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The queer Global South: Transnational video activism between China and Africa

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Hongwei Bao 

University of Nottingham, UK

Abstract

In this article, I examine grassroots cinematic connections between China and Africa by using Queer University, short for the Queer University Video Capacity Building Training Program, a 3-year (2017–2019) participatory video production program between Chinese and African queer filmmakers and activists, as a case study. Through interviews with Queer University organizers and participants, I discuss the transnational politics and decolonial potentials underpinning these grassroots initiatives. Drawing on Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih’s critical term “minor transnationalism,” I study transnational queer grassroots collaborations in the Global South, and, in doing so, unravel the hopes, promises, and precariousness of emerging people-to-people exchanges taking place in the Global South.

Keywords

Africa, China, film, Global South, minor transnationalism, queer, Queer University

The Love Queer Cinema Week (formerly the Beijing Queer Film Festival) took place at the Institut Français in Beijing on 1–5 November 2017.¹ As in previous years, that year’s program included films from different parts of the world, in particular, those from Europe and North America. Different from previous years was the prominent place that the festival gave to African queer films: the 2017 program included several queer films from Africa, including *I am Sheriff* (dir. Teboho Edkins, South Africa, 2017), a film about a trans man’s story in Lesotho.² The festival also included a panel discussion titled “Visual Queer Activism in China and Africa,” which brought together queer filmmakers from China and Africa to discuss how to use films to conduct queer activism (Figure 1). At an identity-based film festival that traditionally looks to the West (i.e. Europe and

Corresponding author:

Hongwei Bao, University of Nottingham, Nottingham NG7 2RD, UK.

Email: hongwei.bao@nottingham.ac.uk



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Figure 1. “Visual Queer Activism in China and Africa” panel discussion, Beijing, 2017 (Courtesy of Jenny Man Wu).

North America) and the East (i.e. other Asian countries), this move to look “South” (Africa in this case) came as a surprise for some people but was welcomed by many.

In a different part of the world and on the African continent, exciting things were also taking place. On 26 and 27 October 2019, the Queer University Film Festival took place in Accra, Ghana (Figure 2). Carrying the slogan “to be queer in Africa: finding truth and peace,” the festival was hosted by the local feminist and queer group Drama Queens. The festival screened seven short films made by Queer University participants, followed by question and answers (Q&As) with participating filmmakers. The festival also featured a trivia quiz at the beginning of the festival and a poetry slam at the end. Sitting outdoors on the grass and watching films projected from a portable data projector, the festival was a memorable experience for many participants (Figure 3).

What brought these two events together was a transnational queer video-making workshop program called Queer University (*ku'er daxue*, short for Queer University Video Capacity Building Training Program), a 3-year (2017–2019) participatory video production program.³ The workshops primarily took place in Zimbabwe and Ghana, bringing together queer filmmakers from China and Africa to engage in transnational queer filmmaking and video activism. It is important to note that these activities took place in a queer-unfriendly context, as queer people in both China and the majority part of the African continent have a difficult time achieving legal recognition and state protection in their own countries. In China, the current government has been heavily restricting the activities of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and it refuses to recognize Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) rights; in both Zimbabwe and Ghana, gay sex is illegal, due largely to sodomy laws from the colonial era and religious



Figure 2. Queer University Film Festival poster (Courtesy of Anthony B. Adeaba of Drama Queens).



Figure 3. Queer University Film Festival, Ghana, 2019 (Courtesy of Popo Fan).

prejudices introduced by British colonialism. Under these circumstances, such a program is remarkable because it was led by people and grassroots social groups, without being mediated by respective national governments. The Queer University program therefore demonstrates the possibilities and potentials between people and grassroots social groups in the Global South. But can Queer University be seen as a form of South–South collaboration that remaps global geopolitics and power relations in a non-hegemonic and more egalitarian way? How do we understand this type of transnational practice?

In this article, I examine grassroots cinematic connections between China and Africa by using Queer University as a case study. Through interviews with Queer University organizers and participants, I discuss the transnational politics and decolonial potentials underpinning these grassroots initiatives.⁴ Drawing on Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih's (2005) critical term "minor transnationalism," I study transnational queer grassroots collaborations in the Global South, and, in doing so, unravel the hopes, promises, and precariousness of the emerging people-to-people exchanges taking place in the Global South.

Queer University and community participatory development

Queer University is a participatory community video production program run by the Beijing Gender Health Education Institute (BGHEI), a Beijing-based NGO.⁵ One of the longest running of its kind in China, the organization is dedicated to gender and sexuality education and LGBTQ rights. BGHEI hosts a community webcast website called Queer Comrades, which regularly presents community news, short videos, and talk show programs (Bao, 2020). Labeled as a Chinese non-profit LGBTQ webcast, Queer Comrades aims to "document queer culture in all its aspects in order to raise public awareness on LGBT matters" and inform both queer and non-queer people "in a relaxed and unrestrained way on the various aspects of queer culture" and by "sending out empowering images of queer life" (Queer Comrades, 2018). After experiencing the forced closure of the Fourth International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA) Asian Regional Conference in Surabaya, Indonesia, in March 2010, Queer Comrades shifted its focus away from lifestyle and entertainment toward rights-related issues (Tan, 2016, p. 46). By making strategic use of the online platform and affordable digital video-making technologies, Queer Comrades functions as a form of community media that inform and educate queer people and the general public, thereby making positive social changes (Deklerck, 2017; Deklerck & Wei, 2015).

Although most Queer Comrades programs are produced by their in-house crew, which primarily consist of a group of queer-identified young filmmakers and activists, Queer Comrades increasingly involves community participation in film and video making. Realizing the urgent need for film and video-making skills among community members and recognizing the importance of films and videos for individual and community empowerment, BGHEI has been running Queer University, that is, queer filmmaking workshops for community members in recent years. Since 2012, 8 to 12 LGBTQ identified people have been selected annually to attend a 1-week workshop (Tan, 2016, p. 45). Priority is given to queer people from the countryside or remote areas with little access to technological or community support. Among the 12 participants in 2014, 3 were from smaller cities instead of provincial capitals; almost half of them lived in less economically developed non-coastal areas (p. 49). Participants pitch ideas for their films and actualize these ideas with the technical and mentoring support from tutors, who are usually more experienced queer filmmakers. As a result of community participation, the style and aesthetics of the Queer Comrades

films become more diversified. Some reveal the lives of queer people in rural China and from a working-class background. Others experiment with alternative cinematic styles and aesthetics, thus rendering the films “queerer.” *Comrade Yue* (2013), directed by Yue Jianbo, and *Silver Rich Road* (2015), directed by Lu Ling, are “essay films” that embody “aesthetics of queer becoming” (Tan, 2016).⁶ Selected films from the Queer University are shown at the Beijing Queer Film Festival and the China Queer Independent Film Tour; 20 to 30 screenings are held in various cities each year. Queer Comrades is thus “more than a medium to disseminate information” and has become “a platform for creation” and community building (p. 46).

