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## REPRESENTATIONS OF THE QUEER: THE SCREENING OF CROSS-DRESSING IN CHINESE CINEMAS

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### **Abstract**

This paper focuses on the gender analysis of how Chinese films, in particular Hong Kong films made in the 1980s – 1990s (the most prosperous era of the Hong Kong cinema), represent cross-dressing. I argue that while Butler’s theory on gender and performative acts can explain the representation of queer identities in some popular Chinese films, cultural specificities cannot be ignored. For example, for the screening of cross-dressing in the context of the traditional Chinese theatre, it is crucial to give reference to the male/female impersonation tradition, which is charged with ambiguities and/or subversive gender-bending implications. The study of both ‘male femaling’ and ‘female maling’ in the following Chinese films made in the 1980s and 1990s are examined – *A Chinese Ghost Story* (1987), *He Lives by Night* (1982), *Mr. Vampire* (1985), *Chicken and Duck Talk* (1988), *He’s a Woman, She’s a Man* (1994) and *Farewell My Concubine* (1993). As a cross-dressing film precursor in the late 1950s, *The Butterfly Lovers* (1958) will also be discussed.

### **Introduction**

“New Queer Chinese Cinema”, a lexicon that emerged in international film festivals and film scholarship in the late 1990s (Leung 518), appears to suggest that queer cinema is a relatively new category developed in the Chinese cinema only in the last two decades. Whenever the term “New Queer Chinese Cinema” is mentioned, classic gay films such as Ang Lee’s *The Wedding Banquet* (1993) and Wong Kar-wai’s *Happy Together* (1997) in contemporary Chinese cinemas will pop into the mind of the cinema fans (Lim 19). However, as Stanley Kwan, a famous art film director in Hong Kong has pointed out in his documentary *Yin ± Yang: Gender in Chinese Cinema* (1996), queer notions are not new to the Chinese cinemas. Over a hundred years of cinema development, transgressive gender expressions have appeared many a time in numerous Chinese films, though these unruly expressions may not explicitly refer to LGBTQ characters. With a view to rediscovering the representation of queer identities in the Chinese cinemas, this paper examines the five ways in which cross-dressing and drag performances were screened in Chinese films, in particular Hong Kong blockbuster films made during the 1980s – 1990s, namely the boom years of the Hong Kong cinema, a most unusual time when Hong Kong was heavily influenced by Western culture under the British rule, and at

the same time experiencing a state of social flux as the handover to China in 1997 was approaching. With cultural interference and diversity as the watchwords, gender diversity became increasingly represented in Hong Kong films in the boom years.

Based on the 100 Greatest Chinese-Language Films of the Hong Kong Film Award and the 100 Must-see Hong Kong Movies of the Hong Kong Film Archive, this study analyzes the most iconic and memorable Chinese films with cross-dressing elements in the plot and characterization, which were mostly made in the 1980s and 1990s. With reference to Richard Ekins' categories of cross-dressing representation in Hollywood films, five categories are constructed to analyze the cross-dressing representation in Chinese films, namely: (1) the abject that needs to be removed; (2) insanity and danger that needs to be medicalized and separated from society; (3) humour which ridicules the drag and affirms the heterosexual norm; (4) "unsocialized pleasure" (Dyer 7), or an "unruly delight" (*ibid*) derived from breaking free of stereotypes and well-behaved narrativity, and (5) the sexually intriguing, which is uncommon in mainstream Hollywood films but may be considered acceptable by the Chinese audience due to the historical and socio-cultural background in the Chinese theatre tradition.

Among the five different kinds of representation, the first three kinds can be classified as what Butler calls "high het entertainment" (*Bodies That Matter* 85). Instead of challenging and subverting heteronormativity (Salih 66-67), such forms of cross-dressing and drag serve only to reinforce existing heterosexual hegemony, confirming the existing distinctions between male and female, masculine and feminine, gay and straight. In contrast, the last two kinds of representation do carry transgressive or subversive messages regarding gender and sexual politics. When cross-dressing is represented as an unruly delight in Hong Kong films, the audience is reminded that "gender is merely a construction regardless of any ontological truth" (Tso 113). In reality, "there is neither an 'essence' that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires" (Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory" 273). To a certain extent, the queer self-expression even inspires "people to try different forms of gender identity" (Nentwich *et al* 10). More interestingly, when the art of male/female impersonation in the traditional Chinese theatre is revisited in Chinese films, cross-dressing is featured as the sexually intriguing. The assumption of heterosexuality is disrupted (Brook 114). Before discussing the representation of cross-dressing in the Chinese and Hong Kong cinemas, in the following, I shall first discuss the representation of cross-dressing in Hollywood cinema as suggested by Ekins. With reference to Ekins' analytical framework, the cross-dressing in Chinese and Hong Kong cinemas will be elaborated.

