

# How China Became a “Castrated Civilization” and Eunuchs a “Third Sex”

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Although eunuchs had played an important role in the history of imperial China, it is surprising how little attention historians have paid to the actual measures of Chinese castration. Like footbinding, castration stands as one of the most important objects of Sinological criticism today. Both have come to represent powerful symbols of backwardness, oppression, despotism, and national shame in modern Chinese historiography. Starting in the early Republican period, cultural commentators often labeled late imperial China as a “castrated civilization” (被閹割的文明, *beiyange de wenming*), a characterization that perpetuated its more common perception as the “Sick Man of Asia” that emerged in the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> Simply put, observers, domestic and foreign alike, invoked the former trope to cast the practice of castration and the institution of palace eunuchs as pitfalls of dynastic China. But unlike the history of footbinding, Sinologists have remained considerably silent on the history of the castration operation itself. This chapter aims to move beyond this historiographical limitation. I approach eunuchism (the bodily state of castrated men), like other forms of embodiment, as a category of experience that needs to be historicized rather than foundational or uncontested in nature.<sup>2</sup>

The distaste for eunuchs and the antipathy for the Chinese imperialism became isomorphic during the peak of Western overseas imperial and colonial expansions.<sup>3</sup> In China’s tremulous transition to a modern

nation-state, men and women experienced profound changes in the prevailing norms and social conventions of gender. The civil service examination for men was formally abolished in 1905, but since the mid-nineteenth century, Western missionaries had created an increasing measure of educational opportunities for women.<sup>4</sup> As coastal cities such as Shanghai turned into global centers of cosmopolitanism, Chinese men and women adopted Western standards of fashion, and more women dressed in a way that would increasingly resemble the French and American “flappers” of the next generation.<sup>5</sup> The 1910s and 1920s were also a period when the cult of *qing* (情, sentiment) incorporated a foreign notion of free love, a kind of modern transformation that hinged on a new nationalist (even revolutionary) “structure of feeling” and reframed the meanings of marriage, the family, and the Chinese state for women.<sup>6</sup> In the decades surrounding May Fourth feminism, many reformers and revolutionaries voiced a pressing concern about patriarchal oppression, something they viewed as an intrinsic shortcoming of traditional (often dubbed “Confucian”) Chinese culture. As castration, like footbinding, reflects the dominant perceptions of gender normativity at any given moment in time, the task of historicizing eunuchism requires us to be more cautious of its gendered implications, and its affiliation to what we might otherwise hasten to call “sex.”

In an age of China’s metaphoric portrayal as a castrated civilization, the perception of eunuchs as demasculinized “third sex” (第三性, *disanxing*) figures became increasingly common. However, historical standards of masculinity and femininity, and by extension emasculation and defeminization, on which such claims were purported shifted across time and place. As we will see, modern definitions of masculinity and femininity tend to be articulated within a Western biomedical lexicon and its cognate understandings of the human body. The absence of a Chinese word for sex until the 1910s suggests that the popular depiction of eunuchs as third sex people tells us more about our modern conceptual preoccupations than the historical experience of eunuchs themselves.<sup>7</sup> Before the emergence of the concept of sex, gender might be the more adequate category of analysis for understanding the meaning and practice of castration.<sup>8</sup> Rather than rendering eunuchs as third sex subjects who nominally defy the boundaries of male and female, this chapter offers a cautionary tale of the tendency to universalize transgenderism as an omnipresent rubric of historical experience. I explore the rise of the perception of China as a castrated civilization from the historical discourse that comprised eunuchism’s demise, which occurred in

tandem with the rise of the modernist notion that eunuchs are third sex figures and the adjacent equation of castration with emasculation. By problematizing the perception of eunuchs as transhistorical third sex subjects, I aim to expose the power, logic, and threshold of historical forces operating upon the eunuch embodiment, forces that ultimately contest the analytical value of absorbing all historic figures of gender liminality into the very category of transgender.

The emphasis on the masculinity of castration before the conceptual availability of sex revises the diverse scholarly literature on Chinese manhood that has drawn on legal, medicoscientific, family reform, homoerotic, theatrical, and diasporic examples.<sup>9</sup> It is perhaps worth noting that the gendered subjectivity of eunuchs has escaped the attention of contributors to the two pathbreaking volumes, *Chinese Femininities/Chinese Masculinities: A Reader* (2002) and *Asian Masculinities: The Meaning and Practice of Manhood in China and Japan* (2003), and of Kam Louie in his *Theorising Chinese Masculinity: Society and Gender in China* (2002).<sup>10</sup> If we borrow the queer theoretical insight of Judith Halberstam, who has narrated the first comprehensive history of female masculinity in Euro-American literature and film, we might be better equipped to entertain a more radical analytical separation of masculinity from men as fecund agents.<sup>11</sup> Chinese masculinity can thus be understood as neither a social extension of biological maleness nor the social meanings assigned to men per se, but a social relational indicator of a discursive cultural practice such as castration. This chapter's focus on the history of knowledge production about castration questions the naturalness assumed in previous studies regarding the immediate and productive relationship of men to manliness.

With respect to footbinding, historians have recently begun to revise its popular conception as a tool of gender oppression. In *Cinderella's Sisters* (2005), for example, Dorothy Ko shows that women as much as men participated in the perpetuation of this cultural practice with complex and nuanced historical agency.<sup>12</sup> That footbinding was often a marker of ethnic and national boundaries, a practice of concealment and adornment, and a sign of civility and culture before the nineteenth century betrays our modern explanations of it as a form of bodily mutilation, an “unnatural” practice, and a barbaric (even perverse) custom.<sup>13</sup> In a similar spirit, Angela Zito has demonstrated that twentieth-century discourses of the bound foot only reflect variations of its modernist fetishization, even thresholds of feminist theorization and intercultural displacements.<sup>14</sup> Taking cues from Ko and Zito, this chapter departs from outside the anticastration discourse, attempting

to balance the historiographical condemnation of Chinese eunuchs. To bring to visibility the historicity of eunuchism and to situate castration in its proper historical and technical contexts, I will pay particular attention to how paradigms of masculinity changed over time, how the visual milieu reciprocated its politics and thresholds of cross-cultural translation, and the problem of narrating the historical experience of eunuchs based on the modern nationalist bias of our sources and informants. By reading against the grain, this chapter traces the formation of a textual and visual archive that documented the methods of Chinese castration, something that was distinctively absent before the nineteenth century and that, I suggest, directly led to eunuchism's social and cultural demise.

## II. THE ARCHIVAL PROBLEMATIC, AND AN ARGUMENT

Despite our best intentions, the reconstruction of an archive based on the sources available about Chinese castration is itself an inherently mediated and problematic project.<sup>15</sup> First, where do we end? If we assume that the metanarrative history of political change determines the metanarrative history of cultural transformation, we might conclude that the unequivocal demise of castration after the fall of the Qing empire in 1911 was a matter of course. However, even after the last Manchu emperor Puyi was expelled from the Forbidden City in 1924 by the warlord Feng Yuxiang, he was declared by the Japanese army as the Kangde emperor of the puppet state of Manchuria in 1934. As the Kangde emperor, Puyi was still surrounded by a dozen or so Chinese eunuchs.<sup>16</sup> When the Pacific War ended in 1945, these eunuchs did not suddenly just disappear altogether. Even in the postwar period, their bodies still served as a pivotal reminder of the past and their stories the lived experiences of castration, to both themselves and the global public. In October 1958, for instance, the Chinese government gathered the final cohort of eunuchs in Beijing and took a photo of them mixed in with Buddhist and Daoist monks. They were interviewed so that their oral histories could be officially transcribed, published, and circulated to a worldwide audience.<sup>17</sup> Even the death of the last surviving Chinese eunuch, Sun Yaoting, in 1996 might be a misleading signpost for where the story of Chinese castration ends.<sup>18</sup> This is because the afterlife of eunuchism in China—namely, the emergence of transsexuality in Sinophone communities—is indebted to the genealogical precursors discussed in this chapter, namely, factors that culminated in the thresholds of its

beginning. Before we examine how the body morphology of eunuchs and transsexuals operate within shifting realms of scientific truth claims and geopolitics, our story must unravel the process whereby the normative regime of eunuchism lost its aura, meaning, and cultural significance.

Apart from the puzzling question of a precise endpoint, the reconstruction of the archive relies on the *type* of sources that are available. Here is where the parallel between footbinding's disappearance and castration's demise is most striking: the abundance of textual and visual sources from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries almost always represents the bound foot and the castrated body by *exposing* them. This mode of representation runs against the very reason of their existence in Chinese history. After all, the naturalness of footbinding and castration depended on *concealing* the female and male bodies, because concealment links these customs to Chinese ideals of civility and culture (文, *wen*).<sup>19</sup> Therefore, upon reading the wealth of visual and textual documentations of the bound foot or the castrated body, the historian must avoid a telos of knowledge production that extracts a certain kind of historicity from these sources that lies beyond the hegemonic parameters of their existence. As Anjali Arondekar has reminded us in a different context, “Even though scholars have foregrounded the analytical limits of the archive, they continue to privilege the reading practice of recovery over all others.”<sup>20</sup> It might be more useful to read the archival remains not as the ultimate arbiter of historical recuperation, but as “traces” of the past that enable alternative epistemological arrangements of the way the past and the present conjoin.<sup>21</sup> In other words, we must not retell a story about eunuchs that identifies with the kind of story that the sources themselves suggest at face value. What they leave us is not something to be “recovered,” but something to be self-reflexively configured.<sup>22</sup>

Precise endpoints and the nature of the sources aside, the repository of “data” about Chinese castration is mediated by their availability. Three available “voices” unique to the historical period under consideration contributed to the making of this archive: Western spectators, eunuchs themselves, and members of the last imperial family. Together, the textual, photographic, and oral records they left behind disclose an increasing disparity between two registers of eunuchism as a mode of historical experience: on the macro level of global narration on the one hand, and on the micro level of individual embodiment on the other. My argument is that an antieunuch sentiment arose out of this growing disjuncture between a collective-public narration of

nationalist teleology and a personal-private embodiment of preternatural corporeality. This nascent sensibility that casts the practice of castration and the existence of eunuchs as indicators of national shame and backwardness would reverberate through the rest of the twentieth century. As eunuchs' gender identity was evaluated anew in the modern era through the lens of Western biomedicine, China's association with the metaphor of a castrated civilization intensified over time. The period between the 1870s and the 1930s thus constituted a transitional phase when the castrated male body—much like women's bound feet and the leper's crippled body—seemed out of sync with the Chinese body politic at large.<sup>23</sup>

### III. G. CARTER STENT AND THE FORMATION OF A PUBLIC ARCHIVE

The formation of an archive documenting the methods of Chinese castration marked a point of no return in the social and cultural demise of eunuchism in China. Textual descriptions of the operation highlight the fundamental difference between a natural male body and an altered, unnatural one. The first elaborate description of the method can be traced to an article by G. Carter Stent, published in the *Journal of the North China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* in 1877. This piece, called “Chinese Eunuchs,” is arguably the earliest incidence of putting the steps involved in Chinese castration into printed words. The first textual objectification of the Chinese eunuch's corporeal experience thus came from the observation of an “outsider.”<sup>24</sup>

Stent first read a version of his paper, which is more than 40 pages in length, before the Royal Asiatic Society on March 26, 1877. His opening sentence stamped the intention—and eventually the persistent significance—of his study, namely to bring something invisible to visibility, to crystallize a vague impression: “Much has been said and written about eunuchs at various times, but very little seems to be really known concerning them.” “In fact,” Stent continued, “everything relating to them is described so vaguely that one is almost tempted to believe that eunuchs exist only in the Arabian Night's Entertainments and other eastern tales, or in the imaginations of the writers, rather than actually belonging to and forming no inconsiderable portion of the human race.”<sup>25</sup> Assigning Chinese eunuchs a textual status of reality, Stent's words epitomized the effort to expose the private experience of eunuchism in the public realm.

