

Double Alterity and the Global Historiography of Sexuality: China, Europe, and the Emergence of Sexuality as a Global Possibility

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Some years ago in a landmark essay on the history of sexuality, Arnold Davidson (2001) remarked that despite the field's maturity, "there are still fundamental conceptual problems that get passed over imperceptibly when this topic is discussed, passed over, at least in part, because they seem so basic or obvious that it would be time badly spent to worry too much about them" (p.30). "However", Davidson continued, "without backtracking toward this set of problems, one will quite literally not know what one is writing the history of when one writes a history of sexuality" (p.30). Perhaps Davidson has identified and, to a certain degree, resolved for us key features of this set of problems in his study of the emergence of sexuality in nineteenth-century Europe. Yet since the publication of his writings on this subject, the discipline of history has undergone a conspicuous transformation in its leading theoretical and empirical preoccupations. I am referring to the rise of such frameworks as transnationalism and globalism to a position of unprecedented prominence in the historian's craft. This change in historians' topical and methodological preoccupations has prompted historians of sexuality to consider non-Western regions of the world ever more seriously. At the same time, to borrow Davidson's words, without backtracking toward the set of conceptual problems that get passed over so easily, "one will quite literally not know what one is writing the history of when one writes a [global] history of sexuality".

With respect to the well-studied topic of homosexuality, an excellent example of the most current and sophisticated effort in producing a global history of sexuality can be found in *Gay life and Culture: A World History* (2006), a collection of essays edited by Robert Aldrich. The framing of the volume might first appear to depart radically from the methodology of an earlier book, Louis Crompton's *Homosexuality and Civilization* (2003), in which each chapter is devoted to a specific country, civilization, or example of other implicit forms of geopolitical

organization. But if one reads the chapters in *Gay Life and Culture* carefully, one soon realizes that certain underlying methodological assumptions actually unite, rather than differentiate, the two books. Both books essentially approach the global history of sexuality in a way that takes as its point of departure the nation-state system that continues to define the division of labor in the modern historical profession. In this vision of the analytic boundaries with which historians are expected to operate, a global history of homosexuality would simply be a history of homosexuality that covers as much world geography as possible, without even attempting to question or historicize the nation-state system itself. Given that scholars of nationalism have for a long time identified the genus of the modern nation-state system in the nineteenth century,¹ a period during which, according to Davidson (2001), the very conceptual space of sexuality was only made possible (p.37), it is somewhat surprising, then, to learn that significant conversations have barely begun to take place between historians of sexuality and historians of nationalism.

Perhaps another way to phrase this puzzle might be to ask the following question. Without assuming the modern system of nation-states as the only naturalized, inevitable framing historiographic backdrop, what can a global history of sexuality look like? My aim in this paper is to approach the global histor(iograph)y of sexuality in a manner distinct from the typical attempt to synthesize, as much as possible, a wide range of empirical evidence drawn from every single society or culture one could possibly think of in the history of the human world. Indeed, one wonders whether this kind of task rooted in empirical compilation is not too idealistic, if even feasible or desirable to begin with. It is my contention that a global history of sexuality should not simply be the piecing together of the “greatest hits” in the existing literature on various national histories of sexuality. One way to move beyond a historiographic framework in which some paramount value is assigned to such units of analysis as nation-states or other geoterritorial structures of sovereignty is to focus on a distinct problem or a set of guiding problems. I therefore adopt this methodology as my main protocol in this paper in order to transgress the conceptual geographical boundaries with which historians are typically trained to think and work. So let me begin by articulating, as clearly as I can at the start of this paper, the set of problems on which I will focus my historical study of sexuality from a comparative and global perspective.

