

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

Queerness and Chinese Modernity: The Politics of Reading Between East and East

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor  
of Philosophy

in

Literature

by

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Chapter Two, "Transgenderism as a Heuristic Device: On the Cross-historical and Transnational Adaptations of the *Legend of the White Snake*," in full, is forthcoming in *Transgender China*, Edited by Howard Chiang (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

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## **ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION**

Queerness and Chinese Modernity: The Politics of Reading Between East and East

by

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Doctor of Philosophy in Literature

University of California, San Diego, 2012

Professor Yingjin Zhang, Co-Chair

Professor Lisa Lowe, Co-Chair

*Queerness and Chinese Modernity* examines the explosion of alternative sexuality in the People's Republic of China (PRC), Taiwan, and Hong Kong. Drawing on methodologies in Chinese cultural studies, East Asian and area studies, and queer theory, I propose an inter-regional, East-East transnational approach that juxtaposes queer literature, films, new media, and cultural politics in the PRC alongside cultural productions in post-Martial Law (post-1987) Taiwan, and Hong Kong before and after the 1997 postcolonial handover. I locate particular dialectics of queer time and space that dislocate the multiple hegemonic forces of normative kinship, nationalism, transnational

capitalism, postmodern claustrophobia, and new forms of discipline and control in the convergence of old and new media.

Chapter 1 studies female writers like Chen Ran, Chen Xue and Huang Biyun who have all written narratives about “the family” that imagine lesbian subjectivity. I argue that these writers radically challenge the nationalist ideology of family’s cooptation under the state. Chapter 2 travels across time in order to study the transgendering of a misogynistic Ming dynasty folklore into modern genres of perverse femininity. I point to various modern adaptations of *The Legend of the White Snake* that rewrite gender regulatory divisions and provide cross-historical methods for reading transgender embodiments. In Chapter 3, I posit “inter-temporality” in wide-ranging filmic traditions and argue that non-normative gender embodiments mark productive sites for disrupting the homogeneous time of the nation.

Chapter 4 explores films by Yonfan, Cui Zi’en, and Tsai Ming-liang that provide sexual remapping of postmodern cities. I argue that “being in the closet” is crucially linked to the postmodern experience of claustrophobia. Chapter 5 demonstrates that new media can re-empower the state’s ability to track dissident sexual cultures while at the same time allow new possibility for redefining “the public sphere.” I draw on Foucault’s theory of the repressive hypothesis and Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of assemblage to theorize our contemporary age as “transmedia assemblage.” Through four case studies, I track the double bind of control and freedom in the age of media convergence. Overall, this dissertation locates vibrant queer transnational connections between multiple Chinese and Sinophone cultures.

# INTRODUCTION

## I. Manifesto

### 15 Theses on Queer Chinese Modernity

1. Queer Chinese modernity is a comparative project that questions existing categorical and cartographical divides between the East and West, the North and South.
2. Queer Chinese modernity understands that Chinese modernity has no origin and end, and any claim to originality has historically been a (hetero)sexualizing project for the nation.
3. Queer Chinese modernity haunts the very claim to “China” by putting the nation alongside competing nationality and regionalism through diasporic differences and Sinophone marginal articulations.
4. Chinese postsocialism, Taiwan neoliberalization, Hong Kong postcolonial regionalization, like queerness, are sites of contradiction.
5. Queer theory remains Eurocentric if it fails to engage with new critical forms of “area studies.”
6. Queering area studies’ imperialistic impulse is part of the project of understanding the uneven modernities in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Sinophone cultures.
7. Queer Chinese modernity can move beyond the provincializing impulse in postcolonial theory.
8. Queer Chinese modernity understands “Asia” as a critical method, as both a signifier of historical violence and enabling possibility for the future.

9. A queer engagement with “China” must also be a project of critiquing Chinese capitalism and its monstrous regionalization of Hong Kong and Taiwan.
10. Renaming queer as a form of social critique of existing power relations in “Asia” can be more productive than queer theory as a form of deconstructive identity politics. In other words, queer theory as deconstruction is only meaningful in its situatedness in sociality and world-making.
11. Queer Chinese modernity needs not “always contextualize” and “always historicize” for the non-specialists; queer China is *just as queer* as Euro-American queer theory.
12. Queer Chinese modernity contests universalist claims of “distant reading,” “literature for the planet,” or “untranslatability” because it understands the local as part of worldliness.
13. Queer Chinese modernity can be one of the many forms of doing queer of color critiques.
14. Queer Chinese transnationalism can frame the nation in meaningful relation to the region.
15. Forgoing, forgetting, and bracketing the “West” in queer theory can provide new points of comparisons for Chinese studies, queer theory, and Sinophone studies.

## **II. Queer China in (Un)translatability**

In his 2009 documentary film *Queer China*, “Comrade” China (誌同志), Cui Zi’en, China’s foremost spokesperson for LGBT and queer rights, describes the ongoing battle between the government and gay and lesbian film festival events in the capital.

When Cui tried to host the first Annual Gay and Lesbian Film Festival in 2001 at Peking University, authorities stormed in and stopped the event because the organizers “failed to obtain public license” after the third day of screening. The festival committee originally planned to host ten days of film screenings. Such a lame excuse is often the convenient measure for public authorities to shut down dissident cultures in China. Learning his lessons, Cui and his cohorts of queer Chinese activists found other ways to negotiate with state power and censorship. In subsequent years, they hosted the gay and lesbian film festivals in local cities while changing the event’s title to “*ku’er*” film festival. Such a renaming of identity markers from LGBT and queer in English was in fact a phenomenon that first emerged in Taiwan. In Cui’s case, he retranslates a Taiwanese transliteration of “queer/*ku’er*”<sup>1</sup> as “cool kid” and “bohemian culture” into his particular political strategy in mainland China, thus creolizing the English hegemonic origin of LGBT and queer while retranslating Taiwanese queer movement for his particular queer activist projects in the current postsocialist landscape. Similarly, the documentary uncovers some interesting phenomena happening in Beijing and coastal cities like Dalian: flying rainbow kites in open spaces and tourist spots like the Great Wall of China. Bing Lan, a community organizer interviewed in the documentary, comments that it is a “very Chinese way of celebrating pride” in absence of large-scale street celebration of Pride events in China. Here, the global queer sign of the rainbow becomes localized and infused with the “very Chinese” sign of the Great Wall of China.

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<sup>1</sup> For a concise genealogy of the various Chinese transliteration of LGBTQ identities into *tongxinglian* (homosexuality), *tongzhi* (neutral and non-pathological shorthand for gay and lesbian), *ku’er* and *guaitai*, see Section II of Chapter 1, 37-42.

Now, please bear with me as I take you from this incident of translating queer Chinese modernity to the subcultural site of urban queer consumerism, where the intricate moment of translatability and untranslatability collapses. During the summer of 2010, I traveled to Beijing to do research on LGBT and queer cultures in contemporary China. After meeting with a queer filmmaker and attending an event that chronicles gay and lesbian activism in China in the last ten years, put together by internationally funded NGOs in the city like Aizhixing and Aibai, I decided to take a break from research and try a more light-hearted version of research—I visited the only visible gay club in town, Destination. Destination is located in the Chaoyang district, a commercial and residential district where the Workers' Stadium is also located. While in my training as a scholar in queer theory I am very attentive to the critique of progressive LGBT politics in the U.S. as reinforcing Western imperialist claim of development and progress, it is almost inevitable that during such an excursion into the gay and lesbian club scene in China I would compare the place to those in the U.S. To my mind, almost everything seems the same. Except that walking in requires locking any additional personal items like backpacks, purses, and so on, people seem to enjoy a good time there and dance to the latest pop offerings from Lady Gaga. Moreover, with the moderate price of 60 RMB, the entrance fee includes a free drink from the bartender. I decided to order the most expensive item on the drink menu in order to “fully immerse” in this subcultural space. The bartender returned with a drink that looks almost like a martini but not quite. With blue milky stuff in it, he went on to light a fire on the top of the drink that tastes lurk warm and strong. When I complained to my bartender that I never had such warm drink



in the past, he told me that “this is how it should be done” and just enjoy it. I gladly gave in and had a good night.

In retrospect, this untranslatable moment of surprise and the less-than-satisfying taste of the blue martini captures a queer culture that, while confirming certain arguments about the arrival of “global gayness” from the Western “global gaze” toward the rest of the world,<sup>2</sup> also produces its own course of neoliberal incoherence and tendencies that are situated at the interstices between the easily translatable signs of global queerness and untranslatability of various markers of the local and the translocal. *Queerness and Chinese Modernity* demonstrates that translation failures permeate the entire project of mapping transnational sexuality, and that sexual comparisons across the globe, or at least across the Asia Pacific, can take on more challenging tasks that move radically beyond traditionally construed methods of comparisons between East and West, and North and South. This is not to deny the continual relevance of East-West comparison that defines the fields of Chinese cultural studies and comparative literature; rather, my project maps alternative ways of articulating transcultural differences and methodologies for tracking “sexualities on the move” in order to capture national-to-national exchanges and national-to-regional processes of queer cultural representations that a method of East-East transnationalism can better account for. In a work that comprises studies of feminist literary rewriting of kinship, transnational and cross-historical reading of transgenderism and adaptation, claustrophobic postmodern sexual spaces in the global cities of Hong Kong, Beijing, and Taipei, queer temporality through the rupture of the time of the

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<sup>2</sup> Dennis Altman, “On Global Queering,” *Australian Humanities Review* 2 (July-August 1996) <<http://www.australianhumanitiesreview.org/archive/Issue-July-1996/altman.html>>. Accessed March 30, 2012.

nation, and the rethinking of old and new media in the re-disciplining of queer sex, I demonstrate that studies in Chinese modernity, area studies, queer theory, and Sinophone studies can speak in closer proximity to one another. The result can lead to the rethinking of existing paradigms of translation, comparison, scale, time, and space. So instead of confining my study to the disciplines of Chinese literature, Chinese film studies, literary studies, and new media studies, this work also offers an interventionary politics that reorders and infuses the gaps between comparative literature, queer theory, area studies, and transnational studies.

### **III. Chinese Modernity Across the National and the Transnational Divides**

Of course, the imperative to transnationalize the field of Chinese cultural studies has been practiced among scholars for quite some times, and the invocation of East-East transnationalism here considerably builds on the comparative approach to Chinese literature and culture, translingual modernity, and revisionist theoretical take on the global shape of Chinese modernity in the late Qing and Republican eras. Specifically, Lydia Liu's work on "translingual practice" shows that Chinese modernity is one of "translated modernity" in which concepts like "culture," "modern" and "democracy" were translated from Anglo-European sources, to Japanese, and back to Chinese in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Imploring theorists on Chinese modernity to move beyond East-West paradigm, which often assumes that the native non-West constitutes automatic sites of resistance and the West as a source of domination, Liu asks, "Rather than continuing to argue about tradition and modernity as essential categories, one is

compelled to ask: How do twentieth-century Chinese *name* the condition of their existence?”<sup>3</sup>

Despite Liu’s provocation to overcome the theoretical deadlock that views Chinese texts as self-contained cultural representation and Western theory and concepts as antithetical to Chinese reality, skepticism still runs deep among scholars of modern Chinese literature on the status of “theory” and its relationship to Chinese contexts, which of course my own project on queering Chinese modernity is implicated in. In this regard, Yingjin Zhang’s call to “practice a critical, theoretically informed reading of Chinese literature and culture” cannot be more timely.<sup>4</sup> He argues that area studies specialists’ outright rejection of Western theory on the one hand, and theorists who mindlessly apply theory to the Chinese texts without deep regards for the materialist aspects of Chinese culture simply reproduce the continual conflict between “Chinese text” vs. “Western theory.” Bypassing these blind spots in an effort to re-envision the field, Zhang proposes a broader set of studies termed “Chinese comparative literature and cultural studies” that “favors ‘Chineseness’ as a cultural rather than ethnic, national, or political reference point.”<sup>5</sup> Zhang’s call for framing the question of Chineseness as cultural that is irreducible to the singularity of ethnicity, nationality, and politics also raises another important question: how does one practice Chinese cultural studies in relational terms to the political? What is the relationship between the textual and the political when situated

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<sup>3</sup> Lydia H. Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 28.

<sup>4</sup> Yingjin Zhang, “Introduction: Engaging Chinese Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies,” in *China in a Polycentric World: Essays in Chinese Comparative Literature*, ed. Yingjin Zhang (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 9.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

in various epochs of Chinese modernities (late Qing modernity, Republican China, postsocialism, and post-New Era/post-1989 China)?

On this question between the textual, the representational, and the sociopolitical, critics diverge on their methodologies with regard to the place of cultural politics. Xiaobing Tang takes a more literary approach that views Chinese modernity as the mediation and play between two thematic focuses: the heroic and the quotidian everyday life. Tang writes, “The dialectics of the heroic and the quotidian, which I pursue here as an interpretive framework, describe an embedded structure of ambivalence, whereby the maelstrom of modernity is understood both to stir in us passions for a utopian future and to make us long for a fulfilling everyday life that is however constantly postponed.”<sup>6</sup> While Tang’s work displays a more thematic concern that contains the dialectics of modernity, Xudong Zhang’s intervention in Chinese modernism and modernity in the 1980s Cultural Fever and 1990s post-New Era (post-Tiananmen Square) is more invested in the dialectical relationship and interplay between the cultural and the political, thus opening up numerous possibilities for alternative readings of culture. Drawing on Walter Benjamin, Zhang reads the dialectic as a “standstill” that contains within it both the possibility of utopia and reification. For him, “this alternative or possibility is rooted in the incompleteness, messiness, and openness of Chinese modernity, in its puzzling relationship, on the one hand, to a tradition still lingering in an arguably modern state

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<sup>6</sup> Xiaobing Tang, *Chinese Modern: The Heroic and the Quotidian* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 1.

power and everyday sphere and, on the other hand, to the postmodern global institutions not yet fully internalized by its local experience.”<sup>7</sup>

The messiness of Chinese modernity in 1980s China that witnessed the turn to Cultural Fever, in which trendy theoretical concepts of deconstruction and postmodernism were feverishly received by intellectuals in China had, by 1990s post-Tiananmen Square China, transformed into a market-driven economy sitting at the highway of finance capitalism. However, even in his subsequent work on postsocialist China, Zhang cautions against a readily misconceived notion that China has become fully postmodern and post-industrialized. If 1980-1990s capitalist postsocialist China marks the negation of socialist modernity, then the stark contradiction in culture, economy, and liberalization vs. repression in politics points equally to the negation of modernity in the so-called postsocialist China. Putting theoretical pressure on the question of cultural politics and Chinese modernity, Zhang argues that “Chinese postmodernism, as both a cultural vision and a social ideology, is intertwined with a Chinese experience for which neither socialism nor capitalism as we know it seems to provide satisfactory answers.”<sup>8</sup> While focusing on a different period of Republican China, Shu-mei Shih’s work on semicolonialism and its uneven literary inflections also grapples with the contradiction in defining Chinese modernity culturally and historically. She writes, “I choose to use ‘semicolonialism’ to describe the cultural and political condition in modern China to foreground the multiple, layered, intensified, as well as incomplete and fragmentary

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<sup>7</sup> Xudong Zhang, *Chinese Modernism in the Era of Reforms: Cultural Fever, Avant-garde Fiction, and the New Chinese Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 27-28.

<sup>8</sup> Xudong Zhang, *Postsocialism and Cultural Politics: China in the Last Decade of the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 167.

nature of China's colonial structure.”<sup>9</sup> Significantly building on Liu's work on translingual modernity, Shih shows that Chinese intellectuals in the Republican era are caught between both the colonial power of Japan and the various imperial contacts with Western power. Modernism then marks the literary effect of multi-layered relationality in which Japan Orientalizes Chinese culture even as it is itself the object of Orientalism by the West. So that while Shih focuses on East-West comparison, she also makes a claim about East-East transcolonial encounters in the making of Chinese modernity.

Perhaps the latest work on “globalizing Chinese literature and culture” speaks in even closer proximity to the kind of East-East transnational methodology that I deploy here. In particular, Shu-mei Shih's recent work on Sinophone culture argues that “Chinese” is a linguistic category tied to nativism and essentialism that denies the many different sounds of “other” Sino-Tibetan languages, including Cantonese, Hakka and Minnan dialects in Taiwan, and Baba Malay in Chinese communities in Malaysia. The Sinophone, operating at the margin of Chineseness, denotes “a network of places of cultural production outside China and on the margins of China and Chineseness, where a historical process of heterogenizing and localizing of continental Chinese culture has been taking place for several centuries.”<sup>10</sup> Jing Tsu and David Der-wei Wang's collaborative work on “global Chinese literature” is closely tied to the concept of the Sinophone; however, their positions provide a balanced rejoinder to Shih's emphasis on the Sinophone as a marginal politics against China as the center. They refine the term: “‘Sinophone,’ depending on the definition, excludes or includes mainland China as a

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<sup>9</sup> Shu-mei Shih, *The Lure of the Modern: Writing Modernism in Semicolonial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 34.

<sup>10</sup> Shu-mei Shih, *Visuality and Identity: Sinophone Articulations Across the Pacific* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 4

focus of analysis. In the case of exclusion, the priority of analysis lies with developing a critical network of minority discourses. Inclusion entails a reworking of the lineage of modern Chinese literature as a solely mainland phenomenon.”<sup>11</sup> Jing Tsu’s own work on debunking and de-naturalizing the assumed links between sound and script of the Chinese language and between one’s ethnicity and “mother tongue” further shows that literary governance sits at the core of the linguistic and cultural production of Chineseness as such. “This opens up other possibilities for analyzing identity itself—along with all its attendant concepts of nativism, nostalgia, nationalism, and ‘Chineseness’—as a situational proxy for manipulating linguistic capital.”<sup>12</sup>

This recent turn to interrogate the very assumed link between ethnicity, nationality, place, language, and essentialism can provide one venue to raise the question of why Chineseness and queerness are mutually constitutive. If Chineseness cannot afford to repress and contain its many performative differences that are only produced over certain reiterative acts over time (like gender performativity), then it becomes evident that the very project of unmaking and refining Chinese modernity is also one of queering Chineseness itself; furthermore, if queer theory is internal to the project of Chinese modernity itself (at least on the theoretical level), we need to thoroughly inquire how the making and narratives of modern Chinese nationalism and transnationalism may coincide with and become complicit with projects of heterosexualizing and systems of heteronormativity. If Chinese modernity needs the de-territorializing impulse of queerness, so can queerness benefit more from the de-centered critiques of Chinese

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<sup>11</sup> Jing Tsu and David Der-wei Wang, “Introduction: Global Chinese Literature,” in *Global Chinese Literature*, ed. Jing Tsu and David Der-wei Wang (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010), 6.

<sup>12</sup> Jing Tsu, *Sound and Script in Chinese Diaspora* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 13.

modernities in particular and Inter-Asia cultural studies in the broadest sense in order to further provincialize the field in the evermore important task of “globalizing” queer studies.

#### IV. Provincializing Queer Theory

The desire to “globalize” queer theory and the emergence of what has come to be known as “transnational sexuality studies” largely results from the new objects of studies by scholars whose scholarly alliances are not based primarily in “sexuality studies” but draw on their work in ethnic studies, women of color feminism, and postcolonial studies.<sup>13</sup> This does not mean that theorists whose work is often traced as the “foundation” (however problematic this term would be to queer theory) of queer theory are not attentive to race, transnational feminism, and the geopolitics of location. In fact, Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* and its prominent deconstruction of the category of “woman” draws significantly from the work of Chandra Talpade Mohanty.<sup>14</sup> In Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s *Epistemology of the Closet* and her subsequent work, she maintains that lesbian and gay theorists and artists of color “whose sexual self-definition includes ‘queer’ ...are using the leverage of ‘queer’ to do a new kind of justice to the fractal

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<sup>13</sup> For some of the initial call to study transnational sexualities, see Elizabeth A. Povinelli and George Chauncey, “Thinking Sexuality Transnationally: An Introduction,” *GLQ* 5.4 (1999):439-450, and Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, “Global Identities: Theorizing Transnational Studies of Sexuality,” *GLQ* 7.4 (2001):663-679. However, one can already mark the emergence of scholarship that interrogates the interlocking power relations between nationalist heterosexuality, global capitalism, and heteronormativity in earlier work in postcolonial studies that critically includes sexuality as a focus of analysis. In some ways, this strand of scholarship can be read as doing “queer of color critique” and transnational sexuality studies before the term emerges in queer theory. See M. Jacqui Alexander, “Erotic Autonomy as a Politics of Decolonization: An Anatomy of Feminist and State Practice in the Bahamas Tourist Economy,” in *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, and Democratic Futures*, ed. M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty (New York: Routledge, 1997), 63-100.

<sup>14</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), 5,18.



intricacies of language, skin, migration, state.”<sup>15</sup> But Butler and Sedgwick’s acknowledgements of the crucial aspects of race, class, gender, and nationalist formations to the studies of queer performativity do not necessarily mean that these modes of sociality have become critical agenda for queer theorizing in the early 1990s either. Part of the resistance to comprehend the concreteness of sociality shaped by intersectional identities as well as the mutually constitutive aspects of identity politics has to do with the very denaturalizing and destabilizing force that works under the rubric of “queer.” Annamarie Jagose, in her reflective definition of queer theory in the mid-1990s, also privileges the destabilizing deconstructive impulse of queer theory over its possible alliance with critical race theory, transnational feminism, and women of color feminism. She writes, “Since queer does not assume for itself any specific materiality or positivity, its resistance to what it differs from is necessarily relational rather than oppositional.”<sup>16</sup>

While it is perfectly fine to frame queer theory as relational method that resists clear oppositions to predetermined sociality and objects of studies, its reluctance to theorize racialized modernity and the global restructuring of race, gender, and class precisely at the peak moment of global capitalism bespeaks equal *opposition* to intersectional models of analysis. As a result, various theoretical models challenge the Eurocentricism of queer theory. Queer of color critique and queer diaspora studies are two major ones. Roderick Ferguson argues, “Queer of color analysis can build on the idea that capital produces emergent social formations that exceed the racialized boundaries of gender and sexual ideals... At the same time, queer of color critique can and must

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<sup>15</sup> See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), and her *Tendencies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 9.

<sup>16</sup> Annamarie Jagose, *Queer Theory: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 98.

challenge the idea that those social formations represent the pathologies of modern society.”<sup>17</sup> By implicating and critiquing the nation and capitalist formation as that which produce and pathologize queer and racialized subjects, Ferguson argues that both racialization and sexuality are constitutive of, instead of simply intersecting with, one another.

Parallel to Ferguson’s work is Siobhan Somerville’s theoretical juxtaposition in which the invention of homosexuality is framed in queer relational terms to the birth of scientific racism in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>18</sup> If Ferguson’s queer of color intervention is directed at the collusion of canonical sociology of race, Marxism, and liberalism and Somerville’s at conventionally received account that separates sexology from race, Jose Munoz’s work on queer of color performance politics through the theory of disidentification argues that minoritarian queer of color subjects do not simply resist and give in to white dominant practices of looking and interpellations; rather, they work out a third mode of partial agency that both works on and against the public sphere.<sup>19</sup> With similar impact, David L. Eng’s study on Asian American men’s racial castration in their inclusion in racialized citizenship in the U.S. points to the ways U.S. structures of citizenship sexualize and racialize Asian American men differently in psychic and social

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<sup>17</sup> Roderick A. Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 11.

<sup>18</sup> Siobhan B. Somerville, *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 15-38.

<sup>19</sup> Jose Esteban Munoz, *Disidentification: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

terms, an account that helps us critically mark “the return of race to psychoanalysis, and the return of psychoanalysis to race.”<sup>20</sup>

While Ferguson, Somerville, Munoz, and Eng’s work more squarely locate at the intersection of queer studies and various strands of critical race theory, at the same time, a queer diaspora approach also emerges to question the U.S. as the proper ontological study for queer theory. Scholars invested in the “queer diaspora” approach question claims about nationalistic ethnic and gender authenticity in diasporic communities in the global North as well as the “global gay” thesis by Dennis Altman. David L. Eng opens the debate about the politics of location in queer studies instead of assuming the direction of queer cultural flows from the West to the non-West. Envisioning queer studies from within Asian American studies, Eng asks, “How does Asian American queerness function not just in terms of identities but in terms of locations?”<sup>21</sup> Eng’s project of moving away from a narrowed U.S. and heteronormative basis of Asian American project leads to emerging studies that rethink queerness through the lens of diaspora studies, a new kind of diaspora studies that refuses what Stuart Hall sees as the problem of the “backward-looking conception of diaspora” that inevitably reproduces heterosexual nationalism.<sup>22</sup> In particular, Gayatri Gopinath highlights the use of queer diaspora by attesting to how the diasporic and the queer are marked as “inauthentic” and impure subjects within discourses of Hindu nationalism and organic heterosexuality respectively. She states, “If

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<sup>20</sup> David L. Eng, *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 13.

<sup>21</sup> David L. Eng, “Out Here and Over There: Queerness and Diaspora in Asian American Studies,” *Social Text* 52/53 (Winter 1997):31-52, 43.

<sup>22</sup> Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” in *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 392-403, 401.

within heteronormative logic the queer is seen as the debased and inadequate copy of the heterosexual, so too is diaspora within nationalist logic positioned as the queer Other of the nation, its inauthentic imitation.”<sup>23</sup> And in his study of diasporic Filipino gay men in New York City, Martin F. Manalansan IV refuses to read the 1969 Stonewall event as the only spatial-temporal historical starting point to measure his informants’ queerness; instead, he shows how these urban Filipino gay men invoke the performance of *bakla*, which cultivates an alternative mode of queer modernity that “emphasizes dignity and attempts at verisimilitude.”<sup>24</sup> Manalansan IV situates his project within a “new queer studies” that is located within “the intersection of established disciplines and formerly marginalized terrain of the American academy such as ethnic studies, postcolonial studies, women’s studies, and gay and lesbian studies.”<sup>25</sup>

To the extent that the new queer studies is situated at the more critical strands of American studies and ethnic studies, a project that examines the intra-regional cultural politics of alternative sexuality within the theoretically strategic locations we call “Asia,” “East Asia,” “China,” “Greater China,” and the Sinophone will necessarily raise new set of methodological and theoretical questions: If the queering of racial formation within the U.S. and the critique of Western narrative of global gay modernity by the new queer studies have moved queer theory in new critical directions that include and even welcome transnational approaches, how can area studies or even China studies reshape queer theory, and vice versa? Here, my task is less to make “queer Chinese modernity” or

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<sup>23</sup> Gayatri Gopinath, *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 11.

<sup>24</sup> Martin F. Manalansan IV, *Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men in the Diaspora* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 33.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 6.

“queer Asia” the newest, better, or more critical, objects of study; the aim is rather to build on existing scholarship in queer of color and queer diaspora studies in order to map out new methods of studying transnational queer lives both within and across the borders of the nation states, between regional formations and beyond East-West comparativism. In what follows, I argue that “queering area studies” through what I term East-East transnationalism can provide new vocabularies for the fields of Chinese cultural studies, queer theory, and transnational studies as well as redefine and enrich theory of translation in comparative literature. Some questions are crucial here: What were some historical assumptions in the formation of the field of area studies that might have prevented the emergence of a “queer area studies?” In addition, how do recent works on sexuality within China studies challenge that early formation?

## V. Queering Area Studies

Area studies is less embraced or even seems suspicious in its relationship to queer theory largely due to imperialistic impulse of the field and its complicity with U.S. cold war politics in the late 1940s. Specifically, Tani Barlow points out that “neither colonialism nor imperialism has been considered a truly core or legitimate problematic for U.S. Asian studies as a field of knowledge.”<sup>26</sup> Rey Chow even makes the more provocative claim that the co-emergence of the dropping of the atomic bombs at the end of WWII and area studies means that “these regions took on the significance of target fields—fields of information retrieval and dissemination that were necessary for the

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<sup>26</sup> Tani E. Barlow, “Introduction: On ‘Colonial Modernity,’” in *Formations of Colonial Modernity in East Asia*, ed. Tani E. Barlow (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 4.

perpetuation of the United States' political and ideological hegemony."<sup>27</sup> More importantly, the occlusion or "writing out" of colonialism in early area studies relies on specific metaphor of biologically deterministic view of sexuality. Barlow remarks, "In a natural-social scientific continuum, structural 'adaptation' and cultural 'absorption' exonerated the scientist from considering the means of domination. That is my ultimate point. When postwar China studies reconfigured itself in natural scientific terms it could suggest that natural selection operated geopolitically."<sup>28</sup> Barlow argues that when sexuality and reproduction are linked to the "reproductive" and evolutionary capacity of the Chinese nation, imperialism is justified in the name of modernizing China. Yet, Barlow's observation on the reproductive logics in her critique of colonial modernity still leaves non-reproductive and queer forms of human subjectivities unexamined. If the conceptual framework is critically anchored through the developmental narrative of sex and modern science in which China is read as in need of evolution, how do non-normative sexuality and homosexuality configure in the historic moment of Chinese modernity during the Republican period? And how does that period bear on later emergence of *tongzhi*, *ku'er*, and other queer discourses since the 1990s in China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan?

Recent work by literary critics and historians on sexuality in the Republican era demonstrates that colonialism does not simply rely on sexual biological logics of natural selection, but it is also productive in the Foucauldian sense of creating, disseminating,

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<sup>27</sup> Rey Chow, *The Age of the World Target: Self-referentiality in War, Theory, and Comparative Work* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 39.

<sup>28</sup> Tani E. Barlow, "Colonialism's Career in Postwar China Studies," in *Formations of Colonial Modernity in East Asia*, ed. Tani E. Barlow (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 380.

and translating new modes of sexual knowledge, including homosexuality and non-reproductive sexuality. Specifically, Tze-lan Deborah Sang points out that the term *tongxing ai* (same-sex love) emerged first in late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century through the translation of European sexology to Japanese source, and finally into Chinese terms.<sup>29</sup> Historian Wenqing Kang extends Sang's reading of the translation of homosexuality by showing how competing discourses of male same-sex relationships were inextricable to a semi-colonial China that confronted claims about national backwardness, often figured in terms of deviant sexualities. Kang argues that sexual categories like *pi* (obsession), *renyao* (freak, human prodigy) were part of the multiplicity of sexual discourses about deviance and national strength as "they were understood as pathological, socially and politically disruptive, and detrimental to the survival of the nation."<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, Howard Chiang points out that even Western sexological discourses were themselves incoherent and produced different styles of reasoning when transplanted to Republican China. He argues that Republican sexology discourse on sexual deviance emerged in the fashion of "epistemic modernity" in which a new "style of reasoning" about homosexuality was developed in the regime of truthful confessions in Zhang Jingsheng's work and Freudian psychoanalysis through the work of sexologist Pan Guangdan.<sup>31</sup> If these works on homosexuality and gender variance in the Republican period (1912-1949) collectively demonstrate the possibility of accounting for a richer cultural history on nationalism and sexuality within conditions of colonial modernity, scholars who work on

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<sup>29</sup> Tze-lan D. Sang, *The Emerging Lesbian: Female Same-Sex Desire in Modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 99-126.

<sup>30</sup> Wenqing Kang, *Obsession: Male Same-Sex Relations in China, 1900-1950* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009), 39.

<sup>31</sup> Howard Chiang, "Epistemic Modernity and the Emergence of Homosexuality in China," *Gender & History* 22.3 (2010): 629-657.

sexuality studies in the more recent contexts of the 1990s point to another fruitful direction for queering Chinese studies.

In addition to Sang's studies on lesbian representations and Kang's study on Republican male same-sex relations, Fran Martin argues that neither the globalization discourse of "global gayness" or an idealist position of absolute local particularism and native difference can account for the hybrid processes in which Euro-American queer politics and theory were hybridized into discourses of *tongzhi* (gay and lesbian), *ku'er* (queer/cool kid), and *guaitai* (strange womb) in 1990s Taiwanese queer cultures.<sup>32</sup> In addition to Song Hwee Lim's first book-length study on representations of male homosexuality in Chinese cinemas,<sup>33</sup> Helen Hok-sze Leung's study on Hong Kong queer cultures makes a correlated argument that "contemporary queer culture in Hong Kong is paradigmatic of the city's postcolonial experience."<sup>34</sup> Leung suggests that because Hong Kong gay and lesbian subjects often find themselves trapped in the cultural contradiction of the lack of legal protection in the political sphere and the surprising long tradition of gender variance in cultural history, queer representations are often figured in the mode of "undercurrents" that depict "queer identities through a 'glass closet'—that is, as open secrets."

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<sup>32</sup> Fran Martin, *Situating Sexualities: Queer Representation in Taiwanese Fiction, Film and Public Culture* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003), 23.

<sup>33</sup> Song Hwee Lim, *Celluloid Comrades: Representations of Male Homosexuality in Contemporary Chinese Cinemas* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006).

<sup>34</sup> Helen Hok-sze Leung, *Undercurrents: Queer Culture and Postcolonial Hong Kong* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2008), 5.



Following Lisa Rofel's pioneering work on gay male cultural citizenship in postsocialist China that is marked by the internal contradictions *within* China itself,<sup>35</sup> more work has continued to expand the transnational explorations of gay male Chinese homosexuality. In particular, Travis S. K. Kong uses a sociological and multi-site based research to map three dimensions of transnationality: transformation, translation, and transgression as gay men identify themselves as *membra* (shorthand for the English word "member"), golden boy (Oriental view of gay Asian men in London), and money boys in Hong Kong, London, and the PRC.<sup>36</sup> Hans Tao-Ming Huang's recent work is an ambitious project of mapping how the KMT government in Taiwan has biopolitically managed both prostitution and non-normative sexualities since its takeover of the island from 1950s onwards; he shows how recent state feminism that aims to sanctify of goals of feminism in Taiwan into strictly domestic concerns of the equality for housewives actually erases the history of state's discipline of all queer sexuality and in fact, ignores the restricting of sexual order in Taiwan in the contemporary moment.<sup>37</sup>

As this brief review of recent work that concerns "queer Chinese modernity" in the PRC, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and their various diasporas demonstrates, most scholarly energy has been devoted to the excavation of how Republican modern China translates homosexual discourses into questions about the health of the nation itself; while scholarship on 1990s queer Chinese cultures has mainly taken a strictly national or regional approach, with main focuses on queer cultures in Taiwan (Martin, Huang), Hong

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<sup>35</sup> Lisa Rofel, *Desiring China: Experiments in Neoliberalism, Sexuality, and Public Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 85-110.

<sup>36</sup> Travis S.K. Kong, *Chinese Male Homosexualities: Memba, Tongzhi and Golden Boy* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011).

<sup>37</sup> Hans Tao-Ming Huang, *Queer Politics and Sexual Modernity in Taiwan* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2011).

Kong (Leung), and China (Rofel). Other studies that include more than one nation or region often employ a single disciplinary approach such as literary studies (Sang), film studies by director (Song), or sociology (Kong). While there is good reason to maintain China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the Sinophone worlds as distinct national and regional categories for the purpose of analysis, this approach also may overlook unlikely coalitions, alliances, and even affinities between literary texts, films, and new media cultural productions. That is not to undermine the significance of the previous scholarship on queer and LGBT cultures in various Chinese and Sinophone cultures. Collectively, they *queer* area studies' foundational premise on biological natural selection theory as the alibi of national and international post-cold war politics while, at the same time, radically shaken queer studies' continual reliance on narrating queer lives within the developmental modernity of the global North.

At the same time, given the significant work already done in the field to excavate queer Chinese cultures in disciplinary, national, and regional frameworks, this is the ripe moment to go beyond the national or strictly regional model in order to map East-East transnational connections across the multiple times and spaces of Chinese and Sinophone cultures. My turn to East-East transnationalism draws from revisionist work on critical East Asian history and new comparative queer methodology in anthropology in order to probe the usefulness these new approaches can provide for transnational cultural studies in China studies and queer theory. While most works in Chinese film studies do include research on the PRC, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and their diasporas, often times these books tend to break down their coverage by regional and national models neatly into chapters

and sections.<sup>38</sup> Literary studies is further bounded by the singular national and regional models, as ample studies on modern Chinese literature vs. Taiwan modernism can attest to.<sup>39</sup> While nationalist and regional approaches work for canonical and broadly accessible cultural productions, for minority cultural productions like gay, lesbian and queer films and literature, such an approach actually becomes confining and misses the opportunity to connect queer readers who may derive pleasures from reading and watching gay and lesbian literatures and films outside of the geographical confines of either China, Hong Kong, or Taiwan. Against the utilitarianism and neatness of national and regional studies I provide my rejoinder for intra-national, inter-regional, East-East transnationalism.

## **VI. Toward East-East Transnationalism**

East-East transnationalism emerges as early as in 16<sup>th</sup> century Sino-centric tributary system in silver trade network between various tributary states toward China, the Middle Kingdom. As Takeshi Hamashita suggests, this view would redraw our Western-centric conceptual framework of modernity from core-to-peripheral states to a view of multiple modern capitalist eras before the consolidation of British colonial empires in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>40</sup> This “before Western hegemony” view is also echoed in the

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<sup>38</sup> An example would be Yomi Braester’s new book, *Painting the City Red: Chinese Cinema and the Urban Contract* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), which separates the study of city in Chinese cinema by mainland and Taiwan, while skipping Hong Kong altogether.

<sup>39</sup> The first study that employs a cartographical method and regional approach to modern Chinese literature remains C.T. Hsia, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971); strictly regional approach that utilizes more cultural studies and cultural history methodologies include Sung-sheng Yvonne Chang, *Modernism and the Nativist Resistance: Contemporary Chinese Fiction from Taiwan* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993); June Yip, *Envisioning Taiwan: Fiction, Cinema, and the Nation in the Cultural Imaginary* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); and Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China, 1930-1945* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

<sup>40</sup> Takeshi Hamashita, *China, East Asia and the Global Economy: Regional and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Linda Grove and Mark Selden (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 12-26.

work of Janet L. Abu-Lughod.<sup>41</sup> Another approach that evinces the East-East emphasis for the study of modern China is Meng Yue's study on the internal dynamics of socio-cultural shifts, accounting for the decline of Qing dynasty after the Taiping Rebellion (1851-1864) as the condition of possibility for the emergence of Shanghai as a prime site of modernity. Bracketing modernity as a field of dynamic shifts within China itself and rejecting traditional historiography that privileges contacts with the West as origin of Chinese modernity, Meng Yue argues, "The great shift of culture and society from Jiangnan to the coast turned the Qing Empire inside out, and its core became the periphery, even the frontier, of defense...As a cultural center, Shanghai was neither a product of sheer Western modernity nor a result of pure Asian capitalism. Its birth as a modern metropolis embodied the crisis-driven historical trajectory of the Qing after the eighteenth century."<sup>42</sup>

An alternative approach to non-Western queer modernity can provincially bracket the auto-referential "West" in order to excavate modern forms of gay, lesbian, and non-heterosexual commercial cultures that arrived coevally, or even before, the rise of gay and lesbian movement in the West in the late 1960s. Peter Jackson's recent study on gay magazine cultures and cruising terminology in 1930-50s Thailand is one that emphasizes the relatively nationalist formation of gay markets and commerce before the infiltration of Western capitalism and tourist industry in Thailand.<sup>43</sup> In this way, East-East transnationalism is not meant to deny the deep influences by Western capitalism and

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<sup>41</sup> Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D.1250-1350* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

<sup>42</sup> Meng Yue, *Shanghai and the Edges of Empire* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), xix.

<sup>43</sup> Peter Jackson, "Capitalism and Global Queering: National Markets, Parallels among Sexual Cultures, and Multiple Queer Modernities," *GLQ* 15.3 (2009):357-395.

colonial modernity in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and places in East Asia that have been unevenly affected by semicolonialism, or by multiple colonial influences in the case of Taiwan. Rather, an East-East transnational framework directs us to the kinetic media and cultural flows that are reshaping “Chinese” culture in the contemporary era; at the same time, it uncovers what Inderpal Grewal terms “transnational connectivities”<sup>44</sup> that would otherwise be seen as unconnected or unrelated. Of course, this “rescaling” of transnational cultural studies compels us to theorize the stake of “comparison” in the three fields that are implicated in the project of comparativism: Chinese studies, queer studies, and comparative literature, as well as the problematic of time and space that are being “queered” and rescaled in new directions for a more critical comparative project of queer theory.

The work of Emily Apter, Gayatri Spivak, and Wai-chee Dimock comprise three most ambitious efforts for rethinking our habitual ways of comparison that can provide useful protocols for thinking queer Chinese modernity. On the one hand, Apter proceeds in a classic deconstructive move by arguing that translation in comparative literature works on both ends: utter untranslatability and immediate technological translatability. Pointing to examples of the will to translation in military zone and the danger of linguicide for unknown Algerian writers in the global marketplace, she suggestively claims that “everything is translatable” while “nothing is translatable.”<sup>45</sup> Spivak calls for a critical utility of area studies in order to pluralize Asia and to rethink Asia as

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<sup>44</sup> Inderpal Grewal, *Transnational America: Feminisms, Diasporas, Neoliberalisms* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 3.

<sup>45</sup> Emily Apter, *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

imaginative plurality.<sup>46</sup> Wai-chee Dimock is perhaps the most ambitious in her attempt to rethink world literature as “literature for the planet.” She shows how world literature can move past the nationalist homogenous readership of Benedict Anderson’s model in order to think about how contemporary writers and readers often connect deeply to ancient ones in diachronic, and even, transhistorical ways. Because literature can and often does outlive the life of the nation and region, it “brings into play a different set of temporal and spatial coordinates. It urges on us the entire planet as a unit of analysis.”<sup>47</sup> While Apter’s deconstructive lexicon of maintaining both “everything is translatable” and “nothing is translatable” describes the disorganized flow of global literary marketplace and the technological will to translate cultural heterogeneity into homogeneous information across time and place, the former statement as applied to queer Chinese cultures may reproduce the global gay cultural imperative to translate everything into the universal self-image of Euro-American queerness; whereas the latter statement of untranslatability may reduce non-Western sexual and gender formations into mere particularism of the “other” native and local cultures, thus denying the West’s possible and ethical encounters with the other. Dimock’s framework to study the relation between the reader and texts across deep time and space that examines the durations of the planet is certainly one that I take up in Chapter 2, where I examine the cross-historical adaptations and changing articulations of transgender in rewriting the transphobic meaning of *renyao* as a gender binary term; however, Dimock’s move to take on the entire planet as unit of analysis may

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<sup>46</sup> See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), and her *Other Asias* (Malden: Blackwell, 2008), 8, 217.

<sup>47</sup> Wai Chee Dimock, “Literature for the Planet,” *PMLA* 116.1 (2001): 173-188, 175.

bypass smaller, more finite, and less translatable scales of cultural exchanges that are reshaping inter-regional formations in the Asia Pacific regions.

Resisting the desire to translate everything into recognizable versions of the “queer” that easily come to mind in global circulation and forestalling the problematic easy resolution that “nothing is translatable,” my invocation of East-East transnationalism studies particular textual, cinematic, and new media connections across the PRC, Hong Kong, and Taiwan by situating these textual lives and afterlives within the socio-historical formations and ongoing unfolding of postsocialist capitalism in the mainland, post-Martial law sexual liberalization and neoliberalization in Taiwan after 1987, and the period before and after 1997 Hong Kong postcolonial handover from British governance into a special administrative region of China. My method of comparison between national and regional formations agrees with Naoki Sakai’s critique of modernity’s universalism that “universalism and particularism reinforce and supplement each other; they are never in real conflict[.]”<sup>48</sup> Given this critical recognition that either the Western universalism of queer modernity or the prioritizing of Chinese queer particularism is theoretically unproductive, my project then avoids the assumption that there can be some pre-established pure commonality between queer literature, films, and new media productions among the three regions.

In a more critical vein that departs from the universal and particularistic claims of queer modernity, *Queerness and Chinese Modernity* thematizes cultural productions that, when taken together, can productively challenge *both* the nationalist control, policing,

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<sup>48</sup> Naoki Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity: On “Japan” and Cultural Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 163.

and management of gender non-normative subjects *and* the global neoliberalizations that mark the conditions of possibility for both the emergence of these queer cultures and their transformative potentials. Therefore, the “transnational” as invoked throughout my dissertation should be read as a critical connectivity among national, regional, and cross-nation-states formations that have transformative queer possibilities. It is in this reformulations of cultural politics that East-East comparison on queer Chinese modernity can evince what Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd see as the alternative possibility of cultural studies within the debris and aftermath of globalization and neocolonial capitalism: in this sense, “ ‘culture obtains a ‘political’ force when a cultural formation comes into contradiction with economic or political logics that try to refunction it for exploitation or domination.’ ”<sup>49</sup>

Bearing in mind the heterogeneous formations of queer cultural politics as well as their differently articulated alternative potentials when situated in Chinese postsocialism, Taiwan’s neoliberalization, and Hong Kong postcolonial regional formations, I examine the divergent ways through which literature, cinema, and new media produce different cultural forms and “knowledge” about gay and lesbian lives in transnational Chinese cultures from the late 1980s to the contemporary moment.

Specifically, Chapter 1 examines three Chinese female writers that emerged in the mid-1990s whose writings fundamentally reshape the intricate relationship between nationalism, family, and meanings of Chineseness. I argue that Chen Ran’s 1996 novel *A Private Life*, through the playful voice of the young female protagonist Ni Aoao, provides

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<sup>49</sup> Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd, “Introduction,” in *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital*, ed. Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 1.



a narrative of familial ruin that breaks up the often-assumed coordination between family and the state within Maoist nationalist ideologies. Comparatively, I show how Chen Xue's 1995 novel in Taiwan, *The Book of Evil Women*, defies existing protocols of nationalist literature within a tradition of Nativist realism that demands "realistic" story of lesbian lives. Reading a strong criticism of Chen Xue's novel's emphasis on mother-daughter incest as unreal, I argue that these criticisms deploy Freudian psychoanalysis that ultimately frames lesbian existence as always already non-real and pre-social. Alternatively, I show how the combinations of dream sequences and realism in Chen Xue's work challenge these nationalist readings. Finally, I read Hong Kong writer Huang Biyun's 1994 novel *She Is a Woman, I Am Also a Woman* as engaging in dialectical relation to emerging stories of Asian transnational families who uphold successful models of finance in oversea Chinese communities. I show how even in transnational networks, Huang's stories depict sisterly bonds between strangers and brotherly intimacy that refuse to cooperate purely with the goal of accumulating transnational Chinese capitals.

Chapter 2 deals with a different kind of rewriting. I attempt the ambitious project of tracing transgender meanings in Chinese literature. I argue that a dominant discriminatory term against transgender people in the Chinese speaking worlds, *renyao* (meaning human demon/ human prodigy), actually relies on the misogynistic depiction of women as demonic in much earlier folklores in the Ming dynasty. Reading the numerous adaptations of a story called *The Legend of the White Snake*, a text that originally depicts Madame Bai as a demonic female seductress, I point to the ways modern adaptations of the folklore in *Green Snake* (1986) by Hong Kong writer Li Bihua and a 1992 Taiwan

TV series both question the assumption of female as demonic by providing transgender and cross-dressing representations.

Elaborating on the missed connections between theories of temporality, nationalism, and sexuality by Henri Bergson, Benedict Anderson, Judith Halberstam, and others, in Chapter 3 I posit “inter-temporality” in wide-ranging filmic traditions, including women’s films in 1980s China, Chen Kaige’s *Farewell My Concubine*, independent queer cinema in the PRC and Hong Kong, and coming of age gay teenage films in post-Millennium Taiwan. I argue that non-normative gender representations and embodiments are productive sites for disrupting the homogeneous time of the nation. Inter-temporality as a particular mode of queer temporal critique excavates how transgender and gender non-normative bodies may also rewrite the weights of historical violence, national reforms, and state oppression as failed attempts at the totalizing power of discipline, progress, and development. Finally, I argue that queer temporality can serve as a critique of cultural productions that presume the successful, neoliberal, and developmental logics of gay sexual modernity as seen in the “queer youth wave” films in Taiwan.

Chapter 4 examines how independent, underground, and commercial filmmakers in transnational Chinese film industries have produced films that radically re-imagine gay male experiences in postmodern space. In current theoretical understandings of postmodernism, space and time are understood to be increasingly compressed so that multiple spaces from across the world can be “annihilated” or compressed through new technological consumptions of the internet and satellite televisions. The disorientation of space is key to an understanding of urban geography in postmodernism. Following this

line of inquiry, I observe a recurring cinematic depiction of Chinese gay men in urban cities as one of entrapment and spatial claustrophobia, as evident in Yonfan's 1998 Hong Kong film *Bishonen* and Cui Zi'en's 2002 film *The Old Testament* (China). In both films, young men often seek the recourse of death because of the pressure of living with families who see homosexuality as "unnatural." Spatial disruption, compression, and claustrophobic death dominate these cinematic narratives. However, I argue that Cui's 2003 film *Money Boy Diaries* and several films by Taiwan New Cinema director Tsai Ming-liang reshape the claustrophobic trope into the possibility of imagining queer sexual pleasures and gay male livelihood despite postmodern entrapment.

Chapter 5 aims to bridge the formal analysis of new media with its ideological critique concerning the governance of gay, lesbian, and queer sexualities in transnational Chinese cultures. I theorize our contemporary information age as "transmedia assemblage," drawing especially from Deleuze and Guattari's theorization of desiring-production as "production of production." Moving beyond the general view that new media necessarily invites freer forms of expression in one's sexuality and minority sexual rights, I point instead to simultaneous new modes of governance by state, women's groups (state feminism), and broadcasting regulation units in order to show how queer sexuality is re-disciplined in both new and old media zones. I examine four "case studies" for the purpose of creative comparison. First, state feminism and NGOs sought to regulate sexuality online by prosecuting Taiwan academic Josephine Ho and her webpage on zoophilia as obscene in 2003, which frames non-human sexuality online as contagion. I compare the Taiwan case with self-censorship efforts by the Broadcasting Authority in Hong Kong in 2007 over the broadcasting of a TV program called

(同志·戀人)/*Gay Lovers*. At the same time, I point to the first gay online show in China called *Same Sex Connection* in 2007 as potentially broadening the possibility of gay and lesbian media consumptions in China. Finally, the case of homophobic outburst by mainland film star Lu Liping on social network site weibo and subsequent cyber activism in response to it point to the precariousness of queer media citizenship in transnational Chinese cultures and the necessity of imagining global multitude acting in “common.”

In the conclusion, I draw on a genealogy of dialectical criticism by demonstrating how each of the cultural production examined in the dissertation forms reciprocal, dialectical, and relational terms with the social and the political. Overall, this project envisions vibrant queer transnational connections between inter-regional Asian sites.

## CHAPTER ONE

### **Queering Chineseness and Kinship: Strategies of Rewriting by Chen Ran, Chen Xue and Huang Biyun**

#### **I. Introduction**

In recent years, Chineseness has become a provocative and almost necessary discussion in Chinese literary and cultural studies. The positions of different theorists on Chineseness share one productive goal of shifting our understanding of China, Chinese identity and diasporic Chinese subjects as fixed and ethnically homogeneous to one that is always open to multiple significations. Specifically, Rey Chow, in her discussion of Chineseness as a theoretical problem, argues that a certain Sinocentrism operates within the spheres of daily language use and academia, where “[t]hose who are ethnically Chinese but for historical reasons have become linguistically distant or dispossessed are, without exception, deemed inauthentic and lacking.”<sup>50</sup> Ien Ang criticizes the problematic assumption that all ethnically looking “Chinese” people are embodied with an official Chineseness from yet another “impure” subject-position, the Australian Peranakan Chinese diasporic position. Ang urges us to “break out of the prisonhouse of Chineseness and embrace... ‘post-Chinese’ identities through investments in continuing cross-influences of diverse, lateral, unanticipated intercultural encounters in the world at

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<sup>50</sup> Rey Chow, “Introduction: On Chineseness as a Theoretical Problem,” in *Modern Chinese Literary and Cultural Studies in the Age of Theory: Reimagining a Field*, ed. Rey Chow (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 9.

large.”<sup>51</sup> For Ang, the troubled relationship of the Westernized, indigenized Chinese in Indonesia and all diasporic Chinese to Chineseness is that “the overseas Chinese is in a no-win situation: she is either ‘too Chinese’ or ‘not Chinese enough.’”<sup>52</sup> Ang finds hybridity a useful tool for breaking away from the constant ethnic conundrum of either belonging or not belonging to “China.”

Another influential approach to the problematic of Chineseness is Neo-Confucianism funded by the muscles of transnational capitals in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the Chinese diasporas in the West. Hailing as an elite intellectual from the U.S., Tu Wei-ming observes that geopolitically speaking, Chineseness is always equated with the logic of centrism in which the center of China is located in Beijing near the Yellow River. This notion carries through the modern era in which diasporic Chinese and Chinese subjects in Hong Kong and Taiwan are forever marginalized in the periphery. Arguing for the need to revive Confucian ethics in a “democratic” sense, Tu concludes that politically and financially, Chinese in Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the West are more advanced than mainland China. Therefore, “the periphery of the Sinic world was proudly marching toward an Asia-Pacific century, the homeland remained mired in perpetual underdevelopment.”<sup>53</sup>

While Chow and Ang share more in common in their diasporic positions and deconstructive approaches, they nonetheless share one assumption with Tu: the theoretical problem of Chineseness is a fundamentally ethnic question that is linked to the

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<sup>51</sup> Ien Ang, “Can One Say No to Chineseness? Pushing the Limits of the Diasporic Paradigm,” in *Modern Chinese Literary and Cultural Studies in the Age of Theory: Reimagining a Field*, ed. Rey Chow (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 287.

<sup>52</sup> Ien Ang, *On Not Speaking Chinese: Living Between Asia and the West* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 32.

<sup>53</sup> Tu Wei-ming, “Cultural China: The Periphery as the Center,” *Daedalus* 120.2 (Spring 1991):1-32, 12.

hegemonic construction of an official Chineseness based in mainland China. Whereas Chow and Ang see this dominant version of Chineseness as an imposed burden on the differently inauthentic diasporic Chinese subjects, Tu predicts the *decline* of this official nationalist discourse of Chineseness in favor of a “Cultural China” that is supposed to be both ideologically more democratic and financially more superior to the mainland. In my own contribution to the question of Chineseness, I contend that these three approaches do not emphasize enough the role of gender and kinship politics in the discursive, historical, and literary construction of Chineseness. In addition, by problematizing Chineseness as a heavily ethnic problem, it risks essentializing Chineseness itself and overlooking the multiple differences that make up every representation of what it means to be Chinese. Underlying these three positions is a certain fetishism of Chineseness, which assumes all Chinese subjects in the mainland as homogenously dominant or authentic. This fetishization of Chinese subjects within China as the imposers of official Chineseness overlooks the ways in which many people who are dislocated and marginalized within the People Republic of China (PRC) in terms of class, gender, and ethnic positions are equally burdened by various regimes of state-imposed violence and thus, their positions can be mobilized for contesting the myth of official China as well.

In addition to the fetishization of Chinese subjects in the mainland as homogeneous is the under-theorization of Chineseness as a gender ideology that is buttressed by kinship logics nationally and transnationally. Departing from aforementioned positions by Chow, Ang, and Tu, Chineseness here is examined anew as inextricably linked to discourses of the fusion of *jia* (family) and *guo* (state) in Maoist and post-Mao China, the question of national literature in literary debates on realism,

lesbian sexuality, and representation of queer kinship in Taiwan, and the resurgence of transnational family governmentality in flexible Hong Kong families in the West. I recognize that different logics of Chineseness emerge in these utterly different sites of “China;” yet, by examining three different female writers who contest these heterogeneous regimes of official kinship *in* Chineseness, we can recognize the potential role of alternative sexuality in the queering of kinship, and in turn the queering of Chineseness itself.

I turn to female writers who emerged in 1990s China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong in order to examine rich possibilities for mapping alternative modalities of kinship. I will focus on the fictions by Chen Ran (陳染) from the PRC, Chen Xue (陳雪) from Taiwan, and Huang Biyun (黃碧雲) from Hong Kong. In my readings, I pay specific attentions to the geopolitical contexts of post-Mao economy in China, the emergence of *Ku'er* queer writing in 1990s Taiwan,<sup>54</sup> and the representations of transnational desires in pre-postcolonial Hong Kong in the early 1990s. Specifically, I argue that Chen Ran’s 1996 novel *Siren shenghuo* (A Private Life) tells two female lives under different official regimes of Chineseness through the child and adult perspectives of the same female protagonist, Ni Aoao.<sup>55</sup> While the child’s voice and her realization of family breakup points to a feminist detachment of the kinship space of *jia* (family) from *guo* (nation) in the 1970s, her contemporary grown up perspective allows the readers to recognize another alternative model of kinship that is based on her solitude and refusal to participate in market consumption in 1990s China. Comparatively, Chen Xue’s novel

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<sup>54</sup> I will elaborate more on the term *Ku'er* in Section II of this chapter.

<sup>55</sup> Chen Ran (陳染), *Siren shenghuo* (私人生活) [1996] (Beijing: Zuoja chubanshe, 2004).



*Enu shu* (The Book of Evil Women) engages with the question of nationalism in a different way.<sup>56</sup> Reading a famous literary critic Yang Zhao's criticism of Chen's emphasis on mother-daughter incest between the protagonist Cao-cao (草草) and her mother Su Qingyu (蘇青玉), I observe that Yang employs a Freudian psychoanalytical framework that subjugates lesbian desire as always already pre-Oedipal and pre-social in order to redeploy that theory in his nationalist and Nativist argument that Chen's novel lacks social reality in its representation of lesbian desire. I argue alternatively that Chen's novel demands us to move beyond nationalist literary tradition of modernism (accused as Kuomintang (KMT) version of Chineseness) versus Taiwanese Nativist realism. Finally, Huang Biyun's 1994 collection of stories *Ta shi nu zi, wo ye shi nu zi* (She Is a Woman, I Am Also a Woman) represents different degrees of intimacy between two Hong Kong working-class female strangers, Chen Yu and Ye Xixi, in Paris and between two brothers, Song Huai Ming and Song Ke Ming, in New York.<sup>57</sup> These intimacies are mediated through tactile forms of bodily exchanges that are not reducible to the flexible logics of transnational Chineseness based on the regulation of family in the accrual of overseas capitals. In short, Huang's fiction presents alternative modes of relatedness to family governmentality that are not based on capital-driven Chineseness in late modernity.

## II. Tongzhi, Ku'er and Guaitai: Practicing Queer Translingual Readings

To further situate the geopolitical context of gender and sexual knowledge within which these texts emerged in the mid 90s, I draw on the work of Lydia Liu and call for a queer translingual reading strategy that accounts for the historical genealogy of the

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<sup>56</sup> Chen Xue (陳雪), *Enu shu* (惡女書) [1995] (Taipei: INK Publishing, 2005)

<sup>57</sup> Huang Biyun (黃碧雲), *Ta shi nu zi, wo ye shi nu zi* (她是女子, 我也是女子) (Taipei: Maitian, 1994).

translation of sexual knowledge in late 19<sup>th</sup> century European sexuality, to Japanese sources, and back to Republican Chinese discourse of *tongxinglian* (same sex love). Liu's concept of translingual practice is productive here as we think through the question of translating queer theory into Chinese contexts. Liu is interested in the question of how Chinese modernity is practiced interlingually and how the host language in the native country may disrupt the assumed authenticity and authority of "guest" European languages. She coins the term "translingual practice" to name the processes by which "loanword neologism has changed the Chinese language since the nineteenth-century."<sup>58</sup> Specifically, Liu demonstrates that many modern Chinese words are produced by three-way travels between Japan, Europe, and China within the context of colonial modernity. For example, "the modern meaning of *wenhua* (culture) derives from Japanese *kanji* compound *bunka*, and it is through borrowing that an equivalence was established between the Chinese *wenhua* and the English 'culture.'"<sup>59</sup> Her position is that linguistic meeting grounds do not always produce predictable patterns of "native resistance and Western domination" because "a non-European host language may violate, displace, and usurp the authority of the guest language in the process of translation as well as be transformed by it or be in complicity with it."<sup>60</sup> This model of translingual traffic of language heavily influences new work on gay and lesbian cultures in China.

In Tze-Lan Deborah Sang's study of same sex desire between women from pre-modern China to post-Mao China and post-Martial law Taiwan, she applies Liu's model and writes, "The term *homosexuality* was first translated from late-nineteenth- and early-

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<sup>58</sup> Lydia Liu, *Translingual Practice*, 18.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 25, 27.

twentieth-century European sexology—often mediated through Japanese sources—into Chinese during the 1910s and 1920s.”<sup>61</sup> While Sang illustrates similar translingual borrowings of languages between China, Japan, and Western modern science in the emergence of “homosexuality” as “*tongxinglian*” (同性戀) in Republican China, the later adapted usage of the term “*tongzhi*” (同志) and the translated usage of the term “queer” in 1990s Hong Kong and Taiwan point to East-East modes of linguistic corruptions, processes that contest the mere assumption of the Western imposition of queer theory. Two dominant transliterations of queer are *ku'er* (酷兒) and *guaitai* (怪胎), popularized in Taiwan’s gay and lesbian fiction writing circles, avant-garde journal publishing, and sexuality-centered academic discourses.

In his introduction to the anthology *Taiwan Tongzhi Novels*, Taiwanese scholar Zhu Weicheng gives a detailed account of how these three translated Chinese terms emerge in 1990s Hong Kong and Taiwan. The first term *tongzhi* is best described as an inter-play word between the earlier medical discourse of *tongxinglian* as “same sex desire” and the playful appropriation of a much dated usage of *tongzhi* as “comrade” in official Maoist Communist Chinese terminology. The word *tongzhi* was first used as a gay appropriation by Hong Kong theater artist Edward Lam/Lin Nihau, who hosted the Hong Kong Tongzhi Film Festival beginning in 1989 and began hosting the “New Tongzhi Film” unit at Taipei’s Annual Golden Horse International Film Festival in 1992.<sup>62</sup> Song Hwee Lim points out that “the term *tongzhi* can be traced to a quote by Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925), the founding father of Republican China, whose dying words were,

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<sup>61</sup> Tze-lan D. Sang, *The Emerging Lesbian*, 23.

<sup>62</sup> Zhu Weicheng (朱偉誠), ed., *Taiwan tong zhi xiao shuo xuan* (臺灣同志小說選) (Taipei: Er Yu Wen Hua, 2005), 9.

‘The revolution has yet to triumph; comrades still must work hard’ (*Geming shang wei chenggong; tongzhi reng xu nuli*).<sup>63</sup> Lim notes that “*tongzhi* has replaced *tongxinglian* or *tongxing’ai* in most post-1990 publications in the Chinese language, especially in publications outside of mainland China.”<sup>64</sup>

*Ku’er* and *guaitai* may need more linguistic elaborations because as cultural expressions of queer sexuality, they indicate creative response to the emergence of queer theory in the West in the 1990s. Literally speaking, Ku (酷) means many things among “hot,” “popular,” “cool,” or “alternative.” Er (兒) means a boy, kid, or young child. *Ku’er* together means a “cool kid.” Its “coolness” can also carry a connotation of gender ambiguity. Zhu Weicheng writes, “*Ku’er* as a transliteration of queer should trace back to 1994 January’s “ku’er” special issue of the avant-garde magazine *Daoyu Bianyuan/ Isle Margin* (島嶼邊緣).”<sup>65</sup> The term *guaitai* literally means “strange womb” or “strange fetus” in Chinese; it is also commonly used as a slang to call someone a “weirdo.” For this reason, the appropriation of queer as *guaitai* in Taiwan may seem to bear some resemblance of the reclaiming of queer as academic and cultural usages in the early 90s Euro-American contexts in which the word is “redeployed, twisted, queered from a prior usage and in the direction of urgent and expanding political purposes.”<sup>66</sup> As the creative renaming of queerness in Taiwan cultural and academic contexts have shown, the invocation of the term is less a direct, finished, and blind translation from the West to the East but a constant transformative process that displays regional traveling of language, as

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<sup>63</sup> Song Hwee Lim, *Celluloid Comrades*, 11.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-12.

<sup>65</sup> As of now, *Isle Margin* had stopped publishing in Taiwan; all issues are still accessible for free at <<http://intermargins.net/intermargins/IsleMargin/index.htm>>.

<sup>66</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 228.

*tongzhi* usage is first transported from Hong Kong to Taiwan and redeployed into *ku'er* and *guaitai* as alternative meanings of queerness.

Perhaps none is a better spokesperson on queer discourse in Taiwan than Ji Dawei, who co-edited the special issue of *Ku'er/Queer* in *Isle Margin* that I mentioned earlier. In 1997, he subsequently edited the first defining anthology on Taiwan queer discourse. In it, he disputes *ku'er* as an “honest translation” of queerness because queer was reclaimed against a history of injurious usage in the West, whereas no history of injury is resurrected in the usage of *ku'er* in Taiwan.<sup>67</sup> Later on, Ji distinguishes the cultural mobilizations of *tongzhi* and *ku'er* in the following way: “Whereas *tongzhi* calls for collective identification, *ku'er* calls identification into question. While the two seem to come into perpetual conflict, in Taiwan they may compliment one another’s needs.”<sup>68</sup> Fran Martin, in her study of queer representations in Taiwanese public cultures, sums up what I call “queer translingual practice” succinctly. Martin states, “Thus, neologisms like *tongzhi*, *ku'er*, and *guaitai* emerged in 1990s Taiwan as examples of glocalization in the domain of sexual knowledge: critical, selective appropriations and reworkings of terms and concepts that originated elsewhere.”<sup>69</sup>

While I reckon with the “fact” of translingual practice in the making of modern Chinese *tongxinglian* identity, I argue that in the 1990s, the complex mobility of sexual and gender identifications produces discrepant queer modes of being in different sites of

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<sup>67</sup> Ji Dawei (紀大偉), ed., *Ku er qi shi lu : Taiwan dang dai queer lun shu du ben* (酷兒啟示錄: 臺灣當代 Queer 論述讀本) (Taipei: Meta Media, 1997), 10.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 16. For a different take on *tongzhi* identity politics, see Fran Martin’s essay, “Surface Tensions: Reading Productions of *Tongzhi* in Contemporary Taiwan,” *GLQ* 6.1 (2000):61-86, in which she argues that a particular strand of *tongzhi* politics that mobilizes the use of public masking actually problematizes the boundary between concealment and disclosure in 1990s Taiwan.

<sup>69</sup> Fran Martin, *Situating Sexualities*, 23.

Chinese and Sinophone worlds. Therefore, queer translingual practice in this period points to how mainland, Taiwanese, and Hong Kong subjects may invoke *tongzhi*, *ku'er*, and *guaitai* identities that are not fully understood or colonized by meanings of gay, lesbian, and Western theoretical insights from queer theory. In my placing of “queer” next to conditions of “translinguality” in the making of 1990s Chinese queer cultures, *tongzhi*, *ku'er*, and *guaitai* identities are not expressions of “belated modernity” of Western gay experiences; alternatively, I observe *tongzhi*, *ku'er*, *guaitai* and sometimes even the absences of their enunciations in the fiction of Chen Ran, Chen Xue, and Huang Biyun as translingual expression of the unevenness and creativity of queer subjectivities among the spatial intersections of mainland, Taiwan, and the Hong Kong diasporas in the West. The queering of kinship provides one arena within which we can “read” the heterogeneity of both queerness and Chineseness.

