Why Does Queer Theory Need China?

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The Advent of the Modern Queer Novel

The first two queer novels in Chinese were published in the 1980s, and both were written by authors in Taiwan. Pai Hsien-yung’s *Crystal Boys* (*Niezi*), published in 1983, is commonly recognized as the first full-length modern queer novel in Chinese. It is the first canonical novel that explicitly represents male homosexuality as its main theme—as opposed to earlier works that contain recognizably homoerotic undertones. Pai’s close friend Chen Ruoxi wrote *Paper Marriage* (*Zhihun*) three years later, but Chen’s work has not received the same kind of critical attention from queer scholars. Chen’s story has nevertheless been made famous worldwide through a loose cinematic adaptation, Ang Lee’s 1993 feature film *The Wedding Banquet.* Both *Crystal Boys* and *Paper Marriage* are transnational tales that problematize
“Chinese identity” in important ways, and the fact that modern Chinese queer literature emerged through, and as an interrogation of, the meanings of Chineseness suggests that no account of sexuality is complete without a consideration of geopolitics—how nations are formed and their borders policed, how these institutions sustain and constrain the possibilities of lives. As the novels depict it, queer identities are as much about private sexuality as they are about the political tensions, cultural exchanges, and economic inequalities between China, Taiwan, and America. Indeed, *Paper Marriage* adumbrates the beginnings of “transnational queer politics”: a mode of mobilizing one’s distance from heteronormativity as a critique of the nation-state. Chen’s queer novel thus shows that the geopolitical identity and future of China is not contingently related to sexuality. Rather, the “queer” and the “Chinese” bear on each other at all times, incessantly changing the ways each term is debated in public culture, represented in literature, and imagined in thoughts private or public.

In the current field, most scholars who work on queer issues in Chinese focus on *tongzhi wenxue*, a major queer literary movement of the 1990s inaugurated by writers such as Chen Xue, Lin Bai, Chu T’ien-wen, Cui Zi’en, and Qiu Miaojin. The fact that Chen Ruoxi wrote her novel almost one full decade before queer literature became mainstream is one reason for her exclusion from the well-established list of queer Chinese writers, but an even more important reason is the political reception of her work during the Cold War. In Chen’s early days, she was first and foremost known, internationally, as an acclaimed anti-Communist writer who launched her literary career through the “China question.” In 1966, Chen, a native Taiwanese, made the shocking decision to relocate from Taiwan (then called “Free China”) to mainland China in order to support and participate in Mao’s Cultural Revolution. In 1973, disillusioned with Maoist politics, Chen left Communist China and, like Arthur Koestler and other “ex-Communists” had done for Stalinism, she became a bona fide interpreter of the “real China” to Western observers. In the opinion of the influential China historian Frederic Wakeman (who has taught at the University of California, Berkeley and served on a number of advisory boards for the U.S. government), Chen’s fictional stories served as “an insider’s voice” from the “lost years” of Chinese historiography. Her literary writings in the 1970s, based on her experiences
in China, were eventually translated into English in 1978 as a collection titled *The Execution of Mayor Yin and Other Stories from the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution.*

Although some of her earlier works (including *Spirit Calling*) also became available in English, *Paper Marriage* was never translated and its reputation was eclipsed by her anti-Communist stories in *The Execution of Mayor Yin* series. Marketed in English as stories “from” (not “about”) the Cultural Revolution—a word that is not used in the Chinese original—*The Execution of Mayor Yin* presents Chen as a survivor of what Howard Goldblatt describes as “a society gone terribly wrong.”

As an “authentic native” whose writings were largely interpreted as historiography and reportage, Chen alone “comprised a significant part of what Western readers knew about Mao’s Cultural Revolution.” Perry Link praises Chen for providing “unique windows into a mysterious China,” “the first signs the outside world had of the catastrophic failure of the Maoist experiments of the 1950s and 1960s.”

Whereas Chen’s Cultural Revolution stories explore a China shrouded in Oriental inscrutability, distorted by Communist irrationality, and badly in need of social scientific explanations, her queer novel continues this documentary interest but transforms its object into the homosexual secret. Written in the first-person voice as the fragmentary diary of a heterosexual woman, *Paper Marriage* employs a narrative framework that skirts traces of novelistic mediation and artificiality. The diary form helps frame the novel as an objective, unmediated record of the heterosexual female protagonist’s encounters with the homosexual community in a manner that resembles an anthropological scene of “original contact.” In so doing, the diary-novel also conveys the impression of a first-person witness account. That the same writer who was instrumental in shaping an entire generation’s perceptions of China also played a key role in the production of modern queer literature reveals the unacknowledged roots of the modern queer in Cold War Orientalism. In other words, “homosexuality” became a legitimate object of high literary interest as a result of Chen’s cultural authority on the “problem” of China, and the conceptual continuity between these tropes highlights the sociopolitical background of a discursive emergence that we are used to treating as a domestic evolution from unintelligibility or stigma to self-assertion and public visibility.
Prior to the 1970s, no full-length queer novels existed in modern Chinese.\textsuperscript{10} It was through Chen’s and Pai’s modernist fiction that a vast domain of aberrant sexualities (including homosexuality, prostitution, cross-generational love, and S/M) was converted into a manageable and describable typology.\textsuperscript{11} While studying at National Taiwan University in the 1960s, Chen, in collaboration with Pai Hsien-yung, helped found \textit{Modern Literature}, a journal of vital importance for modern queer Chinese literature.\textsuperscript{12} Pai is later named by C. T. Hsia as one of his three examples of a collective “obsession with China.”\textsuperscript{13} Pai’s \textit{Crystal Boys}, whose Chinese title (Niezi) literally translates as “bad sons,” has been interpreted time and again as an allegory of the rivalry between the authoritative, unrelenting father figure of “China” and the “renegade province” of Taiwan, the bad homosexual son.\textsuperscript{14} Unlike Pai, who is after all an émigré born in Guilin, China, Chen is a native Taiwanese who had never set foot in China prior to her decision to “repatriate to the fatherland” (\textit{huigui zuguo}). This anomaly shows that while “China” remained a central concern to both queer writers, personal biography does not suffice as an explanation. Whether pathologized as obsession, misread as national allegory, or self-diagnosed as identification — home, belonging, imaginary roots — the China that fueled the imagination of a generation of queer writers carried an emotional weight and a political usefulness that could not be explained away as a psychological aberration. As Chen’s personal transformation from ardent Maoist to anti-Communist crusader shows, “China” is an overdetermined and heterogeneous effect, a complex construct that is irreducible to the People’s Republic of China (PRC).

