

China Media Centre 2017 Winter Seminar

Unsettling Pathologies of Homosexual and Sadomasochistic Desire in *East Palace West Palace*.

Speaker: Derek Hird
Date: Wednesday, 6 December 2017
Time: 14:00 – 16:00
Venue: E4.04, Harrow Campus
Chair: Professor Chang Xiangqun



OPEN TO ALL

Abstract: Made in the mid-1990s, *Donggong xigong* 东宫西宫 (East Palace, West Palace; Dir. Zhang Yuan, 1996), was the first mainland Chinese film with homosexuality as an explicit theme. It imagines China capable of a more open discussion of homosexuality, here taking place within a political framework that is certainly not democratic, but in which the flow of power is not unidirectional: the ideas and practices of the powerful could perhaps transform through the love of those upon whom they exercise power. Two major themes interact: homosexuality (both morally despicable and a mental disorder) and sadomasochism (potentially transformative of subjectivities and social relations). This talk examines how the film challenges the moral condemnation and pathologising of 'other' sexual/gender practices. The film's focus on the negotiation and contestation of power between a policeman and the gay man he arrests speaks to a Foucauldian political struggle, in which power is not concentrated in, or deployed coercively, by one party alone. Running water, ever-present as an aural and visual trope, represents [sexual] power as diffuse, fluid and constitutive of subjects and subjectivities, enabling subversion and transformation of power relations. The talk will conclude by examining the film's relevance to academic and political debates on sexuality in contemporary China.

Biography: Derek Hird is a senior lecturer in Chinese Studies at the University of Westminster. His research interests include white-collar masculinities in China and Chinese migrant men's experiences in London. Recent publications include *Men and Masculinities in Contemporary China* (with Geng Song) (Brill, 2014), "Making class and gender: White-collar men in postsocialist China," in *Changing Chinese Masculinities: from Imperial Pillars of State to Global Real Men*, ed. Kam Louie, 137-56 (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2016), and "Moral Masculinities: Ethical Self-fashionings of Professional Chinese Men in London," *Nan Nü* 18.1 (2016): 115-147.

Notes: This is also one of the Global China Media Seminar Series (GCMSS), co-organised with Global China Institute.

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