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Linda Garber

*Santa Clara University*, [lgarber@scu.edu](mailto:lgarber@scu.edu)

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## Where in the World Are the Lesbians?

Linda Garber

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In 2001 I became, as far as I can tell, the first person hired at a Catholic university specifically because of my work in LGBTQ studies. I am blessed, as it were, with a departmental colleague who publishes widely in postcolonial queer studies, a colleague in another department who teaches queer U.S. history every two years, and many supportive friends on the faculty. Still, I am the most public face of LGBTQ studies on campus, and if a new queer studies course is added to the curriculum, I am likely to be the one who develops it. Over the years I have come to realize that my role is not unusual, Catholic university or not. I was in a similar position at a large state university for seven years and have several friends and acquaintances across the country, at a variety of institutions, in similar spots. Most of us are not lucky enough to work among even a small clustering of others teaching in our field, even if we do have colleagues who assign queer theory in their courses or publish on queer topics. Of necessity, this makes us chameleons, generalists. As an interdisciplinary scholar with an interdisciplinary PhD, I feel suited to the role.

Nevertheless, as an Americanist I was cautious when the coordinator of women and gender studies asked me to develop an LGBTQ course to fulfill the university's "global" core requirement and year-long curriculum "globalization" initiative. But when

I asked myself and my coordinator, “If not me, who?,” the answer was, clearly, “No one.” A scholar in a comparatively new field, hired as an interdisciplinary curricular innovator, I have more flexibility than she, a noted Asianist working in a traditional discipline. She saw the need and opportunity for the course because of her campus experience and scholarly expertise; she asked me to develop it because of my institutional position. I would hazard a guess that no campus, especially an undergraduate university, has experts in all of the areas and disciplines with which it makes sense to pair queer studies in the curriculum. One of us would have had to stretch to develop a course in Asian LGBTQ studies; my position makes it easy for me, in fact requires it of me.<sup>1</sup> So, rather than keeping my queer course offerings to my area of specialization (late twentieth-century U.S. lesbian writers), rather than leaving the “global” Core Curriculum straight, and rather than steering my own research clear of one of the hottest things going in LGBTQ Studies, I dove in. Relying on my colleague’s advice when I felt out of my depth, I developed the now-regular course offering called Asian Gay and Lesbian Cultures. The primary consequence of my lack of expertise in Asian studies is my reliance on sources published in English, a limitation I share with almost all of my students. (This restriction shapes the course’s focus on India, China, Japan, and their diasporas, about which there is more published in English than about the rest of queer Asia.) I quickly came up against a second daunting limitation, inherent in the available source material itself, which I have come to think of as the Woman Problem in Queer Studies.

Why, I wonder, do we keep reinventing the wheel? How come every time “queer studies” looks in a new direction it seems to reproduce the same “male homosexual

studies”? Like academia in general, the field that gave us *Gender Trouble* has gender trouble of its own. “Lesbian studies,” born from a combination of the women’s and gay liberation movements, was in part a reaction against a male-dominated, nascent “gay studies” in the early 1970s. Sexism drove many lesbians from gay organizations – the Gay Activist Alliance, the National Gay Task Force, the Gay Liberation Front – just as it had driven women from many Left organizations to the Women’s Liberation Movement.<sup>2</sup> Though a few women were present from the early days of the Gay Academic Union in New York in 1973, they were greatly outnumbered: seven to one at the first spontaneous discussion, forty to six at a meeting devoted to sexism among gay men and equality for women in the organization (D’Emilio 121, 123). The group’s statement of purpose ultimately gave powerful voice to women’s issues, but the prevailing sexism of the gay men involved continued to alienate many lesbians (D’Emilio 123-25; Loughery 345; Richter; Bart, et al.)

The twin concerns of participation and representation have always been at issue in what we now tend to call “queer studies.” Who is studying (or teaching about) whom? By the 1990s, when queer theory emerged as the dominant voice in LGBTQ studies, women were participating in large numbers, both doing queer theory and questioning it from a lesbian studies position. (And, as had happened with gay activism twenty years earlier, lesbians were both involved in Queer Nation and had split off to form the Lesbian Avengers.) Despite queer theory’s female luminaries, most notably Judith Butler and Eve Sedgwick, its favored theoretical points of reference (Foucault, Lacan, Freud) and most famous subjects (drag queens, male British authors) consistently were men. A decade later, many of the references are to Butler and Sedgwick, but the larger point still

holds. For all its insightful theorizing about the performance of gender, queer theory came rather late to talking about lesbians, and some critics feel it has yet to adequately consider either gender or ethnicity.<sup>3</sup> Many lesbian studies practitioners, setting themselves against what they saw as the elitist invocation of psychoanalytic and poststructuralist “high theory,” were hesitant to embrace queer theory’s contributions.<sup>4</sup> With the two factions quarrelling, the traditional male bias of the academy held sway, and queer theory flourished. Despite thirty years of lesbian studies – at its best (though by no means always) a vigorously multicultural field – by the turn of the century the celebrated face of queer studies was more white and male than our combined efforts could have produced.

What, then, of the recent globalization of the field? Taken to task for its white, male bias in the United States and Britain, is queer studies doing any better as it roams the world? The answer is yes and no. In a general sense, queer studies fares no better or worse than the larger capitalist project of globalization, which carries potentially liberating and imperialist consequences at the same time. The U.S. government publicly expressed concern about the oppression of women in Afghanistan, for example, but the putative feminism of the White House coincided conveniently with a desire to invade the country in the name of liberation. U.S. queer culture is traveling the world, thanks largely to the internet, but as Dennis Altman has pointed out, it is primarily a business trip. Commercial enterprises are “the most obvious indicator” of the “new gay world” according to Altman (19-21). Queer communities and political movements from Bangkok to Rio variously, sometimes simultaneously, embrace and resist the hegemony of what Altman calls “the global gay” (20) in a complex interplay of culture and political

economy (29-36). Scholars, certainly, do not exist outside the nexus of cultural exportation. What do we, in the United States, look for in texts and field research? How has the evolution of queer studies in the United States shaped the very questions we ask, and informed the ways in which we try to take care *not* to impose our agendas on different cultural situations?

My own teaching and scholarship have been shaped by the field of women's studies and the larger feminist movement. So when I began researching queer Asia to develop my syllabus, I immediately noticed that nearly all of the book-length studies are written by and about men, and most anthologies favor men over women. Though articles about women's same-sex relationships do exist, they are vastly outnumbered by articles about men, and they also are scattered across a wide bibliographic range, much less accessible to undergraduates than books I can order for my library's stacks. (Sadly, the increasing availability of full-text on-line journal articles does little to outweigh the combination of most undergraduates' poor research skills and the complexity of navigating myriad, idiosyncratic database search tools. This presents an enormous problem at research paper time, the one opportunity students have to study a particular topic in depth in a survey course.) My desire to shape a course with gender parity clearly reflects my training, and my location and historical moment in the academy. As recently as ten years ago, with a faculty appointment in a degree-granting women's studies program and a background in lesbian studies, I might have attempted to design a course about lesbians and bisexual women in Asia. The ground of queer studies has since shifted to the co-sexual, and I suspect there are fewer lesbian studies courses than lesbian-and-gay or queer studies courses offered nationwide. As one of two people on

my campus teaching courses focusing on lesbian or gay people, gender inclusiveness seems the right choice for a survey in the Core Curriculum. Still, my efforts to include women on equal footing with men is surely due to my women's studies background, lesbian studies scholarship, and quite possibly the fact that I'm a woman. It seems reasonable, perhaps even obvious (if outré), to assume that male authorship is part of the reason that all but one of the book-length studies I found on queer China and Japan focus on men.

