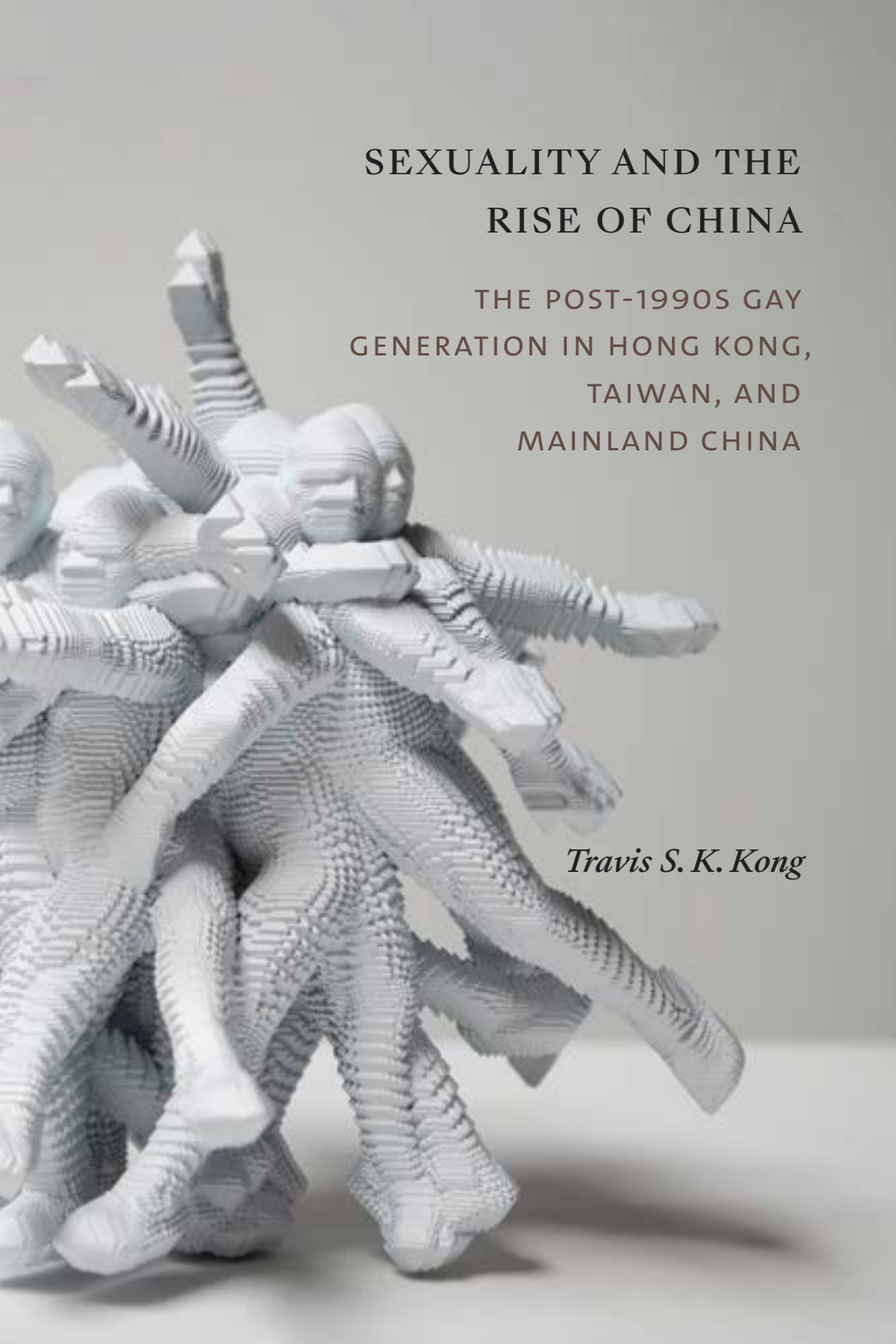




SEXUALITY AND THE RISE OF CHINA

THE POST-1990S GAY
GENERATION IN HONG KONG,
TAIWAN, AND
MAINLAND CHINA

Travis S. K. Kong

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*In loving memory of Ken Plummer (1946–2022) and
for all who fight for love, equality, and respect*

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CONTENTS

ix		Abbreviations
xi		Note on Romanization
xiii		Preface and Acknowledgments
1		Introduction
26	1	Queering Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Mainland China
62	2	Coming Out as Relational Politics
86	3	<i>Tongzhi</i> Commons, Community, and Collectivity
108	4	Love and Sex as Cruel Optimism
130	5	Homosexuality, Homonationalism, and Homonormativity
155		Conclusion
173		Glossary
175		Notes
193		Works Cited
223		Index

ABBREVIATIONS

CCP	Chinese Communist Party
DPP	Democratic Progressive Party
ELAB	Extradition Law Amendment Bill
HKLGFF	Hong Kong Lesbian and Gay Film Festival
HKSAR	Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
IDAHOT	International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia
KMT	Kuomintang (Chinese Nationalist Party)
LGBT+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and other related nonnormative genders and sexualities
NGO	Nongovernmental organization
PFLAG	Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays
PRC	People's Republic of China
ROC	Republic of China

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NOTE ON ROMANIZATION

All non-English terms are Chinese unless stated otherwise, and I italicize them throughout the book. I do not use English plural markers (e.g., *tongzhi* instead of *tongzhis*). The Romanization of Chinese characters follows the *Hanyu Pinyin* system, or *pinyin*, which is the official Romanization system for standard Mandarin Chinese in mainland China (and to some extent in Taiwan). It is widely used in English-language scholarly publications. Cantonese Romanization is marked with the specification “Cant.” (e.g., *nanshen* [Cant.]). The Wade-Giles system is used in this book for the translation of some Taiwanese authors’ names if they have no English translation or if they used that system in their previous publications.

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am increasingly interested in the topic of generational sexualities (Plummer 2010), as it links sexual identity to the sexual life cycle, age and sexual cohorts, and generational sexual worlds. One of the major issues we are currently facing in East Asia is an aging population, with most affected countries seeking ways to care for that population and increase birth rates. At the same time, I am also confronted with my own aging and how it connects to my sexual identity and sexual life cycle. More than these issues, however, the topic has made me consider the positionality of the generations before and after me and the challenges we have all faced as gay men in a Chinese society.

In 2009, I started an oral history project on older gay men in Hong Kong, men born before 1950. I later published a book (Kong 2014 in Chinese, with a translation in English [2019a]) to capture the complexities of their lives intertwined with the history of Hong Kong society. These men, part of what I call the first *tongzhi* (local parlance for LGBT+) generation, were born between 1920 and 1950 in Hong Kong or came to Hong Kong from mainland China as refugees or migrants, living with their parents and siblings in squatter settlements, huts, or overcrowded and unsanitary tenements in postwar Hong Kong. With little support from the government, they lived in close-knit family networks that defined social roles, offered career possibilities, arranged marriages, and provided social security. Homosexuality, largely a taboo subject, was criminalized and seen as a form of mental illness or

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social deviance or simply as an unhealthy lifestyle. In such an environment, there was little room for these men to explore their same-sex desires. Most of them married women and found largely fleeting sexual, romantic, and social liaisons in public toilets.

I am part of a later generation, born in the late 1960s and raised in a working-class family, living with my parents and four elder siblings in a tiny apartment in a public housing estate in Hong Kong. Postwar Hong Kong was undergoing a transformation from an industrial society to an international financial center, from extreme poverty and working-class dominance to affluence and an expanded middle class, and from deprivation to adequate social-service provision. When I was a teenager in the 1980s, Hong Kong society was still conservative and homophobic. Over time, however, increasing numbers of gay men and lesbians started to come out (especially those who had studied overseas and returned to Hong Kong), and the *tongzhi* world has slowly developed with the establishment of fairly substantial yet quite Western expatriate-dominated gay communities, increasing visibility in popular culture, and the emergence of underground *tongzhi* social groups. Like most young gay men at that time, I dated girls and thought that being gay was just a phase, although I secretly tried to explore my puzzling desires. Hong Kong seemed to be too small for me, or at least that's what I thought at the time. With a burning desire to see the world and explore my repressed sexuality, I moved to the United Kingdom in the 1990s to study for my master's and PhD at the University of Essex. I was excited to learn cutting-edge ideas and theories from renowned scholars in sociology and was challenged by the arrival of queer theory from the humanities. I lived in London. Although I regularly complained about the bad weather, technological backwardness, and inefficiencies of everyday life, I embraced the city's cosmopolitan culture and well-established queer world. I enjoyed and benefited from both the society at large and the white-dominated queer community, but at the same time I felt strongly that it was not my place, as I was always seen as a racial and sexual minority.

In late 1999, I came back to Hong Kong to teach and began engaging with queer pedagogy and *tongzhi* activism. I have since come to know more and more young gay men, first in Hong Kong and later in mainland China and Taiwan. They live in a very different era than those of previous generations. Homosexuality is no longer seen as a crime and/or mental illness. Moreover, there is a substantial infrastructure of *tongzhi* consumer markets, various burgeoning offline and online communities and "scenes" and emergent activism. My bigger project is to compare and contrast different

gay generations in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and mainland China, but this book has a more modest aim: to compare and contrast the lives of the post-'90s generation in these three Chinese locales based on ninety life stories. My key question is: How might we understand these young gay men's lives? They share a common Chinese/Confucian cultural heritage but live in very different social, economic, cultural, and political circumstances. This question is especially crucial at this specific historical moment characterized by the rise of China—especially the rise of Chinese nationalism—which has tended to obscure the heterogeneous transformations in Hong Kong and Taiwan. In recent years, I have been much concerned with young people. In Hong Kong, they experienced one of the most turbulent periods of social unrest in the city's history, first by the Umbrella Movement in 2014, and then the protests against the proposed extradition law in 2019. In Taiwan, they (mainly students) led and engaged heavily and passionately with the Sunflower Movement in 2014 and stood proud as Taiwanese when same-sex marriage legislation passed in 2019, despite living under the constant threat of mainland China declaring war on Taiwan. In mainland China, they have sought ways to survive under the rise of the Xi Jinping regime, with its strong state and strict control and censorship of civil society, including the *tongzhi* community, since 2012.