## 2. Cross-dressing in Hollywood cinema

Many drag performances that we find in mainstream Hollywood films are 'high het entertainment' produced by the heterosexual entertainment industry for itself. As Ekins points out, male femalers on screen are often stigmatized and distanced from the audience, if not portrayed negatively. Having done a qualitative analysis of several thousands of cross-dressing/transgender sequences in hundreds of movies, Ekins

notices that Hollywood films often use five basic screening processes when screening male femaling. They are ‘medicalising’, ‘ghettoising’, ‘humourizing’, ‘personalising’ and ‘eulogizing’. All five processes have the effect of distancing the audience from the cross-dresser – ‘medicalising’ distances the audience from the male femaler by portraying the male femaler as the dangerous lunatic. For example, in Hitchcock’s *Psycho* (1960), Norman the transvestite is the insane killer, a danger to society. At the end of the film, he is arrested, separated from society, and incarcerated in an asylum. This archetype of the insane male female keeps recurring in such influential thriller films as *Dress to Kill* (1980) and *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991). ‘Ghettoising’, on the other hand, confines the male femaler to the ghetto. For instance, in *Personal Services* (1987), the male femaler who is not crazy is screened as the marginalized. She is “isolated and segregated in a particular group or area, out of harm’s way” (Ekins). Similarly, ‘humourizing’ ridicules drag acts, making cross-dressing a joke to be laughed at. In *Some Like It Hot* (1959), it is obvious that Lemmon and Curtis are two heterosexual men. Seeing them cross-dressing and invading women’s private spheres becomes extremely funny. Finally, ‘personalizing’ and ‘eulogizing’ emphasize “the subjective aspects of male femaling [as well as female maling], particularly, the personal journey, and its pains and gains” (*ibid*). It creates a distance between the cross-dresser and the curious audience too. Abnormal cross-dressing behaviour of individuals has become a selling point to increase box-office takings. Ekins uses Andy Warhol’s *Trash* (1970) as an example to illustrate his point of ‘personalizing’ male femaling. In the experimental film, Holly Woodlawn, the transgender actress invites the audience to be the witness of ‘her’ personal journey of gender transformation. Another more recent film which serves as a good example of ‘personalizing’ and ‘eulogizing’ female maling is *Boys Don’t Cry* (1999), the first mainstream film that portrays a transgender man. The film is successful in making the audience understand and sympathize with the female maler, but the cross-dressing behavior of the protagonist is somewhat portrayed as odd and abnormal. By and large, while more transgender visibility and positive representations are observed in the media (Stryker 25), most of the screening of male femaling and female maling in Hollywood cinema is not subversive. It rarely disrupts, if not consolidates, existing heterosexual power structures. To a certain extent, Ekins’ five basic screening processes can be applied to the cross-dressing representations in the Chinese cinemas. However, due to the cultural variations of the Chinese culture, there are also subversive cross-dressing representations in the Chinese cinemas which do not fit into any of Ekins’ screening processes. A new framework for assessing cross-dressing in Chinese films is needed.

In addition to the five basic screening processes mentioned above, Kolker identifies “Altering eye cinema”, which is “made in a spirit of resistance, rebellion and refusal” (xviii). Being non-mainstream, it provides room for subversive drag performances. Drag performances that challenge the heterosexual hegemony are celebrated in this kind of radical cinema. While the impact of some successful alternative films might have pushed the boundaries for Hollywood, “Altering eye cinema” (*ibid*) is nonetheless small in scale. The subversive messages it carries can only reach a limited audience. Their impact and popularity cannot be compared with those of mainstream Hollywood films, which inspired cinemas worldwide, including the Chinese cinemas.

### 3. Cross-dressing in the Chinese/Hong Kong cinema

Similar to Hollywood cinema, it is well-known that Hong Kong cinema “has all along been a medium for mass entertainment” (Sek Kei). Money-making has been the first priority for most Hong Kong film producers. This explains why “Hong Kong filmmakers, on the whole, tend to cater to a collective mass audience” (*ibid*). Being taken for granted as “a medium for mass entertainment” (*ibid*), Hong Kong films are commercial, mostly comic, and sometimes superficial. Serious philosophical questions about gender are considered inappropriate and constantly avoided (Stephens, 1993), and this was particularly true in the 1980s–1990s, a stressful time for Hong Kong when the handover to China in 1997 was pressing close. The representation of cross-dressing in Hong Kong films, in this light, is not unlike those in Hollywood.

