

# QUEERING CHINA

## A NEW SYNTHESIS

**Howard Chiang**

*Obsession: Male Same-Sex Relations in China, 1900–1950*

Wenqing Kang

Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009. x + 191 pp.

*Gay and Lesbian Subculture in Urban China*

Loretta Wing Wah Ho

London: Routledge, 2010. xiv + 180 pp.

*Chinese Male Homosexualities: Memba, Tongzhi, and Golden Boy*

Travis S. K. Kong

London: Routledge, 2011. xxiv + 296 pp.

*The Libertine's Friend: Homosexuality and Masculinity in Late Imperial China*

Giovanni Vitiello

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011. xii + 296 pp.

Despite the title of this review essay, none of the four books under review adopts the word *queer* in its title. This serves as both an encouraging sign and a cautionary tale. This is encouraging because, as James Welker has pointed out recently, the horizon of queer studies has evolved and been decentered so rapidly that North America is no longer the only powerhouse, or the exclusive place of “origin,” from where all studies of non-Western, postcolonial, or Third World queer experiences must be derived. This is true not just in terms of leading theoretical paradigms but also in terms of the actual landscape of knowledge production, as exemplified

by the inauguration of the Queer Asia Series by Hong Kong University Press in 2009.<sup>1</sup> So the absence of the term *queer* in these titles, despite the growing militancy, Americanness, and intellectual hegemony of queer theory, might be viewed as an extension of some of the analytic groundwork laid down by an earlier group of scholars who had “queered” queer studies from global, postcolonial, diasporic, and migration perspectives.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, the commitment in all these texts to words like *homosexuality*, *same-sex relations*, or even *gay and lesbian* bears its own unique burden. I am hardly suggesting, of course, that these texts are reverting back to a mode of analysis predating the paradigmatic turn from gay and lesbian to queer in the early 1990s, since such a suggestion depends on the presumption of a self-authenticating style of reasoning that holds “queerness” as the ultimate yardstick of a kind of teleological exceptionalism.<sup>3</sup> On the contrary, the four books under review uniformly implement a sophisticated methodology, for the most part grounded in particular disciplines, with gripping, truly original attention to new sources: late imperial pornographic fictions in *The Libertine’s Friend*, Republican-era tabloid newspapers in *Obsession*, contemporary cyber culture in *Gay and Lesbian Subculture in Urban China*, and diasporic voices in Britain in *Chinese Male Homosexualities*. By bringing forward a different set of research questions and conceptual priorities, each book vividly captures the kaleidoscopic matrix within which queer Chinese studies is transforming itself.

Meanwhile, although this new wave of scholarship on queer China unquestionably supersedes the earlier paradigm-shifting works of Bret Hinsch, Chou Wah-shan, and Lisa Rofel, it pays scant attention to gender and sexual variances beyond a “homonormative” framework.<sup>4</sup> What happens, for instance, when the angle from which we approach this new body of sources is not primarily anchored by queer sexuality but gender? Would the picture change slightly or completely when we prioritize trans over gay as our leading epistemic frame? This limitation immediately brings home the enduring disruptive but also productive nature of queer scholarship. What I have been calling a cautionary tale in the end still projects its own optimism: to open up further questions and debates as the ground for queer studies in general and in the China field in particular to reorient itself continuously. One remarkable theme in this particular set of books is the recurrent emphasis on the importance of language in the study of queer Chinese histories and cultures. By examining the discursive context of homoerotic discourses from the seventeenth century to the present, the authors have crystallized a discrete set of historical and sometimes transcultural explanations for difference, but their works also encourage further revisions of some of their theoretical prem-

ises, whether in terms of the new contours of area studies or the old concern of queer historicism. By challenging the heteronormative bias of China studies and the Western-centrism of queer studies, the structural and theoretical affinity of these four books brings surprising materials and new insights into purview, but, in refusing the name queer, they risk leaving behind some of those same queer genealogical groundings that themselves have instrumentalized a more global synthesis.

### **Homoromance of the Libertine**

When Brill Academic Publishers reprinted Robert van Gulik's classic *Sexual Life in Ancient China* (1961) in 2003, the historian Charlotte Furth considered it a powerful reminder of how far the discipline of Chinese cultural history has evolved in light of the challenges posed by poststructuralism.<sup>5</sup> Whereas van Gulik routinely generalized about pre-Qing erotic norms without questioning the "authentic" sexual truths unveiled by his sources, scholars today are accustomed to approach sexuality as a constructed system of meanings and the status of historical evidence as highly contingent. For van Gulik, it was possible to posit a set of claims about the history of sex and pleasure that is quintessentially "Chinese," and this was exactly what he accomplished. Drawing on a rich array of sources, including most famously medieval bedchamber manuals (*fangzhongshu*), he argued that a fairly open-minded and healthy attitude toward sex, including homosexuality, was abruptly suppressed when the Manchu conquered the Ming (1368–1644) in the mid-seventeenth century.

Giovanni Vitiello's *Libertine's Friend* can be read as both a response to and a significant revision of van Gulik's thesis. In terms of chronology, the book moves beyond the late Ming period, where van Gulik's narrative ends, and examines the reciprocal influence of gender and sexual norms all the way through the second half of the nineteenth century. With respect to sources, Vitiello's study primarily draws on pornographic fictional works, a corpus of texts minimally utilized by van Gulik himself, but it also highlights correlative motifs emerging from nonpornographic literary works, including the eighteenth-century masterpiece *Dream of the Red Chamber* (*Honglou meng*). Above all, Vitiello, who completed his PhD in East Asian Languages and Cultures at the University of California, Berkeley, and is now professor of Chinese language and literature at the University of Naples "L'Orientale," demonstrates virtuosity in extrapolating prominent trends of gender and sexual ideology from his colorful source base and synthesizing them into a lucid, elegant, yet sophisticated narrative. Unlike van Gulik, whose

mode of inquiry ought to be more properly aligned with the European sexological tradition (containing its own orientalist overtones), Vitiello astutely recounts not a set of preordained “facts” about Chinese sexual history but the intertwined representations of homosexuality, masculinity, and romantic love in fictions spanning roughly three hundred years—from the appearance of *Stories from the Water Margin* (*Shuihu zhuan*) in 1550 to the publication of *Precious Mirror for Ranking Flowers* (*Pinhua baojian*) in 1849.<sup>6</sup>

As the first monograph-length study of its topic, *The Libertine’s Friend* also endeavors to set the record straight for some of the major ongoing points of contention in the study of late imperial Chinese homoerotic culture. The most notorious of these is perhaps the disagreement between Vitiello, on the one hand, and Sophie Volpp and Timothy Brook, on the other, over the social prevalence and tolerance of male same-sex desire in the Ming-Qing transition. In his study of Ming literati culture, Brook reads “the social and psychological pressure against *nanse* [male beauty—also the title of the first chapter of Vitiello’s book]” as what “distinguished homoerotic love as an inclusive gesture within reach of only a tiny minority [among the social elite].”<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Volpp cautions against interpreting the extensive literary discussions of the fashionable male-male love as proof of its widespread tolerance in the seventeenth century. By focusing on the rhetorical strategies nested in these texts, especially the association of homoeroticism with the south, Volpp argues that what these rhetorical inconsistencies suggest is all but the idiosyncratic and outlandish status of homoerotic sensibility situated on the cultural margins, not the center.<sup>8</sup>

