Samshasha, HK's first gay rights activist
By Dr. Mark McLelland (murdoch.edu.au)
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Introduction
Samshasha (a pseudonym, also known by the Chinese-character pen-name Xiaomingxiong) was Hong Kong’s first gay activist. Born of mainland Chinese parents in Hong Kong in the early 1950s, he was educated locally until high school before going to the United States to receive his university education. Having encountered the gay rights movement during his stay in America, Sam returned to Hong Kong in 1979 at a time when all homosexual contact between men was illegal, anal sex carrying the penalty of life imprisonment.

In 1968, the Hong Kong government first attempted to ‘legalise’ homosexual acts (between two consenting adult males in private). The issue was favoured by few liberal British expatriate legislators but strongly opposed by local Chinese communities (religious and political ones especially) - if only to re-enforce the ‘decadent west tries to pollute the innocent Chinese’ theory. In 1980, after a series of homosexual scandals involving British expatriates, the colonial Government again attempted to introduce homosexual law reform but its attempts were fiercely resisted by sectors within the Chinese community which insisted that homosexuality was a western vice, unknown in Chinese tradition.

To counter this myth, Sam began to publish gay liberation texts in Chinese including A Chinese Gay’s Manifesto (1980) which was the first such booklet published in Hong Kong, and Pink Triangle (1981), Hong Kong’s first underground gay newsletter. These were followed by Twenty-five Questions about Homosexuality (1981) which was the first gay-liberation book to be published in Chinese and, in 1984, Sam published The History of Homosexuality in China (in Chinese), which is still the most comprehensive account of the topic in any language (a revised and expanded version was published in 1997). In 1989 Sam’s book Thirty Questions about Homosexuality became the first gay-liberation text to be issued by a commercial publishing house in Hong Kong. Sam has also featured as a regular columnist writing about gay issues in Hong Kong magazines, commencing in 1980 when he began contributing to the ‘minority rights’ column in City Magazine. He has also been a central figure in initiating and organizing many of Hong Kong’s gay-rights groups and forums, often serving as a spokesperson for Hong Kong’s Chinese gay community.

I first met Sam at The Fourteenth World Congress of Sexology held in Hong Kong in August 1999 where he spoke a little about his book on the history of homosexuality in China and his previous role as a spokesperson for gay rights in Hong Kong. My own research into the fierce debates which took place in Hong Kong over the proposed decriminalisation of male homosexual sex in the 1980s helped me to...
understand the extremely brave and pioneering role Sam had played in Hong Kong’s gay history; speaking out, as he did, at a time when many local Chinese community leaders, academics and Christians were engaged in fierce anti-homosexual polemic.

Sam kindly agreed to talk to me about his past and current projects and the following interview is the result of three lengthy conversations that took place in December 1999 and January and February 2000. All these discussions were recorded and a single transcript was edited and assembled by myself, then later checked and further edited by Sam. Sam is a prolific writer with wide interests and has had a colourful life. This meant that our discussions covered far more than could be included in a single interview. In consultation with Sam and the editors of Intersections, I therefore chose to highlight a number of issues in the present article which we thought best reflected both Sam’s interests and would also be of most interest to readers of the journal. I have added a few footnotes to historical and cultural events referred to in the text as well as an introduction outlining the background to homosexual law reform in Hong Kong to help readers unfamiliar with recent Hong Kong history to contextualise the discussion.

Background to homosexuality and the law in Hong Kong

Hong Kong was a British colony from 1842 until it reverted to Chinese rule on July 1, 1997. During this time, Hong Kong was subject to the British legal code which defined homosexual acts between men (but not women) as illegal in all circumstances. Although the Sexual Offences Act of 1967 decriminalized consenting homosexual acts in private between adult males over the age of 21 in England and Wales, all male homosexual acts, consenting or otherwise, remained illegal in Hong Kong. The legal situation regarding male homosexual sex in Hong Kong up until its reform in 1991 is outlined in a Hong Kong Government white paper:

Figure 3. The Pink Triangle, issue 2, circulated in 1980/81.

A homosexual act between men is in all circumstances a criminal offence under provisions proscribing gross indecency or buggery (anal intercourse). Gross indecency is not defined by statute. It covers any act involving gross sexual indecency between two men. The maximum penalty for an act of gross indecency between men is imprisonment for two years; for an act of buggery the maximum sentence is life imprisonment. It is immaterial to the offence that the acts take place voluntarily between two adults in private. If discovered, they would both be liable to prosecution and imprisonment.[1]

Figure 4. Thirty Questions about Homosexuality, 1989.

