

Worrying about Gangtai, Playing with History: 'Tales of Qianlong (1991)' in China

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Abstract

This paper looks at the anxieties associated with the 42-episode *Gangtai* period television drama, *Tales of Qianlong*, coproduced by Taiwan Feiteng Film Production and the television production unit of Beijing Film Studio. Closely related to the anxiety of Chinese sovereignty is the alleged failure of domestic programming reaching wider domestic audiences in comparison to Hong Kong and Taiwan dramas, especially in the 1990s. More recently when the Chinese entertainment industry has become more developed and confident, and when there are now more *Gangtai* (Taiwanese and Hong Kong) film and media professionals than ever working in China, it is timely to revisit the early 1990s when the latter saw its own productions as inferior. Concomitant to the issue of media commercialisation is the debate surrounding “fiction” versus “truth” of the televisual representation of history in China. The very concept of fictionality carries implications for the classification and reification of the genres of *lishi zhengju* (历史正剧 official historical dramas) and *xishuoju* (戏说剧 fictional historical dramas) in the 1990s that would later resurface in the controversy over other Chinese dramas.