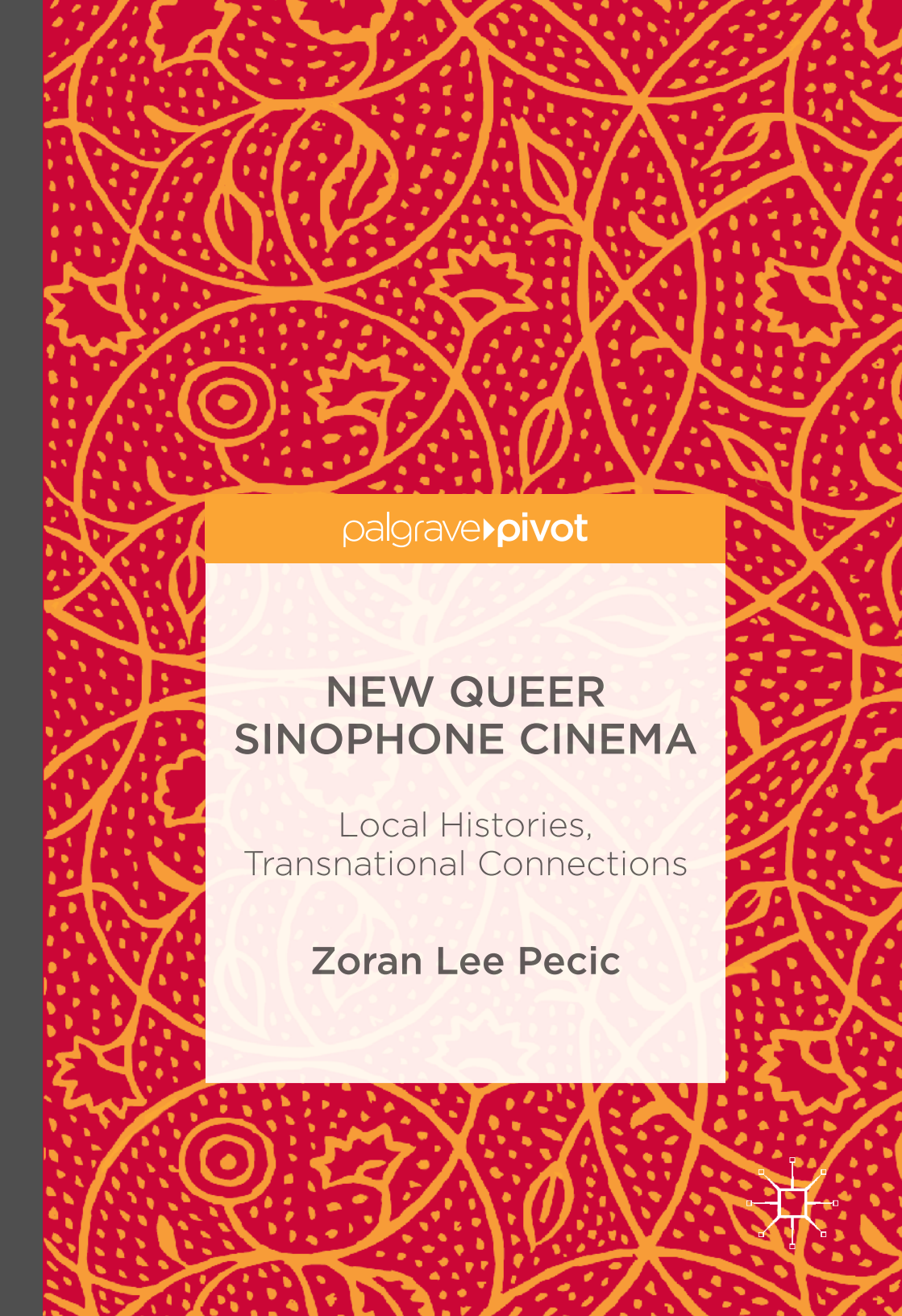




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NEW QUEER SINOPHONE CINEMA

Local Histories,
Transnational Connections

Zoran Lee Pecic



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Local Histories, Transnational Connections

palgrave
macmillan

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ISBN 978-1-349-94881-9 ISBN 978-1-349-94882-6 (eBook)
DOI 10.1057/978-1-349-94882-6

Library of Congress Control Number: 2016936720

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For Macanovic

NOTE ON ROMANISATION

I have used Pinyin for Chinese film titles throughout the book, whilst the names of characters appear as they do in their official English subtitles. I have not included original Chinese film titles in Chinese characters but I do use the Pinyin Romanisation of the Mandarin rendering of the original film titles. These are written in parenthesis after initial appearance as well as in the Filmography at the back of the book.

As for the internationally known people and places, such as Tsai Ming-liang and the Forbidden City, I have used their name as they appear in worldwide circulation, rather than their Pinyin Romanisation.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the Danish Council for Independent Research | Humanities (FKK) for awarding me the postdoctoral grant that allowed me to conduct this research. Without it, this book would have not been possible. I would also like to thank Mette Hjort at the Department of Visual Studies at Lingnan University, Hong Kong for putting me up in this highly rewarding environment during my research stay at Lingnan. A big thanks also goes to Bill Y. S. Lee at the Centre for Cinema Studies at Lingnan, who provided invaluable insights into Hong Kong cinema. I am grateful to my colleagues, particularly Lars Jensen, at the Department of Communication & Arts at Roskilde University for their support and encouragement. Many thanks to Chris Penfold and Lina Aboujeb at Palgrave as well as the two anonymous readers for their insightful criticism and highly valuable comments. Finally, I would like to thank Sunam for all her love and support.

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Introduction

Abstract The introduction begins by outlining the various ways of investigating and theorising ‘Chineseness’ and Chinese cinema. Adding the most recent conceptualisations of the Sinophone to the idea of a decentralised queer studies, the introduction argues that New Queer Sinophone Cinema offers new ways of challenging both heteronormative ideas of a national Chinese cinema and Euro-American notions of queerness. The chapter offers an outline of the book’s aims and scope, highlighting its structure and methodology.

Keywords Chinese cinema • Sinophone • Chineseness • Queer studies • Thirdspace • Queerness

In her introduction to *New Queer Chinese Cinema* (2012), a designation for the recent emergence of queer-themed films across Mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong, Helen Hok-Sze Leung notes that the Chinese-language films that are coded as belonging to ‘queer cinema’ do not necessarily deal with the issues of gay representation on screen. In fact, the majority of these films do not even fulfil that most basic of expectations, namely, that they portray in detail the lives and times of its GLBT characters. Rather, Leung argues, these films deal with issues that go beyond the expected, as they ‘unsettle the parameters of heterosexuality and its kinship

structure; confound expectations of coherence between gender identity, gender expression, and the sexed body; expand the possible configurations of sexual and emotional bonds; and subvert the aesthetic conventions and heterocentric presuppositions of mainstream cinema' (2012, 519). In other words, the New Queer Chinese Cinema, much like its North American counterpart of the 1990s, the New Queer Cinema, *queers* both the heteronormative as well as the 'gay', challenging not only the hegemonic positioning of heterosexuality as 'natural' and homosexuality as the opposite, but also the mainstreaming and the assimilation of 'gay' culture into the realm of the 'accepted'. For more on New Queer Cinema, see Aaron (2005) and Rich (2013). This is not to say, however, that Chinese cinema is merely a reproduction or a continuation of the kind of independent filmmaking that flourished in the cinemas of North America and Europe nearly three decades ago. This would invariably place it within what Dipesh Chakrabarty calls the 'imaginary waiting room' of history (2000, 8), where modernity is constantly waiting to happen and where historicity is rooted deep within the Western liberal notions of development and 'progress'. Rather, the New Queer Chinese Cinema, which spans genres, styles and geographies, is a diverse field that investigates in numerous ways the complexity of non-normative sexuality and desire in the PRC, Taiwan and Hong Kong without consigning itself to a particular field of 'gay cinema' or gay representation. As Leung argues, 'the contexts of [its] production and reception, thematic concerns, and aesthetic directions ... are remarkably different from that of New Queer Cinema' (519–520). What sets it apart is not only the transnationality of Chinese cinema, which is a direct result of the unprecedented internationalisation of Chinese film in the 1990s (Lu 1997). Nor is it that Chinese cinema reconceptualises the national by the means of the 'Sinophone' in areas outside of the PRC, Taiwan and Hong Kong triad (Shih 2007). Rather, in this book I argue that the New Queer Sinophone Cinema challenges both the notions of a 'Queer Cinema' as well as the ideas of a 'Chinese Cinema'.¹ In other words, the New Queer Sinophone Cinema is neither uniquely queer nor is it exclusively Chinese. Whilst the designation *queer* runs the risk of situating Chinese cinema within the dominantly Euro-American paradigms of gay and lesbian identity formations, the adjective 'Chinese' territorialises it within a geographical locale that restricts its translocal and transnational elements.

Numerous scholars have questioned and challenged the essentialised notions of 'Chineseness'. Rey Chow asks 'What is Chinese about the Chinese language and Chinese literature?' (1998, 9), and in his introduction to

Chinese National Cinema (2004), Yingjin Zhang poses a similar question: 'Is "Chinese" in "Chinese cinema" meant as an ethnic, cultural, linguistic, political or territorial marker?' (4). The notion of a national cinema is highly contentious, given on the one hand the complex configurations of a national identity and on the other the transnational modes of film production. Yet, Lu's consolidation of the Mainland, Taiwan and Hong Kong cinemas into the term 'transnational Chinese cinemas', which does little to displace China as a 'shared object' and a 'location of culture' (1997, 12) is equally disputable. Lu and Yeh's notion of the 'Chinese-language cinema' is equally problematic, which is seen in their acknowledgement that 'if language is in part what lends unity to the Chinese nation-state and more broadly to a sense of Chineseness among the diasporic populations, it is also a force fraught with tension and contention' (2004, 3). Citing 'numerous Chinese dialects' spoken by 'nationals in China as well as by immigrants outside China', the editors nonetheless argue that '[Chinese] language helps forge a fluid, deterritorialized, pan-Chinese identity among Chinese speakers across national boundaries' (4). Here, we may object to the equation of dialects and minority languages, whilst the notion that Chinese language film is what binds Chinese speakers across national boundaries is further complicated by the work of directors such as Ang Lee's film to the Filmography, whose films cross not only national but also linguistic and cultural borders. Although these numerous attempts to answer Chow's initial question 'what is Chinese?' attest to the disparate-ness of 'Chineseness', Chow cautions against 'speaking of Chineseness in the plural—as so many kinds of Chineseness-es, so many Chinese identities' (1998, 24). Rather, she argues that instead of pluralising Chineseness, we must 'carefully study ... texts and media ... even as such study is now ineluctably refracted by the awareness of the unfinished and untotizable workings of ethnicity' (24). Looking at these specific texts and the ways they are utilised in their own right provides means for deconstructing and problematising the monolithic construction of the Chinese nation. 'Only with such close study ... can Chineseness be productively put under erasure—not in the sense of being written out of existence but in the sense of being unpacked (Chow 1998, 24). Thus, by unpacking the conceptualisation, the construction and the utilisation of the term 'Chinese', we are able to recodify Chineseness in a way that challenges the unity of the nation without dismissing the close linguistic, cultural and ethnic links between the PRC, Taiwan, Hong Kong and the diaspora. One of the ways is to consider and utilise the concept of the Sinophone, as developed by Shih and

Lu. Whilst Shih places heavy emphasis on its heteroglossia, that is, ‘a network of places of cultural production outside China and on the margins of China and Chineseness, where a historical process of heterogenizing and localizing of continental Chinese culture has been taking place for several centuries’ (2007, 4), Lu’s Sinophone includes Greater China and takes on a more fluid positioning in terms of cultural and national affiliation. He writes: ‘There is no one dominant voice in the field. The multiple tongues and dialects used in varieties of Sinophone cinema testify to the fracturing of China and Chineseness’ (2007, 163). As a result, the Sinophone in this book employs *both* configurations in that the films discussed here are made by directors based in China, Taiwan and Hong Kong, featuring translocal and transnational elements that go beyond national borders. These films are inherently local as well as transnational and global. They are, in effect, both here and there.

What can be said of the use of queerness in this book? Eng et al. have already questioned the utility of queer in the special issue *What’s Queer about Queer Studies Now?* (2005). Here, they argue that the ‘contemporary mainstreaming of gay and lesbian identity ... demands a renewed queer studies ever vigilant to the fact sexuality is intersectional, not extra-neous to other modes of difference, and calibrated to a firm understanding of queer as a political metaphor without a fixed referent’ (1). In particular, the editors note that when considered ‘outside its conventional relationship to francophone and Anglo-American literatures and literary studies’, queer studies exhibit the potential to denaturalise ‘various origin narratives, such as “home” and “nation”’ (7), simultaneously challenging the self-centricity of European and North American definition of what constitutes queer sexuality and culture and the ensuing supposition about the passivity of the non-Euro-American queerness.

My use of queerness in this book builds on these considerations by remaining vigilant to the assumptions of framing a ‘non-Western’ encounter with queer culture and politics as purely an imitation, a delayed repetition, of Euro-American discourses of gay/lesbian identity. In other words, this book challenges the notions that queer visibility is merely a Western import, a presumption that marginalises non-Western sexual practices and consigns them prefixes such as ‘pre-modern’ or ‘unliberated’. The films discussed in this book defy the codification of the practices that do not conform to the Western developmental notions of ‘coming out’ as homophobic or non-progressive. Similarly, they challenge the definition of sexuality in terms of temporality, where the closeted pre-gay subject becomes

aware of his/her homosexuality and works his/her way to the recognition and liberation of his/her homosexual desire. Thus, queerness in this book is a decentralised paradigm, rooted not in the Euro-American White bourgeois assumptions and the transnational lesbian and gay movements, but in interdisciplinary, non-normative investigations of belonging, sexuality and desire which are not fixed by preordained cultural distinctiveness and constructed dimorphisms. Only by unfixing, *provincializing*, queerness can we begin to explore its full potential for producing new ideas, new ways of interrogation, and new domains for cultural, historical and social study of sexuality.

Combining the notion of the Sinophone, as developed by both Lu and Shih, with that of decentralised queer studies offers exciting new ways of interrogating Chinese queer cultures that are both localised as well as transnational. By emphasising its transnational elements, we are able to position queer Sinophone cinema in a context that takes it beyond the borders of the PRC, Taiwan and Hong Kong. Queer Sinophone cinema is very much global, as it depends on the markets, circuits and modes of distribution that can only be found outside of China. Yet, these are films made by China-based filmmakers, whose contexts, themes and characters, if they are to appear intelligible, require localised and regional knowledges. The 'New' in New Queer Sinophone Cinema is an emphasis on the local and the global, the Sino-centric as well as the transnational. This, I argue, has the ability to challenge national heteronormative constructions of Chinese cinema and to defy global forces that deem queer Chinese cinema as that which is distinct from yet always aspiring to Western notions of queerness, cinema and identity formation. In fact, 2010 saw one of the early explorations of the interstices between queer studies and the transnationality of Chineseness. By the editors' own admission, the special issue of *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* entitled 'Beyond the Strai(gh)ts: Transnationalism and Queer Chinese Politics' was 'a provocation' as it 'both reflect[ed] and ... provoke[ed] ongoing debates about the meanings, implications, usages, and effects of each of the terms in [the] title' (Liu and Rofel 2010, 281). The editors also note that the heavy emphasis on transnationalism signals 'a historical moment in which activities, identities, theories, and cultural productions self-consciously position themselves both within and beyond the nation-state' (282). Emphasising the nation-state in terms of identity, politics and sexual affiliation, the contributors attempt to move 'beyond' it by the way of exposing the multiple queer connections and imaginaries between nation-states. Similarly, Howard Chiang's

and Ari Larissa Heinrich's 2013 edited volume *Queer Sinophone Cultures*, which responds to the 'challenge of juxtaposing the margins of gender and sexuality with the margins of China and Chineseness', is another collection of essays that focuses on the 'transnational' or that which lies 'outside of China'. By focusing on the 'constructed "periphery" ... of East Asian studies and queer studies as such', their aim is to 'add greater specificity to our understanding of what might constitute transnational Chinese queer studies'. The volume demonstrates 'how the terms (transnational, Chinese, queer) become meaningful to, and through, each other in the context of a queer Sinophonicity' (5). Whilst *Queer Sinophone Cultures* features chapters on film—most of the Sinophone critique up to this point has emphasised literature and other form of artistic output—Audrey Yue's and Olivia Khoo's edited collection *Sinophone Cinemas* (2014) is the first volume that focuses exclusively on Sinophone cinema. In addition to its aim of demonstrating 'how Sinophone cinemas might extend or displace other models of Chinese cinema, centred on the nation-state and in particular a Mainland Chinese centre' (5), the volume is significant in that it places just as significant an emphasis on the efforts to "'De-Westernize" film studies'. This echoes Bâ and Higbee's call for a critique of 'the West and the Rest' (2012) binary vis-à-vis film production and representation. Although the concept of diaspora has the potential to expose and overturn ethnic absolutism which lies at the forefront of nationalist projects, it also simultaneously affirms fixed origins, adhering to the ideas of cultural purity and authenticity, where diaspora is seen as 'foreign', an imitation of the originary homeland. Sinophone cinema defies the centrality of 'China' and 'Chineseness' in the same way as it challenges Eurocentrism, eschewing notions ethnicity and nationality for localised sites of production that are bound to their own historical and social contexts. As Yue and Khoo argue, Sinophone cinema 'examine[s] the critical efficacy of a methodological shift from diasporic cinemas to Sinophone cinemas in order to re-engage new sites of localization, multilingualism and difference that have emerged in Chinese film studies but that are not easily contained by the notion of diaspora' (5). Significantly, these localisations are not fixed geographically; rather, they are multidirectional, in that the aforementioned move to de-Westernize film studies entails not an inversion of the supposed fixed binary of West/East but its problematisation and decentring. Taking cue from the two above-mentioned volumes, this book emphasises New Queer Sinophone Cinema as a field of study that merges the Sinophone with the queer, investigating films produced in the PRC,

Taiwan and Hong Kong whose queer connections lie within as well as outside the PRC. Significantly, by theorising queerness and the Sinophone as that which is local as well as global, homebound as well as diasporic, the book defies firm grounding within either category. The films discussed here do not employ queerness as a means of uncovering sexual oppression. Rather, queerness works not only as a political means for problematising and nuancing the positioning of non-normative desires within the Sinophone; it also challenges Eurocentric critical perspectives on filmic representation that are tied to the idea of the binary between the West and the Rest. As Yue argues: ‘Located in the margins of Chinese heteronormativity, queer Sinophone cinema questions the ontology of kinship and new queer subjectivities that are produced by the global reordering of Chinese modernity’ (2012, 95). By oscillating between the centre and the periphery, here and there, China and elsewhere, queer Sinophone cinema ‘can be considered a place-based minor transnational network that includes not only queer Chinese cinemas outside of China, but also queer Chinese films in China that are beneficiaries of peripheral Chinese and global western queer film markets’ (2012, 105).

Decentring the Han-centricity of Chineseness as well as Euro-American queerness involves a renewed emphasis on spatiality. In this book, I argue that one of the elements of the new in New Queer Sinophone Cinema is an intricate use of space, where queerness is re-positioned in-between the overarching categories such as local, global, Western and Chinese. As Lisa Rofel argues in her seminal work on sexuality and neoliberalism in postsocialist China, ‘the local and the global are both acts of positioning, perspectives rather than merely locales, used as signifiers of difference’ (2007, 93). Rofel reminds us that the local and the global are themselves *spatial* categories that rely on meanings and particularities of *place*. As will become evident in my film analyses, the highly intricate use of spatiality in these works testifies to the ability of space to inform and to destabilise these discussions, reconfiguring and subverting the expected binary configurations of powerful/powerless, oppressor/oppressed, ‘East’/ ‘West’. In *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (1996), Edward W. Soja argues that the social production of space is built upon three premises. First, ‘spatial practice’ (*Firstspace*) is the material forms of social spatiality made up of things like houses, streets and cities. Second are ‘representations of space’ (*Secondspace*), which is ‘the space of science, planners, urbanists, technocrats, artists’ (1996, 66). These two ‘practices’ make the foundation for the ‘real’ material world and the ways

we interpret this reality. However, between the two realities there exist ‘spaces of representation’ which are the result of an interaction between Firstspace and Secondspace. This Thirdspace complicates material and mental spaces, which Soja sees as ‘simultaneously real and imagined and more (both and also ...): ‘the exploration of Thirdspace can be described and inscribed in journeys to “real-and-imagined” (or perhaps “real-and-imagined”?) places’ (1996, 11).² In this book, I will focus on the interstices between the real and the unreal, as this enables a reconsideration of space and territoriality in a way that punctures their stability, highlighting the invocations of both as ongoing discursive practices that are situated in their own space and time. By focusing on the *lived* spaces that exist in the space in-between—Thirdspace—we are able to expose the constructedness of both the China/West binary as well as the imaginary invocations of a local and a global queerness. The interstices between the real and the unreal, the oscillation between here and there, the movement between the centre and the periphery is that which is new in New Queer Sinophone Cinema.

The questions of the local vs. the global queerness have been put forward by Dennis Altman in his controversial essay on the ‘global gay’ identity. In it, Altman argues that there exist two contradictory tendencies in the articulations of homosexuality in Asia:

On the one hand, Asian gay men, by stressing a universal gay identity, underline a similarity with Westerners. Against this, on the other hand, the desire to assert an “Asian” identity, not unlike the rhetoric of the “Asian way” adopted by authoritarian regimes such as those of China, Indonesia, and Malaysia, may undermine this assumed solidarity. (1997, 418–419)

Altman also notes that ‘the ubiquity of western rhetoric’ in Asia indicates that these men ‘use the language of the west to describe a rather different reality’ (419). Here Altman presupposes not only an unambiguous dissimilarity between what he describes as ‘western style’ and ‘Asian’, but he also posits that Asian gay men employ the rhetoric of the ‘West’ as a means of viewing themselves as a part of a global gay community that ultimately supersedes any cultural differences between them. This Western rhetoric, then, is used by the ‘community’ to describe the encounter between the ‘global’ West and the ‘indigenous’ local East. Importantly, as the above quote demonstrates, Altman not only re-constructs the dividing line between the East and the West—by emphasising the gap between

Asians and Westerners, Altman fails to question the meaning and the validity of both terms. I introduce Altman's essay in order to highlight the risk in assuming that the West is a stable category that requires no clarification.³ Its apparent lack of historical and cultural specificity has a two-pronged effect: it levels racial and ethnic difference, in effect homogenising global gay identity, whilst it conceals the power relations between them. As a result, the global becomes an unproblematised universal entity, a normalising and hegemonic cultural practice that exoticises 'other' sexual practices. By emphasising the spatial elements in the construction of the West and the Rest in queer Sinophone cinema, I wish to decentre Euro-American notions of what it means to be gay whilst at the same call attention to historical specificities that ground both terms in their own locales. The Thirdspace of New Queer Sinophone Cinema destabilises essentialist positionings by interrogating the spaces in-between as those that are real, imagined, and most importantly, *lived*.

In his 2003 edited volume *Chinese Films in Focus: 25 New Takes*—a volume in which we find queer takes on several Sinophone films such as *The Love Eterne* (*Liang shanbo yuzhu yingtai*; Li Han-hsiang, 1963), *Center Stage* (*Ruan Lingyu*; Stanley Kwan, 1991) and *The Wedding Banquet* (*Xi yan*; Ang Lee, 1993)—Chris Berry asks: 'Why are single-film analyses necessary and what do they contribute?' (1). As a way of answering the question, the editor notes that the collection denotes a new direction in the field of film studies: 'On the one hand, towards connecting Chinese cinema studies in English with the theoretical paradigms informing the field of Cinema Studies as a whole and interrogating them; and on the other hand, towards an effort to ground our understanding of Chinese films historically and socially' (2003, 3). The methodology of my book builds on methods similar to those of Berry's collection. Here, the editor observes that 'in recent years, the "textual" emphasis in Film Studies has come under attack' (2003, 3). The attacks, Berry notes, come in the shape of 'calls for understanding the cinema as a social, economic and political institution', which itself is problematic as it risks empiricism by 'implying a divide between the supposed subjectivity of textual interpretation and objectivity of investigations into the so-called "real-world"' (2003, 3). As a statement on not only the methodology of his collection but also on a general direction forward in cinema studies, Berry states: 'Rather than setting up an opposition between empirical institution study and textual interpretation, I would argue that Cinema Studies requires a range of approaches to the cinema that understands the singularity of the film and

the importance of the cinema as an institution without trying to divide them or set them in opposition to each other' (2003, 3–4). The choice of films in this book follows a similar argument, as its scope and emphasis are simultaneously wide and narrow. Whilst I focus on films produced in the PRC, Hong Kong and Taiwan based on their interventions in the construction and positioning of both 'China' and 'queerness', my close, 'textual' analyses allow each film to stand as an individual work of art with its own imaginative logic that may stand in opposition to 'realist/factographical' representations of culture and sexuality. For instance, in Chap. 2, I look at Zhang Yuan's *East Palace, West Palace* (*Dong gong xi gong*, 1996) which could be said to belong to 'Sixth Generation' PRC filmmaking, a movement that sought to bring to light that which is hidden, unseen and at the fringes. When compared to the Fifth Generation that preceded it—a group of filmmakers whose allegorical style reaped international praise—the realist-centred, independent production of the Sixth Generation placed heavy emphasis on the quotidian, the disadvantaged and the marginalised. Whilst Zhang Yuan is considered one of the pioneers of this generation—his *Mama* (*Mama*, 1990) and *Beijing Bastards* (*Beijing za zhong*, 1993) are one of the early features of the generation—my involvement with *East Palace, West Palace* in this book follows a somewhat different line. As I argue in the following chapter, Zhang's film can be said to set the scene for a new direction in queer Sinophone filmmaking, in that it challenges the discourses of queer visibility vis-à-vis 'oppressiveness' of Chinese regime. In other words, whilst the film with its style and subject matter does serve as an example of a Sixth Generation film, it also offers a renewed understanding of the ways China is positioned in Western discourses of modernity and progress. My emphasis on queerness is based on its ability to problematise and nuance discussions about the visibility of non-normative sexuality. Amongst *Palace*, which is arguably China's first 'gay' film (Berry 1998), we also find *Men and Women* by Liu Bingjian (*Nannan nunu*, 1999) as well as Li Yu's feature *Fish and Elephant* (*Jin nian xia tian*, 2001), which is said to be the first lesbian film from the PRC. Although these films foreground visibility—being the 'firsts' of their kind—they also offer complex investigations of both queerness and Sinophonicity that defy clear categorisation.

In his 1998 interview with Chris Berry, Zhang Yuan states:

If you want to say I strive for the authentic in my films, that authenticity has two aspects to it. One side is realism, and the other side is subjective truth.

In *The Square* and *Beijing Bastards* I leaned more towards realism, but I think that in *Mama* and *Sons* I leaned more towards my own subjective truth. (Berry 1998, 85, emphasis in original)

Zhang's output before the release of *East Palace, West Palace* emphasised social minorities and subjectivities that were marginalised. Whilst *Mama* was a minimalist feature film that included documentary footage, *Beijing Bastards* featured real locations and several non-professional actors. It was not until *The Square* (Guang Chang, 1994), however, that Zhang would release his first documentary (which observes the daily activities in the Tiananmen Square several years after the massacre). Filmed on location, *The Square* depicts people conducting their daily lives as they 'compete' with the guards, the military and political officials for the access to act on 'the stage' that is Tiananmen Square. His film *Sons* (Erzi, 1996) was a creative intermixing of documentary and feature, where a real-life actor family re-enact their own history (thus 'playing themselves' in re-enactment of their own lives). Here, Zhang's notion of the subjective is intermixed with the realistic, breaking down boundaries between the two, as the real-life actors stage their own lives on film whilst alcoholism and mental illness loom in the background. Zhang's emphasis on the marginalised continues in *Palace*, but unlike his earlier films which carried with them a realist style, the film departs from this convention in its use of flashbacks, highly dramatized sequences and non-real studio sets. This is not to suggest that the film is simply an artistic exercise, a product of the scriptwriter's imagination. The various police crackdowns, the interrogations, the cruising are all aspects that, according to Zhang, 'are a true expression of the current circumstances gays in China live under' (Berry 1998, 86). In this book, I do not debate the 'realness' of Zhang's film. Rather, I emphasise that the visibility of queerness in *Palace*—which earned it the moniker of China's first gay film—offers a renewed assessment of the complex positioning of queer Chinese sexuality. Whilst Zhang states in the same interview that 'In China today, there is no visible gay culture, and no one understands gay people. It is very hard to find any gay friends who are living a happy, well-adjusted life under these circumstances, and in fact I cannot think of anyone I know like that' (Berry 1998)—thus reaffirming its political statement—his film, on the other hand, provides space for an investigation of that which lies between the visible and the invisible. This Thirdspace, I argue, is vital for the discussions of local vs. global queerness, as the film's mise-en-scène, when viewed in terms of visibility/invisibility of queerness,

creates a space in-between the polarising discourses of modern progression and local authenticity. By bringing in opposing positionings—that of the marginalised queer and the powerful policeman—the film offers a renewed assessment of the complex positioning of queer Chinese sexuality without adhering to binaries such as Asian/Western or repressed/liberated.

Similarly, Li Yu's independent feature *Fish and Elephant* emphasises the lives of marginalised and socially ostracised characters. Featuring non-professional actors, the story focuses almost exclusively on women whose sexual desires for other women are precluded by familial ties and societal pressures. Employing the recognised conventions of the Sixth Generation—long takes, wide-angle shots, documentary-like realism—the style of *Fish and Elephant* is closer in style with Zhang's earlier films than *Palace*. However, the film's spatiality, particularly the use of medium and wide-angle shots in the opening scenes to not only obscure the main characters' faces but also present their reflections in the window, attests to the significance of mise-en-scène in creating a space for the exploration of queerness. Between the camera and Xiao Qun, who sits on the pavement, we see, hear and feel the bustling streets of Beijing, as cars, bicycles and pedestrians block our view of the main character. This presence/absence, being/not being, creates an in-between space between that which is visible and invisible. For instance, Fran Martin notes that the mise-en-scène in the film implies that the 'bedroom and the two women's relationship occupy a space and time continuous with, *yet at a certain remove from*, the space and time of the world "out there"' (2010, 171, emphasis in original). This distinct, 'vertical' space and time, I argue, is not suggestive of an alternative (outcast) status of lesbianism at the periphery of the mainstream. Rather, the spatial configuration of queer desire locates it at the very heart of the city—the view of the city streets is positioned in-between the first kiss and the post-coital embrace between Xiao Qun and Xiao Ling. As Martin notes, these scenes highlight 'the co-presence of the lovers within the local space and present time of the city' (2010, 169). Thus, queer desire lies not 'outside' but rather 'within' the public space of Beijing.

The spatial configuration of queer desire found in a Thirdspace in-between can also be seen in Stanley Kwan's 2001 film *Lan Yu*. Kwan does not only employ the same technique of 'bringing together two impossible spaces at once' (Eng 2010, 462); the mirrored images and reflections in the film present a 'paradoxical space ... a queer space of China'. Although

filmed in the PRC and based on an Internet novella entitled *Beijing Story* (*Beijing gushi*), Kwan's film is a Hong Kong production by a well established 'out' Hong Kong gay filmmaker whose filmic output includes both features and documentaries that depict homosexuality and queerness. In the wake of the 1991 decriminalisation of consensual (male) homosexual relations, Hong Kong saw its share of queer visibility with features such as Shu Kei's *Hu-Du-Men* (*Hudumen*, 1996) and *A Queer Story* (*Jilao sishi*, 1997), *The Intimates* (*Zishu*; Jacob Cheung, 1997), *Happy Together* (*Chunguang zhaxie*; Wong Kar-wai, 1997), *Portland Street Blues* (*Gu huo zai qing yi pian zhi hong xing shi san mei*; Raymond Yip, 1998), *Hold You Tight* (*Yu kuaile yu duoluo*; Stanley Kwan, 1998), Yonfan's *Bishōnen* (*Mei shaonian zhi lian*, 1998), Yau Ching's *Let's Love Hong Kong* (*Ho yuk*, 2002) and Yan Yan Mak's *Butterfly* (*Hudie*, 2004). I should note that whilst these are some of the examples of queer filmic visibility in Hong Kong cinema, their styles, techniques and content are highly distinct from one another. In addition, this visibility differs from earlier Hong Kong Cinema such as *wuxia* and opera films, which featured queer elements such as cross-dressing and gender bending. In fact, the contemporary queer Hong Kong productions must be seen in their historical and political contexts, such as the aforementioned decriminalization of male sex in 1991, the consequent success of Ang Lee's *The Wedding Banquet* (1993), the popularity and impact of the New Queer Cinema in Europe and the US, as well as the approaching handover in 1997 and the ensuing cultural politics of personal freedom and expression. My emphasis on the notion of Thirdspace as a presence/absence and being/not-being works in close relation to Ackbar Abbas's notions of the 'problems of spectatorship' in Hong Kong cinema. Focusing on Wong Kar-wai's films in particular, Abbas notes that the fast-moving images (in his films) serve as a means of engaging affectively and visually with the ever-changing cultural space of Hong Kong. These 'dislocations and discontinuities' within the space of Hong Kong work as a 'space of disappearance' (Abbas 1997, 27); what is important is that the 'act of looking' itself becomes problematized, in that an 'objective or 'distanced' perspective merely runs the risk of 'fixating' both the present and the past in already-existing modes of representation. In *Happy Together*, for instance, what has disappeared from the narrative is the actual city of Hong Kong itself, as the two male lovers' travels in Argentina (and Taiwan) can be read allegorically as Hong Kong's repudiation of the impending reunion with China. Only appearing briefly (and upside down), Hong Kong becomes a Thirdspace caught between the

Firstspace of the diaspora and the Secondspace of the PRC, complicating any clear-cut views of the ‘realities’ of its cultural space. Similarly, if the ‘impossible’ spaces caught in the mirror images in *Lan Yu* record ‘a space of emergence that appears precisely through the logics of disappearance’ (Eng 2010, 463), it is precisely this affectivity which needs to be unsettled: ‘In a dislocated space, affectivity in turn becomes problematic’ (Abbas 1997, 27). As a consequence, problematising affect in turn problematises the viewing process. ‘From what vantage point can the filmmaker describe this cultural space’, asks Abbas. ‘Certainly not from the outside, from a privileged critical distance’ (1997, 27), he continues.

