

# THE RISE OF QUEER OCCIDENTALISM AS A COUNTER-DISCOURSE IN 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY CHINA

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## Abstract

My previous article has argued queer Occidentalism as an official discourse employed by the government apparatus to defend sexual conservatism and to resist Western influences in Maoist and early post-Mao China. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, China's changed cultural and political milieu has not only set a new trend but also given new meaning to queer Occidentalism. Against this background, my MA thesis aims to reconceptualize queer Occidentalism in relation to the context of 21<sup>st</sup> century China, and to recount the rise of queer Occidentalism as a counter-discourse. It argues that Chinese Occidentalism has undergone a double 'queer turn' – on the one hand, the images of the (once superior) 'West' are queered/queried by domestic popular cultural products with the surge of Chinese new nationalism; and on the other, the 'West' is (re)appropriated by queer writers and activists as a liberating force. This double turn gives rise to queer Occidentalism as a counter-discourse against Western imperialism and domestic repressive forces, respectively. By situating the activist discourse of queer Occidentalism within the trans-Atlantic cultural flow and the politics of homonationalism, the thesis aims not only to conduct a critique on queer Occidentalism as activist discourse, but also to show how Occidentalism and Orientalism are mutually informed and disrupted. With the rise of nationalism and anti-imperialism, Occidentalism reveals itself to be a lasting and continual struggle between 'Western' discourses about the 'West' and the 'East' masqueraded as international or universal, and 'Eastern' (re)construction of the 'West'. In doing so, the study not only problematizes the established definition of Occidentalism as 'stylized images of the West' (Carrier 2003, 1), but questions Occidentalism as a project that can ever be settled or accomplished as an 'Oriental' discourse in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## DECLARATION OF ORIGINAL RESEARCH AND THE WORD COUNT

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of original research; it contains no materials accepted for any other degree in any other institution and no materials previously written and/or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgment is made in the form of bibliographical reference.

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Signed      Qingfei Zhang

*(Signature appears on the hard copy submitted to the library)*

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Edward Said (1978), in *Orientalism*, delineates Orientalism as a colonial discourse largely unintentionally imposed by the colonial government as a result of colonial rule, exerting control through ideologies embodying East-West hierarchies. Said (1978, 50) believed that Orientalism as combining scholarly specialization and geographical field is unique to which no Occidentalism can be compared – after all, the ‘West’ is hardly totalized as an entity for scholarly specialization. What he failed to point out are fantasies about the ‘West’ in ‘Eastern’ contexts that constitute the dominant forms of Occidentalism. In this sense, Occidentalism designates a series of fantasied images about the ‘West’, articulated with an eye on the ‘West’ as the non-Western tries to imagine how its image is perceived by the ‘West’.<sup>1</sup> The fantasy nature of Occidentalism often renders the ‘West’ a contested ground for specific, and often contradictory, political or cultural ends, arbitrarily deployed at the will of its appropriators to the extent that the ‘West’ often accommodates opposite images within a given culture. Indeed, Occidentalism is a convenient strategy appropriated not only by/in the Orient but by/in the Occident. Millie R. Creighton (1995), in ‘Imaging the Other in Japanese Advertising Campaigns’, argued the eroticization and exoticization of the ‘West’ in Japanese culture to reaffirm Japanese values and security. Xiaomei Chen (1995), in *Occidentalism*, delineated two opposite images of the ‘West’ that contributed to what she called official and anti-official Occidentalism – on the one hand, the government apparatus appropriated a decadent ‘West’ to suppress its own people, but on the other hand, the opponents of official institutions used

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<sup>1</sup> This is what Meltem Ahiska (2003) calls ‘double reflection’ of Occidentalism: The ‘West’ is not only seen as an evil Other. Occidental discourses also emulate and extend the Western model of modernization for the non-Western to articulate its national identity.

‘Western superiority’ to advance their liberating cause of modernization. Deborah Reed-Danahay (1995) and James G. Carrier (1995) argued how Western anthropologists tended to essentialize the ‘West’ in their studies of the Orient.

As far as Occidentalism is about fantasies concerning the ‘West’ in terms of Chen’s and Ahiska’s double vision, the binary of Orientalism and Occidentalism needs to be problematized. Occidentalism does not exist alone, so far as it creates stylized, hierarchical images of the ‘West’. It connotes, and also speaks to, Orientalism, and vice versa. Take for example the process of re-Orientalisation: the Orientalist discourse is reproduced or re-appropriated by Orientals for the imaginary Western gaze (Lau & Mendes 2011). Re-Orientalism is not uncommon in 21st century (south) Asian contexts, where cultural producers consciously re-Orientalize (south) Asian regions for Western consumption of Oriental exoticism, subjugating local identity politics to the hegemonic discourse of Orientalism, often in accordance with Western market forces (Lau & Mendes 2011). Examples include Lisa Lau and Ana Mendes’s study of South Asian English-language cultural products, such as Deepa Agarwal’s *If the Earth Should Move* and Thalassa Ali’s *A Singular Hostage*, as well as Chinese film directors’ (Zhang Yimou, Chen Kaige) West-acclaimed films, whose success at international (Western) film festivals, Wang (1997) and Wang (1992) argue to a large extent relied on their stereotyping of a backward, rural and exotic China. Categorizing these phenomena as re-Orientalism naturally obscures and diminishes the image of the Occident whose position ‘behind the scenes’ is assumed by scholars beforehand. Scholarly articulation of such (re-)Orientalism presumes on an Occidental discourse which is already there before Orientalism can be articulated.

In this sense, neither Orientalism nor Occidentalism is an independent discourse, each relying on the other for articulation. James G. Carrier (1995) has argued the Orient as

dialectically defined by Orientalists against a ‘West’ that is always hidden behind. The dialectic relationship of Orientalism and Occidentalism not only means that the two geopolitical notions are defined and constructed against each other, but Orientalism always presupposes the image of a racist, imperialist ‘West’ (Massad 2015). Occidentalism, like Orientalism, is hence about the study/images of the ‘West’ as much as the ‘East’ (Massad 2015, 88). Failing to see them in a dialectical, intersectional relationship would render cultural critique reductive. For example, in *Occidentalism*, Xiaomei Chen (1995) observed the modification of Western thoughts in China, but she nevertheless insisted on categorizing it into western construction of China (as Orientalism) and Chinese construction of the ‘West’ (as Occidentalism). Her apparent notice of the dialectic relationship of Occidentalism and Orientalism vis-a-vis her persistent positioning them in binary terms blinds her from certain perspective, for instance, when she insists that this Occidentalism should not be viewed as cultural imperialism whereas this elitist anti-official Occidentalism that she argues in the monograph was to a large extent an appropriation of Western Orientalism. She goes further to suggest that ‘Such Occidentalism may be considered as a counter-discourse, a counter- memory, and a counter-“Other” to Said’s Orientalism’ (Chen 1995, 8). To define Occidentalism as ‘stylized images of the West’ (Carrier 2003, 1) is hence reductive. Acknowledging their mutual reliance and reciprocal information not only helps to trace their common root, but to understand Orientalism and Occidentalism as produced through a dynamic negotiation under trans-Atlantic cultural flow, whose meaning is constantly deferred and forever in the making.

Indeed, Occidentalism, though sometimes rooted in Oriental centrism,<sup>2</sup> is more often informed by imperialist Orientalist discourses facilitated by trans-Atlantic cultural flow starting from colonial conquests, as demonstrated by Roger Keesing's argumentation on the reification of Melanesian *kastom* brought by colonization (Carrier 2003, 6-7; Keesing 1982, 300), and Lamont Lindstrom's notion of cargo cult that connotes the essential distinctions between the 'West' and the alien (1995, 33-60). The flow is neither unidirectional nor unilateral (Laemmerhirt 2014, 11-32; Iwabuchi 2002, 39; Park 2005, 245). Instead, it involves adoption/adaptation as well as rejection during constant cultural contacts, and more prominently, clashes, in which many other factors come into play, including local tradition, social ideologies and nationalism. Mediated through these forces, Occidentalism often manifests to be precarious, hybrid and even paradoxical. Situating Occidentalism within a dynamic cultural flow hence not only enables us to perceive and analyze these forces, but to further problematize the binary of Orientalism and Occidentalism. It allows us to show how Orientalist discourses translate into Occidentalism, and also to unearth the unbalanced power relation in the process, where Occidentalism's reliance on the omnipresence of a new Orientalism for articulation increasingly reveals an imperialist Western discourse that impacts the Orient through cultures and theories masqueraded as 'universal'. In doing so, it also questions the reductive definition of Occidentalism as stylized images of the 'West' under trans-Atlantic cultural flow.

While much has been discussed about Occidentalism, queer Occidentalism remains a relatively new and under-researched phenomenon. According to existing frameworks (Chen 1995), queer Occidentalism can be evoked as either an official discourse employed by the

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<sup>2</sup> For example in the dynastic period, China's seclusion from the outside world made the imperial court uphold a firm belief about the country's central status in the world in terms of both geography and power, and hence all foreigners were degraded to the inferior called *manyi*, or barbarians (Jiang 2012).



government apparatus to repress the queer, or an anti-official discourse serving as a liberating force to counter the repression. Indeed, queer Occidentalism in China once served for the overall political agenda of socialist undertakings, in which the ‘West’ was appropriated by the Chinese government to suppress the queer at home as much as queer sexualities were employed to inferioritize the ‘West’ (Zhang 2015). The shifting discourses of queer Occidentalism from an official repressive, anti-imperialist discourse to a counter-discourse resulted in a form of indirect Orientalism. The interpretations of the relationship between the two geopolitical spaces in terms of the distinction in the ‘homo-capitalism’ versus ‘hetero-socialism’ divide has been transformed, or re-appropriated by queer activists for liberating purposes, giving legitimacy to queer Occidentalism as a counter-discourse. At its initiation, starting from China’s opening-up in the 1980s (Zhang 2014b), we see discourses of Occidentalism on non-normative sexuality as an anti-imperialist discourse constructed through official reports of, mostly, travel notes (for example, ‘A glimpse of the kaleidoscope-like United States’ (Wei 1986); ‘Some random thoughts about my visit to Hollywood’ (Yuan 1985); ‘City of Freedom cannot be demolished’ (Gu 1988); ‘Some thoughts on modern Western culture’ (Zhao 1987) ). These writings, which appeared in the influential official newspaper of the CCP, the *People’s Daily*, dealt in the representation of stereotyped ‘Western queer culture’ and constructed a truth of ‘queer West’, in that the ‘queer West’ was on the one hand viewed as a sign of Western decadency antithetical to traditional Chinese values and official socialist ideologies. Chinese nationalism at this point used queer sexualities to defend the superiority of socialist ideology and red revolutionary culture in the official discourse (Zhang 2015). Particularly, this Occidentalist discourse is used by the Chinese government to justify its rejection of Western-style emancipation but to implement a non-progressive policy known as the three-no – ‘no approval, no disapproval, no promotion.’ On

the other hand, partly fueled by the emergence of some domestic LGBT activism, the same stereotyping was viewed by activists as a liberating force that idealized the ‘West’ as a gay paradise (Bao 2013). With the rise of queer activism since the 1990s, the ‘West’ has been re-appropriated as a counter discourse against the Chinese government’s three-no policy and traditional family values under the trans-Atlantic flow of Western theories, culture and capital.

