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# Portrayals of gay characters in Chinese movies: A longitudinal look

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**Portrayals of gay characters in Chinese movies: A longitudinal look**

by

**Xuan Zhang**

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
MASTER OF SCIENCE

Major: Journalism and Mass Communication

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Ames, Iowa

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## ABSTRACT

Homosexuals were considered criminals and abnormal in China, and the majority of Chinese homosexuals still hide in the shadows, especially in the mainland. However, demands of cultural pluralism and human rights are beginning to show a sign of tolerance to the minority group, especially among the younger generation. As a powerful form of mass media, motion pictures can create images of certain people, affecting the audience's evaluation of a specific group or situation. This study examines the portrayals of gay characters in Chinese films over a sixteen-year period, focusing on the characters' visibility (explicit or implicit), representation (positive or negative), and characterizations. A qualitative content analysis of ten Chinese movies with homosexual themes or having a sufficient role for a homosexual character was conducted. The sample covered movies released from 1993 to 2009. To be included in the study, the films must have been directed by a Chinese director and performed by Chinese actors, and set in Mainland China or a Chinese community. The result shows filmmakers of the analyzed movies tried to humanize them in an apparent effort to evoke sympathy toward and understanding of their plight. And most gay characters in the films suffered oppression from the society and their family. However, the government censorship severely limited the number and funding opportunities of homosexual-themed movies, making it difficult for such films to earn a profit. Even though some filmmakers and younger filmgoers are willing to bring the gay lifestyle into the light, government restrictions on content and distribution of the pictures has limited their exposure. And so the portrayal of gays in films has remained essentially the same during the years covered in the study. But a slight thaw in government regulation has allowed some gay characters to appear in mainstream movies, providing some indication that times are changing.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

It is tough being gay in China. Historically, people have been afraid to talk about homosexuals; they are either ignored or scorned. People who fall in love with others of the same gender are often seen or treated as ill, insane, or even dirty. This general apathy has forced gay people to live in the shadows, afraid to speak out. Still considered a highly conservative country, China has never opened the topic of homosexuality to public discussion or debate, a far cry from many western countries that can be said to have already experienced some kind of a revolution with respect to the equal treatment of gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender individuals. Although homosexuals are no longer invisible to those who were born after the 1980s in many nations, a general atmosphere of intimidation still permeates the country.

The government estimates that there were approximately 5 to 10 million gay people in China in 2011. Zhang Beichuan, an expert on acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) at Qingdao University, says, however, that the number is closer to 30 million (Veksler, 2011). Li and Wang (1998) estimate that homosexuals account for 3% to 4% of China's adult population. A survey of the life situation of 1,259 gay men reports that 62% said they had never "come out" or openly revealed their homosexuality, 9% had been fired from their jobs or forced to quit after employers discovered they were gay, and 5% believed their sexuality had affected their income and career development (Li, 2010).

Stereotypes of minority groups, including gay people, are said to be perpetuated by images of these groups as presented in the mass media (Chung, 2007). Of the channels of mass communication, movies perhaps offer the most enduring depictions of these minority groups in ways that affect people's attitudes toward them. As an art form that reflects people's lives, movies draw and process stories, aggregate audiences into dark rooms, and deliver unique experiences in

two to three hours. The empathy movies foster can affect viewers' evaluations of a specific group or situation. The power of visuals is such that the realism in movies correlates well with people's understanding and interpretation of actors and events (Hall & Bracken, 2011). In two-hours, a movie summarizes a person's life and transforms the real world into vicarious experiences. Movies disseminate ideologies and transmit moral codes, telling people who or what should be considered good or bad, who should be punished or respected, what is noteworthy or worth mentioning, what lifestyles are attractive and what should be frowned upon. Individuals consciously or unconsciously absorb values from films that enable them to make judgments about events and incidents encountered in real life (Giannetti, 2007).

It has also been said that movies have "taught straight people how to think about gay people, and gay people how to think about themselves" (*The Celluloid Closet*, 1996). Before the 1990s, the Chinese film industry hardly touched any theme related to homosexuality. Films that portray the lives of homosexuals are few and far between, perhaps one of the reasons why homosexuals have failed to gain wide acceptance in China (Feather, 2011).

Undoubtedly, gays remain shunned in the Chinese mainstream culture. To date, movies that touch upon this theme are likely to be banned in the mainland. It is notable however, that several Mainland Chinese films with gay themes produced in the past 20 years have gained popularity and wide acclaim. As pioneers in this area, a few even received international awards for their technical and artistic qualities. Among them are:

*Farewell My Concubine* (1993), directed by Kaige Chen. It is perhaps the first Chinese movie with a decidedly homosexuality theme. This movie, the highlight of Chen's career, was nominated for Best Foreign Movie and Best Cinematography by the American Academy for Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (Oscar) Awards in 1993 (Zhang & Xiao, 1998). Set in the 1920s to the 1970s, a period of social upheaval in Chinese history, the movie's main characters are Dieyi and

Xiaolou, two men who have been trained to act in traditional Chinese operas since childhood. Because women were not allowed to play on the stage during those early years, Dieyi was cultivated to play the female character, Yu Ji, in a classic opera. Yu Ji's partner is Xiaolou. In the course of acting their roles, Dieyi falls in love with his partner in real life, and is unable to recognize illusion from reality. Because of strong popular demand, the film was released in the mainland although in a heavily censored version (Feather, 2011).

The movies that followed were not so lucky. Although some of them also received international awards, none were shown in Mainland China. Among them was *East Palace, West Palace* (1996), directed by Yuan Zhang, with a plot set against the backdrop of Beijing. Many say this is the first movie produced in the mainland that explicitly portrayed love between people of the same sex. It famously said in a dialogue: "Are you a man or woman? It does not matter. When you love someone, you are a man. When you want to be someone who is loved, you are a woman." Zhang did not even attempt to cover up the theme. The main character, A Lan, is a man who is in love with, but is being abused by, another character, Xiao Shi. Critics say the movie "lurks around the edges," and that forbidden love was represented in a rather unusual way (Feather, 2011; Berry, 1998).

The portrayals of gays in Hollywood films went hand-in-hand with the homosexual revolution in American history (*The Celluloid Closet*, 1995; *Fabulous! The Story of Queer Cinema*, 2006). In contrast, Berry (2000) observes that gays in Chinese movies as a whole are always portrayed as unhappy, sad, and isolated from the community. Interactions with the west, it is surmised, will lead to a greater tolerance of and openness toward homosexuality. Indeed, there had been noteworthy developments toward this end.

In the 1990s, the government began to reduce restrictions on homosexuality. A law forbidding sex between people of the same gender was abolished in 1997. Since 2001,



homosexuality was no longer listed as a mental illness (Li, 2010). In fact, younger generations of Chinese say they are no longer afraid of gays, and are increasingly recognizing them as part of modern culture. In recent years, it has even been quite fashionable to appear physically androgynous in the movies and in the real world.

Now that movies are distributed as DVDs and through the Internet, there are more avenues by which films with gay characters can be disseminated and seen by a wider audience. Following what happened in Hollywood, gay characters who used to be invisible now take on multi-dimensional roles—as heroes, villains, victims, or as neighbors next door. Observers say these turn-around in portrayals seem to mirror society’s more relaxed attitudes about gay characters in general. Is the same phenomenon apparent in Chinese movies?

This study examines changes in the portrayals of gays in Chinese films over time, focusing on the characters’ visibility (explicit or implicit), representation (positive or negative), and characterizations (e.g., artistic, sarcastic, sympathetic, emotional, volatile, flimsy). It asks: To what extent are gay roles portrayed in these movies? Are homosexual characters portrayed in a positive or negative light? What are the characterizations attributed to gay characters (e.g., artistic, sarcastic, sympathetic, emotional, volatile, flimsy)?

To gather data for this study, a quantitative and qualitative content analysis of Chinese movies with known gay characters with sufficient content will be conducted. Movies produced and shown in the mainland from 1993 to 2012 will be analyzed.

This study aims to fill a nagging research gap in terms of explaining and elucidating the portrayals of gay characters in the mass media in a nation known for its conservative stance on homosexuals. In the process, it hopes to shed light on Chinese media’s depiction of this minority group that has long been marginalized in mainstream Chinese society.

## CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study reviews the evolution of gay characters in the Chinese cinema to illuminate how gay people have been portrayed and to infer the impact of such portrayals on audience cognitions, attitudes and behavior toward gay people in the real world. One objective of the study is to better understand the role of the entertainment media, specifically films, in the broader struggle of gay people to be recognized and accepted as part of Chinese society. This study will examine changes in the portrayal of gays in Chinese films from the 1990s to present time, focusing on the roles' visibility (explicit or implicit), representation (positive or negative), and characterizations. The chapter begins by reviewing the history of homosexuality in Chinese society—from the days of the emperors until modern times. It discusses cultivation theory, which provides the theoretical basis for the analyses. The research questions the study attempts to answer are outlined in the final section.

### **Homosexuality in early China**

The earliest records of homosexuality in Chinese history have been traced to the presence of catamites, pubescent boys who are intimate companions of affluent young men, usually in a pederastic friendship (Williams, 2010). According to the *Yuewei Cottage Sketchbook* (1798), written by Ji Yun, an ancient scholar who lived during the Qing dynasty, this phenomenon originated in the days of Emperor Huangdi, also known as the Yellow Emperor, who reigned from 2696 to 2598 BC (Giles, 1898). The practice of having catamites has been referred to differently under different dynasties (e.g., Wai Chong (外宠), Ning Xing (佞幸), Bi Ren (嬖人), Luan Tong (婬童), and Qi Xiong/Qi Di (契兄/契弟) (Xue, 2011). In the ancient books, many clues about homosexuality could be found, reflecting the prevailing ethos of hierarchy and patriarchy at the time (Zeng and Zhang, 2006). Most homosexual relationships depicted in ancient records were

between emperor and secretary, master and servant, the rich and the poor. For example, the *Records of the Warring States*, in the section titled “Records of Wei” (Section 4), narrates the following story:

One day the king of Wei and Lord Long Yang were relaxing in a boat while fishing within the palace grounds. Long Yang caught several fish, but then began to cry. The king was concerned and asked young Long Yang to explain why he was upset. “Because I caught a fish.” “But why does that make you cry?” the king asked.

Lord Long Yang hesitated to answer, but when again pressed by the king, he replied, “I am thinking of all the fish your majesty may catch.” The king was puzzled, so Long Yang explained: “When I caught the first fish I was extremely pleased. But afterward I caught a larger fish, so I wanted to throw back the first one.” Long Yang then recounted the privileges he enjoyed by being a person in royal favor, receiving deference wherever he went. He added, “But within the four seas there are so many beauties. When they hear that I have received your favor, surely they will lift the hems of their robes so that they can hasten to you. Then I will be like the first fish and will be thrown back! How can I not weep?”

At that point the king, moved by Long Yang’s sad thoughts, issued an order forbidding others from mentioning beauties and comparing their charms in his presence (*Intrigues of the Warring States*, 460-220 B.C.)

Another story in the *History of the Han* tells about Emperor Aidi of Han China who fell in love with a minor official, a man named Dong Xian, and bestowed upon him great political power and a magnificent palace. Legend has it that one day, while the two men were sleeping in the same bed, the Emperor was roused from his slumber by pressing business. Dong Xian had fallen asleep

across the Emperor's robe, but rather than awaken his peaceful lover, the Emperor cut his robe free at the sleeve. Thus, the term "passion of the cut sleeve" (断袖之癖) became a euphemism for same sex love in China (Ban, 32-92 A.D.).

Zeng (2005), researching homosexuality among ancient females, notes that Queen Chen, wife of Emperor Wudi, the seventh emperor of the Han dynasty (141 to 87 BC), was the earliest female homosexual in official ancient records (Ban Gu, 32-92 A.D.). Initially, Emperor Wudi's love for her was so great that he bragged he would build a golden house for her. She eventually lost favor because she did not bear him a son, despite spending over 90 million currency coins in seeking treatment for her infertility. Empress Chen eventually retained witches in the attempt to restore her husband's love for her and to curse other concubines. She fell in love with one of these "witches," with whom she secretly lived. When the Emperor found out, he was enraged and demoted the queen for licentiousness. She was deposed according to imperial laws and put under house arrest. Nearly 300 of her servants, all accused of witchcraft, were executed (Ban Gu, 32-92 A.D.).

In the ancient palaces of China, lonely concubines and maids were known to develop intimate tribade relationships. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, an alliance of women who vow never to marry, called Shu Qi (梳起) or Self-bunning (自梳), was popular in Guangdong province. In a temple, the members swear they would share weal and woe until death, treating their relationships as marriages and living together in a house called Gu Po Wu (故婆屋) (Zeng, 2005). This ancient sub-culture also reveals women's extreme ideology of defiance against a system of feudal marriage, since patriarchy limited women's rights. Most women before new China was established have arranged marriages and did not have the right to reject. The women alliance of Shu Qi (or Ji Sor) allowed them to form a community to oppose federalism, and to escape the arranged

marriage.

From these known records, it is clear that homosexuals in ancient China were tolerated; the moral codes did not pay them much attention. Because early China is patently patriarchal; males have fewer restrictions on sexual conduct, which may account for the numerous stories about male homosexuality in ancient records (Zeng & Zhang, 2006; Yuan, 2011).

According to Wang (2011), this was the state of affairs until western influences permeated China from the Qing dynasty to the Republican period. Christianity treated homosexuality as a sin. Because of the influence of foreign cultures, homosexuality had been categorized as a mental disease and was condemned as criminal. From the 1920s to the 1940s, the treatment of homosexuality underwent a paradigm shift—from tolerance to restraint. Thereafter, it was shunned by the mainstream culture.

### **Homosexuality during the Cultural Revolution**

During the days of the Cultural Revolution, gays kept their sexual orientation a well-guarded secret (Liu & Lu, 2005). They formed a subculture that remained unaccepted by mainstream society (Dang, Zhang & Yan, 2005).

In the legal arena, the first reference to homosexuality appeared in 1957 when the Supreme People's Court referenced it in a case of voluntary pederasty, the (usually erotic) relationship between an older man and an adolescent boy outside his immediate family.<sup>1</sup> According to the high court, "There is no legislation to deal with the issue of pederasty as a voluntary action. The court considers it a non-criminal act" (关于成年人间自愿鸡奸是否犯罪，有待立法解决…不办罪为宜) (Fa Yan Zi, No. 7929, 1957). Although not considered a criminal offense, many were convicted by engaging in homosexual behaviors, categorized as an act of hooligansim before 1997 (Criminal

<sup>1</sup> The word *pederasty* comes from the Greek (*paidierastia*) (love of boys), a compound derived from  $\pi \alpha \iota \varsigma$  (*pais*) "child, boy" and  $\epsilon \rho \alpha \sigma \tau \eta \varsigma$  (*erastēs*) "lover" (Webster's Online Dictionary, n.d.).

Law of the PRC, Article. 160, 1979). Judges have taken advantage of this ambiguous term to convict homosexuals until 1997, when “hooliganism” was deleted from the Criminal Law of the PRC (Chu, 2009).

When homosexuals were not referred to as criminals, they were labeled as people suffering from some kind of a mental disorder even by mental health professionals. Before the 1980s, they were seen as psychopaths. Homosexuals themselves believed that such was indeed the case. An unnamed “patient” talks about his ordeal in an article titled “Homosexuals—An Unsolved Mystery,” published in the health magazine *For Your Health*:

I am a man, but I’m not interested in females at all. When I see good looking men, I get desirable sexual feelings that I carry even in my dreams...If this illness cannot be healed, I do not want to live at all.

