

**QUEER ARCHIVES IN
ZHANG YUAN'S *EAST PALACE*, *WEST PALACE* AND
ANG LEE'S *EAT DRINK MAN WOMAN***

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A Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Masters of Arts

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McMaster University MASTERS OF ARTS (2019) Hamilton, Ontario (English and Cultural Studies)

TITLE: Queer Archives in Zhang Yuan's *East Palace, West Palace* and Ang Lee's *Eat Drink Man Woman*

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NUMBER OF PAGES: 93

Abstract

If one can come out as queer, how does one come out as queer in the Chinese context? More importantly, how exactly does one come out as “Chinese,” especially given the increasingly complex construction and remaking of “Chineseness” across the Taiwan Strait? Building on Hongwei Bao’s concept of the “queer comrade” as an analytical framework that acknowledges the temporal coequality of its circulation across postsocialist China and Taiwan, this comparative study of Zhang Yuan’s *East Palace, West Palace* and Ang Lee’s *Eat Drink Man Woman* explores archives of Chineseness and queerness in a transnational context. At the same time, through examining representations of cruising, traditional opera form, tables, kitchens, and food -- I argue that queer identities are not only about private sexual practices, but also about new family formations, political tensions, and intercultural exchanges. I take cues from archival studies to see them as alternative archival practices and subjectivities which channel new pathways to reimagine Queer Sinophone futurities.

Acknowledgments

I have been privileged to undertake this project at McMaster University, which recognizes and acknowledges it is located on the traditional territories of the Mississauga and Haudenosaunee nations, and within the lands protected by the “Dish With One Spoon” wampum agreement.

Since arriving in Hamilton from Hong Kong more than a year ago, I have been welcomed wholeheartedly by not only my lovely cohort of MA students, but also the people of the broader Hamilton community.

Thank you to all my mentors in graduate school who have guided me through the year. First and foremost my deepest gratitude to Dr. Nadine Attewell for her support in supervising this thesis, and her immense patience that has made this project much more intellectually engaging and inspiring for me as a writer, researcher, and student. Thank you for believing in this work, and for sharing your insights, ideas, and energy with me. I would also like to thank Dr. Don Goellnicht and Dr. Daniel Coleman for serving as the first and second readers on this project.

Thank you to my colleagues and friends, I am forever grateful to Joel Guillemette, Shega Berisha, Sabrina Ramroop, Maggie Ward, Ella Ratz, Raquel Arcenio, Katrina Leial Sellinger, Kirsten Feldner for the privilege of learning with and from you not only in class, but more importantly through the community and beautiful friendships that we have built over the year.

Special thanks to my father, mother, sister, and all the “queer comrades” fighting for democracy and against police brutality in such volatile times in Hong Kong. I miss you all so dearly.

Lastly, 革命尚未成功，同志仍需努力。

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Introduction: Queer Comrade and the Archive

In his 2010 essay “Why Does Queer Theory Need China?,” Petrus Liu argues that modern Chinese queer literature has emerged “through, and as an interrogation of, the meanings of Chineseness” and suggested that “no account of sexuality is complete without a consideration of geopolitics – how nations are formed and their borders policed, how these institutions sustain and constrain the possibility of lives” (Liu 292). Taking my cue from Liu’s suggestion to consider “queer” in its intersections with Chinese studies, in this thesis I ask: what does queer studies have to say about Chineseness and Taiwaneseness? Further, what does queer studies tell us about new social formations, citizenship, and new desires? Insofar as this project reflects my own “coming out” experiences as a queer mobile subject, I ask, if one can come out as gay or queer, how does one come out as Chinese, especially given the transnational arena in which Chineseness gets contested? Thinking with Liu, I argue that “queerness” is not only about private sexual practices and identities but also must be seen or traced across a wider spectrum that includes new family formations, political tensions, cultural exchanges, and economic inequalities between China and Taiwan. How might histories of colonialism, socialism, and transnational capitalism inflect how new socio-sexual desires are produced in the 1990s Chinese-Taiwanese context?

This thesis is situated at the intersections of Chinese studies, gender and queer studies, archival studies, and film studies in its examination of connections between “Chineseness” and “queerness” in early 1990s transnational Chinese cinemas. Focusing on Zhang Yuan’s 1996 film *East Palace, West Palace* and Ang Lee’s 1994 *Eat Drink Man Woman*, which take place respectively in mainland China and Taiwan, I examine how each film negotiates the histories, tensions between, and emergences of “Chineseness” and “queerness” across the Sinophone world during the 1990s. In Zhang’s *East Palace, West Palace*, the self-identified homosexual protagonist A Lan cruises a public park at night for sex. Through his encounter with the policeman Shi, the film reveals, through the creative re-enactment of the Chinese opera, how A

Lan's queerness is complicated by histories of urbanization, his own masochistic desires, and China's socialist and presocialist past. Across the Taiwan Strait in Ang Lee's *Eat Drink Man Woman* (1994), the aging father Mr. Chu carefully negotiates his socio-sexual desires in relation to his three daughters. The "home" in *Eat Drink Man Woman* challenges the closet as a new site for queerness that maintains yet creates new pathways for queer subject-making. Situating these two films within the Sinophone realm, yet noting how they differ from one another, I draw on scholar Hongwei Bao's conception of the "queer comrade" as an analytical framework to allegorize the temporal coequality of the postsocialist "queer" and the socialist "comrade" – together with its circulation within emerging representations of non-normative sexualities, socialities, and collectivities across the Sinophone world.

This comparative study carries two main objectives. First, inspired by Bao's observation that China's "socialist past laid the foundation and provided the inspiration for contemporary Chinese gay identity and queer politics" (Bao 11), even those that have been formed in resistance to the Chinese state, I argue that Bao's concept of the "queer comrade" not only has the potential to assist us in reading queer subject formation in mainland China from a national perspective, but can also be creatively and comparatively used in other national contexts such as Taiwan and Hong Kong. Despite originating in PRC's socialist past, during the 1990s, the term "comrade" (or *tongzhi*) circulated and was adopted transnationally in ways that detached it from state meanings of "Chineseness" to channel queer sexualities as a political-activist category. Second, through attending to the transitions occurring in respectively postsocialist China and Taiwan in the 1990s, I mobilize "queer comrade" as a critical category that conceives of identities as movements rather than as essentialized constructs. Interested in the PRC-Taiwan relationship which is grounded in a shared past yet also involves a struggle to get over the revolutionary past, this thesis builds on Bao's conception of "queer comrade" as an archival framework, looking for

alternative, queer ways to reimagine Chineseness and trans-South China Seas solidarity outside of coercive state frames.

A Brief History of 1990s China and Taiwan

In *Passions of the Cut Sleeve*, Bret Hinsch details China's three thousand year history of homoeroticism, suggesting that the concept of a "gay" identity, as opposed to sexual acts and practices, is relatively new to China, and can be traced to what is variously called the postsocialist era, post-Mao era, or Reform era of the 1980s and '90s. Reflecting on the period of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), Hongwei Bao observes that there is a missing archive, or an "embarrassing silence" about same-sex eroticism during the Maoist era (Bao 10). He reasons that this silence – the scant historical material available regarding sex and sexuality – stems from the extent to which, during the Maoist era, everyday life was hyperpoliticized, so that the mere mention of non-normative sex and sexuality would have spelled disaster for individuals. It is for this reason, he says, that many have described the Maoist socialist era as a "sexless era" or "an era of severe sexual repression" (Bao 10). This began to change in the late 1970s, which many Chinese scholars define as a watershed for Chinese queer modernity.

After Mao Zedong's death in 1976, Deng Xiaoping led China through far-reaching market-economy reforms and has been called the "Architect of Modern China." By encouraging public criticism of the Cultural Revolution, Deng weakened the position of those who still supported Maoist policies, while strengthening the positions of those like himself who had been ousted from power during the Cultural Revolution. Commenting on Deng's introduction of the Open Door Policy in 1978 and the commitment to "opening up" (*kaifang*), Loretta Ho frames the emergence of a Chinese gay modernity and Chinese gay identity as a radical break from China's (pre)socialist "sexless" past and Maoist era, to a Reform era marked by increasing public and academic interest in same-sex relationships in China (albeit mostly in the spheres of social

sciences and medical sciences). Although modern Chinese historians, sociologists, and medical researchers often declare 1978 as a watershed year, their academic endeavours had the effect of “rediscovering” homosexuality as a perversion or disease. Still, Lisa Rofel observes that gender and sexual politics served as a central crux of the economic reforms led by Deng, which entailed a wide range of central government policies to develop a market economy and decentralize economic planning. In official and popular pronouncements, economic reform was supposed to eradicate what, in a revisionist view, were represented as the “natural” gender politics of Maoist socialism. In her study of the proliferation of public and popular culture and media, Rofel coins the terms “desiring China” to describe the overturning, or *fanshen*, of desiring norms grounded in a horizon of possibility – or impossibility – originally derived from the socialist terrain of “consciousness” to one grounded in a postsocialist everyday site of “desire” (the everyday and cultural constitution of desire).¹ In this revisionist retelling of China’s *fanshen* from Maoist socialism to Dengian postsocialism, the regime constructs an allegory of emancipatory modernity: how Maoism impeded China’s ability to reach modernity by impeding Chinese people’s ability to express their gendered human natures, holding out the promise that people could unshackle their innate gendered and sexual selves by freeing themselves from the socialist state (and vice versa). Attending to “desire” as a key cultural practice through which both the government and its citizens reconfigure their relationships in and to world, Rofel suggests that “desiring China” names the production of “a new human being who will help to usher in a new era in China” (3).

To what extent might we take Rofel’s conception of “desiring China” across the strait as a way of understanding queer subject formation in post-KMT Taiwan, even though her work is obviously specific to the postsocialist 1990s PRC? How might Taiwan’s own history, together with its convoluted relationship with Chineseness, produce a “desiring Taiwan”? Ceded by Imperial China under the Qing government to Japan after the first Sino-Japanese War (1894-

1895), Taiwan became Japan's first overseas colony. Followed by its fifty-year of occupation of Taiwan, Imperial Japan implemented a colonial governmentality that has been characterised as at once "brutally militaristic, in its suppression of anti-colonial revolutions, and at the same time pacifying, in its sustained efforts to culturally assimilate and imperialise colonial subjects" (Huang 11). As economic exploitation took place in Taiwan, the colonial regime undertook a modernizing project that profoundly transformed Taiwanese society as it underwent rapid industrialization and urbanization. In his examination of Taiwanese political and cultural identities under the Japanese colonial discourse of assimilation and imperialization from the early 1920s to the end of the Japanese empire in 1945, Leo T.S. Ching observes that this colonial modernity produced a profound sense of ambivalence on the part of the colonial subjects, who detested colonization yet desired the disciplinary prosperity and regimented way of civilization that came with it. After Taiwan was handed back to mainland China in 1945 upon Japan's defeat in the WWII, that sense of colonial ambivalence was soon transformed into nostalgia for the Japanese way of life as both the native Taiwanese (here defined as Chinese diaspora who were born and raised in Taiwan) and the indigenous population found themselves faced with corruption in Chinese nationalist government (KMT). Conflicts between the new mainland rulers and the native Taiwanese soon intensified as the exploitation of local resources for mainland postwar reconstruction led to severe recession in Taiwan.²

Between the mainlanders and Taiwanese natives, the ethnic divide deepened further in 1949 when more than 1.5 million mainland refugees retreated with Chiang Kai-shek's nationalist government to Taiwan after Communist Party (led by Mao Zedong) took control of China during the Chinese civil war. Devoted to recover the mainland, Chiang set Taipei the temporary capital of China in 1949 and turned the island into the revival base with the US's tactical endorsement. To continue waging the fight against the communist rebels while ensuring political stability, Chiang imposed a decree entitled "Provisional Articles of Mobilisation against Rebellion" under martial law in 1949. Under such edict, Chiang was able to rule dictatorially for the next twenty-five years, despite his claim to be upholding democracy in contrast with Mao's regime. With the imposition of rigid censorship in accordance with the KMT government's right-wing anticommunist orthodoxy, civil rights granted by the constitution such as freedom of speech, holding public gatherings and constituting political parties, were highly restricted or even denied. Political and social liberties were further policed and infringed by the regime's installation of the special military secret service—the Taiwan Garrison Command—to suppress political dissidence and native Taiwanese consciousness. Throughout the 1950s, which became known as the "White Terror period," an estimated figure of at least thirty thousand native Taiwanese, largely members of the professional, landed and intellectual classes, were either jailed or secretly executed for political opposition.

For Chiang's government to maintain its claim to represent the "real" China on Taiwan island that had previously been colonized, one of Chiang's government's priorities was to purge Japanese influences by re-identifying its inhabitants as Chinese subjects.³ In his essay "From Nationalism to Nationalizing: Cultural Imagination and State Formation in Post-war Taiwan," Allen Chun investigates how the KMT's attempts at hegemonic nation-building worked to

reinforce Chinese cultural identity during the 1950 to late '60s. For Chun, the nationalization of Chinese culture in postwar Taiwan is typical of nation-state formation more generally. Since the establishment of the Republic of China in 1911, Chiang's administration and the KMT had sought to fulfill the nationalist's task of consolidating the boundary of the nation, inculcating a horizontal solidarity through adhering to traditional Confucian ethics against Western imperialism and its perceived materialist culture(s). Chun also demonstrates the ways in which "Chineseness" (predicated upon the Confucian ethical cultivation of the self) was inculcated in schools as part of the forging of a Chinese national/cultural identity. Ironically, in ostensibly purging the Japanese colonial influences in Taiwan, Chiang had to rely on the very disciplinary mechanism of control that Japanese modernity had imprinted during the colonial period in Taiwan.

Following Chiang's death in 1975, Chiang Ching-kuo succeeded his father to become the leader of the one-party state Taiwan. Chiang Ching-kuo's autocratic and anti-communist regime, however, made a decisive move towards so-called "indigenization," which allowed more native-born Taiwanese elites to hold government positions, which had been previously monopolized by mainlanders. Even so, the one-party regime had to increasingly confront resilient opposition, which resulted in a brisk process of democratization in the 1980s. Under the banner of human rights, political dissidents in Taiwan began to amass public support in their challenge to KMT's dictatorship. Soon after the abrogation of the martial law in 1987, the underground political movements eventually led to the founding of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP)—Taiwan's first opposition party. In contrast to 1990s PRC sexual discourse, Taiwan during the same period witnessed an increasing lesbian and gay activism. Two years after an unsuccessful campaign for the incorporation of gay rights into the Anti-Discrimination Bill drafted in congress

in 1993, lesbian and gay activists took to the streets and staged the first gay demonstration in Taiwan (which took place near the health department in Taipei). Still, in the latter half of the 90s, despite the establishment of the Tongzhi Space Action Network and other gay social-activist groups, venues, and functions, LGBTQ Taiwanese regardless still faced continuous violence and surveillance by the police.⁴

The rise of gay activism in 1990s Taiwan has been analyzed extensively by numerous scholars. In her monograph *Situating Sexualities: Queer Representation in Taiwanese Fiction, Film and Public Culture*, Fran Martin suggests that queer formations in Taiwan are shaped by the confluence of the global and the local, a “glocalisation” that is a result from ongoing process of cultural resignification conditioned simultaneously by particular local history as well as transnational circuits of capital and knowledge. In John Nguyet Erni and Anthony Spires’ study of the circulation of *G&L Magazine* in relation to queer cultural visibility in 1990s Taiwan, they explore how new gay habits of consumption, family life, and relationships went both with and against practices of filial piety central to Taiwanese sociocultural formation and individual subjectivity. Arguing against John D’Emilio and others’ arguments about capitalism and the formation of gay identity in the West, Erni and Spires argue that “commodification” is an insufficient framework for understanding queer identity constructions in 1990s Taiwan, unless we also recognize the contradictory dynamics of new liberal democratic ideals and family politics negotiated in Taiwan’s queer popular culture as reflected in *G&L Magazine*.

In reflecting on the different national histories of the PRC and Taiwan, and the changing place of Chineseness in both, I have come to think that conceptions of Taiwanese national identity are linked to histories of earlier Japanese colonization, the KMT’s authoritarian project of recolonization, U.S. intervention, and in recent decades liberal democratic movements, as well

as to traditional Confucian ideals. A localized articulation of “Taiwanese-ness” during the 1990s in Taiwan is as complex, if not more multidirectional, than the simple umbrella concept of “Chineseness” (especially important in light of the PRC’s claim that Taiwan forms part of China). In describing her use of queer in her conception of “queer diaspora,” Gayatri Gopinath considers queerness as “a way to challenge nationalist ideologies by restoring the impure, inauthentic, nonreproductive potential of the notion of diaspora.”⁵ As she so succinctly compares, “queerness is to heterosexuality as the diaspora is to the nation” (11). 1990s Taiwan, shows the proliferation of discourses surrounding human and social rights which, aided by the changes in politics and the relaxation of the government’s control of the media, signaled an unprecedented opening for a plurality of voices in Taiwan. For example, women’s rights, disability rights, environmental concerns, and gay and lesbian issues “all thrust themselves or were thrust into the new public sphere” (Erni and Spires 29). Echoing Rofel’s conception of “desiring China,” which refers to the new desires (for the everyday citizen) that are produced through the PRC’s postsocialist turn, we might also begin to see how a “desiring Taiwan” takes shape within the specific context of 1990s Taiwan. These new voices and social rights, which were previously ignored, are articulated as new desires as means to venture themselves into the traditional, patriarchal power center. By calling such a turn “desiring Taiwan,” I want to emphasize that it should be read as neither a subcategory of nor a simplistic reaction to Rofel’s conception of “desiring China”. “Desiring Taiwan,” as I will further explore in chapter 2 with Ang Lee’s *Eat Drink Man Woman*, poses itself as an emergent desire, if not an interrogative countersite, one that challenges us to look for new ways of reimagining “Chineseness” in a transnational context.

