Chinese Comrade Literature, Queer Political Reality, and the Tongzhi Movement in Mainland China

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the development of Mainland China's online "Comrade Literature" (同志文学 *tongzhi wenxue*), a body of fiction linked to the experiences of Chinese homosexuals that emerged in the late 1990s. The central question is: *How has Chinese Comrade Literature responded to changes in political rhetoric and government policy affecting queer identity in modern China?* This thesis looks at samples of online Comrade stories as they correspond to political developments in China from 1996 to 2006, with an eye to how these narratives problematize the struggles of a marginalized queer Chinese population. An investigation of implicit and explicit references to laws, policies, and government action in Comrade stories reveals how they establish solidarity by communicating messages about China's repressive political and social environment for homosexuals. The analysis focuses on the fictional texts themselves – on what they tell us about China's political reality and State control affecting the gay community and what imagery they provide that can be interpreted as social mobilization and political protest. This thesis argues that this emergent queer literary discourse constitutes much more than meets the eye. It is not simply an expression of an underground gay culture; it is a dynamic form of resistance to the particular social and government discrimination towards Chinese homosexuality and protest against the broader environment of political repression in China.

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"Our biggest enemy consists of a small number of authoritarian organizations that are using the powerful national propaganda machine to subtly construct mainstream ideology. And our biggest worth, our ultimate goal in presenting queer content…is to challenge and oppose this mainstream ideology for the people of China. **The revolution hasn't succeeded yet. *Tongzhi*, keep up the good work**!"

– Yangyang, one of the 2011 Beijing Queer Film Festival organizers in a press release after the government forcibly cancelled all film screenings, re-appropriating Sun Yat-Sen's famous revolutionary statement to address the queer activist movement in China.

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Chinese Comrade Literature, Queer Political Reality, and the *Tongzhi* Movement in Mainland China

[Introduction: Homosexuality and Comrade Literature in Mainland China]

This thesis analyzes online "Comrade Literature" (同志文学 *tongzhi wenxue*) from Mainland China, a fictional genre about the experiences of Chinese homosexuals that appeared on the internet in the late-1990s. The literature raises a series of questions not only about Chinese homosexuality, but also concerning social and political changes in modern China. For example, why is Chinese queer fiction called "Comrade" literature? Furthermore, why do non-gay Chinese read this literature and risk participating in pro-gay events? What is it about Comrade fiction that draws heterosexual Chinese youth to read, circulate, and even write their own homoerotic stories? This thesis argues that this emergent queer literary discourse constitutes much more than meets the eye. It is not simply an expression of an underground gay culture; it is a dynamic form of resistance to the particular social and government discrimination towards Chinese homosexuality and protest against the broader environment of political repression in China.

The central question is: *How has Chinese Comrade Literature responded to changes in the prevailing political rhetoric affecting queer identity in China?* Looking at Comrade Novels and political developments in China from 1996 to 2006, how do *tongzhi* narratives establish and motivate a community to challenge the government's political agenda? How do these stories communicate messages that enlist Chinese readers – homosexual and heterosexual alike – to the *tongzhi* cause? This thesis will analyze samples of Comrade stories to illustrate key narrative structures, discussing their relationship to the political reality of Chinese homosexuals in contemporary China.

This thesis analyzes how contemporary Chinese same-sex identity is created through online Comrade stories and how these fictional narratives articulate their resistances as China acts in a globalized world. The introduction contextualizes homosexuality in China, outlining the change in official and sociocultural attitudes from pre-modern tolerance for same-sex relations to modern-day homophobic proscription. Chapter One presents the *tongzhi* community in China. Chapter Two discusses online Comrade Literature, situating the sociopolitical environment of modern China's internet storytelling and queer subculture. Chapter Three explains the interdisciplinary methodology that bridges literary criticism and social science narrative research used to explore Comrade Literature. It then analyzes eight Comrade stories as they relate to China's recent socioeconomic change and political agenda, focusing on how they communicate messages to negotiate China's sociopolitical environment. The conclusion integrates Chinese politics, the gay subculture, and Comrade Literature, with special attention to how queer *tongzhi* narratives initiate social policy changes that allow for political protest. This thesis contends that Comrade stories play a key sociopolitical role in disseminating information about the Chinese homosexual experience, fostering solidarity for a *tongzhi* movement that advocates for sexual liberalization.

The History of Same-Sex Relations in Ancient China

In researching the history of male same-sex relations in pre-modern China, the problem is certainly not a scarcity of recourses. A wealth of historical references document that same-sex relations were widespread, recognized, and tolerated in ancient China until the 13th century (e.g.: Chou, 1997; Shiren, 1984; Zhang, 2001). Same-sex activities were a familiar aspect of ancient China's social hierarchy where upper-class males sexually dominated social inferiors, such as his

wife, concubines, or servants (Lau, 1989; Wu, 2004). It was only during the Qing dynasty (1644-1912) that same-sex acts were first persecuted under China's legislation as sexual offenses, but most of these early court cases cited sodomy and same-sex rape as "illicit sexual intercourse" rather than an inborn perversion (Sommers, 2000, p.409). Furthermore, investigations of contemporary medical texts have consistently ruled out the possibility that homoerotic desire was perceived as a pathological illness prior to the Republican era (1911-1949) (Furth, 1988). The classical Chinese world lacked a medical or scientific term comparable to the modern constructs of "homosexuality" or "homosexual" as a discrete sexual identity, and it was only with the influence of Western ideology that the term was named and incorporated into the Chinese lexicon (Brown, 2008; Chou, 1997).

Scholars have speculated that after Western powers invaded and defeated China in the mid-nineteenth century, "progressive" Chinese intellectuals looked to Westernization as a mode for national advancement, promoting Western ideologies (Ruan, 1988; Samshasha, 1997). At this time, homosexuality was regarded as a mental disease in the West, and the Chinese subsequently adopted a pathological view of same-sex behaviors (Ruan, 1991). Although recent scholarship has contested this mainstream belief that homosexuality was "imported" from the West, the notion that same-sex sexual behavior was not seriously persecuted in Ancient China remains a general consensus (Wu, 2003; Farr, 2007).

Although the Chinese term for "homosexuality" (同性恋 *tongxinglian*) did not exist prior to translation in the late-nineteenth century, euphemisms were used to refer to same-sex attraction, often originating from classical Chinese texts that allude to homoeroticism (Zhang, 2001; 2008).[1] In *Passions of the Cut Sleeve: The Male Homosexual Tradition in China* (1992),

[1] A list of notable classical Chinese novels with homoerotic content is included in Appendix I.

Bret Hinsch traces the history of such euphemisms that are still recognized in contemporary Chinese society, including "the cut sleeve" (断袖 *duanxiu*), "the split peach" (分桃 *fentao*), and "male practice" (男风 *nanfeng*). [2] Though identified as the first serious English language treatment of same-sex behaviors in pre-modern China, reviewers have criticized this book for being "unidimensional" and "deceptive" in its conclusion that China's twentieth-century homophobia resulted solely from the adoption of Western sexual discourse (Dikötter, 1992). Alternatively, scholars have proposed that the introduction of legislation against same-sex acts were due to heightened sexual conservatism during the Qing dynasty, forming part of a local political campaign to preserve a strict hierarchal social order (Ng, 1989). This topic requires more comprehensive investigation, but it is important to recognize that contrary to the "homophobic" environment of modern China, traditional Chinese society was relatively tolerant of same-sex practices.

The Sociopolitical Reality of Homosexuality in Contemporary China

The founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 resulted in the government's fervent elimination of all non-procreative, non-marital associations to establish the nuclear family as the bedrock of socialist renewal (Sieber, 2001). Under Communist ideology, homosexuality was classified as a clinical condition in the Chinese *Classification and Diagnostic Criteria of Mental Diseases* and criminalized as "hooliganism" (流氓罪 *liumangzui*) in the 1957 Official Penal Code. [3] Any persons exhibiting or suspected of same-sex behavior could be arrested and sent to prisons, labor reform camps, electric therapy clinics or even executed (Lau,

[2] For a list of other euphemisms, refer to Appendix II.
[3] Translations of relevant official laws and statutes in Appendix IV.

1989; Wan, 2001). The entire topic of homosexuality was taboo, and China's laws, mass media, and scientific reports never mentioned it (Sigley, 2006).

Today, China's laws neither prohibit nor protect homosexuals. Homosexuality was decriminalized in 1997 with the abolishment of the "hooligan" law (Liu, 2005). In 2001, homosexuality was also removed from the official list of mental disorders (Ma, 2011). When a government survey placed the homosexual population at 15 million in 2004, the Chinese State acknowledged the presence of homosexuals for the first time (Gong, 2009). More recent estimates have ranged from 50 to 100 million (Li, 2009; Wen, 2011). Despite this apparent progress, the political status of homosexuals in China is ambiguous and they still face widespread legal discrimination (Cao, 2000; Gong, 2009).

In August of 2012, I had the opportunity to explore the homosexual subculture in Beijing first-hand. I attended *tongzhi* events and talked to more than 150 people about their experiences as a homosexual or views on homosexuality in Chinese society. Events were wide-ranging in structure, from informal dinner gatherings, to book club discussion, to focus groups, and other miscellaneous social events (e.g.: movie screenings, art workshops, and karaoke sessions). Most of these events were organized sporadically, where notifications were circulated on private mailing lists, discussed on membership-only message boards, or selectively communicated via word-of-mouth. Often, meeting locations would not be announced until a few hours before events, and were liable to sudden changes. Most people were willing to talk to me casually about their experiences and share their opinions or personal stories concerning various issues, especially when they saw me as a relatively neutral figure unattached to the Public Security Bureau or the government. However, of the more than 40 people I asked for formal interviews, only five hesitantly agreed after I assured them of their anonymity (*Notes*, 2012). In

contemporary China, the sensitive nature of homosexuality does not encourage Chinese researchers to study gay communities. Because of this, many local homosexuals are unfamiliar with research into same-sex experience and were worried about how my research would affect their personal lives.

During my research, I asked 20 Chinese male homosexuals about how risky they viewed their involvement with the *tongzhi* community. Most people replied that they did not feel very secure, and only two felt that their involvement had little or no risk (*Notes,* 2012). When prompted to specify what kinds of consequences they thought might follow from being exposed as homosexual participants in *tongzhi* activities, the majority of respondents stated that they were uncertain, but admitted that their social reputation would inevitably be affected. The greatest worry was that their parents would grieve and peers would ridicule them. Additionally, about half replied that their careers would be affected, explaining that the work environments at Chinese companies are largely unwelcoming towards gay employees. Four people also mentioned that they may face harassment, blackmail, public humiliation, or the possibility of being sentenced to "reform through education" if caught by the police. As such, there is reason to believe that most gays in China live in a state of uncertainty regarding the legal and civil status of their homosexuality.

The Chinese State continues to see sexual openness (*xingkaifang*) as a threat to "socialist morality and…socio-political stability" (Sigley, 2006, p.71), resulting in the authorities using various legal statutes to indirectly arrest homosexuals and suppress gay activities (Wan, 2008). The Social Order Statute and laws on harmful sexual acts are still used to indirectly imprison people showing homosexual behavior. These laws criminalize behaviors that are "deleterious to fine customs" (妨害善良风俗 *fanghai shanliang fengsu*) or "deleterious to moral decency" (妨

害风化 *fanghai fenghua)* and order that citizens in a "diseased" (病态 *bingtai*) or "abnormal state" (变态 *biantai)* be detained (Sanders, 2006). Another example is the Criminal Law 301 for "Crowd Licentiousness," under which homosexuals are often prosecuted, which can result in a five-year prison term (Godwin, 2010).

In general, however, the preferred government tactic is to act as though homosexuality does not exist, expressed as the "Not Encouraging, Not Discouraging, Not Promoting" (不支持, 不反对, 不提倡 *buzhichi, bufandui, butichang*) approach (Tan, 1998). However, this cautious policy is not neutral, and the combination of official policy and official silence creates a homophobic environment where homosexuals are deprived of legal recognition and protection (Cao, 2000). Consequently, Chinese homosexuals face heavy discrimination and intolerance, where it is "impossible" for individuals "to be publicly gay and retain respectable employment [in China]" (Berry, 1996, p.40).[4] As Li Yinhe (2006), Chinese sociologist and pro-gay activist, states:

> "[T]he most serious threat to homosexual conduct between consenting male adults comes…from social prejudice, which has resulted in the arbitrary imposition of administrative penalties, police arrest, and Party disciplinary legal sanctions" (p.82).

When asked to comment on the above statement, interviewees concurred that social prejudices present a greater concern to the *tongzhi* community than actual physical harassment or police arrest. In addition, three of five interviewees expressed that increased awareness about the challenges gay Chinese currently face, along with more information about homosexuality as

[4] Refer to Appendix V for a more detailed chronology of significant political events for the Chinese *tongzhi* community

natural human behavior, are essential precursors to overcoming mainstream prejudice. For example, 24-year-old Christopher Wong,[5] who works as a consultant, stated that more Chinese people need to be made aware that homosexuality exists before collective action tackling discrimination can be successful. In his own words:

> "I am *tongzhi*…I don't believe that my sexual preferences are in any way improper or unnatural. Same-sex love does not cause any social harm…But social prejudice harms us greatly. Most people who even realize that they are homosexual are just too terrified of what other people will think. I don't know why people think homosexuality is so abnormal and such a monstrous preference to have…I am still in love with my first boyfriend…[But] I don't feel lucky that I have found love. I feel terrible pressure, and a terrible shame that others force upon me. It has driven me to suicidal thoughts before. I [resent] society for being so unjust towards us. They have robbed me of my happiness and of my ability to feel like a complete and "normal" person...[Instead,] I…have to hide my homosexuality…all the time, especially from people at work. For all of these reasons, I think it is exceptionally important that there are more reports, articles, and personal stories in the media about the injustices we face. I believe that getting organized to form a unified *tongzhi* front and actively engage in political life is the only way to tackle social prejudice and protect gay people. More people need to be made aware that homosexuality is natural."[6]

[5] Names of all *tongzhi* interviewees have been changed to preserve anonymity.
[6] All *tongzhi* interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese and quotations are the author's own translations. Additionally, citations of secondary sources that are only available in the Chinese appear as the author's own translations. The author has bilingual proficiency in English and Mandarin Chinese.

Given that the authoritarian government strictly regulates all media and print publications, people in China have very little access to information about homosexuality or human rights through conventional channels (Godwin, 2010). However, the internet now provides many Chinese with an accessible medium to more freely publish, read, and circulate texts as well as communicate with others in real time on a range of issues under the cloak of anonymity. The internet plays a particularly important role in the lives of homosexuals in China, many of whom cite the internet as their primary, if not only, source of information about homosexuality. Most Chinese homosexuals still rely on online message boards to talk to other gays, and even when *tongzhi* meet in person, the internet is the chief mode of communication to facilitate organization of social events. Nonetheless, many *tongzhi* lament that the broader Chinese public remains ignorant about homosexuality and Chinese gays often feel forced to conform to the heterosexual lifestyle deemed "normal" by a patriarchal society. Until there is greater public awareness about homosexuality, *tongzhi* will continue to face a contradictory political reality where they are simultaneously influenced by China's global opening up yet repressed by State control.

[Chapter 1: Understanding the Comrade Community in Mainland China]

Contemporary Scholarship on Homosexuality in Mainland China

Entering the 1990s, China witnessed dramatic changes in its popular culture with a surge of queer novels, films, and art work propelled by the rise of electronic media and technology in everyday life (He, 2008). At the same time, Western institutions such as Amnesty International and the World Health Organization began placing pressure on China's government to adopt more liberalized attitudes towards sexuality (Bullough & Ruan, 1989). The last two decades have seen the development of a semi-public culture of gay bars, restaurants, and cruising zones, as well as the continued efforts of gay activists (Jackson & Sullivan, 2001; Wan, 2001). This tide of homosexual visibility across Chinese society prompted the scholarly world to pay greater attention to the community.

The body of scholarly literature on homosexuality in China over the past few decades can be grouped into three different fields of study according to their order of emergence: 1) early works that explore the history of Chinese homosexuality (e.g.: Lau, 1989; Ng, 1989); 2) social science research that investigate China's political position towards homosexuality (e.g.: Fang, 1995; Li, 2006); and 3) research on the emergent *tongzhi* culture and movement in China (Chou, 2001; Rofel, 2007).

I. Research on Chinese Homosexuality from a Historical Perspective

The earliest modern Chinese scholarly works on same-sex relations were written by intellectuals who labeled homosexuality as a psychological disease (Jackson & Sullivan, 2001). A key representation is *The Sexual Life of Mankind (*1934), written by famous sex educator Cheng Hao, where he describes "homosexuality as gender perversity" and an "abnormal, dirty,

and inhuman bad habit" (p.133-4). Other works published during this time similarly endorse the government's perspective on homosexuality as a pathological obscenity worthy of criminalization (Hinsch, 1990; Kang, 2009).

After the Cultural Revolution in the 1980s, scholars began investigating China's changing attitudes towards homosexuality, but most of these works assert that the evolution of a stigmatized queer identity resulted from China's exposure to Western influences (Lau, 1989; Tsai, 1987). Samshasha's *History of Homosexuality in China* (1984) is a case in point: the book traces China's history of homo-erotic love from the Zhou dynasty (11^{th} century BC to 221 BC) to the early 1980s, concluding that homophobia was imported from the West (Samshasha, 1984). Nonetheless, other scholars have noted that the emphasis on "homophobia" as an imported construct may be due to underlying political agendas (Kong, 2011). By blaming Western influences, authors avoided criticizing China's government for having oppressed homosexuals and engendered a more positive perspective of Chinese politics (Bullough & Ruan, 1989).

Matthew Sommer's seminal work on *Sex, Law and Society in Late Imperial China* (2000) offers a different perspective, proposing that Chinese homophobia cannot purely be attributed to Western influences. His study takes account of the origins of sexual regulation, examining diverse legal materials, including political commentaries and court cases, to determine changes in how same-sex behaviors were dealt with. Through in-depth analyses of historical documents, citing both legal evidence and cultural sources (i.e.: popular stories, personal narratives, etc.), Sommer posits that the changing societal norms and political attitudes towards same-sex relations were due to heightened conservatism during Late Imperial China, before the influence of Western ideology.

II. Social Science Studies on Chinese Homosexuality and Tongzhi Identity Politics

Social science research on homosexuality is diverse, ranging from work in the fields of anthropology, sociology, to political philosophy. These works challenge the criminalization of homosexual acts and respond to increasing exposure to more liberal Western ideologies. They address two main issues: 1) the political and legal status of gay rights in China, and 2) the evolving cultural and societal attitudes towards the *tongzhi* movement (Liu, 1987).

The dominant paradigm for the study of government policies towards homosexuality in China is from the bio-medical field, where research specifically focuses on determining appropriate parameters for government regulation of same-sex conduct in relation to HIV/AIDS (Nielands *et al.,* 2007; Wu *et al.,* 2004). More generally, scholars such as Tan (1998) and Ma (2010) have reviewed legal cases and highlighted government attempts to repress homosexuality through *ad hoc* enforcement (e.g.: where officials have used various excuses to detain homosexuals). Even so, other studies concerning gay rights in China over the past few decades have been relatively unresponsive or simply make no reference to such evidence (Gao, 2003; Wan, 2008).

Another emphasis in social science research examines Chinese homosexual identity formation and queer politics associated with the nascent *tongzhi* movement (Jackson & Sullivan, 2001). These studies employ interviews, participant observations, ethnography, and life narratives as qualitative methods of inquiry (Chou, 2000). Popular ethnographic literature on homosexuality in China stresses the hidden or forbidden nature of gay Chinese relationships and the pressures to conform to social expectations (Sun *et al.,* 2006). Academics have also queried what it means to be queer in an increasingly global environment, and how exposure to Western influences has affected Chinese cultural attitudes, social responses, and government policies

towards the *tongzhi* community (Engebretsen, 2008). In the late 1980s, psychology discourse began to frame and analyze queer identity within the larger context of China's rapid economic development and shifting political framework (Simon, 2001). *Their World* (1992), by Li Yinhe and Wang Xiaobo, stands out as the pioneering work addressing social conditions of the Chinese homosexual population. The book provided insight into the challenges facing gays, prompting other researchers to the homosexual population in contemporary China.

Essays by a range of activists, artists, and scholars further discuss how globalization has become integral to perceptions of gender and sexuality within China (Liu & Rofel, 2010). A number of texts have proposed variable perspectives on how Chinese politics and regulations have shaped the lives of a growing *tongzhi* population (Ruan, 1988; Chiang, 2010). For example, Loretta Ho's fieldwork in *Gay and Lesbian Subculture in Urban China* (2010) analyzed queer personal narratives to examine how an urban Chinese homosexual identity has responded to State politics. She concludes that the Chinese queer identity is "paradoxical" as being "open and decentred" yet still mirrors and "[conforms] to State control" (Ho, 2010, p.138). Nevertheless, contemporary Chinese attitudes toward sexuality are rapidly changing (Farrer, 2002). Since the advent of the Chinese internet in mid-1990s, a growing number of studies have focused on the gay online subculture and underground *tongzhi* communities emerging in modern China (e.g.: Ching, 2010; He, 2008).

III. Discourse Exploring Queer Culture in the Humanities

Although literary publications evaluating themes of homosexuality in fiction are increasing, most are mere synopses of the stories themselves with only superficial analysis. For instance, the psychologist Zhang Mingyuan (1981) published an article addressing the portrayal of homosexuality in Cao Xueqin's (1791) eighteenth-century classic Chinese novel, *A Dream of*

Red Mansions. Zhang wrote that homosexuality was "extremely odd" but that science had yet to make "a final decision on whether or not it should be considered an illness," thereby questioning the prevailing public rhetoric asserting homosexuality as a pathological disease (qtd. in Wan, 2001, p.50). Pioneering scholars thus focused on "discovering" and "uncovering" the existence of homosexuals in China rather than on their sociopolitical status (Hua, 1985; Chiang, 2010).

