Queer Chinese Cultures and Mobilities

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Queer Chinese Cultures and Mobilities

Kinship, Migration, and Middle Classes

John Wei

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Introduction

On a bright summer night in 2013, I found myself in a small apartment with twenty people or so, sitting in front of a digital projection screen. It was a film-screening session hosted by a local gay and lesbian organization in Beijing. *Literature, Auteur, and Same-Sex Love: A Film Perspective* was the theme, and the film clips shown were edited and remixed from over a dozen English-language queer movies. Led by a guest speaker, we viewed these audiovisual materials and discussed the issue of love and romance in same-sex intimacy. After the screening, a few people gathered for dinner in a small restaurant nearby. They all looked quite young, save for the guest speaker, and some of them were apparently college students. We discussed film, literature, musical, opera, and other relevant topics over the meal. With their passion for film and art, these well-educated young men came to network with like-minded "queer comrades" and enjoy a night of quality entertainment.

This scene struck me as a completely different form of queer cultural practice in today's China. The exquisite taste in art-house cinema and the cinephilic euphoria lingering throughout the night served as a strong contrast to what I initially had in mind before putting myself in the field: cruising gay men lurking in public parks and toilets in search of sexual encounters, as depicted in the film *East Palace, West Palace* (*Donggong Xigong*, Zhang Yuan, 1996) and in early gay ethnographies conducted in China (e.g., Li and Wang 1993). The film club also felt strikingly different from the urban gay bars recorded in Elisabeth Engebretsen's (2014), Loretta Ho's (2010), and Lisa Rofel's (2007) fieldwork conducted in Beijing's queer communities. This urban queer film scene, together with other traditional and emerging forms of queer social and cultural practices, inspired me to embark on this journey to explore various types of queer cultures and mobilities in China and other Chinese societies in the early twenty-first century.

Chinese Societies in Transition

The rise of Asia (especially China) on the global stage has caught wide international attention and intellectual interest in its rapid and ongoing social transformations. The last three decades have witnessed several major legislative changes in various Chinese societies regarding sexual conduct between the same sex. In 1991, Hong Kong became the first Chinese society to decriminalize private sexual intercourse between two consenting male adults, although it was not until 2006 that the minimum age for consensual sex was equalized between homosexuals and heterosexuals.[1] Mainland China decriminalized inter-male sex in 1997 and depathologized homosexuality from the *Chinese Classification of Mental Disorders* in 2001.[2] Taiwan, in contrast, has never explicitly criminalized sodomy and homosexuality (Martin 2003, 12–14). It has also become the first Chinese society that bans discrimination based on sexual orientation in education and at work,[3] which set the tone for its endeavor to legalize same-sex marriage in 2017, after several unsuccessful attempts since 2003. Echoing the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) social activism thriving in the West, such transformations in legislation and medical science in the Chinese world have arguably raised the social visibility of sexual minorities, contributed to the development of local queer communities, and underscored the increasingly diverse queer cultures at the turn of the twenty-first century.

Almost two decades into its membership of the World Trade Organization (WTO), China has surpassed Japan to become the second-largest economy and overtaken the United States in key benchmarks to become the world's new economic leader.[4] As the new regional and global economic engine with a vast and fast-growing domestic market, mainland China has seen an influx of capital and talent from both the West and other Chinese societies, such as Hong Kong and Taiwan. Moreover, the return of Hong Kong's sovereignty to China (1997) and the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA) between mainland China and Taiwan (2010) have further tightened the connections among these Chinese societies. These changes have reshaped the production and circulation of queer cultures across traditional geographical and geopolitical boundaries. Along with the economic development and the further opening up of its domestic market, China has also put its cultural policies in transition.

In 2008, China's then-State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television (SARFT) banned cinematic portrayal of *tongxinglian* (homosexuality) in an official announcement but later abolished this announcement in 2010.[5] However, SARFT did not specify whether they had lifted the ban. On 17 May 2013, the International Day against Homophobia, Biphobia, and Transphobia, independent Chinese queer filmmaker Fan Popo applied for "Disclosure of Information" at the film bureau concerning the regulative policies for queer visual content (see CQIF 2013).[6] This rather political move called wide domestic and international

attention to China's film regulation and LGBT issues. The bureau replied that, after abolishing the policy specifically banning homosexuality on-screen, the clause in effect reverted to the previous one from the last century that banned all kinds of "obscene" visual content.[7] What counts as "obscene," however, is subject to the bureau's own interpretation without any clear definition.

But this ambiguity does leave a space, however limited, for the cinematic portrayal of queer characters in China's mainstream cinema. *Let the Bullets Fly* (*Rang Zidan Fei*, Jiang Wen, 2010), a box-office hit in the local film market, has a supporting male character self-mockingly expressing his attraction to the same sex. Albeit not the first gay character on China's commercial film screen, he is perhaps the first one without effeminate stereotyping, compared to previous portrayals of gay men in popular films such as *If You Are the One* (*Fei Cheng Wu Rao*, Feng Xiaogang, 2008). In a minor storyline of *Finding Mr. Right* (*Beijing Yushang Xiyatu*, Xue Xiaolu, 2013), a critically acclaimed commercial film, a Chinese woman in labor is accompanied by her lesbian partner and her American sperm donor. This might be Chinese audiences' first experience of cinematic lesbianism in China's commercial movie theatre. However, this very short sequence only shows a gentle kiss on the forehead between the lesbian couple after the childbirth, with the voiceover "let's bless them"; some viewers may not fully realize the lesbian undertone at all. *Sweet Eighteen* (*Tianmi Shibasui*, He Wenchao, 2012), a low-budget production released in China, also implicitly hides female same-sex intimacy in one of its multiple plotlines.

These transitions, albeit on one level minor and trivial, have opened up a space for the negotiation of queer cultural practices in the new millennium. The rapid development of technology and the rise of cyberculture and social media have also profoundly reshaped queer cultural production, circulation, and consumption. In addition to digital video production and grassroots queer filmmaking, the emergence of the camera-embedded smartphones has made phototaking and videoshooting even more accessible and affordable for average people without specialized knowledge and skills. Social networking services have also become integral to many people's life via the increasingly ubiquitous 3G/4G cellular networks and domestic and public Wi-Fi hotspots. These changes have begun to shift queer cultural productions and consumptions to digital screens—online queer social media, mobile dating apps, and digital queer films and video series, to name a few—which further underline the changing queer cultural landscape in the ongoing socio-technological transformations.

However, these social transformations do not suggest the realization of equal gay rights, nor do they imply a fundamental shift of the social ethos concerning transgressive sexualities in Chinese societies. The legislation of same-sex marriage or civil union, for example, has only seen progress in Taiwan—notwithstanding a strong local backlash and a failed referendum on 24 November 2018 to legalize same-sex marriage under the current Civil Code. Concealing

one's sexual orientation and marrying the opposite sex is still a common choice among same-sex attracted people, while quasi-marriage (*xingshi hunyin*, or a set of fake heterosexual marriages between a lesbian couple and a gay couple) is not uncommon as well, especially in mainland China. Centered in the Confucianist kinship values, filial piety has long been the dominant social discourse that sees hetero-reproductive relationships as both a familial responsibility and a socio-cultural ideal. Sexual minorities are still often stigmatized and marginalized in Chinese cultures, while queer film festivals and LGBT NGOs (non-government organizations) still face the authority's crackdown in mainland China.

The sociocultural transitions concerning queer sexualities in Chinese societies and the resilience of existing heteronormative sociopolitical structures have conjointly reshaped queer social and cultural practices in the twenty-first century. In the case of China, on the macro level, these transitions lead to the increased visibility of sexual minorities in cultural materials, cyberspaces, as well as the society at large, while the struggle of queer people against the dominant heteronormativity remains a prevalent theme in queer cultural productions and social practices. On the micro level, LGBT organizations and businesses are emerging both in China's urban queer communities and on digital platforms, while these organizations and businesses are still closely monitored by the authority and often struggling to secure a venue and a social space for their communal and commercial activities. Today, in short, while the changing social attitude towards queer people provides a somewhat positive environment for sexual minorities and queer cultures, the unchanged sex-related social norms and values remain strong and robust.

(Homo)capitalism without Democracy

Gender and sexual diversity is not necessarily contingent on a Western capitalist modernity. From Petrus Liu's thesis of "Queer Marxism" (2015) to Rahul Rao's critique of "Global Homocapitalism" (2015) and "Queer International Relations" (2018), recent scholarship on non-Western/non-white genders and sexualities tends to further disentangle the assumed correlations between queer cultures and global capitalist modernities and democracies. This body of literature, despite its various disciplinary origins and intellectual genealogies, elicits the arguments that (1) the mobilization of gender and sexuality is not necessarily a function of liberal-democratic and linear-progressive policies and politics; (2) similarly, it is not bound up with the "gay rights as equal rights" agenda that often comes through transnational capitalist expansion and liberal pluralism; (3) the development of global queer cultures does not always follow, nor does it necessarily benefit from, global capitalist production and its neoliberal reconfiguration of market and desire; and (4) contextual changes in LGBT-inclusive policies and legislation may further highlight the dependence of queer politics

on state actors, but the role of the state in regulating/reproducing queer desires should be further contextualized and problematized, be it through the lens of homonationalism or queer Marxism.

Capitalism is integral to the formations of both homophobia and homonormativity. Critics from the Left see capitalism as the root of modern homophobia, in the sense that it has created a need and a necessity to pass on private wealth to offspring and hence precludes non-reproductive desires between the same sex (Wolf 2004). John D'Emilio argues that it is the capitalist development that has made possible an independent gay identity and the emergence of "chosen family" out of the register of consanguineous kinship, when expanded wage labor and socialized production have undermined the material foundation of traditional family life and released sexuality from imperative procreation (1983). To that end, the capitalist free market has also enabled self-expression and placebo gay emancipation through consumption, even though such emancipation is not achieved through progression in state legislation or activist social reform (Puar 2006, 77). The folding of queer desire and sexuality in capitalist production has reproduced a homonormativity signaled by individual participation in the market and a consumerist sexual citizenship hailed by capitalism, in which queer people are recognized as good citizens not through their deviant genders and sexualities but through their contribution to the market and to capitalist production and consumption.

In the new millennium, the neoliberal reconfiguration of capital and labor has continued to underline international development bureaucracies, while the leading institutions of global capitalism such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have extended their developmental agenda from gender equality to equal LGBT rights. These shifts are expected to create workplaces and economies that are more inclusive to improve the efficiency in the allocation of labor resource and human capital, when gender/sexuality-based exclusions are believed to be financially costly for capitalist production (Rao 2015, 38–39). The neoliberal states, whose function lies in creating and securing a free market, are hence incentivized to pass legislation to protect gay rights in employment, education, military, and other social institutions. Globally, as poor countries are believed to be more homophobic with less gender equality, economic incentives (e.g., the injection of capital) have been offered by their more developed neighbors in the West if they take up the inclusive gay rights agenda underpinned by neoliberal capitalist expansion, while economic punishment (e.g., the withdrawal of capital) may follow if they fail to comply (see Rao 2015 for case studies). The issue of gender and sexual equality has been reworked into global capital and labor resource allocation in the name of financial aid and international collaboration, reminiscent of a colonial "civilizing" mission in its promise of growth through a singular model of development (Rao 2018, 142).

