

The Global Trajectories of Queerness

Re-thinking Same-Sex Politics in the Global South

Editors Ashley Tellis
Srutī Bala



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Localized Trajectories of Queerness and Activism under Global Governance

Josephine Ho

ABSTRACT

Faced with the hegemony of morality that is being fortified with the universal democratic values of global governance, local queer activism increasingly needs to reflect upon its own making and draw upon the socio-cultural specificities that make up its vitality. The present text, adapted from an interview with the author, begins from the configuration of queerness in one locale as an exemplar, reflects upon its existence under global governance, envisions its relationship with allied movements and yet-to-connect sites, and cautions against recent mainstreaming tendencies and overconfidence in progressive values.

The reconfiguration of the term “queer” in Taiwan¹

Contrary to the usual criticism that the transplantation of a trendy Western term is merely a replication/importation of the original meaning, the trajectory of affectively-charged terms such as “queer” may be far from this routine in the globalizing context. For one thing, the shame, stigma and defiance² that had sedimented from the socially entangled history of the term “queer” in the West may not be so readily transportable to its new existence in vastly different social contexts elsewhere. In fact, the entry and reconfiguration of the term “queer” may turn out to be occasions for struggle within local – in the context of this paper, Taiwan –gender/sexuality movements.

The term “queer” was formally introduced into Taiwan in 1994 by a number of young aspiring gay/lesbian writers who were producing a special “Queer” issue for a Taiwanese leftist progressive magazine, *Isle Margins*.³ At that historical moment,

Taiwanese gay movement was just beginning to organize and the question of “coming out” proved to be formidable in the strongly family-based Chinese culture.⁴ In the midst of a concomitant sex emancipation movement championed by women and feminists in the early 1990s, the question triggered fierce debates over the issue of “coming out as *what*—respectable citizens who are *just like* everyone else, or sexual subjects who affirm their erotic practices *despite* social stigma.”⁵ Significantly, instead of mobilizing or redeploying, as Western queer movement did, existing derogatory Chinese terms that referred to homosexuality and other sexual perversions, the young gay/lesbian writers chose to echo the pronunciation of “queer” in their creation of a new Chinese term, “*Qu-er*” (酷兒), to characterize their own self-stylized creative writing on themes of unabashed marginal sexualities and tangled perverted relationships. The introduction of the term was supplemented by a queer vocabulary annotated in the dense and dark language that linked the concept to western literary traditions of sexual deviance, vampirism, etc. In Taiwan’s social context where homophobia was more shunned than combated by homosexuals, the reference to “queer” (in its Western sense of sexual defiance) connoted limited relevance for local activism. But, as the coinage also denoted the fashionable meaning of “a cool kid” in Chinese, “*Qu-er*” was taken by the gay community as signifying the emergence of a youthful trendy cultural style quite attractive for the post-martial-law years when the spirit of counter-culture ran high and deviation from the mainstream and the normative was deemed laudable. The term became so popular that at the end of the 1990s many homosexuals identified themselves as “*Qu-er*” without any knowledge of the shame, insult, or defiance that “queer” signified in the West. They took the newly created Chinese term as merely an enticing sexual explicitness in language and imagery rather than a political move to mobilize the community against sexual oppression or sexual hierarchy.

The “coming out as what” debate signaled the rise of homonormativity alongside the evolving Taiwanese gay movement and resulted in a freshly-charged context in which “*Qu-er*” was to find a new life and new meaning. As the first wave of “out” gay figures tended to be respectable and well-known members of the literati whose gay identity could be explained away by their artistic bent, the gay community increasingly leaned toward presenting itself and its members in the best light possible. By 1998, drag queens and sissy gays became targets of criticism in the Taiwanese gay movement because they were said to confirm effeminate, and sometimes flamboyant, gay stereotypes and hence made it difficult for gays to be socially accepted. In the meantime, thanks to the spread of the feminist gender binary dogma, lesbian butches were also chastised for imitating men and reproducing patriarchal values. As tension within the gay/lesbian community mounted, many began to feel the need to assert and affirm the stigmatized and to create a different, non-normative stance.

