

ASIAN VISUAL CULTURES

Shi-Yan Chao

Queer Representations in Chinese-language Film and the Cultural Landscape

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Queer Representations
in Chinese-language Film and
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Asian Visual Cultures

This series focuses on visual cultures that are produced, distributed and consumed in Asia and by Asian communities worldwide. Visual cultures have been implicated in creative policies of the state and in global cultural networks (such as the art world, film festivals and the Internet), particularly since the emergence of digital technologies. Asia is home to some of the major film, television and video industries in the world, while Asian contemporary artists are selling their works for record prices at the international art markets. Visual communication and innovation are also thriving in transnational networks and communities at the grass-roots level. Asian Visual Cultures seeks to explore how the texts and contexts of Asian visual cultures shape, express and negotiate new forms of creativity, subjectivity and cultural politics. It specifically aims to probe into the political, commercial and digital contexts in which visual cultures emerge and circulate, and to trace the potential of these cultures for political or social critique. It welcomes scholarly monographs and edited volumes in English by both established and early-career researchers.

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Cover image from *Sentimental Journey*, directed by Tony Wu and George Hsin, 2003
Courtesy of Tony Wu

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Introduction: Processing *Tongzhi*/Queer Imaginaries

Since the mid-1980s, the West has been “discovering” Chinese cinema. At the same time, more frequent multinational cooperation in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Mainland China has reconfigured the regional landscape of mass media. From pre-production and funding to distribution and exhibition, Chinese cinema crosses the geopolitical boundaries of traditional nation-states. As cinematic interaction between the “three Chinas” increases, the changing mediascape has prompted some to rethink what “China” is, and what the potential meaning of “Chinese cinema” is. Originally introduced by Taiwan- and Hong Kong-based scholars in the early 1990s, the phrase “Chinese-language film” (*huayu dianying*) has broadened to designate “any film produced in a Chinese-speaking society.”¹ A linguistic description, so to speak, has been used “to unify and supersede older geographical divisions and political discriminations”² amid the changing geopolitics and mediascapes in post-Cold War Chinese-speaking societies.³

Since the late 1980s and early 1990s, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and subsequently Mainland China have also seen the rise of *tongzhi*/queer movements and the emergence of *tongzhi*/queer cultures, studies, and communal consciousness. The term *tongzhi* first translated the Soviet concept of “comrade” (or cadre), and was initially adopted by the Communist and Nationalist Parties alike.

1 Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu and Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh, “Introduction: Mapping the Field of Chinese-Language Cinema,” p. 10.

2 Ibid.

3 A 1992 conference organized by Li Tian-duo saw Mainland film scholars invited to Taiwan for the first time. A similar conference was held at Hong Kong Baptist University in 1996; meanwhile, Taiwan’s Golden Horse Film Festival opened entries to “all Chinese language films, regardless of which of the three Chinas they were produced in,” and established a Chinese-language film exhibition to better reflect the changing geopolitical and media landscape of the Asia-Pacific Region. For early studies of “Chinese-language film,” see Zheng Shu-sen (ed.), *Wenhua piping yu huayu dianying* (Cultural criticism and Chinese-language film); Li Tian-duo (ed.), *Dangdai huayu dianying lunshu* (Discourses on contemporary Chinese-language film); Cara Cheng and Liu Xian-cheng (eds.), *Huayu yingpian guanmo zhan, zhuan ti tekan* (Chinese-language film exhibition, catalogue and anthology).

After 1949, *tongzhi* became the preferred non-hierarchical term to address everyone under the communist regime in People's Republic of China.⁴ While it is still used in present-day China for formal introductions, especially in public ceremonies,⁵ its popularity as an everyday appellation has waned in China's postsocialist era (from the 1980s onward).

In the meantime, *tongzhi* was appropriated by queer communities and officially introduced to the public by Hong Kong gay critics Michael Lam (a.k.a. Maike) and Edward Lam (a.k.a. Lin Yihua),⁶ at first casually, in some of Michael Lam's writings in around 1985,⁷ and then formally by Edward Lam for the first Lesbian and Gay Film Festival in Hong Kong in December 1988.⁸ Within a few years, *tongzhi* became the most common term in Hong Kong, Taiwan,⁹ and (by the new millennium) metropolitan areas in Mainland China, to refer to those who are characterized by same-sex attractions. By original definition, *tongzhi* is an umbrella term that includes *all* individuals who are critical of heteronormativity,¹⁰ involving

4 Bao Hongwei. "From Comrade to Queer: A Genealogy of *Tongzhi*," in *Queer Comrades*. p. 71.

5 Engebretsen, and Schroeder, "Introduction: Queer/Tongzhi China," in Engebretsen and Schroeder (eds.), *Queer/Tongzhi China*, p. 5.

6 As Michael Lam recalls, *tongzhi*'s queer appropriation started to circulate in private occasions among Hong Kong lesbians and gay men in San Francisco back in the late 1970s and early 1980s. See Michael Lam, "*Tongzhi jianshi*" (A brief history of *tongzhi*), in *Huchui buru danda* (Single-minded, double-entendre), pp. 244-245.

7 See for instance, Michael Lam's reviews (under the pen name "Yuxian Youzi"), "*Tongzhi reng xu nuli: Weiguo Junhuen*" (Comrades must continue fighting: *Wreaths at the Foot of the Mountain*) and "*Renjian you Zoushuang*" (*An Early Frost* in the human world). In the first, Lam uses *tongzhi* somewhat ambiguously, perhaps since this film was produced and set in Mainland China. Reviewing the latter film, an American drama, he remarks, "Coming out has been deemed pivotal for *tongzhi* individuals," suggesting the term is interchangeable with "homosexual."

8 Xiaomingxiang, "Yishu zhongxing shi'nian geming" (The Arts Center's decade-long revolution).

9 The term "tongzhi" was formally introduced into Taiwan through the twenty-ninth Golden Horse Film Festival (Taipei, 1992), which included a special program in its International Film Exhibition. "Ai zai aizi manyan shi/Love in A Times of AIDS" showed 24 works from the US, Europe, and Australia that dealt with LGBTQ subjects, including "Xin tongzhi dianying/New Queer Cinema" (featuring *Swoon* [Tom Kalin, 1991]), "Tongzhi fangong/Queers Bash Back" (I & II) (e.g. *Edward II* [Derek Jarman, 1991]), "Tongzhi yuwang/Gay Desire" (e.g. *Un Chant D'Amour* [Jean Genet, 1950] and *Caught Looking* [Constantine Giannaris, 1991]), "Tongzhi! shiyan!!/Queer and Experimental" (featuring *Massillon* [William Jones, 1991]), "Tongzhi shang lu/Queers on the Road" (e.g. *The Hours and Times* [Christopher Munch, 1991]), and a retrospective on "nu tongzhi" filmmaker Su Friedrich. In November 2009, when I interviewed Huang Cui-hua, chief programmer for the 1992 Golden Horse Film Festival, Huang modestly gave Edward Lam (a.k.a. Lin Yihua) full credit for introducing the term "tongzhi."

10 Chou Wah-shan, *Tongzhi lun* (On *tongzhi*); Chou Wah-shan. *Houzhimin tongzhi* (Postcolonial *tongzhi*), pp. 360-365. Even in its initial introduction to Taiwan through the 1992 Golden Horse

“sexual or gender non-normativity or an affinity with the political and social movements surrounding these ideas.”¹¹ However, this word in current everyday usage, as Tze-lan Sang notes, designates predominantly gays and lesbians, especially when it is used unmodified.¹² Hongwei Bao’s recent study further highlights an alarming tendency in contemporary China that aligns *tongzhi* with a “[male-centered], essentialist and homonormative identity,” in contradistinction to the more liberating principles of “gender equality, sexual diversity and radical politics that challenge sexual and social norms.”¹³ In other words, *tongzhi*, in everyday use and identity politics, has been gradually losing its radical edge to the concept of queer (*ku’er*), which was introduced to Taiwan and Hong Kong in the early 1990s,¹⁴ and subsequently China in around 2000.¹⁵ Although *tongzhi* and queer overlap in some ways, they are not totally interchangeable. While *tongzhi* emphasizes identity and serves as the rallying call for social movements, queer defies fixed identity categories and stresses the heterogeneity of both identities and human subjects. *Tongzhi* and queer, in other words, should supplement and remain in dialogic relation to each other.¹⁶ By stressing the term *tongzhi* in this project, I include a more affirmative connotation in terms of identity politics than the word “queer” tends to do. By using “*tongzhi/queer*,” jointly or in parallel, I aim to capture the nuanced dynamics between *tongzhi* and queer politics, and those of social movements and media representations.