If Queer Comrades serves as a good example of queer community media, Queer University exemplifies a model for participatory development. Informed by participatory research methods (Gubrium & Harper, 2013), participatory development refers to ways of engaging local communities in development projects (Nelson & Wright, 1995). The method emerged in the 1970s and signaled a profound change in approaches to development: from a “top-down” approach that privileges experts’ and government officials’ voices to a bottom-up approach that is attentive to community members’ voices and needs; from simply offering money and material goods to meet people’s “basic needs,” to offering knowledge, skills, and support so that local communities can actively participate in the projects that have impacts on their own lives (Mohan, 2007). Participatory development has been widely used in development projects in the Global South although its use in queer communities has been under-documented. With the community involvement in video and film production, Queer University represents a successful case of using participatory methods for identity construction and community building.

Queer University would have primarily been a BGHEI project for participatory development that only serves queer communities in China, had it not been for the opportunity through which Xiaogang Wei, director of the BGHEI, connected with some African queer activists at an international conference for queer activists. During a conversation, they discovered that the queer activists in China and Africa have more in common with each other than they have with people from the West and the Global North, and that they can learn a lot from each other. In my interview, Stijn Deklerck, a Belgian national who used to raise funds and make strategic planning for Queer University, explained the reason for Chinese queer activists’ engagement with Africa:

We were motivated to start the program after hearing interest in our Queer University program and Queer Comrades from African activists. We had a strong desire to share our extensive experience in China, especially when also seeing the various similarities between LGBTQI activist conditions in China and Africa, and realizing that parallels between our movements were in some ways more explicit than parallels between China and the Global North. We felt strongly about improving South-South LGBTQI ties. I remember we questioned our own persistent focus on films and experiences from the Global North, questioning why we (in China) were not picking up more from and collaborating with African activists. (Interview with Stijn Deklerck, 6 January 2020)

These words echo the voices of many queer activists from China and Africa: instead of always looking to the West and the Global North, queer activists in the Global South can work together to address shared issues and concerns. Filmmaking is identified as an appropriate way for such a collaboration. This has led to Queer University being run in Africa.

From 2017 to 2019, three Queer University workshops took place in Zimbabwe and Ghana. These workshops were co-organized by Queer Comrades and an African queer organization in each country. Queer Comrades supplied a couple of tutors, together with filmmaking equipment, prizes,

and funding support, and their African counterparts were responsible for publicity, venue, student recruitment, and finding African tutors. Student recruitment was led by African queer organizations, and the publicity was primarily carried out online through social media or by word of mouth. Each workshop consisted of around 18 African participants; they were mostly queer- and activist-identified individuals, and some were working for partner organizations. In these weeklong workshops, participants learned from their tutors crucial skills in documentary film shooting, editing, fundraising, and distribution. They then used their newly acquired skills to document their own community issues and personal stories. Queer University awarded its best students with yearlong material and mentoring support and assisted them in directing and producing their own full-length documentaries. Some films produced at Queer University were subsequently uploaded to the Queer Comrades website for free online streaming and some were shown at the Beijing Queer Film Festival.⁷ In many ways, Queer University epitomized grassroots queer activist collaborations in the Global South.

Queer University demonstrates the importance of self-representation in media and cultural politics. For sexual minorities in the Global South, instead of waiting passively to be represented—or misrepresented—by mainstream media and heteronormative societies, or by their counterparts in the West and the Global North, they have learned to use digital video cameras to represent themselves. The ability to represent oneself is often empowering for queer individuals and communities. After all, films and digital videos function as an important way to conduct queer activism and build queer communities (Christian, 2017; Day & Christian, 2017; Gross, 2002; Pullen, 2014; Raun, 2016; Wu, 2017). In an interview, facilitators of Queer University point out “the potency of film as a medium to do—and also undo—damage” caused by negative representations of marginalized sexualities and identities, including queers and people living with disabilities, in China and Africa (Moshood, 2018). Through exchanging knowledge, skills, and ideas about how to be queer and how to make films, queer activists from China and Africa have been building coalitions and fostering solidarities to fight against heteronormative societies and hostile media environments in the Global South.

China–Africa queer connections

On 3–9 March 2017, jointly organized by BGHEI and GALZ (Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe), the first Queer University workshop in Africa took place in Harare, Zimbabwe. Two Chinese filmmakers and two African filmmakers led the workshop. Two documentaries were completed in November, including a lesbian’s “coming out” story set in a small African village. On the Queer Comrades website, three queer African short films produced during the workshop are available. They include *None on Record—LGBTI Activism in Zimbabwe* (dir. Tash Dowell, Zimbabwe, 2017), *Only Human* (dir. Tsitsi Betha, Zimbabwe, 2017), and *Flipping the Script* (dir. Tash Dowell, Zimbabwe, 2017). *None on Record* is a 32-minute documentary about queer activism in Zimbabwe, featuring interviews with activists from GALZ about their “coming out” and activist experiences.⁸ *Flipping the Script* and *Only Human* are short 3-minute videos documenting life at the workshop, where queer activists from China and Zimbabwe lived and worked together during the workshop. *Flipping the Script* features interviews with Chinese and African queer activists about their attitudes toward their children’s sexualities.⁹ All the interviewees shared an open attitude of understanding and support for different sexualities. In *Only Human*, a sequence shows a Zimbabwean queer activist teaching Hong Kong queer filmmaker Kit Hung how to make dreadlocks.¹⁰ Some lively music and dance sequences are dubbed in the sequence. Both the film title



Figure 4. Co-organizers of Queer University, Ghana, Akosua Hanson and Xiaogang Wei (Courtesy of Drama Queens).

Only Human and the concluding line “one family, one universe, one pride” suggest international solidarity regardless of national boundaries and cultural differences.

These films are “open texts” that actively invite experience sharing and lively discussions; they are also part of the processes of shooting, disseminating, and screening events surrounding the films. In these dynamic and continuing processes, identities are constructed, communities are imagined, and mutual understanding and support are forged. In the meantime, activists from China and Africa imagine a Global South queer subjectivity with their shared feelings and experiences. This subjectivity departs from an individualist, neoliberal, and depoliticized subjectivity often prioritized in the Global North; it emphasizes solidarity, mutual support, and collective struggles based on the political imaginary of the Global South.

