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AS NORMAL AS POSSIBLE

Negotiating Sexuality and Gender in Mainland China and Hong Kong

Edited by
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香港大學出版社
HONG KONG UNIVERSITY PRESS

Dreaming of Normal While Sleeping with Impossible: Introduction

Yau Ching

Issues related to sexuality have emerged in China and Hong Kong[1] in unprecedented ways in the past several years. The growth of religious fundamentalisms and global gay discourses, heightened media attention linking the rising AIDS figures primarily to the gay community, *tongzhi*[2] activist movements, struggles and public demands of sex workers, have all contributed to this new visibility. In Hong Kong, tensions are rapidly rising within the growing impact of the religious neo-liberal front fueled with reclaimed (reimagined) post-1997 Chinese moralism *vis-à-vis* glocalized movements of sexual rights. Normative institutions for the regulation of sexuality including faith-based organizations and megachurches in Hong Kong and to a less successful degree in China, and government bureaucracies across the region, have adopted activist strategies to act in unprecedented unison, and with great speed, triggering waves of moral panic[3] in their campaigns against sexual minorities and representations including but not limited to LBGTIQ and sex workers' movements, pornography and queer mainstreaming, in order to restabilize their stronghold and perpetuate their privileges. As a result, non-normative sexual subjects and communities have been brought centre stage and often stigmatized *together* due to their "abnormal/shameful" gender identities, object choices and/or sexual practices, while *tongzhi* activists—often in alliance with other pro-sexual rights groups—are striving to fight back. There is a very urgent need for intellectual work to more acutely articulate, understand and analyze the complexity of the issues raised, the subject formations concerned, and the ways in which different norms line up and become synonymous with one another. This work will contribute to building situated knowledges that will strengthen the discursive power of non-normative sexual-subjects-in-alliance, enabling them to fight against the stigmatization and facilitate more visibility of variance and differences.[4]

This book showcases the work of emerging and established scholars — working mostly outside Euro-America—on contemporary *tongzhi* studies. As one of the first sustained collections of writings on non-normative sexual subjectivities and sexual politics in Hong Kong and China post-1997 published in English, many of the writers included here are uniquely first-generation. Unlike the Euro-American academia where gender (umbrella word including sexuality) and queer studies have been rapidly proliferating at the risk of becoming normalized, these fields are still marked in Mainland China and Hong Kong as territories for the impossible and unthinkable, inhabited by stigma, silence, risk and frustration. In most universities in China and almost all universities in Hong Kong, postgraduate students are guided away from working on topics concerning queer studies *and/or* sexuality; scholars are discouraged from pursuing or publishing research in these fields. As a result, queer studies scholars have produced relatively little scholarship outside the contexts of Europe, North America and Australia. Scholars based in Asia have had remarkably little opportunity and freedom to access the resources needed to conduct and publish studies regarding LBGTIQ communities and non-normative sexual practices, in our own languages even, not to mention in English. Both of these histories have contributed to a systemic suppression of sexuality and a perpetuation of varieties of hybrid heteronormativities (that also need study) in the formulation and institutionalization of knowledge. In this light, most of the research presented here is *primary* research, literally—most of the topics and/or communities studied here have not been studied before. All the authors here conducted their research primarily in a language other than English. Subjects previously unthinkable in the societies they live in *and* in English are be(com)ing named, spoken, articulated, and communicated through this project. This book could therefore be seen, by its writers as well as its readers, as an act of disclosure. Like most acts of disclosure, a certain strategic essentialism would be considered historically necessary by writers in this book while the collection as a whole resists the normalizing logic of the modernized privileged queer agent.[5] As a project of "continuous deconstruction of the tenets of positivism at the heart of identity politics", the Euro-American critique of queer studies "disallows any positing of a proper subject of or object for the field by insisting that queer has no fixed political referent" (Eng, Halberstam and Muñoz 3). However, in many parts of the rest of the world today, identity politics have not made their way into a core part ("heart") of our culture as most subjects could not afford to politicize one's identity. The Chinese translation of "queer" has also been largely unable to go beyond academic circles in China and Hong Kong.[6] With *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* widely consumed on Hong Kong mainstream television (entitled in Chinese as *Fenhong jiu bing*, literally meaning *The Pink Rescue Team*, thus

avoiding the untranslatability of "queer" and the potential confrontation in the suggested opposition/separation between queer and straight) and on YouTube, queer consumerism has popularized itself as one of the coolest parts of Western globalization. By rechanneling expressions of seemingly non-normative desires *only* into commodity culture this form of queerness helps to serve rather than challenge the hegemonic hierarchies of sexualities.

