

**QUEER MARXISM  
IN TWO CHINAS**

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## CHAPTER I

# MARXISM, QUEER LIBERALISM, AND THE QUANDARY OF TWO CHINAS

When hearing about contemporary China, we do not often find the words *queer* and *Marxism* in the same sentence. If anything, it seems that these two categories work against each other: Scholars often attribute the emergence of queer cultures in China to the end of Marxism and socialism. If a previous generation of Chinese cultural studies scholars seemed uniformly concerned about the specters of Marxism, today's queer critics are more likely to worry about neoliberalism and gay normalization. The scholarly consensus is that, after Deng's 1978 market reforms, the phenomenon many critics have described as the "new homonormativity" in US culture is taking place in postsocialist China as well. The turn to neoliberalism in queer Chinese studies responds to a global conversation of the highest importance. Lisa Duggan defines homonormativity as "a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption."<sup>1</sup> Michael Warner argues that homonormativity in the gay liberation movement requires a "more consolidated gay identity" and signals a "retreat from its history of radicalism into a new form of postliberationist privatization."<sup>2</sup> The phenomenon Duggan and Warner describe is well known and seemingly ubiquitous. A popular T-shirt at a Pride March in San Francisco a few years ago illustrates the point particularly well: "My gay lifestyle? Eat, sleep, go to work, pay taxes." With the homonormative turn, many gay men and women now believe that the best strategy for mainstream inclusion and equal rights (such

as same-sex marriage) is to show society that they, too, are morally upstanding citizens who are no different from anyone else. Worried about homonormativity, new queer theorists now focus on critiquing “queer liberalism,” the economic and social structure underlying this depoliticized consumer space of metrosexual glamor and bourgeois rights. Queer critics point out that liberalism has spawned a homonormative desire to dissociate homosexuality from culturally undesirable practices and experiences such as AIDS, promiscuity, drag, prostitution, and drug use. While it is certainly understandable why gay men and women may wish to combat the conflation of homosexuality with other cultural definitions, the desire for mainstream inclusion has also alienated, disempowered, and further stigmatized gay men and women who are prostitutes, drug users, transvestites, promiscuous, or living with AIDS.<sup>3</sup> As Nicole Ferry points out, the homonormative movement is not an equality-based movement, but an inclusion-based assimilation politics with exclusionary results.<sup>4</sup> The situation is clearly worrisome once we recognize that the culture of homonormativity provides a poor political model by suggesting that assimilating to heterosexual norms is the only path to equal rights.

Many instances suggest that a culture of homonormativity has emerged in the People's Republic of China (PRC) after the state officially entered a postsocialist era by adopting experiments in neoliberalism and privatization.<sup>5</sup> Although LGBT political movements have made important advances in mainland China—significantly, the decriminalization of homosexuality in 1997 and its removal from categories of mental disorder by the Chinese Psychiatric Association in 2001—other inequalities have deepened. As Lisa Rofel shows, the advent of neoliberalism produced hierarchically differentiated qualities of desire.<sup>6</sup> China's neoliberal integration into global infrastructures intensifies the process of gay normalization through the discourse of “quality” (*suzhi*). With the homonormative turn, certain “improperly gay” subjects, such as China's “money boys,” are routinely abused from within the gay community. Seeing money boys as a blight on the image of the homosexual community, Chinese gay men are eager to dissociate themselves from money boys in their quest for respectability and global cultural citizenship as China becomes increasingly liberalized, affluent, and cosmopolitan.<sup>7</sup> Rofel describes how the rise of neoliberalism reconfigures the dreams, aspirations, and longings of gay men and

women in China, producing novel forms of cosmopolitan aspirations, public culture, identities, and modes of memorializing their pasts. In this way, the differentiation of good and bad forms of gay desire also cements boundaries between rural and urban, elite and common, commercial and privatized.

Queer critics who work on the intersections of Chinese sexualities and neoliberalism provide numerous historical examples that explain why queerness and Marxism are understood in antithetical ways. Rofel's two studies, *Desiring China* and *Other Modernities*, analyze the dominant perception among a broad public in China that Maoist socialism was a distortion of people's natural genders and sexualities. Rofel argues that this view, which has become common sense among many, relies on a revisionist history, a distortion of the past that encourages people to reject their socialist past. Once the past has been constructed this way, postsocialist allegories emerge to represent a desire to free one's gendered and sexual self from the dictates of the socialist state. Accordingly, the queerness of human desire comes to be viewed as what sets limits to any and all utopian efforts to control human productivity and to explain the motions of history through economic categories. The arrival of neoliberalism—which, as Rofel crucially argues, is not a *fait accompli* but an ongoing series of experiments that are centrally about desire—produces yearnings that propel people to reinvent “the strictures and sacrifices” for their socialist past by way of cosmopolitan consumption.<sup>8</sup> Compared to Rofel's work, Travis Kong's *Chinese Male Homosexualities* paints a bleaker picture of China's newly emergent queer communities, but similarly emphasizes the complicity between a consolidated homosexual identity and the consumer culture of neoliberal capitalism. Kong shows that the emergence of gay and lesbian identities in China was predicated on the relaxation of state control of the private sphere following the replacement of communism by neoliberalism. Song Hwee Lim similarly attributes the rising representations of homosexuality in Chinese screen cultures to neoliberal globalization, arguing that an internationalized, deterritorialized economy of film production “introduced homosexuality as a legitimate discourse in Chinese cinemas in ways that may not have been previously possible.”<sup>9</sup> These accounts of China's neoliberal queer culture complement the global narrative developed by David Eng's critiques of the increasingly mass-mediated consumer lifestyle in *The Feeling of Kinship*:



*Queer Liberalism and the Racialization of Intimacy* (2010). In these studies, queer critics either emphasize the agency of queer desire and bodies against state prescriptions, or expose the complicity between new sexual politics and advanced liberalism. But in either scenario, the focus is on China's postsocialist character after the neoliberal turn, which implies that Marxism, whether good or bad for queers, has ceased to be a relevant consideration.

The critique of queer liberalism therefore unwittingly naturalizes the assumption that China has unequivocally entered a postsocialist phase. However, we might pause to ask, is neoliberalism truly the dominant cultural logic of contemporary queer Chinese cultures? Are queer cultural expressions always complicit with neoliberal globalization and the politics of gay normalization? Is there a critical, dissident, and, indeed, *queer* Chinese culture anymore? 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.

The story I tell in this book is different. *Queer Marxism in Two Chinas* reconstructs a rich and complex tradition of postwar queer Chinese works that retool and revitalize Marxist social analysis. In assembling this queer Marxist archive, I also propose two intertwined arguments that depart from the scholarly consensus in Chinese queer studies. First, instead of reading contemporary Chinese queer cultures as responses to neoliberal globalization, I argue that a unique local event has centrally shaped the development of Chinese queer thought: the 1949 division of China into the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Republic of China on Taiwan (ROC). In referring to the PRC and the ROC as two Chinas, I am less interested in making a political provocation than in historicizing the implications of their coexistence for queer practice. My second argument is that postwar queer Chinese writers, many of whom are based in the ROC rather than the PRC, developed a unique theory and literature by fusing Marxism with inquiries into gender and sexuality. The fact that Marxism flourished in anticommunist

ROC may come as a surprise. While the queer Marxist tradition embodies a living dialogue between the ROC and the PRC that attests to the permeability of their boundaries, it also highlights a need to disarticulate Marxism from the communist bureaucracy of the PRC. This little known cultural history of queer Marxism in the two Chinas indicates the vitality and dynamism of Marxism in divergent vectors of queer thought. The geopolitical rivalry between the PRC and the ROC becomes an unexpected kind of productive tension for Chinese queer discourse, which, in turn, is also compelled to revise and reintegrate Marxist thought into the analysis of gender and sexuality in distinctive ways.