Taiwan had not experienced the kind of blatant hostility and insult that fueled the defiant energy of terms such as “queer,” nor did it have a gay movement strong

enough to pose any real threat to the heterosexual majority. The term “*Qu-er*” was hence reconfigured discursively into an identity with an attitude, less in opposition to heteronormativity (as in the case of the West) than in resistance to growing homonormativity and feminist gender doctrine in Taiwan.⁶ True to its historical moment, this locally-oriented queer stance contextualized itself in relation to the on-going and marginalized sex emancipation movement, emphasizing the need to transgress fixed, essentialized roles and identities and fossilized differences that were working to stabilize the sex/gender hierarchy. Further, it sought to do away with the binarism that made victimology the ruling passion of new social movements, feminist movement in particular. The central concerns of this new “*Qu-er/queer*” crowd then resided not only with gays or lesbians per se, but more visibly with the decriminalization of sex work, the sex rights of teenagers, the liberalization of intimate relations—all key battlegrounds in Taiwanese gender/sexuality politics at that moment. And today, consistently generating and propagating non-normalizing, non-mainstreaming discourses on gender/sexuality issues, the “*Qu-er/queer*” stance has built alliances with emerging sexual minorities and other marginalities, while thoroughly challenging the growing submission of the LGBT movement to the soft power of governance on issues ranging from gay marriage rights to gender mainstreaming to universal HIV screening.

As history would have it, “*Qu-er*” may have started out as merely a self-identified individualizing cultural style, but it has now lodged itself in a collective struggle aimed at the mainstreaming women’s movement, the normalizing lesbian and gay movements, as well as the NGOization of other social causes in Taiwan, forming an uncompromising and staunchly resisting force against the growing global governance that sustains such mainstreaming/normalizing/NGOizing tendencies.

Queerness and Global Governance

Global governance, or global civil society, has been described innocuously in international relations studies as the global trend in which state-centered structures are now outsourcing/franchising more and more of their work of governance to a growing number of non-state entities, such as international organizations or local social movement-groups-turned-NGOs (Rosenau 4–5). In the meantime, many social movement groups are now embedding themselves more and more in the state structure by becoming grant-dependent mission-oriented organizations, hence adjusting their own structuring principles more and more to fit into state bureaucratic operations. Bureaucratic work to meet requirements of accountability in the form of regular and extensive reporting, and sometimes even direct oversight of the groups’ operations by funding agencies, are becoming routine; while delegates from these groups are recruited in turn to serve as members for various policy-making committees in government agencies. Local NGOs’ connections with international bodies through funding

and exchange of skills, information, and advocacy purposes further enhance the effectiveness and credibility of local efforts, thus vastly improving local NGOs' social image and power of influence. As such civil society actors participate in government operations sometimes as advocates, sometimes as activists, but increasingly more as policymakers, they are learning to conduct themselves in new ways and playing increasingly active roles in shaping norms, laws, and policies at all levels of governance (Ho, "Is Global Governance Bad for East Asian Queers?" 462–464).

As these "movements-turned-organizations" become more and more fluent in professional communication and planned action, as well as transnational networking and local agenda-setting, the norms, laws, and policies that they help to create and execute are also making the inimical effects of global governance felt—mostly acutely and almost always exclusively by the marginal, the non-normal, and the non-conforming (Ho, "Queer Existence Under Global Governance" 541–543). After all, "governance" is but the newest form of power and domination, framed in the language of managerial efficiency and regulative effectivity, to the exclusion of concerns for the people considered least fitting its inherent civil and moral decrees. Understandably, NGOs that could play a part in the global governance scheme tend to be those that already inhabit mainstream values and moralities. Their righteous image and moral zeal often in turn lend much desired support to the state that is in dire need of political legitimation. In fact, the mutual exchange of benefits and power between the NGOs and the state is exactly what constitutes governance. And writ large on a global scale, global governance represents the propagation of values and practices that originated from Western ideals of liberal democracy and modern civility to other locations where such values and practices, now reified as international protocols and covenants, would work to force integration of the local into the global despite local socio-historical-cultural specificities.

Whether "queer" could become complicit with such a form of power deployment depends on how this "queer" situates itself within the global context. Do local emergences of the "queer" phenomenon view themselves as yet another advancement in the propagation of progressive values and "modernized" practices imported from and defined by the West? Yet another step toward desirable civility and democracy that are believed to enhance the status of the local? Yet another move in the process through which allegedly closed societies will be liberated and traditional cultures transformed? Or, yet another huge step forward in reaching "the global queer" ideal? The pursuit of civility and democracy, or equality and modernity—if not accompanied by a thorough de-colonializing reflection/critique on their Eurocentric assumptions and erasure of the local, and if not accompanied by a keen and in-depth excavation/examination of local/regional historicities, realities, and complexities—can easily be appropriated to serve state-oriented, class-specific interests in the local context as such pursuits/desires end up being codified into legislations that solidify existing stratifications of power.

