

# Sexuality and its nuances: On Magnus Hirschfeld's sexual ethnology and China's sapiential heritage

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## Abstract

Between November 1930 and March 1932, German-Jewish sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld (1868–1935) undertook a trip around the world, eventually visiting the United States (where he was greeted as the ‘Dr. Einstein of sex’), Japan, China, Indonesia, India, the Philippines, Egypt, and Palestine. The resulting travel report, entitled *Weltreise eines Sexualforschers* (1933), is generally considered one of the foundational texts of the then-emerging discipline of sexual ethnology, and comprises the first non-Eurocentric, anti-colonialist critique of Asian cultures from a sexological perspective. Taking into account Hirschfeld's overarching design to dissolve close schemes of sexual, racial and cultural taxonomies, the study focuses on his assessment of China's religiously neutral, sober approach of sexual realities as ‘a world-wide exception’ intimately connected to its Confucian and Taoistic heritage, and resonating with the core premises of his Spinozian-inspired and Darwinian-based sexology. Notwithstanding his praise of Chinese sexual realism, however, Hirschfeld argued that China's sexual mores (*Sitten*) – like all other sexual mores to date – fail to suffice the criteria of a universally valid sexual morality (*Sittlichkeit*). While the binary schemes of sexual distribution on which sexual mores are preponderantly grounded misconstrue the complexities of individual sexualities and foster, as compensation, the escapism into the non-constraints of other-worldly utopias, Hirschfeld's postulation of potentially infinite, uniquely nuanced sexualities leads to a radical blueprint of intra-historic sexual emancipation.

**KEYWORDS:** binaries, China, continuum of nature, culture and nature, difference, racial hybridity, sexual categories, sexual ethnology, sexual intermediariness, third sex

‘Do you know that sign?’

He looked at it a long time with a strange look, but then said, ‘No.’

‘It's found on Earth, and on Hain-Davenant, and on Chiffewar. It is yin and yang. *Light is the left hand of darkness* ... how did it go? Light, dark. Fear, courage. Cold, warmth. Female, male. It is yourself, Therem. Both and one. A shadow on snow’.

Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1979: 180)

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## Introduction: Denting binary sexuality

Sexual binarity enjoys the rare privilege of never having been seriously questioned, let alone unsettled, by mainstream human and social sciences. Rather, its cogency has been diligently corroborated by towering twentieth-century intellectual projects, from Freudian psychoanalysis<sup>1</sup> to the structuralism of Claude Lévi-Strauss.<sup>2</sup> It is thus hardly surprising that anthropology has overlooked the crucial elaborations on the ‘neuter’ included in Charles Fourier’s *Le nouveau monde amoureux* (Fourier 1979), the first full-blown sexual utopia in the Western tradition. Against this backdrop, it is noteworthy that a couple of years before the belated publication of the book in 1979, Roland Barthes had already drawn attention to the critical import of the concept in Fourier’s thought, emphasising:

the neuter is that which occupies the space *between* the mark and the non-mark, a sort of buffer ... whose role is to choke, to mitigate, to liquefy the semantic *tic-tac*, the metronomic noise that signs obsessively the paradigmatic alternance: yes/no, yes/no, yes/no, etc.<sup>3</sup> (1971: 112).

Given the relevancy of Fourier’s principled fluidisation of dichotomous sexuality to any conceptualisation of the human, anthropology does not seem to have sufficient reasons for avoiding to assess his insights and the sexological reconsiderations they necessitate.

## Beyond the ‘third sex’

The methodological reflection within anthropology has disregarded not only Fourier’s utopian critique of binomial sexual difference, but also the more empirical forms of argument deployed by Karl Heinrich Ulrichs (1825–1895), the leading figure of the early homosexual emancipation movement in Europe (see Kennedy 1988: 91–7). In Ulrichs’s trinomial sche-

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<sup>1</sup> See Sigmund Freud’s pregnant formulation of his core conviction in this regard: ‘Männlich oder weiblich ist die erste Unterscheidung, die Sie machen, wenn Sie mit einem anderen menschlichen Wesen zusammentreffen, und Sie sind gewöhnt, diese Unterscheidung mit unbedenklicher Sicherheit zu machen’ (Freud 1980b: 345) [‘Male and female is the first distinction that you make when you meet another human being, and you are accustomed to making this distinction with unquestioned certainty’]. All translations from the German and French in this study are by the author.

<sup>2</sup> Since culture, according to Claude Lévi-Strauss, is defined by the exchange of women between exclusively male-constituted clans marked by exogamy and patrilineality, his structural anthropology rests on the assumption of two disjunctive groups: the male exchangers and the female exchanged. The effective relegation of women to the passivity of non-subjects subordinated to the initiative of male clan members is thus just a consequence of the instauration of the male/female binary and its asymmetric configuration. In reference to the rhythm of the seasons, Lévi-Strauss indicatively writes in *Anthropologie Structurale Deux*: ‘Dans l’ordre naturel, celui-ci répond à la même fonction que remplissent, sur le plan social, l’échange des femmes dans le mariage, l’échange des mots dans la conversation, à condition qu’on les pratique l’un et l’autre avec l’intention franche de communiquer; c’est-à-dire sans ruse ni perversité, et surtout, sans arrière-pensée’ (Lévi-Strauss 1973: 35) [‘In the natural order, this corresponds to the same function that fulfils, in the social level, the exchange of women in marriage or the exchange of words in conversation, provided that both are practiced with the frank intention of communicating, that is, without ruse or perversity, and especially, without reservations’]. Given the clarity of the text, there is no need to comment on who the beneficiary of drawing the parallel between the exchange value of women and words actually is.

<sup>3</sup> le neutre est ce qui prend place *entre* la marque et la non-marque, cette sorte de tampon ... dont le rôle est d’étouffer, d’adoucir, de fluidifier le *tic-tac* sémantique, ce bruit métronomique qui signe obsessionnellement l’alternance paradigmatique: *oui/non, oui/non, oui/non, etc.*

me of sexual distribution, the 'third sex' is meant to supplement the sexual dichotomy and thereby complete and close what is representable as sexuality (see Bauer 2004b), but not to alter the binary categories of man and woman, under which most sexed individuals are deemed to be subsumable. Doubtless, an in-depth reception of Ulrichs's conception of the third sex would have necessitated important modifications in anthropology's theoretical instrumentality.<sup>4</sup> It can be assumed, however, that Magnus Hirschfeld's (1868–1935) consistent universalisation of sexual intermediariness would have brought about even more drastic changes in the anthropological understanding of the human sexual condition. That his paradigmatic reconceptualisation of sexual difference has been so blatantly neglected by anthropology appears to be all the more unwarranted, as Hirschfeld was a pioneer who opened one of its fields of inquiry: sexual ethnology.<sup>5</sup>

## **Focusing on the anthropological significance of Magnus Hirschfeld's oeuvre**

The study presented at the 5th Škerlj Days in 2007 under the title *The Female Phallus: On Alfred Kinsey's sexual vitalism, the theo-political reinstatement of the male/female divide, and the postmodern de-finitisation of sexualities* (Bauer 2007b) concentrated on the theoretical challenges posed to anthropology by Kinsey's (1894–1956) critique of the binary conception of sexual difference. The following elaborations concentrate on the significance that the study of sexuality has for anthropology, by focusing on the work by German-Jewish physician and sexual minority rights activist Magnus Hirschfeld, arguably the most renowned pre-World War II sexologist.<sup>6</sup> Like Kinsey, Hirschfeld was a devout student of anthropological matters, housing in the *Institute of Sexology* he had founded in 1919 in Berlin an impressive sexual-ethnological collection that the Nazis destroyed on May 15, 1933, along with the institute's unique library and archives. The results of Hirschfeld's ethnological endeavours are embodied in his 1933 report on the trip around the world he undertook between November 1930 and March 1932. Taking into account how this report relates to Hirschfeld's overall views on sexuality, race and culture, this study pays especial attention to his depiction of China and to the reasons for his avowedly empathetic approach of Chinese intellectual history and civilisation.

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<sup>4</sup> In Herdt 1994, first steps have been taken towards the anthropological reception of Ulrichs's oeuvre, but without paying sufficient attention to the methodological conclusions to be drawn from his main premises.