In Chap. 3, I emphasise Yan Yan Mak’s second feature *Butterfly* (2004), an award-winning independent low-budget film that not only merges different temporalities but also links spatiality with affectivity. Mak, along with Yau Ching, Carol Lai and Barbara Wong, belongs to a group of young independent woman filmmakers whose films have critical acclaim for their ‘transnational, transcultural, and border-crossing characteristics’ (Wang 2012, 336). Despite the decline of the Hong Kong film industry in the mid-1990s, these female filmmakers have amassed international recognition and praise. Significantly, Wang notes, when ‘compared with their male counterparts, Hong Kong woman directors have demonstrated a much more pronounced preoccupation with transnational and transcultural issues, such as migration, diaspora, and reflections on Chinese identity in a global setting’. This is reflected in wide circulation of Mak’s first two films on the international film festival scene. Although *Brother* (*Gege*, 2001) was an experiential feature that included a non-professional cast, the film was a co-winner of the FIPRESCI prize at the 25th Hong Kong International Film Festival, whilst *Butterfly*, whose final budget was only 2,000,000 HKD (Martin 2010), opened, amongst others, the Venice Film Festival Critics Week. Whilst the latter is a melodrama that takes place in Hong Kong and makes an explicit reference to the Tiananmen Square protests, the former is a documentary style feature set in China’s Qinghai Province, although the 1997 handover serves as the political backdrop for the film. Mak’s success both in Hong Kong and abroad attests to the aforementioned transnational elements in her films, and my focus on her second feature is based on the film’s articulation of queer female desire that undermines the notion of progress from ‘repressive’ heterosexuality to ‘liberating homosexuality’. In her analysis of *Butterfly*, for instance, Martin notes that Mak’s film ‘takes up and extends the project of both *Blue Gate Crossing* ... and *Incidental Journey*’ (2010, 157, emphasis in

original). The former, a 2002 Taiwanese film directed by Yee Chih-yen, ‘effectively articulates the modern Chinese schoolgirl romance narrative with postmodern Taiwanese lesbian (*nüdongzhi*) culture—a culture that itself represents a localization of a globally extensive, late-twentieth-century lesbian and gay style and politics that initially emerged in Europe and the United States’ (Martin 2010, 115, emphasis in original). The latter, a 2001 low-budget film directed by Chen Jofei, continues and expands what Martin terms a ‘memorial condition’—a dominant positioning of female same-sex love as experience of the past as a way of ‘de-realising’ lesbian possibility in the present. The film’s ‘repeated cutting away to rippling water ... and mountain slopes’, according to Martin, ‘evokes not only the backward glance of nostalgia but also a reflective gaze ... at the eternal present in the flows and rhythms of an anesthetized nature’ (2010, 156–157). Continuing in this vein, my own emphasis on *Butterfly* is based on the film’s own articulation of the memorial gaze not only as that in the present but also as that which is to come. In other words, I argue that the alienation effect in Mak’s film presents sexual relations between women as not only imagined in youth and the present but also in the future. Moreover, by disassociating the viewer from the characters and creating a distance between the characters themselves—thus not privileging either the inside or the outside view of the characters—the film in fact presents both. Here, familiarity and estrangement coalesce in a queer Thirdspace, calling once again attention to Abbas’s arguments (with heavy emphasis on Wong Kar-wai’s oeuvre) about the problematisation of the act of looking. Certainly, the contexts and the aesthetics of Mak’s film, however, differ greatly from the films of Wong Kar-wai. Produced by a Hong Kong-based independent director, *Butterfly* needs to be seen in the context of the memorializing gaze in female homoerotic Sinophone representation. In other words, whilst the story of *Happy Together* centres on two male lovers’ travels as they negotiate their sexual identity in the diaspora, Mak’s film ‘both references and complicates the memorialism of modern female homoerotic representation’ which secludes homoerotic desires in the (idyllic) past vis-à-vis the heterosexual present. Thus, at first glance, the two films only appear to share the element of same-sex desire, the former highlighting the cultural politics Hong Kong in term of home and away, whilst the latter focuses on the temporal dislocation between the queer past and the heterosexual present. However, in this book I argue that both films emphasise the creation of a critical in-between space—a Thirdspace—as a means for challenging not only the universality of a global gay community

but also the localness of a Chinese sexuality. Significantly, this Sinophone Thirdspace, where Mandarin, Cantonese and English coexist, is a translocal and transnational space caught at the intersection between the affective and the political, where any notions of sexual freedom vs. local oppressiveness are thwarted by the films' alienation effect.

If *East Palace, West Palace*, despite being China's first gay film, ushers a new direction in queer Sinophone filmmaking as it complicates the idea of queer visibility, how does the notion of queer Sinophone Thirdspace relate to film production in Taiwan? According to Martin, 'the 1990s [Taiwan] witnessed not only an unprecedented explosion of public lesbian and gay cultures ... but also a boom in "*tongzhi* fiction" as well as 'the appearance of queer theory within the island's academic cultures' (2003, 1–2, emphasis in original).⁴ Moreover, if the Taiwan New Wave of the 1980s, by taking a 'distinct step away from the pedagogical orientation of healthy realism, the commercialism of studio genres, and the eclectic provincialism of *taiyu pian*' (Yeh and Davis 2005, 56, emphasis in original), introduced diversity in terms of film production, then the Second New Wave of the 1990s was a result of 'Taiwan's interpolation into globalized circuits of knowledge production' and 'the unprecedented burgeoning of minority and civil rights politics in the environmental, labour, feminist, Indigenous and gay and lesbian movements' (Martin 2003, 21). We see this in the outputs of Ang Lee and Tsai Ming-liang who use the international stage as a 'vital platform for the representation of homosexuality in Chinese cinemas' (Lim 2006, 35). *Blue Gate Crossing* (*Lanse damen*; Yee Chih-yen, 2002), *Formula 17* (*Shiqisui de tiankong*, Chen Ying-jung, 2004) and the '*tongzhi* trilogy'—*Splendid Float* (*Yan guang si she gewutuan*, 2004), *Spider Lilies* (*Ci qing*, 2007) and *Drifting Flowers* (*Piao lang qing chun*, 2008) by Zero Chou, are just some of the examples of the expansive field of Taiwanese queer filmmaking that has found its audience on international circuits. Whilst these works serve as examples of queer Taiwanese visibility, their forms and contents are highly diverse and must therefore be investigated within the contexts of each director's visual, linguistic and ideological aesthetics. In Chap. 4, I emphasise Zero Chou's *tongzhi* trilogy in that it exhibits the ability to employ, challenge and renew local as well as global formations of culture and sexuality. In the first film of the trilogy—*Splendid Float*—drag and local customs intersect in a Thirdspace that combines the elements of the real and the fantastic. Staging the drag performance on a mobile float on the bank of the Tamsui River, Chou positions this transient space between the heteronormative Firstspace of

Taipei City and the theatrical Secondspace of the performance. Here, the main performer Roy/Rose becomes a figure that transverses boundaries between man/woman, heterosexuality/homosexuality and shamanism/drag. By invoking the theatricality of the native rituals, Chou provincialises Butlerian notions of drag as a discursive practice and provides it with a historical and a cultural context. In her melodrama *Spider Lilies*, Chou continues the reworking of Euro-American notions of gender parody by complicating the *T/Po* (butch/femme) binary. As the element of the Internet and online presence push the plot forward, the space in-between the real and the unreal intervenes not only into the memorial condition but also into the positioning of queerness as either local or global. The inter- and intratextuality of *Drifting Flowers* solidify Chou's status as a Taiwanese queer auteur whose renewed take on queerness suggests new ways in a global queer cinema.

In Chap. 5, I return to Hong Kong cinema as I focus on two male independent auteurs whose films pose important questions regarding representability and authorship vis-à-vis New Queer Sinophone Cinema. Blurring the boundary between reality and fantasy, Scud (Danny Cheng Wan-Cheung) and Kit Hung usher new aesthetics that is different from their more established counterparts such as Stanley Kwan and Yonfan. In addition to not rejecting the label 'gay directors', these filmmakers explicitly incorporate biographical elements in their work that at first glance appear to reaffirm the close connection between film and filmmaker. Intermixing these features with the elements of the fantastical and unreal, however, enables Scud and Kit Hung to thwart easy identification between the filmmaker and their work, and as a consequence, pose important questions regarding representability of 'gay cinema'. The Sinophonicity of Kit Hung's *Soundless Wind Chime*, in particular, serves as a means for situating his film with the cultural space of Hong Kong whilst simultaneously pointing towards the pan-Asian origins of contemporary Hong Kong cinema, relocating its transnationals roots from the Hong Kong Mandarin cinema of the 1950s to the Taiwan Art Cinema of the 1990s.

Based on the thematics of the book's six chapters, then, what is exactly 'New' in New Queer Sinophone Cinema? Whilst Howard Chiang's and Ari Larissa Heinrich's *Queer Sinophone Cultures* investigates queerness at the periphery of China and Chineseness, focusing on 'materials involving Sinitic-language groups in Taiwan, Malaysia, Singapore, and Hong Kong' (5), Audrey Yue's and Olivia Khoo's *Sinophone Cinemas* intersects Sinophone theory and film studies by presenting 'case studies of multilingual, multi-dialectal

and multi-accented cinemas in their historical, social and cultural contexts, representing screen cultures from Britain, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Australia, Mainland China and the Chinese diasporas' (6). Although both collections employ the concept of the Sinophone as a means of investigating, interconnecting and advancing not only Sinophone studies but also queer studies as well as film studies, neither work emphasises Queer Sinophone Cinema as its main area of critique. This book intersects and enhances these groundbreaking volumes. It employs spatiality as a way of emphasising that Queer Sinophone Cinema is neither exclusively queer nor inherently 'Chinese', neither at the centre nor at the periphery. This 'new' Thirdspace allows for an excavation and interrogation of spaces that are caught between the local and the global, between 'China' and elsewhere, where queerness and same-sex desire are neither positioned as an event in the queer past nor as 'oppressed' in the heterosexual present. Rather, the translocal and transnational Thirdspace in New Queer Sinophone Cinema challenges both a temporal and a spatial fixing of non-normative desires in 'China', unfixing the notions of global gayness and sexual freedom and coalescing the affective and the political into a space that is both hybrid and lived. The 'newness' of New Queer Sinophone Cinema is the emphasis on that which lies between the visible and the invisible, between the real and the unreal, where familiarity and estrangement are coalesced in a queer space that challenges identificatory mechanisms that 'fix' queerness in a particular position, in a particular place and at a particular time.

Whilst the limited selection of films discussed in this book is partially due to my in-depth and lengthy readings of each film, the close analyses allows us to both make sense of the individual text and re-position and nuance the representations of queerness in Sinophone cinema. Destabilising the all-embracing ideas of the local, global, Western and Chinese, requires prolonged and detailed consideration of the intricacies of each film, thereby thwarting the risk of overlooking the subtleties that are present in the text. In addition, the purpose of the strict selection of cultural texts is twofold. On the one hand, whilst the films discussed in this book transverse boundaries and borders, they are not strictly diasporic. Yiman Wang notes that 'As the "other" site that traverses the "Chinese" center, diasporic filmmaking constitutes the alter-center where "Chinese" issues are staged and contested by being placed in interaction with non-Sinic contexts' (2012, 550). Although the cinema of Tsai Ming-liang, for instance, could be said to cultivate a "home" image in a distant place', I look at his oeuvre not because of its engagement with the Chinese diaspora. Rather, his work is a part

of the transnationalism of Chinese queer cultures that benefits from both the Chinese as well as the global Western queer film markets. His oeuvre is thus neither Sino-centric nor heteronormative. On the other hand, the narrow focus in this book precludes the risk of producing an overarching view of the main ‘movements’ or thematics in a particular time or place, as my emphasis on queerness is grounded in the aim of problematising and nuancing discussions about the visibility of non-normative sexuality. This is not to say that the films discussed in this book do not follow a particular methodology. I begin the book with what is considered China’s first gay film, whose spatial configuration informs later films discussed in the book, films that create their own Thirdspace in which they investigate that which lies between the visible and the invisible, the local and the global. By creating a space in-between the notions of modern progression and local authenticity, these cultural texts offer a highly refined investigation of queerness in the Sinophone. I end the book with a brief glance at the ‘experiential’ work of Beijing-based Cui Zi’en who, apart from being a filmmaker and academic, is also a novelist and a gay rights activist. Defying clear categorisation, Cui’s work is as transnational as it is place-based. For instance, Audrey Yue identifies ‘Cui’s subaltern “digital video” (DV) cinema as part of queer Sinophone rather than Chinese screens’ (2012, 96). This way, his status as an auteur—which feeds into the Sinophonicity of the works discussed in this book—emerges ‘as a result of the cross-fertilization with such a minor transnational queer cinema culture ... as well as the global queer cinema movement’ (2012, 97). Cui’s work challenges articulations of modern progression and local authenticity, drawing attention, on the one hand, to China’s LGBT movements and its queer media space, and on the other, the heteronormative and Sinocentric formations of the family, homosexuality and ‘Chineseness’ in official film cultures.

The structure of this book, which begins with a chapter on one PRC director (Zhang Yuan) and ends with another (Cui Zi’en), should not suggest a privileging of the PRC as the Mainland Chinese ‘centre’. Rather, it is the spatial multivalences of the Sinophone that inform the organisation of the chapters. Both localised and transnational, here and there, the films in this book defy heteronormativity as well as Sino-centricity, placing emphasis on localisations that are multi-directional and unfixed. Since this book looks within *as well as* outside the PRC—intersecting the volumes by Chiang and Heinrich and Yue and Khoo—it is structured in a manner that would reflect this oscillation. Thus, the PRC—Hong Kong—Taiwan—Hong Kong—PRC trajectory does not advocate a favouring of Taiwan as

a ‘renegade’ province located at the periphery of ‘Chineseness’ nor does it propose a heightened emphasis on the significance of the PRC as the dominant—indeed central—nation-state. Rather, it is the thematic elements in the films themselves—for instance, their nuancing of the notions of Chineseness and queerness as well as queer visibility vis-à-vis hetero-normative oppressiveness—that dictate the chapter arrangement and the geographical emphasis in this book. Moreover, the choice to begin and end the book with a PRC director rests on not only the significance and relevance of each director’s particular output in regards to the overall themes of this book. It also highlights the workings of the Sinophone in their respective oeuvres, exposing both the similarities as well as the great disparities in their work. If Zhang Yuan is said to belong to a generation of filmmakers that ushered in a new direction in Sinophone cinema in the 1990s, then how does this relate to the experimental work of Cui Zi’en? Yue argues that ‘China’s queer media space has benefited from and contributed to the informal public film culture created by the Sixth Generation urban film-makers’ (2012, 98). The films of this generation, she notes, ‘have enjoyed alternative networks of distribution, including international film festivals, Internet film subcultures and local movie clubs in bars and schools’ (2012, 98). Whilst Zhang’s (early) output solidified his status as a pioneer of the ‘urban generation’, Cui’s involvement with LGBT movements in the PRC relies on this very network, simultaneously feeding into the wide international queer film networks that sustain his status as a PRC queer auteur. This way, Cui expands and further develops cultures of distribution of a queer DV cinema both within and outside the boundaries of the PRC. Thus, the beginning and the ending chapters do not suggest closure or a clear line of progression from ‘then’ to ‘now’. In fact, by emphasising the global yet localised notions of the Sinophone, the chapters serve as markers of the expansive and far-reaching qualities of the notion of the Sinophone, anticipating and incentivising further investigations of New Queer Sinophone Cinema that would take it beyond the geographic, ethnic and national boundaries of ‘China’. In effect, the book’s trajectory—its beginning and ending with a PRC director whose outputs are vastly diverse yet closely connected—only points to the versatility and openness of New Queer Sinophone Cinema to engage and re-engage new sites of possibility and deference both in as well as outside the Mainland Chinese centre.

As a final note on the question of Sinophonicity and Sinocentricity, I would like to add here Song Hwee Lim’s caution about privileging of

the written form in Sinophone studies. Lim notes that the ‘bias against the phonic in the conceptualization of the Sinophone’ (2014, 63) most often results in an emphasis on voice in the figurative and political sense. Film and music as genres that emphasise and rely on the audible and the phonic ‘highlight the differences within and multiplicities of the Sinophone more clearly and distinctly than written form can’ (2014, 63). Without dismissing the utility and the urgency of the term in the more abstract sense, Lim argues that a greater sensitivity to the materiality of the voice—the phonic dimension of cinema—enables an ‘undoing [of] the “Sino” in the Sinophone to the extent that it may become less and less meaningful to speak of the Sinophone and, indeed, of Sinophone cinema’ (2014, 74). In this book, however, I admittedly privilege the visual over the aural, not because the phonic elements are deemed less significant. Rather, the choice of material and the methodology that emphasises the spatial and the temporary requires a heightened stress on the visual. Nonetheless, as evidenced in Chap. 5, the phonic elements in *Soundless Wind Chime*, which serve as a reference to Tsai Ming-liang’s own inclusion of the Mandarin pop music of the 1950s and the 1960s in *The Hole*, reveal Tsai’s intertextual Sinophone linkage between the 1930s Shanghai, the 1960s Hong Kong and the new millennium Taipei. Related to the questions of language, however, is the book’s shortage of attention to Chinese-language critique on the question of queerness and Sinophone cinema. Whilst my insufficient linguistic skills preclude in-depth phonetic analyses, I approach these internationally circulating films as cultural texts that do not rely exclusively on the specifics of language in their transmission of cultural flows. I investigate these films—as they proliferate in meanings across various geographical spaces—with an emphasis on their visibility, and in the process I hope to highlight the political agency of the Sinophone without ignoring its ‘polyphonic realities, expressions, and subjectivities’ (Lim 2014, 74).

NOTES

1. Although Malaysia and Singapore could be ‘placed’ under the rubric ‘Sinophone’—the elasticity of the concept itself allows for such a connection—in this (short) book I focus on the film production from the PRC, Hong Kong and Taiwan.
2. Soja’s arguments are based on Henri Lefebvre’s theorisations of space as it is *perceived*, *conceived* and *lived*. For more, see Lefebvre.

3. Another example of this is Adam et al.'s Introduction to their edited volume *The Global Emergence of Gay and Lesbian Politics: National Imprints of a Worldwide Movement* (1999) in which they write: 'While full-fledged participation in the rights and freedoms of liberal democracy has been increasingly realized, especially in northern Europe, the struggle continues elsewhere against forces that continue to marshal premodern rhetoric' (7).
4. According to Leung, "queer" bears an affinity to the Chinese term *tongzhi* (2008, 3). Coined by Edward Lam and later made popular as part of a translation for a segment on New Queer Cinema for the 1992 Taipei Golden Horse Film Festival, the term *tongzhi* 'caught on quickly in both Hong Kong and Taiwan, first as a preferred term of self-identification ... and later as a widely accepted umbrella term of reference to sexual minorities' (3).

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Thirdspace of *East Palace, West Palace*

Abstract This chapter looks at the use of Thirdspace in Zhang Yuan's 1996 film *East Palace, West Palace*. Exploring Zhang's destabilisation of the relationship between the powerful policeman and the powerless queer subject, the chapter suggests that the in-between spaces in *East Palace, West Palace* attest to the ways New Queer Sinophone Cinema challenges essentialised positionings and introduces new methods of viewing non-normative sexuality in and outside the PRC.

Keywords Zhang Yuan • *East Palace* • *West Palace* • New Queer Sinophone Cinema • Thirdspace • PRC

In his highly instructive analysis of Stanley Kwan's film *Lan Yu* (2001), a film which traces the passionate and volatile relationship between two Chinese men before and after the Tiananmen Square massacre, David L. Eng notes that the film presents a 'space and time dissonant to conventional protocols of Western visual representation and traditional understandings of modernity' (2010, 462). The visual logic of *Lan Yu*, in which the two men appear in a series of mirrored reflections which Eng terms 'impossible spaces', offers 'a *discrepant* modernity: an alternate historical awareness, a different historical tempo and beat, a queer space and time' (462, my emphasis). Combining the film's historical context and its queer theme, Eng notes:

Queerness in Kwan's film comes to function as a critical tool for organizing and evaluating not just the contemporary emergence of nonnormative sexualities and desires in (post)socialist China, but also, and more urgently, historical continuities and ruptures among China's (semi)colonial past, its revolutionary aspirations for a socialist modernity, and its contemporary investments in a neoliberal capitalist world order. (2010, 462)

Taking cue from Eng's highly instructive analysis of the use of mirrors in Kwan's film, I narrow down this argument by looking at mirror reflections as a queer *Thirdspace*. That is, I argue that the spaces in the mirror challenge Altman's claims of the two opposing articulations of non-normative sexuality in Asia: the 'progressive' global and the 'authentic'. In this view, the impossible and paradoxical spaces in the mirror are not impossible after all—these are inhabitable, *lived* spaces in that they are occupied by a simultaneity of presence. To help me clarify this argument, I will look at a film which predates *Lan Yu* by five years, a film which already relies heavily on the use of mirrors and reflections. More importantly, in Zhang Yuan's *East Palace, West Palace* (1996) we find highly intricate uses of space, which inform Kwan's film and add spatiality to my discussions of New Queer Sinophone Cinema.¹ Keeping Eng's reading of *Lan Yu* in mind, I argue that Zhang's film can help us problematise and nuance those discussions (Figs. 2.1 and 2.2).

The significance of Altman's claims about a global gay identity are emphasised by Lisa Rofel who in *Desiring China: Experiments in Neoliberalism, Sexuality, and Public Culture* (2007) notes that 'the emergence of gay identities and practices in China is tied, in certain critical respects, to transnational networks of lesbians and gay men' (2007, 87). Although 'the presence of foreign gay men and lesbians in China who both create and participates in gay networks means that the transnational quality of gayness in China is both visible and visceral' (2007, 87–88), this, Rofel argues, does not translate as evidence of the globality of the homogenous gay identity. Rather, she notes, 'the emergence of gay identities in China occurs in a complex cultural field representing neither a wholly global culture nor simply a radical difference from the West' (2007, 88–89). Arguing against the global gay based on the self-evident notions of the West—a view which she describes as 'irresistible'—Rofel points out



Fig. 2.1 Reflections as impossible spaces, *Lan Yu*



Fig. 2.2 Disconnected lovers, *Lan Yu*

that Altman's ambivalent desire to 'assert cultural diversity and the need to respect it while also recuperating identification in a monumentalist history of gay identity', turns not into a promotion of gay rights but in an erasure of 'diversity, articulation, and alliance with radical cultural difference' (90). She argues that Altman's contention does not account for the (im)balance of power in global gay discourses:

Asianness, or a reputed claim to Asianness, can never be more than a distraction, a power move, or a distortion from the originary truths of gayness. Gay men in Asia can be either universal or Asian but not both, even as their Asianness continues to leave them in the place of otherness to global gayness. Altman's Western origin story of gay liberation places Asian gays forever in the place of deferred arrival. (2007, 91)

Rofel dismisses the notions of the global gay community based on the self-referential tropes of 'modern', 'traditional' and 'Western-style', whose historical specificities are never seriously problematised. As a consequence, we can argue that by placing it within the narrative of Western progress Altman relegates Asian queerness to 'the waiting room'. As a response to Altman, Rofel proposes another way of viewing non-normative sexualities in Asia where both the global *and* the local are imaginary cultural sites that are in a constant state of flux:

The local, rather than a synonym for particularity, is a *spatial* category given meaning through specific signifying practices. Similarly, the global does not exist above and beyond the cultural processes of attaching meaning to *places*. (2007, 93, my emphasis)

Taking cue from Rofel's arguments on the global and the local as spatial categories, I explore the space *in-between* these positionings.² In other words, I combine spatiality with Eng's notion of a discrepant modernity to investigate what happens in the queer space *between* the supposed localness of Chinese non-normative sexuality and the 'universality' of the global gay community. This space, I believe, provides potent means for investigating and theorising the use of space in queer Chinese cinema, where queerness and non-normative desire is not impossible or paradoxical but that which is hybrid and lived.

East Palace, West Palace is arguably China's first 'gay' film. The title of the film refers to the two public toilets that flank the Forbidden City—the

imperial palace just north of Tiananmen Square. Whilst the toilets are popular gay cruising sites in Beijing, so are the city parks, such as the one in which most of the film takes place. The film centres on a conversation between one of the men in the park, A Lan, who is a writer, and Shi Xiaohua, one of the policemen whose job is to roundup and interrogate the men who cruise the premises late at night. During his all-night confession A Lan reveals not only his troubled past but also his masochistic fantasies. His enchanting narrative, which is evocative of the style of Scheherazade in *One Thousand and One Nights*, mesmerises Xiaohua, who usually enjoys interrogating suspected gay men when on night duty. As a result, the confession and the cross-examination end in the seduction of the policeman. Thus, A Lan's masochistic fantasy, in which he dreams of being 'captured' by a policeman, turns into reality (Lim 2006, 89).

It is unsurprising that some of the early reviews saw the film as a critique of the ostensibly oppressive and homophobic Chinese regime (Rosen; Stuart). Indeed, it is hard to argue against the view that *Palace* works as an allegory of not only the state's relationship with its homosexual subjects but also with intellectuals, artists and whoever dares to question or challenge its hegemony (Berry 1998). This argument is particularly apt considering that Zhang Yuan was unable to take part in *Un Certain Regard* at the 1997 Cannes International Film Festival after the Chinese authorities seized his passport and prevented him from leaving the country. Yet, Zhang's film *is* clearly a political statement. In an interview with Chris Berry, Zhang Yuan states:

Although there are many stories recorded about gays in Chinese culture, after the Liberation of 1949 and especially during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), the very word 'homosexual' disappeared from all newspapers, books, and even public discussion. (Berry 1998, 88)

Berry points out that what lies behind 'Zhang Yuan's concern with contemporary Chinese life' is the problem of visibility and the regulation of public discourse in that it 'affects not only gays in China but also many other social groups' (1998, 87). Moreover, Harry Kuoshu notes that Zhang's comments on the visibility of homosexuality in China refer to a 'historical discontinuity and a political culture that saw homosexuality as an import from the decadent West' (2011, 179). In both cases, the positioning of the film in terms of visibility/invisibility of homosexuality ignores the queer space that *allows* non-normative desires to emerge. For

instance, the question of the silencing of non-normative voices prompts Shuqin Cui to argue that

A gay identity and homosexual life history, because of the film's counter-angle, emerge into the culture and into visual representation. In addition to the controversy caused by an openly gay subject in China, the core question ... is how a cinematic construction subverts hegemonic discourse and brings the gay subculture into cinematic representation and public discussion. (2005, 106)

Whilst Lim is sceptical of Cui's claims about the film's ability to subvert hegemonic discourse vis-à-vis the official ban on the dissemination and public showing of Zhang's film, he does note that 'the making of *Palace* and other underground films on homosexuality nevertheless attests to the existence, however interstitial and precarious, of both public and private spaces for the negotiation of homosexuality' (2006, 96–97). I argue that these precarious spaces in-between the public and the private are precisely the queer Thirdspaces that allow us to explore queerness and non-normative desire without adhering to the polarising discourses of modern progression and local authenticity. In other words, I argue that Zhang's film defies these perspectives and offers a renewed assessment of the complex positioning of queer Chinese sexuality. This is done with a highly sophisticated mise-en-scène where space is used to divide and bring together not only different characters but, more importantly, opposing positionings (as the title of the films suggests). In Zhang's film, the policeman and the criminal, the hegemonic and the queer, the masculine and the feminine are brought together in a space where reality and fantasy intersect and where queerness resides (Figs. 2.3 and 2.4).

About twenty minutes into *East Palace, West Palace*, after being caught kissing a man in the park, A Lan is brought to the park police station and made to squat in the middle of the police station floor in front of a standing mirror. What is constructed here is an obvious power relation between the hapless homosexual criminal, who is forced to crouch, and the menacing policeman, who circles his prey before he annihilates it. As Xiaohua is getting ready to interrogate his suspect, we see A Lan occupying the left side of the screen whilst his reflection in the mirror takes the right side, the thick mirror frame separating the two images. Much like the impossible spaces in Eng's analysis of *Lan Yu*, in which disconnected lovers are brought together in asymmetrical mirror images on the screen, the scene



Fig. 2.3 Mirrored image of A Lan, *East Palace, West Palace*



Fig. 2.4 Bars separating the ‘homosexual’ and the policeman, *East Palace, West Palace*

in *Palace* emphasises the seemingly incompatible positionings of A Lan and Xiaohua. This is highlighted further in the subsequent scene which presents us with both characters seen from outside of the police station. Here, the bars on the windows literally separate the two men, further accentuating their disconnectedness (Fig. 2.4).

Whilst these visual cues may suggest that the relationship between the powerful and the powerless remains unyielding and resistant to change, I argue that the use of space in *Palace*, particularly Soja's notion of Thirdspace, allows for a destabilisation of this relationship and an upsetting of the notions of a liberated (modern) Western subject and an 'authentic' (traditional) but oppressed local. Echoing Eng, who argues that the queer space of *Lan Yu* does not 'merely constitute homosexuality as the validation of an emergent sexual identity or the affirmation of a "perverse" sexual practice' (2010, 464), I argue that the convergence of the public and the private in this queer space is exactly the 'mode of speech' that is paramount for my investigations of the complex relationship between the state and the queer (Lim 2006, 97, my emphasis). In *Raise the Red Lantern* (*Dahong denglong gaogao gua*, 1991), for instance, Zhang Yimou uses space in order to convey the main character's (Songlian) sense of estrangement and confinement in the Chen compound. From the wedding chamber to the courtyard to the roof tower, the mise-en-scène in Zhang's film highlights the claustrophobia of the residence and the ensuing captivity of the residing concubines (Firstspace). Moreover, the high walls of the residence reinforce the sense that Songlian's movements, actions, and ultimately mental state are confined and controlled by the feudal patriarch. Tying Songlian to the compound, the spatiality of *Raise the Red Lantern* works to accentuate the oppressiveness of the patriarchal traditions of the 1920s Warlord Era China (Secondspace). Rey Chow argues that Zhang's personification of the 'backwardness' of the feudal China in the form of the landlord who owns several concubines, displays Michel Foucault's idea of the *repressive hypothesis* where sexuality (and in this case the female body) needs to be 'liberated' (1995). Thus, the walls that surround Songlian, in fact all of the compound's architecture, are in effect shackles that chain her to her marriage to Master Chen. In addition, the rooftop scene at the end of the film solidifies Songlian's imprisonment within the male residence as it heralds the death of the third mistress (Meishan) and the ensuing alienation and demise of Songlian's femininity. Zhang Yimou's film, according to Chow, constructs 'a new aboriginality' where women are

The prototype of 'the primitive' in all the ambiguities of that word—they are the bearers of the *barbaric* nature of a patriarchal system that has outlived its time and place; their abuse is a sign of China's *backwardness*; through them we come to understand the *fundamental* horror about a culture. At the same time, women's sufferings reveal a larger human *nature* that has been

unjustly chained and that seeks to be liberated; they are a kind of wronged, maligned, exploited *noble savage* whose innocence must be redeemed. (1995, 146, emphasis in original)

Instead of continuing in the similar vein, only by replacing the figure of the subjugated woman with that of the oppressed queer, Zhang Yuan uses spatiality to complicate and nuance the space of the queer subject, reminding us that space need not only be presented as that which is employed by the tyrannical state to subdue and control its citizens. In fact, we could argue that *Palace* makes an explicit reference to *Raise the Red Lantern* in its bird's eye perspective of the police park station. In the very first scenes of the film, as the camera pans across one of the parks, we are presented with a pond surrounded by house walls built in traditional Chinese style, whilst *kunqu* music plays in the background (as it does in *Raise the Red Lantern*). After the aptly named shot of 'Men's Room' appears amongst the barren and lifeless trees, we get a view of what takes place inside this ostensibly 'typical' Chinese, and highly masculine, space: A Lan is seen urinating in one of the toilet stalls after which a policeman promptly inquires as to where A Lan lives and what he does for a living. This kind of supervision and control, which takes place in the most intimate spaces possible, places the marginalisation of both the woman and the queer within a long history of master/state domination. However, as it becomes apparent in the subsequent scenes, the character of A Lan derails this trajectory not only by refusing to flee from the pursuing policemen but by willingly kissing Xiaohua on the cheek (much to the latter's surprise). Here, A Lan exhibits the agency which is missing in the character of Songlian. This, however, is not simply a 'reversal' of the power relation between the state and the queer. In fact, A Lan's pursuit of Xiaohua (he even sends him a diary with the inscription 'To my Love—A Lan') creates a space in-between the two positions, subverting the repressive hypothesis of *Raise the Red Lantern* and undermining the notion that the queer subject needs to be liberated in order to be seen or heard. For A Lan is certainly not 'liberated'. In fact, in the ensuing scene he is once again being cross-examined about his behaviour in the park toilet, attesting to the 'reality' of the hardships that queer subjects undergo. This time, however, he complies with the instructions and leaves the scene peacefully. Important to note here is the addition of the persistent street noises—car horns, alarms, sirens and passing cars—which have completely replaced the *kunqu* music of the previous scenes. Thus, we are here witness not to the imaginary reality of A Lan's

fantasy or a fetishized image of ‘traditional’ China but to the workings of Firstspace of Beijing, its streets, parks, traffic, and the ‘everyday life’ that takes place here. It is within this amalgam of reality and fantasy that the confession comes into being. As we will see, this Thirdspace is neither impossible nor paradoxical; both A Lan *and* Xiaohua occupy positions of the ruler and the ruled, the controlling state and the restrained subject. As I have argued earlier, by interrogating in-between spaces New Queer Sinophone Cinema destabilises essentialised positionings. In *Palace*, it is the simultaneity of presence that makes above-mentioned positions inhabitable. This heterotopia, to borrow Foucault’s term, is a place/space which is both a site and a counter-site; it allows for more nuanced investigations of how space is used to disturb the sharply defined boundaries between visibility and oppression. As Foucault argues: ‘Between utopias and these quite other sites, these heterotopias, there might be a sort of mixed, joint experience, which would be the *mirror*. The mirror is, after all, a utopia, since it is a placeless place. ... But it is also a heterotopia in so far as the mirror does exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy’ (24, my emphasis) (Fig. 2.5 and 2.6).

