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Pathologization of Homosexuality in China and Chinese Language Queer Films: The Impact of Representation and Cinematic Allegory

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Abstract

Pathologization of homosexuality (the idea that homosexuality is a disease or illness) in China began during the Ming and Qing dynasties, and this idea has continued into current modern China. Confucianism's emphasis on filial piety and binary gender roles, Chinese intellectuals' appropriation of early European sexologists' texts into their own anti-homosexuality writings during anti-traditional social movements such as the May Fourth Movement, and China's criminalization of homosexuality during the socialist era all contributed to the pathologization of homosexuality. This paper investigates how the Chinese-language queer film Wong Kar-Wai's *Happy Together* and the film Li Yu's *Fish and Elephant* both challenge the idea that homosexuality is a disease and challenge the past influences that contributed to pathologization through cinematic allegory and representation.

1. Introduction

This study defines and outlines that pathologization of homosexuality in China is built on post-socialist and heteronormative ideas of normality, and thoroughly explicates the history of pathologization and how it became the popular social idea about homosexuality that it is today. Using a comprehensive knowledge of the history of homosexuality in China, as well as the social and political forces that pathologized homosexuality, this study showcases that pathologization is still prevalent despite claims that it has ceased in China. This research paper explains the ways that two Chinese-language queer films—*Happy Together*[1] and *Fish and Elephant*[2] challenge the pathologization of homosexuality in China.

2. Literature Review

This section reviews the sources used in the study. It begins with an overview of the proper terminology for homosexuals in China, then mentions the overarching societal barrier that contributes to homosexuals in China being discriminated against. it continues, and explains chronologically how pathologization of homosexuality in China came to be and how it has evolved since its emergence. Then, the text clarifies how pathologization is still a current issue in China today, using ethnographic and quantitative sources to explicate that idea. This section describes the genre of Chinese-language queer films, as well as the importance of underground cinema within that genre. It also illustrates the important contextual information about the two films involved in the study, *Fish and Elephant* & *Happy Together*, such as; production, plot synopsis, and key differences between the two films.

2.1 History Of Homosexuality In China

The way to refer to homosexuals in China highly differs based on which gender, area, or era to which someone is referring. There is a vast difference between homosexuality in pre-modern and post-modern times, as well as whether the queer person in question is a male or female. For queer women in China today, the popular terms are *lala*, or *les*[3]. For men in China today, *ku'er* or *tongzhi* are popular[4]. Although the male terms have been used to include female homosexualtiy in China as well, it is much less common. These terms are used instead of the older term *tongxinglian*, also meaning homosexuality, since that term has been used as an insult[5]. This term was used frequently after the end of the Qing dynasty, and is still used today[3].

Currently, China does not consider homosexuals to be accepted in society. *Lalas* and *tongzhi* face various forms of discrimination in China[4]. One of the major contributors to this discrimination is Confucianism. Confucianism, the dominant ideology of thought in China, considers the family as the priority in Chinese society. The importance of family is highly emphasized, and the responsibility that parent and child have to each other is ingrained within Chinese society[3]. In China, it is critical that children carry on their family line, whether men do so for their family, or women aid their husband in continuing his family. It is a responsibility they carry out because they owe their parents this in return for raising and caring for them. This is considered *xiao*, the familial contract between children and parents. To break *xiao* is to be unfilial to one's parents, a major moral and social failing for the child[5,6]. Because of Confucianism, the family is the building block of society, a pillar on which China can uphold tradition and ideals. The family is the source of order and good, and without the family members properly carrying out their intended roles, the family, and therefore society, would fall out of balance. Confucianism directly opposes homosexuality on an social level. As homosexual men in the Ming and Qing dynasties were allowed to have extra-marital affairs that might include men, current Chinese society is monogamous, meaning that there is no way to have a homosexual relationship while upholding the normal expectation of having a wife and children[7]. Female homosexuals in China did not have a space to exist freely during the dynastic period, or after. Women's role of upholding the family structure as a mother and as a daughter-in-law during the Ming and Qing dynasties meant she was crucial to the home, and any exploration of dedication, love, or desire of a woman over a husband would've been catastrophic to the family structure[3]. It is not conclusive that Confucianism in pre-modern times was the most significant obstacle to same-sex love. However, the current *xiao* culture during post-socialist times that requires marriage and bearing children to remain filial to one's parents as a result of Confucianism, is a major obstacle for Chinese homosexuals today[6].