Although the author shifted her interest from Communism to homosexuality, China itself continued to serve as an important object of representation in \textit{Paper Marriage}. Chen’s approach to China, however, is a deconstructionist one. The destabilization of the identity of China affords her an opportunity to “queer” a narrative that would otherwise be a banal heterosexual-homosexual relationship. Conversely, queer feelings helped Chen reevaluate her relationship to China. In her recently published autobiography, Chen recounts that her disenchantment with “the fatherland” began when her collection of nude and half-nude artworks was confiscated on her arrival in mainland China as the “stuff of rotten capitalist consciousness” and she was harassed and humiliated for possessing a book that contained a picture of two
naked men standing intimately next to each other. Queer bonds and feelings changed the meaning of China for her. As China evolved ideologically from utopia to red scare in the author’s mind, the complexity of cross-strait politics remained important to her work. The literary characters of Paper Marriage are American and mainland Chinese rather than Taiwanese—the protagonist, Pingping, is originally from Shanghai, while the story takes place in Oakland and San Francisco, California. The story’s setting is emphatically transnational, not unlike the author’s own background as a displaced, diasporic person with life experiences in Taiwan, mainland China, Hong Kong, Canada, and the United States. Sean, Pingping’s American homosexual husband, expresses a transcultural fascination with China that significantly inflects the queer narrative. After he becomes ill with AIDS, Sean plans a projected (but never realized) trip to that distant country with Pingping, which becomes the “only force that keeps [him] alive” (228). In fact, for Sean, the history of China and the future of homosexuality are intimately related and structurally symmetric. He believes that the Red Guards are the counterparts of the radical student activists and sexual dissidents of 1960s Berkeley, and he posits a homology between the Cultural Revolution and the future liberation of homosexuals (67–68). In Pingping’s own view, however, China is negatively associated with poverty, overpopulation, and Communist persecution of intellectuals (217).

The arc of the story as a whole does not indicate which interpretation of China is correct. The oscillation between utopian and dystopian projections makes it difficult to fix the queer novel’s relation to China, but the real interpretive difficulty posed by this novel involves our habitual tendency to read literature as a reflection of a nationally and territorially defined culture, where culture is in turn understood as a certain stage in a global “history of sexuality.” In part, the novel’s deep concern with China is precisely what makes it a “queer,” rather than simply “gay,” text. The novel’s ability to use the political signifier of China to foreground the mutually constitutive relation between political economy and sexuality makes a contribution to queer theory. The types of queer discourses produced by Chen’s inaugural novel do not map onto discrete cultures that are isomorphic with juridical territories. Rather, her attention to matters sexual shows us how borders are crossed and transgressed at all times, how rules of kinship are unstable and fraught
with internal contradictions, and why new and unanticipated alliances need to be forged in transnational or nonculturally specific ways. As a historical artifact from the 1980s, before the coinage of “tongzhi” and other contemporary queer discourses and political movements, *Paper Marriage* stands as a surprisingly early example of an interventionist tactic for new coalitions and imaginations across the strai(gh)ts. If the history of the queer Chinese novel does not reflect a unilinear development from same-sex eroticism to a modern homosexual identity within a strictly national context, it becomes important to ask what exactly is instantiated by this queer, but heterosexual, romance between a gay man and a straight Chinese woman. Why was this foundational queer novel about male homosexuality written by a woman, and why is it set in America rather than China or Taiwan? To critics who expect literary history and national history to be congruent, this work will appear as a triple impersonation — an inauthentic report by a Taiwanese woman on the psychology of a homosexual man in the voice of a mainland Chinese woman. A reader in search of a gradually unfolding modern queer literature will be disappointed and troubled by its enthusiastic portrayal of a desire to migrate to America and by its punishing attitude toward AIDS and nonmonogamists. Indeed, this perplexing queer novel poses more questions than answers — above all, the very question of cultural comparability and universalism in queer theory.

Queer Theory and Cultural Comparison

“Why does China need queer theory?” is a common complaint heard consistently at conferences in Beijing, Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Taipei. The governing assumption is that China has a unique *tongzhi* community that cannot be conflated with “queer,” which is supposed to be a description of U.S.-style sexual politics. Chou Wah-shan’s works, in particular his *Houzhiming tongzhi* (*The Postcolonial Tongzhi*), have greatly promoted this view. Written while Chou was residing in Hong Kong, this book proposes that the basic sociological unit of Chinese culture is the family and that both homophobia and homosexuality are imports from modern Western culture. For Chou, Chinese *tongzhi* are different from “gays and lesbians” because these English-language concepts have no equivalent in the Chinese tradition.
of same-sex erotic relations, which is characterized by cultural tolerance and harmony.\textsuperscript{19} The postulation of a longstanding “tolerance of same-sex desire” in China promises to make it analytically impervious to the universalizing pretensions of queer theory. The idea of Chinese exceptionalism has since then come to define the field of sexuality studies in China. The conversation is polarized between critics such as Giovanni Vitiello, for whom an exceptionally normative and pervasive tradition of homoeroticism sets imperial China apart from other historical cultures, and opposites such as Sophie Volpp, who invoke a more universalizing queer theory to show that these ostensibly ubiquitous literary representations of homoerotic desire actually testify to the marginality and illegitimacy of same-sex culture in Ming China, where it is more accurate to say that the cult of boy love performed the function of classifying and policing lust in a rigidly defined Confucian moral topography.\textsuperscript{20}

“Why does China need queer theory?” is therefore an important question that connects Chinese gay and lesbian studies to the problematic of the metaphysical universalism of queer theory. Grammatically separating and conjoining “China” and “queer theory,” the question reinforces an intellectual division of labor between the gathering of raw materials in area studies and the production of universal or nomothetic paradigms in (queer) theory. This separatism is strongly resisted by those who develop queer theory in Chinese as \textit{ku'er lilun}, such as Li Yinhe, Pan Suiming, Cui Zi’en, Josep可爱的 Ho, Chi Tawei, Lucifer Hung, Chao Yen-ning, Chu Wei-cheng, and Chang Hsiao-hung.\textsuperscript{21} The possibility of practicing queer theory in Chinese contexts demonstrates that critical attention to local knowledges and concerns does not immediately constitute a categorical rejection of “the queer”; rather, it shows that what is “queer” is constantly expanded, supplemented, and revised by what is “Chinese.”\textsuperscript{22}

The postulation of an alternative Chinese sexuality outside the purview of a Eurocentric queer theory functions as an ideological double-bind. In a field where China becomes a relevant concern only as the producer of differences from Western queer theory, Chinese tongzhi studies often results in what Johannes Fabian has described as the “allochronism of racial time.”\textsuperscript{23} As Fabian argues, modernity’s colonial production of racial others operates through the “denial of coevalness,” whereby cultural differences between
actually coexistent societies are understood as temporal differences in degree of development. The denial of coevalness conveys an impression of a time lag between actually contemporaneous cultures. A queer critique of heteronormativity thus comes into conflict with a postcolonial critique of allochronism. Certainly, a good way to denaturalize heterosexuality is to historicize the invention of the homosexual/heterosexual distinction, but the historicizing effort inevitably provokes debates about whether some human cultures are prehomosexual, prequeer, or altogether different from the West and hence either irrelevant or impervious to queer theory. These theoretical debates about whether it is more ethical to resist universal categories (such as the queer or the human) or to revise universal categories by way of the particular have important political consequences in contexts such as the contemporary discourse of LGBT human rights.