Although the book title pluralizes Chinas, and most of my examples come from the ROC, my project is not a Sinophone studies book. My intention is not to bring together materials from the peripheries of the Sinophone world—Singapore, Hong Kong, and the Chinese diaspora in Malaysia, Indonesia, and North America—to develop a non-PRC-centered story of queer lives in Chinese-speaking communities.<sup>10</sup> Rather, I am interested in historicizing the ways in which Chinese writers, in any location, came to view the historical creation of the PRC and the ROC as a foundational event for queer life. Because the aim of my project is not to displace Chineseness with Sinophone, Sinoglossia, or other critical concepts, I am not treating works by Taiwan-based writers as an expression of Taiwanese-ness. In choosing my examples, I have also privileged transnational and transcultural texts—for example, Chen Ruoxi's *Paper Marriage*, a novel about an American man and a mainland Chinese woman who cross boundaries of nationality and sexual orientation, which the author wrote based on her experiences in the PRC, the ROC, and the United States. Similarly, because my use of the concept of "two Chinas" is historical rather than ideological, my study also excludes Hong Kong as a primary site of consideration. Certainly, Hong Kong-based authors have also developed important queer reflections on liberalism, socialism, and Marxism.<sup>11</sup> Far from being comprehensive, my archive of queer Marxist practice invites comparisons with not only Hong Kong's neoliberalism but also Singapore's "illiberal pragmatism" as a technique of queer social management.<sup>12</sup> It is my hope that *Queer Marxism in Two Chinas* will initiate critical interest in such transregional studies.

My study of the continuous dialogues and cross-pollination between Marxist and queer thought stems from a desire to understand

Chinese queer cultures' engagement with the geopolitics of the Cold War that produced the two Chinas and their corresponding ideological significations. After all, the ideological legacy of the Cold War cements our habitual readings of the economic fortunes of the PRC and the ROC as the historical vindication of Marxism and liberalism. I argue that any discussion of liberalism in the Chinese context must begin with the Cold War divide, because the rise of liberalism in the PRC's political history is critically informed by Taiwan's historical claim as Free China and by its identity as China's "economic miracle"—namely, what would happen in mainland China if the PRC government had adopted liberalism and capitalism instead of socialism. As an ethnically Chinese state without a colonial administration, Taiwan provided the most relevant and compelling economic model for PRC leaders when they first considered liberalizing the market. While the ideologically retrograde elements of Free China discourses are obvious, the legacy of the Cold War has also given rise to positive and productive queer appropriations. In chapter four, for example, I offer a reading of the 1980s' queer narrative of self-invention, entrepreneurship, and miraculous development, to dissect the historical subjectivity underpinning the two Chinas' transitions to postsocialism and postmartial law market economy. For the queer Marxist cultural producers considered in this book, the geopolitical conflicts between the two Chinas are both a historical burden and an intellectual opportunity. Indeed, I would suggest that a persistent engagement with the geopolitics of two Chinas forms the basis of a Chinese materialist queer theory that sets it apart from its Euro-American counterparts.

One of the aims of this book is to develop a useful account of the insights and distinctive features of Chinese queer theory, since we are used to thinking of queer theory as an exclusively Euro-American enterprise. In writing this way about the connections between Chinese queer theory and geopolitics, I also present theory as a product of historically determinate circumstances rather than as a set of timeless principles we can apply to a variety of cultural situations. At the same time, characterizing theory, queer or nonqueer, as a product of the conditions of its own genesis also risks reifying cultural differences. Without raising the enormously complex questions of cultural essentialism and universalism, I would like to propose at this point some of the distinctive achievements and concerns of queer Marxism in the Chinas in

contrast to more familiar intellectual paradigms in the United States. One of the hallmark achievements of US queer theory is the exploration of the intersectionality of identity categories. For example, the "queer of color critique" in recent years provides a powerful framework for exposing the mutual dependency of racialization and sexual abjection.<sup>13</sup> But while US-based queer theory enables a rethinking of the relations between the diacritical markers of personhood—race, gender, class, sexuality, and religion—this queer theory's conception of social differences remains restricted by a liberal pluralist culture of identity politics that is distinctively American.<sup>14</sup> By contrast, Chinese theory of the geopolitical meditations of queer lives does not begin with the concept of social identity; instead, it emphasizes the impersonal, structural, and systemic workings of power. Whereas US queer theory responds to the failures of neoliberal social management by postulating an incomplete, foreclosed, or irreducibly heterogeneous subject of identity, Chinese queer Marxists develop an arsenal of conceptual tools for reading the complex and overdetermined relations between human sexual freedom and the ideological cartography of the Cold War. For these thinkers, to raise the question of queer desire in this context is also to examine the incomplete project of decolonization in Asia, the achievements and failures of socialist democracy, the contradictory process of capitalist modernization, and the uneven exchange of capital and goods.

The intellectual tradition of queer Marxism offers a nonliberal alternative to the Euro-American model of queer emancipation grounded in liberal values of privacy, tolerance, individual rights, and diversity. In my view, contemporary queer critics of homonormativity, queer liberalism, and homonationalism have much to gain from a consideration of this nonliberal queer theory. The existence of Chinese queer Marxism also indicates that LGBTQ communities in the world do not evolve along the same, inevitable path prescribed by a globalizing neoliberalism. Indeed, it would be a mistake to interpret the emergence of queer identities and communities in the two Chinas as belated versions of post-Stonewall social formations in the United States under a singular logic of neoliberal globalization. The archive of queer cultural artifacts and intellectual discourses I assemble in this book disrupts that developmentalist narrative by demonstrating the importance of Marxist reflections on the 1949 division for contemporary queer thought. The confrontation between queer and Marxist discourses in Chinese



intellectual scenes reveals a hidden chapter of the global history of cultural materialism that parts company with both metropolitan understandings of capitalism as corporate greed and the standard signification of global Maoism as Third-World revolutionary struggles.

In literary and cultural studies in North America, Marxism has come to be understood as a somewhat specialized academic sub-discipline associated with figures such as Fredric Jameson and Gayatri Spivak, whose monumental works renewed critical interest in Georg Lukács's concepts of totality and reification, Antonio Gramsci's theories of hegemony and mediation, and Louis Althusser's structuralist interpretation of the economic base as an "absent cause." While the American reception of Marxism made critical contributions to both dialectical philosophy and historical materialism, it has also become increasingly divorced from the "economistic" debates in European and Asian Marxisms concerning such technical questions as "the transformation problem," the withering away of law, the value form, the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, and theories of accumulation and crisis. Nonetheless, the culturalist reinterpretations of Marxism have not rescued it from accusations of economic reductionism and foundationalism, against which queer theory and other "postfoundationalist" projects consciously rebel.<sup>15</sup> While the critique of foundationalism is both timely and necessary, the framing of Marxism as a monolithic intellectual orthodoxy plagued by problems of determinism, teleology, utopianism, and economism also misses the opportunity to deploy the insights developed by Marxist authors for queer use.

In schematic terms, the queer writers examined in this book explore four areas of social thought that are historically associated with Marxism: first, the indivisible organicity of the social body (totality); second, the distinction between formal and substantive equality (fetishism); third, theories of community, species-being, and primitive accumulation (alienation); and, finally, the question of social transformation (ideology). The rich tradition of queer Marxism thus differs from orthodox Marxism's emphasis on the primacy of economics. For the queer cultural producers discussed in this book, Marxism is not so much the content of queer reflections, but a methodology. The analysis I offer significantly differs from projects that seek to "queer" Marxism through delightfully perverse (mis-)readings of letters between Marx and Engels, rehistoricizations of deskilled labor as the conditions of possibility for

the performance of masculinity and reified desire, or interpretations of capitalism as the production of desiring machines and bodies without organs. These queer Marxist projects share two assumptions: that capitalism is the exclusive property of Euro-American modernity, and that Marxism is a closed system incapable of dealing with the complexities of modern life (such as sexuality) and therefore needs to be "queered." By contrast, the type of Marxism I invoke in this study does not take capitalism's historical development in Europe as its privileged object of analysis. Neither do I regard queerness or biopolitical production as the conceptual tools needed to rescue Marxism from its ideological blind spots. Instead of queering Marxism, the authors I consider in this book bring the methodology of Marxism to bear on queer lives. In their works, Marxism is not a state policy such as the planned economy or collectivized labor, but a living philosophy. As a methodology rather than an ideology, Marxism inspires queer authors who occupy a variety of political positions that may be at odds with the "actually existing Marxism" of the People's Republic of China. While some of the most ingenious and hybrid uses of Marxist theories of social structuration, alienation, and totality come from PRC political dissidents who are openly critical of the Communist Party, ROC-based intellectuals have also developed textured narratives of the failures of liberal pluralism through recourse to Marxist theories of substantive equality. As represented by these texts, queerness exceeds the sexual meaning of homosexuality. Instead, queerness indicates a constitutive sociality of the self that counters the neoliberal imagination of formal rights, electoral competition, and economic growth.

