Edited by Heike Bauer

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Cultural and Scientific Encounters across the Modern World

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Data of Desire

Translating (Homo)Sexology in Republican China

HOWARD CHIANG

Carnal Transformations

The translation into Japanese in 1705 of the erotic novel *The Carnal Prayer Mat* (肉蒲團) is a well-known example of the rich cross-cultural currents between Qing China (1644–1911) and Tokugawa Japan (1603–1867). Written in 1657, only thirteen years after the northern Manchus took over Beijing, the novel is generally attributed to the playwright Li Yu (李漁, 1611–1680) even though his name did not appear on the cover of the book.[1] The novel is replete with graphic descriptions of the sexual pursuit of the protagonist, Wei Yangsheng (未央生). As the front page of the Japanese translation indicates (Figure 4.1), the book was considered by many in the early modern period as "the most promiscuous story in the world." Given its explicit content, the book still cannot be sold to minors in Taiwan and continues to be banned in the People's Republic of China. An examination of the representations of intimacy and desire in the text provides a useful introduction to the historical context and the main concerns of this chapter: the translation of homosexuality as a sexological concept in early twentieth-century China.

The Carnal Prayer Mat can be situated in the genre of literary pornography similar to the way in which other erotic novels have been perceived in and out of China's past. The late-Ming *The Plum in the Golden Vase* (金瓶梅), for instance, which appeared only a few decades before *The Carnal Prayer Mat*, is perhaps the best example of this kind of literature. What these

Figure 4.1: Front cover of the Japanese translation of *The Carnal Prayer Mat* (1705)

seventeenth-century erotic novels capture, some observers have argued, is the hedonistic and amoral urban behaviors associated with the growing consumer culture in the waning decades of the Ming.[2] Feminist historians and other literary scholars, too, point to the loosening of gender boundaries and sexual mores of the time, as reflected in the blossoming of women's cultural creativity and alternative arrangements of love and intimacy, especially in the south.[3] But the most striking thing about these novels is the considerable degree of popular interest they continue to attract in contemporary Chinese culture. The plots of *The Carnal Prayer Mat* and *The Plum in the Golden Vase* have been adapted time and again in the production of new computer games and films, including, most recently, *3-D Sex and Zen: Extreme Ecstasy*, a three-dimensional cinematic adaptation of *The Carnal Prayer Mat* released in 2011.[4]

If one focuses on the book itself, certain episodes of *The Carnal Prayer Mat* appear surprisingly queer. Granted, as many critics have pointed out, the story brings a sense of closure to Wei Yangsheng's erotic adventure, reinstating a normative sense of Confucian discipline through eventual punishment. Having mistreated all the women with whom he had sexual relationships, including his wife, Wei eventually castrates himself and becomes a Buddhist monk to atone for his sins. However, as Angela Zito has suggested, it might be more compelling to foreground Li Yu's narrative method and the protagonist's constant subversion of Confucian orthodoxy: "Li Yu presents [the choices of male characters] as the ineluctable outcome of their karmic fates, using against the patriarchal norm, even queering, a

Buddhism that, in complex ways, shored up patriarchal familial arrangements in this time."[5]

Indeed, the homoerotic contents of the novel are as explicit as the heterosexual ones. After leaving his wife, Wei meets a stranger who would eventually become his buddy, Sai Kunlun (賽崑崙). Spending a night together, naked, Wei insists that Sai share stories of his past sexual encounters with women. Sai accepts the request, and his stories fulfill Wei's desires:

> At this point, it is as if the voice of a promiscuous woman comes from right next to Wei, causing his body to tremble. He suddenly ejaculates a dose of semen that he has kept to himself for too long. Unless he is asked otherwise, it is unquestionable what has just happened.[6]

Similar to the kind of male–male intimacy that Eve Sedgwick uncovers in English literature, Wei's homosocial desire for Sai becomes intelligible by being routed through an implicit triangular relation involving women.[7] And before he acquires a hugely expanding dog's penis through surgery, Wei makes love to his sixteen-year-old boy servant one last time.[8]

Neither the implicitly homoerotic nor the explicitly homosexual scene appears in any of the twentieth-century adaptations of the story. Despite their prominence and wide circulation in contemporary popular culture, the modern versions of *The Carnal Prayer Mat* and *The Plum in the Golden Vase* in film and other media are notorious for being consistently marketed as commodities fulfilling the heteronormative desires of men. If one treats these "texts" as immediate historical evidence of sexuality across time, one might be inclined to conclude that homoeroticism "disappeared" in the twentieth century. Or, more specifically, the juxtaposition between the seventeenth-century novels (with their frank and open homoerotic depictions) and their modern, more conservative variations seems to imply a neat discrepancy between the *presence* of same-sex sexuality before its twentieth-century *absence*. It is perhaps more accurate to conclude that the afterlife and proliferation of these pornographic texts in the contemporary period rely on an indirect censorship of their homoerotic content. This censorship exemplifies what Sedgwick has called an "epistemological privilege of unknowing," a successful concealment of certain ways of thinking within the broader structures of knowledge.[9] In Sedgwick's words, "many of the major modes of thought and knowledge in twentieth-century Western culture as a whole are structured—indeed, fractured—by a chronic, now endemic crisis of homo/heterosexual definition, indicatively male, dating from the end of the nineteenth century."[10]

Similarly, we can interpret the evolving cultural representations of such novels as *The Carnal Prayer Mat* and *The Plum in the Golden Vase* through

the lens of this "endemic crisis of homo/heterosexual definition." By highlighting the rise of sexology in the 1920s as a pivotal turning point in the history of sexuality in China, this chapter offers an alternative explanation for the disappearance of homoerotic representations in their modern adaptations. After all, what the trajectory of this historical evolution reveals is not so much the coincidental "disappearance" of homosexuality, *but its very emergence*. With the removal of their homoerotic contents, Ming-Qing erotic texts have essentially become heterosexualized in today's mass culture. The heteronormalization of *The Carnal Prayer Mat*, therefore, points to something more fundamental to the conceptual transformation of sex in the twentieth century: the emergence of its scientific designation as the subject of desire.