Neither opinions about the existence of eunuchs nor attacks on the tradition of castration were new to Chinese discourses. But the

novelty of Stent’s endeavor in making Chinese eunuchs a reality stems from its unambiguous Christian and Orientalist overtone. In his words, “Eunuchs are only to be found in eastern despotic countries, the enlightening influence of Christianity preventing such unnatural proceedings being practiced in the countries of those who profess it.”<sup>26</sup> For Stent, the “unnatural proceedings” of castration in China reveal “at least one beneficial result of the spread of Christianity; for while we [Christian Westerners] are free from the baneful practice, it is a vile blot on less fortunate countries.”<sup>27</sup> Similar to the discourse surrounding *tianzu* (天足, natural foot) in the antifootbinding movement, the significance of Stent’s words lies in his explicit juxtaposition of China against a more enlightened West with an overt Christian justification.<sup>28</sup> However, Stent’s assertion that Christianity and monogamy saved the West from the “unnatural proceedings” of castration is an erroneous interpretation, considering the important role played by the eunuchs in Byzantine history.<sup>29</sup> Defining China as one of the “less fortunate countries,” Stent’s project was unmistakably Orientalist in nature. It ultimately signaled the arrival of a rhetoric according to which China “lacked” the tools of narrating and recognizing its own deficiency, for which castration, like footbinding, typified an unnatural corporeal practice that was out of both place and time. As Yosefa Loshitzky and Raya Meyuhav have observed, “Eunuchs are perceived by the modern Western audience as grotesque rarities of the past that are associated with the ‘otherness’ of exotic cultures.”<sup>30</sup> They have often been regarded as a “barbaric, archaic, and uncivilized phenomenon and therefore as an anachronism.”<sup>31</sup>

The aspect of Stent’s study that exerts the most lasting historiographic influence is not his missionary message, however, but his discussion of the operation of castration itself. To this day, his description of how, where, and by whom Chinese eunuchs were made remains the most cited reference on this topic since its first delivery in the 1870s. In fact, one would look in vain for a serious treatment of the subject that does not follow Stent’s footsteps in one way or another. His words thus deserve quoting in full and a serious reappraisal.

The place where men or boys are made eunuchs is just outside the inner Hsi-’hua gate (內西華門) of the palace, and within the imperial city. It is a mean-looking building, and is known as the Chang-tzu, 廠子, *the shed*. Within this building reside several men recognized by government, yet drawing no pay from it—whose duty consists in emasculating those who are desirous of becoming, or are sent to become—eunuchs.

These men are called tao-tzu-chiang, 刀子匠, “knifers,” and depend entirely for their living on making eunuchs. They get a fixed sum—six taels—for every operation they perform on boys sent or brought to them, and for keep and attendance till the patients are properly recovered.

Grown up men desirous of becoming eunuchs, but who are too poor to pay the necessary fees, make arrangements with the “knifers” to repay them out of their salaries. But in any case the “knifers” dare not operate on them unless they (the candidates) have securities to vouch for their respectability.

The “knifers” have generally one or two apprentices to learn the profession; these are almost invariably members of their own families, so that the profession may be said to be hereditary.

When the operation is about to take place, the candidate or victim—as the case may be—is placed on a *kang* in a sitting—or rather, reclining position. One man supports him round the waist, while two others separate his legs and hold them down firmly, to prevent any movement on his part. The operating “knifer” then stands in front of the men—with his knife in his hand—and enquires if he will ever repent. If the man at the last moment demurs in the slightest, the “knifer” will not perform the operation, but if he still expresses his willingness, with one sweep of the knife he is made a eunuch.

The operation is performed in this manner:—white ligatures or bandages are bound tightly round the lower part of the belly and the upper parts of the thighs, to prevent too much haemorrhage. The parts about to be operated on are then bathed three times with hot pepper-water, the intended eunuch being in the reclining position as previously described. When the parts have been sufficiently bathed, the *whole*,—both testicles and penis—are cut off as closely as possible with a small curved knife, something in the shape of a sickle. The emasculation being effected, a pewter needle or spigot is carefully thrust into the main orifice at the root of the penis; the wound is then covered with paper saturated in cold water and is carefully bound up. After the wound is dressed the patient is made to walk about the room, supported by two of the “knifers,” for two or three hours, when he is allowed to lie down.

The patient is not allowed to drink anything for three days, during which time he often suffers great agony, not only from thirst, but from intense pain, and from the impossibility of relieving nature during that period.

At the end of three days the bandage is taken off, the spigot is pulled out, and the sufferer obtains relief in the copious flow of urine which spurts out like a fountain. If this takes place satisfactorily, the patient is considered out of danger and congratulated on it; but if the unfortunate



wretch cannot make water he is doomed to a death of agony, for the passages have become swollen and nothing can save him.<sup>32</sup>

This passage remains the most authoritative and influential source on the method of Chinese castration. However, for it to be treated as a trustworthy piece of primary evidence, presumably Stent would have to be present when one of such operations took place over the span of at least three days. The richness of his description is certainly remarkable, but its implicit claim of originality and validity is difficult to prove. In fact, this difficulty has not been sufficiently acknowledged in the existing literature, for almost all scholars of Chinese eunuchism have taken this passage for granted as a firsthand account of what actually happened during such an operation.

But what if Stent did not witness any of the castration surgeries? One can barely begin to imagine the historiographical implications if this were true, especially since Stent's text is indeed the earliest and most sophisticated documentation of how Chinese castration was performed.<sup>33</sup> Even if he did pay a visit to the “knifers” for just a single case of castration, did Stent stay for the entire duration (at least three consecutive days or longer)? In fact, his narrative would have us believe that he had personally observed at least two types of operation—successful and unsuccessful—to differentiate survival in the former case and potential death in the latter.

In a slightly different way, the content of Stent's words already betrayed their implicit claim of originality and validity. If the knowledge and skills required for performing castration were transmitted among “knifers” through hereditary apprenticeship, how was it possible for the operation to be described so openly by a Westerner in the first place? If part of the social integrity of the Chinese “knifers” came from maintaining a custom of oral instruction and personal demonstration, it seems highly improbable that a nonfamily or nonprofessional member, let alone a foreigner, would be allowed to witness the surgical protocol in such remarkable detail. An empirical proof of the existence of “the shed,” where these operations were supposedly performed by the “knifers,” would add a layer of validity to Stent's description. However, in their study of eunuchs in Qing and Republican China, scholars have pointed out that no discussion of the “knifers” could be found in the Qing palace archives.<sup>34</sup> As late as 1991, two urologists from Beijing Medical University still conceded that “most people, including urologists, do not have a clear understanding of what is actually done to a man or boy to produce an eunuch.”<sup>35</sup>

#### IV. CHANGING PARADIGMS OF MASCULINITY

The exact procedure of castration is important because it essentially defines what makes someone a eunuch. The subtlety of Stent's emphasis that *both* the testes and the penis had to be removed for a surgical castration to be considered complete might escape the eyes of modern readers. The emphasis is subtle because this requirement sounds so natural to our ears. But as Gary Taylor has reminded us, if the ultimate purpose of castration is to impair a man's fertility, it is not necessary to destroy the penis but only the testes.<sup>36</sup> In fact, the earliest extant medical description of the operation, by the seventh-century Byzantine Greek physician Paul of Aegina, makes it clear that only the testicles, not the penis, were targeted by the techniques of contusion and excision.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, modern medical reappraisals of the operations performed on the European castrati singers indicate that only testicles were severed.<sup>38</sup> In his ambitious survey of the cultural history of the penis, David Friedman carefully incorporated a broad definition of the organ "not merely as the penile shaft and glass, but encompassing the testes, sperm, and all the other parts and products of the male genitalia."<sup>39</sup> This inclusive definition was fruitful for Friedman's undertaking precisely because the penile shaft had not always been the sole locus of biological masculinity since the beginning of Western civilization.

Indeed, Stent's discussion elicited polarized reactions from those who claimed to have had personal interactions with the palace eunuchs. Dong Guo, author of a pioneer 1985 study on the history of Chinese eunuchs, contended that Stent's account is outright erroneous.<sup>40</sup> According to his conversations with Peking palace eunuchs, "the key [to castration] is this: when someone is made a eunuch at a relatively young age, the procedure resembles the gelding of pigs by removing or protruding the testicles. This operation is at least not fatal, and because there is no major concern over bacterial infection from the cut, the person recovers in three to five days."<sup>41</sup> On the other hand, based on their physical examination of the last group of Chinese eunuchs conducted in the 1960s, two urologists from Beijing Medical University seconded Stent's observation: they confirmed that both the penis and the testes were detached from the eunuchs' bodies.<sup>42</sup> Though both were established on personal interactions with eunuchs, the discrepancy between verbal and visual evidence nonetheless left a historical residue of ambiguity surrounding the surgical parameters of castration. This exemplifies how "micro" accounts of eunuchoidal corporeality do not and *cannot* all subsume under "macro" narrations.

Recognizing this epistemic discrepancy, the urologists pointed out the popular “erroneous use of the term ‘castration.’” “Although the Greek root of the word ‘eunuchos’ does indicate a castrated person,” they explained, “the eunuch is not only castrated... ‘Emasculation’ should be the right term to describe the procedure... We think it is better to define ‘emasculation’ as ‘removal of external genitalia in man or boy’, leaving ‘castration’ for removal of the testes.”<sup>43</sup> This shift in conceptual preference from “castration” to “emasculation” highlights an important historical transformation in the biological definition of manhood: from a cultural regime of the scrotum to a regime of the penis. Between the sixteenth and twentieth century, the anatomical measure of manliness changed from whether a man has balls to whether a man has a big stick.<sup>44</sup> This fall of the scrotum and rise of the penis was accompanied by the process by which desire and libidinal pleasures replaced status and reproduction as the organizing principle for making sexual acts socially meaningful.<sup>45</sup> In late imperial China, the decline of the status-centered paradigm directly led to the increasing legal relevance of a gender-performance paradigm.<sup>46</sup>

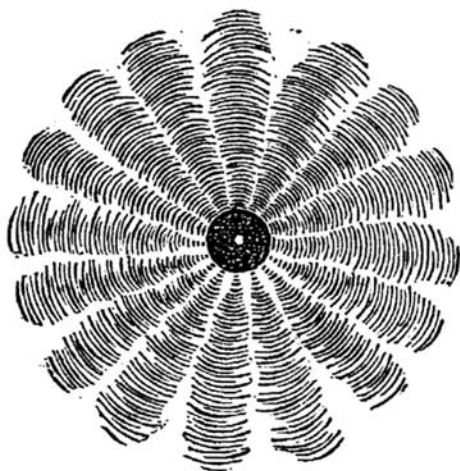
One of the cultural forces that cemented the transformation from a scrotum-centered to a penis-centered regime of masculinity in Western Europe and America was the popularization of Freudian psychoanalysis in the early twentieth century. For Freud, castration anxiety was symptomatic of a psychogenic fear, or at least recognition, of “the lack of penis.”<sup>47</sup> His most influential and controversial French disciple, Jacques Lacan, would subsequently prioritize the symbolic meaning of the phallus in lieu of the anatomical penis.<sup>48</sup> But the phallus is nothing but a figuration of the physical organ, a transcendental penis, so to speak, that extends rather than subverts its anatomical register.<sup>49</sup> To quote Taylor’s astute insight, “Castration—in humanist Europe, as in previous human societies—attacked the scrotum. In twentieth-century psychoanalysis, by contrast, castration has been redefined as an attack on the penis.”<sup>50</sup>

## V. MEDICAL IMAGES AS PROOF AND EVIDENCE

In the 1890s, one of the foremost “pillars” supporting the characterization of Chinese castration more as an attack on the penis can be found in the reports of the American physician Robert Coltman (1862–1931). Born in Washington, Coltman received his medical training at Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia. He was appointed Professor of Anatomy at the Imperial School of Combined Learning (Tongwen Guan, 同文館, which later became part of Peking

University) in 1896, Professor of Surgery at the Imperial University of Peking (later known as Peking University) in 1898, and personal physician to the Chinese royal family and surgeon at both the Imperial Maritime Customs and the Imperial Chinese Railways around that time.<sup>51</sup> Coltman was also known for his two books, *The Chinese, Their Present and Future: Medical, Political, and Social* (1891) and the more famous *Beleaguered in Peking: The Boxer's War Against the Foreigner* (1901), which reflected his reputation for being the first Westerner to reach the outside world during the siege of Peking by the Boxers.<sup>52</sup> In 1894, Coltman presented a hand-drawn image of the site of castration as it appeared on the body of one of his patients (figure 2.1). The expository text indicates that the image was produced by a Chinese assistant, a “xylographist.”