### **III. Chan Ran's Unmaking of Guo/Jia at the Margins of Maoist and Post-Mao China**

Chen Ran's 1996 semi-autobiographical novel *A Private Life* has been described under different writing styles, ranging from *si xiaoshuo* (private novel) and body writing. The novel's explicit exposure of the indulgence, trauma, and pleasure of Ni Aoao's sense of self also invited some criticism from mainland literary critics for “focusing too narrowly on the self and disregarding broader social issues.”<sup>70</sup> In Tani Barlow's situating of Dai Jinhua's poststructuralist feminist intervention on 1990s Chinese cultures, Chen Ran belongs to a group of other then emerging female writers of *écriture féminine*, in

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<sup>70</sup> Tze-lan D. Sang, *The Emerging Lesbian*, 201.

which “the tradition of Chinese women’s writing established in the first half of the twentieth century had reemerged in its last decade.”<sup>71</sup> Sang has also used the concept of “gender-transcendent consciousness,” named by Chen Ran herself in her non-fictional work, to describe “a yearning for love that cannot be reduced to the selection of sex/gender.”<sup>72</sup> In my reading, I stress the peculiar narrative voice embodied by the childhood perspective of Ni and how Chen utilizes that voice to expose the mandate of Maoist nationalism in the 1970s, which requires the unity of kinship under nationalist protocol as a mode of official Chineseness. Employing Homi Bhabha’s concept of dissemination, I will demonstrate Ni’s challenge to the assumed coherence between kinship and nation while pointing to moments of “unofficial” kinship ties between Widow He and her. This symbolic critique of the nation is followed by a more materialist critique of nationalist consumption in 1990s China.

Early in the narrative, Ni Aoao recounts her childhood experiences and identifies her father as a source of violence. Equally important, Ni’s voice expresses a somewhat naïve identification with Maoist party politics of unity, communalism, and cooperation but realizes the impossibility of living up to those standards in her family. Many instances appear in forms of symbolism. Her father is described as more powerful than nature. Ni describes, “When I heard my father’s groaning, the raining suddenly stops.”<sup>73</sup> This parallel established between what is happening within the house (father’s anger) and the world outside (raining) points to the novel’s interconnectivity between the diegetic, namely the narrative, and the extradiegetic, the socio-political. The fusion of the

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<sup>71</sup> Tani E. Barlow, *The Question of Women in Chinese Feminism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 328.

<sup>72</sup> Tze-lan D. Sang, *The Emerging Lesbian*, 204-205.

<sup>73</sup> Chen Ran, *Siren shenghuo*, 14.

individual and the social here already counters some claims that the novel is all about self-love and self-display. The interface between the two worlds points concurrently to the signification of official Chineseness through the fusion and confusion, from the child's point of view, between kinship and nation, *jia* and *guo*.

One particular moment of the psychological world of the young Ni Aoao exposes the mandate of official Chineseness and its linkage to *guo-jia* protocols. Ni reveals, "From the eye contact that my mother does not plan to tell me what happens, I know that my father and mother are fighting again....I say, 'Mama, Mao Chairman says, we make unity, not separation...' I directly quote from the 'Daily Read' Mao speech that I learn from elementary school."<sup>74</sup> Ni's naïve quotation of the Mao ideological speech that she learns from school indicates her seeming submission to state ideologies. On the other hand, it also points to the easy intrusion and transference of state ideologies onto the site of family. Chineseness in this instance means the interchangeable protocols of control and regulation from her education to her family. The Maoist version of kinship and Chineseness implies that to be a good daughter at home is same as being a good student at her school, and both are identical to being a good worker according to the state. While from the perspective of the state the family as a site of the reproduction of kinship norms supports a system of interchangeable signifiers of subjects under state regulation, within the novel Ni's later realization of her familial ruins introduces elements of disruption and ambivalence, which symbolically split the family (*jia*) from the unified domain of the state and rewrite kinship positionality from the margin of the nation.

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.,14.



In order to further situate the role of Maoist state woman (*funu*) within kinship and state ideologies, I now turn to Tani Barlow's work on the historically discursive formations of womanhood and the distinction between "funu," "nuxing," and a reproduced "funu" under Maoist discourses. Barlow shows that in Confucian discourses from 18<sup>th</sup> to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the word *funu* points to women who are defined by their specific "protocols," obligations, and statuses (married or unmarried, within *jia* or married outside of *jia*) within the terrain of kinship. Pointing to Chen Hongmou's Confucian discourse on *funu*, Barlow writes, "They are women, of course. But, as I will argue, they are gendered by virtue of the protocols specific to their subject positions...Funu is a collective noun shaped in relation to differential *jia* positions, whereas Women or Woman is a transcendental signifier."<sup>75</sup> For Barlow, the category *nuxing* emerged in 1920s May Fourth intellectual discourses when "the bilateral mutual exchange of Western signs and Chinese narrative had the effect of producing a category of universal womanhood."<sup>76</sup> Finally, Barlow points out that in "Maoist rhetoric, funu referred to a national subject that stood for the collectivity of all politically normative or descent women. Under the Maoist state's centralizing discourses, funu got resituated, first within *guojia* (state) and then...in the modern *jiating* (family)."<sup>77</sup> If *funu* as a Maoist category of womanhood points to implications of women's subject positions both within the family and under state structures, how does Chen's narrative make that state discourse visible and even unstable?

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<sup>75</sup> Tani E. Barlow, *The Question of Women in Chinese Feminism*, 42.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 38.

While one may be tempted to read Ni's childish voice in the mid 1970s Maoist period as one that submissively follows the dogma of this nationalist ideology of unity, the ways the narrative unfolds playfully betrays this path. For quickly following Ni's childish account of the 70s, the narrative shifts back to the present in the 90s in order to provide a "retrospective" glance back at her own naivety. This second "looking back" gesture in the narrative threatens to expose the impossibility of both the family and heterosexuality to live up to the task of unity. Ni recounts, "At that time, I don't understand the mysterious meaning of 'make' (*gao* 搞) in the phrase 'to make unity.' A man and a woman really need to 'make' in order to 'unite' together...Of course, there is also the situation of splitting and separation after 'unity' is 'made.'"<sup>78</sup> Ni's present voice and its repetitive curiosity that a man and a woman need to "make" in order to stay united may at first seem to reaffirm the love-making procedure of heterosexuality as a core value of a family; yet, her later realization that there is also the "split" and separation after the unity is achieved critically exposes the constructiveness of heterosexual union and its vulnerability to destabilization, splitting, and remaking. If the childish voice in the past tense points to the recitation of the Maoist interpellation of kinship ideal of unity and communalism, the present voice figuratively "splits" that ideal.

In his postcolonial re-thinking of nationalism and its contradiction, Homi Bhabha introduces two running currents that "make up" and narrate the nation, namely the pedagogical and the performative. This understanding of nationalism proves invaluable for reading Ni's potential subversions to nationalist ideal of kinship. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha writes, "In the production of the nation as narration there is a split

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<sup>78</sup> Chen Ran, *Siren shenghuo*, 14-15.

between the continuist, accumulative temporality of the pedagogical, and the repetitious, recursive strategy of the performative. It is through this splitting that the conceptual ambivalence of modern society becomes the site of *writing the nation*.<sup>79</sup> Similarly, in Ni's narration of her familial conflict, the childish voice that recites Maoist ideology of unity points to the pedagogical effect on Ni while the present voice that retrospectively reflects on the past embodies the performative elements that contain the failure of Ni's parents' marriage and its disidentification with the pedagogical imperative of the nation. Building on Barlow's point that *funu* as a discourse and language about women's positionalities become resituated within the state (*guo*) and then kinship (*jia*), Ni's symbolic voice of dissemination points to the possibility that even within official articulations of Maoist nationalism that make women positions within *guo* and *jia* seamlessly equivalent, there still exists the possibility to embody kinship differently, to practice queer kinship forms at the margin of the nation. Of course, this marginal politics of queerness in its dialectical tension with the nation-state form also stretches beyond the literary imagination into cinematic configurations of time (Chapter 3) and space (Chapter 4) and cultural citizenship in contemporary China (Chapter 5).

To practice a different form of kinship that is not over-determined by the state, both in the Maoist period and the 1990s, is a central component of Chen Ran's text. This alternative space that exists tangentially to the Maoist model familial space of *jia* is especially evident in Ni's affective and erotic relationships with Widow He. In order to distinguish official and practical kinship more, let us briefly examine Pierre Bourdieu's uses of the terms and Mayfair Yang's use of Bourdieu in late socialist contexts of

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<sup>79</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 209.

*guanxi*.<sup>80</sup> In *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Bourdieu argues for the importance of practice to the study of kinship in Kabylia. He writes, “We cannot fail to notice that those uses of kinship which may be called genealogical are reserved for official situations in which they serve the function of ordering the social world and of legitimating that order. In this respect they differ from the other kinds of practical use made of kin relationships, which are a particular case of the utilization of connections.”<sup>81</sup> Bourdieu’s introduction of two modalities of kinship, official and practical, provocatively points to relationships between people that are ruled out in official accounts. Taking her cue from Bourdieu, Yang studies how ordinary people participate in “the cultivation of personal relationships and networks of mutual dependence; and the manufacturing of obligation and indebtedness.”<sup>82</sup> But whereas Yang sees practical kinship in late socialist China (1980s) as “a shortcut around, or a coping strategy for dealing with, bureaucratic power[.]”<sup>83</sup> I am more interested in how literary representation of practical kinship in Chen Ran’s novel takes on the sexual, gender, and affective levels that operate through the unofficial network of female homosociality between Ni and Widow He, which exists alongside official kinship spaces.

The reader is first introduced to Widow He as the neighbor right opposite to Ni’s family. Ni’s first affective and sexual encounter with the widow happens right after Ni cut her father’s pants, which was neatly ironed before she destroyed it. Frightened by her

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<sup>80</sup> *Guanxi* literally means “relationship” in Chinese; however, it has broader social significance of networking and social indebtedness. See Mayfair Yang, *Gifts, Favors, and Banquets: The Art of Social Relationships in China* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).

<sup>81</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 34.

<sup>82</sup> Mayfair Yang, *Gifts, Favors, and Banquets*, 6.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

own rebellious act, Ni left her home and ran directly to Widow He's house. The widow comforts Ni and tells her that it was the scissor that cut her father's pants, not her own hand. After awhile, this comforting gesture becomes much more bodily. As the woman sits on her chair, she let Ni lay on her breasts. Their bodily gestures first begin with He's admiration of Ni's eyes: "Aoao, do you know that your eyes are very pleasing to look at?"<sup>84</sup> The woman's compliments for Ni turn more erotic as she asks Ni to kiss her after she has kissed Ni's forehead. When asked by He to kiss her breasts, the curious narrator describes: "I put it in my mouth, like suckling my mother's breasts when I was a child, moving my lips and pretending that I am sucking. I keep sucking like this for a long time...until my mother calls loudly for me to go home for lunch."<sup>85</sup> If official Chineseness through Maoist nationalism makes women's roles within *guo* and *jia* interchangeable coordinates, instituted at the levels of both nationalist policy and in and through the space of the family, unofficial networks (practical kinship), be they economic, supportive, affective, or erotic, can exist alongside official productions of Chineseness yet never be fully acknowledged by it. In the passage above, Ni and the widow share erotic and kin-like affection without official recognition: they are not mother and daughter, nor do they operate according to the mode of the proper socialist *funu*. In addition to this emphasis on the possibility of practicing mode of kinship that is not fully recognized by the Maoist state, Chen's novel also offers a materialist critique of market fundamentalism that became the hallmark of 1990s Chinese consumer cultures.

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<sup>84</sup> Chen Ran, *Siren shenghuo*, 41

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

By the end of the novel, Chen Ran situates the reader back to the historical and political moment that she was writing in, namely 1990s China. Dai Jinhua offers one of the most incisive critiques of the transition of China from a socialist to a market capitalist economy that is helpful for situating Chen Ran's literary intervention here. Specifically, using the example of how the word *guangchang* (public square) has shifted from the revolutionary and political space of Tiananmen Square to the market-driven image of shopping malls and centers, Dai argues that the "invisible writing" of the 1990s was precisely the displacement of socialist ethos into market-based logics of consumption, which led to the lack of critique of the widening economic disparity between the laboring class and the newly rich. Dai argues, "To attach the name *guangchang* to a plaza—a commercial business center—is a political transgression, signifying to the nation the gradual metamorphosis from socialism to a capitalist market economy."<sup>86</sup> Lisa Rofel expands Dai's insight by pointing to how urban female workers imagine themselves as neoliberal subjects who are "cosmopolitan with Chinese characteristics" by placing their mothers' generations in the "traditional" bracket to "transcend this tradition in order to become desirable, globalized subjects."<sup>87</sup> Building on Dai and Rofel's insights, we can observe that 1990s consumption culture is part of a state-supported flexible strategy of maintaining a socialist state with capitalist-driven logics; therefore, official Chineseness is inextricable from the cultivation of a middle-class, cosmopolitan and desirable individualist subject. Situating Chen Ran's protagonist Ni's final act of solitude in the

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<sup>86</sup> Dai Jinhua, "Invisible Writing: The Politics of Mass Culture in the 1990s," in *Cinema and Desire: Feminist Marxism and Cultural Politics in the Work of Dai Jinhua*, ed. Jing Wang and Tani E. Barlow (New York: Verso, 2002), 215-216.

<sup>87</sup> Lisa Rofel, *Desiring China: Experiments in Neoliberalism, Sexuality, and Public Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 126.

novel within this geopolitical consumptive Chineseness in the 1990s will help us read the emergence of an alternative queer individualism in Ni's female subjectivity.

Ni's individualist detachment from social relations and market economy appears early in the story when the narrator is writing in the present temporal mode. Ni tells the reader: "Now, I don't want to wake up. What's the need to wake up? I don't need to be like other people who busily wake up to go to work, to make money."<sup>88</sup> One peculiar moment in her final act of solitude happens when she is laying in her bathtub after all her loved ones died and left her. Ni begins to form intimate relations with her surrounding, her bathtub in particular. Ni narrates, "Since mother and my loved ones left, I feel that the only things left are the bathtub and I; this is the first time I sense that I am like a loved person laying in its embrace."<sup>89</sup> Situating this scene in 1990s mass culture of consumption in China makes Ni's solitude especially political because one can easily fault Chen as penning a female self that is all about enjoying and consuming a privatized space. Indeed, Dai herself, while branding Chen Ran as the pioneer of female individualized writing in the 1990s, has questioned Chen's political utility in the metaphor of a "private life." Dai asks, "Shouldn't female writing step outside 'private life' and once again find its realistic and social coordinate?"<sup>90</sup> While Dai's concern is obviously relevant to her Marxist feminist critique of 1990s China, we can alternatively frame Ni's final embodiment of individualist solitude detached from market participation as a symptomatic response to 1990s production of official Chineseness based on a consumptive self. Read in this way, Ni's individualist yet non-capitalist and non-

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<sup>88</sup> Chen Ran, *Siren shenghuo*, 4.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

<sup>90</sup> Dai Jinhua (戴锦华), *She du zhi zhou: Xin shi qi zhongguo nü xing xie zuo yu nü xing wen hua* (涉渡之舟：新时期中国女性写作与女性文化) (Xi'an: Shanxi ren min jiao yu chu ban she, 2002), 531.

consumptive embodiment of her private surrounding can provocatively offer a materialist critique on dominant nationalist consumption and official Chineseness.

#### **IV. Between Chinese Modernist Style and Nativist Realism: Chen Xue's Psychoanalytical Challenge**

If Chen Ran employs a dissemination politics that allows us to read female subjectivities and kinship forms that dis-identify with 1970s Maoist mandate of official Chineseness and a later 1990s nationalist craze for consumerist participation in the market economy, how does Chineseness operate in relationship to kinship politics in 1990s Taiwan? How is the 1970s Nativist revival of “realism” as a proper Taiwanese literary aesthetics redeployed in 1990s literary judgment amid the emergence of queer fiction writers in Taiwan? I will examine these complex issues about Chinese modernism, Taiwanese realism, literary legitimation, and the representation of queer kinship in Chen Xue's work through the exchange between Yang Zhao, a well-known critic who accuses Chen's novel as lacking social reality, and the various psychoanalytical challenges that Chen's text poses to the question of what constitutes Taiwanese nationalist literature.

1995 saw the simultaneous publications of Ji Dawei's *Gan guan shi jie* (Queer Senses), Hong Ling's *Yiduan xixuegui lizhuan* (The Selected Biographies of Deviant Vampires) and Chen Xue's *Enu shu*, all by Huangguan Publishing in Taipei. However, only Chen's novel is covered with a plastic warning cover that reads “Not Appropriate for Readers Under 18.”<sup>91</sup> In the 2005 new preface to the novel, Chen Xue laments that “this is a novel that almost didn't make it to press because it touches on too many

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<sup>91</sup> Chen Xue, “New Preface for New Version” in Chen Xue, *Enu shu*, 12



representations of female-female desire and eroticism.”<sup>92</sup> Briefly, the main story that causes the controversy, “Searching for the Lost Wings of the Angel,” depicts the loss of Cao-cao’s childhood because her father died when she was ten years old. Since then, her mother was missing for two years before entering back into her life when she was twelve. At the same time, her mother began working as a high-class prostitute, and this change of family life signals “the end of childhood” from the perspective of Cao’s memory. This recollection part of the story runs concurrently with her relationship with Ah Su (阿蘇), a sexually alluring woman, in the present. Cao-cao meets Ah Su in a bar and falls in love with her. The final parts of the story rapidly unfold: her mother reconciles with her by taking her to visit her father’s grave. Three days later, her mother commits suicide; all these happen while Cao-cao is writing a story exactly called “Searching for the Lost Wings of the Angel.” Thus, one can read this story as obviously self-reflexive in some ways. When she finally finished writing it, she could not find Ah Su; she is missing. Nobody remembers Ah Su; her identity is finally revealed to the reader as Cao-cao intuitively walks to a graveyard while trying to find her. On the tombstone, the name reads “Su Qingyu” (蘇青玉), the name of her own mother! Thus, the “lesbian” lover Ah Su throughout the narrative is an imaginary one that shocks the reader in the end as it turns out to be her mother.

Commenting on this specific element of mother-daughter incest in Chen’s story, Yang Zhao (楊照), whom the publisher assigned the task of writing the preface, wrote a didactic and unfavorable piece. For Yang, Chen Xue escapes the threat of social norms towards lesbian desire because “by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when women suddenly

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 12.

realize the desire of other women, they become threatened, scared, and not used to it so that they adopt the strategy of hiding, escape, and rationalization.”<sup>93</sup> Several academic and *ku'er* writers responded to Yang's charge of escapism, mystification, and lack of reality in Chen's work. Ji Dawei first responded in 1996 by writing a preface for Chen's subsequent novel *Sleepwalking 1994*.<sup>94</sup> Ji understands Yang's preface as a quick misreading of Chen's writing as a product of internalization of guilt because Yang reduces the title of the first word of the novel (E/惡) to an exclusive interpretation of sin and guilt (罪惡), which ignores the more radically perverse and queer articulation of evilness (邪惡).<sup>95</sup> Feminist critic Ding Naifei also responds by comparing Yang's criticism of Chen's novel to another literary criticism and preface by the Qing dynasty scholar Zhang Zhupo (張竹坡) on the famous late Ming erotic novel *Jin Pin Mei* (金瓶梅). Comparing the two works across historical times, Ding finds that while Zhang in three hundred years ago tried to produce a moral lesson from reading *Jin Pin Mei*, Yang's reading of Chen Xue in the modern period continues this moralist tradition of equating literary criticism with the “supposed” value of didactic lesson.<sup>96</sup>

In my own contribution to this debate on queer sexuality and literary criticism in Taiwan, I read Yang's critique as issuing from two conjoining discourses. While his criticism employs a Freudian analytical frame on kinship that views all non-heterosexual

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<sup>93</sup> Yang Zhao (楊照), “What Is Evil About It?—Preface to Chen Xue's *Enu Shu*” (何惡之有?—序陳雪小說集) in Chen Xue, *Enu Shu*, 22

<sup>94</sup> Ji Dawei (紀大偉), “Preface” in Chen Xue, *Mengyou 1994* (夢遊 1994) (Taipei: Yuanliu, 1996), 5-9.

<sup>95</sup> For a more in-depth analysis on the double meanings of E in the title of *Enu shu*, see Fran Martin, *Situating Sexualities*, 126-127.

<sup>96</sup> Ding Naifei (丁乃非), “Very Close to Whores and Evil Women—How To Read *Jin Pin Mei* (1965) and *Enu Shu/The Book of Evil Women* (1995),” (非常貼近淫婦及惡女—如何閱讀《金瓶梅》(1695)和《惡女書》(1995)) *Chung-Wai Literary Monthly* 26.3 (August 1997):48-67, 57. (Special Issue on “Difference in Sex and Gender: *Ku'er* Fiction and *Ku'er* Studies”)

relationships outside the “proper” Oedipal socialization as “pre-Oedipal,” thus pre-social (reads pre-political), this Freudian obsession with diagnosing lesbian and queer representations as pre-social, I argue, must be framed within the specific socio-political debate on Taiwan nationalist literature, with attention to Nativist writers’ emphasis on realism as a mobilization against KMT-supported modernist aesthetics.<sup>97</sup> Specifically, Nativist writers like Ch’en Ying-chen in the 1960-70s began accusing “fathers of modernism” like Pai Hsien-yung and Ou-yang Tzu for blindly adhering to Western modernist aesthetics and elements of humanism, universalism, and nihilism, thus ignoring specific political issues in Taiwan like the colonial oppression of native Taiwanese in the history of the KMT government takeover of the island in 1949. Commenting on the politicization of realism by the Nativist *Hsiang-tu* (meaning “native rural land” in Chinese) writers, critic Sung-sheng Yvonne Chang points out: “Ch’en’s concern with historical representation had much to do with the Nativists’ use of ‘realism’ as a political weapon. Although the term ‘realism’ was never clearly defined in the Nativist literary debate, it apparently served an essential political function—because ‘realism’ was seen to be the opposite of ‘modernism,’ and, because antimodernism was equated with anti-West and anti-imperialism, it was adopted by Ch’en’s cohort of Nativists as their own artistic idiom.”<sup>98</sup> Similarly, June Yip also frames the Nativist revival in the 1970s as a literary response to larger political blows that Taiwan suffered, first from Richard Nixon’s 1972 visit to the PRC and then from the expulsions from the

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<sup>97</sup> For an excellent reading on Chen Xue’s story as employing a tactic of “hybrid citations” in which both the Lacanian law of the father and the Chinese kinship of *xiao*/filiality are incommensurably queered, see Fran Martin, “Chen Xue’s Queer Tactics,” *Positions* 7.1 (Spring 1999):71-94.

<sup>98</sup> Sung-sheng Yvonne Chang, *Modernism and the Nativist Resistance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 169.

United Nations and the Olympic Games in the same period. Yip comments on the Nativist writers: “Their simple, humanist realism provided the perfect counterbalance to the excessive aesthetic formalism of the modernist writers, while their critical view of the sweeping social and cultural effects of modernization on traditional Taiwanese society appealed to anti-Western, anti-Japanese spirit of the times.”<sup>99</sup>

Given that any literature after 1970s Taiwan would have to deal with the question of whether it fits within the agenda of “realist” literature (read Nativist) or the earlier literary convention of modernism (reads “apolitical”), Yang’s criticism of Chen’s work as lacking social reality then is heavily indebted to this debate on national literature and the relationship between literary work and social utility. I will lay out Yang’s indebtedness to Freudian psychoanalytical framework and its designation of queer female sexuality as pre-social in order to mark the convergence of his criticism of Chen’s text with the nationalist reading of the text as “lacking” social realism. Then, I will give a brief summary of Chen’s narration of the mother/daughter “lesbian” relationships by demonstrating the ways in which the realistic plot and the fantastical mapping of lesbian desire are actually inseparable from one another; in other words, her narrative challenges the false assumed binary of modernism vs. Nativist realism, thus queering nationalist discourse of literary legitimization.

In his preface, Yang reads Chen’s use of first person narrator in her depiction of mother-daughter incest and lesbianism as a mode of “false consciousness,” which suppresses a truer, more realistic voice of lesbian narrator. He reads the representation of

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<sup>99</sup> June Yip, *Envisioning Taiwan: Fiction, Cinema, and the Nation in the Cultural Imaginary* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 33.

female incest between Cao-cao and her mother in the story as a substitution for a concrete depiction of lesbianism because the narrator's voice is unconsciously suppressed by social forces. Yang writes, "Although Chen Xue focuses on lesbianism (*nu tongxinglian*), female same sex desire in her novel lacks the legitimacy for its proper existence. She will habitually write same sex desire as maternal incest through structural substitution...Chen Xue actually is refusing lesbian realistic self-expression."<sup>100</sup> While Yang is well-taken in his call for more "realistic" representations of lesbianism, his accusation of Chen Xue as committing false consciousness through the substitution of lesbianism by maternal incest inherits a long tradition of Freudian psychoanalytical literature that frames lesbian desire as falling back to a pre-Oedipal, pre-social, and therefore, pre-political sphere.

Specifically, in Freud's first case on lesbianism, "A Case of Hysteria/Dora Case" (1905), lesbianism occupies the sphere of the unconscious in Dora's desire for Frau K, which is masked by her supposedly more conscious Oedipal desire for her father and Frau K's husband, Herr K.<sup>101</sup> In his 1920's case study "The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman," Freud fully develops the trope of "falling" through which female homosexuality emerges. In this study, he reads female homosexuality as the failure to pass through the Oedipal stage. Here, the unnamed female patient suffers so much from Oedipal disappointment when she learns that her mother, a rival, bears a child for the father that she turns away from heterosexuality and substitutes Oedipal sexual object choice with a homosexual one. The trope of female homosexuality as a metaphor of falling back onto pre-Oedipal non-sociality becomes more powerful when Freud states

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<sup>100</sup> Yang Zhao, "What Is Evil About It?", 23.

<sup>101</sup> Sigmund Freud, *A Case of Hysteria and Other Works*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1953), 62.

that “disappointment such as this of the longing for love that springs from the Oedipus attitude at puberty will necessarily on that account fall a victim to homosexuality.”<sup>102</sup>

Literary critic Diana Fuss challenges this metaphor of “falling” in Freudian theory on female homosexuality when she asks, “But why is it presumed from the outset that desire for the mother is a displaced articulation of unfulfilled desire for the father, and not the other way around?”<sup>103</sup> Building on Fuss’ searching question, we can understand Yang’s criticism as reframing the question of how lesbianism falls into a pre-social, non-real status in Chen Xue’s case. In Freudian framework, lesbianism emerges as a substitution and regressive fall-back to the pre-Oedipal maternal stage due to failure in the girl’s pursuit of heterosexual Oedipal object choice, her father. In Yang’s critique, the binary no longer operates through pre-Oedipal lesbian incest vs. Oedipal heterosexual object choice. Rather, lesbianism cannot fully emerge in a realist, nationally progressive mode of representation because of Chen Xue’s accused style of false consciousness; because of this marginalization of a realist mode of lesbianism, it is substituted by pre-Oedipal, pre-social, and non-real representation of maternal incest in the story “Searching.” Therefore, Yang rewrites a heterosexual feminine fallen narrative into pre-Oedipal maternal incest in Freud’s original theory into a psychoanalytically driven nationalist literary criticism about how lesbian realism fails to emerge. This redeployment of psychoanalysis for the question of literary realism in 1990s Taiwan marks lesbian expressions in Chen’s novel as overly suppressed, or even substituted by, “modernist” styles that are deemed too nihilistic and escapist for the demand of Nativist realism.

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<sup>102</sup> Sigmund Freud, “The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman,” (1920) in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Vol. 18*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), 168.

<sup>103</sup> Diana Fuss, *Identification Papers* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 63.

However, I read Chen's depiction of lesbian desire and queer kinship in forms of maternal incest against the grain of both Freudian psychoanalysis and the modernist/Nativist realist divide by pointing to the powerful ways lesbianism is *not* substituted by queer kinship; alternatively, the text demands us to confront the inextricability between lesbian subjectivity and mother-daughter love/desire, overcoming the normative division between the real and the imagined, the realistic and the modernist in excess of existing nationalist literary convention in 1990s Taiwan.

Chen Xue refuses to write lesbian identification and eroticism as the less-than-real element that is substituted by pre-Oedipal maternal love; more disorientingly, sometimes Cao-cao's lesbian relationship with Ah Su is depicted in dream-like quality, whereas other moments her attachment with the mother is more fantastical. In other words, the status of the real and the fantastical is often temporally mixed.<sup>104</sup> Her text crisscrosses the dreaming of Ah Su with her unclear memory of her mother. For instance, Cao-cao at one point says, "I really don't remember everything that is related to my mother."<sup>105</sup> Once the reader turns another four pages, Cao-cao describes Ah Su her lesbian lover in almost the same dreamlike quality: "Ah Su has always been a riddle. Our time together is like a dream...When Ah Su is not around I try my best to keep writing, or I will remain in the mode of memory or daydreaming."<sup>106</sup> By mixing the dreaming of Ah Su with her equally unclear memory of her mother, Chen writes the lesbian narrative into a sticky attachment with her mother-daughter love thread. The result is a simultaneous inter-temporality (see also Chapter 3) of both lesbian desire and mother-daughter love bond. This sticky

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<sup>104</sup> This literary figuration of queerness as in-between multiple durations of time will be taken up again in Chapter 3 through my coinage of the term "inter-temporality."

<sup>105</sup> Chen Xue, *Enu shu*, 46.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

temporality is most apparent in the moment when Cao-cao describes her sexual encounters with Ah Su. Cao-cao narrates, “Ah Su is my inner embodiment of desire, my aspired dream; the world she represents is the source of my happiness and pain in my life, it is the womb that nurtures me.”<sup>107</sup> This narration of lesbian eroticism clearly depicts realistic objectivity of the narrator’s experience of sexual orgasm of the “now” with her strong attachment to the mother; one cannot be “substituted” for the other, and one is not less-real than the other either.

The writer’s own response to the element of queer kinship and lesbian self-expression confirms the inextricability of incest and lesbianism and their unstable mobility within and across the modernist and realist divide. In an interview, Chen reflects on her novel: “Why does everyone claim that I am writing about maternal attachment and love complex? Maybe they want to prove that maternal attachment is the root of lesbianism in my writing. Because in theory this sounds like an explanation for lesbian formation...From my standpoint, mother-daughter incest is actually a form of *tongxinglian*/same sex desire. If there is love and desire between mother and daughter, it is a kind of female same sex desire.”<sup>108</sup> It is perhaps fitting that Chen Xue’s powerful response to Yang Zhao’s politics of literary legitimation also invokes and recites psychoanalytical theory. Chen revises maternal attachment in the pre-social sphere of “lesbian formation” into a more radical possibility of writing the assumed “modernist” element of mother-daughter incest, not as a failure of lesbian realism in the present, but

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>108</sup> Chen Xue, interview, “Female Writer Without Makeup: Exchanging Identity and Situating Self in Erotic Writing” (女性作家素顏: 在情慾書寫中翻轉身分定位), *Taiwan Literature* 158 (1996):110-124, 116.



as a call for moving beyond modernist and realist literary convention, for thinking queer kinship between mother and daughter as a form of lesbian reality.

### V. Huang Biyun's Queer Tactility of Kinship in Transnationality

Concomitantly, what transforms Chineseness in the 1990s alongside the emergence of market fundamentalism in the mainland economy and the rise of *ku'er* fiction in Taiwan is also the rapid emergence of claims about Greater China, transnational "Asian" capitals, and the increasing mobility of goods and people. Reading Hong Kong literature as Sinophone literature through Huang Biyun's fiction can complicate these new processes of transnationality. What are the dominant modes of "Chinese family" and "kinship" that are re-articulated within transnational Chinese capitalism in late modernity? More importantly, is there a possibility for imagining queer kinship forms within mobile circuits of capitals, goods, and people at the margin of Chinese capitalist transnationalism? In what follows, I will build on Aihwa Ong's theory of Chinese transnationality as flexible citizenship by arguing that the politics of family governmentality that accompanies the flexibility of migration is also a heterosexual one. I will then read Huang's *Ta shi nu zi, wo ye shi nu zi* as a text that is highly aware of the flexible strategy of migrations and capital accumulation by Hong Kong subjects; yet, in its representation of intimacies among working-class women in the French Chinese diaspora in Paris and the homoerotic bodily intimacy between two brothers in New York, Huang also literalizes a politics of queer kinship that is extremely tactile. This "tactile kinship" based on queer Sinophone intimacy provides an alternative to conventional narratives of cosmopolitan Chineseness in its refusal to cooperate with either diasporic nationalism, "Greater China" capitalism, or Asian American upward mobility.

In her theorization of the emerging dynamics of Hong Kong business elites who pursue migrations to Western global cities in the midst of the city's 1997 postcolonial handover, Ong coins the term flexible citizenship to "refer especially to the strategies and effects of mobile managers, technocrats, and professionals seeking to both circumvent *and* benefit from different nation-state regimes by selecting different sites for investments, work, and family relocation."<sup>109</sup> Ong points out that because different nation-states mandate different requirements for obtaining citizenship, oftentimes Hong Kong elite subjects' practices of flexible citizenship rely on strict regimes of family governmentality in which the male patriarchs invest in capitals in emerging economies in China and Taiwan while relocating their families to "democratic" safe havens in the West. Ong further adds that flexible citizenship hinges on familial strategies of regulation. She states, "I consider the rational, normative practices that regulate healthy, productive, and successful bodies within the family and their deployment in economic activities for economic well-being as family governmentality."<sup>110</sup>

In another chapter on the articulation of kinship logics by Chinese capitalists in mainland China, Ong finds that another familial romance is expressed by working-class women in urban Chinese coastal cities who "dream" about marrying elite business men from Taiwan and Hong Kong, representing "a vision of capitalist autonomy and a source of new 'network capital.'"<sup>111</sup> I build on Ong here by reading the acceleration of kinship logics as reinstalling heteronormative kinship orders. The fact that Hong Kong patriarchs acquire (masculine) capitals in Asia while their wives perform strict familial roles in

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<sup>109</sup> Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 112.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 117-118.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 155.

migrant communities actually points to the intensification of heterosexual gendered roles of men and women along the divide of public and private spheres. I will now turn to Huang's two stories about Chinese women in Paris and brothers in New York as Sinophone narratives about transnational Chineseness that situate kinship not as automatically tied to the accruelement of capitals or the exploitation of women bodies in heterosexual economies. Alternatively, they point to expressions and modes of relatedness like support networks, sisterhood, brotherhood, and homosociality that are often expressed through specific references to acts of touching, smelling, and bodily proximity, namely bodily economies that are not over-determined by capitalistic transnational Chineseness.

"A Chinese Woman in Exile in Paris" (流落巴黎的一個中國女子) presents a transnational working-class story between two Hong Kong women. Chen Yu (陳玉),<sup>112</sup> who married a Frenchman who worked in Hong Kong, is now divorced and working in a Chinese restaurant. She met Ye Xixi (葉細細), a young female student in Paris 13 University who frequents her workplace. Slowly Chen discovers Ye's tendency for self-destruction due to forlornness and abandonment by her boyfriend in Hong Kong. Chen then takes up the responsibility of taking care of Ye. The exact relationship between the two strangers who happen to run into one another is never clearly explained. However, with more attention paid to Huang's descriptions of Chen and Ye's bodily movements, the story also narrates a form of female homosociality that is more significant than mere strange encounter between two Chinese women but a bit reserved in its representation of

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<sup>112</sup> Huang Biyun has a tendency to repeat character names in different stories within the same collection of stories. So Chen Yu reappears as an illegal Taiwan immigrant in "Love in New York." Likewise, Ye Xixi, a Chinese student in Paris in this story appears again in the story set in New York as a diasporic Chinese woman from Thailand who is involved in drug deals.

lesbianism. Chen's awareness of Ye's tactile body happens first when they meet each other in a Laundromat. Speaking in the first-person, Chen describes, "I become aware of Ye Xixi because she is reading a Chinese book. Hair is very thin, an Asian woman seldom has such thin hair. There are only she and I in the laundry room. I also spread out my Chinese newspaper, reading Hong Kong news...human breathing and the movement of hair can be heard clearly. This woman and her Chinese book become very real...I know Ye Xixi because of this."<sup>113</sup>

This passage illustrates the intense affect that underlines their first encounter. Furthermore, it points to the meeting places for transnational Chinese subjects in the Western diasporas like the laundry room where bodies, smells, and the tactility of human bodies allow for moment of closeness and relatedness. Here the transnational Chinese imaginary narrated by Chen Yu depends not only on the commonality of consuming print capitalistic commodities like newspaper and Chinese books, but also through the proximity of "Chinese" bodies in a seemingly "foreign" place like Paris. Benedict Anderson points out that the emergence of print capitalism allows what he calls imagined community to flourish. In his formulation, "regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship."<sup>114</sup> Whereas Anderson argues that the imagined aspect of nationalism is so powerfully dependent on print capitalism that individuals do not need to come face to face in their experiences of horizontal relatedness, I read Huang's depiction of Chen and Ye's transnational intimacy here as illustrative of the convergence between print

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<sup>113</sup> Huang Biyun, *Ta shi nu zi, wo ye shi nu zi*, 50.

<sup>114</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised edition (New York: Verso, 2006), 7.

capitalism like Hong Kong newspaper and the proximity of tactile bodies within spaces of the Chinese diasporas. Here, both print capitalism in the “imagined community” of transnational Chineseness and the closeness between bodies create horizontal forms of female homosociality that are not reducible to the flows of transnational capital in late modernity. In Huang’s articulation of Sinophone queerness, alternative mode of relatedness between women occupies the margin of presumed “commonality” of being “Chinese” in places outside of Hong Kong, outside of the geopolitics of China.

Two other significant moments of tactile kinship emerge in the development of the story: when Chen Yu visits Ye Xixi’s apartment to have dinner with her and when Chen receives the call from police that Ye committed suicide. Whereas the first moment registers the tactility of bodily proximity that borders confusingly across meanings of sisterhood and homoeroticism, the last moment of tactility literally marks Chen as Ye’s next of kin in a transnational setting where the female exilic subject lacks other forms of kinship structures built upon blood, marriage, and relative networks. Chen narrates her approximate body distance from Ye when she visits her home for dinner: “She does not move at all, only the body is getting warmer. Suddenly my heart feels terrible. So I tell her: ‘I need to go back to work’...she walks with me downstairs. I look at her, give her 200 franc (French currency), and leave quickly.”<sup>115</sup> This passage points to what Helen Hok-sze Leung characterizes as the “undercurrents” of queer Hong Kong cultural productions, which represent “forms of desire that resist the bounds of sexual orientation and...relational bonds that escape categorization.”<sup>116</sup> Concurrently, this undercurrent of

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<sup>115</sup> Huang Biyun, *Ta shi nu zi, wo ye shi nu zi*, 57.

<sup>116</sup> Helen Hok-sze Leung, *Undercurrents: Queer Culture and Postcolonial Hong Kong* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2008), 1.

female queer sexuality that borders between sisterhood and explicit lesbian desire also serves two specific functions that rupture the dominant narrative of the (heterosexual) transnational flexible Chinese family model. The visit to Ye's home and their bodily exchange provide a brief rupture to the routine working hours of Chen's role as a female working-class immigrant; simultaneously, her giving of her money to Ye illustrates female-to-female circulation of capitals that are outside of, or at least less dependent on, the "family romance of mandarin capital,"<sup>117</sup> which, according to Ong, requires the convergence of male fraternal interests between business elites and East Asian politicians and the exploitation of Chinese women as open to sexual exchange for the accrual of social mobility.

If "A Chinese Woman in Exile in Paris" maps female-female intimacy by narrating alternative modes of capital circulation apart from the dominant model of transnational Chinese capitals, "Love in New York" (愛在紐約) provides another significant rupture of the flexible citizenship model that often assumes male business elites' upward social mobility in Western global cities. More queerly, this story explores a complicated set of relationships between three women Chen Yu (陳玉), Ye Xixi (葉細細), and Xu Zhixing (許之行) and two brothers, Song Huai Ming (宋懷明) and Song Ke Ming (宋克明). While the story begins by affirming the older brother Ke Ming's transnational capital in New York as a dentist and his heterosexual romances with the three women, the narrative takes a queer twist as the women either die or leave him while his brother Huai Ming becomes the only one who intimately embraces him. In other

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<sup>117</sup> Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship*, 143.

words, this story does not adhere to the model of upward social mobility that reaffirms Ke Ming's status as the model minority in Asian America, nor does having mobile capitals guarantee his success in managing his familial relationship and romance. The text powerfully maps the disintegration of the "myth" of capitalistic transnational Chineseness while presenting queer kinship as a tactile form of intimacy between two Hong Kong brothers.

Huai Ming's coming-of-age sexual curiosity is intimately tied to his desire for closeness and kinship bond with his brother to the extent that his desire for Ke Ming's women is almost inextricable from his act of smelling, sensing, and touching his brother's body. This desire to be affected and to touch within the configuration of tactile kinship is brought into play early on in the story. For instance, Huai Ming describes the first casual encounter between his brother and Chen Yu, an illegal female immigrant from Taiwan, while he fell asleep. When he wakes up again, he describes his own sexual arousal while his brother is in the shower: "When I woke up, my lower body is wet with light fishy smell. Showering noise comes from the bathroom...There is still a slight fishy smell on the bed, the air of his clean and warm body, the itchy breath, the seduction of the full and peachy lips; I lay on his shoulder, he slowly touches my hair: 'You are still young. I don't know how to explain to you, but I hope you are not like us.'"<sup>118</sup>

Ke Ming, realizing that he fails as a model of family governmentality when their parents are absent in New York, nonetheless warns Huai Ming: "I hope you are not like us." Confusingly enough, this admonishment about non-productive and wayward sexuality carries the homoerotic message that if Huai Ming should not be like "them"

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<sup>118</sup> Huang Biyun, *Ta shi nu zi, wo ye shi nu zi*, 114.

who participate in heterosexual desire, should he then draw closer to him instead? However, the turning of one desire (heterosexual) to another (homosexual) is not made clear. In fact, such a reading reduces the complexity of queerness in this moment of kinship trouble. A queerer reading can interpret this moment as releasing a sexual energy that is what Eve Sedgwick calls “the erotic triangle” in the very structure of male homosociality.<sup>119</sup> In Sedgwick’s formulation, man talks about his attraction to women to another man only to arouse their erotic drive for one another. Building on Sedgwick, I add that Huai Ming’s desire for his brother’s women cannot be easily sorted out from his desire for male (sexual) bonding with his brother. Furthermore, erotic triangle here between the two brothers and the three women is enabled and intensified precisely by the fact that erotic male homosociality exists at the level of blood-related kinship as well, and it has a peculiar tactile quality to it. “The clean and warm body, the itchy breath, the seduction of the full and peachy lips” are all attributes that Huai Ming uses to affectively measure his intimacy with his brother through an optical and olfactory mapping of his tactile kinship with him.

Michael Taussig, in his acute reading of Benjamin’s concept of the “optical unconscious,” associates tactility with mass advertisement images that literally hit the spectator’s unguarded vision in the age of mechanical reproduction.<sup>120</sup> Here, I use tactility in less exclusively optical, but more descriptive terms, by arguing that kinship as a form of sociality is extremely tactile, and its susceptibility to the erotics of touch, smell, and bodily movements frames a sense of relatedness and intimacy that cuts across the

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<sup>119</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 21-27.

<sup>120</sup> Michael Taussig, “Tactility and Distraction,” *Cultural Anthropology* 6.2 (May 1991):147-153, 149.



taken-for-granted division between heterosexuality and homosexuality, and between normative kinship and strange encounters in Chinese diasporic spaces. Overall, Huang's two stories about intimate bonds between two women in Paris and between two brothers in New York show that the flexibility of bodies within modes of governmentality would imply, at least, that there are Sinophone modes of *flexible* desire that operate, however marginally, alongside the flow of transnational Chinese capitals, which are not merely reducible to family (heteronormative) capitals in global Chinese modernity.

## **VI. Reading Queer Chinese Literature (Trans)nationally**

In this chapter, I try to map out a reading practice that accounts for the various ways multiple regimes of Chineseness are conditioned by kinship logics that circumscribe the possibility of alternative queer kinship forms, and in turn, challenged by them. Departing from recent theoretical works by Chow and Ang, which employ strictly diasporic perspectives that call for the critique of China-centrism and authentic notions of Chineseness fetishized in mainland Chinese subjects,<sup>121</sup> a very different approach to Chineseness emerges when we map sexual and gender minoritized subjectivities across different sites of China(s): 1970s and 1990s Maoist and postsocialist China in Chen Ran's *A Private Life*, 1990s Taiwanese *ku'er* literature by Chen Xue, and 1990s Hong Kong Sinophone literature by Huang Biyun. This approach to the multiply constituted sites of Chineseness across national and transnational divides is mindful of the heterogeneity that Chineseness assumes in different discursive terrains: it simultaneously critiques nationalist Chineseness in 1970s Maoist model of proper family and state

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<sup>121</sup> For the latest critique on China-centrism and Chineseness from subject-positions outside of the geographical terrains of mainland China, see Shu-mei Shih, *Visuality and Identity: Sinophone Articulations Across the Pacific* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

cooperation, 1990s market fundamentalism, the discourse of literary legitimation in the debate on proper Taiwanese lesbian desire in queer fiction, and finally new emerging protocols of kinship governmentality in Hong Kong transnational family networks. Consequently, this queer reading practice of (trans)national Chinese literature envisions alternative kinship formations and compares the different marginal claims to the national (Chinese and Taiwan literature) alongside the transnational and the Sinophone (Hong Kong literature) without reducing the situatedness of local and global sexual politics. The next chapter outlines a different kind of transnational reading by paying close attention to the historical genealogy of a transgender sexual category *renyao* (human prodigy). Furthermore, I will show how the term is linked to various cross-historical adaptations of a folklore that rewrites the text's original logics of sexual binarism and abjection of transgressive femininity.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Transgenderism as a Heuristic Device: On the Cross-historical and Transnational

#### Adaptations of the *Legend of the White Snake*

##### I. Introduction

Any project that attempts to read “transgender” meanings into Chinese histories and cultural representations will almost always encounter the following question: How do we “apply” an Euro-American theoretical and social category like “transgender” to different national contexts? But even this obsession with the question of applicability assumes the coherence of the exporting term “transgender,” thereby relegating different forms of “Chinese” gender variance as simply the incomplete faces of an otherwise coherent field of knowledge. This project takes as its point of departure the unpredictability and speculative aspects of transgender subjectivities in the process of adaptation across genre, time, and space. I will first give a brief review of recent works in Chinese studies that touch on transgender topics before making the case for a cross-historical methodology that treats transgenderism as a heuristic open signifier.

In Chinese studies, scholars have begun to pay more systematic attentions to transgender topics. For example, Wu Cuncun has discussed the gender and class hierarchies between male literati and young male actors who played the female *dan* roles in Peking opera in the Ming-Qing era.<sup>122</sup> Helen Hok-sze Leung theorizes the cultural production of two modes of transgender subjectivities—transsexualism and transgender

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<sup>122</sup> Wu Cuncun, “Beautiful Boys Made up as Beautiful Girls: Anti-masculine Taste in Qing China,” in *Asian Masculinities: The Meaning and Practice of Manhood in China and Japan*, ed. Kam Louie and Morris Low (London: RoutledgeCruzon, 2003), 19-40.

butch—in postcolonial Hong Kong cinema.<sup>123</sup> And in her study of Wang Dulu’s martial arts novel, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (1941), Tze-lan D. Sang proposes that the original text offers more ethnic, gender, and bodily transgressions than Ang Lee’s cinematic adaptation allows.<sup>124</sup>

While I still insist on the importance of historicizing what “transgender” might mean in different periods of Chinese history, I also want to ask the more ambitious question of how similar categories of gender variance in Chinese history may brush against one another in what Walter Benjamin calls a historical materialist approach.<sup>125</sup> In my constellational approach, I emphasize the productive potentials of a cross-historical methodology that places the transgender theoretical protagonist, *renyao* (人妖), at the center of analysis. In Chinese, the compound *renyao* literally means human prodigy; when separated into two words, *ren* literally means the human and *yao* the demon or evilness. In its modern colloquial Chinese usage, it often refers to lady boys and male-to-female transsexuals in Thailand. *Renyao* in its transphobic Chinese-speaking usage then bears the strongest link to the local Thai identity of the *kathoey*, which “has developed into a word used almost exclusively for males who prefer the female gender role, i.e., cross-dressers, transsexuals and varieties in-between. That is, *kathoey* has begun more

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<sup>123</sup> Helen Hok-sze Leung, “Unsung Heroes: Reading Transgender Subjectivities in Hong Kong Action Cinema” in *Masculinities and Hong Kong Cinema*, ed. Laikwan Pang and Day Wong (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005), 81-98.

<sup>124</sup> Tze-lan D. Sang, “The Transgender Body in Wang Dulu’s *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*,” in *Embodied Modernities: Corporeality, Representation, and Chinese Cultures*, ed. Fran Martin and Larissa Heinrich (Hawaii: Hawaii University Press, 2006), 98-112.

<sup>125</sup> Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 253-264, 263.

and more to denote ‘transgender.’”<sup>126</sup> Given that part of the modern transphobic usage of *renyao* rests on its imagined horror that the binary opposites (the human and the demon) can coexist within a gender variant body, I will critically relate this demarcation of the human and the non-human in modern Chinese lexicon to earlier dichotomizing logics of the human and the demonic in Ming folklores. Specifically, after probing the subjection of feminine-demonic transgression in Feng Menglong’s *Legend of the White Snake* (白蛇傳) written in the late Ming, I will demonstrate how modern literary and media adaptations of the legend reconfigure femininity as a mobile ground for imagining perverse sexuality and transgender femme subjectivity.

Briefly, the story is set in the years of Southern Song governed by Emperor Gaozong. Madame Bai, with a thousand year of magical power, incarnates as human and seduces a handsome young man named Xu Xuan (許宣). Her entrance into the human world is accompanied by another green fish demon, Qing Qing. In later versions of *The Legend*, Xu Xuan’s name changes to Xu Xian, and the green fish becomes a green snake. In this didactic and moralist tale, Bai is narrated as an evil woman/demon who brings ill luck to Xu and poses threats to his life. The story ends with the powerful monk Fai Hai saving Xu’s life and suppressing the two demons under the Leifeng Pagoda in West Lake. It concludes with a Buddhist, moralist tone: “Admonish the worldly people not to lust! A person filled with lust will be deluded by sex.”<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Han ten Brummelhuis, “Transformations of Transgender: The Case of the Thai *Kathoei*,” in *Lady Boys, Tom Boys, Rent Boys: Male and Female Homosexualities in Contemporary Thailand*, ed. Peter A. Jackson and Gerard Sullivan (New York: The Haworth Press, 1999), 124.

<sup>127</sup> Feng Menglong (馮夢龍), *Jing Shi Tong Yan* (警世通言) [1624] (Hong Kong: Gu dian wen xue chu ban she, 1970), 420-448, 445. All translations of original Chinese sources in the body of the text are my own unless noted otherwise.

The *ren/yao* division in Feng's text depends on a cosmological worldview of Confucian gender that subjugates the feminine as the demonic. I will trace the logic of feminine transgression as evident in the ending of Feng's text by examining how early Qing writer Pu Songling's story "Ren Yao" further substantiates the politics of feminine subjection in *renyao* representations: Pu tells a story of heterosexual male cross-dressing that results in a forced male-to-female sex change, mandated by a cuckooed husband who forces the punished cross-dresser to make do with the "wrong" gender and become his mistress. Situating the issue of feminine subjection in the intertwined context of these different renderings of *renyao* subjectivity and gender variance, I will then draw on recent work on same-sex relations in Republican China to situate the May Fourth writer Yu Dafu's story "Ren Yao" with respect to the broader cultural context in which the *renyao* transgender subject was pathologized. My reading finds that despite the introduction of Western sexology during this historical moment of colonial modernity, Yu's text actually opens up more complicated relationships between the *renyao* subject and the feminine in the sense that *both* the male narrator and his object of desire are ambiguously gendered and feminized. Subsequently, I turn to Li Bihua's 1986 Hong Kong novel *Qingshe* (*Green Snake*) and read it as an "unfaithful adaptation" because, unlike its predecessors, in this iteration of *The Legend* the green snake embodies a mobile form of femininity that is at once perverse and multi-directional in her pursuit of desire.

Finally, I end with the transnational visibility of the legend in the 1992 Taiwan TV series *The New Legend of Madame White Snake* produced by Cao Jingde, which I interpret as a text that manages different forms of femininity in its representation of female masculinity. I call the feminine expression of actress Yip Tong's embodiment of

female masculinity in her portrayal of Xu Xian as the “transgender femme.” Given the various historical periods and different Chinese-speaking geographies that this study concerns with, I want to clarify from the outset that the term *renyao* as deployed here does not indicate some pre-conceived notions of femininity and masculinity or an original emergence of the Chinese transgender. Although in Feng’s text he never refers to Madame Bai as a “*renyao*” but simply as a *yao* (demon), *renyao* as a relational trope productively serves as a reading framework that indicates how the cosmological worldview of the human subject depends on the repudiation and discipline of transgressive femininity that Bai embodies. Theorizing *renyao* as a relational term rather than a specifically confined sexual category of transgenderism then introduces femininity as a shifting and mobile formation as it relates to the diverse configurations of *renyao* in each of the texts examined here.

Furthermore, I define femmeness as a transgender mode of expressing, embodying, and visualizing femininity that can reside in various gendered and sexed bodies. In particular, I will demonstrate the extent to which Cao’s TV series creatively expresses hyper-femmeness in heterosexual form in the actress Angie Chiu’s presentation of Bai while representing Yip Tong’s cross-dressing performance in a male role that is less butch but more femme. Therefore, transgender femmeness illustrates a peculiar transgender configuration of a female body into a masculine body that, at the same time, does not forsake feminine qualities even in its corporeal embodiment of female masculinity. This again illustrates that female masculinity in its transgender form must be framed relationally to the engendering of femininity. Above all, the category “transgender” concerns not only the applicability of Western theory in Chinese contexts;

more provocatively, it can serve as a heuristic lens through which one could see how a specific gender variant term like *renyao* mutates across Chinese cultural history and, indeed, “transgenders” in different forms of cultural production through the very processes of adaptation across the heterogeneous times and spaces of the Sinophone world.<sup>128</sup> It aims to show how transgender studies in Chinese and Sinophone contexts is as much about excavating and “recovering” specific transgender terminology like *renyao* as it is about its afterlife in cultural translations across time and space.

## II. Moral and Gender Contentions

In one of the earliest attempts to fictionalize the folklore into literary form, late Ming scholar and bibliographer Feng Menglong wrote “Madame White Snake Jailed Eternally in the Leifeng Pagoda” (白娘子永鎮雷峰塔) in his *Jing Shi Tong Yan* (警世通言). Written in 1624, the text translated the story from folklore to vernacular Chinese. In order to trace the historical developments of the story, it is more productive to situate the text in the multiple moral contentions that conditioned the textual representation of gender and sexuality than assuming a single moral framework in Ming dynasty. In particular, the relationship between *ren* and *yao*, the human and the non-human, was not always structured in a binary in earlier folklores. For example, in Pan Jiangdong’s encyclopedic compilation of research materials devoted to the legend, he cites the mythological belief that Chinese civilization creator Nuwa was often believed to

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<sup>128</sup> By Sinophone, I meant to track the transformations of the tale and discursive meanings of *renyao* in different Chinese-speaking communities across time and space in Ming dynasty China, Republican China, and 1990s Hong Kong, and Taiwan. Here, I further develop Shu-mei Shih’s foundational definition of the Sinophone as “a network of places of cultural production outside China and on the margins of China and Chineseness” by showing how adaptations of the tale outside the PRC change the way we read the “original” Chinese premodern tale. See Shu-mei Shih, *Visuality and Identity*, 4.



embody a snake-body and human face.<sup>129</sup> This example suggests that the fusion between human and non-human entities, perhaps the earliest example of *ren/yao* embodiment, did not immediately invite moral judgment. Instead, it was even glorified. Another earlier legend that might have inspired the thematic structure of the white snake legend appeared in a five hundred-chapter collection of stories in Song dynasty called *Taiping Guang Ji* (太平廣記) in 978 AD. This version makes a rare example of the seduction genre because the demonic seducer actually incarnates in a male body and seduces a young girl, but the tale ends up reinforcing male heroism in which a knight shoots the snake demon to death, saves the girl, and marries her.<sup>130</sup>

In “From Folklore to Literature Theater,” Whalen Lai underscores another dichotomy of morality at work within the genealogy of stories about man-god encounters in ancient Chinese legends in Han dynasty. Lai shows that not all encounters with the non-human are censored with moral conclusions. Within these encounters, meetings with the immortal gods are celebrated with fertility themes, while meetings with the devils are deemed as “unfortunate.” Lai concludes, “So perhaps it is fitting that by Han, the romance of ‘fortuitous encounter’ with immortals was set apart from the horror of ‘unfortunate run-in’ with the devil.”<sup>131</sup> Thus, within the genre of human romances with the non-human, this Han tradition creates another binary between the good and bad romances, where human (*ren*) encounter with demon (*yao*) is seen as unfortunate.

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<sup>129</sup> Pan Jiangdong (潘江東), *Bai She Gu Shi Yan Jiu* (白蛇故事研究) (Taipei: Taiwan xue sheng shu ju, 1981), 3. [Pan Jiangdong, *White Snake Story Research Compendium*]

<sup>130</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>131</sup> Whalen Lai, “From Folklore to Literate Theater: Unpacking *Madame White Snake*,” *Asian Folklore Studies* 51 (1992):51-66, 56.

While Feng Menglong's canonization of the legend inherits the binary logics of good immortal versus bad devil that was already present in the Han traditional folklore, it nonetheless features a unique rhetorical strategy whereby feminine subjectivity is equated with the demonic, the deviant, and the abnormal, descriptions typically employed in modern condemnations of transgender subjects. Specifically, Feng utilizes literary techniques of *narrative reversal* in which qualities that mark Madame Bai as alluring, seductive, and beautiful all turn out to be improperly aggressive, psychically abnormal, and physically destructive to the male protagonist Xu Xuan. For instance, the third person narrator describes Bai's beauty in a way that simultaneously highlights her demonic power: "Xu Xuan has always been an honest person, upon seeing this alluring woman whose beauty is like flower and like jade, accompanied by yet another pretty servant, his mind is uncontrollably aroused."<sup>132</sup> Shortly after, Bai introduces herself: "I am the sister from the Bai family, was married to Mr. Zhang; unfortunately he passed away, now buried in this Thunder Mountain range."<sup>133</sup> This short, introductory dialogue already marks Bai as an allegorical embodiment of the modern transgender *renyao* (human/demon) subject: this is not a "direct" transgender embodiment in the modern sense of gender transformation, but an "allegorical" *renyao* embodiment that parallels gender and moral transgressions. Bai embodies the alluring beauty that is humanly corporeal to Xu; yet, her beauty foreshadows the demonic power to destroy, thus implying her embodiment of destructive and deviant sexuality as well.

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<sup>132</sup> Feng Menglong, *Jing Shi Tong Yan*, 422.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid, 422.

In addition to this literary description of Bai's *renyao* embodiment, Feng also organizes the moral implication of the story around a Confucian cosmological worldview that legitimates a hierarchical mapping of gendered subjects. This cosmological worldview is buttressed by the Buddhist tone of the ending, which stresses the importance of separating sexually transgressive bodies from normative "human" bodies. Specifically, Bai's embodiment of both human and demonic qualities, while initially posing threats only to Xu, progresses through the development of the story and becomes a danger to the cosmological social body at large. This is reflected in the text's narrative of feminine transgression, which dramatizes Bai's dangerous qualities on top of the story's narrative reversal. While Bai's gender identity remains feminine in her incarnation as a human being, she shifts from her role as a virtuous and compatible wife in a "companionate marriage" to an endangerment to Xu's masculine quality as a husband.<sup>134</sup>

Specifically, when Xu is working as a clerk in a Chinese herbal shop in Zhenjiang, Bai suggests that they set up their own herbal shop. The narrator describes, "Since the opening of the herbal store, the transactions grew day by day, and Xu Xuan gains prosperously."<sup>135</sup> Here, Bai is still described as a compatible wife for Xu who helps him become successful while remaining a helper in his business. This companionate quality of Bai quickly transforms into an aggressively controlling power over him. In particular, when Xu gets special pardon from his previous misdemeanor and returns to Hangzhou, he becomes aware of Bai's identity as a demon ever since the monk Fai Hai

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<sup>134</sup> For a discussion on the ideal of companionate marriage that first fostered in the coastal cities in the Jiangnan region in Ming dynasty, see Dorothy Do, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 179-185.

<sup>135</sup> Feng Menglong, *Jing Shi Tong Yan*, 438.

warns him about her. However, Bai introduces herself to Xu's sister and her husband even before Xu returns home. At this point, Xu begs for his life in front of Bai. Bai, realizing that her non-human identity is exposed, gives Xu a final warning: "I honestly tell you, if you listen to my words and stay happy with me, everything will be fine; if you remain suspicious with alternative thoughts, let me warn you that the whole city will be flooded with blood, everyone will be drown, and all will be dead for no reason."<sup>136</sup> Bai's alarming message to Xu shows that her feminine virtue as a compatible partner is conditional in the sense that her submission to Xu will only remain so if he recognizes her as a female human subject. Once Xu doubts her identity as a woman/human, Bai warns that she will cease being one as well by exerting her controlling power over him and bringing cosmic destruction to the world at large.

Bai's feminine transgression is occasioned by her non-human status as an animalistic demon, in contrast to the equally non-human but almighty power of the Buddhist monk Fai Hai. In this moment of the narrative, Xu Xuan visits the temple where Fai Hai serves as a highly ranked monk. Suddenly, a storm emerges in the ocean, and Xu sees a small boat fast approaching the shore with Bai and Ching Ching riding on it. Just when Xu decides to go home with Bai, Fai Hai shouts loudly and addresses Bai: "*Yechu* (業畜/demonic animal) What are you doing here?" The monk warns Bai again: "*Yechu*, how dare you come again and be improper, destroy the human civilization! This old monk especially comes for you."<sup>137</sup> Again, Feng's specific word choices stand out by marking Bai's status as a demonic female and transgressive subject, which is contrasted

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid, 441.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid, 440.

with Fai Hai's assumed proper subject position. First, *Yechu* is a specifically loaded Chinese phrase that is addressed to demons. Separated into two words, *Ye* often points to another phrase *zuiye* (罪業), meaning sinful deeds, while *chu* often refers to animals. The closest linking word to *chu* would be *chusheng*, meaning livestock in general.

The regulatory gendered consequence of this particular framing of Bai's subject position as demonic, animalistic, non-human, and improper can be better situated within the emergence of the Ming code of *lijiao* (proper teaching), which not only orders gender into binary framework of men and women, but more so through a hierarchical structure that implies the power relations between subject positions. As Kwang-Ching Liu and Richard Shek have noted, "The ethics of *lijiao* centered on the doctrine of Three Bonds—the obligation of child to parents, wife to husband, and official to monarch—which was expressed ritualistically in ancestor worship, marriage ceremonies, and the complex rites at the imperial court, including the sacerdotal exercises of the emperor himself."<sup>138</sup> Situating Fai Hai's policing of Bai's transgressive femininity allows us to read her as an allegory of gender transitivity in which she constantly fluctuates between statuses of the demon and the human, the submissive wife and the controlling partner. As someone who both deviates from humanness and transgresses proper *lijiao* in her direct challenge to higher authorities like her husband and the monk, Bai embodies a feminine transgression that can be read as a moral transgression contesting the Confucian cosmological order at large, which is resolved at the end of the story. Indeed, the moral lesson of the story is

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<sup>138</sup> Kwang-Ching Liu and Richard Shek, "Introduction" in *Heterodoxy in Late Imperial China*, ed. Kwang-Ching Liu and Richard Shek (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004), 1-25, 4. Tani E. Barlow has similarly pointed to the discursive and material construction of women as *funu* who occupy specific protocols according to their subject positions as daughter, mother, etc. in 18<sup>th</sup> century China. See Tani E. Barlow, "Theorizing 'Women,'" in her *The Question of Women in Chinese Feminism*, 37-63.

clearly spelled out by Fai Hai's suppression of Bai and Ching Ching under the Leifeng Pagoda and Xu's conversion to Buddhist ethics. Xu offers the last Buddhist chants: "Powerful monk helps me leave the earthly place, Iron tree leads to blossom and meets the spring; turning to next life and turn again, birth gives to rebirth...lust is emptiness and emptiness is lust, emptiness and lust must be clearly distinguished."<sup>139</sup> Consequently, the resolution of the story supports the Confucian cosmology with a strong Buddhist insistence of distinguishing lust from calm emptiness. This textual necessity to differentiate what is lust and what is the Buddhist way, of course, implies that the various gender transgressions and "improper" femininity of Bai's *renyao* embodiment must be distinguished from the orderly and proper ethics of humanity.

If Feng Menglong's rendition of the legend marks Bai as the exemplar of the *renyao* embodiment through its textual fixation of Bai's improper femininity with non-humanity within a cosmological worldview of gender, Pu Songling, an early Qing writer who penned the story "Renyao"<sup>140</sup> in his *Liaozhai Zhiyi* (*Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*), would further affix the embodiment of *renyao* into a preeminent category of transgenderism. Despite its more specific narration of a "sex change" incident, the story still retains a moralizing logic of subjugating the feminine. In "Renyao," a man disguises as a woman in order to seduce another woman; his cross-dressing act was later discovered by the woman's husband, who then castrates the man and makes him his concubine instead. In Charlotte Furth's important study of men who become women, women who transform into men, and accounts of individuals with congenital intersexed

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<sup>139</sup> Feng Menglong, *Jing Shi Tong Yan*, 445.

