



Roman Catholicism and Confucianism on Homosexuality in Hong Kong Before and After 1997 A Postcolonial, Queer, Feminist Perspective and Implications for Chinese Roman Catholic Ethics

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Resumen

La enseñanza oficial contemporánea de la Iglesia Católica Romana sobre sexualidad no ha tratado el tema del colonialismo con respecto a la homosexualidad. La heterosexualidad recalitrada a través de una compleja «malformación mutua» entre catolicismo romano y confucianismo ha llevado a la invisibilidad y el silencio de católicos queer dentro de la Iglesia Católica Romana de Hong Kong. Este artículo revisa la comprensión histórica de la sexualidad en la sociedad China, el impacto colonial sobre el tema de la homosexualidad y el discurso público reciente sobre la homosexualidad en Hong Kong. Busca así iluminar el contexto y la resistencia que llevan a cabo los católicos queer en Hong Kong desde las perspectivas postcolonial, feminista y queer.

Palabras clave: Sexualidad, Iglesia Católica Romana, Confucianismo, Hong Kong, Teoría Queer, Poscolonialismo.

Resumo

O ensino oficial contemporâneo da Igreja Católica Romana sobre sexualidade não tratou do tema do colonialismo em relação à homossexualidade. A heterossexualidade calcificada por uma complexa «malformação mútua» entre catolicismo romano e confucionismo gerou a invisibilidade e o silêncio de católicos queer dentro da Igreja Católica Romana de Hong Kong. Este artigo revisa a compreensão histórica da sexualidade na sociedade chinesa, o impacto colonial sobre a questão da homossexualidade e o recente discurso público sobre a homossexualidade em Hong Kong. Assim, busca resaltar o contexto e a resistência mantida pelos católicos queer em Hong Kong a partir de perspectivas pós-coloniais, feministas e queer.

Palavras-chave: Sexualidade, Igreja Católica Romana, Confucianismo, Hong Kong, Teoria Queer, Pós-colonialismo.



Abstract

Contemporary official sexual teaching of the Roman Catholic Church has not addressed the issue of colonialism regarding homosexuality. Heterosexism calcified by a more complex «mutual malformation» of Roman Catholicism and Confucianism has led to invisibility and silence of queer Catholics within the Hong Kong Roman Catholic Church. This article reviews the historical understanding of sexuality in Chinese society, the colonial impact on the issue of homosexuality and the recent public discourse on homosexuality in Hong Kong to illuminate the context and the kind of resistance of individual queer Catholics in Hong Kong has been striving from postcolonial, feminist and queer perspectives.

Keywords: Sexuality, Roman Catholic Church, Confucianism, Hong Kong; Queer theory, Postcolonialism.

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Introduction

Current official Roman Catholic sexual teachings have never addressed directly the issue of colonialism when sexual codes largely developed from the European-centered Roman Catholicism are required to apply across all different cultures as universal moral norms. Yet, this bears serious implications for local churches in the Third World when Christian missionary expansion occurred under European colonization. Based on European colonial experience, Ann Laura Stoler (2002: 145) contends that the sexual practice of the colonizer and the colonized is critical for maintaining the colonial order, in which the discourses on sexuality also articulate the bourgeois subjects and discipline domestic recesses of imperial rule. Protestant postcolonial theologian, Kwok Pui-lan (2005: 138-140) also points out that Christianity in its long history has related homosexual acts with the religious and primitive Other. In line with the caution against the power underpinnings underlying moral delineations, black feminist ethicist, Traci C. West (2006: 36-74), finds that the universal principles of the dominant ethics exclude the particular experiences or contexts of the oppressed and marginalized, who are denied full realization of the universal human rights due to race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexualities, and the like. Hence, applying universal sexual norms across cultures may risk serving colonial agenda as well as denying the full human rights of certain minorities.

Some Roman Catholic sexual ethicists have called for critical attention to contemporary experience in revising Roman Catholic moral norms or virtues so that the false universalizing tendency can be corrected. As early as the Papal Commission on Population, Family and Birth established in 1963, «the majority report» incorporates the newer meaning of conjugal love in contemporary understanding of human sexuality and considers the use of



artificial contraception in some cases as promoting the union of spouses and indirectly helping the procreative end; hence, it advocates for a change in the teaching on contraception (Gallagher, 1993: 83-86; Genovesi, 1996: 190; Maloney, 1987: 266-267). With an inductive approach to natural law tradition, revisionist theologians synthesize the sexual anthropology based upon scientific investigation on human experiences, in which basic goods of contemporary, particular cultural contexts are examined and moral norms can accordingly be derived (Salzman and Lawler, 2011: 83). Feminist revisionist theologians primarily draw on the women's experience of gender oppressions to further natural law anthropology beyond the traditional patriarchal and heterosexist biases in order to recover the equal humanity of women and others (Salzman and Lawler, 2008: 112-119).

The diverse experience among women of different cultures has also led some Roman Catholic ethicists to attend to cross-cultural understanding on sexuality and the issue of colonialism. Margaret A. Farley in *Just Love* (2006: 58-68), has pioneered to propose a new sexual ethics while acknowledging the colonialism in the tradition and aiming to respect cultural difference.