The central problem that concerns my comparative and global analysis is, to borrow the question that concerned Davidson (2001)

¹ See, for example, Duara (1995).

more than twenty years ago, “what are the conditions under which [certain types] of statements come to be comprehensible?” (p.126). To take the insight of historicism seriously, not every statement is comprehensible at all times, either on the individual level or the macro-level of social geobodies or historical epochs. Specifically, in this paper I will focus on one particular form of this problem of comprehensibility, namely under what conditions could one comprehend a corpus of statements, those statements that help to constitute the domain of sexuality, as being either true or false? Not all statements claim the status of being true or false, but those that claim a scientific status do claim to be within the realm of truth-and-falsehood. Since I am dealing with how the productive condition of scientific knowledge changes over time, my project is at once both epistemological and historical. Adopting Davidson’s method of “historical epistemology”, which resembles Michel Foucault’s approach of “epistemological history” (1972, p.190), the particular guiding problem of my study, then, is this: under what conditions did various statements of sexuality come to claim the status of being scientifically comprehensible – essentially, the status of being possible candidates of truth-and-falsehood? Moreover, in the interest of situating this problem in a framework of translational economy and global circulation,² I am equally interested in addressing the relationship of these conditions to geopolitical variability and the contours of temporality.

To deal with the synchronic relationship between temporal and spatial change, in this paper I propose the concept of “double alterity”. My argument is simply that sexuality emerged as a global possibility at a critical juncture of double alterity in the nineteenth century, when the alterity of the temporal past and the alterity of the distanced Other converged to generate a new *condition of possibility* for certain statements to claim the comprehensibility of a science – in this case, that corpus of statements that help to constitute the domain of sexuality. What I call “double alterity” is a hybrid concept that merges Foucauldian claims about the history of Western sexuality with post-Saidian claims about the discursive function of the Orientalist discourse. In turn, there are two decisive features to what this concept can illuminate for us. The first is the persistent blind spot of (post-)colonial scholars who tend to take for granted the temporal continuum on which they interrogate the erotic sphere situated in the Orient-versus-Occident binary opposition. For post-colonial historians of sexuality in particular, the historicity of the concept of sexuality itself is often left unexamined, and the concept is typically employed

² For insightful historical and theoretical perspectives on issues of translation and global circulation, see the essays in Liu (1999).

without probing the epistemological preconditions that made possible for its articulation. Second, double alterity brings to light the tendency among historians of sexuality to overlook the foundational role of the distanced Other in shaping the late nineteenth-century discourse of sexology. In this sense, double alterity calls into question some of the underlying Foucauldian assumptions about the historic division between *scientia sexualis* and *ars erotica* (Foucault 1990). Let me proceed to explicate further what “double alterity” can accomplish for us in terms of these two specific features.

In beginning to characterize the unfamiliar notion of double alterity, I want to start, so to speak, inside out – with the terrain of the familiar. It is perhaps a well-established consensus by now that one of the most significant observations Foucault outlined in his *History of Sexuality, Vol. 1* is an epistemic rupture that occurred during the nineteenth century. Many historians of sexuality have interpreted this rupture as a paradigmatic shift from a world of sexual *acts* to a world of sexual *identities*.³ Following David Halperin, I have suggested elsewhere that this is indeed a gross misinterpretation of Foucault’s argument. For queer theory and the history of sexuality to continue to position themselves vis-à-vis one another in a productive way, this characterization must be left behind in favor of acknowledging that the kind of shift Foucault located in the nineteenth century took place on a deeper level of epistemology.⁴ In proposing the idea of *scientia sexualis*, what Foucault’s analysis shows is a new regime of truth in the nineteenth century that relocated the technology of the sexual self from the domain of pastoral confession to the discourse of science and medicine. Yet, picking up where Foucault’s project left off, Davidson (2001) reminds us: “It is not because we became preoccupied with our true sexuality that a science of sexuality arose in the nineteenth century; it is rather the emergence of a science of sexuality that made it possible, even inevitable, for us to become preoccupied with our true sexuality” (p.xiii).

For Davidson (2001), then, the new form of experience that we call “sexuality” is itself what needs to be historicized; for its appearance is “linked to the emergence of new structures of knowledge, and especially to a new style of reasoning and the concepts employ within it” (p.xiii). While others have tended to interpret the Foucauldian shift as one from sexual *acts* to *identities*, Davidson understands it to be the precise turning point for the very emergence of sexuality, by

³ See, for example, Howard (1999, p.xvii-xviii); Foster (2006, p.xii). For an illuminating discussion of this problem with respect to the essentialism-versus-social constructionism debate, see Halperin (1990).