<sup>5</sup> In the introductory chapter of *Weltreise*, Hirschfeld first refers to authors of folklore compilations and then mentions three recently published ethnological studies: Malinowski 1929b (English original edition: Malinowski 1929a); Bryk 1928; and Winthuis 1928 (see Hirschfeld 1933: 3–4). While acknowledging the merits of these specialised studies, Hirschfeld deemed that the specificity of his contribution to sexual ethnology resided in the explicit and systematic framing of his own research within the encompassing discipline of sexology. For Hirschfeld, the relevancy of this pursuit ensues from the central role sexuality plays in cultural life: 'Die Sexualität sei doch nun einmal das Urphänomen, um das das ganze übrige Leben der Menschheit mit allen seinen Einrichtungen kreist' ['Sexuality is indeed the ur-phenomenon around which all the rest of human life with all its institutions revolves'] (Hirschfeld 1933: 5).

<sup>6</sup> The standard biography of Hirschfeld is: Herzer 2001. For a biography in English, see Wolff 1986. A brief presentation of Hirschfeld's life and work can be accessed at Bauer 2004b.

## The narrative of a trip around the world

On November 15, 1930, 62-year-old Hirschfeld left Germany for a lecture tour in the United States. Having reached San Francisco, he decided to extend his journey (see Hirschfeld 1933: v), eventually visiting Hawaii, Japan, China, the Philippines, Indonesia, India, Egypt, and Palestine. Although Hirschfeld returned to Europe in 1932, he never went back to Germany, given the immediate threat that the Nazi regime posed to his life. Hence, the travel report he published in 1933 under the title *Die Weltreise eines Sexualforschers* [*The world journey of a sex researcher*]<sup>7</sup> was not issued, like most of his previous books, in Leipzig or Berlin, but in Brugg, a municipality in the Swiss canton of Aargau. Significantly, in the same period as the Nazi racial directives were beginning to be implemented, Hirschfeld was focusing on the fact that humanity's sexual and racial spectrum had brought about the greatest cultural diversity on record in Asia. To convey his basic outlook, he wove in *Weltreise* a textual fabric, in which the depiction of his geographic progression is interspersed with cultural analysis, historical aperçus, ethical considerations, and even autobiographical references that account, at least in part, for the personal and circumstantial limitations of his travel experiences and their transformation into narrative knowledge. That *Weltreise* has barely received the critical attention it deserves since its publication in 1933 is all the more questionable, as it articulates for the first time a decidedly non-Eurocentric, anti-colonialist understanding and critique of Asian cultures from a sexological perspective.

## Weltreise in the context of Hirschfeld's deconstructive views on sexuality and race

Hirschfeld's trip and the publication of *Weltreise* took place between two of his most important intellectual and editorial projects. During the five years preceding his journey, Hirschfeld published the results of his sexological life work in the five-volume compendium entitled *Geschlechtskunde auf Grund dreißigjähriger Forschung und Erfahrung bearbeitet* [*Sexual science treated on the basis of 30 years of research and experience*] (see Hirschfeld 1926–1930). It is in this monumental work that Hirschfeld offered his most detailed presentation of what he termed *sexuelle Zwischenstufenlehre* [doctrine of sexual intermediary stages], whose first incipient formulations are included in his earliest sexological publication, the 1896 treatise *Sappho und Sokrates, oder Wie erklärt sich die Liebe der Männer und Frauen zu Personen des eigenen Geschlechts?* [*Sappho and Socrates, or How does one explain the love of men and women to persons of their own sex*] (see Ramien 1896; Hirschfeld 1902). Moreover, in the year following the publication of *Weltreise*, Hirschfeld began writing an article series titled *Phantom Rasse: Ein Hirngespinnst als Weltgefahr* [*The race phantom: A pipe dream as world threat*], in which he outlined a theory of racial difference that primarily targeted the declared anti-Semitic ideology of the Nazi government, and therefore had to be issued outside Germany, in a German-language newspaper in Prague,

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<sup>7</sup> There are three editions of *Weltreise* in English: Hirschfeld 1935a; Hirschfeld 1935b; Hirschfeld 1935c. Their titles do not correspond to the original. Important passages are missing in these 'English version[s] by O.P. Green.' The title of the French translation comes closer to the German: Hirschfeld 1938a. For a more recent German edition, see Hirschfeld 2006.

between 1934 and 1935 (see Hirschfeld 1934–1935). While Hirschfeld encapsulated the kernel of his sexological teachings in the ground premise that, sexually, ‘all human beings are intersexual variants’,<sup>8</sup> the reflections he published in the Prague instalment are resumed in the analogical premise that, ‘biologically, all human beings are, strictly speaking, racial hybrids’.<sup>9</sup> To highlight that Hirschfeld’s sexual ethnology is framed, ultimately, by these two radical contentions, seems all the more appropriate in view of the neglect and misrepresentation of his theoretical endeavours by German-language scholarship, from the days of Sigmund Freud<sup>10</sup> to contemporary sexual historiography (see Bauer 2006c). As a result, it is not surprising that Western cultural memory has focused on Hirschfeld’s historical role as the foremost leader of the German homosexual emancipation movement, while ignoring the significance of his principled deconstruction of sexual and racial fixations (see Bauer 2004c; Bauer 2005; Bauer 2006a). Given the import of Hirschfeld’s critical explorations for rethinking the human, there seems to be no cogent reason for the almost total absence in contemporary anthropological debates of the theoretical positions Hirschfeld represented.<sup>11</sup>

### **‘The two scapegoats of the world’**

Considering Hirschfeld’s critique of closed schemes of sexual and racial distribution and the universalised ‘intermediariness’ (in the form of bisexuality and racial hybridity) it implies, it is apposite to draw attention to Hirschfeld as a researcher whose self-understanding was marked by the embracement of his minority status as a Jew and sexual dissident. Tellingly, in his recollections of the sexual-emancipation movement he initiated and fostered from 1897 to 1922, Hirschfeld refers, in an obviously self-reflective mood, to Jews and homosexuals as ‘the two scapegoats of the world, which since the introduction of Christianity are made

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<sup>8</sup> ‘Alle Menschen sind intersexuelle Varianten’ (Hirschfeld 1986: 49).

<sup>9</sup> ‘Biologisch genau genommen, sind alle Menschen Bastarde’ (Hirschfeld 1934-1935: 1935, 2 [Caption of the paragraph: ‘Bastarde’ und ‘Reine Linie’]). For the corresponding passage in the edited English translation see Hirschfeld 1938b: 198.

<sup>10</sup> Sigmund Freud has been the most influential figure to misinterpret Hirschfeld’s core sexological contentions. Thus, in a passage targeting primarily Hirschfeld, Freud wrote: ‘Die homosexuellen Männer, die in unseren Tagen eine energische Aktion gegen die gesetzliche Einschränkung ihrer Sexualbetätigung unternommen haben, lieben es, sich durch ihre theoretischen Wortführer als eine von Anfang an gesonderte geschlechtliche Abart, als sexuelle Zwischenstufen, als ein ‘drittes Geschlecht’ hinstellen zu lassen’ [‘The homosexual men who have undertaken an energetic action against the legal restriction of their sexual activities, like to be exhibited by their theoretical spokesmen as a sexual deviation that is separate from the beginning, as sexual intermediary stages, as a “third sex.”’] (Freud 1969: 124).

<sup>11</sup> Symptomatically, even the author of the ‘introduction’ to an anthology of Queer Studies published in Germany obviates any mention to the relevancy of Hirschfeld’s sexological thought to the issues discussed in the book he presents. In the few lines dedicated to the sexologist, he contents himself with relating what he considers to be Hirschfeld’s views on the ‘third sex’ to the biologicistic ideology of the Nazi and their murderous politics against homosexuals (see Kraß 2003: 14–5). Given the enormity of such a suggestion, the only excuse that could be adduced on behalf of the writer is his apparently total non-acquaintance with Hirschfeld’s texts in general and the ‘doctrine of sexual intermediaries’ in particular, which – as the present study argues – constitutes the core of his sexology.

responsible for all suffering and misery in this world'.<sup>12</sup> From Hirschfeld's perspective, Judaism and sexual anormativity constitute abjections of Western culture to the extent that they resist the pervasive homogenisation of race and sexuality, perhaps the two most complex and entangled ambits in which the human is articulated. While Hirschfeld became increasingly pugnacious in his exposure of anti-Semitism, his sexological oeuvre was from the start concerned with castigating Christianity's ascetic sexual doctrines as almost two-thousand-year-old errors, which 'did not become truth, but nonetheless, due to the long tradition, have assumed the semblance of truth'.<sup>13</sup> Assuming that at the basis of the occidental distortions of sexual life is the unwarranted postulation of a complete disjunction between man and woman, Hirschfeld critiqued the distributional scheme of sexual binarity and its ad hoc supplementary modification through the third-sex construct. In the alternative scheme Hirschfeld propounded, he detached the conceptualisation of sexual difference from categorial subsumptions under mutually exclusive groups, and reframed it within a continuum of unique sexualities emerging from an ever-varying Nature, conceived along the lines of Spinozian monistic thought and Darwinian evolutionary theory. For Hirschfeld, it is only on the basis of a non-essentialist naturalism of radical sexual diversity that a libertarian culture can be envisaged that would be capable of coping with the alienatory sexual closures that inform all recorded history, beginning with the disjunction of *lingams* and *yonis* in prehistoric symbology and art (see Bauer 2010b).