After the noteworthy kiss-on-the-cheek scene, which leaves Xiaohua with a stupefying look on his face, A Lan begins to break open the seemingly unyielding binary between the dominator and the dominated.



Fig. 2.5 Symbolic woman confined within the oppressive walls of patriarchy, *Raise the Red Lantern*



Fig. 2.6 Queer subject within the oppressive park walls, *East Palace, West Palace*

In fact, whilst it appears that the kiss was merely a means with which A Lan manages to escape the ensuing questioning, this presumption proves to be false in that he stays within the premises and begins eyeing his pray, which in this case is the light coming from the park police station. The result is evident during his second apprehension. The expression on A Lan's face—his sly smile—reveals not only contentment with the success of 'seducing' the policemen but also an awareness of the satisfaction Xiaohua receives from observing A Lan being physically intimate with another man. After being taken in to the police station and placed in the middle of the floor, A Lan becomes visually separated from Xiaohua by a thick window bar. Although this may suggest a disconnection between two, especially after Xiaohua's circling around the corridors of the station invokes images of state surveillance and control (Berry 1998), these will prove to be volatile. As Xiaohua begins his questioning, a close-up of A Lan's face reveals his uneasiness at being placed in this position (we also hear Xiaohua's intimidating footsteps in the background), whilst the next frame highlights Xiaohua's calmness as he enjoys his late dinner and soon after begins reading a newspaper. A long angle shot highlights the policeman's stature

as a menacing force that demands answers and an explanation from the 'delinquent'. Moreover, as the policeman begins to record the confession, our bird's eye view through the police station window intensifies A Lan's status as a lowly criminal. Significantly, a window bar completely erases A Lan from the shot, hereby removing from our view not only his presence but also his subjectivity. Thus, the Firstspace and the Secondspace of the police station appear to be repositioning Xiaohua and A Lan back towards the expected binary of powerful/powerless. However, as Lim has also shown in his analysis of A Lan's 'masochistic sexual imagination', the role of the policeman in an interrogation of a suspect/criminal is not an innocuous one, in that the confessor is complicit and integral to the confessant's revelation (Lim 2006, 92–93). It is here that we find a 'thirding' of the film's spatial imagination (Soja 1996, 11), for the Thirdspace between the police station as an interrogation room and a confessional is that which enables a coalescence of First- and Secondspace. This is seen in A Lan's kneeling posture during which he reveals his guilty conscience for deceiving his wife. Performing what looks to be the Christian sacrament of penance, A Lan appears to be fulfilling Xiaohua's expectations of a repenting sinner who knows he is in the wrong and whose sins need to be absolved. As A Lan begins to recount the narrative of his life, his story begins to resemble a traditional coming out story, which usually expresses what is 'the most momentous moment in any gay or lesbian life', refers to a 'complex process of moving from a heterosexual (and confused) identity, telling the stories of others given in childhood, to a strong, positive and accepting sense of identity as gay being given to one through awareness of the gay community in later life' (Plummer 1995, 84). The significance of this is twofold: whilst on the one hand it appears that A Lan's narrative contains elements characteristic of the coming out story, the trajectory from (heterosexual) confusion to (homosexual) clarity is disrupted, on the other hand, by the immediate revelation that A Lan is a writer, severely undermining the 'truthfulness' of his account (Figs. 2.7 and 2.8).

Indeed, we are never completely certain of A Lan's position, in that his accounts are laden with snippets of childhood recollections, sexual fantasies and daily hardships. Moreover, his narrative is non-linear—A Lan's first story is that of present-day sexual encounters with his friends (The Stud, Dandy, Lily) which take place in an abandoned building. Next comes the 'Public Bus' story of his adolescence, after which he tells the story of his childhood, before recounting the story of the punishment he received from a gang of mine workers at the age of 17. In this



Fig. 2.7 Window bar erasing A Lan from the picture, *East Palace, West Palace*



Fig. 2.8 Xiaohua placed on the confessional chair, *East Palace, West Palace*

complex Thirdspace, A Lan narrates, appropriates and nuances his life story, disrupting any straightforward interpretations of his queer identity. Importantly, his fusion of Firstspace realities of an interrogation and the mental Secondspace of a childhood memory creates a Thirdspace that contains elements of both. His story *is* and *is not* a coming out narrative, for if a coming out story is ‘a tale concerned with establishing a sense of

who one *really* is' (Plummer 1995, 86, my emphasis), in *Palace*, we are never offered a picture of A Lan's 'true' identity. This is not to say that A Lan does not claim an identity. Whilst he positions a local cross-dresser as different—'He is very different from us. He never makes love with us and we leave him alone. That goes to how. He marches to a different beat'—A Lan also emphasises his ability to perform a gendered identity: 'I can be a goddess or a prostitute; I can be a man or a woman. I can be whoever I want'. Here, A Lan's becomes a storyteller, a revisionist who re-appropriates and adjusts the elements of the plot to fit the story. By the means of appropriating the past and the present, he constructs an identity which is not ontological or fixed but rather adaptable and ever-changing. In fact, he employs the element of Thirdspace to express pride in who he is, despite Xiaohua's continuous efforts in treating him as a criminal. Importantly, A Lan's renewed exclamation of self-worth startles Xiaohua who feels the need to remind A Lan that he is expected to feel shame, not pride: 'You're crazy. Where do you think you are?'. Despite the attempt to relocate A Lan to the Firstspace of the police station, Xiaohua nevertheless finds A Lan's narrative irresistible to such an extent that a sound of a child's toy dropping on the ground rouses the policeman back to 'reality'.

It is at this stage of the film that we begin to discern a visible shift in power relations between the two men. The fusion of reality and fantasy within the police station is precisely the heterotopia that allows A Lan to realise his own position as a criminal in the eyes of the state and his own personal vision of himself as a proud 'gay' man. After relating the story of how he was used and abused by a mine manager and his employees—interestingly, the manager is played by the same actor who plays Xiaohua—A Lan imagines the kunqu scene not as fantastical escape from his plight but as means of coping with the abuse and, most importantly, procuring agency and empowerment vis-à-vis his position as a defenceless criminal. Whilst his tearful and disillusioned walk on the rooftop may have suggested a concession of defeat and a possible suicide—'Suddenly I was aware of how much I had suffered in my life. It would have been better if I had never been born'—the ensuing statement would prove to be a ruse, in that in the subsequent close-up shot, in which he looks almost directly into the camera with a wry smile, A Lan exclaims: 'But this kind of experience makes life worth living'. Here, we see his drawing from his experience as a queer marginalised subject as a means of gaining agency and positioning himself vis-à-vis the powerful state that considers him corrupt or degraded: 'What I write may be trash, but I am not'. Importantly,

A Lan's story physically displaces Xiaohua from the one who 'oversees' A Lan to the one being placed on the 'confessional chair' in the middle of the floor. In this Thirdspace, where A Lan goes from being monitored by the policeman in the beginning of the film to standing on the veranda looking in at Xiaohua towards the end, we see not only a reversal of positions but also a twofold recognition: A Lan fulfils his fantasy of being 'taken' by a policeman, whilst Xiaohua, by forcing A Lan to put on women's clothing, realises that his position as the powerful policeman parallels not only that of A Lan's previous love affairs but also that of the mine manager who beat him and of the rich man who extinguished a cigarette on his chest. Here, A Lan's body works as a mirror in which Xiaohua sees his own reflexion as a domineering authority. This recognition is not the result of A Lan 'pressuring' Xiaohua into intimacy, although his spellbinding tale of the female prisoner, delivered with delicate touches and seductive smiles, does entangle Xiaohua to the point of complete motionlessness. Rather, A Lan merely precipitates Xiaohua latent desires to engage in intimacy with his 'prisoner', a point already observed by Lim who notes that Xiaohua is 'not totally unaware of his role in A Lan's sexual imagination' (Lim 2006, 92).

The film's ending, which culminates in Xiaohua's 'hose' showering A Lan in a figurative climax scene, offers a nuanced and renewed understanding of not only A Lan's agency but also the space in which such a power relation takes place. For what do we make of that and the final scene at the break of dawn, where a bewildered Xiaohua trudges on the roof of the park compound whilst A Lan looks on half-dressed still wearing his earrings? The scene speaks back to the final scene of Zhang Yimou's *Raise the Red Lantern*, in which Songlian wanders aimlessly around the courtyard, seemingly after having gone mad from witnessing the murder of Meishan. In *Palace*, however, it is not the defenceless woman but the supposedly authoritative policeman who appears to be at a loss. Whilst the Chen compound in *Raise the Red Lantern* works as a symbol of the unyielding patriarchal order of the 1920s Warlord Era China, the Thirdspace of the park police station is a fluid and nuanced space that is seemingly occupied by both the oppressed and the oppressor. The open ending of the film embraces a more complicated view of not only the position of the queer other vis-à-vis the state, but also, and perhaps even more importantly, the ideas of the 'progressive' global homosexuality based on visibility. Although A Lan does not seek liberation, he still takes pride in his identity, challenging and destabilising the policeman's notions of what constitutes 'proper' sexuality. If the hegemonic political culture sees homosexuality

as foreign and imported from the West (Kuoshu), A Lan subverts this view by both complying with the coming out narrative and subsequently eschewing it. A Lan defies both the global and the local perspectives by bringing in the two opposing positions in one space, exposing their interdependence. On Zhang Yimou's films, Chow writes:

The “ethnicity”—“Chineseness”—of Zhang's films is also a sign of a cross-cultural commodity fetishism, a production of value between cultures. Precisely because ethnic practices are theatricalized as arcane and archaic, Zhang is showing a “China” that is at once subalternized and eroticized by the West. (Chow 1995, 170)

East Palace, West Palace, on the other hand, does not cater to a Western audience who may expect either a ‘liberation’ of the homosexual subject or further ‘evidence’ of homophobia of the Chinese regime. Rather, Zhang Yuan's film uses space to position A Lan's queerness as local as well as global, progressive *as well as* authentic. The simultaneity of presence in *Palace* points to the instability of these very categories. Thus, New Queer Sinophone Cinema allows for a reconfiguration and opening up of new methods of viewing non-normative sexuality inside and outside the PRC (Figs. 2.9 and 2.10).



Fig. 2.9 Unbalanced Songlian trudging the courtyard, *Raise the Red Lantern*



Fig. 2.10 Disillusioned policeman on the police station roof, *East Palace, West Palace*

NOTES

1. Although *East Palace, West Palace* is a Mainland film (post-produced in France), I use the term Sinophone as a way of expanding the argument beyond the physical borders of the PRC.
2. I do not suggest that the local and the global are fixed entities. On the contrary, by investigating what happens in the space between these positionings, we are able to destabilise both referents.

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Crossing Time and Space: Female Desire in Yan Yan Mak's *Butterfly*

Abstract The chapter explores Yan Yan Mak's 2004 feature *Butterfly* as a film that merges different temporalities as it presents sexual relations between women as not only an event of the past but also that which imagined in the future. The chapter suggests that Mak's film employs Thirdspace, in which familiarity and estrangement coalesce, as way of problematising both coming out narratives and the act of looking. Finally, the chapter explores Mak's positioning of postcolonial Hong Kong as a translocal and transnational queer space.

Keywords Yan Yan Mak • *Butterfly* • Hong Kong • Transnationality • Alienation effect • Queerness

Tracing the ways Italian migrants in Britain create, maintain and reproduce their identity narratives in terms of origins, tradition and belonging, Anne-Marie Fortier notes: 'Re-membering is the process through which spaces of belonging—imagined and physical—are inhabited, in the literal sense of dwelling, in the sense of populating or "membering" spaces with ghosts from the past, and in the sense of manufacturing ... subjects' (2000, 128). Here, re-membering becomes an important tool for 'stitching together memory', where elements of the past are 'called upon to inhabit the present place, to 'member' it (153). Within the field of queer and diaspora studies, 're-membering' works as a useful tool for challenging the

traditionally backwards-looking diasporic discourse, typically enveloped in nostalgia of past times and lost origins. I have argued elsewhere that queer remembering, through dislocation, brings memories of the past into the present and modifies them, transforming not only the 'home' of the past but also the very spaces from which there are invoked. 'What is remembered through queer diasporic desire', argues Gayatri Gopinath, 'is a past time and place riven with contradictions and the violences of multiple uprootings, displacements, and exiles' (2005, 4). The potential of queer memories is that they possess the ability to alter and translate the national discourses of originality/purity, re-inventing and re-conceiving notions of home and belonging. Whilst the reconfiguration of the traditional notions of home is an effective tactic within the field of diaspora studies, with movement and border-crossing being defining elements, I argue that this approach can also be applied to visual representations of memory and space in regions defined by transitions and translocality. More precisely, I will argue that filmic representations of queer re-memories in postcolonial Hong Kong exhibit highly intricate and nuanced investigations of queer desire found at the intersection of both space and time. Whilst Gopinath uses the notion of queer diaspora in her study of South Asian diasporic film, music and literature, I argue that by employing a similar approach we are able to gain a renewed understanding of the representations of queerness in Sinophone cinema. Although the films mentioned in this article cannot be strictly qualified as 'diasporic', they do nonetheless contain elements of movement not only across territories but also across time periods. In terms of queerness, these movements exhibit the ability to transgress the distinctions between the past and the present as well as, and perhaps more importantly, between the notions of the local and the global (Cruz-Malavé and Manalasan).

If the space in-between, as a visual mode of inquiry into the *spatial* configuration of queer desire, is 'carried over' from the Sixth Generation cinema of Zhang Yuan to the postcolonial Hong Kong cinema of Stanley Kwan, then Yan Yan Mak's film *Butterfly* (2004) transposes to Hong Kong the *temporal* mode of 'The Mark of Butterfly' ('Hudie de jihao'), a 1996 novella by the Taiwanese author Chen Xue. Whilst *East Palace, West Palace*, with its use of mirrors and windows, informs the visual logic of *Lan Yu*, by making visible something which is paradoxical and disappearing, *Butterfly* employs a temporal logic that reworks and reimagines narratives of non-normative desires, 'futuring' that which has been consigned to the past. Here, the translocal and transnational element of

the Sinophone allows both modes of inquiry to travel across and beyond national boundaries, serving as a means of translation without eschewing its localness and cultural specificity. Based on the above-mentioned novella, *Butterfly* is set in Hong Kong and features Flavia (Josie Ho), a seemingly happily married secondary school teacher in her mid-thirties, who falls in love with a young female musician Yip (Tian Yuan). Flavia's affection for Yip stems partly from her failed relationship with her classmate Jin (Joman Chiang), from whom she had to separate due to their 'discovery' by Flavia's mother. Whilst Jin has left Hong Kong to become a Buddhist nun in Macau, this time Flavia decides to end her marriage and pursue her homoerotic relationship despite her husband's protestations, thus actively attempting to counterbalance the painful events of the past. In other words, Flavia decides ultimately to follow her desires regardless of the external forces (social respectability, divorce and the possible loss of child custody) that preclude the fulfilment of such desires. Thus, the film can be said to part with the earlier filmic representations of same-sex desire that ultimately end with the dismantling of homosexual relationship and a subsequent incorporation into a heterosexual marriage.

Butterfly is unmistakably a Hong Kong film. The various shots of Hong Kong streets, taxicabs and public schools situate it firmly within the tight space of the city. Yet, Mak's film also contains numerous transnational elements. Not only is it based on a Taiwanese novella and filmed by a Hong Kong-based director, it features a Mandarin-speaking singer who sings in English whilst the main character travels to the neighbouring Macau where her previous lover now works as a nun. The effect of this amalgamation of the 'Sinophones' is twofold. Whilst it elucidates the various Sinophone expressions by the use of multiple languages, it also brings together different positionings in a queer space that not only reworks the 'global gay formation' (King) but also introduces queer memories as a means of creating a liveable space where the global and the local intersect. In other words, Mak's film challenges both the coming out narrative as part of the 'gay identity' as well as the idea of 'an essential Chineseness' (Shih 2007, 3). The multiple Sinophones are brought together with the use of memory, which eschews temporal progression and proposes an alternative view on queerness in Hong Kong. Sinophone queerness is present, not due to the adequate passage of time, but because of a creative reworking of the notions of identity and belonging.

In her study of female homoeroticism in contemporary mainstream Chinese media and cultures, Fran Martin writes:

A dominant modern Chinese discourse on female homoeroticism has asserted the impossibility of lesbian futures: sexual relations between women are culturally imaginable only in youth; therefore same-sex sexual relations may appear in adult femininity's past, very rarely in the present, and never in its future'. (2010, 6)

Martin emphasises the backwards looking—*memorial*—mode of narration, where same-sex love and desire is forcibly precluded by the heteronormative social impositions of family members or other social figures. These narratives are significant, Martin argues, in that their 'mournful ... remembrance of same-sex love as a kind of paradise lost implies a critique of the social imposition of hetero-marital relations upon young women as a condition of feminine adulthood' (2010, 7). In other words, the very existence of these narratives undermines the hegemonic hetero-marriage by making explicit the personal cost upon which heteronormativity is contingent. This does not imply that there exists a wish to supplant the heterosexual marriage with a homosexual one. On the contrary, the existence of these narratives *within* the Chinese mainstream, mass-culture testifies to their *coexistence* with the dominant sexual systems. Therefore, the enforced and enforcing heterosexuality is simultaneously reaffirmed and disputed: 'The idealization of women's youthful same-sex love and desire, framed as a universal female experience, is remarkably common, and the pain caused by the renouncement of this love is frankly avowed, not simply papered over to enable an air of triumph in the stories' heterosexual conclusions' (Martin 2010, 8). Mak's film, however, although employing the memorial mode, does not entirely follow the above formula in that its temporal logic is that of a past being re-membered not 'as it really was' but both as factual and imagined. Here, temporality becomes a key element in the investigations of queer female narratives. By employing anachrony in the invocations of the past—the use of flashbacks (analepsis) and flash-forwards (prolepsis)—Mak's queer narrative reworks the temporal logic of traditional narratives of same-sex desires as that which is firmly fixed in the past and does not 'belong' in the heterosexual present. Besides employing such temporal tactics in its re-configurations of queer desire, Mak's film also adds to the picture various movements, cultural influences and spoken languages, thwarting any well-defined interpretations of queer desire in

the postcolonial space of Hong Kong. In the following I argue that Mak's queer re-membling alters not only the present but also the past, thus complicating the developmental narrative of queer progress from heterosexual oppression to homosexual freedom.

Butterfly opens with Yip (played by Tian Yuan, a Beijing-based musician) lounging on a bed in her underwear, singing a song in English. Leaning against the large windowpanes of an apartment that overlooks the city, she smiles contentedly as she 'embraces' the Hong Kong skyline. Meanwhile, heard in the background is the sound of a spinning film reel. Next shot is that of a young couple—Flavia and Jin—smiling as they climb a fort that overlooks Macau. These parallel scenes—of Yip and the young couple embracing the city—form an early correlation between the two temporalities: what becomes evident later on is that the relationship between Flavia and Jin is an event from the past whilst Yin's singing seemingly takes place in the present. Although this opening sequence does not appear to be of particular significance, in that it simply works as an analepsis to the main character's past, it does foreshadow a complex representation of time. As Leung and Martin point out, Mak uses Super 8 mm footage—with its grainy recording that stands out in terms of colour, sound and texture from the rest of the film (shot in 35 mm)—as a way of indicating and emphasising the events of the past (Leung 2008, 61; Martin 2010, 158). Here, images of happy childhood convey clearly a sense of nostalgia for the more innocent of times, whereas the present time makes no room for a passion that once was allowed to exist. However, as it becomes evident in the subsequent scenes, the Super 8 footage, seemingly only designated for past events, begins stealing its way into the present. This is seen in the conversation between Flavia and Yip in a coffee shop. Whilst the women exchange deeply intimate stories regarding their former and current lovers, the Super 8 images of both women are suddenly interjected within the main narrative. The significance of the interposition is twofold: whilst the Super 8 film stock brings in the past as an ordinary element of the present narrative, it historicises the present by breaking any clear division between the two temporalities. According to Martin, the Super 8 film stock 'enables not only a memorializing of the present ... but also, and more radically, a "*present-ing*" of the past' (2010, 161, my emphasis).

This highly complex and nuanced representation of the past and present in terms of queer desire is significant to my discussion of identity and belonging. For it is at the intersection of time and space that Mak situates her film, enabling a critique of queerness not only in terms of the global

gay narrative of progress and individual freedom but also in regards to the notions of home and dislocation. If, as Martin argues, ‘the film’s conclusion suggests unambiguously that Flavia’s new relationship with Yip *has a future*’ (2010, 164, my emphasis), I argue that Mak’s film *is* a representation of the future. As I mentioned earlier, *Butterfly* opens with the sound of a spinning film reel, which on the surface works as a foreshadowing of the film’s intertextuality/intercinematicity, where snippets of other texts and films make an appearance. For instance, Andrea Bachner notes that Mak’s inclusion, in a scene meant to be set in 1989, of a sound clip from Stanley Kwan’s 1992 film *Center Stage* (a biographical film about the 1930s silver screen star Ruan Lingyu), in which Kwan himself inserts a sound clip from an earlier film, not only works as a film-within-a-film-within-a-film but ‘constitutes an anachronism, a temporal mismatch, a warp in time’ (213). Whilst these intercinematic elements appear frequently throughout Mak’s film, I argue that under the surface, the characters in *Butterfly* appear to be *aware* that they are being watched, that they are recorded on film. The sound of the film reel, which appears only during Yip’s singing and is not present in the Super 8 footage of young Flavia and Jin climbing the Portuguese port during their getaway to Macau, suggests that the young couple’s retreat is not consigned to the past. Rather, it is Yip’s singing, *in the present*, which appears to be on film. Moreover, the scene to which the reel refers contains a reflective conversation between Flavia and Jin, in which they describe the uncanny sensation that their queer experience has already happened. Their relationship, in Jin’s point of view, appears somehow to be destined: ‘I think I’ve seen this image before. Actually, everything has happened before. It’s all been scripted’. Here, Jin describes the out-of-body experience of watching herself and Flavia overlooking the city, precisely in the same manner as we, the audience, experience watching Mak’s film about Flavia’s present relationship with Yip. Moreover, the interchange between the Super 8 mm and 35 mm footage during Jin’s speech emphasises this point visually. Thus, the opening sequence featuring Flavia’s current love works as a prolepsis to Flavia’s former beloved; here, not only are the past and the present intertwined, they are the images of the lovers’ future.

In *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance* (1997), Ackbar Abbas notes:

One of the features of new Hong Kong cinema is its sensitivity to spatial issues, in other words, to dislocations and discontinuities, and its adoption

of spatial narratives both to underline and to come to terms with these historical anachronisms and achronisms: space as a means of reading the elusiveness of history. (27)

What Abbas refers to is Hong Kong's 'culture of disappearance', where the signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration (1984) and the Tiananmen Square Massacre (1989) 'confirmed a lot of people's fears that the Hong Kong way of life with its mixture of colonialist and democratic trappings was in imminent danger of disappearing' (7). This disappearance is particularly apt in terms of cultural self-reflection of (post-handover) new Hong Kong cinema, where time and space are used as means for engaging affectively and visually with the ever-changing cultural space of Hong Kong. Importantly, Abbas notes that 'the danger now is that Hong Kong will disappear as a subject, *not by being ignored but by being represented in the good old ways*' (25, emphasis in original). In other words, what is significant is not the lack of representation but the manner in which appearance and disappearance are presented. Abbas continues: 'This is *dis-appearance* in a very specific sense ... in that it gives us a reality that is not so much hidden as purloined, a reality that is overlooked because it is looked at in the old familiar ways' (25, emphasis in original). I apply Abbas's argument to Mak's film, not only because most of the action takes place in Hong Kong and is therefore significant for my later discussion of spatiality. It is also because, in terms of affect and queerness, Mak's film employs a similar method of presenting a reality in which sexual relations between women are imagined not only in youth, but also in the present, and perhaps more importantly, in the future. This blurring of boundaries between temporalities dismisses any clear notions of time and progress, refusing to give any particular significance to the fact that the desire between two characters is not a heterosexual one. Analogous to Abbas's contention that there exists a temptation to view Hong Kong in terms of old binarisms such as East and West, my argument is that, in Mak's film, the destabilisation of the neatly structured progression from before to after, from the stifling heterosexuality to the liberating homosexuality, works against the narratives of coming out. Mak's film undermines the notion of 'progress', since it does not position queer desire as belonging only to particular characters. Rather, queerness exists across time and space, which is evident in the relationship between Flavia's two female students, Muriel and Samantha, who are subjected to similar outside forces that want to keep them apart (this time it is *both* of the parents). The shift of emphasis from Flavia to

the girls defies any temporal progression, in terms of personal history as well as queer desire, as it challenges the ‘eventual return’ to heterosexuality. Here, Jin’s comment ‘Sometimes I feel that I am not myself’ points towards an eerie recognition that she herself is an image—a symbol—of something that has been taking place for extensive periods of time and which is somehow larger than herself.

INSIDE/OUTSIDE REFLECTIONS

So far we have witnessed Mak’s nuanced representations of time in which she both historicises the present and *presents* the past, thereby subverting the developmental narrative of the coming out story. Whilst these significant filmic elements contribute to a more in-depth understanding of Mak’s film, in this section I focus on the significance of Jin’s sensation that she somehow can see herself from the outside. This motif, which works in tandem with Mak’s disruption of linear time, holds a twofold significance. Whilst it offers a visual representation of Flavia’s inner state of mind on the one hand, it also questions the validity of such a representation on the other. In the case of Flavia, the time warp and the intermingling of film formats display her double guilt in the form of reflection and mirroring, the first appearing in the shape of mental images of the past, in which Flavia experiences guilt over choosing her family and subsequently a family life, over Jin and her political activism. The second is the outside view, in which we see her (as well as she herself) as an unfaithful wife who deceives her husband and neglects her family. Throughout the film, Flavia attempts to negotiate her queer desire lodged between these two images, finally settling in a space in-between where she appropriates her material conditions by deciding to pursue her passions as well as legal custody of her child (Figs. 3.1 and 3.2).

The first instance of mirroring is seen during the conversation between Flavia and Yip in the Toronto Café. After Yip points out that she has a piece of cake in the corner of her lips, Flavia seizes a spoon and looks at her reflection in it. Upon seeing her own mirror image, Flavia rouses herself, begins rubbing her hands and informs Yip that she has not left school for 30 years. Here, several images flash before the screen accompanied by sensual, instrumental music: that of the ornament of two girls embracing in the shape of a butterfly, the painful parting of the young Flavia and Jin, and Flavia’s hands resting on a glass of water. By the means of an outside perspective, Flavia’s initial attraction to Yip is replaced by a sense of



Fig. 3.1 View from the inside, *Butterfly*



Fig. 3.2 Voyeur view from the outside, *Butterfly*

self-reproach which initially inhibits Flavia's pursuit of her desire. Particularly, her hands serve as the symbol of guilt. Like Lady Macbeth who compulsively attempts to cleanse her bloodstained hands, Flavia is seen repeatedly washing her hands in the school toilet sink. It is upon seeing herself from the outside that Flavia once again begins to doubt her commitment to the pursuit of her desires. After the conversation in the café, Flavia and Yip are seen approaching Flavia's car where the reflection in the car window causes her to pause and re-evaluate her current domestic

situation, seen in the subsequent scenes of a happy husband and his daughter sleeping peacefully side by side. The outside view motif culminates during Flavia's visit to Yip, which takes place in the latter's guardian's apartment. Whilst the two women are intimately engaged, we are presented with Flavia's flashbacks to her happy life with Jin. Suddenly Flavia resists Yip's caresses and runs out to her child who has fallen on the ground. The view alternates from inside of the apartment to the outside, where we see Flavia attempting frantically to silence and comfort her daughter. Here, we are presented with a double reflection: as the two women gaze at their reflections in the mirror, (fore)seeing their alternate lives, we as the viewers see both what *has happened*, what *is happening* and what *will happen*. As I argue earlier in the book, the strength of New Queer Sinophone Cinema lies in its decentring of both Han-centricity of Chineseness as well as Euro-American queerness. This is done by repositioning queerness via a nuanced use of spatiality, where 'here' and 'there', 'then' and 'now' become markers not of spatial and temporal stability but of continuous cultural processes and signifying practices which are dependent on their own spatial and temporal circumstances. In *Butterfly*, the reconfiguration of past, present and future parallels my earlier use of spatiality as a means for challenging Eurocentric perspectives on cinematic representation that depends on the fixed notions of East/West, 'oppressed'/'liberated' (which I investigate in the next section). Here, the close linkage between spatiality and temporality is displayed in the very act of looking. I refer above to the term 'viewer', in that this line of reasoning—one that emphasises looking—has already been examined by Abbas (1997). He notes that new Hong Kong cinema, apart from giving us the sense of *déjà vu* (Jin's feeling of having seen the this image before) also provides the spectator 'the even more uncanny feeling of what we may call the *déjà disparu*: the feeling that what is new and unique about the situation is always already gone, and we are left holding a handful of clichés, or a cluster of memories of what has never been' (25, emphasis in original). Abbas argues that in new Hong Kong cinema, the task of the filmmaker is not to present the past as it is imagined to have existed, for this would entail romanticising the cultural history of Hong Kong which itself was never firmly fixed. Rather, Abbas asserts that 'some of the films of the new Hong Kong cinema ... define for us the *spatial* conditions of viewing and of filmmaking, where the act of looking itself has become problematic: the more you try to make the world hold still in a reflective gaze, the more it moves under you (26, my emphasis). Thus, merely presenting a past,

however fraught it may be, runs the risk of fixating it, in that what appears to be a critical distance is simply a privileged position that removes one from the 'critical proximity' necessary for a more nuanced investigation of Hong Kong cultural space. In Mak's film, I argue, the motif of the reflection works as a means of problematising the viewing process where, on the one hand, the windowpane offers to the viewer as well as to the main character an outside perspective both in terms of situating and pursuing her desire but also of the cost connected with such a pursuit. On the other hand, the 'handheld camera' technique used during the entire encounter in the apartment gives the scene an air of immediacy and nervousness, particularly as the sexual attraction between the women intensifies. The scene culminates with Flavia recoiling and telling Yip to 'find a job and forget about me. I don't know what I was doing just now. Just pretend that we never met'. Here, the camera angle suddenly shifts to a bird's-eye view of the women, presenting an objective point of view reminiscent of CCTV footage (here, Flavia is once again being 'recorded' on film). Whilst we may conclude that at this point Flavia has realised that her affair with Yip must come to a conclusion, the camera once again shifts to a two shot. Here, we are witness to Flavia's attempt to leave the apartment in a hurry, which coalesces her present effort to leave Yip with the scenes of the past where she attempted to put an end to her relationship with Jin ('I can't do this any longer'). We are aware, however, that despite her attempts, Flavia will not leave this time either, as she looks reluctantly at the front door whilst her last words from the past scene—'I don't want to give up either'—linger in the background. The element of mirroring of inside/outside, past/future, which serves as an analepsis and a prolepsis, creates a critical space in-between—a space of disappearance—in which Flavia is able to pursue her desires without adhering to either the narrative of teleological development or the assumption of a gay identity. Like in the other films in this book, films that I argue fall under the 'label' of New Queer Sinophone Cinema, spatiality provides a critical stance towards the act of looking itself. In *Butterfly*, this is perhaps best exemplified in the aforementioned scene where reflections work 'against' the viewer. As we get closer to and more intimate with Flavia's affair with Yip, we are thrown off guard by the sudden realisation (caused by a reflection) that Flavia is conflicted not only by her guilt towards Jin but also towards her parents, her family and her lover. Similar to Jin's awareness of being in/an image, the camera angle with which Flavia is filmed during her affair with Yip (Fig. 3.2) suggests a perspective of a voyeur, someone who is 'looking in'

on a private situation. Here, the viewer becomes an observer who sees situation from a ‘distance’—particularly from the CCTV-like angle—hiding behind the safety of the camera. Even from within the apartment, the camera continues to ‘peep’ inside, giving us a semi-hidden view of what takes place (with one half of the image being blocked by a door). Thus, the perspective goes from the highly personal to the highly objective, thwarting any clear-cut views of either Flavia’s queer desires or of any ‘accuracy’ of her positioning vis-à-vis the sexual or cultural belonging. By problematizing the viewing process with the amalgam of past and future, outside and inside, Mak’s film presents queerness not as a ‘replacement’ of heterosexuality with a homosexual marriage. Instead, the film attempts to find a space in-between that would offer both views simultaneously. This in-between space of New Queer Sinophone Cinema is not an intellectual exercise or a philosophical implementation. Rather, it is an inhabitable space that rearticulates queerness based not on identity politics or the act of coming out but on the liveable local conditions of contemporary Hong Kong, seen in the dissolution of Flavia’s marriage as both parties vow to fight for custody of their child.

