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**Debaters of the Bedchamber:  
China Reexamines Ancient Sexual Practice**

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## Abstract

This article takes note of the revival of interest in China in the ancient art of the bedchamber (*fangzhongshu*). We survey traditional Chinese sex culture, the textual sources of the bedchamber arts, the development of sexology as an academic discipline, and a synopsis of the theory and practice of the art of the bedchamber itself. We present the various views, pro and con, regarding these practices as they are being debated today in academic journals, advice columns, talk shows, and online forums. Finally, we review the roles of Western scholars in reviving the topic in China and Chinese masters in transmitting the art to the West. Formally an aspect of elite culture, like poetry and calligraphy, the art of the bedchamber has reemerged today in the context of cultural nationalism and an exploration of Chinese identity. Moreover, universal literacy and media penetration have democratized the discourse to include the voices of women and ordinary citizens.

## Contributor Note

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## Introduction

A Chinese centenarian today has lived through the imperial, Republican and Communist eras; landlordism, socialism, and capitalism; but perhaps no changes in China have attracted more attention than attitudes towards sexuality, changes many have called a 'sexual revolution'. Our centenarian would certainly be shocked by premarital sex, revealing attire, pornography, and sexual images and discourse in the media, all radical departures from arranged marriage, the cult of virginity, and chaste widowhood. Would she see the irony in yesterday's foot and breast binding and today's high heels and implants; yesterday's polygamy and concubinage and today's 'mistress villages'; yesterday's courtesans and prostitutes and today's sex workers; yesterday's female infanticide and today's sex selective abortion; yesterday's arranged marriages and today's dating services; yesterday's herbal aphrodisiacs and today's Viagra; yesterday's wedding night bloody bed sheet and today's premarital medical exam; yesterday's pillow books and today's sex hotlines? Whether you see all this as an inevitable march from repression to liberation, old wine in new bottles, or simply a strategic shift in state control, there is no doubt that the silence of the feudal and communist eras has been broken.

In one corner of the cacophony of discourse on sexuality today, is a re-examination of the ancient art of the bedchamber, its place in the intellectual history of sexology, and the validity and relevance of its practices for today. Whereas, for two thousand years, the chief challenge to the ideology of 'semen saving' (*baojing*) and the 'battle of stealing essences' (*caizhan*) came from Daoist 'pure practices' and Buddhist

celibacy, today the counter discourse is joined by Western biomedicine. In the current culture wars, whether to play by Western or Chinese rules in the bedroom is a manifestation of a more general national identity crisis. As Judith Farquhar says, 'In other words, a technique for the private life of the inner chambers can perhaps be experienced as a very immediate way of being Chinese' (Farquhar 2002). Like Prof. Farquhar, I am interested in getting behind the texts to the subjectivity of the ancient authors and understanding the mentality of their contemporary exponents. Today, this debate takes place in academic journals, blogs, online forums, advice columns, and call-in talk shows. Moreover, like martial arts, *qigong*, and traditional Chinese medicine, Chinese sexual practices have become an exportable cultural commodity. Not surprisingly, in an age of globalization, this debate has spilled out across national borders, and scholars from the East and West can be found on all sides of the issue, including, ironically, Chinese detractors and Western exponents.

## Traditional Chinese Sex Culture

In seeking a cultural context for the emergence of the bedroom arts, we must look to the traditional family, philosophy, and medicine. Speculation on the nature of the pre-feudal family begins with the early Daoist philosophers' vision of group marriage and matriarchy. The *Zhuangzi*, 'Dao Zhi', says, 'They knew their mothers but not their fathers', and the *Liezi*, 'Tangwen', 'Men and women freely intermingled without matchmakers or wedding rituals'. Spring free love festivals are attested in the *Zhouli*, 'Diguan situ xia'. Neolithic art suggests fertility and phallus worship,

including both direct representations of sex organs and indirect symbolism, such as double fish (vulva), frogs (fecundity), birds (penises), eggs (testicles), mountains (male genitalia), and caves (female genitalia). One version of Genesis in Chinese mythology has the goddess Nü Wa creating humanity as a solo act, and another the god Fu Xi and goddess Nü Wa coiling their serpentine tails and producing the race of man.

The traditional Chinese family can be characterized by the following alliterative mnemonic: patriarchal, patrilineal, patrilocal, and polygamous. Homoeogeniture, not primogeniture, was the rule, and the dominant diad was parent and child, rather than husband and wife. As one of the 'three bonds' – ruler-subject, parent-child, husband-wife – relations between the conjugal couple were inherently unequal, perfect examples, in fact, of the Derridean concept of the inequality of binaries. Han Confucian ideologue Dong Zhongshu raised misogyny to a metaphysical principle: 'Yang is noble; yin is lowly... Husband is yang; wife is yin' (*Chunqiu fanlu*, 46). Five generations living harmoniously under one roof was an enduring cultural ideal, and we cannot fully understand the genesis of Chinese sexual practices without imaging the sexual dynamics of an extended family, with parents, arranged wife, elective wives, concubines, slave girls, brothers, sisters-in-law and children all under one roof. Traditional China regarded filial piety as the highest love, and same-sex friendships came next. The *Mencius*, 'Li Lou xia', says, 'Of the three kinds of unfilial acts, failure to produce an heir is the worst'. Arranged marriage, involving matchmakers, astrologers, bankers, cooks and entertainers, required payment of bride-price and a lavish

communal banquet, after which bride and groom repair to the bedchamber, peruse a variety of pillow books, endure the violent hazing of guests, and are expected to produce evidence of virginity. Divorce was strictly a male prerogative, and poetry, fiction, and folklore abound in themes of true love thwarted by mercenary parents, peasant resistance to landlord *droit du seigneur*, and suicide to avoid unworthy matches.

For women, there was rivalry between the various ranks of wives and concubines for the favor of the master, as well as enormous pressure to produce male heirs. A wife's first duty was to please her mother-in-law, who may have raised her as a child bride alongside her son as a pseudo-sibling. The daughters she bears might well become victims of infanticide, while sons are regarded as the property of their mothers-in-law. By the medieval period, strict separation of the sexes and sequestering of females were exacerbated by the practice of footbinding. Women were the objects of suspicion at every turn: competition for a son's affections, distractions from duty, and sources of ritual pollution through menses and childbirth. Any sign of impropriety on a woman's part could lead to scandal and shame for the whole family. In terms of female initiative or agency in sex, the bedchamber arts literature presents women as a captive but dangerous audience, capable of turning the tables in the 'battle of stealing essences', as opposed to the more open marketplace of pleasure seeking and adventure in the *Ars Amatoria* or *Kama Sutra*.

The imperial household, with its alpha male monarch, wives, concubines, slaves and eunuchs, and ritualized record



keeping of his copulations, is the family writ large, an institution in which sex and sagacity are the twin pillars of the emperor's charisma and legitimacy. His sex life was ritually and medically regulated to insure a eugenic diet of nourishing young *yang*-boosting partners to produce princes and heirs to the throne. At the same time, the emperor's monopoly of the empire's most beautiful women, and the ratio of the imperial seraglio to the general female population, which sometimes reached 1:600, was recognized as creating an imbalance that led to 'bitter women and solitary men'. He performs heroic self-discipline in the mourning rituals for deceased parents and in the practice of *reservatus* for guaranteeing the fitness of the next generation. The mistresses of the European monarchs represented the privilege of pleasure; the *seraglios* of the Chinese emperors were about eugenics and self-discipline.

As China enters the Axial Age, medicine and sexology emerge as inextricable allies. In fact, Chinese medicine is as preoccupied with sexual conduct as religion is in the West. The theoretical frameworks of *yin* and *yang*, the five phases, repletion and vacuity, *jing*, *qi* and *shen*, and the heart-kidney axis all explain the necessity of semen saving in a physiological system of finite resources and infinite desire. Chinese medicine understands the body chiefly as a system of energetics: substance and structure are important only to assimilate, generate, store or transmit energy. The three primary forms of energy, or 'three treasures', are sexual essence (*jing*), vital energy (*qi*), and spirit (*shen*). *Jing* is both semen and the energy residing therein: in its prenatal aspect, it is pure life-giving potential, and, in its postnatal form, is material and

subject to corruption and instability. Semen, in its *yin* form, is fuel and, in its *yang* form, is flame. *Jing* is stored in the kidney, a term in traditional Chinese medicine that takes in the urogenital system, but is also linked to the bones, marrow, brain teeth, and hair. *Qi* is the operational term that denotes the energy entering the body through food and air, the functional activities and influence of the organs and channels, and their pathological manifestations. The last, *shen*, comprises the functions of the heart, brain, and central nervous system, and, although it relies on the material support of *jing* and *qi*, is the master of them. The kidney is responsible for controlling water, retaining the pure and eliminating the turbid, and is the seat of the 'fire of the Gate of Life, or 'ministerial fire', that represents the fire, or *yang*, principle dwelling in the depths of the kidney's *yin* water. *Jing* circulates in the Eight Extraordinary Vessels and nourishes, fuels, and cools and belongs to *yin*. The heart (seat of the spirit) and kidney form an axis such that agitation of the heart (emotion, desires) causes the kidney to lose seminal essence; and deficient seminal essence, in turn, causes clouding of the spirit. A final function of the kidney is to absorb the *qi* of the lungs during respiration, a function enhanced by deep abdominal breathing, as in meditation. The importance of sexual function in Chinese medicine can be seen in the fact that approximately half of the medicines in Li Shizhen's monumental *Bencao gangmu* (Materia Medica) are for 'strengthening yang and tonifying the kidney', and Zhu Danxi's medical maxim, 'Yang is normally in excess and yin deficient', explains the chronic imbalance of supply and demand. However, it is also in the medical literature that we find a rare critique of the dominant ideology of

*coitus reservatus* in the theory of *baijing*, or corrupt sexual essence, which explains that, once aroused, *jing* has already fallen into the post-natal realm.

The bedchamber arts accept the theoretical foundations of medicine, but extend them by positing the transferability of energy between organisms, just as organs within the body can support or steal from each other. Sexual alchemy extends the concept of transferability into the realm of transmutability, holding that males may be fertilized by female sexual energy and gestate an immortal fetus.

The binary cosmology of the *Yijing*, featuring broken and unbroken lines, representing *yin* and *yang*, and interpreted by some as phallic and female symbols, is not based on a duality of good and evil, matter and spirit, or sacred and profane, but value-neutral, cyclical and complementary states of hard and soft, light and dark, hot and cold, dry and moist, and male and female. The trigrams and hexagrams of the *Yijing* are the mathematics of Chinese science. Biological-cosmological correspondences associate the moon with menses and sunrise with erections. Various hexagrams have been interpreted as encoding different forms of sexual congress, and the *Yijing's*, 'Male and female mingle their sexual essences, and all things are transformed and born' is Adam and Eve without the notion of sin or 'fall'. Heaven and earth are man and woman writ large, or conversely, man and woman are a microcosm of heaven and earth. However, as the centuries passed, the theory of *yin* and *yang* became a two-edged sword: *yin*, the dark and material, became associated with death, and *yang*, the light and etheric, with life, providing a

theoretical justification for male dominance.

The phrases, 'Eating, drinking, man and woman – these are the great human desires', spoken by Gaozi in the *Mencius*, and, 'Eating and sex are part of our intrinsic nature' in the *Liji* (Book of rites, 'Liyun' and 'Diguan') have come to represent the Confucian acceptance of sex as natural, but the *Analects*, 'There are two kinds of people who are difficult to develop spiritually: inferior men and also women' is the *locus classicus* for Chinese misogyny. There are few direct references to sexuality in the Chinese philosophical canon, and most subsequent discussions turn on the question of whether human nature is essentially good or evil, the roles of feeling (*qing*) and desires (*yu*), and whether desires should be eliminated or refined. The Confucian classics of the Warring States period initiate the themes of sex as natural, but requiring study and discipline. Thus, the *Book of Rites* advises that, 'Men should marry at thirty and women at twenty', but warns that we must, 'observe separation of the sexes' (Quli, Neize). The *Book of Odes* (*Shijing*) speaks of 'joy without lasciviousness', and collects frank love poetry reminiscent of the 'Song of Solomon', including later allegorical interpretations. Love as allegory and hierogamy are prominent in Qu Yuan's fourth century BCE 'Encountering Sorrow' and 'Nine Songs'. The fourth century BCE *Commentary of Zuo* says, 'The offspring of same surname couples are not hardy' and represents the earliest statement of the incest taboo and observations on eugenics. In the *Analects* ('Jishi'), Confucius himself elaborates on the developmental guidelines for sex: 'The gentleman observes certain disciplines. As a youth, his *qi* and blood are not yet

stable, and he should abstain from sex'. The *Daode jing* admonishes us, 'not to allow our *jing* to become aroused', but praises the baby boy's innocent erections as an expression of strong yang energy, untainted by post-pubescent lust. The *Guanzi*, 'Quanxiu' takes a slightly stiffer tone, 'The gentleman should be without evil behavior, and the woman without lust'. Altogether, the early literary record shows an appreciation of sex as a normal part of life, with due regard for moderation and propriety, but no whiff of sin.

Buddhist celibacy and monasticism, entering China around the beginning of the Western Common Era, pushes misogyny to new heights but also presents women with an opportunity to escape the family trap. Mainstream Buddhism considers sex the most intractable attachment and advocates separation of the sexes, but a persistent underground, left-handed Tantra, advocated using sexual shock therapy to collapse the duality of *shiva* and *shakti*, *nirvana* and *samsara*. Physiologically, in Tantric sexual practices, female energy merges with male essence to form 'translated semen' (*bindu*), which blazes up a new nerve channel to overcome dualities and realize nirvana. Buddhist asceticism challenged Daoism to adopt monasticism and contributed to Neo-Confucianism's 'Preserve heavenly principles and eliminate human desires'. The most conspicuous influence of left-handed Tantra was the *yab-yum*, dual deity sculptures displayed in the Mongol palace during the Yuan dynasty and still preserved during the Ming.

During the period of nationalist revolution, and especially in connection with the May Fourth Movement, some

efforts were made to advance gender equality, education, and free marriage in progressive circles, and the same was true for leaders and ideologues in the communist revolution, but discourse stopped at the bedroom door. Lu Xun's 1925 'Regret for the Past' (Shangshi) explores the tragic results of an experiment in free love, where idealistic talk of Ibsen, Tagore, and Shelley ends in disillusionment and death. In the midst of a nascent women's liberation movement, traditional physicians like Zheng Manqing weighed in, admitting that the sequestration and inactivity of women led to blood stagnation and depression but feared that the hyperactive 'modern' woman would suffer blood desiccation (Zheng 2011).

### **Sources of Knowledge of the Bedchamber Arts**

The textual sources for our knowledge of the ancient art of the bedchamber may be classed as direct, indirect, and reconstructed. The direct are complete, dedicated bedchamber arts classics and chapters in medical works; the indirect are references in philosophical, literary, and polemical works; and the reconstructed are more or less complete works reconstructed from collected fragments. All of these works reflect aspects of the 'bedchamber arts' (*fangzhong*) but are addressed to different audiences. Thus, we may further classify the dedicated bedchamber arts literature into householder, medical, and sexual alchemy. The householder texts are the broadest category, containing elements of philosophy, psychology, medicine, esthetics, and eugenics, with a dash of immortality to pique the readers' imaginations. They use medical jargon, but nothing beyond the ken of their

literati readers. The medical texts are intended as technical manuals for physicians and are generally situated as chapters within larger medical textbooks. The sexual alchemy texts position themselves against Buddhists, Confucians, alchemists, and inner alchemists, rejecting celibacy, procreation, elixirs, and the 'inner marriage' of *yin* and *yang* in favor of the 'human elixir', under the master metaphor: 'If bamboo breaks, use bamboo to mend it'. While amoral in their means, they pursue immortality as a teleological imperative.

