

Sexual Attitudes in the Chinese

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The sexual attitudes in the Chinese have been described by scholars as suppressive or nonsuppressive, based on observations made on various aspects of the Chinese culture. Many characteristics of the Chinese history and society are responsible for this controversy and confusion. The overall picture may be better understood using the developmental model propounded by some modern sociologists in the study of social units and collective behaviors. It is time to proceed from static to dynamic to try to apply this model in comprehending the sexual attitude of the Chinese and those of other cultures.

KEY WORDS: Chinese; attitudes; sexuality; culture.

INTRODUCTION

A great deal that is controversial has been written on the sexual attitudes in the Chinese, both present and past. Many Western scholars, e.g., La Barre (1946), Russel (1928), Van Gulik (1961), Bullough (1976), were impressed by and wrote extensively on the Chinese acceptance of their somatic state of being and its appetites without the puritanism and antisexual tradition of the Platonist and Judeo-Christian West. On the other hand, very different images were portrayed by some psychiatrists, transculturalists, anthropologists, and psychologists, who are mostly Chinese (Suen, 1983; Tseng and Hsu, 1970). They emphasize the Chinese reverence for propriety (*Li*), with its strict moral and social codes, leading to the suppression of sexual needs and expression. Suen went so far as to describe the Chinese culture as asexual.

This paper presents some relevant data, relates them to these controversial views, describes the factors responsible for the controversies, and sug-

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gests a change of approach by which the contradictions may be more fruitfully integrated and studied.

LEGENDARY PRACTICES

Chinese legends are full of descriptions of open sexual attitudes and behaviors. Legendary songs, games, dances, and ritual assemblies depicting free sexual relationships among ancient Chinese youths have been described by Granet (1932) as evidence of sexual freedom in primitive China. These folk practices and attitudes were believed to form the metaphysical background of later Chinese religions and philosophies.

Although legendary materials form an important source of information about primitive societies, the validity of their contents has always been open to doubt. They could well be facts or merely fantasies of those who wrote the legends. There is also no way of knowing how widely the behaviors described were actually practiced. The practices could have been recorded for their peculiarity rather than their generality. Even if the legendary behaviors were factual and generally practiced, it does not follow that because they are primitive, they must form the ideological basis of a culture.

A remarkable degree of sexual freedom is often found in primitive societies, irrespective of race (Goldenweiser, 1942; Bullough, 1976). This has been thought to be due to many factors commonly operative under such circumstances, e.g., the ignorance of the nexus between sexual intercourse and procreation, and when the nexus was known, the importance of procreation in the fertility cults (Malinowski, 1926; Frazer, 1922). Sexual permissiveness was also the case in ancient Greek and Jewish civilizations, but their Christian derivatives were characterized by a long uncompromising period of repressive sexual morality (Murstein, 1974). Briffault (1927) pointed out that primitive magico-religious rituals had two possible routes of development: one was to please, attract, conciliate, and glorify the gods, the other to avert the envy, jealousy, and threat of the supernaturals. Which route a civilization takes depends on the subsequent predominant sentiments of the culture. Primitive sexual attitudes and practices therefore can hardly be representative of the general attitudes of a culture that has continued to evolve. It makes sense therefore if one chooses to disregard primitive Chinese practices in considering the overall sexual attitudes of the Chinese.

CHINESE PHILOSOPHIES

The predominant philosophy of a culture should give a better indication of its sexual attitude. The Chinese, however, have three main streams of phil-

osophy. Although these streams interact with one another, they also have points of disagreement which create different impressions of Chinese sexual attitudes.