The article’s author then proceeded to suggest ways by which people can “prevent homosexuality,” arguing that homosexuality should not be encouraged. These prevention measures include appropriate sexual education at childhood. There are those, termed “absolute homosexuals,” however, who are considered beyond help. Similarly, Liu & Lu (2005) attribute homosexuality to a lack of sexual education and negative sexual stimuli in early childhood. Chen (1985), then chair of the Psychology Department at Beijing University, claims in his book, *Abnormal Psychology*, that homosexuality is essentially an alternative lifestyle.

Those who fight for gay rights, however, stress that homosexuality has been seen as an abnormality because gay people are in the minority (Li & Wang, 1992). Zhang (1994) argues that gays should have the same rights as heterosexuals.

Indeed, the derogatory labels attached to homosexuals have practically forced these individuals in hiding. Li (1992), investigating the condition of gay people in Beijing reveals that to avoid the attention of the police, gay people formed secret “underground” communities, meeting at

night in inconspicuous places such as public lavatories. Two such public lavatories were famously nicknamed “East Palace” and “West Palace,” which became the subject of the movie *East Palace, West Palace*, one of the films examined in this study.

### **Homosexuality in recent years**

Despite intermittent reports of harassment and discrimination, a liberalizing trend gradually took place from the 1980s to the early 2000s. The gay struggle over the years has seen landmark events, providing some evidence that gay people’s lives are changing. In the 1980s, greater public discussion of and more research on homosexuality were permitted. In 1995, gay bars were opened following the holding of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. In 1996, representatives of gay people attended the Global Conference of Chinese Gays held in the mainland. In 1997, “hooliganism” was no longer a crime under the Articles of Criminal Law, effectively making homosexuality legal. In 1999, two female couples held their wedding publicly, although they cannot legally register to marry. In 2001, the third edition of the *Category and Diagnostic Criteria of Mental Disorders of China*, released by the Ministry of Health, stated without any question that homosexual behaviors are not a psychological abnormality, effectively removing it from the official list of mental illnesses (infzm.com, 2008).

There is still much to be achieved, however, in the area of gay rights. Same-sex unions and adoptions still are not legal, and there are no anti-discrimination laws. Although men who have sex with other men are a target audience segment of anti-HIV efforts, gay relationships are censored in television and movies, and police raids of “gay meeting places” continued in 2010 (Hinsch, 1992).

Li Yinhe claims that today’s generation of Chinese who grew up in the age of the digital media and with higher education levels generally adopt a more tolerant attitude toward homosexuality (Nd.Chinanews.com, 2013). More robust discussions about the topic happen on the Web, where more open deliberations of sensitive topics take place. This new attitude went on

display online when, in June 2011, Lv Liping, a famous actress, posted on her Sina Weibo microblog a message from a priest named Feng Wei, who was criticizing the legalization of same-sex marriage in the state of New York. The priest lamented: “God bless an increasingly degenerating world, for homosexuality is a sin. We should believe in Jesus and sacrifice to defeat evil.” Lv, also a Christian, asked her fellow bloggers to spread the message. Angered by the post, online readers sent close to 5,000 comments, most of them chastising the actress for her “backward beliefs.” One said:

Love surpasses sexuality. Reproduction is not the only goal of humans. When people of the same sex love each other, is that a sin? For a public figure, you are brave, but at the same time stupid (Sina Weibo, 2011).

Other Sina Weibo users staunchly defended gay rights, speaking in behalf of themselves and others. Cai Kangyong, a celebrated TV host in Taiwan who has publicly declared he is gay said that by her actions, the actress has hurt her fans and colleagues. Qiu Qiming, anchor of *24 Hours*, a news program on China Central Television (CCTV 13), commented on the air:

It is sad that we have to hear about such discriminatory comments from a public figure. Gay people have the right to live and prosper in our society. They have the right not to be assaulted and harassed (CCTV 13, 2011).

More and more scholars and celebrities are showing their support for gay rights, placing some limelight on the topic in the media agenda. Chen Danjing, a famous cultural scholar, is often quoted in interviews as emphasizing that homosexuality is a human right. He explains that discriminatory attitudes toward gays are remnants of the Cultural Revolution that had been cruel to homosexuals. Such an unfair treatment, he adds, have driven gay people on the fringe of Chinese society, assigning them to live in “grey areas” (ifeng.com, 2011).

Although largely unsuccessful, there are initiatives to legalize gay marriage. Representative



Li Yinhe has submitted such a proposal to two sessions of the National People's Congress and three times to the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (People.com.cn, 2006). According to Li (1992), gay people in Mainland China have suffered long enough—they continuously endure pressure from their family and from society at large, prompting them to hide their sexual orientation on the one hand, and to have to marry someone of the opposite sex against their will on the other.

A gay man bemoans such a condition in a blog:

Because I had not been in a relationship for a long time, I decided to give up being gay and be on the so-called "right track," which means having a serious relationship with a girl. I met a pretty one online, had sex with her. When I brought her home, my Mom was so happy; I can see it in her eyes. But no matter what I do, I know I am with someone I do not like. Sometimes, I feel nauseated just holding her; I just imagine she is a boy. Now, I can't sleep well at night. I worked up the courage to break up with her today. I felt terrible, but what I did was good for her; it was good for the both of us. But I am now afraid to answer my Mom's phone calls because I'm sure she will be looking for her (My sohu, 2009).

Li (1992) suggests that being homosexual does not violate societal ethics, but it is unethical for gays to feel compelled to marry someone of the opposite sex to hide their true identity. Many gay people admit that doing so is unfair to both parties, and suffer from this realization.

### **A unique popularity**

Although homosexuality has not gained wide acceptance in the mainstream media, the advent of digital modes of communicating and a desire for cultural pluralism have encouraged young people to support the rights of gay people in the country (Hou, 2011; Zheng, 2010). Two contemporary phenomena may be seen as evidence of these evolving liberal attitudes toward gays: the growing popularity of homoerotic literature and comics and the popularity of the androgynous

physical appearance.

Homoerotic literature, depicting love between homosexuals (mostly between males), became in vogue with the popularity of Japanese cartoons. Young people, especially females, compose the fan base of these literary products (Zheng, 2010). Zheng (2010) states that behind the popularity of homoerotic literature is the need for “sensual beauty” among readers who find in homoerotic novels romantic and ideal characters.

### **Homosexuals in the media and public perception of gays**

The intentional or unintentional stereotypical portrayals of homosexuals in the media have the tendency to shape and direct the public’s perspectives on gays (Shapiro et al., 2004). Clarke (2006), analyzing the content of Canadian magazines in 1991, 1996, and 2001, found that homosexuality has been linked to HIV/AIDS more explicitly in the past; such a linkage has been relatively invisible in later periods. However, within the medium, homosexuals have been “subtly disparaged” (p. 326). In China, homosexuals have been negatively attached to discussions of HIV/AIDS, crime, and illegal drugs in the mainstream media, consequently imbuing audiences with a skewed perspective of this minority group (Yang, 2010). Zhou (2012) observes that the print media associate homosexuals with entertainment and crime, rather than gay rights. Such depictions demonize homosexuality and create the general conception that homosexual rights are not salient and important.

This path of influence suggests the ability of the media to change or upgrade the public’s perception of a long disadvantaged group. In a study of priming effects, viewers who were exposed to positive portrayals of homosexual characters were found to recall these positive portrayals and to develop positive attitudes toward gay people. In other words, positive roles in the entertainment media have a positive impact on social attitudes (Bonds-Raacke et al., 2008).

## **The popularity of movies in China**

People see movies to be entertained. Many see them as “mirrors of our own lives and our own existence” (Fierstein, from the movie *Celluloid Closet*, 1995). Movies instruct people on life, morality, and love. People recognize themselves and their surroundings in the characters and their relationships they see in films (Liu, 2005). According to Liu (2005), “movies fed a generation of Chinese...in an era of cultural poverty” (p. 42), although only a few were produced or imported in the 1960s. Especially in the countryside, people typically gather in a square to watch movies shown by mobile movie teams.

Movie historians say that the Chinese film industry reached its peak after the Cultural Revolution. In 1977, 29.3 billion people watched movies in China. Although cinema attendance has declined since the 1980s following the arrival of television, DVD distribution, and the Internet, the film industry has been flourishing in China by the new channels of distribution (Hays, 2008). In 2010, the combined revenue of the Chinese film industry reached approximately US\$1.54 billion, up 63.9% from 2009 levels (*Want China Times*, 2011). The growing appetite for movies predicts a profitable future for the industry. This is why the largest cinema chain in China, Wanda International Cinema, planned to build an additional 120 movie theaters in 2012 (Research and Markets, 2011).

## **Movies with lead gay characters**

The heavily censored version of *Farewell My Concubine* (1993), the only film with an apparent homosexual theme released in the mainland, earned box office receipts of over 40 million Chinese yuan (CNY), approximately US\$6.344 million. Back in 1993, a movie ticket costs CNY4, which means that over 10 million people saw the film in movie houses (Sina.com, 2005). Other gay-themed films, also of high quality, were not as lucky. *Lan Yu* (2001) and *East Palace, West Palace* (1996), both award-winning films, were banned in the mainland. It was not until 2006 that

about 20,000 DVD copies of the censored version of *Lan Yu* were sold after a five-year ban (Sina.com, 2006).

Censorship restricts the release and distribution of films with homosexual characters, but many video-sharing sites offer the public access to them. In tudou.com, the number of views of *Lan Yu* reached 3,120,600; for *East Palace, West Palace*, it was 32,933. Public ratings of these films ranged from “good” to “excellent.” According to douban.com, a website that has a section in which viewers rank movies and share their opinion, *Lan Yu* was graded 7.7 out of 10, a rating equivalent to good or above average. *East Palace, West Palace* received a grade of 6.4; *Farewell My Concubine* was graded 9.4.

The comments, however, show a diversity of opinion about these three films. Viewers generally liked *Farewell My Concubine* and *Lan Yu*, but many found *East Palace, West Palace* “too sensual and morbid,” requiring “a high degree of psychological endurance and comprehension” (douban.com, 2007). In contrast, most reviewers appreciated the “depth and subtlety of emotions” in *Farewell My Concubine*. Reviewers particularly liked the Dieyi character (douban.com).

### **Gays in the movies**

Giannetti (2007) says that movies communicate ideology by the “set of values and priorities” they highlight (p. 448). Movies can express ideology explicitly and implicitly so that audiences learn what is normal and abnormal from movies. In the past, homosexuals were invisible in the motion pictures. When they were present, they were shown to be abnormal suffering individuals (Giannetti, 2007). Vito Russo, an American activist for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) rights and a film historian best remembered as the author of the book *The Celluloid Closet* (1981), sums up the impact of gay depictions in Hollywood:

In a hundred years of movies, homosexuality has only rarely been depicted on the screen.

When it did appear, it was there as something to laugh at—or something to pity—or even something to fear. These were fleeting images, but they were unforgettable, and they left a lasting legacy. Hollywood, that great maker of myths, taught straight people what to think about gay people...and gay people what to think about themselves (from the movie *Celluloid Closet*, 1995).

In his book, Russo analyzes the representation of gays and lesbians in Hollywood films from the 1890s to the 1980s, and demonstrates a history of homophobia. He argues that Hollywood's portrayal of lesbians and gay men has often been cruel and homophobic. Gay and lesbian characters have been defined mainly by their sexual orientation, and lacked any complex character development.

Berry (2001) compared gay representations in Asian and Western films and found that Asian films often reveal the dilemma between sexual desire and family or community obligation in gay characters. Family pressure comes from the long-held belief that males have the obligation to continue the family line. This why in China, he explains, “‘coming out’ suggests not only openness, but also a movement” (p. 225). In movies such as *Farewell My Concubine* (1993), aestheticism stands for an idealistic notion of love (Wang, 2009) that aims to break conventional ideas about morality (Zhao & Liu, 2011).

### **Theoretical framework**

Gerbner (1976), one of the scholars who proposed the cultivation theory, posits that the media have the power to direct the ways by which people get to know the world. The media, the theory argues, “provide people with a consistent and near-total symbolic environment that supplies norms for conduct and beliefs about a wide range of real-life situations” (McQuail, 2010, p. 495). The media, as tools of storytelling, help people process ideas about society and culture to understand the environment and the real world. Thus, by virtue of the predominantly negative

portrayals of gays in the media, people come to believe that homosexuality is something to be feared (Fisher et al., 2007).

Gerbner and Gross (1976) stress that the media participate in the “symbolic annihilation” of gays and lesbians by negatively stereotyping them (often consigning them to the margins of the entertainment media, playing either “colorful” and “flamboyant” characters or dangerous psychopaths), by rarely portraying them realistically, or by not portraying them at all. They suggest that the commercial structure of the mass media limits the opportunity for representing diverse characters. Too often, networks and film companies shy away from portraying gays and lesbians for fear of alienating or offending advertisers, investors, and audiences.

According to Coleman (2010), visuals, including moving pictures, have the tendency to influence knowledge, attitudes, and behavior by their subject matter and the way these are presented (e.g., through positive or negative expressions and other nonverbal information). This study examines the portrayals of gay characters in Chinese films over time, focusing on the characters’ visibility (explicit or implicit), representation (positive or negative), and characterizations. It asks:

RQ1: Were the movies with gay themes banned in Mainland China? How many of them were allowed to be shown publicly?

RQ2: To what extent were gay roles portrayed? Did the plot involve gay characters in an integral way, or were they assigned peripheral roles?

RQ3: To what extent were gay roles shown in sex scenes portrayed? Are these implicit or explicit scenes? What is the impact of the scenes?

RQ4: Were homosexual characters portrayed in a positive or negative light?

RQ5: What jobs did the gay characters hold? Do their homosexuality affect their social status?

RQ6: How do the gay characters perceive themselves? What is the cultural and social impression toward the characters' homosexuality in terms of the attitude, reaction, and treatment from their family and the larger society when they find out or doubt the characters' homosexuality?

RQ7: What roles did gay characters in these movies? Were they shown as, for example, artistic, sympathetic, emotional, volatile, or flimsy?

RQ8: Are gay communities shown in the film? How does the film portray them?

RQ9: In terms of the story structure of the movie, how does the character's journey lead to the outcome? In other words, in the process of storytelling, do the homosexual characters achieve what they want? What are the obstacles they face and how do they react to them? What are the outcomes and the turning points that result in the outcomes?

RQ10: Is there any development or improvement in the portrayal of gay characters over time?

RQ11: What might be the impact of these movie portrayals on audiences' perception of gays in the real world?

### CHAPTER 3 METHOD

Gerbner (1998) argues that media content in the U.S. often depict negative stereotypes of gays and lesbians (e.g., as flamboyant characters or as dangerous psychopaths), often relegating them to the margins of entertainment and everyday life. Gays are rarely portrayed realistically, or they are not shown at all. The present study aims to determine whether the same portrayals are evident in the way gay characters are portrayed in Chinese movies. To do so, a qualitative content analysis of a sample of movies that feature gay characters will be conducted.

#### **The sample**

Films with homosexual characters are not allowed for official release in the Chinese mainland, a factor that severely limits the study's potential units of observation. Movies with prominent gay characters are usually seen in the country via the Internet or as DVDs. Ten such films produced in the mainland were analyzed.

