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Lim/Celluloid Comrades

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Introduction

In the last few decades, questions of gender and sexuality have become an increasingly important area of inquiry in many academic disciplines. Within the field of Chinese literature and culture, the focus of this inquiry has been on the female gender. More recently, scholars have begun to turn their attention to the male gender.¹ The study of same-sex sexuality, whether for the male or the female gender, can also be described as an emerging field.² At the same time, we have witnessed Chinese cinemas fast rising as one of the most vibrant areas of research within modern and contemporary Chinese literary and cultural studies, with a particular interest in the representation of gender and sexuality in film.³ This book aims to contribute to this exciting development in scholarship by situating itself at the crossroads of Chinese studies, gender and sexuality studies, and film and cinema studies in its examination of the representation of male homosexuality in contemporary Chinese cinemas.

This study focuses on the contemporary period (that is, since the 1990s), as the proliferation of films from China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong featuring male homosexual themes and characters is a striking but fairly recent phenomenon. Indeed, an *Encyclopedia of Chinese Film* published in 1998 acknowledges that “as a theme, homosexuality did not receive serious attention until the 1990s” (Yingjin Zhang and Xiao 1998, 300). This book looks at the phenomenon from several aspects. First, it accounts for the engendering conditions for the representation of male homosexuality in Chinese cinemas, tracing them to the emergence of Chinese cinemas in the international arena since the 1980s. Second, it delineates how the issue of homosexuality is negotiated in contemporary Chinese societies and Chinese cinemas. Third, it examines the meaning, politics, and burden of cinematic representation and interrogates the related identity politics underpinning discussions of selected films. Fourth, it provides an in-depth analysis of key films and auteurs, reading them within contexts as varied as pre-modern, transgender practice in Chinese theater to post-

modern, diasporic forms of sexualities. It argues that representations of male homosexuality in Chinese cinemas have been polyphonic and multifarious, posing a challenge to monolithic and essentialized constructions of both “Chineseness” and “homosexuality.”

Theorizing Chineseness, Rethinking Chinese Cinema(s)

In our study of films from China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, a construct known as “Chineseness” has been foregrounded in this book. However, the basis of this Chineseness, be it race/ethnicity, culture, language, or geopolitics, is often fraught with dispute.⁴ In English-language scholarship in the last two decades, there have been two high-profile efforts at coming to terms with the concept of Chineseness and the meaning of being Chinese. The first is the Spring 1991 special issue of *Daedalus* (later edited as a book by Tu Wei-ming 1994b). The second is the fall 1998 special issue of *boundary 2* (also edited as a book by Rey Chow 2000b). While both books contain heterogeneous voices, the positions taken by the two editors are in such stark contrast that one could say the former (Tu) “seeks commonality among differences” (*yi zhong qiu tong*) whereas the latter (Chow) “seeks differences within commonality” (*tong zhong qiu yi*).

Tu’s concept of “Cultural China” has since generated heated debate. For Tu, “Cultural China” can be classified into three symbolic universes. The first consists of societies populated predominantly by cultural and ethnic Chinese—namely China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore. The second consists of Chinese communities throughout the world, usually referred to as “overseas Chinese” or, more recently, the Chinese diaspora. The third consists of individual men or women, regardless of their race or nationality, who have an intellectual interest and investment in understanding the Chinese world (Tu 1994a, 13–14). In this regard, this book shares Tu’s construction of the first symbolic universe by studying films originating from societies with a predominantly Chinese population.⁵ It is for this reason, as well as the convenience of not having to repeat the phrase “films from China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong,” that I have chosen to use the term “Chinese” cinemas throughout this book.

However, I am equally if not more concerned with the project of challenging a monolithic and essentialized construction of Chineseness. Citing examples ranging from minority populations in China and the demands for the liberation of Tibet to the independence movement in Taiwan and the call for democracy in post-British Hong Kong, Rey Chow argues that various alternative forces have been gathering momentum in recent years, and “we have begun to see a gradual epistemic shift that seeks

to modify the claim to a homogeneously unified, univocal China” (2000a, 6). Chow’s comments, together with articles published elsewhere, can be seen as a response, if not a reaction, to the concept of “Cultural China” proposed by Tu.⁶

The question of Chineseness, I would argue, is inescapably political on many levels.⁷ In geopolitical and territorial terms, there is no denying that, at least from the second half of the twentieth century, three different Chinese polities have existed: the People’s Republic of China, the Republic of China (Taiwan), and the British Crown Colony of Hong Kong. As a result, the national and cultural identities that have grown out of this separation imply that people from Taiwan and Hong Kong—coupled with their extended period of colonial experience under the Japanese (Taiwan) and the British (Hong Kong)—can no longer be simply subsumed under the umbrella category of “Chinese.”⁸ While it is clear that “the problematic nature of ‘Chinese’ as a signifier should suffice to demythify ‘Chineseness’ as a pre-given, monolithic and immutable essence” (Yingjin Zhang 2004, 4), the tension between “seeking commonality among differences” and “seeking differences within commonality” cannot be easily resolved and is replicated in the definition of “Chinese cinema(s).”⁹

In his introduction to *New Chinese Cinemas*, Nick Browne recognizes this tension:

The presumption that Chinese cinema is the monolithic cultural expression of a Chinese nation has been dramatically undercut by history. . . . The People’s Republic, Taiwan, and Hong Kong and their cinemas are marked as socialist, capitalist, and colonialist, respectively. Yet to exaggerate these differences would be to overlook a common cultural tradition of social, ideological, and aesthetic forms that stands behind and informs Chinese cinema as a whole. This book locates the Chinese cinemas of the People’s Republic, Taiwan, and Hong Kong between the elements of a common culture and the differences of form and significance wrought by history and political division. (1994, 1)

What is remarkable is the rhetorical manner in which Browne acknowledges the differences within the construction of Chineseness only to dismiss them immediately in favor of the commonality. In her review of *New Chinese Cinemas*, Yueh-yu Yeh criticizes the tendency to use the term “Chinese cinema(s),” whether in the plural or the singular, “to include Chinese-language films from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and mainland China without bothering to qualify the problematic nature of the term itself” (1998, 74). While the plural form at least acknowledges the diversity under the sign of “Chinese,” it cannot be seen as the same as resolving the problem

(Chow 2000a, 18). Indeed, any attempt to distinguish cinemas from China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong as distinct “national” cinemas is nullified insofar as the three cinemas are subsumed under the umbrella term of “Chinese cinema(s)” (or, as we shall see below, “transnational Chinese cinemas”), a practice that has become an “apparent consensus” since the mid-1990s (Yingjin Zhang 2004, 4).¹⁰

The question of Chineseness in relation to cinema, therefore, demands a rethinking on the very notion of national cinema, which remains one of the dominant modes of scholarship and publication in film and cinema studies.¹¹ In his introduction to *Chinese National Cinema*, Yingjin Zhang begins by noting the irony of publishing another volume on national cinema at the start of the new millennium given the forces of globalization, post-coloniality, post-modernity, transnationality, and new technological development (2004, 1). In light of the redrawing of national boundaries across the world in the last decade or so (most notably in the former Soviet Union and the East European bloc), notions of the nation both as a people and as a state are undergoing contradictory waves of dismantling and regrouping, at once deconstructionist and essentializing. In terms of cinema, the challenges posed to the notion of the nation manifest themselves not only in terms of self-definition by peoples and states (not to mention different demands from diasporic communities), but also in terms of the mode of production, which is increasingly transnational. The theoretical concept of national cinema is not just “a messy affair” (a declaration by Tom O’Regan in relation to Australian cinema and echoed by Zhang vis-à-vis Chinese cinema; Yingjin Zhang 2004, 3); rather, it is in deep crisis and demands a paradigm shift.

In tandem with contestations to the use of the term “Chinese” in relation to cinema, two other conceptual frameworks compete to replace the Chinese national cinema(s) model—namely “transnational Chinese cinemas,” proposed by Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu (1997c), and “Chinese-language cinema” (*zhongwen dianying* or *huayu dianying*), promoted by Yuehyu Yeh (Yeh 1998; Lu and Yeh 2005a) and used in some Chinese-language publications.¹² While they rightly identify the shortcomings of the national cinema model, both frameworks nonetheless throw up new questions of their own.

In his introduction to *Transnational Chinese Cinemas*, Lu traces the historical development of cinema in China back to its origin and argues that “Chinese *national* cinema can only be understood in its properly *transnational* context” (1997a, 3; emphasis in original). Delineating the different levels in which transnationalism can be observed in the Chinese case, Lu seems to emphasize the “globalization of the mechanisms of film produc-

tion, distribution, and consumption” (ibid.). While Lu’s intention is clearly to decenter the sign of “China” and “Chinese” in relation to cinema, the subsumption of cinemas of China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong under the umbrella of *transnational* Chinese cinemas does not so much displace the nation as reinstate it within a larger framework. Not only is Lu’s statement that “these three cinematic traditions have developed in separate directions and yet all attempt to signify a shared object: ‘China’” (ibid., 12) open to debate, but also to focus on transnationalism chiefly as a mode of production and consumption does not address, much less challenge, the sign of “China” in either its symbolic or substantive senses.¹³

Yeh follows up her 1998 call for the use of the term “Chinese-language cinema” by arguing that it is “a more comprehensive term that covers all the local, national, regional, transnational, diasporic, and global cinemas relating to the Chinese language” (Lu and Yeh 2005a, 2). By Lu and Yeh’s own admission, this model is also not without its problems, including “the linguistic hierarchy and social discrimination embedded in Chinese cinema and society” (ibid., 3), and I would argue that they have overlooked quite a few issues. First, by describing “a Mandarin-language film made and released in the People’s Republic of China” as an example of when “Chinese-language cinema is synonymous with Chinese cinema” and “national boundary and language coincide” (ibid., 1), the issue of non-Han minorities and their languages, which cannot be classified as “Chinese,” is not addressed.¹⁴ Second, in their attempt to distinguish “Sinophone film” from some post-colonial cinemas by stating that “speakers of Chinese dialects around the world have been mostly ethnic Chinese rather than indigenous peoples who were forced or inculcated to speak the language of *external* colonizers” (ibid., 4–5; emphasis mine), they have neglected the processes of internal colonization that include, among others, the People’s Republic’s annexation of Tibet, the Sinification of aborigines in Taiwan, and the Kuomintang’s (KMT) occupation of Taiwan and its associated language policy.¹⁵ Third, as more and more directors from China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the Chinese diaspora begin to make films in non-Chinese languages—from Chen Kaige’s English-language *Killing Me Softly* (2002) and Hou Hsiao-hsien’s Japanese-English-language *Café Lumière* (*Kōhī jikō/Kaife shiguang*, 2003) to Fruit Chan’s Korean-Cantonese-language *Public Toilet* (*Hwajangshil eodieyo?/Renmin gongce*, 2002) and the remarkable example of Ang Lee—such films attest to not just the transnational, but also the translingual and transcultural aspects of filmmaking that may or may not find a position within a configuration of Chinese cinema(s).¹⁶ Finally, in their inconsistent switch between the terms “language” and “dialect” and by speaking of “‘Chinese-dialect film’ as a subgenre of Chinese-lan-

guage film” (ibid., 7), they reinstate the very linguistic hierarchy they have identified elsewhere as prevalent in “both past history and contemporary cultural production” (ibid., 3).