The Yin–Yang Doctrine

The earliest Chinese philosophy which has continued to exert its influence is the Yin–Yang doctrine, represented and elaborated by the *I Ching* of 1150–249 B.C. (Wei, 1970; Humana and Wu, 1971). In this doctrine, the universe was conceptualized as comprising the complementary male and female principles whose coming together and interaction formed all the material and nonmaterial phenomena of the universe. According to this doctrine, therefore, sex is an integral and essential element of nature and the sexual union of man and woman is simply a microcosmic functioning of the two natural forces that are constantly striving for harmony. Since this dogma is still widely observed by the Chinese, a strong argument is that its tenet, which teaches that sexual intercourse is natural and essential, must have also continued to influence the Chinese to remain basically open and receptive to sex. However, this argument is not impeccable. The exact date when the *I Ching* was first pronounced is unknown but it may be more than 3000 years ago, that is, at a time that the Chinese historians would still call legendary. The Yin–Yang concept therefore could be no more than the primitive sexual concept put into words. Considerable similarity can be noted between this concept and the primitive mentality about the universe. The latter is known to be generally direct, concrete, and practical. Its priority is not to interpret life, but to obtain what is needful for its sustenance. Baffled by their ignorance and relative helplessness over nature, the primitives had to submit and adapt to the natural forces. The more they could follow the laws of these elements, the more likely they would be able to adjust and survive, but such measures have their limits especially in a primitive society. Beyond these limits, supernatural and magical measures became their ultimate desperate attempt. The characteristics of the Yin–Yang doctrine suggest that it was an attempt of this nature. Despite an open acceptance and following of the dual forces, the teaching contains much that is magico-mystical. The *I Ching*, with its hexagrams, is in essence a book of fortune telling, an attempt to understand and follow the rules of nature, and to accommodate the inherent unreasonableness and uncertainty. When it comes to sex, its magico-mystical element creates as many myths or taboos as sexual acceptance. Many of the Chinese sexual misbeliefs and superstitions can be traced to these, e.g., the value of semen retention (Lieh-Mak and Ng, 1981), the havocs of nocturnal emission and masturbation, the undesirability of intercourse at certain times or in certain environments (Eberhard, 1967), the distastefulness of homosexual prac-

tices, etc. (Lau and Ng, 1989). In a way, these myths perpetuate an idea of sex under strict control or sexual abstinence. In many modern Kung Fu fictions, we still read how certain top-rank boxers achieved the highest level of strength, vitality, and skill by sexual abstinence or even by being castrated. These are ideas derived from the Yin—Yang doctrine carried to extreme. In the West, the puritans may denounce sex as being sinful; in the Yin—Yang doctrine, sex in certain forms can be proclaimed unhealthy or against the harmony of nature, and what is harmonious or not can be interpreted beyond discretion.

Taoism

Taoism the philosophy, represented by the work of Lao-Tzu (tr. Bynner, 1946), initially had little to say directly about sex. It considers all human desires, including sex, to be the source of trouble and suffering, but does not favor the use of discipline, rules, or moral codes to control them, for in its opinion control creates more trouble. Taoism favors letting a spontaneous occurrence run its natural course, that is to follow the Tao. In a way, it corroborates the Yin—Yang doctrine in supporting an open reception of sex and eliminates much of its magico-mystical aspect. Taoism after the period of the Warring States however very soon became mixed with religious ideas and reincorporated the occult and mythical. It perpetuated further the myths about sex by providing a pseudo-physiological explanation on the Yin—Yang exchange during sexual intercourse (Chang, 1977). The Taoist effect on Chinese sexual attitude was therefore also bipolar and as the philosophical and sexually liberal part of the teaching was difficult to understand and the Chinese had been to a large extent (80%) uneducated up to the last century, there is reason to believe that the magico-mystical portion of Taoism had taken a stronger hold. The Chinese in the street talks about *Ching* (essence), *Qui* (humor), and *Chai-Yin-Pao-Yang* (to use the female element to nourish the male), but few have read Lao-Tzu or his followers or know what their proclamations were.

Confucianism

It cannot be denied that Confucianism is, among the three philosophical currents, the superdominant one in the Chinese culture. Its influence is also the most direct for it makes social and interpersonal behavior its greatest concern. Confucius however did not make any direct ruling on sexual relationship in his teachings. We can infer from description of his personal life and activities that he was rather pragmatic about heterosexual relationships (Liu,

1955) as long as it did not interfere with social stability and good interpersonal relations. Two of his books, however, contain descriptions of very different patterns of sexual attitudes. The *Li-Chi* (Book of Rites) (tr. Harvard-Yenching Institute, 1966) describes in detail the very strict rules the royalties of the previous dynasties had to observe in all types of relationships including sexual ones; the *She-King* (Book of Odes) (tr. Legg, 1960) collected songs and poems from the peasants, some of which depicted explicit appreciation and enjoyment of sexual attractions, courtship, and sexual intercourse. It is not easy to determine what Confucius was trying to teach in these two books. The important point, however, seems to be how the Chinese interpreted the Confucian thoughts and applied them socially. As Chinese history goes, Confucianism was strictly construed only by the Neo-Confucians (De Barry *et al.*, 1960) and became a sexually suppressive doctrine from the Sung Dynasty (960–1276 A.D.) onwards. This rigid interpretation has remained unchanged in the Chinese in the last 1000 years and has appeared to form the backbone of traditional Chinese orientation in this area. It is from this version of Confucianism that the Chinese built up their suppressive sexual attitudes and behaviors so much emphasized by some observers.

