



Chinese Mythology

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A bronze statue of Confucius, who taught that sexuality is natural and not shameful.

Until the 1980s, it was not uncommon for members of the Chinese community in Hong Kong to proclaim their opposition to the decriminalization of homosexual acts between consenting adults. They stated that homosexuality does not exist in China; and if it does, it is the result of decadent Westerners introducing such vices to our innocent people. This idea is popular in China even today.

In reality, however, China has a long, continuous gay history and a large collection of gay documents. Chinese mythology, in particular, is rich in stories about homosexuality.

Religions and Homosexuality in China

The Chinese conception of sexuality is influenced by its aboriginal religions, especially Taoism and Confucianism. Later, Buddhism, which was introduced into China in the Han dynasty (206 B.C.E.-220 C.E.), and Christianity, which was introduced formally to the general public and literary circles during the Ming dynasty (1368 C.E.-1644 C.E.), also influenced Chinese attitudes toward sexuality and sexual morality.

While Christian homophobic attitudes do significantly influence modern China, Chinese mythological stories reflect ancient Chinese views toward homosexuality. Such views were mainly influenced by ancient religions, including the worship of animals and nature, Buddhism, Taoism, and, to a certain degree, Confucianism.

Almost every dynasty in China has its own mythological writings, which concern not only extraordinary heterosexual loves, but also homosexual ones. These writings include stories of same-gender sexual relationships between human beings and fox demons, fox fairies, pig fairies, flower fairies, dragons, monkeys, or spirits. In Chinese mythology, there are also homosexual gods, such as Rabbit-god Wu Tien Bao. There are also temples set up by (predominantly heterosexual) communities to worship deceased but revered gay couples.

Among the famous mythological masterpieces of China are the *zhiquai* stories, or records of strange events, from the Wei-Chin dynasty (265 C.E.- 420 C.E.), the most renowned of which is Gan Bao's *Soushen ji* (In Search of Spirits). Some of these are homosexual stories, such as the *zalu* (miscellaneous topics) and *biji* (random jottings) stories of the Qing dynasty (1644 C.E.-1911 C.E.), including the ghost stories of Pu Songling's *Liaozhai zhiji* (Tales of Anomalies from the Studio of Leisure) and the heresy stories by Ji Yun (1724-1805) in his *Yuewei caotang biji* (Random Jottings at the Cottage of Close Scrutiny). These are the best known ones in China and overseas.

The Chinese View on Sexuality and Mythology

Contrary to the popular belief that the Chinese are ascetic and conservative sexually, the people of ancient China were fond of making love. Early historical records from the Autumn and Spring period--722 B. C. E. to

481 B. C. E.--show how candid the rulers were about sexuality. One empress even publicly compared the national military strategy to the love-making techniques practiced by her and the emperor. For many males in China, sexual freedom prevailed even as late as the 1950s, when polygamy was declared illegal. As late as the 1930s, it was quite ordinary for a man to have concubines (including male concubines) as well as a wife.

Confucius once said "*Shi se xing ye*" (food and sexuality are natural urges). This motto reflects how the Chinese treat sexuality as a natural human desire about which one should not feel ashamed. This philosophy is reflected in the treatment of sexual affairs in the mythological stories, although some of them are didactic.

From the Taoist viewpoint love-making is a way of harmonizing the energies of heaven and earth, thus containing nature's cycle of creation. Love-making, or the "Arts of Chamber," was not only an integral part of early Taoist spiritual training or meditation, it was also believed to be an important method of gaining longevity. So in the mythological stories, it is common for spirits or demons to copulate heterosexually or homosexually with human males in order to extract his "bodily essence" so as to return to human form or to gain longevity.

However, Buddhists view sexuality differently. They believe that sexual activity (whether heterosexual or homosexual) is a manifestation of human greed. Such activity prevents one from "liberating" oneself from the bitter sea of greediness. By committing such sins, the individual is bound to *lunhui*, or reincarnate, after one's death into either a human, animal, or even demonic form, and continue to suffer in the next life. Whether one incarnates into a male or female, into a ghost or an animal, depends entirely upon what the individual did in the past life, a concept that is called *bao* or *yinquo baoying*, the karmic retribution of the next life.