China, a willing recipient of and an active contributor to global capitalist expansion with its particular trajectory of growth, has benefited greatly from the neoliberal blueprint of development while simultaneously remaining more or less immune to some of capitalism's assumed imperatives. As a beneficiary of globalization, China has been actively participating in the international market led by the West (e.g., through the WTO) while at the same time undermining its rules and principles set by Western countries. Controversial as it is, China has proved its capability in growing its economy and society without resorting to a liberal-democratic political and social system commonly found in the West that is often assumed necessary for continued (capitalist) economic development. After more than four decades of strong growth, China has started to assert its economic power and geopolitical ambition to become a new regional and global leader—a privilege previously grasped tightly by the more developed superpowers in the West. For those who remain skeptical, China has shown its determination through its previous and ongoing successes in pursuing its power and growth on its own track.

This is conjoined by a narrowing civil society when China's political leaders have further tightened their control on media, academia, NGOs, and many other aspects of public and social life. The middle classes who have benefited from the country's economic miracle lack the motivation and incentive for change and reform, as any social upheavals may put their hard-earned and newly acquired wealth at risk, while the pervasive nationalist yearning for China's revival engineered by the state has been increasingly satisfied by the country's rise to power on the regional and global stage. The Western world has also become more dependent on China since the turn of the twenty-first century, thanks to the opportunities China has offered in trade, business, and investment through its continued supply of skilled labor and international students and tourists, as well as its newly emerged urban middle classes with a large and growing appetite for global consumption. The relation with China has become crucial for many countries in their post-global financial crisis (GFC) recovery amid a series of social, economic, and political crises facing today's Western Europe and North America. The West has become somewhat reluctant to offend China for fear of the latter's economic retaliation, although the ongoing clashes in trade, cybersecurity, and intellectual property have further complicated the geopolitical tensions between China and the West.

That is to say, while China opened its doors and participated in the global capitalist development, the liberal-democratic progression and the human rights agenda that usually accompany Western capitalist expansions have been stopped by the authoritarian regime at its doorstep. The West has lost its bet on China—the long-anticipated political reform is unlikely to come—and the once-motivated local queer activists have been disappointed that the political conditions do not allow a reformist agenda based on a gay-rights/equal-rights model.

This may change in the future, but the past and recent evidence does not suggest an optimistic way moving forward. The current political status has largely throttled queer activists' dream that China will follow a Western (predominately US) paradigm that enables gay emancipation nested in a liberal, progressive model that China will eventually follow. This dream has long been nurtured by various LGBT activists and organizations supported by their Western counterparts since the turn of the twenty-first century, through which they have been saliently and laudably encouraging queer people's self-acceptance, leading and facilitating community building, and raising the public awareness of gender and sexual diversity. Their reformist agenda, in contrast, has been less fruitful and may have politicized queer issues in the eyes of the authority because of their equal-rights approach and their connections with Western NGOs, which are both deemed potentially subversive and regularly cracked down on by the party-state.

The problems here are not only political but first and foremost cultural and social. At the cultural level, Chinese people have long been obsessed with a Confucianist familism centered on (1) reproduction and the continuation of the family line and (2) filial piety and the obedience to parental authority. These have jointly maintained and reproduced a hierarchical Confucianist family and social order that has been a cornerstone of Chinese culture and society throughout its long history. Non-reproductive queer sexualities are apparently at odds with this long-lasting cultural ideal, while an independent gay identity and lifestyle enabled by a capitalist market economy outside the nexus of the family appear incompatible with the fundamental Confucianist social order and hierarchy. This incompatibility between the modern constructions and practices of homosexuality and the Confucianist family and kinship structure has deeply troubled queer people in Chinese societies. At the societal level, thanks to various social upheavals throughout its modern history, China's premodern inclusiveness of sexual diversity has also been replaced by an intolerance of gender and sexual deviance based on an obsolete Western sexology that is still strong and robust. The identity-based modern LGBT politics from the West may have raised the social visibility of queer people in China but also reinforced existing social stigma and intolerance of same-sex attracted people based on an essentialist belief of sexuality. Despite various developments in legislation and public health policy at the turn of the twenty-first century, recent census data still indicate a prevalent lack of social acceptance of homosexuality in today's China (see Hu 2016; Xie and Peng 2018).

This is why the noble cause of "equal rights" in Western LGBT activism seldom attracts a large support in China's queer communities and wider society: it is inherently a different mode that neither resonates with Confucian culture nor appears compatible or indeed relevant to China's social condition and convention. Its curtailed ability in addressing the sociocultural underpinnings of the difficulties and challenges facing queer people has frustrated the most

willing followers of its agenda. To put it another way, the lack of progression of LGBT rights in China owes not only to the political constraints and a highly concentrated and increasingly consolidated single-party leadership, but more fundamentally to the lack of collective sociocultural groundings of the liberalist gay rights claim. Even if we recur to the neoliberal model of labor-resource reconfiguration and its underlying imperative of capitalist growth, the potential gain in productivity through a more LGBT-inclusive economy still fails to present a strong incentive to overtake the predominant cultural ideal of the Confucianist familism that has been sustaining Chinese society for two thousand years. This deeply rooted and widely held family and social order appears particularly strong and robust that rejects the folding of gender and sexual diversity merely into the capitalist process and liberal social progression in the name of modernity and development. Rather, at both the state and the societal level, the tsunami of global capitalist expansion seems to have further provoked a resurgence of and a stronger holding onto traditional Chinese cultures and values against Western influences, offering a striking contrast to the neoliberalization of China's urban cultures that is often attributed to China's participation in global capitalist production.

While it is erroneous to locate China's queer cultures and social practices completely in its economic development and modernization, attributing China's queer issues as "merely cultural" is equally negligent and oblivious to the capitalist reconfiguration of gender and sexual diversity. Indeed, queer issues are most saliently hailed in China through the process of capitalist development and consumption, exemplified by the popularity of the venture-capital-driven mobile gay dating apps and social networking services in China's emerging "pink" (queer) economy. When China's social, cultural, and political conditions offer a rather limited space for transgressive genders and sexualities, the economic realm seems to be the most promising place where queer issues are visibly tolerated by the state and financially incentivized by the country's private sector.[8] This appears redolent of Lisa Duggan's critique of "a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption," which is essentially a homonormativity that fails to contest the dominant heteronormativity and its social, cultural, and political institutions (2003, 50).

More important, although China's development does not dissolve its sociocultural preclusion of non-reproductive queer sexualities, the capitalist reconfiguration of the labor force and human capital has fundamentally changed queer cultures and social practices, making queer issues inseparable from the process of neoliberal capitalist expansion and its many imperatives and contingencies. First, migrations within and beyond China have become increasingly common among today's young people for better education and employment. These development-induced migrations have shifted the focus of queer issues from within the family to a long-distance kinship structure between queer

people and their families of origin, underpinned by their increased geographical mobilities and desire for social mobilities. Second, the mobilized migrating bodies and desires have also contributed to the increasingly frequent and fluid queer cultural flows across traditional boundaries, where China's expansive growth and capital power has made it a focal point in regional and global queer Sinophone/Chinese-language cultural mobilities. On top of that, driven by a development-induced desire for a better life through upward social class migration, the pervasive and zealous pursuits of social mobilities in today's China have further continued and sustained existing social inclusion and exclusion along the lines of not only gender and sexuality but also who has the power for capital accumulation and who has access to capital.

In other words, gender and sexual injustice may find its roots in the lack of equality in both economic distribution and sociocultural recognition; the former precludes those with less access to capital and material wealth from exercising their voices, while the latter precludes their voices from being heard and recognized on an equal footing. Along with China's rapid rise and growth, queer people's lack of social recognition has been increasingly conjoined with the issue of development and distribution. If the low sociocultural acceptance depicts a hopeless future for queer people, then the development-induced mobilities in pursuing educational, cultural, social, and economic capital may offer a slim hope through which a privatized, depoliticized queer future may be possible in a country like China. That said, development itself does not solve the issue of sociocultural misrecognitions of gender and sexual diversity, nor does it address the problem of the widening inequality in capital and wealth distribution. Overall, the emerging and established forms of queer mobilities (and, in any case, immobilities) have started to challenge our previous understandings of queer issues in China and other Chinese societies and communities. We urgently need new lenses and frameworks in social analysis and cultural critique to make sense of today's ongoing social transformations concerning queer people as well as the changing queer cultural landscapes, when China is marching into internal economic reform and ambitious international expansion for its great dream of revival in the twenty-first century.

Queer Cultures and Queer Mobilities

It is against this backdrop that I situate this book in post-2008 queer Chinese cultures and social practices. The year 2008 arguably marked several historical moments in China that conjointly opened a new era. In addition to the Summer Olympic Games held successfully in Beijing, 2008 marked the thirtieth anniversary of China's reform and opening up (*gaige kaifang*) that led to the country's strong development in three consecutive decades as the world's fastest-growing economy. The year 2008 also marked the beginning of the second decade

of Hong Kong's rule under China, and the tightened connections between mainland China and Taiwan, when the Kuomintang (the Chinese Nationalist Party) regained leadership and began to ameliorate its cross-strait relation.[9] In a broader context, 2008 witnessed the peak of the GFC that led to a worldwide economic downturn, although China managed to avoid a recession despite a slowdown in its growth. Escaping the GFC relatively unscathed when many advanced economies in the West contracted, China has become increasingly confident in its global power assertion and geopolitical ambition over the ensuing decade vis-à-vis the sluggish recovery of the West. Since the GFC, local and global investors and businesses have also been eagerly searching for new opportunities in emerging economies and markets (such as China's gay market), while transnational collaborations on cultural productions have helped boost capital injection and redistribute potential financial risks. It was also in 2008 that Google android devices first appeared on the market and began to bring affordable smartphones to consumers, after the debut of Apple's more expensive iPhone in 2007, and foresaw the popularity of mobile social networking and locative dating apps. Within merely a few years, the smartphone had become integral to many people's day-to-day life as well as the new frontier in queer sociocultural practices and mobilities. In short, 2008 was a turning point that triggered a series of ongoing social, political, economic, and technological transformations that have been shaping and reshaping queer social and cultural practices in China and other Chinese societies in the early twenty-first century.

