

Jasper-like Face and Rosy Lips: An Intertextual Reading of the Effeminate Male Body in Pre-Modern Chinese Romances

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts an intertextual reading of the effeminacy in pre-modern Chinese romances within the context of homosexuality, bisexuality and homosociality. Cultural icons like Song Yu and Pan An have been constantly referred to in the heterosexual scholar-beauty discourse as exemplars of male beauty. However, the "true" stories of these historical figures reveal the homoerotic origin of this bodily rhetoric. The effeminate male body exemplified by the Student Zhang in *The Story of the Western Wing* is therefore a product of male culture; in other words, the ideal male body in men's eyes, instead of women's. The popularization of the image of the fragile scholar-lover was attributable to the largely absence of homophobia and the heterosexual/homosexual dichotomy in pre-modern Chinese culture.

KEY WORDS

scholar-beauty (<i>caizi-jiaren</i>)	effeminacy
homoeroticism	intertextuality
homophobia	the male body
<i>yin/yang</i>	the male fashion
Song Yu	Pan An
traditional Chinese theatre	



The paper attempts a discussion of effeminacy in Chinese literature within the context of homosexuality, bisexuality and homosociality. At the center of its concern is the effeminate male body in the pre-modern heterosexual discourse known as the scholar-beauty 才子佳人 (*caizi-jiaren*) romance. This paper, however, is not a historical study in search of “evidence” showing direct correlations between the homoerotic and heterosexual discourses. Instead, I read the two discourses as intertexts in the light of the theory of intertextuality and argue that the icons of “male beauty” in the scholar-beauty model can be intertextually linked to the homoerotic tradition in ancient China. And most importantly, the bodily rhetoric of the student-lover informed by the “male fashion” tradition demonstrates the largely absence of homophobia and the heterosexual/homosexual dichotomy in the Chinese gender discourse before Westernization. It was this different system of gender identity and the tolerant social atmosphere for homosexuality that made the image of the fragile scholar, which conjures up elements of effeminacy and homoeroticism for Western audience, accepted as the ideal masculine in pre-modern Chinese culture.

It needs to be pointed out that the image of the student-lover (才子 *caizi*) is by no means monolithic and unchanging in the scholar-beauty fiction and drama. For instance, in the late Qing fictions like *The Fortunate Union* (好逑傳 *Haoqiu zhuàn*), the hero is depicted as a chivalrous scholar, who is not only a gifted poet but also an accomplished fighter with military prowess, physical strength, and chivalric spirit. According to Jianyu Zhou, this transformation of the characterization of the hero has something to do with the Manchu ruler’s advocate of martialism (Zhou 125). However, the current paper is not a generic study to cover the development of the male lover in the genre.

Instead I read the bodily rhetoric of the student-lover as a cultural discourse. Even the later chivalrous scholars are portrayed with the rhetorical stereotype of “male beauty,” characterized by “rosy lips, sparkling white teeth, jasper-like face” 唇紅齒白，面若冠玉. And this discourse is exemplified by the Student Zhang in *The Story of the Western Wing* (西廂記 *Xixiang ji*). Both traditional and gender criticism have so far overlooked the possibility of reading this discourse of the feminine scholar against the context of male homoerotic fashion in pre-modern China.

The term “intertextuality” was first coined by Julia Kristeva to refer to the interpretive strategy that “no text is ever completely free of other texts” (Kristeva 146). The basic understanding underlying the theory is that a text (in the narrower sense)¹ “cannot exist as a hermetic or self-sufficient whole, and so does not function as a closed system” (Worton and Still, 1). Judith Still and Michael Worton have provided two reasons for this:

Firstly, the writer is a reader of texts (in the broadest sense) before s/he is a creator of texts, and therefore the work of art is inevitably shot through with references, quotations and influences of every kind. . . . The dominant relations of production and the socio-political context—which could be included within a broad definition of text—are of course a major force influencing every aspect of a text. . . . Secondly, a text is available only through some process of reading; what is produced at the moment of reading is due to the cross-fertilisation of the packaged textual material (say, a book) by all the texts which the reader brings to it. A delicate allusion to a work unknown to the reader, which therefore goes unnoticed, will have a dormant existence in that reading. On the other hand, the reader’s experience of some practice or theory unknown to the author may lead to a fresh interpretation. (Worton and Still 1-2)

What makes this intertextual approach different from the tradi-

tional “influence study” or “source criticism” is a “major shift of the privileged center of signification from that of author/subject to that of text/author” (Jing Wang 7). Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein note that “influence has to do with agency, whereas intertextuality has to do with a much more impersonal field of crossing texts” (Clayton and Rothstein 4). Another difference between intertextual analysis and “influence study” is the former’s stress on interpretation rather than on the establishment of particular facts. According to John Frow, “The identification of an intertext is an act of interpretation. The intertext is not a real and causative source but a theoretical construct formed by and serving the purposes of a reading . . . The prehistory of the text is not a given but is relative to an interpretive grid” (Frow 46).

Classical Chinese literature, especially the elite literature, is characterized by the penchant for using *diangu* 典故 [allusion]. It has been a tradition for poets and writers to show off their learning by richly larding their works with classical quotations and allusions. This tradition, according to Jing Wang, “is often reduced to a ritual and is rarely conscious of its own double bind— aspiring to originality while practicing the act of imitation” (Jing Wang 9). It would be an interesting and fruitful approach to study these allusions as intertexts and investigate the process of recontextualization of them. One salient feature of the *caizi-jiaren* model is the clichéd use of some historical allusions. *The Western Wing*, as well as other scholar-beauty plays and novels, are full of stereotyped phrases like “as handsome as Pan An 潘安” and “as gifted as Cao Zhi 曹植,” which allude to the famous handsome men in history. These historical figures have been popularly read as the paragons of *cai* 才 (talent) and/or *mao* 貌 (looks) and function as prototypes of the *caizi* in the later dramatic and fictional representations. To some extent, their names as such have become the signifier of those qualities while the “true” stories of their own lives have become less important or even forgotten.

A re-reading of the icons of “male beauty” in the cultural past within the context of China’s homoerotic tradition reveals that they were quite likely heroes in the homosexual discourse. It is known that traditional Chinese society did not witness the discrimination against

and strict prohibition of homosexual relations as happened in medieval Europe. Generally speaking, male-male intimacy was tolerated as a kind of trifling dissipation and during some periods it even became a fashion among the upper class men.² The homoerotic tradition known as *nanfeng* 男風 (the male fashion) has indirectly but significantly contributed to the shaping of the cliché aesthetics of the male body in the *caizi-jiaren* romances.