Over the past decades, it is gratifying to see many instances of queer activism that are directly opposed to the mainstream, disdainful of the normal, deeply embedded in the local and national, cool when facing the West or the global, and always ready to create connections with the marginal, the unorthodox, and the difficult. Actual examples in Taiwan include: the alliance between queers and sex-workers since 1997, when the former suffered police raids and the latter faced banning in Taipei city; the active participation of queers in the anti-eviction movement organized by quarantined Hansen disease (commonly known as leprosy) patients since 2004 in Taipei county; and the “destroy family, abolish marriage” discourse launched by queers against the LGBT communities’ concentrated investment in gay marriage rights since 2013.⁷ There are still numerous other instances of queers asserting their sexual autonomy and sexual freedom by challenging the mainstream through individual or collective open displays of sexually explicit messages, bodies, postures, slogans, photos, actions, performances, demonstrations, etc. And just as these queer direct actions find themselves verging on the delicate possibility of being charged with violating the obscenity law, those who work to create a sex-positive social milieu through their discourses or researches may also end up being prosecuted under obscenity laws justified by the universal/global value of protection of women and children.

NGOs and the Hegemony of Moralities

In 2003, a league of eleven Christian NGOs and parent groups in Taiwan filed a complaint in court against me for having included in my massive online sexuality studies data bank two hyperlinks that could lead to photos of zoophilia located on an overseas website.⁸ The conservative groups had been entangled in fierce debates with me for the previous ten years over issues including teenage sexuality, erotic romance novels, professional and occasional sex work, pornography, and internet sexual speech. Now they banded together to accuse me of “propagating obscenities that corrupt traditional values and may produce bad influence on children and juveniles,” and urged that I be dismissed from my teaching position at National Central University. I was prosecuted under the Penal Code and had to fight my way through the legal process for the following 18 months, at the risk of losing my job and my research center, plus suffering imprisonment if convicted. I did not have any political clout to navigate the torturous process, but my colleagues, students, and social movement groups from 20 years of involvement in social activism came together and organized an impressive international petition drive in my behalf, which more or less mitigated the sexual stigma that would have nailed my case. I myself of course had to come up with the real defense in court, in the form of a 90-minute long lecture on Sexualities Studies 101 in order to educate the judges.⁹ I am not sure if the judges understood everything I said, but the final verdict was “not guilty” both in the district court and in the high court. The ruling has since protected the freedom of academics

to conduct research on difficult and controversial subjects in Taiwan. But the court case also helped re-orient my research toward the changing role of Christian NGOs in the formation of governance in Taiwan and its consequence for both civil society and more significantly for sexual marginalities.

In hindsight, the court case was the culmination of a series of struggle over opening up social space for sexuality in post-martial-law Taiwan in the 1990s. My public speeches on female sexuality as one area of gender struggle, which later evolved into my book on sex emancipation and feminism in 1994, intervened at a time when women were already emerging as adventurous sexual subjects. As my feminist discourse mitigated the weight of sexual stigma and social inhibition, it was deemed extremely controversial and marked me as someone who was out to corrupt and mislead women. Then in 1997 my colleagues and I produced volumes of discourses in support of Taipei sex workers who were fighting to keep their licenses that the city government was taking away to “improve women’s status.” Our support and the legitimacy it bestowed upon the sex work issue outraged many religious and conservative groups on a cause that they believed was sure to win by a landslide. In the end, the sex workers won a two-year grace period, and the mayor they opposed lost his re-election bid in 1998.¹⁰ Then, in the early 2000s in Taiwan, my persistent critique of police entrapment of netizens negotiating casual sex on the internet directly challenged the grounds of the new amendments that made mere internet sexual verbal exchange prosecutable in the name of protecting innocent children surfing the internet from being “adversely affected” should they stumble upon such “insinuating messages of sexual transaction”.¹¹ Such a severe infringement of basic civil liberties, appearing in a social context where freedom of speech and pluralistic values had been defended as integral to the basic fiber of Taiwanese democracy since the 1980s, was made possible by none other than the conservative Christian groups riding on growing social anxiety over the dexterity with which the younger generations were managing increasingly wider network of (sexual) contacts through the internet. Presenting themselves as social service, charity, and women’s groups and now child-protection groups, the conservative Christian NGOs succeeded in creating a hegemony of moralities under the global protocol of child protection and profoundly lowered the threshold of censorship in law. As the field of operation centered upon that of sexuality, those of us who put up open resistance were most easily subject to obscenity charges. Fortunately, their effort failed in my case.