For Tu Wei-ming, there is no denying that, at least from the latter half of the twentieth century, three main Chinese polities have existed: the People's Republic of China, the Republic of China (Taiwan), and the British Crown Colony of Hong Kong (under the terms of 2047 as the year of return to PRC). The national and cultural identities that have grown out of such separation suggest that people from Taiwan and Hong Kong, coupled with their extensive colonial experience under the Japanese (Taiwan) and the British (Hong Kong), can no longer simply be subsumed under the umbrella category of "Chinese." It seems undeniable that Chineseness is a complex and overlapping formation that requires careful attention to local histories of colonialism, diaspora, socialism, and capitalism. As Nick Browne says, "the presumption that Chinese cinema is the monolithic cultural expression of a Chinese nation has been dramatically undercut by history. The People's Republic, Taiwan, and Hong Kong and their cinemas are marked as socialist, capitalist, and colonialist, histories respectively" (1994, 1). At the same time, he argues that "to exaggerate these differences would be to overlook a common cultural tradition of social, ideological, and aesthetic forms that stands behind and informs Chinese cinema as a whole" (1994, 1). Taking both Tu and Browne's arguments on the simultaneous proliferation and convergence of the meanings of Chineseness across the Sinophone world, this study reflects on archival fissures within cultural constructs such as "Chineseness," looking at filmic representations in which characters both identify and disidentify with Chineseness.⁶ In Sheldon Lu's historical introduction to *Transnational Chinese Cinemas*, he suggests that "Chinese *national* cinema can only be understood in its properly *transnational* context" (emphasis in original, Lu 3). For Lu, the cultural transition from national to transnational acknowledges precisely the ongoing evolving and plural conditions of image-making. At a moment when the Sinophone world was witnessing rapid economic, industrial, urban

movements, my chosen films (as I will elaborate later in this introduction) archive many images that recall the forgotten histories of colonialism, imperialism, and authoritarianism in order to experiment with modernity. Attending to each film's narration of local history and its own socio-political milieu, this thesis explores the reinterpretation of not only China's socialist past and postsocialist present (chapter 1), but also Taiwan's colonial-imperial past and the democratic liberal present (chapter 2). How might Taiwan's example challenge PRC's essentialized constructions of Chineseness and potentially inspire new Queer Sinophone futurities?

Comrade and Queer as Sinophone Instantiations

In this section, I look more closely at the developmental histories of discursive markers "comrade" and "queer" as instantiations of a '90s Sinophone world to gesture towards an expanding archive of "Chineseness." Speaking about the fraught construction of Chineseness in visual production, Shu-mei Shih coins the term "Sinophone" in her book *Visuality and Identity* as a way to acknowledge the multidirectional, sometimes contradictory approaches which Tu and Browne also develop. For Shih, the modifier Sinophone refers to and demarcates the vast zone of cultural production and circulation of visual culture (film, television, art) in Chinese-dialect-using communities outside mainland China and inside the Asia Pacific region, including Taiwan, Hong Kong, and America. More importantly, the modifier Sinophone highlights the "historical process of heterogenizing and localizing of continental Chinese culture...[and confirms] the continuous existence of the Sinophone communities as significant sites of cultural production in a complex set of relations with such constructs as 'China,' 'Chinese,' and 'Chineseness'" (Shih 4). Both used to connote a wide range of sexual-social subjectivities, the transnational circulation, appropriation, and usage of the two terms comrade (in Chinese, *tongzhi*) and queer

(*ku'er*) instantiate precisely what Shih draws attention to as the Sinophone's heterogenizing and localizing dynamics. By charting out the developmental histories of these discursive markers across the South China Sea in this section, I show how these terminologies can function as archives that are formed and enriched by complex histories of nationalism, colonialism, and academic cultural imperialism. As the central conceptual pillars for this study, what new traffic might arise if we pit/put "queer" and the "comrade" together and also against one another in our filmic analysis?

Up until the 1990s, *tongxinglian* and *tongxing'ai* (literally, same-sex love) remained the most commonly used terms for homosexuality in the Sinophone world. In her study of the Chinese translation of Western sexological terms in Republican China (1912-1949), Tze-lan Deborah Sang notes that the term *tongxing'ai* can be traced back to the Japanese Meiji (1868-1912) and the early Taisho (1912-1925) eras when Japanese intellectuals translated the term from European sexology. She adds there is "reason to believe that *tongxing'ai* was a direct adoption of the Japanese *doseiai*, based on which the Chinese then invented the variants *tongxing'ai* and *tongxinglian* [both meaning same-sex love]" (Sang 278).⁷ The use of *tongxinglian* and *tongxing'ai* began to change in the 1990s with the creative appropriation by underground media and cultural producers of the term *tongzhi* (literally "same will") in association with the Chinese translation of the Soviet communist term *tovarisch*, or "comrade." The appropriation of *tongzhi* references the founding father of Republican China Sun Yat-sen's (1886-1925) dying words, "The revolution has yet to triumph; comrades still must work hard" (革命尚未成功，同志仍須努力). The term was first publicly appropriated for same-sex sexuality by the organizers of Hong Kong's inaugural lesbian and gay film festival in 1989 and introduced to Taiwan in 1992 when the Taipei Golden Horse International Film Festival featured

a comrade section which included lesbian and gay films. The term entered China later and gained limited popularity due to the political ambiguity and confusion resulting from the conflation with its original (pre)socialist meanings. As Hong Kong scholar Chou Wah Shan notes, the term's popularity can be attributed to "its positive cultural references, gender neutrality, deserialization of the stigma of homosexuality, politics beyond the homo-hetero binarism, and its indigenous cultural identity for integrating the sexual into the social" (Chou 2). While in contemporary usage the term *tongzhi* infers, and to some extent archives, *tongxinglian*, the term *tongzhi* (comrade) has slowly replaced *tongxing'ai* and *tongxinglian* in most Sinophone publications after the '90s to avoid invoking the pathological and often derogatory meanings associated with the latter. Throughout the thesis, I use the English translation "comrade" for linguistic consistency. As I argued above, the term "comrade" as an archive itself encapsulates histories of Japanese colonial and Soviet socialist influence that was later officially formalized by with Sun's national calling. Despite the multiple historical roots of the term, the term comrade emphasizes a shared feeling of community that ironically relies on transnational appropriations that sometimes (de)Sinofy and/or disavow explicit queer meanings.

Along with the introduction of comrade across the Sinophone, we must also acknowledge the emergence of *ku'er*, or "queer," during the same period as well. As translated directly from the English term by doctoral students returning to Asia after graduating from Euro-American institutions (mostly in the Humanities and Social Sciences), *ku'er* was first appropriated by scholar-activists in Taiwan and Hong Kong in the 1990s.⁸ Since the mid-1990s, "queer" has also become popular in Taiwan, where it is translated as *ku'er* (literally "cool kid") or *guaitai* (meaning weirdo, or "strange fetus"). In Yin-bin Ning's Chinese-language essay entitled and "What is Queer?," he observes how the proliferation of social movements in '90s Taiwan

supported the emergence of the identity term “queer,” a diversity-building project that aimed to recenter the island’s marginalized subjects (via movements for women’s rights, the normalization of sex-work, disabled rights, indigenous rights etc.). In postsocialist China, following Chinese sociologist Li Yinhe’s use of the term *ku’er* in 2003, as well as in her later publication *Ku’er Lilun* (Queer Theory), the term began to gain popular currency among academics and gay and lesbian cultural producers in mainland China as well, even if, on the whole, the term is more prevalent in Taiwan’s mainstream media.

In contrast to Dennis Altman’s thesis of the “global gay,” which traces what he sees as “the emergence of a western-style politicized homosexuality in Asia” (417) and frames Chineseness and queerness as mutually exclusive (thus putting Chinese gay subjects in a temporality of belatedness), both *tongzhi* and queer as I have briefly examined above offers critical ways of framing emerging sexual formation across locales like China and Taiwan. In the example of Taiwan, although the Taiwanese usage of the term *tongzhi* could be seen as a form of comradeship (or kinship) with mainland Chineseness, at the same time the emergence of queer draws attention to and further critiques precisely the flexible nature of “Chineseness” and Taiwan’s (dis)identification with PRC and Chineseness. Not limited to a politicized sexual subjectivity that enables solidarity and commonality at a transnational level, a reinvigoration of “comrade’s” presocialist contour can retrospectively help us examine how comrade might also be mobilized to negotiate questions of Chineseness and national identification. At the same time, observing how *tongzhi* is being categorized as a “Chinese element” within queer scholarship, Howard Chiang in his essay “Queering China” cautions against the “obsession” with local terms like comrade. He points out that the continued emphasis on the importance of language in the

study of queer Chinese histories and cultures may work to essentialize “a discrete set of historical and sometimes transcultural explanations for difference” (354).

Building on my interest in seeing the formations of “comrade” and “queer” as archives themselves, I want to note how they situate Sinophone queerness as a transnational and transtemporal phenomenon. Noting the common appropriation and usage of comrade across China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, if “comrade” traces a genealogy of mimicry, kinship, sameness, and connection, the “queer” on the other hand does not only signify variance, sexual or otherwise, but offers the playful possibility of reshuffling those qualities while pushing forth a wider historical, social, and cultural critique. In other words, “queer” functions, in Asia as in the United States, as “a discursive site whose uses are not fully contained in advance... for the purpose of continuing to democratise queer politics” (Butler 1993, 20). That said, this project’s attention to local knowledges and concerns does not immediately constitute a categorical rejection of the “gay”; rather, it instead shows how “queer” and “comrade” as time-space specific methodologies are precisely and constantly expanding, supplementing, and revising the contours of Chineseness and queerness in their interarticulation. In this comparative project looking at filmic representations across the Sinophone, what creative effects might arise if we deliberately bring these two thorny archival threads into dialogue, in Howard Chiang’s words, for a “more global synthesis” (Chiang, “Queering China” 354-355)?⁹

Archiving the Queer Comrade

This project is shaped by an engagement with archival theory. The word archive, as discussed in Jacques Derrida’s *Archive Fever*, refers to the Greek *arkhe* and has paradoxical meanings, commencement as beginning, and commandment as the law. How might an archive of

“Chineseness,” or even “queerness,” look given the thorny genealogical debates sketched above?

For Derrida, the archive is the place where authority and social order are exercised, where documents are held and interpreted. The archives are the ultimate places of authority and are characterized by order, preservation, and registration to ensure the origin of the truth. However, the desire for commencements and commandments can only be regarded as the impossibility of archive per se, i.e., the radicalness of the archive consists in changing the law from the beginning, or in initiating a future of a start in transforming itself into a new order of the present. For this thesis, instead of treating the archives of Chineseness and queerness, in Ann Laura Stoler’s words, “as things,” I observe that Derrida’s ideal archive deconstructs its own instrumentality and turns what was governed and commanded into something else, a *détournement*. Other archival scholars have similarly take on Derrida’s conception of the *detournement*: for Stoler, the archives are “epistemological experiments...cross-sections of contested knowledge” (267); Artlette Farge suggests that – and this is worth quoting at length – that the archive leads the reader to a place “where systems of reciprocal compensation play out, where ambiguous attitudes are determined, where the functioning of the confrontation between masculine and feminine can be untangled” (Farge 39). She challenges unitary ways of looking at reality, adding, “if there is a ‘reality’ that exists in these cases, it is the plurality of ways of being and doing, where there is the appearance of disorder” (Farge 39). And finally, Michael O’Driscoll and Edward Bishop stress how “archiving” (neither noun nor verb form) “connotes a diachronic process...the ongoing and historical interanimations of human subjects and those cultural objects that are the effects of archival practices” (3).

Drawing attention to the transtemporal nature of the archive, Rebecca Comay asks, “can one mark the moment when the archive as such begins? How many things, how many

classifications, how many repetitions does it take to turn an assemblage into a collection...Can one determine the essential limits of the archive according to the logic of the archive itself? Is there an archive of the archives?" (14). This archival project is precisely caught at the in-between of what Derrida might call the "commencement" and "commandment." Just as the modifier "comrade" pushes "queer" to its localized specificities and histories, the archive of the "queer comrade" represents an ongoing project of tracing queer formations in the transnational Sinophone world, and potentially beyond. As a contemporary viewer (in a sense a filmic archivist) revisiting these visual productions as archival material, what might these new futurities, languages of articulation, and epistemological connections look like? Thinking beyond the Sinophone world, how can the white Euro-American inheritance of queer studies benefit from such an archival mission that begins from the perspective of the queer comrade? Out of time and length constraints, this thesis does not pretend to be a comprehensive study of filmic expressions of the "queer comrade" in Chinese cinemas. The Han-centric and Mandarin-based nature of the study awaits further exploration. I also want to acknowledge the limits of my focus on cis-gender male formations of queer desire. I hope nonetheless that the multifariousness and complexity of the representations I have chosen to study in this thesis will challenge us to reflect upon many of our assumptions about how identities might be negotiated in relation to or through the matrices of ethnicity/race, nationality, class, gender, and sexuality.

Chapter Descriptions

Informed by these threads of archival thinking, I situate these visual productions as archival entries reflective of 1990s Queer Sinophone *and* as unique archives themselves. In Chapter 1, entitled "Archiving Queer Space-Time in *East Palace, West Palace*," I turn to Hongwei Bao's 2018 monograph precisely entitled *Queer Comrades* which studies gay identity

formation and *tongzhi* activism in postsocialist China. Weaving “the queer comrade” as an archival framework within which to understand gay identity and queer politics in China, Bao looks at ‘90s China’s transition to postsocialism and the subsequent opening up to neoliberal capitalism where he suggests that the socialist “comrade” and the postsocialist “queer” are *mutually constitutive* in the shaping of new social-sexual subjectivities and desires. Having examined the discursive limits of *tongzhi* and queer formation across the Sinophone, this thesis approaches “queer comrade” as part of a larger archival mapping that looks at departures from traditional forms of family, kinship, intimacy and gender norms, together with remappings of everyday social relations that work to produce queer meanings. Looking at mainland China’s Fifth Generation director Zhang Yuan’s 1996 film to examine the encounter between the “queer” and the “comrade,” my reading of *East Palace West Palace* resists viewing the protagonist A Lan merely through the lens of “gay” identity politics but insists that queer sexualities are produced through the complex interaction of state policing projects, (pre)socialist histories of sexuality, and alternative sexual practices. The tension between the “queer” and the “comrade” is best historically contextualized and exemplified in the post-June 4th period. Reading the June 4th incident as a critical moment in the production of new desires in relation to her conception of “desiring China,” Lisa Rofel reframes the incident as

a response to the legitimacy of the redistribution process and the very social transition to the market. The movement did not critique merely the holdover of the old Maoist state but also the “new” reform state and the social and economic life it had produced. Various urban strata, including intellectuals, sensed a diminution in their benefits, while rural reforms stagnated in relation to urban development, bringing a renewed urban-rural divide. Students demanded that democracy, freedom, and liberal justice replace

authoritarian rule in the reform process while other citizens sought an end to official corruption, opposed the “princeling party” of cadres who now formed a privileged monied class, protesting the proliferating inequalities spawned by the market’s expansion, and demanded social guarantees and stable prices – in short, social justice. (9-10)

Through its focus on everyday life and magical realist cinematic language, Zhang Yuan’s *East Palace, West Palace* provides a glimpse of how “non-expert, ordinary citizens” like A Lan the queer hooligan and Shi the policeman “grapple with broad-ranging public discourses and how they actively negotiate, argue about, desire, and differentiate the kinds of subjectivities they are encouraged to embody” (Rofel 19).¹⁰ Examining A Lan’s queerness at the intersections of gender, class, and urbanity, I argue that the film is much more than just a “queer” story. Specifically, I close-read scenes of the film to look at how A Lan’s coming out story – a confessional form – raises a broader network of questions concerning Chineseness, power, surveillance, and private state-violence. Meanwhile, through the trajectory of the state-agent character Shi, the film asks how the socialist “comrade” subjectivity might be transformed in ways that depart from traditional norms of intimacy and gender, and remap everyday social relations. In suggesting how the Euro-American-centric trope of the “closet” is too simple an analogy for A Lan’s queer becoming, I then ask how the film’s representation of cruising offers new ways of reframing queerness in the Chinese context as a set of flexible movements or even as an archive.

In Chapter 2, I move from looking at the queerness of subjects’ relations with the state to look at how Ang Lee’s *The Wedding Banquet* (1993) and *Eat Drink Man Woman* (1994) situates queerness in relation to the heteropatriarchal Chinese family. This chapter reads the Chinese-

Taiwanese Chu family in *Eat Drink Man Woman* as an arena for the emergence for forms of queer comradeship that trouble the equation of Chineseness, Taiwaneseeness, and heteronormativity. More particularly, I look at how *Eat Drink Man Woman* traces and archives the subject-making trajectories of the relationships between the Chinese-diasporic father Mr. Chu and his three Taiwan-born daughters. Through looking at representations of tables, food, and kitchens, I ask what queerness looks like within the confines of the seemingly heteronormative Chinese family. Or has queerness always been at home in Chineseness?

