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The Geopolitics of Queer Archives: Contested Chineseness and Queer Sinophone Affiliations between Hong Kong and Taiwan

Wen Liu, Academia Sinica, Taiwan[1]

Eva Cheuk-Yin Li, Lancaster University, UK[2]

Abstract: Hong Kong and Taiwan, two Sinophone societies peripheral to continental China, have divergent colonial pasts and distinct cultures. Yet, their fates have been increasingly intertwined since the rise of China in the global economy. We propose the geopolitics of queer archives to trace minor-minor exchanges of queer knowledge and activism that are neither officially recognized by the state nor mapped into mainstream discussions of international relations. Through a conjunctural analysis of queer scholarship in Hong Kong and Taiwan since the 1980s, we contest the notion of Chineseness in shaping the knowledge of queer sexualities and argue that a wholesale recycling of postcolonial critique on these two societies' resistance to China risk reproducing US-centrism.

Keywords: Chineseness, Decolonization, Queer Diaspora, Queer Asia, Queer Sinophone Studies

Hong Kong and Taiwan, two Sinophone societies peripheral to continental China, have divergent colonial pasts and distinct cultures. Yet, their fates have been increasingly intertwined since the rise of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in the global economy and regional geopolitics. Most of the literature has understood the entangled relations of Hong Kong and Taiwan with the PRC from the political economy angle of the 'China factor,' especially the shared rise of feelings of insecurity and anger due to growing threats from the PRC to disrupt the autonomy and ways of life in these two societies. Specifically, since the mass pro-democracy protests in 2014 (Taiwan's Sunflower Movement and Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement) and again in 2019 (Hong Kong's Anti-Extradition Law

[1] https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7732-4335
[2] https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3076-3386

Amendment Bill, or 'Anti-ELAB,' movement), slogans such as 'Today's Hong Kong, Tomorrow's Taiwan' were frequently used to symbolize a united fate and struggle against PRC authoritarianism and infiltration. The solidarity between the people of Hong Kong and Taiwan can be epitomized by a famous design by Taiwan-based graphic designer Kyo Chen, which reads 'Hong Kong' when viewed horizontally and *gayau* in Cantonese (an expression showing encouragement) when turned to the side (figure 1). The royalty-free design was widely used during and after the Anti-ELAB movement in Hong Kong.

Figure 1. Royalty-free design by Kyo Chen to support the Hong Kong Anti-ELAB movement.

The shared geopolitical fate of these two societies are, indeed, neither recent nor accidental. Underneath the grand scale of geopolitics and the looming threat of authoritarian encroachment, there have been reciprocal exchanges of queer culture and politics between Hong Kong and Taiwan since the 1990s. On the one hand, queer Hongkongers view Taiwan as a 'queer utopia' due to Taiwan's vibrant queer cultures and political advancements, especially since Taiwan has hosted the first and largest LGBTQ parade in the Asia Pacific region since 2003. On the other hand, the cultural politics of *tongzhi* – a term initially used under Communist China that refers to 'comrade' – was first appropriated by gay rights activists in Hong Kong in the late 1990s and has been widely adopted by Taiwanese LGBTQ communities since then (Kong et al., 2015).

By the late 1990s and early 2000s, the increasingly frequent cultural and activist exchanges of queer communities have produced mutual imagination of cross-border Sinophone queerness between Hong Kong and Taiwan. Iconic queer films during this period, such as *Butterfly* (dir. Yan Yan Mak) and *Happy Together* (dir. Kar-wai Wong), relied upon cultural translations and diasporic longing to construct the queer narratives of the characters. *Butterly*, a 2004 Hong Kong movie, was based on a short story written by Taiwanese lesbian writer Chen Xue, *The Mark of Butterfly* (2005[1996]). Although Taiwan is not explicitly mentioned in the adapted film, the looming background of the

Tiananmen Square massacre from the PRC is deployed to symbolize repressed female sexuality, inter-referencing post-authoritarian closeted same-sex desire in the Taiwan context from the original story. In other words, the film created a thread of intimate circulation of Sinophone politics between Hong Kong and Taiwan, with Beijing in the blurry yet charged background. Similarly, the iconic 1997 Hong Kong movie *Happy Together*, while mainly focusing on the love story between two diasporic queer men from Hong Kong in Argentina, ends with the main character, Yiu-Fai Lai, stopping by Taipei to look for a queer Taiwanese man he met in Argentina, before returning to Hong Kong. From these two examples, we can see how Taiwan has been a prevalent site in Hong Kong cinema's queer diasporic longing and imagination since the 1990s.

While Taiwan may not yet be a place of 'resolution' from Beijing's encroaching authoritarianism after the Anti-ELAB movement, which was explicitly illustrated in the Hong Kong protest documentary *Revolution of Our Times* (2021, dir. Kiwi Chow), it nonetheless shows the necessity of examining the subtle yet ongoing 'affective economies' (Ahmed 2004) – meaning the continuous circulation and co-construction of subjectivities--in the queer cultural and political landscape between these societies. In the activist sphere, the transformation queer NGOs Chinese Lala Alliance (華人拉拉聯盟) and Rainbow China (彩虹中國) from the initial cross-regional focus to nationally specific concern must also be situated under the increased geopolitical tensions in the region.