Contrary to Volpp’s specific association of the south with Fujian, Vitiello expands the meaning of the expression “southern charms” (*nanfeng*, which is a homophonous pun on “male charms”) to refer to the entire Jiangnan region, the geographic area that had been universally recognized as the center of Chinese cultural production up to the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the rich (thus in many ways contradictory and even ambiguous) regional lexicon of homoeroticism itself suggests that the craze for male beauty concerned the country as a whole, implying the discursive ubiquity of male-male desire itself. Similar to what Sharon Marcus has recently done for the place of female same-sex desire in Victorian English society, or what Carroll Smith-Rosenberg has shown earlier for the world of female same-sex relations in nineteenth-century America, Vitiello convincingly demonstrates the need for integrating male same-sex intimacy within the broader paradigms of masculinity and friendship in late imperial Chinese culture.<sup>10</sup>

By situating male homoeroticism within the broader context of male homosociality, Vitiello's analysis highlights not only the convergences between discourses on friendship and love between men but also how syncretic models of masculinity had a lasting impact on attitudes toward male same-sex relations throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Amid the extended cast of literary protagonists on which the spotlight of this book rests (e.g., the chivalric hero, the romantic scholar, the sexy moralist, among others), the libertine stands out as perhaps the most interesting figure, because the shifting boundaries of his "permissible" sexual behavior to a certain degree indexes the changing parameters of masculinity and in turn the conceivability of male homoeroticism.

Specifically, in late Ming pornographic novels, the bisexual desire of the libertine (such as Ximen Qing in *The Plum in the Golden Vase*) was circumscribed by his sexual "impenetrability," a central definition of his manhood. But the libertine and his masculinity underwent multiple transformations in the various pornographic novels published during the early to the mid-Qing periods (from the mid-seventeenth to the mid-eighteenth century). Generally speaking, in a first group of early Qing novels, the libertine successfully transgressed the earlier boundaries of his masculinity by allowing himself to be sexually penetrable by the husband of the beautiful woman whom he was originally courting. The dominant pattern in which receptive sodomy was highly stigmatized throughout the late imperial period was therefore "playfully downplayed" in these narratives (Vitiello, 99). In a subsequent set of novels, the libertine's friend abstained from seeking sexual intercourse with the libertine, and their relationship reverted back to the kind of chivalric friendship in which their homosocial alliance was cemented by the exchange of a woman (the libertine's friend still offered his wife to the libertine but without seducing him). In a later, third group of novels, the libertine protagonist once again assumed his earlier sexually impenetrable persona and began to express distaste for homosexuality, and the narrative involving his friend disappeared altogether from the overall plot. Vitiello concludes that "the penetrated libertine is a short-lived character, whose appearance on the fictional stage is confined to the early Qing period" (127). Here, Vitiello connects the insights he has drawn from fictional works to Matthew Sommer's study of Qing legal history, which shows the increasingly conservative legal reform taking place alongside the consolidation of the Manchu empire, especially during the Yongzheng era (1722–35).<sup>11</sup>

Two other major contributions of Vitiello's book are best understood as correctives to the dominant historiographical "placing" of sexuality in late imperial

China. The first, concerning chronology, is already obvious from Vitiello's study of the changing narration of the libertine and, perhaps more importantly, his friend. Specifically, Vitiello has mined a significant number of pornographic fictions written and published from the early to the mid-Qing periods, and this should revise our common perception of the abrupt end to late Ming hedonism and gender fluidity brought on by the Manchu conquest.<sup>12</sup> One of Vitiello's chief claims is that the period of gender fluidity and pornographic production should be extended to include the early Qing period. Second, Vitiello draws our attention to many examples of same-sex relations between individuals belonging to the same social stratum (e.g., literati peers). These *fictional* horizontal relationships, in other words, dispute our impression of homosexual relations as typically a cross-age and cross-class phenomenon in the late imperial period. However, it is important to be mindful of the nature of Vitiello's sources, which are stories predominantly pornographic in nature. Pornographic fictions easily lent themselves to being a venue for the expression of radical departures from Confucian social and cultural norms. Put differently, it is precisely because nonhierarchical same-sex relations were themselves a form of subversion to the dominant social script that they can be easily detected in vernacular pornographic writings.

### Obsession in Transition

Picking up where Vitiello's narrative leaves us, Wenqing Kang's *Obsession* offers a timely analysis of the evolving cultural and social significance of male same-sex relations during China's transition from an empire to a nation. The prevalence and peculiarity of same-sex intimacy between men has been a topic of intense scholarly debate in Chinese studies, but the chronological focus has been confined to the late imperial period, and the sources that informed these discussions have primarily come from the literary realm.<sup>13</sup> In these respects, *Obsession* both extends and departs from these thorough debates. The book continues to shed light on social attitudes toward male homoeroticism by analyzing a body of fictional works saturated with queer themes, but it also differs from earlier approaches by drawing heavily on accounts of same-sex relations that surfaced in tabloid newspapers, an important set of data that gives this book its empirical distinctiveness. Chronologically, *Obsession* pushes our understanding of the linguistic and cultural transformations of male same-sex sexuality beyond the late imperial period and into the Republican era (1911–49).

Kang, who received his PhD in history from the University of California, Santa Cruz, and is now associate professor in the history department at Cleve-

land State University, makes a compelling case for the urgency of language as an engine of change in the recasting of sexual relations between men in postimperial China. In the early twentieth century, a plethora of indigenous terms describing male same-sex relations from the past survived in the Chinese cultural lexicon. These include *duanxiupi* (the obsession with the cut sleeve), *fentaozhihao* (the love of sharing a peach), *Longyangjun* (the name of a male favorite in history), *nanchong* (male favorite), *nanse* (male beauty), *nanfeng* (southern mode or male mode), *xianggong* (young gentlemen or Peking opera actors who play female roles working as male prostitutes), *tuzi* (rabbit), *pijing* (ass expert), *renyao* (freak, fairy, or human prodigy), *jijian* (buggery or sodomy), *zouhanlu* (to take the land route), *houtinghua* (flowers of the rear garden), *jiangnan zuonü* (to use/view a man as a woman), and *tongxing lian'ai* (same-sex love or homosexuality). Vitiello's book (especially the first chapter) is useful here, because it helps contextualize some of these terminologies within the literary and cultural contexts from which they were disseminated in the Ming-Qing period. Kang's focus is on the discursive enabling effect of these terms in the late Qing and early Republican era: "Chinese thoughts on male same-sex relations circulating in the early twentieth century provided fertile ground for the dissemination of the Western sexological idea of homosexuality because the two shared comparable conceptual contradictions" (19).

For Kang, the multiple and competing meanings of terms such as *pi* (obsession) and *renyao* (freak), in particular, exemplify the kinds of internal contradiction characteristic of Western understandings of homosexuality, and it was this conceptual congruency—however counterintuitively—that made it possible for the rapid embrace of Western sexological discourse in the May Fourth context. In classical Chinese medical and literary writings, the idea of *pi* referred to both a pathological inclination that can be detected among only a limited group of individuals *and* a proclivity inherent in all human nature.<sup>14</sup> Taking a cue from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's observation that the epistemological grounding of the modern Western notion of homosexual subjectivity is underscored by an incoherent mixture of universalist and minoritarian worldviews, Kang suggests that the Chinese concept of *pi*, which gives his book its title and cover illustration, provided a genuine condition of possibility for the transmission of European sexological writings to China.<sup>15</sup> Another point of contact between Chinese and Western systems of knowledge hinged on the idea of *renyao*, whose definitional paradox Kang maps onto the gender separatism (the label of *renyao* was reserved mainly for men) versus gender transitivity (*renyao* men always transgressed gender conventions), a polarity also noted in Sedgwick's earlier formulation.<sup>16</sup> Like *pi*, the idea of *renyao* allowed for "the encounter between two forms of knowledge that not only recycled

and reinforced some old ideas, but also produced some new meanings in the semi-colonial context.”<sup>17</sup>