⁴ See Halperin (2002); and Chiang (2008b and 2009b).

which he defines as a product of the psychiatric style of reasoning that first appeared only in the second half of the nineteenth century. Before then, anatomical sex exhausted one's sexual identity, because people were only concerned with diseases of structural abnormality. Therefore, the epistemological shift from an *anatomical* to a *psychiatric* style of reasoning underpinned the *comprehensibility* of such concepts as homosexuality, transsexuality, etc. In Davidson's words (2001), "[a]s little as 150 years ago, psychiatric theories of sexual identity disorders were not false, but rather were not even possible candidates of truth-or-falsehood. Only with the birth of a psychiatric style of reasoning were there categories of evidence, verification, explanation, and so on, that allowed such theories to be true-or-false" (p.36).

Viewed from this perspective, even the impressive works of post-colonial historians such as Rudi C. Bleys (1995) and Irvin C. Schick (1999) appear to be not sensitive enough to the historicity of the concept of sexuality itself. In their otherwise sophisticated deconstructionist approaches to the history of the Western erotic imagination, the concept is typically employed without an awareness of the epistemological conditions that made possible its historical articulation or experience in the first place. In other words, the temporal dimension of what I call "double alterity" should caution us against speaking about "sexuality" before its emergence in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Davidson's historicization thus fills in this widespread lacuna within the growing post-colonial historiography of what Bleys (1995) calls "the geography of perversion and desire" (p.9).⁵

Still, in Davidson's analysis, one gets the impression that "sexuality", as a novel form of modern experience, was first and foremost christened in nineteenth-century Europe and no where else. Indeed, one might even hasten to conclude that Davidson's study has provided us all that need to be said about the historical emergence of sexuality. But if we backtrack toward some of the fundamental assumptions embedded within the Foucauldian historiography of sexuality, we are confronted with the assumed division between *ars erotica* and *scientia sexualis*. And the most problematic aspect of this assumption is perhaps best reflected in Foucault's own words:

On the one hand, the societies – and they are numerous: China, Japan, India, Rome, the Arabo-Moslem societies – which endowed themselves

⁵ Other important contributions to the historiography include Arondekar (2005); Briggs (2002); Chiang (2009a); Matsuda (2005); Povinelli (2006); and Stoler (1995, 2002 and 2006).

with an *ars erotica* [...]. On the face of it at least, our civilization possesses no *ars erotica*. In return, it is undoubtedly the only civilization to practice a *scientia sexualis*; or rather, the only civilization to have developed over the centuries procedures for telling the truth of sex which are geared to a form of knowledge-power strictly opposed to the art of initiations and the masterful secret.

(Foucault, 1990, p.57)

The division between *ars erotica* and *scientia sexualis*, at least by the nineteenth century, is clearly one that distinguishes the East from the West, the Orient from the Occident, the non-*scientia sexualis* Asia from the non-*ars erotica* Euro-America. As we piece together Foucault's project and Davidson's insight, we begin to sense that there is no place for China, to isolate a region here, in the historical linkage between the emergence of sexuality and the psychiatric epistemology of nineteenth-century *scientia sexualis*. It is as if sexuality – like capitalism, industrialism, and modern science – was born in the West without China; or, put differently, it is as if before the twentieth century, sexuality was an exclusive property of the West, and China had no share.

It is not my intention here to merely highlight the Eurocentricism of Foucault and Davidson. If anything, my goal would be to extend by sophisticating the general picture they provide us. In agreement with Davidson, I am rather convinced that the new form of experience that we call "sexuality" is closely linked to the emergence of new structures of knowledge in nineteenth-century Europe. But I am equally convinced that the Foucauldian historiography of sexuality has fallen short in terms of overlooking the role of, say, China in the creation of a scientific discourse of sexuality starting in the late nineteenth century. This move is crucial because, to anticipate myself a little bit, in order to fully appreciate the historical significance of the transmission of Western sexology to China in the first half of the twentieth century, we must situate *scientia sexualis* in an adequate framework of translational economy and global circulation.