We argue that the queer affiliation between Hong Kong and Taiwan since the 1990s, which has been overlooked by traditional frameworks of state-oriented geopolitics, provides valuable insights into the present geopolitical turmoil in the East Asian Sinophone context. Under the shadow of 'Greater China' or 'cultural Chineseness,' the two societies have been largely examined and compared through the continental China, especially in Anglophone scholarship that is eager to identify *queer Chineseness* as the US-centric Western alternative. Furthermore, by tracing the dominant geopolitical paradigms in queer scholarship produced in Hong Kong and Taiwan, we not only can understand how queer politics has always been created through a mutual imagination between these two societies, but also demonstrate the divergent paths that queer studies have taken in these two places due to geopolitical tensions since the 2010s. In this article, we will first provide a theoretical review of what we term the *queer geopolitics*, a framework we use to investigate the operative geopolitical epistemologies that guide the production of queer knowledge and subjectivities in a given place. In the cases of Hong Kong and Taiwan, we apply queer geopolitics to examine the productive tensions of *Chineseness* in the queer archives of these two places. Through the method of conjunctural analysis, we explore how moments of political and economic transitions shape researchers' structural dispositions in knowledge production (Pina-Cabral and Theodossopoulos 2022:458). One the one hand, the cultural circulations of queer Sinophone films and literature resist singular nationalist narratives and chronology (Heinrich 2013); on the other hand, the social movements in Hong Kong and Taiwan in the recent decades challenge the Sinocentric

political economic domination and cultural frameworks. These transformations become unneglectable social contexts in which queer theory is understood and produced in the two places. Second, we will critically review the underlying geopolitical logic in queer scholarship in Hong Kong and Taiwan between the 1990s and 2010s, tracing both its similarities and differences in knowledge production as well as networks of relations across these archival sites in relation to continental China. Lastly, we show how the queer Sinophone affiliation between Hong Kong and Taiwan can serve as a critical intervention into state- and ethno-racial-focused discourses of solidarity that highlights instead the minor-to-minor queer exchanges that have occurred during the increasingly authoritarian and nationalistic turn in global politics.

The Queer Geopolitics between Hong Kong and Taiwan

Since the breakout of pro-democracy movements in Taiwan and Hong Kong that defied Beijing's pressure toward more political and economic integration in 2014, geopolitical tensions between these three Sinophone societies–Taiwan, Hong Kong and the PRC–have increased and created the conditions for more explicitly political commentaries on affective geopolitics in Hong Kong and Taiwan (Ho, 2019; Liu et al., 2022). As a result, an abundance of scholarship focusing on affect, emotion, and feeling and how they have shaped political identity and affiliation has been published in the past few years. Affect, such as nostalgia, anxiety, and anger, has been central in the understanding of how identity is formed in both places, especially the ways in which Hong Kongers and Taiwanese people's negotiation with multiple colonial histories and the rise of the PRC (e.g., Ip 2020; Ching 2019). Notably, Tsung-Yi Michelle Huang (2020), in her book, *Happiness and Distress in China and Hong Kong: The Cultural Politics of Emotion in Developmentalism*, articulates how the tighter cultural and economic exchanges between the PRC and Hong Kong and the hegemonic pressure of the 'China Dream' have created conflicts and negative feelings between mainlanders and Hongkongers since the 2000s. Beijing authorities' 'geo-economic discourse of hope' (Huang 2020: 9) through regional economic integration has pushed Hong Kong farther away from the PRC. In turn, Huang argues that some Hongkongers start to project their feelings of love toward Taiwan through waves of 'Taiwan fever,' which have not only increased the cultural exchanges and positive attitudes but also actual movements from Hong Kong to Taiwan via travel, immigration, and real estate sales since the early 2010s.

This shifting affiliation between Hong Kong and Taiwan is not only a byproduct of changing geopolitics, but rather, a driving force that creates the perceptual field in which we can better understand what constitutes 'politics'. Under the contested national identity in relation to Chineseness, the affects of love and hate are often implicated in the political struggles in these two societies. Po-keung Hui

(2018: 85-87) articulates how the politics of love has been appropriated by the PRC to force a discourse of 'loving the nation is loving Hong Kong' (*aiguoaigang*) to Hongkongers, indicating a form of conditional love of 'Hong Kong' after national identification with the nation of 'China'. National love as a hegemonic force, in turn, galvanized mistrust and even hatred toward the PRC among Hongkongers and solidified into a local nativist politics of anti-China and anti-communism; this sentiment was visible in the Anti-ELAB movement (Hui 2018: 84), which has been a crucial site in which a political Hongkonger identity was formed (Ip 2020).

At the same time, during the height of the Anti-ELAB movement in Hong Kong between June 2019 and January 2020, Taiwanese civil society organized close to a hundred protests and rallies to show solidarity with Hong Kong (Ho 2022). Ming-sho Ho (2022) argues that the mass support from Taiwan for Hong Kong cannot be reduced to the rhetoric of 'international solidarity,' but rather is mobilized through a perception of Taiwanese seeing Hong Kong as a continuation of Taiwan's local struggle of democratization and resistance against pro-China forces, which significantly affected Taiwan's 2020 presidential election even though the Democratic Progressive Party's Tsai Ing-wen continued on for her second term. The circulation of positive affect between Hong Kong and Taiwan is also effectively *queer*. Adam Chen-Dedman (2022) illustrates this Taiwan-Hong Kong affiliation specifically in queer communities where 'Taiwanese *tongzhi* link their sexual-national struggle to Hong Kong which they see as a harbinger of things to come should Taiwan's sovereignty ever be eroded' (10). In other words, the rising concern about Beijing's encroachment over Taiwan's sovereignty has cultivated a sentiment among Taiwanese queers that LGBTQ politics and the struggle for national sovereignty are inseparable. Hence, the support for Taiwan's independence and Hong Kong's self-governance has become a constant demand expressed by Taiwanese queers through flags and slogans in large LGBTQ-related rallies (Chen-Dedman 2022; figure 2).

Figure 2. A participant of Taiwan Pride 2019 holding the slogan, translated as ‘Taiwanese Democracy support *Tongzhi*. Taiwanese *Tongzhi* support Hong Kong’. Courtesy of Lev Nachman.