In his use of “Chinese national cinema” to cover all films produced in China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, Yingjin Zhang instructs the reader “to keep in mind all problematics or messiness . . . surrounding ‘China’ and ‘Chineseness’” and suggests “we take the messiness of Chinese cinema *positively*, as a sign that producers, filmmakers, exhibitors, state regulators, critics and audiences in different Chinese geopolitical regions and over different periods of time have aspired to different constructions of the national” (2004, 5, 6; emphasis in original). Zhang’s suggestion points to the question of agency in the negotiation of the meaning and construction of the national. Also focusing on the issue of agency, Berry argues for “recasting national cinema as a multiplicity of projects, authored by different individuals, groups, and institutions with various purposes, but bound together by the politics of national agency and collective subjectivity as constructed identities” (2000a, 161).

For me, the more important question is not whether Chinese (national) cinema(s) ought to be reconfigured as transnational Chinese cinemas or Chinese-language cinemas, laudable efforts though these are; rather, we should examine the function each configuration serves, the legitimizing discourse behind each mobilization, its efficacy in unsettling the sign of the national in all its guises, and the agents empowered and disenfranchised in the process. If the nation(al) is, like all classificatory or identity categories, a necessary evil, not only must the constructedness of any category be highlighted as Berry has done, as noted above, but also, as Chow proposes in relation to Chineseness, it must be “productively put under erasure—not in the sense of being written out of existence but in the sense of being unpacked” (2000a, 18), or, as Judith Butler suggests in relation to the sign of lesbian, “to have it permanently unclear what precisely that sign signifies” (1991, 14). Moreover, in a binding together of these national agencies, it is worth bearing in mind that Chineseness often “lies at the root of a violence which works by the most deeply ingrained feelings of ‘bonding’” (Chow 1993, 25).

In a different way of taking the messiness of Chinese cinemas positively, I propose to pay equal if not more attention to agents that by their very nature necessarily trouble and resist subsumption under the sign of the nation. I refer to models such as Third Cinema (Pines and Willemsen 1989), exilic cinema (Naficy 2001), women and feminist cinema (E. A. Kaplan 2000), and queer cinema (Aaron 2004), which transcend national boundaries to form alliances and identifications based on (equally constructed) categories other than the nation. In her introductory essay to a

special section on “Chinese and Chinese Diaspora Cinema” in the film journal *Jump Cut*, Gina Marchetti argues the following: “The common experiences of the Chinese diaspora and the global links among various Chinese communities must not be dismissed. Particularly for those who traditionally may be at odds with a conservative Chinese patriarchy, such as many heterosexual women, lesbians, and gay men, the ability to cross borders and to participate in a wider, global sphere transcends ethnic and cultural ties” (1998, 72). While I am aware that we “should not assume that what is diasporic, fluid, border-crossing, or hybrid is intrinsically subversive of power structures” (Ong and Nonini 1997, 326), an interrogation into the relationship between the nation and these other identifications will throw light on both the institutions of power within the nation and their processes of negotiation with these agents. With regard to the thematic concern of this book, it would be interesting to explore, for instance, the invocation of the “nation” by queer subjects, exemplified by the activist group Queer Nation.¹⁷ While I have outlined so far the problematic nature of the concept of Chinese cinemas in several of its configurations, I will revisit some of these issues by raising the possibility of a queer Chinese cinema in the conclusion.

Speaking of Homosexuality

By “male homosexuality” I refer to the expression of sexual desire between men in the films discussed, though this does not imply that the characters necessarily declare themselves as homosexuals or identify with an identity category known as “homosexuals” (in many cases they do not). As with the issue of Chineseness, I am concerned with a non-monolithic, non-essentialized understanding of homosexuality. Hence I do not enter into a discussion on the etiology of homosexuality because I do not believe it will enhance our understanding of the expression of homosexuality in the films.¹⁸ However, I do have other thorny issues to address: first, what is homosexuality, and second, how is homosexuality understood and discussed in the Chinese context?

To answer the first question, as Kevin Kopelson notes, it is by now “a commonplace of Foucauldian criticism that homosexual identities, as opposed to homosexual acts, arose only after a number of relatively recent, and primarily sexological, discourses breathed life into them” (1994, 8). This understanding is based on a much-cited passage in volume 1 of Michel Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality*:

As defined by the ancient civil or canonical codes, sodomy was a category of forbidden acts; their perpetrator was nothing more than the juridical subject

of them. The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality. . . . Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species. (1990, 43)

This passage has popularly been taken as evidence of a historical moment that separated the understanding of homosexuality as sexual act from homosexuality as sexual identity. While Foucault's argument relates to nineteenth-century Europe, the dichotomy between sexual act and sexual identity arising from this popular understanding arguably informs other historical accounts of homosexuality, usually with a time line dividing pre-modern and modern periods of understanding. In his account of the long tradition of same-sex relationships in China from antiquity to the late imperial period, Bret Hinsch highlights in particular the care to be taken when discussing same-sex sexuality in the Chinese context because classical Chinese language lacked a term comparable to "homosexuality" or "homosexual." Rather, "[Homosexuality] was usually discussed using poetic metaphors referring to earlier men or incidents famed for association with homosexuality. Chinese terminology therefore did not emphasize an innate sexual essence, but concentrated rather on actions, tendencies, and preferences. In other words, instead of saying what someone 'is,' Chinese authors would usually say whom he 'resembles' or what he 'does' or 'enjoys'" (1990, 7).¹⁹ However, with the advent of Western sexological categories since the early twentieth century, Hinsch believes that the "fluid conceptions of sexuality of old, which assumed that an individual was capable of enjoying a range of sexual *acts*, have been replaced with the ironclad Western dichotomy of heterosexual/homosexual," and as a result, the "Chinese now speak of 'homosexuality' (*tongxinglian* or *tongxing'ai*), a direct translation of the Western medical term that defines a small group of pathological individuals according to a concrete sexual *essence*" (ibid., 169; emphasis mine).

Hinsch's argument therefore echoes the popular understanding of Foucault that distinguishes between sexual act and identity by some temporal marker (nineteenth century in the case of Europe and twentieth century in the case of China), and the distinction is attributed to the advent of Western sexological discourses. To adopt this understanding amounts to positing that sexual identities did not exist before the respective time

lines in these geographical locales and that after them it has become impossible to conduct sexual acts without impinging on the notion of sexual identities.

In a drastically different reading of the Foucault passage quoted above, David Halperin argues that Foucault's "schematic opposition between sodomy and homosexuality is first and foremost a discursive analysis, not a social history, let alone an exhaustive one. *It is not an empirical claim about the historical existence or nonexistence of sexually deviant individuals*" (1998, 99; emphasis in original). Rather, Foucault is "documenting the existence of both a discursive and a temporal gap between two dissimilar styles of defining, and disqualifying, male same-sex sexual expression," and in so doing, he "highlights the historical and political specificity of sexuality, both as a cultural concept and as a tactical device" (ibid.). Noting that "the term *identity* nowhere occurs" in Foucault's text, Halperin encourages an inquiry "into the construction of sexual identities before the emergence of sexual orientations," on the one hand, and urges the need "to supplement our notion of sexual identity with a more refined concept of, say, partial identity, emergent identity, transient identity, semi-identity, incomplete identity, proto-identity, or sub-identity," on the other (ibid., 109; emphasis in original).

Halperin's argument does not discount Foucault's claim about the impact of nineteenth-century sexology on the understanding of homosexuals as a species with a distinct sexuality. What Halperin objects to is the distinction between sexual act and sexual identity drawn with that time line and the construction of identity as unitary. Following Halperin, the distinction between sexual acts and sexual identities is not so much that the former is "what one does" and the latter is "what one is" (to borrow Hirsch's phrases); rather, the very concepts of act and identity must be seen as the *effects* of sexual discourses that not only distinguish one from the other, but also, by mobilizing this distinction, impose an arbitrary marker that separates the two concepts as mutually exclusive. For Halperin, his intent is "to indicate *the multiplicity of possible historical connections between sex and identity*, a multiplicity whose existence has been obscured by the necessary but narrowly focused, totalizing critique of sexual identity as a unitary concept. We need to find ways of asking how different historical cultures fashioned different sorts of links between sexual acts, on the one hand, and sexual tastes, styles, dispositions, characters, gender presentations, and forms of subjectivity, on the other" (1998, 109; emphasis in original).

I have brought in Halperin's refutation of the popular (mis)understanding of Foucault's account of the history of (homo)sexuality (which,

as Halperin insists, is a discursive analysis, not a historical assertion; 1998, 111) because the distinction between sexual act and sexual identity arising from that (mis)reading is so prevalent that it invariably impinges on modern discourses of Chinese homosexuality, as shown by Hinsch's account. Indeed, it is precisely because I agree with the general observation by Hinsch that understanding of homosexuality in the Chinese-speaking world has shifted from one of fluid, possible multiple sexual acts to one of monolithic, essentialized sexual identity that it is all the more important to heed Halperin's call in order to dismantle the mythifying distinction between act and identity (and to propose different ways of conceptualizing their relationship), to emphasize the multiple manifestations of sexuality that either break down the unitary construction of identity or displace its centrality in the popular imagination, and to be attentive to the different ways in which these issues are negotiated in different cultures.

In regard to the second question—that is, how homosexuality is understood and discussed in the Chinese context—the centrality of identity in the Chinese understanding of homosexuality since the early twentieth century has been, as Hinsch argues, largely an effect of the advent of Western sexological discourses. I would highlight the role of language in the shaping of this understanding as these discourses are, of course, mediated through translation, or what Lydia H. Liu (1995) has termed “translingual practice.”

In her study of the Chinese translation of Western sexological terms in Republican China (1912–1949), Tze-lan Deborah Sang notes that as *tongxing'ai* (literally “same-sex love”; read as *doseiai* in Japanese) was coined in Japan at the end of the Meiji (1868–1912) and the early Taisho (1912–1925) periods as Japanese intellectuals translated European sexuality, there is “reason to believe that *tongxing'ai* was a direct adoption of the Japanese *doseiai*, based on which the Chinese then invented the variants *tongxing lian'ai* and *tongxinglian* [both also meaning same-sex love]” (1999, 278). While Sang concurs with Hinsch that the “range of Chinese discourses on homosexuality narrowed after the 1920s,” she nevertheless argues that “the idea of there being an extraordinary homosexual nature confined to a small percentage of the population did not become the overruling paradigm for understanding homoerotic desire” (ibid., 297) because “*tongxing'ai* is primarily signified as a modality of love or an intersubjective rapport rather than as a category of personhood, that is, an identity” (ibid., 292–293).