To be included in the sample, a film must have been directed by a Chinese director, must feature Chinese actors, and must have plots or screenplays set in China. The first known "modern" Chinese movie with a homosexual character was produced in 1993. Thus, the sample covers Chinese films that were released from 1993 to 2009. The ten movies to be analyzed are listed in Table 1.



Table 1. The study's sample

<b>Movie title</b>	<b>Year released</b>	<b>Producer</b>	<b>Director</b>	<b>Distributors</b>
<i>Farewell My Concubine</i>	1993	Feng Xu Xiulan Gao	Kaige Chen	Buena Vista Home Video  Editora Europa  Film Arte  Iberoamericana Films Producción S.A.  Living Colour Entertainment  Look Filmes  Miramax Films  Svensk Filmindustri (SF) AB  Svenska Filminstitutet (SFI)  Transeuropa Video Entertainment  (TVE)  Tomson International Entertainment Holdings Company Ltd.  XYZ Desarrollos S.A.
<i>East Palace, West Palace</i>	1996	Christophe Jung Christophe Ménager Willy Tsao Yuan Zhang	Yuan Zhang	Ascot Elite Entertainment Group (Switzerland) (theatrical)  Cinemien (Netherlands) (theatrical)

Table 1. (continued)

				Estação (Brazil) (VHS) Strand Releasing (USA) (theatrical) (subtitled) Optimale (2006) (France) (DVD) Peccadillo Pictures (2003) (UK) (DVD)
<i>Intimates</i>	1997	Wenhui Zou	Zhiliang Zhang	Golden Harvest Company (1998) (World-wide) (all media)
<i>Men and Women</i>	1999	Liu Bingjian	Liu Bingjian	Asia Video
<i>Fleeing By Night</i>	2000	Ligong Xu Shihao Zhang	Ligong Xu Qi Yin	Strand Releasing
<i>Lan Yu</i>	2001	Qin Jian Yongning Zhang	Jinpeng Guan	Guan Jinpeng Studio
<i>Saving Face</i>	2004	James Lassiter Scott Macaulay Jeff Morin Robin O'Hara John Penotti Will Smith Bergen Swanson Teddy Zee	Alice Wu	Columbia TriStar
<i>The Chinese Botanist's Daughters</i>	2006	Luc Besson Lise Fayolle Roger Frappier Maurice Illouz Stéphanie Pages Mehdi Sayah Mario Sotela Luc Vandal Pierre-Ange Le Pogam	Sijie Dai	EuropaCorp. Distribution (2005) (World-wide) (theatrical) Europa Diffusion (2005) (France) (video) A-Film Distribution (2007) (Netherlands) (theatrical) Astaire (2007) (Japan) (theatrical) A-Film Home Entertainment (2007) (Netherlands) (DVD)

Table 1. (continued)

				California Films (2006) (Brazil) (all media)
<i>And the Spring Comes</i>	2007	Ping Dong Changwei Gu Yong Er Kai Li	Changwei Gu	Beijing PolyBona Film Distribution Co. , Ltd
<i>Spring Fever</i>	2009	Sylvain Bursztejn Ye Lou An Nai	Ye Lou	Gold Typhoon Entertainment Limited

To be included in the sample, the film must have gay characters whose roles substantially contribute to the plot. In short, a movie must have at least one gay character who has a meaningful role. The complete movie is the unit of analysis.

The following are the synopses of the movies that were analyzed:

*Farewell My Concubine* (1993). This movie, directed by Kaige Chen, has a plot that covers the 1920s to the 1970s, a period characterized by great upheavals in Chinese society. The movie's main characters are Dieyi and Xiaolou, two men who have been trained to act in traditional Chinese operas since childhood. In a classic opera, Dieyi was cast as the female character, Yu Ji, whose male counterpart is Xiaolou. Dieyi eventually falls in love with his opera partner in real life.

*East Palace, West Palace* (1996). East and West Palace are popular nicknames for two public lavatories where gays surreptitiously meet (Li and Wang, 1998). In this movie, set in the 1990s, Xiao Shi is a policeman who checks out these places to question homosexuals when he gets bored. In one of his stints, he catches A Lan, a gay character who ignores his insults and falls in love with him. Xiao Shi soon became an avid listener of A Lan's personal stories and gradually discovers that he has homosexual tendencies himself. The film garnered awards at both the Mar del Plata Film Festival, an international film festival that takes place every November in the city of Mar del Plata, Argentina, and the Taormina International Film Fest, Italy's oldest film festival.

*Intimates* (1997), the film is set in the 1940s, when Shu Qi (see Chapter 2, Page 8-9), an alliance of women who vow never to marry, existed in the southern part of China. The story is about Foon, who decides to be part of the Ji Sor community in order to escape from being a mistress of her landowner. Wan, an eighth mistress of a silk factory owner, saved her life twice. The first time was when her father sold Foon to a landlord as a concubine, and Wan bought her freedom. The second time was Wan helped her recover from an attempted abortion. Soon they fall in love with each other. The film uses flashbacks to tell the story, following Wan's journey of finding Foon 50 years after they were separated by accident in World War II.

*Men and Women* (1999). This movie follows the travels of a young homosexual man, Xiao Bo, who goes to Beijing in search of a job. There he is taken in by Qing Jie, who not only gives him a home in her apartment, but also a job in her clothing store. While she tries to set up Xiao Bo with her friend, A Meng, Xiao Bo resists and eventually moves out when he is sexually assaulted by Qing Jie's husband Kang. Xiao Bo moves in with his friend, Chong Chong, who was launching a magazine called *Bright Public Lavatory*, and his homosexual partner, Gui Gui, who produces a radio show called *Public Lavatory Horizon*. Their relationship ended when Chong Chong and Xiao Bo developed a romantic liaison. Qing Jie, meanwhile, discovers that she may have feelings for A Meng, and decides to leave her husband.

*Fleeing by Night* (2000). Set in China in the 1930s, the film is about the unsettling relationship between three characters. Ing'er, the daughter of a theater-owner, welcomes the return of Shao-dung, her fiancée and a fine cellist, from America. Shao-dung soon finds himself captivated by the opera *Fleeing by Night* and its celebrated actor, Lin Chung. While Shao-dung attempts to blend eastern and western music, Ing'er becomes torn between her affection for both men, and an awareness of the growing intimacy between them. Soon the blossoming relationship between Shao-dung and Lin Chung became the talk of the town, forcing Shao-dung to return to the

United States. World War II starts after which Ing'er meets up with Shao-dung in the US. She narrates Lin Chong's misery after his departure. Shaodong realizes that his heart has always been with his former lover.

*Lan Yu* (2001). In the movie, Lan Yu, a poor architecture student in desperate need of cash, succumbs to gay prostitution. While waiting for his first client at a bar, he is introduced to a successful businessman (but a closet gay) named Chen Handong, with whom he immediately falls in love. Chen, however, wants no emotional attachments and drives Lan Yu away by seducing other young college lads. Their relationship was rekindled in 1989 when, fearing for Lan Yu's safety amid the army's Tiananmen Square crackdown, Chen searches for his former lover. However, being the only son of a top government bureaucrat, Chen was forced to marry Jingping, a translator who helped him negotiate a business deal with the Russians. The marriage was short lived. A chance meeting at the airport reunited the pair again until the government charged Chen's company with smuggling and money laundering. Lan Yu raised funds to get Chen out of legal trouble. Unfortunately, just as Chen realizes that the younger man was truly his beloved, Lan Yu is killed in a traffic accident.

*Saving Face* (2004). This movie follows the life of Wilhelmina (nicknamed Wil), a young Chinese American surgeon, who meets Vivian, a dancer with whom she was immediately attracted, at a party in a restaurant called Planet China. Wil struggles with her feelings for Vivian as she takes in her mother, Gao, who is shunned by her family after learning she was pregnant. Wil develops an intimate relationship with Vivian, which she desperately tries to hide even from her own mother, although Gao has an inkling her daughter is gay. Vivian later contemplates an offer from a ballet program in Paris and Wil encourages her to go, thinking it is best for Vivian's career. Gao finally agrees to marry a suitor named Cho, but the wedding ceremony was interrupted when it was revealed that the father of Gao's child, one of her friends' son, was more than willing to marry her

despite their large age gap. Three months later, Wil goes to another party at Planet China where her mother sets her up, finally, with Vivian.

*The Chinese Botanist's Daughters* (2006). This story took place in the 1980s. Li Min, a female orphan since the age of three, gets a job as an assistant to a botanist. While on the island where they do their research, Li Min falls in love with the botanist's daughter, Chen An. The two secretly engage in a sexually charged relationship that blossoms into true love. When the scientist's son, Dan, arrives home after some time in the military, the commanding old man forces the son to marry Li Min. When the son discovers that his new bride has had sex before their wedding night, tragedy ensues.

*And the Spring Comes* (2007). This movie earned for its supporting actor, who played the role of a gay ballet dancer, several nominations for Mainland China awards, the first time in the history of Chinese movies that a gay character is favorably recognized. The film tells the story of Cailing Wang, a homely music teacher at the local school who frequently reminds those around her that she will one day leave for Beijing to be a famous opera singer. She meets a painter named Huang Sibao, who seems to take an interest in her, but more so for her possible connections in Beijing. The couple plans to move to Beijing together, but the painter lets Cailing know that he only thinks of her as a friend. Cailing feels devastated by this admission and eventually jumps off a building in despair. She manages to survive the fall with only a broken arm. Cailing then befriends a ballet instructor called Mr. Hu. She feels a kindred spirit with the man, even though he is ostracized by the whole town because of his profession and homosexual disposition. Mr. Hu then asks Cailing to marry him, just for the sake of being married. When Cailing refuses, Mr. Hu feels even more despondent and sexually assaults a female student, an act that lands him in jail.

*Spring Fever* (2009). Jiang Cheng is a vain, saucy travel agent who periodically repairs to a gay bar where he gets on the stage in drag. At the start of the film, he is having a hot affair with

Wang Ping, a married bookseller, whose wife, Lin Xue, a schoolteacher, hires Luo Haitao, an unemployed photographer, to spy on her husband and take pictures of him with his lover. She already knows about the affair when Wang Ping naively arranges for her to meet Jiang Cheng, whom he introduces as a university friend. Lin Xue confronts her husband with the incriminating pictures and goes ballistic. No sooner has the marriage collapsed when Jiang Cheng hooks up with Luo, whose girlfriend, Li Jing, works in a counterfeit dress factory. Luo gamely wants to keep relationships with Jiang and Li, but loses both after all.

The content of the ten movies summarized above will be analyzed using qualitative content analysis methods.

### **Qualitative Analysis**

Qualitative analysis will be used to examine the following research questions:

**RQ1: Were the gay-themed movies banned in Mainland China? How many of them were allowed to be shown publicly?**

**RQ2: To what extent were gay roles portrayed? Did the plot involve gay characters in an integral way or were they assigned peripheral roles?**

This research question deals primarily with the visibility of gay characters. To answer this research question, the following were determined:

1. How many gay characters are evident in the movie? Only characters that have lines and are shown in the scene explicitly were counted.
2. How many of these gay characters perform leading or supporting roles?
3. Are the homosexual characteristics of gay characters shown to the audience?
4. Are gay characters shown as having “sissy” qualities? Homosexuality is often suggested through a character’s mannerisms and behavior. “Sissy” traits refer to hyper-feminine behaviors, and engaging in stereotypical “feminine” activities (e.g., housekeeping, putting on make-up). In this

study, a “sissy” typically assumes the submissive role to a dominant female and/or male partner. A man also might be considered a sissy for being interested in traditionally feminine hobbies or employment (e.g., being fond of fashion, going to meditation sessions, cooking), and for displaying effeminate behavior (e.g., using facial creams).

**RQ3: To what extent were gay roles shown in sex scenes portrayed? Are these implicit or explicit scenes? What is the impact of these scenes on the story and on audiences?**

**RQ4: Were homosexual characters portrayed in a positive or negative light?**

This question refers to the valence of the characters’ representation, examining whether gay characters were portrayed in a positive or negative light. A negative depiction presents homosexuality as an object of ridicule and laughter. A negative portrayal also includes gay characters as psychopaths, or generally seen as immoral, dangerous, violent, or murderous. Movies that frame gays in a negative light see them as less intelligent, less able, and even bad or evil in some way. The trivialization and demonizing of gays may be done by referring to them using pejorative terms, implying, for example, lower intelligence, bad character, having deviant characteristics, or other weaknesses.

A positive portrayal is one that sees gay characters as “normal” individuals or law-abiding citizens who contribute to the betterment of society. Characters are shown in a good light when they are portrayed as moral, well behaved, civil, and courteous despite being subjected to ridicule and constant harassment in everyday life. These depictions imply that there is nothing wrong with being gay and that gays are normal people with plenty to contribute to society. The criterion for judging positive or negative light is whether the character is a good person or not.



**RQ5: What jobs did the gay characters hold? Does their homosexuality affect their social status?**

Gay characters are commonly seen as doing stereotypical jobs (e.g., as hairdressers, fashion designers, beauty consultants and artists). This question aims to determine whether the same stereotypical roles are played out in the movies, and whether their profession and social status are affected by the revelation of their sexual orientation.

**RQ6: How do gay characters perceive themselves? What is the cultural and social impression toward the characters' homosexuality in terms of the attitude, reaction, and treatment from their family and the larger society when the characters' homosexuality is known?**

This question was answered by determining the following:

1. Does the character use any means to hide his/her homosexual identity?
2. Were the gay characters “out of the closet”? Were they afraid to come out? “Out of the closet” means that the gay character’s sexual orientation is known to family and society.
3. Did the gay characters display affection publicly?
4. How do the public or other heterosexual characters react to the gay character’s homosexuality when it is revealed?
5. Is a heterosexual marriage, an attempted marriage, or a relationship with a person of the opposite sex involved in the homosexual character’s life? For example, does the character use or try to use marriage or dating a person of the opposite sex as a tool to hide his/her homosexual identity? Do others (such as the characters’ families) try to pressure them into a marriage?

**RQ7: What roles did gay characters play in these movies? Were they shown as, for example, artistic, sympathetic, emotional, volatile, or flimsy?**

Gay rights activists often bemoan that in movies, gay and lesbian characters are always defined primarily by their sexual orientation, and often lacked complex character development. A compilation of such traits will enable a full description of the gay role. For example, humanizing the character can give straight people a chance to understand homosexuals; making homosexual characters an enemy and punishing them in the end can offer the audience ideas about how to categorize homosexuals. Analyzing the performance is a way to interpret the characterizations of gay persons in the movie.

**RQ8: Are gay communities shown in the film? How does the film portray them?**

Gay community refers to a group of homosexuals. They are identified by characteristic behaviors and the locale of their activities such as regular meeting places and where they hold events. Movies can show only a limited world and audiences can only get limited information from that world. Different from seeing gays and lesbians as individuals, a gay community involves a group of people who can be seen to represent homosexuals as a whole and having an impact on audience members' (especially those who do not have much knowledge of homosexuality) perceptions of this minority group.

