Yi Wang

Making a place for the films he could not find

Yi Wang (王裔)[1] works across cultural production, film programming and audience development. The Taiwanese founder of the UK's Queer East did not begin with a filmmaking qualification or an established position in the film industry. He began with a spectator's dissatisfaction: a lively cinema culture could still leave whole areas of his experience off its screens. His response became an organisation that brings East and Southeast Asian queer cinema and performance into public view, and increasingly gives other people the resources to decide what that view should contain.

This is a career about making conditions for other people's work. Its most revealing progression is from choosing films himself to sharing curatorial authority, teaching, convening and supporting programmes beyond his own taste.

[External image / 外部圖片] Yi Wang portrait published by Forge Press
Yi Wang. The portrait accompanies Forge Press's 2025 interview about the development of Queer East.

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From Taiwan to cultural production in London

Wang describes growing up as an avid filmgoer in Taiwan, encountering both local filmmakers and international cinema. Films helped him imagine unfamiliar places and cultures and understand his own identity. He has publicly described the festival's origins through the overlapping experiences of being Asian, an immigrant and queer. Those overlapping positions help explain the project's origins without exhausting the range of his interests.[2]

He moved to London in 2014 for a master's at Goldsmiths, University of London. His degree was in Brands, Communication and Culture, following an academic background he describes as politics, media and cultural studies. After graduating he worked in theatre and festival production, international touring and cross-cultural events. A 2021 biography identifies an earlier freelance project-management role at Performance Infinity and, at that date, work as a creative producer at The Culture Laboratory. He explicitly said he had not trained in filmmaking or film studies. These are useful distinctions: film programming grew out of adjacent production experience and sustained looking, rather than a conventional film-school route.[3]

A missing programme becomes an organisation

The project took shape in 2019. In his account to Queermunity, Wang connected his frustration as a London cinemagoer with an opportunity to apply to Brent 2020, London Borough of Culture. Support also came from Film Hub London and Taiwan's Ministry of Culture's UK office. Cinemas and other partners made the transition from idea to public programme possible; he described working with more than 15 venues across London, Manchester and Nottingham. The practical breakthrough was therefore a combination of identifying a gap, securing cultural funding and persuading existing institutions to make room for unfamiliar work.[4]

The dates require care. Wang's own Stonewall article says the organisation was founded in 2019, while the first festival was planned for April 2020. COVID-19 disrupted that debut. Queer East moved into online exhibition through QE: HomeSexual in April and QE: Docs4Pride in July. A project intended to gather people in cinemas first had to learn how to reach them in their homes. Wang framed its wider purpose as bringing Asian and diasporic experiences into view and reducing cultural distance.[5]

The first season also connected a diaspora-led initiative to Taiwanese cultural diplomacy. Taiwan's Ministry of Culture identified the island's 2019 marriage-equality legislation as a reason for making Focus Taiwan central to the inaugural programme. Its London cultural division, headed by film scholar Chen Pin-Chuan, collaborated on the selection. The coalition extended to local government, Film Hub London, the Barbican and community-facing organisations. Wang was working at a junction between a state's presentation of its culture abroad, Britain's public cultural infrastructure and a queer immigrant public's wish to represent itself. Those interests could coincide without being identical.[6]

The emergency online pivot was specific and economical. The April 2020 announcement offered five programmes comprising 17 films from nine countries, rentable for £2.99 per programme between 18 April and 17 May. Proceeds went to partner independent cinemas. Small Talk and Mama Rainbow sat alongside thematic short-film packages. This was not simply a digital substitute for a cancelled event: it kept the curatorial project visible while transferring money towards the venues that had agreed to host it. The relationship between festival and cinema became reciprocal at precisely the moment neither could operate normally.[7]

An early programme for Scottish Queer International Film Festival shows that his approach was already broader than solemn representation. His 2020 selection, Gods and/or Monsters, mixed rediscovered and contemporary shorts with supernatural, surreal and unsettling elements. The choice matters: a community's cinema can carry fantasy, strange pleasures and formal experiments as well as testimony.[8]

2021–23: turning screenings into a cultural conversation

The second edition, in September 2021, made the work of contextualisation unusually visible. Its 37 films came from 15 countries, with Japan as the focus and 15 Taiwanese films and moving-image works. Film scholars Chris Berry and Christopher Brown introduced screenings. Online conversations brought together directors Zero Chou and Naoko Ogigami, Taiwanese rights advocate Yu Mei-nu, ASEAN SOGIE Caucus, the LGBT Centre of Mongolia and Asian festival organisers. A UK tour and a SOAS collaboration on director Mickey Chen extended the programme. These were different forms of expertise: artistic, academic, activist and organisational. The festival did not rely on a film alone to explain the social world from which it emerged.[9]

