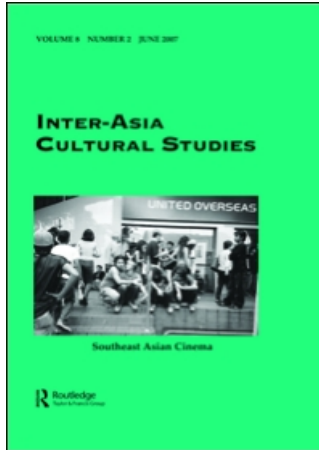


This article was downloaded by:[Leung, Helen Hok-Sze]
On: 12 December 2007
Access Details: [subscription number 788267185]
Publisher: Routledge
Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954
Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Inter-Asia Cultural Studies

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713701267>

Archiving queer feelings in Hong Kong

Helen Hok-Sze Leung

Online Publication Date: 01 December 2007

To cite this Article: Leung, Helen Hok-Sze (2007) 'Archiving queer feelings in Hong Kong', Inter-Asia Cultural Studies, 8:4, 559 - 571

To link to this article: DOI: 10.1080/14649370701568011

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14649370701568011>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.informaworld.com/terms-and-conditions-of-access.pdf>

This article maybe used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

Archiving queer feelings in Hong Kong

Helen Hok-Sze LEUNG

ABSTRACT *This article argues for the revitalization of a productive tension between 'queer' and 'theory' and underscores its necessity for a study of 'local queer theory.' While there is an apparent lack of academic queer theory in Hong Kong, there are numerous examples of writings that advance theoretical positions, albeit in unfamiliar guises. The article analyzes three examples of queer writings by Hong Kong authors, penned between 1984 and 2000. Focusing on the texts' archival effect and affective expression, the analysis demonstrates that these writings form an archive of queer feelings. As a repository of the discomfort and anxiety that are constitutive of queer lives, these writings can offer fruitful interventions into current theoretical debates. The article concludes with a call for more creative and irreverent – in short, queerer – ways of localizing the global phenomenon of queer theory.*

KEYWORDS: queer theory, local/global, Hong Kong, archive, affect

What counts as theory?

Asking this question at the beginning of her book *Theory in its Feminist Travels*, Katie King examines 'theory' as a historically and politically contingent sign deployed and defended for various investments and interests. King's study makes clear that what counts as 'theory' is never governed by an objective or universalist standard. Contextualized within the politics of publication, King examines the specific strategies through which particular forms of theory become 'marked' as such, how they travel globally, and how local and unmarked 'theory' may be made invisible – but may also in turn challenge or alter – generic theoretical forms (King 1994: 2). With a frankness not found too often in academic publications, King also exposes the ways in which the works of feminists of color had been appropriated through improper citations and produced *as theory only* when those ideas were attributed to prominent white academic 'stars' (King 1994: 146–147). For King, 'theory' should ultimately only be thought with this qualification in mind:

Thus, this term 'theory' has to be bracketed in feminist thinking now, used ironically and proudly, shamedfacedly and shrewdly, gloriously and preposterously, if it is really to convey anything like what feminists are doing in the academy and elsewhere. (King 1994: 147)

King's insights and caution about what counts as 'theory' in feminist contexts are just as relevant to a consideration of theory in its queer travels. The institutionalization of queer theory has made proper objects out of bodies, pleasures, identities, emotions, and practices that were hitherto considered deviant, unruly, rude, dangerous. At the same time, these are constituted as objects of theory only in so far as they are articulated in recognizable theoretical forms, within specific intellectual trajectories, and by theorists working in bona fide academic positions. It has often seemed to me that queer theory is defined more by the institutional parameters of 'theory' than by the critical reach of 'queer' which can deform

those very parameters. For instance, in the conclusion to her lucid and concise account of the discursive formation of queer theory, Annamarie Jagose advocates the continual potential of queer as a term of self-critique, an 'identity under construction, a site of permanent becoming' and a means of 'interrogating both the preconditions of identity and its effects' (Jagose 1997: 131–132). Yet, there is surprisingly no consideration of the possibility that the category theory – in other words, the form and not just the content of queer theory – may also benefit from similar processes of self-critique. In 'The normalization of queer theory,' David Halperin recalls queer theory's 'scandalous' origin, which he attributes to a moment at a conference in 1990 when Teresa de Lauretis paired the 'scurrilous term ["queer"] with the academic holy word "theory"' (Halperin 2003: 339–340). Halperin argues that this initially radical provocation gradually undergoes a process of domestication as queer theory becomes institutionally acceptable:

The first step is for the 'theory' in queer theory to prevail over the 'queer,' for 'queer' to become a harmless qualifier of 'theory' ... It can [then] be folded back into the standard practice of literary and cultural studies, without impeding academic business as usual. The next step was to despecify the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or transgressive content of queerness, thereby abstracting queer and turning it into a generic badge of subversiveness, a more trendy version of 'liberal' ... (Halperin 2003: 341)

The ease with which 'queer theory' is now consumed within the academy belies its radical inception which, as Halperin reminds us, was motivated 'first and foremost by an impulse to *transform* what could count as knowledge' (Halperin 2003: 343, my emphasis). It is all the more crucial that this impulse to transform – marked in queer theory's original formulation by the (then) offensive incompatibility of the two irreverently juxtaposed terms – should not be forgotten as we turn to a consideration of 'local theories.' Lest such an endeavor becomes nothing more than a continual institutionalization of queer theory, the qualifier 'local' must not be taken to simply denote local variants of a globally intelligible body of knowledge. Rather, the anxiety-laden exploration of what exactly constitutes the 'local queer' – a process John Erni argues is always structured by lines of discontinuities, divided loyalties and ambiguous subject-positions (Erni 2003: 384) – behooves us *also* to rethink the relation between 'queer' and 'theory.' In fact, one way for 'local theories' to bring 'global queer' to a productive crisis is to reinvigorate the *distance* between 'queer' and 'theory' such that their very juxtaposition may provoke unease, embarrassment or even offense – as it once did when de Lauretis first uttered those terms together in a conference room almost two decades ago.

