

Jamie J. Zhao, *Queer TV China: Televisual and Fannish Imaginaries of Gender, Sexuality, and Chineseness*, Hong Kong University Press, Hong Kong 2023, ss. 252

In recent years, there has been a sudden surge in queer productions across East and South-East Asian countries. While queer literature and comics, especially those about male-male relationships (often referred to as BL meaning *Boy's Love*), have long been popular and widely disseminated throughout Asian countries as a result of Japanese influences, TV dramas are a relatively new phenomenon, especially in countries with conservative societies in relation to the LGBTQ+ community. One such country emerging as one of the leading sources of BL productions is South Korea, with Thailand, Taiwan and Japan in the lead. Starting with productions in which secret glances and subtle touches are all viewers could expect, current Korean BL productions are becoming more daring and controversial within Korean society. One recent major hit was the 2024 series *Love in the Big City*, adapted from a novel by Sang Young Park. Focusing on the romantic lives of gay protagonists, the production faced backlash and criticism from conservative groups, calling for its cancellation

and abandonment of production.¹ Despite this, South Korean BL dramas are gathering the fame and attention that perhaps should also be afforded to productions from other countries eager to expand queer narratives but facing significant obstacles, such as government regulations. This brings us to China, where, although the producers are ready to present Chinese queer productions to the world, they must confront the harsh reality where BL series often end up in suspension with little to no possibility of ever being aired, such as series long-awaited by fandoms like *Eternal Faith* (吉星高照) or *Immortality* (皓衣行).²

Queer TV China: Televisual and Fannish Imaginaries of Gender, Sexuality, and Chineseness, edited by Jamie J. Zhao with contributions by several other scholars, shows queer representation in post-2010 Chinese productions, through three main topics: TV shows, media regulations and LGBTQ+ celebrities. Zhao and other scholars discuss queer

¹ G. Lee, 'Love in the Big City' star addresses backlash, embraces support amid LGBTQ+ controversy, "The Korea Times" 2024, https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/art/2025/02/398_384460.html (access: 6.03.2025).

² T. Hu, L. Ge, C. Yue Wang, *A state against boys' love? Reviewing the trajectory of censorship over danmei*, "Continuum" 2024, vol. 38, no. 2, p. 234.

representation on Chinese TV by focusing on specific types of media culture, such as TV shows, novels, or fandom phenomena. As Zhao writes in the introduction, the book offers some completely fresh and new scholarly research on the extensive term “queer,” also called in the book “queer/ing,” and applies it to TV culture in China. In a mostly heterosexual and patriarchal society based on heteronormative norms, where the term queer is very sensitive and often avoided in a wider context, the idea of queer TV culture is shown in media by presenting non-heteronormative celebrities, homoerotic behaviors between cis actors, transgender personalities, and queer participants in Chinese-language talk shows (p. 13). The term queer is very fluid and Zhao focuses on showing the odd details of behaviors that are not depicted as “normal” in a heteronormative context. The “Chineseness” included in the book’s title refers to communities living in Mainland China, but also in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Macau, and other countries with Chinese-speaking minorities.

While a few scholars have already discussed queer representation in Chinese media and TV series, Zhao’s *Queer TV China* is the first published book to comprehensively cover the subject of queer representation in post-socialist China after 2010, offering invaluable insights into Chinese history, culture, and policies regarding queer visibility in the media. Additionally, this book establishes a theoretical framework for the topic of “queer TV China,” proposing it as a new, interdisciplinary field for

academic research (p. 14). While most scholars primarily concentrate on reality shows, celebrities, and online communities, some provide significant insights into the policies and regulations surrounding queer representation and visibility in public online spaces. Given recent (2021) TV policies related to adaptations of BL novels,³ the issue of censorship cannot be easily overlooked in further research regarding queer representation on both Chinese TV and in the publishing industry, especially considering the broader context of the popularization of Chinese BL novels, which are currently famous not only in China but also in other Sinophone regions and even in Western countries. While offering valuable information on the recent history of queerness on Chinese TV, this book also offers a foundational understanding of the government’s policies and regulations regarding the presence of these communities in online spaces.

With the first part, “Queer/ing Genders and Sexualities through Reality Competition Shows,” focusing on Chinese reality TV, the authors portray shows’ development regarding depicting and using queer-looking celebrities. The first chapter, written by Zhao, focuses on showing feminism through the persona of Liu Yuxin – a reality show contestant, famous for her androgynous and tomboyish look. Liu was one of the first female celebrities that started a sudden change: more masculine women began to be used by the

³ *Ibidem*, p. 234.

media to attract more female viewers, openly using queer female celebrities. In the second chapter, Jia Guo and Shaojun Kong discuss the topic of female audiences more deeply. By approaching the issue of queer visibility in Chinese media through queer, female TV fandoms, they show how their members tend to over-interpret female-only reality shows, by putting contestants into queer frames and making the boundary between female friendships and same-sex romance almost invisible (p. 67). The issue of over-interpretation by fandoms is also tackled in the book's second part, where the author discusses *The Untamed* (陈情令) series fandom's negative influence on production and the whole BL industry. The last chapter by Wangtaolue Guo and Jennifer Quist focuses on *Let's Exercise Boys* – the state's television attempt to get rid of effeminate aesthetics among young men and bring back the image of strong men, sporty and conforming to heteronormative models. However, because the image of the stereotypical gay man in China is also very similar to the show's contestants – firm, muscular, often seen in the gyms – from the very beginning it attracted both female and queer male viewers.