Critiques of contemporary Chinese queer literature often interpret homosexual themes as a literary trope describing the conflict between communism and capitalism in a globalizing world (Liu, 2010). These reviews essentially ignore the homoerotic content itself; representations of homosexuality are said to allegorize the transformation of traditional Chinese ideologies in a Westernizing environment (Chou, 2001). For example, essays on Bai Xianyong's seminal Chinese-language queer novel, *Crystal Boys* (1983), have disregarded the explicit portrayals of homosexual life. Instead, they emphasize the significance of ambivalent father-son relationships within the shifting framework of Western ideology where the traditional Chinese family structure is challenged (Martin[a], 2003). Recently, queer discourse has offered critical views about how representations of male homosexuality in contemporary Chinese novels problematize sociocultural pressures for all individuals to conform to the heterosexual norm (Wu, 2004; Kang, 2009). These works engage queer and feminist studies to investigate the how literary representations of non-normative gender and sexuality challenge patriarchal paradigms that mandate heterosexuality (Jian, 1997; Farrer, 2006).

As queer cultural products are brought into the Chinese market through foreign films and books (e.g.: Western films such as Brokeback Mountain by Chinese director Ang Lee attracted significant attention when it was circulated on pirated DVDs), more people have started to pay attention to Comrade films and novels as well (Higgins, 2009). Literary reviews have attempted

preliminary study of the fictional *tongzhi* identity, but homoerotic texts are still subjected to reductive readings, particularly when they contain graphic sexual content (Kong, 2004). Critics often interpret these stories as soft pornography without any literary value, or denigrate them as self-indulgent and socially irresponsible (Wang, 2005). Recently, several essays have singled out Comrade Literature as a field that articulates the complex dynamics of homosexual relationships in a heterosexist society (e.g.: Sieber, 2001; Martin, 2008). However, no books that conduct in-depth investigations of Comrade Literature from Mainland China have yet been published. Research on Comrade stories at present subsists in the limited form of a few working papers or university thesis and dissertations (e.g.: Cristini, 2005; Wang, 2005).

The Comrade Community: Defining "Tongzhi"

The term "Comrade" (同志 *tongzhi*) literally translates as "same will" or "of the same intent." It was originally used in Chinese Communist discourse as a generic and politically correct term to address everyone in China regardless of social class or gender (Tsai, 1988). Today, *tongzhi* still resonates with this sacred ideal, but is also the most popular word used to refer to Chinese of non-normative sexual orientation, especially homosexuals (Wong, 2008). The word is closely associated with Sun Yat-Sen, the "national father" of modern China whose famous sentence, "the revolution has not yet succeeded; comrades we must struggle still," has been appropriated for the political struggles of Chinese gays (Chou, 2000). *Tongzhi* is politically subversive in the way that it dramatizes the incoherencies of Chinese homosexual relations vis-à-vis issues of sexuality, cultural traditions, human rights, and national identity. In contrast, the medical term "homosexual" (同性恋 *tongxinglian*) is rarely used within the queer community as it bears the clinical undertones of a mental disease (Kong, 2011, p.14).

Although *tongzhi* culture has been seen as a Chinese equivalent to Western "queer politics," many scholars and the Comrade community assert that they are fundamentally distinct (Bao, 2011). The Chinese term for queer is its phonetic transliteration "*ku'er*" (酷儿), which plays a homophone pun on "cool" (酷 *ku*) in Mandarin to mean "cool kid." Nevertheless, "queer" is closely associated with the pathological term "homosexuality," as they are both received as foreign constructs in the Chinese vernacular (Wong & Zhang, 2000). By referring to themselves as *tongzhi* instead, Chinese homosexuals ironically adopt one of the most revered and liberating titles from the very society that oppresses them. As Chou Wah-Shan (2000) elucidates, the reappropriation of *tongzhi* is widely accepted by the gay community for its "positive cultural references, gender neutrality, desexualization of the stigma of homosexuality, [and] politics beyond the homo-hetero duality" (p.2). Instead of confronting the mainstream by stigmatizing oneself as Westernized "queer," *tongzhi* is an indigenous self-proclaimed sexual identity that "appropriate[es] rather than den[ies] one's familial-cultural identity" (Chou, 2000, p.3). As such, *tongzhi* was consciously adopted by Chinese homosexuals as "a strategy of inclusion and exclusion," one that "expresses both the sexual identity of difference and a political identity of sameness," inherently advocating for equality on the basis of sexual difference in modern China (Chou, 2000, p.4).

The Chinese Comrade movement and politics thus reflect the changing social structures and inequities in China today that not only affect the *tongzhi* population, but also the broader Chinese society (Wong, 2008). Both within the *tongzhi* community and outside of it, Comrade narratives opens up possibilities for non-normative identities, political discourse, and sociopolitical ideals in contemporary China (Bao, 2011).

As such, this thesis is significant as it consists of *primary* research: to date, there has been very little study (if any at all) on the relationship between Comrade Literature and China's political rhetoric. The Chinese government precludes university students in Mainland China from working on topics related to queer studies or homosexuality, discouraging research in these fields (Yau, 2010). Scholars based in China therefore have little access to critical resources to conduct and publish studies in Mandarin about the *tongzhi* community and same-sex practices. Moreover, studies on gender and sexuality, particularly queer topics, are often not considered respectable fields of study by Chinese students (Huang, 2009). As Peter Lee, 20-year-old university student, remarked:

> "Queer studies? Such a thing exists? I don't think I have ever heard of that area here. Why would people want to study something like that? It's great that Western scholars want to better understand gender and sexuality, but I think in China people won't really study it...I can't imagine that the government would endorse public schools to have students specializing in queer theory…Sure, there are many famous Chinese experts who specialize sexuality and gender studies, but they are in the fields of social sciences or medicine…If you tell people you study homosexuality or are interested in queer studies, I doubt that people will really respect you – their first response will probably be to think that you're weird."

Hence, even Chinese students or scholars familiar with the *tongzhi* community and *tongzhi* literature are generally reluctant to explore this phenomenon, despite its increasing influence in Chinese society. My work, conducted primarily outside China and written in English, will thus

contribute to scholarship on this important but previously unstudied social and political phenomenon. By examining Comrade narratives, this thesis aims to enhance awareness about the *tongzhi* population and movement, prompting further inquiry into the role *tongzhi* stories play in collective organization against China's repressive government regulations more generally.

[Chapter 2: Why Investigate Comrade Literature?]

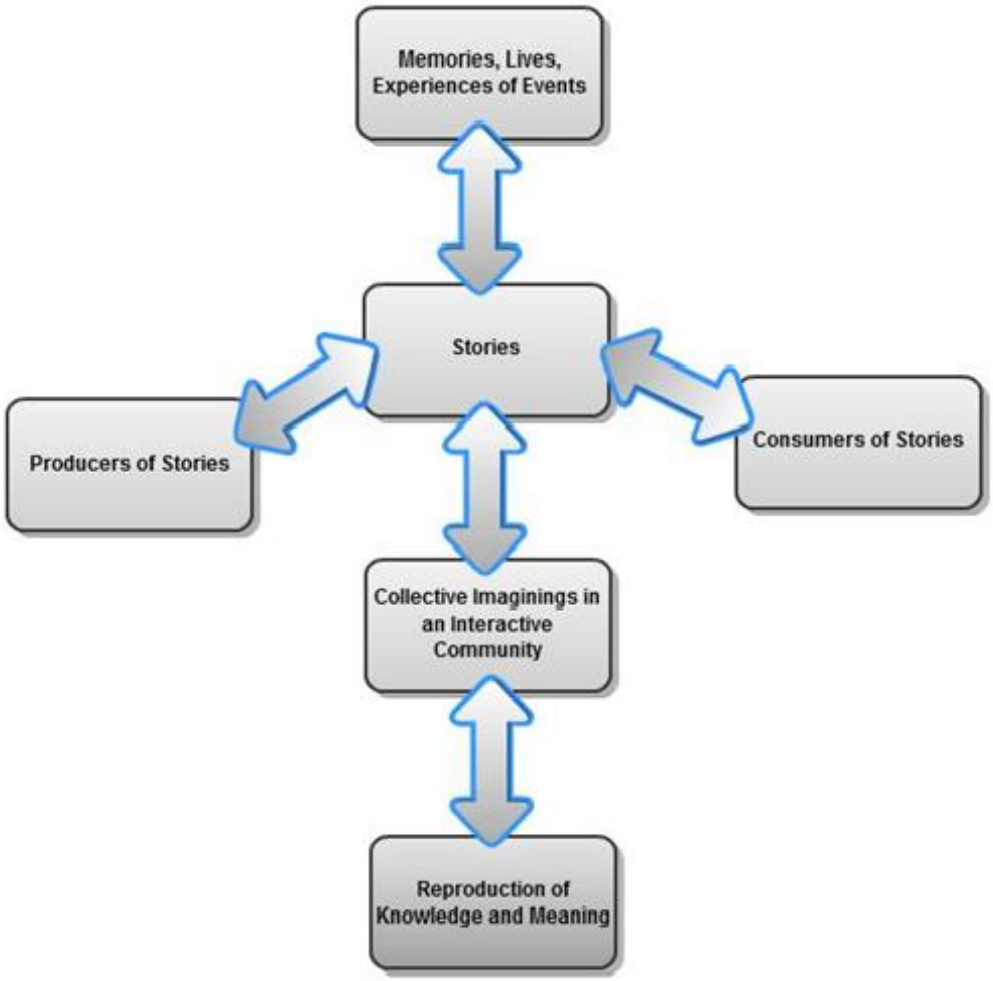
On Comrade "Literature": The Politics of Homosexual Storytelling

Telling stories is at the center of human society where people share experiences, learn from the past, and imagine a future (Garcia-Lorenzo, 2010). Research into storytelling by Ken Plummer (1995; 1996) formulate an insightful framework to interpret the social and political role of Comrade stories, shedding some light on this conundrum. According to Plummer (1995), storytelling signifies a political process that informs people of problems in society, influencing collective acts of resistance and empowerment. Illustrated in Figure 1, his symbolic interactionist theory suggests that storytelling can be interpreted as a host of "joint actions" at the heart of any interactive society. Producers and consumers of stories contribute to the creation of texts that concern lives, events, and experiences, but are "[unable to] grasp the *actual* life" through stories themselves, as the "meanings of stories…emerge out of a ceaselessly changing stream of interaction between producers and readers in shifting *contexts*" (Plummer, 1995, p.22, emphasis original). These communities are "part of wider *habitual…networks of collective activity,*" where story production and consumption is necessarily "an empirical social process involving a stream of joint actions in local contexts themselves bound into wider negotiated social worlds" (Plummer 1995, p.24, emphasis original).

Plummer posits that storytelling is symbolic of the collective power of imagination in an interactive community – one where texts are "connected to lives, actions, contexts, and society" (1995, p.24). Storytelling therefore signifies a stream of power that flows through social acts of resistance, empowerment, and disempowerment, informing us of matters relating to sexuality, class, age, and access to intellectual and economic capital. All these factors come to shape an individual's capacity to tell or not to tell a story, and affect how people open up or close down

spaces for storytelling. In this view, construction and reproduction of Comrade stories represent power negotiations centered around the formation of *tongzhi* identities, "self-actualization, tension between public and private, [and] State control" in Chinese society (Ho, 2010). The emergence and proliferation of private (sexual) stories on an (online) public space is thus closely aligned with the changing sociopolitical environment in modern China.

Figure 1: Symbolic Interactionist Theory of Storytelling



Plummer's symbolic interactionist theory posits that storytelling constitutes an interactive society's host of "joint actions." Producers and consumers of stories contribute to the creation of texts that concern lives, events, and experiences, forming part of a broader collective community. Source: Author's own image with information from Plummer (1995).

Since the founding of the PRC, the government has imposed strict prohibition of all sexually explicit materials. Under the "Rules for the Control of and Punishments Concerning Public Security," persons associated with writing or possessing homoerotic material are charged with "disrupting public order," fined, and detained (1957, Article 5.4). In response to Western pornographic material being smuggled into China in the 1970s, the government enforced "Regulations on Severely Banning Pornography" to emphasize that pornography – especially homoerotic materials – "poison[ed] people's minds, induc[ed] crimes…and must be severely banned" (1985). These laws have been used as instruments of political repression to silence communities the State finds undesirable, particularly when reinforced by strict censorship of all conventional media outlets (Ruan, 1991). Regulations enforced by the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television since 1997 have consistently banned any portrayal or discussion of homosexuality. Today, the 2008 Official Notice on Broadcasting Censorship Standards is still in effect, enforcing that "any details containing…pornography, sex,…sexual abnormalities, [and] homosexuality…should be cut and corrected" (Mountford, 2010). Moreover, China's publishing houses are State-owned and similarly adopt these approaches, rejecting any material with homosexual content (Li, 2008). Although the first Comrade novel was published locally in 2004, books with queer content remain scarce on the Mainland (Cheng, 2004; Li, 2008).[7]

China's first internet connection was established in 1994 and proliferated at an astounding rate, making the online circulation of Comrade narratives possible. Presently, China has the largest population of netizens with approximately 513 million internet users (IWS, 2012; Van de Werff, 2010). Cyberspace offered new possibilities for mass communication and

[7] During my fieldwork, the issue of finding books on queer topics repeatedly came up at *tongzhi* book club discussions. Many *tongzhi* mentioned the difficulty of finding books on homosexuality or other queer topics in local book stores. Books printed in Chinese, particularly editions from Hong Kong or Taiwan, were the hardest to find. Several people told me they get their books when they travel to Hong Kong or ask friends to bring specific titles back for them.

interaction, of which chat rooms and discussion boards became the most popular (Zheng, 2008). Given the precarious social position of Chinese homosexuals in the mid-1990s, gays were drawn to anonymous online communities. Through the internet, Chinese people could circumvent State-controlled media and transcend cultural and national borders, accessing information about homosexuality and communicating in real time without in-person contact (Zhang, 2009). Additionally, 24-year-old Calvin Hong, a banker, describes the *tongzhi* cyberspace as one that provides unique community-specific interactive modes:

> "The *tongzhi* online community is different from other virtual communities...People get very attached through interactions with other *tongzhi* and participation in the community. For example, *tongzhi* have our own private Facebook: Feizan. All *tongzhi* can join and many people use it the same way as a regular Facebook,…but as a social media platform, it is much more intimate than Renren or Weibo[8] that's open to everyone…On Feizan, you can post about things that you don't want your straight friends or colleagues to know, because you can be sure that only *tongzhi* have access. You can ask questions about homosexuality or any other…sensitive issues and get answers or advice from other gays. I think this support network is very important…Before the internet, so many gays bottled up all their anxieties and frustrations as they had nobody to talk to, but now we can conveniently meet like-minded people online...*Tongzhi* also use a variety of applications to get in touch with each other. There are applications that function as a sort of 'GPS' for you to connect with other *tongzhi* nearby who are also using

[8] As Facebook and Twitter are blocked in Mainland China, local Chinese websites Renren and Weibo serve similar functions.

the same application. With all of these unique ways to meet each other that most non-*tongzhi* are completely unaware about, you really do bond with other *tongzhi* around you, even if you never actually meet them in person."

Numerous studies have noted the rapid emergence of a web-based gay community since the 1990s (e.g.: Jiang, 2005; Martin, 2008). By 2005, there were more than 500 Chinese gay websites that provided information, facilitated connections, and established a *tongzhi* community for Chinese homosexuals (Cui, 2009). Fran Martin, a renowned scholar on queer Chinese culture, posits that this online gay subculture is a strategic sphere "to challenge the hegemonies of local regimes of sexual and gender regulation" and "provide imaginative resources for urgent and intensely local struggles" (Martin[a], 2003, p.21). Nonetheless, China's government censorship protocols banning homosexual content extend to the internet. China's Golden Shield censorship project, also labeled "The Great Firewall," and numerous State Regulations concerning pornography transmission explicitly prohibit references to homosexuality online (Zheng, 2008). These repressive policies have restricted the virtual LGBT presence, forcing many *tongzhi* websites to shut down and silencing discussion about homosexuality (Fletcher, 2008).[9]

Thus, *tongzhi* find novel ways to circumvent censorship and share information about sensitive issues through fiction, often using metaphorical language and cultural allusions. Along these lines, Comrade Literature provides insight into gay struggles stemming from discriminatory policies and cultural biases in contemporary China (Jiang, 2005). These narratives

[9] In June 2011, Douban, one of China's more liberal social networking sites and once a popular online platform for the *tongzhi* community, received government pressure to delete all posts with LGBT content. This action underscores the State's repressive stance against discussion of homosexuality on the internet. For more information, see: Jiang, J. (2011). Beijing Gay Community Fights Censorship. *Time*. http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2080443,00.html.

primarily exist online as an informal discursive practice when Chinese netizens write and post stories on *tongzhi* website discussion boards. They frequently contain realistic and even (auto)biographical elements, serving a communicative function that can supersede its aesthetic aspects as an artistic literary product (Cristini, 2005). There are now hundreds and thousands of stories designated as "Comrade Novels" (同志小说) archived on various websites.[10]

A quick search of "*tongzhi wenxue*" on any Chinese search engine will reveal that websites hosting Comrade stories are widespread and it is not unusual for popular *tongzhi* websites to have millions of subscribers. Members of *tongzhi* websites participate in the virtual community by reading, sharing, and writing Comrade stories as well as posting in chat forums. For example, as of November 2012, BoySky (阳光地带) has more than 7 million registered users with an average of 5987 page visits every day. As a prominent Comrade website, Boysky has an archive of more than 20,000 stories, with members posting new stories at an approximate rate of 5-10 per day (2012).

Based on an anonymous survey I posted on the top three Chinese gay websites in September 2012, 84 of 263 respondents (approximately 32%) who indicated that they read homosexual *tongzhi* stories also declared that they were heterosexual (*Survey*, 2012). Furthermore, almost all of the respondents were between the ages of 18 and 25. During my fieldwork, I encountered several people who confirmed a trend of straight university students reading and writing *tongzhi* stories. In fact, the phenomena of heterosexual Chinese women reading male homoerotic fictions has recently become fairly mainstream: the term *funü* (腐女)[11] connotes an avid female fan of *tongzhi* stories. Another colloquial term, *zhitongzhi* (直同志), or

[10] For a list and screenshot of some of these websites, refer to Appendix VI.
[11] The term itself is translates literally to "corrupt woman" or "decayed woman" but culturally denotes "women of the flesh."

"straight *tongzhi*," is also commonly used to refer to individuals who empathize with or enjoy the *tongzhi* subculture (*Notes,* 2012). Whereas more conclusive research and evidence on this development is still needed, the notion that heterosexual Chinese youth constitutes a significant readership of homoerotic *tongzhi* fictions highlights an interesting conundrum. Why would heterosexual college students actively visit gay websites to read stories about homosexuality in a nation where any non-heteronormative behavior is undesirable? What is it about Comrade fictions that draws these students to consume, circulate, and even create their own homoerotic stories? How do *tongzhi* stories influence their readers? To understand this, it is necessary to examine the interaction between fictional representations of homosexuality and government policies affecting the *tongzhi* community in China.

Tongzhi Subculture: Virtual Fiction and Political Reality

The implications behind queer literature are multi-faceted and controversial, but most scholars agree that the influence of globalization on the study of homosexuality cannot be ignored (Kong, 2011). In his book, *Queer Theory/Sociology* (1996), Steven Seidman argues for the integration of literary and social science approaches in queer studies. Academics have since attempted to analyze queer Chinese novels from a social science perspective by referencing key developments in the homosexual movement. For example, Petrus Liu's essay on "*Paper Marriage* and Transnational Queer Politics" uses queer theory to critique the novel in terms of sociopolitical change affecting the perception of homosexuality in China (2008). Additionally, there is a growing body of research on queer issues concerning the development of local and international (sexual) politics in China, where scholars such as Loretta Ho (2010) and Elisabeth Engebretsen (2008) have inquired how Chinese queer novels and identities fit into China's overall sociopolitical context.

From my fieldwork in Beijing, however, existing research does not truly reflect the lives of homosexuals in contemporary China. Physical reality differs greatly from the literary world. In urban China, the gay community is effectively invisible and an enigma to the general public. Gay groups are very low-profile and cannot publicize themselves as organizations associated with homosexuality. Instead, they must register in the guise of HIV/AIDS institutes or social groups (e.g.: book clubs). Even then, they lack government support and stability. The events that I attended were mostly informal gatherings at irregular locations and times primarily organized through private mailing lists. Although many Westerners perceive Beijing to be relatively gay-friendly due to the increasing number of gay bars and clubs, most *tongzhi* I talked to lament that these seemingly liberating semi-public areas were ultimately just "enlarged closets" that homosexuals were still confined to (*Notes*, 2012).

Most gay Chinese resent the misconceptions caused by lack of information and are discouraged that despite China's globalization, gays remain marginalized, unable to fit into rigid State ideals. Many end up forcing themselves into loveless heterosexual marriages and conforming to societal expectations. This lifestyle creates a community of ostracized individuals paranoid of having their homosexual identity exposed in fear of social and political ramifications.

Nonetheless, contemporary attitudes towards gender and sexuality in Chinese society are rapidly changing (Farrer, 2002). At a *tongzhi* book club event, one participant remarked:

> "People are now more receptive to the idea that not everybody is meant to be heterosexual. However, it is frustrating that you can never hear honest discussion about sexuality in the media. I always have to look online to learn more about

> homosexuality and how to cope with being gay in China when it's socially unaccepted to be anything other than heterosexual. However, it is very difficult to find any accurate information in Chinese...I have tried reading books and articles in English, but they are often so foreign and do not speak to the experiences of homosexuals in China…[In contrast,] many Comrade stories are realistic. When reading *tongzhi* stories, I'm not forced to be male or to be straight. I can pick and choose from a variety of stories with characters of different genders and sexualities…What draws me to them is…the idea that, through fiction, I can temporarily forget about who I'm supposed to be to experience different kinds of emotions and love…[Through Comrade stories,] I don't have to always see myself as the heterosexual male, but can explore worlds populated by gays, bisexuals, transsexuals, and lesbians…Although they are fiction, they give me some insight into how I can conduct my own homosexuality…It would be great if everybody read *tongzhi* stories so that there can be more tolerance of homosexuality in China" (Discussion[1], 2012).

This man's perspective highlights not only how *tongzhi* often rely on the internet as a source of information about homosexuality, but also illuminates how Comrade stories provide a voyeuristic lens through which modern Chinese people review their own lives.

