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Oral Histories of Older Gay Men in Hong Kong

Unspoken but Unforgotten

Travis S. K. Kong

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Introduction*

To be gay . . . is not to identify with the psychological traits and the visible masks of the homosexual, but to try to define and develop a way of life.

—Michel Foucault, 'Friendship as a Way of Life', 1996

There are many defining moments of *tongzhi*¹ history in Hong Kong: the criminalization of 'buggery' in 1842 when the British took over Hong Kong; the MacLennan incident in 1980, which triggered the subsequent ten years of public and legal debate over whether male homosexual conduct should be decriminalized; the arrival of AIDS in 1984 and its alleged association with gay men; the decriminalization of male homosexual conduct in 1991; the mushrooming of *tongzhi* organizations and the emergence of a substantial *tongzhi* consumption infrastructure, including bars, clubs, saunas, massage parlours, cafes, and bookshops beginning in the 1990s; the equalization of the age of consent from 21 to 16 between homosexuals and heterosexuals in 2005; the International Day against Homophobia (IDAHO) marches since 2005; pride parades since 2008, the inclusion of same-sex partners in a domestic violence ordinance in 2009; the public 'coming out' of pop stars Anthony Wong Yiu-ming and Denise Ho

* Some of the material in this introduction appeared in an earlier version in a different form as Kong (2012) and Kong, Lau, and Li (2015).

1. *Tong* (meaning 'same') and *zhi* (meaning 'ideal' or 'aspiration') exist in classical Chinese literature but the combination of the two words *tongzhi* was first used in 1911 to signify a revolutionary and political subjectivity "comrade" by Sun Yixian (or Sun Yat-sen), father of the modern Chinese nation, who encouraged Chinese people to fight against the Qing imperialist regime in the early twentieth century. His saying, 'the revolution has not been successful; comrades should fight for it until the end', became a famous slogan for the revolution in both the Republican and People's Republic of China eras. After the First Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, held in 1989, was referred to as the Tongzhi Film Festival by local gay writer Edward Lam, *tongzhi* suddenly became an umbrella term for people with non-normative genders and sexualities and a synonym for LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and queer). The queer appropriation of the term became very popular in both the LGBTQ and straight communities in Hong Kong and then in Taiwan, and finally in the LGBTQ community in China. Its popularity may be due to its erasure of sexual connotation, unlike the clinical term 'homosexual' or the Western term 'gay', and its affirmation of a 'positive' rather than 'negative' (e.g., 'queer') identity (Leung 2008, 1–6; Kong 2011, 14–15; Bao 2018, 65–91; Kong, Lau and Hui 2019).

Wan-see, also known as HOCC, as well as legislative council member Raymond Chan Chi-chuen, in 2012; and Pink Dot Hong Kong since 2014, with the latest one in 2017 reported by the organizers to have attracted 11,000 people—straight and *tongzhi*—to celebrate inclusiveness, diversity, and the freedom to love.

Parallel with this social-historical transformation of homosexuality is the study of homosexuality, which started in the late 1980s but has focused overwhelmingly on post-war (i.e., second Sino-Japanese War [1937–1945]) *tongzhi* generations in Hong Kong. These studies have documented how *tongzhi* realize their same-sex desires; struggle with their sexual identity and thus their coming out stories; seek same-sex encounters; form intimate relationships; live in the stratified *tongzhi* worlds; challenge heterosexist assumptions in virtually all social institutions; fight for equality; and advocate activism and *tongzhi* movements (e.g., Ho 1997; Chou 2000; Ho and Tsang 2000, 2004, 2007; Kong 2002, 2004, 2005, 2011; Wong 2004, 2007; Yau 2005, 2006, 2010; Leung 2008; Tang 2011).

What is missing from this oversimplified history and the studies of homosexuality is the history of the early generations who were born before the 1950s and how they live their present lives. We know very little about the past of older *tongzhi*, from their problems of identity formation and issues with coming out to their struggles in creating a social and sexual space for community networking during the era when homosexuality was still a crime. We also know nothing about their present lives, and what problems they face in their private and social lives, both in the straight and the *tongzhi* worlds.

International research also shows that there is an acute research gap in our understanding of older gay men and lesbians (as well as other sexual minorities). They are under-researched in academic scholarship, under-represented in mainstream and queer popular cultures, invisible in social policy and social services, and marginalized even within the LGBTQ community. In short, they are an ‘unseen minority’ (Berger 1982) or ‘a minority within a minority’ (Jones and Pugh 2005). While the issue of sexuality is under-researched in the sociology of ageing, the issues of age and generation have also been relatively neglected in the sociology of sexuality (Plummer 2010). Only recently has research recognized the intersections between the two, attempting to capture the complexity and diversity of how ageing is experienced and negotiated (e.g., Heaphy, Yip, and Thompson 2004; Heaphy 2007; Cronin and King 2010; Cruz 2011; Suen 2015).

