

Tracing Chinese Gay Cinema 1993-2002

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**Abstract:** Lan Dong explores in her paper, "Tracing Chinese Gay Cinema 1993-2002" the recent landscape of Chinese gay cinema through discussing the following three feature films: Chen Kaige's *Farewell My Concubine* (1993), Zhang Yuan's *East Palace, West Palace* (1996), and Stanley Kwan's *Lan Yu* (2001). The grouping derives from the concern that they all set their stories in Beijing. Using the capital city as a cultural background, the films display how queer is perceived in China from the 1920s to the end of the 1990s. All three storylines portray the characters' struggle to recognize their particular identity as gay men. In *Farewell My Concubine*, Cheng Dieyi never comes out throughout the decades when China experienced a series of political events and ends up with a testimonial suicide for his queer identity. Policeman Xiao Shi's confusion about his sexual orientation leads *East Palace, West Palace* to an open ending. With the social circumstances fading into a supplemental backdrop, *Lan Yu* focuses specifically on two men's love. By way of tracing gay theme as it is reflected in these films, Dong maps a development process of representing gay relationship in Chinese cinema.

**Lan DONG**

### **Tracing Chinese Gay Cinema 1993-2002**

Since its release, Ang Lee's *The Wedding Banquet* (1993) has received wide acclaim from audiences and reviewers, and has attracted much attention from film critics and scholars (see, for example, Berry 1993, 52-54; Berry 1996, 157-82; Marchetti 275-79; Chiang 273-92; Dong <<http://www.americanstudies.wayne.edu/xchanges/4.1/dong.html> >). Yet an anecdote cited by Chris Berry in his article "Sexual DisOrientations: Homosexual Rights, East Asian Films, and Postmodern Postnationalism" throws an interesting twist on the reception of Lee's film at the 1993 Berlin International Film Festival. It is said that when international film critics met in Berlin to discuss their prize for the year, *The Wedding Banquet* came up for consideration. An elderly gentleman from the People's Republic of China (PRC), the only Asian representative on the panel, strongly protested that Ang Lee's film should not possibly be considered because it was "a lie." He reasoned, "didn't everyone know there was no homosexuality in Chinese culture? If there was any truth at all to this film set in New York, it was that it represented the corruption of Chinese manhood by Western decadence" (Berry 1996, 158). It seems that his words stirred up sympathy among the critics present at the time and *The Wedding Banquet* was thus dropped from the list. Surprising as it is, the elderly gentleman's opinion is not uncommon at all. Indeed, in Asian culture "sexuality in general, and homosexuality in particular" are still "troubling epistemological issues" (Lamos 142). Even though *The Wedding Banquet's* depiction of a successful, savvy, and handsome Asian man "provides what might be considered a rather unprecedented portrayal of Asian American male identity within the domestic space of the U.S. nation-state," its artistic treatment of gay relationships involves a taboo (Eng 44). As Eric Wat has pointed out, even in Asian American communities, "for most Asian parents, being Asian and being gay are mutually exclusive." Not only is homosexuality a forbidden topic in most Asian communities, but also more significantly, there is no need to talk about "it" because "it is only a *problem* for white people: 'it' is a white *disease*" (155; emphases in the original). To weigh the persistent exile of gay men from Asian culture as a whole, the elimination of *The Wedding Banquet* from the film critics' prize in Berlin is not a shocking accident but rather another example of misunderstanding and evasion.