The emergence of a disparate and diverse range of queer cultural and social practices both online and on the ground since 2008 has provided a wide array of cultural materials and sociological data for critical analysis and investigation. Germinated from my interest and background in film and media studies, this project identifies and locates post-2008 queer Chinese cultures and mobilities across three interrelated and expansive cultural domains and social spaces: queer video/filmmaking and autobiographical queer cinemas; urban queer communities and queer film clubs (i.e., regular communal film screenings and discussions); and mobile queer social networking platforms and large-scale online queer communities.[10] I treat these socioculturally contextualized and contested spaces and practices of non-conforming genders and sexualities as rich and deep social and cultural reservoirs that offer a certain breadth and depth through which we can gain a substantive insight into the lived experiences and expressions of queer people.

At any rate, I was less concerned with the aesthetics, forms, and styles of queer cultural materials than with the underlying social issues behind them.[11] In other words, I look both at and through these materials and practices as vehicles to scrutinize the wider social changes and cultural shifts concerning queer communities and mobilities. Along this line, I have identified *kinship*, *migration*, and *middle classes* as the three key points in post-2008 queer Chinese cultures, as

these themes have most frequently surfaced and resurfaced across all the queer cultural realms and social spaces that I have investigated in this research and empirically experienced in the past fifteen years or so in China's queer communities both online and on the ground. Indeed, these three factors all play essential roles in today's queer Chinese sociocultural practices. First, kinship has always been the top concern among queer Chinese people when their sexualities are at odds with the fundamental Confucianist family and social order. Second, queer kinship has been further complicated by the growing internal and international migrations as a result of China's ongoing economic development since the turn of the twenty-first century. Third, one's social position and class affiliation have a significant impact on the process of migration and kinship negotiation, to the extent that mobility is often a privilege and kinship negotiation may heavily depend on one's socioeconomic status.

These three elements conjointly constitute what might be termed *queer mobilities*—the motions (geographical relocations) and emotions (psychological readjustments) of queer people and their families across the queer/non-queer and local/non-local boundaries in the intersections of geographical, cultural, and social class migrations. In the first instance, the increasingly frequent internal and international migrations have separated queer people from their families of origin and inevitably changed today's queer kinship structure in China and other Chinese societies (the result of *geographical mobilities*). Second, the flows of queer cultures along the migration routes have become increasingly diverse and fluid across national and geographical boundaries (the manifestations of *cultural mobilities*). Third, it is the pursuit of upward social mobility and social class migration that drives people to leave home and embark on migration journeys (the underlying driving force of *social mobilities* and the stratifying force of inter- and intra-class segregations). On top of that, "queer" itself delineates gender and sexual mobilizations beyond traditional boundaries; it is hence impossible to talk about queer cultures without considering and evoking the issue of mobility. Speaking of queer kinship, migration, and social class, we are essentially talking about *how today's queer cultures are shaping and shaped by post-2008 queer mobilities in China and other Chinese societies and communities*.

Although the term "queer mobility" is hardly a neologism, my project reconsiders and requalifies this concept through a triple lens: (1) the horizontal, geographical relocation of people, (2) the multidimensional cultural flows and counterflows, and (3) the vertical upward social class migration. This reconsideration of gender and sexual mobilities owes to two parallel sets of scholarship: mobility studies and queer geographies. First, since the "mobile turn" and the "global turn" of social sciences in the late 1980s, we have actively recast mobility from a sideline "epiphenomenon of more basic material, social or cultural formations" (D'Andera, Ciolfi, and Gray 2011, 150) to "an evocative keyword for the twenty-first century and a powerful discourse that creates its own effects and

contexts" (Hannam, Sheller, and Urry 2006, 1). Mobilities have become less an option than an obligation as a fundamental sculpting and ordering force in contemporary life, ranging from micro-level daily commuting to macro-level transnational flows of capital and culture (Gössling and Stavrinidi 2016).[12] This mobile shift has enabled us to reframe the issue of gender and sexual diversity through the lens of mobilities. Queer theory, in its anti-fixity propagation for more fluid and flexible gender and sexual expressions and experiences, thus finds an intellectual alliance with mobility studies in their anti-sedentism common ground.[13]

Second, both a "sexual turn" and an "emotional turn" have become evident and prevalent in the interrogations of mobility experiences that consider sexuality and affection as two critical, if not decisive, forces in the imagination and enactment of migration (Mai and King 2009, 296). This dual lens effectively highlights the lived experiences and affective labor of mobility and migrancy that encompass feelings, desires, and memories in spatiotemporal movements. The emotion thus finds its material bearing and grounding in the motion and mobilization of the body, the forefront carrier of feelings and desires in the pursuit of love and comfort through migration, which has been a major focus in queer geographies and geographies of sexualities (Gorman-Murray 2009, 441–47).[14] These developments in mobility studies and humanistic geographies have laid a solid foundation for the interrogations in this book of the conditions and consequences of queer cultures and mobilities in twenty-first-century China and other Chinese societies and communities.

Politics of Sexual Identities

The ongoing social transformations have paralleled the development and diversification of sexual identities and identity-based politics in Chinese societies across everyday vernaculars and academic research. Terminologically, various identity labels have been adopted to describe sexual minorities: *memba* in Hong Kong (Kong 2011a), *piaopiao* in Chengdu (Wei 2006, 2007a, 2007b), and *gaizu* in Taiwan (Lim 2008a)—although these regional slang terms are less known in the Chinese world as a whole.[15] Other terms such as "same-sex," androphilia/gynephilia, and men who have sex with men (MSM) and women who have sex with women (WSW) are mainly used by researchers in social sciences and in public health and HIV/AIDS intervention. However, there exist numerous widely adopted and highly contested identity labels including homosexual or *tongxinglian*, gay and lesbian, LGBT(Q), *tongzhi*, *jiyou*, and queer or *ku'er*. These identity labels have presented more complicated issues in the negotiations and reproductions of sexual identity politics in Chinese societies under the influence of the intermingled localizing and globalizing forces since the turn of the twenty-first century.

The birth of homosexual/*tongxinglian* as a sexual category was an interesting case in China. In the West, it was not until 1869 that journalist Károly Mária Kertbeny published his coinage of the terms *heterosexual* and *homosexual*, a dualism soon picked up by sexologists and psychoanalysts to categorize human sexualities (Bonnet 1997). Since then, social understandings of sexuality were increasingly folded into a dichotomous medical and pathological discourse (see Foucault 1978). In China, intimate same-sex bonding was visible throughout its ancient history and often described with poetic metaphors in lieu of pathologized sexual classifications (see Xiaomingxiong [1984] 1997; Hinsch 1990; Vitiello 2011; Wu 2004).[16] Same-sex desires and heterosexual reproductions were not considered mutually exclusive, and those involved in same-sex relationships were often able to maintain a heterosexual and reproductive marriage. This attested to "the prevalence of bisexuality over exclusive homosexuality" in premodern China (Hinsch, 11)—or, more accurately, a fluid way to balance one's familial/ patrilineal responsibility with the object-choice of one's sexual desire before the modern categorizations of homosexuality and bisexuality came into being.

However, the nuanced and fluid same-sex tradition was reduced to silence when the imperial period came to an end and China underwent dramatic social upheavals from the mid-nineteenth century through to the first half of the twentieth century. Humiliated at the hands of Western colonists, China went through a series of social transformations aiming to reform and strengthen the country. Especially during the Self-Strengthening Movement (*Yangwu Yundong*, 1861–1895), whose slogan was "learning the Western strengths to strengthen ourselves," and the New Culture Movement (*Xin Wenhua Yundong*, 1915–1921) that valued science and democracy as China's salvation, Chinese people began to frantically cast away traditional cultural values for a new society established on a Western paradigm. Roughly at the same time, sexologists in the West began to construct new medical knowledge on homosexuality, which was imported by then-Chinese intellectuals who were borrowing modern science from the West to modernize China, often through Japanese translations of Anglo-European texts when Japan was also undergoing social reforms and modernization driven by Western colonialism and internal social upheavals.

Thus, the categorization and the knowledge of homosexuality were imported from the West when China and Japan eagerly looked at Western modernity and scientific knowledge as a model for their own survival. The Chinese word *tongxinglian* originated from the term *tongxing'ai*, literally "same-sex love," a direct adoption of the Japanese word *doseiai* that was in turn a transliteration of the English word "homosexuality."[17] That is to say, China's more nuanced premodern understanding of same-sex intimacy was reshaped and reproduced by the imported modern, Western classification and pathology of homosexuality (Chou 2000, 249; Hinsch 1990, 139–66; Kang 2009, 2010; Wu 2004, 3–5).[18] Since then, the conduct-based sexual practice was to some extent replaced by the modern

scientific discourse that criminalized and pathologized non-normative sexualities.[19] When the native same-sex cultures were cast away together with other traditional values, the Chinese Civil War (1927–1950) led to the establishment of the Marxist-socialist regime in mainland China and the retreat of the Kuomintang to Taiwan. During the Cold War, socialist China was mostly cut off from the West—the origin of the imported sexology where knowledge of sexuality continued to develop.

More important, the umbilical Chinese traditions including premodern same-sex cultures were further cut off in China in the nationwide pursuit of Maoism and the rejection of "obsolete" premodern values during various social upheavals, including the massively destructive Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). What remained from early sexual cultures was further denied and despised, although same-sex intimacy was still practiced (and punished once discovered) through these turbulent times (Kang 2018). When China once again opened up to the world, the obsolete sexual norms imported from the West at the turn of the twentieth century were taken for granted by Chinese people and had become so shockingly strong and robust that even today's more advanced sexology from their source of origin (the West) cannot overthrow them (Hinsch 1990, 165–71).[20] This is why, in today's Chinese parlance, the term *tongxinglian* still conveys the image of pathologized sexual deviants who need medical diagnosis and treatment. In some school textbooks in mainland China, for example, *tongxinglian* is still described as a disease and homosexuals as patients (*huanzhe*).[21] Partially due to this derogatory connotation, "homosexual" and "*tongxinglian*" have gradually lost their appeal among same-sex attracted people, in Western countries and Chinese societies alike, and have often been replaced by other sexual identity categories such as gay and lesbian, or *tongzhi* and *jiyou*.