What I call "double alterity" is precisely intended to help us in this regard. If Davidson has shown that "sexuality" emerged from a conceptual space a definitive feature of which is the psychiatric style of reasoning, and that such conceptual space is *temporally* contrasted with a previous conceptual space of the anatomical style of reasoning, I would add that the critical positioning of Europe against the *geospatial* alterity of a distanced Other, such as China, was foundational to the rise of the new structures of knowledge associated with the emergence of sexuality. To cite Schick (1999), "[t]he sexuality of the 'other' was a technology of place; its function

was the spatialization of difference, the differentiation of space” (p. 232).⁶ In the realm of sexual science, the cross-cultural interaction between China and the West thus did not take place only by the twentieth century when Republican Chinese intellectuals actively introduced European sexology to the Chinese public (or, for that matter, when doctors, pedagogues, and ministry officials actively appropriated it in Japan); rather, the interaction happened as early as at the very moment when a scientific discourse of sex was just beginning to acquire some formality in Europe.⁷

The particular type of this cross-cultural interaction that I will consider concerns a conspicuous oversight among scholars who have studied the early discourse of European sexology. In an earlier paper, I remarked that:

[b]ased on my review of the existing body of literature in the history of sexuality, not a single author adequately differentiates and analyzes the parameters of science and medicine in turn-of-the-twentieth-century sexology. Historians of sexuality who have written about the sexologists to date, therefore, have risked leaving unexamined critical tensions and issues of historicism that exist at the intersections of medicine and science in the history of sexology.

(Chiang, 2008c, p.35-38)

So the oversight I am referring to is one of historicism that treats the early discourse of sexology as monolithic rather than heterogeneous, one unsaturated rather than saturated with the tensions and distinctions between science and medicine.⁸ Indeed, it is only when we are able to isolate the turn of the twentieth century as a critical turning point around which sexology “scientified”, so to speak, from a medically-oriented paradigm, can we begin to appreciate how its gradual development depended largely on an implicit, though foundational, interaction between Europe and its Other, such as China.

To demonstrate this process of the “scientification” of sexology, one could begin with Richard von Krafft-Ebing’s psychiatric treatises prior to its formal unfolding. However, rather than starting with Krafft-Ebing, I think it would suffice here by going directly to Iwan Bloch, who opened his acclaimed *The Sexual Life of Our Time* with the following proclamation:

⁶ See also Bleys (1995).

⁷ On the introduction of Western sexology to modern Japan, see Frühstück (2003) and Pflugfelder (1999).

⁸ On this oversight in the history of sexology, see also Chiang (2008a).

For more than ten years the author of the present work has been occupied, both theoretically and practically, with the problems of the sexual life, and in his various earlier writings he has regarded these problems, not merely from the point of view of the physician, but also from that of the anthropologist and of the historian of civilization. He is, in fact, convinced that the purely medical consideration of the sexual life, although it must always constitute the nucleus of sexual science, is yet incapable of doing full justice to the many-sided relationships between the sexual and all the other provinces of human life. To do justice to the whole importance of love in the life of the individual and in that of society, and in relation to the evolution of human civilization, this particular branch of inquiry must be treated in its proper subordination as a part of the general science of mankind, which is constituted by a union of all other sciences – of general biology, anthropology and ethnology, philosophy and psychology, the history of literature, and the entire history of civilization.

(Bloch, 1928 [1907], p.ix)

What Bloch called for, and claimed his book to represent, was a comprehensive study of human sexuality that draws on various kinds of scientific inquiry, including biological, ethnological, psychological, and historical perspectives. Indeed, Bloch was precisely one of the early sexologists who published monographs, edited disciplinary journals, founded learned societies, and organized conferences, all devoted to the goal of establishing a comprehensive scientific discipline of human sexuality that incorporated a variety of research methodologies.

Other famous sexologists at the time who shared a similar vision include the British psychologist of sex Havelock Ellis and the German physician Magnus Hirschfeld. Ellis, trained in medicine, authored *Sexual Inversion* (1906 [1897]) – the second volume of his encyclopedic series *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* – with the initial help of the poet and literary critic John Addington Symonds and subsequent assistance from the socialist romantic writer Edward Carpenter.⁹ In the process of writing his book, Ellis integrated the literary and historical information about homosexuality that Symonds and Carpenter had provided with his own medical and psychological insights (John Addington Symonds to Havelock Ellis, Am Hof, Davos Platz, Switzerland, 20 June 1892, in Schueller and Peters [1969, vol.