Then, is it true that homosexuality never existed in Chinese culture, as the elderly film critic from the PRC claimed? Is it really a contagious "disease" transmitted from the "decadent Western culture" to diaspora Asians? As a matter of fact, the stories about gay relationships recorded in such philosophical and historical texts as *Hanfeizi* (Han Fei, d. 233 B.C.) and *Hanshu* (History of the Han, Ban Gu, 32-92 A.D.) date gay history back to around the sixth century B.C. in China. According to the chapter "Shuonan" in *Hanfeizi*, a man named Mi Zixia was an intimate friend to Duke Ling of Wei (534-493 B.C.). One day Mi accompanied the Duke wandering in an orchard. Mi ate half of a peach and found it delicious. He then gave the rest to the Duke, who took it as a demonstration of Mi's deep love for him. The Duke claimed with joy: "You forget your own appetite and think only of giving me good things to eat!" (Watson, trans. 78). Another story appears in "Dong Xian zhuan" (Biography of Dong Xian) in *History of the Han*. A man by the name of Dong Xian won favor with Emperor Han Aidi (r. 7-1 B.C.). One day they took a nap together. The emperor woke up first and found one of his sleeves was underneath Dong, who was still fast asleep. Not willing to disturb Dong, the emperor instead cut his sleeve off when he got up. Later, the phrases "duan xiu" (cutting one's sleeve) and "fen tao" (sharing a peach) were used with particular reference in the Chinese language to a gay relationship. In the light of literary representation, works describing homo-erotic relationships flourished during the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties (for a brief introduction to these works, see Damm <<http://mitglied.lycos.de/tongzhi/old/taiwan-li.html>>[inactive]).

Such citing of anecdotes about gay relationships recorded in Chinese history is not solely a rebuke of the problematic assertion that excludes gay from Chinese culture. Rather, the object of this article is to map the recent landscape of Chinese gay cinema through discussing the following three feature films: Chen Kaige's internationally acclaimed *Farewell My Concubine* (1993), Zhang

Yuan's ambiguous *East Palace, West Palace* (1996), and Stanley Kwan's controversial *Lan Yu* (2001). This selection does not mean these films are the only or the comprehensive representatives of Chinese cinema that portray the thematics of gay. In terms of introducing queerness as a topic, Taiwanese director Yu Kanping's film *The Outcasts* (1987) predates them by years. Moreover, if one were to consider international recognition and critical applause, Ang Lee's *The Wedding Banquet* and Kar-wai Wang's *Happy Together* (1997) are more familiar to many English-speaking viewers. The grouping of Chen, Zhang, and Kwan's films evolves from the fact that all their stories are set in Beijing. Together the three narratives cover a significant time span from the 1920s to the end of the twentieth century and provide a window for the audience to view the development of cinematic representation of gay relationships in China. It is my intention to explore how these films reveal different perceptions of the homosexual relationship in China during their respective periods, using the capital city as a cultural background. Furthermore, we shall examine how all three storylines portray the main characters' struggle to recognize their queer identity as individuals and consequently whether to choose to come out within the contexts of their social environment and personal life.