A telling early selection was Ho Chao-ti's documentary Turning 18. Wang defended its place in an LGBTQ+ programme even though its protagonist's lesbian identity was only one element of her life. He wanted characters whose queerness did not consume their entire representation. The criterion concerned the shape and fullness of a life, rather than the quantity of explicitly LGBTQ+ plot.[10]

This architecture helps explain Wang's role more precisely than the word "representation" does. A screening brings a work into circulation; an introduction supplies historical bearings; a discussion permits disagreement; a visiting filmmaker makes another career visible; a touring partnership gives the encounter a second setting. The significance lies in assembling these components. It would overstate the evidence to call the listed scholars or activists his mentors. What is documented is a working network of people whose knowledge and standing could make the programme legible to different publics.

Wang's own writing shows how he looks. In a 2023 essay for Women Make Waves, he considered 18 Taiwanese competition films through family, labour, sexuality, Indigenous tradition, genre and ecological change. His examples included a night-shift nurse's experience of dating, older women working in a hair salon, Atayal family life and experiments in animation. Rather than treating "women's cinema" as a single stable aesthetic, he argued for a changing field of marginalised perspectives. The essay is evidence of an active critical practice, not simply a festival director promoting his programme. It also brings him back into the Taiwanese festival culture that had helped form his viewing habits.[11]

A Mandarin-language conversation with the diaspora performing-arts podcast Ming Strike offers a useful parallel account of the obstacles. Its published chapter guide identifies discussion of resistance to the queer label in film invitations, British audiences and subtitles, his reluctance to bind the project to commercialised Pride activity, and the difficulty of converting film audiences into live-performance audiences. These are chapter descriptions, not a verified transcript; they should not be expanded into unverified quotations or specific anecdotes. They nevertheless make clear that the practical questions being asked in his professional milieu concerned gatekeeping, language, audience formation and artistic autonomy.[12]

The craft: watching, contextualising, and relinquishing control

In 2024 Wang described programming as an education that changes the programmer. His understanding of queerness had shifted during the festival's life. Archives were part of that education, alongside younger artists and collaborators embedded in cultural communities he could not claim to know comprehensively.

That year he moved away from being the sole curator and invited 13 curators with different disciplines, ages and perspectives. His stated argument was structural: representation on a screen is insufficient if people from those communities do not also hold meaningful decision-making power. He names Taiwan's Women Make Waves, London's Fringe! and Glasgow's SQIFF as influences, particularly their community commitments and approaches to accessibility.[13]

His 2024 interview also locates discovery in relationships. Collaborators connected to particular Asian communities could find work outside the usual international programmers' circuits. Meanwhile, repeatedly screening recognised classics could leave audiences with a dated impression of a living cinema. The resulting task was simultaneously to recover neglected history and prevent a familiar canon from standing in for contemporary production.[14]

This decentralisation has concrete procedures. The festival's 2026 guest-programme call accepted applicants with or without direct film-programming experience. Proposals needed an audience, an artistic rationale and a budget, combining a screening with a live element. A panel assessed originality alongside feasibility and relevance. Each selected project received a £400 curatorial fee and up to £500 for production costs, with Wang and the team helping realise it. These are project-specific 2026 figures, not his income or a universal industry rate. They show the material scale at which artistic access is negotiated: rights, speakers, production and support all have to fit together.[15]

[External image / 外部圖片] Yi Wang speaking before a screening of Kubi
Wang introduces a screening of Kubi (2023). The date in parentheses is the film's release year, not a verified photograph date.