HISTORICAL PRACTICES

Historians of Chinese philosophy have noted that the application of Confucianism had undergone many changes in emphasis prior to the emergence of Neo-Confucianism in the Sung Dynasty (960–1276 A.D.). In the periods of the “Spring and Autumn” and of the Warring States (770–222 B.C.), Confucianism was just one of the many philosophies that flourished, and not a very important one. When taken more seriously and put to practice by the emperors in the middle of the Han Dynasty (206 B.C. – 220 A.D.), it remained still principally as an ideal to pursue in the government for social stability. In other words, for nearly the first 1000 years of its existence, Confucianism remained in the Chinese at what Parsons (1964) called the cognitive level of value orientation and had not been crystallized into a moral system. During these 1000 years or so, sexual relationships and social life of the Chinese showed little evidence of sexual suppression. Courtship, marriage and divorce, and various types of heterosexual or homosexual relationships, were described in *Shi-chi* (Historical Record; tr. Watson, 1961), with nothing to suggest condemnation or disapproval. Historical evidence suggests that the Chinese sexual attitudes at least in the 1000 or more years before Sung Dynasty were very free and open, irrespective of what the Confucians were trying to teach, and the inhibitive and moralistic ideas about sex in the Sung Dynasty were thought only to be a reaction to social and

political instability suffered by the Chinese at the time (Bullough, 1976). Therefore, if one believes in cultural archetypes, it is not unreasonable to consider the long period of sexual openness as representing the basics of Chinese sexual attitudes and to take the post-Sung stances as temporary and superficial. A closer look into the post-Sung Chinese sexual practices gives support to this consideration. Despite widely publicized and rigorous sexual morals, it seemed that the rules were observed mostly by the scholars, striving in the social ladder, to show that they had exceptional ability or standards, or by some members of the subordinate sex who for the sake of family or personal prestige were forced to be the victims of a double standard (Pong, 1974). From the Sung Dynasty up to the last century, the sexual life of the ruling class (the emperors and high officials) was just as colorful as that of their ancient counterparts; brothels flourished as widely as ever, homosexuality was openly practiced, and rich men boasted of the numbers of homosexual partners they kept, and peasants maintained overt extramarital heterosexual contacts.

LITERATURE AND ARTS

Chinese literature tends to give an impression that the Chinese were sexually open. The ancient poems and those in the *Book of Odes* have already been mentioned. In the Chin Dynasty (265–419 A.D.), some well-known verses on homosexual love were produced (Wu, 1985). Some classical literary talks in the Tang dynasty (618–906 A.D.) gave praise to liberal courtship behaviors and the active parts females played in love relationships (Lai, 1964). The Han and Tang dynasties produced a number of female poets. Some of their creations directly revealed their libidinal emotions, e.g., wish for a man or sexual adventure, grievance, or enjoyment in marriage (Wang, 1961). After the Sung Dynasty, even after the Neo-Confucians introduced their suppressive sexual morals, poetry and novels continued to give detailed vivid descriptions of erotic feelings and behaviors, and only paid a passing reference to Neo-Confucian ethics, more out on an obligation to respect than of a genuine wish to propagate the ideas. Well-known erotic passages can be found in the classic novels: *The Story of the West Chamber* (tr. Hart, 1936), *Water Margin* (tr. Jackson, 1963), *The Journey to the West* (tr. Waley, 1942), and *The Dream of the Red Chamber* (tr. Wang, 1958). The classical novels which were at the same time Chinese erotic masterpieces, *The Golden Lotus* (tr. Egerton, 1939) and *Rou-pu-tuan* (tr. Martin, 1963), were also written in the post-Sung period. Art and paintings depicting a variety of sexual behaviors were numerous, dated as early as the Tang Dynasty (Yan, 1983). Erotic scrolls and paintings were mostly products of the post-Sung period. Some of them were illustrations to the erotic or nonerotic novels, and they have been referred

to or reprinted in works by Van Gulik (1951), Chang (1977), and Douglas and Slinger (1979).