While many Hong Kong films at that time were filled with slapstick humour and light-hearted entertainment, the impact of the Chinese culture on Hong Kong films was nonetheless evident. From time to time, the representation of cross-dressing in Hong Kong films reflects gender fluidity suggested in the context of the Chinese Opera, which is not unfamiliar to the Hong Kong audience. In the Chinese culture, male and female cross-dressing can bring up a completely different set of associations. In the Peking Opera (*Jingju* 京劇), all performers on stage had to be male. As Siu Leung Li points out, reliable historical evidence has shown that “male transvestism in a theatrical act appeared at the latest in the third century” (33), and this female impersonation convention had continued until the People’s Republic of China’s cultural policy put a stop to it in the late 1950s. As He Chengzhou explains:

According to the Confucian doctrine, men and women should be segregated for the sake of patriarchal social order. So far as the theatre is concerned, women were usually not allowed to play onstage and female impersonation was used in their place (624).

Before the 1950s, those who took part in onstage Peking Opera performances were considered indecent women:

The reason always given for the prohibition of women from the stage was that their chastity would thereby be compromised, which is understood to mean that they would become whores (Orgel 26).

Because of this reason, for a long period of time, the practice of female impersonation was somewhat naturalized, and “the sexually ambiguous figure of the male *dan* [actress 旦]” (Siu Leung Li 2) became a “cultural obsession” (*ibid*) not just in the Peking Opera, but also in other art forms influenced by the Peking Opera, such as the Chinese cinemas. It also became widely accepted by the Chinese general public that a skillful ‘faan-chuen’ (cross-dressed) female impersonator who plays a woman’s role is supposed to capture the delicate femininity of the role. The most notable female impersonator in the Peking Opera is Mei Lanfang (22 October 1894 – 8 August 1961), who was famous for his exquisite portrayal of femininity. His female impersonation was so successful that female audience members recognize him as “a sympathetic

ambassador of the female sex” (Lawson 34), while male audience members viewed him as “a non-threatening example of Chinese artistry” (*ibid*). Up till today, Mei Lanfang’s male *dan* icon remains a legend in the Chinese culture, though “social attitudes towards sexuality and morality” (Ruru Li 88) have changed drastically over the past decades, giving rise to the popularity of female *dan*.

Beside the Peking Opera, the Cantonese Opera (*Yueju* 粵劇) has also brought a deep impact on the Chinese cinemas. The representation of cross-dressing in Hong Kong films mirrors the practice of female transvestism in the Cantonese Opera as well. Interestingly, the representation is not meant to be a drag parody, but rather a ‘real disguise’ that is meant to be sexually appealing. The reason for the wide acceptance of female transvestism in the Cantonese Opera can be explained by the *wen-wu* framework (Louie 138) that constructs Chinese masculinity: the ideal man is not a warrior (*Wu* 武), but a well-mannered, fragile scholar-gentleman of immense erudition and wisdom (*Wen* 文) (*ibid*). It is commonly believed that “ideal manly beauty is no different from that of a woman” (M, 2006). Expert ‘faan-chuen’ (cross-dressed) male impersonators who play men’s roles in the Cantonese Opera are thought to be able to capture the essence of the ideal man (*Wen sheng* 文生) better than males.

By and large, both the Peking Opera and the Cantonese Opera have influenced the Chinese cinemas. The Chinese audience has accepted the notion that performers, especially impersonators, can ‘act’ and ‘perform’ genders on-stage. Though the highly stylized performances in the Peking Opera and the Cantonese opera are different from realistic performances in the Chinese cinemas, the myth that gender is in-born, essential, fixed in the Chinese patriarchal system is nevertheless subverted. In light of the intriguing East-meets-West cross-cultural interference, a close reading of how Chinese and Hong Kong films incite pleasurable engagements for the audience can be a good starting point to look into the gender ideology at work. As mentioned in the introduction, the representation of cross-dressing in many Hong Kong films made in the 1980s and early 1990s (as well as some Chinese films influenced by the Hong Kong cinema in that era), can be categorized as the following: (1) horror; (2) insanity and danger; (3) humour; (4) an “unruly delight” (Dyer 7) and (5) the sexually intriguing.