Writing as a queer millennial subject from Hong Kong, I look back, in this thesis, at Taiwanese and PRC cultural production at a time when new formations of gendered and sexual subjectivities, or desires, seemed possible. In pursuing such a comparative thesis, the second chapter looks at the family as a site of reproduction and queering of Chineseness, inheritance, and new socio-sexual subjectivities. If Chapter 1's focus on *East Palace West Palace* allows us to think about how queerness emerges and is shaped in the subject's encounter with the state, Chapter 2's focus on *Eat Drink Man Woman* allows us think about how queerness emerges through encounters with and within the family, a different yet related disciplinary structure. Although none of the characters in *Eat Drink Man Woman* identifies as queer in the conventional sense, I argue that the film articulates new and queer feelings of kinship and configurations of desire. How these desires are expressed, managed, and repackaged in the family help us to see how Chineseness was – or could have been – reinvented across the 1990s Sinophone world. The turn from the queer subject in mainland China in chapter 1 to the queer family in chapter 2 is deliberate and strategic: I turn to the seemingly heteronormative Chu family in *Eat Drink Man Woman* as a way to rethink the (homo)normative dependence on individual identity as the sole locus or medium of queerness. As I insist throughout this thesis, Chineseness and queerness are

not essential qualities but cultural expressions and constructs conditioned by flexible social, economic, political, cultural, historical, familial, and discursive lines as well as taking shape through their *détournement*.¹¹ In both their similarities and their difference, these two films show how collectives and forms of relationality are just as important sites for the elaboration of queer possibility as embodied subjectivity.

Chapter 1: Archiving Queer Space-time in *East Palace, West Palace*

After films on the disabled (*Mama*, 1990), rock musicians (*Beijing Bastards*, 1993) and the alcoholic and unemployed (*Sons*, 1996), Zhang Yuan's *East Palace, West Palace* (1996) can be seen as a continuation of his interest in marginalized and disenfranchised groups in postsocialist Chinese society (Berry 84). Having graduated in 1989 from the Beijing Film Academy, which is China's only film school and does not take in students every year, Zhang Yuan was a member of the first class to graduate after the so-called Fifth Generation of film makers, including such now internationally-famous names as Chen Kaige and Zhang Yimou. Contrary to the vast majority of Fifth Generation films, such as *Red Sorghum* (1987), *Ju Dou* (1990), *Raise the Red Lantern* (1991), and *Farewell My Concubine* (1993), that are set in an almost mythical version of pre-revolutionary China, Zhang Yuan and his peers saw more potential in representing China at the postsocialist turn. Stylistically, films from the Sixth Generation filmmakers are nearly all set in contemporary urban Chinese milieus that are readily recognizable to the viewer, and are concerned with making visible that which is usually hidden from view or denied a space in public discourse in the PRC. In the case of *East Palace, West Palace*, Zhang was compelled to examine the marginalization of gay men upon reading reports that the police force had helped to gang up on self-identified homosexual men for AIDS research. The practice prompted Zhang, to quote from an interview conducted by Tony Rayns, to "want to meet gay people...to find out what (if anything) is different about them" (Rayns 28).¹² In another interview with film scholar Chris Berry, Zhang expressed his sense of kinship with gay men and other marginalized groups in China. For Zhang, "the authorities dislike what he is doing so much that in 1994 [the police force] issued a notice forbidding anyone to cooperate any

further with him and a number of other filmmakers.” Although *East Palace, West Palace* is Zhang’s most critically renowned work, in 1997 Chinese authorities seized Zhang’s passport to prevent him from leaving the country to attend that year’s Cannes International Film Festival. The story of Zhang’s career as a so-called “Sixth Generation” director suggests that in *East Palace, West Palace*, Zhang was most interested in showing how new socio-sexual desires are produced, policed, and controlled in postsocialist China through reflecting on the complex relationship between the marginalized queer subject and the policeman as an agent of the state. Identifying the 1989 Tiananmen Square protest as a pivotal turning point in China’s move toward postsocialist modernity, Lisa Rofel observes how the constitution of postsocialist humanity “entailed not merely the demolition of those politics portrayed as hindering human nature but a positive encouragement and elaboration of people’s sexual, material, and affective self-interest in order to become cosmopolitan citizens of a post-Cold War world” (13). Produced nearly six years after the June 4th incident, how might Zhang Yuan’s *East Palace, West Palace* shed light on the construction of new sexual, material, and affective desires at this historical juncture, as well as the tensions in these deconstructive and constructive agendas?

The film takes place one night in a police station and centers on the policeman Shi’s (played by Hu Jun) interrogation of the homosexual writer named A Lan (played by Si Han). The film begins with a long shot of Beijing at night as the camera climbs up a large brick wall covered in decaying vines, revealing the park’s well-kept ancient pavilions and scenery. Inside the park there seems to be no one present until the next shot introduces the protagonist, A Lan. The camera jumps once again into the public bathroom located inside the park. After A Lan relieves himself at the urinal, a man from the government unit, or *danwei* (單位), catches A Lan peering at him and starts to interrogate him, asking for his identity card. The audience is

introduced to A Lan through this interrogative encounter. The next scene reveals what A Lan is suspected of doing: cruising for sex with other men in the park.

Invoking Hongwei Bao's working concept of the "queer comrade" as an analytical framework that allows us to examine "subject, power, governmentality, social movements and everyday life in China" (4), this chapter is invested in how *Palace* allegorizes the encounter between the "queer" and the "comrade" as a reflection of a postsocialist formation which is "characterized by the continuing existence and gradual erasure of China's socialist past and the state's active incorporation of neoliberal capitalism" (Bao 4). In *Palace*, upon being captured by the policeman Shi, a representative of the heterosexist state, A Lan spends the night confessing and telling Shi his life story. This chapter is divided into three parts, each looking at how *East Palace West Palace* engages with, and articulates, Chineseness both as a cultural formation *and* a political one through the coming out scene, A Lan's personal history of displacement and his cruising knowledge of a city under construction, and finally the film's incorporation of Chinese opera.

The first part of this chapter asks: how and what does A Lan "come out" as? And is the Euro-American trope of the "closet" too simple a way of sketching out A Lan's queer becoming? While the tongzhi/comrade discourse has pointed us towards exciting pathways for the examination of Sinophone sexual formations, expressions, and representations, scholars have also cautioned against the obsessive deployment of such indigenous terms to refer to same-sex subjects in the study of Sinophone histories and cultures. Conceptually speaking, the creative mobilization and appropriation of "comrade" does not require us to disavow the legacy of "queerness." While we should be critical of the categories of the "West" and the Euro-American-

centric discourses of gender and sexuality by exposing and exploring their internal tensions, diversities, and differences, we should be mindful that Chinese discourses of same-sex eroticism are also historical constructs. It would be equally problematic to essentialize and universalize the notion of a “Chinese homosexuality,” which is neither static nor totalizing from the start. For this reason, I close-read the film’s coming-out scene in order to think about the possibilities that arise if we take these discursive markers as spurs to identification instead of as identity categories: as in Lisa Rofel’s discussion of the terms “local” and “global,” she defines them as “acts of positioning, perspectives rather than merely locales [places], used as signifiers of differences” (93). Looking at how queerness is named in the coming-out scene, I examine how queerness in the film is shaped by formations of class, heterosexism, and the (pre)socialist past. In addition to Foucault’s understanding of confession as a disciplinary power and machinery, I argue that the play of discursive and institutional power in the film (as a network of intricate and complex web) brings out the creative potential of the confession to formulate a new queer historiography.

As the film progresses, A Lan’s confessional narrative articulates queerness together with Chineseness, weaving reality with history and fantasy in the form of a Chinese opera genre, *kunqu*. Other than the references to *kunqu*, the film is structured by A Lan’s own flashbacks. The back-and-forth storytelling techniques in the film together make up a visual syntax that archives seemingly disparate spatial logics and temporalities: the socialist past and the post-socialist present, fantasy and reality, and so on. I suggest that we imagine these narrative movements as a form of cruising and a medium for channelling queerness and Chineseness. Following spatial and archival theories, the second part of this chapter looks specifically at how gay cruising can be understood as an archival practice that reimagines queerness as a mobile archival subjectivity that engages with traffics of Chineseness, national histories, and the new production of desires

(as embodied in the figure of the “queer comrade”) Looking at the film’s magical realist visual techniques and overlapping visual arrangement, the second part of the chapter examines how A Lan’s (queering of the) confession fashions queerness itself as an archival subjectivity.

The final part of this chapter looks at the film’s ending, and specifically the convergence of the “queer” and the “comrade.” Through A Lan’s engagement with authoritarian power (in the person of the policeman Shi) through tropes of femininity, transvestism, and masochism, Zhang Yuan’s *East Palace, West Palace* highlights “the perverse link connecting the governed and the governing” (Reynaud 1997 33), connecting, that is, the Chinese authorities and China’s marginalized communities and cultural producers. Through A Lan’s identification with the female convict at the mercy of the male prison guard in the *kunqu* reenactment in the film, A Lan plays out his masochistic fantasy during the interrogation with Shi, eventually seducing Shi into physical intimacy. Under the disguise of hyper masculinity, Shi’s repressed homosexual and queer desires are gradually awakened by A Lan. The overnight police interrogation transforms into erotic violence at the end of the film. The theme of sadomasochism reveals a queerness in both the heterosexist authority and the homosexual subject. As Chiang Mei-Hsuan argues, by turning the narrative of police questioning into a sadomasochistic occasion, the film boldly “presents the queerness of modern institutions and reverses the power between the authority and the marginal” (243). Sadomasochism is not solely about violence but about the flexibility and play of power: although at other times A Lan and Shi’s relationship appears tender and even protective. I suggest that Shi might not be interested in A Lan (only) as an erotic object of desire, or an object to be controlled, but sees A Lan, rather, as an avenue or medium to understanding the “desiring China” that is embedded within his political alignment as a (post)socialist comrade. How, I ask, might the film’s ending allegorize the PRC’s 1990s postsocialist *fanshen*? More

specifically, how does the film transform the socialist “comrade” subjectivity into one that departs from traditional forms of intimacy and gender norms, and remaps the social relations of everyday life?

Archiving Queer Time Through Confession

How can we think of queerness as an archival subjectivity, and in *Palace*’s A Lan as a queer archivist? Thinking back to Bret Hinsch’s work on ancient Chinese same-sex eroticism and Howard Chiang’s observations about the “embarrassing silence” regarding same-sex sexuality in Maoist China, I want to suggest that A Lan can be viewed as a queer archivist who uses his own queer history, memories, and experiences to reflect on the emergence of queer subjectivities in postsocialist China. In *Passions of the Cut Sleeve*, Hinsch draws attention to a historical reluctance to discuss sex, let alone same-sex eroticism:

Chinese biography remained tightly tied to the narrow concerns of politics and failed to develop an independent epic tradition centered on the individual apart from society; prose function emerged late in imperial history and remained weak and despised compared to other literary traditions; and philosophers discussing questions of human nature and morality dealt only with the public face of virtue. Biography and philosophy therefore generally ignored the world of private experience, such as sex. *By discouraging discussions of sex, this overall orientation of Chinese literature complicates the reconstruction of the homosexual past* (6 my emphasis).

In response, Howard Chiang argues that in these archival materials, “the question was never homosexuality per se, but whether one’s sexual behavior would potentially reverse the dominant script of social order” (49). Chiang adds that “if we want to isolate the problem of homosexuality

in China, we must jump to the first half of the twentieth century to find it” (49). The broader critique Chiang is getting at argues that historical studies such as Hinsch’s originates from and resembles a post-New Culture Movement (1915-1923) and Foucauldian *Scientia Sexualis* model that does not necessarily take into consideration of the cultural formations of Chineseness and together the developmental histories of sexuality studies in China. As Chinese scholars graduated from overseas universities and returned to China, Chiang argues that what got translated in the aftermath of the New Culture Movement (1925-1923) was not just the sexological category of “homosexuality” itself, but an entirely foreign style of reasoning deriving from Western psychiatric thought about sexual perversion and psychopathology. The conceptual space for articulating a so-called “Western-derived” homosexual identity grounded in some notion of personhood did emerge in early twentieth-century China, primarily as a consequence of the establishment of a new regime of truth conditioned by the arrival of European sexological discourse. In my effort in this part of the chapter to reconfigure queerness as an archive *and* an archival subjectivity, I take my cue from Ann Laura Stoler’s description of the archive as a process rather than as “things.” For her, the archive does not simply refer to the institutional structure itself, but to flexible bodies of knowledges, as “epistemological experiments rather than as sources...as cross-sections of contested knowledge” (267). While acknowledging the undeniable epistemological roots of “queer” in European sexological discourse, I think we can still open up queerness as an archive in order to see what new queer meanings might be embedded within. As modern audiences watch and rewatch queer films such as Zhang’s *Palace*, the less important question to ask is whether we should call A Lan homosexual or queer or *tongzhi*; instead, a more fruitful challenge would be to see how such cultural texts seek to both

archive *and* open up new pathways for us to (re)imagine queer sexualities in the Chinese context via filmic representations.

The subtitles of the “coming out” scene in *East Palace, West Palace* provide an interesting comment on how sexuality is reformulated in postsocialist China. When the policeman Shi begins his interrogation and demands answers from A Lan, who is squatting in silence, Shi asks “Are you ready to talk?” to which A Lan replies in Chinese 我是同性戀。 The film’s English subtitles translate this as “I am gay” when the Chinese is actually closer to the English term “homosexual.” With reference to Lydia Liu’s work on “translingual practice,” the clashing translations of what A Lan *is* – 同性戀 or gay or homosexual – seem to trouble the possibility of answering the question, “so what *is* A Lan?”¹³ If we think of these labels as archival entries that arrive with their own etymology, epistemology, and history, the translations challenge us to look at sexuality not only as a translingual construct but also by extension as a transhistorical one functioning within a global cultural economy. Similarly, in an earlier scene, the police condemn the gay men whom they have arrested for cruising as *bu nan bu nu*, that is, “neither men nor women.” The police also describe their cruising behavior as *liumeng* (流氓) which in English is usually translated as “hooliganism.” In 1990s mainland China, many cruising gay men were arrested by the police on the charge of “hooliganism” (*liumangzui*) and were similarly referred to as *liumang* (hooligans). Only in the late 1990s, under the increasing influence of transnational queer culture, did more terms enter the Chinese language, most translated from English, to refer to same-sex subjects (e.g. tongzhi, comrade, *ku’er* etc.). During the socialist era, homoerotic sex, together with a broad range of actions condemned as immoral and antisocial(ist), were swept under the rubric of “hooliganism,” as activities that involved “roaming” beyond appropriate social borders or relations.¹⁴ Marked by histories of urbanization,

surveillance, and classist violence, “hooligans” as a localized discursive marker referring to same-sex subjects informs us about a unique cultural etymology that is lived, embodied, and rooted in temporal and spatial specificities. As modern viewers revisiting this film, we might perceive this string of labels as archival entries in a film that is also situated within a global cultural economy. Together, the multiplicity of floating terms (gay, homosexual, hooligan) that are thrown at audiences function as what Stoler might call “epistemological experiments” and “contested knowledge” that show just how complicated it is to identify what is locally “Chinese” and “queer” about the film.

Here, I want to invoke Dennis Altman’s “global gay” thesis, where he argues that sexual identity and politics spread from the West to non-Western countries as a result of capitalist expansion. Since publication, scholars have criticized Altman’s arguments about “global queering” (1996) and “global gay” (1997) for their underlying Eurocentrism and imperialist rhetoric. In particular, his concept of the “global gay” elides local or indigenous modes of queer traditions that miss other histories of both queerness and globalization. Paralleling the construction of the “global” with the Western field of queer theory since the late 80s and throughout 90s, labels such as “global”, “transnational” often present themselves as a universal “solutions” for local “problems.” Without disavowing Altman’s thesis, Hongwei Bao observes that “critical theories produced in the West and the Global North offer a ‘universal’ knowledge of abstraction, whereas area studies are assumed to provide ‘unprocessed raw materials’ that await ‘universal’ explanations and solutions” (Bao 23). Realizing such incongruities with the conceptualization of the “global,” scholars from a range of fields have subsequently engaged and produced more nuanced work that traces the transitive processes of globalization and its

interaction with and influence on local, national, regional, and hybrid forms of sexual identities. Together with its potential performative energy that elides Third-world histories of colonialism, imperialism, and transnational capitalism, the usage of “global” in academic discourse signals as an effective alert against the dichotomy between universal and particular models of knowledge.

In her study of the historical interactions between China, Japan, and the West, Lydia Liu coins the term “translingual practice” to refer to the process by which new Chinese words, meanings, discourses, and modes of representation arose, circulated, and acquired legitimacy as they collided with European and Japanese languages and literatures. Considering the translingual nature of the coming out scene, A Lan’s “coming out” story, which takes the form of confession, does not present a unified form of sexual representation. A Lan’s ambivalent yet flexible role as a masochist captive and storyteller resists the official-national expectation of confessing a “gayness” that is heavily tied to (pre)socialist sexological and pathological definitions, instead fashioning a flexible queer subjectivity that critiques the politics of knowledge, narration, and storytelling. In my reading of A Lan as a queer archivist, I argue that his queerness functions as a medium for historicizing and revamping the overturning from socialist to postsocialist queer reality. His narration throughout the film emerges not only as a simple act of memory but also a rewriting of the national expectation of “gayness” as A Lan recalls and remembers his identification, whether sexual, social, professional, in the production of desires at this very juncture. Yet, despite the apparent fractures in this remembering process, A Lan is able to fashion and write a queer history that is uniquely his own. Foucault has cautioned regarding the “archive” as a sign, and A Lan’s many stories are neither the sum of all texts that a culture preserves nor those institutions that allow for that record and preservation. A Lan’s queer archive of memories is rather a “system of statements,” those “rules of practice” that shape the specific

regularities of what can and cannot be said” (Foucault 1972 130). Situated within a translingual network, the discursive markers “gay,” “homosexual,” “*tongxinglian*,” “hooligans” convey localized histories and meanings. Consequently, they can be moved under “queer” as an archival subjectivity that attends to identities as movements and processes rather than as constructs.

