

# QUEER CHINA

This book analyses queer cultural production in contemporary China to map the broad social transformations in gender, sexuality and desire. It examines queer literature and visual cultures in China's post-Mao and postsocialist era to show how these diverse cultural forms and practices not only function as context-specific and culturally sensitive forms of social activism but also produce distinct types of gender and sexual subjectivities unique to China's postsocialist conditions.

From poetry to papercutting art, from 'comrade/gay literature' to girls' love fan fiction, from lesbian films to activist documentaries, and from a drag show in Shanghai to a public performance of a same-sex wedding in Beijing, the book reveals a queer China in all its ideological complexity and creative energy. Empirically rich and methodologically eclectic, *Queer China* skilfully weaves together historical and archival research, textual and discourse analysis, along with interviews and ethnography.

Breaking new ground and bringing a non-Western perspective to the fore, this transdisciplinary work contributes to multiple academic fields including literary and cultural studies, media and communication studies, film and screen studies, contemporary art, theatre and performance studies, gender and sexuality studies, China/Asia and Global South studies, cultural history and cultural geography, political theory and the study of social movements.

**Hongwei Bao** is an associate professor of media and cultural studies at the University of Nottingham, UK. He is the author of *Queer Comrades: Gay Identity and Tongzhi Activism in Postsocialist China*.

## **Literary Cultures of the Global South**

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Recent years have seen challenging new formulations of the flows of influence in transnational cultural configurations and developments. In the wake of the end of the Cold War, the notion of the ‘Global South’ has arguably succeeded the demise of the tripartite conceptual division of the First, Second and Third Worlds. This notion is a flexible one referring to the developing nations of the once-colonized sections of the globe. The concept does not merely indicate shifts in geopolitics and in the respective affiliations of nations, and the economic transformations that have occurred, but also registers an emergent perception of a new set of relationships between nations of the Global South as their respective connections to nations of the north (either USA/USSR or the old colonial powers) diminish in significance. New social and cultural connections have become evident. This book series explores the literary manifestations (in their often intermedial, networked forms) of those south – south cultural connections together with academic leaders from those societies and cultures concerned.

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## **Queer China**

Lesbian and Gay Literature and Visual Culture under Postsocialism

*Hongwei Bao*

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# QUEER CHINA

Lesbian and Gay Literature and  
Visual Culture under Postsocialism

*Hongwei Bao*

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Queer Communities in China and the Sinophone World*



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# CONTENTS

|   |              |
|---|--------------|
| <i>List of figures</i>  | <i>ix</i>    |
| <i>Series editors' preface</i>  | <i>xi</i>    |
| <i>Acknowledgements</i>   | <i>xiii</i>  |
| <i>List of abbreviations</i>  | <i>xvii</i>  |
| <i>Notes on translation, transliteration and names</i>                | <i>xviii</i> |
| Introduction: queer China, postsocialist metamorphosis                | 1            |
| <b>PART I</b>   |              |
| <b>Queer emergence</b> <b>27</b>                                      |              |
| 1 Imagining modernity: the (re-)emergence of homosexuality            | 29           |
| 2 <i>Women Fifty Minutes</i> : in search of queer women's spaces      | 46           |
| <b>PART II</b>  |              |
| <b>Queer becoming</b> <b>67</b>                                       |              |
| 3 <i>Beijing Story</i> : becoming gay in postsocialist China          | 69           |
| 4 <i>Pink Affairs</i> : narrating desire in a girls' love fan fiction | 82           |

|   |            |
|---|------------|
| <b>PART III</b>   |            |
| <b>Queer urban space</b>  | <b>107</b> |
| 5 ‘New Beijing, new marriage’: performing a same-sex<br>wedding in central Beijing                              | 109        |
| 6 The forgotten critical realism: reification of desire<br>in Mu Cao’s poetry                                   | 125        |
| <b>PART IV</b>  |            |
| <b>Queer migration</b>  | <b>137</b> |
| 7 ‘Shanghai is burning’: becoming trans in a global city  | 139        |
| 8 Life of a butterfly: subjectivation and autonomy<br>in Xiyadie’s papercutting art                             | 156        |
| Epilogue  | 180        |
| <i>Appendix: Queer history, culture and activism in postsocialist China:<br/>a brief chronology (1981–2019)</i> | 182        |
| <i>Bibliography</i>   | 192        |
| <i>Index</i>  | 206        |

# FIGURES

|     |   |     |
|-----|---|-----|
| 2.1 | Shi Tou (left) and Ming Ming (right)  | 49  |
| 2.2 | <i>Women Fifty Minutes</i> DVD cover  | 50  |
| 2.3 | 'But none of these disturbs this intimate moment between these two girls.' Film still from <i>Women Fifty Minutes</i> | 53  |
| 2.4 | 'They have been in love with each other for more than eighty years.' Film still from <i>Women 50 Minutes</i>          | 56  |
| 2.5 | 'I like you, and I also like Xiaohong.' Film still from <i>Women Fifty Minutes</i>                                    | 57  |
| 2.6 | <i>Weapon</i> series, No. 6, 1997, 73 × 60 cm, oil on canvas  | 59  |
| 2.7 | <i>Female Friends</i> , 1997, 100 × 81 cm, oil on canvas  | 60  |
| 2.8 | <i>Zhuangzi Dreams of a Butterfly</i> , in <i>Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies</i> series                               | 61  |
| 2.9 | <i>Commemoration (Ji'nian)</i> , 127 × 92 cm  | 62  |
| 5.1 | Valentine's Day same-sex wedding photo 1  | 110 |
| 5.2 | Valentine's Day same-sex wedding photo 2  | 115 |
| 5.3 | Queer rights advocacy campaign on Valentine's Day, Beijing, 2012  | 122 |
| 7.1 | <i>Extravaganza</i> film poster   | 140 |
| 7.2 | <i>Extravaganza</i> film still  | 147 |
| 7.3 | Dorian T. Fisk  | 150 |
| 7.4 | Ennis F. W.   | 152 |
| 8.1 | <i>Harmony</i> , 2016, a set of gender and sexuality themed stamps  | 157 |
| 8.2 | <i>Joy</i> , 2019, papercut on banner paper, 28 × 28 cm   | 164 |
| 8.3 | <i>Flying</i> , 2019, papercut on banner paper, 28 × 28 cm  | 166 |
| 8.4 | <i>Butterfly</i> , n.d. papercut with water-based dye and Chinese pigments on Xuan paper                              | 166 |
| 8.5 | <i>Disco</i> , n.d. papercut with water-based dye and Chinese pigments on Xuan paper                                  | 167 |

## **x Figures**

|      |   |     |
|------|---|-----|
| 8.6  | <i>Flowerpot</i> , 1991, papercut with water-based dye and Chinese pigments on Xuan paper, 176 × 176 cm | 168 |
| 8.7  | <i>Fish</i> , n.d. papercut with water-based dye and Chinese pigments on Xuan paper, 28 × 28 cm         | 168 |
| 8.8  | <i>Gate</i> , 1992, papercut with water-based dye and Chinese pigments on Xuan paper, 176 × 176 cm      | 169 |
| 8.9  | <i>Wall</i> , 2016, papercut with water-based dye and Chinese pigments on Xuan paper, 176 × 176 cm      | 170 |
| 8.10 | <i>Sewn</i> , 1999, papercut with water-based dye and Chinese pigments on Xuan paper, 176 × 176 cm      | 170 |
| 8.11 | <i>Train</i> , 1985, papercut with water-based dye and Chinese pigments on Xuan paper, 140 × 140 cm     | 171 |
| 8.12 | <i>Gardening</i> , n.d. papercut with water-based dye and Chinese pigments on Xuan paper                | 172 |
| 8.13 | <i>Gate</i> , 1999, papercut with water-based dye and Chinese pigments on Xuan paper, 176 × 176 cm      | 172 |
| 8.14 | <i>Tiananmen</i> , 2016, papercut with water-based dye and Chinese pigments on Xuan paper, 176 × 176 cm | 173 |
| 8.15 | Xiyadie and his artwork <i>A Harmonious World</i> , Songzhuang, Beijing, 2008                           | 174 |

## SERIES EDITORS' PREFACE

The ‘Global South’ is a descriptive and analytical term that has recently come to the fore across a broad range of social sciences disciplines. It takes on different inflections in varying disciplinary contexts – as a mere geographical descriptor, denoting a network of geopolitical regions, primarily in the southern hemisphere, with a common history of colonisation; driven by processes of transformation (the Global South has and continues to be the site of an ongoing neo-colonial economic legacy as also of a number of emergent global economies such as India, China, Brazil and South Africa); as an index of a condition of economic and social precarity which, though primarily manifest in the ‘Global South’, is also increasingly visible in the North (thus producing a ‘Global South’); and, finally, as a utopian marker, signifying a fabric of economic exchanges that are beginning to bypass the Northern economies, and, gradually, a framework for political cooperations, especially from ‘below’, which may offer alternatives to the hegemony of the Euro-American ‘North’.

Literary cultures are a particularly pregnant site of south-south cultural analysis as they represent the intersection of traditional and modern cultural forms, of south – south (and north – south) cultural exchange, particularly via modes of translation and interlingual hybridisation, and refract various discourses of knowledge in a highly self-reflexive and critical fashion, thereby demanding and enabling an interdisciplinary dialogue with literary studies at its core. Hallowed connections between literary production and the postcolonial *nation* notwithstanding, *transnational* south-south literary connections have usually marked the (anti-)colonial, postcolonial and indeed contemporary digital epochs. Thus, literary cultures form one of the central historical and contemporary networked sites of intercultural self-articulation in the Global South.

This series intervenes in the process and pre-empts the sort of bland institutionalisation which has forestalled much of the intellectual force of postcolonial studies or the more recent world literature studies. It proposes wide-ranging interventions

## **xii** Series editors' preface

into the study of the literary cultures of the Global South that will establish an innovative paradigm for literary studies on the disciplinary terrain up until now occupied by the increasingly problematised areas of postcolonial studies or non-European national literary studies.

The series contributes to the re-writing of cultural and literary history in the specific domain of the literary cultures of the Global South. It attempts to fill in the many gaps left by Euro-American-dominated but ultimately 'provincial' Northern cultural histories. The study of the literary cultures of the Global South 'swivels' the axis of literary interrelations from the coloniser-colonised interface which, for instance, has preoccupied postcolonial literary studies since its inception (and which inevitably informed the 'national' compartmentalisation of postcolonial literary study even when it averted its gaze from the coloniser). Instead, the series explores a set of 'lateral' relationships which have always existed but until now largely ignored – and which, in an age of digital communication and online cultural production have begun to emerge, once again, into their properly prominent position.

Russell West-Pavlov  
Makarand R. Paranjape

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those in China. Phil has encouraged me and supported this project all the way through; he has also managed to put up with all the stress and idiosyncrasies of an academic. Besides proofreading every draft of this book, he has supplied critical feedback on the manuscript from the perspective of a non-academic reader. This has made the book all the more readable and relevant.

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# ABBREVIATIONS

|        |  |
|--------|--|
| AIDS   | Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome                                   |
| BRI    | Belt and Road Initiative   |
| BRICS  | Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa                        |
| BL     | Boys' Love   |
| CCMD   | <i>Chinese Classification of Mental Disorders</i>                    |
| CCP    | Chinese Communist Party  |
| CDC    | Centre for Disease Control   |
| GDP    | Gross Domestic Product   |
| GL     | Girls' Love  |
| HIV    | Human Immunodeficiency Virus   |
| IDAHOT | International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia       |
| ILGA   | International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association |
| IQ     | Intelligence Quotient  |
| LGBT/Q | Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (and Queer)                      |
| MSM    | Men Who Have Sex with Men  |
| NGO    | Non-Governmental Organisation  |
| PFLAG  | Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays                   |
| PRC    | People's Republic of China   |
| SARFT  | State Administration of Radio, Film and Television                   |
| TOFEL  | Test of English as a Foreign Language                                |
| UNDP   | United Nations Development Programme                                 |
| UNWCW  | United Nations World Conference on Women                             |
| US     | United States  |
| WTO    | World Trade Organisation   |

# **NOTES ON TRANSLATION, TRANSLITERATION AND NAMES**

All the translations from Chinese to English in this book are mine unless otherwise stated.