While discussing the rising obsession over Chinese BL novels and series both in China and abroad, the second part of this book is the most important in terms of current research regarding queerness in contemporary Chinese literature and TV shows. One thing that comes to mind is how, despite censorship and strict media regulations regarding

raising the subject of the LGBTQ+ community, Chinese BL fiction gained both domestic and worldwide popularity. That's why "Queer/ing TV Dramas through Media Regulations," the second part of the book, looks further into the issue of sensitivity toward queer representation in TV dramas, mainly focusing on series including male-male relations. In the first chapter, Aobo Dong examines the BL *Addicted* (上瘾) series through media policies and argues that its final banning from official streaming platforms resulted in creating an ultimate longing for BL dramas among Chinese viewers. However, there are certain ways to evade censorship and, in the second chapter, Jun Lei shows how it was achieved in the case of *The Untamed*. Based on the novel *Grandmaster Of Demonic Cultivation* (魔道祖师), which includes intimate, often sexual scenes and open male-male love relationship, the series was reduced to a simple bromance between two main characters in order to avoid any regulation that could ban the production. These novels are called *danmei* (耽美), which are a Chinese version of boy's love narratives, and especially in recent years these have become popular in Sino-phone and Western countries. Aside from *Grandmaster Of Demonic Cultivation*, other works by Mo Xiang Tong Xiu (墨香铜臭), the most popular author of the bestselling *danmei* novels, like *Heaven Official's Blessing* (天官赐福), have been officially translated into several languages, including English, French, Vietnamese, Russian, Spanish, and Polish (published in 2025).

The rising popularity of Chinese queer fiction and its vast fandoms in the USA and Europe deserves dedicated research, particularly regarding their potential as a new tool for soft power. As seen in the example of Japanese, Thai, and Korean BL's,⁴ this influence could shape how foreigners, especially younger generations, perceive China and its popular culture. However, it is worth mentioning that novels published in China and Western countries often differ in content, particularly regarding sex scenes and romantic interactions between male characters. While Chinese editions are subject to censorship because of local regulations, the versions published abroad offer the full, uncensored works as originally intended by the authors. This means that foreign readers can experience these stories in their entirety, but their understanding differs from that of Chinese readers, who engage with a censored version. As a result, fandoms across different countries may interpret and interact with the same story in different ways, shaping unique, but quite opposite perspectives on the same characters and narratives.

The issue of media regulations and censorship continues, with some *danmei* writers being arrested for publishing works containing sex scenes; their offense is classed as sharing pornography, which is illegal to do in China.

⁴ M.A.N. Lizada, *Boy Power: Soft Power and Political Power in the Circulation of Boys Love (BL) Narratives from South Korea, Thailand, and the Philippines*, "Suvannabhumi" 2024, vol. 15, no. 1, p. 91.

In 2017, a writer was arrested for self-publishing her *danmei* novel,⁵ while in 2024 more writers in Chinese provinces were caught sharing online BL works that could be easily portrayed as pornography.⁶ Further, as previously mentioned, the main actors and the whole production of *The Untamed* series encountered problems as a result of fandom's reckless actions. Among fans of the series, this case is widely known as the "227 Incident,"⁷ which began

⁵ E. Ng, X. Li, *A queer 'socialist brotherhood': the Guardian web series, boys' love fandom, and the Chinese state*, "Feminist Media Studies" 2020, vol. 20, no. 4, p. 481.

⁶ P. Zhang, *Chinese police target writers of gay erotica with prison terms and heavy fines*, "South China Morning Post" 2025, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3293014/chinese-police-target-writers-gay-erotica-prison-terms-and-heavy-fines> (access: 6.03.2025).

⁷ The "227 Incident" was a consequence of a conflict between two sub-communities of actor Xiao Zhan who plays the role of Wei Wuxian in the TV drama *The Untamed*. The conflict emerged between fans of Xiao Zhan as an actor (called Only-fans) and fans who enjoyed his role in homo-erotic settings (described as "CP" fans). The major issue of the conflict was a fan fiction written by one of the "CP" fans and posted on the Archive Of Our Own platform, where both actors were showed as a gay pair with Xiao Zhen being a transgendered prostitute and Wang Yibo a high-school student. "Only-fans" decided to organize a campaign and reported the platform to the authorities, which finally resulted in banning it in China on 27 February 2020. This action turned into national controversy, resulting in consequences not only for the whole BL industry but also for both actors and further dramas, which were stopped in production.

from a minor clash between fans of Xiao Zhan (one of the leading actors in the drama) and escalated into producing a significant backlash for the entire Chinese BL industry⁸ as well as for both main actors, who for a long time were banned from acting in the same series and publicly appearing together. The topic of Chinese fandoms is extensively covered in scholarly discussions, with various researchers often presenting the “227 Incident,” to illustrate not only the considerable influence fandoms can have on major popular industries, but also the severe cancel culture prevalent in China, where many celebrities become targets even when, as in this case, they are not directly at fault for the incident.