While Sang argues (in the spirit of Halperin's call) for a conceptualization of homosexuality away from sexual act or identity, through the course

of the twentieth century, however, *tongxing'ai* and *tongxinglian* have not only become the most common Chinese discursive terms for homosexuality, but also have gradually solidified into an identity category. The latter has perhaps been exacerbated in the past few decades with the arrival of post-Stonewall gay identities and discourses and the concomitant tropes of the closet and coming out. Moreover, there are differences in the development of these discursive terms in China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. For example, while it is not uncommon for those familiar with Western gay parlance to directly use the English word "gay" in these societies, it has been transliterated as *gei* (meaning foundation) in Cantonese, the common language in Hong Kong, and is usually rendered as *gei-lo* (*lo* meaning male), which Wah-shan Chou reads as derogatory "since *lo* carries the connotation of a male who comes from the lower classes" and as sexist "because it totally ignores and rejects lesbians and bisexual women" (2000, 79). In Taiwan, there is a translation of the term "gay" as *gaizu* (*gai* functions as a transliteration of gay and means, among other things, lid or cover, while *zu* denotes clan or tribe), though as far as I am aware, it has never attained wide circulation.²⁰

Up until the 1990s, *tongxinglian* and *tongxing'ai* remained the most commonly used Chinese discursive terms for homosexuality. This began to change with the appropriation of the term *tongzhi* (literally "same will"), the Chinese translation of the Soviet communist term "comrade," as a discursive term for same-sex sexuality.²¹ The popular use of the original meaning of 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, "The revolution has yet to triumph; comrades still must work hard" (*Geming shang wei chenggong; tongzhi reng xu nuli*). Following the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the term became the most common form of political address in the country. The term *tongzhi* was first publicly appropriated for same-sex sexuality by the organizers of Hong Kong's inaugural lesbian and gay film festival in 1989 and introduced to Taiwan in 1992 when the Taipei Golden Horse International Film Festival featured a section on lesbian and gay films.²² It has since gained popular currency in Taiwan, Hong Kong, overseas Chinese communities, and on the World Wide Web, where it is widely used to refer to lesbian- and gay-related activities and publications, and it is used as well by the media and the general public. Even in China, where there is potential ambiguity and confusion in its use resulting from the conflation of its appropriated meaning with its political reference, the term is increasingly used to refer to same-sex sexuality.

The term *tongzhi* has replaced *tongxinglian* or *tongxing'ai* in most

post-1990 publications in the Chinese language, especially in publications outside of mainland China.²³ The term's popularity can be attributed to "its positive cultural references, gender neutrality, desexualization of the stigma of homosexuality, politics beyond the homo-hetero duality, and use as an indigenous cultural identity for integrating the sexual into the social" (Chou 2000, 2). The term can even break down the dichotomy between homosexuality and heterosexuality, as evidenced in the oxymoronic term *zhitongzhi* (straight comrades), meaning heterosexuals who are supportive of gay rights. Since the mid-1990s, the term "queer" has also become popular in Taiwan, where it is translated as *ku'er* (literally "cool kid") or *guaitai* (meaning weirdo, or literally "strange fetus").²⁴

Of the above Chinese discursive terms for homosexuality, I have chosen *tongzhi* as the derivation for the title of this book, *Celluloid Comrades*, not because I particularly identify with its connotation and/or politics but rather to acknowledge the temporal coequality (the 1990s) of its circulation with the emergence of representations of male homosexuality in cinemas from China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. It is significant that the new discursive language for homosexuality in Chinese societies has been occasioned by the introduction of lesbian and gay films from all over the world and that its circulation started in cinematic circles in these societies. On the one hand, this attests to the order of the new global cultural economy, described by Arjun Appadurai (1990) as disjunctive, wherein global flows (such as the circulation of a discursive term for homosexuality) can take place because marginal elements and identities have global interconnections. On the other hand, it exemplifies how a new discursive language can use cinema as a vehicle to transcend national boundaries and, in the process, act as a catalyst for new identity categories and new forms of solidarity. While this coequality can be seen as a consequence of the term providing a timely discursive language for the films, it can also be argued that, on the contrary, these films have created a platform for the extensive use of the new discursive language, thus highlighting the enabling potential and constitutive aspect of cinema.

Because of the temporal specificity of the term *tongzhi*, however, and for reasons of consistency, I have avoided using *tongzhi* or any other Chinese discursive terms in my general discussion of homosexuality in the rest of this book. Similarly, I use the English terms "lesbian and gay" and "queer" predominantly in their temporal-political-activist (post-1970 and post-1990 respectively) and institutional-disciplinary-theoretical (lesbian and gay studies, queer theory) senses, with attendance to the double entendres of the term "queer." As a result, the terms "homosexual(s)" and "homosexuality," despite having their roots in clinical pathology and sex-

ology, become the default general referents in the literal sense of same-sex. Less clumsy than “same-sex sexuality” and more flexible in their uses (as both noun and adjective), the terms “homosexual(s)” and “homosexuality,” it seems to me, are also more capable of transcending the temporal and connotative markings of their discursive histories for general description in ways that “lesbian and gay” or “queer” are arguably not.

To sum up, both “Chinese” and “homosexual” are classificatory and identity categories that are prone to essentialized usage, and the coupling of the two terms can usher in new mechanisms, processes, and opportunities for inclusion and exclusion, legitimation and stigmatization, and empowerment and disenfranchisement. If a category known as “Chinese homosexual(ity)” is invariably invoked in the course or as a result of this inquiry, it is certainly not my intention to propose a Chinese expression of homosexuality or a homosexual expression of Chineseness. Rather, I wish to highlight the opposite—that is, whether it is “Chinese,” “homosexual(ity),” or “Chinese homosexual(ity),” these are not essential qualities but expressions and constructs determined by social, economic, political, cultural, historical, ideological, and discursive forces. It is not *what* they are but *how* they have been constructed, spoken of, mobilized, by whom, for what purposes, to what audiences, and *why* that are the crucial questions.

Representing Homosexuality in Chinese Cinemas

As noted, this book is situated at the crossroads of at least three academic disciplines: Chinese studies, gender and sexuality studies, and film and cinema studies, thus foregrounding its invariably interdisciplinary nature. In terms of theoretical approach, it is also informed by critical theory, cultural studies, and post-colonial studies. It has to be emphasized, however, that the cinematic representations are my primary focus. I believe that rather than imposing themselves on texts, theories ought to illuminate textual elements alongside the latter’s specific historical, cultural, social, and political contexts. Indeed, I would go as far as to argue that the complexity of textual elements often shores up the inadequacies of existing theories, thereby challenging us to reconfigure our theoretical undertakings.

Though I do not subscribe exclusively to any single school of thought, I find the position proposed by two British cultural materialists rather irresistible. For Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, the approach of cultural materialism offers a combination of four elements: historical context, theoretical method, political commitment, and textual analysis. Primarily

aiming at challenging traditional approaches to the study of literature, Dollimore and Sinfield elaborate on these four elements: “Historical context undermines the transcendent significance traditionally accorded to the literary text and allows us to recover its histories; theoretical method detaches the text from immanent criticism which seeks only to reproduce it in its own terms; socialist and feminist commitment confronts conservative categories in which most criticism has hitherto been conducted; textual analysis locates the critique of traditional approaches where it cannot be ignored” (1985, vii).

I believe the interplay and check between the four elements will create a tapestry that is not slanted to, or by, any single overriding imperative. Of the four elements, I should qualify what I mean by political commitment. Like Dollimore and Sinfield, I am committed to any efforts that confront conservatism and will undoubtedly align with minorities, subalterns, and marginalized groups of all variants in posing challenges to orthodox ideologies and cultural hegemonies of all forms. However, if I have a political commitment in relation to scholarship, it would be not to allow the arguments in this book to be dictated by the political dogmas of any imagined community. On the contrary, it is precisely because I am acutely aware of the necessarily essentializing nature of political activism and the communalizing tendency of identity categories that I strenuously argue against the rhetoric of a gay liberationist discourse and demands of political correctness prevalent in many readings of the films under discussion. Indeed, the central issues of representation—including the theoretical, textual-analytic, and political debates—are so deeply embedded in a contemporary climate of identity politics and multiculturalism that they warrant historical, theoretical, political, and textual analyses in themselves.

To begin with the historical, Kath Weston has written on what she calls the “Great Gay Migration” of the 1970s and early 1980s into major urban areas across the United States; it coincided with a gay movement that ushered in the so-called minority model of gay identity, the pitfalls of which she describes as follows:

In the minority model homosexuality becomes an entity supposed to be discernible without respect to culture or context. To write unreflectively about “gay people” is to treat homosexuality as a presocial given. To say “I am a lesbian” or “I am gay” usually presumes a consistency of attraction to the same sex that makes an individual a different kind of person. When the minority model grants gay people ontological status as a finite, bounded group, it uni-

versalizes a Western classification in which sexual behaviors and desires are supposed thoroughly to infuse a self. (1995, 258)

Weston's historical account highlights not only the economic and geographical factors underlying what might seem like a natural formation of an identity, a community, a movement, and a politics, but also the theoretical implications of a minority model that assumes an essentialized, pre-social given. One result of this historical development is the valorization of the gay self/identity and the gay experience, to the degree that, to borrow Diana Fuss' exquisite construction, "who we are becomes what we know; ontology shades into epistemology" (1989, 113). In the process, knowledge becomes derivative of experience, and experience in turn bestows its own authority upon knowledge. In an essay that calls for a historicizing of experience, Joan W. Scott persuasively argues that

we need to attend to the historical processes that, through discourse, position subjects and produce their experiences. It is not individuals who have experience, but subjects who are constituted through experience. Experience in this definition then becomes not the origin of our explanation, not the authoritative (because seen or felt) evidence that grounds what is known, but rather that which we seek to explain, that about which knowledge is produced. To think about experience in this way is to historicize it as well as to historicize the identities it produces. (1992, 25–26)

A theoretical approach to the question of homosexuality as a historical, discursive process will undoubtedly reshape the political debates surrounding its cinematic representations. This historical development has to be situated in the context of Anglo-American societies, as well as other societies informed by the politics of multiculturalism, for two reasons: linguistic and temporal. In terms of language, it might seem like an unusual denaturalizing gesture to bring to the reader's attention that this book is written in English and that I have been able to engage only with debates written in English and Chinese, the latter also entrenched in Anglo-American epistemologies and politics.²⁵ Contrary to the usual broad binary of East versus West, I would argue that within so-called Western societies, the epistemologies and politics surrounding "the gay issue" are organized very differently, especially in their legal, social, institutional, and cultural manifestations.²⁶ The politics underpinning many debates with which I engage throughout the book is therefore chiefly Anglo-American, and as Alice A. Kuzniar argues in her study on queer German cinema, there are

many unquestioned preconceptions about “the progressive nature of gay and lesbian representation in cinema, the sexuality of the directors, and the prevalence of the coming-out narrative” in conventional constructions of film history that purport to survey lesbian and gay representations in a national cinema (2000, 16). Given this background, it seems superfluous, yet totally imperative, to reiterate that it is possible, if not necessary, to approach the question of homosexuality and its cinematic representations away from an Anglo-American-centric, identity-politics-based framework.

Temporally, then, because the films under discussion were mainly released in the 1990s, the debates surrounding their representations and the generation of scholars and critics involved in these debates are inevitably contemporaneous with the politics of multiculturalism that has dominated sociocultural discursive practices since the 1980s, to the extent that one could argue that few (debates or individuals) have not been impinged upon by this politics, and fewer would be self-reflexive enough to escape its stranglehold. There has been an obsession with identities in their innumerable configurations and permutations within the climate of multiculturalism, but one needs to be reminded more often that identity categories “tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes, whether as the normalizing categories of oppressive structures or as the rallying points for a liberatory contestation of that very oppression” (Butler 1991, 13–14).