The story of the recovery of the bedchamber arts' literature is a tale of mystery, serendipity, and buried treasure. We have known of the existence of such texts from the *Hanshu* (History of the Han) 'Yiwen zhi' (Bibliography), completed in CE 111 and covering the period from 225 BCE to 25 CE, which lists eight titles under 'Bedchamber Arts', a rubric that shares billing with 'Medical Classics' 'Classic Formulas', and 'Immortality' under 'Healing Arts'. Although none have survived from this catalogue, the Preface characterizes their teachings as, 'Joy in moderation brings peace of mind and long life'. The *Hanshu* also contains biographies of magician Kan Shi and physician Huo Tuo, featuring references to the art of Master Rong Cheng, a name appearing in the eponymous title of the first work listed in the 'Bedchamber Arts' section of the *Hanshu*, and attributing his longevity to *coitus reservatus* and 'returning the sexual essence (*jing*) to nourish the brain'. Another historical record of the first century CE, the *Wu Yue chunqiu* (Spring and autumn annals of the states of Wu and Yue), 'Unofficial Chronicle of Gou Jian's Attack on the State of Wu', mentions the mythological sex initiatrices Xuan Nü and Su Nü,

whose names adorn the titles of many sex manuals and whose imagined dialogues with the fabled Yellow Emperor define their literary form.

Major thinkers of the Han period reflect the pervasiveness of the principles of the bedchamber arts. Han Confucian ideologue Dong Zhongshu (179–104 BCE), whose essay 'Equating Statecraft and Self-cultivation' is an extended metaphor comparing the importance of preserving sexual essence and the ruler's surrounding himself with humble worthies, writes: 'The secret of regulating the body is preserving the sexual essence ... maintain serenity and stillness to develop the sexual essence' (*Chunqiu fanlu*, 'Tong guoshen'). Arch skeptic and rationalist Wang Chong's (c. 27–97) *Lun Heng* (Weighing theories), Chapter 6, 'The Meaning of Destiny' (*Mingyi*) says: 'Su Nü explained the methods of the five goddesses to the Yellow Emperor. These not only damage the health of fathers and mothers but the natures of their offspring'. This is a rare and unequivocal repudiation of the theoretical foundations of the bedroom arts. The principles of the arts are reaffirmed in the final passage of Chapter 9 'On Marriage' (*Jiaqu*) in the *Baihu tongyi* (Comprehensive discussions in the White Tiger Hall), the record of a meeting of leading thinkers in 58 CE. It cites the need to suspend sexual relations after 60 on the grounds of debility, but resuming after seventy to ward off chill in bed, together with the obligation to have relations every five days with a concubine who has not yet reached fifty.

References to the role of the ancient manuals in the lives of the literati can be glimpsed in a small number of poems alluding to illustrated pillow books and



the names of sex mentors (goddesses, immortals and legendary emperors), such as Han dynasty Zhang Heng's (78–139) *Tongsheng ge* (Song of the first night) and the *Tiandi yinyang jiaohuan da le fu* (Prose poem on the joyous union of heaven and earth, yin and yang), attributed to Bai Xingjian (776–826) and discovered in the manuscript cache at Dunhuang in 1900. The 'Prose Poem' references a rich repertoire of sexual techniques, including the hallmark *coitus reservatus*. Sima Xiangru's *Meiren fu* (Prose poem on a beautiful woman) depicts the joy of sex in its esthetic and therapeutic dimensions. Historical writings highlight the devotion to the bedroom arts of political figures, such as Emperor Wu of the Han, Han usurper Wang Mang (45BCE–23 CE), and Cao Cao and sons Pi and Zhi of the Three Kingdoms Period (220–280 CE).

The theocratic movements of the late Han, featuring ritualized sex as rites of expiation and renewal, are another rich source on the evolution of the bedroom arts. The *Shenxian zhuan* (Biographies of immortals), attributed to Ge Hong, Chapter 5, puts the following words in the mouth of founder Celestial Master Zhang Daoling: 'You my followers are still unrefined and unable to transcend this world. If you practice my qigong and bedroom arts, along with consuming herbs, you can live for several hundred years'. The *Taiping jing* (Scripture of Great Peace), adopted by Celestial Master Zhang Jue of the Yellow Turban Rebellion says, 'Through the way of intercourse between husband and wife, yin and yang are fulfilled, and heaven and earth enjoy peace and tranquility'. The *Taiping jing* emphasizes the procreation and pleasure principles in sexual practices, rather than self-cultivation or immortality. The *Yellow Book* (Huangshu),

a textual liturgy for the sexual ritual associated with the Celestial Master movement, copiously attested in both Daoist and Buddhist sources but thought lost for two thousand years, was discovered in the *Daozang* (Daoist canon) by Kristofer Schipper in the 1970s under the title *Huangshu guodu yi* (Yellow book salvation ritual). It shares some common features with the sex manuals, particularly slow, deliberate, and abstracted sex with *coitus reservatus*. The *Nüqing guilü* (Demon statutes of Nüqing) and *Taishang dongyuan shenzhou jing* (Scripture of the most high cavern depth holy spells) support the prominence of sexual practices according to the teachings of the *Yellow Book*. We know, too, from Daoist defector Zhen Luan's *Xiaodao lun* (Essay ridiculing Daoists) and Daoist reformer Kou Qianzhi's *Zhengao* (True pronouncements) and *Lao Jun yinyong jiejing* (Scripture of Laozi's chanted admonitions) that such rituals and teachings were widespread. If some fellow Daoists were scandalized by sexual rituals, the reaction of Buddhist celibates was even harsher. Dao An's *Er jia lun* (Essay on Confucianism and Daoism), Fa Lin's *Bianzheng lun* (Essay on determining the true), Shi Huitong *Bo Gu [Huan] taoshi Yi Xia lun* (Disputing Daoist Master Gu's [Huan] *Treatise on Foreign Lands and China*), Liu Si's *Mie huo lun* (Treatise on destroying ignorance), and Shi Xuanguang's *Bian huo lun* (Arguing against ignorance) all condemn these practices, even as they testify to their existence.

Another strain of Daoists, the immortalists, staked out three positions in relation to sexual practices: sexual alchemy, qualified paired practices, and inner alchemy. Sexual alchemy texts, such as the *Jindan zhenzhuàn* (True

transmission of the golden elixir), appropriated the theory and vocabulary of inner alchemy, but insisted that additional inputs of sexual energy from female partners was a necessary supplement for a lifetime of loss. Ge Hong (283–343 CE) epitomized the qualified paired practices position, believing semen conservation could confer extraordinary longevity, was an essential foundation for self-cultivation, but only alchemy could guarantee true immortality. His *Bao Pu zi* (Master who embraces purity) mentions the *Classic of Su Nü* by name, and although his *Yufang bijue* (Secrets of the Jade Chamber) is lost, a passage in the *Bao Pu zi* says: 'The most important thing for self-cultivation is conserving sexual essence. The effect of conserving sexual essence is achieved through sexual moderation. If one can limit oneself to two emissions per month, or twenty-four per year, one can live a hundred and twenty years. The technique involves entering soft and withdrawing strong'. This is a fair summary of the moderate dual cultivation position.

As evidence of the popularity of the bedroom arts, Ge tells us that there were 'more than ten schools', some of which overlap with the 'Seven Classics' (*Qijing*) referenced in such Daoist works as the *Taizhen Yudi siji mingke jing* (Scripture of the Holy Jade Emperor's clear precepts for the four corners of the world) and *Dongzhen taishang taixiao langshu* (Pure white book of the true grotto highest heaven), as well as the *Hanshu* bibliography. The *Shenxian zhuan* (Biographies of immortals) describes Tianmen zi, Beiji zi and Li Xiu's attainment of great longevity through the bedchamber arts. The number of references in Daoist and medical works to Daoist authors of sex manuals, such as Bu Shi, Gan Shi, Liu Jing, Feng Heng,

Feng Junda, and figures mentioned in biographies of immortals who are credited with authoring sex manuals, such as Wu Yan, Huangshan Jun, Yuzi, Tian Neizi, Beijizi, Jue Dong zi, and Taiyang zi all attest to the popularity of this genre.

However, support for the art of the bedchamber as a ladder to immortality was not universal. The early third century *Laozi xianger zhu* (Xiang'er commentary to the *Laozi*), attributed to Zhang Lu, grandson of first Celestial Master Zhang Daoling, is critical of the bedroom arts. The *Commentary* pointedly refutes the basic tenet of sexual practices i.e., that sexual energy is transferable: 'Those who practice the *Classic of the Dark Woman* and the methods of Gongzi and Rongcheng all wish to borrow. But what creditor exists who will loan? So they receive nothing. Only those who preserve their own supply of essence and cut off their desires are great without limit' (Bokenkamp 1997, 125). Even the *Shenxian zhuan* reveals a dissenting voice in the biography of She Zheng, who forbade his disciples to practice the bedchamber arts. The *Xiang'er Commentary's* critique of the bedroom arts is echoed in the early fourth century *Huangting jing* (Yellow court scripture), an inner alchemy classic associated with the Shangqing Sect (Highest Purity). Chapter 21 'Jade Chamber' (Qiongshi) says: 'To achieve long life be careful in the bedroom. Abandon lustful desires and preserve your *jing*'. This turn in Daoism from 'dual cultivation' to the 'pure practices' of inner alchemy continues through the *Purple Texts* and *Lingbao* sect's literature, as seen in such scriptures as the *Zhengao* (True pronouncements), *Dongzhen taishang shuo zhihui xiaomo zhenjing* (True scripture of the authenticity grotto most

high who speaks wisdom and dispels demons), and *Taishang dongxuan lingbao shoudu yibiao* (Salvation ritual of the most high mystery grotto numinous treasure).

In sum, then, among self-identified Daoists, there were those like Ge Hong who advocated the bedroom arts for health and longevity; those like the Celestial Masters who advocated group sexual rituals for healing and salvation; and a third group of 'pure practices' (*qingxiu*) inner alchemists, who advocated abstinence. The householder and medical literature are inextricable from the family nexus, but sexual alchemy is a purely individual – some would say selfish and exploitative – path to salvation, contrasting with the communal goals of both Confucians and Celestial Masters. The notion that sexual energy was a transferable quantum was evident as early as the Mawangdui texts. It explained the usefulness of a harem to the monarch and was a part of the preparatory training for consuming alchemical elixirs. However, the toxicity of 'external elixirs' eventually led to their abandonment and replacement by inner and sexual alchemy, the latter a system of sexual apotheosis via the 'marriage' of lead (*qi*) and mercury (spirit) in a process that transmutes the prenatal *jing* into *qi* and the *qi* into spirit, thus 'returning the sexual energy to nourish the brain'. By a process of reversal, then, the energy that is normally expended in conception is retained to gestate an etheric clone of the adept and thus achieve immortality. With the immortalists, the *Daode jing's* reverting to nature has been replaced with reversing nature.

During the Six Dynasties period, Ge Hong's *Bao Pu zi* and Tao Hongjing's (456–536) *Yangxing yanming lun*, 'The

Harm and Benefit of Intercourse with Women' shift the bedchamber arts in the direction of immortality-seeking and away from eugenics, postures, pleasure, and love. After reunification under the Sui dynasty in 581, the *Suishu* does not reserve a special rubric for sex manuals, but lists eleven titles under 'Medical Works' (*Yifang*) and thirteen unnamed works under 'Daoist Scriptures'. None of these correspond to the *Hanshu* titles, and they appear to be shorter, judging by the number of scrolls in each. The short-lived Sui was followed by the Tang in 618, the beginning of three centuries of unity. In the *Xin Tangshu* (New history of the Tang dynasty), bedroom arts titles are listed under 'Medical Works', and most medical literature from this period devotes a section to the bedroom arts, such as Sun Simiao's *Fangzhong buyi* (Benefits of the bedroom arts) and Tao Hongjing's *Yu nü sun yi* (The dangers and benefits of intercourse with women). Although written as chapters of longer medical texts, they are very similar to the stand-alone sex manuals of the same period, or, for that matter, of the Mawangdui manuscripts. Examples of medical works that also devote considerable space to sexual practices are Zhen Quan's *Gujin luyan* (Ancient and contemporary proven remedies) and Wang Tao's *Waitai biyao* (Essential secrets of the external platform). However, by the close of the Tang and beginning of the Song dynasty at the end of the tenth century, Tamba Yasurori, Japanese physician of Chinese descent was only able to collect fragments of the sex manuals listed in the Sui and Tang bibliographies during a book collecting expedition in China. In 984, he arranged these fragments in thirty topics in Volume 28 *Fangnei* (Within the bedchamber) in his *Ishinpo*. The *Ishinpo*, along with the Mawangdui manuscripts,

represent our oldest corpus of primary texts.

The Five Dynasties and Song dynasty that followed the collapse of the Tang are China's Victorian Age, roundly reviled by nineteenth and twentieth century reformers as the epitome of sexual repression. The Song saw the rise of a new ideological orthodoxy, combining Daoist cosmology, Buddhist asceticism, with Confucian commitment to statesmanship, a kind of Confucianism with an inner life, called Neo-Confucianism in the West. Their slogan, 'Preserve heavenly principles and destroy human desires', may have had a dampening effect on pro-bedroom arts discourse, but there is little evidence of decreased prostitution, shrinking seragios, or suppression of public festivals featuring naked women wrestlers. Indeed, Wang Mao's (1151–1213) *Yeke congshu* (Collected works of a wild guest), describing the seductive power of the bedroom arts and Zeng Zao's *Daoshu* (Pivot of the dao) 'Rong Cheng pian', that singles out the *Ru yao jing* for its pernicious sexual alchemy, 'that can kill practitioners but never confer immortality', tells us that the old arts were not dead, and the *Songshu* (History of the Song) still lists some sex manuals under Daoist works.

The Song dynasty ended with the Mongol conquest, the first time the whole of China was absorbed into a still larger empire. Unemployed Chinese literati threw their literary talents into theater, which saw the flowering of this art. The Mongols were devoted to Lamaism, and their Tantric iconography, featuring the 'double deities', Shiva and Shakti, in erotic embrace, were displayed in the imperial palace and survived well into the Ming dynasty. Van Gulik argues that,

contrary to conventional wisdom, it was India who borrowed the bedroom arts from China, with two infusions influencing the rise of left-handed Tantra. New bedroom arts literature of this period is either of the sexual alchemy variety, such as the *Fangshu qishu* by Kangong daoren (attributed to the immortal Chen Xiyi), or medical works stressing moderation, such as Zhu Zhenheng's *Seyu pian* (Treatise on sexual desire) and Wan Quan's *Guangsi jiyao* (The fundamentals of begetting offspring).

The Ming reasserted Han rule and reinstated Confucianism as the state ideology. The *Mingshu* (History of the Ming) lists no sex manuals, and even the Daoist section is notably thin. 'Family Instructions' (*Jiaxun*) attest to the survival of bedroom arts in private life, and, in spite of censorship, a handbook entitled *Su Nü miao lun* (Wondrous discourse of Su Nü) has survived, thanks to Japanese preservationism. It retains the antique mythological dialogue form but is remarkably free of sexual alchemy. Also preserved in Japan, but, by contrast a prototypical sexual alchemy text, the *Chunyang yanzheng fuyou dijun jiji zhenjing* (True classic of the complete union of the all-merciful Lord Chunyang), uses military metaphors to coach the Daoist aspirant in how to win the battle of the sexes. Another text preserved in Japan, but in an original Chinese printing dated 1598, is the *Zijin guangyue daxian xiuzhen yanyi* (Exposition of cultivating the true by the Great Immortal of the Purple Gold Splendor). Although replete with alchemical instructions, this work conserves some of the householder traits in portraying women in a more humanized form, and offering advice on sex aids, procreation, and seduction strategies for various personality types. Sexual alchemy texts from this period

run the gamut from unapologetic objectification and exploitation of women as 'stoves' and 'crucibles' to 'dual cultivation', a Platonic communion of yin and yang without physical contact, as in the *Sanfeng danjue* (Zhang Sanfeng's secret transmissions on the alchemical elixir). Ming dynasty erotic novels, such as the *Jinping mei* (Plum blossom in the golden vase) have echoes of the classic sex manuals in the use of *yin-yang* cosmology to trump Neo-Confucian morality, references to all the classic postures, characters from Daoist lore, such as He Xiangyu and Lü Dongbin, and vocabulary from sexual alchemy, such as 'stoves', 'crucibles', and 'borrowing from the trigram Kan to supplement the trigram Li'.