## The core task of sexual ethnology as sexology's youngest discipline

As Hirschfeld's first book-length sexological publication following *Geschlechtskunde, Weltreise* was conceived from the outset as a contribution to sexual ethnology, a science that Hirschfeld considered to be, 'with regard to its contents, the oldest, with regard to its method, the youngest one'<sup>14</sup> among the sexological disciplines. While according to Hirschfeld 'the *biological* and *pathological* foundations in the field of sexuality' are the same for all humanity, sexual ethnology has to deal with the extreme diversity of 'the *sociological* consequences, solutions and assessments'<sup>15</sup> resulting from how different human groups respond to the potentials inherent in biological sexuality. Since the particular sexual mores (*Sitten*) of a group reflect the way it copes with the sexual dispositions and drives, which

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<sup>12</sup> 'beiden Weltsündenböcken, die seit Einführung des Christentums für alles Leid und Unglück dieser Welt verantwortlich gemacht zu werden pflegen' (Hirschfeld 1986: 126).

<sup>13</sup> The complete German sentence runs: 'Ein Vierteljahrhundert im Kampf für die Rechte Entrechteter, gegen festgewurzelte Irrtümer, die dadurch, daß sie fast zwei Jahrtausende alt sind, zwar nicht zu Wahrheiten wurden, immerhin aber durch die lange Überlieferung den Anschein der Wahrheit, einer gewissermaßen unausrottbaren Selbstverständlichkeit angenommen haben – ein solcher Kampf ist keine Kleinigkeit' (Hirschfeld 1986: 7). See also Hirschfeld 1986: 126.

<sup>14</sup> 'ihrem Inhalt nach die älteste, ihrer Behandlung nach die jüngste' (Hirschfeld 1933: 3).

<sup>15</sup> 'Denn so gleichartig auf der ganzen Erde die *biologischen* und *pathologischen* Grundlagen auf dem Geschlechtsgebiet sind, so verschiedenartig sind die *soziologischen* Auswirkungen, Lösungen und Beurteilungen dieses Naturtriebes' (Hirschfeld 1933: vi).

– ‘taken as a whole’<sup>16</sup> – are shared by all human beings, their validity depends on their capacity to satisfy the criteria that an enlightened sexual morality (*Sittlichkeit*) articulates. On these assumptions, Hirschfeld did not favour specifically occidental sexual traditions at the expense, for instance, of Asian sexual cultures, but, rather, scrutinised and eventually castigated Western and Eastern sexual mores and customs with equal acuity. It is against this general backdrop that Hirschfeld contended that the Chinese sapiential heritage had fostered an exceptional sexual realism, which concurred with the epistemic premises of his own sexology.

## **On the Chinese sober approach of sexuality**

Hirschfeld's acquaintance with China and its people was certainly facilitated by the thirty-five conferences on sexology he held in Shanghai, Beijing, Tianjin, Nanjing, Woosung, Hong Kong and Guangzhou. Thanks to his lecturing activities during his ten-week visit, Hirschfeld had the chance of meeting several thousand Chinese, some of whom confided to him ‘intimate occurrences from the secret treasures of their knowledge and experience, which until now have hardly been accessible to any European or American visitor’.<sup>17</sup> Based on the wealth of information he gathered, Hirschfeld commended the religiously neutral realism that pervades the sexual culture of China as a worldwide exception, asserting: ‘The modern Chinese youth is in many regards traditionally less troubled than the youths of other countries. Especially, they lack religious scruples. In Europe it is hardly known that at least four hundred million Chinese neither have nor miss a religion. Thus they prepare themselves for the reality of this world, not for an illusionary otherworldliness’.<sup>18</sup> Well aware that they revere the moral precepts of Confucius and other sapiential teachers, ‘but do not pray to them’,<sup>19</sup> Hirschfeld considered the Chinese to have a more matter-of-fact approach of sexuality than Europeans,<sup>20</sup> and deemed their eroticism free from ‘sexual hypocrisy’.<sup>21</sup> From his detailed depictions, it becomes apparent that, for Hirschfeld, the way the Chinese confront sexuality contrasts with the Christian repression of erotic life, but resonates with the methodological injunction that he had often heard from one of his teachers at the University of Strasbourg and that had guided his sexological research ever since: ‘Observe, gentlemen, observe!’<sup>22</sup> Taking account of Hirschfeld's professional ethos

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<sup>16</sup> ‘als Ganzes genommen’ (Hirschfeld 1933: 12).

<sup>17</sup> ‘von denen mir eine beträchtliche Anzahl aus dem Geheimschatz ihrer Kenntnisse und Erlebnisse intime Vorgänge anvertraute, wie sie bisher wohl kaum je einem europäischen oder amerikanischen Besucher zugänglich geworden sind’ (Hirschfeld 1933: 59).

<sup>18</sup> ‘Die moderne chinesische Jugend ist in vieler Hinsicht traditionell unbeschwerter als die anderer Länder. Vor allem fehlen ihr religiöse Skrupel. Es ist in Europa ziemlich wenig bekannt, daß mindestens vierhundert Millionen Chinesen weder eine Religion besitzen noch vermissen ... So sind sie auf die Realität des Diesseits, nicht auf ein illusionäres Jenseits eingestellt’ (Hirschfeld 1933: 68).

<sup>19</sup> ‘beten aber nicht zu ihnen’ (Hirschfeld 1933: 68).

<sup>20</sup> ‘weder mit falscher Scham noch mit Zynismus’ (Hirschfeld 1933: 94).

<sup>21</sup> ‘Sexualheuchelei’ (Hirschfeld 1933: 84).

<sup>22</sup> ‘Beobachten, meine Herren, beobachten!’ (Hirschfeld 1903: 3).

and his declared rejection of the bounds imposed on knowledge by religions and ideologies, it is not surprising that he noted in *Weltreise*: ‘One must admire America and Japan, but one must love China’.<sup>23</sup>

## Tao Li, Hirschfeld’s Chinese disciple and friend

Throughout the most part of *Weltreise*, the cultural presence of China can be felt in the figure of Li Shiu Tong (1907–1993), Hirschfeld’s disciple and friend. By far the most frequently mentioned person in the travel report (see, for instance, Hirschfeld 1933: 68, 74, 82, 102, 105, 118, 119, 134, 161, 166, 176, 214, 230, 238, 253, 260, 268, 336, 375), Tao Li (also referred to in *Weltreise* as *Tao* and *Li*) was a twenty-three-year old student of philosophy and medicine when he made the acquaintance of Hirschfeld after his first lecture in Shanghai. Having impressed Hirschfeld by his perusal of the writings by Havelock Ellis, Sigmund Freud, Carl Gustav Jung and Iwan Bloch, among others (see Hirschfeld 1933: 68–9), Tao Li soon became Hirschfeld’s ‘companion’ and ‘protector’<sup>24</sup> as he travelled to Hangzhou, Nanjing, Beijing and Tianjin, to the north, and then to Hong Kong, Guangzhou and Macau, to the south. Thanks to the ‘constant company’ of the young, but highly educated Chinese, Hirschfeld was granted ‘deep insights into the thought, sensitivity and will of this unique people’.<sup>25</sup> When Tao Li expressed his wish to study medicine, and especially sexology, in Europe, his father – ‘a magnificent, old, thoroughbred Chinese’<sup>26</sup>– entrusted him to Hirschfeld (see Hirschfeld 1933: 69). Thereafter, Tao Li remained close to Hirschfeld until his death.<sup>27</sup> Their relatively brief but close friendship is reflected in Hirschfeld’s decision to make Tao Li and Karl Giese – a collaborator of long standing – his universal heirs. That Tao Li passed away in Vancouver, Canada in 1993 without having been asked to share his insights into his teacher’s personality and final years, is indicative of the inexcusable lack of interest in Hirschfeld’s life and oeuvre, for which, first and foremost, post-World War II German sexology should be held accountable.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> ‘Amerika und Japan muß man bewundern, China muß man lieben’ (Hirschfeld 1933: 119).

