

Red Father, Pink Son: Queer Socialism and Post-socialist Queer Critiques

A Dissertation  
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF  
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA  
BY

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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June, 2017



## **Acknowledgements**

This research would not have been possible without the generosity and kindheartedness of my mentors, colleagues, friends and contacts I grew to know over time. I want to give my sincere thanks to Jigna Desai, Richa Nagar, Jason McGrath, Aren Aizura, and Naomi Scheman for guiding me through my research and dissertation writing. Thanks to Kevin Murphy, Howard Chiang, Jess Jingshu Zhu, Chris Tan, Angela Carter, Keren White and many other colleges for inspiring me and reading my first drafts. I also want to thank the friendship of Anna Ziyi Zhao, Laura Noppe, Thorn Hongwei Chen and many others for helping me through the tough time during my dissertation writing. Of course, thanks to my supporting and lovely family. Funding for my work was generously provided by the Interdisciplinary center for the study of social Change, the Department of Gender, Women and Sexuality studies at the University of Minnesota, and the Association for Asian Studies.

**Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to Ray and many others whose lives are erased and undermined.

## Abstract

The dissertation examines how the affect, memory and trauma of socialism have informed queer life and LGBT activism.

Queer sexuality in China is often articulated through a teleological narrative of transition predicated on the dichotomy of socialist oppression vis-à-vis post-socialist liberation. It depicts queer subject as victim *par excellence* of state violence and pre- or anti-modern traditions, and renders queer practices as radical and embodying notions of progress to transform China from a backward socialist totalitarian “other” to a democratic neoliberal world power. Such making of “Queer China,” I argue, is ironically complicit with Cold War formation and its ongoing impacts on today’s neoliberal gay normalization.

Drawing on a wide range of sources, including historical documents, oral histories, cultural productions and ethnographic research, the dissertation unpacks multifaceted impacts of socialist history, memory, trauma, and geopolitical struggles on shaping queerness in order to reframe dominant Cold War culture in the studies of transnational sexualities and to rebuild a radical queer politics freed of commercialism, middle-class assimilation and imperialism under the name of queer liberation.

The dissertation reevaluates notions of sexual repression, state violence, progress, visibility and agency to shed light on theoretical and methodological debates on ethnocentrism, othering and normalization. The dissertation argues that a critical engagement with queer geopolitics and situated knowledge from the temporal, regional, ideological and epistemological margins can contribute to the provincialization of “Western” sexualities and decolonization of queer studies derived from US-inflicted modes of sexuality and a Western-based system of modernity.

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## Introduction

### Post-socialist Knowledge Production of Chinese Queer Sexuality

The night of the bloody crackdown at Tiananmen Square was the moment Yang Tao began to face up to his homosexuality. He had gone to the square to demonstrate on that evening in June, 1989, when soldiers suddenly started shooting. He leaped over a fence and ran to safety.

... ..

“It was a narrow escape. I could have been killed,” said Mr. Yang, ... “I thought: Why should I live with a mask? This is the way I am.”

Above excerpt is from an article titled “I Lived in Darkness, There was no Where to Look for Help” appeared on Canadian newspaper *The Globe and Mail* in 1993, a time when the Cold War just ended with the capitalist world as the supposed winner. In this story, the awakening of Yang Tao’s gay identity is told through the life and death of the 1989 *Tiananmen* upheaval, a political event that marked the climax of intensified social conflicts resulted by China’s economic reform. As the narrative suggests, the precarious queerness of Yang Tao, both being gay and a political dissident, is threatened by the socialist totalitarianism. But it is precisely at the moment of confronting the state violence that the queer will to resist was invoked and the queer self was able to fledge.

The figures of the Radical Queer and the Oppressive Socialist State have been central in narrating the emergence of Chinese queer subjectivity and LGBT politics. We often hear stories of communist prosecution of sodomites, police harassment of homosexuals, and governmental crackdowns of LGBT organizations. In these stories, the queer subject is framed not only as victim *par excellence* of the state socialism, but also norm resister who carries the power to transform China from a backward socialist



totalitarian regime to a post-socialist democratic world power. *The Globe and Mail* article is an example of such narratives-- the awareness of queer resistance, liberation and collective identity are framed through the dichotomy of the “pre-modern” or the “anti-modern” Communist China vis-à-vis the “properly modernized” capitalist West. As the story unfolds, we learned that Yang Tao “was enrolled in an elite language school where he learned to speak English fluently.” In the “darkness” of “confusion”, “despair” and “hard struggle” with the self, it was in foreign books where Yang Tao “came across the words ‘gay’ and ‘homosexual,’ and realized that might be what he was.” In 1986, he spent a year in the United States as a visiting scholar where he discovered a gay subculture, “bought gay magazines, watched gay videos and went to gay bars.” In desperate need of getting housing from his work unit through marriage, Yang Tao tried to date women and subjugated himself into a heterosexual family. Yet it was the 1989 killing, as the article tells us, that Yang Tao finally came to the realization that “the situation was hopeless in China” for both gays and liberal-minded political dissidents and decided to break free from it by escaping to the United States. Eventually Yang Tao, like many political activists, fled to Canton in the South, the home of China’s first four special economic zones and an area considerably “freer” than highly politicized communist center city Beijing. It was there where Yang Tao’s self-identification finally came to a completion—he met other gay men at cruising sites and grew the conciseness of a collective gay identity. “He told me about being gay. He used the English word,” through Yang Tao’s own words, the report highlights the moment that the concept of “Western gay” made sense of Yang Tao’s previously unspeakable sexuality, “It was the

first time I heard a Chinese say the word for homosexual.” Through articulating socialist and post-socialist sexual differences, the story of Yang Tao’s transformation has thus made the narrative of China’s inevitable and desired transition possible.

Starting from the late 1980s and early 1990s, there has been an increasing interest in producing knowledge about China’s sexual and gender variant culture in both popular cultural and academic arenas in and outside China. In the first few years following China’s 1978 “reform and opening” (*gaige kaifang*, 改革开放), a plethora of medical and health magazine brought questions of sexualities into the earshot of ordinary people. The Chinese word for homosexuality, *tongxing lian* or 同性恋, first appeared in print media in 1981, on the magazine *Public Medical* (《大众医学》). The publication of *A Handbook of Sexual Knowledge* (《性知识手册》) in 1985 was the first print media that provides a detailed education on sexuality, in which a full chapter is dedicated to homosexuality. Around the same time period, Western sexual cultures such as gay parade, HIV/AIDS and theories of Sigmund Freud, Alfred Kinsey and *The Shere Hite Report* had made their way to the Chinese public. Starting from the early 1990s, gay bars, discos, and salon discussions have mushroomed in China’s major cities that provide Chinese gender/sexually variant people more space to get together, to meet foreigners and to organize social events. Increasing media attention from the West has also been paid to the Chinese sexual culture, especially the condition of homosexuals. The HIV/AIDS crisis was another opportunity for the emergence of gay and lesbian non-governmental organizes (NGOs) to develop and professionalize. Scholarly research on China’s

homosexual subculture and HIV/AIDS intervention from both local and transnational scholars had been published and circulated. This progress has been accelerated in the first decade of the new millennium when academic research, activism and media coverage addressing gender and sexual diversity has blossomed and LGBT issues have broken into the mainstream.

This phenomenon has led to a common belief that the end of state socialism and the advent of market-driven economy attributed to the visibility of queerness in China. In fact, knowledge of queer sexuality produced during this period has echoed the sentiment of embracing changes resulted by China's neoliberal reform and restructuring. Like the *Globe and Mail* article, many scholarly accounts and popular narratives of queer emergence inherit the binary position between socialist oppression and post-socialist liberation and express a strong affective attachment to embracing China's transition and transformation. In his influential work on Chinese sexuality, for example, prestigious sociologist of sexuality Pan Suiming uses the word "Chinese sexual revolution"(2005) to describe the post-socialist sexual proliferation in contrast the socialist sexual oppression and silence. This ardent embracing for neoliberal transition in sexuality has been well documented and explained by Lisa Rofel (2007), who argues that the expression of desire for neoliberalism allows Chinese lesbian and gay men "to feel part of a universal humanity" and "changes the relation of China to the world economy and the terms by which its people can relate to each other"(Rofel 2010: 427). In other words, queer desire for neoliberal changes is not only about sexuality itself, but more importantly, it

demarcates what the proper Chinese citizen should be and China's proper place in the globalized world.

Despite the seemingly omnipresence of neoliberalism in shaping LGBT and queer experience, Rofel however reminds us that the advent of neoliberalism has deepened inequalities within the LGBT community and movements as it produced hierarchically differentiated qualities of desires. China's neoliberal integration into global economy intensifies the process of gay normalization through the discourse of *suzhi* (quality, or 素质) and embracement of cosmopolitanism. In this way, Rofel describes, the differentiation of proper and improper desires marks the boundaries between proper and improper gay subjects, namely, between urban and rural, elite and common, and western influenced and localized.

Inspired by Rofel's critique of queer normalization, I was interested in documenting queer subject formations and practices that are alternatives and resistance to what Lisa Duggan termed "homonormativity" when I first started my field work. A random chance brought me to Yang Tao, the protagonist of the *Globe and Mail* report, twenty years after the article was published. He revealed that the title he wanted the journalist to use for the article was "If the Father was Red, the Son was Pink." By using "red" and "pink" as metaphors, he wished to convey to his readers the complex struggles of both being gay and Communist in China. Although the color "pink" can be read as deviant from and betrayal of the color red—both market-driven economy and gay identity seem to be deviant and betrayal of socialist ideology of economy and sexuality, pink is

also a derivative from, therefore a continuity of red. He felt that the title in *The Globe and Mail* that centered on the darkness of Chinese gayness cannot do justice to his life story.

This meeting with Yang Tao has led me to rethink the prevalent framework in current study of Chinese queerness that takes neoliberalism for granted as a motif and vintage point of analysis. As Petrus Liu points out that today's queer critics seem to concern about the neoliberalism and gay normalization after Deng Xiaopeng's 1978 market reforms (Rofel 2007; Kong 2004; Eng 2009). In these studies, Liu observes, queer critics either emphasize the agency of queer desire and bodies against the state, or demonstrate the complicity between new sexual politics and advanced liberalism after China's neoliberal turn. The problem of such trend, according to Liu, is that the critique of queer liberalism "unwittingly naturalizes the assumption that China has unequivocally entered a postsocialist phase" and neoliberal gay normalization has been the dominant logic in queer China. "Treating Chinese queer cultures as a symptomatic expression of a globalizing neoliberalism creates an impression that they are belated copies of the liberal West" and "China has arrived at the same conundrum we see in North America"(2015:4).

Despite of abundant evidence, both documented by other scholars and myself, has suggested that there has been a vibrant queer culture prior to China's opening and reform, and a socialist approach has been foundational to the development of queer politics, resistance and movements in China before the advent of China's neoliberalization and entering to globalization, why these complexities barely made way to our awareness? Why the dichotomy between socialism and queerness has been repeatedly reproduced and taken for granted as a fact without further questioning in

popular, activist and academic knowledge production? Why the narrative of neoliberal transition and transformation has taken hold strongly in Chinese queer culture? Instead of looking for alternatives (although this dissertation writes about “alternative” stories), I started to question the very rhetoric of the “alternative.” It seems to me that “alternatives” to neoliberalism always already exist but are not well acknowledged by dominant accounts of queer studies. What mechanism that fosters and sustains our blindness and what tools we need to gain in order to move beyond our own myopia? With these questions in mind, I turned to gaze upon ourselves, namely scholars, activists and other producers of queer knowledge. Instead of looking at the Chinese queer culture and communities as my research subjects and asking how they are impacted by neoliberalism, I started to examine how knowledge of queerness is produced and circulated in relation to questions of modernity, colonialism, the Cold War, and neoliberal globalization.

To address the misrepresentation, limitation and violence of transnational knowledge production of queer sexuality, I honor Yang Tao and borrow his words for my dissertation, *Red Father, Pink Son: Queer Socialism and Post-socialist Queer Critiques*. In this project, I ask what cultural, material, historical and affective processes that construct and perpetuate the narrative of socialist oppression vis-a-vis post-socialist liberation, what purpose it serves and what violence it does. More specifically, I am interested in why the narrative of the oppressive socialist state and the radical queer have been central in political, activist and academic knowledge production of queer subjectivity and politics in China and how queer and feminist scholars can interrupt such a process of producing queer knowledge. I argue that this narrative that characterizes

much scholarship on Chinese queer sexuality is rooted in a trauma-induced affect to deny the socialist past and to justify China's neoliberal transition and transformation. Through a process of "unremembering" (Reed and Christopher Castiglia 2012: 2) the trauma of socialism, the production of Chinese queerness weakens the queer communities by dismissing complex queer history, practices and resistance, and by foreclosing the possibility to imagine queer politics creatively. In creating an epistemological blind spot and a theoretical dead end, this narrative produces a "socialist queer closet," that prevents queer and feminist scholars from further disrupting new forms of colonialism in the guise of queer liberation.

To counter this epistemic, narrative and political violence in producing knowledge of "queer China," this dissertation rewrites the story of Chinese queerness by looking at how socialism has informed queer subject formations and activisms. By "socialism," I do not simply mean the socialist political regime, economic structure or ideology; rather, I am interested in how the memory about Chinese state socialism, the discursive construction of socialism in the Cold War rhetoric, as well as the tensions around "socialism with Chinese characteristics," have shaped the landscape of Chinese queer sexuality and the studies of queerness. To understand these questions, this dissertation organizes itself around three major themes: the trauma-induced discourse of post-socialist transition in constructing dominant queer accounts; subjectivity, practice and culture that disrupt these dominant narratives; and potentiality of a post-socialist queer critique. The dissertation features four figures that embodied above themes—the sodomite in the Cultural Revolution, the "cock-sucker" turned gay man, the *ku'er* "cool

child” and the young grassroots queer feminist. Each chapter tells their stories of how these figures are produced in and attached to the discourse of transition and transformation in Chinese queer studies and activism, as well as how they challenge us to create new episteme through telling different stories, finding new languages and exploring new methods.

### **Post-socialist Condition**

In this dissertation, I do not use “post-socialism” to refer a bounded region or a time period that influenced by the demise of state socialism; rather, post-socialism is a “cultural and ideological space,” or a *condition*, (Nancy Fraser 1997; Gille 2010) constructed by historically specific struggles of geopolitics. Far from being inapplicable in the “West,” post-socialist condition affects the entire world and how “global knowledge” has been constructed. As Shu-mei Shih points out, post-socialism, in its narrow sense, has affected more than 30 percent of the world’s land mass and 50 percent of the human population; and in a broader sense, it reconfigures the world in specific ways—Cold War divided the world around a particular kind of dichotomy of East and West in term of socialist and capitalist differences, rather than Orientalism and Occidentalism. Subsequently, the collapse of the Soviet empire and the end of the Cold War have given rise to a new set of dichotomy of the North and the South, a political and theoretical framework that has dominated the way in which we understand the economic inequality and politics in today’s world. It is this specific political and economic outlook



that “greatly hastened the onward march of the neoliberalization of the entire world” (Shih 2012: 28).

In the North based academia and studies of China, scholars often use “post-socialism” as a synonym for “neoliberalism” in China. In the Chinese academia, neither neoliberalism nor post-socialism is widely used till recent intensified transnational intellectual exchanges and the popularization of theories through means of improved technologies and social media. The official term of China’s economic restructure is “socialism with Chinese characteristics” (中国特色社会主义). In this sense, it is not accurate to call China “post-socialism” since socialism is still the official ideology and political regime. But in this project I distinguish post-socialism and neoliberalism in China by emphasizing the affect behind these terms—neoliberalism suggests that China’s transition is an inevitable result of globalization while post-socialism emphasizes the wrestling with changes and the legacy of socialism. This reduction of these two itself is a symptom of Chinese post-socialist condition—a massive denial and amnesia of the socialist history, legacy and impacts on the present. It flattened the affective, material and cultural struggling and battling people experience in their everyday life and gives an impression of a celebratory smooth transition. It is also why there has not been a pronounced “post-socialist critique” in feminism and queer studies to address the ambiguity of how post-Mao, post-socialist, or Soviet-influenced Chinese subjects, queer or not, negotiate the trauma, aspiration, hope, injury as well as other affect within the subject formation itself and embodied everyday life. Unlike the post-Soviet Russia where the Communist history signifies its nationalist pride of being a world power, denying

Communism/socialism through repeatedly telling the trauma and the backwardness of socialism, both on state and cultural levels, is for China to achieve the world power status. Ironically, queer and feminists are part of this national/nationalist project while challenging state homophobia and gender/sexual violence sponsored by the state.

### **Post-socialist “Transition” and Socialist Trauma**

I want to start with arguing that the statement naturalizing the emergence of queer visibility in the late 1980s and early 1990s is not a historical fact, but rather an affect-induced construct. In my field work, I was told repeatedly by gay men about a vibrant gay cruising culture throughout China’s state socialist era, thus the (in)visibility of queerness is a question of epistemology, depending on how the knower sees. This popular account of the queer proliferation after the end of state socialism arose in the late 1980s for reasons other than the frequently told story of globalization and its liberation.

After the end of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), China has undergone a series of economic, social and political reforms, under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, to transform a state-owned economy to a market-driven one. These Communist government initiated profit-seeking practices, share many features with what has been named “neoliberalism” in the North academy as it valorizes free markets, privatization, and deregulation. Although simply naming China’s “*strange case*” (Harvey 2005: 13) as “neoliberal” is still debatable, the economic, cultural and political practices that associated with beliefs of freedom, individualism, privatization, competition, choice, self-entrepreneurship, self-governing and managing, as well as to tie it to capitalist

consumer culture, cosmopolitanism, and globalization has changed the landscape of Chinese life.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s when the Cold War was approaching to an end, the zeitgeist of China was “opening” and “connecting to the world.” After thirty years of isolation as a Communist regime, China, like many post-Soviet and post-socialist nations, was eager to embrace new rhetoric, new policies and new cultures in order to move past its socialist past. The concept of “transition” (*zhuanxing*, 转型) has been picked up and zealously embraced from the state officials to ordinary people. As Rofel argues, neoliberal transition in China is “a *national* project about global ordering” that “follows on the heels of modernization and globalization as ‘fantasy-productions’ (Tadiar 2004) through which nation-states in the south must remake themselves to participate in the global order” (20). To the Chinese, embracing neoliberalism is a world changing process that propels people into its economic, social, political and ideological enterprises.

This world-renewing project of neoliberal transition has taken great hold in post-Mao China as responses to two intertwined traumas of socialism. The newly ended Cultural Revolution that terrorized the entire country has casted doubts on China’s socialist modernization (Scharff 2010: xiii ) from the Party officials to ordinary people. The ten years of chaos, the overtuning of traditions and values, and the collapse of secure social structures has left China with a feeling of vulnerability, confusions and uncertainty (Wang 2010). As many have observed, in today’s China the belief of socialism has been disillusioned and there is “no subservient mentality towards the Party leadership” even though it is obeyed out of power (Plaenkers 2010: xviii). Standing in stark contrast to the

openness of Germany reflection of the Nazi terror and Holocaust, the Chinese government successfully suppressed the information of Cultural Revolution and imposed censorship of discussion about the Cultural Revolution. This silencing was perpetuated by the Party's official version of the causes of the Cultural Revolution in the Resolution of 1981, in which the seemingly candid reflection on the Party's mistakes has deflected blame away from Mao Zedong onto Mao's wife Jiang Qing and the Gang of Four. The Party imposed suppression of the memory and discussion of the Cultural Revolution has amounted to a collective repression and self-censorship among the mass. Chinese subjects often go out their way to avoid opening the old wound, exploring old traumas and stirring up social orders. This inability and avoidance to address the violence of socialist history on both state and grassroots levels largely contributed to the enthusiasm for the transition: the suppressed trauma of the Cultural Revolution not only triggered insecurity and distrust in socialism, but also evoked utopian hope for something different. Against this motif of historical injury and trauma, market-driven economy, neoliberal desires for consumerism and discourse of freedom and democracy has provided this hope for the traumatized Chinese psychic.

Although the narrative of transition has created new ideas, new economic practices and cultural production, as well as affect and desires on the surface, it is in nature an extension of the old Cold War mandate. After the end of the Cold War, the narrative of what Francis Fukuyama (1992) has called "the end of history" seemed to become a social reality: the battle of ideologies has reached its end in the universalization of Western liberal democracy and alternative modernities are absorbed

into a globalized system of capitalism. “Post-socialist” regions, either the geographic area that was occupied by the former Soviet Union or countries such as China, Vietnam and Cuba, which have hybridized state-socialism with elements of market economy, are seen as transitioning away from the communist past towards a liberal cultural and political assimilation (Stella 2015). The post- Cold War narrative of “transition” coins socialism with totalitarianism, iron fist and other negative factors that hinder social progress and associates “proper” modernization with privatization, western-style market, liberal democracy and civil society (Hann, Humphrey and Verdery 2002). Despite that “socialism” can take various forms that are different from the Soviet blueprint, and in fact elements of socialism has been adopted by northern European countries and even the United States, “socialism” has been kept as an ideological marker to reproduce the west/east difference and hierarchies.

The Cold War Orientalism and its continuous incarnation in neoliberal globalization has evoked and strengthened another trauma in China —being “othered” and excluded from the world. Since China’s defeat in the first Opium War (1840), nationalist discourse has attributed China’s weakness to its seclusion to the outside world and sought to revive the nation by appropriating Western technology. In the early 20th century, nationalist intellectuals and reformers in the May Fourth Movement advocated for Western democracy and science to solve pressing problems China’s semi-feudal semi-colonial society were facing. It is worth noting that China’s “never being officially and completely colonized” left ongoing ambivalence towards colonialism and its later forms in the era of globalization. On the one hand, China was able to seek an alternative

path to modernity through socialism from the early to mid- 20th century. On the other hand, China's lack of colonial history cultivated a national sentiment of exclusion from the global history that is marked by capitalism and colonialization. This sense of seclusion was also galvanized by Western anti-Communist discourse during and after the Cold War, invariably constructing China as a politically and culturally abnormal "other" in contrast to Western normality. In *China and Orientalism*, Daniel Vukovich (2011) identified a new form of Orientalism in Western intellectual and political knowledge production. Developed along with colonial and imperialist discourses in the age of globalization, the basic statement of Sinological Orientalism is that China is still different to the U.S.-West but will become "normal" and equivalent to the liberal and modern West through a series of economic, political, cultural and ideological reforms and assimilation into globalization. Sinological Orientalism imagines the post-socialist reform characterized by neoliberal reordering to enable China to overcome the historical belatedness, social seclusion and political abnormality, and transform itself into a Western-like global power. Therefore the "transition from a despotic, planned, and dark past to a democratic, free, and bright future" (Wang 2003) has been viewed as the remedy to the trauma of being "othered" as socialism.

### **Socialist Trauma, Affect and the Chinese Queer Studies**

The geopolitical trauma produced by socialist violence, its suppression and its "othering" has imprinted the embodied subjectivities of Chinese queers, the Chinese LGBT activism and academic knowledge production of queerness. We see gender and sexual variant

people being prosecuted in the Cultural Revolution, LGBT organizing disrupted by the state and activists and dissident arrested by the police. We see queer injury, pain and suffering in the history and present. Classic trauma theory, grounded in Freudian psychoanalysis, would argue for making visible the trauma so the injured individuals could gain the ability to mourn and overcome the pain therefore transforming the trauma and healing from it. During my field work from 2013-2015, I witnessed a great deal of efforts to make legible the trauma of socialist state violence. However this method towards trauma reinforces a traumatic circle in which both the state socialist violence and the colonialist violence in form of the Cold War Othering triggers a turning away from the trauma and contribute to a process of normalization. For example, there is an increasing interest in knowing life stories of older gay men and lesbians; however, their stories are almost exclusively used by LGBT activists and scholars to prove that the past is hellish therefore to justify and claim LGBT rights, visibility and legitimacy. The early queer culture in socialism, both in gay cruising site and among socialist female workers, for example, was reconfigured as pre-identity and oppressed by the state. This sanctioned narrative of history constitutes a potent form of forgetting in the name of remembering, a process termed by Christopher Castiglia and Christopher Reed as “unremembering” (2012: 2). Different amnesia, unremembering is “the direct assault on particular memories and on the cultural act of remembering” (2012: 2).

To move passed the traumatic past of socialism, earlier LGBT movements in the 1990s framed gay men as at the forefront of combatting HIV/AIDS, governmental neglect and social discrimination. From the “cock-sucker” to the gay man in the new

word “LGBT,” the professionalization of AIDS and LGBT activisms condemn public gay sex as irresponsible and the cause of AIDS pandemic, prescribing neoliberal sexual normalcy through rhetoric of safe sex, human rights and international gay community.

The “gay man as the victim and resister” narrative was quickly replaced by the “gay man as the oppressor” narrative, as lesbian and queer feminists started to call out male privilege, misogyny, assimilation to consumerism and complicity with the state. What problematic of this critique is that queer feminists also utilize the narrative of victimhood and frame themselves as radicals while ignoring their own class privilege and intellectual and discursive capitals. They also utilize an oversimplified version of Western queer theory to claim radicalism while wiping out more complex struggles and forms of resistance. The traumatic event of socialist state’s crackdown and surveillance of LGBT and feminist activisms is also framed simply through the lens of nationalism and socialist oppression. These responses to trauma, while making visible one layer of trauma, concealed the other layer; this concealment functions to justify the neoliberal transition and colonialism as the affective attachment to it is the cure for the socialist trauma. The inability to address the colonialist trauma of being “othered” hinders the possibility for a radical queer politics that engages both state violence and imperialist violence.

Critical trauma studies has recently challenged and moved away from the psychoanalytical approaches to trauma (Casper and Wertheimer 2016: 2). Rather than taking trauma for granted, it calls for an assessment of the political and cultural work that “trauma does”(Stevens 2014) in understanding conflicts, tensions, violence and suffering



in our everyday life. Drawing upon this approach to trauma, this dissertation attempts to encompass how collective queer identities develop and knowledge of queerness produced in response to the experience of social suffering. Rather than taking oppression and suffering for granted, I want to trace how the representation of social suffering is mediated by social forces through scholars, intellectuals and activists. Rather than adopting an essentialist view of trauma or arguing for a return to a pre-trauma state, I am interested in what it means to use the discourse of trauma and how trauma narratives are frame and circulated. As Jeffrey Alexander points out, not all injury, pain and suffering become social and collective trauma. What trauma narrative wins out, is “a matter of performative power” (Alexander 2012 :2) and the effective performance of trauma narratives depends on “material resources and demographics, which affect, even if they do not determine, what can be heard and who might listen” (Alexander 2012:3). Rather than denial, repression, and “working through,” it is important to examine the power in making, framing and circulating narrative of suffering and trauma.

It is precisely because that trauma is a product of history and politics, it is subjected to reinterpretation, contestation and intervention. Therefore approaching the affect and trauma that imprinted Chinese queerness provides crucial ways to rewrite the story of queer emergence and to reproduce episteme of queerness. Instead of a merely viewing the trauma of socialism violent assault on queers, this dissertation wishes to approach trauma as a site for pleasure and aspirations that motivate queer possibilities. These queer possibilities call for different epistemology of seeing, listening, reading and celebrating that goes beyond confrontational methods and challenge us to rethink the

politics of visibility that has been taken for granted in present queer theorization, knowledge production and activism.

### **Politics of Invisibility in Post-socialism**

The question of political agency and critiques of politics of visibility is a common theme that underlies the dissertation. While queer visibility “might appear as an outdated theoretical issues in the Anglophone academic context” as the “politics of visibility and identity assertion have long been on the agenda of queer criticism” in the early 1990s, “the concept of visibility is an immensely productive theoretical tool”(Fejes and Balogh 2013: 3) for the study of post-socialist sexual politics. As many post-socialist queer scholars have insisted, “it is only by situating homosexuality in a ‘politics of vision,’ using Brian James Baer’s expression, that we can properly outline the challenges of homosexuality in gaining political agency”(3). Although queer visibility has improved queer life in significant ways worldwide and “provide(s) useful anchor point for multi-faceted, interdisciplinary, and transcultural examinations”(Kaneva 2015: 3) of queerness in the post-socialist context , the equation of visibility with agency is problematic.

While the politics of visibility can be disruptive to the authoritarian state, it also frequently serves to reproduce hierarchies of domination. As Nancy Fraser (1997) has points out that since the end of socialism gave rise to economic liberalism as a dominant global ideology, class struggle is disrupted as the basis of political mobilization, and identity politics become more prominent. The result is a conflict between a political economic “politics of redistribution,” a thesis of Marxist materialism and a cultural

“politics of recognition,” generally associated with liberalism. The shift to the politics of recognition is a form of backlash against the ideological propaganda during the former socialist regime that characterized in the urge to “return to the Europe” in former Soviet Union countries (Kaneva 2015: 6) and “to catch up to the West” in China through neoliberalism. The global politics of recognition, as Radha Hegde(2011) points out, is intertwined with the proliferation of new forms and mechanisms of visibility, facilitated by media technologies and information networks. She further argues that the outcome of such materialized global politics of visibility in terms of gender and sexuality is that “the hegemony of the West is reproduced in the global imaginary as the site of progressive sexual politics and cosmopolitan modernity”(2011: 3). While such politics provides women and queers a sense of empowerment and freedom as they discard the ideological models of femininity or stigma of sexual otherness, it also put them in a “uniquely unsettling position in relation to the project of modernity”—the negotiation between the western influenced knowledge of gender and sexuality and local realities and aspirations (Kaneva 7). The embrace of such visibility seems also inflicted a form of injustice by foreclosing visibility and agency of people, especially women who were glorified as heroines in former socialism, whether for good or for bad, as workers, mothers and female revolutionaries. The newly created identities seem to suggest such subjects are a socialist propaganda fraud at worse and out-dated at best.

Sara Banet-Weiser (2014) also warns us the pitfalls of commodifying and re-appropriating female and oppressed bodies for political purposes by making a distinction between “politics of visibility” and “economy of visibility.” To what extend struggle for

visibility is subject to commercial exploitation is of great importance for queer and feminist activism and scholarship alike.

In addition, the struggle for visibility is a class issue and social movements' goal for visibility could run the risk of reinforcing the unjust structure of distribution. In analyzing the Pussy Riot activism, Elena Gapova(2014) argues that Pussy Riot exposed a watershed between a new class of urban intellectuals and globally connected elites, and the "masses" who are immersed in a more material economy and lifestyle. The latter translates the economic inequalities into a rejection of Pussy Riot whose protest is coded as identifying with global capitalism. The attention and interpretation of Pussy Riot feminism in the West displaces the issue of class relations as oversimplified dichotomy between new and old, radical and traditional, feminism and patriarchy.

The method, or fetishism, of visibility is predated on specific epistemology which prioritizes the able-bodied white and European knowing subject. The politics of visibility might as well function as an easy way of assimilation that flattens out differences in terms of cultural, geopolitical locations, material and educational realities and creates a false sense of community, sisterhood and solidarity. For example, at the 4<sup>th</sup> United Nation Women's Conference in Beijing in 1995, lesbian women from China set up a lesbian tent as response and resistance to the official denial of lesbians. However, this action is not only the demonstration of lesbian existence, but through which a Chinese lesbian is defined and imagined in relation to lesbians from other locations, in this case, predominantly first world lesbians.

The politics of visibility is also linked to the question of voice. In *Pink Globalization: Hello Kitty's Trek across the Pacific*, Christine Yano points out that western feminists tend to see the imagine of Hello Kitty as representing the submissive Asian-ness because Hello Kitty does have a mouth. Western or the mainstream feminisms tend to associate the ability to be able to speak with agency. “Giving voice” and “making the silence visibility” often imagined as ways of empowerment. However, not all people are privileged to “have a mouth” or prioritize “giving voice” when we think about the different and often not shared and unsharable language, concepts, and discourses in different locations. In other words, unlike Michel Foucault who calls the loss of voice as “limit experience,” aphasia should be understood in relation to other axes of power asymmetries.

In analyzing Frantz Fanon’s anguished remembrance of being called out as a “dirty nigger” in *Black Skin, White Masks*, Rey Chow(2014) writes:

It is the experience of a shock, registered both in embodied form (through his own blackness) *and* beyond corporeality, at what may be called an ineluctability or coerciveness of identification based on none other than the performative mimeticism that is the name. . . . . naming establishes the “community” (or, in the language of today’s social media, “connectivity”) in which the named object is given a life other than muteness. Yet precisely because such community relations *replace* (substitute, take over-indeed, usurp) muteness, the black person has nowhere to hide once the name is pronounced (5).

Chow further argues,

This phenomenon of a compulsory “self”-recognition operates at a level that goes considerably beyond the logical questions about subjective consistency and volition because the knowledge and authority it bears come from another scene, because the injunction of racialization has already been issued long before this particular encounter, before this particular black person enters the picture in an individuated fashion. . . . .For the black person, this chance of self-recognition is

held out in the precise form of his reduction or thing-ification: he can be/become (himself) by being/becoming less, by being/becoming diminished(6).

Chow's understanding of racialization as an encounter with naming serves to remind us that politics of visibility and the very act of asserting it in terms of self-recognition and naming as "gay" may also reduce one to an abstract identity marker. For transnational queer, gender and sexuality studies, we need to build a critical vocabulary and method to addressing the thickness of experiences and complex positioning across time and place.

Evidence suggests that, despite criminalization and medicalization, the invisibility of same-sex desire and the low awareness of same-sex relations in public during the socialist China sheltered individuals practicing same-sex relationship from public scrutiny. This is especially true when it comes to female same-sex desires. Remaining invisible and unnamed had costs, however staying under the radar also provided a degree of freedom. It signals a fundamental problem with the nation of visibility as empowering, and the notion of the closet as a form of oppression.