Finally, the political climate of identity politics and multiculturalism cannot but have an effect on strategies of textual analysis. As Michael Warner admits, “what we may be less prepared to recognize is that the frame of identity politics itself belongs to Anglo-American traditions and has some distorting influences” (1993, xvii). While I cannot possibly claim to be totally free from such influences, I have throughout the book largely adopted a position that refuses to accept uncritically the terms of identity politics and gay liberationist discourses. Rather, by striving to liberate readings of films from the dictates of what has been called the “gaytto” (Jousse 1997, 20), I call for interrepresentation among different groups and identities, arguing that the representation of male homosexuality in Chinese cinemas invariably involves collaboration between gays and straights and that the latter’s involvement in these filmic projects should not always be held with suspicion or dismissed as misplaced goodwill. In so doing, this book in fact ushers in “a new utopian imaginary” (Ong and Nonini 1997, 330) in its quest to illuminate our understanding of homosexuality in its irreducible multiplicity through cinematic representations

that become sites of analysis drawing together textual elements with historical contexts, theoretical frameworks, and political debates.

Representation, therefore, is a central issue linking the chapters that study the celluloid comrades. To begin with the historical, chapter 1, “Screening Homosexuality,” argues that the representation of male homosexuality in Chinese cinemas has been engendered by the marginal and interstitial spaces created by the disjunctive order of globalization. These spaces include the international film festival circuit, which has witnessed the emergence of Chinese cinemas since the 1980s and has served as a global public sphere upon which representations of male homosexuality in Chinese cinemas can come into being. Focusing on the theoretical and the political, chapter 2, “The Burden of Representation,” locates *The Wedding Banquet* (Xiyuan, 1993), by Ang Lee (Li An, b. 1954), within theorizations on the meaning of representation and debates on the politics of representation. Noting that the film has shouldered the heaviest burden of representation given its status as the first “gay film” in contemporary Chinese cinemas and its thematic concern with the position of homosexuality in a Chinese-Confucianist cosmology, it argues that the conjunction of Chineseness with homosexuality and the hegemony of a gay liberationist discourse have led to dominant readings of the film in the tropes of the closet and coming out in less than reflective ways. Chapter 3, “The Uses of Femininity,” further problematizes the politics of representation by raising the question of the place of femininity—a debased cultural stereotype—within male homosexuality. Drawing from *Farewell My Concubine* (Bawang bie ji, 1993), by Chen Kaige (b. 1952), and *East Palace, West Palace* (Donggong xigong, 1996), by Zhang Yuan (b. 1963), I argue that the trope of femininity can provide a model for the reconfiguration of power relations in terms of both gender and sexuality, as well as in the sociopolitical realms through its dynamics of resistance-via-obedience.

Weaving the political with the textual, chapter 4, “Travelling Sexualities,” explores diasporic forms of sexuality by highlighting the economic conditions for travel and the dialectic relationship between home and the diasporic space in *Happy Together* (Chunguang zhaxie, 1997), by Wong Kar-wai (Wang Jiawei, b. 1958). An allegorical reading of the film in the context of Hong Kong’s 1997 return to the People’s Republic of China also leads to an interrogation on notions of normativity in relation to homosexuality. The final two chapters adopt an auteurist approach by paying attention to two key directors. Chapter 5, “Confessing Desire,” traces the poetics of Tsai Ming-liang’s (Cai Mingliang, b. 1957) queer cinema, drawing representational tropes from his early theatrical, television, and docu-

mentary works to illuminate his films *Rebels of the Neon God* (*Qingshaonian Nezha*, 1992) and *The River* (*Helin*, 1997). Deploying the Barthesian concept of *jouissance*, I argue that Tsai's focus on the poetics (of representation) rather than the psychology (of characters) renders his cinema queer insofar as it is impossible to pin down. By contrast, in chapter 6, "Fragments of Darkness," I propose to read Stanley Kwan (Guan Jinpeng, b. 1957) as a gay director through his "coming out film," *Hold You Tight* (*Yu kuaile yu duoluo*, 1998). Positing Kwan's documentary work against Rainer Werner Fassbinder's politics, this chapter identifies a moment when Kwan's filmmaking career and personal history collapse into each other to the extent that the issue of sexuality haunts the film like a darkness that threatens to engulf his cinematic representation of homosexuality. Finally, the conclusion investigates the plausibility of a queer Chinese cinema and its various implications.

Last but not least, some caveats. This book does not pretend to be a comprehensive survey of representations of male homosexuality in Chinese cinemas. I have not included in the discussion films prior to the 1990s, a prominent example being Yu Kan-ping's *The Outsiders* (*Niezi*, 1986), based on the eponymous novel by Pai Hsien-yung (Bai Xianyong). While it is not difficult to find in run-of-the-mill Hong Kong films homosexual caricatures that are usually set up as the butt of demeaning comedy, to study such representations critically demands a totally different approach from what this book aims to achieve. From the 1990s and beyond, there are other films featuring male homosexuality that, for reasons of quality or space, have to be left out of this study.²⁷ The cinematic representation of lesbianism is another project waiting to be undertaken. I also have to exclude many documentaries and short films. Nonetheless, it is hoped that the multifariousness, complexity, and richness of the representations I have chosen to study will challenge us to reflect upon many of our assumptions not only about how identities might be negotiated in relation to the matrices of ethnicity/race, class, gender, and sexuality, but also about identity itself and the pitfalls in contemporary multicultural politics. If I have always believed in deconstructing monolithic and essentialized notions of both Chineseness and homosexuality, that faith can only have been strengthened in the years of pondering over these films and writing this book.



Screening Homosexuality

Thinking of the cinema in terms of the public sphere means reconstructing a horizon of reception . . . in terms of multiple and conflicting identities and constituencies. Indeed, the cinema can, at certain junctures, function as a matrix for challenging social positions of identity and otherness, as a catalyst for new forms of community and solidarity.

—MIRIAM HANSEN, “Early Cinema, Late Cinema”

From the interracial couple in *The Wedding Banquet* and the diasporic sojourners in *Happy Together* to the cross-dressing opera actor in *Farewell My Concubine* and the incestuous father and son in *The River*, the proliferating representation of male homosexuality in contemporary Chinese cinemas was a striking phenomenon at the end of the twentieth century that would not have gone unnoticed by any cinephile. There is a need to account for this phenomenon as representations of a marginal sexuality become increasingly prominent in the cultural and sociopolitical realms in China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. Moreover, as Chinese cinemas begin to capture the attention of even mainstream American audiences with films such as Ang Lee’s *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (*Wohu canglong*, 2000) and Zhang Yimou’s *House of Flying Daggers* (*Shimian maifu*, 2004) and with the wire-fu choreography of Yuen Wo-ping transforming Hollywood products as varied as the *Matrix* trilogy and the *Kill Bill* series, scholarship in Chinese cinemas must also move beyond the paradigm of national cinema and the reading of films primarily as national allegories in order to properly address representations that cannot, and should not, be simply subsumed under the sign of the nation.¹ Rather than seeing cinema merely as providing textual materials for the understanding of a particular nation, this chapter proposes to rethink, via the screening of homosexuality in contemporary Chinese films, cinema as an enabling agent that is also capable of bringing about societal changes. It argues that the amalgamation of

the invariably global dimension of both cinema and homosexuality has engendered new visual representations of celluloid comrades hitherto unseen on Chinese screens.

Chinese Cinemas and Their International Fascination

The 1980s witnessed the simultaneous surge of new waves in the cinemas of China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong that caught the world's attention. In China, prominent figures from the Beijing Film Academy's first graduating class since the Cultural Revolution came to be known as the Fifth Generation (*diwudai*) directors, including Chen Kaige, Zhang Yimou (b. 1950), and Tian Zhuangzhuang (b. 1952). Buttressed by a nationwide "cultural reflection" and "historical reflection" in intellectual circles (Lu 1997a, 7), these directors abandoned the socialist revolutionary project of their predecessors to re-envision the nation. In Taiwan, a similar "obsession with histories," albeit of a different locale and in a different fashion, was evident in the Taiwan New Cinema (Taiwan Xindianying) of Hou Hsiao-hsien (Hou Xiaoxian, b. 1947), Edward Yang (Yang Dechang, b. 1947), and others; it resonated with a wider nativization movement on the island (Kuan-hsing Chen 1998, 557). Led by directors such as Ann Hui (Xu Anhua, b. 1947) and Allen Fong (Fang Yuping, b. 1947), Hong Kong cinema also experienced a new wave (*xinlangchao*), devoted to exploring the bleak living conditions of the underclass, thereby offering an alternative to the (then) colony's signature genre films (Teo 1998, 550).²

The collective new voice of Chinese cinemas soon became an emerging power to contend with globally. Particularly since Zhang Yimou's *Red Sorghum* (*Hong gaoliang*, 1987) captured the Golden Bear at the Berlin Film Festival in 1988, films from China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong have become festival darlings, winning many major awards worldwide.³ For most of these auteurist directors, however, the route to international film festivals is not a choice but a necessity. By the late 1980s the film industries in China and Taiwan were at the brink of collapse. Some mainland Chinese directors such as Zhang Yuan have been blacklisted by the state studios or banned from filmmaking altogether. Many Taiwanese directors cannot survive in the shrinking domestic market dominated by Hollywood blockbusters and Hong Kong genre films. Though Hong Kong is the third largest film-producing region in the world (after the United States and India), its film industry is almost exclusively dictated by commerce, and the space for making art house cinema is arguably more limited than in China and Taiwan. International film festivals have increasingly become the only avenues for these directors to showcase their films. Exposure at

these festivals can lead to the sale of screening rights, investment in future projects, and possibilities of transnational collaboration.

The convergence of Chinese cinemas and international film festivals—a chiefly Western institution—produces a cross-cultural exchange that invariably involves various kinds of politics and power play. According to Esther Yau, the “international fantasy” surrounding new Chinese cinemas since the 1980s can be traced to at least three image-making processes. They are “the rewriting of China’s political and cultural complexities by young filmmakers; the diplomatic exhibition of artistic talent in support of an open-door policy by the government of the People’s Republic of China; and the search for new varieties of art cinema by (mostly western) film critics” (1993, 95).⁴ For me, what is significant in Yau’s analysis is her suggestion that this fascination does not originate only from the West. As much as Western film critics and film festival scouts have been eager to discover new cinemas from the exotic East, the participation of Chinese cinemas in international film festivals may also mask hidden agendas of cultural diplomacy and attempts to gain cultural capital by obtaining a Western stamp of approval.

This observation is of particular importance because in any cultural exchange such as this that becomes embedded in the terms of Orientalism versus Occidentalism, First World versus Third World, often only half of the story is told. Nativist critics have been quick to point out the unequal power relations between Chinese cinemas and international film festivals and to accuse Chinese filmmakers of pandering to the West.⁵ However, Yau’s research shows that as early as the mid-1980s, studio heads, directors, and critics in China “began to speculate on the kinds of films that would impress foreigners,” and some studio heads “allocated funds and personnel each year to the production of one or two films designed to enter foreign film festivals” (1993, 98). Similarly, since 1992, Taiwan’s Government Information Bureau has developed an elaborate scheme for rewarding films that have participated in or won awards at international film festivals.⁶ It would seem that the international fantasy is, in fact, mutual.

