

# History Of Homosexuality In China

Formal historical data provided by ancient records dealing with male homosexuality in China can be dated back to the Shang Dynasty (c. 16th century - 11th century BC), according to Li Yinhe in her book *History of Chinese Homosexuality*.

The term "Luan Feng" was used to describe homosexuality in the "Shang Dynasty Records". Interestingly, there are no record of lesbianism in Chinese history.

Historical traces of male homosexuality persist through dynasty to dynasty from ancient times and never disappear. It was in full swing during the Spring and Autumn and the Warring Periods, at which time Mi Zixia, favorite of the Monarch Wei, and Long Yang, favored by Monarch Wei, were the two best-known figures.

The greatest influences and achievements back then, however, belonged to the famous poet Qu Yuan. It is said that his love for the monarch Chu can be felt in most of his works, for instance his "Lisao" and "Longing for Beauty".

Prevailing among emperors  
Li claimed that during the powerful Han Dynasty (206 BC - 220 AD) the homosexual activities of emperors and ministers were frequently preserved in the historical records. According to the "Historical Record" and "Han Dynasty Records", almost all emperors of the Western Han Dynasty had lovers of their same sex.

There was a much-told story about Emperor Ai, whose name was Liu Xin, and who reigned from 6 BC to 2 BC. Unwilling to awaken his male lover Dong Xian, who had fallen asleep on his robes, Liu cut off his sleeves instead.

After the Han Dynasty, the general attitude was tolerant, so long as homosexuals fulfilled their filial duties by getting married and continuing the family line.

Remarkably, a calm and dispassionate attitude to the homosexual phenomenon was always prevalent in ancient China. There was neither eulogy, nor criticism. It seemed to do no harm in maintaining traditional family ethics.

## Male prostitution

The years 1573-1620 marked the most flourishing period of the Ming Dynasty (1368 - 1644). With great developments in industry and trade, luxurious lifestyles also proliferated, according to Li's book.

Prostitution was a common practice at that time, due to the moral concept which advocated the acceptance of natural sexual needs, an approach promoted by the neo-Confucian philosopher Wang Yangming.

Male prostitutes (gigolos) were widely available to meet their clients' specific requirements.

Confucianism was canonized during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), with emphasis put on strict obedience to the social order. That is to say, both wife and husband should always remember their correct relationship, but homosexuals went directly against such rules.

## Restrictive decree

Then, in 1740, the first anti-homosexual decree in Chinese history was promulgated, defining voluntarily homosexual intercourse between adults as illegal. Though there were no records on the effectiveness of this decree, it was the first time homosexuality had been subject to legal proscription in China.

During the cultural revolution (1966 - 76), homosexuals faced their worst period of persecution in Chinese history. The government considered homosexuality to be a social disgrace or a form of mental illness.

The police regularly rounded up gays and lesbians. Since there was no law against homosexuality, gays and lesbians were charged with hooliganism or disturbing public order. Since that time homosexuality has remained in closet.

## Acceptance and tolerance

With the replacement of the 1989 edict - which defined homosexuality as a "psychiatric disorder of sexuality" - by the new "Chinese Classification and Diagnostic Criteria of Mental Disorders", released this March by the Chinese Psychiatric Association, China took a step closer to WHO policies, with homosexuals also benefiting from a general loosening of social restrictions.

Shanghai is one of the major cities where gays and lesbians are able to live a more open lifestyle, with some musicians and artists being openly gay. Bars are popular places for gays to meet, with weekends as the best time.

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