Coltman included this image in an article called “Peking Eunuchs,” which appeared in the *China Medical Missionary Journal* in 1894.<sup>53</sup> The article was intended as a follow-up on his earlier discussion of three eunuchs in the *Universal Medical Journal* in 1893.<sup>54</sup> Together, the two entries mentioned six Chinese eunuchs in total who visited Coltman for medical assistance. These eunuchs came to Coltman



CICATRIX OF EUNUCH.

\* In reproducing the above, our Chinese xylographist has somewhat improved on the original sketch, with regard to geometrical nicety.—(Ed.)

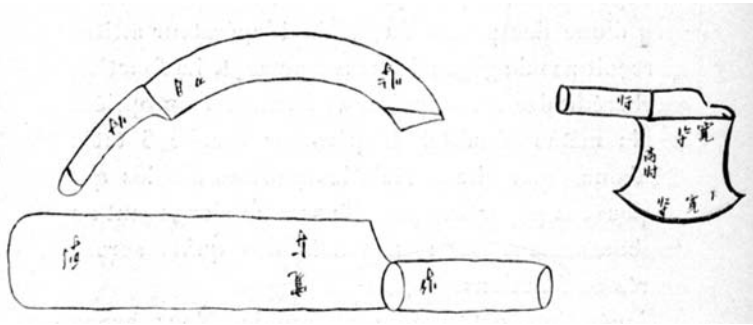
**Figure 2.1** Drawing of an eunuch’s castration site from Coltman (1894)

Source: Robert Coltman, “Peking Eunuchs,” *China Medical Missionary Journal* 8 (1894): p. 28.

mainly for the obliteration of the urethral orifice, because they all suffered from the closing up of the orifice, which led to urination problems. Based on the six cases of eunuchs whom he treated, Coltman observed that “The majority of the eunuchs here [in China] have penis and testicles removed entire.”<sup>55</sup> This statement was remarkable to him, because, as Coltman himself conceded, he “never for a moment supposed the mutilation extended beyond the testicles.”<sup>56</sup> We will revisit Coltman in greater detail below when we compare the Westerners’ account and eunuchs’ narration of their own castration experience. For now, suffice it to say that the textual descriptions and the image of castration that he presented helped (re)define Chinese castration specifically in terms of a penis-centered paradigm of masculinity.

Similar to Stent’s justification of a superior West, Coltman expressed “disgust and contempt” toward his Chinese eunuch patients.<sup>57</sup> His final word on them was “Do such specimen of humanity deserve sympathy?”<sup>58</sup> If we were to read the castration experience of Chinese eunuchs through the lens of Coltman’s papers, we might subscribe to the view that the castrated male body undoubtedly *needed* Western biomedical assistance. We might hasten to add that the enlightenment nature of Western medicine was a viewpoint acknowledged even by Chinese eunuchs themselves, as demonstrated by their very decision to turn to Coltman for medical assistance. However, it is interesting to note that this group of eunuchs all expressed a considerable measure of resistance to treatment by a Western doctor, even a prestigious one such as Coltman who became personal physician to the Chinese imperial family: none of them returned to Coltman after their first visit even if they were explicitly instructed to do so for health reasons and their own recovery assessment. Therefore, by exposing the eunuch’s body, Coltman’s medical reports on Chinese castration ultimately contributed to its demise. In reading these reports, one detects an unprecedented fracturing of the meaning and experience of eunuchism. The failed mutuality and reciprocation between the eunuchs and Coltman marked the rise of a disjuncture in the experience of eunuchs—a discrepancy between foreigners’ totalizing condemnation and their own embodied selves.

An additional piece of “evidence” that construed Chinese castration as the removal of penis and not just the testicles came from another “outsider,” Dr. Jean-Jacques Matignon (1866–1928). Matignon had been a physician to the French legation in Peking since 1894. Having established a high reputation among European colonial officials, Matignon was about to be made Knight of the Legion of Honor. The unfortunate news of his victimization in the “Peking Massacre,” the



**Figure 2.2** Instruments used for castration from Matignon (1896)

Source: Jean-Jacques Matignon, *Superstition, crime et misère en Chine: souvenirs de biologie sociale* (Lyon: A. Storck & Cie, 1899), p. 182.



**Figure 2.3** Photo of a castrated boy from Matignon (1896)

Source: Jean-Jacques Matignon, *Superstition, crime et misère en Chine: souvenirs de biologie sociale* (Lyon: A. Storck & Cie, 1899).

Boxer Uprising, reached Europe in July 1900.<sup>59</sup> In 1896, Matignon offered an illustration of the surgical instruments used in castration (figure 2.2). Unfortunately, he did not indicate the source of these drawings, so it remains difficult to verify their originality and validity. He also obtained a photograph that exposes the naked body of a Chinese eunuch and reveals the physical site of castration (figure 2.3). In the article in which Matignon first published these images, which

continue to be circulated widely today, he repeated Stent’s earlier description of how castration was operated in China. In other words, Matignon was explicit in his intention in adding credibility to Stent’s words with the new visual evidence he provided.<sup>60</sup>

This photographic proof of a Chinese eunuch’s “lack of penis” makes it difficult for any viewer to deny its captured reality. The challenge is more conspicuous in Matignon’s photograph than in Coltman’s image. The difficulty largely stems from the indirect cultural labor of the photo, in which the unilateral viewing didactic turns the beholder’s gaze into the object of the eunuch’s gaze. As Michel de Certeau has put it, a compelling reading of cultural representation pays attention not only to “the production of the image,” but also to the less obvious “secondary production hidden in the process of its utilization.”<sup>61</sup> Or, in the words of Michael Taussig, “The image is more powerful than what it is an image of.”<sup>62</sup> In the photograph presented by Matignon, the eunuch’s reciprocal gaze forces anyone looking at his exposed body to surrender to an implicit operation of knowledge that, if neglected, would indicate a betrayal of his or her own eyes. To deny that the eunuch’s corporeal experience was marked by “the lack of penis” would mean to disqualify the very spectatorial relationship (between the viewer and the seemingly uncensored record of the naked eunuchoidal body) that made the denial possible in the first place. On the eve of the twentieth century, Matignon’s photo thus consolidated a visual layering of “truth” about Chinese castration—that it involved the elimination of male genitalia in its entirety. This ocular evidence added credence to Stent’s earlier textual description, establishing the absence of both the penis *and* the scrotum as an indisputable reality in a castrated Chinese body from this point onward. It paved the way for twentieth-century discussions of Chinese castration to *forget* any eunuchoidal corporeality outside a penis-centered paradigm of masculinity.

The broader import of this amnesia cannot be overstated. The aforementioned cultural mechanics fundamental to its shaping were part of a global circuit of power relations, one that mediated the rise of Chinese medical photography in the late nineteenth century.<sup>63</sup> According to Sarah Fraser,

Photography’s role in shaping China’s image from 1860 to 1900 is evident in the visual transformation of the Chinese subject of over a half-century of colonial intervention. In these shifts related to China’s visual culture, the camera was an instrument of the contemporary practice to create types, classify peoples, and impose hierarchies upon the

world as it was being observed... By the turn of the century, the photographic lens was focused on larger statements about “the Chinese” and national character. Scenes of itinerant workers, destitute people, and military captives at the time of the Boxer Uprising reflect racial debates about the modern Chinese subject prevalent in international power relations.<sup>64</sup>

In her study of the translational politics of visualizing the Chinese, Larissa Heinrich has similarly pointed out that “in early medical photography in China we see the convergence of those colonial, commercial, ethnographic, and scientific ideologies that marked the indisputable entrance of the ‘Chinese specimen’ into global discourses of race and health.”<sup>65</sup> Through its heterogeneous modes of circulation (e.g., archives, museums, private collections, and publications) and deployment of stylistics (e.g., the “before and after” clinical contrasting trope, portraiture, battlefield documentary, and erotic thematization), photographic images of the ill decontextualized and recontextualized Chinese identity by “representing supposedly specifically Chinese pathologies to a global medical community.”<sup>66</sup> In the formative years of China’s nation formation, the increasing popularity of clinical photography gave representational claims of Chinese pathology a new set of cultural valence and ideological relevance. The diseased ontology of the photographic specimen came to be absorbed by the very medium of its cultural production and naturalized as representative of the inherently pathological quality of Chinese empire and identity. Over the course of the nineteenth century, China was granted entrance into the global system of nation-states on the condition of being racially stereotyped as “the Sick Man of Asia” with growing intensity.<sup>67</sup>

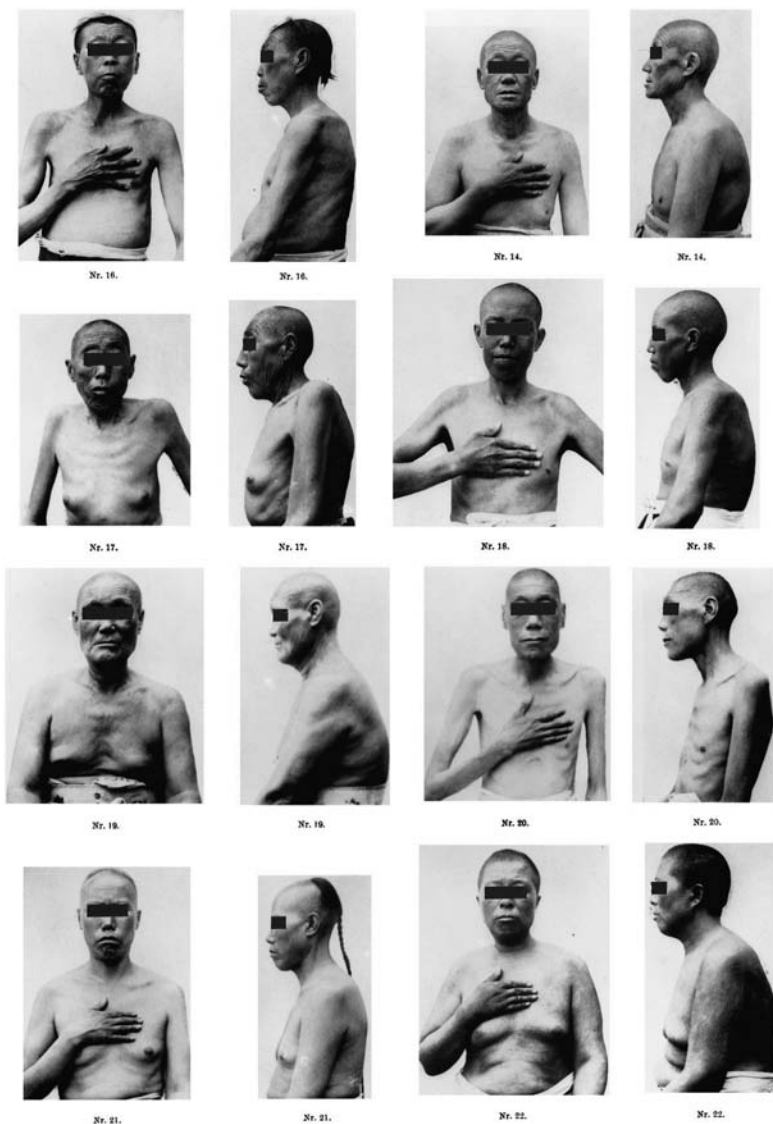
The evolving relationship of the camera to its object of representation relied on, among other things, the circulation of certain medical beliefs about Chinese identity, which substantiated the “Sick Man” stereotype: in the nineteenth century, China was blamed for being the original home of the Bubonic plague, cholera, small pox, and, eventually, leprosy.<sup>68</sup> Through its photographic presence as medical specimens, the castrated male body joined the bound feet, the leper’s crippled body, and other exotic corporeal “types” as exemplars of the material figuration of diseased embodiment peculiar to China. In this sense, Matignon’s photograph could be viewed as a “confession of the flesh,” whereby the penis-absent enuchoidal body displayed and circulated through it helped solidify an ideological portrayal of China as intrinsically deficient, problematic, and in need of Western



(biomedical) assistance. Indeed, when we go back to Matignon’s photo (figure 2.3), what we are looking at is less about “what is wrong with the eunuch,” than about “what is wrong with China.” Or to borrow Jacques Derrida’s terms, the ghost of the penis affirms the spectral presence of the Eurocentrically commodified body; the *hauntology* of this absent presence revalues the global ontology and epistemology of *being* Chinese and knowing what Chinese is.<sup>69</sup>

How can the legacy of this (post)coloniality be evaluated? When we compare a set of photographs of eunuchs published in an English medical article in 1933 (figure 2.4) with images filed in the Qing palace archive (figure 2.5), we witness a distinct contrast in the operation of their epistemological claims. Although both images objectify the eunuch’s body, the former carefully structures the viewer’s position in the subjective terms of clinical (and, one not must forget, colonial) gaze.<sup>70</sup> As the object of this particular kind of gaze, the naked bodies of eunuchs constitute the pathological material ground on which the didactics of spectatorship was made possible in the first place. These unclothed bodies are intended to be compared, deciphered, and scrutinized in every minute detail, and such an attempt on the part of the viewer is comforted, or at least made less guilt-driven, by the artificial “blindfolding” of the patient’s eyes, an epitome of twentieth-century medical photography. Unlike the eunuch in Matignon’s photograph, the eunuchs in this photograph are stripped away of their ability to stare back at the person who is looking at them. Their anonymity thereby makes the power imbalance of this entire visual stimulation all the less threatening to the viewer. The images of eunuchs in the Qing palace archive, on the other hand, defy the foreigner’s clinical and colonial spectatorship. The fully clothed body and the revealing eyes depict these young eunuchs in the normative terms of the native population, not an ostensibly mysterious, deficient object waiting to be investigated and treated according to the normative metrics of Western biomedicine.