Over the years, I have critically engaged with Western theories in understanding notions of identity, masculinity, the body, and intimacy in contemporary Chinese communities in the context of global cultures, and I sought dialogue across disciplines in understanding human sexualities. In this book, I propose what I call *transnational queer sociology* to compare and contrast the intricate and complicated relations of young gay sexualities in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and mainland China during the latest era of globalization. Such sociology acknowledges the West's historically dominant, yet not totalizing, role in shaping experiences in non-Western (in my case, Chinese) societies while acknowledging local and interregional specificities, thereby engaging in critical dialogue with the West and within the non-West. I see my work as part of the decolonizing sexualities program and, more specifically, the emergent discipline of queer Asian studies, which seeks to understand the complex process of Western, local, and interregional knowledge systems in shaping experiences, identities, and desires in specific sites within Asia.

My use of transnational queer sociology to understand the complexity of Chinese male gay sexualities is inspired by three "missing revolutions" in sociology. In Stacey and Thorne's (1985) critique of the "missing feminist

revolution” in sociology, they argue that mainstream sociology, with its legacy of functionalism, quantitative treatment of gender as a variable, and the sexism of Marxism, has prevented feminist scholars from transforming the discipline’s theoretical and conceptual frameworks. Almost a decade later, Stein and Plummer (1994) identified a “missing sexual revolution” in sociology, urging sociologists to take sexuality (at that time, queer theory) seriously. Scholars advancing queer theory have not asked simply for a theory of queers but sought to make theory queer, thereby transforming homosexuality as a minority theory into a general theory and challenging the hetero/homo binary embedded in the knowledge and social systems (sexual or not) that construct selves, identities, and practices. Although feminism and queer studies within sociology have incorporated women and “the sexual self” in the past two decades or so, Bhambra (2007) has criticized the discipline’s “missing post-colonial revolution,” as feminism and queer studies, as well as postcolonialism, have in her view failed to challenge the constitution of sociology and its founding categories of modernity. However, the development of the three revolutions has tended to be compartmentalized. What we need is critical dialogue on a transnational scale that enables sociology to take feminism, queer studies, and postcolonialism more seriously and incorporate the intersection of gender, sexuality, and race/ethnicity in the basic conceptual framework used to formulate sociological knowledge (see Wharton 2006).

I would argue that the three missing revolutions have failed in differing degrees in terms of epistemic exclusion in sociology (i.e., the exclusion of gender studies, queer studies, and postcolonial studies) in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and mainland China. Comparatively speaking, the inclusion of gender studies has experienced the greatest success in sociology departments in the three Chinese societies, although many gender studies courses and programs were recently closed down in mainland China. The inclusion of sexuality studies and postcolonial studies in sociology remains rare, as they are often seen as marginal, niche, and/or improper, although they are well received in arts and humanities departments (e.g., comparative literature, language, and cultural studies).

In the course of my writing and research, I often encounter common obstacles, such as the seeming incompatibility between poststructuralism and sociology (e.g., mainstream sociologists believing Foucault is incompatible with sociology; claims that queer theory is not sociology), sociology’s neglect of postcolonial literature, the geopolitics of knowledge production (e.g., theory generated from the West being used to elucidate non-Western experiences), and interdisciplinary boundaries (e.g., sociologists not much

interested in the humanities, and the humanities not much interested in sociology). Despite these obstacles, I still see this book as part of a continuing effort to decenter Western knowledge of genders and sexualities. Through the lens of transnational queer sociology, I hope to offer a better understanding of Chinese gay male sexualities.

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Travis Kong
Hong Kong
December 2022

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Introduction

Yifan was born in 1990 in a small village in Shaanxi in mainland China and is one of the left-behind, or stay-at-home, children common in rural areas of China, raised by his grandparents after his parents left home to find work in an urban area. After graduating from a university in Guilin, he took up a position in an overseas trading company in Shanghai, which is where we first met in 2017. Yifan moved to Hangzhou in 2018 and then to Shenzhen in 2020, where he lives with his boyfriend but remains deeply closeted. When his sister once came to visit him in Shenzhen, he slept separately from his boyfriend and pretended that they were flatmates, although he thinks his sister knew otherwise. He is still thinking of getting married to please his parents. Yifan is tall and lean and dresses well.

When I first interviewed him in 2017, Yifan applauded the fast pace of Chinese economic achievement, which from his point of view “only took us forty years” while “countries like France and the U.S. [took] a couple hundred years.” Yifan was well aware of the accusations of human rights violations in mainland China by the international press but argued that “democracy . . . is improving. The government has a lot of considerations . . . [and] economic developments will lead to democracy.” His political stance remained the same when I last spoke to him in 2020. Like many of the young gay men I talked to in mainland China, Yifan has a strong Chinese national identity and agrees with the One China policy. Living under a government that is not

considered “democratic” by most Western countries, these young men still have faith that economic pluralism will eventually lead to political pluralism.

However, they recognize that mainland China may never have the same kind of democracy as that in the West but rather “democracy with Chinese characteristics.” In our conversations, Yifan and others regularly make an interesting comparison: we don’t have Facebook, but we have *weibo*. We don’t have WhatsApp, but we have WeChat. We don’t use iPhones, but we have Huawei and Xiaomi, which are even better than iPhones, or at least much cheaper. If the post-’80s generation in mainland China was eager to see the world and join the track of the world, the post-’90s generation proudly proclaims that China is the world! If you want to see the world, come to China. They are self-confident and pragmatic but also politically conservative and reluctant to do anything that could be deemed politically radical. In their private lives, most members of the generation are primarily concerned with their education and securing a good job. Most of them, like Yifan, still struggle with their sexual identity, with some attempting to hide their sexuality and/or thinking about getting married to either a straight woman or a *lala* (lesbian) to please their parents. In the meantime, browsing and dating apps such as Blued seem to be the only way to connect with others, as the gay world in mainland China is heavily censored, regulated, and subject to surveillance.

Born in Hong Kong in 1993, Bobby is the only son of a working-class family. He works at a health-associated nongovernmental organization (NGO) but is constantly looking for a better job. He lives with his parents in public housing and shares a bunkbed with his mother. Bobby is out to his parents, even though they still want him to get married. He is a bit chubby but likes to go to the gym. He is quite desperate to find a boyfriend but finds it difficult to maintain an intimate relationship. He is currently single, although he has ambiguous relationships with several men. He strongly identifies as a Hongkonger, not as a *Zhongguoren* (Chinese national). In 2019, Bobby was heavily involved in the protests against the Extradition Law Amendment Bill (ELAB), which would have allowed the extradition of criminal suspects to mainland China. He only dates guys from the yellow-ribbon camp (crudely seen as prodemocracy), eschewing those from the blue-ribbon camp (who are seen as progovernment, pro-police, or pro-Beijing). When I talked to him in 2020, he said, “Even if he is a *nanshen* [Cant., male god] who fulfills all my fantasies, I would reject him if he were blue ribbon.” He thinks the future will be grim; he is very unhappy and feels powerless. Because of his social class and financial status, and because he is the caregiver for his parents, he

is stuck in Hong Kong. Bobby, like other young gay men I talked to in Hong Kong, participated in the social protests in 2019 to varying degrees. They feel angry, anguished, depressed, and hopeless. With a strong sense of being a Hongkonger, they have fashioned a different kind of Chineseness and cry for freedom and autonomy. In their private lives, they are still concerned about education and work. Finding a boyfriend is a paramount concern, but political affiliation has become an important criterion in choosing one. They are generally comfortable with their sexual identity, and most have come out to their families. However, they are quite pessimistic about Hong Kong's future and its political situation. By extension, they are concerned about the stagnant development of the fight for gender and sexual equality.

Born in 1996 in Taipei, Hao is the only son in his family. He lives with his mother; his father passed away during his first year at university. He has a handsome face, a lean body, and pale skin. He is in the second year of a master's program and working part time as a teaching assistant. His mother runs a small boutique but has encountered financial difficulty due to COVID-19. He has thought of suspending his studies and working full time, but his mother insists that he should complete his education. Hao is out to his family and out at work. He is currently going out with a young man whom his mother likes very much. He has a very strong sense of Taiwanese identity and is proud of Taiwan. When I interviewed him in 2017, he told me that Taiwan "is a pluralistic society [with a] Chinese culture, Taiwanese culture, indigenous culture, and East Asian culture" and, most importantly, is "a land of freedom and equality." When we spoke again in 2020, he cited the previous year's legalization of same-sex marriage as an example of the latter. The young gay men I talked to in Taiwan, like Hao, are proud of being Taiwanese, not just because Taiwan was the first Asian society to legalize same-sex marriage, in May 2019, making that the notable event of 2019 for the Taiwanese, but also because of their determination that Taiwan remain independent and because of their commitment to universal values such as democracy, freedom of speech, and human rights. Although they have difficulty finding jobs or are forced to accept low salaries despite their impressive educational qualifications, they are generally accepting of their sexual identity, have come out to their parents, and engage with gay communities and in gay activism to different degrees.

This book examines the socioeconomic and political transformations in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and mainland China over the past few decades, with a particular focus on the changing nature of same-sex identities, communities, and cultures.¹ Drawing on the life stories of ninety young gay men born in or

after 1990 in these three locales, this book investigates the changing meanings of gender and sexuality in terms of the ways in which these young men see themselves (identity), come out to their parents (family), and connect with one another (community) as well as how they love (intimacy) and do politics (activism). I am particularly interested in examining the interplay between the personal biographies of young gay men and their engagement with social institutions in the three Chinese societies—including the state, the market, mass media, the Internet, NGOs, religion, school, the workplace, and the family—and the ways in which they devise various tactics, be it resistance, redefinition, or accommodation, to negotiate a range of possibilities for the gender and sexual practices that inform their lives. More broadly, I show how these gay men create their own definitions of what it means to be gay by selectively incorporating, revising, or rejecting Western constructions of gayness but at the same time comparing and referencing the idea of being gay among Chinese and other Asian locales. There are significant commonalities among the three Chinese societies under study: they broadly share similar social values and cultural norms with a family-centered culture rooted in Confucianism. Although done at different rates, they have embraced neoliberalism and developmentalism and have come to exhibit strong neoliberal values of success, competition, and performance in such social institutions as the state, the family, education, and work. They have all become affluent societies with established pink economies (a term to describe the purchasing power of the LGBT+ community) and *tongzhi* worlds and a relatively positive sexual identity among members of the young gay generation. However, each of the three societies exhibits a distinct way of being a young Chinese gay man, resulting less from generalized Western queer culture, rhetoric, and processes such as coming out, community building, and queer activism and more from the increasingly inter-Asian influences and their own specific socioeconomic and political contexts under the hegemonic rise-of-China discourse in the latest globalization era. These distinctive pathways demonstrate a complex interplay among history, state, market, and civil society in the three locales, characterized less by the trajectory of Western modernity and more by the logic of polychronic modernities (Eisenlohr, Kramer, and Lanhenohl 2019). In this introduction, I explain why it is important to understand young Chinese gay men at this particular historical moment. I propose a transnational queer sociological approach that has the strength to compare and contrast the specificities of different Chinese locales and, by extension, the lived experiences of the

young gay men in each. I then spell out the methods of investigation used in this study and briefly introduce the following chapters.