Hong Kong provides a challenging but potentially rewarding context for such an undertaking. Unlike the critical scene in Taiwan, there is no comparably coherent formation of a field that can be readily named 'queer theory' in Hong Kong. First of all, academic studies on issues related to sexual and gender minorities have remained scattered on the margins of a handful of disciplines – notably Social Work, Sociology, Cultural Studies and Gender Studies – with no 'critical mass' to form a viable field on its own. These scattered scholarly efforts also tend to be disseminated primarily in English: colonial legacy and the corporate university's drive towards internationalization ensure that academic publications in English 'count' much more significantly towards tenure and promotion. As a result, critical writings on queer issues in English, even when penned by Hong Kong-based scholars (such as Sik-Ying Ho, Travis Kong, John Erni and Mirana Szeto) tend to be published in international journals and, by necessity, reflect the critical priorities of English-language debates. Chinese-language writings that are disseminated locally are often authored by activists and creative writers whose concerns with queer issues are not primarily academic. Even the Chinese-language works by academic writers (such as, for instance, Yau Ching who in addition to being a filmmaker also holds a university faculty position) often appear

in non-academic venues (newspaper columns, magazine articles, and non-academic publications) and are adapted to the stylistic demands of those media. While these writings form a rich repository of queer thought, they do not fit academic publishers' lists, conform to the demands of peer review, or establish positions within current academic debates. With a categorically different kind of political and emotional investment than that of generic theory, they reflect concerns that are entangled with local developments of a specific place and time, address an audience not limited to the academic community, and written with a degree of stylistic freedom, critical ambiguity, and emotional frankness far greater than what is usually allowed in academic theoretical writings. By bringing these writings into a consideration of 'local theories,' I am not arguing for their inclusion as theory in order to elevate their status within the academy. Nor am I suggesting that all forms of thought should be approached as theory *tout court*. Rather, I am led by a queer impulse to pervert the boundaries of queer theory – now respectably distant from its scandalous origin – by attending to precisely what appears to be outside its proper domain. What queer effects may result from this critical impropriety? What dimensions of (local) queer life may be uncovered when (global) theory is made to bend out of its habitual shape? Most of all, how may our understanding of 'what counts as theory' – what constitutes theoretical efforts – be transformed by queering the generic boundaries of a recently institutionalized field of knowledge? In my exploration of these questions, I deliberately turn away from the argumentative and towards the archival and affective aspects of local queer writings. I argue that they constitute significant interventions into current theoretical debates, albeit in unusual guises. After all, collecting things and experiencing emotions are not usually seen as means of advancing theoretical positions. My point though is that they *can be*, particularly when recognizing that they do call upon us to read, use, and do theory a bit more strangely.

In *An Archive of Feelings*, Ann Cvetkovich examines what she calls an 'unusual archive,' the materials of which point to ephemeral phenomena and are themselves ephemeral. Indeed, ephemerality is a defining feature of Cvetkovich's twin objects of study: trauma and queer culture. While the former is rendered unspeakable and unrepresentable in mainstream and therapy culture, the latter risks being forgotten due to institutional marginalization and neglect. By undertaking a study that recovers and makes visible cultural traces that have hitherto remained obscured in public spheres, Cvetkovich's critical work examines as well as *produces* an archive of queer trauma (Cvetkovich 2003: 7–8). In her analysis and documentation of queer subculture, Judith Halberstam further suggests that an archive serves as a 'theory of cultural relevance, a construction of collective memory, and a complex record of queer activity' (Halberstam 2005: 169–170). For Halberstam, queer archival efforts are also *theoretical efforts*: they reconceptualize the boundaries of what is deemed culturally relevant (and thus worthy of being archived). Halberstam demonstrates that archival activities take place not only in academic writings but also in cultural productions that invoke genealogical influences and community memories in both their content and in the continuation and mutual influences between forms (Halberstam 2005: 170–171). Thus, for both Cvetkovich and Halberstam, queer archives are constituted dialogically: through the subject as well as object of their critical writing. Likewise, my efforts in this article to analyze scattered fragments of Hong Kong's local queer thought attempt to archive works that stay only fleetingly in print and have by and large remained outside established academic circuits of exchange (e.g. published citations, conference mentions, and classroom uses). At the same time, the very works that I discuss are *themselves* archival efforts at documenting queer lives and queer cultures. The dialogic interplay between these textual efforts – their impulse to archive queer phenomena as well as my impulse to 'collect' these writings in this essay and by extension in an emergent archive of 'local theories' – bespeaks a form of theoretical intervention: a way to re-examine what is worthy of research and what counts as knowledge.

