



Howard Chiang and Alvin K. Wong (eds)

Keywords in Queer Sinophone Studies

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reviewed by [Yahia Zhengtang Ma](#)

1. Queer has become an all-pervasive keyword in various disciplines, including cultural and media studies, queer studies, and literary studies, to characterise and identify ultra-marginalised genders, bodies, identities and sexualities. Co-edited by Howard Chiang and Alvin K Wong, *Keywords in Queer Sinophone Studies* situates the anthology at a queer epicentre at which queer theory and Sinophone studies intersect and consolidate. Chiang and Wong, both of whose research interests span across disciplines, endeavour to construct an emerging field of queer Sinophone studies, or in other words, to queer Sinophone studies sequentially after *Queer Sinophone Cultures* came out in 2014. [1] If *Queer Sinophone Cultures* co-edited by Howard Chiang and Ari Larissa Heinrich imaginatively advanced Sinophone studies and queer studies by expansively encompassing the minoritized Sinophone world, *Keywords* attempts to reclaim the field of queer Sinophone studies and reconceptualise the transdisciplinary, transnational, transcultural conflux and kinship between queerness and Sinophone studies.
2. In naming 'queer Sinophone studies,' Chiang and Wong argue that the book adopts a conjunctive analytical method to overcome the complicated developments. Bringing together methodologies of history, anthropology and literature, *Keywords* unpacks the queerness of 'queer,' a keyword of keywords by examining works of fiction, film, performance and the media in addition to social activities such as transgender marriage and LGBT+ activism. The strength of the book lies not in its collective investigation of keywords but rather in the thorough study of various factors that will ensure the queering of Sinophone studies. By doing so, it demonstrates an academic activity that builds up a new discipline, a new field of study, a new methodology that challenges the binarism of Sinophone studies and China studies. *Keywords in Queer Sinophone Studies* can be understood as an endeavour to confirm that there are many conceptual convergences and affinities among queer studies and Sinophone studies, and to reveal possibilities that bring queer approaches to Sinophone studies.
3. The contributing scholars of the book never retreat far from queering Sinophone studies. The meaning of 'queering' is extended and expanded through intersectional and inter/transdisciplinary methods by expanding geographical boundaries. In Chapter 2, Lily Wong argues her transPacific methodology was generated at the intersection of Asian North American and queer Sinophone studies. Analysing a mixed-race transgender woman in Jia Qin Wilson-Yang's novel *Small Beauty*,

Wong offers a queer reading of social norms such as heteropatriarchy and heteronormativity by prominently taking the 'trans' in 'transPacific'. The rich lexicon of queerness manifestly suggests the interlocking relations of ethnicity, transnationalism and gender troubles. Similarly, in Chapter 3, Jih-Fei Cheng incorporates the movement across Europe and Asia, the transatlantic and the transpacific in his analysis of the geopolitics of visceral violence in *Warriors of the Rainbow: Seediq Bale*. Also, in Chapter 4, Alvin K Wong's use of the theoretical grammar of post-coloniality remaps post coloniality through the 'roots and routes' of queer intimacies and geographies (p. 62). While arguing the Hong Kongese gay couple's encounters with Argentinian men through cruising in Wong Kar-wai's film *Happy Together* 'trouble the conventional way of approaching the film through the lens of post-colonial anxiety' (p. 65), Wong's analysis thus addresses both transnational queer exile and diasporic space marked by the mythic place of perverse desire in the public domain. To make his argument, Wong addresses the gay couple's desire to witness the falls at the borders of Brazil and Argentina to explore desire and sexuality in a space of betweenness and minor transnationalism that deviates from the British-Chinese influence in post-colonial Hong Kong.