Older gay men and lesbians definitely constitute a missing piece of the puzzle of Chinese *tongzhi* history and also a marginalized area in ageing studies, sexuality studies, and social history studies in Hong Kong. As stated before, local (homo-)sexuality studies focus overwhelmingly on gay men (and lesbians) born in the 1950s or after. This is also the case in local *tongzhi* stories and novels (e.g., Chou, Mak, and Kong 1995; Chou 1996; Mak and King 2000; Kam 2001; Yip 2003, 2004). Moreover, local ageing studies assume their older participants to be heterosexual, failing to consider the specific experiences of older gay men

(e.g., Yip, Chi, Chiu, Kwan, Conwell, and Cane 2003; Chou, Chow and Chi 2004; Cheng and Chan 2006; Yeung and Fung 2007; Phillips, Siu, Yeh, and Cheng 2008). Finally, the stories of older gay men are also absent from the social history of Hong Kong, which focuses overwhelmingly on heterosexual men and women in discussions of the emergence of an indigenous Hong Kong identity (e.g., Pun and Yee 2003; Mathews, Ma, and Lui 2008; Lui, Ng, and Ma 2011).

Oral Histories of Older Gay Men in Hong Kong aims to fill the gap by using an oral history approach to document and examine the lives of older gay men who were born before the 1950s, capturing how the complexity—the flux, ambiguity, and contradiction—of their lives is interwoven with Hong Kong’s history. It seeks to understand how:

- (1) they narrate and retell their past, especially how they managed same sex desires when they were young in the period when male homosexuality was defined and treated as a medical, legal, and moral aberration; how they realized their gayness; how they hung out, and where they went for social and sexual liaisons; how they related to the underground gay subculture or ‘scene’; how they formed intimate relationships or families; how those who got married managed their double lives; and how they managed their closeted life at work.
- (2) their earlier life experiences may inform their present life of being gay, male, and older, and especially how they negotiate ageing and sexuality: how they handle the ageing process and possible internalized homophobia; how they deal with their family, including parents, siblings, wives, children, and grandchildren (if any); how they cope with social isolation and ageism from the straight and the *tongzhi* worlds; and how they survive despite limited access to *tongzhi*-friendly health care and other social services.

Since 2010, I have been interviewing gay men aged 60 or above who have been living in Hong Kong for at least 30 years of their lives. Since 2012, I have held regular monthly *yum cha* (‘drinking tea’) gatherings at a local restaurant, followed by visits to a volunteer’s home for a focus group discussion loosely on four themes: work, family, social services, and the gay community. These interviewees were mainly recruited through *tongzhi* and AIDS non-governmental organizations (NGO) using the snowball technique. As of 2015, I had formally interviewed fifteen such men. They were aged from 63 to 89. Eleven were born into the working class whilst four were from middle-class families. Seven had primary education, four had secondary education, and four had university education. All are Chinese except two, who are British and came to Hong Kong in the late 1970s and early 1980s respectively. All interviewees were born before the 1950s except one, who was born in 1952 but is over 60 years of age. Thirteen of these men’s stories are presented in this book. Two were excluded as their

deteriorating health precluded obtaining a complete portrait of their life histories. Consent was sought before recording. All names are pseudonyms and minor alterations to the biographies of the interviewees have been made for anonymity and confidentiality. The only exception is Nigel Collett, who preferred to use his real name. No alterations to his biographic details have been made.

Older Gay Men and Hong Kong *Tongzhi* History

First tongzhi generation, colonial Hong Kong and familial heteronormativity

It is evident that traditional Chinese society had a strong homosocial culture (Louie 2003), which tolerated men who had same-sex desires (Van Gulik 1961, 62–63; Ruan and Tsai 1987; Hinsch 1990; Samshasha 1997) and even men who possessed feminine beauty (Song 2004). The tales of *yutao* ('the peach remainder', pinyin), *duanxiu* ('the cut sleeve', pinyin), and Lord Long Yang are commonly cited euphemisms among the literati for male homosexuality in Chinese history. The social morality of male sexuality primarily concerned conformity to power hierarchies, within which men had to fulfil social expectations, including marriage and family, and secondarily the containment of excessive sexuality, as manifested in masturbation, prostitution, and so on (Louie 2003, 6–7). Although male same-sex relations were not seen as a threat to masculinity, they were always in a marginal position, subsumed under the Confucian patriarchal family and the institution of marriage. In other words, heteronormativity in ancient China, with the effect of marginalizing male same-sex relations, was not so much based around exclusive sexual orientation (same-sex desire) or sexual identity (the homosexual), but around the *normalcy* of being a son who must fulfil familial roles and social expectations.