Cvetkovich also describes the materials she analyzes as an archive of *feelings* in order to highlight the function of cultural texts as a repository of feelings and emotions. Cvetkovich suggests that this affective dimension is encoded not only in the content of the texts, but also in the practices that surround their production and reception (Cvetkovich 2003: 7). Her study shows that experiences and articulation of trauma are often constitutive of a rich and fulfilling queer culture. As her analysis focuses on ways in which traumatic emotions are culturally *productive*, it avoids value judgments over whether an emotion – be it anger, shame, hatred – is positive or negative. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*, Sara Ahmed makes an important intervention into the frequently debated opposition between queer assimilation (i.e. efforts to be included into normative structures such as marriage) and queer resistance (i.e. efforts to maintain a stance against *all* norms). For Ahmed, while assimilation upholds the normative distinction between legitimate and illegitimate lives, the queer ideal of perpetually maintaining a ‘transgressive’ life against norms is a possibility available only to some and one that, even for those few, may exact too great a physical, psychical, and economic toll. Instead of understanding assimilation and resistance as conservative or radical choices in queer lives, Ahmed draws our attention instead to the possibly productive and generative condition of queer subjects – willing or otherwise – inhabiting norms. Ahmed understands ‘queer feelings’ as *discomfort*: queer lives are uncomfortable as they must inhabit structures whose contours they misfit and live by narratives whose scripts they fail to reproduce. The pressure such queer discomfort brings to bear on the norms it fails to reproduce becomes, for Ahmed, a sign of how queer lives may affect and ‘work on’ the social structures they neither embrace nor reject (Ahmed 2004: 146–155). Guided by both Cvetkovich’s and Ahmed’s ideas, I choose to focus on the emotions generated in the texts I examine while opting out of the critical authority that adjudicates between good and bad arguments. In fact, I want to show that both good and bad – or for that matter, strong or weak, daring or timid – arguments can generate intriguingly queer feelings that are manifest as discomfort, unease, and anxiety.

I now turn to three texts to explore successive ‘moments’ of queer thought in Hong Kong. Not only are these writings representative of particular local contexts, they also bear an uneasy or tenuous relation to academic publishing: Samshasha’s *History of Homosexuality in China* (1997) has been allegedly plagiarized and is no longer in print; Chou Wah-Shan’s self-published *The Postcolonial Tongzhi* (1998) has garnered severe criticism as an academic work; while Anson Mak’s *Bisexual Desire* (2000), which straddles the generic boundaries of creative and critical writings, has remained largely unknown (and is rarely referenced) in academic studies. At the same time, these unwitting or – as I will argue in Mak’s case – self-conscious moments of ‘failure,’ along with the discomfort and anxiety they signal, constitute the most theoretically productive dimensions of these writings. As part of a necessarily incomplete and open-ended archive of queer feelings in Hong Kong, these works warrant quite a bit more of our critical attention.

Queer history and its discontent

In a new preface written for the 1997 edition of *History of Homosexuality in China*, the late writer and activist Samshasha expresses a series of anxieties around the reception and social influence of his 1984 work. Bringing together an extensive collection of textual and anthropological evidence drawn from official court records, apocryphal accounts, religious documents, legal codes, medical manuals, literature, paintings, the plastic arts, ritual artifacts, accounts by foreign missionaries and spanning thousands of years of recorded history from the Zhou Dynasty (1122–500 BC) to the present day, the book purports to archive ‘abandoned’ fragments of history to prove that there has always been a tradition of ‘same-sex love’ in China. Samshasha’s expressed anxieties in the revised edition illustrate

both the possibilities and the peril inspired by this massive historiographic project, one that was undertaken independent of academic institutions and disseminated through an alternative press.

In the preface, Samshasha first sketches the social change that has taken place between the two editions of the book: in the 1980s, social attitudes towards homosexuality had 'improved', yet the discussion around AIDS had revived the claim that 'like AIDS, homosexuality was imported from the West'; by the late 1990s, even though homosexuality was no longer viewed as a foreign import while social movements for gay rights were flourishing in both Hong Kong and Taiwan, there were new concerns with 'Mainland Chinese attitude towards homosexuals in Hong Kong after July 1, 1997' (Samshasha 1997: 1). Samshasha then presents the most significant change in the new edition: a reformulation of his theory in the original book that 'homophobia [was] imported from the West.' Samshasha claims that his theory is now 'defunct' and should be reframed as the 'Westernization of homophobia' in China. Towards the end of the preface, Samshasha refers to the suspected plagiarism of his book by an American academic (Samshasha 1997: 2) as well as his reluctance to include erotic images from the Ming and Qing dynasties lest the theme of homosexuality becomes exclusively associated with sex (Samshasha 1997: 3). The content of the historical evidence gathered in the book has remained essentially the same between the two editions. However, the author's rather awkward re-positioning of this material as well as his anxieties over how this material has been (and may in future be) received or appropriated illustrate how shifts in local/global discursive relations affect the significance of a queer archive.

At the time of the book's first edition, homosexual acts between men under all circumstances were still illegal in Hong Kong. A series of scandals involving prominent British civil servants (most notably the MacLennan Incident in 1980, in which a police officer under investigation on charges of alleged homosexuality 'committed suicide' under very suspicious circumstances) prompted the colonial government to introduce legal reforms to bring about decriminalization. The actual bill which legalized consensual homosexual acts in private was enacted only in 1991, after nearly a decade of fierce debates and hostile opposition. One of the most commonly heard objections to decriminalization was the charge that homosexuality is essentially a product of the West. The colonial government's attempt to legalize this alien behavior, according to this view, posed a threat to traditional Chinese values. It was in indignant response to this kind of thinking that Samshasha rushed to finish the research that he started some years ago while studying in the US. Writing as an 'angry Chinese' (Samshasha 1997: 4), Samshasha argues that it is not so much homosexuality but homophobia which is an import from the West. His argument is built on two fronts: from the material he has assembled to prove that same-sex love has flourished for thousands of years alongside the Confucian order, and from the fact that the law against consensual homosexual behavior that the government was trying to repeal in the 1980s was inherited from British laws and deviates significantly from the pre-modern Chinese legal tradition. Samshasha is aware of the 'illicit sex' (*jian*) laws during the Ming and Qing dynasties and the juridical construction of sodomy as a 'pollution' of chastity (Samshasha 1997: 10, 20–21). However, not unlike the interpretation of Kang Zhengguo (Kang 1996: 109–162) and Matthew Sommer (Sommer 2000: 114–165), Samshasha understands Chinese laws to be regulatory mechanisms that protect the gendered hierarchies of the Confucian household rather than a proscription of homosexuality per se. (In fact, Samshasha will suggest that this regulatory impulse paradoxically also functions to *sanction* certain gendered forms of what we would now call homosexuality – an argument he makes explicit in the revised edition and which I will return to in the next section). Samshasha's polemic was a powerful rebuttal at a time when the majority of oppositional arguments, including those made from religious or moral perspectives, invoked 'Chinese tradition' to appeal to anti-