How does A Lan as a queer archivist in the film, to use David Halperin’s words, *do* the history, or his-story, of queer sexuality? Halperin suggests that the queer historian’s task

is no longer to register the questioner’s scepticism and incredulity (as if to say, “How on earth could such a thing be possible?”) but to inquire more closely into the modalities of historical being that sexuality possesses: to ask how exactly – in what terms, by virtue of what temporality, in which of its dimensions or aspects – sexuality does have a history.

(87)

Instead of formulating an ontological study of sexuality, Halperin’s remark emphasizes the need to locate the modalities, temporalities that condition what we perceive as “queerness.” In *East Palace, West Palace*, when the policeman Shi interrogates the captive A Lan, A Lan queers the confession into an archival event to trace his queer becoming.¹⁵ Confession is an act that not only invariably involved two parties – the confessant (the one who confesses) and the confessor (the one who hears the confession) – but also highlights an unequal power relation, as it presupposes an “authority who requires the confession” (Foucault 1990, 61). Tracing the practice of confession from its origin in religious penance through the loss of its ritualistic and exclusive localization to its new position in a series of modern-day relationships, Foucault recounts how the confessional mode now functions to privilege sex as a theme: “It is no longer a question simply of saying what was done – the sexual act – and how it was done; but of reconstructing, in

and around the act, the thoughts that recapitulated it, the obsession that accompanied it, the images, desires, modulations, and quality of the pleasure that animated it. For the first time no doubt, a society has taken upon itself to solicit and hear the imparting of individual pleasures” (Foucault 1990, 63). Foucault’s account reveals the complicit role of the confessor in soliciting information on forbidden sexual desire. As the confessor/policeman’s duty in *Palace* is to solicit such information in the name of law and order, voyeurism becomes an inextricable part of his job, if not his subjectivity. However, the confessional practice is compounded in the film because it is A Lan who deliberately plays himself into the hands of the policeman. The power relation is thus reversed since the confession does not (only) originate as a requirement by an authority, but rather it is the confessant who demands that his secret pleasures be solicited, imparted, and recorded by the confessor/policeman. Revealing later in the film that one of A Lan’s childhood fantasies is to be taken away by a strong and tall policeman, the confession does not simply work as a top-down power structure; rather it works from the presupposing the existence of a secret that must be revealed, or archived, in order to “liberate” and to finally reveal the hidden essence of the confessant A Lan. As a form of discipline of truth-seeking, the confession Shi had in mind could conversely seen as an official archive of queer lives that contrasts with A Lan’s creative masochistic twist of that very archive itself. As A Lan submissively takes control over and queers the confession, the film enters a series of flashbacks as we see A Lan’s past selves in a wide range of settings. He then begins to recount his memories of the new student at a school, Public Bus (played by Zhao Wei); his first sexual experience with a man; his childhood being raised by a single parent, etc. While A Lan makes clear his past and tries to make Shi understand, Shi attempts to transcribe simultaneously, writing down A Lan’s history on paper. In one of A

Lan's confessions or stories, he elaborates on his sense of loss following upon his sexual experience with a high school peer:

A Lan: Even if I wanted to cry, I still couldn't manage it. When the sun began to rise, when the fog came up, with the bird's cacophonous arrival – it was at this moment I realized I was alive! (就算我想哭，我也哭不出來／／天亮起了後起了霧／／來了很多鳥，嘰嘰喳喳叫個不停，這時候我突然想到我是活著的！)

Shi: Bullshit! You're crazy. Where do you think you are? Calm down. Do you know what you are? Despicable! (我操！你要幹什麼啊妳？你以為你在那兒？老實點！我告訴你，你丫，就是賤！)

A Lan: I have been this way since I was little. (我從小就是賤)

Shi: Go ahead. Tell me about it? (你從小就是賤？告訴我，怎麼賤？)

As A Lan's confessional storytelling comes up against Shi's official archiving, the latter's description of A Lan as despicable points to how queerness in the Chinese context intersects with other affects and social positions. The camera quickly shifts to a flashback of A Lan as a child living with his mother in rural China. Much like the discursive markers of gay and queer I explored above, the term *jian* (賤) Shi uses to describe A Lan reframes queerness as a classist and (hetero)sexist marker. Historically, *jian* is usually paired up with other characters to describe one's sociopolitical standing: *guijian* (貴賤) as a distinctive marker of upper and/or lower class; *pinjian* (貧賤) as a classist marker referring to the poor and lowly; *yinjian* (淫賤) meaning sexually and morally loose, lascivious; even the more ancient usage of the term *jiannei* (賤內) to refer to "my humble wife"; or the contemporary expression *jianhuo* (賤貨), or slut. Referencing different dimensions of what Chinese society both past and present might consider "despicable,"

Shi's attempt to conflate homosexuality (or deviant sexual behavior more generally) with socially marginalized forms of femininity reflects how queerness in historical Chinese context intersects with class and sexist determinations.

Read this way, A Lan's creative storytelling via the confession form resembles a "coming to" story rather than a simple "coming out" story. Throughout the film, there seems not to have been a singular, pedagogical moment when A Lan learned of such terms as "homosexual" and where they *come from*. Recasting the question of the cultural translation of (the history of) homosexuality, we might ask, how does A Lan come to hear about and bear the import of "homosexuality"? A Lan's queerness, throughout this extended "coming out" sequence, cannot be contained as an expression of sexual identity; rather, the film invites Shi and also the viewers to examine queerness as an intersectional embodiment based on and complicated by social relationships across the lines of class, gender, ethnicity, and nationality. The popular usage of "coming out" as a trope that expresses "gayness" via the binary of "in" or "out," neglects the fact that A Lan does not simply "come out" once. As Michael O'Driscoll and Edward Bishop aptly write of the spatio-temporal nature of archive and its gerund form, as "neither noun nor verb, but rather both at once, the term "archiving" connotes a diachronic process that, indeed, can only ever be an event..." (3). Hence, archiving reminds us that what is at stake here are the ongoing and historical interanimations of human subjects and those cultural objects that are the effects of archival practices (O'Driscoll and Bishop 3). Queerness, as evidenced in A Lan's archival storytelling, is not a singular moment. In contrast, "coming to" emphasizes the archival journey that helps to constitute A Lan's queerness as a assemblage of many past selves. A Lan's carefully crafted anecdotes are, using O'Driscoll and Bishop's words, "private histories about encounters [that have their own] private histories" (2), recursively structured inscriptions

emblematic of what Derrida calls “anamnesis,” or the doubled movement of remembering and forgetting that proceeds as we archive the archive.

I read A Lan’s anecdotes as archival events, that is, as moments of enunciation, iteration, inscription, or performance in which the very act of archiving (by A Lan) is itself archived. In *Archive Fever*, Derrida writes, “nothing is less reliable, nothing is less clear today than the word ‘archive’” (90). For Derrida, the only thing we are *required* to do is reflect on the etymology of the “archive”: “*arkheion*, a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the archons, those who commanded” (2). The etymology of the word archive invites us to imagine the archive as a structure of utterance. Thinking back to David Halperin’s remark earlier on writing queer history, what is in question in *East Palace, West Palace* is and is not the truthfulness of A Lan’s anecdotes. Rather, what matter are the politics of utterance: who gets to speak, remember, disremember, and conversely to listen, trust, and distrust? Through the mutual performance of the confession by the “queer” A Lan and the state “comrade” Shi, *Palace* articulates queerness as a transhistorical archival form that reconceptualizes itself through various localized meanings and histories, and new socio-sexual subjectivities in postsocialist China. In the next section, I examine how the trope of cruising together with the film’s spatial logic further establishes queerness as an archival subjectivity.

Cruising Queer Comrade Spaces

How does the film play with spatial logic to narrate the encounter between the “queer” and the “comrade”? Where can (A Lan’s) queerness be found? Erstwhile imperial institutions during the Ming and Qing Dynasties, the East Palace and West Palace were built as “cabins” for the young prince and the empress, and the empress-dowager respectively. Writing on the figure

of heterosexist authority and its disciplinary power in postsocialist China, Chiang Mei-Hsuen describes the two palaces as “private family space in the imperial palace where lady-in-waiting and eunuch are employed to assist the living of the nobles” (241). In *Palace*, these once prominent imperial sites that stand for an essentialized and “authentic” “Chineseness,” are quickly re-rendered and queered by the cruising men: the palace has now become a public space, a park, a place of everyday human traffic and desire. Spatially speaking, the film’s narration travels through Firstspaces (the spatial-temporal now where the audience ground their readings of the film, the Palaces), Secondspaces (flashbacks to the historical past) and the in-between Thirdspaces (the realm of magical realism). Through the haunting reoccurrence of *kunqu* music, which replaces street noises (car horns, alarms, sirens, and passing cars), the film creatively fuses the “real” and the “fictive,” “history” and the “present” so as to emphasize the impossibility of locating A Lan’s queerness in a singular space or time but more importantly stress the possibility of seeing queerness as a mobile subjectivity across place and time. Writing on the use of Thirdspace in *East Palace, West Palace*, Zoran Lee Pecic invokes David Eng’s concept of impossible spaces to refer to “a discrepant modernity: an alternate social awareness, a different historical tempo and beat, and a queer space and time” (462). The concept of Thirdspace and impossible spaces I agree are critical frameworks for us to reconceptualize queer representation without essentializing A Lan’s queerness as simply “gay.” Throughout the film’s various scenes of the *kunqu* reenactment of the ancient tale of the female thief (女賊) and the bailiff (衙役) (as a reflection of A Lan and Shi’s encounter), the *kun qu* music fuses the filmic universes into one another. It is within this amalgam of reality and fantasy that the confessional narrative comes into being. Through the trope of cruising, *East Palace West Palace* expands its sexual connotations and transforms cruising as a medium of reflection on queerness in both postsocialist

and presocialist China. It is through the flexible cruising between these first, second, and thirdspaces that the film grants A Lan and Shi a common ground for the “queer comrade” to take shape – taking turns and occupy positions of the ruler and the ruled, the controlling state and the restrained subject.



fig 1.1 A Lan’s flashback of cruising in abandoned building

Later on, A Lan recounts another of his sexual encounters, this time with an older man at a construction site. In the flashback, a group of construction workers break in on the couple and start to hurl derogatory epithets at A Lan. The man with whom A Lan was having sex moments ago ironically starts leading the violence that gangs up on A Lan. Given that the film never shows any “money shots” – that is, it never shows the characters reaching a physical sexual climax – the violence inflicted upon A Lan acts as a powerful alternative climax. The next shot of A Lan shows a close-up shot of his face but inverted. Theorizing bottomhood (traditionally understood as being the role of receiver in male homosexual relations) in gay Asian visual archives, Nguyen Tan Hoang describes bottomhood “not as a fixed role, an identity, or a physical act” but as a “sexual position, a social alliance, an affective bond, and an aesthetic form” (3). By deliberately inverting a bottoming A Lan, the camera shows how the bottom now becomes a top. Through this cinematic reversal, in which A Lan, who is now lying on the floor, looks up to the

roof, the film conjures the story between the female thief and the bailiff. In the next shot of the sequence, our perspective is aligned with A Lan's, as the *kun qu* characters are shown looking back at A Lan and, by extension, the audience. The visual interplay between the gazed and the gazer achieves a way to open the amalgamation of what Michel de Certeau would call the "prospective" and "perceptive" vision which is capable of opening an opaque past and an uncertain future (93-94). How can we see this sequence in A Lan's cruising practice, which is simultaneously complicated by A Lan's own masochistic fantasy and his identification with femininity, as not merely a sexual practice, but a reflection on the play of history and alternative history-making?



Fig 1.2 The visually inverted A Lan reaching an alternative form of climax

Fig 1.3 Subsequent shot looking up at the *kunqu* reenactment

Drawing on Shu Mei Shih's concept of the Sinophone as a movement, scholar Guo-Juin Hong reads Tsai Ming-liang's film *Rivers* by way of the rhetoric and theatrics of cruising. Referring to the multisensory visual technique of the film, Hong describes the "compromised, frustrated, and even queered" visual pleasures of the film as a "theatrics of cruising" that mobilizes different sensory faculties of the viewer for a different kind of spectatorship that is also participatory. Taking my cue from Michel de Certeau's essay "Walking in the City," I bring Hong's understanding of theatrics of cruising as an operation of what I see as a sexual texturology (91), a sexual-cultural matrix where "extremes coincide – extremes of ambition and

degradation, brutal oppositions of races and styles, contrasts between yesterday's building, already transformed into trash cans, and today's urban irruptions that block out its space" (91).

Whereas the aesthetic form of cruising involves an active recognition and misrecognition of histories, I argue that cruising, in *Palace*, does not promise happiness and security but is where one cruise is a play on space and time. Places, as de Certeau writes, are "fragmentary and inward-turning histories, pasts that others are not allowed to read, accumulated times that can be unfolded but like stories held in reserve, remaining in an enigmatic state, symbolizations encysted in the pain or pleasure of the body" (108). To cruise is to the urban system what the speech act is to language or to the statements uttered which carries triple "enunciative" effects:

It is a process of appropriation of the topographical system on the part of the pedestrian (just as the speaker appropriates and takes on the language); it is a spatial acting-out of the place (just as the speech act is an acoustic acting-out of language); and it implies *relations* among differentiated positions, that is, among pragmatic "contrasts" in the form of movements. (97-8)

With A Lan's memories and flashbacks spanning across his childhood, school years, and later his relocation to rural China with his stepfather to work as a miner, I argue that A Lan's narration and his queer identity throughout the film can be interpreted as a form of cruising. Rather than a "coming out" story, A Lan's narration throughout the film does not necessarily have an *out* moment, if we take "out" as a sign of resolve, reconciliation, and release. The rhetoric of cruising, as Hong writes, "occasions a representational hesitation, repetition and failure, therefore a formal *pause* in visual pleasure; it encourages an embodied cinematic experience beyond the visually frustrated" (151). All together, the image of A Lan as a queer archivist cruising at the archives constitute "a go-stop-and-go-again game that is neither linear nor

teleologically secure” (151). The anecdotal nature of A Lan’s “coming to” story recalls Roland Barthes’ description of an “ambiguous form” because “sometimes it denotes failure, impotence, sometimes it can be read as an inspiration, the stubborn movement of a quest which is not to be discouraged” (294).

Conclusion

To conclude my reading of Zhang’s *East Palace, West Palace*, I want to close-read the film’s ending to answer the question I posed at the beginning of this chapter: can queers be comrade, and can comrades be queer? In the final explosive scene between A Lan and Shi, how do the two qualify, contradict, and desire one another? More importantly, how can these dynamics help us reimagine queerness and radical political and sexual possibilities in postsocialist China? After confessing his sexual fantasy of being caught by a cop, A Lan submits to Shi by holding his hands in the air, asking Shi to put him in handcuffs. Overwhelmed by A Lan’s sexual explicitness, Shi responded, “You’ve got a problem and I’m going to cure you” (你有什麼毛病呢，我來跟你治。) Moments later the fight between the two escalates, as Shi further condemns A Lan’s love for his tormentor:

Shi: What is wrong with you? (你呀抽什麼風?)

A Lan: I love him. (我愛他。)

Shi: You are sick. (你有病。)

A Lan: I am not sick, I am homosexual, I love him.

(我沒病，我是同性戀，我愛他。)

Shi: You, such despicable. (你丫，真賤。)

A Lan: I am not despicable, this is love. (我不是賤，這是愛情。)

This short exchange marks two drastically different modes of framing queerness in the film. As I suggested earlier, Shi's pathologizing framing of A Lan's sexuality as deviant (賤) conjures once again (pre)socialist conceptions of gender, class, and sexuality; and yet, A Lan insists that there is nothing wrong with him and asserts his so-called masochistic desires as self-affirming and fulfilling. Without reading A Lan's self-affirmation as some form of sexual liberation, I want to suggest that the dialogue between the "queer" A Lan and the "comrade" Shi encompasses an intimate moment of reconciliation even if their relationship is founded in the confessional and sadomasochist violence. Writing on the contractual nature in masochistic practices, Gilles Deleuze suggests that it is the masochist who is "in search of a torturer and who needs to educate, persuade and conclude an alliance with the torturer in order to realize the strangest of schemes" (Deleuze and von Sacher-Masoch 20). A Lan's masochistic sexual imagination, however, does not make Shi sadistic by inference. In Deleuzian terms, the policeman functions merely as an "element" in A Lan's sexual imaginary "*in the masochistic situation,*" playing "an integral part in it, a realization of the masochistic fantasm" (Deleuze and von Sacher-Masoch 41-42; emphasis in original). If *East Palace, West Palace* is a story about an encounter between seemingly disparate positionalities (the "queer" and the "comrade"), the sadomasochistic relationship between the queer A Lan and comrade Shi further establishes the flexible formation of the "queer comrade." Having examined how queerness is represented through and by A Lan, now we can see how Shi enters into A Lan's queer archive. From his negotiation, to acceptance, resistance, tolerance, to his later sexual interest, how might we begin to see the comrade as equally capable of queerness? In encountering A Lan's confession, is Shi also forced to navigate the queer "space of entrances, exists, unsystematized lines of acquaintance, projecting horizons, typifying examples, alternate routes, blockages, incommensurate geographies" (198)? After all, it

is the confessant who holds the key to the secret knowledge of prohibited sex and thus the power to disclose it or not. The confessor, Shi, may have the authority to demand a confession, but the film clearly demonstrates that it is the confessant who can twist the knowledge-power to his advantage.