TRANSLOCAL SINOPHONE

In his insightful investigation of the intersections between China studies and gender and sexuality studies, Jeroen de Kloet poses three significant questions:

First, why is it that theoretical, conceptual and methodological cross-fertilization between China studies and cultural studies remains quite scarce? Second, why are popular culture and art important domains of academic inquiry? Third, why is it crucial to theorize and problematize “Chineseness”? (2008, 195)

Here, de Kloet challenges the so-called ‘Western’ theories and ‘Chinese’ contexts in that both run the risk of becoming hegemonic discourses that essentialise local knowledges. Instead, he proposes an interdisciplinary approach that ‘combines theoretical and empirical insights from area studies and cultural studies, and an intersectional take in which gender is analyzed in conjunction with other parameters of difference, such as ethnicity, class or age, and, finally, a multisited, comparative research agenda as to avoid a sino-centric or Han-centric analysis’ (2008, 195). My

arguments about the New Queer Sinophone Cinema follow de Kloet's call for self-critical and interdisciplinary approach to China Studies and Cultural Studies as a way of resisting 'cultural essentialism and cultural relativism' (2008, 195). In relation to studies of gender and sexuality, de Kloet notes a need for studies in which 'thick, contextualized, and historicized description of queer (or, by the same token, gendered) lives ... counter the universal pretensions of global theorizations on gender and sexuality' (2008, 203). If Mak's reworking of the temporality of *Butterfly* suggests an alternative to the global gay formation, it is due to neither the 'absence' of queerness in postcolonial Hong Kong nor a local particularity that posits queerness as 'different' from that of the West. As previously mentioned, *Butterfly* is undeniably a Hong Kong film, despite the presence of several languages and locales. However, it is not the *inclusion* of other 'Sinophones'—Taiwan, PRC, Macau—but their *use* that is of interest here. For Mak's film is not simply a narrative of a lesbian love that works as a critique of the discourses of lesbian autobiography. The film also sutures Flavia's queer identity to the social movements of the 1960s, the Cultural Revolution, Tiananmen Square Massacre and post-handover Hong Kong. Thus, at the centre of Flavia's highly personal struggle is the public arena where China's tumultuous past reverberates as a menacing figure in present-day postcolonial Hong Kong. Here, the merging of the public and the private, the political and the affective, attests to the importance of spatiality in New Queer Sinophone Cinema and my consequent investigations of the ways queerness is situated in Mak's film. If, as Abbas argues, Hong Kong's history 'is one of shock and radical changes' (1997, 26), the inclusion of such historical events in *Butterfly* only reinforces this point. Thus, Hong Kong's past is not shown in order to speculate on its future after the handover. Rather, it works as an image of Hong Kong as it *has been*, as it *is* and as it *will be*. It becomes evident from the early scenes of the film that Mak's Hong Kong is a heterotopic space where languages, styles and temporalities intermix. The highly intimate space of the opening scene in which Yip wears high-fashion underwear is followed by a poetry recital during a Chinese class in a public school—one of the most public spaces of all—where poverty, politics, guilt, sadness and political pressure during the Cultural Revolution intersect. Soon after, we find ourselves in a high-end supermarket with imported goods and all-English signage, and later in a café called Toronto in which Flavia and Yip eat coffee and cake. I do not wish to argue that Hong Kong as a cultural space is an amalgam of 'opposing cultures'—this is what Abbas terms the 'decadent' view, where

Hong Kong figures as ‘an East–West city, mixing tradition and modernity like memory and desire’ (71). Rather, I wish to ‘unfix’ the stabilising view of cultural differences and cultural binaries by emphasising the transnational elements of queerness in Mak’s film, where distinct spaces occupy one single domain. This unfixing, as I argue in the following, is one of the key elements of New Queer Sinophone Cinema.

In her examination of contemporary art by Hong Kong female artists, Carolyn Cartier (2008) notes:

Indexed to local circumstances, and to remembering and recovering translocal conditions of experience, much of it [the art] is not dependably legible in an era of high-impact imagery and Asia in the world economy whose art market seeks recognizably “Chinese” (and perhaps soon “Indian”) iconography. (2008, 267)

Significant here is the position of Hong Kong art vis-à-vis art production in the PRC (by male visual artists in Beijing), the former being positioned outside the conventional national frameworks of art vs. state. ‘Coded to local Hong Kong contexts, and to places of experience worldwide without easily recognizable geographic coordinates, a good part of Hong Kong art does not travel unhindered in the commercialized global art system that adopts geopolitical frames’ (267), Cartier notes. Here, she argues that viewing Hong Kong art in a national or regional framework fails to take into account the ‘presences and absences’ from ‘broader regional and international discourses on “Chinese” art’ which create a ‘dyad of potential translocal interrelatedness, between the production of art in Hong Kong and other places’ (2008, 248). Thus, instead of viewing Hong Kong art production as integrated with the art production in the PRC, contemporary art of Hong Kong must be read not through national but *transnational* discourses, as they enable ‘trajectories of possibility’ which maintain ‘a translocal sense of place in Hong Kong’s unprecedented era of colonial interstitiality. This is not a land in between nations, but a culture and society whose ties and relations have always been translocal and transnational in the absence of a home-grown national project’ (267). Cartier’s arguments are significant for my discussion of Mak’s film in that, as mentioned earlier, Mak features prominently local characteristics of Hong Kong whilst positioning it as a transnational space. More importantly, I argue, is its representation of queer translocality, where queerness appears as inseparable from larger cultural and

political contexts that surround it. Leung already points out that Flavia's 'personal struggle to come to terms with her sexuality' is implicitly connected to Hong Kong's 'larger, continuous struggle for social justice' (2008, 60). If *Butterfly* intermixes the affective and the political, the private and the public, it does so without claiming either a 'Chinese' or a 'Western' sexual and political identity. One of the instances of translocality in Mak's film appears in the early flashback sequences, where we see young Flavia and Jin sneaking out of school and to Jin's studio apartment. Here, Jin is seen holding in her hand Joni Mitchell's 1969 album *Clouds*, an album which is highly political—exemplified by its explicit anti-war sentiments—and yet deeply personal—seen in the theme of the uncertainty of new love. The studio apartment itself contains numerous (mostly female) posters of young rebellion and counterculture—from Jean-Luc Godard's *Breathless* (*À bout de souffle*, 1960), which ushered in the French New Wave movement, to Michelangelo Antonioni's *Blow-up* (1966) with its explicit content, to Patti Smith and Janis Joplin. In this highly personal yet highly political space, Jin puts on an erotic video in an implicit attempt to express her desire to Flavia. Whilst this proves unsuccessful, what does draw Flavia's attention is a small TV set showing Sun Yu's 1933 film *Little Toys* [*Xiao wanyi*], a silent Shanghai film which not only couples Japanese occupation with personal trauma but portrays an erotic proximity between its main characters (played by Ruan Lingyu and Li Lili as mother and daughter respectively). Thus, it is not solely the 'Western-inspired' social movements and erotic images that fuel the desire between the two women, but an amalgam of young rebellion and a need for social change. In this translocal and transnational queer space, caught at the intersection between the affective and the political, we find non-normative desire that not only speaks to Hong Kong's past and the present but also to its future. Any attempt to place sexual or personal freedom solely within the boundary of the 'West' will prove to be unproductive, which is seen in Jin's recollection of the hardships she underwent during her days of travelling across Europe—'I've been beaten and robbed. Even ...'—as well as the interesting fact that Muriel's father beat her and forced her to move *out* of Hong Kong and *away* to Canada as a way of preventing her to see her lover Samantha. Thus, the seemingly 'open' and 'free' spaces of the 'West' appear not to be open and the characters find themselves on the move both *from* and *to* Hong Kong in the pursuit of sexual freedom.

ESTRANGEMENT FROM WITHIN

I have already mentioned Lisa Rofel's critique of the notions of the 'global gay' that works to unfix and destabilise the term 'gay' and its universally legible logic. Rofel makes the case that when theorising sexuality, what is needed is a problematisation of the notions such as 'Western', 'Asian', 'local' and 'global', as a means of not only decentralising the universalism of Euro-American notions of a 'gay' identity but also of exposing the power relations inherent in such a concept. Significantly, she urges scholars to reconfigure the concept of culture 'not as a set of shared meanings found in a bounded space but rather as ongoing discursive practices with sedimented histories that mark relations of power' (2007, 93). Taking on Rofel's call and adding it to Abbas's arguments on the problems of the act of looking, I propose that Mak's film employs both critiques by creating her own version of the Brechtian alienation effect (*Verfremdungseffekt*). This view, which requires a piece of art to confess the means of its production, allows the spectator to see through the theatrical illusion and maintain a critical detachment from the performance. If Abbas emphasises the problems of spectatorship, I would argue that it is not only the viewer whose position is under scrutiny—the characters themselves appear to question their own involvement in the film. Flavia sees her reflections in the form of an outside view whilst Jin has the sensation that she her life has already been seen and scripted. Thus, Mak's effect is not merely that of a distance between the audience and the film. Her film maintains the distinction between the character and the actor, although this becomes even more problematic in the case of Yip who is a singer in 'real life'. One case in point is the early exchange between Flavia and Yip in Toronto Café. Here, during the conversation Yip notices a man drawing in the back of the café. Although he does not appear to be drawing the two women, his illustration seems to comprise of numerous sketches of what appear to be hands. Whilst this may work as a reference to Yu Qiuyu's poem 'The Weight of Thirty Years', which Flavia's students read out loud during her class, it speaks more to Yip's sensation of being observed. This is only reinforced towards the end of the film where Flavia, now sitting in the same seat as Yip earlier, also notices the man. This time, however, we do see the drawing, which appears to depict multiple faces and expressions, validating Yip's earlier suspicions that they were being watched. Moreover, as Flavia sees the waitress collect the drawing, we are presented with a flashback to the previous scene in which Flavia remembers Yip looking inquisitively at the man. Here, Mak's alienation effect is that which not only creates a

distance between the spectator and the character, but also in-between the characters. Flavia sees herself from the inside and the outside, Yip suspects that she is being observed by the man in the café, whilst Jin feels that she has seen herself as an image before. If an added emphasis on spatiality serves as one of the key characteristics of New Queer Sinophone Cinema, where intricate use of space informs and yet destabilises signifying practices that ascribe meaning to places, then *Butterfly*'s use of this Thirdspace creates a narrative method which is at once remote and close, inside and outside, thwarting any simplistic means of identifying with either a character or a space (Figs. 3.3 and 3.4). Moreover, my argument about the



Fig. 3.3 Yip notices she is being watched, *Butterfly*



Fig. 3.4 Man drawing, *Butterfly*

'newness' of New Queer Sinophone Cinema is perhaps best seen in Mak's use of alienation and coalescence, which work in tandem with Rofel's arguments on the importance of examining the ways people *live out* the *imagined* invocations of culture, gayness and 'Chineseness'. Significantly, this method challenges Altman's notions of 'Westernness' and 'Asianness'/'Chineseness' by problematising them, not allowing locality and culture to remain self-evident tropes bound by a particular geography. By approaching these concepts as imaginary yet lived, rather than inherent and fixed, New Queer Sinophone Cinema is able to construct more nuanced means of investigating not only queer time and space but also the ways of looking at these concepts. These questions of form, Abbas argues, 'rise out of a cultural space where the act of looking itself is both the most developed and the most problematic act of all' (47). This does not entail the creation of a distance towards film as a medium with which one can express such a problematic act. On the contrary, Mak's film is a visual treat, with its sumptuous colours schemes, filters and soundscapes, and the aforementioned distinct film stock. Like the films of Wong Kar-wai, which present a visual overload in the form of fast and slow images, of distinct low and high angles, of abrupt transitions, *Butterfly* uses these elements to invoke and subvert the formulaic. By destabilising the chronological narrative, the 'localness' of Hong Kong and the 'authenticity' of Chineseness, Mak puts forward a renewed method of investigating queerness within the postcolonial space of Hong Kong which is not bound by a certain territory or a particular thought. Rather, New Queer Sinophone Cinema presents a translocal and a transnational interrelatedness between queerness and, in this case, Hong Kong, bound not by territory but by the overall cultural and political contexts that surround it. Akin to Abbas's point that the elusiveness and the use of slow motion in Wong's film does not romanticise violence but rather studies it—'the closer you look, the less there is to see' (1997, 35). Mak's film presents elusiveness as a structural motif that brings us closer to an insight into Flavia's desires whilst creating a distance from this very comprehension. One elusive element that runs throughout *Butterfly* is water. Not only does Flavia constantly wash her hands, which suggest a guilty conscience; she frequently comes in contact with water, which in turn triggers memories of her relationship with Jin. Whilst these memories are pleasurable and lead to new relationships (Flavia and Yip have their first sexual encounter in the filled bathtub in Rosa's apartment), they are also painful, such as the splitting up scene between young

Flavia and Jin break during the Tiananmen Square Massacre. Here, water becomes an element of familiarity and estrangement, longing and reassurance. Refusing to romanticise Flavia's past or present, water becomes an element of *déjà disparu*, in that 'slowing' it down would not yield fruitful results. Interestingly, it is Flavia's husband Ming who, after confronting Flavia and vowing to fight for child custody, hovers above the kitchen sink and holds his hand under a running tap in an attempt to contain or grasp its meaning.

Mak's film becomes a watery, fluid means of getting closer to and yet further away from a deeper 'understanding' of Flavia's desires. As queer re-memories inhabit, by the means of bringing in ghosts from the past, the imagined and physical spaces of the present, I argue that *Butterfly* is a film that attests to the workings of New Queer Sinophone Cinema, intersecting time and space and crossing both physical and metaphorical boundaries. New Queer Sinophone Cinema takes filmic representations of Sinophone queerness to a new level, where translocality and transnationality defies the national analytical frames that situate non-normative sexuality as local (authentic) as well as the global sphere that place 'Asian' queerness as queerness in waiting.

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Zero Chou's *Tongzhi* Trilogy

Abstract This chapter investigates the Taiwanese director Zero Chou's *tongzhi* trilogy. It begins by suggesting that Chou's 2004 film *Splendid Float*, which combines the elements of the real and the fantastic, provincialises Judith Butler's notions of drag as a discursive practice, adding localised historicisations of queer desire that do not follow Euro-American notions of gender parody. Then, the chapter examines Chou's 2007 Teddy Award-winning film *Spider Lilies*, which continues to rework Euro-American notions of gender parody by complicating the *T/Po* (butch/femme) binary. The chapter also suggests that *Spider Lilies* repositions the image of the *bishōjo* back to its queer origins. Finally, the chapter suggests that in her 2009 film *Drifting Flowers*, Chou employs and reworks both the schoolgirl romance as well as the tomboy melodrama.

Keywords Zero Chou • *Tongzhi* trilogy • Drag • *Bishōjo* • *Bishōnen* • Tattoos • Tomboyism

So far we have been witness to an interrelationality of New Queer Sinophone Cinema that not only transverses national borders but also, by creating an in-between space, challenges the universality of a global gay community and a localness of a 'Chinese' sexuality. As I argue in the previous chapter, Mak's film affixes the affective to the political, where Sinophonicity links the Cultural Revolution and the Tiananmen Square

Massacre with the post-Handover Hong Kong, whilst its cinematic intertextuality connects it to 1930s silver screens, as well as 1990s Hong Kong cinema. Although Mak's film relocates Chen Xue's story from Taipei to Hong Kong and thus in the process opens it up to a wider network of Sinophone connections, it also downplays the influence of its Taiwanese origins. Whilst Andrea Bachner notes that the film employs the motif of the butterfly—'the butterfly resonates with prevalent symbolic images in the context of Taiwanese queer writing' (209)—its references to the cultural space of Taiwan remain limited. Although Mak sets forth a renewed method of investigating queerness within the postcolonial space of Hong Kong, the notion of the Sinophone requires a deeper exploration of the Taiwanese historical and cultural space. This is due to not only the political status of Taiwan vis-à-vis Greater China and the consequences of such a relation. It is also based on Taiwan's involvement in the global and intra-regional cultural flows that are created and consumed within the Taiwan–Hong Kong–Japan triad. Such a configuration positions Sinophone queerness in a space that calls into question not only the contexts but also the direction of the flow of cultural texts in Taiwan. In this chapter, I focus on Zero Chou as a queer director whose oeuvre is unmistakably recognisable as Taiwanese, yet her films remain open and flexible to interpretations that take them beyond the cultural and geographical space of Taiwan. In addition, when viewed in terms of gender politics, the focus of the two previous chapters remains on subjectivities or group of individuals whose queerness is defined mostly by their sexual object choice. Indeed, a queer cinema of any kind—whether it is French, Spanish, Sinophone or North American—typically centres on a particular group based on their gender. Whilst *East Palace*, *West Palace* highlights the power relationship between the state and the queer other in the form of the cruising male homosexual and the commanding (male) policemen, *Butterfly* exhibits intricate uses of temporality as a means of reworking the traditional narrative logic of queer female sexuality. In both cases, queerness is not only confined within strictly male or female domains; it is articulated and defined in terms of sexual attraction and the subsequent impossibility of the pursuit of such desires. In Zero Chou's oeuvre, however, we find a different and highly original sensibility that breaks open gender exclusivity and envisions a more inclusive queerness that intersects the private and the public as well as the intimate and the non-sexual. More precisely, Chou's *tongzhi* trilogy, which consists of her 2004 film *Splendid Float* (*Yan guang si she gewutuan*), the Teddy Award-winning *Spider Lilies* (*Ci*

qing, 2007) and *Drifting Flowers* (*Piao lang qing chun*, 2008), exhibits a more nuanced investigation of queerness and queer desire, where the quotidian encounters the extraordinary and where centre meets periphery. Significantly, Chou's Sinophonicity is a nuanced one, in that her films, although exhibiting translocal elements, are deeply rooted in Taiwan's cultural and geographical space. Apart from breaking open the Sinophone triad of PRC-Hong Kong-Taiwan, I also argue that the inter- and intratextual elements in Chou's cinema position her as a Taiwanese queer auteur whose inclusive queerness points to new directions in not only New Queer Sinophone Cinema but also queer cinema globally.

SPLENDID FLOAT

I begin this chapter with a closer look at *Splendid Float*, a film centred on a drag troupe whose main performer Roy is a Taoist priest who performs funeral services by day, but who at night becomes Rose, a drag queen putting on cabaret shows in different parts of the country. On one of troupe's travels to north-eastern Taiwan, they encounter Sunny, a local fisherman, with whom Rose falls in love. Later, it is revealed that Sunny had drowned in the ocean and that his family has requested Roy's services in retrieving Sunny's spirit. Thus, both sides of Rose/Roy come together during the religious service in which Sunny's soul is summoned for the benefit of the grieving family. The practice of summoning the soul of the departed (*qian wanghun*) is a Taiwanese Taoist folk custom: 'When a family member dies suddenly or dies without having made a last behest, surviving family members can enlist the help of a Taoist priest or a spirit medium to put them in touch with the departed' (Huang and Wang 2011, 153, n. 24). Most problematic for Roy, however, is that he 'has no right to Sunny's spirit tablet, meaning he will be unable to live out his years with Sunny's soul as company' (146). As a consequence, Roy uses 'his authority as a Taoist priest ... to "divide the spirit tablet" (*fen ling*), and through divination ... secures Sunny's approval to do so' (146, emphasis in original). The division of the spirit table and thus of the soul of the deceased allows the soul of the deceased to multiply and reside in multiple places simultaneously (153, n. 25). In the final scenes of the film, the troupe conduct a performance for Sunny's spirit and the film close with the troupe sitting on the float and looking contently out towards the sea.

Drag and performance in *Splendid Float* appear at first glance to invoke Judith Butler's seminal work *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990/2006) in which she states that gender 'proves to be performative—that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed' (34). In other words, we may say the drag performance in *Splendid Float*, particularly in its portrayal of Roy/Rose as a drag queen, works as an artistic illustration of Butler's challenge of heterosexuality and subsequent deconstruction of the assumption that sex, gender and sexuality are interrelational and interdependent:

The institution of a compulsory and naturalized heterosexuality requires and regulates gender as a binary relation in which the masculine term is differentiated from a feminine term, and this differentiation is accomplished through the practices of heterosexual desire. The act of differentiating the two oppositional moments of the binary results in a consolidation of each term, the respective internal coherence of sex, gender, and desire. (31)

Framing Chou's film in relation to Butler's notions of performance and performativity, however, neglects the highly localised historicisation of queer desire that may not ascribe to Euro-American notions of gender parody as a 'fluidity of identities that suggests an openness to signification and recontextualization' (188). More precisely, my argument follows that of Rosemary Hennessy who notes that whilst Butler's 'analysis of sexuality and gender undoubtedly has a strong social dimension ... [in that Butler] speaks to and out of feminism and understands the processes that construct sexuality and gender as political', this kind of reconceptualization of embodiment as discursive 'is a strategy that safeguards some presuppositions of its own' (2000, 116). Here, Hennessy notes the apparent equation of the social and the cultural, as the 'problem of identity begins with the premise that identity is only a matter of representation' (2000, 117). Without taking into account the social, historical and cultural conditions and contexts in which a contestation of dominant constructions of sexual identity take place, we run the risk of favouring the *discursive* power map over the *racial* and the *national* contexts that may exclude individuals in participating in the subversion of the heteronormative order. In the case of drag, for instance, Butler notes that this parodic repetition reveals the fabrication of identity as it deconstructs the notions of pre-existent, original gender. If we 'consider gender ... as a *corporeal style*', Butler notes,

‘an “act,” as it were, which is both intentional and performative’ (190, emphasis in original), then gender parody is an act of an act, a copy of a copy, that disavows, by the very notion of a parody, the pre-existence of the original. Whilst this critique of identity politics has paved way for a denaturalization of sex and gender, Hennessy points out that what it missing from Butler’s theorisations is the act of historicisation. As she explains:

Considering historical context is quite different from historicizing. Historicizing does not establish connections only in this local scene of reception—between one discursive practice and another—nor does it leave unaddressed the relationship between the discursive and the nondiscursive. As a mode of reading, historicizing takes place at several levels of analysis—connecting particular conjunctural arrangements in a social formation to more far-reaching ones. (2000, 117)

Following this argument, lest it becomes an act that recasts ‘bourgeois humanist individuality as a more fluid and indeterminate series of subversive bodily acts’ (120–121), drag as a discursive practice needs to be historicised and linked ‘to the social relations that make it possible and in so doing [we need to] situate practices specific to a particular social formation’ (117). As a result, Hennessy argues that ‘a social practice like drag might be historicized in terms of the *conjunctural situation* ... in terms of its place in the *social formation* ... and in terms of the *global relations* that this situation is tied to (2000, 120, my emphasis). Employing this outwards-expanding historicisation—conjuncture/social formation/global relations—is a method by which I wish to investigate Zero Chou’s *tongzhi* trilogy. Her films, I argue, not only offer a renewed understanding of Chou’s significance as a Taiwanese queer auteur; they point towards a new direction in and for New Queer Sinophone Cinema.

Huang and Wang, in their highly informative analysis of Chou’s aforementioned use of Taoist customs, frame *Splendid Float* as ‘giving expression to Judith Butler’s argument’ that ‘in imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself—as well as its contingency’ (2011, 145). Moreover, they note that since *Splendid Float* ‘is concerned with drag and gender performance’, the challenge to heteronormativity (and patriarchy as an extension) arises via the imitative elements in the film. They argue that the ‘performance onstage by the anatomically male performers may seem to be an imitation, but taking into account their gender self-identification as female, we understand that it is when they are

offstage dressed as men that they are involved in the imitation of gender' (145). This argument frames drag in an already global relation, as Huang and Wang's assertions are instructive in terms of drag performance vis-à-vis the notions of a stable sexual identity only when we take into account the specific cultural and historical conditions that facilitate and necessitate the slippages in signification. In other words, by looking closely at the local sites of production and the global discourses of availability and exchange, we are able to conduct a thorough investigation of the processes via which drag is performed and utilised. The authors do note, however, that the stage on which the troupe in *Splendid Float* perform—the electronic flower cars (*dianzi huache*)—is mobile, serving not only as 'a reference' to the funeral custom for which they are designed but also as a symbol of Chou's appropriation of *dianzi huache* 'for use in a tongzhi funeral ceremony' (146). I argue, on the other hand, that the float is not merely a reference but Chou's means of anchoring the drag performance in *Splendid Float* to and within the localised Taiwanese ritual performance of the *dianzi huache* and the *qian wanghun*. Thus, the mobility of the flower car enables it to move out of the urban space of Taipei to the surrounding rural fishing villages. Thus, whilst the flower car emphasises the significance of movement, transience and ephemerality, it remains historically and culturally grounded in its space of production. In the following, I wish to look in more detail into Chou's interlocking of drag as a performance and the native religious ritual in a space that is both global and local, here and there.

Splendid Float begins with a close-up shot of Rose as she looks at herself in the mirror and kisses her own reflection. This, as will become evident later in the film, is the first of three instances in which Rose looks in the mirror before her performance on stage, each representing a pivotal moment in her relationship with Sunny. Before we witness her performance, however, we are presented with a different scene in which Rose and Sunny, both undressed and shown in flickering images, make love at night in the open. Clearly visible in the background are the Tamsui River and the passing cars on the other side of its bank. We soon discover that the film in effect begins in medias res, as Rose's question 'Will you stay here with me?' appears once again after Rose and Sunny's meeting in the fishing village. The question appears to stand in contrast with the transitory elements in the film, as its roads, rivers, floats and seas all point towards a state of ephemerality, removed from a sense of fixedness to a particular time or place. It is at one of these sites that both the sexual

interaction between Rose and Sunny and the drag performances take place. In fact, the Tamsui River bank serves as a carnivalesque site—a Thirdspace—as the Firstspace of Taipei city skyline coincides with the fantastic and extravagant Secondspace of the drag performance on the splendid float. The opening scenes of the film position the bank as a gleaming site surrounded by the overwhelming darkness of the city. Whilst the shot reverse shot technique establishes close a relationship between the audience and the performers, the bright lights on the float create a contrast between the show and the city. Moreover, interspersed between the scenes are shots of the city which, with its neon lights and passing cars, imposes itself on its surroundings. The following scenes in which Rose, the main act, sings a tearful number are interrupted by images of Sunny, challenging any notions of progression and temporal development, as they both foreshadow that which it to come as well as point towards that which has already happened. In other words, besides refusing to exhibit the ‘starting point’ of Rose’s queerness, the film does not attempt to trace the beginnings (or the end) of Rose and Sunny’s relationship. What is presented on screen, however, is the time and space in-between states, where the real and the fantastic appear simultaneously, thwarting expectations of conclusiveness and positioning performativity as a means for creating spaces where queerness becomes not an essence or an identity but a perpetual transitory state. This is not to suggest that the queer subject is relegated to being in a constant state of disappearance. Rather, in *Splendid Float*, the character of Roy/Rose, by the means of his/her position as both a drag queen and a Taoist priest, possesses the ability to occupy both roles, intersecting the performativity of priesthood during the day and of drag during the night. The interconnection of these positions allows Roy/Rose to cross boundaries between the patriarchal realm of priesthood and the marginalised space of drag queens. In fact, the strict policing of the borderline between the two can be seen in the instance where Roy’s mourning for Sunny affects his daytime job. Unable to fulfil his duties, Roy is being teased and taunted by his colleagues who think that if he does not ‘cheer up’ he will become a ‘wailing funeral girl’. Moreover, the funeral director has not only noticed Roy’s sense of melancholy but has kept Roy away from funeral work because the latter ‘cries even louder than the dead person’s family’. Unaware of the relationship between Roy and Sunny, the director confesses that Roy seems like he is ‘mourning a lost lover’ and that he suspects the rumours of Roy being gay may be true. The expectations of playing ‘proper’ gender roles, however, are comically contested by

Roy's cross-dressing aunt, whose reaction to the director's concern that Roy sometimes 'doesn't seem like a man', results in an otherwise solemn enquiry of its own: 'Now, do I look like a man to you?'. It is the element of the performative quotidian, I argue, that highlights Chou's intersection of the conjunctural situation and the social formation. For if drag, as argued by Butler, recasts, indeed transforms, identity as performative, exposing through parody the myth of a stable self, then the shamanic performance—by the means of clothing and cross-dressing—performs a similar task in its crossing of the lines between life and death. However, shamanism in *Splendid Float* is exposed not as a discursive act in a Butlerian sense but as a cultural performance that in fact reinforces patriarchal family lines. This is seen in the scene in which a 'requiem' is held for Sunny. Here, Sunny's body is dressed in traditional robes resembling those of the Qing dynasty, much to the chagrin of the troupe. Upon Lily's comment that he does not wish to wear clothes that would make him look like his 'grandfather' when he dies, Roy notes: 'Tradition is just what it is. There's a reason for it'. Moreover, Roy's father, the family patriarch, reminds Roy that if he is 'going to be a priest', he should 'be dignified', referring to the Taoist priest's role as a protector of the patriarchal symbolic realm from the living to the dead. Therefore, as a Taoist priest, Roy is expected to conduct the *qian wanghun* as a means of 'blessing' the spirit tablet and in that way ensuring the continuation of the family line. Roy's decision to use his position as a priest to perform *fen ling*, however, exposes the constructedness of these very traditions, in that his transversal of the lines between priesthood/drag, patriarchy/queerness, is made possible by the means of a staged performance aided by lustrous garments and props. Here, Roy's expected performance of the *qian wanghun* works as a conjunctural situation in which drag is positioned in its historical context. His decision to perform *fen ling*—by which he infiltrates Sunny's familial lines and 'reclaims' Sunny as a member of his own queer family—places it in a social formation where a 'queer funeral' upsets and works against the patriarchal codes of the *qian wanghun*, defying the custom itself. This is evident more clearly in the concluding scenes of the film, where Sunny's funeral is marked by an official procession during daytime (presided by the family patriarch of Roy's family—his father) and during night-time where the troupe perform a queer funeral service for Sunny's soul. During the former, three female dancers chant a 'soul guiding song' whilst performing elaborate acrobatics, during which Roy/Rose, wearing sunglasses, looks like a displeased grieving widow. As the night falls, however, Rose

stands next to Sunny's ghost (the latter sitting on his own grave) and points towards the float on which a special, this time queer performance is being prepared. Here, the troupe stage their own take on the 'soul guiding song', a gaudy version that queers the patriarchal, heterosexual Taoist funeral tradition. This version, however, with its explicit lack of choreography, its garish display and its apparent lack of 'solemnity' when compared to the daytime funeral scene, appears as the opposite to the 'official' ceremony. Its display of drag comes across as playful subversion of gender identity, invoking Butlerian notions of gender as a discursive and linguistic practice. However, as it has been noted earlier, the troupe's tawdry performance on the van emulates the style of the *dianzi huache*, which typically features skimpily clad young women dancing as a way of entertaining both the gods and the audience (Marshall 2004, 738).¹ In the next chapter, I refer to Yeh and Davis's description of the notion of *song* vis-à-vis May's rendition of Grace Chang's number in the Taiwanese auteur Tsai Ming-liang's 1998 film *The Hole* (*Dong*). Here, the tawdriness of the working-class Taiwanese execution of a musical serves as a means for appropriating the middle-class Sinocentrism that renders these local customs 'vulgar'. Significantly, Yeh and Davis argue in connection with Tsai Ming-liang's oeuvre that his 'astute audiovisual design ... builds an organic world of aesthetic artificiality that can roughly be called Taiwan camp' (2005, 223). The explicit working class element in his films—from women's tacky clothing to non-skilled occupations of the characters—all point to the 'earthy world of *song*' (219, emphasis in original). In terms of camp, the authors note that

Tsai Ming-liang's films are camp because they play a game of black humorous role-playing, planting in the most private seat of human subjectivity seeds of doubt. These germinate in the dark, in fantasy, sexuality, and in moments alone, undermining the distinctions between family life/romance, convictions of personal authenticity, and the whole spatiotemporal structure of Taiwan's working-class life encapsulated in a single word: *song*. (223, emphasis in original)

The camp aesthetics in Tsai's films must therefore not be seen exclusively in terms of the 'modernity syndrome' where alienation, loneliness and the search for intimacy become tropes that assimilate 'Tsai's work within Western modernism, which is not wrong but too general to account for what makes Tsai special, funny, and entertaining' (219).

Rather, the camp in Tsai's films allows the *song* to come forward, intersecting class and ethnicity with sexuality and queerness: 'Ethnicity ... reveals key aspects of *song*. Distinctions are maintained between mainlander and islander, Mandarin and Hokkien dialect, civil servant and merchant, as well as distinct neighborhoods in the city [of Taipei]' (223, emphasis in original). Similarly, in *Splendid Float*, the performance on the float links the 'vulgarity' of the drag performance to the already *song* elements in *dianzi huache*, revealing the close proximity of *song* and camp. Similar to Mak's means of suturing alienating and intimacy, which work along with Rofel's arguments on the importance of problematising the notions of locality and culture, Chou's film points to an element of New Queer Sinophone Cinema that emphasises invocations of culture that are simultaneously real and unreal, local as well as global. For example, the *song* qualities of the *dianzi huache* work in Chou's film as an appropriation of the Taiwanese betel nut beauties (*binlang xishi*)—young, scantily dressed women selling betel nuts in roadside glass booths. Thus, whilst *song* works as working-class appropriation of middle-class sentiments, in *Splendid Float* it serves as an appropriation of an appropriation, a tackiness that queers *song* itself, exposing its heteronormative underpinnings. However, whilst Lily, Lulu and Chubby are garish in their exaggerated mannerisms, Rose's impersonation of a woman—in terms of both body and speech—is striking in its style and elegance. Gone are gaudiness and kitsch; what we witness on stage is a remarkable staging of drag that is at odds with the explicit staginess of a *song* performance. E. K. Tan argues that the drag show in the closing stages of the film appropriates the 'mourning ritual of patriarchal ideology' and challenges 'the repressive nature of heteronormative practices' by 'affirm[ing] the performativity of gender and identity' (2013, 464). Whilst the film does expose the close proximity of the funeral and the drag show, I note that Rose's persona and appearance on the float alongside Lily, Lulu and Chubby complicate drag, in that her performance exposes both the denaturalisation but also a renaturalisation of gender norms. Rose's almost impeccable image of the 'born' woman is more than merely a lively, 'discursive' rebellion. Hennessy notes that 'for many lesbians and gays who have not had the social resources or mobility to insulate themselves from heteronormativity's insistence that sex equals gender, drag has been not so much playful subversion as a painful yearning for authenticity, occasionally with brutally violent results' (2000, 118). If Tsai's films complicate the notions of camp via cultural and class difference, drag in Chou's film is shown as more than a mere discursive exercise

that erases cultural and class difference. This is not to say that drag in her film somehow posits an 'authentic' gender identity. As I have argued throughout the book, New Queer Sinophone Cinema complicates queerness as well as Chineseness, which is here perhaps best exemplified in the character of Rose, in that her 'womanly' persona is not indicative of either a 'gay' identity nor a mere playful stage performance. Amalgamating the images of working-class *song* and middle-class glamour on the same stage, Chou's film exhibits an interplay between, on the one hand, drag as a discursive practice that, in a Butlerian sense, discloses the fabrication of gender through repetition; and on the other, drag as a *song* aesthetic that highlights the significance of the local and the quotidian.