In April 2018 and 2019, the BGHEI collaborated with Drama Queens, a feminist and pan-Africanist theater organization based in Accra and held a 1-week Queer University workshop in Ghana (Figures 4–6).¹¹ Each year, eight participants were selected and given rigorous trainings in filmmaking, supervised by Hong Kong filmmaker Kit Hung and Wanlov the Kubolor, a Ghanaian–Romanian musician and filmmaker. At the end of the workshop, four participants were awarded prize packages, which included a 4-month mentorship period, some funding to make the film projects based on the ideas they pitched, and a trip to China to show their films at the Beijing Queer Film Festival (also known as Beijing Love Queer Cinema Week; Moshood, 2018).

Drama Queens brands itself as a “feminist theatre” group instead of a queer activist group because terms such as feminism and art practices are seen as less politically sensitive in Ghana. In contrast to the clear separation between feminist and queer identities, as well as between activism



Figure 5. Queer University, Ghana, 2019 (Courtesy of Drama Queens).



Figure 6. Queer University, Ghana, 2018 (Courtesy of Drama Queens).

and culture, often seen in many parts of the Global North, the queer and feminist—as well as activist and cultural—articulations in many parts of the Global South are often more contingent, organic, and flexible. The Accra-based group is characterized by a strong feminist stance. Its website states,

Drama Queens seeks to use theatre as a means of restoring gender equality and balance to achieve a world state where women would no longer be a group of the oppressed, but would be creative and active agents, playing their key roles in contributing to universal progress. (Drama Queens, 2019)

Queer University organizers have devised flexible and culturally sensitive strategies to conduct activism that speaks to the local context. For example, because commercial venues are less likely to encounter police intervention than public spaces, the group usually hires commercial venues with which it has connections and on which it can bestow trust as event spaces to ensure the safety of the participants. Drama Queens places gender and sexuality at the center of its work and employs an intersectional queer feminist approach to sexuality. It engages with queer communities through multiple forms and formats: discussions, parties, performances, graphic novels, films, and social media. In my interview with Akosua Hanson, founder and director of Drama Queens, she explained the importance of using film and other forms of art in feminist and queer activism:

I am a strong believer of the power of art in changing people's minds and hearts. Changes in law are important, but you also have to change how people think. Art comes with empathy, and stories can help people understand where others come from. Artistic expressions can create a space for questioning the status quo and thinking about alternatives in ways that other forms cannot. (Interview with Akosua Hanson, 13 January 2020)

Based on such a belief, Hanson has included multiple artistic and creative forms to the Queer University program. She has also added new themes—including disability—to the Queer University curriculum. Hanson explained the importance of the disability issue as follows:

Disability is an issue that is not yet properly engaged with in queer and feminist activism. People who live with disability often suffer from great stigma and prejudice. Disability points to new ways of being. We should think of people as differently abled, and society should create different versions of existence.

Against the use of able-bodied language on disability out of “compulsory able-bodiedness” (McRuer, 2006), Hanson sees people as “differently abled” and disability as representing “different ways of being.” This not only counters an ableist bias in neoliberal stratification (Puar, 2012) but also brings a much-needed intersectional perspective into the understanding of sexuality by addressing multiple and intersecting identities and social structures (Crenshaw, 1989).

According to Hanson, the Queer University curriculum has two focuses: one is the technical skills of filmmaking and the other is to identify key issues and discursive frameworks. Hanson also felt that one more aspect that could have been strengthened is “artistic expression,” that is, “how to artistically represent these issues.” The cinematic language and aesthetics, as well as how films work in tandem with other art forms, are thus an integral part of the queer activism in the Global South, where explicit forms of social activism are often deemed too politically risky and therefore discouraged.



Figure 7. Queer University tutor Kit Hung leads a workshop on body visualization (Courtesy of Queer Comrades and Queer University).

Hanson was pleased with the outcome of the workshop: one fiction film and two documentary films came out of the project. She also commented that Chinese and African filmmakers worked well together at the Queer University. Despite the different styles of work, the collaboration between Chinese and African filmmakers and activists was built on trust, goodwill, and a genuine sense of egalitarianism. “We were working together in a real partnership,” Hanson remarked, “there was a lot of listening on both sides.” Listening, as Leah Bassel (2017) points out, in contrast to voice and speaking, is a political and social practice that has the potential to disrupt the colonial hierarchy of discursive framework and create new ways of being and acting together. In listening together and to each other, people are treated as political equals and heard on their own terms. The egalitarian relationship, the democratic way of communication, and the collective subjectivity underpinning the act of listening are precisely what makes Queer University a political project.

Kit Hung, a queer filmmaker from Hong Kong, participated as a tutor in the Queer University in Zimbabwe in 2017 and in Ghana in 2018. In my interview with Hung (on 26 June 2018), he told me about his experiences in Africa and how he approached teaching at the Queer University. Hung started each Queer University workshop with a “visualizing the body” exercise by asking each participant to draw a picture of their own bodies on a sheet of paper (Figure 7). He noticed interesting gender differences among the workshop participants: male participants usually strive for more realistic portrayals of the human body and their sketched bodies are usually clothed or aiming for perfection. Female participants, in contrast, seem more imaginative: they often paint transparent or abstract bodies; the boundaries between human bodies and their environment are sometimes blurred. This has inspired Hung to look at the body and gender in different ways.

Hung's discovery may sound initially like an essentialization and even exoticization of people's gender differences, mediated by racial and cultural categories. His observation, however, points to the different epistemologies about gender, sexuality, and the body that do not map neatly onto the Western, modern, and even postmodern notions of gender difference that have been widely accepted in Western academia and the established discursive frameworks in the Global North.

The videos that Queer University students produced also manifest significant differences, as Hung compares his teaching experience in China with that in Africa. In the videos that Queer University participants made, Hung explains, Chinese participants tend to focus on a person's individual experiences, and this can be explained by the prevailing individualism among the younger generation in China, whereas African participants' videos often address issues pertaining to societies and communities, a testimony to the great importance that many Africans attach to these issues. Two documentaries produced from the Queer University program in Ghana, *Talking in the Shadow* (dir. Darey Adodo, 2019) and *Plain Sight Cut* (dir. Achiro P. Olwoch, 2019), are both 16-minute films featuring "talking heads" interviews with African queer activists and portraying ordinary queer people's everyday lives and community events. Individual stories are often situated in communities and society, and there is a strong sense of the community spirit in *Plain Sight Cut*. While these observations may have come from a personal perspective and are based on a very small sample, they, however, yield valuable insights about perceived gender and cultural differences, some of which conform to cultural stereotypes and some defy these stereotypes. These observations also demonstrate the complex entanglements between already and not-yet colonized knowledges, as well as the difficult processes of decolonization in queer knowledge production. More importantly, these observations and experiences inspire filmmakers and activists to attend to cultural specificities in transnational queer representation and activist strategies, instead of simply importing knowledge or emulating experiences from other places.