In a later scene, an overwhelmed yet aroused Shi realizes that he is losing control over A Lan, and decides to force A Lan to wear the clothes he has confiscated from a transvestite:

Shi: Let me see what you really are. (我看你到底是這麼樣子)

A Lan: this is not what I want, what I want is not this.

(這不是我要的，我要的不是這個。)

Shi: then what do you want? Wear them! (那你要什麼？ 穿上！我操！)

A Lan: That is not right! (不對！)

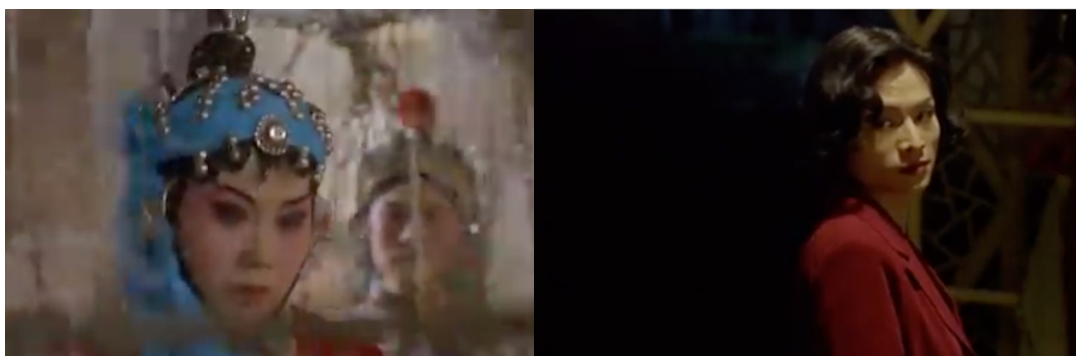


Fig 1.4-1.7 The film's sequence when Shi asks/forces A Lan to don the female attire which conjures the *kunqu* imagery once again.

A series of close up shots of A Lan poignantly putting on red lipstick in a final (attempt at) submission alternates with shots of the reenacted story of the female thief (女贼) and the bailiff (衙役), as the historical Secondspace and the present collapse into the Thirdspace. The past becomes the present; and vice versa. A Lan's initial reluctance, even refusal, to dress up as a woman, carries an ambiguous reading with two possibilities: is A Lan's refusal a part of his sadomasochist fantasy? Or, as Song Hwee Lim argues, is A Lan's femininity an element in (or an allusion to) his homosexuality?

This ambiguity is further complicated by the Chinese tradition of *kunqu*. In Chinese theater traditions (and particularly in Beijing opera), transgender practice has long been an integral part of the performance, as well as of a courtesan culture in which prostitution by male actors who played female roles (known as *dan* actors) and their patronage by bureaucrats and upper-class men were commonplace. In certain historical periods the milieu of theatrical performances was primarily all-male, with women forbidden from performing under Qing law in 1772 (Vitiello 1992, 359) and from viewing such performances until the early twentieth century (Mackerras 1975, 90-91). Given that the film does not explain why A Lan decides to don the transvestite's apparel, I find the ambiguity compelling precisely insofar as it frustrates yet fulfills the encounter between the queer and the comrade. This performance of femininity raises a new set of questions: might A Lan really desire this transformation, or the intimacy it seems to enable? As for Shi, the state's agent, how might we understand his attraction to A Lan, who is now in female attire? In the film's final sequence, upon seeing A Lan's final transformation into a woman, the sexually provoked Shi proceeds to violently drag A Lan out of the park into the

dark alleyways of the city. For the first time in the film, the protagonists leave the park where the confession took place. Finding an abandoned building that recalls one of A Lan's previous sexual encounters, A Lan and Shi awkwardly stare at each other in close distance as Shi pushes in for a kiss. A Lan becomes increasingly passionate and physically involved with Shi, but Shi becomes distraught as A Lan is stripped once again of his female attire.



Fig. 1.8 The shocked and confused Shi freezes as A Lan becomes increasingly passionate

Unable to proceed further with A Lan, the frustrated Shi finds a water hose nearby and douses the sexually intoxicated A Lan. Shi asks A Lan, “is that enough?” (夠不夠?) The “climactic” moment of the film comes in the very last line of the film, when A Lan returns the question to Shi: “You have asked me everything, why don’t you ask yourself?” (你什麼都問過我呢，你為什麼不問問你自己呢?) Although the sexual unification between the two protagonists is not consummated, this final line of the film powerfully reverses the interrogative mode that has been in operation throughout the film: the confessant becomes the confessor and vice versa. The final shot of Shi shows a distraught yet contemplative figure, seemingly taking A Lan’s question seriously, while the soaking wet A Lan is now kneeling on the floor with a cynical smirk looking up at Shi. The final shots of the film end similarly with A Lan walking out to a building’s balcony, again, as in one of the flashbacks. This time, however, the camera pans towards the early morning Beijing city landscape, with A Lan’s back turned to the camera. A

Lan and Shi's sexual encounter is a failure by heteronormative standards; yet at the same time, as Jack Halberstam suggests, it is successful insofar as it unmakes or at least unsettles (2) those expectations and prompts a recalibration of socio-sexual formations. The film's dramatic ending shows both the queer subject and the state's agent in simultaneous victory and defeat. Through this victorious failure, perhaps, the queer can learn to be a comrade, and the comrade can learn from and to be queer. The "queer comrade" thrives where normative relationality fails.

Chapter 2: Food, Tables, and Families as Archives: Ang Lee's *Eat Drink Man Woman*

Born and raised in Taiwan by parents who left mainland China for Taiwan after the end of the Chinese civil war in 1949, the young Ang Lee later went to New York in 1977 to study theater, before switching to film and pursuing a career as a director. His initial works, more commonly known as the “father knows best” trilogy, archive three drastically different fathers and families: in *Pushing Hands* (1992), the tai chi master-father lives with his white American daughter-in-law, prompting inter-cultural conflicts between the “old” and “new”; in *The Wedding Banquet* (1993), the homosexual Chinese son Wai-tung stages a farce-like marriage with the undocumented mainland Chinese immigrant Wei-wei; and finally, in *Eat Drink Man Woman* (1994), the aging father struggles to care for his three daughters and maintain a harmonious family while wrestling with his new-found taboo love. From here, two sets of questions emerge: first, to describe Lee as a “Chinese” or “Taiwanese” and diasporic filmmaker immediately reveals the difficulty of capturing the transnational connections and mobilities in his work. Arguing against the popular practice of referring to Ang Lee as a Taiwanese, American, or some kind of Asian American director, I suggest that these labels all collectively can be read as flexible methods of framing and reading his work. With these identificatory labels in mind, their arbitrary and relative nature helps us to see these descriptions as mobile categories, while emphasizing the traffic between them. As Diana Fuss argues, identification is “a process that keeps identity at a distance, that prevents identity from ever approximating the status of an ontological given, even as it makes possible the formation of an *illusion* of identity as immediate, secure, and totalizable” (Fuss 2). In other words, to identify involves both play with sameness,

where one might identify *with* something; and difference, where one might identify *against* something. In this chapter I read Ang Lee as a transnational director throughout.

At the same time, given the film's specific focus on a Chinese Taiwanese family living in Taipei, it is important to situate Ang Lee in relation to developments in Taiwanese political history in the late 1980s and early '90s, after the abrogation of martial law in 1987. As a "Second Wave" filmmaker of Taiwan's New Cinema, Ang Lee's work reflects the much more relaxed socio-political and moral environment that emerged after five decades of cultural censorship and oppression among the island's intelligentsia. Tracing the history of the cultural transition from "Chinese" to Taiwanese fiction in Taiwan, Taiwanese scholar Sung-Sheng Yvonne Chang suggests that the post-martial law period opened up a socio-cultural realm that is "much less burdened by the nationalist pressure of political correctness, retrospective mainland homesickness, or nativist cultural essentialism." Setting aside the grievances of past political and literary contention, cultural producers like Lee focus instead on explorations of Taiwan's increasing participation in global politics at the end of the millennium. This broadened scope paves the way for new directions and investigates the ways Taiwanese society adjusted to the changes of the 1990s by internationalizing its economy, education, and industry. Juxtaposing Lee's work together with the 1989 Tiananmen Square incident in Beijing across the strait, we can begin to see Lee's filmography as an alternative form of archiving the emergence of a new Chineseness (or native Taiwaneseness). In Tu Wei-ming's work on "Cultural China," which describes the Mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong as the first "symbolic universe," overseas Chinese communities in the second symbolic universe, and non-Chinese who have an affinity for Chinese affairs in the third symbolic universe, the emphasis on cultural affiliation

instead of the rigid fixity of locational markers articulates the ambition and reality of a new Chinese culture in the making that is transnational, heterogeneous, and rapidly transforming. Inspired by Tu's articulation of "Cultural China" as a translocal, transhistorical, and transnational imaginary as well as a matrix, I argue that Ang Lee's "father knows best" trilogy archives the conjunctures between post-martial law Taiwan and post-Tiananmen mainland China in the form of a Sinophone family where the characters negotiate the intersections between the transitive categories of "new" and "old," "East" and "West," "heteronormative" and "queer" etc. Instead of conveniently centering the father as the carrier of the sign of "Chineseness," my readings of Ang Lee's *The Wedding Banquet* and *Eat Drink Man Woman* closely examines other archival traces, signs, and psychostructures via food, kitchens, and tables. In doing so, I look for new pathways to reframe and conceptualize how queerness finds a home in Chineseness, and vice versa – across multiple families with varying geopolitical locations.

As Liou Liang-ya observes, the emergence of queer and postcolonial discourse in late 1980s and early 1990s Taiwan, as well as the mobilization of social movements for women's rights, queer rights, indigenous rights, and labour rights was partly supported by the promotion of a Taiwanese cultural liberal movement. Since the mid-1980s, the return of a number of scholars trained in mostly Euro-American universities, many possessing a doctoral degree in English or Comparative literature, helped stir up radical thinking. As Liao Ping-hui observes, there was "an unconscious desire in Taiwan in the late 1980s to hope to understand the burgeoning social imaginary of Taiwan through correlative Western frameworks" (Liao 92).¹⁶ Since the lifting of martial law in 1987, the country has gone from an authoritarian regime controlled by one family – Chaing Kai-shek and his son Chiang Ching-kuo – to a multi-party system for the people of Taiwan. Elected in 1988, the first Taiwanese-born president Lee Teng-

hui proposed an inclusive nation-building and decolonizing project by way of the political organizing concept “shared entity of life” (生命共同體), seeking to usher forward a new land-based Taiwanese nationalist consciousness that emphasized detachment from Greater China. The legalizing of social rights in ‘90s Taiwan (same-sex marriage, etc.) has as much to do with asserting the government’s “progressive” stand on human rights, in order to distinguish itself from the PRC, as it has to do with queer identity politics. The acceptance of “western” human rights norms has as much, or more, to do with a nationalist project as with transnational forces of mobility. Lee’s proposal of the “shared entity of life” can be seen as a localized specific transformation of the socialist “comrade” subjectivity that emphasizes the potentials of articulating a new geopolitical Taiwanese vision. Throughout this chapter, reflecting on Lee Teng-hui’s call for a “shared entity of life” while working through legacies of socialist Chineseness, I ask: how does Ang Lee’s examination of the family in *Eat Drink Man Woman* bring together Taiwan’s proliferation of social discourses about gender and sexual identity together with a renegotiation of Chineseness? Whereas the first chapter examined the relationship between the queer archive and urban space within the postsocialist/authoritarian state of mainland China, this chapter looks at representations of food and tables as archives in order to ask how in Taiwan, it has been possible to imagine queer and non-normative sexualities and cultures emerging in coordination with family traditions, mores, and histories. In the first chapter, I argued that *East Palace, West Palace*’s interest in exploring how the individual queer subject (A Lan) can or must survive in coordination with as well as betrayal of the national comrade (Shi), challenging Western liberationist models that privatize queer freedom by articulating sexuality through the language of the closet. Here I ask: can the Taiwanese-Chinese Chu family be “queer” if by “queer” we mean non-normative sexualities, desires, and social

assemblages? In choosing the familial as the backdrop for this chapter's discussion, that is, I am interested in exploring how the social givenness of the family helps to shape, even instantiate, queer formations.

Queering the Sign of the Chinese Family in Ang Lee's Work

Before I analyze Lee's films, I want to reflect on the sign of the Chinese family. As a sign, the "family" in a way represents a social given. Rather than put the family in question, as is more usual, I ask, how does the "family" come to be? In her essay "Queer Phenomenology," Sara Ahmed charts the "inheritance of the family" as a work of alignment (Ahmed 557). The formation of the normative family relies on the aligning of "sex (male body) and gender (the masculine character) with sexual orientation (the heterosexual future)" (557). And through repetitions and renunciations, the not-yet-but-to-be subjects, or in Ahmed's words the "child as the not-yet-adult," (557) are brought into the line, by being given a future in line with the family line. Family, according to the requirements of heteronormativity, then can be viewed as lines that are maintained and maintain themselves all at the same time, often through what Butler calls the "stylized repetition of acts" (Butler 519) over time. In this way, any form of nonalignment thus produces what we might call a queer effect. In his "father knows best trilogy," Ang Lee creatively uses the Chinese family as a trope to experiment with the issues raised by transnational, transhistorical, and transcultural movements and identities. Lee's first two films *Pushing Hands* and *The Wedding Banquet* both involve older Chinese Taiwanese parents coming to terms with their sons' relationships with white Euro-American partners, and the conflict in both films is initiated by immigration, relocation, and queerness.

The 1993 film *The Wedding Banquet* examines how a father negotiates the issue of his son's homosexuality vis-à-vis his own wish for patrilineal continuity, with the trope of cross-cultural and interracial communication reprised from *Pushing Hands*, as the son's gay lover is a white American. The protagonist Gao Wai-Tung (played by Winston Chao) is a Taiwanese property developer who has been living in New York for ten years and has a green card as well as a white partner, Simon (played by Mitchell Lichtenstein). In an attempt to end the constant pestering of Wai-Tung's parents (played respectively by Lang Xiong and Gui Yalei), who think that Wei-tung should get married and produce grandchildren for them, Simon suggests a paper marriage between Wai-Tung and his tenant, Wei-wei (May Chin), an artist from mainland China who lacks the documentation she needs to remain legally in the United States. Trouble ensues when Wai-Tung's parents announce that they are coming to attend the wedding, leading to an elaborate wedding banquet. After the banquet, the guests indulge in ritual horseplay, forcing Wei-wei and Wai-tung into their hotel bed naked. In their drunken state, Wei-wei throws herself on Wai-tung and subsequently becomes pregnant, posing a threat to the relationship between the gay couple and resulting in Wai-Tung's coming out to his mother. At the end of the film, Wei-wei decides to keep the baby, Wai-tung's father tacitly acknowledges his son's homosexuality, the parents return to Taiwan, and the gay couple and Wei-wei agree to bring up the baby together.

In many readings of *The Wedding Banquet*, scholars and critics deploy the imagery of the closet to examine the ways in which the film frames homosexuality as a Western product tied to Euro-American liberationist queer histories and discourse. For Fran Martin, the film "stages a kind of postcolonial cultural clash between two regimes of sexuality: broadly, a 'Chinese-familial' regime, and a regime of a 'American gay identity'" (2003, 143), while Shu-mei Shih

situates it at the crossroads of “nationalist patriarchy and gendered minoritization” (2000, 90).

Chris Berry situates the film in the genre of the family melodrama that promotes “audience empathy and identification...with Confucian family unit as it negotiates the interface with globally hegemonic American culture” (2003 183), and Sheng-mei Ma also locates the film genre as a “domestic tragicomedy,” with family ethics “revolving around a patriarchal figure [which] is, after all, the foundation of Confucian cosmology” (1996, 193). The return of the Chinese family in these analyses situates the family as a closet that sets queer sexualities and Chinese family as mutually exclusive. While I acknowledge that there is undisputed textual and contextual evidence to support such a reading of the way in which homosexuality relates to the Chinese patriarchal family, to pursue this overdetermined line of analysis does not provide much productive and creative analysis of the relationship between “Chineseness,” “queerness,” and “familiality” but rather serves to perpetuate the myths that, on the one hand, the negotiation of homosexuality in a familial-patriarchal context is unique to Chineseness and, on the other hand, that Western gay identities are happily free from the family. This line of reading, in short, risks essentializing the relationship between homosexuality, the patriarchal family, and a Chinese-Confucianist ideology where there is equally compelling evidence to suggest otherwise.