Heteronormativity changed its form when Hong Kong became a British colony (1842–1997). Consistent with the colonial government's overarching ideology of 'law and order', buggery first became a crime in Hong Kong in 1842, when the colony was founded. In English law, buggery is a generic term which could mean anal intercourse between two men or between a man and a woman and between a man or a woman and an animal (Lethbridge 1976, 300–306). The criminalization of homosexual acts meant that buggery, whether private or public, consenting or coerced, involving persons of any age, as a pair or in larger groups—was a punishable offence. Other gay male practices such as 'gross indecency' (including fellatio, mutual masturbation) and 'soliciting' (any public indication of interest in sex) were also criminalized. It should be noted that male rather than female homosexual conduct was the main concern in legal cases then.

As a colony, Hong Kong followed English law closely. The death penalty for buggery, for example, was abolished in 1861 in England and in 1865 in Hong Kong; and the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885, dealing with acts of 'gross indecency' between males, was made into law in Hong Kong in 1901. The colonial government, however, did not follow suit with the UK's Sexual Offences Act of 1967, which decriminalized male homosexual conduct in private. It is believed that homosexuality was not even perceived as a social problem by the population before the 1980s, and thus the government had no intention of changing the law as such a move would have been considered too 'liberal' and 'radical'. This can be seen from the average of less than five arrests reported per year between 1842 and 1975, in strong contrast with the UK (Miller 1995, 280–81) or the US (Chauncey 1994, 9). Chinese homosexuals were highly discreet under British rule, and the few more 'visible' and 'outrageous' homosexuals were mainly Europeans who were usually sent back home, with their contracts un-renewed, or encouraged to resign. Both the colonial government and the population seemed to tolerate homosexuality as a 'necessary evil' (Lethbridge 1976, 306–10).

This tolerance of homosexuality can be explained by looking at the relationship between colonial governance and society especially since the post-war period when the population increased due to the civil war in China. There are two possible explanations. Under the minimally integrated-social-political system, Lau (1982) argues that the colonial government had no intention to interfere with the population and Chinese inhabitants relied on family rather than making demands on the government. The colonial government constructed colonial subjects with minimal civil, political, and social rights (So 2002; Ku and Pun 2004), and treated social welfare as a residual concept, with the underlying principle of charity and benevolence. Hong Kong Chinese thus sought help from their families, voluntary agencies, or the market, rather than from the government, to satisfy their welfare needs (Ho 2004). Under British rule, with the conditions of *laissez-faire* capitalism, Hong Kong Chinese families developed extraordinary discipline for hard work, fierce competition, and tight control over family members to improve family livelihood and wealth, a condition famously characterized by Lau (1982) as 'utilitarianistic familism'. This 'boundary politics' (Lau 1982, 163–72) was carefully played up by both parties, serving to differentiate the public space of the British colony and colonial polity from the private space of Chinese society. The tolerance of homosexuality could be viewed as an example of this functional explanation.

However, scholars increasingly view 'utilitarianistic familism' not as the 'inherent nature' of Chinese culture but as a strategy used by the colonial government to manage the refugee and immigrant families of post-war Hong Kong (Ong 1993; Law 1998; Ho 2004). These strategies, which Ong (1993, 753–62) calls 'family biopower' and Law (1998) calls 'colonial managerialism', shifted the site

of governance from the state to the family. ‘Family biopower’ encoded a series of family practices and ideologies—symbolic, emotional, and utilitarian contractual obligations and mutual support—that regulated economic, productive, and hardworking Chinese bodies.

Whether one adopts a functional (‘boundary politics’) or a Foucauldian (‘family biopower’) explanation, the result is the same: the production of healthy, reproductive, and heterosexual bodies—the disciplined father, the sacrificing mother, the filial son, and the dutiful daughter—in post-war Hong Kong. A child’s—especially a son’s—sense of moral worth requires him to comply with parental wishes to marry, to continue the family bloodline, and to do nothing to harm family status and reputation (Kong 2011, 95–98). This largely explains why most Hong Kong *tongzhi*, especially the first *tongzhi* generation, were highly discreet and always worked within the parameters of the family institution. So how did men who had same-sex desires manage themselves when they were young, in the 1940s to 1960s?