The ferocity with which local NGOs enforce global protocols is not without international backing. In fact, nowadays, the entry of international NGOs, along with their funds and protocols, into underdeveloped countries often produces dramatic effects on the landscape of local social movements. In many such countries, sexuality tends to be framed in reproductive terms, and issues of reproductive health and freedom often become occasions for discussing women’s right to sexual self-determination.

But even there, the policies adopted have been criticized for playing active roles in promoting the values and goals of (Western) “advanced” countries at the expense of wiping out local practices and traditions.¹² Another area where international NGO efforts concentrate has to do with AIDS-related prevention programs that often entail extraction of information concerning the sexual practices of local populations as well as promotion of universal screening and modification of sexual behavior. The huge funds that went into these projects have provided employment and livelihood for many (including gay activists), but neo-liberal accountability requirements by the funding agencies have also demanded more busy bureaucratic procedures and fixed programs than the work of significant and vibrant organizing. Recent US funding policies that explicitly exclude services to sex workers or sex work causes cannot be said to be innocent or ignorant moves in this context. On the other hand, in many countries, sexuality is allowable to be discussed as a public issue only in relation to prostitution and sexual assault (and more recently sexual harassment) cases, hence consistently burying sexuality in the inflammatory emotions of sex-negativity. As such, the issues lend themselves easily to legislative efforts by conservative Christian NGOs working to create more regulation or censorship measures, as we have witnessed in Taiwan.

Various differences aside, one serious problem with widespread NGO-ization of social movements may be its orientation toward state-centered thinking, often driven by the NGOs’ need for funding, legitimacy, and affirmation. Examples in Taiwan include: the tendency of NGOs to become franchises of the state in carrying out proposed social services instead of working toward more fundamental social change; the focused interest of such NGOs in working, in the name of protection of the weak and vulnerable, to institute or amend legislations that would justify and strengthen the state’s power of monitoring or surveillance or penalty; and, the aversion of such NGOs to issues or causes that may prove to be problematic for the regimented legislative or juridical framework but may engender real possibilities of fresh outlooks or alternative visions and values.¹³ All in all, while neoliberal ideology calls for a weakening of the state through the enhancement of the power of influence of NGOs, in the reality of developing countries, the empowerment of NGOs often resulted in a state-NGO power block that proved to be especially detrimental to sexual politics.

Furthermore, the mainstreaming tendency among social movement groups and NGOs is more often than not embodied in our friends and comrades turning around to attack us for not moving in the “more effective and more acceptable” direction of collaborating with the state or the mainstream. We had survived the ostracization by state feminists since the 1990s as they gradually moved into the state machine to carry out the gender-mainstreaming project. Now we are faced with gays and lesbians and transgenders who are creating a whole swarm of new NGOs so as to take a bite out of the resources the state hands out in exchange for conferred legitimacy. Watching the massive growth in number of NGOs but not strength of social activism,

we have to feel our way through each battle and struggle by focusing on the issue at hand and standing our “queer” ground through continuously connecting with the excluded and the marginal so as not to lose sight of that perspective. Yet, even there, things don’t always turn out easy.

Links and Gaps between Various Social Movements

I was lucky to have been “sucked into” various kinds of movements as they rose and evolved in the changing realities of Taiwan, from the labor movement since the 1980s, to the women’s movement since the early 1990s, to the gay and lesbian movements since the second half of 1990s, to the transgender movement since the 2000s, to the internet freedom movement since the 2000s. And because of such experiences, I also know fully well that even overlapping participants in the same line-up of movements did not make the movements themselves connect or collaborate automatically. The problem is not that we lacked knowledge of or familiarity with each movement’s conditions and problems and goals—although in some cases and to a certain degree we did lack them—but that even with such knowledge and familiarity, we were still often at a loss as to how we could join our issues and connect our struggles—worse, how we could talk about our different takes on issues without ending up hating each other. (I personally believe that the difficulties we have working with one another especially on against-the-grain causes have a lot to do with the shifting structural tensions and contradictions of our world that are always already built into us in the form of the tendency to simplify or polarize.)