The transformation in the power and epistemological claims of these images parallels Ruth Rogaski’s insight regarding the conceptual transformation of *weisheng* in treaty-port China: what accompanied “a growing hegemony of biomedical approaches to health in the public discourse of Chinese elites” was “a concurrent acceptance of a picture of the Chinese people as inherently lacking when compared with Western-defined standards of health.”<sup>71</sup> In the wake of what she calls hygienic modernity, the state launched an unprecedented public health campaign in which the meaning of *weisheng* moved away from a correlative cosmology of “guarding life,” and



**Figure 2.4** Medical images of Chinese eunuchs from Wilson and Roehrborn (1933)

Source: F. Wagenseil, "Chinesische Eunuchen," *Zeitschrift für Morphologie und Anthropologie* 32 (1933): 415–468, reprinted in Jean D. Wilson and Claus Roehrborn, "Long-Term Consequences of Castration in Men: Lessons from the Skoptzy and the Eunuchs of the Chinese and Ottoman Courts," *Journal of Clinical Endocrinology and Metabolism* 84, no. 12 (1999): 4324–4331, on p. 4329.



Figure 2.5 Photographs of eunuchs in the Qing Palace Archive

Source: Jia Yinghua (賈英華), *Modai taijian miwen: Sun Yaoting zhuan* (末代太監秘聞: 孫耀庭傳) (The secret life of the last eunuch: A biography of Sun Yaoting) (Beijing: Zhishi chubanshe, 1993). Reprinted with permission from Jia Yinghua.

toward an embrace of Western biomedical standards of health, disease, and cleanliness. Whether in the visual sphere of medical representation or in the conceptual domain of medical epistemology, imperialist circuits of power seized the Chinese body as an instrument for the production and validation of global knowledge claims

about its inferiority. Nineteenth-century Western imperialism thus “left a brand on China,” after which the image of China as a “castrated civilization” could be accepted, recycled, and even projected by the Chinese themselves.<sup>72</sup>

## VI. FROM MISSIONARY NARRATION TO EUNUCHS’ AGENCY

Historians and other scholars have treated the accounts of Stent, Coltman, and Matignon as the bona fide source records of how castration was conducted in late Qing China, and have relied on them accordingly to reconstruct the presumed historical reality of the practice. For example, in his widely cited *Chinese Eunuchs* (1970), the only source Taisuke Mitamura drew on in describing how the operation proceeded in late imperial China was Stent’s documentation.<sup>73</sup> In their renowned *History of Chinese Medicine* (1936), K. Chimin Wong and Wu Lien-teh renarrated Stent’s description under the section on early Chinese surgery and reprinted Matignon’s photograph that exposed a naked eunuch.<sup>74</sup> The entirety of Stent’s article even made its way into the pages of one of the most humanist study of eunuchs to date, Charles Humana’s *The Keeper of The Bed: A Study of the Eunuch* (1973).<sup>75</sup> A hand-drawn version of Matignon’s photograph also appeared in Richard Millant’s 1908 medical study of eunuchism, which treated the subject as a type of sexual perversion.<sup>76</sup> And these famous citations of Stent and Matignon represent only the tip of the iceberg. Even in his 1996 study of Ming-dynasty eunuchs, Henry Tsai still infers information about the castration operation in the early modern period from sources that are produced in the modern period, which always adopt a distinctively nationalist bias and are couched either in a scientific tone of objective observation or as an impassioned plea for abolition.<sup>77</sup>

Such detailed records as Stent’s, Coltman’s, and Matignon’s were never committed in writing or visual imaging when castration was a widely accepted practice, because instructions for the practice were transmitted orally and demonstrated corporeally. Starting in the late nineteenth century, however, the availability of both textual and visual documentations regarding what castration entailed signaled the creation of new knowledge about eunuchs’ bodies and new venues of its circulation. At the very least, this “repository” unveiled the secrecy surrounding the operation, transforming a private matter into something public. It is therefore reasonable that scholars of Chinese eunuchs have accorded Stent’s account a high level of evidential

authority, celebrating it as a rare piece of primary source about the practice. Similarly, Matignon’s photograph continues to be circulated today as solid evidence for a regime of masculinity defined around the penis.

However, by bringing a corporeal practice as private as castration into the public domain, both Stent’s textual description and Coltman’s and Matignon’s visualizations actually elevated, rather than diminished, the tension between the private and the public awareness of Chinese eunuchism. These foreigners’ epistemic standardization of the castrated body in the public domain simultaneously made its personal relevance all the more invisible, silencing any corporeal embodiment of eunuchism that did not match their globalizing narrative. The development of the increasing irrelevancy of certain forms of corporeal experience thus went hand in hand with the collapse of eunuchism as a contested subject of experience. Their effort, in other words, constituted the first major step in making a practice as incendiary as castration one of the most *un*controversial issues in and out of China.

From this standpoint, what appears to be utterly inadequate about the existing literature on Chinese eunuchs is the one-sided meaning scholars have assigned and extrapolated from the act of castration—the permanent elimination of the biological reproductive capability of men. Here, it might be useful to borrow the insight of Nancy Rose Hunt from a different context (early twentieth-century Congo) to help us appreciate the significance of castration in Chinese history: namely, to “broaden our focus from reproduction narrowly defined in demographic and medical terms as fecundity and the birth of children, to social and cultural reproduction.”<sup>78</sup> Insofar as our perception of the consequences of castration remains inside the framework of biomedical reproduction, the other half of the historical story completely escapes our attention: the castration of male bodies also *reproduces* eunuchs socially and culturally in imperial China.

To the extent that scholars have neglected the social and cultural reproductive aspect of castration, it could be said that they have implicitly behaved as passive agents of Western biomedicine in reinforcing its epistemic authority. Since the nineteenth century, the languages of Western reproductive anatomy and biology have provided both historians and historical actors an overt epistemic apparatus for privileging the biological consequence of castration to be the only indicator of its sociocultural function and reality.<sup>79</sup> As a result of this revaluation of its social-cultural reproductive meaning in a biomedical lexicon, the castrated male body easily became a third sex (sex

as understood in the anatomical terms of Western biomedicine) and a sign for the inherently deficiency of the Chinese body, thereby enabling a cultural depiction of China as a castrated civilization that lacked virility.

To overcome this limited reading, we need to acknowledge the constructed nature of the bifurcation of Chinese castration as a mode of historical experience rather than renaturalizing it. On the level of personal-private experience, castration denotes a ritualized episode where the death of a man's biological fertility intersected with the birth of his new life as a eunuch. On the level of public-collective experience, castration represents a category that has marked both the elimination of its social and cultural reproductive role in history and the flattening of its epistemic significance to a biomedical one. In reducing the importance of castration to the realm of biology on both the macro and micro levels of historical experience, scholars have inevitably fallen short in handling the question of eunuchs' *agency* in their social and cultural reproduction.

## VII. THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL REPRODUCTION OF EUNUCHISM: DAILY EXPERTS

Whether we consider the scrotum to be the seat of male fertility or the penis the locus of male pleasure, the intended effect of castration on eunuchs is the deprivation of their power to breed biologically. And that is it. They were not impotent in any other sense. Jennifer Jay, for instance, has shown that Chinese eunuchs retained an overtly "male" gender in aspiring to a traditional Confucian lifestyle: "From both the historical sources and the anecdotal reminiscences of Qing eunuchs, it seems that with very few exceptions, the Chinese eunuchs were without gender confusion at the time of castration, and after the operation they experienced physiological changes but no apparent shift in their gender identity and male-oriented role in society."<sup>80</sup> Many eunuchs got married, adopted children, or had kids before offering themselves to the imperial court, suggesting that their masculine social role remained intact as they continued to embrace Confucian family norms. Quite simply put, undergoing castration did not indicate, to them and to their surrounding community, a complete erasure of their masculine identity. More importantly, eunuchs also faced a greater degree of opportunity and power in comparison to other female servants (宮女, *gongnü*) inside the palace.<sup>81</sup> Indeed, the extent of their involvement in the political arena has been the predominant focus of Chinese historiography ever since their institutional lives

were first systematically documented in 1769 in *The History of the Palace* (*Guochao gongshi*), a project commissioned by the Qianlong Emperor.<sup>82</sup>

But conventional wisdom tends to explain the politically corrupt activities of Chinese eunuchs as the result of their internalized anger and frustration with their lost manhood.<sup>83</sup> Gary Taylor might have a point here in inviting us to view the eunuch as “not a defective man but an improved one.”<sup>84</sup> In imperial China, apart from the court officials, eunuchs were after all the people whom the emperor and his family trusted more than any other men. The tremendous political power Chinese eunuchs wielded extended beyond the bedchamber to the rest of the palace and, in well-known examples during the Tang and Ming dynasties, arguably throughout the Chinese empire.<sup>85</sup> Therefore, the political power of eunuchs should be interpreted less as an effect of their demasculinized subjectivity, than a definitive feature of their social and cultural sense of self as gendered through their abiding presence in Chinese history.<sup>86</sup>

Eunuchs could not reproduce biologically, but the practice of castration made their social and cultural reproduction possible. So even if it was not physically feasible for them to give birth to future generations of their own kind, eunuchs frequently took an active role in overseeing the nuts and bolts of castration, the single most important procedure that defined their identity. According to a lithograph from Shanghai in the late nineteenth century, when instances of self-castration occurred on the streets of late imperial Peking, eunuchs were the authorities to whom people often turned for assistance. The title of the lithograph is “How He Lost His Significance One Morning,” and the textual description of the incident reads as follows:

There once was a man named Tang who lived outside the Shunzhimen Gate in Peking. Though in his early twenties, Tang had already acquired the evil habit of gambling and on one recent occasion had lost all of his money. He had no place to flee to, nor any way to repay his debts.

On the ninth of last month, Tang proceeded to the Changyu Pawnshop with the intention of obtaining two strings of cash by pawning a pair of short pants. The pawnbroker on duty told Tang that his pants weren’t worth that much, and that he would have to add something more substantial if he hoped to obtain the desired amount. To this Tang replied, “But all I’ve got to my name are my balls (卵袋!)”

“That would be just fine!” replied the pawnbroker with a laugh.

Tang walked away in a huff. When he got home, he sharpened his knife—which had a blade sharp enough to fell a kingdom—and returned to the Changyu Pawnshop. When he got there he removed all of his clothing and stood there as naked as when he was proceeded to turn himself into a sawed-off shotgun with a single energetic slash of his knife, losing enough blood in the process to float a pestle.

Tang passed out immediately, whereupon the pawnbroker, frightened out of his wits, rushed off to a local official's residence to find a eunuch who could come to Tang's rescue. On the way, he stopped at North City police headquarters to report the incident. Within minutes, the police had dispatched a runner to arrest the pawnbroker, and subjected him to a thorough questioning. Only through the intervention of an intermediary was he able to extract himself from a potentially burdensome lawsuit.