Yatkayan, ‘all in the family’

The Hong Kong population has always been over 90 per cent Chinese. After the end of the Japanese occupation in 1945, the Hong Kong population consisted overwhelmingly of returned immigrants and refugees from mainland China. It more than doubled in size from 625,166 in 1921 to 1,639,337 in 1941 and reached 2,360,000 in 1950 (Hong Kong Government 1952, 23; Faure 1997, 149). Government revenue relied heavily on land sales and taxes, as land development played a central role in Hong Kong’s economic development. The colonial government adopted a policy of high land prices, resulting in half of the population living in crowded public housing (Cuthbert 1995, 298).

Most of my interviewees were working class, settling in Chinese tenement-type buildings, squatter homes built on hillsides or rooftops, or alleys (Rooney 2003, 18). In tenement buildings, floors were usually sub-divided into small rooms or cubicles (averaging 5.57 square metres), each floor accommodating three or four households, who shared a communal kitchen, latrines, and bathrooms (Hong Kong Government 1947, 54). Family members—immediate family as well as relatives and fictive kin—and neighbours formed a fluid collective mode of living under the same roof. This led to an ‘all in the family’ (Lau 1982, 74) notion being adopted by working-class families in the 1940s and 1950s, where mutual assistance and economic exchange, family ownership of property, and utilitarian cooperation became defining norms of ‘utilitarianistic familism’.

‘Home’ has many meanings—‘shelter’, ‘hearth’, ‘heart’, ‘privacy’, ‘root’, ‘abode’, and ‘paradise’ (Somerville 1992; see also Gorman-Murray 2007). For the interviewees in this study, cramped, badly ventilated, unhygienic spaces, and quasi-kin communal familial living was their first experience of ‘home’—a

site of physical security and emotional and psychological comfort and support. The family home was where they learned to be filial sons and to work hard to contribute to the family economy in close relationships with other family members. Their parents taught them frugality, hard work, and compliance with the group—crucial components of the socialization process in the self-sufficient family system (Salaff 1981, 35).

The family home was also where heteronormative culture was fostered. Family members usually did not talk about sexuality, or did so mainly in heterosexual terms. No one mentioned homosexuality. The home, under the gaze of other household members, did not permit privacy or cater to the needs of men with same-sex desires. Heteronormativity was thus materialized in this site of territorialized power and regulatory practices, not so much from government intervention, but more under surveillance by family and other household members who silenced these young men's same-sex desires.

Most interviewees had no idea how to name their same-sex desires when they were young. They did not know the word 'homosexuality', or had not heard the traditional Chinese euphemisms *yutao*, *duanxiu*, and Lord Long Yang. This was long before the queer re-appropriation of the term *tongzhi* (see Footnote 1). They discovered their interest in men through playing with their relatives or neighbours (for example, Shmily, Tommy, and David). However, these homosexual encounters were usually fleeting and had to be carried out secretly. The boys who played together were usually not gay, just adolescents seeking sexual release. As rightly pointed out by Connell (1995, 149), young men's sexuality is a field of possibilities, not a deterministic system. This familial environment shaped how these young men discovered their same-sex desires, some through writing to pen pals (for example, Brother Shing), some reading scant published discussions, usually negative media reports about homosexuality (for example, Shmily, Brother Shing, and Brother Ming), but most through going to public spaces to find other gay men.

After their interactions with other gay men, or even the development of same-sex desire-based identities following participation in the gay 'scene' elsewhere, the family home often became a difficult place to inhabit. Hiding their same-sex desire and emerging identity became a pressing issue. They developed argots to communicate. As I learnt from them, especially through Uncle Leung, 'playing *mahjong*' came to mean 'having sex', and '*mahjong* tile' referred to the male organ. Public toilets were called *fayuen* ('gardens'; later, *yuetong*, 'fishponds'). *Yaufayuen* ('wandering around the garden'; later *potong*, 'wandering around the fishpond') or *diuyu* ('fishing') meant 'cruising' (US) or 'cottaging' (UK). As de Certeau's (1984) discussion of the tactics of introducing alternative meanings within a dominant cultural system indicates, these young gay men did not openly resist domestic heteronormativity; rather, they used covert tactics,

such as argots and the cover of the homosocial overcoat,² to realize same-sex erotic experiences. As these men got older, however, parents urged them to marry. Marriage usually led to a double life, although some interviewees stayed single and lied to their family throughout their lives. In any case, all had to work within the parameters of familial heteronormativity.