Hung remembers fondly the friendliness and hospitality of his African friends. He is particularly struck by the relaxed attitudes toward the use of the body in Africa. The African friends he met did not seem at shy of expressing themselves with body languages. Hung even joined some locals in dancing on the street, something he could never have imagined himself doing in the past. For Hung, this was a liberating experience: he started to think about bodies, intimacies, and kinship in a way that challenges Eurocentrism and the Global North hegemony in epistemology and knowledge production.

Coming from Hong Kong, Hung is deeply touched by the African queer activists' critical attitudes toward the West. Many of the queer activists and filmmakers he met in Africa often remarked, "this is very West" or "this is un-African." Aware of the essentializing tendencies of these claims, Hung appreciates his African friends' keen awareness of unequal power relations between the Global North and the Global South, together with their determination to decolonize knowledge production. "The decolonization in Africa goes further than that in Hong Kong," he remarked in my interview. Although many queer Africans cannot yet articulate what is "African," Hung concludes, their critical attitude is nonetheless a good starting point to think about identity, kinship, and intimacy in different ways, and in ways more attentive to cultural specificities. Here, Hung was making comparisons between Hong Kong and Africa about which he knows, and with which he has physical and affective experiences; he was also critically reflecting on the different experiences and impacts of colonialism and decolonization in both locations. It is important to note that he was actively drawing comparisons and contrasts between the two postcolonial societies situated in the geographic Global South—a "minor transnational" comparison par excellence. The Hong

Kong–Africa cross-referencing functions as a form of “minor transnationalism” in transnational queer connections.

In my interview with the Chinese queer filmmaker Popo Fan (on 1 December 2019), who participated in and screened his films at the Queer University Film Festival in Ghana in 2019, Fan fondly remembered the relaxed atmosphere and lively discussions at the Q&A after the film screenings. In many film events he attended in the Global North, Fan says, people are often too shy to ask directors questions in public: “this is something that we can learn from our African friends. I have learned a lot from these questions and lively discussions.” Fan’s comments should be read as a personal observation of and positive commentary on a particularly dedicated audience group, which happen to have been found at the film festival, rather than a general statement about perceived and essentialized cultural differences. Recalling his experiences at the Queer University, Fan remarked:

At the workshop, we [Chinese filmmakers and activists] were very careful not to reproduce colonial and neocolonial discourses. We were not there to teach people knowledge or send people resources; we were there to share information and exchange skills with our African friends. In the process, I have learned a lot from African filmmakers and activists in terms of how to make films and how to view films. (Fan 2020)

As we can see, the Queer University workshops and the film festival have changed Fan’s and many other participants’ ideas about and attitudes toward things, although their impacts are implicit, unobservable, and often hard to pin down.

Most of these queer filmmakers and activists are all young people in their 20s and 30s, and the Queer University workshop is usually their first encounter with each other and with a different culture. Hung, Fan, and many other filmmakers and activists who have participated in the workshop all expressed that they have learned a lot from each other, and that they still have a lot to learn, both in terms of ways of working and in terms of different modes of understanding gender, sexuality, subjectivity, and the body. Admittedly, their understandings of each other—and of the world—are inevitably fraught with tensions and contradictions, and heavily mediated by dominant discourses from the Global North, not to mention by the hegemonic political and economic power relations in global geopolitics. They constantly have to negotiate with multiple and shifting subject and discursive positions often beyond their control. Also, knowledges and practices from the Global North and the Global South have been intimately intertwined with each other due to long histories of colonialism, imperialism, and capitalist globalization. In this context, decolonization may sometimes seem like a wishful thinking. However, it is these queer activists’ willingness to step out of their own comfort zones and to listen to, speak with, and learn from each other that makes Queer University a fascinating project with emancipatory potentials. It is also these activists’ common wish to decolonize queer knowledge and activism, together with their shared imaginary of the Global South—no matter how precarious this may seem—that gives the concept of Global South a performative life. The search for “epistemologies of the South” (Santos, 2014) is an ongoing and never-ending process, and this process can be full of precariousness and pitfalls. However, the never-ending search itself constitutes a process of decolonization from the “cognitive injustices” of the Global North and the entangled histories across the globe.

The Global South

Queer University demonstrates the hopes, promises, and precariousness of emerging people-to-people exchanges taking place in the Global South. It also demonstrates the complexity of the Global South. In recent decades, the term “Global South” has largely supplanted “the Third World” in development studies and in literary and cultural studies (West-Pavlov, 2018). The term often has a geographical connotation and is often discussed in relation to the industrialized and postindustrialized world in the Global North, where neoliberal capitalism first emerged and subsequently took a strong hold. The term is sometimes understood as an effect of the capitalist globalization emanating from the Global North and extending its hegemonic power to the southern part of the world. At other times, it is seen as forms of discontent shared by the world’s subaltern populations and transnational alliances of counterhegemonic struggles against neoliberal modernity (López, 2007). It is “a sliding signifier forever in pursuit of a changing signified in a dynamic of supplementation dictated by where the North deterritorializes and the South reterritorializes” (Mishra, 2018, p. 54). Despite the multiple critiques launched at the concept of the Global South for its alleged essentialism and utopianism, the critical power, performative function, and emancipatory potential of this concept should not be dismissed. Indeed, even if the imagination of the Global South is an “illusion” that risks concealing internal differences and power relations within the seemingly coherent and yet fragmentary Global South, such an imagination can still serve as a “mobilization myth” (Dirlik, 2007) that enables and empowers individuals and groups at a critical historical juncture (West-Pavlov, 2018, p. 19). The key, therefore, is how, for what purposes, and with what effect the concept is mobilized.

The concept of the Global South has significant implications for reimagining and remapping the trajectories and processes of globalization. Globalization is often understood in terms of Western hegemony, cultural imperialism, and the homogenization of culture (Ritzer, 2000; Said, 1994; Tomlinson, 1999). In such a conceptual framework, the West continues to dominate the world, and the Global North is seen as the epicenter of all transnational processes. Such an understanding is useful, insofar as it points to the deeply entrenched unequal power relations in the world as a result of the entangled historical processes of Western colonialism and capitalist expansion. However, this view obscures what is happening in a large part of the world, that is, the dynamics and the tensions in the non-Western world and the Global South, as well as in ordinary people’s daily lives. After all, it is important to remember that the hegemony of the Global North has not gone unchallenged. In fact, anti-colonial and anti-hegemonic struggles and South–South alliances have constituted an important part of the world’s history (Prashad, 2007). One such historical moment was the Bandung Conference, the first large-scale Asian African conference that took place in Bandung, Indonesia, in 1955. The Bandung Conference inspired a series of South–South collaborations against the Northern hegemony, represented by the Non-Aligned Movement, an ongoing international movement established by a group of developing countries in Belgrade, Serbia, in 1961, which refuse to align with or against any power bloc. The nostalgic memory of the Bandung Conference, sometimes referred to as the “Bandung nostalgia” (Yoon, 2018), has become an inspiration for many transnational projects led by governments, individuals, and grassroots organizations in the Global South.