Although many *tongzhi/queer* activities and events are locally oriented, they generate translocal effects, especially through the internet and media circulation. Various events and organizations, such as the HK-based “Chinese Tongzhi Conferences” (1996-2004)¹⁷ and the CUNY-based “Institute for Tongzhi Studies” (ITS), have facilitated significant translocal conversations among Chinese *tongzhi/queer* communities (see Figures 1-4). The opportunity

Film Festival, the term of “*tongzhi*” was used in a way that was virtually interchangeable with “gay” and “queer” and, to a large extent, “lesbian.” It was evident in the bilingual naming of the thirteen sub-categories within the special program mentioned in the previous footnote.

11 Engebretsen and Schroeder, “Introduction: Queer/Tongzhi China,” in Engebretsen and Schroeder (eds.), *Queer/Tongzhi China*, p. 5.

12 Sang, *The Emerging Lesbian*, p. 236.

13 Hongwei Bao, “*Queer Comrades*,” p. 88.

14 Chi Ta-wei, *Tongzhi wenxue shi* (A history of tongzhi literature), pp. 392-394.

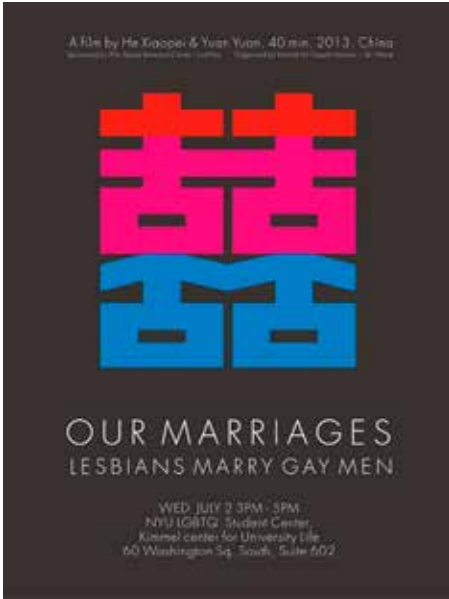
15 Hongwei Bao, *Queer Comrades*, p. 80. Hee Wai Siam, *Cong Yanshi dao xingshi* (From amorous histories to sexual histories), p. 74.

16 Chi Ta-wei. *Wan’an babilun* (Sexually dissident notes from Babylon), pp. 12-13, 15-16, 64.

17 For a documentation of the first meeting with participants from Hong Kong, Taiwan, China and beyond, see Lu Jian-xiong (ed.), *Huaren tongzhi xin duben* (A new reader on Chinese tongzhi).

Figures 1-3 Posters for the Institute for Tongzhi Studies Events

Figure 4 Poster for the INTERACT Event, Columbia University



Figures 1-3: Three 2014 events hosted by the Institute for Tongzhi Studies (organized by Kiang Mai, Liu Wen and I), with guest speakers from China and/or Taiwan
 Figure 4: An event featuring Cui Zi'en (China) and Barbara Hammer (US) that I curated at Columbia University (and co-sponsored by ITS) in 2014

for lesbians in Mainland China (or *lalas*) to connect with those in Hong Kong, Taiwan and the US, alongside the establishment of the Chinese Lala Alliance (CLA) at the core of this transregional network, has played a key part in the conspicuous expansion of China's *lala* movement.¹⁸ Since the first annual "lala leadership training camp" was launched in 2007, the Chinese *lala* movement has grown from fewer than five isolated groups nationally to nearly fifty well-connected, energetic, and informed grassroots organizations.

What is the relationship between Chinese *tongzhi*/queer culture and global gay/queer culture? Is the evolving Chinese *tongzhi*/queer culture merely derived from a neo-colonialist process dominated by Euro-American culture? What roles do Chinese *tongzhi*/queer subjects play in this process? How much collective and individual *agency* can Chinese *tongzhi*/queers exert in our everyday lives in different regions around the Taiwan Strait?

Accelerating globalization exerts its puissance in terms of scale, density, and intensity: it influences and interacts with subject formation. What dynamics play out between various global flows (of imagery, finance, ideas/ideologies, technology and people) and *tongzhi*/queer subjectivity? Conversely, how do local or localized queer representations negotiate with the local/regional conditions? And what does identifying as Chinese *tongzhi* or being Chinese queer mean to a filmmaker?

With these questions in mind, in this book I examine queer representations in Chinese-language film and media from a local *tongzhi*/queer perspective and in a rigorously contextualized manner. By media, I mean "communication media" in various formats: print, sound recording, film, broadcast, photography, and video, and additionally "satellite, cable, computer [and digital media] – both the physical objects and the organizations that activate them."¹⁹ While I focus largely on film as a particular medium,²⁰ I also hope to underline the role of other media in generating the flow of information about *tongzhi*/queer subjects in the larger, multilayered mediascape. This project thus locates the transmedial representation of *tongzhi*/queer subjects within the interactive and interdependent relations between the socio-economic and the cultural, the global and the regional, the regional and the local, and the local and the individual.

18 Email from Kiang Mai at the NYC-based Astraea Foundation, June 2012.

19 Croteau and Hoynes, *Media/Society*, pp. 8-15. Downing, Mohammadi, and Sreberny-Mohammadi (eds.), *Questioning the Media*, p. 487. Creeber and Martin (eds.), *Digital Cultures*.

20 Stam, *Film Theory: An Introduction*, pp. 107-23.



Mapping the Research Field

The ongoing process of institutionalization since the 1980s has also changed English-language scholarship on Chinese cinema. In general, this process reveals a paradigmatic shift from a national cinema approach to a transnational approach (as illustrated by Sheldon Lu, Esther Yau, and Tan See-Kam)²¹ or to a transcultural media approach (as exemplified by Jenny Lau, Kwai-cheung Lo, and Shu-mei Shih).²² Although by the early 2000s English-language scholarship on Chinese cinema/media had analyzed ethnicity, transnationality, postmodernity, and postcoloniality, explorations of queer representation remained on the margins, and consisted mainly of individual articles. Crucial to this early queer intervention were the writings of Chris Berry, who has been immensely influential in shaping the contours of English-language scholarship on contemporary Chinese queer representation. He is possibly the first to discuss contemporary Asian/Chinese queer representation in relation to international circulation;²³ moreover, he usefully discerns two major “patterns” in Asian Queer representation: its tension with kinship system and its reliance on traditional operas.²⁴ Berry also draws special attention to the familial-kinship system, and proffers insights into the postcolonial interplay between Asian and Anglo-American social economies through such cultural formats as melodrama.²⁵ My focus on the familial system and Chinese opera (Chapters 1 and 2, respectively) is significantly informed by Berry’s work.

In retrospect, 2003 was a crucial year for queer interventions into Chinese film/media/cultural studies. Alongside Berry’s edited volume *Chinese Films in Focus: 25 Takes*, Debra Tze-lan Sang’s *The Emerging Lesbian*, and Berry, Martin and Yue’s anthology *Mobile Cultures*²⁶ – the latter bringing into focus the emerging field of queer Asian cultural studies, followed quickly by *AsiaPacifiQueer* (2008), *As Normal As Possible* (2010), and *Queer Sinophone Cultures* (2014)²⁷ – Fran Martin also published the first book-length study on the subject,

21 See Lu (ed.), *Transnational Chinese Cinemas*; Yau (ed.), *At Full Speed*; Tan et al, *Chinese Connections*.

22 See Lau (ed.), *Multiple Modernities*; Lo, *Chinese Face/Off*; Shih, *Visuality and Identity*.

23 Berry, *A Bit on the Side*; Berry, “Sexual DisOrientations.”

24 Berry, “Globalisation and Localisation: Queer Films from Asia.”

25 Berry, “Sexual DisOrientations”; Berry, “Happy Alone? Sad Young Men in East Asian Gay Cinema”; Berry, “Asian Values, Family Values”; Berry, “*Wedding Banquet*: A Family (Melodrama) Affair.”