Bias alone cannot explain the phenomenon, however. In fact, the influence of feminism in queer studies is evident in academic authors' justifications for their neglect of women's sexuality. Most describe the choice as consistent with different constructions of male and female sexuality in history, and in the specific histories of China and Japan.<sup>5</sup> Bret Hinsch's explanation in *Passions of the Cut Sleeve: The Male Homosexual Tradition in China* is representative:

Instead of a 'homosexual tradition,' it might be more accurate to speak of the 'male homosexual tradition.' Unlike modern Western society, which sees male homosexuality and lesbianism as related, the Chinese viewed them as completely separate forms of sexuality. A Chinese woman reading about the history of homosexual men would not have drawn a parallel with female sexuality.

Consequently, what I say about the 'homosexual' tradition in China applies only to men. (6-7)

Hinsch's point about the historical construction of sexuality in China is of course well taken, and it provides one of many opportunities to discuss social constructionism in class. Hinsch goes on to explain that when he searched for information about lesbianism in Imperial China (the anachronistic terminology is his), he found only enough to fill a six-page appendix (7). While his statement is no doubt true, it reveals the limitation of much queer studies research without helping students understand the researcher's role in perpetuating it. Tze-lan Sang usefully challenges Hinsch's assertion of the scarcity of material about female-female desire in Imperial China, in the only book-length discussion of lesbians in China available in English. In *The Emerging Lesbian: Female Same-Sex Desire in Modern China*, Sang disassembles Hinsch's argument that women had few opportunities to spend time together, and she finds a great deal of evidence of "romantic love and desire between women" in "certain genres of minor literature" from the late Imperial period (44, 45).

The exclusion or marginalization of women becomes more suspect in Asian queer studies texts whose scope brings them into the twentieth century. By that time the European and North American construction of homosexuality, encompassing same-sex love whether male or female, had traveled to Asia and been incorporated into first medical or legal and then popular discourse. Gregory M. Pflugfelder admits his decision to exclude women, although his study of the discourse of male-male sexuality in Japan extends until 1950:

Although the emergence of the "same-sex love" construct from the end of the nineteenth century entailed a new understanding not only of male-male



but also of female-female erotic practices and desire, the discursive construction of female-female sexuality in Japan demands a more thoroughgoing treatment than I am able to give it here. (Pflugfelder, *Cartographies* 14)

A colleague of mine in graduate school used to call this the scholar's "Gotta run," an acknowledgement that something is important, but not quite worth the author's valuable time. There are thirty-three brief citations to female-female sexuality in Pflugfelder's thick historical tome. The only lengthy ones – comprising three pages – refer to the legal regulation of female-female sexuality in the late nineteenth century. Notably, there is a subsection indexing "male-male sexuality as isolated from" female-female sexuality. Pflugfelder does cite his own forthcoming essay on the subject of female-female sexuality in early twentieth-century Japan, but does not preview its contents in his book (14-15n22). And, to be fair, the 350-year span of his study makes the confluence of male-male and female-female sexuality a relatively small part of his overall picture.

To understand how Japan's history of sexuality differs from and resembles the model with which U.S. students are more familiar, it is helpful to emphasize Pflugfelder's explanation that Japanese medical authorities coined equivalents to "homosexuality" as early as 1890, though the standard term *doseiai* ("same-sex love") would not come into common usage until the 1920s (*Cartographies* 248). Jennifer Robertson's *Takarazuka*, the only book-length study focusing substantially on Japanese women's cross-gender behavior and same-sex love, provides a pedagogically useful companion to Pflugfelder's male-centered discursive history. According to Robertson, *doseiai* was coined at the turn

of the century “to refer specifically to a passionate, but supposedly platonic, friendship between females, although sexologists found it difficult to distinguish friendship from homosexuality among girls and women: where did one end and the other begin?” (68). Thus, the term that became the standard for referring to homosexuality in both men and women in Japan seems to have its origins in female same-sex love, an etymology that Pflugfelder fails to discuss.<sup>6</sup> The adoption of *doseiai* as the generic term coincided with the first linkage between male and female same-sex orientations (Pflugfelder, *Cartographies* 248; Miller 12).

Studies of same-sex love in contemporary Japan and China make reference to the historically separate conceptualization of men’s and women’s sexuality, but must give other reasons for continuing to emphasize men over women in the present day. Despite the existence of lesbian social and political community in Japan, Mark McLelland chose to ignore them when he wrote a book titled *Male Homosexuality in Modern Japan*, published in 2000. McLelland argues that lesbians and gay men rarely interact, and that gay Japanese men are as misogynist as men in the general population (109-14). Wim Lunsing’s essay “Japan: Finding Its Way,” provides a curricular counterpoint to McLelland’s male-centered perspective. Lunsing begins with an assessment of “the first recorded attempts at lesbian and gay political organization in Japan,” includes information about lesbians and gay men working together in political organizations as well as lesbians meeting separately or with broader feminist groups, and documents “a striking increase in lesbians who are involved in lesbian and gay activism” (293, 306-7).<sup>7</sup>

Research methods and choice of source material clearly influence the gender balance of scholarly texts on queer Asian culture and history. Chou Wah-shan in his

book *Tongzhi: Politics of Same-Sex Eroticism in Chinese Societies* devotes one chapter and part of another to women and feminism, and references them throughout, but the book primarily deals with male homosexuality in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the People's Republic of China. In his initial study, Chou interviewed forty men and twenty women in Hong Kong in 1995; he interviewed an additional 320 people over a longer period but does not provide a gender breakdown of the larger group, leaving readers to wonder whether it has the same two-to-one ratio of men to women. Neither does Chou describe how he contacted interview subjects, though he reveals that he had published seven books on the subject before the interviews and is a gay activist with contacts in Hong Kong, Beijing, and Taipei (8). Sang notes that of the "significant number of works describing homosexual existence in contemporary mainland China...produced by local and transnational Chinese [authors]...the subject in focus is the same – gay men" (169). The gender bias of McLelland's study is perhaps more easily explained by the source of his interviews, mainly internet sites where men meet to initiate social and sexual interactions, a place without lesbians to contact (16). Neither, of course, would a woman have access to McLelland's sources. To be sure, McLelland's methods lead to a rich sociological resource; I am not suggesting that such work is without value, but rather that its explanation for studying only male homosexuality (inadvertently?) undermines the study of lesbian existence. McLelland and Chou focus on contemporary queer cultures that present ample evidence to discuss women as well as men; however, both introduce studies that focus either exclusively or primarily on men with historical background that emphasizes the scarcity of sources on women-women sexuality in history and the differences between men's and women's same-sex erotic cultures. If only the available

English-language texts offered as rich a source for teaching lesbian *and* gay queer studies as they do opportunities to teach students how research methodologies predict results.

