

BEIJING MEETS HAWAI'I

Reflections on *Ku'er*, Indigeneity, and Queer Theory

Jia Tan

On September 21, 2014, I participated in a roundtable discussion at the Beijing Queer Film Festival. This year the film festival went even more underground than in previous years because of tightening censorship by the Chinese government, which had forced the Beijing Independent Film Festival to shut down in late August. To circumvent government surveillance, the screening and roundtable that weekend was held in the Netherlands Embassy, thus technically not on Chinese soil. I had to submit my name in advance and then have my ID checked before entering the festival screening room in the embassy.

During the roundtable “Women on Top,” scholars, filmmakers, and activists discussed such issues as female sexuality and agency, gender imbalance in queer activism in China, women’s filmmaking, the marginalization of women in history, and the problematics of speaking about women as a unitary category. The conversation turned to the question, “Is Western queer theory applicable in China?” While we all agreed that the United States occupies a hegemonic position in knowledge production and that a West-China dichotomy underlies the question, we all seemed to have a hard time offering a satisfactory answer.

This question was posed in another way during that night’s screening of an American documentary in a rather obscure basement of an NGO office. The 2014 documentary *Kumu Hina* features a gender-nonconforming teacher in Hawai’i, Hina Wong-Kalu. Hina identifies as a Māhū, which in Hawaiian culture means living “in the middle” between male and female. As it happened, Hina, together with the filmmakers, were on tour in China to promote the film. The Beijing Queer Film Festival was one of their stops. During the Q&A session, Hina and the film-

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