

PART 1

Ruled and Unruly

Trans without Borders: Castration and the Politics of Historical Knowledge

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Abstract

This essay outlines the programmatic contours of a new keyword, transtopia, which makes room for different scales of gender transgression that are not always discernible through the Western notion of transgender. The methods of comparative racialization, native diversification, and genealogical furcation comprise an epistemological overhaul in which transness is made globally legible in a non-hierarchical way. Using examples from the early modern Ottoman empire, colonial India, and modern Sinophone culture, I relocate the legibility of eunuchism from transgender to transtopian history. By challenging the modern West as the privileged site of theoretical production, a transtopian hermeneutic directs attention to the web of interrelations forged between historical actors and their con/texts from which transness gains nuance and momentum.

Keywords: castration; transtopia; race; genealogy; Ottoman; India; Sinophone

The interest in deuniversalizing the West is so common nowadays that it is hard to imagine postcolonial criticism without it.¹ Even so, historians of gender and sexuality seem to have fallen behind. This is far from suggesting that the field has witnessed no interest in non-Western cultures. Quite the contrary. Over the last few decades, scholarship on the history of gender and sexuality in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Middle East has grown at a steady and promising rate.² Yet an implicit norm continues to govern our scholarly apparatus,

¹ Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983); Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); Kuan-hsing Chen, *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Prasenjit Duara, *The Crisis of Global Modernity: Asian Traditions and a Sustainable Future* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

² For a global synthesis of the most recent findings in LGBTQ history, see Howard Chiang, ed., *The Global Encyclopedia of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) History* (Farmington Hills, MI: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2019).

trickling down to the everyday politics of knowledge production in the history of sexuality. Inasmuch as it would be acceptable for scholars dealing with specific cultures such as those of Britain, France, and the United States to evade regional specificity in titling their work, historians of the non-Western world are expected to designate our project with descriptors such as “in Mexico,” “in South Asia,” “Iranian,” “Japanese,” and so forth.³

Consider the following contrast. On the one hand, monographs such as *Female Masculinity*, *Transgender History*, *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity*, and *Female Husbands: A Trans History* give no indication of their geographical scope even though they all focus on US and, to a lesser extent, European history.⁴ On the other hand, titles such as *Gender Pluralism: Southeast Asia Since Early Modern Times*, *Professing Selves: Transsexuality and Same-Sex Desire in Contemporary Iran*, and *Governing Gender and Sexuality in Colonial India: The Hijra, c. 1850–1900* leave no confusion about the spatial parameters of their analysis.⁵ That this division remains sedimented in queer historiography is what spurs my plea to resist the telos of transgender knowledge.

To that end, I propose a new keyword, *transtopia*, to refer to different scales of gender transgression that are not always discernible through the Western notion of transgender.⁶ The development of this new rubric from the specific context of the Asia Pacific presents a way of decolonizing the study of gender and sexuality from Western epistemological hegemony. With its word roots unpacked, transtopia binds the *temporal* designation of change in the *trans-* prefix to the *spatial* projection of difference implicated in the *-topia* suffix. Conceptualizing transtopia as an alternative “place” frozen in or across time does not account for its entire epistemological force. Transtopia must also be thought of as a mutable “chronotype” that transcends specific geographical units. Given that transphobia has historically assumed varying shapes and scales, transtopia, as its antidote, recognizes the need for different forms of political battle and ammunition. In academic research, this translates into the

³ This observation is inspired by Rey Chow, “Introduction: On Chineseness as a Theoretical Problem,” *boundary 2* 25, no. 3 (1998): 1–24.

⁴ Jack Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998); Susan Stryker, *Transgender History* (Boston: Seal Press, 2008); C. Riley Snorton, *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017); Jen Manion, *Female Husbands: A Trans History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020). This statement is of course not a commentary on the scholarly merit and pioneering nature of these works.

