



The Comparison of the Differences Between Chinese and Western Attitudes Towards Homosexuality

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Abstract. Homosexuality has been a controversial topic in the world. This article takes the attitudes towards homosexuality in China and the West and reviews the reasons for its formation to study the legalization of gay marriage from the relationship between law and morality. After reviewing previous literature, the main arguments of this paper are 1) During the past few decades in almost all western countries, the general public has gradually changed their attitude towards homosexuality from unacceptable to support because of the improvements in government legislation and the efforts of homosexual people to break traditional stereotype; 2) Different from Western, according to traditional Chinese Confucianism, the gay community in China is largely not accepted in the current society. They have been discriminated against varying degrees, but they have also received more tolerance and respect; 3) The reasons for negative attitudes toward homosexuality in China are Confucian religious ethics and a relatively lagging legal system for homosexuality, but many Western countries already allow same-sex marriage and have a relatively rich cultural background for homosexuality; 4) More relevant legislation and positive mass media have significant influence to the public opinion. In addition, individual religion and education level might lead to different opinions on homosexuality, but it may depend on other factors such as family background, age, and gender. Finally, this paper contributes to providing a comparative perspective to analyze the differences between Chinese and Western attitudes. Furthermore, this paper looks forward to the legalization of gay marriage from legislative and social aspects.

Keywords: Homosexuality · Attitudes · China · Western countries · Public · Religion · Mass media · Legislation · culture · Law

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1 Introduction

Homosexuality has been recognized as a distinct social phenomenon in both China and Western countries for the past few years. The growth of homosexuality and social views in China and the West, however, are highly different. This paper is divided into three sections: 1) the attitudes and formation process of homosexual groups in western countries; 2) the attitudes and formation process of homosexuals in China; 3) the comparison of the differences between the attitudes of homosexuals in western and Chinese countries and their analysis. This review also compares the current state of the gay community and attitudes in both Western and Chinese countries. In terms of historical context, legal laws, and social opinion, this paper delves into the causes of disparities in view toward gay groups across populations in China and the West. The purpose of this paper is to improve public knowledge and understanding of the gay community, which is a broad term for a group of gay people and gay-supportive individuals, organizations, and sub-cultures bound together by a shared culture and civil rights movements; an example for this is Cleveland's gay community.

2 Attitudes Towards Homosexuality in Western Countries and the Reasons for the Formation

2.1 Culture

Western society, especially American society has witnessed a complete change in social tolerance and acceptance of homosexuality [1, 2]. Generally, the opinions of the public in western society towards gay and lesbians altered from hate and disgust to acceptance and support during the past few decades [3–5].

“Homosexual” is a term that was initially proposed in 1869 in a political manifesto issued by Hungarian writer Karoly Maria Benkert, in which he criticized Bavarian laws that outlawed male-to-male sexual contact [6]. In the 19th century, psychiatrists categorized homosexuality as a mental condition as part of a general transition away from religious to scientific ways of interpreting human behavior, according to Krafft-Ebing [7]. Herek claims that negative beliefs about homosexuality including hate and disgust all too often led to violence and discrimination against homophile people. Generally, during the negative evaluations of homosexuality, it is summarized that gays were considered “unnatural” and “sexually perversion” and discriminated against by the general public [8]. The gay rights movement resulted from the Stonewall riots in New York and was the first homosexuality movement all over the world and this sparked gay rights movements in the United States and other countries.

In addition, parade campaigns and mass media were the catalysts of complete changes in the opinions of the public about gays and lesbians. Elliott claimed that by the twenty-first century, newspapers had fully reversed their stance. Numerous publications had “gay beats” editorials promoting the passage of LGBT rights laws routinely published, and conservative Christians who are anti-gay received virtually solely bad press [1]. Thompson refers that the Same-Sex Marriage Movement, which the Gay Rights Movement motivated, challenges the conventional definition of marriage, casts doubt on God's

creative plan, and eventually undermines the American constitutional right to practice the Christian views of people in accordance with the 1st Amendment [2].

Flores suggests that the most accepting nations are getting more accepting, the least tolerant nations are getting less tolerant, and the middle nations stay the same [3]. If countries give more freedom to their citizens to express their ideas and thoughts towards homosexuality on social media and hold more homosexual activities such as Christopher Street Day in German and Rainbow Pride in London, more citizens will accept and support homosexual groups.