How do online Comrade stories relate to the wider framework of social and political power in contemporary China? Drawing upon Plummer's logic, the Comrade storytelling process should be interpreted as one that flows through social and political acts of hierarchy, marginalization, and inequality (Plummer, 1995). As bell hooks remarked: "Oppressed people

resist by identifying themselves as subjects, by defining their reality, shaping their new identity, naming their history, *telling their story*" (1989, p.49, emphasis added). In this view, Comrade stories have potential to inscribe a space for people to challenge an oppressive heterosexual hegemony and affirm non-normative identities. It is problematic, then, that existing works on homosexuality in China do not breach the divide between the humanities and social science approaches. There appears to be a missing link where the interaction between cultural literature and political rhetoric in China has not been sufficiently analyzed and connected.

Scope of Comrade Fiction: Geographic Relevance, Queer Content, and Authorship

The genre of Comrade Literature first emerged in Taiwan and Hong Kong in the mid-1980s, but notable scholarship has since been conducted on homosexuality and queer literature in those areas (e.g.: Martin, 2003[b]; Rofel, 2007). In contrast, Comrade fiction from the PRC has not yet received critical attention, despite the rich history and rapidly changing sociopolitical environment for homosexuality in contemporary China. Therefore, this thesis focuses on Comrade Literature as it has emerged on the Mainland.

Male and female same-sex relations in China have divergent historical backgrounds and contemporary contexts (Gao, 2001). Whereas Comrade stories with lesbian themes exist, they are much fewer in number. Moreover, scholars have noted that while gay men confront a legacy of authoritarian conflict and public scorn, lesbian women were considered negligible and insignificant in the patriarchal familial organization of traditional China (Ruan & Bullough, 1992; Tsai, 1987). Recent studies have indicated that contemporary female *tongzhi* narratives are more aligned with feminist issues and place less emphasis on advocating for the same degree of sexual liberalization exhibited in the male variant (Sang, 2003). As such, this thesis only

considers male *tongzhi* online stories and community in relation to China's particular sociopolitical environment for homosexuality.

A final note about authorship: all Comrade texts discussed were posted online either anonymously or pseudonymously. Chinese netizens customarily use nicknames for all online interactions, but on Comrade websites pseudonyms also preserve anonymity of authors writing about provocative matters, protecting them from legal and social ramifications.

[Chapter 3: Comrade Literature as Protest Mechanism]

Examining Comrade Stories: Frame Theory and Narrative Research

Michel Foucault's (1978) *History of Sexuality* offers a compelling model to interpret how Comrade texts communicate messages about repressive social practices and why the telling of homosexual stories has become so popular in contemporary China. Foucault's repressive hypothesis contends that the intensification of repression leads to "a veritable discursive explosion" (1976, p.17). As the State law confines, limits, or prohibits the discussion and practice of sexuality, that restriction paradoxically provides the discursive juncture for potential subversion of that law. Similarly, as the Chinese government encroached upon citizen's personal lives to expunge homosexuality, Comrade narratives emerged to subvert that prohibition by depicting same-sex relations in modern China. These stories thus protest the Chinese State's repressive regulation of sexuality.

This thesis adapts Lieblich *et al.*'s (1998) categorical-content approach to narrative research. First, common plotlines and literary tropes associated with each narrative frame are categorized. Second, specific Comrade texts are analyzed as they relate to those frames, and further sorted by narrative type. To ascertain representative stories, I searched for key elements of each narrative type to determine trigger phrases, then coded story samples accordingly and identified close fits.[12] As Comrade stories have to circumvent strict internet censorship regulations to remain in circulation and communicate sensitive information, they often deploy metaphorical language and cultural allusions. To accurately interpret the political investment of Comrade texts, a flexible coding scheme and close readings of each story was necessary to navigate these subtleties.

[12] Tabulated in Appendix IX.

Framing theory is used to examine how the central organizing ideas of Comrade stories "[define] and [construct] a political issue or public controversy" to prompt social mobilization (Nelson *et.al* 1997, p.221). Narratives are categorized according to Snow and Benford's (1988) three core frames outlined in "Ideology, Frame Resonance, and Participation Mobilization":

1) The diagnostic frame: problem identification;

2) The prognostic frame: strategic solutions; and

3) The motivational frame: rationale for mobilization.

In this view, diagnostic and prognostic Comrade stories engage in "core framing tasks" for "consensus mobilization," establishing a shared understanding of *tongzhi* issues, whereas motivational stories construct *tongzhi* agency and prompt "action mobilization" (Snow & Benford, 2000, p.615)

After reading more than 100 online stories from five *tongzhi* websites,[13] I identified eight narrative prototypes that capture the body of Comrade fiction. These narrative categories exhibit distinct archetypal plots, characters, and settings to address political issues and affect readers in various ways. Although some stories overlap multiple narrative types and frames, it is possible to analyze them according to dominant themes.

To illustrate the prototypes, I selected eight representative stories based on popularity and influence according to the number of views, shares, and comments.[14] For the stories selected, total number of views over the past year range from 30,000 to 100,000, each with hundreds of comments and shares (e.g.: on a fan's blog). The time frame of 1996-2006 encompasses the development of the genre, as China's first Comrade story was circulated in 1996. Stories posted

[13] Refer to "Websites" under Works Cited for more information.
[14] Statistics are documented in Appendix VIII.

after 2006 were not selected because they would not have been circulating long enough to accumulate and sustain a significant viewership over time.

In sum, all eight selected Comrade stories are categorized according to three core frames and eight narrative types (see Table 1). This narrative typology is neither mutually exclusive nor collectively exhaustive, but it captures defining characteristics of most Comrade stories.

Table 1: Comrade Novels

Title	**Author**[15]	**Year Posted**	**Pages**[16]	**Sub-Genre**[17]	**Dominant Frame(s)**	**Narrative Type(s)**
Beijing Story 《北京故事》	Beijing Comrade	1996	110	Origin Story	Diagnostic	Dystopian Imagery
Huizi 《辉子》	Xiaohe	1999	53	Origin Story	Diagnostic	Concrete Injustice Frame
Two Men, Two Women 《两男两女》	Anonymous	2000	46	Family Life	Diagnostic, Prognostic	Affirming Gay Love
The Illusive Mind 《迷思》	Anonymous	2001	38	Campus Love	Diagnostic, Prognostic	Abstract injustice frame; Communication through Writing
Butterfly Talk: Liang and Zhu's Modern Experience 《蝶话–梁祝的现代真相》.	Dongri Nuanyang	2002	32	Indulgent Desire/ Boy Love	Prognostic, Motivational	Escape through Transformation
The Fortune of My Baby and I 《我和我宝贝的幸福》	Dalang Taosha	2004	45	Family Life	Prognostic, Motivational	Role Model
Exposé of Police Comrade Zheng Xiong 《警同郑雄被暴露过程》	Anonymous	2006	29	Military Action	Diagnostic, Prognostic, Motivational	Breaking down stereotypes; Escape through Transformation
Why I Uphold Being GAY 《我为什么坚持做 GAY》	Xiaomanyao	2006	15	Campus Love	Motivational	Role Model

[15] Almost all Comrade stories are published pseudonymously or anonymously.
[16] Page lengths when printed on A4 with 12 pt. font size in Mandarin Chinese.
[17] Sub-genres are derived from how archival *tongzhi* websites sort each title. For more information, refer to Appendix VII.

I. The Diagnostic Frame: Problem Identification and Attributions

Diagnostic stories identify the "source(s) of causality, blame, and…culpable agents," highlighting aspects of social or political life as problematic and in need of attention (Snow & Benford, 2000, p.616). Table 2 summarizes three diagnostic Comrade narrative types.

Table 2: Diagnostic Frame Narrative Types[18]

Narrative Type	Summary
Dystopian Imagery	• Exposes paradox of repressive Chinese regime vs. Western-influenced "opening up" reforms; criticizes outdated State control oppressing homosexuals. • Provokes readers to see injustices perpetuated by State encroachment upon Chinese citizens' private lives; stories are typically set in the 1980s.
Material Injustice	• The antagonists (typically violent military police or abusive parental figures) cause harm to protagonists (innocent homosexuals). Narrative of "good" victim vs. "evil" oppressor. • Emphasizes how traditional authorial figures have abused their power.
Abstract Injustice	• Homosexual characters are helpless against oppressive and omnipresent forces (alluding to the government's ubiquitous social control). Narrative of innocent victim estranged by discriminatory forces. • Protests sociopolitical suppression of Chinese homosexuals.

Narrative 1: Dystopian Imagery

"Dystopian Imagery" narratives criticize the Chinese government for neglecting civil society, often illustrating the repressed homosexual condition along with broader issues of economic and political injustice in contemporary China. This narrative is most frequently used for Comrade novels set in the 1980s when China underwent sweeping socioeconomic transformations that conflicted with the authoritarian political regime. The 1983 "Strike-Hard" campaign enforced the "hooliganism" law (流氓罪 *liumangzui)*as part of a police crackdown on activities the State deemed politically undesirable. Extra-marital affairs, especially homosexual

[18] More detailed explanations of content analysis in Appendix IX.

behaviors, were persecuted as capital crime. Once convicted of "hooliganism," homosexuals were sentenced to the death penalty or sent to "reform through education and labor" camps for indefinite periods (Yin, 2002).[19] These severe legal sanctions targeting homosexuals promoted homophobia in Chinese society during this period, where anyone exposed as homosexual faced extreme social prejudice (Li, 2006).

This narrative type comprises dystopian stories that allude to China's socialist past to expose economic disparity and political power imbalances, criticizing the Party-State's authoritarian control. Many early Comrade stories are "Dystopian Imagery" narratives as they were circulated before strict internet censorship laws banning references to politically controversial events, such as the Tiananmen Square Massacre, were enacted. These stories tend to be improbable but sentimental love stories that lead to catastrophic endings, where gay lovers are either separated by death or other cruel tricks of fate. The plot revolves around an individual who is exposed as homosexual in a paradoxical environment pervaded by Western ideology and rapid socioeconomic changes, yet governed by an anachronistic regime. The gay individual struggles to reconcile traditional State-enforced social ideals with his homosexuality. The story's turning point will be the alienated individual's attempt to deviate from the norm, subvert the encroachment of State control into his private life, and assert his homosexual identity. However, these actions make him vulnerable to societal, economic, and legal ramifications. His life spirals downwards as he encounters misfortunes until meeting a tragic fate, typically a sudden death.

An iconic example of a narrative that depicts China's revolutionary past to problematize China's sociopolitical changes is *Beijing Story* (1996).[20] As the first publicly available gay love story in China published and circulated online, *Beijing Story* pioneered the writing of illicit

[19] For a further discussion of hooliganism and homosexuality see Dutton 1998: 62-72.
[20] Text for all stories analyzed were found online (refer to works cited). Copies stored by investigator.

fiction on the Chinese internet. Set in 1988, it is a tragic love story of Lanyu, a poor college student from rural backgrounds, and Handong, a wealthy businessman and the "son of a high-ranking government official" (1).[21] When Lanyu is short of money, he prostitutes himself and Handong happened to be his first customer and sexual encounter. The men become lovers, but while Lanyu treats the relationship as a life-changing commitment, Handong considers it a casual diversion. The older man takes good care of the younger boy by showing affection in a material way, but does not get emotionally involved and repeatedly warns Lanyu "not to be too serious"(5).

After a year of secretly living together, Handong begins to fear that his homosexual affair would become public knowledge and ruin his reputation. He breaks up with Lanyu and arranges his marriage to convince himself that he is a "normal man" (6). Concurrently, Lanyu participates in the Tiananmen Square protests and is expelled from school for engaging in "immoral activities" when he is charged for being a male prostitute (7). Unlike Handong, Lanyu refuses to conform to heterosexuality by dating women, but his life becomes destitute as he endures poor conditions as a construction worker to make ends meet. After several dramatic twists, in which Handong gets a divorce and is imprisoned for his company's illegal activities, both men finally acknowledge that they are gay and in love with each other. Just when it appears that they have overcome all obstacles in their relationship and can be together, Lanyu dies suddenly in a car accident.

The author's language is straightforward and colloquial, consisting of long dialogues and sexual accounts. In the mid-1990s when *Beijing Story* (1996) first appeared, these explicit scenes alone would have been controversial as the subject of sex was rarely publicly discussed.

[21] As the texts analyzed are only available in the Chinese, all translations are the author's own. Additionally, as these online novels are not paginated, all citations refer to the relevant chapters.

Subsequently, the socially provocative theme of homosexuality made this Comrade novel even more shocking. The overt description of the Chinese policemen's violence towards university students during the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989, which occurs at the turning point in the story, is particularly contentious. On the evening that Chinese soldiers violently end the demonstrations, Lanyu is there with other students. A worried Handong finds him in the crowd, covered with the blood of another student who was shot.[22]

Although the author does not make any political statements and appears to use the event to illustrate the intensity of Handong's feelings for Lanyu, the scene illustrates an exceptionally graphic image of the Chinese military's violent action. In addition to allusions to Chairman Mao and his failed revolutionary vision, depictions of the corruption of money and government power characterize the novel as a dystopian narrative critical of Chinese society and politics. Recurring references to how "money can make people crazy" criticize scandals and frauds in China's business and political world (7). For example, Lanyu discloses how his father "was among the first intellectuals who did business when the economic reforms started" but started cheating on his mother once he became rich. Consequently, his mother committed suicide proclaiming that "she hated money and cursed how money could turn people into cold-hearted and ruthless animals" (8).

Characterizations of Handong's rich business partners are also critical of government corruption:

> "Wang was only in his early twenties but already rotten to the core. This man was evil. He has a grandfather with connections reaching the top, a father who is a high-ranking military official, and a stinking rich older brother. With these people

[22] See Appendix for translated excerpt.

> behind him, he has done just about everything evil and getting away with it. Nonetheless, he is still one of my biggest clients and I have to cater to his whims" (12).

Considering that any references to the Tiananmen protests or depictions of government corruption are still censored in China, these scenes infuse *Beijing Story* (1996) with political overtones. Other Comrade stories of this narrative type similarly project dystopian views of China's socialist history and business or government exploitation. The journalistic style description of the Tiananmen massacre reveals how issues of gender and sexuality are enmeshed in politics, but also highlights the unreliability of conventional information sources. Nowadays, instead of guns and massacre, technology is the most effective way to communicate and produce knowledge about the inadequacies of China's government. Accordingly, Comrade stories take the form of fiction mediated through the internet – a mode that is public and accessible for all to consume.

Comrade stories should therefore not be overlooked as mere fanciful homoerotic love stories, but are in a way a tableau of China's tumultuous recent history (Wang, 2005). They present straightforward, shocking content to break through the confines of an authoritative regime. There is, after all, nothing elusive, nothing subtle, and nothing profound, about a government gunning down its own people. Several scholars have remarked that unrestrained homoerotic and violent content functions to expose the contradictions in China's shifting sociopolitical structure, drawing attention to the specific meaning of homosexuality in this context (Kang, 2008; Liu, 2008). By presenting melodramatic plots featuring main characters that are pure victims and harmed through no fault of their own, these stories galvanize people to

recognize the oppression prescribed by the Chinese government. As fiction, they expose the blemished reality of China's idealistic "opening up" reforms and portray how civilians – homosexual and heterosexual alike – are innocent sufferers of State exploitation.

Narrative 2: Material Injustice

Many diagnostic gay narratives depict an injustice frame, where victims of legal and societal prejudice are identified and stories amplify their victimization (Valocchi, 2005). Even in the absence of legal sanctions and police arrest, homosexuals in China face administrative and Party disciplinary action stemming from societal and political prejudice. This method of social control is unique to the Chinese government (Chen, 2002). In the U.S., for example, actual cases of prosecution are rare and homosexual activities are not subject to sanctions imposed by governmental authorities or employers. At most, they might face employment discrimination, an issue that has prompted the LGBT community to demand equal opportunities (Li, 2009). In China, however, administrative sanctions have no solid legal foundation, but are a serious threat to male homosexuals. Once exposed as homosexual, individuals face extreme difficulties in gaining employment or sustaining a good career (Pan 2006). Moreover, Chinese homosexuals fear that others will despise them as abnormal, immoral, or a repulsive social phenomenon (Li, 2005; *Notes, 2012*).

The virtue of filial piety (*xiao* 孝) is central to the traditional Chinese patrilinear family model and colors the societal view of homosexuality in modern China. Filiality obligates children, once they are economically independent, to support their parents emotionally and financially. Additionally, male children are expected to produce sons to transmit the paternal surname (Laoou, 2011). Filial piety still exerts significant influence in contemporary China,

burdening homosexual children. As Gu Min-Lun (1995) summarizes, *xiao* is a contract where "any deviation from these expectations that break the rules of behavior specified…is 'unfilial' and 'the greatest offence,'" and unfortunately, "being homosexual" is the most "depraved" way of breaking this contract (qtd. in Li, 2008, p.4). After all, same-sex behavior precludes reproduction and conflicts with the traditional hopes and expectations of Chinese parents. Filial piety is thus a key factor why Chinese homosexuals fear expressing their sexual identity. With great family and societal pressure for male children to marry, have children, and support their families with a respectable career, homosexuals are rejected even by their close friends and family. This places severe constraints on the lives of male homosexuals, where pressure to conform to heterosexuality and abandon same-sex inclinations alienates them from the support of other homosexuals.

"Material Injustice" stories highlight the conflict homosexuals face as they struggle to reconcile their homosexuality with the compulsion to conform to the State-enforced Chinese heterosexual ideal. By presenting characters that embody inequitable State-citizen relations, dramatized through forlorn parent-child relationships, these stories exemplify the injustice of such pressures. The main character typically has an unfortunate encounter with the military police and is publicly shamed by authorities. The plot unravels around the character's life spiraling downwards as he confronts various discriminatory practices that are the products of sociopolitical narrow-mindedness in contemporary China. The stigmatized individual is ostracized from family and friends, unable to attain an education or employment, and leads an increasingly dejected lifestyle. As such, the imagery in these stories portray how administrative sanctions stemming from prejudice short-circuits the secure, fulfilling life that homosexual victims seek to establish.

Huizi (1999) exhibits key elements of a "Material Injustice" narrative; it tells the story of Xiaoyang and Huizi, two boys who grow up together in the traditional courtyard houses of downtown Beijing. The first sentence of the story establishes Huizi as the victimized character, stating that "Huizi is Li Zhanghui's nickname, but 'Hooligan' is the name that everybody condemned him with" (1). Although Huizi is only seven months older, Xiaoyang considers him an ideal older brother who "never hit [him], never cursed, and always protected [him] from bullies" (1) Huizi is introduced in the story as good looking, lively, and a promising student, scoring No. 2 in their middle school exams whereas Xiaoyang came in at No. 32. After school one day, Huizi gets involved in a group fight where someone is killed, and even though Huizi himself did not strike the victim, he is labeled a "hooligan" and sentenced to spend two years in a re-education labor camp. When Huizi comes out, his criminal record bars him from returning to school, and he starts working as Xiaoyang prepares for university entrance exams. During this time, Xiaoyang discovers his love for Huizi, but never openly discusses his feelings. He is hurt when Huizi dates women to dispel suspicions about his homosexuality, lamenting that "Huizi has hit rock bottom, fully turning into a hooligan" and decides to study at a university in faraway Shanghai (2).

In university, Xiaoyang struggles with what he considers to be "unhealthy" homosexual feelings (4). He forces himself to suppress homosexual thoughts and conform to heterosexual expectations, and the alienation during this process is revealed through Xiaoyang's stream of consciousness:

> "I wanted to overcome my mental weakness and get rid of those immoral, absurd thoughts. When I look in the mirror, all sorts of feelings come up: I saw sadness

> for being different, self-pity for my loneliness, helplessness because I had no other choice than to choose solitude, but still pride for being brave enough to make the choice to…be 'normal'" (6).

After graduating, Xiaoyang gets married, and Huizi attends the wedding to wish the couple good fortune. Huizi also tells Xiaoyang about his homosexual relationship with another boy, Xiaowei. After the wedding, Xiaoyang moves to a small town with his wife and they have a son. One day, he receives a letter from his parents informing him that Huizi had been sent back to prison. Upon returning to Beijing, Xiaoyang learns that Huizi was reported and imprisoned for his homosexuality on the grounds of "indecent behavior" (8).

Throughout the novel, there are numerous references to how their people regard Huizi as a social outcast – a "hooligan beyond hooliganism" (4). Huizi's criminal record destroyed any hopes for a bright future, and Huizi's parents take his homosexuality as yet another sign he has gone beyond redemption, disowning him as their son. Xiaoyang's parents also repeatedly urge the narrator to break off contact with Huizi:

> "Even though you are from the same neighborhood, people in society will establish social rank and status. You and Huizi are no longer at the same social level. Even if you do not care, others will care. You and Huizi are not equals anymore and you cannot continue your friendship with him" (5).

Nonetheless, when Xiaoyang visits Huizi in prison, he breaks down when Huizi emerges in a pitiful state. Xiaoyang realizes that Huizi had always loved him, but wanted to protect him from

suffering the same prejudices and estrangement he does. The parallelism between Huizi and Xiaoyang is emphasized when Xiaoyang reflects that "Huizi and [he] grew up together in the same neighborhood and had similar childhoods, but [their] adult lives could not be more different" (6). The story ends with Xiaoyang returning home and gazing at Huizi's wedding present to him – a golden ring with the character for "fortune" engraved on it. Xiaoyang ponders how Huizi "sacrificed his own happiness to give [him] fortune," enabling him to achieve a fulfilling life according to social standards, but that he "feels empty inside" (8). With this ending, readers are left with the question of whether Xiaoyang actually achieved happiness by suppressing his homosexual love and living a socially respectable life instead.

Huizi (1999) accentuates the dilemma of pursuing personal happiness versus conforming to social expectations facing homosexuals in contemporary China. Huizi is a victim of re-education labor and his story exposes the personal tragedies that ensue from arbitrary administrative sanctions. A promising middle school student's life is changed in the space of one evening after an unfortunate decision putting him in a bad place, at a bad time. From that evening onwards, he was labeled a "hooligan" and treated as a completely different person without hope of becoming a respectable citizen again. Huizi's unjustified suffering and destitute fate underscores the unfair disciplinary action oppressing male homosexuals in China. Xiaoyang's characterization also highlights the extent to which homosexuals in China fear social condemnation, revealing how legal sanctions function to repress sexuality.