Stella argues that "the forced invisibility embodied in the metaphor of the closet is an important structural mechanism deployed to regulate and stigmatise non-normative sexuality, the concept of 'coming out of closet' is unsuitable to account for women's agency in negotiating their sexuality. Since the expression 'coming out' was popularised by gay liberation, and the closet and coming out are value-laden terms: the former is imagined as a negative space of internalized homophobia, repression and concealment; the latter as an empowering and liberating act, bringing visibility and recognition" (2015: 127?). Yet the binary of closeting and coming out is unable to account for the complex

social, political and affective states that constitute Chinese queer experience and politics. Then it requires us to argue for a politics of invisibility, or put it in other words, a different method of “seeing” and “speaking”. The concept of “strategies of opacity” put forth by Nicholas de Villiers might be a helpful in thinking about the politics of invisibility. Outplaying the obligatory confessional speech and closeted silence, opacity, de Villiers argues, is a queer mode of being that challenges forms of expressions and representations as well as “the system known as the ‘epistemology of the closet’”(2012: 163). It withholds information at the same time as not committing to the very existence of any information supposedly withheld. In his reading of Foucault, Roland Barthes and Andy Warhol, de Villiers suggests that their work and life are not “decrypted for the secret truth of sexuality or seen as simply a result of sexuality”(2012: 16). Queer and feminist scholars also need to discover methods of research and writing that capture multiple ways of representation as well as recognition.

### **About the Chapters**

#### *Repression Hypothesis of Socialism*

The normative narrative often contrasts the void of homosexuality in China’s state socialist era with the proliferation of queer visibility in post-socialism. In chapter one, I challenge the pervasive dichotomy of socialist state oppression and post-socialist desire that have characterized much of the existing scholarship on the history of gender and sexuality in the PRC. Calling for a reparative return to what I call queer socialism, this chapter performs a critical theorization of an alternative genealogy of the queer socialist

closet. Although legal cases of sodomy have attracted a significant measure of critical attention given its centrality for historicizing male homosexuality, I propose a much more radical interpretive approach that alerts to the kind of historical injury embedded within these cases and as manifested in the form of ethical and affective investments scholars put in to constructing historical narratives about Chinese queerness from the perspective of the global neoliberal present. By drawing attention to an important source type, the *tanbai jiaodai* confessions narrated by men who engaged in same-sex behavior during the Cultural Revolution, my analysis delineates these narrative spaces as a queer counterpublic in which the subject is coerced to speak about the most intimate sphere of their personal life. Such “evidence” of queerness serves a function far from the additive nature of representation in that it does not merely allow for a supplementary understanding of queer existence in the Maoist period. Rather, it underscores the value of privileging disruption in the historian’s search for surprises and otherness, giving credence to the reparative—rather than recuperative—imaginings of queerer and more diverse pasts. In this chapter, socialism is not explored as a totalitarian ideology, but as ‘real existing’ state socialism, which could be analyzed in terms of institutions, collective memories, and everyday lived experience.

### *Queer Anti-Capitalism*

The general approach to queer identity often points to its linkage to capitalism and cosmopolitan consumerism. Following Michel Foucault, the dominant genealogy of the “modern homosexual” sees a distinctive homosexual identity as the product of capitalist modernity, and emerged as a result of a broader process characterized by the demise of



feudalism, the rise of the nation-state, secularization, and the rise of biopower in the Western Europe. Work on “the modern homosexual” traces its origins to biopower and the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Western medical and legal discourses about sexual deviance; it also suggests an intimate link between capitalism and the emergence of widely recognizable and distinguishable gay and lesbian identities in the twentieth century. This genealogical approach has been applied to the study of sexualities to non-western contexts, that elevated the uniquely western sexual modernity and its twenty-first century reincarnation as the “global McGay” to a master narrative underpinned by linear notions of time and by normative assumptions about progress and development (Stella 2015: 137-138).

In Chapter two, I challenge the dominant narrative of the connection between gay identity and global capitalism by documenting “queer anti-capitalism.” From the late 80s onward, transnationally sponsored HIV/AIDS intervention programs hand in hand with Chinese medical authorities started to target Men who have Sex with Men (MSMs) at cruising sites as part of the global AIDS epidemic managing. Experts, scholars and activists who are connected with the transnational civil society adopted the rhetoric of HIV/AIDS as a “global crisis” in 1990s which allows China to imagine itself as participating in the global system of security and human rights. On the one hand, the HIV/AIDS activism framed Chinese gay community as brothers of global gays who are collectively threatened by the pandemic, on the other hand, its intervention policies and how such policies are carried out re-marginalize and denigrate social and economic underprivileged groups as “dangerous” and “shameful.”

The HIV/AIDS movements and the transnational capitals that facilitated it in China created a plethora of identities, desires and space for resistance, as well as abjection. As the global funds of HIV/AIDS dried out and transitional capital turned to sponsor LGBT right-based activism, HIV/AIDS activists and people living with AIDS have become surplus for the movements. In chapter two, I examine the everyday life struggles at gay cruising sites and activist, the “litter” of the movement and global funding and argue that their gay identities are formed as critiques of neoliberal globalization. Rather than viewing them as example of alternatives to capitalism, which is often fetishized/idealized by queer and feminist scholars as queer resistance to normativity, I reflect on how our affective and political investments in looking for alternatives shape our research questions, methods and representation of people we study and ourselves.

### *Queer as Radical*

In this project, I use “gay”, “LGBT” and “queer” to roughly refer people whose sexual and gender identities and practices fall outside socially prescribed heteronormativity for the purpose of convenience. I also use terms such as *tongxing lian* (same-sex love or relationship), *tongzhi* (comrade, a pun for homosexual or gay), *lala* (lesbian) and *ku'er* (cool kid, as well the phonetic translation of “queer”) to specify their Chinese context and in the way my informants use them to describe themselves. The contextualization of these concepts allows my dissertation to destabilize identities and examine sexuality as complex and contradictory practices embedded in the process of transnational power interactions. I also discuss the affective labor of translating these words, as well as how

one's choice of concepts reflects their negotiation and positionality in relation to the conceptualization of queerness.

The English word “queer” is translated into Chinese *ke'er* (the “cool child” or 酷儿) and it first appeared in two special issues in Taiwanese journal *Daoyu Bianyuan* (岛屿边缘) and *Aibao* (爱报) edited by cultural critics Hong Ling, Ji Dawei and Dan Tangmo in 1994. It was introduced into mainland China around the time of Da Juesi Conference in 1997 and gradually circulated since the early 2000s, after the publication of prestigious sociologist Li Yinhe's translated anthology on Euro-American queer theories. It was first confined to the academia and cosmopolitan activist communities (Engbretsen and Schroeder 2015: 4) and has gained increasing popularity in Chinese LGBT communities through pop culture adaption, Beijing Queer Film Festivals organized by famous queer director Cui Zi'en and transnational influenced grassroots queer feminists since recent.

Different from the US queer discourse that is originally associated with pain, shame and hurt in long time repressive history of sexuality (Love 2009: 4) and loss in HIV/AIDS pandemic, the Chinese vernacularization of “queer” from its inception embodies a much brighter and more joyful affective undertone as it implicates a future-oriented optimism and political enthusiasm. Contrasting the assimilated middle-class oriented gay culture that was dominant in Taiwan in 90s, “queer” and “queer theory” are represented as radical, revolutionary and transformative. “Ku,” itself an imported word, usually implies something new, unconventional, unique, and even perverted. It places a particular emphasis on innovations in thoughts and values, and welcomes new styles of

living. Anything “unconventional” can be considered “good,” “advanced” and “desirable” in order to reassert modernness and progressiveness. Sexual and gender dissidents, who used to be called deviants and perverts, now are appropriated as pioneers in disavowing China’s dark past and reclaiming the promising future of development, humanism and liberation. The future-looking “cool child,” who self-regulates to exercise the coolness, breaks from the mold of bad traditions and participates in the market logic, has become one of the most prominent figures in China neoliberal discourse.

In this sense, China’s future is really the “cool kid” stuff—unlike reproductive futurism’s rejection of the queer unproductivity (Edelman 2007), the Chinese neoliberal futurity acts upon and operates through precisely the productivity of queerness. Unlike Lee Edelman’s queer subjects that “has been bound epistemologically to negativity, nonsense, unintelligibility and antiproductivity,” Chinese neoliberal imagination of the future propels itself forward through the positive image of the cool child.

Chinese queer theorists and activists embody the power anti-normativity of queer theory in their critiques of anti-state sponsored sexual /gender violence and anti-male privilege. However this embrace of anti-normativity often fuel confrontational LGBT and queer politics at the cost of local communities. In chapter three, I use the example of the debated between biological essentialism promoted by gay activists and queer theory supported by young queer feminists to examine what “queer” and “queer theory” do in producing knowledge of sexuality in China. At the first glance, the debate is about criticizing gay male privilege within the LGBT movements; yet, I historicize the complex social and political contexts for such privilege to form and argue for a more nuanced

understanding of the relation between the state and the marginalized community, power and resistance, and oppression and radicality. I urge queer feminists to reflect our own epistemological and methodological limitations as well as social capitals of our own that may lead to privilege, violence and inequality.

### The Spectacular of the Oppressed

In chapter four, I further interrogate the question of queer as readymade radicals and social capitals queer feminist possession when dismantling state violence, homophobia, patriarchy and male privilege by analyzing the detention of five Chinese feminists in 2015 and the media activism behind it. In this chapter, I call Chinese young grassroots feminists “queer” for two reasons: one, many of them identify themselves as queers and the young feminist and queer activism in today’s China are tightly intertwined; two, as argued in Chapter three, the statue of “political dissident” that the arrested queer feminists occupy allows them to be “radical,” therefore embodying the specific meaning of “queer” in China. China’s 1990s witnesses the emergence of queers as the ready-made political dissidents and poster child to criticize the state authority. This has a lot to do with the mixed impact of international NGOs in Chinese LGBT movement in which issues of sexuality and LGBT rights are framed the barometer of democracy and social progress. Against the backdrop of China’s motive to move beyond political and economic impasses and restore its status in the global order after the *Tian’anmen* incident in 1989, the 1995 World Conference on Women was held in Beijing in hope of changing China’s international image, and thereby to regain foreign investments and economic support. It boosted the exchange of feminist thoughts and accelerated the development of gender

studies in China. National and international funds<sup>1</sup> initiated a vast number of programs to promote education about gender equality and women's emancipation and empowerment. Although these international donors improved queer life in China, the pitfall is that they dictate and pre-demarcate how development, social justice, and democracy should be pursued in a universal/western centric way. This battling leaves a critical feminist and queer work that accounts for the complex queer history and reality while attending state violence without automatically surrendering to neocolonialism and imperialism very difficult to emerge.

In Chapter four, I examine how the complex relation between feminist struggle and the socialist state is flattened in dominant feminist responses to the Chinese Feminist Five incident. I argue that the instrumentalization and commodification of trauma is facilitated by international media, reinforced by Chinese elite and global liberal feminists, creating a site where the overexposure of the "oppressed Chinese women" not only serve to perpetuate the Cold War mandate of anti-Communism but also to reify new yellow perilism in form of "the rise of China" in the twenty-first century.

To make visible the Cold War logic within feminist knowledge production and politics and to address questions of differences, privilege, power hierarchy and geopolitical asymmetry, I argue for a post-socialist feminist critique to account for both gender/sexual violence sponsored by socialist state and imperialist violence fostered by Western liberalism. On the surface, the traumatic detention of the Chinese Feminist Five seems to testify the Communist state violence against women and political dissidents, and feminist responses to the experience emphasize the nature of feminist resistance as

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<sup>1</sup> Such as Ford Foundation, UNDP programs and Open Society Foundations.

radical; yet, I argue that feminist comprehension and responses to the traumatic experience and the traumatized is a prism of post-socialist condition in which the post-socialist feminist subject struggles to cope with the trauma of both Communist patriarchal state violence and being “othered” as Communist in continuous Cold War formation. To understand this doubling in shaping feminist movements and scholarship, I use affect, a subjective expression of desire, feeling and emotion that is conditioned by social, cultural and discursive differences, as an analytical tool to examine the ambivalent conditions of Chinese feminisms in the late 1980s and early 1990s, as responses to both the failure of socialist state-sponsored women’s liberation and problems of the turn to liberal feminism. I argue Chinese feminisms turn to embrace liberalism is a symptom of failure to cope with the comprised socialist gender liberation and it is an affective response to ideological “othering.”

**Chapter One**  
**Reparative Return to “Queer Socialism”:**  
**Agency, Desires and Socialist Queer Past**

**Re-membering the Past: Post-socialist Hypothesis of Repression**

There is always a queer child living in each of us who has made us who we are today.

Then let me start with a story about this child.

After my dad picked me up at school, we took a newly discovered shortcut back home. Sitting on the back of his bicycle, we cut through a small park surrounded by tall trees. I enjoyed the ride a lot. This detour for me was an escape from our boring old routine through the noisy dirty fish market. I loved the fresh smell of the leaves and the sound they made when breezes went through the canopy. There used to be lots of people, like fifty or maybe a hundred of them, adult men, young and old, standing in the shades or wandering around in the park, especially in the summer afternoon and evening. I asked my dad, “What are they doing over there? They must really enjoy the freshness of the greens.” My dad responded, “They are practicing Tai-Chi here.”

One day when we rode through the park, a guy ran out of the public toilet, holding his pants. Another guy chased after him and shouted, “Freeze! You *chou liumang* (stinky hooligan)!” Suddenly many of the Tai-Chi people fled across the park in panic, running frantically there and here. Eventually the escaper was taken down by the chaser, and few people also coming from nowhere joined the chaser and threw punches at the runaway. I was frightened by the brutal scene and my dad comforted me and told me that it was just undercover policemen catching a theft.



This childhood memory of police violence against sexually variant people has been significant in telling my own sexual, political and intellectual stories. When being asked what motivated me to become a LGBT activist and researcher, this traumatic memory is always brought up to tell my determination for social justice. Being part of the gay community on and off line, I have told this story when my knowledge about gay men is challenged or my legitimacy is questioned because of my appearance of a straight cisgender woman. I also tell this story when I first applied to grad school in the United States to show how the personal is bounded with my political and academic commitment. This story of pain and empathy is very enabling: it has allowed me to imagine myself as part of the gay community threatened by a common enemy and given reasons for work that aims social changes and liberation. It has been the motivation for my academic and activist dedications. It also legitimates my interest in studying homosexual people and gives me credits.

On a different plane, this memory also reflects a desire for a transgenerational connection. For years I have been wondering: did my dad really discover the park accidentally? Did he really believe the story of Tai-Chi people and policemen chasing the theft? Did he feel the some heart-thudding fear and pain generated by the cruelty and unjust we witnessed together? In so far as this incident has influenced and changed my life, did it change his to certain degree? Although we have never been able to openly discuss these questions, I would like to think that the unspeakable pain and hurt we both felt at that moment connect us in certain queer ways.

The story of violence, secrecy, repression and pain satisfies many desires in writing queer history and politics in individual and collective ways. But let me share another secret with you: the story I told at the opening of this chapter was not real. The bicycle, the trees, the beating up...none of them really happened to me. During the time I was writing my master thesis in Cincinnati, I dug out some old Chinese books on homosexuality I used to read when I was in middle school. A case study caught my attention: the interviewee recalls his childhood story of witnessing policemen raiding a cruising site that became the very motives for his later activist work. Readers who are familiar with Chinese *tongzhi* literature and films probably already tell that my story of the silent communication between my father and I mirrors stories in Pai's *Crystal Boys* (孽子) or Tsai Ming-liang's *River* (河流). Yet, don't accuse me of being a liar: these culturally scripted stories, imbricated with desires, tensions, and fantasies, have become my memory and they feel so real to me; they created the sense of my identity and reality—they materialized who I am.

In theorizing the relation between lies and history, Luise White(2008) argues, lies and secrets are “extraordinarily rich historical sources” that “provided explanation about the past that are negotiated for specific audiences, for specific ends”(15). By studying rumors of blood-drinking white vampires circulated in East and Central Africa, White shows how alternative forms of information such as rumors, lies and gossip help to understand how Africans experience changes in ideas about work, medicine, space and gender engendered by the colonial process. Far from concealing and withholding truth, White insists “secrets and lies signal that what has been declared secret, what has been

deemed worthy of a lie or a cover story, is more significant than other stories and other ways of telling”(15). It is important to study “how they are crafted and what they are made up of,” as these are “visions of what the liar thinks is legitimate”(19). White further explains, “when people take circulating stories and transform them into personal narratives, they don’t make them up: they deploy powerful and shared vocabularies in their accusations and confessions. That the vocabularies are shared gives them their power”(19).

If the colonial lies of vampires told by White’s informants are about African nationalism, agency and resistance to colonial power, what do the postsocialist queer lies tell us about power configuration in China’s transformation era? What are sources for me to come up with such stories? What are the audiences and specific ends that my lies aim to meet? What affective labor is involved in constructing and maintaining such lies?

I was born into a happy and well established family in Beijing. Most of my family members are medical doctors who are tolerant, open minded and deeply believe that people are born equal and should be treated equally. When I was little, books such as Alfred Kinsey’s *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, or Li Yinhe’s *Their World: A Survey of Male Homosexuality* were scattered all around in my bedroom. My family has always been supportive for my decision of studying homosexuality since I first revealed my interested in the middle school. However, at a very young age, I realized this happy story did not get me too far in the gay community. When I first started making friends with gay men online in the late 90s, I frequently heard stories about childhood abuse, lack of love, repression, attempted suicide and shame. That being said, I do not mean that gay

community is lack of happiness. However, these painful stories seem to be more enabling and powerful in making the community and politics. The usage of pain, hurt and other negative feeling for making politics echoes Judith Butler's call in "Critically Queer" to redeploy, twist, and queer negative feelings associated with queer sexuality to expand political purposes (1997: 228). Similarly, recent U.S.-based queer studies have placed an emphasis on repression, shame, trauma, melancholia and dystopianism (Bersani 1990; Love 2009; Cvetkovich 2003; Butler 1993; Edelman 2004) without fully reflecting on how such negativity has been constructed and spread. This omission risks essentializing 'negativity' as a queer nature. In *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*, Heather Love points out that queer studies and activism often deploy the negative queer figures in history in serve of calling for a liberated future. Through writing about the 'backwardness' of queers, Love argues that "contemporary critics approach these figures from the past with a sense of the inevitability of their progress toward us—of their place in the history of modern homosexuality." For Love, this relation to history is violent as "our existence in the present depends on being able to imagine these figures reaching out to us"(40). To amend this troubling relationship with history, Love argues for a history/future "backward enough so the most reluctant among us might want to live there"(163).

Although Love's argument on the violent relationship with historical figures is helpful, I question the reductionist view on 'backwardness' that may very well based on positions of Eurocentric White queer subjectivity. Homosexuals in China, unlike in Freudian theories, has never been viewed as degeneration, immature and/or

underdeveloped. “Backwardness” in Chinese queer culture, on the one hand, is the outcome of colonialist and orientalist discourses, on the other hand, provides agency to resist and refashion such discourses. Therefore, one of goals of this chapter is to contextualize queer negativity and historicizes how intricate transnational power asymmetry such as globalization and neocolonialism shape different queer feelings and racialized subjects. By asking why and how the narrative and narration of pain, suffering and trauma have been central to queer subjects and politics in China, this chapter also pushes to think about alternative ways of understanding queer history and community.

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Despite the fact that numerous research, oral accounts and lived experiences have shown that sexuality in China’s state socialism was far more nuanced than the narrative of Maoist repression would depict it, how come we keep reproducing knowledge of Chinese queerness in binary terms such as repression/liberation, China/the West, and socialist backwardness/post-socialist and neoliberalist progress?

This chapter seeks to approach these questions by invoking a reparative return to what I call “queer socialism.” I use the word “queer” as both a noun and a verb. As a noun, it refers to non-normative sexualities in general in China’s socialist era. Given the specific historical and ideological contexts of socialism discouraging sex (Zhang 2015), pre-marital, extra-marital heterosexual practices or sex for pleasure can also be read as non-normative and queer; as a verb, I refer to reading and writing practices that challenge normative knowledge production of socialist sexualities. The word “socialism” also bears different meanings that cannot simply be bounded by time, space and ideological

differences. But in this chapter, I use Jeremy Brown and Matthew Johnson's definition of "high socialism" (Brown and Johnson 2015:6) to refer to the historical period from the mid-1950s to the end of the 1970s in China, characterized by state ownership of property, Party-state fusion, a planned economy and the highly politicized everyday life. I distinguish it from commonly used word "Maoism" to emphasize a nuanced nexus of power-relations embodied by multi-layered institutional and individual factors, rather than personal cult and admiration or a totalitarian ideology.

The goals of this chapter are threefold: empirically, I provide a close look of what male homosexuality was like in the Cultural Revolution based on rare historical documents; theoretically, I examine the dynamics between socialist power structure and sexualities from the perspectives of the local and the grassroots; and politically, I ask what affective investments in making and maintaining the dichotomy between the "radical queer" and the "oppressive socialist state" are and what alternative knowledge we can produce to challenge the epistemological violence caused by such simplified opposition. More specifically, I start with a reconsideration of the "socialist closet" and interrogate the closeting practice of post-socialist queer knowledge production. Then through performing a close reading of a personal confession (坦白交代, *tanbai jiaodai*) of sodomy in the Cultural Revolution, the second section of this chapter examines the queer space of state socialism where agency and conformity were intertwined in producing queer narratives and subjectivity. Countering the idea that bodies and sexualities disappear in the production of official socialist discourse (Yue 1993; Yang 1999), this chapter shows how the disciplining power of state socialism ironically

operates through an excessiveness and proliferation of sexuality. Instead of seeing the sexual self as sublimed to the party, it argues that the operation of state socialism relies on subjects' active engagement in exercising their sexual self and exchanging of sexual desires. Thus it adopts a Deleuzian concept of desire as "surface effect" to contest the antithetical construction of "socialist consciousness" and "post-socialist desire" (Rofel 2007) and to present socialism and post-socialism as historically continuous in producing desiring subjects.

Through reevaluating narratives of repressed sexuality and notions of agency and desire, this chapter is set to challenge the narrative of socialist repression vis-a-vis post-socialist liberation. However, such a writing has no intention to erase the materiality of historical violence, suffering and trauma of state socialism. Instead, it argues for a refreshed view on repression, in which queer sexualities and history are suppressed by our epistemological, methodological and political limitations. This chapter concludes with a rumination of ethical historical relationship to further consider how we approach queer subjects and past-present co-construction.

### **Queering the Socialist "Closet"**

The closet is a figure of major significance within Anglophone gay and lesbian studies. In *Epistemology of the Closet*, Eve Sedgwick understands the closet as the ways in which power/knowledge mediates how one knows oneself, or is known by others, as gay. It is the "defining structure for gay oppression this century" (1990: xxi), that contributes to the erasure and forced concealment of non-normative sexualities. Similarly, prevailing queer accounts of Chinese history have understood China's pre-reform years,

1949-1978, as marked by centralized state socialism and Maoism as a dark time wherein shadowy figures of homosexuals, reframing Lord Alfred Douglas' words, "dared not speak their names." It is a common perception that homosexuals and gender/sexually variant people were living in a "socialist closet" in fear of social stigmatization and political persecution. The presumption that sexuality was highly repressed in China's state socialist era, especially in the Cultural Revolution period, however, has recently been contested by historical studies of sexuality. Citing Harriet Evans' work on public education about love, sexual hygiene and marriage (1997), Elaine Jeffreys and Haiqing Yu argue that despite their conservative attitudes, "the public discussions of sex and sexuality were not exactly 'taboo' in the Maoist period"( Jeffrey and Yu 2015: 5). Emily Honig also points out that there were no official declarations prohibiting sexual relationship and the state never overtly promoted sexual repression (Honig 2003) in Maoism. In fact, novels and personal memoirs released after the Cultural Revolution indicates that the Cultural Revolution provided previously inconceivable opportunities for youths to explore sex, love and romance (Honig 2003 and 2015; Min 2009).

Building upon these scholarships, this chapter moves beyond recuperating socialist sexual history and simply supplementing empirical evidence of homosexuality in the Cultural Revolution. It resists viewing socialism as the closet for gender and sexual variant individuals to conceal themselves. As I will demonstrate in the next section of this chapter, China's state socialist era was sutured with pronounced libidinal energy and an excessively visible public sexual culture. But more importantly, I resist the methodology that digs homosexuals out of their closet as if their existence itself is inherently queer. On



the contrary, the existence of homosexuality in socialism does not define queerness, as the existence of non-normative sexual practice is, for lack of better words, the most normative thing throughout history. Instead, I am interested in the epistemology of the socialist closet, which I see as a troubling relationship between sexuality in socialism and the imagination of post-socialist queer politics: on the one hand, there is an urgency for post-socialist queers to see sexuality in socialism as being closeted to fulfill the imagination of liberation and transformation; on the other hand, such a post-socialist desire and longing for liberation limits how sexuality in the past is conceptualized and studied. Therefore, I argue that the socialist closet is at once an affective and an epistemological one through which the post-socialist queer subject comes to construct and know themselves. I am not interested in a discussion of whether and how queer sexuality was repressed in socialist era; but rather I see the knowledge of the queer past is repressed by the methodological and epistemological myopia of post-socialist queer research and the narrow conceptualization of liberation predominantly framed through globalized neoliberal capitalist transformation. In the rest of this section, I wish to interrogate the closeting practice of post-socialist queer knowledge of socialist queerness and its affective and epistemological structures.

*“Closeting” with Chinese Characteristics*

Anti-social queer theorists have long criticized a tendency in Euro-American queer studies that favors a far more liberal understanding of gay and lesbian identity and a narrative about progressive enlightenment. The desire to overcome historical injury and the commitment to “progress,” as Heather Love writes, are “art heart of the collective

project of queer studies and integral to the history of gay and lesbian identity” across the twentieth century (Love 2009: 3). Within this narrative, gay and lesbians are marked as heroic norm resisters who occupied a position to overthrow the tyranny of repressive regimes, respectability, decency and domesticity. This narrative, although is appealing, compelling, and convincing, as Michel Foucault puts it, is utterly wrong. While it is very much “to the speaker’s benefit,” (Foucault 1980:6), to tell such a story is also “another self-congratulatory, feel-good narrative of liberal humanism that celebrates homo-heroism and ignores the often overlapping agendas of the state and homosexual” (Halberstam 2008: 143). Instead, Foucault leads us to see the effects of a “reverse discourse” (Foucault 1976:101): on one hand, modern homosexual identity is continually seen as a form of damaged or compromised subjectivity; on the other hand, gay freedom is produced in response to the history and discourse of damage. A central characteristic of Euro-American queerness, therefore, as Love sees it, in both the realm of subject formation and politics, is that it is structured by this contradiction as “both abject and exalted” (2009: 3). This impulse to turn the dark side of queer representation to “good use,” Love further explains, is linked with the project of Western modernity:

The idea of modernity—with its suggestions of progress, rationality, and technological advance—is intimately bound up with backwardness. The association of progress and regress is a function not only of a failure of so many of modernity’s key projects but also of the reliance of the concept of modernity on excluded, denigrated, or superseded others.... If modernization in the late nineteenth and early twenties century aimed to move humanity forward, it did so in part by perfecting techniques for mapping and disciplining subjects considered to be lagging (2009: 5).

If the abject “lagging” queers in the past in Love’s writing serve as the domestic others of Western modernity, the technology to create and discipline backward cultural others through racializing “deviant” queer figures facilitates modernity’s imperialist global project. Jasbir Puar uses the term “homonationalism” to describe how in a post-9/11 and post-*Lawrence v Texas* context, the advancement of neoliberal politics and technologies of biopolitics have created an imaginary of the United States as queer-friendly through selectively including white homosexual subjects and excluding Muslims as sexual-racial others and even terrorists. This ideology installs an opposition between queers and Muslims, which fortifies US exceptionalism—a political rhetoric that frames the United States as epitomizing a “higher” level of civilization, whereas the Middle East is understood as backward, uncivilized and therefore a national enemy on whom to wage war (Puar 2007).

In the context of Chinese socialism, the script narrating abject queers repressed by socialist regime serves as both the temporal and spatial others of “proper” modernity in its many projects of colonialization, anti-Communism and neoliberal globalization. Repressed socialist queer sexuality is at the heart of the post-socialist collective project of articulating Chinese queerness in relation to neoliberal globalization. As Lisa Rofel points out, Maoist socialism is viewed as hindering China’s capacity to embrace proper modernity by repressing people’s sexuality and transferring individual desires from the private to the public (Rofel 2007). This perception, Rofel argues, relies on a revisionist historical account that encourages people to denounce the socialist past. This specific construction of the past allows a post-socialist allegory to emerge as representing the

desire to free one's gendered and sexual self from the socialist totalitarian state. As David Eng writes of Rofel's theorization of "desiring China", "the social stakes of homosexual's expressive desire unfold upon a political horizon of becoming, a political horizon of great significance for Chinese modernity and for Chinese citizen-subject alike" (2010: 465). As Rofel's informants suggest, expressive desire "promises to mark China's proper, though belated, place within a 'cosmopolitan globalized world'" (465). In this sense, expressive desire becomes a temporal marker on which the narrative of China's progress to proper modernity relies.

To understand such an affective investment in the concept of progress, we need to look at ways in which China's modern and contemporary histories are written in relation to intertwined discourses and projects of modernity, colonialism, nationalism, Cold War anti-communism, global neoliberal capitalism, and developmentalism. Since China's defeat in the first Opium War (1840), nationalist discourse has attributed China's weakness to its seclusion to the outside world and sought to strengthen and revive the nation by appropriating Western technology. In the early 20th century, nationalist intellectuals and reformers in the May Fourth Movement advocated for Western democracy and science to solve the pressing problems China's semi-feudal semi-colonial society were facing. It is worth noting that China's "never being officially and completely colonized" left ongoing ambivalence towards colonialism and its later forms in the era of globalization. On the one hand, China was able to seek an alternative path to modernity through communism and socialism from the early to mid- 20th century. On the other hand, China's lack of colonial history cultivated a national feeling of exclusion from the

global history that is marked by capitalism and colonialism. This sense of seclusion was also galvanized by Western anti-Communist discourse during and after the Cold War, invariably constructing China as a politically and culturally abnormal “other” in contrast to Western normality. In *China and Orientalism*, Daniel Vukovich (2011) identified a new form of Orientalism in Western intellectual and political knowledge production. Developed along with colonial and imperialist discourses in the age of globalization, the basic statement of Sinological Orientalism is that China is still different to the U.S.-West but will become “normal” and equivalent to the liberal and modern West through a series of economic, political, cultural and ideological reforms and assimilation into globalization. Sinological Orientalism imagines the post-socialist reform characterized by neoliberal reordering to enable China to overcome the historical belatedness, social seclusion and political abnormality, and transform itself into a Western-like global power. On this logic of developmentalism and internalized imperialism, Wang Hui remarks that China’s isolation and reform are usually explained as a “transition from a despotic, planned, and dark past to a democratic, free, and bright future” (Wang 2003). In this context, queer subjects with the desires and dispensable capital for a cosmopolitan consumerist lifestyle have been said to refashion the stereotypical image of socialist “blue ants” dehumanized by class consciousness and state-controlled economy. Complementary to Chinese narratives of inevitable transition, this framing offers a story of a queer suffering past in which the pain of socialist trauma—from both the historical violence and from being “Othered,” must be and will be eventually triumphed by the inevitability of a better (neoliberal) future.

The teleological narrative of neoliberalism's triumphalist sexuality and its closeting practice is also foregrounded by a technology of "unremembering," a phenomenon of distancing the past described by Christopher Castiglia and Christopher Reed. Different from amnesia, unremembering is a direct assault on particular memories and on the cultural act of remembering, in which only certain "cleaned-up" versions of the past are allowed to emerge (2012: 2). According to Castiglia and Reed, the partially achieved forgetting has a lot to do with the forms of temporal distancing that have accompanied the traumatic losses (2012: 10). The traumatic experience of the Cultural Revolution and other state violence has led to an oversimplistic version of the socialist past that only remembers its suffering and pain, in order to move past such trauma. Yet "unremembering" does not serve post-socialist queers well. The opposition between queerness and socialism informed by a post-socialist queer project of forgetting subjugates queers to the dominant logic of neoliberalism and a discourse of economic and geopolitical transition. Viewing queer socialism only through a lens of shame, abjection and suffering is structurally replicated by Chinese queers today in an increasing desire for conventional family, mainstream acceptance and consumerism based citizenship. This "gentrification of the mind," borrowing Sarah Schulman's words (2013), is caused by the inability to comprehend and process the trauma of the Cultural Revolution and later the 1989 Tian'anmen upheaval—in which the political radicalism had led to violence, mass death, destruction of community and disillusion of social change. Instead, queers seek for assimilation as their consolation that allows the destruction of queer radicality.

To counter the narrative of neoliberal post-socialist transition and the repressive socialist state, the rest of the chapter returns to the era of state socialism to examine queer space, desires and agency in order to disconnect the link between queerness and capitalist globalization and to complicate the relation between queerness and socialism.

### ***Tanbai Jiaodai (Confessions) as Autobiographic Narratives***

In my fieldwork, I collected about five hundred pages of confidential files from the Cultural Revolution era, including four individual dossiers, three criminal records and four court judgements of people who committed *jijian zui* (鸡奸罪, sodomy) or *luimang zui* (流氓罪, hooliganism). Historically speaking, China has no law against homosexuality since it was not officially recognized by the state authority (Guo 2007; Zhou 2009; and Kang 2012) until 2004. Sodomy, or anal sex between men, as Matthew Sommer shows, was criminalized under Qing dynasty laws as an illicit behavior (Sommer 2000) and continued to be used in state socialist era. Although the Chinese word of sodomy, *jijian*, literally means “chicken rape,” it does not necessarily imply that the sexual act is non-consensual. The word *jian*, such as in *tongjian* (通奸, adultery) or *hejian* (和奸, premarital sex) can simply refer to sex or illicit sex. “Hooliganism” is a broad category of illicit and punishable behaviors that include loitering, public indecency and gang fights and so on (Guo 2007; Kang 2009; and Liu 2015). As Wenqing Kang points out, male same-sex behavior was criminalized under the provisions of disruption of social order rather than as a sex crime (Kang 2009). During the Cultural Revolution,

individuals who engaged in male same-sex practices were classified as *huai fenzi* (坏分子, bad elements) in the revolutionary lexicon. The protagonists of these archival materials range from peasants and workers to communist cadres whose male same-sex behaviors were disclosed and reported to their local Party committees. Some of them participated in *pidou dahui* (批斗大会, struggle session or public denouncement) or reported to the police station for arrest while others were arrested, sentenced and persecuted. Individual dossiers usually consist of a few pages of official judgment from their work units' Party committee, witnesses' testimonies and indictments, as well as many pages of *tanbai jiaodai* (坦白交代, personal confessions) of the individual's *fanzui shishi* (犯罪事实, crime and misdeeds). Although China had no laws that criminalized homosexuality or sodomy and before the Cultural Revolution the attitude of the Supreme Court towards consensual male sexual relationship was ambiguous even tolerant<sup>2</sup>, people who committed such behaviors were still referred as “criminals” and “convicts”. The penalty for these crimes varied given the fact that the new socialist law system was not formalized until 1979 (Kang 2012) as well as the power of the Party and the mass represented by the Red Guards exceeded the juridical authority during the Cultural Revolution. In the dossiers I collected, some people were given warnings within the party or expelled from the Party. Others were sentenced to three to eight years of jail time without trails. In the worst case, the convict who involved in sex with minors was sentence to death with reprieve.