If China has a history of sexuality that cannot be described by the West, this argument does not yet begin to explain where the borders of the exceptionalism of tongzhi, tongxinglian, and tongxing’ai begin and end, where these discourses are located, and whose lives they are supposed to describe. It is indicative that critics who otherwise share an argument about Eastern and Western cultural incommensurability can have wildly different ideas of the temporal and geographical parameters of China. Dissenting from Chou’s essentialism, Tze-lan Sang’s work on the emergence of the modern lesbian in Greater China details an alternative cultural history of translations and traveling neologisms in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and mainland China since the late Qing period. Sang argues that the consolidation of Western sexualological writings into “the discourse of tongxing’ai in Republican China” is essentially nontranslatable. Contrary to both Chou and Sang, Fran Martin identifies a wide array of discursive practices (tongzhi, tongxinglian, ti/po’, xianshen, tongzhi wenxue) in Taiwan that can neither be subsumed under the cultural homogeneity of the West nor celebrated as culturally discrete. Martin emphasizes the imbrication of these “glocal” discourses in power dynamic relations that are simultaneously regional and indigenous, but Martin is more interested in deploying the specificity of these discourses to undo the cultural imperialism of U.S. queer theory. She suggests, for example, that the “closet” is a highly Eurocentric notion and nonnormative Taiwanese sexualities exemplify a practice of “masking” that is distinct from
its European counterpart.27 Chou, Sang, and Martin are nevertheless surprisingly convergent in their insistence on the nontranslatability of “tongzhi,” but their referent of “Chinese specificity” varies radically between a narrow conception of the PRC and an extremely loose conception of “China” as the Chinese language. The state of the critical field shows that it is entirely possible to install one form of linguisticism against another one, to invoke “tongzhi” in order to expose the “queer” as the sedimented effects of U.S. cultural colonization without committing oneself to any given definition of “China.”

Ironically, the antiuniversalist argument underlying these protracted skirmishes is the very legacy and contribution of U.S. queer theory, rather than a manifestation of postcolonial resistance to U.S. theory. In the 1980s, queer theory developed out of “gay and lesbian studies” and distinguished itself from the latter by offering, precisely, a critique of cultural universalism. In her 1990 Gender Trouble, Judith Butler characterizes the application of “women” and “patriarchy” to non-Western cultures as a “colonizing epistemology.” Gender Trouble, which is commonly considered the authoritative work in early queer theory whose main business is the denaturalization of “the category of women,” derives a surprisingly large amount of ammunition from an argument about the nonidentity between Eastern and Western cultures:

The effort to include “Other” cultures as variegated amplifications of a global phallogocentrism constitutes an appropriative act that risks a repetition of the self-aggrandizing gesture of phallogocentrism, colonizing under the sign of the same those differences that might otherwise call that totalizing concept into question. . . . The political assumption that there must be a universal basis for feminism, one which must be found in an identity assumed to exist cross-culturally, often accompanies the notion that the oppression of women has some singular form discernible in the universal or hegemonic structure of patriarchy or masculine domination. . . . That form of feminism has come under criticism for its efforts to colonize and appropriate non-Western cultures to support highly Western notions of oppression.28

In another pioneering work of early U.S. queer theory, Eve Sedgwick proposes that the (crisis of) homo/heterosexual definition is constitutive of
“twentieth-century Western culture as a whole.” Sedgwick’s *The Epistemology of the Closet* powerfully argues that the disavowal and deflection of same-sex desire is not limited to the contours of erotic knowledge; rather, a culturally policed boundary between homosociality and homosexuality structures the entire social terrain “in the modern West.” Sedgwick is interested in destigmatizing the study of sexuality by showing how sexuality is revelatory of how an entire culture organizes itself and therefore central to any type of social analysis, including nonsex-specific kinds. Significantly, Sedgwick insists that these generalizations, “however sweeping,” cannot be applied to cultures “outside the West.” In her formula, the mutually constitutive (or dialectical) relationship between homosexuality and heterosexuality within Western culture “as a whole” is analytically predicated on the rejection of the totality of the world. These queer arguments are critically dependent on the binarism of East and West. In retrospect, we can conclude that the political success of U.S. queer theory is rhetorically derived from the imagination of the East as a civilization sealed off from the rest of the world. This binary opposition is not only implied by, but actually constitutive of, the major claims of poststructuralist queer theory.

If U.S. queer theory has always needed and presupposed the incommensurability between cultures—and for both Butler and Sedgwick, it is not the differences between French and American cultures that matter—the historical tendency to situate China as the paradigmatic Other has served a number of important functions in the development of queer theory. This assumption of the East as the “outside” of sexuality is discernible as early as in Foucault’s work, which maintains that sexuality is not a timeless, immutable given, but rather a construct that has essentially two histories. The first history, which began somewhere in Greece and migrated to France to produce “the homosexual” as a species in 1870, is called *scientia sexualis*. The second history, of which Foucault cites China as an example, encompasses all non-Western societies without distinguishing their ancient and modern forms. The name Foucault proposes for this second history of sexuality is *ars erotica* (a term that emphasizes its lack of scientific and logical basis in comparison to *scientia sexualis*). The grouping of ancient Rome and China as interchangeable examples of *ars erotica* is justified by the view that non-Western societies, due to their lack of *scientia sexualis*, display a develop-
mental stasis through the millennia. The *ars erotica* of “China, Japan, India, Rome, and the Arabo-Moslem societies” is an ossified cultural essence bearing a collective resemblance to the ancient Mediterranean world. Clearly, what Foucault means by *ars erotica* is in fact a code name for non-Christian societies, whereas Europe is defined by “the development of confessional techniques” and “pastoral care.”