### Beyond Neoliberal Homonationalism

In both English and Chinese scholarship, this turn toward a critique of neoliberal homonormativity is informed by two of the most galvanizing developments in queer theory.<sup>16</sup> The first development is the theory of queer temporality, a dynamic body of scholarship that accomplishes many things: it theorizes the conflict between reproductive futurism and queer negativity;<sup>17</sup> excavates a different political historical consciousness from the pleasures of the past;<sup>18</sup> critiques the normative model of temporality that organizes bourgeois reproduction, inheritance, risk/safety, work/play;<sup>19</sup> analyzes movements of sex before the

homo/heterosexual definition as figurations of the “untimely”;<sup>20</sup> and even writes, proleptically, queer theory’s own obituary.<sup>21</sup> The second important development is the much discussed “affective turn” in queer theory, which has also produced an explosive growth of exciting scholarship on gay and lesbian emotion, charting a passage from negative feelings (shame, loss, melancholia, grief, trauma) to positive feelings (outrage, sociability, happiness, public feelings, touching feelings, optimism) in queer history.<sup>22</sup> As generative as these forms of scholarship have been, theories of queer temporality and works in affect studies have a dematerializing tendency. Certainly, the affective turn in queer studies has significantly expanded a Marxist cultural materialism that includes Raymond Williams’s analysis of structures of feelings and Herbert Marcuse’s syncretic writings on Eros and civilization, attuning us to the mutually constitutive and mutually embedded relations between emergent social forms and queer affect.<sup>23</sup> In their emphasis on the subjective meanings of pleasure, play, and desire, however, new queer studies sometimes give insufficient attention to the impersonal structures and conditions of social change.<sup>24</sup>

There is no question that postsocialist China and postmartial law Taiwan have entered a new era marked by the biopolitical production of the neoliberal subject. Yet this bioproduction has also given rise to a reinvigorated Marxist analysis from within Chinese intellectual circles, which suggests that it is difficult to theorize queer subjectivities as a question of affect and shifting temporalities alone. The phenomenon of China’s “pink economy” presents a complex cultural semiotic that the production of the neoliberal subject only partially explains. The metropolitan dreams of China’s new queer bourgeoisie, like any dream-text, have manifest contents as well as deep structures. On the surface, many of these developments do suggest that a new era of liberal rights has dawned to bring about the hypervisibility of queer issues in the public domain. At the time of my writing in 2014, Taiwan is in the midst of massive protests against a proposed bill to legalize same-sex marriage, which would make Taiwan the first Asian country to do so. In the PRC, a visible and self-affirmative gay culture has appeared as well. A recent mainstream blockbuster, *Tiny Times* (2013), adapted from the director Guo Jingming’s own best-selling trilogy *Xiao shidai* (2008, 2010, 2011), comfortably and confidently presents homoeroticism, male nudity, and sexual experimentations as metropolitan glamor. In Beijing and

Shanghai, gay bars, saunas, cruising spots in parks, and other establishments are surrounded by restaurants that cater to middle-class gay consumers. Gay-themed television shows, lesbian pulp fiction, pop songs, youth culture, film festivals, and money boys abound.<sup>25</sup> Many of these structural transformations have impacted not only popular culture but also high art: as Fran Martin’s study shows, contemporary Chinese lesbian cinema has entered a distinctively new phase marked by a “critical presentism” that defines a self-consciously minoritizing lesbian identity, here and now, over and against an earlier, “memorial mode” of narrating same-sex love in the schoolgirl romance genre, where the dominant tendency is to bracket off same-sex experiences as an interlude in an otherwise unilinear and indicatively heterosexual life history.<sup>26</sup> New developments in literature, as well, contribute to this sense of the present as a groundbreaking moment marked by new identities, politics, communities, markets, and bodies in China.<sup>27</sup> As several recent sociological and ethnographic studies have observed, self-identified “tongzhi,” “tongren,” and “lala,” have established their own social vocabulary,<sup>28</sup> new community formations on the internet,<sup>29</sup> affective ties, recreational culture,<sup>30</sup> support networks,<sup>31</sup> relationship strategies, and even marriage rituals.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, since the 1990s, mainland China has seen numerous milestones of gay visibility and social rights: the 1997 repeal of the criminal code of “hooliganism” (under which homosexuals could be prosecuted),<sup>33</sup> Li Yinhe’s campaign to legalize same-sex marriage in China in 2001, the 2001 Chinese Gay and Lesbian Film Festival at Beijing University,<sup>34</sup> the removal of homosexuality from the medical category of perversions by the Chinese Psychiatry Association in 2001, the inaugural Shanghai Pride in June 2009, and the appearances of mainstream lesbian, gay, and transgendered television celebrities (such as Jin Xing).<sup>35</sup> As Lisa Rofel describes, while “from one perspective it might seem as if the Chinese state creates strict constraints on political activism, from another perspective the difficulty of doing politics on the terrain of ‘rights’ opens up a space that enables a different kind of political creativity”—an example being *Pink Space* (Fense kongjian), founded by He Xiaopei.<sup>36</sup>

Queer culture in the PRC is so developed today that the topic of homosexuality per se, once taboo and subsequently greeted by many people with fascination, can no longer command the attention of the public. Instead, today’s China has seen a proliferation of sexual discourses



and identities. *Tongqi* is a new item of China's popular vocabulary that refers to gay men's wives. These "beards" or "living widows" are a new social minority and the constituency of a new social movement in China. A hotly debated topic on Chinese internet forums today, the *tongqi* social movement of "living widows" demonstrates the hypervisibility of contemporary queer issues in China. The intensity of the conversation bears witness to the lightning speed at which Chinese reception and culture of sexuality have evolved. In 2011 a former living widow, Yao Lifan, founded *Tongqi jiayuan*, an organization designed to mobilize and empower other living widows.<sup>37</sup> The organization offers resources and counseling for women who unknowingly married homosexual men, but it also emphatically portrays homosexuality as a threat to women's happiness. Its website characterizes women married to homosexual men as victims of domestic abuse and psychological trauma, and homosexual men as selfish liars who abuse women to protect their own secrets. In fact, the organization urges the Chinese government to penalize deceitful homosexual men by criminalizing such marriages as fraud, and claims that such marriages pose a threat to public health by exposing unsuspecting Chinese women to AIDS. While *Tongqi jiayuan* pathologizes homosexuality and homosexual men, other voices have emerged. Pink Space provides a support group for wives of gay men as well, but the goal of the latter group is to promote understanding and dialogue between these women and the gay male community. A recent television show, "What Are We Doing to Rescue Wives of Homosexuals?" described those women as a "new minority in China more disempowered and alienated than homosexuals" and estimated their number to be around 16 million based on a study by Zhang Beichuan, a professor at Qingdao University.<sup>38</sup> According to the study of Liu Dalin at Shanghai University, China has 25 million *tongqi* at the moment.<sup>39</sup> In the realm of arts and literature, *tongqi* is a well-known topic in China. As early as 2003, Andrew Yusu Cheng's feature film, *Welcome to Destination Shanghai*, already presents a kaleidoscopic view of the entangled lives of *tongqi* and other disenfranchised characters on the margins of society. Two recent popular novels, Qing Zizhu's *Tongqi* and Jin Erchuang's *Tongfu Tongqi*, depict the social life and dilemmas of *tongqi*, while a new feature film made in Taiwan, *Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow?* (Arvin Chen, 2013), bears witness to the cultural interest in the topic across the straits. *Tongqi* is therefore a transregional and a transcultural formation. The attention the topic

has gained not only indicates that sexuality issues have entered a new phase in the PRC, but also demonstrates that the boundaries between the PRC and the ROC are often more porous than we acknowledge.

