

PLATINUM BIBLE OF THE PUBLIC TOILET, Cui Zi'en

ten queer
stories



edited and with an
introduction by

Petrus Liu &
Lisa Rofel

platinum bible of the public toilet

BUY

Sinotheory A series edited by
Carlos Rojas & Eileen Cheng-yin Chow

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PLATINUM
BIBLE
OF
ten queer stories
edited by
Petrus Liu &
Lisa Rofel
THE
PUBLIC
TOILET
Cui Zi'en

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Series Editor's Introduction

Carlos Rojas

I first met Cui Zi'en twenty years ago, when I drove him from Manhattan, where New York University had just organized a mini film festival of his early work, to Cambridge, where Harvard was doing the same. This trip occurred near the beginning of Cui's cinematic career. Although he is currently best known for the provocatively queer-themed films that he began directing in the early 2000s while a professor at the Beijing Film Academy, he first attracted international attention as a queer activist in the 1990s, when he began writing prolifically as both a scholar and a creative author.

Cui's directorial debut, *Enter the Clowns* (2002), opens with a now-infamous sequence in which a young man named Xiao Bo (played by Yu Bo) is speaking to his parent (played by Cui Zi'en himself). The parent—who was originally Xiao Bo's father but has begun identifying as a woman—is on their deathbed, and after a discussion about funeral arrangements and other practical matters, the parent tells Xiao Bo that they would like for him to “see me off with your milk.” After realizing that his parent is asking to perform oral sex on him, Xiao Bo briefly hesitates, but then, as a filial son, he accedes to his parent's dying wish. The remainder of the film features several linked vignettes that include two more plotlines involving trans characters, a rape and a revenge rape, several shots of a crowd praying in a cathedral, and a lengthy Christian-style confession. Viewed two decades after its initial debut, the film may strike some as simultaneously prescient and retrograde. On the one hand, the work's multifaceted exploration of trans issues engages with a topic that is much more widely accepted today than it was in the early 2000s; even when the film depicts what are arguably transphobic reactions, it does so in a nuanced manner. On the other hand, because of the #MeToo

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movement and other recent developments, there is now greater attention to issues of consent, and the film's two rape scenes may sit uncomfortably for many contemporary viewers. It should also be acknowledged, however, that when the novella on which the film is based was first published in China in 1997, these trans themes and rape scenes incited considerable discussion and debate.

Enter the Clowns succinctly captures many of the tensions that animate Cui's cinematic work—including a fascination with the relationships between gender and sexuality, transgression and intimacy, sexuality and religion. Even as the film anticipates some of the themes that will come to define Cui's cinematic oeuvre, it offers a poignant reminder of his long-standing commitment to fiction and scriptwriting. Not only is the film loosely based on a homonymous novella Cui published four years earlier, it also contains two notable sequences in which characters read aloud from Cui's own fictional works. In one sequence, a couple of characters, outfitted as though performing a radio broadcast, read from a script that announces the launch of a new broadcast program titled *Ladies' Lavatory Anthropology*, about an anthropological analysis of the difficulties that women in China encounter in trying to find public bathrooms. In the other sequence, Xiao Bo reads aloud a science fiction story written in the voice of an extraterrestrial angel. Each of these sequences occupies a structurally significant position within the film itself: the first reading begins at minute thirty-eight, almost precisely halfway through the seventy-seven-minute film; the second appears in the film's final shot. Together, these two readings account for six full minutes of screen time, or almost 10 percent of the film's total length. While they have not received as much public attention as some of the other aspects of the film, they are nevertheless clearly central to the film's conception, and they reflect Cui's continued commitment to fiction writing even as he was launching his career as a director.

Although most of Cui Zi'en's films are available with English subtitles, this volume is the first book-length collection of his fiction in English translation. The volume includes translations of nine stories and one novella selected by Cui himself. Readers already familiar with Cui's filmography will find most of these stories to be significantly less speculative and transgressive than his films. Rather than detailing scenarios involving extraterrestrials and quasi-incestuous encounters, most of the stories feature recollections of childhood explorations of gender and sexuality. The works are narrated in a matter-of-fact tone that underscores the inherent normality of the assorted nonheteronormative scenarios that the protagonists observe or experience.

All but one of the works are appearing here in English for the first time and were commissioned specifically for this volume.