"Material Injustice" stories criticize China's imposition of arbitrary administrative penalties against non-normative behaviors, denying homosexuals legal protection and depriving them of academic or employment opportunities. These stories expose that official decriminalization in 1997 was not accompanied by a shift in official thinking on LGBT issues.

Huizi (1999) presents readers with a tragic anecdote of how a promising young boy was condemned by unjustified legal sanctions to suppress homosexuality; Huizi's homosexual behavior did not cause anyone harm, but prejudice resulted in him being criminalized nonetheless. Moreover, social control at the local level (e.g.: corrupt policing teams and neighborhood discrimination) further proscribes the ability for people to lead fulfilling lives once their homosexual identity is exposed.

It was not until 2001 in the third version of the Chinese Psychiatric Disorder and Classification Standards (中国精神障碍分类与诊断标准 - 第三版) that the Chinese Psychiatric Association (中华精神科学会) officially removed homosexuality from its list of mental disorders. However, homosexuality is still perceived as abnormal and police imprison gays using laws for criminal sexual activity such as rape (强奸 *qiangjian*) and prostitution (卖淫 *maiyin*). No provisions against discrimination on the basis of sexuality exist in the Chinese educational system or Labor Law (Sanders, 2006). Hence, anecdotal evidence indicates that extortion of LGBT people is often contingent upon threats to reveal a person's sexuality to their family, employer, or colleagues (Li, 1998). According to 24-year-old consultant, Christopher Wong:

> "My parents and colleagues don't know about my homosexuality. It is very hard to keep it a secret, though. When you are outside, especially when meeting your boyfriend, it is always possible that other people will discover you, including the police. I know a lot of my friends will…plead [policemen] not to disclose our secret to others. Personally, my greatest fear is that my family will find out. They are the ones I care about the most, and whom I cannot run away from. I still

> remember the day I was discovered by a policeman in X Park.[23] He asked me for my identification cards and took me to the Public Security office. He threatened me saying that if I did not cooperate he would notify my family and employer. At the office, more than ten different officers…interrogat[ed] me. They asked me such personal and demeaning questions about my sexual behavior…One even asked me to demonstrate what homosexuals do…When I came out, I was so humiliated...However, the police kept their word and did not notify anyone. So I guess it was all worth it in the end."

Similar stories circulate within the male *tongzhi* community about the injustice they experience as a result of their lack of legal protection, despite the fact that homosexuality is ostensibly decriminalized.

Accordingly, "Material Injustice" narratives present victimized characters as they struggle with dilemmas that readers face in their own daily lives and with which they can identify. Stories such as *Huizi* raise questions about an authoritarian government's attempts to curb sexual freedom and limit privacy in a society where rapid economic growth and the internet's ubiquity have upended traditional values. As discussed before, conservative thinking about marriage and reproduction propagated by the Chinese government is a major obstacle keeping Chinese homosexuals from expressing their sexuality, and is a central theme for many Comrade stories. "Material Injustice" stories thus focus on the painful reality gays confront in recognizing their homosexuality, criticizing the State-propagated prejudice against homosexuality in Chinese society and emphasizing that this injustice cannot be ignored.

[23] In China, as gay people often do not disclose their homosexuality to their families, they will meet in public areas. Certain parks are particularly well-known as gay cruising areas, and police often detain homosexuals there on the grounds of enforcing anti-prostitution laws.

Narrative 3: Abstract Injustice

"Abstract Injustice" narratives depict the subjective account of an individual grappling with his same-sex desires and overbearing sociopolitical pressures. These narratives reveal an individual's thought process – one preoccupied by disease, darkness, death, or other ominous but intangible and seemingly inescapable forces. These narratives are also distinguished by self-reflective dreams or flashbacks.

A good example of a Comrade "Abstract Injustice" narrative is *The Illusive Mind* (2001), where the protagonist's perspective unfolds through dreamlike narratives characterized by a disjointed flow of emotions. The scope of experience is restricted to the protagonist's private life as he narrates capricious feelings of adolescent restlessness. Nonetheless, the novel is striking in its juxtaposition of a university student's mundane everyday life with the emotional conflict of making a life-changing decision concerning sexual identity. Furthermore, the use of anonymous, vague characters denoted by a single, capitalized Romanized letter (X for female and Z for male) deploys a storytelling technique that instructs readers to concentrate on the personal journey of the unnamed narrator.

The Illusive Mind (2001) is about two boys, the unnamed narrator and Z, who have known each other since secondary school and are now living in the same city where they attend different – "A" and "B" – universities (1). Early in the story, readers learn of the protagonist's fondness of the sea and his emotional attachment to Z, even though for the first few chapters there is no indication that their relationship will be anything more than friendship. One night, they fall asleep together after staying up late recollecting shared memories in the dark. In the morning, Z suddenly confesses that he is in love with the narrator, but the narrator is confused and asks for some time to think (6). The narrator goes to the seaside to ponder his situation, and

runs into X as she is struggling with her own emotions after a fight with her boyfriend (7). The rest of the story articulates the narrator's thought process as he reflects on his feelings: on how to understand and express his feelings to Z, or if he should pursue a relationship with X, who is also attracted to him.

During several episodes of self-conscious reflections, the narrator describes a pervasive darkness, combined with thoughts of suicide and sickness, to convey tormented feelings of being silenced:

> "In the darkness of the night pressing down on me, I had a dream. I dreamt I transformed into a huge bird, but a mute bird that could not make sound, flying a difficult path over an endless rainforest. Below me is a land of flowing brightness, but I am hopelessly stuck in and surrounded by a pitch black fog. My wing is also injured, and with every flap, thick black blood oozes from my wound. The oppressive heat attacks me and my wound, and my body is soaked in sweat. I believe that I am flying towards the cool North, but no matter how hard I try, I cannot move. Panicking, I try to call out for help, but no matter what, my throat feels like it has been stuffed with cotton balls, and I can never make a sound" (3).

Throughout the story, the narrator has several of these dreams, after which he harangues himself over his inability to articulate his feelings for Z due to the homosexual nature their love. He fixates on whether he is sick, alluding to China's official pathological label of homosexuality.

Haunted by thoughts of suicide, the narrator repeatedly describes ominous seascapes with the potential to drown him. When the author is heartbroken with the sudden revelation

that Z's love confession was only a dream, he stands precariously at the edge of a cliff, staring out at the sea:

> "This everlasting and undying loneliness is like being a drop of water swallowed up by the savage desert, rendering my footsteps and life journey nonexistent. I run for my life, run to the hellhole that is in my own head. Every time I lift my head, there is no sunlight and warmth, only darkness and a chill in my heart…With the rising tide, waves ferociously surge higher and higher. The beach silently gives in to this assault and slowly shrivels…The waves roll incessantly, crashing onto the shore…I close my eyes, and let the darkness of the sea wash over me and take me with it" (9).

The story ends at this wavering moment, and we do not learn anything further about what becomes of the narrator, Z, or X. The series of silences in *The Illusive Mind* (2001) is symptomatic of the silenced existence of homosexuality that gays confront in reality. By depicting the narrator's feelings of being silenced, the novel subverts censorship to criticize the suppression of same-sex relations. The portrayal of the silence that exists creates a space where *tongzhi* can form solidarity and affirm the legitimacy of homosexuality.

In general, "Abstract Injustice" stories adopt this subjective and ambiguous writing style – one defined by modern Chinese literature scholars as a reflection of the "clear characteristics of youth living in the age of globalization" influenced by the internet's mass culture (Kong, 2004, p.5). Additionally, these stories display "a mixture of rebellion and conformity" to place "an emphasis on self" in decision making (Zhang & Chao, 2007, p.16). Silence is used thematically

to highlight ways in which public discourse has facilitated sexual oppression. Throughout Chinese history, Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism have valued silence as a sacred form of communication (Kenney, 2011). With China's distinctive social control, scholars have noted that "silence can serve the purpose of resistance for those who are subordinated or excluded from power relationships" (Shaw, 1996, p.195).

In contemporary China, the price of assimilation into heteronormativity for homosexuals has been enforced silence. However, even breaking such silence has effected few changes in the sociopolitical landscape for *tongzhi* on the Mainland. Speech is neither guaranteed nor necessarily liberating: anecdotal evidence suggests many instances of homosexuals tracked down and detained after being reported to local police, after which they face harassment and blackmail (Li, 1992; 1998; 2006). These incidents are hardly reported and there is scarce written corroboration, but personal narratives indicate that homosexuals are forced to pay bribes to the police to prevent the disclosure of their sexuality (Cai, 2000; *Notes*, 2012). Although the Chinese Police Law forbids this behavior, local security forces have extensive autonomy and victims are unlikely to complain of corruption to the central authorities (Gong, 2003).[24] The inaugural 2009 Shanghai Pride Parade is a case in point highlighting how speech can intensify suppression: the festival was widely publicized, but the government intervened to shut down numerous events. In the months following the parade, policing campaigns targeting homosexuals increased, where the number of anti-prostitution arrests made in public parks doubled (Ma, 2011). Although this data is not conclusive, it suggests that speaking out about homosexuality in China can be oppressive rather than liberating due to administrative backlash.

[24] Article 22(5-6) of the Police Law (和国警察法中华人民共) states that the police may not illegally restrict others' freedom (非法剥夺、限制他人身自由) nor engage in blackmail (敲诈勒索).

Therefore, the homosexual community developed alternative strategies of resistance. Silence itself becomes a tactic of such resistance, operating both as a form of discourse and a will to "unsay," and is not to be mistaken as a passive submission to authoritarian control (Shaw, 1996). As a mode of protest, silence is non-confrontational, but can transmit a message of refusal. Silence is thus commonly featured in Comrade Literature as a method to question marginalized experiences, histories, and memories through language and an absence of language.

"Abstract Injustice" stories emerged after the Chinese government enforced strict internet censorship laws, curbing the freedom of the online *tongzhi* community. In December 1999, Section Five of China's Computer Information Network and Internet Security, Protection, and Management Regulations prohibited individuals from using the internet to "create, retrieve, or transmit…sexually suggestive materials" or "any information injurious to the reputation of the State" (Abbott, 2004, p.57). State Council Order No. 292 promulgated in September 2000 enforced content restrictions prohibiting China-based websites from distributing overseas media without approval from the State Council Information Agency. Only "licensed print publishers" dissociated from unconventional matters could deliver news online.[25] Any persons violating these regulations were punished with hefty fines and possible detention (Davis, 2005).

In 2002, the Chinese State Order Council promulgated internet content restrictions and initiated the Golden Shield project, an extensive censorship system also dubbed "The Great Firewall" (Zheng, 2008). Furthermore, "Self-Discipline Regulations" to "suppress the spread of obscene (淫秽 *yinhui*)…[and] pornographic (色情 *seqing*) information" were enforced (China Online, 2003, p.1). Any descriptions of sexuality, in general, or homoeroticism, in particular, were considered "content with an aim to provoke people's sexual desire but [with] no artistic or

[25] It is almost impossible for any LGBT-related organizations to acquire a publishing license. For more information, see: "CECC: Freedom of Expression – Laws and Regulations" at http://www.cecc.gov/pages/virtualAcad/exp/explaws.php.

scientific value…caus[ing] the degeneration and perversion of common people" (China Online, 2003, p.2). In 2004, the Regulation on the Transmission of Pornography and Obscene Information Online issued by the Internet Society of China defined homosexuality as an "abnormal and perverse sexuality" to be strictly banned (ISC, 2012).[26] The recent proposal to fit all computers in China with the "Green Dam" (绿色上网过滤软件) censorship software to block any website containing the word "gay" has also challenged the viability of an online LGBT presence (Fletcher, 2008).

Under these laws, *tongzhi* websites have been shut down and Comrade stories with sexual content are censored or deleted without warning (Davis, 2005). That said, one may wonder how *tongzhi* fictions can still be considered "homoerotic" without homosexual or erotic content. Though Comrade stories circulated after censorship came into effect lacked explicit sexual descriptions, authors used metaphorical language and cultural allusions to circumvent being banned yet portray provocative imagery. In *The Illusive Mind* (2001), sensual content is manifest in the rich vocabulary used to describe the colors, shapes, and sounds of seascapes. Furthermore, frequent references to water in the form of rain, waves, and sweat soaks the narrative in a constant wetness that invokes erotic emotions.[27]

Traditional Chinese literature used water to symbolize desire, and the average Chinese reader will recognize that the entire text of *The Illusive Mind* (2001) is saturated with sexual overtones and an overflow of sensual imagery.[28] This metaphor originates from the famous Ming dynasty Chinese philosopher when he describes the mind to be

[26] Full text of law accessible at: http://www.isc.org.cn/ShowArticle.php?id=6486. Excerpt in Appendix.
[27] On this point, it is interesting to note that in China, *gaochao* (高潮), a term that literally indicates water at high tide, also denotes sexual climax in colloquial speech.
[28] See Appendix for a translated excerpt.

like water: its natural state is comparable to tranquil water, sex (性 *xing*) is the principle of water, feelings (情 *qing*) cause the water to flow, and desire (欲 *yu*) is water animated by waves that can begin to flood (滥 *lan*) (Stone, 2003, p.49). Water is also *yin* (阴) in the Chinese conception of a *yin-yang* world balance, where flowing water can symbolize purification and regeneration or overwhelming sexual passion. In particular, vigorously moving water (e.g.: incessant rain and breaking waves) alludes to sexual climax, but also emphasizes the destructive power of water (and desire) to envelope and destroy. Imbued with sexual meaning, water is still used discreetly in modern Chinese texts, particularly poetry, to refer to erotic passion (Huang, 2001, p.28).

Literal or figurative, descriptions of water have also been appropriated as a metaphor of despair, calling attention to problems embedded in Chinese modernity. A paradoxical moral and political situation is exposed where water no longer purifies, but suffocates, expressing the shifting tensions in Chinese society (Liao 2007). Applied to Comrade Literature, water is a powerful symbol alluding to the nature of sexual desire, highlighting the sociopolitical apprehension associated with homosexuality.

After an early appreciation of the internet as a free publishing platform to voice opinions overlooked by conventional media, the government's strict censorship and erasure of any content considered unfavorable engendered criticism from many *tongzhi* writers. As such, Comrade novels that appeared during this period, including *The Illusive Mind* (2001), address issues concerning freedom of expression in relation to contemporary China's sociopolitical development. These narratives allow readers to see themselves as victims and recognize the violation of their rights by presenting an individual's subjective experience silently grappling with his emotions. They provoke people to revise their perception on the suppression of homosexuality, seeing it no longer as misfortune and immutable, but as an injustice and mutable.

II. The Prognostic Frame: Proposed Solutions to Diagnosed Problems

Prognostic stories build upon the diagnostic frame to "[propose] solution[s] to the problem…and strategies for…action mobilization" (Snow & Benford 2000, p.616). In addition to identifying problems and attributing culpability, these stories suggest the tactics people should pursue. Diagnostic and prognostic stories often overlap as both seek to mobilize consensus. Table 3 summarizes three prognostic Comrade narrative types.

Table 3: Prognostic Frame Narrative Types

Narrative Type	Summary
Breaking Down Stereotypes	• Address negative assumptions about homosexuality, exposing them as unsubstantiated. • Stories present homosexuals as good people, emphasizing that homosexuality is as legitimate as heterosexuality.
Affirming Gay Love	• Problematizes how homosexuals conform to the State-enforced heterosexual norm. • Emphasizes the necessity of affirming homosexual identity for sociopolitical development.
Communication through Writing	• Stresses that homosexuals cannot remain silent about their struggles and that awareness must be raised through writing about the gay experience to achieve sociopolitical progress.

Narrative 4: Breaking Down Stereotypes

Comrade Literature is significant for Chinese homosexuals because it reflects the harsh reality that they face and enables them to present homosexuality to a wider Chinese community. "Breaking Down Stereotypes" narratives challenge the stigma attached to homosexuality perpetuated by China's public rhetoric. In 1999, a Beijing People's Court Judge declared homosexuality "abnormal and unacceptable to Chinese people" in a case concerning a gay couple operating a brothel (IGLHRC). This landmark decision influenced the public view towards homosexuality, reinforced by statements from government officials. For example,

China's Deputy Secretary for Home Affairs in 2000 made public declarations imposing that the "majority of Chinese are against gay rights laws" (SCMP).[29] Recently, scholars such as Ho (2010) published ethnological research revealing that *tongzhi* activists in China – specifically operators of gay-oriented websites that aim to increase awareness about homosexuality – "all think that it is vital to make use of cyberspace as a productive site to formulate objective (*keguan*) social perceptions of same-sex experience in China" (p.104). Online Comrade stories thus play a key role in challenging misinformed labels of homosexuals.

In my own fieldwork, interviewees comment that the government's long-standing history of official and unofficial proscription of homosexuality shape misperceptions, hindering LGBT activism. As Zhou Ban, 22-year-old university student, remarked:

> "The main difficulty homosexuals [in China] face is not that people will accuse you of…criminal 'hooligan' behavior, but rather that people will despise you in their hearts for being abnormal, immoral, [and] vile…partly because the government used to say so…Even if many say that they do not mind homosexuality, once confronted with gays within their circle of friends, family, or community, their perspectives inevitably change. This social discrimination is much more powerful than that of legal prohibition. Homosexuality is neither a crime…nor a pathological abnormality; it is merely a lifestyle choice. A homosexual cannot be forced to become straight the same way that a heterosexual

[29] The article titled "Majority against gay rights law" (December 13, 2000) in the South China Morning Post quoted the Deputy Secretary making the statement: "It is not the right time to introduce a law banning discrimination against homosexuals, due to a lack of majority support… Concerned groups have called for the legislation to be brought in, but the community did not support an anti-discrimination law on sexual orientation during a consultation exercise carried out back in 1996, and it is true that even now, the majority of Chinese are against gay rights laws… The government cannot impose any social values on the public [to change such views]." For the full article, see: http://www.scmp.com/news/asia/article/1094200/majority-against-gay-rights-law.

> cannot be forced to turn gay. If there is one thing I wish for, it is that society will be more tolerant…[and give us] the freedom to conduct our personal lives."

Many Comrade stories focus on the intolerant attitudes towards homosexuality in Chinese society (Chou, 1996). "Breaking Down Stereotypes" stories are aligned with "Dystopian Imagery" narratives that depict homosexuals victimized by prejudice. However, this category of prognostic stories further suggest tackling discrimination by revealing same-sex relations as healthy, positive, and ideal. These narratives portray the thoughts or behaviors of characters as they encounter stereotypical acts of "hooligan" homosexuality. For example, stories might describe sensationalized scenes of homosexuals taking drugs or spreading HIV/AIDS through unsafe sex in public toilets. These scenes are juxtaposed with portrayals of good-natured, humble, and hardworking gay men who are simply trying to make a living. The act of wearing a mask and the subsequent process of unmasking is a common trope in these tales. With regard to homosexual stereotypes, the mask effectively symbolizes how gays conceal their sexuality – a fundamental part of their self-identity. Along these lines, unmasking signals that homosexuals should not hide and need to dispel public misperceptions by increasing awareness.

Exposé of Police Comrade Zheng Xiong (2006) is a representative story that uses an extended mask metaphor to dismantle demeaning stereotypes of homosexuals, juxtaposing "immoral hooligan" characters with a gay individual's real-life experience. The story revolves around Zheng, a 27-year-old "devoted member of the police force," and his encounters with homosexuals when a "faceless higher-up authority" orders the police to crack down on "immoral, indecent behavior that disrupts the public order" (1). The story begins with Zheng investigating a suicide report where a young man overdosed on drugs. This scene is striking as

the boy had dressed in full drag – complete with heavy makeup, jewelry, and feminine clothing – prior to taking his own life. A few days later, Zheng is involved with a police raid at a local bar, arresting several gay men who are then subjected to harsh interrogations about their sexual behaviors at the police station.

Though primarily told in third-person, the narrative is punctuated by Zheng's reflections on the nature of homosexuality and the credibility behind derogatory stereotypes, underscored by recurring images of homosexuals as "rabbits." In ancient China, "rabbits" commonly alluded to same-sex attracted people. Notwithstanding the uncertainty of precise origins, one hypothesis contends that the homoerotic connotation of "rabbit" derives from Chinese folklore (Szonyi, 1998).[30] Another postulates that pre-modern Chinese society believed male rabbits mated with other males, and because a term for same-sex practices did not exist, people invoked rabbit imagery to represent it instead (Zhang, 2001). This term is still used in China today as a pejorative name for homosexuals. Zheng debates the meaning of labeling homosexuals as "rabbits," alluding to how the State prosecutes gays the same way a poacher hunts and kills rabbits and depicts how homosexuals are dehumanized in the public perception.

The story's turning point occurs when Zheng leads a campaign against "hooligan activities" and cracks down on a homosocial event. The event is fully narrated through Zheng's perspective:

> "They told us to go catch 'hooligans,' go catch 'rabbits'…It seems they're not even considered humans anymore, but only 'rabbits,' and always only 'rabbits,' 'rabbits,' 'rabbits,'…After everyone was chased out of the apartment, more than

[30] In Chinese folklore, Tu'Er Shen, whose name literally translates as the "rabbit deity," managed the love and sex in male-male relationships.

> ten young men were arrested and forced to stand in line in the hallway. An officer was yelling at them, threatening them to confess their involvement with 'hooligan' behavior. When I got closer, I saw that all of the men standing had been forced to drop their pants. I could see every one of their bare backsides" (2).

Although Zheng is married, he has extramarital homosexual relations, and realizes that his gay lover, Song Bing, is arrested at the event. This forces him to rethink how the impression of gays as an undesirable population perpetuated by the police differs from his own intimate experiences of homosexuality. Song suffers the interrogations of other cops, but refuses to betray Zheng's homosexuality. Zheng realizes that he is actually "a rabbit in uniform," where the uniform allows him to avert suspicion and escape incarceration but also confines his true identity.

Towards the end of the story, Zheng's ruminations become increasingly more insistent as a plea for people to realize that gay people are still people, and should not be judged based on prejudiced stereotypes:

> "Are homosexuals really that bad to require that police treat them worse than a farmer treats livestock? I don't think that people should be considered immoral, diseased, or inferior. It is inhumane to stamp them out like ants. Gay people are people all the same; homosexuals have dreams, aspirations, and the desire to lead a good and fulfilling life with the freedom to find love, just like anyone else. Or, if 'rabbit' needs to stay, there needs to be more recognition that everyone is a 'rabbit' as long as they seek love in their life" (4).