⁹ The first English edition was published as the first volume of the *Studies* in 1897, the second in 1901 as the second volume. The manuscript was translated into German by Hans Kurella and published in Leipzig in 1896 with J. A. Symonds' name included as the co-author. See Ellis and Symonds (1896).

3, p.693-94]).¹⁰ Shortly after, in Germany, Hirschfeld sent questionnaires to 3,000 male college students of the Charlottenburger Technische Hochschule in December 1903 and again to 5,721 metal-workers of the German Metal Workers Union in February 1904.¹¹ Based on this survey method, Hirschfeld (1904b) reported 1.5 per cent homosexuals and 4.5 per cent bisexuals among the students, and 1.15 per cent homosexuals and 3.19 per cent bisexuals among the metal-workers.¹² In addition to estimating its prevalence, Hirschfeld researched homosexuality through another approach – conducting field work in locales of Berlin’s homosexual subculture, the findings of which were documented in his *Berlin’s Third Sex* (1904a). Clearly, Ellis’s collaboration with Symonds and Carpenter, as well as Hirschfeld’s employment of statistical and ethnographical research methods, denoted a strong effort to expand the disciplinary boundary of scientific sexology to extend beyond medicine.

Likewise, learned societies and disciplinary journals in sexual science were founded by this generation of sexologists and not by earlier psychiatrists, who were more concerned with legitimizing their field of specialization within the larger medical profession. At his home in Charlottenburg, Hirschfeld formed the first sexological society in history, the Scientific-Humanitarian Committee (SHC), on 15 May 1897. He also managed the editorship of the *Yearbooks for Sexual Intermediaries*, published under the name of SHC from 1899 to 1923, which included articles by a variety of scientists, including biologists, psychoanalysts, and other physicians, with whom Hirschfeld often shared conflicting theories of homosexuality. His major purpose, though, was to promote professional communications and scientific conversations about problems in human sexuality, especially same-sex desire. Subsequently, the collaboration between Hirschfeld and Bloch, along with other physicians, resulted in the founding of the Medical Society for Sexology and Eugenics in Berlin on 3 February 1913. The founding of this larger and more eminent sexological society also revived the *Journal of Sexual Science*, which Hirschfeld

¹⁰ On Havelock Ellis, see Brome (1979); Calder-Marshall (1959); Collis (1959); Draznin (1992); Goldberg (1926); Grosskurth (1980); Robinson (1989 [1976]); and Rowbotham and Weeks (1977). On John A. Symonds, I have relied on Pemble (1999); Robinson (1999); and Schueller and Peters (1967-69). On Edward Carpenter, I have read Beith (1931); Carpenter (1916); Crosby (1901); Ellis (1910); Lewis (1915); Tsuzuki (1980); and Rowbotham and Weeks (1977).

¹¹ Charlottenburg is a district in Berlin where Hirschfeld resided.

¹² Hirschfeld reported these numbers later again in Hirschfeld (2000 [1914], p.544-45 and p.553-57). The first edition of this monograph was published in German in 1914, the second in 1920. These numbers are also cited in LeVay (1996, p.25-26) and Wolff (1986, p.58-59).

had launched in 1908 by himself as a monthly publication but only lasted for a year, and which was now under the new editorship of Bloch and Albert Eulenburg with an elevated international status. In the summer of the same year that the Medical Society was established, Hirschfeld participated in the International Congress of Physicians organized by the British Medical Association from 6th to 12th August in London. At the Congress, he gave a presentation on hermaphroditic, androgynous, homosexual, and transvestite individuals that brought him immediate worldwide recognition. More importantly, his presence at the convention inspired the births of the first Viennese sexological organization in 1913 and the British Society for the Study of Sex Psychology in 1914.¹³

This social history of the “scientification” of sexology would seem rather Eurocentric, and perhaps rather uninteresting, unless we are willing to situate it in a larger context of epistemic globality. To accomplish this, we probably would do best to turn again to Bloch’s *The Sexual Life of Our Time*:

Let us leave the hospital and the medical consulting-room; let us make a journey around the world; let us observe the sexual activity of the genus homo in its manifold phenomena, not as physicians, but as ordinary observers; let us compare the sexuality of the civilized human being with that of the savage: then we shall recognize the vast extension of our visual field for the comprehension of psychopathia sexualis; we shall see how the civilized and temporary phenomenon becomes absorbed into the general human phenomenon, presenting amid all local variations the same fundamental lineaments. Psychopathia sexualis exists everywhere and at all times. Culture, civilization, and diseases play only the parts of favouring, modifying, intensifying factors.