I use the *hanyu pinyin* system of transliteration for Chinese words, names and places, except in cases where a different convention or preferred spelling or pronunciation exists.

The ordering of Mandarin-language names usually follows their conventional forms; that is, family names first, followed by given names.

In presenting people's names, I use the names my interlocutors chose for themselves, some of which are pseudonyms, to protect their identity.

# INTRODUCTION

## Queer China, postsocialist metamorphosis

Neoliberalism was constructed in and through cultural and identity politics and cannot be undone by a movement without constituencies and analyses that respond directly to that fact. Nor will it be possible to build a new social movement that might be strong, creative, and diverse enough to engage the work of reinventing global politics for the new millennium as long as cultural and identity issues are separated, analytically and organisationally, from the political economy in which they are embedded.

*Lisa Duggan, The Twilight of Equality: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy*

As a scholar of media and cultural studies, I consider my work as contributing to grassroots community histories by documenting contemporary queer culture in the People's Republic of China (PRC).<sup>1</sup> I pursue participatory action research; that is, I work with people from China's queer communities and conduct research on community history, culture and activism in the hope that my research will have a positive impact on the communities with which I identify. Over the past ten years, I have made frequent visits to China, combining research fieldtrips with visits to friends and family. Although I am pleased with the fast development of queer culture in urban China, I am also concerned about the tightening government control over LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer) issues in recent years. Homosexuality is not illegal in the PRC, but queer people still face a lot of pressure from a heteronormative society and a government that hesitates to recognise LGBTQ rights.

In summer 2019, I was in China. I was a bit frustrated because my talk at a Chinese university had been cancelled at the last minute. Students from the university's LGBTQ society had invited me to give a talk on my research. After the event information had been publicised, the university authorities ordered the organisers

## **2** Introduction

to cancel the event, as queer issues are still considered sensitive in many parts of Chinese society, including at schools and on university campuses. But the cancellation of this event unexpectedly freed up my time and enabled me to attend the Rainbow Law School in Beijing, a summer school which provides legal and gender/sexuality diversity training to law school students from around the country. It was an exciting time to be in Beijing. During that summer, China's legislative body, the National People's Congress, was soliciting expert advice and public opinion on the amendment of China's civil code. Many legal professionals and queer activists saw this as a good opportunity to campaign for LGBTQ rights. Despite all the efforts, in August, a National People's Congress spokesperson said at a press conference that marriage would still be defined as the union between a man and a woman in the newly drafted civil code due to China's social and cultural traditions. But this did not stop the momentum of queer activism from continuing. At the Rainbow Law School, participants celebrated a gay couple's recent success in obtaining the right of legal guardianship, which enabled them to take care of each other in times of emergency, critical illness or death and make important legal, medical and financial decisions for each other. Although same-sex marriage is not legal in China, LGBTQ people are gaining more and more rights. On the last day of the Rainbow Law School, many people planned to visit Des, short for Destination, in the evening.

Destination is one of the most famous and longest running gay clubs in Beijing. I anticipated that the club would be busy at night, so I went there in the afternoon instead. The club is located directly opposite the west entrance of the Beijing Workers' Stadium in East Beijing. It used to rent a floor in a four-storey residential building, but it has now managed to purchase the whole building, which is a sign of its commercial success. But the club also functions as a LGBTQ community centre and champions a social enterprise. The ground floor has a restaurant and café; the first floor is used as a bar and nightclub; the second floor is an art gallery and exhibition space; the top floor is used as a community centre. The community centre hosts a choir, a book club, a film club, a sports club, a dance class, an art class, a yoga class, a language class, a wine tasting club, a coffee appreciation club, a tea appreciation club . . . you name it. I was quite impressed with its busy events schedule. While I was there, a reading group was discussing a book, and a coffee appreciation group were chatting in the café. Downstairs in the art gallery, some staff were preparing a queer art exhibition. Outside the building, a huge rainbow coloured poster was advertising the club's fifteenth anniversary celebration, a weeklong list of events including a drag show, a bear night, a foam party, a glitter party, and a huge carnival with some of the world's best DJs.

During my visit to Beijing, I also met up with some of my queer friends and they were all incredibly busy. Xiaogang, director of a queer NGO (non-governmental organisation), was organising another round of the Queer University Videomaking Workshop, training queer community members to use digital video cameras to make their own short films. Zhao Ke, editor of *Gayspot*, a community magazine, was recruiting participants for his queer non-fiction writing workshop. Naying and John from the Beijing LGBT Centre were busy offering gender and sexual diversity

training workshops to people in the business world. Yanzi from a Guangzhou-based NGO, LGBT Advocacy in China, was organising LGBTQ rights workshops to lawyers and legal professionals from around China. At the time of my visit, many of my queer activist friends were preparing for their trips to Seoul, South Korea, to attend the ILGA (International Lesbian, Gay, Trans and Intersex Association) Asian regional conference to be held in mid-August. Some of my queer academic friends were busy writing their conference papers for the International Conference of Sexuality in China, to be held in Harbin, a city in Northeast China, in late August. As I walked past a multiplex cinema in a shopping mall, a big poster of Freddie Mercury caught my eye: the film *Bohemian Rhapsody* had passed censorship and was permitted to be shown in the PRC, albeit with some significant cuts to gay scenes, which had triggered a lot of online debates and opposition from queer communities and Queen fans. Freddie Mercury never visited China in his lifetime; but from the poster I could imagine that he would be very pleased to act as a queer ambassador for gender and sexual minorities in China.

After Beijing, I went to my hometown Xianyang. By contrast, I found very few queer-related events and activities in the city. Located in Northwest China and with an urban population of around seven million (Demographia 2019), Xianyang is by no means a big city in China. It does not have a gay bar or club. The only way to meet other queer people is to visit the nearest big city Xi'an or turn on the gay dating app Blued. Most of the queer people on Blued are from Xi'an or other big cities, and many people do not put face pictures on their online profiles, primarily for the sake of anonymity and safety. I can imagine how lonely it must be for a queer person to live in the city, and that explains why many of them move to big cities such as Xi'an or Beijing as soon as they can. This also reminds me of the vast disparity within China's queer communities, and within Chinese society overall. Whilst queer people in big cities have more access to queer-friendly resources, those from small cities, towns or even the countryside lack resources and support networks. The intersection between queerness and urban/rural divide is symptomatic of how neoliberalism works in China: as it crafts desires, it also creates inequalities, distinctions and hierarchies in society.

In Xianyang, I walked past a street named Rainbow Road and could not stop feeling amused: at the entrance of the street stands a rainbow-coloured arch. Despite knowing that few people in the city would associate rainbow with sexual minorities, I was still pleased that queerness has already been part of the city's architecture, and that Western queerness can lose its meaning and significance in the Global South.

I use my own experience to give readers a glimpse of what was happening in urban China in the summer of 2019. When I described these experiences to my British friends, many of them were surprised at how much is going on in China now, and some were impressed by the dynamism and vitality of queer culture there. Yet all these are largely unknown to the rest of the world. Western media are often full of reports about China's lack of human rights, or sexual minorities' suffering in the PRC from a heteronormative society and an authoritarian government. All these reports are likely to be true, but a narrow focus on the political system and human

#### **4 Introduction**

rights misses the point about what is happening on the ground, in the communities and in people's everyday lives. It is true that LGBTQ rights are far from being guaranteed by China's legal and political systems. Public events such as a queer film festival or a talk on queer issues on a university campus often risk being closed down by the authorities. Films and television programmes containing queer content can be ruthlessly cut or banned. In small cities, towns or the countryside, queer existence can be very precarious because of the lack of resources and support networks. All these obstacles, however, do not stop queer people from getting together and queer public events from taking place. With a bit of online search or some personal communication, queer people in urban China can find plenty of opportunities to engage in LGBTQ activities, hosted by community centres, NGOs, commercial venues, and often organised by queer people themselves. In real life, most queer people are trying to strike a balance between life and work, and negotiate complex relationships with their family, friends and colleagues. For many, LGBTQ political rights and gay prides are desirable but not indispensable. Everyday life matters more. Literature, art, film, performance, dinners, karaoke and other creative and cultural activities play an important part in China's queer life.

Perhaps one of the most exciting developments in China in the past four decades was the emergence of LGBTQ identities, together with a queer culture that has gradually gone public. Although lesbian and gay people are still fighting marginalisation, discrimination, media censorship and heteronormative social norms, a vibrant queer culture, in tandem with a visible queer movement, has undoubtedly transformed the lives of gender and sexual minorities in major Chinese cities. Queer literature, film, art and performance have mushroomed in this process. These cultural forms and practices not only shape queer identities and communities; they also serve as culturally specific forms of social and political activism in urban China. In a country where public demands for political rights are constrained, cultural activism – that is, awareness raising and community building through cultural production and consumption – becomes one of the most culturally sensitive and context-specific forms of queer struggle for representation and existence. The central tenet of this book is, therefore, that queer communities' engagement with cultural production functions as a crucial form of social and political activism in China today.

This is a book about queer cultural production – including literature, film, art, performance, and other creative and cultural practices – in the PRC in the post-socialist era (1978 to the present).<sup>2</sup> Literature and visual culture offer important insights into the process of what I call 'postsocialist metamorphosis' – the transformation of subjectivity, desire and sense of belonging in the postsocialist era. It is widely known that these creative and cultural forms can reflect social realities; but such a mimetic mode of representation needs to be complemented, if not replaced, by a performative mode of representation; that is, these creative forms and texts can shape social realities and construct social identities as well. This book will demonstrate how these creative and cultural practices participate in the transformation of queer culture, and even Chinese society at large, by shaping its contours

and trajectories and instilling it with energy and dynamism; they also offer ample opportunities for modes of desubjectivation and creative resistance.

## **Postsocialist metamorphosis**

In this book, ‘postsocialist metamorphosis’ is used as critical term to describe the transformations of identity, community and politics during China’s post-Mao and postsocialist era, often known inside China as the ‘reform and opening up’ era.<sup>3</sup> Such transformations have touched upon virtually every aspect of people’s lives including their affective and intimate spheres. They are often impacted on, but not dictated by, neoliberal capitalism. After all, other modes of governmentality, including Confucian and socialist governmentnalities, coexist and play important roles as well. These different modes of governmentality shape subjectivities, bodies and desires in China in significant ways. ‘Postsocialist metamorphosis’ is thus a historical process, simultaneously and yet contradictorily producing and unmaking gendered, sexed and desiring subjects. This process of transformation manifests varying degrees of autonomy, agency and resistance; it also attests to the openness of the social and the contingency of identities in a non-deterministic way. Indeed, it is the ambivalence of this process that lends agency to ordinary people and offers hope for creative resistance under the global neoliberal hegemony.

I use the term ‘metamorphosis’ to describe a simultaneous and yet contradictory process of becoming and unbefoming in terms of identity and politics. All the people studied in this book have experienced transformation of identity in one way or another, and sexuality becomes an important identity marker at some point in their lives. However, these processes of subject formation and identity transformation are also deeply embedded in China’s postsocialist context, where the Chinese state collaborates closely with transnational capitalism to produce new modes of subjectivation. Metamorphosis is queer, insofar as it refuses a clear definition, a single trajectory and a definitive goal. It promises potentiality, something yet to be actualised. Although metamorphosis is also subject to complex social conditions and historical processes, it is the potentiality that matters, and that gives people hope. Literature, art, film, performance and other forms of cultural production provide a unique lens into these contradictory and complex processes of transformation. They offer us hope for a queer future.