Turning now to the extant sex manuals themselves, following a lacuna of many centuries, fragments of the ancient manuals were discovered in 1903 by Chinese bibliophile Ye Dehui in the *Ishinpo*, a Japanese collection of Chinese medical literature compiled by Tamba Yasuyori (912–995) in 982. Ye stitched the fragments together to form five nearly complete texts and presented them to the Chinese public as proof of China's advanced sexology in ancient times. The five are: *Su Nü jing*, *Su Nü fang*, *Yufang bijue*, *Yufang zhiyao*, and *Dong Xüan zi*. Though an arch-conservative himself, the public was mostly outraged, and he was executed as a counter-revolutionary. It was seventy years before another momentous discovery in sexology, and that is the 1973 archeological excavation at Mawangdui, which unearthed a trove of manuscripts including, 15 medical texts, five of which have sexual teachings, and of these, two dedicated sex manuals. In terms of their language, anatomy, physiology, and psychology, they are

clearly the precursors of the lost *Hanshu* bibliography texts. Although the original bamboo slips and silk scrolls are untitled, they were named by their contemporary editors, and the two bedchamber arts texts are known today as: 'Uniting Yin and Yang' (*He yinyang*) and 'Discussion of the Highest Dao Under Heaven' (*Tianxia zhidao tan*). Three other medical texts also contain substantial sections on sex: 'Ten Questions', (*Shi wen*) 'Prescriptions for Health' (*Yangsheng fang*) and 'Miscellaneous Therapeutic Prescriptions' (*Za liaofang*). The most famous of the sex manuals, standing synecdochally for the whole genre, is the *Su Nü jing*, first named in Liu Xiang's (c.79–8 BCE) *Lienü zhuan* (Biographies of exemplary women), but left out of Ban Gu's *Hanshu* bibliography, and not reappearing until the Six Dynasties *Bao Pu zi* and *Suishu* (History of the Sui). These early sex manuals show a balance of interpersonal, medical, and transcendental concerns, but these will be discussed in detail in the section below entitled 'Theory of the Classical Bedchamber Arts'.

### History of Chinese Sexology

Ban Gu (32–92 CE), official historian of Emperor Ming of the Later Han may be regarded as China's first historian of sexology. His list of sex manual titles and Preface is evidence of a well-developed literature and a concept of sexology as a legitimate branch of knowledge. In his Preface to the section on bedroom arts, he says:

Sex represents the ultimate in human emotion and the realm of the highest dao. Therefore the sage kings regulated external pleasure in



order to restrain inner passions, and set forth their precepts. An early record says: 'The ancient kings engaged in pleasure in such a way as to regulate all affairs'. Pleasure in moderation brings peace of mind and long life. The foolish take no heed and fall ill, thus shortening their lives. (Wile 1992)

The Preface highlights the role of sexual pleasure as an essential ingredient in human life, even elevating it to the level of a spiritual experience, but warning that its mismanagement can lead to disaster. This encapsulates the essential tension in ancient Chinese attitudes towards sex: cosmic and phobic. Subsequent dynastic histories and Tamba's collection of fragments are without editorializing. Although the bedchamber arts have been critiqued by rationalists, physicians, ascetics, and alchemists, it is not until Ye's reconstruction that we have another reflection on the role of sex in Chinese society and history.

Li Zhi (1527–1602) may have been the first to champion gender equality and autonomous marriage. Three hundred years later, nineteenth-century reformers and utopians like Kang Youwei, Liang Qichao and Tan Sitong reexamined every aspect of traditional Chinese society, condemning footbinding, concubinage, polygamy, arranged marriage, prostitution, and the vogue for deflowering virgins as social pathologies, and advocated equality of the sexes, sex education, free love, and even same-sex marriage. Rather than advancing toward a 'modern' view of sex as unleashing our pleasure potential, the pathway to our inner selves, and the highest form of intersubjectivity, Tan focuses on the

sadistic penchant for footbinding and deflowering virgins. Using the Buddhist tenet of non-attachment and the native esthetic of understatement, he imagines an alternative reality where the sex organs spring from the forehead, evince no excitement, and where the sex act has the 'taste of wax' (Tan 1958). This is, uncannily, like Foucault's: 'in a different economy of bodies and pleasures, people will not quite understand how the ruses of sexuality, and the power that sustains its organization, were able to subject us to the austere monarchy of sex, so that we became dedicated to the endless task of forcing its secret, of exacting the truest of confessions from a shadow (Foucault 1978, 159). In both, we see a longing for a simpler, more unencumbered transaction.

The May Fourth Movement promoted free marriage, and even free love, which carried over somewhat to the revolutionary period. During the Mao era, sex was scientized, polygamy and concubinage were wiped out, and both prostitutes and nuns found themselves in reeducation camps. Traditional sexual practices were condemned as misogynist, decadent, and superstitious. The bedroom arts classics were suppressed in Mainland China, pirated in Taiwan, and made the object of scholarly curiosity in the West. Van Gulik and Needham used Chinese models to assail Victorian attitudes, even as Chinese communists adopted Victorian attitudes to reject them. Current debates over the bedroom arts may have initially had a political dimension, but this becomes less relevant as the regime both relaxes control over the sexual sphere and actively appropriates traditional cultural capital for itself.

Ironically, it was conservative intellectual Ye Dehui (1864–1927), who actively opposed the Reform Movement of 1898 and the Nationalist Revolution of 1911, and supported warlord Yuan Shikai's proclaiming himself emperor, who is responsible for putting the sex classics in the modern public domain. Ye's case demonstrates that the ancient sex classics can be used both by conservatives and progressives for the purposes of cultural nationalism. In his 'Preface to the Reprint of the *Su Nü jing*', Ye states: 'Today Western authorities on health and hygiene are exceedingly thorough in their study of all matters relating to diet and sex ... But they do not realize that the descendants of China's holy emperors and divine rulers already developed this art four thousand years ago' (Wile 1992, 84). May Fourth sexual liberators took feudal repression as a monolithic fact, but Ye Dehui attempted to show a more liberal attitude in the past, as did Zhang Dongmin in his 1927 *Xing de chongbai* (Sex worship). Both Ye Dehui and Richard Burton's Kama Shastra Society used scholarship to shake up their respective societies, but, for Burton, it was to challenge Victorian Puritanism, and, for Ye, it was patriotism.

We can draw a line from Margaret Sanger to Mao's 1979 one child policy, and from Magnus Hirschfeld to China's first native, modern sexologist: Zhang Jingsheng (1888–1970). Zhang was among the first cohort of students to be sent abroad for study by the new Republic in 1912. Seven years later he returned from France with a doctorate in Philosophy, just in time for the 1919 May Fourth Movement and an appointment by Cai Yuanpei at Peking University. Zhang advocated scientific sex research, sex education, contraception, free

marriage, trial marriage, and free love. As chairman of the Folk Customs Survey Committee, Zhang justified studying sex life in words that resonate with the *Hanshu's* Preface to the bedroom arts literature: 'In the philosophy of life, what is more important than sexology? Ethnology and cultural anthropology are intimately connected with sexology' (*Xingshi* 1926). In 1926, he published *Xingshi* (Sex histories), based on interviews with college students concerning their sex lives – 22 years before Kinsey's investigations. The book was widely circulated but ultimately provoked a backlash that haunted him to the end of his life. He regarded China's sexual culture as much richer than the West's, which he believed was stunted by religion. Combining esthetics and eugenics, he advocated a kind of sexual utopianism in which life and the human race itself would be improved by the art of love. Zhou Zuoren (1885–1967), younger brother of famed writer Lu Xun, praised him for, 'raising the flag in this pathological, Neo-Confucian society for the value of beauty in clothing, diet, domicile, and even pleasure'. Zhang Zuolin (1875–1928), warlord of Manchuria, however, felt that he should immediately face a firing squad. Philosopher Lin Yutang, Nankai University president Zhang Boling, literary critic Liang Shiqiu, and even Pan Guangdan, translator of Havelock Ellis' *Psychology of Sex*, criticized him for promoting promiscuousness and decadence. Having been run out of Beijing and Nanjing, he relocated in Shanghai, where he opened Beauty Bookstore, where beautiful young clerks introduced readers to books on sex education and enhancing sex life in marriage. Zhang had no Chinese disciples, and his memory was all but erased; the renaissance of Chinese sexology during

the 1980's was more inspired by Kinsey, Masters and Johnson, and van Gulik.

Both conservative Ye Dehui and progressive Zhang Jingshen were reviled and persecuted for their writings on sex, perhaps indicating the taboo status of the topic itself, quite apart from one's views on it. It was Zhang who invited Planned Parenthood founder, Margaret Sanger, to Peking University in 1922, where addressing a student audience of 2500; famous intellectual, Hu Shih, served as translator. In her Carnegie Hall report on her Asian tour, she said:

I repeat: the Chinese do not need religion. They need our science, sanitation, hygiene, Birth Control ...The women of China in my estimation have an intelligent grasp of life beyond the women of Japan. In some ways I found them superior to the women of the occidental world, for though they may still bind their feet, and many of them are suffering from the habit of feet binding, they are not to be so deplored nor pitied as some of our English and American women, whose minds have never been unbound. (Sanger 1922)

In literature and anthropology, Wen Yiduo's 1927 pioneering *Shijing de xingyuguan* (The concept of sexual desire in the *Book of Odes*) uncovered coded sexual allusions in this revered literary classic, a process continued by Van Gulik (1961, 16–25), and more recent studies by Middendorf (2004, 2007), Goldin (2002), Harbsmeier (1995), Riesel (1997), and Bischoff (1985).

In 1932, ten years after Sanger's visit, Magnus Hirschfeld (1868–1935), the father of modern sexology, and anti-

imperialist, anti-racist, and gay rights activist, visited China during his 1930–33 world tour. Hirschfeld, famous for his 1896 theory of 'sexual intermediariness', used Leibnitz's principle that 'everything happens by degrees and nothing by leaps' to challenge the Adam and Eve binary of the Old Testament. His observations persuaded him that, in Europe, America, Japan, and India, sexuality was under the tyranny of religion, and that only China was exceptional for its matter-of-factness and absence of hypocrisy. Calling Confucius the Chinese Nietzsche, he and his Chinese lover Li Xiutong returned to Europe, where Li became the executor of Hirschfeld's estate. Hirschfeld's impressions echo Sanger's when he says: 'Modern youth in China are in many regards less hampered by traditions than the youth of other countries. In the first place, they have no religious scruples. In Europe it is little known that at least four hundred million Chinese neither have nor miss a religion. ...They are thus prepared for the reality of the here and now, and not for the illusory otherworldliness' (*Weltrreise* 1933, 68). This rosy view is contradicted by Frank Dikötter, who says that the construction of a modern national identity during the early Republican period saw the emergence of new sexual stereotypes: the menstruating girl, the hysterical housewife, the masturbating adolescent, and the syphilitic husband (Dikötter 1995).

During the second half of the twentieth century, there was a delay between the recognition of a need for sex education and its implementation. From the 1950s through the 70s, sex education was not part of the Chinese classroom curriculum, but in 1956 the publication *Xing zhishi* (Sex knowledge) was the first



attempt to reach adolescents and newlyweds. The 1953 census shocked demographers and economists, but after initial promotion of contraception, ideologues reacted against Malthusian pessimism, and family planning was not rehabilitated until the early 1960's, followed by the 'one child' policy in 1979. *Xing zhishi* was reprinted in 1980 and sold many millions of copies. Prime minister Zhou Enlai had acknowledged the need for sex education as early as 1963, but it was not mandated for middle schools until 1988 (Ruan 1991).

Pei Yuxin characterizes the emergence of sex research in China in the post-Cultural Revolution, Deng Xiaoping era of the early 1980s, as the 'medical' period, focused on sexual 'health' and translations of Western texts (Pei 2007). Examples include Wu Jieping's 1982 translation of Masters and Johnson's 1979 *Textbook of Sexual Medicine*, Ruan Fangfu's *Handbook of Sexual Knowledge* (1985), and Hu Tingyi's *Sexual Knowledge*. Ruan's advice column 'On Sex Education' in popular magazine *Fumu bidu* (Required reading for parents) reached an even wider audience.

Liu Dalin's 1988 *Sociology of Sex* broke medicine's monopoly and marks the entry of the social sciences into the field of sexology. Claiming it was a national disgrace to leave the study of Chinese sexology in the hands of foreigners, Liu closed the decade with a 1989 nationwide sex survey, modeled on Alfred Kinsey's 1948 and 1953 *Sexual Behavior* reports. Liu's findings, published in his 1992 *Sexual Behavior in Modern China*, led him to conclude that, 'Women have little right of self-determination in connubial sex life...and this is one of the most essential reasons for the death of sexual feelings in women'. With the

publication of his groundbreaking survey, Liu Dalin achieved the status of public intellectual, and, even more so, with the opening of his sex museum in Shanghai, the Museum of Ancient Chinese Sex Culture in 1999, which has moved several times under government pressure, and is currently located in Tongli on the outskirts of Suzhou. Liu's collection of several thousand ancient sex artifacts, together with his history of Chinese sex culture, and especially his reintroduction of the bedchamber arts literature, has rekindled the age-old debate on sexual practices. Although he has been accused of being rich in sources but thin in theory, and reflecting only the lives of the elite, his work represents an effort to free Chinese sex culture from Western interpretive values and paradigms. Whereas Kinsey is revered as Gospel in China, Masters and Johnson is seen by some as legitimizing perversion and unleashing the excesses of the sexual liberation movement of the 60s. Liu Dalin, who like Kinsey, uses the survey instrument to hold up a mirror to society and as a counter discourse to official propaganda, is also more of a moralist than Kinsey, warning that sexual permissiveness is linked to the explosion of rape, prostitution, and bigamy.

Li Yinhe was the first female sociologist to specialize in sex research. After earning a PhD in the US, she crossed the border from academic research to activism, advocating for homosexual rights, same-sex marriage, and the decriminalization of orgies, prostitution, sado-masochism, extramarital affairs, mistresses, teen sexuality, bestiality, and pornography. These views, together with her marriage to prominent dissident Li Xiaobo, have insured her notoriety in China and challenge the Party's right to define sexual morality. She completes

the arc that begins with the demand for romantic marriage and ends with sex without commitment.

Pan Suiming is a sociologist who believes Chinese style prostitution is a unique arrangement between rich men, who use power to procure pleasure, and women, who use sex to gain privilege. Pan has undertaken in-depth interviews with sex workers and has also done nationwide sex surveys using rigorous, randomized sociological methodology to overcome urban and rural differences and culturally sensitive interviewing techniques to insure candor. This, together with longitudinal studies, has allowed him to claim superiority over informal internet surveys and even the Kinsey report (Pan 2007).

Modern Chinese sexology has its pioneers, martyrs and landmark publications, but the post-80s period of 'openness' and commercialism, together with new media, has seen an explosion of sex memoirs, sex talk shows, sex columns, sex therapists, sex expositions, sex conferences, sexology journals, sexology associations, and internet postings. The pre-modern history of sexual practices and their contemporary relevance is a research niche and controversial topic in all of these media. *The Chinese Journal of Human Sexuality* (Zhongguo xingkexue), for example, has published 4–5 issues per year since 1994, with an average of thirty articles per issue, one or two of which are related to the traditional bedroom arts. What the recent histories of Chinese and Western sexology have in common is that each uses idealizations of the other in order to critique their own traditions and to stretch the boundaries of what is normal.

## Classical Bedchamber Arts Theory

The Chinese view of sex is cosmic and phobic, optimistic and pessimistic. If we look at the whole spectrum of Chinese sex manuals, covering more than two thousand years, the aims may be mnemonically expressed as recreation (pleasure), communication (bonding), procreation (reproduction), medication (health), and meditation (immortality, enlightenment), in various proportions. Dispensing with the problematic term 'Daoist', what distinguishes the householder manuals is equal emphasis on all aspects, whereas the medical manuals stress procreation and medication, and the sexual alchemy literature stresses meditation. Whether simply aiming for a more harmonious sex life in marriage or for spiritual parthenogenesis and immortality, all varieties of Chinese sexual practices rest on a shared foundation of physiological assumptions.

