Queerness, Comrade Politics, and Urban City---Queer Film Festivals in Hong Kong, Taiwan and PRC China

酷儿性、同志政治以及都市---香港、台湾以及中国大陆的酷儿电影节

摘要 Abstract

1970 年代的性解放运动催生了包括男同性恋解放运动和从女性解放分支出去的女同性恋/双性恋运

动。这些活动旨在倡导同性恋权益和自由,并且催生了世界首届同性恋电影节的诞生。进入 20 世

纪 80 年代,此类电影节紧接着在香港和日本等地区兴起。同时代兴起的酷儿理论(queer theory)

主张性的自我认同(sexual identification)与性取向(sexual orientation)并非生物学因素决定,

而是通过社会和文化过程形成的。此后越来越多的性少数派影展使用"酷儿"(queer)这个词指代

性少数派以此使影展本身具有更大的涵盖性。本论文着眼台湾,香港和中国大陆地区的性少数派影

展,即台湾国际酷儿影展、香港同志影展、北京酷儿影展和上海骄傲电影节,提出两个问题:一是,

如何通过这几个案列分析,解读"同志政治"即华语地区的性少数派身份以及性别政治,其目的在

于理清"同志"与"酷儿"之间的联系和区别;二是阐述为何都市空间(urban space)对于研究酷

儿电影节有着至关重要的意义。

关键词 Keyword:酷儿,酷儿电影节,同志政治,都市空间

Introduction

Despite prevalence and omnipresence of film festivals, publications on film festivals were

seldom researched academically and systematically until Film Festivals: From European

Geopolitics to Global Cinephilia appeared in 2007. This monograph comprehensively

introduces the film festival phenomenon which includes "both a historical overview of the

development of film festivals and a cultural assessment of the workings of the present-day

international film festival circuit" (Valck 2007: 14). Since then, academic works on queer film

festivals have been growing by leaps and bounds in the wake of film festival studies.

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Representative researchers working on film festival studies include Dina Lordanova, Marijke de Valck, Ger Zielinski, Skadi Loist, Julian Stringer, Jenni Olson and so forth.

Historical Development of Queer Film Festival

Queer film festivals have historically been the places where queer images could be exhibited and celebrated. Furthermore, they have also provided spaces for queer community construction and members' gathering. These festivals stemmed from the mid-1970s, in San Francisco, and then quickly went global. About historical and social background of queer film festival, Zielinski in the "Queer Film Festival" lists a number of factors which contributed to the formation of lesbian and gay film festivals in the 1970s. He holds the view that such gay liberation movements as stonewall riots were spawned by the feminist and civil rights movements of 1960s and 1970s (Zielinski 2009: 980).

Immediately after the Second World War, homosexual community and political organizations become more open and visible in the public in pursuit of eliminating discrimination. The irresistible momentum towards freedom of sexual orientation was generated around the 1970s, represented by the celebrated "Stonewall Riots1." In the post-Stonewall years, vigor and enthusiasm brought by the previous liberation movement make sexual minorities enter into the public arena. In the dissertation "Exhibition & Community around the Queer Film Festival," Zielinski discusses the influence of the political changes after 1968 on the development of lesbian and gay film festivals, citing the example of the first Gay

Film Festival happening in California in the 1970s. This festival was organized mainly by some local independent filmmakers and gay activists in order to show their own film works. During the 1980s, film festivals went continental across America but first to some larger cities such as Vancouver Queer Film Festival and Hamburg International Queer Film Festival. Since the 1990s, most of European countries have at least one or two, with a few notable ones such as Pink Screens in Belgium, Lisbon Gay & Lesbian Film Festival in Portugal, London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival and so forth.

Names of these festivals have also experienced constant changes. In the current days, many queer film festivals have evolved from "gay film festivals" organized and run mainly by gay activists in the early phases, for instance, the longest-running San Francisco International LGBT Film Festival was called as "Gay Film Festival of Super-8 Films" in the 1970s with little attention to lesbian/female content. As discussions on female contents became increasingly enthusiastic, audiences expressed a wish to see more lesbian images represented in the films. In consequence, "lesbian" was added to the title of the festival, and then it changed the name to "lesbian and gay film festival" in 1982, and "San Francisco International LGBT Film Festival", and "Frameline" up till now. Accordingly, variations of titles throughout more than two decades suggests that sexual and gender politics have been always in and around the issue of queer film festivals.