Translating (Homo)Sexology

From the late Qing period on, biologists and other life science writers translated the epistemological authority of natural science through the production of anatomical, morphological, and chromosomal images of sexual difference. These images affirm a certain kind of distance from the viewer, making it possible to decipher truth's relation to nature through their means of visual objectivation.[11] However, a different kind of relationship between truth and nature and a different type of distance between the subject and object of knowledge emerged in the 1920s. By that point, biological sex had become a commonsense in the popular imagination. With that commonsense, some iconoclastic intellectuals began to contend that the hidden nature of erotic preference could also be discovered and known. Sex, they argued, was no longer something only to be seen, but it was something to be desired as well. They participated in a new concerted effort, though not without friction, to emulate European sexological sciences. Their translation and appropriation of Western sexological texts, concepts, methodologies, and styles of reasoning provided a crucial historical condition under which, and the means through which, sexuality emerged as an object of empirical knowledge. The disciplinary formation of Chinese sexology in the Republican period, therefore, added a new element of carnality to the scientific meaning of sex.

In the aftermath of the New Culture Movement (1915–1919), an entire generation of cultural critics promoted sex education and sexological studies in an unprecedented, systematic fashion. Among the famous May Fourth iconoclastic intellectuals, some not only translated texts and adopted methodological rigor from European sexology but also developed their own theories of human sexual behavior and desire. They frequently engaged in heated debates over the meaning, principles, and boundaries of a science of sexuality. In the 1920s and 1930s, they greeted high-profile European

sexologists, including Magnus Hirschfeld and Margaret Sanger, in major cities such as Beijing and Shanghai. Questions of competence, credentials, expertise, and authority preoccupied those of the early twentieth-century urban intelligentsia who spoke seriously about sex in public. By 1935, disparate efforts and conversations converged in the founding of such monthly periodicals as *Sex Science* (性科學). For the first time in China, sexuality was accorded a primacy of scientific "truthfulness."[12]

In my previous work, I have explored the intellectual journey of two pivotal figures in this rich tradition of Republican Chinese sexology: Zhang Jingsheng (張競生) and Pan Guangdan (潘光旦).[13] Here, I would like to use their oeuvres as the historical background from which to offer more in-depth remarks on the historiographical significance of sexological translation. First and foremost, their writings on homosexuality provide an important resource for extending and revising the limited scholarly literature on the history of Chinese sexology. In his earlier study of the medico-scientific constructions of sex, Frank Dikötter argues that early twentieth-century Chinese modernizing elites did not fully grasp or reproduce European concepts of sexual "perversions," including homosexuality.[14] Similarly, Joanna McMillan asserts that while "sexological studies of perversions were widespread in European medial circles, the literature in Republican China remained almost entirely silent on these enquiries."[15] More recently, in response to Dikötter's thesis, other scholars such as Tze-lan D. Sang and Wenqing Kang have exposed the ways in which selected May Fourth intellectuals—through various debates in the urban press—actually contributed to the increasing awareness of foreign categorizations of human sexuality in early twentieth-century Chinese mass culture.[16]

Nonetheless, taken together these studies tend to depict Republican Chinese sexology as a unified field that treated homosexuality merely as a social, rather than a personal, problem.[17] According to Kang, for example,

> Whereas in the West, sexological knowledge pathologized homosexuality as socially deviant, thus reducing it to an individual psychological problem, in China sexology as a form of modern knowledge was used more to diagnose social and national problems . . . As Chinese writers and thinkers introduced Western sexology to China, male same-sex relations were stigmatized more as a disruptive social deviance than a personal medical condition.[18]

Sang's analysis, too, seems to support the claim that no effect similar to the European "individualization" of homosexuality took place in Republican China. In the context of the May Fourth era, Sang observes, "*tongxing ai* ['same-sex love'] is primarily signified as a modality of love or an

intersubjective rapport rather than as a category of personhood, that is, an identity."[19]

On the contrary, a more critical attention to issues of knowledge translation shows that this interpretation is an oversimplification. The view that homosexuality was only a social problem was not consistently shared by such pivotal sexologists as Zhang Jingsheng and Pan Guangdan. In the process of establishing sexuality as an appropriate object of scientific inquiry, they held different opinions on the etiology, prevention, and significance of same-sex love. They even disagreed on the fundamental principles of sexological research. Given the multiple perspectives competing at the time, it is perhaps more compelling to suggest that homosexuality appeared to Chinese experts and popular audiences to be as much a personal problem as it was a social one—an explicit issue of personhood, subjectivity, and identity. Open communications between "sexperts," their readers, and other "sexperts" further enriched this incitement of a discourse that found truth in sex. To borrow Michel Foucault's insight on the incitement to speak about sex in modern bourgeois society, "Whether in the form of a subtle confession in confidence or an authoritarian interrogation, sex—be it refined or rustic—had to be put into words."[20] Sexology in Republican China was indeed a new system of knowledge in which, literally, new subjects were made.[21]

Ultimately, participants of this new discourse established for China what Foucault has called *scientia sexualis*, which first distinguished itself in nineteenth-century Europe: a new regime of truth that relocated the discursive technology of the sexual self from the theological sphere of pastoral confession to the secular discourse of science and medicine.[22] From the 1920s through the 1940s, the conceptual space for articulating a Western-derived homosexual identity emerged in China precisely from the new regime of truth circumscribed by the arrival of European sexology. Moreover, whereas Dennis Altman, Lisa Rofel, and Judith Farquhar have respectively claimed that "gay identity" and *scientia sexualis* first appeared on the China scene only by the post-socialist era, my historicization suggests that both have deeper roots that can be traced to an earlier epistemic turning point—in the Republican period.[23]