Out of the long list of available terms that described same-sex attraction, *tongxing lian'ai* received the most traction in the 1920s and 1930s, as it became (and continues to remain) the standard translation of the Western concept of homosexuality in Chinese.<sup>18</sup> The May Fourth/New Culture movement, an episode that some historians have called “the Chinese Enlightenment,” reached its peak in the early 1920s and provided the broader cultural backdrop against which Chinese writers passionately translated, introduced, and promoted European sexological texts.<sup>19</sup> Kang shows that the debates among Chinese iconoclastic intellectuals over the meaning of same-sex desire featured the same kind of wide-ranging perspectives that characterized the writings of turn-of-the-century European sexologists (most notably, Sigmund Freud, Richard von Krafft-Ebing, Havelock Ellis, and Edward Carpenter): from pathologization to normalization to utopianism.<sup>20</sup> An important shift in the conceptualization of male same-sex relations generated by this highly diverse phase of sexological appropriation in China was the booming popular attention toward sexual relations between men of *equal social status*. The radical departure from the hierarchical emphasis of late imperial accounts of male homoeroticism suggests far greater room for Foucauldian approaches to the historicization of *tongxing lian'ai* than what Kang’s (and to a lesser extent Vitiello’s) analysis in principle allows.<sup>21</sup>

A major contribution of Kang’s book stems from its sustained engagement with literary works by major and minor writers of the Republican period: Yu Dafu’s “Boundless Night” (1922), Huang Shenzhi’s “Him” (1923), Ye Dingluo’s “Boyfriend” (1927), Guo Moruo’s *My Childhood* (1928), and Ye Lingfeng’s *Taboo* (1931, unfinished novella). As Vitiello’s book demonstrates, literary critics and historians have long utilized fictional writings to situate homoromance, especially between men, in the broader historical and cultural context of late imperial China. In contrast, the repertoire on male same-sex relations in modern Chinese literature has been largely neglected by China scholars, and in this regard, Kang’s study of these Republican-era literary works attempts to recuperate a noteworthy amnesia in Chinese literary historiography. Kang argues that “the representation of male same-sex relationships in modern Chinese literature, sometimes configured through the Western idea of homosexuality (*tongxing lian'ai*), should be understood as a challenge to conventional social and sexual norms” (63). Borrowing from the European style of “decadent” writings, modernist Chinese writers portrayed male same-sex attachment as “fragile” and “ephemeral,” thereby “emphasizing the egalitarian nature of the relationship, which they took care to



differentiate from the old hierarchical model” (63).<sup>22</sup> Most of these literary works were written in the 1920s during the aftermath of the May Fourth movement. For Kang, the outpouring of these queer-themed short stories and novellas represents a brief moment in Chinese history when fictional writers were able to cast male same-sex love in a positive light. Given the emphasis Kang places on the discursive potential of the concept of *renyao*, it is interesting to note the conspicuous omission of Yu Dafu’s short story “Renyao” (1923) in the assembly of literary sources for the book.<sup>23</sup>

Starting in the mid-1930s, as the crisis of Japanese occupation deepened, the stigmatization of male same-sex relations as a sign of the weakness and deficiency of the Chinese nation reached a crescendo. Kang uses the writings of cultural conservatives in major tabloid newspapers, such as *Crystal* in Shanghai and *Heavenly Wind* in Tianjin, to elucidate the increasingly intensified connection between sexual and social disorder. This generation of cultural conservatives blamed Western-style feminism and the cognate set of new gender and sexual values that it promoted. They expressed deep anxieties over the strength and future of the nation in their discussion of same-sex relations between wayward women, male politicians and their male favorites, Chinese and foreign men, and male prostitutes and their clients. According to Kang, these conservative tabloid writers “contributed to the stigmatization of male same-sex relations by representing them as a cause of moral confusion, a symptom of political corruption, a social vice, a crime, a sign of colonial oppression and national humiliation, and a behavior alien to the Chinese” (86). As a result of the growing intensity of sociocultural conservatism, the relationship between *dan* actors (male actors who played female roles in Peking Opera) and their male patrons—a form of relationship that had been considered evidence of the refined taste of upper-class gentlemen in the past—acquired an unprecedented scope of negative connotations and became a copious source of shame for the Chinese nation.

### Beijing Stories

Loretta Wing Wah Ho’s *Gay and Lesbian Subculture in Urban China* fast-forwards to the contemporary era and examines the impact of China’s socioeconomic globalization on the formation of same-sex identities and cultures in the post-Mao reform period. The book weaves together analyses of three types of discourse: discussions of same-sex identity in English and Chinese academic literature, ethnographic information obtained from her fieldwork in Beijing, and the development of same-sex communities on the Internet. The last two types of sources are unique

among the books under review, because Ho's study, based on her interviews with five hundred informants on the subject of *tongxinglian* in Beijing, ventures into the cultural significance of Chinese cyberspace for the mediation of nonnormative sexual subjectivities. Insisting that the metaphor of "opening up" that dominates Chinese discourse on globalization is also germane to the production of gay and lesbian cultural citizenship in late reform-era Beijing, Ho argues that "a host of interlocking factors" helped shape the articulation of same-sex identity in urban China, including "local gay activism, an increasingly globalised gay culture, the same-sex movements in the diasporic Chinese communities [or what she also refers to as 'a hybridised transnational/Chinese identity'], and the emergence of a gay space in Chinese cyberspace" (10, 137).

What is remarkable about the manner in which the ethnographic materials are presented in this book is the decisive effort of Ho, who completed her PhD at the University of Western Australia and subsequently became a research associate at the same institution, to execute a critical self-reflexivity at every turn of communicating her findings. In the chapter "The Problematics of Storytelling," narratives and storytelling represent an opportunity to contest dominant social conventions, with respect to not only heteronormative values but also the corollary hegemonic ideas about *tongxinglian* itself. "For many citizens in Beijing," Ho observes, "storytelling is collectively imagined as a means of self-exploration or even self-liberation; many of them tell their stories into the national and global imaginings of opening up, sexual openness or liberation" (24). The emergence of a public space for the narration of private matters since the era of opening up has been explored in-depth by James Farrer, Yunxiang Yan, and others.<sup>24</sup> Despite the seemingly liberating effect of the explosive discourse of sexuality since the 1980s, Ho maintains that it is actually "a reflection of repressive social practices in Chinese society" and that, as such, "repression and expression coexist and contest each other" (27). Gay activists in Beijing, for example, often felt a sense of empowerment through their cooperation with foreign groups, as can be seen in the collaboration between the Beijing Gender Health Education Institute and foreign sexual health networks. Ho also conceded the many challenges she faced as someone originally from Hong Kong, which led some of her informants to regard her as a "cultural bastard" or "outsider," and as an academic researcher, which fueled a great measure of distrust among her interviewees. Whereas power dynamics tend to operate as an obstacle between the researcher and the researched subject in these cases, the stories of coming out centered on gay bars, the narratives of gay cruising in Dongdan Park, and the conflicting attitudes toward cross-gender expression that she collected all attest to the self-actualization pro-

cesses of cultural belonging, as much as resistance to hegemonic narratives of *tongxinglian*—processes taking shape around the rhetoric of China’s opening up to late capitalist globalization.