Initially banned in China because of its political and homosexual aspects, *Farewell My Concubine* has won international acclaim (on the ban of this film, see Berardinelli <[http://movie-reviews.colossus.net/movies/f/farewell\\_conc.html](http://movie-reviews.colossus.net/movies/f/farewell_conc.html)>[inactive] and Ebert <[http://www.suntimes.com/ebert/ebert\\_reviews/1993/10/886374.html](http://www.suntimes.com/ebert/ebert_reviews/1993/10/886374.html)>; on the awards for this film, see Erickson <[http://movies2.nytimes.com/gst/movies/movie.html?v\\_id=131112](http://movies2.nytimes.com/gst/movies/movie.html?v_id=131112)>). The film opens and closes with a scene in Beijing in 1977 immediately after the conclusion of the Cultural Revolution. The main body of the film is a flashback narrative of the life stories of two Peking opera actors. The storyline covers a particular historical era when China experienced radical political changes: starting from warlord occupation of Beijing in 1924 to Japanese invasion from the 1930s to 1945 to the civil war between the Nationalists and the Communists in the 1940s to the foundation of the PRC in 1949, and finally to the chaotic Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976. At the opening, Cheng Dieyi (Leslie Cheung; Cheng hereafter) and Duan Xiaolou (Zhang Fengyi; Duan hereafter), dressed in Peking opera costumes of Concubine Yu and Chu King respectively, enter an empty theatre for a rehearsal after eleven years since they last had met and twenty-two years since they had performed together. After showing the ups and downs in their lives over the decades, the film closes at the same setting: the theatre stage where Cheng commits suicide after his last performance with Duan. Thus the specific repertoire in the Peking opera *Farewell My Concubine*, after which Chen Kaige's film is titled, has a double meaning in the film. It is the best stage piece Duan and Cheng have performed together, a symbol of the peak of their career; it also embodies Cheng's utopian treatment of relationships. The basic storyline of the opera *Farewell My Concubine* tells a famous tale in Chinese history: the defeated Chu King bids farewell to his favorite Concubine Yu. When his troops are about to be utterly smashed, Chu King asks Yu to flee for survival without him. Yu refuses to leave alone; instead, she cuts her throat after performing her last sword dance for her beloved king, sacrificing her life for love and loyalty. In the film, "[b]ecause of Cheng's slender build and soft features, he is trained to play female roles, while the brawny, imposingly athletic Duan is groomed to play kings and warriors" (Hinson <[http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/style/longterm/movies/videos/farewellmyconcubinerhinson\\_a0a889.htm](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/style/longterm/movies/videos/farewellmyconcubinerhinson_a0a889.htm)>). As performers, they are bonded for life to these roles; as friends, it is Cheng's wish that they could do the same. Cheng identifies with the role of Concubine Yu, not only in opera performance but also in his real life. "To stick together until the day you die" is highlighted as his unshakable faith.

Given the cultural depth and political contents that *Farewell My Concubine* involves, labeling Chen Kaige's film as gay cinema is not without controversy. To some degree, *Farewell My Concubine* is two films at once: "an epic spanning a half century of modern Chinese history, and a melodrama about life backstage at the famed Peking Opera" (Ebert <[http://www.suntimes.com/ebert/ebert\\_reviews/1993/10/886374.html](http://www.suntimes.com/ebert/ebert_reviews/1993/10/886374.html)>). That is to say, this film presents samples of many contexts and lives to convey the complex mosaic of cultural upheaval

caused by everything that happened between 1924 and 1977, and tells a story that is both epic and intimate (Berardinelli <[http://movie-reviews.colossus.net/movies/f/farewell\\_conc.html](http://movie-reviews.colossus.net/movies/f/farewell_conc.html)> [inactive]). What attracts my attention to this film is the deftly interwoven stories of the characters, particularly centered on the "female" role of Cheng. In my view, politically unsophisticated Cheng perceives that his survival and suffering in various sociopolitical environments are significantly related to his talent and skill within the Beijing opera world at playing a female role. To date, the homosexual and homo-social relationships represented in this film have not been given enough attention in scholarly discussion, perhaps because if one were to weigh the narrative of the film as a whole, homosexual relationships are not portrayed explicitly. Duan is portrayed as heterosexual without uncertainty and Cheng never comes out of the closet. The two plots in which gay intimacy is somewhat implied occur between Cheng and his high-ranked patrons. After his successful debut on stage, the teenage Cheng seems to be raped by a former eunuch Zhang (Tong Di). After he becomes a superstar in opera and falls into a deep depression due to Duan's marriage, Cheng becomes an intimate friend of Master Yuan (Ge You) although no aspects of their physical relationship are directly portrayed in the film.