26 Sang, *The Emerging Lesbian*; Berry, Martin, and Yue (eds.), *Mobile Cultures: New Media in Queer Asia*.

27 Martin, McLelland and Yue (eds.), *AsiaPacifiQueer: Rethinking Genders and Sexualities*; Yau Ching (ed.), *As Normal As Possible*; Chiang and Heinrich (eds.), *Queer Sinophone Cultures*.

Situating Sexualities.²⁸ This brilliant monograph argues that queer culture in modern Taiwan is configured by a dynamic process combining local knowledge with globalizing LGBTQ discourses, producing sexualities that are multiple, shifting, and inherently hybrid. In particular, her article on *Vive L'amour* incisively illuminates the film's "obsessive focus on graphic, architectural, aural and metaphysical emptiness" as an index of "the familiar cultural logic" that renders homosexuality "the cipher of heterosexual plentitude."²⁹ Implicitly, it challenges Berry's contention that *Vive L'amour* – alongside *East Palace, West Palace* (Zhang Yuan, 1996, China) and *Happy Together* (Wong Kar-wai, 1997, HK) – typifies a historical moment of queer representation in Greater China that "breaks" the pattern of family narrative.³⁰ While distance from conventional family narrative may not be equivalent to breaking the family narrative, I would emphasize the need to pay attention to visuals in queer narratives, and especially audio-visual elements. I argue in this book that heterosexual familialism – through its influence on both narrative and style – discursively disciplines our audio-visuality while reproducing different narratives. In particular, drawing on Martin's insights into the tension between heteronormative narratives and queer-inflected stylistics, as well as the activist strategy of mask-donning as a way to negotiate queer subjectivity, I posit a *tongzhi*-oriented camp aesthetic (see Chapter 4) as a particular audio-visual expression that is born out of and makes plain the tension between queer subjects and their heteronormative family environments.

My investigation of the discursive nexus between family and state coincides with the expanding scholarship on Pai Hsien-yung's *Niezi/Crystal Boys*, arguably the most influential novel in contemporary Chinese *tongzhi*/queer literature. First serialized, then published as a complete volume in 1983, *Niezi/Crystal Boys* was also adapted as *Outcasts* (Yu Kan-ping, 1986),³¹ the first Taiwanese film to feature gay protagonists. Compared with the abundant scholarship on *Niezi/Crystal Boys*,³² that on *Outcasts* has been sparse. Aside

28 Martin, *Situating Sexualities*; Martin, (ed. and trans.), *Angelwings: Contemporary Queer Fiction from Taiwan*.

29 Martin, "Vive L'Amour: Eloquent Emptiness," p. 178.

30 Berry, "Happy Alone? Sad Young Men in East Asian Gay Cinema," p. 189.

31 The film adaptation of Pai Hsien-yung's novel *Niezi* shares the same Chinese title. The novel was officially translated into English and published by Gay Sunshine Press under the title *Crystal Boys*, while the film was officially released on video by Award Films in the US under the title *Outcasts*.

32 For instance, Chang Hsiao-hung, *Guaitai jiating luomanshi* (Queer family romance), pp. 27-73; Yeh De-hsuan, "Yinhuen bosan de jiating zhuyi chimei" (The haunting spectre of familialism); Chi Ta-wei, "Taiwan xiaoshuo zhong nan tongxinglian de xing yu liufang" (Sex and diaspora of the male homosexuals in Taiwan-fiction); Chu Wei-cheng, "(Pai Hsien-yung tongzhi de) nuren, guaitai, jiazhu" ("Comrade" Pai Hsien-yung's women, queers and nation); Zeng Xiu-ping, *Guchen*,

from some generally favorable reviews upon the film's theatrical release,³³ only a handful of critical articles address the film.³⁴ In a seminal article mapping Taipei's landscape of desire, Chang Hsiao-hung and Wang Chih-hung compare *Outcasts* with two other films – *Good Morning, Taipei* (Lee Hsing, 1979) and Tsai's *Vive L'amour* – tracing the ways in which they negotiate “other spaces”³⁵ for non-normative desires (in contrast to the “mainstream spaces” of the heterosexual institution). While *Vive L'amour* hints subversively at “the heterogeneity of the family and [...] the existence of heterotopias,”³⁶ *Good Morning, Taipei* depicts spaces outside the patriarchal family in an “assimilating” process,³⁷ and *Outcasts* works to rehabilitate its heterosexual family in crisis by “marginalizing” the other spaces of homosexuality.³⁸ Huang Yi-guan likewise notes that *Outcasts* downplays the novel's homoeroticism by reconfiguring it through the ethics of heterosexual family life, shifting the focus toward “the warmth of the family.”³⁹ Like Chang and Wang, Huang essentially sees *Outcasts* as a conservative rendition of the novel, but Huang's analysis places more emphasis on Taiwan's larger “cultural field” in the 1980s.⁴⁰

In similar fashion, my analysis of *Outcasts* and Tsai Ming-liang's oeuvre rests on a detailed mapping of Taiwan's cultural field from the 1950s onward. I look particularly at Taiwan's state-sponsored cultural policy on literature and arts,⁴¹ the nativist movement,⁴² national enterprise during the Cold

niezi, Taipei ren (Lonely subjects, evil sons, Taipei characters); Mei Chia-ling, *Cong shaonian Zhongguo dao shaonian Taiwan* (From adolescent China to adolescent Taiwan), pp. 237-282; Martin, *Situating Sexualities*, pp. 47-71; Liou Liang-ya, “At the Intersection of the Global and the Local”; Huang Tao-ming, *Queer Politics and Sexual Modernity in Taiwan*, pp. 113-142.

33 Liang Liang *et al.*, “*Niezi* zou weimei luxian” (*Outcasts* is characterized by a romantic style); Huang Ren, “*Niezi* yingde yongqi jiang” (*Outcasts* deserves an award for its courage); Wang Chang-an *et al.*, “Yibu dianying dajia kan: *Niezi*” (Combined criticism: *Outcasts*). In Hong Kong, see Xiaomingxiong, “Ai niezi: *Niezi*” (Melancholic niezi: *Outcasts*).

34 See, for instance, Wen Tien-hsiang, *Fuyi ke dianying dan* (To hatch a film egg), pp. 130-131; Wen Tien-hsiang, *Yingmi cangbaotu* (Treasure map for movie buffs), pp. 243-244; Wen Tien-hsiang, *Shayingji yu jiaorouji* (Film camera and meat grinder), pp. 221-223; Timothy Liu, “*The Outcasts*: A Family Romance”; Huang Yi-guan, “Xingbie fuma, yizhi fasheng” (Gender codes, heterogeneous enunciation); Chen Ru-shou, *Chuan yue yao'an jingjie* (Through a screen, darkly), pp. 184-191.

35 Chang and Wang, “Taipei qingyu dijing: jia/gong yuan de yingxiang yizhi,” p. 117.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 125.

37 *Ibid.*, pp. 118-119.

38 *Ibid.*, pp. 119-122.

39 Huang, “Xingbie fuma, yizhi fasheng,” pp. 309, 316.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 292.

41 See Zheng Ming-li's detailed account, “Dangdai Taiwan wenyi zhengce de fazhan, yingxiang yu jiantao” (The development, impact and reevaluation of modern Taiwan's cultural policy).

42 Hsiao A-chin, *Contemporary Taiwanese Cultural Nationalism*; Hsiao A-chin, *Huiguo xianshi* (Return to reality).



War era,⁴³ Taiwan's literary history,⁴⁴ New Cinema and its legacy,⁴⁵ and Taiwan's propaganda films,⁴⁶ alongside important scholarship on Taiwan cinema at large.⁴⁷

Tsai's films, mostly made in and about Taiwan, have been much studied, but most authors do not highlight queer appreciation of the films but rather their distinctive cinematic styles,⁴⁸ modernist genealogies,⁴⁹ and avant-garde resonances.⁵⁰ Tsai's work explores postmodern alienation,⁵¹ paradoxical human relationships,⁵² changing urban spaces,⁵³ and dystopic globalization

43 Allen Chun, "From Nationalism to Nationalizing"; Allen Chun, "The Culture Industry as National Enterprise"; Allen Chun, "Fuck Chineseness."