**RQ9: In terms of the story structure, how does the character's journey lead to the outcome? In the process of storytelling, do the homosexual characters achieve what they want? What are the obstacles they faced and how did they react to them? What are the outcomes and the turning points that result in the outcomes?**

Every character in a film has value to the story. They could be the hero, the public nemesis, or they could be peripheral to the plot. How to make the character a likeable and how to make the film touch the audience emotionally so that audience members can find a sense of identification to

the gay characters are critical. By experiencing the character's journey through the story, the audience develop their perceptions of homosexuals. Understanding what the character wants, what the obstacles are, how the character finds solutions and overcomes difficulties connect the film to audiences, and teaches homosexual and straight people how to perceive the world and themselves.

**RQ10: Is there any development or improvement in the portrayal of gay characters over time?**

Russo (1987) analyzed Hollywood's portrayals of lesbians and gay men from the 1890s to the 1980s and found them often to be cruel and homophobic. The films in the sample were analyzed chronologically to determine whether improvements in gay depictions can be discerned over time. Such developments may include a change from negative to a positive portrayal and replacing stereotypical characters with realistic ones. Improvements refer to any positive changes in the the portrayal of gay characters' roles.

**RQ11: What might be the impact of these movie portrayals on audiences' perception of gays in the real world?**

This question requires a full examination of the gay characters in the movies, including the denotative and connotative meanings of their portrayals, and the manifest and latent content of films. The potential impact of such portrayals on an audience's perception of gays in real life was inferred.

## CHAPTER 4 RESULTS

Gerbner (1998) argues that media content in the U.S. often depicts negative stereotypes of gays and lesbians (e.g., as flamboyant characters or as dangerous psychopaths), often relegating them to the margins of entertainment and everyday life. Gays are rarely portrayed realistically, or they are not shown at all. The present study determines whether the same portrayals are evident in the way gay characters are portrayed in Chinese movies. To do so, a qualitative content analysis of a sample of movies that feature gay characters was conducted.

**RQ1: Were the movies with gay themes banned in Mainland China? How many of them were allowed to be shown publicly?**

In China, pornographic content is illegal and is thus deleted or confiscated. Films with explicit sexual scenes are redacted. In 2008, the State Administration of Radio Film and Television (SARFT) lumped homosexuality with other lurid content (such as sexual scenes and nudity) that should be edited from films and television programs. However, there is a black market for these banned movies. This cache of banned materials can be accessed through the Internet or pirated DVDs.

Among the ten movies examined in the study, only one, *And the Spring Comes* (2007), was distributed in Mainland China. This is probably because the movie did not show the gay character in a homosexual relationship. Instead, the character demonstrated qualities that implied homosexuality—an effeminate demeanor, no interest in women, and wanting to arrange a fake marriage just to show the public he is “normal.”

Jiao Gang, who played the gay character, was nominated for the best supporting actor award at the Chinese Film Media Awards and the Golden Rooster Awards, the first time an actor who played a homosexual role won such distinctions in China.

Another film, *Farewell My Concubine*, was eventually shown in movie theaters after being extensively censored. The public demanded a chance to see it after it was nominated for an Oscar.

The eight other movies have been or are still banned in China. Only *Lan Yu* has legitimate DVD copies released by a Mainland Chinese company after a five-year ban. The rest were either independent “underground” films or were produced and distributed in Hong Kong, Taiwan, or other foreign countries. In general, Chinese audiences can see gay-themed movies only on the Internet and through pirated DVDs. This partly explains why movies about gays often find it difficult to find investors. Movies such as *Men and Women* and *Spring Fever* reveal how limited their production budgets were through their use of available light, low quality cinematography, and the lack of other elements that make a movie visually appealing.

**RQ2: To what extent were gay roles portrayed? Did the plot involve gay characters in an integral way or were they assigned peripheral roles?**

There were 32 homosexual characters in the ten movies analyzed; 18 of these gay characters were featured in leading roles.<sup>2</sup>

Hu Jinqun in *And the Spring Comes* is the only decidedly gay character in that movie. He does not have an affair with another man and is not interested in them. The remaining 23 analyzable characters have explicit roles, which means they all have affairs with a person or people of the same sex. *And the Spring Comes* avoided being banned or censored by not explicitly showing the main character’s sexual orientation, even though the audience can figure out his homosexuality. The actor was nominated for two acting awards. In comparison, Zhang Guorong, who plays the gay character in the widely acclaimed *Farewell My Concubine*, was given only a Special Contribution Award by the China Film Performance Art Institute.

The word “sissy,” derived from the word “sister,” carries a number of meanings. It is used

<sup>2</sup> Some movies have more than three analyzable characters, some have fewer.

to describe any one of the following: an effeminate boy or man, a timid or cowardly person, or a little girl (dictionary.com, n.d.). Sissy quality is reflected in a character's behavior and way of talking, among other markers. People generally laugh at sissy actuations, which audiences immediately identify as homosexual behavior. Epstein & Friedman (1995) state that over the long history of Hollywood cinema, sissy characters have been used for comic relief.

In the sample, four characters are shown to have sissy qualities. They are Cheng Dieyi and Eunuch Zhang in *Farewell My Concubine*, A Lan in *East Palace, West Palace*, Gui Gui in *Men and Women*, and Hu Jinquan in *And the Spring Comes*. The latter was an effeminate ballet dancer who was always ridiculed by others. Although a confident dancer, he holds himself with contempt. His ready smiles are greeted with malice and ridicule by those in a small, narrow-minded backward town where he lives.



Figure 2-1. Hu Jinquan shows very obvious sissy qualities in the film *And the Spring Comes* (2007).





Figure 2-2. People mock and make fun of Hu as he performs on the streets. Audiences walk away in the middle of his performance.



Figure 2-3. A woman invites Hu and his mother to a dance, but the woman's husband berates her by yelling, "Don't talk to an Er Yizi (二腩子) like him! I get sick just looking at him. A pervert!" Hu's mother covers her face in shame.

Er Yizi (二腴子 or 二椅子) is a insulting term in the northern dialect used to describe an effeminate man. It is also used to characterize eunuchs and those who were born with male and female sex organs. Although many in the town were not violent toward him, Hu finds it more difficult to handle the emotional abuse. He tells the lead character, Wang Caling, “Don’t you know that I am the town scandal? I thought people would get used to me by now, but I find I am just like a fishbone caught in their throats. I really am a freak, like someone with six fingers...I disgust myself.”

The term Er Yizi (二腴子) also was used in the movie *Men and Women*. When Xiao Bo was sexually assaulted by Kang, he resisted and left. While he was angrily packing, Kang ironically insults him for being an Er Yizi although Xiao Bo does not show sissy qualities.

In the sample, sissy qualities were not intended to make the audience laugh. Instead, sissy qualities branded characters as tragic homosexual figures.

**RQ3: To what extent were gay roles shown in sex scenes portrayed? Are these implicit or explicit scenes? What is the impact of the scenes?**

Sexually explicit scenes are often used to market movies in the West. They also help define the depth of relationships. Such scenes are important, but not essential. For movies with homosexual characters, the sexual scenes can be critical. A homosexual relationship for many straight people who do not have any knowledge of it can be curious, fresh, and scary. Experiencing something new in a movie can be risky and exciting.

There are five movies in the sample with explicit sexual scenes, four with implicit sexual scenes, and one, *And the Spring Comes*, that does not have any. Any scene that shows two characters (or one of them) nude and/or clearly engaging in the sexual act is considered to be explicit. Scenes that indirectly suggest the characters’ sexual activities are considered to be implicit.

The sexual scenes from the ten movies performed the following functions:



(1) They expose the relationship between two gay characters to move the plot along.



Figure 3-1. Lan Yu engages in a sexual encounter with Chen Handong in the movie *Lan Yu*.



Figure 3-2. Jiang Cheng and Wang Ping drive to a secret place where they have a sexual encounter. A very explicit sexual scene is shown at the beginning of the movie to establish their intimate relationship (*Spring Fever*, 2009).

This technique is risky because the audience may not be ready or conditioned to see intimate physical acts. Some audience members, however, may find this a fresh approach.

(2) Sexual scenes also pave the way for the establishment of gay relationships.



Figure 3-3. Anan and Li Ming in a racy scene in *The Chinese Botanist's Daughters* (2006)



Figure 3-4. Wil and Vivian in an intimate scene in *Saving Face* (2004)



Figure 3-5. Lan Yu and Chen Handong commit to live together after Chen gets out of prison. This frame implies their intimacy (*Lan Yu*, 2001).



Figure 3-6. Foon and Wan are shown together in *Intimates* (1997).

The foregoing scenes indicate the full development of a romantic relationship between characters. *The Chinese Botanist's Daughters* and *Saving Face* have explicit sex scenes that fit into this category. *Lan Yu* and *Intimates* have implicit sexual scenes that have the same purpose. Scenes

that show the enjoyment of sex provide the audience emotional contact with the characters as they feel their desire. Audiences are psychologically prepared for these intimate encounters. *The Chinese Botanist's Daughters* and *Saving Face* emphasize the beauty of female bodies. The aestheticism of the frames made the movies distinctive.



Figure 3-7. Li Xiaoran, who plays Anan in *The Chinese Botanist's Daughters*

According to Epstein & Friedman (1995), people generally find a sexual scene with two lesbians more acceptable than a sexual scene with two gay men. At least many find the former not so scary. "Comfort with female nudity and female girlishness can be sexy and can be completely palatable" (*The Celluloid Closet*, 1995). Sexy female actors are attractive to audiences, especially the males. They are often gentler and less intense than relationships between two males.

(3) Sexually charged scenes also function to demonstrate the uneven power between two characters in primarily violent scenes.

The Chinese people use the yin and yang metaphor to describe the harmonious relationship between men and women. Gays and lesbians are characterized as either "tops and tomboys" who play the active figures in a sexual activity, or the "bottoms and pourgirls," who play the passive figures.

In *Spring Fever*, Jiang Cheng is the active figure in the scene with Wang Ping, and the passive figure in the scene with Luo Haitao. When a player in a sexual relationship is powerless, forced to have sexual activity with another, or is abused or insulted by the other, the harmony is broken.



Figure 3-8. Dieyi is sexually assaulted by Eunuch Zhang (*Farewell My Concubine*, 1993).



Figure 3-9. An attempted rape scene. Xiao Bo is sexually insulted by Qing Jie's husband. Kang. Xiao Bo resisted the assault (*Men and Women*, 1999).

Dieyi (*Farewell My Concubine*, 1993) and Xiao Bo (*Men and Women*, 1999) are both under the power of the other character in each of the scenes. Dieyi is a tragic character, a victim of the times, oppressed by whoever takes power. Eunuch<sup>3</sup> Zhang, on the other hand, enjoys high status in society. Xiao Bo does not have equal social status with his attacker. Although he successfully resisted a rape attempt by his benefactor, Kang, he loses his job and shelter as a result.

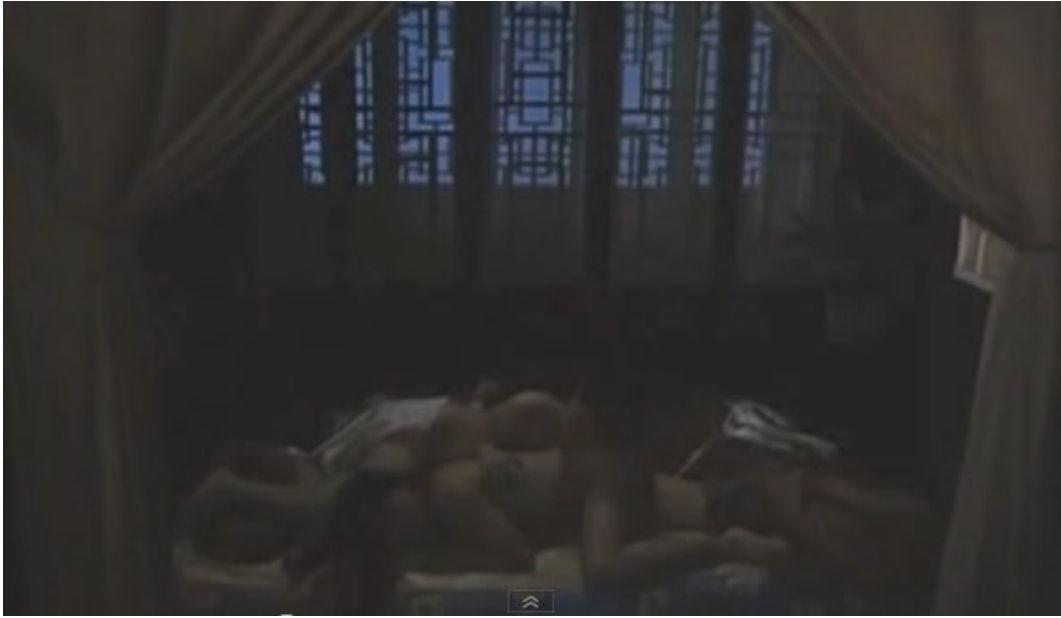


Figure 3-10. Huang Zilei forces Lin Chong to have dinner with him, gets him drunk, and takes advantage of him (*Fleeing by Night*, 2000).

In *Fleeing by Night* (2000), Lin Chong, an actor with an opera troupe, is seduced by Huang Zilei, a nobleman during the period of the Republic of China. The leader of the troupe forces him to obey Huang. Drunk, Lin does not resist, although he is already in love with Shaodong, the other leading character in the movie.

<sup>3</sup> A eunuch (宦官 in Chinese) was a servant of the emperor and emperor's families. During the days of imperial China, only males who are emasculated were allowed to work in the palace (Hydcd.com, n.d.).



In *West Palace, East Palace* (1996), sadism and masochism were portrayed through A Lan's narration of each sexual relationship. However, Zhang Yuan, the director, shot the sexual scenes without showing explicit pictures. The movie was inspired by a real incident in the 1990s when a local police station at Beijing started arresting homosexuals in the name of health research. Gays were questioned and their blood samples tested (News.163.com, 2004). The movie was based on research conducted by Beijing residents Li Yinhe and Wang Xiaobo. A Lan was shown as a sadomasochist to reflect the social oppression of homosexuals.

A Lan, raised by a poor single mother, has been betrayed and abused by his lovers, acts that he interprets as love. To him, "this kind of experience makes life worth living."

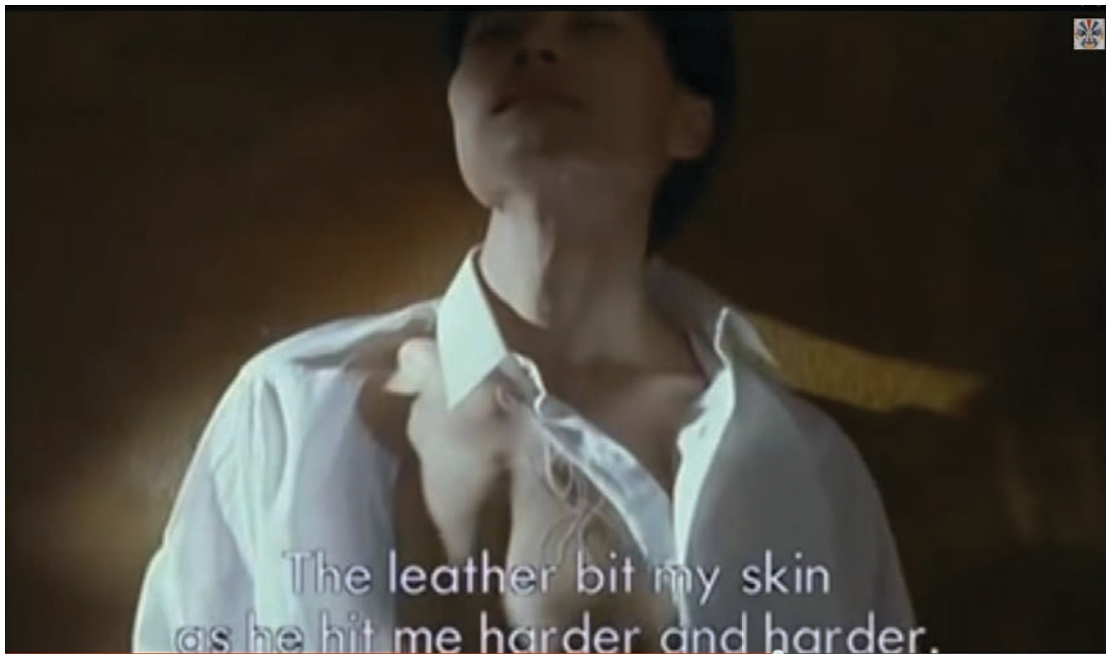


Figure 3-11. A Lan narrates his enjoyment of a masochistic experience with a man (*East Palace, West Palace*).