<sup>24</sup> Hirschfeld mentions the two words in English: Hirschfeld 1933: 69.

<sup>25</sup> ‘durch das ständige Zusammensein mit einem hochgebildeten Chinesen tiefe Einblicke in das Denken, Fühlen und Wollen dieses einzigartigen Volkes’ (Hirschfeld 1933: 69).

<sup>26</sup> ‘einen prächtigen alten Vollblutchinesen’ (Hirschfeld 1933: 69).

<sup>27</sup> Three weeks before his death, Hirschfeld sent Tao Li a copy of the recently published *Weltreise* with the following dedication in English: ‘To my best pupil Li Shiu Tong, to my faithful companion and careful protector Tao from the author Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld. Paris, 28/X 1933.’ (Hirschfeld 2007: 13.) The accompanying letter closed with the sentence: ‘many thanks for everything, what you have done for me in the last four years’ (Hirschfeld 2007: 14).

<sup>28</sup> In contrast to the German indifference to Hirschfeld’s work, British writer Robert Smythe Hichens (1864–1950) modeled one of the protagonists of his 1939 novel *That Which Is Hidden* after the historical Tao Li at the time he was still mourning his deceased teacher. In view of the general menace Germany and the Nazi ideology represented at the time the book was published, it is significant that the issue of racial difference and (only disguisedly) sexual dissidence are present throughout the novel. Accordingly, Hichens deemed opportune to stress in a passage referring to the faithful disciple: ‘Of course, being Chinese, he’s *different*’ (Hichens 1939: 589, italics in the original).



## The exotic and the inhuman

Notwithstanding his fondness of Chinese culture and the report's standards of ethnological objectivity, Hirschfeld made no efforts to conceal his sense of wonder at the outlandish idiosyncrasies and customs in which Chinese culture abounds if perceived with the eyes of a 'representative of German science'.<sup>29</sup> Thus, he conveys, for instance, his lack of understanding for the 'deafening, strange and confusing noise'<sup>30</sup> that dominated the theatre presentations he attended in Beijing and Nanjing, or his surprise at the custom of engaging children to get married while still unborn, or in some cases, even before their conception (see Hirschfeld 1933: 107–108). In fact, the travel report includes a whole chapter on 'Sexual Curiosities',<sup>31</sup> in which one of the most memorable depictions focuses on what the Chinese call – in Hirschfeld's Romanisation – 'such jöng', a much-dreaded pathological condition supposedly leading to the shrinkage and eventual disappearance of the penis (see Hirschfeld 1933: 95–96). While Hirschfeld limited himself to the accurate description of what, to him, appeared to be strange, uncouth, or exotic, he was unrelenting in his analysis and castigation of the age-old patterns of inhumanity that had been integrated into Chinese mores and with which he was repeatedly confronted during his stay. It suffices to mention in this connection Hirschfeld's critical elaborations on abortion and infanticide – especially of female children – (see Hirschfeld 1933: 78–79),<sup>32</sup> and on the phenomenon of prostitution, an extremely well organised business owing much to the structural complicities between the deeply-rooted Chinese disregard for women and the hypocritical interests of European colonial rulers (see especially Hirschfeld 1933: 97–101). As in his treatment of Indian and other cultural traditions, Hirschfeld documents the essential shortcomings of Chinese sexual mores with the intention of conveying the pressing need to rethink the ground principles that define the modern understanding of the sexual.

## Rethinking sexual difference

The thematic focus of *Weltreise* did not allow Hirschfeld to elaborate on issues of theoretical sexology. It is clear though, that the aforementioned 'doctrine of sexual intermediary stages' and the radical diversification of sexualities it implies inform the report's overall design. While Hirschfeld was greeted in America as the 'Dr. Einstein of Sex' (see, for instance, Anonymous 1931: 1, 4.) and in India as the 'modern Vatsayana of the West',<sup>33</sup> to the present day most of his admirers have been prone to neglect the significance of the

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<sup>29</sup> 'Vertreter deutscher Wissenschaft' (Hirschfeld 1933: 93).

<sup>30</sup> 'ein so ohrenbetäubender, fremdartig-wirrer Lärm' (Hirschfeld 1933: 105).

<sup>31</sup> 'Sexualcuriosa' (Hirschfeld 1933: 94–7).

<sup>32</sup> As regards the general attitude toward female children in China, the following passage is especially noteworthy: '[Es] fällt ... kaum auf, wenn Mütter sich unerwünschter Neugeborener (namentlich der Töchter) wieder entledigen, indem sie die Kinder in Zeitungspapier gewickelt irgendwo im Gebüsch niederlegen oder gar in den Fluß werfen. Verschiedentlich haben mir zuverlässige Beobachter von solchen Fällen berichtet' ['It is hardly noticed when mothers rid themselves of unwanted, newly born children (notably daughters) by discarding them wrapped in newspaper somewhere in the shrubbery, or even by throwing them into a river. On several occasions, trustworthy observers have reported to me such cases'] (Hirschfeld 1933: 79).

<sup>33</sup> Hirschfeld quotes the phrase in English (1933: 5). The reference is to the author of *Kamasutra*.

paradigm shift at the core of sexology that his teachings on sexual difference required (see Bauer 1998; or Bauer 2003a). Running counter to the age-old assumption of the male/female disjunction, Hirschfeld's doctrine posits, instead, that a human being is neither man nor woman, but at the same time man and woman in unique and therefore unrepeatable proportions. Within this new scheme of sexual distribution, there is no postulation of a 'third sex' forming a closed supplement to the traditional binary in the way foreseen, for instance, in Plato's *Symposium*,<sup>34</sup> in Vatsyayana's *Kamasutra*,<sup>35</sup> or even by Karl Heinrich Ulrichs in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>36</sup> Although Hirschfeld's adversaries often imputed to him such a suppletive conception, he was keen to stress that the alleged third sex constitutes only a fictional, but indispensable 'makeshift'<sup>37</sup> added to the already fictitious categories of the sexual binary (see Hirschfeld 1923: 24) in order to overcome the 'extremely superficial scheme of classification into man or woman'.<sup>38</sup> On these premises, people who identify themselves as belonging to a third sexual alternative, as well as those who deem themselves in conformity with the traditional sexual binarism of the majority prove to be, in the last resort, just individual instantiations of sexual intermediariness, brought about by ever-varying nature (see Bauer 1999; Bauer 2002b; Bauer 2007a).

## Sexuality as an ambit of transitions

The backdrop and scope of Hirschfeld's re-conceptualisation of sexual difference were already announced by the motto he chose to open the programmatic treatise he published in 1905 under the title *Geschlechts-Übergänge* [*Sexual Transitions*].<sup>39</sup> The quote in question is a brief sentence by the philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz: 'In nature everything happens by degrees, and nothing by leaps'.<sup>40</sup> Applying this general principle to sexuality, Hirschfeld concluded that all members of purportedly distinct sexual groups actually constitute transitions within the pervasive continuities of nature. Contrary to the either/or scheme of the traditional assignation to one of two sexes, the idea of sexual gradation allows, on principle, for infinite variations of sexual constitutions depending on the way the poles of the masculine and the feminine combine at each of the different layers of sexual description. In Hirschfeld's time, such layers were assumed to range from the sexual organs and the secondary sexual characteristics, to the sexual drive and the way psychological traits are articulated in culture (see Hirschfeld 1984: 547–8). Given that in this new scheme sexual difference is not determined in relation to one single excluded alternative (male or female), but in relation to an open-ended system of as yet only partially realised combinations of the masculine and the feminine

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<sup>34</sup> For Plato's treatment of the *triton genos* see Platon 1990: 266-269 [= *Symposion* 189 d–e].

<sup>35</sup> For Vatsyayana elaborations on the *tritja prakrit*, see Vatsyayana 2002: 25, 38, 65-67, 78 [= 1.5.27; 2.1.42; 2.9.1-24; 3.2.3]

<sup>36</sup> See, in this connection, Ulrichs's classic definition of *male* hermaphroditism: 'Anima muliebris virile corpore inclusa' (Ulrichs 1994: title page).

<sup>37</sup> 'Notbehelf' (Hirschfeld 1923: 23).

<sup>38</sup> 'allzu oberflächliche Einteilungsschema der Sexualkonstitution in Mann und Weib' (Hirschfeld 1923: 23).