Recent queer film festival curators and gender researchers have begun to use "queer" as a collective term to describe the vast array of human sexualities that actually exist outside heterosexuality. Loist in "A complicated Queerness: LGBT Film Festivals and Queer Programming Strategies" briefly introduces the historical development of queer film festivals, highlighting the different nuances between LGBT and queer politics. She points out that gay liberation of the 1970s led by gay activists aimed to "stress equal rights and the similarity of homosexuals to heterosexuals" (Loist 2012: 160). Since the 1990s, queer activists together with queer theorists have provided a new insight into traditional sexual identities which are socially constructed. Previous gay liberations sought social equalities and human rights, whereas the succeeding queer politics has defined a form of sexuality which is not only confined to male and female categories.

Nowadays, Queer film festivals are fairly widespread in America and European countries. Lesbian and gay film festivals are not rare in Asian societies either. Hong Kong owns the largest and longest-running queer film festival in Asia---Hong Kong Lesbian and Gay Film Festival (or Hong Kong Comrade Film Festival²), which was launched in 1989. Denise Tse Shang Tang in the "Demand for Cultural Representation: Emerging Independent Film and Video on Lesbian Desires" uses HKLGFF (2004) and HKLGFF (2005) as a case study to discuss "the contesting relations between a politics of consumption, the claim for queer visibility and the emerging representation of lesbian desires in Hong Kong independent film and video" (171). Examining the 2004s and 2005s programming, Tang notes that this festival

should be criticized for the lack of concern for the local themes partly because of the colonial history of Hong Kong (cf. Tang 2009).

In Japan, Tokyo International Lesbian and Gay Film Festival started to display queers' images represented in the films in 1992. Since then, queer film festivals have sprang up all over Japan, successively with ···Kansai Queer Film Festival (2005-), Aomori International LGBT Film Festival (2006-), and so forth. Beijing Queer Film Festival (2001-) of PRC China, has been underground and publicly invisible due to state films' censorship and national policies on grassroots movement (cf. Rhyne 2011). Latest festivals, such as Taiwan International Queer Film Festival (2014-) ³ and ShanghaiPRIDE Film Festival (2015-) are respectively hosted in the metropolises of Taipei and Shanghai. The former has been official supported and sponsored, while the latter has been strictly censored in the public arena.

Queer Film Festival and Comrade Politics

This paper approaches the question of the queer communities' construction in the urban city by introducing the previous research on the queer film festival study. The focus is mainly on queer film festivals in these Asian societies, namely Hong Kong Lesbian and Gay Film Festival (1989-) of Hong Kong, Beijing Queer Film Festival (2001-) of PRC China, Taiwan International Queer Film Festival (2014-) of Taiwan and ShanghaiPRIDE Film Festival (2015-) of PRC China. First, this study carries out an assessment of the emergence of queer life, and queer politics, concentrating on these Asian regions. With respect to the problem of

constitution of queerness, it investigates how global queer dynamics work in the local context. A remarkable problem is that critical discussions about queer life in Asia should not neglect queer globalization. Understandings with regard to queer globalization have always diverged. Some scholars have taken the development of lesbian and gay media, particularly film and literature, as well as queer film festivals and pride parades in some Asian countries to be evidence of a "global queering" (cf. Altman 2001). In Global Sex, Altman points out, "globalization has helped create an international gay/lesbian identity, which is by no means confined to the western world" (2001:86). Mark McLelland comments that "Altman's interpretation, drawing on globalization studies' paradigms, understands the emergence of ostensibly western 'lesbian' and 'gay' identities and mode of consumption beyond the boundaries of the western world as part of a process of 'sexual westernization" (2006:1). Altman's notion posits west and globalization as a source of Asian queer life. Apart from some views on the western dominance and impositions, other works read queer life in Asia from the perspective of local and traditional queer culture (cf. Jackson 2009).