⁵ Michael G. Peletz, *Gender Pluralism: Southeast Asia Since Early Modern Times* (New York: Routledge, 2009); Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Professing Selves: Transsexuality and Same-Sex Desire in Contemporary Iran* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014); Jessica Hinchy, *Governing Gender and Sexuality in Colonial India: The Hijra, c. 1850–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

⁶ Howard Chiang, *Transtopia in the Sinophone Pacific* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021).

demand for new modes of historical knowledge without implicating a hierarchy of transness defined narrowly around the Western notion of transgender. To counter what Susan Stryker has identified as “homonormativity” in the field of queer studies, transtopia renders transness as something that has a universal bearing to all of us and imagines a universe in which gender-crossing is not the exception but the norm by which all embodied subjects can be measured, calibrated, and understood.⁷ Updating Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s thesis, then, virtually any aspect of human culture must be not merely incomplete but damaged in its central substance to the degree that it does not incorporate a conjunctural analysis of transphobia and homophobia.⁸

Of course, the West-versus-non-West binary can only go so far. Decentering Euro-American hegemony can never be the only goal of decolonization.⁹ While the Orientalism of European sources has been justifiably critiqued, what often remains unremarked is the way Western cultures figure in non-Western language commentaries, including Sinitic-language sources (a point to which I return toward the end of this essay).¹⁰ The recourse to Asia nativism is as problematic as the perpetuation of Orientalist presuppositions.¹¹ And despite the possibility that the binary might reinforce a universalist-particularist tension in dominant area studies paradigms, it is precisely the unspoken position assumed by the modern West as the privileged site of novel theoretical production that the project of transtopia seeks to unsettle.¹² Insofar as transtopia is first formulated outside the typical register of Euro-America, transness becomes globally legible in a nonhierarchical way.

This essay parses the analytic of transtopia through the methods of comparative racialization, native diversification, and genealogical furcation. My approach extends the work of Benjamin Hegarty, Ying-Chao Kao, Wen Liu, Alvin Wong, and Ting-Fai Yu to critique the flattening effect of queer theoretical models arising out of the West that, when applied to the Asian Pacific context, are not apt to engage with the most salient structures of power and conditions of resistance.¹³ In particular, I

⁷ Susan Stryker, “Transgender History, Homonormativity, and Disciplinarity,” *Radical History Review*, no. 100 (2008): 145–57.

⁸ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 1.

⁹ Prasenjit Duara, ed., *Decolonization: Perspectives from Now and Then* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

¹⁰ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978); Joseph Boone, *The Homoerotics of Orientalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014); Durba Mitra, *Indian Sex Life: Sexuality and the Colonial Origins of Modern Social Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020), 23–61.

¹¹ A key text that typifies the position of Asia nativism is Chen, *Asia as Method*.

¹² On the problem of universalism and particularism, see Naoki Sakai, “Modernity and Its Critique: The Problem of Universalism and Particularism,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 87, no. 3 (1988): 475–504.

¹³ Wen Liu, “Non-Western Sexuality, Queer Asia, or Cold War Geopolitics? Repositioning Queer Taiwan in the Temporal Turn,” *National Taiwan University Studies in Taiwan Literature*, no. 26 (2021): 3–36; Alvin K. Wong, “Beyond Queer Liberalism: On Queer Globalities and Regionalism from

draw on three historical instantiations—the early modern Ottoman Empire, colonial India, and contemporary Sinophone culture—to relocate the legibility of eunuchism from transgender to transtopian history. Eunuchism refers to the bodily state of castrated men. Rather than asking who is more or less properly trans, a transtopian hermeneutic directs attention to the web of interrelations forged between historical actors and their con/texts from which transness gains meaning and momentum.

