

QUEER CHINESE POSTSOCIALIST HORIZONS: NEW MODELS OF SAME-SEX
DESIRE IN CONTEMPORARY CHINESE FICTION, “SENTIMENTS LIKE
WATER” AND BEIJING STORY

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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This thesis represents an investigation into the strategies used by postsocialist Chinese male subjects to articulate their subjecthood and desires. The introduction explains the choice for using a phenomenological methodological approach in addressing the issue and also lays out the simultaneous goal of this thesis to inaugurate a move away from political allegorical interpretations as the standard for reading contemporary Chinese literature. The body chapters look at two different contemporary Chinese works to help illuminate the arrival of the Chinese subject. Using Wang Xiaobo's novella "Sentiments Like Water" and the anonymously penned online novel Beijing Story as case studies, this thesis investigates the ways alternative epistemologies and uses of history can undo pathological understandings of queerness and create new identities for Chinese subjects. The thesis concludes with thinking about the direction of the queer and Chinese studies fields and offers future points of investigation.

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For my Mouton.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This thesis represents the beginning of an investigation into what I call the queer horizons of contemporary China. Postsocialist mainland China is regularly inundated with an ever-increasing number of ideas, many of which are directly in competition with previous socialist values. Chief among these ideas is the notion of individualized desire.¹ The recognition of personalized desires also inaugurates the emergence of endless subjectivities, the range of which reflects the coalescing of myriad conceptual forces, such as modernity, globalization, capitalism, socialism, and nationalism, as well as more concrete factors such as affect, language, aesthetics, and pleasure. A person's understanding of and relationship to the above concepts works over time to delimit his/her perceived reality, and it is precisely this delimitation that establishes the Chinese subject's horizon of perception.

The scope of the present endeavor is limited to the investigation of two fictional literary works from the 1990s that display two different and queer horizons of understanding in postsocialist China. This opening chapter will first serve to elaborate the function of the metaphor of the horizon and my choice to use it to describe the postsocialist Chinese condition. The flexibility offered by the concept of horizons will also allow for segueing into a discussion and interrogation of terminologies used to describe queer realities, a topic which inevitably haunts discussions of queerness in inter- and trans-national contexts. I will conclude this chapter by introducing another main goal of this thesis, which is to decenter Fredric Jameson's thesis about the nature of third world literature and direct attention to potential alternative reading methodologies.

The first chapter takes Wang Xiaobo's novella "Sentiments Like Water" as its main focus and works to understand how alternative discursive regimes and aesthetic preferences can reshape the subject's understanding of language and love. While Wang's novella stands alone as a work worthy of analysis, when coupled with sixth-generation Chinese director Zhang Yuan's adaptation of the novella into film, the contrast between the two end products helps to highlight the ways in which the varying forces mentioned above, specifically globalization and capitalism, come to bear on a creator's intended artistic message. What I hope to ultimately prove with this chapter is that, underneath the foundations of political allegorical readings, alternative horizons of understanding engage this story differently and acquire meaning in different ways. It is these different understandings that in turn help the reader to clarify the character's queer horizon and individualized epistemology.

The second chapter will begin by looking more closely at how the various forces above have been described as coming to bear on the postsocialist Chinese subject by scholars from varying disciplines and attempt to synthesize the resulting complex of loaded terms into a more digestible form. What follows will be a close reading of the anonymously penned online novel Beijing Story, which relates the story of two men's struggles in life and love and vividly highlights the conflicts that can emerge within a single subject whose allegiance to and understanding of the forces addressed above are unclear. Looking at this literary manifestation of the disorientation that occurs in subjects without a static view of the world, or guiding line, helps to illuminate the struggles faced by postsocialist Chinese subjects to understand individual desire and their creation of personal value systems. The chapter will conclude with an analysis of the strategy

employed by the protagonist Handong to create his new horizon and how it requires a new approach to the concept of history.

What is queer about these horizons can be understood in more than one sense. While it can certainly refer to male same-sex desires and the emotions that are foregrounded in the stories, this does not entirely capture what is queer about the characters' points of view. It is by looking to queer's more recent academic appropriation, which expands its scope to function as a catch-all for that which is anti-normative,² that we begin to approach a more complete understanding of my intended usage. The analyzed characters ways of engaging with the world are not just unique for their preference for engaging in same-sex sexual behaviors, but also for their non-traditional ways of engaging with society-at-large. It is also this broader scope for understanding the potential of queerness that will allow for segueing into a discussion of queerness as it relates to my choice for selecting the metaphor of the horizon.

While a more in-depth discussion of the context for the two works will follow in the chapters to come, it is important to provide a preliminary context in which to understand the texts in question. The plot for the two stories spans a period of time ranging from Deng Xiaoping's implementation of Reform and Opening Up to the early nineties. The larger literary trends during this period, such as Scar literature and Root Searching literature, rarely take issues of same-sex desire as their main topic, as most of the narrative energy is focused on venting either anger over the Cultural Revolution or frustration over feeling disconnected from the plurality of one's own past. Or, in the event that same-sex desire does make an appearance, it is most often discussed in terms

of being a mental illness or perversion and the conversation fails to develop beyond that point.

Broadly speaking, these works are writing under demands from a widely conservative-leaning publishing industry and domestic readership. Issues surrounding sex, let alone sexuality, while at times addressed, were done so with a delicacy and tact that are absent in the two works analyzed here. The explicit sexual descriptions present in both of these stories alone makes these two works notable. Add on the fact that these sexual acts are occurring between two members of the same sex and now these two works are elevated to a category that few other works manage to achieve.

These stories' negotiation of the conservative-bend in readership with their rather liberal sexual descriptions is also a point of value. In "Sentiments Like Water," Wang exploits the common understanding in the Mainland, of homosexuality as pathology, and uses his instances of sexual description to pervert the model, so to speak, in order to make his point. In contrast, *Beijing Story* was originally serialized online in a forum for gay literature and its original readership assumedly was a group of individuals who were particularly interested in stories on this topic. As a result, the way that *Beijing Story* handles conservatism is different. While the sexual descriptions certainly are explicit and deal with the sexual politics of the same-sex desiring community, the story confronts conservative tendencies by presenting a same-sex desiring male protagonist who successfully navigates the volatile social waters of post-*kaifang* Beijing life and shows that despite conservative efforts, alternative lifestyles are realizable.

Ultimately, these two works concern themselves with issues that set them apart from the majority of contemporary literature. By addressing issues that are either not

often written about or actively discouraged, they offer a window into the imaginary of a subgroup of Chinese society that is generally misunderstood. These works can also then serve as useful tools in opening spaces for discussion about the nature and place of same-sex desire in the rocky and unstable terrain that is postsocialist China. It is my hope that this introduction and the successive chapters will lay the groundwork for my future investigations into a series of similar and related issues. While looking at alternative ways of engaging with the world is not in and of itself a unique approach to literature, engaging in discussions about how subjects with same-sex desires develop alternative orientations towards reality takes a distinctly new path in Chinese literary studies. It is in this move toward trying to understand the process of subject construction for the same-sex desiring, postsocialist Chinese male that the value of this thesis can be found.

New Horizons: A Phenomenological Approach to Discourse

The concept of the horizon is one that I have borrowed from phenomenology. And while its mention is far from limited to a single work, the work that has influenced me the most in this respect and in relation to the theme of this thesis is Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. In her work, one of the central themes that she discusses is the way in which bodies orientate themselves towards and extend themselves through objects in their fields of perception and what it means for the body to fail in the extension of the self through space. Noting that such a failure results in the disorientation of the body, Ahmed maintains that it opens new ways of moving around one's perceived reality, as one once again finds one's grounding. It is this process of disorientation that Ahmed marks as a point of productive queerness in

phenomenology. These moments when one's bodily horizon is disoriented and must find ways of grounding itself is one that I find can serve as a useful metaphor for understanding the burgeoning subjectivity of individuals living in postsocialist mainland China.

In describing the function of a horizon, Ahmed turns to the body, the main object of interest for phenomenology:

The horizon is not an object that I apprehend: I do not see it. The horizon is what gives objects their contours, and it even allows such objects to be reached. Objects are objects insofar as they are within my horizon; it is in the act of reaching 'toward them' that makes them available as objects for me. The bodily horizon shows what bodies can reach toward by establishing a line beyond which they cannot reach; the horizon marks the edge of what can be reached by the body. The body becomes present as a body, with surfaces and boundaries, in showing the 'limits' of what it can do.³

If we are to expand this understanding to apply to discursive horizons, which Ahmed herself claims to be intimately tied to one's bodily horizon, it is productive in a number of ways. First, it is useful insomuch as it describes how the ways in which one's body are intended, and the objects that it is able to intend itself toward, are delimited by the perceived horizon of one's reality. In addition, it helps to theorize about the more concrete function of a discursive horizon. For instance, if discursive categories become legible through the limits that are placed around them, or by marking the spaces into which that category cannot extend itself, then a discursive horizon becomes intelligible by separating the discursive traits that constitute themselves from those which are required to be external to maintain its coherency. It is clear from Ahmed's description that one's horizon does not, and necessarily cannot, encompass all of what reality might be. In fact, because the intentionality of the body affects the way that reality is processed and confined, it seems not too far of a stretch to argue that, phenomenologically

speaking, there is no objective reality to speak of, as much as there is a material world that is subjectively processed by the individuals with which it interacts.

What this can mean more practically for understanding subjectivity in postsocialist Chinese subjects is that as one's relationship to certain ideas, such as capitalism, socialism, love or wealth, become increasingly stable, alternative ideas or potential realities that exist on the periphery of one's understanding begin to fade and that what the body envisions as its potential range of action becomes limited based on the habitual practices of the body within the limits of those discourses. This process of losing the periphery and only seeing what one comes to expect is evidenced in both stories analyzed in the following chapters. For the male protagonist in "Sentiments Like Water," Ah-Lan, the objects of his world, such as a police house and a public park, acquire their contours as he reaches/intends for them with the intent to transgress. The result of his intending himself in such a way is that such positioning makes clear his discursive horizon and how what it equates with the contours and limits of love conflicts with the horizontal line of reality. In Beijing Story, the two male protagonists struggle to find common ground upon which to successfully communicate their mutual affection due to being raised under different value systems and consequently holding two incommensurate discursive horizons. Chen Handong is a businessman and the son of a wealthy official, while Lan Yu is a country boy who has come to the capital for school. With discrepancies this large in their personal histories, what behaviors carry what meanings are vastly different for the two men. The notion of love becomes a complex idea to articulate, and their desire to be understood compels them to search for alternative histories and traditions in order to express themselves.

The difference in background that causes such turmoil in Handong and Lan Yu's relationship is more broadly reflected in Ahmed's explanation of the function of history:

...[W]hat is reachable is determined precisely by orientations that have already been taken and that have been repeated over time. If history in some sense is about the reachable (as things must be reached to 'enter' the records), then history can also be described as a process of domestication--of making some objects and not others available as what we 'can' reach.⁴

This process of domestication, of making familiar, informs the range of possibilities for the present. It is for this reason that a historical grounding is important to the discussion of Chinese subjectivity, but also simultaneously becomes a complicated requirement.

Because the shift to the postsocialist world was not a gradual effort but essentially the overnight effect of a policy change, the vast majority of people did not have an adequate or stable vocabulary to describe the new world that they now inhabited. Testing the bounds of language and the symbolic value held in ideas then became a necessary means by which to deal with the disorientation engendered by postsocialism and points back to the queer potential held in this historical moment.

In her discussion of orientalism and the institutionalization of whiteness, Ahmed describes how the reproduction of whiteness is necessary for its perpetuation and is achieved through the recruitment of what it sees as potential subjects. She remarks:

It is important that we do not reify institutions by presuming they are simply given and that they decide what we do. Rather, institutions become given as an effect of the repetition of decisions made over time, which shapes the surface of institutional spaces. Institutions involve lines, which are the accumulation of past decisions about 'how' to allocate resources, as well as 'who' to recruit.
Recruitment functions as a technology for the reproduction of whiteness.⁵

The process by which whiteness is institutionalized, however, is not specific to the phenomenon of whiteness itself but gestures more broadly towards how the composition of institutions becomes normalized. The process of recruiting subjects to an institution—

or perhaps more relevant to my discussion, social or political regimes—is important in maintaining that institutions desired authority and fantasy of homogeneity and universality. How one is recruited then, becomes an important question as well.

The answer that Ahmed, and in reference to Judith Butler, offers is a return to Althusser's model of ideology and the act of hailing:

We can recall Althusser's model of ideology is based on recruitment: “Ideology ‘acts’ or ‘functions’ in such a way that it ‘recruits’ subjects among the individuals (it recruits them after all), or ‘transforms’ the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by the very precise operation which I have called interpellation or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: ‘Hey you there’.”⁶

Ahmed is quick to note, however, that not all bodies are equally likely to be hailed, as bodies that appear to not align with an institution's specific trajectory are likely to be hailed and stopped more frequently than others. It is also this stopping, she notes, that produces moments of disorientation. That is to say, if a body is moving along a specific trajectory (an individual) and is intersected by a line on another trajectory (an institution) and hailed, it halts the forward movement, disorienting the body, and opens the possibility for the body to reorient itself by turning to respond to the hailing.

The ability to recognize oneself as the intended subject of a hailing can also have implications that impact subject construction and the choice involved in “turning” to answer the hail is not a neutral behavior. While Butler's understanding of the turn is more metaphorical and meant to serve simply as a recognition of oneself as the subject of address, Ahmed chooses to approach this turn more literally. It is possible, she argues, to make the “question of direction crucial to the emergence of subjectivity and the ‘force’ of being given a name...” because turning also “allows subjects to misrecognize themselves in the policeman's address” and can “take subjects in different directions.”⁷ The result of

misrecognition is a failure to extend oneself through space. It represents a failure on the part of the body to properly occupy or utilize the discursive limits of the hail and disorients both the individual that is hailed as much as the individual performing the hailing. Properly recognizing oneself in the hail, on the other hand, also allows for changing directions. Whether through disorientation or reorientation, the act of hailing serves to open new horizons of perception and is thus a crucial component in the construction of the subject and defining his/her relationship to institutions.

To once again find more practical applications of these ideas in the literature at hand, several examples come quickly to mind. Given Althusser's example of the police officer and the subject he hails, the plot of "Sentiments Like Water" is a good parallel. Xiao Shi is an officer stationed in a police box in a park and the other male protagonist, Ah-Lan, is a "well-known homosexual" who often frequents the park in search of illicit love. Xiao Shi catches Ah-Lan in the act and hails Ah-Lan to stop, calling him despicable (贱, *jian*). It is in the moment of hailing that Ah-Lan both properly recognizes and misrecognizes himself as the subject of address at the same time, the finer details of which rest on the two men's differently oriented discursive horizons. For Xiao Shi, the term *jian* is intended to carry its normalized meaning, intending to express disdain and to ridicule its intended listener. For Ah-Lan, however, he decided from a young age and thus conditioned himself throughout his life to believe that to be despicable was to be free of social restraints and live a natural life. As far as Ah-Lan is concerned, there is nothing wrong with his being despicable. The disconnect between Xiao Shi's anticipated reaction on Ah-Lan's part and Ah-Lan's actual response to the act of interpellation is disorienting for both parties, and it is exactly this disorientation that allows Ah-Lan to share his

alternative epistemology with Xiao Shi and begin to queer his heteronormatively regulated field of reality.

There are also moments, however, when not knowing how to hail someone also can be equally disorienting, as well as the cause of a productive tension. In Beijing Story, Chen Handong and Lan Yu spend the novel searching for a vocabulary they consider adequate to convey their feelings and clarify what they mean to each other. Starting with formal socially conferred titles, like Manager Chen, and moving towards names of friendship, like Uncle Chen and Little Brother Lan, the men try to borrow from a discursive tradition they know. At another point, Handong tells Lan Yu that he thinks Lan Yu is like a student from a novel of the Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies school in Republican China. Lan Yu responds that what they talked about in the literature from that school was love, which is between a man and a woman, not about what the two of them are doing. The ability to play with language is limited by its associated history and the lines it has traced through its habitual reproduction in what are now taken as normative contexts. While greater discussion of both of the moments described above occurs in the chapters to follow, it can be seen quite clearly that moments of interpellation create the possibility of new horizons and are integral to discussions of subjectivity and subject formation.

One final remark concerning the spaces in which horizons take shape will suffice for an introduction to the generative quality of thinking about discursive horizons. Ahmed makes a point of emphasizing that it is not just a subject whose body's line, or horizon, is determined through habitual action but that space itself is also shaped by the repetition of specific types of bodies occupying it. As a result, "spaces and tools also take

shape by being oriented around some bodies more than others.”⁸ It is in this way that spaces can themselves delimit the action potential of a body. Of relevance to the discussions that follow will be how certain spaces, the majority of spaces I would argue, have been conditioned to be heteronormative spaces and in turn work to parameterize social space through the policing and recruitment of subjects to its cause.

Heteronormativity, Queerness, Queer Theory, and Postsocialist Chinese Reality

The institution of heteronormativity is a well-documented one, the details of which will be briefly summarized in this section, as well as interrogated and contextualized to reflect the postsocialist Chinese condition. Some of the questions raised in this section are not intended to be answered, as their raising is merely done in the hope of raising questions for future investigation as well as to create a flexibility in understanding modes of praxis for queer engagement with the world. Also to be elaborated upon here is the notion of queerness itself. With both colloquial and academic usages, I will briefly gloss its trajectory to this point and look at its potential application in China. What I hope to begin here needs ultimately to be an independent investigation, although the groundwork provided here will suffice to serve as a jumping off point for the more specific literary analysis in the following chapters.

Gust A. Yep offers the following definition of heteronormativity:

“Heteronormativity, or the invisible center and presumed bedrock of [Western] society, is the quintessential force creating, sustaining, and perpetuating the erasure, marginalization, disempowerment and oppression of sexual others.”⁹ While dramatic in style and overstated to be sure, Yep’s definition is symptomatic of a larger trend in

discussions of heteronormativity. By placing heteronormativity as inherent to the construction and functioning of society, he awards it a natural place in the order of things. In doing so, he forgets that the institution of heteronormativity is not a given and that its perceived “givenness” is a result of accumulated practice and recruitment over time.

While Yep does later rehash the familiar history of 19th-century sexology and its lasting effect on Western culture (where it seems he means American culture), he walks a dangerous line of naturalizing its institutionally accumulated power.

Indicative of this precarious position that Yep holds is the wording he uses in the above quotation that refers to “sexual others.” It appears that Yep finds sexual others to be a discrete category that is oppressed by heteronormative hegemony. What Yep fails to identify, however, is that this otherization is itself the effect of heteronormativity, as the categorization of sexes and sexualities that were engendered by the sexological turn towards sexual epistemologies itself produces the categories that are then oppressed by the heteronormative regime. By his separating the effect from the cause and making it an independent unit, he unintentionally reproduces the logic of heteronormativity at the same time he critiques it. It is this kind of residual logic that remains in the wake of trying to imagine a world that is not heteronormatively inclined that must be guarded against.

By refusing the category of the “sexual other” as a priori, it clears the field for new ways of discussing sexual behavior, as well as its interaction with normative and hegemonic systems. Wang Xiaobo’s “Sentiments Like Water” offers a strong case for the inadequacy of the category of “sexual other,” especially given the term’s emphasis on its binary structure of hetero- and homo-sexuality. The protagonist Ah-Lan is a self-

proclaimed homosexual who is married to a woman that he loves and sexually desires, who also engages in masochistic acts of sexual role play. The fact that he is in a loving marriage that is sexually active theoretically makes him eligible for status as heterosexual. That being said, he clearly exists beyond the limits of heterosexuality insomuch as he also engages in sexual intercourse with individuals of the same sex. In addition, regardless of the sex of his sexual partner, he also desires and enjoys erotic practices that find pleasure in acts that are not hetero-genital stimulation. What this indicates is that Ah-Lan exceeds the bounds of the heterosexual, a sort of “heterosexual plus,” while simultaneously occupying the reverse position of being a “sexual other” who also enjoys heterosexual encounters. His ability to freely change between these positions based on his behaviors indicates that the crisp lines that heteronormativity and the category of “sexual other” draw are artificial and that the strict logic that governs them is inadequate for explaining the phenomena of reality.

Attempting to use the categories that heteronormative logic provides fails to acknowledge the nuances of Ah-Lan’s epistemological horizon. Ah-Lan makes very clear that it is his nature to be used, or to be intended towards masochistic behavior, and that his desire to be tied up, for instance, is motivated by an alternative erotic system. This alternative system is one that I will refer to as Ah-Lan’s aesthetic of beauty. What attracts him to people, not specifically men or women, is whether or not he finds them beautiful, as Ah-Lan himself spends a great deal of time maintaining himself in ways he finds appealing. This aesthetic of beauty is what helps to shape Ah-Lan’s epistemological horizon, which in turn limits the scope of his sexual partners, and is a system that heteronormativity fails to comprehend, or at the very least accurately reflect.

Another avenue worth exploring is how the category of heterosexuality itself can be reinterpreted. According to Yep:

Heterosexuality, by its very definition, reinstalls and reaffirms gender division. Kitzinger and Wilkinson point out that ‘hetero’ means other, different; ‘heterosexuality’ means sexual involvement with one who is other, one who is different--man with woman, woman with man. The otherness of the ‘other’ sex, the ‘differentness’ of man from woman, is thereby immediately reinforced.¹⁰

While Yep’s opening line and the citation he provides offer a very traditional way of understanding heterosexuality, there are many aspects of this statement that can open the way for queer readings. Conceding that ‘hetero’ clearly means other and that heterosexuality means “sexual involvement with one who is other, one who is different,” the conclusion Kitzinger and Wilkinson reach should not be considered a given. Men and women posited as opposites are not the only potential pairing that can follow from the definition provided. For instance, what if what is sexualized or desired is not the biological body proper, but a characteristic or item possessed by or associated with a body? If one party desires wealth and finds it possessed by another party, whether there is a male/female division does not seem necessary to meet the definition of “one who is different” or “one who is other.”

Another more basic example could be feelings of love. If two parties love one another, or desire another for their emotional companionship, the other party is clearly external to the self and is “one who is other.” The idea often expressed in romanticized notions of love is that one party “completes” the other, making up for a perceived lack that exists in their partner. This notion fits nicely into the provided definition. The only thing definitionally necessary to fit the model provided for “heterosexuality” is the sexualization of one who is considered to be “other” than the self, which is exactly what

that is. That it has been engrained in society that this otherness must refer to the otherness of the biology of the body is yet another result of modern society's deference to science and is, like all horizons of understanding, a habitual approach to the world engrained over time and one that can be reoriented by changes in practice.

Thinking of heterosexuality in this way most certainly provides a perspective on sex and sexuality of which heterosexual culture would certainly disapprove. Yet, despite the obvious blind spots identified above, Yep is still correct in stating that “[s]exuality has been, and continues to be, a critical site of social organization in the modern West. In modern Western sexual systems, the homo/heterosexual binary has occupied a pivotal position in the definition and constitution of human subjects and their location in the sexual/social hierarchy.”¹¹ If it is true that heteronormativity is the ultimate signifier of meaning for subjects in Western societies,¹² or even partially true insomuch as it influences a majority of people, its majority status makes it an object against which theories and lifestyles of the anti- and non-normative can be aimed, namely queerness, both culture and theory.

According to Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner's essay “Sex in Public,” queer culture is a world-making project and represents a way of orienting oneself towards others. “The queer world is a space of entrances, exits, unsystematized lines of acquaintance, projected horizons, typifying examples, alternate routes, blockages, incommensurate geographies.”¹³ I appreciate this conception of queerness because it is not restricted to being in binary opposition with heterosexual culture, as is often the case. This concept of queerness also dovetails well with Ahmed's notion of disorientation, insomuch as “unsystematized lines” and “incommensurate geographies” indicate

moments where the body is no longer on its projected trajectory or is blocked by the incompatibility of certain approaches to the world, which forces the body to make queer decisions in order to continue extending itself through the world.