‘Postsocialist metamorphosis’ presents various modes of neoliberal subjectivation and desubjectivation. As the case studies in this book will illustrate, although there are plenty of instances for becoming gay or lesbian, there are also abundant signs of queer becoming and unbefoming. Indeed, processes of becoming and unbefoming are closely intertwined. Identification often gets entangled with disidentification; that is, lack of or only partial identification with the global LGBTQ discourse (Muñoz 1999). In other words, it is perfectly possible to talk about identities without subscribing to an identity politics. In the same way, we can also talk about lesbian, gay, *tongzhi* (literally ‘comrade’, a Chinese term for gay or queer) and *ku’er*/queer at the same time, and they are sometimes even found in the same person or

## **6** Introduction

practice, because these different modes of identities coexist and become entangled in the postsocialist Chinese context, on which a linear trajectory of queer historiography does not neatly map.<sup>4</sup>

Throughout this book, I focus on literature, art, film, performance and other forms of queer cultural production in the PRC; I also introduce various modes of queer subjectivation and desubjectivation in the postsocialist era. From discursive constellation and cinematic representation of homosexuality, to processes of becoming gay or lesbian in ‘comrade literature’ (*tongzhi wenxue*, meaning queer literature) and fan fiction; from rural and migrant queers’ literary and artistic engagements, to different types of queer performances in urban spaces, I hope these examples can shed light on the complex processes of queer identity construction and social formation in the postsocialist era. My thesis is that queer culture in contemporary China is never completely identitarian; instead, it embodies identitarian and anti-identitarian aspects at the same time, and the two aspects are mutually constitutive and transformative. I suggest that the best place to observe this identitarian and anti-identitarian entanglement is the realm of literature and visual culture, which shapes queer identity, community and culture in specific and yet contradictory ways. This entanglement also speaks to China’s postsocialist condition and its ambivalent relationship to neoliberal capitalism.

This book explores the life stories and shares the experiences of different creative queer individuals and groups. They have identified themselves as lesbian, gay, *tongzhi* or queer in the past few decades. However, their endorsement to these identity labels is never without hesitation or condition. Like the queers of colour who refuse to fully identify with the white, Western and middle class gay culture in José Esteban Muñoz’s (1999) study of queer performance culture in the United States, the Chinese queers studied in this book also identify and disidentify with the ‘global gay’ (Altman 1997) culture at the same time, looking at it with ambivalence and scepticism. Indeed, their queer subjectivation is not, and perhaps never will be, complete due to China’s historical condition of postsocialism and its ambivalent relationship to neoliberal capitalism. In the postsocialist context, socialist memories, experiences and longings often find their way into the postsocialist present to disrupt the gleaming dreams of the neoliberal hegemony. LGBTQ people in China are not alone in this picture; many people in the Global South often hold ambivalent attitudes towards neoliberal discourses led by the West. ‘Postsocialist metamorphosis’ is therefore a critical framework that can be used to describe transformation of individuals, groups, societies and even nation states in a transnational and postsocialist context, with an emphasis on their incomplete subjectivation as a neoliberal subject and their refusal to be fully incorporated into the global neoliberal economy.

### **Queer histories and memories**

When future historians look back at this era, they will probably be surprised at how much a new form of global governance known as neoliberalism has transformed

the world in as little as half a century; they might equally be amazed by the seemingly endless creative energy of queer culture in the Global South. They would surely be curious about why this was the case and what happened, not only from the perspective of a *longue durée*, but also the nitty-gritty of what happened on the ground and in ordinary people's lives. This book tries to provide a lens into these questions. By looking at what happens in the communities and what lesbians and gay people do in relation to culture, I unfold a dynamic picture of what a queer China is like, or might be like, from the multiple, often intertwined and highly subjective perspective of a community member and academic observer. In doing so, I critically interrogate the relationship between structure and agency, between urban/rural/national/international geopolitics and gender/sexual/identity politics, and between political economy and the study of culture, in understanding LGBTQ identity, queer desire and community culture in China today.

This book attempts to construct a historical archive for the future by documenting and analysing the ongoing present. At the time of writing this book, neoliberalism has unevenly penetrated almost every corner of the world; it has shaped ordinary people's dreams and desires, as well as their public and private lives, in significant but differentiated ways. Throughout the world, people are looking for hope, escape and alternatives. While I cannot propose a solution, I can at least share some stories with which I am familiar to inspire imagination, hope and strength for creative resistance.

This book draws on public histories, collective memories as well as my own personal experiences in China's post-Mao and postsocialist era. I write about this period because I lived through this historical era and was a witness to and participant in the queer histories I document. But this does not mean that I knew the significance of those events at the time they were taking place. In the years gone by, I have forgotten a lot of the moments when personal history intersected with national or even global histories; or perhaps I failed to realise the importance of such moments when they occurred. Born in 1977, I was not aware of the fact that Mao Zedong had died just a year before and Deng Xiaoping was about to take power a year later, two events that have shaped modern Chinese history in significant ways. One evening in my childhood, after school and at the dinner table, I overheard fragments of my parents' conversation about a group of students demonstrating and protesting at the Tiananmen Square in Beijing, and that was in 1989. The Kosovo War was experienced on campus when I was at university as there was a student demonstration to protest against the US bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in 1999. On 11 September 2001, I was woken up from deep sleep by loud noises from people outside the university dormitory: news spread that there had been a terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre in New York. Personal histories like these were unwittingly entangled with world geopolitics. There are many things I wish I could remember and others I would rather forget.

But there is something I cannot forget: a growing awareness of my own sexuality. In 2000, I completed my first undergraduate degree at a small university in Northwest China and moved to Beijing to study for my second degree. It was then and

## **8** Introduction

there that I realised I was gay. I have no intention of going into the ‘nature-nurture’ debate in relation to human sexuality; I also cannot explain why I only came to realise my sexuality in my twenties. But it was in Beijing and on Peking University campus that I started to realise, and acknowledge, that I was different from many others. It was also then and there that I learned how to use the Internet and to keyword search the Chinese term for homosexuality, *tongxinglian*. Whilst I could only find pathologised descriptions of homosexuality in medical and psychological textbooks (including one titled *Psychology of Perversion*) in the university library, the Internet provided a much more diverse range of information about homosexuality. I discovered gay websites, queer NGOs and online dating chatrooms. A brave new world began to unfold in front of my eyes.

My ‘coming out’ took place at a very optimistic moment in China’s queer history. In 1997, the term ‘hooliganism’ (*liumang zuī*), once used to prosecute gay men, was removed from China’s Criminal Law, thus signalling the decriminalisation of homosexuality in the People’s Republic.<sup>5</sup> In 2001, the newly published third edition of the *Chinese Classification of Mental Disorders* (CCMD-3) clearly stated that the ego-syntonic (*ziwo hexie*) type of homosexuality needs no medical treatment, thus symbolising the partial depathologisation of homosexuality in the PRC.<sup>6</sup> In the same year, Hunan Satellite Television broadcast a live talk show, *Youhua Haoshuo*, in which three celebrities were invited to the television studio to discuss issues regarding homosexuality. The names of these celebrities are well known in China’s queer communities today: sociologist and sexologist Li Yinhe, queer writer and filmmaker Cui Zi’en, and lesbian artist and filmmaker Shi Tou. This marked the queer communities’ first ‘coming out’ on Chinese television. In December 2001, the first Beijing Queer Film Festival, then advertised as ‘China Homosexual Film Festival’, took place on the Peking University campus where I was a student. The festival featured several queer films, including Cui Zi’en’s *Ten Commandments*, Liu Bingjian’s *Men and Women*, Li Yu’s *Fish and Elephant*, Stanley Kan’s *Lan Yu*, and Zhang Yuan’s *East Palace, West Palace*, together with Q&As with these filmmakers. The publicity blurb of ‘China’s first homosexual film festival’ and the award-winning film *Lan Yu* gave the event unanticipated media publicity, and this led to pressure being put on the organisers from the university authorities and eventually caused the early closure of the festival.

I was fortunate to be in Beijing and on the Peking University campus at the time, observing a burgeoning queer culture in real time. There was unprecedented optimism in the queer communities at the time about what it meant to be gay and whether sexual minorities would ever be accepted by Chinese society. This coincided with the widespread enthusiasm in Chinese society at the turn of the millennium following China’s entry into the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

China was undergoing a rapid transformation at the time. In 1978, Chinese society bade farewell to decades of socialism under Mao and started its ‘reform and opening up’ under Deng’s administration. In the 1980s, there were heated discussions among Chinese intellectuals about where China would be going, and this was known as the ‘high culture fever’ (*wenhua gaore*) (Wang 1996). The ‘culture fever’

came to a sudden halt in 1989 when the government cracked down on the student protests at the Tiananmen Square in Beijing. The party-state strengthened its ideological control over cultural production in the 1990s. Meanwhile, there was a boom in consumerism and popular culture as China accelerated its economic reforms. In urban China, a thriving commercial culture pushed the expressions of gender and sexuality to the public sphere (Lavin, Yang and Zhao 2017). Queer commercial venues started to crop up in big cities such as Beijing and Shanghai, and this was accompanied by sporadic forms of queer activism initiated by transnational queer activists. Anxieties and excitements coexisted in the *fin de siècle* China.

It was China's entry into the WTO in 2001 that injected hope into Chinese society. Overall there was a widespread optimism among people, brought about by the anticipation of a 'lucky millennium' (*qianxi nian*), following China's eventual entry into the WTO after decades of diplomatic talks. In the midst of optimism and under the government's strict media control, many social problems including the loss of social welfare, widening social gaps, mass unemployment and forced internal labour migration found little coverage in China's domestic and mainstream media. Although China's WTO-entry agreement made no mention of gender and sexuality, there was widespread belief in Chinese society that there would be more free expressions of gender, sexuality and identity as China 'connected track' (*jiegui*) with the rest of the world. Like their heterosexual counterparts, queer people in China also had every reason to imagine themselves as a world citizen in a country that openly embraced the world.

What China has been going through is a process of a gradual adaptation to neoliberalism. Measures including economic liberalisation, deregulation, privatisation and marketisation were in effect neoliberal strategies being adopted all over the world at the time. Socialism, although still an official rhetoric in China, has largely been seen as obsolete, irrelevant and even harmful to Chinese society. As the Chinese economy slowly gets liberalised, and as the market forces start to exert a strong influence upon the economy, cultural production also follows the trend. Literature, art and other forms of cultural production have come to reflect the desire to 'liberate' human beings. Gender, sexuality and desires are widely seen as repressed 'human nature' that needs to be liberated in a 'desiring China' (Rofel 2007). Homosexuality happens to be situated at this historical juncture that connects economic and political liberalisation with 'human nature', hence the surfacing of queer issues in the public discourse.

In the 1980s and 90s, there were also dramatic events taking place around the world. In 1989, the Berlin Wall fell. In 1991, the Soviet Union collapsed. Decades of the Cold War suddenly came to an end. A new world was yet unknown. There used to be two conflicting power blocks: the liberal West represented by the United States and its allies, and the illiberal East represented by the Soviet Union and its allies. Two confronting ideologies, or visions of what a society should be, i.e. communism and capitalism, used to co-exist with and contest each other. After 1989, it seemed that capitalism has triumphed, and there is no alternative. History has come to an end (Fukuyama 1992). After a long and disastrous twentieth

century, how will world politics develop in the new millennium? With the changing position of China in world geopolitics, what is the role of gender and sexuality in the context of ‘neoliberalism with Chinese characteristics’ (Harvey 2005)?