<sup>140</sup> Pu Songling, "Renyao" in Pu Songling (蒲松齡), *Liao Zhai Zhi Yi* (聊齋志異) [1680] (Hong Kong: Shang wu yin shu guan Xianggang fen guan, 1963), 693-694.

conditions in literary and historical records, she shows that Pu's representation of *renyao* is based on an earlier story about Sang Ch'ung from Shansi, a man who was raised as a girl with bound feet, lived close to female quarters, and was known to "falsify" his gender in order to have sex with those women.<sup>141</sup> Thus, Pu's tale about cross-dressing and sex change actually still adheres to similar logics of hierarchical Confucian cosmology found in Feng's Ming dynasty text, because the woman's husband is positioned as the one who restores "order" by punishing another male crossdresser and forcing him to take the feminine role. Wenqing Kang, in his overview of the appearances of *renyao* subjectivities in the Republican period, also notes Pu's emphasis of restoring normative gender even in a narrative about gender crossings: "One might add that in classical records, gender transformations and male same-sex relations always seemed to be appropriated and subsumed within the framework of normative gender relations."<sup>142</sup>

If Pu's literary inflection of the Sang Ch'ung case substantiates rather than defies the subjugation of the feminine through the narrative's emphasis on "restoring" cosmological gender worldview that dichotomizes relationship between male and female, husband and wife, emasculated-turned-feminine and the masculine, how did the literary trope of *renyao* further develop into multiple categories of the transgender that are historically specific to Republican China (1911-1949)? In what ways did Western sexological division of gender binary, along with its concepts of homosexuality, heterosexuality, and pathology build on and extend earlier notions of *renyao*

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<sup>141</sup> Charlotte Furth, "Androgynous Males and Deficient Females: Biology and Gender Boundaries in Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century China," in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michele Aina Barale, David M. Halperin (New York: Routledge, 1993), 479-497, 492.

<sup>142</sup> Wenqing Kang, *Obsession: Male Same-Sex Relations in China, 1900-1950* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009), 34.

embodiment? How did notable May Fourth writers, such as Yu Dafu, respond to this transmutation of earlier tropes of feminine transgression (in Feng's text) and literary transgenderism (in Pu's text)? In *Obsessions: Male Same-Sex Relations in China, 1900-1950*, Wenqing Kang argues that due to the New Culture Movement's (mid-1910s-1920s) general turn to science and revolt against Confucianism and feudalism, competing categories of sexual practices that were already present in earlier Chinese history were re-evaluated anew under the scope of "modern" Western science.<sup>143</sup> While terms like *tongxinglian'ai* (same-sex love) may be compatible with the then emerging idea of free love championed by May Fourth intellectuals, other categories like *renyao* multiplied into numerous gender crossing subjects that bear the sign of pathology. Kang elaborates the lists of pathologized gendered subjects: "Among those named as *renyao* were a sexually prematurely developed boy, crossdressers, intersex people who might have sex with both men and women, Peking opera *dan* actors, male prostitutes, and any men who behaved and dressed in a feminine fashion and had sex with other men. Early twentieth-century writers used the image of *renyao* as evidence of social and political crisis."<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Recently, Howard Chiang revises Wenqing Kang's emphasis on Republican male same-sex relations as continuing, interacting with, and renewing local indigenous sexual vocabularies in previous Chinese dynastic history through mutual encounter of the Chinese and Western discourses. Instead, Chiang argues that the Republican period, through the uneven translations of Western scientific discourses on psychology and sexology by experts, ushers in a new style of reasoning about homosexuality that has epistemological consequences on both personal and national levels. See Howard Chiang, "Epistemic Modernity and the Emergence of Homosexuality in China," *Gender and History* 22.3 (2010): 629-657. For previous scholarship on the translation of Western sexological terminologies from the West, to Japan, and back to China through a translingual model, see Tze-lan D. Sang, *The Emerging Lesbian*, 99-126; on how modernizing Chinese elites reacted negatively to this translation of homosexuality and sexology during the Republican period and explained it as "an acquired aberration," see Frank Dikötter, *Sex, Culture and Modernity in China: Medical Science and the Construction of Sexual Identities in the Early Republican Period* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1995), 145.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid, 34.



While I agree with Kang that categories like *renyao* comprise a whole range of sexed and gendered subjects whose sexual orientations and gender roles may move constantly within and beyond the category of the transgender or same-sex relationships due to the very productive nature of sexual discourse that Foucault outlines in the *History of Sexuality*,<sup>145</sup> this multiplicity of pathologizing discourse on *renyao* still hinges upon the trope of the feminine as demonic in earlier Ming folklores. Indeed, the trope of demonic femininity was examined anew under the then emerging discourse of May Fourth literary humanism. The binary oppositions between the human and the non-human, modernity and traditionalism, and man and woman were under strong attacks by early May Fourth intellectuals like Hu Shi and Chen Duxiu and later on reexamined under the literary modernism of Lu Xun, Yu Dafu, Ba Jin, and others. That is to say, humanism was posed as a question rather than assumed as a fixed trope of literary imagination.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 3-35.

<sup>146</sup> For a more in-depth discussion of the different takes on humanism polarized between May Fourth intellectuals who generally view Confucian traditions as inhumanity and a neo-humanist group *Critical Review* who argue for blending the greatest traditions of Eastern and Western civilizations in order to reinvent a new humanism that is neo-Confucianist in form, see Lydia H. Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity—China 1900-1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 239-258. Through a slightly different orientation, Shu-mei Shih argues that because of China's semicolonial condition and the lack of a total colonization by Western and Japanese powers, there emerged a bifurcation in the ways May Fourth intellectuals adopted Western influences. On the one hand Occidentalists like Lu Xun and Hu Shi generally call for complete Westernization and anti-traditionalism while neo-humanists (what Shih calls neotraditionalists) are more cosmopolitan in spirit in their selective reinvention of Chinese local tradition and reception of Western self-critique after WWI in the new humanism of Irving Babbitt. See Shu-mei Shih, *The Lure of Modern: Writing Modernism in Semicolonial China, 1917-1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 157-158. In another study that focuses on the persistence of inhumanity and monstrosity in the historical and literary writings of Chinese modernity, David Der-wei Wang argues that the very act of writing history depends paradoxically on the negative accumulation of monstrous memory and inhumane violence. See David Der-wei Wang, *The Monster That Is History: History, Violence, and Fictional Writing in Twentieth-Century China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 187.

Specifically, Lu Xun's 1918 short story "A Madman's Diary" most pointedly poses humanism as an ambiguous problem when the narrator who realizes that his brother is as cannibalistic as the other men in his village, asks: "How can a man like myself, after four thousand years of man-eating history—even though I knew nothing about it at first—ever hope to face real men?"<sup>147</sup> Here, Lu Xun equivocates feudal Chinese tradition and cannibalism symbolically and thereby grounds the possibility of humanistic existence as a conundrum for other May Fourth writers. Likewise, his brother and literary critic, Zhou Zuoren, didactically calls for a "humane literature" based on his iconoclastic attack on Confucian and Daoist writings because they are "a hindrance to the growth of human nature; they are things that destroy the peace and harmony of mankind; they are all to be rejected."<sup>148</sup> While Zhou Zuoren's humanistic attack on traditionalism as all that is "unnatural" could be easily deployed by "scientific" discourses that view *renyao* as a sign of non-human social pathology, I will illustrate the ways in which Yu Dafu's literary representation of the *renyao* figure works against the assumption of non-humanity by questioning what constitutes a human subject, narrated from the perspective of a young man who embraces feminine qualities. I now turn to Yu Dafu's literary inflection of *renyao* in his autobiographically Romantic writing style, in order to examine the complex crisscrossing of femininity and transgender representations, which paves the way for critical recitations of the *renyao* embodiment in the rewriting and adaptation of the *Legend* by Li and Cao at the end of the twentieth century.

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<sup>147</sup> Lu Xun, "A Madman's Diary," [1918] in Lu Xun, *The Complete Stories of Lu Xun*, trans. Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), 1-12, 12.

<sup>148</sup> Zhou Zuoren, "Humane Literature," [1918], in *Modern Chinese Literary Thought: Writings on Literature 1893-1945*, ed. Kirk A. Denton (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 151-161, 157.

“Ren Yao” (“Human Prodigy”) is a short story written in 1923 by Yu Dafu that has received limited scholarly attention.<sup>149</sup> The story reveals his deep fascination with the ambiguous dimensions of the erotic and the feminine. In other words, “Ren Yao” is one of the rare texts within the canon of May Fourth literary humanism that deals simultaneously with the theme of gender ambiguity and transgender embodiment as well as their complicated relations to the trope of the feminine. The question of what constitutes a proper human subject is often one that May Fourth writers ask in addition to their rebellion against feudalism, traditional notion of filial duty, and all the “vices” they associate with the “old society.” Their search for a new modern subjectivity was deeply embedded within a larger concern about the geopolitical situation of China at the peak of her encroachment by foreign (both Western and Japanese) imperial powers. Yet it is the gender ambiguous body that the very question of the human is brought forth in the story. Departing from Republican discourses on *ren yao* as a sign of social and nationalist disorder and Pu Songling’s subjugation of the feminine in a narrative of restoring gender order, Yu’s story opens up the field of possibility in embodying femininity and offers what Judith Butler calls “a critical perspective on the norms that confer intelligibility itself.”<sup>150</sup> Specifically, the 17 years-old male protagonist (very likely Yu himself) protests against his mother’s decision to ground him due to his recent health condition. Using internal dialogue, the young man protests, “If I can’t go out, how come you people get to go out? Unless you are human, and I am not?”<sup>151</sup> This interesting question about

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<sup>149</sup> Yu Dafu, “Ren Yao” [1923] in Yu Dafu (郁達夫), *Dafu Zhong Pian Xiao Shuo Ji* (達夫中篇小說集) (Hong Kong: Zhi ming shu ju, 1950), 580-589.

<sup>150</sup> Judith Butler, “Doing Justice to Someone: Sex Reassignment and Allegories of Transsexuality,” *GLQ* 7.4 (2001): 621-636, 634.

<sup>151</sup> Yu Dafu, “Ren Yao,” 581.

the humanness of the protagonist can be contextualized within the Republican discourse on *renyao* that began to pathologize gender ambiguous subjects as not fully human because of their assumed sexual perversity. Thus, the very title of “human prodigy” on which the story is based signals the young man’s “transgendering” of himself as someone who is situated at the threshold of humanity, a reaction to his oppression under the supervision of his mother and his exclusion from the social world at large.

This transgendering of the male subject and the conundrum of humanism is further represented through the narrator’s self-portrayal of his own gender-ambiguous body, which is later projected onto another feminine transgender subject that he desires. For instance, the third-person narrator describes the young man’s body in feminizing terms: “Maybe because of the warm sunlight, his lips today are pitifully redder than he normally is...he sits on the rickshaw and driven into the city, the pedestrians walking north, whether they are men, women, old, or young, not one passes by him without giving him a few stares.”<sup>152</sup> This passage provides a crucial glimpse into the representation of eroticism and the role of gender-crossing desires in Yu Dafu’s work, given that most criticisms on the Romantic dimension of his work focus on his erotic representation of women in heterosexual terms and juxtapose them against homosexual “deviance.” For example, Leo Ou-fan Lee, in situating autobiographical aspects of Yu’s writing, states factually, “Confronted by foppish young men from rich urban families and repulsed by homosexuality among his classmates (Kuo Mo-jo indulged in it in his high school years), Yu again sought escape in books and poetry.”<sup>153</sup> Lee’s contextualization of Yu’s career

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid, 583.

<sup>153</sup> Leo Ou-fan Lee, *The Romantic Generation of Modern Chinese Writers* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 85.

frames his creative productivity as an “escape” from forms of non-heterosexual transgressions. However, in “Ren Yao” the male protagonist is depicted and eroticized with the kinds of representational conventions that are traditionally reserved for heterosexual femininity: red lips and subjection to the gaze of others. And the gaze that structures the scene is open for all genders: men, women, old, and young. Male embodiment of the feminine here is inseparable from his goal of repudiating the traditionally construed feudal femininity: his rebellion against his mother by riding into the city.

Yu’s representation of femininity in the story then, is not a simple subjection or repudiation of the feminine in moralizing frames (as in Feng and Pu’s texts); rather, it projects feminine self-representation onto the male body as something ambiguous yet desirable at the same time. The story’s intentional staging of the feminine in a transgender light is made even more evident in another example: the protagonist’s obsessive stalking of an actress whom he encountered in the opera house. Is it possible that the opera actress is in fact a biologically male *dan* character crossdressed in female form? The narrative offers no decisive clue. The actress’ gender is only hinted in the following description: “From her movement, the size of her limbs, it is a perfect balanced creation. Body is not too long or too short; not too fat or too thin, it is as good as his own.”<sup>154</sup> Shortly after, the story ends with the young man chasing after the “woman” in a rickshaw while never seeing her (or “his”) true face. The story therefore infuses Yu’s conventional erotic depiction of (heterosexual) femininity with embodiment beyond male or female, a body that is “a perfect balanced creation.” While it is highly problematic to

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<sup>154</sup> Yu Dafu, “Ren Yao,” 585.

read Yu as celebrating transgenderism wholeheartedly by depathologizing the *renyao* figure, we can at least appreciate the complexity of *renyao* transgender embodiment as inextricably attached to the configuration of the feminine. The feminine here is not reducible to cosmological Confucian subjugation of femininity; nor is the *renyao* figure fully pathologized in the language of Republican-era sexology, which, according to Howard Chiang, emerged in the cultural apparatus of “epistemic modernity” that translated a new “style of reasoning” from the West.<sup>155</sup> On the contrary, the story assigns the feminine a bifurcated significance: as the upholder of the old social values (his mother), on the one hand, and as a non-fulfilled, rebellious, sexualized self (his own desire and the desire he channeled towards the actress) on the other. This construction of *renyao* as the contested terrain of femininity will be critically taken up by Li Bihua in her queer re-writing of the *Legend*, a project that construes female sexuality as multiply crossing among heterosexual, homoerotic, and gender ambiguous desires, especially in the green snake character Ching Ching’s simultaneous pursuit of sex with her sister Bai, Xu Xian, and Fai Hai.

### III. Perverse Femininity and Sexual Multiplicity: Li Bihua’s *Green Snake*

Li Bihua’s novel, *Green Snake*, presents a critical re-citation of cosmological gender worldview and feminine subjections as found in Feng’s text, by imagining the fluid mapping of sexual bodies that conform to neither the division between the human and the demonic nor the binary possibility of the heterosexual and homoerotic. Let me begin by situating the question of femininity in transgender studies and queer theory

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<sup>155</sup> Chiang, “Epistemic Modernity and the Emergence of Homosexuality in China.”

before analyzing Li's "perverse" vision of femininity. In the 1990s, as queer theory began to mature, it offered a powerful analytical framework for questioning the stability of anatomical sex and the assumed core-essence of gender. Nevertheless, some lesbian scholars have taken issues with the ways in which lesbian femininity and sexuality tend to get relegated to the background while "gender crossing" representational forms like cross-dressing, drag queen embodiment, etc. tend to be discussed as more queer. In *Femininity Played Straight*, Biddy Martin remarks that "too often, anti-determinist accounts that challenge feminist norms depend on the visible difference represented by cross-gender identifications to represent the mobility and differentiation that 'the feminine' or 'the femme' supposedly cannot."<sup>156</sup> That is to say, the coincidence of the institutionalization of gay and lesbian studies as a legitimate field of study and queer theory as an emerging theoretical tool all too often relies on the gay male figure as the preeminent example of cross-dressing and embodying visible forms of crossing in gender and sexual terms, almost always based on the assumption that the feminine is the ground that needs to be challenged. Worst still, the lesbian femme becomes barely visible. Martin here outlines two crucial interventions in queer theory, transgender studies, and feminist politics. First, she questions the neat separation between gender/sexual crossing as the domain of the "new" queer theory versus feminist politics, which is typically framed around the question and subject of "woman." Second, Martin asks why certain trans figures, like the cross-dressers and the drag queen, are fetishized to be the ultimate subjects of crossing whereas femininity is posited as the final success (look how real he

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<sup>156</sup> Biddy Martin, "Sexualities Without Genders and Other Queer Utopias" in her *Femininity Played Straight: The Significance of Being Lesbian* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 71-94, 73.

looks like a woman!) or some unfortunate modes of gender embodiment to be crossed away from (the drag king looks like a real man).<sup>157</sup>

Building on Martin's critique, I point out how Li's novel posits the narrational and psychical subjectivity of Ching Ching, the green snake, as someone who embodies a dual components of the human and the non-human and whose expression of sexual desires often troubles normative categorization of gay, lesbian, heterosexual, or homoerotic. In other words, following Martin's call to rethink the role of femininity in queer and transgender studies, I will show that Ching's embodiment of multiple sexual desires centers the feminine as a subject of sexual-crossing insofar as she does not forsake the ground of femininity. From the start, the reader is fully aware of Li's subversion of the third person narrative convention that often assumes an omniscient moralist tone: the narrator is a snake. Ching narrates, "I forgot to tell you, I am a snake. I am a green snake."<sup>158</sup> These two simple lines actually emphasize a cumulative mode of difference, where Ching asserts her difference from traditional authorial narrator as the human but reemphasizes her unique positionality as a "green" snake. In doing so, she foreshadows a difference of her feminine and non-human subjectivity from any other snake's, especially her sister's.

This dual mode of difference and the complexity of Ching's femininity is further represented through the characteristic contrast between the older, wiser, more heterosexually driven white snake sister (the original female protagonist of the story), and herself. While the story begins in 1986 Hong Kong, when Ching is already one thousand

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<sup>157</sup> For an in-depth study and archive of drag king embodiment and subcultural practices, see Del Lagrace Volcano and Judith "Jack" Halberstam, *The Drag King Book* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1999).

<sup>158</sup> Li Bihua (李碧華), *Qingshe* (青蛇) (Hong Kong: Tian di/Cosmo Books, 1986), 2-3.



and three hundred years old, it quickly flashes back to eight hundred years ago, in the Song dynasty, before Bai and Ching decided to incarnate in human forms. In an intimate dialogue between the sisters, Ching asks Bai, “What exactly is a man?” The white snake replies by citing a poem about Su Xiao Xiao, a talented female poet from the Qi dynasty. Bai describes, “Xiao Xiao wrote a poem once: ‘A young woman rides in a painted carriage, a young man rides a virile horse. Where do they confess their hearts? Just under the pine tree in West Lake.’” Ching, upon hearing this obscure answer to her question about the male gender, bursts into a great laugh: “Hahaha! Even though you got your training earlier than me, you still don’t know what exactly a man is!”<sup>159</sup>

This unique dialogue between the two non-human subjects to “know gender” can be read in two ways. First, it highlights the specific “non-gender” (or “a-gender”) quality of both snakes in the way that while both of them assume female forms, they still “lack” a knowledge of human gender division; thus, the whole narrative is structured around the desire to cross from the non-human to the human world of cosmological gender hierarchy where they will get a first taste of what it means to be a woman, especially a heterosexual woman. The crossing aspect may be “queer” in this sense; but as Martin’s critique implies, this kind of reading risks reducing the story to an empty metaphor of gender crossing where the question of the feminine is unexamined. A second reading suggests a complicated demarcation of Ching’s feminine subjectivity from Bai even in their non-human sameness.

The trajectory of Ching’s multiple routes of desire considerably troubles normative understanding of sexual object choices. On the one hand, she seems to be

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<sup>159</sup> Li Bihua, *Qingshe*, 8

inseparable from Bai in that her relationship with the white snake exceeds the language of sisterly bond or friendship. Before they descend into West Lake, where they will first meet Xu Xian, Ching adores Bai's exquisite clothing and her human beauty. Bai responds, "One woman dresses up for another woman to contemplate, what is the point? One woman won the praise of another woman, what is the pleasure?" To this, the green snake is shocked: "You don't like me anymore?" Bai says, "I do, but are you tired yet?"<sup>160</sup> This dialogue gives the reader the impression that Bai is Ching's proper object choice based on erotic sameness; in this regard one might even call Ching a "lesbian" in the modern sense of the word. Yet, Bai refuses to be the object of Ching's homoerotic gaze on the basis that she is "tired" of it. Is this the literary framework of Li's conception of desire in her rewriting of the legend? Is heterosexuality now presumed to be a new form of desire, whereas the underlying desire that saturates the novel is really intensely homoerotic? While the reader is tempted to follow this simple binary logic of reversal, further plot development confounds any neat division of sexual object choice along the hetero/homo binary.

After Bai successfully "seduces" Xu and begins their relationship, Ching is literally excluded from this heterosexual matrix and relegated to the status of an outsider. Ching angrily confronts Bai: " 'Actually, maybe because I am jealous. You don't love me anymore!' Bai is shocked: 'You want me to not love him and love you only?' After awhile, Ching tries to persuade her, 'Sister, Xu Xian is not a good man.' Bai replies, 'Why are you saying things that you don't even believe in?' " This dialogue mode shifts back to the viewpoint of the first person narrator—Ching—and concludes, "She loves

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid, 14.

him, I also love him. Even though he is not perfect, we haven't met someone better than him."<sup>161</sup> This confession by Ching seems to confirm the traditionally heteronormative narrative of lesbian desire as that which confirms the pleasure of the male subject. Another event seems to support this view. After several twists and turns of the plot, Xu was literally shocked to death by Bai's demonic snake form when Bai failed to preserve her human form after drinking the "Xiong Huang" wine, a wine that is used to drive away demons.<sup>162</sup> Bai risks her life by stealing magical grass from the heavenly palace while Ching takes back the grass to save Xu. After Xu wakes up, Ching seizes the moment and has steamy sex with him. Ching narrates, "Human and snake are reduced to the most basic animals...I won't let him go."<sup>163</sup>

Yet, if the reader were to believe that Ching indeed turns from a lesbian subject to a heterosexual female who is jealous of her sister, this turning of desire remains unstable. As the story unfolds, it turns out that Ching cannot have Xu because Bai is already pregnant with Xu's child. Angry again with being excluded, Ching tries to seduce her enemy, Fai Hai, the monk who battles against both Bai and herself. Asking if the monk desires her, Fai Hai replies affectionlessly: "'There is nothing good about you, you are not what I want. What kind of thing!'" Ashamed of being called a thing, Ching confronts him: 'So, what do you want?' He perversely smiles at her and confesses: 'What do I want? I want Xu Xian!'"<sup>164</sup> While Ching's failure of seducing Fai Hai and the monk's confession that he homoerotically desires Xu Xian seem to re-center the male subject as

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid, 83-84.

<sup>162</sup> See Yi-Li Wu, "Ghost Fetuses, False Pregnancies and the Parameters of Medical Uncertainty in Classical Chinese Gynecology," *Nan Nü* 4. 2 (2002): 170-206, 185

<sup>163</sup> Li Bihua, *Qingshe*, 110.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid, 149-150.

the ideal form of beauty and confirm what historian Wu Cuncun finds to be the idealization of male beauty in the late imperial period,<sup>165</sup> I am more interested in how the constant fluctuation of Ching's multiple sexual subjectivities and her unstable object choices actually trouble the cosmological hierarchy of gender that originally structures Feng's text in the Ming dynasty. *Green Snake* then, paints a world where desire has no orderly flow, where whatever sexual transgression can be possible, and where a perverse utopia of subversion seems too powerful to be true. Indeed, this multiple sexual possibility is reflected in the advertising strategy on the back cover of the book. It summarizes seductively to the potential reader: "A story about 'seduction': Bai Suzhen seduces Ching, Suzhen seduces Xu Xian, Ching seduces Fai Hai, Xu Xian seduces Ching, Fai Hai seduces Xu Xian...Song dynasty legend's ridiculous truth." Echoing the advertising strategy by Li Bihua and Cosmos Publishing, critic Ann L. Huss also contemplates the complexity of sexual positions in the text. Huss writes, "But imagine for a moment Qingshe and Xu Xian, or perhaps Xu Xian and Fai Hai. Never elaborated for the reader, each of these relationships nonetheless does exist mired within the textual 'blankness' which seems to be Li Bihua's trademark."<sup>166</sup> If everyone in this re-writing of the original *Legend* is caught within a "web of seduction," the implication is that it becomes relatively irrelevant what kind of sexual subject is being seduced, or the specific gendered embodiments of the one who is seducing and the one being seduced.

In a different context, transgender theorist Jacob Hale analyzes an ad in which a fag boy is looking for a "daddy" in a cruising section of *Venus Inferis*, a quarterly

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<sup>165</sup> Wu Cuncun, "Beautiful Boys Made up as Beautiful Girls"

<sup>166</sup> Ann L. Huss, "Qingshe: A Story Retold." *Chinese Culture* 38 (1997):75-94, 90.

magazine for leatherdykes, and points out that this ad in which a feminine gay boy is looking for a masculine transgender butch or FTM reveals the complexity of actual erotic possibility within trans communities (or even within the domain of human sexual desires). Hale writes, “Simple classification of sexual activity between this handsome fag boy and an FTM as heterosexual, gay, or lesbian fails. Categorizing any of this as *bisexual* misses the crucial cultural-situatedness of these practices; they are intelligible within sites of overlap between dyke, fag, leatherqueer, and trans communities.”<sup>167</sup> Hale’s argument that sexual practices and desires often exceed the assumed demarcations among the heterosexual, homosexual, lesbian, gay, and transgender points to the very potentiality of sexual fluidity and the erotic possibilities offered by sexual perversion and pleasures. Framed in this way, Ching’s feminine perversion and the multivalence of erotic object choices make Li Bihua’s adaptation of the *Legend* a peculiar allegory for sexual transitivity, meaning sexuality always in the state of transition. Even though it does not designate any explicit FTM, MTF, and cross-dressing representations that are often regarded as the proper domains of transgender significations or appropriate objects of inquiry within transgender studies, *Green Snake* provides multiple angles for thinking about femininity as a site of perverse pleasure without repeating the logic of feminine subjections found in Feng’s text.

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<sup>167</sup> Jacob Hale, “Are Lesbian Woman?” in *The Transgender Studies Reader*, ed. Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (New York: Routledge, 2006), 281-299, 286.

#### IV. Visualizing the Transgender Femme in Female Masculinity: The Politics of Cross-dressing in the *New Legend of Madame White Snake*

If Li Bihua's politics of rewriting troubles the demonic designation of the feminine by imagining a perverse femininity that is non-apologetic and multi-directional in its erotic possibility, Cao Jingde's *New Legend of Madame White Snake* (新白娘子傳奇), I argue, presents female embodiment of masculinity that retains close proximity to femmeness. Unlike femininity or the feminine, which is understood more generally as the proper social norms and conventional roles associated with the female sex, femmeness is defined more specifically here as the counterpart to butchness in the theorization of lesbian dynamics and figurations. My reading is that Cao's adaptation of the *Legend* allows for a fairly flexible notion of female gender-crossing that does not exclude femmeness from representations of the transgender butch; it illustrates how these varying degrees of transgendered subjectivities are intertwined with lesbian eroticism.<sup>168</sup>

*New Legend* is a 50-episode TV series funded by Wanda production firm (萬大傳播), which was screened to TV audiences through Taiwan Television Enterprise (TTV), the main Taiwan television channel. It reinvigorated the classic story as a modern TV favorite in 1992-1993 among Sinophone viewers. The series was first screened in November of 1992 till January 1993 to rave reviews. In the same year, the series was also screened in Hong Kong channel Asia Television Limited (ATV) and China Central Television (CCTV) in mainland China. The series was so popular at the time that in early 2009, there was news that some production firms are considering a re-making of the

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<sup>168</sup> *New Legend of Madame White Snake* (新白娘子傳奇), produced by Cao Jingde (曹景德) (Taiwan: Wanda Production, 1992).

series. When asked what she thinks about a remade series, Yip Tong (葉童), the Hong Kong actress who cross-dresses to play the role of Xu Xian, replies, “Some classics can never be outdone.”<sup>169</sup> However, the 1992 version is also a “classic” in the sense that Yip’s performance of masculinity “can never be outdone.” Before analyzing Yip’s masculine performance in the role of Xu Xian, it is useful to define female masculinity, butch-femme aesthetics, and what I see as strikingly new about Yip’s embodiment as well as its distance and proximity to more femme expressions of femininity.

In *Female Masculinity*, Judith Halberstam observes that despite our ongoing attempt to theorize masculinity, female embodiment and performance of masculinity in forms of butchness and FTM subjectivities have been under-examined. Halberstam writes, “If what we call ‘dominant masculinity’ appears to be a naturalized relation between maleness and power, then it makes little sense to examine men for the contours of that masculinity’s social construction.”<sup>170</sup> Claiming that “female masculinity seems to be at its most threatening when coupled with lesbian desire,”<sup>171</sup> Halberstam is careful in avoiding universal claims of transgression and utopianism by qualifying that “not all butch masculinities produce subversion. However, transsexuality and transgenderism do afford unique opportunities to track explicit performances of nondominant masculinity.”<sup>172</sup> Of course, Halberstam’s point about the ways in which female masculinity expresses its most subversive potential in lesbian and queer representations raises the question of what role this alternative masculinity plays in butch-femme

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<sup>169</sup> “Yip Tong Dresses Elegantly for an Event, Not Supportive for Re-making New Legend of Madame White Snake,” *News Sina*, October 31, 2009, <http://dailynews.sina.com/bg/ent/hktwstar/sinacn/20091031/2331828697.html> (accessed November 11, 2009).

<sup>170</sup> Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 2.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid*, 28.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid*, 40.

aesthetics. In her theorization of butch-femme relationships, Sue-Ellen Case builds on Joan Riviere's concept of womanliness as a masquerade: "If one reads them from within Riviere's theory the butch is the lesbian woman who proudly displays the possession of the penis, while the femme takes on the compensatory masquerade of womanliness."<sup>173</sup> While Case's designation of the butch as "possessive" of masculinity and the femme as "compensatory" is productive in theorizing some lesbian relationships, it also risks separating masculinity as the naturalized domain of the butch and femininity as that of the femme. In my reading of Yip's embodiment of female masculinity, what I find interesting is that her playing of Xu's role still exerts a great degree of femmeness. What is utterly queer about Yip's acting is that her presentation of female masculinity still retains a close proximity to femininity; I coin this specific presentation of female masculinity as the "transgender femme." The more colloquial understanding of transgender femmeness may be the soft butch figure.

Representations of female masculinity in the *New Legend* occupy various vested relationships to femmeness and femininity. The series requires complicated reading of femininity because unlike Li's politics of re-writing, the plot here tends to humanize the *yao*, the demonic white snake (played by Angie Chiu/Zhao Yazhi 趙雅芝), while still visualizing the green snake (played by Maggie Chan Mei Kei 陳美琪) as more demonic. Of course, the humanization of Bai risks relegating her in traditionally heterosexual feminine roles as virtuous mother, sacrificial wife, and Buddhist follower. Indeed, the last episode ends with her perseverance to Buddhism under the Pagoda and her son Xu

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<sup>173</sup> Sue-Ellen Case, "Toward a Butch-Femme Aesthetic," in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michele Aina Barale, David M. Halperin (New York: Routledge, 1993), 294-306, 300.



Shilin's filial tie to her, which moves the Bodhisattva Guanyin (the Goddess of compassion in East Asian Buddhism) so much that she orders Fai Hai to release Bai. Yet, while the linear development of the series follows a Buddhist trajectory and cosmological Confucian *lijiao* gender roles, its characterization of Yip's performance of transgender femmeness and Chan's performance of transgender butchness also simultaneously envisions transgender masculinities and femininities that present an overall queer adaptation of the Ming text.

Female masculinity embodied by the green snake character is seen as a sign of the demonic that needs to be tamed constantly throughout the episodes. In the opening episode, the green snake accompanies five little devils to steal money from the local treasury. In obeying the order of the green snake, the devils actually refer to "her" as "big brother." In fact, Maggie Chan's voice sounds almost not her own, possibly dubbed over by a biologically male voice. This vocal effect thus stresses the green snake character as closer to the transgender butch that Halberstam theorizes. Before her transition as Bai's maid, the green snake embodies a martial art fighter body, easily outdoing the *yamen* (local bureaucrat) officer Lee, who is also the brother-in-law of Xu Xian. Bai intervenes and starts a fight with the green snake. The green snake explodes the earth and shatters Bai's surrounding. The green snake at this moment transforms from the masculine body into the demonic snake form in order to scare Bai. Bai decides that she needs to punish this *yaoguai* (demonic spirit) and warns her/him: "You only have several years of training, but you are already so arrogant and uncontrollable; if I don't get rid of you today, you will cause much trouble in the future." When Bai is about to kill the green snake, he/she pleads for life, and Bai let him/her live. At this moment, the green snake



**Figure 1.** Production still from *New Legend of Madame White Snake*. From left to right: Maggie Chan Mei Kei as green snake, Yip Tong as Xu Xian, and Angie Chiu as Madame Bai the white snake. Reprinted with permission from TTV.

decides to return Bai's kindness by offering to follow the white snake as a maid, thus transfiguring into a female body with green dress and ribbons decorated on her hair. This narrative of transgender embodiment then marks the green snake's transition from a "big brother" into a female maid, from a more butch embodiment of female masculinity into supposedly "proper" femininity in which her demonic nature is linked to her claim to masculinity. If this politics of transgenderism humanizes Bai to the extent that it still adheres to the *ren/yao* division in the Ming text through the dehumanization of the green snake's *yao* quality (in the form of butchness instead of transgressive femininity this time around), Yip's cross-dressing performance as Xu Xian can also be read cross-historically. Specifically, it re-cites ideal model of feminine masculinity popular in the late imperial period, which both Feng's text and the TV series adhere to; yet, this recitation of late

imperial ideal masculinity as feminine also productively performs a second queer function by troubling the assumed binary of butchness and femmeness and the division of T/Po identities within 1990s lesbian and queer Taiwan cultures as well.<sup>174</sup>

In her path-breaking book on male homoerotic sensibility in the Ming and Qing periods, Wu Cuncun finds that “in the late Ming dynasty men had begun to play down their masculinity, a feature that is evident in the ‘scholar-beauty’ (*caizi jiaren*, literally ‘gifted youth and virtuous maiden’) fiction.”<sup>175</sup> In another study Wu finds that “in late imperial China a feminized male appearance was generally accepted as the ideal of male beauty.”<sup>176</sup> Feng’s version obviously reflects Xu Xian’s feminized beauty as he is often rendered as fragile and in need of saving by Fai Hai when confronted by the demonic white snake. So, one can argue that the choice of casting a female actress to play an originally feminized male character in the late imperial context is a modern attempt to remain faithful to historical accuracy of gender ideals.

Yet, to have Yip Tong *fanchuan* (反串/crossdress) and play Xu’s role appears to be an adventurous decision as well. Indeed, Yip herself seems to be fully aware of the novelty and alternative appeals of her *fanchuan* quality and collaborates with Chinese fans across the world to host a site called *Yip Tong’s Fanchuan World*.<sup>177</sup> On the web site, there are numerous archives of media interviews, newspaper clips, and other sources devoted to the Angie Chiu/Yip Tong, feminine/transgender femme (soft butch) pairing of the TV series. Specifically, in an interview with Star TV (Satellite Television for the

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<sup>174</sup> T/Po refers to Taiwanese lesbian identification of the more masculine partner as “T” and the more feminine partner as “po.” Po is a generic term that can refer to women of different ages.

<sup>175</sup> Wu Cuncun, *Homoerotic Sensibilities in Late Imperial China* (London: RoutledgeCruzon, 2004), 164.

<sup>176</sup> Wu Cuncun, “Beautiful Boys Made up as Beautiful Girls”

<sup>177</sup> *Yip Tong’s Fanchuan World*. <http://www.yehtong.com> (accessed November 11, 2009).

Asian Region), a transnational Asian TV network headquartered in Hong Kong, Angie Chiu commented on both Yip's and her performances of femininity in *New Legend*. Chiu responded to the interviewer's question of how she acts Bai's role: "Because Bai is a snake turned human, so in movement techniques, I especially express her to be softer and mellower; and also because my partner Xu Xian is played by female *fanchuan* (cross-dressing/role reverse), I must feminize my role even more." Then the interviewer turned to Yip and she responded: "Since I started my acting career, I never act *fanchuan* roles. Then I was thinking: should I exaggeratingly act a masculine role? Then I felt like it shouldn't be like that; I should act it naturally."<sup>178</sup>

In this sense, Chiu and Yip's specific techniques in manifesting the hyper-femininity of Bai and the non-exaggerating *fanchuan* female masculinity of Xu provide a queer citationality of the male ideal beauty as feminized masculinity in late imperial China, to which Feng's text faithfully literalizes. On the other hand, the idealized gender roles here are obviously altered or queered by both Chiu and Yip's choices of acting and the representation of desire within the series. In a different context, Judith Butler has argued that performativity of gender should not be simplified as free choice actions that are fully agential; if there is any agency it must be located through the complicated processes in which representation and practices of gender variance re-cite previous gender norms. Put differently, agency can both re-circumscribe and challenge gender normativity only within the terrain of existing gender norms and histories of injury. Theorizing performativity as citationality, Butler writes, "What Lacan calls the

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<sup>178</sup> Entertainment Octopus Special Interview, first broadcast 1993 by Asia TV, reprinted and re-uploaded at *Yip Tong's Fanchuan World*. <http://xinbai.yehtong.com/xbinterview.htm> (accessed November 11, 2009).

‘assumption’ or ‘accession’ to the symbolic law can be read as a kind of *citing* of the law, and so offers an opportunity to link the question of the materializing of ‘sex’ with the reworking of performativity as citationality.”<sup>179</sup> Thus, the citationality of late imperial ideal of feminized masculinity in Yip’s performance of the transgender femme is meaningful within both heterosexual and homoerotic imaginaries in ways that both confirm historical accuracy of male beauty and depart from that faithful citationality for queer viewing pleasures.

This kind of queer citationality is especially evident in the eleventh episode. Xiao Ching, the green snake, is angry with Bai for spending so much time to help Xu establish his herbal medicine business and neglecting their goals of training and achieving nirvana statuses. To summarize the plot briefly, while exiled in Suzhou, Xu and Bai’s success in opening the herbal business causes animosity from other doctors. The doctors decided to falsify to the court that Xu killed an old lady by poison. Bai, in order to save the old lady and rid Xu of the charge, chases the old lady’s dead spirit, fights with the guards from the underworld, and restores the spirit in the old lady. When confronted by Ching that she has neglected their common goals, Bai explains, “Ching, our time together in nirvana will be long, yet my time with Xu on earth will be temporary. So I hope you can open your heart and accept him.” Obeying Bai, Ching shockingly confesses, “Sister, actually I like Xu Xian a lot too.” Bai is utterly speechless. Ching covers up her erotic desire for the feminized masculinity of Xu and restates her desire: “I mean, I like his honesty, which makes him admirable.” Bai repeats Ching’s logic of desire by calling Xu “adorable.” Because Bai was missing when Xu tried to find her, at this moment he intrudes the scene.

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<sup>179</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 14.

Here Xu/Yip is dressed in a gray gown, in contrast to the more martial arts fighter gown worn by Ching in the first episode. This moment generates a complex configuration of female homoeroticism in the sense that viewers are fully aware that Ching and Bai are declaring their love for Xu, a fictional male character played by the biologically female actress Yip. Yet, within the visual imaginary, this erotic triangle here also implies that Ching and Bai prefer the alternative feminine form of female masculinity, namely transgender femmeness, which Yip/Xu embodies. This visual representation points to a specific form of female masculinity that still hinges upon a flexible degree of femmeness for its erotic appeal. Reading this scene's pairing of high femmeness (Chiu and Chan) with transgender femmeness (Yip) also corresponds to the need of theorizing more complex notion of lesbian desire in 1990s queer Sinophone culture.

Specifically, Josephine Ho, in an essay called "T/Po Transgender Blues," points out the complexity of lesbian femininity and masculinity and the need to theorize within and beyond the butch/femme division. Ho argues, "Secondly, lesbian self-expression is not always an either T or Po mentality, lesbian interactive models do not only have T/Po kinds; therefore, T/Po cannot be the only universal model for thinking lesbianism."<sup>180</sup> Building on Ho, we can frame Yip's performance of female masculinity as embodying a T identity that still retains Po expressions. Furthermore, Fran Martin, in her study of representations of queer cultures in 1990s Taiwan, points out that queerness hybridized into multiple identity politics that demonstrate the heterogeneity of *tongzhi* culture

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<sup>180</sup> Josephine Ho (何春蕤), "T/Po Transgender Blues," (T婆的跨性別藍調詩) in *Trans-Gender* (跨性別), ed. Josephine Ho (Taiwan: Center for the Study of Sexualities, National Central University, 2003), 377-384, 378.

there.<sup>181</sup> Obviously, T/Po identities are part of the hybridization of Euro-American gay and lesbian identities that emerged in 1990s queer Taiwan cultures. Framing Yip's performance of the transgender femme figure within this cultural context can complicate Sue-Ellen Case's point that the femme occupies a strictly "compensatory masquerade;" rather, Angie Chiu's performance of high-femmeness, Maggie Chan's performance of female masculinity, and Yip's acting out of transgender femmeness show that the critical translation of butch/femme aesthetics into T/Po in Taiwan operates through relational terms that are highly intersubjective; T subjects can claim Po-ness as Po can claim T-ness in their playful expressions of butch/femme identities. Consequently, Yip's cross-dressing act signals a transgender femme subject position in which female masculinity plays femme.

## V. Touching "Transgender" Representations Cross-Historically

In following the binary relational trope between the human and the feminine-as-non human and the embodiment of the transgender *renyao* figure—from Feng's text in the Ming dynasty, to Pu Songling's narrative of sex change as "restoring" gender, to Republican sexology discourse on gender variance as nationalist pathology, to Yu Dafu's imagination of ambiguous femininity as the ground for questioning humanism, to Li Bihua's perverse utopia of femininity, and finally to the intertwined relationship between femmeness and female masculinity in Cao's 1992 TV series—this chapter has traced how the vexed relationship between femininity and transgender embodiment mutates across different historical contexts. By encompassing texts that range from literary, visual, to new media sources and placing them within the more historically situated understanding

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<sup>181</sup> Fran Martin, *Situating Sexualities*, 23.

of *renyao* as a modern pathological category, we can examine more closely how sexological/nationalist discourse in early twentieth-century China and current public condemnation of Thai transgender bodies in Sinophone contexts are linked to literary representations that seek to reinforce bodily division based on the subjugation of transgressive femininity. Furthermore, if femininity has never fallen outside but crucially anchors transgender embodiment, then it makes sense that modern rewritings and adaptations of the *Legend* necessarily engage with the interplay between femininity, sexual transitivity, and female masculinity.

This cross-historical approach to questions of transgenderism and femininity can be understood in Sandy Stone's use of the term "posttranssexual" as a call to move beyond representations and transgender narratives that all too often fetishize perfect transitions from male to female and female to male. Therefore, instead of categorizing transgender or transsexual as simply a "third" gender that can fit all that escape male or female, Stone constitutes transsexuality as "a *genre*—a set of embodied texts whose potential for *productive* disruption of structured sexualities and spectra of desire has yet to be explored."<sup>182</sup> In my reading of Li's novel, I emphasize moments of productive disruption in Ching's embodiment of perverse femininity rather than assuming that her disruptive power simply results from her anger against heterosexual neglect by Xu Xian. In *New Legend*, the complex figurations of femmeness in Maggie Chan and Yip Tong's performances of female masculinity demonstrate that "transgender" does not stand in for a perfect taking over of maleness by biologically female subjects; rather, it depends on

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<sup>182</sup> Sandy Stone, "The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto," in *The Transgender Studies Reader*, ed. Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (New York: Routledge, 2006), 221-235, 231.



certain embodiment of femmeness for its desirability and queer recitation of the Ming dynasty masculinity ideal even when more explicit female butchness in the green snake is still demonized as the *yao*, the demonic.

While recent studies in transgender history have shed light on how the possibility of sex change first emerged in the 1910s and 1920s German sexology and later received sensational public discussions in the American presses from the 1930s through the 1950s, my inquiry here is not an attempt to revise the origin story of the category of the transgender.<sup>183</sup> Nor am I trying to neatly distinguish different figurations of *renyao* as stable categories of transgender in different periods of Chinese history. My heuristic approach, following Benjamin's historical materialism, aims to blast certain forgotten minor figure like the *renyao* "out of the continuum of history" in order to understand how this transphobic Sinophone term touches on earlier histories of feminine subjections in literary narratives.<sup>184</sup> I further reveal how modern literary and media adaptations in Hong Kong and Taiwan significantly revise earlier literary trope of the feminine as demonic in critical directions of visualizing perverse femininity and transgender femmeness as possible sites of pleasure.

Consequently, a heuristic approach to transgenderism treats "transgender" as a historically open, speculative category.<sup>185</sup> It traces certain transgender protagonist like the

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<sup>183</sup> For the historical emergence of sex change surgeries in Germany, see Joanne Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 21, and Susan Stryker, *Transgender History* (Berkeley: Seal Press, 2008), 39-41. For sensational discussions on the possibility of sex changes in 1930-50s American popular presses, see Meyerowitz, 14-50. For the emergence of transgender studies in 1990s American academia, see Susan Stryker, "The Transgender Issue: An Introduction," *GLQ* 4.2 (1998):145-158.

<sup>184</sup> Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 261.

<sup>185</sup> Tani E. Barlow's work exemplifies this approach of thinking categories like "history" and "context" in open, speculative, and future anterior ways. Specifically, she draws on Gayatri Spivak's use of the term catachresis, which refers to "a concept-metaphor without an adequate referent." She contends that while it

*renyao* across different Chinese and Sinophone cultures and sees what kinds of friction and uncertainty may emerge as we theorize transgender politics in a non-predetermined fashion. This cross-historical approach builds significantly on Carolyn Dinshaw's concept of "touching on the past," which is "a queer historical impulse, an impulse toward making connections across time between, on the one hand, lives, texts, and other cultural phenomena left out of sexual categories back then and, on the other, those left out of current sexual categories now."<sup>186</sup> While a transhistorical approach more often presumes the continuity of certain identity and practice across a wide span of historical divides, a cross-historical methodology undertaken here acknowledges the radical impossibility of accurately retrieving sexual identities and practices in the past as "they really were." Instead, a cross-historical approach to theorizing transgender Chinese cultures embraces messiness as the necessary condition of possibility in both a text's faithful citation of the past and its various queer recitations, its unpredictable *afterlife*. It is in this spirit that I hope my analysis of the various configurations of femininity in their demonized, ambiguous, perverse, femme, hyper-femme, and masculine forms in relation to transgender embodiment can broaden the ongoing discussion of transgender politics in different Sinophone contexts that forges intricate relationality between the past and the

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is important to theorize what women had been in modern Chinese history, it is equally important to read their heterogeneous desire for the future and their diverse goals and motivations within their particular time in history, namely to ask the question of "what women will have been." Barlow writes, "A history written in the future anterior, in other words, would not simply note the existence of a future encoded in every present, but would focus particularly on the capacity of this kind of present imagining to upset the sequence of past-present-future." See Tani E. Barlow, *The Question of Women in Chinese Feminism*, 16-17. See also Dipesh Chakrabarty's theorization of History 2 as embodying non-secular forms of history and human diversity that are "constantly interrupting the totalizing thrusts of History 1." History 1 in his study refers to historicist narration of Western modernity that denies the coevalness of non-Western modernities. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 66.

<sup>186</sup> Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 1.

now. If this chapter demonstrates the possibility of reading queer afterlife in the scandal of textual reproductions, the next chapter will perform another queer method to “history” by demonstrating the pervasive modes of incoherence, slippage, and supplemental difference that emerge in cinematic narrations of queer subjects, which challenge the homogeneous and progressive narrations of nationalism and neoliberal developments.

This chapter in full is forthcoming in *Transgender China*, Edited by Howard Chiang (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). The dissertation author was the primary author of this article.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Nation's Time and Its Others: On Inter-Temporality and Queer Times in

### Contemporary Chinese Cinemas

#### I. Introduction

In previous chapters, I have written on the various means through which feminist subjects (Ni Aobao in Chen Ran's *A Private Life*) and queer forms of kinship (Chen Xue's writing) tend to appear in temporally disorganized, fragmentary, and constellation forms. In Chapter 2, I demonstrate that deploying *renyao* (the human prodigy transgender subject) as a relational frame of analysis can free the anxiety to correctly document a historically situated and fixated sexual category (*renyao* in colonial modernity discourse of sexual normativity) while expanding infinitely the possibilities of theorizing non-normative embodied genders across wider span of history and genre. This chapter continues my interests in the gap, fissure, and mismatching between nationalist developmental narratology and its temporal unfolding by turning my inquiry directly at the triangulated but often under-theorized relationship between nationalism, temporality, and queer sexuality.

Taking my cue from Benedict Anderson's now classic theorization of nationalism as one that "*invents* nation where they do not exist" and his acute insight that nationalism depends on the temporal homogeneity of its citizens "always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" through everyday literary activities enabled by print capitalism,<sup>187</sup> I supplement this line of inquiry about homogeneous temporality through

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<sup>187</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 6, 7.

the Derridean trace of supplementarity. I argue that in order to even imagine nation at all, nationalism has always already conceived itself through either revolutionary time (a form of temporal apex, uprising, and breakthrough) or as time's enduring partner in forms of immemorialization, as existing since time's birth. This contradictory doubling of nation's "birth" (itself already a heteronormative figure of speech) thus contains within itself the possibility of a queer temporal critique. It is in this way that Derrida's work on the violence of speech done unto writing, the instability of inscription, and the undecidability of the trace of writing can be re-theorized for a more rigorous queer critique on nationalist temporality.

Derrida perversely rewrites Saussure and argues that there is no structural opposites of the signifier (the sign of meaning) vs. the signified (the ends of interpretation) but only what he calls "signifier of the signifier." He writes, "'Signifier of the signifier' describes on the contrary the movement of language: in its origin, to be sure, but one can already suspect that an origin whose structure can be expressed as 'signifier of the signifier' conceals and erases itself in its own production. There the signified always already functions as a signifier."<sup>188</sup> Elaborating what he calls the "dangerous supplement" that runs throughout Rousseau's writings on nature and culture, Derrida claims that there is no escape from the supplement and *differance* because differences are internal to any ideal meaning of concept, presence, and the totality of speech and writing. For him, "the indefinite process of supplementarity has always already *infiltrated* presence, always already inscribed there the space of repetition and the

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<sup>188</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 7.

splitting of the self...The supplement itself is quite exorbitant, in every sense of the word.”<sup>189</sup>

In every sense of the word indeed, Derrida here is already up for something temporally queer. The presence of the nation (similar to the analogy between speech and writing) is penetrated by the ontological splitting. So instead of thinking nationalism as always excluding gender non-normative subjects from forms of belonging, we may twist this often lamented problem of “gay people are not represented in history” to one of exorbitance and excessive supplementarity—nationalism functions not only as an exclusion but also an infinite process of self-making that inevitably confronts its ontological and temporal others; it not only exercises violent excommunication of bodies, texts, and desire but is itself confronted with the constant threat of being filled up by queer sexuality as well. In this Derridean sense, nation’s time can never quite successfully suppress its temporal others from the vicious acts of splitting its sense of origin.

Deconstruction, however, functions as a double-edged sword. As critics noted, its preferred language of undecidability, endless chains of meaning, traces, and so on forgo the possibility of immediate action and often generalize the formation of identity politics.<sup>190</sup> That is why a temporal reading of sexuality and nationalism cannot stop at deconstruction; it must elaborate and anticipate multiple lines of inquiry. Indeed, my own genealogy here betrays any sense of linear trajectory and prefers a method of temporal irregularity, for many philosophers and critics of time and nationalism actually come

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid, 163.

<sup>190</sup> See Francoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih, “Introduction,” in *The Creolization of Theory*, ed. Francoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 9.

“before” Anderson. Walter Benjamin, writing in his time of escape from Nazi Germany’s persecution of Jewish intellectuals in 1940, passionately reminds us that history’s temporality is intimately connected to acts of violence, erasure, and civilization establishment, acts that commit to write History in the capital “H” for the rest of humanity. He therefore calls for another mode of historical writing, a historical materialism that can fill up and disrupt dominant history. Benjamin writes: “A historical materialist therefore dissociates himself from it as far as possible. He regards it as his task to brush history against the grain.”<sup>191</sup> Later on, he adds that the critique of historical materialism must direct its focus toward a critique of “a homogeneous, empty time.”<sup>192</sup> While the object of his critique is the idea of historical progress, its historical collaborators, nation and modernity, can be part of his temporal critique as well.

It is no surprise that a Benjaminian critique of historical violence receives much rethinking in postcolonial theory, given postcoloniality’s historical encounters with Western modernization, its decolonial resistance to these encounters, and the aftermath of decolonization in which nascent forms of nationalism often end up reproducing rigid and violent forms of managing ethnic, gender, and sexual differences. The most explicit forms of postcolonial temporal critique can be found in the work of Johannes Fabian, Homi Bhabha, and Dipesh Chakrabarty. However, one can also see parallel models emerging in other anthropological and literary-historical studies that aim at rewriting the colonial vs. colonized as one of codependent and contrapuntal influences rather than the

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<sup>191</sup> Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 256-257.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 261.

civilizational discourse of modernity vs. temporal backwardness.<sup>193</sup> In a field-changing critique of anthropology's making of its object of study, Fabian shows how the anthropologist's desire to document "the other culture" necessarily imposes a temporal break in the process of ethnography—the other culture remains fixed in the other primitive time that the anthropologist studies, while the subject, the anthropologist himself, writes in the present mode. The result is a disastrous reconfirmation of the civilizational discourse of tradition vs. modernity and all its attendant violence: "The Other's empirical presence turns into his theoretical absence, a conjuring trick which is worked with the help of an array of devices that have the common intent and function to keep the Other outside the Time of anthropology."<sup>194</sup> This entrenched practice in the discipline of anthropology before its cultural anthropology turn in 1980s thus led to what Fabian calls "the denial of coevalness to the cultures that are studied."<sup>195</sup>

Fabian's call has been answered by subsequent work in anthropology by James Clifford, Aihwa Ong, Lisa Rofel, and others but receives its most incisive parallel critiques in postcolonial theory. What Bhabha's work demonstrates is the realization that nationness depends on a narrational power that constitutes two coexisting but sometimes contradictory forces: the pedagogical and the performative. As already elaborated in my reading of Chen Ran's novel in Chapter 1, the performative contains within it elements of difference, heterogeneity, refusal, and playfulness that betray the pedagogical project of

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<sup>193</sup> For more literary and anthropological account that rewrites temporal difference of modernity into one of codependence and contrapuntal readings, See Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989); Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Random House, 1993); and Ann Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995).

<sup>194</sup> Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), xi.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.



imposing nationalist belonging on the subject, as seen in Ni Aobao's perspectival narration of familial/national conflict in 1970s China in *A Private Life*. Bhabha points out the usefulness of thinking nationalism in these two categories: "Such a shift in perspective emerges from an acknowledgement of the nation's interrupted address articulated in the tension between signifying the people as an a priori historical presence, a pedagogical object; and the people constructed in the performance of narrative, its enunciatory 'present' marked in the repetition and pulsation of the national sign."<sup>196</sup> Here, we see the same dialectical tension between the narration of the nation as time immemorial and one that relies on recursive strategy of narration, a continual process of renewing the tie that binds nationness to its people.

Chakrabarty's work supplements Bhabha's with a much needed materialist critique in the Benjaminian sense by showing how the history of Western modernity functions as one of historicism, modernization through colonial domination *over time* that follows the familiar story of "first in the West, and then elsewhere." Non-Western modernity and non-secular modernities are rendered within the "imaginary waiting room of history."<sup>197</sup> To counter historicism, Chakrabarty creatively develops the concept of History 2, time of the other subjects that exists coevally within History 1, the time of Western colonial capitalism. However, History 2 as conceived by him, similar to the kind of queer temporal critique I foreground here, does not merely constitute the opposite excluded other. Chakrabarty clarifies his stake: "To think thus would be to subsume

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<sup>196</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 211.

<sup>197</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 6, 8.

History 2 to History 1. History 2 is better thought of as a category charged with the function of constantly interrupting the totalizing thrusts of History 1.”<sup>198</sup>

Chakrabarty’s disruption of the dominant, naturalized historicist development of Western modernity at the world stage of colonial modernization, war, globalization, and neocolonial capitalism in many ways finds productive collaboration in the recent “temporal turn” and “affective turn” in queer theory and cinema studies, and correlates to another strand of feminist materialism that draws more heavily its temporal turn from the work of late 19<sup>th</sup> century philosopher Henri Bergson. In particular, Elizabeth Freeman’s work is often cited as one of the earliest attempts to rethink gender performance and performativity not only through the ways repetitive, citational gender acts constitute identity (as Judith Butler argues), but also how these acts of performativity take place “over time.”<sup>199</sup> She argues that while Butler’s concept of performativity usefully destabilizes any claim to the originality of gender, the ways through which gender performative acts are enacted and claimed often re-cite previous gender norms in order to produce new meanings of gender, for example in the reclaiming of “queer” from an injurious past for new political identities. Thus, this future-bent desire of queerness may overlook the ways in which some subjects might claim queerness while still claiming, holding onto, and dragging their previous political and psychic lives as 1960s radical activists, as 1970s lesbian feminist, and so on into the present. Coining this complexity of the time of performativity as “temporal drag,” Freeman writes, “Let us call this ‘temporal drag,’ with all of the associations that the word ‘drag’ has with retrogression, delay, and

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid, 66.

<sup>199</sup> For Butler’s original theorization of gender performativity as the “citing of the law” that both works under normative social constraints and possibly moves beyond them, see Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), 14.

the pull of the past upon the present. This kind of drag, as opposed to the queenier kind celebrated in queer cultural studies, suggests the gravitational pull that ‘lesbian’ sometimes seems to exert upon ‘queer’...for those of us for whom queer politics and theory involve not disavowing our relationship to particular (feminist) histories even as we move away from identity politics, thinking of ‘drag’ as a temporal phenomenon also raises a crucial question: what is the time of queer performativity?’<sup>200</sup>

Freeman’s provocation to think of performativity as gravitational pull, as temporal drag that contains within it the messiness and stickiness of the past upon the present, signals the temporal turn in queer studies. Since then, scholars have taken up temporality in different directions. Judith Halberstam’s work on queer time and space in subcultural practices is important for a general call to locate identities and practices that are not over-determined by postmodernism and late capitalism. She takes theorists to task for the lack of attention to sexuality by neo-Marxists who write about postmodern space (Edward Soja, David Harvey, Fredric Jameson) and argues for the alternative logics of queer time<sup>201</sup>: “ ‘Queer time’ is a term for those specific models of temporality that emerge within postmodernism once one leaves the temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family, longevity, risk/safety, and inheritance.”<sup>202</sup> However, implicit in Halberstam’s theoretical statement seems to be an idealization of the symmetrical power relation between queer space and queer time: queer subcultural space logically generates

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<sup>200</sup> Elizabeth Freeman, “Packing History, Count(er)ing Generations,” *New Literary History* 31.4 (2000): 727-744, 728.

<sup>201</sup> See Edward Soja, *Third Space: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (MA: Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996); David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (MA: Malden, Blackwell, 1990); Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991).

<sup>202</sup> Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 6.

queer mode of temporality outside of late capitalist re-orientation toward “family values.” Perhaps Halberstam’s display of theoretical tension can be generative. It forces us to ask: what is the time of nationalism, late capitalism, and heteronormativity? Can queer temporality ever exist outside of these forces?

While Halberstam ventures boldly into the postmodern landscape of late capitals in order to queer their sites of multiplication, Heather Love asks us to steer away from our mundane desire to embrace gay and lesbian progress in order to “feel backward” into the archive of negative feeling and affect. As such, she marks out negative affect as one generative site for temporal critique. Invoking the queer dead bodies in the ruined “past,” Love clarifies the stake of her call of feeling backward: “It is this disposition toward the past—embracing loss, risking abjection—that I mean to evoke with the phrase ‘feeling backward.’”<sup>203</sup> One critic whose work diverts most strikingly from both the postcolonial critique of Western historicism and the queer temporal turn to subculture and negative affect is Elizabeth Grosz, who argues that feminist politics needs to rethink “real” biological matters and politics in the Bergsonian durational mode and in the unlimited reproduction of social and material difference through a return to Darwinian evolutionism. Bridging the missed connection between Darwin, Foucault, feminism, and the productive mechanism of power, Grosz argues, “In both theorists there is an understanding of the inherent productivity of the subordinated groups—precisely *not* a theory of victors who abolish the vanquished, but a theory of how transformation and change remains in principle open because of the position of the subordinated, because

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<sup>203</sup> Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 30.

domination remains precariously dependent on what occurs not only ‘above’ but also ‘below.’”<sup>204</sup> Turning to Bergson’s creative philosophy of time as durational difference instead of quantifiable decimal units, Grosz argues for the emphasis on creativity and newness that is again future-bent: “Duration proceeds not through the accumulation of information and the growing acquisition of knowledge, but through division, bifurcation, dissociation—by difference, through sudden and unpredictable change, change which overtakes us with its surprise.”<sup>205</sup>

Bergson’s 1907 thesis for an intuitional philosophy aptly titled *Creative Evolution* perhaps captures the durational quality of time that all theorists who are interested in temporal critique have touched upon. Duration emphasizes the surprising hold of the past on the present (temporal drag); the durational difference that queer sexual practice makes can help us rethink the time of heterosexuality (Halberstam); and the politics of violent duration that makes certain colonized population endure more violence than others while enabling Western modernity to advance to the new (Chakrabarty). Bergson claims that the present does not simply “replace” the past, but the past endures into the present, a process that is indivisible so to speak. He writes, “For our duration is not merely one instant replace another; if it were, there would never be anything but the present—no prolonging of the past into the actual, no evolution, no concrete duration.”<sup>206</sup> While Bergson writes in a distinct time and place from Freeman, Love, Halberstam, and Grosz, they share one common oversight in that the “other” materialism of nationalism, of 19<sup>th</sup> century eugenicism, and transnational cultural exchanges are somewhat overshadowed in

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<sup>204</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, *Time Travels: Feminism, Nature, Power* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 29.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid, 111.

<sup>206</sup> Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (New York: Dover, 1998), 4.

their attempts to highlight the new temporal turn. This is especially striking in Love and Grosz's work, who discuss race, class, and intersectional differences in passing but are less clear about how these modes of difference might be embodied by those subjects, or how those subjects' performance of queer temporality might offer critiques of, and alternatives to, nationalist imaginary, postcolonial state discipline, and transnational capitalism.

In my own engagement with queer temporality in Chinese-language films, I am less interested in how to "apply" the concept to contemporary Chinese films but more attuned to how these cinematic productions mark the intricate entanglements of queer subject formations within the already present forces of nationalist policing of gender and class, the power dynamics between nation and region, and how even queer temporal representations can be co-opted and recuperated by neoliberal logics of queer youth culture, especially in the case of Taiwan. Connecting my reading of queer times in cinematic traditions that are not often framed together (1980s women films and the Fifth and Sixth Generation films in China, Hong Kong New Wave, New Cinema in Taiwan and commercial youth films with gay themes) is my argument that representations of queerness and transgender embodiment in contemporary Chinese cinema often invoke a particular logic of what I call "inter-temporality." This concept helps us visualize the temporal fissure and power dynamics between China as the nation and Hong Kong as the relatively new region of China. Inter-temporality also names the conditions of being in-between two or multiple durations of time and helps us see how marginalized figures of history, especially transgender and queer subjects, challenge the linear and homogenous model of dominant history. In my final section on Taiwan, I demonstrate that not all films

that express the theme of queerness and time are critical to the developmental logics of nationalism and modernity. In fact, as products of post-millennial capitalism, Taiwan queer youth films often commercially appropriate the theme of queer childhood into narratives of successful and neoliberal gay developmentalism that are often male-centered.

First, I will examine three films from the PRC from the 1980s to late 1990s that touch on issues of feminist consciousness, transgender subjectivity, and the symbolic message of state oppression of gay life. Huang Shuqin 1987 film *Woman Demon Human* is often read in Chinese film history as the first feminist film from the mainland.<sup>207</sup> It chronicles the life of Qiu Yun, a girl who grew up under a broken family, with both of her parents playing in the Chinese opera troupe. She exhibits precocious talents for playing men's roles, especially the immortal ghost hunter character Zhong Kui (鍾馗). She slowly cultivates a romantic feeling for her training master, Mr. Zhang, who in turn desires her female masculinity. The film narrates her difficult path toward success, trapped dilemma in an unsuccessful marriage, and conflicting role in 1980s post-Mao China through the constant shuffling between the operatic performance fantasy and her real life. Connecting this film to Chen Kaige's *Farewell My Concubine* (1993), I pay close attention to the suicidal scene where the transgender protagonist Cheng Dieyi, after surviving the trauma and persecution during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) and abandonment by the opera partner and man he/she loves, Duan Xiaolou, slits her throat and dies in rehearsal; this moment is where the film begins and ends.

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<sup>207</sup> Dai Jinhua (戴錦華), *Gendering China* (性別中國) (Taipei: Mai tian chu ban, 2006), 91. See also Yingjin Zhang, *Chinese National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2004), 234-235.

Reading both films intertextually and historically enables a queer temporal reading of Zhang Yuan 1996 film *East Palace, West Palace*, arguably the first “gay” film in China. This time, while the film narrative is not centrally about Peking opera, the multiple insertions of the operatic sequence queers the stability of the narrative present. The film tells a powerful seductive story of an effeminate young man who seduces a masculine policeman. Ah Lan the young man confesses his past sexual encounters during confessional sequences in the film, in which he also fantastically imagines himself to be a female prisoner in the *dan* role. In the end, the police officer gets seduced by Ah Lan and releases him. I argue that despite the different meanings of transgenderism in the three films and the interpretive theory one may take (feminism, transgender studies, queer theory), all three films narrate individuals who resort to a mode of embodiment that one may call “inter-temporality.” Drawing on recent transgender theory that rethinks transgenderism as a non-pathological split between bodily image and a felt sense of the materiality of the body,<sup>208</sup> I argue that the use of being in-between two or multiple durations of time, namely inter-temporality, enables rigorous critique on how nationalism disciplines transgender bodies into fixed temporal beings; therefore, an inter-temporal critique excavates how transgender bodies may also rewrite the weights of historical violence, national reforms, and state oppression as failed attempts at the totalizing power of discipline, progress, and development.

Parallel to transgender filmic narrative’s power to illuminate the corporeality of state discipline and its failure are the multiple temporal logics that emerge in several

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<sup>208</sup> Gayle Salamon, *Assuming a Body: Transgender and the Rhetorics of Materiality* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).



Hong Kong films during and since the 1997 postcolonial handover. I read Wong Kar-wai's 1997 film *Happy Together* and Yau Ching's 2002 independent lesbian postmodern flick *Ho Yuk/Let's Love Hong Kong* as different "temporal" takes on the question of Hong Kong postcolonial return and the so-called "motherland" syndrome. Reworking Benedict Anderson's recent theory of long-distance nationalism, a mode of nationalism practiced by patriotic diasporic people outside of the official state and homeland, I argue that these two films exhibit "short-distance" temporal displacements in their navigation of power between the PRC as the nation and Hong Kong as the region.<sup>209</sup> They displace the power and proximity of the PRC by temporal diasporic rerouting in Wong's film and the temporally jarring and postmodern views of the city-region of Hong Kong in Yau's film. Overall, queer temporality names the power of displacement.