It is in this vein that I look to David Halperin's definition of queer as my definition of choice in understanding what queer is intended to signify:

Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers. . . . [It] demarcates not a positivity but a positionality vis-à-vis the normative. . . . [It] does not designate a class of already objectified pathologies or perversions; rather, it describes a horizon of possibility whose precise extent and heterogeneous scope cannot in principle be delimited in advance.¹⁴

Halperin once more brings us back to the metaphor of the horizon, describing queerness as a “horizon of possibility” that is a posited in relation to “the normal.” Supplemented by Ahmed’s notion that a horizon’s orientation and boundaries are reinforced through habitual actions over time, queerness can perhaps be understood as a slanted horizon which engenders the habitual condition of a subject’s disorientation in the face of a horizontal (read: hegemonic or dominant) line.

Rethinking the example above concerning Ah-Lan’s precarious position in the heterosexual matrix, queerness offers an alternative and legitimate position that he might occupy, without causing the nature of his behaviors to be pre-determined. Returning to phenomenology and the notion of lines to represent how the body is projected through space and reality, it becomes possible that Ah-Lan’s epistemological horizon, or horizon of perception, could be said to sit at a slant to the horizontal line that represents normative thought. His horizon is thus both inclusive of heterosexuality and heteronormative logic at certain points where they intersect, but still able to operate without taking it as the core of his epistemology. In doing so, Ah-Lan is logically able to

occupy the role of the “loving husband” and the “sexual deviant,” to borrow heteronormative terminologies, and do so without necessarily reading himself as pathological. His alternative and queer horizon is the realization of the potentiality that Ahmed indicates is made possible by one’s disorientation from the horizontal line.

Ah-Lan’s aesthetic of beauty allows him to find new ground for himself in a way that permanently stabilizes his reality in a disorientated way. This is not to say that Ah-Lan necessarily does this intentionally or refuses to attempt to occupy positions promoted by heteronormative discourse. There is most certainly a degree of self-loathing in Ah-Lan despite the degree to which he believes himself to be living a natural life. Such instances of failure to occupy normative positions are not without effect, however, as “... inhabiting forms that do not extend your shape can produce queer effects, even when you think you are ‘lining up.’ There is hope in such failure, even if we reject publicly (as we must) this sexual as well as social conservatism.”¹⁵ Watching Ah-Lan attempt to occupy the position of the “loving husband” then is simultaneously getting queered by his confession that, deep down, he feels like he himself has the soul of a woman, the result of which functionally posits his wife and himself in a two-woman marriage that exceeds the logic of heteronormativity at the same time that it fulfills its expectations.

Given the potential usefulness that queer theory offers as a tool for rethinking subjectivity and sex in postsocialist China, it is important again to heed Ahmed’s model and recognize that the limits of the scope of queer theory are strongly shaped and delimited by its history. While an important point in this conversation will be saved for the concluding chapter, a comment from Yep is worth positing here to serve as a background for the chapters that follow:

Queer theory, paradoxically, relies on and critiques twentieth century U.S. liberalism. For example, on the one hand, it depends on the commitment of liberalism to free inquiry and expression. On the other hand, the model of free, rational persons developing, forming, and participating in political institutions to guarantee liberty for all has not been a very accurate picture for sexual minorities and other marginalized individuals as they have been mostly excluded from such processes and levers of power.¹⁶

If queer theory relies on a twentieth-century U.S. liberalism, however, what does that mean for a postsocialist and arguably socially anti-liberal yet economically neo-liberal contemporary China? Can the horizon of queer theory itself be expanded or reoriented to have meaning in such a context, or in doing so would queer theory no longer be itself? It is also here that Yep's discussion of queer theory suddenly seems to be oriented, with much greater pointedness than his earlier discussions, towards governmental and large-scale politics, making the values of liberalism appear inherent to queer theory and taking the standard of liberalism to be the U.S. model. This raises this question: Is queer theory an inherently politically motivated notion?

My fundamental response to this question is “no,” although it is not without need of qualification. While queer theory and queerness as political notions are most certainly viable options in American and other cultures, it seems myopic to limit its potential to its function as a marker intended to reflect in a liberal political semiotic field. In the preceding analysis, state-level politics has not made an appearance or played an integral role in validating the effectiveness of queer theory as a conceptual tool for understanding the new horizons that appear in the literature cited and queerness has been identified as existing in forms not related to state politics. This indicates that it would seem possible to separate state interests from queerness and queer theory, as state promoted political ideals are only a portion of what might constitute the horizontal line of reality. It is as Halperin

states above, queerness is whatever is situated outside the range of what is considered normal, and so while state interests may constitute a portion of what orients that line, it need not be the line itself.

It is interesting, however, that Yep's analysis would conclude in a way that reveals an unspoken connection between queerness, queer theory and politics-at-large. Despite his clearly marked focus on what he considers to be Western societies, Yep's argument reflects a larger issue with the analysis of what he might consider to be Eastern literatures, or more precisely contemporary Chinese literature. While state politics most certainly have their place and undeniably wield an immense degree of control over the everyday lives of most people, orienting oneself around the state in order to perform one's analysis of Chinese literature limits one's potential horizon in what have now become very predictable ways. They are predictable because this approach, too, has a history, as Ahmed consistently cautions us to look for. This history, I will argue, however, is one that no longer accurately reflects Chinese subjects in the present postsocialist reality and needs to be reoriented.

Approaching Contemporary Chinese Literature: The Specter of Jameson

Fredric Jameson's discipline-shaping article "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism" was published in 1986 and inaugurated an approach to third world literature that continues to impact the study of Chinese literature to this day. While the more detailed analysis of the shortcomings present in the application of Jameson's theory to contemporary Chinese literature will be performed in the chapters that follow, this section is meant to identify my resistance to this continuing trend as a motivating factor for writing this thesis. This section will be brief, introducing the crux of his general

thesis about third world literature, leaving the remaining bulk of the discussion for the case studies. I will introduce a main argument of this thesis here, however, and that is that the exclusive reign of political allegory is long over and that queer theory both proves this and provides a viable alternative methodological approach to contemporary Chinese literature.

Despite the wording of Jameson's article, where he acknowledges that there will be variations among cultures and that his proposed model is merely that, he makes surprisingly bold statements concerning the nature of third world literature:

All third-world text are necessarily... allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call national allegories, even when, or perhaps I should say, particularly when their forms develop out of predominantly western machineries of representation, such as the novel.¹⁷

One of the major justifications that Jameson uses for this position is the disparity of development experienced under the expansion of capitalism. Stating that, fundamentally, it is an issue of “Freud versus Marx,” with the Freudian reality emerging from the conditions produced under capitalism.¹⁸ Given that Jameson was writing in the mid-80s, his reduction of the complexity of Chinese literature, in addition to all other literatures outside of the first world, to symbols that reflect the battle of economic systems is not overly surprising. That being said, even if Jameson’s theory once possessed a degree of explanatory power, it has long since dissolved with the changes that have occurred in the world since the publication of his article and his theory has since been the center of many critiques. What I hope to do below is investigate the effect of bringing queer theory to bear on his nationally oriented horizon and highlight the productive ways in which it allows us to consider the contemporary Chinese subject’s postsocialist condition.

Obviously central to Jameson's approach to third world literature is the concept of the nation, as it serves as the point around which his horizon of perception is orientated. In the context of analyzing Chinese literature, the idea of China becomes foregrounded as the ultimate referent of literature. While the Chinese example in Jameson's article takes Lu Xun's writings in the early 20th century as their point of reference, a time when the idea of "China" was perhaps more centralized than it is considered to be now, his article is written in the 1980s and does not reflect the political confusion concerning Taiwan, diasporic groups or Chinese language speakers outside the mainland, Mandarin or otherwise. What it means to refer to China and consequently Chineseness is unclear and to assume it is a stable signifier, as Jameson's theory must in order to function coherently, fails to recognize a range of potential horizons that encompass the notion of China without taking it as a universal or stable center around which reality is centered.

The readings that occur in the following chapter can therefore also be understood as queer insomuch as they destabilize the bounded image of the nation and challenge the authoritative and hegemonic logic that reproduces it as the center of one's world. An prime example of this potential is held in Beijing Story, where Handong perceives his partner Lan Yu, as well as his short-term wife Lin Jingping, as being not Chinese due to their associations with international businesses and their ability to operate in foreign languages. That Handong desires these un-Chinese individuals speaks to the degree that desire is no longer simply concomitant with the nation and is imbricated in transnational ideas that have developed out of capitalist opportunities. Without ever naming the destabilized image of China itself, the story works to queer the ways in which

Chineseness is understood and exposes the limits of Jameson's national allegorical model in contemporary Chinese context.

While there is plenty more to be said on this issue, the fundamental gaps identified above in Jameson's theory will serve to begin the process of dismantling the logic that promotes national allegory as the only proper reading practice for Chinese and other third world literatures. I should be quick to caution here that my argument is not against political and national allegorical readings as a reading practice in and of itself, but as the only reading practice approved or promoted for interpreting Chinese literature. It is my belief that this myopic and now predictable approach misses new and different themes that are developing on the literary scene and it is one of these potential issues that will be discussed in the following chapters.

Notes

¹ Lisa Rofel, *Desiring China: Experiments in Neoliberalism, Sexuality, and Public Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), Introduction and Chapter 1.

² Annemarie Jagose, *Queer Theory: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 1996)

³ Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 55.

⁴ Ibid., 117. Italics original.

⁵ Ibid., 133.

⁶ Ibid., 133.

⁷ Ibid., 15.

⁸ Ibid., 132.

⁹ Gustov A. Yep, "The Violence of Heteronormativity in Communication Studies," *Journal of Homosexuality* 45, 2-4 (2003): 18.

¹⁰ Ibid., 32.

¹¹ Ibid., 46.

¹² While this category of “Western Societies” is not unproblematic, further discussion of “Western-ness” is deferred to the Conclusion.

¹³ Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002), 198.

¹⁴ David M. Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 62. Italics original.

¹⁵ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 174.

¹⁶ Yep, “The Violence of Heteronormativity in Communication Studies,” 41.

¹⁷ Fredric Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text* 15 (1986): 69.

¹⁸ Ibid., 69.

CHAPTER II

THE PURSUIT OF PLEASURE: PERVERSE HORIZONS IN WANG XIAOBO'S “SENTIMENTS LIKE WATER”

In the previous chapter, several moments from Wang Xiaobo's novella "Sentiments Like Water" are situated in the phenomenological discourse offered by Ahmed, and it is in this chapter that they will be developed and more fully evidenced. This chapter will contend that Wang's novella serves as a textual example of how queer (non-normative) horizons may engage with the horizontal line of postsocialist Chinese reality. I will focus on the male protagonist Ah-Lan's cultivation of an alternative epistemology that is oriented around an aesthetic of beauty and serves to rehumanize subjects pathologized under heteronormative logic. I will begin by providing a brief background to the story, as well as include a survey of the relevant secondary literature, pinpointing the oversights therein that have since led to the obfuscation of Wang's new epistemology. This will be followed by a close reading of several scenes from the novella, as well as their corresponding moments from the filmic adaptation. I will also argue that the adaptation of this story into film presents the story as it is understood through a heteronormative lens, where a comparison of the two narratives will highlight the oversights contained in heteronormativity, expose an orientalist bend in the adaptation, and reveal the truly radical nature of Wang's alternative approach.

Wang Xiaobo died of a heart condition in 1997, at the age of forty-four. Following his death, Wang's writings, his fiction in particular, gained a popularity that it never achieved during his life. Among these works is his novella, "Sentiments Like Water," that was later adapted into the internationally acclaimed film *East Palace, West*

Palace, directed by sixth-generation Chinese director Zhang Yuan. Despite the film's commercial success, reception of Wang's novella was highly critical, with reviews claiming his position was either too conservative or too radical. Regardless of the critics, however, Wang was content with his work. Before beginning to write his novella, Wang and his wife, renowned sociologist Li Yinhe, conducted one of the first sociological studies of homosexuality in Mainland China, entitled *Their World: A Study of the Male Homosexual Community in China*, and used the results as the basis of his story. Given the amount of work Wang put into trying to accurately reflect the community about which he was writing, another goal of this chapter is to parse out not only the critique he offers, but also the practical value that is embedded in his work.

“Sentiments Like Water” takes places in post-kaifang China. That is, after the implementation of Deng Xiaoping’s policy of “Reform and Opening Up.” While no specific dates are listed in the story itself, knowing that it was based on research conducted for the above mentioned sociological study published in 1992, the reader may safely place the setting of the story in the late 80s or beginning of the 90s. Same-sex desire, while having gone unmentioned for much of the Maoist period, saw a revival of interest during the 80s and was classified as both a mental illness and a crime. It was from under these conditions that Wang produced his pointed social commentary.

Narratively speaking, both Wang’s “Sentiments Like Water” and Zhang’s *East Palace, West Palace* tell the story of two men, Ah-Lan and Xiao Shi. Ah-Lan is a writer and self-proclaimed homosexual who frequents a park known for its homosexual patrons and Xiao Shi is the police officer stationed in the park, as well as the subject of Ah-Lan’s fantasies. The majority of shared plot action between the two works occurs inside the

police box in the park and revolves around the night-long interrogation that ensues following Xiao Shi's apprehension of Ah-Lan engaging in same-sex pleasures in the park. While the conclusions of the two works diverge greatly, this chapter will concern itself first with points of overlap in order to avoid debates over the necessities of adaptation versus directorial intent and then take up the question of animus in the following section.

Breaking the Cycle: Away From Allegory and Against Heteronormativity

Due to the overwhelming authority wielded by the Chinese Communist Party, many people are quick to interpret much of the literature and art produced in mainland China simply as a form of national allegory, wherein the artist simply demonstrates his/her resistance to or support for the state. The notion of resistance involved in political allegorical readings, however, assumes that the subject in question intends to and must be in direct dialogue with a hegemonic state, foreclosing any options where agency might be understood outside of the subject's relationship to state power. It will be proved in this section that political allegory functions upon a base of heteronormative presumptions, which causes it to lose sight of alternative sexual matrices, and that political allegory is constrained by a myopic and self-referential approaching to issues of sex, pleasure and self-expression.

In order to expose these oversights, it is useful to follow the political allegorical reading of the work in question to its conclusion. Under this type of reading, Xiao Shi becomes synonymous with the state and the sadistic pleasure it garners through acts of discipline, and he is contrasted against Ah-Lan and his perverse, masochistic desires.¹ In

his discussion of Zhang Yuan's East Palace, West Palace, Song Hwee Lim concludes the following after his review of an interview Zhang gives to film scholar Chris Berry:

More important, he [Zhang Yuan] highlights the feminized, submissive position from which he practices his filmmaking, and until and unless the political reality changes in China he [Zhang Yuan] cannot but speak allegorically, as allegory takes its impetus from 'the need to negotiate from a position of inferior authority.'²

This conclusion extends the familiar position promoted by Jameson about literature into the filmic domain, simultaneously extending the problems identified in the first chapter.

It also takes several things for granted. The purportedly feminized position that Lim refers to is more fundamentally a queer position, one of normative versus non-normative, and the masculine/feminine corollary to which he defaults only emerges as a symptom of larger and underlying condition. Lim's and Zhang's identification of the feminine is due to their association of femininity with submission. This association, however, relies on an unquestioned acceptance of heteronormativity and the essentialized gender roles this system entails. Under Lim's reading of Zhang's interview, the state is the body that controls the terms of power and authority and the artist/citizen who is subject to the state's disciplinary acts must be dichotomously situated as femininely passive to the state's masculinely active regulation. The disciplinary power awarded to the assumedly superior state, however, goes unquestioned in this formula and perpetuates the myth that the Chinese Communist Party not only is currently in total control but will continue to be so indefinitely.

The logic of allegory thus reproduces the logic of state hegemony by insulating the assumptions upon which it rests from interrogation. By labeling Zhang as feminine and only able to speak through allegory, Lim perpetuates the myth of the state's innate

superiority and eliminates the possibility for alternative agencies. Stating that Zhang's starting point is one already of inferior authority condemns the allegorical reading to failure before it begins since the terms of power are already predetermined. Any action taken is always already emerging from a position whose authority has been gifted from a superior entity which can thus silence any unwanted discourses.

Lim is not alone, however, in his preference for political allegory. Even the English translators for Wang's novella, Hongling Zhang and Jason Sommer, defer to the State and its politics as the most appropriate method for understanding the story. Highlighting Dai Jinhua's argument that the key to Wang's work lies in Foucault and not in Freud, the translators write: "The sadomasochistic element in his [Wang Xiaobo's] work functions not as a space for rebellion, but as a metaphor for state power and the voluntary and even enthusiastic collaboration of its subjects."³ In the space of a single sentence, the translators remove the possibility or desire for anything more than politically-oriented readings of Wang's work. Looking at Dai's original article, however, it appears as if the translators perhaps missed the crux of her argument in setting up their own: "In Wang's writings, scenes of sexual difference and sexual relations are not spaces for rebellion or individual personal space. They are precisely the opposite, they are miniature structures of power and an effective exercise of it."⁴ Drawing from the Foucauldian roots identified by the translators above, Dai's argument is not so much that the scenes that Wang writes are moments of metaphor for state power as much as they are expressions of power itself and its manipulation, regardless of the manipulating body. Dai herself continues in the same article to deny the value of political allegory in Wang's works, noting: "The meaning and value of Wang Xiaobo's fiction does not reside in its

serving as a new subversive allegory, and rather resides in its subversion of allegorical writing styles.”⁵ Identifying the value of Wang’s writing as subverting allegory itself, Dai opens the possibility that in this allegorically unclear world, other ideas may become clear.

Much of the elision and erasure that occurs in the process of political allegorical readings occurs from a misuse and misunderstanding of the function of metaphor. For instance, the relationship of terms that a political allegorical reading requires to produce meaning in the above interpretation is only possible due to the prior legibility of encouraged and perverse sexualities and spaces. What the political allegorical reading requires, in the case of “Sentiments Like Water,” is a misidentified metaphoric equivalency of terms, where ‘the state’ is to ‘normative’ as ‘the artist’⁶ is to ‘non-normative’. This equivalency, however, promotes the fallacy that the state must be inherently normative and the artist inherently queer and vice versa, making invisible the platform that supports it all. This is not to say that all uses of political allegorical readings must position the state and the artist in such positions, but in the case of “Sentiments Like Water” this is the necessary positioning in order for the above reading to have meaning. Other allegorical structures may place different ideas in opposition to each other, but what they will all have in common is their limited ability to only reflect as truth to a specific population who takes the necessary assumptions of the promoted formula as truth.

In the allegorical reading worked through above, this platform supporting their coherency is produced under the horizon of heteronormativity. The reality of such readings, however, is that the discursive relationship between normativity and queerness

(non-normativity) must be established prior to its allegorical abstraction or else the equation produced is completely devoid of meaning. Thus, the allegorical reading is a secondary one and only valid based upon the prior agreement of meaning for its terms of comparison. Therefore, if there is not a division between kinds of spaces and sexual behaviors, then the terms of comparison invoked by a political allegorical reading, of the proper and improper citizen, no longer have meaning because the terms of what constitutes a proper citizen are only made legible through perverse uses of space and sexuality in the novella.

What follows will be an analysis of how the terms used in political allegorical readings came to acquire the meanings that produce their allegorical coherency. Moreover, through an analysis of Wang's queering of spaces and the limits of acceptable sexual behaviors, I will argue that he creates a character that is oriented towards the world in such a way that his bodily and discursive horizon allow for non-heteronormative understandings of himself and engender his humanization in a way that the allegorical reading identified above otherwise eclipses.

The Heteronormative Limits of Desire: Sexology and the State

In his study of Republican era sexology and its impact on Chinese culture, Frank Dikötter reaches the following conclusion:

Sexual discourses constructed a conceptual link between individual, conjugal couple, population and state in which the discipline of the individual founded the power of the state. Finally, sexual desire, represented as a natural drive for heterogenital intercourse, was seen as a mechanism intended to ensure the reproduction of the species only: medical discourses drew a line between procreative and nonprocreative acts. Sex, in other words, was never dissociated from procreation.⁷

As Deborah Tze-Lan Sang notes in her work on same-sex desire, Dikötter's declaration, while not being ungrounded, is an overstatement of the facts.⁸ Despite this overstatement, however, it can be said that Dikötter identifies a predominant trend in medical discourses at the time and, for the purposes of the argument to follow, its holding a majority position in circulated discourses and its instrumentalization by the state still helps to illuminate the process by which the faulty allegorical logic above is pieced together.

Despite the potential urge to label Dikötter's conclusion as corroborative of the correctness of a political allegorical reading, it more accurately supports the above argument that there is a discursive element that necessarily precedes any allegorical reading. Dikötter identifies that discourses about sex "construc[t] a conceptual link" between the state and individual members of its citizenry. This process of construction belies the fact that while certain behaviors may circulate as normative and others as not, that this is not due to the innate nature of those behaviors but rather due to a forced relationship that has been inaugurated by a complex of external forces. Also, the terms of the relationship between the individual and state power here are delimited not simply to the realm of heterosexuality, but more specifically to heterogeneity, wherein procreative sex marks the only acceptable form of sexual desire. The result is that the power of the state becomes defined in terms of its ability to recruit and produce heteronormatively disciplined subjects, with the effective regulation of those subjects' sexual behavior now imbricated in the promotion of the state. And, while this biopolitical⁹ policing does allow for political allegory to be a possible reading in many cases, it not only fails to address its generative terms but serves to both mask both how the regulation of sexuality produces biopolitically disciplined subjects and facilitate and

make invisible biopolitics' darker underside, as necropolitical violence is inflicted in the form of dehumanization and pathologization on those who do not conform.

This viewpoint is not unique to the Republican period, however, and has resurfaced in contemporary Chinese society as well. In her study of same-sex desire and its connections to globalization and the nation, Loretta Wing Wah Ho makes the following remarks about the status of same-sex relations:

For example, Harriet Evans' (1997) research indicates that same-sex relations in contemporary Chinese society are quite commonly seen as a pathological condition or a psychological disorder, something which is heavily caught up with Western sexological notions of homosexuality. Nowadays, the dominant discourse on sexuality still demonstrates strong resistance to the idea of tongxinglian in the mainstream Chinese media. This dominant discourse prescribes that sexuality is based on fixed binaries of masculinity and femininity. It also sets out that intercourse in a monogamous, heterosexual marriage is the only socially and legally accepted sexual behaviour. In a nutshell, same-sex relations in the mainstream Chinese media are still represented as a challenge to public morality, family values, heterosexual marriage and sexual health. Ignorantly, this representation is intermingled not only with sexual politics in Chinese societies, but also with Western-oriented social and medical constructions of (homo)sexuality.¹⁰

Here, the "conceptual link" that Dikötter indicates draws together the individual, family, population and state is not only rearticulated, but perhaps even more pronounced than before. The media, which is state controlled in the People's Republic of China, promotes homosexuality as a pathology, while also dictating that acceptable sexual behavior is heterosexual intercourse or, in Dikötter's terms, heterogenital intercourse. Moreover, that Chinese society functions on a strict binary division between masculinity and femininity only makes Wang's flexible epistemology all the more radical when contextually situated.

The focus on reproduction as the ultimate end of sexual behavior also serves as a factor distinguishing Republican Chinese sexual mores from those espoused under a

more Foucauldian and European/American tradition, broadly speaking.¹¹ Same-sex desire was not the express problem for the Republican Chinese moral code, as any desire that is not ultimately procreative is considered equally objectionable. That means that not only same-sex desire is frowned upon, but that all non-heterogenital sexual activity falls into the realm of the perverse. Different from European sexological models, however, because desire is not strictly divided along the lines of biological sex, all people are thought to posses the capacity for heterogenital desire even if they have desired same-sex partners in the past at some point.

It is important to note, however, that while this mainstream model of preferred Chinese sexuality does draw heavily from European sexology, they are not one and the same. The European sexological model, as interpreted by Michel Foucault in *The History of Sexuality*, creates the homosexual-as-identity, metonymically reducible to the act of sodomy. Unlike the contemporary Chinese position, the European homosexual is not ridiculed due to his pursuit of just any non-procreative pleasure but specifically because his sexual-orientation-as-identity confines him to only preferring the same sex and forever foreclosing the option of heterogenital sex. The stringent association of the homosexual's desire as a biological defect prevents that individual's desire from vacillating from one sex to another and requires treatment to resolve. It is through this division of desire and its pairing with the body that European sexology eliminates heterosexual and reproductive sex as an option for the homosexual, who is now futureless and “endlessly cathected towards death.”¹² One of the major differences between the above two models, then, is the difference between identity and act.