The power of the term "gay" probably lies in its simplicity with only three letters and one syllable, constituting the most concise articulation of sexuality that proclaims a certain identitarian empowerment. This English term probably spread to China in the 1990s. In Li Yinhe and Wang Xiaobo's pioneer research of same-sex attracted man in Beijing (1993), none of their informants self-identified as "gay" in the late 1980s. But in the revised edition that includes follow-up research (Li 1998), many interviewees directly used the English word "gay" as self-identification while describing heterosexuals as "straight." In this case, the influence of Western gay emancipation contributed to the emergence of a self-conscious gay identity and a minoritarian and identitarian awareness among queer Chinese people, underpinned by China's continued participation in the global capitalist development through which the consequences of globalization had become more prominent in gender and sexual mobilization. The gay-straight dichotomy essentially follows the same pattern as the homosexual-heterosexual binary but has largely moved away from pathology and sexology. That is to

say, this identity label has empowered the once criminalized and pathologized homosexuals "to be cheerful and gay" (pun intended).[22]

Such identification has also granted people a sense of connection with their Anglo-American counterparts in the transnational and global flows of gay cultures. However, this "global gayness" (Altman 1996, 1997, 2001) derived from Western, urban, white, male, middle-class gay cultures may appear inadequate in addressing the cultural and historical specificities of local same-sex desires and traditions in China (Rofel 2007, 85–110). In a broader context, it also underlines the emergence of an imagined global gay community of "horizontal comradeship" that potentially flattens the differences among various cultural locales, although this critique risks a "cultural particularism" that claims what it represents is unproblematically authentic and genuinely different (Chiang 2014a, 27–36). At any rate, it is equally problematic to conflate Western and Chinese gay cultures or to argue for a unique Chinese gayness that circumvents global flows of gay texts and images and completely marks itself off from the global gay community.[23]

However, "gay" is probably one of the most problematic identity labels, and those self-identified as "gay" in Chinese societies are not often fully aware of its connotations. The term "gay" was first and foremost a synonym of "cheerful" before it became an alternative and less pathological descriptor of homosexuals.[24] In today's vernacular, the word "gay" has often become associated with a certain level of pride and self-consciousness about one's sexuality and an expressive desire to declare and proclaim one's sexual self. More important, in today's English parlance, "gay" often alludes to a pejorative stereotype associated with a flamboyant quality, a metrosexual glamour and flair, and perhaps a "drama queen" personality that is inseparable from the homocapitalism and the late-modern consumerism discussed above. Then what about those who do not identify with such culturally marked and self-reflexive body images and gay habitus? What about those who do not share the gay-style pride and self-awareness? What about those who dislike the unapologetic, identitarian, and minoritarian conception of gay individuality and sexuality?[25] Has the label "gay" confined them, as much as it has freed others? Are they gay (cheerful) to be gay?

On top of that, to quote Kai Wright's writing of queer youth of color in the US out of context, gay people are understood as "white people . . . with a proud, self-proclaimed sexual identity" (2008, viii). At any rate, the intertwined *gayness* and *whiteness* have little to do with the lived experiences of sexual minorities in China. Their experiences and understandings of themselves may not resonate with, or appear relevant to, the "whiteness of gayness" (107) and the "gay euphemism" (77) in the West. If we simply label same-sex attracted people in China as "gay," we risk assigning them an identity category that some of them can come out with but never fully belong to. Even though many of them self-identify as "gay," they are not often aware of the connotations attached to this label, while

the "gayness" that they have experienced in China and other Chinese societies may be very different from that of their Anglo-American counterparts.[26]

To further complicate the case of sexual identities, while "gay" sometimes serves as a gender-neutral term for both men and women in English-speaking countries, this word is unmistakably linked to male-male bonding in Chinese societies. Gender-distinctive terms such as "lesbian" and the Chinese term *lala* are instead often adopted for inter-female intimacy. "Lesbian" is a word sometimes attributed to ancient Greek poetess Sappho, who resided on the Greek island of Lesbos and whose poetry proclaimed her love of female (Bonnet 1997, 147–48). The history of its usage in designating same-sex desires and intimacies is probably longer than that of "gay."[27] The emergence of Chinese lesbians was also contingent on the reconstructed local understanding of women and homosexuality based on imported Western physiology, sexology, and social theory (Sang 2003, 15). In Chinese societies, the label *lala* has become popular as the nickname variant of "lesbian," given that the Chinese word *la* puns on *les*, which derives from the character *La-zi* in the renowned Taiwanese lesbian novel *The Crocodile's Journal* (*Eyu Shouji;* see Martin 2003, 224–36).

"Gay" and "lesbian" have in turn formed part of the shorthand LGBT(Q), which is also well known and widely adopted in China's queer communities. Here, grouping various sexual preferences and practices in a single alphabet mixture may potentially obscure the differences among and within each and every category, insomuch as the needs, demands, and interests often vary across and within different sexual minority groups. More important, how many identity labels will be enough? When the term "queer" was first borrowed by social activists from queer theory to append LGBT, they were already hoping that the newly added "Q" could become an umbrella term to cover different gender and sexual categories. However, once an analytical weapon in our theoretical arsenal has been reduced to the simple capital letter Q in social activism, it becomes yet another somewhat essentialist category that queer theory tried to criticize in the first place, as well as another label that not everyone is comfortable to identify and come out with. Since then, we have continued to add more labels to create an alphabet soup of LGBTQQIAAP.[28] More recently, this has become the more concise but equally tasteless LGBTQ+. Appending a plus sign ("+") to LGBTQ marks the latest attempt to include potentially indefinite gender and sexual categories as we continue to create more labels along with our diverse sociocultural practices. One day we may realize that not every difference needs a prescribed label and not everyone is willing to be reduced to and represented by a symbol, be it a capital letter or a mathematical sign.

While these Western creations never fully fit in Chinese cultures, the label of *tongzhi* has flourished in Chinese societies since the early 1990s. *Tong* literally means "same," while *zhi* can be understood as *zhixiang* (goal, aspiration, ambition, or intention). *Tongzhi*, a fixed iamb meaning "the same goal," was first

used in *The Discourses of the States* (*Guoyu*), an ancient collection of historical records dated to the fifth to the fourth centuries BCE (Tang and Qu 2008, 270). The modern meaning of *tongzhi*—people who share the same political ideology or who belong to the same political party—was borrowed from the West at the turn of the twentieth century through the Japanese translation of the English word "comrade." Its popular use is frequently attributed by historians to the dying wish of Sun Yat-sen, founding father of Republican China: "revolution is not yet accomplished and *tongzhi* must endeavor to carry it on." After the establishment of the socialist PRC (People's Republic of China), *tongzhi* also became widely adopted as a friendly, politically correct, potentially equalizing, and gender-ambiguous term for people to address and greet each other in everyday life.[29]

The appropriation of *tongzhi* for homosexuals was first introduced in 1989 by the organizer of the inaugural Hong Kong Lesbian and Gay Film Festival and disseminated to Taiwan's Golden Horse Film Festival in 1992 and then to mainland China in the mid- to late 1990s (Chou 2000, 2; Lim 2008a, 237; Tang and Qu 2008, 271). Chou Wah-shan argues that the term *tongzhi* implies a "sameness" between the pathologically divided homosexuals and heterosexuals and potentially transforms the former from sexual perverts to equal citizens who share the same feeling of love and intimacy (2000).[30] The emergence and popularity of *tongzhi* as a native same-sex identity label and sociopolitical discourse further diversifies and problematizes local sexual identity politics in various Chinese societies. However, for those who grew up in mainland China in and before the 1990s, it is still rather uncanny to apply this term to sexual minorities, as it used to be the daily vernacular they adopted to address each other. This local term may also cause confusion in international liaison between Chinese and overseas LGBT organizations. Beijing *Tongzhi* Center, a prestigious NGO well known in the local queer communities, has chosen "Beijing LGBT Center" as its English name despite the completely different implications and genealogies of the two terms. Due to its strong political and historical underpinnings, the term *tongzhi* has gradually lost its charm among the younger generation in mainland China to new identity labels such as *jiyou*.

As a slang term, *jiyou* literally means "gay friend" or "gay buddy." This neologism changes the Cantonese transliteration of gay ("*gei*") to its Mandarin pronunciation ("*ji*") and bridges it with the Mandarin character *you* ("friend," literally). In Cantonese-language areas, "gay men" are often called "*gei-lo*" in which "*lo*" denotes "male" but also connotes "men from the lower social classes" and is hence classist and sexist (neglecting same-sex attracted women) at the same time (Chou 2000, 79). The new portmanteau *jiyou*, however, wipes off the classism and most of the derogatory meaning of *gei-lo*. Its designation of "gay friend" relocates homosexuality into the register of "friendship" and frees it from pathology and sexology, as I have discussed elsewhere (Wei 2012), as

well as from Western-style gay euphemism and local *tongzhi* politics. *Jiyou* soon became a popular term designating all kinds of intimate bonding in both online and offline vernaculars, often in the form *hao jiyou* ("good gay friend"). There has also emerged a gender-distinctive feminine label *hao li you*—literally "good beautiful friend."

This set of terms has been adopted by the young generation to describe and make sense of same-sex intimacies, albeit in a rather jocular way. Having emerged recently at the dawn of the 2010s, *jiyou* is better understood as an outcome of the intermingled local sex-related values and traditions, the influence of Western gayness, the vibrant cybercultures and youth cultures in China, and the (con)fusion among English, Cantonese, and Mandarin. In this sense, the term itself has become a site to negotiate sex-related desires in a globalizing world when the social visibility of queer people is gradually increasing in China. In his study of the use of *jiyou* among college students, Wei Wei (2017) sees the term as both a demonstration of homosociality and an identity management strategy to renegotiate the public display of heteromasculinity. When this term is generalized beyond the scope of homosexuality, *jiyou* becomes less an identity label than a way to understand same-sex social bonding by young Chinese people. Because of its jocular nature and ambiguous and expansive connotations, *jiyou* remains a problematic term despite its popularity among the youth.

This is why we need the term "queer"—as an analytical tool and conceptual framework, not an umbrella identity category. "Queer" as in queer theory has been a highly contested term adopted by scholars and artists in both the East and the West. Marching into its fourth decade and having generated a vast intellectual and artistic repertoire, queer theory offers invaluable insights into the social construction of sexual identity categories and the problem of identity politics. However, those of us working under the "queer" banner do not necessarily agree with each other on the use of "queer" in different contexts; after its initial emergence as an analytical and critical tool, queer theory itself has become a polyphony chirping in different branches of cultural and social theories.[31] I understand queer theory as a view that draws attention to the social construction of our understandings of gender and sexuality, challenges the fixity of sex-related categories and identity-based politics, and questions the dualist, naturalist, and essentialist view of gender and sexuality. I also embrace queer theory as an empowerment to highlight the cultural and conceptual diversity and complexity of marginalized and non-conforming bodies and desires under the dominant heteronormativity.

However, transplanting and implementing queer theory in Asian/Chinese societies is often controversial. Queer theory arguably "remains rooted in Western, primarily Anglo-American discourse" (Welker and Kam 2006, 5), and researchers still hold divergent views about "the salience and appropriateness

of 'queer' as a descriptive term and analytical category" in Asian contexts (Blackwood and Johnson 2012, 442). As Ara Wilson beautifully summarizes,

> the term queer appears to represent a loose domain of disparate non-normative genders and sexualities, although it does not solve any problems of English-language hegemony or ethnocentric categorizations of sexuality. It is not a gloss for Asian vernaculars, nor is it necessarily a term of choice for Asian actors. (2006, 2)

At any rate, the problematic use of queer theory in Asia "may not resonate with local meaning systems regarding sexuality and gender" (Sinnott 2010, 20). A noticeable suspicion of queer theory's value in the study of Chinese gender and sexual diversity is also evident in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and mainland China, although connecting China with queer theory is potentially revolutionary, as it links two distant locales of the Orient and the West and makes them once again intimate (Liu 2010, 296). This both disrupts the East-West binary and reminds us of "the constructedness of Chineseness" in decolonizing the US-based queer theory and further connecting it with the underlying Marxist intellectual and cultural traditions in Chinese societies (Liu 2010, 300–307; Liu 2015; Liu and Rofel 2010, 283–88).