Judging only from art and literature, the Chinese openness and acceptance of sex seem to have continued uninterruptedly to the last century. The crucial point to consider, however, is how extensively these writings or artistic productions could represent the general attitude of the Chinese. Did they only represent the life and views of the educated, the scholars, the high officials, and the well off, who together formed only a small percentage of the ancient Chinese? When these writings or art portrayed practices of the peasants, were they based on facts, on general or exceptional behavior, or simply fantasies of the authors? Could those sexually explicit poems have been selected and circulated for their representativeness or for their being special? These questions throw doubt on what art and literature can impart about sexual attitudes, especially after the Sung Dynasty, for we know that one of the effects of sexual suppression is its vicarious expression through fantasy, pornography, sadomasochism, and other at variance sexual practices. Some such expression emerged after the Sung Dynasty, e.g., the fashioning of the fetishistic bound feet (Levy, 1966), the flourish of prostitution (Wang 1935), the high increase of open homosexual behaviors (Ruan and Tsai, 1987), and some sexual sadistic forms of legal or folk punishment (Chu, 1983). The sexual materials in writings and paintings could well be also part of this form of sexual expression, and they can be compared with productions from other periods and other cultures.

CHINESE MEDICINE

The pattern of medical practice of a culture is a valuable clue to its social attitudes, for different emphasis in medicine reflects the different needs and values of the communities it serves. The well-known Chinese sex manual *Su-Nu-Jing* (The Classic of the Plain Woman) is a medical book. Scholars of Chinese medical history are of the opinion that it was written in the Han Dynasty, and by its format of presentation, could have been derived from the most ancient treatise of Chinese medicine, the *Huang-Ti-Nei-Ching* (Hong Kong Medical Research Society, 1964). There were similar books dealing with sexual disorders in nearly all subsequent periods of Chinese history, e.g., *Tung-Yin-Chi* (The Book of Tung-Yin) and *Yu-Fang-Chi-Yue* (Instructions of the Jade Chamber). Treatment modalities described in these books were mainly special techniques and exercises in sexual intercourse, but psychological advice, advice on suitable time, place, and environments for sexual intercourse, and herbal recipes were also given. Independent of these sex manuals, various other traditional treatment methods have contributed to the management of sexual problems. Herbal medicine has developed many recipes and liqueurs for aphrodisiac action, or strengthening sexual abilities. In a book which col-

lected all the available herbal prescriptions (Gong-jian-lao-ren, 1981) of this type, a total of 300 recipes were listed, which covered 3000 years of Chinese history up to the last century. Procedures of treatment for sexual dysfunctions had been devised also by acupuncturists and Kung Fu masters, and some modern researchers have supported their effectiveness (Fan, 1962; Wu, 1962).

To deduce attitude from the medical practice in the culture, one has first to differentiate between what is medicine and what is quackery. This is especially important in matters concerning sex, which are notoriously susceptible to suggestion, distortion, exaggeration, and abuse for personal gains. To get credence for their theories and products, sex quacks must present themselves under the name of medicine. The *Su-Nui-Jing* may not be a book based on conscientious observation, experimentation, or inference, but an armchair manual produced by the Taoist priests to please their rulers. It might hence not be a book to meet public needs, but simply the needs of the minority ruling class or the wealthy. Similar things may be said about other documents on sexual therapy. However, it is very difficult to distinguish quackery from orthodox Chinese medicine, because even for very authentic, effective Chinese recipes, detailed documentation is rarely available on how the therapies were discovered or derived theoretically. On the other hand, it may be argued that such distinctions are immaterial, for as long as sexual counseling has a prosperous market in a culture, whether offered by quacks or nonquacks, the sexual attitude of the people in it cannot be very restrictive.