**The Unhappy Paper Marriage of China and Homosexuality**

Literary history intervenes usefully at this point. By constructing the queer subject as a transnational encounter, Chen’s text raises the question of whether there is a history of sexuality to be written for China. For Foucauldian critics in the China field, the advent of the modernist queer novel supplies the best evidence that there was no such thing as “homosexuality” in premodern China. The fictional appearance of fully ontologized homosexual characters in the 1980s would indicate, for these critics, an epistemic shift to help us appreciate the difference between a premodern form of same-sex desire and a modern homosexual identity. A modern queer novel such as Chen’s seems to imply a newly available conception of homosexuality as the identity of a small and relatively fixed group of people, in distinction from an earlier view of same-sex desire as a continuum of acts, experiences, identities, and pleasures spanning the entire human spectrum. However, this Foucauldian view does not always acknowledge the fact that the construction of homosexuality as an embodied identity requires, first and foremost, the construction of a location. In Chen’s work, the modern homosexual is created through a “discovery” of America and China as contrastive locations. America is presented as a land of economic opportunities and sexual decadence, as the coexistence of a curious lifestyle called “homosexuality” and material wealth. Through her representation of homosexuality, China and America come to dialectically define each other’s conceptual borders. Chen also stages “the queer” as a revolutionary practice that connects these two distant locations and makes them intimate again. Unlike her earlier anti-Communist fictions, *Paper Marriage* characterizes queer desire as precisely what disrupts the Cold War binary opposition between Chinese Communism and American capitalism.
The diary-novel of *Paper Marriage* encompasses details in Pingping’s life from her marriage to Sean to his death from AIDS. While working as an undocumented immigrant at a Chinese restaurant in California, Pingping experiences sexual harassment by her boss. After making repeatedly rejected advances, Pingping’s boss reports her to the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) in retaliation. Pingping receives the deportation letter and, while literally standing at the crossroads, she thinks about the disgrace of her impending return to Shanghai, where she was once forced to live in a crowded dormitory with other women factory workers (217). Sean, an American man she has met only once through her Chinese friends, magically drives by at this point and offers to marry her for free. Assuming that the fake marriage will “last half a year at most,” Pingping starts living with Sean and meeting other gay men and lesbians, including Sean’s promiscuous boyfriend, who eventually infects Sean with AIDS (13). The beginning of the novel is a representation of her ignorance and curiosity about the gay community. Pingping takes an uninvited tour of Sean’s bedroom. Much to her disappointment, his room is not “decorated with pictures of naked men and strewn with men’s sexy lingerie on a pink bed sheet as she imagined” (17). Other discoveries and self-corrections ensue, and in the course of the novel, Pingping comes to understand the complexity, range of preferences, and internal differences in the gay community. She learns that some are monogamists and others polyamorous and that gay life is intersected with and inflected by differences in gender, class, color, religion, nationality, political views, masculine/feminine self-stylizations, preferred sexual positions, dietary regimen, and religion (206). “Sean’s article in defense of monogamy in *The Advocate* made me ponder the complexity and diversity of human nature. In my eyes, he is a liberal, even a radical; but to his own kind, he becomes a conservative” (128–29).

In the first part of the novel, Sean appears as a highly exoticized and strangely benevolent American character. His American citizenship promises to be the solution to Pingping’s dilemma, and the relationship between the two characters signifies a misrecognition of the structural roots of overdetermined problems. By representing queerness and transnational migration as intertwined historical problems, Chen’s text highlights the problem of the institution of citizenship, the fact that only persons who happen to
be born within a U.S. territory, or married through a heterosexual union to someone who was, are entitled to the privileges of citizenship. Sean’s offer to marry a Chinese immigrant he barely knows, a highly improbable act of generosity, further accentuates the sociopolitical context of queer desire, placing the novel in the context of late Cold War Sino-American political relations and representing America as both the cause of an injurious exclusion and the means for its overcoming. As unrealistic as this plot development may sound, the arrival of the benevolent (American) homosexual character on the Chinese literary scene is a significant event, since Chen’s formula departs from earlier negative stereotypes and representations that associated homosexuality with cross-dressing, prostitution, suicidal tendencies, and gender identity confusion. The romanticism of the homosexualized allegory of postwar American aid is countered by the bleakness of the AIDS narrative in the second half of the novel. Reflecting what Gayle Rubin has called “the domino theory of sexual peril,” the novel draws a punitive equation between sexual promiscuity, homosexuality, and AIDS. The sharp change in tone has perplexed many critics, who have characterized *Paper Marriage* as the embodiment of a strange kind of “sympathetic homophobia.”

The inclusion of the AIDS plot, however, can also be seen as a strategic resolution of the tension between cultural particularism and legal formalism. AIDS offers a convenient ending for the novel because Chen needs to create a morally acceptable plot that will allow Pingping to pay back her emotional and material debt to Sean. Sean’s assistance to Pingping the Chinese immigrant cannot be represented as simply gratuitous in a novel written in the late Cold War years, when it was increasingly clear that Taiwan was materially and politically dependent on the United States for its continued existence (just as Pingping is on Sean). By afflicting the male protagonist with a fatal disease, Chen allows the two to switch roles—the patron becomes the patient, while the refugee becomes the savior. The relation then becomes a “fair trade” between Pingping’s able-bodiedness and Sean’s American citizenship. Pingping is originally the unassimilable alien, the embodied cultural particularity of “China” seeking to be admitted into the universalism of “America.” By the end of the novel, her character exposes the emptiness of this distinction.

Chen begins the novel by setting up “China” as a Sinophone lifeworld of
shared customs and beliefs among the Chinese immigrants. China is represented as a closely knit social network of friends and families (laozhong), marked by a constant exchange of gossip, food, cash, and letters between Shanghai, Taipei, and San Francisco. Pingping’s introduction to Sean is explicitly represented as the benefit of her social capital in the Chinese community. Although several of the minor characters are from Taiwan and Hong Kong, Chen deemphasizes the differences between Taiwan and the PRC in favor of a more culturally defined notion of China as a relatively fixed set of rituals, family ties, and social values in contrast to America. Instead of reflecting what is distinctively Taiwanese about the queer, the novel takes China and America as its points of comparison.

The unitary notion of China is felt in the rhythms of everyday life — the preparations of food, clothing, and different forms of manual labor and emotional attachment. The novel’s concern with China is felt in its strategic choice of the wedding ceremony as the opening chapter. In the very first scene of the novel, a detailed description of the wedding ceremony highlights the idiomatic, ritualistic, performative, and therefore culturally specific nature of the heterosexual marriage. The novel’s first association with China is food. Both homemade Chinese food and professional catering are provided at the wedding, but Chen emphasizes that “no one touched the restaurant food” because of the superior taste of the Chinese cooking (2). We learn that Pingping’s aunt (Guma) disapproves of the sham green card marriage, but she “smiles for the first time since the Minister pronounced them husband and wife” when an American guest compliments her on her dishes (2). The paper marriage scheme, which begins after all with Pingping’s racialized labor at a Chinese restaurant, comes full circle as the novel reinforces the connection between China and food with the addition of a host of gastronomically inspired details of Chineseness: the Chinese invention of tofu is mentioned twice (25, 112). Pingping’s pride in tofu is contrasted with her outrage at a common American identification of soy sauce as a Japanese invention, a mistake she attributes to a problem of Chinese national character: “No wonder he thought soy sauce was first made by the Japanese. We Chinese have never learned the power of advertising. Many of our inventions have been put on Japanese labels and sold as their own . . . . When are we Chinese going to learn to promote ourselves?”
The striking emphasis on Chinese specificity suggests that Chen’s queer novel is shaped by a historical need to give a provisional account of China, without which the representations of queer feelings and identifications cannot proceed.