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<sup>2</sup> See the 1957 Heilongjiang Province Supreme Court Case in Kang(2000).



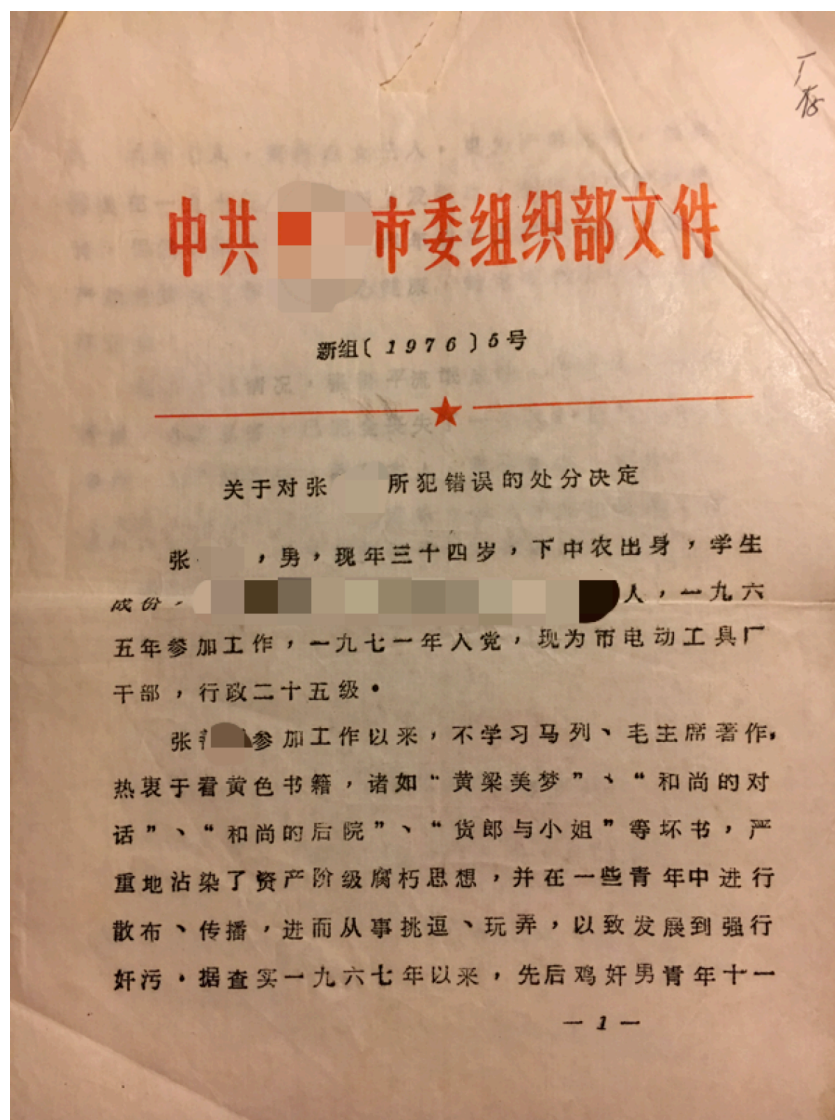
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宗卷事(刑)院法民人縣源沽省北河

書記員	審判員	院長	案由		卷號
			鷄姦		公元一九五五年
歸檔日期	納案日期	收案日期	被告	原告 (關機案送或)	年(刑)字第
一九五五年	一九五五年四月廿六日	一九五五年四月十七日	[REDACTED]	三 60 一 卮	70 號

(Figure 1: Example of Sodomy Dossier)



(Figure 2: Example of *Tanbai Jiaodai*)

In this chapter, I mainly focus on one confidential file, supplemented by other documents, memoirs and interviews I collected during my fieldwork, to show how people negotiated with the state-sponsored project of gender/sexual normalization by reconstructing themselves as pleasure-seeking sexual subjects and how the system of normalization and disciplining provided unexpected queer space to resist official ideologies. But before I move into analysis, I want to briefly discuss the background of

these confessions and indictments and how they provide important sources to understand the personal life of the Cultural Revolution.

Current study of the personal and the private sphere in the Cultural Revolution relies primarily on personal memoirs and diaries released after the Mao era. However, since Mao era diary writing has been seen as a state project of reshaping the Chinese subject and propagating communist ideology, diaries are often dismissed as inauthentic and insincere and are not recognized as reliable autobiographical sources that account for people's personal life (Windscrip forth coming). Although recent study has demonstrated that Mao era diary writings reflect the writer's constant negotiations between individual desires and cultural demand (Windscrip forth coming), diaries rarely speak about issues of sexuality, eroticism and romance as such writings could easily have been branded as capitalist indecency and thus effectively criminalize authors (Du 2015: 134).

A very limited amount of personal court records from the socialist era was previously found and had been analyzed by legal scholars such as Guo Xiaofei (2007) and Zhou Dan(2009) for the purpose of studying the Chinese socialist laws. Apart from their approaches, I use collected material as authoritative narratives, which share many similarities with Mao era diary writing. Although produced under coercion and political pressure, these individuals composed their own accounts rather than being interrogated by authorities, therefore leaving them space for self-narration. Even in court records of interrogation I collected, it is clear that the interrogator and the convict structured their own narratives by asking and answering questions of the crime. Like Mao era diaries, the

subject in *tanbai jiaodao* is whole-heartedly devoted themselves to the Party, Chair Mao and the revolution common goods. They actively engage in self-criticism for the revolution and show strong commitment to transform themselves under the leadership of the Party and the education of Marxist-Lenin and Mao Zedong thoughts. While the selves in diary writing frame themselves as disciplined ideal revolutionary men and women, the subjects of *tanbai jiaodao* manuscripts often describe themselves as lacking political consciousness and indulging in a bourgeois lifestyle. As examples of failure, they must confess how the bourgeois thoughts have corrupted them with details in order to conquer the evil forces of bourgeois class and to transform themselves to serve the proletarian revolution.

It is precisely through the coercive compulsion to confess these evil deeds that the subject finds a space to speak about the most intimate sphere of their personal life that is otherwise discouraged, if not completely prohibited, in public discourse. What demonstrated in *tanbai jiaodai* contests the postulation that “when mainstream ideology comes to dominate the core psychology of the majority, private writing that deviates from public discourse is not only highly dangerous, it is virtually impossible” (Ye 2015: online). The confessor is not only encouraged but required to write about what deviated from the official discourse and ideology. The more detail they use to write about their deviances, the more sincere they become in committing to transform themselves. As a result, it allows a queer space for the subject to construct a sexual self while conforming to a socialist ideology. Apart from Meng Yue’s understanding of Maoist private and public space as “absolute hierarchical” (1993:124), this “place-making practices” enables

queer people to engage “the new understandings of space” and to produce queer counterpublics (Halberstam 2005: 6). In this sense, the legal records, confessions and indictments are rare autobiographic sources for us to understand the intricate interplay between socialist disciplinary power and self-making.

It is also important to keep in mind that we ought not to conflate *tanbai jiaodai*, a specific form of Maoist confession, to Foucault’s historicization of confession in the Victorian society, despite the similarity that insofar as the officials who repressed sex ironically became the producer of sexual subject seems to confirm Foucault’s famous assertion that resistance is internal to power relations and the exertion of power generates multiple sites of unpredictable subversion. In *the History of Sexuality: Volume 1*, Foucault stresses that techniques to regulating sexuality “were formed and, more particularly, applied first, with the greatest intensity, in the economically privileged and politically dominant classes” (1978:120) as “(t)he bourgeoisie began by considering that its own sex was something important, a fragile treasure, a secret that had to be discovered at all costs”(1978:120-121). For Foucault, the deployment of sexuality was not to limit the pleasure of others by the “ruling class,” but to elaborate and to establish the privileged classes through self-affirmation. He writes,

The primary concern was not repression of the sex of the classes to be exploited, but rather the body, vigor, longevity, progeniture and descent of the classes that “ruled.” This was the purpose for which the deployment of sexuality was first established, as a new distribution of pleasures, discourses, truths and powers; it has to be seen as the self-affirmation of one class rather than the enslavement of another: a defense, a protection a strengthening and an exaltation that were eventually extended to others...(1978:123)

On the contrary, *tanbai jiaodai* can be traced to the socialist and Maoist tradition of criticism and self-criticism(批评与自我批评, *piping yu ziwo piping*). Originated as a major mechanism of inner-Party decision making and discipline among Chinese political elites, criticism and self-criticism emerged as a form of mass mobilization and education during the Cultural Revolution as a result of a series of structural changes in the Chinese system of communications (Dittmer 1973). Different from the Foucauldian confession which relied on religion and subjugated the subject to medical authority in order to distinguish a bourgeois ruling class from the mass, Chinese confession had a clear political purpose to educate and transform wrong-doers rather than punishing them. This mechanism of confession was supposed to serve the socialist ideology that advocated for eradicating class differences and homogenizing the society under the rule of a single proletarian class. If Foucauldian confession emphasizes making class differences and privileges through making distinct sexual subjects, Chinese confession is more ambiguous that may require a different model of understanding how power operates in socialism. Apart from repeating the oft-simplified presumption of state repression and its ironic effect of producing resistance as a result of applying Foucault in China, I want to argue for a more complex understanding of how Chinese socialist power operated in everyday life in which the making of sexuality and sexual subject through confession was predicted on interactions of multi-layered factors and desiring subjects at the grassroots. It goes beyond the rigid analytic categories so often imbedded in the study of Chinese socialism, such as “state” and “society”, “Party” and “people,” and the “ruling class” and

the “oppressed”. Now let us take a close look at what has been written and how they were written in the *tanbao jiaodai* material.

### **Queer Subjectivity and Identity in State Socialism**

The protagonist of the confidential dossier I analyze here is Zhang SP, a 34-year-old inventory worker in the province of Henan. Zhang’s *tanbai jiaodao* were written in two respective time periods: from October 12th to 25th 1973 and from July 31st to August 8th 1975, as he was called on to confess and reconfess after his same-sex practices were disclosed. How his same-sex practices were revealed remains unknown, but given the time period of 1973 and 1975, an educated guess could be he was *jiefa* (揭发, exposed) by his workmates under the political culture of the Cultural Revolution. Zhang’s file includes a two-page penalty decision from the county party committee; a three-page criminal report to the police station from his work unit; a four-page resume and family relation history; sixty-six pages of personal confession; and twenty-nine pages including victims’ indictment statements and witness testimony.

In the first confession dated October 12th, 1973, Zhang begins with three lines of revolutionary doggerel that were common in Mao-era writings. He spends most of the pages describing how the proletarian revolution has triumphed across the world and how the Communist party under the leadership of Chairman Mao has led the Chinese people to great victories. In this four-page confession, he only spends six lines in the middle of the second page vaguely describing his same-sex behaviors. He writes,

Because my bourgeois worldview has not been completely transformed, in addition to I did not spend enough effort to study Mao Zedong’s thoughts, and I

was not well aware of the Party's goals and class struggle, I committed such a mistake. One night I came back from the city and I did not go back to my dorm directly. Instead I went to a workmate's dorm. It was late so I shared a bed with him. Then I started to touch his penis to see whose is longer. At the time, I thought it was just fooling around. I didn't think it was such a severe problem.

A day later, on October 13th, Zhang wrote another confession titled "My Second Complementary *Jiaodai*." Different from the first one, the majority of the content is Zhang detailing the sexual contact with his workmate Little Wang. In this three-page additional material, Zhang revealed more details of when he went to Little Wang's dorm, what their conversation was like, and how they went to bed together. He wrote,

The twin-size bed in the dorm is very small, so we were very close to each other. My hand was beside his penis and I felt he had an erection. So I held his penis to see if his is longer than mine. He moved a little and I thought I woke him up. So I stopped and went to sleep...

Although we do not know what happened between these two confessions, the title of the second confession "*buchong cailiao*" ("补充材料", supplementary material) suggests that the party committee was not satisfied with Zhang's first confession as it includes too little information about the "crime." For the party committee, the lack of detail contained in the first confession, can be viewed as Zhang's lack of consciousness of the severity of his crime and a lack of commitment to redeem his mistake. As Zhang continues in the second confession, "At first, I did not think it was a big deal. I didn't realize that it is an issue of the correct Communist road... Because I was not on Chair Mao's proletarian revolutionary road, but on the wrong bourgeois route, I committed such a bad thing...." His explanation on why he did not write enough may confirm the guess that the party committee asked him to confess the detail of his misdeeds.



Under the name of “completely transforming the bourgeois world view” and “return to the correct revolutionary road,” seven days later, on date October 20th, Zhang turned in another writing in which he revealed different details about his “crime.” In this version, he does not use the small bed as an excuse for his sexual contact with Little Wang and discards the part about comparing penis size. Instead, Zhang writes the following:

At first we slept in the opposite of the bed... Around three or four am, I woke up and saw Little Wang was still sleeping soundly. I thought that he must be sleeping heavily because he drank so much that day. I sat up and turned to his side of the bed.....I put my hand into his underwear and started stroking his penis. I got closer to him and started to put his penis into my anus. I wanted to make him ejaculate...

In his fourth confession on October 25th, Zhang revises his story again. This time, Zhang made it clear that the sexual incident was not spontaneous but planned:

Little Wang told me that they (Little Wang and five other guys) drank about four *jin* of liquor today.... So I thought Little Wang must sleep very heavily tonight. I could share the bed with him and play with his penis after he fell asleep ...

Around eleven pm, Little Wang asked me if I had a place to stay. I responded immediately, “No, my place is taken by some guests.”

Reading these four confessions side by side we see that Zhang’s narrative of his sexual contact with Little Wang transforms from accidentally “fooling around” to actively planning and pursuing sex. It is clear that Zhang’s framing changes from presenting himself from a passive actor who made a mistake, to an agentic subject who actively carried out his desires. More interestingly, in his fourth confession, Zhang overtly admitted to nonconsensual sex, which risked being framed as rape—an arguably worse crime than sodomy-- by the Party Committee. As mentioned earlier, the usage of

*jijian* in Chinese bears ambiguity. The word *jian*, as it in *qiangjian* (强奸, forced heterosexual rape) already implied nonconsensual sex and in practices, many *jijian* cases were nonconsensual. *Jijian*, however, was also used to refer to male same-sex behavior without the nonconsensual aspect, such as “he *jijian* me and I also *jijian* him.” In this sense, *jijian* is a synonym for male-male anal sex. It remains unknown whether Little Wang testified and depicted Zhang’s as a rapist in order to sideline his own involvement in the sexual practice and avoid punishments or Zhang attempted to protect Little Wang for the same reason. Perhaps another reading is also possible: from Little Wang’s question whether Zhang had a place to stay, we may speculate that the *jijian* in this case was mutual and voluntary as Little Wang was innuendo sex with Zhang as well.

What also interesting for my purposes is that the transformation of the sexual self and the possibility to articulate such a self is made possible by the mechanism of socialist confession that was set up to create and patrol proper class subject at the cost of sexuality and gender. Originally Zhang did not think “it was a big deal,” but we can speculate that the party committee kept pushing, with or without violence, and felt the need to make the sexual contact a case of the “correct revolutionary road.” In his third confession, Zhang caters to such a need and admits,

When the party first asked me to confess and reflect on my mistake, I did not realize the severity of it. With the help of the party and other comrades, I realized that the occurrence of my mistake is by no means fortuitous. In the winter of two years ago, I played with another workmate’s penis and made him ejaculate. But till today, I have not reported this mistake to the Party. It led me to continue making mistakes.

Regardless of whether he forgot or intentionally withheld the fact of his previous sexual encounters, Zhang’s confession indicates that he had never made a clear and

thoughtful reflection on his sexuality—or at least had never had an opportunity to speak about it. But the confession process forced him to remember his past and to make a connection with the present. As a result, Zhang had to see his behaviors as consistent and this realization of consistency is important to a sense of identity. As Wenying Xu notes, “the act of remembering one’s past necessarily calls for interpreting one’s old self” and the act of remembering “illuminates the person’s new identity in new solidarities” (Xu 2000: 208). This takes place through the process of forced confession, one as both a state mechanism of regulating subject and one that is driven by the curiosity or desire of people who executed state power (I discuss this perspective with more details below). Through multiple confessions, Zhang reconstructs an old unconscious self and narrates the transition to an awareness of a new identity. From “not big deal” and “fooling around” to searching for the reasons for his behavior indicates the emergence of agency in forming identity, self-understanding and subjectivity. Although the identity has no proper name at that time, it can be recognized and has potential for collective actions and community building.

I want to pause here to further consider the discussion of identity politics. In a project like this that sets to disrupt Euro-American normative queer knowledge production and its impacts in Chinese queerness, the discussion of identity, rooted in a specific Euro-American Enlightenment thought and tradition, might be a self-trap. But I do want to acknowledge the important role the discussion of identity has held in Chinese queer studies. Chinese-language queer study has flourished since the late 1980s as the end of state socialism and globalization have brought proliferated queer visibility in the

public. Among all, a central debate that has dominated the Chinese study of non-normative sexuality is around the conflict between a unique premodern sexual culture prior to Western imperialism and a hybridized sexual culture influenced by multi-layered globalization. In his influential work on Chinese homosexuality, Chou Wah-shan makes a distinction between the traditional Chinese homoeroticism and the translation of “homosexual” to emphasize that “the notion of the homogenous, universal and gender-inclusive ‘gay identity’ did not exist in China”(Chou 1995: 22). Chou explains, “Even when sexual activities are categorized, they never refer to a specific minority of people, but to specific behavioral practices that can involve everyone in certain social relations”(Chou 1995: 23). As Chou suggests, unlike Foucault’s homosexuals as a “species”, non-normative sexual subjects were never a “generic personality possessing a unique psycho-sexual essence.”

The question of whether Chinese non-normative sexual subjects are a “species” with self-identification has been important to writing the history of queer emergence and politics. If we look at scholarships on non-normative sexuality since the 1990s, either defined by sociological, medical or psychological approaches to the study of homosexuality (Li and Wang 1992; Zhang 1994; Fang, 1995; and Pan 2006) or later the transnational study of sexuality that emphasizes the globalization of LGBT through capitalism, intellectual institutions or international NGO network, the process of “naming” the homosexual, LGBT, *tongzhi*, queer and other categories of identity is crucial to each and all of these projects. It seems that only through naming, the queer subject is able to become tangible therefore becoming a political subject who are entitled

to be protected and to bear rights. This process of naming and identity politics on the one hand, is believed as the basis for collective resistance; on the other hand, it has brought a numbers of questions and problems. Among all, one problem I want to focus here is whether identity and colonialism. Petrus Liu points out that “Chinese *tongzhi* studies often results in what Johannes Fabien has described the ‘allochronism’ of racial time...” because “a good way to denaturalize heterosexuality is to historicize the invention of the homosexual/hetero sexual distinction, but the historicizing effort inevitably provokes debates about whether some human cultures are prehomosexual, prequeer and altogether different from the West...”(Liu 2015: 47). Seen in this light, if a recognizable and distinct sense of gay identity came to shape in the late 1980s and early 1990s in China as China started to integrated itself into the global economy, can we argue that Chinese gayness is belated therefore trapping ourselves in the colonialist logic of progressive lineal time? If there was an identity of sexually and gender variant people before China’s reform, can we argue for a unique and independent gay culture in China which is sufficient to counter the import-export model of global gayness?

Looking at how queers, such as our protagonist Zhang SP, in the Cultural Revolution come to understand their sexual and political identity helps to response to Liu’s concern of the dilemma of historicizing homosexuality as Zhang’s construction of identity complicates the debate between Western imported identity and an exceptionalist understanding of Chinese same-sex practices as solely behavioral. To make sense of Zhang’s identity, however, it requires a more fluid understanding of identity beyond its definition as a property of the self that exists outside the domain of the social and before

discourse. Unlike normative queer critiques of identity, Stuart Hall (1996) points out that identity is a lynchpin for understanding the interplay of agency and structure in the social world. Identity is:

the meeting point, the point of suture, between on the one hand the discourse and practices which attempt to “interpellate”, speak to us or hail us into places as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand, the processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be “spoken”. Identities are thus points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us. (1996: 5-6)

Hall’s understanding of identity and identification, as a contextual and conditional process that is in response to changing material situations and discourses that non-normative subjects face is constructive in thinking about queer identity in socialism. As both Zhang SP’s confession and many of my informants suggest, the sense of identity was constructed through witnessing to violence and a sense of a shared community emerged in reaction to such a violence(I will discuss this point in the next chapter). Perhaps more importantly, Hall’s theorization of identity that stresses “a radical historicization” (Hall 1996:4) to capture its process of constant change and transformation pushes queer historians and critics to think about questions of how to use “ the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not ‘who we are’ or ‘where we came from’, so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves” (Hall 1996:4). Hall’s insight connects the subject of history and the viewer of that history; it asks not only a historical specific understanding of changing processes of identity, but also for what purpose and for whom the question of identity matters. It is a valuable

vintage point for post-socialist queer scholars, critics and activists to ask ourselves when producing knowledge of queer history.

### **Queering the Socialist Male Body**

It is commonly understood that bodies in socialist ideology were primarily constructed as desexualized bearers of labor, or “a bolt of the socialist machine” (社会主义的螺丝钉). In her analysis of socialist literature, Meng Yue asserts that women’s actual bodies and sexualities disappeared within the Cultural Revolution as official rhetoric sublimated all desires into desire to work for the revolution (Somerson 1997: 105). Zhang SP’s confessions, however, insist on reinserting bodies and sexualities into the socialist discourse. Therefore the body, desire and pleasure become the focal point of his narrative. While bodies are supposed to function only as workers to advance the revolution, Zhang tells his workmate that “anal penetration is better than the New Year celebration”(钻肛门强死过年) and “ejaculation feels better than all other things” (流精比干啥都得劲) (73.10.25). In his confession of how he convinces his workmate to have sex with him, Zhang writes,

I asked him “have you ejaculated before?” He said “no.” Then I asked “Can you ejaculate?” (the original text here is 你会流精不会?, meaning “are you able to ejaculate?”). He said, “I don’t know”...

I then stroked his penis for a while, and he said he was too tired because of work and he couldn’t (was unable to) ejaculate.

That Zhang frames his question as “are you able to ejaculate” may sound odd to present readers as we generally assume that the ability to ejaculate is a bodily function.

As Everett Zhang points out, however, during the Maoist period and particularly in the Cultural Revolution, male bodily function was highly politicized and moralized (Zhang 2007: 498). Analyzing the different social opinions towards impotency and involuntary ejaculation in the socialist era, Everett Zhang argues that “the shame for patients to seek to recover potency for sexual pleasure outweighed the shame of impotence itself” because “the political and moral atmosphere was charged so intensely against individual desire” (2007: 498). Nonlaboring functions such as ejaculation were considered as indulgent; therefore sex was discouraged and even pathologized, with the exception of involuntary nocturnal emission. In this sense, Zhang SP’s invitation for sex can be read as an effort to resexualize the desexualized socialist male body and as a provocation to the official discourse of socialist labor. In his confession, Zhang SP reports that his workmate responded to his question by saying that work had exhausted his body and he was unable to ejaculate. At the first glance, it seems to support the understanding that since the body has submitted to socialist work; it thus loses its sexual function. Nevertheless, we might speculate on different reason that Zhang’s workmate says he is unable to ejaculate. As Zhang tells his readers, before he entered his workmate’s dorm, he peeked from outside of his window and saw that his workmate was playing with his own penis. Instead of being exhausted by work, the real reason of Zhang’s inability to ejaculate might lie in having just masturbated. But by calling upon the ideology of socialist work, Zhang and his workmate, who both indulged in sexual pleasure that contradicts to socialist ideology of work, were communicating sex by dubbing the official



ideology. This opacity of subtle communication and speaking is well evident in material I collected and will be further analyzed in the following section.

### **“Effective Desires” in Queer Socialism**

Both Zhang and his workmates’ expression of sexual desire in above writings not only contradicts with the presumption that put forward by Mayfair Yang (1999) who insists that “sexual desire itself, through a combined process of repression and an emptying out of public discourse on sex” was erased in the Maoist state, but also points to the problematic binary between socialism and post-socialism in knowledge production of sexuality. In *Desiring China*(2007), Lisa Rofel organizes her understanding of China’s neoliberal experiment around the site of desire, arguing that the refashioning of Chinese citizens as “desiring subjects” is at the core of China’s neoliberal project. In studying public culture, Rofel observes a narrative change from socialist emphasis on “consciousness” to post-socialist “desire” in making appropriate subjectivities and speaking about the reality. She notes that during research in the 1980s, her informants often used *sixiang*(思想, thoughts) or *yishi xingtai*(意识形态, consciousness) and their passions were directed toward the significance of state-sponsored political campaigns. On her return to China in the 1990s, young people instead described their *xinli*(心理, heart) and *ganjue*(感觉, feelings) and spoke to embrace a wide range of “desires” (Rofel 2007: page number). Although Rofel does not suggest that there was a lack of desire in socialism, the contrast between consciousness and desire functions in her work as a temporal marker of the differences between socialism and post-socialism. Embodied in a

post-socialist discourse of transition and neoliberal globalization that relied on a revisionist history of socialism, “desire” and “consciousness” become value-laden words. The former is positive and is considered as marking a “new humanity” as Rofel’s informant suggested, while the latter is associated with socialist propaganda and brainwashing that “impedes human nature.” However, we only arrive at the understanding that socialism sublimates personal desire to the political or that post-socialism frees such desires if we understand desire as an innate psychological feature that belongs to the individual subject. To move forward from such binary, I draw from Deleuzian queer theorists who have argued for a non-essentialist understanding of desire that dislocates desire from its object. Whereas in psychoanalytic theory desire is located within the individual as an important force, Gilles Deleuze sees desire as a social force that should be desexualized and de-individualized (Parr 2010:65-67). Adopting this conceptualization of desire, Elspeth Probyn (1995) insists on seeing desire as movement that connects different parts, images and individuals to consider what desire produces as it “spreads itself over objects” (15). Similarly, Elizabeth Grosz (1995) argues against viewing desires in psychic terms, but rather to ask what is being produced when two surfaces come together. The Deleuzian concept of desires as surface effects both Probyn and Grosz rely on is particularly helpful in theorizing desires in queer socialism. Moving from “expressive desire” to “effective desire,” I am not interested in arguing whether there were queer desires in socialism(though socialist desires have by far self-evident in above writings); rather, I ask what happens when surfaces of bodies, institutions and ideologies collide and what desires such encounter allow.

*Clashing Desires at the Grassroots*

At the end of the 1950s, Mao Zedong came to realize that his leadership position was threatened. The disastrous Great Leap Forward (大跃进) and commune program (人民公社), the withdrawal of Soviet support, and the severe food shortages incited intellectual dissidence and criticism from the top leaders of the Party. Acting on fears of a similar attack to Krushchev's 1956 denunciation of Stalin in the USSR, Mao launched a socialist education campaign in 1962 in the name of rooting out revisionism and capitalism and to purge political dissidents. Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping who hold different opinions on economic policies were labeled as *zouzi pai* or capitalist-roaders. Mao called on Chinese citizens to identify and fight "class enemies" in order to strength class struggles and the proletarian revolution. Class very soon surpassed other identity categories in significance and become the most important signifier of that period. The Party's internal political conflicts quickly spread to the literature and cultural field. In 1963, Mao launched a campaign to eliminate harmful bourgeois influence in literature to prevent intellectual dissidents from using literature to carry out anti-party thoughts and activities (Du Lanlan 2015: 134).

In the Cultural Revolution, ideologically unsound literary works were severely criticized and prohibited. In the 1960s, literature and art that depicted the old ruling class, their values and ideologies, as well as some foreign literary works from capitalist countries, were considered "poisonous" and "counterrevolutionary." Works concerned with love and romance were strongly opposed because they were considered as "bourgeois and revisionist." Sexual immorality, such as premarital and extramarital sex,

male same-sex relationships and sex with children, was framed as political impurity that required severe punishment. Yet as a result, previously unspeakable sexual behaviors and liaisons became highly pronounced and recorded for the purpose of education and transformation. Stories of immoral sex and indecency were denounced in public and as bad examples to educate the masses. However as we know now, these stories made their way and became the source for many unpublished *shouchao ben* (手抄本, hand-copied stories). Besides folk stories and traditional erotic literature that avoided the Cultural Revolution censorship, a major source of such hand-copied stories were based on criminal confessions and police investigation records that led out by the authority. In an era where pornographic material was banned, such confessions and investigations were the primary sources for learning about sexuality and sexual arousal. As one of my informants told me, he was reading a *dazi bao* (大字报, big-character poster) in 1973 and he started to get an erection when he read that somebody was a sodomite and committed “male-male implicit relationship” (男男关系, *nannan guanxi*).

We tend to see the Red Guards, or other agents such as party cadres, officials or the police who carried out the state power and violence in the Cultural Revolution, as oppositional to the ordinary people or victims of state violence. Yet it is important to note that the state socialist system is not an abstract apparatus, but consists of different layers of institutional structures and carried out by multiple agents. As many have argued, it is impossible to dislocate the state from the society and the grassroots (Perry 1994; Esherick 1994 and 2006; Hershatter 2011; Brown and Johnson 2015). Jeremy Brown and Matthew Johnson point out, for example, that in factories, a supervisor in the workshop

represented the Party-state while in villages, the face of the Party-state can be a neighbor, a family member or a fellow worshipper (2015: 3). Therefore, we ought to resist seeing the Party-state and the society and the mass as oppositional; instead, focusing on the interaction between local factors and agents provide a renewed perspective on desires and the socialist state. On the issue of sex, different agents shared similar positions and interests. It is not uncommon to hear in my fieldwork that informants' first time acknowledgement of male same-sex practices was through investigating sodomy and rape cases in the Cultural Revolution. Investigation, forced confession, public denunciation and struggle sessions were all channels for the agents of the state to learn about and exercise their own sexuality.

In late 1975, two years after Zhang SP's initial confession and at the final stage of the Cultural Revolution, Zhang was caught again committing sodomy and called on to write *tanbai jiaodai*. Compare to his confessions in 1973, in 1975 Zhang's writing style changes significantly. As the archival documents demonstrate, Zhang is able to exercise the skill of self-writing and has become increasingly blatant about his sexuality. In all of his seven confessions from July 31 to August 8 1975, Zhang barely talks about the Party, his bourgeois thoughts or the revolutionary road. He begins with a brief quote from Mao Zedong and ends his confessions with two lines thanking the Party's education and other comrades' support and help. In the content, Zhang enumerates basic information about his sexual encounters with other workers with minimal narrative. Words such as "penis", "anus", "erection" and "ejaculation" appear repeatedly in these pages. It is uncertain

whether this writing style change is caused by Zhang's intentional decision to feed the curiosity of his audience or to resist it.

As Zhang's 1973 writings read, the "root cause" of his mistake was "bourgeois pornographic material and texts." From this, we can guess that Zhang was well aware of the fact that the unpublished stories that he claimed had corrupted him originated in past sexual criminal confessions. Was Zhang aware of that his own confessions could possibly become the source of unpublished hand copies that would be circulated to arouse other individuals? From a reader to the producer of such texts, we might speculate that Zhang was exercising what Françoise Lionnet calls self-writing as a strategic move that "opens up a space of possibility where the subject of history and the agent of discourse can engage in dialogue with each other" (1989: 193). If we understand Zhang anticipating that his confession would be read by his work unit's cadres, officials and other potential audiences, could we read Zhang's confession as a silent call for dialog with other agents of power, invisible but always present, about sexuality, violence and power across past and future? If we understand Zhang's confession as connecting the past authors and potential future readers, would this politics of silent communication, a more subtle and fluid understanding of the interplay of agency and conformity, provide a different way of thinking about agency rather than voices and visibility, a mode of empowerment too often assumed in Euro-American feminist and queer knowledge production and politics? Perhaps the concept of "strategies of opacity" put forth by Nicholas de Villiers is helpful in thinking through above questions. Outplaying the obligatory confessional speech and closeted silence, opacity, de Villiers argues, is a queer mode of being that challenges

forms of expressions and representations as well as “the system known as the ‘epistemology of the closet’”(2012: 163) as it withholds information at the same time as not committing to the very existence of any information supposedly withheld. In his reading of Foucault, Roland Barthes and Andy Warhol, de Villiers suggests that their work and life are not “decrypted for the secret truth of sexuality or seen as simply a result of sexuality”(2012: 16). The coyness of Zhang’s invitation to communicate about sex with others as well as sharing sexual desires and pleasures through his *tanban jiaodai* echoes such strategies and queers politics of visibility and voices that are taken for granted by present LGBT movements and collective struggles for queer liberation.

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As we can see from above sections, beneath the surface of a self who was supposed to sublimate themselves to the Party and the revolution as well as a coercive culture that forced the private to the public, there lied a mixture of fear, deviation and unruly desires. The oppressive apparatus and space where self-making and narrating were carried out led to unexpected outcome, rendering sexuality of state socialism queer. Marked by passion and tensions, the Chinese queer self was not only at odds with the official discourse of the revolution at the time but also with the present representation of the past. Such an oddity, or queerness, leads me to the political question I asked in the beginning of this chapter: how do we do queer history without simplifying historical injury? What are ethical relations that we, as queer historians, researchers, activists and policy makers, want to develop with the past and its “abject” figures? How do we imagine a radical queer politics that simultaneously attends to violence, damage and

homophobia as well as epistemological, affective and methodological limitations of our own that closet ways of conceptualizing and being queer?