In our experience in Taiwan, two other kinds of division have made connections even harder to achieve. For the basic model of social analysis that has framed most social activism so far is a binary model of oppression and resistance under which connecting the movements into collaborative efforts is taken to be natural and automatic, if not mandatory. Since the oppressed are believed to share the same disadvantageous position, they should stand by one another in united opposition against the oppressor, with the structurally most oppressed group taking the higher ground. (Hence begins the struggle to occupy the prized position of the most oppressed.) Yet in actual experience, such a model of power analysis and the assumed natural alliance among the oppressed have proven to be somewhat impractical. For the model overlooks the *differential* positions of various groups and individuals in relation to various power axes, values, and issues, as well as the *different* desires and expectations that have been nurtured within such embeddedness. Difficulties in understanding the occasional lack of motivation among otherwise friendly groups and individuals, and consequent responses of disappointment and moral indignation, end up further irritating the other parties. As movements mature, and issues and causes become privatized entitlements for different groups in the contemporary process of NGOization, cumulative discontent makes collaboration between movements all the more delicate and fragile.

The second kind of division that we have experienced a lot here in Taiwan has to do with the division of labor within social activism itself. The traditional Marxist position is sometimes taken to be a privileging of praxis over theory, action over knowledge/discourse, the need of the present moment of protestation over the vision of a broader and long-term scope of resistance, so activists tend to prioritize the first terms in the pairs to the extent of turning them into moral decrees. The devaluing of the second terms then expresses itself as an obscurantist dogma that insists on an almost instinctive and absolute political correctness, forestalling any room for broader analyses or complicated frames of thought. Such rigidly conceived hierarchical relationships have turned activists against academics who seem to refuse to serve the so-called needs of the movement and likewise made it difficult for academics to make contributions to the movement in the best way they can. After all, while activists demand that academics produce knowledge directly usable or politically expedient for the moment, it is the academics' tendency toward thinking in broader and higher levels of abstraction that could offer up bigger pictures and longer views that would be truly useful for the movements and their alliance-building.

Recently, perhaps out of desperation, some labor-originated groups in Taiwan have begun to build toward broader discourses and larger pictures so that other movements and causes could be located on a map that shows possible links between different locations and struggles. Workshops and training sessions have been organized with the explicit goal of getting all groups to start reading and discussing each others' key texts of theorization in an effort to expand the scope and horizon of individual groups and movements. Activists as well as theoreticians of various colors have been invited for talks and discussions, and all have found limitations in their own description and self-presentation as they faced very different groups and concerns. It is in these collaborative efforts and mutual interrogations that creative connections may hopefully emerge. In the meantime, despite divisions and tensions, the mere coming together of various groups and theoreticians could be read by those on the outside as genuine possibilities of collaboration and unity, which may then produce other effects that may shake up the game at hand.

As to connecting with other groups and causes on a much larger, perhaps global, scale, it is more than conceivable that queerness makes up one of such fields in which new connections and dialogs could feed into building resistance against the reign of respectability and decency now propagated by global governance.

Localizing “Queerness” in the Global South

“Queerness” has often been associated with metropolitan lifestyles and Western modes of self-presentation, so a productive use of “queerness” in relation to the Global South would do well to take the idea of “the Global South” seriously. Some say the South is marked mostly by poverty and economic underdevelopment; but perhaps

its position within a structural inequality that is global in scope, a structural inequality that has already been fiercely resisted by many localized movements in the South, should be the core. However “queer” is conceived in the South, it will have to see itself as situated within this global structure and to try to build some connection with those movements that have been fighting this structural inequality everywhere. If our queer experience in Taiwan has learned any valuable lesson, queerness in the South should also try to find its local footing rather than seeing itself as something grafted from the West and innately opposed to local cultural traditions. Instead of thinking itself as a natural part of the global queer, or a part of the civilizing force of modernity that has the West as its point of origin, queerness needs to go back to its own localized cultures and societies and histories and excavate usable cultural resources and viable connections. In many ways, queerness will have to rethink its relation to the indigenous and the national in creative and productive ways.