These broader political shifts have allowed scholars in cultural studies and queer theory to increasingly recognize the significance of geopolitics and affect in understanding the production of intersubjectivity and sexual/gender politics. The invocations of ‘queer affect’ in this article are meant to, first, trace the subtle and minor-to-minor affiliations between Hong Kong and Taiwan that are neither officially recognized by the state nor mapped in the mainstream discussion of international relations, and second, pay attention to the affective exchanges and circulations that are not easily observed via discourse or political economy. Drawing from Ann Cvetkovich’s (2003) *An Archive of Feelings*, the queer affect we are chasing after is the quotidian, minor, and not-yet-solidified emergence of relations that have structured the development and evolution of queer scholarship in Hong Kong and Taiwan. As Cvetkovich addresses, queer subjects’ subcultures and histories are often considered overtly private and thus overlooked in the national sphere. Her definition of ‘archive’ extends beyond the physical storage of histories but encompasses the private and collective memories, lived experiences, and cultural artifacts. In our study, we focus on queer literature and queer scholars’ subjectivities as the archives in which we trace how geopolitical relations have shifted between the two places. Specifically, the questions of Hong Kong and Taiwan are frequently asked under the shadow of the hegemonic national figure of ‘China’ and the segmented sovereignty of the two states. The unstable affective attachments to ‘China,’ sometimes tightly pressured and other times distant, show in the ways that the trajectories of queer knowledge production are constructed. While researchers’ positionality can be hidden and disguised, by following the queer knowledge archives, we may be able to trace the broader patterns of the transformations across time.

The intimate entanglements of the co-constitutive formation of queer Hong Kong and Taiwan have been studied under the frameworks of ‘cultural Chineseness’ (Martin 2015), postcoloniality (Leung 2008), hybridization (Wong 2007), transnationalism (Kong, 2020), Inter-Asia approach (Tang 2022), and more recently, Sinophone studies (Shih 2011; Chiang and Wong 2020). In this article, through (re-)discovering the queer affective affiliation between Hong Kong and Taiwan, we aim to trace how queer scholarship and activism in these two Sinophone locales mutually reference each other and perceive their respective relationship with continental China.

Queers Between the Straits: The Greater China Framework (1980s–2000s)

In ‘Why does queer theory need China?’, Petrus Liu (2010) problematizes the way that Foucauldian queer theory, in its pursuit of a specifically Western construction of the history of sexuality,

requires parallel genealogy of non-Western sexuality. The construct of 'Chinese sexuality' arises as an alternative to Western sexuality that produces the specific cultural and political subjects of *tongzhi* as coexisting with the emergence of homosexuality. The politics of *tongzhi* is certainly not without its contestations as it can quickly fall into another form of cultural essentialism. The parameters in which 'Chinese sexuality' begins and ends are highly politicized questions concerning the territorial and sovereign claims of what 'China' entails. Between the late 1980s and early 2000s, Hong Kong and Taiwanese queer scholars predominately dealt with this problem under the 'Greater China' (*dazhonghua* 大中華) (and 'cultural China' to a lesser extent) framework. Although queer Hong Kong and queer Taiwanese scholarship have distinct interpretations of such 'Chineseness,' they have both see themselves through the prism of 'mainland China' rather than between each other. The discursive spatial construction of Greater China that places the PRC, Hong Kong, Taiwan under this ambiguous umbrella term could be seen as a pragmatic approach adopted by transnational corporations to avoid political sensitivities in the 1980s and 1990s (Huang 2020: 295–296). This expression has since then proliferated in everyday usage as well as in academic research. The academic adaptation of the corporate language of Greater China. which aims to capitalize on the market potential of East Asian Chinese-speaking societies, create a sense of 'unity' among very different locales and in turn produce a geopolitical imagination of shared history and Chineseness.

Another version of the Greater China framework is the geographical imagination of *liangansandi* (兩岸三地), 'three places across the Taiwan Strait.' Such expression was frequently used in a series of academic conferences with a Greater China framing held by The Center for the Study of Sexualities at National Central University in Taiwan, headed by Josephine Ho in the late 2000s and early 2010s. Although the English title of the conference series was 'Cross-Strait Conference on Gender/Sexuality Deployment', its Chinese version uses the term *liangansandi*. The objective of the conference is explicit not only in its spatial but also in structural-material-cultural vision of understanding queer lives under the Greater China framework:

> 'The Chinese mainland is the most important site of gender/sexuality in the Greater China Region and even East Asia in the twenty-first century. . . due to linguistic similarities, geographical proximity, and economic ties, the Chinese mainland will be an important *hinterland* for the development of gender/sexual cultures in Hong Kong, Taiwan. . .' (Center for the Study of Sexualities, 2009. Translations and emphasis by authors.)

In their view, the assumed similarities of Chineseness between these societies were held together by the center (mainland China). Such spatial-material imagination could also be seen as a sign of optimism due to the geo-economic developments in the mid-2000s.

Under the looming framework of Greater China, queer Hong Kong as an emergent subjectivity was produced through an analysis of postcolonial Chineseness that marked its distinction from the 'mainland,' whereas queer Taiwan was largely interpreted through the continuous civil war between the Republic of China (ROC) and the PRC as well as a proxy cold war between the US and the PRC. To put it another way, despite little interaction with mainland Chinese queers prior to the 2000s, the predominant analytics of queer Hong Kong and Taiwan scholarship operated under different forms of attachment to a 'Greater China.'