44 Yvonne Chang, *Modernism and the Nativist Resistance*; Chang (Yvonne) Song-sheng, *Wenxue changyu de binaqian* (The change in the literary landscape); Yvonne Chang, *Literary Culture in Taiwan*; Chang Sung-sheng, *Xiandai zhuyi, dangdai Taiwan* (Modernism in contemporary Taiwan); Chen Fang-ming, *Dianfan de zhuiqiu* (In search for literary paradigm); Chen Fang-ming, *Weilou yedu*; Chen Fang-ming, *Hou zhimin Taiwan* (Postcolonial Taiwan); Chen Fang-ming, *Taiwan xin wenxue shi* (History of Taiwanese new literature); Chen Fang-ming, *Wo de jiaguao yuedu* (My homeland reading); Peng Rui-jin, *Taiwan xing wenxue yungdong sishi nian* (Forty years of the Taiwan new literature movement); Liou Liang-ya, *Yuwang gengyi shi* (Engendering dissident desires); Liou Liang-ya, *Qingse shijimo* (Gender, sexuality, and the fin de siècle); Liou Liang-ya, *Hou xiandai yu hou zhimin* (Postmodernism and postcolonialism); Liou Liang-ya, "Taiwan's Post-colonial and Queer Discourses in the 1990s."

45 On literary connections, see Yip, *Envisioning Taiwan*. The definitive volume on New Cinema is Chiao Hsiung-ping (ed.), *Taiwan xin diaying* (Taiwan New Cinema). See also Chen Ru-shou, *Taiwan xin diaying de lishi wenhua jingyan* (The historical cultural experience in Taiwan new cinema); Wen Tien-hsiang (ed.), *Shuxie Taiwan diaying* (Writing Taiwan cinema); Berry and Lu (eds.), *Island on the Edge*; Wen Tien-hsiang, *Guo ying: 1992-2011 Taiwan diaying zonglun* (Past films: An overview of Taiwan cinema 1992-2011);

46 Huang Ren. *Zhengce diaying yanjiu* (Film and political propaganda).

47 Lu Fei, *Taiwan diaying: zhengzhi, jingji, meixue, 1949-1994* (Taiwan cinema: politics, economics, aesthetics, 1949-1994); Li Tian-duo, *Taiwan diaying, shehui yu lishi* (Taiwan cinema, society and history); Liu Xian-cheng, *Taiwan diaying, shehui yu guojia* (Taiwan cinema, society and state); Li, Yong-quan. *Taiwan diaying yuedu* (Reading Taiwan cinema); Yeh and Davis, *Taiwan Film Directors*; Berry and Farquhar, *China on Screen*; Davis and Chen (eds.), *Cinema Taiwan*; Guo-juin Hong, *Taiwan Cinema*; Wicks, *Transnational Representations*.

48 For instance, Jones, "Here and There: The Films of Tsai Ming-liang"; Rehm, Joyard, and Riviere, *Tsai Ming-liang*.

49 For instance, Lim Kien Ket, "Gai yizuo fangzi" (To build a house); Betz, "The Cinema of Tsai Ming-liang: A Modernist Geneology."

50 Weihong Bao, "Biomechanics of Love"; Song Hwee Lim, *Tsai Ming-liang and a Cinema of Slowness*; Sing Song-yong, *Rujing/chujing: Tsai Ming-liang de yingxiang yishu yu kuajie shijian* (Projecting Tsai Ming-liang: Towards Trans Art Cinema).

51 For example, Read, "Alienation, Aesthetic Distance and Absorption in Tsai Ming-liang's *Vive L'Amour*."

52 Guo-juin Hong, *Taiwan Cinema*, pp. 159-181.

53 Braester, "If We Could Remember Everything, We Would Be Able to Fly."



process,⁵⁴ rendered through the dislocation of cinematic time that strains to bind past and present into a meaningful narrative.⁵⁵ The relatively few academic considerations of the queer themes in Tsai's work tend to focus chiefly on *Vive L'Amour* (1994) and *The River* (1997),⁵⁶ not least because of their explicit portrayal of male homosexuality; meanwhile *Rebels of the Neon God* (1992) and *The Hole* (1998), from the same stage of Tsai's career, have been largely neglected.⁵⁷ Partly to remedy this, Chapter 1 and Chapter 4 include in-depth queer readings of *Rebels of the Neon God* and *The Hole*, respectively.

In Hong Kong, the mid-1990s also saw the emergence of *tongzhi*/queer representations characterized by a largely self-affirmative attitude toward *tongzhi*/queer identity politics. These works differ from past queer representation in Hong Kong, such as we see in the fantasy-inflected warrior-errant picture and opera film (where cross-dressing, particularly female to male, is a notable convention),⁵⁸ and occasionally in contemporary dramas like *Sex for Sale* (Chang Tseng-chai, 1974) or "sexploitation" flicks like *The Bamboo House of Dolls* (Kuei Chih-hung, 1973). The affirmative portrayal of lesbians and gay men in 1990s Hong Kong had much to do with the increased visibility of queer activism following the decriminalization of consensual male homosexuality in 1991;⁵⁹ alongside the rise of the New Queer Cinema,⁶⁰ Ang Lee's *The Wedding Banquet* and Kaige Chen's *Farewell My Concubine* (both 1993) had particular local impact,⁶¹ and representations of homosexuality

54 For instance, Ban Wang, "Black Holes of Globalization."

55 Jean Ma, *Melancholy Drift*, pp. 95-122.

56 On Tsai's career, see Wen Tien-hsiang, *Guangying dingge* (Framing through lights and shadows); Yeh and Davis, *Taiwan Film Directors*, pp. 217-248; Song Hwee Lim: *Celluloid Comrades*, pp. 126-152, and *Tsai Ming-liang and a Cinema of Slowness*; Sing Song-yon, *Rujing/chujing* (Projecting Tsai Ming-liang). On *Rebels of the Neon God*, see Chi Da-wei, *Wan'an babilun* (Sexually dissident notes from Babylon), pp. 309-313. On *Vive L'Amour*, see Chang Hsiao-hung and Wang Chih-hung, "Taipei qingyu dijing"; Martin, "Vive L'Amour: Eloquent Emptiness"; Berry, "Asian Values, Family Values"; Berry, "Where Is the Love." On *The River*, see Chang Hsiao-hung, "Guaitai jiating luomanshi" (Queer family romance); Martin, *Situating Sexualities*, pp. 163-184; Marchetti, "On Tsai Ming-liang's *The River*"; Chow, Rey, *Sentimental Fabulations, Contemporary Chinese Films*, pp. 181-196; Kai-man Chang, "Drifting Bodies and Flooded Spaces." On *The Wayward Cloud* (2005), see Vivian Lee, "Pornography, Musical, Drag, and the Art Film." On *Goodbye Dragon Inn* (2004) and *I Don't Want to Sleep Alone* (2006), see Guo-juin Hong, "Theatrics of Cruising" and Kenneth Chan, "Queerly Connecting."

57 However, see Martin's concise reading in *Situating Sexualities*, pp. 170-171.

58 See Chao Shi-yan, "Xungtu jia poshou, citu yan mili: chutan dongdai huayu dianying zhong de fanchuan wenhua" (A preliminary study on the cross-dressing culture in contemporary Chinese-language cinema). *Taiwan dianying biji*.

59 Helen Hok-Sze Leung, "Queerscapes in Contemporary Hong Kong Cinema," pp. 426-427.

60 Ruby Rich, *New Queer Cinema*.

61 Cheung, Marchetti, and Tan (eds.), *Hong Kong Screenscapes*, p. 9.



were frequently seen as a metaphor for individual freedom as Hong Kong faced the impending 1997 Handover.⁶²

Not least because of their often intricate but largely positivist engagement with *tongzhi*/queer identity politics, Hong Kong films of the 1990s have been widely studied. *Happy Together* (Wong Kar-wei, 1997) is taken up by Rey Chow, Marc Siegel, Jeremy Tambling, Song Hwee Lim, and David Eng,⁶³ while the work of gay filmmaker Stanley Kwan is the subject of Lim's analysis of the intertwined personal/political crises around the Handover; Kwan's films *Lan Yu* (2001), *Hold You Tight* (1998), and *Center Stage* (1991) in particular have inspired seminal readings.⁶⁴ Other notable subjects in recent scholarship include Yan Yan Mak's *Butterfly* (2004),⁶⁵ and Yau Ching's *Ho Yuk* (2002).⁶⁶