(Bloch, 1928 [1907], p.456)

Bloch’s discussion descends from a style of sexological reasoning that begins, roughly speaking, in the closing years of the nineteenth century, a moment when rules for the production of true discourses of sexuality evolved radically from the earlier style of medical sexological reasoning. “Truth” about sexuality is no longer exclusively linked to psychiatric theories of sexual disorders. It is now a legitimate concern for a wide array of approaches to knowledge acquisition and development. Rather than confined to “the hospital and the medical consulting-room” in Europe, the conceptual stage of sexology has now expanded to a worldwide platform. By “mak[ing] a journey around the world” mentally (and physically, for some like

¹³ For a more detailed biographical account, see Wolff (1986) and Dose (2005).

Hirschfeld), the sex researcher now “observe[s] the sexual activity of the genus homo in its manifold phenomenon, not as physicians, but as ordinary observers”.

This, however, does not mean that sexual anomalies disappeared altogether in the discourse of sexual science. It just means that places of a distanced Other now play a decisive role in the way sexual anomalies are articulated in the European sexological imagination. Thus, several pages after the passage I just quoted above, Bloch writes:

Since sexual anomalies constitute a phenomenon generally characteristic of humanity, race and nationality, as such, have less to do with the matter than is commonly imagined. The Mongol and the Malay are not less voluptuous than the Semites, or than many Aryan races. Among the Semites, the Arabs and the Turks are pre-eminently sexually perverse nations. They seek sexual gratification indifferently in the female harem and in the boys' brothel (see numerous descriptions of travelers on the moral customs of Turkey, the Levant, Cairo, Morocco, the Arabian Soudan, the Arabs in Africa, etc.). Among the Aryan races the Aryans of India must be considered pre-eminent as refined practitioners of psychopathia sexualis, which they have reduced to a system. In addition to recognizing forty-eight *figurae Veneris* (different postures in sexual intercourse), they practice every possible variety of sexual perversion; and they have in various textbooks a systematic introduction to sexual immorality.

(Bloch, 1928 [1907], p.468-69)

And after this long excursion to various places around the world, Bloch hastens to add that “[h]ere there is manifestly no trace of morbid conditions, of degeneration, or of psychopathia; it is simply a matter of popular manners and customs” (p.469). No longer existing only in the domain of psychopathia, sexuality is now finally to be found everywhere, scientifically.

To be sure, I do not think that the distinction between medical and scientific sexology is as revolutionary as the earlier break from the anatomical to the psychiatric style of reasoning that Davidson has identified. That earlier break around the mid-nineteenth century gave birth to a brand new conceptual space that made it possible for sexuality to be a candidate of clinical truth-and-falsehood. For the relationship between sexuality and *scientia sexualis* to be fully elucidated, however, I am suggesting here that our interpretation of this relationship since the nineteenth century must be more sensitive. We must pay fuller attention to the subtle epistemic tensions between medicine and science that are involved in the gradual unfolding of

sexuality as a comprehensible concept. Before the end of the nineteenth century, sexuality in *scientia sexualis* was understood only with respect to the conceptual status of psychopathology. By the early twentieth century, sexuality in *scientia sexualis* was comprehended in terms of a scientific status that is more comprehensive in nature. And, as I have been suggesting, this is even more crucial as we consider the “scientification” of sexology in a larger framework of epistemic globality, in which regions such as China and India performed an important epistemic function in the shaping of the historical-intellectual contours of this “scientification” process. What we ought to infer from highlighting the Orientalism of the Foucauldian historiography of sexuality,¹⁴ then, is that the emergence of sexuality as a possible candidate of scientific comprehensibility was *global* in scope to begin with, and not a concealed Western project in which places of a distanced Other played no role in the early phases of its conceptual formation.