A representative argument in the nativist mode is offered by Yingjin Zhang, who posits that “oriental *ars erotica* as a mythified entity is fixed or fixated at the very center of Western fascination” with Chinese cinemas (1998, 116).⁷ Zhang goes on to list the “essential” or “magic” ingredients in the formula for satisfying Western aesthetic taste: primitive landscape, repressed sexuality, gender performance, and a mythical or cyclical time frame in which the protagonist’s fate is predestined (*ibid.*, 118). However, these ingredients (except the last one) can also be found in Jane Cam-

pion's *The Piano*, which shared the Palme d'Or with Chen Kaige's *Farewell My Concubine* at the 1993 Cannes Film Festival. Does this imply that Australian cinema has also been serving "oriental *ars erotica*" to satisfy Western aesthetic taste? While some Chinese films might have borne the traits of this description, Zhang's argument is too totalizing to do justice to the varied and complex body of films from Chinese cinemas that have won international accolades since the 1980s.

More important, the theoretical framework and polemical argument of such critics present a discursive impasse that makes their own position untenable. Moreover, as Ben Xu argues, the nativist critics' turn to radicalism "happens at the same time that the Chinese official discourse is desperately in need of new theory to bolster its parochial national position in resistance to international criticism, especially that of the Western world" (1997, 156). By turning away from "domestic problems concerning the relations of culture and power and choosing international culture/power relations as the main area of critical attention," these critics, Xu claims, are articulating "complicitous silences" with the party-state, and their critical stance is hence marked "with a pathetic nativist tone" (*ibid.*).

The relationship between Chinese cinemas and international film festivals requires rethinking in terms that go beyond the limitations of Chinese-nativist post-colonial criticism. I propose to read Chinese cinemas as part of a new world cinema that is premised on a different cultural economy, with an audience that is invariably global. In the case of Chen Kaige's *Farewell My Concubine*, which for nativist critics is yet "another example of third world cultural dependency on the first world" (Xu 1997, 156), Shiao-ying Shen analyzes the success of Chen's film in rather different terms: "Chen is, in fact, exposing an aspect of the marketing ecology of the international commercial film arena: there is actually not much difference between the East and the West today when investors and filmmakers attempt to forcefully access the global market: Hollywood has already successfully interpellated the global film-viewing subject—shaping the film-viewing habit of audiences around the world. To appeal to the gaze of that 'global subject,' the universally acknowledged formula is to pack spectacles of one form or another into a film product" (1995, 9).

I would like to extend Shen's notion of the global film-viewing subject beyond the so-called commercial arena to apply it to the so-called festival and art house circuit. If Hollywood has indeed interpellated the global commercial film-viewing subject, international film festivals and art house cinemas have arguably interpellated another kind of global film-viewing subject, whose devotion to a variety of alternative cinemas does

not depend necessarily on the spectacular. International film festivals range from major ones that can make or break an auteurist film to specific ones that cater to audiences as varied as ethnic or sexual minorities and those with special interests such as anime or horror films. The relationship between Chinese cinemas and international film festivals, therefore, is as much about cross-cultural exchange as it is about market segmentation.

Linked not only to the sensory organ of the palate but also to that of the eyes, the notion of taste is key to understanding the dynamics of international film festivals and their audiences.⁸ For Chinese cinemas to triumph at these festivals, they would have to appeal to panels of judges comprising Western film directors, critics, actors, and actresses—usually white, cosmopolitan, First World cultural elites—and to film festival scouts, journalists, and audiences of largely similar composition. Even if Chinese filmmakers do not intentionally cater to the taste of these global film-viewing subjects, the latter's attitude towards the cinematic encounter may have predetermined the mode of reception. As Martin Roberts observes, "For consumers in such [First World] cities, going to the movies and eating out have become more or less equivalent activities, with choosing a movie, like choosing a restaurant, a matter of selecting from a repertoire of available ethnic options. . . . The audiences for multicultural films may be as transnational as the films themselves, and watching them may be as much a way of reconnecting with one's own culture as of indulging a touristic curiosity about someone else's" (1998, 66). As Roberts reveals, the global film-viewing subject is not homogeneous. Any accusation of a *purely* touristic, voyeuristic, and exotic Orientalism on the part of the viewers therefore runs the risks of overlooking diasporic ethnic audiences seeking reconnection with their own cultures.⁹ In a globalized world in which intermigration and frequent travel are increasingly commonplace, the multicultural, multilingual, and multiethnic (not to mention hybridized) nature of global film-viewing subjects makes assumptions about the reception of Chinese cinemas in "the West" rather hollow.

A paradigm shift is thus required to re-envision the relationship between Chinese cinemas and international film festivals away from the rhetoric of Orientalism versus Occidentalism. Using the entry of Iranian cinema into the international film festival circuit as an example, Bill Nichols situates this cultural exchange in the context of "global image consumption in the age of late capitalism." As he argues, "the discovery of new national cinemas and their filmmaker artists operates much more fully inside the model of a postindustrial economy and postmodern condition devoted to the circulation of signifiers or images as such" (1994b,

73). Indeed, the link between the circulation of cinematic images and nativist sentiments should be decoupled. Rather, it is more important to understand the relations of production and consumption, to assess the ever-changing taste of global-viewing subjects, and to evaluate how representations such as homosexuality in Chinese cinemas can capitalize on the political economy engendered by this cross-cultural exchange.

The New Global Cultural Economy and Public Sphere

Contemporary Chinese cinemas, therefore, should be situated in a new global cultural economy, which “has to be understood as a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order,” wherein global flows occur in and through the growing disjunctures between what Arjun Appadurai calls “ethnoscapes, technoscapes, finanscapes, mediascapes and ideoscapes” (1990, 296, 301). The site of international film festivals is one such disjuncture, facilitating Chinese cinemas’ participation in a global cultural economy. This exchange of global flows has not only raised the profile of Chinese cinemas in the world but, I would argue, has also introduced homosexuality as a legitimate discourse in Chinese cinemas in ways that may not have been previously possible.

One effect of the new global cultural economy is the undermining of the notion of nation-states and enabling cultural imaginaries to transcend national boundaries. As globalization leads to deterritorialization, even marginal groups and individuals can begin to imagine themselves on a global scale. The extensive use of the World Wide Web is the most obvious example of how global an “imagined community” (to borrow Benedict Anderson’s ubiquitous term) can now be. While globalization often results in homogenization, particularly in cultural terms, it nevertheless also deterritorializes by breaking down traditional barriers, decentering orthodox power structures, and creating new alliances for marginal groups. Fredric Jameson argues as follows: “Although it may be an exaggeration to claim that we are all marginals now, all decentered in the current good senses of those words, certainly many freedoms have been won in the process whereby globalization has meant a decentering and a proliferation of differences” (1998, 66).

It is against this background that I situate the representation of homosexuality in contemporary Chinese cinemas. I suggest that precisely because of homosexuality’s marginality and difference, the conjunction of homosexuality and Chinese cinemas lends itself comfortably to the growing disjunctive order of the new global cultural economy. This situation is analogous to Third Cinema, an emancipatory and militant cinematic

form. According to Michael Chanan, "The survival of Third Cinema depends on its origins within the margins and interstices. Margins and interstices are different but closely related spaces. They are also global in their interconnections. . . . The global conditions of postmodern culture make it possible for margins and interstices across the globe to become aware of each other" (1997, 388).¹⁰ Chanan's notion of "margins and interstices" echoes Appadurai's concept of "growing disjunctures." As the new global cultural economy becomes increasingly disjunctive, the representation of homosexuality in contemporary Chinese cinemas can proliferate in its margins and interstices, particularly at the site of international film festivals.

Some may question if international film festivals can be regarded as marginal and interstitial spaces. Undeniably, big festivals like Cannes have become a very "powerful motor propelling films from around the globe into the distribution and exhibition system," some to arrive at smaller, regional festivals, and some even to theaters in other countries (Sklar 1996, 20). However, the international film festival circuit is dwarfed in the face of the cinematic hegemony of Hollywood. As Nichols argues, Hollywood forms the backdrop against which Third Cinema, independent Western cinema, and all other cinemas differentiate themselves. The political economy of international film festivals lies in displacing, not bolstering, the center that is Hollywood (1994b, 74). Though it has been argued that "the differences between Hollywood and the festival circuits are more and more blurred" (Shen 1995, 9), the cultural significance of a "superpower" film festival like Cannes still derives from "its ability to construct a response to the Hollywood colossus" (Sklar 1996, 18).¹¹

Another way of conceptualizing the marginal and interstitial spaces for different forms of cinemas is Jürgen Habermas' notion of the public sphere (1992). With globalization, the public sphere is no longer confined to the boundaries of nation-states but can exist globally and also virtually on the World Wide Web. Many scholars have borrowed Habermas' concept to construct the world of cinema as a public sphere.¹² To her comment in the epigraph at the beginning of this chapter, Miriam Hansen adds, "The category of the public retains a critical, utopian edge, predicated on the ideal of collective self-determination. This perspective mandates not only maintaining critical distinction with regard to commercially disseminated fare but also envisioning alternative media products and an alternative organization of the relations of representation and reception" (1993, 207–208).

Conceptualizing Chinese cinemas as a global public sphere with the potential to challenge orthodox ideologies has appealed to scholars writ-

ing on Chinese cinemas. Invoking the Habermasian concept of the public sphere, Ben Xu points out that “owing to the ideological control of the Party-State in China, public discussion often takes a roundabout route” via artistic forms such as film (1997, 161). Citing *Farewell My Concubine* as an example, Xu argues that “the focus on the moral and cultural dimensions of social transformation rather than on immediate institutional shake-up may be, in its intent and consequences, more effective in shaping a public space than a direct encounter with the state” (ibid., 161–162). Moreover, in a country where film directors have routinely been black-listed and their films banned, the concept of transnational Chinese cinemas, with its emphasis on creating a public sphere that transcends national boundaries, may become “a viable strategy of survival and of resistance to a domestic hegemony” (Lu 1997a, 11). Using Zhang Yimou as an example, Sheldon Lu argues that “while intellectualist, elitist ‘cultural reflection’ was hushed in post-Tiananmen China, filmmakers are able to carry out their critical project with the support of transnational capital and the global market” (1997b, 132), which are premised on the engendering conditions of this global cinematic public sphere.