Nan Feng (the Male Fashion)

Song Yu 宋玉 was the archetype of Don Juan in Chinese literature. He has been associated with romantic love because of his “*Fu* on the Licentious Master Dengtu” (登徒子好色賦 *Dengtu Zi haose fu*). The *fu* begins with Master Dengtu’s slander of Song Yu in front of the king: “Song Yu is a man of handsome features and calm bearing and his tongue is prompt with subtle sentences. Moreover, his character is licentious. I would submit that your Majesty is ill-advised in allowing him to follow you into the Queen’s apartments” 玉為人體貌閑麗，口多微辭，又性好色。願王勿與出入後宮 (Song Yu 100). Song Yu first defends himself by saying that his beauty of face and calmness of bearing are given by Heaven and his subtlety of speech is learned from his teacher. He then rebuts the charge of licentiousness made against him by the following passage, which is interesting enough to merit a quotation at length:

The girl next door would be too tall if an inch were added to her height, and too short if an inch were taken away. Another grain of powder would make her too pale; another touch of rouge would make her too red. Her eyebrows are like the plumage of the kingfisher, her flesh is like snow. Her waist is like a roll of new silk, her teeth are like little shells. A single one of her smiles would perturb the whole city of Yang and derange the suburb of Xiagai. For three years this lady has been climbing the garden wall and peeping at me, yet I have never succumbed. How different is the behavior

of master Dengtu! His wife has a woolly head and misshapen ears; projecting teeth irregularly set; a crook in her back and a halt in her gait. Moreover, she has running sores in front and behind. Yet Dengtu fell in love with her and caused her to bear five children. I would have your Majesty consider which of us is the debauchee (Song Yu 100).

東家之子，增之一分則太長，減之一分則太短；著粉則太白，施朱則太赤。肩如翠羽，肌如白雪，腰如束素，齒如含貝，嫣然一笑，惑陽城，迷下蔡。然此女登牆窺臣三年，至今未許也。登徒子則不然，其妻蓬頭鬢耳，齟齬歷齒，旁行踽偻，又疥且痔，登徒子悅之，使有五子。王孰察之，誰為好色者矣。

By the poignant contrast between his and Master Dengtu's attitude towards women, Song Yu ingeniously trumps up a counter-charge against his foe.

From other works attributed to Song Yu like the famous "*Fu* on Gaotang" (高唐賦 *Gaotang fu*) and "*Fu* on the Goddess" (神女賦 *Shennü fu*), we learn that Song Yu was a handsome young man who constantly accompanied the king of Chu. With his beautiful appearance and bearing as well as his intimate relations with the king, he could very possibly be one of the court favorites (Wen 246). These favorites were very common in the courts of various states during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods and played an important role in state politics. Their major job was to entertain the king with their literary talent and witty language; sometimes they also remonstrated with the king cleverly. The status of the courtiers was not high, but some of them might be possibly appointed high posts or important tasks due to the king's favoritism. According to Hinsch, they and their aristocratic lovers were "the first identifiable practitioners of homosexuality in China" (Hinsch 20).

Re-reading the story against the context of the homosexual ethos in the Zhou court, we may find the plot of two male officials rushing to disprove themselves of being "licentious" highly suggestive of a ho-

mosexual interpretation. It is likely that Master Dengtu was another courtier who competed with Song Yu for the king's favor. And the fact that homosexuality in ancient China was characterized by bisexuality better explains why Master Dengtu accused Song Yu of being "licentious" and advised the king to keep Song Yu out of the harem. Song Yu had to defend himself by proving that he was not interested in women at all and therefore would not lure the king's consorts with his charm. He did this by asserting that he paid little attention to the seduction of the most beautiful girl in the world, while Master Dengtu made love with his ugly wife and produced five children with her. It is obvious that "licentiousness" here stands for heterosexual desire and the two male courtiers rush to prove themselves as being "faithful" to the king and not interested in women.

The story can be read in the context of the situation of male favorites at the Zhou court and the unequal positions of homosexual partners throughout Chinese history. The male courtiers were socially in a low position and since they obtained their privilege by their physical beauty, they always felt insecure and worried about their fate when they grew old. This mentality is typical among women in traditional China. The "*Fu* on the Licentious Master Dengtu" can be read as an intertext to the other homosexual anecdotes during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods. For instance, a household story showing the male courtiers' anxiety is recorded in the *Intrigues of the Warring States* (戰國策 *Zhan'guo ce*): Lord Longyang 龍陽君 was a male favorite in the kingdom of Wei 魏. Once on a fishing trip, after catching about a dozen fish, Longyang suddenly burst into tears. When the king asked the reason for this sudden sadness, Longyang replied that he was very happy when he caught the first fish until he caught a larger fish. He was thinking of giving away the smaller fish when it struck him that he was in a similar situation. He knew that there were persons more beautiful than himself in the world and feared the king might abandon him as he had been prepared to abandon the smaller fish. The king immediately reassured him that this would never happen, and issued an order prohibiting the mention of anyone more beautiful than Longyang.

Male homosexuality was also known as “*nanfeng*” in China. Since “*nan*” means both “male” 男 and “south” 南, the term is a pun on “male custom” (or “male fashion”) and “southern wind.” It has been suggested that homosexuality originated from, and was more popular in, southern China. Historically, this “southern wind” was particularly prominent during the Six Dynasties, roughly from the third to sixth centuries.

Another icon of handsome man was the Six-Dynasty poet Pan An 潘安. In popular literature, Cao Zhi personifies the quality of *cai* (literary talent) and Pan An signifies *mao* (physical beauty). Pan An is the popular name for Pan Yue 潘岳 (247-300, styled Anren 安仁), a prominent *fu* poet in the Jin 晉 dynasty whose physical beauty had been recorded in *The History of Jin* (晉書 *Jin shu*) and *A New Account of Tales of the World* (世說新語 *Shishuo xinyu*).

According to the biography of Pan Yue in *The History of Jin*, he was born in a moderate wealthy family—both his father and grandfather had held office. He was well known as a youth of talent throughout his district and began to hold office at a very early age. However, his talent had attracted jealousy and resentment, so his political career turned out to be full of frustrations. Pan Yue lived in a time when the court struggle was shockingly fierce and cruel and unfortunately, Pan was implicated in it and finally became its victim. At the end of his biography in *The History of Jin*, we find a fascinating account of his physical beauty:

Pan Yue was handsome in appearance and bearing; the diction of his writings was peerlessly beautiful. And he was particularly good at writing eulogies. When he was young, he often strolled about outside Luoyang, holding a slingshot under the arm. Women who met him all surrounded him by hands and threw fruits in his chariot, so when he returned, his chariot was full of fruits. (Fang et al. 1507)