## The new millennium

Queer communities and cultures have developed rapidly in the new millennium. With the depathologisation of homosexuality in 2001, an increasing number of queer venues, organisations, sources of funding support and overt and covert forms of political and social activism have transformed urban China. The HIV/AIDS (Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome) epidemic has proven to be a double-edged sword for China’s queer communities. Huge sums of international HIV/AIDS funding, mediated by the Chinese government, flooded into China and supported the founding of numerous grassroots queer organisations all over the country. They also helped to build a national activist network and basic community infrastructures. At the same time, HIV/AIDS further stigmatised queer people and even gave birth to the MSM (Men Who Have Sex with Men) identity, a stigmatised sexual identity born out of global biomedical governance (Zheng 2015). Moreover, the uneven distribution of HIV/AIDS funding led to the separation of lesbian groups from gay groups (Hildebrandt 2012), and queer politics from gay identity politics (Bao 2018). The gradual withdrawal of international HIV/AIDS funding after 2010 and China’s draconian ‘Foreign NGO Law’ passed in 2016 effectively deprived grassroots community groups from gaining international funding support. Many queer organisations in the PRC had to turn to commercial means, including crowdfunding and running commercial events, in order to survive. As market forces join hands with the Chinese state to eliminate smaller civil society groups, a few big organisations have grown quickly because of their capacity to make money and generate profits.

The China-based gay dating app Blued is an example in case. Launched in 2012, the app now counts 40 million users and boasts of being the largest gay social network app in the world (Blued 2019). The app was valued at 600 million US dollars in 2016 (Hernández 2016). Blued not only gains profits from its live streaming functionality but from its lucrative gay surrogacy service as well. Trapped between a commercial market and a surveillance state, the community service remit of Blued seems to have been compromised (Wang 2020). The story of Blued manifests the dilemma of China’s queer enterprises under ‘neoliberalism with Chinese characteristics’.

Despite the continuing existence of media censorship and the lack of political rights, queer people in China have more space now to live their identities and form their communities. At the same time, a burgeoning pink economy in Chinese cities has given birth to a growing sense of ‘homonormativity’ (Duggan 2004). Queer people are increasingly following a heterosexual way of life in their wish to become patriotic, law-abiding, affluent and respectable citizens; that is, to become ‘as normal as possible’ (Yau 2010). Although social norms should be understood in their historical and cultural contexts and there are different normativities in these

specific contexts (Engebretsen 2014), an originally underground, grassroots and anti-normative queer culture seems to be losing its radical critical edge as queer urbanites strive to conform to nationalist ideologies and middle class values. The annual Shanghai Pride's queer cosmopolitanism (Bao 2012) and PFLAG (Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) China's queer sentimental familism both manifest varying degrees of homonormativity.

A growing sense of homonormativity, in tandem with a fast-developing pink economy, results from the transformation of the Chinese economy and society following China's official entry into the WTO. As China becomes a qualified participant in the global capitalist economy, Chinese queers can also imagine themselves to be full members of the 'global gay' (Altman 1997) community. China's economic and political position within the world has shifted in the past two decades. As one of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) countries and the world's biggest emerging economies, China is challenging the hegemony of the United States and reshaping the global geopolitics after *Pax Americana*. Increasingly, China is becoming a global superpower. Its power and ambition should be understood as those of an 'empire' (Hardt and Negri 2000) rather than an ordinary nation state. Domestically, China advocates a nationalistic 'Chinese dream'; it spares no effort to suppress political dissidents and curb social unrests. Internationally, it keeps expanding its power and hegemony through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in order to extract and exploit resources from Southeast Asia, Africa and other countries in the Global South. Here we can see a reconfigured notion of the Global South. Instead of signalling the formation of a homogeneous version of a counter-hegemonic Global South, the rise of China reminds us that there are unequal power relations and neo-colonialist hegemony among countries in the Global South.

In the context of China's growing economic and political power, the lives of ordinary people in China are not necessarily better off. The growing national GDP (Gross Domestic Product) has not translated into the narrowing down of social gaps and inequalities. The strengthening political power has not given ordinary people more political rights. The country's 'Chinese dream' offers little hope for marginalised social groups. LGBTQ rights continue to be ignored; feminist and queer activism is frequently met with state repression. Increasingly, the state has been crafting a heteronormative image of hypermasculinity, embodied in the figure of the 'wolf warrior' (Liu and Rofel 2018). Commenting on the representation of masculinity in the Chinese blockbuster *Wolf Warrior II*, Petrus Liu (2018) argues:

The jingoistic fantasies about China's rise require a policing of gender, which operates through a complex and subtle mechanism. These complexities demonstrate that gender and sexual lives are not exterior to the story of China's rise, but constitutive of it.

(Liu 2018)

Indeed, China's rise depends on, and at the same time encourages, a patriarchal and hypermasculine male image, complete with a heteronormative and

reproductive family. In this context, the shaming of single women as ‘left-over’ (Hong Fincher 2016), the purge of feminist activists and the marginalisation of sexual minorities all effectively serve the state’s political and ideological agenda. If gay identity is seen as a ‘postsocialist allegory of modernity’ (Rofel 1999), what kind of postsocialist world are we living in? What are the new characteristics specific to the twenty-first century? How are gender, sexuality and identities articulated in the reconfigured geopolitics? What are some of the creative resistances to, and lines of flight in, transnational neoliberalism, if any? This book hopes to provide some critical perspectives into these questions.

## **China and postsocialism**

I have probably left out a lot of details, complexities and contradictions in my very subjective and broad brushstroke account of global history centred on the Chinese experience in the past few decades. With the postsocialist and post-Cold War historical context in mind, the last two decades of the twentieth century and the first two decades of the twenty-first century are the historical backdrop of my narrative about queer China. Without jamming the introductory chapter of the book with too much detail, suffice it to say that the world has changed dramatically since the end of the Cold War, and this change has had a huge impact on people’s subjectivities and lived experiences. Individual and collective experiences are often intertwined with national and even global histories; personal desires and intimate spheres frequently reflect political and social upheavals. Against this historical backdrop, gender, sexuality and desire are often cited as perfect examples that testify to the change. After all, if we were to ask sexual minorities in China about their lives before and after 1989, is there anything better than their own testimony to demonstrate which world they would prefer to live in, and which political system is superior to the other? In this sense, gay identity has become a ‘postsocialist allegory of modernity’ (Rofel 1999) that attests to the inevitability of socialism’s demise and capitalism’s triumph.

The term ‘postsocialism’ is key to understanding the historical experience of China and many other countries in the world. Scholars disagree on the political and ideological nature of contemporary China: some see it as ‘socialism from afar’ (Zhang and Ong 2008) and others diagnose it as ‘neoliberalism with Chinese characteristics’ (Harvey 2005). ‘Postsocialism’ represents one of the most popular – albeit also with great controversy – understandings of China’s historical condition among scholars working in the Western academia (Dirlik 1989; Rofel 1999, 2007; Litzinger 2002; Berry 2004; Kipnis 2008; McGrath 2008; Zhang 2008; Rojas and Litzinger 2016; Bao 2018). The term ‘postsocialism’ offers valuable insights into the understanding of contemporary Chinese society. According to Arif Dirlik (1989: 231), postsocialism describes

a historical situation where (a) socialism has lost its coherence as a meta-history of politics because of the attenuation of the socialist vision in its

historical unfolding . . . (b) the articulation of socialism to capitalism is conditioned by the structure of ‘actually existing socialism’ in any given historical context which is the historical premise of all such articulations; and (c) this premise stands guard over the process of articulation to ensure that it does not result in the restoration of capitalism. Postsocialism is of necessity also postcapitalist, not in the classical Marxist sense of socialism as a phase in historical development that is anterior to capitalism, but in the sense of a socialism that represents a response to the experience of capitalism and an attempt to overcome the deficiencies of capitalist development. Its own deficiencies and efforts to correct them by resorting to capitalist methods of development are conditioned by this awareness of the deficiencies of capitalism in history.

For Dirlík, postsocialism represents an alternative to capitalism. It is a global condition in late modernity and is thus not unique to China. From today’s perspective, his view seems optimistic, when the incorporation of China into global neoliberal capitalism does not seem to represent a genuine alternative. However, if we recognise the continuing existence of socialist ideas, experiences and aspirations in contemporary Chinese society, China can still be seen as neither entirely socialist nor capitalist; rather, it is characterised by the simultaneous non-contemporaneity of hybrid economies and politics, which can be described as ‘postsocialist’. Indeed, although China has adopted state-led capitalism, and neoliberalism has exerted a powerful influence on Chinese society, the state still owns a large part of its major industries and infrastructure, which still nominally fall under the ownership of all the people in China. What is more, socialist histories, memories and experiences still linger on in today’s China and they structure people’s lives, embodiments and emotions in significant ways. They provide legitimacy and support for citizen rights and grassroots activism. As my previous book *Queer Comrades* demonstrates, socialist modes of ‘comrade’ subjectivity and politics still inspire postsocialist queer identity formation and LGBTQ social movements. It is therefore important to recognise the socialist traces, memories and aspirations in the postsocialist era to articulate modes of resistance to global neoliberalism.

## The queer Global South

The Global South perspective marks an important feature of this book. In recent decades, the term ‘Global South’ has largely supplanted ‘the Third World’ in development studies and in literary and cultural studies (West-Pavlov 2018). The term often has a geographical connotation and is often talked about in relation to the industrialised and post-industrialised world in the Global North, where neoliberal capitalism was invented and subsequently took a strong hold. The term has sometimes been understood as an effect of the capitalist globalisation emanating from the Global North and extending its hegemonic power to the southern part of the world. At other times, it is seen as forms of discontent shared by the world’s subaltern populations and transnational alliances of counterhegemonic struggles

against neoliberal modernity (López 2007). It is ‘a sliding signifier forever in pursuit of a changing signified in a dynamic of supplementation dictated by where the North deterritorialises and the South reterritorialises’ (Mishra 2018: 54). Even if the imagination of the Global South is an ‘illusion’ that risks concealing internal differences and power relations within the seemingly coherent and yet fragmentary Global South, such an imagination can still serve as a ‘mobilisation myth’ (Dirlik 1994: 136) that enables and empowers individuals and groups at a critical historical juncture (West-Pavlov 2018: 19). The key, therefore, is how and for what purpose the term is used.

The Global South has significant implications for understanding and imagining globalisation. Globalisation is often understood in terms of Western hegemony, cultural imperialism, and the homogenisation of culture (Said 1994; Tomlinson 1999; Ritzer 2000). In such an imagination, the West dominates the world and the Global North becomes the epicentre of all transnational processes. Such an understanding is useful, because it points to deeply entrenched unequal power relations in the world as a result of Western colonialism and capitalist expansion. However, it neglects what happens in large parts of the world, that is, the dynamics and the tensions in the non-Western world and in the Global South. It is important to remember that the hegemony of the Global North has not gone unchallenged. In fact, anti-colonial and anti-hegemonic struggles and South-South alliances have constituted an important part of the world’s history. One such historical moment was represented by the Bandung Conference, the first large-scale Asian-African conference that took place in Bandung, Indonesia, in 1955. The Bandung Conference initiated a series of South-South collaborations against the Global North hegemony. The memory of the Bandung conference, sometimes referred to as the ‘Bandung nostalgia’ (Yoon 2018), is still cherished by many people who experienced that era today, and it becomes the inspiration for an increasing number of transnational projects led by governments, individuals and grassroots organisations in the Global South.