Dikötter makes a further distinction between European sexology and Republican Chinese traditions on the purpose of pleasure and its acceptable forms, a distinction that, given Ho's more recent sociological study, is still relevant today:

The psychiatrization of perverse pleasures, according to Michel Foucault's history of sexuality, became vital in the detailed description and regulation of individual life. The impressive repertoires of anomalies, perversions and deformed sexualities constructed by psychiatrists and sex researchers in Europe envisaged the social subject as a site of individualized desires, and expressed the possibility that pleasure could be an end in itself. Such a possibility was not envisaged by modernizing élites in China.¹³

While Dikötter again goes for a sweeping statement about the condition of Republican China that is an overstatement of the facts, the fact remains that while pleasure may have been imagined as an option by modernizing elites, it was not one that was actively promoted. This is because pleasure on its own does not stem from a procreative impulse and thus complicates one's loyalty to the state and becomes something to be guarded against. It is at this point, however, that a fissure opens. While enforced norms of sexuality delimit the potential for pleasure exclusively to the world of procreative sex, the state also feels it necessary to declaim against and regulate other sexual activities. The need for such regulations, however, implicitly recognizes the natural desire for non-procreative sexual behaviors and betrays the fact that there is pleasure to be found outside of heterogenital intercourse. The fear of pleasure as its own end, or at the very least pleasure achieved through modes not sanctioned by the state, threatens the authority of the state and its ability to produce disciplined subjects. It is exactly this inability and refusal on the part of the State to account for these so-called perverse pleasures that Wang exploits in his project of humanizing his queerly desiring subjects.

The Limits of Discipline and the Pleasure of Depravity

Critical to the biopolitical organization of populations is the preexisting understanding among that population of the limits of life. This limit, for the normatively-inclined Chinese population, is drawn at reproductive sex and, even at its perhaps more liberal end, does not extend beyond heterosexual contact. To not have sex with the end goal of creating life is conversely to desire death and is antithetical to one's own existence, which is doubly imbricated in the life of the state. In Wang's novel, the adjective used to describe those subjects who do not desire life is *jian* (賤), commonly translated as 'depravity' or 'baseness'. In Wang's novel, however, this word is translated as 'easy,' albeit loaded with meaning beyond its dictionary definition. Intended recipients of this word emerge as the detritus from the life-affirming biopolitical policies of the state, as it is intended for all those who do not contribute to the state-building project. To feel the derision intended to be conveyed by this word, however, the subject it is supposed to discipline must also share a discursive horizon with the state and see himself/herself as indebted to its construction, not to mention be complicit in the reproduction of its expected sexual and gender norms as well as its anticipated affective economy. If that intended disciplinary subject's epistemological positioning is not aligned with the horizontal line of the state, but rather reoriented towards personal pleasures for example, the disciplinary tool, in this case the word *jian*, becomes void of its intended meaning for this subject, or takes on a slant at the very least, and subsequently not only fails to reprimand the subject but can also trigger circuits of positive feedback instead of negative.

The disconnect between the state-produced, regulated discursive economy and individually produced discursive systems is one of the points that Wang exploits in order to depathologize the non-reproductively desiring subjects in his story. That there is a slippage between economies also bolsters the argument that the normative standards used as the basis for allegorical readings are only achieved through a prior organization of sexual behaviors in such a way that the categories of masculine/feminine and dominant/submissive become coherent terms for a metaphor and are not inherently so. In Wang's novella, Public Bus is the nickname given to a girl who is accused of being sexually promiscuous or, more appropriately understood, as a girl who is thought to desire pleasure as its own end instead of for reproductive purposes, and is therefore considered to be very jian. It is of no relevance to people that she has yet to actually engage in any sexual behaviors, however, because her being escorted to school by different older men each day (who the reader is led to assume are friends of her family) registers her as easy and potentially a prostitute in the heteronormative affective economy of the state. Instead of lamenting her status, however, Public Bus has a different idea. In an exchange with the male protagonist Ah-Lan during their youth, Public Bus tells him: "...everyone was born easy, which could never be changed. The more you want to disguise your easiness, the easier you'll be. The only way to escape was to admit your own easiness, and try to enjoy it."¹⁴ Rather than fighting her socially-imposed label, Public Bus decides that at a basic level all people are easy. It is the normativizing project promoted by society and codified in state regulation that actually represents and magnifies depravity for Public Bus. For her, because everyone is born easy, attempting to conceal that natural state is what marks one as deserving of ridicule. Public Bus's shift in

horizon of understanding removes the stigmatizing effect associated with easiness and evacuates the term of its disciplinary power because she makes it a universal condition that can no longer be selectively leveraged against certain bodies. This approach to knowing the world represents an epistemological shift that directly challenges the state's biopolitical imperatives by making pleasure and all forms of sex, sexuality and gender no longer dangerous, functionally destroying one of the measures by which the state regulates the population.

This move to mark all subjects as imbued with easiness erases the line that society takes as marking the boundary between normative and queer and diffuses the disciplinary authority that is intended by its deployment. This destabilization creates an anxiety in those subjects indebted to or aligned with the regulatory system, while simultaneously creating the opportunity to reconceptualize the relationship between affect, desire and pleasure. The resulting anxiety is evident in the conversations that occur following Xiao Shi's accusation that Ah-Lan is easy. Ah-Lan shocks Xiao Shi by not only having no reaction to what Xiao Shi imagines to be a highly offensive remark, but also by relaying the knowledge imparted to him by Public Bus, that all people are easy. Xiao Shi tells Ah-Lan that he has "never come across someone like [him] before--that is, no one would admit he's easy" and proceeds to identify Ah-Lan's admission of easiness as true easiness.¹⁵ Ah-Lan's narration during this conversation demonstrates that he already functions under the assumption that easiness is common to all people and not a category that divides them, while at the same time exposing Xiao Shi's indebtedness to the reigning order through his translation of Ah-Lan's acceptance of easiness as true easiness. Xiao Shi's re-articulation of Ah-Lan's words proves how diligently Xiao Shi

works to maintain the boundary upon which he relies to make sense of the world, especially in light of Ah-Lan's exposing the falseness of its fixity through the introduction of a competing discourse.

It is this play, however, between the allegiance to normativity and competing queer horizons, as well as between the perverse and permitted and the anxiety it creates, that is productive in disentangling pathology from queerness. The points of binding between these two concepts are maintained only by the adhesive force of heteronormativity and as that system becomes questioned, even if not dismantled, the stability of pathologized queerness, as a unified structure, becomes precarious. When Public Bus and Ah-Lan espouse alternative forms of engagement with pleasure, it tugs at the strings that suture pathology to pleasure and this loosening produces a space in which these supposedly abject subjects can regain their humanity; or conversely, this space allows for the pathologization of society as a whole.

This is where the deference to political allegory as an analytic form also falls short. As Lim advocates, allegorical readings are useful because they bind politics to representation,¹⁶ but it is exactly this binding that obscures the sexual and gender politics that underlay the terms of politics-at-large. Reading politics concomitantly with representation prevents new epistemologies from dismantling the existing system because politics becomes, for Lim as well as Zhang and Sommer, always pre-understood in the epistemic mode particular to the state, which automatically reads new epistemologies as feminine, marginal, and in need of being guarded against. This a priori queering of competing discourses is what facilitates the extension of pathology to queer bodies and reduces allegorical readings to mechanical repetition of heteronormative politics. The

following section thus takes as its focus Wang's epistemological challenge to this heteronormative obfuscation of sexual, gender and affective politics and analyzes how the juxtaposition of the two discursive horizons can open spaces in which pathology may be disentangled from pleasure.

Competing Discourses: Epistemic Reform and Heteronormative Pathology

In the previous section I have argued for the disruptive potential of new knowledges and the productive perversion of personalized affective and discursive economies in Wang Xiaobo's "Sentiments Like Water." In the following section, my aim is to expand this argument with further textual examples, while simultaneously drawing comparisons to their corresponding scenes in Zhang Yuan's adaptation, East Palace, West Palace. This juxtaposition is intended to highlight both the humanizing effect of Wang's writing as well as the calculated re-articulation of pathological desire that is conveyed in Zhang's film, and in doing so lay the groundwork for the concluding section which investigates the motivations that are embedded in such a process of adaptation.

Perversion, Beauty and Pleasure: Ah-Lan's Challenge to Heteronormativity

One of the most striking moments in the novella in which a queerly desiring character is imbued with a humanness typically denied him is when Ah-Lan submits himself freely for medical treatment in hopes of curing his same-sex desires. The terms by which this scene exists alone testify to the pathological understanding of homosexuality that is engrained in mainstream society and more subtly supported by biopolitical government policies. Ah-Lan himself even appears to be convinced that there

is something wrong with him and that he needs to be punished for his transgressions, fueling his decision to submit himself for treatment.

Upon reaching the treatment center, the doctor presents Ah-Lan with two stacks of cards, one of women and one of men. He is also presented with a glass of milk and a glass of emetic, the former of which he is supposed to drink when he sees a picture of a woman and the latter when looking at the cards with men. The doctor, having thus instructed him, leaves Ah-Lan to perform his treatment alone. Wang narrates the scene as follows:

[Ah-Lan] didn't especially dislike women, nor did he especially like men. He just hated ugly things and liked beautiful things. After a while, Ah-Lan put down the pictures, sat by the sink and drank the glass of emetic one mouthful after another. When he was vomiting, he tried his best to remain graceful (looking at himself in the mirror above the sink). He even began to enjoy vomiting.¹⁷

Two things about this moment are of particular interest to me. The first is Ah-Lan's elaboration of the scope of his personal horizon of desire. His sexual preferences are not confined to a single, biologically determined sex but rather emanate from something different, an aesthetic of beauty. This aesthetic of beauty begins the rehumanizing efforts of Wang's competing discourse by allowing for understanding Ah-Lan outside of heteronormative logic. Heteronormative prescriptions of the state and society expect that all subjects will be heterogenitally desiring and, because they start from this assumption, also assume that to desire differently must mean that something is wrong with that person. Instead of capitulating to existing heteronormative expectations about the division of perverse and acceptable sexuality and gender, however, Wang provides Ah-Lan with a new approach that reads his desires as natural and expected within his personal system of beliefs and in doing so restores to Ah-Lan a sense of humanity.

This is not to say that Ah-Lan lives in a vacuum and is unaffected by society though, as he clearly struggles to balance his personal standpoint with those of the society in which he lives. Living under a heteronormative regime, Ah-Lan learns to expect the attending shame that is tied to what is called a homosexual lifestyle:

Ah-Lan was known for being easy in his work unit... Because he came out as gay long ago, he accepted the following treatment long ago. He had to arrive at the cultural center very early, to mop the floor, get boiling water, and scrub and clean the toilet. By going along with this, he was trying to make a place for himself, or we might say he sought out the easiest place. But he couldn't make a place for himself, because 'easiness' has no place.¹⁸

Balancing his personal epistemology with society's competing and dominant views requires Ah-Lan to simultaneously accept his own easiness, as well as the inevitable social shame such acceptance entails. His unique understanding of easiness has no place in a heteronormative regime. The intersection of these two lines of thought produces a kind of double acceptance, however, and engenders a unique form of pleasure in which both Ah-Lan's personal drive towards natural pleasures and the social pleasure achieved from shaming deviant bodies coalesce in a single space. Moreover, this form of pleasure is achieved by a means that is unexpected by heteronormativity's regulatory apparatus and which ultimately subverts its authority, namely masochism.

This leads into the second point of interest arising from Ah-Lan's experience at the hospital, which is the masochistic pleasure Ah-Lan's receives from taking the emetic. The emetic is given to Ah-Lan by the doctor in order to discourage him from desiring perverse pleasures. The underlying logic here being that one does not like to vomit and that associating vomiting with images of men will prevent future instances of same-sex desire. This logic breaks down, however, if the subject of this treatment wants to be punished. Because Ah-Lan accepts that he is easy (jian), he no longer protests against it

and in doing so dispels the disciplinary power it is intended to carry. Instead, he learns to desire the shame and basks in his natural condition. This belief in an innate nature is confirmed in Ah-Lan's thoughts as he goes to work: “[H]e couldn't conceal his compulsions: to go to the painter's house, to be tied up, to be smeared, painted, and used. Only at those times did he feel his image of himself suited what he was doing, that is, fit his nature.”¹⁹ Happiness is appended to the shame of punishment in Ah-Lan's world of competing discourses because his personal desire for pleasure requires society's punishment and he thus learns to find pleasure in their combination, with punishment serving as a recognition of his natural state. The doctor's use of the emetic as a form of punishment then not surprisingly results in Ah-Lan's developing a liking for it exactly because it is presented to him in the form of a punishment, a shaming of his perverse desires. In the end of the scene, he no longer looks at the pictures but simply sips on the emetic, trying to remain beautiful (graceful) as he enjoys his shame.

This ability to find pleasure in punishment begins the process of rehumanizing Ah-Lan. He is no longer simply a patient who must be cured of a disease but a person who unabashedly desires pleasure. Not only is he conditioned to want to be punished for his shamelessness but he is ultimately gratified by knowing that society gives him his due share. Ah-Lan's masochistic and perverse means of achieving gratification via disciplinary methods intended by the state to limit his non-heterogenital desires turns the disciplinary system on its head and exposes not only its incomplete authority but also the fact that either Ah-Lan is not uniquely pathological or that the state itself also permits pathological desires, which destroys the dichotomous foundations from which the state draws its power. This reading of Ah-Lan's behaviors and desires also exposes what

political allegorical readings fail to account for: Ah-Lan does not act from a place of minor authority. An allegorical reading requires placing the masochist in a position of relative powerlessness in the face of the sadistic state, but this misses the point. Ah-Lan does not play the games of the heteronormative regime and instead bends its static system to his will for his personal pleasure. Read in this way, Ah-Lan is not so different from Xiao Shi, or any other character in the novel, who desires to achieve happiness; his path is merely misread.

In its filmic adaptation, however, Ah-Lan's recalling of masochistic pleasure in the doctor's office is reoriented. The retelling is reduced to the following dialogue:²⁰

I was in a hospital once. They tried to cure me. They made me watch straight videos while I ate my favorite foods. They fed me bitter things while I watched gay films. It did not work. Of course, I didn't want to go. They made me.²¹

While the general idea remains the same as Wang's description in the novella, what is different drastically restructures the viewer's understanding of Ah-Lan. This visit to the doctor reduces Ah-Lan to a pathological subject who needs to be cured, falling neatly in line with the horizontal line that dominates mainstream society. In this version, Ah-Lan does not want to see a doctor at all and the fact that he is successfully forced to go only serves to reinforce the inescapability of the heteronormative mandate laid on society. Moreover, the film omits the emetic and Ah-Lan's developing a taste for vomiting and removes the terms by which Ah-Lan comes to be understood as simply desiring and not pathological. Had the film made mention that Ah-Lan developed a taste for bitter foods or gorged on them after being told that they were his punishment, then the pleasure found in punishment would have been maintained and produced the key moment where, in the story, the reader is introduced to Ah-Lan's alternative approach to the world. In this way,

the film's changes write Ah-Lan as pathologically troubled and unable to be cured, obscuring the alternative epistemology that Wang works so carefully to introduce in the novella. And while the above example is a tightly focused one, it represents only a single case in a series of more major and noticeable changes that leave Ah-Lan represented as wholly pathological and without any redemptive qualities in the film.

Object Choice, Sexology and Erasure: The Role and Fate of Public Bus

As the novella develops, the reader is informed that Ah-Lan is married to the woman referred to as Public Bus, whose actual name is never revealed. Ah-Lan envies Public Bus's easiness (*jian-ness*) and at certain points imagines himself living life through her body. This imagining also conforms closely to sexological understandings of homosexuality: "The concept of 'inversion' contributed to keep sexuality firmly linked to procreation: in its representation of the homosexual as a female trapped in a male body, heterogeneity continued to be viewed as a natural need."²² While Dikötter identifies the idea of inversion as contributing to the maintenance of heterogenital desires as a norm, Wang troubles this conclusion by providing the following description: "Ah-Lan was a man, but it didn't really matter; in his bones, he was the same as she [Public Bus]. From a certain point of view, what happened between them was really homosexual."²³ Playing with the sexological understanding of inversion by reading sex and gender through Ah-Lan's fluid understanding of wanting to love and be loved, Wang pushes heteronormative logic to its brink. By writing Ah-Lan as potentially a woman trapped in a man's body, it may at first appear as if Wang is guilty of reproducing the logic of pathology. Instead, however, he also has Ah-Lan succumb to the normative impulse to heterosexual marriage, and places him in a loving union with Public Bus. The result is

that there are two functional women in this nominally heterosexual marriage. By pushing at the artificial limits of heteronormative logic and exploiting the inconsistencies in its division of appropriate sexualities and gendered behavior, Wang forces the reader to question the very nature of pathology by pathologizing heterogenital sex itself. As the category that marks Ah-Lan as queer becomes increasingly destabilized by Wang's narrative, the pathological identity assumed to be inherent to Ah-Lan becomes disentangled from his subjecthood and the betrayal of pathology's externality and artificiality facilitates Ah-Lan's rehumanization.

To say that the adaptation changes the way that Ah-Lan is presented is an understatement, as Zhang Yuan functionally removes the role of Ah-Lan's marriage from the film. Instead of troubling the arbitrary lines of acceptability and the relationship between pathology and heteronormativity, Zhang leaves the viewer unsure if Ah-Lan is married at all:

Ah-Lan: I am married.
Xiao Shi: You're married?
Ah-Lan: I know that it's not right, especially for her. In my circle, everyone knows that I'm married. They look down on me.
Xiao Shi: Does your wife know? Answer me!
Ah-Lan: What?
Xiao Shi: Does she know about your stinking habits? Talk!
...
Xiao Shi: Are you really married? To whom? ²⁴

This is one of the viewer's first opportunities in the film to hear Ah-Lan speak of his history and establish their opinions about him. The director's notes in the script about the delivery of these lines, which immediately follow the above scene where Ah-Lan narrates his time at the hospital, require that they be delivered darkly and muffled.²⁵ Presenting Ah-Lan as a haunting, dark and insecure character, Zhang Yuan directs Ah-Lan to appear

in such a way that he is devoid of all credibility and reinforces the pathological expectations of a heteronormatively inclined audience. The scene that is omitted where the ellipses occur above is the only potential reference to Public Bus as Ah-Lan's partner, as Xiao Shi's prompting convinces Ah-Lan to share a story about how he met Public Bus and identified with her. When Xiao Shi asks Ah-Lan to whom he is married, however, Ah-Lan follows this question with a story about his first same-sex encounter. The non-linear logic of the conversation, combined with Ah-Lan's dark and untrustworthy presentation, only serves to further encourage the audience to read him as mentally unstable and reinforces the pathology that Wang attempts to dispel in the novella.

The only relevance that Public Bus has to the film is reduced to being a female body that Ah-Lan can admire and through which he can imagine himself living. Due to the unclear nature of their relationship beyond Ah-Lan's imagined body switching, Public Bus's character only serves as a foil for Ah-Lan and further forces his character to succumb to sexological stereotypes of sexual perversion. The competing epistemological position that Public Bus gives Ah-Lan in the novella is also recalculated in the film and appears as follows:

Ah-Lan: We all march to a different tune. That we can't change. Each of us is different, but we are also identical.

Xiao Shi: Your tune is despicable.²⁶

Not only is Public Bus no longer the source of this knowledge but the nature of the exchange is radically different. Rather than Ah-Lan explicitly labeling all people as born easy or jian (translated as 'despicable'), the subtitles appeal to an individualist mentality that eliminates the universal appeal promoted in the novella. This appeal to individual identity as the justification for Ah-Lan's existing in the world creates his situation as

unique, detached from and unable to influence others. This individualist understanding also guts the more radical proposal that Wang provides in the novella, in which all people have the potential to look at issues of gender and sexuality from an alternative perspective because all people are easy by their nature. Because Ah-Lan's struggle is reduced to an individual one, his position is a marginalized one and produced as always having been powerless from its outset, safely protecting the dominant heteronormative frame of society. Xiao Shi's declaration that Ah-Lan's tune is a despicable one further serves to reinforce the isolation of Ah-Lan's condition and its lack of relevance to society.

The elimination of Public Bus in the overarching narrative of the film drastically restructures the meaning it produces when compared to the novella. Rather than disentangling the inherency of pathology in queerly desiring bodies, the film makes a series of changes that re-pathologize the characters in a way that makes them legible and safe to a heteronormative regime. As a result of Zhang's direction, there appears to be an intentional removal and discrediting of alternative horizons, the result of which marks him as complicit in and supporting a dangerous and pathologizing discourse that Wang's novella attempts to undo. That several aspects of Wang's original work had to be entirely removed to achieve the film's narrative coherency also attests to how truly radical a threat Wang's story poses to the coherence of hegemonic thought.

A Perverse Performance: Ah-Lan and Xiao Shi's Subversion of Space

The division of space is also important in informing the reader's ideas about acceptability and pathology, as well as love and intimacy. In the novella, there is a clear

distinction between the space of the police station and the park that surrounds it. Ah-Lan's understanding of the two spaces differs most clearly in their relationships to love:

If love had no reason at all, it would be punished; otherwise it might be forgiven. This was the police station's logic. But the park was different; all the love there had no justification, but could always be forgiven, and therefore couldn't be called love. This was exactly why Ah-Lan despaired.²⁷

For the police station, love must have a reason. This reason, at a very basic level, is reducible to reproduction, as the police station is an extension of a state that encourages heteronormative lifestyles in order to promote its own preservation. Love without logic is unforgivable in this space because it means to desire the death of not only oneself (through choosing not to reproduce) but correspondingly the state and therefore must be punished. The park, in contrast, is not a direct extension of state authority and provides a potential escape from the draconian enforcement of heteronormative logic. Love in the park can be for any reason, procreative or not, but, because it is not considered to be transgressive, it is always forgivable. As Ah-Lan sees it, however, if it is not punishable, it cannot be called love. This understanding of the division of spaces grows out of Ah-Lan's already doubly-produced reality that is constantly negotiating between the aesthetic of beauty he feels best describes the world and the state's imperative towards heteronormativity.

The perverse pleasures that Ah-Lan desires are also imbricated in this division of space. The novel's denouement arguably occurs in the first sexual congress of Ah-Lan and Xiao Shi. Xiao Shi first leaves the police station where he has been interrogating Ah-Lan and tells him to put on the articles of clothing that were confiscated from a transvestite wandering in the park. Xiao Shi's departure creates the absence of a regulatory figure and thus allows for Ah-Lan's transformation into a woman:

The woman that Ah-Lan dressed up as wore a black dress, which happened to be Ah-Lan's favorite color. When the young police man finally entered the office, Ah-Lan stood up, and walked over to him with grace, casting his eyes around the room charmingly. He bent slightly to gather up his skirt and then calmly knelt. He unzipped the young policeman's pants while he moistened his lips with his tongue. . . the scene that Xiao Shi bowed to see was incredible to him. He raised his arms midair, like a surgeon in an operating room. . . at last, he lowered his hands, pressed them on Ah-Lan's head. Meanwhile, he raised his head to the sky in ecstasy.²⁸

When Xiao Shi reenters the police station he finds a woman waiting for him. Not having witnessed the transformation, he is adequately convinced that the man that was in his office moments ago has been replaced by this stunning woman. Ah-Lan, enjoying his affectively subversive performance of womanhood in a space of heteronormative logic, gracefully moves towards Xiao Shi while charmingly casting his eyes about the room. Without interruption Ah-Lan falls to his knees and is welcomed by Xiao Shi.