Finally, I call our attention to a recent development of Taiwan cinema by designating a group of teen flicks as the "queer youth wave," which obviously rides the wave after the end of Taiwan New Cinema in the early 1990s. These post-millennium films narrate queer sexuality as one of the pain of growing up and the bravery of young love. However, I also show that the queer temporal logics of framing these films as queer adolescence stories also bring into sharp focus the "structures of feeling" that point to Taiwan's political order as the queer orphan of Asia, an island-region without official claim to nationhood and "adulthood" on the world stage. Therefore, I read Yee Chih-yen's *Blue Gate Crossing* (2002) and DJ Chen/Chen Yin-jung's *Formula 17* (2004) as

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<sup>209</sup> See "Long-Distance Nationalism," in Benedict Anderson, *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia and the World* (London: Verso, 1998), 58-74.

commodities that belong to what Anne Allison called “millennial monster.”<sup>210</sup> While Allison shows how Japanese toys acquire affective forms of soft capitalism that unleash monstrous power of “cuteness” in their global dominance, I will extend her insight about the globalization of youth cultures within the context of queer youth films in Taiwan.<sup>211</sup> These films exhibit immense commercial quality and tend to homogenize queerness as simply a frustration of young love. Rather than complicating the “straight” transition of childhood into normative and properly gendered, heterosexual adulthood, the films often freeze queer love in a moment of eternity, through which a developmental logic into a “brighter future” is implied. This temporal homogeneity, I argue, can better market queer youth films through logics of queer neoliberalization that in turn market Taiwan as a nation that is forever young and appealing. By underlining the various temporal modes that are pervasive in contemporary queer Chinese films, I show how inter-temporality can be deployed as a critical viewing positionality that disrupts the narration of nationalism and regional-to-national power relation, while on the other hand queer temporal narratives can also become complicit with the arrival of queer neoliberalism in certain regions in the Sinophone worlds.

## II. Transgender Bodies and Inter-Temporality as a Critique of Nation’s Time

Huang’s *Woman Demon Human* (*Ren gui qing*/人鬼情) provides a feminist and transgender critique of the linearity of woman’s reproductive time by telling the story of a young girl, Qiu Yun, who experiences the pain of maternal abandonment in childhood

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<sup>210</sup> Anne Allison, *Millennial Monsters: Japanese Toys and the Global Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

<sup>211</sup> On the globalization of affective forms of “immaterial labor” that depend on cultural products’ and workers’ increasing appeal to generate affective satisfaction for consumers, see Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2004), 108.

and forsakes the proper path of heterosexual femininity in her own life course. The film is set in an unknown part of rural China, where Qiu Yun grew up in a family with parents who are principle actors in an opera troupe. It is assumed that the time of her girlhood is pre-reform China during the socialist period because later on in the narrative after Qiu Yun is married, it states that she survives the widespread persecution of the opera arts form during the Cultural Revolution. While Qiu Yun would have enjoyed a happy childhood despite the lower economic class of her family, she found out early on that her mother was cheating with another man. In fact, Qiu Yun accidentally interrupted the primal scene during which her mother was having sexual intercourse with the unknown man in the haystack. After this, her mother left the father, who is presumably impotent. We also later learn that Qiu Yun's father is not her real father, given that he is impotent. Yet, her surrogate father loves her more than a father by blood, raising her and prohibiting her to join the opera because he fears that she will follow her mother's footsteps to become a "bad" woman. Qiu Yun rebels against her father's discipline and eventually decides to act male parts. Her unusual talents in acrobatics and learning the *sheng* (male role in Chinese opera) roles draw the attention of Mr. Zhang, a handsome but married young trainer from the city. Qiu Yun follows Mr. Zhang to the city and eventually falls in love with him. However, she forbids him to go further with her sexually, and eventually Zhang is forced to return to his rural home due to unfavorable rumor about Qiu Yun and him. Eventually she is married to another man but leads an unhappy life. All her life, she is most proud to act the part of Zhong Kui, a famous legend of a general from the underworld who fights all evil spirits in the human world. Unable to

lead a normative childhood and still not satisfied with her current marriage in post-Mao China, is she herself a woman, demon, or human?

To pose the naming of the film as an enigma performs a temporal critique of childhood and woman's constant non-identification with the nationalist script. Certainly a woman is a human, but as various feminist scholars on modern China have pointed out, the category of woman is only admitted as part of the nation's body politics through incorporation as self-same non-difference from Chinese men.<sup>212</sup> The politics of the women's association *Fulian* (the All-China Women's Federation) for example negotiates women's rights through terminology of the modern state to such an extent that the state's interests become almost identified *as* women's interests. Therefore, by highlighting Qiu Yun's strange identification with male operatic roles and spectral roles like Zhong Kui, Huang Shuqin the filmmaker is implicitly posing the question of whether post-Mao Chinese women can ever enter into nationalist imaginary as equal counterparts of men, or whether women will continue to occupy the spectral margin of the nation. However, I want to push this feminist inquiry further by arguing that perhaps what this film offers at the same time is also an inter-temporal critique.

Inter-temporality in this film not only illustrates women's non-belonging and non-selfsameness with the nation, but the possibility that transgender embodiment in Qiu Yun's enacting of male operatic roles and her/his gender troubles can excavate and further reveal the inability of nationalist policy, national development, and "personal"

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<sup>212</sup> See Lydia H. Liu, "Invention and Intervention: The Female Tradition in Modern Chinese Literature," in *Gender and Politics in Modern China: Writing and Feminism*, ed. Tani E. Barlow (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 37-38; Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, "Introduction," in *Spaces of Their Own: Women's Public Sphere in Transnational China*, ed. Mayfair Mei-hui Yang (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 38; and Li Xiaojiang, "With What Discourse Do We Reflect on Chinese Women? Thoughts on Transnational Feminism in China," in *Spaces of Their Own*, 270.

marriage to fully contain and discipline the incoherence between the bodily ego and the psychic “felt sense” of the body’s material contour. Here, I am drawing on Gayle Salamon’s recent contribution to transgender studies by rethinking transgender bodies, and perhaps even all normatively gendered bodies, as produced and marked by this incoherence from what we feel is the “felt” sense of materiality about bodies and their actual and material contours in relation to various social contexts. Elaborating on the concept of the bodily ego (via Freud) and the body schema (via phenomenology), Salamon explains, “This concept can be of use to genderqueer communities because it shows that the body of which one supposedly has a ‘felt sense’ is not necessarily contiguous with the physical body as it is perceived from the outside, thus complicating the notion of the subject’s relationship to the materiality of her own body.”<sup>213</sup> While I will draw on Salamon’s point heavily in my readings of most films in this section, especially on Huang’s film, I also want to make it clear that I am not suggesting that all transgender bodies or all transgender people should feel this sense of discordance between one’s felt sense of bodily ego and the body’s material contour; but I am making the case that thinking these bodily contours through temporal fissures can accentuate a productive critique of nationalist/heteronormative temporality.

Huang opens the film with a peculiar sequence in which the grown up adult Qiu Yun feels out of place and time in the transgendering of her gender self-image as the male general role Zhong Kui. The opening shot shows three bowls of paint in white, black, and red colors. Across each bowl, the Chinese caption inscribes the title of the film “*ren*/human” across the white paint, “*gui*/demon” across the black paint, and “*qing*/love

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<sup>213</sup> Gayle Salamon, *Assuming a Body*, 4.

or emotion” across the red one. Note that the Chinese title actually does not make any reference to woman as a symbolic referent, thus one can argue that woman here is marked as the present yet non-selfsame other of human and ghost. The naming of this film then is itself a clever indication of the creative conceptual gap between woman as the signifying subject matter of the film and its linguistic referent as constrained by the equivalence of man with the denominator of the human subject. The sequence then beautifully captures Qiu Yun (played by Xu Shouli) putting paint on her face to become Zhong Kui while facing her image in front of a cosmetic mirror. Through multiple linear cross-cutting techniques, the sequence dramatizes her transformation into Zhong Kui with red silky general garment. In the film, most scenes where the ghost Zhong Kui appears are actually played by another actress who professionally acts Zhong Kui in real life, Pei Yanling. The next cross-cutting shot shows Qiu Yun without operatic makeup sitting in front of multiple angled mirrors, seeing too many images of herself; yet what she sees is not her womanly self-image but images of Zhong Kui. In one of the mirrored image, Qiu Yun’s left eye is shown to be irregularly bigger than her right eye, dramatizing the effect of her bodily out-of-placeness in her portrayal of the male operatic role. The sequence then shifts to her childhood “time” when her playmates, all of them boys, mark operatic paint on her face.

This dramatic opening sequence shows not an easy masquerade or transgendering of a woman’s body into a male one through exterior gender role-alterations or makeup; more strikingly, it illustrates the incompleteness of the body’s felt sense of gender identity between Qiu Yun as a grown up woman, her professional life as a performer of Zhong Kui, and her corporeal performance of maleness. Furthermore, it also hinges upon



**Figure 2.** A film still from *Woman Demon Human*. The split between the bodily ego and the body schema in Qiu Yun's transgender transformation.

the coevalness and coexistence of two temporal zones, one belonging to the “real life” of Qiu Yun, one always lingering in the fantastical world of operatic performance, a performance that depends on the temporal difference in the mythical time of the Chinese legend of Zhong Kui as well. This scene thus displays the crucial connections between transgender embodiment, the productive mismatching between one's felt sense of bodily ego and its non-identifying, non-selfsame bodily material contour, and how these gaps are inter-temporally traced back to Qiu Yun's childhood. In fact, while Chinese feminist Dai Jinhua's reading of the film mostly deploys a strictly feminist reading that highlights Huang's revision of age-old Chinese patriarchy, she nonetheless points to the ways this film betrays the traditional cross-dressing tale of Hua Mulan (花木蘭) in “temporal” terms. Dai writes, “A Hua Mulan tale always terminates after the lines ‘I replace my

martial attire with the garments of my former days,’ and then the male (real or performative) world and the female world are situated in two separate spaces, two temporalities...The world of *Human, Woman, Demon*, a feminist film, however, is never clear or easy.”<sup>214</sup>

Building on Dai’s insight about the film’s uneasiness with space and time, I deploy my concept of “inter-temporality” here as a framework for understanding a transgender critique of nation’s time and its never complete project (or even impossibility) of disciplining, conforming, and smoothening out the non-identifying relation between non-normative genders and their national non-belongings. Inter-temporality then marks the ways bodily material contours deviate from their felt psychic senses, and how that productive fissure marks subjectivities and subject formations that are always trafficked within two competing times, or even multiple times that cannot be fused into the linear narration of History 1. In this way, inter-temporality marks a peculiar transgender representation of bodily queerness, yet, this queer corporeality can be deployed for a critique of hegemonic temporal structure, including nation’s time.<sup>215</sup> While Qiu Yun’s numerous failed relationships with men (her surrogate father who disagrees with her decision to join opera; her real biological father whom she meets but never looks face to face; the trainer Mr. Zhang who is transferred elsewhere by the authorities; and her current misogynistic husband) may reduce this film to simply a

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<sup>214</sup> Dai Jinhua, *Cinema and Desire: Feminist Marxism and Cultural Politics in the Work of Dai Jinhua*, eds. Jing Wang and Tani E. Barlow (London/New York: Verso, 2002), 157-158.

<sup>215</sup> Ann Anagnost is arguably the first to study modern Chinese nation and its temporal narrational fragments. Her reading of the ways “speaking bitterness” as narrative trope and mode of grievance in the past keep leaping into the present has much to offer for the thinking of queer temporality in Chinese studies. She writes, “In the Chinese postrevolutionary political culture, speaking bitterness no longer stood but became temporally split by the double trope of “recalling past bitterness” to “savor the sweetness of the present.” See Ann Anagnost, *National Past-Times: Narrative, Representation, and Power* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 38.



straightforward critique of “Chinese men,” I think the greatest strength of the text actually lies in its representation of inter-subjective bodily relationships across different tempos: childhood and adulthood, and how that inter-temporality shapes Qiu Yun’s feminist and some may argue, transgender subject position. Indeed, Huang’s cinematic positioning of the primal scene as stitching onto Qiu Yun’s sexual awakening with Mr. Zhang is one cinematic practice of inter-temporality, which depicts bodies as shaped by another’s bodily contour, in this case, Qiu Yun’s mother’s sexualized body.

For example, after a day of successful opera show, the little Qiu Yun was running around playing with boys. All the boys say they want to marry the little Qiu Yun. Qiu Yun, like a naughty little girl, runs away. While running by herself late at night, she runs into a stack of hays, where accidentally, she spots the sight of a man’s naked back. Through a point-of-view shot, we realize that it is Qiu Yun’s mother who is lying under the man, having an adulterous sexual encounter with him. Qiu Yun, shocked by this “discovery,” screams and runs frighteningly back to her father’s bedroom, where the impotent man is alone. He hugs Qiu Yun. Years later, during opera training, Mr. Zhang takes special admiration of Qiu Yun because he finds her “even more beautiful” in her performance of male roles. One night they practice acrobatics and operatic gestures together outdoor, coincidentally, among the haystacks (what a coincidence!). During the heat of passion, Zhang confesses to her that “he has a wife and four children back in the village, but never known passion in his life.” As Zhang draws Qiu Yun’s face closer to his, caressing it with his palms and calling out her name, she opens her eyes in frightful recognition of the threat of seduction. She refuses, “I don’t want...I don’t want it!” and

runs away, away from the haystacks, like what happened years ago when she discovered her mother's sexual taboo.

Huang's inter-temporal juxtaposition lends itself to interesting interpretations about mother-daughter psychic structures in the film. For example, in the first book on women's representations in Chinese cinema in English publication, Shuqin Cui argues that Qiu Yun's female position is contradicted by both her mother's image upon her woman's self-image and her male masquerade in her professional life. Drawing on Joan Riviere's notion of womanliness as a masquerade that masks the possibility of female possession of male power,<sup>216</sup> Cui states, "On the one hand, masquerade enables the transvestite to obtain a distance between herself and her image, therefore raising the possibility of resisting the socially assigned female position. On the other hand, the masqueraded identity appears as a mask under which a real sense of oneself has been concealed or suppressed."<sup>217</sup>

While I find Cui's point about mother-daughter conflict convincing, her reading also tends to dangerously rely on an overly simplistic feminist urge to find an essentialized female identity that can be located under the masquerade once Qiu Yun "resolves" the conflict. In contradistinction, what I find most productive for thinking transgender corporeality, feminism, and their temporal challenge to nation's time is precisely the way Qiu Yun's performance and inhabiting of female masculinity is inter-temporally enmeshed with her mother's sexuality. In a significant way, her childhood's sexual awakening and her mother's marginalized and tabooed sexuality, shape her

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<sup>216</sup> Joan Riviere, "Womanliness as Masquerade," in *Formations of Fantasy*, ed. Victor Burgin, James Donald and Cora Kaplan (London: Methuen, 1986), 35-44.

<sup>217</sup> Shuqin Cui, *Women Through the Lens: Gender and Nation in a Century of Chinese Cinema* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003), 230.

discordance and non-equivalence between a masculine material contour and her bodily ego, which desires heterosexual admiration from Mr. Zhang in some ways. It is through this inter-temporal shaping and articulation of her transgender bodily materiality that she refuses the heteronormative script of Zhang and runs away. Indeed, the ending of the film refuses any easy feminist reading that can unearth her female body suppressed by maternal abandonment and patriarchal structure.

The last sequence shows Qiu Yun a little drunk after enjoying a banquet with her surrogate father. Wandering around the stage, she encounters Zhong Kui again, cross-dressed by another female actress Pei Yanling. The ghost approaches her and says, "I am an ugly ghost. It's hard for men to play me. You are a woman. It's even harder for you." The ghost disappears temporally. Qiu Yun chases after it, saying that "No, I am not tired. I enjoy playing it." The ghost now appears as a fading shadow on the big black platform behind Qiu Yun, telling her that he wants to marry her off to a good husband (this is a retelling of the classic Zhong Kui legend of marrying off his sister). Qiu Yun insists that she does not regret her life and wants to marry herself to the stage. At this point, the fading shadow of Zhong Kui disappears and the high-voltage stage suddenly lights up. The ending of the film pictures Qiu Yun walking confusingly under the stage light. Powerfully, the film's never resolved resolution provides an inter-temporal critique of nation's time. It shows that in post-reform, post-Cultural Revolution China, a woman can play a man's role and choose an alternative path, despite the fact that Qiu Yun is in fact unhappily married in real life at this point. Yet, her inter-temporal exchange with the fantastical figure of the ghost shows that her bodily contour is shaped by the critical embodying of her operatic female masculinity. Consequently, the film points to an

uncertain futurity of a woman's fate in post-reform China. It poses the question to the viewer with a temporal non-resolution: not the quotidian "What is a woman?" or "What is a Chinese woman?" but instead: "What will/can a Chinese woman be?" in a future-anterior mode.<sup>218</sup>

Huang's filmic non-resolution paves way for Cheng Kaige's too easy resolution for the transgender body in his *Farewell My Concubine*, an ending that, while executing the transgender body on stage, nonetheless provides an inter-temporal representation of non-normative gender as the site of corporeal concentration and condensation of historical trauma and personal sufferings. My reading bypasses conventional approach to the film as either pioneering or denigrating homosexual representation in order to situate *Farewell* as an inter-text between Huang's film and Zhang Yuan's *East Palace, West Palace*. *Farewell* places the protagonist Cheng Dieyi as the center of narration through a grand historical journey from the Warlord Era (1916-1928), to Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist government, through Japanese invasion during WWII, the Communist nationalization in 1949, and finally through the Cultural Revolution and its aftermath. The personal life of Cheng is connected to the larger "fate" of Peking opera as a national art form that undergoes various nationalist repositionings: as a regarded and vernacular

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<sup>218</sup> The phrase "future anterior" first appeared in Louis Althusser's reflection on Marxism in which he criticizes the ways traditional Marxists reconcile the later Marx of materialist critique with the earlier "young" Marx who wrote "On the Jewish Question." Thus, Althusser actually associates this concept with negative connotations as it projects a school of thought backward in order to reconcile what might be different, heterogeneous, or irreconcilable in intellectual formations. See Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 1979), 54, 75. Some feminists re-interpret "future anterior" as a mode of writing women's history in an anticipatory but non-predetermined future. Tani E. Barlow's work exemplifies this approach of thinking categories like "history" and "context" in open, speculative, and future anterior ways. Barlow writes, "A history written in the future anterior, in other words, would not simply note the existence of a future encoded in every present, but would focus particularly on the capacity of this kind of present imagining to upset the sequence of past-present-future." See Tani E. Barlow, *The Question of Women in Chinese Feminism*, 16-17.

art during the 1920s-1930s (when renowned *dan* actor Mei Lanfang (梅蘭芳) was also at the peak of his career), to Communist “re-evaluation” during the 1950s, and to its eventual demise during the Cultural Revolution, a period that, as Paul Clark points out, heavily imposed model plays and denounced older art forms as bourgeois and politically incorrect.<sup>219</sup>

The film further links the traumatic historical event to the erotic triangle between Cheng (Leslie Cheung), who plays the female *dan* role as Yu Ji in the classic play *Farewell My Concubine*, his adolescent “big brother” Xiao Shitou, (played by Zhang Fengyi; his role is later known as Duan Xiaolou in the film) who plays the King of Chu role, and Duan’s lover Juxian (Gong Li), whom he met in the brothel and later married. Several parts of the film touch on the homoerotic mutual “love” between Cheng and Duan, Duan’s shift of love toward Juxian when he grows up, and Cheng’s jealousy toward Juxian—a triangular love drama that explodes on the real stage called “history.” Through a historical grand vision that is the signature of the Fifth Generation filmmaking, the film performs an enormously complex task of entangling the personal, the historical, the artistic, and the homoerotic and queer within a single text. The narrative reaches its climax when during the intense public interrogation by the Red Guard in the Cultural Revolution, Duan refuses to acknowledge his love for “this” prostitute, Juxian who is by now his wife. Duan, wanting to save his own life, also reveals Cheng’s sexual behavior and accuses him of homoerotic practices with the many alleged male patrons who support his acting career.

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<sup>219</sup> Paul Clark, *The Chinese Cultural Revolution: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

Given the visible presence of homosexuality in the film, the historically situated practice of cross-dressing in Peking opera, and its homoerotically inflated class structure between the male patron and the feminized *dan* actor, it is not surprising that most popular and film criticisms devote much energy to how Chen represents homosexuality. They fault his conflation of male homosexuality with transgender femininity and stereotypical representations of gay men and measure his failure or success in presenting the issues for Chinese audiences and transnational viewers.<sup>220</sup> The Cannes Palme d'Or Award Committee that granted the prize to Chen praises the film "for its incisive analysis of the political and cultural history of China and for its brilliant combination of the spectacular and the intimate."<sup>221</sup> Wendy Larson points out the correlation between Cheng's homoerotic "prostitute" role and the unequal relationship between Chinese filmmakers and transnational audience. Larson writes, "The authority of the King of Chu can be maintained only when the concubine prostitutes her art—the essentially Chinese art—before the art-loving audience, whose imperializing position corresponds to that of the international (Western) film spectator and critic."<sup>222</sup> Taiwan cultural critic Liao Ping-hui's criticism of Chen's treatment of gender and sexuality is harsher, a criticism that also belies his desire to provide a "corrective" reading of homosexuality in the film. Liao argues, "Using *Farewell* as an example, it is not hard for us to detect that Chen's historical and lyrical model overshadows the existence of Cheng Dieyi's role as an artist

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<sup>220</sup> For the first in-depth study on homoerotic practices and class relations in late imperial China, see Cuncun Wu, *Homoerotic Sensibilities in Late Imperial China* (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004).

<sup>221</sup> Vincent Canby, "Top Prizes at Cannes is Shared," *New York Times*, May 25 1994, C13.

<sup>222</sup> Wendy Larson, "The Concubine and the Figure of History: Chen Kaige's *Farewell My Concubine*," in *Transnational Chinese Cinemas: Identity, Nationhood, Gender*, ed. Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997), 331-346, 340.

and his sexual identification. Sexual identification thus becomes only ‘a small case’ under historical change and marginalized as a result...from Cheng’s self-destruction, anger, jealousy, to Master Guan’s (their opera teacher) effort to reconcile the two brothers, it is always through a stereotypical description of homosexual identity.”<sup>223</sup>

While I wholeheartedly agree with Larson’s critique about the symbiotic relationship between the figure of the concubine and the “prostitution” of Chineseness to the West in its transnational consumption, with Liao’s point about Chen’s manipulation of stereotypical “gay” femininity in service of a grand cinematic narrative, and concur with what Rey Chow has elsewhere termed for this kind of grand narrative of China as a mode of autoethnography in the Chinese filmmaker’s self-ethnographizing of China to the West,<sup>224</sup> I nonetheless want to hold Chen’s representation of Cheng Dieyi and the film’s final resolution of the homosexually transgender body in productive tension. In what follows, I provide a short but succinct reading of the beginning and ending of the film in order to argue for the relevance of a queer temporal critique to questions of nationalist narration through a reconsideration of transgender body as the mediation and the “bearing-witness” agent of historical violence.

The film begins in 1977, one year after the official ending of the Cultural Revolution. Cheng and Duan enter an empty basketball stadium/theater rehearsal stage to practice for their reunion to perform the play that earned them reputation and admirations in the past. A loud voice in microphone asks them “What are you doing here?” in an

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<sup>223</sup> Liao Ping-hui (廖炳惠), “The Performance of Time/Space and Sexual Identification: Re-viewing *Farewell My Concubine*,” (時空與性別的扮演: 重看霸王別姬) in *Farewell My Concubine: Tongzhi Reading and Transnational Dialogues* (Ba wang bie ji : tong zhi yue du yu kua wen hua dui hua), ed. Chen Yazhen (陳雅真) (Taiwan, Jiayi Xian: Nan hua da xue, 2004), 15-36, 24.

<sup>224</sup> Rey Chow, *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 180.

authoritative manner. Cheng and Duan, a bit shocked, answers that National Peking Opera Company has asked them to rehearse here. The official voice confesses that he is actually a big fan of them for a long time. The official also claims that it is all the fault of the Gang of Four (四人幫) that causes them to separate and end their careers. This official interpretation of the Cultural Revolution tends to blame all historical injustice onto individuals while de-emphasizing or even erasing the role of Mao in historical violence. Moreover, the voice assures that “the time is better now.” Cheng and Duan, still too traumatized by their persecution in the never-quite-gone past, reply in hesitation and stutter: “Is it not, now it’s better...yes yes.” The next scene then flashes back to the 1924 Warlord Northern Expedition era, and the rest of the film runs through a historically linear and smooth progression. It is not until the final scene that as viewers we are “returned” to Cheng and Duan’s rehearsal in the “present” when historical trauma is “concluded” and Juxian had committed suicide due to Duan’s refusal to acknowledge their love during trying times.

Now, in post-Mao China where things are presumed to be “better off” than old times, Cheng and Duan perform the final scene of the play where the sacrificial concubine Yu Ji dies while King of Chu is dangerously pursued by the army of Liu Bang (劉邦), the future emperor of Han dynasty. As they repeatedly sing and act for the climactic moment, Duan keeps losing breath and confesses that he is older now, not as good as before. Cheng smiles at him almost with an epiphany that follows with a sorrowful look. Duan, realizing that Cheng still hasn’t put the past behind him/her, cheerfully recites half of the line from another play about gender change. Cheng, when he started training as a boy, always recited in a wrong verse. The line is supposed to read as



“I am by nature a girl and not a boy” for a *dan* actor, but Cheng always got it wrong (perhaps because of his relentless sense of his biological felt sense of being a boy) and suffered the punishment by their opera master. Now, years later, Duan tricks Cheng by reciting the first line as “I am by nature a boy...” and Cheng forgetfully completes the line “and not a girl.” After realizing that he/she recites the gender line incorrectly again, Cheng stares into the air as if he is within another temporal zone, while beckoning Duan with a smile to practice again. At the final moment, they recite the part where the concubine will slit her throat; only this time, when Duan is not aware, Cheng slowly draws out the long sharp sword and slits her own throat, ending his life as concubine Yu Ji and completing and realizing the perfection of the operatic role.

Many critics find Chen’s decision to stage a suicide scene at the end as reinforcing the “tragic gay and lesbian” plot that predominates in earlier cinematic traditions,<sup>225</sup> that is to say, they contend that Chen’s mandate that Cheng Dieyi “must die”<sup>226</sup> misses the chance to further elaborate the possibility of alternative gender expressions in post-Mao China, or how his relationship with Duan may pursue. Beyond an obvious critique of Chen’s possible cinematic homophobia is perhaps an alternative “alternative” reading that marks the unstable queer meanings in the final scene. The fact that this final scene is temporally the same but cinematically “split” between the beginning and the end suggests that memorialization of Cheng Dieyi remains split in

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<sup>225</sup> Liao Ping-hui, “The Performance of Time/Space and Sexual Identification: Re-viewing *Farewell My Concubine*,” 34; see also Sean Metzger, “Farewell My Fantasy,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 39.3-4 (2000): 228, where he writes, “This melodramatic ending suggests that the transvestite figure, finally unable to become the idealized woman, takes his own life in frustration. Thus, the neat and tidy conclusion avoids the problematics of dealing with an alternative gendered subjectivity.”

<sup>226</sup> This cinematic choice is revealed in Hong Kong filmmaker Stanley Kwan’s interview with Chen Kaige. See *Yang ± Yin: Gender in Chinese Cinema*, Stanley Kwan, British Film Institute, 1996.

multiple paths. On the one hand, the final moment seems to imply that Cheng sees no hope of living after “all that have happened.” On the other hand, Cheng’s act of final death suggests that he, a biological male, decides to enact the transgender script of the concubine to his own script of “perfection” by following, faithfully, the narration of the play. Finally, an inter-temporal critique suggests that Cheng’s death does not present a final resolution of all historical violence, but instead, must be viewed as a gradual but never predictable corporeal mapping of histories, memories, and violence onto the transgender body. This is a body that refuses the easy conflation between his felt sense of bodily ego (as evident in his constant mis-recitation of the gender line) and the material contour of his almost perfectly transgendered femininity. Cheng’s death also further shows that history and historical violence does not proceed from the past to the present through a trajectory of redress that can easily evacuate from the present; more astutely, historical violence is spectrally returned to the present in the mode of a “temporal drag,” “the pull of the past upon the present.”<sup>227</sup> Finally, Cheng’s transgender body serves as a critical inventory of the tensions between the China of Cultural Revolution and post-Mao China, where the queer body’s corporeality is not a fetish but functions as a bearing witness to the weight of the monumentality we call “History” upon non-normatively gendered bodies. This queer mode of inter-temporality and its vexed relation to state violence and transgender embodiment will be taken up by Zhang Yuan’s *East Palace, West Palace* in 1996.

If *Farewell* inter-temporally indexes past historical violence and the post-Mao present through the indexicality of Cheng’s transgender body as the culmination, and

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<sup>227</sup> Elizabeth Freeman, “Packing History, Count(er)ing Generations,” 728.

therefore, bodily witness to historical trauma, inter-temporality in *East Palace* involves three dimensions: the inter-subjective bodily shaping of desire and embodiment across gender and sexual identification through a re-memorization and re-narration of “sexual histories”; the temporal blurring and misrecognition between fantasy and realism; and finally, the material consequence of inter-temporal imaginations for possible tactics of resistance to symbolic state power. First, let me give some background on Zhang Yuan the filmmaker and a brief plot of the film.

Zhang comes after Huang’s generation of filmmakers in the 1980s and Chen Kaige and Zhang Yimou’s Fifth Generation and therefore, he is often referred to as a member of the Sixth Generation. Film critic Zhang Zhen coins the term the “Urban Generation” for “periodizing contemporary film history as it is a critical category that places film practice right in the middle of a living, if often agitated, social, cultural, and political experience.”<sup>228</sup> Previous films by Zhang explore issues of disability (*Mama*, 1991), rock music (*Beijing Bastards*, 1993), and alcoholics and unemployment (*Sons*, 1996). In an interview with Chris Berry, Zhang quite frankly reveals his motives for filming the marginalized segments of contemporary China: “I prefer my view from the edges of society, the perspective of an ordinary guy looking at people and society...I’m a marginal kind of director myself.”<sup>229</sup> While the Urban Generation directors in general and Zhang in particular position themselves as the speakers for the everyday man, film critic Berenice Reynaud also notes “the apparent contradiction that runs throughout Zhang’s

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<sup>228</sup> Zhang Zhen, “Introduction: Bearing Witness: Chinese Urban Cinema in the Era of ‘Transformation,’” in *The Urban Generation: Chinese Cinema and Society at the Turn of the Twenty-first Century*, ed. Zhang Zhen (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 1-45, 8. See also Paul G. Pickowicz and Yingjin Zhang, ed. *From Underground to Independent: Alternative Film Culture in Contemporary China* (MD: Lanham, Rowman and Littlefield, 2006).

<sup>229</sup> Chris Berry, “Zhang Yuan: Thriving in the Face of Adversity,” *Cinemaya* 32 (1996): 41.

work—between the ‘realistic’ semidocumentary impulse and the theatricalization of the contemporary urban experience.”<sup>230</sup>

The co-presence of the documentary impulse (realism) and the theatricalization of reality in the form of fantasy accounts for the inter-temporal elements in *East Palace*. The film centers on the erotic power relation between Ah Lan (Shi Han), a slightly feminine gay male writer, and Xiaoshi (Hu Jun), the police officer who catches him from sexual cruising in a park and interrogates him. The title of the film in Chinese is *Donggong, Xigong* (東宮西宮), which refers to the two public restrooms on either side of the Forbidden Palace on the north side of Tiananmen Square. The cruising park’s ethnographic element in the film is loosely based on the novel of the same name written by the late Wang Xiaobo, who was the husband of sexologist Li Yinhe. And Zhang’s research on the film bases much on the research that Wang and Li did on gay male population in China back in the early 1990s.<sup>231</sup> In the film Ah Lan is a masochist whose dream since childhood is to be captured by the police. Xiaoshi, while symbolizing the figure of the state and authority, captures Ah Lan the first time but let him go. The second time around he captures him again and forces Ah Lan to confess his “disgusting” deeds. It is during these interrogation scenes that Ah Lan “over-confesses” and retells seductive and at times irrelevant stories of his childhood. He identifies himself with a girl called “Public Bus” because every boy at school can have a fun ride and have sex with her. He also claims to have married this female classmate, but of course as viewers we are never

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<sup>230</sup> Berenice Reynaud, “Zhang Yuan’s Imaginary Cities and the Theatricalization of the Chinese ‘Bastards,’” in *The Urban Generation*, 264-294, 266.

<sup>231</sup> Li Yinhe and Wang Xiaobo (李银河, 王小波) *Ta men de shi jie :Zhongguo nan tong xing lian qun luo tou shi* (他们的世界:中国男同性恋群落透视) (Taiyuan : Shanxi ren min chu ban she, 1992).

quite sure of the validity of all Ah Lan's claims, confessions, and fantasies. As the policeman gets more entangled with Ah Lan's stories, he participates in Ah Lan's masochist fantasy and orders him to cross-dress as a woman at the end of the film. Ah Lan dresses up, and they passionately make out with one another. In the end, the police is seduced by Ah Lan and is forced to confront his own queer desire.

The style of narration in *East Palace* and Ah Lan's re-narration of his sexual past move beyond the binary mode of individual history (personal) versus collective (national) history through the inter-temporal corporeality of bodies across gender and sexual identifications. As such, Ah Lan's confession charges the task of history telling with the inter-subjective erotics of power that pays specific attention to the sexual histories of subjugated sexual "others."<sup>232</sup> Specifically, during one interrogation Ah Lan reveals in passing that he is "married," a fact that is surprising to the policeman/confessor but never directly confirmed by Ah Lan. For when Xiaoshi asks Ah Lan to tell him more about his wife, he instead tells the story of a beautiful and sexually alluring girl called "Bus" (played by Zhao Wei) in his high school days, thus evading the imperative to confess and Xiaoshi's power over him. He remembers, "She was very beautiful. She didn't have a family. Everyone calls her 'public bus,' meaning everyone could get with her." As he is narrating his recollection of "Public Bus," the scene shows a curious handsome young man staring a look at the beautiful girl as she sits on the stairs. The boy then moves

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<sup>232</sup> My point about the erotically charged dimensions of history, as represented in this film, is also very much in line with Elizabeth Freeman's concept of "erotohistoriography." She defines, "Erotohistoriography admits that contact with historical materials can be precipitated by particular bodily dispositions, and that these connections may elicit bodily responses, even pleasurable ones, that are themselves a form of understanding. It sees the body as a method, and historical consciousness as something intimately involved with corporeal sensations." See Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 95-96.

behind the stairs and slowly masturbates while no one is watching. After the sequence returns to the “present” mode when Xiaoshi questions if Ah Lan really did get married, he does not reply but instead talks about his “first sex” in middle school. He describes the boy as very strong and handsome, and he always protected him at school. One time when Ah Lan was at his house, they talked about girls in the class, especially “Bus.” As they fantasized, they both got aroused and had sex.

These long back-and-forth sequences between flashback and present narrative during the interrogation are intriguing for theorizing a mode of history that intertemporally links up different bodies, different sexual desires, and distinct subjugated bodies that would not belong to official history of the nation. In fact, the very act of Ah Lan telling these people whom he either had sex with or whose body (Bus) he fantasized in order to arouse another body (the handsome boy) is meant to record and re-channel an alternative form of history that is akin to what Foucault called “subjugated knowledge.” This knowledge comprises “a whole series of knowledge that have been disqualified as nonconceptual knowledges, as insufficiently elaborated knowledges...knowledges that are below the required level of erudition or scientificity.”<sup>233</sup> This aspect of knowledge that cannot be observed according to normative frame of reference then exposes the necessary gaps in conventional historiography. This “gap” is highlighted when Ah Lan was narrating the personality of “Bus,” but the sequence shows “additional” scene of the other handsome boy self-pleasuring himself. By showing what exists “outside” of narration, albeit a narration that is itself already fragmentary, disjointed, and fantastical,

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<sup>233</sup> Michel Foucault, *Society Must be Defended: Lectures at the College De France 1975-1976* (New York: Picador, 2003), 7.

Zhang's filmic aesthetics also provides an inventory of erotohistoriography that is marked by inter-subjectivity within inter-temporal gap. While it is tempting to read Ah Lan's use of the girl's sexual allure in his first encounter with the handsome boy through the classic erotic triangle model that Eve Sedgwick theorizes as the prime model of homosociality (when two men arouse each other via a third woman),<sup>234</sup> what these interconnected sequences display are the possibility of, and methodology for, narrating a personal life not through the autobiographical form or collective history but selective momentary connections between bodies, even bodies with different sexual orientations.

In addition to Zhang's emphasis on the inter-temporality across sexual bodies, the film also significantly blurs the division between fiction and realism; this blurring allows Ah Lan to bind his sexual positioning as a gay man not only to "Bus," a feminized subject position, but also to an imaginary female *dan* actress in the role of a female prisoner in the *kunqu* Chinese opera genre. Through imaginary introjections of *kunqu* operatic sequences, Ah Lan cross-identifies himself with the female prisoner through his actual position in the present as a "prisoner" at the police station. At the same time, this submissive position also seduces Xiaoshi to further push Ah Lan to the limit of confession, at the point of which he forces him to dress up as a woman. I want to provide a close reading of the final shots of the film in order to show how Ah Lan's inter-subjective identification with the convict role and Zhang's blurring of fantasy and realism provide a tactical seizure and re-mastery of time, a tactics of resistance that challenges the state's symbolic power over gay, lesbian, and queer lives in China.

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<sup>234</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

Specifically, at this moment in the film, Ah Lan has successfully aroused erotic interest in Xiaoshi. But the confessor, as the enforcer of the law, still acts aggressively to Ah Lan. He orders Ah Lan to cross-dress as a woman, using the clothes of a previous cross-dresser that he arrested in the park. During the dressing up scene, the shot shifts to a *kunqu* sequence in which a female convict awaiting execution is placed in a big birdcage. The executioner, staring the convict with pity, walks around the cage in circle. After this fantastical interlude, the film returns to the narrative present in which Xiaoshi has returned to the station. Ah Lan is already dressed. Cross-identifying with the female convict role and walking around the policeman in a circle like the executioner in the operatic fantasy, he performs a poetic speech, “In this desperate situation, the thief falls in love with her executioner. The love she feels is a kind of perversion. But in this story, under her white dress, perversion and vice have no place. All that is left is purity and pity. She can already feel the blade against her neck. At that very moment, she throws herself into his arms and gives herself completely into her executioner. The convict loves her executioner. The thief loves her jail keeper. We love you, we have no other choice.” After hearing Ah Lan’s “opera” performance, Xiaoshi violently drags him outside the interrogation room and attempts to “cure” his sickness. They fight and struggle for a while until Xiaoshi puts the handcuffs on both of their hands. They make out passionately in a dark space of an abandoned factory. The policeman uses a water hose to wet Ah Lan’s body and his face. Tactically, Ah Lan seizes the opportunity. He kneels down, takes Xiaoshi’s hands, and declares, “You have asked me a lot of questions. Now why not ask yourself?” Confronted with this question, Xiaoshi could not utter a word. He left



Ah Lan, and the film ends without proclaiming Xiaoshi's gender and sexual identification.

Various critics have noted the discursive reversal of power at the end of the film. Song Hwee Lim, in the first book-length study on gay male homosexuality in Chinese cinemas, argues that both *Farewell* and *East Palace* use transgender femininity as a cinematic form to position the power of the filmmaker-as-intellectual in relation to state power. In other words, by positioning his film as a dissident cultural form, Zhang Yuan as the "marginalized" filmmaker by analogy also shows his resistance against state discourse. Lim writes, "Finally, I would suggest that a more radical reading of *Palace* is in the positive light of its ending, in which the state, represented by the policeman, has the potential of acknowledging both the existence of the homosexual-criminal Other and its own repressed desire, for it is precisely this power relation that has been subverted in the film."<sup>235</sup> In his reading, Chris Berry warns against the easy applicability of Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity in its potential to recite and thus rewrite existing law of normative gender, because he argues that the existing social constraints on gay and lesbian lives in China means that the possibility of gender performance in the film is significantly curtailed in real life. Berry contends, "In other words, we need to ground Butler's insights into performativity's potential both socially and historically if we are to understand how it does not simply smuggle the liberal free subject back into the picture but instead inscribes agency as regulated and deployed differentially."<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>235</sup> Song Hwee Lim, *Celluloid Comrades: Representations of Male Homosexuality in Contemporary Chinese Cinemas* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006), 98.

<sup>236</sup> Chris Berry, "East Palace, West Palace: Staging Gay Life in China," *Jump Cut* 42 (1998):84-89. Accessed November 20, 2011. <http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinessays/JC42folder/EastWestPalaceGays.html>.

Taking my cue from Lim's optimistic reading of the subversive potentials of the film's ending as well as Berry's caution, I want to conclude my reading of the film's inter-temporal critique through Henri Bergson's notion of time as durational actuality and Michel de Certeau's theory of tactical resistance. Bergson, as I have outlined earlier, shows that time may be better theorized as temporal duration instead of one moment replacing another. To further substantiate the logics of duration, he argues that the emergence of the actual, the one existing present, also involves a certain logics of negation. It negates all the forms of the possible before the ultimate actual is sorted out. Bergson elaborates, "To deny, therefore, always consists in presenting in an abridged form a system of two affirmations: the one determinate, which applies to a certain *possible*; the other indeterminate, referring to the unknown or indifferent reality that supplants this possibility."<sup>237</sup>

If time is in fact a durational mode of temporal difference that contains many forms of the possible, then it becomes possible to conceive what I have been calling inter-temporality as marking many modes of the possible that are temporally suppressed or forgotten by the easily recognized actuality that is nation's time. Bergson's reminder that there are always multiple possibles even within our conceptual habit of only seeing one actuality dovetails with Michel de Certeau's concept of tactics. De Certeau reasons that minority subjects cannot rely on strategy because strategy implies a possession of a proper locus. He writes, "The 'proper' is a victory of space over time. On the contrary, because it does not have a place, a tactic depends on time—it is always on the watch for

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<sup>237</sup> Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 293

opportunities that must be seized ‘on the wing.’”<sup>238</sup> De Certeau further clarifies that the tactics “seize on the wing the possibilities that offer themselves at any given moment.”<sup>239</sup> Indeed, the tactic sees multiple “possibilities” that must be engaged in every duration, in contrast to a pragmatist who only sees the actual in the singularity of the homogeneous present. This reading allows us to rethink Ah Lan’s challenge to the system as not one of singular overhauling of the entire system. Instead, the critical mode of temporality that *East Palace* offers lies in the queer subject’s tactical mastery and re-mastery of possible moments for rupture. It urges the viewers and other queer subjects in contemporary China to act on temporal nodes and points of intervention that disrupt the monumentality of nation’s time.

### **III. Beyond Disappearance: Durational Difference, Temporal Dislocation, and the Queer “Transnation” in Hong Kong Cinema**

Hong Kong cinema in the same 1990s moment envisions other forms of temporal tactics. Since the official signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration in 1984 that would mandate Hong Kong’s return to China on July 1, 1997, Hong Kong cinema enters a new phase of the Hong Kong “new wave,” and Hong Kong cultural politics is obsessed with the search of authentic, deep-rooted Hong Kong culture in order to assert its distinctive regional difference from the PRC. This assertion of Hong Kong cultural authenticity marks a state of cultural instability that is indicative of Hong Kong’s “motherland syndrome,” a fraught relationship with China as the “motherland.” Different cultural critics on Hong Kong approach this fraught relationship of the Chinese mother nation’s

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<sup>238</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), xix.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid, 37.

and its “other” through politics of disappearance and the concept of “between colonizers” that provide crucial points of departure for my reading of temporality and queer sexuality before and after the 1997 handover. Ackbar Abbas characterizes the city facing its postcolonial return as “a space of disappearance.” Abbas argues that “culture in Hong Kong cannot just be related to ‘colonialism’; it must be related to this changed and changing space, this colonial space of disappearance, which in many respects does not resemble the old colonialisms at all.”<sup>240</sup> He further elaborates the concept of disappearance as tied to the ambiguous status of Hong Kong in the available vocabulary of colonial history and postcolonial theory: “This amounts to saying that colonialism will not merely be Hong Kong’s chronic condition; it will be accompanied by displaced chronologies or achronicities. Such a situation may well be unprecedented in the history of colonialism, and it might justify the use of the term *postcoloniality* in a special sense: a postcoloniality that precedes decolonization.”<sup>241</sup>

Another critic Rey Chow has largely criticized Abbas’ model of disappearance but nonetheless agrees and even extends his implicit argument that Hong Kong’s relationship with the PRC is another form of colonialism without the possibility of decolonization. Using the model of “between colonizers” in which she calls China a new cultural and economic “colonizer” that will take over the British colonizer, Chow remarks that “Hong Kong confronts us with a question that is yet unheard of in colonial history: *how do we talk about a postcoloniality that is a forced return (without the consent of the colony’s residents) to a ‘mother country,’ itself as imperialistic as the*

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<sup>240</sup> Ackbar Abbas, *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 3.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

*previous colonizer?*”<sup>242</sup> While Abbas has repeatedly stressed that disappearance “does not imply nonappearance” and that the concept might be better understood as an impending postcolonial space charged with the velocity and “consequence of speed,”<sup>243</sup> as cultural critics it is crucial to point out that both Abbas and Chow’s positions seem overly invested in *the* moment as a temporal problem in the “anomaly” of postcolonialism, without clarifying the ways in which Hong Kong cultural productions may engage themselves in the ever creative positioning and repositioning of the space of Hong Kong in relation to older British colonialism and its fraught relationship with China, politically, economically, and culturally. Chow’s concept of “between colonizers” further puts Hong Kong as a figure in between two great powers while dangerously equating Chinese postsocialist capitalistic control of Hong Kong’s economy as equivalent to older forms of European colonialism. Here, Hong Kong as a figure of cultural disappearance literally “disappears” within the fetish of pronouncing Hong Kong as the great mystery of postcolonial theory. Alternatively, Yingjin Zhang’s approach to the politics of disappearance in Hong Kong is more attuned to the interaction between the national, the regional, and the global when he claims that Hong Kong as “a translocal culture seeks pluralism and interculturalism, favors cultural flows in space, and tends to produce syncretism, synthesis, hybridity, and possibly even third cultures.”<sup>244</sup>

Drawing on but critically departing from Abbas and Chow’s positions, I will demonstrate that Hong Kong new-wave cinema, especially the work of Wong Kar-wai,

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<sup>242</sup> Rey Chow, *Ethics after Idealism: Theory-Culture-Ethnicity-Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 151. Italicized in the original.

<sup>243</sup> Ackbar Abbas, *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance*, 7, 9.

<sup>244</sup> Yingjin Zhang, *Screening China* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan/Center for Chinese Studies, 2002), 261.

and post-SAR (post-1997; Hong Kong as Special Administrative Region) Hong Kong cinema in the work of Yau Ching, provide nuanced models for reposing the question of Hong Kong's relation to the PRC through specific cinematic temporal politics. First, reading various cultural criticism on Wong Kar-wai's *Happy Together*, I argue that it is through Wong's excavation of time as incommensurable, lived, and sexually material durations that the film temporally dislocates Hong Kong through its multiple diasporic escapes away from Hong Kong, away from its then looming fate of postcolonial return. Instead of politics of durational and short-distance temporal dislocation, Yau Ching's *Let's Love Hong Kong* imagines lesbian existence in post-Millennium Hong Kong through a jarring, temporally unstable, and cybernetic futuristic mapping of the cityscape, a queer "transnation" always in temporal transition. In both aesthetics, Wong and Yau provincialize the monumental power of the PRC through tactical temporal interventions.

Let us take this queer temporal journey first through Wong's film. *Happy Together* tells the love story of Lai Yiu-fai (Tony Leung) and Ho Bo-wing (played by the late Leslie Cheung). It follows the gay couple's journey from Hong Kong to Bueno Aires, Argentina. The narrative is shot mostly in black-and-white, documentary-style close-up shots, and many slow montages. This temporally fragmented style is linked to an almost sublime emphasis on the power of nature, as indicated by Lai and Ho's desire to witness the powerful Iguazu Falls, bordering between Brazil and Argentina. Most of the time the narrative focuses on the incompatible relations between Lai and Ho, the former is more care-taking, domestic, and faithful, while the latter is sexually perverse, always whinny, and relatively selfish. Toward two-third into the narrative, the film introduces a young Taiwan man Chang (Chang Chen), whom Lai befriends in the Chinese restaurant they

both work at. Lai relates his love problems and the eventual break-up between Ho and him with the young man but never consummates his desire for Chang. By the end of the film, Lai earns enough money and travels to Taiwan, Ho is left melancholic and alone in the deserted apartment in Argentina, while Chang travels by himself all the way to Tierra del Fuego, disposing the sorrow that Lai has confided in him through a recorded cassette tape. The film ends on a slightly optimistic beat with Lai boarding on a train, followed by the music of “Happy Together.” As viewers we never know whether Lai will arrive at Hong Kong or not. Given Wong’s prominent place in art-house cinema and the film’s global recognition, which earned Wong the Best Director Award at the 1997 Cannes Film Festival, film critics have theorized the film in relation to wide-ranging concerns like poststructuralism and the impossibility of a nostalgic unitary togetherness,<sup>245</sup> traveling sexuality and migration,<sup>246</sup> and queer diasporic self-fashioning as an alternative to queer liberal individualism.<sup>247</sup> In an attempt to avoid revisiting already well-theorized terrains, my discussions here will consider all of these conceptual contributions while emphasizing more heavily on Wong’s cinematic aesthetics of temporal duration and dislocation in relation to the imbricated logics of sexuality and nationalism in Hong Kong’s 1997 postcolonial return to China.

To visualize the criss-crossing of queer sexuality, diasporic movements, and the escapist dislocation from the nation that is China, Wong maps the ephemerality of queer sex alongside acts of border-crossing, thus complicating migration as simply a question

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<sup>245</sup> Rey Chow, “Nostalgia of the New Wave: Structure in Wong Kar-wai’s *Happy Together*,” *Camera Obscura* 42 (1999): 31-49.

<sup>246</sup> Song Hwee Lim, *Celluloid Comrades*, 99-125.

<sup>247</sup> David L. Eng, *The Feeling of Kinship: Queer Liberalism and the Racialization of Intimacy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 58-92.

of political escape but one of sexual exploration as well. The establishing shot of the film is a close-up shot of the passport of Lai Yiu-fai, which also indicates the passport as belonging to the category of BNO, a shorthand for British National Overseas. The next shot shows the title of the film (春光乍洩/ *Cheun gwong tsa sit* in Cantonese). The long sequence that follows right after the film's introduction is first a medium shot and then zooming in of Ho smoking and staring into a lampshade that resembles Iguazu Falls. The next shot depicts both of them having passionate sex, which is shot completely in black and white and lasts about two minutes. During this scene, the voice-over of Lai summarizes the lovers' journey in a matter-of-fact tone: "Ho Po-wing always says 'Let's start over.' And it gets to me every time. We have been together for a while...and broke up often...But when he says starting over...I find myself back with him. We left Hong Kong to start over. We hit the road and reached Argentina."

These several shots, while depicting different subject matters (migration, immigration checkpoint, melancholic contemplation, and sexual climax), serve to link Lai and Ho's identities as particular border-crossing Hong Kong subjects (those who hold the BNO passports) with their identities as gay men. Although the film overall is not interested in narrating a coming-out story, the fact that the opening sequence maps the stampings of their passports and temporally links up their sexual intercourse with the migration narrative thus points to the crucial relation between queer sexuality and movement. Their movement out of Hong Kong due to possible fear of Hong Kong's return to China parallels their desire to "start over again," a desire to renew a traumatic relationship. Rey Chow interprets the peculiar use of black-and-white color in the sexual intercourse scene as a nostalgic desire, not the traditional understanding of nostalgia as



desiring the old and the past but a desire for oneness, unitariness, and togetherness that is constantly ruptured by poststructuralist understanding of “1=1+”, or supplementarity. Chow explicates, “In terms of narrative structure, therefore, these images of copulation constitute not only a remembered but an enigmatic other time, an other-worldly existence. They are unforgettable because their ontological status is, strictly speaking, indeterminable.”<sup>248</sup>

Whereas Chow emphasizes the problematic of structure in the narratological tensions in the film between erotic oneness and the poststructuralist play of difference (especially exemplified by Lai and Ho’s repetitive conflicts), I read the durational elongation and lengthy emphasis on queer sex in the opening sequence as Wong’s understanding of temporality in this film as one of durational difference, a difference that queer sexuality makes to the otherwise ontological, linear, and onward clocking of homogeneous time. Here again, it is helpful to revisit Bergson’s theory of time, durational difference, and creative self-reinvention. Bergson provides an understanding of time not as passing from moments to moments but as change itself; moreover, it is a form of change that is charged with the materiality of sensations and affect. Reading his own impatience with the time it takes to melt sugar in a glass of water, Bergson elaborates, “It coincides with my impatience, that is to say, with a certain portion of my own duration, which I cannot protract or contract as I like. It is no longer something *thought*, it is something *lived*.” Therefore, even if one follows Chow’s line of inquiry that the passionate sex between Lai and Ho indicates a forever mythic recollection of a perfect union, I would also add that such queer recollection, narrated here cinematically in black-

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<sup>248</sup> Rey Chow, “Nostalgia of the New Wave,” 35.

and-white, is experienced by the two as both “thought” and “lived.” So that while this scene recalls the desire for nostalgic origin, Wong’s juxtaposition of this shot with the realism of the immigration checkpoint shots render queer sex as lived and material. These contradictory aspects in the film between the nostalgic and the “now” bespeak the general temporal approach in most Wong’s films. As Jean Ma’s acute study on melancholic time in Chinese cinema suggests, “Wong’s work readily encompasses the countervailing propulsions of speed and nostalgia, it instantiates an incongruent, forward-backward temporality particular to not only transitional-era Hong Kong but also the postmodern condition.”<sup>249</sup> Ultimately, postcolonial temporal dislocation in the film cannot be analytically separated from the durational emphasis of queer moments and affective time as evident in the opening sequence.

To further highlight the intricate way Wong connects postcolonial return, the Hong Kong-China nexus, and temporal dislocation, I will conclude my discussion of the film with a closer reading of Lai Yiu-fai’s traveling routes and the analogy between his never-consummated reunion with Ho and his never arrived destination of Hong Kong. Temporal dislocation in the film is most pointedly marked by the impossibility of being “happy together” between personal desires and between the geopolitical framing of the PRC and Hong Kong. Specifically, the film juxtaposes the disintegration of the bond between Lai and Ho alongside the difficulty of a perfect reunion between the PRC and Hong Kong. Toward the end of the film, Lai wants to return to Hong Kong and has earned enough money from his job at the abattoir in Buenos Aires. Part of his desire to

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<sup>249</sup> Jean Ma, *Melancholy Drift: Marking Time in Chinese Cinema* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010), 139.

return home can be attributed to his guilt toward his father (a figure that could be symbolically linked to the PRC). He stole money from the Hong Kong job that he quitted, and the boss is a good friend of his father. If Lai's return to Hong Kong is propelled by his desire to return to the father (here figured as the narrative of a prodigal son returning to the father, or perhaps returning to the fatherland that is China), such a return is never cinematically actualized.

Furthermore, the failure of the father-son reunion is linked to Lai's failure to fully consummate and "start over" with Ho. In the end, Ho is left alone in the apartment in Argentina. Almost a melancholic subject in the sense that he has lost interests in the world, Ho repeats domestic duties that Lai performed when they were together in that little apartment, implying that the melancholic has indeed swallowed the love object as his own ego, as his own worldview.<sup>250</sup> Lai, unlike Ho, is hopeful. In fact, one day after work as he entertains his plan of returning to Hong Kong, he wonders what it would be like to see Hong Kong from "here," from Argentina. The next shot magically pans the city of Hong Kong upside down. In the meantime, Chang the coworker who is presumably interested in Lai, has carried a cassette tape that contains Lai's crying voice when Lai was drunk one night at the bar. Chang carries this tape of sorrow all the way to "the end of the world" in Tierra del Fuego. Lai subsequently leaves Ho, travels to witness the sublime that is Iguazu Falls, and arrives in Taipei. Coincidentally, the night he arrives in Taipei, February 19<sup>th</sup>, 1997, also happens to be the day of Deng Xiaoping's death, the Chinese leader who is most responsible for the rise of postsocialist China. The film ends

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<sup>250</sup> Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia" in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume XIV, ed. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1957), 243-258.

with Lai riding in the metro transit in Taipei, with the background music playing a different version of “Happy Together” sung by Danny Chung. As the music is playing, we also hear cheering noise in the background as if some kind of celebration is in order. The music is contradicted by the very narrative of a young man traveling by himself. The film freezes on a final image of the metro train arriving at an unidentifiable station.

The several iconic images from the film that I just narrate here provide numerous elaborations of a queer temporal critique that can be understood as “temporal dislocation.” Temporal dislocation points to subjects of exile, diaspora, forced migration, agential migration, and other forms of displacements—it denotes how displacements may engender in the subjects a different understanding of time. Migratory subjects like Lai develop multiple time consciousness that cannot be contained within normative homogeneous time. The camera’s framing of the city as antipodal of Argentina and as upside down acutely points to Wong’s political trickery, as if he is suggesting that the city is in a state of instability, a state of reversal. Thus, the whole political uncertainty surrounding postcolonial Hong Kong is cinematically rendered as a kind of reversal, hinting at the changes that may take place. Lai’s diverted route of return to Hong Kong via Taiwan, and the weaving together of the footage of Deng’s death with the filmic text (considering that the production of the film must be near its completion at this point in February 1997) altogether posit an ambivalent politics of identification between the “nation” and the queer subject in question. The film, through its temporal reversal of the city and the temporal linking of the death of the “father figure” in relation to queer subjectivity, ultimately understands temporal dislocation as a kind of non-arrival. David Eng’s reading of the film is more psychoanalytical in the way he analyzes Lai’s refusal to

return to his Hong Kong father as both a critique of Oedipal kinship structures and the desire to form new kinship structures with Chang's family in Taiwan. Eng argues, "That is, by affiliating with another man's filial unit, Lai and Wong Kar-wai suggest that the turn back to an original scene of loss and impossible desire is made possible only by this move forward, through an alternative structure of family and kinship, and through another time and space outside the prohibitions and mandates of blood descent."<sup>251</sup> While Eng's project seems to be more invested in using *Happy Together* as a queer diasporic text that challenges the queer liberalism of gay marriage and inclusion into normative kinship structures, I am more interested in how the film's multiple maneuverings of temporality disorganize the temporal-spatial configuration of postcolonial Hong Kong, thus refusing in the end to posit a neat arrival in Hong Kong. Consequently, the film foregrounds temporal dislocation through strategic methods of prolonged and highlighted durations. As Lim's reading suggests, "the promise of 'happy together' cannot be anchored in any particular location but is a journey on which travelling sexualities embark, then perhaps detour and never make their way home."<sup>252</sup>

If Wong's method of inter-temporality partakes in the temporal dislocating of the postcolonial city, Yau Ching's 2002 film *Ho Yuk* (好郁)/*Let's Love Hong Kong* situates queer temporality firmly within the already post-colonized city, a region undergoing drastic economic downturn as a result of the economic crisis in Asia shortly after the 1997 handover. Considered as the "first" Hong Kong film that depicts lesbian relationship in a non-sexplicative manner, the film demonstrates the possibility of

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<sup>251</sup> David L. Eng, *The Feeling of Kinship*, 91.

<sup>252</sup> Song Hwee Lim, *Celluloid Comrades*, 125

lesbian independent filmmaking and belongs to part of a larger body of transnational Chinese queer independent films that include films by Cui Zi'en, Zhang Yuan, and Li Yu in the mainland and Zero Chou's lesbian teen flicks from Taiwan. Like Li Yu's first independent feature *Fish and Elephant* (2001), which contains footages of a variety of urban landscapes in Beijing, Yau Ching's film is unmistakably Hong Kong with its many footages of the Victoria Harbor between Hong Kong Island and Kowloon, as well as less glamorous views of the city like rundown auto shops in Yau Ma Tai and rent-by-the-clock type of love motels in what looks to be the red light district in Mongkok. While the filmic landscapes construct a strong "local feel" of urban density that is the trademark of the global city, its cybernetic construction of an electrified world of interface also pictures an alternative time and place for lesbian connections, which destabilize the symbolic power relation between China and Hong Kong. This kinetic cyber temporality enables a queering of the very status of Hong Kong as a special administration region into a "transnation," a city bordering between positions of national sovereignty and regional autonomy.

The film revolves around three lesbians, all of whom are non-professional actresses handpicked by Yau Ching herself as she was preparing the script back in 1996.<sup>253</sup> The protagonist Chan Kwok Chan (Wong Chung Ching) is an "actress" for an interactive porn Web Site called "Let's Love." Nicole (Colette Koo) is a female entrepreneur who speaks London-sounding British English, trades with advertising agents in the mainland, and constantly fluctuates between speaking English, Cantonese, and

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<sup>253</sup> Gina Marchetti, "Interview with Yau Ching: Filming Women in Hong Kong's Queerscape," in *Hong Kong Screenscapes: From the New Wave to the Digital Frontier*, ed. Esther M.K. Cheung, Gina Marchetti, and Tan See-Kam (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press), 217.

Mandarin. Nicole “meets” Chan through the cyber interface in which erotic connections are only made possible, paradoxically, through non-human anonymity. The lesbian character that comes closest to inter-personal contact and intimacy with Chan is Zero (Erica Lam), who seems to occupy a lower social position than Chan, who at least lives with her parents. Zero dwells with other low-income strangers in a deserted movie theater, which is much like Hong Kong, a “borrowed place.” She labors between multiple jobs and is extremely street smart, convincing straight men to buy exotic arousing oil, selling underwear at boutiques, and working as a real estate agent for old and undesirable rental flats, where she meets Chan. Since then, Zero has been stalking Chan. In the final moment of the film, all three women run into each other on the sidewalk of a street at night by coincidence, and the film does not end with any kind of reunion or romantic development.

*Ho Yuk* confronts viewers to move beyond modernist neat coordination of time and space as linear unfolding and geographical expansion through its propulsion into multiple temporalities of the cyber interface, an interface that draws our attention to the nexus of power relation between the Chinese “nation” and the Hong Kong region as “transnation.” Indeed, as Helen Hok-sze Leung points out, the title of the film “Ho Yuk” in Cantonese literally means “moving so much” and “constantly shaking.”<sup>254</sup> In addition, the word *ho* is the Cantonese pronunciation of the Chinese word *hao* (好), which, if broken down into two characters, means “girl and boy”; alternatively, it can also mean *nuzi*, meaning girls. Therefore, within the multiple meanings of the film title lies the nuanced queering of gender expressions and the possibility of lesbian connections

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<sup>254</sup> Helen Hok-sze Leung, *Undercurrents*, 35.

between “girls” to move the city, to cause some sensations. The movement of the city via interpersonal erotic connections is most evident in the opening shots that are weaved into a messy whole through fast crosscutting techniques.

The first shot shows Zero holding a torch and marking up advertisings in the classified sections of a newspaper in the ruined theater; the next one crosscuts to a close-up shot of Chan, who keeps hearing noises in the background; the next shot crosscuts to a medium shot of a mainland prostitute (who sells her body to both Chan and straight male clients) calling out Chan’s full name: “Chan Kwok Chan (陳國產),” which in Chinese literally means “Chan-Made in China.” The next several shots display visual images of Nicole enjoying a relaxing facial at a beauty salon; a scene that displays the pornographic interactive genre of cosplay in which Chan is dressed up in multiple feminine attires; a shot of Nicole’s face turning dark green under dim light as she masturbates into climax to Chan’s cybersex cosplay. The next shot self-reflexively stages a directing scene in which Chan is called on to get ready for a shooting scene, and the shooting scene again fades into cybernetic frame in which Chan is dressed in a traditional Chinese angelic garment that resembles the legend of Chang’e (嫦娥) who lands on the moon. Among the cosplay roles that Chan embodies across the digital screen are domestic servant *mui tsai* (妹仔) in 1930s Hong Kong, a female athlete in the background of a refashioned Chinese flag with a pink instead of red flag, and a female samurai dressed in black within a pictorial version of the Great Wall of China.

These plentitude of visual mismatchings and playful defamiliarization of the national essence of Chinese legends and landscape mark Chan as a peculiar figure of Hong Kong as a regional interface—a queer transnation. First, by naming the character



Chan as “made in China,” Yau Ching dramatizes the newly postcolonial status of Hong Kong as a new region of China, a new product of China. But while such a desire to fixate Chineseness in the film to Chan’s body is signified in her name, her cybernetic figurations across the multiple times and spaces within the interface trouble any fixed and easily locatable status of Chineseness, thus undermining Hong Kong’s stable location within the body polity of a Chinese nation. As Olivia Khoo highlights in her reading of Chinese identity in the film, “There is also a significant fault line between Hong Kong and the People’s Republic of China in the film, particularly in the context of the post-1997 handover. The precariousness of this balance is highlighted by the presence of a fourth character in *Ho Yuk*—the mainland sex worker whom Chan periodically hires for sex and conversation.”<sup>255</sup>

Indeed, by having the unnamed mainland female prostitute pronouncing Chan’s name in the film for the first time, this politics of enunciation dramatizes the troubling position of Chan Kwok Chan’s national identity as a patriotic new “Chinese” subject because she is obviously exploiting the mainland Chinese prostitute’s body here. Moreover, if the Hong Kong lesbian subject Chan is unable to become a real Chinese because of her asymmetrical subject position vis-à-vis the mainland prostitute, equally ambivalent as well is her impersonal, anonymous, yet highly corporeal connectivity with Nicole through real-time temporal mapping of digital media. Zero, the lesbian whom Chan will have the most encounters with during the unfolding of the film, is caught in this multiplicity of visual arrangements where Chan serves as a temporal interface

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<sup>255</sup> Olivia Khoo, “The Ground Beneath Her Feet: Fault Lines of Nation and Sensation in Yau Ching’s *Ho Yuk: Let’s Love Hong Kong*,” *GLQ* 14.1 (2008):99-119, 110.

between all women. In Yau's creative design of this cyberworld (which could realistically exist in a technologically driven city like Hong Kong), real-time temporality ironically enables impersonal encounters between Chan and Nicole, lesbians from different classes and social positions. Crucially, Chan's bodily interface here renders Hong Kong as a queer transnation, highlighting the power differentials between the exploited sex worker, the intermediary position of Chan, which playfully mocks Chinese nationality, and the flexible-capitalistic lesbian positionality of Nicole, who maneuvers Chan's erotic corporeal body at her will across the computer screen. Inter-temporality here directs our attention to new technological remapping of queer bodies across both the clocking of everyday homogeneous time and the simultaneity of real-time transition and transactions across the fiber-optics, and in this fantasy-like real world, Yau Ching still manages to map lesbian subjectivity in intersectional modes of difference—she brings into sharp focus Hong Kong's status as the queer transnation as much as indicating a critique of Hong Kong as a mediation of power relations between multiple "Chinese" subjects.