In other words, the power of queer critique in Chinese contexts first and foremost lies in its revelation of how gender and sexual classifications are socially and discursively constructed, dichotomized, and colonized. That said, I do not mean that "queer" can be used as an overarching term to blur the material-bodily and psychosexual differences among individual people, but that it offers enough intellectual flexibility to address the diversity and embrace the non-conformity of genders, sexualities, bodies, feelings, desires, attractions, and texts and images (Sinnott 2010). In this project, I follow Ara Wilson and Megan Sinnott to use the term "queer" as academic shorthand but *not* as a label of identification. I have titled this book *Queer Chinese Cultures and Mobilities* but would like my readers to keep in mind that "queer" is neither the common vernacular among Chinese sexual minorities nor an identity label widely adopted and recognized by Chinese people.

As much as terminology is concerned, "queer" and its Chinese transliteration *ku'er* are mostly used by artists and intellectuals in a way that often has little appeal to the masses. In this book, my use of "queer" as academic shorthand owes to its epistemological liberating power—an intellectual emancipation beyond gender and sexual emancipation—to highlight the diversity and heterogeneity among and within communities, societies, cultures, and mobilities. I agree with Evelyn Blackwood and Mark Johnson that we use "queer" in Asian contexts as it "effectively highlights the possibilities and constraints of different systems of gender/sexuality" and makes explicit our concern with the "relative instabilities inherent in and productive of both normative and transgressive bodies and practices" (2012, 442). In this case, "queer" and other terms discussed

here are by no means monolithic; in fact, these terms themselves have long been the sites of negotiations and resistance in the global flows of sex-related cultures and discourses.

Finally, I hope this section has been able to shed further light on the complexity of sexual identities as well as on the power and the limits of "naming" and "labeling." None of these identity labels can single-handedly capture the complexity of sexualities and the lived experiences of people; in sex-related Chinese cultures and social discourses, homosexual or *tongxinglian*, gay and lesbian, LGBT(Q), *tongzhi*, *jiyou*, and whatever comes up next all have their roles to play and cannot be used simply interchangeably. Here, I am fully aware of my deep skepticism of identity-based politics, my discontent with stereotyping and sexual dualism, and my preference for fluidity over rigidity in the understanding of sexualities. These have further underlined my choice of "queer" as a more flexible analytical tool and conceptual framework as well as my intellectual, epistemological, and critical shorthand instead of a categorical identity label. This section, I hope, has further cleared up the terminological ground for the rest of the discussions in *Queer Chinese Cultures and Mobilities*.

Doing Queer Ethnography in China

This project is not completely ethnographic; rather, it is highly interdisciplinary in its scope and methods that include (1) focused ethnographic fieldwork and community research; (2) textual and contextual analyses of queer cultural materials, mainly autobiographical queer films and online video series; and (3) digital anthropological studies of large online queer communities and mobile queer social networks. As far as fieldwork is concerned, I would like to make two notes regarding the research methods. First, "focused ethnography" refers to a method of carrying out short, intense ethnographic research in one's own culture to study its certain aspects, when an ethnographer is already (more or less) familiar with the research field but has difficulty securing long-term research stays (Knoblauch 2005; Kühn 2013; Wall 2015). Derived from my previous experiences in China's queer communities online and on the ground, my focused ethnography from 2013 to 2014 consisted of three fieldtrips to China, each lasting for over a month. I participated in a large number of communal events organized by various LGBT organizations, including more than twenty screening sessions combined in five queer film clubs—three in Beijing, one in Shanghai, and one in Guangzhou—although I was unable to include all of them in this book. I devoted my fieldwork to participatory observations as well as semi-structured, in-depth interviews with community leaders and stakeholders in these queer social enclaves.

Second, my fieldwork was conjoined by a digital anthropological study (Horst and Miller 2012) that originated in 2011, when I joined a major online queer community, and then expanded to numerous China-based online and

mobile queer social networking platforms between 2013 and 2016. This multi-year digital fieldwork, or "networked anthropology" (Collins and Durington 2015) or "virtual ethnography" (Hine 2008, 2015), has enabled me to not only participate in and observe online queer social interactions but also closely scrutinize the development of specific virtual queer communities contextualized by the ongoing social transformations concerning queer people. In other words, I "lived" with these people online for several years to study virtual queer communities as social and cultural sites that constantly generate their own voices and stories, instead of simply treating digital platforms as representations of real-life communities (cf. Underberg and Zorn 2013, 10) or merely connecting with interlocutors through digital networks (cf. Collins and Durington 2015, 4–6). This method is of particular importance in China, where queer people have limited public space and many of them can only come out anonymously online while hiding in the closet in everyday life. This also holds true for people from less-developed areas, where queer social groups and events are scarce. The cyberspace has been a central stage for queer social life and cultural production in China, through which we can gain a deeper anthropological understanding of queer cultures and mobilities in the early twenty-first century.

Despite my decade-long experience in China's queer communities before embarking on this research, I came across a few obstacles in the ethnographic field. These include: (1) the timing and the method in approaching the gatekeepers and initiating field rapport, (2) the balance between participation and observation in the ethnographic sites, and (3) the negotiation of the researcher's own identity in the field and how this identity defines and confines the ethnographer's access to the sites. These three factors presented various problems at different stages of my fieldwork, especially given that my previous experiences were not gained through the NGOs or LGBT groups that were organizing and supporting the queer communal events that I set up to research. Also, before the onset of this project, I only had limited experiences in Beijing, my main ethnographic site where several queer film clubs and many other queer social groups and organizations were in active operation.

When I started my ethnographic fieldwork, how to reveal my researcher's identity and initiate field rapport became my first concern. Loretta Ho's (2010) experience in Beijing as an ethnographer was still alarming: she was directly taken by an informant to meet with other gay activists in the city, who openly showed their distrust in this newcomer foreign to the local queer community. More important, for queer social activities organized by or in association with local NGOs, the gatekeepers often have already seen academics coming to these places for research purposes. Before I had the chance to disclose my identity in a film club, for example, the club organizer mentioned that there were researchers coming to the club to "study them," as distinguished from real participants coming for films and for dating/networking. Although he said immediately that

the club welcomed researchers as well, I felt an invisible line suddenly emerged in the thin air between me (as an observer and outsider) and other club members (as participants and insiders).

I had to wait for the right time to "come out" in this particular club. First, I participated in the discussion about the short films we saw and shared my stories with other members. Then the next day I met a new friend in another social group who wanted to explore the local queer film scenes, so I brought him with me to the next screening session in this film club. When I disclosed my researcher's identity in that second session, the organizer was grateful that I brought a friend to the club. What I did had unintentionally demonstrated my willingness to contribute to the development of the club by introducing new members; in so doing, I had convinced the gatekeeper that I indeed cared about the film club instead of treating people as mere research objects. My practice in the research field, merely out of my love for film and my enthusiasm to introduce people to queer cultural spaces in the city, unexpectedly turned into an effective ethnographic strategy to strengthen my rapport with the key informants.

To put it another way, actions always speak louder than words when it comes to building field rapport, while taking initial steps to observe how things work in particular ethnographic sites may turn out to be fruitful. In my case, furthermore, participating in film club sessions not only demonstrated a certain level of devotion and commitment to these queer cultural spaces but afforded me the chance to share my stories and feelings in post-screening discussions. Therefore, by the time I revealed my identity as a researcher, the gatekeepers and other participants already saw me as a person with stories and emotions, instead of a total stranger coming to "study them."[32] However, this role between an insider and an outsider was at times awkward. Even after the disclosure of my identity, I often felt that I was lingering on the borders of these urban film spaces that I was studying, neither fully committed as a member nor totally detached as an observer. On an optimistic note, this minimized the risk of "over-rapport" in my fieldwork and allowed me to participate in and withdraw from the ethnographic sites with less emotional and personal attachment. But I was also uncertain about how to balance participation and observation in the research field.

When I first set foot in queer film clubs in urban China, I was always quite wary about how I should participate in the post-screening discussions. For one thing, it was not clear to me the degree to which an ethnographer should partake in the cultural scenes he was observing. For another, I was caught in the cultural difference regarding speaking and listening. Having received graduate education in the West, I was accustomed to speaking out during group discussions. However, Chinese culture is largely listening-centered ("*tinghua*"), as the entitlement to speak is often a privilege of the senior and the leader (Chia 2003; Gao and Ting-Toomey 1998). As a newcomer to the local queer communities, I was concerned that my potential talkativeness would appear aggressive to other

more established members in the film clubs. Listening to what they had to say would better fit my role as an observer and show my due respect for their seniority as long-term members of the clubs.

However, I gradually realized that my involvement in the discussions offered a better chance for me to gain further access to the field. Once the club organizers and participants became aware that I had a background in film studies and queer studies, for example, they would become very curious about what I had to say on relevant issues. Some participants indeed showed a strong interest in cinematic art and relevant theories, and sometimes I clearly felt the pressure that I had to deliver some critical analyses of queer films and social issues in order to win their trust. Showing a good knowledge and understanding of queer cultures and queer studies thus became an effective ethnographic strategy to approach the field and strengthen the rapport. Later, when I theorized and wrote about *gated communities* in this book, I started to realize that I actually offered some cultural capital for exchange in the field that earned me membership in these queer communities gated and walled by knowledge, education, and cultural tastes and interests.

This discussion reveals another issue in my ethnography—the negotiation of my own identity in the field. I was fully aware of my image as young, urban, and educated overseas in these queer cultural spaces. This image may well have influenced, if not determined, which queer groups and individuals were willing to befriend me and which groups and individuals I was able to establish a strong rapport with. Before my first fieldtrip to Beijing, I had earned a master's degree in film studies in an English-speaking country. In the field with my informants, we engaged in many discussions about queer cinematic art, kinship negotiation, and "coming out as coming home" (see Chapter 1). My knowledge of English-language scholarship on queer Chinese cultures often became a point of interest that they were keen about. Together we also visited art-house movie theatres, art galleries, concert halls, and opera houses in the city. It was not until that point that I realized that my key contacts in the field were exclusively young gay men who had completed or were en route in geographical and social class migrations. All of them migrated to Beijing from other parts of China, and most of them had college degrees or were studying at elite universities, who had demonstrated distinctive middle- to high-brow cultural tastes. Although not all of them came from what we can describe today as urban middle-class families, they were overwhelmingly successful in their educational or employment-orientated migrations underlined by the overall increase in Chinese people's development-induced mobilities.

Thinking retrospectively, the roots and routes of my own migrations have largely shaped my identity and image in the research field. My experience of migrating from an underdeveloped small town to Beijing and then to the West itself presented a successful story of geographical, cultural, and social mobilities.