Confucianism contributed to the one of the first instances of pathologization of homosexuality in China. Pathologization in this paper means the idea that homosexuality is a disease, sickness, or a mental illness. This term also includes instances in which homosexuality is considered abnormal, unnatural, or morally incorrect. While the pathologization of homosexuality in China is considered to have begun after the influence of the West began to modernize China, this is not true[8]. The pathologization of homosexuality in China began even before the end of Qing dynasty[3]. While same-sex eroticism was certainly enjoyed by the male populace of China during the Ming and Qing dynasties, it was not 'homosexuality' in the same modern sense as it is meant now. These same-sex relations were sexual in nature, based on power relations such as age and class, and were deeply entrenched in sexist gender roles that dictated the younger, more submissive partner played 'the woman' whereas the older, likely larger initiator was 'the man'[3]. These relations were not meant to be romantic, as heterosexual marriage was still considered more important to the family and society, and romance outside of the marriage could destabilize the family. This is also why same-sex attraction between male peers were far more rare, since the same-sex partners were merely replicating heterosexual copulation[3,5].

One of the earliest instances of Chinese writings pathologizing (male) homosexuality are illustrated in Confucianist writings. Shi[3] states:

> ...The Confucian theory of *yin* and *yang* is often used against sexual relations between men, especially in the Ming and Qing dynasties. In this system, sex between a man and a woman is taken as an instance of union between *yin* and *yang* and is accorded the status of belonging to the natural order. By the same token, sex between people of the same gender is considered unnatural and abnormal.

In this case, homosexuality in China was considered unnatural and abnormal, meaning that these sexual relations were considered outside of what society deems appropriate, healthy, and acceptable. Although this instance of pathologization seems to be more concerned with social order than medicalization of homosexual behavior, *yin* and *yang* are principles of Tradtional Chinese Medicine, and an overabundance of one energy was believed to be the cause of health issues in body, mind and spirit. This then implies that when homosexuals engage in sexual relations, their

union will eventually lead to an imbalance of their energies, and therefore, become sickly[3]. This implication also showcases that the words "abnormal" and "unnatural" are also words that contribute to the pathologization of homosexuality in China, even if the terms are not inherently medical in definition[9]. This first instance of pathologization continues and begins to expand after the end of the Qing dynasty, due to modernization.

China's rush to modernization gave rise to mass cultural upheaval, and a rejection of the traditional past. This push to modernize after the end of the Qing dynasty led to homosexual behavior being included in political critiques of the nation during the May Fourth movement, citing this behavior as the cause of a weakened nation. According to Zheng[10], "Constructions of gender and sexuality were inextricably connected to the construction of a nation". This means that gender and sexuality during this modernization period was a critical part of the nation's politics, and the roles that gender and sexuality had to adhere to were now not only socially, but also politically strict. Breaking out of the expected roles, which were the heteronormative wife and husband roles, meant not only social condemnation, but political persecution[10].

During this same time, Chinese intellectuals were translating Western texts and bringing them into discussion. Among the texts translated, there were references from early European sexologists, and their stance influenced many opinions of sex and gender within China's modernizing revolutions. These writings had not only the Western-defined homosexual explained and medicalized, but also pathologized them by using words such as "perversion" and "disease"[3]. These terms and ideas being used and appropriated by Chinese intellectuals, created a medical interpretation for the growing homophobia during China's modernization period. Zheng[4,10] also notes the significance of the Western idea of pathologization, "The Western pathologized view of homosexuality came into China with the translation and spawned a reconfigured interpretation of homoerotic relationships as immoral, deviant, decadent, and ultimately the cause of a weak nation". However, despite the effect that the West had on pathologizing homosexuality in China, it is important to differentiate between this being a major influence and being the *origin* of pathologizing homosexuality in China. As previously stated, homosexuality had been considered abnormal or unnatural even before the West's inclusion. It is more apt to say that homosexuality itself was re-defined and re-categorized because of the West, and therefore, pathologization was borne out of Chinese social disdain for traditional same-sex attraction and the medicalization of sexuality that occurred through Western influence.

Additionally, from 1949 to 1997, China's government legally persecuted homosexuals under the charge of Hooliganism[3,6,7,11]. This political discrimination led to homosexuality continuing to stay hidden and secretive. These events caused a radical shift in how homosexuality is regarded and understood in China, and pathologization continued and expanded for both male and female homosexuality, creating a mentally ill, demonized, criminalized, and immoralized image of homosexuality in China[3,4,10,11]. This image of homosexuality led to many homosexuals choosing to stay closeted, or out of the public eye, as well as led to homosexuality being censored during and after the socialist era.