### **A Reparative Return to “Queer Socialism,” or Is there One?**

There was an odd chance that I could have gotten in touch with the protagonist of *tanbai jiaodai* I analyzed in this chapter. As my relationship with the person from whom I obtained the material has grown stronger and closer, he began to relate his own stories of prison sex in the Cultural Revolution and expressed a tremendous compassion towards people who were persecuted because of their sexuality. I joined the dots and figured that he might be related to Zhang SP. At one point, he even offered me a lead to contact Zhang SP’s relatives. Instinctively I wanted to pay a visit to Zhang; I had many questions for him to answer about life in the “dark times.” If I met him, Zhang might become a “living person” I could connect to rather than a representative of the “dead history.” I thought that this theoretical narrative of cross-generational connection that empowers the imaginary queer community could only be completed if I did meet him. If the pain, suffering and agency of queer historical forebears mirror the pain, suffering and agency of queers in the present, through historical touch, we might form connection and community across time, reminding us that no matter how difficult the situation was/is, there were/are always queers and our comrades. This longing for community, connection and identification is crucial in both the queer historical experience in general and my own writing.

But eventually I resisted my desire to meet Zhang, as I decided that there is no way for our meeting to be ethical. I imagined someone knocking at my door asking me about anal



sex I did forty years ago. If we really met, what kinds of silly questions could I ask? How did you feel when you write your confessions? How did it impact your life and future? How is life now? At the end of the day, Zhang's pain, fear and everyday life is beyond what I can touch. To resist the desire to meet him is to resist what Love has warned us against: the trap of historical curiosity and the desire to know—the past and its abject figure become instrumental in serve of liberating the present (2007: 9).

However, perhaps the real reason for me to not to meet Zhang lies in my fear of what Zhang could tell me. Throughout this chapter, I have suggested a queer agency emerged in the Cultural Revolution, in order to correct a present misunderstanding of the past. I have portrayed Zhang as a queer anti-hero who survived the dark times and who exercised the power of queer resistance. What if the “real” Zhang is nothing like this projection? What if he tells me that he was coerced and repeats the story of repression that we are too familiar with? The tension between the desire to know and the fear of “truth” underlies my entire historical research and has been manifested repeatedly in my ethnographic work. On the one hand, we all know that we cannot take what our subject tells us as at face value; on the other hand, how can we dismiss or even suppress their agency in telling their own version of story in order to fit in the story that we want to tell? Granted all historical and ethnographic work are saturated with our own desires and affect, is there a real difference between my presentation of the past as agentic and presentations of the past as traumatic? Does the resistance of the desire to know the historical “truth” render a queer project that emphasizes on the importance of desire more

ethical? To these questions, I do not have an answer. But at least queer scholars have offered us some vintage points.

In “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or You’re so Paranoid, You probably Think this Essay is about you,” Sedgwick disrupts the epistemological framing of critical reading which presumes that the process of demystification is the ultimate goal of social and ideological critiques. According to her, such readings are “paranoid” since they insist that “bad news be always already known” (2003: 130). Thus paranoid readings are those that ultimately only confirm what is already known and the act to expose them itself becomes a theoretical dead end that forecloses any possibility of alternative readings. Meeting Zhang for the sake of knowing what happened to him from his own words risks privileging such “paranoid readings.” To resist any anticipatory forms of reading, Sedgwick rethinks the investment in unveiling and exposure through an articulation of “reparative” possibilities which operate through a principle of flexible recursivity. Such a method is crucial for affective reading of historical injury since it allows the reader to recognize “that the future may be different from the present, it is also possible for her to entertain such profoundly painful, profoundly relieving, ethically crucial possibilities as that the past, in turn, could have happened differently from the way it actually did” (Sedgwick 2003: 146).

The surprising effects of reparative reading also echo Love’s reading of Foucault’s concept of genealogy. Rather than seeing history according to a smooth logic of progression, genealogy begins accidentally and proceeds by fits and starts. Such a history, Love remarks, “serves to disrupt the seeming inevitability of the present.

Divisive and incendiary, genealogy points out the otherness of the past, and shows us our own imagine in the present as multiple, subject to an internal alienation”(2007: 44).

Following such methods, historical research can embrace “surprises” and “otherness” in the encounter with the past or our present subjects and let our desires clash.

## Chapter Two The Search for Queer Anti-Capitalism: Stories of the AIDS Economy and Queer Radicality

### Many Stories We Tell

In *mudan yuan* (牡丹园, or the Pony Garden), a well know gay cruising park in the west side of Beijing, I met seventy-eight-year-old *tongzhi*, Lao Bali (老巴黎, or Old Paris). He is something of a celebrity in the cruising community as his life story was made public by Phoenix TV—an influential mainstream media based in Hong Kong in late 2014. Lao Bali was born to a lower-middle peasant family in Beijing in the late 1930s and started realizing his sexual desire for men in his adolescence. In the late 50s—at the height of the Cultural Revolution, the sixteen-year-old accidentally stumbled in a public toilet near *Tian'anmen* Square and discovered “people of his kind.” Soon Lao Bali got himself familiarized with other cruising sites in the city and became popular because of his good-looks and well educated manner. In a sunny afternoon of 1963, when Lao Bali was idling in *Xidan*, a handsome foreigner accosted him. After a brief and clumsy body language conversation, the young Chinese man quickly found himself in love with the blue-eyed French gentleman who worked at the embassy. Lao Bali’s friends teased him with a little jealousy, “Shit luck, hooked up with a French guy?” “So we shall call you Madame Paris now.” “Fuck off!” Lao Bali responded with a complacent smile, “We are not married yet.” “Then you are Miss Paris!” Since then, the nickname “Miss Paris” and later “Old Paris” have accompanied with him for almost fifty years of his cruising life.

Old Paris was a young model teacher (青年模范教师) in a prestigious middle school in Beijing and led a comfortable life before he was arrested for homosexual

“hooligan” behaviors. In the early 1980s when the government launched its Intensive Crackdown Campaign (严打运动), Old Paris was caught by undercover police and put into reform-through-labor camp (劳改所). After he returned, his homosexual behavior was disclosed and he was expelled from his teaching position and transferred to the janitor section, cleaning toilets at the school. In the next few years, he was arrested twice at cruising grounds and eventually lost his job. During the hardest time, he lived on a ten *yuan* per month budget and had to sell cheap maps illegally at the *Tian'anmen* Square. Sometime he was caught by city inspectors (城管) and his maps were confiscated, leaving him no money to get by. Now, at the age of almost eighty years, Old Paris lives in a small room in *Xidan*. He is a HIV/AIDS volunteer sending condoms in the Pony Garden and receiving 400 *yuan* compensation from the local Center of Disease Control on top of his 380 *yuan* social security (the average income in Beijing in 2014 is 6900 *yuan*).

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Two years later during my return trip in 2016, I had a random conversation about Old Paris with one of my informants, Big Cat, a gay man who was extremely active in Beijing's cruising communities from the 1980s to early 2000s. “Did you really believe the French guy bullshit?” Big Cat burst into laugh when I mentioned the well-known story of Old Paris's foreign love affair. According to Big Cat, Old Paris was called “Bali” because of a scar on his neck. The Chinese word for “scar,” “bala”(疤痕) is pronounced as “bali” in Tianjin dialect and sometimes in Beijing *hutong* Mandarin—an accent associated with unrefined lower class people residing in Beijing's traditional alleyways

area. “When I first heard the French guy story, I almost laughed my ass off.” Despite his despise of Old Paris’ lies, Big Cat further explained, “but I understand why he made up this story. Nowadays, who doesn’t want to be famous? Being famous will bring you more money. He was on TV and he knows which story would benefit him.”

The conflicted stories of where the name “Old Paris” came from raise important questions of the imagination of Chinese gayness in relation to neoliberal globalization. In her influential work of “desiring China,” Lisa Rofel identifies a proliferation of gay visibility and practices in urban China in the mid-1990s that is “tied to, in certain critical respects, to transnational network of lesbians and gay men” (2007: 87) created by China’s transition to neoliberal capitalism. Rofel remarks, the initiation of HIV/AIDS movement in China in the early 1990s, the arrival of lesbian women from around the world at the 1995 United Nations Fourth World Women’s conference, as well as the mushrooming of gay bar and saloon discussions with the presence of foreign gay men and lesbians galvanized queer visibility, led to networking in and outside China and added to the transitional quality of Chinese gay culture and existence. The emphasis on transnationality of Chinese gayness, however, does not consolidate a homogenous “global gay identity.” As Rofel shrewdly points out, “the emergence of gay identities in China occurs in a complex cultural field” and “Chinese gay identities materialize in the articulation of transcultural practices with intense desires for cultural belongings, or cultural citizenship” (2007: 88-89). To understand such a transnational and transcultural process of gay identification, Rofel urges us to look at the sexual, material and affective dimensions of producing desires for cosmopolitanism. Through the expression of desire,

Rofel explains, Chinese lesbian and gay men “are able to feel part of a universal humanity. The fact that they must do so is itself a result of the embrace of neoliberalism, which changes the relation of China to the world economy and the terms by which its people can relate to each other”(Rofel 2010: 427).

If Big Cat was right, Old Paris’ self-fabricated story exemplifies Rofel’s observation that Chinese gay men refashion themselves into an imagined cosmopolitan worldliness through creating and narrating stories of desires in transnational encounters that triumph the past suffering and pain the subject endured. Miss Paris, French guy from the embassy and the unfilled love in Old Paris’ telling put us immediately in mind Henry Huang’s play *M. Butterfly* and David Cronenberg’s 1986 film of same name. The invention of “Miss Paris” in the context of transnational love affair captures the desire to transform the self through embracing an imaginary cosmopolitan belonging. On the contrary, Big Cat’s words seem to reflect concerns and critiques of such desires. Big Cat recalls, “the golden time of Beijing’s *Tongzhi* culture is from the mid 80s to late 90s and had declined since 2000s.” He further explains, “in the late 90s, around the Second Ring Road, there used to be a cruising site every two bus stops. ‘Our kind of people’(我们这样的人, *women zheyang de ren*) were everywhere outside, on streets and in public toilets. But as internet had become popular and the urban reconstruction went on, people started to closet themselves in their rooms and this prosperous public scene gradually disappeared.” Big Cat’s opinion surprisingly challenges Rofel’s view that the emergence of Chinese gay culture is in close affinity to the neoliberal globalization. Instead, Big Cat interprets gay visibility in term of the loss of local community that is led by the

transnational encounters. His nostalgia and romanticization of the 80s and 90s are critiques of the relation between gayness and consumer culture facilitated by China's transition to the market-driven economy.

Should I believe Old Paris or Big Cat? I could have gone back to the Pony Garden and to see if Old Paris indeed has a scar on his neck in order to figure out who is the liar. Yet to privilege either story is to dismiss the complex social, historical and affective conditions behind any story telling. I am less interested in finding out the factual "truth" than how people tell their stories. As critical feminist ethnographer Richa Nagar remarks, storytelling ought not to be seen as revealing the essential or authentic experience of the subject; rather, "the responsibility and labor of telling stories involves a series of delicate negotiations ... one's engagements with who is speaking, who is referenced, and who is listening can become legible only when contextualized with the multiple and shifting social relations in which they are embedded" (2014:106). Old Paris' invention of his story and Big Cat's decision to reveal it to me, a researcher located in the North academy, are both political projects that are entangled with remaking of facts, desires and specific social locations they situate themselves in.

However, the question comes: if we agree that there are multiple narratives, stories and genealogies of the emergence of Chinese queer culture, identity and activism, how come some narratives and constructed stories have become more dominant and more believable than others? What are material, affective and epistemological structures that facilitate the circulation of certain stories while silencing others? How do we present



other stories that might contradict the collective telling we are customized to? Do telling alternative stories and new ways of representing them render our research more ethical?

This chapter approaches these questions by considering two interlocking aspects: knowledge producers' own affective, epistemological and materialist specificities in making knowledge of queer experience; and how to write alternative queer experience. As queer historian Scott Bravmann reminds us, rather than describing a fact of a historical process, the making of the homosexual subject is always making an argument. It is fundamentally a narrative with serious implications, and that the accounts of the past are agents in reformulating and contesting the meanings of homosexuality (Bravmann 1997:9). Therefore, citing White, Bravmann argues that the inquiry of queer history is more about "what certain events might mean for a given group, society, or culture's conceptions of its present tasks and future prospects"(White1986:487). Viewing representations of queer past as performative sites where meanings are invented, both Bravmann and White urge us to situate our own history and representation of the history/subject in the discourse of history making and to discover what have been overlooked and for what purpose. Bringing their insights on the relation between queer history and historian to ethnography, in this chapter I turn the gaze upon myself as a researcher, an activist and a member of the community I do research on, as well as other scholars whose work are influential in Chinese queer studies, to reflect on how our affective and political investments shape our research questions, methods and representation of people we study and ourselves. These investments are mediated by discourses, power relations and social locations that simultaneously motivate us to tell

stories of those we care about and allow us to perpetuate violence in such telling. One of the stories I want to interrogate with details in this chapter is the inevitability of neoliberal capitalism, one that has characterized much of existing scholarship on the emergence of Chinese contemporary queer culture.

The narration of the rise of Chinese queer visibility in relation to neoliberal globalization is indeed an enticing one, given the fact that China's economic reform in the late 1970s has brought significant changes in many aspects of Chinese society. Government policies after Deng Xiaoping's Southern Tour in 1992 has created dense nodes of transnational investments in China's major cities. Emphasis on consumer culture created new experience of urban life and the gap between rich and poor widened significantly. Rural population moved to the cities and changes the layout of social class and new bourgeoisie emerged with more dispensable money. The Chinese state increasingly embraced neoliberal policies of international institutions such as the WTO. However, to what extent the "fact" of neoliberalism has become the dominant cultural logic of China and to what extent such claims are dependent on our own desire for neoliberalism still remains debatable. As Petrus Liu(2015) remarks,

Treating contemporary Chinese Queer cultures as a symptomatic expression of a globalizing neoliberalism creates an impression that they are belated copies of the liberal West, evolving along the same path with no local history and no agency. According to this narrative, China's socialist past and dialogues with international Marxism appear to be a detour at best, with no lasting effects on the development of its queer cultures. Ultimately, China has arrived at the same conundrum we see in North America today: queer liberalism and homonormativity.(2015:4)

While Liu's claim is crucial in rethinking the relation between neoliberalism and queerness and his call for reevaluation of connection between queer emergence and class-

based Marxist analysis is urgent, my chapter differs from his in two ways: while Liu locates what he terms “Queer Marxism” in figures such as Chen Rongxi, Josephine Ho and Cui Zi’en—famous queer writers, scholars and film makers in PRC and POC, I look at class-based anti-capitalist resistance and activities at grassroots level. Secondly, compare to arguing whether neoliberalism is the dominant logic in queer China is less intriguing to me than why the framework of neoliberalism has been so prevalent in producing subject as well as in knowledge production of research, activism and politics while the reality is more complex. How our attachment to neoliberal capitalism and its cultural logic in queerness have shaped our research and methods and how such an attachment has hindered our ability to see a different picture is at core of this chapter.

While Rofel is right in pointing out that Chinese gayness is a complex transcultural process intertwined with cultural citizenship and belongings, I question Rofel’s presumption that struggles over cultural citizenship and belongings are primarily focused on the question of “who represents the cultural competence to carry China into the future and to create wealth and power for the nation under neoliberal capitalism.” Rofel recognizes that the post-socialist allegory relies on a revisionist story of repressed human nature and the end of socialism meant that human nature has emerged to find its freedom of expression; However, Rofel’s project to criticize the uneven production of desires under neoliberalism reinforces such allegory as she dismisses how queer desires do not always necessarily embrace transnational cosmopolitanism, but can be critiques of it.

If the dominant story is not the only story, how our research and writing allow and facilitate space for us and our subject to write alternative stories? And what it means to rewrite these stories? I seek the answers to these questions in two tasks: how to read a story and how to retell a story. In this chapter, I examine multiple stories of the emergence of gayness. Instead of viewing these stories as embracing neoliberalism, which has been argued as a driven force of the formation of contemporary Chinese queerness, I read them as providing a glimpse of how Chinese gay identity as critiques of social changes and inequality that caused by neoliberal transitions. More specifically, I start with examining the emergence of what I call the “AIDS Capitalism” in China that generated various forms of resources, capitals and desires, as well as abjections, inequality and hierarchies. I then move to document what Peter Drunker (2015) termed “queer anti-capitalism” in Beijing’s gay cruising sites in order to disconnect the inevitability of queerness and neoliberal capitalism. By so doing, I do not intend to fix a historical fallacy, nor bash previous scholars on the study of Chinese queer culture. Rather, I wish to invite problems for my readers as embodied subjects with their own particular histories (Bravmann 1997: 98-99) and affect, to reflect on their own reading practices. I also wish to consider how to allow and enable space for my subjects to better address issues of violence and silencing through presenting their stories. As Nagar tells us with optimism, if we recognize all theorizing as an excise in storytelling, then “it is also possible that the epistemic violence of existing paradigms and frameworks can be resisted, mitigated or confronted by telling stories differently” (Nagar 2015:161). Finally, I invite queer and feminist writers and readers to rethink our own desires in looking for queer

anti-normativity and radical politics as alternative while subjugating “normal life” to “bare life”.

### ***Tongzhi* Identification as Queer Anti-Capitalism**

The word *tongzhi* (同志, comrade) coined by Edward Lam in 1992, has been a commonly accepted one used in sexual variant communities in mainland, Hong Kong and Taiwan. Originally a political word for “comrade” in both Sun Yat-sen’s nationalist legacy and Chinese Communist revolution, *tongzhi* was appropriated by Chinese sexual countercultures to refer to same-sex practices. For most queer scholars, the appropriation of *tongzhi* resembles the way in which the English word “queer” was made into a means of self-empowerment in the US without the pejorative connotations (Liu 2015: 41). Rather than simply a sexual identity, *tongzhi*, as Elisabeth Engebretsen and William Schroeder point out, embodies “a debate that encompasses a multitude of dimensions and subjectivities across different social, political, cultural, economic, regional and philosophical landscapes” (Engebretsen and Schroeder 2015: 4). Engebretsen and Schroeder also note, that rather than being called, the best way of describing what *tongzhi* means is through a practice of *zicheng* (自称)—ways “of calling oneself and people one assumes are like oneself, which usually implies sexual or gender non-normativity or an affinity with political and social movements surrounding these ideas” (Engebretsen and Schroeder 2015:5). This understanding emphasizes the multitude and polysemy of *tongzhi* as well as its agentic structure for individual and collective identification and political actions.

Despite the story of *tongzhi* has been told many times, Cui Zi'en, a prominent queer filmmaker and novelist in mainland China, points out the gentrification of *tongzhi*. In a 2014 conversation, Cui explained to me although both the Nationalist Party and Communist Party used *tongzhi*, its meanings and origins diverse. Ze has tried to avoid *tongzhi* and instead using the term “queer” as *tongzhi* has been compromised by middle class discourse of individual freedom, sexual diversity and cosmopolitanism in China. In this section, however, I want to revisit the process of *tongzhi* identification and reconsider its anti-capitalist potential by looking at how gay men identify themselves as *tongzhi* in relation to pressing social issues such as class privilege, access to healthcare and shrinking living space.

### *Lao Peng's Story*

It was a cold but sunny winter afternoon in Beijing in 2015. I went to Dongdan Park to meet Lao Peng, sixty-five-year-old *tongzhi* volunteer who conducts HIV rapid test at Beijing's cruising grounds. This was my second time meeting him and our conversation started with small talks. Lao Peng told me that it usually takes him forty minutes from home to Dongdan by bus and he comes to the park almost every day around the year. When I asked if his transportation is reimbursed by his organization, Lao Peng told me that since the Global Funds who used to fund China's HIV/AIDS programs withdraw in 2014 and the Chinese government started to assume responsibilities of HIV/AIDS intervention programs, their financial support reduced significantly. However, Lao Peng did not express much compliance; instead, he immediately explained, “I don't want to

occupy resources of the country. I embrace old traditions and principles. I believe in the virtue of *fengxian* (奉献, sacrifice or serve).”

We sat down on a bench and started talking about how Lao Peng came to his *tongzhi* identity,

About ten years ago, I worked at XXX factory, an old state-owned enterprise in Zhangjiakou (a city in Hebei Province). Back then I often travelled to Beijing for work and usually stayed here for several months on a trip. I used to stay at a *zhaodaisuo* (state-owned hostel) in Qianmen area (a block away from Tian'anmen Square, one of the most populated area in Beijing with mixed population). The hostel was very cheap, like eight *yuan* per person for a day. After work, I often hung around in the area and noticed many young migrant workers coming and going. Sometimes I initiated conversations with them and asked if they were looking for jobs. These youngsters were often poorly educated and had no credentials and qualifications, and they were like headless flies having no idea where to look for jobs. I was the legal person in my enterprise back then and I knew the bureaucratic stuff very well. I told them a governmental office in Xuanwu District, just a couple blocks from Qianman. They were the first labor market (人力市场) in Beijing, not human resource market (人才市场), and they didn't charge agency fees.

I was waiting for Lao Peng's story turning to some unexpected romantic encounter during the period of time he was commuting for work in Beijing; however, he did not go to the direction I projected. He continued,

About a year later, I heard from a hostel acquaintance that a young rural migrant worker at a construction company had been delayed salary for no reason for three months and couldn't offer his living in Beijing. I gathered some legal documents and went to his work place arguing with the managers and telling them I could file a legal case against them. They saw me an elder who knew about laws and they compromised and gave him his salary in next few days.

I did not want Lao Peng to go astray from the topic of how he realized his *tongzhi* identity and then interrupted, “So were you attracted to the young worker? Is it why you did a favor for him?”

“No,” Lao Peng responded immediately, “he was not a *tongzhi* and I never see him again after he went back home with his salary.” I was confused then why Lao Peng told me this story if it is not related to his *tongzhi* awareness. He explained, “It was only because the social responsibility. For my generation, the official education was as a member of the society, each of us should contribute to it.” Lao Peng went on,

One day a neighbor in my hostel came to me, ‘Hey Lao Peng, I heard that you are a *rexin ren* (热心人, hot-hearted person or kind-hearted person). I happen to know a *gongyi* (公益, welfare) program that you might be interested in.’ This program he mentioned is *Aizhixing* (爱知行)<sup>3</sup>. That’s how I started my volunteer work and it was at the same time that I realized that I am a *tongzhi* as well.

It surprises me that Lao Peng frames his *tongzhi* identification as first and foremost pertaining to his political awareness of assuming social responsibility and helping underprivileged people, rather than through the narrative of sexual awakening that characterizes modern gay identity. Unlike many stories of the origin of one’s gayness, which privilege the narrative of a repressed self being enlightened by political awareness, Lao Peng resists to see his *tongzhi* identity as a hidden essence that was woken by an event. During the course of our conversation, I was impatiently waiting him to cut into the “theme”—the sexual aspect of his *tongzhi* identity-- through injecting questions that based on my understanding of sexuality; however, Lao Peng challenged my scopophilic desire of knowing by making a temporal, not a causal, connection between his volunteer work and his realization of *tongzhi* identity, indicating the mutual construction and

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<sup>3</sup> Beijing *Aizhixing* Institute is an influential non-governmental organization for HIV/AIDS intervention, founded in 2002 by Dr. Wan Yanhai. It was developed from Beijing Aizhi Action Project established in 1994. Wan is one of China's most prominent AIDS activists who he set up the first AIDS hotline, conducted the first AIDS-related surveys among gay men, and formed a health promotion group and AIDS education campaigns within the gay community. His projects were often shut down by the authorities, and he was detained many times. Eventually Wan was pushed out of his position and lives in the United States currently.



inseparability of the two. In this sense, there is no identity prior to the site where the identification is realized, and his *tongzhi* identification is a process, or in David Halperin's word, a "practice" (Halperin 2012) that can be performed on a daily basis through doing *tongzhi* volunteerism. By frustrating my desire to privilege one's sexual aspect of being gay, Lao Peng confronts me with the need to think about understanding *tongzhi* identity and the assumption of the *tongzhi* formation beyond the sexual realm.

Lao Peng then proceeded to tell a story of how helping homeless young rural migrant workers at the cruising sites consolidate his sense of being *tongzhi*,

It was probably the year of 2007. I met a homeless teenager, Xiao Qiang, at Dongdan Park. This kid was in dirty clothes and had not had a full meal for days. He ran away from home and ended with sleeping on the bench at the park. Sometimes he went to Babaoshan Cemetery to steal tributes to get by. He came here and wanted to sell himself for money, but who is going to want such a dirty bum?

... ..

Few elders in the park and I chipped in some money for him, brought him to wash up at a public bath house, got him a haircut and bought him several meals. We started to educate him that being *tongzhi* is not a disease and encouraged him to get a job if he wants to survive in Beijing.

In a different conversation, Lao Peng told me that his monthly income is only about 1500 *yuan* (about 250 USD), including some subsidies from the volunteer position ranging from 400 to 800 *yuan* and his retirement. Lao Peng lives in a small room in a temporary self-build apartment building (*zìjiàn fáng*, 自建房) outside the south Fourth Ring Road of Beijing. His room is only big enough for a double bed, a desk and a dining table. I asked why Lao Peng insists support homeless and migrant workers at the park when he himself barely makes a living. Lao Peng is adamant that if he as a *tongzhi* does not help other *tongzhi*, who else they can count on?

The sense of the collective is omnipresent in Lao Peng's narrating of his *tongzhi* identification. His *tongzhi* identification is shaped in and through the process of thinking and dealing with material conditions of himself and others in his daily life. Being *tongzhi* also allows Lao Peng to imagine himself as actively participating in the work of solving pressing issues such as enlarged poverty caused by China's transitions.

In a later conversation at Lao Peng's place, he generously shared his love stories with me. The reservation and critiques of consumer culture is also evident in his narration of his romantic life. This identity formation is against the desire to embrace neoliberal capitalism but rooted as a critique of deepening social inequality that caused by China's transition and socialism's failed promised of an egalitarian society.

Lao Peng has been in a long term relationship with Xiao Min, a thirty-year-old migrant worker from Fujian Province, for about ten years. During the course of their relationship, Lao Peng had several affairs but never left Xiao Min for others. Lao Peng explained, Xiao Min is a sincere and honest guy, who is also very hard working and responsible. Four years ago, Lao Peng met a twenty-four-year-old, Xiao Kai, at an online chatroom. Xiao Kai is from a very wealthy family in China's economic heartland city Shanghai, good looking and well educated. A year after graduating from college, Xiao Kai already owns an IT company. As a *lianlao zu* (恋老族, gay people who are into elders), Xiao Kai was very attracted to Lao Peng. He invited Lao Peng to Shanghai to live with him and promised supporting his life. Lao Peng rejected it because he thought it is immoral to leave Xiao Min for a wealthier life. Later, Xiao Kai also offered money to Lao Peng so he can establish his own company or organization. Of course Lao Peng

rejected the offer. Lao Peng told me, “Later after we got closer to each other, I figured that Xiao Kai’s company is an international one and he himself has eleven billions *yuan*, no wonder he has the money to give me.” But immediately, Lao Peng changed his tone,

I asked Xiao Kai one day, ‘now you know me well and I know you well, and I know you are very fond of me. But why every time when we are together, you never smile?’ ‘How can I smile?’ Xiao Kai responded, ‘the more money you have, the less happy you become.’

Lao Peng used this story to tell me the conflict between happiness and consumer culture. This story contradicts the familiar narrative put forth by John D’emilio that the development of capitalism provides empowerment, liberation and happiness for gay people. To resist Xiao Kai’s offering, Lao Peng makes it clear that a good life is not necessarily connected to material fulfillment.

To my surprise, Lao Peng also shared a story of how to educate underprivileged youngsters at cruising sites to sustain an active sexual life. He often tells homeless kids at the park where to find place to sleep, shower and to have sex, for money or for pleasure. Lao Peng introduces other cruising sites to new comers, for example, he recommends the Pony Garden, because there is a 24 hour McDonald nearby. The basement level is big and many homeless people stay there overnight. For tips of having sex, Lao Peng adds, the restroom in Neimenggu Hotel is good because they don’t have people to check at the door and it has nice washrooms. The only thing, Lao Peng, reminds his young *tongzhi*, is to make sure keeping the restroom clean and being discreet. Lao Peng further explains, the janitors there are also from underprivileged background and you don’t want to put them in trouble. Lao Peng’s words remind us that the realization of queer desires and

wants need to be independent from the money and privilege and can be fulfilled outside of the neoliberal order.

### **Is there a Radical Grassroots Queer Movements?**

While it is clear that the movement for sexual and gender freedom and equality has made significant gains worldwide, radical queer critics and activists have contended that the demand to fully restructure sexuality and gender norms as well as the economic and social foundation on which they rest has been compromised. As they have argued, in today's neoliberal capitalism, one that is capable of tolerating and assimilating a plurality of dissident identities under the name of "free choice," acceptance of queer people into the institution of nuclear family, military and mainstream culture is far from a victory. In *Warped: Gay Normativity and Queer Anticapitalism*, Peter Drucker(2016) argues for a renewed queer radicalism that draws insights from left feminism, queer of color critiques and transnational turn in queer studies. Opposing to the privatization of the LGBT movements, Drucker urges us to broaden the LGBT movements and explore new ways of activism that address basic LGBT needs such as housing, healthcare and decent-paying jobs. Despite its potential, Drucker writes, "the queer radical left today still only occupies a small corner of the global LGBT political scene" (Drucker 2015: 308). While I appreciate Drucker's emphasis on the significance of working class and a class-based Marxist approaches to queer movement, I do not share his pessimism of the prematurity of "queer radical left." Drucker's call for queer radicality is hindered by his narrow definition of "the political." From the examples he provides, it is clear that a preferred

form of radical queer movements for him should make political scenes and focus on making governmental changes, lobbying and advocacy. However, in this section, I want to expand the concept of radical queer movement by considering multiple ways in which activism, movement and resistance are carried out, given the cultural, social and political specificity of various geopolitical locations. I document activities and activism in Beijing's cruising sites that characterized what James Scott has termed "infrapolitics" and "everyday resistance". Such resistances are often off radar for researchers and activist as they usually do not have a clear political goal and does not yield measurable outcomes. The concept of "infrapolitics" and "everyday resistance" as part of normality of subaltern life also allows a reconsideration of radicality and alternatives. I reflect on a desire in the study of queerness for looking for alternatives and argue that the search for radicality might be a result of privilege.

### *Everyday Resistance*

The concept of "everyday resistance" is put forward by James Scott in 1985 in order to articulate a different kind of resistance—one that is not as dramatic and visible as rebellions, riots, revolutions or other such organized, collective or confrontational resistance. Scott argues that everyday resistance is quiet, dispersed, disguised or seemingly invisible, something he calls "infrapolitics" that exploited people use in order to both survive and undermine repressive dominations (Scott 1985, 1989, 1990). Scholars of resistance studies have commonly agreed that everyday resistance is a heterogenic practice and contingent on changing contexts and situations. Although it might not be easily recognized, it undermines dominant power in unexpected ways. It is important that

this concept refreshes common understanding of “politics” by “making the ordinary life of subalterns part of political affairs”(Vinthagen and Johansson 2013:4).

People at gay cruising sites are often seen as idling lower class population who are lack of political consciousness and HIV/AIDS volunteers are merely labors fulfilling assigned tasks by the national and international donors without activist intentions and goals. Everyday work at cruising sites do not yield political outcomes that would make headlines and HIV/AIDS volunteers are not photogenic for global media who are more interested in China’s LGBT human rights violation and governmental oppressions. During my fieldwork at cruising grounds in Beijing, however, I learned that individuals are quite sophisticated when it came to determining the parameters of their relationship with researchers, donors and the bureaucratic. They have strong sense of the role that successful dialogue and collaborative efforts could play in advancing the person, organizational, and political agendas of all involved parties. Although their efforts might not lead to direct social change, they provide different pictures of political struggles. In the next section, I want to use the example of HIV/AIDS activist volunteering work to illustrate such resistance and how this form of resistance has been dismissed by both activism and scholarly knowledge production.

### **A Belated Encounter**

In 1998, I was fourteen-year old, female bodied but gay identified, all fired up to devote myself to the LGBT movement of China. I contacted Guo Yaqi, who later became a leading gay activist and the founder of Beijing Gender Health Education Institute, and

conveyed my determination to be part of their activist enterprise. Guo responded and told me a volunteer position for their HIV/AIDS intervention program—distributing condoms and educating about safe sex at Beijing’s gay cruising parks.

Guo’s response definitely threw a wet blanket over my enthusiasm. Me? Sending condoms at cruising parks? The volunteer position was nowhere near what I expect my role to be in the LGBT movements. I have read so much about gay literature, history, Western gay rights movements and even queer theory, and how on earth does the job of sending condoms need my knowledge? I wanted to write great articles about gay people’s life, do research to combat homophobia and push the government to legalize same-sex marriage. As a teenager, I imagined the gay world and LGBT activism to be gay bars with meticulously dressed beautiful people, salon discussions with foreign scholars and activists and celebrating same-sex love at pride parades. The cruising park is exactly the opposite: it is a filthy place infused with disease, crimes and promiscuity. It is a place for uneducated, low class, and low quality people, hustlers, and immoral cowards who closet themselves in heterosexual marriage but look for a quick fuck.

I rejected Guo’s offer and had never met up with him. Few years later, I followed what I thought would be the proper route for my intellectual, activist and life growth and ended up in the United States studying gender, women and sexuality. My agenda have changed over the past ten years: from learning from Western LGBT movements to empower China, to write about the uniqueness of Chinese *tongzhi* culture, then to criticize queer globalization. Besides the development of my intellectual path, these shifts also have a lot to do with what was/is trendy in the North academy.

