

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

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Abstract

The central problem that concerns my comparative/global historiographic analysis 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? In the interest of situating this problem in a framework of translational economy and global circulation, 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”. I argue that sexuality emerged as a global possibility at a critical conjuncture 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 of sexuality to claim the comprehensibility of a science. Accordingly, “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. Using this analytic rubric, I bring the geopolitical frameworks of colonialism and imperialism to bear on the study of the seemingly private domain of desire and the intimate in the context of China, Europe, and beyond.