Coinciding with the activists’ (re)appropriation of the ‘West’ as a liberating force is the rise of Chinese new nationalism that started to queer/query the images of the superior ‘West’ once prevalent in the early post-socialist era. Literature in China studies has argued that there was a prevalence of ‘Western superiority’ that structured public feelings in the early post-socialist period (Chen 1995; Wang 1997; Bao 2013) when the high fever of ‘Western learning’ stimulated a ubiquitous sentiment of ‘Western worshiping’, leading to Chinese people’s loss of faith in Communism (Guo 2004). Under this circumstance, Chinese nationalism started to manifest a divide between ‘identification with the nation’ and ‘loyalty to the state’ (Guo 2004). Nationalism was, on the one hand, articulated through the elite discourse of ‘Western learning’ that would allegedly lead the country to prosperity and democracy, but on the other hand through the Chinese government’s resisting discourses against ‘capitalist ideologies’ that threatened to effect China’s regression into capitalism (Guo 2004). ‘Western worshiping’ reached a cult status in the 1989 Tian’anmen students’ movement. Sinologists widely viewed the movement as a transition in Chinese people’s attitude towards the ‘West’/‘Western’: the movement has not only changed the worldview of Chinese youth from pro-West to anti-West (Gries 2004, 7), but ‘the matters of identity have been conceptualized in vastly different ways before and after the dramatic Tian’anmen events of 1989. Such was the national ethos throughout the 1980s that the ‘correct’ view in society was that nothing except wholesale Westernization could save China’

(Guo 2004, xii). Coincidentally, as China was, actively or passively, involved in global affairs in the 1990s and 2000s, the collective emotion was very much manipulated by China's 'failures' and 'successes' on the international stage (e.g. the Li Wenhe espionage case, the bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, the collision of a Chinese F-8 fighter with a US Navy EP-3, China's entry into WTO, China's successful bid for the 2008 Olympic Games, the return of Hong Kong and Macao), which produced waves of grand rejoicing, enormous pride, as well as indomitable anger, and these feelings were related to, primarily, the 'West'.

With the rise of new nationalism in the post-Tian'anmen era (Gries 2004), 'China is in search of a new national identity when it came up against what was widely known as a "crisis of faith", which was not merely a loss of faith in communism but a loss of faith in Chinese culture and tradition as well' (Guo 2004, xi). In response, the Chinese government changed its diplomatic policy towards Japan and the 'West', including the Party's narrative of the nation from 'victor' to 'victim', and the recount of Japanese imperialism and the 'Century of Humiliation', and the 'apology' policy towards Japan (Gries 2004). On the other hand, popular nationalism, or 'neonationalism', 'fill[s] the ideological vacuum in China' (Yang 2009, 56). Particularly, rounds of anti-West and anti-Japan campaigns cultivated a group of *fenqing* (angry youth) nationalists who 'are far more vocal than moderate citizens and set the tone for policy debate on the Internet' (He 2007, 61). Popular nationalism is often enthusiastically engaged with images of the 'West', expressed through sentiments against China's enemies, the 'West' and Japan in particular.

Against this background, I ask what makes Chinese Occidentalism 'queer' in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and in what ways queer Occidentalism, as so conceptualized, serves as a counter-discourse. To answer the questions, the thesis consists of three main chapters besides Chapter 1

Introduction and Chapter 5 Conclusion. They are: Chapter 2 Maoist Occidentalism, the three-no policy, and the government politics of homonationalism; Chapter 3 Chinese Occidentalism's double 'queer turn'; Chapter 4 Queer Occidentalism as activist discourse. Chapter 2 sets out to outline the Chinese government's policies/discourses about queer sexualities and LGBT rights from the founding of PRC in 1949 onward. By doing so, this chapter aims to not only provide a historical background to understand the rise of queer Occidentalism as a counter-discourse in 21<sup>st</sup> century China, but also to delineate repressive forces, against which activists' appropriation of the 'West' can be evaluated in Chapter 4. Chapter 3 looks at the images of the 'West' as represented by Chinese nostalgic youth films in the 2010s, when nationalist sentiments surged to a new high after waves of anti-'West' campaigns, as well as queer writings published in the 21<sup>st</sup> century by Chinese writers at home and abroad. By doing so, this chapter aims to reconceptualize 'queer Occidentalism' in China's changed political and cultural milieu. Chapter 4 focuses on queer Occidentalism as activist discourse, examining the appropriation of Western theories and discourses in queer activism and evaluating its pros and cons. By situating queer Occidentalism within the trans-Atlantic cultural flow and the politics of homonationalism, this chapter also looks at how images of the 'West' are strategically appropriated, (un)intentionally destabilized, or dynamically negotiated. The multi-facet image of the 'West' problematizes the established definition of Occidentalism as 'stylized images of the West' (Carrier 2003, 1) that can ever be settled or accomplished in the 'Orient'.

This thesis argues that Chinese Occidentalism has undergone a double 'queer turn' – on the one hand, the images of the (once superior) 'West' are queered/queried by domestic popular cultural products with the surge of Chinese new nationalism; and on the other, the 'West' is (re)appropriated by queer writers and activists as a liberating force. This double turn gives rise to

queer Occidentalism as a counter-discourse against Western imperialism and domestic repressive forces, respectively. By situating the activist discourse of queer Occidentalism within the trans-Atlantic cultural flow and the politics of homonationalism, the thesis aims not only to conduct a critique on queer Occidentalism as activist discourse, but also to show how Occidentalism and Orientalism are mutually informed and disrupted. With the rise of nationalism and anti-imperialism, Occidentalism reveals itself to be a lasting and continual struggle between ‘Western’ discourses about the ‘West’ and the ‘East’ masqueraded as international or universal, and ‘Eastern’ (re)construction of the ‘West’. In doing so, the study not only problematizes the established definition of Occidentalism as ‘stylized images of the West’ (Carrier 2003, 1), but questions Occidentalism as a project that can ever be settled or accomplished as an ‘Oriental’ discourse in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In accordance with this thesis’s (re)conceptualization of ‘queer Occidentalism’, the term ‘queer’ is used as an umbrella term for LGBT (as in queer Occidentalism as activist discourse), or, in the case of cinematic articulation, a term designating either weirdness or subversiveness, including subversive gender roles and sexual morals. The ‘West’, as Lazarus (2002, 44) remarked, designates ‘an ideological category masquerading as a geographic one’ that encompasses capitalist modernity and civilization (Lazarus 2002, 44). Specifically, the ‘West’ in this thesis refers to the First World countries with whom China has an entangled history, particularly those who were in antagonism with socialist China during the Cold War. Overall, textual analysis is used as the method of this study.

## Chapter 2: Maoist Occidentalism, the three-no policy, and the government politics of homonationalism (from 1949 onwards)

### 2.1. Socialist history, Maoist Occidentalism, and sexual binaries

To understand the continuities and changes of the government's policy, it helps to consider the context relevant for the emergence of the official discourse of queer Occidentalism since 1949. As I argued elsewhere (Zhang 2015), under the guidance of so-called Marxism, China ushered into a socialist regime as a formally established state in 1949. To ensure the victory of socialism and prevent a capitalist restoration, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) launched movements of 'proliferating the socialist and eradicating the capitalist' (*xingshe miezi*) in an all-round manner. This included a series of 'labor transformation' (*laodong gaizao*) programs aiming to transform people, especially those of a capitalist or landlordist background, into the proletariat class, for an alleged better fairness in society, and for the Party's founding promise that 'people are masters of themselves' (*renmin dangjia zuozhu*). The socialist aspiration, however, was soon distorted by China's then peculiar political context. At the third plenary session of the eighth central committee held in October 1957, Mao fundamentally re-oriented the CCP's policy towards 'class struggle' (*jieji douzhen*), and initiated his (in)famous anti-rightist campaign. As prevention of a capitalist restoration became the Party's priority concern, ideology was viewed as a major battleground of resistance that would otherwise threaten the CCP's rule. In rushing to demonstrate its superiority over capitalism and to consolidate its rule, the Party demarcated the cultural sphere into distinctively capitalist and socialist camps, and waged battles against 'bourgeois elements'.

'Class struggle' was played out through sexuality by means of demarcating gendered/sexual expressions, behaviors, and practices into socialist and bourgeois camps. This

led to the official construction of what I termed as ‘sexual Occidentalism’ and ‘queer Occidentalism’ in the Maoist and early post-Mao era (though queer Occidentalism was less articulated until the early post-Mao era as social discourses significantly increased under the AIDS crisis) (Zhang 2015). The Party mobilized a set of sexual binaries such as ‘asexual socialism’/‘sexual capitalism’, ‘hetero-socialism’/‘homo-capitalism’, in which both lust and queer sexualities were viewed as signs of political perversion that must be resisted to avoid the country’s regression into capitalism (Zhang 2015). While ‘sexual Occidentalism’ helped define socialist ‘new women’ and ‘comradely romance’, ‘queer Occidentalism’, through stereotyping queer sexuality as a sign of social decadency, promoted a belief of capitalist inferiority and socialist superiority (Zhang 2015). Under this mobilization, individuals’ gendered behaviors and sexual expressions became highly politicized. Both queer subject and women not conforming to socialist sexual expression were disclosed, persecuted and executed in the name of ‘hooligan [*liumang*’] or ‘bad element [*huai fenzi*’] in the highly politicized era of the Cultural Revolution (Zhang 2015). As a ‘capitalist vice’ exclusively pertaining to the ‘West’, queer sexualities became a ‘political error’ that should ‘be corrected via reform through education and/or labour’ (Li 2006, 83), subject to ‘the arbitrary imposition of administrative penalties and Party disciplinary sanctions’ (Li 2006, 82). ‘Administrative penalties and Party disciplinary sanctions are a method of social control pertaining to China’, ‘used to control the activities of those who are deemed to have committed offenses against social order’ (Li 2006, 82).

Through the official construction of queer Occidentalism, queer sexualities testified the Party’s political, cultural, and moral supremacy. This practice was, as I argued elsewhere (Zhang 2015), a result of China’s antagonism with anti-revolutionary forces, as well as the re interpretation/misinterpretation of socialist ideologies, under which ‘Marxist’ revolutionary

thoughts found best alliance with the conservative ‘peasant-party’ culture. Therefore, queer Occidentalism was largely an official repressive discourse in Maoist and early post-Mao China.

## 2.2. The three-no policy

Indeed, as ‘official Occidentalism’ in the socialist era was devoted to justifying hetero-citizenship, queer sexualities were subject to the discourse of shame and humiliation under prevalent nationalist sentiments that claimed to resist Western imperialism and influence. Queer Occidentalism, through a (hetero)normative narration of the nation-state, played a critical role in the formation of the party-state throughout the Mao period. It became increasingly problematic with the surfacing of queer subjects at home, notably under the AIDS crisis in the 1980-90s. The Chinese government then implemented ‘sexual exceptionalism’ where, on the one hand, ‘queer capitalism’ continued to testify Western decadency, and on the other hand, domestic queer subjects started to be included into citizenry in order to contain AIDS, to whom limited rights and protection were granted to counter the nationwide ubiquitous homophobic sentiments. This exceptionalism engendered an official policy known as the three-no, ‘no approval, no disapproval, no promotion.’