岳美姿儀，辭藻絕麗，尤善為哀誄之文。少時常挾彈出洛陽道，婦人遇之者，皆連手縈繞，投之以果，遂滿車而歸。

The account of Pan Yue’s beauty was just a reflection of the social practice of admiring the male body during the Jin (265-420) and Southern Dynasties (420-589). The late third century has been singled out by Van Gulik as the high point in the openness of male homosexuality (Van Gulik 159-60). Male homosexuality, or “*nanfeng*,” was very popular among the upper class, including emperors, generals, high officials, renowned men of letters, during that period. A cornucopia of records on homosexual attraction can be found in both the official histories and literary sketches of that time. The popularity of “male favoritism” as a social fashion was just like Wang Shunu’s 王書奴 observation:

From the Xianning and Taikang reign periods (275-290) of the Western Jin dynasty onward, male favoritism flourished considerably and was as extensive as attraction to women. All of the gentlemen and officials esteemed it. All men in the realm followed this fashion to the extent that husbands and wives were estranged. Resentful unmarried women became jealous. (Wang Shunu 64)

Pan Yue’s beauty is recorded from a homoerotic perspective in various extant sources. *A New Account of Tales of the World* refers to him and Xiahou Zhan 夏侯湛 as two handsome men who were always together: “Pan Yue and Xiahou Zhan both had handsome faces and enjoyed going about together. Contemporaries called them the ‘linked jade disks’” 潘安仁、夏侯湛并有美容，喜同行，時人謂之連璧 (Liu 314). “Linked jade disks” later also became a euphemistic phrase for homosexual lovers. During Pan Yue’s lifetime, male homosexuality had stepped out of the imperial court and been taken up by members of the scholarly elite and officialdom. Male clubs with homosexual connotations like “seven worthies of the bamboo grove” 竹林七賢, which was composed of seven most influential dissident poets of that time, were very popular among the social elite. We have reasons to believe that the “twenty-four friends of Jia Mi” 賈謐二十四友, of which Pan Yue was a leading member, was also a club of that kind and might

involve sexual aspect apart from political and literary activities.

A New Account of Tales of the World is a very interesting anthology of anecdotes, noteworthy conversations and remarks, and brief characterizations of historical persons who lived in the period between the declining years of the Latter Han and the founding of the Liu-Song state (roughly 150-420). The book is conveniently divided into sections according to the subject and there is a section titled *rongzhi* 容止 (appearance and bearing) which consists of stories of the admiration of handsome men. This section of stories mirrors the popular appreciation of male beauty of the fifth century, which often includes sexual overtones.

In these interesting stories we find not only admiration of men's temperance and demeanor, but also descriptions of the fragments of the male body written by men. For instance, He Yan's 何晏 face was extremely white. The emperor suspected that he used powder. At the peak of the summer months he offered him some hot soup and dumplings. After He Yan had eaten them he broke into a profuse sweat and with his scarlet robe was wiping his face, but his complexion became whiter than ever (Liu Yiqing 311). Wang Yan's 王衍 hands were so white that when he gripped a sambar-tail chowry with a white jade handle, it was almost indistinguishable between the handle and his hand (Liu Yiqing 313).

From the story of He Yan's white face, we learn that men's white face was fashionable at that time. Additionally, applying powder to the face to make it look white was quite popular among noble men. The admiration of men's white and tender skin is also reflected by the usage of the metaphor of jade in describing the male body. Terms like "pearls and jade" 珠玉 and "jade mountain" 玉山, which had been mainly employed to eulogize the female body, appear in *A New Account of Tales of the World* in the portrayals of handsome men. For instance, the following metaphor is used to praise Wang Yan's beauty: "When he's in a crowd of other men, he's like a pearl or jade in the midst of tiles and stones" 似珠玉在瓦石間 (Liu 316). In the admiring description of the homosexual poet Ji Kang 嵇康, who was the lover of another famous poet Ruan Ji 阮籍, it is said that when he was drunk, he leaned

"like a jade mountain about to collapse" 傀俄若玉山之將崩 (Liu 312). And "jade mountain" is also used to portray a high-ranking official named Pei Kai 裴楷:

Pei Kai possessed outstanding beauty and manners. Even after removing his official cap, with coarse clothing and undressed hair, he was always attractive. Contemporaries adored him to be a man of jade. One who saw him remarked, "Looking at Pei Kai is like walking on top of a jade mountain with the light reflected back at you." (Liu 315)

裴令公有俊容儀，脫冠冕，粗服亂頭皆好，時人以為“玉人”。見者曰：“見裴叔則，如玉山上行，光映照人。”

Apart from pale countenance and light skin, men's weakness and fragility were also regarded as beautiful, which is attributable to the "trans-gender" feature of Chinese homosexuality.³ Wang Gong 王恭 was said to be as "sleek and shining as the willow in the months of spring" 濯濯如春日柳 (Liu 324). In another place, when the calligraphic master Wang Xizhi 王羲之 saw the capital intendant Du Yi 杜羲, he sighed in admiration and said, "His face is like congealed ointment and his eyes like dotted lacquer; this is a man from among the gods and immortals" 面如凝脂，眼如點漆 (Liu 320). These descriptions reveal the feminization of men as a social fashion and the homoerotic articulation during the Six Dynasties. One extreme example of male weakness is Wei Jie 衛玠. He was so thin and frail that his contemporaries maintained that it's "as if he couldn't bear the weight of silken gauze" (Liu 316). When he went to the capital, people had long since heard of his reputations, and onlookers were lined up along the road like a wall. He had previously suffered from an emaciating illness and his body could not endure exertion. As a consequence he became sick and died, and his contemporaries claimed that people had "stared Wei Jie to death" (Liu 317).

It is noteworthy that the bodily rhetoric of the later *caizi* can be intertextually linked to the literary texts on male beauty during the Six

Dynasties period. There are a number of poems written by emperors and high officials in the anthologies of this period that openly praise the beautiful bodies of male prostitutes.

During the Southern Dynasties, a new poetic style known as *gongti shi* 宮體詩 (palace style poetry) crystallized from the royal patronage. These poems written by court poets mainly focused on palace life and their subject and diction were influenced by the "salon" environment of court literary entertainments. Many *gongti shi* were collected in an anthology entitled *New Songs from a Jade Terrace* (玉臺新詠 *Yutai xinyong*). While love poems constitute a considerable proportion of *gongti shi*, it is noteworthy that the emotional love and carnal desire expressed by poets are both heterosexual and homosexual. And both women and men are treated as objects of the *yongwu* 詠物 (writing about things) scrutiny. There are several poems in praise of beautiful catamites and male prostitutes that reveal the aesthetic ideals of the male body at that time. One of them is written by Emperor Jianwen 梁簡文帝 (r. 550-551) of the Liang Dynasty:

How winsome! The young catamite!
 He tramples Dong Xian and o'ersteps Mizi Xia.
 In his feathered curtains, morning fragrance grows redolent;
 Within beaded blinds the evening clepsydra sounds.
 Kingfisher quilts bear mandarin-drake hues;
 A carven couch inset with elephant-ivory.
 His youth is that of the little Emissary;
 His beauty compares with the bloom of dawn.
 Sleeves out from jade-strung brocade;
 Slips fashioned of fine cotton.
 As he catches his skirts, delicate pink peeps forth;
 At the turn of his head, twin-crowned coiffure lies aslant.
 Bewitching eyes now and then reveal a smile;
 A jade hand of a sudden plucks a flower;
 Harboring suspicions that he be not the last to be hooked;
 Intimate affection like that of the "former carriage."
 He would surely make the Yan girls jealous,

And cause the maids of Zheng to sigh. (Marney 115-16)

變童嬌麗質，踐董復超瑕。
 羽帳晨香滿，珠簾夕漏餘；
 翠被含鴛色，雕床鏤象牙。
 妙年同小史，姝貌比朝霞。
 袖裁連璧錦，床織細種花；
 攬褲輕紅出，回頭雙鬢斜；
 懶眼時含笑，玉手乍攀花。
 懷情非後釣，密愛似前車；
 定使燕姬妒，彌令鄭女嗟！

Without the allusions to Dong Xian and Mizi Xia, we would have no way of knowing whether the figure in the poem is a male or female. The feminine feature of male prostitutes is revealed in another poem written by Zhang Han 張翰:

The actor Zhou elegantly wanders,
 the youthful boy is young and delicate,
 fifteen years old.
 Like the eastern sun,
 fragrant skin, vermilion cosmetics,
 simple disposition mixes with notoriety.
 Your head turns—I kiss you,
 lotus and hibiscus.

Your appearance is already pure,
 your clothing is new.
 The chariot follows the wind,
 flying after fog and currents of mist.
 Inclined toward extravagance and festiveness,
 gazing around at the leisurely and beautiful.
 A pleasant expression delights in laughter,
 a handsome mouth delights in talking. (Hinsch 71-72)

翩翩周生，婉孌幼童。
 年十有五，如日在東。
 香膚柔澤，素質參紅。
 團輔圓頤，齒苒芙蓉。
 爾形既淑，爾服亦鮮。
 輕車隨風，飛霧流煙。
 轉側旖靡，故盼便娟。
 和顏善笑，美口善言。

The sexual implication is more evident in this poem. And the stress has been put on the freshness, fragrance, softness, and tenderness of the male body. As Bret Hinsch notes, "His pale skin and rosy complexion evoke ideals of female beauty that apparently transferred to sexually passive men" (Hinsch 73). However, there are also poems showing sympathy toward the fate of the catamites. As a group of people who made a living on their looks, they, like women, felt uncertain about their patrons' favor and worried about the fading of their youthful beauty; all of these resemble the traditional theme of "abandoned wife." The following is a typical lament for a male prostitute written by Liu Zun 劉遵 (d. 535):

Pretty little Zhou
 Picks bunches of orchid faintly smiling.
 Fresh skin paler than powder white,
 Smooth cheeks like peach pink.
 He hugs his catapult near Diaoling,
 Casts his rod east of Lotus leaves.
 As his arms move he swings his perfume pouch,
 Clothes so light are at the kind wind's mercy.

Lucky to be chosen to dust the pillow,
 To serve in painted halls.
 Gilt screens enclose his kingfisher quilt,
 Indigo cloth drapes his incense clothes-frame.
 From an early age he knew the pain of scorn,

Kept the words in, ashamed to speak.
 Ripped sleeve favors though generous,
 Leftover peach love still not ended . . .
 Moth eyebrows, what's the use of envy?
 New faces stream steadily through the palace. (Birrell 213)

可憐周小童，微笑摘蘭叢。
 鮮膚勝粉紅，慢臉若桃紅。
 挾彈雕陵下，垂釣蓮葉東。
 腕動飄香麝，衣輕任好風。
 幸承拂枕選，得奉畫堂中。
 本知傷輕薄，含辭羞白通。
 剪袖恩雖重，殘桃愛不終。
 娥眉詎誰嫉，新姬近入宮。

Homophobia: East and West

It is astonishing to find out the similarities between the male body in homosexual discourse and that in heterosexual representations in the Chinese space. While male/female, homosexual/heterosexual are fundamental gender categories in Western culture, they were actually not important identity categories in pre-modern China. This phenomenon has been termed by Xiaomingxiong as a "fuzzy transgender-transsexualism" (Xiaomingxiong 12). In what follows I will argue that homophobia, which is at the center of the construction of masculinity in Western culture, was largely absent in China's indigenous culture. The reason of it could be further traced to the different position of gender in Western and Chinese symbolic systems.

I should first make it clear that the "homosexuality" in traditional China discussed here is by no means the same category of sexual orientation in today's Western gender discourse. David Halperin argues that the homosexual/heterosexual dualism is actually a cultural construction of the last century or two in the West and the category "homosexuality" did not exist before late nineteenth century, when the

term was first invented (Halperin 41-53). He substantiates this argument by holding that there was only "sexual inversion" in ancient Greece, which cannot fit into the modern category of "homosexuality" (Halperin 37-53). While his argument is highly enlightening for the realization that the male-male intimate relations in pre-modern China cannot be identified with the "homosexuality" in terms of the Foucauldian conception of sexuality, I use the word "homosexuality" simply to refer to any form of same-sex sexual behavior for the sake of convenience in this paper. However, an important theoretical awareness underlying this paper is that the heterosexual/homosexual binary was largely absent in pre-modern Chinese society.

The fear of being feminine and the fear of being homosexual are the central constituents of the modern notion of masculinity in the West. Homosexual relations had been condemned by the dominant discourse in society as a moral degeneration for a long period of more than one thousand years in the West. Byrne Fone writes that "[h]omophobia sometimes seems to be especially virulent in, and perhaps even unique to, Western culture." The reason, many argue, is because the anomaly blurs the clear-cut line between men and women and thus disturbs the established gender identity based on the rigid binaries, as explained by Halperin:

Indeed, the "soft"—that is, sexually submissive—man, possessed of a shocking and paradoxical desire to surrender his masculine autonomy and precedence, is monstrous precisely because he seems to have "a woman's soul confined by a man's body" and thus to violate the deeply felt and somewhat anxiously defended sense of congruence on the part of the ancients between gender, sexual practices, and social identity. (Halperin 46)

Although homosexuality/heterosexuality seemingly constitutes another binary, it is subversive to the established gender order because it cannot align clearly with other binaries of gender and social identity, namely:

Male	female
Masculine	feminine
Man	woman

It is interesting that though homosexuality has been associated with femaleness and femininity by the dominant discourse, we cannot add the binary "heterosexuality/homosexuality" to the above columns like this:

Heterosexual	homosexual
Male	female
Masculine	feminine
Man	woman

This new binary cuts across the distinctions created by other pairs, because we cannot logically align "homosexuality" exclusively with "female/feminine/woman" (Buchbinder 58). People tend to fear things that they cannot name. Although there were many other political, religious and economic factors contributing to the treatment of homosexuality in Western history, we may fairly argue from the perspective of gender politics and social identity that the subversiveness of homosexuality lies in its incompatibility with and disturbance of the existing discourse of gender identity.