The translation process is a useful and necessary mechanism for making Cui's fictional work available to English-language readers, and at a structural level it also reflects several of the qualities that distinguish Cui's creative output itself. For instance, just as Cui's works are characterized by a combination of intimacy and alienation, quotidianity and transgression, translation similarly involves a careful balance of domestication and foreignization. On the one hand, the process of domestication aims to minimize the visibility of the translation process and to produce a text that reads comfortably. But it does so by forcibly coupling the source and target languages and hiding the resulting linguistic violence beneath a veneer of smooth readability. On the other hand, the process of foreignization involves preserving the underlying gaps and incommensurabilities that necessarily exist between the two languages. Although the result may appear rather jarring and alienating, it affirms the independence and autonomy of each language. Many of Cui's works explore a similar set of issues with respect to both the relationships between individual characters (which are often characterized by a combination of desire and alienation) and the relationship between the works' conceptual concerns and the presumed sensibilities of Cui's viewers and readers. Thus the works are frequently characterized by a combination of veritably transgressive and utterly mundane elements, even as the transgressive aspects are simultaneously intended to help normalize a set of marginalized queer practices and subjectivities, and conversely the putatively mundane segments frequently have a startling impact by virtue of the broader context in which they appear.

There has recently been a surge of interest in Cui Zi'en's work, with the almost concurrent publication of several volumes with direct ties to *Enter the Clowns*. For instance, the title of Cui's directorial debut is also the title of a 2022 Chinese-language collection of interviews that Michael Berry conducted with Cui, and which translates as *Enter the Clowns: The Queer Cinema of Cui Zi'en*. The fictional text that Xiao Bo spends a full minute reading aloud in the film's final scene is a section of the novella *Pseudo-Science Fiction Stories* that appeared in the Guangzhou literary journal *Flower City* (*Hua cheng*) in 2000 (and in the film Xiao Bo is seen reading directly from that journal issue). The novella was subsequently published as a stand-alone book in January 2003 by a mainland Chinese press in Zhuhai, and in January 2023 a new edition of the novel was published by a press in Taiwan. Meanwhile, the fictional story that two characters spend five minutes reading aloud at

the midpoint of *Enter the Clowns* was completed in 2000, and it would have been published in a volume of Cui's collected works a few years later had it not been rejected by China's censors. The story was eventually published in Chinese in 2017 in the queer Chinese magazine *Gay Spot (Dian)*. It also lends its title to this collection of translations: *Platinum Bible of the Public Toilet*.

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Editors' Introduction

Petrus Liu & Lisa Rofel

Cui Zi'en is China's most famous, some would say most controversial, queer filmmaker, writer, scholar, and human rights activist. *Platinum Bible of the Public Toilet* brings together for the first time for an English-language audience a collection of Cui's creative fiction translated from the Chinese. Today Cui's name is inextricably fused with the history of homosexuality in China. Reading Cui alongside milestones in legal and cultural changes in Chinese homosexuality—such as the 1997 “decriminalization” (repeal of Provision 160 of the 1979 Criminal Law) and the 2001 “depathologization” (revision of the Chinese Classification and Diagnostic Criteria of Mental Disorders, or CCMD-III)—Western commentators frequently depict Cui and his work as indexing the emergence of queer cultures in the postsocialist era.

These newly available senses of sexual subjectivity are captured by Cui Zi'en's literary craft. Born in 1958 in Harbin, a major city in China's northeast rust belt, Cui came of age as a young adult during this postsocialist period, at the tail end of the Cultural Revolution (1966–76) and the beginning of China's economic reforms in the 1980s. The 1990s witnessed the emergence of queer community building, especially after the signal 1995 UN Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing, which gathered together lesbians from all over China and the world. Public spaces, private salons, HIV/AIDS and safe-sex education, sex hotlines, and much more emerged in the late 1990s.¹ New forms of subjectivity through the expansion of desires—sexual, consumption, wealth accumulation—became a prominent project of both the state and ordinary citizens.