Though never expressly stated by the Chinese government, the three-no policy has been de facto enforced consistently, shaping public views on queer sexualities as well as the LGBT movements in China. Used by scholars like Maud Lavin (2013), it effectively summarizes the Chinese government’s ambivalent policy towards LGBT issues. Particularly, the policy succeeds and contradistinguishes the criminalization and pathologization of same-sex practices that lasted until 1997 and 2001 respectively, with the removal of ‘hooliganism’ [*liumangzui*] from *Criminal Code* [*xingfa*] under which same-sex practices were penalized, as well as the removal of ‘same-sex love’ [*tongxinglian*] from *Classification and Diagnostic Criteria of Mental Disorders in*



*China* [zhongguo jingshen zhangai fenlei yu zhenduan biao zhun]. On the positive side, the policy opened up a space for in-community socialization. An increasing number of bars and NGOs have sprang up in urban China over the past couple of decades or so (though a ‘normative’ name to deflect government and public attention is a must for NGOs’ registration purposes),<sup>3</sup> serving for the community’s interests and welfare. On the negative side, the policy stipulates limited reach of activist influence and has basically banned public promotion/exposure, which greatly reduced the efficiency of LGBT movements that are taking place mainly in urban China.<sup>4</sup> Underpinning this policy are concerns, for example, to contain the spread of AIDS, preserve traditional family values, and protect children and youth. The three-no policy, as will be argued in ‘4.2 The coming of Western theory and global capitalism: queer activism and the “new homonormativity”’, contributes to the ‘new homonormativity’ which entrenches the disparity between the elite and the lower classes, between the rural and the urban. But above all, it turns a blind eye to a variety of social problems pertaining to LGBT people, leaving them vulnerable to social ostracization, discrimination, etc. An enormous number of them are suffering from internalized pathologization, rampant employment discrimination and suicide crisis (UNDP 2016).

Advocating is dangerous in China, as suggested by the detention of five feminists in 2015 and the official pressure imposed on sociologist/activist Li Yinhe to shut her mouth (Anonymous 2017a). The government’s three-no policy basically outlaws any public exposure of queer sexualities, evinced through the police’s arrest of BL (boy’s love) fiction writers in 2012, the governmental ‘porn crackdown’ projects in which same-sex erotica was attacked (Qu 2013), and

<sup>3</sup> For example, one of China’s largest gay bar in Beijing Destination, opened in 2004 at the bar district of Sanlitun (source: <http://www.visitbeijing.com.cn/a1/a-XAJXM8F8725EA3E4C24D4D>); the allegedly oldest gay bar in Shanghai Eddy’s Bar, opened in 1995 now relocated to 1877#, Huaihai Middle Street, Xuhui District (Source: <http://mt.sohu.com/20160828/n466438968.shtml>).

<sup>4</sup> Hou Lixian (2014) argued that LGBT movements in mainland China are urban-centric.

the state media's erasure of the previous Prime Minister of Iceland, Jóhanna Sigurdardóttir's spouse in the media coverage of their visit in 2013 (Bacchi 2013). Particularly, the government's non-reporting attitude towards suicide deteriorated the community's subsistence. The suicide of Gaga, a known transsexual figure earlier in 2016, which caused a sensation among the LGBT community, hardly made its presence even in the popular media. This echoes with an incident two years ago, in June 2015, when the government ordered in secret to permanently remove an episode of *Qipa Show*. In the episode, the famous Taiwanese host Cai Kangyong 'tearfully relayed' his out-of-closet life over the past 14 years. Informants disclosed that 'guests expressed sympathetic attitudes towards abnormal sexual relationships, which challenged traditional morals and values' (Anonymous 2015a). As the massive removal of queer-themed videos went, same-sex [*tongxinglian*] has been now restored into a sensitive word for online search at major video channels of mainland China. In this sense, the policy has substantially hindered the advance of LGBT rights and the improvement of public knowledge about LGBT people. As Petrus Liu (2015, 37) rightly observed, 'the states goal is to contain AIDS rather than combat social stigma and discrimination'.

### 2.3. The government politics of homonationalism

While the three-no policy appears to mediate between the rights of the collective and individual rights, it at the same time provides a basis where the discourse of human rights becomes central to the government's making of the politics of homonationalism. Carl F. Stychin (2004, 951) observed the globalization of human rights discourse, 'whereby human rights have become a key criterion by which the "progress" of nations is evaluated', but 'resistance to cosmopolitan claims to gay rights is often grounded in communitarian claims based on the language of the right of self-determination of a people'. As (the ambivalent attitude of) the three-no policy in China allows resilient claims that move between traditional values and

modernization, the discourse of human rights is rendered a double-sided tool by the government in defining and claiming Chinese nationalism. On the one hand, LGBT rights are seen as a tool of Western cultural imperialism which attempts to contaminate Chinese culture and moral values. Petrus Liu (2015, 139) argued the entanglement of queer human rights with the dilemmas of Chinese sovereignty, where the language of human rights reminds the PRC of ‘a long history of US interference in Asian national affairs in the name of human rights, humanitarianism, and democracy’. Homonationalism thus in this circumstance means ideological defense and self-determination, in which not only queer sexuality but also human rights become a target of abjection against which China defines its national boundary. Wan Yanhai, a pioneering activist who established China’s first hotline for LGBT people, was accused in 1993 by the Chinese government of ‘advocating homosexuality, preaching human rights, and sympathize with prostitution’ (Wan 2014a; Ministry of Public Security 1993). He recalled how his organization’s receiving funds from international human rights and democracy foundations, together with his personal participation of a series of human rights cases, brought him a major trouble (with the Chinese government) in his life (Wan 2014a). This official construction of queer Occidentalism, where queer sexuality is viewed as exclusively pertaining to the ‘West’, allows the government to reject the language of Western-style emancipation but to adopt a non-progressive attitude. An official editorial (Anonymous 2015b) commented right after the US Supreme Court’s same-sex marriage verdict that China does not necessarily follow suit when the shortcomings of the practices are yet to be revealed, and that the best way for China is to wait a long time for the change of people’s views while avoiding Western-style radicalism. A great impulse behind, which the government has felt reluctant to speak out but is occasionally voiced by the state agents, is fear of Western cultural imperialism in which evil political ambitions are embedded.

The editorial's subsequent argument of the overall Asian situation, to which China claims belonging, reinforces an anti-imperialist/postcolonialist imperative that has been closely related to LGBT rights in China.

But on the other hand, the state discourse of homonationalism is also evinced through a national(istic) drive to modernize China, in which the Western discourse of human rights is appropriated and justified. As such efforts have to mediate 'tradition', beneficiaries are strictly selective, creating uneven progress among L/G/B/T that largely, if not exclusively, advanced transgender people's legal rights. The symbolism embedded in transgenderism/transsexuality allows the government to refute its highly charged record of human rights. 'Gender as a choice means that the scope of human rights has expanded to choice making', as an article in *People's Daily* reads (Anonymous 2005). The 'unusual' report of legal progress by the Party's official newspaper – mainly ID card change and marriage registration – reveals a clear intention to 'modernize' China's national image, as long as such progress does not threaten (indeed reinforces) family values and gender dichotomy. Homonationalism, in this sense, reflects the Chinese government's endeavor to present a progressive national image using the overwhelming Western definitions of modernity and human rights, buying into Western ideologies as universal and superior. If the case of transgender rights is targeted at the domestic public, then homonationalism is also about the Chinese government showcasing its modern image to the international community, subjugating to Western pressures by appropriating Western languages of modernization and human rights. As Zhu Xiaojia (2015) observed, the 2008 Olympic Games 'brought many benefits to LGBT communities'. Xinhua News Agency compiled a report to introduce China's biggest gay bar, Destination (Zhu 2015). Without doubt, this pressure is much needed (Liu 2015, 138) and such an impulse has added to a more vibrant activist culture,

especially when it is under the surveillance of an international society. While substantial government behaviors should not be expected as long as the government politics of homonationalism remains to be anti-imperialist, it does help expand the government's tolerance of activist behaviors. A Chinese official's promise at the UN periodical review that LGBT people will be protected from social discrimination (Anonymous 2014), for example, has opened up a space for anti-discrimination proposals submitted to the two sessions – the National People's Congress and the Chinese Political Consultative Conference (Anonymous 2016a).

The government's politics of homonationalism is a manifestation of what I would term 'queer Occidentalism' in that both discourses not only assume, but are constructed against, a certain image of the 'West', which are not necessarily consistent with each other. While in both discourses the 'West' serves as a tool against which China defines itself (whether to resist ideological and cultural contamination or to fight back against Western imperialist charges of its human rights situations), LGBT rights are, in the meantime, contradictorily received by the Chinese state. At one time, queer sexuality is viewed as an evil of Western society and LGBT rights are therefore an imperialist tool of the 'West' for ideological imposition, but at another time, the Western idea to see LGBT rights as a criterion for evaluating the progress and civilization of nations is appropriated by the Chinese government to showcase its modern image. The conflation of contradictory images of the 'West' in the government's discourses reveals the hybrid dimension of official Occidentalism, reinforcing Occidentalism as invertible fantasies about the 'West' and a convenient tool for political ends.

## Chapter 3: Chinese Occidentalism's double 'queer turn'

In this chapter, I argue how Chinese Occidentalism underwent a double 'queer turn' in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. On the one hand, with the rise of new nationalism, popular cultural products in mainland China dramatically changed the representation of the 'West' and 'Westerners' and discursively constructed them as 'queer', deliberately negating the discourse of 'Western superiority' prevalent in the early post-socialist period. This consists of queering/querying the once superior image of the 'West', as well as reconstructing 'Westerners' as the queer/lustful Other as opposing to Chinese gender roles and sexual morals. For this, I will look at images of the 'West' represented by nostalgic youth films debuted during 2010s. On the other hand, there is a (re)engagement with the 'West' in queer-themed writings as a way of empowerment and liberation, which runs countering to the government's appropriation of the 'West' as a repressive force against domestic LGBT people since the Mao era. Mediated through political (socialist and nationalist) forces, Chinese Occidentalism embodied by such queer writing usually manifests itself to be precarious, hybrid and paradoxical. For this end, I look at, and compare, a formally published queer-themed novel, *Cross-Ocean Diary*, and/with an autobiography published by the *Journal of LGBT Youth* titled 'Transgender in China' (Jun 2010). In doing so, I intend to not only illustrate my conception of queer Occidentalism in 21<sup>st</sup> century China, but to introduce queer Occidentalism as a counter-discourse against imperialism and domestic LGBT-repressive forces, respectively.

### 3.1. Queering/querying the images of the 'West'

During 2013-2014, mainland Chinese cinema witnessed the thriving of nostalgic youth films (*huaijiu qingchun pian*). By evoking collective memories of the post-1970s/80s generation

[70/80后],<sup>5</sup> these films achieved great box-office success with relatively less investment<sup>6</sup>: *So Young* (2013): 720 million yuan; *American Dreams in China* (2013): 537 million yuan; *My Old Classmate* (2014): 456 million yuan; *Fleet of Time* (2014): 580 million yuan. The importance of cinema as a public discourse where an imaged community is created has been argued by Jyotika Viridi (2004), in that it counters imperialism of literature, contributing to diverse epistemology in postcolonial studies that respects ‘non-western cultures’ predominantly oral traditions’. This observation also speaks to China’s context where the cinema is a more popular cultural form than, for instance, literature. In this sense, the cinema indeed gives greater cultural immediacy to postcolonial studies in terms of how the nation is (re)imagined – it responds swiftly to public sentiments about nation and nationalism for market demands.

This section looks at these films’ representation of the ‘West’. It aims to demonstrate how popular cultural products in mainland China dramatically changed the representation of the ‘West’ and ‘Westerners’ with the surge of Chinese new nationalism, and discursively constructed them as ‘queer’. On the one hand, these films deliberately undermine the discourse of ‘Western superiority’, which was once prevalent in early post-socialist China, and reconstructed an Occidentalist discourse onto which ‘white threats’ are projected in line with the shifted worldview of the post-1970s/80s generation in the new millennium. On the other hand, sexual stereotypes are appropriated to construct ‘Westerners’ as queer for both political and artistic articulation. Specifically, this discourse is articulated through, as I argue below, queering/querying the ‘superior West’ and depicting ‘Westerners’ as the queer/lustful Other. In doing so, it not only reconstructs the image of the ‘West’ against which the Chinese nation is re-

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<sup>5</sup> ‘Post-1970s/80s generation’ is used here to refer to people who were born in the 1970s/80s.