If Yau Ching's queer temporal mapping of lesbianism departs from Wong's politics of temporal dislocation through its attention to Hong Kong newly postcolonial, ambiguous, and playful claim to nationality and Chineseness *within* Hong Kong, her film also poses other temporal challenges and points of fragmentations. Specifically, the temporal mixture of cybernetic fast time versus an emphasis on stillness in hearing/feeling the movements of the city also invites the viewer to come up with new temporal imaginations of the city-region. Beyond the politics of cultural disappearance that must give ways to the velocity of speed in postmodern Hong Kong, as Abbas would

argue through his conception of Hong Kong as the *déjà disparu*: “the feeling that what is new and unique about the situation is always already gone,”<sup>256</sup> *Let's Love Hong Kong* is interested in envisioning emergent temporality that is trafficked contingently between the super fast and the perceptively slow. Specifically, lesbian eroticism and bodily connections (between inter-personal human contacts and across cyber impersonal contacts) are often cinematically juxtaposed with ethnographic Discovery Channel-style footages of giraffe in Kenya, and the film constantly references this utopic “elsewhere.” Yet, this slowness is never detached from the simultaneous, instant immediacy of cyber sex through the figure of Nicole.

Specifically, one long sequence (at 48:43) in the film shows a conversation taking place between Chan and Zero, who has been stalking Chan several times. Because of her occupation of cyber porn modeling, Chan doesn't need to “talk” to her “clients” and therefore, her character is oddly silent and socially awkward. In contrast, Zero manages to strike up a conversation and breaks the ice. Zero's personal advances toward Chan are remarkable given that they are riding in the cabin of the fast MTR subway system in Hong Kong. It is unusual for any stranger to initiate a conversation in the subway, not to mention that there are empty seats around Zero. At this point, Zero points out that Chan's neck is particularly long and it is very “cute.” The next shot crosscuts to a giraffe slowly eating leaves hanging on the top of the tropical tree; this slowness parallels the slow conversations between the two and the awkward stillness of Chan, in contrast to Zero's aggressive affection. The next shot displays Nicole doing her usual trick, climaxing with the pornographic performance of Chan, whose real corporeal body is obviously in

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<sup>256</sup> Ackbar Abbas, *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance*, 25

another time (everyday time) and place (in the MTR cabin). The next scene after this long sequence stages a news reporter giving a report of an earthquake (imaginatively inserted into the narrative as Hong Kong never has earthquake) that causes the magnitude of 7.2 on Richter Scale, or 2.34 on the revised Grand Sino Scale. The reporter claims that “the earthquake can only be felt by those who were completely still.”

What are we to make of the difference in erotic sensation, experienced as slow and fast (between Chan and Zero; between Nicole and simulated Chan), and its cinematic pairing with region, matter, geography, physics, and perhaps, the nation? Here, instead of the inability to capture the city that is always at the brink of disappearance due to postmodern velocity of speed, movement, and the impossible enigma of decolonization (in Abbas and Chow’s models), Yau Ching dares the viewers to move disorientingly and queerly between slow affective engagement and fast erotic climax. This multiple inhabiting of slow and fast time is further dramatized by the fact that in this new mapping of Hong Kong temporality, only those who care to appreciate both velocity *and* stillness can feel and listen to the shaking of the city. As Brian Massumi explains in his call to study the “autonomy of affect,” one cannot really move without at the same time “feeling” the bodily movement and its attendant sensations. Massumi theorizes, “When I think of my body and ask what it does to earn that name, two things stand out. It *moves*. It *feels*. In fact, it does both at the same time. It moves as it feels, and it feels itself moving.”<sup>257</sup> In a similar vein, *Ho Yuk*, through its queer temporal mapping of lesbian erotics alongside the endless re-positionings of the city-region as a site of queer

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<sup>257</sup> Brian Massumi, *Parable for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 1.

transnation, envisions a city always moving, in fast and slow motions, but never into a predictable future.

#### **IV.A Forever Young “Nation”: The Neoliberalization of Queer Youth Wave after Taiwan New Cinema**

Having outlined how inter-temporality disrupts nation’s time through transgender corporeality that unravels the temporal gaps between “History” and its incompleteness in disciplining queerness in films from the PRC, in the previous section I point to the indispensability of this temporal critique in navigating the always shifting power terrain between the national and the regional in Hong Kong’s postcolonial cinema. In this last section of the chapter I want to further delve into the logics of queerness, time, sexuality, and nationalist narration by clarifying the stake of queer temporality as critique and queer temporality as cultural dominants—not all queer films that are related to childhood, growing up, and “time” are automatically self-reflexive or critical for the kind of inter-temporal critique that aims at undermining nationalist homogeneity and transnational capitalist expansions. Queer temporality is not an auto-critique. Instead, I argue that currently there emerges in post-Millennium Taiwan a new “queer youth wave” that capitalizes on the neoliberalization of queer cultures and imagines a time that is forever young, forever freezing at the moment of a brighter future yet-to-come. I contend that the relative optimism about the box office successes of this queer youth wave after the continuing commercial failure of Taiwan New Cinema must be read alongside a queer temporal critique that unhinges itself from the hegemony of trans-regional neoliberal capitalism. I point to Yee Chih-yen’s *Blue Gate Crossing* (2002) and Chen Yin-jung’s

2004 film *Formula 17* as exemplars of the neoliberal mode that require our continual critique in order to counter logics of sexual modernity and developmentalism.

First, a brief history of Taiwan cinema and nationalist narration is in order. Almost all film criticism on Taiwan cinema begins with a brief history of Taiwan's multiple colonial invasions and control by the Dutch in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, followed by the Manchu conquest in the Qing dynasty, and by the Japanese when China lost its battle in the first Sino-Japanese War, thus ceding Taiwan to Japan under the Treaty of Shimonoseki (1895). The island again fell under control to the foreign power of the KMT in 1945 and was subsequently controlled by the KMT rule under the Martial Law (1948-1987). Given the existence of various ethnic and native groups throughout Taiwan history—Taiwanese aborigines who speak Austronesian dialects, “native” Taiwanese who speaks Fujian variant of the Hokkien, officially rendered as Minnan dialect but popularly referred to as “Taiwanese” or *Taiyu* in Taiwan, and the *waishengren* “the people from outside the province,” who are basically the “Mainlanders” who migrated with the KMT party since 1945—the very fiction of a coherent imagined community of Taiwan nationalism is hard to sustain, and the challenge to nationalist unity becomes increasingly possible after the end of Martial Law in 1987. Given this complex historiography of Taiwan, film criticism tends to map cinematic production in relation to KMT control over film censorship and marks the early 1980s toward the end of the era as the rise of “New Cinema.” Pairing Hou Hsiao-hsien’s critical rewriting of Taiwan history in *A City of Sadness* (1989) with previous rise of nativist literature and movement, June Yip writes, “Emerging in the 1980s, Taiwanese New Cinema put Taiwanese filmmaking

on the international map and is thought by many to be the heir to the nativist cultural traditions of hsiang-t'u literature."<sup>258</sup>

Other film critics like Emilie Yeh and Darrell Davis have sought to depart from the emphasis on the international recognition of the New Cinema of the 1980s in order to map what they call "parallel cinemas." They show that long before the generation of Hou Hsiao-hsien, Edward Yang, and later on Ang Lee, and Tsai Ming-liang took international film festivals by storm, the golden period of Taiwan cinema in the 1960s saw the rise of two competing cinemas: *taiyu pian* (Taiwanese-language films) that catered to millions of Minnan speaking audience and the Mandarin tradition of "healthy realism" in the 1960s under the Central Motion Picture Corporation (CMPC), overseen by the KMT.<sup>259</sup> And while all critics reckon with the global achievements of the auteur-driven New Cinema from the 1980s to the second new wave of the 1990s, almost all situate the 1980s as the commercial demise of Taiwan film industry, whose failing state continues until the revitalization of the industry recently.<sup>260</sup> In this light, the success of recent gay and lesbian teen flicks like *Blue Gate Crossing*, *Formula 17*, and *Eternal Summer* (Leste Chen, 2006) can be read as local film industry's creative response to revitalize Taiwan cinema itself, as well as its desire to globalize a new "youthful" image of Taiwan to both

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<sup>258</sup> June Yip, *Envisioning Taiwan: Fiction, Cinema, and the Nation in the Cultural Imaginary* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 9.

<sup>259</sup> Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh and Darrell William Davis, *Taiwan Film Directors: A Treasure Island* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 15-53

<sup>260</sup> Ibid, 56. Here, Yeh and Davis factually comment, "Today the New Cinema is blamed for the total collapse of commercial cinema in Taiwan. Nevertheless, the New Cinema put Taiwan itself, not only Taiwan film, back on the world map." In the first English anthology on Taiwan cinema, Chris Berry and Feii Lu concur with Yeh and Davis' assessment of the global recognition but financial failure of the local film industry: "Although some were moved that these films brought them closer to life, others did not connect with them. As the dramatic plots faded away in the Taiwan New Cinema, so did the audience, and with them the producers and investors, pushing the film movement to the edge of financial non-viability." See also Chris Berry and Feii Lu, "Introduction" in *Island on the Edge: Taiwan New Cinema and After*, ed. Chris Berry and Feii Lu (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005), 6.

local and global audience. Departing from strictly audience reception studies in the previous studies of these films,<sup>261</sup> I will scrutinize the logics of temporality as one of successful developmentalism from painful youth into joyful queer adulthood and inquire how these films articulate the neoliberalization of Taiwan itself as forever young and vibrant.

Despite its beautiful narration of teen love story and the pain of growing up, *Blue Gate Crossing* achieves its local and global appeals precisely by universalizing time, sexuality, and lesbian narratives into one of universal adolescent romance. The film is a coming of age tomboy narrative that caters to wider transnational audience, both in and out of Taiwan. Yee's film lands at No. 5 among the top 10 grossing Chinese-language films in Taiwan domestic market from 2001 to 2002, which is a great commercial success, considering the continual dominance of Hollywood and Hong Kong films in Taiwan.<sup>262</sup> The film's transnational co-production between Taiwan Arc Light Films and the French Pyramide Productions also ensures the widest possible distribution. *Blue Gate* narrates a lesbian tomboy identity through circular displacements of desire. It revolves around three characters. Lin Yuezhen (Liang Youmei) is a 17 year-old high school girly girl who has a huge crush on Zhang Shihao (Chen Bolin), an athletic hunk who later reveals to be a virgin still. Meanwhile, Meng Kerou (Gui Lunmei), the tomboy, is in love with Lin her best friend. While Lin asks Meng to act as the go-between for Zhang and

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<sup>261</sup> For one such fascinating case study on the marketing strategy of *Eternal Summer*, see Hong-Chi Shiao, "Marketing Boys' Love: Taiwan's Independent Film, *Eternal Summer*, and Its Audiences," *Asian Cinema* 19.1 (2008): 157-171.

<sup>262</sup> "Taiwan Film Market in 2002." *Taiwan Cinema*. Accessed April 29, 2011. <http://tc.gio.gov.tw/ct.asp?xItem=50940&ctNode=124&mp=1>.



herself, during the process of befriending Zhang for Lin the boy falls for the lesbian girl Meng instead. So, this film can relate to viewers of diverse sexual orientations precisely because it tells a story about the *disorientation* of desire—it tells the story of a heterosexual young girl (Lin) falling for a heterosexual young man (Zhang), who in turn falls for a tomboy (Meng), who also is in love with an object choice she can never possess, Lin.<sup>263</sup>

While such a disorientation of sexual object choice may queer the growing up narrative altogether, I argue that the film begins with such a queer vision that ultimately subsumes to a universalizing vision of the future, one that will naturally develop into heteronormative adulthood. First, let's take a closer look at the possibility of queer temporal remapping of adolescence that the first opening sequence seems to offer, and one that the filmic unfolding eventually forecloses. Specifically, the opening scene is a striking close-up shot of Meng, with the wind blowing her short bangs, she frustratingly tells her friend Lin: "I still can't see." Lin asks her to picture her life in the future, and she begins telling Meng her own dreamy future as a rich young wife raising a kid with a handsome husband. Later on, Lin runs in a hurry to Meng, telling her that her future ideal husband is Zhang. Here, the narrative intentionally sets up heterosexuality as an ideal future only to later on disavow that dreamy futurity of Lin; at the same time, the tomboy Meng's future simply cannot be sighted. Read radically, the impossibility of Meng "to see her future" can possibly account for what Chakrabarty calls History 2, which accounts for "the diverse ways of being human."<sup>264</sup> However, upon a second critical

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<sup>263</sup> For an in-depth study that takes up the question of disorientation in queer theory, see Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

<sup>264</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 70.

reading of the film one simply cannot locate the possibility for Meng's future. What actually dominates the film is the total overshadowing of Meng's lesbianism under various heterosexual imaginations.<sup>265</sup>

*Blue Gate* neoliberalizes queerness by referencing political queer movements as stage props in Lin's heterosexual desire for Zhang. Specifically, in one of the most moving scenes in the film, Lin asks Meng to put on a paper-made costume mask with a photo print of Zhang so she can imagine Meng to be him. Putting on the "mask," the two girls dance happily to an upbeat tempo of local Taiwanese music. The next shot shows Lin taking out all kinds of belonging she secretly steals from Zhang, including his sneakers, basketball, swim goggles, and pen. Meng is made to sympathize with Lin's crush. While she initially wants to return home given that she cannot bear to hear how much Lin is in love with Zhang, Meng eventually gives in, wears the mask again, and dances slowly with her best friend who is clueless about her same-sex desire for her. What is ironic about this scene is that Meng's lesbian desire for Lin can only be mediated through a heterosexual face. Furthermore, as Fran Martin's reading of the use of masking in queer political movements in 1990s Taiwan indicates, the mask signifies a form a queer political tactics for subjects to "come out" in public demonstrations while withholding their identities, remaining within a "queer" zone between the "closet" and

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<sup>265</sup> For an intriguing study on the particular "memorial" discourse of lesbian schoolgirl romance and female same-sex desire in the mass media of China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, see Fran Martin's recent book *Backward Glances: Contemporary Chinese Cultures and the Female Homoerotic Imaginary* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010). Martin's account of the often forceful termination of lesbian desire resonates with my reading of *Blue Gate Crossing*'s narrative closure with heterosexual futurity. However, my overall reading of Taiwan queer youth wave focuses more on the developmental narrative of sexual modernity that often centers neoliberal form of gay male desire.

complete “coming out.”<sup>266</sup> Read alongside the history of queer mobilization and the subversive use of masking, this film segment therefore reads closer to a de-politicization of LGBT movements in Taiwan while substituting the history of sexual movement to one of heterosexual object choice. The ending of the film performs another substitution, this time not by erasing the urgency of gay and lesbian movements but through the narration of Meng’s future in the viewing position of Zhang, the cheerful young hunk.

The narrative episodically unfolds. Meng tries very hard to force herself to like boys, even to the point of allowing Zhang to date her. She finally confesses to him that she likes no one else but Lin. Zhang urges Meng to confess her lesbian desire to Lin. Meng tries to kiss Lin on the face, and at that point Lin realizes that her best friend may have a crush on her. Lin, instead of being a good friend, simply avoids Meng. At the closure of the film, Meng and Zhang each ride on their bicycles, imagining what their futures would hold. Meng’s voiceover offers this vision: “Shihao, seeing your flying color shirt, I am thinking...one year, three years, five years from now, what would we become? Because you are kind and cheerful, you will be more handsome. Though I can’t see myself even when I close my eyes, I can see you.” The film’s last shot of the characters shows Zhang riding his bicycle toward the traffic in a local neighborhood with Meng catching up behind him. The final sequence shows some chalking on the wall at their high school. First is Meng’s writing on the wall: “I’m a girl, I love boys.” This line was written when Meng was trying hard to deny her desire for Lin. Right below Meng’s writing we see Zhang’s confession: “Zhang Shihao had a trip here!” Zhang’s writing that

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<sup>266</sup> Fran Martin, *Situating Sexualities: Queer Representation in Taiwanese Fiction, Film and Public Culture* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003), 193.

he “had a trip” with Meng forecasts that his misplaced desire for a tomboy was merely a phase, and that he will naturally grow into the kind of handsome straight young man that everyone loves, as stated in Meng’s voiceover just the scene before. This scene thus confirms what Judith Halberstam calls “the emergence of the adult from the dangerous and unruly period of adolescence as a desired process of maturation;”<sup>267</sup> furthermore, this universalizing ending in a smooth transition of queer adolescence into heterosexual future may be linked to what Fran Martin reads as the “multicoding” meanings of the film, which allow it “to work at once as a queer and a straight, a local and a global, a culturally specific and a culturally generic media product.”<sup>268</sup> If *Blue Gate* marginalizes the queer temporal potential of the tomboy narrative through its universalization of queer childhood into one of proper adulthood, a temporal forward-looking into a “normative” future, *Formula 17*’s local and global appeals rely more on a fresh but capitalistically driven narrative of inter-regional neoliberalization, a temporal narrative that hinges on the fantasy of self-sufficient and neoliberal developmentalist gay manhood.

*Formula 17*’s unmistakable appeal to queer youth and global youth culture in general is evident in its marketing strategy. The English film title “formula 17” belies a certain commercial savviness about the film itself as a marketing “formula” that will be a sure win among average teenagers. Furthermore, the Chinese title “*Shi qi sui de tian kong*” (17歲的天空) means “sky for the seventeen,” with the sense of utter hopefulness that the sky is the only limit for these young gay men in neoliberal Taiwan. The film tells the story of a sexually clueless but very handsome country bumpkin Tien (played by

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<sup>267</sup> Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, 4.

<sup>268</sup> Fran Martin, “Taiwan (Trans)national Cinema: The Far-flung Adventures of a Taiwanese Tomboy,” in *Cinema Taiwan: Politics, Popularity and State of the Arts*, ed. Darrell William Davis and Ru-shou Robert Chen (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 142.

Taiwan TV series star Tony Yang), who travels north to Taipei to meet an online date who is nicknamed as “half man and beast,” implying that the man is only into fulfilling animalistic desire. The date could not have been more awful and awkward, as Tien only believes in “true love.” Tien soon spots his new love interest called Bai Tieh-nan (played by Hong Kong actor Duncan Lai), who is infamously known as the playboy in town. However, as the film develops we learn that Bai only has one-night stands because from when he was young he experienced curse in which everyone and everything he loves ends up meeting tragic ends. This causes a psychic phobia in him of kissing anyone, a phobia that only Tien can cure. The film exploits numerous romantic clichés: Tien breaks up with Bai because Bai cannot confront his own fear about loving someone; Tien gets jealous of Bai’s best friend Jun, who is also his coworker; Bai realizes that he can’t lose the boy anymore and attempts to get him back. Along the way of converting a heterosexual chick flick into a gay teen flick, the film also doesn’t take so seriously conventional gay stereotypes by exploiting and showcasing them to the fullest. For example, Tien’s only best friend in the city is Yu, who is a feminine gay boy in love with an American white man. We also get to meet the ridiculously dramatic drag queen CC, whose name is an obvious shorthand for “sissy.” These sidekicks cheer Tien and Yu up whenever they go through breakup. While Yu’s long distance, inter-racial, and Taiwan-US romance ends in despair, at the end of the film Tien successfully wins Bai’s heart and they become a happy couple.

While the film can be easily discarded as unserious, the huge financial success of the film as the second highest grossing local film in 2004 has sparked all kinds of discussion of teen flicks, and gay teen movies especially, as providing new models for a

new Taiwan cinema.<sup>269</sup> What concerns me more, however, is the way the film invites us to reconsider the spatial reconfiguration of Taiwan and Taiwan cinema vis-à-vis its capitalistic inter-regional nexus with Hong Kong, and how this sexual-spatial hub of connectivity depends on particular logics of sexual-temporal sequence. This is a sequential logic that narrates models of successful development and neoliberalism.

*Formula 17*'s neoliberal temporality exploits and dramatizes the difference between the rural heartland and Taipei the global city in order to mark the urban global site as the "endpoint of modernity," which enables the protagonist to develop into a modern and sexually free gay man.<sup>270</sup> The geo-temporal division of the rural and the urban as one of sexual backwardness vs. sexual modernity is almost too clear for anyone to miss. Specifically, after Tien's first date went wrong, he visits the gay club where his friend Yu works. As the disco lights keep flashing upon Tien's face, the camera screens Tien's body from his face down to his feet in a close-up shot in which one can notice that he is carrying his luggage to the club! Worse still, when asked by Yu if he had used the "lucky condom" that he gave him as a gift, Tien gets embarrassed and replies: "No, I haven't I am still a virgin." Yu couldn't hear him because of the loud background music. Tien repeats it the third time with a loud voice: "VIRGIN!" At this point the whole club stares at Tien, becomes silent, and finally responds with hysterical applause. Indeed, the film is obviously going less for the sentimental teenage coming of age genre as evident in *Blue Gate*, but more aims at revamping funny gay jokes that young audience can spot

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<sup>269</sup> See for example Darrell William Davis' optimistic reading of the film in his essay, "Trendy in Taiwan: Problems of Popularity in the Island's Cinema," in *Cinema Taiwan: Politics, Popularity and State of the Arts*, 154-156.

<sup>270</sup> Judith Halberstam levels an important critique on this rural-urban divide and assumption in theorizing queer politics and space through the concept of "metronormativity." See Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, 36.



**Figure 3.** A film still from *Formula 17*: country bumpkin Tien exposed to sexual modernity at a gay club in Taipei.

immediately. Comparing this film with the aesthetically sophisticated long-shot, slow motion, montage, and “less entertaining” styles of the New Cinema auteurs, Brian Hu likewise reads the film as “representing new aesthetic, thematic and marketing possibilities in mainstream Taiwanese cinema arising in a transitional commercial environment that could accurately be described as ‘post-sadness.’”<sup>271</sup>

Parallel to Tien’s sexual under-development and the film’s eventual transformation of him into a free sexual subject is the equally problematic pairing of Yu and his White American boyfriend. They met on a beach one day as CC wanted to introduce Yu to cruising spots in the city. Yu was left on the beach alone as CC goes on hunting for men. Yu then came across Ray, a strong muscular Caucasian guy. As they start chatting, we realize that Yu can’t really speak much English, but that’s precisely

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<sup>271</sup> Brian Hu, “*Formula 17*: Mainstream in the Margins,” in *Chinese Films in Focus II*, ed. Chris Berry (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 121.

what interests Ray. One usual mis-communication as communication between the interracial lovers goes like this: “I am Ray and you?” Yu replies, “And you?” “Still Ray, and you?” Yu makes up a response: “Ah Huh...” As the relationship develops, Ray teaches Yu to say “I love you” in more than twenty different languages. What is implied in Ray and Yu’s relationship is that it is through Yu’s contact with American influence that he becomes a truly globalized gay subject, learning cosmopolitan (multilingual) ways of being gay. Neferti Tadiar elaborates elsewhere on the libidinal relations between nations of differential powers and argues that “in this fantasy, the economies and political relations of nation are libidinally configured, that is, they are grasped and effected in terms of sexuality. This global and regional fantasy is not, however, only metaphorical, but real insofar as it grasps a system of political and economic practices already at work among these nations.”<sup>272</sup> Therefore, it is through this excavation of the libidinal relationship between the U.S. as the Cold War neocolonial power over Taiwan and the Asia Pacific Rim that the politics of sexual modernity is further highlighted in the logics of developmentalism. However, I will push this temporal logics in the arrival of sexual modernity even further by arguing that the film also pivots upon an Inter-Asian and “Cultural China” fantasy of developmentalism that hinges upon a sexual and “inter-regional” copulation between the Taiwan and Hong Kong lovers, Tien and Bai. This newer form of neoliberalization fantasizes the harmony, economically and sexually, between Taiwan and Hong Kong in Taiwan’s self-imagination as the one and only space

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<sup>272</sup> Neferti Xina M. Tadiar, “Sexual Economies in the Asia-Pacific Community,” in *What is in a Rim? Critical Perspectives on the Pacific Region Idea*, ed. Arif Dirlik (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), 183-210, 183.



of sexual freedom within the transnational imaginary of the PRC-Hong Kong-Taiwan nexus.

The film constructs a developmental temporality of Taiwan as a place that supposedly have *already* progressed through sexual liberalism and liberation by assuming normative homosexual partnership as the ideal form of gay male self-fashioning. In doing so, it presumes post-Martial Law DPP (Democratic Progressive Party) as the liberal and multicultural liberator for “all” gay and lesbian subjects, despite the material resurgence of conservative sexual politics in recent years in Taiwan (see the politics of sexual censorship discussed in Chapter 5). Specifically, one day during lunch hour Tien and Bai run into each other at the crossroad, where an older well-dressed man is standing in between them. Both young men steal a glance at each other and struggle to say a word, until the old man acts as a comic interlocutor: “What do you want to say? Just say it! What’s up with you young people these days!” Bai asks him what he will do later today, and Tien replies that he will take care of his friend (Yu) later because he just broke up with his boyfriend. The older gay man mistranslates Tien’s reply on purpose and says: “He just broke up and he is heartbroken, so he is going home.” And then the old man asks Bai to give him a business card, of which he passes to Tien. He concludes with a quick wit: “Here’s a tip young man. A broken heart is easy to steal. Don’t miss your chance.” Shortly after, another well-dressed mature man walks out of a nice sedan, takes the man by his arm, and both of them walk into their car.

This sequence is light-hearted and obviously functions as a comic relief in juxtaposition to the shyness of the young men. However, by constructing the ideal gay coupledness as a possible, or even quotidian everyday existence in post-Martial Law and

post-Millennium Taiwan under the party politics of DPP, the filmmaker Chen Yin-jung constructs Taipei as a global gay haven and bestows the current political landscape as the final arrival of gay liberation and liberal multiculturalism.<sup>273</sup> At the same time, this politics of representation masks the actual and continual deferral of gay and lesbian equal rights (which was promised by the previous DPP President Chen Shui-bian, who is now in prison for corruption charges). The failure of the political parties to ever live up to their promises for gay marriage rights, whether it was during Chen's term or in current Ma Ying-jeou's term of Presidency, still does not get at a more rigorous social critique—of how this temporal narrative of progression from KMT to post-Martial Law Taiwan actually masks the way normative sexual politics elides and erases those whose sexuality and sexual practices lie at the fringe of normativity. Furthermore, given the rise of China and the conversion of socialism to postsocialist capitalist modernity, the bi-polar Cold War Manichean structure of Chinese socialism vs. Taiwan capitalism no longer sustains. Therefore, “sexual freedom” of politicized identity politics of gay and lesbian comes to stand in for one of the last signs of Taiwan's modernity within the Asia Pacific region. Petrus Liu argues that “a revamped Cold War bi-polar lens of ROC and the PRC has come to depend heavily on the phenomenon of ‘new queer human rights’ in Taiwan for a sense of its difference from Mainland China.”<sup>274</sup> However, as Liu has perceptively critiqued, this actively constructed “liberal” sexual difference of Taiwan from the PRC, and to a lesser degree from Hong Kong, does not provide greater sexual freedom of other queers “who do not fit into those norms—prostitutes, transsexuals, surrogate mothers,

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<sup>273</sup> For an excellent critique of this empty, politicized, and seductive forms of gay liberalism currently in sway in post-Martial Law Taiwan, see Petrus Liu, “Queer Marxism in Taiwan,” *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 8.4 (2007): 517-539.

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid*, 518.

drug users, and promiscuous men and women—are increasingly excluded from public participation by the normalizing politics of representation.”<sup>275</sup> Not only does *Formula 17* neglect to represent these “other queers,” who probably belong to another timeline of Taiwan history, it constructs a “Cultural China” imaginary that projects a post-Millennium neoliberal fairy tale of gay happy ending.<sup>276</sup>

By the end of the film, the Hong Kong business man Bai, a flexible citizen and up-and-coming advertising agent, has symbolically proposed to Tien. Tien gives in to Bai’s apology for leaving him alone in his apartment after their first intimacy. At this point, he answers all the questions that Tien asked him before, including the romantic cliché “ $\sin^2 + \cos^2 = 1$ .” Tien complains that he is tired and doesn’t want to walk anymore. Bai romantically offers to carry him on his back, and the film ends by playing to the upbeat theme song “I Think Your Happiness is Because of Me” by the Taiwan band Rock Bang. Beyond the obvious happy ending, it is important to note that the Bai’s character is played by a Hong Kong actor, who first got his career started as a professional windsurfer. The fact that the film remodels him into a successful ad agent who travels frequently out of Taiwan points to the neoliberalization of gay male identity at work. This fantasy coupling of the Hong Kong capitalist with the non-sexualized-turned-modern Taiwan boy bespeaks a kind of global fantasy about Inter-Asian capitalism that is both erotic and infrastructural at the same time. This fantasy endows the film with a magic to attract probably Taiwan and Hong Kong viewers, as well as certain

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<sup>275</sup> Ibid, 520.

<sup>276</sup> The term “Cultural China” is a controversial argument put forth by neo-Confucian scholar Tu Wei-ming in which he argues that the periphery of China, including Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and their various diasporas, will outdo China in democratic and financial “development.” See Tu Wei-ming, “Cultural China: The Periphery as the Center,” *Daedalus* 120.2 (Spring 1991):1-32.

upward middle-class cosmopolitan subjects in the mainland. In another different context of studying the “soft power” capitalism of Japanese toys, Anne Allison describes the Japan-U.S. circulation of toys beyond their immediate use values to the power of enchantment by consumers as “millennial monsters.” The term describes “enchantments and commodities that hover between reality and the imagination with the power to both unsettle and entice.”<sup>277</sup> Likewise, the enchantment that comes with “queer youth wave” films in contemporary Taiwan propels a temporality of sexual developmentalism that relies on the combined power of late capitalism and neoliberal imagination about inter-regional economic ventures between Hong Kong and Taiwan. A queer temporal critique must be attentive to the new emerging power relational logics that work to displace other queer modes of being.

### **V. Nation States, Transnation, and Queer Temporality**

The nation state and transnation’s imaginary moves beyond relational logics of print capitalism, technological media, and the citizen’s identification with these national and diasporic forms of comradeship; instead, the nation and transnation’s temporality always already contains and thus confronts its ontological others; in Derridean term, queer temporality would name the supplement that “occupies the middle point between total absence and total presence.”<sup>278</sup> Precisely because some of the most atrocious trauma in modern nation-states are grasped in the name of rape, victimhood, and violation (often expressed in symbolic metaphor of rape or in actual historical violence done onto men and women of the enemy state), it becomes harder to theorize times of nationalism that

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<sup>277</sup> Anne Allison, *Millennial Monsters*, 34.

<sup>278</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 157.

are not reducible to logics of heterosexual state violence, or to its revenge against imperial conquest and competing nations. Queer temporality then not only concerns itself with subcultural time and space that lie outside of the reproductive logics of the family,<sup>279</sup> nor can a Darwinian feminist mode of “infinite and unexpected expansion”<sup>280</sup> fully address the relation or missed connections between queerness, nation’s time, and transnational developmentalism. My reading redirects our focus toward the ways queer time operates at the limit of nationalist imaginary, while in certain contexts queer narrative of time, childhood, and adulthood can also be dangerously colluded by neoliberal capitalism. This double-pronged critique—queer temporality as both alternative methodology and points of complicity—helps us better understand the queer subject’s vexed relation to nationalist state power (in Huang, Chen, and Zhang’s films from the PRC); its relation to the always shifting power between nation and its regions (in Wong and Yau Ching’s films); and queerness’ complicity with new and mutant forms of neoliberalism. All of these social formations require very specific tracking and diagnosis of inter-regional capitalism, scale, and developmentalism.

Queer temporality recognizes that our historical moments are bound up with various forms of temporal contradiction, particularly the re-empowering of nation states to police borders, emergent forms of dictatorship, neocolonial economic and libidinal exploitations, and so on. Therefore, it is all the more necessary that queer temporal critique does not fixate on rescuing the past or waiting for the undecidable future, whatever radical differentiations it may promise us. This queer temporality then concurs

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<sup>279</sup> Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, 1-21.

<sup>280</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, *Time Travels*, 31.

with Elizabeth Freeman's claim in *Time Binds* that "Erotohistoriography is distinct from the desire for a fully present past, a restoration of bygone times. Erotohistoriography does not write the lost object into the present so much as encounter it already in the present, by treating the present itself as hybrid. And it uses the body as a tool to effect, figure, or perform that encounter."<sup>281</sup> Where I depart from Freeman's emphasis on the erotic pleasure of writing the present as the hybrid and the centrality of the body in that endeavor is a critical return to the question of nationalism and its temporal narration. This is a conversation that often emerges in postcolonial critique but still not enough in queer studies. Queer studies can better account for the nation form and its supplementary others and how the desire for national unity and multiculturalism (coded as sexual liberalism) necessarily produces new forms of desire *and* exclusions. Furthermore, queer studies must inquire more rigorously into the developmental logics of sexual modernity, in places of queer diasporas but also more increasingly in developed regions and states in Asia in order to queer the monstrous collusions of nationalism, transnationalism, and neoliberal developments from within.<sup>282</sup>

The concept of inter-temporality as deployed here functions less in the allegorical mode of prioritizing certain figures and embodiments (transgenderism in Huang Shuqin and Chen Kaige's films in the mainland, or cybernetic lesbianism in Yau Ching's *Let's Love Hong Kong*) as the most proper or radical figures to envision the queer temporal

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<sup>281</sup> Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds*, 95.

<sup>282</sup> The strand of queer scholarship concerned with queer diaspora and its critique of sexual developmental narratives in the global North can potentially enable critiques of sexual and temporal developmentalism of uneven sexual modernity in Inter-Asian nation states and regions. See Gayatri Gopinath, *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), and Martin F. Manalansan, *Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men in the Diaspora* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

outside and alternatives; more productively, thinking in inter-temporal terms can highlight the symbolic and sometimes material violence that is inherent and internal to logics of national reforms, historical progress, and neoliberal developments by pointing to the very queer incompleteness of these power dynamics. Figures like Yiu Qun in *Woman Demon Human*, Cheng Dieyi in *Farewell My Concubine*, Ah Lan in *East Palace, West Palace*, Lai Yiu-fai in *Happy Together*, and other temporal misfits illuminate the broader insight that many marginal sexual figures are often burdened with the obligation of violent conformity to nationalism, or else forgotten by history in the rush for some to claim more successful forms of gay selfhood coded as neoliberal self-sufficiency. Inter-temporality as an interventionary model returns us to the marks of historical trauma on these bodies; in return, these temporal misfits demonstrate that there are multiple ways of embodying time, of living the thickness of time's durations, even under the weight of dominant historicism. The next chapter will move from a consideration of queer time to that of queer space in order to place the question of queer sexuality within the broader theorization of postmodern space, as expressed in Chinese-language films. If this chapter on time suggests that nationalist temporality and neoliberal developmental time necessarily coexist with their queer temporal others, the next study suggests that many cinematic narratives of gay male subjects, while filming these subjects as contained within claustrophobic landscapes of the global cities, also provide counter-narratives of perverse cognitive remapping.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **Claustrophobic Sexuality: Mapping Gay Male Urban Subjects in the Films of Yonfan, Cui Zi'en, and Tsai Ming-liang**

#### **I. Introduction**

No two places on earth are exactly the same in their stages of modernization and global-local reconfiguration; but as subjects with cosmopolitan imaginaries and local situatedness, we desire urban comparison, even when theoretical impossibility lies at the heart of spatial comparison. This chapter reconsiders the “place” of sexuality in postmodernist theory and inquires into the reasons that a postmodernist urban mapping of gay male subjects in many transnational Chinese films appears often through the distinctive trope of claustrophobia. Invoking the lens of claustrophobia has three advantages. First, it revises the over-determined conventional understanding of the gay “coming out of the closet” narrative as a personal, individualist, and psychological liberation by thinking the spatial compression of sexuality as distinctively social. Second, it helps us to tease out how postmodernist theorization of spatial compression, postmodern labyrinth, and the total space often rely on tropes of psychoanalysis and sexuality. Finally, I argue that while these films narrate unlivable, spatially compressed queer lives, they also help us imagine a queer kind of cognitive mapping, a perverse remapping that hints at the possibility of pleasures, rebellion, and queer existence despite postcolonial uncertainty in 1990s Hong Kong, the forces of postsocialist market expansion in China, and postmodern dystopia in Taipei.

While places like Hong Kong, Beijing, and Taipei are not homogeneous in their stages of modernizations and post-industrialization, they all exhibit high degrees of what



David Harvey calls “conditions of postmodernity,” which marks “another fierce round in that process of annihilation of space through time that has always lain at the center of capitalism’s dynamic.”<sup>283</sup> Although Harvey outlines new modes of flexible accumulation since the 1960s as predominantly the compression of space and time in the annihilation of multiple world spaces through highly mediatized satellite temporality, his analysis emphasizes time-space compression in the global city over individuals’ entrapments within such spaces of commodifications and spatial-temporal disorientations. For Fredric Jameson, postmodern spatial entrapment in a space like the Bonaventure Hotel in Los Angeles necessarily calls for a radical politics of “cognitive mapping” in which the individual trapped in postmodern geography needs to regain “some new heightened sense of its place in the global system” in order to grasp the subject’s imaginary relationship to the condition of social totality.<sup>284</sup>

In his subsequent work on cinema and space in the world system, Jameson expands his earlier metaphor of cognitive mapping into cinematic analysis that rethinks the representation of postmodern spatiality as “the conspiratorial allegory of late capitalist totality.”<sup>285</sup> Meanwhile, in Chinese film studies, Yingjin Zhang has challenged the assumption that cognitive mapping must operate at the level of global abstraction in favor of a variety of everyday-level mappings of visuality that depict the city in translocal ways, or what he calls “polylocality.” A politics of polylocality refers to “instances of cinematic remapping that favor street-level views over cartographic surveys, contingent

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<sup>283</sup> David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (MA: Malden, Blackwell, 1990), 293.

<sup>284</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 54.

<sup>285</sup> Fredric Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992, 22.

experience over systematic knowledge, and bittersweet local *histoires* over a grand-scale global history.”<sup>286</sup> If individual entrapment in the postmodern world city is part of the conspiratorial script that needs to be critically mapped and unpacked, I will extend both Harvey and Jameson’s analysis by looking at how such spatial conspiracy is most powerfully represented through individual claustrophobic relation to urban totality; more crucially, I argue that the films of Yonfan (Hong Kong), Cui Z’ien (PRC), and Tsai Ming-liang (Taiwan) both confirm the logics of queer claustrophobia while self-reflexively provide alternative perverse mappings that powerfully challenge them.

This dominant spatial claustrophobia is evident in Yonfan’s 1998 Hong Kong film *Meishaonian zhi lian* (Bishonen). The story centers on the intense love affair between two handsome young men, Jet (Stephen Fung) a hustler and Sam (Daniel Wu) a policeman. Eventually, Sam realizes that Jet has been in love with him all along and the two share an intense erotic moment in Sam’s bedroom, where, simultaneously, his father walks in on them. The film ends with Sam looking emotionlessly up the sky from the top of his apartment building, implying that Sam will end his own life. Cui’s 2002 film *The Old Testament* also reinforces a symbolic structure of death, narrated in a small apartment in 1980s Beijing. It presents three segments grouped under “Psalm” in 1981, “Proverb” in 1991, and “Song of Solomon” in 2001. The “Psalm” segment begins with a young man Zheng Yang, who visits his college lover, Xiao Bo. As the young gay lovers shower together in the bathroom, the camera shifts to the close-up shot of the nervous face of an older woman, Qing Jie, Xiao Bo’s sister-in-law. This specific shot thus sets up the film’s

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<sup>286</sup> Yingjin Zhang, *Cinema, Space, and Polylocality in a Globalizing China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2010), 74.

claustrophobic vision, from a happy gay male bonding experience to one that will be eventually subsumed by social forces, especially prohibition from Xiao Bo's brother and his wife based on the reasoning that this is not "natural." This segment ends with Zheng Yang leaving after Xiao Bo's brother forces him to marry a female friend called Xiao Cui. But Xiao Bo dies shortly after his son was born, probably due to sadness.

If both *Bishonen* and *The Old Testament* reinforce the claustrophobic drive of being boxed in by eternal social forces such as filial duty and compressed living arrangements with families, how have other filmmakers in transnational Chinese cinemas responded to this complicated, triangulated relationship between claustrophobic entrapment, sexuality, and postmodern spatiality? I propose that several films by Tsai Ming-liang that focus on 1990s Taipei, which include *Rebels of the Neon God* (1992), *Vive L'Amour* (1994), and *The River* (1997) and Cui Zi'en's 2003 film, *Ai yaya quburu* (Money Boy Diaries), provide creative spatial remappings that imagine queerness within the materialist pressures of postmodern spatial compression yet beyond the conspiratorial script of claustrophobia that inevitably confirms the visibility of death.

## II. The Place of Sexuality in Postmodernism

Before looking at how postmodern, postsocialist, and post-informational landscapes are sexualized and queer, it seems urgent that I must first qualify my use of two keywords here that are affectively and psychoanalytically charged as they are theoretically ambitious: claustrophobia and postmodernism. First, let me give a brief genealogy of the term "claustrophobia" in Freudian psychoanalysis before linking it to postmodern space. In his 1894's study "Obsession and Phobias," Freud argues that obsession is different from phobia in the sense that the person suffering from obsession

often replaces the original obsession with a form of substitution. For example, a woman who suffers from obsessive mysophobia of hygiene is actually reinstating an original, incompatible remorse for infidelity. While obsession works through the Freudian trope of substitution, Freud locates phobia as embedded in social contexts. He calls agoraphobia, the closest explanation of claustrophobia, a type of “contingent phobia.”<sup>287</sup> This contingent phobia is “the fear of special conditions that inspire no fear in the normal man; for example, agoraphobia and the other phobias of locomotion.”<sup>288</sup> While Freud’s concept of contingent phobia as occurring in those other than the “normal man” immediately brings to mind his study on inverts as social aberrations in his “Three Essays,” even in his pathological views on homosexuality and especially the female invert, the lesbian, he still insists that inversion is both a physically and socially acquired process and posits inversion as the intersection between the two forces.<sup>289</sup>

After Freud, the configuration of sexuality, claustrophobia, and the closet comes full circle in psychoanalyst Bertram D. Lewin’s 1934 essay “Claustrophobia.” While he defines the distinct social definition of the term as “a fear of being caught or crushed by a gradual closing in of the space about one[.]”<sup>290</sup> as different from simply entering an enclosed space, his definition actually ends up reinforcing the heterosexual model of Oedipal conflict and the child’s primal fantasy. Basing his claim on clinical studies, he argues that many dreams by patients indicate “a long pole was violently pushed through a window pane into the room where she was lying,” basically, “the claustrophobic fears

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<sup>287</sup> Sigmund Freud, “Obsessions and Phobias: Their Psychical Mechanism and Their Aetiology” [1894] in *The Standard Edition*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1962), 80.

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>289</sup> Sigmund Freud, “Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality” [1905] in *The Standard Edition*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1953), 140.

<sup>290</sup> Bertram D. Lewin, “Claustrophobia,” *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 4 (1935): 227-233.

“the idea of being disturbed or dislodged by the father or father’s penis.”<sup>291</sup> In Melanie Klein’s account, claustrophobic anxiety “appears to be connected with the idea of being shut up within the mother.”<sup>292</sup> Indeed, in all three accounts, space emerges as an important problematic; it is a contingent fear of locomotion; it is a fear of the father’s penis; it returns to the desire to be one with the mother, which in the primal scene of parental sex will be disrupted by the phallus again.

In order to counter the logic of heteronormative Oedipal formation in the literature of psychoanalysis’ understanding of claustrophobia, we can reformulate the concept not as an individual’s relation to his own enclosed space or to Oedipal formation; rather, claustrophobia has social purchase. Following Althusser’s definition of ideology, we can posit claustrophobia in the films (as my readings will make clear) as that which “represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real condition of existence.”<sup>293</sup> If I argue that claustrophobia is centrally and cinematically narrated through the story of the closet within urban landscape, thus politically social, I am also making the case that postmodern theorizing cannot afford to not think about sex, and more pointedly queer sex. This kind of double-consciousness thinking requires us to bring the theoretical rigors of both Eve Sedgwick and Fredric Jameson together, although the two theorists are not always framed together as such.

In her seminal text *Epistemology of the Closet*, Sedgwick makes the almost universalizing provocation, albeit a crucial one, that modern Western sexuality is governed by two poles of discourses and viewpoints at the same time: a universalizing

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<sup>291</sup> Ibid, 229.

<sup>292</sup> Melanie Klein, *The Psychoanalysis of Children* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1959), 329.

<sup>293</sup> Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” [1970], in *Lenin and Philosophy* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 162.

and a minoritizing view, out of which all the previous theoretical discussions of public vs. private, essentialism vs. constructionism, nature vs. nurture about modern sexuality converge. More precisely, she shows that the figuration of the closet exercises immense political and social claims on queer lives. The closet, or the psychological state of feeling and living with claustrophobia, is prevailingly social. At the same time, those who claim power through the universalizing view that all heterosexuals are normal can resort to the minoritizing and sometimes closet-position when the legal apparatus comes into play. One such powerful claim is the so-called “homosexual panic” defense. Since the closet and the psychoanalytical trope of social phobia are central here, it is worth quoting Sedgwick at length: “Judicially, a ‘homosexual panic’ defense for a person (typically a man) accused of antigay violence implies that his responsibility for the crime was diminished by a pathological psychological condition, perhaps brought on by an unwanted sexual advance from the man whom he then attacked.”<sup>294</sup>

In a revealing reading, Sedgwick shows that the trope of the closet and the psychological condition of claustrophobia can be homophobically and politically redeployed by the aggressor of violence against queer subjects, and that in defending himself through the seemingly *apolitical* claim of “phobia,” the aggressor curiously “comes out of the closet” as someone who “suffers” from homosexual panic. What an interesting way of employing claustrophobia here: claustrophobia, far from a psychological condition of the excess of unused libido, here proves to be an excess of misused violence. Yet, twenty years have passed since Sedgwick’s foundational thesis on

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<sup>294</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 19.

the contradictory nature of the closet as a form of epistemology; now with the emergence of globalization and neoliberalism as dominant logics of late capitalism and the prime social contexts of our time, it seems that this may be a ripe moment to engage with how claustrophobic sexuality is articulated within postmodern social spaces. This move can also help to queer and de-center the current theoretical premises of postmodern theory and the Marxist critique of postmodernism, for few of the major practitioners within these debates have much to say about sexuality, with even less references to queer sexual practices.

Claustrophobia enters the postmodern and late capitalist vocabulary around 1990 with Jameson's theorization of the intensification of spatial disorientation within postmodern space, or what he calls "hyper-space." For Jameson, postmodernism is not simply what comes after modernism per se, nor is it a pure artistic or aesthetic movement that operates independent of politics and cultural dominants. Rather, postmodernism "is also at one and the same time, and *necessarily*, an implicitly or explicitly political stance on the nature of multinational capitalism today."<sup>295</sup> Because for Jameson, the cultural is necessarily embedded within the reconfigured world of global multi-nationalism, he finds architecture "the closest constitutively to the economic,"<sup>296</sup> thus serving a better example of the manifestation of late capitalism as cultural dominant in everyday life. Out of all, the Bonaventure Hotel serves as a most powerful metaphor for conveying the sense of postmodern hyperspace that exerts tremendous all-enclosing force upon individual subject. While obviously cultural critics on postmodernism have persistently noted the

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<sup>295</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 3.

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

collapsing of space over modern calendrical notion of time, Jameson's hyperspace assumes our individual incapacity to "catch up" with our own entrapment. Thus, our temporality is literally *out-of-sync* with postmodern space. He laments our postmodern incapacity: "My implication is that we ourselves, the human subjects who happen into this new space, have not kept pace with that evolution; there has been a mutation in the object unaccompanied as yet by any equivalent mutation in the subject. We do not yet possess the perceptual equipment to match this new hyperspace, as I will call it, in part because our perceptual habits were formed in that older kind of space I have called the space of high modernism."<sup>297</sup> While Jameson did not exactly use the term claustrophobia to name the condition of postmodern incapacity in response to spatial mutation, the "structure of feelings" that he names certainly invokes the claustrophobic trope. Individuals are still "trapped" in modernist notion of time and space; the Bonaventure Hotel produces a certain aggressivity toward the Other; we have yet to "come out" of our modernist "closet" and respond to postmodern hyperspace.

Given the heavy emphasis that Jameson places on "cultural dominant" and the sexualized language of claustrophobia and aggressivity that he deploys, it seems surprising that none of the example that Jameson cites deals directly with sexuality. The hotel is only a space of multinational corporation for some, but a place of hustling and illicit sexuality for others. The hotel invites white-collar professionals most of the time while it aggressively repulses those with the wrong race, gender, class, and sexuality. At this point of my theoretical linkage between Sedgwick and Jameson, it becomes urgent that we demand a re-orientation of postmodern study toward a more rigorous analysis of

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<sup>297</sup> Ibid, 39.



cultural identity that accounts for the ways sexuality is manifested in regional, local, and global dynamics. Some of the most important efforts to interrogate race and sexuality in postmodern hyperspace and global cities like Los Angeles and New York City have shown how multi-corporations' efforts to gentrify the city produce a racially phobic fortress city<sup>298</sup> through visual technologies of surveillance.<sup>299</sup> In terms of sexual landscapes of the city, writer and theorist Samuel Delany points out the ways gentrifications in New York City during the 1990s seek to erase memories, bodies, and places of pleasure that queer subjects of different classes and racial lines have gathered before, especially in public theaters.<sup>300</sup> I take these points of departure to examine the cinematic form and look at the different strategies that filmmakers use to depict the postmodern sexual landscape of the city. I will first begin my analysis with Yonfan's overtly sentimental approach, which on the one hand illustrates the overlapping of queer sexscapes in postcolonial Hong Kong while, I argue, it ultimately reinforces a certain tragic and fatal cinematic closure that reinforces postmodern claustrophobia.

### **III. Yonfan's Sentimental Claustrophobia of Postcolonial Hong Kong**

Yonfan's 1998 film *Bishonen* is the most ambitious effort to tackle the issue of gay identity in Hong Kong cinema after Wong Kar-wai's internationally acclaimed *Happy Together* (1997). Whereas Wong's film is decisively art-house driven, given its sensuous slow-montage and black-and-white color, and more politically daring with its message about Hong Kong's return to China, Yonfan's film in contradistinction is more

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<sup>298</sup> See Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (New York: Verso, 1990)

<sup>299</sup> See John Fiske, "Surveilling the City: Whiteness, the Black Man, and Democratic Totalitarianism," *Theory, Culture & Society* 15.2 (1998): 67-88.

<sup>300</sup> Samuel R. Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (New York: New York University Press, 2001)

invested in portraying the sentimental in the everyday. Its cast is also considerably “smaller.” Several cast members’ film careers had barely taken off. For example, Daniel Wu, now one of the hottest male heartthrobs of transnational Chinese film industry, starred in this film as his first shot. Years later, Wu still recalls Yonfan as the first director who gave him lunchbox when he was very poor at that time. Stephen Fung Tak-lun, who plays Jet the beautiful male hustler that falls for Sam (played by Wu), was an emerging young male celebrity in Hong Kong, having previously formed the successful rock band called Dry. The Chinese name of the title (美少年之戀), which roughly translates into “Love Between Beautiful Young Men,” aptly captures the attentions that this film self-referentially draws to itself, both at the level of its sentimentalism, unashamed celebration of the male beauty, and its choice of casting beautiful young male celebrities like Fung and Wu.

In previous film criticism, Australian queer scholar Romit Dasgupta reads the film as evidence of trans-regional expression of inter-Asian sexuality, especially one between Hong Kong and Japan. He shows how the film draws on the young boy love genre in the Japanese *shojo manga* tradition. More revealingly, Dasgupta points out that *Bishonen* gathered quite loyal followers among both gay audiences and young girl fans to the extent it inspired a Japanese manga version written by Kido Sakura in 2000.<sup>301</sup> In his approach, Dasgupta rightly calls for an analysis that “situates the discussion within the context of cultural flows between Japan and other societies in the Asia-Pacific region.”<sup>302</sup>

My own approach in mapping the production and disruption of queer claustrophobia in

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<sup>301</sup> Romit Dasgupta, “The Film *Bishonen* and Queer(N)Asia through Japanese Popular Culture,” in *Popular Culture, Globalization and Japan*, ed. Matthew Allen and Rumi Sakamoto (New York: Routledge, 2006), 56-74, 67.

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

transnational Chinese urban landscapes is part of this effort in proposing a research agenda of inter-regional and inter-Asia sexuality studies. At the more local level, Helen Hok-sze Leung cites this film as evidence where the postcolonial city is in fact a city of cruising “in secret.” Asking viewers to pay close attention to the specific locality of the financial and bar districts of Central that is shown throughout the film, Leung illustrates that Lan Kwei Fong in Central “is revealed in the opening sequence of *Bishonen* to be a latent erotic zone where queer desire is always lurking just beneath the surface.”<sup>303</sup> If as Leung argues, the city itself is in closet, then it follows that the urban landscape of the postcolonial city is also a closet space, one where the knowledge of one’s straightness, queerness, and sexual practices is in constant motion. Whereas Yonfan’s claustrophobic mapping of the city is mixed with the pleasure of cruising in the first half of the narrative, the later part reconfirms claustrophobia as a sentimental trope of the closet figured as psychic/physical death.

In the first opening scene of the film and the several establishing shots after, the city is shown as a space where sexual orientation and sexual practices overlap and collapse with social identities, and where the distinction between the two are in the realm of the undetermined. The all-enclosing urban density that is the trademark of Hong Kong, especially in financial districts like Central, Causeway Bay, and dense places like Mongkok, are shown in the film to offer advantages of cruising and, at the same time, reproduce the danger of unmaking and disclosing the epistemology of the closet. The opening scene displays this playfulness toward the knowledge and “un-knowledge” of the

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<sup>303</sup> Helen Hok-sze Leung, *Undercurrents: Queer Culture and Postcolonial Hong Kong* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2008), 18.

closet, situated within the unmistakable Hong Kong imaginary—the iconic view of the Victoria Harbor seen from a rooftop. Here, the protagonist Sam (whose past identity as Fai is unknown to Jet at this point), begins a playful conversation with Jet, a young male friend whom he befriended later on in the film literally on the street. Therefore, the viewer is introduced into the heart of the story quite confusingly in the middle of a relationship.

As the conversation unfolds, it becomes clear that the relationship between the two young men, like the viewer's position vis-à-vis the film's narrative, is in the realm of half-knowledge. Against the view of the harbor and the Bank of China Tower, Sam poses the question to Jet: "Mom told me that you're dating someone." Jet replies, "Yup." Sam "congratulates" him while Jet teases him provocatively: "Do you want to know with whom?" Sam ends this conversation with a simple hook: "I'm sure you will tell me when you feel like it." This opening shot anchors male homoeroticism firmly within the postmodern hyper-space, where the old building rooftop is juxtaposed with the all-encompassing space of late capitalism. The Bank of China Tower symbolically signifies the then transformed economic status of the city into the Chinese nation as the new pioneer of global capitalism, whereas the Victoria Harbor itself connotes the colonial historical traces of the city. The parallelism here can be analyzed in the following way: just as the cinematic structure here presents Hong Kong as caught between late Chinese capitalism ushered in with the reunited relationship with the PRC vs. British colonial administrative trade commerce through the harbor image, the gay men here are also caught between two modes of sexual possibility—one of liberating mutual recognition on the one hand and sexual confusion and mistaken positions on the other. Their desire

needs to be routed and re-routed through numerous epistemologies of knowledge and un-knowledge. Sam tells Jet that his mother told him about Jet's love interest; Jet then asks Sam if he would like to know whom he desires (which, obviously, is Sam himself); Sam then ends with the convoluted shuffling of desire with the simple reply that doesn't end the closet game here: "of course, if you are ready, you will tell me yourself." Just as the postcolonial city is caught in a space of confused transition economically, sexual desire between urban gay men is also caught between systems of closets and playful revelation simultaneously, where one form of revelation may turn out to be another mode of closet and unknowing.

In addition to the parallel that is drawn between the city in transition and queer urbanity in competing modes of knowledge, the hybrid space of the city itself is linked to the hybridity of cruising practices, which enables embodiments and performance of sexual identities that are both painful and pleasurable, innocent and commercial, hidden and relatively public. I will discuss each pair of these modes of urban/sexual hybridity. The painful and pleasurable elements of the film are in constant influx, and this whirlpool of affective intensity also structures the entire film in order to arrive at the sentimental ending. The street here, more than a place of hyper-density, fortress city, and landscape of finance, also embodies painful memories and the bodily performances of pleasure, especially through the act of flaneurie. The flashback scene of the second shot illustrates this point. After the confusing conversation between Sam and Jet, we are told that "Sam is gone," foreshadowing his death at the end of the narrative. At this point in the present mode of time, Kana, as a female confidant of Sam (who later on revealed to be a possible lesbian in a club scene), walks passed the downtown alley in Central. This walking scene

thus introduces a way of embodying the street of Hong Kong that is embedded within the cinematic mode of queer memory.

The omniscient narrator describes, “After Sam was gone, Kana passed by the downtown alley in Central, reminiscing on what happened the first day.” In a follow-up shot, the same narrator describes the sex appeal that Jet displayed on that first day when he met Sam and Kana. This is also the first scene in the film where the viewers become aware of the fact that Jet is a male hustler, an extremely classy one. The narrator describes Jet’s self-displayed queer flaneurie: “That day, Jet dressed in black, sauntering down the street, exuding a seductive air, attracting gazes from passersbys.” As evident in this narrative’s viewpoint, Jet is definitely a flaneur of postmodern, postcolonial Hong Kong. But what kind of flaneur exactly? The figure of the flaneur in the urban city in studies of modernity remains contested between positions expressed by Charles Baudelaire and Walter Benjamin. For Baudelaire, the nineteenth century Parisian flaneur is a distinctive figure of modernity. He is not quite the aristocrat, nor is he a bourgeoisie in the strict Marxian sense. He is an observer who bears witness to modernity at the street-level view, which is defined by Baudelaire as the ability “to distill the eternal from the transitory.”<sup>304</sup> For Baudelaire, the flaneur possesses a contradictory desire to be one with the crowd and to be concealed in his incognito: “The crowd is his element, as the air is that of birds and water of fishes. His passion and profession are to become one flesh with the crowd...To be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home[.]”<sup>305</sup>

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<sup>304</sup> Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays* (New York: Phaidon, 1965), 12.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid, 9.

For Benjamin, the flaneur's distinctive modern features depend on his refusal to become part of the crowd due to his material status as a man of leisure. Taking his cue from Engels' critique of emotionless crowds in modern cities who bypass one another day to day without forming collective desire, Benjamin disagrees with Baudelaire's reading of the flaneur's immersion into the crowd: "It is hard to accept this view. The man of the crowd is no flaneur...There was the pedestrian who would let himself be jostled by the crowd, but there was also the flaneur who demanded elbow room and was unwilling to forgo the life of a gentleman of leisure."<sup>306</sup> The sexual landscape of the city through the cinematography of Yonfan seems to encompass both views of flaneurie at once, only with a certain sentimental twist. If in Benjamin's reading the flaneur's leisurely status materially elevates him from being with the crowd, in Yonfan's portrayal of Jet it is rather his inability to access non-commercial love that results in his exclusion from the ordinary crowd. As a male hustler, he belongs to the street with "other crowd" in which he is only one out of many other possible figures of commercial sex within the orbit of late capitalist exchanges; yet, his act of walking down the street also excludes him from the economy of romantic love—the street where he flaunts his sexual appeal, a place that confirms his attractiveness, also isolates him from being the "man of the crowd" who can enjoy romantic relationships like other "ordinary" couples. This simultaneous aspect of inclusion and exclusion in the economy of love and sex is evident in this important walking/cruising performance by Jet.

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<sup>306</sup> Walter Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," in his *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 172.

The street in Central is also presented to the viewer as a sexual labyrinth, where someone is always chasing after someone, who, in turn, is cruising another man. The centrality of the location of the Central district in the film is crucial here in the ways that Yonfan queers the dominant imaginary of Central as a space of order, financial efficiency, and supreme capitalism—values that are often identified with Hong Kong itself. Drawing on Taiwan cultural critic Lung Ying-tai's coinage of the term "Central values," Leo Ou-fan Lee highlights the centrality of the district to Hong Kong itself: "In her view, this value system is dominated entirely by the operational logic of capitalism. The key words are money and power, profit-making and commercial competitiveness, efficiency, development, and globalization."<sup>307</sup> Yonfan's film, however, provides a glimpse into the underside of capitalist efficiency by imaginatively visualizing street-level erotic ways of *seeing* Central, thereby pointing to competing cultural landscapes that are not over-determined by capitalist "Central values."<sup>308</sup>

I want to take this argument about the inseparability of romance and sexual commerce in the postmodern cruising landscape further and show how it operates at the level of the gaze, from Jet's perspective. Just before the intriguing gaze by Jet (which I will discuss), the film introduces the cruising element first with Jet walking down the street in a manner that performs exactly what the narrator describes, full of confidence, self-obsessed, and enticing. At exactly the moment he brushes his hair with his fingertip, he notices that someone is following him, a middle-age man who holds the title of an

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<sup>307</sup> Leo Ou-fan Lee, *City Between Worlds: My Hong Kong* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 51.

<sup>308</sup> For a journalistic account of "Central values" and how long-standing administrative bureaucracy in government jobs lead many white-collar professionals to rethink capitalist values in Hong Kong, see 譚蕙芸, "牛津精英十年AO 夢醒," 明報, 2010年9月6日. (Tan Huiyun, "Oxford Elite Graduate Awakened from Ten Years of Administrative Officer Dream," *Ming Pao Daily*, September 6, 2010. )





**Figure 4.** A film still from *Bishonen*: Jet, full of erotic appeal, beckons his chaser to follow him.

Honorary Justice of Peace (played by Wong Jim), a title usually reserved for rich people who are interested in being recognized by the colonial British government. Just as Jet “discovers” he is being spied upon, he also turns a quick look to the man with an erotic smile, beckoning him. Here, cruising, while traditionally understood as someone chasing after another person, actually turns the street into a kind of postmodern game where the active/passive distinction of the chaser and the chased are made rather irrelevant. Moreover, Yonfan illustrates that this multiplicity of queer gaze also operates at the relatively non-commercial aspect of romance.

Shortly after Jet is done with a sexual transaction with the rich man, he checks out himself in front of a mirror. However, this is not any ordinary mirror; it is a mirror on the

street. Jet, like those who are obsessed with beauty, conveniently uses one of the silver frames of a furniture store as a mirror, making sure his hair looks right. Just at this moment, we realize that we are seeing from Sam's perspective through a sudden point-of-view shot. This is perhaps the third time we are introduced to Sam, first during the unclear timing of the film's establishing shot where they converse on the rooftop, then through Kana's memorial perspective, and now where Sam's eyes meet Jet's through a reflective silver-tag/mirror on the street. At this point, Jet reckons with Sam, who is shopping with Kana. In this initial encounter, Sam and Kana look almost like any ordinary straight couple; of course, their straightness may merely function as a closet-vision, which the film will unravel. While the cruising earlier between Jet and the old man operates strictly at the level of the erotic and the commercial, Yonfan seems to privilege an intense degree of romance through Jet's longing for the warmth of the couple. Indeed, the world of Sam and Kana, the "ordinary" "straight" world, fascinates Jet's repetitive life as a hustler. It is as if Jet finally sees something, for the first time, on the street that he traverses daily. Yet, it is precisely through the elevation of the romantic, the sentimental, and the affective that the film privileges Sam's life and eventually his domestic kinship structure as one that Jet cannot belong. Leung succinctly points out the film's contrast between the space of the street versus the home: "Scenes of domestic intimacy in the stable, enclosed space of the home are contrasted with the spontaneous, uncertain, and layered existence on the streets and in the bars."<sup>309</sup>

If in the beginning the overlapping territories of the sexual and the urban city allow numerous possibility of embodying the street, of finding sex, and occasionally

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<sup>309</sup> Helen Hok-sze Leung, *Undercurrents*, 21.

happening upon love, in the later parts of the film the logics of overlapping space take a swift turn into one of spatial claustrophobia and dismantle both romantic and sexual possibility. Following this drive toward spatial enclosure, the film's dominant logics of kinship, filiality, and domestic belonging simply cannot contain same-sex love between young men. Elsewhere, Chris Berry coined this kind of family melodrama as the "sad young man story" that can be found in many gay films in Asia about male love.<sup>310</sup> However, if as I have argued throughout my reading of *Bishonen*, that one cannot separate a critical reading of postmodern urban landscape from the acts of urban cruising and street romance, it becomes problematic to disengage a reading of the film's ending from consideration of the postmodern city and reduce the film to some grand narrative about depressing masculinity. Indeed, I choose deliberately to think more creatively about how this claustrophobic logic of the domestic contains elements of the postmodern total space, however symbolically it operates in the film's ending. It is not simply domesticity as confining but the domestic as the surveilling gaze that is everywhere and nowhere at once, that ultimately characterizes queer claustrophobia in the film. The patriarchal family then symbolically becomes the very thing of postmodern sight itself through this logic of surveillance. In this way, I am arguing that postmodernism inheres not only in architectures that differ from the International Style modernist buildings through the total space of the skyscraper, but postmodernist spatial structure can magnify its effect of the total space affectively, sentimentally, and erotically when it is mediated in cinema.

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<sup>310</sup> Chris Berry, "Happy Alone? Sad Young Men in East Asian Gay Cinema," *Journal of Homosexuality* 39.3-4 (2000):187-200.

Jameson characterizes the Bonaventure postmodern space as one that “aspires to being a total space, a complete world, a kind of miniature city[.]”<sup>311</sup> Likewise, in the ending of the film, Yonfan paints a space in which heteronormative domesticity itself becomes a total space, a complete world in which other queer possibility becomes increasingly enclosed. Jet’s father (played by Kenneth Tsang), who works as a taxi-driver, emerges as the emblem of this domestic force. For example, after Jet tries, failingly, to seduce Sam by pretending to be drunk and spending a night at Sam’s house, the next day he felt discouraged and resorted to his prostitution work again. Not knowing that the taxi he lands on is actually driven by Sam’s father, he announces his destination to the driver as a hotel on The Peak that is famous for hosting commercial sex. Sam’s father, turning his head around, looks at Jet hesitantly and expresses the feeling that he can sense something “abnormal” about the life of his son’s best friend.