SPIDER LILIES

Whilst *Splendid Float* brought her, amongst others, the award for Best Taiwanese Film at the 2004 Golden Horse Awards, Zero Chou's subsequent film *Spider Lilies*, a box office hit, was pronounced the winner of the prestigious Teddy Award at the 2007 Berlin International Festival. Unlike *Float*, which emphasises the *song* qualities of the working class, the latter takes place in the urban space of Taipei. If in *Splendid Float* the mobile float on the bank of the Tamsui River works as a transient Thirdspace that provincialises Butlerian notions of drag as a discursive practice, in *Spider Lilies*, Chou reworks the Euro-American notions of gender parody by complicating the *T/Po* (butch/femme) binary and introducing another kind of Thirdspace. Here, the Internet and online presence 'drive the plot—misunderstanding is created by the disconnect between the virtual world and the real world' (Huang and Wang 2011, 147). Whilst the melodramatic elements, such as a police investigation, family trauma, and a subsequent amnesia caused by the 921 Earthquake, obstruct and delay the fulfilment of the romance between its two female characters, it is in the space in-between the real and the virtual that these elements come together. This Thirdspace collapses the divisions between the real and the unreal, the past and the present as well as life and death, as it allows the young webcam girl Jade (Rainie Yang) to finally meet again her childhood love Takeko (Isabella Leong), who has forbidden herself to pursue her lesbian desires due to the tragic consequences they ostensibly have caused. Moreover, amnesia and remembrance are persistently juxtaposed, as the death of Takeko's father is relived daily through the spider lilies tattoo on Takeko's arm. As a result, the overwhelming results of the effectuation of

Takeko's queer desires, both in childhood (a natural disaster that causes a death of a parent and the brother's loss of memory) and in adulthood (loss of Ah-Dong's arms and her brother's coma) lead to a constant state of guilt and shame. Thus, Takeko's tattoo itself—a spider lily or *Manjusaka*—becomes a visual means of forgetting and remembering queer desires that have been repressed on the one hand, and her father whom she mourns whilst attempting to jog her brother's memory on the other. Significantly, Takeko's physical and symbolic remembrance and mourning of her father via her tattoo positions her, not unlike Roy in *Splendid Float*, within the patriarchal symbolic realm, as her entire body becomes a visible sign of her father. Not only does Takeko seemingly appear in the image of a *T* (she rides a motorcycle and wears what appear to be men's shoes), her more 'masculine' features are highlighted by her insistence on learning the art of tattooing despite having to remove her father's own tattoo by severing the skin off his arm. This, we are told, was per request of Sensei Yoshi, who was sceptical of women's ability to work as tattoo artists. The tattoo, however, also works as a constant reminder of her feelings of shame, as the family misfortunes and its subsequent disintegration appear to be the consequences of her queer adolescent encounter with her first love. Thus, the purpose of Takeko's tattoo is twofold: it prohibits the pursuit of queer desires whilst underscoring the presence and persistence of those very desires. It is not only Takeko who appears to be infatuated with tattoos. Jade, as a webcam girl, teases her customers by revealing that she too may have a tattoo, using this knowledge to attract more private shows. During the film, however, we learn that it is Takeko whom Jade wishes to entice erotically, thus positioning herself as the *Po* in the *T/Po* binary. Serving as a central motif in the film, tattoos therefore become public physical markings of private characteristics, such as fears, aspirations and desires. In other words, tattoos work as a queer fetish, making them both present and absent. It is this space between the real and unreal that I wish to explore, as it presents a significant intervention into the 'memorial condition', as described by Martin (2010), a structure that positions female same-sex love as an occurrence in the past as a way of circumventing its manifestation in the present. Moreover, as I argued in the previous chapter, the creation of a critical in-between space—a Thirdspace—works as a means for challenging the opposing notions of queerness as either universal or local. Whilst in Mak's film, Mandarin, Cantonese and English coexist in a translocal Thirdspace where the alienation effect frustrates the binary between sexual freedom and local oppressiveness, in *Spider Lilies*,

this space is an online space that destabilises the *T/Po* binary and enables the realisation of queer female desire in the present.

Positioned as a *Po*—a Taiwanese (rough) equivalent to a femme²—Jade's character is defined by her relation to Takeko. If the *Po*, as Chao argues, refers to T's 'wife' or her 'feminine sexual partner' (2002, 369), her doll-like appearance in Chou's film consolidates her image as passive and feminine, seen most visibly in her performance as a sweet, innocent girl whose exaggerated feminine traits place her somewhere at the beginning of her adolescent years. Significantly, Jade's appearance is reminiscent of the Japanese style of *bishōjo* (beautiful young girl)—a female appropriation of the *bishōnen* (beautiful boys)—a particular way of depicting male characters in manga. According to Orbaugh, *bishōnen* 'are uniformly svelte, with enormous eyes and features recognisably male, but nearly as delicate and beautiful as those of the depiction of female characters' (2002, 45). These narrative depictions, Orbaugh notes, 'often involve a homo-erotic romance between these beautiful young men'. In the Introduction, I note Yonfan's 1998 feature *Bishōnen* (*Mei shaonian zhi lian*) as one example of queer visibility in the 1990s Hong Kong cinema. As its name suggests, the film's storyline, its 'visuals and the almost angelic beauty of the two lead actors ... [come] across quite explicitly as a cinematic rendition of a particular genre of *shōjo manga* (comics read by and targeting teenage girls and young women) in Japan ... which revolve around homoerotic and/or homosexual attraction between adolescent males or young men' (Dasgupta 2006, 56, emphasis in original). The incorporation of the stylistic elements of the *shōjo manga*, however, does not suggest that Yonfan's film is somehow a 'translation' of the Japanese original. Emphasising the cultural flows that cascade not from *within* but rather *towards* the traditional centres of 'modernity', Dasgupta argues that Yonfan's film is not a case of 'cultural borrowing and adaptation' (2006, 56) but an example of the 'ways in which dynamics of transnational and intra-regional popular culture flows intertwine with configurations of emergent 'Queer(N) Asian' sexualities' (2006, 57). Adaptation, we may argue, necessitates the existence of the original, however fraught that term may be. In the case of *Bishōnen*, Dasgupta argues, there is no such original, as the *manga* version of Yonfan's film is in fact an adaptation itself:

There is, in fact, a Japanese *manga* version of *Bishōnen*, written by Kido Sakura, the storyline of which is almost identical to that of the film ... However, interestingly the Japanese *shōjo manga* version came *after* the film

had been produced, released and shown in Japan (where it did comparatively well within specific audiences). There was, in fact, no *shōjo manga-style* text upon which the film was based. The original writer of *Bishōnen* was in fact Yonfan himself. (2006, 67, emphasis in original)

What appears as a cultural flow that has emanated from Japan and reached the cultural space of Hong Kong—replicating the dichotomies of centre and periphery, North and South, East and West—is shown to be a vector that is not only incorrect but also increasingly complex. In fact, it is Hong Kong that can be said to serve as a primary influence on the construction Sakura's *manga*. As Dasgupta argues, 'the Japanese *manga* adaptation of *Bishōnen* does not just reproduce the story in the film. Rather, it quite firmly situates the *manga* within the framework of Hong Kong films and male sex symbols associated with Hong Kong films' (2006, 69, emphasis in original). This insight, apart from complicating and challenging the ideas of the directions of cultural flows within the Japan–Hong Kong trajectory, deterritorialises the film's geography and opens it up to multiple and simultaneous anchoring within the region. This is significant for our investigations of New Queer Sinophone Cinema, particularly in terms of the effect of various cultural flows on the positioning of Sinophone queerness. The aforementioned geographical and cultural re- and de-attachment complicates the narratives of origins, pointing towards a transnational queer Asian connectedness that not only 'acknowledges the incommensurabilities of narrations mapped by the irreversible crossings of the marginal spaces' but also 'produces an identity that disrupts the post-Stonewall, Anglo-Saxon model of coming out as a narration of sexual identity' (Yue 2000, 252, 253). Whilst Yue's notion of the 'Queer(N)Asian' sexualities includes the production of identities through hyperbole—'a practice [that] exposes the (Asian gay and lesbian) stereotype by turning the object into the subject in its moment of (queer and Asian) self-articulation' (2000, 253)—the transnational and intraregional flows between Japan and Hong Kong in *Bishōnen* point towards the need for reconceptualising Sinophone queerness, one that is both at the centre as well as the periphery of cultural flows in the Asian region.

In the case of Taiwan, Martin argues that its 'extremely internationalized economy and its high degree of integration into global cultural and media flows has persistent effects at the level of everyday life: One thinks, for example, of the soaring rates of consumption of international satellite and cable TV and Hollywood and Hong Kong cinema' (2003, 28).

Martin notes that Taiwan's immersion and presence in the regional and global economies has a profound effect on the *tongzhi* cultures and their consumption—from the mobility in the form of 'gay tourism' in regional centres of gay culture to local consumption of gay and lesbian cultures from other parts of the world. At the same time, however, she notes that 'the everyday life practices of *tongzhi* in Taiwan are also shaped by traffic with cultural forms originating elsewhere in the region' (2003, 29, emphasis in original). What she refers to are the intraregional popular culture flows that are created and consumed within the Japan–Hong Kong–Taiwan triad, such as the aforementioned Yonfan feature or the Japanese elements in Chou's film. 'For instance', Martin notes, 'the Japanese *manga* comics (*manhua*) that are extensively translated into Chinese and widely read by Taiwanese teenagers include numerous series of *bishonen* manga' (2003, 29, emphasis in original). The confluence of both East Asian and 'Western' aesthetics in the production and consumption of queer and *tongzhi* cultures in Taiwan results in a context that is 'as much that of the regional Asia-Pacific as it is that of the "global (Euro-American) gay"'. Thus, on one level, the inclusion in *Spider Lilies* of the elements of the *bishonen*—in the form of the female *bishōjo*—speaks to the significance of the intraregional popular culture flows. On the other, it points to the intricate configurations of 'Queer(N)Asian' sexualities, in that the 'bearer' of the *bishōjo* image is a Taiwanese lesbian who performs online pornography for the benefit of her heterosexual and homosexual viewers. This elaborate configuration is exactly that which is 'new' in New Queer Sinophone Cinema, as it positions Sinophone queerness in a wider transnational and translocal Thirdspace, calling into question the traditional understanding of the movements and flows of popular and cinematic culture in the Japan–Hong Kong–Taiwan triad. In the following section, I will take a closer look at the character of Jade who takes on the image of a *bishōjo* as a way of not only subverting the male heterosexual gaze but also nuancing Judith Butler's notions of gender performativity as more than merely a discursive practice.

In their investigation of pornographic preferences in a selection of heterosexual men in Taiwan, Wong and Yau argue that 'Taiwanese men identify more with Japanese especially *bishōjo* AVs than other varieties of pornography because the narrative structure of *bishōjo* AVs resembles the discursively mediated "real" sex of Taiwanese men' (2012, 413, emphasis in original). If the 'sexual script', as a guideline for 'appropriate' sexual behaviour, for men is based on the notion that 'the male sex is

“animal”-like, biological, physical’, the result is the idea that ‘men must lead the sex by taking the initiative as well as taking charge of the act, for if they “need” sex, it is “natural” that they initiate and guide the sex and not the reverse’ (417). By contrast, if the script dictates that men are the active players, ‘it follows that women must be “passive” ... where passivity means that women need not actively pursue sex ... [and] given that women do not ‘need’ sex in the first place, there is no need for them to be active in the actual sex’ (418). The authors note that the idea of the sexual script, when applied to Taiwanese women, ‘can be further understood through the Chinese concept of “*shun qing*” or simply “*shun*”, which still exerts a strong cultural sway over Taiwan and Hong Kong’ (418, emphasis in original). Whilst the *shun qing* ‘is commonly referred to a woman who is moral, naive, pure, well bred, wholesome’, this becomes only a part of the storyline, in that she is not expected to remain so for the rest of the film. In fact, whilst the man initiates the sexual arousal with the initially passive woman, she is expected to transform into a sexually active partner. By the means of *tiaojiao* the man receives a sense of achievement in ‘transforming the sexually uninvolved lady into a sexually active partner, who enjoys sex and attains orgasm, is arguably even more sexually pleasurable for men than the physical penetration’ (419). Arguing that the transformation from an innocent/inexperienced woman into a sexually confident woman is that which appears as ‘real’ to their informants, Wong and Yau contend that the ‘so-called “real” sex resembles very much the narrative structure of Japanese *bishōjo* AV, which in turn accounts for Taiwanese men’s preference for *bishōjo* AVs’ (2012, 421, emphasis in original). This structure, in which the cute girl-next-door women—dressed in school girl uniforms and other ‘innocent’ looking outfits—go from being a recipient to a desiring women—all with the encouragement and stimulation of the male character—‘bears a striking similarity to the sexual script of Taiwanese men’ (431).

Whilst these images of the *bishōjo* operate within the heterosexual matrix, where the ‘cultural assumptions regarding the relative status of men and women and the binary relation of gender itself’ (Butler 62) fuel the sex-determining assumptions, what is palpable is that the notion of the *shun qing* is highly unstable. For, as Wong and Yau note, ‘a libidinous woman is never positively evaluated in Taiwan and Hong Kong, though she might be sexually desired by men’. Thus, a woman who is active on her own accord and does not indulge in the role-play of the *tiaojiao*, one who is ‘sexually demanding’, is ‘described as “*yin jian*”. ‘*Yin*

refers to excessiveness of sexual desire while ‘*jian*’ denotes vulgar, base, mean, degraded and cheap’ (418, emphasis in original). Therefore, the sexual script, in which a heterosexual woman, with the means of the *tiao-jiao*, goes from a *shun qing* to a sexually demanding partner, testifies to the indeterminacy and instability of these very sexed and gendered identities. It reveals the fragility of the heterosexual man’s sense of maleness, as this itself depends on the female’s performance as a *shun qing*. If the image of the *bishōjo*, which was first introduced to Taiwan in the shape of *manga* in the 1980s, has over decades been appropriated and consigned to the realm of the heterosexual male gaze and phallocentric imagination, its use in *Spider Lilies* is twofold. Whilst Jade takes on the image of the *bishōjo* to seduce online viewers as a way of earning money, she also reverts it to its *bishōnen* origins, as the person she attempts to seduce is her lesbian love Takeko. In other words, the *bishōjo* serves here as both a female appropriation of homoerotic romances between young men as well as an unmasking of the heterosexual male fantasies of next-door virgins who need guidance (*tiao-jiao*) towards their sexual awakening. In this online space, Jade appears to employ Butlerian notions of gender performativity, as her resignification of the normative signs that reiterate heterosexual hegemony expose the ambiguity of very identificatory processes that consolidate the heterosexual matrix. However, I wish to argue that Jade’s online performance is more than a discursive/citational practice—a ‘contentious practice of “queerness”’—which can be viewed as ‘not only as an example of citational politics, but as a specific reworking of abjection into political agency that might explain why “citationality” has contemporary political promise’ (Butler 1993, 21). Although Butler sees in citationality the potential for a transformation from abjection of non-sanctioned gendered/sexed into potential for political agency, this ‘radical resignification of the symbolic domain’ occurs in *Spider Lilies* in a Thirdspace which is historicised in its conjunctural, social and global formations. In other words, Jade’s online persona is more than merely a concealment of an ‘unrevealed’ secret, i.e. her queerness; Chou uses the intraregional cultural signifier of the *bishōjo* in order to expose and re-queue the phallocentric commodification of the *shun qing* as an ideal image of the Taiwanese female subjectivity. For if the Jade’s innocent appearance in her online shows is historicised as the popular cultural flows of the *bishōjo*, its social formation is its use in pornography as a means for affirming the male sense of dominance and achievement in seducing and transforming the once-Japanese manga image to localised image of the *shun qing*. Jade’s performance as a *shun qing* mesmerises

David the policeman (who goes under the undercover name of Silence) whose objective is to record her performance for his criminal evidence against her. Breaking his commitment to his employer by postponing and divulging the time of the upcoming raid, the policeman—as a symbolic bearer and protector of patriarchy—is hereby revealed as a voyeur whose actions in fact resemble those of the *tiaojiao* (he also inquires about Jade’s ‘first time’). Unlike Takeko’s sense of shame of her queer desires, Jade is here presented as the active participant in the exposure of the slippages/ambiguities/failures of gender identification. In addition, if Jade is positioned as a *Po*, she challenges this characterisation by actively pursuing her queer desires and simultaneously exposing the instabilities of the heterosexual matrix. Whilst Takeko is hesitant in her pursuit of queer desire—in fact, her self-prohibition works as self-effacement—Jade is adamant about exposing the hypocrisy of the moral derision she received from her customers. In their analysis of the film, Huang and Wang note that ‘Jade is not a passive subject put on display but rather an agent who manipulates the viewer’s desire by what she says and how she moves. Indeed, Jade can go offline whenever she likes: she can sever the viewer’s connection to the object of his desire at her whim’ (2011, 147). Moreover, refusing to be shamed by the policeman, Jade turns the accusatory table by invoking the false sense of superiority when being concealed behind a screen. Her schoolgirl performance online is a renewed articulation of the *bishōjo*, in that it transforms the sense of shame into a sense of empowerment. By acting out her ‘child persona’, she reworks the policeman’s desires (for a heterosexual female body as well as the virginal *shun qing*) by emphasising her (lesbian) body whilst indulging in childhood memories of her then-emerging lesbian desires. Thus, through the enactment of the hyperbolic femininity in the image of the *bishōjo*, Jade in fact re-enacts her lesbianism, turning the feelings of abandonment and shame into an active pursuit of her lesbian lover (as she hopes to entice Takeko). Here, Jade takes on the excessively feminised image and dispels any preconceived notions of *Po* as the passive counterpart to the more active *T* who, in *Spider Lilies*, is immobilised by her feeling of lesbian shame.

QUEERING THE TABULA RASA

If Jade re-articulates the image of the *bishōjo*—in effect, re-positioning it back to its queer origins of the *bishōnen*—she does this by situating it within the framework of Taiwanese online space. This re-territorialisation,

akin to Yonfan's *Bishōnen*, delinks the image of the *bishōjo* from the territory of Japan and positions Chou's film at the intersection of the intra-regional popular culture flows that are created and consumed within the Japan–Taiwan dyad. As a way of emphasising this new approach in New Queer Sinophone Cinema, I would like here to introduce one of the more prominent Japanese cultural texts that contain the motif of tattooing. In Yoichi Takabayashi's 1982 film *Irezumi: Spirit of Tattoo* (*Sekka Tomurai Zashi*), the main character Akane, as a way of satisfying the fetish of her lover Fujeda, sees a master tattooist Kyogoro Yamato in order to get a full back tattoo. Kyogoro employs his male apprentice Harutsune to make love to Akane during the process as a way of relieving pain. Subsequent to the death of the renowned artist later on in the story, Akane returns to his home and carries out his wish of having a 'final cut' made by his daughter Katsuko. Lucy Fischer notes that in Takabayashi's film 'issues are raised around the female body as *tabula rasa*, and questions are entertained about the intersection of authorship, eroticism, fetishism, and gender politics' (2013, 166, emphasis in original). Emphasising the cultural fascination of and with the tattoo, Fischer argues that it becomes a mark of an obsession of the male characters in the film: 'Clearly, both Fujeda and Kyogoro have (what we would term) a "fetish" for tattooed women. Only through the mediation of the tattoo is a female made sexually desirable to them' (2013, 169). Similarly, in *Spider Lilies*, the tattoo works as an ambivalent fetish, in that it symbolises Jade's queer desires as well as Takeko's continuation of the patriarchal family lines. Both here and there, the tattoo becomes an indicator of obsession, but in Chou's film, it is turned into a queer marker that enables the pursuit of desires that have been consigned to the past via the 'memorial condition'. Thus, what appears as an impossible goal of unfastening homoerotic desires from the past in the form of the memorialising gaze, is made imaginable by reconfiguring the fetish of the tattoo not as that which is unattainable (a fantasy) but that which is possible in the queer present.

Equally important, perhaps, is Chou's 'talking back' to Takabayashi's film. Whilst *Spider Lilies* is a queer story between two female characters who unite both in an online space and in a tattoo parlour, *Irezumi*, despite portraying the life of its main female character, is a highly masculinised and patriarchal narrative. Not only is Akane a 'victim' of Fujeda's desires and fetishes, she is also the object of Kyogoro's artistry and ultimately a sexual partner of Harutsune. In addition, the narrative begins with a flashback, in which Kyogoro posthumously speaks to Akane, expressing his gratitude

for her fulfilling his last wish. Thus, the story is narrated by a patriarch well after his death, eliminating any possibility Akane taking over the narrative. Moreover, the film presents a heteronormative framework in which sadism and masochism are clearly positioned as a relationship of and between the male and the female. The expression on Akane's face, as she is being tattooed and penetrated, is one of agony and delight. Similarly, the camera explicitly shows Kyogoro's enjoyment in both seeing 'skin like snow' as well as once again having the opportunity to place his mark on it. This heterosexual configuration of male sadism and female masochism, Fischer argues, points directly to one of the main arguments in the notion of *écriture féminine* as argued by Hélène Cixous, Monique Wittig and Luce Irigaray amongst others. The exercise of 'writing the female body', as it is exhibited in *Irezumi*, literalises the French feminist project of exposing the inscriptions of the feminine body in text and language, as Akane's body is being imprinted by a male with a portrait of another female—'Lady Tachibana', painted by Utaway Kuniyoshi. As Fischer notes, 'in possessing Akane, Fujeda not only collects a female but an artwork. The gorgeous, colored portrait on her back also literalizes the sense of woman as decorative object; here she is layered with yet a second-order level of ornamentation' (2013, 172–173). The writing of and on the woman's body in *Irezumi*—along with the overarching flashback of the master tattooist—exhibits narration as solely a male privilege. As Kyogoro tells the story of his younger years, during which he became obsessed with tattoos (after an encounter with a tattooed prostitute), as well as that of his apprenticeship with Atsutarō Shimizu, during which he developed his own style, we realise that it is Kyogoro, with all his desires, wishes and aspirations, who enjoys the privilege of narration. More precisely, it is the Oedipal conflict between, on the one hand, Kyogoro and Shimizu, and on the other, Kyogoro and Harutsune, that stands as the focal point of the narrative. Akane, in this case, serves merely as a battle ground—a canvas—on which this patriarchal conflict needs to be resolved. In Chou's film, however, the tattoo does not stand as a symbol of the heterosexual dynamic of the relationship between male sadism and female masochism. In fact, it is Ah-Dong who, despite his wishes to have knives, blades and ghost skulls tattooed on his arms (which he uses to bully other men), experiences most pain during the tattooing process (Takeko notes that he is 'chicken-hearted'). Jade, on the other hand, is an active pursuer of a tattoo. Initially choosing the design of the spider lily which she notices in the tattoo parlour, Jade attempts to jog Takeko's memory of their queer past.

Upon being reminded that being tattooed is a painful experience, Takeko remarks that ‘boys are usually more afraid of pain than girls’, which is seen later in the film as Ah-dong wallows in pain whilst Jade appears not be affected by it. Initially insisting on the same tattoo as Takeko, Jade agrees to a jasmine flower tattoo, which Takeko draws for her. Being the name of the song she used to sing to Jade when they were young—in effect revealing Takeko’s recollection of her past desires—Jade takes this gesture as an acknowledgment of those desires. Thus, instead of serving as a point in which the heterosexual dynamic of male sadism and female masochism is hinged, the tattoo here is turned into a symbol of not only female agency but also of queer desire and eroticism. Whilst the character of Takeko, as I argued earlier, appears as an heir to her family’s patriarchal lines, her queer partner Jade actively disrupts this lineage by forcing Takeko to remember and embrace her traumatic past and in the process reveal the history of her tattoo. The tattoo is hereby transformed from an ambivalent fetish to a material symbol of lesbian desires. By positioning Jade as an active *Po*, Chou unlocks both the homoerotic desires from the past as well as the co-dependence of the *T/Po* binary. This, in turn, enables a realisation of queer female desire in the present outside of the memorialising gaze as well as a reconfiguration of the gender identification in terms of passivity/activity of lesbian partners (Figs. 4.1 and 4.2).



Fig. 4.1 Akane’s expression of both pain and pleasure, *Irezumi*



Fig. 4.2 Kyogoro, the master tattooist, performing his art, *Irezumi*

Significantly, Chou's film does not only talk back to the heterosexual dynamics of Takabayashi's film. My discussion of the alienation effect in Mak's *Butterfly* in the previous chapter was based on the notions that the film, as part of New Queer Sinophone Cinema, coalesces familiarity and estrangement in a queer Thirdspace. I argued that the film takes on Rofel's call for a reconfiguration of the concepts of culture and complements it with Abbas's arguments on the problems of the act of looking. This way both the viewer and the characters themselves appear under scrutiny, disallowing any easy identification between the viewer and the characters. Here, I argue that *Spider Lilies* expands this element of New Queer Sinophone Cinema, in that the film employs a similar tactic, where distancing and the creation of an in-between space serve as a critique of not only the relationship between spectator and character but also that of a film and filmmaker. I already mentioned Huang and Wang's emphasis on the agency in the character of Jade who, by going offline whenever she so chooses, severs the connection between herself and her viewers, thus defying her role as a hapless victim. Here, I add that placement of Chou's camera during Jade's webcasts creates another version of the alienation effect, working in effect as a mirror to the same audience who watch her film. As the film begins, the movement of the camera follows closely that of Jade as she dances in an 'erotic' fashion, emphasising her bare legs and heavily glossed lips. As she continues to titillate her viewers, she looks directly into the camera, simultaneously addressing both her customs and us as the

viewers. The effect of this self-reflexivity, according to Huang and Wang, is that it 'direct[s] its critique at the film's audience: the audience is made aware that as it watches *Spider Lilies* it also watches Jade's webcam girl broadcasts. The camera takes the point of view of Jade's customers, putting Jade in front of Zero Chou's camera, facing it, looking straight at the film's audience' (2011, 147, emphasis in original). The element of a performance and staging is also seen not only in Jade's grandmother walking into the frame and breaking the (so-called) illusion, but also in the Chou's camera showing Jade's point-of-view, as she lies on the bed and looks up towards the ceiling. Here, we see the dilapidated state of her room, which stands in contrast to the constructed glittering image of the *bishōjo*. This is particularly significant, in that it works as a negation of Silence's accusation that she is 'living in dreams', whilst the flashbacks to the 921 Earthquake attest to the realities of this very situation. Chou's intention here is to engage 'the audience to reflect critically on the activity of looking'—thus, Jade's rebuke (of Silence) for urging her to quit works as a criticism of 'society for rarely making the consumer of webcam girl images the objects of its moral criticism' (147). In addition, the authors note, since Jade's 'erotic performances are intended to arouse Takeko, who is a woman', this misunderstanding and misdirection 'upsets the uniformity of gender identification and sexual desire among customers for Internet pornography' (147–148). As a consequence, they argue, 'this self-reflexive device disrupts the structures of Taiwan's male-centered Internet visual culture (148). Whilst the reversal of the camera does serve as a critique the male gaze, I argue that the alienation effect in Chou's film adds to this criticism by creating a distance between the film and the filmmaker herself.

If, as I contested earlier, Chou's film talks back to the male gaze of Takabayashi's film—and patriarchal cinema in particular—it also makes a more general comment on the relationship between body and cinema. For, if *Irezumi* is a prime example of the male gaze, where the woman's body serves as a canvas for the resolution of a male conflict, the film itself attempts to refute this claim by offering its own version of female resistance against this very oppressive patriarchy. Not only does Akane begin to enjoy the pain inflicted on her by Kyogoro and Harutsune (as noted earlier), she begins to oppose Fujeda by not only preventing him from witnessing the tattooing process but also by embarrassing him in public by taking off her clothes in an attempt to publicly reveal her tattoo, much to Fujeda's dismay and discomfort. Perhaps most significant is Akane's answer to Kyogoro's question as to whether she is ready for such a tattoo:

‘Yes. I don’t want to be defeated. My life is what I have chosen. I don’t want to lose’, she replies. Here, we witness a sense of rebellion and defiance in her acceptance of Fujeda’s request. As she proceeds with the tattoo, Akane becomes more self-consciously defiant—something she even confesses to Fujeda: ‘I think I’ve changed since I began being tattooed’. Although Akane’s ostensible defiance against patriarchy would serve as a mechanism that would assuage the film’s masculine narrative, she nonetheless proceeds with getting the additional ‘secret’ tattoo, performed by Harutsune, as well as fulfilling Kyogoro’s last wishes. Thus, what appears as defiance and opposition is, in fact, inadequate a means for subverting the dominant male, patriarchal narrative. Ultimately, it is the female body that serves a blank paper for the narration of several male narratives, which we can link to Laura Mulvey’s rejection of classical form, a seminal work that challenges (male) spectatorship and the visual pleasure derived thereof. As a consequence, Fischer argues that apart from highlighting the ‘questions of woman and the *corpus*, it [*Irezumi*] can be imagined as foregrounding questions of body and cinema. For upon thought, there are parallels not only between the processes of tattooing and writing, but between it and filmmaking’ (2013, 177, emphasis in original). What Fischer refers to are the similarities between creating an image on a body and on a screen:

Both tattooing and traditional filmmaking involve the creation of an image through a process of cutting—one of skin, the other of celluloid. Both can be seen to involve the “burning in” of a picture—tattooing, through the insertion of ink and needles; film, through the exposure of photographic material to light. Both are “alive”—the tattoo through its embodiment on a human being, the cinema through its animated illusions. (2013, 177)

Whilst this linkage between the body and the screen posits questions about gender and filmmaking, when we consider the above quotation in relation to Takabayashi’s film, what becomes apparent is that ‘when theorists have imagined parallels between screen and body, they have done so around the figure of woman’ (177). Here, the body and the woman become synonymous, where the act of tattooing and the act of filmmaking are positioned as male undertakings. Although this argumentation may be analogous to *écriture féminine*, I argue that *Spider Lilies* complicates this view. If the films discussed in this book form New Queer Sinophone Cinema’s self-reflexive and self-critiquing view of only queerness and Chineseness but also (queer) spectatorship, then *Spider Lilies* takes this

notion even further, as the film critiques not only the male gaze, as I have argued earlier, but also the very act of filmmaking itself. Whilst Jade's striptease in the opening scenes corresponds to Mulvey's notions of a traditional woman in cinema as either an erotic object for the characters or an erotic object for the spectator, her active pursuit of Takeko and rebuke of Silence defies this view. In addition, Jade's performance in front of the camera, following Mulvey's argument, 'allows the two looks to be unified technically without any apparent break in the diegesis', and as she performs within the narrative, 'the gaze of the spectator and that of the male characters in the film are neatly combined without breaking narrative verisimilitude' (1999, 838). However, as I have shown earlier, Jade's direct address to the spectator as well as her acting as a *bishōjo* complicates the conflation of the male character and the male spectator, as it unmasks this very synthesis of heterosexuality and maleness. In addition, the 'visual pleasure' of the erotic encounter between Jade and Takeko is interspersed by the images of Ah-Dong and his newly found strength in his tattoos and his subsequent bullying. Here, the erotic encounter between the women results in a coma and a severing of limbs, which further strengthens Takeko's feelings of guilt, as her brother reproaches her for failing to take care of him and her father accuses her of producing 'fake' tattoos. However, what ensues is a hallucinatory sequence, in which Takeko walks in a field of *Manjusakas* trampling on the flowers, as her brother suddenly regains consciousness. Here, the very roots (indeed tattoos) of Takeko's feelings of shame caused by the accusations of abandonment by the male family figures are exposed as 'false', as they fail to jog Ching's memory as well as make Ah-Dong stronger. The tattoo as a symbol of male creativity and female passivity is hereby reworked into a queer symbol of remembrance and desire, whilst the self-reflexivity of Jade's online performance challenges Mulvey's notions of 'to-be-looked-at-ness' of women in cinema (837, emphasis in original). Thus, whilst *Spider Lilies* reworks the heterosexual dynamic of the act of tattooing as a means of talking back to Takabayashi's film, it also advances one of the defining elements of New Queer Sinophone Cinema—self-reflexivity. Here, the self-conscious use of direct address to the spectator defies previous formulations of the woman's position in traditional cinema as "‘authored’ by a man’ and ‘posed before the screen as spectacle’ (Fischer 2013, 178). In the following section, I look at the final instalment of Chou's trilogy which offers an even more nuanced reflection on New Queer Sinophone Cinema.

DRIFTING FLOWERS

Only a year after her commercial success with the lesbian-themed *Spider Lilies*, Chou released the third instalment of her *tongzhi* trilogy. *Drifting Flowers*, a film that follows several Taiwanese women and one man, continues to explore the notions of authorship and cinema, as it excavates and addresses several decades of Taiwan's LGBT histories and cultures. Whilst *Spider Lilies* received international praise for its portrayal of the urban lesbian romance, the reviews of her latter film were less favourable. In his review for *Variety* at the 2008 Berlin Film Festival, Derek Elley notes that the film 'moseys along for 90-odd minutes, seemingly content to speak largely in lesbian clichés'. In particular, Elley summarises the film as being 'centered on a group of femmes struggling with that old gay chestnut, "identity," three-parter looks to bounce into fest dates on the strength of Chou's niche success with last year's "Spider Lilies"'. Here, the reviewer positions the film as not only a recognisable product of its successful lesbian director but also an expected one, in which 'femmes' go through hardships on their way to full realisation of their lesbian identity. Perhaps even more significant are Elley's considerations as to the reasons behind the film's apparent shortcomings: 'But without Asian name leads behaving transgressively onscreen this time, theatrical biz looks far weaker, especially in the East'. Here, the lack of 'transgressive' behaviour in the 'East' is positioned—in the image of modern Euro-American lesbian and gay narratives of identity and gay visibility—as a weakness in need of rectification. Rather than identifying additional instances where Chou's film is positioned in the impossible space between cliché (conforming to already established notions of sexual identity) and insufficiency (aspiring towards recognised standards of plot development and closure), I argue that *Drifting Flowers* employs and eschews both, as it challenges both Western transgender tropes as well as linear coming out narratives. By employing and reworking the memorial condition and the tomboy melodrama as noted by Martin, Chou's film makes a signification contribution to queer Sinophone cinema that defies the global gay narratives of identity formation. Significantly, I argue that Chou positions herself—via inter- and intratextual elements—as a *female* queer auteur, distancing herself from her already-established male counterparts and pointing towards a new turn in not only New Queer Sinophone Cinema but perhaps also in queer cinema in a more global context.