colonial sentiments and patriotic cultural pride (Ho 1997: 80–82). Anti-coloniality and homophobia were constructed as each other's alibi and Samshasha's sweeping historiographic efforts aimed at undoing that relation. Yet, by the time the revised edition came out on the eve of Hong Kong's sovereignty transfer from British to Chinese hands in 1997, the discursive relationship between homophobia, coloniality and nationalism had shifted considerably. Anti-colonial sentiments had been displaced by fears over the uncertainty of impending Chinese rule and by the pressure (or temptation) to become 'suddenly patriotic' (*hurán aiguo*) as many opportunistic ex-colonials had done, to great personal benefits. Meanwhile, the social movement for sexual minorities – now dubbed the *tongzhi* movement – had been flourishing with a decidedly nativist cast. The imperative to 'find our own path' dominated the agenda of the first Chinese Tongzhi Conference in Hong Kong (Loo 1999: 392–424) and continued to exert influence on subsequent rhetoric. Parallel to these local developments was the concurrent and continuing globalization of an increasingly universalist conception of homosexuality. Although not explicitly stated in his book, Samshasha was clearly also concerned with the latter development: in an interview with Mark McLelland for the journal *Intersections*, he laments that modern gay movements all over the world seem to be primarily influenced by Western notions of sexuality and are ignorant of indigenous expressions of alternative forms of sexuality (Samshasha 2000: para. 41).

The anxiety-ridden preface of the 1997 edition of *History of Homosexuality in China* was produced by the convergence of all these discursive currents: a very recent history of homophobia appropriated as a form of anti-colonial discourse, the advent of Chinese nationalism replacing colonial ideology as the new hegemony, and the rise of a global homosexual identity that threatens to subsume all sexual variance in its monolithic image. While the original intention of the project was to prove the existence of a Chinese tradition of homosexuality, Samshasha's awareness of the discursive shifts in Hong Kong society and the potential for nativist tendencies in *tongzhi* discourse to be appropriated into a newly hegemonic Chinese nationalism prompts him to reframe his understanding of homophobia in Hong Kong as a *Westernized* rather than Western phenomenon. This modification allows Samshasha to theorize that, prior to Westernization, homophobia in Chinese culture functioned 'implicitly' through a 'fuzzy transgender-transsexual pansexualism' (Samshasha 1997: 12) that sanctioned same-sex love but only in so far as it involved a transgender feminization of the male partner and the coexistence of heterosexual familial relationships. This new formulation theorizes a unique – but not unproblematic – system of sexual regulation in pre-modern China. It reflects Samshasha's attempt to both launch an argument for the uniqueness of Chinese homosexuality while at the same time refrains from celebrating it as a solely positive tradition. While this attempt helps Samshasha resolve one source of tension, it also immediately breeds others. The explanation reduces transgender embodiments and bisexual desire as merely regulatory mechanisms that facilitate same-sex love under a regime of 'implicit homophobia.' This blind spot is further reinforced by the retention of the book's original title, which categorizes its diverse historical material under the sign homosexuality (or 'same-sex love' [*tongxing'ai*] in Chinese) even though Samshasha has pointed out elsewhere that 'there isn't even an exact term for *homosexual* in Chinese history and we certainly don't have any precedent for the concept *gay*' (Samshasha 2000: para. 39). Yet, what is most productive about the book's shifting tension and anxiety is what they reveal about the book's (and more generally queer historiography's) negotiation with crisscrossing discursive currents. From his angry assertion of cultural uniqueness to the cautionary repositioning of that uniqueness, Samshasha exposes the need to signify an archive in relation to the discursive alignment of power at any given time. The naming and organization of historical material is never

complete and the anxiety-ridden 'tic' to *continually* rename and reframe those material may ultimately be the only productive strategy for doing queer history.