<sup>39</sup> As the subtitle of the treatise makes clear, the term 'sexual transitions' refers to 'Sexuelle Zwischenstufen', i.e. 'sexual intermediary degrees' (See Hirschfeld 1913).

<sup>40</sup> 'Tout va par degrés dans la nature et rien par sauts' (Leibniz 1978: 155 [= IV,16,12]).

at the different descriptive layers, sexualities are characterised by a unique complexity, and their number is co-extensive with the number of sexed individuals (see Bauer 2002a; Bauer 2003b). Inasmuch as Hirschfeld's contentions imply a principled re-inscription of sexual difference in an expansive framework of natural continuity, his doctrine can be considered to adumbrate the post-modern contestation of closed schemes of sexual subsumption.<sup>41</sup>

## Race and the continuities of Nature

As already suggested, Hirschfeld's critical pursuits aimed not only at the dissolution of closed schemes of sexual distribution, but also at the dismantlement of hypostatized racial categories. Having been raised as a member of a group socially marked by racial *otherness*, Hirschfeld was especially attentive during his world trip to the racial factor in the power configurations of the colonised nations. Accordingly, he remarked on the wide range of racial differences even among the Jews in the countries he visited. In this connection, Hirschfeld noted for instance that, although the Jews who emigrated from Babylonia and settled in China had preserved the faith of Israel, 'the color of their skin and their eyes manifest in many cases a slight resemblance to the Mongolic type'.<sup>42</sup> Later, he mentioned how impressed he was upon encountering 'Jews with black skin' in India.<sup>43</sup> Stimulated by the racial diversity he had observed throughout his journey, and, at the same time, foreboding the consequences of the Nazi ideology of Aryan blood purity, Hirschfeld began with the publication of *Phantom Rasse* the year after Adolf Hitler's rise to power. Notwithstanding its journalistic format, the article series outlines a conceptualisation of race based on biological postulates comparable to those of the doctrine of sexual intermediaries and leading to similar deconstructive results. Resonating with his new scheme of sexual distribution, the notion of racial difference Hirschfeld posited is guided by Jean-Baptiste Lamarck's epistemic premise that, with regard to the infinite fullness of inherited characteristics and forms, 'all classifications of living beings are ultimately only "artificial instrumentalities", [for] Nature herself . . . knows neither classes nor species'.<sup>44</sup> On this assumption, Hirschfeld went on to contend that there are no clear-cut, fixed differences between the races, but only gradual racial variations between individuals. At the antipodes of naturalistic essentialisms, Hirschfeld's disruption of age-old schemes of sexual and racial distribution for the sake of the individual's unique sexual and racial configuration was meant to pave the way toward an unprecedented culture of humaneness (see Bauer 2006b).

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<sup>41</sup> In his book *The Genealogy of Queer Theory*, William B. Turner takes a characteristic post-modern stance when arguing that the actual philosophical relevancy of queerness is not that it challenges the contents of specific sexual categories, but rather that it raises the question of the epistemological status of categories *per se*. Thus he notes: 'Queerness indicates merely the failure to fit precisely within a category, and surely all persons at some time or other find themselves discomfited by the bounds of the categories that ostensibly contain their identities' (Turner 2002: 8).

<sup>42</sup> 'in Hautfarbe und Augen vielfach Anklänge an den mongolischen Typus erkennen lassen' (Hirschfeld 1933: 83).

<sup>43</sup> 'Juden mit schwarzer Hautfarbe' (Hirschfeld 1933: 278).

<sup>44</sup> 'Schon einer der größten Naturforscher Frankreichs, Lamarck, hatte mit Rücksicht auf die unendliche Fülle erbter Eigenschaften und Erscheinungen gesagt, daß alle Einteilungen der Geschöpfe im letzten Grunde nur "künstliche Mittel" seien: die Natur selbst . . . kennt weder Klassen noch Arten' (Hirschfeld 1934–1935: 14 (1935) Nr. 6 [Caption of the paragraph: 'Menschliche Varianten und Typen']).

## **On the spectrum of cultures**

Notwithstanding his critique of the many socio-political and cultural shortcomings he witnessed throughout his trip, Hirschfeld did not assume that Western culture and the mores it has brought about could function as parameters for assessing or judging Asian insufficiencies.<sup>45</sup> Having experienced first-hand throughout his life the extent of Gentile prejudices and intolerance, Hirschfeld was in a privileged position to examine Western as well as Eastern cultural articulations of sexuality and race as related configurations within a spectrum that he deemed to be, as a whole, in need of critical analysis. Explaining this relatedness with a rather innocuous example, Hirschfeld remarks that the difference between the belly slapping of Ceylonese forest people and the buttocks slapping of Bavarian dancers is hardly greater than that between the nose rings of Indian women and the earrings of their European counterparts (Hirschfeld 1933: 198). Since in his view these phenomena are ‘basically the same’,<sup>46</sup> Hirschfeld asserted that, ultimately, there ‘is no essential difference between “primitive” and “civilised” people’.<sup>47</sup> Well aware of the unfavourable light he was shedding on the allegedly ‘civilised’, Hirschfeld brought home that, as in the case of sexual or racial individuation, the specificity of cultural phenomena is not the result of unique qualities, but of gradual differentiations within an open totality, so that, on principle, mores, institutions and cultural articulations in general should be explained in relation to the continuity in which they are embedded. Mindful of the ‘the mighty greatness of Nature’ in its ever-creative Spinozian sense, Hirschfeld was intent on conveying the relatedness and relativity of the phenomena he discusses, while exposing ‘the human pettiness and narrow-mindedness’<sup>48</sup> that invests more or less randomly chosen instances of natural or cultural productions with the allurements of universal paradigms. Rejecting the insulation of individuals in the putative purity of a sexuality, race, or culture, the later Hirschfeld pleaded for a new radical grasp of their uniqueness within the continua of life, as a first step toward their liberation from the constrictions of arbitrary categorisations and the hierarchical fixities they instate.

## **Confucius – ‘the Chinese Nietzsche’**

On these assumptions, Hirschfeld went on to assess the areligious – but certainly not unspiritual – character of the Chinese people. Thus, he praised the work of Christian charities in China, while doubting that, ‘in themselves, the Christian faith and spirit would make the Chinese actually better and happier than their “paganism”’.<sup>49</sup> Considering their conspicuous reserve with

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<sup>45</sup> For studying Hirschfeld’s assessment of the German variety of Western insufficiencies in this regard, his recollections as the leading activist in the homosexual emancipation movement are arguably the most detailed and rich source: Hirschfeld 1986.

<sup>46</sup> ‘Im Grunde ist es das Gleiche’ (Hirschfeld 1933: 198).

<sup>47</sup> ‘Auch in dieser Hinsicht sind zwischen “Natur”- und “Kultur”-Völkern keine wesentlichen Unterschiede vorhanden’ (Hirschfeld 1933: 150).

<sup>48</sup> ‘der ... Gegensatz zwischen der gewaltigen Größe der Natur und der menschlichen Kleinheit und Kleinigkeit’ (Hirschfeld 1933: 221).

<sup>49</sup> ‘zweifelhaft bleibt nur, ob der christliche Glaube und Geist an sich die Chinesen wirklich besser und glücklicher machen würde als ihr “Heidentum”’ (Hirschfeld 1933: 76).

respect to an unknown beyond (see Hirschfeld 1933: 68), Hirschfeld maintained that ‘Christian mysticism and its related sexual ethics appear to be completely alien to the natural sense of the Chinese’.<sup>50</sup> From Hirschfeld’s perspective, the ascetic worldview propounded by Christianity and other world religions actually runs counter to ‘the natural sense’ not only of the Chinese, but of humanity in general. Thus, the Nietzschean motto: ‘What is natural, cannot be immoral’,<sup>51</sup> which opens Hirschfeld’s first sexological treatise, is especially revealing in this connection, as it announces the type of sexual ethics that undergirds his emancipatory commitments.<sup>52</sup> Presupposing that both Friedrich Nietzsche and Confucius had postulated the interdependency of naturalness and morality against the encroachments of religious supernaturalism, Hirschfeld apostrophised the Asian sage as ‘the Chinese Nietzsche’.<sup>53</sup> As his related elaborations make it apparent, Hirschfeld viewed both thinkers as cultural heroes battling against the same kind of otherworldly misrepresentations of human corporeality, which his own sexology had set out to dismantle. Thus, Hirschfeld’s understanding of the unique differential nuances that mark the individual’s sexed body will eventually evince itself as appertaining to an age-old, trans-cultural tradition culminating in Nietzsche’s phrase: ‘The degree and kind of sexuality of a human being stretches all the way up to the last summit of his spirit’.<sup>54</sup>

## **Sexuality and the Chinese sapiential tradition**

Emphasising his appreciation of the sexual lucidity that informs Chinese culture, Hirschfeld states that even in ancient China ‘false shame and cynicism’ in dealing with sexual matters were far less dominant ‘than among us in Europe’,<sup>55</sup> and adduces as supporting evidence that

[a]lready Confucius (551-479 B.C.) taught (a phrase that was written in my travel book at least six times): “Jam dsig nam noi, / Jen dzi dai jog”—eating, drinking and sexual intercourse are the greatest of all human instincts.”<sup>56</sup>

<sup>50</sup> ‘Die christliche Mystik und die mit ihr verbundene sexuelle Ethik scheint dem natürlichen Sinn der Chinesen ganz fern zu liegen’ (Hirschfeld 1933: 76).