After thus introducing the Chinese characters as a people with a special connection to the culinary arts, Chen quickly turns the wedding ceremony into a scene of gift-giving “the Chinese way,” namely in cash. After the ceremony, Auntie and Cousin try to force three hundred U.S. dollars and a jade bracelet on Pingping, which results in the usual polite protests, tears, and remarks about the protagonist’s dead mother. The jade bracelet Pingping puts on in this opening scene turns out to be only the beginning of a series of objects and labels that will cement the link between her gender and her Chineseness against her will. To further develop the theme of cultural differences, Chen has Pingping commit a faux pas. When the minister asks her if she will take Sean as her lawfully wedded husband, she answers “yes” in English instead of “I do.” The signifying elements of the ceremony’s hyperbolic Westernness—the exchange of wedding vows, the Christian church, the minister’s pause at Pingping’s nonstandard wedding vows—are followed by scenes that are hyperbolically Chinese.

For her INS interview, Pingping decides to wear “something feminine,” which earns her an offensive compliment from Sean: “You look very pretty in American clothes” (143). To Pingping, the characterization of her “feminine” outfit as “American” clothes misidentifies a gender expression as cultural mimicry. Pingping, however, does not try to correct Sean’s confusion of gender with culture. Instead, she considers the mistake itself to be representative of a certain culture, which must be held in check in a culturally specific way. Pingping attributes Sean’s misunderstanding to the American national character: “Like most Americans, Sean thinks that China has never evolved past the era of Blue Ants. But prejudice and ignorance cannot be dispelled overnight. I decided not to correct him. Instead, I tried to act like an American—when someone pays you a compliment, don’t try to be modest; just say ‘thank you’” (143, emphasis added). While the stereotype of China as a yellow peril of millions of blue ants working under the red flag is used to explain a general failure of American culture, the Americanness of this mistake is contrasted with the self-stylized Americanness of Ping-
ping’s response. Pingping, too, mistranslates the discussion of gender into the problematic of culture.

Although *Paper Marriage* is written as a tale about the homosexual community, the narration is constantly interrupted and hijacked by a desire to say what is Chinese and what is not Chinese. The amount of textual attention to the comparison between American and Chinese cultures in a text that purports to be concerned with homosexuality suggests that the articulation of sexuality cannot be extricated from the history of forced cultural comparison. A mode of cultural comparison helps condense categories of primary labor and subsistence—food, language, clothes, and Pingping’s gender and sexuality—into a unitary notion of “the family” as the governing metaphor for China itself.

The fake marriage plot is instrumental for these purposes. Fearing that their communications might be under INS surveillance, Pingping decides to withhold the “truth” about her marriage from her own family in China, while Sean is too distanced from his own divorced parents (which is a common stereotype of Americans in Chinese fiction) to bring up this topic. These strategic decisions on the part of the characters allow the novel to construct binarized responses from the respective parents of the newlyweds. Assuming that his daughter has actually “married a foreigner” and “forgotten her roots so soon,” Pingping’s father writes an angry letter accusing her of “bringing disgrace to the entire family” (87). By contrast, when Sean’s mother calls and finds out that she is speaking to a woman who self-identifies as “Mrs. Murphy,” the American mother is deliriously happy (19). Pingping writes: “American parents are so forgiving. When they find out their sons got married without inviting them to the wedding, instead of getting angry, they ask you if you are willing to accept a belated wedding gift” (20). (The gift turns out to be a microwave.) Whether Sean’s mother’s reaction is an expression of American culture or the result of her son’s apparent conversion back to heterosexuality is unclear, although Pingping’s own interpretation leans toward the former, which she further emphasizes by noting Sean’s mother’s failure to speak Chinese correctly: “She said, ‘Welcome to the Murphy family, Bing Bing.’ She can’t pronounce ‘Pingping’” (20).

The creation of stereotypical Chinese characters—laced with sentimentality, family values, ethnocentrism, and secret kitchen recipes—is, how-
ever, deconstructed by the novel’s attention to queer matters. The linguistic and social elements that are compressed into the signifier of China begin to be disarticulated by the queer, and China’s claim to distinctiveness is overwritten and negated by the advent of AIDS. World-shattering and border-erasing, AIDS returns a narrative that began with cultural incommensurability to the vulnerability of the human body prior to its cultural markings. After Sean’s sickness comes to light, the food-loving, communally living, blood-related, and family-oriented Chinese characters begin to disavow their “blood-is-thicker-than-water” connections to Pingping. The ease with which a supposedly unshakable solidarity falls apart in the second half of the novel offers a sharp contrast to the initial representation of Chinese culture as a unique kinship structure of mutual obligations and shared history.

The contrast is even more striking on the extradiegetic level: the essentialist construction of Chinese culture through tofu, soy sauce, and familism is undermined by defecting Chinese characters who abandon Pingping and, by extension, the self-Orientalizing project of the novel as well. Once those characters stop treating Pingping as “family,” they are immediately removed from the story plot. The precise excision of the Chinese characters from the novel at the transitional juncture between Orientalism and Pingping’s awakening queer consciousness—her cross-identification with the gay male community—reveals the constructedness of Chineseness. The Chinese characters are elaborately constructed, but they also prove to be surprisingly disposable. Chen’s textual organization offers more insight into her historical concerns than the novel’s manifest thematic issues do. In the second half of the novel, Chen’s characters are developed in relation to Sean’s illness. Sean’s American friends—Julian and his estranged mother—begin to assume a greater role. The criterion for narrative inclusion changes from a particularizing language of cultural affinity (China) to a universalizing language of human life. A communal solidarity through long-distance or diasporic identification with China is undone by its own terms. The last Chinese character to leave Pingping is Mable, an “ABC” (American-born Chinese). Mable’s betrayal is particularly disappointing to Pingping, because Pingping believes that ABCs embody the “synthesis of American and Chinese virtues” (225). The strategic positioning of the most Americanized Chinese character as the last one among the laozhong to exit the novel ensures
that the textual disappearance of these characters is keyed to their degrees of Chineseness or Americanness.

The seemingly essentialist construction of culture in the first half of the novel turns out to be a narrative ruse to expose the fragility of cultural essentialism, which the novel critiques by representing AIDS as a queer issue with which the Chinese characters fail to sympathize. An expectation of an essentialist discourse of China is created and thwarted by the same text. Pingping’s odyssey from persecuted illegal immigrant to permanent resident is represented, temporally and causally, as the unlearning of her heteronormative assumptions about the institution of marriage. Initially, both characters assume that a marriage, or the family, is the site where procreation, sexual pleasure, shared bank accounts, taxes, emotional repair, companionship, and social obligations are meant to line up perfectly with each other. By the end of the novel, Pingping obtains her green card as planned, along with an unexpected husband. She begins as a homophobic character wishing to “convert” Sean back to heterosexuality and help him recover from “his addiction to that kind of sinful lifestyle” (45). By Sean’s deathbed, she has learned to disaggregate love, support, and emotional bonds from her partner’s procreative choice, gender, and sexual orientation. The queer novel therefore has a dual focus: it is both a story of an immigrant who sheds her Chinese nationality through a marriage and a story about a heterosexual person who sheds her homophobia through the same marriage. If this landmark queer text collapses Pingping’s nationality and heterosexism into one and the same transformation, the desire this novel narrates, and the histories that gave rise to it, cannot be facilely translated back into a calculus of the presence and absence of a modern Chinese homosexual identity. Rather, it is a textual instantiation of the mutual transformation of the discourse of China and the discourse of sexuality.