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Cui has been at the center of these milestones in queer politics in China. Cui's contributions to this queer community building are numerous and well known: Cui is one of the first public figures to come out in China, first in the classroom at the Beijing Film Academy in 1991 (which resulted in the suspension of his teaching assignments) and then, nationally, on Hunan Satellite Television in 2000.² In 2001, the Beijing Queer Film Festival was founded by a group of Peking University students including Zhang Jiangnan and Yang Yang; Cui was invited to be the artistic director and guest curator of the event, which became a beacon of hope and sociality to many other queer-identified artists and activists (notably Shi Tou, Fan Popo, and Wei Xiaogang).³ For raising public awareness of LGBTQ issues in China, Cui received the Felipa de Souza Human Rights Award from the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC), based in San Francisco, in 2002.

Internationally, Cui is well known for pioneering an avant-garde style of depicting nonconforming genders and sexualities that has earned him the reputation of being the enfant terrible of contemporary Chinese cinema.⁴ He consistently challenges both heteronormativity and the middle-class homonormativity that quickly emerged in postsocialist China once Chinese lesbians and gay men began debating the best way to be accepted into mainstream society and how to protect a proper gay identity from those who sully it. Cui's documentaries and independent digital videos are thematically transgressive, depicting subjects living at a critical distance from our imagination of what China is or ought to be today: heteronormative organizations of family and kinship and capitalist accumulation of wealth. *Night Scene* (2003) and *Feeding Boys, Ayaya* (2013), for example, are both concerned with the experiences of young men known as "money boys" (in English), rural-to-urban male sex workers who sell their sexual labor in an increasingly stratified society after the end of socialism had "smashed the iron rice bowl," the phrase in official pronouncements touting the withdrawal of guaranteed livelihoods. As Lisa Rofel has shown elsewhere, these films "playfully satirized normalized work lives" by depicting how society's "normalization techniques reduce and embed desire in a structured world of intensive labor extraction, one that produces a capitalist-inflected heteronormativity."⁵ In another famously scandalous scene from *Enter the Clowns* (2002), the protagonist's father (played by Cui himself) unexpectedly becomes a woman. On her deathbed, Cui's character regrets that she never had a chance to breastfeed her son and demands to taste her son's own "milk" by sucking him off instead.

But perhaps what is even more defiant is Cui's visual style. Working on a low budget—without studio sound recording, without omniscient voice-over

commentary, and often in an unscripted setting—Cui mobilizes the underground film as a political strategy to disrupt the connection between mainstream definitions of aesthetics and American-infused capital. He fortifies the visually displeasing qualities to challenge Chinese viewers' Soviet-conditioned, and now Hollywood-influenced, comfort zone and taste. Cui never allows his films to cohere into a relatable sentimental drama about gay men's struggles with familial expectations or unrequited love, as one often sees in feature films by Stanley Kwan or Ang Lee. Unlike films such as *Lan Yu* or *The Wedding Banquet*, which focus on the queer person's heroic efforts to overcome adversity in life and then offer the viewer the pleasure of catharsis, Cui does not write about queer people's tragic struggles with coming out, family pressures, discrimination, or difficulties with finding love. Instead of portraying Chinese gay men and women as victims of an unaccepting society, Cui breaks up his queer narrative with randomly inserted nonqueer, sometimes nonsensical, elements to prevent the film from relapsing into a work of voyeuristic pleasure or political vindication.⁶ As viewers we are immersed in stories of desire as an unstable, contingent rhizome between people and bodies.

This political task informs Cui's literary as well as cinematic projects. Cui's texts build up the reader's expectations only to thwart them by undermining their own narrative logic and refusing closure. In the short story in this volume "Some Admire Wisdom, Others Do Not," for example, Cui engages storytelling at a metanarrative level, in which the narrator continually asks an unnamed listener about how he finds the dark stories of death and love the narrator feels the need to speak about. Reading the stories requires tolerance and even appreciation for ambiguity because the narratives can be jarring and full of dissonance. Cui deliberately interrupts the narrative at the very moment when it is about to cohere into a recognizable story about a queer person's life, desires, and struggles that would provide gratification or identification to the reader.

