

The Transgender Community in the Changing Times of China

-- the image of transgender in Chinese common media

Yunying Zhang^{1,*}

¹University of Washington, Seattle, the United States

*Corresponding author: yunyiz7@uw.edu

Abstract. As a sexual minority, China's transgender community is under great pressure in social life, and transgender people tend not to be present in the common media as frequently as their peers in other countries. The progression of society and the development of Internet technology provide the cultural foundation and technical condition for transgender people to enter the public. This paper would discuss how has the image of transgender people changed in China's common media and analyses the impact of the development of mass media on the transgender community. This study will further explore the history of Chinese transgender community and will further assist in considering the changing attitudes towards transgender people in Chinese society and the increasing acceptance of transgender.

Keywords: Transgender in China; Sexual Minorities in China; Sexual Gender in China.

1. Introduction

Chinese society has a very low level of visibility of sexual minorities, with only 5% of sexual minorities disclosing that they are of a sexual nature. As one of the most marginalized, vulnerable, and disadvantaged groups in society, sexual minorities are often one of the ones who suffer the most discrimination, while transgender individuals suffer the least awareness, as well as suffering the most discrimination [1]. In the article, the author uses the literature review method, combining history and logic, to analyze and synthesize the image of transgender in different stages of China and discusses how the common media played a role in building the image of the transgender community in different time periods. Having a clear understanding of the portrayal of transgender groups in the common media can be helpful in eliminating misconceptions about sexual minorities, promoting multigender education in a variety of fields, and providing support to Chinese society to improve the cultural and social environment for sexual minorities, as well as strengthen the legal protection of sexual minorities rights and interests.

2. Development of Chinese Mainstream Media & Transgender people

2.1 Time Before 1990s: Newspaper & TV

2.1.1 1950s-1970s: Suppression of Transgenderism

From 1949 to 1976, it is the period of the establishments and initial development of the new China. Chinese communism achieved tremendous progress during the Maoist period, and the country was constantly evaluating and revising its socialist path, as well as deploying class struggle to ensure that the "capitalist backwardness" of the country would not be resurrected and could no longer affect the country's socialist future [2]. As a result, the government took steps to regulate people's speech and conduct in a sensitive manner. Behavioral or conceptual elements that are considered "capitalism" or "landlord thinking" would be "educated" and "reformed". The public has developed a high level of political sensitivity. Those who spoke or behaved in a manner that was incompatible with socialist ideology were subject to these investigations, and people were encouraged to report suspects. Public support for Socialism increased during the "Great Leap Forward (1958-1962)" and "People's Commune (1958-1983)" movements, reaching a climax during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). Maoist culture adopted a "red" revolutionary culture and devalued exotic Capitalism culture. As a

means of distinguishing itself from capitalism, the government resisted anything that was reminiscent of Western hedonism, such as popular songs and modern dance. In addition to China's strong opposition to Capitalist ideology during Maoist times, due to its isolation from capitalist states, sexuality was also repressed during this period by the party as well as subjected to administrative and party sanctions as a result of the principle of morality at that time.

China under the Maoist is heavily influenced by Soviet Stalinism. Stalin criminalized homosexuality through the Soviet Union in 1934, with anyone involved in gay sex would be sentenced to three to five years in prison [3]. The same homophobic atmosphere prevailed in China as in the Soviet Union. Maoist China embraced the Stalinist model of the Soviet Union by arresting homosexuals [4]. During the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s, homosexuals were publicly shamed and sentenced to long prison terms [4]. If a person was homosexual, let alone transgender, that person would be treated with terror, humiliated, and even imprisoned.

From 1949, the founding of the People's Republic of China, to 1976, the end of the Cultural Revolution, the common media for the Chinese have officially published newspapers, such as the People's Daily, and official broadcasts. With the responsibility of delivering Chinese government official information to the public, newspapers, and official broadcasts play a vital role in the era of inconvenient communication to spread Socialism ideologies and government propaganda. In the hopes of consolidating its power, the party used all media channels to promote the positive aspects of socialism during this period. Given its negative reputation, it is not surprising the media did not cover transgenderism, since it is a concept from the western world, and hence studying this western knowledge diminished confidence in socialism due to its classification as capitalism. Furthermore, the general attitude of society toward sexuality tends to be conservative in general. The topic of heterosexuality is taboo to discuss, let alone "deviant" sexuality, a concept that is seen as deceptive, false, and shameful by administrative units, monitored, and investigated [2].

In the article, "Transgender Representation by the People's Daily Since 1949", the author examines how transgender people have been represented by the People's Daily to investigate the changes taking place in the government's attitudes towards transgender people over time. As part of the paper, the author introduces the reader to the history of transgender in the early days of the new China. "Transgender" had never existed in Chinese terminology before the concept was introduced as a Western term. As a result of this lack of understanding, transgenderism was mainly portrayed in this era as cross-dressing. The majority of MtF cross-dressing was done on stage, and a variety of disguises were created either to create comedic effects or to satisfy the need for female characters in traditional Chinese operas. It was consistently reported that FtM cross-dressing was a celebration of Chinese female heroic behavior, as opposed to FtM cross-dressing. Despite public ignorance, transgender people's private or personal identities that they construct through cross-dressing are dismantled as a result.