Although the gay and lesbian movements in the West have remarkably changed people's attitude toward homosexuality in the last decades, generally speaking, homophobic discourse remains a central organizing principle of the Western cultural definition of manhood.

In the Chinese space, the *yin/yang* dichotomy was much more important than the male/female. The *yin-yang* resembles the Western binary oppositions on the surface but is fundamentally different from them with a strong emphasis on the dialectical and correlative relations between the two forces. Unlike the binary oppositions, the *yin* and *yang* in Chinese philosophy are interchangeable, interdependent, correlative and dynamic. The *yin-yang* theory emphasizes that there cannot be one

without the other and each needs the other in order to be complete.

The principle of the balance between *yin* and *yang* provides us with a theoretical basis for our understanding of the discourse of androgyny in traditional Chinese thought. The application of *yin-yang* theory to gender discourses is firstly manifested in the ideal of a harmonious interaction between the male and female. The two sexes depend on each other to survive; if one prevails over the other, the balance between *yin* and *yang* will be destroyed and the society will be in trouble. Additionally, *yin-yang* has also been used to interpret the discourse of androgyny. There is no "pure" *yang*/masculine or "pure" *yin*/feminine; in every person we can find at the same time both *yin* and *yang* and his/her identity as a man or woman only indicates the proportion of the two forces, as Billington observes:

[The *yin-yang* philosophy] gives expression to a reality that the Western world is slowly beginning to appreciate: no human reality is entirely *yang* or entirely *yin*, as no mountain is entirely *yang* or *yin*. Normally men have more *yang* than *yin* and women more *yin* than *yang* (although there are enough exceptions to this generalisation to encourage caution against speaking in absolutist terms), but every man has some feminine (which is not to say female) qualities, and every woman some male qualities (with the same cautionary concession). (Billington 110)

While the discourse of androgyny in the Judaeo-Christian culture is a manifestation of the male-dominance fantasy, in which the male body has been regarded as the wholeness and the female body the deficiency, the *yin-yang* theory of androgyny shows a dialectical and dynamic understanding of the overriding oneness of all things when the *yin* and *yang* are in harmonious and balanced positions. Since both *yin* and *yang* belong to the undivided One, man and woman are actually One and cannot be separated.

In the light of this *yin-yang* interpretation of hermaphroditism, the human body has been regarded as another site of the constant

change and transformations between the two forces. The Taoist discourse of a relatively flexible and dynamic sex identity had great influence on traditional Chinese culture as a whole. One obvious example is that it was not a shame for male ministers to speak in a feminine voice, especially when they addressed the emperor. In traditional Chinese paintings and engravings, it is hard to tell the gender of the figures should there be no difference of dress, because men and women are represented in almost the same way. And it is well-known that cross-dressing is very common in traditional Chinese theater. As a matter of fact, cross-dressing, transvestitism and transsexualism have been frequent motifs in Chinese folklores and popular narratives. The stories of the woman warrior Hua Mulan 花木蘭, who disguises as a man to join the army on behalf of her father, and Zhu Yingtai 祝英台, who transvests herself to study in a school and falls in love with one of her male classmates, are known to every household.⁴

Medical discourses in pre-modern China also supported the interchangeability of the two sexes and the existence of the androgyne. Charlotte Furth, in her analysis of some famous reported cases of sexual and reproductive anomaly in late Ming China, points out that "in Chinese biological thinking, based as it was on *yin-yang* cosmological views, there was nothing fixed and immutable about male and female as aspects of *yin* and *yang*. . . . In medicine *yin* and *yang* permeate the body and pattern its functions, and here as elsewhere they are interdependent, mutually reinforcing and capable of turning into their opposites. This natural philosophy would seem to lend itself to a broad and tolerant view of variation in sexual behavior and gender roles" (Furth 3). In her essay, Furth examines several cases of males becoming female and female becoming male or the two organs co-existing in one body recorded in the official histories as well as unofficial *biji* 筆記 (jottings) during the late Ming period to explore the relations between the complementary bipolarity of *yin-yang* biological theory and the socially hierarchical interpretations of sex change in practice.

The *yin-yang* theory was so deeply rooted in the Chinese thought that it has actually informed all aspects of Chinese signifying discourse. However, it is not convincing enough to explain the distinguishing

homoerotic tradition and lack of homophobic discourse in the construction of masculinity in traditional China by the *yin-yang* theory alone. Since Taoism had never become the dominant ideology throughout Chinese history, we have to turn to the Confucian discourse for a political reading of the gender discourses in the context of the imperial power relations.

It seems paradoxical that though the *yin-yang* theory engenders a flexible and dialectical understanding of sexual difference and gender identity, "Confucianism constructed gender around strict hierarchical kinship roles" (Furth 1). In the Confucian discourse expounded and revised by Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 of the Han dynasty, the balanced and correlative relationship between *yin* and *yang* has been taken place by a domination of *yang* over *yin*. In a set of one-sided relations between husband and wife, father and son, emperor and minister, etc., the first-named always enjoy the dominant position as the *yang* role and the other is always the submissive *yin*.

The ritualized *yin-yang* and its interaction with gender discourse were manifested not only in the male-female relations but also reflected in the male-male relations. Men were relegated to the *yin* role in front of their superiors in the social hierarchy. This political revision of the *yin-yang* paradigm engendered a "feminization" of men, because in front of their superiors they were in the same position as women in front of their husbands. The *shi* 士 as a group were posited in the submissive, docile and servile subject position by the imperial power, undergoing a metaphorical castration.

The homoerotic relations between the emperor and his court jesters or between members of the ruling class and their catamites were therefore fundamentally in consistency with the literary tradition of "fragrant grass and beauty" 香草美人, the minister who speaks in a female voice, as far as power relations are concerned. In the Confucian interpretation of gender as a social institution, the powerful, the dominant always plays the masculine *yang* role while the weak, the powerless is identified as the feminine *yin*. Whether this *yin-yang* dichotomy involves a sexual relation is actually not so important. The husband-wife pattern became a mindset for the male members of the educated

elite when they faced not only the emperor but also anybody who was higher than themselves in the social ladder. It was therefore a tradition for the male poets to speak in the voice of a woman when addressing their superiors.⁵

The homosexual practice in traditional China was, first of all, a typically hierarchical relation known as "male favoritism." In other words, it was normally the sexual relationship between the rulers, or wealthy people in the later periods, and their "favorites," i.e. low-status catamites, jesters, eunuchs and actors, who were not much more than a plaything. And sodomy was, generally speaking, a dissipation and indulgence outside of the "normal" heterosexual life. It even served as a symbol of political and economic prestige because only the powerful men were able to sexually exploit the lowly men. Therefore it was a fashion among the rulers and aristocrats to keep catamites and actors apart from their numerous wives and concubines in the harem or mansions.