*Paper Marriage* begins with Pingping and Sean’s exchange of Christian wedding vows and ends with Sean’s death. Its narrative structure is an ironization of the marriage vow, initially taken by a heterosexual immigrant and a homosexual man to “cheat the immigration system.” At the beginning of the novel, Sean and Pingping promise to take each other as husband and wife — until “death do them part.” After Pingping receives her green card, she has the option of divorcing Sean in order to find her own romantic pros-
pect, but the unexpected intrusion of AIDS into their life forces her to stay in the marriage to tend to Sean and causes her to fall in love with the dying gay man. She nurtures Sean through his illness, and her decision alienates her from her friends in the Chinese community, who are uniformly anxious to distance themselves from anyone who is in contact with an AIDS patient. The death of Sean from AIDS is also the death of the novel, that is, the termination of the fictional diarist Pingping. After his death, Pingping is overcome with her loss and grief. Her writing voice ceases, and the paper marriage—that is, the novel _Paper Marriage_—comes to an end. Sean’s death is the demise of Pingping’s fictional persona, the moment where the “I” and _Paper Marriage_ finally part company. The unexpected literalization of the economically motivated lie, “till death do us part,” makes the paper marriage the only true marriage in the book.

Before he dies, Sean tells his friends on two different occasions that he is truly glad he is finally married (141, 178). The strength of their union is foregrounded by a panorama of failed marriages in the book, which the author spends much time developing with scenes of discord (Rongfang’s marriage), estrangement (Cousin’s marriage), failed romance (Pingping’s friend Shangguan), divorce (Pingping’s ESL classmate and Sean’s ex-wife May enter the novel as divorcées; Sean’s mother is married three times), and even domestic violence (Jean is abused by her alcoholic husband). In the end, Sean acknowledges Pingping as his true wife—not just legal or convenient, but “beloved.” The very last scene in the novel is a conversation between Pingping and her lawyer after Sean’s death, in which Pingping tries “futilely” to explain her “real relationship to the deceased,” who has left all his worldly assets to his “beloved wife.” The lawyer responds coolly that he is “only capable of answering questions related to the law,” and “Sean’s will is entirely legal” (372–73). The novel ends on a poignant note, drawing the reader’s attention to the distinction between the “legal” meaning of the marriage, which is now imposed upon Pingping (together with Sean’s assets and the privileges of American citizenship) despite her protests, and the “human,” inexplicable meaning of marriage in Pingping’s life. The novel ends, in other words, with the failure of language in the face of a heterogeneity effect that can only be called “queer.” The ending of the story is, of course, the terminus of another event—the reading of a tale called
Pingping’s inability to explain the titular event also signifies another order of textual silence, the impossibility of narrative closure. Is the novel about immigration or homosexuality? Does it endorse either of these experiences? By making the novel’s ending coincide with Pingping’s linguistic failure, Chen characterizes “paper marriage” as a richly ambiguous idea.

The association of the queer with unspeakability is, finally, reinforced by the insertion of an enigmatic episode before the formal ending of the novel. The very last diary entry, which is preceded by the meeting with the lawyer after Sean’s death, is a short note on the unexpected suicide of Pingping and Sean’s friend Julian. Neither his motive nor the relevance of the suicide to the queer/immigration plot is explained. Pingping concludes that she can only mourn the premature passing of their friend in silence and gives up the diary-keeping for good. The novel ends with pain, inarticulateness, and enigmas, leaving the reader with a profound sense of the emptiness and meaninglessness of the immigration law its principal characters have been striving to bypass for so long.

Chen represents Pingping’s marriage to a homosexual man itself as a formative queer experience that changes the emotional locations of China and America. Before her queer marriage, China is synonymous with poverty and oppression, from which only a green card can help her escape. The American Dream, however, is both accomplished through and forcefully shattered by an unexpected queer love. Pingping’s growing attachment to her husband changes the meaning and purpose of the paper marriage. The ultimate loss of Sean, the love of her life, makes the green card, and hence the difference between China and America, irrelevant to her in the end. Pingping’s marriage to Sean becomes the most rewarding experience her life.

A Queer Discovery of Geopolitical Differences

Stylistically, Chen’s diary-novel turned out to be a formative precedent for several influential queer novels in Chinese, including two groundbreaking, scintillating works—Qiu Miaojin’s *The Crocodile’s Journal* (1994) and Chu Tienwen’s *Notes of a Desolate Man* (1994), both of which take the same narra-
tive form, a first-person diary of the protagonist. The narrative frame Chen helped popularize for queer writing dispenses with third-person omniscient narration and creates the poetic impression of “language overheard.” The privileged mode of modern Chinese queer writing emphasizes motifs of confession and secrecy, which are derived in part from a longstanding perception of China as a form of interiority shrouded in real and metaphoric barriers—the Iron Curtain, the Forbidden Palace, the Great Wall, socialist policies of delinking from world trade, and the imperial attitude of the Qing Court toward the West.

In Chen Ruoxi criticism, her prose style is considered an integral component of her thematic interests. Chen’s use of a candid stream of consciousness, delivered in a simple, straightforward prose, has been cited as part of her unique ability to unveil the realities of a mysterious Communist country. Fan Luoping notes that Chen’s stories have an evocative power that produces the reality it represents through a characteristically plain, unadorned style. Expressing his admiration for Chen’s ability to translate the experience of victimization into literature, Yang Hanzhi characterizes the stories as a “dagger made of flesh and blood,” while Wei Ziyun calls them a “testimony of blood and tears.”

Characterizing Paper Marriage as fiction and her Cultural Revolution stories as “realism,” Yang Changnian claims that Chen’s queer novel is an inferior work compared to her earlier “brilliance.” In David Der-wei Wang’s opinion, Chen “has not written a great work since The Execution of Mayor Yin,” but precisely for the opposite reason: her depiction of the Chinese diaspora in America is of journalistic interest (xingwen xing) rather than aesthetic interest (wenxue xing). For Wang, Paper Marriage contains too much realism.

Stylistically, Paper Marriage is an heir to the “China question” as exposé literature. The Cultural Revolution itself is mentioned several times in Paper Marriage. The bonding moment between Sean and Pingping is a conversation on the similarities between the 1960s countercultures (65–68). A shared interpretation of queer feelings as “revolution” allows these two human beings, born on different sides of the Pacific Ocean, to imagine themselves as belonging to the same history. The most significant representation of the Cultural Revolution, however, is the novel’s metafictional dialogue with another diary. Pingping’s brother, she recounts in one of her own diary
entries, was persecuted and tortured by the Communists during the Cultural Revolution because of a diary:

When our house was confiscated during the Cultural Revolution, Yihe’s [Pingping’s brother] diary was seized and transcribed for all to see. Because its contents were too rich and too real, not only did the diary get Yihe into trouble, poor Mom was denounced as having “ideas of the capitalist class” and “encouraging children to become rich and powerful.” My own diary only talked about the weather and other trivia so it was tossed away . . . but I was so scared and scarred that I decided never to keep a diary again (46).