During my doctoral field work in 2014, fortuity brought me to Guo Yaqi again. Different from what I have previously imagined—a somewhat glorified hero figure who symbolized my juvenile dedication to Chinese LGBT movements, Guo is about my height, skinny, hunched over a little bit. He looks weathered. He told me that he handed over Beijing Gender Health Education Institute, the NGO he formed, to another person few years and left LGBT movements permanently, “I felt tired and burnt out, deeply hurt too.” Soon after we started our conversation, Guo shared with me his frustration of participating in the LGBT movements,

Who discriminate homosexuals the most? Who condemn homosexuals the most? Let me tell you, the deepest discrimination is from the inside, not outside of the movement. Those LGBT leaders who claim themselves as the sublime and pure homosexuals are those who damage the movement the most.

Guo’s comment is referring to the ongoing process of normalization and gentrification of the gay community since the 1990s. He continued,

I often tell people that if there is no AIDS, Chinese people won’t know about homosexuals; CCTV<sup>4</sup> won’t even report on homosexuals. AIDS movement in China is the biggest LGBT movements. However, look at the AIDS movement now. It is labeled as the business of the “lower body.” For those who are aiming at a sublime LGBT movement, the AIDS activism is not accounted as important because it is related to dirty sex and promiscuity that pollute the gay community and sully the reputation of gay people. The stigmatization from the inside of the community is worse than from the outside.

While the HIV/AIDS intervention contributes to the visibility and recognition of MSM/LGBT/*tongzhi* populations, many have agreed that it has also led to gentrification and the destruction of community. From the 1990s, medical experts, scholars and activists

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<sup>4</sup> China Central Television.



who are connected with the transnational civil society adopted the rhetoric of HIV/AIDS as a “global crisis” which allowed China to imagine itself as participating in the global system of security and movement of human rights. To fully assume this role, gay activists must fight against discrimination that rooted in social oppression and uncivilized traditions. On the one hand, the HIV/AIDS activism framed Chinese gay community as brothers of global gays who are collectively threatened by the pandemic, on the other hand, its intervention policies and how such policies are carried out re-marginalize and denigrate social and economic underprivileged groups as “dangerous” and “shameful.” For example, in the promotion of condom use, promiscuous sex act in public such as cruising sites are condemned as barbaric and backward, and gay sexuality is subjugated to normalizing medical gaze and administrative authorities. The systemic assault on sexuality, for example in the crackdowns and clean-up of nonnormative sexual spaces by both the police and liberalist LGBT activists, serves both state interests that turn the unruly cocksuckers to manageable and respectable LGBT subjects who deserve protection and rights, and interests of heteronormative family that functions as the stabilizer of the post-socialist society. I was told by an elite LGBT gay activist that by 2010, their organization basically withdraw all HIV/AIDS related programs because “gay people have already gained the consciousness of safe sex and regular testing. There is no more need to promote safe sex at bars and clubs. People who go to *Destination* (a gay night club in Beijing) basically all know about self-protection.” His opinion not only contradict stories I heard from HIV/AIDS activists at cruising sites; more importantly,

such an argument functions not as describing a reality, but has performative effort of making class difference and making hierarchy of people and places.

The process of gentrification and normalization is produced not only through the asymmetrical power relation between experts, transnational institutes and the local community, but also entangled with desires at a personal level. Guo continued to express his frustration with LGBT activists' personal interest and the separation of HIV/AIDS movement and LGBT movement despite its original connections,

LGBT leaders in China are often from abroad or Chinese nationals who are educated abroad. They learn some terms and theories without engagement with the local community and graft what they learn into the Chinese community. They think they can lead the movement...the movement they are doing is their own movement, but not a movement for LGBT people...These leaders got funding from international groups, flying around the world, representing their work for more money and fame, to what extend it really benefit the community?

Knowledge of Euro-American queer cultures is unevenly distributed in China's public. While print media in 1980s, portrays Euro-America as a desirable land of material and sexual attractions, it is interesting to note, among all information about western homosexuality, gay culture and AIDS epidemic, radical social movements such as ACT-UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) which targeted at global expansion of capitalism, US empire and the neoliberal state were completely filtered out. The debut of western queers as sassy consumers, not social reformers, in China's 1980s paves the road for further opening in term of consumer culture. The sanctioned knowledge of western radical queer culture and politics in China seems to suggest the colluding of the Chinese socialist state and the western liberal state in promoting the market logic, in which queer subjectivities only can be allowed to emerge as conformist cosmopolitan consumers.

This belated meeting with Gou, which I wish we could have gone to sixteen years ago, has switch my perspective of looking at LGBT activism and China's queer culture. I started to turn the gaze upon myself as a researcher, an activist as well as a member of the community whom I do research on and devoted to empower and to reflect on how my changing desires and locations have shifted my academic and activist projects and methods. In this backward look, I see myself resembling Rofel's "desiring subject," who embraced cosmopolitanism and refashioned myself, but such desires also allowed me to reproduce various forms of violence that is rampant in current knowledge production, activism and politics in China's queer studies.

As feminist and queer scholars and researchers, who are we writing for, why and how? What it mean to situate our in the multiple contexts in which we are also politically and affectively engaged beings? In the following sections, I want to explore these questions by examining the AIDS capitalism.

### **The AIDS Capitalism and its Debris**

#### *Ray's Story*

I came to Beijing in 1998 after graduated from college in Heilongjiang Province. My first stop in Beijing was Dongdan Park. Back then cruising sites in Beijing were everywhere, the East Palace and West Palace, Chongwenmen-Taijichang "the Golden Triangle", and the Pony Garden... Many *tongzhi* bathhouses were around the Third-Ring Road too.

When I was hanging out at the park, a young guy approached me and started telling me about AIDS, condom use and HIV testing. There was a look on his face, like a ray of

sunshine that touched me for some reasons. I thought I could be like him and do something to help our *tongzhi* community. I volunteered to be a HIV/AIDS activist. I went to the park every evening after work, with a backpack full of condoms, leaflets and testing strips, for four years. I became a core member of the XXX organization and traveled to places in China to provide AIDS prevention education and to help build other groups. I felt like I was a pioneer who was doing something sublime to save the world.

In 2011, I came back to XXX organization as a cameraman, just for a “bite a food”. Its leadership had long changed and the organization had successfully transformed from a HIV/AIDS intervention group to a well-funded leading LGBT advocacy NGO. We often had meetings about strategies for the movement, funding raising and application, possible activities and etc. On the surface, these meetings run like democratic process where everybody has a say of the development of the organization; but I know compare to other people who are young, well-travelled and abroad educated, I am no longer the pioneer and my opinion does not matter much anymore.

### *The HIV/AIDS Economy*

It is commonly considered that the outbreak, spread and subsequent government interests in HIV/AIDS prevention created the most important opportunity for LGBT activism to emerge in the early 1990s in China (Hildebrandt 2012). In the early 1990s, medical doctors Zhang Beichuan, Wan Yanhai, *tongzhi* scholars Tong Ge, Fang Gang as well as many *tongzhi* networks leaders started HIV/AIDS intervention within the MSMs communities. With limited funding ranging from small amount private donations and individual savings to international donors such as the Barry and Martin’s Trust and the

Ford Foundation, these pioneers were able to run hotlines, publish journals and conduct research and survey on the condition of male homosexuals and MSMs. Not until 2001, the Chinese government did not admit that the existence of male homosexuals and in August it eventually officially acknowledged that country was facing a serious AIDS crisis and recognized the urgency to tackle the problem and set out policy objectives and strategies for AIDS prevention and control. Funded by the UK department of International Development, the China-UK HIV/AIDS Prevention and Care Project was launched in the same year. First started its pilot programs in Sichuan and Yunnan Provinces, the project aimed to develop replicable models of HIV prevention, treatment and care for high-risk and vulnerable groups in order to inform and develop the national policy framework. In the early 2000s, there were almost no established and registered LGBT NGOs in China<sup>5</sup>. To ensure freer movement of the funding and government surveillance of foreign donations, the China-UK project initiated a “filter model”, whereby international funds are directed first to the Chinese government. Government agents, usually the Center for Disease Control (CDC) or government organization NGOs<sup>6</sup>, pass funds to community based organizations. This model has been largely followed by other international funding donors in the field of HIV/AIDS intervention, such as the China Global Fund AIDS Program and the China-Gates Foundation HIV Prevention Program. Because of the model of receiving international funds—the Chinese

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<sup>5</sup> Most LGBT organizations in China are not legally registered as either NGOs or commercial companies to avoid government surveillance. Some organizations register as commercial companies such as Work For LGBT in Shanghai. By the year of 2015, there are only two LGBT organizations registered as civil organizations, including Shanghai Qinai, which has close affinity with and is obligated to report to the government.

<sup>6</sup> Such as the Chinese Association of STD and AIDS Prevention and Control and the Chinese Preventive Medicine Association. These organizations registered as non-governmental, but are consist of retired governmental officials, state experts and professional, and are cooperated with the government.

government is officially the “primary recipients” and its agency of local CDC is the second level sub-recipients, it is believed by many activists and scholars that the motive behind Chinese government’s participation in AIDS intervention is for economic gains(Hildebrandt 2012). For example, CDCs use the money to build their own infrastructure, expend local offices, hire more personnel and organize conferences, which are supposed to be sponsored by the central government since CDC is a governmental institute.

Putting the AIDS intervention under the motif of China’s health reform, for the best, the Chinese government was experimenting different modes of health system through collaborating with international funding, expertise and professionals; at the worst, AIDS intervention allows the government to shift the financial burden of failed health reform and to make profits from other channels of resources. China’s neoliberal restructure of economy started to deepen in the field of medical and health care in the early 1990s. Set in motion in 1994 by the central government, the agenda of the health reform aimed to replace state-funded health care coverage by commercial health insurance, local government, work unit and the individual altogether. To solve problems of low efficiency and bureaucratic management of state-owned hospitals, the government implemented a series of market strategies to cut resources and governmental support. The former public good of health care, in the project of marketization, was subsumed under the “service sector” in the market economy (Zhan 2013:79). To make up the budget cut and make profits, hospitals generated new services such as “special care” and “high-rank room” and doctors often prescribe expensive medicines and unnecessary

examinations to patients. The privatization of health care led to pricy medical care, low service quality, and severe corruption which significantly deepened social inequality and broadened class and rural-urban disparity. In 2000, the WHO no longer advocated China's health care system as one of the models for developing countries and ranked it 188 on its scale of "fairness in financial contribution"(Wang 2004:8).

The HIV/AIDS intervention in China had generated a vast account of financial and human resources. For example, from 2004-2009, the China Global Fund AIDS Program created 708 communities based intervention organizations; in the 2012-2013 annual report, 845 organizations and 973 local intervention programs were operating and about sixty-one million *yuan* (ten million US dollars) was spent on these programs. The AIDS economy, however, is at the cost of the LGBT community, people with HIV and the labor of activists. In the AIDS intervention, MSMs have been officially identified as a high-risk group vulnerable to HIV infection, along with intravenous drug users, illegal blood donors and commercial sex workers (Wei 2013). However, the social stigma surrounding homosexuality has made conducting effective intervention, education and care difficult within the gay male population. While many gay men, especially those with little education, experience a lack of access to HIV/AIDS information, the government faced difficulty in locating the target populations (Wei 2013). To solve this problem, the China-UK Project proposed the mobilization of self-help groups within the gay community by recruiting collaborators and volunteers in the gay community as "insiders". This model of mobilization, later termed as the "companion education" (同伴教育) has been the primary strategy in discovering, testing and confirming HIV infected

individuals and promoting education. Ray, Old Paris and Lao Peng are the “insider volunteers”. Many *tongzhi* volunteers, like Ray, are motivated in the HIV/AIDS movements to educate themselves and their peers, becoming one of the most important factors that the international and state AIDS programs have hinged on. However, their physical, intellectual and affective labors are often not given justified recognitions. Financially, volunteers are not registered as state employees who only receive little monetary compensation ranging from 400 to 1000 *yuan*<sup>7</sup> from their programs rather than given basic salary and benefits. Due to the filter model, these insider volunteers have no means to apply for programs themselves and no bargaining power with local CDCs. When the international donors first entered China, they sent money to local CDCs who identified several local organizations to work with. Over years, these local organizations worked hand in hand with CDCs and became monopolist in their regions. New emerging organizations and groups have no equal opportunities in applying for international funds due to lack of networks and professional skills for grant writing. They usually relied on programs assigned by larger organizations and have very little autonomy in deciding whom they work with, how and where to carry out their intervention activities. For example, I was told by an informant that the monopolist organization in the southeastern China region “A” threatened smaller organizations who intended to apply for the Global Funds programs independently by asking the local CDC to disprove the reception of the funding. The insider volunteers have basically become the lowest level “cheap” disposable labor in the HIV/AIDS intervention. The concept of “cheap” labor, however, itself is problematic. The continuous operation of the AIDS economy is dependent on the

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<sup>7</sup> The data is based on my fieldwork in 2014-2016 in Beijing.



physical, intellectual and affective labor of insider volunteers; yet the exploitation of their labor has often gone unacknowledged due to the institutional and discursive structure of the intervention: in the early 2000s, volunteers were usually young LGBT individuals, like Ray, whose passion for “self- help” and “help each other” is part and parcel of their individual and collective identification as *tongzhi*. When the AIDS projects initiated in China, international donors promoted community-based and participatory research and intervention, where the insider knowledge from the MSM and *tongzhi* communities were especially valued. However, their expertise was essentialized as part of their “nature” or being a member of the community, and their affective and intellectual labor was framed as for self-interest therefore justifying their low or none paid work. It is also commonly believed that early volunteers had received professional trainings, opportunities to connect to international civil society, and lots of them had become leaders in other organizational institutes. Thus the social and cultural capitals they gained overweighed the limited monetary compensation they received. This justification relies on and further reinforces an imperialist and colonialist logic of China’s lagging behind and seclusion from the “outside” world that also fuel China’s neoliberal reform. Nowadays as both the HIV/AIDS and LGBT movements have moved towards professionalization, inside volunteers at cruising site are mainly consist of retired, lower class and migrant *tongzhi*. At Pony Garden, for example, a volunteer usually works on a four-hour shift in majority of the year, conducting HIV rapid tests, sending education material and providing basic information of condom use, medical care and mental health assistance. Sometimes they also accompany positive individuals to the hospitals, picking up medicine for them and

giving care for sick patients. Sometimes they are invited to CDC meetings but they function as the token of the “community voice” and their opinions are rarely taken into consideration as the intervention model has been long established. However, the low compensation they receive is justified based on another neoliberal hidden logic: “they have nothing else better to do”. The insider volunteers are themselves old, unemployed or rural poor, in other words, the valueless litter of production and the economy. They are at the park at the first place and otherwise would not have a better job. For example, a CDC official told me that they gave Old Paris 400 *yuan* for distributing condoms at the park and it is what they can help to make his life better to compensate his 380 *yuan* social security. Under the kindness and good-intention of the CDC official, it goes the bleak truth of structural inequality: both homosexuals and lower-class people are stigmatized as the surplus of the economy and become dispensable. The transition from the state-owned economy to the market-driven economy not only failed to compensate people who were stripped from jobs because of the state homophobia, but also marginalize them for the second by exploiting they labor under the name of assistance and job opportunities. The state social security system also takes advantage of the “charity” of insertional donations to deal with the litter of the market economy.

In this context, can we reread Old Paris’s story of his name as agency of marginalized people actively participating in the remaking of stigmatized local cruising culture? Bali, the scar, is not only a physical symbol of the undesired and wounded body, but a reminder of a collective history when cruising was/is associated with social disorder, crime and disease. To be acute, Big Cat later added, Old Paris’ scar is not actually from a

wound, but a symptom of eczema, leukoderma or some other unknown dermatosis. In the early 80s, when sexual transmitted disease was under the category of Dermatology and Venereology in China, the mark on Old Paris' skin can be easily associated with signs of gonorrhea, syphilis or even HIV/AIDS by people who lack of medical knowledge. From the late 80s onward, transnationally sponsored HIV/AIDS intervention programs hand in hand with Chinese medical authorities started to target MSMs (Men who have Sex with Men) at cruising sites as part of the global AIDS epidemic managing, ironically leading to the association of bodies at the cruising sites with AIDS in the mind of the mass and further contributing to the idea of cruising site as a dirty disordered space. Old Paris' refashioning of the scar through the intercultural romance, on one hand, is an intentional purification of his own body, on the other hand, can be read as a resistance to such stereotypical assumption by re-creating the cruising space with romantic happenings.

Cruising site is also a space for masquerade. As many reflect, parks are seen as offering a stage for closeted gay men and transgender individuals to play out their "true selves" and get away from their families and regular social circles. Nicknames and alias, on the one hand, were used as a strategy of convenience to avoid police harassment especially given when male-male sexual activities were charged as hooliganism; on the other hand, they function as stage names. But it is also important to note, performances at cruising sites are often regarded as low culture and performers as "lousy" (闹). It is perhaps for the same reasons that Old Paris rejects his nickname "bali", the scar. Needless to say, "bali" reminds him his traumatic experience of police brutality. But more important, to Old Paris, the accented "bali" used by Hutong rogues epitomizes the

profane low culture with which Old Paris didn't identify — he was a well-educated special-class teacher and considered himself a “civilized and cultured person”(wenming ren or wenhua ren). The dislike and denial of “bali” can be seen as Old Paris' denounce of associating gayness with the stigmatized low culture as well as the internalization of such stigma.

### *Professionalization of AIDS Intervention*

Different from the AIDS movement in the early 1980s in the United States where community based social movements have shaped AIDS research (Epstein 1996), in the Chinese AIDS intervention, experts, relying on their authority, legitimacy and credibility, claimed a monopoly on the right to determine what is useful and effective for HIV/AIDS intervention and education (Wei 2015 :206-207). Although the donors urged to implement community-based reaction to the AIDS cries, local activists' ability to claim expertise, present actual needs of the community and revise intervention plans was still largely limited due to the complicated bureaucracy.

Another issue of the professionalization is that the government demonstrated an interest in accepting international assistance and, as it happened, donors were also interested in using assistance to develop “civil society” and “community-based” approaches to development. Hence, for a few years, the interests of the government and international donors both sought to create an expanded space for social organizing. The HIV/AIDS crisis brought both financial and human resources that local groups could use to get started, and the training experience gained through these donor-sponsored projects could also be used in other social organizing (which also presents potential threats to the

stability of the “socialist harmonious society” put forth by the Communist Party. I will discuss with more details in Chapter three and four). Many community leaders who were trained in the AIDS movement later become pioneers for the LGBT movement and they are well aware of techniques for funding application and akin to trendy international discourses. They adopted discourses of LGBT rights and later the concept of “SOGI” and have become the spokespersons of the movements. That is why Ray felt he was out of fashion and no longer had a say when he returned to the organization that he was one of the original members.

#### *Destruction of the Community*

When international donors first arrived China, they allocated funding according to the programs they set up. However, the Chinese organizations did not run like NGOs in the US or UK which have their established office and personnel. Part of the money were used on developing basic structure of the organization, including renting office, hiring full time staff and purchasing equipment. Many activists believe that the mechanism of funding distribution promoted corruption and diversion in a large degree.

For HIV testing, Gaga, a well-known HIV/AIDS activist pioneer based in Tianjin and Beijing, recalls,

back to the 90s, the method international funding used to localized in China is through compensation and reimbursement. For instance, when we draw a tube of blood, we received 60 *yuan*, in which 35 *yuan* is going to the person as compensation. Back then ID was not required and it turned out to be that one person can provide blood many times just for money. In the past when we organized activities such as dancing, discussions or networking—things to gather gay people together, people just show up. But now the first thing people ask is ‘does it offer money?’ It makes mobilizing and activism very difficult.

Another informant told me, when he started testing HIV, they gave the subject 30 *yuan* for compensation. But a new program funded by the Global Fund was able to offer 50 *yuan* per person and his group was forced “out of business”.

Lao Peng told me,

The HIV/AIDS programs have failed. The government invested lots of money but you don't know where the money has gone to. When international funding was here, there were lots of programs where you can apply money from. But the governmental fund works differently. Because of bureaucracy, there is barely money delivered to the hands of the local level. Every year on December 1<sup>st</sup>, there are outreaches of AIDS prevention, but besides that, you barely hear HIV/AIDS. Lots of young people tested positive but they even don't have money for basic living, let alone money for health care. Although the antiviral drugs are free, the examination fee costs about 2800-3000 *yuan*, how do these kids get the money? Most of these people don't have comprehensive health insurance because they don't have a stable job. I have addressed this problem at many conferences, but nothing has changed.

Lao Peng's words reflect his frustration with both the government and transnational institutions which in his eyes, failed to address issues of universal health care and poverty from a systemic level. What Lao Peng can bank on for social changes is friendship and networks that he accumulated through years of activist work at the ground level as well as other “hot hearts” of people. Lao Peng continued,

The head nurse Ms. Fu at You'an Hospital is a good person and very companionate. I often bring patients there and Ms. Fu helps them to apply for programs that reduce some cost for the poor people.

... ..

I am not saying we are doing a better job than the government. I just want to point out the gap between people on the ground and policy makers. The programs are good, but they are never carried out well.

Different from the mainstream LGBT movements in China that utilize media and privilege a confrontational method with the government, resistance and activism at the cruising site have a complex relation with the government, bureaucratic officials and the

police. They often cooperate as well as have conflicts with local governmental institutions and people who carry out governmental power. Lao Peng shared stories of how they push against the authorities taking over public space,

The administrative people built twenty-three rooms in the east side of park. We want to rent a room as our office for the rapid testing. Now we don't have an office, our regular testing location is in the pagoda on the hill. But it is cold in the winter, and it would be nice to have a room for us. We talked to the manager of the park and he told us there was no available room. I don't believe that because it is obvious these rooms are empty. They think we are doing dirty work and don't want to rent it out to us. They build these rooms hoping rent them out to people how visit patients in Xiehe Hospital.<sup>8</sup> I went there to argue with them, 'Dongdan Park used to be called Dongdan People's Park, and it was built by people's tax and supposed to serve the people. You use people's money to build these rooms, but rent for high price to benefit yourself!'

Although Lao Peng does not see himself as politically engaged with socialism, his negotiation with and critiques of the park administrators' privatization of public space is heavily drawn from socialist ideology of "serving the mass." Meanwhile, Lao Peng also expressed his frustration with the failure of socialism by telling me why he is not a Communist Party member,

I love the Party, that's why I don't join it. Look at what the Party has done to its people. Corruption and self-interests, they are not serving the people anymore. I have been doing what they can't do, and I don't want them to take advantage of me.

The ambivalent relation with the Party and the government is also reflected in Lao Peng's complaint with the local police station. On the one hand, activists like Lao Peng are frustrated with the authorities who execute the state power violently; on the other hand, Lao Peng also draws from the state authority, such as regulations and laws, to combat such violence,

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<sup>8</sup> Dongdan Park is near a well-known hospital in Beijing.

One day a new police officer from Dongcheng police station came here and yielded at us, ‘What are you doing here? Some hooligan activities?’ Some youngsters were scared but I came to confront him, ‘first off, the law says that homosexuality is not defined as hooliganism anymore; and secondly, let me educate you, we are doing HIV/AIDS prevention work. It is supported and encouraged by the state.

### **Radicality as Everyday Life**

It is important for us who writes about queerness to think about that the existence of mundane or non-dramatic resistance as a continuum between public confrontations and hidden subversion, it suggests a possibility to understand resistance as integrated into social life and is a part of normality, rather than something spectacular. Everyday resistance at Beijing’s gay cruising sites reminds us that resistance is part of the normal life of marginalized people, which poses important question of radicality and normativity.

In the summer of 2016, I went back to Dondan Park to see Lao Peng again. What greeted me was Lao Peng’s half joke, “I am begging alms now.” Lao Peng further explained, last October the Dongcheng and Xicheng CDCs decided to merge and to take more financial support from AIDS funds from the government. The government had a policy to establish more programs to improve the skills and competence of AIDS volunteers and turn volunteers to paid employees in 2015. Lao Peng was encouraged by the new policy and applied for 10% work load for 2016. The administrative at the new CDC also told Lao Peng their transition was smooth which allowed them to do a better job for next year. But till the end of 2015, near the Chinese New Year, Lao Peng and his group members had not received any funds for 2016 from the CDC. Lao Peng called many times and eventually was told that CDC decided to terminate collation with his



group without given any legit reason. “Although the support stopped, our work can’t stop.” Lao Peng was adamant, “One test costs 40 *yuan* and the annual goal is to conduct 6000 tests. That is not including condoms and lubricants we give out for free. Now we are using our own money and savings to buy testing strips. Sometimes we got money from other brother groups and programs. But I am not sure for how long our work can sustain before we run out of money.”

Lao Peng’s determination moved me as did many people I met during my fieldwork. There is an inclination to portray them as unsung heroes who live outside the neoliberal norms but also successfully manage their lives as if the existence of them is the proof of queer anti-capitalism. “Queer” has always been conceptualized as an unsettling mode of living that disrupts the normal. “Queer”, as Martin Manalansan puts it, is also “about the productive possibilities of people who are left out, displaced, or dispossessed because of their position within the landscapes of the normal” (2015). I would like to call Lao Peng and people like him queer as their living itself provide radical possibility to disrupt the normative order of neoliberal China. However, lives that are queer to me are normal to Lao Peng. It is his everyday life. As argued in Chapter one, the existence of queer life, whether in the sense of queer sexuality or anti-normativity, is the least queer thing in life. It has become queer and radical only to those who live in and are used to the normative neoliberal life, those who are privileged. The desires for searching for something queer itself reflects an epistemological privilege that allows everyday life being exploited for radicality. The conflict between desires for normality and radicality

will be further explored in next chapter which centers on the debate between China essentialist gay activists and queer feminists.

### **Queer/ing Connection**

I want to conclude this chapter by thinking about queer connections. A week before I finished my fieldwork and returned to the United States, I went back to the Peony Garden with Ray to have a farewell dinner with Old Paris and few other friends I met at the park. I ordered a Peking Duck to treat them. Old Paris did not talk much at dinner; instead he ate like a child. Ray whispered at my ear, “Old Paris likes it, he probably does not have much opportunity to eat such a good dish, maybe you should order another one for him to bring back home.” Although I had reservation about what Ray suggested, I did order another one for Old Paris. I also told him that my dad has a medical company and I can get him some free medicines under the table if he wants. At the moment, like the CDC official I interviewed, my good heart and my ethic contradicted each other. I got the opportunity to receive education abroad and gain social and intellectual capitals because my family was benefited from the privatization of health system. The privilege I have that enabled me to buy another Peking Duck is precisely the cause of Old Paris’ inability to afford it. At that moment, I could not think of anything that is more insulting than it. Yet at the same time, I could not help to offer what I can for people I care about.

When I first started my fieldwork in 2014, I was questioned by a young US educated Chinese queer feminist. She asked why I am still researching on gay men since they already had enough sources, scholar attention and enjoy male privilege. Now I think

I know the answer: we may carry the box of our prescribed identities; these boxes branded us with certain traits, characters and baggages, but we are also embodied beings who are shaped by our specific social, political and economic complexity, which I will further interrogate in the next chapter.

Another incident at the same day was that before we went to dinner, Ray and I walked by the HIV rapid test station at the park and we both did a blood test. Ray's result turned out to be positive. For an AIDS activist who started in the late 90s, Ray appeared handling the news quite well at first. He was calm and said he knew it was coming. He asked me, "Should I feel shocked? Is it strange that I am not even worried?" Then he started giving me a lengthy lecture about AIDS, CD 4 and CD 8 counts, the best timing to take antiviral treatments, and how AIDS is not a death sentence anymore, all those things that we have learned many times in the HIV/AIDS pamphlets. To stand in solidarity with him, I tried to act like nothing happened too, even though my heart was broken. He smiled and told me, "probably I will already be taking medicines when you come back this winter." At the moment, I didn't tell him that my field work was done and probably won't be back to China for a long time. Then we got on the subway together but chose a longer route getting back home. I was on my period that day and had a bad cramp from sitting on the cold bench at the park for almost the entire day in the late February. The pain was getting worse and I must have turned blue and couldn't straighten my back. Suddenly Ray asked, "Is it the pain from your lower belly? It is strange that I feel my lower belly hurts too. There is a pain I never felt before." I didn't know how to respond. When I think back what he said that day, I wonder if his comment on the pain in his own

belly-- the shared pain, imaginary or somatic, was a call for solidarity. Was he afraid that HIV will distant us and destruct our friendship and love?

In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004), Sara Ahmed offers a non-essentialist view on pain—she argues that lived experiences of pain is shaped by contact with others as pain is experienced as an intensified sensation that intrudes upon the surface and coherence of the body. “Pain is hence bound up with how we inhabit the world, how we live in relationship to the surfaces, bodies and objects that make up our dwelling places”(27). The pain I felt from the menstrual blood—the stigmatization of being a woman and the pain Ray felt from his own contaminated blood—the stigmatization of sex connected us in shared way of inhabiting the world through stigma. This bodily connection of pain, rather than pain in its abstract form, may offer more ethical way of thinking about the knowledge production of sexuality and queerness.

Next time I saw Ray in 2016, he got a lot skinner. He told me that the side effects of the antiviral pills had caused him many stomach problems and he could not eat much. He also quit smoking. He was a heavier smoker back then. In 2004, Ray started learning English and translated few books on male homosexuality into Chinese. He also spent ten years writing a book on the history of homosexuality in China. But because he has no connection and credibility in academia, his book was not published. I proofread his book in 2015 and couldn't tell him that the theories he wrote would be considered out of date and his methods were not popular anymore. I recalled what he told me that he felt sad when he thought he was no longer the pioneer of the LGBT movement. The movement has created desires and hope for him, but now he is the debris redundant to it. I saw the

same disappointment on his face I saw before. Yet I call him Ray because regardless his  
withered face, I still see a ray of sunshine on his face that he saw at the face of the  
volunteer at the cruising park twenty years ago.

### Chapter Three “Cool Child’s” Revolution: Queer Is as Queer Does

#### Knowledge Production of “Queer” in Post-socialist China

##### The “Queer” Battle (*Ku’er Lunzhan*, or 酷儿论战)

Damien Lu, also known as Doctor Star (*Xingxing Bosi* or 星星博士), is an influential columnist for *Aibai* (short for *aiqing baipi shu*, “White Paper on Love), one of earliest gay websites and later one of the biggest LGBT organizations in China. Despite being a longtime activist working on LGBT issues, especially HIV/AIDS intervention, community education and fund raising, Lu has become notorious in the Chinese queer and feminist circle because of a series of online articles he published. In “What is Queer Theory and How Does It Related to the Gay Movement”(2011), Lu contends that “queer theory is the product of the imagination of those living in an ivory tower” and propagated by Western and Western-educated critics and scholars. It has misled people to believe that sexual orientation is socially constructed and fluid; therefore can be changed. In other related articles, Lu further points out that such a position is dangerous and harmful to the gay community; instead, he suggests that the only way for gay people to free themselves from discrimination and self-loathing is to convince the society and the authorities that people are naturally born homosexuals.

Lu’s articles has triggered heated debates on and off the Internet, which climaxed by the “*Meishaonv Zhanshi Lala* incident” (Beautiful Girl Fighter Lesbian, or 美少女战士拉拉).

In the late 2011, an anonymous user named *Meishaonv Zhanshi Lala* (*Meishaonv* for

short below)<sup>9</sup> on *Sina Weibo*, a Chinese version of Twitter, posted a series of tweets targeting Lu as well as his organization *Aibai*. The tweets started with challenging biological determined accounts of homosexuality and accordingly introducing US-based classical Queer Theory; and soon turned to criticizing gay male privilege within the LGBT movements and unequal distribution of resources in activist organizing.

### Queer Is as Queer Does

I started to feel I was a boy trapped in a girl's body from a very young age. In my adolescent years, I spent a lot of time idling in online gay chatrooms, hoping to find people just like me. Some gay men got angry with me when they found out I was a girl pretending to be a gay boy and kicked me out of their space. Kind-hearted gay friends advised me to go to "Beijing *Lala* Chat Room" where "a 'P' lesbian like me" would be welcomed. My appearance in the *Lala* chatrooms, however, also pissed off lesbian members because they thought I was a curious "hetero" who threatened their space. For most people, it did not make much sense that why I want to be a man who loves men, and I could not wrap my head around the idea neither at that time. So I spent several painful years questioning myself and worrying about my inevitable pathetic destiny of alienation before I by accident ran into a book on queer theory in my later high school year.

Ideas such as "heteronormativity," "anti-binary" and "gender fluidity" were fascinating to me and provided hope for me to understand and accept who I was. At a time when Chinese LGBT activism focused on identity and rights, it was queer theory that saved me and became guidance for me to get by my daily frustrations. The liberation

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<sup>9</sup> Behind the registered user, it was a collaborative of several leading queer and feminist activists and young scholars. Although I had conversations with them in my fieldwork and maintained connection with them since then, they prefer keeping their identities withheld.

I found from knowing about queer theory, the joy I had from learning it, and the urgency of bringing queer theory back to China also propelled me travelling thousands of miles away home to the United States. I believed as it empowered me, queer theory will empower hundreds and thousands of people like me who suffered from gender normativity.

The adolescent desire for queer theory has turned to a decade long journey.

When I was doing my Master's on Chinese queerness and neoliberalism in Cincinnati in 2007, I started to translate Nikki Sullivan's *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory* into Mandarin. I hoped introducing queer theory would help the LGBT activism in China by providing it a leading theory that goes beyond identity politics, human rights framework or/and empowerment through consumerism. The Chinese academic market at that time was filtered through both the state and the neoliberal market, where an academic book on queer sexuality and the radical norm-shattering queer theory was both sensitive and not profitable. I contacted Damien Lu, who was a popular public voice in the gay communities, hoping he could provide some channels and networks for me to publish and promote the book. The response I received from Lu was that he didn't know any publisher and he didn't think queer theory should be introduced to China. As outrageous as I was, I decided to shift my research from studying Chinese queer sexuality to power relations embedded in how queer knowledge is produced and circulated in China. This switch allowed me to see theory not only as a product of academic research, but as Richa Nagar beautifully put it, "the activity of making knowledge" and a "medium for negotiating difference and power" (Nagar 2014:140). Trained in the US feminist and



gender studies, I was very familiar with criticisms of gay male privilege and was able to quickly come up with the “seven sins” of Chinese gay men utilizing theories and literatures what I learned. Such critical sentiment has been translated into conference presentations and academic papers, allowing me making alliance and standing solidarity with people who are in the same position with me.