Given Cui's visibility as an underground queer filmmaker from China, it is no surprise that there is now a large body of Anglophone scholarship on Cui's films.⁷ However, studies of Cui in North America often fail to mention his work in creative fiction. In China, Cui did not achieve his cultural influence through underground filmmaking alone. Cui is also a prolific essayist and fiction writer, having published in Chinese five novels, three collections of short stories, six volumes of cultural criticism essays, and a memoir.⁸ Yet there is virtually no discussion of Cui as a fiction writer and an essayist in the Anglophone world. To date, only two translations of Cui's fictional works

have appeared.⁹ We hope *Platinum Bible of the Public Toilet* will augment the growing body of scholarship on Cui. This volume connects his visual and written works by showing their shared roots in Chinese and Western philosophy, history, and contemporary cultural politics. These stories reveal the capaciousness of Cui's creativity. Together, they demonstrate the value of understanding his creative journey in a more holistic way. This volume represents a writing style and a set of thematic concerns that are quite distinct from other works from contemporary China.

Historical Background

The transgressive creativity of Cui's work is best appreciated against the historical background of struggles and debates in China over questions of gender and sexuality from which he emerges.

The contentious and lively debates on the changing meanings and practices of gender and sexuality that have taken place since the 1980s, with China's turn away from Maoist socialism and its rising presence as a power in the global capitalist economy, have a longer genealogy in China's encounters with both Western colonial incursions in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and Japanese occupation before and during World War II. While the former weakened China's own imperial system, the latter decimated the Chinese republic established in its wake. Orientalist justifications for these incursions focused on the oppression of Chinese women and male-male intimacies as signs of China's supposed inherent weakness that needed uplift from the presumptive superiority of Western civilization.¹⁰ Chinese intellectuals engaged with these depictions as they grappled with building a culture and a nation that would throw off imperialism.

Reconfigurations of femininity, masculinity, and same-sex love thus became the grounds upon which alternative futures were imagined.¹¹ Social and political ruptures that wrecked China throughout the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries became questions that would continually resurface and reformulate dominant forms of gendered and sexual subjectivities, in dialogue with international feminism and theories of homosexuality.

In the first half of the twentieth century, Chinese elites—both men and women—argued that women had been subordinated by the feudal, Confucian family system and needed various modes of education and social transformation.¹² Radicals called for the end of the treatment of women as property, along with the end of capitalism.¹³ As for masculinity and same-sex

love between men, Chinese modernizers took up a range of positions as they engaged Western sexology as well as China's premodern history of same-sex relations. These spanned from praising intimacy between men as offering the possible means to a human utopia, while at the same time distancing themselves from the premodern hierarchies of same-sex relations (notably between an emperor and his male favorites and patron-actor relations via Peking opera), to pathologizing homosexuals for their social immorality and moreover for producing a weak masculinity that these modernizers interpreted as signifying the weakness of the nation.¹⁴ Underlying these differences, however, was a shared emphasis on the importance of a modernized understanding of gender and sex in order to strengthen the nation.

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) inherited these debates, emphasizing the socialist revolution's liberation of women through public labor and national economic development and the strengthening of men's manhood by getting them out of poverty, while also normalizing heterosexual family life and subordinating gender politics to that of class. Using the famous phrase "women hold up half the sky," the CCP encouraged women to understand themselves as equal to men and, at times, to strive to accomplish men's work, even as men remained the unquestioned standard. Many women experienced the enormous possibilities of stepping out of their former kinship strictures. Yet the socialist government also established an unequal gendered division of labor and gender hierarchy within the party.¹⁵

During the post-Mao reform period in the 1980s, denunciations of socialist politics in the name of "re-naturalizing" gender and sexual life infused debates about what China is and should become. A revisionist history of the socialist past among scholars and writers argued that Maoist socialism had deferred China's ability to reach modernity and that the cause of this deferral was the suppression of so-called natural humanity and the creation of unnatural passions and interests. These intellectuals portrayed postsocialist reforms, in contrast, as setting human nature free.¹⁶ The debates about gender and sexuality were thus vociferous in the 1980s, as various writers sought to naturalize gender, on the one hand, and challenge the persistent gender inequalities under Maoist socialism, on the other. Both positions centered gender and sexuality as the ground upon which to once again reconfigure the nation and its sociopolitical and economic arrangements, this time through the invocation of what was presumed to be a universal human nature.¹⁷ Those who invoked presumably natural genders decried women for having become too masculine during the socialist era, which was accompanied by the inability of men to find their true masculinity.¹⁸ Those who focused on gender

inequalities argued that the socialist government's feminism had been too narrow. They called for a renewal of feminist politics that was broader than the question of participation in public labor and that should include gender consciousness and analysis of other forms of oppression.¹⁹