Despite the insights that can benefit from cross-cultural study, the understanding of sexuality and the eventual moral delineation cannot be separated from the specific historical context. Postcolonial theorist, Gayatri C. Spivak (1999: 332), notes that the homogenization of the complex histories of the various groups by privileged group lends support to colonial power underlying the Western universal discourse on identity and culture that it is necessary for the minorities to claim their identities for survival. In the context of Hong Kong, the discourse on homosexuality has been constructed by different colonial powers. For the ethnic Chinese comprising over ninety percent of the whole population in the past decade (Hong Kong Census and Statistics



Department, 2011), the Chinese culture that binds everyone in the patriarchal family-kinship system —with the obligation of getting married— marginalizes homosexuality. Without threatening the social hierarchy, the elite class in traditional Chinese society enjoyed the privilege of homoeroticism (Zhou, 2000: 20-26). Before the handover of sovereignty of Hong Kong back to China on July 1, 1997, the British common law system, enforced in Hong Kong since the colonial rule in 1842, has also heavily penalized male-male anal sex. Even after 1997, the common law system continues to exclude anti-discrimination legislation regarding sexual orientation (Zhou: 60-66).

Roman Catholicism also becomes another colonial power to the local Catholic *tongzhi*,¹ and the wider community through its extensive school and social service networks. The Roman Catholic Church established Hong Kong as an apostolic prefecture in 1841 (Kwong, 2002: 57). According to statistics of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong (2011), the Hong Kong Catholic Church consisted of about 363,000 Catholics and served 189,575 students in 276 Catholic schools. With the establishment of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference in 1972, the Hong Kong Catholic Church has paid the efforts on inculturation and indigenization (Yuen, 2005). Yet, their teachings of condemnation on homosexual acts have followed the official Vatican position developed from the European civilization and have ignored the 1983 Law Reform Commission report, which said that homosexual acts have long existed and been tolerated in Chinese history (Law Reform Commission of Hong Kong, 1983). The absence of a *tongzhi* group within the

¹ It is the English pronunciation of a Chinese term for LGBTQ people in contemporary Chinese societies in Hong Kong, Mainland China and Taiwan since 1989. The origin of this term will be discussed in the last paragraph under the section, «Tolerance of Same-Sex Eroticism in Chinese Society».



Hong Kong Catholic Church may reflect the effect of the colonial power of the Church in silencing and marginalizing them.

Hence, when the Hong Kong Catholic Church imposes on the Chinese community the western sexual codes embedded in its teachings on homosexuality as universal moral principle, it may serve the Western cultural hegemony and its colonizer to oppress the colonized Other and the missionary objects. Based on queer theory on the fluidity and hybridity of identity, Michael Warner (1993) also points out that queer is a transgressive resistance to the normative regime. To prevent domination in the name of upholding Roman Catholic morality, the Hong Kong Catholic Church needs to investigate the discourses on homosexuality with an awareness of colonialism from the past history and learn from the sexual diversity and struggles of local sexual minorities so that its teachings can be as liberative as Jesus' radical inclusion of the marginalized into communal life, restoring their full personhood.

In this article I discuss briefly the concept of sexuality and the tolerance of homoeroticism in Chinese culture. Then, I show different colonial discourses on *tongzhi* and the resistance of *tongzhi* in Hong Kong before and after 1997. I argue that although the Hong Kong Catholic Church has appropriated the justice and human rights tradition of Roman Catholicism in combating the British colonial law and in the defense of equal human rights of *tongzhi*, it cannot resolve the oppression of *tongzhi* which occurred in the Roman Catholic Church and Chinese family-kin system due to its own bias for Vatican authority. It also imposes a stricter sexual code on *tongzhi* generated by an interaction of mutual malformation of Roman Catholicism and



Confucianism (the major Chinese philosophy) (Lee, 2004).² Based upon the resistance of Catholic and non-Catholic *tongzhi*, I use a postcolonial, queer and feminist perspective to draw insights to tackle the mutual malformation of Roman Catholicism and Confucianism in the Hong Kong Catholic Church.

Sexuality and Tolerance of Homoeroticism in Chinese Culture

While Confucianism is the dominant philosophy in Chinese Culture and Daoism is complementary to Confucianism, the understanding of sexuality in Chinese culture needs to consider both (Wawrytko, 2000: 165-169). Sex is considered as an integral part of life, never assumed as a dominant feature of life, in both Confucianism and Taoism. Since people are not identified by their own objects of eroticism, there is no conception of sexual orientation such as heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual. Before westernization in the twentieth-century China, there is no Chinese word equal to sex. Words of eroticism include *se* [sensory], *yu* [eroticism], and *qing* [passion or sentiment]. While these words carry sexual connotation, they cannot be reduced to sexual acts. *Jiao-he* [intercourse] is usually used in spousal relations. The Chinese translation for sex is *xing*, which originally means «nature.» A Confucian saying, *Shi se xing ye* [eating and sex are human nature], reflects the «naturalness» of sex without any negative connotation (Zhou, 2000: 13-14).

² Lee (2004) describes the oppression of Korean women as the resultant of the interaction of «mutual malformation» between two cultures, Confucianism and Christianity. I borrow her concept of «mutual malformation» in the case of the oppression of *tongzhi*.