In the meantime, Tang had been carried home on a wooden plank, but he had lost so much blood that his life hung in a delicate balance. The proceedings described above cost the pawnshop some four hundred taels of silver.<sup>87</sup>

Late nineteenth-century lithographs have long been considered by historians as a creative source for the tangled social and cultural history of late Qing China.<sup>88</sup> This particular lithograph is no exception. First, Tang's choice of the word *ruandai*, which is translated here as "balls" but literally means an "egg bag," goes a long way to show that people had not always considered the bodily target of castration to be the entire male genital organ in late imperial China. This lithograph might in fact be the only visual representation of Chinese castration before Matignon's photograph. In the mid-nineteenth century, when the English word "testes" was translated into Chinese for the first time, the medical missionary Benjamin Hobson left no room for ambiguity when he remarked that the "outer kidney"—his terminology for the male gonad—was the organ responsible for "the generation of semen," and for "the change in voice and facial features alongside the elimination of reproductive power when castrated (闖之割之)."<sup>89</sup> In both examples, the message is clear: before the rise of the penis, the anatomical target of castration was the scrotum.

Moreover, the lithograph implies that when it came down to castration, eunuchs were the everyday experts whom people sought for advice. That "knifers" were not involved in this incident is reasonable, because they may have been located too deep inside Peking at the time to be a source of assistance, if they existed at all in light of Stent's account.<sup>90</sup> But for a health issue as serious as loss of blood, and



potentially death, it is interesting to note that no physician is either mentioned in the expository text or present in the lithographic staging of this male-dominated event. Curiously enough, the individual who had the best view of what Tang actually excised from his body is the child located at the center of the drawing, and most certainly not the eldest man on the left who seems to focus more on Tang’s upper body. If the lithograph is a tenable representation of common attitudes toward castration in late Qing society, one can infer from it that the preservation of castration as a cultural practice relied heavily on the role of eunuchs as a determinant agent in guiding its historical existence in China.

### VIII. THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL REPRODUCTION OF EUNUCHISM: SELF-NARRATION

Indeed, one of the most powerful ways through which eunuchs exerted a significant measure of agency in their social and cultural production was by narrating their own experience. This began arguably as early as when Stent was collecting materials for his study. He mentioned twice about the existence of native “informants.”<sup>91</sup> Given the secretive impression that he gave of the system of “knifery” and “the shed,” it would be only logical to assume that his account was based on information provided by other eunuchs, who would indeed be rather familiar with the practical measures involved in castration, at least more so than anyone else. Similarly, in Coltman’s reports, all of the information about the actual castration experience were filtered and made accessible only through what the eunuchs said.<sup>92</sup> So the evidential status of foreigners’ accounts is substantiated only when its epistemological function as a secondary, rather than a primary, source is adequately acknowledged.

But Chinese eunuchs did not narrate their experience only through the voice of “outsiders.” Besides the textual and visual repository created by foreigners such as Stent, Coltman, and Matignon, additional historical information about the operation itself came from the personal recollection of late Qing eunuchs. According to Ren Futian and Chi Huanqing who were among the oldest surviving eunuchs in the twentieth century, the two most well-known places that offered professional services in castration prior to the 1890s were Biwu (Bi “the Fifth”) and Xiaodao Liu (“pocket knife” Liu). Bi operated an establishment on Nanchang Street, whereas Liu’s was located inside

the Di'an Gate in the imperial city. "Each season," Ren and Chi explained, "they supplied the *Neimufu* [Imperial Household Department] forty eunuchs. Together the two families were responsible for all the formal procedures pertinent to castration."<sup>93</sup>

According to Ren and Chi, "registration" with Bi or Liu was the first step required of parents who wished to turn their boys into palace eunuchs. In turn, the boys would be "examined—for his appearance, conversational skills, intelligence, and genital organ (done with his pants on)—and admitted only if considered appropriate." Although Bi and Liu "had many years of experience and the necessary utilities," Ren and Chi insisted that "the overall experience remained painful for the subject of operation, since they possessed neither pain relievers nor adequate medicinals that would help stop the bleeding. Antiseptic preparation was done simply by heating up the surgical knives with fire."<sup>94</sup> Committed to print almost a century apart, Ren and Chi's discussion of Bi and Liu seem to provide solid evidence for the "knifers" described by Stent.

However, their words verify Stent's account only by increasing, rather than decreasing, the distance he first established for the historical experience of castration between a personal realm of embodiment and a public domain of collective memory. Evident from this example, eunuchs themselves participated in the archival rendering of the "knifers" as primary operators of Chinese castration. This historiographic substantiation adds another layer of complexity to the historian's task, to quote medievalist Gabrielle Spiegel, of "solicit[ing] those fragmented inner narratives to emerge from their silences."<sup>95</sup> For any eunuch whose castration experience deviated from this global narrative would require additional explanation and narrative space for inclusion. One of the most popular alternative routes to serving in the palace, for instance, was voluntary castration (*zigong*, 自宮), a category that included self-castration.

More prevalent in the Ming dynasty, self-castration became illegal under early Qing law. The lessons from Ming eunuchs' political corruption were difficult to ignore, so up to the second half of the eighteenth century, Qing emperors made it illegal for civilians to castrate themselves, which simultaneously curbed the number of available eunuchs. However, the legal codes that imposed death penalty for voluntary castration were not strictly enforced throughout the first hundred years or so of Qing rule. In June 1785, the Qianlong Emperor took a step further in loosening the codes to allow the Imperial Household Department to accept individuals who offered themselves after voluntary castration.<sup>96</sup> Actually, this only reflected

the strictness of the regulations imposed on eunuchs by early Qing rulers, which facilitated the decline in the formal supply of eunuchs and the growing number of eunuchs who fled. At one point Qianlong even promoted a policy of eunuch illiteracy.<sup>97</sup>

Famous late Qing eunuchs whom the court admitted as a result of voluntary castration include Zhang Lande (more popularly known as Xiaode Zhang), Ma Deqing, and the last Chinese eunuch who died in 1996, Sun Yaoting.<sup>98</sup> To be sure, persons born with ambiguous or dysfunctional genitalia were categorized by physicians as “natural eunuchs” (*tianyan*, 天閹) and recommended for service in the imperial court as a typical solution. But in most cases of voluntary castration or *zigong*, the father was the person who performed the operation. Such was the experience of Ma Deqing, one of the last surviving Chinese eunuchs in the twentieth century:

When I was nine, roughly in 1906, one day my father succeeded in persuading me to lie on the bed and castrated me with his own hands. That was a really agonizing and scary experience. I can't even recall the exact number of times I passed out. I've never been willing to discuss the incident with anyone, not because I'm shy, but because it was way too painful. . .

Think about it: in those years, neither anesthesia, needles, nor blood-flow prevention medicines were widely available . . . consider the kind of pain inflicted on a restless kid by holding him down on the bed and cutting his *yaoming de qiguan* [“organ for life”] from his body! Every single vein was connected to my heart, and, with the kind of pain involved, I almost puked it out. Ever since, my reproductive organ and I became two separate entities.

After the surgery, it was necessary to insert a rod at the end of the surgical opening. Otherwise, if the wound seals up, it becomes impossible to urinate and will require a second surgical intervention. . . Seriously, [in those years,] the meds applied to facilitate the healing of the wound were merely cotton pads soaked with white grease, sesame oil, and pepper-powder. Changing and reapplying the meds was always a painful experience.

I remember I was on the dust *kang* [“depository”] all the time, and my father only allowed me to lie on my back. Sometimes I wished to move a bit when my back started to sore, but how could I? Even a mild stir would bring up extraordinary pain from the cut.<sup>99</sup>

Similar in function to Ren and Chi's account, Ma's recollection of his childhood castration actually confirms aspects of the operation first described by Stent. Most notably, both Ma and Stent mention the

kang on which castration was operated and the postsurgery necessity to place a rod inside the main orifice to secure successful future urination. From the lithograph to Ma's life narrative, then, eunuchs actively monitored the details of what it took to become and live as a eunuch, historically and historiographically—that is, in both historical real time and as vanguards of their own body history.

However, it is worth stressing that whereas “knifers” or professional castrators took the center stage in previous documentations of the operation, their role was replaced by Ma's own father in his reminiscence of his childhood castration experience. This is one of the most significant parallels between footbinding and castration in Chinese history: the cultural survival of both practices entailed a homosocial environment in the occasion and demonstration of their corporeality. Footbinding was a custom conducted by women and on women; castration was a practice performed by men and on men. But whether mothers bound the feet of their daughters, fathers castrated their sons, or male “knifers” operated on boys, neither footbinding nor castration should be understood as a timeless, spaceless practice with a universal *raison d'être*. In discussing the actual measures involved in castration and the degrading ways in which they were treated by the imperial family, the stories Chinese eunuchs told of themselves ultimately joined the public repository developed by European “outsiders,” constituting the second major step in defining their own bodies as templates for national histories.

In the waning decades of the Qing dynasty, Chinese eunuchs' self-narrations and Western spectators' observations converged most tellingly in the Coltman reports. Recall that Robert Coltman, a personal physician to the Chinese imperial family, reported treating six Chinese eunuchs in Peking and—based on his experience—provided an image of the castration site of one of his patients (figure 2.1). Coltman revealed a transformation in his feelings toward eunuchs from “sympathy” to “disgust and contempt.”<sup>100</sup> In the two articles he published in the *Universal Medical Journal* and the *Chinese Medical Missionary Journal* in the 1890s, Coltman admitted that this transformation may be explained by his realization that a surprisingly high number of Chinese eunuchs, at least during the late Qing period, actually castrated themselves. In all of the cases he reported, the patients did not merely undergo voluntary castration, but they became eunuchs through the more specific measure of self-castration. In 1894, Coltman wrote: “I am now fully convinced, that many of the eunuchs employed in and about the palace, *have made themselves so*, for the purpose of obtaining employment.”<sup>101</sup> In light of the

later personal recollections of eunuchs as discussed above, one might assume that self-castration was rather rare, and most voluntary castrations were carried out by their father. On the contrary, Coltman's reports presented evidence for the prevalence of self-castration in the last decades of eunuchism's existence.

One of Coltman's patients, over 50 years of age and who went to him “for the obliteration of the urinary meatus,” was once with the Tongzhi Emperor and, after the death of the emperor, took service with the seventh prince. This eunuch “stated that at twenty-two years of age, he being married and the father of a year old girl baby, resolved to seek employment in the palace. He secured a very sharp *ts'ai-tao-tzu*, and with one clean cut removed his external organs of generation entire.”<sup>102</sup> Coltman also operated on a eunuch 32 years of age, “who emasculated himself eighteen months ago.” “This man,” according to Coltman, “is a large framed sturdy fellow who could earn a good living in any employment requiring strength, but he deliberately emasculated himself for the purpose of getting an easy position in the Imperial employ.”<sup>103</sup> Interestingly, some eunuchs castrated themselves to spite their fathers. One of his patients, 16 years old, “had an elder brother who had been made an eunuch at an early age, and was in service at the imperial palace. Knowing that his father depended on him (his second son) for descendants to worship at his grave, this lad, after a quarrel with his father, on the 23d of March, took a butcher-knife and cut off his penis close to the symphysis pubis.”<sup>104</sup> Another eunuch, aged 22, cut off his penis and testicles “with a razor,” explaining that “he was the only son of this father, and having had a quarrel with him, he had, to spite him, thus deprived him of all hopes of descendants at one blow—the dearest hope known to an elderly China-man.”<sup>105</sup> To stress the relatively high incidences of self-castration in the late Qing, Coltman concluded that “many able bodied men voluntarily submit to the operation by others, and *not a few* perform it upon themselves.”<sup>106</sup>

These examples confirm a number of the crucial insights that we have drawn thus far regarding the history of the demise of Chinese eunuchism: the foregrounding of the penis in the biomedical (re) definition of masculinity with respect to Chinese castration, the separation of the eunuchs' masculine subjectivity in the social sphere (as husbands, fathers, and sons) from the (gendering) effect of the castration operation itself in the realm of embodiment, the crucial role of foreigners—especially Western doctors—in relating the castration experience of Chinese eunuchs to a global community of observers, and the self-narration of eunuchs, though often conveyed through the

voice of foreign informants, as a cornerstone in the shaping of twentieth-century common understandings of their own experiential past.

## IX. THE ABOLISHMENT OF THE IMPERIAL PALACE EUNUCHS SYSTEM

Adding to the public discourse on the corporeal experience of castration sustained by Western commentators and eunuchs themselves, members of the imperial family completed the process of turning the eunuchoidal body into homogenous anchors of anticastration sentimentality. Strictly speaking, there was no anticastration movement comparable to the antfootbinding movement that acquired a national urgency in the final years of the nineteenth century. The eunuchs system was simply terminated when the last emperor, Puyi, decided to do so. Puyi's ad hoc explanation for his decision, supplemented by the detailed recollection of his cousin Pujia, thus brought an end to the social and cultural production of Chinese eunuchs. Once the eunuchs system was abolished, the cultural existence of castration also came to a halt in China.<sup>107</sup> With Puyi and his relatives' autobiographical words printed and circulated globally, Chinese eunuchism became a truly historical experience.