In the householder and medical manuals, the technical emphasis is on arousal and self-control. All traditions consider sexual resources finite, but transferable and transmutable. The householder and medical manuals follow a standard template, that includes: the cosmic context, emotional harmonization, foreplay, stages and signs of arousal, postures, ejaculation control, benefits, trauma, conception, yogic and herbal therapies for dysfunction, taboos, nocturnal emissions, penile enlargement and vaginal shrinking, painful intercourse, fetal education, etc. They attempt to raise sex to a gentlemanly art – like poetry, painting, and calligraphy – and integrate it into medical science. The sexual alchemy texts also follow a template, employing the language of alchemy and

inner alchemy, and including such procedures as: establishing the foundation, selecting the 'crucibles', entering the 'stove', locking the 'mysterious gate', absorbing the 'medicine', and gestating the 'holy fetus'. The texts are not without their ambivalences: sometimes *reservatus* is depicted as hoarding treasure and sometimes as preserving peak interest; sometimes foreplay is depicted as guaranteeing female satisfaction and sometimes as inducing the woman to release her essence. Even subtler than the doctrine of *coitus reservatus* is the teaching that, following coition, desire burns more intensely because 'vacuity fire' is unchecked by reserves of water (semen) and that *reservatus* is only possible when a strong supply of semen (water) balances the fire of desire. The Chinese sexual literature calls for full arousal for both partners, but *reservatus* for the male, and orgasm for the female; abstinence leads to obsession, nocturnal emissions, or possession by *succubi*. Because female absorption of male essence is always a real possibility, men are admonished to adopt the *Daode jing's* strategy of non-contention, reversing roles and playing the passive partner, including female superior postures to facilitate male restraint and women's surer satisfaction.

Taken together, this is an even more fundamental challenge to the Western ideology of orgasm than the Hite Report's frontal assault on Freud. Sex may not be sinful, but it is, nevertheless, highly problematized. The man has macrobiotic aspirations and social obligations: if he ejaculates, he draws down his macrobiotic account of seminal essence; if he does not ejaculate, he cannot procreate and produce sons. If the woman does not

orgasm, she is not an essence resource; if she does not conceive, she is worthless to the family and cannot build social capital. If she drains the man's account without orgasm and conception of sons, she is in double jeopardy. Furthermore, over time, both menses and menopause diminish her assets and ability to transfer energetic funds to her husband's account.

The art of the bedchamber texts are presented without benefit of clinical trials, laboratory experiments, or surveys, but simply as phenomenological facts. It is always necessary to discriminate between true empiricism and forced cosmological consistency, science and scholasticism, but Chinese sexual cultivation is articulated as a response to a series of perceived existential dilemmas:

1. Sexual arousal floods the system with positive energy, but ejaculation causes enervation and detumescence.
2. The more we spend the essence that creates new life, the more we shorten our own lives.
3. Heart-kidney (fire-water) homeostasis is maintained only when the mind is calm, and the semen is stable.
4. A deficiency of water (semen) allows the fire of desire to rage unchecked, leading to loss upon loss.
5. Men are fire, easily aroused and easily extinguished; women are water, slow to warm but more sustainable.



6. Ejaculation causes depletion, but abstinence causes physiological and psychological aberrations, atrophy of sexual fitness, and obsessive ideation.
7. Love-making creates harmonization and bonding between partners, but ejaculation leads to loss of interest and somnolence.
8. Long abstinence, punctuated by occasional ejaculation, results in 'violent vacuity', that is worse than consistent *reservatus* with occasional ejaculation.
9. A man's primary loyalty must be to his parents, and every act of emission gives away part of his inheritance, making him a slave to his wife.
10. Following menopause, women are energetically bankrupt and cannot be tapped for sexual essence.

The solution to these dilemmas is multiple partners, inducing female orgasm, and frequent copulation with infrequent emission. The Chinese game of love allows only one winner: the one who suppresses orgasm while inducing the 'enemy' to surrender their essence. Simultaneous orgasm is mutual destruction. The post-coital refractory period is highly pathologized and not a time of blissful afterglow. The ideal is to remain forever in an anabolic state. The belief that sexual pressure (the hydraulic theory) or tension must be relieved by orgasm contrasts with the art of the bedchamber view that pressure actually represents homeostatic fullness, and release is emptiness and deficiency. Only culture can account for such different

experience of the same set of somatic facts. In Western sexual culture, beauty is the fuel of sexual arousal; in the Chinese bedroom arts, beauty is the enemy of self-control. Sexual alchemy needs no God, rebels against nature's death sentence, and seizes the prize of immortality by stealth, the opposite of Genesis, where the fruit of knowledge is stolen, and immortality is sacrificed. The ultimate question for scholars of Chinese sexual culture is why ejaculation became an existential problem.

The above list of assumptions underpinning the bedroom arts theory should not lead us to the conclusion that we have captured sociological reality. We should not assume that the ideal of *reservatus* was realized by all males, any more than all brides were virgins or monks did not masturbate. The written record upon which this analysis rests clearly reflects elite male culture; how far this ideology of seminal parsimony penetrated the lower classes is perhaps best seen in the folk belief in fox spirits, *succubi* who manifest as beautiful women to seduce hapless young men.

Sexual alchemy seeks to overthrow inner alchemy's claim that immortality can be achieved by the mating of spirit (dragon, mercury, *shen*) and sexual energy (tiger, lead, *jingqi*) in the body of the solo meditator, asserting that *jing* loss following puberty and years of depletion leaves us insufficient fuel to achieve spiritual escape velocity. In Genesis, man rebels against God, steals the fruit of knowledge, and loses immortality; in sexual alchemy, man rebels against nature, reverses her rules, and gains immortality. Instead of harvesting one's own prenatal *yang* essence during 'the hour of the living *zi*' (spontaneous meditation erections) and 'reversing the



flow of the Yellow River', as in 'pure practices' (solo meditation), the sexual adept harvests the female 'medicine' and practices microcosmic orbit meditation to refine it. Depleted males are deemed too weak for the self-contained marriage of *yin* and *yang*, and must turn to real females, whose *yin* bodies release the highest potency *yang* essence through orgasm or ovulation. The female vagina, which has the power to produce new life, and is the site of so much loss of male essence, is the logical place to replenish biological resources. In the next stage of sexual alchemy's development, the emphasis shifts from female orgasm to ovulation as an even more rarified source of prenatal *yang* energy, and finally to the quest to capture the ripe *yang* essence precisely at the onset of menarche. Instead of harvesting limited amounts of *yang* energy from spontaneous erections and saliva (thought of as kidney water translated by the lungs' metal), as in inner alchemy, the adept harvests plentiful *yang* 'medicine' from virgins and young girls. In some texts, this is expressed as blatant sexual vampirism; in some both male and female adepts enter an ecstatic state together and cultivate the elixir, either with intromission, etheric exchange without contact, or even pure visualization. Some texts allow that women may also engage in theft of essence and gain immortality by preying on male partners, and solo women's meditation speaks of 'cutting down the red dragon' of menses to stop the clock of aging.

Dorothy Ko says, 'Footbinding began as an act of embodied lyricism – to live as the poets imagined' (Ko 2005), and I have tried to show that the art of the bedchamber, especially as it evolved in sexual alchemy, is also an exercise in

male imagination, the fantasy of mastery of women, invincibility in the bedroom, and the perennial search for immortality. Both were esthetic expressions, but, whereas body modification is not unknown in the West, one could argue that the bedchamber arts practice of *coitus reservatus* represents a truly radical alternative. Today, contraception has liberated sex from reproduction, and artificial insemination and in-vitro fertilization have liberated reproduction from sex, but it remains a wholly personal transaction; Chinese sexual alchemy similarly liberated sex from reproduction, kinship, and lineage but drove it in the direction of transpersonal goals.

Western esthetic programming, whether Aristotle's three act drama structure, Horace's five act structure, Freytag's plot pyramid, the four movements of a classical symphony, Indian ragas' *alap*, *chor*, *jhala*, or Masters and Johnson's arousal, plateau, climax, and resolution all demand a grand crescendo and climax. However, the Chinese high arts, including the bedroom arts, feature an esthetic of anti-climax, or 'blandness', as it has been called by François Jullien (2004). A high value is placed on potential rather than kinetic energy, on anabolism over catabolism, on the plateau rather than the peak. Ejaculation is viewed as a total solar eclipse in which the whole patriarchy comes crashing down. Sin is the shadow that haunts the Western psyche; semen loss is the phobia that haunts China, through fox spirits, *succubi*, and shrinking penis syndrome (*koro*, *suoyang*). The extended family, polygamy, and arranged marriages contrast sharply with the nuclear family, monogamy, and romantic marriage, but none so sharply as *coitus reservatus* versus simultaneous orgasm.

## Debating the Bedchamber Arts

The bedchamber arts literature spans more than two millennia; the Internet barely two decades. The theoretical consistency of the ancient literature amounts to an ideology, where the few dissenters only serve to prove the rule. We do not have women's voices, lower class voices, or the voices of men as they struggle to realize the ideal, just as the harmonious extended family was the ideal, but partition of property was often the reality. The testimony of contemporary sex surveys and Internet confessions reveal the persistence of traditional teachings in contemporary post-Mao China and helps fill the historical gap between the prescriptive theories of bedchamber arts texts and the lives of real people. We can now begin to approach the sociology of the doctrine of *coitus reservatus* with the same magnification as anthropologists have studied the phenomenon of *koro* (mass outbreaks of shrinking penis phobia), and demographers have speculated on the effects of low coital frequency on birthrate.

The current debate over the ancient bedroom arts represents the confluence of two trends: one is the sexual revolution, and the other is cultural nationalism. Judith Farquhar succinctly describes the impact of 'openness' on sexual culture:

Beginning in the mid-1980s, Chinese modernity began to look a lot more sexy. Several distinct literatures on sex – pornographic magazines, family sexual hygiene manuals, medical sexology, respectable erotic fiction, translations of sexology classics like Havelock Ellis's *Sexual*

*Psychology* and the Kinsey Report, scholarship on ancient Chinese *ars erotica*, and a new sub-discipline of traditional medicine called *nanke*, men's medicine – emerged and flourished in a book market that was no longer directly controlled by the state (Farquhar 2002, 211).

China's sexologists today write and work with three ghosts standing at their backs: one is the ghost of past glories, another is the specter of superstition and perversion, and the third is the achievements of Western science. Ancient debates were over efficacy; early twentieth century debates were over whether the subject should be part of public discourse at all, and today, once again, the debate returns to efficacy. Pre-modern bedroom arts champions faced the Buddhist ideal of total abstinence, while in the modern period we have the triumph of pleasure for its own sake and sexuality, rather than family or class, as a site of identity and self-definition. Kinsey is universally revered, but some Chinese sexologists see Masters and Johnson as unleashing the permissiveness of the 1960's. Sexuality has also become a battlefield for debating objectification, domestic violence, privacy, pedophilia, disease, and human rights.

Again, Judith Farquhar characterizes the contemporary Chinese consumer of the ancient art of the bedchamber literature in these words:

In the rather miscellaneous topics discussed above, I have assembled an image of the modern bedchamber arts body: this is a historically civilized, Chinese-nationalist, life nurturing and jing-conserving, potentially impotent (and thus anxious), thoroughly

post-Maoist male ... Male lovers are praised for devoting their arts to delivering female pleasure, and proprieties are invoked that will protect women from abuse by the men who remain in charge. (Farquar 2002, 177)

I think this is a perfectly adequate description of one band on a spectrum of reactions to the ancient arts, but perhaps too homogeneous to capture the complexities reflected in the seemingly infinite number of journal articles and online posts.

What follows, then, is a summary of the current debate on the art of the bedchamber. The original sources are generally organized by dynasty, philosophical school, or Western disciplines – medicine, psychology, and sexology; I have organized them by author's point of view. Citing of sources, however, is problematic, for three reasons: authors are usually anonymous or pseudonymous; articles and posts have a short lifespan on the web, and the blogs and forums on which these posts appear are themselves ephemeral. However, the sheer volume of online articles and new anthologies of ancient writings is witness to the vitality of the old debate.

### **A. Panel of Pioneers**

The *Shengming shibao* (Life times) convened a panel of sexologists to address the question: 'Is Chinese sex culture progressive or regressive?' Prof. Xu Tianmin sees Chinese sexology as an inverted bell curve, with the Han, Sui and Tang dynasties as a high point, the Song dynasty as a low point, and the present as another high point. He says that

literature reflects romantic marriage, monogamous devotion, and sexual pleasure; the art of the bedchamber texts distinguished themselves among world medicine by uniting pleasure, eugenics, health, and longevity. The ancient art of the bedchamber was very comprehensive in its scope but contained some 'unproven concepts'. His conclusion is that the progressive side of today's sexual culture is that it is scientific and objective, but the regressive side is the separation of love and sex and the lack of sex education for the young, together with casual sex leading to sexually transmitted diseases and teen pregnancy.

Joining the conversation, Prof. Pan Suiming says it is impossible to say whether today's sexual culture is progressive or regressive because contemporary culture is so influenced by the West, and this 'grafting' makes comparisons impossible. He also notes the separation of sex and love, but says that nowadays people consider love a lofty ideal but consider sex dirty. Rapid progress in society has caused some to exaggerate the importance of sex, but this is not something to worry about.

Shanghai University sociology professor and erotic art collector, Liu Dalin, notes that not all ancient erotic art was as refined as the scene described in Bai Xingjian's 'Prose Poem on the Joyous Union of Heaven and Earth, Yin and Yang'; the majority was crude and intended for popular consumption, just like the portrayal of sex in today's media, but which, nevertheless, functions to reflect this very important aspect of life. He invents a parable of contemporary sexual life, saying that it used to be that men were wolves and women were sheep, and wolves chased sheep. Today

sheep also chase wolves, which means that wolves have the pleasure of being chased, but the pain of not being able to possess women, and women have the pleasure of freedom, but the pain of lacking protection. He foresees that as society evolves, these roles will disappear and male and female will be equal and free. He laments the lack of post coital tenderness, citing statistics showing that the situation is worse in the most male dominant countries, like China and Japan. Continuing, he explains that women do not have to maintain erection, do not have a refractory period, have unlimited orgasms, and have more diffuse erogenous zones, allowing more variation in sexual pleasure. Confucians and Daoists became aware of this asymmetry in sexual power, and fearing the threat to male dominance, Confucians repressed female sexuality, and Daoists repressed their own ejaculations. Women could not initiate sex or learn how to enjoy their infinite pleasure potential.

Xu diplomatically distributes praise and blame equally over ancient and modern times, while Pan avoids reference to the ancient arts, focusing instead on shortcomings in the current climate. Liu is an apologist for both ancient and modern practices but foresees a future of gender equality. All share an optimistic view of the outcome of the current sexual revolution, while maintaining a degree of scholarly objectivity vis-à-vis the pros and cons. Although not represented on this panel, Ruan Fangfu was the first to use the strategy of pointing to China's positive past to shame the present, saying, '[Bai Xingjian's 'Prose Poem'] demonstrates the ancient period's positive valuation of not only sexology by also of sex education' (Ruan 1991, 34).

## Latter Day Masters

A subset of proponents adopts the rhetorical stance of the ancient texts and speak in the first person with the authority of mastership. They claim to have tapped into 'transmissions' and thus eschew what Justin Lin calls the modern 'experiment-based' method in favor of the traditional Chinese 'experience-based' method (Lin 1995). A poster styled 'yzidc' says he learned the techniques in a dream from 'an old Daoist priest', while another poster, calling himself 'Xuandao wuxing', claims to be quoting the legendary Chinese Methusala Pengzu. Another self-styled master named Professor Qing Yuan assures us that his transmission is 'authentic and true' because it is characterized by 'simplicity' and 'non-action' and delivered by oral transmission, a route more reliable than complicated and misleading written texts. Another poster who remains anonymous says he learned the art from 'the older generation', and still others, like Wang Ling, simply launch into an exposition of teachings with an authoritative tone, but without explicit attribution of origins.

As to their teachings, yzidc combines perennial concern for premature ejaculation with the very contemporary phenomenon of the proliferation of pornography, offering 'Daoist techniques' to remedy 'overexposure to online pornography'. Xuandao Wuxing, claiming Pengzu's true teachings, does not forbid ejaculation, but rather infrequent sex with infrequent ejaculation, further claiming to have given his wife forty orgasms in one night as a world record. Professor Qing Yuan offers a simplified method that requires no foundation in *qigong* and can be mastered in '21 to 90



days'. He accepts the principle of absorbing *jing*, but takes the nontraditional position that men enjoy natural advantages on the bedchamber battlefield and offers a repertoire of seductive sounds for women to avoid being sucked dry by male virtuosos.