The description of homosexuals being humiliated and treated like "livestock" criticizes the State's "inhumane" policies "to stamp them out like ants" (4). Many Comrade stories depict how negative stereotypes causes mistreatment of homosexuals, particularly by the military police. These stories reflect the challenges that Chinese gays face in reality: though the decriminalization of homosexuality has provided them some freedom in their private lives, pervasive official silence on and prejudice against homosexuals has led to personal security issues. Though the situation varies across China, informal reports on police harassment and arbitrary detention of LGBT people continue (ChinaAIDS, 2012). The police often use stereotypes of homosexuality to indict gays. For example, homosexuals are commonly arrested for suspected prostitution and police will take circumstantial items such as possession of condoms as *prima facie* evidence of the alleged prostitution involvement (Cai, 2000). Moreover, as previously discussed, Chinese police often extort homosexuals by threatening to reveal their sexuality.

In two separate 2009 raids ostensibly conducted for public order reasons, more than 110 people were detained in Guangzhou's Renmin Park, a popular meeting place for homosexuals. The Guangzhou police arrested homosexuals on charges of being sex workers, but there was no attempt to determine whether people detained were actually prostitutes. Subsequently, 11 outreach workers from Chi Heng Foundation, an HIV NGO, were arrested whilst distributing condoms and information pamphlets.[31] They later reported that the police claimed it was too difficult to determine which people in the park were prostitutes, and so simply decided to detain

[31] The Chi Heng Foundation is a non-governmental organization registered and based in Hong Kong with offices in Henan, Anhui, Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou. Although primarily focused on offering help to village children affected by AIDS, volunteers at the Foundation frequently work to increase awareness amongst high-risk communities, including homosexuals, and provide support for individuals to decrease their sense of social stigma and isolation. More information at: http://www.chihengfoundation.com/index_en.html

as many people as they could (Mountford, 2010).[32] This neglect to differentiate between legal and illegal homosexual-related activity creates a situation where even the lawful association between consenting adults is *de facto* penalized (Gong, 2003). These incidents demonstrate the serious barriers that gays face in trying to meet each other, organize activities, or provide services for the community.

Accordingly, stories such as *Exposé of Police Comrade Zheng Xiong* (2006) depict the injustices that homosexuals suffer stemming from negative stereotypes. In addition to criticizing the discrimination against homosexuals in Chinese society and politics, these stories emphasize the need to disassemble derogatory misperceptions. Ultimately, this category of narratives prompts the breaking down of stereotypes of homosexuals as depraved, abnormal, and pathological to promote sexual tolerance.

Narrative 5: Affirming Gay Love

As mentioned before, even in the absence of legal prohibition, many social and political constraints on the activities of male homosexuals exist. In particular, the continued government-influenced social condemnation of homosexuality and family pressure to uphold filial piety enforces a strong imperative in Chinese culture for sons and daughters to marry and have children (Wen, 2011). This pressure on individuals from their parents, extended family, and the broader community is heightened by the context of the one-child policy, as filial responsibilities rests on only one child (Sigley, 2001). Hence, many gays suppress their homosexuality and ostensibly conform to the heterosexual norm. Those who do not completely forsake homosexuality conceal it from their parents and friends, creating new problems where the law's

[32] For more information about the raids, see: "Guangdong police arrests 110 men in 2 raids." *Fridae.com News*, 7 Apr. 2009. http://www.fridae.com/newsfeatures/2009/04/07/2253.

ambiguity on homosexuality renders them vulnerable to arbitrary blackmail and humiliation (Chen, 2011). Nevertheless, most homosexuals marry opposite-sex partners to fulfill their filial obligations and deflect public suspicion of their gay inclinations (Yao, 2010).

This pressure on homosexuals to conform to heterosexual expectations has spawned the phenomenon of "sham" marriages (行婚), where gay men marry lesbians (Wen, 2011). In summer 2012, I met a gay male Chinese couple who told me about their lives in one of these "sham" marriages. These gay men had posted on an online message board calling for "sham wives" to relieve family pressure to get married. Within a few days, a lesbian couple similarly looking for "sham husbands" responded and all four have been married to their lovers' spouse for more than three years. By entering into fake opposite-sex marriages, all four individuals believed they could relieve family pressures and obviate public suspicion about their homosexuality, but still secretly continue their same-sex relationships. At personal risk of having their scheme exposed, the men revealed their disillusionment. They complained of having to consistently lie about their "happy married life" to friends and family, their disenchantment with heterosexual marriage, and the frustration of not being able to legally live together as same-sex couples (*Notes*, 2012). In short, their resentment of an undesirable marriage exposes the extreme psychological distress that many homosexuals endure due to an intolerant Chinese society, depriving them of the ability to be openly gay.

"Affirming Gay Love" narratives build upon "Material Injustice" frames to expose how homosexuals in China are innocent victims of administrative punishments and social condemnation, proposing that people need to affirm homosexuality and challenge the heterosexual hegemony. The plot develops around homosexuals finding superficial ways to conform to heterosexual expectations yet pursue clandestine same-sex relations. However, these

seemingly promising strategies ultimately fail after numerous setbacks and irresolvable problems. Main characters grapple with their homosexuality to try and understand their conflicted position and emotions, conveyed through elaborate self-reflective passages on love, generally, or gay love, specifically. The story concludes with the protagonist recognizing that they are undeniably gay and can only achieve self-actualization by pursuing same-sex love.

In *Huizi* (1999), two homosexuals made divergent decisions regarding their homosexuality, accentuating the quandary of achieving personal happiness versus conforming to social expectations that Chinese gays confront in reality. Xiaoyang rationally decided to suppress his homosexuality and lead a socially respectable life. He forgoes all homosexual desire and forces himself into a loveless heterosexual marriage to establish a family, thereby fulfilling his sense of social and filial duty. Nonetheless, this lifestyle choice leaves him feeling bereft and frustrated, as he does not find happiness or love. In contrast, Huizi publicly embraces homosexuality, but only after accepting that he will always socially ostracized can never become a respectable citizen again with his criminal record.

The juxtaposition of Xiaoyang and Huizi's life decisions makes clear that homosexuality and social expectations are not compatible in contemporary Chinese society. The desolation of forsaking same-sex love and the estrangement of being openly homosexual are both dystopic realities. Typically, diagnostic stories such as *Huizi* (1999) fail to offer a real solution to reconcile the conflict between filial piety and expressing one's homosexuality so that characters can assuage their parents' worries and still pursue same-sex love. In *Two Men, Two Women* (2000), the characters opt for "sham" marriage as a radical remedy to this dilemma, but the story reveals that affirming gay love is necessary for homosexuals to find personal happiness and foster tolerance towards homosexuality.

Two gay men, Wang Kechun and Zhang Liming, meet two lesbians, Zhang Chulei and Xujing, and arrange a "sham" marriage. Wang Kechun marries Zhang Chulei and Zhang Limin marries Xujing. The married "couples" live together and go to social outings with relatives to keep up appearances during the day, but stay with their same-sex lovers in the evenings. However, three months after the four characters have been married, Kechun notices that Limin spends progressively more time chatting on the computer with the same person – someone known only by the online moniker "White Rabbit." One night when Limin is out, Kechun discovers their chat session logs in which Limin confesses that he is in love with "White Rabbit." Upset, Kechun goes to a bar and starts drinking alone, until a stranger sits down next to him and they discuss love and heartbreak. The stranger happens to be a gay psychologist, and they have a philosophical conversation about gay love and the homosexual psyche, where the psychologist gives a lecture that turns into an ardent plea for gay emancipation:

> "Actually, homosexuality is a very natural phenomenon. In a lifetime, people have a 70% chance of experiencing homosexuality and 10% of any population actually *is* gay. This means that China has 120 million gay people! If you stand on the street for some time, then for every ten people that walk by one is gay. But of course as a result of societal factors, some people never dare to even think about the possibility. However, there are also people who are clear about their identity from the very beginning. In the animal world, homosexuality also exists. In some other countries, homosexuality is not even seen as a mental disease. Once there was a Chinese doctor who spent ten years of his life trying to find a way to cure homosexuality, but then gave up. Ten years! He just wasted ten precious years of

> his life. Homosexuality cannot be cured, because it is innate. To accept it is all you can do. It would be much better if people tried to accept their own homosexual feelings rather than suppress them" (4).

When Kechun returns home, he finds a note from Chulei stating that Xujing is pregnant. When he arrives at Limin and Xujing's place, he learns that his own boyfriend is the father and that Xujing plans to keep the baby. He also learns that Xujing is the "White Rabbit" with whom Limin has been chatting with. Xujing wants to stay with Limin and start a family, convincing Chulei that she no longer desires a lesbian relationship. Limin's attitude throughout the whole scene is phlegmatic: he cannot deny that he is still in love with his boyfriend, but does not want to give up his chance to lead a socially respected family life and please his parents with grandchildren. Chulei and Kechun get drunk in their rage and sadness, and make love in an attempt to take revenge on Xujing and Limin. However, they discover that Kechun is sterile and divorce a month later. Kechun decides to leave to another city, and Limin meets him at the train station, begging him to stay. Disappointed that Limin did not have the courage to affirm his homosexuality, Kechun rejects him:

> "Kechun looked at Limin who was kneeling at his feet. This is a man whom he had deeply loved and still loved. But, they were not compatible. He did not have the bravery or the resolve to embrace our kind of love. Now, he is even less free to love. Kechun deeply understood Limin, but he could not empathize with him. Kechun thought to himself: it is strange how love works. It is painful to let go of what you…are familiar with to start anew. Yet, I feel freer now than ever before. I

> know I made the right choice. I will not give up on finding love, and I know that when I do, it will be more beautiful than anything I've experienced before. I just need to be brave, and accept that this is who I am so that I can live without regret. If more people will stand up for our kind of love, one day, we will be accepted for who we are. After all, people are all voyeurs in search of a love that they can call their own" (6).

Although the novel's ending is bittersweet where the ostensibly ideal fake marriage falls apart, it conveys an optimistic outlook: that if one stands up for gay love, personal fulfillment and social progress will ensue. *Two Men Two Women* (2000) and other stories in this narrative type depict how homosexuals conform to a heterosexual lifestyle to relieve social pressure and avoid revealing their homosexuality, but bares the flaws, inconsistences, and misperceptions of such decisions. These narratives focus on the difficult choice that characters have to make between giving up their homosexual feelings and adapting to social rule, or prioritizing those feelings at the risk of social estrangement. Though distinguished by inconclusive endings, these prognostic stories suggest that upholding gay love rather than complying with societal pressures is vital to achieve self-fulfillment and acceptance of homosexuality. The inflated Chinese cultural significance of marriage and child-bearing is criticized as archaic, where the practice of concealing homosexuality to conform to heteronormativity is untenable. Instead of elaborate schemes, "Affirming Gay Love" stories suggest that all Chinese citizens should be accepted regardless of their sexual preferences and should not suppress their true desires.

Narrative 6: Communication through Writing

In many Western countries, the decriminalization of homosexuality has been followed with a dispersal of media information about LGBT issues, increasing public awareness and prompting further legislative reforms (Van de Werff, 2010). As society becomes more sentient of the LGBT minority, tolerance of homosexuality increases and gay themes enter popular culture. However, awareness of LGBT issues in Chinese society is short-circuited by government control of conventional media (Wan, 2008). As stated previously, regulations specifically prohibit the diffusion of queer-related media content, restricting public exposure to homosexuality.

Immediately after the "hooligan" law was abolished in 1997, the Radio, Television and Film Board (广播电影电视部令) promulgated Film Censorship Regulations to prohibit "any scenes, language, or plotlines" that portray or "make reference to pornography, rape, prostitution, or homosexuality" (Article 10.1). In May 2004, the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (国家广播电影电视总局) issued an Official Notice on Ensuring that Broadcasting Strengthens and Corrects the Moral Character of Adolescents (未成年人思想道德建设的实施方案通知广播影视加强和改进). [33] Article 15 of this Notice imposes that:

> "Broadcasts/films/TV shows should consider the behavior of the adolescent audience, their ability to accept different things, their upbringing, the correct moral and healthy mental education and development of adolescents, and should ensure the censorship of any programs that sell based on pornography and sex. This unquestionably includes a prohibition against the promotion of any unhealthy content which is against normal morals. Unhealthy sexual content such

[33] This 2004 Notice is accessible at: http://www.china.com.cn/chinese/PI-c/563676.htm.

> as the promotion of sexual freedom, promiscuity, and sexual enjoyment together with language, scenes, and plots about homosexuality…should be cut. In particular, language, scenes, and plots connected to the sexual behavior and early [sexual] relationships of adolescents should be cut."

Violations of these restrictions in Chinese radio, television programs, and film were punished with fines up to 50,000 RMB for each infringement (House, 2011). This policy reveals the direct relationship between censorship of homosexual content and the preservation of public morality and proper adolescent education presumed by Chinese authorities.

Such sweeping restrictions on sexual content in media programs are carried into China's educational system, where LGBT topics are absent from all levels of education. It was not until 2003 that Shanghai's Fudan University, one of China's best, introduced the first class discussing gay health issues, focusing on HIV/AIDS. Within two years, more than 2000 students had enrolled in the class. In 2005, Fudan also hosted a public class dealing directly with homosexuality and the gay rights movement (Pan, 2006).[34] However, the overall lack of student access to effective sexual health education, including LGBT issues, has affected the psychological well-being and social integration of gay youth (Huang, 2009). This privation of knowledge about homosexuality fostered the perpetuation of aforementioned discriminatory gay stereotypes. Institutional intolerance is manifest in how attempts to register LGBT student societies have almost always been refused despite an absence of legal prohibition. For example, attempts to

[34] For more information about the class, see Sexual Health Shanghai's article, "Shanghai University to Offer First Program in Gay Culture," (Aug. 6, 2010), from: http://www.shshanghai.com/feature-articles/279-shanghai-university-to-offer-chinas-first-program-in-gay-culture.html.

register the first LGBT student group at Beijing University in 2004 were refused, and to date, the school has not officially recognized any gay student societies (Carlson, 2010; *Notes*, 2012).

Due to the lack of LGBT-related content on conventional media and university campuses, many people turn to the internet for information instead. As the Chinese government also enforces strict internet content censorship, people consume, contribute, and circulate stories to share experiences and information (Zhang & Chao, 2007). Such an environment resulted in many Comrade stories portraying the process of writing as a means to disseminate information about sexuality and the Chinese homosexual condition. Prognostic "Communication through Writing" narratives respond to "Abstract Injustice" frames that emphasize omnipresent forces silencing an innocent victim, suggesting that resolving these issues require written communication about homosexuality. A common theme concerns the process and products of writing, describing characters as they write letters, chat in online forums, or compose poetry. Additionally, these stories exhibit recurring references to the act of writing through symbolic objects such as pens, diaries, paper, and computer keyboards.

The Illusive Mind (2001) was previously discussed in the context of an "Abstract Injustice" frame; however, this story exemplifies how prognostic elements interact with and develop diagnostic frames to prompt consensus mobilization, publicizing information through writing. Throughout the story, silence is an emblematic trope prompting questions concerning relationships among gender, sexuality, and society. Told from the subjective perspective of a reticent 21-year-old college student who "hardly says seven sentences a week," the emphasis on silence and being silenced invokes the Foucaultian

hypothesis that what is prohibited inevitably returns in new and re-signifying forms, reconstructing an oppressed identity (Foucault, 1978). This theme of silence is not merely symptomatic of the sexual silence that *tongzhi* experience in real life, it appeals to liberatory rhetoric and political acts of "'speaking out,' 'finding a voice,' 'breaking silence,' and 'coming out'" (Jungkunz, 2008, p.175).

Although the narrator is largely silent, writing is repeatedly invoked as a means to communication messages about love. Fond of composing songs, the narrator turns to songwriting when he struggles to reorganize his feelings for both X and Z. After many reflections, the narrator decides to tell Z that he loves him. When they meet, Z gives him a golden pen and the narrator uses it to write "I love you" on a blank sheet of paper. However, Z responds by advising the narrator to pursue a relationship with X. Later in the story, the narrator is heartbroken when he realizes that Z's love confession was only a dream. Feeling dejected, he writes long love letters to send to both X and Z, but recognizes that it would complicate matters and instead goes to the seaside. Standing on a cliff, he ponders throwing the pen that Z gave him into the sea; however, he cannot find the courage and holds on firmly to it. Acknowledging that his love for Z is unrequited, the narrator is now also aware of his homosexual desires.

By attempting to throw the pen into the waves, the narrator tries to liberate himself from what he perceives to be a "hopeless" love. Gay love that is silenced and rendered non-existent in Chinese society is thus objectified by the "brilliantly golden" pen – the "golden cocoon" of same-sex desire (20). Nonetheless, the story ends with the narrator "firmly grasping that golden pen" (20). The pen's significance is emphasized by it being the only object described in color, where it is repeatedly depicted as "radiant gold." This luminous presence starkly contrasts the shadowy imagery that pervades the story, calling attention to the pen as a symbol of the

redemptive process of writing. By holding on to it, readers are left with the impression that the narrator does not give up hope for finding homosexual love again. At this point, the story comes full circle and implies that the narrator's courage to hold on to the pen resulted in the writing of *The Illusive Mind* (2001) as a liberating account of his experience. Although the narrator does not attain love in the end, he realizes his ability to share his experience and guide others as they navigate their own internal struggles.

Stories with prognostic elements such as *The Illusive Mind* (2001) emphasize that writing about the gay experience allows *tongzhi* individuals to reclaim their voices about homosexuality. By creating and circulating personal and informative narratives, *tongzhi* provide their perspectives on the nature of homosexuality, prompting greater awareness in Chinese society. In practice, this strategic method has been met with some degree of success. As gay organizations customarily are not granted licenses by the government to print and sell materials, publications are circulated online instead and reach a large audience across China (Cui, 2009). The March 2009 edition of Gay Spot, a Chinese gay publication featuring informative articles and personal narratives, was downloaded over 220,000 times three months after its first publication (Li, 2012). Anecdotal evidence suggests that these online stories succeed in reaching vulnerable people in rural China (Focus[2], 2012). In Beijing, a man told me about his experience volunteering at a help hotline for people with HIV/AIDS and general inquiries about sexuality. He mentioned that he often receives calls from people all over China who notice the hotline listed online and decide to seek support anonymously (Focus[2], 2012). As such, online LGBT publications provide accessible information about homosexuality, presenting alternative experiences for people to better understand their sexuality when they do not have access to such resources in their local communities or through conventional media outlets (Carlson, 2012).

Nevertheless, legal regulations continue to define homosexuality as "abnormal" and fail to differentiate between sexually explicit and non-explicit LGBT content. Furthermore, ordinances against LGBT publications are actively enforced by the Chinese authorities. One such policing incident well-known amongst *tongzhi* occurred in Dalian (Focus[1], 2012).[35] In 2001, Dalian police forces started a "special campaign" targeting *tongzhi* and raided the headquarters of Dalian *Tongzhi* Net (大连同志网), a popular gay website. The police proclaimed the raid was conducted on account of the website publishing international gay content, specifically "lewd homosexual images and cartoons," and forcibly secured the premises. Consequently, the website's technicians were sentenced to "reeducation through labor" for disseminating illegal foreign material (Kun, 2009).

As recently as July 2012, the Beijing Cultural Law Enforcement Agency raided the Beijing LGBT center and forced closure citing that the center was distributing illegal publications (*Notes,* 2012). Hence, police harassment of LGBT organizations acts as a strong disincentive against printed material, investing the writing and circulation of online Comrade narratives with even greater potential for distributing information and increasing awareness.

[35] Also, see articles on the raid online at: http://bbs.koubei.com/thread_202_8647_1.html and http://news.dayoo.com/guangzhou/200905/16/53872_6056000.htm

III. The Motivational Frame: Rationale for Mobilization

Motivational stories stimulate an impetus for engaging in corrective *tongzhi* action, going beyond diagnosis and prognosis to instigate mobilization. As Snow and Benford (1988) elucidate, "agreement about the causes and solutions to a particular problem does not automatically produce corrective action" and "participation is thus contingent upon the development of motivational frames that function as prods to action" (p.202). Whereas diagnostic and prognostic narratives establish consensus, motivational stories are necessary to "[convince] particular participants of both the need for and the utility of becoming active in the cause" (p.202). For the *tongzhi* movement, rationale for participation is framed by appealing to moral considerations and shared values, making *tongzhi* concerns central to all Chinese concerns.

Motivational Comrade stories demonstrate how Chinese citizens advocate for sexual rights, specifically the rights to discuss, explore, and decide their own sexual values. As Plummer (1996) contends, individual "rights and responsibilities are not 'natural' or 'inalienable' but have to be invented through human activities, built into the notions of communities, citizenship, and identities…[and] depend upon a community of stories which make [them] plausible and possible" (p.150). Therefore, Plummer (1995; 1996) posits that shared stories justify and solidify certain conceptions of "rights" that allow for community building and collective social action.

In the United States, participation in public debates facilitates the creation of norms that governs citizens and shapes the civic discourse of citizenship (Beiner, 1995). In China, organized collective action through traditional media is difficult, but scholars have noted that "loose communities of discourse have emerged around prominent stories shared through the internet and other media" (Farrer, 2006, p.103). Online Comrade narratives thus constitutes a popular

mode of sexual storytelling that establishes solidarity for the *tongzhi* community to claim sexual rights. As such, motivational stories represent collective narratives that enlist readers to the *tongzhi* cause and stimulate social participation. Table 4 summarizes two motivational narrative types.

Table 4: Motivational Frame Narrative Types

Narrative Type	**Summary**
Escape through Transformation	• Protagonists are transformed to demonstrate that escape from misfortune is possible. Advises readers to avert repressive expectations and reconstitute themselves by actively changing their environment. • Often portrays mistreatment of homosexuals; conveys urgent need for transformative action to stop innocent people from suffering.
Role Model	• Shows potential for happy ending. Advocates for the right to freedom and equality based on sexual difference. • Mobilizes pre-existing preference structures drawing upon shared experiences, particularly historical events, to make *tongzhi* struggles familiar to all Chinese people.