In discussing her fieldwork experience, Ho is particularly self-reflexive. Here, the mutual gaze mediated by the field between the anthropologist and the “culture” being scrutinized generates a parallel process in which narratives about the everyday lived experiences of same-sex subjects in urban China are coproduced. The ethnographer constantly struggles with issues that emerge at the intersection of the problems of *representation* (e.g., who is being represented; how representative is the sample; and does self-representation force a recognition of perpetual difference between the fieldworker and the informant), *legitimation* (e.g., is authenticity the ultimate source of authority; who is a legitimate ethnographer; and who is a legitimate subject), and *self-reflexivity* (e.g., to what end should the fieldworker write in a self-reflexive manner; toward what ethnographic and political goals should the fieldworker strive). These problems underscore the difficulty of discerning the possible ways by which the power dynamics of an ethnographic interaction can be altered (73). Henceforth, whether the focus is on the structure of communication (storytelling) or the mediation of fieldwork itself, Ho persistently propagates a self-conscious enumeration of the simultaneous conditioning of the subject *and* the object of social research. She shows that this self-reflexive praxis is nowhere more pivotal than in a topic as sensitive as our understanding of how same-sex desiring subjects are (trans)formed in contemporary metropolitan China, where the forces of globalization have proceeded with a considerable measure of paradox.

Besides forging critical self-reflexive praxis for research, Ho’s book taps into the cultural terrain of gay cyberspace in China. However, the space in which Chinese netizens, Chinese-language websites, Chinese website operators, and mainland-based online censors interact is anything but a straightforward open platform of sexual and cultural experimentation. Rather, Chinese cyberspace is a cultural milieu full of contradictions, one that both represents and *misrepresents* same-sex identity as much as it is circumscribed by both self-censorship and growing commercialization. Ho’s attention to how gay and lesbian communities have moved from physical locations to cyberspace is especially insightful, as the period in Chinese history under consideration intersects post-Mao socioeconomic reforms with the amalgamation of socialist and global capitalist political economies. The opportunity that the World Wide Web offers Chinese Internet users to reach beyond the geophysical confinements of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) via electronic technology typifies the historical peak of global integration

around the turn of the twenty-first century. As Ho notes, “Gay netizens in China are constantly borrowing language and images from global flows of information and people, while adapting themselves locally” (108). Of course, it would be a mistake to view this globalizing cultural process merely in terms of homogeneous calibration. The blossoming of the new online literary genre known as comrade literature (*tongzhi wenxue*) in Chinese cyberspace is an example of centrifugal hybridization, because, as Ho points out, “Comrade Literature is a *local* genre that has its antecedents in other forms of Chinese literature” (112). In sum, by allowing Chinese gay netizens to be connected virtually and globally, Chinese cyberspace breaks down the boundaries and transcends the borders that have long played a determinant role in the construction of sexual identities. Meanwhile, the hegemonic ideas about aspects of international gay and lesbian practices and lifestyles circulating in Chinese cyberspace are often fragmentary and sometimes even distorted because of the rapid annexation of online commercialism.

This brings us back to an important theme picked up by all four books: the tension between global and local identity formations. Amid China’s opening up and ascendancy to the global stage as an economic superpower, it should be no surprise that the Internet has become an important medium through which Chinese people are both exposed to and transform the wider world. Yet Chinese gay and lesbian subjects have also situated themselves within spaces of intercultural articulation that defy the mutual exclusiveness of global uniformity and local heterogenization. Ho’s study joins the work of other scholars (including, most notably, Lisa Rofel and Travis Kong) on the discourse of *suzhi* (quality) as it relates to the articulation of same-sex subjectivity.<sup>25</sup> As a manifestation of how sexuality and class intersect, the practice of normalizing a certain notion of gayness based on the degree of *suzhi* exemplifies how nonsexualized social hierarchies are reinforced and reproduced through the discursive categorizations of sexuality. In other words, the postsocialist desire for gay or lesbian identity, as it is underpinned by the discourse of *suzhi*, emerges from and adheres to a distinctively urban, middle-class-based genealogy of cultural participation. Responding to the global-local debate, then, Ho concludes that “same-sex attracted individuals in urban China selectively (re)appropriate patterns of gayness through a Western model of modernity, while still continuing to defend an ‘authentic’ Chinese same-sex identity and sense of belonging” (119).

### Multiqueering of Chineseness

All three books discussed so far rely on sources and informants from within Mainland China in order to capture and re-present Chinese same-sex identity, desire, cultures, and histories. Whereas Vitiello's study concentrates on fictional writings emanating from the centers of the publishing industry of the late imperial period, Kang's source base largely comes from the treaty ports of Shanghai and Tianjin, and Ho's fieldwork was conducted solely in Beijing. Despite their shared interest in queer topics and, to some extent, queer methodology, none of these authors has stepped out of continental China to deconstruct what the category of China itself might mean in a nonnormative sense—that is, to queer China from the outside in. Interestingly, it is the book that comes closest in form and method to conventional social-scientific studies that does the most to interrogate conceptions of sexuality and China in a simultaneous and reciprocal fashion.

In *Chinese Male Homosexualities*, Travis S. K. Kong, who received his PhD in sociology at the University of Essex and is now associate professor of sociology at the University of Hong Kong, delineates three “transnational traffics” that “allow three concrete critiques for three specific socio-political circumstances”: Hong Kong, London, and the PRC (11). Based on interviews and collection of life histories with sixty Chinese gay men in Hong Kong, London, and Guangdong (1997–98 and 2007–8), in addition to thirty Chinese “money boys” (men who have sex with other men in exchange for money) in Beijing and Shanghai (2004–5), Kong maps a polyvalent matrix in which transnational flows of capital, bodies, ideas, images, and commodities condition the mutually generative relationship between queer and Chinese identities across the lateral sites of (post-)socialist, postcolonial, and diasporic Chinas.

Kong's book does not take China for granted as a static theoretical and geographic entity. Rather, Kong is concerned with the inherently fraught relation between “(male) homosexuality” and “Chineseness” as reciprocal cultural constructs that can be illumined from the inside out (e.g., Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangdong), outside in (e.g., London), and liminal/transient (e.g., Hong Kong) angles. This multidirectional approach enables Kong to enter the scholarly dialogues and debates on essentialism versus social constructionism, queer theory versus sociology, and Western-centric gay studies versus postcolonial queer globalization studies, among others. Adopting a pluralist model of the Foucauldian power-resistance paradigm, Kong clarifies that in his attempt to “internationalize queer studies,” he is “not adding Chinese homosexuality to a total study of *world*

homosexuality, nor [is he] recovering a local and authentic origin for the study of Chinese homosexuality. Instead, [he is] writing a brief alternative genealogy of the study of homosexuality that is aware of some neglected voices and is critical of the constructed singular origin (read: Western) of the study of homosexuality” (17). Empirically, Kong is committed to a queer sociological approach that combines “individual biography, local social institutions and broader global/transnational processes through the data from extensive fieldwork (interviews, life stories, ethnography)” (28).