A final variation among the latter-day masters also adopts the prescriptive voice, but embraces the biomedical paradigm. Representative of this approach is an anonymous poster, who says there are three traditional stages: 1) harmonization of endocrine and nervous systems; 2) desensitization to stimuli; and 3) immortality. He denies the possibility of immortality but affirms the scientific usefulness of some techniques in addressing sexual dysfunction. An unattributed *360doc* article, 'Xing baojian cao – kongjingshu de mimi' (Sexual health routine – the secret of controlling sexual essence) offers an entire training curriculum, complete with historical overview, Western and Chinese theory, and detailed techniques for enhancing pleasure and health. The author claims the internet as his source, rather than mythological figures or secret transmissions.

With Masters Marx and Mao in eclipse, the field is now open for new masters to win hearts and minds. This was spectacularly demonstrated in the field of *qigong*, which saw 'masters' gain large religious followings, as well as provoking professional debunkers and government crackdowns. To date, no such sex cults have surfaced in the public media.

## Endorsement

Today's exponents of traditional sexual practices follow in the footsteps of the

nineteenth century self-strengthening slogan, 'Chinese essence and Western technology', or twentieth century, 'Make the past serve the present' and 'digging up and sifting the past', but today in the realm of sexology, this manifests as the use of Western science to purge traditional sexual practices of superstition and mystification, while preserving Chinese sexual style. Thus, in the midst of wholesale modernization, there is also a post-modern current of commodifying traditional culture for tourist consumption, a revival of both native and Western religions, and, in educated circles, an interest in cultural nationalism. The latter is used by anti-regime forces to claim to be the champions of true Chineseness, and, more recently, by the regime itself to mount its own cultural charm offensive under the slogan of 'soft power', as Guo Yingjie says, 'In the new game of identity politics, the focus has clearly shifted from the liquidation of 'backward traditional culture' and the 'ugly national character' to the 'reconstruction of national culture' and the rediscovery of 'the national spirit', even though contestation is continuing unabated' (Guo 2004). This contestation takes place in academic journals, blogs, online forums, advice columns, and call-in talk shows. As some of the blandishments of modernity fade and culture folds back on itself, native cultural resources are revisited and reclaimed for pride or for practical use. Some recycling of the past is unconscious cultural reflex, such as burning incense and praying for good test scores, but some is very deliberate, such as the movement to reclaim the 'mother tongue' or rehabilitate Confucius. This is an attempt to revive a traditional model or narrative of sex, rejecting bourgeois-romantic love, Maoist-class love, and cynical sensuality in favor of a

distinctively Chinese style. Here, we explore the dream in some quarters of China reclaiming the role of teaching civilization in the bedroom and the equally vehement push back by the forces of modernity against these ancient practices and beliefs.

### The Bedchamber Arts and Daoism

Within the endorsement camp, there is a strong tendency to identify the bedchamber arts with 'Daoism' (*daojia* or *daojiao*). Ignoring for the moment legitimate questions over the definition of 'Daoism', it is sufficient for our purposes that most Chinese commentators on the bedroom arts have a very casual and inclusive understanding of the term. Once Daoism is installed as the home of the bedroom arts, its enlightened views can be used to sell Daoism; and, conversely, giving it a religio-philosophical cachet can be used to sell sexuality, just as martial arts, Chinese painting, and calligraphy have all become 'Daoist' arts, and everything appealing to Western taste in Japanese culture is 'Zen'.

Wu Yuming's *Defining the Bedroom Arts* (Fangzhongshu shiyi) delivers a ringing endorsement: 'China's ancient bedchamber arts are the earliest and most profound sexual science in the world and a true miracle'. He praises Ge Hong for exposing charlatans and Needham for his recognition of Daoism's championing of male-female cooperation in the bedroom. He says that, in this respect, Daoism is superior to Confucianism or Buddhism. Summarizing the Daoist teachings, he lists eight techniques: 1) absorbing post-natal essences; 2) absorbing pre-natal essences; 3) opening up the channels

with 'pleasure qi'; 4) opening up the *chakra* points, such as *guanyuan*, *sanguan*, etc.; 5) mutual exchange of *yin* and *yang* essences; 6) man and woman 'return the jing' (pleasure *qi*) to nourish the brain; 7) mobilizing 'pleasure qi' to cure illness; and 8) using 'pleasure qi' to enter a state of spiritual ecstasy, similar to Zen meditation, but without repressing the pleasure principle. The terms *leqi* (pleasure *qi*) may be the author's neologism, but it shows the curious confluence of traditional and modern linguistic sensibilities, capturing the traditional *jingqi* (sexual *qi*) and *kuai* (pleasure, orgasm) and the modern *kuaigan* (experience of pleasure).

Daoism's superiority to other schools is described in an unattributed, nearly book-length article on the online *Hexun* forum entitled, 'Fangzhongshu: quanji' (Art of the bedchamber: complete collection), that says Confucianism and Buddhism each made their contributions to Chinese culture, but when it comes to health and human sexuality, one offers patriarchy and the other celibacy, which cannot compare to Daoism's gender equality and acceptance of sex as natural and healthy. Ying Jian's *Fangzhong shu gouxuan* (Exploring the mysteries of the bedroom arts) also echoes this view, crediting Needham and Van Gulik for pointing out Daoism's championing of gender and class equality.

Historicizing Laozi or other legendary figures, such as Peng Zu and Lü Dongbin, is another characteristic of this approach. Song Shuming is a professor at Beijing University of Chinese Medicine, and writing in the scholarly *Journal of Human Sexuality*, says he considers Laozi a historical person and the father of Chinese medicine, self-cultivation, and

bedchamber arts. He gives a purely sexual reading of many passages in the *Daode jing* and *Guanyinzi* as well as the *Xingqi yupei ming* (Jade pendant inscription on circulating the *qi*) (Song 2012). Also, while the *Daode jing* may be a hermeneutical chameleon, the support for a sexual reading is pretty thin. Historicizing Laozi and reading sexual connotations into the *Daode jing* may be outside the current scholarly consensus, but it is stock in trade for this group of endorsers. Another case in point is Ye Yu Shi Nü (Ten women in one night), who posted a long 2009 article entitled 'Secret Knowledge: A Casual Study of China's Ancient Bedroom Art' (Yinmi de xuewen: Gudai fangzhongshu mankao) on the online forum *Tianya shequ*, where he calls Laozi a 'sex specialist', and gives suggestive interpretations of words such as 'valley' and 'root'. An anonymous 2006 article entitled, *Pengzu yangsheng fangzhongshu* (Pengzu's self-cultivation art of the bedchamber), appearing in the *Meishan Daily* speaks of Pengzu as a historical figure and author of extant works.

Many authors rue the loss of the Daoist bedroom arts and speculate on the cause. An anonymous, undated *Baidu wenku* article, *Daojia fangzhongshu shichuan de yuanyin* (Why Daoist bedroom arts were lost), blames the 'loss' of the Daoist bedroom arts on their intrinsic difficulty but says they should be revived today for their efficacy in, 'boosting the immune system and curing sexual dysfunction'. Poster Ye Yu Shi Nü explains that the Daoist attitude is superior to Confucian patriarchy and Buddhist celibacy, but exaggerated claims drew derision and sullied Daoism's reputation. This forced Daoism to disown the bedchamber arts and pursue 'pure practices', or solo

meditation. Another anonymous, undated *Baidu wenku* poster in an article entitled, *Zhengshi renshi daojia fangzhongshu* (A correct understanding of Daoist bedroom arts) says that he laments that the arts have been misunderstood throughout the ages, and unlike food, which has also been raised to the level of an art, cannot be openly discussed. He uses *yin-yang* theory to explain the importance of sex and calls feeling (*qing*), desire (*yu*) and sex (*xing*) natural and essential expressions of a harmonious life. The author says *jing* conservation is the most important practice, but varies with individual and age. Song Neo-Confucianism is usually cast as the antagonist and blamed for the decline of Daoist sexual science, but Zifu in a *Sina* 'Xinlang dushu' article, *Zhang Tianshi de fangzhongshu* (Celestial Master Zhang Daoling's bedchamber arts), credits second-century CE Celestial Master Zhang Daoling with popularizing the arts for healing among the people, but faults Cao Cao for co-opting and corrupting them for ruling class indulgence.

### **Appeals to Medical Science, Sinology, and Sexology**

Traditional Chinese bedroom arts literature lacks transparency in authorship and methodology: assertions are made in a didactic style, with little appeal to evidence or even anecdotes. Some contemporary apologists attempt to compensate by applying the Western 'scientific method' to proving the value of traditional practices in the areas of physiology, gender equality, and sexual pleasure. Ma Xiaonian sets the tone for this approach in his Introduction to *Zhongguo gudai xingxue fazhan shiji* (Landmarks of ancient Chinese sexology), emphasizing the convergence of ancient

wisdom and modern science: 'China deserves to be considered the cradle of civilized sexology' and, 'More than two thousand years ago, the ancients had a very advanced understanding of sex...not the least bit inferior to our modern laboratory research'. Li Xianghua concurs, saying in his 1994 *Zhongguo gudai xing jiankang lilun dui shijie xingyixue de gongxian* (The contributions of ancient Chinese sexual health theory to world reproductive medicine) that, although inhibited by cultural taboos, the bedroom arts took a scientific approach to studying sexual anatomy and physiology and made a contribution to population growth and sexual health.

Zhu Jian's 1995 article in *The Chinese Journal of Human Sexuality* entitled *Zhongguo gudai wenxian zhong de nüxing shejing jilu* (Records of female ejaculation in ancient Chinese documents) says that modern science's discovery of female ejaculation confirms the ancient discovery of *yinjing* (female ejaculate) and early twentieth century sexologist Zhang Jingsheng's theory of the 'third fluid'. He answers accusations of lovelessness and polygamy by pointing out that the *Kama Sutra* and Masters and Johnson are also loveless, and the Old Testament reflects polygamy. An author calling himself Zifu on *Sina's* 'Xinlang dushu' forum posted an article entitled *Zhang Tianshi de fangzhongshu* (Celestial Master Zhang Daoling's bedroom arts), saying that postures, taboos, benefits and harms accord with science and common sense, and the emphasis on mutual pleasure accords with the Western concept of 'simultaneous orgasm'.

Turning to Western sinology and sexology, Ying Jian credits Needham and Van Gulik for understanding Daoism's

contribution to healthy sex life, and an anonymous *Hexun* poster in a 2011 article entitled *Fangzhongshu: quanji* (The bedchamber arts: complete works) even defends Van Gulik against Furth's accusations of misogyny, saying she exaggerates contradictions between the sympathetic view of women in the medical literature and the exploitative view in the bedchamber arts. The author credits Van Gulik not only with correcting the West's negative views of Chinese sexual customs but of reawakening China's interest in her own past glories. China's teachings on sexual harmonization are compared by Ying Jian to Masters and Johnson's 'integrated therapy', and Zhang Yuqin also invokes Masters and Johnson in crediting China with discovering the G-spot, as evidenced in the Mawangdui corpus and novel, *Rou putuan*. Going further, Zhang advocates mutual consent as the only standard of morality and trial marriage to determine sexual compatibility.

### Qualified Endorsement

Qualified endorsement, as the name implies, balances the proto-scientific and common-sense teachings of the traditional texts with reservations about safety and efficacy. Generally, there is praise for the pleasure principle and criticism of the exploitation of women. The qualified endorsement position is perhaps best expressed in the *Baidu baike* (Baidu encyclopedia) article on the bedroom arts: 'The art of the bedchamber is China's ancient sexual science ... and represents a fusion of sex, qigong, and self-cultivation ... Over the centuries, it became the subject of much mystification and deceit, but in reality, to a great extent, it represents China's ancient sexology theories'. In a

note, the anonymous author warns that Daoist dual cultivation practices should not be undertaken until further scientific study. A *Baidu wenku* post admits that, 'absorbing yin to supplement yang' is a perfect example of pre-modern gender inequality, but says that there are also egalitarian dual cultivation teachings. Another *Baidu* hosted site, *Baidu wiki*, offers a further example of the 'yes ..., but ...' position, saying that if Ge Hong's reservations about the bedroom arts is an objection to licentiousness, that was correct, but if it is an objection to pleasure, that was not correct. The *wiki* author approves of Tao Hongjing's target of twice a month for sex but criticizes him for advocating multiple partners. He also cites a long list of popular works on bedroom arts that circulate outside of scholarly circles, saying that these contain a great deal of rubbish but nevertheless should be examined for nuggets of scientific value. He questions the exploitation of women and adds that practices like collecting a virgin's first night secretions, i.e. first menstrual flow or a boy's first ejaculate, are errors which caused many to dismiss Daoist health practices. An anonymous *360doc* post says that modern science may concede the value of semen conservation, but 'returning the *jing* to nourish the brain' is an exaggeration. An anonymous *Baidu* post periodizes the history of the bedroom arts, such that from the Warring States to Qin is the beginning of the Daoist art (but harboring the fatal flaw of stealing essences), from the Han to Tang, the height of scientific development, and from the Song to the Qing the nadir (sabotaged by Daoist court magicians who catered to imperial excesses).

It is a common qualified endorsement strategy to point to a combination of

internal theoretical weaknesses and external corruption by ruling class devotees. Wang Li uses a class analysis, saying the bedroom arts literature represents elite culture, Ming erotic novels represent middle-class culture, and the visual art of sex cults represents lower-class culture. He says upper-class preoccupation with pleasure and immortality prevented sexology from achieving a healthy development. Liu Xiao regrets that some see teachings, such as 'one drop of semen represents ten drops of blood' and the use of dog and tiger penis tonics, as proof of superstition in the bedroom arts and throw the baby out with the bathwater. He says that moderation is good, but *reservatus* invites physiological and psychological problems. He praises the emphasis on foreplay and female orgasm and adds 'the nine shallow one deep' formula promotes stimulation of the G-spot. He also endorses as 'scientific' many of the taboos, contraindications, and remedies for sexual dysfunction described in the traditional manuals. Tu Jianhua writing on the *Sina* cite in an article entitled *Huashuo fangzhongshu* (Speaking of the bedroom arts) says that many teachings are reasonable, but those that are unreasonable are very far off the mark, for example, consuming dates that have been placed in the vagina overnight and retrograde ejaculation for nourishing the brain. He is sympathetic to the practice of public sexual rituals in the Celestial Masters movement because they were open to all classes and treated men and women equally, as contrasted with Buddhist asceticism and Confucian self-righteousness. Lin Pingshun accepts the teachings on conception, pregnancy, health benefits and ability to cure sexual dysfunction as scientific, but rejects inequality and stealing essences as

unscientific. An anonymous *360doc* post entitled *Zhongguo xingyixue qiangdiao dong er shaoxie* (Chinese medical sexology emphasizes arousal with few ejaculations) strongly endorses the techniques and value of *reservatus* but remains skeptical about the possibility of 'returning the *jing* to nourish the brain'. Taken together, then, the qualified endorsers steer a course between radical self-deprecation and self-aggrandizement.

### Rational Reinterpretation

This could also be called the allegory method, as it seeks to deny the literal meaning of phrases in the classical texts in favor of more currently acceptable meanings. For example, Ying Jian says that '*jing*' in the formulation, 'return the *jing* to nourish the brain' is not literally semen but 'formless sexual essence', or 'pre-natal *jing*'. He says that *reservatus*, and even lustful thoughts, exhaust the essence; hence, he insists '*reservatus*' in the ancient texts actually refers to remaining in the state of serene non-arousal. Ye Tian insists that the phrase 'absorb yin to supplement yang' is not literally true but describes the natural state of euphoria that intercourse confers. An anonymous author on a site called *Jiandan gou – Zhongguo* says that the phrase 'nourishing the brain' in the classics does not mean forcibly restraining ejaculation but raising the *jing* up the *yinqiao* channel to the upper *dantian*. He says the average person rejects these practices as mysterious and difficult, but the Daoist transmissions are simple and easy to understand. Ye Yu Shi Nü sums up traditional bedroom arts practices in eight formulas and says they are based on the circulation and exchange of

'pleasure qi' (*leqi*). He calls the bedroom arts 'male self-defense', citing the biochemical analysis of the beneficial constituents of semen, which are 'donated' to the female during intercourse at his expense. He attributes the cult of virginity to the rise of private property and inheritance, plus the belief that virgins hold the greatest energetic resources to plunder. He rationalizes prostitution, saying that, in the past, prostitutes were often forced into sex work, but now it is simply a side effect of consumerism and the willingness to sacrifice morality, conscience and personal rights for money. He even defends foot binding on the grounds that, like high heels, it corrects gait, promotes muscular development in the lower extremities, and sensitizes the G-spot. An anonymous article on the *Dazhong wang* site entitled *Renjing bushe qianliexian tong zui changjian de bingyin* (*Coitus reservatus* is the most common cause of pain in the prostate) agrees with detractors that *reservatus* causes prostate pain, but insists this is a misinterpretation of the ancient teachings, which only counseled moderation.