<sup>6</sup> Their investment scale is often less than 100 million yuan, significantly lower than those commercial blockbusters.

imagined and redefined, but extends the imagined community to a larger audience including particularly the younger generations who constitute the major cinema audience today.

### 3.1.1. Queering/Querying the superior 'West'

The majority of these nostalgic youth films (2013-2014) share an obvious component of the 'West', a 'place' which attracted widespread positive sentiments most remarkably in 1980s/90s mainland China. *American Dreams in China*, *My Old Classmate*, and *So Young* are not just set against the backdrop of 'Western fever', but 'American dreams' serve as an important thread that advances the development of stories (e.g., to shape the protagonists' college life, to cause conflicts like betrayal and relationship breakup). While these films often reproduce the scenes of 'Western fever', much in a way to evoke collective memories of the post-70s/80s generation, this section suggests reading them as a re-Occidentalizing strategy through which 'Western superiority' is deliberately reproduced for nationalistic attack, mockery and self-mockery, thereby queering/querying the superior image of the 'West'.

Set against the backdrop of the rapidly changing social and political context since the 1980s, the film *American Dreams in China* (2013, Chen Kexin) tells how the three protagonists—Chen Dongqing, Meng Xiaojun, and Wang Yang—gradually set up a grand career in China's English-learning market. Along with the main clue is the film's narration of the changed worldview of the post-1970s generation from fervent Western worshipers to *fenqing* nationalists, urging the protagonists to regain dignity from the West (the US in particular). The film starts with the depiction of 'Western fever' on the campus of Peking University when, in Meng Xiaojun's words, 'the place everyone wants to go most is the US', because 'the most important for our generation is to change' whereas 'there is only one place where we can change the world—the US' (*American Dreams in China* 2013).



This is contrasted with the film's depiction of Meng's shattered American dream. The film briefly depicts Meng's falling into a loser in the US: not long after he worked in the laboratory, he was fired by his professor and his position (of feeding white rats) was taken over by a Chinese new-comer who felt no less helpless. Meng then served dishes as a busboy at a restaurant, receiving a minimum payment from his boss, without even the right to accept tips. His girlfriend, a pianist, who would not even let her fingers touch onion water in China, started to do hard labor at a US laundry. Meng's personal experience in the US shapes the film's nationalistic tone through its effective articulation of an 'authentic' hell-like US. In bringing about the disparity between the imagined and the real, the film forcefully speaks for the protagonists' once ignorant and naive youth years, consciously undermining the discourse of 'Western superiority' to suit the current nationalist(ic) sentiments. The feeling of being a loser has radically changed Meng's worldview, urging him to reclaim dignity in the US.

Indeed, to regain dignity is an important factor that drives the development of the story. As Su Mei told Chen Dongqing when the former couple met again in the US, 'the important is not to succeed, but not to lose dignity' (*American Dreams in China* 2013). Though primarily, it was used to explicate Su's breakup with Chen years ago, implying that Chen, who was born in an impoverished family, could not give her a moderately decent life that she wanted, her words nevertheless echo a recurring theme of the film—to regain dignity.

The urge to regain dignity, driven by Meng's shattered American dreams in the US, increases along with the success of the protagonists' career in domestic English-learning market on their return to China. It manifests to the full as the film draws to an end, when the three protagonists came back for negotiations about ETS copyrights. They sat around a table where Meng's personal account of being a loser in the US, which embodies a national humiliation,

greatly motivated the protagonists to, in their own words, ‘bring down the US’ (*American Dreams in China* 2013). Meng recalled his experience at the restaurant where he once worked,

This woman, when she was happy, would give me some small changes, the least of all [...] When I first came to the US, I fed white rats in a lab, and then served dishes here. The second time I brought my career here, a career that I was proud of. I wanted to let them know that I was not a loser, but they did not show even the least respect. [...] They checked me over and over for one hour. They still thought that everyone coming to the US would want to stay illegally. [...] I waited [Mr. Bono, an executive representative of ETS] for six hours and drank eight cups of coffee [and their appointment was deferred till the week after]. [...] At that time I started to realize that we were really too young, too naive. (*American Dreams in China* 2013)

The roundtable scene recalls scenes of Western exploitation, blackmailing, distortion and stigmatization, which mirrors Western attitudes towards China in a series of economic, political and cultural incidents in the post-Tiananmen era. On one side is the arrogant and aggressive Americans charging an outrageous sum of fine, speaking in a threatening tone, deliberately violating ‘American spirits’ and international regulations; on the other side is three Chinese men, angrily yet persuasively fighting back point by point, firstly through reciting international regulations concerning copyright violation, which reveals their deep-rooted bias with which they likewise suspect Chinese students’ TOFLE score. Nationalism is in full swing when Chen’s defense turns into aggressive accusations of the Americans with stubborn and persistent misunderstanding about the Chinese, whose suspicious and distrustful attitudes have deprived *us* of the least respect and dignity:

We came here today, hoping to educate you about one thing: China has changed.

Unfortunately, you are still stuck in the past. [...] Today Chinese students don't expect to stay in America. They want to go home. Yet you are still stuck on whether they cheated on exams. (*American Dreams in China* 2013)

The film embraces and ends in the protagonists' all-round victory, not in terms of negotiations but of their dignity: right after the negotiations, Chen took Meng to the laboratory where he once worked, and Meng was warmly greeted. Seeing the laboratory named after him (Figure 1), Meng was moved, calling Chen's nickname in a pretentiously complaining tone and says, 'tubie, but I like it.' Till then, it has been clear what Meng really wants—not a luxurious villa Chen bought for him earlier, but the dignity he once lost in the US. This move is certainly not to acknowledge Meng's work for feeding rats in the lab. It is a militant fight-back against his lost dignity which evokes a grand theme of anti-imperialism, by means of subverting the once superior-inferior status of the US and China. Such a recurring theme speaks forcefully about how popular nationalism and *fenqing* culture have contributed to shaping the current discourse of Chinese Occidentalism: under the 'rise of China' rhetoric, the 'West' starts to be looked upon with disgust as an assumed hegemonic force, a colonial force that must be undermined for China's more confident nation building.



**Figure 1. ‘The lab is now named after you.’**

### 3.1.2. The queer/lustful Other

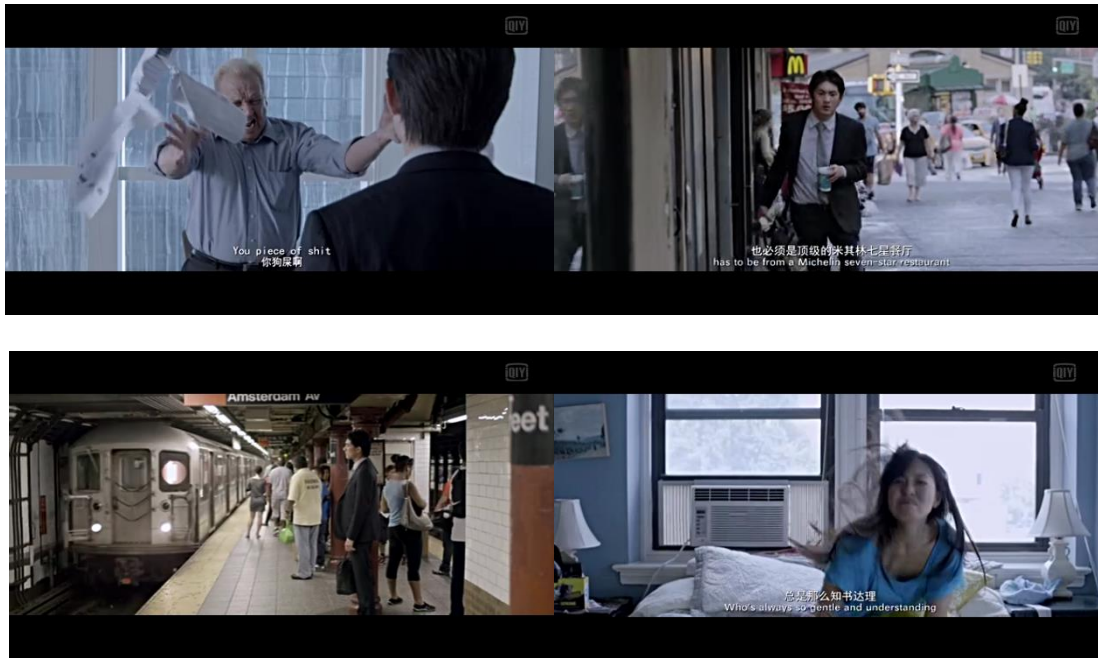
The film *My Old Classmate* (2014, Guo Fan) is a nationalist text whose employment of ‘white gender stereotypes serves multiple layers of purposes that are artistically provocative (in its development of plots, promotion of nostalgia, and generation of comic effects) and politically subversive (in its embodiment of public discontent over ‘Western superiority’). The film tells a romantic story about the former couple—Zhou Xiaozhi (female) and Lin Yi (male)—from middle school classmates to lovers in China. However, their relationship broke up for Lin’s pursuit of further study at Stanford. After ten years, Lin’s life in the US was still far from ideal—he was underpaid and had an unsatisfactory relationship. One day, Lin received an invitation to Zhou’s wedding. At the airplane he recalled those sweet memories with Zhou. They met again in China, which left Lin with both regret and hope.

The film starts with a monologue by Lin Yi that depicts his superior life in the US:

I soared to success. I hold a decent job in a big company, and have a group of friendly colleagues. I made a wise investment. I purchased a big apartment in a quiet neighborhood

close to the subway right outside the second ring of New York. I have a fiancée, who is always gentle and understanding. Every morning, I would drive a limo to work. Even breakfast is from a Michelin seven-star restaurant. (*My Old Classmate* 2014)

Such romanticization of the US, which generally fits in with Chinese people's (once) popular imagination about the 'West', effortlessly creates an ambiance of 'romantic nostalgia' that is in line with the film's representation (through Lin's recall) of his pure school romance after he received an invitation to his former girlfriend Zhou Xiaozhi's wedding party. While it lays the ground for the overall tone of the first half of the film, 'Western superiority' assumes a satiric tone when the same words are deliberately (mis)matched by completely contrary scenes: Lin lives in a noisy neighborhood, takes the subway to work, eats breakfast at fast food restaurants, has a boss with a volcanic temper, and is shouted and thrown at by his fiancée (Figure 2). Particularly, the film's representation of Lin's foreign (American Chinese) fiancée as sexually immoral assumes an extraordinary power in promoting nostalgia, as Lin sees her having sex with a man when expecting a peaceful weekend with her. Clearly, a 'Western' other in this circumstance can more compellingly justify Lin's nostalgia for his school romance, contributing to the film's major theme. This contrasting representation (particularly through sexuality), which underscores the reality of Lin's life in the US, unexpectedly re-orientates the film towards more realistic. It invites, in the first place, a nationalistic (self-)mockery of the post-1980s generation against their (once) positive imaginings about the 'West', but as these scenes appear right before the former couple's gathering, they strategically open up new suspense and possibilities to what is going to happen when Lin meets Zhou again at the latter's wedding party, which foreshadows the film's two endings.