Each term in the book’s subtitle, *Memba, Tongzhi, and Golden Boy*, refers to a unique type of gay male identity and alludes to the corresponding locale of its social production and circulation: *memba* in Hong Kong, *tongzhi* (and “money boy”) in China, and “golden boy” in London. In Hong Kong, because of the city’s colonial history and transformation into a Special Administrative Region of China circa 1997, residents have been deprived of full access to civil, social, and political rights. Because the development of Hong Kong citizenship has been circumscribed by economic ideologies, which contributed to Hong Kong’s reputation as an “apolitical” society, Kong argues that to understand the development of sexual citizenship in this particular region, “we have to shift from institutional political spheres to other spheres, such as the market economy, the civil society, the media, popular culture, and the private realm of family and marriage, which are also involved in ‘politics’” (44).<sup>26</sup>

As such, Kong focuses his discussion of queer citizenship in Hong Kong through three prisms: the *tongzhi* movement, queer consumer culture, and the subversion of heteronormative family biopolitics.<sup>27</sup> Although the decriminalization of homosexuality in Hong Kong took place as early as 1991, the mushrooming of local *tongzhi* groups tended to embrace an assimilationist, nonconfrontational, and normalizing strategy throughout the 1990s. It was not until more recently, with the launch of the International Day Against Homophobia (IDAHO) in 2005, that a more radical but also more coalitional politics of sexuality has gradually taken shape. However, many Hong Kong gay men claim a considerable lack of interest in institutional politics. In turn, the cultural politics shaping a distinct *memba* identity (*memba* is a local parlance that reflects the way Hong Kong self-identified gay men pronounce the English word *member*—implying a sense of exclusiveness—with a Cantonese accent) reflect the passion of Hong Kong gay men for economic consumption and cultural representation. As cultural space—for example, media and popular and consumer culture—becomes the major space for the production of texts and practices that disrupt the hegemony of heteronormativity, this new form of queer cultural citizenship subsequently loosened homosexuality from its

pathological, deviant, and criminalized social status and brought it closer to a cosmopolitan archetype of cultural respectability and decency.

But the new queer consumer culture galvanized by the neoliberal economy is not without its limitations. As Kong reminds us, precisely because the commercial queer scene in Hong Kong is “largely male-dominated, highly class-specific, youth-oriented, camp-phobic and fashion conscious, and has always been coloured by a substantial Western input,” Hong Kong *membra* “are caught within the disciplinary hegemonic cult of gay masculinity and the practice of conspicuous pink consumption” (83, 92). With respect to intimate citizenship, although Hong Kong gay men are not necessarily interested in fighting for same-sex marriage or other kinds of legal recognition, the private lives of *membra* are filled with nuanced and subtle quotidian strategies of negotiation—ranging from coming out to secret closeting, from leaving home to getting married and forming families—that seek to create alternative scripts of kinship and intimacy within the parameters of family biopolitics.

A distinctive feature of Kong’s work is its attention to queer Chinese overseas communities. Despite the fact that Hong Kong was a British colony between 1842 and 1997, or precisely because of it (the British government limited the quota of incoming Hong Kong population in response to the political anxiety of the 1997 handover), Chinese migrants to Britain (and Europe in general) are far fewer in number, making up only 0.4 percent of the total population according to the 2001 census, in comparison with the case in North America and Australia. The most popular image of Chinese gay men in the UK is the “golden boy” (*jintong*), which, in traditional Chinese literature, denotes a young virgin boy who is innocent, pure, and feminized (even androgynous). Interestingly, the white man–golden boy pairing remains the most generic type of ethnic-crossing gay relationship in London, reflecting a certain degree of social acceptance (even by Chinese British gay men themselves) of the masculine whiteness and the soft oriental dichotomy that reverberates through the broader cultural imaginary of Asianism in the Western world.<sup>28</sup> Whether Chinese gay subjects came to the UK as overseas “brides” of white British gay men (many of whom benefited from the 2004 Civil Partnership Act), with family (usually of middle or upper-middle class), or as independent migrants (mainly through strategies of individual enhancement such as education or training), the image of the golden boy has occupied a central ideological place within the British queer community—from which certain Chinese diasporic gay men radically depart and with which others closely identify.

After taking us to Hong Kong and London to show how “Chinese” and “gay” identities denaturalize each other on the periphery or outside geopolitical

China proper, Kong returns to the queer communities in Guangdong, Beijing, and Shanghai. On the book's back cover, the anthropologist Lisa Rofel asserts that "*Chinese Male Homosexualities* is an original study of what happens when the translation of global gayness 'fails.'" But this statement, which reads Kong's contribution as an affirmation of Rofel's earlier ethnographic findings, undercuts the book's major accomplishments.<sup>29</sup> This is because what Kong brings to surface is an important archive documenting the imbricated fracturing of Chinese queer identities—a crucial step forward that puts the critique of global gayness behind (12–13).<sup>30</sup> For instance, the emergence of gay identity among men who self-identify as *tongzhi* (comrade) in reform-era Chinese cities features a complex set of generational differences.<sup>31</sup> Gay men who came of age in the Maoist era tend to be more cautious about disclosure, more wary of the regulatory mechanism of the work unit (*danwei*), and more sensitive to the obligation of familial morality, whether in terms of owning up to the filial duties of being a son or saving the family's "face" (*lian* or *mianzi*). In contrast, the younger generation of gay men, born in the late 1970s and 1980s, feel more empowered by the Internet, the possibility of migration (especially from rural to urban areas), and a growing sense of individuality and sexual subjectivity, which were repressed in the Maoist period (1949–76).<sup>32</sup>

By leaving behind the debate over the success or failure of "global gayness," Kong shows that many of the themes central to the transnational constructions of Chinese gay male identities converge asymptotically on the figure of the money boy. As gay identity became increasingly associated with consumption and material privileges in the PRC since the 1980s, money boys (not all of whom identify as gay) walk a fine line in separating sex from work and from love. The emphasis on cultural citizenship therefore channels the self-identification of Hong Kong *momba* and the self-understanding of mainland money boys through consumer desire. Meanwhile, the money boy in Beijing and Shanghai distinguishes himself from the feminized golden boy in London, because the axis of their psychological and social constitution diverges with respect to their object of negation (the Chinese nonsex worker versus the white Western man). Kong's impressive ethnographic study makes it evident that even the term *tongzhi* operates as a highly uneven (sometimes even unsuccessful) rubric for capturing the lived experiences of sexual minorities across these three horizontal sites of "transnational traffic." By throwing light on how different modes of capitalism in London, Hong Kong, and China construct different routes to, for the lack of a better word, "global" gayness, the book shows that the coconstituted aspects of global-gay-capitalism are invariably heterogeneously articulated through and against one another.<sup>33</sup>



### The Missed Rendezvous between Queer Chinese Studies and Genealogy

Despite the obvious differences in their disciplinary orientation, these four books share a remarkable sensitivity to the role of language in the study of queer China. Vitiello's and Kang's two more historically oriented books give life to a rich lexicon describing male homoeroticism in the Chinese past. Both works highlight the various literary and cultural subtexts within which different terminologies gained footing and the pertinent social and historical contexts in which their meanings changed over time. If intimacy between men was once a symbol of cultural refinement imbued with hierarchical connotations, as implied by the terms *nanfeng* ("southern charm" or "male charm") and *jijian* (sodomy) in the late imperial period, sexual relations between men of equal social status became a source of China's shame, as suggested by Republican-era discussions centered on the term *danpi* (obsession with *dan* actors) or *tongxing lian'ai* (homosexuality).

On the other hand, layered with captive ethnographic insights, the two books by Ho and Kong explore the nuances of the dominant vocabularies that have gained wide currency in recent and contemporary queer Chinese communities worldwide. In excruciating detail, their works shed new light on transformations in discourses of sexual identity against the backdrop of China's rapid ascendancy on the neoliberal world stage. Like those Beijing *tongzhi* who were quick to elevate a discourse of *suzhi* (quality) as a fraternal arbiter of gayness, *membas* in Hong Kong, money boys in Shanghai and Guangdong, and golden boys in London all find affinity, in one way or another, with an urbancentric, materialist, cosmopolitan, and upwardly mobile prototype of queer consumer citizenship. If the first two books enumerate the tensions and pulls of a host of lexical evolutions so well, the last two show remarkable strength in deconstructing the valences of "China" and "Chineseness" from lateral sites of subcultural trafficking, punctuated by their unique conditions of queer subjectivity.