The active and passive roles in homosexual relations were just a reflection of the social position of the two parties. The socially dominant male was often the sexually active one. For instance, there are a group of "effeminate" men in *The Dream of the Red Chamber* (紅樓夢 *Honglou meng*) who attract each other: Jia Baoyu 賈寶玉, Qin Zhong 秦鐘, Liu Xianglian 柳香蓮, and the Prince of Northern Tranquility 北靜王. However, only Qin Zhong and Liu Xianglian are objects of masculine desire; Qin is a poor distant relative of the Jia clan and Liu is an actor who plays female roles. Their social status made them sexually available. They are therefore sought out by Xue Pan and other lecherous sons of the Jia clan. Baoyu, though more beautiful than the other boys, has never become the object of sexual desire for Xue Pan and his friends because of his high social status. By the same token, although there are descriptions of the feminine beauty of the Prince of Northern Tranquility through Baoyu's eyes and the friendly conversation between the two (165-6), it is impossible for them to be sexually related because both of them are socially noble.

By now we can propose the hypothesis that the relatively tolerant atmosphere for male homosexuality in pre-modern Chinese society

was attributable to the fact that homosexuality did not constitute a threat to the established gender ideology and social order. More than that, the one-sided hierarchical relations between powerful people and their catamites or actors even helped to reinforce the *yin/yang* or masculine/feminine gender paradigm. According to Hinsch, "The institutionalization of male prostitution by boys and low-status actors, among others, helped to solidify sexual roles" (Hinsch 10). And since the overwhelming majority of the men who indulged in male-male sexual pleasure were bisexual instead of exclusively homosexual, the Confucian discourse on family obligation and especially the stress on the masculine duty of carrying on the family line had never been hazarded. The aforementioned difficulty in putting homosexuality in either of the two columns can be easily solved in the context of Chinese culture. Since "homosexuality" as a category in the modern sense of the word sexuality did not exist in traditional China, the sexual relations between men fit the *yin-yang* divisions in the Confucian discourse like this:

<i>Yang</i>	<i>yin</i>
Masculine	feminine
Man	woman
active patrons	passive catamites/actors

There were generally two highlights in Chinese homosexual history when the "male custom" became a fashion among members of the ruling class and the society saw a proliferation of homoerotic discourse, one was from Han (206 B.C.-20 A.D.) to the Southern Dynasties (420-581), the other was in the seventeenth-century late Ming period. During the first period, the homosexual relations between the emperors and their courtiers or catamites flourished in the palace, known as "male favoritism." The courtiers were usually from lower-class families and some of them climbed to the top of the power hierarchy because of the emperor's favor. There were numerous records on the anecdotes between emperors and their favorites in official histories. However, these records are rather coy and vague about the sexual dimension of these relations so we have no way to know for sure the nature of this

"favoritism."

In late imperial period, the homosexual relations were mainly between rich men and actors. During this time, the descriptions of homosexual love in fiction and drama were not only explicit but also extremely bold. Feminine actors known as *dan* 旦 became a special group with a strong implication of the objects of homosexual desire. Sophie Volpp points out that "[a]ctors as a group were symbolically coded feminine; that feminization was a part of their professional identity in their off-stage interactions with patrons. . . . The feminization of actors was an artifact not only of cross-dressing but of the sexual availability of actors to elite men" (Volpp 139). In fact, the homoerotic overtone of traditional Chinese theater as a whole can best explain the cross-dressing of male actors on stage, which remains to be a hallmark of Chinese operas. Zhu Dake 朱大可 re-reads traditional Chinese theater as such as a homoerotic discourse and holds that this is the key to understand the flowering of it in the nineteenth century as well as its decline after the mid-1950s. The relationship between theatrical cross-dressing, homosexual eroticism and gender politics in pre-modern Chinese society has become an issue attracting increasing academic attention from various perspectives.

From Homosexual to Heterosexual

Now let us go back to the image of the effeminate *caizi* in the heterosexual scholar-beauty discourse. It should be borne in mind that the *caizi* was produced by male writers mainly for a male audience. Instead of reflecting the notion of ideal masculinity in women's minds, it actually is a construct of male culture as such, i.e. the aesthetic and rhetorical ideals of the male body in men's minds.

It was a distinguishing characteristic of imperial Chinese culture that the habits, tastes and liking of the emperor were always imitated by members of the ruling class, and then spread to the whole society. In this sense, imperial Chinese culture was a typical example of hegemonic culture since the ideas and fashions of the ruling class had always been accepted by the subordinate classes as the dominant dis-

course in society. The royal preference for homosexuality and the homosexual fashion among the ruling elite in various dynasties were therefore not without exerting influence on the notion of male beauty in the symbolic system.

Since the images of Song Yu and Pan An had become established icons in the male culture, they were also signifiers of male beauty in heterosexual discourse. This, of course, was because of the dominant position of male culture and men's hegemonic power of speech in narratives. Men's fantasy on the male body was without question the master narrative, since women's sexual expectations had been totally silenced. In other words, women had no other choice but to accept the discourse of masculinity prescribed by men for them. Therefore Student Zhang is actually the ideal courtier in men's minds, instead of women's. And I argue that his image can be further traced back to the homoerotic articulations in men's culture. This partially explains why the image of *caizi*, with his jasper-like face, white and tender skin, and rosy lips became the ideal male body in popular romanticism. Since the heterosexual/homosexual binary did not mean much in traditional China, there are actually not many differences between the representations of the male body in the two discourses. For instance, the following portrayal of the hero Su Youbai 蘇友白 in the scholar-beauty novel *Yu Jiao Li* 玉嬌梨 are full of allusions to the aforementioned homoerotic icons and are suggestive of the bodily aesthetic of the male prostitutes in homoerotic literature:

He was as beautiful as the jasper in a crown and as brilliant as a ruby. He seemed to have been formed of the air of the mountains and the rivers. His mind, like a glittering ornament, was worthy of his features. He had the elegant height of Wei Jie, the noble bearing of Pan An, and nothing of the arrogant demeanor of a purse-proud upstart; everything about him bespoke a man of genuine merit. (*Yu Jiao Li* 135)

美如冠玉，潤比明珠。山川秀氣直萃其躬，錦繡文心有

如其面。宛衛玠之清儼，潘安之妙麗。並無紈褲行藏，自是風流人物。

In almost every culture, male homosexuality has been closely associated with feminization. In China, it has been an established narrative that the southern men are more feminine than the northern men and the provinces south of the Yangtze River are the hotbed of male homosexuality. As noted before, *nanfeng* can also be interpreted as the "southern wind." It has long been believed that homosexuality as a custom was more popular in the South.⁶ And this notion led to the stereotyped image of the feminized southern men, as revealed by Lin Yutang's 林語堂 portrayal of the southerners:

Down the south-east coast, south of the Yangtze, one meets a different type, inured to ease and culture and sophistication, mentally developed but physically retrograde, loving their poetry and their comforts, sleek undergrown men and slim neurasthenic women, fed on birds'-nest and soup and lotus seeds, shrewd in business, gifted in *belles-lettres*, and cowardly in war, ready to roll on the ground and cry for mamma before the lifted fist descends, offspring of the cultured Chinese families who crossed the Yangtze with their books and paintings during the end of the Ch'in Dynasty, when China was overrun by barbaric invaders. (Lin 17)

The construction of the womanish image of the southern man should be read in the context of the political situation of southern China in history. Chinese history has been characterized by the alternation between unification and division of the country. During times of division, northern China was occupied by "barbarian" invaders and the Chinese regime had been driven to the south of the Yangtze River. In history, after the aforementioned Southern Dynasties, periods of long division also include the Five Dynasties (907-960) and the Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279). The southern regimes were known for their cowardliness. Their courts were content to exercise sovereignty over a

four of these paradigms are present to varying degrees in the Chinese tradition" (Hinsch 11), I take the view that male homosexuality in traditional China was mainly characterized by the first three categories, especially "trans-genderal" and "class-structured." As for "egalitarian homosexuality," it was rare in Chinese history, if not completely absent.

⁴ Of course, very few stories of man dressing as woman could be found in the literary and oral representations. This is true at least in today's representations of the past. The transgression of the gender code by women toward a higher status is, in a way, tolerated and even encouraged, but men's "self-degeneration" to the lower position of women is much more threatening to social order. This is similar to the situation in Western culture.

⁵ See, for instance, the famous Tang poem written by Zhu Qingyu 朱慶余 to the examiner before the imperial examination ("Jin shi shang Zhang shuibu" 近試上張水部) and Zhang Ji's "Jiefu yin" 節婦吟. The poems show that it is obviously not a shame for a man to assume a feminine identity. In today's (homophobic) cultural context, however, these poems would be labeled as a shameless attempt to fawn on powerful people and even arouses distaste and anxiety among the readers, because even symbolically adopting the female role would be a threat to the social order based on gender differentiation.

⁶ In the Ming commonplace books and fictional sources by writers like Shen Defu 沈德符 and Li Yu 李漁, homoeroticism has been ethnographically attributed to southern China, especially the modern Fujian province. "The farther south you go, the more entrenched the Southern Mode becomes, until not only do 'bees do it, birds do it' but even plants and trees do it" (Volpp 118).

⁷ Chen Kaige's 陳凱歌 prize-winning film, *Bawang bieji* 霸王別姬 [Farewell my concubine] can be read as a footnote to the homosexual connotation of the *dan* role played by actors in Peking opera. See also Li 167-203.

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small part of the country and led a befuddled life. In numerous historical and literary discourses, the ruling elite of those southern regimes had been constructed as politically incompetent, militarily weak, and most importantly, lacking in the ambition to reclaim the lost land. This lack of political ambition equals "lack of masculinity" in the dominant gender discourse of the Confucian culture. Therefore the southern culture and southern men had been symbolically associated with femininity and weakness. The aforementioned "southern wind" of the southern dynasties is a vivid illustration of the "decadent" social custom of the south.

I would adapt a political and cultural reading of this phenomenon instead of an essentialist interpretation. Feminization and emasculation have been constructed as signifiers of political incompetence; the southern man has been relegated to a passive *yin* position. Consistent with the power relations shown by the homosexual tradition in China, the production of the northern/masculine and southern/feminine stereotypes in Chinese culture is also due to the hegemonic political reading of gender.

The cultural differences between the north and south are also shown in the different styles of the northern and southern dramas. In fact, from the Yuan period on, the development of Chinese drama was characterized by the rivalry between the northern and southern dramatic traditions. Yuan *zaju* 雜劇 originated in the northern area with the modern Beijing as the center and therefore was also termed as the northern drama or northern song. At almost the same time, as a rival of the northern *zaju*, in the south there existed another kind of drama, *nanxi* 南戲 (southern plays), which originated from the music of *ci* 詞 of the Southern Song dynasty. After the unification of China by the Mongols, the northern *zaju* drama spread rapidly and soon gained the ascendancy in the south too, though southern plays continued to be performed. However, with the downfall of the Mongol Yuan dynasty, from about 1330 onward, the *nanxi* gained a new lease of energy and popularity. As the mainstream dramatic form of the Ming dynasty, it defeated northern drama and came to be referred to as *chuanqi* 傳奇 (marvel tale) during the Ming and later developed into *kunqu* 昆曲,

which are performed to this day.

The stylistic differences between the northern and southern dramas can be conveniently summed up as follows: the northern drama is vigorous and unconstrained and there are relatively more grand historical and heroic stories in its repertoire; the southern drama is more restrained and sentimental and therefore deals with more domestic and love stories. As William Dolby points out, in the southern drama "[t]hemes of romantic love were much more common, with very little of the warlike drama seen so often in the northern plays. . . . A northerner could perhaps have complained of the southern drama . . . that it was 'always' about scholars and beautiful ladies . . ." (Dolby 86). As for the overall musical effect of the two dramas, an oft-quoted remark is made by the famous Ming dramatist Xu Wei 徐渭 (1521-1593):

Hearing northern *qu* stirs one's mood and spirit, rendering them as fierce and martial as the soaring falcon, makes one's hair bristle and scalp tingle, and is capable of inspiring one to bold endeavors. Yes, truly, the northern barbarians excel in drumming up fury, and just as is said, "the music by being compressed and staccato creates hatred." Southern *qu* on the other hand are meandering and slow, drawn-out endlessly, graceful, charming and seductively lilting, floating and drifting one away, so that one loses all firmness of purpose without being conscious of it oneself. Yes, truly the south is soft and beguiling, just as is said, "the sentimental music of a perished state is melancholy and anxious." (Xu 76)

聽北曲使人神氣鷹揚，毛髮洒淅，足以作人勇往之志，信胡人之善於鼓怒也，所謂“其聲譙以立怨”是已；南曲則紆徐綿渺，流麗婉轉，使人飄飄然喪其所守而不自覺，所謂“亡國之音哀以思”是已。

Similarly, another Ming critic made more specific and striking comparisons between the music of the two dramatic forms:

The north stresses vigor, urgency, boldness and vivacity, whereas the south stresses tranquility, insubstantiality, gentle softness and ethereal remoteness. In the north the syllables are many and the tune compressed, this compression giving prominence to qualities of energy. In the south the syllables are few and the tune is slow and extended, this extendedness giving prominence to the rhythmic cadences. In the north the semantic import of the words is greater than the musical import, while in the south it is the other way around. . . . The north tends to be too coarse of mood and the south to be too feeble. (Wang Jide 34)