Reasons accounting for queer film festivals in the Asian societies are complicated. For example, Hong Kong Lesbian and Gay Film Festival has been thought to be influenced as much by the queer politics and queer cultures of the western countries as local Hong Kong gay activists (cf. Tang 2009). The development of Chinese independent film festivals together with international recognition of Chinese independent films are generally attributed to the progress of Beijing Queer Film Festival (cf. Pickowicz and Zhang 2006, Zhang 2010). ShanghaiPRIDE

Film Festival was launched in 2015 as a chief tributary of Shanghai Pride (2009), the pride march which is another mode of queer activism. When looking at these festivals it is necessary to pay attention to the complex developments of global LGBT activism with its "geo-temporal disjunctions, seriality, coincidence and stories of progress" (cf. Mizielińska and Kulpa 2011). This notion provides an inspiration for Asian queer studies which are explored not only through Asian local or western lens but also through the "intensity, extensivity and velocity of globalization" (Harootunian and Miyoshi 2002: 1)

The main reason why this study targets on those festivals of East Asian worlds as Taiwan, Hong Kong, PRC China and Japan is because Chinese-speaking regions including PRC China, Hong Kong together with the "Chinese diaspora" Taiwan are explored within the broad category of "Greater China" to give a further investigation of "comrade politics." Nowadays, the urban slang "Comrade" (tongzhi) referring to LGBTQ people occurs not only in China but also in Hong Kong and Taiwan through the process of linguistic transition. The term "Comrade" (tongzhi) was originally used by revolutionist Sun Yat-sen (孙中山) during the revolutionary period of ROC China. He said the famous words "The revolution is not over yet comrades, keep making great efforts" (革命尚未成功,同志仍须努力) in Three Principles of the People, a political philosophy oriented towards democracy and livelihood of people. After 1949, as a socialist identity category, the term "Comrade" (tongzhi) began to enter the discourse of PRC China. In 1989, the term, for the first time, was appropriated by a queer activist of Hong Kong Lesbian and Gay Film Festival which is also called as "Hong Kong Comrade Film

Festival"(Xianggang Tongzhi Yingzhan) in Chinese. Since then, "Comrade" began to gain popularity in the Chinese speaking world.

Gao Yanning compares "Comrade" (tongzhi) with gay/lesbian, viewing that "Comrade" tongzhi is characteristic by being in the closet and getting into heterosexual marriages while gay/lesbian has a distinctive feature of being coming out or even homosexual marriages (cf. Gao 2011). Refol supplements Gao's interpretation by pointing out that "Comrade" (tongzhi) not only signals an emphasis on "characteristic Chineseness" but also "slips into inclusion of western foreigners and thus into universal applicability" (Rofel 2007:103). Shifting from unique locality to the western context, this understanding of "Comrade" (tongzhi) is contrary to the appropriation of the term "queer" which was originally exercised in the western world then has spread to the Asian regions.

The terminology "Queer" entered the Chinese-speaking world of Taiwan in the 1990s, translated as 酷儿(ku'er). Since then, many gay people in Hong Kong and PRC China have adopted the term to describe themselves. In PRC China, many queer community and LGBT organizations has brought into play the literal ambiguity to eliminate discrimination or avoid governmental pressure. Originally advertised as "Beijing Gay and Lesbian Film Festival" (Beijing Tongxinglian Dianyingjie), Beijing Queer Film Festival was held for the first time in 2001 by some gay activists and independent filmmakers. At the 2011's festival, curators changed the original title to "Beijing Queer Film Festival" in order to avoid censorship and

obstruction from the PRC governmental authorities. The festival can be confused with those which showcase art or vanguard films since the literal meaning of loanword "queer" (ku'er) denotes "excellence."

While Gao's understanding of "Comrade" (tongzhi) may focus on the sexual subject of the unique locality, Rofel's may indicate that "Comrade" (tongzhi) is as much indigenous as it is universally applicable through an analogous analysis of "queer" and "Comrade" (tongzhi). It suggests that queer politics should be not equated with comrade politics which is neither solely promoted by the dynamics of queer globalization nor merely by the impetus of local LGBT culture. In addition, generative relations of comrade politics and queer politics, of subjectivity of comrade and queer identities should be deliberately reconsidered.