While these developments unambiguously suggest a neoliberal transformation of queer identities and discourses, many crucial questions are left unanswered without a materialist analysis. Above all, it is unclear whether the queer community's newfound visibility indicates collective social progress, or the cooptation of the gay movement by neoliberal capitalism. For example, Fang Gang's 1995 book, *Homosexuality in China*, brought about the first legal case against the libel of homosexuality and is for that reason frequently cited as a milestone of gay cultural history in China.<sup>40</sup> For queer Marxist Cui Zi'en, however, Fang Gang's work exemplifies an opportunistic voyeurism that transforms the social plight of homosexuals into a commodity.<sup>41</sup> A similar and earlier example is the publication of Li Yinhe and Wang Xiaobo's coauthored book, *Their World: A Penetrating Look into China's Male Homosexual Community*. No scholar can deny that Li and Wang's book brought about a paradigm shift in gay and lesbian research in China, and that Li, a prominent sociologist, sexologist, and advocate of gay rights, has made numerous contributions to China's LGBT community. In particular, Li is well known for her campaign to legalize same-sex marriage in China. However, Li and Wang's book, as its title shows, has also been criticized for objectifying and exoticizing the gay community. Critics point out that Li and Wang emphatically separate the researchers from the object of their inquiry ("their world"), while establishing the researchers as the authoritative and scientific fact-finders who "penetrate" China's male homosexual communities.<sup>42</sup> A catalogue of queer films, novels, visual arts, conferences, and social movements alone will not provide a meaningful account of how and how much PRC's sexual communities have evolved. These changes need to be recontextualized by an analysis of the political economy of two Chinas.

Excavating the Marxist intellectual roots of contemporary queer thought in the Chinas is one way of answering some of today's most urgent questions: How does being queer matter? If China's popular culture and social science research indicate that homosexuals are not just visible, but already firmly established in their roles as society's latest neoliberal subjects fighting for mainstream inclusion—what's queer about queer studies now, in the two Chinas or elsewhere? My formulation of

this question comes from the 2005 special issue of *Social Text* (edited by David Eng, Judith Halberstam, and José Muñoz), but it has, in some form or another, been at the heart of conversations around “being critically queer,” the question of social transformation,<sup>43</sup> “queer occupy,”<sup>44</sup> queer antiwar movements,<sup>45</sup> and a host of other concepts. As queer people transform from victims to consumers, queer theory is no longer centered on loss, melancholia, or other feelings associated with the era of the AIDS epidemic. Instead, contemporary queer theory mourns the loss of radicality in queer movements, which have been taken over by the assimilationist logic of commodified desire. Against the backdrop of a perceived universal loss of queer radicality, North American critics have even more reason to consider the historical development of a nonliberal alternative as it has occurred in the Chinas. The insights of Chinese queer Marxist writers are particularly relevant to our times. In this book, I offer an analysis of their thinking on the alliances between labor and queer movements, the material conditions that govern permissible language and democratic participation, and the future of substantive equality. In turning to these ideas, I also hope to show that Marxist methodology has flourished in the two Chinas, both of which are locations that international commentators expect to have been eroded by capitalist penetrations. The vitality of Marxist thought in postsocialist China and anticommunist Taiwan also indicates the limits of a static conception of Marxism and queer struggles as historically successive social movements.

I do not intend to suggest that China alone has a queer Marxist tradition. Certainly, sophisticated meditations on the convergence of Marxism and queer studies are available in North American intellectual circles. A vibrant tradition that encompasses, among others, Kevin Floyd’s important *The Reification of Desire: Towards a Queer Marxism* has already standardized the vocabulary for analyzing the relation between biopolitical reproduction and crisis of capitalist accumulation, a topic that received reinvigorated treatment in a 2012 special issue of *GLQ*.<sup>46</sup> However, as I mentioned already, scholars working in this vein tend to be more interested in queering Marxism than bringing historical materialism to bear on queer studies. But Marxism is not just a critique of capitalism, corporations, and consumption. It is also a philosophy of the totality of the social world, a critique of the bourgeois

conception of rights, an analysis of the mechanism that regulates differential access to resources, a social theory of alienation, and a dialectical method of reading historical tendencies and countertendencies. All of these strands of Marxist thought have influenced Chinese queer writings, which in turn provide some of the most powerful, yet underconsidered, resources for contemporary theory and politics.

The dynamic tradition of queer Marxism in the Chinas has produced a nonliberal queer theory, but reaping its insights requires the labor of two kinds of cultural translation. The first is disciplinary: we must take Chinese materials seriously as intellectual resources rather than local illustrations of theoretical paradigms already developed by the canon of queer theory. Doing so also means that we must adamantly reject the common division of intellectual labor in area studies programs between the production of paradigms (queer theory) and the gathering of raw materials (Chinese examples). Hence, we should not assume that queer theory automatically refers to the distinct body of theoretical works produced in 1990s’ United States and later translated into Chinese. In my study, queer theory refers to a global discourse that was simultaneously developed by English, Chinese, and other academic traditions. Queer theory is a transnational and transcultural practice of which its US instantiation is only part. Moreover, this global dialogue is necessarily impure in its methodology, entangled in historical trajectory, and varied in modes of dissemination.

The second kind of translation performed in this book is methodological: I read fiction as theory and society as text. Literature is a node of densely woven information and ideas provided by a culture, though its insights are often obscured by its self-declared status as fiction in our habitual search for stable meanings, historical truths, and readily digestible propositions. Similarly, the social text of contemporary Chinese queer cultures often resists our desire to transcode it into political allegories and narratives of emergence. Despite the formidable work of the historians of sexuality, queer Chinese cultures remain recalcitrant, thwarting every effort to produce neatly organized histories from taboo to identity. Instead, those interested in reading, interpreting, or writing about Chinese queer cultures are more likely to be confronted with enigmatic political signifiers and overlapping temporalities. While these aberrant Chinese queer narratives fail to delineate the heroic

journey of the self-making of a subculture, they also defy attempts to align their signification to the economic policies of the socialist and non-socialist parts and phases of Chinese cultures. The cultural narratives produced by the two Chinas are too complex to be reduced to expressions of Marxism and liberalism. In turn, queer writings provide precisely the conceptual tools we need to overcome these static Cold War bifurcations.

### The Quandary of Two Chinas

Cold War  
PSTW

Today two nations in the world refer to themselves as China: the People's Republic of China and the Republic of China on Taiwan. The coexistence of two Chinas (and two Koreas) indicates that the Cold War is not yet over in Asia. This reality is significantly absent in the American perspective, which tends to consider the disintegration of the Soviet Union as the beginning of a post-Cold War world order marked by "the end of ideology." The coexistence of two Chinas also limits the usefulness of nation-centered history. From the beginning, the creation of two Chinas signals a sedimentation of multinational interests and conflicts. At the end of the Chinese Civil War in 1949, the Chiang Kai-shek government relocated to Taiwan and, under the protection of the Seventh Fleet, became America's island fortress for the crusade against communism in the Pacific. As part of the United States' strategy of containment, the Sino-American Mutual Defense Treaty prevented both the PRC and the ROC from initiating direct military action against each other, effectively ensuring the division of China. While the two Germanys were unified after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, East Asia remains divided according to the original cartography drawn at the height of the Cold War, and ideologically governed by popular responses to the economic outcomes of socialism and liberal capitalism. In Taiwan, while the rhetoric of "taking back the mainland" has dissipated with the liberalization of political culture and commerce, the stigma of communism (understood as poverty, cultural backwardness, and one-party dictatorship) translates into sinophobia and remains the primary emotional material fueling the Taiwanese independence movement. As Chen Kuan-Hsing argues, decolonization in East Asia is an incomplete project that was hijacked by the US installment of a Cold

War structure of feeling.<sup>47</sup> The Cold War created the spatial fracturing and "worlding" of Chinas (first, second, and third worlds) as well as their temporal desynchronization (pre-, anti-, and postcapitalist). This fracturing is most symptomatically seen in the contradictory senses of center and periphery in the two Chinas: while the PRC is militarily and politically dominant, it is also economically and culturally colonized by the ROC.<sup>48</sup> Although the ROC no longer claims to be the seat of the legitimate government of the whole of China, it continues to see itself as the center of authentic Chinese culture, where standard Chinese writing remains in use and traditional culture remains protected from the disastrous events of the Cultural Revolution. Such claims no doubt carry an imperialistic undertone, although it is far from clear whether it is colonialist to consider Taiwan Chinese or not to do so. The interpenetrations of American neocolonial interests, Han Chinese chauvinism, Taiwanese ethno-nationalism, and Sinocentrism often render the operations of power illegible, greatly limiting the application of a dichotomous model of domination and resistance from postcolonial studies to the quandary of two Chinas.<sup>49</sup>