Localizing is more often than not a question of historicizing. I understand “queerness” as not one thing, not one identity, but a composite of many socio-historically salient elements. There is the element of non-normative/non-conforming existence, the element of against-the-grain attitude, the element of liminal but often deemed criminal practices, the element of non- or fluid identity, the element of always moving downward rather than upward, etc. Likewise, the traditional is not innately against the queer; the national is not wholly parochial or oppressive. Negotiating queerness in the Global South thus entails finding a big enough, old enough historical frame of reference in which modern colonialism and imperialism had not plundered the parts of the world now referred to as the South. We need to locate elements that could connect with queerness out of this myriad of historical paths by continuously studying the complexities and multiplicities that make up our world as it is, as well as how else it could be understood differently based on such studies of histories. Queer’s acute awareness of intersectionalities and distinctiveness in all their fluidity needs to prove itself up to the task in attempting such re-conceptions.

As it stands now, many Western practices and ideas (e.g., absolute equality, individual freedom, liberal democracy, environmental protection, etc.) have been elevated to the status of global values and thrust upon the South as UN-decreed “non-negotiable standards and obligations”. The recent emergence of homo-nationalism may be a premonition that equality for same-sex sexuality, in some limited form such as marriage rights, may yet become another future addition to these global standards. As much as this may seem beneficial and welcome by the majority of the homosexual community, queers must connect with other movements in interrogating the “global” in global values and its erasure of local specificities, as well as the fall-out of the disciplinary power of such non-negotiable standards and obligations.

Western, now global, LGBT terms are widely and eagerly used as civilized identity terms by homosexual communities elsewhere to present themselves to the public.

Sadly, such eagerness also results in a drive for respectability and presentability that makes the social existence and practice of (non-normative) sexuality all the more undesirable. Under these circumstances, the staunch presence of the relentlessly queer is both encouraging and invigorating. In China, through the mediation of LGBT cultures and movements in Taiwan and Hong Kong, a familiarity with same-sex concepts and identities and ways to frame issues in conciliatory mainstream values is now developing. Fortunately, in the vast geographical and cultural spread of China and the uneven access to communication technology due to economic as well as geographic reasons, many diverse and uniquely context-specific sexual practices still exist or continue to emerge, where little concern is given to respectability and continued matter-of-fact existence is much more pragmatic. In the area of same-sex sex work in China, no respectable terms exist, nor are they desired. Instead, you hear terms used by trans sex workers themselves in ways that would have been described as “queer” elsewhere, but in fact were merely simple terms of self-reference for daily usage. The term Yiau (妖) – the closest equivalent in English may be “nymph” (a cross between demon and human and deity, sexually potent and constantly luring young men) – is widely used in mainland China, not by the general public, but by self-identified transwomen (MTF) sex workers themselves (most of whom have not gone through sex-reassignment surgery and are perfectly happy with only augmented breasts to help with their business). They serve a male clientele which includes both gays and straights, and the self-naming helps mark out the liminal existence of gender-ambiguous bodies and their amazing sexual attraction. Understandably, they are also targeted for incarceration by the police at the urge of respectable citizen NGOs and the governance-minded state. It is in such unique existences that the self-creating energies on the gender/sexuality scene are plainly in sight; and gratefully, neither the iron-fists of the state or its police, nor the enticing lure of straight-faced creed of civility or respectable identity have been able to subjugate or domesticate this self-generated vitality. In a way, they constitute another “South” that stretches beyond the geopolitical map, where many other similar liminal existences reside. And whether or not to refer to them as same-sex sexualities or even queers really does not matter that much, so long as they continue to exist and thrive. No doubt, it is our duty to make sure they do.

Perhaps for a number of locations in Asia, the growing *mainstreaming* or *normalizing* tendency within the LGBT movements is expressed and fortified most markedly through the concentrated investment in the same-sex, and more recently transgender, marriage rights issue for individual subjects.¹⁴ In Taiwan, deemed as having the most vibrant gay and lesbian movement with the largest pride march in all of Asia (amounting to 50,000 people attending in 2013), the marriage issue has been heating up rapidly and, to the dismay of many queer activists, is now the number one issue when thinking of things homosexual. Common belief in the LGBT community

holds that, more than any other issue, marriage rights, signifying state-approved intimacy and genuine love, would once for all exonerate gays and lesbians from the guilt of bringing shame to the family. The emphasis on true love expressed as loyalty and faithfulness (converging ironically with conservative Christian advocacy for chastity) is now reframing homosexuality into an esteemed form of intimacy, much more desirable than the unstable, affair-ridden, divorce-prone heterosexual relationships. The Pope's 2013 statement that clears homosexual orientation from the sin of homosexual act is yet another example of the de-sexing of homosexuality (Donadio).