Sam’s father’s all-enclosing postmodern vision of surveillance, operates seemingly “everywhere,” also exerts its control from nowhere. In the most climactic moment of the film, Jet, after Sam left him awkwardly while running into his old flame, Ah Ching (who is also the current roommate of Jet), runs directly to Sam’s house. He keeps knocking on the door while Sam locks himself up, trying to avoid Jet, avoid his past—a past that also includes prostitution and selling his own body when he tries to borrow enough money for his old lover K.S., who was an aspiring singer at that time. Jet, violently and passionately shakes up Sam’s body and confronts him: “Do you think you are the only person with a past? Don’t I have my past too?” Sam, cannot deny his love to Jet anymore, stops Jet’s questioning and proves his love by grabbing Jet’s body and

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<sup>311</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 40.

making love with him on his bed. About 20 seconds into this sequence we hear a door-opening sound from within the living room without seeing the frontal shot of who exactly the intruder is. Only later in an emotional exchange between Sam and his father do we realize that it was the father who “happens” to intrude the only passionate moment between the lovers. The film ends with Sam committing suicide without showing the actual scene of him jumping off the building’s top. The camera paints the cityscape through a spiral moment and slow-montage, as if identifying its vision with Sam’s anticipating death. Helen Hok-sze Leung comments on this scene: “As an emblem of the tragedy that is taking place, the shot suggests that the veneer of the city’s worldliness and modernity collapses under the weight of its own contradiction.”<sup>312</sup>

If the feeling of queer claustrophobia depends on this postmodern vision of enclosure, surveillance, and the totality of the order of domesticity as the total space of the city symbolically, it simultaneously relies on a certain privileging of the romance genre as well. Yonfan’s trademark sentimental framing depends on Jet’s memorialization of Sam as the romantic, sanctified figure who is “not” a prostitute like him. Whereas the viewer has access to Sam’s past through the voiceover and becomes aware of Sam’s sacrificial act of prostituting himself to save up money for his former lover K.S., Jet himself never knows this secretive part of Sam. Therefore, this effect of preserving the sanctity of Sam’s image within the memoryscape of Jet actually reinforces Sam and arguably his family as the emblem of domesticity while repelling Jet’s queer existence within a collapsing world of postmodernity.

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<sup>312</sup> Helen Hok-sze Leung, *Undercurrents*, 22.

#### IV. Cui Zi'en's Cinema of Elegy: Allegorical Death in *The Old Testament*

Unlink Yonfan, whose films are semi-commercial and contain high flavors of the art-house genre, Cui's cinematic aesthetics are driven by what I take to be two primary forces: the first is an elegiac mood that critically comments on how compressed social space makes queer lives unlivable, often by revealing gay male subjectivity as much as the feeling of homophobic disgust and contempt by people around them. In this sense, his elegiac aesthetics is both subjective and post-subjective. This filming technique is combined with an anti-foundational force that forcefully questions what is taken to be legitimate, desirable, and natural, whether these claims to legitimacy operate through age-old Chinese sayings or through biological gender essentialism. I will now proceed to Cui Zi'en's two films, *The Old Testament* (2002) and *Ai yaya quburu* (*Money Boy Diaries*, 2003), in order to examine how each text critically comments on gay male subjectivity within geography of urban entrapment and new forces of postsocialist neoliberalism.

*The Old Testament's* claustrophobic spatial "mood" is confirmed through a cinematic narrative that mostly happens within the interior space of the home, whether it is a familial domestic space or a non-descript apartment occupied by individuals. While tight interiority governs the logic of the film, its narrative is thematically disrupted by the use of interlude moments in the film, which aesthetically break down the story into three segments, each containing within it certain elements of elegy. Elsewhere, Cui himself has explained away the focus of interiority in his films through functionalism and economic reasons. In an interview with Cui, Qi Wang asks, "I noticed that outdoor scenes command quite a prominent place in *Men and Women*, but in later films, like *Enter the Clown* and *The Old Testament*, the shooting mainly takes place indoors. Is that the result

of an intentional, aesthetic choice on your part or a result of limited funding?” Cui responds: “Both. Film production is totally at the mercy of external conditions. I have more than ten film projects in hand right now, but which of them go into production depends on how much funding I can raise at the moment, and on what the script calls for.”<sup>313</sup> In the film, economic functionalism may actually work rather well with the message that Cui delivers, which is about the social conditions and attitudes that circumscribe queer lives in postsocialist China, with each segment resulting in symbolic death, a forced separation due to lack of economic resources, and exclusion by other gay men due to stigma attached to AIDS. These different aspects of death are mediated by an interior zoom-in filming strategy. Rather than simply reinforcing claustrophobia, I argue that the film as a whole amounts to a critical social commentary on the difficulty of gay men’s lives within a city that was still developing, a city before the rapid urban transformation that will take place prior to the 2001 announcement of Beijing to host the Olympics in 2008. I will focus my readings of the film on the “Psalm” segment, which most arrestingly illustrates the affect of elegy.

The prelude to “Psalm” dates the narrative to 1981, could this segment be a temporal comment on the back-then temporality of China before rapid economic growth, only five years after the end of the Cultural Revolution and eleven years before Deng Xiaoping’s Southern Tour? Whether 1981 marks a significant meaning in the film is less important, I think, than the overall elegiac attitudes and structures of feelings that this segment achieves by ways of the politics of spatial intrusion. Claustrophobia works

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<sup>313</sup> Qi Wang, “The Ruin is Already a New Outcome: An Interview with Cui Zi’en,” *positions* 12.1 (2004): 181-194, 189.

through surveillance as well. However, unlike the kind of surveillance that is nowhere and everywhere at once in postmodern Hong Kong in *Bishonen*, surveillance here operates through repetitive intrusions, sometimes through planned intrusions upon an otherwise innocent romance between two gay college students.

Intrusion into private gay male spaces is further justified upon the notion that the two gay men are doing something that is disgusting. Thus, Cui utilizes the DV (digital video) documentary gaze as one that unravels the curiosity of “straight people.” In other words, while Cui’s narrative, like traditional narrative films, relies on certain arrangement of plot, suspense, crisis, climax, and possible resolutions, it also traffics heavily in documenting “realness.” The shaky quality of the DV camera constructs resemblance to the banality of everyday life while the use of non-professional actors further adds to his documentary fiction film a non-glamours depiction of real-life situations. *The Old Testament* shows how straight people endow themselves with the mission of disrupting gay male spaces in the name of preserving the normative. Therefore, if in conventionally understood terms documentary depicts and allows minority and interested subjects to speak for themselves, either through interviews, talking-heads, and the like, Cui’s aesthetics here disrupts the primary documentary urge by investigating queerness through a post-subjective filming style, which exposes heterosexual views as equally, if not more “perverse,” than queer subjectivity. My use of the term “post-subjective” does not mean that Cui’s cinemas are purely objective either. Rather, Cui is interested in troubling the assumption that heterosexual views are often taken to be the objective viewpoints, and that they are the un-questioned crowds, by *subjectively* filming and heightening the sexual paranoia of straightness in his films. This use of the documentary gaze in a fiction



film then blurs the line between fiction and documentary, subjectivity and objectivity, particularly through its focus on the subjective paranoia of straight homophobia in a film that is marketed as a commentary on gay people.

In addition, the question of how the Sixth Generation filmmakers (the generation that Cui is mostly associated with) perceive objectivity in their less commercial aspects of filmmaking and more direct contacts with the daily lives of common folks is also an important discussion in current Chinese film studies. For example, Yingjin Zhang argues, “I contend that ‘objectivity’ is rarely a concern for most independent directors; rather, the desire to reclaim the artist’s subjectivity is that which has motivated their disassociation from or competition with official and commercial filmmakers in the representation of the real.”<sup>314</sup> Zhang therefore urges practitioners in Chinese film studies to move away from a simple binary thinking that polarizes the Fifth Generation (Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige) as allegorizing national myths through commercialism vs. the Sixth Generation as the ordinary hero of the people. More productively, we have to take seriously both the objective and subjective aspects in the aesthetics, filming techniques, and ideological position of the independent filmmaker. Taking up Zhang’s call to problematize “objectivity,” I show how *The Old Testament* paints the claustrophobic interiority of the home by ways of an elegy; moreover, it is an elegy that does not privilege the objectivity of the queer subject but investigates deep into the psychic paranoia of the heteronormative.

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<sup>314</sup> Yingjin Zhang, “My Camera Doesn’t Lie? Truth, Subjectivity, and Audience in Chinese Independent Film and Video,” in *From Underground to Independent: Alternative Film Culture in Contemporary China*, ed. Paul G. Pickowicz and Yingjin Zhang (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 27.

The opening shot of the film pictures a home fraught with the pressure of interiority. First, the camera follows Xiao Bo and Zheng Yang, his college friend visiting from far away, through the staircases. Then, we are invited to the close embraces between the long departed lovers, with Zheng Yang giving a neatly stitched hand-made sweater to Xiao Bo as a gift. Then, they engage in close physical contacts and play in a shower scene. However, this series of romantic moments is quickly interrupted by a nervous look from a third party, and it is the curiosity of the gaze that is in question here. Is this the gaze purely from the perspective of the intruder? Or is this the camera's perspectival gaze? Let's zoom in closely in this crucial moment in the film. We quickly find out that the third party is Xiao Bo's sister-in-law, Qing Jie. The scene does not end with the same "coming out" trauma in *Bishonen* where, as we recall, sex abruptly ends with Sam's father witnessing Jet and his son making out in his home. Rather, the nervous Qing Jie retreats into her own space in the kitchen as if that is her own "safe" territory (homosexuality is often viewed as a "disease" from Qing Jie and Xiao Bo's brother's perspectives).<sup>315</sup> The sequence ends with Qing Jie slowly walking out of the kitchen with dark lighting in the room; the musical score playing in the background recalls any scene in a conventional Chinese ghost movie that is rather haunting. Obviously, Cui here hints at the elegiac not without a sense of humor, marking Qing Jie's figure ghostly even as she herself is haunted and scared by the homoeroticism that was taking place right before her eyes. Cui's film is not so much interested in pure objectivity per se; it disorients the viewer and forces a shift between different kinds of subjectivity, from the

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<sup>315</sup> The idea that homosexuality constitutes a form of social disease was also the prevailing rhetoric that the state and health institutions used in the early days of the AIDS epidemics, see for example Sandra Teresa Hyde, *Eating Spring Rice: The Cultural Politics of AIDS in Southwest China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

heteronormative to the queer; from the erotic to the claustrophobic, and so on. This shifting post-subjective perspective works in parallel with the elegiac as well.

Filming the claustrophobic social space of the family from the post-subjective perspective of Xiao Bo's brother and his wife, the film then traces their numerous attempts at foreclosing the possibility of desire between the two men through a strategy of intrusion. Intrusion marks the enclosed space of the domestic as one of spatial battle in which various subjects claim to insert their own moral way of governance onto the space, so that within the logic of intrusion is the very matter of legitimacy. Spatial intrusion by the couple is legitimized through affect of scare and paranoia. For instance, when Qing Jie has a moment alone with her husband, she worriedly tells him about the scene she intrudes upon this morning: "When I entered home, I saw your brother and his classmate were having bath together. They were hugging and kissing...I was scared I can tell you! What should we do? There he was, kissing another boy, is that normal?"

While this conversation seems not so important overall upon first viewing, I would argue that Qing Jie's paranoia toward a subject and knowledge that she does not possess (male homosexuality) precisely captures the post-subjective aesthetics of Cui's film, which unravels heteronormative knowledge and oppression through the affect of scare and ambiguity that the couple displays. Their paranoia springs from what Sedgwick so perceptively observes as the governing logic of public attitudes towards gay and lesbian subjects in the 80s and 90s: the homosexual panic.<sup>316</sup> The homosexual panic as I outlined earlier rests on the psychic and social "apology" that anti-gay violence enacted by gay-bashers may spring from the individuals' own psychic insecurity and panic. What

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<sup>316</sup> See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 19-21, for a longer definition.

Sedgwick shows is that this so-called individualist defense for homophobia creates systematic, social, and legal consequences. Sedgwick argues, “The forensic use of the ‘homosexual panic’ defense for gay-bashers depends on the medically mediated ability of the phrase to obscure an overlap between individual pathology and systemic function. The reason I found the phrase attractive for my purpose was quite the opposite: I thought it could dramatize, render visible, even render scandalous the same space of overlap.”<sup>317</sup> Following Sedgwick, I extend the importance of the spatial overlap between the individual and the systemic by arguing that Qing Jie’s view registers a similar homosexual panic that embodies significant social force. Read in this way, the film then narrates not so much a love story gone wrong between the two young men as much as it is about presenting a social commentary on the unlivable space of queerness through the post-subjective gaze and feeling of the non-queer subjects. Post-subjectivity in this sense names the film’s curious departure from purely narrating queer male subjects’ feeling and experience; instead of lessening the “objective” talking head style of conventional documentary film, this post-subjective approach may actually intensify Cui’s claim to truth and objectivity, as the film can easily be read as a social critique of heteronormative governance of space in 1980s China.

But an analysis of postmodern space, affect, and sexuality cannot easily settle for an “objective” reading of the documentary form; instead, I argue that what coexists with Cui’s obvious social critique through the elegiac aesthetics is his anti-foundational ridicule. Postmodernism in this film functions less descriptively but more allegorically and symbolically. Postmodernism does not embed within neoliberal and postindustrial

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<sup>317</sup> Ibid, 21.

urban space yet, as in Cui's later film *Money Boy Diaries*; rather, it presents itself through the very instability of cinematic space in the form of spatial game, which I take to be a critical remodeling of Jean-Francois Lyotard's notion of the language game within new systems of narrative and the breakdown of meta-narrative that often characterize postmodern knowledge production.<sup>318</sup> How exactly is the space of the interior home laid out as a conquest for space? Who are the winner and loser of this "game?" What different orders of space justify the moral governance of space that Xiao Bo's brother and his wife possess, and which the gay lovers cannot lay claims to? Specifically, shortly after Qing Jie reveals her disgust of Xiao Bo's intimate acts with Zheng Yang, his brother first responds with distrust and later presents various strategies for preventing further gay sex from happening in his home. The most obvious act is his brother knocking on the door while the gay lovers are having pillow play. Smoking his cigarette while screening to see if any fishy act is happening under the bed sheets, the older brother asks Xiao Bo, "Why lock the door? You're no maidens." Later on, after he finished "checking" his brother, he prescribes a strict order: "Don't lock this door. We don't have this habit." Later on, as he returns to his brother's room once again, he uses his hands to press firmly between the space of the lovers in order to create a line, an imaginary border between the two men. Judging from these acts of intrusion and spatial disruption, what fascinates me is how Cui presents the sequence of the film first from the distrust of Xiao Bo's brother over his homosexual tendency, then to the brother's inquisitive question of "why lock the door," and finally to more aggressive acts of drawing the physical line between what is normal

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<sup>318</sup> Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984)

and abnormal within the space of the otherwise private bedroom. Indeed, his various modes of spatial disruptions can be read in light of Lyotard's conception of language game in the wake of postmodern knowledge regime.

Lyotard is interested in how languages in the postindustrial society lose their own authority of legitimization, and therefore, the postmodern can well be defined as "incredulity toward metanarratives"<sup>319</sup> He critiques Jurgen Habermas' theory of the public sphere in the way that it posits and assumes rationality through mutual public discussion; instead, drawing on Ludwig Wittgenstein's concept of the plurality of language functions, he argues that postmodernism is marked by the challenge to metanarrative, which often functions as prescriptions "modulated as orders, commands, instructions, recommendations, requests, prayers, pleas, etc."<sup>320</sup> Language is not just the source of authority, it is also a kind of "move," and it points to various moves that players can enact. Taking my cue from Lyotard's insights on language, power, and the crisis of legitimation in postmodernism, I argue that what "Psalm" presents is nothing less than a spatial outline of postmodern language game, in which language exerts tremendous hold on the question of morality, sexuality, and belonging within the domestic space. Claustrophobia is not reducible to psychological essence or pathology but is mediated by conquest of morality through the legitimacy to language. Xiao Bo's brother's actions are not only curious questions about "why lock the door?" More than that, they demand compliance and sexual orders; but as I will illustrate, Cui's anti-foundational approach, together with an elegiac epilogue, render Xiao Bo's brother (and heteronormative

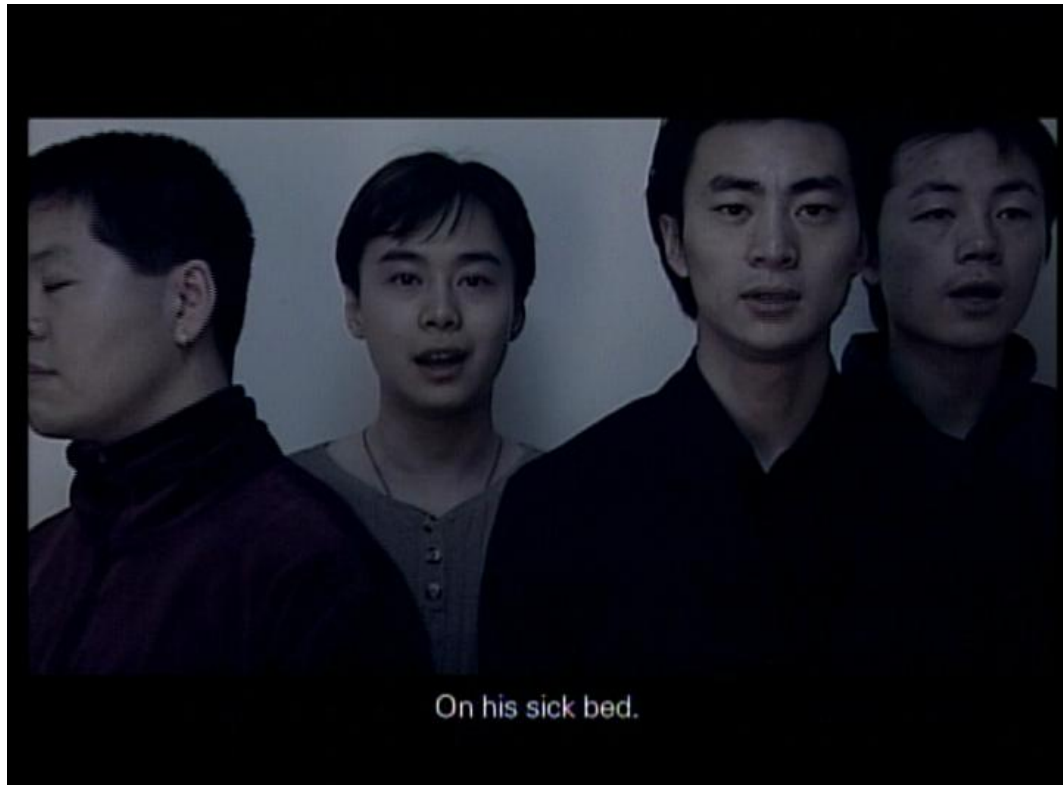
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<sup>319</sup> Ibid, xxiv.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid, 10.

parents, neighbors and social subjects like them) ridiculous. One ridiculous game/move that his brother carries out is to wake up the lovers in the middle of the night and warn them that there was an earthquake. At this point, Cui's film points to a crisis of legitimacy in Qing Jie and her husband's claim to normativity. They produce falsehood and generate lies in order to prove their sexual normalcy.

My analysis that the home presents an allegory of language and sexual games that, in the end, undermines the very legitimacy of the heterosexual order is most telling when Xiao Bo's brother, lacking any other recourse, asks his own wife to feign being drunk and seduce his brother in order to "test" whether he can be rescued from homosexuality. By undertaking yet another game in order to secure the space of the home and preserve spatial claustrophobia, the couple ends up implicating themselves within a possibly incestuous action that is outside of their own view of the normative. The ending of the segment rapidly unfolds as Xiao Bo is forced to marry his college friend Xiao Cui, set up by his brother. The epilogue that comes after the marriage features Cui Zi'en the filmmaker himself, singing somberly with four other men, a cinematic performance that disrupts the linear narrative of conventional narrative films and the voice-over form of documentary. The chorus sings: "Xiao Bo is getting married; has a child and a woman. Then he dies, on his sick bed." This scene is captured under dim light, dramatizing the elegiac "feel" of the song. As Cui sings the song with the other four men (possibly gay men in real lives; one of them actually becomes the main host for the gay online show *Queer Comrade*), he walks out of the frame of the camera, followed by a second man who also disappears out of the frame. While of course this scene exudes a very low-quality production texture, its candidness also produces touching affect that possibility



**Figure 5.** A film still from *The Old Testament*. The epilogue features Cui Zi'en the filmmaker (on the left), who walks out of the frame.

hints at an alternative space outside of domestic claustrophobia; this imaginary frame within the film can also be read as a critical commentary on the claustrophobic existence of queer life reduced to the only option of “disappearance.” Yet, the very act of singing and elegizing the symbolic death of Xiao Bo and countless others who live under social pressure suggests that the film as a self-reflexive form testifies to the survival of “voices” despite the claustrophobic ending.

#### **V. Make Some Rooms for the Money Boys: Cui Zi'en's Anti-Foundational Sexual Politics in Neoliberal, Globalized Beijing**

In the previous section, I show how *The Old Testament's* claustrophobia works at the allegorical level mediated by the legitimacy to language; in Cui's 2003 film *Money*



*Boy Diaries*, claustrophobia loses its legitimacy as the status of the prescriptive in language and spatial game. With this film, Cui takes the symbolic order of postmodernism out on the street in order to map neoliberal queer male subjectivity within what Yomi Braester calls “the urban contract.”<sup>321</sup> The urban contract is a concept that points to the two-way relationships between the city and cinema, with politics playing an important part in both. Braester argues, “The cinema has redefined the relationship linking the viewer, the screen, and the city as one between citizen, ideology, and political and economic power.”<sup>322</sup> By making money, gay male survival, prostitution, and a continual critique of human sexual nature as co-relating subject matters in the film, Cui indexes postsocialism to be a political, historical, and cultural project that opens up the possibility for “marketing” oneself while re-subjecting homoerotic desire within economies of pleasure and service. However, I will demonstrate that in this film, Cui’s representation of Beijing no longer confines itself to the claustrophobic domestic space governed by moral legitimacy, as seen in *The Old Testament*. More queerly, the film questions the very ground of social legitimacy by arguing for self-prostitution in a neoliberal, globalized, and postsocialist economy, through the claim of doing it for the social good. Therefore, instead of marking postsocialism as a complete break away from the socialist past, I argue that Cui marks the money boys as subjects who are indexed by and situated at the very historical contradiction of a market-driven economy that still relies on and responds to the socialist ethos. This mixture of a country with Western style consumptive desire regulated by socialist doctrine is what makes postsocialism so hard to

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<sup>321</sup> Yomi Braester, *Painting the City Red: Chinese Cinema and the Urban Contract* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

<sup>322</sup> Ibid, 4-5.

grasp, thus escaping simple theoretical statements. Before pointing to Cui's anti-foundational sexual politics in the film, I will first attempt to locate some working theoretical paradigms of Chinese postsocialism.

Arif Dirlik and Xudong Zhang define postsocialism as one element among others that mark the specificity of Chinese postmodernity, as distinct from American and European postmodernity, where social aspects of an informational postindustrialized society are homogenized in wider spatial scales. In contradistinction, they suggest that "it is precisely such a situation of spatial fracturing and temporal desynchronization that justifies the use of the postmodern against the spatial (as in the nation-form) and temporal (as in the development of a national market and culture) teleologies of modernity."<sup>323</sup> They further sustain this complex argument about spatial and temporal compression by pointing to how the residual elements of revolution, socialism, and enlightenment ideologies are integral parts of all historical Chinese modernities; consequently, current discussions of Chinese postmodernity can only be theorized as critical engagements with these revolutionary projects. They conclude with this point: "While Chinese postmodernism may be striking as an antirevolutionary repudiation of a socialist modernity, what may make Chinese postmodernity unique is that, within a postsocialist situation, postmodernity itself may serve as a site of struggle between the legacy of the past and the forces of the present."<sup>324</sup> Even Chinese critic Wang Ning, in his six mappings of Chinese postmodernity, concludes that it is the disorganized ways in which various elements blend in that make the postmodern unique in the Chinese case. Wang

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<sup>323</sup> Arif Dirlik and Xudong Zhang, "Introduction: Postmodernism and China," in *Postmodernism and China*, ed. Arif Dirlik and Xudong Zhang (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 3.

<sup>324</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

poses the question as such: “The fact is that China is still a Third World country in which various elements are blended: premodern, modern, postmodern, and even primitive. In a society such as this, which is subject to contingencies and uneven development, anything can happen at any time, so why not postmodernism?”<sup>325</sup>

Within these theoretical attempts to come closer to a picture of a country that is now the second biggest economy as of late 2010, marked by a widely reported income gap in which the top 1% of Chinese families own about 41.4% of the nation’s wealth, it is not surprising that the postmodern must re-engage with the cultural politics of equality, redistribution, and socialist legacies.<sup>326</sup> In this spirit, postmodernism and postsocialism can be thought of as comprising simultaneously the predominantly cultural and political mixture of contemporary cultural productions. In my reading of the film, I argue that Cui shifts his cinematic aesthetics from the claustrophobic interior home of 1980s Beijing to a globalized urban city organized by disorganized capitalism, where the survival of the money boy is not completely overdetermined by the logics of the neoliberal market; more creatively, Cui depicts the money boys as regulated subjects in the Foucauldian sense but still possessing partial agency. Their agency lies in their flexible positions, which follow the desire of money while, at the same time, mobilize to blend in with the lowest of the low of the masses. They express a socialist ethos that is further buttressed by an anti-foundational approach against long-standing Chinese philosophy on human nature, the social good, and personal enlightenment. In other words, Cui precisely engages with the aspect of the postmodern as “a site of struggle between the legacy of the past and the

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<sup>325</sup> Wang Ning, “The Mapping of Chinese Postmodernity,” in *Postmodernism and China*, ed. Arif Dirlik and Xudong Zhang (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 34-35.

<sup>326</sup> Chen Weihua, “Income Gap, a Woe for China and US,” *China Daily*, October 12, 2010, accessed October 14, 2010, [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/bizchina/2010-10/12/content\\_11399437.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/bizchina/2010-10/12/content_11399437.htm).

forces of the present” through his championing of the socialist element of the common good that works flexibly to the desire of economic globalization. How does he achieve these seemingly irreconcilable elements of neoliberal desire and socialist common good through the route of non-normative sexuality? In other words, how does he *queer* both the market and the political?

To highlight the multiple facets of globalization, neoliberalism, gay male prostitution, and socialist residues in the film, Cui designs a narrative that is fragmentary at the level of storyline and dissonant at the level of musical scores. For example, the film introduces themes as wide-ranging as religious salvation, advice on how to be a good male prostitute by an older hustler, a family narrative about an older brother saving his younger brother, some preaching of old Chinese sayings, and the money boys’ self-justification of sex as community service. In this way, the fragmentary narrative actually captures the complex position of the money boy as what Norma Alarcon terms “a subject-in-process who constructs *provisional* identities” and who “can be ‘constituted by discourse and yet not be completely determined by it.’”<sup>327</sup> In the beginning of the film, an unnamed narrator/DJ composer asks one of the money boys, Zaizai: “This theme is for you. It may not match your character in the film. The distance makes it precise. I think it might be even better. Do you have any objections?” Zaizai’s back is facing us in a medium shot, never looking at the composer or responding to him. Shortly preceding this sequence, we are introduced to Zaizai and Xiao Bao, who is the younger brother of Dabin. Dabin is a hardcore Protestant. Here, Zaizai and Xiao Bao are making bad sexual

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<sup>327</sup> Norma Alarcon, “Conjugating Subjects in the Age of Multiculturalism,” in *Mapping Multiculturalism*, ed. Avery F. Gordon and Christopher Newfield (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 137.

jokes with one another while blowing two condoms as if they were balloons. Zaizai points out when Xiao Bao blows the condom: “Ayaya (Chinese slang of saying ‘oh’), this way it looks like a dick, it changes into a breast when it gets bigger. The breast changes into a dick, and the dick into a breast!” By framing narrative distance between Zaizai the nameless composer (who self-reflexively points to Zaizai’s role in the film) and by pointing to the playful sides of money boys who make fun of their own sexual positions as “flexible,” the film points to contingent discourses and the boys’ multiply constituted subjectivities. These discourses range from the projection of class and style (this music may not fit you), self-prostitution, and how money boys themselves may respond to or refuse to speak to these discourses.

In her reading of the film and theoretical intervention into postsocialist engendering of neoliberal subjects in contemporary China, Lisa Rofel locates the public discourse on money boys as one that is deeply fraught within the division of licit and illicit desire, a division that is predicated on who can be the “proper” cosmopolitan subject of the future of China. Rofel writes, “My argument, in brief, is that the place of lesbians and gay men in China is intimately connected to cosmopolitanism because it is through the expression of desire that they, as well as other Chinese citizens, are able to feel part of a universal humanity...Neoliberalism thus produces a yearning for cosmopolitanism, which then gets encoded as a difference between licit and illicit desires.”<sup>328</sup> Working within a similar vein on the divergent social effects of neoliberalism on the hierarchical mapping of gay male subjectivities, I add to Rofel’s reading an attention to how Cui develops an anti-foundational cinematic aesthetics. His is a politics

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<sup>328</sup> Lisa Rofel, “The Traffic in Money Boys” *positions* 18.2 (2010):425-458, 427.

of representation that maneuvers flexibly with both cosmopolitan desire and socialist utopianism, thus, marking these otherwise low-class subjects as subjects of Chinese postmodernism who embody both the residues of socialist utopianism and the present and future forces of cosmopolitanism.

To highlight the multiply constituted subject positions of the money boys, Cui stages a family drama between Xiao Bao and his older brother. This scene challenges the assumption of money boys as over-determined neoliberal subjects of the market; rather, they possess the right to refuse to be consumed. In other words, money does not always lead to the possession of bodies by others even if they are on the market. Dabin the older brother preaches Xiao Bao, “As your brother it’s my duty to ask you: do you need money or do you like doing it? If you need money, I’ll give you some. How much do you want? Go and study something...If you get 100 yuan (Chinese dollars) for doing that, I’ll give you 200 yuan. If you get 200 a day I will give you 400 yuan.” To these persistent demands Xiao Bao simply replies: “Leave!” Here, Cui cleverly shows that neoliberalism does not simply produce good and bad, desirable and undesirable subjects within cosmopolitanism; in fact, even the “cleanest” of the clean, the Protestant brother, buys into the relentless logic of the market in the form of bidding in his failing attempt to “save” his brother. Here, in the language game of postmodernism, the language of human nature and legitimacy (as seen in *The Old Testament*) no longer works. In order to convince someone in this postsocialist era, one needs to *play* flexibly with the market; in fact, it is arguably that Dabin becomes as entangled with the market logic as these money boys are. Xiao Bao’s surprising rejection of money (as viewers may presume that money is what all money boys are after) marks him as a complex subject who desires more than

just capitals. What exactly do these money boys want? If money does not define who they are, what does? How do they position their jobs in relation to the common crowds?

If as Rofel argues, that neoliberalism not only creates the rich and the poor in China but also those who are dividedly framed as proper and improper desiring subjects, then Cui's film can be read as a queer *and* socialist critical response within these new processes of neoliberal marketization.<sup>329</sup> In contrast to simplistic theory of the "outside" as the utopian alternative to oppressive social regimes, Cui's alternative logics can only be located *within* the already globalized postsocialist landscape. Specifically, refusing to remain complicit with class iniquity, Dabin's second brother Xiao Jian expresses a socialist imaginary in his self-positioning as a money boy. Although Xiao Jian belongs to an upper middle-class family, he writes his own "money boy diary" outside of conventional logics of where money and human nature should flow. In a by now familiar cinematic tool of Cui, which is long intense dialogue between family members (this is evident in *The Old Testament* too when Qing Jie and her husband discuss how to "save" the gay brother), Dabin is surprised by Xiao Jian's decision to join the profession of male hustling as well. Their intriguing conversation is worth quoting at length in order to note what I term the "anti-foundational" approach of Cui's film.

Xiao Jian tells him: "I want to sell my body like Xiao Bao." When the older brother questions the seriousness of his decision, Xiao Jian gives his perspective on money boys that accounts for not his selfish decision but the social structure of contemporary China. Xiao Jian gives his justification for entering the profession: "Most

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<sup>329</sup> For more on queer filmmaking as socialist missions, see Cui Zi'en, "The Communist International of Queer Film," *positions* 18.2 (2010):417-423.

of these youngsters are from villages and from very poor family backgrounds. I was born into a happy family, but I want to join the hustlers and change their social status.” To this seemingly impossible goal of gay socialism, the older brother objects: “Does everything need you to change it?” Dabin, becoming desperate in his last attempt to rescue his brother from becoming another money boy, preaches, “Water flows downhill, doesn’t mankind soar heavenward?” (水往低處流, 人不是往高處走嗎?) To this conventional Chinese street-saying the younger brother counter-argues: “These sayings always mock the rule of nature: if water flows downhill, then why should mankind soar heavenward?”

Cui’s use of dialogue is rather anti-foundational in its stylistic purpose. Unlike memorable dialogues in transnational Chinese cinemas (we may recall Leslie Cheung’s Yuddy character in Wong Kar-wai’s *Days of Being Wild* (1990), asking Maggie Cheung’s character to remember this one minute while he is romantically staring at her), dialogue does not work to instill and freeze memorable moments within the narrative. Instead, a long dialogue in Cui’s films often serves the merit of staging a debate, where toward the end, the marginalized position will ultimately seem more convincing or less outlandish than it appears to be. Instead of reading this film as a radical break from *The Old Testament*’s symbolic structures of death in domestic claustrophobia, I find it more intriguing to read these two films as inter-texts on different social subjects that are attentive to the rapid transformations that have taken place in China from the 1980s to the present. Whereas Cui’s previous film symbolically comments on the social unlivability of queer lives in 1980s when most people still use the discourse of the “natural” to condemn gay male subjects as unnatural, *Money Boy* is no longer arguing about whether being gay is disgusting or not. This may be accounted by a shift of public discourse since the



Chinese Psychiatric Association declassified homosexuality from lists of mental illness in March of 2001.<sup>330</sup> More provocatively, Xiao Jian radically counters the status of the “natural” in terms of what a cosmopolitan and socially progressive person should be in a postsocialist neoliberal world driven by measures of success, money, and economic progress. In Xiao Jian’s vision, he must join the lowest of the low in order to counter the effects of the widening social gaps in China. For him, to be queer and sexually perverse as a money boy is also to fulfill the “natural” mission of residual socialism, which is to be with the poor crowds and redefine the common good. In Cui’s perverse remapping of 2003 Beijing, to be queer is not antithetical to being a utopian postmodern socialist.

## **VI. Tight Space and Overlapping Territories: Playing in the Closet with Tsai Ming-liang**

On the surface, Tsai Ming-liang’s films are visually more aligned with those by Wong Kar-wai (discussed in Chapter 3) than with Yonfan and Cui Zi’en’s cinemas in terms of filmic style. Both Wong and Tsai prefer altering conventional narrative temporality by prolonging the use of slow-motion montage in the case of the former and the never-ending long takes in the latter. Whereas Wong is characterized by a consistent use of voice-over, Tsai resorts to minimal dialogue, as many film critics point out.<sup>331</sup> Furthermore, while some critics rightly observe that Wong’s films are more attuned to the maneuvers of temporality that suspend calendrical realist time in order to get into the

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<sup>330</sup> Henry Chu, “Chinese Psychiatrists Decide Homosexuality Isn’t Abnormal,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 6, 2001, accessed November 1, 2010, <http://articles.latimes.com/2001/mar/06/news/mn-33985>.

<sup>331</sup> For a detailed summary of Tsai Ming-liang’s cinematic aesthetics, see Fran Martin’s introduction to the *Journal of Chinese Cinemas*’ special issue on Tsai’s films, “Introduction: Tsai Ming-liang’s Intimate Public Worlds,” *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* 1.2 (2007): 83-88.

deeper core of the character's mindset,<sup>332</sup> it is arguable that Tsai on the other hand is attuned to both time and space, with Taipei's urban mapping remains a main concern for almost all of his films since his 1992 debut, *Rebels of the Neon God*. It is this consistent textuality of urban maps, street scenes, and queer male subjects' entrapments in 1990s Taipei that makes Tsai's urban aesthetics an inviting comparison with Yonfan's sentimental look on 1990s Hong Kong and Cui Zi'en's queer vision of postsocialist Beijing. Specifically, I will argue that if in Yonfan's film queer death is conveyed through logics of surveillance and the re-sanctification of the domestic home, Tsai's films are closer to Cui's in that they invest in elements of playfulness, reversal, perversity, and even campiness. Yet, while Cui's films mobilize certain activist, socially conscious commentaries that are anti-foundational and certainly postmodern, Tsai's postmodern and queer mapping of Taipei is less outspoken and easily discernible than Cui, whose characters spell out the socialist queer mission of joining the gay money boys.

In what follows, using Tsai's *Rebels of the Neon Gods* (1992), *Vive L'Amour* (1994), and *The River* (1997) as examples, I make the case that Tsai's films are invested in a perspective of sexuality and space that lends itself to aesthetics of "overlapping territories." In a cinema in which heterosexual desire overlaps with latent gay male erotic desire (as in the case of *Rebels*), where moments of heterosexual sex is compressed with queer autoeroticism (as in the case of *Vive L'Amour*), and where the order of kinship is not only overlapped with incest but queered from inside out (as in *The River*), Tsai's work allows viewers to read the heterogeneity of urban space. These films map queer

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<sup>332</sup> Ewa Mazierska and Laura Rascaroli, "Trapped in the Present: Time in the Films of Wong Kar-wai," *Film Criticism* 25.2 (2000/2001): 2-20.

male subjects' relation to spaces where social power is most dominant, where the possibility of queerness seems laughable and impossible (kinship), and where sexual subjects may connect through intermediary and luminal spaces within urban Taipei. I will especially pay close attention to the intertextual use of Lee Kang-sheng as the main character in each film in order to tease out his overlapping relationship with other characters in the films.<sup>333</sup>

In *Rebels of the Neon God*, Tsai unravels the compressed vision of urban Taipei by locating the overlapping affect of urban alienation that is central to all his other films. However, moving beyond conventional discussions of Tsai's films as mainly concerned with the feeling of alienation,<sup>334</sup> I will also show how the affect of alienation as such is mediated through intersubjective relationships, in which the alienated queer subject, Hsiao Kang, seeks to explore urban pleasure but ends up eluding himself, while those who seem to partake most wildly within the city, Ah Tze (Chen Chao-jung), Ah Bing, and Ah Kuei (Wang Yu-wen), end up finding themselves alienated, marginalized, and deluded with nowhere to go in a ruined and flooded apartment by the end of the film. In other words, there is no "spatial exit" as such in *Rebels*: liberation and sexual pleasure outside of home within the city is one side of the same coin as boxed-in interiority of the domestic home. Therefore, the narrative does not privilege the space outside the home as one of freedom, urban pleasure, and liberation; rather, different sexual subjects

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<sup>333</sup> My interest in intertextuality in Tsai's film is mostly concerned with Lee's character Hsiao Kang by illustrating the overlapping territories of desire; for a more in-depth discussion of intertextuality in Tsai's films, see Song Hwee Lim, "Positioning Auteur Theory in Chinese Cinemas Studies: Intratextuality, Intertextuality, and Paratextuality in the Films of Tsai Ming-liang," *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* 1.3 (2007): 223-245.

<sup>334</sup> See Woei Lien Chong's essay, "Alienation in the Modern Metropolis: The Visual Idiom of Taiwanese Film Director Tsai Ming-liang," *China Information* 9.4 (1995): 81-95.

(heterosexual, queer) are trapped within urban territories differently. My reading of this film will emphasize the spaces of the apartment and the video game store as ones where the possibility of sexual freedom and urban entrapment overlap through intense affect.

How does Tsai visually convey these elements of overlapping spaces, affect, and sexuality? One way to probe deeper into this aesthetics of visibility is to think through his representation of spatial coincidence in the film. In the opening sequence, we are introduced to the visually alluring image of two preppy looking young men, Ah Tze and Ah Bing. They are soaked wet by the heavy rain outside; they squeeze into the little telephone booth and smoke a joint. Just as we are tempted to think of them as an obvious pair of gay lovers in the film, we are surprised by their actions as they take out an electric screwdriver, open up the coin storage of the telephone, and steal large amount of coins. This tight space and the naughty, campy, and comic insinuation of homoeroticism and homosociality is strategically and coincidentally overlapped with an alienated young man Hsiao Kang, who is trapped within a domestic home. While the first shot of Ah Tze and Ah Bing frames them as urban parasitic subjects, whose means of survival are parasitic on liquid capitalism, the informal economy of the global city, and illicit commerce, Hsiao Kang, the latent gay young man trapped within the home, turns out to be as much an urban parasite as these two men, as a close reading of the next several shots demonstrates.

The next sequence moves from a medium distance shot to a close-up shot of Hsiao Kang's back as he is moving his study chair to the front and to the back because of boredom, as a result of excessive studying (or not studying?). Out of nowhere, a cockroach (the quintessential urban parasite) sneaks into his room. Hsiao Kang, provoked

by the insect's intrusion into his own space, uses a circle-drawing compass and pinches the cockroach's body with the pointy needle. The parasite, struggling on his desk, cannot move. Hsiao Kang then throws the cockroach out of his window. The next shot shows Ah Tze and Ah Bing entering a local video arcade, where many other young urban parasites are seeking auto-visual electronic entertainment. The next shot comes back to Hsiao Kang's room. Surprised by the magical survival of the cockroach, which is now laying on the middle of his window outside in the rain, Hsiao Kang slams the window twice, only resulting in breaking his window and harming his own hands in blood. His blood then drops one by one onto his high school textbook; the page tainted with blood is showing the map of Taiwan itself.

While these scenes of urban coincidence strike one as particularly mundane: raining, video store, and cockroach; and cinematically they are low-cost in production (dirty old room, any telephone booth in Taipei, etc.), they nonetheless are visually striking in their casual effects of linking different urban subjects: young rebels and law-breakers, a young student who doesn't want to study, and a cockroach early on in the narrative. Moreover, such logic of spatial coincidence foreshadows the social locations of these urban parasites through one single object of the cockroach. The cockroach that is pinched hard by Hsiao Kang may represent Ah Tze and Ah Bing, who will be captured by competing gangsters and mafia groups, whose territory of power is violated by their other acts of stealing. The cockroach also functions as an object pointing to the intersubjective relation between Ah Tze and Hsiao Kang too, with the latter parasitically following every move of Ah Tze, who is the young, charismatic, and virile heterosexual object of desire that Hsiao Kang can never possess. As such, through the visually ugly

cockroach, Tsai beautifully maps the overlapping territories of late capitalist above-ground and underground commerce, sexual desire, heterosexuality, and male homoeroticism through logics of spatial compression and coincidence.<sup>335</sup> In one of the first books in Taiwan on Tsai's cinema, Wen Tianxiang reads the cockroach and the blood on the map of Taiwan as alluding to Hsiao Kang's symbolic death by Taiwan's educational system."<sup>336</sup> Here, I further extend Wen's insightful reading of the parasitic object by suggesting that Hsiao Kang's blood here, literally tainting the map of Taiwan, marks the mapping of urban desire as intersubjectively queer. By linking personal pain and frustration, and the dropping of blood with the geopolitical map of Taiwan, Tsai connects the personal space of the home to the geopolitical "space" of the nation and the urban city, again, through the logics of spatial coincidence.

If the apartment is the claustrophobic space par excellence, so are highly capitalist non-descript commercial spaces in the existing world system. I will use the specific example of the video arcade as a coexisting, overlapping site of desire, underground commerce, law, and crime in order elucidate the queer cartography of overlapping urbanity in Taipei. In probably the most claustrophobic scene in the film, Ah Tze and Ah Bing are playing the big hammer game. The sequence prolongs till the closing of the store, where both men hide behind a corner in the bathroom to make sure that the security guard has left the store. With the electric door sliding down, the "real game" has begun. The men engage in yet another illicit form of capitalist adventure as they open up the

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<sup>335</sup> On reading capitalist commerce and personal, intersubjective relationship in transnational Chinese films, see Gina Marchetti's essay, "Buying American, Consuming Hong Kong: Cultural Commerce, Fantasies of Identity, and the Cinema," in *The Cinema of Hong Kong: History, Arts, Identity*, ed. Poshek Fu and David Desser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 289-313.

<sup>336</sup> Wen Tianxiang (聞天祥), *Guang ying ding ge : Cai Mingliang de xin ling chang yu* (光影定格：蔡明亮的心靈場域) (Taipei: Heng xing guo ji wen hua shi ye you xian gong si, 2002), 77.

backsides of all video game booths, unscrewing the green decoding video chipboards. In this scene, Hsiao Kang is also hiding in the store. But always a bit clumsy, he was too slow to leave the store after the two men locked up the store when they left their crime scene. Hsiao Kang is literally boxed in and re-trapped into a space where he thought he could get a glimpse of urban desire and liberation from his home. His pursuit of freedom and latent sexual desire for Ah Tze re-inscribes him into yet another space of compression, boredom, and restraints. In the geospatial imaginary, the video arcade store may seem too commonplace among global cities to the point of what Ackbar Abbas calls a nondescript space in his global cosmopolitan comparison between Shanghai and Hong Kong, a characterization that can easily describe 1990s Taipei as well: “Beyond a certain point, there is a blurring and scrambling of signs and an overlapping of spatial and temporal grids, all of which make urban signs and images difficult to read...This means that the anomalous is in danger of turning *nondescript*, in much the same way that the more complex the city today, the more it becomes a city without qualities.”<sup>337</sup>

Abbas’ acute analysis of the global city as engendering “an overlapping of spatial and temporal grids” of nondescript spaces calls for an analysis that appreciates both the degrees of overcomplexity of spaces and over-homogenization of Taipei with other world cities, as well as the specificity of highly local and translocal spaces that contain within them overlapping territories and desires. To illustrate this, the local video store serves several visual typologies in the film. It is at once a space of masculinity, where Ah Tze shows off his good skills in winning the latest Japanese video games in front of his

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<sup>337</sup> Ackbar Abbas, “Cosmopolitan De-descriptions: Shanghai and Hong Kong,” *Public Culture* 12.3 (2000):769-786, 772.

girlfriend Ah Kuei; it works as a space of high-degree, visualized, and electronized liquid capitalism, where money (coins) and pleasure (visual pleasure) are mediated and exchanged at an accelerating rate.<sup>338</sup> Finally, it is also a space of claustrophobic queerness, as Hsiao Kang literally preys on Ah Tze and his friends. The overlapping of desire further attenuates the common theme of urban alienation in Tsai's films. Here though, it is not only the alienation of desire that deserves our attentions; it is also the way Tsai maps desire both multi-directionally and non-reciprocally that makes it queer. In this moment of the narrative Ah Tze misses out on a date with Ah Kuei because of his need to make money, whereas Hsiao Kang also attempts to know Ah Tze, misses the opportunity, and ends up boxed and re-entrapped again. Therefore, straight heteronormative urban desire is coincidentally (what a coincidence again!) and disorientingly aligned and linked.

If *Rebels* illustrates the nuanced ways overlapping, translocal, and highly claustrophobic spaces of the apartment and video game store both constrain, enable, and induce overlapping forms of desire within Taipei's postmodernity of illicit commerce and sex, *Vive L'Amour* further develops the trope of the apartment home by twisting the conventional understanding of home as one of belonging, nourishment, and the epitome of traditional family form. The "postmodern home" that Tsai builds in this film can refer to several possible interpretations. It is a home that counters the modern meta-narrative of home as residue of bourgeoisie values, escape from work, and heterosexual reproduction. In terms of sexual desire, it is a home that still inherits the claustrophobic logic of postmodern space in the ways that I have outlined thus far, but one that reorganizes

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<sup>338</sup> See Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000).



subjects' sexual positions by pointing to the unlikely and unexpected coincidence and overlapping of hetero/homoeroticism. Finally, it hints at the possibility that the epistemology of the closet can be everywhere, closer to heterosexuality than one may presume. To borrow Rosemary Marangoly George's useful notion of the critical recycling of domesticity, in Tsai's films, home functions "as a site from which social organizations can be rendered visible and open to critique."<sup>339</sup>

The Chinese title of the film, *Ai qing wan sui*, literally means "love forever" or "all hail to love," is a postmodern pun to what love appears to be in the text. As Taiwan feminist and queer critic Zhang Xiaohong argues, "*Vive L'Amour* is a film that departs from the binary opposition of home vs. non-home, center vs. margin; no longer using the homogenization and marginalization representational politics that were prevalent in 1970s Taiwan films, the film actually works to 'empty-out' *jia* (home/family)."<sup>340</sup> In a perceptive essay on the discourse of *tongxinglian* (homosexual subject) in 1990s Taiwan and in Tsai's films, Fran Martin builds on Zhang's interpretation of the "emptied-out" family in Tsai's film by arguing that the representation of emptiness in *Vive* can be understood as a discursive representation of the *tongxinglian* subject, who always appears to be ghostly, non-human, and threatening to the patrilineal line of the family (see also my discussion of *renyao* in Chapter 2). Martin writes that "this figuration of *tongxinglian* by *tongzhi* authors through cipher-like, non-human figures can be interpreted as a reverse-discourse: a form of resistance to the dominant discourse that would place

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<sup>339</sup> Rosemary Marangoly George, "Recycling: Long Routes to and from Domestic Fixes." in *Burning Down the House: Recycling Domesticity*, ed. Rosemary Marangoly George (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 1-20, 3.

<sup>340</sup> Zhang Xiaohong (張小虹), *Yu wang xin di tu : xing bie, tong zhi xue/Queer Desire: Gender and Sexuality* (慾望新地圖: 性別・同志學) (Taipei: Lian he wen xue chu ban she, 1996), 96-97.

*tongxinglian* beyond the bounds of the human due to its perceived threat to the reproductive, heterosexual *jia*.”<sup>341</sup> Building on Zhang and Martin’s insights that Tsai’s film attempts to strip away family values via representational politics of “emptying out” and one of queerness as discursive ghostliness, I will pay more attentions to how, through such an effect of emptiness, Tsai envisions an alternative, postmodern “home” that posits sexual subjects in motion, a mobility that parallels to the film’s very representation of architectural space in Taipei.

To further understand sexual subjects’ dislocation of the family in postmodernity, a brief summary of the three main characters is in order. Hsiao Kang (played by the same actor Lee Kang-sheng) is a young man whose sexual identity, like the Hsiao Kang in *Rebels*, is in question. He desires again the young rebel character played by Chen Chao-jung, Ah Jung. Ah Jung is another urban parasite, selling clothes he bought from Hong Kong on the street. Ah Mei (played by Yang Kuei-mei), is a real-estate agent who speaks in pretentious voice to lure her clients (usually male) and treats “love” rather casually, just like Ah Jung. These three urban lives are weaved together by the fact that they all share a key to a two-story apartment home. The apartment home here embodies the very urban textuality of postmodernity, one that is runaway and “for sale.” It is a space that tolerates unstable romantic relationship, a no-string-attached kind of “love.” A reading of the first sex scene between Ah Jung and Ah Mei points to the interconnectedness between urban architecture and the mobility of sexual subjects. First, through close-up shots of Hsiao Kang, we see him hesitating about whether to slit his wrist or not, an act of self-

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<sup>341</sup> Fran Martin, “*Vive L’Amour*: Eloquent Emptiness,” in *Chinese Films in Focus: 25 New Takes*, ed. Chris Berry (London: British Film Institute, 2003), 177.

destruction. Through coincidental logic of intersecting montage, we see Ah Jung and Ah Mei wandering on the street, with Ah Jung making every attempt to stalk her. Finally, the two both know how to “play the game,” with Ah Mei taking him to one of the empty apartments that she sells. There, we see Hsiao Kang, already dripping blood from his wrist, remains on the first floor while Ah Mei and Ah Jung have sex on the second floor. The morning after, Ah Mei already left, pointing to her lack of attachment to such a one-night stand romance. Meanwhile, Ah Jung looks out from the apartment window, only to find a big “for sale” sign written on a huge red banner.

This cinematic coincidental pairing of real-estate commerce capitalism, sexual subjectivity, and unstable empty-out representation of home then counters a simplistic reading of *Vive* as only a reflection of postmodern personal alienation. Beyond Martin’s intriguing reading of the film as mediating the discourse of *tongxinglian* subjects as ghostly, I argue that this coincidental, overlapping mapping of heterosexual and homosexual subjects with a specific form of capitalism that has to do with urbanity (real-estate mortgage) allows us to read sexual subjects’ situatedness within the postmodern breakdown of metanarrative and urban textuality. I want to situate these subjects within a cultural politics of late capitalism that allows for both the re-organization of sexual experiences as well as possible re-inscriptions and re-entrapment within Taipei commerce landscapes that are, as Yingjin Zhang argues, “part and parcel of a new global politics at work.”<sup>342</sup> A more illustrative support for my reading of the overlapping relationship between late capitalism, urbanity, and sexual mobility can be glimpsed from the

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<sup>342</sup> Yingjin Zhang, *Screening China: Critical Interventions, Cinematic Reconfigurations, and the Transnational Imaginary in Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, 2002), 309.

occupations of the characters. Ah Jung's street-level capitalism does not rely on a real urban locale—it is trans-regional and trans-local in the sense that he makes fast money by buying materials from Hong Kong and reselling them wherever he finds legitimate space on the street where policemen are not present. Hsiao Kang's occupation as a columbarium salesman, selling "home" for the death, actually is not as unrelated to the other two characters' occupations as it may seem. Like Ah Mei, Hsiao Kang's job requires him to advertise "home" for potential clients. His boss, while giving a "tour" for potential clients who are preparing funerals, stresses the different prices for the different slots, thus emphasizing the similarity between selling home for the death and home for the living. In other words, the three characters' coincidental sexual encounters are structured by their different and similar situatedness within the multi-layers of late capitalism, where even death is treated as a business for profit.

While postmodern re-inscriptions of subject position certainly entrap them within the urban textures of capitalistic exchanges, its potential effect of emptying out the logics of home is, I argue, what ultimately allows for the campiness of sexual subjects as mobile, unpredictable, proximately coexisting, and temporally overlapping. Thus, the urban textuality of the apartment, or the apartment plot rather, is not a simple form of claustrophobia, or one that is reducible to symbolic death (Yonfan and Cui's films). More playfully, Tsai's claustrophobic aesthetics points to postmodern entrapment with a twist, a politics of what I call "playing in the closet." Specifically, in the most important scene of the film, Hsiao Kang masturbates on the mattress where Ah Mei and Ah Jung first had sex, only to happen upon the two, who are fast approaching the room. In a hurry, Hsiao Kang hides under the bed while the two are having intense, roof-toppling sex on the top.

Chris Berry reads this scene as exemplifying a mode of realism that is hyperbolic. It indulges in audience's attention to characters' performance of loneliness to such an extent that realism itself becomes hyperbolic and "teeters on the brink of farce."<sup>343</sup> Berry's reading of farce and hyperbolic realism is very suggestive here because farce is not necessarily unreal; farce describes a situation that is so much bordering on the unreal, the unpredictable, and the ridiculous that it distances viewers and audiences from the everyday cruelty that is reality. Likewise, Hsiao Kang's performance of autoeroticism here is farcical because it is possible that his homoerotic desire, which structures the epistemology of the closet in this film, can be *this close* to the structure of heterosexual desire. From the larger theoretical standpoint on sexual politics, this scene can be read as a powerful challenge to the legitimacy of sexual boundary, wherein a postmodern breakdown of heterosexual metanarrative emerges through the figure of Hsiao Kang playing in the intermediary closet, in the apartment, in Taipei itself.

*The River* abandons the apartment, the video arcade, or the apartment-without-home to explore the subculture of bathhouse. While one can argue that this film is all about exploring the gay male subcultural space as a postmodern new space that is measurable with other bathhouses in the global queer contexts (for example, those in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and European urban cities), I want to locate the potentiality of queerness in Taipei's postmodernity by calling for a reading that examines the breakdown of private versus public spaces, especially through the queering of the oppositional spaces between the domestic "private" home and the "public" bathhouse.

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<sup>343</sup> Chris Berry, "Where is the Love? Hyperbolic Realism and Indulgence in *Vive L'Amour*" in *Island on the Edge: Taiwan New Cinema and After*, ed. Chris Berry and Fei Lu (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005), 92.

This queering of postmodern space moves beyond the sentimental narrative that Yonfan's *Bishonen* achieves at the expense of the reclamation of the domestic as normative and desirable in the end, which Jet cannot join and belong. Instead, *The River*, through the incestuous relationship between the father (played by Miao Tien) and the son Hsiao Kang (Lee Kang-sheng), publicizes, commercializes, and scandalizes the normative kinship between father and son while, paradoxically, re-ties the "normative" bonds of father-son through intense intimacy in "public" spaces.

More than implying the proximity between heterosexuality and homosexuality, as indicated by my reading of *Vive*, in *The River* Tsai provocatively marks the Kuomintang (KMT) identified patriarch as queer. Gina Marchetti goes so far as to argue that the film potentially reasserts Neo-Confucianism and political conservatism, despite its queer message, by having the KMT-identified father figure fuck his son, whom can be seen as the new Taiwanese youth figure that is identified with post-Martial Law native Taiwanese identity.<sup>344</sup> While such an allegorical reading is very suggestive in terms of rethinking geopolitical significance that the film yields, the allegorical reading may uncritically reduce the materialist significance of social spaces themselves to mere objects of politics. That is not to say that highly political reading of the father figure does not produce radical queer reading. In fact, another line of inquiry can assert that the queer father, as a mainland perpetual exile in post-Martial Law Taiwan and as a gay man stuck with patriarchal duty, mirrors the status of Taiwan in the political world stage as a form of double marginalization that Ping-hui Liao theorizes in another context. Liao describes

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<sup>344</sup> Gina Marchetti, "On Tsai Ming-liang's *The River*," in *Island on the Edge: Taiwan New Cinema and After*, ed. Chris Berry and Fei Lu (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005), 117.

the historical and global rejection of Taiwan by world politics from Nixon's visit to China in 1972 to a new political democratization in 1978 in the following way: "By the time Chiang Ching-kuo took over as president in 1978, he was ready to declare himself a 'Taiwanese' and, unlike his father, gradually accepted the historical effects of Taiwan's relocation from China's *pien-tsui* (periphery) to the world's *pien-yuan* (margin), of a tiny island-state being twice removed from the global culture map."<sup>345</sup> Conceiving the father symbolic role in this way, he is doubly abandoned by the failed KMT's desire to reconquer mainland China as well as abandoned by the vibrant queer youth culture since 1987 Taiwan post-Martial Law sexual liberalization.

However, Tsai's film's overwhelming images of the postmodern shopping mall, of overlapping spaces between the familial and the commercial, of the compartmentalization of family members into subjects almost unknown to one another, and of the glossy image of global capitalistic McDonald's, produce altogether an overwhelming significance of meanings that resist the allegorical analysis but propel, instead, toward a more materialist analysis of postmodern spaces. Likewise, Rey Chow reads *The River* as engendering "a production of discursivity, one that is not exactly geared toward a centralizable and thus summarizable logic but that operates in the manner of an archaeological excavation."<sup>346</sup> My reading asks how the postmodernity of social spaces are mediated through the destabilization of the private and the public by showing how Tsai's film "empty-outs" and makes questionable the privacy of the home

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<sup>345</sup> Ping-hui Liao, "Postmodern Literary Discourse and Contemporary Public Culture in Taiwan" in *Postmodernism & China*, ed. Arif Dirlik and Xudong Zhang (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 81.

<sup>346</sup> Rey Chow, *Sentimental Fabulations, Contemporary Chinese Films: Attachment in the Age of Global Visibility* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 187.

and the public-ness of public sex through a representational strategy that I term “overlapping territories.”

Tsai destabilizes the kinship-family-home equivalence by representing familial subjects as coincidentally related, rather than naturally and intimately tied by blood or the coherence of domestic space. This representation of kinship as mere coincidental encounters within urban postmodernity is most evident in several scenes. The first opening scene in which Hsiao Kang rekindles friendship with an unnamed female friend (played by Shiang-chyi Chen) against the two-way escalator rising up and down to the entrance of Shin Kong Mitsukoshi Department Store foreshadows the ambiguity of relationship in a city marked by postmodern dystopia and overlapping spaces. First, the young woman almost passes by Hsiao Kang, and only after second thought does she recognize her old friend. The escalator in public space then allows for both encounter and missed encounter. In a crowded situation, they would probably be pushed to the side of each escalator and would surely miss one another; in a day-time non busy hour like the opening sequence in the film, the escalator built-in structure makes avoidance of gaze almost impossible and thus links up urban subjects through the visual-spatial-temporal re-compartmentalization of subjects within boxed in, inescapable moment, even when, contradictorily, such moments happen in an “open” space.

While the meaning of Shin Kong Mitsukoshi Tower remains puzzling in the film, I suggest that the compartmentalization of the building’s activities, in the supremely multifunctional sites of shopping (on its first twelfth floors and two underground floors) and life insurance business, makes the split among consumption, production, pleasure,



and work obsolete.<sup>347</sup> It was the tallest building in Taipei until 1997, the same year the film was first screened. The postmodern overcoming of different social spaces parallels the representation of Hsiao Kang's social identity as well. The "chance" encounter between the woman and him introduces him to the woman's work as a film production crew member. He is then introduced to a film director (played by renowned Hong Kong filmmaker Ann Hui), who asks him to play a dead human body/dummy floating on a dirty river because the fake prop simply does not work for authenticity. At this point, the viewer may wonder, "What is the point of having a character plays another character in a film within a film? What does the filthy river have to do with the film's title 'River?' Or with the theme of broken family and incest more specifically?"

Again, one can certainly read many fascinating symbolic references to "river" in the scene where Hsiao Kang plays the dummy. It can certainly refer to the Yellow River that is imagined as the center of Chinese civilization, and the polluting of the river as well as Hsiao Kang's body may refer to non-heterosexual relationships as a pollution of kinship and tradition. At the same time, these series of coincidences and strangely related incidents in the film serve to dissolve concrete distances across multiple spaces in Taipei, from the department store, to the river, to the film production site, to the motel room (where Hsiao Kang actually had sex with the young woman), and so on. The very staging of a heterosexual encounter between friends (or strangers?) in an early sequence of a film about queer incest further troubles any solid reading of Hsiao Kang's identity as stable in social and sexual terms. More significantly, by having Hsiao Kang play the dummy, an

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<sup>347</sup> For a brief reading of the building as postmodern, see Ping-hui Liao, "Postmodern Literary Discourse and Contemporary Public Culture in Taiwan," 79.

object that is supposed to depict the close-to-the-real resemblance of an actual dead human body, Tsai playfully depicts human subjects as interchangeable and the real and the imagined as malleable. The non-human dummy does not capture the authenticity of a dead body, yet, ironically, it is the “alive” human body of Hsiao Kang that simulates the realness of a “dead” body. By inference, Tsai shows that “real” human relationship like father and son may be more malleable than what it seems. Just as a human can turn into a dummy, the authentically alive body into an authentically dead body representationally, so too can normative kin relations turn queer.

If human subjects can be re-compartmentalized within postmodern space, kinship structure can also be de-compartmentalized into barely related encounters between postmodern subjects. Such is the picture of Hsiao Kang’s family. One intriguing but easily overlooked sequence of the film makes such de-privatizing of the family clear. The family drama surrounds the neck pain of Hsiao Kang, which the parents try various methods of Taoist cure, acupuncture, and physical therapy to no avail. Other than their concerns for their son’s pain, the parents and the son live in the home behaving as if they are renters and strangers; and the parents are more concerned with their public lives and extra-familial affairs more than their kinship roles. For example, knowing that her son suffers neck pain, the mother gives her own vibrator as a massage device to her son. At night while she is watching pornographic movies that she obtains from her pornographic movie pirater boyfriend, her son is massaging his neck with the sexual device; whereas the father is having troubles sleeping at night, probably due to his desire for young men. The home here is de-compartmentalized, de-personalized, and de-privatized through a cinematic screening of each in their room doing their own things through intersecting

montage sequence. The next shot shows the father, sitting inside the glossy image of McDonald's in the morning, fixates on a young male hustler (played by Chen Chao-jung, the actor who plays the straight young male roles, Ah Tze and Ah Jung, in *Rebels* and *Vive*). By de-personalizing and remaking the space of kinship, the film playfully links to what exists outside the home, namely the cruising activity of the father and public commercial sex in general. In a very campy way,<sup>348</sup> through such linkage to public sex, the son and the father will reunite in the most intriguing incestuous scene in the bathhouse.

The scene in question accentuates the major issues that I have examined thus far, namely the configuration of claustrophobic sexuality in postmodern space and the critical perverse remapping envisioned by queer filmmakers. Specifically, I contend that it would be too simplistic to argue for the film's privileging of commercial sex vs. private relationship; more critically, the film debunks any assumption about private and public life by depicting a possibly utopian, salvational, and interlocking relationship between kinship and public sex, between the intimate and the commercial, and between father and son as both strangers and lovers. In this way, the film moves beyond a simple elevation of public sex as queer because even the male hustler does not satisfy the desire of the father. In one scene in the bathhouse, the hustler refuses to perform fellatio on the old man. In contradistinction, in the incest scene, the father is awaiting in the dark room in the bathhouse while the son, walking through many rooms, happens to come into the dark room where the father lies in. Both, "unknown" to each other, engage in mutual affection,

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<sup>348</sup> For a reading of Tsai's as practicing camp aesthetics, see Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh and Darrell William Davis, *Taiwan Film Directors: A Treasure Island* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 217-248.



**Figure 6.** A film still from *The River*: The father intensely looks at Hsiao Kang as he finally realizes the love/incest he just committed in the bathhouse.

with the father selflessly helping the son masturbate instead of forcing Hsiao Kang to perform pleasure on him. After pleasuring the young man, the father enjoys affection by holding him from behind. The morning after, recognizing that it was his son whom he just engaged in sexual encounter, the father slapped the son's face hard. The same day, returning to the motel room (they were on a journey to find cure for the son's neck pain), the father makes a call to the religious master Mr. Liu only to find out that the master has instructed them to return to Taipei to find a doctor. The father goes out to buy breakfast for the son, while the son, turning the curtains in the room, looks up toward the bright sky.

Critics have performed different readings on these interesting turns of kinship trouble; while some comment on the possible neo-Confucian message of the father who re-normalizes his role as paternal, most agree that the film's ending urges a queering of the family. Gina Marchetti reads an optimistic call of the film's ending for sexual liberation in Taiwan: "The father's slap can be read as a wakeup call to Chinese gays that the closet cannot continue and that it is time for all homosexuals to come out of their dark cubicles and face the light of the day as Hsiao Kang does in *The River*'s closing image."<sup>349</sup> Fran Martin's reading seems a bit more aligned with my attempt to reconstitute possible spaces of sexual possibility even within the most claustrophobic, all-enclosing space of urbanity. Martin writes, "What these shots represent are perhaps paradoxically *situated* utopias: new spaces of possibility opening up within the constrained conditions of everyday life in the dystopian cities of Taiwanese (post)modernity—the spaces of love re-imagined."<sup>350</sup> By reordering the discursive limits of social spaces in urban Taipei, *The River* turns the claustrophobic space of interiority and postmodern dystopia into a kind of perverse social space. Through this perverse remapping of claustrophobia, Tsai's cinematic aesthetics also allows for the possibility of a new temporality—a queer futurity yet-to-come, as pictured by the gesture of Hsiao Kang looking up to the sky.