First, transtopia utilizes comparative racialization to render different markers of bodily trait as interconnected, such as the interrelation between transness and Blackness. Eunuchs in the early modern Ottoman court occupy a historical position that may not seem directly related to the contemporary idea of transgender. Some might even argue that writing these royal servants into trans history risks miscasting the nature of a politically recuperative project. However, as Abdulhamit Arvas's work has shown, early modern Ottoman eunuchs embodied the “transing of gender and race.”¹⁴ The pertinent question becomes: In what ways is the transness of eunuchs made legible through the labyrinth of historical racialization? Even though eunuchs have been known to exist across time and space, dating back to the ancient civilizations of China, Egypt, and Greece, race sharply demarcated two groups of eunuchs in the Ottoman context. Couched in an anti-Black rhetoric, Ottoman elite discourses distinguished Black from white eunuchs in terms of social hierarchy, individual volition, and, in some instances, genital morphology.¹⁵ White eunuchs tended to exert greater political freedom and occupy a more politically central position than Black eunuchs; the former were sometimes given the choice to be castrated, while the latter were not; and, so the rumor goes, white eunuchs had only their testicles removed, but Black eunuchs lost both their penis and testicles (ergo less threatening to the imperial harem). In fact, when it came to anti-Black racism, the experience of enslaved eunuchs was not an exception but the norm. Judges,

Postcolonial Hong Kong,” in *Sexualities, Transnationalism, and Globalisation*, ed. Yanqiu Rachel Zhou, Christina Sinding, and Donald Goellnicht (London: Routledge, 2021), 107–18; Benjamin Hegarty, *The Made-Up State: Technology, Trans Femininity, and Citizenship in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2022); Ting-Fai Yu, “Queer Sinophone Malaysia: Language, Transnational Activism, and the Role of Taiwan,” *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 43, no. 3 (2022): 303–18; Benjamin Hegarty, “A Queer Footnote: The Anthropology of Containment,” *American Ethnologist* 51 (2024): 84–89; Ying-Chao Kao, “The Coloniality of Queer Theory: The Effects of ‘Homonormativity’ on Transnational Taiwan’s Path to Equality,” *Sexualities* 27, nos. 1–2 (2024): 136–153.

¹⁴ Abdulhamit Arvas, “Early Modern Eunuchs and the Transing of Gender and Race,” *Journal of Early Modern Cultural Studies* 19, no. 4 (2019): 116–36.

¹⁵ For the contextualization of this anti-Black disparagement in the wider history of African slavery, Ottoman social and political crises, and westernizing reforms, see George H. Junne, *The Black Eunuchs of the Ottoman Empire: Networks of Power in the Court of the Sultan* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2016); Jane Hathaway, *The Chief Eunuch of the Ottoman Harem: From African Slave to Power-Broker* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

professors, and civil servants of color were routinely insulted in Ottoman accounts. By drawing attention to the white versus Black distinction, a transtopian reading of Ottoman eunuchs underscores the operation of race as a social vector in the shaping of gender liminal subjects: it activates a mutually imbricated analytic whereby antitransphobic and antiracist strategies work together to decode the histories of border transgression. Although the critique of race has begun to take center stage in American trans theory, engaging with the history of Ottoman eunuchs shows how we can think of race outside a purely Western and modern framework.

Moreover, transtopia widens the foundation of trans history by diversifying and destabilizing the coherence of non-Western categories. Similar to the way Ottoman eunuchs crossed gender and social conventions, the *hijra* community in colonial India came under intense scrutiny, especially after the passing of the Criminal Tribes Act (CTA) in 1871. British officials implemented the law in order to solve what they perceived as the “eunuch problem,” including prostitution, obscenity, gender transgression, social unrest, moral corruption, and urban insanitation. As Jessica Hinchy’s research makes clear, the very equation of *hijra* with the eunuch category obscures more than what it illuminates.¹⁶ In the logic of colonial governmentality, eunuchs, defined as impotent men, included not only self-identified *hijras* but also *zenanas* (effeminate men who adopted feminine gender roles or the clothing/appearance of the opposite sex), *sakhis* (religious devotees who cross-dressed), and cross-gender performers (including *bhands*). Not all of these groups underwent genital alteration. Local authorities, in fact, increasingly broadened the definition of eunuchs to include anyone who was “reasonably suspected” of committing sodomy, feminine dress and public performance, castration, and kidnapping.¹⁷ The point is that the colonial apparatus of identifying, registering, and convicting eunuchs was *itself* the mechanism whereby *hijra* became a category of deviant sexuality. The depiction of *hijras* as habitual criminals clashed with their self-understanding as a knowledge tradition, belonging to discipleship-based lineages, and members of a form of nonreproductive and nonconjugal community. The incongruence between the subject positioning of *hijras* and the technology of colonial containment illustrates the purchase of shifting the grounds of *hijra* genealogy from a purely transgender to a transtopian framework. By offering a multidirectional critique, a continuum model of transness exposes such epistemic collision, refuses an