With the increasing institutionalization of queer studies in the US around the same time, Greater China scholarship has become the most visible representation of queer Hong Kong and Taiwan as well as (still) the most cited work in the Anglophone academy (Chou 2001; Ho 2008; see also Liu 2015). In this section, we examine different interpretations of Chineseness in the queer Hong Kong and queer Taiwanese archives. We argue that for Hong Kong scholarship, Chineseness points toward enactment and embodiment of postcoloniality, a departure from British colonial rule; and for Taiwanese scholarship, Chineseness indicates an ongoing civil war conflict and attachment between 'two Chinas.' Interestingly, although queer Hong Kong and queer Taiwanese scholarship have distinct interpretations of such Chineseness, they both see themselves through comparison with and projection onto continental China, rather than between each other.

Hong Kong's Postcolonial Chineseness

Hong Kong under British rule has always been taken for granted as a 'Chinese' society. Social scientists Siu-Kai Lau and Hsin-Chi Kuan (1988) argued that the 'Hong Kong Chinese' are a distinctive (ethnic) group of Chinese different to those in the PRC. They argued that, from the late 1960s onwards, the Hong Kong Chinese have embarked on divergent paths of modernization, resulting in dynamic interactions between 'traditional Chinese culture' and the 'cultural features' of Hong Kong. Their 1985 survey reported that more than half of their respondents preferred to identify with the identity 'Hong Kong Chinese' when asked to choose between this option and 'Chinese' (2). Subsequent discussion on Hong Kong identity has primarily centered on Hong Kong's relationship with the PRC, that is, the struggle between being 'a part of China' and 'apart from China' (Mathews 1997).

The distinctive cultural features of Hong Kong are partially a by-product of British colonial governance. The non-interventionalist laissez-faire policy during British rule, along with a benevolent welfare policy, created a population that preferred stability with a certain degree of tolerance towards social conflict (Lau and Kuan 1988:189). The segregation between ethnic Chinese and (white) Europeans has resulted in the preservation of various 'ancient' Chinese traditions that vanished or were prohibited in continental China after the establishment of the PRC. As a result, Chineseness has been emphasized in queer scholarship produced by Hong Kong scholars. The 'Chinese family' is often

rendered through the patriarchal family structure. For example, the manifesto of the first Chinese *Tongzhi* Conference (華人同志交流大會) in Hong Kong (1996) emphasized that:

> 'Certain characteristics of confrontational politics, such as 'coming out,' mass protests, and parades may not be the best way of achieving *tongzhi* liberation in the family-centered, community-oriented Chinese societies, which stress the importance of social harmony. In formulating the *tongzhi* movement strategy, we should take the specific socio-economic and cultural environment of each society into consideration.' (Utopia-Asia, 2024)

Although the Chinese name of the conference literally means 'ethnic Chinese *Tongzhi* Exchange Conference,' the English title evokes the (unintended) homogeneity of Chineseness. The manifesto stresses the uniqueness of Chinese values and the need to decolonize Western-centric queer activism strategies; specifically, the Chinese family is identified as the common denominator. However, such emphasis on the 'Chinese family' risks essentializing Chineseness, as configurations of the (patriarchal) family in Hong Kong are the result of complex political and material-structural processes since the post-war colonial era (Lau 1981, Kong 2018).

The oppressive nature of the Chinese family is emphasized in queer scholarship in the 1990s and early 2000s (Ho 1995, Chou 2001). Chou's work (2001) exemplifies the tendency of studying the lives of Hong Kong queers as a stand-in for theorizing some grand notion of 'Chinese homosexuality,' as most of Chou's interviews were conducted with gays and lesbians in Hong Kong. Subsequent scholars are more attentive to the heterogeneity of Chineseness. For example, Kong (2010: 205–6) underscores the pluralities of Chinese under transnational exchanges. Hence, the definition of Chineseness is expanded and given more diverse manifestations in cross-border exchanges. Likewise, Yau Ching uses the phrase 'different Chinese' to pose a new challenge to Euro-North American queer scholarship (2010: 5–6).

Taiwan's Cold War Chineseness

Queer Hong Kong scholarship on postcolonial Chineseness was circulated in Taiwan, mainly in the cultural form of the 'Chinese family' and its ramifications on the 'coming out' experiences of Taiwanese gays and lesbians (e.g., Wang et al., 2009). Chineseness is partly understood as the dominant cultural paradigm under Confucian influences in a cross-cultural comparative framework where Taiwan is often lumped together with other 'Confucian societies' such as the PRC, Hong Kong, and Singapore, all of which are assumed to have similar sexual practices and norms (Liu 2022). Critical of the normative idealization of the 'Chinese family,' Fran Martin (2015) acknowledges the instability of Chineseness and argues for its inherent 'multiple, contradictory and fragmented' qualities produced via disjunctive transnational regimes (35). Other scholars, such as Hans Tao-Ming Huang (2011) interprets Confucian cultural hegemony as rooted in the KMT (*Koumingtan*) administered paternalistic discourse

of family values since the Cold War in an attempt to construct a 'normative national heterosexuality' in Taiwan (24).

The argument on Taiwan's sexual modernity as created through the Cold War split of 'Republic of China' versus 'The People's Republic of China' dominated queer archives between 1990s and 2000s. The Center for the Study of Sexualities (CSS) at National Central University, famously known as the 'avant-garde' center of queer theory in Taiwan, along with leftist intellectual figures such as Kuan-Hsin Chen, began to fashion the bourgeoning field of queer studies in Taiwan as a critical position against the rise of Taiwanese nationalism. They specifically framed the waves of pro-independence and democratization movements that are generally understood as *bentuhua* (localization, or Taiwanese nativism) forces in the 1980s and 1990s as influenced by postwar US cultural imperialism pushing for national and sexual modernization (Ho et al., 2005). Chineseness, to this milieu, was not yet specifically named as an object of study or an epistemological paradigm, but was understood as a form of anti-Western internationalism that provided alternative gender and sexual paradigms beyond Eurocentric liberal individualism.