After a series of homosexual scandals involving British civil servants in Hong Kong in the late 70s and early 80s, the colonial administration was sufficiently embarrassed to attempt to bring Hong Kong law relating to homosexuality into line with that of Britain. However, government plans to decriminalize homosexuality met with fierce resistance from some sectors of Hong Kong’s Chinese population who saw it as an attempt to impose ‘decadent’ western values on a ‘traditional’ Chinese society. The fact that the law against homosexuality was itself a colonial imposition which had no parallel in the legal codes of either the People’s Republic or Republican China went unmentioned. Instead, conservative Chinese groups organized and conducted a media battle against the proposed changes, asserting that ‘Church leaders, educators and social workers are unanimous in attacking legalised homosexual activities as “deviant behaviour”’.[2] Since homosexual acts were illegal at the time, few homosexual men could be found to speak out publicly in favour of legal reform and those who did had either already been arrested for engaging in homosexual acts or were represented anonymously as ‘Mr. X’, further reinforcing the media stereotyping of homosexuals as nefarious criminals. Consequently, the media tended to over-report the views of the anti-reform camp in eye-catching headlines such as ‘Riot if Gay Laws Passed’,[3] ‘HK will become a Gays’ World’[4], ‘Women will be Sufferers from Changes in Gay Law’,[5] and ‘Doctor Urges Help for Gays’.[6] The result was that in 1985, as the South China Morning Post put it “Too Hot” Sex Laws Shelved’. It was not until 1991, two years after the Tiananmen Square massacre, when growing concern over human rights issues as Hong Kong approached the handover to China in 1997, as well as the need to monitor the spread of HIV infection, created an environment among the Chinese community in Hong Kong in which the colonial administration could finally bring the laws relating to homosexuality in line with those in Britain.

Throughout the 1980s, Sam was a key figure in making accurate information available about homosexuality to Hong Kong’s Chinese population at a time when the Special Investigations Unit of the Royal Hong Kong Police Force, with the backing of the Attorney General, regularly raided gay bars and kept files on suspected homosexuals. In 1990, these files were estimated to contain three thousand names. It was in this context of fierce anti-homosexual polemic when known homosexuals were in danger of losing their
I enjoyed being a boy scout and I remember having to salute the British flag and make a calendar on my wall. At that time I was very confused about my identity. For instance, I had become politically quite aware as in the colonial school system you never learned about modern Chinese history so I started to read all these books about China including Communist books which at that time were banned in Hong Kong. I remember reading about modern Chinese history so I started to read all these books about China including.

Also, at that time, the media in Hong Kong were really silent about sexual issues; homosexuality because I was really underdeveloped as I had spent all my time studying. I didn't know that about real life. I finished high school when I was sixteen. This meant that I was always the youngest in the class and compared with my peers I was a bit na?ve. I didn't really know that much about life. I remember one time when I was in form three or four, we did human reproduction in biology and the teacher told me that the sperm fertilized the ovum in the womb. I had no idea how it got in there, I guessed that the sperm must swim in while the couple were taking a bath! Since I was one or two years younger than everybody else, they used to tease me quite a lot as I was a bit effeminate. They used to fool around and say that I was a 'boy-girl.' Of course, they didn't say 'gay' because we didn't have that word at that time but they used to say things like I was a 'boy-girl' and that I was like a boy with girls but like a girl with boys, that kind of thing. But I was so na?ve about sex that I didn't understand what they meant.

I had no sexual awareness at all? Samshasha: I remember I liked one of the 'uncles' who worked in my father's wood-cutting factory. I used to hang out and play with him quite a lot. Even though he was married and had a family back in China, he used to say that I was cute and he would hug me and kiss me on the face. This started when I was seven or eight. I don't think it was really sexual for me. I just enjoyed getting the physical attention from this older man because my father always scolded me, he was always so strict. But I liked to hold hands and hug my uncle. He would hug me publicly but that was OK at that time for two men to hug or even hold hands but he would only kiss me in private. In fact, I think I was the one who first kissed him. I don't know if this was sexual for him. In the 1950s and early 1960s, people never talked about sex and as he was completely uneducated, I don't think he had any idea about 'homosexuality.' It was still quite normal for Chinese guys to be physically affectionate with each other at that time.

What was it about him that attracted you? Samshasha: I really admired him. He was strong and brave. I remember that in a typhoon one year he jumped into the sea to save a family whose sampan had capsized. I remember really admiring him for that. So although he was uneducated, I looked up to him. But from about age eleven I began to pull away from him. Nobody said anything exactly but I began to feel that it was taboo for two men to touch each other in that way. I remember reading reports in the newspapers about 'homosexual perverts' having sex in toilets and I became aware of the word 'homosexuality' (tongxinglian) and that this was something terrible and taboo because of the way it was reported in the media. And I thought that what I was doing with my 'uncle' might be connected.