The New Era of Globalization: The Rise of China and the Post-'90s *Tongzhi* Generation

Young gay men who were born in or after 1990 are living in a new era of globalization that has dramatically changed the dynamics of mainland China's role in world politics and its relations with Hong Kong and Taiwan. Previous eras of globalization featured the traffic "from the West to the rest" (Hall 1992), with successive Western countries as global hegemonic powers in different waves of globalization: notably, various European superpowers and imperialism from the sixteenth to the early twentieth century (Portugal, the Netherlands, Great Britain) and the United States in the post-World War II era (Therborn 2011). The hallmark of the new era, in contrast, is the rise of Asia, with growing economic development and Asian regionalism. More specifically, mainland China has experienced rapid economic growth, expanded its economic and political power to Asia and beyond, and is in the process of constructing a new social, political, and cultural world order (Arase 2016; Chan, Lee, and Chan 2011; Choi 2018; Fong, Wu, and Nathan 2021). The resulting new geopolitical alignments are thus not only driving new traffic from "the rest to the West" but also traffic among the rest. Dai Jinhua (2018) has argued that a "post-post-Cold War era" began sometime around 2008 with the global financial crisis of neoliberal capitalism, the Beijing Olympic games, and China's emergence as the United States' largest creditor. Meanwhile, authoritarianism and fascism have risen in reaction to that financial crisis and, more broadly, neoliberal globalization in the early twenty-first century, with increasing recognition of the need for human rights protection (Berberoglu 2021). There is growing anxiety globally about the rise of China, especially about its shift from "soft power" to "sharp power" (Walker and Ludwig 2017), sparked in particular by the country's launch of a China-centered global trading network under the Belt and Road Initiative in 2013. China is also accused of using its economic clout to silence challenges from other countries in recent years (Roth 2020).

How has the rise of China specifically affected the relationship among Hong Kong, Taiwan, and mainland China? The historical division in 1949 between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Republic of China (ROC) has shaped the postwar development of all three societies, but the enormous

social, economic, and political transformations that have taken place over the past few decades have tied them together culturally and politically in unprecedentedly intimate and constraining ways. Hong Kong was formerly a British colony (1842–1997). It underwent rapid industrialization and urbanization from the 1950s onward and separated itself from mainland China under the sway of both Cold War ideology and its British colonial status, developing a distinctive Hong Kong identity. It then successfully transformed itself from a colonial city into an international financial center, with a strong middle class emerging in the 1970s. Hong Kong has made significant economic contributions to mainland China, particularly in the early reform period of the 1980s, contributions that have led to the restructuring of its own economy. Since Hong Kong's return to Chinese sovereignty in 1997 under the one country, two systems political framework, the new government, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) has rebranded Hong Kong as “Asia's world city.” As Mathews (1997) has argued, after the handover, Hong Kong found itself in the new position of being “a part of China” but also “apart from China,” owing to its distinct social, cultural, and political features such as cosmopolitanism, colonialism, and the rule of law. The dilemma is how to maintain its own unique position without falling into nationalization (Hong Kong as just another Chinese city) or localization (an independent Hong Kong) (So 2002; Wong and So 2020). In recent years, however, Hong Kong has experienced political turmoil, first with the Umbrella Movement protests calling for universal suffrage in 2014 and then the large-scale anti-ELAB protests in 2019, culminating in the introduction of a new national security law proposed by the Beijing government in 2020.²

Taiwan has taken a somewhat different path. Although the ROC was formed on mainland China in 1911, Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang (KMT) relocated the government to Taiwan after Chiang's defeat by Mao Zedong in 1949. Taiwan experienced rapid economic growth from the 1970s onward with aid from the United States. After its transition from authoritarian KMT rule to representative democracy in 1996, it developed a strong and distinctive Taiwanese identity. Taiwan also contributed to China's economy, especially in the 1980s and 1990s. Although Taiwan is a world leader in the manufacture of electronic components and devices, its economy lags behind those of both Hong Kong and mainland China, and Taiwan is politically marginalized on the international stage due to the One China policy insisted on by the Beijing government and adopted by the United Nations and many countries. In her victory speech following her second election

as president in 2020, Tsai Ing-wen asked China to “face the reality” of Taiwan’s independence.³

The PRC celebrated its seventieth anniversary in 2019, marking the seventy years that had passed since its founding by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 1949. China’s economic reforms and its opening up in the late 1970s reconfigured both the state and the market, leading to a shift from Maoism/socialism to a postreform China that since the late 1990s can be characterized as late socialism or state capitalism.⁴ However, the Beijing government under President Xi Jinping’s leadership continues to exert strong control. It has tightened regulations over various sectors of society, with the Internet, activists, and many NGOs subject to surveillance. Issues related to freedom of speech and human rights are highly sensitive subjects. The One China policy is manifesting itself in the government’s attempts to unify different races and ethnicities within China, including Tibetans and Uyghurs as well as Taiwanese, Hongkongers, and Macanese. Using “imperialist center-periphery theories,” Fong (2021, 5) conceptualizes mainland China as the center in East Asia, with Hong Kong seen as having “peripheral autonomy” (6) and Taiwan as a “peripheral contested state” (6).

These sociopolitical transformations in the three locales have had major impacts on everyday life, including sexual life, and the young generations have been particularly affected. Since the 1980s, all three societies have relaxed restrictive standards of sexual morality and have seen an increase in sexual permissiveness; increases in premarital sex, abortion, and divorce; the burgeoning of pornography and the sex industry; and the emergence of new sexual identities, including *tongzhi* (which literally means “common will,” although it is often translated as “comrade,” and is the local parlance for LGBT+) (Davis and Freedman 2014; Ho et al. 2018; Huang 2011; Jeffreys and Yu 2015; Pan 2006).⁵ These developments have nurtured the emergence of new forms of sexual subjectivity, marking a turn from colonial subjectivity (Hong Kong), politically repressed subjectivity (Taiwan), and Maoist collective subjectivity (mainland China) to cosmopolitan, transnational, neoliberal, or desiring subjectivity.⁶

In particular, young gay men in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and mainland China who were born in or after 1990 are living in a markedly different era of sexuality from that of previous gay generations. The Western medical model that had long constructed homosexuals as mental patients or social deviants⁷ is now far less influential in the three locales, although it still carries power, and the laws governing homosexual acts were changed in all three societies in the 1990s.⁸ In Hong Kong, male homosexual acts

were criminalized in 1842 under British rule but then decriminalized by the colonial government in 1991. Homosexuality was never a criminal offense in Taiwan, but gay men were often charged with offenses against *shangliang fengsu* (“virtuous customs”) under the Police Offense Law, which was replaced by the Social Order Maintenance Law in 1991 (Huang 2011). In mainland China, *liumangzui* (“hooliganism,” the offense used to arrest homosexuals) was deleted from the country’s criminal law in 1997, and the Chinese Psychiatric Association has not considered homosexuality a mental illness since 2001. The consumer infrastructure of the pink economy is now firmly in place, characterized by such visible and often Westernized “gay ghettos” as Lan Kwai Fong in Hong Kong and the Red House in Taipei and the gay scenes of major cities in mainland China (Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen, Chengdu). Originating in North America, circuit parties (large-scale dance parties targeting mainly gay and bisexual men) have now spread to metropolitan cities worldwide, with an increasing trend in Asia. There were more than fifty-four globally identified weekend circuit parties held in metropolitan areas in 2015, twenty-three of them in Asia (Cheung et al. 2015); for example, SongKran (April, Bangkok), Ageha or Gtopia (July, Tokyo), I am (August, Seoul), and Parade Party (October, Taipei).⁹ Although attended by gay men from across Asia, they are dominated by gay men from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and mainland China. *Tongzhi* communities and social groups, as well as social media and dating apps, have burgeoned. Finally, the 2000s saw the emergence of *tongzhi* activism, inspired by the rise of the sexual citizenship and queer political movements in the West—for example, International Day against Homophobia (2005–), the Pride Parade (2008–), and Pink Dot (2014–) in Hong Kong; LGBT Pride in Taiwan; and Shanghai Pride (2009–2020) in mainland China (Kong, Lau, and Li 2015; Kong et al. 2021). Same-sex marriage legislation was passed in Taiwan in 2019, and the next Gay Games will be held in Hong Kong in 2023. Transnational Christian/evangelical groups in Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea, and Singapore are the main opposing forces to the *tongzhi* movement in Hong Kong (Wong 2013) and Taiwan (Ho 2008; Huang 2017; Lee 2017), whereas in mainland China, it is the government (Engebretsen and Schroeder 2015).

It is at this particular historical juncture that we see generalized but differential Western influences still impinging on each locale but also witness interinfluences among the three. Chinese gay men are increasingly taking their references on what it means to be gay less from the West and more from themselves and from other East and Southeast Asian countries such as Japan, South Korea, Thailand, and Singapore. At the same time, the heterogeneous

transformations mean that men in Hong Kong and Taiwan exhibit very different ways of being gay from those in mainland China, and young gay men in those two societies are thus implicitly resisting the domination of the rise-of-China discourse and the emergence of a homogeneous Chinese or Sinophone gay identity. Why do we need a comparative framework? It is because the terms *Chinese*, *young*, *gay*, and *man*, among others, hold such different meanings in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and mainland China, which is why I now turn to my proposed approach: transnational queer sociology.

Transnational Queer Sociology

The sociology of homosexuality and queer theory are the two dominant models for understanding contemporary nonnormative sexual identities. However, they are drawn primarily from the theorization of Western queer identities, cultures, and communities. Western theories are often universalized, with non-Western experiences serving merely as empirical data for validation. Engaging with the emerging field of queer Asian studies, I call for a “transnational” turn in the sociology of homosexuality, proposing a new theoretical approach that I call *transnational queer sociology*, which advances the literature in three major respects. First, it resists the dominance of Western models in elucidating non-Western, nonnormative sexualities. It does not completely reject Western theories but rather provincializes them through critical application (Chakrabarty 2000). Second, it goes beyond the usual binary and essentialist ways of framing research and analysis to cultivate a glocal queer understanding and critique of globalization by examining cross-national and cross-cultural similarities and differences to produce mutually referenced experiences to inform gender and sexuality studies. Third, it engages sociology with queer theory by paying equal attention to the materiality and practices of social institutions as well as to discourses and culture in shaping genders and sexualities.