There are several important aspects to this scene, all of which work in tandem to blur not only the lines of acceptability between appropriate sexuality and affect but also the assumedly innate relationship between pathology and pleasure. The first aspect that should be identified is the further extension of the sexological understanding of same-sex desire in terms of inversion. Ah-Lan, prior to this moment, shares with Xiao Shi a picture of himself presented as woman: "Ah-Lan showed Xiao Shi a picture of himself made-up as a woman. You couldn't tell in the picture that the woman was Ah-Lan. On the surface, it was only a picture of a naked woman, but knowing what was beneath the surface lent it a perverse beauty."²⁹ Because of this knowledge, Xiao Shi knows what Ah-Lan will look like when he performs as a woman. So, while Xiao Shi can be convinced that this performance will fool the disciplinary apparatus that requires heterosexual engagement only, Xiao Shi's personal knowledge allows him to see through the sartorial façade that

Ah-Lan adopts and revel in the perverse pleasure that is both physical and also tied to the system's subversion. This perversion is also a form of pleasure for Ah-Lan because he is not only able to posses the object of his desires, Xiao Shi, but is also unable to be forgiven for this transgression because it occurred under the logical surveillance of the heteronormative space of the police station. This encounter allows Ah-Lan to express his love in his own terms. The fact that love is communicated in a cross-dressing performance of same-sex desire troubles the lines of heteronormativity, as all the pieces heteronormativity requires (a man and a woman engaging in an act of intimacy that would be read as the precursor to heterogenital sex) are purportedly in place, but are able to simultaneously facilitate the very behaviors its requirement is intended to guard against. In this way, sexuality, affect, and space work concurrently to isolate pathology from desire and pleasure and reveal that the relationship between them is not inherent but constructed.

The recalculation of the scene in which Ah-Lan and Xiao Shi have their first sexually charged encounter in the film ignores the above interplay of space, gender, sexuality and affect and instead is used to produce an exotic and wild picture of a deranged homosexual. In the novella, Ah-Lan's performance as a woman is couched in terms of artistry: "For the painter, love was a kind of art; but for Ah-Lan, art was a kind of love."³⁰ The self-deprecation and shame that society associates with one's performing in the affective and sartorial mode of the opposite sex makes the act sexually charged and gratifying for Ah-Lan and his performance contributes to the troubling of heteronormative assumptions. In the film, however, Ah-Lan is resistant to Xiao Shi's request to wear the transvestite's confiscated clothes:

Xiao Shi: Put those on so I can see your real face.
Ah-Lan: This is not what I want.
Xiao Shi: Then what do you want? Get dressed.
Ah-Lan: This is not what I want.
Xiao-Shi: Bastard! Get dressed! What do you want? You're despicable!³¹

The resistance demonstrated in this scene, if read in isolation from the rest of the film, might be interpreted as Ah-Lan baiting Xiao Shi into violence in order to appease Ah-Lan's masochistic desires. When contextualized against Ah-Lan's previous statements about the film's transvestite, whose clothes he is now asked to wear, however, it becomes clear this is not the case:

One of the regulars in the park is a transvestite. He adores dressing as a woman. If it weren't for his hands, you would never know. He is very different from us. He never makes love with us and we leave him alone. This just goes to show that he marches to a different beat.³²

This scene clearly draws a line between the filmic Ah-Lan's perception of himself and the transvestite, marking them as uniquely different and not of the same kind. This is starkly different from Ah-Lan's artful understanding in the novella where making oneself up is a form of love. In the case of the film, Ah-Lan's resistance to Xiao Shi's command comes from Ah-Lan's recognition that Xiao Shi is conflating him with the transvestite via the singular category of *jian*, as Xiao Shi finds them interchangeable in their marginality. The adjustment of Ah-Lan's character in the film to favor individuality also means that he must disconnect his personal struggle from that of the transvestite because, unlike the novel, there is no universal condition that connects all people in their baseness. Despite Ah-Lan's having admitted that he himself has dressed in woman's clothing before, he feels his cause is different from the transvestite's; he marches to a different beat. This separation of causes also requires Ah-Lan to become complicit in heteronormative logic. Although their shared status as depraved allows for their interchangeability from the

perspective of heteronormative authority, Ah-Lan's attempt at creating a hierarchy between his personal struggle and that of the transvestite's assumes that they already share an inherently marginal position in relation to the State/Xiao Shi and insulates those normative beliefs from interrogation. And, while Ah-Lan's motive for this distinction may be based in his desire to not be complicit in the erasure of the transvestite's agency, this explanation simply functions as an avenue by which Zhang injects a liberal humanist subjectivity that helps to make sense of Ah-Lan's filmic turn towards individualism and will be interrogated more thoroughly in the following section.

The use of space also varies greatly between the novella and the film, the result of which is the continued queering of Ah-Lan in a way that only compounds his pathological nature. Ah-Lan eventually succumbs to Xiao Shi's violent encouragement and dresses in the transvestite's clothes. After being fully made-up, Xiao Shi takes Ah-Lan from the police station into the park and then to a dark alley beyond it. In a rare moment where the film has the potential to align with the novella, Ah-Lan asks:

Ah-Lan: Where are you taking me?
Xiao Shi: I'm going to cure you.
Ah-Lan: I'm not sick. It's just that I love you. ³³

Ah-Lan's defense for not being pathological is that he is in love with Xiao Shi. This scene would align itself well with the project that Wang creates in his story except that this love now occurs outside the police station. The love that Ah-Lan desires in the novella is a transgressive kind that can only be achieved if his performance happens in the space of the police station under the watchful eye of the heteronormative gaze. The scene's relocation to the park removes its subversive nature and highlights the exotic nature of things that are imagined to happen beyond the bounds of constant surveillance.

Performing in woman's clothes in the park does not achieve the same love that Ah-Lan desires in the novella. Sexual activities that occur in the park or other obscure places have a different meaning for the Ah-Lan in Wang's short story:

...they would go to a construction site or the top of a skyscraper to make love, or they would jerk each other off under the water in the public bathhouse. He said he didn't really like this sort of thing, because when people did this, they turned themselves into taps that sperm flowed out of.³⁴

Sex in the park is no longer love because it is forgivable in the unregulated space beyond the police station. Occurring beyond the disciplinary grasp of the state, it signals that those performing sexual behaviors in those spaces are actually shamed by their society-given title, jian, and that they are trying to conceal what for Ah-Lan is considered to be his natural state. While the film still works to maintain a division between inner/outer and regulated/wild, this scene does not work to trouble these divisions and instead plays into the expectations of the viewers.

Predictably then, Ah-Lan and Xiao Shi's first and only erotic encounter in the film happens in an abandoned building. Xiao Shi dominates Ah-Lan. He slaps him, tears off his clothes and humiliates him by choking him with water from a hose curiously placed in phallic relation to his body. Ah-Lan falls to his knees and places his face against Xiao Shi's erection through his pants. Ah-Lan then asks Xiao Shi why, despite his asking questions about someone else all night, Xiao Shi never asked the same questions of himself, referring to his "habits." Xiao Shi storms out and the two men do not see each other again. Out in the wild, unregulated space of the abandoned building Ah-Lan makes Xiao Shi come to terms with the fact that he also harbors perverse desires. There is no challenge here to normative ideas, as space matches behavior. In fact, this scene works to reinforce the pathological and contagious nature of pleasure because it plays up

heteronormative fears of perverse sexualities and their ability to corrupt proper citizen-subjects.

The juxtaposition of the pathologized exoticism presented by Zhang Yuan against the epistemologically retooled reality of Wang's novella highlights with great clarity both the radicalness of Wang's social critique as well as a suspiciously transnational and heteronormatively-inclined agenda embedded in the film. Wang's pushing of limits is also perhaps why the novella has never become one of Wang's more well-known works. Even after the release of *East Palace, West Palace*, many people today are unaware that the story is an adaptation of a previously published work. To be sure, much of what Wang writes in "Sentiments Like Water" may be hard for the average reader to entertain, especially as each successive scene continues to tell him/her that the reality they participate in is not only false but brings harm to others. It is perhaps for this reason that Zhang Yuan made the decisions he did in his adaptation.

Falling in Line: The Pathologizing Effect of Transnational Orientalist Expectations

The film *East Palace, West Palace* was never officially released in mainland China where it was filmed. In fact, it was filmed without the approval of the Chinese Film Bureau and after filming was shipped posthaste to France for post-production so that it would not be confiscated by the Chinese authorities. It was selected to be shown in the Un Certain Regard category of the 1997 Cannes Film Festival following its premiere at the Mar de Plata Film Festival in Argentina in November of 1996. The film's selection for the Cannes Film Festival incited Chinese authorities, who promptly confiscated

Zhang Yuan's passport in order to prevent his participation in the festival.³⁵ In light of the film's international acclaim and its seemingly unusual content, it leads one to wonder exactly for whom this film was produced and why it achieved the level of recognition that it did. It is my contention that Zhang produced *East Palace, West Palace* with a specific transnational audience in mind and intentionally constructed his characters through an orientalist lens, inclining its objects towards pathology and exoticism by their very nature, in order to make them appealing and legible to the narrow audience on the international film festival circuit.

As discussed in the beginning of this essay, sexology's influence on China, while great, did not lead to the emergence of a homosexual identity like the one identified by Foucault in Europe. Martin Manalansan identifies that the behaviors that became associated with the homosexual, and eventually the gay identity that emerged later in a more specifically American context, are not universal categories:

The other defining characteristic of gay identity is the focus on sexual object choice, or who you have sex with, as the primary and singular defining factor. In other allegedly antecedent forms such as those in Latin American and Asian countries, participation in same-sex acts is not the crucial standard for being labeled homosexual or identifying as gay; rather, gender performance (acting masculine or feminine) and/or one's role in the sex act (e.g., being anal inserter vs. insertee) form the standard.³⁶

Despite Manalansan's vocabulary still being oriented around being able to deploy the label of homosexual/gay, his point is well taken. There is a different standard for what informs identity construction across cultures and the word 'gay' invokes a very specific and nontransferable historically delimited identity. In his discussion of Filipino men who desire same-sex partners, Manalansan reviews the state of the field to find that many scholars are writing pathology onto native Filipino bodies. "Fleras pathologizes the bakla

and prescribes the debunking of this ‘false’ image... Fleras’s nativist attempt to situate historically the fight for gay and lesbian rights in the Philippines falls apart when he unconditionally takes the Western model of sexual object choice in characterizing gay identity and repudiates the gender-based model of the bakla.”³⁷ Manalansan’s analysis of Fleras is merely one example provided throughout his book, Global Divas, of several scholars who all engage in the same form of analysis. In their attempts to find ‘gay’ culture, scholars intentionally portray native understandings of same-sex behavior as feudal and behind a teleological modernity for which they were searching and under which they were working. Manalansan critiques Fleras again saying that “[h]e does not interrogate the notion of visibility/invisibility and instead portrays the fight for rights in terms of public cultural productions such as parades, films and books.”³⁸ The mistake that Fleras makes comes from his misunderstanding of the applicability of the gay identity across space and time and from his unquestioned belief that all sexual identities must operate according to the need to move from a position of invisibility to visibility. Assuming that all same-sex desires will eventually come to look like the Western gay identity, he analyzes the terms of the bakla identity, native to the Philippines, as needing to strive for visibility in order to catch up, without ever interrogating the value of visibility itself in Filipino culture.

While Manalansan’s research is only immediately pertinent to the Philippines, the larger shortcomings he is concerned with, such as the pathologization of non-gay identities that try to name same-sex desire as well as the desire for visibility, resonate strongly in response to Zhang’s portrayal of same-sex desire in East Palace, West Palace, as he falls equally victim to many of the same pitfalls as the scholars of gender and

sexuality in the Philippines. In an article produced largely through an interview with Zhang Yuan himself, Chris Berry and Zhang both make claims to desiring visibility, couched in terms of public discourse, for marginalized gay people in China. For instance, “I will argue that in Zhang's work [East Palace, West Palace], the emphasis is more on access to public discourse, the ability to find a place to stage a public performance at all,” or “I would argue that in the light of Zhang's previous productions, what this highly dramatized quality draws attention to is the immense difficulty at the moment of putting China's real gay subculture into public discourse.”³⁹ In fact, at one point Berry even reduces the entirety of the effectiveness of Ah-Lan's performance in the film to his ability to achieve visibility:

However, what I want to emphasize here is not only the way in which [Ah-Lan's] performative perversity attempts to reconstruct and resignify his own identity differently, but also how that attempt depends on the ability to seek out and obtain access to public space, public discourse and public record, however unpromising the particular circumstances might seem.⁴⁰

Berry's statements raise several red flags and betray an underlying allegiance to very narrow ideas about the possibilities for same-sex desire and the politics of performance. Berry's notion that performance must be public is highly problematic. While in his article he claims to not want to debate the semantics of public/private discourse, his refusal to do so leaves in place spacial distinctions that are inherent to the maintenance of state authority as well as its heteronormative mandates. If Ah-Lan's performance must occur in a specific space in order to have meaning, and for Berry this must be a public space that is state sanctioned, but participation in this space is limited to a certain list of proper subjects to whom Ah-Lan does not belong, then under Berry's framework Ah-Lan's participation in public discourse is always already foreclosed because of deference to

heteronormative state politics and predetermined divisions of space. If this is the case, then the Ah-Lan of the film is merely a reflection of a backward Chinese homosexual who has yet to achieve a level of visibility equal to that of Western homosexuals. The potential for the film to play with the teleological narrative of modernity, let alone more local sexual and affective politics, is also eliminated under Berry's understanding because his deference to a modern sexual telos obscures all other epistemic approaches to the issue.

To the contrary, the Ah-Lan of the novella, as explained through the alternative epistemological framework whose very evaluation is precluded by Berry's capitulation to heteronormativity, presents Ah-Lan as a character who actively manipulates the power systems around him. He has no need for another more public venue because the publicness or privateness of a space is irrelevant to the aesthetic of beauty through which Ah-Lan constructs reality. The addition of the concept of public and private spaces merely serves to accentuate Ah-Lan's potential for pleasure as it opens the possibility for committing an unforgivable transgression. Berry's reading, that Ah-Lan requires a public venue to be effective, is guilty of applying a very specific form of gay identity politics, identified earlier by Manalansan, to a population that it does not accurately describe. The extension of these politics obscures individual sexual politics in favor of a transnational perspective that is imbricated in broader orientalist expectations about Chinese subjects and sexualities.

I argue it is also important to address Berry's phrasing of "China's real gay subculture." What real gay subculture Berry is referring to is unclear. Given his predilection for the Western, most likely American, gay identity, however, it seems a fair

inference to say that Berry is referring to those subjects who desire visibility and political rights and that resemble their Western counterparts against whom he appears to be judging the status of their current condition. His distinction, however, between legitimate and illegitimate forms of same-sex desire obscures more localized and alternative concepts of sexuality that do not readily form themselves around sexual object choice. In the case of the Ah-Lan presented in Wang's novella, he is not a "real gay" because he has sexual relationships with both men and women and is not so much interested in rights as he is in aesthetics and being punished for the norms he is transgressing. Wang's Ah-Lan has no interest in achieving visibility or having access to public discourse. Furthermore, Zhang's search for "real gays" in China also betrays the Western impulse that undergirds the lines of acceptability he draws for his film. His deference to this transnational standard, however, is problematic. As Mark Chiang notes, "[t]he proclamations of an 'international' lesbian and gay movement risk subsuming heterogeneous forms of sexuality under a gay identity that is implicated in a specifically Western and bourgeois construction of subjectivity, with its themata of voice, visibility, and coming out."⁴¹ This move for visibility both explicitly identified by Berry and implicitly by Zhang's transnational inclinations is inherently tied to a specifically Western form of gay subjectivity and occludes other forms of sexuality like the more nuanced kind espoused by the Ah-Lan that is presented in Wang's novella. The blind-eye that is turned to competing discourses allows for the perpetuation of the heteronormative system that is purportedly the target of their criticism. More grievously, this false call to action has the potential to placate people's activist zeal as it is able to parade as radical critique despite its underlying allegiance to a normative regime.

In Berry's defense, his article is referring specifically to Zhang's film and the comparison to the novella, while revealing, is slightly unfair. Unfortunately, Berry's description of the film, whether accurate or not, lands either himself or both he and Zhang Yuan in a rather indefensible position. If Berry is incorrect in saying that Zhang Yuan directs his film as a political comment that desires access to public recourse, then he alone is guilty of universalizing a very specific sexual identity to a population where it does not belong and spares Zhang Yuan complicity in a highly reductionist reading of a people he claims to accurately present and the guilt of reproducing the orientalist fantasy that positions the West as a modern body to which China must catch up. If Berry is correct, however, then Zhang Yuan is equally complicit in this promotion of the orientalist fantasy and his motivations for directing the film as he did land on precarious ground, as his purportedly accurate portrayal must now be read against his simultaneous allegiance to a transnational order that only reads sexuality in a predefined fashion.

In his interview with Berry, Zhang notes that his directorial decisions were based on his personal investigations into gay life in China. Berry quotes Zhang at length to justify the potential for a negative reception of Zhang's presentation of Ah-Lan:

I believe this dramatic situation and these characters are a true expression of the current circumstances gays in China live under. I interviewed many, many people, including my own friends and also sociologists who have carried out investigations of gay life in China and AIDS researchers. All the stories I heard, including those from the gay community itself, were bound by circumstances of oppression, discrimination and control. In China today, there is no visible gay culture, and no one understands gay people. It is very hard to find any gay friends who are living a happy, well-adjusted life under these circumstances, and in fact I cannot think of anyone I know like that.⁴²

In this response, Zhang freely admits to conducting a search for gays in China. By the very definition of his terms, Zhang excludes a series of native conceptions of sexuality

that do not necessarily take sexual orientation as their defining characteristic. What he finds is also predictable because what his investigation really represents is not so much an investigation, as much a comparison of where China's visible gays stand in contrast to their Western gay counterparts. I will not argue that there are not gay men and women in China but simply that the implied universality embedded in this act of naming obscures a large portion of the population that does not actively identify as gay or take object choice as the basis for their identity. Based on Zhang's statement, it would appear that Berry's reading of the filmic Ah-Lan is not all that far from the mark, as Zhang seems to be searching specifically for "gays," the presence of which is indeed partially marked by visibility. The result of Zhang's investigation, however, promotes a very specific and myopic view of sexuality that promotes an orientalist fiction of occidental modernity that the Chinese have yet to achieve.

Zhang's impulse to orientalize the characters of his film is not his alone, however, and he is imbricated in a much larger process of globalization and transnationalism. In his discussion of the international success of Ang Lee's film *The Wedding Banquet*, Mark Chiang states that "the success of independent (that is, non-Hollywood) films in the international art house and film festival circuit is most often tied to that text's proximity to the culture and values of the transnational capitalist class, which constitutes the main audience for these venues."⁴³ The selection of *East Palace, West Palace* to be shown at the Cannes Film Festival in large part then reflects its ability to resonate with the viewers on the circuit. These viewers, however, are not the Chinese population-at-large or the average person, but the transnational capitalist class whose values strongly align with and emerge from Western identities and histories.

In a rather explicit criticism of Chris Berry's reading of the impact of public discourse about sexuality and its ability to restructure East Asia, Chiang carries Berry's conclusions a step further to expose their shortcomings:

Images of homosexuality may indeed disrupt homophobic nation-state discourses of identity, but the question that Berry fails to pursue is To what end? What replaces the nationalist ideologies of collective identity that homosexuality subverts? Berry's statecentric, postcolonial framework restricts his argument within the opposition between homosexuality and the nation that is part of nationalism's own self-consolidation, occluding an investigation of sexuality as a component of various transnational practices.⁴⁴

Chiang identifies the relationship that Berry creates between the state and homosexuality as one that is actually itself merely an outgrowth of nationalist logic and that ends up eliminating the independent evaluation of sexual politics as a force of its own or as a component in other systems. Chiang's assertion also brings this chapter full circle in its exposure of the limitations of allegorical analysis, as its fate is identical to that of Berry's logic. The exposure and visibility towards which both Berry and Zhang strive are still imbricated in heteronormative beliefs and functionally eliminate the discussion of sexuality and gender on their own terms. The postcolonial framework that Chiang names is also another way of labeling Zhang and Berry's impulse to promote the orientalist fantasy that also functions based upon heteronormative logic and undermines the radical potential towards which they claim to work.

Knowing that the transnational viewers that circulate on the film festival circuits are predisposed to favor films with which they can identify more easily, Zhang created a film that aligns itself as closely as possible to those transnational values. As Chiang notes, this transnational audience is informed mainly by Western understandings of sexuality that are manifest in the gay identity. This film, although garnering Zhang

international recognition, does so at the price of eclipsing heterogenous understandings of sexuality that exist not only in Chinese society but even in the source text from which the film is adapted. Zhang's extension of the homosexual to China in such totalizing terms imbricates him in the orientalist project that maintains occidental authority and simultaneously reveals the linkage between pathology and orientalism that is further corroborated by Manalansan's anthropological investigation in the Philippines. In the end, it appears as if perhaps the desire for recognition from a transnational body in which Zhang desires participation causes him to succumb to the pathologizing effects of orientalism in order to win a form of visibility for himself, which he believes is necessary for the lagging 'gay' citizens of China.

In concluding this section, I will be the first to identify a potential shortcoming and offer what I hope is an adequate defense. Zhang Yuan did not work on this piece alone and Wang Xiaobo was most certainly involved in creating potential scripts for the adaptation. In the two versions of the script referenced for this chapter, neither match the final cut and in fact both are drastically different from the film in certain points. With the exception of a single citation from the script that is noted explicitly above, all other references to the film are personal transcriptions of the dialogue from the film itself and I therefore attribute those scenes to Zhang's directorial intent. A film is after all made in the cutting room and not on paper. This is not to say that perhaps Wang did not contribute to these decisions, but I have been unable to find any information to date that indicates one way or the other. In the event that Wang did not express discontent concerning the final cut, however, this does not invalidate the argument of this chapter, but instead

merely means that Wang perhaps should receive less praise for writing what is still a very radically provocative piece of literature.

Conclusion

Wang's successful representation of a character who is able to survive outside of hegemonic discourses marks a great contribution to both queer studies and Chinese literary fields. In terms of queer studies, Wang's work bridges the oft leveled criticism of the existence of a monumental gap between theory and praxis by providing a character who has not only restructured his way of thinking, but also found a way to make his thoughts a reality, even in the face of a competing and dominant discourse. As to Chinese literature, Wang's novella ends in a way that does not force its characters to conform to social standards and complicates the static presentations of gender and sexual norms traditionally required by heteronormativity. Historically speaking, much of Chinese literature that would raise a social critique does so by resolving its characters back into the mainstream in order to avoid government censure. And while the last hundred years have definitely begun to see a break with this tradition, the use of a same-sex desiring character in Wang's novella pushes the envelope a step further than is often dared by most authors at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s.

Gender and sexual norms anywhere in the world represent a complex matrix of relationships and social customs that exert an enormous power over members of those communities. As is demonstrated above, it is often the case that such customs are often taken for granted and concealed in other forms of understanding, such as the terms of political allegory and national politics. Knowing this opens a potentially rich avenue of

investigation for the future, as other works may have suffered a fate similar to Wang's "Sentiments Like Water." It is with this investigation of gender and sexual norms and traditions that we can also turn to another contemporary work, Beijing Story. While written under quite different circumstances and with arguably different intents, these two works still contribute to a similar genre of material that looks at liminally situated members of society and uncovers ways in which individuals can negotiate their selfhoods against hegemonic and mainstream society's mandates. It is my hope that the following chapter can continue to reveal potential and practical alternatives for confronting the damaging effects of heteronormativity and that queer models for engagement with power can be expanded to confront and dissect those discourses that would otherwise cause others harm.

Notes

¹ Hongling Zhang and Jason Sommer, *Wang in Love and Bondage: Three Novellas by Wang Xiaobo* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), xiii.

² Song Hwee Lim, *Celluloid Comrades: Representations of Male Homosexuality in Contemporary Chinese Cinemas* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006), 97.

³Zhang and Sommer, *Wang in Love and Bondage*, xiii.