In the spirit of the Bandung Conference and the Non-Aligned Movement and inspired by anti-imperialist and anti-colonial struggles in the Global South, scholars from the Global South have come up with different ways to conceptualize South–South relations. In the context of Asia, Kuan-Hsing Chen (2010) suggests using “Asia as method,” Koichi Iwabuchi (2014) and Chua Beng Huat

(2015) propose “inter-Asia referencing,” and Ran Ma (2019) examines independent cross-border filmmaking within Asia. Instead of always using the Western historical experience as a reference point, scholars from different Asian contexts learn from one another to articulate shared feelings and experiences of decolonization and anti-imperialist struggles, in order to explore different ways of solidarity building and creative resistance.

This line of thought on making South–South connections has a profound impact on queer studies in the context of Asia. For example, Travis S. K. Kong’s (2019) “transnational queer sociology” focuses on queer cultures in different parts of the Chinese-language societies in order to tease out how globalization and various forms of state governance have combined to shape queer cultures in distinct ways. Howard Chiang, Ari Larissa Heinrich, and Alvin K. Wong (Chiang & Heinrich, 2013; Chiang & Wong, 2020) come up with the critical term “queer Sinophone cultures” to decenter the PRC (People’s Republic of China)-centrism in transnational queer studies. Audrey Yue (2017) and Helen Hok Sze Leung (Yue & Leung, 2017) use “queer Asia as method,” whereas Howard Chiang and Alvin K. Wong (2016, 2017) study “queer Asia as critique”: in both cases, “queer Asia” is treated with a great theoretical vigor, rather than simply reproducing the West/Asia and theory/method dichotomies in academic knowledge production. Drawing on Yue and Leung, Jia Tan (2019) examines the use of inter-Asia referencing in queer film festivals in the Asia Pacific; Ting-Fai Yu (2019) examines the role of class in comparative queer cultures in Asia. Meanwhile, academic journals such as *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* and *Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific* have been established, while book series such as Hong Kong University Press’s *Queer Asia* series have been set up to promote inter-Asia scholarship. Since 2016, the Queer Asia event series, comprised of academic conferences, film festivals, and art exhibitions, have been taking place at SOAS (School of Oriental and African Studies), University of London. Some of these transnational initiatives and research networks have produced anthologies such as *Mobile Cultures: New Media in Queer Asia* (Berry et al., 2003), *AsiaPacifiQueer* (Martin et al., 2008), *Routledge Handbook of Sexuality Studies in East Asia* (McLelland & Mackie, 2015), and *Queer Asia* (Luther & Loh, 2019). My work joins these scholars’ de-Westernizing and decolonizing efforts in imagining a queer world in which the Global North does not naturally occupy a central place in “queer worldmaking” (Berlant & Warner, 1998). Different from most of these scholars, who tend to use the geographic category of Asia, the Asia Pacific, or the Sinophone, as reference points, I explore the much-neglected China–Africa connections in the context of the Global South.

The focus on the Global South has its epistemological foundations in “Southern theory” (Connell, 2007) and “epistemologies of the South” (Santos, 2014). Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2014) uses the term “cognitive injustice” to describe the West’s failure to recognize different ways of gaining knowledge across the world. He argues that the knowledge that we have is heavily biased toward the Global North, and that Western domination has marginalized knowledge and wisdom from the Global South. He proposes to learn from and develop “epistemologies of the South” in order to restore the epistemological diversity of the world. Raewyn Connell (2007) similarly calls for a recognition of social theory from societies outside the dominant European and North American metropole; she uses the term “Southern theory” to give voice to the knowledges produced in the Global South. This article does not aim to come up with yet another overarching “Southern theory,” but it joins Santos and Connell, among others, in challenging the Global North hegemony of transnational knowledge production and in exploring possible ways of decolonizing queer knowledge.

Major and minor transnationalism in China–Africa screen industry entanglements

Queer University can be best understood as a form of queer “minor transnationalism.” In *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, Giles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1986) criticize the concept of “majority” and advocate a position of the “minor” or “becoming minoritarian.” Here, majority or minority has nothing to do with size or number; it is, instead, a political position through which individuals or social groups situate themselves in relation to hegemonic forms of power. “What defines majority is a model you have to conform to [. . .] A minority, on the other hand, has no model, it’s a becoming, a process” (Deleuze, 1990, p. 173). It is the anti-hegemonic, undefined, and unpredictable processes of transformation that make the concept of the “minor” particularly useful for understanding and theorizing globalization. If a “major transnationalism” is understood as a form of globalization defined by nation-states and the transnational flow of global capital, a “minor transnationalism,” according to Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih (2005), encompasses heterogeneous transnational processes rife with potentials to challenge hegemonic forms of power and create new social relations. In what follows, I will illustrate “major” and “minor” forms of transnationalism in the context of the Global South by using screen industry collaborations between China and Africa as examples.

Transnational projects in the Global South, especially those initiated by governments, are often intertwined with complex economic and political interests. In recent years, with its rise into a global power, China has launched an overwhelming number of large-scale economic and cultural projects in Africa, many of which fall under the rubric of the Belt and Road Initiative. Some of these projects are controversial: they are often accused of exploiting Africa’s natural resources and cheap labor, while their benefits to the local communities in Africa are not obvious. “To what extent it is South-South cooperation embodied, for instance, in Chinese investment in Africa is a genuine example of ‘Global South’ reciprocal support, and to what extent it is merely a form of ‘Southern’ neocolonialism, is heavily debated” (West-Pavlov, 2018, p. 6). The expansion of China’s media companies in Africa, represented by the four major media corporations including the China Global TV Network (CGTN), China Radio International, *China Daily*, and the Xinhua News Agency, is also seen as playing a “mouthpiece” role for the Chinese Communist Party and to “manufacture consent” for China’s dominant position in Africa (Li, 2017). The government-led “media going out” strategy also helps Chinese media to become emerging global media conglomerates, with their roots securely anchored in the Global South, thus consolidating China’s political and economic powers in a changing global landscape (Thussu et al., 2017; Wagner, 2018; Zhang et al., 2016).

Encouraged by China’s state policy and partly supported by public funding, the Chinese film industry has also entered the African market and expanded its reach and influence in the past decade. In June 2015, a Chinese Film Festival was held in Namibia’s capital Windhoek (Forum on China–Africa Cooperation, 2015). In October 2017, the inaugural China–Africa International Film Festival (CAIFF) took place in Cape Town, South Africa. Organized by China Radio International, Beijing Film Academy, and the Global Max Media Group, the festival showcased five Chinese films and five African films (CAIFF, 2017).¹² The festival also announced the start of the first “China–Africa co-production” *When Africa Meets You* (dir. Cui Yan, China, 2018; Global Max Media Group, 2018). The expansion of China’s screen industries on the African continent should be understood as Chinese screen industries’ ambition to “go global” (Voci & Luo, 2018) in the context of China’s expansion of its soft power in the Global South. It is also worth noting that these

official collaborations in the film industries are mostly projects financed and led by China's state institutions. African participation in these projects remains limited and the relationship between different parties in these "collaborative" projects is far from being equal.