Aside from the anxious repositioning of the book's central argument, the 1997 preface also betrays the author's anger over an alleged case of plagiarism. Samshasha explains that he did not pursue legal action only because of limited financial resources. He also thanks two American scholars for their published discussion of the case which 'brought a correct understanding to the international academic circle' (Samshasha 1997: 2–3). The alleged work of plagiarism refers to Bret Hinsch's *Passions of the Cut Sleeve* (1992) which assembles similar archival material and advances a similar argument about the Western 'origin' of homophobia in China (Samshasha 2000: para. 61–64). Samshasha's self-construction as an injured party in this case prompts us to ask questions regarding the politics of publication and its impact on the circulation and adaptation of knowledge. In her review of Hinsch's book in 1991, Charlotte Furth approaches the plagiarism charge from two angles. First, she attributes it to Chinese gays and lesbians' resistance against 'powerful outsiders' appropriating a local cause. Second, she faults Hinsch not for plagiarism but for relying on secondary material without tracing their primary sources: the parallels between Hinsch's and Samshasha's works in Furth's view result from their reliance on the same secondary source (Furth 1991: 912). What I find missing in Furth's discussion, regardless of whether Hinsch's work can actually be considered an act of plagiarism, is the unequal power dynamic between scholarly studies with institutional support and independent research conducted outside of the academy. Not only do English-language works already enjoy a global reach of dissemination while Chinese-language works tend to get ghettoized (because rarely translated) within local regions, a work by an author with a PhD and published by a prestigious university press automatically accrues more scholarly credential and longevity than an amateur historian's work published by a little-known independent press with few print runs. (Hinsch's book is still in print and widely cited in the field while Samshasha's is no longer easily available.) Moreover, the boundary between citation, translation, and outright plagiarism is more easily disrespected when one party is outside of the established academic circuit of exchange. It would likely have been unthinkable for Hinsch to use the material in the same way had Samshasha's work been that of an established sinologist published in English. Samshasha's anger and desolate dependence on other scholars' efforts to adjudicate over the case in the international scene reveal the hierarchical politics of publication and the immense difficulty for local queer works, especially those conducted outside of established academic circles, to enter into the international scene of scholarly debates as equal and respected partners in dialogue (as opposed to being appropriated or consumed as raw material). This unequal politics of publication also spawns other unexpected (and seemingly unrelated) effects. In the book, Samshasha mentions his extensive collection of erotic images from the Ming and Qing period which he has deliberately excluded from both editions of the book (Samshasha 1997: 3). He explains that the images are left out because he does not wish the theme of homosexuality always to be associated with sex. This reflects an uncharacteristically prudish concern that reproduces the normative distinction between good/chaste (hetero)sexuality and bad/promiscuous (homo)sexuality. Yet, as my discussion of Sara Ahmed's work previously has shown, those in relative positions of privilege can more often afford to practice the queer ideal of transgression. This seemingly prudish gesture likely reflects a prudent impulse to protect his historiographic work from being pushed further beyond the realm of respectable scholarship. More than anything else in the book, this easily overlooked act of self-censorship signifies the most heightened form of queer discomfort. It also serves as a somewhat grim reminder that theoretical agency is always contingent on one's relative position within the hierarchical politics of publication.

Heterosexual melancholia

If Samshasha had been concerned that an overly celebratory cultural essentialism would result from the influence of his historical work, then the Chinese-language writings of sociologist Chou Wah-Shan signal a period of queer thought in Hong Kong that rides precisely on the wave of such an influence. Aside from a handful of articles in English, Chou's main publications during 1993–1997 were in Chinese. This voluminous body of work (over ten books) represents a problematic but visibly productive period in queer theorizing in Hong Kong. Furthermore, while Chou held a faculty position in the University of Hong Kong during this time, his works in Chinese were self-published by a now defunct small press Tongzhi Studies Group (*Tongzhi yanjiu she*) that appeared to be devoted to the publication of Chou's own work. The status of Chou's Chinese language works is thus ambiguous: while Chou occupied an established academic position, his Chinese-language publications were not disseminated through accredited academic channels and not held up to standardized processes of scrutiny. While this 'freedom' has certainly resulted in major problems in Chou's work as scholarship, it also gives queer issues an unprecedentedly popular visibility in Hong Kong. As I will argue later, it also allows Chou an affective outlet that sheds light on some intriguing issues.

In her study of radicalism in contemporary Chinese societies, Mirana Szeto offers a meticulous critique of Chou's works, in particular his conceptualization of 'Chinese *tongzhi*' as a theoretical category. Szeto exposes the complicity between Chou's self-positioned racialized and colonized victimhood and a problematic reassertion of hegemonic ideologies, amongst which are: a neo-Confucian 'familism'; frequent instances of cultural essentialism despite repeated denials; an essentialist consolidation of *tongzhi* as a monolithic identity, often at the expense of women; an anti-colonial hysteria that may be a pathological after-effect of the colonial condition (Szeto 2004: 378–441). Szeto's work provides a critical look at what has often appeared in mainstream culture at the time to be the only possible queer discourse in Hong Kong. Szeto's critique is unrelentingly harsh: not only does she disagree with Chou on almost every single issue, she also questions his work on *ethical* grounds while characterizing his argumentative flaws in pathological terms. Ironically Szeto's critique (perhaps unintentionally) accords a form of academic respect towards Chou's works: through citations and serious critical engagement, Szeto's discussion actually serves to archive Chou's work as a form of serious scholarship, albeit one with which she is in fierce contention. What interests me most, however, is Szeto's intense aversion to Chou's persistent rhetoric of self-positioned victimhood, which betrays *her* unease towards a fundamental question: what is at stake in a self-identified straight man's decade-long affective investment in queer lives? Moreover, Szeto's unease is evidently, if unwittingly, *shared* by Chou himself who displays throughout his work these paradoxical emotions: an intense shame over his heterosexuality on the one hand and an equally intense fear of homosexuality (not in theory but evidently in practice) on the other. How may we best approach this affective investment in (and simultaneous disavowal of) queerness? How may Chou's work serve as an archive of queer feelings?

In *Postcolonial Tongzhi*, Chou advocates several 'resistant' strategies of self-identification for heterosexuals (especially men) who work in the *tongzhi* movement. First, he suggests that they should not immediately disclose their heterosexuality and should 'actively explore intimate relations with members of the same sex' (Chou 1998: 45). Second, they should also 'tease' those who are homophobic with deliberately ambivalent replies such as: 'You guessed it about me, aren't you also?' 'How do you know you aren't as well?' or 'Which parts of me make me look bi or gay?' (Chou 1998: 45) While Chou advocates these strategies for others, his *own* experience in practicing these strategies often result in expressions of anger, bitterness, and tortuous self-examination. Several examples of such expressions are

found in the autobiographical introductions that precede Chou's ethnographic accounts in *Hong Kong Tongzhi Stories* (1996) and *Postcolonial Tongzhi* (1998). In these texts, Chou recurrently betrays his intense discomfort with being a straight man involved in queer research. This discomfort provokes an initial questioning of his heterosexuality which is in turn followed by a vehement disavowal of his possible homosexuality and a tortuous re-embracing of straightness.