<sup>51</sup> ‘Was natürlich ist, kann nicht unmoralisch sein’ (Ramien 1896: title page). In the second edition of the treatise (Hirschfeld 1902: title page), the same dictum is mentioned along with other mottos.

<sup>52</sup> Interestingly, Hirschfeld recurred to the opposition nature/morals in the foreword he wrote to the first complete German edition of Kamasutra, when he pointed out in reference to its author: ‘Er sieht eben Welt, Menschen und Dinge mit “rein natürlicher Weltanschauung” an und ist bei dem, was er sieht, bei den Schlüssen, die er daraus zieht, bei den Ratschlägen, die er gibt, von keiner “Moral” behindert.’ (Hirschfeld 1929a: xi–xii) [‘He contemplates the world, human beings and things from the perspective of an “utterly natural worldview” and no “morals” hinder what he sees, the conclusions he draws therefrom, or the advice he gives’].

<sup>53</sup> Hirschfeld, *Weltreise*, 58: ‘der chinesische Nietzsche’.

<sup>54</sup> ‘Grad und Art der Geschlechtlichkeit eines Menschen reicht bis in den letzten Gipfel seines Geistes hinauf’ (Nietzsche 1980: 87 [= Viertes Hauptstück, § 75]).

<sup>55</sup> ‘wobei zugunsten Chinas hervorgehoben werden muß, daß diese beide Einstellungen [d.h. falsche Scham und Zynismus] gegenüber dem Geschlechtsleben auch im alten China bei weitem nicht so vorherrschend waren wie bei uns in Europa’ (Hirschfeld 1933: 94).

<sup>56</sup> ‘Hat doch schon Konfuzius (551 bis 479 v. Chr.) gesagt (ein Wort, das mir nicht weniger als sechsmal in mein Reisebuch geschrieben wurde):

“Jam dsig nam noi  
Jen dzi dai jog”

Essen, Trinken und Geschlechtsverkehr sind die größten aller menschlichen Instinkte’ (Hirschfeld 1933: 100). The Chinese phrase is quoted according to Hirschfeld’s transliteration.

While regarding this validation of sexuality as an important corrective to the Christian asceticism derived from the ‘Greek-Roman-Jewish culture of the Mediterranean’,<sup>57</sup> the Confucian sapiential outlook was not the sole major cultural influence that favoured the Chinese liberal attitude towards sexuality. As Hirschfeld was careful to underscore, the Chinese reserve regarding religious otherworldliness could invoke the authority not only of Confucius, but also of ‘some other great masters’.<sup>58</sup> Although Hirschfeld does not mention Lao Tzu expressly in this passage of *Weltreise*, he asserts in *Geschlechtskunde* that, in his view, the author of the *Tao Te Ching* was the foremost figure among the sages of Chinese antiquity (see Hirschfeld 1928: 538). Considering this estimate, it is surprising that in *Weltreise* the name of Lao Tzu appears only in the context of a passage quoted from an ancient poem by Po Chü-i (772–846 C.E.). While suggesting a critical-ironic stance vis-à-vis one of the pillars of Lao Tzu’s teachings, the poem as quoted in Hirschfeld’s translation can be read as a reminder of the insurmountable tension between the grasp of truth and its ultimate incommunicability. Thus, Hirschfeld could well have interpreted the core aporia outlined in the poem as corresponding to the principled strains between the always provisory results of sexology concerning sexual taxonomy, and the emancipatory acknowledgement that the individual’s actual sexual constitution remains, in the last resort, beyond any possible categorisation and thus ineffable. The passage quoted from Po Chü-i’s poem reads:

“Men, who speak, do not know. Men, who know, do not speak.” These words, as I am told, were spoken by Lao Tzu. If we are to believe that Lao Tzu was himself one who knew – How is it that he wrote a book of five thousand words?<sup>59</sup>

## Lao Tzu, Confucius and the idea of human bisexuality

While Hirschfeld does not comment on Lao Tzu in *Weltreise*, he does elaborate on the sexological relevancy of the sage’s teachings in the first two volumes of *Geschlechtskunde*. Indeed, Hirschfeld refers in his *opus magnum* to the Chinese thinker as one of the greatest

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<sup>57</sup> ‘griechisch-römisch-jüdische ... Mittelmeerkultur’ (Hirschfeld 1933: 66).

<sup>58</sup> ‘einiger anderer großer Lehrer’ (Hirschfeld 1933: 68).

<sup>59</sup> ‘Menschen, die sprechen, wissen nicht.  
Menschen, die wissen, sprechen nicht.’

Diese Worte, ließ ich mir sagen, wurden von Lao Tzu gesprochen. Wenn wir glauben sollen, daß Lao Tzu einer war, der wußte – wie kommt es, daß er ein Buch schrieb von fünftausend Worten? (Hirschfeld 1933: 104).

Hirschfeld mentions that the translation he quotes is by Albert Ehrenstein (1886–1950). In the text of this study, the poem has been translated from the German rendering cited by Hirschfeld. In the translation by Arthur Waley, the poem is titled *The Philosopher* and reads:

Those who speak know nothing;  
Those who know are silent.  
These words, as I am told,  
Were spoken by Lao Tzu.  
If we are to believe that Lao Tzu  
Was himself *one who knew*,  
How comes it that he wrote a book  
Of five thousand words? (Po Chü-i 1919).

personalities in humanity's intellectual history, who, along with Dante and Goethe, 'gave form and permanence to the most subtle sentiments and most sublime thoughts'.<sup>60</sup> In a further passage dealing with the cosmic-philosophical dimensions of love, Hirschfeld refers to Lao Tzu's concept of *tao*, Kant's *thing in itself*, and Meister Eckhard's *essential ground* as some of the designations given to the great Unknown by religious grounders, philosophers and poets, 'most of whom united in themselves both sexes in especially pronounced form'.<sup>61</sup> More importantly, Hirschfeld points out that 'the Chinese sages Lao Tzu and Confucius'<sup>62</sup> considered divinity to be male and female simultaneously, thus becoming classical forerunners of the 'ur-idea of human double sexuality',<sup>63</sup> a conception that also had its advocates in occidental antiquity, but was revitalised in Europe only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by the emerging science of evolution (see Bauer 2010). After mentioning Charles Darwin and the notable evolutionary theorist August Weisman (1834–1914), Hirschfeld states that in his 1904 lecture on *Übergänge zwischen dem männlichen und weiblichen Geschlecht* [*Transitions between the male and female sex*] he had already contended: 'The variability of individuals with regard to their somatic and psychical characteristics depends to a large extent on the very variable ratio of male and female attributes'.<sup>64</sup> In view of this brief, but telling genealogical outline, it seems safe to assume that Hirschfeld's distinct predilection for Chinese culture was closely related to his assumption that Lao Tzu and Confucius were precursors in the postulation of the constitutional bisexuality of all human beings, a paradigmatic alternative to the pervasive dichotomisation of sexuality, which his own understanding of universal sexual intermediariness was designed to overcome.

## Hirschfeld's doctrine of sexual intermediaries and the ontology of Tao

Although Hirschfeld mentions conspicuous instances of sexual transitions throughout *Weltreise*, he makes no effort to frame their occurrence within the theoretical purview of his universalisation of sexual intermediariness and the principled dissolution of closed schemes of sexual distribution it entails. This omission hardly needed any justification, since Hirschfeld had in the past offered increasingly detailed elaborations on his doctrine of sexual intermediary stages throughout his work, from his initial *Sappho und Sokrates* to *Geschlechtskunde*, whose first volume includes the most comprehensive presentation of his sexology's core premises. It is in this volume that Hirschfeld praised Lao Tzu and Confucius for adumbrating the supersedure of the binomial sexual divide and, per implication, his own endeavours to reconceptualise sexual difference. To judge by the textual evidence, Hirschfeld assumed that his own approach of the specific gradients signalling the individual's irreducible sexual alterity resonates with the Taoistic attentiveness to the

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<sup>60</sup> 'den feinsten Stimmungen und erhabensten Gedanken Gestaltung und Dauer gaben.' (Hirschfeld 1928: 538).