Narrative 7: Escape through Transformation

The first category of motivational stories presents a prod to action signified through depictions of material transformations allowing characters to escape from tragic fates. "Escape through Transformation" stories are closely related to "Breaking Down Stereotypes" and "Affirming Gay Love" narratives. Specifically, these motivational stories draw upon the trope of being masked and unmasking to highlight a transformative process that merges dismantling negative stereotypes with promoting positive images of homosexuality. The plot sets up gay characters in situations where they appear trapped by discriminative actions against homosexuality, and are driven to suicide or an empty life concealing their gay nature. These

stories portray abuse of homosexuals, accentuating the need for transformative action to stop innocents from suffering and provoking mobilization.

Nonetheless, the story will end with characters undergoing transformations, enabling them to escape from seemingly inexorable constraints and find happiness. Gay characters' psychological self-actualization is displayed as bodily transformations. Common scenarios feature homosexual lovers turning into a pair of birds and flying away from a world that sought to force them apart. Another popular storyline focuses on a gay male preoccupied with his psychological difference and believes that this difference is physically marked by an abnormality on his body; he obsesses over concealing it to appear normal, but eventually finds others who are similarly marked and is transformed by revealing his true nature.[36]

Accompanying these fictional transformations is an appeal to readers to comprehend that all Chinese people – regardless of sexual orientation – should have actual freedom to make their own relationship decisions. The tale's moral is that the current environment of sociopolitical oppression cannot continue, and that increased tolerance for homosexuality is necessary for China's national progress. By engaging in "frame amplification" whereby "an interpretive frame that bears on a particular issue, problem, or set of events" is clarified, motivational stories "invigorate" shared values to prompt collective action (Snow *et al.* 1986, p.469).

In this view, depictions of violence towards homosexuals in Comrade stories not only accentuates the mistreatment of gays stemming from sociopolitical prejudice, but also speaks to the oppression that all Chinese suffer more generally. Even if people may not necessarily empathize with homosexuality, it is hard to argue that they would willingly cause harm to innocents or deprive others of the ability to make personal life decisions. Hence, "Escape

[36] For example, stories may feature characters who believe they have grown protruding limbs or tails, have different skin colors, or are marked by a grotesque scar.

through Transformation" narratives facilitate the evolution of new values concerning homosexual rights building upon existing principles about human rights, enabling the formation of *tongzhi* interests and action. This process of connecting new norms to previously accepted norms as a means of boosting societal acceptance ties into theories about the evolution of norms in international society more broadly as well (e.g.: Klotz, 1995; Kelley, 2008).[37] Accordingly, motivational stories appeal to readers' beliefs about justice, equal treatment, and romance to amplify that discrimination against homosexuality – and by extension, oppression of non-conformist sociopolitical positions – should be acted upon.

Butterfly Talk: Liang and Zhu's Modern Experience (2002) adapts a famous traditional Chinese romance – the story of *Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yintai*, also known as "The Butterfly Lovers" – to illustrate emancipatory transformation. The original folktale tells the story of heterosexual lovers, but the Comrade narrative transmutes them into homosexual characters.[38] Two boys meet each other on the way to an all-boys school when Liang drives past Zhu walking. Liang orders his driver to stop and offers Zhu a ride, and Zhu's rural upbringing is obvious to the privileged Liang. Despite their different backgrounds, the two become good friends. Both boys excel in writing poems and often work together secluded from their schoolmates, and long

[37] Scholars have argued that norm entrepreneurs often "graft" new norms onto existing norms to enable actors and create organizing interests or categories of action.

[38] *Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai*《梁山伯与祝英台》: A traditional Chinese folktale set in Ancient China that tells the story of Zhu Yingtai, a young girl from a rural family who desperately wants to go to school. However, at the time, only males were allowed to receive an education, and Zhu leaves home to attend school in a faraway city by dressing as a boy to deceive her teachers and classmates about her true identity. She falls in love with Liang Shanbo, one of her fellow students. They study together for three years and Liang also feels strongly attracted to her, but all the while fully believing that Zhu is a boy. When Zhu returns to her parents after finishing school, she makes up her mind to reveal her true identity in the hopes that Liang will marry her and urges him to come and visit her at home. However, they find out that Zhu's parents had already arranged for her marriage to another man. When Liang finds out that Zhu is a woman, he desperately wants to marry her, and dies from heartbreak knowing that she is to marry someone else. On the day of her wedding, Zhu insists on having the bridal procession pass by Liang's grave. As she walks past, a sudden storm hits and the grave is opened by a crack of lightning. Zhu jumps into the grave, which then closes again. After the storm dies down, all people saw were a pair of butterflies, flying away from the grave. This story has been told in China to symbolize that the most ideal love cannot be confined by a conventional and restrictive society, but will find other ways to attain freedom so that lovers can fly away to sanctuary together.

passages describe how they enjoy being together. On Zhu's birthday, Liang surprises him with a bottle of wine; slightly intoxicated after drinking it, they kiss each other for the first time. From that day on, they become very intimate and their schoolmates mock them. However, they simply ignored the teasing, as Liang ruminates:

> "It was to be expected that our lame classmates would gossip about our intimacy. However, we didn't mind. (Why would we care about the opinion of people who we despise?)...Anyway, we were not the only boys in our class who had formed a couple. Of course, to other people it was simply an innocent game, as there were no girls at our school" (3).

The most dramatic scene is when Zhu is beaten up after trying to save a boy who was tied to a bed and being raped by other students in their dormitory. Liang finds the two boys and takes them both to the hospital. They learn the other boy is studying Chinese theatre at a nearby all-boys school, where the students there are often sent off as prostitutes to older men who will pay the school for this "service" (4). To prevent such future ordeals, Liang gets money from his parents to rent an apartment for the three of them. All three sleep together on one bed, and at night Liang and Zhu lovingly embrace each other.

One day, Liang is summoned home on the pretext that his mother had fallen ill, but he quickly finds out that the real reason was to introduce him to the girl his parents had chosen as his wife. When Liang returns to school, he confesses his love to Zhu and they make love for the first time. After a period of "pure bliss," Liang returns home to prepare for his marriage, but is so depressed that he falls gravely ill (6). Concurrently, Zhu learns that his mother had also arranged

a marriage for him, and is prepared to follow Zhu into death. However, Liang urges Zhu to fulfill his filial obligations and not to cause his mother the grief of losing her only son.

Liang dies and enters the body of a dead butterfly to witness Zhu's wedding. On his wedding day, Zhu lingers at the edge of a cliff but does not jump. Instead, Zhu leads a heterosexual married life and has a son, making his mother happy. During this time, Liang flies around the world as a butterfly and waits for his lover. Twenty years later, Zhu's mother passes away and Zhu commits suicide. He meets Liang in the spirit world and they fly around earth together as two male butterflies, visiting other countries where homosexuality is accepted. After an unspecified amount of time, they discover that their story has been retold in China. The story ends with an optimistic message for the prospects of homosexuals in modern Chinese society:

> "One day, the truth about our story will be revealed. By that time, Chinese people will have become more educated, tolerant, and open-minded. I firmly believe that this day will come, as long as more people continue to understand that homosexual love is just as pure as other kinds of love. No matter how the story of Liang and Zhu is passed on – whether between a boy and girl, two boys, or two girls – it resonates with the same tribute to an unchanging and unconditional love. Our love is every type of love, and it tells people that no matter in what period of time you live in, it is only when you are sincere and prepared to make the sacrifices to really love someone, even if it feels like everyone is against that love, that you know you have not lived in vain. If we can all remain true to ourselves and act upon our beliefs, perhaps that beautiful day is not even that far away" (8).

The rationale for action proposed is that the suppression of homosexuality is outmoded, something that belongs to uncivilized and antediluvian times. It is significant that although Zhu initially marries and establishes a family to fulfill his filial obligations, he eventually subverts the constraints of heterosexual marriage to reunite with his true homosexual lover. The visionary transformation of the lovers into butterflies motivates readers to mobilize for a brighter future. The story criticizes parochial Chinese thinking and presents a redemptive ending where forbidden lovers are able to finally attain freedom and embrace their love for each other – a striking contrast to most diagnostic and prognostic stories that have pessimistic, if not fatalistic, finales. Most importantly, by inscribing homosexual relations within one of the most renowned and retold Chinese folktales, *Butterfly Talk* (2002) places *tongzhi* stories within the historical and cultural framework of mainstream society, framing it as central to both homosexual and heterosexual Chinese readers of all ages.

Another example of a motivational "Escape through Transformation" narrative is *Exposé of Police Comrade Zheng Xiong* (2006), where the main character is preoccupied with concealing his "true" identity – that of a "rabbit." Zheng describes himself multiple times as just a "rabbit in police uniform" and contemplates how that "uniform conceals [his] true rabbit appearance" (3). He is hyper-self-conscious of his police uniform and obsesses over accidentally "revealing [him]self as a rabbit" (3). Even when making love to his wife, he insists on roleplaying in police uniform. It is only when he makes love to gay partners that he strips his uniformed exterior to feel "no fear, but only the sky-high elation of having found what [he] feels like others spend their whole lives searching for" (4).

Later, when Song, his gay lover is detained, Zheng realizes that he should be suffering police interrogations together with the other "rabbits." He feels like a fraud hiding behind a police identity to avert suspicion and deliberates the conflict between his desire to affirm homosexuality and fear of being persecuted:

> "He never thought he would be the one wearing the police uniform; he knew himself, that in that dangerous underground place, a person wearing police uniform is an ominous thing. But even though he has become so good at playing the role of the police, every morning when he looks at himself in the mirror and sees his own mighty reflection and heroic body clad in police uniform, he inevitably thinks of the events of the night before where he had not been wearing uniform, or even any clothing at all, and bitterly realized how everything is only a farce. He made up his mind never to go to that dark place again. He would stay at home, put on his police uniform, be sent for training, win awards, and be a well behaved and civilized citizen for all of his life to make his parents proud. Yet, the need to be with others who were so much like him was unbearable…" (5).

Here, the "dangerous underground place" refers to gay meeting places where Zheng experiences covert but gratifying homosexual encounters. After tortuous deliberations, Zheng finally decides to turn himself in to the police. However, when he arrives at the police station in plainclothes and reveals himself as a "rabbit," he finds out that his boss, Sargent Yuan Liang, had released all prisoners with a small 300 RMB fine, specifying that employers were not to be notified. This lenient discharge surprises Zheng, and he asks the Sargent for an explanation:

> "I'm not one, and I don't want to be one. I don't care if others are or not, as long as they don't harm me, and don't think of me as a lover, everyone can be friends. You're one of them; go join them if it makes you happy. Why torture yourself over concealing your true self from everyone? Life is too short to not try and be with the ones you love. Comrade, don't forget, our generation is a modern generation, we won't be that backward" (7).

The story ends with Zheng nodding in appreciation, leaving readers optimistic about him accepting his homosexuality and establishing kinship with other gays. By depicting homosexuals victimized by military police, the story provokes recognition that the current injustices persecuting gays are grossly unfair. Zheng's personal transformation through the decision to reveal and accept his homosexuality, embodied through his shedding of police uniform, emphasizes that individuals should transform their lives by embracing their sexuality as a fundamental and unalterable part of self-identity. The Sargent's concluding words are not solely directed at Zheng, but implicate all readers, imploring mobilization for greater tolerance of homosexuality, creating a "modern generation" that leaves "backward" prejudices behind (7).

Military Comrade stories are an especially popular sub-genre of Comrade Literature. One of the book club meetings I attended in Beijing coincidentally took up a Military Comrade story, and the discussion revolved around the notion that by imagining a *tongzhi* identity as one merged with the police, the "terrible brutality" of military power is presented as one that can be "vanquished" (Discussion[2], 2012). For example, one participant commented:

> "The power to fantasize, to re-enact, to sexualize the questions of power…is so invigorating and liberating. Because through the story…I can decide to allow myself to have a fantasy scenario with a cop – regardless of whether they are supposed to be a false or real cop in fictional stories – they are at least somebody who represents all the things I'm against. The figure of the Police, to me, represents the utter misuse of power, corruption in the political system, [and] social injustice…By fantasizing that I am able to sexually dominate or seduce a cop…gives me a sense of power over cops in the real world. I can persuade myself of this power because that cop has already gone through my mind…[to] become part of a story that I have control of" (Discussion[2], 2012).

This argument speaks to Plummer's theories of sexual stories being part of a political process that "shifts outcomes and distributes control and regulation" (1995, p.26). Along the lines of Plummer's analysis, the telling of Military Comrade stories is as a political act that empowers *tongzhi* readers with the ability to disempower the authority of the police – a symbol of the very power that marginalizes homosexuals and suppresses all attempts to challenge the State's authoritarian regime.

In sum, *Butterfly Talk* (2002) and *Exposé of Police Comrade Zheng Xiong* (2006), along with other "Escape through Transformation" stories, depict characters that overcome obstacles and experience a liberating metamorphosis enabling them to achieve self-actualization by embracing homosexuality. Often, there will be violent scenes where homosexuals are vulnerable targets resulting from lack of legal recognition and protection, provoking readers to recognize that these injustices cannot be allowed to continue. This narrative type emphasizes that gay

discrimination is unfounded and invalid, and that the country needs to accept homosexuality to achieve sociopolitical progress. They appeal to shared values about the basic rights to be treated humanely and to pursue personal romantic love, amplifying *tongzhi* reality as a shared reality, ultimately motivating readers to empathize with and mobilize for the *tongzhi* cause.

Narrative 8: Role Model

This narrative type constitutes of stories that portray successful role model characters affirmed as paragons for the *tongzhi* cause. Typically, stories depict homosexuals as they confront and overcome obstacles to accept gay identity. There are two major storylines for "Role Model" narratives: the first depicts same-sex lovers as they struggle to protect their love from outside forces, the second illustrates a gay male's introspective experience as he comes to terms with homosexuality. Nonetheless, both plotlines have happy endings accompanied with an optimistic statement about the future. The overall plot development contributes to identity formation and enables social action through a process of "frame extension," whereby the boundaries of *tongzhi* narratives are extended to encompass the interests and sentiments of both queer and straight individuals.

The first of these Comrade narratives resonates with a more general narrative: that of the heterosexual romance story where man meets woman, man loses woman, man and woman eventually realize their true love for each other and overcome obstacles to end up together. Certainly, when stripped to the core, all romantic relationships – in highs and lows, in security and jealousy, in passion and monotony – share the same recognizable emotional experiences as depicted in a standard romance novel. However, the irony is manifest when readers recognize that the woman in the story is actually another man. By borrowing the heterosexual romance

plot, these stories create a world where homosexuality can be normative rather than aberrant, central rather than marginal.

The Fortune of My Baby and I (2004) tells the story of a gay couple who first interact through an online gay chat service. They fall in love when they meet in person, but struggle with their homosexuality and social pressures to conform to heterosexual expectations. Told in flashback, the story reflects on the trajectory both characters took before deciding to confront their families with the news of their gay relationship. In particular, the narrator recounts Baby's coming-out process:

> "I have not yet seen Baby's mother, even though I've slept with Baby before – countless times…Our relationship is one that has been in the dark for more than four years now. For four years, this relationship has brought us both extreme happiness, but also depressing heartbreaks and never-ending migraines. Finally, we decided that we simply cannot live without each other and want to spend the rest of our lives together. Unfortunately, that also means we would have to tell our families and parents…" (1).

This passage reveals the absence of gender identifiers; it is not until halfway through the story that the narrator identifies Baby as the only son of his extended family, placing strenuous pressure on him to carry on the family name:

> "Baby's family has been very unsuccessful with boys. Although his father has two brothers, neither of them managed to have a son…Baby's family and

> extended family all place their hopes on him to carry on the family honor…Of course they don't want to hear that he's with another man, but what is probably even more devastating is the news that Baby is sterile and can't have a child even if he tried" (6).

The story details the experiences of the narrator and Baby as they bear the fury of their family, where parents refuse to talk to them and actively shame them. This anger turns into emotional pleading, where parents ask their sons why they "can't just be normal and find a nice wife to take care of [them] and bear a child" (8). Finally, after much determination, the couple receives acceptance:

> "After failing over and over again,…[a] contract was eventually made, but a contract with one exception. The contract is that Baby will bring someone to meet them who will take care of him for the rest of his life. However, this person might be another man. His parents' eyes rolled around in their head, as if flying in circles, but in the end they recognized that this situation is as uncertain to them as a comet hitting the earth, and so they agreed…In that moment, we felt as if we had just achieved a huge breakthrough. No matter how tortuous and uncertain the future may be, we must struggle, we must resist; one day we will obtain a harmonious, tolerant, and more open-minded world. A world where men can be women and women can be men; where people can choose for themselves the half of the sky that they want to live up to" (11).

In traditional Chinese culture, gender roles are often discussed in relation to the Yin-Yang (阴阳) balance. Yin represents the female: negative, dark, and soft; Yang represents the male: positive, bright, and hard. According to the Chinese, Yin and Yang are in constant interactive flux, making up the universal balance. The conception of Yin-Yang balance still influences modern Chinese society, resulting in prescribed social roles for female and male individuals. Men and women take up separate responsibilities, holding up their "half of the sky" according to the division of biological sex. These gender stereotypes are reflected in various aspects of contemporary Chinese life, including marriage, family, politics, and economy (O'Brien, 2009). Hence, the reference to a world "where people can choose for themselves the half of the sky that they want to live up to" challenges restrictive gender roles in a patriarchal society (11).

The extension of a *tongzhi* motivational frame onto broader societal issues is emphasized by the inclusive use of "we." This "we" directly connotes the narrator and Baby, but indirectly implies a larger Chinese *tongzhi* community. All referents of "we" are linked by the shared histories and experiences of all Chinese confronting pressures to conform to rigid masculine or feminine roles. The enunciation of "we" invites readers, regardless of biological gender or sexuality, to empathize with the *tongzhi* cause and identity. Through the *tongzhi* movement, individuals are motivated to participate in a collective rejection of homosexual oppression and call for social recognition. Additionally, they subvert widespread social norms that inhibit all Chinese.

The second common "Role Model" storyline is exemplified by *Why I Uphold Being Gay* (2006). In this story, the protagonist narrates personal struggles as he explores and learns to accept his homosexuality despite heartbreak, moral dilemmas, personal safety issues, and social

discrimination. The narrator begins with the proclamation that he has already achieved self-acceptance, but segues into reflective accounts of his struggles:

> "It was only during my college years that I knew I was GAY; before, I only knew that I liked men sometimes. But now, I know I was naturally born GAY, and that I have no other alternative except to be GAY. Dedication was always my approach to emotions and dreams. Through the winds and the rain, it has not changed…Love has its romantic side, and naturally, I have done a lot of frivolous things. For example, in high school I wanted to cook soup dumplings for the person I liked at the time. To earn money for the dumplings, I wanted to sell blood at the hospital. However, the doctor at the clinic took one contemptuous look at me and told me they were not collecting blood from people like me. This made me start to wonder, is there something wrong with 'people like me'? What is it about us that give others such bad impressions before we even tell them our names?" (1).

The reference to the narrator being denied from giving blood recalls a national prejudice against homosexuals that has been at the forefront of *tongzhi* activism efforts. In 1998, China's Ministry of Health issued Article 52 (6.16) in the Blood Bank Administration Regulation banning homosexuals from giving blood, purportedly because of HIV/AIDs risk (Li, 2012).[39] In 2006 when *Why I Uphold Being Gay* (2006) was first posted, LGBT activists were petitioning against the ban, decrying its discriminatory application to the whole queer community (Tan,

[39]1998 血站管理办法, 第五十二条，第六项，第十八点。

2008). Pro-gay organizations specifically used online *tongzhi* networks to agitate for an amendment by soliciting blood donation stories, emphasizing nationalist sentiment in the act of donating blood to save Chinese lives. Coincidentally, an amendment to this national policy allowing lesbians to give blood took effect in July 2012 when I was in Beijing.[40] Although *tongzhi* applaud this improvement, there is still much discontent, as gay men are still barred from donating (*Notes*, 2012). Xu Bin, a prominent lesbian rights activist, stated that further amendments are mandatory as an issue of "human dignity and the elimination of blood donation discrimination" (Weber, 2012). As such, this Regulation is still in effect and is a contentious issue for the *tongzhi* community. Nonetheless, *tongzhi* I spoke to are aware that some Western nations, including the United States, also enforce bans against gay men donating blood,[41] and articulate the belief that international policies need to be more progressive before China will follow (*Notes*, 2012).

The narrator continues by relaying his experiences confronting common challenges facing Chinese homosexuals, including obligations of filial piety in relation to marriage pressures, discrimination from authorities and peers, inability to find stable or genuine relationships, and the mental frustration of not understanding homosexuality. However, the story ends in support of gay emancipation:

[40] Read more at: http://www.cnn.com/2012/07/06/world/asia/china-lesbian-blood-donors/index.html.
[41] In the U.S., the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) enforces that "men who have had sex with other men, at any time since 1977 (the beginning of the AIDS epidemic in the United States) are currently deferred as blood donors. This is because MSM are, as a group, at increased risk for HIV, hepatitis B, and certain other infections that can be transmitted by transfusion." For more information, see: http://www.fda.gov/BiologicsBloodVaccines/BloodBloodProducts/QuestionsaboutBlood/ucm108186.htm. For information about other Western nation's policies towards homosexual blood donors, see: http://bloodbanker.com/plasma/plasma-donation/homosexual-blood-donors-deferred-or-discriminated.

"What do *tongzhi* owe society; what do we owe to others? Being a *tongzhi*, our spirit feels burdened, and our heart fades to a mere shadow. In society, emotion is already such a complex issue, and *tongzhi* emotions are even more abstruse and forbidding! This bitter, marginal life becomes the *tongzhi* life…In this view, being GAY is truly very agonizing, so why should we uphold being GAY? To put it simply, this is a question about sexual inclinations; to put it more broadly, it is a question of one's emotions; to say it more insightfully, it is a question about living in a society that excludes such behaviors and makes it an impossibly difficult life decision. So, why should we uphold being GAY? It is because everyone needs to uphold being themselves. We should all uphold the pureness of our souls…We cannot throw away our life's very own substance. We all want to find love in this world, and we want to find a love that is our own, not what others tell us it should be.

Reflect on yesterday, being GAY is the path to illumination!
Look forward to tomorrow, everything is still unknown and *tongzhi* can pave the way!" (8).