How, then, is the problem of queer liberalism entwined with the quandary of two Chinas? For many international observers, Taiwan has been a poster child of East Asian democratization. Taiwan's highly touted economic "miracle" is causally linked to its political liberalism, although it is hard to say which is the cause and which is the effect. The tentative links between Taiwan's economic and political liberalism aside, one of the most important indices of Taiwan's political liberalism is indeed its queer movement: queer literature has blossomed in Taiwan since the 1990s, producing mainstream and internationally acclaimed titles such as Chu T'ien-wen's *Notes of a Desolate Man*. In addition, the popular gay TV series, *Crystal Boys*, aired in 2003 to wide attention. Taiwan was also the first Chinese community to hold a Gay Pride parade in 2003. Since then, Taiwan has been rumored to be on its way to becoming the first East Asian country to legalize same-sex marriage.<sup>50</sup> Since these significant changes in queer visibility occurred after the lifting of the martial law in 1987 and the multiparty election in 2000, it is natural to assume that queer emancipation is a byproduct of the advent of the liberal-democratic state. This view reinforces the link between political liberalism (queer visibility) and economic liberalism

Taiwan



(free trade), which, consequently, implies that any observable degree of queer progress in the PRC must be attributed to the supersession of socialism by international capitalism.

The assumption of free and repressed queer subjects depends on the dichotomy of two Chinas. Since the Cold War period, Taiwan is almost never studied in the West as an object of interest itself. Instead, as Yvonne Chang points out, Taiwan has served either as a surrogate for China as a whole (during the years when scholars could not access mainland China for fieldwork or language training), or as a thought experiment of the "road not taken" in communist studies: "What would have happened to China without the Communist Revolution?"<sup>51</sup> The celebration of Taiwan's liberalism, then, works in tandem with the reduction of China to communist studies, whereby Marxism is caricatured as the planned economy and rigid power structures, and democracy conflated with the ballot box.

Commentators who consider Taiwan to be a formerly Leninist state that has successfully undergone democratization commonly attribute a revolutionary character to the lifting of martial law in 1987. The event ended near four decades of Kuomintang (KMT) autocracy and granted oppositional parties formal political representation. But as Marx once said, "the political revolution dissolves civil society into its elements without revolutionizing these elements themselves or subjecting them to criticism."<sup>52</sup> The creation of a multiparty electoral system does not signal substantive equality and social change; nor can we comfortably equate democratization to the formal competition between parties. Despite the rhetoric of radical break, this common reading of 1987 as the beginning of democratization in Taiwan actually derives in part from a perception that Taiwan was always and already liberal before the lifting of martial law.

It is worth noting that such readings are possible only because liberalism itself is a contradictory ideology whose political and economic meanings are conflated in the cultural imaginary. In the pre-1987 authoritarian phase, Taiwan was the "Free China" that was not yet lost to the revolution against the property system. During this phase, Taiwan was free in the sense of the free market. Like many other capitalist, but not necessarily democratic, regimes supported by the United States, Taiwan played a key role in the global translation of liberty as laissez-faire capitalism. Long before the popularization of the term

East Asian Economic Miracle, triumphant accounts of the Four Asian Tigers already identified Taiwan's high growth rates since the 1960s as the vindication of liberalism over the socialist model. In the period after the lifting of martial law in 1987, Taiwan is again a paradigmatic manifestation of a universal liberalism, whose meaning has suddenly shifted from free trade to the ballot box. Discussed in the Western media mainly as a counterpart of the People's Republic of China, Taiwan stands as a comforting example of how Western liberal principles, such as freedom of expression and free elections, can take root in non-Western cultures. Together with Japan, India, and Namibia, Taiwan is the living proof that "traditional societies," despite their recalcitrant cultural customs and economic backwardness, can also become just like the West. By the twenty-first century, the old world order was turned upside down by a post-martial-law, democratic Taiwan and a post-Maoist, capitalist China. Because formerly stable ideological metaphors are reversed, the revamped Cold War bipolar lens of the differences between the ROC and the PRC has come to depend heavily on the political rivalry between the Democratic Progress Party (DPP) and the KMT for a sense of Taiwan's liberalism. Although the principal justification for the grouping of Taiwan with the liberal West has now shifted from its capitalism to its democracy, the theoretical inconsistencies of global anticommunism have only reinforced the impression that Taiwan is a steadily liberalizing society on the verge of becoming a belated version of multicultural America.

One crucial consequence of this queer emancipatory narrative is the analytical reduction of human emancipation to democratization, to a revolution in the form of the state from the one-party rule of the KMT to the present multi-party system in Taiwan. However, since Taiwan's "democratization"—its first multifactional presidential election in 2000—ethnic identity has replaced anticommunism as the dominant political issue in Taiwan. Currently, the Taiwanese polity is divided into two color-coded camps: the Pan-Green Coalition led by the DPP and devoted to the promotion of Taiwan's *de jure* independence, and the "One China" Pan-Blue Coalition centered on the nationalist party's (KMT) platform of unitary Chinese national identity and close economic cooperation with the People's Republic of China. The Green Camp made the creation of a distinctive Taiwanese identity and "de-Sinicization" (*qu Zhongguo hua*) major campaign issues, emphasizing the KMT's long

record of oppression and martial law, its massacre of Taiwanese protestors in the 228 Incident, and its regime of White Terror that imprisoned and executed 45,000–90,000 intellectuals in the 1950s. The electoral competition between Green and Blue has blocked queer issues from entering the domain of politics. In 2004, a group of concerned intellectuals, writers, artists, and activists in Taiwan formed the Alliance of Ethnic Equality in response to DPP's electoral campaign, which created "a divisive identity politics playing on ethnic friction rather than resolving them."<sup>53</sup> The Alliance recognized that Taiwan did not have a true democracy because elections were monopolized by ethnic identity issues, while other concerns—environmentalism, migrant workers, queer rights—were effectively purged from the domain of electoral politics. More specifically, elections in Taiwan are determined by the ethnic identities of the running candidates—whether the politician in question is Taiwan-born (*bensheng*) or an émigré from the mainland (*waisheng*)—and both camps have been unresponsive to and uninterested in queer and feminist issues.

This analysis suggests that a simple dichotomy between liberal and illiberal regimes, democracies and authoritarian bureaucracies, is insufficient for comprehending the conditions of queer lives. Indeed, sexual dissidents, migrant workers, and other disempowered social groups often bear the brunt of globalization-induced crisis. Threatened by the prospect of reunification with mainland China, Taiwan has focused its diplomatic strategy on integrating into the global economy and on securing popular support from the West by promoting itself as a democratic regime with values similar to those in the United States. As Josephine Ho demonstrated, the realignment of local cultures with the demands of globalization has also created a repressive regime for queer people through the establishment of NGOs, religious groups, psychiatric and health experts, and even human rights watch groups.<sup>54</sup> The queer Marxism project runs counter to the perception that liberalism has advanced queer rights. Giving up the notion of a liberal Taiwan, in turn, frees us of these debilitating habits of thought inherited from the Cold War that are blocking more useful analyses of the complex relations between queer struggles and power. Moreover, disabusing ourselves of the knee-jerk equation of Marxism and liberalism with the correlated Chinas also allows us to recognize these struggles as intellectually hybrid, impure, and even promiscuous formations.

### Why Does Queer Theory Need the Chinas?

Viewing Marxism as an intellectual resource rather than an economic policy necessarily raises the question of theory in Chinese studies. It should be clear by now that "China" in this study is not an empirical location that refers to the PRC alone. Instead, I focus on how queer cultural producers engage with the problematic of China(s). Treating China as an object of theoretical reflection disrupts a strong tendency in the current field of gender and sexuality studies to separate theory, in particular queer theory, from empirical and historical perspectives on same-sex relations in China. Scholars who separate theoretical and historical perspectives in Chinese gender studies often insist that queer theory is a Euro-American formation of sexual knowledge, and that applying queer theory to the study of China perpetuates a colonialist epistemology. The critique is not unfounded, since Sinophone queer cultures indeed have important and distinctive features that cannot be assimilated into a global history of sexuality.<sup>55</sup> In addition, this critique of queer theory's Eurocentrism is both urgent and necessary, given that it is increasingly common for critics, such as Dennis Altman, to interpret new sexual formations in Asia as the spread of Western models of homosexuality without local history and agency.<sup>56</sup> A stronger version of this view categorically rejects the applicability of the terms queer and homosexuality, insisting that *tongxinglian* and *tongxing'ai* in China are entirely different from these concepts.<sup>57</sup> My study questions the assumption that renders China as antithetical and exterior to queer theory; in turn, I characterize queer theory as an incomplete project that is constantly transformed by China. In my view, limiting the provenance of queer theory to North America misses not only the opportunity for a transcultural dialogue, but also the point of queer theory altogether: that sexual difference necessitates a rethinking of cultural comparison and comparability.