Carrying the same commitment to challenge male privilege in LGBT activism and knowledge production, I started my doctoral field work 2014 interviewing people who work for gay organizations. As a self-sought radical queer feminist, I was ready to kick out their office door and interrogate on how they are colluding with “pink economy” and erase women’s experience. But my first several conversations with the well-known gay “villains,” (some of them are called *heiwulei*, or “the black five categories,” a lexicon inherited from the Cultural Revolution) have led me to rethink power relations in knowledge production. Putting aside the grudge I hold, I eventually met Lu and wanted to know what stories the “bad guy” can tell me. When I asked Lu why he is so against queer theory and what is the appeal of biological determinism, Lu responded with another question, “When a kid comes to you, hating himself being gay and thought about committing suicide many times, do you think telling him about queer theory, Butler and gender fluidity would help?” To Lu, telling gay men who do not accept their sexuality that sexuality is socially constructed does more danger than good: if sexuality is constructed, then it can be changed. This argument would fuel the practices of changing one’s sexuality, evident in conversion therapy still prevailing in China nowadays. If

sexuality is learned, it can be unlearned as well. It fits the prevailing misassumption that homosexuality is a moral deterioration and can be corrected.

Lu's response reminds me another incident in my early field work. In 2014, some queer scholars and I went to the Parents and Friends for Lesbian and Gay (PFLAG) annual conference in Guangzhou. PFLAG is well-known for their utilization of "born this way" to persuade and educate family of gay and lesbian people and for social acceptance at large. At the after party, a mother of a gay man came to me, holding my hand, and asked, "I heard you are a Phd student in the United States, specializing in homosexuality, so tell me if my son is really born this way. If he is, I will stop my worries and resentments, and just let him be." The heart breaking, struggling, but also loving mother, was desperate to hear what she wanted to hear from another so-called authority, as if the advanced knowledge from the United States I obtain is the Holy Grail to her family happiness. There was a short silence following her questions: some other parents stopped hoping to hear what the "authority" from the United States would say; my queer scholar peers also stopped to see how I would handle it because they were often put into similar situations. It was one of the most uncomfortable and embarrassing moments, not because I found myself speechless and my inability to give her an answer undermined my credibility; I felt impotent: my ten years of academic training and investment in queer theory didn't allow me to feel empowered and to empower others—a primary reason I left China for studying US queer theory.

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Queer theory has shaped my understanding of my identity as well as my intellectual journey. It allowed me a language to express myself and to rethink what have been taken for granted. It motivated me for pursuing activism for social change and provided me a tool to dismantle privilege and domination. However, queer theory, at times, also silenced me and prevented me from furthering knowing about and making a difference to the communities I care about. Over years, my relationship with queer theory has shifted as I have traveled, grown and situated myself in different geographical and intellectual locations. The discussion and trends in the field of queer theory has also changed dramatically as queer theory travels and being challenged and renewed by new experience, understanding and critiques of queerness. I started to get interested in how queer theory has shaped our understanding of sexuality, politics and activism; in other words, what queer theory does.

### Here Comes the “Cool Child”

Starting from the late 1990s and early 2000s, the field of sexuality studies and activism in mainland China has witnessed a proliferated desire for and investment in “queer” and “queer theory.” The English word “queer” is translated into Mandarin Chinese *Ku'er* (酷儿), literally meaning the “cool child.” It first appeared in two special issues in Taiwanese journal *Daoyu Bianyuan* (岛屿边缘) and *Aibao* (爱报) edited by cultural critics Chi Ta-wei, Dantangmo and Lucifer Hung in 1994. It was introduced into mainland China around the time of Da Juesi Conference in 1997 and gradually circulated since the early 2000s, after the publication of prestigious sociologist Li Yinhe’s translated

anthology on Euro-American queer theories. Although it was first confined to the academia and cosmopolitan activist communities (Engebretsen and Schroeder 2015: 4), it has gained increasing grassroots popularity in Chinese LGBT communities in the first decade of twenty-first century. In the early-mid 2000s, Beijing-based LBT/queer NGO *Tongyu* (同语, or Common Language) started translating and introducing short canonical Queer writings into Chinese on their official website. Besides my translation of *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*, several translated work including Butler's *Gender Troubles* and *Undoing Gender*, and were published in mainland China. Translating and circulating Queer Theory online by young queer/feminists has become more popular in the late 2000s as blogging and social media became more accessible and an crucial way for information circulation. Among all, well-known queer director Cui Zi'en's documentary film *Queer China, Tongzhi China* (2009) and her<sup>10</sup> controversial annual Beijing Queer Film Festival were among the most crucial, in her own words, to “fly *ku'er* all over the sky” (酷儿满天飞). The *meishaonv* incident opened this chapter is regarded by many activists as another landmark that has promoted the popularization of queer theory.

In this chapter, I use capitalized “Queer Theory” to refer to the canonical queer theories which best represented by scholars such as Judith Butler, Eve Sedgwick and Michel Foucault. Although the Euro-American based queer theory itself is a contested field, with complex histories, trends and generations, only a small part of the queer

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<sup>10</sup> Cui is gender queer identified and uses “they” as gender pronoun; but Cui also politically shares positionality as woman. In this chapter, I use she/her as it was a pronoun by Cui during the time when my interviews were conducted.

conversations and debates has been made popular in mainland China. A particular set of debates and arguments in queer theory, such as critique of hetero-homo binary, gender fluidity and anti-normativity made their way to and became useful in Chinese academic discussions and LGBT activism, while other theorization such as the anti-social queer thesis or queer of color critiques still remain largely unattended. My use of capitalized “Queer Theory” calls attention to the specific “canonization” and reduction of queer theory in and by Chinese queer theorists and activists. I use “queer” and “queer studies” broadly to refer to the diverse field of study of gender/sexually variant individuals, communities and cultures in China. I also distinguish “queer” from its Chinese translation “*ku'er*,” which I use in this chapter to emphasize its affective diverge from the English word “queer” and its specificity in shaping Chinese queer subjectivity and activism. I will discuss these words with more details in following sections of this chapter.

Coeval with the proliferation of “queer,” “*ku'er*” and Queer Theory in China’s LGBT activism and scholarly work promoted by local or Western-educated Chinese scholars and activists, interests in Chinese queer sexuality by US/Western based transnational scholars has also blossomed (Rofel 2007; Kam 2013; Bao 2012 and 2014; Eng 2010; Engebretsen 2014; Schroeder 2011 and 2014). Underlying the clusters of these scholarship and work by both local and transitional scholars and activists were two major questions: why China needs Queer Theory and Why Queer Theory needs China. As demonstrated in the first scene, Queer Theory represents something that dismantles male privilege embedded in the conservative theorization and tyrannical circulation of biological determinism. In the second scene, Queer Theory suggests some new

theoretical vocabularies and critical lens to transform supposedly more constraint categorization of sexual identities. In this sense, China needs Queer Theory to transform old, conservative and restrict paradigms and norms in both research and activism.

If why China needs Queer Theory is a more China-based scholarly and activist concern, Why Queer Theory needs China has characterized most recent transnational and/or US-based queer scholars on China. In the first decade of 2000, queer theorization in the US academic institutions has turned to the transnational. The desire to “destabilize ‘the West’ and fixed identities as site of origin and authenticity”(Eng, Halberstam and Munoz 2005:8) has driven many transnational US/Western based scholars on Chinese queer studies, such as Elizabeth Engebretsen (2014), William Schroeder(2014) and Ching Yau(2010) to contribute “an overlooked counterweight to Eurocentric, Western hegemonic frames of gay, lesbian, transgender or queer in Asia” (Wilson 2004?:1). For them, studying queer sexuality in China is particularly important, not because China is relevant “only as the producer of differences from Western queer theory” (Liu 2010: 297)—a method typically taken by Anglo-American Foucauldian queer theory according to Petrus Liu, nor because Chinese sexualities provide some exceptions that suggested scholars such as Chou Wah-shan(1990); on the contrary, “focusing on the Asian region and global circuits of critical queer activism and politics challenges Euro-American hegemony and pushed toward alternative reading of sexual modernity beyond Western conventions” (Engebretsen 2014: 10). To challenge Western centrism in queer studies and critically engage with anti-normativity—a central imperative in Queer Theory, these scholarships are theoretically and methodologically “attentive to the complex

negotiations of normative social hierarchies and bound, including kinship, alternate ways to live and think about queerness beyond identity regimes, and the regulatory regimes that shape marginalized life structures and politics in paradoxical ways (2014:9). The significant contribution of Chinese queer theory to the West is well evident in Liu's ambition who sees the "critical task in the coming years is to transform the signifier of 'China' into a useful set of queer tools" because "what is 'queer' is constantly expanded, supplemented, and revised by what is 'Chinese'" (Liu 2010:297).

It has been clear that the concept of "queer" has gone beyond its reference to sexual subjectivity and theories around sexual culture and practices; rather, the discourse of "queer" has come to be a battlefield for what the proper queer subject is, who best represent queer experience, and what theory and politics are qualified for guiding the study of (queer) sexuality and LGBT activism. In other words, these battles are about what is and should be "normative" in current Chinese queer studies.

To present a normative subject, imperative or method as the axiom in queer studies is surely odd to queer scholars and critics as queer studies first and foremost resist the disposition of "the straitjacking effects of institutionalization" and commit to remaining viral in the process of ambiguous (um)becoming" (Sullivan 2003: v). The thesis of anti-normativity has been central to "the political imaginary and analytic vocabulary of queer theory" (Wiegman and Wilson 2015:2). Unquestionably, it has governed the theoretical and methodological projects in the field of queer studies since its nascent years. It not only collectivizes the diverse work of foundational queer theorists, such as Judith Butler, Eve Sedgwick, Leo Bersani and David Halprin, but also

“underwrites the critical analyses and political activism of the field’s most important interactions” (2015:3) with other fields of social science and humanity. Although the attachment to anti-normativity is more explicit in the first question of why China needs Queer Theory, the question of why Queer Theory needs China is also motivated by the desire to challenge current norms in queer theorizations, in this case, the normative Western queer theory, research paradigm and method.

How does queer theorization undermine its ambition to anti-normativity through institutionalizing anti-normative imperative as its most normative and normalizing principle?

Many queer scholars and critics have engaged above question from different perspectives. Building upon these works, in this chapter, I want to further ask how the attachment to anti-normativity, even in the form of making legible embodied and nuanced experience of norm, has become a fundamental mode of thinking in producing *transnational* queer knowledge? To approach this question, I look at ways in which Euro-American queer theory is institutionalized and circulated in relation to other economic, political, cultural, affective and discursive processes such as globalization, Cold War imperialism and neoliberalism. Affect-induced knowledge production of Chinese *ku'er* and tensions in queer theorization in post-socialist China provide us a lens to understand how geographic struggles inform queer theorization. Motivated by a curiosity to “know more about the history, social practices, identities, discursive attachments, and political desires”(2015:1) behind queer normalization through antinormativity, this chapter seeks



to understand what queer theorization does, rather than proving an outlook of what Chinese queer theory is like.

More specifically, I start with a brief history of the introduction of Queer Theory in China to discuss the affective political economy of “queer.” Instead of being “at odd,” the Chinese localization of “queer” into *ku'er*, the “cool child,” is a production of and complicit with neoliberal cultural practices of sexuality. Grounding the two scenes I open this chapter with in complex historical, material and discursive contexts of the emergence of Chinese queer studies, I then complicate the presentation of the *ku'er* and biological essentialism battle as oppositional. I see “queer” as a contested site where various discourses, practice and politics of gender, sexuality and class are intertwined with questions of progress, identity, geocultural location and temporality. Finally, to answer the call for a “more dynamic and more politically engaging” understanding and approach to norms that goes beyond what “queer critique has usually allowed” (Wiegman and Wilson 2015: 2), I demonstrate a non-binary perspective in understanding how norm operates through the figure of “socialist queer spy.”

### **Affect and Political Economy of Chinese *Ku'er***

The translation and vernacularization of “queer” and Queer Theory has been a contested site where various discourses and politics of gender, sexuality and class are intertwined with questions of progress, identity, geocultural location, temporality and affect.

Different from the US queer discourse that is originally associated with pain, shame and hurt in long time repressive history of sexuality (Love 2009: 4) and loss in HIV/AIDS

pandemic, the Chinese appropriation of “queer” from its inception embodies a much brighter and more joyful affective undertone as it implicates a future-oriented optimism and political enthusiasm.

In the section titled “the Little Queer Encyclopedia”(小小酷儿百科) in *Daoyu Bianyuan* published in 1994 in Taiwan, the editors define “queer” as:

(one who) has homosexual inclination but is antithetical to the mentality of a gay man: queers are not subjugated to social norms; they would rather reflect on the social positions they are located in and their own behaviors, than minding whether they should abide by common sense, rationality or laws; they are not intended to cater to normalcy. If gay men are settlers with their feet on the ground, queers are nomads floating around... queer also can be translated as “freaky embryo.” Because the embryo has grown strong, showing its vigor of a cool and cunning young man, we translated it as “cool child.”(*Translation Mine*)  
(具同性性向却对盖族(gay)意识形态反动者:他们并不与社会温吞同流,宁可诚实思索自己的位置与行止而不在意是否合乎情/理/法,更无意对正常人示媚。。。。。。因此盖族是脚踏实地的居民,酷儿是漂浮的浪人。。。。。。queer或译“怪胎”。由于胚胎已渐成长茁壮,有酷黠小儿之势,故此译“酷儿”。)

In the 1997 edited volume of above two special issues, Chi adds,

.....because of the Chinese character *ku* indicates “the unruly and overbearing youth” in Taiwanese culture, the word *ku'er* is associated with the image of the playful, the rebellious, the juvenile, and sexual diversity.  
(。。。。。。由于“酷”一字在台湾文化中早有“年轻人桀骜不驯”的意味,因此“酷儿”一词自然也就予人类似的联想:戏耍的、叛逆的、青春的、性的文化多元。)

As the first quote makes clear, the creation of *Ku'er* is meant to be in oppositional to and to challenge the conservatism, classism and urban privilege of Taiwan gay culture. By emphasizing the rebelliousness, coolness and novelty of *ku'er*, such dichotomy of queer and gay implies that gayness is aligned with negative features such as “subjugated to social norms,” “abide by common sense, rationality or laws” and “intend to cater to

normalcy.” No doubt the self-made image of *ku'er* as a vital heroic social outlaw is enabling in challenging sexual normativity and in complicating and pushing forward the movements and activism predominantly based on gay and lesbian identitarian politics.

What behind such appropriation of the odd “queer” into the rebellious, juvenile and playful cool *ku'er*, was the desire to embrace a neoliberal logic in producing cultures of sexual novelty. Song-Hwee Lim(2006) rightfully suggests, the localization of “queer” to something cool and young in the 90s, was closely bound up with the marketing strategy in Taiwan. Lim remarks, “in an era when the publication market is saturated with new concepts and the word *tongzhi* has occupied a central place in the discourse of homosexuality, to introduce a novel, hot, cool neologism is no doubt a smart tactic.” (在一个出版市场饱和、各种观念充斥的时代，“同志”一词已经占据着同性恋话语的中心位置，要在夹缝中突围而出，翻译引介一个全新的、热门的、超酷的新词也不失为一个好的策略。性别与疆界 2006:82) Lim further points out, although “queer” claims to subvert the classism indicated in the word *tongzhi* and among the homosexual community, it itself represents tremendous class privilege:

To understand the “coolness” of *ku'er* and the Western poststructuralist knowledge traditions, one needs to have high academic education, be proficient in English and understand the development of Western social movements and theorization, as well as to be a middle-class with metropolitan and cosmopolitan backgrounds.

(且要完全体会其“酷”感，理解其源自西方后结构主义的知识体系，也许亦必须具备高学历、通英文、培西方社会运动与学术理论之发展，同时也具有中产阶级、都市化乃至国际化的背景。87)

... because the translation of *Ku'er* implies the meaning of “being cool,” it is said that the subjugated class is unable to afford playing cool.

(。。。。。“酷儿”一词隐含了“酷”(cool)一字的原意/译:在这层意义上,从属解释恐怕是没有耍酷的本钱的。88)

The figure of Chinese *ku'er*, the “cool child”—rebellious, punk, unconventional, unique, and sexual outlaws or even perverts, who self-regulate to exercise the coolness, to break from the conservative gay men and to participate in the market logic, is the opposite of the Western “queer” who is repressed. In this sense, China’s future is really the Cool Kid stuff—unlike reproductive futurism’s rejection of the queer unproductivity Lee Edelman articulated, the Chinese neoliberal futurity acts upon and operates through precisely the productivity of queerness. Unlike the Western queer subject who “has been bound epistemologically to negativity, nonsense, unintelligibility and antiproductivity” (Edelman 2007: 1?), Chinese neoliberal imagination of the future propels itself forward through the positive image of the “cool child.” Pursuing, utilizing and consuming “*ku'er*-ness” is the very site where neoliberalism’s promise of managing life is realized through embracing the internalized neoliberal doctrines and moralities.

Although the classism of *ku'er* and its complicity with neoliberalism has long been criticized in Taiwan, such a criticism has remained underexplored and even marginalized in intellectual and activist space in mainland China. This silence is due to many reasons, such as the lack of the gender and sexuality institutes in mainland China, unfamiliarity with queer theorization, the profit-driven and highly censored academic publication market. However, the most important reason of this omission, to me, lies in the fact that “queer theory in China” has been a site of power struggles. To make visible the contested site and to understand *ku'er*’s coy complicity with neoliberal sexual culture,

require a renewed theorization of how gender, class, sexuality and geopolitics intersect in post-socialist queer China, which I will detail in the following two sections

### **Privileges and its Various Forms**

While middle class male radical cultural critics, editors and writers promoted *ku'er* in Taiwan, it was young grassroots queer feminists who popularized *ku'er* in popular culture through mass media, as a means to fight gay male privilege and domination. As discussed in Chapter two, China's LGBT activism started as HIV/AIDS intervention when transnational capitals and organizations localized in China in the 1990s in projects of fighting AIDS. Since gay men are identified as one of the primary risk groups, Chinese NGOs focusing on gay men were the main groups that received international aids and sources.

The uneven distribution of sources is believed furthered the invisibility and omission of women and lesbian experiences and unchecked misogyny in LGBT activist movement that colludes with long lasting Chinese patriarchal traditions and social practices. At the Beijing LGBT conference in June 2012, Taiwanese queer feminist activist Song Jialun, also known as Mistress Shiye, took off her clothes and wrote on her body "Have you seen it? You don't see it." to protest against the ignorance of lesbian and female experience.

Scientific account of sexuality promoted by many gay activist organizations, especially *Aibai*, also has foil reputation among queer feminists. As Petrus Liu citing Cui Zi'en tells us, homosexuality in China was/is only recognized as an object of medical and psychiatric management as well as a threat to public health due to the AIDS epidemic and

the study of homosexuality is subjugated to medical and state pathological and criminal gaze. The pathologization of homosexuality in the medical field has led the academic studies to view homosexuality as a social problem in need of expert dissection. Thus, the beginning of the field of study homosexuality was defined by medical, sociological and psychological expertise (Liu 2015:37).

To read the first scene against these backdrops, it is not difficult to understand why Lu, the front man of the largest gay organization in China who received the largest financial support and advocates for biological essentialism, is seen by young queer feminists as sitting at the pinnacle of male, national and international patriarchal power.

The *meishaonv* incident, on the contrary, was aimed to challenge privilege gay men obtained and to address issues of sources redistribution in activism. Many LGBT activists I interviewed regarded the conflict as the hallmark of the rupture between gay and lesbian/queer movements and the beginning of strengthened coalition between grassroots queer activism and feminist movements.<sup>11</sup> It not only popularized Queer Theory but also promoted the visibility and reputation of some young queer and feminist activists who have become the backbones for the Chinese young grassroots feminist/queer movement, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4. Additionally, the nascent field of queer theory in China is seen as not only offering a new perspective of studying sexuality from interpretive cultural analysis, according to Liu, but also

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<sup>11</sup> The Chinese feminist activism and LGBTQ movements were separated because of their origins: it is commonly agreed that the HIV/AIDS intervention starting from the 1990s has contributed the emergence of LGBT movements while the feminist movements are connected to socialist state feminism and scholars in women's studies. At best, women's organizations often ignore the existence of lesbian women and their experience; at worst, homophobia was/has been a prominent phenomenon in many women's organizations and activist groups.

represents a struggle against experts who are also considered as the embodiment of the state and bureaucratic power which is patriarchal in nature. Thus, the victory of *ku'er*, led by “young grassroots queer feminists,” one of the most oppressed mass in terms of class, gender and sexuality, led by a “radical queer theory” (Ma, Huang and Liu 2015:26), has been seen as a victory of the most oppressed mass against representatives of patriarchy, state and male, one that deserves the most cheerful celebration.

This battle for Queer Theory in China put me in mind Robyn Weigman and Elizabeth Wilson’s observation that the discursive attachments to and political desires for anti-normativity has led to some methodological quandary in the field: the unquestioned, even privileged stances of oppositional and confrontational politics and conceptualization in queer projects—because the norms are constructed in negative sense, “the desire to stand against those norms becomes politically and critically irresistible” (2015:11). Since the normative is so restrictive and oppressive, the moral and political superiority of those who are anti-normative are granted in theory making and political engagement. The mechanism of how normativity has been simplified and immobilized in queer studies, to me, resembles the effect of a “reserved discourse” (Foucault 1980: 76): to promote the anti-normative, norms need to be continuously constructed in abstract and negative fashions.

The configuration of norm as “domineering social practices”(2015:11) and a “synonym for what is constricting or controlling or tyrannical”(2015:12) and confrontational politics grown out of it lead to an oversimplification of norms, from “a more capacious event”(2015:12), to rules, standards and coercions. More importantly, it

risks “dislodge(ing) a politics of motility and relationality” (2015:14) embedded in the system of norms. In doing so, the antinormative stances of queer theory not only stabilize norms but also generate immobility onto normativity.

What we see in young queer feminist critiques of the gay male normativity is how these critiques not only set up new norms, but immobilize a more complex and dynamic analysis of Chinese queerness and LGBT movements. While dismantling normativity and binary, male privilege, misogyny and other gender based inequality, young grassroots queer feminists fail to acknowledge their cultural, intellectual, ideological and discursive capitals. They may have no monetary capital compare to well internationally fund gay activists and gay men who are “pink washed” by consumerism, cannot be simply sidelined, but many of them are with cosmopolitan backgrounds from their academic or activist education and training in Euro-American countries. Some of them gain political agency as a political dissidents, which will be explored in Chapter 4.

Criticizing gay male privilege has been a Western queer studies norm and such a normative criticism has been utilized by Western trained queer critics in China with little contextualization.

The position one takes on Queer Theory has been used to distinguish one’s position in the movement. One’s affinity to Queer Theory has become a political and activist currency, granting them a more “advanced,” “radical” and even “morally superior” position; on the contrary, aversions, doubts or simply critiques of Queer Theory are easily branded as “conservative,” “backwards” or even anti-queer and feminist. This differentiation and “grouping” without contextualization and complexity is also furthered



through uneven access to means of knowledge circulation. For example, by 2017, two academic articles addressing the incident have been published in the North Academy by young grassroots queer feminist scholars. While these articles provide a critical lens to China's queer studies and activism, I am deeply troubled by their triumphalist narrative that equates the gay male activists as conservative and queer feminists as radical. These scholarly productions not only flatten the complex history and materiality of gay activism in China but also cater to, intentionally or unintentionally, a familiar and normative mode of queer critique in the Western queer institution which often relies on and fueled confrontational politics.

Above reduction reflects some epistemological and mythological plights in the transnational institutionalization of queer studies that limits queer researcher, critics and activists' ability to provide a more complex and nuanced pictures of Chinese queer knowledge production. Many queer Western-based or educated researchers come to China without reflecting queer theories' own tensions and critiques such as lack of materialist analysis. Their interests in queer China might be driven by what is "hot" in the academia and their first zone of contact for many of them is usually LGBT activist organization based in metropolitan areas. These observations are fortified in two examples in my field work. When I first expressed my research in gay men at cruising ground during a LGBT social in Beijing, I was questioned by a young queer feminist. She could not understand why I am still attributing my time and financial source to gay men, a group who have been overloaded by sources and attentions. Later I find the misrepresentations of gay men as either privilege consumers or people who only think

without their lower half of their body are not uncommon in both LGBT and feminist/queer activisms. Another example is during an interview I had in my return trip in 2017. The interview was supposed to be about governmental efforts to improve LGBT conditions in China, but my informant, a well-known activist in an influential LGBT organization, spent half an hour discussing how my research can contribute to the status-quo of LGBT in China. She made it clear that if I cannot contribute to the movement she won't accept my interview. Her reason was that they have been requested by too many scholars domestic or from abroad and feel overboard. Many of them write about China and publish in English media and academic journals without making any good to the community as return; often times, their depictions are oversimplified as well. Although I have different opinion on how research could impact communities, her concerns showed how the "hot" knowledge of Chinese queer is packed, sold and consumed.

### **Queer Identity?**

The appropriation of the English "queer" to the "cool child" not only shows the affective change, but also suggests a revised stance towards identity politics.

At the 5<sup>th</sup> *Renming* University International Seminar of Sexuality in Beijing in the summer of 2015 summer, young scholar and activist Stephanie Wang presented her research titled "The Development of Bisexual Communities and its Challenges in China." In her presentation, Wang surveyed pressing issues in Chinese LGBT activism and research regarding the invisibility of bisexuals, the struggles of local bisexual communities and political coalition with queer and transgender movements. In the Q&A

section, her research was challenged and criticized by several well-established scholars in the field of Chinese queer studies. Comments went from “the concept ‘bisexuality’ you used is too narrow to cover the scope of your work” (双性恋这个词 hold 不住你讨论的群体); to “‘bisexuality’ is still based on the logic of binary”(双性恋这个词还是基于二元分立) and to “I don’t find your research fascinating at all. It was discussed ten or twenty years ago, nothing new”(你谈的这个问题十几二十年前已经谈过，毫无新意). Although Wang contextualized how she uses bisexuality, addressed limitations and opportunities the concept provides, and discussed its relation to other commonly used words in Chinese lesbian and gay lexicon, attentions were rarely paid to her efforts to understand the embodied life experience and everyday struggle of people who identify as bisexuals; as the comments suggested, “queer” should be a better and more inclusive word to use.

The remedy to the “narrow” conceptualization of bisexual is *ku'er*, which better covers the diversity of Wang’s research. In this sense, *ku'er* is primarily used as an umbrella word to include sexual differences. To these scholars, *ku'er* promises a more desirable subject position of sexual diversity. Helen Leung contents this homogenization of differences by distinguishing the theoretical and political challenge to identity politics posed by anti-normative aspiration and “a proliferation of minority identities”(Leung 2009: 2). *Ku'er* used in the comments confirms Leung’s observation of a romanticism in proliferated sexual identities and expressions. Instead of criticizing the “narrow scope” of “bisexuality”, what the queer critics showed is a faith in *ku'er* to be more inclusive. This optimism reflects a neoliberal logic of diversity in the disguise of sexual differences.

Rather than expanding “bisexuality” to *ku'er*, the leading queer scholars at the conference ironically constrained the potential of queer to identities which queer studies claim to destabilize.

To call out the hypocrisy of Chinese queer studies and the normalization of *ku'er*, however, does not tell us much about the dynamics of norm. Instead, I want to take a close look of identity and identity-politics, the presumed ultimate evil in Queer Theory. Rather than arguing for or against queer objection of identity, I examine to when, to whom and under what situation it is enabling or constraining.

Although identity politics in US-based queer theorization has been unjustly torn apart, it still holds importance in Chinese queer studies and activism. Chinese-language queer study has flourished since the late 1980s as the end of state socialism and globalization have brought proliferated queer visibility in the public. Among all, a central debate that has dominated the Chinese study of non-normative sexuality is around the conflict between a unique premodern sexual culture prior to Western imperialism and a hybridized sexual culture influenced by multi-layered globalization. In his influential work on Chinese homosexuality, Chou Wah-shan makes a distinction between the traditional Chinese homoeroticism and the translation of “homosexual” to emphasize that “the notion of the homogenous, universal and gender-inclusive ‘gay identity’ did not exist in China”(Chou 1995: 22). Chou explains, “Even when sexual activities are categorized, they never refer to a specific minority of people, but to specific behavioral practices that can involve everyone in certain social relations”(Chou 1995: 23). As Chow

suggests, unlike Foucault's homosexuals as a "species", non-normative sexual subjects were never a "generic personality possessing a unique psycho-sexual essence."

The question of whether Chinese non-normative sexual subjects are a "species" with self-identification has been important to writing the history of queer emergence and politics. If we look at scholarships on various sexuality since the 1990s, either defined by sociological, medical or psychological approaches to the study of homosexuality (Li and Wang 1992; Zhang 1994; Fang, 1995; and Pan 2006) or later the transnational study of sexuality that emphasizes the globalization of LGBT through capitalism, intellectual institutions or international NGO network, the process of "naming" the homosexual, LGBT, *tongzhi*, queer and other categories of identity is crucial to each and all of these projects. It seems that only through naming, the queer subject is able to become tangible therefore becoming a political subject who are entitled to be protected and to bear rights.

Since naming is a political act that demarcates the contour of the subject and legitimizes politics, word choice of *ku'er*, queer, bisexual, gay, and *tongzhi* is about power. To normalize a word is often for the purpose of practical strategy in activism and movements. The increasingly preference of *ku'er* is an example of power relations in the field of Chinese queer studies.

According to the comments, the study of bisexuality seems to have no merit in a time when "queer is hot" (Berlant and Warner 1995). The "hotness" of academic trend is also a prism of the asymmetrical knowledge production in the North and South academic and activist institutions. Transnational scholars and activists often found themselves being the appropriator of knowledge travelling in different locations: in their location of

origins, they utilize the “advanced Western knowledge” to enlighten the local, in this case, the hot and more advanced Queer Theory, while in the North, they deploy “local differences” as their academic capital to counter Euro-American centrism without reflecting upon their privilege of mobility.

The comment on the obsolescence and belatedness of Wang’s research is from a well-known Taiwanese queer scholar, does his feedback point to the assumption that Taiwan's queer culture has developed in contradistinction to China? Does it regenerate a homonational sensibility that relies on and reinforces the logic of Mainland China as “backwards” due to political and ideological reasons, or is it a question of a queer aversion to China as the “colonizer”?

### **Theory VS Practice?**

Although many interpretations and usage of gender fluidity, social construction and Queer Theory by pro-essentialist gay activists (and feminist queer activist and scholars) are not exactly what Western queer theories, this misunderstanding cannot be reduced to simply male privilege. China has very different and diverse academic traditions and activist environment which structuralism, post-modernism and Foucauldian discursive analysis and genealogy may not enjoy attentions and priorities as they do in the Euro-American locations.

The triumphalist depiction of the Queer battle and the reduction of the debate into conservative make privilege, including US-based academic publications grew out of the debate, turned a blind eye to the complexity of history, turning people and struggles into

labels, standards and rules, borrowing Wiegman and Wilson's words, "generat(ing) much of the political tyranny they claim belong to the regime of normativity"(2015: 12). If we could critically reflect on the affect and desires embedded in writing about queer sexuality and politics, and in theorizing Chinese queer studies as a field of inquiry, by asking why, how, by whom, and through what ways specific knowledge is created, circulated and erased, we could open space for thinking about the opportunities, pitfalls and violence in transnational queer praxis and what it means to do queer transnational work in feminist ethical ways. Often times it is too easy for queer scholars to be trapped in our own academic narcissism and we are too busy criticizing the so-called normativity from an abstract position, forgetting that norms are often "more dynamic and more politically engaging than queer critique has usually allowed" (Wiegman and Wilson 2015: 2). Does the view of the "bad guy", namely the conservative privileged gay male, also deserve our serious speculations without being simplified as oppressive? Does simply occupying the position of "being queer feminists" exempt us from reflecting on our own myopia and privilege in knowledge production and granted us "genuine knowledge from the oppressed"? Those questions are unsettled and unsettling, however, it is exactly through these tensions in the knowledge production of queerness that we learn how to move forward and with the field of inquiry.

The history of how gay men have become the center, the norm and the privileged need to be further integrated before we reach to the conclusion that they represents conservative essentialist and science. The discourse of "science" and "democracy" has held a special place in China's modernization project. Since the May 4<sup>th</sup> movement in

1919, Chinese elite intellectuals have promoted learning Western-scientific knowledge as a crucial way for Chinese national restoration. The emphasis on science has also been a crucial element in the Chinese Communist party's articulation of socialist modernity since 1949.

Because the national emphasis on science, some gay activists I interviewed believe that if homosexuals are proved by science of being born this way, it would help for activists to make the argument of scientific normalcy thus pushing the Communist party to legalize homosexuality. Although not all gay activists are convinced by scientific method, many of them accept the idea that "scientific proof" can be utilized for political and activist purposes. To clarify, I have no intention to support essentialism and to ignore the problems behind it. What I want to point out, however, is the method of taking the essentialist stance out of its historical context and adopting a Western-based critique of essentialism is problematic. As Lu complains, although young queer feminists present themselves as the "grassroots" and the most oppressed, they dislodge themselves from Chinese locality and embodied community when involved in the online debates prioritizing the norm of Western academic queer study to Chinese on-ground struggles.

It has also become clearly to me that gay activists are well aware of questions of strategy and loss and gains in appropriating dominant narrative to meet their activist goals. Rather than simply assuming and supporting the authority of experts, they have utilized the culture of respecting authority and experts.

To better understand the role of experts and the fad of respecting experts in the medical field, I want to briefly address how the Cultural Revolution impacts the Chinese



society. During the Cultural Revolution, the normative social order and hierarchy had been largely uprooted. The once admired political leaders were prosecuted. Students could beat their teachers and children could criticize their parents and elders in name of fortifying socialist principles. These activities uprooted Chinese traditions that put a great emphasis on respect social orders. The chaotic years led to distrust in and destroy of political, cultural and familial “authority.” Perhaps the only authority that still held its place was the medical authority, since people still got sick and subjugated to doctors’ authority for treatment, care and survival. It is no surprise that doctors were one of most respected profession during and after the Cultural Revolution. Both emphasis on scientific research and the remaining of medical authority explain the gain of discursive power of medical researcher and doctors, especially in the early years of sexual disease, as well as the LGBT activism evoked by AIDS. Without historicization, queer critics’ reliance on Foucauldian analysis of medical authority in the nineteenth-century Victoria society falls short.