Recently, some collections of essays engage the question of what constitutes Chinese gender politics and how these politics shapes. From the fields of literature, cultural and film studies, and theoretical works, these essay writers looks into what is distinctive about queer politics in Taiwan, Hong Kong and PRC China. Take *As Normal as Possible* as example, this anthology "seeks to examine the processes of (re)genderization and sexualization of Chinese cultures today via cities including Hong Kong, Shanghai and Beijing" (Yau 2010: 6). Others problematizes adopting nationality and ancestry to define LGBT identity, like *Father China and Mother(Queer) Taiwan* 『文なる中国、母(フィア)なる台湾』) which conducts an inquiry into LGBT literature in modern Taiwan centering on the queer theory (cf. 垂水千恵 2009).

Although these writings take into account different film and literature texts, and social context, they do not construct a singular argument about distinctive aspects of these different locales. An exploration of queer film festivals in societies as diverse as PRC China, Taiwan and Hong Kong recognizes the existence of multiple, various localities. Furthermore, it provides new insights into how gender and sexualities are negotiated in these different locales by investigating the combined actions of films, urban cities and curators' network.

Queer Film Festival and Urban Space

The second question of the study is concerned with the interplay between city and queer film festivals as festival experiences and is operated in the city which is a lived social reality. Recent discussions on spatial aspects of film festivals has been increasingly important in the film festival studies. Some research on film festivals, from two perspectives, has contributed to the analysis of festival space; namely, "arts and urban development" perspective and "liveable cities" perspective (cf. Film festival research, org).

The "arts and urban development" perspective sees festivals "as a catalyst for urban renewal, attracting tourists and capital investments, enhancing a city's image and creating new jobs", while "liveable cities" perspective stresses how communities can appropriate commodified festival events for their own purposes, such as self-identification, and a local sense of community and place. (Filmfestivalresearch.org)

The issue of connections between city and film festival has provided a rich avenue for discussing and probing into how film festival has industrially played a crucial role in the exhibition and distribution of cinemas and how it has evoked the question of festival space and urban city.

In order to explore wider social and cultural meanings of festivals, some scholars look at film festivals as public spheres, following the generative theories of Jürgen Habermas's public sphere (cf. Wong 2011). Others offer an axis which tends to study film festivals both from local and global perspectives through focusing on the national films and film industries. For example, Ahn in the doctoral dissertation explores the combination of regional (Pusan) and national (South Korean) politics brought by global forces by analyzing the case study of The Pusan International Film Festival International (cf. Ahn 2008).

Concentrating on the term "International film festival circuit", Julian argues that it is cities "which now act as the nodal point on the circuit, not national film industries" (Stringer 2001:138). Drawing primarily on globalization theory, Stringer understands film festival as "a socially produced space" and "a cultural arena" where unevenly differentiated power relationships are built (138). As to the question of studying film festivals through the axis of place and space, Valck and Loist suggests that we should "understand festival space as being made up of complex dynamics of local and global forces, always defined by the physical place in which the event is organized but at the same time embedded in an international circuit"

(Valck and Loist 2009: 187). Questions of Space and place are crucial to film festival studies, firstly, the physical space of festival such as the screening site is often affected by city planning and spatial planning; secondly and importantly, festivals identity are decided and defined by the city especially since the 1980s when inequality is built into the structure of the international film festival circuit. (cf. Stringer 2001).

Different from general festivals, queer film festivals, the place where queer community are represented always pursue the liberal agenda. What is more, development of disparate festivals, in relation to the regional/national policies governing sexuality remains fairly uneven. In those Asian societies like India, PRC China, where public queer group activities have always been censored and repressed due to the religious reason or the liberal content it offers. They are independent, short-funded, and grass-rooted rather than being official-funded and government-supported. In contrast, others like Taipei International Queer Film Festival and Hong Kong International Gay and Lesbian Film Festival are characteristic of official support and commercial activities due to the regions' leniency towards queer sexuality and queer grassroots activism. Accordingly, when probing into the spatial aspect of queer film festivals, it demands inquiring into the interconnections of film texts, organizational strategies, national politics, city planning and queer community activities of disparate cities. It is crucial that the study of queer film festival should make inquiries about the role of the city in shaping queer identities and queer lives.