In what follows, I offer some reflections on the historical entanglement between queer theory and cultural comparison as the discipline was practiced in North America. I assert that queer theory, for all its emphasis on sexual difference, was actually founded by a theory of the non-West that was captured by the sign of China. In this context, the proper question to ask in the postcolonial debate is no longer, "Why does China need queer theory?" but rather, "Why does queer

theory need the Chinas?" By demonstrating that queer theory has always needed and presupposed the Chinas, and that queer theory is also a theory of the cultural difference between China and the West, I strive to show that queer theory requires a theory of geopolitics. In turn, Chinese queer Marxists' theorization of the intimacy between geopolitics and sexuality, which I reconstruct more systematically in chapter two, serves as a model for queer writings in English. Recognizing Chinese queer theory as a geopolitically mediated discourse, then, helps to correct the perception of it as a derivative discourse. Instead, we can place Chinese queer theory in the proper intellectual context as a globally capacious tradition that prefigures and encompasses its Euro-American variant.

In the United States in the late 1980s and the 1990s, a major question in queer theory was the postulation of a universal patriarchy. In retrospect, it is surprising how many of the founding texts of queer theory were derived from a theoretical argument for a nonidentity between Eastern and Western cultures. Take, for example, Judith Butler's 1990 *Gender Trouble*, a text primarily known today for its theory of performativity and for its critique of the category of women as the universal basis of feminism. In *Gender Trouble* and later elaborations, Butler argues that gender is not an immutable essence of a person but, rather, a reiterative series of acts and a citational practice of norms that are, significantly, culturally variable.<sup>58</sup> The theory of cultural variability underlies the book's central claim, which is that a representational politics based on an idealized and dualistic conception of gender forecloses transgressive possibilities and agency. But Butler means several things by the phrase "culturally variable." The immediate context for Butler's intervention is a structuralist legacy in French feminist theory that she understands to be a dyadic heterosexism. In *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, Claude Lévi-Strauss maintains that the prohibition against incest is not only a law present in every culture but also what founds culture as such. Lévi-Strauss's understanding of the prohibition against incest as a culturally invariable "elementary structure" of human civilization provides the basis of the Symbolic in Lacanian psychoanalysis, which elevates the incest taboo into a heterosexist theory of the Oedipus complex.<sup>59</sup> Later, Butler wonders what would happen if Western philosophy (and gender theory) began with Antigone instead of Oedipus, and formulates an alternative to the Oedipus complex in *Antigone's Claim*. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler identifies the important links (and discontinuities) be-

tween the structuralist legacy of Lévi-Strauss, Ferdinand de Saussure, and Jacques Lacan, and the French feminist theory of Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous, and Luce Irigaray. The contributions of French feminist theory are many, but most significant is the view that the fundamental difference between masculine and feminine is a precondition of human signification and communicability. Butler argues that Lévi-Straussian theories of universal structures and fundamentals were indispensable in elevating feminist theory to the center of social analysis: "The speaking subject was, accordingly, one who emerged in relation to the duality of the sexes, and that culture, as outlined by Lévi-Strauss, was defined through the exchange of women, and that the difference between men and women was instituted at the level of elementary exchange, an exchange which forms the possibility of communication itself. . . . Suddenly, [women] were fundamental. Suddenly, no human science could proceed without us."<sup>60</sup>

Why was *Gender Trouble*, the foundational text of US queer theory, so preoccupied with the question of cultural variability in structuralist anthropology? In the 1966 preface to the second edition of *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, Lévi-Strauss openly acknowledges that his theory of kinship was based on insufficient and secondary sources about China and India.<sup>61</sup> Butler returns to Lévi-Strauss's writings on China in *Undoing Gender*, citing the 2001 anthropological findings of Cai Hua to dismiss the structuralist myth of universal kinship.<sup>62</sup> Here, China occupies a strategic place in Butler's quarrels with the structuralists, many of whom (such as Kristeva and Žižek) have also produced famous statements of their own on China.<sup>63</sup> Butler's goal is not only to reveal the heteronormative and cisnormative assumptions in structuralist and psychoanalytic understandings of kinship, but to demonstrate that these laws, norms, and structures are products of human culture and hence subject to social change and democratic contestations.<sup>64</sup> The thesis of social transformability then requires Butler to demonstrate that such laws must vary from culture to culture. If cultures like China can be discovered to operate outside or, better yet, against the systematic descriptions of universally valid laws and conventions of the human world in Western philosophy, the structuralist project can be finally overcome.<sup>65</sup> In these queer battles against the heterosexism of the Symbolic, observations about the culturally constructed nature of social categories become an argument about cultural differences in the



anthropological sense, and the critique of gender norms becomes entangled with theories of Oriental exceptionalism.

In *Gender Trouble*, Butler argues that the category of women is an oppressively restrictive notion that is dependent on an equally restrictive imagination of a singular patriarchy.<sup>66</sup> To make this argument, Butler points out that there must be other cultures that do not share Western ideas about what a woman is or what constitutes oppression and patriarchy. In order to deconstruct the fixity of women as a category, Butler has to first caution her reader against the search for a universal patriarchy in non-Western cultures:

The effort to include "Other" cultures as variegated amplifications of a global phallogocentrism constitutes an appropriative act that risks a repetition of the self-aggrandizing gesture of phallogocentrism, colonizing under the sign of the same those differences that might otherwise call that totalizing concept into question. . . . The political assumption that there must be a universal basis for feminism, one which must be found in an identity assumed to exist cross-culturally, often accompanies the notion that the oppression of women has some singular form discernible in the universal or hegemonic structure of patriarchy or masculine domination. . . . That form of feminism has come under criticism for its efforts to colonize and appropriate non-Western cultures to support highly Western notions of oppression.<sup>67</sup>

What exactly are these "highly Western notions of oppression" and how do non-Western cultures serve as their conceptual limits, as the *l'impensé de la raison*? More specifically, how does an argument that designates non-Western cultures as the unrepresentable and the unspeakable counter the history of colonial violence and the hegemony of Western thought? In this critique of the foundational ethnocentrism of the West, paradoxically, the non-West becomes excluded from thought, standing in for the epistemological limits of Western reason. This particular post-colonial critique certainly has its political promises and uses, but the more pressing question is why the ethical call to realign what is possible in human gender and sexual relations in queer theory has to rely on an anthropological hypothesis of the incongruity of Western and non-Western cultures, which in turn posits China as the exteriority and lacunae of "Western notions of oppression."

*Gender Trouble* is not the only text from the 1990s whose theory of gender relies on this particular conception of the non-West. Another pioneering text of early US queer theory, Eve Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet*, makes a different argument about sexuality via the distinction between the totalizability of the West and the nontotalizable nature of the non-West. Sedgwick's work is generally acknowledged as a paradigm shift that establishes the study of sexuality as the foundation of all social analysis, rather than as its footnote. She makes this argument by showing that the definitional crisis of homosexuality/heterosexuality is "epidemic" and central to all organizations of knowledge, even non-sex-specific kinds. In many scenarios that do not appear to be primarily concerned with homosexuality—for example, romantic English poetry—the text's structure of address belies a preoccupation with what Sedgwick calls the triangulation of desire that involves the deflection and disavowal of homosocial desires. In order to show that sexuality is central to every node of knowledge, however, Sedgwick has to qualify her argument with the phrase "in Western culture." The West then becomes a totalizable entity, while the non-West is definitionally excluded from this theory of sexuality.