Their exceptional attention to linguistic issues and the polyphony of discourse transformation notwithstanding, all four books still leave room for further elaborations on the significance of language. For instance, given Ho's and Kong's undertaking in deconstructing and queering notions of Chineseness, it would have been interesting to see how their work potentially connects with the Sinophone framework that has recently acquired increasing appeal in critical transnational inquiries.<sup>34</sup> A major intervention of Sinophone studies has been the breaking down of the chain of equivalence between language, nationality, ethnicity, and culture. One can easily imagine the polylingualities of the Chinese diasporic site in London. As such, a more thorough deconstruction of the markers "Chinese" and

“British” may bring to light the localizations and mutual interactions of Chinese-speaking (Sinophone) versus English-speaking (Anglophone) queer diasporic communities in London. To say the very least, the Chinese-speaking queer subject in Britain sits on the fringes of both “Chinese” and “Western” queer cultures, so their double, conjunctive peripheralisms destabilize any hegemonic attempts of reading their identity through the exclusive lens of language, nationality, ethnicity, or culture. Similarly, a more careful delineation of the borders of translation and zones of contact between Sinophone and Anglophone netizens may help ground a more sophisticated appreciation of the limitations and possibilities of a (virtual) “queer planet.”<sup>35</sup>

On the other hand, the two books by Vitiello and Kang seem to have minimized their engagement with the genealogical approach of Foucauldian historicism, which has been shown to be so valuable to historical studies of sexuality.<sup>36</sup> This is one area where Vitiello and Kang could have expanded their sensitivity to linguistic usage, perhaps by pushing the conceptual boundaries—but also recognizing the constraints—of words that they have maintained as neutral across time (and place). In the case of *The Libertine’s Friend*, the tendency to deploy homosexuality and masculinity as transhistorical categories of analysis is quite evident, despite their analytic utility. The discussions in *Obsession*, on the other hand, tend to proceed without questioning the very idea of “sex” within the phrase *same-sex relations*. As Afsaneh Najmabadi reminds us, “to the extent that we continue to narratively reproduce gender binaries, are we not naturalizing (and by implication atemporalizing) gender, despite our best intentions?”<sup>37</sup> The fact that the Chinese word *xing* acquired a new epistemic component in coming to mean “sex” only by the early twentieth century itself signals a historical process.<sup>38</sup> This is a process that suggests the distinctiveness of the global circulation of ideas, commodities, and people that characterizes Republican Chinese history, and, by extension, it flags some of the possible ways in which we can benefit from—yet also fall short of—approaching the past through the lens of “same-sex relations,” let alone “homosexuality.”

Vitiello and Kang have refrained from advancing a claim about the occasioning of an epistemological break in the Republican era by showing that earlier concepts associated with male same-sex sexual practice (e.g., *nanshe* or *pi*) jostled alongside and informed the new sexuality discourse. However, one must not forget that the congruency between earlier and later understandings of same-sex practice *is itself* a cultural phenomenon unique to the Republican period and not before. If we go back to the arguments in *Obsession*, preexisting Chinese ideas about male favorites and *pi* supposedly “laid the ground for acceptance of the modern

Western definition of homo/heterosexuality during [the Republican] period in China.” Kang’s first explanation is that “both the Chinese concept *pi* (obsession) and Western sexology tended to understand same-sex relations as pathological.” Relying on Sedgwick’s model of the overlapping “universalizing discourse of acts and minoritizing discourse of persons,” he then suggests that indigenous Chinese understandings shared a comparable internal contradiction in the conceptualization of male same-sex desire. In short, “The concept *pi* which Ming literati used to characterize men who enjoyed sex with other men, on the one hand implied that men who had this kind of passion were a special type of people, and on the other hand, presumed that the obsession could happen to anyone” (21).

By contrast, a view grounded in Foucauldian historicism would suggest that Kang’s *isolation* of both a pathological meaning and this internal conceptual contradiction of *pi* represents his anachronistic effort to read homosexuality into earlier modes of thought. As Cuncun Wu and others have shown, the Ming-Qing literati’s world of connoisseurship features multiple meanings of and cultural significance for *pi* that cannot be comprehended through a single definition of pathology or an independent lens of same-sex relations decontextualized from other types of refined human desire.<sup>39</sup> We can therefore conclude that the very semblance between what Kang calls “the internal contradictions within the Chinese indigenous understanding of male same-sex relations” and “those within the Western modern homosexual/heterosexual definition” was made possible and meaningful only alongside (or after) the emergence of the concept of homosexuality in China (490). Treating discourse seriously requires us to pay closer attention to how old words take on a new meaning (and life) in a different historical context, rather than impose later familiar notions onto earlier concepts.

As David Halperin remarks so succinctly on the dangers of neglecting the embedded nature of discourses of sexuality (e.g., the hierarchical implications of *pi* in literati discourses): “Of course, evidence of conscious erotic preferences does exist in abundance, but it tends to be found in the context of discourses linked to the senior partners in hierarchical relations of pederasty or sodomy. It therefore points not to the existence of gay sexuality per se but to one particular discourse and set of practices constituting one aspect of gay sexuality as we currently define it.”<sup>40</sup> We might add here that the nonhierarchical examples of homoeroticism to which Vitiello’s book draws our attention must be also read with great caution, because the genre of his sources actually reflects the limited nature of their representativeness. The horizontal relationships between men are depicted as such in *pornographic fictions*, precisely because this type of relationship deviated from the more conventional sexual relations between a male elite (typically the

active partner) and a member of a lower social stratum (thus making this a vertical relationship).

Both Vitiello and Kang refer to the oeuvre of the eugenicist Pan Guandan, who enumerated twelve cases of male homosexuality and one case of female homosexuality in his annotated translation of Havelock Ellis's *Psychology of Sex*, as exemplary of the historical continuity between late imperial and Republican-era understandings of same-sex eroticism. But the cases identified by Pan should be understood less as direct historical evidence of homosexual experience in the Ming and Qing dynasties than as a reflection of the ways in which the epistemological reorientations brought about by a new sexological vocabulary culminated in occasioning the condition of their very comprehensibility. Vitiello interprets Pan's effort "to provide a Chinese perspective on an experience inadequately represented in the Western book. These negotiation attempts remind us that the transformation of sexual culture in twentieth-century China cannot be read simply as the replacement of one model with another" (201). There are two major assumptions embedded in Vitiello's statement: first, the internal coherence of a unified structure of homoerotic sentiment had *always already existed* in China before the Western concept of homosexuality, and second, the congruency between the former and the latter structures of knowledge was inevitable and unproblematic. Vitiello's reading does not address how the internal coherency of an indigenous structure of knowledge on which the foreign model of homosexuality could be easily mapped and the condition of possibility of this mapping *were both themselves* historically contingent on—even historically produced by—the very process whereby "homosexuality" was translated into Chinese in the early twentieth century. When Republican-era Chinese sexologists and other writers utilized examples from ancient Greece to render the modern category of homosexuality intelligible, the result was a similar moment of epistemic alignment in China in the establishment of what Foucault calls *scientia sexualis*.<sup>41</sup>

The epistemic continuity forged by Chinese sexologists between the foreign concept of homosexuality and earlier examples of homoeroticism do not undermine the kind of Foucauldian epistemological rupture that I have been suggesting, but actually exemplify it. Before the rupture, according to the normative definition of desire in male spectatorship and connoisseurship, the possibility of having the same (homo)sexuality as either the *dan* actor or the male favorite would have appalled the literati gentleman. As Vitiello himself points out, "There was no such thing in late imperial China (or in classical China, for that matter) as a category covering both the desire of a man for a boy and that of a boy for a man,

something similar to what we might call today ‘male homosexual desire’” (15). He further acknowledges that “in contrast with the wealth of expressions describing the desire of men for boys, there is no specific expression to convey the opposite” (24). I would not go so far as to describe Vitiello’s book (or Kang’s) in the manner that Joan Scott has dismissed the ahistoricity of Judith Bennett’s claims in *History Matters* (2006), a book—because of the categorical and context-insensitive nature of its conceptual vocabularies, such as “patriarchy,” “feminism,” “women,” and “lesbian-like”—considered by Scott to be “confused at its best, incoherent at its worst,” and “lack[ing] a meaningful approach to the study of history, substituting slogans for conceptual formulations.”<sup>42</sup> But I think it is important to point out the inconsistencies between Vitiello’s sporadic confessions, as quoted above, and his justification for using “the term ‘homosexuality’ to generically refer to a sexual practice that appears to have existed and to still exist in all human cultures” (14).