2.2 Policies

Various laws and policies protecting the rights of gays and lesbians were established in a number of western countries throughout the years [4, 9, 10]. Below are some relevant laws and policies:

Though homosexuality was rarely the explicit subject of legislation, in the early and middle ages of the 20th century, same-sex relationship was not legally allowed in public area. Schneider suggests that before the first turning point, from 1969 to 1974, Americans who came of age lived in a culture where homosexuality was institutionalized in the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, and lesbian and gay people were treated as mentally ill [4]. The 1987 National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights, according to Ghaziani, may have marked the beginning of the second turning point [5]. At this time, Hart-Brinson suggests that homophile movements started to use aggressive and theatrical tactics to raise public awareness of the AIDS pandemic and the discrimination that contributed to it at this point [11]. They also started to focus more intently on legal equality and their rights-oriented strategy.

The Netherlands was the first nation to legalize same-sex marriage until April 1, 2001. As the name supplies, same-sex marriage refers to the marriage between two men or two women. In July 2005, a law passed by the Canadian Parliament went into effect, allowing same-sex couples to get married in all 13 of Canada's provinces and territories on an equal footing with heterosexual couples. Currently, same-sex marriage is legal through legislation, judicial action, or by popular vote, in more than 35 states in America [9]. The debate over same-sex marriage in Europe is a laboratory for numerous experiments, and currently, same-sex marriage is permitted in thirteen Council of Europe nations, eleven of which are also members of the European Union [10].

People's attitudes towards homosexuality and same-sex marriage change with governments' attitudes and policies to a large extent. When same-sex marriage becomes legal in the country, homosexual couples and families can receive the same benefits as heterosexual families, the general public would attach great importance to the rights of gays and lesbians and support them.

3 Attitudes Toward Homosexuality in China and the Reasons for Its Formation

3.1 Culture and Formation

Homosexuality in China can be traced back to the ancestor of the Yellow Emperor. The earliest historical records of homosexuality in China came from the Shang Dynasty. The Book of Commerce Yi Xun is mainly about three unhealthy customs, one of which is today's homosexuality. This shows that homosexuality has emerged as an anti-social concept and system three thousand years ago [12].

In the following dynasties, the phenomenon of homosexuality always existed, especially in the ancient imperial court. It can even be seen in the works of ancient poets. For example, Sima Qian's work - Historical Records mentioned that many Han emperors were bisexual. Although Chinese men bear the responsibility of passing on incense, the ancient attitude towards homosexuality was at most neutral [13]. It means that they did not think that homosexual love threatened the social and family structure and violated morality and ethics.

This open mind in moral concepts led to the unprecedented prosperity of homosexuality in the Ming and Qing dynasties of China. The emergence of some famous works reflects that the prosperity of homosexuality at that time has reached an unprecedented level. Although China's religion does not explicitly prohibit homosexuality as other major religions in the world, the main belief is heterosexuality, that is, the concept of the integration of "yin" and "yang" in Confucianism and Buddhism (i.e., men are considered to be yang, women are considered to be yin). Coupled with the influence of traditional ethics, it is advocated to emphasize that strict women should abide by women's morality and men should perform the duties of father and husband. Homosexuality is listed as a category against morality. The policy on homosexuality was promulgated in the Qing Dynasty of China, which is also the beginning of the socialization of homosexuality in Chinese history. It is regarded as a social hazard and bad behavior, which should be controlled by law. This has also led to the anti-gay attitude of Chinese society that has lasted for a hundred years to the 20th century [14].

3.2 The Public Attitude

China's attitude towards *Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer* (LGBTQ) groups tends to be inclusive and understanding over time. People's attitudes towards LGBTQ groups are also related to their age, gender, location, and education level [15]. In the experiment of Luhur, Brown, and Liu, the research on transgender people shows that up to 70% of the research participants agree that China is becoming more tolerant of transgender people, and they do not believe that transgender people violate their traditional concepts; Most of the participants the study believed that transgender persons were naturally occurring, and few believed that transgender persons were allowed to engage in criminal activities or that they had related mental or psychological diseases; 62% of the participants also hoped that China would do more to support and protect transgender people [16].

In addition, another experiment based on the whole of China revealed that discrimination against LGBTQ groups still exists in China [17]. From the regional perspective, LGBTQ groups are generally discriminated against more in economically less developed regions than in economically more developed regions; LGBTQ is the most unacceptable when it becomes a member of this group at a young age; Under different circumstances, LGBTQ groups suffer from extremely high discrimination in the face of social services [18].

China has a long history of homosexuality, and the government and people of different periods and dynasties have different attitudes toward homosexual groups. Overall, in modern society, China has not yet established an organization to deal with LGBTQ groups' problems. Homosexual groups are not accepted by society to a large extent, and they are suffering from different degrees of discrimination in different regions and environments as well. However, China's acceptance of homosexual groups is also improving, which means they are embracing more tolerance and respect.