### 3.1. Cross-dressing as horror, the abject

In Hong Kong films, especially those of the horror genre, evil monsters or ghosts often possess bisexual characteristics. These monsters or ghosts are either men who behave queerly, or women who are abnormally and vulgarly masculine. Sometimes, the audience may even find it hard to recognize whether the haunting creatures are male or female. They create terror and disgust because they destabilize the existing gender norm and system. As Kristeva explains:

It is...not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite (4).

The evil antagonist in *A Chinese Ghost Story* (1987) is a typical example of the disgusting bisexual monster. In the film, the evil monster is Lao Lao (which literally



means grandmother in Chinese), a thousand-year-old dominatrix ghost mistress who feeds on young men's yang (masculine) energy. To quench her thirst for young men, she orders the hungry female ghosts in the forest to roam the nights, seducing and hunting young men for her. The appearance of the dominatrix ghost mistress is a disturbing sight, if not a fright: played by a middle-aged actor of a tall, macho build, the ghost mistress wears her hair in braids hideously combed in the shape of two protruding horns. Wearing a long, mahogany dress made of silk, she also has heavy devilish make-up with thick black eyebrows, strong eyelines, and deep red lips. What is even more frightening is that inside her mouth, she has a fifty-foot tongue that wraps and coils like a serpent. At the tip of the tongue, there is also a jaw full of sharp teeth. When the tentacle-tongue attacks, it drips sticky, creamy and semen-like saliva. Yue remarks that the ghost mistress "bears the image of a phallic tongue" (371). I would add that the jaws and the incisors at the tip of the tongue also remind the audience of the vagina dentata, the castrating "saw-toothed orifice" (Gilmore 42), or simply female genitals which Chinese patriarchs regard as "executioners of men" (Walker 1034). When she speaks, male and female voices switch with the enunciation of each sentence. Whether the audience perceives this monster as a man cross-dressed as a female or a woman cross-dressed as a male, it does not matter. The hermaphroditic monster is the abject creature that blurs and transgresses the gender border. At the end of the plot, the demonic Lao Lao is chased away and removed by the Taoist priest. The abject figure that threatens the gender demarcation is removed.

### 3.2. *Cross-dressing as insanity and danger*

In another popular Hong Kong thriller, *He Lives by Night* (1982), cross-dressing is also represented with the most derogatory implication. Similar to Hollywood productions such as *Psycho* (1960) and *Dressed to Kill* (1980), the maniac serial killer in *He Lives by Night* (1982) is a man who suffers from schizophrenia. Whenever he is under stress, he involuntarily cross-dresses as a woman and kills female victims who fall prey to him. At the beginning of the film, neither the audience nor the protagonists in the film know the real identity of the killer. In the first murder scene, the audience can only see the silhouette of a woman slashing at the terrified female victim. Yet, as the story of the film develops, it is revealed that the killer is not a real woman but in fact a transvestite. The transvestite was once a normal and happy family man, but he was driven insane when he found his wife sleeping with a man dressed as a woman and wearing white fishnet stockings. Filled with jealousy, rage and hatred, he killed his wife and the adulterer. From then on, whenever he sees anyone wearing white fishnet stockings, he is filled with murderous desires. He uncontrollably takes on his alter-ego, cross-dresses himself as a woman, stalks and stabs the woman victim(s) in white fishnet stockings to death. As Clover describes, in most slasher films:

The killer is often unseen or barely glimpsed, during the first part of the film, and what we do see, when we finally get a good look, hardly invites immediate or conscious empathy. He is commonly masked, fat, deformed, **or dressed as a woman** (My emphasis) (296).

In *He Lives by Night* (1982), the killer is medicalized. It is told in the narrative that the killer is a dangerous lunatic suffering from a serious mental illness. Portrayed as a

bestial transvestite freak, the killer gains no sympathy from the audience. At the end of the film, the detestable male killer dies. Safety and social order are restored. Cross-dressing is represented as a sign of insanity and danger. The perverse gender subversion has to be stopped.