Resistance to the (queer) normativity seemingly offered by the American-centric (subjectless) agent, as summarized by Eng, Halberstam and Muñoz, also needs to be problematized. In this age of globalized "queer liberalism", not only does that normativity need to be foregrounded and interrogated as "variegated, striated, contradictory" (Villarejo), it is also important to remember that normativity as a relative ideal might not be accessible for many people in most parts of the world. As a performative façade fraught with fission, consumed and upheld with ongoing-but-never-to-be-exposed sacrifices and sweat, it is practically impossible and thus always desirable. I began to learn this from the following experience. Undergraduates in Cultural Studies at the school where I teach are required to work on an article-length thesis under supervision in their final year. Last year one of my students, K., wanted his thesis to be on "Straight-boy Complexes of Hong Kong Gays". Mainly based on his self-inquiry, his personal observations of friends around him, interviews and focus group discussions with friends and acquaintances, his project tried to understand how and why Hong Kong gay boys—especially "sissies" like himself—seemed to have an unyielding fixation on straight-looking guys in spite of repeated hurt, rejection and shaming. In the second tutorial, in my most gentle and understanding voice, I asked him if he had considered these "complexes" as constituted at least partly by self-loathing homophobia. Much to my surprise, with a big nodding smile he responded he had certainly asked himself *this*. He didn't tell me what his answer was. Later in his paper, he concluded by suggesting that these fantasies to date or *have* straight boys might be closely akin to a naturalized/socialized desire to access normativity—to be as close to being normal as possible because it is through sleeping with straight boys that one can imagine *being close to* getting married, having children and building families. Thus the moment of being closest to normativity is also the moment of confirming the impossibility of one's desire is also the moment of knowing one's queerness. It is only upon acknowledgement of one's not being straight that one needs to put one's finger on straightness in other ways, including in ways apparently impossible. In other words, my simplistic and presumptuous question had failed to register the complex processes of construction of and negotiation with normativity *within* subjects who are deprived of the right or the option or resist to be normal to start with. With "As Normal As Possible"—

the title of this collection—the emphasis is on the two "as"es; how its meanings change *aaaasssss* it moves along the conditions that define it. In what ways does normativity produce (im)possibilities for our sexualities; how do we stretch and resist the hegemony of normativity *and* survive to redefine, make productive and/or transform its violence and tensions in our be(come)ings? When it is given that certain forms of sexuality could not be "normal" period, the challenges for the continual and thriving existence of non-normative sexual subjects reside between the operations of at least these two levels (among others) *simultaneously*: accessing "normal" as a possibility *and* transforming "normal" into "possible".

Different Normativities

As what is considered "queer" might vary from context to context, what is constructed, desired and/or resisted as normative also varies across different bodies and communities. This collection seeks to highlight the context-specificity of normativity and the ways in which different individuals'/communities' love-and-hate relationships with normativity are also manifested and negotiated differently at different historical moments, fine-tuned according to the different power structures of each context and making different meanings. For male sex workers who serve primarily men (in local parlance "money boys") in contemporary Mainland China, the neo-liberal ideology of achieving upward class mobility and adopting a cosmopolitan lifestyle signifies more normativity than concerns regarding sexual identity or health. For Indonesian domestic helpers in Hong Kong, the prescribed feminine role of getting married, serving one's husband and having kids at home exerts tremendous pressure on the migrant workers' lives, thus informing and configuring their choices of migrancy, transgenderism and exploration of same-sex desires and practices. Compared to female migrant workers in Hong Kong and lesbians in Shanghai, Hong Kong lesbians are less confronted with the pressure to get married, but they suffer nonetheless from the expectations of their being straight-behaving, income-aspiring or income-earning hard-working girls at school, at work and at home. Their need for lesbian-only spaces expresses a desire for a buffer and comfort zone to work out and manage the stress that comes with their non-normative identities and to gain more bargaining power within a highly condensed capitalist normativity. In desiring to access this normativity, the women in Tang's study identify—not without contradictions—with a visible queer consumerism, and an affirmative discourse on lesbian sexuality as (close-to-)normal possibilities. In Shanghai *lalas*' (a Chinese term for women with same-sex desires) experimentation with "fake marriage" in order to act "normal", they have created new forms of intimacy and familial relations in