You say your relationship with your 'uncle' wasn't consciously sexual. When did you become aware of sexual feelings? Samshasha: Well, remember I was very young and na?ve. In fact, one of my classmates decided I should know about sex so he took me to Mongkok [a district full of brothels] where there were some gloomy bookstores selling sex books but they weren't really pornography, they were more like text books explaining how to get a woman pregnant and stuff like that. It was there that I found about heterosexual sex for the first time. As for homosexual sex, that story's actually quite funny. You see, at that time (the early 60s) Japanese monster movies were really popular in Hong Kong and I used to go to see movies like Godzilla with my father in these small cinemas. Before the monster movies, there were previews of other movies from Japan also shown in the theater and these previews showed two women kissing, caressing and undressing each other! My father would come back later and watch these movies by himself. However, I didn't really realise that two men could have sex together until much later, when I went to America.

When was that? Samshasha: The first time I went was at age sixteen. I had finished high school in Hong Kong early and I went to college in the States. At that time I still had no idea about male homosexuality because I was really underdeveloped as I had spent all my time studying. Also, at that time, the media in Hong Kong were really silent about sexual issues; sexuality was something never mentioned or reported on. Also, from about age twelve I had become politically quite aware as in the colonial school system you never learned about modern Chinese history so I started to read all these books about China including Communist books which at that time were banned in Hong Kong. I remember reading books by Mao even before the Cultural Revolution. I even had a Cultural Revolution calendar on my wall. At that time I was very confused about my identity. For instance, I enjoyed being a boy scout and I remember having to salute the British flag and make
Samshasha: In 1971 I went to one of the southern states. I moved into a dormitory and attended classes at a university there. I was taking science courses but my private study was still about Communism. At this time I began to identify as a Socialist and I remember thinking that I should be asexual and that I should devote all my energies to achieving Socialism.

Interviewer: But wasn't Communism still a very sensitive issue in America at this time?

Samshasha: Not at all. It was the time of Nixon's visit to China. People, other students in the dormitory, they were all very interested in China.

Interviewer: Also, you arrived in the States at the peak of the Sexual Revolution.

Samshasha: I had just turned seventeen years old and was staying in a small town in Louisiana. It was such a conservative place. I remember applying for a driver's license and there were two categories for race on the form: black or white. The police officer put me down as 'white' and I complained saying 'I'm not 'white' I'm "yellow".' This was the first time that I insisted on being acknowledged as Chinese.

Interviewer: Would you describe yourself as 'gay' at this time?

Samshasha: Well, I think I was. I was still reading a lot and I came across books by the first generation of gay lib writers and I became aware that there were these people called 'gays' but it wasn't until I transferred to another graduate school that I met anyone like that. My new school was in Texas and by that time there was a small lesbian and gay society and I started attending their meetings. The first time I went to a meeting I was really nervous. I still remember feeling afraid as I climbed the stairs to the meeting room as I had no idea what these gays and lesbians were going to look like. But when I got in I met two fellow students from my Russian class. After the meeting we started speaking Russian together. So there I was a Chinese speaking Russian with an American accent discussing 'coming out' issues! I was struck by how normal the people there were. I mean there were astronomers, physicists, just regular students in ordinary clothes. I think I still had at that time the impression that gay people were all camp or dressed up as transvestites. My impressions of gays in America were formed by a Newsweek article about a gay parade which was full of pictures of fabulous drag queens.

Interviewer: Were all the students at the meeting white?

Samshasha: Mostly. I mean it was a very conservative place. The university in Texas (University of Texas in Austin) that I attended was at that time quite liberal and academically prominent. However, in terms of enrollment, it was 'conservative', as the number of Afro-American students was far fewer than that of overseas Chinese students at that time, and still quite 'racist' against black and chicano (Mexican-American) students. So it was not surprise in the gay student community, and even local gay bars, that only white gays (and a Chinese - me) 'appeared'.

Interviewer: What did 'being gay' mean to you at this time?

Samshasha: Well, really I had no idea. I had read a lot of gay books and I had seen all the movies that had gay scenes in them but I still had never had sex with a man. I think I was young and attractive at the time. I remember American guys following me but I didn't know how to respond. I remember one time I was followed into the bathroom at a YMCA in San Francisco by one man and he showed me his erection and I was shocked. I remember thinking 'how can he go into the bathroom like that?' All my knowledge of gay life had been completely mediated through books. You see, I'm a very bookish person. At that time I was still quite uneasy about sex. I didn't act on my knowledge until I returned to Hong Kong in 1975. But there was nothing happening there and I really wanted to find out more about gay life. So I decided I had to go back to America. I had very high grade point averages and so I decided to pursue more graduate studies and I applied to a college in New York State and in 1976 they accepted me with a teaching assistantship.