Later in his book, *Queer Marxism in Two Chinas* (2015), Petrus Liu articulates this anti-nationalist impulse of the CSS queer milieu, which consisted mostly of *waishengren* (originally from continental China) intellectuals, as a form of 'queer Chinese Marxism' —not Taiwanese, but Chinese— that could bridge over the Cold War divide toward deimperial emancipation. Similar to the CSS intellectual circle, Liu (2012) is critical of the deployment of 'human rights' by Taiwanese LGBTQ advocacy groups because he believes that such framings can only result in a nativist differentiation between Taiwan and China that bolsters a Taiwanese independent project led by the Democratic Progressive Party rather than a broader vision of cross-strait queer Marxism. Such argument, while ostensibly ideal, situates Taiwanese LGBTQ agency exclusively within a Cold War dichotomous division in relation to the PRC, and worse, as a form of anti-China Sinophobia. It refuses to value progressive elements in the pursuit of Taiwanese sovereignty in itself, and undermines the anti-KMT authoritarian movements for Taiwanese democratization which gave rise to LGBTQ consciousness since the 1980s (Chen-Dedman 2022). The queer impulse to reject any expression of nationalism in this case, ironically bolsters another imagined nationalism under the familiar discourse of Greater China or Chineseness.

The queer archives between the 1980s and 2000s in Hong Kong and Taiwan, hence, prioritize a gaze toward continental China rather than locally or between other marginal Sinophone sites, despite the fact that the circulations of *tongzhi* discourses were only possible due to the queer affiliations between Hong Kong and Taiwan. The lack of interreference between the two sites is not due to an absence of exchanges; in fact, queer Taiwanese desired Hong Kong as a more developed and sophisticated form of cosmopolitan Chinese modernity, while queer Hongkongers saw Taiwan as a place where queer rights were tightly connected to democracy. However, these gazes represented more about an idealized form of Chineseness—a 'modern Chinese society' and a 'democratic Chinese

society'—rather than about Hong Kong or Taiwanese societies themselves. The first wave of queer scholars in Taiwan collectively imagined a hope for what China—a country on the edge of opening up and liberalization—could be. The ambiguities of Chineseness allows it to circulate and get appropriated as a form of imagined internationalism against the West. However, this line of reasoning consolidates a bifurcated worldview of the East versus the West under Cold War influences. Furthermore, under the geopolitics of an increasingly aggressive PRC regime that seeks to monopolize the meaning of Chineseness since the late 2000s, it has become apparent that the ambiguity of Chineseness is rendered less and less intellectually productive in capturing the diversity of hybridized queer lives in Hong Kong and Taiwan.

Albeit pursued in light of the noble, reflexive quest of decolonizing and de-Westernizing knowledge, the emphasis on Chineseness unfortunately reifies the terms that it seeks to undermine (Heinrich 2013:3). In order to generate productive dialogues to apprehend the lived experiences of queerness, a new milieu of queer scholarship in Hong Kong and Taiwan since the mid-2000s has shifted away from continental China as the imagined singular 'center' of reference. The 'Queer Asia' paradigm (e.g., Martin et al. 2008; Chiang and Wong 2017) and Queer Sinophone Studies (e.g., Chiang and Heinrich 2013; Chiang and Wong 2020) both offered possible alternatives, as we will discuss in the next section.

Queer Asia and the Transnational Turn (mid-2000s–2010s)

At first, the emergent paradigm of 'Queer Asia' in the mid-2000s helped challenge both the Eurocentrism and the white colonial gaze of queer theory vis-a-vis 'Asia' (Chiang and Wong 2017). However, the framework conceptualizes 'Asia' as an anti-imperialist potential against the so-called 'West' (Chen, 2010), yet did not necessarily prioritize the understanding of the differences and heterogeneity within Asian societies. In other words, 'Queer Asian Studies' might be perceived as a regional descriptor and injunction to include queer scholarship from 'Asia' and has become an umbrella term for relating analytical frameworks including Inter-Asia cultural studies. We argue that Queer Asia could stand as a widely applicable framework without intense internal controversies between the 2000s and early 2010s, because the PRC was relatively preoccupied with its own economic growth and sought international recognition as an equal partner under global capitalism. The PRC mainly sought economic measures to incorporate Hong Kong and Taiwan t further into its reach. For instance, the Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement between PRC and Hong Kong since 2003 greatly increased the flows of capital, services, and people between these two places. The rhetoric of 'China-Hong Kong Integration' (*zhonggangronghe*) was repeatedly used by the PRC and Hong Kong government to foster Hong Kong's integration into the PRC, not just economically but also politically and culturally. Such advocation of resinicization was met with widespread concern that the more liberal, democratic Hong

Kong was forced to integrate with an authoritarian regime (Lien 2014). Similarly, in Taiwan, Ma Ying-jeou's KMT administration rolled out policies that allowed Taiwan to further integrate with the PRC since 2008, which included allowing PRC citizens and students to come to Taiwan more freely. Arguably, this was a 'honeymoon' period between Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the PRC in which the PRC was eager to open up to the world rather than change the existing international order for its political agenda. Many Hongkongers and Taiwanese also saw economic integration as a positive opportunity rather than political coercion. However, the two cases of queer NGOs, Chinese Lala Alliance and Rainbow China, mobilized under the broader umbrella of (cultural) Chineseness that are illustrated below indicate how 'multiple Chineseness' as a framework implied by Queer Asia is insufficient to capture the internal tensions accumulating during this period and the need for an intervention of affective geopolitics to fully understand the changing queer politics.