### 3.3. Cross-dressing as humour

Similar to the way Hollywood cinema screens drag performances, the Hong Kong cinema frequently represents cross-dressing as humour. The cross-dressing scenes in two Hong Kong films, namely *Mr. Vampire* (1985) and *Chicken and Duck Talk* (1988), are good examples that show how drag acts are humorized. A number of plot devices can be found in these two comedy films, including “the narrative necessity for disguise”, “adoption by a character of the opposite sex’s specifically gender-coded costume”, “the simultaneous believability of this disguise to the film’s characters and its unbelievability to the film’s audience”, and/or “an “unmasking” of the transvestite” (Straayer, 43–44). In *Mr. Vampire* (1985), Man Choi, the imbecile is infected by the vampire’s poison. One day as he wakes up, he finds that his fingernails have grown as long as a vampire’s. When he looks at himself in the mirror, he also finds that his complexion has changed to that of a vampire. Very upset by the transformation of his looks, Man Choi is afraid that people in the village may recognize his vampire features and kill him. In order to avoid being caught and killed on the spot, he cuts his long fingernails and puts on heavy make-up (foundation, blush and lipstick) on his face so as to conceal his corpse-pale complexion. But since only women wear make-up, Man Choi disguises as a woman. Ridiculously, he also ties his hair into a feminine braid and behaves, speaks and dances in an extremely feminine way. Of course, no audience sees Man Choi as a real woman. He is so inadequately disguised that everyone sneers at him, thinking that he is a queer transvestite who makes a fool out of himself. Different from Hollywood films, Man Choi’s “adoption...of the opposite sex’s specifically gender-coded costume” cannot gain “the believability of [his] disguise to the film’s characters” (*ibid*). Nevertheless, “the narrative necessity for disguise” and “its unbelievability to the film’s audience” are apparent (*ibid*).

Similarly, in *Chicken and Duck Talk* (1988), there is a cross-dressing scene where the male cross-dresser exaggerates the feminine features and appears inadequately disguised. In the film, Ah Hui is the boss of an old Chinese roast goose restaurant whose business has been seriously affected by *Danny’s Fried Chicken*, the newly-opened fast food shop opposite his restaurant. To gain a better understanding of the taste and the unique recipe of the fried chicken, Ah Hui disguises himself as an Indian woman as he enters his rival’s fast food shop. Like Man Choi in *Mr. Vampire* (1985), Ah Hui paints his face in a tone as dark as that of an Indian. He also paints a red dot in the middle of his forehead, wears a nose ring, some golden bracelets, and dresses himself in feminine Indian clothes. What makes him look even funnier is that he speaks, walks and behaves in an unnatural, exaggerated feminine way. At the end of the scene, his disguise is unmasked by the manager of *Danny’s*. His scheme to steal the unique fried chicken formula fails.

Simply put, the drag performances in these two Hong Kong films do not function as subversive parody. Rather than disrupting the heterosexual norm, the cross-dressing ridicules drag acts, turning them into humour. Like Dustin Hoffman’s performance in



*Tootsie* (1982), the “denaturalizations” (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 231) of the heterosexual norm actually enforce heterosexual hegemony. Traditional gender positions are reinstated instead.

### 3.4. *Cross-dressing as an unruly delight*

Similar to films in Hollywood, the female cross-dresser is also occasionally portrayed as a charming delight in Hong Kong films. No matter how hard she pretends to be a man, she can never be a ‘real’ man. She is an object of desire for men, not for women. From time to time, the inadequacy of the disguise is brought into focus so that the audience is constantly reminded of the female cross-dresser’s femininity, a quality which is considered natural and essential to women. As in *Yidl Mitn Fidl* (1936), a sharp contrast is meant to be formed between the female cross-dresser and the male hero of the film. In *He’s a Woman, She’s a Man* (1994), the female protagonist, Wing, cross-dresses as a boy in order to enter an audition for new male singers. She tries to look and behave like a man in all ways. She cuts her hair, ties a plastic tape around her chest tightly, dresses in man’s clothes, and even ties three glow-in-the-dark light sticks together and puts them between her legs as a substitute for her absent penis. What is more, she tries to learn the male’s way of walking from Yu Lo, a male friend of hers. She is taught to put one hand in the trousers’ pocket and scratch her thigh with that hand, and spread her legs slightly when she walks. Yet, no matter how hard she tries, throughout the film, Wing is criticized and teased many times for being a sissy by various characters in the film. Some of them even ask Wing if ‘he’ is gay. The inadequacy of the disguise is always in the foreground. Because of her lovely appearance, she is chosen and given a contract by Sam, the most famous composer and producer in town. Sam treats Wing warmly and kindly as if ‘he’ is his little brother. Wing soon finds herself falling in love with Sam. Yet, for the sake of her rising career as a male singer, Wing must continue her gender disguise.