Through comparisons of the spatial mapping of postmodernity configured as sexual claustrophobia in the cinematic representations of Hong Kong, Beijing, and Taipei, we can rethink more critically about the spatial dimensions of sexuality in

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<sup>349</sup> Gina Marchetti, "On Tsai Ming-liang's *The River*," 126.

<sup>350</sup> Fran Martin, *Situating Sexualities: Queer Representation in Taiwanese Fiction, Film and Public Culture* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003), 180.

contemporary Chinese-language films. Thinking about the “place” of sexuality in theory of postmodernism can also productively counter the class-based Marxist explanation of postmodernism as the cultural dominants of late capitalism. Instead of “the waning of affect” in postmodern geography, Yonfan’s heavy sentimentalism in his mapping of Hong Kong, Cui Zi’en’s elegiac aesthetics in domestic interiority, and Tsai Ming-liang’s perverse de-compartmentalization of kinship structures all point to the centrality of affect and rearrangement of desire in the unpredictable reshaping of social space.<sup>351</sup> One way to move beyond what Halberstam observes as the “foundational exclusion” of sexuality from postmodern theory, which “assigned sexuality to body/local/personal and took class/global/political as its proper frame of reference” is by highlighting the effects of spatial mutations and architectural designing of cities to all forms of sexualities.<sup>352</sup> For example, the popularity of “love motels” in Taiwan, the migrations of young women in Northern parts of China to Hong Kong to work as illegal prostitutes, and the emergence of new subjects of capital like the money boy in Cui’s film all point to new modes of sexualized subjectivities in postmodern geographies and late capitalism. This turn to the sexual in our theorization of the postmodern global city also means that queer theory’s classic deconstructive and de-territorializing mode can likewise benefit from an understanding of how the rescaling of spaces in general also mutually constitute new queer subjects who may lead “normative” life at home while pursuing “queer” experiences in other parts of the city, as evident in the father figure in *The River*. The kind of queer intimacy in migration stories by Huang Biyun (Chapter 1) also

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<sup>351</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 10.

<sup>352</sup> Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, 5.

demonstrates the specificities of space for the narrative of transnational queer Chinese lives.

The next chapter will further explicate my concern with these spatial configurations of power and perverse cognitive remapping by venturing into the deterritorializing and reterritorializing power of alternative sexuality in new media in the age of media convergence. It also continues the conversation about the necessity to form a critique on developmental sexual modernity in Taiwan (see the section on queer youth films in Taiwan in Chapter 3) by undermining the assumed logics of developmental sexual liberalism that often frame Taiwan as more sexually liberatory and multicultural than the PRC and Hong Kong. It inquires into the role of new media in generating new forms of control and freedom in transnational Chinese cultures in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### **Transmedia Assemblage and Cybernetic Sexuality: Sex Scandals, New Media, and the Formation of Counter-Publics**

#### **I. Introduction**

In this chapter, I continue my methodology of queer inter-regional analysis of Chinese modernity and postmodernity by entering into the archive of new media and public spheres. I argue that despite the pronouncement of the “new” in new media, the centrality of queer sexuality, whether it is about educational information on bestiality or a televised documentary of everyday gays and lesbians in Hong Kong, still sits at the limit of what the public can handle and imagine about mediatized sexuality. Thus, I will show how inquiring into these limits of representation in Hong Kong and Taiwan and venturing into newer modes of gay and lesbian self-representations in postsocialist China help us think about not only how queer sex is represented in new media, but more importantly, about our own fear and anxiety, representational limits, and imagination about cybernetic sexuality in transnational circuits of information and capitals. For this reason, I will be using two new analytical models, which I coin “transmedia assemblage” and “cybernetic sexuality” throughout this chapter. Since both terms are not self-transparent, I will elaborate them before accounting for their cross-currents in sex scandal, new media consumption, and formations of counter-public spheres in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and China.

New media, in Chinese *xin meiti* (新媒體), is a theoretical misnomer. While the expansion of consumers’ power and contestation into media ownership through Napster and later on Limewire pronounces the “death” of traditionally organized music industry



and the advent of iTunes, new media, as I will be arguing, can be more aptly theorized as “transmedia.” Take for example international Asian gay online website for men, *www.fridae.asia*. In some respects, fridae can be seen as the Chinese equivalence of *www.gay.com* that dominates gay cyber circuits from the late 1990s to the early 2000s, which arguably is overtaken by other cyber networks recently. Yet, fridae also goes beyond the 1990s phase of chatroom by replacing that older format with newer profiles that look almost like the Chinese counterpart of facebook. Each registered member can set up a profile, and this profile will include personal information (as much as you want to share) like gender, age, height, weight, and nationality. Below your photogenic profile there are also functional buttons that you can click on, indicating “heart,” “messaging,” “add to friend,” and “add to favorite.” Using fridae as an example of one among other emerging queer online networks situated in Asia and transnational Chinese sites, we can see that the so-called “new media” also mixes with and depends on older media functionality such as “messaging” in the form of an email, “profile” in the form of both older chatroom style and newer facebook format, and newer cybernetic function that copies after the style of YouTube: “add to favorite.”<sup>353</sup>

New media, as shown in the case of fridae, is re-theorized as transmedia here, or better yet, transmedia assemblage, where an array of information, technologies, new modes of self-expression, and new national and international regimes of surveillance and control converge. In calling these compartments of new media and convergence between old and new media as assemblage, and in refusing to accept the clear divide between the

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<sup>353</sup> For an excellent discussion of how “new media” draws its condition of possibility from pre-existing media forms and from the functionality of films, see Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 25, 50-51.

old and the new aspects of media as a public medium, I am obviously drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's concept of rhizome as an assemblage of knowledge that always undergoes deterritorialization. Their assemblage theory is linked to the atomic theory of the  $(n-1)$ , which subtracts entities even as it expands in its multiplicity. There is no essential numerical order of the  $n$ , but always already  $n-1$  in its relentless process of *becoming*. Deleuze and Guattari sets out their task of revolting against structural psychoanalysis and other forms of structuralist theory in this opening statement in *A Thousand Plateaus*: "All we talk about are multiplicities, lines, strata, and segmentarities, lines of flight and intensities, machinic assemblages and their various types, bodies without organs and their construction and selection, the plane of consistency, and in each case the units of measure."<sup>354</sup>

If their connotation of assemblage as machinic strikes anyone as structuralist or delimiting, it reads to me as a continuation of their earlier theory of desire as desiring-production. Desire, in their micropolitics, is irreducible to capitalism. There is no superstructure of ideology and sexuality that sits above the hardcore base of capitalism, labor, and production. The desiring machine is part of the history of the ever expanding horizon of capital, even in its current phase of information highway and liquid capitalism. Thus, in the first volume that precedes *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari posits desire as a form of grafting onto a previous production, in short, a production of production. They argue, "Producing is always something 'grafted onto' the product; and for that reason desiring-production is production of production, just as every machine is a

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<sup>354</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 4.

machine connected to another machine.”<sup>355</sup> In hindsight, we can understand that the machinic assemblage that they talk about in the later volume significantly draws on their theory of desire as a form of grafting that does not let go of the previous cultural production; but in the process of production of the production of desire and capital, the newly grafted “thing” necessarily contains the old in its “new” form. In this way, we can now rewrite new media as a form of production of production, a *transmedia assemblage* that is grafted onto every representation of mediated desire, yet never outside of the machinery of capitalism.

Building on the enormous task set out by Deleuze and Guattari, I likewise theorize new media as the *thing* that grafts onto the existing media forms: in its assemblage with sexuality and state capitalist formation, transmedia assemblage actively produces new production of desire, even as newer mechanism of legal restriction and governmental control over “what can be screened” exert new modes of governmentality. In short, transmedia assemblage indexes the double bind of freedom and control in the ever proliferating media in transnational Chinese cultures. Some urgent questions that motivate my study of transmedia and sexuality are: What is it about sex that we desire? How far can we screen and live out sexual knowledge? Who decides between obscenity and knowledge, and what is the role of feminism vis-à-vis the state in this redrawing of sexual boundary? What is sexual scandal? Is there something productive that emerges from the midst and aftermath of scandal? How can activist sexual liberations re-territorialize the debate on sexual shame? Is mainland China always lagging behind the

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<sup>355</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (New York: The Viking Press, 1977), 6.

development of sexual democracy, as we currently assume? How does new media change these assumptions about developmentalism and sexuality? In asking these questions I am not after the beginning and the end of new media in its convergence with the old; rather, we need to unpack what this production of production enables and disenables in order to posit moments of lines of flights that escape systems of control and usher in new frontiers of queer counterpublics.

Transmedia assemblage is another way to argue that sexuality is no longer a privatized domain of analysis (if it ever was); in the age of media convergence, sexuality has become what one can say, *cybernetic sexuality*. Briefly, cybernetics, a concept originally proposed by American mathematician Norbert Wiener in 1948, encompasses the fields of physical sciences, life sciences, and social sciences to propose new ways of studying and inventing information, control, and system between the animal (humans included) and the machine.<sup>356</sup> It provides material conditions that form the basis for online communication since the mid-1990s, sometimes referred to as “the age of fiber-optics,”<sup>357</sup> the network society,<sup>358</sup> or the information age in more popular usages. Most relevant to a theory of sexuality within nodes of media assemblage is Manuel Castells’ theory of “the space of flows” and “timeless time” that characterize the simultaneity of networks and their power to transcend borders of nation states, or sometimes only across the borders of the office in the next town. The triumph of cybernetic time (real-time) over

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<sup>356</sup> Norbert Wiener, *Cybernetics; or, Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1961).

<sup>357</sup> Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Control and Freedom: Power and Paranoia in the Age of Fiber Optics* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2006).

<sup>358</sup> Manuel Castells, “Informationalism, Networks, and the Network Society: A Theoretical Blueprint,” in *The Network Society: A Cross-cultural Perspective*, ed. Manuel Castells (MA, Northampton: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2004), 3-45.

world spaces is both imaginary and concrete. It is enabled by the expansion of real development in the material progress of telecommunication, to dialed up internet, to cable internet, and to the most recent convergence between different forms of media: iTunes, cable television, personalized TV options (TiVo), youtubbing, twitter (weibo in China), and iPhone. Correspondingly, users have to imagine themselves already inhabiting this “space of flows” and “timeless time” in order to feel oneself “at home” within this latest frontier of the global imagined community. It bespeaks to what Arjun Appadurai already said more than a decade ago about globalization as the “work of the imagination.”<sup>359</sup> Work because we have to *work through* our global aspirations through these very concrete networks of fiber optics.

The imaginary and concreteness of cybernetics parallels sexuality’s constant trafficking between the imaginary and the real, fantasy and reality. Indeed, one cannot really theorize the “cyber” without recalling the “sexual.” But cybernetic sexuality is more than cybersex. Certainly, cybersex has become a cultural dominant in transnational Chinese cultures: from the public juicy scandal of Taiwan female politician Chu Mei-feng (璩美鳳) in the exposure of a sex tape with a married man in 2001; to a British young male blogger named David Marriot, who self-titled himself “Chinabounder” in 2006 and wrote about numerous sexscapes he had with young Shanghai women, which sparked intense Chinese nationalism among netizens to hunt him down;<sup>360</sup> to the more recent Edison Chen’s scandal that involves the leaking of nude photos taken between him and several big female stars in Hong Kong in 2008; or, to everyday romance and sex

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<sup>359</sup> Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 3.

<sup>360</sup> Justin McCurry and Jonathan Watts, “China Sex Blogger Reveals His Identity,” *The Guardian*, July 17, 2008, accessed July 19, 2011, <http://http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2008/jul/17/blogging.internet1>.

between people from all walks of life, cybersex is as juicy as one can handle. However, to theorize sex (the act) and sexuality (the history and theory thereof) requires more than simply glimpsing the ubiquity of it in these regions. It returns us to the very biopolitics of sexuality, in its latest reinvention on the information highway. Cybernetic sexuality here refers to the way freedom is imagined, fantasized, promised, and lived out in the age of fiber-optics, even as new regimes of control and surveillance ensue. Perhaps precisely because we enter into new regimes of control that the freedom and desire to transcend these sexual borders become ever more urgent, ever more desirable. Thus, cybernetic sexuality points to the imaginary “freedom” that we embody when we act out, or better yet, leak out sexual information online.

Foucault’s coinage of the term speaker’s benefit is most helpful here when he describes the repressive hypothesis that underpins the productive aspect of sexuality in Victorian Europe during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Foucault argues, “If sex is repressed, that is, condemned to prohibition, nonexistence, and silence, then the mere fact that one is speaking about it has the appearance of a deliberate transgression.”<sup>361</sup> Building on Foucault, “new media” theorists argue that we are currently not dealing so much with a repressive hypothesis but with a “freedom hypothesis” that imagines the network as relatively open and free (although hardcore cyber Marxists would still maintain that internet can be re-contained by big corporate interests). In Wendy Chun’s defining book on sexuality, paranoia and fiber-optic networks, she distinguishes her focus as a critical divergence from Foucault: “Unlike Foucault’s investigation, this work focuses on the impact of sexual ‘freedom’ rather than the historical processes that led us to the ironic

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<sup>361</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol 1: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 6.

belief that sexuality—with its attendant call to ‘tell everything’—could liberate us.”<sup>362</sup> If Foucault argues that sexuality is never as repressed as we think it was, Chun, writing at the current moment, is arguing somewhat from the other end of the debate—sexuality in the age of informationalism is and will never be as free as we desire it to be. Yet, I want to hold the tension between Foucault and Chun’s insights here as a productive one, that what we are witnessing here is simply another frontier of sexuality that will never be fully transcended. Instead of the discourse of “the speaker’s benefit,” we can reformulate Foucault, think with Chun, and elaborate the cybernetic subject as desiring “the user’s benefit.” The user of the network, imagining himself as a free, unlocatable, invisible yet active spectator, desires to screen himself and others into the open network. The user’s benefit fictively promises for us the total liberation of sexuality. Simultaneously, it is precisely in our re-inscription of our sexual bodies, self, and language online that sexuality becomes wedded to the network of power once again, this time imagined as free rather than repressed. Cybernetic sexuality captures this aspect of the user’s benefit that Chun calls the double bind of control and freedom.

Pairing the convergence of media in transmedia assemblage alongside my coinage of cybernetic sexuality then, I will closely examine four major media events about sexuality, its double bind of freedom and paranoia, in the contexts of Taiwan, Hong Kong, and mainland China at the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Tracing these “case studies” chronologically, I closely read two legal cases concerning the role of non-heterosexual sex in media arena in Taiwan and Hong Kong in order to undermine the assumption of

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<sup>362</sup> Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Control and Freedom*, 27.

neoliberalization and democratization of sexual rights in post-Martial Law Taiwan and postcolonial Hong Kong.

First, I study the 2003-2004 Taiwan case that involves the prosecution of sexuality and queer studies scholar and activist He Chunrui/何春蕤 (known as Josephine Ho internationally), who is a professor of English at National Central University (NCU). This case involves an intense media exposure of a hyperlink to human-animal sexual information, including links to pictures that were hosted for several years at the Center for the Study of Sexualities at NCU. Surprisingly, joining the forces that brought charges to Professor Ho were also women groups, in addition to NGOs for child protections and anti-child prostitution organizations. While Ho eventually was cleared of all allegations from the case in the first trial and the appeal trial, I want to focus less on the legal morality of the case and more on the positioning of new media as a source of sexual threat to the category of the vulnerable “child of the nation,” which is an imaginary category that incites sympathy, protection, and rights for the future reproductive health of the Taiwan nation.<sup>363</sup> I argue that the legal and moral desire to re-contain cybernetic sexuality ultimately fails given the transmedia circulation of sexual images in the age of instant reproducibility of images and information. Finally, this case shows that sexual scandal, instead of re-shaming the queer subject in question (Ho, bestiality, human-species sexuality), can also hold the potential in productively enlarging our relation to what is considered obscene. Furthermore, this case radically challenges, or at least puts a halt to, the rapid ascendancy of state feminism in contemporary Taiwan.

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<sup>363</sup> For more on how the child is always already posited as the object and subject that we must fight for in a sexual politics pre-determined for the brighter future, namely the child of futurity, see Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).



If the Taiwan case illustrates the sex-phobic convergence between the neoliberal state that is supposedly democratic and state feminism in opposition against transmedia circulation of queer sexuality, the Hong Kong case points to a dishearteningly increasing self-censorship of human rights and sexuality in postcolonial Hong Kong. In July 2006, Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK) broadcasted 同志·戀人 (*Tongzhi Lovers*). After the TV program, the Broadcasting Authority (廣播事務管理局), an independent unit of Hong Kong government that regulates all TV channel professionalism, received a moderate amount of complaints. As a result, in January 2007, Broadcasting Authority handed down a severe admonishment according to its Codes of Conducts 《通用業務守則》. In particular, the unit cited that RTHK violated the rule of “impartiality in professional news broadcasting.” It censored RTHK for advocating one-sided opinion of gay marriage and gay rights without considering the “harmful effects” on children who may not be exposed to such topics as homosexuality. The main interviewee, Cho Man Kit (曹文傑), who is also a sexuality studies doctoral student at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, sued the Broadcasting Authority in 2008 and subsequently won the case concerning sexual discrimination and breach of free speech. In my reading of this case, I argue that while the internet does allow a proliferation of sexual image, we are currently experiencing a simultaneous re-containment, and re-territorialization of “old media” as the safe zone from sexual knowledge. I show how Cho Man Kit’s online activism and gathering of support in his legal battle demonstrates the promising activism through transmedia assemblage of sexual freedom.

In contradistinction, I point not so much to cases that involve the censorship of gay, lesbian, and queer identities in mainland China but the emergence of queer self-expressions for the sake of creative juxtaposition. I want to debunk the often-assumed view that Hong Kong and Taiwan are necessarily more sexually free and democratic than the mainland in their treatments of gay and lesbian subjects. Instead, I illustrate how gay and lesbian subjects in the PRC exercise alternative notions of cultural citizenship through the example of an internet talk show called *Tongxing xianglian* (Same Sex Connection/ 同性相連) in 2007. I then quickly juxtapose this show with newer technologies of cyber communication enabled by the emergence of weibo, a Chinese version of twitter and facebook. I will conclude briefly with a recent controversy surrounding a homophobic comment by a mainland celebrity on weibo, which incites activism from fellow celebrities from China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong and passionate responses from academics and a TV news reporter of the state backed and supported main network, CCTV (China Central Television). The way old media (state owned television) supports and re-appropriates online activism points to both the possibility of envisioning queer media citizenship online and the urgent task of conceiving gay and lesbian activism in the critical convergence of old and new media.

## **II. Cybernetic Sexuality as Contagion: Legality, Queer Knowledge Production, and the Ascendency of State Feminism**

In cyberspace, at the tips of our fingers, our mouse, and in front of our computer screen, we imagine ourselves as transparent subjects of the penultimate communication, freely transmitting information from this side to the other side of the interface. But this transmedium that constructs our imaginary easy transmission of knowledge also links one

user to another, one site to another, one form of knowledge to “other” unwanted knowledge; cyberspace does not guarantee us from the threat of the other. Chun sums up this inherent contradiction about the freedom of user in isolation and the *imperative to connect* succinctly: “In contrast, the Internet physically separates, but virtually connects.”<sup>364</sup> New media scholar Henry Jenkins, in his work on “convergence culture,” also emphasizes that the digital revolution is not so much about containing all information inside one blackbox or machine we call the interface. “Instead, convergence represents a cultural shift as consumers are encouraged to seek out new information and make connections among dispersed media content. This book is about the work—and play—spectators perform in the new media system.”<sup>365</sup>

Jenkins’ notion of participatory culture lends crucial insight on cybernetic sexuality; in this new discursive and material medium called the interface, we participate in the reshaping of sexual culture. There is no one side that is more aggressive and shameful in transmitting sexual knowledge. When sexual matters transmit to the other side, it assumes participation. This is as much the participation in expanding our autoerotic and intersubjective zones of pleasure *as well as* in potentially unwanted information. Convergence then implies the connectivity between and transferability of older form of knowledge and emerging forms of knowing. Furthermore, our participation in this convergence culture implies that we can self-customize what virtual spaces on the interface we want to enter into, as well as our vulnerability of entering and linking up with more contagious forms of sexuality. Contagion then, is not the unwanted object of

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<sup>364</sup> Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Control and Freedom*, 86.

<sup>365</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 3.

convergence—it is the defining aspect of this age of cybernetic sexuality. Yet, the framing of queer sex as object of contagion is precisely what underlines the larger moral panics surrounding the infamous Zoophilia Webpage Incident that involves the prosecution of Josephine Ho. I will first provide some background information about the case as well as the current state of feminist and sexual politics in Taiwan in order to map the interlocking relationship between sexuality, cyberspace, contagion, and the imaginary figure of the child in this case concerning obscenity.

On April 10, 2003, *The China Times* published an article entitled “A Special Look on Human-Animal Sex: Hyperlink Enters National Central University Website.”<sup>366</sup> This piece by Chen Luo-wei (陳洛薇) employs a sensationalist approach that incites the reader’s curiosity and shocked response. If new media and especially cyberspace is imagined to be both the new libratory space and in this case figured as the source of contagion, I will argue that Chen’s first “outbreak” of the news is both “infected” by cybernetic sexuality and in turn, infecting the public as well, grafting onto the very scandal it hopes to sensationalize; and in doing so, it is already part of the processes of desiring-production, intrinsic to transmedia. Chen writes obscenely, “Enter into National Central University’s Center for the Study of Sexualities website can connect you to a webpage called “sexual liberation.” That webpage recently showcases shocking images of zoophilia and bestiality between human and zebra, pig, bear, etc. Many women’s groups yesterday joined forces to censor this website as harming the spiritual health of

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<sup>366</sup> Chen Lou-wei, “A Special Look on Human-Animal Sex: Hyperlink Enters National Central University Website,” *China Times*, April 10, 2003. Reprinted in He Chunrui (何春蕤), ed., *Dong wu lian wang ye shi jian bu* (動物戀網頁事件簿) (Chungli, Taiwan: Guo li zhong yang da xue xing / bie yan jiu shi, 2006), 492. [Josephine Ho, ed., *The Zoophilia Webpage Incident*] Ho’s edited collection is the only authorized account of the whole incident by herself, including almost all the media coverage of the event, as well as letters from her supporters.

child and youth and will begin the effort to launch anti-obscenity campaign with religious organizations.” In the same piece, Chen continues to describe other scenes of sexual encounters between human and animals: “Sexual liberation webpage not only introduces “zoophilia,” it also pastes photo album of appalling photos of human-animal intercourse...featuring a sheep riding on the top of a nude girl, a snake entering the vagina; it even shows a woman sucking the dog’s penis, an animal ejaculating on the girl’s breasts, face, and inside her mouth, and a naked man penetrating the dog’s vagina.”<sup>367</sup>

As evident from the passages quoted above, news reporting understood as “old media” cannot be said to be separated from the very “new media” that it reports. It re-territorializes the language of cyberspace, re-staging the very imaginary scene of any user entering “accidentally” into the webpage, and re-performing the appalling response that the women’s groups must have felt upon their foray into the archive of zoophilia. So that even when Chen’s journalistic account is supposed to objectively distance itself from the very sensational object it depicts, it is already part of the machinery of transmedia assemblage, thus repositioning the reader of news as a cybernetic subject as well. This proliferating, uncontainable, and transmediatized potentiality of cybernetic sexuality can, again, be understood in Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of desire as schizoanalysis, which I view as the overall contribution of their take on the inter-penetration between desire and production and infrastructure and superstructure to the theory of new media as transmedia assemblage. They outline their manifesto on desire: “The most general principle of schizoanalysis is that desire is always constitutive of a social field. In any case desire

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<sup>367</sup> Ibid, 492.

belongs to the infrastructure, not to ideology: desire is in production as social production, just as production is in desire as desiring-production.”<sup>368</sup> Schizoanalysis points to the heart of the case about the webpage materials as obscene; by framing the materials as immoral and harmful to the societal reproduction of itself, women groups’ initial response already frames animality and human-animal encounter as non-reproductive to the social field. Yet, if we take the convergence of old and new media seriously, and the very schizo, rhizomatic energy of queer sexual knowledge as penetrative of the whole social field, then the sensationalism of the news outbreak becomes part and parcel of the social field that desire travels, instead of existing outside the sexual contagion from which it distances itself.<sup>369</sup>

Apart from the delimiting language of viewing the zoophilia webpage as cultural contagion to the future of the nation and the child, we must also situate the sex-phobic responses from conservative groups within the political climate of the ascendancy of state feminism in post-Martial Law Taiwan. Taiwan state feminism emerged in full-fledged mode by 1997 in the prostitution rights debate during which the city of Taipei suddenly abolished legally licensed prostitution, which splits the feminist movement between state feminism on the one hand and sex radical feminists (which Josephine Ho is part of) and queer activists on the other. However, its political ascendancy can be further historicized

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<sup>368</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 348.

<sup>369</sup> For another view on the always already doom-to-be-failed project of containing and censoring pornography from conservative “feminist” groups, see Judith Butler’s essay, “The Force of Fantasy: Feminism, Mapplethorpe, and Discursive Excess,” *Differences* 2.2 (1990):105-125. However, while Butler wants to debunk the claim that sexual fantasy and violation of women in porn necessarily leads to violence in real live, a claim of equivalence made too carelessly by anti-porn feminists and policymakers, I think Deleuze and Guattari’s theorization of desire as inseparable from social production stresses less on the conflation between fantasy and the real, but more on the inescapability of the censors from the field of desire, which will necessarily inflect their own subject positions as well.

through the KMT state's management of sex work and non-heteronormative sexuality since its takeover of the island in 1949.

Specifically, Hans Tao-Ming Huang has provided a powerful genealogical critique on how the KMT government regulated prostitution and homosexual conducts in its early state formation in the 1950s, during the complicit Cold War alliance with the U.S. through the urban entertainment districts, which led to the current state feminist opposition to obscenity and licensed prostitution. The imperative to cultivate the upright national citizen (*guomin*) presumes the subject position of Chiang Kai-shek as the “sage-king.” Under the tremendous effort to re-nationalize the national body after its takeover, the KMT government sought to erase teahouse and geisha house that were prominent spaces of sexual pleasure in the Japanese colonial period. By the 1960s, the state has given the police the power to 1) root out illicit prostitutes and check them for venereal diseases; 2) register and manage brothels; 3) “rescue” prostitutes to help them regain respectability (often by marriage); 4) reforming these women.<sup>370</sup> Huang's critique illustrates the confluent method of state management of non-normative sexuality in which “female sexuality and male homosexuality have both been historically regulated by the state *through* its banning of prostitution in postwar Taiwan.”<sup>371</sup>

While Huang's work situates the socio-historical formation of “virtuous custom” through the police state and the moral position of the sage-king as the historical backdrop of state feminism in the 1990s, Naifei Ding more pointedly argues that state feminism renders sexual radicals, prostitutes, and queers as the “parasites” of the “proper” women's

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<sup>370</sup> Hans Tao-Ming Huang, “State Power, Prostitution and Sexual Order in Taiwan: Toward a Genealogical Critique of ‘Virtuous Custom,’” *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 5.2 (2004): 237-262, 241.

<sup>371</sup> *Ibid*, 251.

movement. Ding shows how state feminists like Fang-mei Lin (林芳玫) and Yu-xiou Liu (劉毓秀) polarize the debate between state feminists who advocate for issues like “universal rights,” childcare, and retirement care versus sex radicals who barely occupy the fringe of the movement, whose energy is devoted to non-reproductive aspects of marginal groups. Ding points out that such polarization posits state feminism in post-KMT and post-Martial Law Taiwan as the rightful heir of the sage-king, namely the Confucian sage-queen. Ding theorizes the neoliberal ascendancy of Taiwan state feminism: “Feminism is the arm of conquest, and the goal is the machine of government. It must be taken over, and once in the hands of women, governance by women will change the machinery itself, as well as changing simultaneously the dominant patriarchal logic. But who is speaking and strategizing? This question can only be reached via the mediating position of housewives, given prominence as the catalyst subject of state feminism.”<sup>372</sup> Given state feminism’s legitimate self-positioning as the rightful articulation of what feminist politics holds for contemporary Taiwan and its domestic familial sanctity, it is not surprising that state feminism posits “the child” as the imaginary future of the nation vis-à-vis the “perversity” of sex radical feminism, which Josephine Ho embodies.

Ho’s case points to the irreducible contradiction in the age of transmedia assemblage. In this assemblage of knowledge where queer sexuality and animal-human encounters “clash” with the limit of academic freedom, the vulnerability of the child as easily corrupted by zoophilia precisely depends on the assumption of what I term “the

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<sup>372</sup> Naifei Ding, “Prostitutes, Parasites and the House of State Feminism,” *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 1.2 (2000):305-318, 312.



user's benefit." The women's groups and religious organization assume the child as freely accessible, unlocatable, yet existing everywhere in the virtual world; thus his freedom to connect in cyberspace precisely exposes his vulnerability to Ho's sexual liberation link, which links to another hyperlink that contains images of bestiality. Several questions arise here: how can the same imaginary figure of the child be vulnerable and in need of proper guidance, yet at the same time his very vulnerable self is ironically premised on his virtual savviness, his knowledge of virtuality? Furthermore, how is academic knowledge production implicated in this re-disciplining of cybernetic sexuality? Especially since cybernetic sexuality is never far from the double-bind of freedom-as-control (to borrow Chun's term once again), what new modes of discipline and governmentality of knowledge as such emerges from this case, and how does the academic institution respond to this publicly generated sex phobia?

First, some notes on the initial response from the public and the self-generating and sensational aspect of this case point to some interesting interface between new media and old media in the age of media's competition for generating "fresh" exciting news. Ho's reflection points out that *China Times* news reporter Chen first approached her through phone interview when she was a visiting research professor at the Ochanomizu University's Institute for Sex and Gender Research in Tokyo. On April 8, 2003, two days before Chen broke the news on *China Times*, she conducted a phone interview with Professor Ho, who was physically in Tokyo. Chen became interested in interviewing Ho because Ho had participated in a political activity about using nude bodies to protest the U.S. invasion of Iraq. Ho recounts that Chen at that moment also raised her curiosity about the Center for the Study of Sexualities webpage. While Chen's first phone call did

not mention anything about zoophilia, her second call a day later indicated her “new discovery,” especially mentioning the existence of the zoophilia hyperlink in the sexual liberation database. One question that Chen asked was: “Putting images as ‘bone-showing’ (a Chinese phrase for sexually explicit material) like this on the internet, do you think that is appropriate for child?” Ho recalls that she directly confronted Chen’s assumption about the boundary of sexual knowledge by responding professionally: “I directly tell her that as adults we need to use a calm approach to view marginalized subjects. If we are not easily surprised and shocked about things that deviate from us, then children will not inherit from young age an attitude that discriminates other. This is not a question about what is proper and improper for viewing.”<sup>373</sup> Ho’s response radically counters the assumed differentiation between the adult subject and the child subject, the former as knowledgeable about what is improper in visual culture while the latter presumed as vulnerable to obscenity. Rather, Ho places the responsibility of obscenity back to the inquisitive subject for sexual and media perversity, asking her to assume the responsibility of expanding our youth’s tolerance and acceptance for queer knowledge.

Correspondingly, in Ho’s critical reflection she shows that the desire to generate this phobia about obscenity online and its invasion into the academic space of production is crucially related to the competition for “news values” as a form of desiring-production in the age of transmedia convergence. Ho recounts that early that year in 2003 the Hong Kong news franchise *Apples Daily* had announced its official publishing in Taiwan, thus all other newspapers, fearing competition, adopted the approach of “apple-ization.” *Apple Daily* is infamous for its daring political reports, sometimes to the point of angering

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<sup>373</sup> Josephine Ho, ed., *The Zoophilia Webpage Incident*, 4-5.

mainland officials as well as for its all-pervasive gossip columns. Thus, at that moment in Taiwan there was a media frenzy in searching out more outrageous news online, creating “news values” from without.<sup>374</sup> From this angle it becomes evident that old media has, in this age of convergence, feverishly clings more than ever onto the expanding horizon of sexuality in “new media,” reattaching itself to the cyberspace in order to reclaim its news values. The scandal and its aftermath, NCU’s official response and subsequent censoring of Professor Ho, and the ensuing legal battles altogether ensure limitless productivity of news values, generating an unbelievable energy that is charged into the process of the production of the production of desire. From this viewpoint then, the news media is never far from the very queer sexuality it seeks to degenerate.

From the unfolding of the zoophilia case, a critical inquiry becomes possible in disentangling the ways in which academic institution, under the ever-threatening power of state feminism and legality, re-disciplines its own academic freedom as necessarily incompatible with cybernetic sexuality. In other words, the institution of academic knowledge seeks to disengage itself from what is considered improper sexual knowledge under the intense and collusive enjoinder of power between state feminism and legality. NCU’s administrative authority, the newly appointed principle Liu Quan-sheng (劉全生) was very unkind after the exposure of the case. Given that Ho was still physically in Japan and could not represent herself at the school, her colleagues Zeng Anguo (曾安國) and Ding Naifei from the English department decided to meet with Liu first to understand what the school’s firm stance was on the case. After the meeting, Zeng informed Ho that the meeting was extremely unfriendly and the principle even chastised them for allowing

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<sup>374</sup> Ibid, vi-vii.

something of this sort to happen in the department. The tone seems to be that this case can affect even the continual existence of the Center for the Study of Sexualities, with possible implication that Ho can be fired. Seeking to re-contain or even immunize itself from the “contagion” that is queer sexuality, the Office of the Secretary of NCU posted its three clarification points on the incident: 1) The sexual liberation link on NCU’s English department’s Center for the Study of Sexualities webpage does not belong to NCU; it is hyperlinked from a commercial website. If it is truly involved in obscene pictures, while respecting investigating our school will also use our own lawyer to proceed to investigation. 2) While respecting academic research and freedom, our school also embodies the duty for education. If this incident creates societal harm to the next generation, our school will try to negotiate with and persuade Professor Ho. 3) NCU’s secretary Zhu Jianmin (朱建民) has spoken strongly to the news media that “this act has already exceeded the boundary of academic freedom; it is definitely not the proper behavior of an educator.”<sup>375</sup>

Like the ideology of state feminism that enshrines itself as the proper subject of women’s issues, placing the housewives and the domestic family as the proper sites of rights and entitlement, the institution NCU deems itself capable of pursuing and identifying only certain knowledge of sexuality and imbues itself with the morality of defining the very limits of academic freedom. In this case, the “freedom” that the institution defines under the duress of state feminism and legal discipline becomes the “freedom to discipline” sexual knowledge rather than the freedom of academic knowledge production.

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<sup>375</sup> Ibid, 20.

To further illustrate the efforts of women's groups and religious institutions in their conjoined efforts to discipline the undisciplined nature of cybernetic sexuality and queer knowledge production, it is necessary to understand what kind of legality is involved in this case and the radical ways in which Josephine Ho and her queer colleagues performed to rearticulate an alternative form of academic institution, one that crosses national sites and borders in its formation of queer counterpublics. On June 23, 2003, 11 organizations filed lawsuit against Ho. While the constituencies of these organizations are not one and the same, they mainly comprise of women's groups that narrowly articulate vision of state feminism and religious groups that concern themselves with child prostitution. Among the plaintiffs are Tseng Tsai Mei-tso (曾蔡美佐), the head of the Republic of the People Publishing Committee Fund; Lee Li-fen (李麗芬), Secretary of Taiwan Committee on the Termination of Child Prostitution; and Zhang Chao-qing (張焯青), the Overseer of National Teacher Association. The main criminal law that is adjudicated is Criminal Law 235, which states: "This law prohibits the spread, circulation, and sale of obscene writings, pictures, visual and sound, film and other products; or publicly showing and assisting others in viewing and listening to these materials. The punishment ranges from imprisonment under a 2-year term or \$30,000 fine."<sup>376</sup>

Responding to the allegation and the impending real legal threats to both the Center for the Study of Sexualities and Josephine Ho herself, Ho, her colleagues, and other activist groups for sexual minorities solicited support from organization, professors,

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<sup>376</sup> For a detailed description and explanation of the Taiwan Criminal Law 235, see *Taiwan Law Webpage*, accessed July 28, 2011, [http://www.lawtw.com/article.php?template=article\\_content&area=free\\_browse&parent\\_path=,1,2169,2233,&job\\_id=112373&article\\_category\\_id=1692&article\\_id=51066](http://www.lawtw.com/article.php?template=article_content&area=free_browse&parent_path=,1,2169,2233,&job_id=112373&article_category_id=1692&article_id=51066).

and public intellectuals from local and abroad. Before Ho's arrival back to Taiwan, these activist groups held an event that critiqued conservative censorship titled "Academic White Terror under Sex phobia" on April 26, 2003. Long time queer activist Wang Ping organized the event to publicize support for Ho, with some of the most important academics in Taiwan speaking and in attendance, including Jen-peng Liu (劉人鵬), Zhu weicheng (朱偉誠), Chen kuan-hsing (陳光興), and others. It was at that meeting that the idea of internet online petition and signature emerged. By February 28, 2004, 1,457 concerned people have signed the petition in support of Ho, including scholars such as Gayle Rubin, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Judith Butler, Judith Halberstam, Lee Edelman, Arif Dirlik, Jing Wang, Bruce Robbins, and others. Prominent queer literary scholar D.A. Miller especially mentioned in the petition that given that he gave the inaugural speech at the Center years ago and the extremely kind and exciting academic environment that the space fostered, it is an insult that what he participated in came to be known as "obscene." He writes, "It would better be called 'thought.'"<sup>377</sup>

In addition, two international human rights organizations, Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights and the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, listed the case as urgent; the former provided substantial support for the legal costs of the case. If we can understand cybernetic sexuality as one that is highly rhizomatic, this transnational activism that emerges in the midst of the case can be theorized through Deleuze and Guattari's language as one incident of deterritorialization. They call on the schizophrenic activist: "Write, form a rhizome, increase your territory by

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<sup>377</sup> The petition letter and the complete list of people who signed in support of Ho's case can be found here, accessed August 1, 2011, <http://sex.ncu.edu.tw/animal-love/support/support-englist.htm>.

detritorialization, extend the line of flight to the point where it becomes an abstract machine covering the entire plane of consistency.”<sup>378</sup> This transnational form of activism destabilizes what counts as proper academic knowledge by owning up the very perversity that brings the case into existence. By claiming perverse sexuality as legitimate form of knowledge and social practice, activist groups de-territorialize the boundary of the normal through cybernetic means. This transnational activism demonstrates a minor transnationalism that forms queer coalition horizontally, which short-circuits the means of the state as the adjudication of power and legitimacy.<sup>379</sup>

While transnational activist effort in the signature petition signals an alternative articulation of academic freedom and community, Ho’s own self-representation in court also critically voiced series of rebuttals that get to the heart of several issues: state feminists’ imaginary positing of the child, the complexity of cybernetic sexuality that goes beyond the contagion/source-target model, and the importance of cultural studies in generating queer form of knowledge beyond canonical sexology, the only form of sexual knowledge deemed “proper” in the public sphere. The case first opened on January 16, 2004 at the Taipei Provincial Judicial Court, but it was not until the fourth proceeding on May 28, 2004 that Josephine Ho was finally allowed to testify. In her “ten thousand words” speech, Ho began her statement by pointing out the insulting nature of the Criminal Law 235 in its application to academic knowledge housed in cultural studies. She speaks, “Treating this hyperlink as spreading obscenity shows the prosecutor’s lack of academic research knowledge and disrespect... Nowadays the main research agenda in

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<sup>378</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 11.

<sup>379</sup> Francoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih, ed., *Minor Transnationalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 11.



**Figure 7.** Josephine Ho, with the microphone, held up 50-feet long reprints of online petition signatures outside of the court.

English department is cultural studies, including the cultural studies of sex and sexuality. The fact that NCU's English department petitioned in the past to create a doctoral program in cultural studies as target field points to the centrality of cultural studies to academia. Why do I have to say these things? Because the prosecutor may wonder: why does an English professor study something unrelated to her subject: sexual liberation link, zoophilia hyperlink and images; these must be unrelated to her professional field. Basically she is unprofessional, just like hanging sheep's head while selling dog meat (掛羊頭賣狗肉, a Chinese slang for being a hypocrite, not doing what one preaches)."<sup>380</sup> Ho goes on to elaborate on the inseparable connection between cultural studies and

<sup>380</sup> Josephine Ho, ed., *The Zoophilia Webpage Incident*, 212.



sexuality studies, citing Gaston Dubois-Desaulle's book on bestiality in 1933 as evidence that animal-human sex is not illegitimate topics in public discussion.<sup>381</sup>

Regarding the issue of child's vulnerability and the imaginary invocation of the child as both easily exposed to harm but highly acquainted with virtuality, Ho cites a well-respected historical studies of Chinese sexuality by Liu Dalin (劉達臨), which shows an illustration of an ancient Chinese painting in which the grandchild sits on the laps of the grandfather, playing with the old man's penis while the father looks on. Ho argues that this kind of historical example suggests that children sexuality is culturally situated and cannot be homogenized. Ho reasons: "This proves that ancient treatment of children was not as sexphobic as our contemporary age."<sup>382</sup> Finally, regarding the issue of how the Center for the Study of Sexualities webpage assists in "spreading" obscene images, Ho argues that this view obscures the complexity of the intractability of images in the age of informatics and cyber connectivity. She contends, "The media and prosecutor assume that our webpage 'pastes' bestiality pictures, making it sound like our webpage 'owns' these pictures and intentionally shows it for the public. First, the hyperlink that contains these images is hosted at [www.gautier-x.com](http://www.gautier-x.com); this domain still exists and you can search by Google. Second, the images were provided by internet users hyperlinked from [www.dreansdeliriuns.hpg.com.br](http://www.dreansdeliriuns.hpg.com.br); this is a porn webpage, and the domain is housed in Brazil. It existed two months ago but already disappears by now."<sup>383</sup> Ho goes on to argue that if providing the capacity to connect to these other hyperlinks constitutes crime under the 235 provision, then the university NCU that houses the English department, which

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<sup>381</sup> Gaston Dubois-Desaulle, *Bestiality: An Historical, Medical, Legal, and Literary Study* (Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 1933, 2003).

<sup>382</sup> Josephine Ho, ed., *The Zoophilia Webpage Incident*, 214.

<sup>383</sup> Ibid, 222.

houses the Center for the Study of Sexualities, would also be prosecuted in this imaginary schema of obscenity. By the same token, any governmental websites that can be linked to NCU website can also be prosecuted.

While Ho is not trained as a cybernetician or a new media theorist, her powerful rebuttal shows the extent to which she reads our contemporary age as one of transmedia assemblage, in which the question of obscenity cannot be easily blamed as the source of contagion, which then purportedly targets the imaginary vulnerable “child.” Certainly, Ho’s defense can be read in light of Lee Edelman’s critique of what he calls reproductive futurism. Edelman argues that our vision of the political is always already limited by the future that is premised on the imperative of fighting for the Child. Edelman elaborates reproductive futurism as one belonging to the inescapable and oppressive political discourse: “political insofar as the fantasy subtending the image of the Child invariably shapes the logic within which the political itself must be thought.”<sup>384</sup> Ho’s impassionate defense for the value of sexuality to cultural studies and academic freedom, her call for a more radical articulation of children sexuality in our current age, and her ingenious reading of cybernetic sexuality as one of intractable linkages of connectivity beyond concepts of source, origin, and target altogether dare us to picture a futurity of the political that is not premised on some preexisting notions and terms of children sexuality. More importantly, she further advances Edelman’s argument to show that if this reproductive futurism needs to be changed, it *can be* challenged through materialist and actually existing practices of activism and radical model of pedagogy.

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<sup>384</sup> Lee Edelman, *No Future*, 2.

### III. The Fate of Old Media under Postcolonial Self-Discipline: Media's Neutrality, Gay Marriage, and the Quandary of the Normal Citizen

If Ho's case illustrates the impossibility of quarantining new media as a site for producing queer knowledge and the possibility that sex radicalism can still survive within the political ascendancy of state feminism within the state form, the case of censorship by the Hong Kong Broadcasting Authority (BA) over RTHK's broadcasted program *Gay Lovers/Tongzhi Lovers* and its eventual legal victory for gay and lesbian rights illustrate not so much a forward movement for LGBT rights in Hong Kong. I argue that the very fact that BA decided to censor the documentary about gay and lesbian lives in Hong Kong points to several issues pertaining new media, old media, and postcolonial state self-discipline, and at the heart of these various convergence of power relations lies the very matter of cultural citizenship; namely, who can be counted as a normative citizen subject, what defines the boundary of normative sexuality, and the discursive televisual limit of the family room, a site from which new media and gay marriage are purportedly intruding from outside. In analyzing this case, I introduce the element of affect and how normative and non-normative affects are fought, contested, and reconstituted through the concept of the public sphere. Some questions to consider are: what sentiments in the public sphere predetermine the boundary of the normal? What do these public sentiments assume about, once again, the positionality of the child in the family room? How do the queer, non-married or non-marital-able subjects get framed as dangerous? From there, how do critical sites of counterpublics emerge if one were to forge an alternative vision for the public sphere?

First, some backgrounds on the actual contents of the program are helpful for framing these questions. *Hong Kong Connections* 《鏗鏘集》, the series that aired the program in question, has been on air for thirty three years since 1978. It is a highly regarded journalistic account of Hong Kong life, covering issues as wide-ranging as education, China-Hong Kong relations, profile of famous people, and social issues such as poverty, education reform, and societal oppression.<sup>385</sup> *Gay Lovers* was aired on July 9, 2006 at 7:35pm on Jade Channel (the most popular TV channel in Hong Kong), and on October 19, 2006 on its sister channel at 7:10pm. The BA, an independent regulation unit on media content, investigated the program on January 20, 2007 after receiving twenty-three public complaints. While RTHK is editorially autonomous and has been regarded as one of the most neutral and politically concerned voices in Hong Kong, it is still subject to regulation by the BA. The BA decided to issue a warning, pointing out that *Gay Lovers* have breached the limit of the Generic Code of Practice on Television Programme Standards. It determined that the documentary was “unfair, partial, and biased towards homosexuality with the effect of promoting marriage between homosexuals.”<sup>386</sup> In response to this criticism, RTHK adheres to its social mission: “The programme did not debate sexual orientation from a legal or ethical perspective. Instead, it featured a story focusing on several aspects of

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<sup>385</sup> For a Chinese version of *Hong Kong Connections*, see: <http://rthk.hk/special/hkconnection/index.htm>. For the English version, it is viewable at <http://www.rthk.org.hk/rthk/tv/hkce/>. Accessed August 15, 2011.

<sup>386</sup> “鏗鏘集被指鼓吹同性戀遭廣管局強烈勸喻港台稱裁決堪商榷,” *Mingpao Daily*, January 21, 2007, accessed August 15, 2011, <http://os.hkcrz.info/viewthread.php?tid=11207&page=1>.

homosexual life. It aimed to reflect social phenomena within a minority group that the public may not be familiar with. It conducted interviews with these couples through which the pressures faced by homosexuals were exposed.”<sup>387</sup>

Thus, central to this case is whether *Gay Lovers* delivers social issue in an “impartial” manner that doesn’t compromise opposing views on an important issue. Another major concern in this case is the battle over whether the contents of *Gay Lovers* are suitable for the “family viewing hour” rule set out by BA. Specifically, the BA contends that “children and young viewers watching the programme might have no knowledge of homosexuality and might be adversely affected by the partial contents of the programme if parental guidance was not provided.” During family viewing hours, between 4:00 p.m. and 8:30 p.m., the BA prohibits content that is “unsuitable” for children since this is when children are more likely to be watching TV without parental guidance. A program might be considered unsuitable for children if it includes violence, bad language, innuendo, sex and nudity, or any matter likely to lead to hysteria, nightmares or other undesirable emotional disturbances. After 8:30 p.m., parents “may reasonably be expected to share responsibility for what their children are permitted to watch.”<sup>388</sup> It specifically distinguishes two types of programs that exceed the visual limits of what is permissible during family hours. It states, “No programmes

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<sup>387</sup> This official response is quoted in Lauren Sancken’s legal analysis of the case. See Lauren Sancken, “Hong Kong’s Discriminatory Air Time: Family Viewing Hours and the Case of *Cho Man Kit V. Broadcasting Authority*,” *Pacific Rim Law & Policy Journal* 19.2 (2010): 357-386, 370-371.

<sup>388</sup> Ibid, 375.

classified as Parental Guidance Recommended (“PG”) or Mature (“M”) should be included within family viewing hours.”<sup>389</sup>

However, upon closer reading the document on regulating TV program contains a segment that reveals what exactly constitutes the “threat” that must be protected from children during family viewing hours. In Chapter Seven under the title “Protection of Children,” the BA lays out six rules that must be observed during family viewing hours: 1) scenes in which pleasure is taken in the infliction of pain or humiliation upon others should be avoided. 2) Scenes in which the infliction or acceptance of pain or humiliation is associated with sexual pleasure should be eliminated. 3) The portrayal of dangerous behavior easily imitated by children should be avoided. This applies especially to the use in a manner likely to cause serious injury, of knives and other offensive weapons, articles or substances which are readily accessible to children. 4) Ingenious and unfamiliar methods of inflicting pain or injury, which are capable of easy imitation, should be avoided. These include, for example, rabbit punches, suffocation, sabotage of vehicles and booby traps. Smoking or drinking of alcoholic beverages by minors should not be presented in a favorable light. 5) References to the consumption of illegal drugs should only be made where absolutely justified by the story line or programme context. 6) Care must be taken in the treatment of themes dealing with gambling, prostitution, crime, or social or domestic conflict.<sup>390</sup> While this list of behavioral contents that the BA sought to regulate at first seem rather unrelated to the “content” of homosexuality and gay marriage, which

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<sup>389</sup> Broadcasting Authority, *Generic Codes of Practice on Television Programme Standards*, 7, accessed August 15, 2011, <http://www.hkba.hk/en/tv/codes.html>. The document is downloadable as a file: [http://www.hkba.hk/en/doc/code\\_tvprog\\_e.pdf](http://www.hkba.hk/en/doc/code_tvprog_e.pdf).

<sup>390</sup> Ibid, 21-22.

the case is concerned, upon critical re-reading one can detect an obsessive concern about things that are inextricable from any discussion of sexuality: pain, pleasure, improper mimesis (whether the child can easily learn “bad” behavior), non-procreative sexuality (prostitution), and social conflict. These aspects of the social must be shielded from the child because, as the BA argues, the family viewing hours constitute the “real” proper locus of the social, whereas the other affective elements of the social must exist outside of the public sphere. However, if one were to take the question of the public sphere seriously, from which the possibility of the counterpublics can even be theorized, the question remains: what constitutes the dimension of the public? Here, I want to take a slight detour into an elaboration of the theoretical project of Jurgen Habermas and his commentators concerning identity politics, sexuality, and the public sphere before my close analysis of what constitutes the “threat” and breaches the “neutrality” of the public from the BA’s viewpoint, which purports to speak *for* the public.

Habermas in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962) theorizes the emergence of the public which is structurally distinct from the earlier Greek form of philosophical fraternal relationships and the earlier Western direct democracy model in which everyone has a voice to speak (although that “everyone” only includes highly educated males in the polity). The public he proposes is also distinct from the courtship system in which the King embodies the divine rule of law and decides on issues of public importance. The public in the Habermasian sense connotes individuals who come together in the public sphere to debate things of importance, often in spaces such as the salon and coffeehouses since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Habermas asserts, “The bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a

public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor. The medium of this political confrontation was peculiar and without historical precedent: people's public use of their reason."<sup>391</sup> These individuals are to be non-identified with the domestic family that they emerge from (whose flaw lies in its over-identification with the private) and to be non-directed by the state (which often stands for authoritarian state power). Thus, the public sphere emerges as a third way out between the individual and the state. It is this non-state element of the public that is potentially radical about the public sphere.

Since Habermas, various intellectuals have challenged Habermas' assumption that individuals must bracket their identities to achieve rationality before entering into the public sphere. Craig Calhoun summarizes Habermas' definition of the public sphere and its limit in the following ways. He writes, "In a nutshell, a public sphere adequate to a democratic polity depends upon both quality of discourse and quantity of participation. Habermas develops the first requirement in elaborating how the classical bourgeois public sphere of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was constituted around rational critical argument, in which the merits of arguments and not identities of arguers were crucial."<sup>392</sup> However, Calhoun's further elaboration on the false promise of neutral debate (which is also crucial to the question of neutrality in the Hong Kong case) points out the recurring vexing problem and promise of identity politics, a political desire that cannot

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<sup>391</sup> Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989), 27.

<sup>392</sup> Craig Calhoun, "Introduction: Habermas and the Public Sphere," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 2.



and must not be erased. He explains the importance of the feminist critique: “It also points up that the public/private dichotomy itself imposes a neutralizing logic on differential identity by establishing qualification for publicness as a matter of abstraction from private identity. Difference may be ‘bracketed’ or tolerated; it is hard on Habermas’s account to see the need for it to be positively thematized.”<sup>393</sup>

Calhoun’s insight into the double sword of the “neutralizing logic” in Habermas’ conception of the public sphere points to the core of the conflict in the *BA v. Cho Man Kit* case. In order to claim publicness, the BA assumes all subject matters and subject positions as already equal in the public sphere; but the very bracketing of difference, identity, and otherness in the rush to claim neutrality thus misses the chance and possibility of critically encountering materialist modes of difference, in this case, the difference in sexuality and the articulation for a different social agenda in gay marriage. Neutrality as a double-edged sword thus ensures the rights to public opinion and visual presentation even when it functions as a regulative regime to limit the very field of what is deemed “representable.” Within this field of visibility, affective tendency for SM sex, infliction of pain (including social pain?), and improper mimesis and/or imitation by children are to be strictly prohibited. More importantly, by judging *Gay Lovers* as exceeding the proper limits of impartiality, another catchword for neutrality, and by equating the program with those modes of affect and bad imitations that are impermissible within the field of the social, the BA conflates the program’s contents with SM sex, non-consensual sex, and those “other” queer sexuality that cannot be named. The questions that the BA didn’t ask in its rush to censor but ones that are worth asking are:

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<sup>393</sup> Ibid, 35.

What contents within *Gay Lovers* comprise the bad and negative affective tendency that exceeds the field of representation? For whom is a program expressing the issues of gay and lesbian lives in Hong Kong “painful” to watch? So painful that it may lead to improper mimesis? The parents? The child? The proper citizen? Adult gays and lesbians? The queer child? And what are the critical possibilities that emerge when one re-engages with these modes of “bad” affect?

A critical re-reading of the documentary reveals *Gay Lovers* to be more than a documentary that presents basic facts and history of gay and lesbian lives in Hong Kong through the typical omniscient voiceover; instead, the program forces the viewers to engage with various complex encounters within cross-identificatory exercises in empathy, empathetic identifications that push beyond one’s position as a heterosexual subject. Furthermore, it challenges the assumption of the citizen subject as endowed with basic rights by asking us to view rights, justice, and citizenship from the position of those LGBTQ subjects who have yet to embody those rights. Specifically, the program begins with a two-line precaution that states: “This program concerns with topics related to homosexuality. Please be aware.”<sup>394</sup> The documentary then begins with upbeat cartoonist background music of ringing bells, with the screen showing two dolls, a boy and a girl. The next shot displays two coconuts that have the red inked Chinese word *xi* (囍) written on it, which means double happiness, a word usually reserved for wedding. The voiceover then narrates: “A grown up man asks for marriage, a grown up woman asks to be married; societal dominant view encourages marriage between one man and one

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<sup>394</sup> The program can be viewed in two parts through YouTube at [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8oam8ADbeOU&feature=mh\\_lolz&list=WL445FF7CFACDB12A9](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8oam8ADbeOU&feature=mh_lolz&list=WL445FF7CFACDB12A9), accessed August 17, 2011.

woman, and then they will reproduce the next generation.” The next sequence depicts two pairs of couples through cross-cutting technique, each cut shows two arms holding one another, walking, without showing the faces of the subjects. The music shifts to one that is much more tragic in mood. The narrator now describes, “But for gay and lesbian, even though they may be in love, Hong Kong law does not recognize gay marriage. In addition, they must often endure the sight of prejudice from others.” The next shot then shows a marriage ceremony between a man and woman, while one lesbian named Connie, standing with her lover Ah Lik (阿力), begins speaking. Connie expresses her view on marriage: “Whenever I see people getting married, whether it is between men, between women, or between a man and a woman, I think it is something to feel happy about.”

The introductory scenes of *Gay Lovers* present various subjects in Hong Kong society. While the narrator’s voice seeks to place social subjects side by side, conveying the life course for heterosexual people who follow linear trajectory of growing up, getting married, and reproducing, it also introduces subjects who are denied the rights to marry while simultaneously enduring the daily pressure of prejudice. Although the format of the documentary enters the structure of a public address through “neutral” representation and through comparative visual display by cross-cutting shots, it becomes clear that the subjects of representation in question are inherently unequal. Thus, the act of watching the program already requires the work of disassociating oneself from normative practice of looking, from the comfortable position of the socially normative citizen-subject. In a review essay on gender and media ideologies in contemporary Hong Kong, Micky Lee and Anthony Fung remind us that mass media engages in unequal practices of

representation. They contend, “It is not at all difficult to name a few examples: many soft and entertainment news items in newspapers are written by female journalists, while male journalists are assigned to cover hard and financial news; tabloid and entertainment magazines use the female body as a selling-point; and there is a lack of gays’ and lesbians’ representations in the mainstream media.”<sup>395</sup> While the rest of Lee and Fung’s essay mainly focuses on the tyranny of the slimming culture in Hong Kong and how it harms women’s bodily self-image, their casual remark on the lack of visual appearance of gays and lesbians, not to mention transgender subjects in media, is worth pondering. What happens when sexual and gender “non-normative” people enter into the visual public sphere? How can one even visualize queer subjects in *any* neutral terms if the very kernel of visibility is always already saturated by and bound up with the cultural dominance of heteronormativity?

The staging of the lesbian subjects Connie and Ah Lik within the background of a marriage ceremony and Connie’s insertion into this marital discourse then displays a creative juxtaposition, an incitement to *speak otherwise*. Connie is both engaged in a mode of what Trinh T. Minh-Ha calls “speaking nearby” and what I coin “speaking otherwise” here. Minh-ha defines speaking nearby as “a speaking that does not objectify, does not point to an object as if it is distant from the speaking subject or absent from the speaking place. A speaking that reflects on itself and can come very close to a subject without, however, seizing or claiming it.”<sup>396</sup> Minh-ha’s representational politics of

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<sup>395</sup> Micky Lee and Anthony Fung, “Media Ideologies of Gender in Hong Kong,” in *Mainstreaming Gender in Hong Kong Society*, ed. Fanny M. Cheung and Eleanor Holroyd (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2009), 291-309, 294.

<sup>396</sup> Trinh T. Minh-Ha and Nancy N. Chen, “Speaking Nearby,” in *Feminism and Film*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 317-335, 327.



**Figure 8.** A film still from *Gay Lovers*: Ah Lik (left) and Connie (right) witnessing a marriage ceremony.

speaking nearby aims at critiquing the anthropological desire for truth and objectivity by situating the speaking subject at the limits of cultural representation itself. Thus, Minh-Ha argues that there is no recourse to objectively frame Senegalese subjects in, for example, her experimental film *Reassemblage* (1982); rather, within the realm of speaking nearby the filmmaker and the speaking subject (interviewees, informants, etc.) are both engaged in the rearrangement of desire and disturbed by the constant deferral of truth. Therefore, while Connie as an onlooker could not objectively feel what it is like to enter into a marriage sanctioned by the state and family members, she nonetheless speaks nearby the discourse in order to rearrange the mechanism of desire *otherwise*. Her statement that “whenever I see people getting married, whether it is between men, between women, or between a man and a woman...” thus reverses the sequential law of marital recognition in Hong Kong. It positions the viewers to imagine marriages between men and between women, not as something that must come after the establishing desire of heterosexuality, but as one that can coexist side by side, even in reversing order.

While the BA predetermines “the public sphere” by assuming that the program is biased against public opinion and “harmful” to the child without guidance, its definition of the public sphere frames *Gay Lovers* in a vision already saturated with heterosexuality; in this way the subject of grievance ironically turns into the source of threat to the family. Alternatively, I argue that the process of watching *Gay Lovers* generates multiple routes of affective identification that cannot be fixed in advance: identification with oneself, identification beside oneself, and empathy without identification. Specifically, about five minutes into the documentary Connie recounts a homophobic incident from her own family member. One time after she was interviewed by a newspaper about her sexual identity, her uncle called her mother and questioned: “Why is she like that? After going to schools for so many years?” Connie’s mother replied: “We are one family, why are you treating her differently and why are you saying these things?” Connie recalls that after her mother relates the incident to her, she feels that her mother is very strong and she is very touched by her action.

This scene and the re-narrating of homophobia imagines multiple kinds of spectators: possible queer children and adolescents facing the problem of coming out; parents of gay and lesbian children, as well as ordinary folks who “fear” that anyone they know could be LGBT subjects. Connie feels touched not only because her mother recognizes her subjectivity as a lesbian daughter; more powerfully, she is touched by the fact that her mother can identify with her despite the fact that she herself is *not* a lesbian. This mode of identification thus embodies processes of intersubjectivity across sexual and gender lines, identifying beside oneself and pointing to empathetic relation without identifying with a particular identity politics of being gay, lesbian, and queer. My reading

thus resonates with Brian Massumi's theorization of affect as relatively autonomous event that assumes its variation when it still inhabits potentiality, instead of a possibility that can be easily calculated. Massumi writes, "Affects are *virtual synesthetic perspectives* anchored in (functionally limited by) the actually existing, particular things that embody them. The autonomy of affect is its participation in the virtual. *Its autonomy is its openness.*"<sup>397</sup> Of course, my readings of these various forms of identifications and inter-subjective formation are limited by my own speculative thoughts. One can never recover the scene of affective engagement since it only happens at a specific time and place that envelops the speaking subject. Nonetheless, Connie's retelling of the trauma of homophobia and her mother's support brings into sharp focus the complexity in the working of affective engagement, one that BA's censorship limits in advance.

When a field of vision is predetermined by the over-accumulation of sexual prejudice that denies the very instability and mobility of affect, what begins as a scene of redress for justice and evidence of discrimination against queer can be dangerously reframed as the source of danger and harm to "family values." It is only through numerous efforts of aggressive counter-reading that an alternative public sphere, a queer counterpublic, can emerge. One scene that retells the difficulty of being out in public by Cho Man Kit, the gay interviewee who sued BA later on, illustrates the enormous power relation that determines the field of vision. Cho remembers, "One time I was hugging with my boyfriend at the Tsim Sha Tsui harbor. Then two people passed by and leveled curses at us. They warned us that they would call the cops. My feeling was very down

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<sup>397</sup> Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 35.

that night. My boyfriend started crying and wanted to go home. Originally we planned to watch a movie but could not go.” While the BA did not specify a particular scene that is harmful to children in its initial censorship, its insistence that the contents of *Gay Lovers* are “harmful to children” and not suitable for screening during family hours requires further critical readings.

For the scene in question, Cho attempts to describe the everyday scenes of discrimination that can happen to gay and lesbian people shall they dare to display acts of intimacy in the public sphere. The retelling of Cho’s past suffering displays a voice for harm done unto him that is, at the moment, unredressable. Here, his voice for redress becomes sentiment that is harmful to children and not to be imitated, a voice impermissible for imitation. What is implied in this reading is the revelation that the censor views queer lives as so improper and outside of the purview of the normal that they should not be imparted to children. In this framing, the violence suffered by Cho becomes “an evidence” of possible “harmful” behaviors for children that should not be reproduced. It seems to warn: “Because gay and lesbian lives can only lead to pain, as children you should not imitate these ‘behaviors.’” In a different context, Judith Butler’s incisive reading of how the beaten body of Rodney King by white policemen gets framed as a sign of “evidence” that King’s Black body is itself a source of violence prior to the Los Angeles Riots in 1992 is very productive for my reading here. Butler argues, “This is not a simple seeing, an act of direct perception, but the racial production of the visible, the workings of racial constraints on what it means to ‘see’”<sup>398</sup> Reworking Butler’s

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<sup>398</sup> Judith Butler, “Endangered/Endangering: Schematic Racism and White Paranoia,” in *Reading Rodney King/Reading Urban Uprising*, ed. Robert Gooding-Williams (New York: Routledge, 1993), 15-22, 16.



critique of the working of the racist scopic regime that determines ways of seeing, one can argue that the BA's rush to censor *Gay Lovers* as not suitable for children and family values indicates the heteronormative production of the visible, the workings of sexual constraints on what it means to "see." Cho Man Kit's subsequent attempt to sue the BA and publicize the case, his victory over the case, and Judge Michael Hartmann's delivery of court opinion point to efforts to perform counter-readings of the media event, through which an alternative public sphere is imaginable.

I will briefly summarize the procedures and outcome of the case and the multiple counterpublics that the case engenders. In response to BA's admonishment in January 2007, Cho Man Kit, Connie, and Ah Lik decided to file lawsuit on June 18 of the same year. The High Court accepted that the case has standing on June 20 and the subsequent proceedings took place on February 18-19, 2008. The plaintiff Cho asserts that the BA's ruling constituted sexual orientation discrimination with no reasonable and objective justification, that the ruling interfered with Constitutional rights of free speech and free expressions, that the ruling was a decision that no reasonable decision-maker could have made, and finally that the ruling was based on a misinterpretation of the code of practice. On the other side, the BA argues that *Gay Lovers* failed to meet the requirement of impartiality when dealing with sensitive factual matters and that the program should have broadcasted outside of family viewing hours to decrease the likelihood that unsupervised children would be watching. At the heart of the court's adjudication is whether BA's warning was neutral or unfairly targeted homosexuals in its regulations. Judge Hartmann applies the proportionality test in his delivery of court opinion. The test holds that any restriction on free speech must still respect the rights and reputations of others and can

only do so “for the protection of national security, public order, public health, or public morals.” The proportionality test, similar to what in the U.S. Supreme Court is understood as “strict scrutiny,” asks that the burden of proof be placed on the party that restricts free speech and also that the means to achieve such ends and results are “rationally connected to some legitimate purposes,” a phrasing that is slightly different from the American standard of “narrowly tailored means” and “compelling state interests.”