¹⁶ Jessica Hinchy, “The Eunuch Archive: Colonial Records of Non-normative Gender and Sexuality in India,” *Culture, Theory and Critique* 58, no. 2 (2018): 127–46.

¹⁷ Hinchy, “The Eunuch Archive,” 133.

overdetermination of *hijra* as a transgender category, and acknowledges that the wider social and historical valence of *hijras* bears more than matters distinctively sexual.¹⁸

In addition to interweaving transgressions of bodily difference and pluralizing native categories, transtopia disrupts the notion that transgender identity always occupies the assumed destination of historical narratives. It does so by opening up new ways of relating the past to the present. What I term *genealogical furcation* arranges different trajectories of “branching out” in which history unfolds around certain epistemic anchors, such as the body operating as the material conduit of disparate truth conditions. The case of Chinese eunuchs illustrates at least three discrepant pathways by which such relations can be (re)imagined, even though these actors, like Ottoman eunuchs and South Asian *hijras*, often fall outside the remit of contemporary transgender thinking.

First, the historical demise of Chinese eunuchs served as the precondition for the emergence of transsexuality in the Sinophone world.¹⁹ This genealogy is sutured by not only the coeval shifts in Chinese biopolitics and geopolitics (how the contested meanings of “life” and “sex” evolved from the late Qing to the Cold War era), but also, more than a matter of chronology, the way that the castrated body provided Chinese modernizing thinkers something concrete with which to grasp new theories of sex, including ideas about sex hormones and plasticity (both of which had proven to be necessary for envisioning sex change in the human body). Not only did eunuchs use their bodies as templates for narrating China’s historical

¹⁸ Gayatri Reddy, *With Respect to Sex: Negotiating Hijra Identity in South India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Aniruddha Dutta and Raina Roy, “Decolonizing Transgender in India: Some Reflections,” *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 3 (2014): 320–36. For a critique of India-centrism in the study of South Asian *hijras*, see Adnan Hossain, “De-Indianizing Hijra: Intraregional Effacements and Inequalities in South Asian Queer Space,” *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 5, no. 3 (2018): 321–31. See also Adnan Hossain, *Beyond Emasculation: Pleasure and Power in the Making of Hijra in Bangladesh* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021). On the temporal implications of the turn from *hijra* to *khawajasara* in Pakistani trans communities, see Omar Kasmani, “Futuring Trans* in Pakistan: Timely Reflections,” *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 8, no. 1 (2021): 96–112.

¹⁹ My thinking on this subject is inspired by Susan Stryker’s comment on the decolonizing of trans studies: “If we accept the basic proposition that gender is part of a regulatory apparatus of statelike powers that—as described by Foucault, Agamben, Hardt, Negri, and others—individuates embodied subjects while aggregating them as members of a conglomerate body-politic, then any analytically rigorous conceptualization of *transgender* necessarily depends on the concrete, material, and historical arrangements that must be ‘crossed’ in a given biopolitical context: Chinese transgender in the transit from eunuchism to transsexuality, is specific to itself” (Susan Stryker, “De/Colonizing Transgender Studies of China,” in *Transgender China*, ed. Howard Chiang [New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012], 287–92, on 289).

progression, but other agents seized the same corporeal “type” for the transmission of new scientific ideas and modernizing ideals.²⁰