While the plot goes smoothly as the audience has expected, there is a surprising twist – the “unruly delight” of cross-dressing is introduced. Unlike other conventional Hong Kong films, the filmmakers of *He’s a Woman, She’s a Man* (1994) suggest a new view-point of cross-dressing. The ambiguity of sexual orientation and the gender-bending theme become the selling point of the film (Chan). As the film progresses, Sam finds that he also has fallen in love with Wing. Not knowing that Wing is a woman, at first Sam is very worried about his own ‘queer’ sexual orientation. He tries to save and reassure himself of his heterosexual identity by sleeping with another woman. However, as his love and desire for Wing grows stronger each day, he cannot suppress himself anymore, resulting in a “paradoxical bivalent kiss” (Straayer 54) – On a piano, Sam sensually and passionately kisses Wing, who is still cross-dressed as a man. Dazed and shocked, Wing shyly says, “I’m a man.” Sam seriously replies, “So am I.” The romantic and beautiful close ups of the kiss invite the spectators to sympathize with the ambivalent relationship between Sam and Wing. More intriguingly, when Sam finally finds out that Wing is a woman, he bravely confesses, “Whether you are a girl or a boy, it doesn’t matter. I only know that I love you.” The film does end conventionally with the unmasking of the cross-dressing. The heterosexual hegemony is reinstated at the narrative level, but to a large extent, the film questions the heterosexual norm in its comical way.

### 3.5. Cross-dressing as the sexually intriguing

In addition to influences of Hollywood cinema that can be spotted in Hong Kong filmic depictions of cross-dressing, the impact of the Chinese culture is also evident. Film critics suggest that the gender-bending tradition has long existed in Chinese and Hong Kong cinemas (Stanley Kwan). In *Farewell My Concubine* (1993), Leslie Cheung plays the role of Dieyi, a female impersonator (Dan) who plays the role of a beautiful concubine in a Peking Opera called “Farewell, My Concubine”. Off stage, Dieyi is gay. Being “neither the prey of men’s sexual desire, nor a hunter of women’s sexuality”, he is “an enemy to the whole heterosexual structure” (Zhang 105). However, on stage, when Dieyi is in ‘her’ female costume and concubine make-up, he is (mis)taken as the beautiful concubine. Everyone, including the audience and the characters in the film, is mesmerized by ‘her’ grace, elegance and femininity. Paradoxically, the on-stage cross-dressing of Dieyi is represented and perceived as sexually intriguing by the mass Chinese audience. For all his childhood and adolescence, Dieyi has been trained and “regularly groomed for patrons as models of feminine beauty” (Berry x) so as to become up-to-standard for playing the beautiful Concubine Yu in the Peking Opera. In the same light, in *The Butterfly Lovers* (1958), a theatrical version of the famous Cantonese opera, the role of the male hero, Liang Shan-Po, is played by a popular and well-loved male impersonator and opera diva, Yam Kim Fai. In the film, Yam is perceived as a ‘real’ handsome man by the Chinese, especially the Hong Kong audience. The Cantonese public takes pleasure in watching ‘his’ love affair with the female role, who cross-dresses as a male scholar at the beginning of the plot. Yam’s cross-dressing is so ‘natural’ that many Cantonese female fans and audience member find Yam’s cross-dressing performance attractive. Meanwhile, Yam’s feminized masculinity has not created resistance among the male audience members because Yam’s performativity of the Wen masculinity has not posed “a real threat to the tradition of tough, strong (yanggang 陽剛) masculinity” (Leung 695), as film critics have observed.

## 4. Conclusion

In *Gender Trouble* (1999), Butler makes the point that drag performances could be seen as a subversive parody that mocks the existing heterosexual power structures. Yet, looking at how drag and cross-dressing are screened and represented in classical Hollywood cinema, one may find it disappointing because for most of the time, drag and cross-dressing are either represented negatively, or that they are distanced from the mass audience. Only in ‘Altering eye cinema’ can subversive drag performances be found less predictable and heteronormative. However, the case is quite different in Chinese cinemas. Because of the gender-bending tradition in the Chinese culture, drag and cross-dressing do not necessarily have to be marginalized, distanced, or represented negatively in Hong Kong and Chinese films. In certain Chinese contexts, cross-dressing can be enjoyed, appreciated and embraced by the general public. Although the Chinese film market is slow in developing alternative cinema such as the ‘Altering cinema’ in the West, heteronormativity is challenged and overthrown in the Hong Kong cinema, in its own unique way.

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