**Figure 2. 'Western superiority' narrated subversively through contrasting scenes.**

Under such an impulse, the film also characterizes another white figure, Tom. When Tom first appears, he is represented as a threat to Lin, when he gets off a motorbike to accost Zhou (Figure 3). He was introduced by Lin as follows: 'The guy on the motorcycle is Tom. I learn later that he is just like us, who worked his way here through hard exams. But he likes to pretend he is a foreign student to get the innocent girls' (*My Old Classmate* 2014). Well aware of the exclusive privilege and charm as a white Westerner, Tom deliberately speaks Chinese with a foreign accent for special favors, particularly to attract girls. However, the film's depiction of such a character does not seem to be in support of Western fever or superiority, but to embody public discontent over it, particularly when the film stereotypes him to an extreme as a lustful and annoying other perceived by Lin as a potential threat to his girlfriend and their relationship. But, ironically, the discourse of 'Western superiority' looms large when Lin directs his contempt towards Tom's quasi-whiteness, implying that he is not white enough.



**Figure 3. Tom gets off a motorbike to accost Zhou, deliberately speaking Chinese with an overseas accent.**

Indeed, queering the Other seems to be always an unfailing artistic and political tool of cultural products in the age of Chinese new nationalism. It not only tells about what the Other is, but what we are as opposing to the Other. The cultural clash constituted by such binarized gender and sexual images not only justifies *our* behaviors but also creates interesting encounters that help to develop the plot. When this Western Other is queered in an intimate relationship, as I argue below, gender roles are subverted and the relationship becomes comically queer. *American Dreams in China* depicts a stereotypical US woman Lucy, who is independent/individualistic and sexually aggressive/immoral. In the film, Wang Yang, one of the three protagonists who initially aspired to study in the US, gave up the chance for his American girlfriend Lucy who was then in China. The film's re-Orientalization of Wang as obedient and passive is more substantially reinforced through Lucy's subversive sexual role, such as her active kiss, her forceful pushing Wang onto the bed, her aggressive sex despite Wang's warning that 'this [sex before marriage] is illegal in China' (*American Dreams in China* 2013), her upper sexual

position (Figures 4 & 5), as well as her decisive breakup with Wang that puts Wang in a status of agony and self-destruction. The narrator utters in a humorous tone when Wang, very desperate, sees Lucy disappear at the airport: ‘She wants to go back to America. She said the luggage had already been full, and could not put Wang Yang in’ (*American Dreams in China* 2013). Such stereotyping of a Western woman serves its special cinematic purpose: the subversion of gender roles, again as justified by a Western female, invites the audience’s mockery of the Western other as well as self-mockery of the moral and virtuous self without causing offence to the audience, thereby creating comic effects.



**Figure 4. Narrator: ‘Lucy pressed the ‘fast-forward’ button.’**

**Figure 5. After undoing Wang’s buttons, Lucy said, riding on Wang, ‘this is the most beautiful Chinese body I have ever seen.’**

### 3.2. Queer (re)engagement with the ‘West’

This section looks at two queer-themed literary texts – a novel *Cross-Ocean Diary* (*piaoyang riji*) (2003) formally published by Changjiang Literature and Art Press, and an essay-length autobiography ‘Transgender in China’ (2010) published by the *Journal of LGBT Youth*. I voice at the ways how, against the grain of Chinese new nationalism, these literary writings portrayed the West as superior in one sense or another. While the imagery in the novel deliberately fits into the imagination of domestic audience about a liberating West for market promotion, the autobiographical text assumes a liberating West and depicts a repressive China to meet the imagination of a Western audience. While in doing so both fall into the stereotypical depiction of the West and reproduce colonial discourses, I suggest reading them as a queer turn



of Chinese Occidentalism where these authors shift the image of the West from a repressive force once appropriated by the government to silence and repress LGBT people at home to a trope of empowerment for liberation and modernization. This (queer) turn (to the West) is significant as it indexes the transformation of queer Occidentalism into a counter-discourse in 21<sup>st</sup> century China.

### 3.2.1. *Cross-Ocean Diary*: ‘Western superiority’ and prohibitive expression

Xiaojie’s *Cross-Ocean Diary* is a same-sex romance about Xia Dong’s relationship with two men – Liu Wei and Awen. The novel starts with Dong’s discovery of an unfinished secret diary that recorded a triangle relationship among a boy Hui, a girl Mei, and the protagonist, Lan of ambiguous gender. It turns out that this dairy foretells Dong’s own romantic ties. Wei is Dong’s middle school classmate who once had affections towards Dong and followed him to Tsinghua University. At Tsinghua, Wei fell in love with the girl Jiahui, which evoked Dong’s resentment. Then Dong went to the US for pursuit of a Master’s at the University of Michigan, where he got to know and fell for Awen, a boy born in Taiwan and raised in Hong Kong. The novel was first published in Chinese in 2003 by a domestic prestigious publisher – Changjiang Literature and Art Press.<sup>7</sup> It was promoted as ‘in the strict sense, the first formal queer-themed novel in mainland China’ since the founding of P. R. China which was expected to ‘have a great impact on conventional ideologies’ (China.com 2003). Its author Xiaojie, a gay writer of youth novels, graduated from Tsinghua University and Stanford University, after which he worked and lived in the United States for years. Through analyzing this single work, I argue that queer Occidentalism manifests not only as a liberating image of the West, but as the author’s strategic appropriation of ‘Western fever’ to get the novel promoted in domestic market. But on the other

<sup>7</sup> Its literature books hold the highest share in China’s retail market. Source: (<http://www.cjlap.com/column/aboutus.asp>).

hand, it manifests to be highly paradoxical under the regulating forces of socialist ideologies and surging nationalism that prohibited the author's explicit expression of 'Western superiority'.

It could strike one as odd why the Chinese government would allow this unconventional novel to be published in the first place, and by such a prestigious press. The beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century was a confluent point when the thriving of market economy met with the rise of (loosely-regulated) new media. On the one hand, these once state-owned presses were undergoing, or just underwent, a privatization process, which means that profits became a priority concern that would determine their life or death (Zhu 2006; Du 2004). On the other hand, LGBT issues, as a fresh topic then, started to be used by the increasingly commercialized media to attract attention and achieve profits (Shen 2010; Zhou 2015). It marks the beginning, and perhaps also the heyday, of an era when capital was driven towards fields where revenues were generated. Chronologically, the novel was a succession to a transgender autobiography, *A Transgender Dream (nüren meng)*, published by another prestigious press in 2002, which solicited wide social responses and achieved sensational effects. The genre of fiction apparently made a move forward by discarding any medical or educational purposes that other queer-themed books (Wu 2005; Deng 2002) assumed and formally declared (usually) in their preface. *Cross-Ocean Diary*, like other literary publications, had to negotiate both the Chinese market and state censorship, delicately mediating between public sentiments and political consciousness.

While the novel succeeds in subverting the stereotypical images and pathetic tones with which the mainstream media had portrayed LGBT figures (particularly, the novel gives a promising ending with the reunion of Dong and Awen in Los Angeles, in contrast to Dong's abortive romance with Wei in China), its romanticization of the West seems to be largely based on the depiction of an opposite – China's socio-cultural values that would fail any non-

heterosexual subjectivity. In the novel, China is depicted as a site accounting for Wei's heterosexualization, and later, his thoroughgoing essentialist attitude, when Wei, at the end of the novel, suspected Dong of falling in love with his [Wei's] girlfriend. As the novel repeats, both Dong and Awen suffer strong pressure from their father/parents to get married (*chengjia*). Though they do not like the US, they do not want to get back either, because getting back would mean to face unwanted pressures in a Chinese society as a gay man. Both characters view China as more homo-repressive for its institutionalized 'family-centred system of Confucian values' that laid special importance on filial piety and descendant compulsivity (Vervoorn 2004, 3), from which the US could offer them an escape and grant them more space in the exploration of gender identity and same-sex practices.

While the author's Western background has much elevated this novel from the reception of a presumably 'low culture' work embodying shame and humiliation to a novel of higher status for its 'Western flavor' (*yangwei/yangqi*), except for romanticization, the Western setting does not seem to generate due significance that one would normally expect from a queer diaspora-themed novel. Though the author probably did not mean to explore such a taboo issue as queer sexuality in front of his domestic audience, occasional ruptures at critical moments of the plot also indicate a reluctance to position the West as superior. For instance, it is unclear why Dong went to the US, and the scene is only followed by an incident that Wei turned his affection away from Dong to Jiahui; how the West facilitates Dong's exploration of sexual identity is unknown, except a symbolic revelation of Lan's gender in Dong's dream when Hui called Lan 'Brother Dong'. Lan (the protagonist in the dairy) as a mirror character of Dong (the protagonist in the novel) allows its author to incorporate an implicit yet unelaborated theme that China's socio-cultural values prohibited – queer sexuality.

As the western setting becomes largely a dry backdrop in the novel, one cannot help but ask why the author employed a western setting without *really* relating it to the story? Is he just telling his own story? Or is he strategically taking advantage of the audience's assumed feelings for the West? Probably both. In fact, one can sense the author's occasional discontent over the US. For instance, Dong blatantly expressed his dislike for the United States, saying that 'I don't want to waste much of my time and efforts in such an idle environment'. 'Idle' and 'decadent' seems for Dong what characterizes the US lifestyle as he repeatedly uses them to describe, for instance, the afternoon, songs, and even a dike. Interestingly, what the protagonist in the novel dislikes – the West – turns out to be an important selling point of the novel. Beneath such a paradox is 'Western fever' on the one hand, and prohibitive expression of 'Western superiority' on the other; the latter is meant to elevate the author's national integrity. Therefore, while taking advantage of the widespread Occidentalism feelings among Chinese audiences, the author reinvigorated nationalism through a critique of 'Western worshiping' (*congyang meiwei*). The critique of 'Western worshiping' has its origin in the Maoist era when the West was negatively stereotyped by the Party to sustain political allegiance and avoid the infiltration of capitalist ideologies, under which circumstance 'Western worshiping' was criticized as a serious political error and an anti-revolutionary act (Xinhua News Agency 1976, 1). In 1976 when the opening-up policy was put forward, the late Prime Minister Deng Xiaoping received fierce criticism from China's political circle; it was believed that this policy was a 'fallacy of Western worshiping' and threatened 'to kill the creative revolutionary spirits of the working class in our country, and to abort the undertakings of the smoothly-advancing socialist construction' (Xinhua News Agency 1976, 1). Under the dual forces of 'official Occidentalism' and popular nationalism, to avoid talking the good of the West is now regarded as more than a patriotic, but a rational

practice by the elite themselves. In other words, while incorporating a ‘Western flavor’ to the novel in response to the prevalent ‘(queer) Western fever’ in mainland China, the author strategically prohibited the expression of ‘Western superiority’ to preserve his national integrity in order to better promote the novel in domestic market.

### 3.2.2. ‘Transgender in China’: Archiving Occidentalist feelings

The regulating force of socialist ideologies on domestic queer-themed writings is reinforced through the disparity of publications at home and overseas. If Xiaojie is constrained in expressing ‘Western superiority’ in front of his domestic audience, writers pursuing publication overseas make up a different story. This section argues that in Pi Jun’s autobiography ‘Transgender in China’, published in the *Journal of LGBT Youth*, he recklessly and uncritically positions China and the West in binary terms to signify the two extremes of LGBT rights and their living environment. This is achieved through his imaged West vis-à-vis his claim of this single story to represent the life condition of female-to-male transgender people in China. While the community can certainly never be a monolithic whole, treating the community as if homogeneous allows him to articulate his (apparent) desperation about China, which justifies his turning to the West for help. The article is especially concluded in a sentimental and somehow miserable tone:

NOW, UNDER THIS SITUATION

No job.

