

2019 INTERACTIONS SEMINAR SERIES

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORICAL & CULTURAL STUDIES,
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO SCARBOROUGH

AFTER EUNUCHS

SCIENCE, MEDICINE, AND
THE TRANSFORMATION OF SEX
IN MODERN CHINA

HOWARD CHIANG



Thursday, March 21, 1-3pm

HW525C • 1-3pm

For much of Chinese history, the eunuch stood out as an exceptional figure at the margins of gender categories. Amid the disintegration of the Qing Empire, men and women in China began to understand their differences in the language of modern science.

In this talk, Howard Chiang traces the genealogy of sexual knowledge from the demise of eunuchism to the emergence of transsexuality, showing the centrality of new epistemic structures to the formation of Chinese modernity. Focusing on the anticastration discourses in the late Qing era and sex-reassignment surgeries in Taiwan in the 1950s, Chiang explores the ways the introduction of Western biomedical sciences transformed normative meanings of gender, sexuality, and the body in China. Drawing from stories of gender and sexual minorities as well as a large supporting cast of doctors, scientists, philosophers, educators, reformers, journalists, and tabloid writers, Chiang investigates how competing definitions of sex circulated in science, medicine, vernacular culture, and the periodical press, bringing to light a rich and vibrant discourse of sex change in the first half of the twentieth century.



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