4 The Differences Between Chinese and Western Attitudes Toward Homosexuality

4.1 Historical Background of China and Western Countries

In China, there are very few campaigns for legal rights for gays and lesbians. In addition, traditional Chinese religious concepts have a negative impact on homosexuality. Feng et al. referred that individuals who embrace more traditional Confucian beliefs are more likely to have a negative view of homosexuality. The reason of it is that they regard homosexuality as a threat to the traditional values they hold dear and believe that homosexuals breach the established norms of what men and women should be [19]. Wang et al. pointed out that the strongest pressure on members of China's LGBT community to comply with prosocial conduct and identity standards comes from family members. Marriage and child raising are regarded as key elements of filial piety in Confucian cultural norms [20]. Therefore, based on traditional Confucianism, society's negative view of the gay community is difficult to be changed, especially for the older generation. Da and Zhang referred that the homosexual community is still only active on the Internet and homosexuality has not become an open political issue [21]. The main problem facing the survival and development of gay culture in China is the deep-rooted public perception of its non-acceptance.

Compared to China, the background of the development of the gay community in the West appears to be relatively much richer. Tina pointed out that there were many sociologists who defended homosexuality in Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, like Thomas Cannon, Jeremy Bentham, etc. And France was the first country to decriminalize homosexuality [22]. This shows that homosexuality has been valued by all parties in Western countries for a long time, thus laying the foundation for the LGBT movement. According to Tina, the LGBT movement in the U.S. has dedicated decades of effort to achieving societal acceptance and equal rights. LGBT activism has had a significant influence on society, from the early Stonewall campaign to the more current struggle for same-sex marriage [22]. Unlike Confucianism, which most Chinese groups

believe in, Amy and Cassady referred that the severity with which religious traditions condemn homosexuality varies tremendously. The Jewish and mainline Protestant faiths are typically seen as the most liberal in the United States, followed by Catholicism [23]. In comparison to other religious groups in the U.S., conservative Protestants are typically seen as having the least welcoming attitudes. It is easy to see that the richness of religious beliefs has led to a more tolerant attitude toward homosexuality in Western countries.

In general, the historical background of the gay community in China and the West is very different. Compared to the prevalence of the gay movement in the West, the development of the struggle for gay rights in China has lagged behind. Historical and religious concepts are deeply rooted in people's minds, so there is still a long way to go for gay rights in China.

4.2 Policy of the Law in China and Western Countries

In many Western countries, homosexuality is protected by legal policies. In addition, gay marriage is legal in some countries and regions. To date, a total of 29 countries and 1 region in the world have officially recognized same-sex marriage laws. For example, the Civil Union Act, enacted on July 20, 2005, made same-sex marriage legal in Canada nationwide. Canada became the first country in North America and the fourth in the world to recognize same-sex marriage. Tina refers that legal policies regarding gay marriage were not recognized in the 1990s. Some major religious rights organizations utilize the topic of same-sex marriage to oppose lesbian and gay rights [22]. However, the LGBT community continued to demonstrate marriage equality and put pressure on the government, many continents came to support legalizing same-sex marriage. Apparently, the United States' legal position on homosexuality is fairly open-ended. According to the legal regulations issued by some countries, same-sex marriage is lawful in all English-speaking cultural circles across the world. For example, on July 20, 2005, Canada's Parliament passed the gender-neutral Civil Union Act, which legalized same-sex marriage at the federal level. On August 1, 2001, the German government allowed same-sex couples to become registered life partners and granted them most of the rights based on heterosexual marriage.

In China, however, developments in laws and regulations concerning homosexuality have lagged far behind. According to Da and Zhang, the 1979 Chinese Criminal Law provides for the crime of 'liumangzui' in relation to same-sex groups. In 1997, China's new criminal law was enacted to decriminalize homosexuality by removing the crime of 'hooliganism', which had been used to punish certain same-sex acts [21]. In April 2001, the Chinese Classification and Diagnostic Criteria for Mental Disorders removed 'homosexuality' from the list of mental illnesses, achieving a shift from the medical definition of homosexuality in China as a 'sexual perversion' to a non-pathologized one. The first case for same-sex marriage rights only emerged in 2016, but it ended with the appellant losing. Jia pointed out that in the Chinese legal system, there are cases of discrimination against homosexuals, for example, in the relevant laws and regulations, homosexuals are not protected, thus constituting "reverse discrimination", or the current legal system, to a large extent, ignores the issue of "homosexuality"[24]. The growth of homosexuality-related regulations in China is just a reflection of society's attitude toward the LGBT population. In some ways, the over-regulation of laws and the legal vacuum

represent the collective suppression of the homosexual community as an alternative society.

In conclusion, at the legal level, the Chinese and Western approaches to homosexuality are quite different. Many Western countries are gradually recognizing homosexuality and even legalizing gay marriage, and the gay movement is growing rapidly. However, the Chinese government has not yet legalized homosexuality on its agenda, and the gay movement is rare in China. Homosexual relationships, as a type of interpersonal relationship that does exist, are still a dark side of society in China's legal and other fields, which are often ignored and avoided by society.