Sadomasochism refers to "interaction, especially sexual activity, in which one person enjoys inflicting physical or mental suffering on another person, who derives pleasure from experiencing pain" (dictionary.com, n.d.). A Lan discusses his sexual relationships with lovers of higher social

standing. He is a passive, emaciated, and effeminate figure. In contrast, Xiao Shi, the other leading role, is a powerful, strong, masculine man.

This movie does not depict explicit sexual scenes or language, but A Lan's psychological state is told through his violent sexual experiences albeit narrated in a gentle way. Hearing A Lan's story, Xiao Shi becomes confused and angry about being attracted to a gay personality. To protect his identity, that of a "normal (i.e., heterosexual)" and masculine policeman, he lashes out by with aggressive acts and language. In the last scene, he was shocked by his desire to have sex with A Lan. He sprayed water on A Lan, yelling: "Have you had enough?" Though the action is directed at A Lan, Xiao Shi is actually talking to himself. A Lan responds: "You asked me a lot of questions. Why don't you ask them of yourself?" The movie ends right after this scene, showing Xiao Shi walking into the dawn, confused about his role as a man and a person in a position of authority.





Figure 3-12. Last scenes from *East Palace, West Palace*.

Thus, sex serves as an enslaving mechanism for the lead characters and a privilege enjoyed by powerful people. This unbalanced relationship creates a state of discomfort on the part of viewers despite the absence of explicitly violent and/or highly sexually charged frames.

In traditional China, showing an explicit sexual scene is considered harmful to society's morals, especially those of the older generation. Such a scene must be reedited or removed before the movie can be shown to the general public. Five movies in the sample showed obvious sexual scenes perhaps because the filmmakers did not expect the movies would be shown in Mainland Chinese theaters. Such explicit sexual scenes may reinforce the impression that homosexual movies are not suitable for mass audiences and strengthen gay stereotypes, leading to more hostilities against this group.



Figure 3-13. *Spring Fever* has a number of explicit sexual scenes between homosexual, heterosexual, and bisexual characters.

#### **RQ4: Were homosexual characters portrayed in a positive or negative light?**

All movies in the sample showed those in leading roles in a positive light. The ten movies generated a total of 24 gay characters 21 of whom were depicted positively. A negatively portrayed character, however, is not absolutely evil. For example, Zhang, the eunuch in *Farewell My Concubine* who sexually assaulted young Dieyi, also made him a nightmare at some point. He later became a victim of shifting politics and alliances.



Figure 4-1. Eunuch Zhang becomes homeless when feudalism was overthrown by communism. When Dieyi and Xiaolou asked if he still remembers them, he just answered, “Buy some cigarettes from me.”

Yuan Shiqing, who was proclaimed by a character as “a master no matter who is in power,” was eventually sentenced to death. Although a loathsome character, he defended Dieyi when the nationalists accused him of performing for the Japanese occupiers. Yuan, threatened by Xiaolou’s wife, saves Dieyi from jail. When the prosecutor claimed that Dieyi’s the *Peony Pavilion* shows obscene material and then accuses him of disparaging the Chinese spirit, Yuan righteously rebuts: “Anyone with common sense knows that *Peony Pavilion* is the quintessential Chinese opera. How dare you insult our tradition and culture! You’re the one disparaging the Chinese spirit and damaging our national pride!”



Figure 4-2. Yuan Shiqing's claim evokes loud applause in the court.



Figure 4-3. Yuan Shiqing was given the death sentence.

Everyone in the film is a victim of politics. The two negatively portrayed characters in *Farewell My Concubine* once stood for political might, but later became victims of the inept system.



In *Farewell My Concubine*, the “enemy” was not any particular person, but society and culture as whole. Figures that stand for the opposite side are their families, people around them, or an invisible force that reflected on the characters’ pain.

In *East Palace, West Palace*, A Lan is a social outcast who hides his real identity in a world that discriminates against homosexuals. He is betrayed and abused by his own lovers. He went to the hospital once, asking for a cure for his homosexuality and thinking “it would have been better if I had never been born.” Like Hu Jinquan, he loathed who he was. However, these two characters chose different ways to fight back. Oppressed by the Chinese social ethic, A Lan endured the pain and humiliation: “The convict loves her executioner, the thief loves her jail keeper, and we love you. Do we have choice?” Hu Jinquan, on the other hand, chose an extremely defensive way of asserting his “normality”—by faking a sexual assault on a woman for which he was sentenced to prison. Like Cheng Dieyi (*Farewell My Concubine*), he committed suicide. The gay characters, therefore, were victims of a society that ostracizes and relegates homosexuals to the periphery.

### **Affectionate portrayals**

Romantic movies are one of the most popular film genres. How a movie portrays homosexual relationships, therefore, can help shape the general public’s perception of gays and how they behave toward this minority group.

*Farewell My Concubine* is a movie centering on a famous Chinese opera that tells the story of Xiang Yu, the King of Chu, and his concubine, Yu Ji. Xiang Yu is a proud warrior who was finally outwitted by his enemies. The night before he was killed, he asks Yu Ji to escape, which she refuses to do. She cuts her throat with a sword, faithful to her king until death.

Cheng Dieyi and Duan Xiaolou who play the role of the doomed couple in a Chinese opera troupe, grew up together. In Dieyi’s mind, *Farewell My Concubine* is not only an opera, but represents the story of his whole life. He sees Xiaolou as his lover and husband on and off the stage.

Audiences watched them grow up intimately like childhood sweethearts. Xiaolou, however, sees Dieyi as a brother, a relative, and a special partner on the stage, but not as a lover. Dieyi was heart broken when he learned that Xiaolou was having an affair with Ju Xian.



Figure 4-4. Xiaolou helps Dieyi cheat their master and is punished by being forced to kneel outside in the heavy snow. Dieyi lies next to him to keep him warm.



Figure 4-5. In *Farewell My Concubine*, Dieyi lovingly paints Xiaolou's face before a performance.



Figure 4-6. Dieyi and Ju Xian meet for the first time, knowing that they are both vying for the love of the same man.



Figure 4-7. Dieyi lovingly pinches Xiaolou when Xiaolou teases him.

The tension among the three persists. Afraid of being tortured by the Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution, Xiaolou betrays Dieyi by divulging the latter's secrets, including his affair with Yuan Shiqing, a character that the communists detest. Dieyi and Xiaolou separated after Ju Xian commits suicide. Eleven years later, when they were already old, they meet again to perform the opera one last time. Dieyi actually dies during the play.



Figure 4-8. Dieyi and Xiaolou are persecuted by the Red Guards. Dieyi cries, “But now even the king of Chu is on his knees, begging for mercy. Can the Peking opera survive this indignity?”

The story line, production techniques, and framing devices all help show a character as normal or likeable. A positive portrayal of a character not just shows the individual performing heroic acts. It also means depicting a person as normal or human. In other words, as long as the characters do not invite viewers’ antipathy, they were shown in a positive light.

**RQ5: What jobs did the gay characters hold? Did their homosexuality affect their social status?**

What gay characters do for a living as shown in moves can reinforce gay stereotypes. These stereotypes include equating gay people with jobs related to beauty and fashion. Previous films have pigeonholed homosexual characters to jobs that are low-status (e.g., factory worker, eunuch) or that are related to the arts (e.g., clothiers, fashion designers).

The current study’s sample of ten movies showed 24 gay characters in story lines with timeframes that date back to the 1920s. The characters occupy various positions in the movies. For the most part, homosexual characters are condemned by society no matter the job they hold.



Xu Shaodong, a lead character in *Fleeing by Night* (2000), is a violinist-cellist from an upper-class family in 1930s Beijing. His affair with another male lead role, Lin Chong, became the scandal of the town, causing him and his family to “lose face” in society. His parents locked him in his room, he then escapes to the U.S. Lin Chong dies in jail; Xu Shaodong leads a lonely life.

*Spring Fever* (2009), set in contemporary society, tells the story of Jiang Cheng, a travel agent who has an affair with a married man, Wang Ping. When their relationship is discovered by Wang Ping’s wife, she makes a scene at Jiang’s place of work, causing Jiang to quit his job and to break up with Wang. This scene foreshadows later events. Having lost his lover, Wang Ping commits suicide. Jiang lives to experience two failed relationships.

Hu Jinquan (*And the Spring Comes*) and Vivian Shing (*Saving Face*) are both outstanding ballet dancers. Hu, the male dancer, lives in a small town in China; Vivian has a successful career in New York. Hu, ridiculed by neighbors and those around him, fakes a sexual assault on a woman and is sentenced to prison. By contrast, Vivian’s career is not affected by her homosexuality, although her partner hesitates to come out. *Saving Face* has a happy ending, however, when the two gay characters finally got together.

The contrasting outcomes for Hu and Vivian indicate that social acceptance spell the difference between successful and failed careers.

Although replete with struggles, most of the gay characters examined were portrayed sympathetically. Only three were shown in a negative light: Yuan Shiqing and Eunuch Zhang from *Farewell My Concubine*, and Huang Zilei from *Fleeing by Night*. Whatever powers these three possess were derived from their social status, not from their jobs.

Both movies were set in the early years of the 20th century, when feudalism was still alive in China. These three characters were at the top of the social hierarchy, powerful enough to intimidate people and unapologetic about their negative reputation. They abused or seduced the leading

characters. Eunuch Zhang, although seen by people as a “useless person” because he has lost “a man’s normal function,” is the most egregious of the three. Yuan Shiqing (*Farewell My Concubine*) and Huang Zilei (*Fleeing by Night*) are bullies who refuse to “come out” though others can guess or know their secret. Yuan Shiqing successfully hides what he really feels toward Dieyi; only a few characters knew about his real intentions. Huang Zilei is obsessed with Lin Chong and does not care what people say. When his love triangle with Lin Chong and Shaodong becomes the news of the town, he hardly notices. In fact, he becomes obsessed with Lin Chong. These characters hold enough sway during the feudal period that their social status is not affected by their homosexuality. In addition, they did not have to contend with family obligations, such as marriage.

The movies analyzed did not hold stereotypes relating to the homosexual characters’ careers or professions. The gay characters who belong in different social classes during specific epochs in Chinese history held various types of jobs in society. Whatever power they exercised in the movie was neither related to their jobs nor their social status. Their homosexuality overrides all other factors.

**RQ6: How do the gay characters perceive themselves? What is the cultural and social impression toward the characters’ homosexuality in terms of the attitude, reaction, and treatment from their family and the larger society when their homosexuality is revealed?**

Most gay characters in the movies examined do not show particular ways that reveal their homosexuality to the general public. They tried to behave “normally” as heterosexuals although some displayed “sissy” qualities. Some, however, use marriage to cover their identities.

Twenty-two of the 24 characters analyzed did not reveal their gay orientation. They tried to hide their identities from the public in general, including their friends and family members. *Saving Face*, a romantic comedy, was inspired by director Alice Wu’s personal experience of coming out. Shot in New York, the movie’s tone is more relaxed and positive. Happily, the gay lovers were

accepted by their family and others.

The scene in which Wil comes out to her mother illustrates a traditional Chinese perspective on being gay:

Daughter: I love you. And I'm gay.

Mother: How can you say those two things at once? How can you tell me you love me then throw that in my face? I am not a bad mother. My daughter is not gay.

In Chinese culture, a cultured person is one who is successful in career and in marriage, not one who is despised and scorned. Wil's coming out serves as the movie's little climax, revealing her ambivalence between love and family expectation. The mother eventually accepts Wil and Vivian's relationship when she admits she has an affair with a man of her daughter's age.

In the films examined, only the female characters showed affection in public. In Asian cultures, it is common to express some level of physical intimacy between two females. This includes holding hands or kissing in public. For males, these are taboo behaviors.



Figure 6-1. Li Ming and Anan dance in Anan's brother's wedding reception. Anan's brother becomes nervous and interrupts their dance.



Figure 6-2. People stare at Li Ming and Anan as they hold hands in a restaurant.

Li Ming and Anan show public displays of affection. Even though they are brave enough to do so, the level of intimacy would be still questioned by other people, as is shown in the two foregoing images.

Only *Saving Face* has a coming out scene. In the rest of the sample, the gay characters' hidden homosexuality and homosexual relationship were detected. In short, the lovers were "found out." In general, gay characters did not find acceptance when they revealed their homosexuality to friends and family. They were scorned by society in general. A Lan (*East Palace, West Palace*) is caught and insulted by policemen. Xu Shaodong (*Fleeing by Night*) is locked by his parents and ridiculed by the public. Li Ming is nearly killed by Anan's father when he witnesses their physical intimacy (*The Chinese Botanist's Daughters*). The two women were sentenced to death after Anan kills Li Ming's father accidentally. Hu Jinquan (*And the Spring Comes*) bore the heavy stress of discrimination even though he dares not have an affair with other men.



Figure 6-3. When Ying'er's father tells his wife that Huang Zilei likes men, his wife wailed, "Stop telling me about these filthy things!" (*Fleeing by Night*).

In a large majority of the movies analyzed, the public sees gays as "filthy." When the lovers Li Ming and Anan faced the court at the end of *The Chinese Botanist's Daughters*, the presiding judge announces that "an abnormal passion between people of the same sex led to the death of our famous botanist...neither of these our society can tolerate. The punishment must be executed."

In traditional Chinese culture, one is duty bound to be married and have children. Thus, Chen Handong (*Lan Yu*) breaks up with Lan Yu to marry a woman, saying that "Everyone should get married. I always thought about it that way. You should understand." Li Ming marries Anan's brother (*The Chinese Botanist's Daughters*) just to be with Anan. Wang Ping hides his homosexuality from his wife as he dates Jiang Cheng secretly.

Traditional Chinese values frown upon "unfilial" ways. The most unforgivable among them is not producing an heir (不孝有三，无后为大). Marrying someone of the opposite sex is a good way to hide one's real sexual orientation and satisfy the expectations of family and society. China is



a country that highly values blood relationships and community—“The old gets cared for and the young are cultivated (少有所教，老有所养).” In other words, the parents’ prime responsibility is to raise their children well. In return, their children support them when they get old. Through the centuries, married couples have lived with their elders (usually their parents) to take care of them. Many families still do so. The fear of losing descendants, therefore, may be driving the negative public reaction to homosexual relationships.