Robert Van Gulik's book *Sexual Life in Ancient China* —a classic on the topic— has shown that the Chinese attitude towards sex was quite open until the rise of neo-Confucianism in the Song Dynasty in the thirteenth-century (Gulik and Goldin, 2003). While romantic love has been absent in traditional Chinese culture, *qing* [passion or sentiment] expresses the utmost passion shared by the people involved and its types vary with relationships. In Daoism, *yin* and *yang* are the two cosmic life forces and dynamics to create all life existences. While *yin* is largely for women and *yang* for men, the two forces exist complementarily in a person. Sexual differentiation of a person is the momentary resultant of the two dynamic forces. This implies fluid sexual and gender expressions. Sexual intercourse, in which mutual exchange of energies occurs, serves the socio-cosmological purpose of longevity and the continuation of human race (Wawrytko, 2000: 173; Zhou, 2000: 15-18).

In Confucianism, all persons are located within the «Five Relations,»³ which serve for human flourishing. In addition, within the «Three Bonds,» obedience is observed in the authority of the ruler over the minister, the father over the son and the husband over the wife (Tu, 1998: 122-130). Sex is regulated by the appropriate family-kinship relationships under the Five Relations and the principle of no excess (Zhou, 2000: 19). However, Charlotte Furth (1994) contests the idealization of an open attitude in Chinese sexual arts by Van Gulik is his Western-vs-Oriental construction based on the Victorian sexual code. Bedchamber arts are modes of male empowerment (Furth, 1994: 130-131). Rose Wu (2006: 42) also concurs that sexual pleasure has been a male privilege among the ruling class.

³ The «Five Relations» include: (a) father-son, (b) ruler-minister, (c) husband-wife, (d) old-young, and (e) friend-friend.



Tolerance of Same-sex Eroticism in Chinese Society

In traditional Chinese society, same-sex activities were termed socially and non-sexually. For example, there were homosocial roles such as *xiang gong* [male prostitute], *duan xiu* [cut sleeve], *fen tao* [shared peach], and homosocial relations such as *jinlan zimei* [golden orchid sisters], *qidi* and *qixiong* [adopted brothers], *hanlu yingxiong* [stranded heroes]. Terms for sexual acts were poetic without any condemnation such as *mou dou fu* [grinding bean-curd], *hou ting hwa* [the backyard flower], *dui si* [paired eating] and *chui xiao* [playing a vertical flute]. Only in the Tang Dynasty (618-907 CE) the first degrading term for homosexual acts, *jijian* [chicken lewdness], appeared. Under sex segregation in Confucian propriety, homosociality and same-sex intimate friendship were socially institutionalized for emotional support, not necessarily homosexual sexual relationships (Zhou, 2000: 22-24).

Same-sex activities, sex with prostitutes, or polygamy were tolerated as long as the patriarchal and patrilineal family system was safeguarded through the fulfillment of filial piety in which one was obligated to get married and reproduce offspring. Since homosexual relationships were also constructed on classism, sexism and ageism, tolerance of same-sex eroticism should not be romanticized. Rulers and powerful ministers could keep young boys. Famous cases of *long yang*, *duan xiu* [cut sleeve] and *fen tao* [shared peach] were examples of the emperors' favorite young men. Some rare cases of egalitarian same-sex relationships also existed such as *qi xiong-di* [adopted brothers] in Fujian province, wives and concubines within the same polygamous family and *zi-zhu nu* [marriage-resistant sisterhood] in Guangdong (Zhou, 2000: 20-41). The tolerance of same-sex eroticism bothered Roman Catholic missionaries, Matteo Ricci and Friar Gaspar de Cruz, who visited Beijing during the Ming



Dynasty (1368-1644 CE) and were told by their Beijing friends that this practice had never been considered as sin nor evil (Spence, 1985: 220-221).

People gossiped on same-sex erotic practice, but nothing like gay-bashing occurred. Only in the Qing Dynasty, the first law that penalized consensual homosexuality was introduced in 1740. In the late nineteenth-century, the call for modernization from Chinese intellectuals has led to the domination of western sexual discourse, which has been generated from capitalist, biologically deterministic, and individualistic traditions. Gender, sex, orgasms, perversity, and heterosexuality have replaced the more relational terms *se* [sensory], *yu* [eroticism], *qing* [passion or sentiment], *yin* and *yang* [masculine and feminine].

The Chinese intellectuals have wished that western science would redeem China from backwardness. They have not adopted fully the western hetero-homo duality or homophobia, but medical pathologization of non-procreative sex. Westerners who have visited China in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth-century have regarded the Chinese as immoral and inferior for their openness to homosexual activities (Zhou, 2000: 14-15, 25, 45-55). Yet, Zhou (2000: 45-55) contests that through the series of modernizing efforts, same-sex eroticism has gradually become pathological. When the Communists took over China in 1949, they regarded homosexuality as western corruption and made it a crime. Under the British colonial rule, Hong Kong has normalized the Western hetero-homo duality and homophobia (2000: 54-55).



Legal Discourse of Homosexuality in Hong Kong in the 1970s and 1980s

During the early period of British colonial rule, the hierarchy between the colonizer and the colonized was apparent in the governance structure where all the top positions were occupied by white males only. While the «civilizing mission» has been conducted basically through a governance emphasizing order, law and rational procedure, similar emphases adopted in the notions of citizenship in the liberal capitalism also serve to institutionalize white heterosexual masculinity. Following the 1861 English Offences Against Persons Act that prohibited anal sex and bestiality, the colonial government introduced this law to Hong Kong in 1865 with a penalty of life imprisonment for anal sex. Yet, the government rarely took active enforcement of this law before 1970 because of its non-intervention policy on local people's lives and cultures unless necessary (Zhou, 2000: 61-65). Based on newspaper clippings, Zhou (2000: 63-65) has found that half of the offenses in the 1970s and 1980s were committed between Caucasians and Chinese. Only these interracial homosexual relationships caught public attention as the racial boundary was transgressed. Same-sex relationships in the Chinese community were not recognized whereas female intimacy was trivialized and ignored. Chinese people blamed the Western corruption on Chinese purity for these interracial offenses (Zhou, 2000: 64).