In sum, the four books reviewed here provide compelling evidence that queer Chinese studies is entering a new phase in which diverse disciplinary registers can easily be crossed or amalgamated. Although each author comes from a different disciplinary background (Vitiello in literature, Kang history, Ho ethnography, and Kong sociology), their studies often end up addressing a vibrant set of interconnected issues. For instance, the social-scientific findings of Ho and Kong allow us to bring our historical narrative of same-sex sexuality in China to the present. This historical appreciation, nevertheless, begs for more in-depth explorations of the Maoist period (from the 1950s to the 1970s) and the legal ramifications of homosexuality in the twentieth century more generally.<sup>43</sup> More can also be said about the problem of “homonormativity” with which I began this essay, in that there is an overwhelming attention toward men and masculinity in this particular set of books. The relative paucity of research on female same-sex relations in the premodern period makes it difficult to assess the gendered implications of the kind of historical continuity that Kang and Vitiello tried to establish between earlier formations of (male) same-sex relations and the later concept of “homosexuality.”<sup>44</sup> For better and for worse, Chinese queer inquiries today demonstrate great resilience toward cultural influences from not only geographically dispersed sites but also, most importantly, temporally dispersed contexts. The study of the distant and immediate past is no longer the chief preoccupation of historical scholarship (after all, many disciplines continue to grapple with the past), but the queering of Chinese studies and a new synthesis of its unruly regimes of disciplinarity cannot but focalize the heteroglossiac dynamics of change over time.

## Notes

I extend grateful thanks to Ari Larissa Heinrich, Alvin Ka Hin Wong, and the journal editors for offering generous and insightful comments on earlier versions of this essay. My thinking on historicism is indebted to David Halperin.

1. James Welker, "(Re)Positioning (Asian) Queer Studies," *GLQ* 20, nos. 1–2 (2014): 181–98.
2. See Cindy Patton and Benigno Sánchez-Eppler, eds., *Queer Diasporas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000); Arnaldo Cruz-Malavé and Martin F. Manalansan IV, eds., *Queer Globalizations: Citizenship and the Afterlife of Colonialism* (New York: New York University Press, 2002); Martin F. Manalansan IV, *Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men in the Diaspora* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); Eithne Luibhéid and Lionel Cantu, eds., *Queer Migrations: Sexuality, U.S. Citizenship, and Border Crossings* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005); David L. Eng, Judith Halberstam, and José Esteban Muñoz, eds., "What's Queer about Queer Studies Now," special issue, *Social Text*, nos. 84–85 (2005).
3. The early 1990s has often been characterized as a pivotal moment for the rise of queer theory and queer studies because of the relatively synchronic publications of a number of the field's key founding texts, including Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature, and Difference* (New York: Routledge, 1989); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990); David Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality: And Other Essays in Greek Love* (New York: Routledge, 1990); and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990). For recent reflections on the state of queer studies since the early 1990s, see Janet Halley and Andrew Parker, eds., "After Sex? On Writing after Queer Theory," special issue, *South Atlantic Quarterly* 106, no. 3 (2007).
4. Bret Hinsch, *Passions of the Cut Sleeve: The Male Homosexual Tradition in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Chou Wah-shan, *Tongzhi: Politics of Same-Sex Eroticism in Chinese Societies* (New York: Haworth, 2000); Lisa Rofel, *Desiring China: Experiments in Neoliberalism, Sexuality, and Public Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007). Although the concept of homonormativity has been invoked by queer theorists such as Lisa Duggan to denote the imitative constructs of heterosexual norms within mainstream neoliberal gay and lesbian politics, my usage sides with the transgender scholar-activist Susan Stryker, who adopts the term to describe the normative imposition of a gay and lesbian agenda over the concerns of transgender people on the margins of sexual politics and history. See Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon, 2003); and Stryker, "Transgender History, Homonormativity, and Disciplinarity," *Radical History Review* 100 (2008): 145–57.

5. Robert Hans van Gulik, *Sexual Life in Ancient China: A Preliminary Survey of Chinese Sex and Society from ca. 1500 B.C. till 1644 A.D.* (Leiden: Brill, 2003); Charlotte Furth, "Rethinking van Gulik Again," *Nan nü: Men, Women and Gender in China* 7, no. 1 (2005): 71–78.
6. For an argument that aligns van Gulik's work with the European sexual tradition, see Charlotte Furth, "Rethinking Van Gulik: Sexuality and Reproduction in Traditional Chinese Medicine," in *Engendering China: Women, Culture, and the State*, ed. Christina K. Gilmartin, Gail Hershatter, Lisa Rofel, and Tyrene White (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 125–46. On the orientalism of sexology, see, for example, Parminder Kaur Bakshi, "Homosexuality and Orientalism: Edward Carpenter's Journey to the East," in *Edward Carpenter and Late Victorian Radicalism*, ed. Tony Brown (London: Frank Cass, 1990), 151–77.
7. Timothy Brook, *The Confusions of Pleasure: Commerce and Culture in Ming China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 232.
8. Sophie Volpp, "Classifying Lust: The Seventeenth-Century Vogue for Male Love," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 61, no. 1 (2001): 77–117.
9. For an erudite study of how the urban centers of Chinese culture shifted from the heartland to the shore in the second half of the nineteenth century, see Meng Yue, *Shanghai and the Edges of Empires* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).
10. See Sharon Marcus, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007); Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 1, no. 1 (1975): 1–29.
11. Matthew Sommer, *Sex, Law, and Society in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000).
12. See Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994); and Zuyan Zhou, *Androgyny in Late Ming and Early Qing Literature* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003).
13. See Vivian Ng, "Homosexuality and the State in Late Imperial China," in *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, ed. Martin Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and George Chauncey (New York: Meridian, 1989), 76–89; Giovanni Vitiello, "The Fantastic Journey of an Ugly Boy: Homosexuality and Salvation in Late Ming Pornography," *positions: east asia cultures critique* 4, no. 2 (1996): 291–320; Brook, *Confusions of Pleasure*; Vitiello, "Exemplary Sodomites: Chivalry and Love in Late Ming Culture," *Nan nü: Men, Women and Gender in China* 2, no. 2 (2000): 207–58; Sommer, *Sex, Law, and Society*; and Volpp, "Classifying Lust."
14. Judith T. Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange: Pu Songlin and the Chinese Classical Tale* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 61–97.

15. Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 1–65.
16. Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 1–65.
17. Wenqing Kang, “Male Same-Sex Relations in Modern China: Language, Media Representation, and Law, 1900–1949,” *positions: east asia cultures critique* 18, no. 2 (2010): 506. For a critique of Kang’s analysis of *renyao* and a more in-depth historiographical contextualization of the term, see Howard Chiang, “Archiving Peripheral Taiwan: The Prodigy of the Human and Historical Narration,” *Radical History Review* 120 (2014).
18. On the translation of the concept of homosexuality and its epistemological implications in Republican China, see also Tze-lan D. Sang, *The Emerging Lesbian: Female Same-Sex Desire in Modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 99–126; and Howard Chiang, “Epistemic Modernity and the Emergence of Homosexuality in China,” *Gender and History* 22, no. 3 (2010): 629–57.
19. Vera Schwarcz, *The Chinese Enlightenment: Intellectuals and the Legacy of the May Fourth Movement of 1919* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).
20. On the writings of European and American sexologists on the subject of homosexuality around the turn of the twentieth century, see, for example, Jennifer Terry, *An American Obsession: Science, Medicine, and Homosexuality in Modern Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); and the essays in Vernon A. Rosario, ed., *Science and Homosexualities* (New York: Routledge, 1997).
21. Interested readers may also wish to consult my earlier work on Republican-era sexology for an in-depth discussion of the place of Pan Guangdan’s oeuvre in shaping the discourse of homosexuality in twentieth-century China. See Chiang, “Epistemic Modernity.”
22. On the decadent style of Republican-era writers, see Shu-mei Shih, *The Lure of the Modern: Writing Modernism in Semicolonial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 110–27.
23. For an insightful analysis of this short story, see Alvin Ka Hin Wong, “Transgenderism as a Heuristic Device: On the Cross-historical and Transnational Adaptations of the *Legend of the White Snake*,” in *Transgender China*, ed. Howard Chiang (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 127–58.
24. Judith Farquhar, *Appetites: Food and Sex in Post-Socialist China* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002); James Farrer, *Opening Up: Youth Sex Culture and Market Reform in Shanghai* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Yunxiang Yan, *Private Life under Socialism: Love, Intimacy, and Family Change in a Chinese Village, 1949–1999* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003); Joanna McMillan, *Sex, Science, and Morality in China* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Elaine Jeffreys, ed., *Sex and Sexuality in China* (New York: Routledge, 2006).
25. See Lisa Rofel, “Qualities of Desire: Imagining Gay Identity in China,” *GLQ* 5, no. 4 (1999): 451–74; Rofel, *Desiring China*; Rofel, “The Traffic in Money Boys,” *posi-*



- tions: *east asia cultures critique* 18, no. 2 (2010): 425–58; Travis Kong, “Outcast Bodies: Money, Sex, and Desire of Money Boys in Mainland China,” in *As Normal as Possible: Negotiating Sexualities in Hong Kong and China*, ed. Ching Yau (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010), 17–35; and Kong, “Transnational Queer Labour: The ‘Circuits of Desire’ of Money Boys in China,” *English Language Notes* 49, no. 1 (2011): 139–44.
26. For a groundbreaking study of queer cultural politics in postcolonial Hong Kong, see Helen Hok-Sze Leung, *Undercurrents: Queer Culture and Postcolonial Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2008).
  27. Kong draws on the theoretical framework of family biopolitics proposed by Aiwaha Ong in *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).
  28. See, for example, David L. Eng, *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).
  29. Rofel, *Desiring China*.
  30. Kong draws on the notion of queer subcultural archive proposed by Judith Halberstam in *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 169–70.
  31. On the socialist genealogical roots of the term *tongzhi*, see Hongwei Bao, “Queer Comrades: Transnational Popular Culture, Queer Sociality, and Socialist Legacy,” *English Language Notes* 49, no. 1 (2011): 131–37. Cf. Chou, *Tongzhi*.
  32. On sexual repression in Maoist China, see Wendy Larson, “Never This Wild: Sexing the Cultural Revolution,” *Modern China* 25, no. 4 (1999): 423–50; Emily Honig, “Socialist Sex: The Cultural Revolution Revisited,” *Modern China* 29, no. 2 (2003): 143–75; and Everett Y. Zhang, “Rethinking Sexual Repression in Maoist China: Ideology, Structure, and the Ownership of the Body,” *Body and Society* 11, no. 3 (2005): 1–25.
  33. I thank Alvin Wong for pointing this out.
  34. On the Sinophone framework, see Shu-mei Shih, *Visuality and Identity: Sinophone Articulations across the Pacific* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Shih, “The Concept of the Sinophone,” *PMLA* 126, no. 3 (2011): 709–18; Shih, Chien-hsin Tsai, and Brian Bernards, eds., *Sinophone Studies: A Critical Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013); and E. K. Tan, *Rethinking Chineseness: Transnational Sinophone Identities in the Nanyang Literary World* (Amherst, NY: Cambria, 2013). For a set of critical essays that bring together the theoretical concepts of queer and Sinophone, see Howard Chiang and Ari Larissa Heinrich, eds., *Queer Sinophone Cultures* (London: Routledge, 2013).
  35. Michael Warner, ed., *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).
  36. See Halperin, *One Hundred Years*; Arnold Davidson, *The Emergence of Sexuality*:

- Historical Epistemology and the Formations of Concepts* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); David Halperin, *How to Do the History of Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Susan McCabe, "To Be and to Have: The Rise of Queer Historicism," *GLQ* 11, no. 1 (2005): 119–34; Valerie Traub, "The Present Future of Lesbian Historiography," in *A Companion to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Studies*, ed. George Haggerty and Molly McGarry (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 124–45; and Traub, "The New Unhistoricism in Queer Studies," *PMLA* 128, no. 1 (2013): 21–39.
37. Afsaneh Najmabadi, "Beyond the Americas: Are Gender and Sexuality Useful Categories of Historical Analysis?," *Journal of Women's History* 18, no. 1 (2006): 12.
  38. See Leon Rocha, "Xing: The Discourse of Sex and Human Nature in Modern China," *Gender and History* 22, no. 3 (2010): 603–28; Howard Chiang, "The Conceptual Contours of Sex in the Chinese Life Sciences: Zhu Xi (1899–1962), Hermaphroditism, and the Biological Discourse of *Ci* and *Xiong*, 1920–1950," *East Asian Science, Technology and Society: An International Journal* 2, no. 3 (2008): 401–30.
  39. See Cuncun Wu, *Homoerotic Sensibilities in Late Imperial China* (New York: Routledge, 2004); and Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange*.
  40. David Halperin, "How to Do the History of Male Homosexuality," *GLQ* 6, no. 1 (2000): 98–99.
  41. Chiang, "Epistemic Modernity."
  42. Judith Bennett, *History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006); and Joan Scott, "Back to the Future," *History and Theory* 47 (2008): 279.
  43. For a preliminary analysis that taps into these two underexplored terrains, see Wenqing Kang, "The Decriminalization and Depathologization of Homosexuality in China," in *China in and beyond the Headlines*, ed. Timothy Weston and Lionel Jensen (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2012), 231–48.
  44. This gender imbalance has been offset more recently by the works of Fran Martin, Denise Tang, Lucetta Kam, and Elisabeth Engebretsen, among others, on lesbianism in contemporary Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the PRC. See Martin, *Backward Glances: Contemporary Chinese Culture and the Female Homoerotic Imaginary* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Tang, *Conditional Spaces: Hong Kong Lesbian Desire and Everyday Life* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012); Kam, *Shanghai Lalas: Female Tongzhi Communities and Politics in Urban China* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012); and Engebretsen, *Queer Women in Urban China: An Ethnography* (New York: Routledge, 2013). See my review of the last three books in Howard Chiang, "Lesbianism in Urban China: Everyday Life and Quotidian Politics," *Somatechnics* 4, no. 1 (2014): 196–201.