
“Chinese Lesbian Cinema”, despite its broad title, has a very narrow focus, consisting mainly of a detailed description of four recent films rather than a critical analysis of an emerging genre. This makes the volume a useful book for readers particularly interested in the current “moment” of mainland Chinese lesbianism, but less so for the casual reader, or readers with a more general interest in film studies or queer studies.

Unusually for a book on films, the author situates the material not so much in the Chinese cinematic tradition as the literary one, focusing the introductory discussions on premodern same-sex eroticism mainly on Chinese literature and historical traditions. After this, the book first discusses three twentieth century films involving female same-sex eroticism: *Da Lu* (1934), *Nu’ergu* (1995), and *Chunuzou* (1997), exploring the context from which out-and-out lesbian cinema would emerge. It then devotes a chapter apiece to four twenty-first century films, three of which deal explicitly with lesbianism—*Fish and Elephant* (*Jinnian xiatian*, 2001), *Lost in You* (*Lalala*, 2006), and *Love Mime* (*Xiao Shu de xiatian*, 2008)—and a fourth, *Hong’er* (2008), which, while marketed as a lesbian film, is more ambiguous in its treatment of the subject. All of the directors are female and all were new to directing at the time of making their films; in contrast to the lesbian film industries in other countries, none identify as lesbians. The four films chosen provide something of a chronology of the development of lesbian film as genre in twenty-first century China.

The book appears to lack a central argument or research question, being less an analysis or critical discussion of its subject than it is an introduction to mainland Chinese lesbian cinema and some of its significant works. The author’s task is complicated by the fact that lesbian film, as opposed to films which may involve female same-sex eroticism, has only existed in China since the turn of the twenty-first century, and is officially banned from receiving state funding.
and appearing in state cinemas, meaning that what little there is has to operate through the independent and/or underground systems, and is generally screened at overseas film festivals.

On a similar note, the book is also restricted by the author’s decision to focus only on lesbianism, which he defines as involving “a woman who is sexually attracted to women only and, furthermore, is committed to an exclusive relationship with women” (p. 32). This, by default, excludes Chinese films which may depict female same-sex desire more ambiguously. It also, however, causes problems for defining the films under study: *Love Mime*, for instance, appears from the plot synopsis to deal with bisexuality rather than lesbianism. One might also ask why, if films such as *Da Lu* can be included as examples of earlier films with “homosexual implications” (p. 89), one might not also include more recent films which can be said to have the same. It also might have been interesting to have considered the situation in the wider Chinese diaspora, particularly Hong Kong with its strong tradition of queer filmmaking.

At times, also, the author seems to try to have his cake and eat it too, for instance observing that the existence of a global film industry is what allows such films to exist in the first place while nonetheless insisting that the films under discussion are wholly indigenous and uninfluenced by wider discourses, whereas it seems like it might have been more fruitful to unpack the contradictions and hidden, possibly subliminal, references within the films.

The book is very readable, with a prose which is academic in style but not too inclined to descend into jargon. The descriptions of the films are very detailed (of necessity, since none are easily available to the reader). However, the book has no concluding chapter, making one think that the volume might have been improved had the author reduced the long discussion of male same-sex relations at the start of the volume, and used the space instead to develop a comparative analysis or discussion of the new genre.

The book is valuable as an introduction to what is clearly a developing genre of Chinese cinema, as well as providing useful context on the way in which modern Chinese filmmakers
fuse indigenous concepts of same-sex love with Western concepts of lesbianism. However, it could have done with more consideration of what these developments mean for Chinese film, lesbian film, and for local and global concepts of lesbianism, as well as a more critical analysis of the material.

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