4.3 Public Opinions Towards Homosexuality

Homosexuality is controversial around the world, and research suggests that it is significant for this topic to focus on public opinion. Even though in the same country, the attitudes towards homosexuality are different, which can be explained by the below section. Bais investigated the acceptance in Dutch society. The results show that three-quarters of LGBT people said they experienced anti-gay sentiment in their daily life. In recent decades, the acceptance of the public toward homosexuality increases visibly [25]. What kinds of reasons drive different attitudes of the public towards homosexuality? At the national level, public opinions might be dominated by legal recognition and the nation's mass media. In the individual level, religious values and education level might be mainly affected the acceptance of homosexuality. In this section, the literature reviewed will focus on public opinions from two levels, national and individual. It is important to gain support from society and family acceptance on the impact of the group LGBT's identity and health.

4.3.1 Nation Level

With the development of psychology and sociology, the level of support for homosexuality is increasing in many nations. The public policy that respects homosexuality might be a factor affecting public opinion. In some European countries, homosexuality is highly accepted because they have equal rights with heterosexuality such as civil marriages. In Canada, LGBT groups have a particular celebration day, Lesbian and Gay Pride Day. In 1991, the city of Toronto officially endorses Lesbian and Gay Pride Day. In addition, Hooghe and Meeusen indicate that the public attitude towards homosexuality depends on legal recognition. The level of discrimination against gay and lesbian in countries that recognize same-sex marriage is lower by controlling democratic stability and religious tradition. There is a charity Egale Canada contributing to maintenance gay and lesbian culture. It devotes itself into pressing sexual orientation as Canadian Human Rights Act. In addition, Welcome Friend Association provides supports for understanding LGBTQ community and activities for them. However, in China, there is no significant culture administration for LGBTQ community. In this regard, legal recognition has a significant influence on public attitudes [26]. More homosexual legal policies were released, and higher acceptance got from the public. In 1969, same-sex sexual activities were considered legalized under passing an omnibus bill in Canada.

Another factor influencing public opinion might be mass media. Since the nineteenth century, the acceptance from the public was rose through an increasing representation of gay appearing in the news, television, and movies. For example, Russia Today introduced gay rights in the United States [27]. Ayoub informed the clear correlation between media and public attitude by a survey of LGBT in 47 countries using a multi-level model [28]. Although the direct effect of social media was not significant during his examination, the channels about gay and lesbian issues have a significant impact on young people.

4.3.2 Individual Level

Homosexuality is considered negatively by Jewish and Christians [29]. People appear to be more disapproving of homosexuality according to traditional values. For example, Wang et al. examine Chinese family concern about their honor and dignity under the influence of Confucianism. If their children are homosexual, their family will be the subject of vicious gossip. In addition, the public thinks it is shame to be an LGBT individual [20]. In addition, people who had stronger religious particularistic beliefs do reject homosexuality stronger than others. The religious provides different norms and strengthens these norms in people's minds through rituals and preaching. Over time, the study showed that the higher the frequency of individuals participating in religious rituals, the more strongly they refuse homosexuality [30].

Education level might be an influencing factor affecting public opinion as well. Higher-educated people are more accepting of homosexuality than lower-educated level [31]. Firstly, students in school might be induced the tolerance of homosexuality. Secondly, schools explain complex reasons to guide individuals to accept new forms of gender education [32]. However, the evidence shows that public attitudes towards homosexuality correlated with individuals' education level, but there are also many other correlative factors such as family background, age, and gender combined together to be discussed.

The reasons causing different public opinions on homosexuality vary at national and individual levels. The government should focus on improving related legal recognition and policies about the basic rights of LGBT groups. In addition, controlling the direction of mass media is important as well. Individuals, it is hard to change the attitude of those who had strong religious beliefs towards homosexuality, but the acceptance of its particularity will be increasing with the development of society.

5 Conclusion

To conclude, this paper analyzes the attitudes of western countries, especially in the United States and China towards LGBTQ groups and the reasons for their formation from the perspective of historical background, regional culture, and humanistic quality. It can be concluded that compared with Western countries, especially the United States, Chinese society is relatively less acceptable of the gay community, and the gay community in China suffers multidimensional discrimination compared with that in Western countries. These attitudes are fundamentally influenced by Chinese traditional Confucianism and western religious ideas. Individuals, legislation, and public media also play

a role in society's attitudes toward homosexuality. This article is to analyze the procedures and problems of LGBTQ groups from a macro perspective. Finally, this paper contributes to laying a crucial foundation for the future society to formulate relevant laws and regulations for LGBTQ groups and enhance their respect and tolerance in society.

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