Alongside these critiques is a reevaluation of the experiences of men who have sex with men. The commonsense assumption among scholars, activists, and media about the experiences of men who had sex with men during the socialist era in China is that it was a dark era of political repression for them, after which the post-Mao loosening of social controls led to the end of their punishment. However, as Wenqing Kang has argued, this "repressive hypothesis" fails to explain the complexities of China's sexual politics. Building on the research of China-based legal scholars Zhou Dan and Guo Xiaofei, Kang shows that the much-lauded decriminalization and depathologization of homosexuality in China (in 1997 and 2001, respectively) are mischaracterizations of the problem because homosexuality was never technically criminalized and medicalized in China to begin with. Instead, the Chinese state from the Qing (1644–1911) to the Republican (1911–49) and PRC (1949–present) periods has consistently denied the existence of homosexuals. For this reason, male same-sex relations were prosecuted under the name of "hooliganism" (*liumang zui*) or social disturbance but never under the category of homosexuality as such. The emergence of queer communities and identities in the postsocialist era represented both new forms of intimacy and new modes of surveillance, as postsocialist power engaged with neoliberalism and its associated privatizations.²⁰ This positive fostering of a wide range of desires means that a great deal of ambivalence persists about homoerotic desire and queer identities, an ambivalence whose gaps and fissures queer community building has been able to organize with and against.

Platinum Bible of the Public Toilet

The stories in this collection draw on Cui's own experiences growing up in Northeast China in a community of underground Christians. During his coming-of-age years, the northeast was China's rust belt, with growing industrialization based mainly in heavy industries such as military equipment, chemical, steel, and alloys production, as well as textile, apparel, and construction industries. Given its geographic location, bordering Russia and close to Japan, Northeast China had also long been home to a variety of international migrants and colonial settlers. In the case of settlers from Japan, for

example, many remained after the Japanese empire was defeated at the end of World War II, especially if they had a Chinese spouse. “Orphans of the Japanese Empire” in this collection describes one such family. The socialist era lies in the background of these stories. Cui’s goal is not to denounce that era’s politics. Indeed, as Petrus Liu has emphasized elsewhere, Cui embraces what he considers to be the true spirit of Communist internationalism.²¹ His goal in these stories is rather to demonstrate that much nonnormative life took place in that socialist period, underneath and around government strictures.

Anglophone readers of gay fiction from contemporary China sometimes expect to find images of individuals suffering from state persecution or Confucian familism on account of a repressed identity that corresponds to Western notions of homosexuality. But Cui’s stories offer an expansive canvas of social subjects that are queer in a broader sense, including money boys, creepy uncles, voyeurs, exhibitionists, cross-dressers, and, in other stories that do not appear in this collection, outer space sex-crazed extraterrestrials and dinosaurs. Whereas Western, in particular Freudian-inflected, accounts of individual psychosexual formations and struggles tend to focus on the private bedroom, Cui chooses an entirely different scene for his stories to challenge and deconstruct the trappings of polite society: the public toilet.

For Cui, the public toilet is an institution that emphatically reveals the coded nature of gender. It is also the site where sexual and nonsexual functions and pleasures of the body are regulated and exchanged. In this location, the possibility of a queer revolution does not begin with the assertion of a preexisting individual identity. Rather, it involves the unlearning of the social shame that accompanies the most basic functions the body performs—defecation, urination, but also touching, feeling, giving, and receiving. They strip away our rigidified notions of what is socially appropriate and what is vulgar, what is supposed to be public or private, and what constitutes intimacy and community. Everything we have learned to hide about our sexuality, religion, or political beliefs finds an outlet in the toilet, where the body, stripped of its social artifice, reminds us of our common fragility and human needs regardless of differences in station, rank, and power. Hence the title of this volume.