### *Challenging the Foucauldian Orthodoxy*

Any queer scholarly treatment of the history of sexuality inevitably leads to Michel Foucault, whether his Introduction to *The History of Sexuality* is explicitly referenced or not. And, in fact, I hand out a passage from the book on the first day of class to facilitate a basic discussion of the social construction of sexuality. Foucault placed the birth of “the homosexual” in 1870, and while the date differs from place to place, culture to culture, the notion of a time before and after the birth of the social construct “homosexuality” is referenced so frequently and applied so widely that the phenomenon deserves a name: I call it the Foucauldian Orthodoxy. In its strictest form it prohibits any discussion of homosexuality before 1870 or outside the so-called West.

While the adoption of the European discourse of homosexuality pathologized same-sex love for the first time in Japan, students in my course learn that the process does not map directly onto Foucault’s description of what happened in North America and Europe. Foucault famously wrote “the sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species” (43). Far from being an aberration, however, sex between men had been a recognized and thoroughly documented choice for hundreds of years in Japan. A wealth of historical texts and visual art relay the discourse of male sexuality in Japan, where the generic term for male-male eroticism as early as the

seventeenth century was *nanshoku*. The “companion term” *joshoku* refers to male “love of females” (Pflugfelder, *Cartographies* 24-25).<sup>8</sup> While “homosexual” and “heterosexual” derive from medical sources and refer to types of identity, *nanshoku* and *joshoku* derive from Buddhism and were widely used in popular discourse (Pflugfelder, *Cartographies* 25-26). McLelland, citing Foucault’s work as “fundamental” to his approach, argues that the notion of sexuality as constituting an “identity” in Japan is relatively new and not particularly helpful in understanding how the majority of men who have sex with men in Japan see themselves (2-4). The importation of the medical model of homosexuality changed ideas about same-sex eroticism in Japan (linking male and female sexual desire and introducing the concept of sexual identity), but evidently not in the same ways it did in Europe and North America, given their divergent histories.

The transformation of China’s traditional tolerance of male same-sex intimacy in China happened over a longer period of time, and for different reasons. China emerged from devastating losses in the First Opium War and Sino-Japanese War with changed attitudes toward the usefulness of western developments in science. During the Republican Period, 1912-1949, western concepts were imported in the service of rebuilding Chinese national strength (Chou 43-44).<sup>9</sup> Homosexuality appeared infrequently in Chinese medical texts during the period, but “a wide spectrum of conception of same-sex desire and correlative value judgments” were introduced to China through translations of Magnus Hirschfeld, Havelock Ellis, Iwan Bloch, Richard von Krafft-Ebing, Sigmund Freud, and Edward Carpenter (Sang 100). Chinese sexologists seem to have been less concerned with identifying and vilifying homosexual persons than with regulating sexuality in general to serve the procreative ends of building a strong

Chinese republic. The condemnation of homosexuality typically facilitated by European sexology as it spread around the globe did not occur in China until the Communist revolution in 1949, when the government used the issue as part of a campaign to root out foreign influences and enforce loyalty to the family and the state (Chou 54, Sieber 165).

In India, the importation route for European ideas about same-sex eroticism was legal, not medical discourse. Like China and Japan, India has a long history and literature of same-sex love between men. The institution of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code by the British colonial government in 1860 outlawed sodomy, making the act of “carnal intercourse against the order of nature” illegal as it was in England. “Homosexuality” had not yet entered the British lexicon and was never outlawed per se, although Section 377 was and still is used to persecute men who have sex with men and to mobilize homophobic cultural forces.<sup>10</sup> The 1895 conviction of Oscar Wilde in Britain under more recent “indecent” laws added to the fear of men who had sex with men in India, where British newspapers circulated widely.<sup>11</sup> The British government, still in control of India, no longer merely prosecuted acts, but clearly persecuted homosexual men (Vanita and Kidwai 195). Thus, in India, China, and Japan it may be argued that it was proscriptions and prescriptions against homosexuality, not homosexuality itself, that were imported into culturally and historically different situations after the celebrated invention of the notion in Europe in or around 1870.

My point is not that Foucault was wrong; though I might stop short of David Halperin’s memorable pronouncement that “the guy was a fucking saint” (6), I value his contributions as much as the next social-constructionist LGBTQ scholar. Rather, I suggest that like every discourse, Foucault’s has its limits, and they are made clear in his

own descriptive analysis of the birth of homosexuality in a European context. The widespread application of the Foucauldian Orthodoxy to the global arena risks misusing the historical and cultural specificity of its own origin. Sang, for one counterexample, principally follows Foucault in her analysis of modern China but asserts that his ideas “are insufficient to provide a precise understanding of the change in question.” Rather than “a radical rupture in sexual episteme ushered in by the discipline of psychopathology,” Sang finds that the transformation in China “was first and foremost a matter of discursive proliferation and diversification” (17). Queer scholarship on India suggests that it is not so much that homosexuality is a “Western,” time-specific construct, as that its specificity and historicity differ across cultures. Ruth Vanita, the most prominent scholar of gay and lesbian India in the United States, devotes two books to questioning the Foucauldian Orthodoxy. Once challenged, reductive Foucauldianism gives way to more nuanced applications of Foucault’s insights, opening up space in the classroom for various cultural renderings of same-sex love, including the love between women that has otherwise been ignored or dismissed as an impossible object of study.

For all of Foucault’s brilliant insights into the workings of power and discourse, and his invaluable historicization of sexual identity in Europe, the growing literature of the history of sexuality in China, Japan, India, and elsewhere make it clear that he blundered monumentally when he consigned sexuality in an undifferentiated mass of societies to a mysterious *ars erotica*, as opposed to the *scientia sexualis* with which “our society has equipped itself” (Foucault 57, 67). This shockingly large cultural blind spot undoubtedly fuels some of the vitriol of a critic like Giti Thadani, an activist and co-founder of the Sakhi lesbian archives in New Delhi, who refers to “a limited postmodern

understanding [that] obliterates the complex tensions of biological differences, politics and social constructs” in Indian history (8). Vanita asserts that plenty of evidence exists in ancient and medieval Indian texts to substantiate both the idea of premodern homosexual identities and the discussion of male and female sexualities in tandem before the advent of Foucault’s *scientia sexualis*. Her argument with the Foucauldian Orthodoxy offers students a valuable lesson in queer historiography at the same time that it promotes class discussion of the implicit biases of other assigned readings.