In his review article, James Berardinelli points out not only that Cheng is "attracted to men, but his role as a woman in 'Farewell My Concubine' creates a certain ambivalence about his own gender" (<[http://movie-reviews.colossus.net/movies/f/farewell\\_conc.html](http://movie-reviews.colossus.net/movies/f/farewell_conc.html)> [inactive]). In fact, from the onset in the film, Cheng's sense of sexual identity is confused. Born in a brothel to an unknown father, Cheng is raised as a girl by his mother, a prostitute. Considering the female impersonation in *Farewell My Concubine*, Shuqin Cui has summarized three metaphors -- "symbolic castration, corporal punishment, and costuming" -- that "mark the transformation of a biological male, Dieyi, into a cultural female, the opera figure Yuji [Concubine Yu]" (151; note added). At a young age, the boy is sent to an opera troupe by his mother simply for survival. In order to qualify her son to become an opera apprentice, the mother has to chop off the extra part from his six-finger hand with a cleaver. In this brutal scene, where the child's scream and the mother's tears chill the quiet setting of a winter morning, the boy is symbolically castrated. For Cheng (nicknamed Xiao Douzi at the time), the process of adopting a female identity is linked with a long-term torment filled with violence. Because of blowing his lines repeatedly as "I am by nature a boy, not a girl" in rehearsal, Xiao Douzi is severely punished in a series of training scenes. The screen then cuts to a transitory plotline that marks the drastic turning point of Xiao Douzi's sexual identification, again with blood and tears. When Xiao Douzi finally recites his line correctly -- "I am by nature a girl, not a boy" -- while dressed in a female role (for the first time in the film), his transformation from a biological man to a cultural woman takes place on two levels: in opera performance and in real life. In quick succession, a crosscut leads the viewers to a few years later when Xiao Douzi (now adopting the stage name Cheng Dieyi) sings the opera *Farewell My Concubine* on stage as Concubine Yu in full costume. The moment Xiao Douzi adopts a female identity in opera performance is also the point that he sets up his enduring conviction to remain with his beloved "king," Duan. For Cheng, the boundary between performance and life thus begins to blur.

Despite his ideal, his relation to Duan is understood as brotherhood by other characters including Duan himself. In the film narrative, the two paternal fellows first conflict when Cheng finds out about Duan's frequent visits to brothels. Shortly after, Duan's marriage to a former prostitute Juxian (Gong Li) further distances them. As a matter of fact, Duan's wedding pushes Cheng to the edge of desperation and incurs Cheng's deep resentment toward the bride. He then turns to drugs for consolation. Cheng's tragedy is related to multiple elements given the political turmoil in China during that particular time period. Nonetheless, the fact that the heterosexual Duan differentiates opera from life predetermines the failure of an "everlasting" intimacy between the two actors. As Duan himself points out in the film, "I am just a fake King, but you are a real Concubine Yu." Cheng's suicide, in exactly the same way as Yu's, seals his last show on stage with Duan as well as in the film. This denouement marks a completion of Cheng's lifelong pursuit and a realization of his faith: to remain with his beloved "king" until his last breath. In this sense, Cheng's story is more tragic than that of Concubine Yu. Yu's tale ends with her sacrificial death for

her love, a mutual passion she enjoyed with the Chu King, whereas Cheng is never blessed with the realization of the dream for which he yearns. It is only through cutting his throat by the side of his beloved "king" that he can realize his wish of being a cultural female Yu.

If the spotlight of *Farewell My Concubine* never moves away from the social contexts of the troupe, of the Peking opera society with performers, managers, and fans, and of the larger political chaos, Zhang Yuan's *East Palace, West Palace* concentrates more on the two leading characters -- policeman Xiao Shi (Hu Jun) and "homosexual criminal" Ah Lan (Si Han) within a much smaller temporal and spatial setting. In Zhang's film, the social environment fades into the background and remains of secondary importance. The pivotal storyline of the two characters is thus almost disengaged from the surroundings. Mostly on an individual level, *East Palace, West Palace* explores with unexpected sophistication and intimacy the expression of emotional and sexual feelings through the personal history related by the protagonist[s]" (Lazere