Interestingly enough, in her own writings on queer representations in Hong Kong cinema, critic-filmmaker Yau Ching often addresses the conflicting ideologies, spectatorial pleasures and even subversive potential of mainstream films unbounded by affirmative identity politics. She sees "forms of self-renewal through unconventional genderization" in film classics like *You Were Meant for Me* (Wong Tin-lam, 1961)⁶⁷ and calls for a "transgender reading" of contemporary box-office hits like *Swordsman II* (Ching Siu-tung, 1992) and *He's a Woman, She's a Man* (Peter Chan, 1994).⁶⁸ In her innovative research on Hong Kong queer media, *Undercurrents: Queer Culture and Postcolonial Hong Kong* (2008), Helen Leung further argues that "contemporary queer culture in Hong Kong is paradigmatic of the city's postcolonial experience" overdetermined by the lack of any "political possibility of an alternative nationalist claim."⁶⁹ Despite the fact that gay and lesbian identities (like their nationalist counterparts)

62 Grossman, "The Rise of Homosexuality and the Dawn of Communism in Hong Kong Cinema," p. 151.

63 Rey Chow, "Nostalgia of the New Wave"; Siegel, "The Intimate Space of Wong Kar-wai"; Tambling, *Wong Kar-wai's Happy Together*, esp. pp. 67-75; Song Hwee Lim, *Celluloid Comrades*, pp. 99-125; Eng, *The Feeling of Kinship*, pp. 58-92.

64 Song Hwee Lim, *Celluloid Comrades*, pp. 153-179; Eng, "The Queer Space of China"; Marchetti, "Between Comrade and Queer." Reynaud, "Center Stage: A Shadow in Reverse."

65 Helen Hok-Sze Leung, *Undercurrents*, pp. 58-63; Martin, *Backward Glances*, pp. 157-164; Bachner, "Queer Affiliations."

66 Yau Ching, *Ho Yuk: Let's Love Hong Kong (Ho Yuk: script and reviews)*; Dang, *Conditional Spaces*, pp. 127-140; Marchetti, "Handover Bodies in a Feminist Frame."

67 Yau Ching, "Cong *Youxi renjian* kan dianmao dianying de nanxing qingjie" (A study of genderization and the representation of masculinity in *You Were Meant for Me*), p. 160.

68 Yau Ching, *Xing/bie guangying* (Sexing shadows), p. 92.

69 Helen Hok-Sze Leung, *Undercurrents*, p. 5.



remain characteristically nebulous in Hong Kong culture, “undercurrents” of diverse and complex expressions of gender and sexual variance, as Leung eloquently shows, are widely evident. By analyzing filmic texts that may appear too “understated” or to pre-date affirmative identity politics – such as *Swordsman II* and *Portland Street Blues* (Raymond Yip, 1998), both of which have been interpreted by other critics as “failed” representations of homosexuality – Leung actively engages the critical rhetoric of “queer” while contesting the restrictive nature of “gay and lesbian” as an analytical category for Hong Kong popular culture.

Swordsman II and *He’s a Woman, She’s a Man* also illustrate the theme of gender-bending popular in Hong Kong cinema, which exists in significant tension with the affirmative politics of gay and lesbian identities. This phenomenon, I suggest, can also be understood from the perspective of camp impulse in Hong Kong mass media. In his seminal essay on the Western treatment of Hong Kong cinema as camp, Julian Stringer presents a two-fold argument.⁷⁰ On the one hand, he proposes that camp response to Hong Kong cinema is “not only textually encouraged, it is aesthetically correct,”⁷¹ in that Hong Kong’s is “a postmodern, hybrid film culture that truly does [...] provide a playful, knowing, self-reflexive theatricality.”⁷² On the other hand, Stringer also draws attention to cross-cultural camp appreciation’s unequal power relations, wherein “racial, ethnic and cultural distance,” alongside a “seeming lack of emotional investment,” become “conducive to the distance that allows for camp laughter.”⁷³ For Stringer, the Western treatment of Hong Kong cinema as camp is aesthetically appropriate but politically problematic, since the “cultural capital” privileges the West.⁷⁴

While I respect Stringer’s view, I am not entirely satisfied with his elucidation of Hong Kong cinema as textually and aesthetically camp. For one thing, his conception of Hong Kong cinema focuses mostly on its post-1979 period, just as the New Wave was reshaping the local film industry. His overgeneralizations not only include labeling Stanley Kwan’s post-New Wave dramas “playful” and thus campy,⁷⁵ but also presenting martial arts films (particularly those of Bruce Lee and King Hu) as the *only* examples of Hong Kong cinema before 1979. He fails to account for the significant genre

70 Stringer, “Problems with the Treatment of Hong Kong Cinema as Camp.”

71 *Ibid.*, p. 53.

72 *Ibid.*, p. 60.

73 *Ibid.*, p. 60.

74 *Ibid.*, p. 55.

75 *Ibid.*, p. 53.



of comedy, particularly the widely influential Hui Brothers comedies of the 1970s and 1980s; nor does he consider the influence of different media (especially television, from the 1970s onward) on camp expressions in film. In Chapter 3, I thus conduct a genealogical analysis of camp expression in Hong Kong popular culture from the 1960s onward. This incorporates a more comprehensive, transmedia perspective on the one hand (cf. Stringer) and, on the other, a consideration of camp – in a locally embedded form – as a legitimate discourse gradually adopted and adapted by the Hong Kong populace since the late 1970s. I argue that this camp impulse in local mass media, alongside its discursive formation among the local residents, has played a crucial part in the proliferation of gender-bending images in contemporary Hong Kong cinema.

Only a handful of fiction features from the independent filmmaking scene in contemporary Mainland China feature self-conscious portrayals of non-normative sexualities or gender embodiments. Arguably, Zhang Yuan's *East Palace, West Palace* (1996) and Li Yu's *Fish and Elephant* (2001) are the first to deal with China's gay men and lesbians, while Liu Bingjian's *Men and Women* (1999) intentionally leaves its male protagonist's sexual orientation open and undecided.⁷⁶ Here Cui Zi'en, an acclaimed novelist and critic, merits special attention since he not only taught at Beijing Film Academy but was also the chief organizer of various queer cultural events in Beijing. He is the writer/director of a series of independent digital-video films. His early fiction films include avant-garde fictions like *Enter the Clown* (2002), *The Old Testament* (2002) and *Star Appeal* (2004), whose queerness, Chris Berry suggests, informs "an unholy trinity of themes: the sacred, the profane, and the domestic."⁷⁷ Audrey Yue and Wang Qi, meanwhile, explore the "mobile intimacies" and "queer embodiments" in Cui's experimental works.⁷⁸ Cui's documentary film *Queer China, "Comrade" China* (2008) – addressing *tongzhi* community building – is analyzed by Luke Robinson and Hongwei Bao;⁷⁹ and finally, docudramas *Feeding Boys*, *Ayaya* (2003) and *Night Scene* (2004) are the basis for Lisa

76 Cui Zi'en, *Diyi guanzhong* (First audience), pp. 44-45. For significant English-language scholarship on these works, see Berry, "East Palace, West Palace: Staging Gay Life in China"; Song Hwee Lim, *Celluloid Comrades*, pp. 89-98; Martin, *Backward Glances*, pp. 164-169; Williams, "Troubled Masculinities."

77 Berry, "The Sacred, the Profane, and the Domestic," p. 196.

78 Yue, "Mobile Intimacies in the Queer Sinophone Films of Cui Zi'en"; Qi Wang, *Memory, Subjectivity and Independent Chinese*, pp. 168-176.

79 Robinson, "'To Whom Do Our Bodies Belong,'" pp. 294-297; Hongwei Bao, "Digital Video Activism," pp. 37-44.



Rofel's anthropological study of the pressing issue of "money boys" among China's urban gay men, which for Rofel must be articulated through a reconsideration of neoliberal ideologies shaped by China's socio-economic transformations since the 1980s.⁸⁰

Alongside Cui's docudramas and documentary films, a growing number of independent DV documentaries have augmented China's unofficial archive of queer images. This group of queer documentary films emerged from what Lu Xinyu famously terms the "new documentary film movement" in the People's Republic,⁸¹ which pointedly addresses topics or subjects ignored in official discourse. Such films contribute to what Berry and Rofel call the "alternative archive" that does not supplant the state-corporate hegemonic culture of contemporary China but "grows alongside [it] as something additional."⁸² I identify two major categories emerging from this movement: one engaging with lesbian subjects – beginning with *The Box* (Echo Y. Windy, 2001) and *Dyke March* (Shi Tou, 2004) – and the second with male-to-female transsexual subjects (e.g. *Miss Jin Xing* [Zhang Yuan, 2000] and *Our Love* [Jiang Zhi, 2005]) and male cross-dressing performers, particularly *Tang Tang* (Zhang Hanzi, 2004), *Mei Mei* (Gao Tian, 2005), *Beautiful Men* (Du Haibin, 2006), *Madame* (Qiu Jiongjiong, 2010), and *Be A Woman* (Fan Popo, 2011).⁸³ These two thematic categories are explored in detail in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6, respectively.