If the gay marriage rights issue changes the tone and tenor of the homosexual movement, then the normalization and integration of certain "more acceptable" homosexuals into the nationalist ideal also signals the shifting structures of homophobia and homosexuality in the context of global politics. Deemed problematic are no longer all homosexuals but only those that refuse to behave in ways worthy of tolerance and respect. And defiance is to be dealt with not through stigma and insult – they don't produce the desired effect on queers anyway – but through legal and juridical means. Hence, legislations are increasingly put into place to govern the flow of sexual information (considered demeaning hence discriminatory to women) and the exchange of sexual contact (to be subject to public-health-oriented surveillance), thanks to the efforts of sex-phobic feminists and women's groups working under broadly applied UN protocols such as CEDAW. If activists and scholars are serious about the state of same-sex sexuality at this moment, then they would do well to look beyond the seeming friendliness that claims to embrace gay and lesbian identities while remaining silent and stern about their sexualities. In short, the actual effects of progressive values such as equality and civility, the inherent moralities underneath international protocols and covenants of gender equality and child protection, and the sentiments surrounding the vulnerable and the weak that have come to buttress stringent measures of social control, can only be unraveled from the vantage point of the relentlessly opposing queer. Such is the important task of thinking through the queer in the Global South.

Concluding Thoughts

Three important and developing issues warrant our attention within this context of queerness under global governance constituted as desirable civility and modernity.

The desire for modernity and civility, generated from a Third World location with strong upward prospects and aspirations, has now become the basis for the creation of new civic mores that govern people's lives down to the smallest details and feelings, hence blurring the public/private divide that used to stop state surveillance of people's lives and relationships at the door. Modernity, with its progressive sounding ideals and practices, has turned out to be a formidable force of regulation and exclusion, especially of things sexual. Incidentally but not accidentally, gender/sexuality

mainstreamers and their newly acquired legitimacy constitute important elements in this drive toward modernity and civility, and the affective potency of this upward drive has gathered immense support for governance measures that directly incriminate basic civil liberties. The emergence of such affective citizens in aspiring democracies/economies and their consolidation of new forms of regulation, exclusion, and governance are in urgent need of study as well as resistance.

In many locations, new forms of governance are able to thrive because political correctness has silenced dissent and cleared the way. As the idea of gender equality rigidifies into laws and regulations that are imposed from top down without much debate or discussion, with rationale and justifications based on vacuous but irresistible values such as human rights, safety, and progress, certain changes are also being induced on the social and cultural landscape. Traditional masculinities have become suspect, deemed as embodiments of patriarchal violence and oppression and designated for containment, if not extinction. Male promiscuity finds itself increasingly condemned as a violation of the gender equality principle while constituting a bad example for the young and tender-hearted. Any physical contact that takes place even while children are having fun on the playground have become easily identifiable as acts of bullying, for elements of inequality (in gender, age, size, family background, etc.) can always be located between the involved parties. Intimate relationships are becoming tense as every exchange, every chore, every utterance is subject to scrutiny by the standards of strict gender equality. Encouraged by such an atmosphere of required political correctness, other “progressive” ideas (modern civility, health consciousness, environmental protection, animal protection, child protection, etc.) also rise to such levels of moral supremacy that no challenge or dissent can be uttered without causing outrage. How this moral absolutism plays itself out in a world increasingly inclined to claim its pluralism or multiculturalism is another topic worthy of study.