2.2 Current Opinions Of Homosexuality and Exposure

Today, the homosexual community in China remains fairly hidden. Many of the societal pressures and expectations put on young people in China prevent safe, open exploration, and being publicly known as gay is often a cause for despair[6]. *Lalas* tend to struggle with invisibility, but *tongzhi* often have to keep hidden lest they fall victim to *baoguang* or being outed, and having their identity as gay exposed. This act can be devastating[5,6]. As the identity of a lesbian was unknown in China until the twenty-first century, *lalas* are a very new identity that are still relatively invisible to the general public, and what is 'known' about them are stereotypes that are harmful and ignorant, leftover from when many Chinese intellectuals used information from European sexologists that cited lesbian behavior as a disease[3]. This negative stigma continues to exist with *tongzhi* as well, as *tongzhi* face the most exposure in Chinese media[6]. Part of the reason this negative stigma still persists is the pathologization of homosexuality, and that homosexuality was legally regarded as a mental illness during the socialist era, and during a majority of the post-socialist era as well.

While Chao[5], Zheng[4], and Huang[8] state a claim that depathologization of homosexuality was achieved in mainland China in 2001, this claim cannot be properly confirmed. Homosexuality was considered removed from the CCMD-3 (Chinese Classification of Mental Disorders version 3) in 2001, but this has not effectively ceased social or political pathologization of homosexuality. A study by Huang[8] analyzed media exposure on same-sex attracted people in *The People's Daily*, a very influential newspaper in China. In this study, Huang reported that one of the few articles written on homosexuality being a mental disorder was written in 2005, four years after the supposed depathologization of homosexuality. This means that major media exposure of homosexuality was still actively contributing to the pathologization of homosexuality years after the medical field 'ended pathologization'. The sources that claim

pathologization ended did not explain nor consider that homosexuality wasn't completely removed from the CCMD-3 in 2001. Instead, homosexuality split into two categories; ego-syntonic homosexuality (meaning homosexuals who feel no discomfort with their sexuality) and ego-dynamic homosexuality (homosexuals who feel any discomfort with their sexuality), and ego-syntonic homosexuality was removed from the CCMD-3, but ego-dynamic homosexuality was not[8,9].

This removal of a "type" of homosexuality may have allowed pathologization to be less prominent, but in a country that discriminates against homosexuals, many *lalas* and *tongzhis* will feel uncomfortable with their sexuality, and perhaps even recieve conversion therapy to combat their sexuality[9]. The change in the CCMD-3 did not end the pathologization of homosexuality, since the ideology of pathologization is prevalent in China today[9]. Homosexuality is still pathologized partially because of the public's association between male homosexuals and HIV/AIDS[11]. Bao[9] also notes that homosexuality is widely considered to be a disorder even today, and found that "A recommended text for mental health education, *Zixun xinlixue* (*Consulting Psychology*) published by Guangdong Higher Education Press describes homosexuality as a 'disorder'". The chapter also mentions that HIV/AIDS has become somewhat synonymous with the gay identity, and homosexuality pathologized because of the association between HIV/AIDS and gay sex[9]. This evidence shows that pathologization of homosexuality is still very much present in current Chinese society.

2.3 Queer Chinese-Language Film: *Fish and Elephant* & *Happy Together*

The knowledge of *lalas* and *tongzhis* is imperative to understanding the history of queer Chinese-language film, and how this genre has been defined over the course of its production. The production of *Fish and Elephant*[2], is important not only to its origins, but to its categorization of queer Chinese-language film. The film was not approved by the PRC (People's Republic of China) film bureau, was produced underground and not commercially released. The film follows the commonalities of many underground Chinese-language films. Such as, marginalized peoples as the main characters, cinematography attempting to remain unbiased and authentic, and using these marginalized peoples as cinematic allegories to critique or articulate social or political ideas[3,5,12]. This production style allows the film to be considered fairly unbiased in its representation, as it's not produced by a political force, such as the PRC film bureau or homosexual activists.