Employing Judith Halberstam's notions of transgender as relationality—'it describes not simply an identity but a relation between people, within a community, or within intimate bonds' (2005, 49)—Leung argues that the films of queer auteurs such as Zero Chou 'especially warrant such an approach as they explore how relational bonds, particularly between queer subjects, can be transformed by unexpected modes of gender presentation and recognition' (2012b, 186). In regards to *Drifting Flowers*, Leung notes that 'while there are no transgender-identified characters per se in the film, locating trans relationality amongst its characters illuminates the film's nuanced and highly original treatment of queer friendship' (2012, 192). Taking cue from Leung, I look not at friendship or transgender but queer female desires in the film, without consigning these to either identity politics or a postidentity 'liberal' order. Rather, looking at queer desire and affinity in terms of relationality allows for a more nuanced investigation of queer Sinophone cinema, where time and space are re-worked and re-imagined without dismissing the local and the gendered. The film, a triptych of the interlinked stories of Diego, Jing and Lily, tells of lesbian and queer desires that are neither romanticised nor victimised. Before the first part entitled 'May' begins, we are introduced in the coda to some of the film's motifs, such as railways and trains traveling through tunnels. Significantly, the unsteady camera of the opening scenes parallels not only the ramifications of Alzheimer's Disease from which Lily suffers but also its effects on our memory and the perception of time, as we realise later on that these events in fact occur later in the film's timeframe. Thus, the film 'in effect' begins with the second part entitled 'Lily' (which features similar scenes), defying a clear timeline and introducing the notion of a warped temporality, which we have seen in other films mentioned in this book. This is not to say that the film's narrative structure is merely non-linear; although some of the characters from each of the three parts appear elsewhere, the timeline does not indicate a logical temporal development. Whilst it appears that the first part acts as a prologue to the second—May, for instance, goes from being a child to an adolescent—the third part serves as a prologue to the first, as we find the young Diego working for her family's puppet theatre business in the 1960s. However, upon a closer inspection, we realise that in the final coda, in which all three female characters appear, Lily's ageing does not correspond to that of May or Diego. In other words, whilst May's development from a child to an adolescent covers a timespan of approximately ten years, this period is significantly longer in the character of Lily. Likewise, Diego,

who stands on the train with her accordion appears to be the same age as when May saw her for the first time as a child. As in Yan Yan Mak's film, which I investigated in the previous chapter, where parallel scenes form a connection between two temporalities (in effect historicising the present), the warped temporality in *Drifting Flowers* forecloses a simplistic viewing of the film as offering a historical development of queer cultures in Taiwan. For instance, Huang and Wang note that the third story 'Diego' is 'about how the *tie* T Diego comes to realize who she is. ... Diego's experiences as she comes of age can be taken to represent the collective memories of the generation of butch lesbians who grew up in Taiwan in the 1960s' (2011, 149–150, emphasis in original). Although the film, particularly in the final story, does indeed portray specificities of local contexts, such as the puppet theatre in Kaohsiung, these elements do not always remain grounded in their own temporal contexts. Likewise, I argue that Diego's coming of age must be not be seen solely as a narrative of development from the past to the present. Rather, as I argued in the previous chapter, the temporal warping in New Queer Sinophone Cinema presents and imagines queer relations in/from not only the past but also those in the future.

I mention once again Yan Yan Mak's film for its memorial gaze—a preclusion of a lesbian experience in the present by the means of positioning it in the past—as it complicates the modern female homoerotic representation. This is done not only by disassociating the viewer from the characters but also by offering a complex representation of the relationship between the past and the present. Whilst Chou's film employs similar tactics, it also works with another element identified by Martin: the tomboy melodrama. 'Although a majority of [Sinophone] mass-cultural representations [of women's same-sex relations] focus on normatively feminine protagonists, nonetheless in both popular representations and self-understandings on the part of the self-identifying lesbians in China, Taiwan and Hong Kong today, the gendered distinction between masculine and feminine women ... is central' (Martin 2010, 13). We were witness to this distinction and its subsequent reworking in Chou's earlier film, *Spider Lilies*, where the notions of passivity/activity are challenged by Jade's pursuit of Takeko. In terms of the memorial mode, however, Martin notes that the latter category—that of 'temporary' same-sex love of feminine women—overwhelmingly outnumbers the cultural representations of 'permanent lesbianism' of masculine women (tomboys). Significantly, whilst the contemporary Chinese tomboy narrative typically comes in the shape of a 'social problem melodrama', it is at odds with the feminine (protagonist's)

memorial narrative. Therefore, as a particular social problem genre, the tomboy narrative 'is held at a greater distance than the schoolgirl romance from sexual and gender normativity' (14). This distancing, Martin notes, precludes identification with the tomboy, or the 'victim-hero' (104), as we the readers/viewers are encouraged to take a sympathetic, onlooker view, situated within the sphere of normativity. Moreover, the temporality of the tomboy is that of 'no-future'. Whilst the feminine protagonist's future has conventionally been defined as ending in a heterosexual marriage (something that Yan Yan Mak's film defies), the tomboy's future 'has been strictly unimaginable—a kind of blank space in the popular imaginary, commonly dealt with by the most expeditious means of having tomboy protagonists die young' (Martin 2010, 112). In *Drifting Flowers*, we find elements of both schoolgirl romance as well as the tomboy melodrama. Where Chou's film differs, however, is in its positioning of Diego, for although the viewer is encouraged to sympathise with the tomboy, her same-sex attraction does not become a scourge of her tragic existence and an ultimate and unavoidable end. In fact, not only does Diego not face a tragic death; we are aware—due to the film's chronology—that she will ultimately partner with Jing. More significantly, perhaps, she serves as a lynchpin of the three stories, as her character has a bearing on May's, Lily's and Yen's life. Similar to Mak's tactics of creating a distance between the viewer and the characters—echoing Abbas's arguments on the problematisation of the act of looking—Chou does not privilege either the inside or the outside view of Diego. For instance, in 'May', the optical point of view of that of the eponymous girl, who is enamoured and ultimately falls in love with her sister's accordion player. In 'Diego', we are privy to the familial and societal pressures exerted onto Diego, whilst the 'Lily' section hardly features her at all. Yet in each instance, Diego is present not as a 'victim-hero' but as a friend and a lesbian who has had an impact and continues to effect both Yen and Lily (and May). In terms of queer affiliation, Leung notes that the friendship between Yen and Lily—captured most vividly in the scene where they both sit on a train platform dressed in women's clothes—'is based not on sexual attraction but on compassion, mutual dependence, and a shared experience of living queer lives' (2012, 532). Likewise, the childhood scenes in which Diego and Yen discuss their relationship and the reasons behind their strong bonds, 'provides a nuanced and finely tuned portrayal of the complex dynamics between two queer friends. While Yan is attracted to Diego's boyishness, Diego is in turn drawn to Yan's femininity. In other words, they each appreciate the

other's queer gender presentation' (Leung 2012, 532). In terms of queer desire, on the other hand, the sexual attraction between Diego and Lily as they take shelter from the rain in a van at the concluding stages of the film has a two-pronged effect. Whilst it codes both women's 'sexual identity' as lesbian, thus paralleling a coming out narrative, the ensuing laughter seems to oppose this view, as both characters appear to be cognisant of these expectations. Here, once again, the estrangement effect precludes a reading which would position Diego on either side of the inside/outside binary. For if, as Martin argues, 'the schoolgirl romance narrated by a conventionally feminine woman is a memorial narrative that looks back on youthful same-sex romance', a reversal of this would be a 'same-sex attracted tomboy schoolgirl looking *forward* to potentially lesbian adulthood' (2010, 116, emphasis in original). Thus, whilst the temporarily of Chou's film allows a potential realisation of a tomboy lesbian adulthood, the scene above would not be its starting point in a linear narrative, since we as the audience are aware that Diego will later find Jing, whilst Lily would partner with Ocean. In both instances, Diego is positioned as a childhood crush, a queer friend, and a sexual and lesbian partner, forming a queer connection with all of the characters. In *Drifting Flowers*, lesbianism is neither minoritised (the figure of a tomboy) nor made universal (the figure of a feminine woman). Rather, the film evokes and subverts both readings, as it ushers in a renewed understanding of same-sex female desire.

GENDERING AUTEURSHIP

In his chapter on the poetics of Tsai Ming-liang's queer cinema, Song Hwee Lim notes that 'what is queer about Tsai's works is not the literal representation of queer sexuality but rather its metaphorical unrepresentability, intelligible only because of the conventions that Tsai has constructed in his oeuvre, from the theatrical to the cinematic' (2006, 131). These conventions include the use of symbols and metaphors as well as 'intratextual practices [that] interpellate a particular kind of spectatorship that is predicated upon an established familiarity with his previous films' (2014b, 50). As a consequence, Tsai's work encourages the audience to make connections between the individual films as a way uncovering motifs, recurrent themes and symbolism that make up his signature style. According to Lim, 'By drawing attention to elements in his previous films, Tsai's intratextual practices serve to remind the audience of both the history and the historicity of his filmmaking, reinforcing, however

unwittingly and unconsciously, the image of the director as an established filmmaker and, by implication, an auteur' (2014, 50). So far in the book the notion of auteurship vis-à-vis New Queer Sinophone cinema has been nearly synonymous with the persona of the *male* director. Although I began this chapter by positioning Zero Chou as a Taiwanese queer auteur whose output paves way for new directions in a global queer cinema, the issue of gender in regards to auteurship has remained unquestioned. For instance, my inclusion of Lim's insightful investigations of the body of work of Stanley Kwan and Tsai Ming-liang, along with my own readings of Scud and Kit Hung as queer auteurs in the following chapter, place heavy emphasis on male queerness and male auteurship. Chou's persona as an out lesbian director appears at first glance to stand in contrast to Tsai's refusal to be labelled as a 'gay director'.³ In other words, whilst 'Tsai's oeuvre has generated a reception that is best described as queer—in both senses of the word' (Lim 2006, 126), Chou's out lesbian persona grounds her films within an identity politics framework that appears to speak to particular LGBT groups that demand higher sensitivity to issues of accurate representation.⁴ Yet, in the following, I wish to argue that her *tongzhi* trilogy establishes Chou as a female Taiwanese queer auteur whose intertextuality simultaneously references and talks back to the Taiwanese queer auteur Tsai Ming-liang.

In the Introduction to her edited volume *Chinese Women's Cinema: Transnational Contexts* (2011), Lingzhen Wang notes that 'despite their large number and historical significance, few English-language studies have been devoted to Chinese women filmmakers or their films' (1). Whilst the majority of existing scholarship is devoted to body of work of internationally renowned male filmmakers—Hou Hsiao-hsien, Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige—there exist only a handful of studies on female women directors such as Ann Hui, Hu Mei and Sylvia Chang. 'This is particularly disconcerting', Wang notes, 'considering the rapid development of Chinese film studies and the increased establishment of feminist film studies in Western academia' (1). Whilst Wang argues that the nationalist turn in film studies as well as the advent of poststructuralism in the 1980s irrevocably altered the view of feminist film discourse, I emphasise Chou's auteurship in the context of the transnationality of Sinophone cinema. For the success of Chou's films owes as much to the international LGBT film circuits as it does to the national cinema of Taiwan. In other words, Chou's position as a queer auteur is as much a local as it is a global phenomenon. Despite being a cinema of a small nation, Taiwan cinema's international prestige 'is disproportionate to its size and can be largely attributed to a

quartet of directors with an undisputed auteur status: Hou Hsiao-hsien, Edward Yang, Ang Lee, and Tsai Ming-liang. Indeed, these four directors are collectively responsible for always all top prizes that Taiwan cinema has won at the three most prestigious international film festivals (Berlin, Cannes, and Venice)' (Lim 2014, 47). In the case of Tsai Ming-liang, Lim notes that his 'self-image as an auteur is rooted in his cinephilic obsession with the European New Wave cinemas of the 1960s and '1970s, which he regards as the high point in film history' (2014, 45). Whilst the inter- and intratextual elements in Tsai's oeuvre have been instrumental in augmenting and solidifying his recognition and status on the international festival circuits, the popularity of Zero Chou's production on the national *as well as* the international stage is linked to what Martin argues is the new transnational Taiwan cinema's negotiation 'between the local and the global, the particular and the general, minority and mainstream audience, and cultural deterritorialization and reterritorialization' (2007, 131). Emphasising Taiwan-based filmmakers whose output, whilst grounded in Taiwan but drawing on investment overseas, 'target[s] a broader international and domestic audience beyond hard-core auteurist art-film fans' (132), Martin notes that these filmmakers mark a new direction for Taiwan cinema, as the positioning of sexuality in these films is ambiguous enough to invite various and conflicting interpretations. One such film is Yee Chih-yen's *Blue Gate Crossing*, a three-way high school drama that incorporates art-film elements with 'promotional image-making style of a multinational fast-food corporation' (Martin 2007, 136). Not only does the film contain some of the elements of a coming out story; it also taps into the aforementioned narratives of the schoolgirl romance as well as the tomboy melodrama. In addition, the film could be said to be 'transnationally oriented self-translating text ... a "flexible, adaptable, user/reader/audience-friendly cultural product"'. This is not because it exoticises Taiwan. On the contrary, it is the 'effacement of any strong traces of the local' that make the film appealing to an international audience, as the local viewers attempt to re-localise the film within the space of Taipei, whilst the international audiences are being drawn to the 'extra-local translatability' of the film's setting in what appears to be a 'generic East Asian city' (Martin 2007, 139, 140). This multicoding allows the film a 'smooth passage across geo-cultural and sexual-subcultural borders in order to maximize its market ... [as] its viewers effectively "value-add" specificity in both respects at the moment of consumption, customizing this flexible product to cater to their local, specific needs and desires' (Martin 2007,

141). Whilst Zero Chou places much heavier emphasis on the historical and cultural specificities of Taiwan, the Sinophone queerness in her films enables them to travel in space that is at once local, (inter)regional and transnational. In addition to the flexibility of her texts, I argue that Chou's intra- and intertextual practices serve not only as a reminder of the historicity of her filmmaking but also as a device that engages her cinephilic spectators, as they are 'encouraged to pore over [her] earlier films ... for retrospective enlightenment' (Lim 2014, 54–55). This way, the spectator will also learn to 'anticipate that elements ... will be taken into unforeseeable directions in the future in a seriality and circularity that concretize [Chou's] position as an auteur' (55) (Figs. 4.3 and 4.4).

One of the most visible examples of Chou's intratextuality can be seen in a scene halfway into *Drifting Flowers*, in which we find Yen wandering the city after having a row with Lily. Here, a wall is plastered with identical posters of what appears to be Chou's own film *Spider Lilies*. Clearly visible is the Golden Bear logo of the Berlin International Festival, although on the poster we see two male actors, taking the places of Rainie Yang and Isabella Leong as Jade and Takeko as per the official poster. Leung views this as more than a 'sly intratextual joke', as it also 'captures the inclusive spirit of Chou's queer vision ... [to produce] a "six-color rainbow cinema"' (2012, 531). Similar to Tsai's intratextuality which, according to Lim, has been 'instrumental in enhancing the international reception of [his] films and the viability of his filmmaking', Chou's reference to her own film enables her to 'move from producing

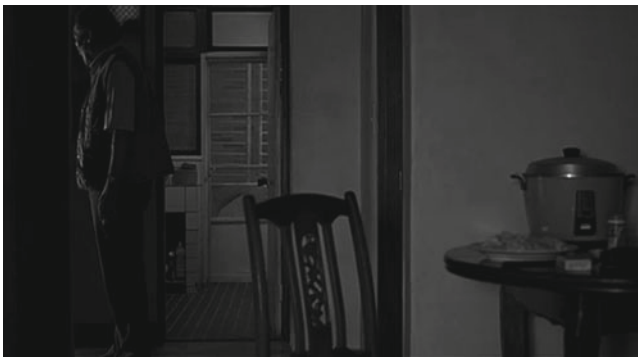


Fig. 4.3 Green rice cooker on the dining table, *What Time Is It There?*



Fig. 4.4 Green rice cooker on the dining table, *Drifting Flowers*

films in a national cinema mode to that of an international art cinema' (2014, 60). In addition to this instance of intratextuality, I argue that the poster also serves as Chou's means for establishing herself as a Taiwanese *female* auteur, as the *intratextual* and *intertextual* elements in *Drifting Flowers* work in tandem, creating a link between herself and Tsai Ming-liang. In terms of casting, this is evident in the aforementioned opening scene featuring septuagenarian Lily, played by Lu Yi-Ching, a core actor in Tsai Ming-liang's films who would typically embody the role of the mother of Hsiao-kang, played by the Tsai's regular Lee Kang-sheng. Alongside a regular of Tsai is another regular of Chou, namely Pai Chih-Ying, who in *Spider Lilies* plays the young Jade but who here plays the Jing's younger sister May. Whilst the choices in casting do not necessary suggest a close linkage between Chou and Tsai, they only reinforce some of the other elements that appear to connect the two auteurs. In the 'Lily' section of the film, the cause of the argument between Lily and Yen was Lily's hiding his suitcase from him, in effect making him stay with her (he had placed it near the door, suggesting his impending departure). As he searches the apartment, we notice a green rice cooker on the kitchen table. Dedicated fans of Tsai's cinema may recognise the rice cooker as the same one that is on the table in the opening shot of *What Time Is It There?* (*Ni na bian ji dian*), Tsai's 2001 film about a watch vendor and a woman on holiday in Paris. The cooker, however, is itself an intratextual element, as it echoes two of Tsai's earlier films—*Rebels of the Neon*

God (*Qingshaonian Nezha*, 1992) and *The River* (*Heliu*, 1997)—only this time its colour has changed from red to green. These intratextual elements in Tsai's oeuvre, which re-create and solidify his status as an auteur, depend on 'discourses of cinephilia and authorship, which have particular currency in the institutions of the international film festival and the art house cinema' (Lim 2014, 46). This kind of authorship, Lim notes, is 'performatively constituted ... so that the focus is not so much on the so-called genius of the author but rather on the discursive means by which certain kinds of cinematic agency are contingently constructed, come into being, and become visible'. In *Drifting Flowers*, Chou references visually an already-existing intratextual element of Tsai's oeuvre, in effect continuing the performance and establishing herself as an auteur in the process. In *What Time*, the static long take places the father in a scene with a dining table on the right, a corridor in the middle and a kitchen on the left of the frame. In Chou's film, the mise-en-scène is nearly inverted, as the shallow focus reverts our attention to Yen whilst he walks inside. In addition, despite being the family patriarch, the father in Tsai's film is killed off early in the film, as his widow mourns his passing by obsessing about the return of his ghost. One of the ways she displays her loss is by masturbating with his (wooden) pillow, whilst his black-and-white photograph looks on disapprovingly. In *Drifting Flowers*, a similar scene occurs as Lily, now that she believes Ocean has returned, decides to take down the latter's black-and-white photograph. Here, Ocean's appearance is strikingly similar to that of the father. Whilst in both films



Fig. 4.5 Father's stern look, *What Time Is It There?*



Fig. 4.6 Lily taking down Ocean's photograph, *Drifting Flowers*

a deceased partner casts a shadow over their surviving companion, in *Drifting Flowers* it is not the family *patriarch* but a *lesbian* partner who is being mourned. Because both Lily and the mother are played by the same actress in the two films, we are here witness to a convergence and a differentiation of auteurship between Tsai Ming-liang and Zero Chou. In the beginning of this section, I argued that Chou's final instalment of her *tongzhi* trilogy offers a renewed take on queer Sinophone film-making. Here, at the end of the section, I argue that Chou appropriates Tsai's renowned '*écriture* queer'—his portrayal of male gay saunas, male pornographers, theatres as male cruising sights as well as father-son relationships—and offers a female take on the queer auteur by referencing and appropriating the cinephilic elements of the former. Chou's film, I contend, speaks of the 'newness' of New Queer Sinophone Cinema, in that her placing a lesbian character at the forefront in 'Lily', a tomboy in 'Diego', and an emerging lesbian in 'May' (along with an AIDS stricken gay man), gestures towards a new direction in Taiwanese queer cinema that is inclusive, complex and historically and culturally specific. At the same time, Chou's inter- and intratextuality allow her films to travel transnationally, opening up the PRC-Hong Kong-Taiwan configuration and solidifying her status as an internationally recognised auteur of queer Sinophone cinema (Figs. 4.5 and 4.6).

NOTES

1. Marc L. Moskowitz's 2011 short documentary *Dancing for the Dead: Funeral Strippers in Taiwan* offers an interesting perspective on *dianzi huache*, particularly in terms of class and gender.
2. For more on the *T/Po* binary, see Chao 2002.
3. See Lim 2006, Chap. 6.
4. Huang and Wang note that Chou included a breast-binding scene in *Drifting Flowers* 'because many lesbians said that [she] had yet to give expression to the true voice of the *tie T*', p. 153, n. 28.

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Queer Auteurs of Hong Kong Cinema

Abstract The chapter examines two Hong Kong-based queer auteurs whose films, by blurring the lines between what is real and what is unreal, complicate the notions of representability in queer Hong Kong cinema. First, it suggests that Scud's 2010 film *Amphetamine* frustrates and alienates the viewer, and by undermining the 'gay film' genre, forces him/her to re-think his/her relationship with the film. Second, the chapter argues that Kit Hung's 2009 film *Soundless Wind Chime*, whilst offering a similar method of subverting the gay film genre, employs slowness as a way of thwarting the viewer's expectations. Finally, the chapter suggests that intertextuality in *Soundless Wind Chime* establishes Hung as a queer auteur whose work references and continues the Sinophone cinematic tradition.

Keywords Scud • *Soundless Wind Chime* • Tsai Ming-liang • Li Xianglan • *The Hole (Dong)* • Hong Kong auteurs

So far in this book, the notion of auteurship vis-à-vis New Queer Sinophone Cinema has been restricted to two directors who, despite their international reputation and popularity, are usually identified as Taiwanese. Whilst Zero Chou, despite her acute sensitivity to local contexts, attracts an international following, the Malaysian-born, Taiwan-based Tsai Ming-liang, who consciously invokes the legacy of and pays homage to the French

New Wave, cannot easily be placed within a national cinematic framework. In fact, Stephen Teo notes that because his ‘films are not about being Taiwanese at all ... Tsai is thus a misfit and, as such, he is perhaps the true diasporic director’ (2010, 493). Yet, although they mobilise ‘discourses and culture of cinephilia to good effect for the international reception of [their] films’ (Lim 2014b, 9–10), both directors remain deeply rooted in Taiwan’s vernacular culture. They are, in effect, both here and there. In addition, I argued in the previous chapter that the inter- and intratextual elements in Chou’s cinema reinforce her standing as a Taiwanese queer auteur as well as a highly original participant in New Queer Sinophone Cinema. Although her ‘status’ as an out lesbian director stands in contrast to the queer poetics of Tsai Ming-liang, who has publicly expressed his dislike for the label ‘gay’ in connection with his films, Chou’s inclusive queer universe complicates the linkage between the sexual identity of the director and their authorship/auteurship. In this chapter, I return to Hong Kong cinema in order to pursue the notion of representability in New Queer Sinophone Cinema, as it is closely connected to the idea of the auteur. In other words, having established Chou and Tsai as recognised auteurs of Taiwanese cinema, in this chapter I emphasise two Hong Kong-based auteurs whose work blurs the boundary between what is real and what is unreal, complicating the relations between authorship and representability. Undermining not only the genre of ‘gay cinema’ but also that of autobiography, these directors introduce new aesthetics to New Queer Sinophone Cinema, where the real intermixes with the unreal, and where the issues of class become equally important as issues of sexual identity. Significantly, much as we witnessed it in the work of Chou and Tsai, the Sinophone elements in their work are highly sensitive to local contexts whilst reaffixing the cultural space of Hong Kong outside the national framework of both Hong Kong and the PRC. Whilst Scud’s work emphasises the particulars of Hong Kong everyday life, the spatiality of Hung’s feature takes it beyond the borders of ‘Greater China’. Here, the film’s protagonist travels from Beijing to Hong Kong to Switzerland and ultimately back to Beijing. In addition, Hung’s references to the cinemas of Shanghai, Hong Kong and Taiwan affirms his status as an auteur whilst acknowledging the pan-Asian roots of those very Sinophone cinematic traditions.

If, as Leung notes, ‘experimentation with queer aesthetics [in Hong Kong cinema] can be found in the works of mainstream directors such as Stanley Kwan and Yonfan’ (520), there are also a handful of independent

filmmakers whose on and off the screen personae are tightly linked with their reputations as ‘queer’ or ‘gay’ directors. Lim, in his insightful analysis of Stanley Kwan’s on and off screen persona, argues that Kwan’s coming out in his documentary *Yang± Yin: Gender in Chinese Cinema* (*Nansheng nüxiang: Zhongguo dianying zhi xingbie*, 1996) is more than merely a (public) statement of personal sexual choice. Rather, Kwan’s self-outing is a ‘performance ... complex in meaning’ as it ‘foregrounds the significance of Kwan as the first openly gay director in Chinese cinemas’ (Lim 2006, 153). Positioning the documentary as a starting point in Kwan’s career as a ‘gay director’, Lim looks at Kwan’s 1998 film *Hold You Tight* as a film that ‘captures a moment when Kwan’s personal history and filmmaking career collapse into each other and serves to illuminate issues of gay identity politics in a Chinese context’ (153–154). Lim locates *Hold You Tight* as a conflation point between Kwan’s filmmaking and his personal history, where Kwan’s own sexuality becomes inextricable from its own presentation of it on screen. Despite this kind of autobiographical reading, which potentially runs the risk of positioning Kwan and his work under the umbrella of ‘gay cinema’, Lim notes that Kwan’s ambivalence and refusal to take on the ‘gay director’ persona complicate the notions of what constitutes a gay film and challenge ideas of representability of queerness. Whilst Kwan is one of the most established directors of queer Sinophone filmmaking, the problems of queer representation are not only restricted to the realm of mainstream filmmakers. Independent filmmakers in Hong Kong face similar challenges, albeit they are, according to Leung, ‘less resistant to the label and more forthcoming about their sexual identity, politics, and relation to queer cinema’ (2012a, 527). This, however, does not suggest that independent filmmaking is grounded in visibility and the transparency of an openly gay identity. Rather, what is significant about queer independent cinema in Hong Kong is the close correlation between the private lives of directors and the themes explored in their work. In other words, if Stanley Kwan serves as a prime example of a mainstream gay director, independent filmmakers such as Scud (Danny Cheng Wan-Cheung) and Kit Hung, who have produced deeply personal films, go beyond what Lim terms ‘the burden of representation’. Interestingly, by fully embracing the persona of ‘gay directors’ these filmmakers subvert the label altogether, in that their films, although highly autobiographical, feature elements that undermine the genre of not only ‘gay cinema’ but also autobiography itself. In this chapter, I wish to emphasise selected films by the two directors, in that they both produce works that synthesise

the personal and the public as well as the real and the unreal. This allows them, I argue, to challenge the idea of a gay cinema, despite their notable embracement and proclamation of a gay identity. In terms of the overall framework of New Queer Sinophone Cinema, I argue that Scud and Kit Hung, by contesting the representability of the label ‘gay’, usher in a new aesthetics in Hong Kong queer filmmaking, where sexual identity is only one of numerous themes explored in their work. In effect, by refusing to provide queerness a prominent position, these filmmakers expose the limits of gay representability itself, taking New Queer Sinophone Cinema in yet another direction.

ANGELS IN HONG KONG: *AMPHETAMINE*

Whilst Yan Yan Mak’s film features homoerotic love between two female characters, I will focus here on a film which takes the opposite approach by featuring a nearly all-male cast. In fact, this is a film in which female characters play only a peripheral role. Although this fact would ordinarily expose the film to the risk of neglecting to highlight the significance of queer female desire, it is the film’s director and his public reputation that attract most of the attention from both the audience as well as the film critics. Yet, the marginality of female characters does highlight one of the film’s weaker points. The Mainland-born Hong Kong director Scud (Danny Cheng Wan-Cheung) is well known for not being shy about proclaiming his sexual identity on or off screen. In his second feature film *Permanent Residence* (2009), a life story of a young gay man who pursues a relationship with a heterosexual man (a narrative based on Scud’s own life), the protagonist, who has now become a filmmaker, confesses in an interview that he is working on two new art films—one called *Amphetamine* and the other *Life of an Artist*. Besides this obvious self-reference, the entire film is based on Scud’s own life. Even the voiceover is narrated by the director himself, effectively removing any doubt as to the assumption that his film is an autobiography. Leung notes that despite the clear link between the self-representation of filmmakers such as Scud and the overall themes of their work—which adds to their image as ‘gay directors’—there exists other elements ‘that shed a more complex light on the relation between authorship, gay lives, and queer cinema’ (528). She notes that Scud’s tactics of exchanging roles with his actors on and off camera ‘tease audiences into blurring the line between the sensationalist fictional representations on screen and the context of everyday life’ (528). In the following section,

I expand this argument by focusing on Scud's 2010 film *Amphetamine*—which was nominated for the Teddy Award at the 2010 Berlinale—not because it challenges, via explicit depictions of nudity and violence, the mainstream audience's perception of a 'gay film'. Nor do I wish to explore its blurring of the lines between gay self-representation and 'reality' of gay life. Rather, I wish to emphasise *Amphetamine* as a film that not only follows Abbas's aforementioned notions of the problems of spectatorship but also ushers in an element of the fantastic to the realist mode of representation of queerness in Hong Kong. In other words, whilst Scud employs the notion of estrangement which emphasises the reality of the film's context—an element that is repeated in this book—its dreamlike storyline and somewhat implausible plot add an element of fantasy that pushes the realistic border to its limits. Thus, Scud's tactics are not only those of teasing the audience; he abrades the limits of queer representation by including within the film not only himself as a 'queer auteur' and his 'true' life story but also his characters' personal struggle with childhood trauma, drug addiction and repressed homosexuality. In short, these tactics make his film a theatrical staging that defies realist traditions.

Before I discuss Scud's film in more detail, I introduce here a play that predates Scud's film by nearly two decades and one that serves as a parallel to my analysis of Scud's film. Tony Kushner's (1992) Pulitzer Prize-winning two-part play *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes* and the HBO mini-series adapted from it (directed by Mike Nichols) display not only a similarity in style but also a visual likeness with Scud's film. *Angels* follows two couples, one homosexual (Louis Ironson and Prior Walter) and the other heterosexual (Harper and Joe Pitt). The two couples' fates intertwine, whilst the AIDS epidemic rages on, destroying the lives of all of the characters in the play. Described by critics as one of the most important US plays of the last half a century, Kushner's play explores the AIDS epidemic in Reaganite America, looking back critically at the politics of the era. Bringing together on the same stage, at the same time, in the past, the present and the future, what would appear to be polar opposites, such as conservatives and liberals, gays and straights, Kushner interrogates identity politics of the 1970s with a sense of both humour and irony. Significantly, the play explores marginalisation and disenfranchisement across colour and gender lines, as the disease pushes to the margins those who enjoyed political power, whilst the once marginalised find themselves in a new position of power.¹ Whilst *Angels* has been recognised as one of the most thrilling plays on the North American

stage, it is the play's epic style and its queering of official history that stand as its main achievements. Important for my discussion of Scud's film is the play's political agenda, for as its titles and subtitles suggest, *Angels in America* is a political drama. It looks at 'national themes' in a particular time at a particular place. Yet, its heavy emphasis on the personal and the particular attest to the influence of an individual's psychological state on the play's political analyses. Being a '*gay fantasia* on national themes' (my emphasis), the play is both 'unreal' and 'real', epic and personal. Thus, the employment of reality *as well as* fantasy becomes vital for Kushner's investigations of gender and sexuality in 1980s US. Perhaps even more important, however, are the means with which Kushner stages his play: he draws on the 'metadramatic' theatre of Bertolt Brecht whilst implementing supernatural elements that go against Brecht's template for a political drama. Here, realism and magic work together as a way of bringing past, present and future in a political and metaphysical space. Similar to the films I discussed in this book, films that contribute to New Queer Sinophone Cinema's emphasis on Thirdspaces *in-between*, Scud's *Amphetamine* presents and formulates a queer space that is both real and unreal. Its fantasia is a result of drug use, which ultimately challenges clear-cut notions of what defines or constitutes gay self-representation in queer Hong Kong cinema (Figs. 5.1 and 5.2).

Amphetamine begins with a visually stunning, slow motion shot of the main character Kafka, who stands on what appears to be a Hong Kong



Fig. 5.1 Angel arriving, *Angels in America*, HBO production



Fig. 5.2 Kafka as a queer angel, *Amphetamine*

roof ledge, wearing only a pair of angel wings. Shot in a cool, blue palette, the slow motion scene shows a Kafka, in worm's eye view, positioned as Michelangelo's David, as he extends his arms and ostensibly jumps into the dark, cold water. Significantly, behind him is a panorama of Hong Kong. Interspersed between the opening shot and the next scene are flash-forwards to critical moments in the film, such as Kafka's screaming as a result of gang rape, family pressure and drug use. The next scene presents us with the other important character in the film, an openly gay Australian businessman, Daniel, whose introduction parallels the 2008 Financial Crisis, which is explicitly mentioned in the film. Thus, whilst the first scene introduces the element of the supernatural/fantastical, the second scene situates the film firmly within Hong Kong time and space. This is compounded in the following scene with the first instance of the estrangement effect, in which we find Kafka being offered money for sexual services by an American man in the men's changing room. The Hong Kong audience may recognise the man, who also speaks Cantonese, as the well-known and influential film critic Paul Fonoroff. Here, not only is a public swimming pool presented as a cruising site but this element of the 'real' is combined with an element of the 'unreal'—we as the audience are reminded that this is a feature film, the comic element being a cameo presence by a well-known personality of

Hong Kong cinema. In addition, Kafka's initial reluctance to accept the offer—he is meant to serve as a 'straight' character—is overcome by his dire financial situation, blurring the boundary between homo and hetero. Thus, Scud does not place the film within the sphere of 'gay cinema', in that the use of cameo appearances acts as a reminder that this is a fictional piece, despite the public reputation of its director.