No endowment insurance.

No medical care insurance.

Except for life, I have nearly nothing. Fortunately, at least I have the warmth from my family.

Here I want to emphasize that though cross-gender star as Li Yuchun appears in China, it does not mean LGBT groups are accepted by ordinary people or that they have the equal opportunity and right to work and live, and though socialist Li Yinhe appeals at the National People's Congress for the equal treatment to LGBT, it cannot change the authority's extreme indifference to the human rights of this weaker group.

'I need to survive.' I believe this is the most strongly inner voice from thousands of LGBT, including me in China. I hope this article could let more people realize this tough situation and give us a hand. (Jun 2010, 357)

In describing the realities that LGBT communities face in mainland China, Jun seems to suggest that the West is the opposite – with job, under endowment insurance and medical care insurance, in queer-friendly culture, with human rights. The final call is especially Occidental as Jun puts his hope in, probably the paradise-like West, as if the West could act as the rescuer to China's queer-repressive culture. As '[w]hat underpins the 'telling bitterness' practice is the indisputable authority and authenticity of people's experiences' (Bao 2013), such practice would easily fall into, consciously or unconsciously, the Occidental imagination about the Orient, only to reinforce the Orientalist stereotyping that Chinese queer must have suffered a lot (Bao 2013). With all that said, it seems that beneath Jun's uncritical move lies a concealed truth that he was taking advantage of Orientalist stereotyping, which is usually more recognizable in the West (Wang 1997, 57), for pursuit of publication in the Occident where such stereotyping was produced and justified.

However, thinking out of Jun's anti-postcolonial stance, which assumes the colonizer is superior and denies Chinese LGBT groups' agency in enacting changes themselves, the images of the West have been transformed from a repressive force to a liberating one in Jun's account.

This transformation, as Bao (2013, 130) argues, is based on an inverted reading of ‘the government’s condemnation of homosexuality and other ‘decadent’ lifestyles in the West’. The ‘West’, in these circumstances, provides an exclusive locus for Chinese writers to articulate such feelings outspokenly.

## Chapter 4 : Queer Occidentalism as activist discourse

### Scene 1:

At the LGBT session of the 2016 Bookworm Festival held in Sunlitun, Beijing, feminist Wei Tingting recounted how she was monitored when ‘released upon guarantee pending further investigation’ (*qubao houshen*) during the two sessions – the National People’s Congress and the Chinese Political Consultative Conference (NPC&CPPCC), ‘they [the police] visited my house now and then, gave me phone calls, and asked about my plan, typically in this way: Are you going to the *laowai* (Westerners’) area [Sanlitun, Beijing] the next few days?’

### Scene 2:

Not long after the US Supreme Court’s verdict on same-sex marriage, Hanscom Smith, the United States consul general in Shanghai, held a briefing, in which he responded to Chinese media concerns about his marriage with Taiwanese Lu Yingzong in San Francisco earlier, highlighting the progress taken place in the US while introducing a forthcoming workplace diversity plan initiated for Shanghai by the Consulate General and the American Chamber of Commerce in Shanghai. He also emphasized that marriage (equality) belongs to human rights (Zhou 2016).

Scene 1 exemplifies how the police, as surveillance agents of the Chinese State, defends state security against ‘Western’ power by framing domestic sexual radicalism within anti-imperialist discourses. The detention of five Chinese feminists (some of them are queer feminists) on the eve of 2015 Women’s Day, which stirred up much a sensation overseas, was initially justified at home by rumors that the feminists’ actions were provoked by foreign political forces. The term ‘foreign political forces’, as argued by Wang Zheng (2015) in ‘What



are foreign political forces’, is meant to mess up so as to quell domestic petition. In response to Hillary Clinton’s charging remarks in September 2015, an official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China responded that the feminists were arrested not because they promoted women’s rights, but their behaviors violated China’s law (Long 2015). Later in 20017, *Global Times* (*huanqiu shibao*), the official newspaper of the Central Committee of the CCP, on its Weixin page accused *New York Times*, who wrote that the Chinese government was repressing feminism, of using feminism as a tool to overthrow the Chinese government (Gengzhige 2017). Officials’ instinctive feeling that grassroots radical activism are provoked by the ill-intentioned support of ‘Western’ forces is built upon the same stereotyping of ‘sexual/queer Occidentalism’ with which the country’s founding ideology allied. Yet on the other hand, there are ostensible alliances between sexual activism, queer activism in particular, and ‘Western forces’, when, for instance, Western embassies and typical *laowai* bars frequently provide patronage for organized LGBT talks and activities in Beijing; Heather Cassell (2011) described how the US Learn Act Build program has trained LGBT leaders from China and helped to ‘export’ the much-needed US LGBT movements. Under constant international pressures from the ‘West’, for instance, Ireland’s and Netherlands’ proposal of 186.89 and 186.90 at the UN’s Universal Periodic Review that requested the Chinese government to ban all kinds of discrimination against LGBT people, the state discourse of ‘queer West’ lingers and continues to play a part in anti-cultural imperialism. Queer sexuality signifies a national ideological boundary that distinguishes *us* from *them*.

Scene 2 reveals how (Western) ideas and events may (easily) travel across ideological boundaries, exerting (or attempting to exert) an influence on ‘the East’ – from the unconventional representation of queer characters in popular Western sitcoms and films, through

the advances of LGBT legal rights, to the thriving of LGBT topics and the high visibility of LGBT celebrities. Such transnational cultural flow, more often than not, tends to amplify a certain image/aspect and contribute to a hierarchic presence or dichotomy. However, Western cultural hegemony that it often creates or reproduces importantly provides a powerful weapon for the relatively deprived to counter domestic repression. It is through such ‘exchanges’ that theoretical apparatus is borrowed and political agenda is set – from the birth of NGOs serving community welfare, bars for socialization and entertainment, through ‘Western’ concepts like human rights that provoked LGBT people’s rethinking of their marginalized, (internalized) pathological and criminalized status and mobilized the first LGBT rights movements marked by Wan Yanhai’s establishment of the country’s first hot line for gays and lesbians in Beijing in the 1990s, queer theories that justifies a more inclusive queer politics, to the more recent legal rights struggles. Queer activism’s increasing engagement with the ‘West’ in China helps to counter the repressive forces by questioning the foundation allegedly laid by Confucianism and socialism and other so-called tradition, thereby fostering a radical dimension of domestic queer politics.

I use the two instances above to illustrate two major factors that fostered and continue to foster the production of the images of the ‘West’ in China – China’s entangled relationship with the ‘West’ (both historical and present) and trans-Atlantic cultural flow. In this chapter, I focus on recounting how queer Occidentalism serves as activist counter-discourse in 21<sup>st</sup> century China. For this end, I start with a historical inquiry into the formation of modern LGBT identities and ‘homophobia’, two major factors that I believe set in motion the LGBT movements in China. This inquiry helps question or justify the historical legitimacy of activist appropriation of certain ‘Western’ ideas that constitute what I term here as ‘queer Occidentalism’. I then move on to demonstrate how the coming of Western theories, capital and global capitalism has

informed queer activism in China on the one hand but fostered the ‘new homonormativity’ on the other. By situating queer Occidentalism within the trans-Atlantic cultural flow and the politics of homonationalism, I intend to not only evaluate its pros and cons, but also to show how images of the ‘West’ are produced rather than assumed, reaffirmed and at the same time destabilized. Occidentalism, in this sense, as an ‘Oriental’ discourse is a lasting struggle between Western discourses about the ‘West’ or the ‘East’ masqueraded as international or universal, and ‘Eastern reconstruction of the ‘West’ in which anti-imperialism and nationalism play a role. Unravelling this complexity helps to question Occidentalism as ‘stylized images of the West’ (Carrier 2003, 1) that can be ever settled or accomplished.

#### 4.1. Historical legitimacy: the formation of ‘homophobia’ and modern LGBT identities

In ‘A Preliminary Exploration of the Gay Movement in Mainland China: Legacy, Transition, Opportunity, and the New Media’, Jin Cao and Xinlei Lu observes that the development of China’s gay movement since the 1980s is set in motion by ‘the recent understanding of homosexuality in Western society and the influence of the Western gay emancipation movement’. But before commending the role of the ‘West’, some important questions should be asked: how is the understanding of homosexuality influenced by Western culture and how does that relate to LGBT movements in China? What opportunities and challenges has it brought up? Will a historical inquiry justify or negate queer Occidentalism after all? In this section, I will trace the birth of the modern sense of ‘homophobia’ as well as modern LGBT identities in China in a way to question or justify the historical legitimacy of queer Occidentalism, that is, queer activists’ appropriation of Western discourses and theories. This is based on my assumption that modern LGBT identities and homophobia constitute two major factors that gave rise to LGBT movements in China. Carl F. Stychin (2004) argued the globalization of same-sex sexualities as identities after the Stone Wall riot and how such sexual

identities helped activists to use the universalizing discourse of human rights in LGBT movements particularly during 1994 – 2004. My further assumption is that, in the context of China, LGBT movements rose with gays and lesbians' identity claims in the 1980s to counter homophobia that institutionalized LGBT repression, particularly to fight against pathologization and criminalization in the AIDS crisis.

Historians have argued the emergence of Western-style homophobia in 20<sup>th</sup> century China is triggered by transnational cultural flow – Bret Hinsch (1990, 168) pointed out that a westernized sexual morality that China imported through Western sciences perceived homosexuality as a form of sexual pathology, as well as a linguistic shift to simplified Chinese that allowed the authoritarian regime to rewrite history; Wenqing Kang(2009), in his monograph *Obsession*, observed a national(istic) drive to modernize China through regulating sexuality, and equally remarkable, the colonial threat that urged nationalists to build a positive heteronormative image of the Chinese nation. While the origin of homophobia in China has been much discussed, the historical formation of LGBT identities has received less attention. Historians and queer scholars (Hinsch 1990; Zhang 2001) have argued 'deviant' sexualities in federal China manifested as behaviors instead of identities from cultural and linguistic perspectives. As Hinsch observed, traditional Chinese designations "did not emphasize an innate sexual essence" (1990, 7). Male same-sex was described in terms of preferences/inclinations instead of a stable, and thus essential, identity. This might be partly because family-centered values, complicit with compulsory heterosexuality, basically prevented the essentialization of same-sex inclination

while polygamy<sup>8</sup> opened up a certain degree of freedom for extra-marital same-sex engagement. To argue the exact time for the emergence of distinct LGBT identities in China might not be possible as it takes time to evolve and develop, but pathologization starting from the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century no wonder helped to tag them as a ‘group’ (Bar-Tal 1998), which raised their awareness of similarities in what Bar-Tal calls ‘natural evolvement’ (Bar-Tal 1998, 103). The emergence of preliminary capitalist economy in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century provided women with a financial basis for resisting heterosexual marriage (Zhang 2001). Financial independence enabled those self-combing ladies (*zishunu*) to establish communities to liberate their compatriots from patriarchal bondage and to live out their lives. This provides an innovative clue which otherwise could not be perceived from the male angle, because as long as polygamy lasted (until after the founding of P. R. China), men’s superior status made male same-sexuality less an issue than that between women.