<<http://www.culturevulture.net/Movies/EastPalace.htm>>). The film starts with a quiet scene in a police station in Beijing where policeman Xiao Shi receives a vanilla envelope. A close-up shot shows that there is no letter in it, but rather a book. On the title page, the author writes: "dedicated to my lover." The narrative then unfolds through Xiao Shi's recollection of an unforgettable event in his life. The timeline for the main plot is one night when Xiao Shi captures and then detains Ah Lan, a freelance writer for a "homosexual crime" in a police station. Xiao Shi's original intention is to listen to Ah Lan's homosexual activities under the umbrella of interrogation in order to kill time when he is on night duty. Surprisingly, Ah Lan confesses his attraction to Xiao Shi and his fascination about the relationship between a cop and a prisoner, symbolically structured in a power hierarchy. The unexpected development of the plot is that Xiao Shi changes his attitude toward homosexuals through his discovery that he himself is gay. A succession of shots moves the setting from the interrogation room in the police station to a dilapidated building, where the viewers see the passionate intimacy between the two characters. Full of ambiguity, the film ends with Xiao Shi leaving at dawn and feeling lost after spending the second half of the night with Ah Lan. It is not clear whether what happened between the two is merely a one-night transgression or the beginning of a difficult coming out process for Xiao Shi. The film does not provide enough clues for the audience to conjecture Xiao Shi's sexual orientation after his rendezvous with Ah Lan nor does it suggest any possibility of the two characters' future relationship.

Ah Lan's first person narrative in the film reflects the oppression and misunderstanding that he confronted growing up as a gay man. As a teenager, he was first taken advantage of and then humiliated by a company quartermaster in a small mining town. As a young adult, he was once devoted to a primary school teacher. According to Ah Lan's recollections, what attracted him the most were the teacher's big, rough hands covered by calluses. Ah Lan even cherishes the memory of a man who physically abused him in a suburban villa. In remembering his experiences of being maltreated, Ah Lan is not full of resentment but joy. He seems to relish being a victim of the "love" in which he believes. These anonymous characters who have had sexual relationships with Ah Lan are displayed in vague images in the film without clear characterization. An alternative episode about a female thief and a police official in a costumed opera is carried out partly hidden and partly visible to reinforce Ah Lan's narrative. The thief is captured by the police official but is not turned in for judgment. Instead, he keeps the young and beautiful criminal for himself. Hierarchies of powerful and powerless, sadistic and masochistic are emphasized when the two narratives flow side by side: one in reality in the present and the other in performance in the past. The operatic episode functions as a footnote to Ah Lan's philosophy that all things beautiful and gentle are oppressed and punished. In this sense, he is not only a gay man but also a masochist. Ah Lan's testimony in the film -- "The condemned prisoner loves the executioner; the woman thief loves the police official; we love you. Except for this, what other choice is there?" -- to some degree explicates the living situation of the marginalized homosexual group and in the process adds even more ambiguity to the film. This film is adapted from Wang Xiaobo's short story under the same title by the director Zhang Yuan and Wang Xiaobo. An influential writer and literary critic in late twentieth century, Wang volunteered to participate in fieldwork in the 1980s as a social worker for



research conducted by his wife Li Yinhe, a leading sociologist in the study of homosexuality in contemporary China (Li and Wang 1992; Li 1998). The film's title alludes to two public restrooms on the eastern and western sides of So-and-So Park in Beijing, where gay men frequented when homosexuality was underground in PRC in the 1980s. At that time, homosexuality was not officially defined as illegal in China, but homosexuals were usually persecuted by police and arrested for "hooliganism." Given the specific allusion of its title, the film is believed to be a critique on the treatment of homosexuality by the Chinese government before the 1990s. The juxtaposition of a policeman and a captive kindles the question: how can a person be considered a criminal and be detained solely because his sexual orientation is different? As a matter of fact, the director Zhang Yuan, together with his film *East Palace, West Palace*, were banned in PRC. It is said that in 1997, Zhang Yuan was confiscated of his passport. His friends smuggled the film out of the country so that it could be screened at the Cannes Film Festival (Lazere <<http://www.culturevulture.net/Movies/EastPalace.htm>>). Although the ban for the director was lifted in 1998, the film is still kept underground in the PRC (Pengpeng 56).