In this story, the narrator presents himself as a man who has embraced his *tongzhi* identity and encourages others to do the same. The capitalized "GAY" appears very abruptly and forces readers to think about its usage: it is the only English word throughout the whole text and draws attention to its mono-syllabic reverberation. In the concluding passage, the narrator also uses an inclusive "we" to extend the plot beyond characters in the fictional text and include

readers, who are invited to participate in the story and apply its message to their own real-world lives. This story reveals that *tongzhi* challenges concern not only homosexuals, but all Chinese people. The narrator's "we" indicates that all Chinese – both queer and straight – should claim their sexual freedom despite a repressive sociopolitical environment. In this way, *tongzhi* rights are connected to a broader conception of sexual rights, linking the *tongzhi* movement with an impending sexual revolution.

Ultimately, motivational Comrade stories aim to elucidate that all Chinese are *tongzhi* in their common struggle to attain a "love that is [their] own" and not one imposed on them by outside forces. These narratives appeal to sentiments shared by all Chinese, especially youth, who occupy transitional positions between more liberal Western ideologies about sexuality and traditional State proscription of all sexual expression. Comrade fiction connects people who share grievances about the inability to express their sexuality or romantic ideals in a restrictive society; motivational stories, in particular, solidify an organizational base that allows disconnected individuals to identify with a collective *tongzhi* movement, motivating social action.

[Conclusion: Political Role of Comrade Literature in Mainland China]

The story is one of the most ancient and popular forms of communications, and they have the power to shape beliefs, evoke emotions, and appeal to values (Propp, 1958). Since time immemorial, stories have functioned as critical sociopolitical commentaries pointing to areas needing attention. To date, significant Western research has focused on how stories play a prominent role in revealing social and political acts of hierarchy, marginalization, and inequality (e.g.: Bold, 2012; Mitchell, 1981; Riessman, 1993). This line of analysis contends that stories serve as the organizing principle for human action (Cronon, 1992; Bruner, 1987). In sociology, research indicates that shifting narratives lead to radical transformations of the social order (e.g.: Gergen, 1991; Green, 2007). In political science, scholars propose that people inhabit modern worlds regulated by discourse where the ability to control the story of one's own life is a major mode of empowerment (e.g.: Conolly, 1991). In all of these views, "narrative is a scheme by means of which human beings give meaning to their experience of temporality and personal actions" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p.11).

Numerous works have applied this concept that narrative provides meaningful constructions to identify contexts where they contribute to successful identity formation and sociopolitical action (e.g.: Alexander & Smith, 1993; Beiner, 1995). Popular sexual stories therefore form part of the process through which contemporary politics is rewritten by the public (Ku, 1999). This thesis thus argues that queer Comrade stories not only reflect the marginalized realities of China's homosexual population, but also harbor potential to initiate sociopolitical change by challenging government regulations that encroach into Chinese citizens' private lives.

In China, where the government censors all conventional media, Chinese citizens turn to the internet to voice resistance against the Party-State's authoritarian regime (House, 2011). This

"resistance discourse" relies on a dynamic mode of alternative political cant deploying innovative images, frames, metaphors, and narratives to force an opening for free expression in Chinese civil society (Jian, 2009). Despite stifling online speech restrictions, Chinese netizens have adopted coded language to avoid outright censorship yet ridicule and criticize government action. Popular expressions generally take the form of political satire, fiction, or parodies, and sexual undertones are common.[42]

Hence, the analysis of Chinese homosexual Comrade stories is not just an idiosyncratic interest, nor is it a voyeuristic, titillating absorption. It becomes central to an understanding of the workings of sexual politics and self-identity formation in contemporary China: Comrade stories are critical to the process through which Chinese citizens constitute their sexual identity and claim rights in an inhibited society. These stories establish and depend on *tongzhi* communities that create, circulate, and consume those stories, signifying the importance of active and local storytelling to initiate reform. In a way, Comrade stories become what Cain (1991), in a study on the use of personal storytelling for identity acquisition, proposes as a "learned genre" that mediates one's understanding of the self and past: as an individual learns to place the events of his life into the structure of a *tongzhi* story, he learns to tell his life as a *tongzhi* story and subsequently interprets his past in this way, adopting the *tongzhi* identity in the process.

China's censorship program and authoritative regime has circumscribed collective action and government protest by clipping social ties whenever any localized social movements are in

[42] For example, the "Grass-Mud Horse" (草泥马 *caonima*) is widely used by Chinese netizens as a form of symbolic defiance of internet censorship in China. It is a pun on the obscene Mandarin phrase, 操你妈 (*caonima*), which literally translates as "f* your mother." In 2009, renowned artist Ai Weiwei published an image of himself nude with only a grass-mud horse plush toy covering his genitals, with the caption "草泥马挡中央" ("*cǎonímǎ dǎng zhōngyāng*," literally meaning "Grass-Mud Horse covering the center." However, another obvious interpretation of the caption is: "f* your mother, Communist Party Central Committee." As such, sexual politics and human rights activism is closely intertwined in contemporary Chinese cultural production. For more information about the "Grass-Mud Horse" or other subversive political terms created and used by Chinese netizens, see: http://chinadigitaltimes.net/space/Grass-Mud_Horse_Lexicon.

evidence (Zhang, 2008). However, the Chinese cyberspace provides an accessible public space for subversive sexual discussion, where the role of online Comrade stories as a revolutionary means of community identification and communication is pronounced. Although Comrade Literature exemplifies a loosely coordinated strategy by ordinary storytellers, its potential to renegotiate power paradigms in relation to gender, sexuality, societal pressures, and State power cannot be ignored. For Chinese people, generally, and the homosexual population, specifically, the online *tongzhi* platform exists as a rhizomatic[43] public space in which private narratives and common experiences are shared, compared, and retold through stories, avoiding State-imposed restrictions while using State-owned resources. Comrade narratives emphasize that prevailing norms perpetuated by the Chinese State are not the right ones, criticizing government policies and pointing out social needs that the State is unable to meet.

This thesis contends Comrade Literature's three key frames and eight distinct narrative types, illustrated by eight representative stories, exposes critical injustices against homosexuals, proposes strategies to foster solidarity grounded on the *tongzhi* cause, and prompts popular mobilization for increased tolerance of homosexuality. Comrade stories overtly establish the *tongzhi* cause as a LGBT rights movement, but fundamentally anchor it in larger revolutionary motivations for sexual freedom and human rights. Hence, Comrade narratives disseminate information to establish and mobilize a community towards a sexual *tongzhi* revolution that is conveyed as ideologically congruent with the push for human rights.

[43] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari used the term "rhizomatic" to describe theory and research that allows for multiple, non-hierarchical entry and exit points in data representation and interpretation (1980). A rhizomatic model for cultural production is characterized by "ceaselessly established connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles" that "has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo" (Deleuze and Guatarri 1980, 25). In the context of Chinese online Comrade stories, this term describes how the body of narratives is constantly interrupted and moved (for example, by censorship regulations that delete tongzhi websites), but new stories constantly emerge and are charged with potential to address issues that characterize a rapidly transforming sociopolitical environment to advocate for equity and tolerance in contemporary Chinese society.

Supporting Evidence from Fieldwork and Interviews

My approach and analysis in this thesis was influenced by my fieldwork with Beijing's underground homosexual community. Of the more than 150 people I talked to, many agreed that access to the internet and reading *tongzhi* stories helped them understand more about homosexuality and get involved with the gay Chinese subculture. When asked why they read Comrade fiction, the four most frequent responses provided were:

1) the desire to learn more about sexual experiences,
2) to understand how others see love and homosexuality,
3) curiosity about the subjective experience of being *tongzhi,* and
4) the vicarious thrill of deviating from the norm (*Notes* 2012).

However, the fact that the majority of self-identified *tongzhi* individuals refused to participate in formal interviews for fear of having their identity exposed highlights the extent to which homosexuals in China still fear social condemnation and possible political ramifications. As Liu Kang, a 23-year-old university student active in the Beijing *tongzhi* underground scene confided:

> "I have no desire to come out or make my gay inclinations public knowledge. I have seen other people suffer discrimination from their peers and employers for being homosexual, and I do not want to risk that. I have heard bad stories about people being detained and beaten up by the police, or being harassed, and that also deters me [from coming-out]…People will regard you with contempt. There is just too much pressure for people to marry and have children that it is difficult, and too disgraceful, to think about coming-out in public. Even if I don't mind

> whether people look down on me, and even if my parents eventually accept my homosexuality because they love me, people will mock (嘲笑) them. I can't put my parents through that shame…It would be great if China could be more tolerant like in the West, but Chinese people focus on cultural traditions too much, and since homosexuality is considered unacceptable in that tradition, I think it will take a long time before people's attitudes will fully change, especially the older generation. However, my generation is…more open-minded. So, I still believe that there will be change as long as education and information is available."

Many *tongzhi* I talked to anticipate an uncertain future, where despite Chinese society's increasing receptiveness towards gays, many feel it is unlikely that homosexuality will be officially accepted. Although many gays are aware of a national 2009 survey that revealed how 60% of the Chinese population indicated that they would accept homosexuality as "natural" (Chen, 2011), many are skeptical. The major obstacle they cite is that homosexuality is still seen as "unhealthy," a view closely tied to the Chinese government's perception that non-normative behaviors threaten its moral leadership. In this manner, the Chinese Party-State's apparent openness still demands political subservience. Most *tongzhi* believe the situation is unlikely to change until the West makes further advances and exerts greater pressure on China to adopt human rights measures. Nonetheless, a number express hope that, in line with China's rapid socioeconomic development and absorption of Western influences, homosexuality in China will ultimately gain acceptance along the trajectory that it is accepted on a global level (*Notes,* 2012). As 20-year-old Peter Lee mentioned:

> "I hope that people will gradually come to understand homosexuality; to understand us as regular people. I believe that with the rapid rate of social and economic development in China,…same-sex love will become acceptable in China when it becomes acceptable in the West. All *tongzhi* realize that on some level, the government is the reason why gay love is currently socially unaccepted. It will be very progressive for the Chinese State to allow for homosexuality, and they don't lose much political power [over making such a policy change]…So, it is probably just a matter of time."

Throughout my involvement with the Chinese homosexual community and the Beijing LGBT Center, a recurring lament concerned the poor ability to organize because of political repression, resulting in dependency on the internet. As Steven Li, a volunteer at the Beijing LGBT Center, remarks: "We organize and alert our supporters to upcoming activities and events through email. We find new recruits and new members for the *tongzhi* cause through the internet. Without the internet, most *tongzhi* activity would cease to exist" (*Pers. Comm.,* 2012). Moreover, it is difficult to provide LGBT services at a local level, as there are very few homegrown Chinese people who are already "out" or "willing to work in a *tongzhi* organization at risk of disclosing sexual orientation" (*Per. Comm.,* 2012).

As such, it seems that the current status quo with regard to the *tongzhi* situation in China is unlikely to change in the near-future. Nonetheless, the role of online Comrade stories to communicate information, influence attitudes towards homosexuality, and establish a *tongzhi* community stands out as significant.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

A general but critical pitfall of this investigation pertains to the validity and reliability of subjective data, where results from narrative-based research are intertwined with the personal interpretations of the investigator (Webster & Mertova, 2007). Stories affect readers in different ways, but this thesis only presents the author's interpretation when alternate readings of the same story can be valid. In this thesis, subjective interpretation issues are exacerbated by the process of translation from primary texts only available in the Chinese into English for critique. As such, the empirical section of this research could be further substantiated by having multiple readers provide their interpretations to determine if the analysis is corroborated. In future work, it will be helpful to acquire information from Comrade authors about their reasons behind writing *tongzhi* stories. The experiences of Comrade netizens when reading specific stories will also enhance understanding of the interaction between creators and consumers of *tongzhi* texts, contributing to a more balanced critique.

This research was also limited by the inability to code large bodies of texts, resulting in only eight texts being analyzed when there are vast numbers of different stories posted online. This was because a master archive for Comrade stories at the time of writing did not exist, and texts had to be collected from multiple sources and individually coded. Furthermore, this thesis only focused on the male variant of queer Chinese Comrade stories. The Chinese queer community constitutes of more than just gay men, but conducting comprehensive analysis of both gay and lesbian stories was beyond the purview of this thesis. To improve, more texts should be analyzed to provide a broader, more representative sample. A key component of future research should also incorporate other queer narratives, especially lesbian stories.

Additionally, there is limited data on how much collective action, social mobilization, or public perception is influenced by Comrade stories. This is a possible avenue for future anthropological research, where more information can be collected on the interaction between *tongzhi* writers, readers, and activists, as well as the extent to which Comrade narratives influence public opinion. Such data will be useful to determine the importance or shortcomings of online textual storytelling versus other methods of communication, such as films. An improved method of evaluating the selectivity in storytelling to navigate how authors decide what they write about would also be effective.

Finally, in the course of this research, I found three distinct literary structures of Comrade stories. The most prevalent form is exhibited as an observational worked example, where the story is told from an objective first person point-of-view and the narrator comments on his own experience (e.g.: *Two Men, Two Women*; *The Fortune of Baby and Me*). A second common form is a stream of consciousness narrative that strips the narrative to a subjective core and directly places the reader into the narrator's position (e.g.: *The Illusive Mind*). The third structure takes the form of an instruction manual, where the narrator will address readers directly and instruct them on what should be the best mode of action (e.g.: *Why I Uphold Being Gay*). In addition, the category of microblog stories is one that I did not have examine, but would be a compelling subject of study as they present narratives in a unique textual format using only 140 characters. All of these different forms of Comrade stories affect readers in different ways; more research is needed to better understand this phenomenon.

Final Reflections

Scholars have remarked that descriptions of social change in China are often associated with the metaphor of revolution. Sigley (2006) holds that "China is in the throes of a new and very modern revolution, in the form of its own belated 'sexual revolution'" (p.43). In this view, the *tongzhi* revolution will represent "a moment when Chinese citizens, especially the younger generation, embrace the 'progressive' sexual mores of the modern" and increasingly Westernized world (Sigley, 2006, p.43). Another popular view of China contends that socioeconomic development demands political liberalization, arguing that visible signs of sexual liberalization can be read in parallel to political liberalization (Braverman, 2002). Just as political liberalization implies enhanced political autonomy for citizens, so too does sexual liberalization presuppose that individuals will gain greater scope to conduct their sexual lives according to personal desires (Li, 2009).

Yet, there remains a strong presence of moral righteousness in official State pronouncements on matters of sexual mores in China that needs some form of explanation. Evidently, the current circumstances of corruption, conspicuous consumption, and increasing class polarization in the upper echelons of the Chinese government make that "righteousness" appear hypocritical (Li, 2008). The ability of both State and society to respond to a changing homosexual subculture will thus stand as a measure of how freedom and autonomy are to be practiced in twenty-first century China.

In this regard, the fate of the 5th Beijing Queer Film Festival in 2011 provides an interesting footnote to the current state of affairs for the *tongzhi* community and

activism. The organizers decided to host the festival at a book club in downtown Beijing to make the event more accessible, but planned not to announce the venue until the last minute to decrease risk of a premature shutdown. Nonetheless, three days before the festival's start, district police and Bureau officers showed up at the book club ordering that the festival was "illegal" and had to be cancelled. The book club was also threatened with "harsh consequences" if it decided to continue hosting the festival. Until today, the organizers do not know how government authorities found out about the event location. Although the organizers made public statements indicating that the festival was indeed cancelled, they deployed guerilla-style tactics to host a series of underground screenings at different venues instead (Tan, 2011). In response to police harassment, Yangyang, a 29-year-old straight woman and one of festival's organizers, tellingly commented that:

> "Our biggest enemy consists of a small number of authoritarian organizations that are using the powerful national propaganda machine to subtly construct mainstream ideology. And our biggest worth, our ultimate goal in presenting queer content…is to challenge and oppose this mainstream ideology for the people of China…The revolution hasn't succeeded yet. *Tongzhi*, keep up the good work!"[44]

By reiterating the Chinese nationalist motto from which the name "*tongzhi"* spawned, her rejoinder indicates how the queer Chinese movement is closely aligned with a broader sociopolitical protest against the Communist Party-State.

[44] For more information about the festival, see: http://shanghaiist.com/2011/06/22/beijing_queer_film_festival_2011.php#photo-1

Small signs reveal that attitudes towards homosexuality within official Chinese circles may be changing. Specifically, the State-run English-language newspaper China Daily has recently released a number of positive articles on LGBT issues, including an editorial on the inaugural 2009 'Shanghai Pride' parade. Although the 3rd annual Shanghai Pride in June 2012 was relatively successful and attracted a large corpus of media coverage, the parade's relevance to the *tongzhi* subculture remains contested.[45] The weeklong schedule of events primarily catered to and was attended by Westerners in Shanghai, or Westernized Asian gays (for example, Asian Americans or Taiwanese studying in Shanghai). *Tongzhi* generally agree that the festival raises awareness about LGBT rights, but most do not participate. As Zhou Ban, a 22-year-old student studying in Shanghai, remarks:

> "I think that Shanghai Pride is a good way to get Chinese people to pay more attention to homosexuality and gay rights. I have heard it is a really big event– lots of workshops, social events, and parties…I don't think I would participate though. It is just too risky to expose my homosexuality. Even if I participate and tell others that I am straight and merely advocating for LGBT rights, I think people will suspect. Within the *tongzhi* community there is a general consensus that we don't get personally involved in the actual festival, but of course we can still learn about the events through video recordings or microblog posts online and talk about them when we meet up."

[45] For more information about Shanghai Pride, see: http://www.shpride.com. (Website features content in English.)

The structure of sexuality, gender, and identity in China today are still enforced within restrictive binary categories where people are governed by repressive social control and a patriarchal society (Bao, 2011). For the numerous reasons discussed in this thesis, local Chinese gays are still hesitant to reveal their homosexuality. This problematic existence where Chinese gays simultaneously grapple to better understand yet actively conceal any association with homosexuality is a theme that haunts many Comrade stories. Comrade narratives depict and address the nuanced challenges that *tongzhi* in China face: in the public sphere, homosexuality is forcibly suppressed by prejudices stemming from the authoritative government's social control over sexual practices; in the private sphere, *tongzhi* are unable to express themselves due to pressures coercing them to adopt self-censorship and active concealment of their homosexuality.

Across temporal and transnational borders, art and the imagination influences people to look through and beyond what are defined as "normal" and "ideal" to inscribe a space for non-normative behaviors and positions to emerge (Bacon *et al.*, 1999). Storytelling through online Comrade Literature hence challenges dominant ideologies about gender and sexuality, disputing universal claims to truth by replacing them with a diversity of perspectives. As such, in a society where queer identities are rendered non-existent and invisible, reading and writing about it means a lot for the *tongzhi* population.

In the final analysis, all Comrade stories tell variants of the same tale: the story of a *tongzhi* individual's maturation and self-discovery as he contests modern China's repressive sexual paradigm. The Comrade texts analyzed in this thesis – together with countless other stories – inform *tongzhi* readers that people do imagine something other than the status quo, and they struggle in different ways to attain and validate that difference through literature.

Ultimately, the important issue is if *tongzhi* passively accept and live by the fiction they are given, or if they are able to create one of their own in the form of active resistance. Comrade texts suggest possibilities for agency to subvert repressive conventions of gender and sexuality. In this way, Comrade readers use texts and Comrade texts use readers in a process that aims to establish the presence of a *tongzhi* community and potentially effect social policy change.

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[Appendices]

Appendix I: Classical Chinese Novels with Homoerotic Content[47]

Period of Origin	Title	Author
Ming dynasty (A.D. 1368-1644)	Xiu-ta ye-shi (*Unofficial Records of the Embroidered Couch*)	Lu Tien-Cheng (A.D. 1580-1620)
	Lang-shi (*Romantic Story*)	Anonymous
	Bai-yuan-chuan (*One Hundred Love Stories*)	Anonymous
	Shuang-feng-chi (*Two Peaks Records)*	Anonymous
Qing dynasty (1644-1911)	Tao-hua-ying (*The Shadow of the Peach Blossom)*	Xu Cheng
	Nong-qing-kua-shi (*The Happy Story of Intense Passion)*	Anonymous
	Zhu-ling Ye-shi (*Unofficial History of the Bamboo Garden*)	Anonymous
	Ping-Hua Bao-Jian (*Precious Mirror for Appreciating Flowers)*	Chen Zenzhu
	Hong-Lou-Meng (*Dream of Red Mansions*)	Cao Xueqin
Date Unknown (either Ming or Qing)	Bian-er Chai (*Wearing a Cap but also Hairpuns)*	Zuixifu Xinyezhuren
	Seng-ni nie-hai (*Monks and Nuns in a Sea of Sins)*	Tang yin
	Chun-deng Mi-si (*The Fascinating Stories of the Spring Lanterns)*	Anonymous
	Shuang-Yin-Yuan (*Pairs of Predestined Relationships)*	Anonymous

[47] References: Ruan, 1991; Zhang, 2001.

Appendix II: Euphemisms Alluding to Male Same-Sex Relations in Imperial China[48]

1. 兔儿爷/兔子: Rabbit father/Rabbit son
2. 分桃之爱/余桃/分桃: Splitting the peach/shared peach
3. 龙阳之兴/龙阳/龙阳之好: Long Yang (Dragon Sun)
4. 抱被之欢: The joy to be held
5. 男风: Male wind; male practice
6. 相公: Traditional deferential term wife calls husband with, but skewed to mean male prostitute in modern society
7. 断袖之癖/断袖: "Cut Sleeve" (Favorite of the "cut sleeve")
8. 小唱: little song
9. 香火兄弟: Brothers of incense
10. 契兄弟/契哥契弟 (qi): adopted brothers
11. 契父子: adopted father
12. 旱路(姻缘): the dry canal (to describe marriage without "flow"/children)
13. 旱路英雄: stranded hero
14. 外风/外交: Outside wind/outside socialization
15. 男妾/男夫人: Male concubine/male wife
16. 贴烤饼: Sticking a fried biscuit
17. 鄂君绣被:The monarch's embroidered blanket
18. 寡独书生: Born of loneliness and books
19. 吹箫: playing the bamboo flute
20. 男色 male eroticism, beauty and seductiveness
21. 摸镜:polishing mirrors
22. 后庭花:backyard flower

[48] References: Hinsch, 1990, Kang, 2009; Liu, 2005; Also from: http://dui.lu/index.php/detail/show/152170.