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Beyond London, beyond the film screening

The tour's administrative machinery is particularly well documented. In May 2024 Queer East advertised five freelance regional coordinators, grouped around Scottish, northern English, Midlands and southwestern cities. The proposed rate was £20 an hour for approximately seven to ten hours a week, rising around events. Duties included venue

liaison, guest lists, marketing, introductions and Q&As, documentation, audience surveys and post-event reporting. Local LGBTQ+ and Asian-community connections were essential; knowledge of DCPs, codecs and aspect ratios was desirable. The listing makes visible work that the finished programme conceals: somebody must know whom to invite, which file will play, who will welcome the filmmaker and how an event's impact will be recorded. These are advertised role conditions, not proof of actual earnings or a measure of Wang's personal workload.[16]

A 2025 interview describes Queer East beginning alongside Wang's theatre-production job and expanding beyond a side project. Audience messages asking for screenings in places such as Bristol and Glasgow helped sharpen the case for touring. His reasoning was straightforward: London already offered unusual access to international cinema, while some of the films Queer East selected might otherwise have little or no UK exhibition. The 2025 On the Road tour was reported as reaching 15 cities with more than 50 events. Distribution here means getting an encounter to happen where people actually live.[17]

His earlier performing-arts work also reappears in the festival's form. In 2023 Queer East introduced international dance performances, including Robin Nimanong's Cyborg DNA and Choy Ka Fai's Yishun is Burning.[18]

By 2026, DAYTRIP at the ICA, co-curated with Bart Seng Wen Long, combined film, live work and practical workshops with a club night. A spectator could enter through a screening and stay for a different kind of participation. This is the producer's skill applied to curating: the space, sequence and social occasion become part of the meaning of the work.[19]

2025–26: the economics of access and the limits of recognition

By 2025, reporting described a not-for-profit festival with sliding-scale tickets and some free screenings, supported by the BFI National Lottery Audience Fund and Arts Council National Lottery Project Grants. The same report recorded Wang responding to criticism that his selections did not always supply obvious LGBT narratives. His interest in more experimental approaches could therefore generate friction inside the constituency the festival sought to serve. Inclusion did not remove the argument over what should count as queer art.[20]

Public subsidy matters here as a condition of artistic choice. A programme can offer lower-price entry and less immediately familiar material when every event need not recover all of its costs from tickets. That is an interpretation of the documented funding and pricing model, not a claim that Queer East has escaped financial pressure. No complete operating budget or reliable account of Wang's own remuneration was located.

A specific funding decision shows the difference between a festival edition and a durable

organisation. On 23 June 2025, City Bridge Foundation awarded Queer East CIC £60,000 over three years, allocated as £20,000 annually, towards staffing, venue hire and other costs of expanding year-round community outreach in London. The award is neither the festival's entire budget nor the founder's salary. It buys some continuity between public events: staff time and rooms in which relationships can be sustained.[21]

CNA's 2025 reporting, republished by OCAC, identified another form of accumulated capital: trust from filmmakers and distributors. Wang told the reporter that they entrusted UK premieres to the festival because they believed it would care for the films and connect them with an established audience. The report described more than ten UK premieres that year and an almost full ICA screening of A Journey in Spring. It also named support spanning British and Taiwanese cultural bodies. Recognition in this account was operational: an organisation's previous handling of films made later rights-holders more willing to work with it.[22]

The evidence does not reveal individual licensing prices, negotiations or distribution agreements. It does show that a programmer's selection cannot be reduced to a private ranking of films. Availability, permission, confidence in the presenter, affordable attendance and the capacity to stage the event all help determine what reaches the screen.

Building a field, not only a festival

Wang's Independent Cinema Office trustee biography records jury work for Iris Prize, MIX Copenhagen, Taiwan's Women Make Waves and Taiwan International Queer Film Festival. It also identifies him as a co-founder of the Association of Curators and Programmers of Asian Cinemas. These roles place him within an international network of exhibition, evaluation and professional exchange; the biography does not establish dates for each appointment.[23]

Queer East's 2025 Industry Day at BFI Southbank made that network-building visible. Wang joined programmers from Queer Vision, SQIFF and Leeds Queer Film Festival to discuss community-oriented festivals. Other sessions brought together Asian-cinema organisations and filmmakers. The work extends beyond selecting a finished film into making practitioners more capable of finding audiences and learning from each other.[24]

The Up Next: Future Film Curators Lab formalises this transfer of expertise. For its 2025/26 cycle, the programme combined film aesthetics and research with licensing, marketing, copywriting, planning and event management. Participants would work collaboratively on shorts programmes with festival-team mentoring. It was free to attend, with a £350 curatorial fee and travel/accommodation bursaries, and specifically sought early-career participants outside Greater London. Applicants could have no more than 12 months' professional programming experience. This is a response to two barriers at once: entering a field without established credentials and entering it from outside the capital. The modest fee should not be mistaken for a salaried training position.[25]