### Cultural Comparisons

If the endorsers tend to be moderate-cultural nationalists, the comparatists, who consider the Chinese arts superior to the West's, are ultra-cultural nationalists.

An anonymous *Yinren fengcai* poster says that modern Chinese are less advanced than their ancestors, who were more advanced than the *Kama Sutra* and *Ars Amatoria*, a fact that stands alongside the 'four great inventions' and makes China the envy of the West. The

tolerance of the ancients for homosexuality, masturbation, and anal sex is not behind contemporary Western standards. Finally, he cites the irony that Chinese sex masters satisfying Western women has become a literary trope, while domestic surveys consistently show a low satisfaction rate for Chinese women.

An anonymous article on the *Hexun* forum says, 'Sexual moderation is one of our civilization's treasure's and is exactly the opposite of modern Western libertinism'. Wang Minghui agrees, arguing that the Western mind considers orgasm the supreme experience of sex, but that China's *coitus reservatus* eliminates post-coital enervation and leaves one full of energy and is a philosophical, physiological and psychological concept worthy of further study. An anonymous *Baidu wenku* poster says that Zhang Heng's *Tongsheng ge* (Song of the first night) mentions the couple consulting a pillow book, and the Japanese preserved this custom of giving illustrated manuals to newlyweds. Likewise, Zhang Yuqin reminds us that the repertoire of zoomorphic postures, though anciently considered decadent by some, adds to variety and stimulation, and counters monotony in bed.

Some hold that Chinese lovemaking techniques predate and are superior to Western ones. For example, Ka Wenbo says that modern sensate focus therapy, compression technique, and desensitization are inferior to ancient Chinese methods that are guided by the principle of 'treasuring the *jing*' and making use of *qigong* techniques of breath control, acupressure, visualization, herbal infusions, sphincter contraction, and distraction. Zhang Yuqin reminds us that

the *He yinyang*'s 'sex sinew' (*jiaojin*) and *Rou putuan*'s 'sensitive sinew' (*yangjin*) predate Grafenberg's 'discovery' of the G-Spot by hundreds and thousands of years. Candy2wallace praises the 'nine shallow one deep' technique because it forces men to pay attention to their partner's pleasure and avoid premature ejaculation. He cites the 'Jewish custom' of regarding anything but total female consent and satisfaction as 'conjugal rape'. He praises the wisdom of the ancient Chinese for applying acupuncture knowledge to foreplay, saying that Western sexology is inferior to such Chinese techniques as: '9 and 1', 'thrust dead, withdraw live', and 'left and right', all of which enhance the woman's satisfaction and the man's stamina.

### Artistic Value

Artistic value is certainly not a major theme in the repertoire of the endorsement camp, but a number of writers mention the 'artistic value' of the bedroom arts in passing. Wang Minghui credits the large menu of zoomorphic postures with providing exciting choreographic possibilities and combating monotony. A *Yinren fengcai* poster also praises the zoomorphic postures, together with the refined literary style of the ancient texts and the graphic illustrations that often accompanied them. An author writing under the name of Tsubasa on the *Dajia jiankang wang* (Popular health network) forum refutes the accusation that the arts represent feudal ruling class indulgence by saying that pleasure is everyone's right, and the bedroom arts represent the unity of health and beauty.

## Opposition

The voices of opposition to the bedchamber arts are equal in volume and vehemence to the exponents, but here, too, their arguments take a variety of forms.

## Historical

Bi Huanzhou is rare among historians in siding with Song Neo-Confucians. Citing the inscription on a Song dynasty sash by Yugu Laoren, he gives historical examples of those who courted early death by sexual practices, and even fashioned model vaginas to practice their shameful arts. He holds the classic Neo-Confucian slogan, 'destroy human desires' as the true path to long life. Youyou uses the historical development of the arts to derive two definitions, broad and narrow: the broad definition refers to ancient sexology, and the narrow to sex techniques. The former includes health and eugenics, whereas the latter merely to pleasure seeking. Tracing the arts in their pure form to Laozi and Celestial Master Zhang Daoling, he credits them with propagating the arts for healing among the people. However, the knowledge was appropriated by the ruling class for their own selfish lasciviousness. He believes that the arts declined from internal contradictions, notably the emphasis on stealing essences and exploitation of women, as well as external attacks from Buddhists and Neo-Confucians. Peng Zu 111 Sajian takes on a similar stance, saying that the decline was precipitated by the attacks of Buddhists and physicians and the inability to deliver immortality. In his view, the arts are in conflict with the basic principle of 'pleasure in moderation' and are

inappropriate for modern sex life. Wang Wei in a 2009 article entitled *Shanggu fangzhongshu yidian bule rutong pao chang malasong* (The ancient art of the bedchamber was no fun but more like running a marathon) on the *maxcoo.com.cn* site agrees, noting examples from history and classical novels that indulgence and abstinence were deleterious, but practicing *reservatus* with multiple partners was not a solution. Diyi Qiumi Pangge offers a direct counter discourse to the cultural nationalist argument, saying that some consider the arts proof of China's 'advanced' knowledge in ancient times, but, in reality, it was merely proof of decadence and the impossibility of immortality. An anonymous *Yinren fengcai* poster says that from Mawangdui to Sun Simiao the basic teachings are consistent, showing a lack of scientific progress. *Reservatus* is bad enough, but adding multiple partners is even worse. We should see these ideas as historical curiosities and not follow them today. Li Yangquan delivers the standard medical rebuttal but ends with an interesting twist on the historical argument: 'Unfortunately, there is no way to enlighten our ancestors'.

## Medical

Often written in medical advice columns and in response to questions from readers, the plethora of negative responses from physicians is testament to the persistence of belief in the benefits of *reservatus* among readers. Jun Qi says young people mistakenly use *coitus reservatus* and *coitus interruptus* for contraception. He warns that retrograde ejaculation can cause infertility, and *reservatus* can cause sexual dysfunction and destroy the



quality of sex life for couples. Andrologist Dr. Wang Jinsong, writing on his personal blog *Hao daifu zaixian* (2012–03–19), defines ‘normal sex’ as Masters and Johnson’s four stages, and says that practices such as ‘returning the essence to nourish the brain’ and ejaculating outside the vagina can lead to four conditions: 1) chronic non-infectious inflammation; 2) ineffective contraception; 3) psychological problems, such as repression, depression, and lack of sexual satisfaction; and 4) sexual dysfunction, such as impotence and premature ejaculation. An anonymous *Sina Jiankang* poster says that the traditional practice of *reservatus* for the purpose of ‘returning the jing to nourish the brain’ and ‘stealing from yin to nourish yang’ leads to: 1) incomplete intercourse and lack of sexual satisfaction, violating natural physiological processes, and damaging the nervous and endocrine systems; 2) unrelieved tension and blood engorgement in the male reproductive organs, causing inflammation and discomfort, urinary incontinence, turbid urine, and hematuria; and 3) impotence from habituation of the nervous and endocrine systems to *reservatus*. He concludes that orgasm is essential for happiness and health, and that old concepts should be rejected.

Liu Longfei gives us the case study of a Mr. Zhang, who was inspired by the *Tianxia zhidao tan* text to practice *reservatus*, resulting in hemorrhoids, impotence, infertility, and prostatitis. Similarly, an anonymous advice column article entitled, ‘Gujing buxie wei hai da’ (The great harm of *coitus reservatus*) points out that semen saving is a deeply rooted belief in the culture and many middle-aged men practice it. He lists five pathological effects: spermatorrhea,

prostatitis, erectile dysfunction, hemorrhoids, and infertility. A column in the *Feihua jiankang wang* forum says that fluid in the prostate has 40 times the zinc and enzymes as circulating blood, and excessive sex can reduce this, thus diminishing resistance to infection, however, *reservatus* causes tension in the frontal cortex and central nervous system and pain in the prostate. He adds that not all ancient sexologists advocated *reservatus* but rather avoidance of sexual exhaustion. An article posted by the Zhejiang Medical Association on the *Kuaiyi jie* forum argues that, rather than thinking of semen as something that needs to be stored, we should think of it as something that needs to be spent and then restored. Writing on the *Renmin wang* website, and answering a query about using *reservatus* to satisfy a slow wife, Dr. Zhang Chunying responds that, if a male withholds ejaculation, it can cause the female partner to experience blood engorgement of the pelvic area, delayed normalization of the cerebral cortex and central nervous system, back pain and insomnia. For men, the arc of tension release will be much longer, thus putting a strain on the reproductive organs. This can cause impotence or rupture of capillaries in the seminal vesicles, leading to blood in the semen and prolonging the refractory period.

### **Ethics and Feminism**

Appeals to morality are made both to approve and condemn past practices. Song Shuming warns that, ‘Today we should no longer be blinded by false feudal morality and accusations of lust and filth, but faithfully study and reclaim this precious cultural legacy for the sake of the health of all humanity’. Ma

Xiaonian notes that it is important to study the physiology and psychology of sex, but not to forget morality. He has harsh words for the Song Neo-Confucians, whose influence extended all the way through the *Qing*, for stigmatizing the value of pleasure. He says that mutual consent should be the only standard of moral judgment but paradoxically does not condone trail marriage. Candy2wallace praises the 'nine shallow one deep' technique for accommodating the women's slower arousal time and likens it to the Jewish teaching that anything short of female consent and satisfaction is tantamount to 'conjugal rape'. He stresses the need for post-coital contact and expressions of affection, while an anonymous *Hexun* poster reminds us that, 'individual responsibility is superior to legislation'.

Curiously, objections based on the 'sexual vampirism' argument are conspicuously lacking. There are actually more ethical reservations among the qualified endorsers than among opponents, although these are usually afterthoughts, following praise for the positive health and bonding benefits. Often the qualified endorsers couch their ethical concerns in terms of class, blaming the ruling class for perverting the Celestial Masters' or early bedroom arts teachings, which were more egalitarian. These ethical deficiencies are generally lumped together as 'feudal dregs'. Apart from an unattributed *Baidu wenku* article entitled 'Looking at China's bedroom arts from a woman's perspective', I have not found another that condemns the bedroom arts solely on the basis of inequality and the exploitation of women. The author characterizes Western sex as historically focused solely on male orgasm, with no attention to the woman's pleasure.

China's bedchamber arts, by contrast, emphasize emotional harmonization, foreplay, and female orgasm. However, she says the motive for all this seeming sensitivity is to absorb the woman's essence to compensate for male loss. Rulers use it in the belief that it enhances their political power, the average person for health, the elderly for long life, and Daoists for immortality. In this way, 'although the woman may receive a bit of sexual satisfaction, in the end, she is controlled, manipulated, and exploited'. By contrast with the immortalists' goal of transcendence through sex, the Confucian emphasis is on procreation and continuing the family line, but here, too, the woman has no autonomy and is a mere 'baby making machine'. The article concludes that the bedroom arts manuals' admonitions to multiply the number of partners reflects the double standard of polygyny and the inferior position of women in feudal society.

### Qualified Opposition

Like the qualified endorsement position, the qualified opposition condemns the bedchamber arts but allow that they have some positive elements. In the case of a *360doc* poster calling himself Tianjizi, he says that Chinese have the concept that sex cannot exist for its own sake but must have a purpose: for Confucians, it is family line; for Buddhists, it is an opportunity to defeat desire; and for Daoists, it is self-cultivation. Immortality is a myth, but the emphasis on female satisfaction is positive, although it was co-opted by the ruling class for pleasure and perversion. Perceived benefits are due to the suggestibility of practitioners and have no relevance for modern couples. Li

Guang's *Renjing buxie yinhuan congsheng* (*Coitus reservatus* causes countless problems) acknowledges that *coitus reservatus* is a traditional practice but warns that, while occasional *interruptus* may be innocent, consistent practice of *reservatus* is unhealthy and harmful to the marriage. An article posted on the *Kuaiyi jie* forum by the Zhejiang Medical Association, entitled *Weishenma shuo renjing bushe buli yu shuangfang jiankang* (Why is it said that *coitus reservatus* is unhealthy for both sex partners) advises that delaying ejaculation by reducing stimulation in order to synchronize with a female partner is acceptable, but *reservatus* is fundamentally unhealthy. Instead of regarding semen as treasure to hoard, it should be seen as substance that needs to be periodically emitted and then restored.

### Latter Day Masters

Reproducing the full spectrum of traditional debates, the anti-camp also includes champions of the pure practices (*qingxiu*) or inner elixir (*neidan*) persuasion. A transcript of a lecture by Nan Huaijin, famed scholar/master of Daoist and Buddhist self-cultivation practices, appears on the *Sina Xinlang Boke* site, under the title, 'Huanjing bunao de fangfa' (The method of returning the jing to nourish the brain). Nan embraces the traditional notion of health and spiritual progress, based on sexual continence of the pure practices school, but adopts much of the theory of energetics of the sexual school. He describes a method of 'returning the jing', which involves massaging the *taiyang* point in the temples, pinching the base of the cranium to stimulate the pituitary, rotating the head, and rolling

the eyes, and gentle breathing. This, he claims, neutralizes lustful thoughts and cures presbyopia. Lamenting that the average person lacks sufficient courage and intelligence, he says, 'Those who can overcome sexual desires are very few'. Summing up, he recites the aphorisms that, 'When the jing is full, one does not think of lust; when the qi is full, one does not think of food; and when the spirit is full, one does not think of sleep', and that these practices lead to retraction of the testicles, as in 'The horse hides its genitals'. He also promises dreamless sleep without nocturnal emission, but warns that abstinence without retraction and desirelessness is unhealthy. For women, the breasts regain the prepubescent state of firmness and fullness, and both sexes dwell in a kind of androgyny. The goal is to be full of sexual energy without sexual desires.

Another example of scholar/master is Daoist exponent Xiao Tianshi, who illustrates a different kind of ambivalence when it comes to sexuality and spirituality. Although a strong supporter of the pure practices, he is reluctant to ostracize any branch of his beloved Daoism, when he says that sexual cultivation is 'a side door, left path', but, nevertheless, 'a side door is also a door, and a left path also a path', for, 'When a good man practices a heterodox method, the method becomes good, and when an evil man practices a good method, the good method becomes heterodox'. What these two examples illustrate may be seen as Foucault's 'repression hypothesis' with Chinese characteristics, in the sense that pure practitioners are interested in repressing dual cultivation, involving the arousal of sexual energy with a partner, but very keen to arouse sexual energy, circulate and transmute it within the body, and

retain it. In other words, while recoiling at sexual contact, they make sexual energy the object of intense focus.

## Western Debate

Western scholars have recently joined the Chinese bedroom arts debate, weighing in on two levels: scholarly and clinical. The scholarly debate, in turn, has two aspects: philological and hermeneutical. The clinical, or practical, debate replicates the traditional Chinese debate over efficacy and healthfulness, but interpreted within the framework of Western romantic love and monogamy. While contemporary Western scholars have used criticism of Needham and Van Gulik to highlight their differences with the previous generation of scholars, many Chinese scholars have used Van Gulik's praise of Chinese sexual culture to bolster pride in China's past achievements and to advocate continued practice of these traditions.