My decision to study China's urban queer film clubs was also led by my own cultural interest in cinematic art and my academic training in film and media theories. My very identity as a researcher returning to China from the West indicated advantaged cultural capital and certain social privilege that both defined and confined my ability in approaching the ethnographic field. I was able to earn entry to urban film clubs because my own cultural profile fitted in these social groups, while many others might have been precluded from such urban queer cultural venues. Along with the progression of this project, class-related social distinctions became increasingly clear as a strong and prevalent indicator underpinning the queer sociocultural phenomena that I was examining. Although I never intentionally selected my informants and interviewees based on their class status, this project largely materialized as a study of China's queer middle classes, insofar as the cultural products and the social spaces in question were noticeably produced and dominated by those with middle-class capital and those desiring and willing to work for such social privilege.

In this case, despite their different geographical origins across a large span of China's territory, my informants were in fact demographically limited in a group of young, all-male, well-educated, and successfully migrated queer people. At any rate, those left behind in geographical, cultural, and social class migrations seldom have access to the vibrant queer cultural spaces and social organizations in China's major metropolises that I was able to approach and research. The elderly, the rural, the undereducated, those with disabilities, and other transgressive (e.g., transgender) sexual minorities who are underrepresented in these places are precluded from this project, in spite of my earnest intention to cover a wide range of queer social practices and cultural spaces in China.[33] Every research has its limits and pitfalls; that said, I do believe that the findings of this project can shed further light on wider social issues concerning queer cultures and mobilities that potentially benefit a more diverse range of social groups beyond this relatively narrow demography.

Kinship, Migration, and Middle Classes

In retrospect, a complex interplay of historical, sociocultural, economic, political, legislative, and technological forces has contributed to the formulations and interventions of the lived experiences, social practices, and cultural expressions of today's sexual minorities. The issue of queer cultures and mobilities is deeply intertwined with (1) the locations and dislocations of Chineseness and the globalized Western gayness and (2) the negotiations and contradictions between the sex-related social norms and the emerging queer cultures that have assumed more social visibility and economic values. The issues addressed in this book are not simply a growing number of queer social practices and cultural products that have been struggling to secure their social legitimacy against the ongoing

familism and the ongoing process of neoliberal development, nor are they mere lineages of ancient Chinese sexual cultures or simple imitations of modern, Western gay emancipation. Rather, *Queer Chinese Cultures and Mobilities* examines the germination and movements of queer cultures and social practices across geographical locations, cultural conventions, and social stratifications, when the configurations of gender and sexuality and the understandings of gendered and sexual cultures have become less stable/sedentary and increasingly mobilized beyond traditional and conventional frameworks, categories, and boundaries.

Following this introduction, Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 continue to discuss the issue of compulsory familism and hetero-reproduction facing queer Chinese people, as well as their coming-out and kinship negotiation strategies and the processes of queer homecoming and homemaking through migration. These chapters draw insights from both my ethnographic fieldwork and my analyses of post-2008 autobiographical queer films and digital video series to examine the changing queer kinship structure (the result of *geographical queer mobilities*). As kinship negotiation with the family of origin has been the predominant concern among queer Chinese people under the strong and ongoing familism, I put these chapters up front to address this overwhelmingly common and primary question in queer Chinese communities. I argue that the so-called "coming out as coming home" strategy no longer works in today's Chinese societies, and "home" has often become an impossible location for people to return to; queer kinships are often physically and emotionally distanced when people leave their original families to pursue education and employment through internal or international migration. I have therefore developed a new paradigm of *stretched kinship* to consider a wide range of family/kinship arrangements and various practices in queer homecoming and homemaking, so as to better understand and make sense of the changing queer kinship structures that are shaping and shaped by today's queer Chinese cultures and mobilities.

Chapter 3 furthers the discussion of migration by engaging both mobility scholarship on geographies of sexualities and Sinophone scholarship on settlement and localization to analyze border-crossing queer migrations and cultural flows between mainland China and Sinophone societies such as Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the Chinese community in Malaysia (the manifestations of *queer cultural mobilities*). I examine various forms of queer cultural flows to question and "queer" (i.e., destabilize) the concept of Sinophone and to reconsider mobilities through the concept of queer Sinophonicities. By developing and problematizing the idea of *Sinophone mobilities*, I look at the ways in which we can shift our focus from post-migration settlements to a broader range of mobilized migrating experiences beyond roots/routes and origin/destination. My analysis extends to the flows and counterflows of queer cultures and migrants between mainland China and the Sinophone sphere, in which China itself has become a site for Sinophone cultural productions. Through these discussions, I question

the many problematic imperatives and assumptions in the conceptualization of the Sinophone cultural sphere to examine the intentions and enactments of migrations as well as their conditions and consequences in Sinophone theories and ontologies.

Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 deal with social inclusion and exclusion, cultural capital and social distinction, and social class migration in China's queer communities (the underlying driving and stratifying force of *queer social mobilities*). Drawing upon sociological analyses of various forms of human capital, as well as academic inquiries into the issue of *suzhi* ("quality") and into the rising and aspirational middle classes in today's China, these chapters analyze the ongoing social stratifications both inside China's queer communities and in the society at large. Through an investigation of China-based online queer communities, mobile social networking platforms, and urban queer film clubs, I argue in these chapters that the state-engineered discourse of *suzhi* has to some extent expired, but the lingering myth of *suzhi*/quality continues to underline queer social distinctions. The politics of proximity on locative mobile media also evoke the issue of social position and class affiliation, while online and urban queer communities are often segregated by class-related cultural tastes and capital as well as the affiliated social status and privilege as *gated communities*. The pursuit of upward social mobilization and class migration led by China's development and expansion has reproduced larger social stratifications and segregations in today's queer communities, when the rising and aspirational urban middle classes have assumed more social visibility and economic significance in today's China.

Synthesized under the theme of queer cultures and mobilities, these threads come together in the final chapter to highlight and further interrogate some of my key analyses and arguments through the lines of kinship, migration, and middle classes. With a focus on the dual pressure of compulsory familism and compulsory development facing queer people, this final chapter considers the values and pitfalls of the development-induced mobilities and post-development syndromes. The discussions extend to the claims of China's neoliberal cultures and desires, the conception of China's middle classes and intra-class stratification, the emergence of an economy of loneliness, as well as how stretched kinship functions as a resilient strategy amid the ongoing social changes that will continue to shape the understandings, expressions, and practices of nonconforming sexualities and transgressive desires. Through a critique of China's neoliberal capitalist process and its role in queer cultural productions and social practices, this chapter concludes with a consideration of the extent to which this book may have presented a queer Sinophone Marxist analysis and critique, and further envisages a possible future for queer people in twenty-first-century China and Sinophone Asia.

Closing Remarks

From late 2017 to early 2018, I revisited China when its growth was slowing down (but still topped the world) and the country was undergoing internal economic restructuring. Sitting in a taxi with the radio turned on, I heard a central government official deliver a speech in a high-profile economic forum in Beijing, saying that "China's economic development is changing from high-speed growth (*gaosu zengzhang*) to high-quality growth (*gaozhiliang zengzhang*)." Outside the window and along the highway, established residential compounds were accompanied by construction sites where new apartment buildings were erected. I caught a glimpse of a slogan on a wall that read "improving the level of urban development" (*tigao chengshi fazhan shuiping*). I was told that the local government had temporarily shut down the high-pollution industries to reduce the suffocating smog in winter, although some factories continued production at night under the radar. During my stay, the TV news and current affairs programs made a great deal about China's determination to eliminate poverty within a few years in some of its most impoverished countryside; on the international stage, it was promoting the ambitious Belt and Road Initiative to its neighbors and followers near and far, trying to win support from its allies and critics alike.

These seemingly innocuous moments signaled China's ongoing socioeconomic transformations under the continued developmental agenda—although the focus has been gradually shifted to environmental protection, quality growth, and international expansion. Slogans promoting "change," "development," "rise," and "improvement" were still prevalent in every corner of my hometown, a small inland city overshadowed by and trying to catch up with the affluent coastal areas. In a country with an unprecedented and unparalleled growth rate for several decades, the upward theme of development has indeed permeated all walks of life and all parts of China. Born in the late 1980s and growing up during China's economic miracle and dramatic and profound social transformations, people in my generation have become accustomed to a life dominated by "development" (*fazhan*) and "progression" (*jinbu*)—at both the

individual and the societal levels. When everyone is going up and everything is changing at a rapid speed, development and progression have become compulsory, while standing still essentially means lagging behind. Under a deep and strong developmentalism, people do not seem to have the choice or the excuse of not moving forward and upward. Entering the third decade of the twenty-first century, the party-state's confidence in China's power and prosperity through development has reached a new level both internally and externally, gaining a wide nationalist support from its many citizens in spite of various challenges and ineluctable "growing pains" facing it today.

China's case presents a very important lens through which we can better understand and further problematize the issue of gender and sexual modernity and diversity vis-à-vis the liberal-democratic and linear-progressive discourse that appears dominant and imperative in the West. It is also necessary for us to consider China through the lens of gender and sexual mobilities as a compelling case to scrutinize and make sense of its ongoing social change in its determined and single-minded pursuit of the country's great renaissance and revival in the twenty-first century. Along with China's capital-driven expansion and unapologetic power assertion on the global stage, the development-induced mobilities and immobilities will continue channeling queer desires and cultures through a neoliberal capitalist process without a fundamental political reform or a major shift in sex-related social ethos in the foreseeable future. This will further consolidate the stretched kinship structure and the stratified social classes and strata, insofar as compulsory familism and compulsory development are the two pressure points around which Chinese people have been structuring their practices and understandings of transgressive desires. While the diverse and disparate queer social and cultural practices will continue to grow under these shadows, queer people have to work out how to survive under the strong familism and developmentalism when the ongoing neoliberal process never really attends to their underlying longings and sufferings.

The Figure of the Queer Migrant

"The twenty-first century will be the century of the migrant"; political philosopher Thomas Nail opens his book *The Figure of the Migrant* with this declaration (2015, 1). There was movement before there was territory, which effectively mapped the boundaries and created the territories to differentiate clans, communities, societies, and countries. In this sense, argues Nail, migrants are constitutive figures and powers of histories and our current times. Yet in normative liberal paradigms, movement and mobility are overwhelmingly considered secondary and derivative, if not subordinate and invisible, as an aberration to the rules of stable, civilized lifestyles and tight nation-state governance and border control. If the migrant is "the political figure of our time" (235), then it

is necessary to refigure the migrant through the lens of kinopolitics (politics of movement) instead of kinetophobia (fear of motion), although movement itself cannot be valorized given the heterogeneous material conditions embodied in migrations (4). The regimes of territorial, social, and cultural motions have been constantly shifting and shaping the figure of the migrant across different types of borders—gates, walls, fences, cells, checkpoints, detention centers, etc.—that are themselves unstable and keep shifting along with geopolitical tensions and conflicts, as Nail further points out in *Theory of the Border* (2016).