Perhaps one of the most prominent contemporary representations of the China–Africa relation comes from a 2017 Chinese action film *Wolf Warrior 2* (dir. Jing Wu). This high-grossing blockbuster features a brave Chinese soldier rescuing people, regardless of their nationality, from an unnamed war-torn and plague-ridden African country; it also shows the "strong" Chinese man risks his own life protecting "weak" women and children. Symbolically, the film depicts the Chinese hero fighting against Western imperialism on the African continent by declaring to his American counterpart: "that was the past." A *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* dossier co-edited by Petrus Liu and Lisa Rofel (2018) demonstrates that the gender and sexual politics of the film speaks to the global geopolitics of the era. The film presents a version of Chinese heteromasculinity that manifests China's increasing ambition to play a key role in the world. As Liu (2018) contends,

The jingoistic fantasies about China's rise require a policing of gender, which operates through complex and subtle mechanisms. These complexities demonstrate that gender and sexual lives are not exterior to the story about China's rise, but constitutive of it.

Indeed, the reshaping of gender and sexuality in the contemporary era is at the core of a changing global geopolitics. Such a process tends to reproduce hegemonic forms of masculinity and heteronormativity. With the proliferations of screen representation of China–Africa encounters in global mainstream and commercial media, a hegemonic—and often uncritical—regime of gender and sexuality is likely to be consolidated in the Global South.

But not all forms of transnationalism are hegemonic and not all are dominated by nation-states or supranational entities. There are always collaborations between individuals or grassroots organizations, which function as forms of "minor transnationalism" (Lionnet & Shih, 2005). Lionnet and Shih observe that the field of transnational studies often focuses on analyzing vertical relations between minority culture and mainstream society, and thereby ignores horizontal relations and lateral networks between minority cultures. As a result, minority groups often form their identities "in opposition to a dominant discourse rather than vis-à-vis each other and other minority groups" (p. 2), thus missing opportunities for offering mutual support, forging collaboration, and forming synergies to fight for shared goals. Lionnet and Shi recommend that we shift our attention to horizontal relationships among minority groups, encourage collaborations, and foster solidarities among these groups. The notion of minor transnationalism opens up an alternative vision in which the transnational can be conceived as "a space of exchange and participation wherever processes of hybridization occur and where it is still possible for cultures to be produced and performed without necessary mediation by the center" (p. 5). To date, the theory of "minor transnationalism" has not yet paid sufficient attention to issues of gender and sexuality, with a few exceptions. Alvin K. Wong's (2020) study of "queer vernacularism"—that is, queer literary modernism since the 1990s—in Hong Kong and Singapore serves as a good example of the queer minor transnationalism in Asia. In this article, I hope to make a scholarly contribution in this discussion by envisioning a "queer minor transnationalism" centered on the Global South.

In the context of the Global South, "minor transnationalism" between China and Africa is manifested in a myriad of ways. Cobus van Staden's (2017) research into South African audience's consumption of Hong Kong martial arts film is a good example. Martial arts films, through legal

or illegal channels of distribution, have connected South African audiences with Hong Kong and Chinese characters and audiences in their imagination of anti-colonial and anti-hegemonic struggles under Apartheid:

Both the attractionist structure of these films and their “Chinese” (and therefore non-Western) setting aided audiences whose skills in resistant reading had been honed through years of westerns, to take maximal viewing pleasure from films which combined attractionist violence with explicitly antihegemonic narratives. (van Staden, 2017, p. 59)

A second example of South–South minor transnationalism concerns Lesothian filmmaker Carl Houston McMillan’s 2016 film *Laisuotuo*.¹³ It is a touching film for many people because it humanizes the China–Africa relationship by focusing on the cross-cultural and daily interactions between ordinary people from China and Lesotho (Olander & van Staden, 2016). Both examples highlight the importance of “minor transnationalism”—be it informal circulation of films or cinematic representation of people-to-people exchanges in the Global South. These cultural exchanges are not initiated or led by nation-states, and they are often enacted in everyday, mundane, and even unnoticeable ways. However, their impacts are likely to be more enduring and sustainable than many government-supported “soft power” vanity projects. As Audrey Yue and Gary Hawkins (2000) point out in their study of the diasporic Chinese communities’ everyday consumption of media in Australia, narrowcasting in the form of community media is more than a site where local and transnational information becomes available; it is also a site where different forms of temporal–spatial relations can potentially decenter the identity of nation as narration. Yue and Hawkins propose the analytical category of “going south” to examine identity construction, community formation, and “minor” transnational connections beyond hegemonic national articulations. To talk about “minor transnationalism” in the Global South, therefore, is a political project that puts into question the hegemony of the nation-states in a world demarcated by state borders and national identities.

Queering the Global South

The Global South is ambivalently situated in relation to issues of gender and sexuality. A Western understanding of modernity is key to the process of (de)gendering and (de)sexualizing the Global South. The Global South in the premodern context is often cast under an orientalist gaze and imagined as a land of sexual abundance, decadence, primitivism, and sometimes tinted with an infantile innocence (Said, 1991); Michel Foucault’s (1998) description of *ars erotica* vividly captures such a fascination. In the modern era, with the expansion of Western colonialism and industrial capitalism, a liberal and pristine notion of sexuality gave way to a discourse of sexual repression, religious fundamentalism, communist asceticism, and human rights abuse in the Global South. Queer people in the Global South are often seen as powerless victims that passively await salvation by their liberated brothers and sisters from the Global North. In priding itself on gender and sexual diversity and in seeing itself as the epitome of human civilization, the Global North has deployed the dichotomy of a sexually liberalized North versus a sexually illiberal South, and this further consolidates the unequal power relations between the North and the South (Pigg & Adams, 2005). Moreover, a sense of national pride and cultural superiority based on an assumed sense of sexual liberation is often used to legitimize military, political, economic, and cultural interventions in other parts of the world. Jasbir Puar (2007) points out that the US “war on terrorism” is often premised on a sexually liberated “liberal West” versus a sexually repressive “illiberal East,” and that such a discourse is often used to justify American military intervention in the Arab countries.