On her wedding night, after marrying a homosexual for a green card, Pingping is “so depressed” that she cannot help but break her own promise and start another diary, a project that accompanies her throughout her marriage (45). By characterizing *Paper Marriage* as a product of a compulsion to write, a compulsion that reverses and overrides a scarring experience from her childhood during the Cultural Revolution, Chen uses the novel’s diary-form as a mise-en-abyme device to link Pingping’s queer life to the trauma of the Cultural Revolution. The novel’s interest in the political event, however, exceeds the critique of the Communist Party. It is, quite specifically, a representation of a reading process — the decoding of a diary within the framework of a diary. The Red Guards read both Pingping’s and her brother’s diaries, but decided that only the latter was of value to the political reeducation of the masses through a historically determinate mode of evaluation. Pingping in turn reads and comments on the fate of the two early diaries in her adult diary and proposes her own interpretation of their political significance and life-altering effects. By allegorizing the reading process, *Paper Marriage* establishes a homology between the two great objects of Pingping’s discovery, American homosexuality and Chinese Communism. The documentary lens of the diarist characterizes them as two great modern secrets in need of being deciphered, explained, published.

Since *The Execution of Mayor Yin*, Chen’s fictional setting has moved from China to America, although some of Chen’s critics have identified *Paper Marriage* as the novelization of a “binary” relationship — between Communism and anti-Communism — disguised as the “triangular” transit
between Asian America, mainland China, and Taiwan.\footnote{The fictional construction of a mysterious China provides a further interpretive background for the stigma of homosexuality as an open secret that awaits a reader in the form of a novelized diary. Yihe, whose downfall was caused by his own diary-writing, continues to live in Shanghai and never makes an actual appearance in \textit{Paper Marriage}; however, his act of writing continues as a disembodied voice in the form of a host of textual objects he sends to his sister in America—letters from home (\textit{jia-shu}), art supplies, care packages, and the memory of the exposed diary from the Cultural Revolution era. The important link between the revolution that changed China and the life experience that changes Pingping’s life is both preserved and displaced onto a different symbolic plane. Metafictionally, the only reason the existence of the brother’s diary can be preserved and allowed to exist as an “event” of importance in the queer novel is that Pingping’s reflections on the Cultural Revolution serve a cathartic function for her queer experience with a gay man. Pingping’s stance toward the trauma of China is represented as the desire to reconstruct a lost object of words (Yihe’s diary was “confiscated” and her own was “tossed away”) through a different kind of verbal narrative, her diary about a gay man.}

\textbf{History of Sexuality or Geopolitical Critique?}

I have suggested that an antiuniversalist impulse in queer theory has created useful, “thick” descriptions of homosexuality in China, and that, at the same time, an antiessentialist argument has rendered any invocation of “Chinese difference” or “Chinese specificity” politically suspect. We might, however, reread Chen’s novel in light of this contradiction and understand this contradiction as one of the achievements of queer theory itself. The historical development of queer theory from gay and lesbian or homophile studies indicates that an empiricist description of alternative sexualities and heterosexist assumptions is no longer satisfactory, and that queer theory is constantly searching for intellectual tools to develop a political critique of concrete power relations. In the case of Sino-American relations, there is a history of occluded forms of imperialist practice that cannot be rectified by a liberal humanist understanding of the self. In this regard, queer theory
has much to gain from a consideration of those transnational institutions, laws, circuits of exchange, and literary works that emphasize an inarticulate experience of social disempowerment with no recourse to a single language of a nation-state. These transnationally formed, nonterritorially organized power relations are rich sites to be mined for a queer theory that emphasizes that “the subject” is always barred, incomplete, and opaque to itself. By showing how power produces abject bodies outside national boundaries, queer theorists armed with an understanding of China can demonstrate that queer theory is not an empty rhetorical game, but a concrete tool we will need to construct models of transnational politics and social change.

While a previous generation of queer theorists worried about the postulation of a universal womanhood as a false generalization of a Western experience in structuralism, we are now much more aware that the “requirement of difference” also decides in advance what contributions non-Western cultures have to make to queer theory. If non-Western cultures are consulted only when they manage to produce “differences” that can expand a liberal-pluralist collection of anthropological specimens, antiuniversalist poststructuralist thought is not altogether different from the universalism of structuralism. Scholars will continue to debate whether there was such a thing as homosexuality in premodern China and whether it was like or unlike the ancient Greek or modern American model, but it is my hope that this essay will serve as a reminder that the very language of difference may naturalize and justify the “West” as an indispensable and normative point of comparison.

The productive tension between those who insist that sexuality is an acultural or universal phenomenon and those who argue that sexuality is linguistically distinct and nontranslatable poses an important political question. As an empirical location for scholarly research, China has served as an important “context” for sexuality. The signifier of China, however, refers to numerous relations other than the nation-state of the PRC. China can be a mode of consciousness and a sense of belonging. It is an institution of citizenship, a cultural identity, a territory, and an ethnic group. It is also a historical division of human birth-accidents and life opportunities along artificially created borders. “Greater China” or Sinosphere is also a critical regionalism, a minority discourse, and a political movement that has both
capitalist and anticapitalist implications. Chen’s novel invites us to theorize China in all of those senses through her representation of a border-crossing, nonhomosexual love that she designates as “queer.” This sense of the queer requires much theorization that should be done in terms of the dynamic interaction between China and other political entities. In turn, the queer will change the conceptual and political borders of China.

The reading that I offer in this essay goes against a conventional scholarly view of homosexuality as a linguistic invention. Chen’s novel, which emerged in the late Cold War period, indicates a historical relation between queer literature and geopolitical conflicts. As the older binary opposition between communism and capitalism ceased to function as an effective rallying point, the complexity of human sexuality became a more attractive theme for progressive Chinese intellectuals. Chen is an exemplary thinker from a generation of writers who began to reject the metanarratives of class struggle and national liberation and found, instead, in queer sexuality the language and imagery through which to explore a more complex and transnationalized world. In the 1970s, Chen’s disillusionment with the Cultural Revolution produced the anti-Communist stories in the *Execution of Mayor Yin* series for which she became famous. In 1986, her topic was now homosexuality, which she saw as a kind of “social excess” entwined with a more complex organization of political power, national borders, and cultural ambiguity.