## Scholarly Interpretations of Contemporary Chinese Sex Culture

Western observers come in three flavors: critics, apologists, and relativists. Critics use the failings of other cultures to justify claims of superiority for their own; apologists use the strengths of other cultures to critique their own; and relativists use the strengths and failings of both cultures to emphasize the universality of nobility or absurdity. Some have considered China the most practical and realistic civilization and some the most superstitious and barbaric. Both China and the West have alternately viewed each other through the bipolar lens of enlightened or perverse. Ng and Lau in *Sexual Attitudes*

*in the Chinese* (1990, 373) point out that Western scholars like La Barre, Russel, Van Gulik, and Bullough have portrayed Chinese cultures as relatively free of sin and shame around sex, whereas many Chinese reformers and social scientists view it as repressive, or even asexual. Discussions have tended to break down along typical binaries: East-West, tradition-modernity, repression-liberation, and agency-victimization in a way that naturalizes Euro-American norms (Grewal and Kaplan 2001), and typical historiographic paradigms: China's response to the West, tradition versus modernity, and imperialism (Cohen 2010). Beyond the binaries and apparent paradoxes are more nuanced interpretations of changes in Chinese sexual culture, which have raised four questions: 1) what is China revolting against and what is the normative standard; 2) is the state necessarily opposed to liberation; 3) is sexual liberation necessarily liberating for women; and 4) how reliable are the new modes of knowledge production in the study of sex culture.

The story of recent Western debates on the Chinese bedroom arts begins with Henri Maspero's (1882–1945) 1937 'Methods of Nourishing the Vital Principle in Ancient Daoist Religion' Part II 'The Methods of Uniting Yin and Yang to Nourish the Vital Principle', published in the *Journal Asiatique*. In this article, he identifies retrograde ejaculation as the key to understanding the classic formula, 'return the *jing* to nourish the brain'. Van Gulik's 1951 *Erotic Colour Prints of the Ming, with an Essay on Ancient Chinese Sex Life from the Han to Ch'ing Dynasty, B.C. 206-A.D. 1644* introduces a number of ancient sex manuals, translates some into Latin, and was distributed to fifty research libraries around the world. He

accepts Maspero's retrograde ejaculation thesis and characterizes some of these practices as 'sexual vampirism'. This work, together with his 1961 *Sexual Life in Ancient China*, ultimately caused a stir on three continents and across multiple disciplines: French post-modernism, American feminism, and New Age lifestyle advocates. However, the first controversy was between Van Gulik and fellow sinologist Joseph Needham. Needham, an advocate of open marriage and gymnosophy, bristled at Van Gulik's leaving a bad taste in the reader's mouth by raising the specter of 'sexual vampirism', and, in personal correspondence, persuaded Van Gulik to soften his views and present a more favorable impression in his 1961 *Sexual Life in Ancient China*. This dialectic has taken on the status of high drama, beginning with Van Gulik's Preface to the second book, where he confesses his error, though his ambivalence is still evident near the end of the book when he characterizes the Ming novel *Zhaoyang jushi* in these words: 'The main plot is sexual vampirism, a perversion of the old Taoist disciplines' (Van Gulik 1961, 317). This, of course, begs the question: What is distinctively 'Taoist' about the *Mawangdui* or *Ishinpo* texts, and are the sexual alchemy texts, which are unabashedly exploitative of women, Daoist, Confucian, or other?

Van Gulik has paid dearly in scholarly criticism for carrying this banner. In his zeal for free love, Needham insisted on a sympathetic view of Chinese sexual practices, both to rescue China from the reputation of sexual perversion and to strike a blow at Victorian prudery. In refuting the 'repressive hypothesis', Foucault characterizes contemporary 'prophets' and 'preachers' of sexual liberation in these terms: 'What sustains

our eagerness to speak of sex in terms of repression is doubtless this opportunity to speak out against the powers that be, to utter truths and promise bliss, to link together enlightenment, liberation, and manifold pleasures' (Foucault 1980, 7). Needham was inclined to present an idealized picture of China, and 'Taoism' specifically, to critique his own society. This is evidenced in his uncritical view of the bedroom arts, his enthusiasm for their first apostle in the West, Jolan Chang, and his completely ahistorical view that taijiquan 'originated as a branch of Taoism gymnastics'.

Schipper was the first to critically engage Van Gulik and Needham in his 1969 'Science, Magic and Mystique of the Body', and 1982 *The Taoist Body*, which are in many ways as ambivalent and evolving as Van Gulik himself. He begins by reacting to Needham's, 'No sharp line of distinction can be made between arts specific to the Taoists and the general techniques of the lay bedchamber', saying, '... there is a difference between the sexual hygiene of say the *Yu-fang bi-chueh* and Taoist practice'. He goes on to explain that the essential difference is that the householder manuals were written from the male perspective, whereas the Daoist texts, 'at least ideally identified with the female body'. This falls into the trap of assuming the 'feminine' philosophy of softness, non-contention, and non-action translates into equal and sympathetic treatment of real women. If anything, the glimmers of mutuality and intersubjectivity in the householder texts disappear in the sexual alchemy texts, which are purely impersonal and exploitative. He attempts to resolve these contradictions by divorcing Daoism from both the householder manuals and sexual alchemy, 'It is a mistake to see

the idea of nourishing yang at the expense of yin as Taoist'. Taking aim at simplistic idealization, he says, 'It is nonsense to think that sexuality in traditional China was practiced freely' (1993, 146), a view echoed by Jessica Leo who calls out Van Gulik's promoting the view that Chinese 'sexual habits were normal and healthy' (Van Gulik 1961, XII), reminding us that, '... Chinese sexual culture is a complex phenomenon intimately linked to philosophy, medicine, health care, religion, eugenics, and family life ..., it is likely to be wishful thinking that the Chinese treated sex in a liberal and light-hearted manner' (Leo 2011). Schipper's ambivalence is seen in 'Love is also fearful: woman is a vampire who steals man's essence', but lapses into idealization, observing that sex in China was sacralized by *yin-yang* cosmology 'without the intervention of religion or political authority'. He also balks at Van Gulik's laying blame for sexual repression at the feet of the Manchu conquerors, saying 'open love and sexual expression were not favored' in the feudal Confucian family' (Schipper 1978).

On the philological front, Van Gulik, following Maspero's lead, interpreted the enigmatic formula, 'return the *jing* to nourish the brain', as retrograde ejaculation. Needham did not challenge this interpretation, and it was not until my 1992 *Art of the Bedchamber* that a preponderance of passages was assembled, demonstrating the polysemy of the term *jing*, admitting of two readings: semen and sexual energy. This philological error thus led to a major distortion of the whole theory of Chinese sexual yoga. We believe, based on a close reading of the texts available to Van Gulik and Needham, as well as a significantly larger number currently available, that retrograde ejaculation and

*coitus reservatus* were two distinct practices and should not be conflated, and that the latter was the dominant teaching. If one interprets every instance of *gijing*, *renjing*, *bushi*, *buxie*, *bushe*, and all of its synonyms as denoting retrograde ejaculation, the definition becomes so narrow that all discussion is foreclosed, the explanatory power of the expression in multiple contexts is crippled, and one falls into the same trap as translating *qi* as 'breath'. In fact, in most contexts in the bedchamber arts texts, *jing* and *jingqi* are used interchangeably. Beyond correcting philological errors in previous scholarship, it also sought to double the corpus of primary texts in order to provide a larger sample from which to draw conclusions about the details and theory of the art of the bedchamber. It also challenged the liberationist ideology of Van Gulik and Needham in regard to Daoism and the role of women. Finally, it suggested that, as an esthetic experience, abstention from orgasm must be consonant with substrative values within the culture and contrasted sharply with other cultures.

Charlotte Furth's 1994 article *Rethinking Van Gulik: Sexuality and Reproduction in Traditional Chinese Medicine* takes up the cause of disabusing readers of Chinese sexual culture's sympathy for women, issuing a thorough indictment of Van Gulik's 'androcentricism', 'anthropological relativism', 'Orientalism', and 'Freudianism'. She accuses Van Gulik of using the art of the bedchamber's techniques to overcome female frigidity and insure orgasm to assail Christian asceticism. She points out that, in the Chinese texts, pleasure was always subordinated to other ends, macrobiotic or procreative, and that the point of view is always male, and ruling class males at

that. Both early and late twentieth century scholars have been champions of sexual liberalism and of women's rights, but strategies have changed. Van Gulik and Needham, and Burton before them, hoped to use selective evidence of a sophisticated art of love in the East to critique the Victorian legacy, whereas today's scholars emphasize the long and continuing history of the victimization of women. The projection of utopian fantasies on China's sexual culture by reformers like Sanger and Hirschfeld is not unlike Voltaire or Leibniz's Enlightenment idealization of Confucian society.

Fabian Heubel employs his equally impressive sinological and philosophical credentials in a remarkable article entitled, *Nengliang de xixue zhuyi – Li Outa, Fu Ke, De Lezi yu Zhongguo fangzhongshu* (Energetic vampirism: Lyotard, Foucault, Deleuze and the Chinese art of the bedchamber). He shows how the Chinese art of the bedchamber, as introduced by Van Gulik, found its way into Western philosophy and became a cross-cultural case study in the dilemma of energetics and ethics.

Focusing on Lyotard's 1974 *Economie Libinale*, Heubel credits him for not embracing idealized and naïve Western views of Daoism's soft power philosophy of *yin-yang* harmony and non-action, and for correctly seeing the ethical problem in Chinese theories of *qi* in the sexual realm. Combining the Freudian concept of libido and the Marxist concept of capital in a process he calls the 'capitalization of energy', Lyotard describes the goal of the Chinese bedchamber arts as a process of maximizing female *jouissance* in order to extract 'energetic profit' and reduce women to 'anonymats'. Arriving at the

same ethical conclusion as the early Van Gulik, Lyotard insists that the ancient Greeks did not view their women this way, and attributes the difference to Greek democracy versus Oriental despotism. However, based on the *Yufang bijue's* (Secrets of the Jade Chamber) passage on the reversibility of absorption, he says 'The intention is not, as one might think, essentially misogynistic ... No, the question is not one of feminism ...' (Lyotard 1974, English trans. 1993, 206–207). Of course, Lyotard is not a sinologist, and although he devotes ten pages to an exposition of the art of the bedchamber, it is really a metaphor for his analysis of capitalist production, which he identifies with 'Daoist' pleasure value, and socialist production, which he identifies with 'Confucian' use value. According to Lyotard's theory of 'libidinal capitalism', the capitalist consumer, like women in the art of the bedchamber, must experience '*jouissance*' in order to give up profit. The difficulty with this metaphor is that economic systems consist of raw materials, producers, and consumers; it seems more consistent with the art of the bedchamber theory to view women as raw materials, but, then, they cannot simultaneously be consumers, who need to be stimulated. Clearly it is men who are consumers in this transaction, and, whereas capitalist 'libidinal economics' is one of spending and consuming, Chinese economics has traditionally been one of hoarding, indeed grain hoarding was the first responsibility of the Chinese state.

Turning to Foucault, Heubel is less interested in his views on the 'repression theory', or even the distinction of *ars erotica* and *scientia sexualis*, than in contrasting ancient Greek and Chinese 'biopolitics' and arguing for the sexual

foundations of the emergence of individual freedom and democracy in Greece. In his third and final volume of the *History of Sexuality*, Foucault examines how sexuality becomes an ethical problem and how it became the pivot of a unique kind of self-formation in ancient Greece, one where reason regulated sexual pleasure, resulting in an esthetically pleasing life of self-mastery. Heubel points out that Foucault traces the transition from Christian sexual nihilism to the life-affirming ethos of modern sexual liberation, a process where Catholic confession, and then psychoanalysis, bring incoherent desires into the realm of discourse, and the bourgeois state becomes more interested in promoting life than exercising the power of death. By contrast with Medieval Europe, both ancient Greece and China viewed sex in a life affirming light. He compares modern Europe's realization that knowledge and power could play a role in shaping our biological fate to China's association of the bedchamber arts with 'self-cultivation' (*yangsheng*), or what Foucault calls 'care of the self' (*le souci de soi*). The Greeks saw self-control of sexual impulses as the foundation of moral agency, however, as Heubel points out in describing the Chinese situation, Foucault carefully avoids linking the art of the bedchamber with the emergence of ethics. Heubel says that this whole discussion suggests the possibility of a post-metaphysical basis for ethics, a kind of bioethics, strictly within the context of life, energy, and power. Heubel believes that, in comparing China and Greece, Foucault does not come to grips with the philosophical dilemma arising from the tension between the demands of self-control and self-liberation. Heubel claims that Foucault's descriptions of the Chinese art of the bedchamber's

emphasis on 'strengthening', 'intensification' and 'prolongation' and the removal of 'rational obstacles' to the unrestricted 'flow of energy' do not account for the emergence of 'an ethical subject'. According to Foucault, this is seen in the very detailed proscriptions of the bedchamber arts as opposed to the very general guidelines in the Greek sources. This suggests to Foucault that the free Greek citizen was trusted to exercise his own judgment and taste and did not require rigid rules, such as in the art of the bedchamber or Christian asceticism. Thus, he concludes that the unity of power and esthetics in the art of the bedchamber cannot support the emergence of ethics. Moreover, the art of life in Greece requires a kind of self-reflection that nurtures a skeptical and critical attitude towards authority, whereas China's art of the bedchamber involves no such self-reflection. In comparing ancient Greece and China, Heubel tells us that Foucault's sympathies are with Greece for its fostering moral agency, but he also credits the Chinese style with nurturing 'self-creation'. Finally, Heubel says that the tension between energetics and ethics in the development of 'subjectivation' is more reflective of contradictions in Foucault's own later thought than differences between East and West.

In a famous interview with Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, Foucault uses three formulas – behavior, pleasure, and desire – to analyze the sexual cultures of ancient Greece, China, Christian Europe, and modern times, finding that ancient Greece emphasized behavior, whereas China emphasized pleasure but recognized the need to regulate behavior in order to accentuate it. Christianity attempted to root out desire and



pleasure and to restrict behavior to procreation. In the modern era, the emphasis is on desire, and behavior is not so much the object of control. Both the Christian era and the present emphasize desire, but, for one, it was to root out and, for the other, to liberate. The act is important now, but pleasure is *terra incognita* (1994, 399–400). Ancient Greece and China were similar in viewing sex as a site of violent action, expenditure of energy, and death (infertility) and were thus a cause for concern but not inherently sinful (1985, 136–7).

Because of the influence of Foucault's monumental *History of Sexuality*, it is appropriate to digress for a moment from Heubel's exposition to give a more complete airing of Foucault's views on Asian '*ars erotica*'. The key passage is quoted in full below:

Historically, there have been two great procedures for producing the truth of sex. On the one hand, the societies – and they are numerous: China, Japan, India, Rome, the Arabo-Muslim societies – which endowed themselves with an *ars erotica*. In the erotic art, truth is drawn from pleasure itself, understood as a practice and accumulated as experience; pleasure is not considered in relation to an absolute law of the permitted and the forbidden, nor by reference to a criterion of utility, but first and foremost in relation to itself; it is experienced as pleasure, evaluated in terms of itself; its specific qualities, its duration, its reverberations in the body and the soul. Moreover, this knowledge must be deflected back into the

sexual practice itself in order to shape it as though from within and amplify its effects. In this way, there is formed a knowledge that must remain secret, not because of an element of infamy that might attach to its object, but because of the need to hold it in the greatest reserve, since, according to tradition, it would lose its effectiveness and its virtue by being divulged. Consequently, the relationship to the master who holds the secrets is of paramount importance; only he, working alone, can transmit this art in an esoteric manner and as the culmination of an initiation in which he guides the disciple's progress with unflinching skill and severity. The effects of this masterful art, which are considerably more generous than the spareness of its prescriptions would lead one to imagine, are said to transfigure the one fortunate enough to receive its privilege: an absolute mastery of the body, a singular bliss, obliviousness to time and limits, the elixir of life, the exile of death and its threats. On the face of it at last, our civilization possesses no *ars erotica*. In return, it is undoubtedly the only civilization to produce a *scientia sexualis*. ... (Foucault 1978)

Area specialists have no difficulty nitpicking the theories of thinkers with big ideas: Like Freud, Foucault can be attacked but he cannot be ignored. Leaving aside his account of the evolution of sexual attitudes in the Western world, we find his conflating of Indian and Chinese sexual esthetics a bit too facile. To be sure, the *Kama Sutra* makes an *ars* out of foreplay, but there is

no suggestion that the act does not culminate in orgasm. The theme of the *Kama Sutra* is the maximization of pleasure, whereas in the art of the bedchamber, pleasure is a by-product of the maximization of male health, and strength is demonstrated by the ability to withhold expenditure. The *ars-scientia* dichotomy is also questionable in the Chinese case, as the art of the bedchamber literature is thoroughly imbricated with traditional Chinese medicine. Indeed, the art of the bedchamber literature cannot be read without a solid grounding in traditional medicine, whereas understanding the *Kama Sutra* is not dependent on the knowledge of *ayurveda*. Certainly, traditional Chinese medicine was not the same as modern biomedicine, but it played the same functional role in society and sought to distinguish itself as a rational alternative to folk remedies and magical healing. The Mawangdui bedroom arts and medical manuscripts were found literally bundled together; in many dynastic histories, the bedroom arts titles are bibliographically classed under medicine, and a number of bedroom arts texts are authored by famous physicians, such as Tao Hongjing and Sun Simiao. Chinese medicine is unthinkable without the bedroom arts, and the bedroom arts are unthinkable without Chinese medicine.