Fish and Elephant is labelled as the first lesbian film in mainland China[3,5,13,14]. *Fish and Elephant* is a queer Chinese-language film that showcases the relationship between Xiao Qun, an elephant-keeper at the Beijing Zoo, and Xiao Ling, a seamstress. Their relationship is the main focus of the film, but Xiao Qun's mother and Xiao Qun's ex-lover both create tension and obstacles for the couple. Despite the significant contribution that *Fish and Elephant* made to the queer Chinese-language film genre, the movie is still considered divisive in terms of proper representation, because the director, Li Yu, is not herself a *Lala*[15]. However, most Chinese-language lesbian feature films have directors who identify as straight women working to portray *lalas*, and these films are criticized as they take information and the experience of being a *Lala* from secondhand sources. *Fish and Elephant* is among these criticized films, but despite the director not being a *Lala*, the film does feature two women who are *lalas* in real life as the main characters[3,5,15].

The second film involved in this study, *Happy Together*[1], is a queer Chinese-language film produced in Hong Kong and shot mostly in Buenos Aires. This film showcases the toxic relationship between Lai Yiu-Fai and Ho Po-Wing as they live and work in Buenos Aires and try to make enough money to return to Hong Kong after being stranded there due to lack of money during a vacation. Lai and Ho's interactions are the focus for half of the film, and a burgeoning attraction and bond between Lai and his co-worker Chang is the focus for the second half of the film. The film is set mostly in Buenos Aires where Lai works as a doorman, and then a cook, and Ho works as a prostitute.

This film's production differs greatly to *Fish and Elephant*'s, as restrictions in Hong Kong cinema are not the same as in Mainland China. Wong Kar-Wai's reputation allowed him to direct this movie commercially, with professional actors and crew to work on the film. However, despite *Happy Together* being commercially made, the film does share commonalities with underground Chinese-language film, such as having marginalized peoples star as the main characters, and using these characters and their interactions as cinematic allegory to portray political or social ideas. Oftentimes the representation in many Hong Kong produced queer films are not only about queerness, but freedom, political rebellion, and/or social expectations[14]. Queerness in these films are connected to political metaphors, meaning that homosexual characters do not only represent the homosexual population of China, but also represents queer struggle, and how that intertwines with political and social expectations. This fact explains why these queer films do not always offer happy endings, nor an uplifting message to a queer audience who may see themselves in the characters[16,17]. *Happy Together* showcases a queer relationship, but the movie focuses on their relationship and how

queerness relates to Hong Kong's politicalscape[16]. The movie is often analyzed for its political and social relevance to Hong Kong and the Turnover era, in which Hong Kong was set to be placed under China's governance again[16,18].

While many analyses of *Happy Together* focus on the political allegories between Hong Kong, Mainland China, and Buenos Aires, this study analyzes the film's characters and their relationship for allegories that challenge the pathologization of homosexuality in China. The tendency towards unhappy endings in these films may lead to the analysis that *Happy Together* is not meant to truly be queer representation, but this is an analysis that denies the fact that the homosexual community in China faces discrimination, and incorrectly implies that for queer representation in film to be accurate to *lalas* and *tongzhis* lived experiences, happy endings are resolute.

This information provides deeper explanation on the complexities of queer representation in China, and why Chinese-language queer cinema does not only focus on representing queer subjects, but also upholding and pushing forward the social and political connotations that queerness holds, such as deviating from normal expectations and rejecting common paths of life. With this information in mind, the idea of representation in Chinese queer film becomes more fleshed out, as the goal for representation is not just to show homosexual relationships, but to do so in a way that tackles the overwhelming discrimination from social influences such as *xiao*, *baoguang*, and the past of homosexuality being persecuted under the charge of hooliganism, and the current reality that homosexuality is in the CCMD-3 as a mental illness.

3. Methodology

This section explains the method used to engage with the references within the study, and defines the critical framework through which the sources were analyzed in order to synthesize proper conclusions based within cultural contexts. These methods are then further delineated and the strengths and weaknesses of these methods are identified and acknowledged.

This study employed textual analysis to engage with the references alongside the two films, and the recurring themes between the films and the references were investigated. These recurring ideas created a basework that helped define what information had been agreed upon within the field and what had been left relatively unexplored. As the topic of this paper is contained within a relatively small field—queer Chinese-language film— it was decided rather than narrowing the search for information to sources that only specifically analyzed these films, the search was widened to add necessary sources that aid the understanding of queer Chinese-language cinema, cultural and historical analyses on homosexuality and its role in China, and the politics of queerness in China. These sources were necessary for the analysis of these films to be placed into a proper cultural context. Any significant disagreement between sources was noted, and was evaluated to be able to understand why this discourse may exist. The study noted if references used differing theories or theoretical frameworks. While using sources with different frameworks might seem to allow discrepancies in the analysis, any source that made a particular claim was also able to cite either primary or secondary sources that confirmed that their claims were not unfounded.