北主勁切雄麗，南主清峭柔遠。北字多而調促，促處見筋；南字少而調緩，緩處見眼。北辭情少而聲情多，南聲情少而辭情多。…北氣易粗，南氣易弱。

The *caizi-jiaren* model came into being mainly with the flourish of the Yuan drama (Song Geng 1999). However, we have to take into consideration the influence of southern drama on the extant texts of Yuan *zaju* drama. As Wilt Idema points out, the Yuan *zaju* suffered extensive and formal changes at the Ming court and the plays in *The Selection of Yuan Drama* (元曲選 *Yuanqu xuan*) and various other editions of Yuan *zaju* of the Wanli 萬曆 period had undergone significant adaptations and revisions. He argues that we have to acknowledge these texts for what they are: “[They are] late and heavily adapted versions of earlier plays for performance at Court, and the extensively rewritten adaptations of these as closet drama for the late Ming Jiangnan [southern] literati” (Idema 784).

For instance, although *The Story of the Western Wing* has been categorized as a Yuan *zaju* play, it has been commonly acknowledged that this play is markedly different from other *zaju* plays but is actually quite close to the southern drama as far as the stylistic rules and layout are concerned. Jiang Xingyu 蔣星煜 has masterfully examined the evidence showing the influence of southern drama on *Xixiang ji* from

various perspectives. He concludes that *The Story of the Western Wing* is a “southernized” *zaju* play showing many features of the southern drama. It had been considerably influenced by the southern dramatic style and southern culture as a whole.

Wilt Idema and Stephen West also point out in the introduction to their translation of *The Story of the Western Wing* that the extant texts of the play are actually closet drama for the southern literati:

When northern *zaju* ceased to be performed onstage in the course of the late sixteenth century, *The Story of the Western Wing* not only continued to be played in other forms of theater but also staged a spectacular comeback as closet drama. (Wang Shifu 11)

It can therefore be argued that the scholar-beauty pattern and especially the bodily normalization of the scholar and beauty are mainly the production of the “feminine” southern culture. It should be particularly pointed out that the role type of *sheng* 生 (young man), by which the scholar-lovers are represented, first appeared on the stage of *nanxi*. In Yuan *zaju*, all the leading male roles are called *mo* 末. But in *nanxi* and *chuanqi*, there was more specific classification, *sheng* exclusively referred to young scholars while the *mo* role had changed to subsidiary roles. This shows the conventionalization of the image of *caizi*, with his rosy make-up, colorful costumes and soft movements. And the role type of *sheng* in *nanxi* has been handed down to the role type of *xiaosheng* 小生 in today’s Peking opera and regional operas. In his *A History of Chinese Drama*, William Dolby thus notes the appearance of the *sheng* role in the southern drama:

Sheng may have been a role category which first arose with the *nanxi*, and apart from a few exceptions which may be errors of editing, it remained a peculiarity of southern dramas, *nanxi* and, later *chuanqi*. The *sheng* in *nanxi* was the main male role. It was not, however, quite the same as the *zhengmo* of the Yuan *zaju*, being more exclusively limited

to Confucian scholars and young students and not covering such martial roles as those of a Zhang Fei or Guan Yu. Originally it may simply have meant "young man." (Dolby 86)

Zhou Jianyu, in his research on the publication and circulation of the *caizi-jiaren* novels in the Qing dynasty, observes that "[m]any characters of the *caizi-jiaren* novels are from the Jiangnan area, which may have some connection to the authors' origin or the location where *caizi-jiaren* novels were printed and circulated. . . . It is also very likely that it was the Jiangnan area where the *caizi-jiaren* novels were most widely printed and circulated" (Zhou 70). His discovery further bolsters my argument on the close relations between the *caizi-jiaren* romances and the influence of southern culture.

The conflict between the two dramatic traditions went on in the nineteenth century and was embodied by the rivalry between *kunqu*, known as *yabu* 雅部 (refined section), and the northern regional dramas, known as *huabu* 花部 (flowery [gaily lascivious] section). Because of the royal patronage, Peking opera obtained the hegemonic position in the Peking theatrical world in early nineteenth century. The *huabu* soon prevailed over *yabu*. However, *kunqu* still maintained its popularity among the social and intellectual elite. And the southern style kept exercising strong influence on Peking opera. This can be particularly seen from the tradition of male actors playing female roles, i.e. the *dan* role in Peking opera and other local operas. The feminine *dan* played by young actors soon became the most popular and important role in Peking opera, which revealed the homoerotic tendency of the audience. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the transvestite *dan* became so predominant in Peking opera that "eight out of ten actors play the *dan* role; nine out of ten amateur performers play the *dan*." And the leading actors at that time invariably all played the *dan* role, like the "four famous actors who played female roles." Among them Mei Lanfang 梅蘭芳 had achieved the highest attainment of the cross-dressing *dan* and become the symbol of not only Peking opera but Chinese theater as a whole (Zhang 1993; Dolby 157-83). To a cer-

tain extent, his stage image is a signifier of the homoerotic aesthetics of Chinese drama.⁷

Both the effeminate *sheng* and the transvestite *dan* reveal the homoerotic overtone of Chinese theater. The exploration of the relations between the "southern wind," namely, the impact of southern culture on the development of traditional Chinese drama, and the "male fashion" in the south, which could be traced back to the social fashion of the Six Dynasties, helps deepen our understanding of not only the "homoerotic nature" of traditional Chinese theater described by Zhu Dake, but also the establishment of the feminine *caizi* as the ideal male body in heterosexual discourse. Only in the light of this exploration, can we clearly know how the originally homosexual bodily rhetoric was accepted as the established (heterosexual) masculine image on stage and in fiction. We can therefore argue that theater was the medium through which the homosexual aesthetics of the male body disseminated into heterosexual discourse.

NOTES

¹ In a narrower sense, a text means a piece of writing. In a more general sense, text can be used to refer to anything perceived as a signifying system. The term has been generalized to cover virtually all social phenomena.

² Xiaomingxiong holds that pre-modern China was by no means an oriental paradise for homosexuals. He calls the prejudice against homosexuality in traditional China "implicit homophobia" or "hidden homophobia." But he also agrees that compared with the legal and religious persecution of sodomy in Western history, the general picture in China was tolerant toward male-male sexual relations due to the lack of the homosexual/heterosexual categorization (Xiaomingxiong 1997).

³ David F. Greenberg, in *The Construction of Homosexuality*, divides the social expressions of homosexuality outside of the modern West into four categories: "trans-generational homosexuality," "trans-genderal homosexuality," "class-structured homosexuality," "egalitarian homosexuality" (Greenberg 25). While Hinsch holds that "[a]ll

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