This study takes the relationship between the city and the queer lives into consideration because cities have long been understood as "spaces of sexual encounter, as sites where bodies come together, mix and mingle" (Hubbard 2011: xiii). Many works in this field, such as *Cities and Gender* (2009) and *Cities and Sexualities* (2011) have taken a broad overview of human sexualities, suggesting that cites are no mere background against which different sexual lives are played out but are the key to shaping human sexuality. Cities have also been important for queers who historically have suffered from homophobia and social inequality:

They are known as sites of sexual experimentation, radicalism and freedom, as places where individuals can pursue or purchase a rich diversity of sexual pleasures. Historically, the city has been regarded as a space of social and sexual liberation because it is understood to offer anonymity and an escape from the more claustrophobic kinship and community relations of smaller towns and villages. (Hubbard 2011: xv)

In contrast with rural places which are often thought to be sexually unprogressive and even backward, cities are regarded as locations where queers can take refuge. On the one hand, cities have apparently been places where can satisfy various sexual desires, on the other side, they have also been the locations where queer lives are disciplined and intensely censored. Sexual freedom and queer activism in the cities produce literacies of sharing and participation that bring forth development of queer economy, such as the omnipresence of gay/lesbian/queer

bars and clubs in the metropolises. Eventually, it demands public regulations on those queer lives in order to maintain social order.

In the general discussion on queer film festival, only a few studies on spatial aspects have been undertaken. Zielinski examines the space of the gay and lesbian film festival thorough the concept of Foucault's heterotopia, suggesting its relation to the act of queering space (cf. Zielinski 2012). The heterotopic notion of space refers to the other space which are both physical and mental. Foucault illuminates the utopic aspect of heterotopia through the example of looking into a mirror:

The mirror functions as a heterotopia in this respect: it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there.

(Foucault 1986: 24)

Laying out six general principles the heterotopia concept, Zilinski argues that gay and lesbian film festival can produce and perform this heterotopic space, as audiences can experience a similar play of presence and absence specifically in the screening event. In light of the six principles, Zilinski respectively illuminates six heterotopic aspects of queer film festival, namely, its production of refuge space, its historical development, physical space of cinema, relation between festival and time, its space of opening and closing, and the production of real

illusionary and real space. With exclusive emphasis on the temporal and spatial features of films and festival, Zilinski's illumination has been particularly fruitful in helping interpret queer film festival and in providing an inspiration for studying it. However, a series of linked case studies are also required in order to highlight the multiplicities and complexities of queer film festival in these Asian societies. Detailing the relationships between cinema, queer identities, queer film festivals and urban city, this work attempts to settle questions like "How does the city underplay the role in regulating the queer subjects?" "How is the city constructed by the images and representations?"

Conclusion

Through an exploration of the complexity and multiplicity in these Asian societies, this study, firstly, reexamines the queer globalization which was thought to be the source of Asian queer life; secondly, it argues that queer film festivals stakes out a prominent and unique position of displaying sexual minority members in different regions; thirdly, it explores what kind of new insights and perspectives we may gain from an investigation of contemporary Asian queer culture in terms of queer film festivals. Queer film festival study is an interdisciplinary which is constructed in gender studies, media studies, sociology and urban studies. In order to investigate how gender politics in these the Chinese-language areas is defined and constructed through festivals, it demands theoretical framework such as queer theory, theories on public space and so forth. Apart from it, studying queer film festival should

focus much on the relationship film festivals and queer community (audience/spectator), and on that between festivals and films as well. The description of diverse queer lives, characterizing both the disparate cities as well as contemporary queer cultures of different societies, helps us understand that sexuality is simultaneously biological, psychological and social.

Notes

- 1. The Stonewall Riots are a series of spontaneous demonstrations by gay people against police violence which took place in New York City in 1969. They are widely thought to be one of the most important event that lead to the gay and lesbian liberation movement in America.
- 2. The festival is advertised as "Hong Kong Lesbian and Gay Film Festival" in English, while its Chinese title is translated as "Hong Kong Comrade Film Festival" (Xianggang Tongzhi Yingzhan).
- 3. Taiwan International Queer Film Festival is a screening tour launched in different cities in Taiwan, namely Taipei, Taizhong and Gaoxiong.

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