TRIBAL PRACTICES

A valuable source of information on the history of Chinese sexual attitude is from the observation of sexual behavior in those Chinese tribes who had largely escaped from the influence of the mainstream Chinese (or the Han tribe) civilization. This source has been relatively neglected by sinologists who hold that tribal practices are not representative of the Chinese culture since these minority groups have not been "sinified." However, Chinese historians and anthropologists (Hu, 1969) pointed out that these tribes were not without links with the civilized Hans at various points in Chinese history. Some minority tribes, e.g., the Huns, the Mongols, the Manchurians, ruled China in some important periods of Chinese history. Some other tribes and aborigines were outcasts due to social, political, or environmental changes. Their sexual practice at the present time may represent that of the Hans when their contact with the latter was intense. The extent of variation in sexual practice in these tribes also gives some indication as to how far the dominant philosophical or moral doctrines had reached and influenced the masses.

From the sexual practice and attitudes of some of the aboriginal tribes, one is given the impression that in the Chinese, philosophy or moral dogma

never outwon practical need. To ensure marital bond, procreation, or property inheritance in a family in risky or difficult circumstances, sexual relationships could be manipulated to degrees which contravened conventional sexual morals or Confucian teaching (Lou, 1970). In the Wei-On district of Kiangsu, for example, a poor man who could not afford to have a permanent wife could rent one for 1 to 2 years from another man for reproduction purposes; in Chikiang, to preserve the properties of the patrilineal family and to take care of the sexual need of the widow, a man could take his brother's wife after the brother dies. For a rich family to have an additional pair of hands for services and for a poor family to be relieved from feeding one more person, a small girl could be "married" into a rich family as a child bride; in the Hakka tribe of Hunan, members of married couples were free to have extramarital sexual partners, called "male or female colleagues," and if the spouses separated, they could each go to live with his or her colleague.

The Miao tribe, according to anthropologists (Hu, 1969) could have descended from the Hans who migrated to the south circa 2000 B.C. Their sexual customs may represent those of the most ancient Chinese. They have open heterosexual relationships, courtship behavior called *Zuo Mei* (staying overnight with a girl one fancies), and free and simple marriage and remarriage procedures.

The Tibetan is also a very old tribe that probably originated from the Hans of the Chou Dynasty (1122-222 B.C.). They are fervent Buddhists, but marriage is not considered a sacred rite. One finds monogamy, polygamy, trial marriage, and temporary marriage. Also, a woman can be shared among a number of brothers.

Tending to be suppressive are the sexual practices of the Pai-I and the Mongols. The Pai-I of Yunnan are supposed to be the posterity of the Sung nobilities who migrated to the southwest in the 13th century consequent to the Mongolian invasion. They practice a form of trial marriage, but class commensuration is strictly observed in the choice of a sexual partner, and virginity in a girl is highly valued. The Mongolian is a tribe independent of the Hans, but since it ruled China in the 14th century, its sexual practice and references may represent those of the post-Sung era. The Mongolians of the present time have free courtship, but marriages are strictly monogamous and require parental consent. Weddings include complex consecrating ceremonies.

MODERN CHINESE

The other group of Chinese we can directly observe is the modern Hans. However, some of them have received Western and Christian influence so

much that they have acquired many sexually suppressive attitudes, for example, towards homosexuality, extramarital sex, and prostitution (Family Planning Association of Hong Kong, 1989). In the People's Republic of China, official and professional pronouncement often give an impression of high and rigid sexual morals. Pi (1958) advised that young women should express sexual feelings in marriage only, and emphasized the prevention of venereal diseases; Pi (1958) and Han (1973) recommended a coital frequency of once or twice a week as the norm; Yiu *et al.* (1985) wrote strongly against losing one's virginity before marriage and drew attention that premarital sex was an offense by law. Physicians in the People's Republic of China frequently claimed that sexual deviations are rarely seen (Ruan and Tsai, 1988). From the Chinese communities in Taiwan, Singapore, and Hong Kong, however, came reports of transsexualism (Wen, 1979; Tsoi *et al.*, 1977), homosexuality (Wen and Chen, 1980; Lau and Ng, 1989), and treatment of sexual dysfunctions (Ng, 1988; Lieh and Ng, 1981; Feng, 1987; Wen, 1981). It appears that the facility of communication and transportation in these regions has led to admixture of ideas from diverse cultures and schools, and added conflicts and inconsistencies to already complicated attitudes.

DISCUSSION

Factors for Variation

To emerge from the dilemma created by the conflicting evidence, the wealth of information must be sorted out and reexamined for the construction of testable hypotheses. During this process, certain features common to civilizations and some characteristics of the Chinese culture which can cause variation and controversy in sexual attitudes must also be considered. These features and characteristics can have effects on the following.