In the preface to *Hong Kong Tongzhi Stories*, Chou gives an account of what he feels is an instance of homophobia towards him from a colleague. Prefaced by a reference to a T-shirt slogan 'You don't know I'm straight,' he describes how a colleague, on seeing a visibly gay man in Chou's office, raised her voice to announce with unmistakable innuendo: 'Someone is waiting for you in your office.' Chou interprets her expression to mean she has 'caught him out' (Chou 1996: 2). Chou notes that he had to suppress his intense disappointment at his colleague's apparently homophobic intimation that Chou was gay by association. Yet, isn't the situation entirely Chou's own making and a re-enactment of what he advocates as a strategy of resistance? By remaining ambivalently silent about his heterosexuality while conducting queer research, he is virtually inviting his colleague to make the normative assumption that he is 'not straight' and 'therefore gay.' Such a moment would appear to be precisely the opportunity of critical engagement that Chou supposedly wants. Yet the situation only signals for Chou a sense of disappointment. Examples of his *other* strategy – not to immediately disclose one's heterosexuality while living and working amongst queer folks – backfire in even more dramatic ways. In the first section of *Postcolonial Tongzhi*, Chou describes in detail the behavior of a white man who thought Chou was gay:

He stared at my calf, thigh, waist, chest, neck, face, eyes and skillfully pushed my hands away to hug me tightly for five seconds, then let go ... While we were in the car, he lightly and very slowly ran his fingers on my hair and neck and said, 'Sweetheart, we're almost there.' (Chou 1998: 10)

Chou then recounts the man's reaction when Chou disclosed to him that he was in fact not gay: the man became enraged and said that everyone who knew Chou had told him Chou was gay. He also accused Chou of concocting his theory of Chinese *tongzhi* only as a justification for remaining closeted (Chou 1998: 10). Subsequently in the same section, Chou describes his own association with queer research as a 'tattoo' that follows him everywhere. Queerness, he claims, 'runs in [his] veins' so much so that he 'would make great efforts to force [himself] to try, even to push [himself] to develop a relationship with another man' but to no avail. He then wonders if 'subconscious homophobia prevents [him] from being sexually attracted to men or whether genetic factors have rendered [him] a hopeless heterosexual' (Chou 1998: 34). Eventually, Chou claims he realizes it is not 'a sin' to be heterosexual and thus begins to publicly hold his female partner's hands without feeling guilty about his heterosexual privilege (Chou 1998: 35). While Chou interprets the white man's angry response as a racist reaction (which could of course be accurate), the above statements also show that Chou would intentionally use another man's attraction as a 'test case' for his possible homosexuality, a possibility he would then disavow while conceding that, for ideological or genetic reasons, he disidentifies completely with same-sex attraction in practice. What Chou does not seem to realize, or at least is reluctant to admit in print, is that in these instances he is using his queer scholarship as a *sexual tease*. His subsequent declaration of straight identification would thus be taken as a wounding rejection from those who are unlucky enough to have taken the bait. At the same time, Chou's entire career of researching queer lives seems to signal a long struggle to come to terms with his own shame at '(not) being gay.' (I use this neither-nor identity formulation as a parody of Chou's preferred identities throughout the first section of *Postcolonial Tongzhi* as '(not) British ... (not) Chinese ... (not) Christian ... (not) a queer scholar and (not) straight' [Chou 1998: 7–45]). The affective

narrative assembled from the previously cited passages runs like this: Chou is paralyzed with guilt and shame about being heterosexual, then implicates himself in situations in which he knows he would frequently be mistaken for gay (obsessively researching queer lives, 'forcing' himself to 'test' his attraction to men, playfully refusing to affirm he is straight), then disavows the gay identity others attribute to him, and *then* reclaims a form of heterosexuality without the prior sense of guilt and shame. Yet, clearly this strategy does not resolve his discomfort once and for all. Rather, it has to be performatively reiterated, over and over again to purge his shame and reaffirm his '(not) gay' identification.

This repeated narrative may be understood through Judith Butler's formulation of drag and melancholy, albeit in modified terms. In the seminal essay 'Critical Queer,' Butler cautions against theorizing cross-gender drag through a Freudian notion of melancholia, as a form of ungrieved loss for a rejected object which also becomes manifest in a heightened identification with that very object (Butler 1993: 234). To do so, Butler suggests, would run the risk of consolidating the assumption that a man performing femininity has some attachment to and prior rejection of the figure of femininity (Butler 1993: 235). In other words, to apply the Freudian understanding of melancholia *only* to cross-gender drag would reinforce the conventionally homophobic interpretation of male homosexuality as ungrieved loss for femininity and lesbianism as ungrieved loss for masculinity while heterosexuality remains 'natural.' In her famous reversal, Butler stands this formulation of melancholia on its head by applying the paradigm to *same-gender* performance. As Butler understands *all* acts of gender to be a form of drag, she characterizes a straight masculine man's heightened identification with masculinity (itself a form of drag) and concurrent rejection of masculinity as an object of love as a form of 'heterosexual melancholy' (Butler 1993: 235). According to this formulation, the straight masculine man incorporates masculinity into his embodiment out of an ungrieved loss for (and which is manifest as a rejection of) the same masculinity as an object of love. If we further modify this formulation to approach queerness itself (however gendered) as a sexual performance and interpret Chou's queer scholarship as a form of critical drag, then Chou's melancholia is manifest in his incorporation of (and heightened identification with) queerness in *theory* via a simultaneous *exclusion* of queerness as a possible object of love in *practice*. Chou intensely identifies with queerness in theory, an identification he reiterates and performs over and over. Yet, in practice, he repeatedly disavows and rejects queerness only to reconsolidate what is ultimately a melancholic reassertion of being '(not) gay.'