the interstices between heterosexual and same-sex relationships. A reading of some pornographic period dramas made in 1970s–1990s Hong Kong suggests that the assumed normative ideal of monogamous marriage based on romantic equalitarian love between opposite genders is a very recent invention and might not be quite universalized or even desirable in contemporary Chinese imaginaries that retain memories of our literary past. Yet, for an openly queer icon Leslie Cheung Kwok-wing (who starred in films including *Rouge, Farewell My Concubine* and *Happy Together*, among others) operating in an increasingly or more overtly homophobic post-1997 Hong Kong, he found himself exhausting all his energies and creativity in negotiating with the limits of masculine- and hetero-normativity. In films representing transgender subjects in China today, realism, essentialized genders and assumed mutual exclusivity of homosexuality and heterosexuality are explored and critiqued as sites of normativity, whereas for transsexuals who are inevitably subject to the violence of Hong Kong's medical system, a stable and changed gender offers simultaneously the promise for normativity as well as the means for self-invention.

Different Chinese

In providing grounded and original fieldwork, as well as critical applications from the wider fields of sociological studies, public health, cultural and film studies, this interdisciplinary collection taps on the one hand, the denaturalizing of disciplinary boundaries and assumptions in Euro-American queer studies, and on the other, demonstrates the study of Chinese sexuality as an emergent field currently emanating from multiple disciplines. This book will hopefully help to just begin queering and re-sexualizing established academic disciplines, anthropology, sociology and cinema studies, to name a few, in putting together a long overdue initial knowledge base on sexuality and queer politics in China, including Hong Kong. Using a variety of methodologies ranging from ethnographic studies, documentation of activist happenings, to institution and textual analysis, it builds on existing scholarship to further diversify the study of sexuality as well as produce differences within the study of "Chinese" sexualities. As it is impossible to study sexuality in Hong Kong as a subject in isolation without studying its embeddedness in other domains such as class, educational backgrounds, religion, gender, ethnicity, and various relationships to westernization-cum-modernization, nationalism and colonialism, I envision this collection as potentially posing new and exciting challenges to queer studies pioneered but also now still somewhat shadowed by the Euro-North American axis.

Recent studies of male and female same-sex desires in early modern, modern and contemporary Chinese studies tend to privilege the site of China, at times with a comparative reference to Taiwan, but have understudied other Chinese-speaking cultures, most notably that of Hong Kong. While studies on Japan and Thailand have contended that local gender and sexual identities are shaped as much by traditional cultural trajectories as by the reworkings of globalization through the negotiative frameworks of the nation-states, this anthology seeks to examine the processes of (re)genderization and sexualization of Chinese cultures today via cities including Hong Kong, Shanghai and Beijing. The changing configurations of sexualities are studied in light of the destabilizing, internally differentiated and contested notions of the Chinese nation-state through its conflicted relations with regional and local territories such as Hong Kong, whose cultural and geographical boundaries also need to be problematized by the presence of its large population of immigrants and migrant workers, with Indonesians as a prominent case in hand.

Structure and Chapters

This collection chooses as its starting point considerations of late-twentieth-century global and local movement of labour that have reconfigured class, urban-rural, ethnic and gender hierarchies and their mutual embeddedness with sexual identifications and practices. For many in China, sex work is an attractive occupation which can provide more economic reward than that of an average (manual or even white collar) worker. As Warner notes, sex workers are the most visible examples whose gender identity and object choice could pass as normal yet they nonetheless "find themselves despised as queer because of their sexual practice" (37). Constructed by the rapidly compressed economic development of China today, sex work is a possible means to make one more "normal", while simultaneously making the subject an "abject disgrace" as well as an agent who enables new possibilities for oneself and for others. China's joining the World Trade Organization not only intensifies the already severe urban-rural inequality but further accelerates the growth of a migrant labor underclass, many of whom become sex workers in cities. The majority of clients for sex workers in Southern China are tourists from Hong Kong; the majority of sex workers in Hong Kong today are from the Mainland. While sex work is a popular profession in China and Hong Kong, the Chinese sex trade remains under-studied and most scholarly work done on the subject is available only in Chinese. Part one of this book re-frames sexualities closely related to Chinese cultural trajectories as well as drastic socio-economic changes around work and around spatial and bodily shifts. It begins with focusing on an area which is often overlooked in existing scholarship: male sex workers.[7] Based on forty-five in-depth interviews of money boys mainly coming from rural or semi-rural areas to big cities in China, Kong's study facilitates understanding of these triply-stigmatized (rural-urban migrants, sex workers *and* engaged in homosexual behaviours) subjects' own perception of risk, intimacy and mobility in relation to their structural constraints and work experiences, analyzing the relationship between poverty, homelessness and sex work in light of the political economy of sexuality, and the "circuit of desire" that links up sexuality with tourism, work and love under the thesis of transnationalization of bodies. Contrary to the overtly one-sided and dominant representation of male sex workers as depressed, depraved, dissolute and violent sociopaths in popular Chinese culture and media representations, Kong has found that the option of sex work has offered new possibilities for survival, livelihood and self-development for young migrants in a class-stratified society confronted with massive tensions between rural and urban developments.