Interviewer: Why New York?

Samshasha: Because NY City was famous for gay life.

Interviewer What were you going to study in New York?

Samshasha: I was supposed to be studying geology even though my father was dead against it. He said 'no-one can get a job as a geologist'. But I was interested in studying geology and then going to China to look for oil or whatever. I really wanted to go to help China as I was still a Socialist at that time. In fact I'm still a bit of a Socialist now.

Unfortunately, I disliked the school because it was in a really countrified place. I had no motivation to study: I just wanted to travel into NY city and immerse myself in gay culture. Basically, after a year I stopped going to classes even though I was still supported by the university. I still feel kind of guilty about that.

Interviewer: So you were just playing around?

Samshasha: No! I was doing research. I was travelling around meeting different gay groups and individual crusaders and I interviewed them. I met people like the first gay bookshop owner and the first founder of gay parents and many of the first generation of gay writers. I met Jewish gay people. I went to Philadelphia to meet Daniel Tsang, a Hong Kong Chinese who wrote the first article about gay life in Hong Kong in English in
1966. I went to Baltimore to see a black gay organisation. This was an important learning period for me. I had got all these wrong impressions from the media like blacks were lazy and that gays were like women. I was interested in finding out what people were really like. I went to gay centres, gay bathhouses, even cruising places. Anywhere that had anything to do with gays and I wanted to go see it. I met transsexual and transvestite groups. I was the first Chinese they had ever met! I read more than a hundred gay books and I saw every movie with any kind of gay content. And I visited the White House as part of a gay delegation on June 4 1979, just ten years after the Stonewall riot and exactly ten years before the Tienanmen massacre. There was this gay group pressing for rights but they couldn't find an Asian who was willing to be part of the delegation so even though I'm not an American citizen, I agreed to go along. We met with a secretary of Jimmy Carter, I talked a lot about difficulties gay people have with immigration rights because at that time if you wanted to enter the US you had to answer all sorts of questions, including whether or not you had homosexual tendencies.

Interviewer: What effect did all this have on your ideas?

Samshasha: I realised that up to that point I had many homophobic concepts but also I realised that all this 'gay' stuff was about western guys and it didn't mean that much to me as a Chinese. I mean when Chinese come out, it's totally different from white people. When I told my father that I was gay, he said 'So what? You've still got to get married!' I mean he NO idea. He asked me 'Why do you want to be a female-role actor?' His concept was that a homosexual was a guy who acted female roles in the Peking opera and that it had something to do with prostitution. This was the reason that I had to write my book about homosexuality in China to help myself find a path. I had to show that the way Chinese think about homosexuality is totally different.

Interviewer: Can you say more about why you became dissatisfied with the Western idea of 'being gay'?

Samshasha: As I said, I spent a lot of time in the US reading gay books, watching gay movies and participating in different gay groups but what these all had in common was they were based on and were also responding to a certain Anglo-Saxon culture which comes from a Judeo-Christian worldview. I didn't really fully feel that it was relevant to my own identity. I realised that there was a lot of white Anglo-Saxon cultural stuff that just didn't fit and that I had to base 'being gay' in my own Chinese culture. For instance, in the West, we all know how negative the Bible is about homosexuality, but in China what did Lao Tzu say about it, what about Confucious or the Buddha? There isn't even an exact term for 'homosexual' in Chinese history and we certainly don't have any precedent for the concept 'gay'. So when we 'come out' in Chinese society we are under a Western shadow. I mean, 150 years ago, if I had wanted to have sex with men, there wouldn't have been any problem!

So, the reason I have been working so hard to bring out books about homosexuality in China is that so far 99 per cent of all 'gay' books are written in Western languages. In most Asian societies, there simply are no local books produced by local people in their own languages about gay issues. And what about the other Third World countries? There really is nothing by local people although these people are sometimes written about by Western scholars! I have tried to find out all the different indigenous ways of expressing homosexuality which have existed throughout Chinese history. Remember China is a vast country with many different races and with an incredibly long history. We have to look into Chinese history to find our own path. It's not good enough to think 'Oh I'm gay so I must go to Sydney'. In China during the Ming Dynasty, there were all these plays where some male actors cross-dressed (male actresses) and the plots were full of homosexual intrigues, some of them glorifying the love between gay and lesbian couples. You don't need to go to the West to see drag queens flaunting it! I remember meeting an old Chinese guy here in Hong Kong who had been closely associated with an important War Lord in Canton in the 30s during China's civil war and he told me how much this War Lord loved a particular female-role actor and every evening he would send an army jeep to collect him after the theatre closed.