Second, despite the death of court eunuchs, contemporary fascination with fictionalized eunuchs—as gender-transgressive but powerful martial artists—looms especially in Sinophone cinema. That is to say, even though the physical bodies of eunuchs have disappeared from the center of Han Chinese political culture, the Sinophone periphery generates a vibrant space for the expression of queer and nonnormative fantasy. If the Sinophone world is understood as Sinitic-language cultures and communities outside or on the margins of China and Chineseness (e.g., Taiwan and Hong Kong), its relationship to “Chinese history,” then, always takes the form of Derridean supplementarity.²¹ Because such configuration upsets the fixed permutations between the supplement and that which is to be supplemented, I would go so far as to make a similar case for transtopia’s *différance*.²² As David Valentine has shown, it was only in the 1990s that an academic discipline and a global movement coalesced around the category of transgender.²³ Viewed in this light, the “trace” of transtopia in the twenty-first century may very well supplement but also exceed the originary status of transgender as a master sign.

There is a third mechanism whereby the transness of Chinese eunuchs surpasses both pre- and post-transgender telos of knowledge production. Insofar as the history of sexuality relies on the conditions and idioms of archival knowledge, the politics of what, why, and how certain kinds of information are preserved by historical actors frustrates any straightforward correlation across a linear timeline. The paradox of sexuality’s invisibility and the retrospective search for its signs in the archive has been placed under the microscope by queer historians and archival theorists.²⁴ Here, I wish to elucidate this tension in the Asia Pacific by turning to the writings of the Sinophone physician Chen Cunren (1908–90) on the subject of castration, which offer an illuminating example of archival subversion. Known as the

²⁰ For a fuller discussion of these themes, see Howard Chiang, *After Eunuchs: Science, Medicine, and the Transformation of Sex in Modern China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).

²¹ On the Sinophone concept, see Shu-mei Shih, *Visibility and Identity: Sinophone Articulations across the Pacific* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

²² Chiang, *Transtopia*, 137–69.

²³ David Valentine, *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

²⁴ Anjali Arondekar, *For the Record: Sexuality and the Colonial Archive in India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009); Zeb Tortorici, *Sins Against Nature: Sex and Archives in Colonial New Spain* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018); and the essays in Daniel Marshall, Kevin P. Murphy, and Zeb Tortorici, eds., “Queering Archives: Historical Unravellings,” special issue, *Radical History Review*, no. 120 (2014); Daniel Marshall, Kevin P. Murphy, and Zeb Tortorici, eds., “Queering Archives: Intimate Tracings,” special issue, *Radical History Review*, no. 122 (2015); Daniel Marshall and Zeb Tortorici, eds., *Turning Archival: The Life of the Historical in Queer Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2022).

founding editor of the journal *Kangjian bao* (Health news) in 1928, Chen famously joined the five-person coup that protested the Nationalist government's effort to abolish Chinese medicine in 1929.²⁵ Toward the end of his career, Chen published a series of essays on Chinese eunuchs in Hong Kong, where he relocated from Shanghai in 1949. These essays, which first appeared in *Dacheng* (Panorama) magazine in the 1970s, remain the most detailed and authoritative account of Chinese castration in the twentieth century.²⁶ Hence, they warrant a closer inspection.

The elusiveness of the eunuch category with respect to queer/trans genealogy is captured in Chen's eunuch project in at least four ways. First, even though Chen expressed his interest in the topic from the position of a medical authority, he executed traditional philological techniques—something distinctively absent in contemporary trans inquiry—in order to excavate Chinese classical references on the topic of castration, including discussions about its origins, its development, and the details of the actual procedures. In so doing, he enumerated a comprehensive taxonomy of the terms used to refer to eunuchs throughout Chinese history: *taijian*, *yanren*, *jingshen*, *sibai*, *siren*, *gongren*, *furen*, *huanguan*, *huansi*, *huangmen*, and *gongong*.²⁷ Each of these terms hinted at a different modality of gender and social transgression. Such a diversity of philological connotations defied a singular containment by the word “eunuch,” echoing what we saw in the case of *hijra*, and, by extension, a linear genealogical interpretation of its transness.

