

In the second part of a series about homosexuality in China, a male 'mamasan' tells *Vivien Cui* about his busy life

'Money boys' become currency of pimps

Had it not been for the constant ringing of his four mobile phones, it would have been difficult to tell that the clean-cut, slim young man in the cake shop in Dalian (大连), Liaoning province (辽宁省), was one of the region's best-connected panderers.

With his unusually pale complexion, dry, delicate lips, pink shirt and jeans, 22-year-old "Bing Bing" looked more like a timid student than a pimp – or "mamasan" in Chinese – in the lucrative underground world of male prostitution.

As the phones rang like a frenetic electronic orchestra, Bing Bing answered each with a steely professionalism.

"Tell him to get the hell out and go home", the male-prostitute-turned-mamasan said. "Or tell him to get back to my place and wait for me right there."

"A newbie," Bing Bing sighed, hanging up the phone.

"He offended my guest by running away last night while they were in the middle of doing [it]. No, this child is not [gay]. It was actually his first time."

A "child" in the mamasan's vernacular is a male prostitute servicing male customers, more commonly known as a "money boy".

Bing Bing is at the centre of the Dalian money boy world, connecting hundreds of clients with more than 30 "children" on his books. He says he keeps six of the best prostitutes as long-term contractors, while the rest rotate through different pimps in town or between different cities. This is a practice called "full-mooning".

Insiders say up to 80 per cent of the money boys are not homosexuals but poor young men prostituting themselves simply to make money. And there is great demand for their services.

"My client has been complaining that I keep sending chicken [inexperienced prostitutes] these days, but my business is too busy. I have simply run out of hands," Bing Bing said.

The Dalian mamasan could do with a few more hands to answer all the calls. Trying to answer two phones at once, a third mobile



Li Ning, a "mamasan" for male prostitutes, is jailed for eight years by a court in Nanjing (南京). Prostitution is illegal on the mainland, regardless of gender. Photo: EyePress

calls out for attention. In the past two years, Bing Bing has seen more than 500 money boys under his employ come and go.

Most are from Heilongjiang (黑龙江省), Jilin (吉林省), Liaoning and Shandong (山东省), and once their Dalian rotation is over, most join the legion, migrating to the provincial capital of Shenyang (沈阳), then to Beijing and Shanghai and all the way to metropolises down south such as Guangzhou and Shenzhen. As this legion, comprising teenaged boys and men in their early 20s, moves silently from one section of the prostitution in-

dustry to another, and from city to city, its ranks are continually swelled by youths from the country's lowest economic strata.

A source from Shenyang says Guangdong panderers sometimes go to the northeast to help meet demand there. But he says that a new trend is that of southern pimps flying in "well-trained, excellent" money boys directly from northeast China when "the trade is too brisk" in Guangdong.

"There is already a well-developed employment market and professional agents for prostitutes," he said.

"My customers are from all walks of life ... officials, police, professors, businessmen"

Bing Bing 'mamasan' for gay men

Bing Bing said he did not keep tabs on the whereabouts of the "full-mooned" boys.

Rather than operating under the guise of a sauna, massage parlour or karaoke bar, Bing Bing runs his business by maintaining five apartments which also serve as workplaces for the prostitutes.

The apartments are all rented so Bing Bing can regularly uproot

the operation to avoid police attention. He has to move often, even though almost every pimp is protected by figures in the police force or judicial system, many of whom are also their customers.

"My customers are from all walks of life, including officials, police, university professors and businessmen. Some only hire my 'children' because they trust me," Bing Bing said with pride.

Mu Yang, head of the grassroots gay organisation Dalian Rainbow, said customers tended to go directly through pimps such as Bing Bing to hide their identities.

Mr Mu said the clients feared being blackmailed or threatened by the money boys if they hired them themselves.

Bing Bing willingly acts as a go-between, but takes no responsibility for protecting either party from HIV/Aids or other sexually transmitted diseases.

"It's all up to the 'children' [whether to use a condom or not].

How am I supposed to monitor that? They never do the deed within my sight," he said, before another round of phone calls.

In July, the Ministry of Health listed male homosexuals, migrant workers and university students as the groups at highest risk of contracting HIV/Aids.

Mr Mu, who has been pushing the Aids-prevention message in Dalian for the past six years, said the poorly educated migrant population was at greatest risk. "They are hard to reach, move frequently, are ignorant of the essential knowledge, desperate for money and sexually active," Mr Mu says.

Yuan Suoxian, a director of the Chinese Traditional Medicine Committee at the China Sexology Association, said that "if no measures are taken, promiscuity and unsafe sex practices will lead to a pandemic soon or later".

He suggested legalising prostitution might be a solution. "Look at how affluent the market is. It is not something that can simply be banned as long as there is this huge demand."

"It's all up to the 'children' [whether to use a condom or not].

'ONCE YOU START IT'S VERY HARD TO BREAK AWAY'

Tony, as he asks to be called, is a gay fourth-year university student and prostitute.

"I am luckier than most 'money boys' because I am gay," the 22-year-old beamed. "Most of them never enjoy the work because they are straight."

"For them, this job is just a desperate way to earn enough to live. Going against their natural orientation pits the job against their natural will."

As one of the rare well-educated people in the money-boy community, Tony learned the lesson of having to use condoms with every client when he contracted genital warts at the age of 19.

But most of his colleagues are poorly educated and more ignorant about protection.

Tony said money boys earned on average between 200 yuan to 300 yuan per client, depending on the kind of service they provided, with about a third of it going to their boss, or "mamasan".

Most of his customers were middle-aged men from all walks of life, and some were foreigners.

"One of my customers I feel great sympathy for is a divorced young man. He usually gets himself dead drunk every night and calls a money boy, simply out of fear of loneliness," Tony said.

Tony's debut as a money boy started when he dated a man he met online.

The "date" turned out to be a mamasan soliciting boys and the meeting was more of a job interview. The job offer gave Tony, who was fighting with his parents, a chance to be "rebellious and offbeat".

"I accepted the offer and in an instant moved from the dormitory to his rented apartment where other money boys lived," he recalled.

"This career is an experience of being decadent but gay. Once you start, it is very hard to break away from it, because it is such a temptation: money comes too easily." *Vivien Cui*

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