All these traditional and indigenous ways of being gay are being lost because of the prominence of Western culture. In Africa for example, what happened to indigenous African gay culture before colonisation? I know it is being researched now by western academics but do they have any native people writing about their own gay past? Are there any Middle Eastern scholars writing about the Arab gay past? Because there are no local people writing their own histories, everything gets internationalised through Western eyes and there is this idea that 'being gay' is something special to the West. There simply isn't enough diversity in 'gay studies'. Just look at how all the information is concentrated in the English language. And how many English speakers know other languages? English-speaking scholars should be able to speak to gays from other cultures in their own terms. There are so many different ways of 'being gay' in the world.

Interviewer: So how long were you in NY?

Samshasha: A year and a half and then my visa came to an end. I wanted to stay in America but I think it was fate that I had to return to Hong Kong especially just before the AIDS epidemic started because as you know NY was one of the first centres of the disease.

Interviewer: When did you come back?

Samshasha: At the end of 1979. When I arrived in Hong Kong from New York, it was like being transported to the state of Mississippi or falling into a time warp and ending up twenty years in the past. There was only one gay bar called Dateline and I only found out about it because this Chinese magazine City Magazine ran a story on gay life and I phoned the editor and asked him for the address. It was hard to get anyone to tell you where these places were. I mean no-one admitted it was a 'gay bar' because sex between men was illegal. I finally found the place and opened the door and I asked the guys there 'Is this a gay bar?' and they denied it.[8] But when I looked around it was so obvious, all these gay people cruising each other. In 1979 there was such a closet mentality. Apart from Dateline, there was a 24-hour café in the Hilton hotel called Cat Street that gay people would sometimes go to. I dropped by Dateline and met a Chinese
after its publication in 1990. When a friend passed on a copy of the book, I went through
Chinese scholars in The Society of Lesbian and Gay Anthropologists Newsletter.

Samshasha: Yes. This was originally pointed out in a review of Hinsch’s book by two
story goes that Bret Hinsch’s book on Chinese homosexuality heavily borrows from
your work without due acknowledgement. If I’d written the book 15 years later, it might
have been like that ever since, there is so much group politics going on among gay
people in Hong Kong. I’m a writer not a politician, I don’t care about all this leadership
and scoring points.

Interviewer: Were your parents aware that you had this whole other life as a
spokesperson for gay issues in Hong Kong?

Samshasha: I didn't tell them. I didn't even tell my sister who was one of the readers of
City Magazine. Although I think they suspected. You see, I was still living at home. In
fact I still live at home. My father was set against any interest I showed in homosexuality
and he wouldn't talk about it. Every time I had to go to China on business, he would go
into my room and throw out any book or article that had ‘homosexuality’ in it. I lost so
many books that way.

Interviewer: Let’s talk about your book on the history of homosexuality in China. When
did you start work on it?

Samshasha: I started it when I was in NY but the information was very patchy. After my
meeting at the White House, I went to the Congress Library and there I found a book in
Chinese called The Secret History of Homosexuality written in 1964. It had a lot of
historical information but the analysis was all wrong; the comments the author made on
why people became homosexual were just ridiculous. I had known for a long time that
China had this homosexual tradition as I had found some books written in the 1930s
about male homosexuality in Chinese history but information was scarce and not readily
available.

Interviewer: That’s interesting because, as you know, in the early 80s the Chinese press
was saying ‘Homosexuality is this evil colonial thing. We have never had it in China, it's
counter to Chinese values.’

Samshasha: Yes. My book was a response to all that. In my book I argued that
homophobia, not homosexuality, had been imported into Hong Kong by the colonialists!
Although now I don't have that view and have revised it in the new edition. But at the
time I used this argument a lot as a kind of political weapon against all those Chinese
who were saying homosexuality was this foreign vice.

Interviewer: When did you publish the book?

Samshasha: In 1984. I rushed it through before the results of the discussion of the
Chinese-British Joint Liaison Group about the future of Hong Kong were released
because I feared that in the run up to the handover to China there might be some
suppression of freedom of speech, especially about ‘gay’ issues. The print run was just
one-thousand copies, but I had to sell and distribute them all myself because no book
distributors would take them. I went from bookshop to bookshop saying “I've written this
gay book, do you want to sell it?” And most places would look at the book to see if I had
included obscene pictures and then tell me, ‘Oh there’s no market for this no-one will
buy it.’ But other places were more enthusiastic and offered to take ten or so copies. And
actually, they found it sold very well and the bookshops would call me later and say
‘Sam, send over another fifty!’

Interviewer: Who paid for the publication?