Second, assuming the viewpoint of a medical historian, Chen treated his study of Chinese eunuchs as an opportunity to chronicle the prevalence of castration in other civilizations, including European, Middle Eastern, and South Asian cultures. This circles back to my point about the mirror image of Orientalism in Western sources, such as the way non-Western eunuchs often become Orientalized “others” in European travelogues, literature, and stage plays. In Chen's rendering of antieunuchism in his vision of Chinese modernity, Greek slaves, Roman servants, Persian eunuchs, Italian castrati, and Indian *hijras* similarly served as an

²⁵ Sean Hsiang-lin Lei, *Neither Donkey nor Horse: Medicine in the Struggle over China's Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 113.

²⁶ Originally published as Chen Cunren, “Nanxing kuxing taijian kao” [An investigation of male castration and eunuchs], *Dacheng* 44 (1977). The version I consulted is the reprint edition: Chen Cunren, “Nanxing kuxing taijiankao 1,” *Zhuanji wenxue* 57, no. 3 (1990): 77–88; Chen Cunren, “Nanxing kuxing taijiankao 2,” *Zhuanji wenxue* 57, no. 4 (1990): 129–36; Chen Cunren, “Nanxing kuxing taijiankao 3,” *Zhuanji wenxue* 57, no. 5 (1990): 124–31; Chen Cunren, “Nanxing kuxing taijiankao 4,” *Zhuanji wenxue* 57, no. 6 (1990): 120–27; Chen Cunren, “Nanxing kuxing taijiankao 5,” *Zhuanji wenxue* 58, no. 1 (1991): 126–35; Chen Cunren, “Nanxing kuxing taijiankao 6,” *Zhuanji wenxue* 58, no. 2 (1991): 113–17. *Dacheng*, a magazine featuring cultural commentaries, was originally founded in 1970 as *Daren* and published until 1995, with the name change occurring in December 1973.

²⁷ Chen, “Nanxing kuxing taijiankao 1,” 77–78.



作者在上海哈同花園曾為流落在上海的老太監診病，其面容完全與常人迥異。

Figure 1.1. Chen Cunren's photograph of a eunuch whom he met in Republican-era Shanghai. In the side bar, Chen stated that the face of the eunuch resembles nothing like that of a normal person. From "Nanxing kuxing taijiankao 1," *Zhuanji wenxue* 57, no 3 (1990).

aggregated object of negation. As a Chinese medicine practitioner (as opposed to a doctor trained in Western biomedicine) and someone concerned with the fate of the Chinese nation in the aftermath of imperialist aggression, Chen came to his encyclopedic project from a globalized stance on recasting China's colonial modernity: geopolitical "others" undertook the role of omnipresence in China's relation to the world.

Third, the intent to document the place of eunuchs in Chinese history afforded Chen a context for discussing his own personal encounters with Qing eunuchs. According to Chen, these encounters were made possible with the time he spent in attending to the clinical needs of Aili Garden (also known as Hardoon Garden), owned by a successful Jewish businessman, Silas Hardoon, in Shanghai in the 1930s and 1940s.²⁸ Chen's remark on the bodily traits of eunuchs paralleled the medical depictions of the Chinese castrated body as a mutilated exemplar circulating in and outside China starting in the late nineteenth century (Fig. 1.1).²⁹ When he described in detail the grotesque facial and physical features of those eunuchs whom he saw

²⁸ Chen, "Nanxing kuxing taijiankao 1," 86.

²⁹ Chiang, *After Eunuchs*, 15–69.

on site, his condemning tone rode on the lexicons of perversity, abnormality, and pathology—all of which, too, enjoy notable currency in transphobic medical discourses today. In other words, Chen's disparaging *rhetoric* turned dynastic eunuchs into an unlikely predecessor of modern transsexuals.