⁴ Jinhua Dai 戴锦华, "Zhizhe Xixue: Yuedu Wang Xiaobo" 智者戏谑 : 阅读王小波 (*The Banter of a Sage: Reading Wang Xiaobo*), *Dangdai Zuojia Pinglun* 当代作家评论. 2, 21-34 (1998): 26. Original Chinese as follows: “在王小波笔下, 性口场景, 性爱关系, 并非一个反叛的空间或个人的隐私空间; 而刚好相反, 它便是一个微缩的口力格局, 一种有效的口力实践。”

⁵ Dai, *The Banter of a Sage*, 27. Original Chinese as follows: “王小波小说的意义和价值不在于作为一部新的颠覆性的”寓言“，而在于对类似寓言写作的颠覆。”

⁶ This usage of ‘artist’ refers to those avant-garde authors and sixth-generation directors whose position is understood in terms of their counter-mainstream status.

⁷ Frank Dikötter, *Sex, Culture and Modernity in China: Medical Science and the Construction of Sexual Identities in the Early Republican Period* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995), 180.

⁸ Deborah Tze-lan Sang, *The Emerging Lesbian: Female Same-sex Desire in Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 307.

⁹ Biopolitics, made common by Michel Foucault, refers to the extension of politics into the regulation of biology. For instance, sexual behavior (heteronormativity) and reproductive rights (China's One Child Policy, or regulation of abortion more generally).

¹⁰ Loretta Wing Wah Ho, China's Opening Up : Nationalist and Globalist Conceptions of Same-Sex Identity. (University of Western Australia School of Social and Cultural Studies, Graduate School of Education. Dissertation, 2007), 72.

¹¹ Michel Foucault is one of the most prominent French philosophers of the last century and wrote extensively on the issue of gender and sexuality, among a range of other issues. For more, see *The History of Sexuality: Part I*.

¹² Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), xiii.

¹³ Dikötter, *Sex, Culture and Modernity in China*, 143.

¹⁴ Zhang and Sommer, *Wang in Love and Bondage*, 135.

¹⁵ Ibid., 136.

¹⁶ Lim, *Celluloid Comrades*, 98.

¹⁷ Zhang and Sommer, *Wang in Love and Bondage*, 136.

¹⁸ Ibid., 142.

¹⁹ Ibid., 142.

²⁰ English quotations from the film are taken from the subtitles provided by the distributor. Transcriptions of the Chinese are my own, as the dialogue to the film is not accurately reflected in any officially published copies of the script that I could find.

²¹ Dir. Zhang Yuan 張元. *East Palace, West Palace* (東宮西宮). (Strand Releasing, 1999). Original Chinese as follows: 我到醫院裡看過，我試過行為療法。就是看著異性性交的錄像，吃你喜歡吃的東西，看同性性交的錄像，吃你不喜歡吃的東西。不過，都沒甚麼用。再口，也不是我自己想去看的，是別人硬送我去的。

²² Dikötter, *Sex, Culture and Modernity in China*, 141.

²³ Zhang and Sommer, *Wang in Love and Bondage*, 150.

²⁴ *East Palace, West Palace* (東宮西宮). Original Chinese as follows:

Ah-Lan: 我結婚了。

Xiao Shi: 你結婚了？

Ah-Lan: 我知道這不好，對不起她的。再口，在圈兒裡，人家知道我結了婚。也都瞧不起我。

Xiao Shi: 你老婆知道嗎？問你呢！

Ah-Lan: 什麼？

Xiao Shi: 你老婆知不知道你天天這個操行？口呀！

... ...

Xiao Shi: 你真的結婚了？那你和誰結婚了？

²⁵ Xiaobo Wang 王小波. Wang Xiaobo wenji 王小波文集 (Wang Xiaobo: A Collection) (Beijing: China Youth Publications 中国青年出版社, 1999), 389.

²⁶ East Palace, West Palace (東宮西宮). Original Chinese as follows:

Ah-Lan: 每個人的生活都有一個主題，這是改變不了。每個人都是不同的，但大家也是相同的。

Xiao Shi: 你丫的主題就是賤。

²⁷ Zhang and Sommer, *Wang in Love and Bondage*, 134.

²⁸ Ibid., 150.

²⁹ Ibid., 148.

³⁰ Ibid., 149.

³¹ East Palace, West Palace (東宮西宮). Original Chinese as follows:

Xiao Shi: 把它給我穿上。我看到你到底是什麼樣子。

Ah-Lan: 這不是我要的。我要的不是這個。

Xiao Shi: 那，你要什麼呢？唉，穿上吧。

Ah-Lan: 我要的不是這個。

Xiao-Shi: 混操蛋！穿！穿上！你要什麼呀？你丫就是他媽的賤！

³² Ibid. Original Chinese as follows: 這個公園兒裡有一個常客，是個易裝癖。他老愛把自己打扮成女人的模樣。要是不是看那雙輕輕柔柔的手，誰也看不出他是個男人。他和我們不一樣。他從不和我們做愛，我們也不和他做愛。這就是口，他的主題和我們的是不一樣的。

³³ Ibid. Original Chinese as follows:

Ah-Lan: 你帶我去哪兒？

Xiao Shi: 治病。

Ah-Lan: 我沒病。我的毛病就是我愛你。

³⁴ Zhang and Sommer, *Wang in Love and Bondage*, 134.

³⁵ Chris Berry, “*East Palace, West Palace: Staging Gay Life in China*,” *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media* 42 (December, 1998): 84.

³⁶ Martin Manalansan IV, *Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men in the Diaspora* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 23.

³⁷ Ibid., 37.

³⁸ Ibid., 37.

³⁹ Berry, “*East Palace, West Palace: Staging Gay Life in China*.”

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Mark Chiang “Coming Out into the Global System: Postmodern Patriarchies and Transnational Sexualities in *The Wedding Banquet*,” *Q&A: Queer in Asian American* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 386. Italics added.

⁴² Berry “*East Palace, West Palace: Staging Gay Life in China.*”

⁴³ Mark Chiang, “Coming Out into the Global System,” 376.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 388.

CHAPTER III

BUILDING A HISTORY: BREAKING TRADITIONS AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF QUEER POSTSOCIALIST SUBJECTS IN BEIJING STORY

In the previous chapter, I looked at the process by which an individual of a queer orientation practically and pragmatically negotiates his horizon with the horizontal line of hegemonic reality. This chapter will look at a similar process in the male protagonist of the novel *Beijing Story*,¹ Chen Handong, whose struggle is one that is similar to Ah-Lan's. What is unique about Handong's story, however, is that the narrative places a greater emphasis on the process by which one becomes grounded in one's own orientation, whereas "Sentiments Like Water" already places its protagonist in a queerly grounded position. The complex condition of the modern mainland-Chinese reality in which the novel is situated raises unstable and often contradictory models by which a subject can orientate his/her life and it is the goal of this chapter to identify strategies used by the characters in successfully negotiating this precarious and unstable terrain.

The majority of recent literature concerning Chinese modernity and its varying forms relies heavily on the interplay between the narrative of a capitalist history and a postsocialist materialist reality. While this tension has been described by a diverse set of terms, each reflecting the preferred vocabulary of an author's respective discipline, they all point, with minor variation, towards a singular conclusion. Chinese modernity is one that is inextricably tied to state politics and that to ignore its influence is equivalent to advocating an irresponsible utopianism. It is to this maxim that I wish to continue to respond, as the development of Chinese modernity need not always be mediated through the lens of state-centric politics. Again, this is not to say that these politics serve no

purpose, but rather that they are also able of being interpreted by from other perspectives and that to examine instances of their deprioritization will fill a void in contemporary scholarship that is left by the oversight of non-state oriented experiences and struggles.

Situated in the late 1980s and spanning nearly a decade in its narrative scope, the online novel Beijing Story offers an opportunity for such investigation. While governmental politics are clearly at play throughout the story and it can easily be read as a critique of Chinese society and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), it is also possible that these politically pertinent moments can serve as a background for other developments, such as the emergence of queer subjectivities in post-socialist China. While the impact of state politics on understandings of queerness is undeniably important, what politics means to those who view the world through a queer lens is not always the same as the state would have it and this shift in perspective represents a valuable point of interrogation. To change the locus from which one's horizon of understanding emerges alters not only the way information is received, but also the type of information that is received at all. In terms of a newly postsocialist China, the capacity to make this change represents a shift from a monolithic and universally accepted point of reference advocated under socialist ideology and simultaneously marks the creation of the potential for a diverse range of subjectivities. Located at the bridge between socialist and postsocialist China, Beijing Story offers a revealing interpretation about how Chinese subjects begin to develop their own value systems and modes of expression beyond the pale of socialist ideology.

This chapter will be divided into three major sections. The first section will review the literature that led me to investigate the vacuum of meaning that occurred

during the transition from socialism to postsocialism, as well as serve as the space in which I will attempt to articulate several of the forces that are concurrently at play in the construction of these temporally and geographically specific postsocialist subjectivities. The second section will focus on the limited secondary sources available concerning the novel itself and the preferred reading practice that has been employed for understanding Beijing Story. This will include a focus on the function of allegorical readings, as well as the perceived (un)importance of the Tiananmen Square Incident to the story. This section will ultimately prove that, under the postsocialist Chinese regime, politics and state interests are able to be displaced as one's primary orientation and that their ability to be reorganized signals the development of new subjectivities. The final section will trace the strategies employed by the character Handong to construct his new horizon of personal understanding. This section will ultimately argue that, not finding a singular historical tradition which is able to encompass his desired presentation of himself, as a same-sex desiring subject he is required to construct and put together his own history in order to ground himself and move forward from his postsocialist disorientation.

I. The Lexicon of Modernity and the Evolution of Chinese Subjectivity

Writing this chapter has been a difficult endeavor for several reasons. Chief among them is that a wide range of scholars, from varying backgrounds, have written on the issue of Chinese modernity and that the linguistic confusion emerging from reading these accounts against each other has taken time to parse out. The following section will retrace a tightly focused set of ideas through various theoretical sources with the intent of more clearly outlining the state-of-the-field in relation to Chinese modernity and

subjectivity. The disciplines traversed will include anthropology, psychology, literature and film, and social theory. The collective impact of these works, both their overlap and interplay, will serve as the jumping off point for the following section, as well as allow for the new subjectivities displayed in *Beijing Story* to be made intelligible as an example of the potential condition of postsocialist Chinese modernity.

Desire

One of the most widely cited works concerning Chinese modernity and sexuality is anthropologist Lisa Rofel's *Desiring China: Experiments in Neoliberalism, Sexuality and Public Culture*. Through her fieldwork, Rofel concludes that there has been a shift in what is considered to be inherent to human nature, and that this new model "has the desiring subject as its core: the individual who operates through sexual, material, and affective self-interest."² Moreover, this notion of desire is played out as a "cultural practice in which both the government and its citizens reconfigure their relationship to a postsocialist world."³ Fundamentally, Rofel's conclusions corroborate the development of the subjects seen in *Beijing Story*, whose desire presents itself in ways that are both sexual and material and take self-interest as their motivation. What is worth noting about her conclusion, however, is the way it is presented, as it gestures towards a state-oriented model that too often dominates discussions of China. The latter citation above indicates that Rofel imagines the new postsocialist model of desire being played out by "both the government and its citizens," and proceeds to analyze desire through a state/citizen binary that, while far from unimportant, is not inherently necessary as the core principle in order to understand desire.

I should be very clear that while I find Rofel's approach to understanding subjecthood a completely legitimate one, it is not beyond interrogation. Looking at postsocialist Chinese subjecthood from a state-centric model most certainly reflects the worldviews of a large portion of the Chinese population, particularly those subjects who were surveyed for her research. Said another way, it reflects the horizontal line of reality. Rofel's research goes so far as to note that even within the Beijing gay community, a term that I am wary to use, there is another line, a standardized gay horizon, that dictates how gay subjects should desire in order to contribute to society and the nation. What is important to note is that while this model reflects one particular mode of understanding desire, there are always exceptions to the rule which are equally worthy of analysis. Her results concerning the regulation of discourse represent a landmark in the investigation of desire in postsocialist China but are no means exhaustive of the potential permutations of forces that contribute to a subject's motivations for desire.

For instance, what happens to those subjects who desire in ways that are outside of the normative and regulated discourses approved by the majority that Rofel identifies above? Are there ways to operate within and without the state-centric model at the same time? If one is able to exist outside, must they ceaselessly be in contest with normative discourses, or can they exist independently? Is there even an inside and outside to be spoken of? *Beijing Story* looks at various possible answers to these questions, and it is in this vein that it is worth investigating the limits of the normative boundaries of desire identified by Rofel, in order that they may later serve as a point of contrast to the modes of desire presented in the story.

In order to contextualize Rofel's conclusions and see how her framework is both implemented and altered in the alternative discursive horizons of understanding adopted by the characters in Beijing Story, it is pertinent to look more closely at how her proposed understanding of desire delimits social spaces for subjects who operate both within and beyond its normative bounds. In chapter five of her book, Rofel investigates the dual process of how varying legal cases have both been influenced by the rise of a gay identity and simultaneously contributed to the construction of the gay identity's socially acceptable limits. She begins with tracing the origins of "interests" in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe and proceeds to adapt this model for more specific use in postsocialist China, noting that Maoist socialism is unique insomuch as it is understood to have both repressed human nature and fostered excess passion:

My [Rofel's] argument, which I illuminate through the legal debates, is that a triangular relationship has been constructed in China among repression, which signifies the inhibition of human nature; interests, which signify self-regulation; and passion, which signifies excess. Between repression and passion lies socialism, while between passion and interests lies capitalism.⁴

For Rofel, the two regimes of socialism and capitalism create a triangular relationship with the citizen-subject, the content of whose individual desires determines his/her allegiance to one regime or the other. Given that the purpose here is to understand what this normative model might mean to a non-normatively inclined subject, this system must be dissected. Rofel performs an act of substitution by association, replacing socialism with repression, capitalism with self-interest and the citizen-subject with passion-as-excess as part of her interpretation. The combination of repression and passion produces socialism, while the combination of self-interest and passion produces capitalism. The framework that Rofel identifies, however, is insulated from the non-normatively inclined

subject, and eliminates his/her agency for making truly independent decisions and replaces it with the false choice between two economic regimes that are always already overdetermined by the associations outlined above (socialism::repression and capitalism::self-interest).

What is also worth noting in this system is that desire, or passion-as-excess, serves as the lynchpin for determining one's political allegiance. As Rofel remarks:

[D]esire is unpredictable. Nevertheless, it is essential for the creation of postsocialist subjects... Desire results from negating repression, but the problem is that it can go toward either excess or self-regulation. Try as one might to subsume desires under interests -- the goal of the postsocialist governance -- full control over where desire might end up is impossible.⁵

In this formula, the potential results of one's desire are locked into a binary equation, wherein how one desires determines one's subject-status. This places one's economic orientation as the ultimate referent in subject construction and defers subjectivity by means of a false choice. Again, it is not that this model is flawed, so much as it does not account for everyone and gestures towards questions concerning the nature of desire/passion in postsocialist China. In the system Rofel proposes, desire/passion is read as excess by the two systems between which it is said to be held in tension. This raises the question, however, of what this "excess" might look like outside of Rofel's formula. Is there even a vocabulary that is able to describe this excess, or is it something that always exists relationally to other components of one's subjecthood? In terms of queer subjects, does a subject's status as queer necessitate a degree of excess in their desire or, if such a distinction can be made, is queer desire regulated differently than normative desires? Stated another way, are one's desires able to be directly articulated, or are they necessarily sublated into other ideas or behaviors? Although it only represents a single

perspective, the novel serving as the subject of this essay would respond with a “no” to the first question. There is not an adequate vocabulary without engaging with normative discourses. This does not mean, however, that there is not a desire or need for that vocabulary. How the postsocialist condition negotiates these demands is constantly unfolding and it is my hope that a turn towards history will help elaborate a potential answer to this question in the final section of this chapter.

As for the subjects of her research who seem to believe that one’s desires must be coterminous with the state’s need to cultivate properly desiring citizens, their realities are subject to specific and necessary distortions in order to make them coherent and should be named. First, such an *a priori* positioning of state projects as central to the formation of one’s desires not only animates the state as an independent, rational actor, but simultaneously confines the coherency of the citizen-subject to only his/her articulations that have a governmental resonance. This creates a false agency in the hollow concept of the state, while simultaneously evacuating any agency in the individual that exceeds the potential power gifted him/her by an artificial state authority. And while this most certainly represents a form of subjectivity, it by no means encompasses the complete range of subjects in postsocialist China. Second, as cited above, because the desiring subject also has “sexual, material, and affective self-interest” at its core, and these motivating forces are supposedly organized in order to promote a modern China with properly desiring citizen-subjects, the foundations of individual desire are also given a political tinge that appears to be immanent but that in reality is merely achieved by association. And while it is important to concede that, for certain people, this association is considered to be of an ontological order, for the purposes of this chapter the

recognition of this association's fundamental artifice is crucial to opening new ways of approaching postsocialist subjectivity. It also opens the path for questions such as "Is it possible for the postsocialist Chinese subject to desire properly without contributing to the state's project of modernization?" or "Is modernity inherently tied to the nation-state in postsocialist Chinese culture or can one be modern while standing outside it?"

Ultimately, Rofel's work has identified the normative and hegemonic practices against which non-normative and queer subjectivities can be identified and investigated more thoroughly and the questions raised above in terms of her research will be fundamental to illuminating the value of Beijing Story and discussed in the following sections.

(Post-)Socialism

Rofel's understanding of Chinese modernity serves as a point of convergence for a series of different ideas that all come to bear in both unique and overlapping ways on the contemporary Chinese condition. Weaving together the idea and practice of (post)socialism, passion (feeling/desire), capitalism and the development of the public spaces (spheres), she touches upon the most frequently referenced concepts used in discussions about Chinese modernity. And while her work is considered one of the most authoritative sources on the topic, she is far from the only one who has attempted to address these issues.

Central to the conversation of Chinese subjecthood is an understanding of what socialism and postsocialism signify to the modern project, as Rofel makes clear that a sense of modernness is somehow inherent to the new Chinese subject. Social and literary critic Xudong Zhang understands postsocialism in the following terms:

Postsocialism... is a conceptual proposal to stay and live in contradictions and chaos in a mixed economy and its overlapping political and cultural (dis)order. It is a way to attend to a diverse and radically uneven geosocial terrain characterized by ‘synchronic noncontemporaneity’ (Ernst Bloch) and coeval difference as deep-rooted contradictions are rendered more visible and unruly precisely by the equalizer of a globalized capitalist economy...⁶

According to Zhang’s understanding, postsocialism is a term that serves as a theoretical lens through which to process the contradictions witnessed in the face of an uneven global capitalist influence. As such, Zhang’s notion of postsocialism as an analytic category already encompasses the influence of capitalism and identifies capitalism as constitutive of postsocialism’s very nature. This approach complicates Rofel’s understanding, however, as it collapses what she sees as two distinct categories into one. The triangular relationship that exists for Rofel is dismantled via Zhang’s belief in the immanence of capitalism to postsocialism and opens the door for a conversation about the relationship of politics and economics to other concepts which are valued as their equal.

While Rofel’s triangular and formulaic approach is clear-cut and in certain circumstances preferable for getting at a general gist of the modern condition, Zhang’s understanding of capitalism as interior to postsocialism is perhaps more productive as an analytical approach because it allows for realizing modernity as not inherently locked in a zero-sum battle for people’s (political and economic) attention, as much as it is in a constant state of (re)negotiation. Far from a semantic quibble, this internalization eliminates the binary relationship between capitalism and socialism and creates a space in which something besides politics can emerge as the object of the subject’s (as opposed to citizen-subject’s) desire. This repositioning functionally explodes the potential field of desire for the Chinese subject because instead of being tied to a vocabulary that is

intelligible exclusively to the domain of state-centric politics, concerns of a more individualized nature are able to be understood as legitimate and able to influence a subject's decision-making processes. Not only this, but these new concerns may even be understood through their interactions with state politics, as opposed to being understood solely through politics in a top-down fashion.

At this juncture, any number of concerns can potentially occupy a subject's attention and it is this variability that confers the potential for subjectivity upon the postsocialist Chinese subject. Particular to the argument of this chapter will be the analysis of how the different subjective modes chosen by the two same-sex desiring male protagonists in Beijing Story interact with not only each other but society-at-large. The contradictions that Zhang finds to be inherent to the postsocialist condition are most certainly experienced in the world of the story, as the two protagonists' attempts to communicate their desires to one another are consistently misinterpreted over the course of their relationship. The disconnect between Chen Handong, the materialist venture capitalist, and Lan Yu, the simple and hard-working boy from the countryside, creates an excess that is unable to expressed in a direct and intelligible way and often ends up manifesting itself by what might be called a "saturated reticence," insomuch as the silence or weight of what is not said actively communicates.

The realization of individual subjectivities requires the characters to relearn how to communicate. This inability to clearly and directly communicate their desires, also read as passion (Rofel) or feeling (Lee, below), represents an interesting development in the becoming of the Chinese subject and highlights the nuance involved in how postsocialist logic impacts queerly desiring subjects in China. Additionally, because there

is nothing inherently state-oriented about the characters' desires and emotions, Beijing Story stands as an important counterpoint to Rofel's more broad-scale approximation of the postsocialist Chinese condition. Further discussion of the expression of emotions and desires must be deferred, however, as the investigation into subjecthood requires not only the further investigation of the nature of (post)socialism but also an adjusted understanding how the concepts of public and private function under its influence.

Feeling/Passion

In Haiyan Lee's book *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900-1950*, she tackles the changing meaning of terms of affection. Her research begins from the turn of the 20th century and, while her main argument concludes shortly after the Communist Revolution, she ends with her thoughts on contemporary love and interpersonal relationships. According to Lee, “[a] socialist subject ‘loves’ another socialist subject for his or her class belonging, not for his or her moral qualities, intellectual prowess, economic standing, social status, or sexual appeal.”⁷ Given this arrangement of priorities as the potential pretext for the structure of affection in postsocialist life, it begs the question of just what this post- condition entails for its subjects, while also raising issues of its relationship to modernity due to the “after-ness” inherent in the prefix itself.

Remarking on just this issue, Zhang discusses the function of being post- as being a challenge to capitalist claims about History:

Like the prefix post- in postcolonialism, the post- in postsocialism figures the new but is embedded in an order of things that does not readily recognize the ideological claim, political legitimacy, and cultural validity of capitalist globalization for the totality of human history and its future horizon.⁸

The condition of postsocialism then, becomes the “negative supplement in the total truth-claim of capitalist globalization,”⁹ constantly in negotiation with capitalism but not ruled by it. This understanding is also complimentary to Ahmed’s understanding of the value of the past and the effect of habitual engrained behaviors. Just because something is not the same does not mean that it has severed its link to the past; rather, it means that it has engaged in new habits and begun the process of reorienting its own line. Continuing the train of thought that the prior must prefigure the latter to some degree, values held by Chinese citizens during the socialist era do not simply vanish with the arrival of capitalism, but instead become the supplement to the more interest-based value system utilized by capitalist regimes. What this means for the expressions of feeling and love are now complicated as Lee remarks, as the socialist referent for love of class solidarity is no longer stable and can either be supplemented by other values or displaced entirely.

This displacement and reevaluation of the socialist grammar of love happens because the introduction of capitalist market principles necessarily requires the curtailing of a socialist planned economy, which in turn disrupts the guarantee of class unity. Embedded in this move is also a reduced role for the government and relevance of state politics more generally, or at the very least insofar as economics is concerned. What this means for the Chinese subject is several-fold, however, and extends beyond mere economic implications. Because desire was solely directed towards achieving the erasure of class difference, love, as a manifestation of desire, was also expressed by working towards the same goal.¹⁰ As a result, it was simple for the government to manipulate people’s love and desires by regulating economic development in a way that guaranteed class equality. With capitalism stratifying the distribution of wealth and complicating the

value of one's family background, however, finding someone of the same class becomes more difficult in the postsocialist world and its status as the sole standard for finding "love" must now be reconsidered. With desire no longer regulated by the state's planned economic model, individual preferences can begin to emerge as the standard for choosing a partner. This indeterminacy requires re-learning how to talk about one's desire and feelings of love, no longer necessarily the same thing, and to discover new ways of relating to one another. It is this process of (re)learning to communicate with other people and the disorientation associated with it that opens a space for the (queer) subjectivities seen in *Beijing Story*.