Finally, the spread of a global LGBT movement has generously provided indigenous LGBT communities with ready lists of LGBT vocabulary, readings, and films from the West that have now, via translation, become common culture for same-sex communities across the globe. Western gay and lesbian styles and fashions have also arrived to constitute local identities and fashions. Sometimes, even local movement agenda are set under the influence of the West, especially the priorities and preoccupations of Western funding agencies. Hence, we see gay and lesbian movements in different locations, under the influence of global feminism, take prevention of domestic violence as a key issue for advocacy, as if that were an integral part of gay and lesbian life. We see HIV activists carry out the prevention-as-treatment directives without much reflection on the consequences for and intervention into individual's daily life activities. We see gay and lesbian movements pushing for marriage rights as if it were a panacea for all of the varied problems facing homosexuals. But categories,

concepts, histories, and strategies can hardly be directly grafted without problem. So work has to begin to seriously reread, in a queer fashion, our own culture and history to rediscover indigenous practices, traditions, cultures, vocabularies, and knowledges that could provide invaluable insight for a new understanding of local culture and the presence of gender/sexual variance in it.

What will result from such changes in perspective and knowledge production? How will it enrich our understanding and experience of gender and sexuality? These are questions that will drive and direct our studies.

Notes

1. This text is based on an interview conducted by Ashley Tellis in July 2013, and revised by Josephine Ho in September 2014.
2. Queer defiance was exemplified by the emergence of direct action advocacy groups in the US such as ACT UP in 1987 and later Queer Nation in 1990, both well known for their confrontational tactics and slogans.
3. The now legendary bi-monthly was created by a collective of left intellectuals in 1991 to intervene in socio-cultural change after the lifting of martial law in Taiwan in 1987. The journal spearheaded radical thought as well as marginal issues with very subversive page designs until it closed down in 1995 due to lack of financial resources. The historical journal is now available online (<http://intermargins.net/intermargins/IsleMargin/index.htm>).
4. One local scholar sees the problem of “coming out” as greatly exacerbated by the hegemony of Western identity politics that takes an individual-based affirmation of gay identity as the basic prerequisite for activism. He hence calls for the assertion of “a postcolonial autonomy” so that alternative forms of gay activism that are grounded in Taiwan’s socio-cultural realities while jointly employing universalizing and minoritizing strategies could be devised. See Chu 52–58.
5. Feminist publications such as my own books *The Gallant Woman: Feminism and Sexual Emancipation* (1994) and *Sexual Moods: A Therapeutic and Liberatory Report on Female Sexuality* (1996) both provided sex-positive discourses for female sexuality and called for collective action by women to battle the sexual stigma that weighed upon illicit or non-normative sexual practices.
6. Ka Wei-Po’s seminal essay “What is Queer?” (1998) was one such effort to redefine “Qu-er” in all its flamboyant defiance and critique.
7. Such alliances are mostly manifest in actual street demonstrations and resistance actions, while discursive exchanges are carried out in marginal online presses and social media sites such as FACEBOOK.
8. For details on the court case, see Ho, “In defence of academic research and internet freedom of expression”; see also the website that documents the case at Ho, “Zoophilia Hyperlink Incident”.
9. Chinese readers may read the complete defense online at Ho “05-28-2004 最後一次出庭之自辯詞 (Self Defense at Final Court Appearance)”.
10. After losing the Taipei mayoral bid, Chen Shui-Bian returned in full force and won the presidential election in 2000 with the help of his Democratic Progressive Party. Eight years later, at the end of his second term, he became the first president to be jailed for money laundering and corruption.
11. Statistics from the Ministry of Justice later confirmed that, in a matter of 8 years, up to 20,000 inexperienced young people, who were taking advantage of the anonymity of the internet to explore possibilities of sexual contact, were being dragged through the legal process for the mere act of typing inquiring messages that made some reference to the fashionable Japanese term of *enjo-kosai* “compensated dating” (see Ho, “Queer Existence under Global Governance” 541). The term referred to the 1990s popular trend of Japanese high school girls using their cellphones to negotiate companion services ranging from offering dinner or coffee to petting, kissing, or sexual intercourse with middle-class men. The fad quickly spread throughout East Asia, aided by readily available cellphones and internet communication that created casual relations through transactions among strangers. Many governments deemed it a corruption of the nation’s girls and clamped down hard on the phenomenon. Still, casual sex work and other forms of contact/exchange continue.
12. Kate Bedford’s seminal study documents how the World Bank’s lending policies in under-developed countries are in fact maneuvers

geared toward fine-tuning local heteronormative arrangements to collaborate with global economic transformation. See Bedford 305n.

13. For one obvious example, HIV prevention groups have consistently avoided open-minded discussions over the popular use of recreational/psychoactive drugs in the gay community, an aversion that denies the radical synergies implicit in the prospect of combining prevention/care with pleasure.

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