Readers with some familiarity with the history of sexuality in China would perhaps turn to the rich history of male homoeroticism in traditional China, a topic of in-depth scholarly discussion, as a potential counterpoint to my argument.[24] This history, however, is not static but dynamic: over the years, the social significance of same-sex relations in premodern China evolved according to the relevant historical factors. As Matthew Sommer's work on Chinese legal history has shown, sodomy appeared as a formal legislation in China only by the late imperial period. During the eighteenth-century Yongzheng reign (1723–1735), male same-sex practice was for the

first time directly "assimilated" to heterosexual practice under the rubric of "illicit sex." This Qing innovation, according to Sommer, fundamentally reoriented the organizing principle for the regulation of sexuality in China: a universal order of "appropriate" gender roles and attributes was granted some foundational value over the previous status-oriented paradigm, in which different status groups were expected to hold unique standards of familial and sexual morality.[25] But whether someone who engaged in same-sex behavior was criminalized due to his disruption of a social order organized around status or gender performance, the world of imperial China never viewed the experience of homosexuality as a separate problem.[26] The question was never homosexuality per se, but whether one's sexual behavior would potentially reverse the dominant script of social order. If we want to *isolate* the problem of homosexuality in China, we must jump to the first half of the twentieth century to find it.

The relationship between forms of experience and systems of knowledge thus occupies a central role in this historical problem, if only because what we have come to call "sexuality" is a relatively recent product of a system of medico-scientific knowledge that has its own unique style of reasoning and argumentation.[27] In the European context, Arnold Davidson has identified the emergence of sexuality from the new conceptual space conditioned by the nineteenth-century shift from an anatomical to a psychiatric style of medical reasoning.[28] The historical specificity and uniqueness of sexual concepts cannot be overstated, especially since our modern formulation of homosexuality, as the classicist David Halperin reminds us, does not anchor on a notion of object-choice, orientation, or behavior alone but "seems to depend on the unstable conjunction of all three."[29]

Indeed, if we consider homosexuality not as a strictly "modern" category but as a by-product of a contested historical process that yielded specific cultural associations with the traditional, the modern, and the authentic, we can begin to take the growing global hegemony of Western conceptions of health and diseases seriously without necessitating a full-blown self- or re-Orientalization. By that I mean an intentional project that continually defers an "alternative modernity" and essentializes non-Westernness (including Chineseness) by assuming that the genealogical status of that derivative copy of an "original" Western modernity is somehow always already hermeneutically sealed from the historical apparatus of Westernization.[30] Now that studies in the history of sexuality in non-Western regions have begun to mature,[31] historians should be even more (not less) cautious of any effort to view the broader historical processes of epistemic homogenization as having any lesser bearing than forms of local (or "Oriental") resistance.[32] The idea that "local" configurations of gender and sexuality cannot be overridden by modern Western taxonomies of sexual identity is by now

a standard interpretation of both the historical record and cultural archive of non-Western same-sex desires. But a variant of this interpretation has already generated controversial repercussions in the field of Middle Eastern sexuality studies. Consider Joseph Massad's infamous claim that all social significations of homosexuality, including internal gay rights activism, reflect the growing penetration of Western cultural imperialism: "The categories of gay and lesbian are not universal at all and can only be universalized by the epistemic, ethical, and political violence unleashed on the rest of the world by the very international human rights advocates whose aim is to defend the very people their intervention is creating."[33] It bears striking similarity, however ironically and uncomfortably, to Lisa Rofel's adamant critique of a "globalized gay identity."[34] Whether the target of critique is global gay or global sex, post-Orientalist critical thinking should not deter the historian's interest in the condition of the translatability of such concepts as homosexuality especially since they were frequently invoked by historical actors themselves.

The Threshold of Scientificity

To redress the analytical conundrums concerning the relationship between transnationalism and sexuality from a strong historicist viewpoint, what we are concerned with, then, is not a social history of homosexuals in China "from below," but an *epistemological history* in the Foucauldian sense that "is situated at the threshold of scientificity."[35] In other words, what is at stake here is "how a concept [like homosexuality]—still overlaid with [earlier] metaphors or imaginary contents—was purified, and accorded the status and function of a scientific concept. To discover how a region of experience [such as same-sex intimacy] that has already been mapped, already partially articulated, but is still overlaid with immediate practical uses or values related to those uses, was constituted as a scientific domain."[36] In Republican China, what constituted the socio-cultural foundations for the establishment of sexology was the creation of a public of truth, in which the authority of truth could be contested, translated across culture, and reinforced through new organizational efforts.

In the context of Zhang Jingsheng's sexology, whether it is the dualism between literary representations of love versus scientific truthfulness of sex, or the juxtaposition between Daoist cultivational ideas in Chinese medicine versus the bio-psychological language of Western biomedicine, two registers of truth production on which sexological claims operated always proceeded in a reciprocal fashion: one concerning explicit claims about the object of scientific knowledge (human sexuality) and another concerning implicit claims about cultural markers of traditionality, authenticity, and modernity (modes of narrating sex, theoretical foundations of medicine,

etc.). But Zhang's project quickly turned into the antithesis of science and modernity in the eyes of his contemporaries, including Pan Guangdan and Zhou Jianren (Lu Xun's youngest brother). Moving beyond the limitations of his work, they aimed to establish an independent discipline with greater resemblance to European sexology. By the mid-1930s, disparate efforts in making sexuality a legitimate subject of scientific discussion and mass education culminated in such projects of disciplinary consolidation as the founding of *Sex Science*. Similar to its Western counterparts such as the *Journal of Sexual Science* in Germany and *Sexology* in the United States, *Sex Science* functioned as a textual archive reinforcing the specialized authority of sexology across culture. The founding and circulation of this journal—alongside other periodicals famous for their introduction of foreign ideas about feminism, mental hygiene, gender relations, individualism, and other cosmopolitan concepts, such as *New Women*, *New Culture*, *Ladies Journal*, *Sex Magazine*, and *West Wind*—thus marked an important episode in the intellectual translation and disciplinary consolidation of *scienta sexualis* in Republican China.[37] These unprecedented achievements gave rise to a radical reorganization of the meaning of same-sex desire in Chinese culture around a new psychiatric style of reasoning.