Sedgwick begins *Epistemology of the Closet* with the proposal that the (crisis of the) homo/heterosexual definition is constitutive of "twentieth-century Western culture as a whole."<sup>68</sup> This argument builds on her analysis in *Between Men* (1985) that the disavowal or deflection of same-sex desire, often found in English poetry whose manifest theme is the celebration of heterosexual union, constitutes a culturally policed boundary between homosociality and homosexuality that structures the entire social terrain "in the modern West."<sup>69</sup> Sedgwick argues that although the figure of the closet may appear to be a merely sexual or even trivial question, it is actually the paradigm of knowledge/ignorance that organizes the entire domain of modern social thought. Later, Sedgwick elaborates this argument in the discussion of the "privilege of unknowing" in *Tendencies* (1993). Sedgwick shows that social domination depends on a strategic separation of mutually implied forms of knowledge of which the closet is a paradigmatic case.<sup>70</sup> This point is the basis of Sedgwick's claim that the interpretation of sexuality should be taken as the starting point of social analysis rather than as its afterthought. The future of queer studies depends on the promise that rethinking the sexual can lead to the rethinking of the social as well.<sup>71</sup>

The power of Sedgwick's work comes from her ability to show that sexuality is revelatory of the ways in which an entire culture organizes itself and therefore central to any type of social analysis. Sedgwick, however, cautions that sexuality studies can become the foundation of social analysis only if we do not apply such generalizations, "however sweeping," outside the West: "It is very difficult for [this book's choice of the Euro-American male as its subject matter] to be interpreted in any other light than that of the categorical imperative: the fact that they are made in a certain way here seems a priori to assert that they would be best made in the same way everywhere. I would ask that, however sweeping the claims made by this book may seem to be, it not be read as making that particular claim [of applying the analysis to non-Euro-American cultures]." <sup>72</sup> In this formula, the mutually constitutive and dialectical relationship between homosexuality and heterosexuality within Western culture "as a whole" is analytically predicated on the categorical rejection of the commensurability between Western and non-Western cultures.

Sedgwick suggests that sexuality can maintain its illustrative power as a paradigmatic instance of the ways discourse organizes the entire social field only if we accept that it makes sense to speak of "twentieth-century Western culture as a whole" in the first place, but what are the implications of the insistence on the links between these two arguments? What are the historical and theoretical contexts in which Sedgwick's argument for the centrality of sexuality studies comes to be analytically dependent on the totalizability of the West, on our ability to view "twentieth-century West as a whole" as a coherent unit of analysis? It is unclear whether Sedgwick would consider Spain, Greece, or Serbia part of a West whose definitional axis extends from Marcel Proust to Henry James, Jane Austen, and Herman Melville. But it is clear that the hypothesis of the totality of the West requires the incommensurability between East and West, since it is only in relation to the non-West that the phrase "Western culture as a whole" acquires any meaning and coherence.

While 1990s' US queer theory needed and reified the incongruity between cultures—and for the founding critics, it is not the differences between French and American cultures that matter—the historical tendency to situate China as the paradigmatic Other served a number of important functions in the development of queer theory. The argument

that homosexuality was a modern invention (in contrast to, for example, Greek pederasty) is among the most important claims of queer theory. <sup>73</sup> Some queer theorists have argued that the modern period is defined by a newly available conception of homosexuality as the identity of a small and relatively fixed group of people, in distinction from an earlier view of same-sex desire as a continuum of acts, experiences, identities, and pleasures spanning the entire human spectrum. This claim, sometimes known as the "before sexuality thesis," is commonly associated with the work of Michel Foucault, who is quite specific in his dating: Foucault writes that homosexuality as such was invented in 1870 in the West. <sup>74</sup> But in making that claim about the constructedness of homosexuality, Foucault also argues that two different histories, one Western and one Eastern, must be carefully distinguished from each other. Foucault maintains that sexuality is not a timeless, immutable given because sexuality as we know it is absent in the East. The first history, which began somewhere in Greece and migrated to France to produce "the homosexual" as a species in 1870, is called *scientia sexualis*. Foucault's definition of *scientia sexualis* does not include modern Greece, but draws a line of continuity between modern French culture and ancient Greek culture. The second history, of which Foucault cites China as a primary example, encompasses all non-Western societies without distinguishing their ancient and modern forms. The name Foucault proposes for this second history is *ars erotica* (a term that emphasizes its lack of scientific and logical basis in comparison to *scientia sexualis*).

Whereas Western civilization (from Greece to France) enjoyed a science of sexuality that discursively produced "the homosexual" as a species in 1870 (in a manner similar to the production of the criminal, the vagabond, the prostitute, the blasphemer, and the insane Foucault analyzes in *Madness and Civilization*), China remains mired in the stage of *ars erotica* that has blocked the invention of homosexuality: "On the one hand, the societies—and they are numerous: China, Japan, India, Rome, the Arabo-Moslem societies—which endowed themselves with an *ars erotica* [sic] . . . Our civilization possesses no *ars erotica*. In return, it is undoubtedly the only civilization to practice a *scientia sexualis*." <sup>75</sup> Foucault further insists that China's *ars erotica* is precisely what "we" have shed in order to achieve modernity: "Breaking with the traditions of the

ars erotica, our society has equipped itself with a *scientia sexualis*.”<sup>76</sup> Here China functions as the constitutive outside of the modern European homosexual’s self-definition, as the negative space against which it becomes possible for individuals who are, presumably, genetically unrelated to the Greeks to speak of a “we” and “our society.” While the cultural differences between ancient Greece and France of the 1870s are construed as a historical advance, the distinction between ancient China and modern China does not bother Foucault much. In fact, the grouping of ancient Rome and unspecified periods of Chinese history as interchangeable examples of *ars erotica* is justified precisely by the claim that non-Western societies, due to the lack of *scientia sexualis*, display a developmental stasis through the millennia. China’s *ars erotica* signifies an ossified cultural essence bearing a collective resemblance to the ancient Mediterranean world. In fact, what Foucault means by the *ars erotica* of “China, Japan, India, Rome, [and] the Arabo-Moslem societies” is a code name for non-Christian societies, whereas Europe is defined by “the development of confessional techniques” and “pastoral care”—namely Christianity.

Noting the glaring absence of race in Foucault’s considerations of the bourgeois self in the *History of Sexuality*, Anne Stoler argues that Foucault’s Collège de France lectures present a more nuanced treatment of racism and a “shift in analytic weight,” where “a discourse of races . . . antedates nineteenth-century social taxonomies, appearing not as a result of bourgeois orderings, but as constitutive of them.”<sup>77</sup> If the history of sexuality has always been a history of race as well, Foucault’s own insight indicates that European preoccupations with race do not reflect a negotiation of the boundaries between self and other; rather, the concepts of race and sexuality are parts of the metropole’s technology of managing social differences within a domestic setting, forming part of the bourgeois state’s indispensable defense against itself.<sup>78</sup> The conflation between the global hierarchization of cultures and a liberal pluralist understanding of race in domestic politics is indeed the major problem confronting queer critics writing in the Foucauldian idiom. The influential scholarship of David Halperin is a case in point. In his 2002 *How to Do the History of Sexuality*, Halperin restates the famous thesis of his 1990 *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality* that “‘homosexuality’ was a modern cultural production and that there was no homosexuality, properly speaking, in classical Greece, the ancient Mediterranean

world, or indeed in most premodern or non-Western societies.”<sup>79</sup> Like Foucault, Halperin does not find the distinction between ancient and modern relevant to non-Western societies, and uses “most premodern” and all “non-Western societies” as interchangeable examples. For both Halperin and Foucault, modern China and other non-Western (that is, non-Christian) societies, precisely due to their lack of something that can be called “sexuality,” experience an evolutionary stasis that makes them similar to “classical Greece” and the “ancient Mediterranean world.”