<sup>61</sup> 'meist beide Geschlechter besonders stark in sich vereinigenden' (Hirschfeld 1926: 336).

<sup>62</sup> 'die chinesischen Weltweisen *Lautse* und *Kungfutse*' (Hirschfeld 1926: 485).

<sup>63</sup> 'die Uridee der menschlichen Doppelgeschlechtlichkeit' (Hirschfeld 1926: 485).

<sup>64</sup> 'Die Variabilität der Individuen in somatischer und psychischer Hinsicht hängt zum großen Teil von dem sehr variablen Mischungsverhältnis männlicher und weiblicher Attribute ab' (Hirschfeld 1926: 485).

inexhaustible combinatory of nuances reflecting the polar, but non-reificatory ontology of *yin* and *yang*. Contrasting with the dichotomous constraints of mainstream Western *weltanschauungs*, such an ontology allows, at least in principle, an understanding of sexual individuality as a unique composite of male and female characteristics that dispenses with the postulation of a hiatus between the two mutually exclusive sexes of man and woman. Instead of a binary sexuality according to the patterns foreseen by biblical creationism and the Pythagorean table of opposites to which Aristotle refers in the first book of *Metaphysics* (see Aristotle 1968: 34 [986 a 22–30]), the universal bisexuality that, on Hirschfeld's assumptions, follows from the ontology of Tao is essentially a sexuality of variable nuances constellating the individual's unique sexual constitution.

## **On sexual taxonomies and the non-categorisable sexed individual**

As a monist in the philosophical tradition of Giordano Bruno and Baruch de Spinoza, Hirschfeld certainly sensed that the kind of ontology implied by Lao Tzu's sapiential teachings had affinities with the vitalism on which he based his postulation of sexualities determined by gradual, ever-varying differences within the continuities of nature, and co-extensive with the number of sexed individuals. Elaborating in an early treatise of 1903 on the consequences of his core sexological premises, Hirschfeld emphasised: 'In correspondence to the amount of scientific observations, the system [of human sexual intermediariness] has become more and more complicated, but then finally simplified in the sense that, in the last resort, each case among the innumerable intermediary stages constitutes a case for itself, a class for itself, a sex for itself'.<sup>65</sup> By acknowledging that increasing taxonomic complexity finally yields to the uniqueness of the sexed individual, Hirschfeld draws attention to the theoretical bounds of any scheme of sexual classification, and hints at the necessary transition to the field of emancipatory sexual ethics and its political implementation, in correspondence to his life motto: *per scientiam ad justitiam* (Hirschfeld 1933: 239). Not contradicting nor invalidating the results of sexual taxonomy; this transition sheds light on the asymptotic nature of classificatory procedures owing to the perfectibility (and thus provisoriness) of any categorial scheme of sexual distribution. In consideration of the limitations imposed on sexual taxonomy by the categorially non-subsumable sexed individual, it does not come as a surprise that, as already indicated, *Weltreise* quotes Po Chü-i's poem referring to Lao Tzu's dictum on the aporetic relationship between true knowledge and its linguistic communicability. In accordance with this line of thought, Hirschfeld conveyed the results of his life-long sexological research in the detailed articulateness of the five-volume *Geschlechtskunde* – which could be homologised with the 'five thousand words' mentioned in the poem – while carefully focusing on the principled limits of sexological discursivity, and envisaging an ambit of sexual liberation where the individual's unutterable sexual uniqueness is designed to come to concrete fruition.

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<sup>65</sup> 'Mit der Menge wissenschaftlicher Beobachtungen hat sich das System [der menschlichen Zwischenstufigkeit] mehr und mehr kompliziert, um sich schließlich dahin zu vereinfachen, daß im Grunde genommen jeder Fall in der Unsumme der Zwischenstufen einen Fall für sich, eine Klasse für sich, ein Geschlecht für sich bildet' (Hirschfeld 1903: 127).



## Critiquing Chinese sexual mores

It is against the backdrop of Hirschfeld's overarching commitments to an emancipatory sexual ethics that his critical aperçus on China attain their specific relevancy. Notwithstanding his praise of the sexual realism fostered by China's sapiential heritage, Hirschfeld did not overlook the appalling shortcomings of Chinese society in dealing with sexual and reproductive matters. In view of his sustained critique of the societal oppression and exploitation of women, the general acceptance of prostitution, abortion and even infanticide, as well as the unwillingness to introduce methods of birth control, it is clear that China does not constitute an exception to the worldwide refusal to revisit inveterate sexual mores and traditions, even when their ill-grounded nature is generally admitted.<sup>66</sup> Since *Weltreise* documents the diversity of Chinese sexual mores, and simultaneously conveys their failure to suffice the criteria of a universally valid sexual morality, it confirms Hirschfeld's ethnological ground contention that 'humanity has not as yet succeeded in finding a uniform solution to the question of sexual and erotic mores, that would corresponds in like manner to the results of sexual-biological and sexual-sociological research'.<sup>67</sup> Despite its sapiential heritage and the ensuing advantages for grasping the individual's unique sexual difference, China never overcame the world-historical pervasiveness of binomial sexuality, and the power asymmetries between male and female it sanctions. Not having renounced on principle the thoughtless conveniences of reductive categorisations, and thus maintaining the phallogocentric subordination of yin-principled femininity, China's actual sexual culture belies its own best sapiential traditions, and – like all other sexual cultures on record – contravenes Hirschfeld's most fundamental theoretical insights and emancipatory objectives.

## Emancipatory politics and the memory of nomadism

As a humanist and socialist, Hirschfeld makes abundantly clear that he was a supporter of the emancipatory struggles personified by Sun Yat-sen in China (see Hirschfeld 1933: 87, 118–20, 346), Mahatma Gandhi in India (see Hirschfeld 1933: 205, 224), and Zaghul Pascha and Nahas Pascha in Egypt (see Hirschfeld 1933: 345). Moreover, it is especially noteworthy that Hirschfeld closes his treatment of China in *Weltreise* with an extensive quotation from Sun Yat-sen's political testament, and expresses his hope that a successor will soon achieve the aims the Chinese leader had envisaged (see Hirschfeld 1933: 120). Notwithstanding his outspoken sympathies for anti-colonialist causes, however, Hirschfeld was aware that the leaders of revolutionary movements of the time were barely willing to acknowledge the urgency of the changes he called for. This denial did not come as a surprise, given the scarce resonance of his

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<sup>66</sup> Hirschfeld pointedly observes in this connection: 'Nirgends findet man soviel "Angst vor der eigenen Courage" wie dort, wo sich Menschen zu der inneren Überzeugung durchgerungen haben, daß die herrschende Sexualeinstellung einer objektiven Nachprüfung bedarf' ['Nowhere does one find so much "fear of one's own courage" as where people arrive at the inner conviction that the dominant approach of sexuality requires objective re-examination'] (Hirschfeld 1933: 311).

<sup>67</sup> 'Es ist der Menschheit bisher nicht gelungen, eine einheitliche Lösungsform der Geschlechts- und Liebessitten zu finden, die den Ergebnissen sexualbiologischer and sexualsoziologischer Forschung in gleicher Weise entspricht' (Hirschfeld 1933: 12).

theories even among Western theoreticians and intellectuals.<sup>68</sup> For the most part, they ignored the import of Hirschfeld's biologically grounded theses concerning the sexual intermediariness (see Hirschfeld 1986: 49) and racial hybridity (see Hirschfeld 1934–1935: 14 (1935) Nr. 2) of all human beings, as well as his related socio-historical contention that 'culture is the result of racial mixings, and only this mixing saves from barbarity'.<sup>69</sup> On this account, it is all the more relevant that when discussing the need to bring about a radical transformation of the regnant view of sexuality, Hirschfeld evoked a more encompassing historical horizon than that of current sedentary cultures. Indeed, mindful of the time-honoured bond between freedom and the nomadism of nations that once 'wandered around without any restrictions',<sup>70</sup> Hirschfeld makes a telling reference to the Jewish character, and advisedly asks 'whether the Ahasveric restlessness of the Jews is a heirloom from their immemorial nomadic past'.<sup>71</sup> When in a later passage reviewing the Jewish path in history, he states that 'this "restlessly and hastily" wandering people can find nowhere a true home and nevertheless achieves everywhere a great human mission',<sup>72</sup> it becomes apparent that for Hirschfeld Jewish-nomadic ur-history was still effectual in his own emancipatory endeavours on behalf of the sexually oppressed.