Having highlighted the deterritorialized and disjunctive cultural economy that ushers in a global cinematic public sphere, I believe it is possible to rethink the notion of cinema in terms of its enabling potential and constitutive effects. While cinematic representations are often regarded as a reflection of society or “reality,” the margins and interstices generated by the global public sphere of Chinese cinemas may, in fact, bring some “realities” into existence. That is to say, rather than merely “reflecting the thinking of an era,” cinema actually “makes possible such thinking,” thus marking a “constitutive, not a reflective relation” with “reality” (Andrew 1986, 7). To illustrate this, the new mainland Chinese cinema has, “at least in its most important phase in the mid-1980s, succeeded in creating a hitherto nonexistent discursive space for the formation and transformation of individual identities and subjectivities” (Yingjin Zhang 2002, 6–7). Similarly, the Taiwan New Cinema of the 1980s opened the way for a varied and diverse film production that, in the 1990s, joined a proliferating global film culture in helping to “create a new, more open and democratic, Taiwanese public sphere” (Kellner 1998, 102). For example, Hou Hsiao-hsien’s *A City of Sadness* (*Beiqing chengshi*, 1989) contributed in generating public discussion on the hitherto taboo issue of the February 28 incident.¹³

It may seem more difficult to make a similar case for Hong Kong cinema because its modus operandi is fundamentally different. Unlike its mainland Chinese and Taiwanese counterparts of the 1980s, the Hong Kong New Wave has never achieved a break with its cinematic tradition,

which is rooted in melodramatic narrative and the star system (C. Li 1994, 160). Even the stylistically avant garde cinema of Wong Kar-wai cannot do without Hong Kong's glittering pop and movie stars in the leading roles. However, I would still argue that the "critical, utopian edge" inherent in the notion of the public sphere is not necessarily less pronounced in Hong Kong cinema as it is differently formulated, demanding a reading that looks beneath (or beyond) the surface to uncover its oppositional potential. In the case of Stanley Kwan's *Hold You Tight*, for example, it was the Golden Harvest Studio that approached the director to make a film starring the actress Chingmy Yau (Qiu Shuzhen), more popularly known for her soft porn flicks. As it turned out, the film features an openly gay character and another male character who has sex with women but secretly loves men. *Hold You Tight* is hence "a brilliant example of a film that straddles the industrial fence by turning what is intended as a vehicle for female sexuality in a heterosexual framework into a film about queer desire" (H. Leung 2001, 439).

While cinema can certainly function, as Hansen argues, "as a catalyst for new forms of community and solidarity," a project such as the representation of homosexuality in Chinese cinemas is dependent upon the engendering conditions of a global cultural economy that are far beyond the control and prediction of any individual film director or producer. In his evaluation of the Habermasian concept of the public sphere, Nicholas Garnham writes: "We have to raise the question of how much room for maneuver agents actually have within a symbolic system within which both the power to create symbols and access to the channels of their circulation is hierarchically structured and intimately integrated into a system of economic production and exchange, which is itself hierarchically structured" (1992, 372–373). Insofar as the global public sphere of international film festivals has hitherto engendered conditions favorable to the representation of male homosexuality in Chinese cinemas, the terms and relations of production and consumption are as ephemeral as they are hierarchized. The key to survival may lie in being sensitive to the ways the five "scapes" described by Appadurai interact with each other and in locating the disjunctures wherein the representation of homosexuality in Chinese cinemas can continue to proliferate in the margins and interstices. In what follows, by providing case studies of the production, distribution, exhibition, and reception of the films discussed in this book, I will delineate the negotiation of homosexuality in Chinese societies and Chinese cinemas. While this is not the place for a full-blown sociological account on the state of homosexuality in China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong—which, in any case, changes rapidly with time¹⁴—I will highlight aspects of these

societies that impact on the roles of both agents and institutions in making the representation of homosexuality in Chinese cinemas possible or difficult.

Playing the Party Game in China

In China, though there is no specific law for the criminalization of homosexuality, homosexuals can be arrested and imprisoned under Article 106 of the Criminal Law Code, which is meant for the prosecution of hooliganism (Ruan 1991, 131). Reports have shown that the enforcement of this law is highly uneven and often left to the whim of policemen. Punishment can vary from a mild chiding or a small fine to a few days' detention with no record kept or a few years' imprisonment (Chou 1996a, 139–151; An 1995, 26–31; Li Yinhe 1998, 380–398; Ruan 1991, 126). Written accounts concur that so long as homosexual activities do not disrupt social order or involve sodomy with minors and are not coupled with other petty crimes, the punishment will tend to be light.

According to sociologist Li Yinhe, who co-authored the first full-length study on homosexuality in contemporary China with her novelist husband Wang Xiaobo, the greatest threat for homosexuals in China is not legal prosecution but “administrative and party disciplinary action” (Li 1998, 389).¹⁵ Again, such punishment can be as varied as that carried out by the police, who, instead of prosecuting the homosexual criminals, often refer them to their work units (*danwei*) or threaten to do so, though the control of work units over the lives of civilians is diminishing in contemporary China. The tropes of mental breakdown and attempted suicide are particularly salient in the accounts of homosexuals who have faced such disciplinary action.

Outside of the new commercial gay venues that have emerged in big cities across China, homosexuals mainly interact in open public spaces, making them vulnerable to police raids and extortion. Because regulations prohibit local residents from staying in hotels, homosexuals seeking sexual liaisons often find themselves driven into the dark corners of public restrooms (Chou 1996a, 65–66). Police raids on homosexuals and sociological research coincided in a bizarre episode in the early 1990s. In 1991, several projects linked to AIDS education were set up in China, involving the famous gay activist Wan Yanhai, who was working at the China Health Education Institute and the Prohibitions Section of the Social Public Order Department of the Beijing Public Security Bureau—that is, the police. According to Wan's own account, at a work meeting for the research project in which the topic of how to make contact with the gay community

was brought up, a police officer “suggested the police should take the gay men in, and then the researchers could do surveys and take blood samples for testing” (Wan 2001, 56–58).

This incident in fact became the trigger for Zhang Yuan’s *East Palace, West Palace* (which refers to the two public toilets on either side of Tiananmen Square known for gay cruising) because the director, having read the story in a newspaper, wondered what would go through a straight policeman’s mind during his arrest of a gay man and “what kind of relationship could be woven between these two men in terms of sex and power” (Reynaud 1997, 33). The film features a policeman responsible for conducting raids on homosexuals cruising in a park and his relationship with a gay man who finally succeeds in seducing the policeman into physical intimacy. Zhang’s film therefore is a strange reconstruction of reality as fantasy and challenges orthodoxy by queering the very apparatus of surveillance and law enforcement.

While homosexuality is no longer regarded as an illness in the *Categories and Diagnostic Standards of Mental Illness in China* (third edition), published by the Chinese Society of Psychiatry in 2001 (Z. Cui 2002, 13), the main legitimate channels for public discussion of homosexuality are still predominantly in terms of health and medical discourse. For example, discussion sessions in which “psychiatrists, volunteers from the Women’s Hotline, and a few individuals discussed homosexual issues” in the early 1990s were held “under the label of ‘mental health research’” (He 2002, 10). That many homosexuals have indeed sought medical help and psychiatric cure (Ruan 1991, 129) attests to the extent to which ill-informed discourses have shaped even the homosexual subjects’ understanding of themselves. This, for Harriet Evans, is a “violation of gay and lesbian rights in China through the denial of social and discursive spaces permitting the expression of homosexual identities” since such (mis)understanding “penetrates even the subject positions with which homosexuals themselves identify” (1997, 211).

With the unprecedented speed of the opening up of the Chinese economy at the turn of the twenty-first century, there have been clear signs of greater visibility of both “people who call themselves gay” and “semi-public spaces” such as “gay bars; weekly salon discussions, a national hotline; books, magazines, and videos from abroad” that cater to their needs (Rofel 1999, 451). At the same time, there are also continuing reports of official censorship of the Internet, the shutting down of Web sites providing AIDS information targeted to men who have sex with men and run by the scholar Zhang Beichuan (who has written a book on homosexuality), and the closing down of a lesbian and gay film festival to be held in Bei-

jing University.¹⁶ This attests to the disjunctive order, this time within a national space, which engenders contradictory flows that simultaneously permit and disallow expressions of homosexuality; it is also reflected in the negotiation of the making of the two mainland Chinese films discussed in chapter 3, *Farewell My Concubine* and *East Palace, West Palace*.

Given the official censure of homosexuality in China, transnational capital played an important role in the production of Chen Kaige's *Farewell My Concubine* and Zhang Yuan's *East Palace, West Palace*. Chen and Zhang are representatives of China's so-called Fifth and Sixth Generation directors respectively. Fifth Generation directors made their earliest films under the state studio system, which for a brief moment produced experimental films such as Zhang Junzhao's *One and Eight* (*Yige he bage*, 1984) and Chen's *Yellow Earth* (*Huang tudi*, 1984). By contrast, the Sixth Generation is mainly regarded as an underground movement existing outside the state studio system, "shooting films without acquiring official permits and shipping them overseas for exhibition" (Yingjin Zhang 2004, 289). However, by the 1990s, both generations of directors were operating in an economy in which the injection of transnational capital into Chinese filmmaking was increasingly the norm for those with an international cachet.

Farewell My Concubine was conceived when the Taiwanese producer Hsu Feng (Xu Feng) presented Chen Kaige with a copy of the eponymous novel by Hong Kong writer Lilian Lee (Li Bihua) at the 1988 Cannes Film Festival, where Chen's *King of the Children* (*Haiziwang*, 1987) was unceremoniously given the unofficial Golden Alarm Clock Award as "the most boring picture of the year" (Zha 1994, 402). Despite drawing early international critical attention with his debut film, *Yellow Earth*, Chen had heretofore not enjoyed the prestigious accolades won by his contemporary Zhang Yimou (Chen's cinematographer for *Yellow Earth*), who clinched a Golden Bear award at the 1988 Berlin Film Festival with his film debut, *Red Sorghum*. With its epic, historical narrative; its dazzling and flamboyant visual style; and the use of bona fide stars, *Farewell My Concubine* became, in 1993, the first film from Chinese cinemas to capture the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival.

Financed by Hsu's Taiwanese Tomson Group through its Hong Kong subsidiary and co-produced with the Beijing Film Studio (Rayns 1994b, 48, 57), the film's release in China was to follow a tortuous trajectory. According to a report (*China News*, February 28, 1994), *Farewell My Concubine* was initially banned for three reasons: homosexuality, depiction of the Cultural Revolution, and the "pessimistic" ending.¹⁷ The ban was later lifted but not before three cuts had been made.¹⁸ As to the turn of events,

rumor had it that China's then president, Jiang Zemin, had disliked the film, prompting the minister for radio, film, and television to order the postponement of its scheduled release. However, the paramount Chinese leader, Deng Xiaoping, subsequently saw the film and apparently thought otherwise, saying it should be released as soon as possible "after modifications." After its release the film enjoyed box-office successes in Beijing and Shanghai (Rayns 1994b, 48).

Nonetheless, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) machinery did not try to mask its objection even after the film's release in China. A 1994 article in *Qiushi* (meaning "seeking truth"), an official CCP journal, criticized the film for portraying "a kind of perverted [*biantai*] love." According to the article, "as we all know, together with drug addiction, prostitution, and gambling, homosexuality is regarded in Western countries as a social public nuisance." The author goes on to claim that in China, "homosexuality had long been swept clean after the [1949] liberation" (Ji 1994, 45–46). Wang Dan, one of the student leaders in the 1989 Tiananmen incident, published a rebuttal (*United Daily*, March 3, 1994), arguing that any artistic work criticized by the CCP would immediately gain popularity with the Chinese public. This was evidenced by the underground circulation of *Farewell My Concubine* on videotape following the attack on it in *Qiushi*. Calling this attack a "devious exposure of [Communist China's] cultural totalitarianism," Wang highlighted the disparity between official censure and public sentiments in contemporary China.