Similar to Yan Yan Mak's film in which the act of looking—whether by the audience or by the characters themselves—becomes problematic, *Amphetamine* employs multiple flashbacks and flash-forwards that disturb linear time, problematising the temporal logic of a progressive narrative. Moreover, the film's estrangement effects in the form of cameo performances by Paul Fonoroff and Scud himself (he serves Kafka in the video shop) prevents identification with the characters and creates a distance between the viewer and the film. This is seen in one of the numerous 'shower scenes'. After the couple experience their first kiss, Kafka is seen taking 'Ice' during which he talks to his ailing mother and promises to wear his 'suit' next time he talks to her. The reference to the suit works as a foreshadowing of his encounter with Daniel, which occurs in the following scene in the public swimming pool. The minute-long scene in the swimming pool showers, during which both men's bodies are displayed and gazed at by both the viewers as well as the two characters, places *Amphetamine* firmly within the 'gay film' genre. Here, classical music is played prominently, lending the scene a certain artistic status, elevating the men's lean and muscular bodies to a level almost equal to Michelangelo's David. However, whilst the scene may appear to be set to culminate in an intercourse between the men, it in fact ends with Kafka walking out of the shower whilst Daniel stands looking longingly over his shoulder. Much in line with Leung's previous arguments, Scud teases Daniel as well as the viewers by thwarting his and (and the viewers') expectations. Here, the 'teasing' is not simply act of playing tricks with the audience. It is a conscious tactic of alienating the audience from the film by creating a space in-between the viewer and the character. This space allows for a more nuanced investigation of queerness, in that the two characters are not simply 'gay men' who, despite their differences, are destined to be together. This space is symbolised by the inclusion in the film of the unfinished construction of the Stonecutters Bridge, where only the final connecting elements are missing. As Daniel remarks: 'Maybe when the bridge meets, there'll be no gap between us'. What, we may ask, is this gap? In other words, what prevents the two men from fulfilling their love affair?

The first meeting between Kafka and Daniel occurs in a coffee shop in which Kafka waits for his girlfriend (ostensibly in order to end their relationship). However, even before her introduction there appears to exist a perceivable attraction between the two male characters, as Daniel gazes upon Kafka's sword, whilst Kafka seems to pay special interest in Daniel's clothing, which materialises in a form of a flash-forward to Kafka's mother's inquiry as to his visit to the 'famous K. K. Tailor'. The exchanging of glances between the two men is reminiscent of cruising, as Daniel appears to have his eyes set on a sexual partner. This interest is reciprocated by Kafka who also appears to show interest in Daniel. In addition, the coffee shop appears at first glance to be a highly masculine space, as Daniel's colleagues discuss purchasing and selling expensive cars whilst drinking beer. As Kafka walks past Daniel, both men exchange glances that clearly indicate strong sexual attraction, despite Kafka's ongoing heterosexual relationship. The subsequent scenes reveal more information about the character of Daniel, who appears to be a prudent investor who is well liked and well-respected by his peers and above. These expository scenes set up ostensible binary between Kafka, a 'local' swimming instructor and martial arts practitioner who is constantly in need of money in order to support his ailing mother, and a 'foreign', well-earning, young businessman (who explicitly reveals to his boss that he is attracted to men) who usually gets what he desires. Thus, the film seemingly sets out to explore the impossible love between the two positionings and the various hardships that both characters go through. I have previously mentioned Rofel who argues that the 'local' and the 'global' are, more than anything else, perspectives and acts of positioning, rather than locales. Although Scud places the film deep within the Hong Kong space, both Kafka and Daniel oscillate between Hong Kong and elsewhere, defying easy definitions of what constitutes Hong Kong queerness. Whilst Kafka is a Hong Konger, whose shares the name with not only the influential novelist but also with Haruki Murakami's 2002 novel *Kafka on the Shore*, Daniel is an Australian who was born and raised in Hong Kong.² Thus, the gap between them is not between that of a 'local' and a 'foreigner', although both men exhibit traits of being 'rooted' in their respective locales; it is a complex, drug-induced space where poverty, addiction and mental effects of physical abuse reside. Both real and unreal, this space serves a twofold purpose: it introduces drugs as an element that separates and joins the two men, whilst simultaneously connecting and disconnecting audience from the characters. In other words, Scud' refuses to unite Kafka and Daniel in the

same way that he refuses to unite the 'gay' spectatorship with his persona as a 'gay' filmmaker.

In *Angels in America*, Kushner presents his characters as having contested identities. In his play, we find a vast array of characters that refuse to be positioned under one category. Although most of the play's characters are 'gay', they do not exhibit a single political identity. Prior's sense of self is determined by the figures of his past, Louis's sense of self is determined by Prior's state of health, while Harper's sense of self is determined by her marriage to Joe. The queerness of these characters problematises their positioning, in that queerness in itself is not a stable identity. In Scud's film, Kafka's sexual identity is fluid—whilst he is in a heterosexual relationship, he is not averse to performing homosexual favours for money. This is seen in the most 'heterosexual' scene of the film, during which Kafka has intercourse with his girlfriend, whilst his mind appears to be set on Daniel. Here, I do not wish to emphasise Kafka's 'queerness' or the 'fluidity' of his sexual identity. Rather, I argue that Scud's tactic of complicating the relationship between the viewer and the film lies not in his refusal for his characters to take on a specific gay identity. Instead, he links class to sexuality. Whilst Daniel is an openly gay man who is proud of his sexuality, he is also a successful businessman who knows that he wants. As Kafka perceptively tells him, 'Buying whoever you crave, chasing whoever you fancy. Money really is power'. Here, Kafka repositions Daniel's and his own sense of self in relation to his economical capital, sidelining sexual identity and placing emphasising on wealth. The juxtaposition of Kafka and Daniel is seen in the contrasting scenes of Kafka's proud telling of his father's work on his childhood home and Daniel's luxurious apartment overlooking Hong Kong. Here, Kafka exclaims: 'It's like heaven after passing through hell', to which Daniel replies: 'For many, a big company is already heaven'. Whilst these scenes foreground the social and financial differences between the men, they also speak to the sexual and power relations inherent in them. After failing to appear for the music concert at the Asia World Expo, for which he is derided by Daniel, Kafka offers sexual favours as reparation: 'I'll stay with you tonight as compensation', which Daniel gladly accepts. Kafka's subsequent attempt to reconcile with Daniel is unsuccessful, not only because of the class difference between the two but because this gap is filled with childhood trauma and drug addiction, which is seen in the dream sequences where the gang rape figures as a defining moment in Kafka's life. Here, childhood trauma leads to drug addiction which in turn leads to the widening of the gap between the

men. These ‘realist’ elements are Scud’s means of refusing to unite the two men, as it appears that despite the palpable attraction between them, the outer circumstances stand in the way of the fulfilment of their relationship. However, I argue that by merging the real and the unreal, Scud explores queerness in a new way. For although drugs work as a means for creating a gap between the two men, due to Kafka’s addiction and the effects resulting from it, they also allow for a connection between them. The film’s dream-like, drug-induced quality accentuates the ‘unrealness’ to a new degree (Figs. 5.3 and 5.4).

One of the early examples of the film’s fantastical mode is Kafka’s praying at the shrine in the apartment he shares with his brother. After the first instance of Kafka’s taking amphetamine, he begins to conduct a conversation with his mother, who walks around the apartment behind him. Whilst the viewer is aware that his mother is in the hospital—he visits her after his swimming lesson—the mother’s apparition appears to be real enough for him to have a conversation with her. Significantly, it is during this conversation that we learn that the mother is on her deathbed. Because this is most likely the result of Kafka’s hallucination and thus is not ‘real’, Scud nonetheless attributes drugs and the unreal the ability to interfere within the realm of the real, providing insights that otherwise would have remained

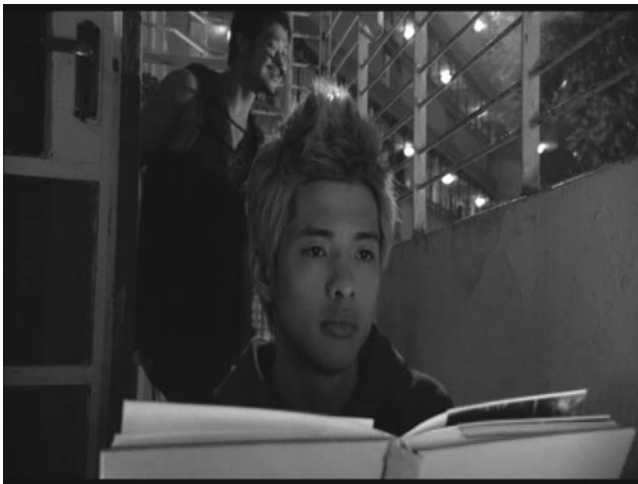


Fig. 5.3 Kafka’s hallucination—apparition of the mother, *Amphetamine*



Fig. 5.4 Blurring the lines between fantasy and reality, *Amphetamine*

uncovered. Similarly, Kafka's brother's taunting—"Dumped by girls, switching to boys?"—provides the viewer an insight into Kafka's subconscious, despite its most likely being a result of drug use. Here, Kafka himself learns something about his own inner thoughts, as his queerness is revealed in the firm of an awareness of his attraction to Daniel. Like in Kushner's *Angels*, Scud's fantasia provides Kafka crucial insights about himself that he has not consciously realised. More important, however, is the drugs' capacity to connect the men, despite their ability to drive them apart. After learning of Kafka's addiction, Daniel sets out to reverse the effect of the addiction by taking drugs himself, this time in the form of LSD, which he shares with Kafka. During their symbolic boat ride underneath the Stonecutters Bridge, the men attempt, in their hallucination, to pull the bridge together as way of overcoming their differences. Although this attempt appears to be successful—Kafka seems to agree to quit 'Ice'—we soon learn that he has reneged on his promise. Daniel's subsequent dream (which seems to be the result of Kafka's broken promise and continuous use of amphetamine) in which he appears to be burdened in the literal sense by a blue, icy figure, similarly provides the viewer an insight into his psyche that otherwise would not have been possible. In other words, Scud employs drugs as a means for connecting and disconnecting the men, symbolically bridging the gap on

Stonecutters Bridge whilst at the same time severing the ties between them. Referring to Yau Ching's analysis of the controversy surrounding Scud and his troubled relationship with gay audiences in Hong Kong, Leung notes: 'Scud's self-construction as a "gay director" is ... premised not only on his openly gay identity or play with homoerotic explicitness on and off screen, but paradoxically also on his penchant for pushing against the acceptable boundaries of gay self-representation in Hong Kong' (2012, 528). In *Amphetamine*, Scud's pushes against the very expectations of his audience, in that homoeroticism, explicit nudity and openly gay characters lead to separation and ultimate death. Indeed, online reviews do note that whilst the film includes beautiful cinematography, it is 'messy ... given its many sudden flashbacks' (Mensgsta). Others point out its lack of authenticity, noting that its characters are 'unable to ... act like a couple in love' (Marsh). By ushering the unreal to the realm of the real, Scud draws his audience in only to push them away.

The film's poignant ending features elements of the real and the unreal, encapsulating neatly Scud's familiarising and de-familiarising approach to Hong Kong queerness and New Queer Sinophone Cinema more broadly. Whilst the image of Kafka as a queer angel points back to the opening scene of the film, it also simultaneously refers to the impossibility of their relationship. The queer angel nearly jumps to his death and is on his death-bed, dreaming about Daniel and imagining their future in the icy waters underneath the Stonecutters Bridge. The latter, we realise, is on his way back to Australia, lamenting the ending of their relationship and Kafka's death. Thus, it is only in Kafka's mind that we encounter the two men together, in their beautiful underwater re-enactment of Michelangelo's *The Creation of Adam*. Scud refuses to offer a neat understanding of his film, instead opting for more a complicated representation of queerness between an openly gay man and his seemingly heterosexual object of desire. By frustrating and forcing the viewer to (re)think his/her connection with the characters in the film, Scud makes an important statement regarding 'gay authenticity' in Hong Kong cinema, complicating the notions of authorship and representability, pushing against boundaries and paving new ground for New Queer Sinophone Cinema.

SOUNDLESS WIND CHIME: A QUEER CINEMA OF SLOWNESS

The conflation of the real and the unreal, the autobiographical and the fictional is perhaps best exemplified in Kit Hung's 2009 film *Soundless Wind*

Chime. According to the director himself, the film is based on his real-life relationship with a Swiss man: ‘I’ve been having a long-distance relationship with my boyfriend for years now, where we split our time between Hong Kong, Switzerland, and Chicago’ (Lee 2009). Whilst this statement echoes, albeit in a different manner, Scud’s voiceover in *Permanent Residence*—an element which bridges the gap between the artist and the work of art—Hung also notes that he did not ‘know any new immigrants from China, much less one doing delivery’. The character of Ricky, he remarks, was ‘closely based on my friend Chet Lam. I’ve known Lam for years. We have many connections, and we inspire each other’ (Lee 2009). The close links between the autobiographical and the fictional are here reinforced by Hung’s statements on his motivation for creating the film and its storyline: ‘This film was made after a friend of mine committed suicide, as well as the deaths of my Swiss boyfriend’s parents’ (Lee 2009). Whilst these comments may serve as a definitive confirmation that the film is indeed an autobiography and a personal recollection of significant moments in the director’s life, a closer look at the film’s thematics defies this perspective. In fact, I argue that the highly personal features become charged to the point where they cease to exist as such and transform into elements that offer a political view on queer and cultural representation. By defying narrative conventions and complicating the film’s plot development, Hung subverts the notion of an identifiable gay film and ushers in a new and complex understanding of queer Sinophone cinema. Here, the gay and the queer become elements which, although significant, are merely some of the film’s numerous thematics, such as death and the personal loss experienced as a result of it. As a consequence, Hung’s film becomes to a greater extent a rumination on the death of a loved one than a realist representation of ‘gay life’ in Hong Kong. I end this book with a deeper look at *Soundless Wind Chime*, in that it encapsulates many of the themes of New Queer Sinophone Cinema that I have investigated so far. For instance, whilst Hong Kong features prominently in the film, it is, like in all of the films discussed in this book, merely one of the numerous Sinophone spaces interconnected by queer desire.

Before I begin my analysis of Hung’s film, I wish to include here once more Song Hwee Lim’s *Tsai Ming-liang and a Cinema of Slowness* (2014), a highly insightful look into the oeuvre of the Malaysian-Taiwanese auteur. Here, Lim notes that slowness ‘poses a challenging theoretical question for film studies as it is predicated upon the profound and complex notion of time’ (2014, 15). By investigating the uses of the long take

in Tsai Ming-liang's films, Lim highlights the significance of speed in its ability to alter the perception of time, where diegetic action is either withheld or slowed down to the point where the viewer's patience is tenuous at best. By paying particular attention to the image and the experience of viewing this image, Lim argues, the cinema of Tsai Ming-liang 'invites us to form a different relationship to the images we see, to relish them as self-contained units of time and space, and to see them unfold at a pace that allows time to take its own time' (2014, 18). Working predominantly as a defiance of the fast-pacing materiality of mainstream cinema, whose aesthetics dictates an intensified continuity predicated on the smoothness of moving images, the cinema of slowness defies this approach by breaking up this temporal aesthetics. It complicates the relationship between stillness and movement, and as an extension, between the film and the viewer. Significantly, Lim notes that if 'a cinema of slowness is full of characters who do nothing much but wait or, worse still, *waste time*, characters in a cinema of speed, while not always action heroes and heroines, must nevertheless be filled with a sense of purpose' (2014, 24, my emphasis). Whilst Lim cautions against constructing a simplistic binary between slowness as an aesthetic form and speed as a mission fulfilling statement of purpose and resolution, a cinema of slowness nonetheless forces the viewer to rethink his/her relationship to time and narrative. According to Lim,

A cinema of slowness chooses to dwell ... on the interstices between events or on moments within events during which nothing much happens. Indeed, it uses so-called dead time to create non-events through which a different temporality, meaning, and value can come into being, thereby questioning the notion of "event" or "happening" and unsettling the very foundation of what constitutes a film's narrative. (2014, 30)

It is in this light that I wish to look at *Soundless Wind Chime*, in that Hung intermittently employs the notion of the cinema of slowness in order to unsettle and unfix the viewer's expectations of not only moving images but also of the distinction between what is real and what is imaginary. *Soundless*, however, it not a film which at first glance appears to fall within the genre or category of slow cinema. In fact, there are numerous flashbacks, flickering images, unsteady cams, slow motion scenes and non-diegetic sounds, all of which set it apart from what would be considered a cinema of slowness. Nonetheless, slowness appears as an element that

coalesces the autobiographical and the fictional, as it appears to fulfil the expectations of a personal rumination whilst simultaneously offering a critique of gay representation in Hong Kong and Sinophone cinema.

Beginning in medias res, *Soundless* opens with flickering images of two lovers caressing in what appears to be a recollection by Pascal, the Swiss pickpocket, whilst he lies on the ground. Both scenes are filmed in slow motion, whilst non-diegetic music plays in the background. The segment ends with a call to Pascal who is suddenly transported to his childhood with a voiceover informing us that time is running out and that he is not going to survive. These elliptical scenes, shot in a dreamy sequence, create a non-sequential sense of passing of time, where the past and the present appear to be joined together in an act of remembrance. Although the viewer may not learn until the very end of the film that these memories in fact belong to Ricky, a noodle delivery boy from the Mainland, who is currently in Switzerland in search of his deceased lover's past, the slowness of the opening sequence situates the film within a dreamy landscape of memories of the past. In addition, the repetitiveness of images blurs the boundary between what is real and what is remembered, as both men appear to be sleeping and possibly dreaming. Here, the narrative is pushed forward not by events but by moments in-between events. The opening sequence emphasises the heightened awareness of the workings of memories in shaping the film's narrative, as the viewer is made to believe that the memories (most likely) belong to Pascal, in that the childhood scene takes place in the mountainous Switzerland. I mentioned earlier some of the online reviews of *Amphetamine*, which highlighted its slow pace and an apparent lack of 'authenticity'. Similarly, and perhaps even expectedly, Hung's film has been criticised online for being a 'total waste of time'. Certainly, with its slow pacing and a non-linear storyline—particularly its measured character development—Hung's film places a strain on the viewer's patience. From the tranquillity of the slow images of the past, which are shot in a warm colour palette, to the confusion of the quickly moving images in the present (shot with a handheld camera in a cooler palette), the viewer's patience is being tested, in that we are never certain if these memories belong to Ricky or Pascal. Moreover, as Ricky's recollections of his life with Pascal appear in the mirror, we are once again transported back in time, this time to a period even further back in the past, in which Ricky works as a delivery boy and the circumstances that led to his encounter with Pascal. This time shift adds further confusion to the storyline which is not resolved until the very end of the film. We can compare

Ricky's recollections in the mirror (and the subsequent spatial and temporal changes) to Abbas's notions of the problems of spectatorship which I referenced in the previous chapters. However, whilst the elusiveness of Mak's film, for instance, works as a structural motif that simultaneously draws us closer to its characters whilst continuously avoiding insights into their psyche, Hung's film prepares us for the subsequent slow images in which very little is being said and where characters communicate not in words but through their actions accompanied by non-diegetic sounds. Thus, although their work in a similar fashion, Mak's and Hung's films employ the motif of closeness and distance as a way of complicating the notions of a 'gay' film and queer spectatorship. Thus, one pertinent question arises: What is particularly 'gay' about Hung's film?

The first instance of queerness in *Soundless* appears soon after Ricky has been pickpocketed by Pascal. The latter, returning home with his loot, decides to hide Ricky's wallet and soon after begins to masturbate. Whilst this scene does not in itself suggest queerness, we do notice that Pascal masturbates shortly after his encounter with Ricky. Moreover, the method with which the scene is filmed suggests not only queerness but also voyeurism. The handheld camera is positioned in a different room from Pascal, with the doorframe partially blocking the view. As the slow movement of the camera slowly exposes Pascal, we are reminded of the similar perspective in Mak's film, where the viewer becomes a voyeur, someone who looks in on the situation from a distance. As Pascal becomes the object of our gaze, we notice, as we did in *Butterfly*, the various posters on the wall, suggesting young rebellion and counterculture. However, whilst Mak positions Jin's studio apartment as a translocal queer space which intersects the affective and the political, in *Soundless* this space is occupied not by Hong Kong residents but by two Swiss pickpockets who can barely make a living. In Mak's film, the non-normative desire is fuelled by not only a need for 'sexual freedom' inspired by social movements of the 'West' but also by young rebellion and a need for social change. This view, however, is altered in *Soundless*, in that the queer space occupied by two Swiss men is pervaded by theft, deception and sexual violence. Thus, instead of positioning the two men as the embodiments of a Euro-American vision of personal and sexual freedom, Hung inverts this notion by inserting Hong Kong as a space in which such desires are allowed to take place, for these men are outsiders, forced to relocate to Hong Kong in search of a better life. Moreover, the voyeurism of the scene speaks to distance created between the film and its audience. As Pascal is nearly

‘caught’ masturbating on the bed, he quickly puts on his clothes and closes the bedroom door. The slamming of the door and the subsequent darkness on the screen creates an alienation effect, as Pascal appears to be shutting the door right in front of the viewer. Here, we, the audience, take on the perspective of an onlooker who is caught looking in on Pascal in private. Thus, the film exposes the gay cinema’s expectations of seeing on screen a struggling gay subject who is usually positioned at the fringes of the heteronormative society. This expectation is thwarted because the violence to which Pascal is subjected is perpetrated by another gay subject in nearly identical circumstances. More importantly, however, the construction of the scene is such that the viewer, by ‘spying in’ on Pascal but not being allowed to see him ‘fully’ in private, is almost perfectly aligned with Marcus, his abusive partner [fig. 27]. Here, Hung tests ‘gay spectatorship’ by making it fully conscious of its role in (re)constructing the notion of openness and full visibility as a marker of queerness. As it does in *Butterfly*, the camera perspective moves from the highly personal and private to the highly objective, preventing straightforward interpretations of either Pascal’s desires or his sexual and cultural belonging. By amalgamating closeness and distance, Hung refuses to grant queerness a prominent position whilst obfuscating Pascal’s cultural belonging vis-à-vis his sexuality (Figs. 5.5 and 5.6).

If Pascal and Marcus are outsiders, forced to make a miserable living in Hong Kong, so is Ricky, a delivery boy recently arrived from the Mainland and living with his aunt in a claustrophobically small apartment. Despite being based in Hong Kong, his strongest connection is with Beijing where his sickly mother resides. Lying to his mother about his fictional career as a stockbroker, Ricky works as a delivery boy and is continuously reminded of his poor ability to deliver on time. Significantly, his status as an outsider is positioned in-between the scenes of Marcus’s physical and subsequent sexual abuse of Pascal which, as previously mentioned, takes place in a space that seems to signify personal and sexual freedom. Thus, for Ricky and Pascal, Hong Kong appears as a harsh space in which they do not belong, despite their efforts to make it liveable. It is only after their meeting initiated by Pascal, who loiters nears the noodle restaurant in for which Ricky delivers, that the two men attempt in unison to make the space of Hong Kong inhabitable. Their first meeting occurs on a public bench where Hung’s slow cinema comes into the light. Apart from working as a *queerscape*, to use Leung’s term (2001), the bench serves as a meeting place, both physical and metaphorical, between two strangers, two



Fig. 5.5 First meeting in a public space, *Soundless Wind Chime*



Fig. 5.6 The viewer 'peeping in', *Soundless Wind Chime*

potential lovers and two cultural positionings of non-normative sexuality. This scene, which captures neatly the notions of Thirdspace in New Queer Sinophone Cinema, is filmed in a 54-second medium close-up shot of the two men eating a sandwich together. Whilst this quotidian scene stands in contrast to the opening scenes of the film—dreamy landscape vs. passing cars—the motionless camera, much like Tsai Ming-liang's cinema of slowness, forces the spectator to dwell on the interaction between the two characters. Here, the meeting between the two men is figured not in

terms of queerness or physical attraction but in terms of tenderness and sympathy, particularly from the point of Ricky who appears to sympathise with Pascal by offering him food. If queerscapes ‘refer to the contingent and tangential uses of public space by sexual minorities’, in which we find ‘expressions of desire, eroticism, and sexuality that momentarily disrupt what heterocentric ideology assumes to be an immutable, coherent relation between biological sex, gender, and sexual desire’ (Leung 2001, 426), their use in *Soundless* is based not only on sexual desire but also financial and social standing. For the two men, particularly Pascal, the search for food and shelter is as significant as his desire for Ricky. Thus, although serving as a queerscape, the park bench also offers the two outsiders a space from which they can begin to create a ‘site of possibility’ not only in terms of queerness but also belonging and ultimately a temporary notion of a ‘home’. So if nothing is particularly ‘gay’ about *Soundless Wind Chime*, we may then pose another equally significant question: what is particularly Sinophone about Hung’s film?

Before I attempt to answer this question, I introduce here Wong Kar-wai’s seminal 1997 film *Happy Together* which, according to Rey Chow, is a nostalgic film, in that the two main character’s ‘wishful imagining of, or insistent gesturing back to, an originary state of togetherness’ cannot be read as merely ‘a hankering after a specific historical past’ (1999, 36). Instead, she argues, Wong Kar-wai’s film is nostalgic for ‘what we may call the flawless union among people, the perfect convergence between emotional and empirical realities, a condition of togetherness in multiple senses of the term. This is a condition which can never be fully attained but which is therefore always desired and pursued’ (1999, 36). Chow provides one interpretation of this togetherness, namely, the idea of home:

To this extent, the partners involved in an erotic relationship, insofar as they can be considered as a single unit, may be regarded as members of a certain kind of home. The relationship between Fai and Bo-wing can be thought of as a home which, despite its many breakups, both attempt to maintain. (1999, 37)

The main reason for viewing the film in terms of nostalgia, Chow argues, lies in her commitment in opposing ‘the analytically reductionist readings’ of *Happy Together* which affix to the film what she terms a ‘reflectionist value by way of geopolitical realism’. In other words, Chow refuses to frame *Happy Together* as ‘a film made in Hong Kong around

1997' as 'having something to do with the factographic "reality" of Hong Kong's return to the People's Republic of China' (1999, 32). Whilst others have challenged Chow's method of viewing Wong Kar-wai's film in isolation from the historical and social contexts of the 1997 Handover (Leung 2001; Lim 2006), I employ Chow's analysis not because I wish to pursue the idea of nostalgia in Hung's film but because the notion of home informs it, despite the Hung's objection to such a comparison. In an interview with *Cinespot*, Hung notes:

I just feel that overseas audiences like the Americans have scarce knowledge on Asian LGBT films. Almost all of these films are viewed as copycats of *Happy Together*. ... I don't understand why every Asian LGBT film is related to *Happy Together*. It is perhaps their habit is to associate different films in their writing, but when you try to quote something, it is automatically seen as copying. (Kantorates 2009, emphasis in original)

Here, Hung acknowledges the influence of Wong Kar-wai's film but stresses that similarities are only referential. However, the style of *Happy Together*—the fast-moving images, in particular—along with Chow's notion of togetherness as home, are, I argue, closely tied to Pascal and Ricky creation of a 'home' in Hong Kong. For the aforementioned queer-scapes are not viewed only through the slow camera but the amalgam of slow *as well as* fast-moving images, the latter being a hallmark of Wong Kar-wai's cinema. I have previously referred to Abbas's notions of the problems of spectatorship in Hong Kong cinema where the fast-moving images (in Wong Kar-wai's films in particular) are a means of engaging affectively and visually with the ever-changing cultural space of Hong Kong. In *Soundless*, the slowness of the scene of the two men sitting on a public bench is replaced by the fast images coming from the hand-held camera which portrays both inside and outside of Ricky's aunt's living quarters. Here, the documentary-like shots stand in stark contrast to the earlier scene whilst the shots of the two men settling in Ricky's room is reminiscent of Lai Yiu-fai and Ho Bo-wing's claustrophobic quarters in *Happy Together*.³ On the latter, Chow notes:

None of these scenes are, strictly speaking, visually spectacular. On the contrary, they often convey the impression of things and people being captured in a drab, matter-of-fact manner. Like the ordinary and fragmented nature of the two lovers' life together, the reality displayed unobtrusively by these images appears unremarkable and unattractive. (1999, 42)

The same can be said of the quotidian character of the scenes in *Soundless*. As Ricky and Pascal are getting ready for sleep in Ricky's stiflingly small room, they overhear Ricky's aunt talking to and subsequently having sex with one of her customers. Whilst these scenes testify to the 'realities' of their dire circumstances, the closeness of the men lying on the bed creates a memorable moment reminiscent of the 'tango scene' in *Happy Together* which, according to Chow, 'becomes a unique image of love' (1999, 43). Like the scenes in Wong Kar-wai's film, where the two men are 'basked in warmth and light' emanating from the symbolically charged lampshade, the images in the scene in *Soundless* also appear to 'imbue the love story with a kind of magic, inserting in the mundane reality of the documentary-like fragments a dreamlike world' (Chow 1999, 43). Hung's indebtedness to Wong Kar-wai's film is undeniable, in that the former's use of light serves as a means of a queer connection between characters. Whilst the most direct reference to *Happy Together* appears to be Ricky and Pascal dancing together on the street, the scenes in which the two men are moving into their own apartment may serve as an indirect citation of Wong Kar-wai's film. Shot as an amateur time-lapse, the scenes exhibit the aforementioned notion of togetherness-as-home where the camera captures slow and fast moving images. The significance of this is twofold: whilst the slow images force us to dwell and spend considerable time watching the interaction between the two characters, the fast-moving images remove any sense of comfort and stability within these very scenes. The oscillation between the fast and the slow, closeness and distance as well as the inside and the outside poses a challenge for the viewer as he/she attempts to make sense of the relationship between the two men. What becomes apparent is that *Soundless* is not a 'gay film' but a picture that contains elements of queerness which is not given a prominent position. In fact, it is queerness that enables the creation of a home and the subsequent, albeit temporary, sense of belonging.

If Hung is indebted to *Happy Together* on a stylistic level, where does that leave the element of the Sinophone? In other words, if we take on Chow's approach of viewing the film in isolation from its social context, we may conclude that Hung's film works on a similar level, where the historical and social settings are ancillary to the investigation of the relationship *between* the characters themselves, not their cultural settings. Whilst this may seem like a workable strategy, I argue that viewing Wong Kar-wai's film (and Hung's film as an extension) as detached from the contexts of its production, particularly in terms of Hong Kong's 'return to China', does not

appear to be a viable method of examining the workings of sexuality, politics and (post)coloniality in the film. For instance, Lim argues that ‘1997 serves as the main impetus for the production of the film’ (2006, 101). Looking closely at the opening credits of the film, which takes place in Argentina—the antipodes of Hong Kong—Lim notes: ‘The disappearance of Hong Kong from the film’s narrative, the impending change in its political status, and the tropes of travel and diaspora are simultaneously highlighted in this brief sequence’ (2006, 102). Focusing on the diasporic elements in the film—Lai Yiu-fai and Ho Bo-wing’s travels in Argentina—Lim contends that their travelling sexualities complicate the relationship between home and away, as they negotiate their sexual identity in the diaspora:

Read metaphorically in geopolitical terms, the film offers travelling denizens of Hong Kong a choice away from the reunion with China. However ironic the film’s title might have been intended to be, the promise of “happy together” cannot be anchored in any particular location but is a journey on which travelling sexualities embark, then perhaps detour and never make their way home. (2006, 125)

Although Lai Yiu-fai appears to be on his way home to Hong Kong, he makes an important stop in Taipei in order to see Chang. Thus, Taiwan becomes both geographically (the film ends in Taipei) and symbolically (Taiwan’s sovereignty vis-à-vis the PRC) an ‘emergent third space in the Hong Kong transnational and diasporic imaginary’ (Yue 2000, 261). Significantly, the character of Chang comes in-between the two lovers in *Happy Together*:

Indeed, a fight ensues between Leslie and Tony because of Chang. When the film ends with Tony on the monorail in Taiwan, we are left not knowing whether he really is returning to Hong Kong. As either one or the other (of the other China), Taiwan can be considered as the third space that disrupts the reunification between Hong Kong and the Mainland. (Yue 2000, 260)

Although my task in this book is not to provide an in-depth analysis of Wong Kar-wai’s film, I include Lim’s and Yue’s allegorical readings of *Happy Together* in order to highlight the film’s transnational Sinophonicity and its relation to queerness. Here, the relationship between Lai Yiu-fai and Ho Bo-wing can be read not just in terms of ‘gay’ representation but also in terms of diaspora, belonging and cultural politics. In *Soundless Wind Chime*, the character of Ricky embodies the Sinophone diasporic

experience as he travels from Beijing to Hong Kong to Switzerland and eventually back to Beijing. It is important to note that his movements from Beijing to Hong Kong do not stem from homophobia or oppressiveness but rather from his dire financial situation. Similarly, his journey to Switzerland is an attempt to uncover his former lover's past as a way of coming to terms with his death. In both cases, Ricky's diasporic movements from one place to another are not an example of the dialectic relationship between home (oppressive) and away (liberating) but a necessary element in Ricky's excavation of his past, present and future, as it enables him to make sense of Pascal's motivation for leaving Switzerland. Similarly, Ueli's travel to Beijing enables him—and us as the audience—to better grasp Ricky's incentive to move to Hong Kong. In both cases, travel and queerness serve as elements that connect these disparate spaces and places. The aforementioned reference to *Happy Together* is more than simply an acknowledgement of the influence of Wong Kar-wai's film on *Soundless Wind Chime*. In the following, I want to argue that the intertextuality in Hung's film serves as a means of bringing together the various 'Sinophones' as a way of highlighting the translocality of Hong Kong. If the inclusions and the use of several Sinophones in Yan Yan Mak's film connects Flavia's queer identity to social movement and unrest—thus suturing the affective and the political—Hung's film performs similar tactics, albeit without granting queerness a prominent position. Instead, intertextuality in *Soundless* testifies to the ability of Hong Kong independent cinema to bring in various cinematic Sinophone traditions, challenging the notion of a gay cinema as well as the representability of 'Chineseness'. Significantly, I argue that the element of convergence of cinematic traditions is the one of the most innovative element of New Queer Sinophone Cinema, as it positions (in this case) Hong Kong and Hong Kong cinema as a heterotopic space that brings together the cinema of the PRC and Taiwan. In the following, I wish to look in detail at Hung's explicit reference to Tsai Ming-liang who has gained international attention and praise from the early stages of this work. His only second feature film *Vive l'amour* (*Aiqing wansui*, 1994) netted a Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival that year whilst his subsequent film *The River* won the Silver Bear at the Berlin film festival in 1997. I focus on Tsai Ming-liang's 1998 feature film *The Hole*, for which he was awarded the FIPRESCI award at the 1998 Cannes Film Festival. More specifically, I wish to emphasise the film's translocality and Sinophonicity, as these inform not only Hung's film but also my discussions of queer Sinophone desire.