I find that the factors for the decriminalization of homosexuality in Hong Kong in the 1980s were different from those for the abolition movement of sodomy laws in the West, which were associated with the gay movements since in the 1970s. It was a series of homosexual offences among the civil servants and the Caucasian community in the 1970s that had embarrassed the colonial government who then initiated decriminalization on homosexuality (Zhou, 2000:



62-67). The most shocking MacLennan Incident in 1980 is located among these cases. John MacLennan, a Scottish police inspector, was found dead before his arrest for eight charges related to male prostitution. Police Inspector Fulton was asked by the Special Investigation Unit to trap MacLennan, who might know a lot about high-ranking homosexuals, including Police Commissioner Roy Henry. However, the case was exposed by a local retired sergeant whose son had a friend, David Lau, cruised by MacLennan. There may be different reasons for the sergeant to make the report such as the transgression of racial boundaries, intolerance of possible unreported abuses of local police by their white seniors, etc. The exposure of a large number of unreported and unprosecuted cases did embarrass the government (Zhou, 2000: 66-68).

Eventually, the Law Reform Commission released a report in 1984 to suggest decriminalization for private consensual homosexual acts between two male adults. However, public debate in Chinese communities had halted the government's move to decriminalization, leading to the release of a consultation paper instead. The greatest opposition was from conservative Protestant groups represented by the Joint Committee on Homosexual Law. Unaware of the cultural imperialism in the Western sexology discourse of homosexuality at that time, Chinese Protestant groups claimed to defend Chinese tradition, which, in their conception, did not accept homosexuality. The Hong Kong Catholic Church was the first to support decriminalization, claiming that private consensual acts should not be penalized. Most Caucasian Christians and some Roman Catholic priests strongly supported this as well. Chinese leaders from different sectors also adopted the myth of the absence homosexuality in China and rejected homosexuality as a Western vice (Zhou, 2000: 67-74).



The homophobic discourses in the public debate also led to the social construction of homosexual or gay identity and the organizing of local *tongzhi*. The largest *tongzhi* group, The Ten Percent Club, was established in 1986 to combat the homophobic law. Under the leadership of Rev. Fung Chi-Wood, a homosexual support group was formed in 1989 to advocate for political democracy. Some other groups, though invisible, also made their voices heard in the public arena to fight homophobia and heterosexism. In the whole debate, all different parties spoke with a language of scientific knowledge and objective truth. The Law Reform Commission report took the lead to shape such a language (Zhou, 2000: 74-75).

The political context in the 1980s finally led to decriminalization. The 1997 issue which had arisen in the early 80s triggered tremendous anxiety over the political future of Hong Kong. While the debate on political democracy had commenced, safeguarding human rights also became a priority concern. The June Fourth Incident at Tiananmen Square, Beijing, in 1989, in which the Chinese government cracked down on the democratic movement, became a strong thrust for safeguarding human rights in Hong Kong. The Bill of Rights passed in 1991 was meant to prop up the confidence of Hong Kong people and render a «glorious» retreat of the colonial rule. Decriminalization of homosexuality was then made in 1991 so that the law matched with the Bill of Rights. Yet, the decriminalization was sexist in the sense that it did not recognize female same-sex intimacy and laid a heavier penalty for anal sex offense. It was also classist as the working class cannot afford the private space at home for sexual activities (Zhou, 2000: 75-78).

In the meantime, local LGBT people have begun to develop an indigenous self-identity, *tongzhi*. *Tongzhi* is a Chinese word translated from the communist Soviet term,



«comrade» — a title for the revolutionaries. First appearing in Republic China in the early twentieth-century, this term was then adopted by both Communist and Nationalist Parties. Literally, *tong* means equivalence or «homo» and *zhi* means goal, aspiration or orientation. In the first Lesbian and Gay Film Festival in Hong Kong in 1989, a local gay activist was the first to appropriate the term for same-sex eroticism. This appropriation soon gained popularity in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Mainland China as it was regarded as gender-neutral, desexualized, fluid yet relational, transcendent from the homo-hetero binarism, culturally compatible in its integration of the sexual into the social and free from medical and cultural stigmatization. With the approach of 1997, the adoption of the most respectable title in China by *tongzhi* rendered them the subversiveness of indigenizing sexual politics in the reclamation of their cultural identity (Zhou, 2000: 1-3, 78-84).

Legal Discourse on Homosexuality before 1997

The political context in the 1990s was still filled with concerns of human rights protection and political democracy and with an increasing attention to attitudes of the Chinese government. However, when Legislative Councilor, Anna Wu, proposed the Equal Opportunity Bill in 1993, the colonial government was opposed to the anti-discrimination protection regarding sexual orientation in employment and social services. During the consultation period from 1993 to 1995, the bill not only received opposition from conservative Protestant groups, but also lacked support from most local *tongzhi* groups, except a few local and Caucasian groups. The Hong Kong Catholic Diocese's Justice and Peace Commission, together with some progressive Protestant groups and human rights groups, supported the coverage on



tongzhi rights.⁴ Surveys also showed low public acceptance of homosexuality and bisexuality and strong opposition on positive legal protection of *tongzhi* rights (Zhou, 2000: 272-274).