What would constitute a far more productive project, both for Chou and for those critical of him, is an exploration of the originary trauma of heterosexuality, of which Chou's melancholia may well be an important and instructive part. What conditions produce Chou's sense of guilt, shame, and frustration about being heterosexual? What *other than* melancholia may resolve his persistent identification with queerness in theory but inexorable disavowal in practice? What lives other than Chou's are similarly affected? These are the stories that could emerge from our engagement with – rather than wholesale disavowal of – the complex queer feelings in Chou's works.

Creative failure and queer discomfort

After Chou's departure from the University of Hong Kong in the late 1990s, he had by and large stopped researching and writing on queer lives. The publication in 2000 of *Bisexual Desire* signals a new era of queer writing in Hong Kong without Chou's hitherto dominant presence. *Bisexual Desire* is an eclectic, semi-collaborative work by Anson Mak, an activist and multimedia artist as well as one-time collaborator and later sharp critic of Chou Wah-Shan. In Mirana Szeto's critique of Chou Wah-Shan, she contrasts Mak's non-identitarian formation of 'bi/bai' to Chou's essentialist formation of *tongzhi*. Szeto characterizes bi/bai as

a 'bicultural and strange "creole"' term that appropriates the negative meanings of 'failure' and 'defeat' in the service of transgressive activities such as 'ruining, messing up and the active attempt to make boundaries fail and dysfunction' (Szeto 2004: 412). I am particularly interested in exploring Mak's creative use of 'failure' as a queer trope in relation to Ahmed's formulation of 'queer feelings.' In contrast to the unspoken anxiety that pervades the works of the previous two authors, Mak consciously *deploys* her feelings of anxiety as a form of creative expression. Mak's insistence on not cohering an identity while at the same time invoking such non-coherence as a form of failure produces unease. Yet, as Ahmed has demonstrated, we do not necessarily have to take an active stance against identity or be uncritically invested in identity to feel the queer discomfort of 'failing' (willingly or otherwise) to inhabit normative zones of comfort. For me, then, the most productive of Mak's formulation of 'bi/*bai*' involves a profound engagement with these feelings of failure/discomfort even as the book itself searches for ways to alleviate such feelings.

The second chapter of Mak's book is titled with this phrase: 'It began simply with a search for comforting/appropriate [*shu(he)shi*] language ...' (Mak 2000: 6). In the chapter, Mak describes how bi/*bai* exposes various conditions of discomfort. The first is a linguistic discomfort:

Speaking of 'bi' or *bai*, one doesn't even know if one's speaking in English or Chinese. Hong Kong people often use words which can be spoken aloud but have no corresponding written characters. Even if these are Chinese words, they only exist in Cantonese. I don't even know whether to be happy about such hyper localism or anxious about its exclusivity. Speaking of 'bi' or *bai* is difficult not only because there is a lack of discussion on sexuality and desire in Hong Kong culture and hence a lack of adequate vocabulary, but also because there is no acknowledgment that bisexual desire even exists. (Mak 2000: 6)

Many of the most nuanced theorists of Hong Kong culture such as Leung Ping-Kwan, Li Siu-Leung, Ackbar Abbas and Rey Chow have written on the linguistic and cultural difficulty of representing Hong Kong. Their scholarship aims at capturing the hybrid, mediated, and layered expressions that writers, songwriters, and filmmakers must deploy to represent a rapidly changing city, the specificity of which seems to defy easy representation. Mak understands a similar difficulty in representing what she provisionally calls bi/*bai*, a form of desire that is uncomfortable to speak about because it is not even recognized as existent, a predicament quite close to what Abbas theorizes as 'disappearance': a form of 'reverse hallucination'; a failure to see what is actually there (Abbas 1997: 6). Mak goes on to describe the difficulty (*nan*) of articulating this desire even in *tongzhi* circles:

This kind of difficulty involves the difficulty of speaking, the difficulty of not having words even if one speaks, and the difficulty of facilitating any development culturally. There is nothing to be done [*wunai*] and it is painful. (Mak 2000: 7)

Mak explains that her decision to speak of 'bisexual desire' rather than a 'bisexual identity' is to 'allow our lives to be better' (Mak 2000: 9). Ironically, what Mak documents throughout her book is the utter discomfort and difficulties her choice causes. Yet, it may precisely be through these difficult experiences that life could become 'better' – or at least filled with more possibilities. A narrative of queer feelings is woven through Mak's documentation of queer social activism in Hong Kong which she narrates as a series of autobiographical reflections. In particular, in the concluding section, Mak vividly evokes the dynamics of the contemporary activist scene through the utter discomfort and immense difficulties she experiences while trying to sustain activist communities, create new space for thought, and juggle school, work and physical well-being:

The fiftieth anniversary of the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights ... I was asked by the Hong Kong Christian Women's Association to write a report on sexual orientation I thought of

what to write, the fact that I had to write in English I did not use the word *queer*... or *tongzhi* ... homosexuals are homosexuals, bisexuals are bisexuals! Why mix all these together under *queer* or *tongzhi* when we are all so different ...

1998 *Tongzhi* Conference ... Before the conference I was so sick I had to go to the ER ... and then rushed to Lantau Island for the meeting. It was so hard physically. I didn't say much ... I felt so uncomfortable, like an outsider ... Why did I put myself in these uncomfortable surroundings ...