The once active queer network that mobilized under the Greater China framework, the Chinese Lala Alliance (CLA), went dormant by the late 2010s. Established in 2008 in Shanghai, the CLA mobilized Sinophone queer women from the PRC, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the US to conduct in-person and online workshops, camps, film screenings, and organizational trainings to forge links across groups under both a '*lala*' identity and a '*huaren*' (ethnically Chinese) identity. The maturation of various social networking sites online in the early 2010s facilitated cross-strait and multi-sited exchanges. Most importantly, it was possible to imagine a civil society outside of state and national boundaries (Damm 2018). As a participant in the network, Author A witnessed how the CLA, specifically, insisted on a democratic process of leadership by the organizing board and having representatives from each region. However, the increasingly public campaign for same-sex marriage in Taiwan since the mid-2010s not only increased Taiwan's international visibility as a democratic state but also turned it further away from a cultural and political association with China. Taiwan's same-sex marriage movement, given its contrasting effects with increasing authoritarian control across the strait under Xi Jinping and the criticism it has drawn from queer Taiwanese scholars operating under the Greater China framework, have made a 'Chinese' alliance within transnational queer circles more and more uncomfortable.

Parallelly, in Hong Kong, during the 'honeymoon' period with China in the 2000s and early 2010s, individual members of the LGBTQ community and queer NGOs such as PFLAG China and university LGBT student societies were usually visible as participants in Hong Kong Pride Parades. Yet, in a similar way where geopolitics led to increasingly irreconcilable differences within the CLA, queer exchanges between Hong Kong and China have become increasingly difficult. The cross-border queer activism of Hong Kong activist Kenneth Cheung exemplifies how shifting Hong Kong-PRC geopolitics impacts queer activism in Sinophone societies. Cheung is a publicly out and HIV-positive queer activist who has been organizing since the late 1990s. He held leadership positions in civil society

organizations such as the Rainbow of Hong Kong and League of Social Democrats. Due to the frustration with resistance to bringing the queer movement into the pan-democratic movement, Cheung faded out in social activism in Hong Kong and shifted his focus to queer activism in the PRC. He founded Rainbow China in 2009 and appearing on PRC reality TV, gathering hundreds of millions followers on Weibo, PRC social media. He believed that his public education campaigns contributed to the broader queer movement in China (Lam 2018). However, with tightening controls in the PRC, Cheung has since faced more censorship and surveillance. In early 2019, he was detained in China for violating the Law on the Management of Foreign NGOs' Activities within Mainland China, a controversial law passed in 2016 under Xi's leadership. Since then, Cheung was banned from entering China, and Rainbow China was shut down. Cheung's queer activism between Hong Kong and China illustrates the difficult situation faced by Sinophone queer activists who believe in ethnic Chinese unity and cross-border coalitional queer politics.

Queer Sinophone Studies: Seeing China Differently (post-2014 to the present)

The two cases of queer activism during this rapidly shifting time illustrate how the 'honeymoon period' of seemingly cross-strait peace was demystified quickly. In 2012, Taiwanese student activists started to campaign against the pro-PRC media monopoly over a domestic cable television merger (Ho 2022). The anti-media monopoly movement shed light on how business transactions with the PRC were never neutral but could potentially damage Taiwan's democratic system and press freedom. Concurrently, student activists in Hong Kong were resisting the implementation of the 'brainwashing' Moral and National Education, which curriculum mostly glorified the Chinese Communist Party. Amidst these controversies, the ambition of the PRC to not only extend its market but also its political control over Hong Kong and Taiwan became more apparent. By 2014, the contradictions reached full-scale explosion and led to the Sunflower Movement in Taiwan, a mass movement against the Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement, and later the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong.

Since the early 2010s onwards, we see the emergence of queer scholarship that turn to Inter-Asia and queer Sinophone studies. We argue that this body of scholarship, by focusing on the structural-material-affective conjuncture between queers in Hong Kong and Taiwan, can better highlight the significance of the geopolitics of affects in shaping these nuanced, bottom-up, grassroot experiences and feelings. Denise Tang (2020), in her transnational ethnographic study of older lesbians in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore, drew explicitly from Inter-Asia cultural studies scholarship to understand the cultural flows and connected histories across Asia; importantly, Tang does this without resorting to Chineseness as her explanatory framework. In the editorial introduction of the *Sexualities* special issue 'Queer Asias: Genders and sexualities across borders and boundaries,' Ho and Blackwood (2022:5) use

the term ‘Queer Asias’ to conceptualize the multi-directional crossings, which entails both the acts of crossing over and crossing back of queer bodies, spaces, and social movements, with an emphasis on the circulation of queer theories, categories, and politics among Hong Kong, Taiwan, Indonesia, the Philippines and beyond.