**RQ7: What roles did gay characters play in these movies? Were they shown as, for example, artistic, sympathetic, emotional, volatile, or flimsy?**

The gay characters in the sample are often shown to be sad, sympathetic, powerless, and flimsy. The most common characteristic, however, is that of being the object of sympathy. The filmmakers clearly intended to portray their pain and their inability to come out for fear of public ridicule, the loss of social status, and loss of personal safety.



Figure 7-1. Hu Jinqian cries after Wang refuses his proposal for a fake marriage.



Figure 7-2. Hu Jinquan is shown as a delicate dancer (left) and a pathetic prisoner (right).

Dancer Hu Jinquan is delicate and cultured compared to the crass and narrow-minded residents of his town. He tries to marry Wang Cailing to cover up his homosexuality, but she refuses. After the rejection, he is shown crying while walking alone in the snow. He fakes a sexual assault on a female student in another attempt to cloak his identity. While in prison, he says in relief, “I have finally been taken out of people’s throats, where I was stuck like a fishbone. It’s a relief for me and for everyone.” In the closing scenes, he dances to a sad melody for Cailing.

The gay characters Lin Chong (*Fleeing by Night*), Dieyi (*Farewell My Concubine*), Lan Yu (*Lan Yu*), and Wang Ping (*Spring Fever*) all die at the end of each movie.

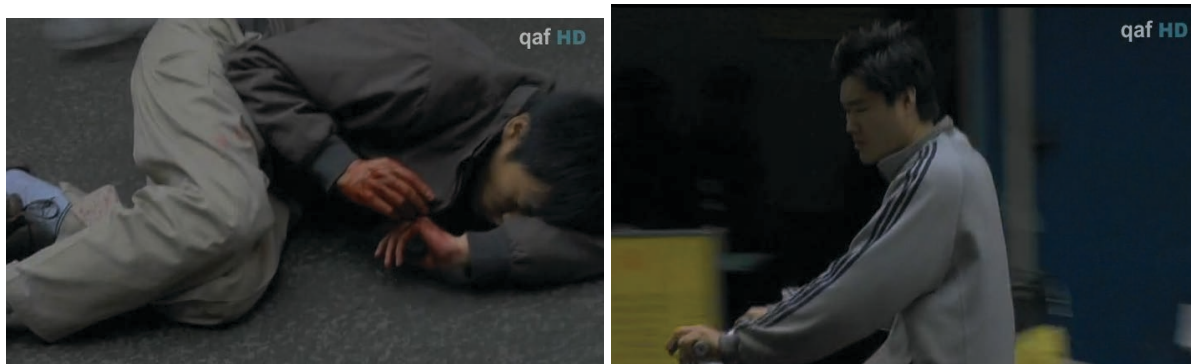


Figure 7-3. Jiang Cheng is injured by Wang Ping’s wife after Wang Ping commits suicide. As he lays dying on the street, people pass him by, no one stops to help.



Figure 7-4. Jiang looks at a dead cat lying on the street, a visual metaphor of his own life.

Sadness is woven throughout the movies as viewers see powerless characters being defeated by reality. In contrast, viewers celebrate the triumph of the leading characters in *Saving Face* and *Intimates*.

**RQ8: Are gay communities shown in the film? How does the film portray them?**

Gay communities are shown in *East Palace*, *West Palace* and in *Spring Fever*. The former, was adapted from a novel by Wang Xiaobo (Li Yinhe's husband) and was based on research conducted by Li (1992) and Li and Wang (1992). The title *East Palace*, *West Palace* refers to two famous public lavatories where homosexuals meet and engage in their activities, because the two lavatories are located on the west side and east side of Tiananmen Square in Beijing, where the secret gay communities are.



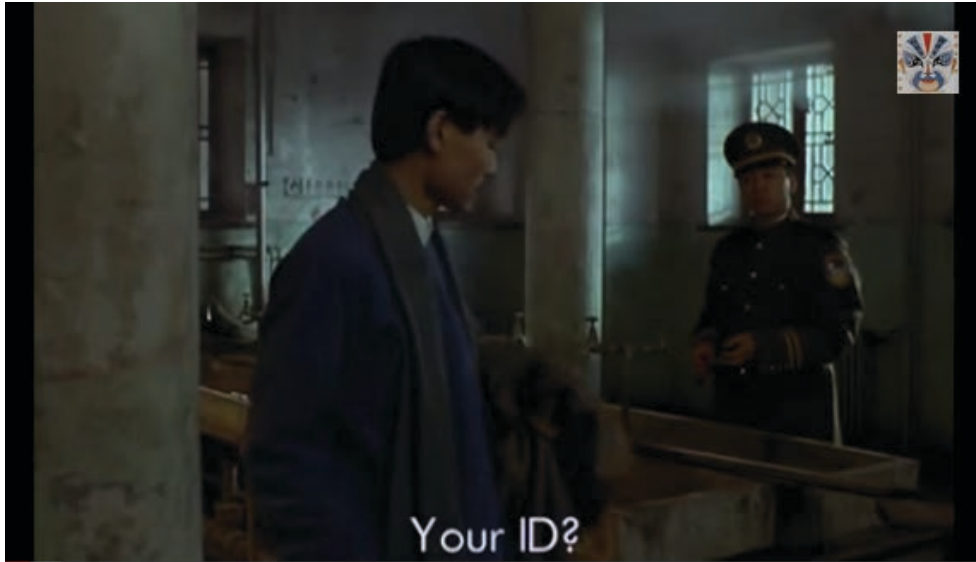


Figure 8-1. A Lan is questioned by a policeman in the lavatory (*East Palace, West Palace*, 1996).



Figure 8-2. Xiao Shi and other police officers nab homosexuals for questioning. On the left photo, one of them manhandles a gay person.

For a few minutes, the film shows the gay community meeting and conducting their business secretly in public lavatories. When people mention lavatories, they hardly think of them as a normal place to meet.



Figure 8-3. A gay nightclub is shown in *Spring Fever* (2009) where drag queen shows also take place.



Figure 8-4. Jiang Chen, the lead character, performs in the homosexual club.

*Spring Fever* is the movie with the latest date of release. It gives viewers a glimpse of homosexual communities in modern China. In it, gay characters are shown behaving normally, not at all fearful of being detected, in crowded nightclubs. The host describes Jiang Cheng as “a well-known figure in our gay community.”

From lavatory to nightclub, from sneaking out as criminals to having a fixed place to meet,, gay communities are shown to be in the shadows. Neither A Lan (*East Palace, West Palace*) nor

Jiang (*Spring Fever*) is shown to have stable communities to depend on. As A Lan says, “I come to this park (where the lavatory is located) to find friends. This is where **we** all hang out in this city. It’s easy to find others here. I have lots of friends—Stud, Dandy, Lily, and others I meet on the park. Of course, they are only nicknames. We find a deserted spot...” The camera then cuts to a scene in which two gays meet in a building under construction.

In *Spring Fever*, Jiang sits in the club alone. Like in other places, he is shown without friends.

The superficial depictions of gay communities do not give a sense that homosexuals have support groups they can count on. They are shown as being isolated from the rest of society.

**RQ9: In terms of the story structure, how does the character’s journey lead to the outcome? In the process of storytelling, do the homosexual characters achieve what they want? What are the obstacles they faced and how do they react to them? What are the outcomes and the turning points that result in the outcomes?**

The classic story structure of a movie consists of Exposition, Rising Action, Climax, Falling Action, and Resolution (closure). The story has several key events to hold the audience’s attention and make them experience the journey along with the characters.

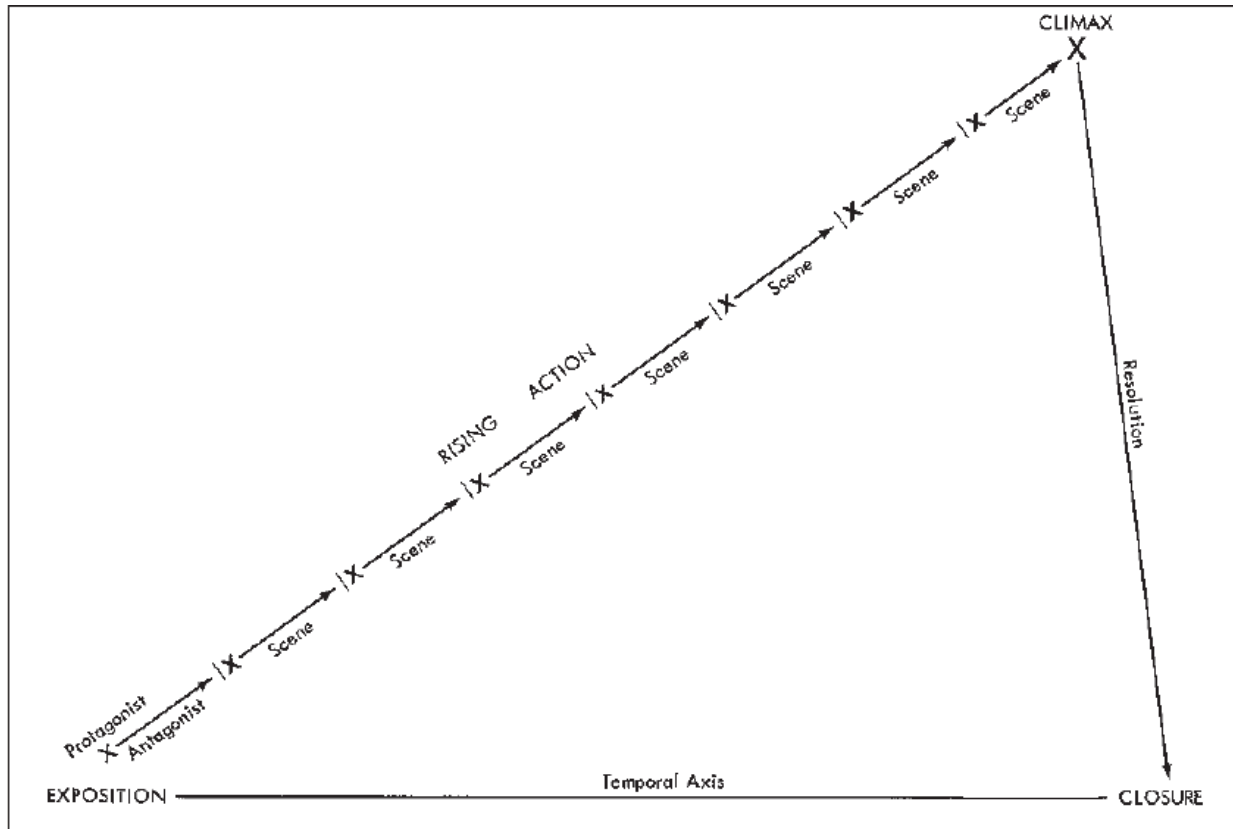
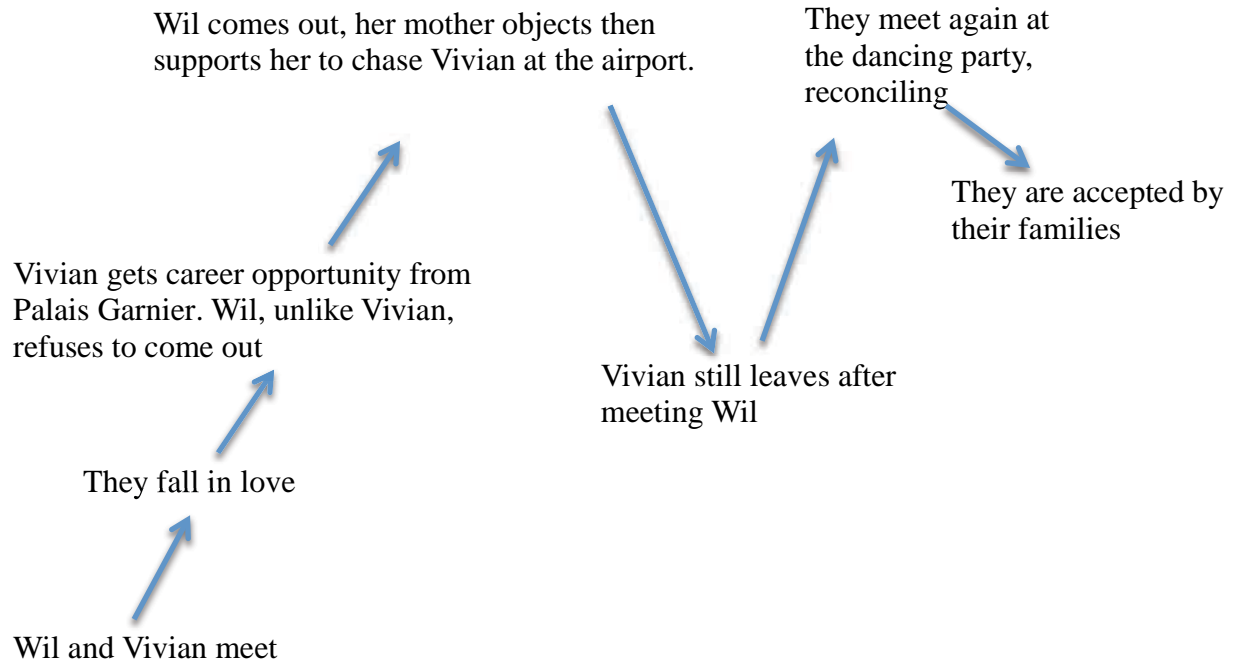
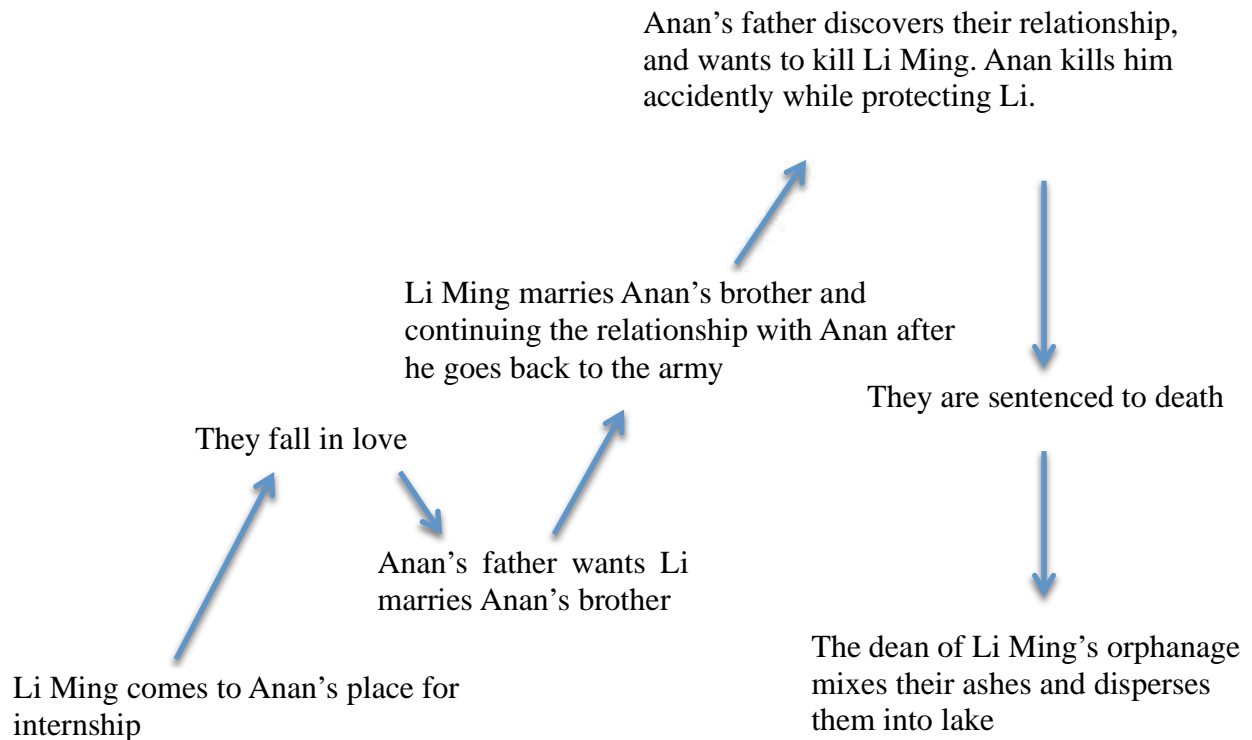


Figure 9-1. The classical paradigm (*Understanding Movies*, 2007)

In this case, exposition is shown in terms of how gay characters meet and the way they reveal their orientation to the audience and to others. Rising action occurs when two characters fall in love and react to obstacles. Climax is the big moment when the movie achieves maximum tension. An example is when, upon learning of her relationship with Li Ming, Anan's father tries to kill Li Ming, but ended up being killed by Anan. Falling action happens after the climax, which is followed immediately by some kind of resolution.