Because transnational queer sociology is built on the sociology of homosexuality and queer theory, a brief history is needed. Here I outline the history of the sociology of homosexuality and queer theory in understanding nonnormative genders and sexualities and discuss how these two approaches have made a global turn and how queer Asian studies has become an important school of thought to understand nonnormative, non-Western genders and sexualities. Before we start, a note on terminology. I use the term *West* or *Western* for convenience and treat it as a cultural construction rather than a geographical absolute (Jackson and Ho 2020). *West* is a

contested term; it is not homogeneous but usually refers collectively to the social and political constructs of the Anglo- and Euro-American cultures and traditions of North America and Western Europe and also extends to Northern and Southern Europe as well as to Australia and New Zealand. The term *non-West* refers broadly to “the rest of the world” (Hall 1992) and, like the term *West*, it is a cultural construction with its own heterogeneity. In this book, it refers specifically to Asian societies, and its nuanced differences are shown through the case studies of three Chinese societies—namely, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and mainland China.

Sociology originated as a discipline preoccupied with European modernity. Its emergence between the 1880s and World War I coincided with the heyday of Western imperialism, when Britain, Germany, France, and the United States exercised control over broad swathes of Asia and Africa (Seidman 1996a). In classical (or Comtean) sociology, “progress” was generally used to highlight the difference between metropole and colony; the status of women, evolution of sexuality, and changing forms of family and marriage were themes of great interest in measuring societal progress. However, classical sociologists in both Europe and the United States also concerned themselves with the great problems of modernity. Examples include Karl Marx’s class struggle-based critique of “ill” capitalism, Max Weber’s thesis on rationalization and the bureaucratization of modern life, and Emile Durkheim’s division of labor as conducive to social growth. Sociology should be seen as part of the development of empire itself, which shaped sociological thinking on what counts as knowledge and who can produce it and who cannot (Go 2020). In the story that early sociologists told, there was little room for gender, sexuality, or race (Connell 2014; Seidman 1996b).

In examining the modern “social,” sociology has traditionally neglected homosexuality, dismissing it as belonging to the realm of nature (as illness), and thus to the fields of sexology, psychology, and psychiatry. The 1960s and 1970s saw sociology take up the study of sexuality (e.g., sexual scripts [Gagnon and Simon 1974]), but it generally subsumed it under gender within feminism (e.g., sex roles in Parsonian sociology [see, e.g., Parsons 1942]), whereas homosexuality fell largely into the sociology of deviance.¹⁰ In the 1970s and 1980s, social constructionism became the major framework for understanding gender and sexuality, especially in explaining sexual identities (Stein and Plummer 1994). These new (homo)sexuality studies signified a new paradigm, deeming human sexuality to be socially produced, organized, maintained, and transformed (Plummer 1998). They examined the sociohistorical conditions that gave rise to the “making” of homosexual

identity and explored that identity in terms of the coming-out process of individuals, thereby linking identity to politics (Seidman 1996b).¹¹

Although social constructionism argues that gender and sexual identities are historically contingent, it tends to view identities, once formed, as neatly fixed, binary categories. The arrival of queer theory in the early 1990s heralded a discursive or poststructuralist turn in the study of sexuality (e.g., Butler 1990; Sedgwick 1990; Warner 1993). Queer theory is indeed poststructuralism applied to genders and sexualities. Queer theory rethinks identity by focusing on “deviant” cases that do not align neatly with sex, gender, and sexuality and views identity as interlocking with other social divisions such as gender, class, race, and ethnicity, rendering identity permanently multiple, open, hybrid, and in flux (Seidman 1996b; Valocchi 2005); this resonates with the symbolic interactionist tradition in sociology, which also views the self as emergent, processual, and transformative. Queer theory also challenges mainstream homosexuality-as-minority theory for its dependence on conceptual dualisms (male/female gender models, natural/cultural systems, essentialist/constructionist frameworks) that reinforce the notion of minority as other; these binary oppositions leave the center (read *heterosexuality*) intact and unquestioned (Stein and Plummer 1994). By exposing the hetero/homosexual binary as a master framework for constructing the self, knowledge, and social structures, queer theory opens up homosexual theory as a general social theory and critique (Seidman 1996b).

Rooted primarily in philosophy and literary criticism, queer theory tends to ignore both the materiality of sociostructural configurations that makes cultural discourses and analyses possible and the lived experiences, habitus, and practices of queer lives. Sociology and queer theory are thus at odds with each other—but some changes are reconciling them. For example, some sociologists have called for the “queering of sociology” to address the gap between sociology and queer theory (e.g., Green 2002; Seidman 1996b; Stein and Plummer 1994; Valocchi 2005), whereas others have advanced a new approach called “queer materialism” or the materialist analysis of sexuality (e.g., Alldred and Fox 2015; Tapley 2012). Queer theorist Love (2021) recently acknowledged the importance of the post–World War II social science tradition, especially the sociology of deviance, in understanding the history of (homo)sexuality and linked that tradition to queer theory. Transnational queer sociology builds on the history of sociology but is sensitive to its Eurocentric narrative of modernity. It also draws on the long history of both the sociology of homosexuality, for its strength in offering sociomaterialist analysis and narrative tradition to understand

and interpret social action, and queer theory, for its strength in offering discursive analysis and a creative critique of binary thinking. Transnational queer sociology thus joins the aforementioned efforts. It acknowledges the contributions of each discipline and attempts to bridge the two.

However, the sociology of homosexuality and canonical queer theory offer little on non-Western (homo)sexualities. Such sexualities were initially studied in history and literature (e.g., *The Immoralist* by André Gide) and in anthropology (e.g., Herdt 1981; Malinowski 1922; Mead 1952; Weston 1993) and were then later addressed by the sociology of homosexuality and queer theory when they took a global turn in the late 1990s.¹² Transnational queer sociology is thus situated in these later developments. Since the late 1990s, the Western model of sexual identity and emancipation has provided the dominant explanations of same-sex desires and practices in both academia and politics across the globe. Building on the coming-out model, the discussion of sexual identity has shifted toward the formation of sexual citizenship: the sexual citizen has distinct rights concerning conduct, identity, and relationships (Richardson 2000, 2017). This model has manifested in an equal rights/assimilation-based LGBT+ political movement, urban and consumption-based queer enclaves alongside homonormative mainstream assimilation, and a “global gay identity” (Altman 1997) or “gay International” (Massad 2002) in which the West is culturally represented as the origin of gayness.¹³ Western theories of sexual knowledge have become universal in explaining non-Western, nonnormative genders and sexualities. Two broad strands of sexuality studies address this global turn. The first is what Plummer (2012) calls “critical sexualities studies.” Primarily sociological or social science-based, they seek to understand the complex relationships among sexual selves, meanings, cultures, structures, conflicts, and regulations within the wider process of globalization, glocalization, and transnationalism. The second is what Manalansan (2003) calls “new queer studies.” Based on canonical queer theory and the humanities, their aim is to provide a “more nuanced understanding of the traffic and travel of competing systems of desire in a transnational frame” (Gopinath 1998, 117). Later developments of this second approach expand queer theory to “address issues of US empire, race, immigration, diaspora, militarization, surveillance, and related concerns in the wake of 9/11 and its political aftermath” (Eng and Puar 2020, 1) and most recently to “explore how emergent theoretical debates in debility, indigeneity, and trans revise and rework subjectless critique, histories of materialism, and queer studies as American exceptionalism” (2).¹⁴

Neither strand has produced a single mode of inquiry in the study of genders and sexualities in the interconnected global world. Martin and colleagues (2008) articulate three approaches. “Global homogenization,” the dominant approach, is a direct, linear process of sexual Westernization on a global scale. “Local essentialism,” in contrast, which constitutes an opposing thesis, uses local sexual experiences to reify “authentic” sexual cultures and traditions that are unpolluted by and resist the West. Both approaches have been criticized as overly simplistic, failing to explore the complexity of non-Western sexual cultures in an increasingly interconnected world. For example, the first approach sees theory itself as Western, and thus universal. Non-Western experiences are used merely as empirical data to validate such Western theories as social constructionism and Foucault or queer theory. As Chen (2010, 226) argues, Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality* is usually seen not just as an account of European sexual experiences but as a history of *all* human sexual experiences. The notion of “global queering” (Altman 1997), which has been criticized as privileging the Western origin story of gay liberation, posits “a *white* gay male gaze” (Manalansan 2003, 6), rendering, for example, Asian gay men “forever in the place of deferred arrival” (Rofel 2007, 91). The second, opposing approach assumes an indigenous selfhood and culture untouched by the West. Chou’s (2000) distinction between Western “confrontational” queer politics and Chinese “silent” and “non-confrontational” *tongzhi* politics, for example, has been criticized for essentializing Chinese cultures (Liu and Ding 2005). Martin and colleagues (2008) thus propose a third approach, what they call the “queer hybridization model,” in which “*both* Western and non-Western cultures of gender and sexuality have been, and continue to be, mutually transformed through their encounters with transnationally mobile forms of sexual knowledge” (6, emphasis in the original). This approach forces the study of globalization and sexuality to acknowledge a transnational understanding of global sexualities and examine the complexity of sexuality and culture as they intersect with race, class, gender, capital, and nation (e.g., Cruz-Malave and Manalansan 2002). Fascinating work has been done across the globe, such as in Mexico (Carrillo 2017), the Arab States (Massad 2007), and Africa (Eprecht 2004). Queer Asian studies, emerging sometime in the early 2000s (Wilson 2006), manifest this third approach, which can be further divided into two main camps. One camp is part of the queer-of-color critique (e.g., Ferguson 2004) and queer diasporic studies (e.g., Manalansan 2003), especially in the North American context, in which queer scholars of Asian origin examine the complex diasporic queer experiences in Western cultures

(e.g., Eng 2001; Han 2015; Leong 1996; Lim 2014; Nguyen 2014). The other, “critical regionalism” (Johnson, Jackson, and Herdt 2000; see also Chiang and Wong 2016), conceptualizes queer life in the complex modernities of Asia as centers of transnational queer critique and analysis (e.g., Berry, Martin, and Yue 2003; Chu and Martin 2007; Ho and Blackwood 2022; McLelland and Mackie 2015), with some scholars focusing specifically on a comparison of Hong Kong, Taiwan, and/or mainland China.¹⁵

