ABSTRACT


Suisui Wang, Indiana University

While the translation of sexual science dates to Republican China, the emergence of sexuality-related clinical diagnosis and taxonomy is a recent phenomenon. In Chinese Classification of Mental Disorders (CCMD), homosexuality made an ephemeral presence in 1989 and was declassified in its 2001 revision. Yet the continuous debate surrounding homosexuality’s normalcy/pathology constitutes a site for articulating post-socialist medical authority and global sexual modernity. Although some closeted psychiatrists used disease status to protect homosexual patients from criminalization and treated homosexuality to express their own same-sex desire, gay health activists disregarded such internal complexity of medicalization and asserted pathology as incompatible with modern sexual identification. Activists harnessed the nascent infrastructure of global health to demand demedicalization by evoking the scientific and moral authority of World Health Organization’s International Classification of Disease (ICD). While the ideal of scientific internationalism eventually prevailed, activists’ claim sparked Cold-War-inflected backlash deeming homosexuality as a Western imperialist threat to socialist hygiene. Weaving together historiographies of sexual and hygienic modernity, I argue that postsocialist transitions of homosexuality from pathological diagnosis to sexual identity reflects the shifting foundation of clinical authority from state-sanctioned political psychiatry to global epistemic community.