Finally, the last chapter of this part revolves around queer media in Chinese-speaking societies, where Alvin K. Wong examines queer representation based on a country's politics and history. By comparing three Sinophone communities and their productions, the author argues that queer media should be researched in a wider historical and sociological context, one that often influences the development of the progress of queer visibility in the public media. Special attention is paid to Hong Kong and Taiwan, where the higher social acceptance of LGBTQ+ matters allows producers to engage with more serious productions and fully express

daily concerns of queer communities, without being bound to any regulations or restrictions.

The final section, “Queer/ing Celebrities across Geocultural Boundaries,” discusses queer representation within various Sinophone media. By comparing two male singers, the Taiwanese Wu Tsing-Fong and the Chinese Zhou Shen, the first chapter by Linshan Jiang explores the challenges faced by male queer celebrities in patriarchal societies, especially those who embody soft masculinity or even effeminacy. In the subsequent chapter, Oscar Tianyang Zhou examines the talk show *Kangsi Coming* to highlight how gay men are often misinterpreted and misrepresented in popular shows throughout Sinophone countries. Finally, the book moves to Thailand; Pang Ka Wei discusses the phenomenon of motherly female fans of celebrities such as BL series actor Suppapong Udomkaewkanjana, commonly called “Saint.” Through his case, the author illustrates how Chinese fans engage with celebrities beyond their linguistic culture and vice-versa. Although the book predominantly addresses Chinese and Chinese-speaking media, celebrities, and fandoms, the inclusion of Thailand is not unexpected. As a leading nation in the production of queer series – both BL and GL (*Girls' Love*) – Thailand had produced over 340 BL series by the beginning of 2025.⁹

⁸ E. Ningxin Wang, L. Ge, *Fan Conflicts and State Power in China: Internalised Heteronormativity, Censorship Sensibilities, and Fandom Police*, “Asian Studies Review” 2022, vol. 47, no. 2, p. 356.

⁹ *Thai BL series growth expected to generate over 4.9 billion baht*, “The Nation” 2025, <https://www.nationthailand.com/blogs/life/entertainment/40045102> (access: 6.03.2025).

All in all, *Queer TV China: Televisual and Fannish Imaginaries of Gender, Sexuality, and Chineseness* offers much-needed analysis, adding value to current academic research in culture and media studies. All scholars and research articles broaden the topic of queerness and how it can be represented depending on a country and its culture. As this review pays special attention to the topic of *danmei* novels, their adaptations and censorship issues, some chapters provide a deep analysis of media and policy regulation towards homosexual relations and bromance shown on screen. With many more *danmei* series being stopped in production, the book covers

the broad topic of sometimes quite problematic Chinese fandom and its significant influence on the BL production process, which was seen especially in the case of *The Untamed* series. While the book does not focus on Chinese LGBTQ+ communities and their current, daily situation, it is an important landmark in the discussion of queer representation over the years, especially in the new era. It is, overall, a very well-written scholarly work, suggesting new research areas that deserve to be examined in future studies.

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Yaohua Lin, *Złote skrzydło. Historia chińskiej rodziny*, przeł. Krzysztof Kardaszewicz, Wydawnictwo Naukowe SCHOLAR, Warszawa 2023, ss. 249

Ponad 80 lat temu w Stanach Zjednoczonych została po raz pierwszy wydana¹ książka *Złote skrzydło. Historia chińskiej rodziny*, należała ona do serii książek napisanych w latach 30. i 40. XX w. przez młodych chińskich badaczy „wykształconych w zachodnich

metodach naukowych, ale mocno związanych z rodzimym rolniczym i nieuprzemysłowionym społeczeństwem”².

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¹ Y. Lin, *The Golden Wing: A Family Chronicle*, International secretariat, Institute of Pacific relations, New York 1944; *idem*, *The Golden Wing: A sociological Study of Chinese Familism*, K. Paul, Trench, Trubner, New York 1948.

² Zob. tytuły innych książek z tej serii: Ch. Han-seng, *Landlord and Peasant in China*, International Publishers, New York 1936; *Agrarian China, Selected Source Materials from Chinese Authors*, with introduction by R.H. Tawney, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1938; H. Fei, *Peasant Life in China*, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., New York–London 1939; H.Y. Lowe, *The Adventures of Wu: The Life Cycle of a Peking Man*, Peking Chronicle Press, Peking 1940–1941; H. Fei, Ch. Chang, *Earthbound China: A Study of Rural Economy in Yunnan*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1945; M.C. Yang, *A Chinese Village: Taitou, Shantung Province*, Routledge, London 1948; H. Feng, *The Chinese Kinship System*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1948; F.L.K. Hsu,