Zhou (2000: 272) contests that the reluctance of local *tongzhi* to adopt confrontational politics in the legal discourse was due to the wider sociopolitical conservatism of the society. On one hand, the bureaucratic polity and the Chinese society existed as separate entities in harmony in which political apathy was cultivated. Utilitarian familism as the guiding ideology in Chinese society designated the family as the major site responsible for socioeconomic and emotional needs of an individual that reduced reliance on public resources. Even appeals for democracy since the 1980s were meant to secure stability and economic prosperity. The Chinese Communist rule over Hong Kong after 1997 created a huge tension and anxiety for local people to employ confrontational politics. In the absence of gay-bashing and other homophobic violence, most *tongzhi* preferred social order when they could benefit from economic prosperity. On the other hand, most *tongzhi* agreed with the spirit of the bill, but found the bill irrelevant. Their major problems come from family and parents. Some could not afford the huge sacrifice for visibility. Some found that the bosses would not fire them and the bill could not stop people's gossip. They also preferred freedom from state intervention. Some did not regard sexuality as their top priority issue nor coming out as liberating (Zhou, 2000: 272-278).

⁴ Hong Kong Christian Council, Hong Kong Women Christian Council, Hong Kong Student Christian Movement and Justice and Peace Commission of the Hong Kong Catholic Diocese jointly issued a public statement on July 7, 1996 to critique the resistance of the government to anti-discrimination legislation on sexual orientation.



Based on the *tongzhi*'s concerns, the core issue lies in the incapability of the legal discourse to address the *tongzhi*'s concern for the family harmony and social order. The Western legal discourse of rights and the rule of law presume the value of reasonableness that suppresses the Chinese value of *qing* [passion or sentiment]. In Chinese culture, *qing*, *li* [discursive reasoning] and *fa* [law] seek to exist in unity and *fa* is the last resort. Law needs to ground in *qing*. While the discourse of rights based on individualistic tradition is a powerful tool to govern the contractual relations between individual citizens, it is a minimal ethical requirement in modern society, incapable of resolving the relationships in familial context. Moreover, legal discourse also invites state control over sexuality that marginalizes other possible sexual expressions. When the local culture sees same-sex eroticism as potentially shared by everyone, the focus of concern should be everyone's needs and rights for intimacy, irrespective of gender or sexual identity (Zhou, 2000: 278-282). I agree with Zhou that although anti-discrimination legislation based on sexual orientation is important, it is limited. Queer politics that transgresses the notion of fixed identity and normality is a necessary complementary strategy.

Legal Discourse on Homosexuality after 1997 and the Hong Kong Catholic Church

Since the drastic political change in the 1980's, the Hong Kong Roman Catholic Church has already become aware of the need to develop its prophetic role, other than its servant role in providing social services (Wu, 1989). The Diocese's Justice and Peace Commission has actively advocated for minorities' rights and democracy since its establishment in 1977. It is this mission for social justice and human rights where the Hong Kong Roman Catholic Church has supported



the anti-discrimination legislation regrading sexual orientation in order to respect the equal rights of *tongzhi*.

After the handover of Hong Kong to China in July 1, 1997, one of the most controversial issues has been the rights of abode of the Mainland-born children of Hong Kong people. Cardinal Zen and the Commission have been outspoken on this issue.⁵ Regardless of strong public opposition, the government plans to legislate for national security, through which the government can exert more limits on the basic rights of Hong Kong people and exert tighter control. Cardinal Zen has thus become more vocal in confronting the government practice. On July 1, 2003 —the sixth anniversary of the handover of Hong Kong back to China—, over 500,000 to 1,000,000 Hong Kong people have demonstrated against the proposed legislation and appealed for faster democratization. Despite criticisms on his political actions, Cardinal Zen has gained appreciation inside and outside the Church. Some regard him as «the conscience of the society», whereas others as anti-government. While working at the Commission from 2000 to 2007, I have witnessed that more Roman Catholics than before have taken pride in the prophetic voice of the Roman Catholic Church in defense of human rights.

A month later after the July 1 demonstration, the Diocesan newspaper published in the headlines the release of a Vatican document on the opposition to gay marriage. A small of gay and youth activists stormed the Roman Catholic Cathedral for about ten minutes during a Sunday mass on August 17, 2003 in protest against the headline news (Cài, 2003). Through the arrangement of the Legislative Council, Cyd Ho, a number of *tongzhi* groups have met with Cardinal Zen to discuss this discrimination (Xiè, 2003). Very soon in 2004, the government has initiated consultations with

⁵ Bishop Zen has become Cardinal since February 2006.



different sectors of society, including the religious sector, on its plan for anti-discrimination legislation on sexual orientation. Whether this has been a coincidence or a plot, this has trapped the Hong Kong Roman Catholic Church in a dilemma. Although the Roman Catholic Church has supported the anti-discrimination legislation and played a significant role in protesting the colonial power of the Beijing Government, the Cardinal will not discard the Vatican's position on gay marriage. Any support of the legislation since then has been suspected of paving the way for gay marriage. Cardinal Zen has been silent on this issue. Some critics of Cardinal Zen have framed this silence as hypocrisy. The dilemma and silence of the Church have largely been an unquestioned bias towards homosexuals to the degree that the equal basic rights of *tongzhi* can be sacrificed in the name of obeying to Vatican authority on the teaching on homosexuality.