In the politically volatile context of Republican China, the introduction of Western sexology often reframed same-sex desire as an indication of national backwardness. In *Sexological Science*, after documenting the prevalence of homosexual practice in different Western societies, the author Zhang Mingyun concluded that "the main social cause for the existence of homosexuality is upper-class sexual decadence and the sexual thirst of the lower-class people."[38] And this, according to Zhang, should help shed light on "the relationship between homosexuality and nationality."[39] "For the purpose of social improvement," according to another concerned writer, "the increasing prevention of homosexuality is now a pressing task."[40] Pan Guangdan expressed a similar nationalistic hostility toward the boy actors of traditional Peking opera: since they often participated in sexual relationships with their male literati patrons, Pan described them as "abnormal" and detrimental to social morality. He explained that their lower social status prevented them from participating in the civil examination system, implying that a modernizing nation in the twentieth century certainly has no place for them.[41] The physician Wang Yang, known for his expertise in human sexuality and reproduction, went so far to identify homosexuality as "a kind of disease that eliminates a nation and its races."[42]

If we take the insights of Lydia Liu and others concerning cultural translation seriously, the transmission of *scientia sexualis* to China ultimately characterizes a *productive* historical moment.[43] When Republican Chinese sexologists viewed the *dan* actors and other cultural expressions of

homoeroticism as signs of national backwardness,[44] they in essence domesticated the Western psychiatric style of reasoning and turned it into a new *nationalistic style of argumentation* about same-sex desire. In addition to staging certain elements of the Peking opera field as being out of time and place, epistemic modernity occasioned an entrenched nationalistic platform, on which other aspects of this cultural entertainment also functioned as a powerful symbol of quintessential Chinese tradition and authenticity. Rendered as a prototypical exemplar of the modern homosexual, the twentieth-century *dan* actor became a historic figure signifying a hybrid embodiment of the traditionality and what Prasenjit Duara aptly calls "the regime of authenticity" of Chinese culture.[45]

It is therefore possible to contrast this new nationalistic style of argumentation with the *culturalistic* style of argumentation that underpinned the comprehensibility of same-sex desire in the late imperial period.[46] For this purpose, we can turn to the late Ming essayist and social commentator, Zhang Dai (張岱), who reflects on his friend Qi Zhixiang's fondness for a young man named Abao in his *Tao'an mengyi* (Dream reminiscence of Tao'an). Tao'an is Zhang's pen name, and this collection of miscellaneous notes serves as a good window onto the literati lifestyle circa the Ming-Qing transition, since Zhang is often considered to embody the bona fide literati taste of the time. An example from the late Ming is also most apt because the period is infamous for marking the peak of a flourishing "male love" (男色, *nanse*) homoerotic culture in late imperial China. The title of this passage is "The Obsession of Qi Zhixiang," and because it places seventeenth-century male same-sex love in the context of multiple desires, it is worth quoting in full:

> If someone does not have an obsession (*pi*), they cannot make a good companion for they have no deep passions; if a person does not show some flaw, they also cannot make a good companion since they have no genuine spirit. My friend Qi Zhixiang has obsessions with calligraphy and painting, football, drums and cymbals, ghost plays, and opera. In 1642, when I arrived in the southern capital, Zhixiang brought Abao out to show me. I remarked, "This is a divine and sweet voiced bird from [the paradise of] the western regions, how did he fall into your hands?" Abao's beauty was as fresh as a pure maiden's. He still had no care for decorum, was haughty, and kept others at a distance. The feeling was just like eating an olive, at first bitter and a little rough, but the charm is in the aftertaste. Like wine and tobacco, the first mouthful is a little repulsive, producing a state of tipsy lightness; yet once the initial disgust passes the flavor soon fills your mind. Zhixiang was a master of music and prosody, fastidious in his composition of melodies and lyrics, and

> personally instructing [his boy-actors] phrase by phrase. Those of Abao's ilk were able to realize what he had in mind. In the year of 1645, the southern capital fell, and Zhixiang fled from the city to his hometown. En route they ran across some bandits. Face to face with death, his own life would have been expendable, but not his treasure, Abao. In the year of 1646, he followed the imperial guards to camp at Taizhou. A lawless rabble plundered the camp, and Zhixiang lost all his valuables. Abao charmed his master by singing on the road. After they returned, within half a month, Qi again took a journey with Abao. Leaving his wife and children was for Zhixiang as easy as removing a shoe, but a young brat was as dear to him as his own life. This sums up his obsession.[47]

This passage also sums up what a man's interest in young males meant in the seventeenth century remarkably well: it was perceived as just one of the many different types of "obsessions" that a male literatus could have—a symbol of his refinement. For Zhang, a man's taste in male lovers was as important as his "obsessions" in other arenas of life, without which this person "cannot make a good companion." Despite all the hardship, the romantic ties between Qi and Abao still survived, and perhaps even surpassed Qi's relationship with his wife and children.

To assess the epistemological transformation of same-sex desire in Chinese culture from an indigenous historical perspective, then, we can begin to reconstruct some of the polarized concepts that constitute two opposed styles of argumentation. We are presented, for instance, with the polarities between literati taste and sick perversion, refined obsession and pathological behavior, cultural superiority and psychological abnormality, markers of elite status and signs of national backwardness. The first of each of these pairs of concepts partially makes up the culturalistic style of argumentation about same-sex desire, while the second of each of these pairs helps to constitute the nationalistic style of argumentation. These polarities therefore characterize two distinct intellectual modes of representation, two conceptual spaces, two different kinds of deep epistemological structure. In mediating the translation of the foreign category of homosexuality, Chinese sexological knowledge had not only pushed the concept of same-sex desire over the threshold of scientificity, but also left a distinct legacy in catalyzing an internal shift in the indigenous conceptual paradigm of same-sex relations.