Research Method

My approach in this book is inflected by queer theory and cultural studies. Although both these critical schools can lack for definitive, coherent methodologies and clearly demarcated fields of investigation, I understand queer theory as a form of analysis that systematically challenges any theoretical or discursive practice which naturalizes sexuality, and cultural studies as "a radically contextual and conjuncturalist practice"⁸⁴ through which to comprehend contemporary culture. My theoretical framework emphasizes

80 Rofel, "The Traffic in Money Boys."

81 Lu Xinyu, *Jilu zhongguo* (Documenting China).

82 Berry and Rofel, "Alternative Archive," in Berry, Lu, and Rofel (eds.), *The New Chinese Documentary Film Movement*, p. 137.

83 Chao Shi-yan, "Performing Gender, Performing Documentary in Post-socialist China," p. 15; Chao Shi-yan, "Documenting Transgenderism and Queer Chronotope in Postsocialist China," pp. 15-16.

84 Grossberg, *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense*, p. 20.



the dynamics and negotiations of multiple layers – the individual, the local, the intraregional, and the global⁸⁵ – wherein certain discourses are queerly rendered through various media in particular social and historical contexts, and as such this study responds to Arif Dirlik’s concern for “bringing history back in” through places.⁸⁶

Alexander Doty offers valuable models for the multilayered formation of contemporary queer mass cultures, particularly the diachronic and synchronic dynamics between film texts, filmmakers, stars, and queer audiences.⁸⁷ However, his conceptualization is predicated on American queer culture and tends to overlook globalizing influences and postcolonial conditions. Meanwhile, although Arjun Appadurai does not focus on queerness, he theorizes the flows and disruptions of finance, technology, information, images, and ideas/ideologies via the complex relations between the local and the global.⁸⁸ Rather than taking a defeatist view of globalization as the “Empire,”⁸⁹ demonizing capitalism (which is at once oppressive and *liberating*), and potentially erasing cultural differences, Appadurai emphasizes process, disjunctures, and heterogenization.

At the same time, Appadurai’s concept of imaging/imagination as a “social practice” calls attention to the individual in the process of globalization,⁹⁰ whose subject realm is increasingly articulated “in and through” technology and consumption.⁹¹ Here, Mayfair Yang’s writing sheds light on the interaction between the consumption of mass cultural products and the proliferation of imagined “transnational subjectivities” in post-Mao China.⁹² Lisa Rofel brings a specifically queer perspective to this phenomenon, placing queer subjects among other “desiring subjects” who avidly negotiate their “cosmopolitan” citizenship in a postsocialist world through their engagement with public culture venues such as window displays, print media, TV dramas,

85 For current critical attention to the intraregional linkages in cultural studies, see Yue, “Queer Asian Cinema and Media Studies”; Yue, “Trans-Singapore: Some Notes towards Queer Asia as Method.” See also Kuan-hsing Chen’s influential monograph, *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization*.

86 Dirlik, “Bringing History Back In: Of Diasporas, Hybridities, Places and Histories.”

87 Doty, *Flaming Classics*; Doty, *Making Things Perfectly Queer*.

88 Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*; Appadurai, “Grassroots Globalization and the Research Imagination.”

89 Hardt and Negri, *Empire*.

90 Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, p. 31.

91 Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*; Hay, “Piecing Together What Remains of the Cinematic City”; Jameson and Miyoshi (eds.), *The Cultures of Globalization*.

92 Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, “Mass Media and Transnational Subjectivity in Shanghai.”

and gay bars.⁹³ The concepts of transsubjectivity,⁹⁴ intersubjectivity,⁹⁵ and “flexible citizenship”⁹⁶ also represent helpful interventions in the intricate dynamics between queer representations and queer subject formation in a transnational framework. They conceptually reflect the particular ways in which queers negotiate their own Third Space⁹⁷ and queer chronotope,⁹⁸ their own imaginaries and disidentifications.⁹⁹

To better understand the mechanism of queer subject formation and authorship in relation to queer imaging/imagination, I connect this macro picture with a micro one developed in the fields of queer/women’s studies. I draw on first Teresa de Lauretis’s and Joan Scott’s reconceptualization of “experience” as a process of subjectivity, which subverts the traditional insistence on a hygienic interior/exterior boundary and offers a Bakhtinian understanding of an evolving subjectivity.¹⁰⁰ Secondly, I consider imaging/imagination as one of the social technologies of self¹⁰¹ and gender¹⁰² (including what Butler calls “heterosexualized genders”)¹⁰³ with a biological special effect.¹⁰⁴ Thirdly, I consider “reality” to be ingrained in fantasy, where fantasy is “the mise-en-scène of desire.”¹⁰⁵ Fantasy simultaneously conditions and produces subjects but also allows “a varying of subject positions.”¹⁰⁶ Thus queer subjects at once experience and negotiate a reality/fantasy constituted

93 Rofel, *Desiring China*.

94 For instance, Kwai-cheung Lo, *Chinese Face/Off*.

95 For instance, Zhang Zhen, *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen*.

96 Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality*.

97 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, pp. 50-56; Chow, *Ethics after Idealism*, pp. 149-167; Sang, *The Emerging Lesbian*, pp. 173-184. Chu Yiu-wai (ed.), *Xianggang yanjiu zuowei fangfa* (Hong Kong studies as method).

98 Halberstam, *In A Queer Time and Place*; Helen Leung, *Undercurrents*; Freeman, *Time Binds*; Dang, *Conditional Spaces*; Kam, *Shanghai Lalas*; Chao, “Performing Authorship in a Queer Time and Place.”

99 Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*.

100 De Lauretis, *Alice Doesn’t: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*; Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*; Scott, “Experience”; Scott, “The Evidence of Experience.”

101 Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 2*.

102 De Lauretis, *Alice Doesn’t*; de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender*; Haraway, “A Manifesto for Cyborgs”; Barlow, “Theorizing Woman: *Funü, Guojia, Jiating*.”

103 Butler, “Imitation and Gender Insubordination,” p. 21; Butler, *Bodies That Matter*; de Lauretis, “Sexual Indifference and Lesbian Representation.”

104 Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*. Zito and Barlow (eds.), *Body, Subject & Power in China*; Zito, “Silk and Skin: Significant Boundaries”; Zito, *Of Body and Brush*.

105 Laplanche and Pontalis, “Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality,” p. 26. See also Žižek, *Looking Awry*.

106 Cowie, “Fantasia,” p 160.



by social technologies that are supposed to interpellate historical beings into heterosexualized gendered positions.

As image-making practices for filmmakers negotiate with the available discourses performed by decentered authors as “performers”¹⁰⁷ or “orchestrators,”¹⁰⁸ they encounter the discursive constraints of performativity. While Judith Butler’s notion of gender performativity locates those who “fail” to repeat heterosexualized gendered norms within the “unlivable” zones of social life,¹⁰⁹ Chris Straayer identifies the crucial distinction between “*failure to repeat*” and “*refusal to repeat*,” wherein the latter precisely embodies the sense of queer agency unwittingly marginalized by Butler’s totalizing formulation.¹¹⁰ This is echoed in Halberstam’s more recent appraisal of “the queer art of failure.”¹¹¹ As Judith Mayne eloquently shows in her study of lesbian filmmaker Dorothy Arzner (1897-1979)¹¹², Arzner exerts her agency through characterization and particularly *mise-en-scène*, and it is *herself* she is fashioning. In *Golden Gate Girls* (2014), Louisa Wei likewise shows how pioneering director Esther Eng (1914-70) fashioned herself in her daily life, characterized by her patent lesbian tomboyism.¹¹³

Like Fran Martin, I also draw attention to the stylistics and technologies of visibility/invisibility, for instance the transformation of female homoeroticism into asexual comradeship for the “greater” purpose of socialist nation-building (Chapter 2). More importantly, I consider *audio-visibility*: for example, the use of dubbing to solicit camp responses (Chapter 3), the role of soundscape in mediating queer affects in Zero Chou’s *Corner’s* (2001), the function of voice in the queer presence ironically premised upon queer invisibility in Tsai Ming-liang’s *The Hole* (Chapter 4), and the importance audio-visual embodiment for female impersonators in today’s China (see Chapter 6). Throughout, I argue that aspects of sound and voice, often overlooked, comprise a fundamental resource with which *tongzhi/queer* subjects perform and negotiate their non-normative subjectivities.