Queer Chinese Cultures and Mobilities has considered many different figures of queer migrants: the "sad lonely young men" who are nonetheless self-conscious about their gay migrant/diaspora identities in autobiographical queer films and videos; the young generation who has to face the "annual interrogation" during family reunions; people relocated from *danwei*/workplace-based living arrangements to private residential compounds; co-tenanted queer migrants in shared apartments; the founders, organizers, volunteers, and participants of the urban queer film clubs; regular wage earners and leisure-class queers in various gated communities with different levels of entitlement to a mobile lifestyle; those who have failed and who have succeeded in geographical and social migrations; as well as large numbers of social media users on online and mobile digital platforms who are segregated and stratified by the type of human capital they are displaying and going after. In this sense, the figures and images of queer migrants are far from consistent or homogeneous; rather, they look fragmented and stretched across the complex formulations and interventions of family and kinship, internal and international migrations, and social classes and social strata.

On the other hand, the queer migrants recorded in this book still look rather confined in a small demography of young and educated gay males, while mobilities along the lines of gender/sexuality, ability/disability, and ethnicity/nationality should be further contextualized and examined in relation to China and other Sinophone societies. Studies on lesbian women in Chinese societies are growing under the avid academic interest in gay-male cultures along with emerging scholarship on queer people of age (e.g., Kong 2012) and sexual minorities in rural China (e.g., Koo et al. 2014). However, other marginalized queer people (transgender, bisexual, intersex, asexual, those with disabilities, etc.) in Chinese societies have not caught enough attention. In addition, many agencies based in the West have extended their businesses to China for overseas gay marriage and adoption/surrogacy, when the cost has become more affordable for a growing number of middle-class queer couples. In the years to come, we will see an emerging demography whose same-sex marriage and parent status are recognized in other jurisdictions but not in their home country. These reconfigurations of sexuality and mobility in transnational queer homemaking deserve our attention in the imminent future.

On top of that, as I have discussed earlier in this book, my own image in the research field also appears inconsistent and straddles the East (where I was born) and the West (where I returned from), gay (as all my informants assumed) and not-gay (I never labeled myself as such and never believed in dichotomous sexual categories), desiring and desirable (as young and new to the local gay circles), questioning and questionable (as an ethnographer peeping into the local queer spaces where he was not really a member), as well as backward (growing up in a severely underdeveloped small town and in a regular wage-earner family) and upward (with advanced education at a high-ranked university in the West and a good knowledge of the so-called "high culture"). When I interviewed Yeh-tzu in the Taiwanese Two-City Café in Beijing, he was also curious that I, a researcher growing up in the Mainland, was interested in Taiwanese and other Sinophone cultures on the margin of China and Chineseness. My own contradictory image in the eyes of other queer migrants reflects the heterogeneous formulations and configurations along the very concepts and categories of "queer" and "migrant."

"Migrant" is a strong word. Every time we use this term, we essentially bring up a very complex figure embodied with different constituencies and contingencies as well as different motions and emotions that have been mobilized across geographical and cultural enclaves, borders and boundaries, routes and roots, time and space, body and mind, pain and pleasure, connection and alienation, conformity and non-conformity, social classes and social circles, home of origin and home of choice, and many, many more. Both "queer" and "migrant" are highly complex formulations: nothing other than the conjoint "queer migrant" is more powerful in challenging existing borders and limits, and nothing except for "queer migrant" is more effective in reminding us of existing social norms and conventions. "Queer" and "migrant" are inherently contradictory terms—transgressing and transcending the boundaries, while simultaneously reaffirming the social, cultural, historical, political, and economic conditions that helped reproduce them in the first place. That, at any rate, is the figure of the queer migrant in the twenty-first century.

Gay Circles and Neoliberal Desires

The rise of neoliberal cultures in China in particular, and Asia in general, has raised further questions about the changing queer cultures in the ongoing social transformations in Chinese societies. As a theory of political-economic practices of a free market made possible and safeguarded by the state, neoliberalism appears to have put the "state" in a contradictory position, and it is debatable to what extent neoliberalism entails a strong state and whether democracy is a precondition of a neoliberal economy and society (Bockman 2013; Harvey 2007, 2). Here, I agree with Aihwa Ong that we should consider neoliberalism in its "extreme dynamism, mobility of practices, responsiveness to contingencies, and

strategic entanglements with politics" (2007, 3; italics mine). This helps make sense of the reproduction of neoliberal structures and agencies in a country without a liberal democracy, such as China, when it is still controversial whether China can be considered a neoliberal economy (Harvey, 139–40; Nonini 2008; Ong 2006, 2007; Ren 2010).

Recent studies (e.g., Rofel 2007) have documented the reproduction of neoliberal subjects and subjectivities in China in such domains as TV drama, museums, and gay bars. Neoliberalism appears to have energized the emergent urban queer cultures that have extended the free-market principles, enabled people to practice and express sexual interests under the banner of liberal individual choice, and to some extent freed social practices and cultural productions of gender and sexuality as well as desire and intimacy from state agencies. This is why Lisa Rofel also makes clear the significance of the expressive desire in the construction of neoliberal agents and the (imagined) gay spheres in such neoliberal spaces as urban gay bars. However, gay bars are not the only "queer publics" in China, and in fact many people have kept a conscious distance from these "cruising" spaces, as shown in my previous discussions. The expressively desiring gay men who are active in gay bars seem to belong to what we call *quanzi* ("circles," literally) in China's gay communities. Loretta Ho (2010) notes the use of the word *quan* among her informants in Beijing (46, 91, 157) and tries to differentiate this concept from what we call "community" in English. *Quanzi* is a slang term frequently used by gay men in mainland China to describe lifestyle-based social circles constituted of socially and sexually active gay men. Those in the "circle" are believed to be more libertine—more likely to seek casual sexual encounters and frequent gay cruising spaces both online and on the ground.

People outside the circle, in contrast, are often less liberal in sexual conduct and especially less active in seeking socio-sexual encounters with strangers. They often see *quanzi* as in a constant state of disorder ("*luan*"; Ho 2010, 46, 91) and criticize those in the circle for their obsession with casual sex and their reluctance to commit. More important, people in the *quanzi* often take the blame that their openness to sex further stereotypes and stigmatizes the entire gay community in the general public, although this so-called "gay community" is in fact a loosely defined entity whose members vary significantly in class, age, education, occupation, and other key demographic parameters. Similarly, *quanzi* is also a loosely defined "imagined community" that lacks clear boundaries. Some people believe that *quanzi* only includes those who are sexually hyperactive, while others think that anyone openly searching for same-sex relationships is also in the *quanzi*, regardless of his attitude toward sex. In addition, "entering the circle" (*ru quan*) and "quitting the circle" (*tui quan*) are not uncommon in the vernacular of same-sex attracted men in China. That is to say, people tend to see *quanzi* as a fluid domain where they can join in or drop out at ease.

"One man's imagined community," to quote Arjun Appadurai out of context, "is another one's political prison" (1996, 32). The desiring neoliberal subjects and subjectivities recorded in previous ethnographies seem to belong to this *quanzi*: the more self-conscious, desiring, liberal/libertine, and expressive gay circles in China. However, their counterparts outside the circles—potentially equally desiring—are often silenced and alienated from this neoliberal euphoria of expressive queer desires. Gay bars as cruising spaces and consumer spaces may be highly productive of expressive desires and desiring neoliberal subjects; however, as I have discussed in this book, they remain inattentive to the process of self-improvement and self-investment for cultural pursuits and social migration through which a queer future may become possible outside the heteronormative closet. The film club organizers in my research maintain a clear distinction between cultural spaces and cruising spaces, and many queer people are very proud that they have never visited such "disordered" places as gay bars and nightclubs, precisely because these so-called neoliberal places and neoliberal desires offer little relevance to their ongoing suffering under compulsory familism and compulsory development, and to their real longing for love and anchorage when many of them still have to marry the opposite sex and live in the closet for life.

The valorization of gay bars and that of neoliberal desires in previous ethnographies hence become problematic. It is not only that we have precluded those outside these places and overlooked other queer social spaces gated by the all-important cultural capital, but that the neoliberal claims have failed to account for what is still at stake for queer people and where their continued sufferings come from under the ongoing and entangled forces of familism and development. In this context, queer film clubs or urban gay bars alone can no longer offer a full picture of today's queer cultures and social practices. Although different queer spaces and enclaves are not mutually exclusive and participants can join in various social circles, these places still entail different forms of human capital in including or excluding different members and participants. In this case, the claims of neoliberal desires and subjects alone are inadequate in addressing and understanding the complex formulations and interventions of queer mobilities and immobilities amid China's rising inequalities and social stratifications in the early twenty-first century.

Searching for China's Middle Classes

Where are the middle classes in today's China? Or, more broadly, how can we qualify (and quantify) the so-called "middle classes" in a Chinese context? Social scientists have been using a range of measurements to delineate this newly emerged social class, from occupation and education to income level, family background, marital status, geographical location, and Communist

A Queer Sinophone Marxist Critique

Do queer people in China have a future? Can we remain optimistic about a futurity when the hope for social progression seems slim, our life becomes more complicated, and tomorrow turns increasingly uncertain? Haejoang Cho, in her keynote speech at the 2018 Association for Asian Studies Annual Conference, remarked that we are living in an age when capitalism has prevailed over human dignity and everything and everyone is calculated to the benefit of capital. Caught up in these post-development syndromes, today's young people in East Asia have become less idealistic and more pragmatic to heavily and self-consciously invest in self-development. Yet many of them still end up jobless and relationless in the hyper-competitive educational system and labor market where the winner takes it all and everyone must find his or her own way to survive. The question of surviving has replaced that of living, and people no longer expect a future when life is permeated with endless insecurity and anxiety that things will only get worse, not better. The capitalist rationality and the neoliberal marketization of human capital have promised a lot to the young generation but never really come to their salvation. Can we still talk about hope, as Haejoang Cho mused, when young people find themselves compressed between the race for survival and the still strong and ongoing familism in today's Asia?

I share Cho's observations and solicitude, despite her different approaches and contexts. Exhausted by the fierce competition for capital and resources and by the tough competition for love and anchorage, the young generation starts to lose hope when it becomes increasingly difficult to envisage a meaningful future attentive to their real longings and sufferings. The dream of settlement through homemaking and relationship building has often become remote and slim, when the cost of living and the cost of love become unbearable for many capital-deprived urban youths and young migrants struggling to move up and move on. Yet they are still pressured to build a family, start a life, accumulate capital, and pass that on to the next generation to complete the cycle of the great bestowment of life in continuing the family line. Can they—or "we," as this has an impact on many of us—still think about hope when we are compressed between the imperative forces of familism and development? This book, after all, holds its critique against compulsory familism and heteronormativity in one hand, and against imperative development and the dominance of neoliberalism in the other. The former deals with the social and familial misrecognition of non-conforming desires, while the latter addresses the maldistribution of resources. In this sense, we may wonder to what extent and to what end this project may have presented a "queer Sinophone Marxist critique" of the triad of heteronormative familism, China-centrism, and neoliberal capitalism, even though I did not openly engage Marxist thought or follow the Marxist lineage in

class analysis, nor did I assemble a conspicuous Marxist/anti-capitalist archive of sociocultural materials.