Meanwhile, the Society of Truth and Light has mobilized a large number of conservative Protestant groups and individuals to oppose the legislation, especially when they see the adoption of the legislation as a step before gay marriage right, as in the cases of Canada, Massachusetts and now California. Not only have they claimed to protect «family values,» but also framed the legislation as reverse discrimination, which grants *tongzhi* privileges to harm the rights of their opponents (Míng Guāng Shè, 2005). It has borrowed the discourses from fundamentalist Protestant groups in the United States. The so-called «family values» assumes the western nuclear family and the monogamous, heterosexist marriage as normality. A pro-family and pro-life camp has actively organized within the Hong Kong Roman Catholic Church, agreeing with the anti-gay rights agendas of the Society of Truth and Light. Since more *tongzhi* groups have formed in the 1990s, they have made more voices to advocate for their own rights. They have not only de-



mythicized the reverse discrimination logic (Xiǎo cáo, 2005), Some have successfully appealed to the court for the unequal treatment on age of consent between anal sex and vaginal sex (Shao, 2005). Moreover, there have been voices that protest the imposition of certain Christian values on civil society (Zhào, 2005). Although the discourse of rights has limitations as discussed in the previous section, the whole public debate during this period has deepened the understanding of rights and *tongzhi* employ the western discourse of rights to challenge the government and the conservative Christian groups, both of which have adopted the western heterosexist bias.

Mutual Malformation of Roman Catholicism and Confucianism

While local *tongzhi* have reappropriated western discourse in claiming their own rights, the Hong Kong Roman Catholic Church has not yet facilitated the Roman Catholic *tongzhi* to claim their identity and space within the Church. So far, there are no groups of Roman Catholic *tongzhi* formed within the Church. Only after the *tongzhi*'s storming of the Cathedral did the Diocese start planning ministry for Roman Catholic *tongzhi*.⁶ Despite its appropriation of the social justice and human rights tradition of the Church in its anti-discrimination efforts and commitment towards human rights and democracy, the Hong Kong Roman Catholic Church has followed the pro-life and pro-family Christian camp and slighted the oppressions *tongzhi* have been facing. It has not fully aware of nor explored any possible discriminations in their practices in its appropriation of

⁶ In June 2006, the Diocese organized three seminars on ministry to queer people and announced its plan to start such a specific ministry (Harvey and Rudegeair, 2006).



heterosexist teachings on its own flock, i.e. condemnation of homosexual acts and treating homosexual orientation as intrinsically disordered, though claiming to accept the sinner. The human rights and social justice tradition of the Church is, at the end, not easily meant for Roman Catholic *tongzhi* to claim their own dignity and empowerment within the Church.

There is no research on the Church's attitude on *tongzhi*. From my internet search, I have found only a few stories of Roman Catholic *tongzhi*: a short interview of a *nu-tongzhi* (female *tongzhi*), Bik-kei (Lǐ, 2006), two stories of a *nu-tongzhi*, Stargazer (2005) and a father having a *nu-tongzhi* daughter (Xīng zhī fù, 2005) in two separate issues of a *tongzhi* association newsletter. From a local oral history of (male) *tongzhi*, there are three Roman Catholic cases, Tim, Tak and Sze (Lǐ, Chén, Liáng, Zhāng, 2007: 12-30, 51-62, 159-68). From another female oral history project, there is only a story of a student educated in a Roman Catholic school (Chan, 2005: 15). From my experience at the Diocese and these few stories of Roman Catholic *tongzhi*, I contest that Roman Catholicism and Confucianism have mutually malformed each other to render a stricter sexual code to impose heteronormativity and reduce the tolerance for deviation and other sexual expressions. The unaware western bias in the sexual ethics of the Hong Kong Roman Catholic Church has led to its conspiracy with the oppressive aspects of Confucianism to impose homophobic and heterosexist teachings. This is expressed in two phenomena.

First, is the invisibility of Roman Catholic *tongzhi*. Although the experiences of local *tongzhi* indicate no urgent need for them to come out, the exceptionally low visibility of Catholic *tongzhi* in the Church is a sign of fear of rejection or lack of support. From my knowledge, the Blessed Minorities Christian Fellowship of a Protestant tradition and the cell group at Rainbow Hong Kong have respectively got a few



Roman Catholic members. Catholic *tongzhi* exist, but they are invisible in Church. Sze does not go to familiar priests for confession. He also separates his personal life from church life that he will not cruise anyone at the parish. Through reliable referral, Tak only comes out to certain trustworthy priests who have related ministerial experience and will show acceptance to him. After knowing that some Roman Catholics have been very angry at the storming of the Cathedral, Tak is afraid to come out there and plans to leave that parish. Bik-kei and Tim stay away from parish life. Stargazer chooses to come out only to close friends from childhood in her parish group, but has to tackle a serious challenge from a friend in this group. Only through her updated information on homosexuality, can she pass the challenge. She gradually gains more acceptance from these friends, one of whom later comes out to her privately. These stories show that acceptance of *tongzhi* within the Roman Catholic Church simply cannot be taken for granted, despite the official teachings on love and friendship for homosexuals. Homophobic intolerance is the reality.