The early Chinese believed in a celestial realm known as *T'ien* (Heaven) and a nether world known as the *Huang Ch'un* (Yellow Springs), but they apparently conceived of them only in the vaguest of terms, and certainly never as abodes of the blessed and the damned respectively. According to various texts, each human being was supposed to have two souls: the *p'o*, or anima, produced at the time of conception, and the *hun*, or animus, which was joined to the *p'o* at the moment of birth. After death, the *hun* ascended to Heaven, while the *p'o* remained in the tomb with the corpse for three years, after which it descended to the Yellow Springs.

Mythological stories, whether heterosexual or homosexual, embody these concepts of *p'o* and *hun*, as well as ancient beliefs in animal worship, the reincarnation and karmic retribution of Buddhism, and the Taoist thoughts on sexual power (*qi*, or energy flow of the human body). Those stories not only serve as Confucian moral teachings for the general public, especially the uneducated, but also, interestingly enough, as "scientific reasons" to explain why someone would be involved in homosexual relationships.

Mythological Stories

In the mythological stories, the soul, after death, is transformed into a free-flowing form of animus, like smoke in the air. Then, according to the deeds of the individual's past life, he or she could reincarnate into either a human form, male or female, or into an animal, demon, or plant.

In these stories a ghost, a fox fairy in a male body form, or simply a man may perform homosexual intercourse with another living male, just because the former was his female lover in the past life. In order to "complete" the heterosexual relationship of the past life, they could then conduct acts that are homosexual (because of his male form in this life). A female may be reincarnated as a male because of some good deeds--especially deeds related to chastity--that she performed in her past life. That is, she may be "rewarded" by being reincarnated into a male form. These stories reflect Confucianism ideas about female chastity and the Buddhist concept of *baoyin*.

Such homosexual plots might be condemned in the West as pagan and immoral, but the Chinese believe that they reflect the fate of humankind. Believing that all events are predestined or predetermined according to one's deeds in past lives, the Chinese tend to accept the facts of this life, including homosexuality, as a result of past lives. Such ancient religious beliefs may explain why the Chinese, in general, are even today less homophobic than Western Christians.

Also, in Chinese mythological stories, homosexual ghosts are not necessarily demons. They often have more virtue than ordinary people. In some mythological stories and in some novels, Buddhist monks or Taoist priests (including homosexual ones) could be more corrupt and evil than the ghosts or fairies. Authors such as Pu Songling and Ji Yun tried to criticize the social inequality of genders and classes. By writing these gay mythological stories the authors stated that even ghosts or fairies are more "humane" than corrupt and arrogant officers or self-proclaimed "moral" Confucian scholars.

"Old Farmer and a Dragon"

Among the mythological stories is one called "Old Farmer and a Dragon." In this story, a 60-year-old farmer named Ma strolled along a field, when suddenly there was thunder and a rainstorm and the sky turned gray. He felt a crow scratch his back and he thought it signified wrath from Heaven. So he crawled down and lay still.

Rather than wrath from Heaven, however, the curious events were caused by a dragon descending from the sky. Finding Ma lying still, the dragon sodomized him, while biting his head. After the dragon finished sodomizing the farmer, it ascended to the sky and bellowed with the thundering noise; the farmer was left alone on the ground with stinking liquid all over his body. At first, the farmer dared not mention what had happened to him to his family, until his rear hurt so much that he asked a doctor for a cure; then the event was revealed.

While most of the animal fairies in Chinese mythology enjoy homosexual relationships with younger men or boys, only the dragon consistently enjoys sexual relationships with older men. As the dragon was the symbol for the rainbow in ancient China, they frequently appeared during thunderstorms and then they captured old men for gay sex.

"The Farmer and the Pig"

Another gay story in Chinese mythology is about "The Farmer and the Pig." In this tale, there was a farmer in the Yangtze River region who maintained a gay relationship with a castrated pig. But he sold the pig to a butcher. After the pig was slaughtered, its soul could not rest. It went to the Emperor of the Nether World and complained about the farmer.