In the final opinion, Judge Hartmann recognized that “RTHK did no more than faithfully record the fears, hopes, travails and aspirations of persons who happened to be gay. It did so faithfully, in an unprejudiced manner.” The Court viewed the program as “a study of gay people involved in stable, long-term relationships” and was “not designed as a vehicle to ‘advocate’ any particular point of view.” Thus, the Court finds that BA’s Impartiality Rule as it applies to the restriction of *Gay Lovers*’ contents does not survive judicial scrutiny. However, regarding BA’s censorship of the program as unsuitable for family view hours of 4:00-8:30 p.m., Hartmann sides with the BA. He delivers, “The understanding of sexual matters in a way that avoids confusion, concern, even prejudice, demands a certain maturity and ideally . . . the guidance of parents or teachers.” Furthermore, “presentation to immature viewers who have no relevant knowledge of matters going to sex and sexual attraction—in all its permissible forms—may in some cases arouse emotions which are hostile, emotions even of confused revulsion, emotions which embed prejudice rather than remove it.”<sup>399</sup> Thus, the judicial outcome of the case marks a bittersweet victory for Hong Kong LGBT rights. While it recognizes gay and

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<sup>399</sup> Quoted in Lauren Sancken, “Hong Kong’s Discriminatory Air Time,” 375-376.

lesbian representations in the public media as legitimate form of free speech, it has the tendency of pushing further queer media representations outside of “family time,” namely the imaginary terrain of family values. Nonetheless, the case helps to forge various counterpublics through the medium of cyberspace, internet petition, appearance of Cho Man Kit on TV shows prior to the ruling, and so on.

Prior to the Court’s judgment, Cho began a series of effort to gather public support for his case. He initiates a webpage through Google called “Gay Lovers RTHK” at (<https://sites.google.com/site/gayloversrthk/home>). The site contains a chronology of the development of the case to keep the public informed while providing more “personal” ways for both supporters and dissenters to voice their opinions. One special link on the webpage is entitled “一人一句公道話,” which in English is translated as “one person speaks one fair statement.” To this day, forty-three people have left their messages mostly in support of the case. One user named Darling contends, “In a harmonious international city, it is so disappointing that something like this happens. So gay people do not even have the rights to express their own voices?” Another netizen is more outspoken: “*Tongxinglian* (homosexuality) is not a sin. Please do not publicize homosexual image and then kill it. Is this the way government do things now? The government only received twenty something complaints before issuing severe warning. If all the gay people come out and stand up, it will easily surpass this number. Causing such a public ordeal, so what will you government do to us at that time?” Another link takes online users to a guestbook for people who want to sign and send their blessings to the outcome of the case.

As an alternative redefinition of the public sphere, Cho's effort engenders multiple expressions of queer subjects. Not all of them agree in their criticism of BA's censorship. Indeed, some seem to deliver their criticism toward a more abstract category like "society" and "government." Overall, the possibility of allowing strangers bonding together to express their outcry against the suppression of gay and lesbian representations constitutes what Nancy Fraser has elsewhere called "subaltern counterpublics"<sup>400</sup> and what Michael Warner simply terms "counterpublics." Warner defines the counterpublics: "Perhaps nothing demonstrates the importance of discursive publics in the modern social imaginary more than this—that even the counterpublics that challenge modernity's social hierarchy of faculties do so by projecting the space of discursive circulation among strangers as social entity and in doing so fashion their own subjectivities around the requirements of public circulation and stranger sociality."<sup>401</sup> The queer strangers that bond together, some anonymously online, some in public rallies, demonstrate that even in a postcolonial city that faces uncertain political future path to democracy, queer counterpublics can sustain critical formations that potentially redress those voices that would otherwise be shadowed by the burdens of neutrality, "public" opinion, and conservative family values.

#### **IV. Queer Media Citizenship in Contemporary China: *From Same-Sex Connection to Online Activism***

The censorship of cybernetic sexuality in Josephine Ho's case and the disciplining of televisual content in Cho Man Kit's case together illustrate the complex convergence

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<sup>400</sup> Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1992), 123.

<sup>401</sup> Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone books, 2002), 121.

of old and new media as a social imaginary through which questions of queer sexuality and the public sphere are currently reconfigured. In this last section of the chapter I turn to online broadcasting and transnational online activism to consider the limit and possibility in shaping queer cultural citizenship, through which new gender and sexual identities emerge in postsocialist China during the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In previous chapters, I point to the contradictory ways different gay, lesbian, and queer identities enter into the social imaginary of postsocialism. Chen Ran's novel *A Private Life* (1996) displays a female self that is marked by lesbian tendency, failed heterosexual love, and a desire for abandonment. Ni Aoao desires a ruined self in abandonment and crafts an alternative kinship through her radical refusal to participate in the workforce and the common crowd (see Chapter 1). In Cui's perverse remapping of Beijing in *Money Boy Diaries* (2003), again gay male subjects do not exist outside the political maneuvering of the gendered subject; rather, money boys are always already marked by their contradictions in postsocialist global capitalism. Xiao Jian's middleclass status and his desire to join the lowest of the low clearly shows that within queer subject formation in contemporary China, the convergence between queerness and socialism points out how new social subjects critically hold on to the residual elements of the past (socialism) while confronting a China that is pervasively divided by unequal statuses in consumption, class, and wealth. Likewise, their willingness to join others in the fight against class inequality illustrates the ways that queer bodies perform surplus social values that cannot be homogenized by the will of capitalism (see Chapter 4). If queer subject formations cannot be fixed in advance but must be critically engaged in a social field that is rapidly changing, it becomes all the more urgent to identify discursive

formations and material sites where these shadows of capitalism persist and where they transcend various sites of assemblage.

To understand how desire (often problematically presumed to be merely superstructural) forms part of the machinery of postsocialist capitalism (often presumed to be the infrastructure of China's rise to global power), I will first provide a brief overview of current legal and social constraints on gays and lesbians in China before engaging with *Same Sex Connection* as an incident of transmedia assemblage. While neoliberalism in the U.S. is marked by the ascendancy and cultural dominance of self-determining queer people desiring rights and protection through civil rights victory in gay marriage and military service, which unsurprisingly produces the rights-bearing queer subjects-in-process, neoliberalism in post-Mao China since 1978 ushers in similar landscape of neoliberal capitals without similar existence of the rights-bearing queer subjects. China is by now well-known as the global village that provides the largest labor supply for the endless accumulation of capitals. There are 221 million migrant workers, so-called "floating population" migrating from rural areas looking for jobs in urban centers like Beijing, Shanghai and other coastal cities that have opened up since Deng Xiaoping 1992 Southern Tour.<sup>402</sup> This group of economic underclass illustrates vast social inequality that accompanies China's miraculous economic growth. For instance, economist Minqi Li approximates that between 1-5% of the population control 70% of national wealth in China.<sup>403</sup> When confronted with this social disparity, socialism indeed

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<sup>402</sup> "China's 'Floating Population' Exceeds 211 Mln," *English People Daily*, March 1, 2011, accessed August 30, 2011, <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90776/90882/7303707.html>.

<sup>403</sup> Minqi Lee, "China's Top 1% Control 70% of Wealth," Interview with Paul Jay, *The Real News*, August 15, 2008, accessed August 31, 2011, [http://therealnews.com/t2/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=31&Itemid=74&jumival=2054](http://therealnews.com/t2/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=31&Itemid=74&jumival=2054).

seems like a ghost of the past that is haunting China. Within state nationalist discourse, leaders from Deng in the 1990s and Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao in the current reform era resort to the language of harmonious society and the idealism of socialist modernity. The slogan is that “some people must get rich first” before the rest. As the popular critique of the mainland government goes, China is selling socialism in theory but fully capitalistic in practice.

To sum it up, the most important issue that concerns the discussion of neoliberalism, sexuality, and queer subjects is that contemporary LGBTQ subjects in China, similar to working class and certain transnational queer subjects in the U.S., are placed outside of neoliberal entitlement of rights even while they are embedded within neoliberal landscape of capitalist expansions. Specific legal status and its extreme ambivalence create confusion and problems for sexual subjects in everyday life in China. Specifically, sexologist Li Yinhe shows that before the revision of Criminal Law in 1997, gay men and to some extent lesbians could be prosecuted under the crime of hooliganism, meaning being at the wrong place at the wrong time.<sup>404</sup> Even after the Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from the list of mental illness in 2001, the ambiguity of the law results in people being penalized in unpredictable ways. This legal limbo of queer subjects in the political terrain place them within a zone of indistinction between what is legal and illegal and what is permissible and punishable, to borrow Agamben’s language in *Homo Sacer*.<sup>405</sup> In other words, sovereignty upon queer sexuality in postsocialist China exercises its power precisely by indefinitely suspending the absolute

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<sup>404</sup> Li Yinhe, “Regulating Male Same-Sex Relationships in the People’s Republic of China,” in *Sex and Sexuality in China*, ed. Elaine Jeffreys (New York: Routledge, 2006), 88.

<sup>405</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 9.

interpretation of legal rights. This is what Aihwa Ong terms “neoliberalism as exception” within developmental states in Southeast Asia and in authoritarian state in China, where subjects with super-capital capacity can evade and often collude with state power while subjects within limbo legal rights are exposed to the impunity of violence.<sup>406</sup>

Against this legal ambivalence of the law is the simultaneous flourishing of gay and lesbian public cultures and subcultures in social structures that cannot be overdetermined by the law. For example, a sizable list of new sociological studies on gays and lesbians in China point out that despite legal restrictions, they have come up with creative responses to social intolerance and familial pressure for heterosexual conjugal marriage. In addition to the pioneering work by Lisa Rofel on transcultural gay identity in postsocialist China,<sup>407</sup> other sociological studies illustrate the complex negotiation and mobility that *lalas* (shorthand for the English word “lesbian” in mainland China) use to balance the dual identity of being filial daughters and loyal housewives while pursuing same-sex relationships on the side. Specifically, some utilize “contract marriage” with gay men in order to alleviate the inescapable social pressure for heterosexual marriage.<sup>408</sup> While Rofel’s earlier study on 1990s gay and lesbian salon discussion groups shows how different gays and lesbians may prefer divergent ways of expressing their sexuality and gender identity (some prefer to frame it as a human rights

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<sup>406</sup> Aihwa Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 19.

<sup>407</sup> Lisa Rofel, “Qualities of Desire: Imagining Gay Identities in China,” *GLQ* 5.4 (1999):451-474.

<sup>408</sup> Elisabeth Lund Engebretsen, “Intimate Practices, Conjugal Ideals: Affective Ties and Relationship Strategies Among *Lala* (Lesbian) Women in Contemporary Beijing,” *Sexuality Research & Social Policy* 6.3 (2009):3-14. See also Lucetta Yip Lo Kam’s article, “Opening up Marriage: Married *Lalas* in Shanghai,” in *As Normal as Possible: Negotiating Sexuality and Gender in Mainland China and Hong Kong*, ed. Yau Ching (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010), 87-102.



issue while others refuse to come out to parents in order to uphold “harmony”), Elisabeth Engebretsen and Lucetta Kam’s work that comprises the new sociology and anthropology on queer subject formation suggests that public forum for discussing sexual identity certainly is not unrelated to the creative life choices that gay and lesbian pursue in their real lives. Here, I contribute to this burgeoning field on queer public cultures in postsocialist China by arguing that different media platforms, including online broadcasting (itself a combination and assemblage of television style broadcasting and the less regulated form of internet) and online activism across new and old medias, provide a next stage for envisioning queer media citizenship as an alternative cultural citizenship that redefines and transforms the political field.

As an exercise in assembling different forms of media, *Same Sex Connection* interestingly sits at the intersection between the televisual form and cyber technologies, a form that retains the older formats of hosting, interviewing, and inviting guests while allowing greater cyber participations from queer subjects from all walks of life. In early 2007, ifeng.com (鳳凰網), a sub-unit of the parent company Phoenix Television (PHTV) (鳳凰衛星電視), announced a search for a broadcasting host for the new weekly online show. In its search call, ifeng’s correspondent states, “Homosexuality is an unavoidable discussion; it is a collectivity that we need to encounter directly. As the first show about gay issues, mutual friendly understanding is the basic goal of the show. And the identity of the host must be that of a *tongzhi*. The host must confirm his or her sexual orientation and possess a rational thought and healthy lifestyle. We hope that more male and female *tongzhi* can honestly face themselves in the mirror. A mature, healthy image, full of love and kind attitude, and also a firm grasp on how to maneuver controversial issues are the

basic requirements for this job.”<sup>409</sup> It also states that the host’s compensation is provided for transportation costs, but the main duty is volunteering work in nature.

Implicit in this call is once again the double bind of control and freedom in guiding what a proper gay and lesbian show should be. While the medium of “online show” escapes the stricter “party line” of traditional television contents that are still regulated by the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television (SARFT), regional television programs and online contents that are not as directly regulated by the party organ still nonetheless exercise modes of self-censorship. As Yuezhi Zhao’s innovative study on media reform and democracy in China shows, ideological work has shifted from a mode of direct discipline to soft ideological work that includes the opinion of common folks. In one example, Zhao shows how the new Shanghai East Radio in 1992 solved a case of social wrong by helping a jobless young man who wanted to commit suicide. Then, various audiences called in and some even offered to help him find a job. Thus, radio broadcasting in this case helps to reinforce the goal of achieving societal harmony despite the rapid path of Chinese neoliberalization and privatization. Zhao concludes on this case: “Indeed, a Shanghai District Party secretary credited them with being more capable at ideological work than the professionals. Shanghai’s Ideological Work Research Society praised East Radio’s nighttime talk show as ‘a new type of ideological work in the new era’ and reported it to the Propaganda Department of the Party Central Committee.”<sup>410</sup>

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<sup>409</sup> “Ifeng in Search of Gay Host,” April 3, 2007, accessed August 29, 2011, [http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog\\_4cacaac010007su.html](http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_4cacaac010007su.html).

<sup>410</sup> Yuezhi Zhao, *Media, Market, and Democracy in China: Between the Party Line and the Bottom Line* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 102.

Seen in this light, *Same Sex Connection*'s requirements for its ideal talk show host illustrate the inherent double bind of freedom and regulation that is not only central to a theorization of the information age (a point that I have sustained throughout), but also in a globalizing Chinese media system that must respect "the party line" while ever expanding and testing the bottom line. The search call's emphasis on "rationality" and "healthy image" seems to betray the common societal assumption that Chinese LGBT subjects are often risky minority population who lead unhealthy "lifestyle." At the same time, the requirement that the host must be willing to engage in "controversial" topics shows the media firm's willingness to test the bottom line of media representation.

The hosts of the show do not disappoint ifeng's search. Gang Gang (刚刚) works as both the producer and co-host of the show, while Didier Zheng is recruited as the main host. While Zheng did not work for media firms previously, he studied in France, is multilingual in Chinese, English, and French, and worked for the Chi Heng Foundation, a NGO for AIDS education and activism. In the two seasons of talk shows, the hosts invite guests who are singer, coworkers of the host in Phoenix TV, sociologist, social worker, and university students to discuss issues ranging from same sex romance, love in college, gay and lesbian filmmaking, homosexuals as high risk group, and STDs. I will provide a close reading of the first episode of the show and examine how the hosts, guest, and online participants navigate the complicated boundary between individualist desire and social harmony and the difficulty in determining a proper queer subject. More importantly, the hosts often explore these questions by referencing and engaging with different means of mediatization: online survey, call-ins, webcam, and literal re-narrating of personal encounters and histories in public cultures.

The 1<sup>st</sup> episode premiered on April 5, 2007 at 3pm.<sup>411</sup> The first show is titled “Hello, *Tongzhi*!” It invited guest singer Qiao Qiao (乔乔), a boyish looking *lala* (mainland shorthand for lesbian) who gained some fame for her lesbian themed song “爱不分,” roughly translates as “Love Does Not Discriminate.” She is also the owner of Beijing first lesbian bar. After some brief introduction of themselves, Gang Gang draws the audience’s attention to an online poll that was drawn before the first broadcasting. It asks the online viewers and users (including those who refuse to watch the show) to comment on the necessity of the show. The poll asks the viewers to complete the sentence “You think a *tongxinglian*-themed show is...” The five possible answers range from “necessary in this age and era,” “totally unnecessary,” “doesn’t matter either way,” to “it is worth for public curiosity” and “what is this all about?” While the majority ticks the option that the show is necessary in this current age, 18 people choose the more carefree opinion of “doesn’t matter either way.” Qiao Qiao herself chooses the option of “either way.” She explains, “I don’t want to agree or disagree with heterosexuality or homosexuality. I think this is a personal issue. This is a private lifestyle issue; I can choose not to deny it or I can publicize to people that I love girls.” Didier then asks, “Were there any circumstances where the guys you hang out with lament for the fact that you don’t like men because you are so cool? And how would you respond in a situation like that?” She replies cleverly about how to express her *lala* identity with friends: “I would deal with my unwanted male admirer by pointing to our mutual male friend: ‘So would you like to try him?’ He replied without even thinking ‘Of course not!’ I would

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<sup>411</sup> All the episodes are still for public viewing at, <http://v.ifeng.com/news/society/201107/601c3e63-8d8b-4917-a74e-03cb788f0120.shtml>, accessed August 25, 2011.

then explain to him: ‘So I am just like you. I am also not attracted to any man. So even though our sexual orientations are different, we think and feel the same way.’”

Qiao Qiao’s response points to the heart of performing and living queer identity in a postsocialist landscape that fosters desire but still legally prohibits the full support for gay and lesbian self-expressions. In order to talk across sexual boundary, Qiao Qiao must affirm the belief that while her male friend and her share the same object of desire (women), their sexual orientations are radically different. And while their differences may draw them apart, they think and feel alike. Therefore, performing queer cultural citizenship means that one must assert queer differences while irreducibly asserting one’s sameness as a fellow Chinese citizen and human subject, who feels and thinks alike. This polarity between sexual difference and human sameness underlines the contradictory forces that condition the possibility of queer cultural citizenship: one seeks to express an individualist desire and understands lesbian identity as individualistic only in the name of cultural sameness.

However, queer desire and gender expression is too far-reaching, expansive, and fluid for it to be fixed by the discourse of sameness in the postsocialist field. As Judith Farquhar’s illuminating study on the shifting discourse on food, love and sex in the postsocialist era demonstrates, desire can be readily observable or rather mundane, but it is never quite homogeneous in forms. She denaturalizes the assumed equivalence between body and desire: “The things we desire need not be simple, immediately present to consciousness, or concrete: they can be abstractions like true love or

communism...Such variable ends give form to desires themselves.”<sup>412</sup> Indeed, I am less interested in how *Same Sex Connection* promotes a certain encouraging and positive representation of gay and lesbian lifestyle than how the show reveals the complex social processes of initiating a discursive space for discussing material lives of queer subjects. The non-predictable structure of hosting a television show through the cyberspace thus provides a more open-ended format of discussion. It introduces a platform that cuts across different kinds of media. Specifically, one segment of the show allows home viewers to connect through Skype. A female viewer calls in and she requests Qiao Qiao to sing her signature song “Love Does Not Discriminate.” The woman (presumably also a *lala*) also comments on how “handsome” Qiao Qiao looks in person (although of course they are not meeting in “real space” face to face). Qiao Qiao initially does not want to sing it given the surprise request. However, due to popular demand, she sings for one minute during the show. In this way, the show connects different lesbian subjects in real time through differential space. Furthermore, this personal encounter is broadcasted to all viewers who are viewing at the same time, while introducing them to a different medium, a song. Thus, transmedia assemblage here enables different information and materials to pass through while audience’s participation also changes the contents of the show itself. This kind of transmedia encounter would not be possible within the everyday social landscape where a *lala* may pass by another *lala* without even acknowledging each other’s presence due to social restrictions.

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<sup>412</sup> Judith Farquhar, *Appetites: Food and Sex in Postsocialist China* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 2.

While the open-ended format connects viewers and the show's hosts and guests in different spaces through logics of assemblage, it also deterritorializes identity formation through moments of fissure, disagreement, and democratic discussion of what it means to be queer in the current moment. For example, Qiao Qiao the guest seems to hold a rather strong personal opinion of how to be a proper gay and lesbian subject that actually betrays very universalist and cosmopolitan ideas of class, income, and personal autonomy, whereas Didier's mediation of the conversation provides further reflections on the contingency of queer cultural citizenship in China. For example, in addition to calling in through Skype, the show also allows viewers to post questions before and during the show. One question comes from a man who is questioning about his sexuality. The question reads, "I feel that I have homosexual tendency; I only like young men, and I like to hang around them. Is it possible that I am really a *tongxinglian*? What can I do? I am very afraid." While Didier suggests that this young man can contact many hotlines that provide psychological counseling and talk through his issues with people, Qiao Qiao suggests that he doesn't need to do that. Instead, she analyzes the issue from the perspective of a self-sufficient, self-providing queer subject. She speaks: "First you need to be a responsible and useful person to society and to your country. If you are always looking for jobs and never find one, and if you are just a dog fart (狗屁, a slang for a useless person) and always screw things up, then suddenly one day you tell your mother that you are gay. Of course, your parents will blame all of this for the fact that you are gay."

Didier thinks about Qiao Qiao's comments for a while and then responds: "Hmm, I see. But I also think that a *tongzhi* (a homosexual) has the rights to be unsuccessful, the

rights to be ugly and not beautiful.” Gang Gang jumps into the discussion and clarifies Didier’s point as well. He says, “I think what he means is that just because a person is unsuccessful, we cannot blame all of that to his being gay.” This brief, not extremely tense, but nonetheless revealing exchange between the hosts and the guest about a question posted by the anonymous viewer points to the urgency and instability surrounding how to perform gayness, *lala* identity, and queer selves in a country where class, wealth, and citizenship remain touchy issues and mark the very limit of ideal citizenship. Queer cultural citizenship in postsocialist China describes an embodiment of economic rights and selfhood that exists apart from the formal legality and protection of the law; therefore, appropriate accumulation of capital ironically becomes for many the only “neutral” barometer to measure one’s self worth, as Qiao Qiao’s comment seems to imply. In contrast, Didier’s response calls for the recognition of fellow queer subjects who may not approximate this ideal type of queer cultural belonging due to fear of coming out, exposure, lack of economic resources, and other socio-political limits. Thus, his commentary sheds light on “other” social subjects who, like the anonymous viewer, cannot come close to the self-determining queer subject that embodies proper capital-capacity. These heterogeneous positions that emerge from *Same Sex Connection* recall Rofel’s remark that “indeterminacy haunts claims of neoliberal coherences” and that “transcultural gay identities are crafted in ongoing processes of historical and cultural contingency.”<sup>413</sup>

Of course, *Same Sex Connection* is not the only transmedia platform where the discussion and performance of queer cultural citizenship take place. I now turn to a recent

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<sup>413</sup> Lisa Rofel, *Desiring China*, 110.



controversy about a weibo/微博(Chinese online community's version of twitter) posting by a mainland Chinese actress, which contains homophobic messages. I examine the various anti-homophobic and anti-discriminatory responses from other celebrities in Taiwan and the transmedia circulation of responses, which include a serious news report from an old media platform like CCTV (China Central Television), the official television network that serves as the unofficial mouthpiece of the nation state. I will show how this media event culminates in a trans-regional response about gay and lesbian rights in an unprecedented manner and how it may provide an incident for us to theorize a "queer media citizenship."

Sina Weibo is a popular microblogging website that is structurally similar to global social network sites like facebook and twitter. It has more than 140 million registered users by May 2011.<sup>414</sup> On June 26, 2011, Lu Liping (呂麗萍), well-known mainland Chinese actress and winner of the 2010 Taiwan Golden Horse Award for Best Actress, tweeted a response to a homophobic comment written by a pastor on the recent legalization of gay marriage in New York. The original blogging by the pastor contains one especially harsh comment: "The state of New York legalized gay marriage on the 25<sup>th</sup>. This is the 6<sup>th</sup> state in the U.S. that passed similar measure, and it is also the biggest state. Please pray to god for this land that is morally declining day by day. Even if one day there is a law in China that prohibits discriminations toward homosexuals, I still must spread the gospel: homosexuality is a sin. God loves sinner but hates the sin! Believe in Jesus Christ, win over sin, leave death behind and enter life." In response to this

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<sup>414</sup> "Sina Doubles Down as Weibo Reaches 140 Million Registered Users," *iChinaStock*, May 12, 2011, accessed August 31, 2011, <http://news.ichinastock.com/2011/05/sina-doubles-down-as-weibo-reaches-140-million-registered-users/>.

overblown religious fundamentalist message, Lu tweets on her weibo: “Brothers and sisters turn around! Give strength!”<sup>415</sup> Lu’s pro-discrimination comment and homophobic stance sparks intense media response from academics and intellectuals in the mainland; various celebrities also blogged passionately against Lu on weibo. For example, Taiwan celebrity and openly gay host Kevin Tsai (蔡康永) immediately tweeted back a strong supportive stance for the queer community. He writes, “The homosexuals that you hate, they are not just nouns or metaphors that are incapable of pain and hurt. They are full-blooded and bodied human beings. In your whole life the people who collaborated with you on set, the media that supported you, those who watched your films and supported you when you won the award, many of them are *tongzhi*. No matter what religion, just speaking from the basic morals of being a human, how can you encourage hatred toward them? Is this possible?”

Long time Chinese gay rights activist and prominent sexologist Li Yinhe (李銀河) voices her concern for this media storm through her blog. She provides statistical results from her 2007 study and survey on tolerance and acceptance toward gay and lesbian people in the mainland. One note especially worth mentioning is that in that study, 91% of respondents affirm that LGBTQ people should have equal rights at workplace. In terms of gay marriage, 70% disagree while 27% support it, a rate still higher than the 17% support rate in Hong Kong comparatively. At the end of the blog, Li writes satirically, “In comparison, Lu Liping’s tolerance and acceptance for homosexuality is

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<sup>415</sup> For a politically neutral news report on this incident, see, Lu Liping’s Homophobia Receives Bombing Attacks on the Web,” Daily News Sina, accessed September 1, 2011, <http://dailynews.sina.com/bg/ent/chinapress/20110630/00562565163.html>. For a re-posting of various responses from other celebrities and public figures to this incident, see <http://blog.163.com/hot/217/>, accessed September 1, 2011.

much lower than ordinary Chinese folks. This is something she must seriously reflect upon.”<sup>416</sup> Finally, what comes as the most surprising turn of events in this ever-proliferating media maelstrom on homophobia and social justice is the official news report from CCTV-13, a channel under the party affiliated news network CCTV that broadcasts 24-hour news. The news reporter Qiu Qiming (邱启明), after matter-of-factly reporting the development of this media event, provides his own commentary. He speaks: “We respect the faith of individual celebrities, and we allow them to have their own point of view on issues. But that does not mean that we agree that a person of such influence should have the power to openly discriminate against certain communities in China.” He continues his passionate stance on protecting sexual minority in China: “The sexual orientations of certain people in our midst are different from the rest of us. But they are also diligently contributing to society. Gay people, like us, have the right to exist and develop themselves in society, and this right should not be overtaken by any other concept.” Qiu said in closing, “We like to say a word to the gay community, and it’s something we have all heard many times over—I may not agree with the way you live, but I will defend your right to be different from me.”<sup>417</sup>

How do we begin to understand the ever more closely linked nature of communication, community building, activism, and mediatization in transnational Chinese cultures? While new media and cyberspace tend to be assumed as spaces that are more free from state regulations and tolerable toward queer subjects, how do we account for the fact that CCTV, a more “traditional” form of “old” media that has strong

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<sup>416</sup> Li Yinhe, “Lu Liping, You Should Reflect Upon Yourself,” *Blog Sina*, July 5, 2011, accessed August 31, 2011, [http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog\\_473d533601017ykp.html](http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_473d533601017ykp.html).

<sup>417</sup> The complete reposting of the original CCTV broadcast is accessible through YouTube here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UMFPwJu58tU>, accessed August 31, 2011.

affiliation with the government, sides strongly with the *tongzhi* community? Lu Liping weibo homophobia incident and the ensuing transmedia activism that traverses the spaces of multiple online and offline communities in the mainland, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the Chinese diasporas powerfully illustrate our cybernetic dwelling and embeddedness in a world fully immersed in the affective connection of transmedia assemblage. Assemblage connects multiple actors, bloggers, and media networks across time and space; within these disorderly assemblings of subjects and opinions, it deterritorializes the original speech by Lu. In this way, transmedia assemblage productively enables what Deleuze and Guattari observes about the irreducible but never measurable potentiality of the rhizome: “the rhizome, on the other hand, acts on desire by external, productive outgrowths.”<sup>418</sup> Moreover, assemblage, in the unfolding and re-mediatization of information, breaks down the divide between old and new media. While the original hateful speech by Lu appeared on weibo, a “new media” forum, it kinetically traversed the whole social field of cyberspace and non-cyberspace. It was “updated” on television, and the actual way I personally found out about Qiu’s speech on CCTV was through a post on my Facebook’s wall!

What do these endless circulations of images, voices, and activist fever tell us about media, queer culture, and cultural citizenship? About control and freedom? About emergent sites for imagining and acting on new social identities? Recent scholarship on the relationship between “new media” and alternative model of citizenship in postsocialist China provides some further rethinking on the constraint and possibility of exercising queer media citizenship. In an important study about how Chinese people

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<sup>418</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 14.

during the SARS crisis take advantage of text messaging to mock the Communist party, Haiqing Yu theorizes a mode of media citizenship that is enabled by ordinary people's acts of "talking, linking, clicking." Yu writes, "New media not only contribute to the emergence of invisible subjects and the formation of reflexive subjectivity, but also constitute a new citizenship based on spontaneous and individualized deliberation on matters of public importance, through textual flows of written words rather than direct oral and/or physical engagements. New media have become an important venue in which to exercise citizenship—to express, protest, and mock."<sup>419</sup> But of course, media citizenship through the means of new media is still not identical to rights of political participation. While there were 162 million Internet users in the mainland by June 2007, that number only accounts for 12% of the population in China at that time.<sup>420</sup> More revealingly, in regard to Qiu Qiming's passionate defense for the rights of queer subjects in China, his statement can be read in several ways. It could be read as his "personal" support for gay and lesbian fellow citizens. Or, seen in a less positive light, it could be read as a re-appropriation of "new" media by old media through the voice of the party: the party's will to pacify the dissident gay and lesbian crowds by showing that it hears their grievances. This method of pacification could indeed re-territorialize the radical potential of protests and direct actions and reduce the voice of Qiu to that of the party, whose goal is to restore social harmony in a country disorganized by capitals, social class, and sexuality.

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<sup>419</sup> Haiqing Yu, "Talking, Linking, Clicking: The Politics of AIDS and SARS in Urban China," *positions* 15.1 (2007):35-63, 52.

<sup>420</sup> Zhou Yongming, "Privatizing Control: Internet Cafes in China," in *Privatizing China: Socialism from Afar*, ed. Li Zhang and Aihwa Ong (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 219.

Queer media citizenship names this site of fragile connectivity between strangers and fellow citizens in the battle against homophobia and the evermore re-appropriation of sites of resistance by state and global capitalism both online and offline. It points to the limits of the user's benefit that I have discussed earlier via Foucault and calls on us to act on multiple sites of mediatization by resisting the fantasy of new media and our naïve belief in it as the last frontier of democratic freedom. In the multiple cases that connect questions of queer sexuality, media censorship, public sphere, counter-publics, and media citizenship, new hegemonic collusions between state feminism and conservative forces, between public opinion and legality, and between new media usage and homophobic violence are emerging through violent means of assemblage. At the same time, their ever-shifting sites, unstable formations, and the dispersing means through which mediatized images travel also promise new sites for envisioning what J.K. Gibson-Graham called the "anticapitalist imagination." Gibson-Graham argues, "Theorizing capitalism itself as different from itself—as having, in other words, no essential or coherent identity—multiplies (infinitely) the possibilities of alterity."<sup>421</sup>

The hegemonic, multiple, and plural formations of global capitalism within sites as diverse as post-Martial Law Taiwan, postcolonial Hong Kong, and postsocialist China mean that a queer media citizenship and any conception of counterpublics must ground its queer theory and praxis through concrete commonality against multiple hegemonic formations across transmedia sites. Therefore, queer media citizenship names the politics of alliances and solidarity not based on some common, assumed, pre-existing queer

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<sup>421</sup> J.K. Gibson-Graham, *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It): A Feminist Critique of Political Economy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006 Edition), 15.

Chinese identity, or in the mythic locale of “Greater China.” In contradistinction, queer media citizenship enacts alternative method of contesting new formations of heteropatriarchy and heteronormativity through the logic of opposition itself. This logic of opposition based in the effort of identifying shifting and multifarious sites of struggle dovetails with Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s methodology of “Third World women” politics of solidarity. She clarifies her project in this way: “Thus, while this is not an argument for just recognizing ‘common experiences’ of Third World women workers, it is an argument for recognizing (concrete, not abstract) ‘common interests’ and the potential bases of cross-national solidarity—a common context of struggle.”<sup>422</sup> An inter-regional, East-East transnational approach undertaken here excavates the political stake of identifying common interests of queer politics across different sites of Chineseness.

The concept of cybernetic sexuality that I began with in this chapter can further highlight the stake of “common context of struggle.” The user’s benefit, a term that I adapt from Foucault’s notion of the speaker’s benefit, promises a fictive imagination of total freedom in cyberspace; however, in Lu Liping’s case of homophobic comments on weibo, we see that the reinscription of personal subjectivity (Lu’s posting) online does not automatically lead to a sense of freedom or total control, either. In this case, it is a little bit of both. Lu’s will to freedom and her belief in “user’s benefit” in a “free” open format of personalized blogging lead to the reinscription of anti-homophobic “control” by queer and non-queer netizens. In this way, cybernetic sexuality as a concept that underlines the double bind of control and freedom also suggests the possibility of

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<sup>422</sup> Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 143.

alternative exercise of power that is not over-determined by state sovereignty, nor can it be easily reabsorbed by logics of transnational capitalism. Cybernetic sexuality then involves a certain kind of unpredictability as different media events and scandals may lead to unpredictable forms of activism. This precariousness of queer media citizenship resonates closely with what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri call “multitude,” or the formation of “life in common.” They argue that the multitude under the age of Empire, perpetual war, and fractured postmodernity is distinct from older conceptions like the “people,” which is a unitary national subject, or the masses, who are often indifferent and directed by higher power. In contrast, “the internal differences of the multitude must discover *the common* that allows them to communicate and act together. The common we share, in fact, is not so much discovered as it is produced.”<sup>423</sup>

The social subjects who emerge in the media events of Josephine Ho, Cho Man Kit, *Same Sex Connection*, and online activism against Lu Liping show that neither the polarized positions of imaginary freedom nor total control will foster the emergence and participations of the commons. Rather, these media-texts demonstrate that while queer netizens all embody differences marked by nationality, location, sexual orientation, and class, the productions of concrete social common remain possible and perhaps even hopeful. On the one hand, these media events and the diverse activisms could be read as merely local bottom-up efforts and struggles against separate authoritarian regimes in nation (PRC), state (Taiwan), and region (Hong Kong). On the other hand, when juxtaposed horizontally and inter-regionally, these common contexts of struggle provide

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<sup>423</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude*, xv.



materials, urgency, and hope for reading, thinking, and visualizing the contour of queer Chinese modernity.

## CONCLUSION

### Queer Dialectics and Not-Yet-Articulated Readings: The Times and Places of Queer Chinese and Sinophone Cultures

#### I. Queer Dialectics

In a project that rethinks the queer spaces of kinship, method of cross-historical reading, queer temporality and spatial remapping in cinema, and the kinetic control and possibility of queer sex in the age of media convergence, the stake is high in rethinking how we pursue objects of study for Chinese studies, queer theory, and transnational cultures. One's relationship to one's object of study is never easy to explain; after all, as Avery Gordon reminds us in a quote from Patricia Williams, "That life is complicated is a fact of great analytic importance."<sup>424</sup> I have decided from the outset in pursuing a study of queer Chinese and Sinophone cultures to avoid both the easy task of simplifying the alternative potentials of these queer cultural productions to the question of cultural politics, or confining these texts as merely representational of "the real" social world. The debate about the neat distinction between the real and the representational seems to be a bygone concern. Instead, more exciting directions of cultural studies in the last several years draw our attention to the unacknowledged life-worlds of textual phenomena that are more than the marked effects of the local and the global; more so, texts are things that tend to "fall away" from ambitious global imaginations that, at the same time, constitute

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<sup>424</sup> Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 3.

the remainder of practices of worlding and relocalization.<sup>425</sup>

In pursuing how texts queerly disorient us into modes and practices of worlding, temporalizing, and the replotting of spaces across the national, regional, and the transnational, my project aims to move beyond the already visited paradigms of mapping gay and lesbian cinemas and literary aesthetics within a specific discipline (like film studies, literary studies, or cultural history) and method of periodization. If the scope of the analysis in its combinations of literature, cinema, and new media seems too messy and undisciplined to some, it is because to large measures both queer theory and Chinese modernity traffic in the realm of messiness. Beyond the textual outline of sexual non-normativity and the interpretive recovery of homosocial desires, what is queer about queer studies (to borrow the phrase from David L. Eng, Judith Halberstam, and Jose Esteban Munoz) is precisely that new strands of queer theory are ready to rethink queerness through new social formations, given that “some of the most innovative and risky work on globalization, neoliberalism, cultural politics, subjectivity, identity, family, and kinship is happening in the realm of queer studies.”<sup>426</sup> The shift in the field from theorizing elegantly about performativity, gay shame, and differential consciousness that characterize the queer studies of 1990s to queer rescaling of sociality suggests that, more than ever, we need to pursue new methodologies that track the queer as it emerges in practices of (re)worlding. Parallel to queer re-orientation toward the new social, we may be well suited to rebelliously forget already established objects of study in order to

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<sup>425</sup> See Neferti Xina M. Tadiar, *Things Fall Away: Philippine Historical Experience and the Makings of Globalization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), and Aihwa Ong, “Introduction: Worlding Cities, or the Art of Being Global,” in *Worlding Cities: Asian Experiments and the Art of Being Global*, ed. Ananya Roy and Aihwa Ong (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 1-26.

<sup>426</sup> David L. Eng, Judith Halberstam, and Jose Esteban Munoz, “Introduction: What’s Queer about Queer Studies Now?” *Social Text* 84-85, 23.3-4 (Fall 2005): 1-17, 2.

“discover” and rethink new ones.<sup>427</sup> In what follows, I propose to rethink queer theory as a relational method that studies the dialectical tensions and possibilities between the social and the textual in order to map out emerging temporal and spatial terrains of queer Chinese and Sinophone cultures.

How does one grasp the different relational scales between the textual and the political, the queer and the social, theory and praxis, and the national and the regional? Dialectic involves the process of grappling with the differential grids of the world, from the local, national, global, and the planetary to individual situatedness in this world. Contemporary critics who study emergent cultural politics that disrupt cultural dominants then inherit at least two traditions of dialectical method. In the Hegelian dialectic, the Spirit exists “in itself and for itself,” and the premise of dialectic is to resolve and understand as closely as possible the self-negation of the Spirit in its path of becoming.<sup>428</sup> It is through this method of negation and self-to-self measuring that Hegel was poised to claim the dialectic of world history, where the Spirit’s “in itself and for itself” desire measures the “success” to which the world moves through historical progress.<sup>429</sup> Whereas

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<sup>427</sup> Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011). For a refreshing account about how queerness can be read as a mode of disorientation away from familiar objects and spaces through phenomenology, see Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

<sup>428</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 117.

<sup>429</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, trans. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980). Hegel defines the internal dialectical logics of the Spirit, nation, and world historical process in the following way: “The spirit is essentially individual, but in the field of world history, we are not concerned with particulars and need not confine ourselves to individual instances or attempt to trace everything back to them. The spirit in history is an individual which is both universal in nature and at the same time determinate: in short, it is the nation in general, and the spirit we are concerned with is the spirit of the nation” (51). One major problem of Hegelian dialectics as it applies to world history and colonial modernity lies in his refusal to reckon with Asian modes of being modern by relegating them to the mode of governance called Oriental despotism: “The Orientals do not know that the spirit or man as such are free in themselves. And because they do not know this, they are not themselves free... The One is therefore merely a despot, not a free man and a human being” (54).

Hegel reads negations and contradictions as internal to the Spirit's becoming, Marx and Engels understands the dialectic as the mediation between "man" and social totality. In his reading of the tension between the two strands of dialectical method, Georg Lukacs concurs with Marx: "He maintained that Hegel's dialectic, which purported to be an inner, real dialectic of the historical process, was a mere illusion: in the crucial point he failed to go beyond Kant. His knowledge is no more than knowledge *about* an essentially alien material."<sup>430</sup> Lukacs' strand of Marxism revises the tendency to split social totality (base) from subjective formation and ideology (superstructure) by reading into the "interaction" between subjectivity and social formations. In his method of dialectic, "contradictions are not a sign of the imperfect understanding of society; on the contrary, they belong to *the nature of reality itself and to the nature of capitalism*."<sup>431</sup> Writing in the same period, Gramsci also revises older methods of Marxist analysis: "This reasoning is based on the necessary reciprocity between structure and superstructure, a reciprocity which is nothing other than the real dialectical process."<sup>432</sup>

This slight detour into the development of the dialectical method permits us to rethink queer theory and its various manifestations in Chinese cultural politics. While throughout this project I have invoked queer as synonymous with identity markers such as *tongzhi* (a neutral terminology of "homosexual" in Chinese cultures) and *ku'er* (Taiwan transliteration of queer) that emerged in specific contexts in China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, each chapter also performs a dialectical intervention of *queering* that

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<sup>430</sup> Georg Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1971), 16.

<sup>431</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>432</sup> Antonio Gramsci, "Hegemony, Relations of Force, Historical Bloc," in *A Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916-1935*, ed. David Forgacs (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1988), 193.

juxtaposes the textual in reciprocal relationship to contemporary Chinese and Sinophone cultural politics. In Chapter 1, Chen Ran's fin-de-siècle novel *A Private Life* reveals Ni Aoao's sharp perspectival consciousness on the relationship between her family breakup in the socialist period and the authoritarianism of the Maoist state. In a parallel socio-literary critique, she takes the reader back to the contemporary postsocialist emergence of state-sponsored capitalism in 1990s China by alerting us to changing landscapes in Beijing and the horror of Tiananmen Square in 1989. In doing so, the novel evinces a double historical consciousness that marks the queer subject as intertwined with the changing dynamics of nationalism and China's insertion into the global order.<sup>433</sup> Ni's self-abandonment at the end issues a queer dialectical critique that refuses the over-determination of market participation by enclosing herself in a lonely apartment.

Likewise, Chen Xue's perverse rewriting of Freudian psychoanalysis confronts Yang Zhao's literary paternalism that aims to dictate the proper social utility of "literature" in 1990s Taiwan. Her literary intervention asks us to rethink the vexed relation between the literary and the socio-political. In many ways, Chen's novel *The Book of Evil Women* resists any easy distillation of textual meanings that the social must dictate by pointing to a new social imaginary that marks the site of contradictions in sociality, as Lukacs reminds us. Huang Biyun's stories are perhaps the most dialectical among the three: as Huang mediates various scales of female-to-female circulations of capitals in the French Chinese diaspora and narrates the various failed heterosexual desire between Song Ke Ming the older brother and Chinese women from other Sinophone

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<sup>433</sup> For a succinct summary of intellectual debate about global capitalism in post-socialist and post-New Era China, see Wang Hui, *China's New Order: Society, Politics, and Economy in Transition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 141-187.

regions like Taiwan and Vietnam (Chen Yu is an illegal immigrant from Taiwan and Ye Xixi is a Vietnamese immigrant who came to the U.S. via Thailand), his brother Huai Ming remains the only “faithful one.” Queer kinship in the three novels forms alternative spaces that exist tangentially as dialectical tensions to Chinese nationalism, postsocialist market economy, literary nationalism, and diasporic reproduction of kinship in transnational capitalism. As evident in my reflection of the queering of kinship in Chapter 1, queerness names the dialectical tension as literary productions emerge from the social and in turn, offer productive modes of difference that challenge dominant forms of nationalism and transnationalism.

Modernity in this sense then marks not only the spatial neat coordination into successive stages that become knowable as “progress” and “development,” it also depends on logics of temporalizing that produces imaginary distinctions between the premodern and the modern, the modern and the postmodern, measurable time and duration, and nation’s time and its temporal others. While time and space and their socio-cultural determinations are not analytically separate from one another, they do deserve distinctive examination in order to highlight the queer critiques that emerge from them. Chapters 2 and 3 both carry out dialectical criticism from a consideration of queer temporality. In fact, my own attraction to the *The Legend of the White Snake* in Chapter 2 largely results from my queer childhood memory of watching the Taiwan produced TV series in Hong Kong as a young boy. I was fascinated as much by Angie Chiu’s hyper-feminine performance of the white snake character as well as by Yip Tong’s not-so-feminine and slightly masculine assuming of the husband Xu Xian role. Thinking about how to turn my fascination into analytical vocabulary is itself a cross-historical

methodology, a queer impulse to connect what is strikingly queer in the modern rendition of the folklore, back to my childhood, and then more “backward” to the original version by Feng Menglong in late Ming dynasty. Moving beyond simply denoting the theme of cross-dressing in the modern adaptation in the TV series and sexual perversity in Li Bihua’s novel, I argue that the binary division between the human and the non-human demonic can be linked and theoretically unpacked through a parallel elaboration of the modern transphobic transgender identity marker, *renyao* (human prodigy). This cross-historical methodology is attuned to the misalignment of desire and historicity as well as the possibility of affecting history in corporeal and erotic modes, what Elizabeth Freeman terms “erotohistoriography.”<sup>434</sup> In doing so, I am also interested in the question of “unfaithful translation” and the way in which the afterlife of texts might work in queer dialectical oppositions to, and strange deviations from, the “original” text.

Chapter 3 further unpacks the relational logics between nationalism, temporality, and queer sexuality by pairing several intellectual inquiries within which the question of temporality has been taken up. If dialectical method in revised Marxist theory admits that the ideological works in reciprocal relation to capitalist totality, this chapter asks what happens when the narrative of nationalism is framed in dialectical tensions to the “other” sexual narratives that it seeks to suppress but is never able to do so fully. Intertemporality here not only enables a queer reading into the embodied aspects of sexuality in cinema but reveals the very unstable temporal ontology of the nation and the transnation. I pair Huang Shuqin’s 1987 feminist film *Woman Demon Human* alongside Chen Kaige’s *Farewell My Concubine* (1993) and Zhang Yuan’s 1996 film *East Palace*,

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<sup>434</sup> Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds*, 95.



*West Palace* and read them all as telling different variations of transgenderism. I show how “inter-temporal” moments in these films can be grasped as dialectical temporal critiques of nationalism in its failed attempt to discipline queer subjectivities into the smooth and linear narratives of national belonging.

Chapter 4 returns to the question of space that Chapter 1 opens with by problematizing the universal logics of “coming out of the closet.” Much of the work in queer transnational studies and queer diaspora studies is aimed at overturning the universal temporal (becoming modern) and spatial logics (coming out and moving away from heterosexual familial space), which assume that “coming out” expresses the most desirable and global articulation of LGBTQ subject formations.<sup>435</sup> While I concur with this critical queer critique of Western developmentalism, I also show that any understanding of gay oppression in popular culture, especially in Chinese cinema, must be framed in dialectical relation to the spatial compression of the global cities. With similar impact like the literary interventions in Chapter 1, films by Yonfan, Cui Zi’en, and Tsai Ming-liang visualize the claustrophobic cartography of gay male subjectivity while materializing spatial rearticulations that embrace cruising (in Yonfan’s *Bishonen*), unravel heteronormative violence (in Cui Zi’en’s films), and “play within the closet” in postmodern geographies.

In Chapter 5, a queer dialectic provides a productive framework to comprehend the disorienting flow that emerges in the new convergence of old and new media. The various new media scandals and events of Josephine Ho, Cho Man Kit, *Same Sex*

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<sup>435</sup> The earliest articulation of this queer critique against the developmental narratives of “coming out” comes from Martin F. Manalansan IV’s essay, “In the Shadows of Stonewall: Examining Gay Transnational Politics and the Diasporic Dilemma,” in *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital*, eds. Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 485-505.

*Connection*, and the weibo homophobia scandal by Lu Liping altogether lay bare the concomitant and reciprocal perversity of power, freedom, and control within and across the fiber optics. As these events and medial texts travel across China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and diasporic communities in the world, queerness names the very textual scandal of our “being in the world” across the national, regional, and transnational scales. Queerness here marks our dialectical attachments to new social imaginary online and offline while sustaining alternative possibility of cyber and social reworldings. Queer dialectics function as the contagious pressure points upon the normatively social.

## **II. Queer Chinese and Sinophone Cultures: What Lies Beyond the Postsocialist/Postcolonial Paradigms**

If thinking queer dialectical interventions opens up the many possible forms of alternative cultural expressions and their embedded resistances against hegemonic political and cultural formations in postsocialist China, postcolonial Hong Kong, and post-Martial Law Taiwan, dialectical relationality can provide directions for future scholarship that traverses the many connective threads between different sites of Chinese and non-Mandarin dominated Sinophone cultures. A common concern across all the chapters revolves around the questions of “when” and “how” a singular cultural production, whether a novel by Chen Ran or a film by Cui Zi’en, connects to transnational queer cultural productions beyond the national terrain. This inquiry drives both materialist critiques and reading habits. Some cultural formations, like Huang Biyun’s theme of transnational capitalist failure, Cui Zi’en’s filmic narration of money boys in Beijing, and transnational media controversy over homophobic remark by Lu Liping, are decisively global and transnational in either their textual focus or material

impacts; other formations such as Chen Ran's politics of abandonment and lesbian erotics in 1990s China and Huang Shuqin's engagement with feminist and transgender consciousness are less obvious as modes of transnationality. However, I think that a queer dialectical method, while appreciating particular local and global situatedness, can afford to take risks and boldly make connections between them in order to probe the uselessness for thinking minor and critical queerness beyond current paradigms of theorizing Chinese modernity. This move can shift our analytical habit beyond national and regional theorization of postsocialist modernity in the PRC, postcolonialism in Hong Kong, and post-Martial Law neoliberal modernity in Taiwan.

In other words, new transnational studies that take up this challenge would connect critical racial, ethnic, class, and sexual alliances within China to those already in place or emerging from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the greater Chinese diasporas. This transnational approach is attuned to both actually existing material transnationality in the production, circulation, consumption, and political impacts of queer Chinese modernity as well as *not-yet-articulated methods of reading* that may connect them. Here, the work of cultural critics such as Lisa Lowe, Neferti Tadiar, Grace Hong, Roderick Ferguson, Amie Elizabeth Parry, and Anna Tsing provide some clues to how this possible alliance between Chineseness and Sinophone articulations may look like in new methodologies of East-East transnationalism.

In an important interview with Angela Davis, Lisa Lowe asks her to theorize the possibility of coalitions across different racial, gender, and class lines in the then contemporary moment (late 1990s), when the U.S. state increasingly targeted community of colors through criminalization and withdrawal of welfare, as well as through the

language of colorblindness that follows the supposed “success” of the civil rights movement in the 1950s-60s. Davis suggests that new forms of political coalition result from politicizing the category of women of color, “basing the identity on politics rather than the politics on identity.”<sup>436</sup> Davis further broadens the alternative potentials of the political dimensions of women of color feminism by urging us to “focus on the creation of unpredictable or unlikely coalitions grounded in political projects.”<sup>437</sup> In a similar vein, Lowe’s work on Asian American cultural politics argues that it is not the essentialized commonality among diverse Asian American subjects that permit the emergence of alternative cultural studies; rather, an understanding of the contradictions in their shared inclusion as commodified labors in the U.S. and their shared histories of exclusion from political belonging enables disidentifications from the ontology of the nation-state forms.<sup>438</sup> Likewise, the cultural productions by feminist writers, queer filmmakers, and political events that question state repressions and the reach of transnational capitals give material substance to theorizing the “unlikely coalitions” among dissident sexual formations in China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan from the 1990s onwards. Importantly, actually existing coalitional movements have begun to emerge between queer activists from China and Hong Kong, the former often sponsored and attended the International Day Against Homophobia (IDAHO) held in Hong Kong since May 2005.

Despite their different local situatedness in different regimes of political governance, their shared deviance from mixed governance of global capitalism, state-

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<sup>436</sup> Lisa Lowe, “Angela Davis: Reflections on Race, Class, and Gender in the U.S.A.” in *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital*, 303-23, 318.

<sup>437</sup> Ibid, 322.

<sup>438</sup> Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 6.

supported neo-Confucianism, and conservative sexual ethics may be one shared political dominance under which these various queer cultural projects can articulate their critical differences together through unlikely connections. This brings us back to the dialectical reading method that I mentioned earlier and one that I want to further pursue not only between queer texts and the social, but also between Chinese modernity and its Sinophone cultures within and outside the geopolitics of the PRC. To more precisely articulate this potential shared queerness among Chineseness and Sinophone cultures as political projects position themselves against the scattered hegemonies of global capitalism and the state's alignments with neoliberal forms of sexual conservatism, I now turn to Neferti Tadiar's reading of globalization as constitutive of new lifeworlds of experiential subjectivities that far too often "fall away" from traditionally construed notion of the political. Tadiar writes, "Tangential to the aims of both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic forms of political agency, these seemingly obsolescent modes of experience propel and shape the production of the very conditions of life around which organized politics revolve, as they are the inventions of people struggling with those conditions. Putting these diminished experiential practices into language thus becomes a way to contemplate the creative political potentials and alternative social resources that they might spell, potentials and resources that are instead quickly jettisoned in attempts to wrest control of a world gone awry."<sup>439</sup>

Similar to Tadiar's project of excavating those modes of experience by Filipino female migrant workers, revolutionary literature, and people power movements, which constitute the tangential makings of globalization, I learn much from reading the

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<sup>439</sup> Neferti Xina M. Tadiar, *Things Fall Away*, 5.

tangential experiences of abandonment and queer solitude (Chen Ran's novel in Chapter 1), from visualizing queer claustrophobic death and social alienation in cinema (Chapter 4), and from reckoning with multiple temporalities in cinematic narratives about trauma, displacement, and transgender embodiments (Chapter 3). Indeed, reading these experiences of abandonment, alienation, and alternative sociality as parallel but utterly heterogeneous formations between the three geopolitical sites names a mode of reading that Grace Hong and Roderick Ferguson terms "strange affinities." Hong and Ferguson rethinks the concept of difference in comparative gender and racialization as "not a multiculturalist celebration, not an excuse for presuming a commonality among all racialized peoples, but a cleareyed appraisal of the dividing line between valued and devalued, which can cut within, as well as across, racial groupings."<sup>440</sup> Building on the work by Lisa Lowe and Angela Davis, they redefine culture as "the site for the production of alternative modes of comparison and affiliation."<sup>441</sup> While Hong and Ferguson's project situates comparison between minority racial formations and queer of color critiques within the U.S., their naming of critical difference and queerness as analytical lens to measure "the dividing line between valued and devalued" dovetails with Tadiar's call to engage with experiential cultural forms, be they literary, cinematic, and political, that either fall away or are seen as queer and devalued from dominant viewpoints of neoliberal capitalism and globalization. Indeed, Huang Biyun's stories about queer intimacies among working-class women in Paris and erotic intimacies between two brothers in the Chinese diaspora of New York may seem overtly devalued,

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<sup>440</sup> Grace Hong and Roderick A. Ferguson, "Introduction," in *Strange Affinities: The Gender and Sexual Politics of Comparative Racialization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 11.

<sup>441</sup> Ibid, 15.

impossible, or queer to traditionally recognized genres of “the transnational.” But once put into critical comparisons with other queer lifeworlds from China and the Sinophone, Huang’s experiential literature returns our critical attentions to dialectical comparative projects.

To perform *not-yet-articulated methodology* means that contemporary critics need to move beyond readings of cultural forms strictly within confines of the nation and the region on the one hand, or presume the immediate “border-crossing” priority of some cultural forms over and against decidedly “national” ones on the other. In fact, if Saskia Sassen’s formulation of globalization as both the *de facto* transnationalism and the “re-nationalization” of the legality of the nation-state has any purchase, it means that cultural studies practitioners can anticipate future directions in the broader field of transnational studies to look for, recover, and imagine unlikely connections among both major and minor cultural formations within shared and distinct languages and dialects.<sup>442</sup> Transnationalism as the rescaling of nation (the PRC), region (Hong Kong), and semi-nation state (Taiwan) in this new model of comparison will necessarily situate cultural studies in histories and cultures of colonial modernity and neoliberalism. Amie Elizabeth Parry, for example, has studied the dominant function of U.S. modernist writing and its seeming absence in Taiwan modernist poetry, which complicates the scale of comparison between national and regional forms. She calls this transnational reading method “interventionary translation.”<sup>443</sup> Each chapter of my project here performs different degree of interventionary vision as the experiential literary, cinematic, and new media

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<sup>442</sup> Saskia Sassen, *Globalization and Its Discontents* (New York: The New Press, 1998), xxvii, 6.

<sup>443</sup> Amie Elizabeth Parry, *Interventions into Modernist Cultures: Poetry from Beyond the Empty Screen* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 14.

forms demonstrate how they constitute the contours of Chinese modernity and Sinophone cultures, as much as they are conditioned by already existing hegemonies of the state, market, and developmentalist narrative of the global.

To read queerness dialectically as naming the not-yet-articulated can lead to new agendas in comparative literature, queer theory, Chinese studies, and Sinophone studies. First, as Anna Tsing points out recently in her theory of “supply chain capitalism,” logics and practices of human diversity such as ethnicity, race, gender, and sexuality are not homogenized by the globalizing infiltration of national markets. “Labor, nature, and capital are mobilized in fragmented but linked economic niches; thus, supply chain capitalism focuses our attention on questions of diversity within structures of power.”<sup>444</sup> To queer Chinese modernity and Sinophone cultures is to bring back the question of human diversity into political and theoretical conversations on modernization, modernity, and globalization, which as Tsing sharply points out, often aim for generality in their erasure of diversity, and I would add, queer and sexual politics. Furthermore, the insistence to read queer cultural politics from the PRC, Hong Kong, and Taiwan as parallel to one another suggests that there are many ways of performing queer of color critique and queer transnationalism. While comparative racialization and gender studies provides one logical direction, more work needs to be done in queer studies about national to regional queer cultures.<sup>445</sup> Placing alternative logics in cultural forms and attending to the tangential experiential forms in literature, film, and media can

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<sup>444</sup> Anna Tsing, “Supply Chains and the Human Condition,” *Rethinking Marxism* 21.2 (April 2009): 148-176, 149.

<sup>445</sup> For a study that takes up explicit queer of color connections between different nations and regions in Europe, see Fatima El-Tayeb, *European Others: Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).



productively counter recent suspicions by some literary scholars who put renewed faith in world-system theory. In many ways, this renewed theoretical turn to world-system theory often dismisses the important work of anti-racist and queer cultural studies as automatically and “wrongly” assuming that intersectional differences promise changes in the system.<sup>446</sup> Whereas I argue that these forms already constitute crucial parts in the literary world-system.

Mapping the critical potentials of queer cultural studies at the intersections of recognizable “Chinese” cultures and Sinophone productions requires the work of delineating the relational logics of cultural dominants between the national, the regional, and the transnational. The national in this study can be better conceived as a descriptive marker for any cultural production based in the People’s Republic of China; so too, it can name the very contentious claim of Taiwan nationhood before and after the arrival of the KMT political government led by Chiang Kai-shek since 1949, as well as its forceful governance over minority populations in Taiwan in its claim to national cohesion. Likewise, the regional names not a coherent smaller-scale geographical location. Instead, the “regional” here often refers to Hong Kong and its uneasy but interesting status as a “transnation,” a city that continues to negotiate its ambivalent political position since its return to China in 1997. This debate has not ceased but instead gained new political urgency as 15 years later in 2012, many Hong Kong citizens protested against the public election in March 2012, in which a public official Leung Chun-ying (梁振英) was elected

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<sup>446</sup> For the recent turn in literary studies to world-system analysis, see David Palumbo-Liu, Bruce Robbins, and Nirvana Tanoukhi, ed. *Immanuel Wallerstein and the Problem of the World: System, Scale, Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

as the next Chief Executive of Hong Kong. Leung's pro-China politics leads to what many citizens view as a "small-scale" and closed-door election.

Meanwhile, geopolitically speaking, Taiwan has recently signed the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA) with the government of the PRC. This treaty, signed on June 29<sup>th</sup> 2010, promises to reduce tariffs and many commercial barriers between the two nations. Taiwan President and current Chairman of the KMT party Ma Ying-jeou's role in signing the agreement with China led many citizens in Taiwan to consider him as "selling Taiwan to China." Furthermore, the economic downturn in the U.S. in the last two years led some neo-conservatives like Paul V. Kane to come up with politically immature and self-imperial posture of "ditching Taiwan" in order to "enter into closed-door negotiations with Chinese leaders to write off the \$1.14 trillion of American debt currently held by China in exchange for a deal to end American military assistance and arms sales to Taiwan and terminate the current United States-Taiwan defense arrangement by 2015."<sup>447</sup>

Several points about regionalism and transnationalism vis-à-vis postsocialist Chinese modernity seem urgent here. First, Hong Kong's increasing absorption into the political governance by the PRC and Taiwan's recent closer economic lateral integration with China illustrate that socio-politically and culturally, the trans-regional and trans-Chinese connections can both reaffirm global capitalist expansions on the one hand, or urge activists and critical movements to come up with creative paths that resist the sub-imperial desire of China to replace the colonial and imperial roles of British and U.S.

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<sup>447</sup> Paul V. Kane, "To Save Our Economy, Ditch Taiwan," The Opinion Page in *The New York Times*, November 10, 2011 < <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/11/opinion/to-save-our-economy-ditch-taiwan.html> > Accessed April 26, 2012.

hegemonies over the world in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century in its current global ascendancy.<sup>448</sup> Ironically, Kane's anxiety about U.S.'s declining economic "health" and its unsustainable control in the Asia-Pacific region does reckon with the reality that there are emerging and competing models of empire instead of one theoretical Empire.<sup>449</sup> If the Chinese nation and its political and economic hegemony constitutes one emerging challenge against previous modes of global sovereignty through trans-regional economic infiltrations instead of clearly manifest imperialism and military outposts, it becomes urgent that cultural critics map out alternative formations of cultural politics that connect emerging social movements in race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality in order to account for actually existing modes of living and human diversity. It is in this particular sense of intervention that the Chineseness of "China" and the marginal politics of the "Sinophone" can be framed in reciprocal, relational, and dialectical relationship to one another. In other words, while transnationalism often describes the global contacts between words, images, people, goods, commerce, and so on in the longer span of the globe, it is the critical ways in which the term is deployed to make visible emerging logics of capitalist accumulation, imperialist and sub-imperial desire, and neoliberal formations, as well as their attendant discontents, that transnational methodology can become counter-hegemonic.

The coming to terms with the emerging neoliberal logics of China's transnationalizing of regions and state in Hong Kong and Taiwan as well as the possibility of counter-hegemonic formations across nations and regions point to the blind spot in treating the postsocialist modernity paradigm in the study of China and the

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<sup>448</sup> For a concise theorization of sub-imperialism, see Kuan-Hsing Chen, *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 17-64.

<sup>449</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

postcolonial paradigm in the study of Hong Kong and Taiwan as analytically distinct. Jason McGrath's call "to conceptualize postsocialist China as neither presenting an 'alternative modernity' to global capitalism, nor simply being assimilated into some unchanging, essentialized abstraction called *modernity* (or *capitalism*)" is crucial for understanding Chinese postsocialism and postsocialism in general as global conditions that are not restricted to countries with socialist past in the "second" and "third" worlds.<sup>450</sup>

In the breakdown of postsocialist and postcolonial paradigms toward the study of China and Chineseness, we could instead study bi-lateral, transversal, and particularly dialectical relationality between marginal communities within the PRC and those operating under the terms of the "Sinophone." In Shu-mei Shih's initial definition, the Sinophone is understood as "a network of places of cultural production outside China and on the margins of China and Chineseness, where a historical process of heterogenizing and localizing of continental Chinese culture has been taking place for several centuries."<sup>451</sup> Critics like Sheldon Lu have since critiqued Shih for excluding China in her theory of the Sinophone and maintaining the binary of China as Sinocentrism and the Sinophone as anti-Sinocentrism.<sup>452</sup> In her latest elaboration of the concept, Shih writes

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<sup>450</sup> Jason McGrath, *Postsocialist Modernity: Chinese Cinema, Literature, and Criticism in the Market Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 17.

<sup>451</sup> Shu-mei Shih, *Visuality and Identity*, 4.

<sup>452</sup> Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu, "Review of *Visuality and Identity*," *MCLC* (January 2008), accessed April 26, 2012, <http://mclc.osu.edu/rc/pubs/reviews/lu.htm>.

In this review, Lu argues, "The Sinophone is a counter hegemonic formation against China-centrism and a deconstruction of essentializing notions of "China" and "Chineseness." The exclusion of China itself from the domain of the Sinophone may seem liberating and progressive at first glance in academic discourse; but ultimately, this is unsound theoretically and inaccurate empirically. A major theme throughout Shih's book is the ineluctable condition of transnationality in the Sinophone region at the present historical juncture. But does transnationality only gather momentum in Hong Kong and Taiwan, and stops short of crossing the Chinese border? The transnational is by definition border-crossing. China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the

that “the Sinophone can perhaps be posited as a method that unsettles binaries and offers in their place the far richer potential of multidirectional critiques. It is in this way that the Sinophone interrupts.”<sup>453</sup> In another instance, Shih argues, “The historicizing of the processes gives substance to the earlier definition of the Sinophone as situated ‘on the margins of China and Chineseness,’ which was never intended to exclude China, but to give space for minoritized and colonized voices within China, be they Tibetan, Mongolian or Uyghur.”<sup>454</sup>

The controversial discussions of where the geopolitical reach of Chineseness ends, of whether the Sinophone is inherently anti-Sinocentric and hence anti-China, and whether Sinophone studies favors a dichotomizing theory that excludes China altogether point back to the very instability of the symbolic and material sign of “China.” Furthermore, if one were to take up Shih’s challenge to theorize the Sinophone in multidirectional modes, it becomes evident that there are still many non-hegemonic formations within the geopolitical terrain of China that could bring into sharp analytical focus their affinities with Sinophone non-Mandarin based cultural productions in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and other “Chinese” diasporas in various parts of the world, especially in Southeast Asia. In this way, the tension between Chineseness in all its senses and the Sinophone in its marginal politics needs not be one of conflictual division but one of dialectical and cross-regional productivity instead. This rescaling of “comparison”

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Chinese diaspora are mutually imbricated in the globalizing world. The concept of “Sinophone” loses its critical edge in this exclusionary approach to China and the Chinese diaspora. If we have to use this imperfect label, the Sinophone would include all Chinese-speaking communities in the world, including, not excluding, China itself.”

<sup>453</sup> Shu-mei Shih, “Theory, Asia, and the Sinophone,” *Postcolonial Studies* 13.4 (November 2010): 465-484, 482.

<sup>454</sup> Shu-mei Shih, “Foreword: The Sinophone as History and the Sinophone as Theory,” *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* 6.1 (March 2012): 5-7, 5.

proposes a method of comparing global formations that is much more scattered across nations and regions, thus disrupting the homogeneous and self-contained assumptions behind traditionally construed East-West and North-South comparative projects. In their visualizations and articulations of alternative spaces of kinship, multiple non-linear temporality, and perversion of global cities and new media flows, the productivity and disorientations of queer subjects and cultural politics examined in this project provide us with new objects and methods for reading and anticipating unlikely coalitions across the many times and places of queer Chinese and Sinophone cultures.

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