I want to conclude by building on what Tani Barlow and others have called “colonial modernity” in order to bring, even more explicitly, the geopolitical frameworks of colonialism and imperialism to bear on the study of the seemingly private domain of desire and the intimate. According to Barlow, “colonial modernity” can be understood as:

a speculative frame for investigating the infinitely pervasive discursive powers that increasingly connect at key points to the globalizing impulses of capitalism. Because it is a way of posing a historical question about how our mutual present came to take its apparent shape, colonial modernity can also suggest that historical context is not a matter of positively defined elemental, or discrete units – nation states, stages of development, or civilizations, for instance – but rather a complex field of relationships or threads of material that connect multiply in space-time and can be surveyed from specific sites.

(Barlow, 1997, p.6)

By treating China and Europe as my referential points of historical comparison, I follow other scholars of colonialism to see this geopoliticized project as inherently worldwide in scope. It is crucial, therefore, for us to abandon quantitative categories such as “semi-colonialism” or “informal empire” in favor of Barlow’s “colonial modernity” as heuristic tools of historical investigation. Certainly, the British colonial administration in India looked nothing like its counterpart in China, but I am not primarily concerned with the issue of sameness or difference between China and India. What I am taking issue here is with the typical attempt to impose quantitative

¹⁴ On this point see also Stoler (1995 and 2002).

categories (such as semi-colonialism, informal imperialism, etc.) on historical situations and use them as qualitative qualifiers in describing what is conceived as “historically real” about, say, the juxtaposition of China against India. In place of “semi-colonialism”, other scholars such as Ruth Rogaski (2004) have proposed the notion of “hyper-colonialism” to account for the presence of other colonial forces (most notably Japan but also other European ones) at various corners of the Qing Empire. But here again, we fall into the trap of using quantitative categories to conceptualize qualitative permutations of networks of colonial power. Is it asking too much to think about these various inter-related attempts of colonial, imperial, and national geopolitical entanglements in a complex set of unified framework that we might call “colonial modernity”? This would not lead us, in using terms such as “semi-colonialism”, to privilege a certain type of colonial administration and turn a blind eye on other co-existing modalities of colonizer-colonized relations. Adopting “colonial modernity” as a historical and historiographical category would thus force us to rethink about China and India, for instance, as two sites of colonial power/resistance – two nexuses of imperial struggle – in terms of a *global configuration*, a worldwide web of the social epistemological forces of the (re)formations of state-centered apparatuses and state-induced historical colonies and empires.

Through the frame of “colonial modernity” we can also begin to appreciate the materiality of the imperial discourse of sexuality. Many scholars have demonstrated that the material and the discursive spheres of imperial experience are not opposites, but mutually reinforcing. Bruno Latour’s notion of “immutable mobile” (1990), Thomas Richards’ “epistemological complex” (1992), Gayatri Spivak’s “effects of the real” (1999, p.198-311, esp. p.203), alongside the works of Mary Louise Pratt (1992), David Spurr (1993), James Hevia (2003), and Laura Hostetler (2001), all show that the way empire is “written” or “drawn” on paper cannot be completely separated from the way it functions in social reality.¹⁵ “Word” and “world” cannot be treated as historical opposites, and, insofar as the assumption about their opposition is fundamental to the issue of representationalism, I think one would not be going too far to argue that the consolidation of the nineteenth-century *scientia sexualis* precisely denotes a “de-territorialization” and “re-territorialization” of the human sexual

¹⁵ More explicit connections between these important works in empire studies and the nineteenth-century paradigm shift in visuality observed by Jonathan Crary (1990) are still waiting to be made. One valuable starting point is Heinrich (2008).

sphere.¹⁶ The establishment of an European archive of sexual science in the nineteenth century did not merely reflect, but completely reconfigured the global culture of eros and sexual desire. In essence, this archive developed a “true” discourse about sex that aims for scientific comprehensiveness, and the knowledge it collected, indexed, and cross-referenced about the sexuality of the Other reveals the imperialist impulse imprinted on its very own methodological empiricism. Moreover, it is precisely in light of this nineteenth-century epistemological layering of colonial modernity can we begin to make sense of the way in which nationalism and sexuality emerged roughly around the same time. From around the 1850s onward, the emergent global system of nation-states and the nascent worldview of sexuality together constitute a critical moment in history when what scholars have often referred to as the “new imperialism” or “Euroamerican global hegemony” imposed a new world order onto the colonized Africa, Pacific, and much of Asia as a result of the expansion of continental European nations and the United States.