While conventional discussions about queer representations mainly take the perspective of texts and their authors, I am convinced that (queer) audiences and the *tongzhi/queer* communities that consume queer texts – and

107 Dyer, “Believing in Fairies,” p. 188.

108 Stam, *Subversive Pleasures*, p. 191.

109 Butler, *Bodies That Matter*.

110 Straayer, *Deviant Eyes, Deviant Bodies*, pp. 160-183.

111 Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*.

112 Mayne, *The Woman at the Keyhole*; Mayne, “Lesbian Looks: Dorothy Arzner and Female Authorship”; Mayne, *Directed by Dorothy Arzner*.

113 See also Louisa Wei and Law Kar, *Xiage chuanqi* (Legend of Brother Xia).



even actively assert their agency through queer readings – also engage in “queer performativity,”¹¹⁴ Alexandra Juhasz’s moving project *AIDS TV*, for instance, illuminates how a new community may form around AIDS as an identity and develop through AIDS videography and video-viewing, as a way of self-empowerment.¹¹⁵ Since I believe communal agency arises through cultural participation in both production and consumption, I have engaged in conversations with queer-identifying filmmakers including Tsai Ming-liang, Zero Chou, Mickey Chen (1967-2018), Tony Wu, Ying Cheng-ru, Evans Chan, Yau Ching, Kit Hung, Shi Tou and Mingming, Cui Zi’en, Fan Popo, He Xiaopei, and Wei Xiaogang. I also frequently refer to and consciously incorporate the queer readings “performed” by local critical agents, including those by pioneering gay film critics Li You-xin and Wen Tien-hsiang from Taiwan, Xiaomingxiong (or Samshasha),¹¹⁶ Michael Lam and Yau Ching from Hong Kong, and Cui Zi’en, Fan Popo and Wei Xiaogang from Mainland China. I thereby put my project in dialogue with the collective agency historically emerging from local *tongzhi* communities.

The main body of my project is composed of textual analyses of Chinese queer representations, organized thematically (see below). Moreover, my approach is *both diachronic and synchronic*: I follow the trajectory of an idea or trace a discursive practice, as in the discipline of discourse analysis. Informed by Michel Foucault’s genealogical inquiry¹¹⁷ and taking language as “an irreducible part of social life, dialectically interconnected with other elements of social life,”¹¹⁸ discourse analysis sees “language as social practice,” and considers “context of language use” crucial.¹¹⁹ Focusing on “patterns of language across texts as well as the social and cultural contexts in which the texts occur,”¹²⁰ discourse analysis can be characterized by three aspects. (1) It involves not only spoken or written language but other types of semiotic activity that produces meanings, such as visual images, sound, and non-verbal communication (from gestures to dances).¹²¹ (2) Between texts and

114 Sedgwick, “Queer Performativity.”

115 Juhasz, *AIDS TV*.

116 Cultural critic and author Xiaomingxiong (1954-2006) was Hong Kong-born Han Chinese. To signal his rejection of the patriarchal social institution, he repudiated his original family name and adopted the self-invented “Xiaoming” as his surname (with the first name “Xiong”). He is referred to as Xiaomingxiong or Samshasha (see the brief biography in his *Zhongguo tongxingai shilu*).

117 Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*; Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*.

118 Fairclough, *Analysing Discourse*, p. 2.

119 Wodak and Meyer (eds.), *Methods of Critical Discourse Studies*, p. 5. Fairclough, *Media Discourse*.

120 Paltridge, *Discourse Analysis*, p. 1.

121 Fairclough, *Media Discourse*, pp. 17, 54; Shohat and Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism*.



social practices are “intermediate organizational entities,” or what Norman Fairclough terms “orders of discourse,”¹²² wherein genres, modes, and styles constitute their key elements. (3) Discourse analysis, as Siegfried Jäger maintains, addresses knowledge that must be located in “respective concrete context” that is inseparable from “a certain place at a certain time.”¹²³

Drawing on discourse analysis’s emphasis on transmedia, genre/mode/style and sociohistorical context, my discursive approach underlines Stuart Hall’s idea of “articulation” that stresses the “contingent [...] connections between [...] different social practices and social groups.”¹²⁴ Also important here are Lydia Liu and Arif Dirlik’s notions of “translingual practice” and “translated modernity,” illuminating the localizing process of imported ideas in an indigenous context,¹²⁵ and Zhang Zhen and Miriam Hansen’s notion of “vernacular modernity,”¹²⁶ which casts early Shanghai cinema as a “translation machine”¹²⁷ that synthesizes different cultural ingredients to create “a domestic product with cosmopolitan appeal [...] in the realm of embodiment.”¹²⁸

Crucially, my textual analyses incorporate two levels of contextualization. On the one hand, I consider the local within the global context, emphasizing the negotiation between the individual, the local, the intraregional and the global. In so doing, I stress the unevenness and multilayered-ness of globalization, while arguing against the simplistic notion of a “global gay” identity that either equates Western gay identity with modernity and Asian homosexualities with tradition,¹²⁹ or conversely sees the global Anglo-American-dominated gay movement as merely a form of neo-colonialism.¹³⁰ On the other hand, I underscore the socio-historical specifics of local and local

122 Fairclough, *Analysing Discourse*, p. 24.

123 Jäger, Siegfried. “Discourse and Knowledge,” p. 33.

124 Hall, *Cultural Studies* 1983, p. 122.

125 Lydia Liu, *Translingual Practice*; Dirlik, *Zhimin zhi hou?* (After colonialism?), esp. Chapters 2 and 3.

126 Zhang Zhen, *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen*; Hansen, “Fallen Women, Rising Stars, New Horizons.”

127 Zhang Zhen., *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen*, p. xxx.

128 *Ibid.*, pp. 30–31. For film experience as a sensual and affective embodiment, see also Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts*; Marks, *Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*; Hansen, *Cinema and Experience*; Elsaesser and Hagener, *Film Theory: An Introduction through the Senses*; Weihong Bao, *Fiery Cinema*.

129 Altman, *Global Sex*.

130 Other seminal studies on cultural translation, postcolonial hybridity, and cultural alterity that inform my study include Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*; Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*; Said, “Traveling Theory,” in *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, pp. 226–247; Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*; Shohat and Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism*; Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in*

discourses. Not only do queer representations negotiate with the available discourses, but those discourses evolve with *time*. In particular, *tongzhi*/queer movements have to varying degrees reconfigured the mindset of be(com)ing *tongzhi*/queer and thus in various ways influenced queer representations. Scholarship in Chinese and other local discourses voiced in Chinese are hence crucial to my research and analysis in each chapter, and I thoroughly integrate local histories and evolving discourses, avoiding ahistorical interpretations or over-generalizing theories. My overarching cultural studies methodology is thus characterized by a productive interdisciplinary approach and contextualization that highlights “historical contingencies and local specificities.”¹³¹

Book Structure

Though I set out to provide the “bigger picture” of queer representations in Chinese-language film and media, including as many individual film/media works as possible, the wealth of material and the speed at which new works appear puts this beyond the scope of a single monograph. My selection therefore supplements the current scholarship either by foregrounding some lesser-studied titles, or by addressing certain more familiar titles from new perspectives. The works in question are linked through the themes and discourses described above; I also refer to numerous other film/media titles where they are relevant to these themes, expanding their scope further. Each of the six chapters tackles one principal theme or discourse – Chinese familialism/filiality (Chapter 1), Chinese opera/melodrama (Chapter 2), mass camp and *tongzhi* camp (Chapters 3 and 4), lesbian and transgender documentary (Chapters 5 and 6) – largely in chronological order in accordance with the historical context. The chapters also form thematic pairs: Chapters 5 and 6 (Section III) trace the “documentary impulse,” Chapters 3 and 4 analyze “camp aesthetics” (Section II). Chapters 1 and 2 both deal with issues under direct influence by state politics, intersected by Chinese familialism; the first section: “Against Families, Against States,” thus provides the cultural and historical foundation for much that follows.