Suggesting that the film offers a global perspective on Wai-tung’s struggle to assert his sexuality in the face of his parents’ heteropatriarchal policing, Mark Chiang insightfully observes that the transnational “complex entanglements” (274) of sexual and ethnic identity in *The Wedding Banquet* cannot simply be read from within the frameworks of a monolithic national culture (either Chinese or American), but must be read across them in a transnational analysis that attends simultaneously to the local and global. The family histories presented in *The Wedding Banquet* are multiply complicated by, first, Wai-tung’s relationship with his American white

lover Simon; second, the Chinese parents who have escaped the mainland to Taiwan, and are now visiting New York; third, the undocumented Chinese immigrant Wei-wei who serves as the fake bride and stages the fake marriage with Wai-tung. Each of these parties coincidentally and respectively embodies what Tu Wei-Ming would refer to as the symbolic universes of “Cultural China.” These symbolic universes in *The Wedding Banquet*, that is, where the characters are historically *from* (in terms of their place of origin), are not monolithic but together construct what Mark Chiang might refer as a “transnational allegory” representing a process of translation and resignification that not only crosses cultural and national boundaries; it also describes an emergent global/transnational culture, which achieves concrete form in the growing cohesion of a global system (Chiang 275).

Lee’s third movie, *Eat Drink Man Woman*, appears to be least obviously concerned with diasporic/transnational concerns in terms of identifying labels as the entire film is based and shot in Taiwan as the spatial locus. Moving away from *The Wedding Banquet*’s exploration of an explicitly homosexual relationship, *Eat Drink Man Woman* uses the family as a backdrop to establish how family and the continuation of family histories often rely on the repetitive styling of Chinese traditionalism and heteropatriarchy to sustain the familial lineage. Read as a sequel to *The Wedding Banquet*, I argue that *Eat Drink Man Woman* reflects on the specificities of the transnational interactions occurring during and as a consequence of the rapid transformation of contemporary post-martial-law Taiwanese society. While the title of the movie references one of the Confucian classics, *The Book of Rites*, in which drinking (飲) and eating (食) are described as “irrepressible human desires” (人之大慾), the film highlights the physical and ideological connection between food and desire. In the film, food-making and the pursuit of desire in proximity to the sign of “home.” Of Mr. Chu’s three daughters, the eldest Jia-Chen is a devout,

conservative Christian who is working as a high school chemistry teacher, the second daughter Jia-Chien is a sexually liberated, strong-willed, and glamorous executive in an international airline, and the youngest Jia-Ning is a twenty-year old student, who is working part-time at a Wendy's burger joint. Meanwhile, Mr. Chu, the famous chef, is a domineering and testy widowed father whose culinary career has been hampered by the loss of his ability to taste.

This chapter is interested in seeing how the film uses the home-kitchen to archive these eating and sexual formations. This is implied by the ambiguous film title which conveys a two-fold relationship between eating, consuming, and social-sexual relationships. In a more heteronormative reading of the title, the everyday-ness of eating and drinking naturalizes the "man woman" dyad in the form of the heterosexual couple. As I will argue about Father Chu's relationship with the younger Jin-Rong, however, the "man woman" relationship(s) in this movie are not as straight as they appear. In contrast to *The Wedding Banquet* where the sign of home is queered by travel and diaspora, the home in *Eat Drink Man Woman*'s functions both as a backdrop *and* a space where unconventional, queer desires are allegorized through food and practices of food-making. More than a story about Mr. Chu's paternal efforts to maintain the shape of the family (the main plotline is the tension between Mr. Chu and his three daughters), *Eat Drink Man Woman* shows how each character's struggle to express their socio-sexual desires contests the very stability of the home Mr. Chu is trying to maintain. In short, the film's ambiguous title can also be read as hinting at the queerness of even the heteropatriarchal family. Without relying on the categories of father/daughter or husband/wife to trace the Chu's family history, the linguistic retreat to the more neutral "man woman" sees characters in the film as flexible subjects ready to take up other socio-sexual subjectivities. Here, a more nuanced look at the title allows us to nuance our reading of the film to read the queer potentials hiding and

embedded in the Chu family, as what I read as an overlapping social-sexual overlapping collective. Arguing against the liberationist discourse that often frames queer as a family-free subjectivity and detached from the home, I suggest the film emphasizes the need to read queerness in other social forms such as the family, coupledness, and inheritance.

Exploring the rhetoric and the hegemonic universality of coming out narratives, Song Hwee Lim questions the violent application of the coming out narrative to queer subjects in *The Wedding Banquet*. As the Hong Kong film critic Edward Lam asks, “who decides if homosexuals should come out? Does the act of coming out necessarily promote understanding and acceptance of homosexuality? If coming out is chiefly linked to Western epistemologies and practices, should it be regarded as universal and imposed indiscriminately on other cultures” (Lim 51)? In a similar way, Eve Sedgwick argues for the multiplicity and the queerness of queerness itself, noting that the closet is not a single space, nor is coming out a single act. She writes,

the deadly elasticity of heterosexist presumption means that... people find new walls springing up around them even as they drowse: every encounter with a new classful of students, to say nothing of a new boss, social worker, loan officer, landlord, doctor, erects new closets whose fraught and characteristic laws of optics and physics exact from at least gay people new surveys, new calculations, new draughts and requisitions of secrecy or disclosure. (Sedgwick 68)

Questioning the emphasis on “visibility,” “liberation,” and “sexual transgressiveness,” Sedgwick’s critique reminds us that the psycho-architecture of the closet must itself be constantly queered. The reliance on using coming out narratives to convey queerness is precisely what normalizes the closet and how we think about queerness itself. While I acknowledge the

effectiveness of the imagery of the closet and the narrative of “coming out,” throughout this chapter I deliberately mobilize the trope of “coming out” to connote a wide range of movements that suggest alternative modes of queerness. In order to challenge the hegemonic reliance on the closet to understand queer sexualities, how might other psychic structures in Ang Lee’s films help us to reconceptualize Chineseness and queerness?

Food, Archive, and Phenomenology in *Eat Drink Man Woman*

This section begins by looking at Sara Ahmed’s phenomenological approach to gender, sexuality, and race in relation to my interest in food and archival studies. Through these discursive threads, I trace how representations of food in *Eat Drink Man Woman* allegorize and problematize Chineseness as well as queerness in the seemingly un-queer family. How food is consumed is a critical method of defining a community. A group that follows proscriptions forbidding certain foods, or combinations of foods, immediately separates itself off from others. Through practices of preparing and consuming food, a sense of order, place, and discipline is created: the tacit understanding is that without such regulations the community would fall victim to its individual appetites. As much as cuisine induces an imaginary collectivity among members of a community, it stratifies us also in that our food practices and taste buds render us complicit with divisions along the lines of culture, region, race/ethnicity, gender, age, class, and sexuality, and therefore binds us to a hegemony that is exercised via appetite and desire. As food scholar Deborah Lupton argues, cooking and eating “are the ways that we live in and through our bodies” (1). Who we think we are has everything to do with what and how we eat. The system of ordering culinary matters socializes our taste buds and metabolisms, which in turn stand in the front line of demarcating the border between the normative and the “queer.”

Understanding food practices at the intersections of gender, class, urbanity, and family, then, this chapter argues that food achieves a series of archival effects. Nonverbal practices such as cooking, as Diana Taylor argues, have “long served to preserve a sense of communal identity and memory” (Taylor 18) that are not considered as valid or traditional logographical forms of knowledge. Cooking points us towards the politics of knowledge storing, transmitting, and inheritance. Using the term “repertoire” in conjunction with the traditional archive, Taylor further argues that these embodied memories and performances not only exceed the archive’s ability to capture it, but function as complex mediated processes of “selection, memorization or internalization, and transmission takes place within specific systems of representation” (Taylor 21). Through looking at the phenomenology of these culinary-archival practices, my close reading pays attention to the milieu and the corporeal behaviors such as gestures, objects, and tone, that are irreducible to language or visual form.

The tight connection between food archives and practices is helpfully elucidated by Sara Ahmed’s exciting work on orientations and queer phenomenology, in which she poses the question of sexual orientation as a phenomenological question that is directed

toward[s] objects and hence is always worldly, situated, and embodied...[the study of phenomenology] emphasizes the lived experience of inhabiting a body...emphasizes the importance of lived experience, the intentionality of consciousness, the significance of nearness or what is ready to hand, and the role of repeated and habitual actions in shaping bodies and worlds. (544).

Using the figure of the “table” to conceptualize the conflicting relationship between queerness and the collective social, Ahmed observes that the table functions as “a givenness that holds or is shaped by the flow of perception” (548), in contrast with Husserl’s definition of the table as a

“dimly apprehended depth or fringe of indeterminate reality” (102). Whereas the analogy of the closet imagines queerness as an “either/or” – specifically the dichotomy between “in” and “out” – I take up Ahmed’s understanding of the table as a *medium* of queerness. As an organic and flexible cultural concept, the psycho-architecture of the table offers alternative ways of looking at queerness and queer sexualities using the language of distances/proximities as well as surfaces (above and below). Ahmed clarifies the playful positioning of the table that can be *in* the background, as well as *of* the background that is *around* the table, noting that the table itself *may have* a background (that is, a unique temporal and spatial character of its own). Attending to these various flexible positionings of the table (of, in, around the background), I understand the table to be a visual prop and a metaphysical organizing concept that structures the traffic between Chineseness and queerness in *Eat Drink Man Woman*. Around the Chu family’s dinner table, a collective “we” converges (or doesn’t), yet at the same time underneath their table exists relationships, secrets, and promises as archival histories. When the table placed within the scene and juxtaposed with other structures (such as the chairs, plates and so on) the narrative points us back to the very orientation of the protagonists’ bodies, or what they come into contact with. The horizontal table surface, at the same time, is supported by the vertical “legs,” or axes that *stand* for histories, legacies, and hierarchies. The queering moment occurs when the vertical axes appear out of line, as a “slanting” (Ahmed 560). As supported by the confluence of food, archival, and phenomenological studies, the trope of the table is instructive for looking at cultural and material practices that are often neglected or dismissed by traditional or hegemonic archival praxis.

Building on Ahmed’s conception of the family in terms of lines – straight and oblique, horizontal and vertical – to convey how queerness can manifest in and through the (heterosexual)

family, I argue that in *Eat Drink Man Woman*, the heterosexual family's containment and regulation of normative sexuality can work in queer ways. The main question I am interested in exploring in this chapter comes into view: how does queerness find a home in, or has indeed it always been at home in, the domain of the Chinese family? Here, I depart from the previous chapter, where queerness inheres in the subject (A Lan), or in the sexual relationships between subjects. In contrast with *The Wedding Banquet*, where the queer (gay) Asian American son is continuously haunted by family and national (and heterosexist and patriarchal) histories together with the burden of marriage, in *Eat Drink Man Woman*, I suggest, the Chu family members negotiate the maintenance of the "Chinese" family while attending to their particular socio-sexual desires, with queer effects.

Overall, the film is structured by five ritualistic family dinners. The beginning of the film establishes a promise of confession, which as we saw in the last chapter is often understood as central to the promise of coming out, insofar as we know that Mr. Chu has planned to confess something to his daughters, but do not know what. The first family dinner is cut short when Mr. Chu is urgently asked to rescue a wedding banquet when the main dish shark fin soup is found to be subpar. Having arrived at the banquet, Mr. Chu and the rest of the kitchen crew gather around the dish for a tasting while others look to Mr. Chu for a solution. Strategizing with the head chef, Mr. Chu proposes that they use abalone instead of the planned shark fin:

Chu: Fake shark fin! Lost all texture after soaking, and will only dissolve after a long time of cooking. No matter how long you cook it does not take up any flavor. (假翅! 發開了之後沒彈性, 久煮則散。怎麼餵也不入味兒。)

Wen: Then what should we do? The general is having a banquet and we cannot afford to go wrong with all these people of high rank! (那怎麼辦？司令娶兒媳婦兒，滿天星啊！)

Chu: This kind of thing can only be made into a slurry. Let's make Dragon Phoenix Twin dish with abalone. (這玩意只能做翅羹 翠盖就变成了刺蝟了。改「龍鳳呈祥」。))

Wen: Abalone! We are going to lose a lot of money for that! (啊！鮑魚！那得賠多小錢啊？)

Chu: In such occasion, we need to do so even if we are paying extra. Let us calm the tables first, I will explain to the people later. (到這個時候，賠錢也得做，先把場面穩下來，回頭我在跟上面解釋。)



Fig. 2.1 Old Wen acting as a “tongue” to taste for Mr. Chu who has lost his ability to taste

Read in relation to the fake heterosexual marriage between Wai-tung and Wei-wei in *The Wedding Banquet*, the use of abalone as a substitution for defective shark fin demonstrates the flexibility of remaking Chineseness even as it simultaneously satirizes the notion of a unified or authentic Chineseness. The kitchen rescue mission becomes an ante-table where Mr. Chu strategically reformulates the food to maintain the harmony on or at the banquet table. In using

the more extravagant abalone as the substitute for the dish, what concerns Chu primarily is the “face” of the banquet. That is, he seeks, above all, to maintain the appearance of exterior grace and cooperativeness, even if it comes at a bigger cost. Celebrating the wedding involving a high-ranking general’s family likely affiliated with the KMT, the banquet scene demonstrates a Taiwan which is still much living through the remnants and shadows of post-war PRC histories of diaspora. Mr. Chu’s willingness to substitute abalone for rotten shark fin *before* the table pokes fun at Chineseness as no longer a unified construction.

For Mr. Chu, who shares a similar historical trajectory with the general, having likewise escaped from mainland China to Taiwan due to the Chinese Civil War, the professional kitchen is where he feels the most assertive, cognizant, and forward-thinking. However, in taking care of his three daughters, he does not perform the same way at home as he is doubly troubled by his role as a father. In short, this brief incident allows us to see how Mr. Chu behaves in and out of his home, revealing the assertiveness that the Chu family is ironically lacking and longing for. Indirectly, the wedding banquet scene foreshadows the Chu family’s attempts to avert an incoming crisis through a flexible performance in order to maintain what is on and around the table.

On and Below the Archival Dinner Tables

The family dinners in *Eat Drink Man Woman* underscore the fragility of the unity that is presented on and at the table. Having lost his wife (the absent mother), Mr. Chu’s double role as the father and a chef further complicates the heteronormative expectation that mothers serve as the provider for daughters. Although we might connect the missing mother to the fracturing of Chineseness in the aftermath of the civil war as a figure for the missing motherland, I want to

resist this reading for its reliance on a heterosexual narrative that reads queerness as a sign of “lack” that requires fixing. The belief that the return of the mother (as a symbol of Chineseness/China) might repair and maintain the Chu family neglects the thematic concerns the film aims to present. What is worth focusing on, rather, is how the Chu family in the film, takes up the new set of questions and challenges that emerged in 1990s Taiwan, as part of and as a response to local democratic liberal movements and non(re)negotiation with Chineseness. What is presented on the table is often assumed to function as a way of maintaining a unitary performance. Upon closer inspection of the table at the first Chu family meal, however, we find chicken shark fin soup (a Cantonese delicacy), roast duck (Beijing), Dongpo Glazed Pork (Sichuan and Zhejiang), steam pot chicken (Yunan), and soup dumplings with crab yolk filling (Suzhou). Reminding us of Diana Taylor’s concept of the repertoire, these dishes as embodied archival entries derive from multiple (provincial) cultural locations which, through the process of making and cooking, collectively enact a complex performance of a “Chineseness” (including through their transposition to Taiwan). For Mr. Chu, who received his culinary training in mainland China before moving to Taiwan, food is a way of recreating and conjuring tastes from a remembered past. During the first Chu family dinner, what audiences experience on the table is an imagery of a unified Chineseness despite each dish’s different provincial origin. Since the family is now physically situated in Taiwan, to what extent might the Taiwanese-ification of Mr. Chu’s dishes be called a queering?

In a later exchange, the banquet manager invites Mr. Chu to take over the restaurant. The manager begins by suggesting that Mr. Chu is a “living recipe” for Chinese cuisine. Upon being rejected by Mr. Chu, the manager asks, “but where can we find someone like you who has mastered Sichuan, Yangzhou, Chaozhou, Zhejiang cuisine? Even if you don’t cook and just

stand there, you can count as a living recipe still....[elipsis] Yes, you have your point, but you have spent your whole life on this, what a waste!” (可是像你這樣精研川、揚、潮、浙菜的大師傅。已經不多了，您就是不下手，光站在那兒，也是一本活菜譜。。。話是沒錯，可是您這一生的心血都在這上頭，可惜呀。) Mr. Chu laments the futile need to continue passing on his culinary skills, sighing, “People’s hearts are getting less meticulous these days. It doesn’t matter how delicate the food is anymore. Don’t even bother mentioning that Chinese cuisine has “flowed” into Taiwan for more than four decades, all these different streams have all entered the ocean, and all become just one taste. Even the abalone replaces the shark fin in another dish, what can we say more?” (唉！人心粗了，得再精也沒什麼意思。別說中國菜到台灣四十多年，早已經三江五湖匯流入海，都是一個味兒。就連「龍鳳呈祥」都能做到「翠蓋排翅」，還有什麼好說的呢？) Referencing the earlier scene of the wedding banquet crisis, Mr. Chu comes to acknowledge the multiprovincial character of the cuisine usually described simply as “Chinese” and draws attention to the “flow” that occurred during the diasporic movement of Chinese cuisine to Taiwan. For Mr. Chu, they have all become just “one taste.”