This study used three specific ideas as a critical framework. The first, a post-socialist framework, that states that social and political change in post-socialist China is complicated and contradictive, and predicts a future in which queer lives are made invisible[16]. Additionally, a 'heteronormative' framework was applied, explained as the idea that to be included or to belong visually and culturally, one must be heterosexual, or appear to be[13]. This study also used a queer theory framework, presented as queering everyday life; meaning that one must be able to inspect certain subjects through the understanding that homosexuality exists as many different lived experiences[18]. This framework combines queer theory and social and political theories in order to reach an intersection of research that properly combines prior work done in this field and the ability to further define those ideas with the history of pathologization of homosexuality in China. This provides the capability for the study to cross-examine the films in a way not previously explored in the field.

This approach was taken for this study because using primarily quantitative data misses the actual connotations, ramifications, and consequences that queer representation can cause or create. Using qualitative data allows for deeper interpretation of the films and their implications on queer representation in China. The usage of primarily textual analysis promoted an intersectional understanding of the films and the studies about homosexuality, and allowed for connections to be made that would not have been with the usage of quantitative or ethnographic modes of research. The connections made are not from a singular study's conclusion, but instead was found by building upon and further exploring past research and by using textual analysis, post-socialist framework, and queer theory in tandem.

This method ensures that this study explains how these films challenge pathologization of homosexuality in China, and investigates, anatomizes, and interprets the techniques these films use in order to challenge that belief. This method therefore does not outline how the representation in these films better the lives of homosexuals in China, nor

how these representations resonate with the queer population in China. This study also cannot accurately quantify the cultural or political significance these representations have in China.

4. Analysis

This section explicates the analysis that Fish and Elephant's characters and scenes are queer cinematic allegory, and demonstrates the implications of that reading. Happy Together is also examined in the same way, and the characters and scenes in the film are deciphered through allegory. The two films are then compared for their similarities in cinematic technique, and the significance of their techniques are evaluated.

Within *Fish and Elephant*, while the focus of the film is Xiao Qun and Xiao Ling's relationship, the film follows Xiao Qun more intimately, as she is representative of *lalas* in China. *Lalas*, the word for Chinese lesbians, deal with the overwhelming invisibility of their identity, and are misunderstood because of the lack of information or representation they have, and what little they do have is pathologized[3,5,6,11,19]. Xiao Qun states multiple times throughout the film that she is not attracted to men, and is instead attracted to women. Her confession on every occasion is met with confusion and surprise. Rather than being hostile towards Xiao Qun, the people who hear this information have no idea how to comprehend it. This is representative of how *lalas* are relatively invisible and unknown to China[3]. Interestingly, her partner, Xiao Ling, had been with men prior to Xiao Qun, but she is apathetic and dismissive of the men in the film. She is only energetic and engaged when she is with Xiao Qun, and otherwise is melancholy and rude. When they are together they represent the lived experiences of *lalas* in China in the past (Xiao Ling) and in the future (Xiao Qun). Xiao Ling is representative of the past, where *lalas* had to be with men, despite their resistance or their apathy towards men, and attempted to appear 'normal' by Chinese standards, (i.e. being heterosexual, getting married and having kids). Xiao Qun is representative of the future, in which *lalas* are open and honest about their attraction, and are eventually accepted by the people around them. The two characters subvert expectations about homosexuality, as they are not violent, sick, immoral, nor do they have tumultuous relationships with their parents.