In Chinese societies in general, just as individual identities are ingrained in the familial-kinship system, so are Chinese *tongzhi*/queer subjects largely developed and imagined with regard to the familial. My opening chapter,

Late Twentieth Century; Chow, *Primitive Passions*; Shu-mei Shih, *Visuality and Identity*; Young, “Cultural Translation as Hybridisation”; Yiman Wang, *Remaking of Chinese Cinema*.

131 Chen Kuan-hsing (ed.), *Trajectories*, p. 4.



“The Chinese Queer Diasporic Imaginary,” examines the representation of queer subjects in relation to intersecting familial discourses, particularly filiality (*xiao*), familial-home (*jia*) and family-state in a Chinese cultural context. It offers a historical perspective on the discourse of filiality, along with a sketch of state-sanctioned cultural policy in martial-law-period Taiwan during the Cold War era. This survey is intended to counter the pitfall of cultural essentialism underpinning much discussion of the role of “filiality” in Chinese cultural settings. Against the hegemonic, official setup in Taiwan’s cultural field, a civil force was gradually taking shape on the margins, which eventually informed the modernist and nativist literary movements of the 1960s and 1970s, and eventually the New Cinema movement in the 1980s. This historical evaluation of Taiwan’s larger cultural field is the foundation for my analysis of *The Outcasts* (Yu Kan-ping, 1986). Based on Pai Hsien-yung’s novel *Niezi* (or *Crystal Boys*), the film contests “family-state” discourse both in its determination to make queer communities more visible and by integrating local and postcolonial perspectives into the narrative and setting. While the term “niezi” (literally “bad” son, unloved by his father) has been used of gay men since the mid-1980s, this chapter also examines an array of other tropes that have likewise contributed to a Taiwan-based Chinese queer diasporic imaginary. In particular, an intertextual approach to the folkloric character of Nezha informs my reading of Tsai Ming-liang’s “Taipei trilogy” of the 1990s, which – alongside a rethinking of the queer diaspora in recent years – concludes this chapter.

While the familial-kinship system comprises the foundation for Chapter 1 (and Chapter 4), Chapter 2 (and later Chapter 6), emphasize the influence of Chinese opera in queer representation. Moving from Taiwan to Mainland China, Chapter 2, “*Two Stage Sisters: Comrades, Almost a Love Story*,” investigates acclaimed director Xie Jin’s film classic (1965). Analyzing the film as political melodrama, on the one hand, on the other, the chapter pays special attention to the history of Shaoxing opera (or *Yueju*, *Yue* opera), which provides the backdrop for *Two Stage Sisters*. As a reflection on the history of the opera from the 1910s to around 1949, the film itself embodies the social history of the “Seventeen Years” (from the founding of PRC in 1949 to the onset of the Cultural Revolution in 1966), characterized by the promotion of socialist nation-building. Shaoxing opera was previously known for its all-women performances, but during the 1950s and 1960s a state-engineered effort saw actors integrated with the actresses on stage; the underlying theme of *Two Stage Sisters* translates this state intervention (against cross-dressing) into a narrative in which the overly (read “queerly”) invested life-force (*qing*) between the eponymous two stage sisters is redirected toward socialist



revolution. I contend that the parallel mechanism that both intervened in Shaoxing opera and also mediates the dynamic between the female characters is characteristically heteronormative. By foregrounding the historical context of the opera, in my queer reading of the film I aim to bring out the female homoeroticism barely muffled by the socialist agenda of the Seventeen Years. Importantly, my integration of the social history into the textual analysis serves as an alternative historiography, responding to and countering the ahistorical tendency of existing queer readings.

The following two chapters engage with the cultural translation of camp – a discourse admittedly originating in the West – in a Chinese cultural setting. Chapter 3, “Mass Camp in Contemporary Hong Kong Cinema,” delineates the socio-historical context particular to Hong Kong from the 1960s onward, laying the groundwork for understanding the diffusion of mass camp impulse among a populace characterized by a “self-conscious, often parodic attitude”¹³² toward the artifice of conventions, particularly those associated with art, dress, gendered behavior, and media representation. This chapter investigates the particular ways in which mass camp has informed and been informed by Hong Kong mainstream cinema since the 1970s. A crucial issue here is the intimate relationship between mass camp and the proliferating gender parodies of contemporary Hong Kong cinema, as epitomized by the sensational blockbuster *Swordsman II*. Chapter 3 also traces camp discourse in Hong Kong in general since the late 1970s. While I argue that this is chiefly “mass camp,” affiliated with mass culture, the 1990s witnessed the rise of another branch of camp discourse in Hong Kong and particularly Taiwan, discussed in Chapter 4.

This latter camp discourse can be labeled “*tongzhi* camp,” since it reflects upon the experience of being gay in Chinese societies. In Chapter 4, “Toward an Aesthetic of *Tongzhi* Camp,” I investigate the significance and articulation of *tongzhi* camp. After first unpacking the nebulous concept of “gay sensibility” in a Chinese cultural setting, alongside gay shame and gay melancholy, the chapter examines how a queer “structure of feeling” is transformed into camp expression in *Corner’s* (2001) and *Splendid Float* (2004), both directed by Zero Chou. Finally, this chapter analyzes the way camp is adopted and adapted by Tsai Ming-liang in *The Hole* (1998), where camp becomes a powerful implement for negotiating heteronormativity by playing on the mechanism of homosexual closet: there are no more homosexuals in sight, and yet homosexuality is *still out there*, imbricated in the film’s characteristically *tongzhi* camp audio-visual style.

132 Klinger, *Melodrama and Meaning*, p. 138.



Shifting the focus from Taiwan and Hong Kong to contemporary China, the final two chapters tackle queer issues in the new documentary film movement, particularly exploring how digital media help shape emerging local queer identities on a global scale. Chapter 5, “Coming out of *The Box*, *Lalas* with DV Cameras,” focuses on China’s first two documentaries on lesbian subjects: *The Box* (Ying Weiwei, 2001) and *Dyke March* (Shi Tou and Ming Ming, 2004). It examines the relationship of technique (particularly the use of digital video), and “objectivity” in documentary filmmaking, particularly the question of how we produce knowledge about social others. I argue that the knowledge/power scheme we see in *The Box* sits uneasily with some aspects of LGBTQ politics; in contrast, the more politically activist *Dyke March* shows the filmmakers’ great sensitivity and responsibility towards its subjects. More broadly, this chapter illustrates the developing trend for independent production in Chinese lesbian documentary filmmaking, emphasizing both collaboration and the specifics of communal identities.

My last chapter “Performing Gender, Performing Documentary in Post-socialist China,” likewise focuses on two DV documentaries: *Tang Tang* (Zhang Hanzi, 2004) and *Mei Mei* (Gao Tian, 2005). Each centers on a female impersonator and is marked by a concern with spatial parameters and geopolitics: *Mei Mei* elicits particular emotional investment in its subject, while *Tang Tang* is an experiment in form. I view *Tang Tang* through the realist aesthetic of *xianchang* (literally, on the scene) and the artistic effects of reflexivity, examining the ways in which the film blends fiction and documentary to draw attention to the openness of its queer subjects. The film itself I dub “performing documentary,” while the subject, Tangtang, “performs gender.” Meanwhile, taking into consideration the matrix of social, political, and economic conditions that inform individual subjectivities, *Mei Mei* can be read in terms of geopolitics. Here I explore the multilayered significance of female impersonation and the contexts of its expression. Finally, I consider how the cross-dressing subjects of both films negotiate their subjectivity in postsocialist China.

The epilogue readdresses the key ideas of the book and its thematic strands and interconnections, and concludes with the hope that future research will emerge from this monograph.

Note on Translation

Unless otherwise noted, all the translations in this book are mine. The pinyin system of romanization serves as the general rule. However, commonly



accepted spellings such as “Sun Yat-sen” and “Taipei” have been retained. In addition, for names I have adopted the spellings used by the authors and filmmakers themselves, such as novelist Pai Hsien-yung, critics Wen Tien-hsiang and Chou Wat-shan, as well as film directors Tsai Ming-liang, Tsui Hark and Wong Kar-wai.