4. Particularly, readers of *Keywords* may enjoy how Mian Chen pieces together the story of an alleged homosexual murder case to argue that the mass media in the People's Republic of China (PRC) tended to trivialise and silence homosexuality (p. 154). In the discourse analysis of the case represented in the mainstream Chinese-language media, Chen, who is the only contributor focusing on the PRC, knits adaptation and cultural politics by applying insights from queer Sinophone studies. The author's argument 'homosexuality was often suppressed and trivialized in the PRC' (p. 164) may lead to a question, while homosexuality is trivialised in the PRC, why then is homosexuality in the PRC trivialised in Queer Sinophone studies and queer studies? To answer this question, Chen's central keyword 'adaptation' in Chapter 8 contributes to the author's queering of Sinophone studies by touching upon the cultural politics of homosexuality in Republican China, the PRC within the Sinophone world.
5. In addition to 'adaptation,' 'translation' may be an addition to the keywords as translation can be applied as a fundamental method to think about transnational circulation of queerness in gender and sexuality. Although all the chapters are written in English for their imagined *English* readers, the hegemony of English seems to be problematised by the translations of terms in Mandarin Chinese (with *pinyin*, e.g. Carlos Rojas's use of *cixiong tongti* 雌雄同體) and Cantonese (with *kyutping*, e.g. Wong's use of *kau cim* 求籤). Moreover, by problematising the translations of the terms, the scholars' different ways of dealing with the terms could be understood as a resistance/acceptance of Anglophone imperialism that associates writing and translating. For example, Kyle Shernuk uses the combination of pinyin (*Zhonghua minzu*) and characters (中華民族) without providing an English translation while Lucetta Y.L. Kam offers an English translation (gender-neutral) followed by *pinyin* and characters (*Zhongxing* 中性). More importantly yet, Kam's translation of '*nütongxinglian/lazi*' that includes both 'lesbian' and 'bisexual women,' from a perspective of translation studies, seems to have de-queered both translation and queer sexualities to a generalised monolingual model of hyper inclusiveness although the author declares that 'lesbian is a collective term that all informants agreed to use' (p. 133). Elsewhere in the same chapter, Kam inconsistently quotes Fran Martin's discussion of the *nütongxinglian* identity, which includes a bilingual translation both in Chinese as '女同性戀' and English 'female homosexuality or lesbianism.' Despite its possible inconsistency, the use of terms such as '*tongzhi*' and '*tongxinglian*' reveals the varied usage and multiple meanings of the terms about queer desire of various kinds.
6. Continuing his inauguration of the subfield in Chinese transgender studies in *Transgender China* (2012) [2] and *After Eunuchs: Science, Medicine, and the Transformation of Sex in Modern China* (2018), [3] Howard Chiang extends his attention to transgender marriage rights in Hong Kong. Taking from 'the polite residuals of heteronormativity,' the keyword 'residual' offers an alternative

reading of both the transitioning body and the geopolitical positioning of Hong Kong. While linking the intersections of transgender rights and gay rights and relating the *W* ruling to the Wu-Wu union in Taiwan, Chiang disrupts and intervenes in heteronormativity and the issues and debates are made manifest. Moreover, Chiang triangulates his study by introducing the geopolitical 'difference' from mainland China, which is shared by Taiwan and Hong Kong in a broad transnational context.

7. Engaging with the keywords such as transPacific, viscosity, postcoloniality, ethnicity, liminality, fandom, adaptation, intermediality, activism and residual, *Keywords in Queer Sinophone Studies* conjures up a foundational framework of Shu-mei Shih's conceptualisation of 'Sinophone,' which focuses on Sinitic-language communities situated at 'the margins of China and Chineseness.' Chiang's inaugural conception of 'queer Sinophonicity,' among all the other queer keywords, allows for both Chineseness and queerness to 'find their most meaningful articulations *in and through* one another' (p. 5), to challenge against ontological views on China and Chineseness and move beyond a set of dichotomies towards binary understandings. Ultimately, Sinophone is used as a method in *Keywords in Queer Sinophone Studies* to queer the concept of 'Sinophone' and the emerging field of queer Sinophone studies.

Notes

[1] Howard Chiang and Ari Larissa Heinrich (eds), *Queer Sinophone Cultures*, London: Routledge, 2014.

[2] Howard Chiang (ed.), *Transgender China*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

[3] Howard Chiang, *After Eunuchs: Science, Medicine, and the Transformation of Sex in Modern China*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2018.

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