

# Sussex China Seminar Series

Perspectives on Social, Technological and Environmental Dynamics in a Changing China

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## How to be digitally queer (in independent Chinese documentary)

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### Abstract

Independently produced digital documentaries about the Chinese queer community have been available since the late 1990s. The earliest examples of such documentaries focus on male homosexuality as performance; they also frequently deploy formally performative techniques to document their subjects. This reflects how those shooting the films understood digital video as a medium, but also the ambivalence with which their subjects approached what Paola Voci has termed digital's "lightness": the ease with which the digital image circulates and is replicated. In contrast, more recent work exploits this "lightness" to the full. This paper focuses on Fan Popo and David Cheng's *New Beijing, New Marriage*, Cui Zi'en's *Queer China, Comrade China*, and the webcast *Queer Comrades*, to demonstrate how contemporary queer non-fiction production embraces the "light" qualities of remediation and low impedance, in the process refashioning the relationship of the Chinese queer community to visual representation. One consequence of this development is a shift in the metaphorical construction of queer male subjectivity in these works – inscription becomes incorporation, and sexuality as performance becomes identity as network – which also raises new questions regarding what is distinctly "Chinese" about Chinese queerness. This, I suggest, is ultimately where the "queer politics" of these documentaries lies.

### Biography

Luke Robinson is lecturer in Film and Television Studies in the Department of Culture, Film and Media at the University of Nottingham, UK. He is the author of *Independent Chinese Documentary: From the Studio to the Street* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), and has articles on Sinophone media culture published in the *Journal of Children and Media*, *Journal of Chinese Cinemas*, and *positions: asia cultures critique*. From 2013-2014 he co-directed the Chinese Film Festival Studies Research Network with Prof. Chris Berry (KCL).