With this very short history, I have shown that transnational queer sociology draws on the strengths of both sociology and queer theory in offering nuanced understandings of non-Western, nonnormative genders and sexualities; this history also situates transnational queer sociology in global studies of sexualities in general, and queer Asian studies in particular. So what does a transnational queer sociology look like? Another note on terminology is in order, specifically the words *transnational*, *queer*, and *sociology*. The word *transnational* is used strategically. Transnationalism usually means above and beyond nations and is used mainly in economics (e.g., transnational corporations) and politics (transnational social movements and activism). However, it also means “from below” and is used mainly in relation to individuals (especially immigrants) and civil society, such as transnational civil society or international NGOs (Tedeschi, Vorobeva, and Jauhiainen 2020). I use transnationalism in a broad sense to examine connections and flows of people, capital, cultural reproduction, and politics that traverse a variety of locations and to show how different locales are exposed to and adapt wider translocal, interregional, and cross-national social, cultural, economic, and political influences. Transnationalism is thus a form of consciousness and identity, a mode of cultural reproduction, an avenue of capital, a form of political engagement, and a basis to reconsider the meaning of “place” (Watson 2017). The word *queer* is used in this book less as a sexual identity marker (an umbrella term for LGBT+) and more as a verb (to queer), an adjective (queer feeling), an attitude, an enduring practice of unsettling or challenging normativity, and a continual effort to embrace the potentiality of gender, sexuality, bodies, desires, and affects (Ahmed 2016; Butler 1990; Moussawi and Vidal-Ortiz 2020; Somerville 2014). I understand the term *queer*, in a Foucauldian sense, has its disciplinary effect, and in a postcolonial sense, its colonizing effect. I mainly use *queer* in the first sense when I talk about LGBT+ people in Western countries or in Asia as a whole. When I talk about LGBT+ people in Hong Kong, Taiwan, or mainland China, I generally use *tongzhi*. I use *gay* to refer to the study participants, as it is the identification in which most of them choose to

identify. I use *queer* in the second sense when I talk about the general LGBT+ state of being (queer activism, queer feeling), although I sometimes use it interchangeably with *tongzhi* (*tongzhi* activism). The word *queer* should be distinguished from queer theory, which refers to a specific theory that originated in North American humanities universities (e.g., works by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Michael Warner, Judith Butler, and Lauren Berlant) but later became an important theory for conceptualizing the lives of LGBT+ (e.g., work by Jack Halberstam, Lisa Duggan, and Heather Love), and some studies go beyond the West (e.g., David Eng, Roderick Ferguson, Jasbir Puar, and José Esteban Muñoz). Moreover, queer is also different from queer studies, a broader emerging school of thought that incorporates queer theory, feminism, postcolonialism, and other critical theories to understand the multifarious lives of LGBT+. Queer Asian studies is part of this new school of thought. And the word *sociology* signifies that this approach is sociological in nature, as it stems from earlier works on the sociology of homosexuality and efforts to combine sociology with queer theory (e.g., Stein and Plummer 1994; Valocchi 2005). In contrast with the textual analysis of literary works and films as the main method of investigation in queer theory, my work is an important intervention, using traditional sociological methods (in this case, ethnography, in-depth interviews, life stories) to provide insight into lived experiences, habitats, and practices of queer people—that is, insight that sociology can best offer.

My proposed sociology has a particular theoretical orientation. I situate myself in the “mobilities paradigm” (Sheller and Urry 2006), which calls for a “sociology beyond societies” in the age of mobilities. This paradigm emphasizes the mobility and fluidity of social processes and movements of people, capital, information, and images, which have effectively replaced geoculturally bounded societies, thereby transforming the static (or “sedentarist” to use the authors’ term) view of sociology. More specifically, I engage with transnational studies (e.g., Hannerz 1996, 6; Ong 1999, 4–8; Grewal and Kaplan 1994, 1–33), which calls for “transnational” rather than globalization study, as transnational analysis addresses the asymmetric nature of the globalization process. I am indebted to transnational sexualities studies that address questions of “globalization, race, political economy, immigration, migration, and geopolitics” (Grewal and Kaplan 2001, 666) and conceptualize the complex terrain of sexual politics as “at once national, regional, local, even ‘cross-cultural’ and hybrid” (663). I am also indebted to transnational feminist studies (Alexander and Mohanty 1997; Grewal and Kaplan 1994). In particular, I have gained insight from Kim-Puri’s (2005)

transnational feminist sociology, which bridges discursive and material analyses, highlights the importance of social structures and the state, examines linkages across cultural contexts, and stresses the role of empirical research as well as from the transnational feminist queer methodologies of Browne and colleagues (2017), which engage with the multiplicities of “many many” lives and recognize local specificities and the complexities—parallels, divergences, linkages—of lives within transnational research.

Transnational queer sociology does not simply involve the transnationalism of sexualities. Rather, it seeks to analyze how general processes impinge upon national practices while *comparing* different nations at any given time. Such a sociology rejects both the top-down approach of applying Western theories to understand non-Western local experiences (global homogenization) and the separationist approach of reifying authentic traditional cultures (local essentialism). The task is to seek ways of understanding the complex processes of Western, local, and interregional knowledge systems in shaping experiences at specific sites and engaging in critical dialogue with the West and within the non-West. The approach goes beyond the usual binary queer flows between the global and local (as well as other binary imageries such as East-West, modernity-tradition, power-resistance) to examine the glocal queer flows among and within non-Western societies that constitute, inform, and shape queer identities, desires, and practices. The approach thus rejects the teleological trajectory of the linear development of Western modernity and engages with the logic of polychronic modernities (Eisenlohr, Kramer, and Lanhenohl 2019), which could be characterized as disjunctive modernities (Appadurai 1996); discrepant modernity (Rofel 1999); or compressed modernity (Chang 2010).

Transnational queer sociology embraces a power-resistance paradigm that is based on a politics of difference about identity within the matrix of domination and maps it onto a transnational time/space geography of sexuality.¹⁶ Such sociology refutes the essentialist or unified notion of identity and understands that identities, rather than identity, are always multiply formed, with various identity components or categories of difference (e.g., class, gender, sexuality, race and ethnicity, nationality, etc.) intersecting and combining with one another.¹⁷ A matrix of identities gives rise to a matrix of oppression. This politics of difference rejects the system of oppression as separate but points to the intersections and interconnectedness, such as the “intersectionality” (Collins 1990; Crenshaw 1991) of how interlocking systems of oppression structure the experience of individuals—in the case of this book—of young (age), gay (sexuality) men

(gender) in three Chinese (race/ethnicity) locales in any given sociohistorical context (political-economy). While an intersectional model of identity may presume components as separable analytics, an assemblage is “more attuned to interwoven forces that merge and dissipate time, space, and body against linearity, coherency, and permanency” (Puar 2007, 212). To understand identity as assemblage is to acknowledge identity not as an attribute of individuals but rather as “an event or action, whereby a multitude of factors such as historical context, geographic location, and social context contribute to the experience of ‘identity’” (Warner, Kurtis, and Adya 2020, 266). Whether intersectionality or assemblage, such a reformulation of subjectivity that suspends or moves away from identity does not intend to abandon identity but to acknowledge that “queer” has no fixed political referent (Eng and Puar 2020, 2).¹⁸ Identity formation and assemblage are a part of the disciplinary and regulatory structures that frame the self, body, desires, practices, and social relations. Heteronormativity—the major form of oppression of sexuality—works with other multiple fluid and complex forms of domination (patriarchy, sexism, racism, nationalism, neoliberalism, developmentalism), which form “scattered hegemonies” (Grewal and Kaplan 1994, 7) that construct our identities, desires, and practices in a transversal space. This web of dominations actively administers, regulates, and reifies sexuality on different levels—the systemic, the community, and the personal—in our everyday lives and on a transnational scale. It is through these disciplining gazes of surveillance at all levels that we are constituted as sexual subjects (Foucault 1982). At the same time, these sites of domination are potential sites of resistance (Foucault 1980), and the scope of domination and scale of resistance are both subject to the political, social, and cultural circumstances of a particular locale as well as to the position of the subject, who possesses different intersectional categories or assemblages. Such an understanding of identity avoids essentializing a category called “Chinese gay man” by paying special attention to the personal and interpersonal levels, social structures, material and discursive practices, geographical location, and particular historical moments that constitute what it means to be a Chinese gay man. It is this “decolonial intersectionality” (Warner, Kurtis, and Adya 2020) that challenges the Western world (including the Western epistemological position) in discussing identity and subjectivity, oppression and domination, and liberation and emancipation.

Transnational queer sociology is interdisciplinary in nature. It engages sociology with queer theory and highlights the importance of both material/structural and textual/discursive analyses. Discourse and materiality

should be seen as two sides of the same coin (Moussawi and Vidal-Ortiz 2020). Transnational queer sociology acknowledges not only that social structures and relations are mediated and (re)produced through cultural representations and discourses but also that discourses are embedded in particular sociostructural configurations that make such cultural discourses and analyses possible. More specifically, it stresses the role of material analysis of such social structures as the state, the market, and civil society, thereby revealing how identities, social structures, and cultural discourses are mutually constituted (cf. Kim-Puri 2005; see also Alldred and Fox 2015). It is thus grounded in material conditions and political economies as well as in discursive formations and cultural representations, centering the multifarious display of power relations in the personal, social/interpersonal, and institutional aspects of everyday life.