According to Puyi, his main motivation for expelling palace eunuchs came from a fire incident inside the Forbidden City during the summer of 1923. By then, more than a decade had passed since Sun Yat-sen inaugurated a new republic. Puyi and the imperial family were nonetheless protected by the "Articles of Favorable Treatment of the Emperor of Great Qing after His Abdication" (清帝退位優待條件), an agreement reached between his mother Empress Dowager Longyu, Yuan Shikai, who was then the general of the Beiyang Army in Beijing, and the provisional Republican government in Nanjing. The articles guaranteed Puyi and his family the right to continue residence in the Forbidden City and ownership of Qing treasures, as well as a \$4 million stipend a year and protection of all Manchu ancestral temples. Under these conditions, Puyi retained his imperial title and was treated by the Republican government with the protocol and privileges attached to a foreign monarch. Hence, the overthrown of the Qing dynasty did not end the institutionalization of eunuchs immediately. The corporeal experience of Chinese eunuchs existed almost a quarter into the twentieth century, as the demand for them survived with the imperial family in Peking.

Still relying on their service and loyalty at the time of the fire, Puyi mainly held eunuchs responsible for the incident. The fire swept across

and destroyed the entire surrounding area of Jianfu Palace (建福宮) at the northwest corner of the Forbidden City, including Jingyixuan (靜怡軒), Huiyaolou (慧曜樓), Jiyunlou (吉雲樓), Bilinguan (碧琳館), Miaolianhuashi (妙蓮花室), Yanshouge (延壽閣), Jicuiting (積翠亭), Guangshenlou (廣生樓), Nihuilou (凝輝樓), and Xiangyunting (香雲亭).<sup>108</sup> The timing of the event coincided with Puyi's effort in cataloguing his official assets. Indeed, Jianfu Palace stored most of his valuables, including the wealthy repertoire of antiques, paintings, pottery, and ceramics collected by the Qianlong emperor. One day when he came upon (and was astonished) by a small portion of Qianlong's collection, he asked himself: “How much imperial treasure do I actually possess? How much of it is under my awareness, and how much of it has slipped through my fingers? What should I do with the entire imperial collection? How do I prevent them from being stolen?”<sup>109</sup> Ever since the founding of the republic, Puyi and members of his extended family had confronted repeated reporting of theft. The frequency of palace robbery rose rapidly by the early 1920s, which fed into an increasing recognition of the value of the Qing collection of artistry and material goods on the global market. In hoping to control the situation, Puyi decided to tabulate and document his inventory at Jianfu Palace. “On the evening of 27 June 1923,” Puyi recollected, “the same day when the project was just underway, the fire took off, and everything was gone, accounted for or not.”<sup>110</sup>

Puyi formally abolished the palace eunuchs system on July 16, 1923, only 20 days after the fire incident. In the words of his cousin, Pujia, who had been taking English classes with him since 1919, “the fire undoubtedly had a direct bearing on [this decision].”<sup>111</sup> Pujia recalled that after what happened to Fujian Palace, many eunuchs were interrogated, and Puyi learned from the interrogations about their previous success in stealing and selling his possessions. “And according to the fire department,” Pujia added, “the crew smelled gasoline when they first arrived at the palace. When Puyi heard about this, he became even more confident in his accusation that eunuchs started the fire in order to cover up what they had stolen from Fujian Palace.”<sup>112</sup> Initially met with great resistance from his father, uncles, wife, and other imperial family members, Puyi eventually won them over when he insisted: “If the palace is on fire again, who's willing to take the responsibility?”<sup>113</sup>

Interestingly, Puyi himself revealed a completely different reason for terminating the imperial employment of eunuchs. Although he realized how rampant theft was inside the palace, he was more concerned about his life than his possession. Not long after the Fujian

Palace incident, another fire was indeed started right outside his own bedchamber, Yangxingdian. Given how badly he treated eunuchs, Puyi's real motivation, therefore, came from his growing suspicion that eunuchs actually tried to kill him for revenge.

Moreover, Pujia suggested that Puyi's decision to end the eunuchs system was also shaped by the influence of their English teacher, Reginald Johnston. In 1923, Johnston informed Puyi about eunuchs smuggling treasures out of the palace and selling them in antique shops. As an "outsider" and a non-Chinese, Johnston was able to remind Puyi constantly and frankly of the rampant corruption of his palace eunuchs.<sup>114</sup> In addition, Puyi was quite explicit about his admiration and respect for Johnston.<sup>115</sup> It is reasonable to assume that part of Puyi's motivation for disbanding the palace eunuchs can be attributed to the way he was moved by his teacher's attitudes toward things Chinese.

But whether it is due to Puyi's own paranoia, frustration with palace theft, or intentional self-refashioning and self-Westernization under Johnston's influence, the historical reasons for getting rid of the eunuchs system are minimally concerned with how eunuchs felt or how they were treated. The elimination of eunuchism in China proceeded on one precondition: the transfer of historiographic agency from eunuchs themselves to members of the imperial family, especially the last emperor Puyi. With respect to castration, the historiographic distance between a public domain of collective memory and a private realm of individual embodiment was so firmly in place by the 1920s, that even when we are confronted with the concrete reasons and motivations for discontinuing eunuchism, a cultural system with two thousand years of history in China,<sup>116</sup> the reasons and motivations bear zero relevance to the actual embodied lives of castrated men. Eunuchism and castration are perceived as backward, oppressive, shameful, and traditional not because they impose violence onto men's bodies, not because they punish men corporeally, not because they hurt men's psychological well-being, and not because they demonstrate inflicted cruelty of the flesh: these are not the *real* reasons why eunuchism and castration elicit negative attitudes in Chinese nationalist sentimentality. Eunuchism and castration sound "bad" because they bring to sharp focus a host of social values—lagging behindness, oppression, shame, tradition, and even disregard for human rights—that gives Chinese civilization a history on the platform of the globe. When one enters this global platform to reflect on China's past, one essentially risks neglecting the personal voices of those castrated servants who lived closer than anyone else to the epicenter of that history.



## X. CONCLUSION

From the Self-Strengthening to the May Fourth era, whereas the antifoetbinding movement was built on the rhetorical power of newly invented categories such as *tianzu* (“natural foot”) and *fangzu* (“letting foot out”), the demise of eunuchism depended on the collapse of the saliency of already existing categories such as *tianyan* (“natural eunuch”) and *zigong* (“voluntary castration”). The annihilation of the relevance of these categories in Chinese culture thus carved out a space for new conceptual ontologies to be associated with the practice of sex-alteration, such as transsexuality. Viewed from this perspective, both eunuchism and transsexuality are categories of experience whose historicity is contingent rather than foundational or uncontestable.<sup>117</sup>

My implicit argument has been that before we enter the history of transsexuality in postwar Sinophone culture, it is necessary to consider its genealogical preconditions. The critical reflections on the meaning and value of evidence throughout this chapter are attempts to demonstrate “the possibility of examining those assumptions and practices that excluded considerations of difference in the first place.” They ask and highlight “questions about the constructed nature of experience, about how subjects are constituted as different in the first place, about how one’s vision is constructed—about language (or discourse) and history.”<sup>118</sup> Insofar as the accounts analyzed above can be treated as representative of the social reality of castration in late Qing and Republican China, each of them moved from being a form of evidence operating on the level of individual embodiment to a source type functioning on the level of global historical narration. Surprisingly, they stand in for all that we know about how castration was actually operated in the past three millennia. As such, historiographically speaking, this textual and visual archive not only exposes the castrated body of the eunuchs in the public sphere, but also conceals its existence in the personal historical realm. I have adopted a very specific strategy to reading the archive assembled in this chapter: by “underscore[ing] the grids of intelligibility within which claims of both presence and absence have been asserted and questioned.”<sup>119</sup> This method of archival problematization brings us closer to, rather than blinding ourselves from, the core issues of proof, evidence, and argumentation that define the historian’s task.

The discursive effect of the sources laid out in this chapter belongs to the global episteme of historical narration, and is occasioned outside the pulses of men’s embodied lives. Just like *tianzu* or *fangzu*

are “‘gigantic’ categories formulated from a vintage point outside the concerns and rhythms of the women’s embodied lives,” the perpetual dissonance between the public records of Chinese castration and the varied private experiences of eunuchs in the past *becomes constitutive of* a nationalist sentiment that considers Chinese castration backward, traditional, shameful, and oppressive.<sup>120</sup> As a truly historical specimen, the castrated male body has come to appear completely out of sync with the Chinese body politic at large. When news of the “discovery” of the first Chinese transsexual eventually came from postcolonial Taiwan, her glamour saturated the lingering culture of a “castrated civilization.”<sup>121</sup> The birth of a “corpus style” is predicated upon another’s death.

## NOTES

1. Wu Guozhang (吳國璋), *Beiyang de wenming: Zhongguo taijian wenbualun* (被閹割的文明: 中國太監文化語) [Castrated civilization: On the culture of Chinese eunuchs] (Beijing: Zhishi chubanshe, 1999); Chen Cunren (陳存仁), *Beiyang de wenming: Xianhua Zhongguo gudai chanzu yu gongxing* (被閹割的文明: 閒話中國古代纏足與宮刑) [Castrated civilization: On footbinding and castration in ancient China] (Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2008). On “the Sick Man of Asia,” see Larissa N. Heinrich, *The Afterlife of Images: Translating the Pathological Body between China and the West* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Michael Keevak, *Becoming Yellow: A Short History of Racial Thinking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011); and Carlos Rojas, *The Sick Man of Asia: Diagnosing the Chinese Body Politic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, forthcoming). The “castrated civilization,” therefore, must be historically contextualized on a par with other relevant images of China in the early twentieth century, such as “Yellow Peril” and “the sleeping lion.” See Jing Tsu, *Failure, Nationalism, and Literature: The Making of Chinese Identity, 1895–1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 88–96; Yang Ruisong (楊瑞松), *Bingfu, huanghuo yu shuishhi: “Xifang” shiye de zhongguo xingxiang yu jindai Zhongguo guozu lunshu xiangxiang* (病夫, 黃禍與睡獅: 「西方」視野的中國形象與近代中國國族語述想像) [Sick man, yellow peril, and sleeping lion: The images of China from the Western perspectives and the discourses and imagination of Chinese national identity] (Taipei: Chengchi University Press, 2010).
2. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990); Joan Scott, “The Evidence of Experience,” *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4

- (Summer 1991): 773–797; David Halperin, *How to Do the History of Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).
3. World historians have designated the period between the mid-nineteenth century and the First World War “the age of high imperialism.” See Scott B. Cook, *Colonial Encounters in the Age of High Imperialism* (New York: Harper Collins, 1996).
  4. Jessie Gregory Lutz, *China and the Christian Colleges, 1850–1950* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1971).
  5. On the emergence of Shanghai as a global cosmopolitan center in the early twentieth century, see Meng Yue, *Shanghai and the Edges of Empires* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005); Marie-Claire Bergere, *Shanghai: China’s Gateway to Modernity*, trans. Janet Llyod (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009); and Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, *Global Shanghai, 1850–2010: A History in Fragments* (New York: Routledge, 2009). On women’s fashion in Republican China, see Eileen Chang, “A Chronicle of Changing Clothes,” trans. Andrew Jones, *positions: east asia cultures critiques* 11, no. 2 (2003): 427–441; Anotnia Finnane, *Changing Clothes in China: Fashion, History, Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008). On American flappers, see Joshua Zeitz, *Flapper: A Madcap Story of Sex, Style, Celebrity, and the Women Who Made America Modern* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2006). On flappers in France, see Whitney Chadwick and Tirza True Latimer, eds., *The Modern Woman Revisited: Paris between the Wars* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003).
  6. Haiyan Lee, *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900–1950* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007); Susan Glosser, *Chinese Visions of Family and the State, 1915–1953* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Tze-lan D. Sang, *The Emerging Lesbian: Female Same-Sex Desire in Modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).
  7. On the emergence of the conceptual equivalent of “sex” in China, see Howard Chiang, “Why Sex Mattered: Science and Visions of Transformation in Modern China” (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 2012), Chap. 2; Leon Rocha, “*Xing*: The Discourse of Sex and Human Nature in Modern China,” *Gender and History* 22, no. 3 (2010): 603–628. On “third sex,” see Shi Kekuan (施克寬), *Zhongguo huanguan mishi: renzao de disanxing* (中國宦官秘史: 人造的第三性) [The secret history of Chinese eunuchs: The man-made third sex] (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1988); Wang Yude (王玉德), *Shenmi de disanxing—Zhongguo taijian* (神秘的第三性—中國太監) [The mysterious third sex: Zhongguo taijian] (Hong Kong: Minchuang chubanshe, 1995).
  8. Joan W. Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” *American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986): 1053–1075. On the significance of Scott’s argument for Chinese historiography of