The story of the rise of queer Chinese literature out of concrete geopolitics that I sketch in this essay will, I hope, serve as an example of how the category of the queer can be transformed and expanded by the political history of China. In *Paper Marriage*, Chen reconfigures China as a metaphor for a transnational movement that is useful for queer theory and practice. In a move that prefigures the poststructuralist critique of the self-owning subject, *Paper Marriage* lays bare the limits of geopolitical consciousness. China is presented as an unstable, but necessary, geopolitical referent for the articulation of the queer. For an author like Chen, if the Chinese queer is to be a meaningful category, the queer needs to understand Chinese politics—how the signifier of China was formed, deformed, and transformed by different lives in different locations. The queer will therefore require an account of China, even if that account can only be exploratory,
insecure, and always standing in an uneasy relation to other cultural knowledges and claims. As such, Chen’s text is an invitation to a radical theory of sexuality that is ultimately incompatible with the one developed by Foucault, and our critical task in the coming years is to transform the signifier of “China” into a useful set of queer tools. The Foucauldians have taught us much about the sexual history of China. The point, as Marx said, is to change it.

Notes

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2. The story of a “paper marriage” between an American citizen and an immigrant woman from China was first invented by Chen. Lee retains many details from the original novel, including the woman’s occupation (an artist) and her initial relationship to the gay man (as his tenant) before their fake marriage unexpectedly “turns real” (jia xi zhen zuo).

3. On the rise of queer writing as a major literary movement, which critically involved the creation of a female-female public sphere, see Tze-lan Sang, The Emerging Lesbian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 175–273.

4. Frederic Wakeman, “The Real China,” New York Review of Books, July 20, 1978. Wakeman predicts that Chen’s stories will have a negative impact on China’s tourism industry, which,
he explains, has lured a throng of unsuspecting foreigners with official propaganda and false advertisement. Chen’s writings will expose the truth of Communist China to “make that kind of blissful ignorance much harder to sustain in the future.”


7. Ibid.


9. After the protagonist of the novel learns more of her homosexual husband’s sexual history, Chen literally has her character scream with excitement, “I have discovered a new continent!” (54).

10. Before the modernist writers legitimated the theme of homosexuality as an object of serious literary interest, the 1970s saw the publication of several important “mass novels” about homosexuality including Guangtai’s Taobi hunying de ren (The Man Who Does Not Want to Be Married) (Taipei: Shibao, 1976) and Yuan Xiaofu’s Yuan zhi wai (Outside the Circle) (Taipei: Nanqi, 1976).

11. Significantly, Chen’s literary strokes depict a broad range of sexual practices beyond homosexuality, including S/M and domestic sexual abuse (53). Wang Ping has argued that the stigma of S/M, paradoxically, provided the basis for the destigmatization of homosexuality in Pai’s literary project. Wang Ping, “Qiaqia wubuli qingniao gaofei,” Zhanglaoshi yuekan 304 (April 2003): 97 – 100.

12. The first parts of Pai’s Crystal Boys were first published in Modern Literature in the 1970s before the story appeared in book form.


14. For an excellent review and critique of these desexualizing reductions of Pai to political allegories, see Martin, Situating Sexualities, 57 – 71.

15. Chen Ruoxi, Jianchi, wuhui (Taipei: Jiuge, 2008), 173, 175.


18. Chou Wah-shan, Houzhiming tongzhi (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Tongzhi Yanjuushe, 1997).


22. A representative collection of essays that emphasizes the need to rethink the category of the queer from a critical perspective produced by the marginalization of Taiwan is *Pipan de xingzhengzhi (Critical Sexual Politics)*, ed. Chu Wei-cheng (Taipei: Taishe, 2008).


25. A useful work in this regard is Josephine Ho’s essay in this volume. Ho points out that the same discourse of international human rights has been appropriated by progressive activists for LGBT rights, freedom of speech, and the decriminalization of sex work and by mainstream women’s groups and religious groups for the protection of children and the sanctity of the family. See also her “Is Global Governance Bad for East Asian Queers?” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 14, no. 4 (2008): 457–79. For an analysis of the strategic use of “human rights” for LGBT enfranchisement, see Wang and Chen’s essay in this volume.

26. Martin, *Situating Sexualities*; see also the introduction to Fran Martin and Larissa Heinrich,


30. “It is very difficult for [this book’s choice of the Euro-American male as its subject matter] to be interpreted in any other light than that of the categorical imperative: the fact that they are made in a certain way here seems a priori to assert that they would be best made *in the same way everywhere*. I would ask that, however sweeping the claims made by this book may seem to be, it not be read as making that particular claim.” Sedgwick, *Epistemology*, 13–14, emphasis added.

31. Michel Foucault, *An Introduction*, vol. 1 of *History of Sexuality* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 43. This view, which came to be known as the “before sexuality thesis,” has been further developed by Katz’s *The Invention of Heterosexuality* and Halperin’s *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*. In his more recent work, *How to Do the History of Sexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), Halperin again asserts that “homosexuality” was a modern cultural production and that there was no homosexuality, properly speaking, in classical Greece, the ancient Mediterranean world, or indeed in most pre-modern or non-Western societies” (13). Acknowledging that his theory might be “aligning marginal or non-standard sexual practices in post-industrial liberal societies with dominant sexual practices in developing nations, thereby perpetuating the hoary colonialist notion that non-European cultures represent the cultural childhood of a modern Europe,” Halperin insists that the “irreducible epistemic and social privilege [of the Western historian] does not mean it’s wrong. There are positive uses to be made of inequality and asymmetry, in history as in love” (20).

32. “On the one hand, the societies — and they are numerous: China, Japan, India, Rome, the Arabo-Moslem societies — which endowed themselves with an *ars erotica* . . . our civilization possesses no *ars erotica*. In return, it is undoubtedly the only civilization to practice a *scientia sexualis*. . . . breaking with the traditions of the *ars erotica*, our society has equipped itself with a *scientia sexualis*.” Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 57, 58, 67.

33. On the internalization of America as desire and violence from within, see Kuan-hsing Chen, *Qu diguo: Yazhou zuowei fangfa* (*Towards De-Imperialization: Asia as Method*) (Taipei: Xingren, 2006).

34. On the representations of sexual perversions as melancholia and masochism in early twentieth-century China, see Jing Tsu, *Failure, Nationalism, and Literature* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 167–81. On male same-sex relations, cross-dressing, and


36. On the notion of “homophobic sympathy” in Chen, see Chu, *Taiwan tongzhi xiaoshuo xuan*, 19.

37. Sedgwick offers a trenchant critique of J. L. Austin’s elevation of the heterosexual wedding ceremony into a source of fascination and the “pure, originary, and defining” example of performative utterances in “Queer Performativity: Henry James’s *The Art of the Novel*” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 1: 1–16. Given that the theory of performativity has been appropriated by gay and lesbian studies, the origins of the theory in Austin’s heteronormative assumptions are indeed another underexamined aspect of queer theory.


44. An example of this new trend of queer theory is Judith Butler’s *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), in which she attempts to recast gender as a mode of ethical responsibility that exposes the constitutive sociality of the self. This constitutive link then serves as the basis for building a political community with “unknowable” Others. To have a gender is to participate in “modes of being dispossessed, ways of being for another or, indeed, by virtue of another” (19).

45. Chen Ruoxi depicts the changing lives and visions of progressive Chinese intellectuals in *Yuanjian* (Foresight) (Taipei: Yuanjing, 1984).