If this project can be considered a queer Marxist critique as Petrus Liu (2015) has formulated, then this critique probably derives from the following lines: (1) the problem of maldistribution of resources, both material and symbolic, has led to today's socioeconomic stratifications in China and capitalist Asia; (2) the emancipation offered by liberal pluralism is quite limited when it fails to address the underlying structural issues and leaves gender and sexual differences as private matters; (3) the liberalist understanding of gender and sexual mobilities as individual rights does not resonate with or appear relevant to the Confucianist emphasis on reciprocal responsibilities, nor does it relate to the view of the human as a social relation in the Marxist labor theory of value; (4) previous claims of China's neoliberal queer cultures largely missed the still strong familism and the compulsory nature of development, failing to take into account people's struggles under this dual pressure; and (5) the valorization of neoliberal queer agency and subjectivity focuses on people's expressive desires but appears inattentive to their ongoing longings and sufferings under the so-called homocapitalist and homonormative conditions. To that end, these threads have conjointly formed an underlying queer Marxist critique through the case of China and Sinophone Asia against global neoliberal capitalism.

This critique is particularly important when neoliberalism has not only survived but become even stronger since the 2008 GFC (see Mirowski 2013). At any rate, China's capitalist expansion and development have laid the material foundation for and most saliently channeled the emergent formations of queer cultures and economies. The process of compulsory development has produced many "life winners" whose access to capital offers them some protection and compensation for their non-conforming genders and sexualities, but simultaneously alienated many others whose relative lack of capital has limited their options in expanding life experiences and negotiating transgressive desires. In either case, they may end up feeling hopeless and futureless, insomuch as China's capitalist expansion and development do not and cannot address the underlying social, cultural, and political constraints facing queer people. Instead, the neoliberal process leaves structural and systematic problems to the hands of the market and its individual participants, where wider and deeper sociocultural issues become individual responsibilities under the watch of an authoritarian state. The partial remedy offered by the neoliberal process leaves more fundamental issues intact and creates more problems than solutions, where its beneficiaries also fall victim to its imperative agenda.

In other words, neoliberalism's imperative expansion has confined queer people as much as it has mobilized queer desires; it may have enabled certain queer social practices and cultural articulations but also cornered queer cultures and desires in a neoliberal channel. What I have shown in this book is queer

people's ineluctable involvement in and obligatory embrace of capital accumulation and neoliberal development, through which I interrogate the values and pitfalls of the neoliberal capitalist process that conditions and structures queer mobilities and immobilities across a wide range of social institutions. Here, my critical lens comes directly from regular queer people who live under global capitalism and both benefit and suffer from the many consequences of its neoliberal expansion. Their focus on self-development and self-regulation as engineered by the state has become increasingly conjoint with a nationalist and ethnocentric mandate for China's revival and dominance, and with a privatized socioeconomic self-reliance that is imperative to the neoliberal process. Today's queer Chinese cultures and mobilities are stretched in a normalizing process by the triad of a familism that mandates heterosexual reproduction, a single-minded China-centrism that dictates the monolithic productions of cultures and sexualities, and a neoliberal capitalist economy that monopolizes the function of capital. The triple lens of queer, Sinophone, and Marxist critiques and that of geographical, cultural, and social mobilities have conjointly disentangled the underlying contingencies and constituencies of gender and sexual modernity, diversity, and mobility in twenty-first-century China and Sinophone Asia.

For a Queer Future

If a gay meritocracy has become a possible modality for a queer future in a country like China, then the more important question is whether the meritorious class can survive at the expense of others who find it increasingly difficult to move up as a means to afford a queer life. The issue of gender and sexual mobilities has been further complicated by that of social immobilities and the concretized social stratifications, where the failure of neoliberalism is equally pronounced in its triumph. Those of us who cannot get into the meritocratic club may find it harder than ever to cross the class boundaries and acquire the socioeconomic and sociocultural capital necessary to establish a queer life and a better tomorrow. Then what choice do we have in building a promising future outside capital accumulation and neoliberal self-reliance? If we can still talk about hope, then where does this hope lie after all? While still exercising their agency, queer people's choices often appear limited and have to be channeled through the structure of family or the process of growth.

One thing that Haejoang Cho did not make clear in her aforementioned speech is which kind of pressure is stronger—compulsory familism or compulsory development—especially for young queer people. Here I can share a brief anecdote from my trip to China in early 2018. I met a particularly talkative driver when I took a "Didi" (the local equivalent of Uber) in my small hometown. The middle-aged male driver unleashed a long verbal attack against me immediately after he learned that I was still single without children. He accused me of not

fulfilling my filial piety, being selfish, and not considering my parents' happiness that (he assumed) was hinged upon my procreation. When I got out of the car, he shouted at me "fulfill your filial piety"—or "care for and obey your parents" (*xiaoshun nide fumu*) if we take a more verbatim translation—which is probably the harshest moral accusation one can bear in Confucianist societies.

Here, my career achievement and higher social status were simply brushed off in the face of my singleness and childlessness; based on the latter and nothing but the latter, I was a target of direct moral judgment or what I considered verbal abuse from a complete stranger throughout the ride. After all, going against the familism at the expected age of marriage and procreation is a cardinal sin in Confucianist doctrines. Nothing else—not my cultural and socioeconomic capital—can be my saving grace. In the eyes of the older generation, they hold the moral pinnacle of the traditional values; the liberalist concepts of "privacy," "individual choice," and "treating others as equal with respect" simply did not exist in their vernacular or in their own upbringing decades ago. By that I mean it is culturally appropriate for them to (ab)use the seniority and authority bestowed on them by a strong and rigid Confucianist social hierarchy—they were probably treated in the same way when they were young—which many people in my age group and social circle may find abhorrent. However, admittedly, there are still many young people in China who to various degrees willingly uphold this kind of social hierarchy and will one day become the dominant (senior) part of it, while the low acceptance of transgressive genders and sexualities is also not uncommon among the younger generation today.

What I went through in my hometown offered a striking contrast to my experiences in the West, where taxi drivers are often fascinated by my occupation as a university lecturer with doctoral degrees at a young age—many of them are immigrants themselves and seem glad to see a young immigrant like me who has fared well. I still remember a taxi driver I met in Auckland after completing this research, who literally said it was the "quality" of the passengers that mattered and made him enjoy his job at the end of the day; there was also an Uber driver in Washington, DC, who enthusiastically inquired about my migration journeys and educational credentials throughout the ride. However, back in my hometown, personal merits seem to be rather weightless compared to the fundamental familism as shown through people's single-minded understanding of filial piety as "getting married" and "having children." We can of course argue that what happened to me was an isolated case, or that the older and more conservative generation in China's less-developed areas has not acquired the middle-class politeness that is rather common among today's well-educated younger generation in the country's major metropolises. But I strongly believe that this case offers a microscopic lens through which we can better understand what queer Chinese people are still going through in their day-to-day life and why many of them still feel overwhelmingly helpless and hopeless.

I should note that this incident and my discussion here are highly problematic. On the first level, I have valorized compulsory familism/heterosexual reproduction as a single, predominate problem that renders everything else irrelevant. Second, I might have suggested that to some degree this problem can be solved by development ("if my hometown was more developed and if people had better education, then this probably would not happen"). Third, my discussion appears to have implicitly and somewhat arrogantly lauded my own privilege and good fortune that I have access to a different lifestyle beyond compulsory familism, which I owe not only to my migration and mobility but also to China's growth that enabled such opportunities in the first place. Fourth, I seem to have argued for the West as an unproblematic place for queer migrants, where their socioeconomic achievement may save them from various disadvantages and visible and invisible discrimination facing them as both racial and sexual minorities. Fifth, I have suggested that there exist other and better ways to fulfill one's filial piety beyond marriage and reproduction, such as honoring the family and providing for the parents' material and cultural wellbeing with one's socioeconomic and sociocultural wealth, where compulsory development seems to have offered a partial solution to compulsory familism. However, at any rate, to what extent do these assumptions hold true? These questions should not have gone unchecked, and I would like to leave these to my readers who have been bearing with me the question of ineluctable development as well as the conditions and consequences of mobilities and immobilities from the start of the book.

Then, in light of these discussions, can we still talk about hope and remain hopeful for a queer future? Is that possible to locate a queer futurity not only within but beyond familism and development? There is no easy answer to these questions. One thing I am certain about is that we will not see a linear-progressive development of queer social acceptance and equal rights in China, although changes will come, for better or for worse, and however small and trivial. The society and the culture still mandate the filial responsibility of reproduction, which deprives the wider social acceptance of homosexuality and makes it difficult for grassroots activism to attract broad support across a large country with a complex demography. While the bottom-up activism is abysmal, a top-down reform is equally unlikely, due to the regime's refusal of the equal-rights agenda. The newly emerged queer meritocratic class is relatively small in number and lacks the incentive to call for wider social changes, while overall China lacks an effective civil society for informed discussions of gender and sexual diversity. We still have a long way to go for any substantive social progression to take place. Here, I hope *Queer Chinese Cultures and Mobilities* will open up new avenues for critical considerations of these issues—if this book can offer any value for us to reflect upon the past and think through the present, then tomorrow's paths may be better illuminated.

I still remember that, after each interview during my fieldwork, my interlocutors would ask me why I had chosen to conduct this research. After my explanation of the academic purposes, they often told me that it would be great if my research could benefit queer people instead of being circulated only within academic circles. They were mostly polite, but I could see in their eyes the suspicion that researchers may only focus on intellectual pursuits whose work offers little relevance to the people and the communities under scrutiny. Each time I returned from the field, what I thought was exactly how to make this research both intellectually rigorous and practically relevant to the lived experiences of queer people who have real stakes in this project. I hope my work has been able to fulfill these purposes and this book can speak to minds and hearts alike. Without being sentimental, I remain cautiously hopeful that there will be a queer future that we can build together.

One day this research will be forgotten. The ashes of time will dust my book, the pages unturned and the cover untouched. However, those recorded in this research will be remembered for their creations of such diverse and dynamic queer cultures and social practices against all the odds in the early twenty-first century. Nested in the many imperatives and contingencies of the entangled forces of mobilities and immobilities, future generations will carry on their great legacy and continue to write the never-ending stories of queer people's struggles and successes in kinship negotiation, geographical relocation, and social class migration. As a researcher, I am deeply grateful that I have had this opportunity to put their cultures and creations in front of the world—for me, for them, and for everyone who would like to see a better tomorrow and a brighter future. When the cold pages of this book feel the warmth of your fingers, I hope you can also feel the hearts of the people behind this project.

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