The Source of Sexual Knowledge

Attitudes are dispositions to face the external world, known or unknown. In a primitive society, personal experience and encounters with those in close contact would be the major source to rely on, and much depends on instinct, intuition, and introspection. In an advanced society, however, the source of knowledge becomes very much contingent on the interest of the ruling class or the power elite, usually including an educated group, the intelligentsia or literati. The fountainheads of sexual knowledge are religious

or philosophical doctrines and concepts, and products of scientific experimentation and theories, including medical, clinical, sociological, ethological studies. The Chinese have a well-developed system of relevant knowledge and thoughts, but much of it is too idealistic and abstract, making it susceptible to varying interpretations.

Observation and Reasoning

Ideally, knowledge is received undistorted and theories are formed through objective reasoning. However, this can rarely be the case as philosophers or scholars never exist in a vacuum. A sexual doctrine, usually part of a broader philosophical system, tends to conform to the latter's specific aims, practical or spiritual. In Confucianism and Taoism, sexual codes could have been intended to please the ruling class or for other manipulative political purposes. Some sexual standards were instituted to suit the prevalent or model social ideology, e.g., humanism, egalitarianism, or rationalism. Other ideas and rules may be modified as a result of unrestrained imagination, wish-fulfilling notions, armchair philosophizing, or whims of the established philosophers.

Communication

After sexual norms and standards are set, how would these be disseminated to the public at large? In China, before the invention of printing (in the Han Dynasty, 206 B.C.–220 A.D.), how reliable were the sexual norms communicated by words of mouth or model setting? Would this explain, for example, the differences between the practice of the nobilities described in the *Book of Rites*, and the behavior of the peasants portrayed in the *Book of Odes*? Even when books could be printed, how did ideas reach the illiterate, who constituted the majority of the Chinese before this century? If the means of communication had been quite ineffective, there is reason to believe that what was taught by the philosophers, practiced by the educated and the higher classes, need not be observed by the uneducated or lower classes. On the other hand, with the development of modern advanced communication media the populace may suffer from information overload, and the problem becomes one of sorting out conflicting messages which have caused ambiguities in sexual attitudes. In the reverse direction, since the gurus obtain feedback more readily, they would be challenged to reexamine their statements more often and may facilitate a rapid change of attitudes and norms.

On the level of individual psychology, messages can also be distorted through condensation, abstraction, elaboration, misunderstanding, misinterpretation, impaired judgment, and workings of personal defense mechanisms.

The Target of Application of Sexual Standards

In the elucidation of sexual standards, there is a tendency to focus on what these standards are with a relative omission on how and to whom they should be applied. One takes for granted that they must be aimed at people of all types and at all levels, and form part of the superego of every one. This need not be true, as philosophers and trend setters may be speaking only for people of their own class or of their interest groups. There are at least three other principles of sexual standard application, and they can simultaneously engender discrepancies in sexual attitudes within a culture.

1. There can be the tolerant principle that although the standards should ideally be universal, subjects should be exhorted but not compelled to follow. The standards are set forward to the public as ego-ideals and deviance is considered less ego-syntonic but not necessarily ego-dystonic. In the Chinese, this principle is likely to have caused some inconsistencies in sexual attitudes, e.g., the tolerance towards homosexuality and prostitution in the moralistic post-Sung periods.

2. Another principle is to apply the standards to the elite only, with little attention paid to the rest of the world, e.g., the lower class, the servants, the slaves, the savage.

3. Double or multiple standards are applied to different groups in a time, differentiated not only by class but also by sex, occupation, religion, age, etc., causing more confusion.

The Strength of Enforcement of the Sexual Standards

Even in one culture, some sexual standards are more strongly enforced than others. A standard can be applied in a mild and lax manner, consisting of exhortation only; or it can be encoded in laws and/or religious or moral tenets for strict enforcement with intense surveillance and harsh penalties. Between these extremes are legal or moral tenets with many loopholes, escapes, excuses, and mild penalties; or ambiguous guidelines entrenched in social and cultural customs, with the deviants ostracized, stigmatized, and demoralized. Such variation in enforcement gave support to both the suppressionists and the liberalists, who could make selection of sexual attitudes in favor of their respective theories.