Finally, transnational queer sociology draws on various strategies from sociology and cultural studies for comparing different societies. Skocpol's (1979) comparative historical analysis is useful: it examines the specificities of different national/cultural contexts through a comparative lens to highlight cross-national similarities and differences, such as comparing and contrasting the different paths of the homosexual cultures in Hong Kong, Singapore, and India, all of which were British colonies in which the penal code pertaining to homosexual conduct was (or still is) enforced, thereby highlighting the role of sociomaterial conditions in shaping sexualities and subjectivities on a transnational level. Chakrabarty's (2000) and Go's (2020) "provincializing" strategy of European history and sociology, respectively, is also important, as it highlights the epistemic exclusion of non-Western studies and emphasizes that genders and sexualities in Europe and North America are as provincial, specific, and local as those in China, Japan, and India.¹⁹ Chen (2010) proposes "Asia as method" as an imaginary anchoring point that provides multiple frames of reference among Asian societies to transform existing knowledge structures and ourselves, thereby offering alternative horizons and perspectives to advance a different understanding of world history. De Kloet, Chow, and Chong (2019) propose a trans-Asia-as-method project that aims to examine human mobilities, media cultural flows, and connections across Asia and beyond. Ong's (2011) notion of worlding Asian cities suggests comparing Asian cities using different modes to understand metropolitan transformation: "modeling," which refers to the replicability of urbanism that does not find its ultimate reference in the West; "inter-referencing," which refers to the "practices of citation, allusion, aspiration, comparison, and competition" (17) among Asian locales;

and “new solidarities,” which refers to the “symbiosis between neoliberal calculations and social activism” (21). Of the three, “inter-Asia referencing” is particularly important to transnational queer sociology, as it makes “concepts and theories derived from Asian experiences translocally relevant and shared” (Iwabuchi 2014, 44) and thus leads to a nuanced comprehension of Asian experiences through a reciprocal learning process—although we should be mindful that comparison may lead to hierarchical competition (Chong, Chow, and de Kloet 2019). Transnational queer sociology constitutes a response to Chiang and Wong’s (2016) call for “queering the transnational turn” to consider what critical edge “regionalism” might afford investigations of queer modernities in Asia and to Yue and Leung’s (2017) “queer Asia as method,” which aims to provincialize Western queer knowledge production and initiate critical conversations.

Generational Sexualities and Life Stories

This research is qualitative in nature. Although I appreciate the merits of quantitative sociology (e.g., surveys), which can sketch out a general pattern (attitudes, behavior, practices) of a population, the complexity of the life experience of individuals—the meaning, context, and constraints they face—is best captured by qualitative sociology such as life stories. A sociology of stories focuses on the social role of stories: “the ways they are produced, the ways they are read, the work they perform in the wider social order, how they change, and their role in the political process” (Plummer 1995, 19). My basic premise is that human beings make personal and social meaning by constructing stories that make experience sensible (Hammack and Cohler 2009, 2011; Plummer 2010). Individuals make meaning of social and political environments through the construction of stories. Such stories are particularly important for sexual minorities who have to negotiate with a master narrative that negates their thoughts, feelings, and actions to produce their own counternarrative or resistance narrative (Hammack and Cohler 2011). Stories, especially sexual stories (Plummer 1995), are important, as they are personal and powerful, sometimes therapeutic and empowering, and challenge and transform societal domination and oppression. Different generations have different stories to tell. Situating the study within the emergent field of generational sexualities studies (Plummer 2010), I understand young gay men as occupying a specific generational position. I view generation not only in terms of biological age, age cycle, or age cohort but also as a socially constructed and symbolically grounded position (Mannheim 1952; Plummer

2010). Age is therefore a result of a “nexus of social pathways, developmental trajectories, and social change” (Elder, Johnson, and Crosnoe 2003, 10) in a life-course approach (e.g., Elder 1975). A life-course approach to the study of young gay male identity can reveal the interplay between individual life stories and larger social and historical forces.

Western work draws on a range of terms to describe the young (and queer) generations: Millennial (1981–1996), Generation Y (mid-1980s to mid-1990s), Generation Z (late-1990s and into the new millennium), and similar terms (e.g., Howe and Strauss 2000; McCrindle 2014; Marshall et al. 2019). In the Chinese context, the term *post-’90s generation* (*jiu ling hou*) was first used to describe the second generation of Chinese people who grew up as only children in the post-Tiananmen era and the first generation born after the Tiananmen protests. The term is sometimes used interchangeably with the post-’80s generation and millennial generation to refer to the young generation in China (Li 2021; de Kloet and Fung 2017). People in Hong Kong began using the term *post-’90s generation* largely after the publication of a Chinese book called *Hong Kong Children* (Huang 2009), which describes the post-’90s children in Hong Kong who were raised by overprotective and indulgent parents (Chan and Lee 2014). In Taiwan, the “strawberry generation” refers to the post-’80s generation (e.g., Jheng 2018) while the “collapsing generation” (Lin et al. 2011) is used to refer to the young generation in a more general sense. Nevertheless, the post-’90s generation in the three sites grew up in different sociopolitical eras: mainland China entered a postreform era in 1990 following the suppression of the democratic movement in 1989, Hong Kong ratified the Basic Law in 1990 and was returned to China in 1997, and Taiwan overturned martial law in 1987 and had its first democratic presidential election in 1996. In all three sites, the post-’90s generation has enjoyed a more affluent and consumption-oriented lifestyle than prior generations and faced a highly competitive education and work environment. More specifically, the post-’90s gay generation, whose adolescence and young adulthood was in the 2000s and 2010s, live lives that are qualitatively different from those of previous gay generations, owing to changes in the laws governing homosexuality, the establishment of the pink economy, and the emergence of *tongzhi* activism since the 1990s.

Between 2017 and 2019, I conducted in-depth interviews with Han Chinese men who were born in or after 1990 and were at least eighteen (i.e., members of the post-’90s generation). All of the participants self-identified as gay (or another sexual identity label indicating same-sex desires/experiences or emotional attachment to members of the same sex) and had been

born in or were currently living in Hong Kong ($n = 30$), Taipei ($n = 30$), or Shanghai ($n = 30$). Ninety interviews were conducted, thirty in each site. During the 2017–2019 period, I made numerous field trips to Taipei and Shanghai but could no longer travel from 2020 onward because of the COVID-19 pandemic.²⁰ In 2020 and 2021, I updated their stories by conducting follow-up interviews with half of the interviewees in each site, most conducted online. I have also closely followed some of the men over the years and with whom I have had informal conversations from time to time, and whose stories appear in the various chapters as ongoing, focused case studies. Hong Kong, Taipei, and Shanghai were chosen as study sites to facilitate comparison. Hong Kong is a uniquely cosmopolitan city owing to its British colonial history and special “one country, two systems” constitutional principle. Historically it has had the most well-established pink economy of the three sites. Shanghai is the largest and most populous city in China, attracts the greatest amount of foreign investment, and exemplifies a strong market economy that encompasses both state-owned corporations and small, privately owned businesses fostered by the state. It also has a lively *tongzhi* scene. Taipei, the capital of Taiwan, is also a cosmopolitan city, it is the hub of social movements and *tongzhi* activism, and it has a large and vibrant *tongzhi* life. The three cities are all urban, cosmopolitan, and populous cities with thriving *tongzhi* activities and differing degrees of activism that may exhibit the strong presence of metronormativity (Halberstam 2005). I recognize that other cities (especially in rural areas) may have different governing strategies and patterns of hetero/homonormativities, and the gay men therein may have different lived experiences. I chose the Han Chinese, the major ethnic group in all three cities, for ease of comparison. Other ethnic groups such as South Asians in Hong Kong, indigenous people in Taiwan, or Uyghurs and Tibetans in China, who may well exhibit a different sense of belonging and a different life trajectory, were excluded. The interviewees were recruited via nonprobability (purposive) sampling, such as personal and NGO referrals, publicity in social media (Facebook), and the snowball sampling technique. I do not claim that my participants are representative of the post-’90s gay generations in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and mainland China, but I tried to compile a sample that was as demographically diverse as possible in terms of class, education, occupation, relationship status, religion, health status, sexual experiences, living conditions, and social activism.²¹

I have developed standard interview guidelines over the years that use a life-course approach to capture the life stories of participants, with a particular focus on their same-sex experiences: (1) participants’ realization of their same-sex desires as well as their sexual practices, romantic

experiences, and intimate relationships; (2) their coming-out experiences to their families, schools, workplaces, churches, and other social institutions; (3) their participation in the gay scene or community and *tongzhi*/queer activism (if any); (4) their opinions about the three societies as a whole and their *tongzhi* communities in particular; and (5) their understanding of the meaning of life and of what it means to be young, Chinese, gay, and a man. As a self-identified Chinese gay male researcher who was born and raised in Hong Kong and educated in Hong Kong and Britain, I was able to establish rapport with the interviewees quite easily based on shared gender (male), sexuality (gay), ethnicity (Chinese), and language (I speak both Cantonese, the major language in Hong Kong, and Mandarin, the major language in mainland China and Taiwan). The interviews were conducted at my office and in hotels, NGO offices, and the interviewees' homes. I am well aware of the power differential and other issues embedded within the insider/outsider dilemma in social research (Denzin and Lincoln 1994) and of intersectionality issues in queer studies (Kong 2011, 208–11; Kong 2018; Rahman 2010). I followed other self-identified queer researchers (see Lewin and Leap 1996) in being “out” in the field and often declared my own sexual orientation at the beginning of the interviews to collapse the split between the subject/researcher and the object/researched (Kong, Plummer, and Mahoney 2002). In this sense, I am an insider. I am studying something that is as much a part of me as it is of the people I interview, and what I have learned has contributed as much to my own self-understanding as it has to a social understanding. It was also easy to establish rapport with and gain trust and acceptance from the participants because they saw themselves in me and because I have a well-known, decades-long track record of researching Chinese (homo)sexuality. I am also an outsider, not just because of the age difference (I am in my early fifties), but also because of such intersectional differences as education, class, and cultural upbringing. Ethical approval was obtained from my university's institutional review board. The nature of the study was carefully explained to all interviewees, and they were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. A small honorarium was provided to cover transportation and other expenses. All names appearing in this book are pseudonyms, and minor alterations have been made to the interviewees' biographies to protect their identities. Their written consent was sought before audio-recording the interviews. Spoken Cantonese or Mandarin was transcribed verbatim, with all quotes translated into English by me. Each interview is a story of its time and space. I treat interviews as a site of storytelling and as both text and lived experience. I offer a

discursive analysis of the interviews and a sociomaterial analysis that links the participants' stories with broader sociohistorical and political changes. Guided by the grounded-theory approach (Strauss and Corbin 1997), the analysis of these stories included identifying themes, building codebooks, and marking texts (Ryan and Bernard 2000). Themes were initially based on the interview guidelines and findings, and the analyses were then compared with the local and international literature. Due to space limitations, each data chapter generally presents two focused cases for each locale. The two cases chosen are generally contrasting and entail theoretical diversity of the samples. They are also selected in consideration of the comparisons across the three locales (i.e., Hong Kong, Taiwan, and mainland China). The three locales appear in different order in each chapter, subject to the respective chronological or theoretical dynamics of the argument. The main aim is to reveal the intercategorical differences among young gay men in the three locales rather than the intracategorical differences within each locale. This book thus brings my encounters with these young men to life by telling their stories about coming out, about their families, about connecting with people, about love and sex, and about their love and hate relationships with their societies.²²

Outline of the Book

The overarching aim of *Sexuality and the Rise of China* is to examine Hong Kong, Taiwan, and mainland China—their past, present, and future—with a particular focus on age, sexualities, families, love, and community under the new socioeconomic and political world order. Chapter 1 examines the historical formation of contemporary *tongzhi* identities and cultures in Hong Kong and Taiwan (1980s to 1990s) and mainland China (late 1990s–early 2000s) and tracks the effects of recent socioeconomic and political transformations. The chapter offers a social-material analysis that conceptualizes the state, the market economy, and civil society (family, religion, NGOs, popular culture) as sites of both governance and resistance wherein different *tongzhi* generations are being made and are self-making as sexual subjects. It also demonstrates that the birth of contemporary *tongzhi* identities is the result of both the differential impacts of the West and mutually referencing effects among the three locales. This background chapter provides context to inform the subsequent chapters, which focus on members of the post-'90s generation.

