

The Specter of Materialism: Queer Theory and Marxism in the Age of the Beijing Consensus

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No longer merely emerging, the Beijing Consensus is a global order, political economy and social formation that has matured and mutated. Three decades into China's global ascendance, our theoretical frameworks and political imaginations in the anglophone/Northern academy have yet to catch up. In this ambitious new work, *The Specter of Materialism: Queer Theory and Marxism in the Age of the Beijing Consensus*, Petrus Liu endeavours to deprovincialize queer theory and “[rethink] the motions of global capitalism from its margins” (p. 13). Written during the pandemic, Liu's sequel to *Queer Marxism in Two Chinas* (Duke University Press, 2015) extends earlier groundbreaking engagements across Chinese studies, queer theory and Marxism in a moment when the global majority is more precarious and the PRC's position in the world more prominent. While the PRC and Sinophone world are the locus of transformations in global capitalism, these locations remain outside of queer studies, despite its materialist and transnational turns in recent years. Liu stages equally important interventions in queer theory and Chinese studies, making China matter to US-based queer theory and gender and sexuality matter to the study of China in/of the world.

As *The Specter of Materialism* argues, capital requires a “geopolitical outside” and racialized, gendered and sexual populations and spaces in its endless quest of accumulation. China's incorporation into global capitalism has been possible through its investments in Africa, Asia and Latin America, the financialization of its rural hinterland, gendered and sexualized migrant labour, and novel regimes of human value. Central to Liu's argument is Marx's concept of subsumption in which social relations are reified into conditions for labour and valorization processes. Liu's account of the subsumption of social difference within post-socialist China puts gender and sexuality at the centre, a corrective to world-systems theory and macro political economic analysis. Relations of gender and sexuality and geopolitically segregated spaces are not the secondary effects of capitalist production; they are core to capitalism's workings.

In addition to revisiting classical Marxist theory, the book engages with queer theory's materialist turn. In response to the precarity, dispossession and slow violence wrought by neoliberal capitalism, the field has shifted from representation to “the material”: the matter of bodies, material conditions and empiricism. But the transformative potential of this turn has been undercut by the field's provincialism, functioning as American area studies, and its insufficient materialist analysis of global capitalism, of which China is at the centre. Since its inception in the early 1990s, queer theory has been haunted by the spectre of materialism, having never quite figured out the problem of materialism, and another spectre, the Beijing Consensus.

The arguments are grounded in close readings of popular film, canonical Chinese literature, UN conferences and field-defining texts in anglophone and Chinese feminist/queer theory (e.g. Judith Butler, Gayle Rubin, Eve Sedgwick, Li Huiying and Wang Zheng, among others), while also drawing on Liu's participation in academic workshops on China and the global South and sexuality studies. The book's strength is Liu's deft movement across the latest debates in Marxism, queer theory, inter-Asian cultural studies and China studies. The book begins with two theoretical chapters on the coeval emergence of queer theory in the US and the rise of China, which are informative and



provocative for readers within and outside of these fields. Three historical chapters follow that are themed around subsumption and raise questions of historicity and periodization. Each of these can be read and taught individually. Chapter three, on the subsumption of literature, reads Lu Xun's "Diary of a Mad Man" for its queer subjects to recover a queer modernism. Chapter four on the subsumption of the Cold War reframes the war as a cultural palimpsest for queer Asia. Through an analysis of *Swordsman II: Asia the Invincible*, Liu shows how the Cold War continues to unfold through structures of feeling, partitions, ideologies and memories. Chapter five on the subsumption of sexuality examines discourses of sex/gender (*shengli xingbie*, *shehui xingbie*), from the 1995 Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women to contemporary "gender mainstreaming" that deploys gender to marginalize queer sexualities in China and buttress China's engagements in the global South. The book ends with an inspiring vision for global queer Marxism.

It would be a disservice to limit this book to readers in Asian Marxist cultural studies and Chinese queer studies. The book speaks to audiences beyond its immediate fields. Liu offers an instructive, imaginative study in bringing together objects, areas, theories and histories. In the vein of subjectless discourse, Liu does not link Marxism and queer theory through their proper objects (class, sexuality) but through their methods and concepts (dialectics, alterity). The book explores how concepts such as sex/gender are translated across language, national contexts and epistemes, insisting that gender is always in translation, not merely a Western concept translocalized in China. Liu's scholarship leaves a blueprint for scholarship on non-Western social formations and global histories of sexuality, capitalism and race. These approaches are vital for queer theory, or any critical theory, to remain relevant in the age of the Beijing Consensus.

Among its most compelling points, *The Specters of Materialism* urges scholars to "promiscuously" work across intellectual silos and question a hierarchy of knowledge production whereby the global South provides examples, not epistemologies, for the North. In the prolonged life of the Cold War, knowledge is still organized through area studies, "which reflects a division of *intellectual* labor created by the international division of *manual* labor" (p. 109). To reenergize queer theory's materialist project, "a Marxist analysis can help establish an alternative conception of US queer theory as a minority participant in a global conversation sustained by the labor of scholars and activists working in other languages" (p. 34). Such a decentring of Western/anglophone knowledge production is central to creating new paradigms and collective struggles everywhere.

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Negotiating the Christian Past in China: Memory and Missions in Contemporary Xiamen

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This book provides a beautifully crafted insight into the ways in which contemporary Christianity in Xiamen is informed and shaped by Christian history in the locality, and the ways in which memory of this past is constructed and selectively employed by all actors – local churches (both official and