Second, there is almost no room for discussion on views different from the official position on homosexuality or a taboo to discuss. In no seminars will anyone ever dare to raise a discussion on the possibility of accepting gay marriage. After the storming of the Cathedral, the Justice and Peace Commission have published in its newsletter on this topic, which has contained some comments on the official teachings. In an article of this issue, a Roman Catholic has complained of the rigid fixation of Vatican on the procreative purpose of sex (Xin Qíng, 2003). One of my Diocesan colleagues has also showed dissatisfaction on the inclusion of «deviant» views in a Diocesan publication. When several fatal cases of domestic violence have occurred, local groups have advocated for a comprehensive domestic violence legislation to include same-sex relationships in 2007. However, due to



the translation of domestic violence into «family» violence in Chinese, the Diocese refuses the inclusion of same-sex relationships. Tak regards the open and public talk about sex in a *tongzhi* church as incompatible with his faith. Obedience to the moral truth of the Church is required from Roman Catholics whereas obedience to authority is a Chinese virtue.

According to the Confucian teaching, everyone has a major obligation to get married and procreate. Since the Han Dynasty (206 BCE – 220 CE), women had to be confined to the domestic sphere and fulfill men's sexual pleasure. In the Song Dynasty (960 CE – 1279 CE), chastity of widows and foot binding of women were practice. Women's sexualities are for men's pleasure in the heterosexist marriage (Wawrytko, 2000: 176-177, 181-182).

This Confucian tradition has echoed largely with the Roman Catholic sexual teachings in the way that one either leads a life of chastity or only has procreative sex within marriage. The early Church fathers such as Augustine and Clement of Alexandria valued virginity and control in sexual pleasure. The body-mind duality also devalued body pleasure. Sex was confined to marriage to guard against lust and to procreate. Aquinas further defined certain sexual pleasure as sinful. Female sex and sexual pleasure were trivialized or ignored (Jordan, 2002: 47-130).

Hence, the long history of Roman Catholic teachings on the rejection of sexual pleasure and the compulsory heterosexuality in form of life-long, monogamous, heterosexual marriage is thus mutually malformed with the Confucian heterosexist marital teaching to give a stricter sexual code based on these homophobic, heterosexist, anti-sex, anti-body, anti-pleasure, and anti-women traditions and within a context of respect to church teaching as moral truth and an obedience to authority as a virtue.



In addition to the difficulty in coming out in Church, Roman Catholic *tongzhi* also share the same difficulty as other *tongzhi* in coming out to their family and friends. Sze and Tak, each being the only son in the family, feel the expectations of their parents, relatives and friends on their obligations of getting married whereas this expectation is not too evident in the daughters. This reflects the Confucian propriety for the sons to continue the patrilineal line. The Roman Catholic father has used all the means to stop his daughter's lesbian relationship. After paying several years' painful efforts in vain and the increasing distance with his daughter, he finally gives in. His worry that his lesbian daughter will face a difficult life in the society resonates with those of other parents who have lesbian daughters. This concern reflects the Confucian thought that daughters, wives or mothers are to be taken care of.

Hence, the Roman Catholic *tongzhi*, like other non-Roman Catholic *tongzhi*, have more immediate concern or difficulty in coming out to family and friends. However, they have an extra burden from the Church. Both in the Roman Catholic Church and the family contexts, Roman Catholic *tongzhi* cannot use a discourse of rights to help them to resolve the conflicts. They are even expected to respect the authority of the Church and the parents without any challenge.

Insights for a Chinese Roman Catholic Ethics for Tongzhi

In this section, I draw insights from the struggles and negotiation of Roman Catholic *tongzhi* in order to uncover the knowledge of resistance for tackling the mutual malformation of Roman Catholicism and Confucianism from a postcolonial, queer, feminist perspective.



Non-Absolutization of Morals

Although Catholic *tongzhi* face stricter sexual codes and less tolerance, most of the above cases do not have much struggle with official church teachings on homosexuality. Bik-kei and Stargazer have developed their own understandings of faith and religion. Although Tak knows the heated debate on homosexual acts, he feels a bit confused and troubled, but manages to ignore it temporarily. Sze repeatedly commits and confesses his «sins», but does not feel much pressure from the prohibition imposed by the priests. I find that this kind of flexibility in the compliance of ethical requirement reflects the non-absolutization in the Chinese yin-yang cosmology. Taoist giant, Zhuang-zi, furthers the yin-yang cosmology to reject false dichotomy, stating that «neither side of a dichotomy is wholly true» (Graham, 1991 [1981]: 252).

Within Christianity, Roman Catholicism tends to equate their moral wisdom as the absolute moral truth. Moral teachings on good or bad become absolutized. Any in-between will be regarded as a tendency towards bad — a slippery slope rhetoric. The absolutization of moral wisdom serves to exert a hegemonic power of the Roman Catholic Church. Heterosexism in its teachings is a vivid example. Hence, the Roman Catholic Church needs to be aware of how it has gained the authority to set moral teachings and how sexual teachings have been developed over its history. When it advocates for social justice and human rights, it can still trip into self-righteousness. Whatever appears objective is easy to absolutize as truth. Critical examination of the value behind any truth claims is necessary. Humility to listen to the experiences of *tongzhi*, women and Other is a virtue for the Roman Catholic Church to learn, given its long oppression women and *tongzhi*.