2.1.2 1970s-1990s: Controversy of Transgenderism

Since 1978, when the "Reform and Opening Up" policy was implemented, China has been undergoing rapid development both in terms of economic development and technological advancements, as well as in terms of the attitude of its people. There has been a resumption of the process of westernization at a fast pace after decades of seclusion. It was during this period that China was characterized by its willingness to keep up with modern technology and its participation in the international economy, which led it to follow several methods like those of the West in most aspects. As a result of modernization, and sex reassignment surgery transsexualism is now on the rise, but it is also a subject of heated moral debates in society. On September 21, 1982, the People's Daily published the first report of transgender people in its history. The author of the report protested what he considered irresponsible propaganda toward new medical technologies. A sex-change operation was performed for the first time in the Netherlands in Arnhem in 1959-1960, the construction of a penis, known as a phalloplasty [4]. It has been a matter of excitement and fear for Chinese doctors to embark on gender-changing surgery, a new medical method. Despite the fact that transgender individuals attempt to correct their "physical and psychological mismatch" through sex reassignment

surgery, other people seem to feel that the practice poses a serious threat to the social and moral order, as indicated by the doctors' aversion to their medical needs and their fear of them. The ideology behind transgenderism is so universal that doctors and authors alike believe it has to do with irresponsible propaganda from medical science which has led to an increase in transgenderism. The first gender reassignment surgery (MtF) in mainland China was conducted in 1983 [5]. In China transgender, people still suffer from pathologization because of their unorthodox gender identity. Until 1997, Gay sex has been decriminalized [6]; The Chinese Classification and Diagnostic Criteria of Mental Disorders (Third Edition) (CCMD-3) released in 2001 has also partially de-criminalized homosexuality and bisexuality [7]. "Conversion therapy," which attempts to change sexual orientation and gender identity, is still a real phenomenon and can be harmful to the physical and mental health of LGBT people. People with LGBT identities are threatened by conversion therapy, especially when it involves coercive treatment. From the 1970s to the 1990s, it is estimated that the transgender community had a significantly lower level of exposure in the common media, as well as a higher level of pathology. In China, a society heavily influenced by Confucianism, heterodox gender identities still suffer discrimination.

2.2 Time After 2000s

2.2.1 1990s -2010s Internet Forum & Tieba: Establishment of Transgender Community

In 1990s, China entered the Internet era. Websites and online forums became the main social platforms for young people at that time. Anonymous chatting on the Internet provides a relatively relaxed environment for sexual minorities to communicate and released their emotion. The freedom on the Internet does provide the transgender community with some freedom to escape the incomprehension of their family and friends and find comfort and understanding from trans people just as them. Tieba became the main tools for transgender people to communicate at that time. Tieba is an online forum, and it allows users to search for a topic of interest forum known as a "bar" and join into this bar to communicate with people shared the same interest. Yet as a double-edged sword, Tieba also brings uncontrollability and potential harm to the transgender community.

"Yaoniang (medicine woman)", is a Chinese Internet term, which refer to a male or bi-sexual person who has been masculinized by means of drugs or injections to make his physical state (mainly physical features) more like that of a female. Yaoniang are usually men who have decided to have sex reassignment surgery and use hormones to induce their bodies to transform in the period before the surgery. The medicine is usually called "sugar" by the Yaoniang. There are three general categories of "sugar": estrogens, anti-androgens and progestins [8]. All of this medicine, without exception, are Rx (prescription medicine, which must be taken under medical supervision). As a private transaction, there are following ways to buy "sugar": 1. Offline purchase; 2, acquaintances; 3, e-commerce black market. If a Yaoniang want to buy it offline, she needs to go to the hospital to open a complicated transgender diagnosis certificate and then go to the pharmacy to pick up the medicine, which often exposes the Yaoniang's identity, and is contrary to the original intention to conceal her identity. The second way, "acquaintance" route, is to buy from friends or other Yaoniang in Tieba. However, buying through acquaintances still entails a huge risk, as fake drug dealers are everywhere. The third way, e-commence, is to buy "Sugar" on the Taobao. As the lack of market regulation, Tieba and Taobao stores are flooded with fake drugs. The online world without market control is full of real and fake information. Yaoniang take drugs without a doctor prescription had numerous side effects, such as high blood sugar, headaches, nausea, chest pain and even lactation. Nevertheless, Yaoniang stop taking drugs suffer a high price, with a high risk of losing sexual function and a shortened life span due to long-term unprescribed hormone use and concurrent depression.