The Global South is ambivalently situated in relation to issues of gender and sexuality, as a Western understanding of modernity is key to the process of the (de) gendering and (de)sexualising of the Global South. The Global South in the pre-modern era is often cast under the orientalist gaze and imagined as a land of sexual abundance, decadence, primitivism and sometimes infant innocence (Said 1991); Michel Foucault’s (1990) description of *ars erotica* vividly captures such a fascination. In the modern era, with the expansion of Western colonialism and industrial capitalism, a liberal and ‘primitive’ understanding of sexuality was believed to have given way to a discourse of sexual repression, religious fundamentalism, communist asceticism and human rights abuse in the Global South. Queer people in the Global South become powerless victims that passively await salvation by their liberated brothers and sisters from the Global North. In priding itself on gender and sexual diversity and in seeing the Global North as the epitome of human civilisation, the sexually liberalised Global North versus the sexually illiberal Global South dichotomy has often been reinforced, and this further consolidates the unequal

power relations between the North and the South. Furthermore, a sense of nationalism, pride and cultural superiority based on an assumed belief in sexual liberation is often used to legitimise a series of military, political, economic and cultural interventions in other parts of the world. Joseph Massad (2007) has examined the negative Western influences on sexual cultures in the Arab world, represented by Gay International's interventionist strategies which impose a Western type of sexual development and social movement agenda irrespective of local cultural traditions. Far from being apolitical, gender and sexuality in the Global South have become battlefields where complex power relations converge and where intricate international politics is played out in the most intimate sphere.

This book imagines and maps a 'queer Global South' by using contemporary queer Chinese culture as an example. In documenting China's queer history and culture in the last four decades, and through close reading of queer cultural texts and an ethnography of contemporary queer public culture, I hope to demonstrate the critical potential of the imagination of the 'queer Global South', by not treating it as yet another overarching 'grand theory' but seeing it as one of the critical lens through which we can yield important insights. Using a combination of research methods including historical and archival research, textual analysis, discourse analysis, interview and ethnography, I hope to reveal the dynamics of a queer Global South in its complexities and contradictions. In queering the Global South and imagining a queer Global South, I also hope to open up alternative imaginaries of sexuality, communication and culture full of creative energies and liberating potentials.

## Queer comrades

This book grows out of my frustration with many concurrent journalistic and academic writings on queer globalisation. These writings tend to cast the Global North in a positive light and the Global South in a negative light in terms of queer rights. According to this discourse, the economic and political system in the Global North, i.e. neoliberalism, is seen as intrinsically better for queer people as they have more rights under this system. This discourse further suggests that countries in the Global South should liberalise themselves faster and integrate themselves more deeply into the global neoliberal political economy so that the queer people living (or 'suffering') in these countries may enjoy more rights and freedom one day. In the light of this homonationalistic and Euro-American-centric logic, sexual freedom is framed as a necessary outcome of neoliberalism and is often used to justify the existing global geopolitical system and power relations (Puar 2007). This line of argument often turns a blind eye to the fact that neoliberalism has been built on the erosion of welfare states and the mass dispossession of poor people worldwide. It also does not hide its white, middle class, male privilege, as well as its geopolitical rootedness in the Global North. It seems a cruel paradox that the acquisition of political rights for sexual minorities parallels the loss of welfare rights for many people in various parts of the world. This is not to suggest that queer people are

directly responsible for social inequalities and injustices in a world infiltrated by neoliberal capitalism. Rather, it is a timely reminder of the ideological ambivalence of some uncritical international discourses on queer rights and gay liberation. These discourses can function as a form of ‘pinkwashing’ (Puar 2010): that is, using queer rights to disguise hidden and often insidious political and ideological agendas. Under these agendas, the evocation of queer rights effectively serves to renounce socialism and the welfare state, as well as their associated principles such as democracy, egalitarianism and social justice.

This book will demonstrate that sexuality is never an individual, private and personal matter; it is always already intertwined with complex power relations and world geopolitics (Foucault 1990). Indeed, sexuality is a battlefield for ideological struggles between neoliberalism, socialism and other forms of social imaginaries. If neoliberalism has tried to define human sexuality and dominate the intimate sphere through individualisation, consumerism and private property rights, such attempts have not gone unchallenged. Queer people all over the world have articulated their resistance to the hegemony of neoliberalism through individual and collective struggles, and through imagining alternative ways of being, feeling and engaging with politics. Using contemporary China as an example, I hope to unravel the political and ideological ambivalences of gay identities and queer desires in the Global South. In many parts of the world, gay identities and queer desires have emerged in the historical and transnational processes of departure from socialism and entry into neoliberalism. However, it must be remembered that socialist imaginaries, aspirations and practices have not dissipated. They still exist on the ground level and in ordinary people’s minds and memories; they continue to inspire radical subject formation and novel forms of political engagement.

This book builds on and develops the argument from my last book *Queer Comrades: Gay Identity and Tongzhi Activism in Postsocialist China* (Bao 2018). In *Queer Comrades*, I focused on the term *tongzhi*, one of the most popular terms for queer identification in the Chinese-speaking world today. Using a deconstructive approach in tracing a genealogy of the term *tongzhi*, I reconstructed a history of the term and highlighted the socialist visions and aspirations embedded within the history. In doing so, I unravelled the progressive potential of queer subjectivity and sexual activism in China today. The ‘queer comrade’ assemblage embodies the potential of challenging the neoliberal gay identity born out of global capitalism; the ‘queer comrade’ activism holds the promise of developing a radical, progressive, Left and socialist politics by building on socialist ideals of egalitarianism and justice as well as revolutionary experiences of mass mobilisation.

If *Queer Comrades* focuses primarily on political activism and social movements, this book examines diverse forms of queer community culture, with meticulous attention paid to queer people’s lives, feelings and intimate experiences. In doing so, I hope to identify the ‘structures of feeling’ (Williams 1961) in China’s queer communities in the past four decades. I also hope to demonstrate that literature and visual culture are not apolitical forms of representation and self-expression.

Although they are frequently manipulated by hegemonic forms of power to manufacture consent, they can also be used by marginalised groups to construct their identities and communities, fight for rights and social justice, and imagine an alternative future. In a part of the world where citizens' rights are often constrained by political regimes and neoliberal governmentality, literature, art, film, performance and other forms of community culture and creative practices have vital roles to play in empowering individuals and social groups. This book rejects the Euro-centric idea that there is no queer activism in China – understood in the sense of pride parades and LGBTQ political rights – and suggests that cultural production serves as an important form of queer activism in contemporary China.

### **'Queer China' assemblage**

I use the term 'queer' (*ku'er* in Chinese) to refer to all gender and sexual minorities. 'Queer' usually describes the 'gestures or analytical tools which dramatise incoherences in the allegedly stable relations between chromosomal sex, gender and sexual desire' (Jagose 1996: 3). The word has been used broadly to refer to all the non-normative identities and practices. Eve Sedgwick (1993: 9) observes that 'queer' has been spun outward along dimensions that cannot be subsumed under gender and sexuality at all; the term has come to signify the ways in which race, ethnicity and postcolonial nationality crisscross with each other, together with other identity-constituting and identity-fracturing discourses. In this sense, 'queer' recognises the convergence and divergence in subject formation worldwide under capitalist globalisation. Meanwhile, the term also denotes a post-identitarian stance by suggesting that the complexity of human gender, sexuality and desire cannot be reduced to fixed identity categories. Such is my standpoint in relation to gender, sexuality and identity, and this a post-identitarian stance will be emphasised throughout this book. In the transnational Chinese context, 'queer' encompasses all gender and sexual identities and identifications, including LGBTQ, *tongzhi* ('comrade'), *tongxinguilian* ('homosexual'), *lala* ('lesbian') and gay.<sup>7</sup> As I recognise the cultural specificity of the terms including LGBTQ, *tongzhi*, *tongxinguilian*, *lala* and gay, I use them selectively in my writing based on the context. But for the purpose of clarity and consistency, 'queer' is the umbrella term I opt to use throughout the book to refer to all the gendered and sexual subjectivities. This is because I acknowledge the transnational nature of the term 'queer', paying meticulous attention to how queer theories and political practices are circulated in China. I understand 'queer' not as a fixed entity, but as an ongoing process of cultural translation, pointing to unpredictable directions. In this process, new meanings and possibilities are produced, and they have the potential to defy the mythical origin of the term, along with the power relations that underpin such origins. I will engage with the issues of identity politics and cultural translation in the various chapters of this book.

Similarly, although my project primarily focuses on queer cultural production in the PRC context, what is 'China' or 'Chineseness' cannot be taken for granted.

Travis Kong's (2010) ground-breaking work on transnational Chinese male homosexualities in various geographical locations points to the multiplicity of Chineseness and queerness. Howard Chiang and Ari Larissa Heinrich (2014) draw on Shu-mei Shih's (2007) term 'the Sinophone' as a critical tool and decolonising strategy to critique the PRC-centrism in Chinese queer studies. The Sinophone critique brings to light the role of world geopolitics in shaping gender, sexuality and intimacy by drawing attention to issues of marginalisation, a task to which this book is also committed. Although the subject matter of this book is queer culture in the PRC, the queer Sinophone critique informs much of the book's analysis. Throughout this book, I will demonstrate the instability of the signifier 'Chineseness' by challenging fixed identity categories and undoing cultural essentialism. Furthermore, by situating 'China' and 'Chineseness' in a transnational context, I will consider how 'China' and 'Chineseness' are produced as a result of complex global geopolitics unevenly shaped by postsocialism, postcolonialism and cultural translation.

This book can be seen as an effort to construct a 'queer China' assemblage that undoes identity politics, unsettles conventional ways of thinking and creates spaces for critical reflection and autonomous living. Assemblage usually refers to a collection of things or concepts that have been temporarily put together. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) suggest that the different parts that constitute an assemblage are not stable and fixed; rather, they can be displaced and replaced with other parts, and that this is a constantly changing and never-ending process. The concept 'assemblage' thus gestures towards a flexible and contingent relationship between things. If the different parts that make up 'queer' and 'China' are unstable, fluid and contingent, the 'queer China' assemblage put together in this book is even more unstable and fluid, and subject to constant mutation and transformation. 'Queer China', together with its associated categories and concepts, thus epitomises a post-identitarian trajectory of thinking.

As nation states and neoliberal capitalism continue to reify bodies, desires and identities worldwide, 'queer China' takes a 'disidentification' (Muñoz 1999) approach by identifying with dominant ideologies and discourses partially, contingently, conditionally and sometimes subversively. This is not to romanticise 'queer China' as a utopian space of resistance and defiance, but to recognise that identification for minority cultures and marginalised communities is never complete, uncompromising and without failure throughout the world. Only in this way can we imagine 'homotopias' and lines of flight in a world dominated by state violence and neoliberal hegemony.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, while 'China' may conjure up memories of a socialist past and remind people of the continuing existence of a communist regime, 'queer' rejects possible nostalgic, romantic and even authoritarian associations by situating itself in relation to sexuality and desire in the context of a post-Cold War world order. 'Queer China' is thus about complicity as well as alterity. As I will demonstrate in this book, 'queer China' encompasses bodies, desires and identities reified in global capitalism; it also articulates their resilience, defiance and modes of creative existence.

## Queer cultural production: an encounter

This book's focus on cultural production reflects the crucial role that queer culture – including literature, film, art and performance – play in constructing identities, communities and politics in the PRC. It is true that the rights-based, overtly political and antagonistic type of queer politics such as protests and pride parades are uncommon in China, but this does not mean that queer activism does not exist in mainland China, as contributors to the edited book *Queer Tongzhi China* convincingly demonstrate (Engebretsen, Schroeder and Bao 2015). Through representing queerness in cultural texts and creative art forms, queer identities and desires are made visible. Such a representation is itself political in a country where representation is often dictated by opaque and yet idiosyncratic government directives. Through producing and consuming these cultural texts, queer people can gain a sense of their identity, community and politics through engaging with queer issues in a relatively safe and supportive environment.

