

# CULTURE MATTERS

## Comrades: The Chinese LGBT Film Festival

When Beijing University students tried to launch a gay film festival on campus in 2001, representatives of the Ministry of Public Security showed up in plain clothes and shut down the event. The organizers tried again in 2005, but despite careful efforts to limit publicity for the event, the film festival was exposed and banned from the campus. This summer, several Chinese Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) films were successfully screened with no hassles—this time in New York City. Asia Catalyst, an NGO that supports grassroots human rights advocacy throughout the region, hosted “Comrades: The Chinese LGBT Film Festival” in solidarity with these intrepid festival organizers.

The weekend-long showcase featured four films from the festivals banned in Beijing. These compelling stories reveal glimpses of the lesbian, gay, and transgender experience in contemporary China. *East Palace, West Palace* (《东宫西宫》, 1996) may be the first Chinese film to explicitly explore homosexuality in China. *Tangtang* (《唐唐》, 2004) uses documentary and fictional filmmaking techniques to tell the story of a

**September 5–7, 2008**  
**The LGBT Community Center**  
**208 West 13th Street**  
**New York City**

**For copies or more information on hosting your own showing, please contact Yang Yang at [oignon@163.com](mailto:oignon@163.com).**



FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 5, 2008 - SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 7, 2008  
 THE LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL & TRANSGENDER COMMUNITY CENTER, 208 W 13TH ST

supported by [www.asiacatalyst.org/comrades](http://www.asiacatalyst.org/comrades)

transvestite performer’s cross-gender love affair. In *Butterfly* (《蝴蝶》, 2004), a schoolteacher’s chance encounter with a seductive singer reawakens memories of an adolescent lesbian fling and sparks a journey of rediscovery. Blending realism and fantasy, *Welcome to Destination Shanghai* (《目的地上海》, 2003) features a collection of vignettes that examine the underground sex trade and those living on the fringe in glittery Shanghai.

Letters written to Asia Catalyst by one of the organizers of the original Chinese LGBT film festivals describe the poignant—and often vexing—story of their repeated attempts to screen these films in Beijing. The organizers used a variety of strategies, including cell phone text messaging and underground publicity, but were blocked at every turn. True to its title, “Banned in Beijing, Out in New York,” the film festival was finally brought to fruition on

September 5–7, 2008, at the LGBT Community Center in New York City.

For the full text of the aforementioned letters, see: <http://www.asiacatalyst.org/comrades/history>.

## (In)Human Scale

BY CLAIRE KELLS

*Up the Yangtze* opens with the otherworldly noise of a luxury cruise ship scraping through a lock in the massive Three Gorges Dam, setting the mood for this documentary’s elegiac look at a handful of the two million people to be displaced by the imminent and inexorable rise of the Yangtze’s waters.

***Up the Yangtze (2007)***  
**Directed by Yung Chang**  
**Running Time: 93 minutes**  
**Mandarin with English subtitles**

Canadian director Yung Chang focuses mainly on the lives of two young people as they go to work on a “farewell cruise” catering to Western tourists taking in the spectral Yangtze River landscape before it is immersed under a colossal man-made lake. Yu Shui, nicknamed Cindy by the ship’s managers, comes from a family of illiterate