Joseph Massad (2007) similarly has examined the negative Western influences on the sexual cultures in the Arab world, represented by Gay International's interventionist strategies, which imposed a Western type of sexual development and social movement agenda on Arab cultures at the risk of marginalizing and even destroying local cultural traditions. In the Chinese context, activists have also expressed concerns about the Western influence, exemplified by the "Sailor Moon Warrior Lala" (also known as "Pretty Fighters") debate in the queer communities 2011–2012, which critiqued the hegemony of Western queer knowledge and identity politics in China (Bao, 2018, pp. 83–88). Far from being personal and apolitical, gender and sexuality in the Global South have become battlefields where complex power relations converge, and intricate international politics are played out in the most intimate sphere.

The intervention into queer issues in the Global South by governments and civil society groups from the Global North is not without controversy. Homosexuality remains illegal in many African nations and "coming out" may not be the most viable option for many queer people. Despite the legalization of same-sex marriages or civil partnerships in South Africa in 2006, homosexuality has long been seen as "unAfrican," "unGodly," and "unnatural" in mainstream media and popular representation in Africa (Vincent & Howell, 2014). Since 2012, the American government has spent a large amount of money and resources on expanding civil rights for gay people overseas by marshaling its diplomats and directing its foreign aid. The outcomes of these programs remain limited, but many queer people in African countries have been increasingly put at risk of harassments and even violence because of their forced visibility (Onishi, 2015). Stella Iwuagwu, executive director of the Center for the Right to Health, an HIV patient and rights group based in Lagos, comments,

Before, these [gay] people were leading their lives quietly, and nobody was paying any attention to them. Before, a lot of people didn't even have a clue there were something called gay people. But now they know and now they are outraged. Now they hear that America is bringing all these foreign lifestyles. They are emboldened by the law. The genie has already left the bottle. (Onishi, 2015)

Queer Africans find themselves increasingly caught in the American cultural battles waged in Africa, where pro-gay and anti-gay groups both exert their pressures on African governments. Rev. Kapyia Kaoma, an Anglican priest from Zambia, comments, "When two elephants fight, the grass will suffer. This is what's happening in Africa. African LGBT people are just collateral damage to US politics on both ends" (Onishi, 2015).

In China, despite the decriminalization of homosexuality in 1997 and its partial depathologization in 2001, gender and sexual minorities also face enormous pressures from their families and a heteronormative society. The Chinese government frequently bans dissident political expression and open representation of sexuality in mainstream media. Many Chinese families follow the tradition of marriage and posterity in a society that prioritizes collectivism, conformity, and Confucian family values. LGBTQ people in China have long regarded the West as a gay paradise. Western gay classics such as *Brokeback Mountain*, *Milk*, and *Bohemian Rhapsody* have become widely known in China's queer communities through informal circulation online (Guo & Evans, 2020). The Western type of "coming out" politics and same-sex marriage have often dominated the agenda of LGBTQ activism in China. Some financially well-off gay couples travel abroad to get married. Every year selected Chinese queer activists travel to the LGBT Center in Los Angeles for sponsored internships. They took with them experiences they have learned from America back to China to deal with local issues. Some worked, and others did not. Damien Lu (also known as Xing Xing),

an American-born Chinese, often lectures in China and advocates gay identity politics (Engebretsen & Schroeder, 2015, p. 7). The West and the Global North, two often conflated categories, have become default reference points for queer activism in China for decades.

In recent years, there has been a growing discontent in China's queer communities with queer cultures from the West and the Global North. A 2018 *Global Times* news article carried the headline "China's LGBT activists break away from Western agenda, [and] bring their own experience to the world." The article featured interviews with several Chinese queer activists. In an interview, an activist identified by the English name John expressed his frustration with the Western "arrogance," together with his hope to explore localized ways of conducting queer activism:

They're so arrogant about China's situation. We're not that miserable, and their way of dealing with things would only have an adverse effect [. . .] They only care about superficial things. When it goes deep, they don't bother to care anymore [. . .] We need to have a new, more localized way to do things. (John, quoted in Xie, 2018)

Another Chinese queer activist, Ah Qiang by name, expressed similar sentiments:

Some [Western organizations] give us money and want to control our agenda. But they are totally blind to the real situations in China. For instance, some say they patron us for intersex people in China, as this is now a hot topic in their countries. They have no idea that, back in China, we are still fighting for gay men's rights. (Ah Qiang, quoted in Xie, 2018)

These African and Chinese activists' shared feelings of frustration toward some hegemonic forms of queer transnational practices in the West and the Global North manifest the complexities of queer lives and activism in the Global South. Charity organizations and queer groups from the Global North are often insensitive to social and cultural conditions in the Global South, as well as specific needs and demands of the local queer people, possibly because of their self-assured feeling of cultural superiority. Moreover, these "foreign aids" are often translated into gaining more bargaining power with national governments over non-queer-related issues, and this sometimes strikes many queer activists as too hard to accept.

For many African and Chinese queer activists, the "honeymoon" with the West and the Global North seems over. Some have started to look at the world from a different angle and in a way that is more critical of unequal power relations and more attentive to equality, collaboration, and mutual support. As they shift their attention to other parts of the world, China and Africa as geographic and cultural entities enter the picture. Chinese and African queer activists' collaboration with each other is situated at the historical juncture of China's "going global," represented by the Belt and Road Initiative. However, neither the Chinese government nor governments from African countries have been eager to embrace LGBTQ rights, nor have they placed queer rights into their strategic plans of collaboration and development. The exchanges between queer filmmakers and activists from China and Africa are often carried out underground, ad hoc, and at grassroots, people-to-people, or group-to-group levels. They work together to address gender and sexuality issues marginal to the national and supranational agendas but central to queer people's lives. This is what makes transnational projects such as the Queer University remarkable: in the Global South, ordinary people and grassroots organizations have found each other; they have been working together irrespective of their national governments' agendas and priorities. It is a shared feeling of

marginalization, together with a mutual sense of social justice, that brings these communities together. This is a form of “minor transnationalism” that traverses the Global South and fosters an anti-hegemonic solidarity against patriarchal and heteronormative states as well as a linear, progressive, and teleological conception of international development.