Samshasha: I had to subsidise it myself. No commercial house would take it. However, I
got responses from all over the world; besides subscription letters from Hong Kong and
America, there were letters from Italy, Norway, Australia, Germany, Mexico and even
Poland and Yugoslavia. I don't know how the books got there as I had no money to sell it
overseas. In Hong Kong, because the pen name I use looks a bit Japanese, some
reviewers thought I was Japanese and dismissed the book saying ‘Oh, his Chinese isn’t
very good! He doesn’t understand about China’. But the book soon sold out.

Interviewer: Wasn't there some controversy over your book in academic circles? The
story goes that Bret Hinsch’s book on Chinese homosexuality heavily borrows from
your work without due acknowledgement.

Samshasha: Yes. This was originally pointed out in a review of Hinsch’s book by two
Chinese scholars in The Society of Lesbian and Gay Anthropologists Newsletter soon
after its publication in 1990. When a friend passed on a copy of the book, I went through
the Star, 15 June 1983.

Hong Kong Standard, 10 June 1983.

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Homosexual Offences: Should the Law Be Changed? - A Consultation Paper, June - West was first placed in the 1985 July issue and then in subsequent issues. Hinsch also contributed an article to the same magazine as late as 1990. I wonder if Hinsch really did not know the existence of my book during his research on gay Chinese history as he claimed.

Interviewer: Was this issue ever resolved?

Samshasha: I never received any formal apology or compensation from either author or publisher. What is really annoying about the whole thing is the claims made by Hinsch and his colleagues who endorsed the book that he was presenting this information and analysis for the first time. Of course, I had already been making this material available in Chinese since 1980. It's like if it isn't written in English, it doesn't count! Legal proceedings were just too expensive and as I was redrafting the book anyway, I decided not to press charges.

Interviewer: Was your book referred to in any of the arguments about legalising homosexuality in Hong Kong? Because all these arguments rested on the assumption that homosexuality was foreign to Chinese tradition, which your book showed to be totally false.

Samshasha: Yes, I was cited in the references of the Law Reform Committee.[15] They asked me to testify before them and explain my views but I refused as something political was going on. I had received a letter from Ian Christie, a Scottish Member of Parliament. He told me that the British had no intention of legalising homosexuality in Hong Kong for fear of upsetting the Beijing government. Because all the homosexual scandals at the time involved British civil servants in Hong Kong, the British government wanted to be careful not to be seen to be legalising this behaviour to suit itself. I thought the whole issue had become a political game between China and Britain and that no-one was really interested in the human rights angle. That's why I had to write the book to show it wasn't something that only the British did, we Chinese do it too! Even liberal Chinese like the Democrat Szeto Wah violently opposed decriminalisation as they saw homosexuality as a moral vice. The calls for reform anyway are always from British expatriates and the Chinese response was always the same: 'We pure Chinese do not have now and have never had homosexuality! It's only a pollution from the western world.'

Interviewer: When did you bring out the revised edition?

Samshasha: I was working on it for a long time but didn't bring it out till 1997. It was just like in 1984, I was afraid that after the handover I wouldn't be able to publish it, so I rushed out the second edition before the first of July. The second edition is much more comprehensive because for the last 13 years I had been gathering more material to try to counteract that idiotic 'pure Chinese' theory. In the new book I show that yes, we Chinese did already have homophobic attitudes but not so obvious and not so severe as in the western world because we don't have Christianity, we don't have to follow these divine laws and there is no tradition outlawing 'the sodomite'. The source of Chinese homophobia is different. In Chinese society your body has to be a procreation tool to continue the family line. It's a totally different situation from the modern west where 'gay is gay', you know, full stop. In China, Japan, Korea and even in Thailand, there is this idea that 'OK you're gay - so what? You still have to produce children'. When my grandparents died, I remember my father saying to me 'You are the first grandchild of our family, you must not forget the duty you owe to our clan', and my mother, as she died, was still asking me to get married even though at that time she knew I was gay.

Interviewer: So do you plan another edition?

Samshasha: Yes, I'm still working on it. But now I want to start to write fiction as well. I have four or five ideas for Chinese gay novels.

Interviewer: What about the future for lesbians and gays in Hong Kong? What do you think about this new idea of tongzhi[16] which is being talked about by some Chinese gay rights activists?

Samshasha: Actually, this term, as you know, is a traditional Chinese term meaning friend or partner and was picked up by members of the Nationalist Party first and then the Communists who used it to mean something like 'comrade' and a few years ago, it was decided by some gay writers that this would be a good word to use to describe lesbian and gay people as it had positive connotations and none of the stigma which attaches to words to do with sex. But this isn't the first time that tongzhi has been connected with homosexuality in Chinese history. In the new edition of my book, I point out how it was used in some poems in a Ming Dynasty novel to describe an unusually close bond between friends of the same sex. I don't think that the people who are now popularising the use of this term know this. So this idea of tongzhi is nothing new and just shows how much more we need to find out about our own Chinese gay past.