Criticisms of Chen's film have also come from outside China, albeit for different reasons. The film's portrayal of the homosexual character, Cheng Dieyi, has been attacked as "incarnating a homophobic fantasy of the hysterical faggot" (Berry 1993a, 21), and the erasure of Hong Kong (where in the novel Dieyi and his object choice, Duan Xiaolou, reunite after the political upheavals in China) from the film's narrative has also been criticized as mainland-centric (Lau 1995, 26; see also Leung Ping-kwan 1995, 361–362; Wang Hongzhi, Li, and Chen 1997, 224–226). Both accusations can be partly explained by Chen's dissatisfaction with the novel and his roping in of a scriptwriter from China to collaborate on the film adaptation. The resulting screenplay was to boost the female character, Juxian, "from a two-page walk-on [in the novel] to a full scale role [on screen] for Gong Li" (Rayns 1994a, 42). Chen admitted in an interview that the expansion of the female role was necessary to accommodate the mega-star Gong Li (*Yang ± Yin* 1996) who, as the most recognizable Chinese actress in both the East and the West, would have been crucial to the film's box-office success. While Chen defends Juxian's role as pivotal to the structure of the film (Chiao 1998, 106–107), it has been argued that this

role prevented the film from dealing directly with the issue of homosexuality (Rayns 1994a, 42).

Released three years after *Farewell My Concubine* but generally hailed as mainland China's first gay film, Zhang Yuan's *East Palace, West Palace* received most of its financial backing from France and was produced by a French company (Reynaud 1997, 33).¹⁹ Made outside the state studio system, Zhang's film was illegal by default and thus destined to be banned in China. When the film was invited to the out-of-competition section of the 1997 Cannes Film Festival, the Chinese authorities tried to block its participation. When this failed, China withdrew its official entry, Zhang Yimou's *Keep Cool* (*You hua haohao shuo*, 1996)—an ironic title in these circumstances. Then, also in retaliation, Zhang Yuan's passport was confiscated to prevent him from attending the festival. At the screening of the film, the organizers of the festival placed an empty chair on the stage to mark the director's symbolic presence (Rayns 1997; Reynaud 1997, 33; Berry 1998, 84).

Just as the punishment for engaging in homosexual activities in China varies from one enforcing authority to another owing to the disjunctive order of the state apparatus, what constitutes an official ban on filmmaking in China remains ambivalent. Apparently, there are interstices within the system that are wide enough for a banned filmmaker like Zhang Yuan to do his shoots in broad daylight. Zhang was blacklisted, together with a few other directors, in an official directive in 1994. However, policemen who subsequently saw Zhang shooting films would simply comment, "Oh, it's Zhang Yuan, isn't it? I see you are still making movies, then" (Berry 1996b, 40–41). In the case of *East Palace, West Palace*, the shoot was by no means low profile, as the film crew took over an entire park, but there was no intervention from any official figure. The explanation for this seemingly paradoxical situation lies, to quote Zhang, in the fact that "China is too big and one department cannot command another" (Rayns 1996, 28; see also Chiao 1998, 259). The trick, it would seem, is to beat the party at its own political games.

This probably explains why more underground films on homosexuality have since been made. Liu Bingjian, the director of *Men and Women* (*Nannan nü nü*, 1999), was asked to write a "self-critical review" for making a film without official permission, though the "punishment" does not seem to have stemmed from the homosexual theme of the film itself. Consistent with underground filmmaking's practice in seeking foreign assistance, the film's negatives were shipped via French and Swiss diplomatic pouches to be developed abroad.²⁰ Into the twenty-first century, Li Yu's *Fish and Elephant* (*Jinnian xiatian*, 2001) has been hailed as China's

first lesbian film, while *Men and Women's* screenplay writer, Cui Zi'en, has also made a couple of gay films on digital video (*Enter the Clowns/Choujue dengchang*, 2001; *Feeding Boys, Ayaya/Aiyaya, qu buru*, 2003). Cui's film, *The Old Testament (Jiuyue)*, 2002), was shown at the aforementioned lesbian and gay film festival held at Beijing University that was cancelled halfway through (Wang Qi 2004, 191), and *Enter the Clowns* was funded by the Jeonju International Film Festival in Korea. As Chris Berry notes, "Cui has had the advantage of the relative ease and cheapness of video production and the availability of an international gay and lesbian film and video festival circuit to counter-balance the sometimes restrictive political situation in China" (Berry 2004, 200). On top of these developments, Hong Kong director Stanley Kwan also managed to make *Lan Yu* (2001) with a predominantly mainland Chinese cast and crew in China without official permission.

Capitalizing on the Market in Taiwan

Taiwan is undoubtedly the most tolerant and liberal of all Chinese-speaking societies in terms of lesbian and gay representation, ranging from governmental policies and civil rights to cultural production and commercial enterprises. It is difficult to imagine the mayor of any other Chinese city who would follow the example of the Taipei mayor, Ma Ying-jeou (Ma Yingjiu), in appearing on the front cover of a glossy gay lifestyle magazine as Ma did on *G&L* in April 2000 to celebrate its fourth anniversary (Simon 2004, 83). It is equally hard to see another Chinese government (or even those in some countries in the so-called liberal West) that would propose a human rights bill that includes "a clause granting gays and lesbians the rights to form civil unions and adopt children," as the Taiwan Ministry of Justice did in June 2001 (*ibid.*, 74). Not only can Taiwan boast of commercial enterprises aimed at the pink dollar such as gay bars, saunas, and bookshops, but also civil groups for homosexuals range from those devoted to political activism to those catering to students, teachers, Christians, and Buddhists. Together with the political energies unleashed by the lifting of martial law in 1987, gay activism has joined forces with other previously marginalized groups in demanding greater recognition and representation, culminating in a "transformation of the cultural configuration" (Wang Yage 1999, 30–31). There is certainly a market for homosexual-themed cultural products, including film, waiting to be tapped by enterprising businesses. In addition to being of interest to the commercial market, homosexuality is also a hot ticket for politicians eager to attract the pink or liberal vote. In progressive circles in Taiwan, it is

considered politically incorrect to speak negatively about homosexuality. For all its inherent problems and hypocrisies, political correctness seems to have served homosexuality well, at least in the case of Taiwan.

One of the most salient representations of homosexuality in Taiwan has been in the field of cultural production, especially in literary writing. Since the publication of Pai Hsien-yung's groundbreaking *Crystal Boys* (Niezi, 1983), commonly regarded as Taiwan's first homosexual novel, homosexuality had, by the 1990s, become the most fashionable topic in literary writing. Three literary awards inaugurated in that decade, each with a top prize of one million New Taiwan dollars, were won by novels with a lesbian or gay theme.²¹ In terms of literary and cultural spaces dedicated to the expression of homosexuality, Taiwan has at least two publishers, a handful of glossy magazines, two specialist bookshops, and the ubiquitous lesbian and gay section in fashionable chain bookshops. A booming industry of *tongzhi* and *ku'er* literature has also attracted academic attention, both within Taiwan and beyond, as has the translation of these works into English.²² Moreover, literary and intellectual journals regularly feature articles and special issues devoted to the issue of homosexuality in its various expressions, ranging from literature, cinema, identity politics, and sexuality to queer theory, space, and architecture. Queer theory has become the latest fashion in academia, with a Center for the Study of Sexuality established in the National Central University, which also publishes a journal, *Working Papers in Gender/Sexuality Studies*. Lesbian- and gay-related activities such as film festivals, book exhibitions, talks, and conferences are organized regularly in Taipei and other major cities.

A momentous event in recent gay and lesbian history in Taiwan was the wedding between writer Hsu You-sheng (Xu Yousheng) and his Paraguayan-American lover Gray Harriman in November 1996.²³ Mirroring the characters in Ang Lee's *The Wedding Banquet* in their interracial coupling and middle-class, professional backgrounds, Hsu and Harriman received largely positive, front-page coverage of their wedding in almost all the major newspapers. A documentary based on the wedding, entitled *Not Simply a Wedding Banquet . . .* (*Buzhishi xiyan*, 1997) and directed by Mickey Chen Chun-chih (Chen Junzhi) and Mia Chen Ming-hsiu (Chen Mingxiu), has toured many lesbian and gay film festivals around the world. Though not legally binding, Hsu's wedding represents a certain "normalization" of homosexuality in Taiwan, where it has become nothing more than media hype, encountering little or no official or societal condemnation.²⁴

As in China, there is no law for the criminalization of homosexuality in Taiwan, though this has not prevented the police force from conduct-

ing raids in public spaces known for gay cruising, as an incident on Changde Street in 1997 shows (Simon 2004, 80). While the gay bookshop Gin Gin (Jin Jin) generally enjoyed good relations in its neighborhood, its window was repeatedly smashed in 2001 (Martin 2003b, 15). However, there is no question that Taiwan looks most promising in terms of furthering civil rights for gays and lesbians within the Chinese-speaking world, as a broad alliance has been built across the realms of politics, academia, civil society, and artistic and literary communities to ensure that the tides would not be rolled back on Taiwan's progressive political agendas.

In contrast to China, where the cinematic representation of homosexuality is officially prohibited, the Taiwanese films discussed in this book—*The Wedding Banquet* in chapter 2 and *The River* in chapter 5—are productions of the KMT-backed Central Motion Picture Corporation (CMPC). While I am not suggesting that the KMT's cinematic machinery is actively promoting homosexuality, these films are in fact aimed at participation in international film festivals. Their production reflects the acute marketing acumen of the man at CMPC's helm in detecting trends in fashion and taste in the international film world. These films were made under the aegis of Hsu Li-kong (Xu Ligong), then CMPC's vice-chairman, who understands that taboo and marginality in the East often translate into desirability and marketability in the West.²⁵ Both films proved successful at winning top awards at the Berlin Film Festival, with *The Wedding Banquet* sharing the Golden Bear in 1993 and *The River* capturing the Silver Bear in 1997.

Behind-the-scenes accounts reveal, however, that before the 1990s, homosexuality was still taboo in Taiwanese cinema. When the first draft of the screenplay for *The Wedding Banquet* was completed in 1987, it found no backers because of its homosexual theme. Having won a 1990 competition for his screenplays for both *Pushing Hands* (*Tuishou*) and *The Wedding Banquet*, Ang Lee decided to film *Pushing Hands* first because it did not involve a controversial issue like homosexuality. After achieving critical success with *Pushing Hands*, Lee was still not convinced that the time was ripe for making *The Wedding Banquet*. Apparently, at the screening of *Pushing Hands* at the Berlin Film Festival in 1991, many gay people in the film industry warned Lee that gay subject matter was like a minefield that could blow one into pieces if not handled properly. It finally took Hsu's persuasion to convince Lee, who trusted Hsu's judgment, to make the film (A. Lee and Peng 1993, 39–41).

Once again, the international stage provided a vital platform for the representation of homosexuality in Chinese cinemas, and the producer of *The Wedding Banquet*, Hsu, cautiously planned the film's first screening.