Parallel to sociological and anthropological research that adopts the Inter-Asia and plural Queer Asias paradigm, a new body of ‘Queer Sinophone studies’ scholarship from primarily history, literature, and film studies has also emerged in recent years. The framework of Queer Sinophone studies (Chiang and Heinrich 2013, Chiang and Wong 2020) extends the Sinophone studies framework pioneered by literature scholar Shu-Mei Shih (2011, 2013). Shih conceptualized Sinophone studies as the study of ‘the margins of China and Chineseness’ to denaturalize these terms. Sinophone culture is therefore transnational in formation and local in practice and articulation (Shih 2013). Such radical approach transcends the ‘China and the West’ binary and sidesteps the trap of reifying those terms while critiquing them (Heinrich 2013:36). The ‘Queer Sinophone’ framework emphasizes anti-normative transnational practices that recognize the mutually generative and denaturalizing processes that occur between the contested, intersectional concepts of ‘Chineseness’ and ‘queerness’ (Chiang 2013:36). Nonetheless, there are two major critiques against queer Sinophone studies scholarship: methodological and conceptual. The first criticism follows that given her background in literary studies, Shih, the advocate of Sinophone studies, has confined the applicability of Sinophone studies (and thus queer Sinophone studies) to representation and deconstruction; hence, the framework yields little in terms of knowledge production on the lived experiences of queer Sinophone subjects in the social sciences. However, this is hardly the case as the edited volume *Keywords in Queer Sinophone Studies* (Chiang and Wong 2020) seeks interdisciplinary synergies by expanding queer Sinophone studies into empirical methodologies of the social sciences. Hence, there is the potential for queer Sinophone studies to capacitate more empirical and transdisciplinary approaches to understanding the multi-faceted dimensions of queerness in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and other Sinophone peripheries. The second criticism mostly comes from researchers using the framework of ‘Greater China’ (Wang and Shih 2017). These scholars criticize the Sinophone studies framework for ‘excluding China’, ‘xenophobic’and adopting Cold War narratives (Wang 2018; Shi 2021). There seems to be an underlying assumption that any ‘productive’ dialogues can only be achieved by ‘including’ China. As Wong (2018) eloquently argued, the question is less about whether Sinophone studies should include or exclude China (see also: Wang 2018), but more about *how* to engage with or ‘include’ China. Hence, the critique of queer Sinophone studies for deliberately ‘not including China’ is largely misplaced.

The geopolitical lens is also helpful in examining the application of US-centric queer critiques and why the debate of whether China is included in the Sinophone framework is often misplaced, such as those related to the concept of homonationalism (Liu 2021). There has been a tendency to see our

arguments of (re)discovering the geopolitics of queer affect between Hong Kong and Taiwan as 'right-wing nativism' and their assertions of national identity vis-a-vis queer politics as equivalent to American nationalism and the 'anti-China sentiments' as related to the US state-sponsored Islamophobia. However, such equivalences overlook the geopolitical tension of the region in a realist sense and the material-structural reality of the more powerful PRC's military threat and aggression towards Taiwan, Hong Kong, and neighboring countries. The wholesale application of the homonationalism critique in Sinophone societies also risks flattening geopolitical comparisons based on the cultural dichotomy of West (the US) vs. East (China), a dichotomy which positions Taiwan as caught between two great powers without its own agency or history (Liu and Zhang 2022). Hence, the Sinophone critique, is not about excluding China but rather *discussing China differently*, as a geopolitical concern, a power center in the region, a culturally colonial force, and a comparative site.

Considering that scholarship adopting the Greater China framework—be it called multiple or transnational Chineseness—aims to debunk a unitary Chineseness and that queer Sinophone scholarship seeks to open up the signifier of Chineseness to denaturalize China, both bodies of scholarship seem to share something in common—to problematize Chineseness. The question is whether we need to keep using the concept of Chineseness to continue critical dialogues on queer lives in Sinophone societies. While in the Chinese language, the expression of Chinese nationals (PRC citizens, *zhongguoren*) and ethnic Chinese (*huaren*) can be clearly distinguished, in English, they are conflated under the singular, colonial, racialized term Chinese (Shih 2010: 31–36). Geopolitically, Chineseness does not serve as a politically, ethnically, or nationally neutral term as it may have been alleged to be prior to the 2010s. For the Greater China scholars, Chineseness itself represents forms of diversity, while for Sinophone scholars, Chineseness is hegemonic for flattening other expressions of diversity. Hence, the distinction between the articulation of multiple Chineseness and the Sinophone critique is often the lack of recognition of a hegemonic center of Chineseness as rooted in the PRC's articulation of Chinese ethno-nationalism. Furthermore, the Greater China framework tends to see continental China as the 'origin' or 'authentic form' of Chineseness, whereas Sinophone Studies emphasizes the agency of and expressions from the margins that resist the hegemonic center. Hence, Sinophone studies can help queer scholars better understand the operations of power at the margins of the Chinese empire, which can free us from the 'prison' of Chineseness, especially when one needs to navigate between multiethnic and multicultural spaces where Chineseness is no longer the hegemonic norm (Ang 2001:50). Our proposition of a geopolitical perspective on queer affects, hence emphasizes the need to go beyond Greater China and engage with broader frames of reference and minor-to-minor transnational synergies by staying attuned to the power differentials and geopolitics between Sinophone societies. Instead of tracing genealogies or origins, a geopolitical approach focuses on the networked and relational processes of queer articulation and circulation.

	1980s-2000s	2000s-mid 2010s	Post 2014-Present
Political discourse	Greater China or *liangansandi*	Economic integration, usually forceful or coerced with incentives	Political splits; resistance against China's expansionism
Chineseness in intellectual discourse	Hong Kong: Ethnic Chineseness and hybridity	Hong Kong: Multiple Chineseness; contested local identity under resinicization	Hong Kong: Heightened and politicized tensions between localism and resinicization
	Taiwan: Cultural Chineseness as a form of anti-Western imperialism	Taiwan: An imagined alternative; transnational Chineseness	Taiwan: Taiwanese nationalism and identity towards desinicization
Queer framework	***Postcolonial critique***	***The transnational turn***	***The decolonial turn***
	Hong Kong: Challenging Western-centric queer theory by focusing on the Chinese family	Hong Kong: Queer hybridity; neoliberal cultural citizenship	Continuous engagements with the Queer Asia critique; the emerging framework of queer Sinophone studies
	Taiwan: Cold War divide between ROC and PRC under Inter-Asia approach	Taiwan: Homonational Taiwan, neoliberal influences on sex/gender politics	
Affective attachment	Toward the distant, imagined "China"	Attention to Intra-Asia differences, including China as one of the equally comparable sites, instead of the "root"	Hong Kong-Taiwan as inter-referencing sites; resisting China as a regional and global hegemonic power