In the anthology *Same-Sex Love in India*, a prominent text on my syllabus, co-editors Vanita and Saleem Kidwai trace homoerotic themes and mentions of same-sex behaviors in historical texts. The linchpin of their argument contra the Foucauldian Orthodoxy, however, is their inclusion and explanation of various terms that existed to categorize the people who experienced the emotions and performed the acts. These identities do not conform to the bifurcated hetero-homo model of Europe and North America in the late nineteenth century but instead pose other models in different cultural contexts. In both *Same-Sex Love in India* and *Queering India*, Vanita points to the *Kamasutra*, which, beyond its illustrious catalog of sexual practices and positions, “attempts to categorize those who are given to these types of behavior.” For example, the text makes reference to men of “the third nature” (*tritiya prakriti*), whether masculine or feminine in appearance, who desire other men (Vanita and Kidwai 24, 48). The *Sushruta Samhita*, a medical text of the “epic period...approximately the last centuries B.C.E. up to the fourth century C.E.,” terms men who can only be aroused by performing oral sex on other men *A’sekya* (Vanita and Kidwai 24, 26). Thadani goes farther, translating the same text’s term *shand* as male homosexual and *shandali* as the “equivalent” of the



*shand*, that is a woman “who ‘desires like a man’ (*narchesta*)” (58-59).<sup>12</sup> Vanita finds additional evidence in the Sanskritic tradition, as Kidwai does in the Perso-Urdu tradition, from the medieval period.<sup>13</sup> Kidwai discusses the primary importance in the Muslim tradition of the *ghazal* or love poem, which commonly “depicts romantic and erotic interaction between men across class and religious divides” (108). Urdu poetry of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is especially known for its frank homoeroticism, and many individual poets were known to “form networks with other men who were [homosexually] inclined.” More than one term survives for these men who loved men, and “none...is derogatory. They were mostly referred to as boy worshipers (*amrad parast*), worshipers of beauty (*husn parast*), professional lovers (*ishq peshā*), or of colorful/amorous temperament (*rangeen/ashiq mijaaz*)” (119). The flourishing urban environments of the bazaars provided opportunities for men who desired men to interact, hence the term “bazaar boys” to refer to men so inclined (108). The poet Abru (c.1683-1733) was so identified with male homoeroticism that his name seems to have had the same cachet as Wilde’s would acquire two hundred years later in England; according to Kidwai, “contemporaries indicated the sexual preferences of other poets...by knowingly labeling them ‘Abru’s friends’” (119).

From the same period, Urdu poetry uses the term *chapti* (clinging or sticking together) to describe sex between women and also the women who engaged in the practice (Vanita and Kidwai xxi). Vanita holds up the example of *chapti*, a term still in use, to argue that notions of same-sex sexual identity predate “any importation of nineteenth-century European psychologists’ terminology” (xxi). The close textual proximity of *chapti* and the love poems of the *amrad parast* is one of the “many”

justifications in tradition that Vanita and Kidwai find for “examining representations of female and male homoeroticism together” (xviii). Vanita and Kidwai do not appear to ascribe to an essentialist understanding of homosexuality. Rather, they illustrate how to marshal evidence to make a historiographical case at variance with the Foucauldian Orthodoxy, arguing that societies have constructed sexual identities in different ways at different times. In other words, while Foucault’s specific genealogy of “the homosexual” may stand for Europe and North America, his history of sexuality does not exhaust the history of sexual identities for all time or the whole world. As a careful student of Foucault might expect, his historical narrative is not exempt from its own insights about the particularities of discourse.

*Naming Names: The Terminology Taboo*

Teaching lesbian history always involves demonstrating how to interrogate what “lesbian history” is or can be, and for more than thirty years lesbian studies and activism have been centrally concerned with the axiomatic question, “What is a lesbian?”<sup>14</sup> Questions of ownership and application of the term have been rife in politically charged conversations and the academic literature. Judith Halberstam’s *Female Masculinity* is a notable case in point as it intervenes in the debate under the terms of the new transgender studies. Halberstam’s project is to construct “a framework within which we can study pre-twentieth-century cross-identifying women without reading them always as lesbians who lack a liberating and identitarian discourse” (52). She calls for a “perverse

presentism” by which our contemporary uncertainties about the nature of gender identity and sexuality are allowed as uncertainties that may have existed in the past. As opposed to Halberstam’s more nuanced Foucauldian approach, the Foucauldian Orthodoxy holds that applying contemporary terms to the past in any circumstance violates what could be called the social-constructionist prime directive, throwing up a large roadblock in the path of both lesbian and transgender history.

Vanita argues that the terminology taboo is wrongheaded and unproductive. Despite the brilliance with which a scholar like Pflugfelder evokes the geographic and temporal foreignness of the concept “homosexuality” to seventeenth-century Japan (*Cartographies* 23-29), Vanita has a point when she asserts that the terms scholars “carefully use...to talk about the past,” such as “*homoerotically inclined, queer, or alternative sexualities*” are themselves problematic, presentist social constructions. Further, she points out that careful scholarly use of historically appropriate and culturally indigenous terms such as “*amradparast, tritiya prakriti, or dogana*” implies that their meaning is today transparent. Finally, Vanita argues persuasively that the meanings of such seemingly unproblematic terms as “*family, marriage, slave, master, law, woman, or man,*” when applied historically or cross-culturally, are no less ambiguous and inexact (4-5). If Vanita takes this argument to a ridiculous extreme when she suggests that only scholars who “write...in Persian about Persian texts and...in Sanskrit about Sanskrit texts” could be completely authentic, her rhetoric drives her point home (5).

Both Vanita and Thadani openly state the contemporary political stakes of deploying the terms *homosexual, gay, and lesbian* outside of their historical and cultural contexts of origin. Thadani claims “lesbian” as “a political choice, as it foregrounds

erotic and sexual desire between women” (9). In fact, that is the thrust of her entire project, contra conservative forces in India that claim that homosexuality is a corrupt foreign import (6, 8-9, 12-13, 85). She asserts the importance of the word *lesbian* in a culture that has allowed women who love women to “*be*, but only if [they] remain nameless” (10). Vanita argues that scholars outside India who would restrict the use of present-day terms in English handcuff an activist gay and lesbian rights movement in India that needs and commonly uses the terms:

It is significant that it is usually those who have already obtained most of their basic civil rights and liberties in first-world environments who object to the use of these terms in third-world contexts. ...[T]he choice of terms has crucial consequences for lesbian and gay movements in urban India ...The Indian press and media have overall represented gay organizations and their demands for human rights in a supportive way, thus making terms like *gay* and *lesbian* accessible to urban bilingual populations whose opinions are crucial in determining who gets civil rights and who does not. (Vanita 5)

Such exhortation are poignant reminders of the political stakes of language, academic or otherwise.<sup>15</sup>