## Exilic rootlessness and the individual's alterity

From Hirschfeld's non-Zionistic perspective, the Jew in his exilic existence preserves the core anamnesis of the nomadism that was once shared by all humanity, and that still offers a critical alternative to myths and ideologies enthusing peoples and nations with the illusions of geographical rootedness (see Bauer 2004a). Since Hirschfeld's travel through Asia was, in an important respect, a memento of his own ancestral history, *Weltreise* sheds light on the liberatory motivation of the challenges that his counterintuitive disruptions of sexual, racial and cultural preconceptions pose to traditional understandings of the human. Exposing the supposedly 'natural' partitions and segmentations of the human species as being epistemologically ill-grounded and ethically reprehensible, Hirschfeld insisted that humanity does not exist in the fractionation of biological groups or historico-cultural collectives, but of individuals. Against the delusional fixations of sexual, racial and civilisational identities fostered by unreflecting schemes of human

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<sup>68</sup> For quite different reasons, the work of Hirschfeld after his death has not elicited sympathies on the side of the Jewish cultural establishment either. Symptomatic in this regard is the fact that in the 1996 edition of *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (1996) there is no entry for Magnus Hirschfeld, although it does cover in seven Hirschfeld lemmata other figures ranging from the well-known American caricaturist to a former president of the *American Academy of Periodontology*. This omission is all the more telling as other Jewish encyclopaedias published during Magnus Hirschfeld's lifetime treat his sexological and humanitarian accomplishments in some detail. See, for instance, *Große Jüdische National-Biographie* (n.d.) or *Encyclopedia Judaica. Das Judentum in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (1928–1932). Fourteen years after Hirschfeld's death, even the Mexican *Enciclopedia Judaica Castellana en diez tomos* (1949) still included an article on him.

<sup>69</sup> 'Die Kultur ist ein Ergebnis der rassischen Vermischungen, und nur diese Vermischung rettet vor der Barbarei' (Hirschfeld 1934–1935: 14 (1935) Nr. 9 [Caption of the paragraph: *Zoologischer Rasseglauben* (sic)]).

<sup>70</sup> 'ausnahmslos freizügig ... herumschweiften' (Hirschfeld 1933: 329).

<sup>71</sup> 'Ob ... die ahasverische Unruhe der Juden ... ein Erbstück aus ihrer nomadischen Urzeit ist?' (Hirschfeld 1933: 329).

<sup>72</sup> 'dieses "unstet und flüchtig" herumwandernde ... Volk ... nirgends eine eigentliche Heimstätte finden kann und doch überall eine große menschliche Mission erfüllt' (Hirschfeld 1933: 390).

taxonomy, Hirschfeld argued that the alterity of individuals ensues from the unique configuration of gradual nuances within an ontology of pervasive continuities. On this account, his critical efforts were not merely strategic reactions to the deplorable mentalities and ideologies he depicts and denounces, but the result of a thoroughly reasoned, non-essentialist naturalism. As a new Ahasver inhabiting the fringes of a soil-bound humanity, Hirschfeld assumed the salutary task of disclosing its radical rootlessness and envisioning a site of its dwelling consonant with what, decades later, Black lesbian poet, theorist and activist Audre Lorde (1934–1992) would term ‘the very house of difference’ (Lorde 1993: 226).

### **Coda: On the ethnological gaze and the universality of critique**

The editorial Hirschfeld wrote in 1929 for the first issue of the journal *Die Aufklärung* (*The Enlightenment*), closes with a reference to the 18<sup>th</sup> century classical Enlightenment that puts into historical perspective the scope and claims of his emancipatory program. The passage reads:

And like 150 years ago the ‘Enlightenment’ (‘Aufklärung’) meant the end of political absolutism, so our ‘Enlightenment’ (‘Aufklärung’) pursues a no lesser goal: the end of the absolutism of mores (‘Sitte’), that autocracy, which, unkindly and unworldly, wishes to accord validity only to its own petrified views: the end of servility.<sup>73</sup>

Resonating with the political critique that began in 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe, Hirschfeld’s sexual ethnology seeks to bring about the ‘end of the absolutism of mores’, inasmuch as it uncovers and ‘de-constructs’<sup>74</sup> the theo-mythological rootage of customs and conventions for the sake of a universal sexual morality. Despite its concentration on the non-European world, such a sexual ethnology does not exclude from scrutiny the sexual mores of the culture from which it stems. Very much like Montesquieu’s anthropological gaze on Europe in *Lettres persanes*, Hirschfeld’s sexual-ethnological outlook is sustained by the insight into the shared relativity of standpoints from which any search for the universally human necessarily begins. Notwithstanding the similarity of their perspectives, however, Hirschfeld’s reflective regard on Europe differs in an important aspect from that of Usbek and his companions in Montesquieu’s classic text. While the figures of *Lettres persanes* are well *rooted* in their Asian culture, and have just been ‘transplanted’<sup>75</sup> for a while to a European setting, Hirschfeld’s journey around the world does not purport the interruption of an intrinsic rootedness. His ethnological gaze preserves throughout the exacting rootlessness of the nomadic Jew.

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<sup>73</sup> ‘Und wie vor 150 Jahren die “Aufklärung” das Ende des politischen Absolutismus bedeutet hat, so soll unsere ‘Aufklärung’ ein nicht minderes Ziel verfolgen: Das Ende des Absolutismus der Sitte, jene Selbstherrlichkeit, die ungütig und weltfremd nur die eigene versteinerte Anschauung über Moral gelten lassen will, kurz: Das Ende des Muckertums’ (Hirschfeld 1929b: 3).

<sup>74</sup> In this connection, it is noteworthy that Hirschfeld criticises symbolic or idealistic explanations of sexual mores as *nachträgliche Konstruktionen* [*later constructions*] (Hirschfeld 1933: 12).

<sup>75</sup> Signally, Montesquieu refers to the Persians he depicts as ‘des gens transplantés de si loin’ [‘people transplanted from far away’] (Montesquieu 1973: 48).

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## **POVZETEK**

Med novembrom 1930 in marcem 1932, se je nemško-judovski seksolog Magnus Hirschfeld (1868–1935) podal na potovanje okoli sveta, ga zaključil v ZDA (kjer so ga pozdravili kot 'Dr. Einsteina seksa'), še prej pa obiskal Japonsko, Kitajsko, Indonezijo, Indijo, Filippine, Egipt in Palestino. Nastalo potovalno poročilo z naslovom *Weltreise eines Sexualforschers* (1933), na splošno velja za eno temeljnih besedil takrat vzhajajoče discipline etnologije spolnosti in vsebuje prvo ne-evropocentrično, anti-kolonialistično kritiko azijskih kultur z vidika seksologije. Upoštevaajoč vseobsegajoč Hirschfeldov dizajn, ki raztaplja sheme spolne, rasne in kulturne taksonomije, se študija osredotoča na njegovo oceno kitajskega, versko nevtralnega, treznega pristopa k spolnim realnostim kot 'svetovni izjemi' tesno povezani s konfucijsko in taoistično dediščino in v sozvočju s temeljnimi premisami Hirschfeldove seksologije, ki sta jo navdihovala Spinoza in Darwin. Ne glede na hvalo kitajskega spolnega realizma, pa je Hirschfeld trdil, da kitajski spolni običaji (Sitten) – tako kot vsi drugi spolni običaji do danes – ne zadostijo merilom univerzalno veljavne spolne morale (Sittlichkeit). Medtem, ko binarne sheme spolne distribucije, na katerih spolni običaji pretežno temeljijo, napačno interpretirajo kompleksnost posameznih seksualnosti in spodbujajo eskapizem v ne-omejitve drugih posvetnih utopij, vodi Hirschfeldova postulacija potencialno neskončnih, unikatno prefinjenih seksualnosti, v radikalni načrt znotraj-zgodovinske spolne emancipacije.

**KLJUČNE BESEDE:** binarnosti, Kitajska, kontinuum narave, kultura in narava, razlika, rasna hibridnost, spolne kategorije, etnologija spolnosti, spolna vmesnost, tretji spol

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