Fig. 2.2 (top left): first dinner scene of the film showing Mr. Chu's food? table?(finish the sentence)

Fig. 2.3 (top right): Opening sequence of the film where Mr. Chu forcefully blows up the chicken before roasting

Fig. 2.4. (bottom left): first family dinner scene

If we were to reimagine the kitchen as an alternative archive, Mr. Chu as a food archivist, and the dishes as multicultural signifiers of “Chineseness,” we can see how the dinner table in the film is able to organize the family and functions as a unique matrix where food practices are contextualized, performed, and problematized. The second daughter Jia-chien says at one point, “we keep our relationship by eating dinner together” (我們靠吃飯聯絡感情). In the Chu household, the empty space of the table is surrounded by four leaning chairs; once the table becomes full of Mr. Chu's home cooking, the Chu family members take their seats opposite one another. Overall the table becomes a hosting site, a cultural domain where people assemble and fashion a collective as a “family.” The “man” and “woman” in the film's title in this way assemble as a “family” through the ritual of family dinners.

At the same time, the “man” and the “woman” also suggest an element of distancing and individual subject-making. At the first family dinner, each of the three daughters and Mr. Chu takes up one of the cardinal orientations (North, East, South, West; see fig. 2.4). The first dinner

shows the family cooperating *at* the table; yet the distances between these individual members continue to grow. The physical positions they occupy resemble a mahjong gaming table. In a mahjong game, each player takes an “orientation” and takes it in turn to play their mahjong tiles; whoever first matches a hand of fourteen tiles can “call mahjong” and end the round, whereupon tiles are scored, and a winner is declared. The players are kept apart from each other from a distance, so that they are not able to see their “cards.” Along similar lines, each of the Chu family members has their own “cards” to play: Mr. Chu’s taboo love with the young divorcee Jin-rong; the eldest daughter Jia-chien’s broken heart and impulsive marriage to her lover; the second daughter Jia-chien’s decision to move out and possibly move to Europe; the youngest daughter Jia-ning’s secret relationship and pregnancy. At the dinner table there is the performance of a social gathering, the keeping of a “Chinese” culture. The dramatic irony of the Chu family dinners lies in how they function as an opportunity to reconcile these personal social-sexual agendas even as the effort of maintaining the (sur)face creates anxiety. As Ahmed points out, “the table is assembled around the support it gives” (551). In other words, what the Chu family members do with the table, or what the table allows them to do, is essential to the keeping of the table. So, they do things “at the table,” which is what makes the table what it is and take shape in the way that it does. Contrary to using the “closet” as a mode of reading the individual queer subject’s sexuality (in *The Wedding Banquet*), the table’s trans-spatial element makes it a liminal space *between* the queerness below and the apparent cohesion, unity, and/or the tradition being performed above. In these scenes, the Chu family members perform what Husserl and Merleau-Ponty might call a “sedimented history” in the form of repeated bodily actions. Through their comportment, postures, and gestures, the tables where the Chu family assembles show how they are “tending” and oriented to one another, but also oriented towards the ritualistic

performance of eating what is *on* the table, which is at once an effect and the origin of those sedimented Chinese and familial histories. In the following section, I further explore how queerness is represented and transported by contrasting the family table with some of the tables that exist outside the paternal home.

A Tale of Two Tables

Tables are everyday. If *East Palace, West Palace* portrays a queer subject under interrogation and coming out via the analogy of the “closet,” in what ways do the tables outside the home in *Eat Drink Man Woman* allow the Chu family members to negotiate their social-sexual subjectivities? Does one “come out” through, around, or at a table? This section looks at two tables outside of the Chu household and examines alternative ways of remapping the Chu family. First, after rescuing the wedding banquet, Mr. Chu and Old Wen, a good friend of Mr. Chu’s and a fellow chef, gather together for a quick dinner. The two older men come together instantaneously via their shared experience of the hardships of maintaining households as widowed fathers, and talk about their relationships with their daughters. The homosocial and complementary relationship between Mr. Chu and Old Wen is suffused with queer comradeship:

Chu: Honestly, I am not able to cook without you. This tongue I am working with is not working well lately. Everything I do I need to check your reaction first.

(朱：說真的，最近沒你啊！我菜都燒不成。我這舌頭越來越不行了 每一次下手都要看你的臉色。)



Fig. 2.5 (left): Old Wen and Mr. Chu share tender comradery over liqueur and dishes

Fig. 2.6 (right): Old Wen experiences a heart attack and falls into Mr. Chu

Whereas Mr. Chu is no longer able to taste food accurately (this is something Mr. Chu does not admit in front of his daughters), Mr. Chu and Old Wen in this scene share a tender moment where Mr. Chu spoon-feeds Old Wen. Later when Old Wen suffers a heart attack and receives a visit from Mr. Chu and Jia-chien, Jia-chien leans close to Old Wen in bed while she and her father Mr. Chu get into a passive-aggressive argument:

Jia-chien: What good does it do? I was cast out of the kitchen by you at the end.

(家倩：有什麼用，还不是被你趕出廚房了。)

Mr. Chu: It is for your own good that I cast you out of the kitchen, to learn more useful things. (老朱：趕出去是為你好，多學點有用的東西。)

Jia-chien: You just cannot accept the idea of a woman being a chef.

(家倩：你就是沒辦法接受女人當大廚。)

Old Wen: He is getting old and silly like me. But I understand from my heart that your dad is proud of you. Look at him, a stomach full of things unsaid. If he doesn't tell you more, I think he will be in the hospital soon. (老溫：他老了，跟我一樣老糊塗了。但

是溫伯伯心裡清楚，你爸爸是以你為榮。你看看他，憋了一肚的心事感情說不出來。如果他再不跟你說的話，我看將來非住醫院不可。)

While other critics have connected Mr. Chu's diminishing appetite to his fading sexuality, the queer and comradely relationship between Mr. Chu and Old Wen pushes the limits of what counts as "family." In *Eat Drink Man Woman*, the character Old Wen stands in as a symbol of nostalgia for Mr. Chu's professional past, but also in his effort to be the intermediary between Mr. Chu and the daughters. In the hospital scene, the camera brilliantly shows the triangulation between the three characters through the varying distance: Jia-chien who is leaning against Old Wen in the hospital bed; Old Wen who is trying to reconcile the tension between Mr. Chu and Jia-chien; and finally Mr. Chu who sits with his back to the other two in silence and embarrassment. This scene forms a particularly apt example of how the family can be queered such that labels like "father" and "daughter" are momentarily troubled by the characters' nostalgia and desires for different futures. Founded upon their professions as chef and its associated nostalgia, a queer reading of the two's dynamic welcomes a new "queer comrade" formation that could also help to usher in new meanings of family. A more radical reading would see Old Wen welcomed into the Chu family as Jia-chien's second father.

Outside of the home patriarchal table maintained by the aging father, the table second Jia-chien shares with her partner Raymond allows her to conjure the feeling of home she longs for. In one of the film's earlier scenes, Jia-chien takes over Raymond's kitchen and cooks for him, Jia-chien explains how the home kitchen exclusively belongs to her father:

Jia-chien: I cannot cook at home. The kitchen is basically his [Mr. Chu's] place. If I am there to make a scene, he will come and stop me as if I am taking away his

business. (家倩：我不能在家燒菜。可是那是他的禁地，如果我在里面大燒毀特燒的，他會過來阻止我，好像怕我搶了他飯碗。)

Jia-Chien: It is because I learned how to cook in a big proper institution...It's really strange. I can't recall my childhood memories unless I make them. (家倩：因為我學做菜，在一間大館子的廚房學的。。。好奇怪！我好像沒什麼童年記憶。除非我把它們煮出來。)

Having the freedom to cook and share a table with Raymond, Jia-chien observes that the kitchen-archive at home is a gendered and sexist institution that is only accessible to her father. Having trained in the culinary field when she was younger, Jia-chien reclaims cooking and the role as a chef as a form of reorientation, in Ahmed's sense: as Jia-chien recreates her father's role as a chef and takes on the traditionally feminine role of a provider for her male partner, this short scene portrays the capacity that the "table" offers Jia-chien to conjure memories and familial-social desires. Echoing the earlier hospital scene where Old Wen (as Mr. Chu's mouthpiece) explains to Jia-chien the reason she was barred from her father's kitchen:

Old Wen: Jia-chien. To be honest, if you were to be a chef, I am sure you would be one of the best. Your father's decision to send you to school is for your own good. You should be thankful for it. If we didn't force you out of the kitchen filth back then, how would you have reached the success you have today? (老溫：家倩，說實在的，如果你來當大廚，那你是頂尖的。你爸爸送你去讀書，是為你好。你要感激你爸爸。當年把你從廚房的油煙轟出去，要不然你怎麼會有今天呢？)

Jia-chien: No one ever asked me what I wanted. (家倩：從來沒有人問過我，領不領這個情。)

Reading these two scenes, I argue that although the kitchen and the kitchen table are historically a nexus of heteropatriarchal and sexist reproduction, nonetheless, it is also possible to imagine deconstructing – queering – the very histories, legacies, and constraints that hold and give alternative shape to the “table.” It is this traffic between the above and below that allows the characters in *Eat Drink Man Woman* to take turns moving and performing around the table, conjuring queer effects.

Mr. Chu’s attempt to force Jia-chien out of the kitchen can be contextualized by way of liberalization of Taiwan’s social milieu during the 1990s, particularly in regards to women’s rights. In her work on developments in Taiwanese feminism from the 1920s to the present, Doris Chang divides the modern Taiwanese women’s movement into three stages: the pioneering period (1971-82), the Awakening period (1982-1987), and the post-martial-law period (1987-present). Whereas the primary goal of activists during the first period was to advocate for the rights of female workers, the *awakening* period was a time of experimentation, as Taiwan sought to reform education and healthcare provision for women, while activists critiqued Confucian patriarchal ideology. After the end of martial law, Taiwanese society underwent significant socio-cultural transformations as women’s organizations participated in movements for democratization. To name just a few examples, the Homemakers’ Union advocated for environmental protections; the Women’s Rescue Association offered support and legal consultation for sex workers; and the Warm Life Association helped divorced women achieve financial and emotional independence. Although Mr. Chu’s insistence that Jia-Chien leave the kitchen in order to pursue higher education might be seen as a progressive move, it also neglects Jia-Chien’s explicit interest in food. What is more, if food functions as a symbol of Chineseness, Mr. Chu’s decision to turn others away from a life in food, his decision to himself turn away

from such a life, suggest that there is no place for Chinese foods or the values expressed through food in modern Taiwanese society. But although her culinary desires are neglected by her own father, the table Jia-Chien shares with Raymond provides a glimpse of an alternative form of homemaking, an avenue for the social-sexual desires that she has been prevented from exercising within the Chu family. Over the course of the film we witness a reorientation of the meanings associated with food, which goes from being associated with Mr. Chu's Chinese mainland past and functioning as a symbol of patriarchal tradition to furthering Jia-chien's efforts to discover what is best for her at the intersection of her own desires and her emergent family and professional roles.

The Lotus Leaf Chicken: Coming Out, or Coming to?

If, in *East Palace, West Palace*, the homosexual queer subject comes out via the form of a confession, how might the tables in *Eat Drink Man Woman* function similarly? Returning to the home kitchen table near the end of the film, Mr. Chu's coming-out moment is also interestingly represented through food. Towards the end of the film, at yet another family dinner, Mr. Chu deposits Lotus Leaf Chicken on the table and proceeds to violently hit the dish with a hammer. Traditionally made by wrapping the chicken first with a lotus leaf and then a layer of soil, Mr. Chu violently slams the dish with a hammer thus exposing the chicken. As Mr. Chu cracks the chicken, the camera purposefully yet slowly pans along the rest of the table: the other dishes, the two remaining daughters in their seats watching Mr. Chu frowning in discomfort, and the banging which causes the food to jiggle.

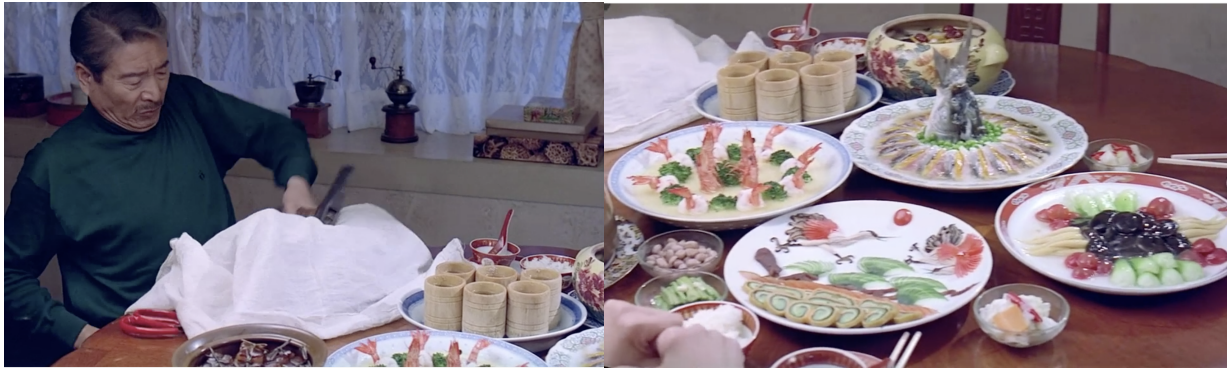


Fig. 2.7 (top left): Beginning of the family dinner where Mr. Chu violently hammers the dish covered in a white cloth

Fig. 2.8 (top right): the camera pans slowly along the table showing a great variety of dishes

Fig. 2.9 (bottom left): Mr. Chu cracks open the dish

Over the course of numerous family dinners, Mr. Chu has been unable to tell his daughters about his relationship with Jin-rong. In Tsai Ying-chun's study of classical Chinese literary thought, he suggests that one of the aesthetic ideals of a Chinese literary tradition is a mode of writing wherein "the real message tends to go beyond the actual words of the text." Reticence (含蓄) literally means both "holding back" (含) and "storing up" (蓄) and has been variously translated as "conservation," "reserve," and "potentiality." Building on Tsai, Liu Jen-peng and Ding Naifei approach reticence in conversation with Queer Sinophone studies to rethink the interface of tolerance and reticence as a dominant aesthetic-ethic that has consequences for how? deviant sexualities are conceived and expressed. Whereas food is often imagined to encourage conversation, however, in *Eat Drink Man Woman*, food conserves conversations and silences the family. The effects of heterosexist-patriarchy take shape as "silent words and reticent tolerance, passing for the most "traditional" of virtues in modern "democratic" guise (Liu and Ding 32).

Reticence, as Liu and Ding argues, is not merely a poetics and a rhetoric, but “constitutes [an] ever-refigured socio-familial force and power” as it circulates in “everyday practices along pathways that maintain the ‘normal order’ of persons and things as well as of actions and behavior” even as it can also be activated in reverse to work to disturb and harass so-called normativity. As a visual representation of “normal order,” the tableful of dishes is disrupted by the creation-destruction of the Lotus Leaf Chicken. The use of the dish in this scene is particularly apt for illustrating the ambiguity it plays on the table: looked at from the outside, the chicken does not resemble a chicken. Inside the Lotus Leaf Chicken, the soil from “below” is used in a dish on “top,” but is later broken up, while inside the chicken hides the stuffing Mr. Chu has so diligently prepared. In this scene’s poignant yet comedic predicament, Mr. Chu’s frustration with the dish highlights the tension between Mr. Chu’s sexual self and the social-family. In the Chu family, where personhood is inextricably entangled with paternalist familial relations in impure modern forms, the rhetoric and politics of tolerance and reticence retain seemingly “old powers while articulating new disciplinary and rhetorical forces, especially in the field of sexuality in and around the family” (Liu and Ding 32-33). The food on the table conveys a truth that cannot be spoken, whereas the breaking-creating foreshadows a new family in the (re)making.



Fig. 2.10. (left): Mrs. Liang awkward speech before Mr. Chu's announcement

Fig. 2.11. (right): Jia-chien is shown to be the one who remains after Mr. Chu's explosive announcement

At each of the five family dinners, something is confessed: at the first family dinner, Jia-chien confesses she has spent all her savings on a mortgage for a new home but at the very next dinner she brings the sad news that the new home faces demolition due to construction violations; at the third dinner, the youngest daughter Jia-ning confesses her relationship with her boyfriend and that they are expecting a baby; at the fourth dinner, the eldest daughter owns up to a new relationship; while at the fifth dinner, Mr. Chu finally reveals his relationship with the younger Jin-rong, explaining that they have bought a new house elsewhere. At the end of the fifth dinner, Jia-chien, who had planned to leave the house, ironically stays. Each of these “coming out” moments points to the possibility for the family to be queered by possibilities of inheritance and new desires. The Sinophone family cracks and gets resignified, undergoing a queer reformulation.

This is not uncomplicated. Mr. Chu's relationship with Jin-rong is especially layered. Jin-rong widowed mother, Mrs. Liang, has been trying to win over Mr. Chu over the course of the film, only to find out that she's been beaten by her own daughter. Given that Jin-rong has long been close with the Chu daughters, the family's explosive response could reflect their sense that the relationship comes close to incest. Through his relationship with Jin-rong, Mr. Chu reassumes the role of a husband and (step)father (to Jin-rong's daughter Shan Shan as well as his own three daughters); while Jia-chien, the eldest daughter, becomes a wife in her own right; and Jia-chien, the middle daughter, reaffirms her role as the inheritor. A new family takes shape as Mrs. Liang realizes she has become Mr. Chu's mother-in-law, which sends her into a rage – “this shameful and promiscuous Mr. Chu, how dare you take my daughter away! What is wrong with

this family, go to hell!” (你這個殺千刀的老朱！你竟然拐我的女兒。我告訴你，我要還有一口氣在，你休想。這什麼家庭，下地獄去！) – and causes her to faint. Recalling the scene in *The Wedding Banquet* when Wai-tung comes out to his mother, who is played by the same actress as Mrs. Liang, the coming out scene in *Eat Drink Man Woman* prompts an even more dramatic reaction in Mrs. Liang, who chastises Mr. Chu for his “shameful” relationship with Jin-rong.