Historicism Uncontested

In light of the prevailing criticisms of Foucauldian genealogy, many historians of sexuality have refrained from advancing a claim about the

occasioning of an epistemological break in the Republican era by showing that earlier concepts associated with male same-sex sexual practice (e.g., *nanse* or *pi*) jostled alongside and informed the new sexology discourse.[48] However, it has been my intention to show that the congruency between earlier and later understandings of same-sex practice *is itself* a cultural phenomenon unique to the Republican period and not before. Wenqing Kang, for example, has argued that preexisting Chinese ideas about male favorites and *pi* "laid the ground for acceptance of the modern Western definition of homo/heterosexuality during [the Republican] period in China." His first explanation is that "both the Chinese concept *pi* (obsession) and Western sexology tended to understand same-sex relations as pathological." He then relies on Eve Sedgwick's model of the overlapping "universalizing discourse of acts and minoritizing discourse of persons" to suggest that indigenous Chinese understandings shared a comparable internal contradiction in the conceptualization of male same-sex desire. In his words, "The concept *pi* which Ming literati used to characterize men who enjoyed sex with other men, on the one hand implied that men who had this kind of passion were a special type of people, and on the other hand, presumed that the obsession could happen to anyone."[49]

My interpretation of Zhang Dai's passage on *pi* suggests that isolating both a pathological meaning and this internal conceptual contradiction of *pi* represents an anachronistic effort that reads homosexuality into earlier modes of thought. Zhang's remark precisely reveals the multiplicity of the meaning and cultural significance of *pi* that cannot be comprehended through a single definition of pathology or an independent lens of same-sex relations decontextualized from other types of refined human desire. Kang therefore seems to forget that the very semblance between what he calls "the internal contradictions within the Chinese indigenous understanding of male same-sex relations" and "those within the Western modern homosexual/heterosexual definition" was made possible and meaningful only in contemporaneity with the emergence of the concept of homosexuality in China.[50] In this regard, the following statement confuses his interpretation of historical sources with the very colonial landscape it claims to exceed: "When Western modern sexology was introduced to China in the first half of the twentieth century, the Chinese understanding of male same-sex relations as *pi* (obsession) was very much alive, as evidenced in the writings of the time. It was precisely because of the similarity between the two sets of understandings that Western modern sexology could gain footing in China."[51] The claim is confusing because the similarity Kang points to would not have made much sense in a context without the epistemological salience of the very concept of homosexuality itself, that is, before the twentieth century. Treating the discursive nature of discourse seriously requires

us to pay closer attention to how old words take on a new meaning (and life) in a different historical context, rather than imposing later familiar notions onto earlier concepts.[52] A distinct problem with Kang's reading remains the way he turns a blind eye to the *hierarchical nature* of the invocation of *pi* in literati discourses. It might be useful to rephrase this problem by borrowing David Halperin's remark: "Of course, evidence of conscious erotic preferences does exist in abundance, but it tends to be found in the context of discourses linked to the senior partners in hierarchical relations of pederasty or sodomy. It therefore points not to the existence of gay sexuality per se but to one particular discourse and set of practices constituting one aspect of gay sexuality as we currently define it."[53]

Despite how Pan Guangdan's condemnation of the homosexuality of boy actors (and, by implication, their patrons) was informed by the long-standing and still-continuing practices of male prostitution, his condemnation was made possible—and comprehensible—only by the arrival of a psychiatric style of reasoning that construed same-sex relations in negative terms. In their study of nineteenth-century "flower guides" (*huapu*), Wu Cuncun and Mark Stevenson have probed the many social taboos surrounding this literary genre that extolled the beauty of boy actors, including "rules about money and taste and passion and lust, and also rules about the representation of social competition." They conclude that "none of these were concerned with fears of same-sex desire or of stigma through connection to the world of Beijing's homoerotic nightlife."[54] The scientific reasoning of desire that gained rapid momentum in the 1920s, on the other hand, ushered in a new era of the social stigmatization of male same-sex relations. Pan and other sexologists isolated homosexuality as a conceptual blueprint for individual psychology *independent of* hierarchical indexes of power relations, social status, class subjectivity, and so on, but it was a concept that, unlike heterosexuality, carried a pathological connotation and linked to notable cultural signifiers of traditionality contributing to, according to these elites, China's growing national deficiency. It was in this context that homosexuality came to set itself apart from gender transgression as two distinct nodes of conceptualization in modern Chinese culture.

The twelve cases of male homosexuality and the one case of female homosexuality that Pan enumerated in his annotated translation of *Psychology of Sex* should be understood less as historical evidence of homosexual experience in the Ming and Qing dynasties than as a reflection of how the epistemological reorientations brought about by a new psychiatric style of reasoning culminated to generate the condition of their comprehensibility. Here is where I part company with Giovanni Vitiello, who interprets Pan's effort "as if to provide a Chinese perspective on an experience inadequately represented in the Western book. These negotiation attempts remind us that

the transformation of sexual culture in twentieth-century China cannot be read simply as the replacement of one model with another."[55] Two major assumptions are embedded in Vitiello's statement: first, that the internal coherence of a unified structure of homoerotic sentiment had *always already existed* in China before the Western concept of homosexuality, and second, the congruency between the former and the latter structures of knowledge was inevitable and unproblematic.