The development of the movie following these stages is shown in the *Saving Face*, a movie with a happy ending, and *The Chinese Botanist's Daughters*, which has a tragic one. Figure 9-2 and 9-3 show the story structure for *Saving Face* and *The Chinese Botanist's Daughters*.

Figure 9-2. The story structure for *Saving Face*Figure 9-3. The story structure of *The Chinese Botanist's Daughter*

In these movies, the gay characters are always faced with a dilemma. In *Saving Face*, Wil and Vivian fall in love. Vivian wants to come out, but Wil hesitates. Wil's mother becomes pregnant without disclosing the father of the child. Vivian is called to Paris. Will and Vivian break up. Wil reveals to her mother that she is gay, but is rebuffed. Wil interrupts her mother's wedding to a man her mother does not like. As it turned out, the father of the baby is a very young man. Her mother finally encourages Will to be with Vivian. The lovers are accepted by their families.

This is a classic story structure with a happy ending. Viewers obtain power and affirmation by experiencing the tension of key moments. The death of a lead character often completes a story of tragedy as in *The Chinese Botanist's Daughters*. The exceptions in the sample are *Saving Face*, *Intimates*, and *Men and Women* the first two movies have happy endings, *Men and Women* presents the gay characters' journey in a very flat way, which perhaps explains why many viewers rated the film poorly. The low rating may also be due to the marginal production values caused by the film's small budget.

*Saving Face* and *Intimates*, however, are anomalies. In the sample, the lead characters always die a tragic death. One of them is relegated to prison, the others were condemned to lead lonely lives. The message is that in intolerant societies, homosexuals cannot be who they want to be.

**RQ10: Is there any development or improvement in the portrayal of gay characters over time?**

All movies analyzed in this study convey the message that homosexuals are still not accepted by the mainstream Chinese society. They are shown to be isolated, sad, living in the shadows, and are highly devalued. Most gay characters do not achieve what they want and experience tragic ends. The same theme permeates this study's sample of movies released from 1993 to 2009, showing little improvement in terms of plot. China, however, is showing signs of

tolerance in evaluating homosexual images.

**RQ11: What might be the impact of these movie portrayals on audiences' perception of gays in the real world?**

Except for three supporting roles, all the 24 characters examined in this study were shown as likable and deserving of sympathy. Most were painted as powerless and participate in less than decent activities, such as behaving in sadomasochistic acts, pursuing fake marriages, having extra-marital affairs, murder, or attempted rape, which served as excuses for the powerful majority in the movie to punish or discriminate against them. Hence conflicts between gay characters and the opposite were established. Most of the homosexual figures are portrayed as normal human Beings, filmmakers intend to bring them to the light and rationalize their indecent activities. And the opposite side of gay figures (e.g. family members, people around them, the society and so on) is the force pushing them into such positions. However, although filmmakers aimed to open the door for audience members with positive understanding toward gay people, viewers may have different interpretations of what they saw in the movies.

Movies, as mass media channels, contribute to people's understanding of topics and issues that may not be familiar to them. People generally develop their cognitions about topics or issues following four stages: (1) schema formation, (2) assimilation, (3) accommodation, and (4) equilibration. In the first stage, people develop an architecture of cognition based on their experiences. Their first impression of a concept or issue would have an impact on their understanding of those topics or issues. For example, when a child sees a small dog first, he/she may think that all dogs are small. The second stage involves taking in and processing the new information with the old. The third stage, accommodation, involves gathering more information from new experiences, which requires the receiver to change or adjust his or her previous belief. People may encounter some level of discomfort when new information does not conform with



existing beliefs. The fourth stage, equilibration, involves balancing the stages of assimilation and accommodation to achieve harmony between previous beliefs and the new information to ease people's psychological discomfort (McLeod, 2009). Therefore, audiences may react to the homosexual characters positively or negatively based on their different knowledge and life experiences with gay people.

The propositions of cultivation theory and second-level agenda setting suggest powerful media effects on audiences, including those who watch movies. First, for those who know little about homosexuals, movies serve as potent vehicles for developing people's schemas about this under-represented group. More positive messages generally lead to positive perceptions and attitudes. Negative portrayals tend to lead to negative evaluations. For example, A Lan in *East Palace, West Palace* is a psychologically defective person. People, upon seeing the movie, may think that all homosexuals suffer from the same malady. It is important to show that the affliction is not confined to gays. In *The Botanist's Daughters*, the court scenes with Li Ming and Anan give the impression that Chinese law ridicules homosexuality as a disease and that gays are easily put to death without a just trial (Wang Xianke, 2007). However, positive information as A Lan's braveness of expressing himself and as Li Ming and Anan's uncompromised love can also bring insight to audience members for evoking their thought of justice. The two movies, on the other hand, may also help audiences understanding gay people.

Secondly, a film that "goes over a viewer's head" may also generate negative attitude toward gays. The philosophical and psychological elements embedded in *East Palace, West Palace* require a level of intelligence and patience to comprehend. If a movie creates difficulties in comprehension, the level of enjoyment it may bring is greatly compromised. Viewers may reject the movie altogether and thus miss the message of the film. For example, *Men and Women* is structured and paced so that it fails to create the intensity of emotional reaction the producers may



have intended. The lack of tension may cause the audience members to lose emotional contact with the film and its characters. Though the movie received international awards, it did not receive positive public reviews.

Nonetheless, the sample of films analyzed in this study displayed nuanced portrayals of gay characters, without explicitly making judgments about the good and the not-so-laudable traits of homosexuals. This balanced rendition invited a deeper processing of the content, suggesting to regular movie consumers that, in general, gays are human beings that embody a natural combination of strengths and weaknesses.

## CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In summary, several conclusions can be drawn from a review of Chinese movies over the years that explicitly portrayed homosexual figures. These are as follows:

1. There is still a dearth of movies that were bold enough to field homosexual characters in lead roles. The absence of gays in the mainstream media, including the cinema, limits the public's opportunity to understand homosexuals and change out-moded perceptions about them.

2. Except for three, the 24 gay characters examined were portrayed in a positive light. The filmmakers tried to humanize them in an effort to evoke sympathy toward and understanding of their plight. The movies positioned society, politics, and the general public as critics, agents of disparagement, opponents, perhaps even enemies of gay characters in the films that were examined.

3. Censorship limits the number and quality of gay-themed movies. To date, SARFT, the watchdog agency of all media and entertainment productions, still considers homosexuality taboo. Filmmakers who want to feature homosexuals still face considerable difficulties in exhibiting and marketing their pictures. Except for *Farewell My Concubine*, which has received worldwide recognition, and *And the Spring Comes*, which did not explicitly show the gay character as homosexual, the rest of the movies examined in this study still cannot be shown in Mainland Chinese theaters. For filmmakers who wish to tackle this issue, the only channels left open to reach broad audiences are the Internet and pirated DVDs. Such restrictions severely limit the productions' opportunity to earn a profit. As a result, very few movies with gay themes are exhibited publicly. Some underground films such as *Men and Women* and *Spring Fever*, on the other hand, suffer from low technical quality. The films that were lucky to have escaped the censorship ban only hinted at homosexuality and homosexual affairs. It is clear that censorship restricts the production of homosexual movies and the presentation of gays in mainstream movies.

4. The nature of the Chinese culture plays an important role in creating and encouraging homophobia. Because gay characters in films allegedly betray the morals of society, the public is likely to consider them disgusting, sick, abnormal, filthy, and unacceptable. Sympatric portrayals of homosexuals may improve public understanding and thus soften the intensity of homophobic attitudes. In the sample, some gay characters go to the extremes—sometimes even deliberately breaking the law— to hide their homosexuality and blend with society. Some exploited heterosexual marriage as a way to balance family obligations and personal desire.

5. The homosexual characters in this study are often shown in a miserable state—sad, isolated, powerless, and depressed. They hide their sexuality and are afraid to come out regardless of their social status. To them, the fear of being “outed” is overwhelming. Consequently, they lead tragic lives, beaten down by pressures from friends, family, and society. Most cannot defend themselves against the tacit assault on their sexuality. Characters such as Xu Shaodong (*Fleeing by Night*) and Jiang Cheng (*Spring Fever*) are shown in a perpetual state of suffering, prompting them to flee.

6. Filmmakers who want to shed light on the gay plight are likely to run against the prevailing general publics’ incomprehension of, and objection to, gay people. This challenge behooves filmmakers to have a thorough understanding of issues facing gays so that their professional skills are applied not only in creating technically astute, but also meaningful products. Though movies frequently exaggerate some elements to create drama, how much they exaggerate and what part of reality they emphasize can have different effects on audiences. In addition, the invisibility of homosexuals in real life makes it difficult for filmmakers to find suitable stories to bring to the screen. As a result, filmmakers have to decide what production elements will relate to the homosexual characters so viewers will be able to get an accurate impression of them and not reinforce stereotypes they may already have.

On another vein, when filmmakers offend audiences by portraying straight people, especially family members, in a negative light, they may reduce the public's willingness to accept a favorable picture of gays. Putting gays and straights on opposite sides and especially exaggerating bad images of these opposing figures can generate negative feelings.

7. Those who created the films analyzed in this study, however, can be commended for their courage in producing movies that they knew were going to earn the ire of censors in the first place. Their attempt to portray nuanced—not stereotypical—gay figures in their films attest to the power of movies to shed light on the real human condition.

### **What may lie ahead**

Although gays are still virtually absent in the movies, it is encouraging to note that homosexual figures can now be seen in recent movies and TV series, providing some indication that times are changing.

Feng Xiaogang, a famous Chinese director whose hand prints are cemented on Hollywood Boulevard, recently directed three movies and produced one that have homosexual characters in them. They are *A World Without Thieves* (2004), *If You Are the One* (2008) and *If You Are the One II* (2010), and *The Message* (2009). The character Jasmine in *If You Are the One* (2008) explicitly comes out to the male lead in a brief scene. Some members of the gay community bemoaned that Jasmine, who displays “sissy” traits, portrays a negative stereotype (A Qiang, 2008; Jianming, 2008). However, sociologist Li Yinhe (2008) argues that characters like Jasmine offer a way of introducing gays to a mainstream audience. She describes four phases in the development of homosexual figures in cinema: (1) stereotyped supporting roles such as comic relief figures; (2) general supporting roles in which the characters are shown as regular people; (3) leading roles in homosexual-themed movies; and (4) leading roles in mainstream action, science fiction, and mystery movies. She thinks the appearance of gay characters as in *If You Are the One* (2008) is an

indication that gays are slipping into mainstream movies (Li, 2008).

Along these lines, two recent films, shown back-to-back within a week in 2013, also are worth noting. Both surprised audiences by showing same-sex couples publicly displaying affection.



Figure D-1. Two men hold hands at a café in *Love Deposit* (2013).



Figure D-2. Zhou Yi delivers her baby in the movie *Finding Mr. Right* (2013), The scene uncovers the mystery of Zhou’s complex relationship—and her real sexuality—when a voice-over and a subtitle asked viewers to “Let us bless them.”

The content of these two movies garnered praise from the Chinese homosexual community. To attract audiences, the director of *Love Deposit* brought the crew to a gay bar. The actress Hai Qing, who plays, the lesbian Zhou Yi in *Finding Mr. Right*, unabashedly told reporters, “Love is not divided by gender; it’s natural. I am very supportive of love among homosexuals” (A Qiang, 2013). Although homosexual content in both movies were shown only for a few seconds,, the positive images won public acclaim.

A popular 2014 TV series (the last episode of which rated second nationwide among all television series aired the same time)—*My Honey Bee Man*—featured a supporting male character, Jenny, who has a very pronounced feminine behavior. In one scene, Jenny’s manager, the star of the series, asks him to find her a fake boyfriend to make the man she loves jealous. She says, “Do you know why I ask you for help? I don’t want to hurt anyone...do you...understand?” Jenny smiles and answers, “Got you...I assure you, the person (the fake boyfriend) I find is a pacifist who owns guns, but would absolutely not fire at a woman.” This response suggests that the fake boyfriend is very possibly a homosexual and is therefore not interested in women.



Figure D-3. Jenny Wang plays a manager’s assistant in the TV series *My Honey Bee Man* (2014)

Jenny represents the director’s desire to bring a positive image of gays in the small screen. In its latest episode, a supporting character stresses during a wedding scene that. “Love is not about age, identity, social status, even gender...”



The movie *Flying Swords of Dragon Gate*, released in 2011, grossed approximately \$87,870,768 in Mainland China (IMDb, 2011). Chen Kun, who plays Yu Huatian, the androgynous character in the film, received public acclaim. In the movie, Yu Huatian echoes the role of Zhang Guorong in *Farewell My Concubine* (1993) who captivated countless fans. Himself gay, Zhang came out in 1997 during one of his concerts. As an actor, his portrayals of gay characters (he was also starred in *Happy Together*, a Hong Kong homosexual movie) have been successfully recognized by his fans. But being a homosexual in real life, he had suffered a lot of oppression from media as a public figure. He was diagnosed of depression, and commits to suicide at 2003. It is still a mystery that what led his death, but he was clearly exhausted by many stigmas.

His friends say that his death, also by suicide, may have been triggered by the general public's adoration of his portrayal of a gay character on the screen and its rejection of him as a homosexual in real life.

(Zhang Guorong was diagnosed having depression, he did suffer a lot by the paparazzi, but there is no evidence to say his death was caused by public's objection about him being gay)



Figure D-4. Yu Huatian is a popular figure in the movie *Flying Swords of Dragon Gate* (2011).

### Absent HIV-AIDS content

The public's fear of HIV-AIDS may have strengthened homophobic attitudes in China. In the 1980s, the Chinese generally believed that the disease originated from homosexual behavior in western countries. Thus, homosexuals were seen as agents of contamination. To combat HIV-AIDS, the state passed a law effectively prohibiting homosexuality (Li, 2012). A report released in 2012 showed that infections from male homosexual sex constitute only 20.4% of all cases of transmission. In contrast, the percentage of infections from heterosexual behavior stood at 67.2% (Li, 2012; China CDC, 2013), which contradicts the impression that homosexuals are the chief culprits and spreaders of HIV.