Four major aspects of the lives of these young gay men are investigated in this book. In chapter 2, I examine how the participants came out to

their families, if they indeed have come out. There is a double closet in the Chinese context, characterized by the tension between heterosexuality and homosexuality and the tension between performing and not performing a traditional familial role (a filial son/daughter who gets married and has children). They have devised a range of coming-out strategies in response to both their parents' and their own expectations of what it means to be a son within this double closet. Instead of viewing coming out as identity politics, I argue that it is better viewed as relational politics. Through their stories of coming out, we see the changes in family, parenting culture, and the parent-child relationship as well as the shifting meaning of masculinity and filial piety in the three Chinese societies.

In chapter 3, I examine how these young men connect with one another. I show that the participants exhibit three rather different trajectories of *tongzhi* community engagement under the societies' particular forms of neoliberal development and state governance: cross-national economic/consumption engagement in Hong Kong, fragmented/mainly online engagement in mainland China, and diffuse engagement in Taiwan. No matter whether they engage with large-scale collectivities or small-scale personal communities or commons, what is important are the affective/emotional and imaginative/translocal components of engagement as well as the encountering of what I call "homonormative masculinity"—a combination of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1995) and homonormativity (Duggan 2002)—under neoliberalism, cosmopolitanism, and nascent consumerism.

In chapter 4, I examine the young men's love and sex lives. I argue that they view monogamy as a major component of a good adult life, which is an example of Berlant's (2011) notion of "cruel optimism": "Something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing" (1). Accordingly, they have developed various strategies for negotiating with the monogamy ideal—for example, venturing out, either together or separately, openly or in secret, and with explicit or implicit rules, to form different kinds of relationships. However, this particular type of love story is complicated by the specific socioeconomic and political circumstances of each society: family co-residence, political unrest, and the ethics of the self under the COVID-19 pandemic in Hong Kong; marriage pressure, a fragmented gay world, and the precarity of labor in mainland China; and a democratic environment, well-established gay world, and optimism after the Sunflower Movement in Taiwan.²³

In chapter 5, I examine the participants' cultural/national identities and their engagement with civic-political activism. I show that the three

governments exert both enabling and restricting effects on (homo)sexuality, revealing three versions of “homonationalism” (Puar 2007): incorporative homonationalism in Taiwan, deficient homonationalism in Hong Kong, and pragmatic homonationalism in mainland China. The three distinctive cultural/national identities (Taiwanese, Hongkonger, and Chinese national) give rise to three different identifications with (homo)nationalism, resulting in three different forms of civic-political activism that align with or contradict the state’s position on homosexuality.

Sexuality and the Rise of China offers a nuanced analysis of Chinese queer identities, practices, and cultures in which we can simultaneously see the generalized Western queer culture, rhetoric, and processes that have impinged upon Hong Kong, Taiwan, and mainland China as well as the differential negotiations of subject formation owing to their particular social, historical, political, economic, and cultural circumstances. What we gain is an understanding of the mutually referenced, commonly shared, and translocally influenced queer experiences among different locales that are often neglected in studies of the globalization of sexuality. Moreover, the subject-formation of identity is intimately connected with the personal, interpersonal, and institutional levels that link social structures and practices such as the family (chapter 2); the gay community and pink economy (chapter 3); intimate relationships, marriage, and monogamy (chapter 4); and the state (chapter 5), allowing an emphasis on the mutually constitutive relationship between sexuality and intersubjectivity, institutional structures, social practices, and discourses. Through the narratives of the post-’90s gay generation in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and mainland China, *Sexuality and the Rise of China* is part of the emerging decolonizing sexualities program (e.g., Bakshi, Jivraj, and Posocco 2016), an ongoing effort to provincialize Western knowledge of sexualities.

NOTES

Introduction

Earlier versions of the section “Transnational Queer Sociology” appeared as “Transnational Queer Sociological Analysis of Sexual Identity and Civic-Political Activism in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Mainland China,” *British Journal of Sociology* 70, no. 5 (2019): 1904–25, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.12697>; and “Toward a Transnational Queer Sociology: Historical Formation of Tongzhi Identities and Cultures in Hong Kong and Taiwan (1980s–1990s) and China (Late 1990s–Early 2000s),” *Journal of Homosexuality* 69, no. 3 (2022): 474–98.

- 1 In this book, I adopt a transnational queer sociological approach to understand the dynamics of the three Chinese locales (Hong Kong, Taiwan, and mainland China), as they are deeply marked by their distinct political histories, local cultures, civic traditions, and social structures. However, I do not intend to make any claim about the political independence of Hong Kong or Taiwan. Moreover, the word *state* is sometimes used interchangeably with the word *government* (the agent of the state) to refer to the distinct political administration of Hong Kong, Taiwan, and mainland China.
- 2 Hong Kong’s Umbrella Movement was sparked on August 31, 2014, by a National People’s Congress Standing Committee decision in China about the proposed reform of the Hong Kong electoral system. More specifically, the decision prescribed the prescreening of candidates for election as the chief executive of the HKSAR government (Ho 2019a).

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- 3 “President Tsai Interviewed by BBC,” News and Activities, Office of the President, Republic of China (Taiwan), January 18, 2020, <https://english.president.gov.tw/News/5962>.
- 4 *Postsocialism* is a term commonly used to refer to the current political economy of mainland China, but it may not be the correct usage for two reasons. First, mainland China is not postsocialist in the way that parts of the ex-Soviet bloc can be thought of as postsocialist. Second, mainland China remains a single-party state under the control of the CCP; for it to be a postsocialist state, the CCP would need to relinquish some political control to other parties, which has not yet happened. I prefer to refer to “postreform China,” which can be characterized as “late socialist” because it reflects a certain degree of economic market reform and/or features state capitalism, although we have to be mindful that capitalism in mainland China is heavily controlled by the CCP rather than by the market economy as commonly understood in most Euro-American societies.
- 5 I use LGBT+ to refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and other related nonnormative identities and sexualities (intersex, asexual, pansexual, questioning, etc.), which are usually subsumed under the umbrella term *queer*. As the book uses the word *queer* less as a sexual-identity marker and more as a verb, an attitude, or an enduring practice to challenge normativity, I use LGBT+ instead of LGBTQ.
- 6 For Hong Kong and mainland China, see Ho et al. (2018); Kong (2011); for mainland China, see Rofel (2007); for Taiwan, see Martin (2003).
- 7 For Hong Kong, see Kong 2011, 48–51; for mainland China, see Kong (2016); for Taiwan, see Damm (2017).
- 8 For example, aversion therapy (turning gays straight) is still practiced in Hong Kong (IRCT 2020) and mainland China (IRCT 2020; Bao 2018, 93–118), although not in Taiwan since 2018. See Noah Buchan, “Rainbow Crossing: Conversion Therapy by Another Name?,” *Taipei Times*, December 19, 2019, <http://www.taipetimes.com/News/feat/archives/2019/12/19/2003727797>.
- 9 These annual parties may not be organized every year, as they are subject to various factors such as the state of pink businesses, government intervention, and health conditions (e.g., the COVID-19 pandemic).
- 10 For example, sexual stigma (Plummer 1975) is understood in symbolic interactionism and labeling theory.
- 11 Some examples of sociohistorical conditions are the emergence of gay subcultures (McIntosh 1968), professionalization of medicine (Weeks 1981), and the rise of industrial capitalism (D’Emilio 1983).
- 12 As I argued elsewhere (Kong 2011, 21), early Western studies of non-Western sexual cultures were mainly based on reports from missionaries, traders, and seamen. Western anthropologists have long used such reports and their own ethnographic research to understand “other” sexual cultures. Consider,

for example, Malinowski's (1922) and Mead's (1952) understanding of gender and sexuality in Melanesia; Herdt's (1981) idea of ritualized homosexuality, in which a "semen transaction" between boys and young men is a common practice supported by the whole social order in Papua New Guinea; Lancaster's (1988) notion of Nicaraguan *machistas* who have sex with other men but do not consider themselves homosexual; and the "third" gender—Thai *kathoey*, Filipino *bakla*, Indonesian *waria*, Polynesian *fa'afafine*, and Indian *hijra*—commonly found in traditional Asian and Pacific societies (Johnson, Jackson, and Herdt 2000). This body of work shows the sex/gender systems in non-Western countries to be quite different from those in the West. The binaries of male/female, masculine/feminine, and heterosexual/homosexual are more modern inventions heavily influenced by Western biological and medical discourses (Weston 1993).

- 13 Altman's (1997) notion of a "global gay identity" alludes to a universal gay prototype that is implicitly based on Western gay identity, characterized by such phenomena as openly expressing one's sexual identity, contesting sexual rather than gender norms, replacing the idea of male homosexuals as would-be women with new self-concepts, preferring primary homosexual relationships as opposed to marrying and engaging in "homosex" on the side, and developing various commercial venues based on sexuality and communities with a gay political consciousness. His formulation of a "global gay identity" that conflates such an identity with a white, gay male identity under the globalization of queer identities has been criticized (Manalansan 2003, 5; Rofel 2007, 89–94).

He was later critical of this formulation, writing that "western assumptions about homosexuality as the basis for identity are spreading rapidly, often in ways that displace or further marginalise more traditional assumptions about gender and sexuality. While theorists may see this as the imposition of western values . . . increasing numbers of people in the majority world assert 'LGBT' identities, self-consciously using terms taken from the west. . . . When I started to write about new gay and lesbian assertion in South East Asia at the end of the 1990s, my conclusions were based on the visibility of new groups that used western (usually American) terminology and literature to make sense of their desire to assert identities that they could relate to in their contemporary urban societies" (Altman 2013, 181).