LBGTIQ scholarship filtered through an upper middle class lens and elite sensibilities tends to overlook communities of migrant workers whose sexuality is commonly assumed to be non-existent. The second chapter studies the ways in which Indonesian migrant workers in Hong Kong, not unlike rural-to-urban sex workers in China, re-configure their sexual identities and behaviours contingent upon the economic-driven contexts of labour and mobility. In studying the *trans* of "transitional sexuality" among female migrant workers, Sim looks at the nature of same-sex relationships that occur during labour migration and focuses on the mutability of sexuality, object choices and sexual behaviours to explain the complex ways in which cultural norms "at home" inform the experiences of migrant workers in the "host country". Sim also explains how geographic mobility enables greater sexual and gender mobility, rendering a mutually constitutive and simultaneous existence of the needs of queer agencies with the demands of straight family norms possible. This chapter explores the conditions within which lesbian relationships emerge and recreate expressions of alternative sexual identities, which Sim coins "neo-heterosexuality". I would suggest it could also be read as "trans-lesbianism", a form of experiencing same-sex desires on the part of transnationalized bodies which not only complicates lesbianism in its variable combination with heterosexual marriage and family norms but also produces multiple possibilities for transitionally gendered embodiments. Echoing other chapters in the book addressing survival problems encountered and creative coping strategies invented by various sexual minoritized subjects (in ways more than one), this chapter investigates the ways in which the social body of migrant workers is heavily disciplined by mechanisms of socio-political control. These Indonesian trans-lesbians are rendered as multiple

abjects, yet they simultaneously reconfigure bodies, values, and challenges to lead meaningful lives that go beyond binary oppositions of resistance and co-optation. This chapter also touches upon the ways in which these meanings are informed and transformed by the various spaces sexual subjects enter, produce and manoeuvre in.

Due to the density in population and the lack of physical land space, people in Hong Kong—sexual abjects more than others—negotiate privacy and self-expression in specifically spatially-defined ways. In a contrastable study, but on a more micro scale, Tang maps how lesbian commercial spaces in Hong Kong—including karaoke bars, upstairs cafés, lesbian specialty stores in a high-density shopping hub known as Causeway Bay or Tung Lo Wan—function as sites of community formation for lesbians to escape from heteronormative society, validate their self-images, build and maintain social networks, and/or to perform political subjectivity. Through this study, based on interviews with more than thirty lesbians and space owners/managers, Tang contends that these physical spaces are in a continuously mobile process to transform themselves through customers who take part in the reproduction of social and sexual relations within them; a finding shared by other writers in this section. All three chapters problematize the heteronormative class-biased dichotomy of private versus public that marks the beginning of modern selfhood—the domestication of emotions and privacy within the "home" and rationalized civic engagement and regulation in the public realm.

The chapters in part two articulate narratives which explore strategies in challenging *and* living/thriving with the systematic modern abjection of "deviant" gender and sexual subjectivities, under the shadows of upholding, subverting and/or redefining the respectability and usability of institutions, hence offering *tongzhi* studies channels in understanding the productivity of power relations in specific contexts today. Cheung argues for a depathologization of transsexuality through detailed and contextualized data gathered from studying the operation and limitations of the medical system in Hong Kong and from interactive fieldwork with gender-variant subjects[8] in order to further understand the complex processes of gender identity (trans)formation at work today. Cheung relates how transgender and intersexed peoples negotiate with medical institutions demarcated by handbooks, definitions, standards, (mis) information, presumptions, and habits of surgical and psychiatric treatments. This original study investigates and critiques the various ways in which the institutionalization of a gender identity spectrum have been recently taking shape in Hong Kong and recommends a critical paradigm shift in revising current treatment directions and methods. As one of the first academic studies of this silenced topic in Hong Kong, it is significant not only as an account

studying the history of contemporary transsexuality but also as a powerful political critique of Hong Kong's specifically modern regulatory apparatus of (inter and trans)sexuality.