The stories in *Platinum Bible of the Public Toilet* specifically address the gender and sexual discoveries of young boys coming of age, usually told from the perspective of an adult narrator looking back on his childhood. Like Cui’s films, *Platinum Bible of the Public Toilet* subverts normative sexuality and kinship. The stories violate all kinds of social divisions—those separating normal and abnormal, proper and improper, homophobic and homoerotic desires

and relations. “Teacher Eats Biscuits Thin as Parchment,” for example, upends the taboo on teacher-student sexual relationships. Many of the stories describe someone becoming aware of his own homoerotic desires without putting a label on them. In these stories, Cui feels no need to have the “inverted” person justify his way of being. He just is. It is up to others to accept him or not. Nor are his stories about “identity.” It is others’ relationships to homoerotic desire and nonnormative gender presentation that are examined, which usually involves either some form of matter-of-fact acceptance or an enactment of queer desire that is then deflected. These stories, in other words, compose a form of queer theory that intervenes in attempts to assimilate nonnormative expressions and desires.

In “Uncle’s Elegant Life,” for example, a young boy first adores his effeminate uncle and then feels shame about him, only to recapture his adoration of the uncle when he becomes a young adult. In “The Silent Advent of the Age of Sexual Persuasion,” the protagonist’s singular obsession is with the size of his boyfriend’s cock. Full of graphically detailed descriptions of the joy of being penetrated, this story apologizes for neither penis worship nor bottomhood. For the story’s protagonist, this kind of erotic submission and penetrability is in fact a survival strategy, and he urges all bottoms to let go of the values of the old age of romantic persuasion, such as modesty, subtlety, and artifice, and replace them with exuberant appreciation of their partners’ sexual organs. If “The Silent Advent of the Age of Sexual Persuasion” celebrates the pleasures of being penetrated and dominated, “Men Are Containers” offers an entirely different perspective by casting the receiving partner as the active agent in the process. Instead of thinking of sex as penetration, the story describes it as a form of enveloping and containment: the mouth, the anus, and other orifices of the body are given agency as the containers of men. This formulation reverses the conventional view of the penetrator as the active or “top” partner in a relationship while deconstructing the binarism of yin and yang and the logic of gender.

Many of these stories have the quality of a fable or allegory, presenting the reader with a challenge not to assess their “truth” quality but rather to engage their vision of a matter-of-fact nonnormative world. The structure of the narratives is usually about one or more persons enacting, viewing, and evaluating others’ gender behaviors and sexual desires, both public and secret. “Intrigue like Fireworks,” for example, tells a recursive tale of different generations of young boys surreptitiously watching illicit lovemaking. The stories together are about commitments to one’s erotic attractions and passionate attachments, even in the face of numerous obstacles. It is not just the

characters who are transgressive. Cui Zi'en is transgressive in how he allows the stories to unfold, without resolution in homonormative endings. He refuses to explain or explain away homoerotic desire or nonnormative gender behavior. Often the boys and young men are those who enact homoerotic desire but declaim they are not homosexual. All these subjects, however, are "queer" in that they do not simply enact cultural norms. Cui thus expands the notion of "queer" to encompass a wide range of nonnormative expressions. For Cui, "queerness rests on a capacity to recognize the distance between received categories and the diversity of erotic desires and modes of intimacy in human cultures."²²

Predictably, Cui's transgressive storytelling puts him in tension with the Chinese state. After receiving the Felipa Human Rights Award from the United States in 2002, Cui was put under surveillance by the Chinese state. Yet Cui's writings also put him at odds with much of society at large, as well as with many LGBTQ projects that focus on middle-class acceptability within Chinese society, that is, homonationalism. In direct and indirect ways, Cui's works tell powerful stories about a China not well known to outsiders. These stories also give us a sense of how fast China has changed in the last thirty years, as well as what persists despite such changes.

Growing up as part of an underground Christian community and as a queer person during the height of China's socialist era formed a double closet. From an early age, Cui had to learn to conceal his faith from the Maoist state's suppression of religion, while keeping his nascent sexuality a secret from school bullies. In the foreword written specifically for this translation, Cui recounts a childhood memory of himself wearing the red scarf as a young Red Guard and the immense pride he felt in the moment. The significance of the anecdote lies in the chasm between his interior self and the only source of "pride" available to him at the time. Alienated from his religion and his sexuality, Cui could express himself only through the slogans and paraphernalia created by the state. Later, through his creative fiction, Cui began to rebel against the socialist script and reclaim an authentic self. For Cui, the socialist script was particularly problematic because it flattened the complex dimensions of the human subject into categories that he felt were false: workers, peasants, soldiers; women, men; Western imperialists or Communist liberators.