Finally, the project also enabled Chen to connect Chinese eunuchism to both endocrinological theories of sex mutability and the phenomenon of transgender sex workers in postindependence Singapore.³⁰ In so doing, Chen inserted Chinese eunuchs into a global circuit of sexual science. Whereas China's place in the social and intellectual history of sexology has been studied extensively with respect to the problem of same-sex desire, Chen's writing on castration narrativized China's connection to global sexual science through the figure of the eunuch.³¹ It is hardly disputable that labeling dynastic eunuchs "transgender" resembles an anachronistic move. Even so, the temporal ruptures ligated through a textual effect such as Chen's treatise implode rather than sustain the two coeval targets of transtopian critique: the transphobic denial of the past and the transgender presumption of the present.

What can scholars of Western trans history learn from transtopia? First and foremost is the lesson that the operation of *transgender* as an umbrella category carries its own historicity, one that is neither universal nor exemplary. When we confront the culturally circumscribed nature of this rubric, we are ready to accept its status as a single point of positioning on a historical continuum neither predetermined by nor tethered to the time and place of a given identitarian locus. A well-known example is the history of Two-Spirit people as a moving form of resistance toward heteronormative settler colonialism.³² Scholars of the early modern world have also begun to rethink the relationship between historical cases of castration and the modern notion of trans.³³ Another example concerns the concept of sex change itself, particularly the way its parameters and the kinds of procedures

³⁰ Chen, "Nanxing kuxing taijiankao 1," 88; Chen, "Nanxing kuxing taijiankao 6," 117.

³¹ Tze-lan Sang, *The Emerging Lesbian: Female Same-Sex Desire in Modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 99–126; Wenqing Kang, *Obsession: Male Same-Sex Relations in China, 1900–1950* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009), 41–59; Chiang, *After Eunuchs*, 125–77; Laurie Marhoefer, *Racism and the Making of Gay Rights: A Sexologist, His Student, and the Empire of Queer Love* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2022).

³² Scott L. Morgenson, *Spaces between Us: Queer Settler Colonialism and Indigenous Decolonization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

³³ Greta LaFleur, "Trans Feminine Histories, Piece by Piece: or, Vernacular Print and the Histories of Gender" (presentation, the Global Early Modern Trans Studies Folger Symposium, Washington, D.C., May 18–20, 2023); Zeb Tortorici, "Fantasies of Corporeal Eradication: Performing Genitalia in Colonial Latin American Archives" (presentation, the Global Early Modern Trans Studies Folger Symposium, Washington, D.C., May 18–20, 2023).

it entailed evolved over time.³⁴ Before the 1960s, American surgeons, sexologists, and psychiatrists frequently considered simple castration surgeries “sex change” operations. They even debated about the most adequate way to perform such procedures, for instance, with respect to the removal versus the retention of gonads.³⁵ Even today, the clinical record suggests that some individuals experience intense castration ideations and embody a modern-day eunuch identity after castration.³⁶ Transtopia questions the exclusion of these “others within” from radical queer and trans thinking. To the extent that such exclusion anchors the normative hierarchy of transness, a shift to the language of transtopia might just be the solution to the divisiveness of trans politics and feminism—and what is needed to diversify the history of gender and sexuality.

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³⁴ Joanne Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

³⁵ See, for example, UCLA surgeon Elmar Belt’s explanation in a letter to a prospective patient of the rationale for keeping the testes inside the transsexual’s body: Elmar Belt to E. V. H., December 9, 1958, Elmer Belt 1958–59 folder, box 3, series IIC, Harry Benjamin Collection, Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, Indiana University, Bloomington.

³⁶ Richard J. Wassersug and Thomas W. Johnson, “Modern-Day Eunuchs: Motivations for and Consequences of Contemporary Castration,” *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* 50, no. 4 (2007): 544–56; Richard J. Wassersug, Emma McKenna, and Tucker Lieberman, “Eunuch as a Gender Identity after Castration,” *Journal of Gender Studies* 21, no. 3 (2012): 253–70.

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