Kam's study, based on in-depth interviews with twenty-four *lalas* in Shanghai, politicizes the discourses of standing up (*zhan qi lai*) / coming out (*zhan chu lai*), and examines the negotiational conflicts between the desires for familial recognition of one's personal life and the aspiration for social recognition and political collectivity. As *lalas* in China face not only social prejudice towards sexual non-normativities but also prejudice towards women as a culturally and economically subordinate gender, they are found in this study to feel obliged to outperform their male and heterosexual counterparts in ways that receive greater social recognition ("upward social mobility"): to be filial daughters, productive workers, contributing citizens, and last but not least, married wives, so as to "compensate" for their "abnormal" sexuality, which has been thought to have deprived their parents of "normal" family lives with grandchildren. It is their apparent social hypernormativity that makes their rejection of sexual normativity possible. This "politics of normalization", as argued by Kam, could be seen as a political strategy for maintaining sexual dissidence, earning visibility, recognition and potentially more freedom for a self-identified community in the long run. Would these hard earned new spaces necessarily imply selling out to more regulation through discourses of capitalist individualism? The emphasis on "community" in Kam's chapter seems to suggest otherwise.

Deviant subjects and normative institutions compete in bending each other while they also work hard (and occasionally have fun) in bending themselves accordingly. He's narrative of her performance retraces her unique tactics of setting an admirable example in turning the institution of heterosexual, monogamous *and* monosexual marriage inside out. Her queering of the marriage ritual raises poignant challenges to the limits of the institution as she confronts its discriminatory effects via creative and tongue-in-cheek ways in experimenting towards a programme for change, responsive to the cultural-specific needs of her community and society, "the lived arrangements of queer life, and articulated in queer publics" (Warner 146). Her appropriation and critique of the ritual demonstrates the vitality and pleasure of a possible queer politics and counterpublic which prioritizes non-normative intimacies, coalition building, sex education and advocacy over love, privacy and the life-long couple form of marriage. While the two chapters of He and Kam speak dialogically to the politics of compulsory family, marriage and heterosexual normativity and various diverse strategies for possible subversion and reconfiguration, the playful language that He's essay strategically adopts in documenting her own performance also paves the ways for Chao's readings of performing transvestism

in Chinese documentaries. The research of Kong, Sim, Kam and Cheung place more emphasis on the ongoing struggle for a (like-)normal possibility under the overarching shadow of impossibility (closer to normal but never quite there), whereas in He, Yau, Chan and Chao's essays one might be able to see how "normativity" takes on many angelic and contradictory shapes (and/or has been bent) in its giving way to multiple (as-if-)possible lives. These subjects and representations move away from being normal in order to becoming possibly something else, something perhaps closer to accessing normal on their own terms. In this process of moving from one "as" to another, this "normal" might have been bent to create new desires and visions. Possibly as normal as ...

The last part of the book interrogates the symptomatic relations of sexual discourses to modernity and postmodernity, linking contemporary identity positions and performativity through continuities in representation with largely unlexicalized gender- and sexual-variant subjectivities from a past not too long ago. These chapters inaugurate readings of Chinese cinematic texts and cultural icons—from late Ming to post-Mao China, from colonial (1970s–1990s) to post- or neo-colonial (post-1997) Hong Kong—that reconfigure as they reinvent "Chinese" and "sexuality" *vis-à-vis* each other. While "homosexuality" has been positioned rhetorically by official Chinese authorities today as "a decadent ideology imported from the West", the rendering of Ming erotic texts by pan-Chinese film director Li Han-hsiang's (Li Hanxiang) (1926–96) helps to set the historical scene for charting a vibrant yet suppressed trajectory of Chinese sexualities. Li's cinematic explorations yield historical knowledge in multiple ways: it sheds light on the contemporary—in fact, very recent—regulation of sexuality through polarizing categories such as homosexuality and heterosexuality, symptomatic of Western modernity, as well as the rich but much repressed representations and discourses of diverse and malleable genders and sexualities in Chinese culture. If, according to Kong's study, the proliferation of money boys in China today has been significantly re-shaping and problematizing the landscape of normative masculinity, Li helps us gain further insights on the ways in which so-called normative sexualities in Chinese sexual imaginaries have always already been diverse, malleable and undefinable—if you like—queer, thus helping to expose the fragility of contemporary heteronormativity. Extensively drawn from a Chinese literary tradition deemed obscene, Li's "softcore" pornographic films were most popular during the 1970s but continually made until the 1990s, constituting a genre of its own known as *fengyue pian* ("wind and moon" films). These films are often referred to by critics as Li's "cynical" films as they portray a world "morally corrupted by vulgarity" and sexual "perversions". Yau's essay re-traces the radical potential of the *fengyue* porn genre populated by nonmonogamous subjects and *yinfus*