Perhaps we should part with the rigid view that a version of the Stonewall riot will take place in China one day, and that this magic moment would usher in an age of queer liberation. While disruptive historical events like Stonewall or a sudden policy change from the Chinese government may still be possible, it is not everything that Chinese queers should aim for. Rather, we should appreciate what is happening here and now, and their potentialities in pointing to a there and then. Indeed, these queer community cultural practices should be regarded as effective and affective ways of articulating identity, community and rights. In other words, instead of expecting historical ruptures and landmark events, let us appreciate what we have now and the minute changes literature and visual culture make to queer people's lives and Chinese society. By focusing on the affective dimension of these minute changes, this book hopes to shed light on the political potential of queer culture via a cultural approach to queer politics.

I choose to focus on the last two decades of the twentieth century and the first two decades of the twenty-first century because this is a historical period through which I have lived, and with which I am familiar. Having spent a large part of my youth in this era, first in China and then outside China, I do not pretend that I am objective and unbiased about this history. My account of queer history does not claim to be comprehensive or representative. Every step of the account, from the selection of case studies to the choice of interpretive framework, has been inevitably mediated by my own preoccupation, politics, idiosyncrasy and affective experiences. I acknowledge the subjective nature of such an account, but I also wish to demonstrate that such an account is still valid and useful, because it sheds important light on our understanding of China's queer culture in its complexities and contradictions.

This book focuses on the analysis of queer cultural texts and practices. It challenges the boundaries between various cultural forms including literature, film, art and performance, often artificially demarcated by academic fields, disciplines and institutions. To write a book encompassing a wide range of creative and

cultural forms is an ambitious, and even risky, undertaking for an author. I am aware that without specific academic training in many of these fields, I may risk losing some of the disciplinary specificities for each cultural form. But it is a risk that I am prepared to take. Indeed, it is important to look at the similarities and commonalities amongst all these artworks and cultural forms on top of their perceived differences. After all, these literary and artistic works are invariably situated in a specific historical context and they manifest ‘structures of feeling’ of a society and an era. My general approach is a media and cultural studies one: that is, to situate cultural forms and texts in their historical, social and cultural contexts and to look at the discourses in which they are situated and the power relations that shape them.

Recognising the textual mediation of society and the narrative feature of social practices, this book disrupts the rigid boundaries between cultural texts and social practices, and between humanities and social sciences. In this book, queer texts are also social and cultural practices in their processes of production, circulation and consumption, and in their situatedness in social contexts and relation to and impact on society. Queer social practices are often informed and represented by cultural texts. Bringing together queer texts and practices, this book examines queer culture in its mediated and lived complexity.

A recurring theme of this book is the relationship between queer culture and political economy. I will dedicate the book to exploring the connections between queer culture and the postsocialist Chinese and global geopolitics. Queer culture in postsocialist China has been, and will continue to be, shaped by a global neoliberal political economy in which China plays a part. Meanwhile, Chinese queer culture can serve as important sites of contestation for global neoliberalism.

Identity is an important theme for the book: in charting the emergence and formation of queer identities, I also reveal their contingency, instability and even deconstruction and possible demise. In delineating the processes of sexual and neoliberal subjectivation, I also seek modes of desubjectivation, or moments when ideological interpellation fails, and places where agency and autonomy can be located. Overall, I hope that this book depicts various forms of ‘postsocialist metamorphosis’ without giving them a fixed shape, contour or trajectory. The flexibility of ‘postsocialist metamorphosis’ also points to the openness of the social and the contingency of identities in a postsocialist context.

This book does not aim to offer a comprehensive history of queer cultural production in postsocialist China. I have encountered many queer individuals, texts and events in the past ten years while I was researching on queer China. Their names are largely unknown outside, and even inside, China’s queer communities, let alone being recognised by literary scholars and art historians based in academic and art institutions. However, these people’s lives, stories and artworks have all touched me in one way or the other. I therefore decided to write about them, as a research diary for myself, as a memoir for the queer community with which I identify, and as an archive for those who are interested in issues pertaining to queer China. I understand my research and writing process as a continuing process of encounters: random, idiosyncratic but nonetheless meaningful. These encounters are personal and

affective and yet they are deeply reflective of and closely connected to the collective and the social. They may look random and even idiosyncratic, and yet they are subject to historical and structural influences. They can reveal as much as they can conceal things. But who is to say that such encounters do not have their own validity and value? In my research and writing, I have certainly benefited from my encounters with these people, texts and practices and they have changed me in ways I could not have anticipated. I hope that you will enjoy these encounters too. Get prepared to be touched, shouted at and even bored by them; take delight in being taken away to their worlds, the small cosmoses that make up the imagination of a queer China.

## A user's manual

Books in queer studies are often notoriously abstruse. It is my hope to make this book more reader friendly. I have intended that the book be read in open and flexible ways. Each chapter stands on its own by dealing with a separate case study and a different set of theoretical concerns. Readers can therefore start with any chapter and read in any order they prefer. In doing so, readers can construct their own versions of the book and build various human-book assemblages. I call this section 'a user's manual' to convey the constructed nature of the book. Here I am thinking of a user's manual for Lego instead of for a piece of furniture. With Lego, one can follow instructions to put bits and pieces together to build something, although one does not have to do so; following one's own creativity and idiosyncrasy usually leads to more pleasant surprises. Similarly, one can read the book in any way and in any order by ignoring the following structure designed by the author.

This book is divided into four parts. They constitute various types of queer Chinese constellations. Part I traces the emergence of homosexuality and queer desires through discursive formation and cinematic representation in China's post-socialist era. Part II narrates two stories of 'becoming queer' in online literature. I choose online literature because print publication is strictly censored in the PRC; the Internet, loosely censored in comparison, offers more space for creative writing, identity formation and author-reader interaction. The online platform also creates novel literary forms and innovative reader-writer engagements, such as the case of girls' love fan fiction. Part III looks at two instances of how queer people engage with urban spaces: one is a 'flash mob' type of queer activism disguised as a same-sex wedding event in central Beijing, and the other features a working class queer's physical and literary engagements with Beijing's queer spaces. By juxtaposing the two case studies, I hope to highlight the social disparities and class differences in queer urban spaces and identities. Part IV interrogates possibilities and modes of desubjectivation from the perspective of migration: transnational migration, as in the case of an international cohort of drag queens in Shanghai; and domestic migration from the countryside to the city, as in the case of Xiyadie. My goal in this part is to demonstrate how migration can deterritorialise identities, and how performance, documentary film and papercutting as art forms and modes of

self-expression can offer spaces for queer agency and autonomy. Running through all these chapters is a post-identitarian way of thinking. As discourses and power relations construct queer identities, identities are also deconstructed through the convergences of people, media, technology, urban space, as well as creative and cultural engagements.

The book chapters roughly follow a chronological order, spanning the period of postsocialist Chinese history from the 1980s to the present. They also cover a range of cultural and creative forms, including literature, film, art and performance. Apart from Chapter 1, which historicises and contextualises homosexuality in the PRC in the postsocialist era, all the other chapters deal with a specific case study – be it a novel, a film, a poet, an artist or a public performance. In choosing these case studies, I have paid specific attention to people and groups who have previously been under-represented in Chinese queer studies: queer women, ethnic minorities, rural, migrant and working class queers, drag performers and international expatriates working in China. I have also given special place to China's development issues, rural-urban migration, burgeoning drag communities in Chinese cities, as well as the fast-developing reading and writing communities of 'comrade literature' and fan fiction.

Chapter 1 offers a historical background for the book by tracing a genealogy of the emergence of gay identities and queer desires in postsocialist China. I look at multiple and intersecting discourses including medical, legal, academic and journalistic constructions of homosexuality. Refuting the 'repressive hypothesis' common in Chinese queer historiography, I understand the emergence of gay identities and queer desires as a result of discursive formations closely associated with the Chinese intellectuals' and ordinary people's imagination of a postsocialist modernity. Such an imagination is situated in the post-Cold War and postsocialist context, when modernity and gay identity are imagined in specific ways that are both national and transnational, both collectivising and individualising. Such an imagination is underpinned by a gradual erasure of socialism and an endorsement of neoliberalism in China and worldwide.

Chapter 2 brings together lesbian artist, filmmaker and activist Shi Tou's life and artworks through an analysis of her film *Women Fifty Minutes*. With an emphasis on space and place, this chapter examines the construction of queer women's identities and spaces through representational practices. In doing so, I delineate the emergence of queer women's identities and spaces through film, artworks and activism in contemporary China. I also unravel the complex relationship between feminism and queer movements, and between the representation of Chinese women and the representation of queerness. Shi Tou's films and artworks can be seen as an effort to bring queer women into existence through an examination of the heterogeneity of Chinese women, and to bring queer issues into feminist discussions. They also remind us of the gendered dimensions of China's economic development under neoliberalism.

Chapter 3 interrogates the political and ideological underpinnings of the emergence of gay identity by focusing on the protagonists' 'becoming gay' narratives in an online queer fiction *Beijing Story*. Perhaps one of the best-known queer stories

in the Sinophone sphere, *Beijing Story* foregrounds the emergence of gay identity in postsocialist China's restructuring of its political economy and social relations. Drawing on the Derridian notion of 'hauntology', this chapter argues for a reconsideration of class and socialism in understanding postsocialist China's historical transformation and queer culture.

Chapter 4 examines the production and consumption of a *Super Girl* fan fiction in an online community. Fan cultures in China have been strongly influenced by popular cultural flows in East Asia and the Sinophone spheres; they also manifest a strong sense of queerness that cannot be neatly captured by identity politics. Through textual analysis of a lesbian-themed online fan fiction *Pink Affairs*, I delineate how this text depicts middle class dream, transnational imagination and queer desires. Meanwhile, by considering the text as symptomatic of the 'structures of feeling' in contemporary Chinese society, I also explore the postsocialist historical and social contexts in which such cultural practices and queer desires become possible. In addition, by describing the author-reader interaction in co-creating the text, I draw attention to the importance of consumption – or 'prosumption' (Toffler 1980), a combination of production and consumption – in shaping contemporary queer popular culture.

Chapter 5 analyses a same-sex wedding event that took place in Beijing in 2009, which turned out to be a queer rights advocacy campaign carried out by some queer activists in the form of shooting wedding photos. I use this case study to showcase how Chinese queer communities have been devising culturally sensitive and context-specific activist strategies. These strategies make creative use of public spaces and incorporate the use of embodied performance and digital media. They depart from the 'pride' and 'coming out' model of queer politics and suggest innovative modes of political and social engagements.

Chapter 6 introduces working class poet Mu Cao and analyses his poetry to show how neoliberalism has transformed the life of an ordinary person, and who might have been lost in China's neoliberal transformation. Mu Cao's poems, evocative of the critical realist literary tradition, remind us of the dark side of neoliberal capitalism and those who are further marginalised in the global picture of neoliberal governance.

Chapter 7 looks at a documentary film about a drag show that took place in Shanghai in 2017. If queer Shanghai represents how transnational capitalism shapes queer identities in a global city, drag culture in Shanghai seems to confirm this assumption. But the subculture also offers a more nuanced picture by pointing to the grassroots queer connections in non-hegemonic forms of 'minor transnationalism' (Lionnet and Shih 2005). If cinema is an apparatus to produce and shape queer images and imaginations, the 2018 documentary *Extravaganza*, made by British filmmaker Matthew Baren, gestures towards new forms of queerness and cinema, together with a queer-cinema assemblage which is not confined to national boundaries, identity categories, and the logic of the global capital.