To resist the state-sanctioned narrative, he turned to many intellectual resources. He was an avid reader of classical Chinese literature, which he read in secret because many of these texts, still written in traditional Chinese characters, were banned after 1949 by the socialist government as representations

of feudal values. In the university, Cui studied classical Chinese literature and later published an important study of the seventeenth-century Chinese writer Li Yu (*On Li Yu's Fiction*, 1989). Western postmodern fiction, especially the works of Italo Calvino, became a major inspiration for him. He immersed himself in an eclectic range of philosophical and theoretical works, from Confucianism, Buddhism, and Christian liberation theology to the poststructuralist writings of Gilles Deleuze and Jacques Derrida. Fueled by these ideas, Cui began publishing essays, short stories, and underground films depicting alternative, antiestablishment configurations of gender and sexuality.

The stories in this collection all address the gender and sexual transgressions that many young boys and men experience, including those who do not identify as homosexual or do not even know that term. It is about commitments to one's erotic attractions and passionate attachments, even in the face of numerous obstacles. Richly imaginative and deeply unsettling, Cui's stories are bound to challenge the readers' beliefs as much as they inspire them.

Notes

- 1 Liu, *Specter of Materialism*, ch. 5.
- 2 Cui spoke about his controversial experience at the film academy in M. Berry, *Choujiao dengchang*.
- 3 See Cui, *Queer China*, "Comrade" China; and Bao, *Queer Media*, ch. 6.
- 4 Wang, "Embodied Visions," 666.
- 5 Rofel, "Traffic in Money Boys," 446–47.
- 6 Liu, *Queer Marxism*, 48–58.
- 7 See, among others, C. Berry, "Sacred"; de Villiers, *Sexography*, ch. 4; Voci, *China on Video*; Leung, "Homosexuality and Queer Aesthetics"; Robinson, *Independent Chinese Documentary*, ch. 4; Zhang, "Cui Zi'en's Night Scene"; Pickowicz, "From Yao Wenyan to Cui Zi'en"; Wang, "Ruin Is Always a New Outcome"; Yue, "Mobile Intimacies"; Zhou, "Chinese Queer Images"; Spencer, "Ten Years"; Bao, *Queer Media*, ch. 3 and ch. 6; and Bao, *Queer Comrades*, ch. 5.
- 8 See the appendix for a full list of Cui's works.
- 9 Cui, "Endangered Species Rule!" (translated by Petrus Liu); and "Uncle's Elegant Life" (translated by Lisa Rofel).
- 10 Western commentators, observers, religious missionaries, capitalists, and political leaders who intervened in China used these justifications for their powerful efforts to dominate life in China. What makes these justifications orientalist, as well as being colonial, modern, Western, and imperialist, is their use of cultural stereotypes that negatively portray Chinese culture as the main source of why Western interventions are needed and appropriate.

- 11 They were, to borrow Gail Hershatter's succinct phrasing in *Women and China's Revolutions*, "flexible symbol[s] of social problems, national humiliation, and political transformation." Hershatter, *Women and China's Revolutions*, xiii.
- 12 As Tani Barlow has pointed out in *The Question of Women in Chinese Feminism*, they embraced social Darwinism and eugenicist Reason about the biocultural road to a healthy nation. Barlow, *Question of Women*.
- 13 See Liu, Karl, and Ko, *Birth of Chinese Feminism*.
- 14 See Kang, *Obsession*, 1.
- 15 See Evans, *Women and Sexuality*; and Liu, *Specter of Materialism*, ch. 5.
- 16 Rofel, *Desiring China*.
- 17 Rofel, *Desiring China*, 1–30.
- 18 Zhong, *Masculinity Besieged?*
- 19 Dai and Meng, *Fuchu lishi dibiao*; Dai, *Cinema and Desire*; Li, "Economic Reform."
- 20 Instead of a linear narrative, it is more accurate to view the 1997 decriminalization of homosexuality and the 2001 removal of the category of homosexuality from CCMD-III as secondary by-products of a broader effort to standardize the Chinese legal system and the medical profession in keeping with international standards. Kang, "Decriminalization and Depathologization." See also Kang, "Male Same-Sex Relations."
- 21 Cui, "Communist International"; Liu, *Queer Marxism*, 49.
- 22 Liu, *Queer Marxism*, 55.