Foucault's use of Van Gulik's introduction to the art of the bedchamber to critique sin, confession, psychoanalysis, and finally *scientia sexualis* inherits Hershfeld and Sanger's eagerness to discover in China a sex culture unencumbered by religious scruples and purely an affair of pleasure and 'art'. In reality, the Chinese bedroom arts are anything but an uncomplicated pursuit of pleasure, laden as they are with eugenics, macrobiotics,

family and gender politics. Even if we could hold everything else constant, the reality of arranged marriages, polygamy, concubinage, legal prostitution, and slavery makes comparisons nearly impossible. However, we can imagine that juggling jealousies in a polygamous household and the obligation to satisfy multiple wives was daunting. If all this is not enough, the male faces the final hurdle of bringing his partner to orgasm while restraining his own ejaculation. For a few adepts, *coitus reservatus* may have yielded a rarer, more exquisite pleasure, or the fantasy of immortality, but, for most, it was a prescription for vulnerability, anxiety, and failure.

Although we cannot speak of religion in China in the monolithic terms that we are used to in relation to 'Christianity', nevertheless, there are a number of pervasive cultural practices that had the force of religion. Pressure to have male children was not merely a biological imperative of 'this world' but an obligation to ancestors in the 'other world' as a means to insure continuity of veneration and support. Moreover, the cult of premarital virginity and chaste widowhood were public performances of self-sacrifice, just as binding as monastic vows of celibacy. Saving the body in China was every bit as anxiety provoking as saving the soul in the Christian West. Love of parents was the highest love: not love of God, humanity, country, or mate. When it comes to the master-disciple transmission and secrecy, this is certainly true of the sexual alchemy tradition, but the general principles of the art of the bedchamber were widely diffused among the upper classes, a fact borne out by their revival today as a topic of public discourse.

Turning to Deleuze, Heubel says that he identified a third realm, a 'relationship to the self' in the ancient Greek experience, that developed outside of knowledge and power and allowed a kind of 'subjectivation'. The exercise of power over others requires self-control, which, in turn, requires self-reflection. Here, Heubel expresses his disappointment with Deleuze's inability to transcend traditional sinological stereotypes of Asian inability to produce true subjectivity, stalling at an immature stage of discipline as 'a kind of destructive practice'. Heubel considers Deleuze's assessment of Asian thought as a Nietzschean reaction to Schopenhauer's embrace of Christian and Buddhist nihilism. He points out that Deleuze considered Foucault's view of the Chinese art of the bedchamber a little too generous. Heubel stresses that, by denying the emergence of a 'self' in the Chinese art of the bedchamber, there can be no basis for a cross-cultural comparison with Foucault's concept of 'care of the self'. Heubel concludes that Foucault, Lyotard and Deleuze's understanding of power in Chinese culture could only lead to nihilism and the denial of life and not to the emergence of moral reflection and free men; it could not lead to the 'folding' of exteriority into interiority and the process of 'subjectivation'. Heubel warns that the Nietzschean 'will to power' contains the danger of energetic vampirism and ignoring moral consequences. Returning to the Greek experience, Heubel says for Foucault and Deleuze, the relationship between self-cultivation and sex leads to the emergence of the free man, not in the context of domestic relations of male dominance and female subservience, but rather the 'fold' (domination of self over self) of power that takes place in homosexual relations. Competition

among free men inevitably leads to power struggles, which cannot, in themselves, produce ethics; however, homosexual relations in ancient Greece often involved a mature man and a youth, who were unequal in age but equal in social status as free citizens. In order for this relationship to be legitimized, and not simply replicate the unequal power of men and women, it was seen as an opportunity for youth to practice self-control and develop an internalized sense of moral agency. In the end, Heubel is uncomfortable with his trio of Continental philosophers' Orientalist assumptions but consistently brings us back to the deeper discussion of how the Chinese philosophy of 'qi' influences the Western concept of 'energetics' and the ethical problem of promoting liberation without license.

Leon Rocha's 2011 '*Scientia sexualis versus ars erotica*: Foucault, van Gulik, Needham' continues Wile and Furth's critique of Van Gulik and Needham for romanticizing the art of the bedchamber, but also faults Foucault for the same wishful thinking in his celebration of Asian '*ars erotica*'. If Foucault is an Orientalist, Rocha sees Liu Dalin as a self-orientalizing heir to Van Gulik, using Chinese otherness to construct a Chinese cultural identity. Rocha dismantles Needham on the grounds that his claim of 'mutual nourishment' in the bedchamber arts was untenable in the face of asymmetrical androcentrism, and apparent attention to female pleasure was a ruse to plunder her essence. He argues that the restoration of pride and redistribution of credit for scientific invention is not the same as reviving ancient cultural traditions as an antidote to modern malaise (Rocha 2011, 340). Rocha also points out that Liu Dalin's claims for the bedroom arts

were a two-pronged attempt to demonstrate superiority over the West and to critique Party repression.

Richard Shusterman's 2007 essay 'Asian *Ars Erotica* and the Question of Sexual Esthetics' enlists the Chinese art of the bedchamber to bolster his 'somaesthetics' project. Using a cross cultural strategy, he attempts to demonstrate that esthetics and instrumentality need not be mutually exclusive. Hence, sex can be pursued for procreation and health, while having esthetic dimensions. As Shusterman says, 'That such aesthetic ritualization can artfully transform the most basic function of life is a crucial insight of Asian culture that could be therapeutic for our dominantly Platonic-Kantian aesthetic tradition grounded on the art/reality and aesthetic/functional dichotomies'. While I am extremely sympathetic to Shusterman's notion of somaesthetics, his desire to portray China and India as instructive alternatives blinds him to the issues of vampirism and ejaculation anxiety, both of which color the esthetic experience of sex. Beyond that, he is so keen to simply establish that sex should be considered an art that he misses the opportunity to examine the real challenge posed by the Chinese case, which is that the experience of orgasm and its aftermath is culturally constructed, such that one man's triumph is another man's defeat, and one's man's relaxation is another man's enervation.

### **Western Adopters**

Although we cannot compare the impact of the art of the bedchamber on Western sexual culture to the impact of Western sexual culture on China, the former

deserves to be called at least a subculture. Van Gulik reawakened China to her own past glories and emboldened a wave of Chinese sex gurus to invade the West. One of the first was Janan Chang, who won Joseph Needham's imprimatur and entree to Western intellectual circles. His 1977 *The Tao of Love and Sex* touts the art of the bedchamber for enhancing pleasure and inaugurates the trope of the Asian sex master. This was followed by Stephen Chang's 1986 *The Tao of Sexology*, which balances pleasure and health, and Mantak Chia's series of titles for men, women, and couples, blending detailed qigong practices, *coitus reservatus*, and romantic intimacy.

Marnia Robinson is on a one-woman crusade to rescue monogamy from the monotony of orgasm. Her 2009 *Cupid's Poisoned Arrow: From Habit to Harmony in Sexual Relationships* marshals evidence from medicine, psychology and evolutionary biology to argue that boredom in the bedroom, or the 'Coolidge effect' of declining interest with habituation, is at the root of marital malaise, but that this is an evolutionary strategy to spread alpha male genes. On the hormonal level, foreplay produces oxytocin, a sustainable high, but orgasm, the release of dopamine, is quickly neutralized by prolactin, resulting in a cycle of peak and crash and a desire to move on to new partners. Just as sexual alchemy was a strategy to outwit Thanatos and live forever, this is a strategy to foil nature's plot against monogamy. Armed with traditional Tantric and Chinese teachings, modern science, scores of anecdotal reports, and the late nineteenth century practice of *Karezza*, she argues that *coitus reservatus* is both more meditative and more meaningful in creating a deeper

bond between partners. Ironically, a technique developed for the polygamous patriarch has been repurposed to save monogamy. However, there are four essential differences between Robinson's method and traditional Chinese teachings: 1) traditional teachings stress the necessity of multiple partners, whereas she is trying to defeat the mammalian brain; 2) the traditional texts recommend full arousal, whereas she recommends a sustainable plateau; 3) the highest goals of traditional teachings were family harmony, procreation, health and immortality, whereas her goal is conjugal love as a spiritual aspiration; 4) her system does not emphasize the transferability of energy. Thus, she draws inspiration from traditional teachings, but is selective, and clearly more influenced by biomedicine and romantic love. She differs from some of the more Sino-centric sex masters, who preach the doctrine of 'inner orgasm' and 'multiple orgasm', based on the concept that ejaculation and orgasm can be separated, and orgasm experienced without ejaculation.

Eduardo De Souza's 2011 *Health and Sexuality: Daoist Practices and Reichian Therapy* combines scholarship, clinical experience, and a personal path. He reminds us of the centrality of sexuality in both Chinese medicine and Freudian and Reichian psychology and the similarities between Reich's 'orgone' and Chinese 'qi', although he says that the former attempts to demonstrate an objective measurable substance, whereas the latter is a subjective sensation of pleasure. The major conflict, however, is with Reich's insistence that repression of sexual energy leads to neurosis, is not sublimated and redirected into higher pursuits, and represents an immature fixation on

maternal nurture and increase of muscular armoring. The 'clouding of consciousness' associated with full orgasm in Reich's theory represents the absence of neurosis and body armor, whereas in the art of the bedchamber, it is mental dullness, dimming of eyesight, and buzzing in the ears; the ability to 'lose ourselves' in one is the loss of self-control in the other.

De Souza's basic argument is strong, but there are serious weaknesses in the details. First, the notoriously slippery term 'Daoist' is never defined and used with about as much precision as the terms 'classical' or 'liberal'. Characterizing the martial arts and bedroom arts as 'Daoist' is untenable. Moreover, the only bedroom arts text he cites extensively is the *Su Nü jing*, a householder text and in no way specifically 'Daoist'. Second, he says, 'For Daoists the sexual realm is ruled by women ... In other words, while males tend to externalize and disperse their essence during intercourse, females internalize and store it. Their orgasm is thus ideal for guarding *jing*, and is accordingly the model that men should strive to achieve if they intend to preserve their health (200–2001)'. He insists that Reichians cannot understand the art of the bedchamber because they are stuck in a phallogocentric view of explosive, externalized orgasm, but he misunderstands the traditional teachings, which are predicated on inducing women to release their essence, and it is their loss that justifies frequent changing of partners. Furthermore, his assertion that more female essence is lost through menses than orgasm is simply not attested in the primary literature, but this allows him to successfully skirt the issue of sexual vampirism. In the end, this is a work of autobiography and advocacy and

valuable as a reminder that what once shocked Reich's contemporaries is now mainstream in view of our culture's sex saturation and obsession with orgasm and that Reich is a good touchstone for cross-cultural comparisons in the realm of sexuality.

Appearing in the same anthology, and under eminent editorship, Stephan Wik's *Dual Cultivation in Modern Relationships* offers little but autobiography and New Age clichés. Referring to the *Yijing* at the outset of the article as a 'Daoist-inspired book' and attributing all quotations in the article from the *Daode jing* to 'Laozi' signals that we are once again in ahistorical territory. The bibliography contains only four works, two of which are books by the author. Sins of scholarly omission aside, the author shares his personal journey through physical and psychological challenges, how he achieved redemption through 'Daost' inspiration, and leaves the reader with the impression that a few books and workshops qualify one as a self-help author and psychotherapist. In a flash of honesty, however, he admits that when it comes to teachings on building trust and respect in romantic relationships, he finds nothing relevant in Daoism, or in Chinese culture in general, and resorts to citing the matriarchal and open marriage practices of the tiny ethnic minority known as the Na people or Mosuo. Finally, rather than directly advocating *coitus reservatus* as Roche does, he favors 'polyamory', wondering if the ancient Daoists 'would have enjoyed the learning, growing, and challenges that polyamorous relationships offer'. Naturally, the debate over the pros and cons of the bedchamber arts plays out differently in the past and present, China and the West. The practices collectively called 'the art of the bedchamber' have a

more than two-thousand-year history of cultural consensus in China; in the West, the bedroom arts advocates are too small and marginal to have attracted the attention of medical or religious opposition. We are aware of no scientific studies looking at whether the practice of the bedroom arts leads to longer life span, lower divorce rate, or greater overall physical and mental health. Chinese advocates of the bedroom arts used the observation that Buddhist monks did not enjoy exceptional longevity as an argument against abstinence, but they did not directly engage the few critics who challenged the practices on rational or medical grounds. Likewise, although Chinese sexologists acknowledge Western biomedical critiques of the art of the bedchamber, the chorus of the current Western gerontologists, who tout the benefits of sex for the elderly, are unaware of, or feel no need to respond to Chinese calls for continence in old age.

### Conclusions and Comparisons

The Chinese art of the bedchamber is interesting to us today because it contrasts so sharply with Western norms of sexuality and because it has been a cultural constant in China and a subject of controversy for more than two thousand years, a controversy that survives today. Surely, there is no starker contrast in the realm of sexual experience than that between the fear of orgasm and the fear of failure to orgasm. Here are some of the conclusions and questions we can draw from our survey of the history of the art of the bedchamber and its current revival:

1. The continuity of this tradition is not dependent on textual transmission but propagates as a culture meme.
2. While drugs to treat erectile dysfunction (phosphodiesterase 5 inhibitors) are widely available in China, there is still a market for the idea that sexual performance is something that can be trained using traditional techniques of visualization, desensitization, breath control, and acupuncture.
3. Just as sexual liberationists in the West have blamed Christianity for repression, modern Chinese sexologists blame Neo-Confucians and Communists.
4. As the art of the bedchamber evolved over time in China, both the negative consequences of semen loss and the potential for immortality became increasingly exaggerated; the West evolved from pathologizing deviance to ambiguating the male-female binary and liberalizing sexual expression.

What are the limits of the data available in the new media when it comes to the art of the bedchamber? Certainly, it has widened the discourse to include the voices of ordinary citizens and women. Under the influence of modern bioscience, it has allowed a fundamental assault on the physiological assumptions of the ancient practices, especially *coitus reservatus*. However, the debate has remained largely on the level of technique and scientific efficacy, with little insight into the experience of couples as they negotiate their roles. For example, how do women feel about

participating in the 'battle of stealing essences?' Do they feel like winners if they cause their male partners to ejaculate? Do they feel exploited or unsatisfied if men withhold their ejaculation? The media is full of 'liberated' female voices who have gained notoriety as champions of casual sex, but none who march under the banner of the mythical Queen Mother of the West, who turns the tables in the 'battle of stealing essences'.

The *History of the Former Han* tells us that sex is a 'peak' human experience; the *Classic of Su Nü* tells us of the Yellow Emperor's anxiety and post-coital 'symptoms'; the sexual elixir literature boldly offers a prescription for immortality; and the *Yellow Book* offers expiation of sins through ritual sex. What are the culturally constructed meanings of the sex act to participants today? The term commonly used for sex today, *xing*, is not of Chinese origin and was introduced in the early twentieth century as a Japanese loan word. In a sense then, the Chinese have been attempting to practice modern sex for the past century, and the revival of interest in the art of the bedchamber represents a nativist impulse.

What allows Western practitioners to feel exotic and special allows Chinese practitioners to feel authentic and superior. One can never underestimate the importance of feeling superior in the bedroom, or the importance of being a star with an audience of only one. The bedroom becomes an arena where Chinese men can win. China has enjoyed the role of teaching civilization in the martial arts, and the Chinese art of the bedchamber allows Chinese men to play by their own rules and to feel like masters in the bedroom.

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