- gender, see Gail Hershatter and Wang Zheng, “Chines History: A Useful Category of Gender Analysis,” *American Historical Review* 113, no. 5 (2008): 1404–1421.
9. Matthew Sommer, *Sex, Law, and Society in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000); Everett Zhang, “Switching between Traditional Chinese Medicine and Viagra: Cosmopolitanism and Medical Pluralism Today,” *Medical Anthropology* 26, no. 2 (2007): 53–96; Everett Zhang, “The Birth of Nanke (Men’s Medicine) in China: The Making of the Subject of Desire,” *American Ethnologist* 34, no. 3 (2007): 491–508; Susan Glosser, *Chinese Visions of Family and the State, 1915–1953* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Cuncun Wu, *Homoerotic Sensibilities in Late Imperial China* (London: Routledge, 2004); Wenqing Kang, *Obsession: Male Same-Sex Relations in China, 1900–1950* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009); Wenqing Kang, “Male Same-Sex Relations in Modern China: Language, Media Representation, and Law, 1900–1949,” *positions: east asia cultures critique* 18, no. 2 (Fall 2010): 489–510; Giovanni Vitiello, *The Libertine’s Friend: Homosexuality and Masculinity in Late Imperial China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); Wu Cuncun and Mark Stevenson, “Speaking of Flowers: Theatre, Public Culture, and Homoerotic Writing in Nineteenth-Century Beijing,” *Asian Theatre Journal* 27, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 100–129; and David Eng, *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).
  10. Susan Brownell and Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, eds., *Chinese Femininities/Chinese Masculinities: A Reader* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Kam Louie and Morris Low, eds., *Asian Masculinities: The Meaning and Practice of Manhood in China and Japan* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003); Kam Louie, *Theorising Chinese Masculinity: Society and Gender in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
  11. Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).
  12. Dorothy Ko, *Cinderella’s Sisters: A Revisionist History of Footbinding* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).
  13. Dorothy Ko, “The Body as Attire: The Shifting Meanings of Footbinding in Seventeenth-Century China,” *Journal of Women’s History* 8, no. 4 (1997): 8–27.
  14. Angela Zito, “Bound to be Represented: Theorizing/Fetishizing Footbinding,” in *Embodied Modernities: Corporeality, Representation, and Chinese Culture*, ed. Fran Martin and Larissa Heinrich (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2006), 21–41. See also Angela Zito, “Secularizing the Pain of Footbinding in China: Missionary and Medical Stagings of the Universal Body,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 75, no. 1 (2007): 1–24.

15. The “archive” I am referring to here does not correspond to a physically existing archive. Rather, it refers to a repository of sources that I have collected that recount information about the castration operation as performed in late Qing China.
16. Aixinjueluo Puyi (愛新羅覺 溥儀), *Wo de qianbansheng* (我的前半生) [The first half of my life] (Beijing: Qunzhong chubanshe, 1981).
17. Ma Deqing (馬德清) et al., in *Wan Qing gongting shenghuo jianwen* (晚清宮廷生活見聞) [Life in Late-Qing Imperial Palace], ed. Zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi quanguo weiyuanhui wenshi ziliao yanjiu weiyuanhui (中國人民政治協商會議全國委員會文史資料研究委員會) (Beijing: Wenshi ziliao chubanshe, 1982).
18. Seth Faison, “The Death of the Last Emperor’s Last Eunuch,” *New York Times*, December 20, 1996.
19. Ko, “The Body as Attire,” 10.
20. Anjali Arondekar, “Without a Trace: Sexuality and the Colonial Archive,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 14 (2005): 10–27, on 12.
21. Anjali Arondekar, *For the Record: Sexuality and the Colonial Archive in India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).
22. My discussion of the archive is critically inspired by Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973); Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002); and Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).
23. On the antifoetbinding movement, see Ko, *Cinderella’s Sisters*, Chaps. 1–2. On the leper’s crippled body in the era of Chinese national modernity, see Angela Leung, *Leprosy in China: A History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), Chap. 4.
24. G. Carter Stent, “Chinese Eunuchs,” *Journal of the North China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 11 (1877): 143–184.
25. Stent, “Chinese Eunuchs,” 143.
26. Stent, “Chinese Eunuchs,” 143.
27. Stent, “Chinese Eunuchs,” 143.
28. Ko, *Cinderella’s Sisters*, 16.
29. See Elizabeth James, ed., *Women, Men and Eunuchs: Gender in Byzantium* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Shaun Tougher, ed., *Eunuchs in Antiquity and Beyond* (Swansea: Classical Press of Wales, 2002); Kathryn M. Ringrose, *The Perfect Servant: Eunuchs and the Social Construction of Gender in Byzantium* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Kathryn Ringrose, “Eunuchs in Historical Perspective,” *History Compass* 5, no. 2 (2007): 495–506; and Myrto

- Hatzaki, *Beauty and the Male Body in Byzantium* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 86–115.
30. Yosefa Loshitzky and Raya Meyuhas, “‘Ecstasy of Difference’: Bertolucci’s *The Last Emperor*,” *Cinema Journal* 31, no. 2 (1992): 26–44, on 31.
  31. Loshitzky and Meyuhas, “‘Ecstasy of Difference,’” 34.
  32. Stent, “Chinese Eunuchs,” 170–171.
  33. The only exception might be the passage documented in Chen, *Beiyang de wenming*, 81. However, I have not been able to locate this historical source.
  34. Melissa S. Dale, “With the Cut of a Knife: A Social History of Eunuchs during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) and Republican Periods (1912-1949)” (PhD Dissertation, Georgetown University, 2000), 37; Liu Guojun (劉國軍) in Zhang Yaoming (張躍銘), *Zhanggong buanguan quanshu: Lidai taijian mishu* (掌宮宦官全書: 歷代太監密史) [The secret histories of eunuchs throughout the dynasties] (Harbin: Heilongjiang renmin chubanshe, 1996), 1690.
  35. Wu Chieh Ping and Gu Fang-Liu, “The Prostate in Eunuchs,” in *EORTC Genitourinary Group Monograph 10: Eurological Oncology: Reconstructive Surgery, Organ Conservation, and Restoration of Function*, ed. Philip H. Smith and Michele Pavone-Macaluso (New York: Wiley-Liss, 1990), 249–255, on 254.
  36. Gary Taylor, *Castration: An Abbreviated History of Western Manhood* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 85–109.
  37. J. Lascaratos and A. Kostakopoulos, “Operations on Hermaphrodites and Castration in Byzantine Times (324-1453 AD),” *Urologia internationalis* 58, no. 4 (1997): 232–235.
  38. Enid Rhodes Peschel and Richard E. Peschel, “Medical Insights into the Castrati in Opera,” *American Scientist* 75 (1987): 581–582.
  39. David M. Friedman, *A Mind of Its Own: A Cultural History of the Penis* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001), 4.
  40. Dong Guo (東郭), *Taijian shengyayi* (太監生涯) [The life of eunuchs] (Yonghe City: Shishi chuban gongsi, 1985), 21.
  41. Dong, *Taijian shengyayi*, 22 (see also 12).
  42. Wu and Gu, “The Prostate in Eunuchs.”
  43. Wu and Gu, “The Prostate in Eunuchs,” 254–255.
  44. Taylor, *Castration*, 46–47.
  45. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, vol. 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990 [1976]; Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality since 1800* (London: Longman, 1981); Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985); John D’Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper & Row., 1988); Sharon Ullman, *Sex Seen: The Emergence of Modern Sexuality in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Arnold

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46. Matthew H. Sommer, *Sex, Law, and Society in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).
  47. Sigmund Freud, “The Passing of the Oedipus Complex,” *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 5 (1924): 419–424. For an account of the relevance of female castration to the development of psychoanalysis, see Carla Bonomi, “The Relevance of Castration and Circumcision to the Origins of Psychoanalysis: 1. The Medical Context,” *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 90 (2009): 551–580.
  48. See Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1977).
  49. For feminist endorsements of Lacan over Freud, see especially Jane Gallop, *Reading Lacan* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 20–21.
  50. Taylor, *Castration*, 91.
  51. “Dr. Robert Coltman, Royalty’s Friend, Dies; Was Physician to the Former Imperial Family of China, Where He Lived for Forty Years,” *New York Times*, November 5, 1931, 23.
  52. Robert Coltman, *The Chinese, Their Present and Future: Medical, Political, and Social* (Philadelphia: F. A. Davis, 1891); Robert Coltman, *Beleaguered in Peking: The Boxer’s War Against the Foreigner* (Philadelphia: F. A. Davis, 1901).
  53. Robert Coltman, “Peking Eunuchs,” *China Medical Missionary Journal* 8 (1894): 28–29.
  54. Robert Coltman, “Self-Made Eunuchs,” *Universal Medical Journal* (November 1893): 328–329.
  55. Coltman, “Self-Made Eunuchs,” 329.
  56. Coltman, “Peking Eunuchs,” 28.
  57. Coltman, “Peking Eunuchs,” 28.
  58. Coltman, “Peking Eunuchs,” 29.
  59. “Obituary: J. J. Matignon,” *British Medical Journal* 2, no. 2065 (1900): 268.
  60. Jean-Jacques Matignon, “Les eunuchen in Peking,” *Arch Clin Bordeaux* 5 (1896): 193–204, reprinted in Jean-Jacques Matignon, *Superstition, crime et misère en Chine: souvenirs de biologie sociale* (Lyon: A. Storck & Cie, 1899).
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  62. Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 62.
  63. Larissa N. Heinrich, “The Pathological Empire: Early Medical Photography in China,” *History of Photography* 30, no. 1 (2006): 26–37.
  64. Sarah E. Fraser, “Chinese as Subject: Photographic Genres in the Nineteenth Century,” in *Brush and Shutter: Early Photography in China*, ed. Jeffrey W. Cody and Frances Terpak (Los Angeles, CA: Getty Research Institute, 2011), 91–109, on 106.

65. Larissa N. Heinrich, *The Afterlife of Images: Translating the Pathological Body between China and the West* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 76.
66. Heinrich, *The Afterlife of Images*, 105.
67. On the evolving politics of “the Sick Man of Asia,” apart from Heinrich, *The Afterlife of Images* (2008), see also Yang, *Bingfu, huanghuo yu shuisbi* (2010); Keevak, *Becoming Yellow* (2011); and Rojas, *The Sick Man of Asia* (forthcoming).
68. Carol Benedict, *Bubonic Plague in Nineteenth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 166; François Delaporte, *Disease and Civilization: The Cholera in Paris* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986); Larissa N. Heinrich, “How China Became ‘the Cradle of Small Pox’: Transformations in Discourse, 1726–2002,” *positions: east asia cultures critique* 15, no. 1 (2007): 7–34; Angela Leung, *Leprosy in China: A History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).
69. Jacques Derrida, *Specter of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994).
70. This colonial gaze, strictly speaking, is not identical to the kind of clinical gaze described by Foucault. For Foucault’s historicization of the Western medical gaze, see Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception* (New York: Vintage, 1994). For important critiques of Foucault’s colonial blind spot, see, for example, Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).
71. Ruth Rogaski, *Hygienic Modernity: Meanings of Health and Disease in Treaty-Port China* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 9.
72. See James Hevia, “Leaving a Brand on China: Missionary Discourse in the Wake of the Boxer Movement,” *Modern China* 18, no. 3 (1992): 304–332; James Hevia, “Looting Beijing: 1860, 1900,” in *Tokens of Exchange: The Problem of Translation in Global Circulations*, ed. Lydia H. Liu (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 192–213; and James Hevia, *English Lessons: The Pedagogy of Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century China* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003). See also Lydia Liu, *The Clash of Empires: The Invention of China in Modern World Making* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).
73. Mitamura Taisuke, *Chinese Eunuchs: The Structure of Intimate Politics*, trans. Charles A. Pomeroy (Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle, 1970), 28–35.
74. K. Chimin Wong and Wu Lien-teh, *History of Chinese Medicine: Being a Chronicle of Medical Happenings in China from Ancient Times to the Present Period*, 2nd ed. (Shanghai: National Quarantine Service, 1936), 232–234.
75. Charles Humana, *The Keeper of the Bed: A Study of the Eunuch* (London: Arlington, 1973), 125–153.
76. Richard Millant, *Les Eunuques à travers les âges* (Paris: Vigot, 1908), 234.