I would not suggest that the heart of the matter concerns the question of whether the contested process of translation is itself fraught with the possibility of "losing" or "adding" new dimensions of knowledge (because of course it is). But what escapes Vitiello's reading is the way in which the internal coherency of an indigenous structure of knowledge on which the foreign model of homosexuality could be easily mapped and the condition of possibility of this mapping *were both themselves* historically contingent on—even historically produced by—the very process whereby "homosexuality" was translated into Chinese in the early twentieth century. Likewise, when Pan and other sexologists used examples from ancient Greece to render the modern category of homosexuality intelligible, the result was a similar moment of epistemic alignment in the establishment of *scientia sexualis* in China. Their debates on "true" or "fake," "inborn" or "acquired," "natural" or "curable," homosexuality in the pages of *Sex Science* already takes for granted the new psychiatric style of reasoning and so treats sexuality and its attendant disorders, such as homosexuality, as if they were naturally given and carrying broader implications for the modern nation. Simply put, the epistemic continuity forged by Chinese sexologists between the foreign concept of homosexuality and earlier examples of homoeroticism do not undermine the kind of Foucauldian epistemological rupture that I have been suggesting but actually exemplify it. Before the rupture, according to the normative definition of desire in male spectatorship and connoisseurship, the possibility of having the same (homo)sexuality as either the *dan* actor or the male favorite would have appalled the literati gentleman.

If we ever wonder how to make sense of the prevalence of same-sex sexual practice in China before the rise of an East Asian *scientia sexualis*, as so vividly captured in *The Carnal Prayer Mat*, we only need to remind ourselves that as little as a century ago, the very notion of (homo)sexuality did not fall within the possible parameters of Chinese thinking.

NOTES

1. For a discussion of the authorship of the book, see Nathan K. Mao and Liu Ts'un-Yan, *Li Yü* (Boston: Twayne, 1977), 90–95.

2. Timothy Brook, *The Confusions of Pleasure: Commerce and Culture in Ming China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

3. Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chamber: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995); Sophie Volpp, "The Discourse on Male Marriage: Li Yu's 'A Male Mencius's Mother,'" *positions: east asia cultures critique* 2 (1994): 113–132; Sophie Volpp, "Classifying Lust: The Seventeenth-Century Vogue for Male Love," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 61 (2001): 77–117; Giovanni Vitiello, *The Libertine's Friend: Homosexuality and Masculinity in Late Imperial China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

4. The first Chinese 3-D pornographic film came out in early 2011 and is based on *The Carnal Prayer Mat*. See Stephen Shiu, Stephen Shiu Jr., and Mark Wu, *3-D Sex and Zen: Extreme Ecstasy*, dir. Christopher Suen (Hong Kong: One Dollar Production, 2011). For an earlier version, see Lee Ying Kit, *Sex and Zen*, dir. Michael Mak (Hong Kong: Golden Harvest, 1991).

5. Angela Zito, "Queering Filiality, Raising the Dead," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 10, no. 2 (2001): 201.

6. Li Yü, *Rouputuang miben* (肉普團密本) [The carnal prayer mat] (Taipei: Guojia Chubanshe, 2011), 45. All translations are mine.

7. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 201–202.

8. Li, *Rouputuang*, 71–73.

9. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 5.

10. Ibid., 1.

11. See Howard Chiang, "The Conceptual Contours of Sex in the Chinese Life Sciences: Zhu Xi (1899–1962), Hermaphroditism, and the Biological Discourse of *Ci* and *Xiong*, 1920–1950," *East Asian Science, Technology and Society: An International Journal* 2, no. 3 (2008): 401–430.

12. See the notion of truthfulness used by Bernard Williams in *Truth and Truthfulness: An Essay in Genealogy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002). I take a cue from Ian Hacking and use "truth" in this chapter as a formal (as opposed to a strictly realist) concept. Ian Hacking, *Scientific Reason* (Taipei: National Taiwan University Press, 2008), 1–48.

13. Howard Chiang, "Epistemic Modernity and the Emergence of Homosexuality in China," *Gender and History* 22, no. 3 (2010): 629–657.

14. Frank Dikötter, *Sex, Culture, and Modernity in China: Medical Science and the Construction of Sexual Identities in the Early Republican Period* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1995), 143–145.

15. Joanna McMillan, *Sex, Science and Morality in China* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 90.

16. See Tze-lan D. Sang, *The Emerging Lesbian: Female Same-Sex Desire in Modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Wenqing Kang, *Obsession: Male Same-Sex Relations in China, 1900–1950* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009).

17. Dikötter, *Sex, Culture, and Modernity*, 140–141; Chou Wah-shan, *Tongzhi: Politics of Same-Sex Eroticism in Chinese Societies* (New York: Haworth, 2000), 50; Sang, *Emerging Lesbian*, 7, 118; Kang, *Obsession*, 42–43.

18. Kang, *Obsession*, 42–43. Some Western sexologists (and eugenicists) were concerned that the homosexual type was both a sign of racial/national degeneracy and a

threat to the health of the nation. Although the remainder of this chapter will focus on revising Kang's point with respect to China, it is equally important to acknowledge the limitation of his point with respect to the West as well.

19. Sang, *Emerging Lesbian*, 118.

20. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1: *An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin, 1990), 32.

21. Ian Hacking, "Making Up People," in *Reconstructing Individualism: Autonomy, Individuality, and the Self in Western Thought*, ed. Thomas Heller, Morton Sosna, and David Wellbery (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1986), 222–236.

22. Foucault, *History of Sexuality*.

23. Dennis Altman, *Global Sex* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 86–105; Lisa Rofel, *Desiring China: Experiments in Neoliberalism, Sexuality, and Public Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 85–110; Judith Farquhar, *Appetites: Food and Sex in Post-Socialist China* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 211–242. See also Loretta Wing Wah Ho, *Gay and Lesbian Subculture in Urban China* (London: Routledge, 2010); Travis Kong, *Chinese Male Homosexualities: Memba, Tongzhi, and Golden Boy* (London: Routledge, 2010); McMillan, *Sex, Science and Morality in China*; James Farrer, *Opening Up: Youth Sex Culture and Market Reform in Shanghai* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002). On the argument for an emphasis shift in modern Chinese historiography to the Republican era, see Frank Dikötter, *The Age of Openness: China before Mao* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); Howard Chiang, "Liberating Sex, Knowing Desire: *Scientia Sexualis* and Epistemic Turning Points in the History of Sexuality," *History of the Human Sciences* 23, no. 5 (2010): 42–69.