The pig said: "I can not complain about being butchered as I was destined to reincarnate into a pig. But since my master had affection with me, he should not have sent me to the butcher for money."

The Emperor decided that the pig was right and allowed it to take revenge on the farmer. The pig bit the farmer on his ass in a dream. When the farmer awoke, he felt his rear itching and he desperately needed men to sodomize him in order to stop the itching. However, when he grew older and could not attract anyone to do it for him, he could only use bamboo stakes for the task. One day, he got drunk and his ass began to itch; he went into a butcher shop and picked up a sharp cutting knife used for butchering pigs. When he used the knife to stop the itching, he pierced himself and bled to death.

This story illustrates the principle of Buddhist karmic retribution, as well as beliefs of earlier religions in animal spirits and sexual intercourse between human and animals.

"Fox Fairy and a Scholar"

Another story is called the "Fox Fairy and a Scholar." In this story an old scholar, with no attraction toward women, lives alone in a big house. One night, a man dressed in black enters the house and asks the scholar for sex.

The man dressed in black is actually the scholar's "husband" and the scholar was his "wife" in their lives before reincarnation. Then they loved each other and vowed to keep their intimate relationship in their future lives. But when they made the vow, it was during a war, and the beautiful wife was captured by rebels. At last, she committed suicide to escape rape. The husband, however, followed the rebels and became one of them, and later was also killed during the war.

Because of the chastity of the wife, who was willing even to kill herself to preserve it, she was permitted by the Emperor of the Nether World to reincarnate as a man. But the husband, who followed the rebels and showed no loyalty to the king, was forced to reincarnate as a fox.

Still, the fox wanted to maintain his relationship with his (dead) wife for one more year. So he practiced alchemy and became a man, which enabled him to search for his wife in the earthly world. After listening to the man dressed in black (actually a fox), the old scholar faintly remembered his past life. But the scholar wondered if they could maintain any sexual relationship now, since both are now males.

The fox then smiled and replied : "It should not be any problem, so long as we love each other; it does not matter if it is between males, or between male and female, we still could love each other."

So the old scholar agreed. He unfastened his clothing and shared intimate moments with the man-fox . The fox then came once every two days for some time. One night, however, the fox told the scholar: "This is our last night together. Tomorrow you can check our loving relationship on one of the pillars of the house." The next morning, the scholar woke up and checked out the pillars: there was a pillar with 365 denture marks! The fox had succeeded in maintaining his relationship with his former wife, now a man, for an additional year.

In this story the philosophy is clear. Love is love; it does not matter whether it is between two men or between a man and a women. This idea actually anticipates the approach of gay liberation.

The Rabbit God

Finally, there is the story of "The Rabbit God." This tale concerns a young official of the Fujian province, who was very handsome and intelligent. His beauty captured the heart of a man called Wu Tien Bao, who followed the official wherever he went. Every time the official appeared for a court case, Wu attended. The official became aware of Wu's constant presence, but he did not know why he was following him.

One day, Wu was caught peeping at the official's ass through a toilet wall. After several rounds of beating with bamboo stakes, he confessed that he was attracted to the official. When the official knew the reason, he was so angry that he ordered more punishment and Wu died under heavy torture.

After Wu's death, he told his friend in a dream that "even though it was improper to peep at a man, it was done only because of love and should not have been punished with death. Now the court officials in the nether world have assigned me as Rabbit God to safeguard loving affairs between men, and you should build a temple for me."

The friend built the temple. When there were quarrels between gay couples or when someone suffered for gay love, they went to this temple to worship the Rabbit God, Wu Tien Bao, and they were usually aided by the Rabbit God in their quests.

This story may have inspired the construction of temples to the Rabbit God, though none have been precisely identified. There was, however, a temple in Southern China called "Double Flowers Temple," where a deceased gay couple was worshipped by the general public. The temple was destroyed by the Japanese army during the World War II and no longer exists.

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