Set in an abandoned and quarantined apartment complex, *The Hole* is a bleak ‘science-fiction existential melodrama’ (Gorbman 2007, 159), featuring two characters—Hsiao Kang (Lee Kang-sheng) and May (Yang Kuei-mei)—who are physically and symbolically connected through the hole in the floor separating their apartments. With a ‘diluvian gloom shrouding the action’ (Yeh and Davis 2005, 232), the monotony of the main story is abruptly broken by five campy musical sequences (performed by May), whose mise-en-scène stands in stark contrast with the drabness and the isolation of the two characters. On the contrast between the ‘reality’ of the situation and the ‘fantasy’ of the musical, Gorbman notes: ‘Tsai’s decision to locate even these ostensibly escapist musical numbers in the apartment block has the effect of amplifying the film’s *huis clos*, its sense of doom condemning its characters’ (2007, 160, emphasis in original). For Gorbman, the musical numbers only accentuate the plight of the situation and the hopelessness of their predicament. However, what is significant for my discussion of Hung’s film is the symbolism of these scenes and their connections to Hong Kong cinema of the 1960s. For Tsai’s use of these sequences is closely tied to the politics of the PRC-Taiwan relationship and its connection to the 1997 Hong Kong Handover (Figs. 5.7 and 5.8).

About an hour into the film we are presented with May (in dim surroundings), lying in her bathtub, and as she suddenly sneezes (a sign that she probably has contracted the ‘cockroach disease’) we are transported to a world in which bright lighting and Technicolor hues and glamour dominate the scenes. Here, May is a campy singer, wearing a pink dress whilst surrounded by male dancers dressed in dinner jackets. Reminiscent of Marilyn Monroe’s dance scene ‘Diamonds Are a Girl’s Best Friend’ in Howard Hawks’s *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953), May dances on the staircase of the food market which is one of the main elements of the film’s diegesis. Important to note, however, is May’s lip-syncing to Grace Chang’s 1950s number ‘Achoo Cha Cha’ which thematically links the motif of sneezing and its relation to an unknown disease. Chang, a film and singing star of the 1950s and the 1960s, who starred in Hollywood-style musicals such as *Mambo Girl* (1957), *Air Hostess* (1959) and *The Wild, Wild Rose* (1960), was a ‘cheerful, classically trained beauty’ who embodied ‘an impeccable image of modern Chinese femininity’ (Yeh and Davis 2005, 234). We may wonder as to the significance and the purpose of including and impersonating in the film a Hong Kong star of Mandarin pop music of the 1950s and the 1960s. For the scenes are undeniably parodic: ‘The production numbers’ feverish hunger not only for sexual gratification but



Fig. 5.7 Marilyn Monroe performing 'Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend', *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*



Fig. 5.8 Yang Kuei-mei performing Grace Chang's 'Achoo Cha Cha', *The Hole*

for grand, glam style ironizes the performance and takes it way over the top' (233). In fact, Yeh and Davis argue that 'May's rendition of Grace Chang is quintessentially *song*: gaudy, vulgar, tawdry, saucy, loose, ersatz, smelling of the street if not the gutter, and very Taiwanese' (2005, 234, emphasis in original). Here, it appears that Tsai, by bringing to Taiwan the music and dance of Grace Chang, also links the former to the latter's colonial associations with Shanghai nightclubs, Hong Kong musicals and Hollywood cinema. This time, however, the glittering star image of the 1960s is replaced by the crude and bleak local rendition that situates it firmly within the Taiwanese working-class culture:

Grace Chang is replaced with May's sultry, beefy *song*, carrying the aroma of working-class Taiwan, tinged with torrid masculinity. A sunny colonial metropolis is substituted by the disease-bearing monsoon of Taipei. The cozy bourgeois villas of Hong Kong are transformed into anonymous working-class "citizens' residences" (*guomin zhuzai*). (235, emphasis in original)

The appropriation and the satirisation of the early pop culture of Hong Kong works both as a homage as well as a critique, in that what is seen as 'cheerful' and 'classical' is here transformed into bleak and tawdry. These scenes exhibit Tsai's intertextual Sinophone linkage of the 1930s Shanghai and the 1960s Hong Kong with the new millennium Taipei. In his analysis of the musical numbers in *The Wayward Cloud* (*Tianbian yiduo yun*, 2005), Lim notes that, although nostalgic, Tsai recasts the numbers through a 'pornographic lens'. Paying particular attention to the final number in *Wayward*, Lim notes that it 'challenges musical's heteronormative convention since it is, in fact, a threesome' (2014, 142). Moreover, the scenes involving actresses dressed in tawdry neon dresses 'making love' to a statue of the former president of Taiwan, Chiang Kai-shek (1887–1975), work as an 'uncharacteristically explicit political critique aimed at challenging the heteronormative discourse and nationalism myth proposed up by the KMT regime under Chiang's leadership' (2014, 146). If the amalgam of the political and the sexual in *The Wayward Cloud* works to dispel heteronormative discourses, in what way do the musical numbers in *The Hole* serve as a means for complicating the relationship between the reverential and the disrespectful? If Grace Chang served as an embodiment of modern Chinese femininity, she did so by not having the 'ethereal, tragic beauty of Lucilla You Min that might have been deemed too

“Chinese,” or the aggressive sexuality of Linda Lin Dai that seemed to “Western” (Yeh and Davis 2005, 234). In fact, Yeh and Davis argue that Grace Chang is ‘a bit of both ... the perfect blend of ingénue and siren, of activity and stylish grace’ (2005, 234). Seen in this light, Tsai’s inclusion of Grace Chang’s musical numbers in *The Hole* works as a political and a queer positioning of Hong Kong and by extension Taiwan. In other words, if Hong Kong in the 1950s and the 1960s appears at first glance as a time and place of innocence and ‘wholesomeness’, it is only in relation to the equivalent ‘White Terror’ period—a crackdown on intellectual and political dissidents—of the 1950s and the 1960s Taiwan (Chao and Myers). Similarly, if the Hollywood style cinema of 1960s Hong Kong promoted virtuosity and respectability, the genre of ‘healthy realism’ (*jiankang xieshizhuyi*) in Taiwan advocated patriotism and traditional family values (Berry and Farquhar). Placed in relation to each other in terms of both time and space, the two Sinophone cinemas inform and complement each other, pointing out their interdependence. Thus, Grace Chang’s impeccable image of a modern Chinese woman is exposed as a political negotiation of different notions of Chineseness which is neither local (Shanghai to Hong Kong to Taipei) nor global (Hollywood to Hong Kong to Taipei). ‘If Tsai’s films are marked by a profound angst’, notes Peter Hitchcock, ‘their ennui picks away at formulas of identity that oscillate within the boundaries of nation and transnation, Taiwan and Greater China’ (2009, 236). Importantly, Hitchcock argues that Tsai’s films ‘simultaneously question both their own status as correctly representing Taiwanese identity and those transnational narratives that would render Chinese modernity in a single key, as something that naturally aspires to or is in accord with “nation”’ (2009, 236). Seen in this light, the inclusion of Grace Chang, who ‘like Tsai, was part of a Chinese diaspora, in her case one that took her from her native Shanghai to Hong Kong at the time of the 1949 revolution’ (244), serves as a challenge to ‘Orientalism [that] continues to produce a burden of Chineseness ... an identity girded by both a traditional mythology and globalization’s ideological reflexes’ (236). Challenging the idea that Chineseness and its representation is ‘caught’ in-between ‘tradition’ and ‘globalisation’, the music of Grace Chang in *The Hole* points not towards nationalisation of Chineseness as either Chinese or Taiwanese, but rather to its transitional Sinophonicity where Chineseness is an amalgam of various diasporic elements that always point ‘elsewhere’ or *elsewhen*. For after the screen goes dark at the ending of the film, Tsai’s handwritten coda—‘In the year 2000, we are grateful

that we still have Grace Chang's songs to comfort us, Tsai Ming-liang, 1997"—emphasises not only the film's futuristic prophecy but also its nostalgic, yet critical backwards-looking vision. For apart from addressing the audience in the near future, the coda also speaks to the audience in the present, both in Taiwan as well as Hong Kong. Significantly, Tsai's reference to the year 1997, besides stating the year of production, alludes to the Hong Kong Handover which is presented as a point in the past, both in term of the film's diegesis—it is seven days before the year 2000—as well as the film's release in 1998. Thus, the temporality of Tsai's film is such that the future is envisioned from the point of the past in which the linking between new millennium Taiwan and the colonial 1950s and 1960s Hong Kong, bypasses the present, in effect effacing it both from the film's diegesis as well as from its cultural representation. If the disappearance of the (present) Hong Kong in Wong Kar-wai's *Happy Together* is realised in terms of spatiality, the temporality of *The Hole* effaces both Taipei and Hong Kong from the film, pointing instead towards the past as a way of imagining the future. Correspondingly, if Taiwan in *Happy Together* is a Thirdspace that upsets the reunification between Hong Kong and the PRC, Hong Kong in *The Hole* works in a similar fashion, serving as a cultural space that is positioned between the PRC and Taiwan. In his examination of the Hong Kong Mandarin musicals of the 1950s and the 1960s, Siu Leung Li notes the significance in situating the films in 'a transnational interpretative framework so as to fully understand the social relevance and cultural significance of this imaginary representation in its own spatial-temporal context and in relation to our own experience of the early twenty-first century' (2008, 75). According to Li, the formation of two major film studios in Hong Kong—the MP & GI and the Shaw Brothers Studio—had transnational roots, as they were 'modeled on the Hollywood studio system and were geopolitically not merely "Hong Kong" studios' (2008, 75). Rather, Li notes, 'the two could be understood from today's perspective as transnational enterprises interlocking at least (1) Hong Kong the British Crown Colony, (2) Nanyang (Singapore and Malaysia), and (3) Taiwan, the Republic of China' (2008, 75). These Sinophone productions are very much that—Sinophone in almost literal sense of the word—rather than 'Chinese', seeing as they challenge the notions of cultural belonging in strictly national terms. Moreover, Li argues that 'these cultural texts effect a veiled motto of "forgetting China"'. Significantly, "China" is put under erasure; it is very much invisible, lost in the emerging webs of desire for Westernization' (2008, 78). Thus, if 'the imaginary

of the movie musical insinuates a disappearance of “China”—the nation that is vanishing, if not already vanished in the hilarious quest for youthful pleasure, Euro-American modernity, and local identity’ (78), Tsai’s inclusion of the Hong Kong musicals in *The Hole* does not suggest a ‘Westernisation’ of Taiwan. Rather, it points towards a (trans)localisation, as his critical appropriation of the early pop culture of Hong Kong transforms both the original as well as its contemporary reproduction. This way, the original Grace Chang numbers are removed from their aura of innocence whilst Tsai’s contemporary rendition is a parody that challenges the ‘dark’ period of Taiwanese nationalist ideology. In both cases, the musical embodies the Sinophone interplay between the local, the national and the global, never settling on a particular territory or a cultural identity. Rather, according to Li:

Hong Kong’s cultural experience through the colonial and postcolonial times is a *mélange* of Westernization, the emergence of local nonnational identity, the rise of ethnonationalism ... the unconscious self-Orientalization, and the conscious business-is-all-there-is approach. (2008, 89)

As a result, the temporality of *The Hole* works in line with Abbas’s notions of *déjà disparu*, in that the Hong Kong musical is represented not as ‘in the good old days’ but rather as a fleeting moment which cannot be grasped. Tsai’s musical numbers ‘construct images out of clichés’ (Abbas 1997, 26) as they problematise the viewing process by which such images are received. By coalescing cinematic Sinophone traditions, *The Hole* challenges the notions of a ‘Chinese cinema’, and when viewed in connection with Wong Kar-wai’s *Happy Together* and the latter’s positioning of Hong Kong and its return to China, Tsai’s film leaves the present in the state of temporal vacuum which will only be filled in the anticipation of future events.

My emphasis on *The Hole* in this chapter is not only based on Kit Hung’s intermittent use of the cinema of slowness but also on his explicit citation of Tsai’s film in *Soundless Wind Chime*. The reference occurs around a half-hour mark, during one of Ricky’s recollections of his life as a food delivery boy in Hong Kong. As he enters an elderly woman’s apartment, the woman, who appears to be of poor health, unexpectedly bursts into a Grace Chang musical routine. Here, the contrast between the ‘reality’ and the ‘fantasy’ is just as stark, in that the elderly woman in the first instance appears weak and in poor physical condition (she is unable to walk), whilst

she is agile and lively in the musical song. Interestingly, it is after Ricky hears her sneeze that she begins to perform the same musical number—‘Achoo Cha Cha’—as Yang Kuei-mei does in *The Hole*. Like in Tsai’s film, the significance of the Grace Chang number lies in its Sinophonicity, as it reaffixes the cultural space of Hong Kong outside the national scope of ‘China’ and more towards a transnationalism which is simultaneously local and global. In his online review of Hung’s film, Paul Fonoroff cites the musical number and remarks that ‘the interlude is too reminiscent of Taiwanese gay art house auteur Tsai Ming-liang to win points for originality’. Here, I argue that Hung’s inclusion of the number works not as an original element but as a reference—much akin to his acknowledgement of Wong Kar-wai—that confirms Tsai’s image as an auteur whilst it establishes Hung as a filmmaker and a cinephile who is aware of the significance of intertextuality in instituting credentials of authorship. For if Tsai’s self-image as an auteur is grounded in his passion for and fascination with the European New Wave of the 1960s and the 1970s, Hung’s reference to Tsai’s filmmaking creates a new starting point that positions Tsai as the original and Hung as a continuation of the cinephilic Sinophone cinematic tradition. Significantly, by positioning Taiwanese cinema as an original, Hung relocates the translocal roots of Hong Kong cinema from the Hong Kong Mandarin to the Taiwan Art Cinema which, according to Lim, ‘fully subscribes to the mode of international art cinema in terms of aesthetics; mode of address; discursive formation; cross-cultural flow’ (2014, 149). Here, I do not suggest that Hung’s positioning of Tsai as a new starting point for a Sinophone cinematic tradition somehow erases the pan-Asian roots of Hong Kong musicals. It is not merely the intertextuality of the aforementioned musical scene that positions Hong Kong as a transnational and translocal cultural space. More important, I argue, is the diegetic music played in the background just before the appearance of the interlude in which the elderly woman re-appropriates Grace Chang’s colonial Hong Kong of the 1950s and the 1960s, to the postcolonial, post-Handover Hong Kong of the 2000s (Figs. 5.9 and 5.10).

Moments before the musical number in *Soundless*, Ricky is seen slowly announcing himself before entering the elderly woman’s apartment. As he delivers his order, Ricky’s eyes wander around the various black and white and sepia photographs on the woman’s wall. Here, we see the images of her glory days in which she appears to have been a film or a music star. Significant, however, is the diegetic music coming from inside the apartment. Astute listeners may recognise the song as ‘He Shang De Yue



Fig. 5.9 Weak elderly woman, *Soundless Wind Chime*



Fig. 5.10 ‘Achoo Cha Cha’, *Soundless Wind Chime*

Se’ [Moonlight on the River], performed by Li Xianglan [born Yoshiko Yamaguchi and later Shirley Yamaguchi], a film star and a pop singer in the 1930s and 1940s China. In this section, I wish to highlight Li’s career not as a Chinese but rather as a transnational icon, whose pan-Asian identity positions her not within the Chinese but rather within the Sinophone cinema. Born in Manchuria in 1920 to Japanese parents, Li starred in multiple Japanese (propaganda) films, playing a Chinese woman who falls for Japanese men. Her embodiment of Chineseness was sustained by her

fluent Mandarin and ‘the mannerisms of a Chinese girl’ which she perfected ‘first with the help of school friends and later with the help of her co-stars’ (Stephenson 2002, 4). Whilst her nationality remained a secret, Li became a star in both Japan and China, despite the existence in the press of reports of her ‘true’ identity. According to Stephenson:

Li Xianglan was probably considered more unambiguously Chinese to her Japanese audience, for whom she seemed to represent a quintessentially Chinese repository of femininity, an ideal colonized subject. From evidence in contemporary Chinese sources, though, Li seems to have represented much more fluid meanings to her Chinese fans, meanings which lent her an ambiguous, pan-Asian quality. 2002, 7–8

Li’s pan-Asian mobility allowed her blur and to cross borders (cultural as well as national) both on and off screen, effectively removing her ties to any specific place or nation. After the Second World War, Li—now Yoshiko Yamaguchi—starred in Japanese films under her real name, whilst she in the 1950s relocated to the United States and established a career in both Hollywood and on Broadway under her new name Shirley Yamaguchi (Wang 2012). Li’s transnational persona and her ability to ‘fit in’ contributed to the image of her as a border-crossing icon and a truly ‘international’ star. Moreover, Stevenson argues that to her fans Li’s origins and background become ‘immaterial’. What was more important was that Li Xianglan ‘echo the question mark which has accompanied her name: she came from everywhere, or perhaps nowhere at all’ (9). Notwithstanding Li’s ostensible mobility and border crossing, however, I do wish to reference Yiman Wang who notes that it is important to ‘politicize and historicize Li Xianglan’s pan-East Asian mobility within the context of nation/empire-building’ (2005, 7). More specifically, the typical narrative of her films, which relied on the aforementioned emotional encounters with Japanese functionaries, paralleled ‘her linguistic shift from Chinese to Japanese, in speaking *and* singing (Wang 2005 7, emphasis in original). What is significant is that the ‘political agenda of expansionism and assimilationism was packaged in the form of depoliticized, sentimentalized romance which, combined with Li’s musical interludes, won her pan-East Asian appeal’. Despite the non-existence of national boundaries within the film, it is the political (and gender) hierarchies within the diegesis that reinforced and maintained border, both national as well as cultural. Thus, viewing Li Xianglan’s identity vacillation and success ‘was premised upon her performative suturing into

variant national, ethnic imaginaries, as much as it suggested her pan-East Asian mobility; that is, the national and the transnational are mutually constitutive, not contradictory' (Wang 2005, 7).

If Hung's reference to *The Hole* highlights his awareness of Tsai's Sinophone cinema, it is not merely for the (self-serving) purpose of establishing authorship via intertextuality. Rather, the scene leading up to the musical number in *Soundless Wind Chime* emphasises the roots of even Tsai's reference, in effect exhibiting the history of not only the colonial Hong Kong but also the colonial Shanghai. In his reflections on the possibilities of a multidisciplinary approach to Chinese film studies, Paul G. Pickowicz poses the question: 'Are the new "global" and "transnational" directions of the Chinese movie industry, complete with co-production, regional "cross-border" and international marketing, really new?' (2007, 43). His answer is: 'No, the Chinese film industry was already involved in complicated "global" and regional dynamics in the 1920s and 1930s'. 'We sometimes forget', Pickowicz reminds us, 'that from the 1920s to the early 1950s it was often the case that there were more new foreign films being screened in Shanghai and elsewhere than there were new Chinese films being exhibited' (2007, 44). Pickowicz argues that investigating 'foreign' influence on Chinese film, for instance, provides a better understanding of contemporary Chinese/Sinophone cinema. Particularly, his insistence on looking at the 'old' rather than (or perhaps in order to understand) the 'new', facilitates an investigation into what qualifies as foreign and what is defined as 'Chinese'. If Chinese cinema/filmmaking has been commercialised and global from the very early days, it is also imperative to 'situate' those works in a transnational framework. Poshek Fu's investigation of the Shaw Brothers Studio, which had 'by the 1930s ... linked British Hong Kong, China, and Southeast Asia into a transnational network of entertainment businesses' (2008, 2–3), is one such example. Positioning early Sinophone cinema in this context becomes vital for 'our understanding of the complexity of issues and themes concerning the history, politics, diasporic network, global business, identity construction, and pan-Chinese cultures of Chinese-language cinema' (21). Here, Li Xianglan serves as a case in point. Upon her return from the United States, she had starring roles in no less than four Hong Kong films—*Chin Ping Mei* (1955), *One Night of Love* (1956), *The Lady of Mystery* (1957) and *The Unforgettable Night* (1958)—all of which were Shaw productions. By including the diegetic music of Li Xianglan, *Soundless Wind Chime*, then, becomes part of this network, in that it synthesises the Sinophone cinemas it references,

from Shanghai (late 1930s) to Hong Kong (1950s and 1960s), to Taiwan (1990s) to Hong Kong/Switzerland/Beijing (2000s).

Whilst the trajectory above, in its circumventing of the PRC, appears to follow Siu Leung Li's arguments on forgetting or erasing China, we must not forget that the Shaw Brothers adoption of Mandarin as the official language of their productions was part of a vision to '[represent] the modern nationhood of China to a desired global audience' as well as 'a strategy that aimed to construct a pan-Chinese culture' (Fu 2008, 12). In other words, if the Hong Kong Mandarin musicals of the 1950s and the 1960s embodied the modernising logic of 'catching up' to the West, resulting in a disappearance of China, the Shaw Brothers instalment of Mandarin as a linguistic framework for connecting the diasporic, pan-Chinese communities was 'most successful ... through *constructing* the consciousness of a cultural China' (Fu 2008, 12, my emphasis). Here, 'China' became 'an imagined homeland expressed by principally an invented tradition, a shared past, and a common language ... [tapping into] the nostalgia and nationalism of Chinese audiences around the world'. Thus, the simultaneous erosion and construction of the notions of China and Chineseness is a continuous process which involves multiple locales as well as temporalities. Sheldon Lu notes that the idea of the Sinophone, if 'sensitive to the issues of is diaspora, identity-formation, colonialism and postcoloniality' (2014, 23), must not 'exclude China from its geographic and linguistic range' (2014, 22). Serving as the 'ancestral home', China is always in the process of re-construction and re-formation, both from the outside as well as from within. 'Cinematic modernity', Lu notes, 'is the story of the translocal, transregional and transnational circulation of images, speeches and dialects inside and outside China, in Chinese cultural centres whether under colonial rule or under the sovereignty of another nation' (2014, 24). My engagement with New Queer Sinophone Cinema in this book follows Lu's example, in that the construction of China in these films takes place both within as well as outside the periphery of the PRC. In Chap. 3, for instance, I referred to Andrea Bachner's arguments on the inclusion in *Butterfly* of a sound clip (from Stanley Kwan's *Center Stage*) of Ruan Lingyu (played by Maggie Cheung)—a prominent silent film star of the 1930s Shanghai cinema—as an intercinematic element that intertwines the past and the present. This musical sequence, then, which appears as a soundtrack to Sun Yu's 1933 film *Little Toys*, thwarts well-defined notions of time and progress and positions Hong Kong as a transnational Sinophone space. According to Marchetti,

The picture that emerges complicates the historical Ruan and the world of old Shanghai cinema by connecting it with contemporary Hong Kong. Ruan and Cheung symbolize the “modernity” of the city, the contemporary Chinese woman, as well as the medium of the motion picture, and Kwan explores issues of history and film aesthetics, personal and public identity, as well as the relationship between the film star and the press through the Ruan–Cheung dyad. (2012, 103–104)

Whilst the use of intercinematic Sinophone elements in Mak’s film present a reality in which queerness (amongst women) is imagined in the past, the present and the future, the Sinophonicity of *Soundless Wind Chime* comes full circle in Ricky’s return to Beijing. As Ueli—perhaps as a reincarnation of Pascal—finally locates Ricky’s childhood home and sees Ricky’s mother’s ghost announce its leaving with a sound of the wind chime, we are transported back to the fateful moment of Pascal’s death. Here, the two men’s apartment in Hong Kong becomes a space where different temporalities and spatialities merge, as images from the past, the present and the future align with Ricky’s memories of and from Switzerland. Significantly, it is the—*phone* in the Sinophone that comes to full view here, as the figure of Li Xianglan/Yoshiko Yamaguchi appears once again, this time in the form of a ‘Singing Angel’ (played by a child) who sings an altered (slow) version of ‘He Shang De Yue Se’. Here, a song by a 1930s film star is not only reclaimed by a new generation in a new cultural space, but it is simultaneously queered, as the lyrics (‘I miss my lover ... We cuddled and kissed’) are applied to a queer, transcultural couple. The very last scenes of the film coalesce the various spaces—Hong Kong, Switzerland and Beijing—in an amalgam of memories and realities, all of which end with Ricky’s driving his motorbike taxi on the streets of Beijing. Thus, the homely space of Hong Kong, in which Ricky and Pascal appear to be ‘happy together’, the cool palette of the Swiss landscape, which highlights its calmness and serenity, all come together in the bustling streets of Beijing. Hung, then, draws on both early and contemporary cinematic Sinophone traditions and in the process re-constructs them into a highly personal yet non-specific narrative of loss, memory and queerness that takes place both outside as well as inside the ‘ancestral home’ of China. Similar to the optimistic ending of Mak’s film—where ‘the best is yet to come’—the meeting between Ricky and Ueli suggests an openness to future queer affiliations within as well as outside ‘Chinese cultural centres’. Cinematic modernity in *Soundless Wind Chime*—indeed in all of the

films discussed in this book, films that form what I refer to as New Queer Sinophone Cinema—allow for an interconnection and an opening up of numerous Sinophone spaces, all of which are connected by queer desire.

NOTES

1. Although *Angels in America: Millennium Approaches* premiered in 1991, around the same time as the emergence of ‘queer theory’ in academia (a term coined by Teresa de Lauretis at a conference at the University of California, Santa Cruz in 1990), I do not suggest that the play should be viewed solely in terms of anti-identitarian politics (particularly considering the play’s emphasis on the AIDS epidemic vis-à-vis 1980s gay activism).
2. It appears that the magical realism of Murakami’s novel—particularly the relation between dreams and reality—has a direct influence on the aesthetics of Scud’s film.
3. Interestingly, in the shot in which Ricky’s aunt appears on the street, a hand reaches out and lights her cigarette. The hand nearly appears to belong to the camera operator, attesting to the documentary-style of the scene.

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Conclusion

Abstract The conclusion offers a brief look at the work of Cui Zi'en, whose output is both localised and transnational. The chapter suggests that Cui's work, whose unconventionality and complexity highlights the questions of representation, forms a significant part of the wider network of New Queer Sinophone Cinema.

Keywords Cui Zi'en • New Chinese documentary film movement • DV cinema • Docudramas

In her analysis of the 'mobile intimacies' in the oeuvre of the Chinese auteur Cui Zi'en, Audrey Yue notes: 'In queer Sinophone cinemas, the spatial is a significant concept that contests the ontology of kinship. ... Similarly, emphasizing the temporal, the revolutionary DV cinema movement of the Sixth Generation of Chinese filmmakers, of which Cui is central, can also be considered as part of the Sinophone's subaltern challenge to official Chinese modernity' (2012, 96). I include here Yue's analysis of Cui's cinema, in that it is directly linked to my analyses in this book, as the spatial and temporal configurations of queerness and queer desire are reworked as a challenge to the global gay formations as well as the positioning of an 'authentic' local sexuality. Yue's focus, however, is on Cui's influence of the independent film scene as well as his contribution to the nascent LGBT social movements in the PRC. Besides co-writing and

co-starring in several queer films, Cui has also directed a range of independent DV productions, from features such as *The Old Testament* (*Jiuyue*, 2002) and *Enter the Clowns* (*Chou jue deng chang*, 2003), to documentaries such as *We Are the ... of Communism* (*Women shi gongchan zhuyi shen-gluehao*, 2007) and *Queer China, 'Comrade' China* (*Zhi tongzhi*, 2008). His *Feeding Boys*, *Ayaya* (*Aiyaya*, *Qu Buru*, 2003) and *Night Scene* (*Ye jing*, 2003) are typically identified as 'docudramas' whose 'experimental visual logics ... blur documentary and fiction and ... refuse narrative linearity or closure' (Rofel 2010, 443). In the context of *The Old Testament* and *Enter the Clowns*, Berry notes that the 'relative ease and cheapness of video production and the availability of an international gay and lesbian film and video festival circuit' has afforded Cui international visibility and recognition (2004, 200). In her analysis of *Feeding Boys*—a film about male hustlers (money boys)—Rofel notes that the film portrays a 'set of representations. The question of how to represent money boys and who can and should speak in their name is highlighted in this film' (2010, 442). Whilst Berry views *Enter the Clowns* as a queer take on the traditional family structure, Rofel's approach frames *Feeding Boys* as a re-articulation and a rethinking of neoliberal ideologies that position cultural flows as moving from West to the Rest. Rofel notes that the 'place of lesbians and gay men in China is intimately connected to cosmopolitanism because it is through the expression of desire that they, as well as other Chinese citizens, are able to feel part of a universal humanity' (2010, 427). More specifically, Rofel views the film as 'addressing the specificity of neoliberalism in China by challenging the hegemonic articulations between Chinese culture and proper desire on the one hand, and labor, money, and desire on the other' (2010, 443). I include here in the concluding pages a reference to Cui Zi'en oeuvre, in that his output, which is highly distinct in form, style and content from the films discussed in this book, feeds into the larger network of New Queer Sinophone Cinema. My positioning of *East Palace*, *West Palace* as both within and outside the Sixth Generation filmmaking in the PRC attests to the 'new' in New Queer Sinophone Cinema, namely, its heightened emphasis on spatiality and in-betweenness. The complex realism and spatial logic of *East Palace*, *West Palace* breaks down the imaginary invocations of a local/global queerness as well the power binaries between the oppressor and the oppressed. Although relying on similar modes of alternative networks of distributions—from international film festivals to online cinephile subcultures—Cui's cinema is highly unconventional and demands a significant amount of patience and thought on the part of the

viewer who is often left wondering about the ‘truthfulness’ of what he/she has just seen. *Enter the Clowns* was funded by the Jeonju International Film Festival. *East Palace*, *West Palace* received financial backing from France. Yet, both films are highly local and personal, finely attuned to the specificities of Beijing city parks and own personal experiences and family history, respectively. Whilst producing films with international backing may contain in itself the risk of exoticisation and self-orientalism, it once again points to the question of representation. As I have shown in Chap. 2, Zhang’s film, with its use of mirrors and reflections, highlights the instabilities of terms such as local/global, East/West. In *Feeding Boys*, Rofel argues that ‘filmic representation does not establish unmediated truth’ (2010, 452). Cui’s on-and off-screen persona—his disdain for the money boys in the film and his personality as a gay activist in ‘real life’—blurs the boundaries between that which is real and that which is not. Moreover, and much like in Zhang’s film, ‘the consistent use of mirrors throughout the film, in which the various characters view their reflections, further pushes us to reflect on how money boys are seen versus how they see themselves’ (2010, 452). Whether on small mobile screens that have transformed the independent/underground DV cultures, or on the big screens at international film festivals, New Queer Sinophone Cinema exhibits instabilities in representation, as it complicates both sexual and cultural identities. By paying attention to as well as challenging the centrality of Chineseness, New Queer Sinophone Cinema introduces complex spaces where the local meets the global and where ‘China’ meets the ‘periphery’.

Berry and Rofel note that ‘any attempt to understand China’s visual culture today must start from an understanding of the New Documentary Movement’ (2010, 4). The movement, which built on the burgeoning independent thought that ensued in the aftermath of The Cultural Revolution and China’s opening up towards the West in 1980s, saw the rise of independent, low-budget and spontaneous documentary production that emerged alongside independent photography and the Sixth Generation filmmaking as artistic practises that appeared and developed outside China’s state-sponsored and state-controlled culture. Rather than labelling these records as alternative—which implies a more realistic and/or ‘truthful’ replacement of or a competitor to the official archives—Berry and Rofel note that these works ‘grow alongside as something additional’ (137). Cui’s docudrama *Night Scene*, for instance, which ‘documents’ male prostitutes in Beijing, falls into the category of an alternative archive, although its blurring of the lines between fiction and non-fiction

poses questions about the ‘authenticity’ of its own account, thus reworking the genre from within. However, Cui’s is only one of the numerous DV documentaries from the PRC that explore queer themes. Whilst Echo Y. Windy’s *The Box* (*Hezi*, 2001) and Shi Tou’s *Dyke March* (*Nü tongzhi youxing ri*, 2004) deal with lesbian themes—a lesbian couple in China and the 2002 San Francisco Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Pride Celebration, respectively—Zhang Hanzhi’s *Tangtang* (*Tangtang*, 2004), Gao Tian’s 2005 *Meimei* (*Meimei*) and Qiu Jiongiong’s *Madame* (2009, *Gu nainai*) explore male cross-dressing, emphasising the tensions between the filmmaker and the object of his/her film. Luke Robinson notes that ‘one can often trace a tension in these documentaries between the impulse to conceal, and the urge to reveal. On the one hand, they try to render the identity of the documentary subject uncertain and difficult to pin down. ... On the other hand, they seek to generate knowledge through or about these subjects’ (2013, 115). This is in line with my arguments about the ‘New’ of New Queer Sinophone Cinema, where a queer Thirdspace becomes a means for problematising non-normative sexuality and its representation. Significantly, these DV documentaries also engage in translocal and transnational queer imaginaries that take them outside the PRC territory. As Chao notes, ‘the main subjects in *Mei Mei* and *Tang Tang* choose pop songs from Greater China for their gender-crossing performances. ... To Chinese female impersonators like Tangtang and Meimei, the performance and consumption from Hong Kong and Taiwan ... manifest their engagement with a gendered trans-local Chinese imaginary’ (2010, 174, emphasis in original). Tapping into the transnational Sinophone networks described by Yue (2012), New Queer Sinophone Cinema, then, as argued in this book, creates an in-between space—a critical Thirdspace—that challenges both (nationalist) heteronormative constructions of Chineseness and Chinese cinema as well as Euro-Centric positioning of Chinese queerness as that which is ‘lagging behind its ‘Western’ counterparts. Significantly, by employing intricate spatiality as a means of re-shifting queerness in-between designations such as Chinese/Western, local/global, New Queer Sinophone Cinema re-evaluates and re-thinks discussions of modernity, queer visibility and cinematic representation inside and outside the PRC.

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