Massad (2002) uses the term "Gay International" to refer to international rights organizations dominated by white Western males such as the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) and the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC) whose mission is to defend the rights of gays and lesbians all over the world based on the Western gay emancipation model.

- 14 Please see the special issues "What's Queer about Queer Studies Now?" (Eng, Halberstam, and Munoz 2005) and "Left of Queer" (Eng and Puar 2020) in *Social Text*.

- 15 See, for example, Yau (2010) on mainland China and Hong Kong; Liu and Rofel (2010) and Liu (2015) on mainland China and Taiwan; and Chiang and Heinrich (2014) on queer Sinophone cultures.
- 16 This orientation to a power-resistance paradigm based on a politics of difference is derived from my earlier work. For details, please see Kong (2011, 28–32).
- 17 I share in the critique of a unified notion of identity offered by symbolic interactionism (e.g., Plummer 1975), deconstruction (e.g., Derrida 1976), queer theory (e.g., Butler 1990; Fuss 1989; Jagose 1996), and Black feminist thought on intersectionality (e.g., Collins 1990; Crenshaw 1991).
- 18 I agree with Warner, Kurtis, and Adya (2020) that scholars who use assemblage theory do not intend to replace intersectionality but rather to reenvision intersectionality as assemblage. Assemblage theory is thus partly a critique of a popular (mis)interpretation of intersectionality as representing essentialized ideas of identity.
- 19 Please also see Meghji (2021), who suggests in his conclusion seven strategies for decolonizing sociology: (1) situate the development of sociology in the field of colonial-imperial relations, (2) deuniversalize any canon, (3) look for links even if you were not taught them yourself, (4) value the Global South regardless of northern valuation schemes, (5) do not “neoliberalize” decolonial work, (6) encourage students and scholars to be multilingual, (7) and accept that decolonizing sociology does not have an end point.
- 20 Ten participants in mainland China were first interviewed by my coinvestigator, Lin Chwen-der, but were followed up by me in subsequent interviews.
- 21 A brief profile of the participants (including their age, place of origin, level of education, occupation, and whether they live with their natal families) is given here. All of the information provided was obtained during the first interview. The Hong Kong participants were born between 1990 and 2000 and had an average age of twenty-four. They were all born in Hong Kong, with the exception of two who were born in South China and one who was born in Macau and moved to Hong Kong when they were children. Ten percent were secondary school students or had only a secondary level of education; more than one-third (40 percent) had completed or were currently in postsecondary education (e.g., diploma, higher diploma, associate degree); and a similar proportion (36.7 percent) were studying for or had obtained a bachelor’s degree. Slightly more than ten percent (13.3) were studying for or had obtained a master’s degree. Just under one-third (26.7 percent) were students, and a few (6.6 percent) were unemployed at the time of the first interview. The remainder were employed in a variety of occupations in education, finance and business, IT, medicine, catering, sales and service, and the government and nongovernment sectors. Two-thirds of the Hong Kong participants (66.7 percent) still lived with their natal families.

The Taiwan participants were born between 1990 and 1999 and had an average age of 24.4. Half of them (50 percent) were born in Taipei or New

Taipei, and the rest were from middle (e.g., Taichung), southern (e.g., Tainan), or eastern (e.g., Hualien) Taiwan. Only one had not advanced beyond secondary school. More than half (60 percent) were studying for or had obtained a bachelor's degree, and more than one-third (36.7 percent) were studying for or had obtained a master's degree. The relatively large percentage of Taiwan participants with a high level of education reflects education policy in Taiwan, where most young people have an opportunity to pursue higher education, as well as the fact that there are very few diploma or associate degree programs, as most of the educational institutions that previously offered such programs have reorganized themselves as degree-bearing universities of technology or science and technology. Thirteen percent of the participants were unemployed, and more than half (60 percent) were students. The rest were employed in a variety of occupations in education, IT, management, finance, engineering, medicine, catering, sales and service, the military, and the government. Less than one-third (23 percent) still lived with their natal families, as the families of half the participants did not live in Taipei.

The mainland Chinese participants were born between 1990 and 1998 and had an average age of 23.9. Just under one-third (30 percent) were born in Shanghai; the rest were born in various regions of mainland China, including the southwest (e.g., Yunnan, Sichuan), midwest (e.g., Hunan, Jiangxi), and northeast (e.g., Liaoning). Ten percent were students in or had completed secondary (junior) education, and twenty percent had completed or were in postsecondary education (i.e., vocational or junior college education in the mainland Chinese context). More than half (56.7 percent) were studying for or had obtained a bachelor's degree, and slightly more than ten percent (13.3) were studying for or had obtained a master's degree. Roughly one-third (30 percent) were students at the time of the interview, and the rest worked in a variety of occupations in education, finance, trading, medicine, engineering, catering, sales and service, fashion, media, IT, and the government and nongovernment sectors. Less than one-third of the mainland participants (26.7 percent) still lived with their natal families, as two-thirds were migrants whose families did not live in Shanghai.

As a whole, the participants constitute a diverse although fairly educated sample.

- 22 There are three methodological problems that I would like to reflect upon: the problem of representation, the problem of legitimization, and the problem of ethics. The first problem consists of two separate but related questions: the question of the subjects being studied (i.e., Who is the other?) and the question of the author's place in a text or field (i.e., Who can speak for the other, from what position and on what basis?) (Denzin and Lincoln 1994, 577–78). Study of the “homosexual” in Euro-American societies can be categorized into three waves (Kong, Plummer, and Mahoney 2002). “Traditional homosexual research” was dominated by sexology, medicine, and psychiatry. Presumably, heterosexual scientists relied on a form of positivism that

drew a sharp distinction between researcher and researched and conducted standardized interviews to obtain objective accounts of the nature of homosexuality. They interviewed “abnormal” homosexuals in search of a pathological diagnosis. This positivistic and clinical approach was gradually replaced by a more hermeneutic and interpretive approach (“modernizing homosexual research”) from the 1970s onward, collapsing the dichotomy between subject/researcher and object/researched and emphasizing self-awareness, reflexivity, and shared meanings. Some researchers even came out during the research process. The arrival of queer theory in the 1990s, signifying “postmodern or queer research,” further complicated the issue of representation, pointing out that the gay and lesbian experiences represented are usually a reproduction of the experiences of white, middle-class, Western gay men and lesbians and neglects other marginal and queer voices. Queer theorists urged the reconciliation of our multiple fragmented selves and discursively constituted subjectivities, intersected significantly by gender, race, sexuality, and class, among the diverse social positions that mediate everyday life and the research process. Situating myself in the third research paradigm, I am mindful of my dual role as insider/outsider and my authorial voice in producing, not just describing, the participants’ voices in the production of knowledge about young Chinese gay men in analyzing the stories in this book.

The second problem, that of legitimization, is traditionally seen as a problem of validity, which concerns the technical issues of finding valid answers to such questions as how to avoid lying, deception, and the display of “demand characteristics” and problems of memory and accounting for the past (Plummer 1983). The problem is partially resolved through triangulation of my various field trips, repeated interviews, and discussions with my coinvestigators, research assistants, and referred NGOs to testify to the validity of the participants’ narratives. The problem cannot be totally overcome, however—claiming that the truth can be revealed risks falling into the trap of positivism. The task is to subvert the unified notion of gay identity and to paint a picture of multiple and conflicting sexual/gendered experiences. I chose life stories to highlight the tension between objectivity and subjectivity by showing participants’ tendency to produce consistency in their biographies when they recast the past while also seeking out ambiguity, contradiction, flux, and diversity in their narratives to illustrate the fullness of their lived experiences.

The third problem, that of ethics, is a matter not simply of dealing with such technical issues as consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and risk/harm reduction but also of finding a way to develop an ethical strategy that is reflexive and empathic and learning the art of the boundaries and limitations of relationships or friendships formed in the field. I am fortunate to have developed beautiful friendships with my participants, who shared with me their wonderful and bittersweet stories.

- 23 The Sunflower Movement of 2014 in Taiwan was launched by students and civic groups in protest over the legislature's passage of the KMT's proposed Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement without a clause-by-clause review. The protestors believed that a trade pact with the PRC would harm Taiwan's economy and leave it vulnerable to PRC political pressure (Tseng 2014).

Chapter 1. Queering Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Mainland China

This chapter is derived and modified from Travis S. K. Kong, Hsiao-Wei Kuan, Sky H. L. Lau, and Sara L. Friedman, "LGBT Movements in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and China," in *Oxford Encyclopedia of LGBT Politics and Policy*, ed. D. Haider-Markel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.1275>; and Travis S. K. Kong, "Toward a Transnational Queer Sociology: Historical Formation of Tongzhi Identities and Cultures in Hong Kong and Taiwan (1980s–1990s) and China (Late 1990s–early 2000s)," *Journal of Homosexuality* 69, no. 3 (2022): 474–98. Owing to space limitations, this chapter focuses primarily on the development of gay (and to a lesser extent lesbian) identities. It should be noted that other nonnormative sexual identities (e.g., transgender, intersex) have different histories but cannot be fully captured in this chapter.

- 1 The Qing legal code of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911) introduced a substitute against male-male rape (forcible sodomy) in 1679, which was superseded by a similar substitute in 1734 that remained in force until the end of the Qing dynasty (Sommer 1997).
- 2 See Chiang (2010, 634–47) for the debate between Zhang Jingsheng and Pan Guangdan; see Kang (2009, 43–49) for that between Hu Qiuyuan and Yang Youtian.
- 3 The theory's dominant status was established after Pan Guangdan, a US-trained sociologist, translated Ellis's book into Chinese. He started his translation in 1939 and took three years to complete, but it did not go to press until 1946. In his translation, Pan provided rich annotations concerning Chinese sexual culture alongside Ellis's text and included an appendix documenting textual evidence of traditional Chinese same-sex practices (Guo 2016; see also Pan 1986, 1–7).
- 4 See Kong (2016) for this early development of Chinese homosexuality.
- 5 For examples of *tongxinglian* subcultures that seemed to flourish in the post-Second World War period, see Kong (2014, 2019a) for Hong Kong; see Chiang and Wang (2017), Huang (2011), and Taiwan Tongzhi Hotlines (2010) for Taiwan; and see Chiang (2012) and Li and Wang (1992) for mainland China.
- 6 Hong Kong Yearbook, *Religion and Custom*, accessed July 11, 2022, <https://www.yearbook.gov.hk/2020/en/pdf/E21.pdf>.
- 7 There were, of course, men who had same-sex desires before the 1920s, but I refer to this generation (1920s–1950s) as the first *tongzhi* generation for