Appendix III: Online Tongzhi Terms

1. 玻璃(*boli* glass): Name for *tongzhi*.
2. 兔子(*tuzi* rabbit): Contemporary slang for gays.
3. 公司(*gongsi* company): A public meeting location for gay gatherings.
4. MB(Money-boy): male prostitute in the homosexual circle，sometimes called "swans" or "geese."
5. 1/0： roles in a male homosexual relationship. 1 is the "husband" or "penetrator," 0 is the "wife" or "penetrated."
6. 419: in Chinese, these numbers sound like the English phrase "for one night," and so indicate a one night stand
7. GAY 吧(*ba)*: gay bar
8. 熊(*xiong* bear): chubby gay man
9. 哥哥(*gege* older brother): gay male whose outward appearance is masculine
10. 弟弟(*didi* younger brother): A gay male whose outward appearance is feminine
11. CC："sissy" in the English pronunciation; feminine male homosexuals
12. 直人(*zhiren* Straight person): heterosexual person
13. 直同志(*zhitongzhi* straight *tongzhi*): heterosexual person who considers himself as part of the *tongzhi* movement and community
14. "出柜"(*chugui* Come out of the closet): to publicly indicate one's homosexual identity
15. 现身/亮相(*xiansheng* or *liangxiang* to show yourself): showing oneself to society as a homosexual
16. 拉拉(*lala* lesbian)
17. Fruit Fly: homosexual person who is not "out" to anyone

Appendix IV: Selected Legal Documents Used to Imprison Homosexuals[49]

a. Hooliganism Law in Official Penal Code
    i. 1957: People's Republic of China's Criminal Law Code
    ii. http://cecc.gov/pages/newLaws/criminalLawENG.php
    iii. The crime of "hooliganism" was abolished in China in 1997 and was replaced by "disrupting public orders," "causing mass anger," "vandalism," "destruction of public or private property"; all punished by prison or death.
b. In 1984 hooliganism was introduced for the "Strike-Hard" campaign.
    i. Sex in public, group sex, rape, or sex with children was affirmed by the government to be transgressions of criminal law.
    ii. *Source: http://www.chinahush.com/2011/02/22/chinas-last-hooliganism-convict-should-convict-continue-serving-his-sentence-for-a-repealed-law/
c. Homosexuality Classification as Mental Disease
    i. 1984: The first edition of China's Psychiatric Association's Classification and Diagnostic Criteria of Mental Disorders (《中国精神障碍分类与诊断标准》第一策) is published and lists "homosexuality" as a form of sexual deviance and a pathological disorder.
d. Prohibition of Erotic Fiction/Anti-Pornography Laws
    i. October 22, 1957: "Rules for the Control of and Punishments Concerning Public Security of the People's Republic of China"
        1. Article 5: A person who commits any of the following acts disrupting public order shall be punished by detention of not more than ten days, a fine of not more than twenty yuan, or a warning:
            7. Putting up…reactionary, obscene or absurd books…or pictures that have previously been repressed.
    ii. April 1986: "The State Council's Regulations on Severely Banning Pornography"
        1. Pornography is very harmful, poisoning people's minds, inducing crimes…and must be severely banned. The items which must be severely banned include: any kind of…book, newspaper, photograph, painting, magazine, written and hand-copied material which contains explicit descriptions of sexual behavior and/or erotic pictures. The person who produced, sold, or organized the showing of such materials, whether for sale or not, shall be punished according to the conditions, by imprisonment or administrative punishment."
    iii. *Source: (Fang, 1991, 98-100)
e. Internet Censorship Laws
    i. December 1997: Computer Information Network and Internet Security, Protection, and Management Regulations
    ii. – Section Five: No unit or individual may use the Internet to create, replicate, retrieve, or transmit the following kinds of information:

[49] References: Mountford, 2010; Ma, 2011; Fang, 1991.

1. Inciting to resist or breaking the Constitution or laws or the implementation of administrative regulations;
2. Inciting to overthrow the government or the socialist system;
3. Inciting division of the country, harming national unification;
4. Inciting hatred or discrimination among nationalities or harming the unity of the nationalities;
5. Making falsehoods or distorting the truth, spreading rumors, destroying the order of society;
6. Promoting feudal superstitions, sexually suggestive material, gambling, violence, murder;
7. Terrorism or inciting others to criminal activity; openly insulting other people or distorting the truth to slander people;
8. Injuring the reputation of State organizations;
9. Other activities against the Constitution, laws or administrative regulations.

*Source: (Abbott, 2004).

f. September 2000: State Council Order No. 292
    1. China-based Web sites shall not link to overseas news Web sites or distribute news from overseas media without separate approval. Only licensed print publishers have the authority to deliver news online. Non-licensed Web sites that wish to broadcast news may only publish information already released publicly by other news media. These sites must obtain approval from State information offices and from the State Council Information Agency.
    ii. *Source: "CECC: Freedom of Expression – Laws and Regulations". http://www.cecc.gov/pages/virtualAcad/exp/explaws.php.
g. Laws Regulating Public Order and Indecency (used indirectly to imprison homosexuals and/or criminalize homosexual behaviors)
    i. Section 158 of the Penal Code
        1. Punishes “disturbance against the social order” with up to 5 years imprisonment.
    ii. *Source: (INS, 2012)

Appendix V: Brief Chronology of Political Developments Affecting Male Tongzhi[50]

- 1957: China's government reasserts criminalization of homosexuality in the Penal Code as "hooliganism" ("流氓罪").
- 1981: Zhang Mingyuan of Dazhong Medical School published a controversial essay analyzing homosexual elements in the classical 17th century Chinese novel, *Dream of Red Mansions*, to conclude that homosexuality is a medical phenomenon that requires further research before it can be understood and should not be labeled a mental disorder.
- 1983: The "Strike-Hard" (严打) campaign, was a government crackdown to curb rising crime rates, during which hooliganism was targeted as a capital crime.
- 1984: The first edition of China's Psychiatric Association's Classification and Diagnostic Criteria of Mental Disorders is published and lists "homosexuality" as a form of sexual deviance and a pathological disorder.
- 1986: Professor Zhao Min Yin at Hua Dong Normal University in Shanghai began researching how homosexuality could be cured, but was arrested on unspecified charges 6 times during the course of his research.
- June 4 1989: Tiananmen Square Massacre in Beijing, military troops open fired and violently suppressed peaceful demonstration by university students.
- 1989: China's Police Department makes the statement that the law is ambiguous on charges of homosexuality, and gays should not be convicted under "hooliganism."
- 1990: Lin Yinhe (李银河) and Wang Xiaopo (王小波) conduct interviews to publish *Their World* (《他们的世界》), the first book that compiles case studies of homosexuals in China.
- 1991: Research on homosexuality from the medical sciences is spearheaded by scholars Cheng Lianzhong (陈秉中) and Wan Tinghai (万延海).
- 1994: Zhang Beichuan (张北川) publishes research on *Homosexual Love* (《同性爱》) in which he discusses popular discourse on the psychology of gay relationships.
- June 1995: "China Rainbow" (中国彩虹), a pro-gay organization in Beijing, reports on the repressed homosexual condition in China on international media circuits. This prompts other international media organizations to pay greater attention to the status of homosexuals in China as well, resulting in increased coverage of the community.
- 1995: Fang Gang's publishes a controversial book on *Homosexuality in China*, generating widespread media attention. Events described in the book were later used to convict and imprison Chinese homosexuals involved in gay activism and events.
- 1997: New Legal code removes the "hooliganism" law that had been used to imprison homosexuals. This is seen as a landmark move in China's legal history towards homosexuality.

[50] References: Ma, 2011; Cao, 2000; Gong, 2009; Qiu, 1997.

- 1998: 14 gay and lesbian groups formed the *Tongzhi* Joint Committee, the first officially recognized organization advocating gay rights.
- September 1999: Judge Zhang Lihua residing over Beijing's Xuan Wu District People's Court, declares homosexuality "abnormal and unacceptable to Chinese public." This is a landmark decision and the first time a mainland court officially ruled on nature of homosexuality.
- 2000: An internet survey of 10,792 reveals that Chinese netizens are more tolerant towards gays, with 48.15% in favor of gays to express their homosexuality without discrimination.
- 2000: China arrests 37 gay men as part of nationwide anti-vice campaign in Guangzhou.
- Dec 2000: Liu Kuan Wing-Wah, Deputy Secretary for Home Affairs in China, makes the public statement that government survey results indicates the "majority of Chinese are against gay rights law."
- March 2001: Chinese lawmakers urge life imprisonment for people guilty of spreading AIDS. Beijing National People's Congress submitted joint proposal to make it crime for people (particularly gay prostitutes) to spread AIDS.
- April 2001: The third edition of China's Psychiatric Association's Manual for the Classification of Mental Diseases removes "homosexuality" from its list of pathological disorders, setting the precedent to indicate that homosexuality should not be considered a mental aberration.
- 2003: Shanghai's Fudan University introduces the first university class on gay health issues, focus mainly on AIDS prevention. 2000 students enrolled in the course within 2 years.
- 2003: Golden Shield Project (Great Firewall) for internet censorship implemented
- 2004: Law enforced prohibiting pornographic or obscene information on the internet, including descriptions of homosexual behaviors.
- Dec 2004: First official government survey on China's homosexual population puts gay male community at 5-10 million.
- 2005: Shanghai's Fudan University introduces an unprecedented public class that deals directly with homosexuality and the gay rights movement.
- 2005: The inaugural Homosexual Culture Festival (第一届北京同性恋文化节) is held in Beijing and is the first gay pride event to attract widespread attention, but eventually shut down by the government.
- July 2005: China's government releases official population census results with a survey that indicates the existence of a significant percentage of homosexuals within the population. This is the first time that the government publicly acknowledges the existence of homosexuality as part of the Chinese population.
- June 2009: Inaugural Shanghai Pride festival held.

Appendix VI: Tongzhi Website Screenshots

a. 淡蓝: www.danlan.com.cn

b. 同志交友: www.94gay.com

c. 阳光地带：www.boysky.com

d. 171069: http://www.171069.com/

e. RLES: www.rcles.com

f. 爱白网: www.aibai.com

Appendix VII: Online Comrade Novel Sub-Genres

Sub-Genre	**Description**
Origin Stories	Comrade novels recognized as being the earliest stories circulated. Often set in the 1980s and tend to have simple narrative structures; typically improbable love stories with tragic endings.
Indulgent/Boy Love	These stories have characters that span all ages (from adolescent to elderly romances). Often highly sentimental male-male love stories with either open-ended or happy endings where the two lovers have some hope of finding happiness together.
Campus Love	Stories about university students exploring their sexuality. Mostly coming-of-age stories where university youth learn more about same-sex relations and consider their own ideals for love and relationships.
Military Comrades	These novels feature military or police settings, where a soldier or cop explores his sexuality and tries to reconcile his ostensibly contradictory public career with private desires.
Family Life	These stories revolve around an individual struggling to reconcile his homosexual identity with the expectations from parents or wife. Often concerns filial piety, where individuals are pressured to conform to the heterosexual ideal.

Appendix VIII: Statistics for Selected Comrade Novels[51]

Title	**Year[52]**	**Website Archived**	**Views**	**Shares**	**Comments**
Beijing Story	1996	Shuku	49,040	4,876	825
Huizi	1999	Bookbao	34,923	2,048	162
Two Men, Two Women	2000	Shulink	29,109	2,587	197
The Illusive Mind	2001	Boysky	44,287	296	102
Butterfly Talk: Liang and Zhu's Modern Experience	2002	Boysky	97,187	683	735
The Fortune of My Baby and I	2004	Danlan	64,287	926	276
Exposé of Police Comrade Zheng Xiong	2006	CC gaystories	35,487	1,236	232
Why I Uphold Being GAY	2006	Danlan	84,967	1,825	298

[51] Statistics for the past year as of retrieval in 2012 (refer to Works Cited).
[52] Refers to first circulation.

Appendix IX: Frame Categories and Narrative Types

DIAGNOSTIC FRAME			
Narrative Type	**Influence**	**Trigger Phrases**	**Targeted Political Issues**
Dystopian Imagery	Highlights the paradox of repressive Chinese regime and policies vs. Western "openness" Indirectly criticizes State control oppressing homosexuals as outdated Communicate that there are glaring problems in Chinese society due to the injustice and oppression of State control and people cannot just let the situation continue (government needs to be more tolerant of non-normative behaviors).	• Homosexual identity exposed • Tragic downfall or demise of homosexual character • Allusions and references to Chinese history • Tiananmen square, Communism • Military or police violence towards civilians • Dystopian capitalist vision , superficial consumerism • Fixation on money; wealth disparities • Juxtaposing "visionary" modernity and advancement with the "tragedy" of reality constrained by repressive State control • Character's family related to government • Money Boys or male prostitution • "Hooliganism"	• Communist regime • Socialist past and revolutionary history • Hooliganism law • Homosexuality as pathological disease • Unequal power relations within Chinese society (between rich and poor; government and civilian) • Chinese Communist Party (CCP)
Material Injustice: "good" innocent people vs. "evil" oppressive State	Emphasizes how authorial figures that are invested with a role of responsibility and discipline have abused/misused their power and are not acting in the public interest. Guides readers to recognize that homosexuals are victims who have been discriminated against and had their rights violated, providing a concrete target as the "bad" guy	• Presence of "evil" characters intending harm or chasing main character • Metaphors where the oppressive and unequal State – civilian relationship is embodied (e.g.: through animal interactions) • Description of abusive or dystopian father-son relationships • Description of military police abusing or misusing their power (violence towards innocent civilians) • Human rights violations • Depictions/References to violence and unjustified discrimination towards homosexuals • "Rabbits"	• Authoritarian government power • Censorship laws • Military violence to civilians • Government corruption • Corruption of capitalism • Oppression of homosexual behaviors • Lack of free choice • Imprisonment on basis of disturbance of public order • Indirect Administrative Sanctions and Party Disciplinary Action
Abstract Injustice: homosexual individual estranged due to oppressive intangible and omnipresent forces	Allows readers to see themselves as victims and recognize how their rights have been violated by an authoritarian government Provokes revision in how people perceive (homosexual) life, seeing it no longer as misfortune and immutable, but as an injustice and mutable.	• Description of omnipresent sense of foreboding • Inability to escape from the dark or repeated references to an oppressive darkness • Representations or references to characters being forcibly silenced (direct attack on State censorship) • Tragic downfall of innocent homosexual individual • Drowning or suffocation • Dreams/Memories • Suicidal thoughts • Preoccupation with (mental) disease	• Corruption of capitalism • Economic and political disparities in an unstable environment • State-enforced social norms • Censorship issues • Lack of free choice and personal freedoms • Discriminatory imprisonment and detainment of homosexuals through indirect statutes

PROGNOSTIC FRAME			
Narrative Type	**Influence**	**Trigger Phrases**	**Targeted Political Issues**
Affirming Gay Love	Problematizes how homosexuals conform to heterosexual norm enforced and regulated by the State. Shows readers that it is necessary to believe in homosexual love and happiness to understand and accept oneself.	• Philosophical ruminations on the gay psyche and lifestyle (what does it mean to be homosexual?) • Epiphany or Self-Conscious Revelation that homosexuality cannot be "cured" to turn heterosexual • Character abandons all schemes or plans to conform to heterosexual lifestyle to embrace homosexuality • Depiction of disillusionment with heterosexual life/social expectations	• Hooliganism law • Social and political discrimination • Classification of homosexuality as mental disease • Misrepresentations and misunderstandings of homosexuality • State control of media circulation • Restrictive marriage laws
Communication through Writing	Emphasize that homosexuals cannot remain silent about their struggles and must spread awareness of their presence (through writing) before progress can be achieved.	• Recurring theme of the need to write or speak about something • Descriptions of key objects that are closely associated with writing and documentation (e,g.: a pen or diary) • Depictions of characters in the physical act of writing or singing • (love) Letters • (love) poems • (love) Songs	• Censorship laws restraining communication • Social and political discrimination due to misinformation and misunderstandings of same-sex attraction
Breaking Down Stereotypes	Address common misunderstandings and negative assumptions about homosexuality to expose them as false and unsubstantiated. Instead, stories show homosexuals are also good, decent people and that gay love it is as valid and natural as heterosexuality (and perhaps even more ideal)	• Philosophical arguments about what people think about homosexuality vs. what homosexuality really is • Depictions of gay men who are respectable, good and ideal (according to traditional heterosexual standard: good career, humble, well-educated) • "We are just like everyone else" • Juxtaposition of "bad" homosexual behavior (society's stereotype) with description of true life of an average homosexual • HIV/AIDs stories • Unmasking	• Social and political misinformation and misunderstandings of homosexuality • State suppression of all non-normative behaviors • Government policies for AIDs/HIV • Homosexuality as pathological disease

MOTIVATIONAL FRAME			
Narrative Type	**Influence**	**Trigger Phrases**	**Targeted Political Issues**
Role Model	Gives a glimpse of what is "at the end of the tunnel" – shows rewards and potential for optimism in future Mobilization of pre-existing preference structures or sentiment pools: Advocates equality based on difference Makes *tongzhi* struggles central to all Chinese people's struggles	• Happy (fairytale) endings for gay couple • Acceptance by family • Self-acceptance/confidence • Compare and contrast between heterosexual and homosexual relationships • Assertions that gay people are no different from all Chinese people • Equality • Sameness (between male/female or gay/straight) Blurring of boundaries (between homo/hetero)	• Self-censorship and silencing • Family abandonment • Modern day discrimination • Misinformation about homosexuality • Overall feeling of repression • Social inequity • Human rights – right to individuality • Sexual rights • Commodification and need for differentiation
Escape through Transformation	Inform readers that even though the situation may seem bleak, escape from and aversion of failure and continued misfortune is possible if action is taken Advise readers that they can obviate repressive expectations and reconstitute themselves in the course of changing the conditions of their material corporeal existence Shock readers into action by portraying the severity of homosexual discrimination and abuse – conveys urgency of need for action to stop innocent people suffering	• Transformations • Running away from bad situation • Theme of homosexuals *becoming* something non-human (angel, animal) • Violence • Abusive relationships • Suicidal inclinations • Suicide scenes • Death (or references to death)	• Legal and political discrimination • Gay crackdowns • Consignment to oppressed fate • Underground and suppressed status • Social prejudice • Military violence towards gays • Political corruption

Appendix X: Translated Excerpt for Beijing Story(1996)

On June 3, Cai Ming called me as I was just entering my office. His tone was perplexed but full of poorly constrained excitement. They are going to end the standoff tonight. His message was about 99% correct. I had a similar feeling too.

I received a call from my mom in the afternoon. She advised me not to step out tonight by any means. I jokingly retorted: "Why shall I go out? I don't want to be part of the turmoil."

In two hours, Lanyu called and said that the situation was promising tonight and that he would go to the Tiananmen Square with a classmate of his. I was immediately alerted.

"You can't go out tonight!"

"We just want to go and have a look. I will definitely come back tonight."

"No, you can't go! Let me tell you something. Something big is going to happen tonight!"

"How do you know?"

I couldn't stand it anymore but had to explain to him patiently: "The message is 100% accurate. Don't ask me more!"

"I have to go then!" He got excited.

"Are you fucking crazy?!" I became nervous.

"I'll be back by 10. I'll take extra care." He had made up his mind. I wondered why he was sometimes so stubborn.

Leaving everything behind, I rushed to find him but he had already left the house.

I drove my car around the city, which was in a state of disarray and saturated with a depressing atmosphere. It was over 11 p.m. The radio and loudspeakers everywhere were playing the national anthem. A girl was advising everybody to go to the square to support the students. The air was humid. There was not a single star in the sky. It was extremely depressing. I had not eaten anything since the afternoon. But I still did not feel hungry… The day was about to break. I became exceedingly desperate and started to call numbly:

"Lanyu, Lanyu…"

"I have to go find him. I don't care if I will die or not!"

From afar, someone jogged over here. It was Lanyu. I could feel it without looking.

His white shirt was full of blood. So was his face. I could not utter a word at the sight.

"Fascist! Bastard!" He cursed.

"What happened to you?" I was completely at loss as to what to ask or say.

"I was not hurt." He looked at his shirt and said. "It was all others' blood."

Hearing this, my head started to swirl.

We walked all the way home from "The North River." He kept telling me everything he saw.

"When the first shot was fired, everyone was frantically running away. I crawled onto the ground too. After the gunshots, I noticed someone in front of me was not moving at all. I reached out to grab him but got a handful of blood… There was a girl beside me. I wanted to take her away from the scene, but she was too scared to move. All of a sudden, the gun shots restarted. I jumped on top of her and protected her underneath my body...

Pictures of the bloody scenes flickered through my brain as I was listening to Lanyu's account of the story. I stared at him... I could hardly believe someone as obedient, graceful and sentimental as him could reach out to protect others under the gunfire.

Appendix XI: Translated Excerpt from The Illusive Mind(2001)

The narrator frequently goes to the beach, alone, to sit silently and reflect on the internal struggle he experiences over his feelings and desires for Z. Thus, the story is punctuated with detailed portrayals of seascapes:

> "You could only vaguely see the contours of the mountain chain on the other side of the misty bay. It was early Autumn, and the surface of the sea was serene. Brilliant sunlight and a few cotton white clouds floating in the azure sky.
>
> Even the smallest waves smashed to pieces when they crashed onto the shore. The moment just before they shatter, their bellies, yellow like orioles, would swell as if they had taken on the burden and all the unhappiness of the seaweeds.
>
> The swelling water reflects glinting spots of light on its endless ripples. The arch of the horizon stretched out endlessly, as if it were a blue hoop, firmly holding the sea together. In a sudden moment, a white wave would suddenly rise like a gigantic wing, but in the next, it would disappear again with a spontaneous and refined dance, a hint of vitality; but also of life and death.
>
> With the rising tide, the waves surge higher and higher. The beach would silently give in to this assault and slowly shrivel. A shaft of light would slowly extend over the water surface, from west to east, like a folding fan opening up. The face of the fan is rippled, and at the base of the fan the darkness of the mountains would blend in the dark green plane. The waves roll incessantly, never surpassing the boundaries of the shores, and always obedient to the distant moon (1)."

The beautiful imagery of water and waves throughout the story can be read in terms of the sexual desire that preoccupies his mind when he thinks about Z. The "wetness" of the entire story reinforces the fluidity of the characters, their sexual identity, and desires set forth by the ambiguous narrative.