Conformity

Besides individual differences in interpretation, responses, and conformity, variations among groups or classes can lead to biased generalizations. Confucius had thought of two classes of citizens: *jun-zi* (the exemplary) and

xiao-ren (the nonexemplary); and consciously and unconsciously, the Chinese tend to identify themselves with either one of these. Among the exemplary class, there are always some extremely conscientious and compulsive people who follow the letters of instruction to perfection, to meet the most ideal of sexual attitudes. They may become saints, idols, martyrs, and immortalized by poets, writers, and historians. Others in the class would pay lip service to the standards, but indulge in some deviation from them, secretly or openly with certain rationalizations. Among the nonexemplary, there may also be varying types of responses. Some may feel the standards unreasonable, but would obey the teachings mostly out of fear of punishment; some may disobey by finding loopholes in the standards, making excuses for themselves, or going underground to form a subculture, the effect of which may not be insignificant. There are of course those who would openly ignore or challenge the taboos or inhibitions, and those who are ignorant of the standards and simply follow their instincts or what is practical and expedient for a situation. With such variation of responses, one has to be very cautious in stating which types of practice and attitudes were representative of the Chinese, even at any one point in time and place.

The Developmental Approach

The many factors and possibilities to consider in elucidating Chinese sexual attitudes reminds one of the age-old problem of consensus versus conflict or structure versus process in understanding social phenomena. In sociological terms, our failure so far is probably due to a biased devotion to the consensus model or the structural approach. We have attended too much to shared ideas, shared traditions, shared ways of perceiving and understanding the world, and given excessive weight to the persistence of these ideas as determinants of behaviors. In analyzing abstract social units and collective behaviors, we have ignored the individual and the interaction within and between groups and have not attempted to ascertain the implicit culture from the explicit.

In studying sexual attitudes in the Chinese, in view of the long history, multiple changes, and the magnitude of diversity and controversy, the conflict approach might be the more appropriate. This approach conceives the society as an arena of actual and potential conflicts, the struggling with and the manipulation of which determine its future development. Its main concern is not so much the manifestation of behaviors, but the process of their formation, i.e., the internal stress and tension that produce and extinguish the behaviors or maintain an equilibrium between the incompatible ones. The idea

is towards the formation of a developmental model. An early propounder of this model is Tylor (1865/1964) who believed that culture evolves in successive stages: from savagery through barbarism to civilization. Elaborating on this model from a psychological standpoint, Freud (1913/1961) equated primitive mental mechanisms with the way that primeval people thought and behaved. He advocated a psychological counterpart of the recapitulation theory and that civilization represents the ultimate repression and sublimation of the host of primordial impulses. Although his view appears too simplistic and sweeping, and is against the principle of cultural relativism, it suggests a way by which we can look at and understand sexual attitudes developmentally. If the mind has its instincts, functional units, consciousness and subconsciousness, and its psychosexual development, it may be fruitful to trace the various conflicting elements in a culture using parallel terms, for culture is but the product of a collection of people, and cultural institutions according to Freud can be looked upon as their collective projections.

The sociological principle and method of applying this developmental model has been outlined by Moore (1978). His principle begins with the acknowledgment of multiple factors, external as well as internal, as the determinants of change. Changes are then looked upon as adaptations to these factors with multiple patterns and directions. Methodologically, he calls for the identification and ordering of the principal segments of social systems. The patterns and interrelations of these segments are then to be analyzed, by throwing onto each segment the following insistent questions: (i) What are the intrusive dynamics of this segment? (ii) What changes are the orderly consequences of intersegment functional interaction? (iii) What are the predictable leads, lags, and tensions? (iv) What are the reliable consequences for whole societies of these trends and interplays? (v) What can be painted with a broad brush on large canvases about intersociety relations and the trend of humankind generally?

For human sexual attitudes much has been collected longitudinally and cross-sectionally, especially in the Chinese culture, owing to its long history and colorful civilization. It is time to proceed from static to dynamic, to try to use the developmental approach to work out an evolutionary theory of sexual attitudes, first in the Chinese and later in other cultures. The contribution should go not only to the further understanding of human sexuality or the establishment of a discipline of transcultural sexology (Dewaraja and Money, 1986) but also to the advancement of behavioral sciences and theories in general.

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