It should be noted, however, that the incidence of the disease among homosexual groups increased markedly over the last decade. That percentage rose from 0.2% in 2004 to 20.4% in 2013. This can be attributed to the fact that homosexuals change partners frequently, and also lack knowledge about how to protect themselves (Li, 2012). Xu Yi, who surveyed 927 gay men in the city of Hangzhou, found that most respondents do not use condoms and are not aware of their sexual partners' health condition. Some are fatalists, saying, "death is not a big deal" (Sina.com, 2004). Some cloak their real orientation by having sexual relations with heterosexuals, which exacerbates the spread and the perception that homosexuality is an unhealthy and dangerous lifestyle. Movies can help offset this sentiment by showing realistic gay lives.

None of the movies examined in this study touched on HIV-AIDS. An exception is the movie *The Old Testament* (2001) whose limited distribution precluded its inclusion in the current study's sample. In the movie, Xiao Bo, who lives with his boyfriend, Jian, brings to their abode Xiao Gang, who is HIV-positive, for a one-night stand. Learning about this betrayal, Jian left the relationship. Xiao Bo soon cannot afford Xiao Gang's medical expenses and decides to sell the



apartment. A prospective buyer, a woman, came to see it and ended up liking Xiao Bo instead. Xiao Bo thus becomes a male prostitute and dies at the end.

Cui Zien, an independent filmmaker wrote and directed the movie. A, famous scholar, he is also a homosexual who came out in 1991, when homosexuality was still prohibited in Mainland China. He paid a high price for admitting he is gay. The school where he was employed sent him to a hospital for his homosexuality. He was also widely criticized by the public. Perhaps because of these personal experiences, his movies embody plenty of darkness and break the general custom of having only one partner.

The lack of HIV-AIDS content in homosexual-themed movies may be an attempt to make these stories appealing to a general audience. Movies are, after all, meant for entertainment. *Dallas Buyers Club* (2013), a Hollywood movie about an HIV-positive person who establishes a “club” that offers alternative treatments to patients, was awarded the Academy Award for Best Actor in 2014. Such is not an easy feat.

### **Limitations and suggestions for future study**

This study analyzed only ten Chinese movies with homosexual themes or having a sufficient role for homosexual figures. The sample covered movies released from 1993 to 2009. To be included in the sample, the movies must have been directed by a Chinese director and performed by Chinese actors, and set in Mainland China or a Chinese community. Only those known and recognized by the public were studied.

The study reviews the evolution of gay characters in Chinese cinema, but focuses on Mainland China where censorship has been strictly enforced. Hong Kong and Taiwan are more open to the topic, as is indicated by the number of homosexual movies available and the number that received awards (*Intimates* was included in this study because the story is set in the mainland, although it was produced in Hong Kong). Thus, studies that compare the portrayal of gays in these

three cinema industries of China, which share the same culture but have different policies, are warranted.

This study is, in essence, a content analysis of a selected number of films in an effort to assess how gay people have been portrayed on the screen. It did not evaluate audience opinions and attitudes about these films, which future scholars may pursue. In this study, audience reactions are only inferred. Future studies may focus on audience effects to develop a comprehensive literature on the impact of gay-themed movies on peoples and societies.

## APPENDIX A

**GAY CHARACTERS IN CHINESE MOVIES:  
CODE BOOK FOR THE QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS**

Variable number	Variable name	Variable label	Values
1	Movie	Title of the movie	Enter string
2	Producer	Producer of the movie	Enter string
3	Date	Year of release	Enter string
4	Studio	Distributor of the movie	Enter string
5	Ban	Was movie banned in Mainland China?	1= yes 0= no
6	Number	Total number of gay characters in the movie	Enter number
7	Numlead	Number of gay characters in the movie in a lead role (main characters)	Enter number
8	Notlead	Number of gay characters in the movie <b>not</b> in a lead role	Enter number
9	GC1	Whether the first gay character has an implicit or explicit role	1= implicit role 2= explicit role
10	GC2	Whether the second gay character has an implicit or explicit role	1= implicit role 2= explicit role
11	GC3	Whether the third gay character has an implicit or explicit role	1= implicit role 2= explicit role
12	lightGC1	Is the first gay character portrayed in a	1= positive

		negative or positive light?	0= negative
13	lightGC2	Is the second gay portrayed in a negative or positive light?	1= positive 0= negative
14	lightGC3	Is the third gay portrayed in a negative or positive light?	1= positive 0= negative
15	Closet1	Does the first gay character come out of the closet?	1= yes 0= no
16	Closet2	Does the second gay character come out of the closet?	1= yes 0= no
17	Closet3	Does the third gay character come out of the closet?	1= yes 0= no
18	Outed1	Does someone detect he/she is a gay and point it out to the public?	1= yes 0= no
19	Outed2	Does someone detect he/she is a gay and point it out to the public?	1= yes 0= no
20	Outed3	Does someone detect he/she is a gay and point it out to the public?	1= yes 0= no
21	ReacHet1	How do public/other heterosexual characters (if there is any) react to his/her homosexuality?	Enter as string
22	ReacHet2	How do public/other heterosexual characters (if there is any) react to his/her homosexuality?	Enter as string

23	ReacHet3	How do public/other heterosexual characters (if there is any) react to his/her homosexuality?	Enter as string
24	Pde	Do the gay characters show public display of emotion	1= yes 0= no
25	Sex	Were gay characters shown in explicit/implicit sex scenes	1= explicit 2= implicit 0= no
26	Sissy1	Is the first gay character showing sissy qualities?	1= yes 0= no
27	Sissyt1	Sissy qualities displayed by the first gay character	Enter as string
28	Sissy2	Is the second gay character showing sissy qualities?	1= yes 0= no
29	Sissyt2	Sissy qualities displayed by the second gay character	Enter as string
30	Sissy3	Is the third gay character showing sissy qualities?	1= yes 0= no
31	Sissyt3	Sissy qualities displayed by the third gay character	Enter as string
32	JobGC1	Job of first gay character	Enter as string
33	JobGC2	Job of second gay character	Enter as string
34	JobGC3	Job of third gay character	Enter as string

35	Proaff1	Does the detection of the first character's homosexuality affect his/her profession?	1= yes 0= no
36	Proaff2	Does the detection of the second character's homosexuality affect his/her profession?	1= yes 0= no
37	Proaff3	Does the detection of the third character's homosexuality affect his/her profession?	1= yes 0= no
38	PortGC1	Personal traits. Example: artistic, sarcastic, sympathetic, emotional, volatile, sad, or flimsy	Enter as string
39	PortGC2	Personal traits. Example: artistic, sarcastic, sympathetic, emotional, volatile, sad, or flimsy	Enter as string
40	PortGC3	Personal traits. Example: artistic, sarcastic, sympathetic, emotional, volatile, sad, or flimsy	Enter as string
41	Marri1	Does a heterosexual marriage or an attempt marriage affect the homosexual character by any chance?	1= yes 0= no
42	Marri2	Does a heterosexual marriage or an attempt marriage affect the homosexual character by any chance?	1= yes 0= no
43	Marri3	Does a heterosexual marriage or an attempt marriage affect the homosexual character by any chance?	1= yes 0= no

		any chance?	
44	MarrAff1	How does marriage affect the character's homosexuality and personal life?	Enter as string
45	MarrAff2	How does marriage affect the character's homosexuality and personal life?	Enter as string
46	MarrAff3	How does marriage affect the character's homosexuality and personal life?	Enter as string
47	Hide1	Does the character use any means to hide his/her homosexual identity?	1= yes 0= no
48	Hide2	Does the character use any means to hide his/her homosexual identity?	1= yes 0= no
49	Hide3	Does the character use any means to hide his/her homosexual identity?	1= yes 0= no
50	Obstacle1	What kind of obstacle he/she faced to oppose their sexual orientation	Enter as string
51	Obstacle2	What kind of obstacle he/she faced to oppose their sexual orientation	Enter as string
52	Obstacle3	What kind of obstacle he/she faced to oppose their sexual orientation	Enter as string
53	ObsReac1	How does he/she react to the obstacle?	Enter as string
54	ObsReac2	How does he/she react to the obstacle?	Enter as string
55	ObsReac3	How does he/she react to the obstacle?	Enter as string
56	GayCom	Is gay community portrayed in the film?	1= yes

			0= no
57	GayComH	How does gay community portrayed in the film?	Enter as string
58	Outcome1	What is the outcome of this character?	Enter as string
59	Outcome2	What is the outcome of this character?	Enter as string
60	Outcome3	What is the outcome of this character?	Enter as string
61	Turnpoin1	What is the turning point to affect the outcome	Enter as string
62	Turnpoin2	What is the turning point to affect the outcome	Enter as string
63	Turnpoin3	What is the turning point to affect the outcome	Enter as string



**APPENDIX B**  
**THE AWARDS AND NOMINATIONS**

<b>Movie title</b>	<b>Name of the awards</b>	<b>Achievements</b>
<i>Farewell My Concubine</i>	Academy Awards, USA (1994)	Nominations of Best Cinematography and Best Foreign Language Film
	Golden Globes, USA (1994)	Nomination of Best Foreign Language Film
	BAFTA Awards (1994)	Winner of Best Film not in the English Language
	Camerimage (1993)	Winner of Silver Grog for Gu Changwei (cinematographer) Nomination of Golden Frog for Gu Changwei
	Boston Society of Film Critics Awards (1993)	Winner of Best Foreign Language Film
	Cannes Film Festival (1993)	Winner of FIPRESCI Prize for Chen Kaige (director) Winner of Palme d'Or for Chen Kaige (director)
	Los Angeles Film Critics Association Awards (1993)	Winner of Best Foreign Film
	National Board of Review, USA (1993)	Winners of Best Foreign Language Film and Top Foreign Films
	New York Film Critics Circle Awards 1993	Best of Best Supporting Actress and Best Foreign Language Film
	César Awards, France (1994)	Nomination of Best Foreign Film (Meilleur film étranger)
Dallas-Fort Worth Film Critics Association Awards (1994)	Winner of Best Foreign-Language Film	

	<p>Italian National Syndicate of Film Journalists (1994)</p> <p>National Society of Film Critics Awards, USA (1994)</p> <p>Political Film Society, USA (1994)</p> <p>London Critics Circle Film Awards (1995)</p> <p>Mainichi Film Concours (1995)</p>	<p>Nomination of Best Foreign Director</p> <p>3rd place of Best Foreign Language Film</p> <p>Winner of Foreign Language Film of the Year</p> <p>Winner of Best Foreign Language Film</p>
<i>East Palace, West Palace</i>	<p>Mar del Plata Film Festival (1996)</p>	<p>Winner of Best Director</p> <p>Winner of Best Screenplay (Wang Xiaobo)</p> <p>Winner of Special Mention (cinematography)</p>
<i>Intimates</i>	<p>Golden Bauhinia Awards (1998)</p> <p>Golden Horse Film Festival (1997)</p> <p>Hong Kong Film Awards (1998)</p>	<p>Winner of Best Actress (Carina Lau)</p> <p>Nomination of Best Supporting Actress (Theresa Lee)</p> <p>Nomination of Best Actress (Carina Lau) and Best Supporting Actress (Theresa Lee)</p>
<i>Men and Women</i>	<p>Locarno International Film Festival (1999)</p> <p>Pusan International Film Festival (1999)</p>	<p>Winner of FIPRESCI Prize for Bingjian Liu (director)</p> <p>Nomination of Golden Leopard for Bingjian Liu (director)</p> <p>Nomination of Golden Leopard for Bingjian Liu (director)</p>
<i>Fleeing by Night</i>	<p>Asia-Pacific Film Festival (2001)</p> <p>Chicago International Film Festival (2000)</p>	<p>Winner of Best Music</p> <p>New Directors Competition Li-Kong Hsu (director)</p> <p>Chi Yin (director)</p>

	Golden Horse Film Festival (2000)	Nomination of Best Supporting Actor (Leon Dai)
	Hawaii International Film Festival (2000)	Nomination of Golden Male Award for Narrative Feature Li-Kong Hsu (director) Chi Yin (director)
	Torino International Gay & Lesbian Film Festival (2001)	Winner of Best Feature Film
<i>Lan Yu</i>	Cinefan - Festival of Asian and Arab Cinema (2002)	Winner of Betpac Award for Stanley Kwan (for its sensitive and insightful depiction of love relationships in a society that remains intolerant of personal choices)
	Glitter Awards (2003)	Winner of Best Feature - International Gay Film Festivals
	Golden Bauhinia Awards (2002)	Winner of Best Actor (Jun Hu, Who plays Chen Handong)
	Golden Horse Film Festival (2001)	Winner of Best Actor (Ye Liu, who plays Lan Yu) Winner of Best Director Winner of Best Screenplay Adapted from Another Source Winner of Best Editing Nomination of Best Actor (Jun Hu)
	Hong Kong Film Awards (2002)	Nominations of Best Picture, Best Director, Best Actor (Jun Hu), Best Actor (Ye Liu), Best Supporting Actress, Best Screenplay, Best Cinematography, Best Art Direction, Best Costume & Make up Design, Best Original Film Score, and Best Film Editing
	Hong Kong Film Critics Society Awards (2002)	Winner of Film of Merit

	Vesoul Asian Film Festival (2002)	Winner of Golden Wheel for Stanley Kwan
<i>Saving Face</i>	GLAAD Media Awards (2006)	Nomination of GLAAD Media Award (Outstanding Film - Limited Release)
	Golden Horse Film Festival (2005)	Winner of Viewer's Choice Award Nomination of Best Actress (Michelle Krusiec, who plays Wil)
	Gotham Awards (2005)	Nomination of Breakthrough Director Award
	San Diego Asian Film Festival (2005)	Winner of Visionary Award for Alice Wu (director)
	San Francisco International Asian American Film Festival (2005)	Winner of Best Narrative (Alice Wu)
<i>The Chinese Botanist's Daughters</i>	Montréal World Film Festival (2006)	Winner of Best Artistic Contribution Winner of Most Popular Canadian Feature Nomination of Grand Prix des Amériques
	Toronto Inside Out Lesbian and Gay Film and Video Festival (2007)	Winner of Best Canadian Film or Video
<i>And the Spring Comes</i>	Asian Film Awards (2009)	Nominations of Best Actress and Best Screenwriter
	Golden Phoenix Awards, China (2009)	Winner of New Performer
	Golden Rooster Awards (2009)	Winner of Best Actress Nominations of <b>Best Supporting Actor (Jiao Gang, who plays Hu Jinquan)</b> , Best Film, Best Supporting Actress, and Best Screenplay
	Rome Film Fest (2007)	Winner of Best Actress Nomination of Best Director
	Shanghai Film Critics	Winner of Film of Merit

	Awards (2008) Chinese Film Media Awards (2009)	Nomination of <b>Best Supporting Actor (Jiao Gang, who plays Hu Jinquan)</b>
<i>Spring Fever</i>	Cannes Film Festival (2009) Golden Horse Film Festival (2010)	Winner of Best Screenplay Nomination of Palme d'Or for Ye Lou (director) Nomination of Best Actor (Qin Hao Qing, who plays Jiang Cheng)

(Form IMDb)

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