On the other hand, Wei Junjun, Xiao Qun's ex-lover is indicative of the pathologization of homosexuality in China, and showcases the past misconceptions about *lalas*. Junjun appears mid-film, asking Xiao Qun to hide her as she's broken the law and the police are after her. It is later revealed that she killed her father because he sexually assaulted her when she was younger. Junjun encompasses many preconceived notions of lesbianism in China: She is violent, a criminal, promiscuous, had a bad relationship with her parents, and was victimized by a man in her past. Although Junjun is not demonized by the film, she does still represent the misconceptions of lesbians in China, and she carries out a tragic storyline that ultimately ends with a policeman killing her. Junjun being killed by a police officer is representative of the Chinese state killing *lalas*, and that the discrimination and misconceptions China has about *lalas* ultimately will lead to death. Junjun's story is the only one pathologization would allow, that because Junjun was 'afflicted' with homosexuality, and didn't submit to state authority, it led to her demise. However, Junjun's demise is the also demise of pathologizing homosexuality, and the erasure of those misconceptions that result in the unity of the lived experiences of *lalas* that Xiao Qun and Xiao Ling represent. The consummation of Xiao Qun and Xiao Ling's survival together is portrayed through their love-making scenes, which are interspersed throughout the scenes leading to Junjun's death.

The movie ends with Xiao Qun's mother worriedly waiting for her daughter and Xiao Ling to arrive at her wedding, and there is no indication that Xiao Qun or Xiao Ling show up. This is a haunting image to end on, and it sends a clear message; this is the absence felt when we erase *lalas* from China. This is the absence that will be felt if the lived experience of lesbianism in China does not 'arrive' and become visible publicly. Nunes[13] agrees with the notion that the ending scene is meant to emphasize how deeply the *Lala* couple's absence is felt.

Happy Together follows our main character Lai Yiu-Fai and his lover, Ho Po-Wing. The film more intimately shows Lai's perspective. Lai Yiu-Fai and Ho Po-Wing are stuck in Buenos Aires. Their intended destination was Iguazu Falls, but the couple ran out of money before they made it there. Buenos Aires, in this case, is the space between denial and acceptance. Interpreting Buenos Aires in this way is a notion introduced by Quero[18], who suggests the characters of *Happy Together* are stuck within a liminal space as queer Asian immigrants, and therefore, struggling within the difficulties of identity politics. However, this study proposes that Buenos Aires is occupied by the characters to showcase specifically how homosexuality exists in the liminal space between normality and abnormality, because pathologization has brought homosexuality into the public sphere, but simultaneously silenced queer voices and dismissed them[9,11,18]. This relationship between queerness and China is palpable in the film, despite never actually taking place in Hong Kong or Mainland China. Kim and Atanasoski[16] support the interpretation that the film provides a critique on the relationship between queerness and China. In the case of Lai and Ho, Hong Kong is symbolic of the

state of 'normality', and Iguazu Falls is the state of acceptance of their sexuality and their personhood. Buenos Aires is therefore, the space where they cannot effectively 'be normal' in the Chinese sense and they also cannot properly accept their desires.

If we interpret Lai as the 'closeted' *tongzhi* who does not engage in any public display of his homosexuality, and we consider Ho the 'out' *tongzhi*, as he openly engages in homosexual relations, then the film becomes a representation of how homosexuality is not a disease, but that the pathologization of homosexuality has kept homosexual people in a toxic liminal space that does not allow them to accept themselves. The film showcases many moments of queer suffering.

One such moment in the film is when Lai and Ho only reconcile after Ho is severely beaten by a client and needs support. Lai can no longer be resentful and hateful to Ho because of his choice to be a prostitute, because Ho is not actually able to accept his homosexuality without physical harm. Rather than Ho becoming sick or being ill from his job, he instead is beaten, symbolizing that Ho's sexuality is not a disease, or an illness, but that he is harmed by outside forces judging and injuring him for his lifestyle. This choice is significant, because HIV/AIDS was a major contributor to homosexuality in China remaining pathologized, and it would have been an easy choice to have Ho contract HIV while working as a prostitute. The film instead has him injured by another person, and this choice can be interpreted to mean that Ho's sexuality is not what harmed him, but instead choosing to be open and public about his sexuality caused him harm, therefore showing that homosexuality isn't the disease that plagues Ho, homophobia is. While Ho is recovering, Lai states that they are the happiest they have ever been together. This can be interpreted as Lai and Ho being capable of settling their resentment against each other because Ho understands why Lai chooses to keep his sexuality hidden, and Lai understands that despite being open about who he is, Ho is hurting as well. This portion of the film showcases the two as intimate, friendly, and capable of understanding each other.