The underage, no economic resources Yaoniang have no money to buy drugs, they will be through some underground ways to get income and thus to buy drugs. To outsiders, the underage status of drug maidens makes it difficult for capital to drain their value, but some black-hearted agents dare to try. They believe that the most valuable thing about Yaoniang is their identity. Some people sell Yaoniang sex trade videos in Yaoniang group. In Tieba some ignorant Yaoniang are compelled to

participate in the sex trade [9]. Many underage Yaoniang are misguided in this way. As group of Yaoniang, many people dropped out of high school, generally poorly educated, only through the sex trade in exchange for the money to survive

Currently, transgender females (MTF) are globally recognized as one of the high-risk groups for HIV infection [9,10]. Previous studies [11] have shown that the MTF population is at high risk of HIV infection, with high rates of alcohol and substance abuse, multiple sexual partners, unprotected anal sex, and commercial sex. Studies have reported that due to social discrimination and lack of education, MTFs are often restricted from employment and forced to engage in sex work, which is an important indicator of risk for HIV infection [12].

As a medium of communication between Yaoniang, Tieba is the source of all knowledge. Tieba is definitely a very important piece of transgender history in China. Although there are some bad effects such as misleading others, there is no denying that a considerable number of transgender people complete their self-identification from this platform.

2.2.2 Time After 2010s Mobile Internet: Raising Exposure and Acceptance

A great deal of laxity has been achieved by the Chinese government regarding the regulation of citizens' behavior and speech. The Chinese State Council passed a revised version of the Marriage Regulation in 2003. Under the new regulations, legal recognition of transgender marriage can be gained by means of an ID card that can be changed after gender reassignment surgery. The transgender community has been able to cope with these circumstances and changing ideologies because of these factors. More and more transgender representatives come into the public eye, for example, world-renowned dancer Jing Xing; 2004 Miss Universe contestant, Lily Chan; transgender autobiographical narrator Kesha Chang; world-renowned makeup artist Jimmy; social celebrity Abbily. It is worth mentioning that the mobile network has been an important help for their exposure and occurrence, allowing the transgender community entering the public eye from the common media.

In the previous Internet era from 1990s to 2010s, although transgender groups were widely present in online forums such as Tieba, their image was seriously marginalized in the public eye and in the mainstream media. It was hard to see transgender people speaking out for themselves, and more often, many unscrupulous media outlets demonized transgender community in various ways to attract attention. Nevertheless, social media such as Weibo provides themselves a microphone to give yourself a voice, never again to be stigmatized by unscrupulous media. More and more people in society are also becoming concerned about this group. In 2016, UNDP affiliate with Peking University and Beijing LGBT Center to conduct a project "Being LGBTI In China --- A National Survey on Social Attitudes towards Sexual Orientation, Gender, Identity and Gender Expression". This is the largest national survey on the topic of sexual diversity conducted in China before 2016. The report provides a proof of the level of acceptance of sexual minorities in Chinese society and a clear understanding of the exclusion and discrimination experiences by many lesbians, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) people. This report paints a picture of a country in transition. Most of the country does not hold stubbornly negative or stereotypical attitudes toward sexual minorities; they simply "do not understand". Thus, there is a tremendous opportunity to turn these wavering attitudes into supporters of affirmative action. They are hesitant now because they do not know enough about the issues and about the millions of people who are affected by them. This also demonstrates how education, fact-based correct information, including more objective and truthful media coverage of sexual diversity, is critical to moving society forward. At the same time, the growing acceptance of sexual minorities is not only reflected in public attitudes, but also the responses of the government. Transgender people have been recognized as part of human rights by the government, which is working to challenge gender conventions and report on transgender legal developments [1]. There are some small signs that attitudes toward homosexuality may be changing within China's official circles, especially since the state-owned English-language newspaper China Daily published several positive stories about LGBT people in 2009, including a supportive editorial about the cultural events at the opening of Shanghai Pride Week in June 2009. Other changes in the government's position include a small but significant increase in mainstream media coverage of

LGBT issues, some collaboration between the Ministry of Health and AIDS-related NGOs, and a degree of legal progress, including proposed changes to transgender surgery regulations [13].

Until now, the study of medical legal dilemma of transgender people in China and analysis of the current situation of transgender people's survival are very essential research topic. The research on sexual minorities and transgender people demonstrates several significant advances --- sexual minorities deserve to be treated equally and to have full access to social services; government should develop and implement specific policies that respect the status of LGBTI people and protect them from discrimination; the national education system should promote gender-diverse education ---- and so on.

3. Summary

The development of technology drives the progress of society, and the progression of common media also provides a platform for transgender groups to voice their thoughts and opinions. The change of common media, from newspaper to mobile device, from public to private, reveal people's prevalence and acceptance of social media is linked to the acceptance of the transgender community. Online platforms allow us to see the different possibilities in the world and to be more tolerant of these differences.

In recent years, the issues of sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression (SOGIE) have received increasing attention in China, and the survival and development of the LGBT community has improved. Sexual minorities' rights have become a concern for the international community, and some countries and regions have developed legal systems to protect their rights. There is no doubt that these positive changes have played a significant role in quietly changing social attitudes, even though these changes are not fully synchronized on all levels as yet. In accordance with the report [5] on the intergenerational shift in perceptions, it appears that young people are more progressive at all levels, showing a clear intergenerational shift. The perceptions and attitudes of society toward sexual minorities are expected to gradually become more friendly as generations change, as a result of a gradual change in generational views and attitudes.

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