(Counter)Public(s)

One major discussion remains before being able to speak directly to this chapter's "modern text," and that is Chinese modernity's division of space, most notably concerning the public and the private. While there is a vast body of literature that has already taken up this issue, here I will focus on the spatial distribution of subcultures in postsocialist Chinese society, as it will serve as the strand that will contextualize this broad survey in terms of the literary analysis that will follow. The subculture in question can be called by any number of monikers. Generally speaking, *Beijing Story* is a story told in the first-person that has one of the male protagonists recount his relationship with another man and the various women along the way, often in graphic detail.¹¹ It has been called Gay fiction, Queer literature, a Cut-Sleeve Romance (*duanxiu luomanshi*), and Comrade Literature (*tongzhi wenxue*), to name a few.¹² These categories themselves are not discreet units, it should be noted, and there is often a degree of overlap between them.

For the sake of consistency I will use the latter, Comrade Literature, as its meaning is most often used to indicate fictionalized online writings by same-sex desiring subjects about issues of same-sex desire and is most pertinent to the discussion of divisions of space due to its emphasis on the digital world.¹³

There are several ways of understanding the notion of a public. The article ‘a’ itself specifies a public that is different from ‘the’ public, and to make it plural, ‘publics’, only compounds the term’s potential meaning even further. Incorporated into this plurality of publics, however, is the idea of the counterpublic. According to Michael Warner:

A counterpublic, against the background of the public sphere, enables a horizon of opinion and exchange; its exchanges remain distinct from authority and can have a critical relation to power; its extent is in principle indefinite, because it is not based on a precise demography but mediated by print, theater, diffuse networks of talk, commerce, and the like.¹⁴

Based on this understanding, counterpublics can function as the publics of subcultures. This broad category is useful because it allows for there to be still a bounded object of inquiry while simultaneously allowing that object to function outside of (hetero)normative and mainstream prescriptions. It is in one sense bounded because it circulates mainly among those that identify with a particular constellation of traits, whatever they may be, and in another sense incredibly flexible in its boundedness, insomuch as those it would include are able to be recruited through even accidental or tangential contact with it. Thought of in another way, a counterpublic space is created among those whose horizons slant in such a way that they intersect with the values of the space; conversely, the counterpublic space itself is simultaneously constructed by a density of intersecting horizons and those in that locus’s peripheral space. It has a

relatively dense center, the edges around which change with the variation in horizons held by participating and even arbitrarily encountered subjects. It is also because only people who take those traits as normative may circulate in these counterpublics that it is able to circumvent hegemonic discourses; there is no one among these publics to reveal the disorientation and subjects of these publics are thus able to produce their reality as the horizontal line itself. The benefit that this engenders, analytically speaking, is that non-dominant logics are able to be played out in a way that does not force them to be mediated through a dominant and oppressive framework.

What is problematic with Warner's formulation, at least in terms of the postsocialist Chinese condition, is that his analysis assumes a culture that is historically rooted in capitalist development, and not a culture that bears the residual mark of socialism. And while the above discussion has situated capitalism as inherent to postsocialism, although not to socialism itself, it begs the question of how the public sphere, let alone a counterpublic, functions in postsocialist China, especially when the public sphere has not developed in a Habermasean fashion, as per Warner's analysis. Moreover, because capitalism is not unfettered in China, as in Warner's assumptions, and is still subject to the Party's every whim, even the postsocialist condition does not meet the prerequisites for producing publics as they are discussed in Warner's work.

To push the interrogation further, the question of the potential for a counterpublic in Beijing Story should also be raised. In his discussion of the function and impact of counterpublics, Warner speaks to how these discursive counterpublics are produced through particular forms of subjectivity and provides a potential link between our postsocialist novel and the counterpublics about which he theorizes:

Counterpublic discourse is far more than expression of subaltern culture and far more than what some Foucauldians like to call ‘reverse discourse.’ Fundamentally mediated by public forms, counterpublics incorporate the personal/impersonal address and expansive estrangement of public speech as conditions of their common world. Perhaps nothing demonstrates the importance of discursive publics in the modern social imaginary more than this--that even the counterpublics that challenge modernity’s social hierarchy of faculties do so by projecting the space of discursive circulation among strangers as a social entity and in doing so fashion their own subjectivities around the requirements of public circulation and stranger sociability.¹⁵

Coupled with the previous analysis about the potential for new subjectivities to emerge in the vacuum left by the withdrawal of the state and in the advent of the rise of capitalism, it is not beyond the pale to believe that this modern, postsocialist story might be eligible to produce or be read through the lens of a counterpublic, or some distorted form thereof that arises from the shifting and unique conditions of postsocialism. If a specific form of subjectivity is what marks the limits of a particular discursive public, then there is no reason why the subculture depicted in Beijing Story, with its use of metaphor and double-entendre only intelligible to members in-the-know, is not a potential candidate for participation in the logic of counterpublics.

I raise this potential for being eligible for counterpublic status for a couple of reasons. Perhaps most obviously, it is simply for highlighting the nuance that is required when addressing contemporary China and the ways in which literature can be used to spawn new ways of thinking about the present. Beyond this, however, I feel it is necessary to dabble in the discussion of the counterpublic in order to complicate the growing trend that cites “the public” or “the public sphere” without naming the intended audience. The theory of the counterpublic is important because, given Warner’s descriptions of it, it appears capable of elaborating on the ways in which spaces are

developing in postsocialist China and can serve as a tool in expanding the vocabulary with which we discuss the postsocialist Chinese age.

Another notion of publicness that must be addressed, although tangentially here since it lies beyond the scope of this chapter, is the ability of the story itself to serve as the basis of a (counter)public. Distributed on the internet, adapted into film and published in several languages, *Beijing Story* itself as a cultural artifact has generated on-going discussion that has led people to label it as the seminal work of the genre of Comrade Literature. Given that the plot intertwines sex, sexuality, economics, and politics, this piece offers a generative source material for future investigation. In her dissertation, *China's Opening Up: Nationalist and Globalist Conceptions of Same-Sex Identity*, psychologist Loretta Wing Wah Ho notes that “[i]ncreasingly, cyberspace has been seen [as] an important part of the public sphere in contemporary China.”¹⁶ The public sphere being referred to here, I infer, is the body which Ho assumes reflects popular opinion according to the subjects of her research. She then concludes her thoughts on the internet as follows: “I also propose that Chinese cyberspace is imagined as an empowering network, especially for marginali[z]ed people to disseminate counter-hegemonic speeches and beliefs, and build a ‘community’ with a degree of safety.”¹⁷ What Ho appears to be gesturing towards here, although with a vocabulary of her own, is the notion of counterpublics described by Warner. It is a space distinct from power but with a critical relation to it, it is an unknown body but bounded at the same time by varying senses of community, and it functions for people who are marginalized by mainstream society, or subcultures. It is not necessarily a single counterpublic in and of itself, as Ho’s analysis appears to indicate that any number of minority or marginalized groups can use

this medium to create these kind of spaces. If this is truly the case, the bourgeois public sphere that Warner takes as the foundation for his theory of counterpublics has already taken hold among a certain population in China, further expanding the horizon of possibilities for the postsocialist Chinese world and offers an interesting avenue for future study.

Despite the ranging lexicon employed by the scholars cited in this section, Lee ties its various strings together with a single sentence in her discussion of the civilizing project of the modern postsocialist state and its reaction to newly developing senses of public and private: “With the retreat of the state, capitalism efficiently turns consumer desires into the ligaments of a new public sphere.”¹⁸ Individual desire, identified by Rofel as the mark of the new humanist subject of postsocialism, is absorbed by the new capitalist machinery (Zhang) and, by nature of particular aesthetic tastes (subjectivity), functions as the connective tissues that constitutes particular publics (Warner) and shapes their discursive limits. While Lee perhaps uses these terms less critically than this discussion has developed them, that she feels comfortable making a statement tying them all together indicates the degree to which they appear as interconnected in the postsocialist age and is also why I have tried to use this section to try and unpack the meaning embedded in such a loaded statement.

Given the interrelatedness of these various ideas, what can now be said about the condition of Chinese postsocialism? It can be said that new forms of subjectivity are emerging due to the unique constellation of traits that can be attributed both to political and economic regime shifts. It can also be said that these shifts have injected a reflexiveness into Chinese subjecthood, insomuch as the subject is not prefigured in a

top-down approach by a presiding ideology and is instead able to desire for himself/herself and critically reflect upon his/her personal interests. As for the potential impact of this developing subjective taste, there is no simple answer to this question, except to say that the answer will reveal itself in time. The vicissitudes that preside over the current negotiation between political, economic and social regimes all intersect each other in ways that make postulating on the issue no better than a shot in the dark. What this article will offer below, however, is a textual reflection of this condition and a glimpse of the potential beyond the horizon of postsocialism, or at least one that is imagined by the author of Beijing Story.

Toward New Reading Practices

Beijing Story represents a unique moment in the history of modern China. Spanning almost a full decade in its narrative arc, the story begins shortly after Deng Xiaoping's policy of "Reform and Opening Up" (gaige kaifang) and is temporally in sync with the myriad processes and forces investigated in the preceding section. As mentioned briefly above, the story is told as the reflections and memories of the wealthy Beijing businessman Chen Handong. His unintentional love interest, Lan Yu, is a poor student who comes from the countryside to Beijing for school. The plot takes several twists and turns as the two men discover the depth of their feelings for one another, come to terms over their future and navigate the social landscape of a rapidly changing Beijing. Reviews of this work are limited and focus the majority of their energies on the meaning of the fleeting political references in story. It is my argument in this section that this near-exclusive focus on the Tiananmen Square Incident and attempts to find political

allegorical potential is myopic given the nature of the new postsocialist world described above and that such an approach misses the new and potentially queer subjectivities that are emerging on this modern scene.

The tradition of reading Chinese, as well as other ‘third-world’ literature as political allegory can be traced back to an argument offered by Fredrick Jameson, in his article “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism.” Jameson makes the claim that “[a]ll third-world texts are necessarily... allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call national allegories...”¹⁹ His justification lies in what he labels as an essential characteristic of capitalist culture, which is the “radical split between the private and the public, between the poetic and the political, between what we have come to think of as the domain of sexuality and the unconscious and that of the public world of classes, of the economic, and of secular political power: in other words, Freud versus Marx.”²⁰ As for the potential usefulness of retaining those categories in analyzing third-world literature, Jameson believes that:

...although we may retain for convenience and for analysis such categories as the subjective and the public or political, the relations between them are wholly different in the third-world culture. Third-world texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic--necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society.²¹

It is with this call to search for the political/national relevance even in moments that may seem to not be directly invested with it that Jameson establishes a framework that continues to permeate much of academic scholarship today, despite the myriad critiques which have been leveled against it.²²

Given the discussion in the previous section, and the knowledge that capitalist principles now reside within the contemporary postsocialist Chinese condition, Jameson's framework requires a major overhaul. While his original theory stood on precarious grounds to begin with, given the binary-crisp lines that he draws between ideas such as the public and private, his claim that those concepts' very separation in capitalist society, and lack thereof in socialist society, is what inclines socialist literature towards allegory and capitalist literature away from it crumbles from its foundations up. The time of national allegory, however, has not passed. That there are unevenly developed politico-social spaces and publics, each with their corresponding privates, means that the potential for forms of allegory most certainly still exists, just within qualified parameters. What matters now is that allegory is not the only choice, but is one among many.

Despite the unsuitability of Jameson's approach to Chinese literature, Hee Wai Siam (許維賢) notes that scholars are still fascinated by the potential for political allegorical readings of *Beijing Story*. Such interpretations will generally read Chen Handong as the post-kaifang, emergent red-capitalist and Lan Yu as the traditional socialist whose identity is made legible only through his acts of labor.²³ This clear-cut formulation reflects the same mistaken logic as Jameson, insomuch as it posits its objects as distinct units of a single constitution and not as subjects with potentially varying and volatile allegiances. Instead of falling in line with the majority of other scholarship, Hee believes that there is a greater framework at play in the story. He concludes that a shift away from political allegorical analytic terms is necessary in order to accommodate this new potential: "The story essentially takes the question of the contemporary nation-state and its citizens and replaces it with a proposition about male same-sex love: loyalty and

betrayal.”²⁴ That this displacement of terms does not invalidate or make impossible a coherent political allegorical reading is productive because it allows for political allegorical readings to be analyzed in a framework that does not take itself as the ultimate referent. It also complicates the relationship between sex, sexuality and the state. By naming sex and sexual orientation as co-constitutive of state discourse and vice versa, as opposed to ideas of sex and the body being unilaterally controlled by the state,²⁵ Hee reveals that scholars’ preference for political allegorical readings masks the ways in which sex and its regulation are constitutive of allegorical readings.

The evidence that Hee uses to defend this shift, however, walks a fine line between reverting back to the primacy of the state governance model and performing his intended comparative analysis, and is actually suggestive of perhaps an even more important development in the subjecthoods in postsocialist Chinese. The scene that Hee uses as evidence occurs early in the story, when, despite Handong’s entreating Lan Yu to stay inside, Lan Yu decides to participate in the Tiananmen Square protests. Remi Cristini, the author of one of the only works dedicated solely to Comrade Literature, also identifies this moment as a pivotal one in the novel and summarizes it as follows:

On the evening that Chinese soldiers end the demonstrations by force, Lan Yu is there with some of his fellow students. Handong, worried sick, goes looking for his young lover and finds him in the crowd, covered with the blood of another student who has got shot. Although the author does not make a political statement in this paragraph, but simply uses the event to illustrate that Handong’s feelings for Lan Yu were deeper than he wanted to admit at the time, it is still an exceptionally direct reference to the army’s violent action against the students.²⁶

Cristini’s recap of this scene is the quintessential result of a perceived horizon produced by a search for political allegory. He combs through the scene to produce a sort of standard for political clarity. “Although the author does not make a political statement,”

Cristini still manages to reduce this scene's value to its "exceptionally direct reference" to military violence, whose "directness" is only achieved through allusion. Performing a political reading is by no means an unfounded reading, but is simply one that leaves a much greater portion of the material to be analyzed. By naming the allusion to the Tiananmen Square Incident as the main point of interest in this passage, Cristini reproduces state interests as the ultimate referent through which people's lives are understood and continues later to reduce Lan Yu and Handong to the status of citizens with confused emotions in the midst of political uncertainty. This is not to say that the allusion to the violence of the Incident is not worth acknowledging, as I agree with Cristini that this kind of reference is not all that common. But to reduce the scene to its political relevance alone, especially in light of its admitted secondary status, is to perhaps miss the forest for the trees.

Hee offers a more nuanced reading of this scene than Cristini by highlighting the conflict that Handong faces due to his divided allegiances, moving the focus away from an exclusively political allegorical reading and towards his new framework of loyalty and betrayal:

Handong's state of mind is extremely conflicted. On the one hand, when he hears from the Inner Department that the government has decided to take action against that group of students [the Tiananmen protesters], he 'also thinks that he should take action'. Otherwise, in the future he will not be able to do business. On the other hand, he has no means of preventing Lan Yu from taking to the streets on the night of June 3rd. Handong is scared that he will lose Lan Yu on this night. He drives his car in a frenzy around the capital in search of Lan Yu.²⁷

In his article, Hee situates this conflict as one between Handong's capitalist impulses and desire for traditional socialist values, situating Handong as a member of the class that has benefitted most greatly from the freedoms of the new economic system inaugurated under

gaige kaifang and is therefore deeply committed to it, but also equally showing him to be emotionally wedded to Lan Yu who, for him, signifies traditional socialist values. This formula is, however, teeming with the residual influence of Jameson, evidenced in the clear-cut and binary juxtaposition of the capitalist Handong and socialist Lan Yu, and results in the oversimplification of the complexity embedded in this scene.

Hee's description of the moment itself highlights something familiar. His analysis reflects the conditions identified in the first section as characteristic of life under the postsocialism. There is individuation, ushered in on the coattails of capitalist expansion, and the emotional attachment that can develop from concern with personal interest, but also concern for political and economic security; it reflects a change in habits that is not independent of history. I believe that Hee is correct in his remark that Handong is scared of losing Lan Yu, as that seems self-evident in the narration. Based on what Hee sees as this moment's supposedly perfect fit with allegorical reading practices, however, I am inclined to disagree that it is because Handong finds Lan Yu to be the embodiment of an ancien political regime that he is interested in possessing him. For Hee's argument to be true, it would mean that a single person could only have allegiance to a single political order, reinforcing the model offered by Rofel and complicated above. What is more interesting as a potential alternative is that since Handong's concern for Lan Yu is in competition with state interests, it might indicate the competition of publics or incommensurate horizons. This occurs because State discourse refuses to recognize personal concerns that are not mediated through it, while the sphere of queer affect is bounded and discrete from the state's heteronormative impulses. The result of participation in two different public spheres, or of having an unstable horizon, could

potentially engender the same frenzy and disorientation that Hee notes in his description of the scene and offer a more productive way of analyzing the displacement of politics and the rise of the subject that does not force it to succumb to a predetermined allegorical mold.

Regardless of why it is that Handong loves Lan Yu, whether it be for his “antiquated” moral values, good looks, intellect or something else not from the list of (post)socialist grammar spelled out previously by Lee, the fact that there is a list of potential reasons that Handong could love Lan Yu indicates a drastic break between socialist and postsocialist realities and indicates a historical moment of disorientation. This potentiality should not be glossed over lightly, as it is this instability that gives rise to the various subjectivities witnessed in novel. Given all the factors that are in play (economics, politics, love, sex, social pressure), Handong arranges them in a formula that posits his personal attachment to Lan Yu in opposition to both his political safety and economic success. On one level, this arrangement corroborates part of Zhang’s formulation that finds capitalist principles as inherent to postsocialism and Chinese modernity. On another level, however, this grouping pushes Zhang’s logic one step further by insinuating that, in the postsocialist world, politics and economics can still be considered interchangeable ideas, a residue of socialist policies, instead of separate yet inherent to one another, as Zhang’s prescription indicates. The choices that Handong is faced with reflect a unique set of terms that produce an equally unique form of subjectivity, wherein his choice does not line up neatly with decision-making processes identified in the relevant scholarship that prefers clean-cut allegorical binarisms.

While Hee's proposed framework is intended to move from the political allegorical citizen-subject to a more broadly interpreted subject-at-large, this jump ultimately returns to allegorical grounds, although no longer political. Hee comments that “[a] highly contentious historical event [Tiananmen] becomes old tongzhi Handong and new tongzhi Lan Yu’s process of ‘leaving home--searching--reconciliation--flirting--love-making’. It alludes to a change in the times, the red capitalist once more finds a method by which to flirt with Maoism.”²⁸ Hee’s identification of a shift in priorities, where what is potentially a politico-historical moment is simultaneously a moment of personal affective struggle, is accurate in mapping the unfolding terrain of postsocialism. His identification of a pattern in queer relationships is also a useful model that I will return to later. What is problematic, however, is when he places Handong as the “red capitalist” back into the battle of economics and politics. While this can be read as Hee highlighting the way in which sex and sexuality are simultaneously imbricated in state politics, and it is most certainly this, it also betrays a deeper dependence on the logic of allegory that ultimately constrains his model. By setting up the romance of Handong and Lan Yu as a direct parallel to what he considers above to be binary economic systems, the red capitalist Handong and the socialist throwback Lan Yu, Hee reduces the two men to signs that reflect in a different semiotic field of allegorical meaning. While this system perhaps has a usefulness beyond its presented face in Hee’s article, its ultimate function for Hee creates a comparative allegorical framework where his allegorical symbols can be compared and contrasted against political allegorical ones. It is merely the same game but played with a different name, and the predetermined roles that each player must

perform risk producing cleavages in these subjects that cannot be contained in the models provided.

The excess that is cleaved under Hee's framework begins to reveal itself as the scene used as evidence for his model comes to its concluding moments and is read in light of the following passage. Once it is established that Lan Yu is not harmed during the protests, Handong threatens to kill Lan Yu for making him worry so much. Lan Yu reads this as a sign of affection and musters the courage to break the general silence that governs their relationship and asks Handong, "You really like me... that much?"²⁹ The concluding moment of this scene then is not one that is political in nature, as even the reticence they are accustomed to performing due to political and social prejudice fades from importance in their personal world, but the moment is gesturing towards the counterpublic theory offered above. What is left is the affection shared between two men.

In the story, the moment of intense violence that is the Tiananmen Square Incident narratively hinges on a question of feeling and swings into an affective statement. The conclusion to the chapter in which the protests occur reads as follows, picking up where Lan Yu's question to Handong leaves off:

Once the fear of dying left us, we started to caress each other. We both used each other's bodies to prove we were alive... His [Lan Yu's] beautiful eyes were filled with a boundless intoxication for the moment... My mind had only one thought: "I can't lose you! I can't! I can't!" I seized the opportunity to press him down to the floor and held his face in my hands. I looked into his eyes: "I love you!" I never said this to a woman, the thought was enough to make my flesh crawl. [But] it came naturally, they were the only words I could think of... Then again we fell back deeply into the excitement of making love... That was actual love, it was absolutely not "just sex." No matter how people treated us, because I was able to actually experience all of this, every time I think back about this moment I become uncontrollably excited. My love was visible, was audible, but Lan Yu's love I could only try to feel out.³⁰

The first sentence of this paragraph deserves attention, as its placement indicates that its content contains the themes that are most important for tying together the previous and following scenes. This sentence moves the characters from a fear of death to intimacy. The absence of politics in this statement, combined with Cristini's own admission above that the author does not ever make a directly political statement, at the very least indicates that politics is tangential to whatever is intended to be the primary focus of this passage. And although the political climate does produce the conditions for this moment, even the characters themselves are not immediately concerned with the political repercussions of the evening so much as they are concerned that the primary object of their desire is safe.

What this shift in focus might mean can be more clearly understood if we refer back to Ahmed's analysis about the function of the horizon. It is not just the scope of reality that is perceivable and imaginable by a subject, but it also decides importance. Things that are closer to the point of horizon are given a greater value than those that inhabit the margins, imagined as those spaces around the point of horizon and within its line of sight that provide the context for the center but are not the center itself. The fact that the Tiananmen Square Incident serves as a backdrop for other actions and is not made to appear important is a direct reflection of the characters' horizons. It is there, undeniably so, but it is merely the catalyst for other behaviors that are thought to be more important, namely the realization of the love felt for another member of the same sex.

The ending of this chapter sufficiently corroborates the fact that it is possible for the postsocialist Chinese subject to place something above state interests, exercising a new form of subjectivity specific to postsocialist China. Moreover, the fact that this new priority can be feelings of romantic love between two men also indicates the potential for

queer subjectivities, whose regulation is unique from that of exclusively heterosexually-desiring subjects. The so-called politically-charged moment above can be read simply as a moment of love without losing the meaning of the story. It does not have to serve as an allegory but can be read as an active exercising of one's subjective priorities. This is the point that deserves emphasis.

Additionally, in light of the various readings above, there also seems to be a consensus that political allegory alone is no longer an adequate model for reading modern Chinese literature. That the models that have been offered up so far still retain a residual logic from the model that Jameson presented almost twenty-five years ago, however, is a clear sign that we have yet to arrive at an adequate solution. It should finally be noted that searching for a "solution," or a better model, is perhaps the problem. Solutions often involve creating formulas for future predictions and in doing so give in to tendencies to make claims larger than they should. It is with that in mind that the next section will not necessarily offer a solution, so much as it will tightly read a specific example and take it as just that, as one example of how subject construction occurs for men who sexually desire men in postsocialist China.

Toward a New History: Strategies for Queer Self-Expression in Beijing Story

In an attempt to be as least prescriptive as possible, this section will look at the process through which the male protagonist Handong comes to articulate himself and clarify himself as a subject, rather than try to articulate a formula for identifying a specific type or category of subject. As this section will discuss subjects whose desires are directed towards members of the same sex and as this behavior is often discussed in

queer studies, an exploration of this relationship will be the first point of discussion. Given that there is an active debate concerning the applicability of the idea of queerness and queer theory to Chinese contexts, I will begin with glossing the relevant points of this debate and proceed to see how the various arguments can be brought to bear on the textual example at hand. This will be followed by an investigation into the strategies engaged by the character Handong to define himself as a subject, concluding that a reorganization of histories is the fundamental strategy he utilizes to orientate himself and articulate his same-sex desires in the postsocialist world of the novel.