Indigenous Wisdom

I find that the Catholic *tongzhi* tend to face more issues from their Chinese identity, but, at the same time, Chinese cultural resources are more likely to facilitate their empowerment. For example, Sze will tell his mother that he is too poor to get a wife. Then, his mother will not pressure him anymore. In the modernization of the Republic China, indigenous culture has been regarded as backward. Consequently, the introduction of western sexology has ruined the cultural tolerance of same-sex eroticism. There have been real life stories and literature in Chinese history that can show the occurrence of various sexual expressions. Recovering indigenous history becomes important for empowerment as indigenous discourses and wisdom are connected to the particular cultural context. Of course, we should not romanticize the indigenous culture.

Owing to the limited stories on Catholic *tongzhi*, I will supplement an example here on how indigenous wisdom is used in *Tongzhi*'s coming out with their own partners. Zhou finds that for Chinese, everyone is identified within the family-kinship system. It is necessary to let the partner build up relationships with one's parents or family. Being the family's friend is located within the Five Relations (friend-friend). This will break the insider-versus-outsider boundary so that the partner will be accepted as son or daughter soon. Joining family activities such as dinner or playing *mahjong* —a Chinese tiles gambling game— are very popular strategies used by local *tongzhi*. No heated argument on homosexuality is needed with one's family (Zhou, 2000: 249-271). I will add that once the parents or family members accept the partner as part of the family, it will be easier for them to accept other *tongzhi* relationships. Hence, the Roman Catholic Church needs to respect other civilizations and cultures and be aware of its own Eurocentric bias before it can capture the



indigenous wisdom. Otherwise, it will not be able to recover the liberative element of Confucianism and other Chinese traditions for the empowerment of Catholic *tongzhi*.

Queerness Within a Group

From the few cases of Catholic *tongzhi*, we can still see no fixed Roman Catholic's expressions of faith. Bik-kei involves herself in queer advocacy in the community without affiliation to a particular parish whereas Tak, Sze and Stargazer tend to emphasize participation in a parish. The queer expression of Roman Catholic spirituality and the queer notion of *tongzhi* show an openness for diversity that is lacking in official Roman Catholic sexual ethics regarding diverse sexual expressions within a person or the whole human community. However, I find that queer theories from the West tend to focus on individual fluid identity and lack the capacity to build up connection and solidarity in the society.

I will supplement another example to show how this limitation can be avoided. Day Wong (2006) finds in the local oral history project on women who love women a sense of identification built up through sharing similar experiences. While they do not have a common identity, the root-searching for similar experiences and sharing of experiences actually build up an imaginative community. Although the definition of women in this project is based on their biological sex, they come from different backgrounds, but all share same-sex desires (Wong, 2006). The subversiveness here lies in the fact that same-sex eroticism is shared among females, not necessarily lesbians or bisexuals. Women's concern about relationality and sharing experiences are vital in building up a sense of community and solidarity without requiring a fixed identity. The Roman Catholic Church should be aware of its gender and sexual binarism that has



marginalized all other creative and diverse sexual expressions. It needs to break down its mental boundaries to embrace the creative and ever-changing potential of God in all things. It needs to learn genuine communion in diversity, instead of imposing uniformity for shaping a Catholic identity. Moreover, it should empower the moral agency of each individual to make moral discernment in a communal effort.

Complementarity over dualism

While both Confucianism and Catholicism have their own liberative and oppressive aspects, there is no need to use a dualist classification for them such as civilized-vs.-primitive, good-vs.-bad, promiscuous West-vs.-virgin East, and the like. Rather, the two may complement each other in a helpful way. For example, for a Chinese Roman Catholic, one can learn from the strong justice tradition from Roman Catholicism to complement Confucianism. One can learn the limitation of the discourse of rights in resolving conflicts and turn to use *qing* [passion or sentiment] for building up the relation for acceptance and the support for change. In fact, interreligious and cross-cultural dialogue on the issues of sexuality and homosexuality can help to uncover possible bias and broaden understanding.

Conclusion

The scrutiny on the creation, integration and re-appropriation of different discourses on homosexuality in a specific cultural context or same-sex eroticism helps to locate various actors of domination and resistance. The Hong Kong Roman Catholic Church has played the roles of a good person and a bad one in the issue of homosexuality. The former role can help to mask the latter role. It is necessary



for it to see how these two roles are related to its oppression to *tongzhi*.

Moreover, before the introduction of western sexology discourse on homosexuality in Republic China, there was a certain degree of cultural tolerance of same-sex eroticism and even queer sexual expressions in Chinese culture. Although the British legal discourse continues to penalize male homosexuality and impose a heterosexist, sexist and classist control over sexuality, *tongzhi* has been increasingly capable of making their discourse and queer strategies. While the Hong Kong Roman Catholic Church has used a discourse of rights and social justice to support anti-discrimination, its unawareness of its colonial power in imposing a western sexual code has limited its prophetic role in the empowerment and respect for equal dignity of *tongzhi*. In order to overcome this limitation, the Church needs to listen to the experiences of *tongzhi*, recover their moral agency in their discernment of sexual ethics and recover the hidden Chinese queer history.

Finally, while acknowledging that I have not drawn insights from more diverse sexual expressions, I will regard it as a continuous effort to make discursive discourses on human sexuality.

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