24. Robert Hans van Gulik, *Sexual Life in Ancient China* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1974); Xiaomingxiong (小明雄) [Samshasha], *Zhongguo tongxing'ai shilu* (中國同性愛史錄) [The history of homosexual love in China] (Hong Kong: Fenhong Sanjiao Chubanshe, 1984); Bret Hinsch, *Passions of the Cut Sleeve: The Male Homosexual Tradition in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990). For a lucid analysis of Xiaomingxiong's study in its proper historical context, see Helen Leung, "Archiving Queer Feelings in Hong Kong," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 8 (2007): 559–571.

25. Matthew Sommer, *Sex, Law, and Society in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000). For earlier works on the legal construction of sodomy in China, see Marinus J. Meijer, "Homosexual Offences in Ch'ing Law," *T'oung Pao* 71 (1985): 109–133; Vivian W. Ng, "Ideology and Sexuality: Rape Laws in Qing China," *Journal of Asian Studies* 46 (1987): 57–70; Vivian Ng, "Homosexuality and State in Late Imperial China," in *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, ed. Martin B. Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and George Chauncey Jr. (New York: New American Library, 1989), 76–89.

26. For an explanation of why homosexuality was not criminalized in the Republican period, see Wenqing Kang, "Male Same-Sex Relations in Modern China: Language, Medical Representation, and Law, 1900–1949," *positions: east asia cultures critique* 18, no. 2 (2010): 489–510.

27. On the epistemological applicability of "style," see Howard Chiang, "Rethinking 'Style' for Historians and Philosophers of Science: Converging Lessons from Sexuality, Translation, and East Asian Studies," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 40 (2009): 109–118.

28. Arnold I. Davidson, *The Emergence of Sexuality: Historical Epistemology and the Formation of Concepts* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 36.

29. David M. Halperin, *How to Do the History of Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 131. On the historicism of homosexuality, see also David M. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality and Other Essays on Greek Love* (New York: Routledge, 1990); on heterosexuality, see Jonathan Ned Katz, *The Invention of Heterosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007 [1995]).

30. For recent reflections on the problem of Chinese self- or re-Orientalization, see Ien Ang, *On Not Speaking Chinese: Living between Asia and the West* (New York: Routledge, 2001); Chu Yiu-Wai, "The Importance of Being Chinese: Orientalism Reconfigured in the Age of Global Modernity," *boundary 2* 35 (2008): 183–206. For a similar argument on how certain formulations within queer studies could be complicit with homophobic reticent poetics by positing culturally essential "Chinese" non-homophobic subjects and situations, see Liu Jen-peng and Ding Naifei, "Reticent Poetics, Queer Politics," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 6, no. 1 (2005): 30–55.

31. See, for example, Khaled El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500–1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Dror Ze'evi, *Producing Desire: Changing Sexual Discourse in the Ottoman Middle East, 1500–1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Kathryn Babayan and Afsaneh Najmabadi, eds., *Islamicate Sexualities: Translations across Temporal Geographies of Desire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008); Keith McMahon, *Polygamy and Sublime Passion: Sexuality in China on the Verge of Modernity* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009); Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Professing Selves: Transsexuality and Same-Sex Desire in Contemporary Iran* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013).

32. See Dennis Altman, "Rupture or Continuity? The Internationalization of Gay Identities," *Social Text* 14 (1996): 77–94; Dennis Altman, "Global Gaze / Global Gays," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 3 (1997): 417–436; Peter Drucker, "Introduction: Remapping Sexualities," in *Different Rainbows*, ed. Peter Drucker (London: Gay Men's Press, 2000), 9–42; Linda Garber, "Where in the World Are the Lesbians?" *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 14 (2005): 28–50; Afsaneh Najmabadi, "Beyond the Americas: Are Gender and Sexuality Useful Categories of Analysis?" *Journal of Women's History* 18 (2006): 11–21; Evelyn Blackwood, "Transnational Discourses and Circuits of Queer Knowledge in Indonesia," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 14 (2008): 481–507; Peter A. Jackson, "Capitalism and Global Queering: National Markets, Parallels among Sexual Cultures, and Multiple Queer Modernities," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 15 (2009): 357–395; Howard Chiang, "(De)Provincializing China: Queer Historicism and Sinophone Postcolonial Critique," in *Queer Sinophone Cultures*, ed. Howard Chiang and Ari Larissa Heinrich (London: Routledge, 2013), 19–51.

33. Joseph Massad, *Desiring Arabs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 41.

34. Joseph Massad, "Re-Orienting Desire: The Gay International and the Arab World," *Public Culture* 14, no. 2 (2002): 361–385; Massad, *Desiring Arabs*; Rofel, *Desiring China*. The target of Rofel's critique is Altman, *Global Sex*. Note how strikingly similar are the titles of Massad's and Rofel's books.

35. See Howard Chiang, ed., "Queer Transnationalism in China," topical cluster, *English Language Notes* 49, no. 1 (2011): 109–144. See also Chiang and Heinrich, *Queer Sinophone Cultures*.

36. Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972 [1969]), 190.

37. See Wen-Ji Wang, "*West Wind Monthly* and the Popular Mental Hygiene Discourse in Republican China," *Taiwanese Journal for Studies of Science, Technology and Medicine* 13 (2011): 15–88 (in Chinese); Geoffrey Blowers and Shelley Wang Xuelai, "Gone with the *West Wind*: The Emergence and Disappearance of Psychotherapeutic Culture in China, 1936–68," in *Psychiatry and Chinese History*, ed. Howard Chiang (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2014), 143–160.