Endnotes and References


opinions in letters to the Commission was overwhelmingly negative. For instance, a
The response from members of the general public who were invited to offer their
point of view (sic), it is an abominable practice’ (A72).
Surgery at the University of Hong Kong, opined that ‘the fact that homosexuality is
expressing their views. For instance, Professor G B Ong, on behalf of the Department of
Inspectors’ Association, Royal HK Police [A70]). However, others were less candid in
'This question lies outside the terms of reference of the Association’ (Expatriate
Federation of Industries. As many of these organizations pointed out in their responses
human sexuality. These included the Incorporated Trustees of the Islamic Community
organizations, whose opinions would not normally be solicited on issues relating to
Homosexual’. The Commission also consulted a bizarre array of individuals and
Included in the report were the ‘Statement of a Chinese Homosexual’, ‘Notes of a
meeting with 4 Young Chinese Homosexuals’, and further ‘Submissions by a
book which was not yet published.
Sam’s 1981 booklet 25 Questions about Homosexuality which was consulted, not his
report: Report on Laws Governing Homosexual Conduct (Topic 2), was presented three
of Hong Kong was asked to consider the topic: ‘Should the present laws governing
homosexual conduct in Hong Kong be changed and, if so, in what way?’ The completed
incident, at the Governor Sir Murray MacLehose’s request, The Law Reform Commission
by the fact that both authors had independently used the same ‘canonical’ Chinese
wrote that ‘Through most of the book we felt that we had already read what was on the
page. Comparing the text to Xiaomingxiong’s, over and over, we found that Hinsch
quoted exactly the same passage with the same starting and ending points. Then Hinsch
made the same comments after the quotation that Xiaomongxiong made before the
quotation’. See renowned writer on world gay cultures and histories Stephen O. Murray;
criticism, stating he had not encountered Xiaomingxiong’s book until he had already
completed his manuscript and that the similarities in the two books could be explained
by the fact that both authors had independently used the same ‘canonical’ Chinese
source materials.

[8] This is not surprising as Dateline was occasionally raided by the police on a variety of
pretences. For instance, on 29 January 1983, a Saturday, Dateline was raided by a ten-
man task force from the Special Investigation Unit between 11:30 p.m. and midnight when
the bar was packed with drinkers. All two hundred people in the bar were detained and
had their names, ages and addresses taken down. On this occasion the police came
armed with a warrant allowing them to search for drugs but, as one eye-witness pointed
out ‘they were asking more questions than they should have been. If they had been
searching for drugs they would have turned the place upside down’ (SCMP 1 February
1983). By 1990, the police were believed to be in possession of a list of up to three
thousand people who were ‘either suspected of being homosexual or may have
expressed a view on homosexuality’ (SCMP 15 July 1990). The police claimed that this
list was necessary ‘in vetting procedures for Government jobs’ referring to a 1982
circular instructing the heads of Government departments to ‘report known
homosexuals in the civil service’ (ibid.).

was found dead with five bullet wounds in his chest by a group of fellow officers who had
come to arrest him on suspicion of having engaged in homosexual activities. The
coroner’s inquiry returned an ‘open’ verdict on cause of death and there was much
media speculation that he had been murdered to prevent him from going public with the
names of high-ranking police officers who were also under investigation for homosexual
‘offences’. MacLennan had fallen foul of a new policy by the Attorney General who, in
August 1979, had instructed the Special Investigation Unit of the police force whose
remit it was to investigate the doings of homosexual procurers and paedophiles to
extend its inquiries into the lives of ‘members of the Judiciary or of the Attorney
General’s Chambers or of other lawyers in active practice in the Courts or of the Police’
where ‘credible leads’ indicated that the members of these professions had been
engaging in homosexual activities (Letter dated 31 August 1979 from the Hon. Attorney
General of Hong Kong to the Commissioner of Police, reproduced in the Law Reform
Commission’s Report, p. A214). The reason outlined by the Attorney General being that
‘it is unacceptable to have those charged with the enforcement of the law themselves to
be deliberately breaking it’. This led to the opening of the proverbial can of worms and
brought to the media’s attention a number of cases involving the homosexual
proclivities of expatriate civil servants, much to the colonial administration’s
embarrassment.