Hsu chose to premiere the film in Berlin, before its domestic release, as he feared possible polarized reviews in Taiwan might adversely affect its international reception. The film's international accolades may have cushioned any negative reaction to its theme in Taiwan, where, by 1993, homosexuality was already less of a taboo. However, isolated incidents showed that there were still some pockets of discomfort about homosexuality. At the 1993 Golden Horse Awards, Taiwan's equivalent to the Academy Awards (Oscar), a panel judge threatened to hold her fellow judges responsible for the proliferation of homosexuality in Taiwan if they presented *The Wedding Banquet* with an award. Her reported comment (*China Times*, December 13, 1994) was circulated in cinematic circles as "a joke."

The situation was somewhat different for Tsai Ming-Liang's *The River* because, in its depiction of an act of homosexual incest between a father and his son, the film pushes the boundary much further than *The Wedding Banquet* did. The power of the taboo was exemplified by Tsai's difficulty in convincing the actor Miao Tian to play the role of the homosexual father. Described as the Chinese Jack Palance, Miao has had a long cinematic career starring in macho roles such as knights and swordsmen. Miao feared that playing an aged homosexual who has sex with his son, albeit unknowingly, would tarnish his reputation among the Taiwanese audience. An impasse ensued, with Tsai summoning respected figures from the film industry to try to persuade Miao, while Miao's family members in Taiwan and beyond objected vehemently to the proposal. Miao finally gave in when Tsai threatened to abandon the project should he refuse (Hu Youfeng 1997, 106–107). After the film's release, Tsai was severely criticized for the incest scene (Rivière and Tsai 1999, 98). However, as most of these criticisms came from within the film industry (Huang Wulan 1999, 239–245), they could be attributed to infighting within the industry rather than a veiled attack on homosexuality.²⁶

Taiwan cinema has since produced more gay- and lesbian-themed films, including short films and documentaries. From his debut film, *Rebels of the Neon God*, to his recently released seventh film, *The Wayward Cloud* (*Tianbian yiduo yun*, 2005), Tsai Ming-liang's oeuvre, while not always directly representing homosexuality, can nonetheless be read as queer (see chapter 5) or as camp (Yeh and Davis 2005). Even Hsu Li-kong, Tsai's producer at CMPC, has made a film with a homosexual theme, *Fleeing by Night* (*Yeben*, 2000). Lesbianism is touched upon in *Murmur of Youth* (*Meili zai changge*, 1997), by Lin Cheng-sheng (Lin Zhengsheng), and in a sixty-minute film, *The Love of Three Oranges* (*San ju zhi lian*, 1998), by theater director and poet Hung Hung (Hong Hong).

The ambivalence of adolescent sexuality seems to be fast becoming a staple in the genre of youth films (*qingchun pian*) in Taiwan cinema. Yee Chih-yen (Yi Zhiyan), whose 1995 film, *Lonely Hearts Club* (*Jimo fangxin julebu*), deals with homosexuality between young men, has won critical acclaim for his sensitive portrayal of teenage female same-sex attraction in *Blue Gate Crossing* (*Lanse damen*, 2002). *Formula 17* (*Shiqisui de tiankong*, 2004), by Chen Ying-jung (Chen Yingrong), and a short film, *Too Young* (*Yemaque*, 1997), by Huang Ming-cheng (Huang Mingzheng), are two other examples. Meanwhile, documentary filmmaker Mickey Chen Chun-ih has been particularly noted for his direct portrayal of queer Taiwanese teenagers. After making *Not Simply a Wedding Banquet . . .* in 1997, which has not been screened publicly in Taiwan because the interviewees in it spoke on the condition of anonymity, Chen's next documentary, *Beauty for Boys* (*Meili shaonian*, 1999), enjoyed a full house when released in Taipei.²⁷ Among the audience at its premiere were the principal and students of the high school Chen had attended, along with cultural celebrities who gave their support. Within a span of two years, not only did teenagers feel unafraid to appear in a gay documentary, but it is also now in fact considered quite "cool" to do so.

Hong Kong in the Shadow of 1997 and Beyond

As a British colony until 1997, Hong Kong experienced a key moment in relation to homosexuality with its decriminalization in 1991.²⁸ Prior to this, a homosexual act between men was a criminal offense under provisions proscribing "gross indecency" or "buggery," a law Hong Kong's colonial master discarded in 1967 on British soil. The decriminalization process in Hong Kong had been filled with controversy, encountering opposition from the Chinese and religious communities (McLelland 2000). It had inadvertently also heightened the public's awareness of the issue of homosexuality and might have helped to unite homosexuals in forming activist groups to fight for their rights (Chou and Chiu 1995, 175). Despite its cosmopolitan facade, it has been argued that the notion of a sexually permissive and progressively liberal Hong Kong is a myth and that decriminalization did not alter the stigma attached to homosexuality (Lilley 1998, 214–215).

Perhaps owing to Hong Kong's colonial legacy and a partially English-language education system, Western lesbian- and gay-related ideas and institutions are more readily imported. Hong Kong boasts the first lesbian and gay film festival in the Chinese-speaking world, and the organizers of the inaugural film festival, Mai Ke and Edward Lam (Lin Yihua), are pro-

lific writers on gay-related issues. Homoeroticism and homosexuality have also found expression in avant garde theater performances.²⁹ Chou Wah-shan (Zhou Huashan), a British-educated sociologist, is responsible for most of the popular writing in Chinese on homosexuality (see Chou 1996a, 1996b, 1997). Homosexual groups began to flourish in Hong Kong in the 1990s and range from the political and cultural to the social and religious. Members of these groups tend to be young, middle class, consumeristic, Westernized, and male-dominated (Chou and Chiu 1995, 178–195).

With the looming of Hong Kong's return to the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1997, there were genuine concerns with regard to the state of lesbian and gay rights in post-handover Hong Kong. While interracial coupling between Hong Kong and Western men was a prominent mode of gay relationship in colonial times, the handover has in fact led to the opening up of "gay tourism in Mainland China [as] a new way in which Hong Kong gay men can channel their sexual gratification" (Kong 2002, 43–44). The geopolitical reality of 1997 also impinges on the state of film-making in the final days of the colony. Fearing a possible tightening of the censorship system after 1997, many Hong Kong directors reportedly rushed to complete their films on homosexuality before the deadline (Peng 1997, 42). While it still remains to be seen if or when tighter censorship might be introduced, the poster advertising Wong Kar-wai's 1997 film, *Happy Together*, showing the gay couple in the film embracing and kissing on a rooftop, was banned in Hong Kong (Chiao 1997a, 18). However, fears of immediate change after 1997 were unfounded, as two films featuring homosexuality, Stanley Kwan's *Hold You Tight* and *Bishōnen . . .* (*Meishaonian zhi lian*), by Yonfan (Yang Fan), were released in 1998.

Unlike their mainland Chinese and Taiwanese counterparts, Hong Kong actors are usually mega-stars who double as pop stars, making the stakes higher if they are to play a homosexual character on film. For example, *Happy Together's* explicit opening sex scene proved to be a problem for one of the lead actors, Tony Leung Chiu-wai (Liang Chaowei), who was apparently "devastated" after filming the sex scene and complained to the cinematographer Christopher Doyle, "Wong said that all I'd have to do was kiss Leslie [Cheung, the other lead actor, who was openly gay]. . . . Now look how far he's pushed me" (cited in Doyle 1998, 163). Some members of the crew of *Happy Together* also displayed their ignorance about homosexuality while filming in Argentina. On a night out on the town, the camera assistants went to a gay bar by mistake. They ended up drinking their beer through straws and refused to use the toilet. Christopher Doyle comments in his journal, "We've been filming two men

simulating blow jobs and anal sex for weeks now, and ‘my boys’ still think you can get AIDS from a beer glass or a sweaty handshake” (ibid., 167–168).

Stanley Kwan, who came out to the Hong Kong audience via his 1996 documentary, *Yang ± Yin: Gender in Chinese Cinema (Nansheng nüxiang)*, has since moved from displacing his sexuality onto the women characters for which he is most famous in his earlier films to the direct representation of homosexuality in *Lan Yu* in 2001. Yonfan’s trilogy deals in turn with transgenderism (*Bugis Street/Yaojie huanghou*, 1995), homosexuality (*Bishōnen . . .*), and lesbianism (*Peony Pavilion/Youyuan jingmeng*, 2001). Other films that portray homosexuality include *The Map of Sex and Love (Qingse ditu*, 2001), by Evans Chan (Chen Yaocheng); *When Beckham Met Owen* (2004), by Adam Wong; and a fifty-minute film, *First Love and Other Pains (Xinhui*, 1999), by Simon Chung (Zhong Desheng). Hong Kong cinema of the popular and generic forms has always been filled with homosexual characters of various guises (such as comic caricatures and drag swordsmen) and representations of masculinity, male bonding, and homoeroticism that open themselves to a queer reading.³⁰

The making of *Lan Yu* deserves special attention here because it exemplifies, on the one hand, the marginal and interstitial spaces available for the cinematic representation of homosexuality even in unpromising circumstances, and, on the other hand, the transnational nature of Chinese cinemas at the turn of the twenty-first century. The film is based on a novel entitled *Beijing Story (Beijing gushi)*, which first appeared on the World Wide Web in 1996 under the authorial pseudonym of Beijing Tongzhi and was subsequently published in print in Taiwan in 2002. According to Kwan’s account on the official Web site of the film, Kwan was approached in February 2000 by Zhang Yongning, who had read the novel and found it very moving. The film was made with “some ingenuity” (“I can’t tell you how or where we shot it”), with the cast and crew mainly from mainland China. The lead actors who play the gay couple in the film are Hu Jun, whose previous gay role was as the policeman in Zhang Yuan’s *East Palace, West Palace*, and Liu Ye, an up-and-coming actor hitherto best known for his role as a postman in *Postman in the Mountains (Nashan naren nagou*, 1999), directed by Huo Jianqi.

As the above account clearly shows, *Lan Yu* is a text that has travelled across nations, transmuted across media, and thrived in the disjunctive order of the new global cultural economy. The original form of the text belongs to the genre of *tongzhi* literature on the World Wide Web, whose anonymity allows, in particular, those from mainland China to participate in the writing of this officially censored subject.³¹ Zhang Yongning, a Chi-

nese national who lives and works in Britain, then decided to produce the film and single-handedly sourced international funding, secured the Hong Kong director, and coordinated the shoot in China. Initially, Kwan was apprehensive about shooting in China, but it turned out that Zhang, who had trained as an actor, was very familiar with the film industry there and knew exactly when to push the limits and when to be restrained (Zeng 2001, 50). While its box-office reception was less than enthusiastic in Hong Kong (Li Zhaoxing 2002, 62), the film won critical acclaim in Taiwan, where Stanley Kwan was awarded the best director and Liu Ye the best actor in the Golden Horse Awards in 2001. The combination of global capital, transnational cast and crew, and local knowledge managed to circumvent official censorship in China to produce a cinematic representation of male homosexuality that first existed in virtual reality and later found new incarnations in print and celluloid. With *Lan Yu*, screening homosexuality has entered a new mode.