If Zhang Yuan's film laid the groundwork for portraying the theme of gay relationships on the individual level with the social context fading into the background, then Stanley Kwan's *Lan Yu* ventures further into the examination of the emotional and personal bonding between two men. Before filming *Lan Yu*, this Hong Kong director had already shown an interest in exploring gay themes through the genre of film. His 1990 film *Full Moon in New York* briefly touches upon the lesbian relationship in three diaphanous Chinese women's stories. A few years later, Kwan's *Hold You Tight* (1998) proved to be a landmark in his directing career as well as his personal life. Even though this film displays the emotional entanglement of three gay men, it relates the characters' connections and life stories in such an ambiguous manner that Kwan himself does not label it a gay film (Ng <[http://www.indiewire.com/people/int\\_Zhang\\_Yongning\\_020725.html](http://www.indiewire.com/people/int_Zhang_Yongning_020725.html)>). When *Hold You Tight* premiered on Valentine's Day in Hong Kong, Kwan came out of the closet and exposed his gay identity to the public. Adapted from a popular anonymous Internet novel *Beijing Story* (1998), the film *Lan Yu* illuminates the rise and fall in two men's love in Beijing during the decade from the late 1980s to the end of the 1990s (for the novel *Beijing Story* in Chinese, see Yi Fan Internet Library <<http://www.yifan.net/yihe/novels/mulu/gay.html>>).

In various interviews, the director talks about autobiographical elements in *Lan Yu*, more specifically how shooting this film relates to his own experience of sexual identification and becoming publicly gay. Kwan views the connection between gay men as one of the human relationships that deserve to be cherished and respected. For instance, in an interview with Fiona Ng, he said that despite initial hesitation, "[i]n the end, I wanted to make the film because I was touched by the novel, but on some other level, I was probably using it as a lens to view my own relationship" (Ng <[http://www.indiewire.com/people/int\\_Zhang\\_Yongning\\_020725.html](http://www.indiewire.com/people/int_Zhang_Yongning_020725.html)>). The love story in Kwan's film does not begin romantically. Lan Yu (Liu Ye), a college freshman studying architecture, driven by an urgent need of money, ends up in bed with a successful Beijing businessman, Chen Handong (Hu Jun; Chen hereafter). Chen is obviously in a privileged position. Socially he was born into a high-ranking official's family and is well connected; financially his company has been doing well with an increasing market value. Lan Yu enters the capital city as a "country boy" from northeastern China and struggles to make ends meet while adapting to his new college life. Even though their first encounter is more or less a commercial trade, it unexpectedly leads to Lan Yu's unreserved commitment to their bond. In contrast to Lan Yu's wholehearted devotion, it takes Chen years to come out and realize the fact that his love for Lan Yu is stronger than the pressure from his surroundings and his commitment to having a family in the traditional sense. This yearlong process of connection is portrayed through a series of crosscuts: Chen's short marriage and divorce, the booming season of his business, and finally his imprisonment because of a charge for illegal fundraising and management. All these are supplementary plots to assist the development of the core narrative: namely, the bittersweet relationship between Lan Yu and Chen. When the plot eventually builds up to the promise of a happy life for the two, a sudden accident at the construction site takes Lan Yu away from Chen forever.