I feel that Queer Sisters should be rebuilt but it's hard to push through the proposal, hard to assemble more people, hard to properly represent everyone's views. As for bisexual theorizing, there're not a lot of opportunities to involve more people. I fear that I have failed. I feel guilty and terribly uneasy. Still, I have to work on my thesis. If I don't complete it I can't graduate ... I don't know what to do.

I fell sick. This time for real. I could not get up. I thought I would die. Sick. Still sick.

Everything has to quiet down. Everything has to be still. (Mak 2000: 30)

Mak's long illness then becomes a queer trope: the 'normal' working life becomes utterly uninhabitable for a sick person. The discomfort Mak endures while being sick seems to signify the heart of her activist project. Her illness has led her to let go of her anxiety about the theoretical and political importance of all of this work:

A book is just a book. It's the reader's heart that is most important. Hope can first aim for the heart, then culture, then politics.

It's all to make life a bit better. A mouthful of rice, a good night's sleep, a blue sky, a star, a whiff of wind, a cat, a love for both sexes. It's all just to fill life with love. (Mak 2000: 33)

Ironically, Mak reaches a state of comfort (which denotes open possibilities and hope) only through her experiences of discomfort, both physically (being ill), emotionally (feeling uneasy, disheartened, guilty) and critically (inhabiting theoretical spaces that are demanding). This paradoxical state echoes what Sara Ahmed theorizes as the trajectory of queer feeling, 'along with an excitement in the face of uncertainty of where the discomfort may take us' (Ahmed 2004: 155). For Mak, such 'excitement' does not cause agitation but rather instills cat-like grace:

Between critical self-awareness and a soul at peace, I just want to be a cat, a cat with a sense of justice, that lives lovingly and tenderly. At ease, careful, at peace. Like a cat, that's enough. (Mak 2000: 20)

This enigmatic and beautifully simple wish radiates ease and resilience at the heart of a book that predominantly documents discomfort and difficulty. The eccentricity of its humor (mis)fits (in)appropriately into the more cautious formality of my own academic prose. This uneasy distance between how I write and what I write about takes me back to the beginning of this essay, where I speak of the necessity to revitalize what was once an uncertain *gap* between 'queer' and 'theory.' Inhabiting rather than avoiding this gap – in the face of all the queer feelings this endeavor may entail – will bring us far closer to what is local about the global queer, in Hong Kong and elsewhere.

References

- Abbas, Ackbar (1997) *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Ahmed, Sara (2004) *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*, New York and London: Routledge.
- Butler, Judith (1993) *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*, New York: Routledge.

- Chou, Wah-Shan 周華山 (1996) *Hong Kong Tongzhi Stories (Xianggnag tongzhi gushi)* 香港同志故事, Hong Kong: Tongzhi yanjiu she 同志研究社.
- Chou, Wah-Shan 周華山 (1998) *Postcolonial Tongzhi (Hou zhimin tongzhi)* 後殖民同志, Hong Kong: Tongzhi yanjiu she 同志研究社.
- Cvetkovich, Ann (2003) *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Culture*, Durham: Duke University Press.
- Erni, John (2003) 'Run queer Asia run', *Journal of Homosexuality* 45(2/3/4): 381–384.
- Furth, Charlotte (1991) 'Review of *Passions of the Cut Sleeve* by Bret Hinsch', *The Journal of Asian Studies* 50(4): 911–912.
- Halberstam, Judith (2005) *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, New York and London: New York University Press.
- Halperin, David M. (2003) 'The normalization of queer theory', *Journal of Homosexuality* 45(2/3/4): 339–343.
- Hinsch, Bret (1992) *Passions of the Cut Sleeve: The Male Homosexual Tradition in China*, University of California Press.
- Ho, Petula Sik-Ying (1997) 'Policing identity: decriminalization of homosexuality and the emergence of gay identity in Hong Kong', Dissertation, Essex University.
- Jagose, Annamarie (1997) *Queer Theory: An Introduction*, New York University Press.
- Kang, Zhengguo 康正果 (1996) *Aspects of Sexuality and Literature in Ancient China* 遺書萬卷: 性與中國古典文學, Taipei: Rye Field Publishing 麦田出版有限公司.
- King, Katie (1994) *Theory in its Feminist Travels: Conversations in U.S. Women's Movements*, Indiana University Press.
- Loo, John 盧劍雄 (ed.) (1999) *New Reader on Chinese Tongzhi (Huaren tongzhi xin dupin)* 華人同志新讀本, Hong Kong: Worldson 華生.
- Mak, Anson 麥海珊 (2000) *Bisexual Desire (Shuangxing qingyu)* 雙性情慾, Hong Kong: Hong Kong Christian Women Association.
- Samshasha 小明璽 (1997) *History of Homosexuality in China (Zhongguo tongxinglian shilu)* 中國同性戀史錄, Hong Kong: Rosa Winkel Press (Revised Edition).
- Samshasha 小明璽 (2000) Interview with Mark McLelland, *Intersections* 4, http://www.she.murdoch.edu.au/intersections/issue4/interview_mcllelland.html.
- Sommer, Matthew H. (2000) *Sex, Law and Society in Late Imperial China*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Szeto, Mirana May (2004) 'The radical itch: rethinking radicalism in contemporary Chinese societies', Dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles.

Author's Biography

Helen Hok-Sze Leung 梁學思 is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Women's Studies at Simon Fraser University, Canada. Her articles on cinema, sexuality, and queer cultural politics have appeared in numerous journals and anthologies. Her first book *Undercurrents: Queer Culture and Postcolonial Hong Kong* is forthcoming from the University of British Columbia Press. She is currently developing a project on body transformation in Chinese cinemas.

Contact Address: Department of Women's Studies, Simon Fraser University, 8888 University Drive, Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada V5A 1S6.