The Mao era is a time when lack of social discourse deprived and fragmented gays’ and lesbians’ collective belonging (if it ever existed), but casual encounters/adventures under isolation, which were common under the great sexual freedom enjoyed by gay men in the Cultural Revolution as argued by Heather Worth et al. (2017), enabled them to participate in a gay imaginary. In the meantime, the Party’s outlaw of polygamy created a same-sex crisis as the gender equality-based monogamy institution made extra-marital same-sex practices morally repugnant, which increasingly rendered important a tendency to essentialize one’s ‘deviant’ sexual inclination and to claim an ‘authenticity’ of it. The institutionalized repression

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<sup>8</sup> Polygamy here refers to the concubine institution passed from feudal China where marriage served mainly for reproductive purposes, embedded with gender inequality that denied women’s sexual autonomy. When the family line was carried on, men’s development of extra-marital relationships would to a large extent spare them from moral scrutiny.

‘facilitate[d] the perception of a common fate’ (Bar-Tal, p. 103) and ‘indicate[d] the boundaries operating between the ingroup and outgroup’, which prepared for a stronger reunion as a deprived minority group afterwards. Subsequently, when Western lexicon was (re)introduced to China, it was taken up as categories imposed from above, yet emotionally interiorized and internalized by domestic queer subjects as essentialized and fixed identity categories. Hongwei Bao’s (2011) argument about postsocialist gay identity and subjectivity in China as ‘queer comrade’, under shifting temporalities of socialist history and global neoliberal capitalism, is presumably based on the understanding of the Western identity categories instead of negating them. We may conclude that it is the rise of such diverse yet distinct identities that mobilized China’s LGBT movements today, or else we cannot properly explain the lack of institutionalized prosecution and social activism in the previous history of China.

#### 4.2. The coming of Western theory, capital and global capitalism: queer activism and the ‘new homonormativity’

Queer activists in China often view, somehow justly, domestic movement as part of the global project of LGBT emancipation, and have adopted some popular toolsets in their activism, which contributes to local queer politics. Bao (2011) argued how global neoliberal capitalism informed the formation of an indigenous queer subjectivity and identity politics called ‘queer comrade’ in the post-socialist era. In ‘Young activists, new movements: Contemporary Chinese queer feminism and transnational genealogies’, Wen Liu, Ana Huang and Jingchao Ma (2015) showed how the hegemonic Western feminist discourse helped shape the transnational politics of queer feminists in the complicated context of history and present formation, based on which they urged for something more creative out of the borrowing. On the other hand, queer theory helped queer feminists to challenge the exclusive gay politics that, according to Liu et al., relied on the ‘authority of Western scientific research’, and to radicalize the movement (Liu et al. 2015; Hou

2014). Furthermore, queer theory ‘challenges the state’s control over the population with privileges attached to the institution of marriage’ (Hou 2014). Benefiting from ‘ties to the international community – and the funding that can accompany them’ (Hildebrandt 2012), functional NGOs sprung up in the new millennium, dedicated to different aspects of LGBT welfare. These include PFLAG China, dedicated to promoting family members’ understanding and facilitating environmental changes of LGBT families; Wu Youjian’s Studio, dedicated to AIDS prevention and medicare; Beijing LGBT Center, broadly contributing to collaborative scientific research, LGBT mental health, knowledge training, among many others. There are also organized events like ShanghaiPRIDE Festival and Beijing Queer Film Festival established in 2009 and 2001 respectively. The annual China Rainbow Awards, launched in 2011 jointly by some major LGBT organizations, academic forums and news magazines, award non-stereotypical public reports by the Chinese media and public figures including celebrities, in recognition of media’s contribution to transforming Chinese society towards an ‘inclusive, diversified and objective’ space. ‘Start changes from voicing out’ (*gaibian cong fasheng kaishi*) is their slogan, implying a counter-strategy against the party-state’s three-no by not only encouraging representation but, more importantly, de-stigmatizing through non-stereotypical representations.

However, this does not mean that the coming of Western theories and capital is all about radical breakthroughs. Besides the NGOs’ non-confrontational attitude towards the government’s policy, as Petrus Liu (2015) observed, ‘new homonormativity’ takes place in post-socialist China as well. Neoliberal globalization colludes with the government’s three-no policy to depoliticize LGBT movements and marginalize certain groups. Homonormativity, as defined by Lisa Duggan as a politics that ‘promise[s] the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized,

depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption' (Duggan 2004, 50), finds compelling evidence in 21st century China, where being gay has been linked to a specific lifestyle and a specific group of people. It has been argued that traditional public venues for gay socialization (such as parks) were outlawed, replaced by Western-style bars as a secure site (Wang 2015). The China's allegedly largest gay bar, Destination, for example, provides an easy means for in-group socialization and entertainment, at an average cost of 85 yuan.<sup>9</sup> The urban lifestyle it sanctions and reproduces, together with its featured celebration of gay cosmopolitanism (with events chaired and attended by a cohort of international LGBT figures), reveals itself to be middle class centric. While a group of urban citizens are hilariously celebrating their commodified freedom and liberty, they tell little about the experience of lower-classes and their concerns, even that of their own. The government's three-no policy further entrenches the boundary between the middle class and the lower, between the rural and the urban. While it allows discourses and services to be promoted among the LGBT community, public promotion is outlawed, and access to information on these ingroup activities and welfare is largely restricted to a group of well-informed people who are usually not only well-educated, but courageous or able enough to overcome the prevailing social discourse of shame and humiliation attached to them. This elite group is especially outspoken in uttering a discourse of '*tongzhi yi fanren* (queer as ordinary people)' attempting to normalize the *tongzhi* identity. As observed by Bao (2013) and Liu (2015), the dominant homonormative politics in China is heavily anchored in the discourse of *suzhi* (quality), trying to assimilate proper subjects into mainstream society and heterosexual norms while excluding 'improperly gay' subjects, including the less educated, the less decent worker, people infected with AIDS, money boys, etc. Anchored

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<sup>9</sup> This figure is valid by June 7, 2017. Source: [http://www.dianping.com/shop/1920124/review\\_more\\_3star](http://www.dianping.com/shop/1920124/review_more_3star).



in this elitism, some activists' outspoken content with the in-community feature is a bit shortsighted – Activist Xiaogang perceived no major obstacles for LGBT movements in China except for community welfare and boasted that Chinese activists should promote this non-confrontational mode to the West at the queer film screening at Beijing LGBT Center on May 29, 2016. This vision is elitist. It would mean that the vast number of LGBT people beyond the communities, many of whom are lower-classes and/or from the rural area, will benefit little. Also, it neglects a large number of transgender people who have been till now ineffectively engaged in the communities, posing striking contrast to trans-shaming, unreported suicides and rampant employment discrimination that transgender people are now suffering from. It even overlooks the problems that a broader number of gays and lesbians hired beyond LGBT NGOs may encounter, as well as the widespread forced marriages under family pressure.

#### 4.3. Queer Occidentalism under trans-Atlantic cultural flow

Having said that, Western thoughts have unapologetically informed radical queer politics in China: one is through human rights, a thought increasingly central to the emerging form of confrontational activism, as will be discussed in '4.4. Glocalizing human rights: Legal rights and confrontational activism'; another is through the politics of coming out. On the other hand, there are also rejections of certain 'Western ideas' like individualism which is believed to be rooted in 'Western' culture. Through these instances, I intend to conduct a critique on queer Occidentalism on the one hand, and on the other, to show how in dynamic cultural exchanges the images of the 'West' are not just assumed but produced, reaffirmed and at the same time destabilized. 'Glocalizing human rights' is singled out as a separate section for convenience of organizing only.

First, coming out serves as a way to improve visibility and tolerance among the public in the Chinese context where limited forms of queer activism can be enacted. It has been upheld by the sexual left as it is not only liberating but also doing social justice to innocent beings. Steven Paul Bielinski, an American activist in China, views coming out as gay and lesbian's responsibility of and contribution to the LGBT community, forming a counter force against gay marriage's rationalization of elusion and mediocracy which has long hindered LGBT movements in China (Danlan 2014). Coming out is especially concerned with the massive number of *tongqi* (wives who marry gays without previously knowing them) in China. *Tongqi* has been an urgent social problem that reportedly caused irremediable consequences on women. It is to sacrifice women's happiness for maintaining family values, mainly to carry on the gay men's family line, to fulfill filial piety and to maintain family glory. Coming out is therefore believed to not only contribute to better self-identification / reception and hence mental health of gays themselves, but emancipate women from compulsory procreative sex. Indeed, coming out also forcefully unwraps the parcel in which the notion of family line is tightly knotted to filial piety and good citizenship, which significantly contributes to the internalized abnormalization / pathologization of LGBT people, least to say that it is also a way of turning away the shame one or one's family in China would usually feel about.

Certainly, certain Western thoughts are rejected by queer activists in China, the most prominent of which is perhaps individualism. The implication that being queer is not totally individual but relates to one's social relations, family in particular, is strongly embedded in activist discourses. The significance of parents' support for being LGBT in China has been widely recognized, which tends to define one's sense of freedom and mental health. It is this acknowledgement that informed the establishment of PFLAG China, a NGO modeled on

Parents, Family and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) of the US. PFLAG China is arguably one of the largest and most influential LGBT organizations in China. It provides services for perplexed parents and helps them to better understand their children. In the meantime, the organization calls for parent volunteers to join in their undertakings. They have jointly conducted most successful promotions within, and occasionally out of, the community. Their foundational philosophy is best captured by Aqiang, Director of PFLAG China, that

Compared with other countries, China does not have religious and cultural obstacles to the development of LGBT subsistence and rights. For the majority of the Chinese, they would not even bother to care about whether someone is gay or lesbian as long as the one who comes out is not their family member. (Li & Li 2016)

His contention that being queer is a family issue reflects a major diversion of the Chinese context from the Western one. This diversion is further reinforced by a survey report chaired by the UN Development Program, titled *Living Condition of Sexual Minorities in China* (UNDP 2016). The report concludes that family discrimination is the severest form of all forms of discrimination LGBT people in China are facing (UNDP 2016; Anonymous 2016b). Hence, the belief that family relation is the key to LGBT emancipation thus accommodates a two-fold significance: one is parents' understanding of their children, the other, as the achievements of PFLAG China show, is parents' dedication to social understanding. Both are of special importance in China's LGBT movements.

#### 4.4. Glocalizing human rights: Legal rights and confrontational activism

Scholars (Ding 2008; Li 2008) have argued for the absence of the modern sense of human rights in dynastic China. Human rights consciousness was nevertheless embedded in Chinese cultural principles of, for example, 'goodness of human nature', 'humanism' and

‘benevolent governance’ (Li 2008). Mizuyo Sudo (2006, 472) traced *minquan* (civil rights) and *renquan* (human rights) along with *nuquan* (women’s rights) and found that these terms were borrowed from Japanese which were translated from the West; and that concepts of human rights emerged in 1903 in the revolutionary leader Zou Rong’s call for ‘civilising revolution’ to mean ‘equality between men and women, abolition of class divisions, guarantees of free speech and limitations on government power’. Scholars (Huang 2009; Song 2010; Wang 2011) further argued that it was not interiorized by Chinese people until Sun Yat-sen, founder of the Nationalist Party of China and later first president of the Republic of China, introduced ‘civil rights’ (*minquan*) to China in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. While human rights as a Western import seems almost indisputable, the forms of human rights struggles ‘glocalized’ into local contexts could be diverse. Below, I argue that ‘glocalization’ of human rights in China shed light on an emerging form of queer activism that constitutes an important part of Left practice under China’s three-nos policy.

As mentioned earlier, the concept of human rights provoked Chinese queer subjects’ rethinking of their marginalized, (internalized) pathological and criminalized status as well as mobilized the first LGBT rights movements, and the rights issue is becoming increasingly central to an emerging mode of queer activism – confrontational activism in legal rights struggles. Indeed, as legal rights became a realization of the more abstract form of human rights, queer activists increasingly resort to legal procedures. Activists who sought such rights are usually on the utmost left – they confront government bodies and authorities, through which to seek breakthroughs for current predicaments in China where public movements have been basically

outlawed.<sup>10</sup> The fact that there are no law specifically regulating or governing LGBT issues opens up possibilities for such breakthroughs; official negation of them would be groundless and, in occasions, violate the rule of law that the government increasingly advocates.