At the same time, where the force of common usage today actively resists the imposition or appropriation of terms in English – Altman’s “global gay” in its linguistic form – scholars do well to respect and note those practices, and instructors do well to point them out to students who want to understand the world only as it relates to their

own experiences. The difficulty comes in the lack of agreement or uniform usage of terms among speakers of a particular language, but this should be recognizable to students who, from varying personal and political perspectives, differ in their choice of English terms as well. In Japan, for example, men use a range of words including *gei* (“gay,” which has the problematic connotation of *nyu-hafu* – transvestite or transsexual – as stereotyped in mainstream media); *okama* (slang metaphor for “deep pot,” referring to anal sex, a derogatory term reclaimed by some, especially activists); *doseiai* (“homosexual,” a sexological term); and *homo* (which can connote perversion). Lesbians do not use *gei*, which refers only to gay men in Japan; among the most common terms are the transliteration *rezubian* (or *rezu* or *bian*, used mainly by activists) and *onabe* (slang metaphor meaning a pan or shallow pot, which gets its meaning in reference to *okama*) (Lunsing 314; McLelland 9-11, 54, 227). Differences in usage can be personal, regional, and/or political. Increasing aversion to the use of *rezubian* appears to be connected to a perception that homophobia is rampant in the United States; opposition to *gei* in some instances stems from resistance to U.S.-style political activism (Lunsing 313-14). The move to adopt *tongzhi* in China similarly reflects opposition to a U.S. model, according to Chou, whose publications have helped spread the term (Chou 3, 284; Sang 235).<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, Vanita and Thadani also argue for recognition of current practices in India when they insist that American and British scholars recognize that English terms like *gay* and *lesbian* are frequently the ones used by Indian activists (Thadani 116, 123; Vanita 5). The linguistically global *gay*, for all its baggage, holds sway in international contexts, such as “Sexualities, Genders, and Rights in Asia: An International Conference of Asian

Queer Studies” planned for July 2005 in Bangkok, which will be held in English presumably because it is the one language most attendees are likely to have in common.<sup>17</sup>

It seems clear that the answers to the terminology question will continue to change over time. Vanita’s findings, Chou’s activism, and everyday disagreements over usage all across Asia productively trouble the standard scholarly answer that now seems too pat, that is, the prohibition of the use of English terms to describe similar, though not identical, behaviors and identities outside of Europe and North America, or before the talismanic year 1870. From Vanita’s and Thadani’s points of view, the opening up of language eases some of the strictures that most historians have treated as immutable barriers to studying love between women, or lesbian history. If we recognize that, at least in some cases, there are notions of and terms for same-sex love before Euro-American “homosexuality,” that there are instances in which male and female same-sex love were understood as related to one another, that there are extant sources describing or depicting female homoeroticism, then historians can, in fact, pursue something they might call lesbian history in the new globalized queer studies. In turn, this allows for gender inclusivity in queer studies classes. Certainly, if we follow the arguments that limit Foucault’s proclamation to its own original cultural context, we may pursue the path suggested by Chou, to “look through the margins, gaps, discrepancies, ruptures, and breaks, and be sensitive to secrecy, masquerades, and the silence of women’s voices.” We can, for one example, investigate the history of women in China and elsewhere who spent their lives together in gender segregated environments at court or in extended family homes (Chou 38). Historians may never be able to construct for women the complete documented histories that are possible for men who – in control of literacy,

publishing, archival preservation, and even the very definitions of sexual desire – have set the historical record.

*Where in the Available Resources Are the Lesbians?*

How then, from my position as a lesbian women's-studies scholar in the United States, can I construct a balanced syllabus for a course called "Asian Gay and Lesbian Cultures"? Despite the dearth of lesbian-focused book-length monographs and anthologies, I am able to turn to the internet and to essays that go some distance in bridging the gender gap.<sup>18</sup> And notwithstanding their biases, books that focus on male homosexuality provide useful morsels, such as Hinsch's appendix, which relies on men's depictions of erotic love between women, some of them intentionally pornographic. Even Sang, who plumbs minor literary genres for evidence previously untapped in English-language studies of female desire in China, must conclude that "very few pre-twentieth-century Chinese texts, other than pornography, explicitly depicted sex between women" (42). The very problems presented by the sources become a theme of my course, as queer historiography shares equal billing with queer history, stemming from the discussion of Foucault during the first class meeting.

Most of the evidence of women's sexuality in the premodern era, pornographic or otherwise, comes from male sources, and as such its authenticity can be suspect. Carla Petievich argues as much in "Doganas and Zanakhis: The Invention and Subsequent Erasure of Urdu Poetry's 'Lesbian' Voice," published in Vanita's *Queering India*.

Petievich explores *rekhti* poetry, an Urdu genre associated with women's domestic sphere in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century India, written by men who dressed as women to perform it. Petievich is interested in the genre's infrequent but provocative depiction of women's desire for one another, "almost none of [it] explicitly sexual, let alone explicitly lesbian" (52), which nevertheless caused its suppression by literary scholars (57). Petievich provides students a lesson in careful use of evidence when she concludes that "we cannot look to *rekhti* for insight into what it means for women, living together, to develop a literature of same-sex eroticism [but only for] what it means for men, who keep women secluded and socialize with other men, to invent a parody of their own idealized love literature [*rekhta*, *ghazals*], and to perform it for other men while impersonating women" (56). Vanita's sharp disagreement with Petievich's analysis of *rekhti*'s importance to lesbian history brings to life the terms and stakes of historiographical debate for my students, few of whom are history majors. Vanita and Kidwai include *rekhti* in their compilation of evidence of same-sex love in India on a number of grounds elaborated by Vanita in editorial introductions. She concludes that *rekhti* "poets did indeed give sexual love between women a voice – they introduced it into the realm of literary discourse from which it had been almost completely absent" (Vanita and Kidwai 194).

A further interrogation of the meaning of "lesbian" and "lesbian history" is facilitated by the introduction of a variety of materials depicting or discussing what Halberstam calls "female masculinity." These texts written about or translated by both male and female scholars include, among others, Vedic texts of gender-switching (Vanita and Kidwai); a twelfth-century Japanese tale of a boy and a girl raised to assume opposite



gender identity (Pflugfelder, “Strange Fates”); and an analysis of the modern Japanese all-female theater review *Takarazuka* (Robertson). Jennifer Robertson introduces her book *Takarazuka: Sexual Politics and Popular Culture in Modern Japan* in part by explaining that it is not “a history of (homo)sexuality in Japan” but rather “an exploration of the overlapping discourses of gender, sexuality, popular culture, and national identity as they erupted into the world framed by Takarazuka” (23). In other words, she provides a case study in the interrogation of the relationship between lesbianism and female masculinity called for by Halberstam, meanwhile explaining the development of modern Japanese conceptions of lesbianism.