The Queer Global South

The Queer University team is acutely aware of the global context of China’s engagement in Africa. “This project seemed to be more easily embraced among certain people in China because it happened in the slipstream of China’s ‘going out,’” former team member Deklerck remarks. However, this does not compromise the grassroots aspect of the program. After all, Queer University receives no support from, and is unlikely to be recognized by, both Chinese and African governments. It does, however, highlight the importance of gender and sexuality often ignored in international development. “An extra consideration was that we were seeing growing charity work from Chinese organizations in Africa, but not focused on gender and sexuality,” Deklerck comments:

I think it’s super important because these economic ties are getting more and more important. Diplomatic ties as well. China also has its official charity foundations that are going over to Africa to work with people there. But there is almost no talk about gender or sexuality. There are more and more African people in China, and there are more and more Chinese people in Africa, but there hasn’t been a real exchange between grassroots activists, to talk about if there is Chinese influence and what it can bring to our activism, or what we have to be careful of. (Deklerck in *Queer China, Queer Africa*)¹⁴

Deklerck insightfully identifies some of the problems with the current situations in the Global South: first, an overemphasis on politics, economy, and international relations in the Global South—issues such as gender and sexuality have only recently received limited attention in recent years and are often cast in a negative light (Pigg & Adams, 2005); second, an urgent need to promote exchanges between people and grassroots organizations—government-led and investment-driven projects do not necessarily promote understanding and collaboration, and grassroots-based and people-led projects are often more effective in this respect; and third, a stronger emphasis on the role of media, including films, to change people’s perceptions and to bring people together. As Kathryn Batchelor and Xiaoling Zhang (2017) point out, images have the potential to initiate changes and enhance understandings between people in China and Africa. Emeka Umejei (2017) also observes that news coverage of China–Africa relations is often framed by the interest of the elites, with little attention paid to ordinary people’s voices. As Queer University demonstrates, self-representation is more important than representation by others for marginalized people and communities; representations through working together and having dialogues work often more effectively than representations coming from only one side. Queer activists in China and Africa are keenly aware of the importance of self-representation, collaboration, and communication. Their collaborations, represented by the Queer University program, are generating some emerging new social relations and cultural formations with democratizing and decolonizing potentials.

In a world saturated with unequal power relations and in the lingering shadows of colonialism and neoliberal capitalism, it is difficult not to look at transnational projects with a skeptical eye. Queer University is no exception. After all, it was a project made possible with the funding from the Global North, and this raises questions about the complex relationships between the North and the South, as well as the long and arduous journeys of decolonization. However, the program did

manifest some exciting new forms of “minor” transnational queer emergences. Queer University was a grassroots-led initiative between Chinese and African queer activists, neither of whom were supported by their respective governments. Therefore, if we shift our attention from grand narratives such as nation-states, international relations, and diplomatic ties, and turn to what is happening on the ground and in people’s everyday lives, we can envision hopes, promises, and “lines of flight,” as well as different ways of creative existence and resistance (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). By living and working together, and by drawing strengths from and sharing knowledge with each other, queer activists in the Global South form “imagined communities” (Anderson, 1983), and enact a “minor transnationalism” between marginalized people and minority groups in contrast to the “major transnationalism” mapped by nation-states and supernational bodies. The “minor transnationalism” taking place in the Global South may not be as immediately recognizable as the globalization process that traverses the globe from the North to the South, but they can have a much more profound impact on ordinary people’s lives and experiences. Such a transnationalism is bound to be “minor” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986) and even “queer,” insofar as queer continues to register an anti-normative political stance and at the same time remains attentive to both political economy and cultural politics. In this sense, the Global South is queer, and with these emerging and ongoing transnational connections, it is likely to be queerer.

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ORCID iD

Hongwei Bao  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1905-7926>

Notes

1. For more information about the Beijing Love Queer Cinema Week 2017, see <https://www.shpride.com/2017/11/13/recap-bjqff/?lang=en>; Promotion video <https://www.queercomrades.com/news/2017-love-queer-cinema-week/>
2. I am aware of the heterogeneity and diversity of cultures both in China and in Africa (and by extension, the West, the Global North, and the Global South). I use terms such as China and Africa as a shorthand to denote these distinct geographical and cultural entities not because I think that they embody some intrinsic, unchanging, and essentialized cultural traits but to indicate that these categories that people—including my interlocutors—often use in their everyday language have a material, normative, and even performative function, and they matter to both global geopolitics and ordinary people’s lives. It is best to understand my use of these terms as a form of “strategic essentialism” (Spivak, 2008)—that is, provisionally accepting some identity categories as a strategy for collective representation and political action, but using these categories critically in order to challenge and deconstruct them in the long term.
3. The Queer University in Africa program was supported by the Ford Foundation.
4. *Methodological note:* I interviewed two Queer University organizers (Akosua Hanson and Xiaogang Wei), a Queer University staff (Dennis Kwaku Frimpong Agyemang), a Queer University former staff (Stijn Deklerck), and two participants (Kit Hung who was a Queer University tutor, and Popo Fan who participated in the 2019 Queer University Film Festival). Most of my interviewees are “out” queer filmmakers and activists working transnationally. I use the names that they chose for themselves, some of which are pseudonyms, in this article.
5. For more information about Queer Comrades, see <https://www.queercomrades.org/about-us>, and about Queer University, see <https://www.queercomrades.org/university>

6. Weblink to the film *Comrade Yue*: <https://www.queercomrades.com/videos/%e5%90%8c%e5%bf%97/>
Weblink to the film *Silver Rich Road*: <https://www.queercomrades.com/videos/%e5%ad%9f%e5%ae%b6%e8%af%b2%e9%93%b6/>
7. These videos can be accessed from the Queer Comrades website: <https://www.queercomrades.com/videos/>
8. Weblink to the video *None on Record—LGBTI Activism in Zimbabwe*: <https://www.queercomrades.com/videos/%e6%9f%a5%e6%97%a0%e6%ad%a4%e4%ba%ba-%e6%b4%a5%e5%b7%b4%e5%b8%83%e9%9f%a6%e7%9a%84%e5%90%8c%e5%bf%97%e8%bf%90%e5%8a%a8/>
9. Weblink to the video *Flipping the Script*: <https://www.queercomrades.com/videos/%e7%bf%bb%e8%bd%ac%e5%89%a7%e6%9c%ac/>
10. Weblink to the video *Only Human*: <https://www.queercomrades.com/videos/%e5%8f%aa%e6%9c%89%e4%ba%ba%e7%b1%bb/>
11. Weblink to Drama Queens: <https://dramaqueensgh.com/>
12. Weblink to China–Africa International Film Festival (CAIFF): <http://caiff.co.za/>
13. Weblink to the film trailer *Laisuotuo*: <https://vimeo.com/174339516>
14. Weblink to the CINEMQ video *Queer China, Queer Africa*: https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=764263450424744&external_log_id=6deb582400a7ed856bf5bf5724bd957f&q=queer%20china%20queer%20africa%20stijn%20deklерck

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Author biography

Hongwei Bao is an associate professor of media studies at the University of Nottingham, UK. He is the author of *Queer Comrades: Gay Identity and Tongzhi Activism in Postsocialist China* (Nordic Institute of Asian Studies Press, 2018) and *Queer China: Lesbian and Gay Literature and Visual Culture under Postsocialism* (Routledge, 2020). He has published articles in *Continuum*, *Culture Unbound*, *Cultural Studies*, *Feminist Media Studies*, *Global Media and China*, *Health, Culture and Society*, *Interventions*, *Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art*, and *The JOMEC Journal*.