As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, the applicability of queer theory to Sinophone cultures is a question that does not have a clear-cut answer. It is in the hope of contextualizing this debate that I will look at arguments and ideas contained in queer theory and how and if they are reflected in the characters' subjecthoods. This discussion will also bring us back to Rofel's work discussed above, as she makes a strong and nuanced argument for the specificity of queer and gay identities in China. One of the major motivations for writing her work was to serve as a response to Dennis Altman's argument concerning the globalization of gayness. Despite these mutually opposed positions generally taking center stage in discussions of queerness, however, I will prove that it is between the local and the global that the characters' moments of disorientation can be located. Stated more precisely perhaps, the characters find themselves located at the intersection of these lines of thought, simultaneously reflecting the validity of both theses advanced by Rofel and Altman and domesticating them both for personal gain.

While there are several factors that may actually be at play in this discussion of queer theory and China, the present discussion will begin with contextualizing the

discursive notion of gayness, since it is the preferred vocabulary of Rofel and Altman, as well as the pertinent vocabulary required to occupy and extend oneself through this identity. This will be contrasted to the novel's use of another category that encompasses same-sex desires, namely *tongxinglian*, the Republican era neologism for homosexuality. In Howard Chiang's and Larissa Heinrich's forthcoming book, *Queer Sinophone Cultures*,³¹ Chiang identifies a shortcoming in Rofel's queer critique of Altman. He remarks that despite her nuance and meticulous attention to detail, she "overemphasizes the forces of local resistance working against globalization in ways that under-appreciates the epistemic homogenizing power of globalization itself."³² He continues that one of the pitfalls of anthropological studies, more broadly speaking, is their often unintentional attribution of origin to the local, in turn risking a different kind of universalism they so oft critique in the globalization thesis. What this section hopes to do is focus on the ways in which the characters discursive horizons are not only homogenized by globalized ideas of gayness, but also the ways in which this globalized gayness simultaneously expands the potential positions they might occupy as subjects beyond and through the category of gayness.

Remarking about the usefulness of globalization as an analytical category, Chiang argues: "Part of what is so compelling about the globalization thesis has to do with its explicit contextualization of the epistemological trajectories of, to borrow Rofel's own words, 'what it means to be gay' on a level that transcends the boundaries of nation-states."³³ Not only do Chiang's words of an "epistemological trajectory" incline towards the terminology provided by phenomenology, inviting a fresh approach to the topic, but they also gesture towards a historical disorientation. The globalization thesis itself, in

Chiang's understanding, requires the contextualization of knowledge. Contextualization, by its very nature, is a process that requires adaptation and translation of histories, cultures, and languages, at the very least. To contextualize knowledge, then, also requires its breaking from the history that produced it and requires it to float, ungrounded, in a transnational space. It should be noted here that not all histories must be oriented around the nation, but given the well-defended result of Rofel's study, which places normative subject construction in postsocialist China in line with state projects, this understanding is generative because it identifies a necessary break from the horizontal line of reality in which postsocialist China exists and is consequently disorienting and produces the potential for queerness.

The novel itself uses the word “gay” only once, which is written in English, and more often defers to the Chinese neologism for homosexuality, tongxinglian, or on occasion the word for comrade, tongzhi. It is understood by the characters, however, that although these words are intimately related, they do not necessarily share a single object of reference. Since the word gay does achieve more widespread use in reality following the point in time when the novel narratively concludes, it is important to note its usage in the text:

What our being together counted as was not important, what mattered was that we were together every day... I was cautious and frequently changed locations. I knew a few GAY places, but I never took him to any. He was like an unblemished piece of jade and I was afraid other people would tarnish him.³⁴

In the online and formally published editions of the story, the word gay’s being written in English appears very abrupt and causes the reader to think about its usage. It is clear that Handong thinks that he and Lan Yu are people who qualify to participate in gay spaces, but whether that makes the two men themselves gay as well is another question. In fact,

the quotation above reveals a certain degree of disdain for gay spaces, as Handong believes that to take Lan Yu to one would risk polluting him. While it is not necessarily the location itself that is problematic, it is the people that are attracted to such a space that are of questionable character.

Who these people are, however, is unclear and directs the reader's attention towards a bounded population whose actual participants are unknown. Said in another way, it directs attention towards the potential for a queer counterpublic. In her discussion of how the direction of one's line is established through the "repetition of the act of 'facing'" and the direction of one's attention, Ahmed touches on Warner's notion of the counterpublic:

Michael Warner considers the role of attention in his analysis of publics and counterpublics. As he notes, 'The direction of our glances can constitute our social world.' For Warner, directing one's attention to a shared object is enough to create the public, which then exists by virtue of being addressed.³⁵

By directing attention towards these "gay places," Handong faces or directs his attention towards the shared object of gayness and helps to constitute it as a (counter)public space. His refusal to name himself and Lan Yu as gay, however, keeps the men at odds with this space, despite their ability to participate and circulate at its margins at will. What can be said for certain is that this historically displaced discursive category and its ensuing public space has found its way into the reality of the characters and exerts a degree of influence over them, even if it is evidenced by their identifying traits in it that they find to be less than desirable.

That this gay space emerges on the postsocialist scene but does not wholly monopolize either man's subjecthood also says something about the way in which the concept of gayness has disseminated around the globe. In this instance, this example is

simultaneously indicative of the globalizing theses promoted by Altman and of the local resistance to such forces proposed by Rofel. This is proven by gayness's circulation as an discursive category with which individuals can associate and that exerts influence over the local population's sense of self, while simultaneously being acknowledged by Handong who still manages to place himself in a critical relation to it. This unique constellation is useful in identifying what values are taken as more central to the character's understanding of self and which are more peripheral, as well as how different historical trajectories are integrated into a single subject. Stated another way, it is useful in understanding how the subject clarifies his/her subjectivity.

What this means for the usefulness of using counterpublics to understand the novel becomes at the very minimum two-fold. One the one hand, it means that there are burgeoning public spaces and counterpublic spaces in the world of the novel, in addition to the reality of the counterpublic online space in which the novel itself is published. This also raises the possibility of various counterpublics that are not necessarily gay but that still encompass subjects whose desires incline toward same-sex sexual behaviors and offers an interesting path for future investigations. One the other hand, however, that it receives a single reference that is not developed further in the scope of the novel requires that I bracket this conversation for a later and different investigation into the actual development and function of public spaces in postsocialist China. Ultimately, it is not a foreclosed reading but one that does not intimately or fundamentally alter the strategy for subject construction that Handong utilizes and is discussed below.

From here we can delve into the psychology of the characters of the novel and try to map the potential function of queerness. It is perhaps easiest to start with the end of

Handong's journey and work backwards. This will serve to highlight with the most clarity the larger trajectory of his life and the forces that may have influenced him in reaching his self-declared destination:

My first, short-lived marriage was over and what I lost as a result was far too much! But, it was just as Lan Yu said: "If one suffers losses, one most certainly will make gains." I gained verification of something that, despite its facticity, I had always been unwilling to acknowledge: No matter how little or great the degree, I am a homosexual.³⁶

It is in this moment of recognition that Handong aligns himself with a vocabulary whose history is incommensurate with his own and yet in which he still feels at home. His ability to comfortably inhabit the discursive space of the homosexual gestures towards a necessarily transnational history, foreign lexicon and arguably queer history, all of which work to complicate the ways in which he understands himself.³⁷ It is important as well that Handong ultimately declares himself a homosexual and not gay. Again, while this distinction may be lost on the characters themselves, the choice in vocabulary reflects a specific orientation towards the world that will become clear as we follow Handong's journey.

While Handong's self-identification with the sexological invention of the homosexual certainly could be seen as gesturing towards and reflecting a pathological understanding of the self, by the end of the novel he ultimately discards this model's original content while retaining the category as a shell which he can inhabit. Prior to the above declaration, Handong goes to great efforts to prove that he is a "normal guy" and is excited to find a psychiatrist who specializes in the phenomenon of men who are attracted to men, scientifically referred to as homosexuality. After his first consultation, the doctor tells Handong that he is a normal man with "slight homosexual tendencies" that can be

cured by separating from Lan Yu and getting married. The doctor is concerned for Lan Yu, however, and offers to treat him.

While Lan Yu does not want to be treated, because Handong asks it of him, he goes. One day the doctor calls Handong and says that the treatments are not having the desired effect on Lan Yu and asks to change to electro-shock therapy or hormone injections. Handong is appalled by the doctor's recommendation and begins to question the very category he later declares to be his own, and in the process identifies not only its inability to explain his own life but also the excess it cleaves from Lan Yu's personality:

I didn't know whether Professor Shi had such intense anxiety concerning the danger posed by the homosexual community or if he felt sorry for the exorbitant counseling fees I paid him, but he persisted to give me suggestions. I didn't listen anymore.

I thought repeatedly about the professor's "scientific explanation." I remembered when we first talked and he asked me: "Is it that you are just looking for stimulation, or do you love that boy?" I said I just was looking to mess around. He said that didn't matter. That just meant that my attitude towards life wasn't serious enough and that I absolutely was not a bona fide homosexual. According to this logic though, my attitude toward my time with women is not serious. If I must fall in love with them in order to qualify as heterosexual, and to this day I've yet to actually love any of them, what does that make me?

I also thought about the professor's theory that Lan Yu sees himself as a woman. Lan Yu certainly longed for me like a woman: he is sensitive, delicate and adorably clever. But in other respects I find his character to be more self-respecting, independent, tenacious, and even brave. These [traits] most certainly are not exclusive to the domain of women.³⁸

Without naming it as such, Handong begins by identifying a suspected homophobia in Professor Shi's deep-seated anxiety about homosexuals and continues by questioning the purportedly scientific explanations that he previously provided him. Following the logic that one's sexuality is determined by the sex of the sexual partner for whom one has romantic feelings, Handong categorically denies himself the ability to properly occupy

the space of the heterosexual. However, that at this moment he does not immediately conclude that he is the heterosexual's binary counterpart, the homosexual, I will argue is indicative of the "contextualization" identified above by Chiang, and instead leaves Handong fundamentally disoriented and with a fundamental question concerning his selfhood, namely what he is.

The Language of Love

Part of Handong's inability, or at least apprehension, to label himself a homosexual hinges on a question about the nature love. It seems that, in following back the Professor's logic, Handong should be able to immediately label himself as a homosexual without doubt due to his feelings for Lan Yu. The idea that two men can be in love, however, is not a given for Handong and directs us to a different shortcoming in language that should be addressed, as it marks an conceptual difference between Handong's understanding of love and that promoted by sexological models. His ultimate concession later in the novel that he believes that love can exist between two men and his confession of love for Lan Yu, however, gesture towards the homogenizing impact of globalizing ideas concerning the understanding of same-sex desire promoted by Altman, while also indicating a degree of contextualization promoted by Rofel.

Towards the beginning of their relationship, Handong and Lan Yu are discussing the impact of the cultural revolution on students. Lan Yu says that he thinks three groups of people in school benefitted the most from "being in revolution," the students preparing for the TOEFL exams, the people who wanted to play mahjong, and the "mandarin ducks and butterflies," or the students who were dating and in love. Handong tells Lan Yu that

he thinks Lan Yu counts as a member of the mandarin ducks and butterflies group, but Lan Yu disagrees. “[W]hat that refers to is serious courtship,” Lan Yu counters.³⁹

What Lan Yu gestures towards with his remark is the limit of the discursive horizon of love. While two men may have feelings for each other, those feelings are not considered to represent love because the habitually encountered limits of love itself are predetermined to be heterosexual, inherently limiting out the potential for the subjects of love to be of the same sex. One day, Handong musters the courage to ask Lan Yu if he “believe[s] that feelings between members of the same sex can be eternal?”⁴⁰ The men conclude with an essentially split decision. Handong believes that since heterosexual love exists, same-sex love must as well, while Lan Yu remains silent on the issue. Lan Yu’s silence continues to haunt Handong even after Lan Yu’s death at the end of the novel, as Lan Yu never once tells Handong that he loves him, even when Handong finally musters the courage to say the words himself.

The road to Handong’s confession of love for Lan Yu is not easily traveled, and is ultimately reached via a reorientation of his normative horizon through a repeated and productive failure to occupy specific discursive categories. One strategy that Handong uses is to talk about the functional practice of heteronormative concepts, with a descriptive circumlocution acting as an avenue for expressing his queer sentiments: “‘We can’t get married... but everything I have I can give to you... do you understand?’ I didn’t know how I should express myself.”⁴¹ Here Handong names the institution and immediately forecloses it as an option for him and Lan Yu. After providing the requisite heteronormative response, he then substitutes the word marriage for a result of being married, the sharing of property, and in doing so indicates his intention. Even as he

finishes his thought he is unsure if he has successfully communicated his point, although Lan Yu says he understands. The identifiable inability to extend oneself through a discursive space then also generates the potential for its functional occupation, albeit stripped of the nominal title. The result is that the normative category is queerly contextualized and this shows how normative and queer horizons of practice might overlap and yet be conceptually at odds.

After this conversation, Handong is reflecting on his evening with Lan Yu and their discussion: “I don’t know if two male tongzhi can stay together for their entire lives or not. People said that at most we would only have one good year, but I can’t agree because I’ve already lived happily with a man for almost four.”⁴² Struggling with negotiating the history of his own life against the knowledge promoted by heteronormative logic, Handong reveals that the normative horizon of his world does not necessarily encompass all of reality itself and that he and Lan Yu are proof of the existence of something different. Without naming them as “in a relationship” and “in love,” he articulates these ideas through a description of the points they already reached, or the spaces they’ve already extended themselves through, proving a fundamental discrepancy between lived reality, or the trajectory of their lines, and heteronormativity’s constructed logic, the horizontal line.

The final paragraph in the block quotation in the above section also discusses this kind of discrepancy in the doctor’s diagnosis of Lan Yu as suffering from the sexological notion of inversion. Also discussed in chapter one, sexual inversion is where the homosexual male imagines himself to actually be a woman on the inside and is an important concept in sexology because it restores the heteronormative sexual

constellation that is central to the coherency of its logic. On several occasions, Handong is revealed to think of Lan Yu as a woman, either through his physical descriptions or by descriptions of his behavior. For all his remarks, however, Handong is constantly surprised by Lan Yu and his ability to stand up for himself.

For instance, one day Handong receives a package with money in it and a phone call from a male acquaintance's father. He ultimately concludes that something has happened with Lan Yu but refuses to raise the issue with him. While at the office one day, a female coworker, also aware of what happened, brings up the confrontation and fills in some of the blanks. As it turns out, Lan Yu and this male acquaintance met up, but when the other man made sexual advances, Lan Yu took the man's knife and told him that he would kill him if he tried to lay a hand on him. This also explains the injuries that Handong notices on Lan Yu shortly before the phone call comes. The female coworker, well aware of Handong's amorous past, jokes that "that boy's endless devotion and protecting his integrity on your behalf is all in vain!"⁴³ After hearing the story, Handong has no choice but to admit to himself that Lan Yu is braver than he is.

The Chinese idiom the coworker uses to describe Lan Yu is shoushenruyu (守身如玉), literally translating to conserving one's body like a piece of jade and often refers to a woman's sexual purity. The juxtaposition of this phrase against Handong's admission of Lan Yu's bravery, a masculine trait he attributes to himself but even more to Lan Yu, complicates the notion of inversion. Even more confounding is that this expression of masculine bravery is for the purpose of maintaining a purportedly womanly virtue. What ultimately results from this episode is that the clean categories promoted by

sexology fail to encompass either Lan Yu or Handong in their entirety and must cleave a part of their personalities in order to make them fit the requisite and pre-made molds.

On an analytical level above the close reading, it is important to look at the function of the psychiatrist's name. The character for the doctor's name is shi (史). While certainly serving as a Chinese surname, this character also refers to the idea of history. While potentially coincidental, given the emphasis on feeling lost, not knowing how to process the world, and searching for ways to relate in postsocialist Beijing, I find it unlikely. The doctor, through his promotion and defense of sexology, represents institutionalized knowledge that promotes state interests by encouraging the reproduction of citizen-subjects.⁴⁴ By beginning treatment with the doctor, Handong attempts to stabilize his disoriented reality by grounding himself in normative history. That he lies to the doctor about where his emotions are invested indicates that he is attempting to extend himself through a space for which he is not a perfect fit, the excess of which Handong attempts to conceal behind his short-lived marriage to business-woman Lin Jingping. When he discovers what happens to that excess when it is "untreatable," however, as in the case with Lan Yu, Handong decides that the doctor's purportedly scientific knowledge is not useful and discards it wholesale. It is in this symbolic moment that Handong discards the validity of the normative line and is forced to think once more about who and what he is.

The destabilization of normative categories witnessed in the scenarios outlined above simultaneously support and disprove the globalization thesis offered at the beginning of this section. Handong discovers the scientific model of homosexuality, a foreign import from Europe and later America that gained hold during the Republican

era, which consolidates and limits his horizon of understanding in ways that medicalize his subjecthood. At the same time, however, it is through the application of these ideas, or through their contextualization, that he finds these categories are not perfect reflections of his or Lan Yu's person and loses faith in them. In terms of Rofel's thesis, this would most likely be represented as a kind of a local resistance to globalization. What Rofel overlooks, and Chiang identifies above, is that the discursive category of the homosexual, and the gay identity that rose in response to it in America, have already delimited the potential discursive range of Handong's linguistic field by providing a name for something that was otherwise considered unnameable and given him a space to occupy. In light of his discomfort with the category of the homosexual, that Handong still ultimately proclaims himself to be one raises the question of just what kind of homosexual he is, let alone where to begin understanding Lan Yu.

In an attempt to figure out exactly what homosexuality means to Handong, we return to a question of history and the historical dislocation that occurs when the postsocialist Chinese subject appeals to and actively claims the status of the homosexual subject. While Handong ends with the subject status of homosexual as his own, he does not begin there. In the above section, Hee identifies a formula for mapping the turbulence of Handong and Lan Yu's relationship: "leaving home--searching--reconciliation--flirting--love-making." What is not included in this summary of the two men's relationship, or perhaps that is glossed over without enough attention, however, are the conflicts that occur between them. They have very few fights throughout the novel, but each is the culmination of an unnamable frustration and serves as a key moment in which the reader is privy to the psychological dilemma faced by the two protagonists. The first

fight the men have occurs early in the novel after they have had several sexual encounters and is representative of the confusion each fight encompasses. The fight unfolds as follows:

That morning I [Handong] didn't go into work and he [Lan Yu] also skipped class. We had our first fight... "Did I not already talk about this with you? There is nothing serious about our carrying on like this!" I roared at him. "Do you take anything seriously?" His voice wasn't loud, but he hit the nail on the head. "It's not like that, if we're together then we should be happy, otherwise we should just forget about it!" I changed the topic. Those words were threatening, I grabbed his weak point. "Don't you think of me as..." He was most likely thinking of an appropriate word. "I think of you as my friend, my little brother, I'll say it again. Don't be such a girl, suspecting trouble at every shadow."⁴⁵

The argument is narrated from Handong's perspective and highlights both a linguistic disorientation on the part of Lan Yu, as well as a disconnect between Handong's thoughts and words. The cause of the failure to communicate for both men lies in a similar if not singular cause. The more obvious failure occurs in Lan Yu, where he literally cannot find a word to complete his thoughts. At the risk of supplying a word that is not historically commensurate with the context of the story, it should suffice to say that Lan Yu is clearly looking for a word that indicates that the degree of intimacy between himself and Handong has surpassed that of just merely friends and brothers. In being quick to supply the standard vocabulary to fill in the gap left in Lan Yu's sentence, Handong attempts to swiftly correct a slanted trajectory back towards the horizontal normative line by pulling on a familiar linguistic history.

Borrowing once more from Ahmed, it is worth considering what it means for Handong and Lan Yu to attempt to extend themselves through the categories of friends and brothers. I am reluctant to label this extension a failure on the part of the characters, although I do believe that it may be justifiably read as such, and instead want to direct

attention to the effect of having the characters attempt to occupy these positions at all. While it is most likely the case that the discursive notions of “friend” and “(little) brother” are, normatively speaking, intended to be exclusive of sexual contact, especially since words do exist for members of society who engage in approved and unapproved sexual behaviors, Handong’s extension of their relationship into this space has an interesting effect. Contrary to the strategy seen above where circumlocution achieves the desired goal of communication through the absolute denial of the possibility to occupy a discursive title, here Handong highlights the men’s potential to fully occupy the discursive space of the friend and brother. Although the men’s relationship exceeds the category due to the sexual nature of their relationship, it is not unable to be occupied because the application of the category itself cleaves this excess from their subjecthoods and leaves it ungrounded in the liminal and queer periphery of normative existence. This conversely employed strategy of subject formation functions to split the subject into his/her normatively suitable component and the potentially queer counterpart that permanently haunts it, always threatening to reveal its dislocation. Whether this form of subject formation is inherently queer or not is not a question I will not address here, but one that I wish to defer and keep at hand for discussion in the concluding chapter.

The splitting of one’s subjecthood and ability to conceal the resulting excess is not the only possible result achievable by extending oneself into a discursive space. In a later encounter where his mother confronts him about his relationship with Lan Yu, Handong searches through history for an explanation that will placate her anger and produces the following:

In fact, since ancient times China has had the saying of the “southern mode.” People with money have always looked upon it as a kind of fun. You still

remember Cai Ming, right? He occasionally enjoys this too. Its just eating together, talking, nothing more..." I said haphazardly. I just wanted to be able to make my mother stop hurting.⁴⁶

Because what was reachable under socialist ideology did not extend to same-sex love and desire, seeing that all desire was directed towards the single goal of class unity, Handong reaches back farther in time for a history that informs the history of socialism itself, and consequently postsocialism, to find his defense. Referring back to the Ming dynasty terminology of the "southern mode," Handong strategically deploys history to normatively ground a potentially queer line. By attempting to establish this straight line to a recognized past, Handong is able to correct the slant in the perception of his own trajectory by subsuming himself under the horizontal line of a recognized tradition and in doing so console his mother.

Handong's reference to a moment in history where same-sex desire, while not necessarily promoted, was most certainly recognized as a potential lifestyle for the elite, provides a window into the way in which he positions his horizon of understanding. Given that the flexibility awarded to people of Handong's economic status in contemporary society is arguably comparable to that of a Ming literatus,⁴⁷ he is able to draw parallels between himself and the literati of the time in a way that brings history to queerly bear on modern times. I say queerly because by jumping several hundred years in which this discursive category fell out of use, Handong destroys the linearity of history, assumed by heteronormative logic and the logic of reproduction it entails,⁴⁸ and reassembles it in a way that makes his line appear straight to his mother but that in reality relies on the resurrection of a defunct past in the present moment. It is this strategic use of

history that begins directing us towards a fundamental precipitating factor of the disorientation Handong experiences as a postsocialist Chinese subject.

What the discursive category of the homosexual represents for Handong, given the examples analyzed above, can either be an affirmation of a failure or a split reality accompanied by a masked excess. That he believes that homosexuals can experience love, however, also indicates that he retains a part of the original sexological model in which one's libidinal desire may be "incorrectly" invested in the same sex. That it has now been contextualized and stripped of its perverse status and used to identify his own excess in positive terms, however, indicates that this model is no longer understood in terms of the original form by which it was introduced. This domestication of a historically domesticated terminology, in combination with Handong's ultimate confession of love for Lan Yu, also indicates the validity of Ahmed's argument from the introduction: lines can be reorientated over time and through repetition. The spaces that one can reach are able to be expanded as one's horizons shift, with Handong and Lan Yu's relationship serving as proof of this point. That living together permanently or confessing love as such was not an option for Handong at the beginning of the novel but becomes a feasible idea by the end of the story gestures towards a reorientation in his horizon and a stabilization of his subjecthood upon a queer trajectory in relation to the horizontal line of postsocialist Chinese reality.