Along with the discourse that pathologized same-sex love there came to Japan from Europe and the United States a discourse of personal freedom and individuality that I illustrate through the inclusion on the syllabus of two feminist, Marxist writers who, beginning in the 1920s, recorded their love for other women under the political banner of personal liberty. Yosano Akiko (1878-1942), who wrote love lyrics to a woman, was among the most renowned Japanese poets of the early twentieth century and a leading feminist; Miyamoto Yuriko (1899-1951), who wrote autobiographically about her relationship with Yuasa Yoshiko, a journalist and scholar who self-identified as a lesbian, was a feminist social critic and fiction writer.<sup>19</sup>

In an interdisciplinary course on queer cultures, literature is frequently able to fill gaps otherwise left by the historical record. Vanita and Kidwai provide indispensable translations of short stories, poems, and letters written in a number of different Indian languages from the medieval and modern periods. They include Kamala Das, “one of India’s best known writers in English” whose autobiographical story *My Life* includes

explicit lesbian sex, and whose Malayalam story “The Sandal Trees” (“*Chandana Marangal*”) centers on the lifelong mutual obsession of two women who were lovers in adolescence.<sup>20</sup> Among many other selections they also include a translated excerpt from Urdu writer Ismat Chughtai’s novel *Tehri Lakeer* (*The Crooked Line*, 1945) about Muslim women and the relationship between two schoolgirls. Chughtai is most famous for the 1944 obscenity charge leveled at her lesbian-themed story “*Lihaf*” (“The Quilt”). In 1993, Shani Mootoo, the Indian-Trinidadian-Canadian author of the lesbian novel *Cereus Blooms at Night*, published a contemporary gloss on Chughtai’s story called “Lemon Scent.”

Teaching the pair of stories points up the importance of diasporic writers to the study of lesbianism in Asia. Engendering an entire field of criticism in its own right, diasporic literature is particularly important to international lesbian studies in the United States because of the relative paucity of Asian literature dealing with female same-sex love that is written in or translated into English. Anchee Min’s memoir of the Cultural Revolution, *Red Azalea*, is a fairly widely taught example. (She also has published two novels thematizing love between women, *Katherine* and *Wild Ginger*.) Students seem to appreciate the pairing of *Women of the Silk*, a novel written by Asian-American author Gail Tsukiyama, with historical analysis such as Margaret Topley’s classic essay “Marriage Resistance in Rural Kwangtung.” In Sang’s *The Emerging Lesbian*, each chapter about an era in Chinese history is paired with a chapter about literary texts of the same period featuring love between women (almost all of them unavailable in English), providing an unprecedented resource in English for Chinese lesbian history and literary study.

While literature may prove popular with students and compensate to some extent for historical lacunae, certain pop-culture fictional accounts are especially problematic – though nevertheless excellent at provoking meaningful discussions about representation and historicity. For example, what should we make of the contemporary Hong Kong martial arts film *The East Is Red*, whose main character is a cross-dressing woman warlord sexually involved with a woman? The reviewer of the film on the internet site “Popcorn Q Movies” answers with presentist abandon: “In the film's queer logic one can't help but read Asia the Invincible as the first transsexual lesbian superhero. A fantastically choreographed, genderfuck Kung-Fu period piece.”<sup>21</sup> The film is hardly reliable documentary about lesbianism in either contemporary Hong Kong or Ming Dynasty China, but it is significant for its reception and as evidence of the depiction of lesbianism and female masculinity in mass culture. Similarly, Japan in the early 1990s experienced a “gay boom” (*gei bumu*), a period during which film, magazines, and television featured an unprecedented volume of images of gay men, transgendered people, and to a lesser extent lesbians. The main audience and force behind the gay boom was heterosexual, but in creating a market for gay-themed material, it also opened space for material created by gay men and lesbians themselves (McLelland 34). In response to products of the gay boom such as the film *Okoge* (aka *Fag Hag*), students tend to take opposing positions that mirror scholars’ critiques: some skeptically view the gay boom as exploitative voyeurism, while others point hopefully to the generally positive tone of gay-boom journalism and the increased visibility of homosexuality (McLelland 36-37; Lunsing 296). Products of the gay boom will undoubtedly be among the prominent artifacts of Japanese homosexuality of the era, stereotypes blazing; while

they may not depict gay men and lesbians accurately or representatively, they are nevertheless germane to any discussion of contemporary queer Japan.

Lisa Daniel and Claire Jackson's *The Bent Lens: A World Guide to Gay and Lesbian Film* lists thirty-eight lesbian films from Asia among over 2,600 queer films from around the world, revealing the increased presence of Asian queer films in festivals and mainstream release in the last few years (Leung 14).<sup>22</sup> Among the wide variety of types of narrative films are the first lesbian feature film by an openly queer director in Japan, *Sugar Sweet* (dir. Desiree Lim, 2001), and reportedly the first lesbian film from the People's Republic of China, the underground production *Fish and Elephant* (*Jin Nian Xia Tian*, dir. Li Yu, 2001). Some of the films are clandestine queer productions while others are mainstream star vehicles. The difference in distribution of the two types of films presents another teaching opportunity, since the queer films are more likely to be seen at film festivals outside their countries of origin while the mainstream films, arguably less accurate in their portrayal of lesbian lives, are more able to expand the visibility of same-sex love in their home countries (Leung 14-15). Documentary films, a staple of U.S. queer studies courses, are hard to come by from lesbian Asia. Of the few catalogued in *The Bent Lens*, the majority are unavailable in the United States.<sup>23</sup>

Undoubtedly the best known Asian lesbian film is Canadian director Deepa Mehta's *Fire* (1996), a feature-length drama about two women, married to two brothers and living in the same extended family household, who become lovers. *Fire* is extremely teachable in its own right, but perhaps more importantly the controversy it caused raises issues of religious homophobia and lesbian activism in contemporary urban India. *Fire* was popular with audiences in India but met with sometimes violent protests led by the

far right Shiv Sena organization, which were countered by lesbian activists from organizations such as CALERI (Campaign for Lesbian Rights) (Patel 230). The DVD version's extra documentary about the controversy provides an excellent resource for teaching about the different receptions *Fire* received in North America, where it was seen as a lesbian film, and in India, where it was considered to relate to debates about Hinduism, colonializing influences, obscenity, masculinity, and the role of women in the family.<sup>24</sup>

*Fielding Different Questions: Women's Studies, Gender Studies, Queer Studies*

As different audiences construe *Fire* as more or less feminist or lesbian, the film raises the question for lesbian studies of where to find images of and information about women loving women. How has the depiction of lesbianism been contextualized in various forms of presentation? Where in the (academic) world are the lesbians? Frequently, the answer has been "not in queer studies." Texts that announce themselves as belonging to women's studies are as likely, or more likely, to include information about lesbians than texts that call themselves queer. Although the boundary between the two is permeable – witness the rubric "women and gender studies," created in part to accommodate queer studies – in many cases a distinction can be drawn. An anthology of women writers belongs to one, of queer or gay-and-lesbian to the other. To my knowledge, the literary works of Yosano Akiko and Miyamoto Yuriko are not available in English in anthologies of queer writers; they are, however, published in anthologies of

Japanese women writers. This is not to say that the two categories are mutually exclusive, but to point out that women's studies is a vital source for lesbian material. Simply stated, women's studies has been more interested in lesbians than queer studies has been in women. Robertson's book *Takarazuka* is one example among many. While it reveals more about the discourse and practice of love between women in twentieth-century Japan than most other sources in English, it does not do so under the articulated rubric of queer studies. In fact, the words queer, lesbian, and homosexual do not appear in the book's Library of Congress subject headings.<sup>25</sup>