However, once Ho recovers, they both become focused on leaving the liminal space of Buenos Aires, and this leads to their final separation. It is the tension between 'going back to normality' and acceptance that harms *tongzhi*, not homosexuality itself. Lai, through meeting Chang, who is representative of an optimistic future where being a *tongzhi* isn't pathologized, is able to finally escape the liminal space and make it to Iguazu Falls, where he accepts who he is. Instead of immediately returning to Hong Kong, instead of returning to 'normality' at the end of the film, Lai goes to Chang's home in Taiwan, where he doesn't find Chang, the symbol of a hopeful future. Instead of being distraught, Lai takes a photo of Chang with him. Lai takes this photo, this visualization of hope, and says that he knows where to find Chang (and therefore this better future) if he chooses to do so. In doing this, Lai has effectively rejected pathologization, and has given himself hope for a better future that doesn't depend on 'returning to normal' nor staying in the liminal space that tormented both himself and Ho.

Happy Together and *Fish and Elephant* have distinct differences, such as their production, their locations, and the genders of the main characters. However, while it is important to acknowledge that these films are both different, they have important similarities that occur throughout the films. Firstly, both of the movies display non-physical intimacy between the homosexual characters the same way. When Xiao Qun and Xiao Ling are unable to be physically close because Xiao Qun's mother is in the other room, the two women smoke together, and Xiao Qun specifically lights her cigarette from the burning end of Xiao Ling's cigarette instead of getting a lighter to do it. This also occurs with Lai and Ho. When they are out in public near the bar Lai works at, Ho lights his cigarette from Lai's, rather than getting the lighter. This similarity is more than a coincidence. Both of the films portray a scenario where the queer couple cannot be physically intimate in fear of being outed *'baoguang'*, and what might happen to them as a result. Then, they portray the same action of non-physical intimacy between the couples in order to establish that even though they are not touching, and are not proclaiming their love for each other in demonstrative ways, they are still engaging in homosexual behavior, and therefore, retaining their homosexual identity even when they are unable to express themselves freely.

This similarity is an incredibly important point, because both of the films showcase how homosexual people in China can feel displaced— like they do not belong in their surroundings. *Happy Together* does this by having the film take place in the liminal space of Buenos Aires, a limbo between denial and 'normality' and acceptance and 'abnormality', and *Fish and Elephant* does this through Xiao Qun and Xiao Ling's absence in the final scene of the film. These two similarities between the films showcase that both of these films are capable of expressing the social discrimination that homosexuals in China face, but also how they resist this discrimination, and how they survive through it, and continue to express themselves in ways that are not overtly visible. In this way, these films provide representation that showcase the lived experience of homosexuality in China.

This representation is able to combat pathologization of homosexuality in China by the nuances of the films' third characters. Both of the films have third characters that act as forces of change, to either showcase the downfall of pathologizing homosexuality, or to showcase a future where it does not exist. In *Fish and Elephant*, Junjun acts as the pathologized *Lala*, and her death becomes a force of change that allows Xiao Qun and Xiao Ling to stay together as

a healthy *Lala* couple. In *Happy Together*, Chang acts as an optimistic future where pathologization of homosexuality no longer exists, and when Lai states that he can return to Chang's home to find him, it essentially states that Lai is able to find a future where his homosexuality can be accepted without being considered 'abnormal'. These films significantly challenge the idea of pathologization of homosexuality, and despite their differences, their similarities include their usage of cinematic allegory and representation in order to effectively achieve this.

5. Conclusion

Happy Together and *Fish and Elephant* are well-informed films that understand pathologization and the influences that led to it still being a popular opinion in China today. The pathologization of homosexuality in China is still prevalent and significant, despite claims that it ended after the CCMD-3 made its change to abstain from including all homosexuals in 2001. Many factors still contribute to this popular opinion of homosexuality, including; Confucianism, *xiao* culture, the influence of Western sexologists, the Socialist era's criminalization of homosexuality as hooliganism, and the HIV/AIDS crisis that affected homosexuals in China. The Chinese-language queer films *Fish and Elephant* and *Happy Together* use cinematic allegory and representation to challenge these contributing factors, and to challenge the pathologization of homosexuality in China. These films intimately showcase *lalas* and *tongzhis* respectively, and use their characters to critique how China's homophobia and heteronormative society have led to pathologization, and ultimately, queer suffering. This study found that *Fish and Elephant* and *Happy Together* represented the social and political struggles of being homosexual in China, and that this led to subverting preconceived notions of homosexuality in China that had been defined by pathologization. These films employ cinematic allegory and representation to critique how queerness in China is pathologized and discriminated against, and challenges the popular belief in China that homosexuality is a disease, or a sickness.

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