(licentious women or women "who have seen a lot of life", as defined by Li) in dialoguing with Li's own historical epics—primarily narratives of shrews and abject men—as well as "talking back to" (and laughing at) the increasingly normalizing times that through regulatory privatizing apparatuses privilege the modern monogamous marriage. This body of work, according to Yau, should be reread as political as these films communicate a precious sociability and sexual equality—an abjection intimately shared by the pornographic gaze and the heterogeneous, commonly denigrated as "pre-modern" sexual subjects on screen.[9] Yau explores the various ways in which Li's *fengyue* complicates the genre of pornography through subverting the sexual hierarchies assumed by film critics, inventing Chinese pornography as a *different* modernity than the colonial-Western, and seducing the audience—including men, women and in-betweens—through strategies such as recentering women's and polygamists' sexual and cross-gendered agency, use of multiple perspectives and self-reflexive devices.

Although the focus of this collection is on the contemporary, I hope to also emphasize that what is "contemporary Chinese" sexuality needs to be reunderstood in terms of the region's territorially differentiated relationships to the representations and disavowal of a "Chinese past". This collection cannot even begin to include the varieties of relations to the "past" that distinct Chinese locales have (whether or not a part of the PRC at a given historical moment) because each of these relations is embedded within each place's formation of sexuality. Yau's chapter might allow us to register one way in which renewed readings of "past" texts could enrich our understanding of present formations—including their desexualizing and normalizing processes in their complexity and quandaries. Research of the past in light of non-normative sexualities is even more difficult in the scholarly communities in Chinese Asia itself. The difficulty could be explained in terms of the specific formation of communities of knowledge of sexual politics in Asia, which has been unequally developed and heavily skewed toward disciplines of the contemporary, most notably literature, sociology and anthropology.

For *tongzhi* studies scholars, rewriting history and its interconnectedness to the present is an urgent political necessity. Leslie Cheung, hailed as one of the most important queer icons in pan-Asian popular culture in the past two decades, jumped off the balcony of the twentieth-fourth floor of the Mandarin Oriental Hotel in Hong Kong in 2003. While Li's cinematic representations demonstrate the abundance of nonnormativity in the historical trajectory of Chinese popular imaginary, Cheung used his life (and death) to illustrate the extreme lack of room outside normal in a contemporary Chinese society. Would these two conditions be mutually constitutive of each other? Rewritten from

a small part of her appraised Chinese book on Leslie Cheung, Chan's chapter re-contextualizes Cheung's (sudden) suicide in light of Cheung's cross-dressing gender performativity, his "bisexuality"/"androgyny" and "intersexuality", and the polarizing reception and consumption of his work both locally and internationally. As opposed to the dominant ideology of Cheung as a ghost-haunted freak who miscalculated the reception of transgressive sexuality in the society he lived in, Chan's work provides the first sustained study of Cheung's gender and sexual representations as consumed locally, while she maps his suicide as a result of various forms of stigmatization he had suffered from Hong Kong's own inadequacies in negotiating its contradictions embedded in glocalized consumer culture. The fact that Cheung ultimately used his own death to perform a critique of life impossible, hetero- or homo-sexual, speaks to the immensely oppressive gap between the global discourse of (promising) compulsory happiness[10] circulating in the post-identity neoliberalist world, and the local dominance of queerphobic normativity. Through detailed textual analysis and focusing on debates within existing local discourses, this chapter carefully interrogates the ways in which a cultural icon with his various non-normative behaviours and expressions, struggled to negotiate with mainstream media. While such struggles might have increased his marketability for queer reception, they more overtly and with relatively little resistance aggravated the destructiveness of normalizing forces.