Women's studies, and in particular feminist history, opens doors to the study of gender roles and unconventional women's lives. As such, it frequently leads to lesbian or potentially lesbian discoveries. For example, in the spirit of Chou's call to read between the lines of women's silences in Chinese history, Vivien Ng speculates about the lesbian possibilities of the Chinese women living in Japan who founded the all-female Mutual Love Society in 1903. Among them, the cross-dressing, "dashing" swordswoman Qiu Jin and another woman, Wu Zheyang, formally pledged eternal friendship to one another, commemorated by Qiu in an "Orchid Verse," perhaps alluding to the Golden Orchid Society of marriage resisters in southern China (200-201). Unable to answer fully whether Qiu and Wu were lesbians in the contemporary, sexual sense of the word, Ng concludes that "to reclaim the bonded nature of their emotional lives" must be "enough" (204). Faced with a similar lack of evidence, some U.S. lesbian scholars came to the same conclusion in the 1980s. Famously, Lillian Faderman defined *lesbian* in her study of same-sex romantic friendship, *Surpassing the Love of Men*, to include women's primary intimate attachments to one other, whether or not their physical affections have

“a genital component” (37). Vanita and Kidwai focus on “love, not sex” both because “a primary and passionate attachment between two persons...may or may not be acted upon sexually” (xiii) and because of the shifting nature and definition of the sexual. Sang found that focusing narrowly on sex misses the “far more significant categories of female-female bonds” in the premodern era, “*sisterhood* and *friendship*.” As a result, Sang investigates “a wide range of questions about feelings, fantasy, longing, physical familiarity, intimacy, commitment, and gender subordination” (42) and declares in her introduction that she does “not privilege either emotional investment or physical sex as the staple of lesbianism” (34).

Left out of histories of homosexuality because of lack of evidence, excluded from cultural constructions of sexual agency because of gender stereotypes, unnamed because of scholarly prohibitions against imposing anachronistic or culturally inappropriate terms – women who love women face an uphill battle for scholarly recognition which in turn leads to their underrepresentation in queer studies curriculum. Women have never been served by following institutional orthodoxies, even when those orthodoxies may have (or have had) radical aims in mind. If we don’t interrogate the Foucauldian Orthodoxy, how will we know what is possible to know about women who loved women in the past, or who do so around the world today? Lesbian scholars must look outside the boundaries of queer studies, must even (or especially) question theoretical insights based on the study men in European history, if we are to go beyond the sort of hopeful but idle speculation voiced by Hirsch, but characteristic of other historians, that “in ancient times...with thousands of women locked in the palace together with only the emperor and eunuchs, it seems inevitable that some should have formed deep attachments to one another” (174).

Hunches and creative research may lead us down some dicey paths, and some will surely dead-end in cul-de-sacs of undocumentable speculation. But if we merely stick to the main roads, we will never know what we have missed, whatever caches or fragments of the lesbian story are waiting for the intrepid traveler. Queer studies in the United States benefits from drawing on an international constellation of sources. As the field goes global – in classrooms as in scholarly tomes – we would do well to remember the wealth of diversity of material coming from women, among varied queer activists and scholars from around the world, whom we purport to represent but too often shortchange.



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Notes

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<sup>1</sup> See Kristin Ross, "The World Literature and Cultural Studies Program," *Critical Inquiry* 19 (Summer 1993):666-76, for a trenchant analysis of the ideological implications of "the problem of expertise" and "Teaching What You Don't Know."

<sup>2</sup> There are too many sources to list here on conflicts between lesbians and gay men in the early Gay Liberation Movement. For conflicts in GAA, GLF, and NGTF, see, for example, John Loughery, *The Other Side of Silence* (New York: Henry Holt, 1998), 345; Martin Duberman, *Stonewall* (New York: Plume, 1993), 249-51. See also Del Martin's 1970 farewell to the co-sexual homophile movement in favor of lesbian feminism, "If That's All There Is," in Mark Blasius and Shane Phelan, eds., *We Are Everywhere* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 352-55.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, the papers by Elisa Glick, Linda Garber, Sharon Holland, Daniel Balderston, and José Quiroga, published as the "GLQ Archive" titled "New

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Directions in Multi-Ethnic, Racial, and Global Queer Studies,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 10:1 (2003):123-35. I have written more extensively on the topic in *Identity Poetics: Race, Class, and the Lesbian-Feminist Roots of Queer Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> Bonnie Zimmerman lays out the terms of the debate in her essay “Lesbians Like This and That: Some Notes on Lesbian Criticism for the Nineties,” in Sally Munt, ed., *New Lesbian Criticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 1-15.

<sup>5</sup> Other texts, less scholarly in focus, simply exclude women without mention. See, for example, Jeremy Seabrook, *Love in a Different Climate: Men Who Have Sex with Men in India* (London: Verso, 1999) and Hoshang Merchant, ed., *Yaraana: Gay Writing from India* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> Robertson cites Yasuda Tokutaro, *Doseiai no rekishikan (History of Homosexuality)*, 1935.

<sup>7</sup> Lunsing’s book *Beyond Common Sense: Sexuality and Gender in Contemporary Japan* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1997) investigates the intense pressure to marry in Japan, and the consequent place of gay men, lesbians, and single heterosexuals in Japanese society. It is notable for its treatment of both gay men and lesbians, but because it is not readily available in the United States it is not as helpful as his essay for a course taught in a U.S. university.

<sup>8</sup> So far as I can tell from the English-language sources, no parallel terms survive, if they existed, for women’s erotic inclinations.

<sup>9</sup> I use the term “western” here, although it is a geopolitical misnomer, because of its use at the time in this context.

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<sup>10</sup> For information about the applications of Section 377 in India, see the web sites of the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission ([www.iglhrc.org](http://www.iglhrc.org)) and the International Lesbian and Gay Association ([www.ilga.org](http://www.ilga.org)).

<sup>11</sup> References to Wilde's homosexuality, including his conviction and subsequent death, occur frequently in discussions of homosexuality in early twentieth-century India. See, for example, Vanita and Kidwai 195-96, 201-202, 216, 247; Suparna Bhaskaran, "The Politics of Penetration: Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code," in Vanita, 18; Leela Gandhi, "Loving Well: Homosexuality and Utopian Thought in Post/Colonial India," in Vanita, 90; and Giti Thadani, *Sakhiyani*, 67.

<sup>12</sup> Vanita, while acknowledging Thadani as "perhaps the first commentator to examine female homoeroticism in Ancient Indian texts" calls into question Thadani's "wishful thinking and exaggeration" as illustrated in at least one translation and her tendency to "focus on a few passages out of context and in a critical vacuum" (Vanita and Kidwai, 2n2).

<sup>13</sup> Vanita and Kidwai define "medieval" in India as extending from the eighth century through the eighteenth century, the period when "Islamic culture took root in the Indian subcontinent" (54).

<sup>14</sup> Phrased in just this way, the question is the opening line of the 1970 lesbian-feminist manifesto "The Woman-Identified Woman." The second line reads, "A lesbian is the rage of all women condensed to the point of explosion," an answer that resonates in the long-standing debates over the sexual specificity and social construction of lesbian identity. (Radicalesbians, "The Woman-Identified Woman," in *Radical Feminism*, eds. Anne Koedt, Ellen Levine, and Anita Rapone, (New York: Quadrangle, 1973), 240-45.)