During the 1990s and early 2000s, as discussed in Chapter Two, transnational funding fluxed into China as the HIV/AIDS crisis was recognized as a global pandemic and Chinese government sought “insiders” in the gay community to promote interventions. Many scholars and local activists contend that this mode of HIV/AIDS intervention has subjugated community voice to expert voices. But the reasons are more complicated than the “evil privileged experts” narrative. On the one hand, the voices and experience of the community has been made visible by and through experts simply because experts are those who speak English as well as who have the knowledge and

common language with transnational donors and governmental officials. In the early years of HIV/AIDS, as well as later gay activism, the transnational donors and international NOGs promoted “community-based research”(CBR) a mode of activism that has been popularized and considered as ethical since the 1990s. However, according to one of my gay informant, nobody knew what CBR is like. Chinese experts assumed the mediators between the communities and the international donors and NGOs. Many experts were themselves gay men and many gay activists and community leaders became experts as receiving trainings and education abroad in the process of the movements. Their expert/grassroots position is not only more intertwined but also more dynamic. On the other hand, the gay community activists and leaders were actively engaging in educating the experts and governmental officials. For example, early activists invited medical experts, officials from health department and scholars from prestigious universities and research institutes to their activist meetings, providing them information, material and raw data. The purpose behind it was that they know these scholars, experts and officials need “unique” publications or political compliments for their tenure and career promotion; these promoted scholars and experts may one day become the voice for the community, in explicit or implicit ways. Through this mutual beneficial process of “planting seeds,” gay activists accumulated personal network, liaisons and some safety nets. Many LGBT activities became possible through these connections. Some of these experts have become national congress delegates who voted in favor of LGBT rights, who submitted marriage-equality appeals, or who have bridging the gap between queer community and the government and the authorities. In early 2017, state-owned China

Global Television Network (CGTV), the former Chinese Central Television(CCTV)'s international News channel, aired an interview program on lives of transgender people in China, focusing on the equal work opportunities and anti-discrimination issues trans people face. Although the broadcasting language of CGTV is English and it especially targets the international audience, it is the first time that the official Communist Party's TV media positively addressed issues of LGBT. In May 2017, CGTV also broadcasted a dialogue program on "pink economy" and LGBT rights. Activists have read the increasing visibility of LGBT in Chinese Party media as a sign of tolerance that fueled by China's desire to present itself as progressive in the international society. This progress was made possible as a result of the long time networking and relation building between the activists and the official and experts.

There are many stories in my field work that provide twist to the simplified representation of the *ku'er* battle. The confrontational politics make it difficult to articulate shared intellectual and political journeys engaged by activists. However, providing a different narrative still does not do justice to nuanced struggles as well as resistance, it does not satisfy a queer critique that sees its goal as integrating the operation of normativity. In the next section, I want to consider some ways of thinking of norm beyond the familiar confrontational method and politics.

### **Rethinking Normativity**

If Chinese *ku'er* is always and already "pink washed," privileged and compromised, how do we keep queer critically viral? Should we further tear apart norms as many anti-social queer theorist suggested? Jack Halberstam would argue for the need for "multiple

genealogies of queer histories” to engage what he called “radical passivity” through building the anti-social archives. Apart from Edelman’s “white elitist apolitical negativity,” Halberstam suggest to “fail, to make a mess, to fuck shit up, to be loud, unruly...” to achieve what he termed “a truly political negativity” (2004:?). Chinese queers are unable to afford the idealist faith in “fuck shit up” as the ability to fuck thing up is a very classed thing. What are other possibilities of “political negativity” that Chinese queers can embrace, or in fact, have been embodying? Why by far we have not been able to see or theorize it?

Vicki Kirby asks us to consider “why the center, the norm, the rule, is routinely accepted as a fixed reference point against which deviation, change, and singularity—the exception—must be measured” (2015:97). As almost all critiques claimed themselves as “queer” have shown us, the identifying label of “being queer” or “qualifying a queer critique” is realized through its “negative affirmation”—in terms of breaching and breaking with conventional claims of gay, lesbian and other identity politics. In other words, the super power of queer lies in its special ability to “rupture and thwart the oppressive circumscription of a norm by way of experimental possibility, a privilege presumably afforded the outsider” (Kirby 2015: 97). The thesis and method of “queer” suggest two underlying assumptions: queer is something exceptional as there is a readily identifiable outside; and queer is something phenomenal as it carries the transgressive radical power.

In the following section, I want to challenge these assumptions by examining the figure of what I call the “Chinese queer spy.” A spy is a ghost figure who infiltrates a

system and who is often considered as traitors; but a spy is not always a hateful figure: they mediate in different systems and political regimes, smoothing out political tensions and making changes otherwise unimaginable possible. However, the most important thing to know about a spy is that they succeed their task precisely because their work is secret and hidden. They leave marks intentionally or unintentionally. Listening to their whispers, we are able to trace them. The figure of the spy provides us a way to rethink the politics of invisibility and the dichotomy between the center and the peripheral.

During my fieldwork, a plenty of traces, hints and marks have lead me to believe the vast number of the existence of queer spies. As discussed in Chapter one, I was first shocked by the explicit sexual descriptions during the Cultural Revolution era, a time when sex was supposedly prohibited. In archiving popular magazines in the 1980s, I found a large number of articles addressing issues of homosexuality. Although they first read as methodical research that pathologies homosexuality, reading between lines show different stories.

Following these leads and signs, I eventually met some of them. I have talked to people who worked at state-owned enterprises, universities and governmental units, such as CCTV or Chinese Visa and Immigrant department. These people have promoted the rights and visibility of queer lives precisely through invisible ways. These encounters were what initially raised my interest in politics of invisibility that contradict with what we know about activism through confrontational queer theorization, method and politics. They are simultaneously at the center and the periphery, reminding us that queer activism does not always rely on the confrontational binary that so passionately taken for granted

by queer critiques. They are often closeted queers who challenge the epistemology of the “closet,” who do not have a recognizable face, and who do not claim their radicality. In other words, they are queer precisely because they are not the “cool child.”

The existence of Chinese queer spies raises methodological conundrum of representation: how do I write about them when they cannot be made visible?

In looking at Chinese socialist feminism, Wang Zheng points out a similar situation which I think deserves discussion here. She observes that Chinese state feminists in the 1950s and 1960s in the Women’s Federation operated in what she terms as “a politics of concealment” (2016: 17) in promoting feminist agenda. Since women’s experience in the Communist Party was often marginalized or trivialized, state feminists “learned to insert feminist items into the Party’s agenda in order to gain legitimacy and resources for action” (2016:17). By articulating their strong support to the Party’s central tasks, as Wang remarks, state feminists embedded a “hidden script” in the male dominant Party agenda to promote women’s interests. Although this strategic maneuver worked, Wang contends, the politics of concealment that “expressed both their marginalization in the power structure and subversive possibilities in the socialist state” (2016: 18) was accompanied by self-effacement and a politics of erasure. The remedy to the marginalization, effacement and erasure, Wang suggests, lies in making visible of early state feminists through memoirs, oral histories and interviews; in other words, a method of “finding women in the state” suggested by the title of her book.

The operation of concealment articulated by Wang is not unique to socialist state feminism and resembles the politics of invisibility acted out by queer spies. However,

different from Wang's method and commitment to make visible of feminist work and resist the erasure, I am more interested in different approach of understanding politics of invisibility as "queer spies" cannot be outed. It requires a different way of looking that sees the center and the periphery as non-oppositional and simultaneously visible and invisible.

Although I didn't know my queer spies' names or pseudo names and cannot quote their words, I can chart a map of traces, hints and marks they left for us. To read this map, we need a different practice of reading. In the following section, I wish to provide a starting point.

### **China's Queer 80s**

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In my archival work, I found an article titled "Homosexuality: an Unsolved Myth" published on a medical journal *Wish You Good Health* in 1985. It is one of few materials in print media about homosexuality in 1980s and was influential for gay self-recognition and public visibility. At the first glance, homosexuality in this article is described as a "disease," "against of the law of nature" and "shouldn't be promoted in socialist China." But when reading between the lines, it is not difficult to tell the author's antagonism to the pathologization and criminalization of homosexuality. Framing the issue of homosexuality as a "myth" also indicates the author's desires for further exploring the homosexual world. At the beginning of the article, the author shows her compassion by pointing out that the death penalty of homosexuals in many countries is "a cruel fact of oppression of the minority by the majority". Although "human sexuality is linked to reproduction", the author argues that "homosexuals should not be punished and

discriminated against due to their non-reproductivity.” She further claims, that “in the era of family planning and one-child policy, most sex has nothing to do with reproduction. The society not only does not blame it, but also encourage it, so how come on the earth homosexuals should be blamed?” In the later part, the author introduces several famous historical figures such Plato and Leonardo Da Vinci and studies of sexuality by Freud and Kinsey, to further justify “loving” and “harmless” homosexuals and distinguish them from “criminal-oriented, society-threatening” homosexuals who should be punished.

Similarly, the journal of *Report Literature* published a twenty pages article featuring life stories of Chinese homosexuals in 1989. Like above mentioned piece, for being “politically correct” at that time, this article describes homosexuality as “intolerable” “social threating” and “pervert behaviors” at the beginning and conclusion paragraphs. But in the main body of this piece, the author labors to detail stories of six homosexual individuals with a highly romanticized language and artistic writing style. He also shows tremendous compassion to homosexual people and expresses anger toward the ill and unjust social situations they face. More important, the author uses bright affective tone and positive wording to offer an introduction of homosexuals around the world, including literature, scholarly research and social movements. In his description, the world of the homosexual is inviting and saturated with desires and lures. For example, the author writes,

San Francisco is a blessed paradise for homosexuals. At the end of June each year, homosexuals all around the world who are hiding in the ‘glass house’ meet in San Francisco, show themselves under the sun, and hold the Pride parade. This extraordinary parade, attracting 300,000 participants and audiences each year, is a



city tourist wonder. The theme of the colorful march procession is like a pageant of outlandish clothes. Some participants cover their bodies by feathers and metallic accessories while others are nearly naked...

The author continues,

I believe that the modern China is open, humanist and should respect science. To the question of homosexuality, we should learn from the foreign experience and treat it with advanced morality.

In the first excerpt, the discussion of homosexuality reflects many conversations that China had with the world in the early stage of the reform, such as population control, non-reproductive sex, and despotism. Through introducing figures in the west, the author reconnects China to the outside world. Likewise, words choice and writing style in the second excerpt resembles many 'travel and tourist guides and TV programs in China's late 1980s, which it is not merely an introduction of the life of homosexuals in the west; rather, it provides a colorful picture of the desirable outside world, teasing the imagination of the Chinese audience. These knowledges of homosexuality that might be said contributed to the stigmatization are in fact shaping queer culture as the miniature of the cosmopolitan capitalist culture and queer subjects as the post child of consumerist-citizens *par excellence* that in serves of promoting the inevitability of neoliberal globalization affectively.

### **Ailanthus**

My first year as a doctoral student at the University of Minnesota was the time I started to think about questions of queer anti-normativity. From a die-hard punk radical queer to a scholar often framed by other radical "cool child" as conservative "fifty cents,"<sup>12</sup> I was

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<sup>12</sup> Conservative scholars who speak for the Communist Party

trapped in the questions of how to be queerly critical but also validating embodied experience of “normal life.” In a class I took with Dr. Naomi Scheman, a story of the Ailanthus tree she told has made a deep mark in my head for years. The seeds of the ailanthus trees are very adaptable and they often sit themselves under cracks of highways. At the first, nobody notices these seeds and never bothered to do anything about them. But one day they grow viral and collapse the highway systems. This story struck me because I often imagined the “queer spies” insides the Chinese government in very similar ways. What I did not know at the time was that Ailanthus tress was actually a Chinese import to America in the eighteen century. The Chinese name of it is *chouchun*, or 臭椿, literally the “foul smelling tree.” It is “fouly smelly” to Chinese not only because it smells bad, but because it is uncontrollable. Although the “queer spices” are “bad eggs” to both the system and to the visible “cool child,” they also hold the possibility of transformation.

**Chapter Four**  
**The Drama of Chinese Feminisms:**  
**Trauma, Cold War Colonialism and the (Im)possibility of Postsocialism**

On 27 September 2015, Secretary Hillary Clinton tweeted and commented on a *New York Times* news story about Chinese president Xi Jinping's co-hosting of the United Nations Summit Meeting on Women's Rights, "Xi hosting a meeting on women's rights at the UN while persecuting feminists? Shameless."

Clinton was alluding to the incident in early 2015 when a group of young Chinese feminists in Beijing, Hangzhou and Guangzhou were taken into custody on 7<sup>th</sup> of March that year, the eve of the International Women's Day. After the initial arrest and interrogation, several were released, but five of them were sent to detention centers. Later the Chinese authority broadened its investigation to many more feminist and human rights activists, which eventually led to the shutdown of several influential women's rights NGOs in China. The five women were finally released after thirty-seven days detention without any formal charges, but still remained criminal suspects since then by the state.

The traumatic event of the detention has generated desires for transnational solidarity, new forms of resistance as well as discourses of crisis, precarity and hopelessness among Chinese feminists. The year of 2015 is the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United Nations Fourth Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 and the detention occurred few weeks before the Beijing 20+ platform held in New York City in the late March. Later of the same year, the Chinese President donated ten million dollars at the UN summit to promote women's rights. The irony of these contradictory events invoked

tremendous fear, anger, distrust and disappointment toward the Chinese Communist government as well as activist commitments and actions to stand against the despotic regime. Young feminists spread the images of the five women and previous activities they engaged through Chinese social media *Sina Weibo* and *Wechat* as well as on global media such as *Facebook* and *Twitter*. Influential Chinese feminist scholar Wang Zheng at the University of Michigan sent out a petition link through academic listserv calling for transnational feminist support and solidarity. Many foreign political and governmental officials including Hillary Clinton and Samantha Power also stood up and announced their condemnation of the violent act.

The generative nature of the traumatized experience of the oppressed and profound suffering of the “Chinese feminist” is the theme of this chapter. While the exposure of the traumatic incident has increased the visibility and public awareness of pressing issues such as gender inequality, injustice and state violence, it also flattened the complexity of women’s oppression and resistance and eclipses the asymmetrical power relation within both the domestic and global feminist movements. The overexposure and commodification of “the oppressed feminist” not only fail to present, but also subjugated gender justice to colonialist and imperialist violence through creating the “celebrity-ness,” borrowing Eric Louw’s words, of the traumatized, victimized and wounded that renders embodied experience into nothing more than “figures,” even with the good intention for representing the oppressed. Very quickly, the “Chinese feminist Five” became a recognizable public face that best characterizes current feminist movement in China as well as the precarious condition it is facing. From naming the women “Chinese

feminist activists,” to *nvquan wujie* (女权五杰, feminist five exceptional heroes) or *nvquan wujiemei* (女权五姐妹, feminist five sisters), they are accorded the status of the “hero” and the “martyr,” transcending their embodied experience into legend that captures the story of the collective suffering and revolutionary sisterhood. The daily updates of their situation and continuous counting of days they had been detained<sup>13</sup> had hooked many young feminists and created a sense of “imaginary community” where these five women were not only suffering, but suffering for “us”—all Chinese feminists who are oppressed by the state violence. It has since then given birth to many panel discussions and presentations at North-based academic conferences such as at Association for Asian Studies and National Women’s Studies Association, as well as consecutive lectures and exhibitions in North America.

However, “collective traumas are reflections of neither individual suffering nor actual events, but symbolic renderings that reconstruct and imagine them. Rather than descriptions of what is, they are arguments about what must have been and what should be” (Alexander 2012:4). The political and affective labor behind making the figure of the oppressed but heroic Chinese woman is not unfamiliar in social movements. In this chapter, I locate the incident and the responses to it in the context of the ongoing Cold War at the moment of transnational neoliberalism. I ask how the Cold War thinking still underwrites feminist knowledge production in women’ studies and global feminist

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<sup>13</sup> The Chinese laws and regulations allow a seven-day interrogation at local police station and detention center without a warrant. During the seven days, the Haidian District Police Station and detention center gave out an unofficial warrant of *xunxin zishi*, meaning “making troubles and disturbing the social order” (see attachment 1), which allowed longer detention. Without a legal charge, the law regulate the detention should not exceed thirty calendar days. If the total detention of the feminist exceeds thirty-eight days, it becomes unlawful. Feminists tweeted countdowns of days via social media to monitor whether the detention is lawful.

movements through the psychic and the affective. More specifically, I started with examining how the complex relation between feminist struggle and the socialist state is flattened in dominant feminist responses to the incident, wherein the utilization of the traumatic experience of oppression and suffering reinforces the dichotomy of state oppression and grassroots resistance. This instrumentalization and commodification of trauma is facilitated by international media, reinforced by Chinese elite and global liberal feminists, creating a site where the overexposure of the “oppressed Chinese women” not only serve to perpetuate the Cold War mandate of anti-Communism but also to reify new yellow perilism in form of “the rise of China” in the twenty-first century. In other words, I trace how the representation of social suffering is mediated by social forces through scholars, intellectuals and activists. I am interested in what it means to use the discourse of trauma and how trauma narratives are frame and circulated. As Jeffrey Alexander points out, not all injury, pain and suffering become social and collective trauma. What trauma narrative wins out, is “a matter of performative power” (Alexander 2012 :2) and the effective performance of trauma narratives depends on “material resources and demographics, which affect, even if they do not determine, what can be heard and who might listen” (Alexander 2012:3). Rather than denial, repression, and “working through,” it is important to examine the power in making, framing and circulating narrative of suffering and trauma.

To make visible the Cold War logic within feminist knowledge production and politics and to address questions of differences, privilege, power hierarchy and geopolitical asymmetry, I argue for a post-socialist feminist critique to account for both

gender/sexual violence sponsored by socialist state and imperialist violence fostered by Western liberalism. On the surface, the traumatic detention of the Chinese Feminist Five seems to testify the Communist state violence against women and political dissidents, and feminist responses to the experience emphasize the nature of feminist resistance as radical; yet, I argue that feminist comprehension and responses to the traumatic experience and the traumatized is a prism of post-socialist condition in which the post-socialist feminist subject struggles to cope with the trauma of both Communist patriarchal state violence and being “othered” as Communist in continuous Cold War formation. To understand this doubling in shaping feminist movements and scholarship, I use affect, a subjective expression of desire, feeling and emotion that is conditioned by social, cultural and discursive differences, as an analytical tool to examine the ambivalent conditions of Chinese feminisms in the late 1980s and early 1990s, as responses to both the failure of socialist state-sponsored women’s liberation and problems of the turn to liberal feminism. I argue Chinese feminisms turn to embrace liberalism is a symptom of failure to cope with the comprised socialist gender liberation and it is an affective responses to ideological Othering. The troubled relation with the failed socialism lurks current feminist movements and politics of representation. I call for a different method to address what I call the “dark matter” of socialism by concluding with the concept of “playing” exemplified in the coy dubbing in Wang Zheng’s current writing.

### **The Incident and its Multiplicity**

On March 9<sup>th</sup> 2015, two days after Chinese feminist activists were arrested by the police, I was interviewing a colleague of Wei Tingting, one of the arrested feminists, at a restaurant in Beijing. He told me that the organization they both worked at closed temporarily to avoid police investigation and harassment. Several emergent meetings around how to rescue the women had been called up by their organization and activists at the meetings debated over whether this incident was just a routine round-up before “*lianghui*,” the annual plenary meetings of the National People’s Congress and the National Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, or it was a sign of the intensification of governmental discretion of foreign sponsored NGOs. The government began to further scrutinize and exercise surveillance over NGOs and foreign funded civil societies around the year of 2014, when feminist and LGBT activists started to find themselves more frequently “invited for a cup of tea,” a sarcastic expression that refers to being called upon and questioned by the national security authority or local police. With years of experience doing guerrilla activist and advocate work within China’s authoritarian system, these activists have developed a set of strategies to carry out their work, utilizing personal *guanxi*(networking), looking for “internal” alliance in the authority, bridging the government and the civil society, and testing and pushing the state limit imposed by the state. The tension between the civil society and the representatives of state power, such as the police and national security agents, often varies depending on the larger political climate, current governmental policies as well as differences at the personal level. Wei Tingting, a twenty-something young urban woman, according to my informant, had good relations with the local police. She is well educated,



well mannered, and good at utilizing her social skills and personal charisma to “play” with those who are in power and to smooth out the tensions between her NGO and the authorities. I was told that a picture of Wei Tingting smoking cigarette with the police at the police station was tweeted on Chinese social media *Sina Weibo* thus suggesting the ambivalent relation and “gaming” between the often presumed oppositional positions—the state and its oppressed people.

Meanwhile I was also invited to an online group on a chatting client, a secured foreign cellphone app that allows activists and political dissidents to communicate and organize activities without subjugating to the Chinese Internet surveillance. At the early stage, one of the debates among activists I observed was whether this incident should be elevated to the international level and whether feminists should utilize international media and source to pressure the government. Some activists expressed concerns that international pressure would escalate the tension between the government and civil society and turn feminist and LGBT activists into political dissidents. On the one hand, it might worsen the situation of the arrested young women, leading to harsher treatment at the detention center; on the other hand, it may make “feminism” a sensitive subject, breaking the “unhappy but still working marriage” between feminism and the state. What the government really fears, according to this side of opinion, is the Western governments’ ability of using NGOs to mobilize civil societies for democratic “color revolutions,” a “foreign hand” evident in the recent political tumult in Ukraine, Egypt and Hong Kong. They pointed out that the reason some of the arrested activists were released after short interrogation while the other five were sent to detention was because these five

were believed to have the ability and network to mobilize the mass, based on the records of activities they have organized previously. To call for help from the international civil societies and foreign governments, is no doubt to expose current feminist movement and prove the point for the government. Yet these voices were called out and accused of being complicit with the oppressive state, feeding into the continuous expansion of state violence under the name of national security and social stability. On the contrary, some feminist activists hold that the state is the ultimate embodiment of patriarchal power and the detention is an example par excellence of patriarchal oppression executed by the state. To dismantle patriarchy, feminists must dismantle the state. These radical claims of uprooting the state as means of women's liberation are also strongly opposed for taking revolutionary violence for granted without considering realistic situations and over simplifying the relation between the state and its people. They are also questioned for their personal motives behind it, such as taking advantage of being political dissidents from China to gain immigrant status as political refugee in so-called developed countries, especially in the United States of America, and become Western sponsored "celebrities" because of their oppositional position to the Chinese government. A majority of the feminist activists in the chatting group I observed advocated for a "painting with two brushes" strategy-- utilizing both international sources and support and their "internal" connections to archive the goal of rescuing the five women.

Around the rescue of the arrested, feminist activists utilized various creative strategies. While some rallied in front of the police station holding signs such as "release the Five Sisters," others raised funds and sent the money to the detention center so that

the arrested could buy better meals and toiletries. Social media became an important means to spread the words and make the incident visible to a broader audience, both domestic and international. Responding to Wang Zhang's call for solidarity, feminists around the world signed the petition. Young grassroots feminists in China wore masks of the faces of arrested five on streets to show that feminists will not disappear because of the arrest and their pictures were spread through social media to call for broader social awareness of the incident and support. An interesting example that shows the multiplicity and ambivalence of the mechanism of the public, the state and feminist movement is that the detention was also reported on print media *Huanqiu Shibao*, or *Global News*, a high coverage mainstream newspaper sponsored by a major Communist Party news publisher. Although the author defended the state by describing the incident as "disturbing social order" and urged young feminists to carry out their activities within the compound of laws, it brought the incident to a larger audience including citizens of different classes, age and social-geographical locations who may not have access to social media, especially mainland prohibited Facebook and Twitter, or who has no affinity with the young feminist circles.

Although various opinions had been voiced out at the different stage of the incident, they were not equally treated in the movements. For example, people who advocate for a "cooperative" mode of resistance are easily regarded as anti-feminism or political incorrect. They find themselves attacked by influential feminist leaders, marginalized by the movements or labeled as *wumao* (fifty cents), an expression that

refers to public scholars who speak for and on behalf of the Communist Party.<sup>14</sup> In contrast, radical voices that are demagogic are given more currency and more politically mobilizing. The variously weighted political agency and strategies are reflections of the complex political and activist landscape of post-socialist feminism in China, where affect, history and power intersect. However, such a complexity often does not make its way to representation and feminist politics. The dominant representation of the incident and women's oppression often fail to represent the multiplicity of responding to the incident and diverse strategies of negotiating with the state. How did this failure happen?

In the following section, I shall discuss how our representations of the oppressed women by the state and feminisms in China are limited by the Cold War logic. I will look at how both global media and Chinese feminist activism reinforce the dichotomy between state oppression and grassroots resistance.

### **The Spectacular of the Oppressed: Ongoing Cold War in Representation**

*The Daily Mail* is among one of the first Western media reporting the incident of the detention. On its 7 March 2015 essay, the journalist writes, “(A)ccording to another Chinese activist, Li (one of the arrested women, my note) was planning to hold a demonstration on Sunday to protest sexual harassment of women aboard public transportation.”<sup>15</sup> The activity the feminist activists were planning involved putting small stickers of anti-sexual harassment on Beijing's subways and buses. However the miswording of *The Daily Mail* hyped the event to “demonstration” and “protest,” which

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<sup>14</sup> The phrase comes from the rumor that when a scholar writes an article or uploading a post praising the Party, the Party gives them fifty cents as rewards.

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/afp/article-2984026/China-detains-feminists-ahead-Womens-Day.html>

drew significantly more attraction of readers who are accustomed to the imagination of a totalitarian China. If what the feminists planned was demonstration and protest without a governmental permit, the government would have had the legal right to cancel the activity or arrest the protestors because unregistered and unapproved demonstration and protest is unlawful in China. Whether the government's rules and regulations can be justified is one thing, to report China's case with a universalist or Western democratic standard is another. But in this case, the reporter first misunderstood the activity and second dismissed more complex context of the arrest. This mistake is rooted in a long history of the Cold War of representing the Communist Other.



(Figure 3: Stickers for Feminist activities)

If the miswording reflects the ignorance of Chinese specificity, the picture the article chose is no doubt intentionally provoking. In the middle of the lines, a photo of two solemn sentinel guards patrolling at the *Tian'anmen* Square is inserted. This picture, borrowed from a social media account of a Westerner living in China, was taken on 6

November of 2012, a date that is dissociative with the current incident. However, the image of the soldiers against the background of the portrait of Chairman Mao immediately put us in mind the 1989 *Tian'anmen* political upheaval, an event best captures the Western imagination of the Communist totalitarian Other. The juxtaposition of the image and the story of innocent and oppressed female/feminist body and the suggested connection between two traumatic moments evoke a feeling of compassion for the victimized and a sense of morality that stirs once to seek justice by acting against the state. Rather than simply reporting the incident, what the article shows is how the over-exposed Chinese woman has become a site on which viewers could access the trauma of the Communist past and the effect of this trauma on the misery of the present. What the representation does here is not only visual but also psychological and affective. What we see is how the Cold War continues to dictate how knowledge is produced through a visual-psychic way. The effect of such a representation on post-socialist subject is complex—on the one hand, the western/global media made state violent visible, on the other hand, the continuous othering embedded in such representations shapes post-socialist subject as inferior and forecloses possibilities to develop a more nuanced language to address connections to socialism. Ironically, this oxymoron is often reinforced by feminist activisms.



(Figure 4: a photo by Sina account “Westerner living in China” was taken on 6 November, 2012)

Politics of Visibility: A Double Edge Sword



# #FreeTheFive



(Figure 5 and 6: online poster for “Free the Feiminist Five”)





(Figure 7: Chinese activists wearing masks of the arrested feminists)

Feminist and Women's movements has long learned that representing the invisible and the marginalized is key to empowerment and social justice. Especially in the era of hyper mediation, images and visualization of marginalized and oppressed women can be powerful tools to achieve political and activist goals. After the arrest, young feminists in China collaged the five women's headshots, created avatars for them, and wore masks of faces of the five women to demonstrate in public space. These images were circulated online via social media and many NGOs website to call for international support. The streamlined pictures of their faces and Warholesque carton images remind us Deleuze and Guattari's concept of faciality (1977;1987) -- a public face that brands the self as the private property of the bounded individuals, making it recognizable, consumable and profitable. The production of public faces, as Rosi Braidotti remarks, is a site for producing normativity and privilege, where dominant cultural and political codes are

allocated into the “right” image excluding nuanced differences. In other words, “a face is a landscape of power”( Braidotti 2014:7). Although Braidotti refers to the making of the public face as a mode of capitalist domination, feminist movement is not immune to the process.

The mask allows connections between the recognizable public faces and anonymous masses and facilitates an imaginary transposition between the symbolic body of oppressed Chinese feminism and the individual feminist bodies. On the one hand, the mask is like a super hero costume a Chinese feminist can put on and become the super woman who fight and suffer for all; on the other hand, the five feminists are de-subjectivatized and become nothing more than the face of Chinese feminism. The commodification of the faces fulfils “both a psychic and a social function”( Braidotti 2014:10) interpellating the individual feminists to identify with the dominant feminist icons abstracted from the embodied experience.

The pitfalls of commodifying and re-appropriating female and oppressed bodies for political purposes is warned by Sara Banet-Weiser (2014) who make a distinction between “politics of visibility” and “economy of visibility.” Although feminists predominant criticize “economy of visibility” for subjugating women to commercial exploitation (Keneva and Ibroscheva 2014), I shall emphasize the perspective of political and ideological exploitation in the following section.

In both examples of the *Daily Mail* and Chinese grassroots Feminist social media presentation of the incident, the over-exposure of the images ensures that the incident/past will be repeated instead of remembered. For the readers and viewers, the

very act of tweeting functions as self-affirmation and self-admiration of participating the event. The trauma is transformed into a contractual obligation to congratulate and reward ourselves, in this case, as wounded feminists. It also reminds us what Sigmund Freud's conceptualization of trauma as a myth outside of historical time. The Feminist Five, like the 1989 incident, now become an iconic image we can use whenever we want to discuss the state oppressed feminism. Reframing Freud words, it exists in the present, insinuating itself into the current moment in place of any immediately experience. Our own experience and vision is blocked by a kind of memory that is not a recollection but a repetition.

### **Cold War in Feminist Knowledge Production**

The representation of the oppressed Third World women who need to be saved is not an unfamiliar topic in feminist critiques. Produced by Third World nationalists, global liberal feminists and domestic feminist elites, the Third Women is a gendered map of power relation in intertwined processes of colonialism, nationalism and globalization. As Chandra Mohanty famously argues, the monolithic and universalizing production of the Third World women functions to maintain the superiority of the First World women. However, the post-colonialist and transnational critiques of homogenization of the Third World are inadequate to account for the ambivalent condition of post-socialist experience as the Cold War geopolitics is often sidelined and displaced by globalization and anti-colonialism. Let me further explain this point from the following three aspects.

*Western Feminist Production of the “Global Women” and the Omission of the Post-socialist*

In the 1950s, feminist movements in the United States were intertwined with anti-War, Civil Rights and Homophile movements. Although it was a time before “intersectionality” was termed, the movements were overlapped in dismantling capitalism as the common cause of oppression and injustice. The intersected feminist movements, however, became significantly split in the 1970s when neoliberal restructuring was implemented in the US to revive and advance capitalism. US-based liberal feminism, predominantly white and middle class, turned to primarily targeting patriarchy, which is captured in the rhetoric of gender war, when multi-layered oppressions were reduced to gender oppressions. The coeval occurrence of nascent neoliberalism and the reduction in liberal feminism leads to a speculation: the proliferation of liberalism feminism is resulted by global capitalism in forms of neoliberalism since capitalism is no longer framed as the common enemy of radical movements. Liberal feminism’s complicity with the rise of neoliberalism and new forms of colonialism and imperialism has been criticized by many. One of prominent example is the production of the Third World women and the arrival of the phenomenon of globalizing women.

From 1976 to 1985--the United Nations Decade for Women successfully sponsored a series of world conferences on women and its parallel nongovernment organization meetings.

Accompany with the trend of emphasizing women on the global level, the notion of a politics of location become crucial in globalizing women’s studies (Hawkesworth 2006).

Third-world feminism in the United States in the 1980s started to challenge the idea that there was a singular or stable female subject of feminism. At the same time, women of color feminists in the United States started to connect their struggle with third world feminism to challenge the US hegemony, when “US foreign policies that were integral to neocolonial and nondemocratic arrangement in the Latin American, Africa and Southeast Asia were mirrored in the U.S domestic welfare and law enforcement policies that maintained racial and class hierarchies”(2011, 840-841). However, the method of challenging the US centric focus of women studies in the 80s and early 90s often resulted in a first/third world dichotomy. As a result, according to Jennifer Suchland, the most common formula of the globalizing women in the US based women’s studies, is one that equates global women to the Third-world and global South women. In this formula, the post-socialist woman is subjugated to either the First world or the Third World. Suchland points out a tendency after the end of the Cold War that the former three-world metageopolical division collapsed into two. The Second world is considered as either being westernized and acceding to the First, or descending to the Third. During the Cold war, the Third world is associated with anticolonial and critical of the West, while dissident voice from the Second world were understood as opposing to Communist totalitarianism and presumed to be pro-Western. With the end of the Cold War, post-colonial and third world critiques were left to challenge neoliberal globalization while former socialisms were left to deal with the normalizing process of democratization and assimilation to the globalization.

In China's case, we see how "Chinese women" play various roles in intertwined discourses. In western feminist imagination, the Chinese woman is often seen as the Third World woman who occupies a formulated place. Like the Muslim woman who is oppressed by patriarchy in terms of gendered religion, the Chinese women are oppressed by the communist ideology and the socialist state. Accompany with this Cold War logic, it is feminists' own representation of women as oppressed by the state, which is exemplified in examples in the above section. But the reality is far more complicated. China does not fit in neatly the first/third world dichotomy given its socialist history and present capitalization and Chinese feminists do not necessarily see themselves as the Third World women even though the Third World status is often utilized in China's political discourses and Chinese feminist struggles. In the following section, I shall trace the affect and tensions in Chinese feminism since the 1980s.