What are the strategies of queer representation currently circulating in non-mainstream culture in China? The last chapter, "Performing Gender, Performing Documentary in Postsocialist China", addresses representations of transgender and male queerness found in the prolific underground documentary genre, also known as the "New Documentary Movement". By focusing on two recent documentary films, *Tang Tang* (Zhang Hanzi, 2004) and *Mei Mei* (Gao Tian, 2005), Chao examines how the film's reflection on queerness could be seen as parallel to its reflection on realism and how the two embody and foreground each other. Reading transgender performance as a means of survival and a negotiation strategy with capitalist mechanisms *and* the normative tradition of *jingju* (Beijing Plays a.k.a. Peking Opera) in (post)modern Chinese contexts, this chapter resituates forms of boundary-crossing (from gender-crossing, genre-crossing to translocal/glocalized imaginaries and consumption; between "failures to repeat" and "refusals to repeat"; between heterosexual and homosexual; between the urban and the rural; between reality and fiction, etc.) *vis-à-vis* the emerging queer and popular subcultures, in enabling nonessentialized dissident subjectivities-in-the-making. Further expanding the inquiry begun in the first two chapters of this book, the analysis of Meimei and Tangtang's transgenderism as labour and the construction of new intimacies by this form

of labour facilitates deeper understanding of the multiple ways in which gender and sexual identities are being reconfigured and negotiated within hierarchies of political and capitalist class struggles in contemporary (post-socialist) China. The controversial representation of Tangtang's realistic suicide *as* fabricated foregrounds and critiques the power dynamics between queer subjects, media control and audience expectation, helping to reflect on forces that inform suicides of subjects beyond the screen like Leslie Cheung's. These forces contribute to aspects of Cheung's suicide that have gone beyond representation, the limits of which Chan's chapter passionately engages with. Chan analyzes how Cheung pushed limits in his representational life that are intrinsically in Hong Kong unpushable for an out queer public figure. The multiple possibilities of queer desire as publicized and evoked through Cheung's representations are also actually not realizable in public in Hong Kong people's experiential life. Since the source of impossibility and the hold/regulation of the private lies in the limits placed on the public, the only way to unravel this is to commit an act of suicide bombing—on one's public self. Cheung's suicide amounts to a form of social protest against an unspeakable contradiction that, as Chan argues, needed then to be recontained in the normalizing media discourse of privatizing sexuality and gay pathologization.

Challenges

I was invited to contribute a short essay to an issue of *GLQ* in 2005 focusing on perspectives from film critics and scholars working with queer film festivals and media. I concluded my essay by outlining some challenges "facing us in Asia today", which I would like to rewrite as follows: to strengthen LGBTIQ writers access to knowledge production and distribution resources in Asia; to foster an interest by writers and readers to reconnect current issues with repressed histories, however obscene and/or colonialist; to develop the willingness and courage of LBGTIQ constituencies and communities in building coalition with other sexual dissidents and minoritized peoples in order to fight ghettoization and stigma, discuss the interconnectedness of all sexual marginalization and advocate *real* structural change; and to relocalize LGBTIQ issues and strategies within and against the global gay economy. It is not fortuitous that Li Han-hsiang, with audiences in Chinese communities worldwide, chose a modernized Hong Kong after all as the base for most of his work of rewriting historical texts, and that one of the sites where a project like this one in its attempt to carve out and formulate a publicly queer critical space is also Hong Kong. Organizing and editing this anthology in this late-colonial city where global Christian and paternalistic Chinese forces are miraculously working hard to join hands (despite

tensions and contradictions) in systemically defining normal and possible for us in certain parts of Chinese Asia, I hope this volume can contribute to the long march of registering and learning from the subjects analyzed, experiences and feelings lived and documented which speak of survival, authenticity, courage and hope. This can only be an introduction.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the Department of Cultural Studies at Hong Kong Lingnan University for providing me a safe and supportive space to work on this project, Hong Kong University Press for its continual commitment to academic freedom and intellectual pursuit in spite of the "controversial" nature of the project, the two anonymous reviewers for insightful comments, Liang Xiaodao for not giving up on me in offering editorial assistance most needed, and all the writers in this collection for their trust and hard work. I am deeply indebted to Denise Tang, Kathy High and Laurie Wen who took care of me when my health was in crisis. Last but not least, my apologies and deepest gratitude go to dnf who serve as my reader, therapist and companion through hard times as well as to my two cats, Dimdim and Suensuen, for their tolerance and unconditional support.

Spring 2010

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Travelling Bodies