Table 1. Archive of queer scholarship between Hong Kong and Taiwan (1980s–the present)

Conclusions: Different Forms of Attachments under Shifting Geopolitics

Our proposition of the geopolitics of queer affects is a response to changes in queer scholarly networks and political concerns and how these changes shape the shift in queer circulation and articulation. By examining the underlying epistemologies that guide the production of queer knowledge in Hong Kong and Taiwan, we argue that the queer geopolitics is a *network of relations*–including those

that are hegemonic, marginalized, and underground. Researchers' choice of theoretical language and epistemological framework reflects the temporal-structural-conjunctural positions in which they are embedded. The 'Greater China' archive between the 1980s and 2000s was useful in challenging Western-centric knowledge on gender and sexuality. It should be noted that the 'Greater China' framework has not completely faded away but is somehow revitalized within the transnational turn nowadays. For example, Kong (2023) compares the young gay '*tongzhi* generation' in urban China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan under a framework of transnational queer sociology. Despite the fact that the LGBTQ communities in these three societies are shaped by different colonial histories, political movements, and economic developments, as well as ethnic and class tensions, the parallel comparisons render Chineseness an ambiguous yet hegemonic concept that is most visibly defined by its Han-centrism and PRC nationalism.

Our archive of queer affect between Taiwan and Hong Kong, compiled alongside changing geopolitical concerns throughout the past three decades, calls for a method of analysis beyond the fixation on hegemonic Chineseness (be it homogenous or plural). Our consideration of geopolitics implies that it would be impossible *not* to include China; instead, the focus on geopolitics helps us to move away from the one-way center-peripheral imagination of identity by relying on (continental) China as the center, and toward different directionalities and forms of attachments to and away from China. By considering geopolitics in the formation of queer knowledge and identities more broadly, we have come to see a paradigmatic shift in approaching queerness in Sinophone societies. Hong Kong and Taiwan will not be able to liberate themselves by looking at an imagined China as a utopian reference point; instead, their liberation will depend on how they relate with each other as allies positioned on the margins of both Chinese empire and Western imperial domination. Such affiliation is witnessed among the current generations of queer academics and activists as well as among more dispersed, grassroots, and informal exchanges.

Despite the positional differences we see from the queer archives, our aim is not about claiming an origin of queer politics or 'authentic' representations in the region. Rather, by considering the longstanding undercurrents of queer affective affiliation between Hong Kong and Taiwan across time, we call for a reconsideration of the mutual referencing between these two Sinophone societies. Even though ethnic Han people are the majority populations in Hong Kong and Taiwan, the experiences and identities of these places are not a mere variation of China/Chineseness but contested and diverse. We hope that our intervention via affect, geopolitics, and Sinophone critiques will contribute to discussions in diasporic studies by accentuating the role of careful, reflective, and contextual consideration of geopolitics and the role they play in shaping community, connections, and emotions. In this way, we can better understand resistances and identity formation in these places without returning to the notion of Chineseness and focusing on minor-to-minor connections (Lionnet and Shih 2005). The geopolitical

and affective alliance between Hong Kong and Taiwan is at best understood as a response to the intensifying material-structural threats posed by the PRC to suppress autonomy and sovereignty in these societies. Such position does not ignore the internal schisms of local queer communities and movements, but instead reorients our focus to the broader structural-geopolitical space in which these communities exist and which have been overlooked by critical scholars.

Our theorization of the geopolitics of queer archives is not only confined to the understanding of queer scholarship in Hong Kong and Taiwan against the contested Chineseness, but also yields potential applicability and contributions to other regions in the world where minor-to-minor queer affiliation and circulation of queer knowledge under the constellation of a regional hegemonic center and geopolitical tensions, such as the role of India and Anglophone academia in the production of queer knowledge in South Asia (Arondekar 2023). By examining the significance of geopolitics in shaping queer knowledge production and queer activists' exchanges, we argue that queer attachments between Hong Kong and Taiwan should be understood as a product of geopolitics and the quest for democracy and local identities instead of being reduced to forms of xenophobia (Chong and Pan 2022). The unreflective recycling of postcolonial and poststructuralist critique to undermine Hongkongers' and Taiwanese resistance to the PRC as xenophobic risk misplacing and masking the obscure circuits of colonialities as well as reproducing US-centrism in analyzing global politics (Law 2009: 177; Chong and Pan 2022). Similar to the call to *provincialize* queer theory and recognize the field's limit beyond the Anglo-American contexts (Eng and Puar 2020; Rao 2020), one should also note the continually shifting geopolitics of queer affect. As queer activism becomes increasingly difficult in Sinophone societies due to the recent tightening of control in the PRC (Yiu 2021), queer scholars and activists will need to stay attuned to the development of not only sexual politics but also geopolitics. In this way, we can forge a utopian queer future that is critical of authoritarian oppression, respectful of local resistance, and unhampered by differences.

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Wen Liu is assistant research fellow at the Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica, Taiwan. She received her Ph.D. in Critical Social Psychology from the Graduate Center, City University of New York. Informed by affect theory, critical race studies, and queer theory, her work investigates diasporic Asian American subjectivities and their geopolitical alignments in times of US–China interimperial rivalry.

Eva Cheuk-Yin Li is Lecturer (Assistant Professor) in Media and Cultural Studies at Lancaster University, UK. She holds a Ph.D. in Gender, Media, and Culture (King's College London). Her research focuses on queer fandom and audience participation, gender nonconformity, and Hong Kong diaspora media. She has recently co-edited special issues, "Androgynous bodies and cultures in Asia" in *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* (2021) and "Encounters with Western media theory" in *Media, Culture, Society* (2023).