38. Zhang Mingyun (張敏筠), *Xing kexue* (性科學) [Sexological science] (Shanghai: Shidai Shuju, 1950), 78.

39. Zhang, *Xing kexue*, 75.

40. Yang Youtian (楊憂天), "Tongxing'ai de wenti" (同性愛的問題) [The problem of same-sex love], *Beixin* (北新) 3, no. 2 (1929): 436.

41. Pan Guangdan (潘光旦), trans., *Xing xinlixue* (性心理學) [Psychology of sex] (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1946), reprinted in *Pan Guangdan wenji* (潘光旦文集) [Collected works of Pan Guangdan], 14 vols. (Beijing: Peking University Press, 1994), 12: 708–709. See also Pan Guangdan (潘光旦), *Zhongguo lingren xieyuan zhi yanjiu* (中國伶人血緣之研究) [Research on the pedigrees of Chinese actors] (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1941), reprinted in *Pan Guangdan wenji* (潘光旦文集) [Collected works of Pan Guangdan], 14 vols. (Beijing: Peking University Press, 1994), 2:255–258.

42. Wang Yang (汪洋), *Fufu xingweisheng* (夫婦性衛生) [The sexual hygiene of married couples] (Shanghai: Zhongyang Shudian, 1935), 49, 53.

43. Lydia H. Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Cutlure, and Translated Modernity—China, 1900–1937* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995). See also the essays collected in Liu Kang and Xiaobing Tang, eds., *Politics, Ideology, and Literary Discourse in Modern China: Theoretical Interventions and Culture Critique* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993); Lydia H. Liu, ed., *Tokens of Exchange: The Problem of Translation in Global Circulations* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).

44. On the association of male homosexual practice with national backwardness in the Republican period, see also Kang, *Obsession*, 115–144; Cuncun Wu and Mark Stevenson, "Male Love Lost: The Fate of Male Same-Sex Prostitution in Beijing in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," in *Embodied Modernities: Corporeality, Representation, and Chinese Cultures*, ed. Fran Martin and Ari Larissa Heinrich (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006), 42–59.

45. Prasenjit Duara, "The Regime of Authenticity: Timelessness, Gender, and National History in Modern China," *History and Theory* 37 (1998): 287–308. On the complicated historical layering of the *dan* figure, see John Zou, "Cross-Dressed Nation: Mei Lanfang and the Clothing of Modern Chinese Men," in Martin and Heinrich, *Embodied Modernities*, 79–97; Joshua Goldstein, *Drama Kings: Players and Publics in the Re-creation of Peking Opera, 1870–1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

46. For the transformation from "culturalism" to "nationalism" in the Chinese political sphere, see Joseph R. Levenson, *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate: A Trilogy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965).

47. Zhang Dai (張岱), *Tao'an mengyi* (陶庵夢憶) [Dream reminiscences of Tao'an] (Shanghai: Shanghai Shudian, 1982), 35–36, as translated [with my own modifications] and cited in Cuncun Wu, *Homoerotic Sensibilities in Late Imperial China* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2004), 42–43.

48. Criticisms of Foucault have been voiced most prominently in lesbian historiography. See Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); Bernadette J. Brooten, *Love between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Judith M. Bennett, "Confronting Continuity," *Journal of Women's History* 9, no. 3 (1997): 73–94; Judith M. Bennett, "'Lesbian-Like' and the Social History of Lesbianism," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 9 (2000): 1–24; Louis Fradenberg and Carla Freccero, eds., *Premodern Sexualities* (London: Routledge, 1996); Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999); Martha Vicinus, *Intimate Friends: Women Who Loved Women, 1778–1928* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004). For an excellent defense of the social constructionist approach to lesbian history, see Valerie Traub, "The Present Future of Lesbian Historiography," in *A Companion to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Studies*, ed. George E. Haggerty and Molly McGarry (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 124–145; Valerie Traub, "The New Unhistoricism in Queer Studies," *PMLA* 128, no. 1 (2013): 21–38. For criticisms of the Foucauldian genealogical method raised in the historiography of Chinese sexuality, see Kang, "Male Same-Sex Relations"; Vitiello, *Libertine's Friend*, 13–14, 200–201.

49. Kang, *Obsession*, 21. For Sedgwick's original formulation, see Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*.

50. Kang, "Male Same-Sex Relations," 490.

51. Ibid., 492.

52. My disagreement with Kang can be viewed as partially reflective of an earlier debate between Sedgwick and Halperin, with whom my analysis sides, on the genealogy of homosexuality in Western culture. See Halperin, *How to Do the History of Homosexuality*. For a defense of an essentialist approach to the history of sexuality, see John Boswell, "Revolutions, Universals, and Sexual Categories," in *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, ed. Martin B. Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and George Chauncey Jr. (New York: Meridian, 1989), 17–36. For critiques of Boswell's tendency to elide historicism, see David Halperin, "Sex before Sexuality: Pederasty, Politics, and Power in Classical Athens," in Duberman, Vicinus, and Chauncey, *Hidden from History*, 37–53; Robert Padgug, "Sexual Matters: Rethinking Sexuality in History," in Duberman, Vicinus, and Chauncey, *Hidden from History*, 54–64.

53. David Halperin, "How to Do the History of Male Homosexuality," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 6, no. 1 (2000): 98–99.

54. Cuncun Wu and Mark Stevenson, "Speaking of Flowers: Theatre, Public Culture, and Homoerotic Writing in Nineteenth-Century Beijing," *Asian Theatre Journal* 27, no. 1 (2010): 121. Wu and Stevenson diverge from Andrea Goldman, who discusses *huapu* authors' "awareness of the stigma that was associated with the sex trade in boy actors." Andrea Goldman, "Actors and Aficionados in Qing Dynasty Texts of Theatrical Connoisseurship," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 68, no. 1 (2008): 5.

55. Vitiello, *Libertine's Friend*, 201.