Elsewhere, by reconfiguring “colonial modernity” into “epistemic modernity”, I have discussed the significance of the arrival of Western sexology in Republican China (1912-1949): namely, knowledge claims about sexuality *themselves* became explicit claims about referential points of cultural authenticity, traditionality, and modernity (e.g., as when mapped onto such systems of knowledge as Chinese versus Western medicine). When the cultural apparatus of epistemic modernity mediated the translation of the Western category of “homosexuality” into *tongxing lian'ai* at the peak of the May Fourth and beyond, what got translated was not just the vocabulary itself, but an entirely foreign *style of reasoning* descending from Western psychiatric thought about sexual perversion and psychopathology. And to assess the transformations in the epistemology of same-sex desire in China from an internal historical perspective, we can begin to reconstruct some of the polarized concepts that constitute two opposed *styles of argumentation*.¹⁷ We are presented, for instance, with the polarities between literati taste and sick perversion, refined obsession and pathological behavior, cultural superiority and psychological abnormality, markers of elite status and signs of national backwardness. The first of each of these pairs of concepts partially makes up the *culturalistic* style of argumentation about same-sex desire, while the second of each of these pairs help to constitute

¹⁶ On the theoretical concepts of “de-territorialization” and “re-territorialization”, see Deleuze and Guattari (1983).

¹⁷ I also develop the epistemological applicability of “style” in Chiang (2009b).

the *nationalistic* style of argumentation. These polarities therefore characterize two distinct conceptual modes of representation, two conceptual spaces, two different kinds of deep epistemological structure. It follows that the discursive apparatus of epistemic modernity has not only mediated the importation of a psychiatric style of reasoning about homosexuality from the Western world, but, in doing so, it has simultaneously catalyzed an internal shift in the conceptual paradigm of same-sex desire.

Therefore, from “double alterity” to “epistemic modernity”, what I offer is a history of sexuality in the framework of translational economy and global circulation: “China” resituated chronologically from a position of possessing a critical geospatial ontology in the Western sexological imagination to a historical status of absorbing the globally circulating discourse of sexology, category of homosexuality, and practice of articulating a psychiatric style of reasoning. Ultimately, the implication of this historical process, I believe, is a story of “Great Convergence” in the history of the modern world, whereby a “sexual revolution” that spanned across the globe over the course of roughly a hundred years established the preconditions for our conceptualization of sexuality since the mid-twentieth century.¹⁸ One of the most decisive consequences of this revolution is the appearance of increasingly visible movements, organizations, communities, and urban cultures structured around sexual identity categories throughout the world during the last sixty years or so. The new *episteme* of sexuality consolidated by this “sexual revolution” has also enabled the framing of sexual rights to be figured into a larger international discourse of human rights in the twenty-first century. Finally, whereas historians have tended to treat historical “revolutions” (such as the Scientific or the Industrial one) as great divergences or indications of civilizational difference,¹⁹ this study suggests that interpreting “revolutions” as global convergences offers a rare approach in our continuing effort to comprehend our shared past, present, and future.

¹⁸ In this sense, I agree with Michael Geyer and Charles Bright (1995) and Prasenjit Duara (2009), who see the mid-nineteenth century as a major turning point in modern world history. For other perspectives on the periodization of major turning points in the world integration (or “Great Convergence”) thesis, see, for example, Bentley (1996); Hopkins (2002); Mazlish (2006); and Northrup (2006).

¹⁹ The most recent successful attempt at revising the old Euro-centric historiographic interpretation of the Industrial Revolution is Pomeranz (2000). For a balanced treatment of the rise of modern science with respect to the historiographic role of China, see Elman (2005).

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