#### The Affect of Chinese Feminisms and its Complexity of Neoliberalism

In 1992, Li Xiaojiang, a Chinese woman who single-handedly pioneered the discipline of women studies (*funv yanjiu*) in China in the 1980s, was invited to a conference on Chinese feminism at Harvard University. At the conference, Li disputed the Western feminist assumptions by pointing out two myths of Chinese women created by American women's studies scholars. According to Li, the first myth is "women's liberation in the 1950s." In the 1950s, the socialist state instituted equality between women and men through the 1950 Marriage Law and the 1954 Chinese Constitution, legally granting women equal rights in all social and political spheres (Yang in Shih). To guarantee the

enactment of women's economic, political and cultural and educational rights, the state established the Women's Federation and its branches at grassroots level (Shih 2012). Compare to their Western counterparts who still struggled for rights to work and equal pay, the state granted equality for Chinese women marked their "advanced" status in social equality. This equality, however, Li contended, is idealized by Western feminists such as Betty Friedan and Julia Kristeva, who dismissed the condition such as women's heavy burden of social and domestic labor.

The myth of Chinese women as "forerunners" was deconstructed by the myth of "double oppression," Li remarked, as Western feminists gained access to China after the 1978 reform. They see Chinese women as oppressed by both patriarchal family traditions and the undemocratic and underdeveloped socialist state.

Li's critique of both myths resembles what I would call "post-socialist feminist critique" in which Li addresses both the socialist state patriarchy in terms of a unique form of sexism and the "othering" process of socialist women under Western eyes. However, what puzzles me is that most of Li's writings in the 1990s interrogated the first but reinforced the second. In the early 1990s, Li as well as a group of emerging Chinese feminist writers and scholars, made it clear that the state-led gender equality inherits a male dominant logic, in which women's equality is framed in terms of women's sameness to men therefore degendering women and depriving them of their gender difference and femininity. To break free from the dictate of socialist state, Li and others further advocated for self-discovery and self-consciousness in order to search for women's subjectivity (*funv zhutixing*). The women's rediscovery of subjectivity, however, as Shu-

mei Shih points out, is framed in terms of “a strong refeminization drive among urban women, who were freshly incorporated into the politics of femininity in global capitalism, celebrating their newfound femininity with flair” (2005: 83-84). It seems to suggest that “after a detour in history through anti-imperialist socialism, China in the post-Mao era has seemingly reentered the global arena and been subjected to a renewed teleological narrative of capitalist development and modernity within which Western liberal feminism is situated (Shih 2005: 84). Although Li admitted the problems of regendering women such as commodification of women and capitalist exploitation, she insisted that women are liberated and reconnected to their gender by being given more choices and subjectivity than under state sponsored liberation.

It is not difficult to notice that the time when Li was writing was also the time when Mohanty’s famous essay “Under Western Eyes” rocked the field of Western women’s studies in US. While the Third World feminists in the West challenged the global liberal feminism, Chinese feminists demonstrated an affinity to it. Instead of positioning itself as in solidarity with the Third World women to disrupt imperialism in form of feminist knowledge production, it becomes apparent that the priority of Chinese feminism in the 1990s is to break free the seclusion and to connect to the globalized world through denouncing Maoist socialism and embracing liberalism. The reconnection to the globalized world was fortified by a key event, the UN Beijing Conference in 1995, which allowed Chinese feminists to imagine a global sisterhood. This sisterhood however is highly racialized as specific version of feminism, liberation, femininity and female sexuality, best represented by Hillary Clinton, was framed as the norm. The 1995 event is



often framed in Chinese feminism as an eye-opening and enlightening moment, when lesbian women in China and consumer-subject female/feminist finally found a world they belong to. This world is in sharp contrast with the degendered socialist state and it is definitely different from the Third World which the socialist China used to align itself with. Why Chinese feminists in the 1990s chose to stand with liberal feminism in the West, rather than their third world sisters? This perplexing situation needs to be put into a larger context of affect-induced knowledge production of China's post-socialist condition and (post)Cold War geopolitical map.

Like the former second world states, after the reform in the early 1980s, China is understood as has been on the sliding slope between the first and the third world. Noticeably, the metanarrative of China's rising, both from the nationalist perspective and the Western critiques, shows that China chose to catch up and to be assimilated, at least culturally and economically, if not politically, for its project of being a world power. Unlike the third world reading of the second world Suchland argues however, the analogy between postsocialism and postcolonialism is not prominent for both academics and cultural critics, due to largely that China is never officially colonized. In addition, as Shih points out, if socialism is already a project of anti-colonialism and post-colonialism, post-socialism should be understood as post- post-colonialism. This explains why feminist work on China barely find postcolonial framework appealing and useful. Critique of neoliberalism in the 1990s is often associated with pro-communism and current feminist critiques of neoliberalism usually focus on China's assimilation to neoliberalism. The relation among Western forms of neoliberal imperialism, new forms of Chinese

neoliberalism and post-socialism is often left unaddressed in many feminist work and advocacy. But what interesting to me is that the transnational framework on the other hand in both feminist/queer academic work and activism has been quickly picked up. This attachment to such framework ushered by specific cultural elites is problematic.

The affective tendency to denounce socialism in order to connect to the world starting from the late 1980s in China has been documented by many scholars. The ardent embrace of transnationalism and critiques in both academia and activism, especially by US- based or influenced feminists critics seems to celebrate how global force has transformed the imagination of China from a closed “iron curtain” to a permeable borderless space. It seems to me the logic of globalization is already presumed and internationalized by scholars and activists alike.

My entry point is the affect behind using the concept of neoliberalism. The preference of neoliberalism seems to suggest that China’s transition is an inevitable result of globalization while post-socialism seems to emphasize the wresting with changes and the legacy of socialism. This reduction itself is a symptom of Chinese post-socialism—a massive denial and amnesia of the socialist history, legacy and impacts on the present. It flattened the painful struggling, affectively, materially and culturally people experience in their everyday life and gives an expression of a celebratory smooth transition. It is also why there has not been a pronounced “post-socialist critique” in feminism and queer studies to address the ambiguity of how post-Mao, post-socialist, or Soviet-influenced Chinese subjects, negotiate the trauma, aspiration, hope injury as well as other affect within the subject formation itself and embodied everyday life. This neglect refracts how

an ongoing cold-war formula has been internationalized through affect and it is in serve of the neoliberalism's global projects—unlike Russia that the Communist history signifies its nationalist pride of being a world power, denying Communism/socialism through repeatedly telling the trauma and the backwardness of socialism, both on state and cultural levels, is for China to achieve the world power status, and queer and feminists are part of this project.

If Chinese feminists' embrace liberalism as a form of complicity with neoliberal globalization, feminist oversimplified critique of the state also confirms the yellow peril discourse in which the rise of China only can be viewed in terms of masculine power.

#### Woman and the Socialist Nation

As showed above, the reinforcement of the dichotomy between the oppressive state and the radical feminists is largely fostered by liberal elite feminists both in and outside of China. One of the most prominent examples is Hillary Clinton's remark that I quoted at the beginning of this chapter. Since her famous "Women's Rights are Human Rights" speech at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, Clinton has been an iconic figure in Chinese feminist movement.

In a *wechat* article in 2015, Lv Pin, influential civil society activist and feminist who has lived in New York City since the feminist five incident and the crackdown of a women's rights organization she closely associated with, wrote "*nvren meiyou guojia*" ("女人没有国家"), meaning "women has no country" or "women belong to no nation." Her words, echoing her exile condition, on the one hand, express her anger and disappointment with the state and government as "women are abandoned by the nation-

state,” on the other hand, invoke an optimism and political aspiration embodied in the figure of “the stateless woman.” The stateless woman can be read as one who is independent on the nation-state and government, who is not confined by and constantly crossing the border of the state, or who is violating the symbolic and actual order of the nation. The constant trespassing and breaking-down highlights women’s mobility and agency of transforming the state.

For both Secretary Clinton and Lv, the figure of women and feminists as oppressed, violated and forced into exile, carries the transformative power to resist the ultimate embodiment of male power and patriarchy—the nation-state. As postcolonialist and transnational feminists have long pointed out, women’s body and sexuality function as producer and carrier of the nation in both symbolic and material ways. The irony between the persecution of feminists and Chinese President Xi Jinping’s ten million dollars donation to promote women’s right at the UN summit render clear the tension between women’s right as the symbol of national progress and women’s precarious social and political situations. In this irony, women are flattened and utilized to promote the image of nation. However, how is the “celebrity mode” of feminism that utilizes oppressed women as the symbols, flattening the material struggles and eclipsing power inequality and privilege within the feminist movements any different from nationalist project that relies in abstracting women from their embodiment?

If we simply view feminist counter-state stance as progressive politics of liberation, we risk losing sight of the complexity of the discursive and political conditions under which the very rhetoric of liberation is constructed. If we locate the tension

between women and the state in the picture of asymmetrical transnational and global power nexus, we find an ambiguity Chinese feminists are situated in: on the one hand, Chinese feminisms are facing predicaments from the domestic patriarchal oppression and sexism perpetuated by the project of China's dream for national restoration, on the other hand, are threatened by the neoliberal imperialism in the guise of feminist liberation and women's emancipation.

It is no doubt that state represents the patriarchal power. However, it is important to see to what extent this claim is racialized logic and what this claim serves. I want to open up the complications by pointing out a discursive tendency in Western knowledge production in general and First World/Global feminist scholarship and activism in particular that privileges oppositional narratives as anti-hegemonic discourses when dealing with a non-western context. For example, nationalism is often taken as a necessary evil, as Partha Chatterjee (1993:4) points out that "like drugs, terrorism, and illegal immigration, (nationalism) is one more product of the Third World that the West dislike but is powerless to prohibit." It is prominent that any forms of anti-nationalism are imagined and idealized in simplistic dichotomy of oppression and liberation. In China's case, anti-national discourse is also hued with Cold war geopolitics and present day political tensions. Issues of women's rights, LGBT rights, death penalty, Taiwan and Tibet issues are taken as the barometer of democracy and social progress of China and related to issues of sovereignty. Political dissidents and subjects considered as oppressed by the state such as feminists in this case, are often seen as the ready-made poster child to criticize the state authority and to predict a future of progress imbedded in the rhetoric of

transitions, democracy, catch up, and so on. This has a lot to do with the impact mixed of international NGOs in the 1990s and the larger international relations and tensions.

Although these international donors improved life in China, the pitfall is that they dictated and pre-demarcated how development, social justice, and democracy and so on in a universal/western centric way and hinders a critical feminist work that address more complex and richer history and reality to emerge. That being said, I have no intention to defend nationalism nor state violence in the oppression of women and feminism, but I want to point out that the imagination and representation of Chinese feminisms, or any Third World feminisms, feed into such imperialist cultural logic, sidelining more complex dynamics in a multinational context of political intersections. Such simplification, wrapped with emotions and affect, replicates itself through tragic and traumatic events in in highly regenerative space such as social networking media.

I want to pause here to discuss what I call “elite feminists” in China. Although grassroots feminist activists are typically not considered as privileged elitists in terms of monetary capitals and many of them are often from unprivileged backgrounds, their discursive, cultural and intellectual capitals need to be considered when thinking of social class. In the era of social media, the ability to access to means of technology and network of communication, especially through global media, provides them enormous privilege of having a voice that average Chinese do not have. Activists’ ability to connect to the transnational civil societies, NGOs, and scholar circles also give them intellectual, cultural and political in terms of the right language and the right venues. In addition, the capital from simply being the voice of the oppressed, what I call the “heroic victim”

capital, grant them unquestionable authority in speaking about the situation in China on the international level. To view them as simply the “oppressed” or “marginalized” grassroots is to dismiss the complexity of agency, violence and affect of Chinese feminisms.

### **The (Im)possibility of Socialist Feminism**

Given the specific history of how the Cold War functions in producing feminist knowledge, the Chinese Socialist feminist seems to become an impossibility. She never existed and will never exist --as feminists criticized, she is an ideal created by Western feminists based on an Othering logic of socialism and she was the bearer of degendered state violence; She has no place in current discourse of feminism and the state because how can a feminist in China now embracing socialism and still call herself a feminist?

A post-socialist feminist critique must consider these impossibilities in relation to the global neoliberal hegemony and to allow a more nuanced critique to explore the richness of post-socialist ambiguity. Echoing Suchland’s call for a “critical interjection” in the knowledge production of the academy, I see post-socialist critiques as disrupting the western/transnational knowledge production that itself has fed into the imperialist and colonialist projects under the guise of globalization.

Needless to say, the politics of visibility and confrontational strategy provide agency to feminism and women’s social movement, but surely not the only way of doing feminism. Chinese feminisms as a multiplied form of resistance, have the intertwined histories and complex relationships with the state and the party. Confrontational politics

reflected in Hillary's and many first world feminists vision of liberation might shut doors for opportunity for solidarity in different political and geocultural contexts. To develop a feminist critique and strategy that account for these complexities and controversy requires to develop a politics of invisibility that enable us to speak about subtlety and unspeakable.

Cathy Caruth famously claimed that trauma dislocates history and makes it difficult, if not impossible to think in terms of singular historical or cultural contexts (1996). While classical trauma theory provides a powerful tool to link violence, subjective and collective experiences and discursive structures, the trauma related to Chinese feminists' utilization of visibility and confrontational politics cannot be located in a single moment. Avery Gordon's concept of "ghostly matter"(2008) offers a constructive method for the politics of invisibility to tell the story of losses. For Gordon, the ghost is a "social figure" and the investment in it "lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life"(8). She proposes a new way of knowing of "being haunted"--a listening than a seeing, a practice of being attuned to the echoes and murmurs of that which has been lost but which is still present among us in the form of intimations, hints, suggestions and portents. Gordon's method of reading and knowing is particularly helpful to think about the ambiguity post-socialist subjects cope with in everyday life. Slightly different from Gordon, I would like to use "dark matter" to think about how socialist history shapes how post-socialist politics. Dark matter permeates and shapes the post-socialist everyday life, but it is difficult to be captured and measured. Although every daily dialogue happens around the dark matter, it is invisible. However,



from how we react to the dark matter, we not only get the chance to touch it but also to change our relation to it. In the last section, I wish to consider some possible strategies for the politics of invisibility.

### **Feminist Playing**

As mentioned in the earlier section of this chapter and in chapter three, the Communist system can be transformed from inside out as “queer spies” do work for the state. There are queer cops, queer Communist cadres, officials, Visa officers and journalists, whose queer politics and activism are carried out precisely through their “closetedness” and for their work to work, their closetness needs to be maintained. I was at an UN meeting with several queer and/or feminist identified high up governmental officials. Although they cannot come out of the closet or publicly speak about LGBT and feminist issues, their invisible work cannot be dismissed as they have played important roles in governmental policy changes and smoothing out tensions. The dilemma however, is for the politics of invisibility to work, it needs to maintain invisible therefore difficult to write about. When I had conversations with these insiders, I barely got a chance to record or take notes. They hardly gave names nor described the event with much detail. I can speculate but was barely able to confirm. It poses questions and challenges for ethnographers and social scientists who often rely on “concrete” grounded data. Because of this ambiguity, reading becomes an important praxis in ethnographic work.

To conclude this chapter, I will provide an example of reading the coyness of many feminist strategies. Although this chapter has been skeptical to the reliance of

international source, supports and discourse of liberation as they serve the epistemology of Western colonialism and imperialism, the rhetoric of “international” also can be utilized to leverage the contradiction between the state and feminism. Like Wei Tingting who played with those who are in power, I’d like to consider Wang Zheng’s popular writings circulated through social media as an example of how to carry out feminist work by dubbing and “playing” with the official ideology.

Wang Zheng is among the first feminists that criticized state socialism and introduced “gender” to China in 1980s. Wang’s writing, like many of her peers, reflect nostalgia and disappointment of socialism. In her critiques of the arrest of the five feminists, complaint of state’s failure to promote socialism is prominent. For example, in current interview conducted by a social media account on feminist movements and government pressure before the International Women’s Day, Wang remarks, the governmental crackdown of feminism is a “historical regression.” She further explains, “after China’s economy connected to global capitalism, many gender equality polices were abandoned by the government..... when there is no longer structural protection, the promotion of gender equality become more difficult.” Although emphasizing the complicity of state and feminism, Wang is also one of the key persons who advocate for international support and solidarity for the rescues. Opposite to some who views the government needs to dismantled, Wang however speaks about how the crackdown and arrest contradict to the socialist principle of gender equality. In her writing, she often uses the metaphor such as the government slapping its own face to address how current governing betrayed socialist forbearers. Instead of arguing giving up socialism, Wang

seems to suggest socialism as a radical means for gender equality, which is not fulfilled by current Communist government.

This vision of gender equality and feminism is also accompanied by appropriation of the official ideology and discourse of China's development. For example, Wang points out that gender equality is benchmark for a nation's development and international image. The arrest damages China's face in the international communities and is counterproductive for political, cultural and economic goals China seeks to pursue as a world power. Despite that the discourse of national development, progress and restoration is problematic, it can be used to advance gender issues, hoping the geopolitics and China's nationalist goal could outweigh the oppression and surveillance of feminists and the civil society. These tactics consciously exploit the nationalism and universalism for promoting progressive goals and the strategies own a great deal to the geopolitical tensions, bringing the conflicts to productive use.

## Conclusion Towards a Transnational Post-socialist Queer Critique

### To Russia with Love—Post-socialist Homonationalism

On the Valentine's Day of 2014, six Chinese feminist and LGBT activists gathered outside the Russian Embassy in Beijing to protest Russia's anti-LGBT propaganda law. They held a rainbow banner that read "To Russia with Love," and kissed in front of a countdown clock for the Sochi Winter Olympics outside the embassy. Xiao Tie, executive director of the Beijing LGBT Center and one of the kissers, comments,

Vladimir Putin has a very bad attitude towards gays, who have to live with the threat of violence...Russia still needs some education on diversity. That is the reason for today's advocacy mission.<sup>16</sup>



(Figure 8: To Russia with Love)

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<sup>16</sup> [https://sinosphere.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/02/14/gay-rights-activists-in-beijing-protest-for-their-russian-comrades/?\\_r=0](https://sinosphere.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/02/14/gay-rights-activists-in-beijing-protest-for-their-russian-comrades/?_r=0)

“To Russia with Love” tells an interesting story of how queers across post-socialist regions connect. Unlike “global queering” where queers as cosmopolitan consumers and world citizens are connected by borderless movement of capital, queers from Beijing and Moscow are linked by the complexity of the post-socialist condition.

Post-Soviet Russia and post-socialist China share a similar narrative of the emergence of contemporary queer identity and culture. It is commonly believed that both countries suffer from a history of socialist state homophobia, persecution of homosexuals and long-time denial of the very existence of homosexuality. For example, Communist Party of the Soviet Union under Stalin officially criminalized homosexuality in 1934 and has since stigmatized it as a “capitalist degeneracy.” It remained criminalized in the Soviet Union and then the Russian Federation until 1993. Sodomites were sentenced to death, persecuted and forced to public confession and subjugated to mass violence during the Cultural Revolution (1967-1977) in Maoist China and the “Crackdown movement” the early 1980s. Not until 1997, China decriminalized sodomy as “hooliganism” and in 2001 removed homosexuality from categories of mental disorder by the Chinese Psychiatric Association. Under the pressure of HIV/AIDS pandemic, Chinese government finally admitted the existence of male homosexuality in 2004. Even today, Russia has not passed a law that decriminalizes male homosexuality. Along with narrative of socialist homophobia and state violence against homosexuals, it is believed that the end of state socialism (dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 and China’s “reform and opening” starting from 1978) and rapid economic reforms and social transformation that followed in both China and Russia are ascribed to the increasing

visibility of sexual and gender diversity. Non-normative sexualities began to appear in varied forms of public display in the late 1980s and early 1990s after the collapse of the Iron Curtain: on TV shows, magazines, discos and bars, just to list few. With the help of international NGOs and new middle class and cosmopolitan LGBT elites, both countries are believed to be more tolerated and open in the following two decades. Especially since the turn of the millennium, academic research, activism and media coverage addressing the diversity of non-normative sexual and gender subject positions and cultures have boomed. However, the legacy of socialist authoritarian governance is still hindering the way of queer liberation, by continuous banning and harassment of gender and sexual varied people, political censorship and tight surveillance of civil society in present-days. The conflicts between sexual and gendered citizen-subjects and the state have escalated in the second decade of the twenty-first century as China's economy growth slows down and Russia's economic crisis deepens. Oppression of queers and social dissidents in Vladimir Putin's Russia and Xi Jinping's China has climaxed in Russia's anti-gay propaganda law in 2014 and Chinese governments' intensified crackdown of foreign sponsored NGOs from the same year. Following Secretary Hilary Clinton's "Gay rights are human right" speech in 2010, how LGBT issues are treated has become a barometer to judge a nation's progress of modernity and to distinguish the normal state from the pathological one. Both Russia and China have been criticized by international and civil societies for LGBT issues and in this regard, have been put on the side of the pathological states in opposition to the liberal normal state that the United States represents.

At the first glance “to Russia with Love” demonstrates a transnational post-socialist solidarity through shared affect and histories; however, it is an example of what Jabir Puar has termed “homonationalism”: led by Western influenced and sponsored Chinese LGBT elites, China now is ahead of its former Communist “big old brother” and has moved away from its backward socialist past. By breaking free from the stigma and pathologization of LGBT oppression, China will arrive its deserved place in the world ordering.

The desire for an upcoming homonationalism in the elites LGBT community is an internalization of the US based colonial logic of sexual exceptionalism and is based on a reductionist view of socialism as oppositional to queerness. Against the backdrop of the end of Cold war and the Western sanction of socialist countries in the 90s, sexuality in socialism is simply rendered as repressed by the state and the authoritarian state as hindering human sexual nature. Homonationalism in China is another example of the legacy of the Cold War rhetoric branded in new geopolitical temporality.

When it comes to the critiques of homonationalism in China, queer critics need to be especially careful. To critique such homonationalism and homonormativity, US-based queer studies focus on challenging the intersection of neoliberal governmentality and capitalist globalization. These trajectories of theorization and analysis have also been adopted by queer scholarship working in the field of China and activism alike, assuming the phenomena of neoliberal governmentality, homonormativity and homonationalism are happening in China as well. Petrus Liu warns us against such tendency as it risks

reinforcing the colonialist logic that gives an impression that Chinese queerness is a belated version of the liberal west, adopting its progress as well as its problems.

### **The Conundrum of a Transnational Post-socialist Queer Critique**

Thinking along with Liu, I have argued in the dissertation that to understand the complex dynamics of post-Cold war geopolitical-sexual economy, we need to develop a queer post-socialist critique that account for the entangled experience of socialism and its historical, material and affective impacts on sexuality and sexual politics, before we jump into the broad critiques of global capitalism and neoliberalism without differences. I use “socialism” in its broad sense, including socialist values and ideas of democracy, sense of community, and analysis of class and so on, rather than the narrow state socialism. The demise of socialist ideology followed by the global collapse of socialist states in the 1990s and the triumph of neoliberal global capitalism not only impact the former socialist states, but also lead to a precarious condition concerns the Left in the capitalist “West.” As Marxist-inspired alternatives had become discredited, the political Left was outcast and radical alternatives have been sidelined in the debates of social justice. However, the feminist/queer discussion have never lost its ground in intersected lived experiences of oppression based on gender, sexuality, class and other social categories. While it is clear that the movement for sexual and gender freedom and equality has made significant gains in the United States, radical queer critics and activists have contended that the demand to fully restructure sexuality and gender norms as well as the economic and social foundation on which they rest has been compromised. As they have argued, in



today's neoliberal capitalism, one that is capable of tolerating and assimilating a plurality of dissident identities under the name of "free choice," acceptance of queer people into the institution of nuclear family, military and mainstream culture is far from a victory. At a moment when Bernie Sanders, who is the first presidential candidate running on a democratic socialist class-based platform in US history, a critical engagement with the post-socialism beyond the so-called post-socialist regions is urgent and can be productive to explore the possibility of alternative gender, sexuality and liberation. As mentioned above, canonical queer theory has been criticized for its cooperation of producing liberal sexual subjects and a lack of a materialist basis. A critical engagement of the everyday practices and lived experiences of queers, Against discourses which position the neoliberal 'global queer' as the universal queer subject, whose abjection is rescued by its ability to shop, and the 'global queering' as the end of queer history, post-socialist queer critique is a tool to imagine ways to integrate the politics of recognition and the politics of redistribution. At this moment, a post-socialist queer critique, rather than a nostalgia or retro socialism, is particularly necessary and urgent.

By post-socialist queer critique, I do not mean to suggest that a nostalgic return to socialism is the way to radical queerness. What I argue for is to use post-socialism as a critical lens to reexamine taken-for-granted claims and familiar narratives in theorizing queer histories, politics and present-day's struggles. In this sense, post-socialist queerness is a method that attends to the asymmetrical geopolitical power relations and its embodiment in queerness and how queerness reshapes such relations. Such project requires us to rethink not only "global queering," but more important, to look at the

genealogy and globalized institution of queer studies and LGBT politics- in another word, the praxis of queer studies.

This dissertation has examined how the trauma-induced opposition of queerness and socialism informs how queer and feminist activisms have been perceived carried out and how queer subjectivities are formed in China. Although China is the primary ethnographic and archival site for this project, it is important for transnational post-socialist queer critiques to address the intersection and mutual construction of the state violence against gender and sexual variant people and the violence that implemented by the continuous Cold War orientalism in the post-Cold War era and imperialist and colonialist aggression under the guise of neoliberal globalization. A transnational queer critique, however, is difficult because of ideological, affective and institutional conundrums: for one, our own present relation with the socialist history closets us and prevents us from looking for queer socialist connections across borders; for another, the Cold War geopolitics continues to dictate the post-Cold War queer activism and knowledge production that leaves little space for cross regional post-socialist queer theorization.

Take China as an example, as Lisa Rofel(2008) rightly pointed out, what at heart of the post-socialist transformation in China—or the neoliberal reform, is to create a desire for post-socialist subjects to free their gendered and sexual selves from the socialist state which is constructed as hindering the human nature. The creation of “desiring subject” in China echoes with the consolidation of public gay identities transnationally in the wake of late capitalism as “it affects the growth of affluence and the

formation of a free subject”(Hennessy 2002). Such a discursive and affective construction of queer subject formation in relation to capitalism relies largely on a revisionist history that simplifies historical account of state socialism as oppressive and homophobic, and erases the historical and geopolitical complexity and the agency of the oppressed. For example, Communist history of persecution of homosexuals cannot be taken out of its context of the Cold War rivalry between USSR and the US where both sides scapegoated homosexuality for national security reasons. Despite the fact that Russia was one of first European countries where homosexuality was decriminalized shortly after the October Revolution of 1917 and a great number of queer subjects took part in the international Communist movement of the early 20th century around the globe, queer subjects from the socialist past, by and large, are understood only as victims without power for resistance or conservative conformists who are forced to live in the shadow of the past. As post-Soviet artist Yevgeniy Ficks points out that “an overwhelming sense of denial of Soviet history as a way of dealing with (post-) Soviet trauma is one of the most striking symptoms of the post-Soviet condition.”<sup>17</sup> Similarly, there has been very limited interest in knowing about the lives of queers living in the socialist past in China, unless the past is utilized for justifying a neoliberal future. When queers do look back, the past is only rendered in a way to remind us the pain we had and to caution us it is a history that we don’t want to go back to. The denial and “unremembering” have not serve post-socialist queer subject well: we see the trauma of socialist violence as well as the trauma of the demonization of socialism repeat themselves in current LGBT movements and studies of

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<sup>17</sup> [http://yevgeniyfiks.com/artwork/1438940\\_Artist\\_Statement.html](http://yevgeniyfiks.com/artwork/1438940_Artist_Statement.html)

queer sexuality in promoting epistemic violence through confrontational politics, marginalizing differences and flattening the complexity of histories.

The oversimplified relation between queerness and socialism not only prevents us from seeing different forms of queer resistance and politics of liberation in terms of identity, community, visibility and voices as already existing alternatives to the liberal LGBT agenda, such as demonstrated in my reading of Cultural Revolution *tanbai jiaodai*, abject “cock sucker” on gay cruising site, queer spy in socialist state system and the coy play with official power, but also renders queer and feminist critiques in complicity with neoliberalism and homonormativity.

Despite post-socialism is “a cross cultural phenomenon that reveals striking parallels” (McGrath 2008: 14), the study of post-socialism as a transnational condition has not been given deserved attention. Although recent post-socialist cultural studies has committed to promote “dialogic encounters across disciplines, regions, and linguistic traditions” in order to “imagine a nonbinary critical location- a space for inquiry that deconstructs the East-West divide,” many dichotomies still remain prominent. Two major divides among all are: (1) the discussion of post-socialism in the North academia is still largely confined in area studies due to the general understanding of the inapplicability of the post-socialist framework in the West; and (2) within the cultural studies of post-socialism, there appear two separate schools of studies: Eastern European Studies and China studies. Eastern European scholars often place an emphasis on the troubling position of “the Second World” in order to deconstruct the West/East divide and problematizing the Western hegemony and to promote negotiation of other dualisms of

gender, race and sexuality (Zaborawska, Forrester and Gapova 2004: 24). For them, post-socialist studies “shuttles between and around past and present, Cold War and aftermath, East and West, reconstructing history, geography, politics and cross-cultural translation around the issue at the core of how identities are constructed and negotiated”(2004:25). Although in this sense, post-socialist cultural studies have much in common with postcolonial studies and transnational studies, majority of works focus on Eastern European locations versus the European center. There is also a gap between Post-Soviet studies of Russia and the studies of former Soviet colonies, in which is informed by the Cold War legacy. Post-socialist studies of China frequently focus on China’s changing role in the system of world capitalism, as pointed out earlier, whether post-socialist China transform neoliberal capitalism. In this context, it is not difficult to understand why feminist and queer scholarship on post-socialism has also been largely confined with in national or regional boundaries.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, scholars in the studies of sexuality started to interrogate the process of “global queering,” a term coined by Denis Altman (1997) to capture the proliferation of transnational queer and transgender identities and cultures accompanied with neoliberal globalization. A post-socialist approach to sexualities shares lots of similar goals with transnational sexualities in de-decentering and provincializing the “west” within global queer studies. It promotes “dialogic encounters across disciplines, regions, and linguistic traditions” in order to “imagine a nonbinary critical location- a space for inquiry that deconstructs the East-West divide” (Zaborawska, Forrester and Gapova 2004: 24). Scholars in post-socialist sexuality also see questions of the continuity

of past and present, multiple modernities, cross-cultural translation and so on as at the core of how identities are constructed and negotiated in post-socialism( 2004: 25).

Because of these similarities, post-socialist queer scholarship has been often subjugated under the rubric of transnational and post-colonial queer studies without attending to the theoretical difference and potentials.

Despite the ideological, institutional and affective difficulties, a transnational post-socialist queer critique is not impossible. In the next section, I want to demonstrate some vintage points for such possibilities.

### **Imaginative Dialog through Tale-telling**

At the last stage of my fieldwork, I was privileged to meet Vlad, a post-Soviet queer artist, and John, a senior member of Communist Party USA. Vlad is a Russian American now who left Moscow for New York after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. John grew up gay in a leftist family in Southern California and has been a member of Communist Party USA since his twenties. In the middle of our dinner, Vlad asked me, “what do young generation in China now think about Communism?” Before I started to answer, John jumped in, “Compare to Russia, I think China is taking a smarter route to build their socialism. They compromised and adapted the market economy voluntarily, and in my opinion this detour preserves socialism and eventually will lead China to Communism.” I couldn’t help bursting into a long laugh and responded with a little sarcasm, “John, as much as I wish, but you are really a romantic idealist. Nobody in China today really believes in Communism anymore.” Followed the laugh however, it came a sudden

sadness. The belief in and the practice of Communism for emancipation has affected more than 30 percent of the world's land mass and more than 50 percent of the human population. It once delivered hope to millions to build a classless world where all human beings can live equally and freely without oppressions. However, communism couldn't sustain the hope and keep its promise to liberate all who are suffered. While revolutionary Bolsheviks abolished anti-homosexual law in the October Revolution of 1917, homosexuals were persecuted in nearly 60 years of Soviet history. While women's liberation and gender equality has been a crucial part of the Chinese Communist revolution and socialist modernity, young feminists have been harassed, arrested and detained by the state.

What is like for early revolutionaries to see a world that they had strived to build turns its back on them? What is like for people to realize what they used to firmly believe dissolved? When Harry Whyte's plead for anti-criminalization of homosexuals was rejected by the Communist icon Joseph Stalin, was he hurt? When Harry Hay was forced out of the Communist party because he was a gay man and purged out of Mattachine Society because he was a communist, was he heart-broken? When Yang Tao, who used to believe everybody was born equal but his own sexuality was rejected by his beloved communist father, did he feel betrayed?

These three broken heart comrades across time and space, what would they say to one other if they had a chance to be at the table like John, Vlad and I had. Can their pain, suffering, and affect function as the translocational and transtempoeral tie that forge a radical queer politics?

There is no way to know the answer because this connection had been foreclosed for reasons elaborated in the previous section. However, there is still a possibility to forge critical connections through tale-telling. In his project *Anatoly*(2014), Yvegeniy Fiks asks nine post-Soviet LGBT people living in New York to speculatively write the story of Anatoly, a Russian man who was in a relationship with British Soviet spy Guy Burgess in 1951, at a time when male homosexuality was severely punished in the Soviet Union. Drawing on their knowledge of Soviet history, personal experiences, and imagination, the contemporary LGBT post-Soviets participants reconstruct Anatoly's narrative and in so doing, raise their own consciences and reclaim the Soviet gay and lesbian histories as their own. Fiks' queer method of reclaiming history and forging connection is an example of how tale telling post-socialist queers can be a “deliberative exercise” to amend the omission of connections that is lost or made impossible under Cold War legacy and ideology of neoliberal inevitability.



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