Chapter 27
Coming Out, Going Home:
Spatial Mobility Among the Gay College Students With Their Supportive Parents in Taiwan

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ABSTRACT

Despite the historical centrality of Western cities as sites of queer cultural settlement, larger global economic and political forces have vociferously shaped, dispersed, and altered dreams of mobility for gay Taiwanese millennials in the age of globalization. While Taiwanese gay millennials follow a seemingly universal "rural-to-urban," "East-to-West" movement trajectory, this study also explicates local nuanced ramifications running against the common trend. Drawn upon five-year ethnographic studies in Taiwan, this study examines how parents could to some extent conform to societal pressures by co-creating a life narrative to the society. Parents/family appear to contribute to how participants' decision on spatial movement but gay male millennials with supportive parents are eventually "going home." However, the concept of home is configured by multiple economic and social forces involving (1) the optimal distance with the biological family and (2) the proper performances of consumption policed and imposed by the gay community in the neoliberal Taiwanese society.

INTRODUCTION

This article highlights the common threads of lived experiences of increased regional relocation and these recent trends among Taiwanese supportive families with gay college students, as these provide interesting insights into the processes of their identity negotiation and social embedding in the dynamic process of local, regional and global geographic reconfiguration. To take a transnational approach means paying deliberate attention to the material and immaterial interactions among sexuality, class and space. Through comparing the geographic im/mobility among Taiwanese and Western supportive families, I

subsequently demonstrate the cultural specialties shape their identities. Studies concerning coming out in the nuclear family home, has tended to concentrate on negative emotions experienced by gay male millennials (Bryson, MacIntosh, Jordan & Lin, 2006; Lea, Wit & Reynolds, 2014). However, following a Constitutional Court ruling and a subsequent legislative act, Taiwan became the first country in Asia to legalize same-sex marriage nationwide on 24 May 2019 (Jennings, 5/24/2017). As witnessed on the daily life experiences, the public display of intimacy among young Taiwanese gay men in urban areas has been increasingly common, being 'gay' in Taiwan has been perceived as affluent consumers in the emerging pink economy (Jennings, 2017). Taipei has been transformed into probably the most gay-friendly city in Asia (Jennings 2017; Martin 2003, He 2006). Scholars analyzing queer movements in Taiwan have long focused on identity formation in the cyber-community, championing the cyberspace as what 'liberates' gay people and makes the formation of gay subjectivity tangible (Berry & Martin 2003; Chou, 2000). Accounts of queer subjectivity in Taiwan that also emphasize a hard-won sense of belonging have been prevalent in cyberspace (e.g. Lin, 2006). With the emergence of new media technologies, the gay civil rights movement in Taiwan has become closely affiliated with virtual communities, with alliances to facilitate social change being aggregated and mobilized online. Nevertheless, this social transformation and cultural change is a hard-earned process along the civil right movement. The Taiwanese society witnessed the malicious police raids on gay cruising grounds in 1997, on gay saunas in 1998, on lesbian pubs in 2002, and on gay home parties in 2004, all of which resulted in violations of their basic human rights among gay men in Taiwan, not to mention stigmatization of gay lifestyles and gay-oriented businesses (Ho, 2010).

Given the varying friendliness of temporal-spatial affordances and mobility faced by the Taiwanese gay millennials, it is a complicated negotiation to locate one's gay subjectivity. In much literature regarding globalization of gay civility movement, the formation of gay subjectivity is closely related to rural-to-urban, south-to-north movement, with such work contending that queer individuals are oppressed and harassed in "conservative" rural communities in the South, and flee to the "big city" to find anonymity and like-minded communities in the West, and explore their sexual identities and desires (Gray, 2009). Boellstorff (2012) offers an in-depth knowledge of "gay Internet studies" suggesting that new social media dating apps generates space to reflect on current academic positions on gay men and technology. Carillo (2004) conceptualised such concept as "sexual migration" – a type of transnational movements enabling queer practices, identities, and subjectivities. Mowlabocus (2010), and more recently Race (2014, 2015) have been the starting point for this research. Due to the popularity of new dating apps, mobility might run against a normalizing process where migrants move for the purposes of biological and heterosexual reproduction as prior research suggests that sexuality—as a key element of their subjectivities— plays a major role in migration decisions of non-heterosexuals. Given the recent transformation, this study tries to address the nuanced changes of the flow, explicating how the earlier global im/mobility among LGB communities do not always represent the social reality with the implicated value of West-centrism – where urban areas in the West were (re)produced through an intricate process as 'actually-existing cosmopolitanisms' embracing cultural others (Binnie 2004; Gray, 2009). Although anecdotal, the movement of sexual dissidents from Taiwan to the West have long been circulated and discussed among the Taiwanese gay communities. Such a migration, while ostensibly sexually driven, was often enabled by the apparent visible and friendlier queer employment market.

With the rise of global mobility, however, the formation of gay identity has moved beyond a nation-based modernity, which functions in tandem with the glamorization of local queer urban lifestyle via popular media texts. As such, in Chinese society, homosexuality was typically perceived as taboo (Wang

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