Hong Kong, 1964.
Hong Kong was signed on December 19, 1984. When it became apparent that Hong
Kong would inevitably revert to Chinese administration, there was considerable anxiety
about the implications of this for freedom of speech in Hong Kong.
[12] Sam’s Chinese-character pen name, Xiaomingxiong, can be read in Japanese as
Koake Takeshi.
[14] SOLGA, 12:3 (1990), pp. 61-64. The reviewers, Keelung Hong and Baoxih Chen,
rote that ‘Through most of the book we felt that we had already read what was on the
page. Comparing the text to Xiaomingxiong’s, over and over, we found that Hinsch
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by the fact that both authors had independently used the same ‘canonical’ Chinese
source materials.

[15] On 14 June 1980, partly in response to the scandal created by the MacLennan
incident, at the Governor Sir Murray MacLehose’s request, The Law Reform Commission
of Hong Kong was asked to consider the topic: ‘Should the present laws governing
homosexual conduct in Hong Kong be changed and, if so, in what way?’ The completed
report: Report on Laws Governing Homosexual Conduct (Topic 2), was presented three
years later on 15 April, 1983. According to the references section of the Report, it is
Sam’s 1981 booklet 25 Questions about Homosexuality which was consulted, not his
book which was not yet published.

Included in the report were the ‘Statement of a Chinese Homosexual’, ‘Notes of a
Meeting with 4 Young Chinese Homosexuals’, and further ‘Submissions by a
Homosexual’. The Commission also consulted a bizarre array of individuals and
organizations, whose opinions would not normally be solicited on issues relating to
human sexuality. These included the Incorporated Trustees of the Islamic Community
Fund of HK, the Scout Association of HK, the Lions Club International and the Hong Kong
Federation of Industries. As many of these organizations pointed out in their responses
‘This question lies outside the terms of reference of the Association’ (Expatriate
Inspectors’ Association, Royal HK Police [A70]). However, others were less candid in
expressing their views. For instance, Professor G B Ong, on behalf of the Department of
Surgery at the University of Hong Kong, opined that ‘the fact that homosexuality is
legalised tends to lead to corruption of young boys on a large scale. From the medical
point of view (sic), it is an abominable practice’ (A72).

The response from members of the general public who were invited to offer their
opinions in letters to the Commission was overwhelmingly negative. For instance, a
Regina Tong asserted that ‘a vampire...sucks blood from someone else who later becomes a vampire as well. Homosexuality is something as horrible as the above story but it is not a story at all’ (A37). These extracts indicate the highly charged atmosphere in which the ‘debate’ over homosexual decriminalisation was taking place.

[16] As Sam explains, 'tongzhi' is a Chinese term once current in the Communist era and used in the sense of 'comrade'. In the 1990s, it came to be preferred by some Hong Kong Chinese gay activists as a term for all lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender individuals because it was inclusive, rather than exclusive and, unlike the other terms, had no sexual connotations. In 1996, the first Tongzhi Conference was held in Hong Kong.

e-mail: Samshasha
website: Samshasha

References


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Same-sex marriage rights include estate planning, power of attorney, insurance coverage, and parentage. LegalMatch provides online legal insights in their law library to help you better understand your case. Learn more. At first, gay couples were able to legally enter into a union of same-sex marriage only in the states of Massachusetts and Oregon. In June 2015, the U.S Supreme Court made same-sex marriage legal in every state and extended the right for same-sex couples to marry. What Is Same-Sex Marriage? Insurance Coverage – Life insurance, auto insurance, insurance granted by employers and other benefits may extend to the partner. Parentage – Women with same sex partners may have their partner’s name on their child’s birth certificate. Gay marriage is covered under this, as demonstrated in the 1974 Supreme Court ruling that “freedom of personal choice in matters of marriage and family life is one of the liberties protected by the Due Process Clause”. To promote anti-gay marriage sentiments as well as the banning of same-sex marriage are unconstitutional actions. For the heterosexual couples who believe in the institution of marriage and/or choose to participate in it, it represents a public celebration of one’s commitment to their life partner. Same sex couples have every right to enjoy this benefit, as they are legal citizens and members of society as well. Anti-same sex marriage laws and bans don’t just disadvantage couples who wish to marry, but they discriminate against members of the LGBT community as well. Gay marriage around the world. Despite Proposition 8, many regions around the globe are allowing same sex marriage. This is a list of those legalized gay marriage states and countries. Where are the countries that legalized gay marriage? They’re mostly in Europe, where progressive societies ... LGBT Countries Where Gay Marriage is Legal. Web Infoguy. 179.3k views 37 items. Gay marriage around the world. Despite Proposition 8, many regions around the globe are allowing same sex marriage. This is a list of those legalized gay marriage states and countries. Where are the countries that legalized gay marriage? They’re mostly in Europe, where progressive societies have warmed to same-sex marriage.