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<sup>15</sup> Outside the arena of civil rights activism, other scholars retain the word homosexual for more mundane purposes. Gary Leupp, author of a volume on male homosexuality in Tokugawa Japan, rejects “any depiction of homosexuality as a specific, ahistorical psychological condition,” but “nevertheless...find[s] it difficult to abandon the term ‘homosexuality’ itself” because of its compact usefulness (7). Hinsch allows that “homosexual” is a false generic for gay male and lesbian, but nevertheless uses all three terms in his book about China’s tradition of male-male erotic love. His solution is to use the readily understandable, contemporary English term, but to provide detailed descriptions and explanations that make clear the specificity of “actions, tendencies, and preferences” in their Chinese historical context (7).

<sup>16</sup> A variety of other terms are used in China as well, and each has its connotations and pitfalls. *Gay* has been adopted by some people but only in reference to men. There are no specific terms for lesbian, although *gei mui*, *gei po*, and the derogatory *doufu po* (bean-curd women) are sometimes used. Chou uses *nü* (female) *tongzhi* to refer specifically to women, evidence that the generic *tongzhi* is presumed to refer to men, like the false generic *gay* in English. *Queer*, *lesbian*, and *bisexual women* are sometimes used by “more educated and Westernized women” (Chou 60). *Gay* has been appropriated and desexualized by some Chinese male *tongzhi* as the Chinese word *gei* (pronounced the same way), which means foundation or ground. The strategy backfired when the mainstream media began to use the term *gei-lo*, which relegates the *gei* to lower class status (Chou 79).

<sup>17</sup> Significantly, conference organizers felt compelled to explain their use of the term “queer”:

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The conference organisers use the word “queer” in both its current senses. “Queer” is both a shorthand for the full diversity of homoerotic, transgender, and transsexual behaviours, identities, and cultures as well as a term describing critical forms of theory that draw on poststructuralist and postcolonial analyses. In its conferences and publications the AsiaPacifiQueer Network emphasises the need to rethink queer theory in Asian contexts, simultaneously critiquing homophobic discourses and practices in Asia and questioning the eurocentrism of Western accounts of sexuality and gender.

The conference announcement can be viewed on the internet at

<http://bangkok2005.anu.edu.au>.

<sup>18</sup>The internet is a rich source of journalism, pop culture, and information from activists and their organizations. Most scholarly journal articles that discuss “gay and lesbian” or “queer” Asian cultures say very little about lesbians. Following are some of the useful available sources, including a variety of types of essays:

Ng, Vivien. “Looking for Lesbians in Chinese History.” In Martin Duberman, ed., *A Queer World*. New York University Press, 1997. 199-204.

Robertson, Jennifer. “Dying to Tell: Sexuality and Suicide in Imperial Japan.” *Signs* 25:1 (1999):1-35.

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Sang, Deborah. “At the Juncture of Censure and Mass Voyeurism.” *GLQ* 8:4 (September 2002):523-52.

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Summerhawk, Barbara, et al., eds. *Queer Japan: Personal Stories of Japanese Lesbians, Gays, Transsexuals, and Bisexuals*. Norwich: New Victoria, 1998.

Swarr, Amanda Lock and Richa Nagar. "Dismantling Assumptions: Interrogating 'Lesbian' and Struggles for Identity and Survival in India and South Africa." *Signs* 29:2 (2003):491-516.

Thadani, Giti. "No Lesbians please – We Are Indian: Shattering Some Popular Myths." *Trikone* (April 1994):5-6.

<sup>19</sup> For brief information about Yosano and Miyamoto, see Bonnie Zimmerman, ed., *Lesbian Histories and Cultures* (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000) and Chieko I. Mulhern, *Japanese Women Writers: a Bio-Critical Sourcebook* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1994). Yosano's love poems are available in English in the volume *Tangled Hair*, currently out of print; *River of Stars: Selected Poems of Yosano Akiko* (Boston: Shambala Publications, 1997) is still in print.

<sup>20</sup> For an exploration of homoerotic themes in Das's work, see Rosemary Marangoly George, "'Queerness All Mine': Same-Sex Desire in Kamala Das's Fiction and Poetry," in *Vanita*, 111-26.

<sup>21</sup> The review is available on the web at [www.planetout.com/pno/popcornq/db/getfilm.html?342](http://www.planetout.com/pno/popcornq/db/getfilm.html?342).

<sup>22</sup> Among the Asian lesbian films, Daniel and Jackson list seven Japanese films, five Indian films, and twenty-one Chinese films (four from the mainland/PRC, twelve from Hong Kong, and five from Taiwan). They also list films about gay men and transgendered people, and films from Korea and Thailand. My count of lesbian films

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includes titles that include women who love women but may also include people who identify with other categories. The distribution information in Daniel and Jackson's book makes it especially useful in syllabus planning.

<sup>23</sup> The easiest to obtain are documentaries made by diaspora filmmakers. Pratibha Parmar, based in England and relatively well known in the United States, depicts South Asian lesbians and gays living in India, Britain and the United States in the experimental short *Khush* (1991). The Canadian film *Rewriting the Script* (2001) is a traditional documentary about relationships between queer South Asians and their families in the diaspora. Documentaries made in Asia are more difficult to find but would certainly enhance an undergraduate course. *Darkness before Dawn* (dir. Wu Feng, 1996) promises a rare look into lesbian and gay life in the People's Republic of China; although Daniel and Jackson cite San Francisco's Frameline as the distributor, the organization does not have the tape available for rental or sale, nor could they tell me who does. I was fortunate enough to view the film, sometimes referred to by the title *Tongzhi*, at the Frameline office in San Francisco in Fall 2002. Two faces of lesbian Japan apparently are depicted in two very different documentaries which I have been unable to locate. *One Shadowless Hour* (dir. Sasagawa Narusa, 1995) documents Tokyo's second Lesbian and Gay Parade and interviews lesbians to show the diversity of lesbian lives in Japan. *Shinjuku Boys* (dir. Kim Longinotto and Jano Williams, 1995) explores one of Tokyo's "Miss Dandy" bars, whose hosts are female cross-dressers who live as men and have women lovers but do not identify as lesbians. (Robertson describes the cross-dressed "Miss Dandies" as "basically offstage *otokoyaku*," the term for women who play men's roles in *Takarazuka* theater [143-44].)

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<sup>24</sup>Two essays that complement the documentary are Geeta Patel's analysis of the protests in India in the context of larger Indian national and diasporic politics, "On *Fire*: Sexuality and Its Incitements" (in *Vanita*, 222-33) and Monica Bachmann's essay about lesbian counter-protests, "After the Fire" (also in *Vanita*, 234-43).

<sup>25</sup> Similarly, lesbian activism can frequently be found in feminist rather than queer or gay organizations, especially in highly gender segregated societies, as McLelland, Lunsing, and Chou all attest.



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