Chapter 8 focuses on queer artist Xiyadie's life story and his papercutting works. Using a critical biographical approach, in tandem with an analysis of his artworks,

I examine the transformation of Xiyadie's identity from a folk artist to a queer artist and ask what types of power relations have made this transformation possible. In doing so, I consider the role of queerness in mediating his identity and in facilitating his social mobility; I also pinpoint the role of art and creative practices as possible means of desubjectivation. Conscious of the transformation and reification of human subjectivity and creativity under global capitalism, I hope to seek possible ways of desubjectivation, human agency and queer autonomy.

This book marks a modest start on the topic of queer literature and visual culture in contemporary China. It hopes to encourage more people to pay attention to the fast-developing and vibrant scenes of queer cultural production in China. I am aware that these people, history and creative forms would probably be soon forgotten if they were not documented in a timely manner, and that these stories are important assets for China's queer communities. Indeed, in compiling a chronology of queer history in the PRC (see the appendix of this book), I was alarmed to find out how much community history has been lost, forgotten or even erased because of political censorship, technological takeover and human negligence despite the fact that they only happened not so long ago. I do not know how long it will take for China to recognise LGBTQ rights; nor can I predict whether China will follow the Western model of LGBTQ political rights and same-sex marriage. But I am keenly aware that if we refuse to look at what is happening in China's queer communities now, and if we miss the development of these fascinating creative and cultural practices, our understandings of China, Chineseness and queerness would be incomplete, if not flawed.

This is the first scholarly monograph devoted specifically to the study of queer literature and visual culture in the PRC context, written from the perspective of a community historian and critical scholar. The case studies of Mu Cao's queer poetry, Xiyadie's papercutting art, Shi Tou's film *Women Fifty Minutes* and Matthew Baren's film *Extravaganza* are among the first scholarly efforts to study these artists and artworks in both English and Chinese languages. Weaving together historical and archival research, textual and discourse analysis, along with interview and ethnography, this transdisciplinary work contributes to multiple subject areas and academic fields including literary and cultural studies, media and communication studies, film and screen studies, contemporary art, theatre and performance studies, gender and sexuality studies, China/Asia and Global South studies, cultural history, sociology and anthropology, human geography, political theory and the study of social movements.

## Notes

- 1 This book focuses on queer cultures in mainland China. Readers interested in queer histories and cultures in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore and other parts of the Sinophone Sphere can consult Chiang 2018; Chiang and Heinrich 2014; Kong 2010, 2019; Lavin, Yang and Zhao 2017; Leung 2008; Lim 2006, 2014; Martin 2003, 2010; Tang 2011; Yau 2010; Yue 2012, among others.

- 2 I use terms such as ‘post-Mao era’, ‘postsocialist era’ and ‘reform era’ interchangeably to refer to the historical era after the death of Mao Zedong in 1976 and the ascent of Deng Xiaoping in Chinese leadership through the third plenary of the Eleventh Party Congress in 1978. I consider the 1976–78 juncture to be a watershed moment in modern Chinese history that marks the beginning of a new era, an era that marked China’s re-entry into global capitalism after years of socialist experiments.
- 3 ‘Reform and opening up’ refers to a series of economic reforms initiated by the then Chinese president Deng Xiaoping from the late 1970s, which include the privatisation and deregulation of a previously state-regulated economy and joining the global market and the world capitalist economy.
- 4 *Tóngzhi*, literally ‘comrade’, is a popular term used in the Chinese-speaking world to refer to sexual minorities such as LGBTQ people. For a brief genealogy of the term, see Bao 2018: 65–91.
- 5 This remains controversial. Guo Xiaofei (2007) points out that the removal of ‘hooliganism’ from China’s 1997 Criminal Law did not aim to decriminalise homosexuality, although in effect it produced an unexpected result which seemed to have decriminalised homosexuality.
- 6 CCMD-3 states that only those ‘ego-dystonic’ (*zìwò buhexié*) homosexuals need to seek medical treatment, and therefore this is not a complete depathologisation. This lends legitimacy to the ‘treatment’ of homosexuality by many hospitals and clinics in China today. See Bao 2018 for an account of the conversion therapy of homosexuality in China.
- 7 For an explanation of the term *lala* in the PRC context, see Kam 2013 and Engebretsen 2014.
- 8 I thank Howard Chiang for suggesting the term ‘homotopia’ to replace the heteronormative sounding ‘heterotopia’ (Foucault 1986). The concept of ‘homotopia’ is nicely in tune with the camaraderie and homosociality of the *tóngzhi*/‘queer comrades’ subject discussed in *Queer Comrades* (Bao 2018).

## References

- 1 In the 1910s and 1920s, apart from the introduction of concepts such as gender, sex and sexuality, the term *tongxing'ai* (same-sex love; homosexuality) entered the Chinese language from the European sexology (particularly from writings by the German Richard von Krafft-Ebing and the Englishmen Havelock Ellis and Edward Carpenter), often through Japanese sources (Dikötter 1995; Kang 2009; Sang 2003).
- 2 Discourses of homosexuality as both ‘feudal remnant’ and ‘Western decadence’ seem contradictory, but they represent the multiple and often conflicting discourses about homosexuality circulating in the postsocialist Chinese society. In fact, there is never a single and coherent discourse about homosexuality in China. It is productive to ask what discourses there are and how people negotiate these discourses.
- 3 For discussions of male same-sex desire in the Cultural Revolution see Ye (2018) and Kang (2018).
- 4 The Chinese term *jijian* is not exactly equivalent to the English term ‘sodomy’. Both terms have their distinct historical and cultural associations. *Jijian* does not have the religious association that ‘sodomy’ evokes. In China, *jijian* only refers to same-sex anal sexual behaviour between males and it is a term that appeared at the end of China’s imperial dynasties. There was no law before Ming and Qing dynasties to punish *jijian* between consensual adults. Ming and Qing criminal laws made *hetong jijian* (consensual sodomy) an offence that involved a punishment of ‘100 strokes of heavy bamboo’ because it disrupted the social and gender order, but the punishment was by no means heavy at the time, and the law was seldom implemented in practice (Guo 2007: 21–22; Sommer 2000: 122).
- 5 But this does not mean that homosexual behaviours were not punished in the socialist and postsocialist China. Guo points out the difference between law in texts (*shuben shang de fa*) and law in practice (*xingdong zhong de fa*) (Guo 2007: 1). In the socialist era and the early stage of the postsocialist era, homosexual behaviours were sometimes punished with the charge of ‘hooliganism’ (*liumang zui*) (Dutton 1998). ‘Hooliganism’ was removed from China’s 1997 Criminal Law, which was generally considered ‘decriminalisation (*feizuihua*) of homosexuality in China. ‘Administrative penalty’ (*xingzheng chufa*), which takes the forms of lowered job position, less salary and even unemployment, is also another form of punishment in China.
- 6 In 1999, Fang was sued by one of his interviewees, a Mr. Xu, for ruining the latter’s reputation by disclosing his identity in the book. This court case marked a watershed moment in postsocialist China’s legal history concerning homosexuality: The judge had to delete the sentence ‘homosexuality is seen as an abnormal sexual behaviour’ in his court decision because of Fang’s appeal. For details of the case, see Rofel’s chapter ‘Legislating Desire’ in *Desiring China* (2007: 135–55).
- 7 Admittedly, the term ‘intellectual’ (*zhishi fenzi*) in Chinese has different connotations from the word ‘intellectual’ in English. The Chinese term covers all the ‘educated’ professionals including teachers, editors, journalists, medical doctors, scientists and engineers. The denotations and connotations of the term *zhishi fenzi* vary from historical and social contexts. The importance of intellectuals in China, however, should not be underestimated, not only because they are considered to embody the Confucian ideals of ‘nurturing one’s virtue, taking care of one’s family, governing the state and pacifying the world under heaven’ (*xiushen, qijia, zhiguo, pingtianxia*), but also due to the important roles that they played in Chinese history, especially during the May Fourth Movement in the 1910s and 1920s and, as I suggest in this chapter, in the postsocialist era.
- 8 I use the term ‘enlightenment’ in a broad sense, instead of referring specifically to the Age of Enlightenment in the West which centred upon the eighteenth century. For a discussion of ‘enlightenment’ (*qimeng*) in the modern Chinese context, see *The Chinese Enlightenment: Intellectuals and the Legacy of the May Fourth Movement of 1919* (Schwarz 1986).
- 9 I use capital letters here to indicate that the original language is in English.
- 10 Shi Tou’s name is sometimes spelt as Shitou. It is a pseudonym name that the artist chose for herself. According to an interview conducted by Xin Huang, Shi Tou’s original name

- is Shi Xufei and she ‘discarded her original typically feminine name given by her parents and claimed a name that seeks to express her queerness’ (Huang 2018: 128).
- 2 As a camerawoman, Ming Ming has shot several films directed by Shi Tou. Shi Tou attributes many of the works, especially photography, to the joint authorship of herself and Ming Ming.
  - 3 *Nüren* in the film title is translated into English as ‘woman’. Yet other words such as *funi* and *nixing* also refer to women in the Chinese language.
  - 4 The Chinese state has been advocating heteronormativity in the names of family values, social stability and cultural nationalism, especially in recent decades. For more discussions about (hetero)sexuality in relation to the biopower of the postsocialist Chinese state, see Evans 1997; McMillan 2006.
  - 5 The film has English subtitles, but I have re-translated them to make the text flow more naturally.
  - 6 *Qing* is a Chinese term referring to deep sentiment or passion between people. The notion of *qing* is central in understanding Chinese conceptions of love, friendship and intimacy, especially in premodern Chinese context. Chou Wah-shan (2000: 15–19) argues that same-sex eroticism in China is characterised by *qing* instead of *xing* (sex) as in the West. According to classical Chinese philosopher Xunzi, nature (*xing*) is that which is formed by Heaven; the disposition (*qing*) is the substance (*zhi*); the desire (*yu*) is the proper response (*ying*) of the disposition (Yu 1997: 58; See also Lee 2006). In Ming and Qing Dynasties, *qing* refers to the intent of the mind/heart and *yu* refers to the intent of the flesh. (Huang 2001) For more discussions about *qing*, see Chou 2000; Huang 2001; Plaks 1976; Yu 1997.
  - 7 For discussions of ‘mandarin ducks and butterflies’ (*yuanyang hudie*) as a literary genre, see Link 1981; Chow 1991; Wang 1997.
  - 8 The *New Year Calendar* series are not featured in the film. They are photographic works created by Shi Tou shown in some art exhibitions, including the *Dreaming Fantasy* Photo Beijing exhibition held at the Agricultural Exhibition Hall (*nongye zhanlan guan*), Beijing on September 6–9, 2008. The works in this series include: *Karaoke* (*Kala* OK, 127 × 92 cm, 2006), *Commemoration* (*ji'nian*, 127 × 92 cm, 2006) and *Witch Work* (*monü gongzuo*, 127 × 92 cm, 2006). For an insightful analysis of Shi Tou’s artworks, see Huang 2018.
  - 9 *Fridae* ([www.fridae.asia](http://www.fridae.asia)) is one of the biggest and most influential queer websites in Asia. Based in Hong Kong and with the slogan ‘connecting gay Asia’, it offers information and personal ads services in both English and Chinese languages to queer communities in Asia and other parts of the world.
  - 1 The story has been translated into English and published under the title of *Beijing Comrades* in 2016 (Bei Tong 2016). The story is also available online at [www.bhzw.cc/book/3/3280/162448.html](http://www.bhzw.cc/book/3/3280/162448.html) (in Chinese, accessed 25 August 2019) and [www.wattpad.com/story/67282221-beijing-story-lan-yu](https://www.wattpad.com/story/67282221-beijing-story-lan-yu) (in English, accessed 25 August 2019).
  - 2 The author was later identified as a writer named Youhe. The story was first published in an online magazine titled *Huazhao* in October 1998 and was later reposted on other websites including Yifan and Huangjin shuwu.
  - 1 The show’s official name was the Mengniu Yoghurt Super Girl Contest, after the company that sponsored the series. The reality TV show ran between 2004 and 2006. The organiser, a provincial TV station, had to stop the show in 2006 because of the political sensitivity and controversy over the media event. Liu Zhongde, a member of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, accused the program of being ‘poisonous’ and corruptive for the youth (Martinsen 2006). The show was relaunched in 2009, with the Chinese name changed to ‘Happy Girls’ (*kuaiile nǚsheng*) though the English name ‘Super Girl’ remained unchanged. The last season of the show was aired in 2011.
  - 2 Fanzine is a nonprofessional and nonofficial publication produced by fans for the pleasure of others who share their interest. In Asian popular culture, *anime* refers to digital animations in films and videos, while *manga* refers to comic art magazines and books.