At the forefront of the rights issue is perhaps the same-sex marriage rights, first proposed by sociologist Li Yinhe in 2000 to a government solicitation for marriage law modification. Its significance has been pointed out by Sherry Wolf (2009) that ‘same-sex marriage is a civil right that must be unapologetically defended by socialists and other leftists – not only for its own sake as a material and social benefit under capitalism, especially to working-class and poor LGBT people, but because the reform is not a barrier to further struggles – it can be a gateway to them instead’. Wolf’s remarks speak well to China’s context. Especially, such an advocate sets a practical agenda that provides a channel to address the rights issue. The implication that though marriage is a corrupt practice, the rights to marriage are not reveals a pragmatic aspect of queer activism which figures the indigenous forms of queer activism in China. Marriage rights assumes special importance amid traditional values so heavily oriented towards family, as well as the Chinese national character of obedience. As Li Yinhe remarked at an interview right after the US Supreme Court issued the same-sex marriage verdict, ‘it [same-sex marriage] is a shortcut to the improvement of LGBT [rights/conditions]. Because people [in China] very much trust laws, once marriage is legal, then discrimination will lose its basis.’ (Ifeng Culture 2015)

If the appeal of same-sex marriage lacks a transparent and reasonable legal procedure in China, others are not necessarily so. Individual activists have been resorting to legal procedures for resolutions. China’s first employment discrimination case against a transgender person was

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<sup>10</sup> Cao and Lu (2014, 845) have argued that ‘developing alternative media [...] and [...] extending the movement to some out- reach or off-media activities (e.g., picnics and family gatherings) has been the only feasible way for Chinese gay people to build an emancipation movement.’

audited on 11 April, 2016 in Guiyang City, Guizhou Province. Mr. C, a female-to-male transgender, was fired by the Guiyang Branch of Ciming Checkup seven days after employment, for wearing male suits for which the boss thought he was not suitable for the sales position. The verdict ruled that Ciming's firing of Mr. C was not illegal. Lack of a persuasive explanation unwittingly justifies employment discrimination against transgender. For lack of legal grounds, gender/sexuality-based discrimination no longer stands firm in front of increasing law suits and media exposure. Those involving authorities or government bodies are especially so, exposing institutionalized repression against LGBT people which sometimes has to be masked in one way or another.

In December 2014, Director Fan Popo's documentary film *Mama Rainbow* was removed from (all domestic) online video sites, for which he requested information disclosure from the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television (anonymous 2015c). Discontent with their (dishonest) reply, he filed a suit against the Administration, which was formally established. Fan called the outcome a half win because the court only confirmed the Administration's 'illegal use' of an improper name 'Bureau Office Comprehensive Center' in its reply but still denied what seemed an obvious truth – its massive removal of LGBT-themed videos during a short window period of time (Anonymous 2015c). Fan's case sets up a model through which to proclaim (in a loud voice) the rights of sexual minorities that LGBT people have been deprived of. The incident was viewed by the LGBT community as a historic victory for its successful challenging of the government apparatus, which opened up a brand new mode of confrontational activism.

Initiated by one or two individuals, confrontational activism focuses on pragmatic legal rights. It aims to achieve a clear-cut goal through legal procedures, in the hope of maximizing

efficacy and minimizing reactionary risks during its confrontation with repressive government bodies. Other prominent cases include Qiubai's accusation of the Ministry of Education being 'administrative inaction' (*xingzheng buzuowei*) since 2015, requesting the Ministry to recall all misguiding textbooks that stigmatized LGBT people (Anonymous 2017b), and Sun Wenlin's lawsuit against the Civil Affairs Bureau of Changsha City for betraying their duties and violating his (marriage) rights (Anonymous 2016c). With a rising momentum, confrontational activism constantly questions the legal basis of institutionalized repression while exposing its shortcomings, releasing power among LGBT communities and extending its influence beyond.

#### 4.5. The activist politics of homonationalism

In Chapter 2, I have argued the government politics of homonationalism, where the human rights discourse serves as a double-sided tool for the government to claim national boundary or to demonstrate the country's modern image. In either case, the government politics of homonationalism serves anti-imperialist purposes, which assumes a certain (inconsistent) image of the 'West' against which China defines itself. Below, I argue how the discourse of nationalism is also appropriated by activists to enact changes. In claiming LGBT rights, the activist politics of homonationalism often strategically uses the overwhelming discourses from the 'West' masqueraded as international or universal. While it assumes, and partly relies on, a superior 'West' to create much-needed pressure on the Chinese government, these 'Western' discourses are mediated through claims of nationalism and anti-imperialism. This 'strange' conflation creates highly hybrid and paradoxical images of the 'West', in that the assumed superior 'West' is believed to be inferior than *us*. The activist politics of 'homonationalism' shows that, Occidentalism is not only informed but also disrupted by Orientalism or Western Occidentalism. Occidentalism, as an 'Oriental' discourse, is a lasting, forever unaccomplished struggle between Western construction of the 'West' or the 'East' and Eastern reconstruction of

the ‘West’. This politics provides modes of inclusion that at one time diverge from, but at another time align with, the government’s limited forms of LGBT rights.

As early as December 2008, Wan Yanhai, Director of Love Knowledge Action (*Aizhixing Yanjiusuo*) submitted three documents to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, including one application form requesting the Ministry to publicize China’s stances concerning LGBT rights expressed at the UN; one LGBT rights proposal to supplement the country’s first human rights initiative under planning then; and one advice letter urging the Chinese government to sign on a UN joint declaration on LGBT rights proposed by France (Wan 2014b). International pressures imposed on the Chinese government,<sup>11</sup> which usually entails a nationalistic aspiration to get rid of what is commonly regarded as backwardness, have fostered an international society-led, NGO-monitored mode that steadily contributes to public understanding of LGBT people in China. The politics of ‘homonationalism’ also manifests itself on certain rights struggles. Its appropriation of the official language – its conflated but strategic addressing of anti-imperialism and Party supremacy – constitutes another dimension of ‘homonationalism’. For example, in the *Same-Sex Marriage Motion* that sociologist and activist Li Yinhe submitted to the National People’s Congress, Article Two of the *Motion* wrote as follows,

If same-sex marriage can be approved in our country, it will be a legislation dedicated to minority protection and anti-discrimination, which will not only place our country among the world’s advanced list in the field of human rights, but demonstrate that our Party and government are representative of advanced culture, thus gaining advantages over some Western countries in human rights [...] Once same-sex marriage is protected by law, it will

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<sup>11</sup> Typically by the United Nations, as evinced by a recent survey (Beijing LGBT Center 2016) conducted in collaboration with Peking University and Beijing LGBT Center, as well as the UN Periodical Review.



be a favorable evidence for China's protection of human rights, dwarfing the United States which only approved gays' entry into army services (Li 2007).

By claiming that LGBT progress is not only an effective way to resist western interference, but to elevate the nation-state and the Communist Party to a superior socialist regime and a more advanced leadership, Li's argument demonstrates a distinctive activist discourse characterized by alliance with instead of antagonism to the state. Indeed, what would have been a better way to use the state discourse of nationalism to argue against the current state policy? But as the discourses of 'homonationalism' are mainly directed at the state – for their belief that support of the state is the only viable route – their effects are inevitably limited. The activist politics of homonationalism hence can hardly lead to a radical breakthrough in LGBT movements.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

Through the chapters, I hope to have, first, reconceptualized ‘queer Occidentalism’ in relation to the context of 21<sup>st</sup> century China; second, recounted the rise of queer Occidentalism as a counter-discourse in 21<sup>st</sup> century China; third, showed the pros and cons of queer Occidentalism as activist discourse; and finally, demonstrated that Occidentalism (as an ‘Oriental’ discourse) has been unsettled into a continual struggle between Western construction of the ‘West’ or the ‘East’ and Eastern (re)construction of the ‘West’.

First of all, queer Occidentalism assumes two layers of meaning in the context of 21<sup>st</sup> century China, derived from Chinese Occidentalism’s double ‘queer turn’. On the one hand, queer Occidentalism designates a popular discourse to queer/query the images of the ‘West’ with the surge of Chinese new nationalism. While queering/querying the ‘West’ appears primarily as a political strategy to subvert the superior ‘West’ once prevalent in the early post-socialist era, it also plays a significant artistic role in, for example, developing the plot, promoting the films’ major theme of ‘nostalgia’, and creating comic effects. On the other hand, queer Occidentalism refers to a liberating discourse in which the ‘West’ is strategically appropriated by queer writers and activists to fight against domestic repressive forces. Queer Occidentalism, in this case, accommodates a fairly hybrid and paradoxical image of the ‘West’, as appropriation of the liberal/superior ‘West’ is often mediated through nationalist and anti-imperialist claims; during dynamic cultural exchanges enabled by the trans-Atlantic cultural flow, the images of the ‘West’ are no longer assumed but produced, reaffirmed and at the same time destabilized.

Second, queer Occidentalism serves to counter two major forces in 21<sup>st</sup> century China accordingly – imperialism and domestic LGBT-repressive forces. By queering/querying the

images of the ‘West’, popular cultural products, represented by the nostalgic youth films, deliberately negate the discourse of ‘Western superiority’ once prevalent among the post-1970s/80s generation, and articulate an anti-imperialist stance to reflect the trend of new nationalism. While primarily a cinematic strategy for artistic and political articulation, this discourse also serves for the nation-building project as it extends the imagined community to the younger generations who constitute the major audience today. For LGBT writers and activists, the liberating image of the ‘West’, together with Western theories, capital and discourses, is (or can be) used to fight against domestic repressive forces, including the government’s repressive three-no policy, traditional family values, and exclusive gay politics. However, queer Occidentalism is far from a radical politics per se as it also brings about global capitalism and colonialism. On the one hand, neoliberalism colludes with the three-no policy to foster the ‘new homonormativity’ to divide the LGBT community and depoliticize the movement; and on the other, in bringing the overwhelming discourses to create much-needed pressure on the Chinese government, queer activists subjugate themselves to colonial discourses masqueraded as international or universal.

Third, while certain Western theories and ideas helped ignite and prosper the LGBT movements or form radical queer politics in China, ‘Western’ institutions like neoliberal capitalism as mentioned above has come to be tied with local repressive policies to depoliticize the movement and divide the LGBT community. Besides, appropriation of the overwhelming Western discourses subjugates both domestic activism and the Chinese government to colonial forces, which not only squeezes the space for domestic creativity but might not necessarily be effective under the government’s anti-imperialist stance.

Lastly, Occidentalism is at stake when the stylized/stereotypical images of the 'West' are constantly disrupted during dynamic cultural exchanges between the 'East' and the 'West'. The 'West' starts to be looked at uncritically and appropriated strategically. During the process, Western discourses are deliberately appropriated to reaffirm certain images of the 'West' but at the same time they are challenged by 'Eastern' reconstruction/reconciliation of these very images. The precarious and hybrid image of the 'West' helps problematize the established definition of Occidentalism as 'stylized images of the West' (Carrier 2003, 1). Especially with the rise of nationalist and anti-imperialist forces, Occidentalism as an 'Oriental' discourse has been unsettled into a continual struggle between Western discourses about the 'West' or the 'East' and Eastern reconstruction of the 'West'.

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