Writing one full decade after *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*, however, Halperin acknowledges “the force of [the] postcolonial critique”:

Constructionist discourse about the modernity of sexuality and the historicity of premodern sexual formations often has the effect of aligning marginal or nonstandard sexual practices in postindustrial liberal societies with dominant sexual practices in developing nations, thereby perpetuating the hoary colonialist notion that non-European cultures represent the cultural childhood of a modern Europe. . . . [However, this] irreducible epistemic and social privilege [of the Western historian] does not mean it’s wrong. There are positive uses to be made of inequality and asymmetry, in history as in love.<sup>80</sup>

Halperin is conscientious in his “positive” uses of this “inequality.” One detects in his writing no pejorative descriptions of those erotic experiences and expressions that supposedly characterize modern non-Western and premodern Western societies. But one notices how quickly an opportunity to learn from understudied cultures is read as an injunction to suspend moral judgment. Surreptitiously, an engagement with the “postcolonial critique” is replaced by a call to defend and de-stigmatize “nonstandard practices” within modern Western (here defined as “postindustrial” and “liberal”) societies themselves. In other words, the intellectual critique of Eurocentrism in queer research becomes a commitment to “diversity” as an American social value, and the invitation to think sexuality “transnationally” is understood as an argument for multiculturalism and tolerance for US subjects’ alternative sexual practices. In this liberal version of the story, the problem of Orientalism becomes a “hoary colonialist notion” that must be corrected by the enlightened Western historian. Translating



the “inequality and asymmetry” between global cultures into the domestic signification of race misses the opportunity to ask how the supposedly “irreducible” “epistemic and social privilege” itself should and can be transformed. In the final analysis, Halperin’s approach is a liberal pluralist one whose primary concern lies with diversity in a domestic context instead of transnational dialogues. By contrast, I would insist that transnational dialogues are both possible and necessary, and that we have much to gain from a consideration of the intellectual history of queer China, which provides an important alternative to the liberal pluralist emphasis on tolerance, respect, and diversity as the ethics in dealing with “nonstandard practices.”

### *Queer Marxism: An Alternative to Liberal Pluralist Analysis*

In retrospect, we can conclude that the political success of US queer theory—the fact that it was able to make sexuality a legitimate field of social and cultural theory—is rhetorically derived from imagining a binary opposition between East and West. Ironically, the incongruity between East and West, despite its importance to queer theory, does not appear on the famous list of “axiomatic binarisms” Sedgwick enumerates in *Epistemology of the Closet* as the fabric of modern culture, because it is exterior to it.<sup>81</sup> While we are indebted to the works of Foucault, Sedgwick, and Halperin, we cannot afford to keep assuming that queerness or homosexuality has a single origin in Greece or France. Nor can we assume that queer theory should begin with a description of how a certain “we” evolved from a Greek cultural organization of gender and sexuality to the making of the modern French homosexual as a species and then to the twentieth-century homo-/heterosexual definitional crisis. Conversely, it would be erroneous to argue that China disrupts the colonial epistemology of Western universalism by presenting a different history of same-sex relations. However, the problem is not an inherent racism or Orientalism in queer theory. My argument is that postwar theories of sexuality often unwittingly reproduce the logic of liberal pluralism and fail to develop stronger political responses to the dilemmas of the Cold War, which the case of a divided China helps us understand. In other words, queer theory needs the Chinas not because it is ethically imperative to include the Other, but because US theory is itself born in the shadows of the failures of liberal pluralism.

Queer Marxism in the Chinas provides precisely the conceptual tools to illuminate the historical connections between queer theory and liberal pluralism for the global scholarly community.

The queer Marxist approach does not ask society to tolerate or accept “alternative” sexualities. Rather, queer Marxists ask, what kinds of historical processes empower individuals of certain sexualities to decide who should be tolerated and accepted in the first place? Queer Marxists analyze the field of socioeconomic conditions in which desire, pleasure, intimacy, human connectedness, and permissible speech become possible, asking how such social relations are reproduced along unequal axes of power for differently positioned human beings. Similarly, instead of arguing for more “inclusion” of China in queer studies in the hope of undoing the epistemological imperialism of the West, queer Marxists reject inclusion as a mode of social redress, opting instead for an analysis of geopolitically reproduced relations of power. Queer Marxism engages questions of location and situatedness without reifying alterity. The point is neither to return to the primacy of economic determinants by reinstating an intellectual foundationalism for queer theory, nor to reiterate a moralistic critique of bourgeois consumption brought about by transnational capitalism. Rather, queer Marxism emphasizes the possibilities of systemic analysis in investigating those configurations of gender, sexuality, and social power that liberal critics characterize as mere contingencies.

Queer Marxism in Two Chinas traces the dynamic traditions of queer art, film, literature, social movements, and popular culture in the Chinas that produce a Marxist philosophy of human sociality. Chapter 2, “Chinese Queer Theory,” explores the “theoretical status of theory” in contemporary Chinese queer critical discourses centered on Cui Zi’en, Josephine Ho, Ding Naifei, and the Gender/Sexuality Rights Association, Taiwan. Rather than assuming that anyone producing queer theory in Chinese must be working with a translated concept and hence conflating Euro-American sexual politics and Chinese “tongzhi” in the service of the cultural imperialism of the West, I argue that queer theory itself is an incomplete project with global origins, and that the particular variant of queer theory we have become accustomed to in North American academia is constantly expanded, revised, and displaced by competing sources of knowledge in the Chinas and elsewhere. While the highly transnational, mobile conversations across the straits (between PRC- and

ROC-based scholars) do not represent a univocal queer theory, this body of scholarship is distinct from its North American counterpart in that it has successfully produced an analysis of the relation between geopolitics and sexuality.

Chapter 3, "The Rise of the Queer Chinese Novel," demonstrates that the emergence of queer fiction in Chinese is not merely the result of a consolidated and self-affirmative social identity, as is often assumed, but, rather, a development critically shaped by the geopolitics of the Cold War and the vicissitudes of Chinese Marxism. Tracing the emergence of queer literature and subjectivity back to an earlier generation of writers before the more commonly discussed examples of "tongzhi wenxue" (Chinese queer fiction) writers such as Chu T'ien-wen, Chen Ran, Lin Bai, and Qiu Miaojin, my analysis treats Chen Ruoxi's transnational novel *Paper Marriage* as an exemplary case of the productive tensions between queer feelings and Marxism.

Chapter 4, "Genealogies of the Self," examines the political problem of queer liberalism through a reading of a feminist novel, Xiao Sa's *Song of Dreams*. While the novel makes a feminist claim by representing a self-invented woman who attains both financial and sexual independence in the era of Taiwan's economic miracle, I argue that the novel's feminism is critically predicated on a queer arrangement of desires and commodities, which implies that the gendered "self" is a palimpsest of internally contradictory pasts, rather than the immutable essence of a person. Against the neoliberal fable of middle-class self-transformation and virtuous striving, the novel insists on the need to conduct a genealogical review of the irreducibly queer pasts of a self that appears to be willed into being through sheer determination and hard work. Through a queer critique of economic liberalization and unbridled capitalism, *Song of Dreams* shows a creative way to mobilize queerness for anticapitalist thinking.

The final chapter, "Queer Human Rights in and against the Two Chinas," examines the mutual entanglements between queer human rights discourse and the quandary of two Chinas. Whereas "human rights" remain a sensitive issue in the PRC because of the incomplete character of its independence resulting from US neocolonialism, human rights—including queer human rights—have also become a key tool by which Taiwan disciplines China in order to secure its own independence. While one aim of this chapter is to document the numerous cases of queer human rights violations in Taiwan despite its claims to politi-

cal liberalism, I also examine the creative guerrilla tactics that queer Marxists have developed that strategically invoke the concept of human rights in the service of progressive ends.

As represented by the queer films, texts, and social movements reconstructed in this book, queerness is not grounded in the subjective meanings of affect, desire, shame, and loss; rather, queerness indicates the constitutive sociality of the self, which shifts the focus of Chinese queer discourse away from questions of cultural diversity and formal electoral competition to the substantive socioeconomic conditions of effective participation in public culture. Inspired by Marxism, these queer movements in the Chinas emphasize the importance of systemic understandings of the material reproduction of power and society, while deploying multilayered, impure, and promiscuous circuits of social exchange to undo habits of thought that congeal around the quandary of two Chinas. Since the underlying structures and causal mechanisms that regulate the conditions of queer democratic participation are necessarily bound up with the dynamics of international capitalism, the specificity of geographical location, and the incomplete project of decolonization, queer Marxism in the Chinas also stands as a historical response to neoliberalism. In this uncanny convergence of queerness, Marxism, and Chinas, we find an alternative imagination of human creativity, fulfillment, and freedom.