I will also argue more broadly that the conglomerate effect of mixing and matching these varying traditions disrupts one's history, necessary for one's projection and forward movement, and consequently is what entails Handong's disorientation. This disruption, however, is not necessarily the end of one's history, as much as it is a new

beginning. If the standard understanding is that one's history is supposed to inform the reachable scope of one's horizon, as Ahmed argues, or that the residual effects of one's history must exist in a post- condition, as Zhang argues, perhaps what it means to be a queer postsocialist subject is that this standard does not hold. Perhaps what it means to be queer is that there is no longer a single, coherent history from which the subject arrives on the scene and there is instead a new cluster of histories that must first organize themselves around a subject's desires before a new and stable line of horizon can be projected.

Conclusion

This finally returns us to one of the original questions that prompted this chapter: How do same-sex desiring male subjects articulate themselves and arrive as subjects in postsocialist China? They do so through the contextualization, breaking, reassembling, and what is essentially the building of new histories. By borrowing at times from a linear, heteronormative history, and at others from resurrected and/or foreign histories, all incommensurate with each other, these subjects temporarily stop their own trajectory and create queer moments in which they are disoriented. It is from these moments that new histories are assembled and from which subjects begin to reorient themselves. By making a habit of facing various historical trajectories, the collective result of this new orientation is a single horizon that strategically instrumentalizes multiple points of reference in order to actualize the desires of the subject. It is this construction of a single history from many that engenders the contradictions witnessed under the postsocialist condition and it is also this process that marks the subject as queer, as its new history veers from the

heteronormative and horizontal line of a hegemonic reality. It is this strategy that represents one of the fundamental tools used in the process of subject construction in postsocialist Chinese society.

For as much as this chapter complicates the picture of Chinese postsocialist queer subjecthood, I believe it offers a greater degree of clarity about how the pertinent forces are instrumentalized in order to precipitate the arrival of the subject and thus makes a much needed contribution to the discussion of postsocialist China. While the terms of the discussion can be quite intricate at times, whittling them down to their basic functions allows for a comparison across disciplines and allows us to more accurately investigate the interactions between these forces. While this chapter takes a single angle in approaching this issue, it should be remembered that there are several ideas that are raised in passing throughout this chapter that offer promising paths for future investigation, such as the development of a discourse of gayness in relation to native Chinese terminologies, the role of publics and counterpublic in the novel, as well as the work *Beijing Story* itself as a public artifact.

Another potential future investigation could also concern the function of the concept of modernity. Not discussed in-depth above, both Handong's first wife, Lin Jingping, and Lan Yu are at times considered to be either not Chinese or more modern due to their proximity to foreignness, particularly Japan and America. The descriptions of these modern scenes are highly reminiscent of 1930s New Sensationalist descriptions of the "modern girl" and the potential for a comparative study there appears ripe. This would also allow us as literary scholars to draw lines in China's literary history and understand the residual conceptual categories that still inform contemporary writing.

It is my hope that my focus on something other than state-related interests, or at least the mediation of its presence through another lens, and the move away from political allegory can begin offering an alternative model to the more traditional reading methods. While I will be the first to concede that a focus on anything necessarily precludes a thorough investigation of other aspects, I believe that getting away from state politics is at the very least a good first step in broadening a limiting approach to Chinese literature and clears the field for future investigations. The example provided here uses two characters from a single story to elaborate a specific strategy and represents just that, a single example. Other strategies exist for articulating and clarifying the self within *Beijing Story* itself, let alone in other literary works and it is my hope that others will take up this call to identify what those are.

Notes

¹ *Beijing Story* is the title of the original manuscript from the internet, while *Lan Yu* is the title of the movie into which it was adapted. The formal publication of the novel was a result of the popularity of the adaptation and resulted in the change of its title to *Lan Yu* for the published edition.

² Rofel, *Desiring China*, 3.

³ Ibid., 3.

⁴ Ibid., 139.

⁵ Ibid., 140.

⁶ Xudong Zhang, *Postsocialism and Cultural Politics: China in the Last Decade of the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 15.

⁷ Haiyan Lee, *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900-1950* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 286.

⁸ Zhang, *Postsocialism and Cultural Politics*, 12.

⁹ Ibid., 13.

¹⁰ At the risk of making too universal a claim, I should note that while there was also a substantial portion of the population that may have disagreed with this formula, the draconian enforcement by the government and the incentive for citizens to police among themselves made this a near-universal reality. Even if one wanted to behave differently, the influence of those who did was not enough to change the tide of larger social behaviors (if not beliefs).

¹¹ The amount of sexual description in the formal publication of the story, entitled *Lan Yu*, is far less than that of the original posted online, both cited in the bibliography. A future investigation I hope to perform will be concerning the public-ation of sex and the normalizing impulse/effect of the publishing industry.

¹² Respectively: Remy Cristini, *The Rise of Comrade Literature: Development and Significance of a New Chinese Genre* (S.l: s.n., 2005); David L. Eng, "The Queer Space of China: Expressive Desire in Stanley Kwan's *Lan Yu*," *positions*. 18:2 (2010): 459-487; Wai Siam Hee 許維賢, "*Beijingzhiye de Xiongdimen: Cong "Pinhua Baojian" Dao "Beijing Gushi" de Duanxiu Luomanshi*" 北京之夜的哥儿们 : 从《品花宝剑》到《北京故事》的断袖罗曼史 (Brothers of the Beijing Night: From *Pinhua Baojian* to *Beijing Story's Cut-sleeve Romance*) *Chengshi Wenhua Pinglun* 城市文化评论 4 (2009): 192-204; Loretta Ho, "China's Opening Up," 2007.

¹³ Ho, "China's Opening Up," 180.

¹⁴ Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 56.

¹⁵ Ibid., 121.

¹⁶ Ho, "China's Opening Up," 184.

¹⁷ Ibid., 186.

¹⁸ Lee, *Revolution of the Heart*, 307.

¹⁹ Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," 69. Italics original.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid. Italics original.

²² For further discussion on critiques of Jameson, see Lee 17, 311.

²³ This is taken from an updated manuscript of a previously published article. Manuscript 6. For the original publication please see the bibliographic citation. All translations are my own.

²⁴ Hee 6. Original as follows: 小□似乎把當代中國政治國家余人民的一道難題，置換成一道男同志的愛情命題：忠誠和背叛。

²⁵ Ibid., 6. Original as follows: 国家与人民到底应该处于一种怎么样的关系？这在百年以来的中国根本无法说清。尤其在这半个世纪以降的中国，这个问题更不被允许说清，一切的争议似乎永远只能在忠诚和背叛的二元矛盾里互相移位而已。八十年代改革开放后的中国，毛主义可不可能跟红色资本家同床？作家只能把这些现实无法解决的问题，转化成艺术或美学的问题：两个男同志的相爱是可能的吗？如果忠诚的不可能性是一个性别的问题，那么背叛的可能性是不是一个国家的问题？

²⁶ Cristini, *The Rise of Comrade Literature*, 16.

²⁷ Hee, 7. Original Chinese as follows: [在面对这场学生运动的当儿,] 捍东的心情是极为矛盾的, 一方面从内部获知国家会对这批学生采取行动的时候, 他“也觉得早该动手了”, 不然“将来要做不成生意”²²; 另一方面他又无法阻止蓝宇在 6 月 3 日当晚走上街头, 捍东害怕会在这一晚失去蓝宇。他疯狂开着车在京城里乱转, 寻找蓝宇。

²⁸ Ibid., 7. Original Chinese as follows: 一場眾說紛紜的歷史事件, 轉化成老同志捍東和新同志藍宇的一場“出走—尋找—和解—調情—做愛”的過程。它暗喻著一個時代的轉折, 紅色資本家又找到一個跟毛主義調情的方式。

²⁹ Ibid., 7.

³⁰ Anonymous, 北京故事 *Beijing Gushi (Beijing Story)*, <http://www.xici.net/#u10778484/d39931708.htm>. Translation my own; Original Chinese as follows: 剛剛告別了死亡的恐懼, 我們開始互相撫摸。我們都在用互相的肉體來證明對方還活者。。。他漂亮的眼睛裡充滿了無限的陶醉。。。我的腦子裡只有一個念頭:‘我不能失去他!我不能!我不能!’我順勢將他按倒在地, 雙手捧著他的臉。我看著他的眼睛:‘我愛你!’我口出了對女人都沒有口過的, 在我認為是非常肉麻的話。我講的自然, 那是我唯一能想到的寓言……我們再一次沈醉在愛的激情中……那的確是愛, 口不僅僅是“性”。無論世人如何看待, 可我真的會經實實在在感受到這些, 每每回憶起來, 我仍激動不已。我的愛是看得見, 聽得到的, 可藍宇的愛, 我只能去感覺。(Ellipses original)

³¹ All citations are from an article presented at the 10th Junior Scholars Conference on Sinology held at the University of California from the 14th-18th of August, 2011. The final publication may vary from what is cited above.

³² Howard Chiang, “The Historical and Cultural Parameters of Queer Sinophonicity,” invited pre-circulated paper presented at the 10th Junior Scholars Conference on Sinology: Taiwan as Hub for Transculturation across the Pacific, Department of Literature, University of California, San Diego (14-18 August 2011), 9.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Anonymous, 北京故事 *Beijing Gushi (Beijing Story)*, <http://www.xici.net/#u10778484/d39931708.htm>. Original Chinese as follows: 我們在一起算什麼已經不重要, 重要的是我們幾乎天天在一起。。。我會小心的經常更換地方。我知道幾個 GAY 的場所, 但我從來不帶他去, 他就象塊完美無暇的玉, 我惟恐別人染指。

³⁵ Ahmed 120.

³⁶ Anonymous, 北京故事 *Beijing Gushi (Beijing Story)*, <http://www.xici.net/#u10778484/d39931708.htm>. Original Chinese as follows: 我第一次短命的婚姻結束了, 我為此失去了太多的東西!可正象藍宇口的, 有失必有得, 我得到了一個我從來不願承認, 卻是事實得驗證:無論程度多深淺, 我是一個同性戀者。

³⁷ For more, see the discussion of Sexology in Chapter 1.

³⁸ Anonymous, 北京故事 *Beijing Gushi (Beijing Story)*, <http://www.xici.net/#u10778484/d39931708.htm>. Original Chinese as follows: 不知史教授史對同性戀的社會危害性有強烈的緊迫感, 還是對我較多的諮詢費過意不去, 他堅持要給我一些建議, 我沒有聽下去。//我反覆地想著教授地“科學闡述”。我記得第一次交談時他曾問我:是只想尋求刺激地玩兒, 還是愛戀那個男孩, 我口我只是想玩兒。他口那沒關係, 那僅僅口明我的生活態度不嚴肅, 並不是真正的同性戀者。如果按這個邏輯解釋, 我

玩弄那些女孩是生活態度不嚴肅，我愛上他們才算是異性戀者，可我到目前還沒真正愛過那個女人，我算什麼呢？//我又想到他□藍宇將自己當成女孩的理論。藍宇的確對我有些女人似的依戀，他敏感，細緻，乖巧。可在另一些方面，我看到更多的是他自尊，自立，頑強，甚至勇敢的品質，這些□非女人專有。

³⁹ Ibid., 40. Original Chinese as follows: 那是指正經談戀愛的。

⁴⁰ Ibid., 54. Original Chinese as follows: “你相信同性之間會有永恆 地感情嗎？”

⁴¹ Ibid., 56. Original Chinese as follows: “我們不可能結婚……可我能給你的都給你了……你明白嗎？”我不知該如何表達。

⁴² Ibid., 57. Original Chinese as follows: 我不知道兩個男同志是否有可能終生廝守，但有人□他們最多好不過一年，我不能贊同，因為我曾和一個男孩非常愉快的生活了將近四年。

⁴³ Ibid., 54. Original Chinese as follows: “。。。那孩子可白對你‘一往深情’，‘守身如玉’了。”

⁴⁴ For more, see Chapter I.

⁴⁵ Anonymous, 北京故事 *Beijing Gushi (Beijing Story)*, <http://www.xici.net/u10778484/d39931708.htm>. Original Chinese as follows: “那天上午，我沒去公司，他也逃課了。我們第一次爭吵……“我不是沒和你講過，玩兒這個沒有那麼認真的！”我大聲向他吼著。“你玩兒什麼認真？”他聲音不大，可一針見血。“我不是那句話，想在一起就高高興興的，否則就算了！”我轉移話題。這話是威脅，我已經抓住他的弱點。“你是不是把當成。。。。”他大概再想個合適的詞。“我把你當成朋友，當成我弟弟，我再□一遍。別象個女人似的，疑神疑鬼的。”

⁴⁶ Ibid., 77. Original Chinese as follows: “其實中國自古就有‘南風’之□，有錢人向來視之為一‘樂兒’。您還記得蔡明吧？他也偶爾這麼玩兒。就是在一齊吃吃飯，聊天兒，沒別的……”我胡亂□著，只要能不讓老媽傷心就行。”

⁴⁷ Generally speaking, Ming literati were awarded a great number of freedoms as a result of their being perceived as highly cultured. This flexibility extended to sexual attitudes that encouraged taking male companions as a sign of their exceptionality. For more on this point please see: Sophie Volpp, “Classifying Lust: The Seventeenth-Century Vogue for Male Love” in the *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 61, no. 1 (Jun., 2001): 77-117.

⁴⁸ For more on this point, see: Judith Halberstam, “In A Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies and Subcultural Lives” (New York: New York University Press, 2005), Chapter 1.

CHAPTER IV

NEW HORIZONS AND THE ARRIVAL OF POST-QUEERNESS?

The preceding chapters have argued for the emergence of new epistemological horizons for Chinese subjects living in postsocialist China. The literary examples analyzed serve as evidence for not only the varying strategies subjects might employ to complete the process of reorienting their horizons, but also about how subjects who have undergone such a reorientation negotiate their positions in a society with which they are queerly/non-normatively at odds. Strategies for understanding the self can range from foreclosing the occupation of normative categories to oneself to fully occupying such categories and concealing the excess that the forcing of oneself into such a mold entails. Positioning oneself in a society with which one is at odds can also result in what can be understood as masochistic desire. As one learns to expect society's displeasure in response to one's queer lifestyle and receives it as recognition of one's success in actualizing the self, this creates a system where the subject successfully exists on a queer orientation that intersects with heteronormative principles. The examples analyzed here both gesture towards historical disorientations in which incommensurate lexicons and discursive categories are employed that simultaneously expand and delimit the possible horizons of the subjects in question and identify new processes for queer subject formation.

This idea of queerness is one that I use with caution and I want now to return to a question raised at the outset of this thesis concerning the value and applicability of queer theory to contemporary China. In his provocative article, "Why Queer Theory Needs

China,” Petrus Liu argues that the foundations of queer theory rest upon a binary division between the conceptual referents of the East and the West. Referencing Eve Sedgwick’s groundbreaking work *The Epistemology of the Closet*, Liu highlights her insistence that the conclusions she draws, “‘however sweeping,’ cannot be applied to cultures ‘outside the West,’” and concludes that the “mutually constitutive (or dialectical) relationship between homosexuality and heterosexuality within Western culture ‘as a whole’ is analytically predicated on the rejection of the totality of the world.”¹ Continuing to ground his argument historically, Liu turns to Foucault’s *History of Sexuality* and the division it articulates between *scientia sexualis* and *ars erotica*, concluding that “[t]he grouping of ancient Rome and China as interchangeable examples of *ars erotica* is justified by the view that non-Western societies, due to their lack of *scientia sexualis*, display a developmental stasis through the millennia.”² Given the emphasis placed on the value of history in this thesis and history’s ability to inform the present trajectories of bodies and objects, Liu offers a compelling range of evidence for queer theory’s necessary distortion and orientalization of the East. It should be remembered as well, however, that imagining a discrete notion of China more generally is dangerous and requires that we look to case studies for more tangible proof one way or the other.

Drawing from the analysis in the previous chapters, it is clear that, on some level, homosexuality and ideas of gayness have traveled to and influenced Chinese writers and society. It is also precisely these ideas that ultimately gave rise to queer theory in the United States. That queer theory has then been domesticated in Chinese cultural settings, to borrow from Ahmed, or contextualized, to borrow from Chiang, and effectively leveraged in new contexts, however, means that we are perhaps approaching a new point

in the development of queer studies as a field. More than a new point in the field, perhaps we have reached a point that exceeds the historical bounds of the field. In these concluding remarks I hope to explore briefly the thought of a post-queer world and the implications that might have on future research, in addition to complicating the preceding chapters.

Returning to the remark in the introduction that queer theory is indebted to a liberal tradition and that recognizing its historical groundings is a requisite obligation for fully understanding its potential range of uses, the queer readings successfully performed in this thesis indicate that something is amiss with this statement. To resolve this issue, Howard Chiang and Larissa Heinrich offer the idea of a queer sinophony, which helps to resolve the incommensurability of these two conceptual artifacts: “Situated at the double margins of Chinese and Queer studies, the concept of queer Sinophonicity suggests that both Chineseness and queerness find their most meaningful articulations in and through one another,” and come to serve as “mutual epistemological referents.”³ Their argument is productive because queerness and Chineseness are no longer discrete entities but concepts whose coherency depends on the changes experienced in the other. This idea of positing their relationship as mutually reinforcing is generative because it provides us yet again a connection to phenomenology and ultimately points towards a more fundamental reorientation.

To articulate more clearly the connection queer sinophonicity has to phenomenology, we return to a common object of discussion in the field, the (Husserl’s) table. It is at the table that Husserl first pondered a phenomenological approach to the world and it is this example that has proved useful time and again in articulating just how

objects and spaces relate to one another. In continuing this tradition, Ahmed also takes up the example of the table and discusses the changes that occur when objects are orientated towards each other and when they are not:

This body with this table is a different body than it would be without it. And, the table is a different table when it is with me than it would be without me. Neither the object nor the body have integrity in the sense of being ‘the same thing’ with and without others. Bodies as well as objects take shape through being orientated toward each other, as an orientation that may be experienced as the co-habitation or sharing of space.⁴

In terms of Chiang and Heinrich’s notion of a mutually constitutive queer sinophonicty, I believe they identify something conceptually important, namely that when these ideas are orientated towards one another they become something different than when they are orientated in other ways. Unlike the philosopher and the table, who arguably share a historical trajectory of being mutually inclined, queer theory historically speaking is of a separate order than Chinese studies and breaks from the formula above. I argue that by inclining these two objects towards each other, it represents a test of their flexibility to respond to historically incommensurate counterparts and opens space for queer moments that can overcome their supposed incommensurability and produce new lines.

Given the successful application of queer theory to Chinese literature in the previous chapters, it is worth pushing this point one step further. If we extend Ahmed’s analysis, to have two objects that are mutually inclined towards one another, or find one’s consistency through the relative positioning of the other, it might generate the creation of a discrete object with its own line. And while this new line is made of two independent components with two independent historical trajectories, the moment that they incline towards one another and intersect their ability to reproduce themselves and continue on their projected path comes into question. To make the change to being a singly perceived

yet doubly constituted object requires a queer moment in which both individual trajectories are halted by their very incommensurability and are disorientated, the resolution finding itself in the production of a doubly constituted single line.

The resolution to this disorientation then becomes a new object with a new history and broken past. How these pasts are negotiated is partially explored in the essays reviewed in this thesis, where terms of one discursive horizon can be evacuated and appropriated, or where terms from various histories can be simultaneously deployed to constitute a new kind of subject. What I think is fundamental to this move towards a queer sinophonicity is the combination of what are assumed to be discrete historical objects. What is fundamentally troubling in these scenarios is that the linear projection of oneself into the future is brought to a startling halt. Ahmed remarks that lines and horizons are always oriented towards organizing one's "arrival" and it is the mixing of these historical trajectories then that shatters the ability to arrive on the scene. While these moments of disorientation do facilitate the presence of something queer, they also gesture towards something more as they break from the historical traditions which once informed them. At the end of the day it is a question of histories: new, incommensurate, resurrected and borrowed.

What this means for the notion of queerness then, is that it may have seen the end of its use as a discrete object, at least in situations where the histories utilized by the subjects in question are not of the same trajectory. Queerness as an analytic category obviously has its uses, but the domestication and contextualization of this requires understanding its translated uses and how the desires of the subject instrumentalizing it direct its new line. While this may not mean a post-queer world, it does indicate a world

where the category of queer itself is no longer adequate for naming the analysis that is being performed. And I can appreciate Chiang and Heinrich's attempt to name a queer sinophonicity that is conceived as mutually constituted, as it moves us toward a recognition of this fact. What this means for the arguments made in this thesis is not all that drastic, as I have tried to remain careful in my deployment of the word queer in situations that are not explicitly anti-normative. Definitionally, queer still works for the majority of this chapter. Whether or not Ah-Lan and Handong are "queer subjects," or should perhaps be called "queer sinophone subjects," however, becomes a question that is open for interpretation and identifies a path I hope to investigate in the future.

In terms of the other goal of this thesis—to offer alternative and tenable methodological approaches to contemporary Chinese literature—it is my hope that the previous chapters speak for themselves to this point. By shifting the focus away from searches for national allegorical meaning in the analyzed texts, it is revealed that there are myriad forces at work in their construction that exist beyond the engrained horizon of Jameson's thesis. In terms of issues of gender and sexuality in China, the analysis in Chapter one reveals how such readings exist on false foundations that require the advance organization of relationships between sexual and national terms in order to function coherently and circulate the false metaphors used to promote the fantasy of its truth. In addition, chapter two reveals the degree to which political allegory is habitually deferred to in the analysis of contemporary Chinese texts. Critics can even acknowledge a work's lack of direct political relevance while continuing to search for its unspoken investment in the state. This is why I have offered a potential alternative reading by drawing from similar examples and contextualizing them differently. That is to say, by destabilizing the

centrality of state interests in my analysis, a new horizon of importance emerges and reveals what is missed under the allegorical gaze.

This raises several other interesting questions for future investigation. Assuming that the “battle between Freud and Marx” can safely be bracketed as an important yet not universally extendable lens by which to interpret the world, that leaves a potentially limitless number of alternative positions from which to establish one’s world view and find meaning. Briefly touched upon in chapter two, the development of public spaces within the postsocialist framework of contemporary China, as understood in the Habermasean sense assumed by Warner, is a position that I hope to investigate further. In her research, Loretta Wing Wah Ho identifies the internet as a potential space for the development of public spaces, as well as counterpublic spaces. An internet phenomena then that might serve as the basis for launching an investigation into the developing world of public spaces in China is the phenomenon of Danmei Xiaoshuo (耽美小□), perhaps more commonly referred to as Boy Love Fiction. Such an investigation, however, must continue to look more seriously at the dual forces of globalization and localization, as well as the new histories that are produced via the domestication and contextualization of transnational and transcultural ideas and consequently will require a larger historical endeavor than is undertaken here in order to properly situate any findings.

With the endless possibilities for future investigation, new methodologies for approaching Chinese literature are sure to abound. The new horizon offered here, of a queer, or even post-queer, reading is only a single approach selected from a larger field of possibilities. If we continue to incline our attention towards matters that are outside the perceived horizon of hegemonic reading practices, while it will take a commitment to

experiencing and navigating a perhaps unwanted sense of disorientation, the result is bound to be something new and valuable and offer an understanding of reality that has been previously undervalued or unrecognized. The histories we break from will never disappear, but it must be remembered that the ways they come to inform our bodily and discursive horizons, as well as contextualize our arrival as subjects, are able to be strategically instrumentalized by the subject to fit his/her desires. Stated far more simply, taking the world at its perceived face-value risks missing many of its fascinating and ever-changing features. It is this process of constant change, combined with our ability as individuals to piece together the trajectory of the world, which offers us constantly new and exciting points of departure.

Notes

¹ Petrus Liu, “Why Does Queer Theory Need China?” *positions: asia critique* 18:2 (Fall 2010): 300.

² Ibid., 301.

³ Howard Chiang, “The Historical and Cultural Parameters of Queer Sinophonicity,” 2.

⁴ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 54.

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