Both films, more than depicting intergenerational, intercultural, and interracial conflict and (mis)communications, show how new socio-sexual desires reshuffle traditional ways of imagining and conceptualizing subjects as well as families. In *The Wedding Banquet*, the film’s queerness inheres in how it complicates traditional Chinese ways of thinking about gender and sexuality. In *Eat Drink Man Woman*, queerness circulates through how the Chus navigate the burdens and expectations of inheritance. Given similar examples from Chinese as well as Euro-American culture (including, for example, Zhang Yimou’s film *Raise the Red Lantern*), the relationship between Mr. Chu and Jin-rong may not appear to be transgressive, and can even be read as normative. It is true that their relationship recalls quite “traditional” tropes and norms. Still, I am not interested in deciding whether their relationship is “impermissible” or “progressive.” Instead, I borrow from Raymond Williams’s thinking about structures of feeling as a way to the new sexual, cultural, and familial possibilities stirring in the new Chu family formation. Williams uses the term “structure of feeling” to describe the ways of thinking or knowing that are vying to emerge or residual at any point in history but may not yet be articulated in a fully worked-out form. At one point during the fifth dinner, Mrs. Liang comments, “Even if we are not a biological family, we still feel like a family” (我們雖然不是一家之親，但是還是親如一家。). Mrs. Liang may not feel the same way after Mr. Chu’s

confession. Still, something about Jin-rong's relationship with Mr. Chu seems to signal new possibilities for feeling as part of Taiwan's transformation in the 1990s.



Fig. 2.12.: Final scene of the film between Mr. Chu and Jia-chien

In an essay by Zhang Bingbei, Ang Lee reflects on his interest in the movements that occur within the family, noting that “I have always been interested in these moments of convergences and divergences. The food and the dinner table are only symbols for the family. There are no never-ending banquets in the world, although the purpose of leaving is to reconvene” (my translation; 2013 85). The final scene shows Mr. Chu returning to the old home as Jia-chien comfortably prepares the final family dinner in the film. The contest over ownership of the kitchen, the fluidity of gender identity and the deconstruction of sexual hierarchy are issues that are shown to be resolved in this last Sunday dinner. By then, Mr. Chu has already bought a house in which he lives with the now pregnant Jin-rong and his step-daughter Shanshan. Coming “home” for the ritualistic dinner this time prepared by Jia-chien changes his role from the feeder to the fed, from the provider to the provided for, from the criticized to the critic. As a guest, Mr. Chu is now understandably removed from the kitchen. This removal demystifies his once sacred cooking archive and enables us to see Jia-chien glide through the forbidden ground with the ease of a woman at home to prepare the last dinner in the house. In Lizzi Francke’s 1995 review of the film, she argues that the reversing of the roles “manifest[s]

the various needs that bind a family by setting a mother back at the heart of it” (Francke 64). Similarly, Dariotis and Fung also observe that “ironically, it is in fulfilling her wish to be ‘like her father,’ that is, to be a chef, that Jia-chien is reinscribed into the domestic role she had tried so hard to escape” (Dariotis and Fung 212) The structure of return – positioning the woman back to the heart of the family – is in my view, however, not a regression or a reconfinement of women to the domestic space but a reconstruction. Jia-chien’s culinary desires are not simply a sort of expression of appropriate daughterly or wifely femininity, or conversely an attempt to assert her female masculinity in a field traditionally dominated by men.

Upon tasting the ginger soup made by Jia-chien, Mr. Chu regains his ability to taste as the film ends with the two calling one another “father” (爸) and “daughter” (女兒) respectively. Although nothing seems to have changed, as each affirms the other’s role within the Chu family, the feeling is different, as the family has gone through a subtle reshuffling. Having found ways to pursue their socio-sexual desires, Mr. Chu and Jia-chien are able to reconcile with each other and their familial roles at the end of the film. Underneath this final dinner table (scene), their recognition of each other marks the changing landscape of both the “father” and the “daughter” respectively: while the father becomes more than the patriarch supposedly responsible for maintaining the unity of the family when he relinquished this role to pursue a new life with Jin-rong, Jia-chien, who has been denied the role of her father’s successor, finds a way to express her culinary vocation on her own terms. This tender moment between Mr. Chu and Jia-chien resolves the tension embedded in the family throughout the film. Although the family structure has not dissolved, the changes in Mr. Chu and Jia-chien’s relationships, including with one another, draws out a renewed set of flexible positionalities which redefines the family as a site of horizontal, vertical, and at times slanting desires.

Conclusion

In 1986, the Trinidad-born Toronto-based artist Richard Fung produced a documentary entitled *Orientations*, in which he interviews fourteen lesbians and gay men from diverse backgrounds on a wide range of themes such as “first gay realizations, coming out into the gay/lesbian community, coping with racism in the sexual area, [and] cultural self-assertion through art” (Richard Fung’s website). The project was partially inspired by Fung’s understanding of queerness, Chineseness, and transnationality as a continuous visual archive. In the video, men and women from different Asian backgrounds speak frankly, humorously, and often poignantly about their everyday practices of queerness. Long before “queer” gained its contemporary currency, Fung’s archival work was quintessentially queer in its effort to document the multitude of those living within the gay Asian community in 1980s Toronto. To a viewer watching in 2019, Fung’s *Orientations* generates “not just knowledge but feeling[s]” (Cvetkovich 241) of transnational solidarity. Compensating for institutional neglect, Fung’s work can be perceived as archival particularly in his attempt to formulate “acknowledgement of a past that can be painful to remember, impossible to forget, and resistant to consciousness” (Cvetkovich 241). Thirty years later, Fung produced *Re: Orientations*, for which he decided to reach out to the 1986 interviewees for a look back at the documentary in which they had featured. As suggested by the title itself, *Re: Orientations* is a reply, a remembering, a rememorialization, a return to the question, “what does it mean to be queer?” Since some of the earlier interviewees couldn’t be located, didn’t wish to participate, or had passed away, the 2016 update included younger queer and trans people – the shapeshifting “queer” working to pry open the closure of the “Asian gay” archive.

In a similar way, I have turned to Zhang Yuan's *East Palace, West Palace* and Ang Lee's *Eat Drink Man Woman* as queer Chinese visual archival materials that have provided me with pathways to look at how queer Chineseness was imagined and represented across the Sinophone during the 1990s. The project does not pretend to be a comprehensive study of 1990s Sinophone gender and sexual formations, which bear further exploration. In *Eat Drink Man Woman*, for example, there is more to be said about the three daughters' socio-sexual subjectivities in light of Taiwanese movements for women's rights. Still, as a student-scholar writing in Canada, the public availability of these films has provided me with an opportunity to learn how the archive of Chineseness and queerness is complicated and enriched by histories of colonialism, imperialism, (post)socialism, and capitalism within a transnational context. As I have explored throughout the thesis, rather than functioning as an identity category, queerness entails and archives a wide range of identifying processes and movements. More importantly, it can be creatively and theoretically mobilized to intervene in the broader cultural formations of Chineseness, national belonging, and other social formations.

From a more personal perspective, this project partially stems from my experiences as a mobile queer subject. My queerness moves as I move – from Hong Kong to Canada pursuing my Masters degree. Just as in the US, the emergence of “gay rights” in Canada beginning in the 1980s gave rise to homonationalisms and homonormativities as these intersect with white privilege, capitalism, sexism, transmisogyny, and cissexism. In addition, Canadian multiculturalism often positions the racialized Asian body *as* exemplary. I therefore found myself slowly moving towards “queerness” as a resistive marker-response to forms of “gayness” and “Asianness” that tend towards whiteness, middle-classness, cisness. In moments of “coming out,” I have often found it necessary to trace such identificatory and transitory processes as

having their own unique historical and cultural implications that will further excite and enrich queer studies. In contrast with Hong Kong, where racial difference is heavily class-stratified (whiteness is associated with wealthy expatriate, people of colour are framed as migrants, and Han Chinese are ascribed indigeneity), I have found that my Chineseness (or more broadly, my Asianness) is accented in these coming out moments in Canada.

In postcolonial Hong Kong, Hong Kong's colonial history is often framed by the mainstream media as a nostalgic bulwark against the PRC's increasing linguistic, cultural, economic, and legal control over Hong Kong since the handover in 1997. This has become all the more fraught in light of the ongoing protest against the Extradition Bill and the violence of the police. The current political crisis has inspired calls for increased intervention by the PRC and its ruling party, and global calls for solidarity with the protestors' five main political demands, which include complete withdrawal of the extradition bill, retraction of the "riot" characterisation, the release and exoneration of arrested protestors, the establishment of an independent commission of inquiry into police conduct and the use of force against protestors, and finally, the resignation of Chief Executive Carrie Lam and the implementation of universal suffrage for Legislative Council and Chief Executive elections. In looking back at the 1990s as a critical moment in the histories of China and Taiwan when transformation seemed more possible, I have been prompted to imagine alternative futures at a moment of crisis for Hong Kong. In Hong Kong, anti-communist sentiment and anti-PRC political action makes it increasingly difficult to identify as *tongzhi*, or a comrade. How might Hong Kong movements for democracy reshape the archives of Chineseness and queerness? As the "national father" (國父) Sun Yat-sen has it, the revolution is here. We must work hard, not only to expand the queer archive but

also to bring about a revolution that makes it possible to imagine Chineseness outside of compulsion to identify as comrades.

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¹ In Lisa Rofel's 2007 "Desiring China: Experiments in Neoliberalism, Sexuality, and Public Culture," she draws on her research over the past two decades among urban residents and rural migrants in Hangzhou and Beijing. Through window displays, newspapers, soap operas, gay bars, and other public culture venues, Rofel analyzes the meanings that individuals attach to various public cultural phenomena and what their interpretations say about their understandings of post-socialist China and their roles within it. She contends that neoliberal subjectivities are created through the production of various desires – material, sexual, and affective – and that it is largely through their engagements with public culture that people in China are imagining and practicing appropriate desires for the post-Mao era.

² The resentment towards the government eventually erupted in a riot on 28 February 1947 in Taipei, known as the "228 riot," in which more than ten thousand native Taiwanese were executed by the nationalist government. For the next three decades, the KMT government not only categorically denied responsibility for the massacre, but also made the mere mention of it politically taboo.

³ This nation-building scheme was nowhere more obvious than in the imposition of Mandarin as the national language. Japanese was banned from mass communications, while the use of Taiwanese dialects such as Minnanyu and Hakka (spoken by the majority of the indigenous population of ethnic Han origin from the Fujian province in south-east China) and the aboriginal languages was severely restricted in public life. Mandarin Chinese was effectively instrumentalized by the KMT government for the inculcation of Chinese national consciousness and Chinese cultural identity.

⁴ In 1996, the Tongzhi Space Action Network was founded to contest the Taipei city government's new urban planning to eradicate gay cruisers at the Taipei New Park. For an inclusive analysis of the 1990s *tongzhi* movement and activism in Taiwan, see Ni 1997.

⁵ Gopinath further writes of the relationship between diaspora and queerness: "if 'diaspora' needs 'queerness' in order to rescue it from its genealogical implications, 'queerness' also needs 'diaspora' in order to make it more supple in relation to questions of race, colonialism, migration, and globalization" (11).

⁶ Citing Tu's understanding of Chineseness as an ethno-cultural hybrid construction, Chris Vasantkumar attends to Chineseness similarly as "processual rather than fixed" (427). Working through static modes of "being of Chinese origin." Vasantkumar examines how individuals and collectivities might *become*, stay, and cease to be Chinese. He posits the term Overseas Chinese "not as an always already naturally existing outgrowth of something prior called China but as contingent artifact of historical process of the production of conditions" that enable such commonality.

⁷ While Sang concurs that the "range of Chinese discourses on homosexuality narrowed after the 1920s," she nevertheless argues that "the idea of there being an extraordinary homosexual nature confined to a small percentage of the population did not become the overruling paradigm for understanding homoerotic desire" (Sang 297) because "*tongxing'ai* primarily signified as a category of personhood, that is, an identity" (292-3). While Sang argues for a conceptualization of homosexuality away from sexual act or identity, over the course of the twentieth century, however, *tongxing'ai* and *tongxinglian* have not only become the most common Chinese terms for homosexuality, but also have gradually solidified into an identity category.

⁸ For a more detailed account of the emergence of the term *ku'er*, see Howard Chiang's (2014) chapter titled "(De)Provincializing China: Queer Historicism and Sinophone Postcolonial Critique" in *Queer Sinophone Cultures*. Eds Howard Chiang and Ari Larissa Heinrich. London and New York: Routledge. 2014. 19-51, and Huang, Hans Tao-Ming's 2011 introductory chapter in *Queer Politics and Sexual Modernity in Taiwan*.

⁹ Moreover, there are differences in the development of these discursive terms in China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. For example, many cruising gay men in mainland China were arrested by the police on the charge of "hooliganism" (*liumangzui*) (See chapter 1 on Zhang Yuan's *East Palace West Palace*) and were similarly referred to as *liumang* (hooligans.) In Hong Kong, while it is not uncommon for those familiar with Western gay parlance to directly use the word "gay," it has been transliterated as *gei* (menacing foundation) in Cantonese, the majority language in Hong Kong, and is usually rendered as *gei-lo*, which Chou Wah-Shan reads as derogatory, "since *lo* carries the connotation of a male who comes from the lower class," and as sexist "because it totally ignores and rejects lesbians and bisexual women" (Chou 79). In Taiwan, there is a translation of the term "gay" as *gai zu* (*gai* functions as a transliteration of gay and means, among other things, lid or cover, while *zu* denotes clan or tribe).

¹⁰ In 1997, the Chinese criminal code was revised to eliminate the vague crime of "hooliganism," which had been used as a de facto ban on private, adult, non-commercial and consensual homosexual conduct. Rofel describes the use of "hooliganism" as a legal and psychological rubric that swept all immoral, antisocial – as well as anticosialist activities—under the public rug. In the name of maintaining public morality, government officials in 1990s PRC closed bars, shut down publications, and arrested people they believed to be gay. For a more detailed work tracing the legal use of "hooliganism" in PRC, see Rofel 2007 chapter "Legislating Desire."

¹¹ As Homi Bhabha notes in processes of cultural translation, he is more compelled by the so-called "foreign" articulations than in the supposedly "original," as it "desacralised the transparent assumptions of cultural supremacy, and in that very act, demands a contextual specificity, a historical differentiation within minority positions" (Bhabha 327). In a similar light, Gayatri Spivak suggested that cultural translation can be used as a "decolonizing" strategy. Taking "queer comradeship" strategically as a lived archival subjectivity and even practice of queer life, my reading of the films in this thesis resists privileging particular approximation and essentialization of a so-called "Chinese queer sexuality."

¹² The screenplay of *Palace* is co-written by Zhang Yuan and Wang Xiaobo, a novelist who co-authored the first sociological study on male homosexuality in contemporary China with his wife, Li Yinhe. The screenplay is slightly different from the film and is published in Wang Xiaobo 1998, in which *East Palace, West Palace* also appears in the form of an eponymous play that has been staged in Beijing and Brussels (Wang 1998, 371; Rayns 1996, 29) and as a short story entitled "Love tender as water" (似水流年).

¹³ In Bao's (auto)ethnographic work on Chinese "gay" men in Shanghai, he observes that "the English word is not often translated into Chinese even in a conversation in Chinese. It does not need to be. It both embraces a transnational and cosmopolitan identity and manifests a classical Chinese aesthetics of *hanxu* (implicitness or reticence), that is, one does not need to articulate it clearly, at least not in Chinese. Code switching, in this context, is an indirect gesture of 'coming out: at least, it suggests a move toward 'moving out,' but the 'coming out' is apparently limited to people who understand English, or people who have similar class positions or education backgrounds. The English term "gay" in this context can be considered both an 'out' strategy and a closet" (*Queer Comrades* 52).

¹⁴ For a more detailed overview of a postsocialist historical context of queer politics in 1990s China, see Lisa Rofel chapter 3

¹⁵ The confession has been central to Foucault's understanding of the workings of power. In the West "the obligation to confess is now relayed through so many different points...that we no longer perceive it as the effect of a power that constrains us" (1978, 60). We have become accustomed to believing that power constrains us, holds us back and pins us down and that it is only through confession, through the revelation of all of that is inside of us that we can finally become free. For Foucault, sex has become a "privileged theme of confession" (1978, 61), a form of confession that compels individuals to confess any and every sexual peculiarity. Its effect is to reinforce heterogeneous array of sexualities. Foucault believed that "sexual interdictions are constantly connected with the obligation to tell the truth about oneself." Through the confession of inner secrets truth becomes the means by which sex is manifested.

¹⁶ Post-modernism was hot in the air following the visit of Federic Jameson and Ihab Hassan to Taiwan in 1986, while post-structuralism, post-colonial theory, new Marxism, feminist theory, and gay/lesbian/queer theories were welcomed in the academy since the early 1990s.