In *Farewell My Concubine*, the social environment plays a crucial role in the protagonists' life. Moreover, the power structure embodied by policeman and detainee is as important a theme as the two men's bonding in *East Palace, West Palace*. In contrast, in *Lan Yu* Kwan deals with the historical and cultural context in a different way from these earlier films. The political turmoil at Tiananmen Square in 1989, which Lan Yu participated in as a college student, is included only as a brief backdrop for Chen to realize Lan Yu's importance to him as well as the inseparability of their connection. In an interview in a Sundance Channel production, Kwan acknowledges that the focus on the "woman character" in his film is a deliberate choice that is linked to his "female sensibility." In both the e-novel and the film, Chen is the narrator who recollects memories of Lan Yu and their story; whereas the leading character in the spotlight is actually Lan Yu. Early on in the film, while Lan Yu is devoted to true love and yearns for a committed relationship, Chen insists that "he wants a play-mate, not a lifelong companion." His philosophy that "when people get to know each other too well, inevitably they part" is obviously a heartbreaking idea for Lan Yu (*Lan Yu* <<http://lanyu.gstage.com/english/synopsis.html>>). For Chen, "being gay is a troubling experience not because he doesn't trust his sexual instincts, but because he's not confident enough to be open about them in public" (*LoveHKFilm.com* <[http://www.lovehkfilm.com/reviews/lan\\_yu.htm](http://www.lovehkfilm.com/reviews/lan_yu.htm)>). Instead of emotional commitment, Chen showers Lan Yu with expensive gifts, expecting to deflect the boy's love by keeping their relationship on the level of a commercial trade instead of an emotional one. Lan Yu's pertinacious faith in and fanatic devotion to love makes the story beautiful and deeply touching. To some degree, the character's escape is a shared perspective in many films that address gay themes. Cheng Dieyi's addiction to drugs in *Farewell My Concubine* is as typical an example as the fairytale-like landscape in South America in *Happy Together* and Gao Weitong's fake marriage to a woman in *The Wedding Banquet* (Pengpeng 52). Compared to these earlier efforts in representing the life and sentiment of gay men, *Lan Yu* marks a new level of Chinese gay cinema. Completely shedding the uncertainty about one's sexual orientation, this film is essentially a love story between the two characters Lan Yu and Chen Handong and thus can be clearly identified as a gay film. Indeed, the situation and general perception of "queer" has significantly changed in China, especially during the past decade or so. Towards the end of the millennium, more scholarly study and critical works on queer topics appeared in China (Fang 1995; Li 1998). Moreover, a number of websites have been established to host news, discussions, and other resources concerning gay relationships (for example: Chinese gay website <<http://www.gaychinese.net/>>). Some Internet libraries have gone so far as to set a category for queer literature, where readers may read stories, novels, and memoirs written about and/or by gay men and lesbians free of charge (for instance, "Gay Literature" at Yi Fan Internet Library <<http://www.yifan.net/yihe/novels/mulu/gay.html>>). Nonetheless, homosexuality in China is still a taboo, a forbidden topic that most people do not discuss in public. Being aware of the fact that their artistic creation is surely at odds with the social ethics, the production team of *Lan Yu* did not and will not pursue a theatrical release of their film in the PRC (Ng <[http://www.indiewire.com/people/int\\_Zhang\\_Yongning\\_020725.html](http://www.indiewire.com/people/int_Zhang_Yongning_020725.html)>). Instead, the film is accessible through videos and DVDs for Chinese viewers. By way of tracing the theme of homosexuality reflected in the aforementioned films, I examine how the cinematic representation of gay relationship has a developing process from emphasizing cultural context to telling the stories on the personal and emotional levels. In *Farewell My Concubine*, the protagonist Cheng Dieyi never really comes out throughout the decades when China experienced a series of political events and ends his life as well as the film narrative with a testimonial suicide for his homosexual love and his queer identity. The rise and fall in his personal life are closely tied to his social surroundings. The development of policeman Xiao Shi's understanding of homosexuality -- from his unawareness at the beginning to his confusion about his own sexual orientation and finally to his vague identification with the gay culture -- leads *East Palace, West Palace* to an open-ended finale. With the social circumstances fading into the supplemental backdrop, *Lan Yu* focuses exclusively on the relationship between Lan Yu and Chen Handong, which shows more nuances in gay men's life on the individual and emotional levels. As the director Stanley Kwan offers his definition, this film is solely a story about two men's love.



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