77. Shih-shan Henry Tsai, *The Eunuchs in the Ming Dynasty* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995).
78. Nancy Rose Hunt, *A Colonial Lexicon: Of Birth Ritual, Medicalization, and Mobility in the Congo* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 32.
79. See, for example, Benjamin Elman, *On Their Own Terms: Science in China, 1550-1900* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), Chaps. 8 and 11; Benjamin Elman, *A Cultural History of Science in Modern China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), Chap. 4; Heinrich, *The Afterlife of Images*; Yi-Li Wu, *Reproducing Women: Medicine, Metaphor, and Childbirth in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010); and Chiang, “Why Sex Mattered,” Chap. 2.
80. Jennifer W. Jay, “Another Side of Chinese Eunuch History: Castration, Adoption, Marriage, and Burial,” *Canadian Journal of History* 28, no. 3 (1993): 459–478, on 466.
81. By a greater degree of opportunity and power, I am referring to explicit/legal opportunities and power. One could argue that it was still possible for *gongnü* to exercise some kind of de facto political power implicitly, such as based on their ties to powerful female figures inside the palace. On the role of eunuchs in the Qing court, see Evelyn Rawski, *The Last Emperors: A Social History of Qing Imperial Institutions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 162–166.
82. Yu Minzhong (于敏中), ed., *Guochao gongshi* (國朝宮史) [A history of the palace during the Qing period], 5 vols. (Taipei: Taiwan xuesheng shuju, 1965); Qing Gui (慶桂) et al., ed., *Guochao gongshi xubian* (國朝宮史續) [A supplemental history of the palace of the reigning dynasty], reprint ed. (Beijing: Beijing guji chubanshe, 1994).
83. See, for example, Shi, *Zhongguo huanguan mishi: renzao de disanxing*, 8–12; Zou Lü鄒律, *Lidai mingtaijian miwen* (歷代名太監祕聞) [The secrets of famous eunuchs] (Tianjin: Tianjin renming chubanshe, 1988), 306; Gu Rong (顧蓉) and Ge Jinfang (葛金芳), *Wuheng weiqiang—gudai huanguan qunti de wenhua kaocha* (霧橫帷牆—古代宦官群體的文化考察) [A study of the culture of ancient eunuchs] (Shanxi: Shanxi renmin jiaoyu chubanshe, 1992), 316–354; Tang Yinian (唐益年), *Qing gong taidian* (清宮太監) [Qing palace eunuchs] (Shenyang: Liaoning University Press, 1993), 5; Yan Dongmei (閻東梅) and Dong Cunfa (董存發), *Ren zhong yao—wan Qing quanjian zhi mi* (人中妖—晚清權監之謎) [Monsters among humans: The riddle of late-Qing powerful eunuchs] (Beijing: China Renmin University Press, 1995), 3–6; Wang, *Shenmi de disanxing*, i; Zhang, *Zhanggong huanguan quanshu*, 6; Xiao Yanqing (肖燕清) in Zhang, *Zhanggong huanguan quanshu*, 1901. See also the negative depiction of eunuchs in Han Suolin (韓索林), *Huanguan shanguan gailan* (宦官擅權概覽) [An overview of the power of eunuchs] (Shenyang: Liaoning University Press, 1991 [1967]); Du Wanyan (杜婉言), *Zhongguo huanguanshi* (中國宦官史) [History of Chinese eunuchs] (Taipei: Wenjin

- chubanshe, 1996); Zhang Yunfeng (張雲風), *Zhongguo huanguan shilui* (中國宦官事略) [Matters regarding Chinese eunuchs] (Taipei: Dadi, 2004); Wang Shounan (王壽南), *Tangdai de huanguan* (唐代的宦官) [Tang-dynasty eunuchs] (Taipei: Commercial Press, 2004); Shiniankanchai (十年砍柴), *Huangdi, wenchen he taijian: Mingchao zhengju de "sanjiaolian"* (皇帝, 文臣和太監: 明朝政局的“三角戀”) [The emperor, scholar officials, and eunuchs: The triangular relationship of the political situation in the Ming dynasty] (Nanning: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2007); Wang Jingzhong (汪靖中), *Wugen zhi gen: Zhongguo huanguan shibua* (無根之根: 中國宦官史話) [The roots of the rootless: History of Chinese eunuchs] (Beijing: Dongfang chubanshe, 2009).
84. Taylor, *Castration*, 38.
  85. Wang, *Shenmi de disanxing*, 60–94, 115–155; Tsai, *The Eunuchs in the Ming Dynasty*; David Robinson, *Bandits, Eunuchs, and the Son of Heaven: Rebellion and the Economy of Violence in Mid-Ming China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001); Wang Sho, *Tangdai de huanguan*; Zhang Chengxiang (張承祥), “Wan Ming huanguan Feng Bao zhi yanjiu” (晚明宦官馮保之研究) [Research on the late Ming eunuch Feng Bao] (MA thesis, National Central University, 2006); Shiniankanchai, *Huangdi, wenchen he taijian*.
  86. Historians today continue to have a difficult time in resisting the appeal of the trope of “emasculatation,” despite their critical positioning of their analyses of Chinese eunuchs. See, for example, Melissa Dale, “Understanding Emasculation: Western Medical Perspectives on Chinese Eunuchs,” *Social History of Medicine* 23, no. 1 (2010): 38–55; Christine Doran, “Chinese Palace Eunuchs: Shadows of the Emperor,” *Nebula: A Journal of Multidisciplinary Scholarship* 7, no. 3 (September 2010): 11–26.
  87. Don J. Cohn, *Vignettes from the Chinese: Lithographs from Shanghai in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 1987), 36–37.
  88. See Cohn, *Vignettes*; Wu Yoru (吳有如) et al., ed., *Qingmuo fushihui: Dianshizhai huabao jingxuanji* (清末浮世繪: 《點石齋畫報》精選集) [Late Qing Lithographs: Best Collections of *Dianshizhai huabao*] (Taipei: Yuanliu, 2008).
  89. Benjamin Hobson, *A New Treatise on Anatomy* (1851), section on 外腎 (*waishen*, “outer kidney”). See Howard Chiang, “Why Sex Mattered: Science and Visions of Transformation in Modern China” (PhD dissertation, Princeton University, 2012), Chap. 2.
  90. Stent, “Chinese Eunuchs,” 170–171.
  91. Stent, “Chinese Eunuchs,” 171, 181.
  92. Coltman, “Self-Made Eunuchs”; Coltman, “Peking Eunuchs.”
  93. Ma Deqing et al., in *Wan Qing gongting shenghuo jianwen*, 224.
  94. Ma Deqing et al., in *Wan Qing gongting shenghuo jianwen*, 225.

95. Gabrielle M. Spiegel, “The Task of the Historian,” *American Historical Review* 114, no. 1 (2009): 1–15, on 15.
96. Mei Xianmao (梅顯懋), *Luori wanzhong: Qingdai taijian zhidu* (落日晚鍾: 清代太監制度) [The system of Qing-dynasty eunuchs] (Shenyang: Liaohai chubanshe, 1997), 139.
97. Dale, “With the Cut of a Knife,” 27.
98. On Zhang: Zou, *Lidai mingtaijian miwen*, 292–303, on 294 (account through taiyi); Yang Zhengguang (楊爭光), *Zhongguo zuihou yige taijian* (中國最後一個太監) [The last eunuch in China] (Beijing: Qunzhong chubanshe, 1991), 6–22, on 14; Yan and Dong, *Ren zhong yao* 107–133, on 108; Xiao Yanqing (肖燕清) in Zhang, *Zhanggong huanguan quanshu*, 1903–1907. On Ma: Ma Deqing et al., in *Wan Qing gongting shenghuo jianwen*. On Sun: Jia Yinghua (賈英華), *Modai taijian miwen: Sun Yaoting zhuan* (末代太監秘聞: 孫耀庭傳) [The secret life of the last eunuch: A biography of Sun Yaoting] (Beijing: Zhishi chubanshe, 1993); Ling Haicheng (凌海成), *Zhongguo zuihou yige taijian* (中國最後一個太監) [The last eunuch in China] (Hong Kong: Heping tushu, 2003), 17–21.
99. Ma Deqing et al., in *Wan Qing gongting shenghuo jianwen*, 222–223.
100. Coltman, “Peking Eunuchs,” 28.
101. Coltman, “Peking Eunuchs,” 28 (emphasis mine).
102. Coltman, “Peking Eunuchs,” 28.
103. Coltman, “Peking Eunuchs,” 29.
104. Coltman, “Self-Made Eunuchs,” 329.
105. Coltman, “Self-Made Eunuchs,” 328–329.
106. Coltman, “Peking Eunuchs,” 29 (emphasis mine).
107. See also Pujie’s recollection in Pujia (溥佳) and Pujie (溥傑), *Wan Qing gongting shenghuo jianwen* (晚清宮廷生活見聞) [Life in Late-Qing Imperial Palace] (Taipei: Juzhen shuwu, 1984), 304–306. This statement requires further qualification. In the context of this chapter, “castration” is used in this sentence as a synonym for “eunuchism” as it relates to the Chinese imperium polity. There is a growing trend within the contemporary transgender community in the West to advocate/normalize castration ideation (e.g., “male-to-eunuch” instead of “male-to-female”). I thank Susan Stryker for pointing this out to me. See Richard J. Wassersug and Thomas W. Johnson, “Modern-Day Eunuchs: Motivations for and Consequences of Contemporary Castration,” *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* 50, no. 4 (2007): 544–556; Thomas W. Johnson, Michelle A. Brett, Lesley F. Roberts, and Richard J. Wassersug, “Eunuchs in Contemporary Society: Characterizing Men Who Are Voluntarily Castrated,” *Journal of Sexual Medicine* 4 (2007): 940–945; Michelle A. Brett, Lesley F. Roberts, Thomas W. Johnson, and Richard J. Wassersug, “Eunuchs in Contemporary Society:

- Expectations, Consequences and Adjustments to Castration,” *Journal of Sexual Medicine* 4 (2007): 946–955; Lesley F. Roberts, Michelle A. Brett, Thomas W. Johnson, and Richard J. Wassersug, “A Passion for Castration: Characterizing Men Who Are Fascinated with Castration,” *Journal of Sexual Medicine* 5 (2008): 1669–1680.
108. Puyi, *Wo de qianbansheng*, 148; Pujia and Pujie, *Wan Qing gongting shenghuo jianwen*, 22.
  109. Puyi, *Wo de qianbansheng*, 147.
  110. Puyi, *Wo de qianbansheng*, 148.
  111. Pujia and Pujie, *Wan Qing gongting shenghuo jianwen*, 28.
  112. Pujia and Pujie, *Wan Qing gongting shenghuo jianwen*, 31–32.
  113. Pujia and Pujie, *Wan Qing gongting shenghuo jianwen*, 32.
  114. For Reginald Johnston’s own account of his interaction with Puyi during this period, see Reginald Fleming Johnston, *Twilight in the Forbidden City*, 4th ed. (Vancouver: Soul Care Publishing, 2008 [1934]).
  115. Puyi, *Wo de qianbansheng*.
  116. Yuan Qu (遠樞), *Diyici huanguan shidai* (第一次宦官時代) [The first era of eunuchs] (Taipei: Yuanliu, 1999).
  117. Here I am drawing on the notion of historicizing experience discussed in Scott, “The Evidence of Experience.”
  118. Scott, “The Evidence of Experience,” 777.
  119. Arondekar, “Without a Trace,” 26.
  120. Ko, *Cinderella’s Sisters*, 68.
  121. On the history of the first Chinese transsexual, see Howard Chiang, “Sinophone Production and Trans Postcoloniality: Sex Change from Major to Minor Transnational China,” *English Language Notes* 49, no. 1 (2011): 109–116; Chiang, “Why Sex Mattered,” epilogue.