- 3 The Chinese term *tongren zhi* comes from the Japanese term *doujinshi* and refers to self-published works, usually hard cover art or *manga* but also extended to include paperback or online production. Some derivatives of the term include *tongren wen*, self-published stories either in print or online, and *tongren niu*, young girls who produce and consume these self-published works.
- 4 Slash fiction is a type of fan fiction that focuses on sexual or romantic relationships between fictional characters of the same sex.
- 5 GL and *Yuri* (*baile*) are different genres of writing in the fan community. In mainland China, it is generally considered that *Yuri* depicts more ‘pure’ love without explicit sex scenes, while GL may have a lot of depiction of sex. In Japan, *Yuri* is a term used in the fan community while GL is the term used by outsiders.
- 6 There are some differences between Japanese slash and Anglophone slash but their differences are not significant. The two conventions of aesthetic and graphic slash, ‘boys’ love’ (*Shōnen-ai*) and *Yaoi* in Japanese slash, are also apparent in the Anglophone slash.
- 7 Web link: <http://tieba.baidu.com/f?kw=%E7%B3%C9%AB%B3%AC%C5%AE> (accessed 23 March 2019) The story is also available at [www.sto.cx/book-26399-1.html](http://www.sto.cx/book-26399-1.html) (in Chinese, accessed 25 August 2019).
- 8 BT is the short form for the Chinese term *biantai*, meaning perverse. Its Japanese equivalent is *hentai*.
- 9 The author’s name ‘Clockwork Orange 521’ shows an Anglophone influence. There is ample evidence in online GL fan communities that Chinese GL fans are familiar with both Asian and Western popular cultures, in terms of both ‘high’ and popular cultures. Fans often adopt names from a wide repertoire of cultural references to demonstrate their distinctive personalities and classed tastes.
- 10 In *Super Girl* fan communities, Yang represents Liu Liyang and Shang represents Shang Wenjie. I use Liu and Shang to refer to the two protagonists in this chapter.
- 11 *Seme* (*gong*) and *uke* (*shou*) are jargons in BL and GL fan communities. In a GL sexual relationship, *seme* (*gong*) refers to the active, and usually penetrative, party; *uke* (*shou*) is used to describe the passive, and usually penetrated, party. In the BL and GL world, all the characters have their distinct roles in sex, and they are either *seme* or *uke*. *Seme* (*gong*) and *uke* (*shou*) are fan jargons and they differ from the jargons in the Chinese-language gay and lesbian communities, such as top (1), bottom (0), butch (T) and femme (P).
- 12 ‘Home’, ‘house’ and ‘family’ can all be translated into *jia* in the Chinese language. I primarily use ‘home’ to translate *jia* in this article with some context-specific exceptions.
- 13 Though privileging peasants and workers in general, the Maoist society had its own ways of social distinction. ‘Capitalists’ with good connections with the Party State still prospered. Those who attended the People’s Liberation Army and those who allied themselves with the Communist Party in the early years became social elites in the Mao era. For a brief account of the Mao and post-Mao Chinese history, see Maurice Meisner (1999); for discussions about social class in China, see David S. G. Goodman (2008) and Minglu Chen (2013).
- 14 The foreign language texts I quote here are all from the Chinese text. The non-English sentences in the conversation mean: life is an illusion (in French); love is a great pain (in French), and I love you (in German).
- 15 Although these traits are also common to Anglophone romance fiction, people in China still widely believe that people in the West are more promiscuous in sex, and that loyalty and long-term relationship is characteristic of Chinese people. Chou Wah-Shan’s (2000) *qing/xing* dichotomy is a good example of this type of popular understanding: in Chinese culture, people attach more importance to *qing* (deep emotional attachment) while people in the West put more emphasis on *xing* (sex).
- 16 It is possible to attribute this type of culture stereotyping to the influence of other cultural texts, including literature, film and popular cultural representations. Many high school and university educated Chinese people associate the UK with capitalism, industrial revolution and the ‘alienation of human beings’, exemplified by critical realist novels

## 30 Introduction

such as those written by Charles Dickens and Thomas Hardy, and France with culture, taste and romance. These cultural texts are widely circulated both in school curriculum and in popular cultural representations. Most readers in China are familiar with the Marxist vocabulary of reading cultural texts as a result of the compulsory Marxist training in the school curriculum.

- 17 This is in line with the Japanese meaning for YAOI (aka Boys' Love), short for *Yama nashi, ochi nashi, imi nashi* ('No climax, no point, no meaning').
- 18 The works of Claude Levi-Strauss (1969) and Gayle Rubin (1975) on family, kinship and the exchange of women in the patriarchal society is useful in understanding this issue.
- 1 I use the Chinese term *chang* here to describe an assemblage of bodies, emotions and affects that work together at a particular time and place to produce certain effects. In Taoism, *chang* is always associated with *qi* (free-flowing energies characterised by *yin* and *yang*) and refer to a terrain of such energies that accumulate, reform, transform and disintegrate. Please note that *chang* should be understood as multiple, contingent, and fluid. *Chang* affects people and things and is deeply affective.
- 2 Many gays and lesbians use pseudonyms, cyber names or English names in the queer communities. Only a few out public personas use their real Chinese names in queer public events. This is generally considered as understandable and necessary by people in the community. The politics of naming in relation to queer identities and communities is an interesting issue that requires separate treatment elsewhere.
- 3 Tiananmen literally means 'the gate of heavenly peace' and Qianmen 'the front gate' in English.
- 1 Mu Cao is the pen name of Su Xianghui.
- 2 Mu Cao's publications include poetry collections *The Age of Transsexuals* and *The Bible of Sunflower*, novels *Outcast* and *The Lake for Outcasts*, and collections of short stories *Says An Old Man* and *A Hundred Lan Yu's Screams*. Some poems have been translated into Dutch, English, French, Japanese and Slovenian. One of his poetry anthologies, *Selected Poems of Mu Cao*, is bilingual, translated into English by Yang Zongze. His novel *Outcast* (*Qi'er*) has been translated into English by Scott Meyers, titled *In the Face of Death We Are Equal* (Seagull Books 2020). Excerpts of the novel can be accessed from the *Words without Borders* website [www.wordswithoutborders.org/article/june-2016-the-queer-issue-vii-out-cast-mu-cao-scott-e-meyers](http://www.wordswithoutborders.org/article/june-2016-the-queer-issue-vii-out-cast-mu-cao-scott-e-meyers) (accessed 1 January 2019) and some translated poems can be accessed from the *Pen America* website: <https://pen.org/two-poems-mu-cao/> (accessed 1 January 2019). See van Crevel (2017) and Ming (2017) for an account of the contemporary Chinese poetry scene of which Mu Cao plays a part.
- 1 For more information about the film, please visit <https://matthewbaren.wixsite.com/filmmaker/extravaganza> (accessed 18 December 2018)
- 2 This chapter follows the convention in the local drag community to use the gender pronouns of the performers' drag personalities. It is a common practice in local drag communities to refer to a drag king as 'he' and a drag queen as 'she', regardless of their assigned biological sex. Neither Fisk nor Ennis identifies with being they/them/theirs.
- 3 RuPaul (full name RuPaul Andre Charles) is an American drag queen and TV celebrity, known for being the producer and host of the reality competition series *RuPaul's Drag Race*. Fisk commented that the RuPaul show 'focuses on a very narrow slice of drag culture and does not include drag kings' (personal communication, 18 November 2018). Baren points out that drag existed long before RuPaul, and whilst the RuPaul show has an important influence, it is not the only or defining influence on drag cultures in Shanghai (personal communication, 18 November 2018).
- 4 For a cinematic representation of the life of transgender sex workers in Shanghai, see Wang Leijun (Yutian)'s 2009 documentary *Lost in Shanghai Lan (Shanghai Shanghai lan)*.
- 5 I thank Matthew Baren for pointing out the bohemian nature of Shanghai's drag scene, which does not always map nicely onto a fixed 'class' structure of a society.
- 6 The prefix 'trans' in transgender and transnational carries different meanings. While it is important to recognise their differences, this chapter places emphasis on their similarities, i.e. how they all index a post-identitarian mode of thinking and how they can be used to think

- about and beyond identity categories. Also, as two modes of identities or ways of being, transnational and transgender are not just paralleled but also intersected in complex ways.
- 7 I am aware of the possible controversy regarding the dismissal of identity politics for racial, ethnic, gender and sexual minorities. My post-identitarian politics is not a universal one; instead, it is situated in specific historical and social contexts: in this case, the intersections of gender/sexual and racial/ethnic identities may produce specific configurations and unexpected effects.
- 1 'Tom of Finland', the pseudonym of Touko Valio Laaksonen (1920–91), was a Finnish artist known for his highly stylised homoerotic art depicting male hypermasculinity and fetish cultures (Ramakas 2004).
  - 2 Xiyadie's works have also been shown at Flazh!Alley Art Studio, San Pedro, USA (2012); Museum of World Culture, Gothenburg (2013); Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, Stockholm (2012); Galerie Verbeeck–Van Dyck, Antwerp (2015); Topenmuseum, Amsterdam (2015); Para Site, Hong Kong (2017); 'Cut Sleeve, Split Peach' exhibition, Berlin Nome Gallery (2018) and the 12th Gwangju Biennale: Imagined Borders, Gwangju, South Korea (2018) (NOME Gallery 2018).
  - 3 The film *Wellspring* (*Zai yiqi de shiguang*, dir. Sha Qing 2012) won the Shinsuke Ogawa prize in the New Asian Currents Section at the Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival. The jury commented, 'The cooperation and conflicts that the family experience while taking care of a disabled child under economically difficult conditions invite empathy' (quoted in Berry n.d.).
  - 4 Xuan paper, or rice paper, is a type of paper originating in ancient China and often used for writing calligraphy and painting traditional Chinese painting; it is soft, thin and has a fine texture. Banner paper is a type of paper often used for decoration or advertising; it is usually hard and often has a smooth surface.
  - 5 In the 1980s and 1990s, the public toilets on both sides of Tiananmen were often used by gay men as cruising grounds, and they were often referred to as 'East Palace' and 'West Palace' in local gay slang, hence the title *East Palace, West Palace* for Zhang Yuan's 1996 gay film (Wang and Li 2006). The biggest cruising ground for gay men in Beijing, Dongdan Park, is situated east of Tiananmen.
  - 6 This is a reference to a classic tale from the Chinese philosopher Chuang Tzu (Zhuang Zi), which is about the exemplary skills acquired by a master chef in carving an ox through years of practice (see Chuang Tzu n.d.).
  - 1 This chronology only includes selected key queer community events in mainland China in the post-Mao era. It does not include queer events in Hong Kong or other parts of the Sinophone world. In compiling this chronology, I have primarily referred to Cui 2009; Gao 2006; Guo 2015; Hou 2014; Tongyu 2011; Nüai 2009; Wei 2015; Zhao and Shi Tou 2015) and numerous online sources.
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## 40 Introduction

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