019, pp.440-456.
- Elaine Jeffreys, "Pathways to Legalising Same-Sex Marriage in China and Taiwan: Globalisation and "Chinese Values", within B.Winter, M.Forest, R.Senac (ed), Global Perspectives on Same-Sex

¹⁷ 社会调查：大众对同性恋群体的态度
正式调查数据分析,
http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_15218e7990102vyk8.html

Marriage: A Neo-Institutional Approach, Global Queer Politics, Palgrave Macmillian 2017, Chapter 12, pp.197-220.

-Arber Mavraj, "The LGBT Movement in China: Public Perception, Stigma and the Human Rights Debate", Inquiries Journal, Vol.8, No.12, 2016.

- Julia Dahlkemper, Benjamin Diaz, Feyi Lawanson Jeffrey Messina, Ebony Morris, "TRANSGENDER HEALTH CARE IN CHINA Final Report & Recommendations prepared for: Psychological Team for Trans People in China", Northwestern Access to Healthcare Project, March 2019.

-Tao Hong, and Lucas Monteil, "LGBT: Chinese and Online", within Susannah Dale (trans. Ed.) Laviedesidees, Florence Gould Foundation, booksandideas, October 2018.

-Chuyun Oh, "Queering Spectatorship in K-pop: The Androgynous Male Dancing Body and Western Female Fandom", Journal of Fandom Studies, Vol.3, No.1, University of Texas, 2015.

-Andrew Reynolds, "Representation of Rights: The Impact of LGBT Legislators in Comparative Perspectives", Cambridge University Press 2013.

-Sabrina Strings and Long T.Bui, "Feminist Media Studies: "She is Not Acting She is""", Routledge, 2013.

-UNDP, UNDAID, "Being LGBT In Asia: China Country Report, A Participatory Review and Analysis of the Legal and Social Environment for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Persons and Civil Society", 2014.

-Alvin ka, Hin Wang, "Queerness and Chinese Modernity: The Politics of Reading Between East and East", Doctoral Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Philosophy, University of California, San Diego, 2012.

-Huike Wen, "" Diversifying" Masculinity: Super Girls, Happy Boys, Crossdressers, and Real Men on Chinese Media", ASIANetwork Exchange, Vol.21, No.1, 2013.

-Li Yinhe, "Regulating Male Same-Sex Relationships in the People's Republic of China", within Elaine Jeffreys (ed) Sex and Sexuality in China, Routledge, 2006, Chapter 4, pp.82-102.

-Jamie J.Zhao, "Queer Yet Never Lesbian: A Ten-Year Look Back at the Reality TV Singing Competition Show Super Voice Girl", Celebrity Studies, Routledge, 2018, published online.

DOI: 10.1080/19392397.2018.1508957

-Xi Han, Weiting Han, Jiabin Qu, Bei Li, Qinghua Zhu, "What Happens Online Stays Online? - Social Media Dependency, Online Support Behaviour and Offline Effects For LGBT", Computers in Human Behaviour, Vol.93, April 2019, ELSEVIER, pp.91-98.

Online Resources:

-社会调查：大众对同性恋群体的态度
正式调查数据分析,

http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_15218e7990102vyk8.html

-联商网, 这些迷恋 "中性风" 的年轻人, TA们在追求着什么?,

<http://www.linkshop.com.cn/web/archives/2017/373666.shtml>