The route led to public credits, not only workshops. Holly Rowley’s Out of the Shadows, Into the Streets! appeared at Genesis Cinema in May 2026 with the curatorial idea credited to her through the lab. Its programme connected queer resistance across different historical and imagined settings. The example demonstrates an actual mechanism for allowing someone else’s research to become a Queer East event; it does not establish the longer-term career effects of participation.[26]

The seventh festival, held from 1 May to 6 June 2026, foregrounded cinema heritage. Its opening presentation was the restored Taiwanese film The Outsiders (1986), including previously censored material. Wang’s programme statement connected historical recovery to conversations with present-day audiences; 35mm prints, restorations and archives were part of that effort. The current occupation is therefore also one of cultural memory: giving older work another public life, rather than treating visibility as a demand only for new production.[27]

A producer’s authorship

Wang’s career is best understood as a change in the scale and distribution of authorship. He began with the absence he experienced as a spectator; adjacent work in producing supplied a practical way to respond. The response then acquired partners, public funding, venues, collaborators and an audience. As it grew, its credibility depended less on the founder being able to speak for every community than on the organisation’s capacity to invite other people to shape it.

Several tensions remain productive rather than resolved. An organisation founded around immigrant experience must also make space for British-born and other diasporic experiences. A programme described through geographic identity must avoid treating its countries as interchangeable. A queer festival can satisfy a demand for recognisable identity narratives while also troubling the categories that make it publicly legible. A director can decentralise programming while retaining responsibility for money, feasibility and the whole event. The particularity of Wang’s trajectory lies in working through these tensions at the level of selection, partnership and production, rather than resolving them through a single manifesto.

The publicly documented record supports an account of cultural institution-building more strongly than a comprehensive private biography. His principal medium is an arrangement: films and performances, people and rooms, grant applications and prices, historical works and present audiences. Its success should be assessed through the encounters and opportunities it makes possible, without confusing the organisation’s expanding public profile with a complete account of its founder’s life.

What is not documented

The sources reviewed do not establish his birth date, childhood city, undergraduate

institution, exact graduation date, personal income, weekly hours, private household circumstances or a typical daily timetable. A May 2025 newspaper profile describes him as 36, but that is not sufficient to assign a precise birth date. Watching films, archival exploration, collaborating, fundraising and public hosting are documented practices; a reconstructed hour-by-hour routine would be invention. The 2021 employer information should not be presented as verified current employment.

Selected chronology

- 2014: Moves to London for postgraduate study at Goldsmiths.[28]
- 2019: Queer East begins to take shape; its first full festival is planned for 2020.[29]
- 2020: The pandemic interrupts the planned debut; HomeSexual and Docs4Pride establish online programmes.[30]
- 2021: The second edition develops introductions, discussions, a UK tour and scholarly collaborations.[31]
- 2024: Wang describes moving away from a sole-curator model and inviting guest curators.[32]
- 2026: The seventh festival foregrounds restoration and cinema heritage; the Emerging Curators Lab brings participants' programmes to public audiences.[33, 34]

Sources and notes

1. Wang's Chinese name appears in his signed Crossing essay and Taiwan Ministry of Culture reporting.↩
2. QX interview, 2023.↩
3. Chinese Independent Film Archive interview, 2021.↩
4. Queermunity interview, 2021.↩
5. Wang for Stonewall, 2021.↩
6. Ministry of Culture, April 2020.↩
7. Queer East's contemporary announcement.↩
8. SQIFF programme, 2020.↩
9. CNA's contemporary report, September 2021.↩
10. CIFA interview.↩
11. Wang's Women Make Waves essay, 2023.↩
12. Ming Strike, episode 24, published show notes.↩
13. t' ART interview, 2024.↩

14. t’ ART interview.↩
15. Queer East guest-curator call.↩
16. 2024 regional-coordinator recruitment notice.↩
17. Forge Press interview, 2025.↩
18. QX interview.↩
19. ICA event listing.↩
20. South West Londoner, May 2025.↩
21. City Bridge Foundation’ s grant record.↩
22. CNA/OCAC report, May 2025.↩
23. Independent Cinema Office biography.↩
24. Industry Day programme.↩
25. Up Next’ s 2025/26 call.↩
26. 2026 programme record.↩
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28. Chinese Independent Film Archive interview, 2021.↩
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31. CNA’ s contemporary report, September 2021.↩
32. t’ ART interview, 2024.↩
33. 2026 programme announcement.↩
34. 2026 programme record.↩