The secret garden: The emergence of the early gay 'scene'

The colonial government's strict control and discrimination policies concerning the use of public space mainly focused on public hygiene (such as hawker control) and social problems like gambling (Too 2007, 31–36). In this situation, Hong Kong gay men found the space to develop a 'fishing' subculture. Before the 1980s, when public debate over homosexuality began in Hong Kong, the interviewees had not heard of the law governing homosexuality and had no idea that homosexual conduct was a criminal offence. They only believed it was a moral issue that would bring shame to the family. Family networks were crucial, and they mainly found work through family members, relatives, or neighbours. There were no exclusive spaces for homosexuals, only one or two Shanghai-style saunas for presumably heterosexual men (the most popular one was Yuk Tak Chee which was closed in 2006), a few hotel cafes, and secret parties or boat cruises catering for mainly the gay and lesbian middle-class, celebrities, and expatriates. We can grasp some of these scenes through the stories told by Jonathon, David, and Robert. For most gay men, public space became the major site for finding sex, love, and friendship. They sought privacy in public, as they had little freedom to express their sexuality in the 'privacy' of their homes. As Chauncey (1994) puts it succinctly in his description of pre-Stonewall gay subculture in New York, 'privacy could only be had in public' (179–206). The cruising ground was thus the site for the redefinition of public and private, where there was no freedom to be 'out' and no possibility of subscription to any identity or community (Bell 1995, 308).

My interviewees 'found' other gay men virtually everywhere—walking down streets, on ferries (Brother Ming), at street performances (Old Chan, Uncle Leung), in railway stations (Tommy, Jonathan), or in cinemas (Tommy and Jonathan). De Certeau (1984, 97) discusses walking as 'a process of *appropriation* of the topographical system on the part of the pedestrian' (emphasis original); 'queering the street' can thus be seen as a way to form queer consciousness through wandering, walking, looking, and being looked at. Such 'acts of operating' are moments of transgression that destabilize 'the assumed heteronormativity of urban public space with theatrical displays of queer affection desire

2. The homosocial overcoat relates to the idea of homosociality (e.g., Sedgwick 1990), which refers to a same-sex relationship that is not of a romantic or sexual nature but signifies friendship or mentorship. The latest colloquial term is 'bromance'.

and rage.’ (Bell and Binnie 1998, 131) The public toilet was the most common site for ‘fishing’. ‘Fishing’, like walking down a street, became almost a routine. Some would fish for immediate quick sex, but most went to public toilets to meet friends or catch up on gossip, which subsequently led to knowing more men with same-sex desires or even joining small gay subcultures. The public toilet was like Starbucks nowadays. This concept of ‘fishing’, a form of non-normative intimacy, redrew the public and private distinction and challenged normative intimacy. It was public in terms of location but private in terms of the intimate moment the participants shared. It was criminal intimacy, not just if sex occurred, but also because showing interest in sex publicly was considered ‘soliciting’. But this eroticism outside of the conventional couple form gave these men tremendous pleasure, especially when there was no material gay space for them to go to. Affections formed with strangers and acquaintances could even develop into lifelong friendships or partnerships. We can read some beautiful (but mostly sad) love stories from Brother Ming.

This non-normative, even criminal, intimacy bears ‘no necessary relation to domestic space, to kinship, to the couple form, to property, or to the nation’ (Berlant and Warner 1998, 558), but it does bear a necessary relation to a ‘counter-public’: ‘an indefinitely accessible world conscious of its subordinate relation’ (ibid.). It was this network of erotic and non-erotic friends—acquaintances, friends, sex partners, lovers, and life partners—that provided a loose sense of ‘gay community’, a counter-public, or a heterotopia (Foucault 1986) that nurtured a local gay identity and facilitated sexual and social liaisons.

Decriminalization of Homosexuality and the Rise of the *Tongzhi* Identities and Movement

Public debate about homosexuality came to the surface when the Scottish police inspector John MacLennan, who was employed by the colonial police force then, was charged with acts of gross indecency and later committed suicide in his apartment in 1980. Some observers suggested that his death was a murder as he had access to a file that contained names of government officials who were suspected to be homosexuals. His death was thus seen as a result of a police cover-up, which raised media attention and brought into question the justice and integrity of the colonial government. The colonial government responded by appointing a judicial committee (Commission of Inquiry) to investigate the case and another committee (Law Reform Committee of Hong Kong) to review laws governing homosexual conduct. The Commission of Inquiry concluded in 1981 that the case was a suicide, with the Law Reform Committee publishing a report in 1983 recommending that male homosexual conduct be decriminalized (Ho 1997, 7–21; Chan 2007, 38–45). If the Stonewall Riot in New York in 1969 signified the formal beginning of the LGBTQ movement in the US, the MacLennan

Incident in Hong Kong in 1980 similarly paved the way for the *tongzhi* movement in Hong Kong. It was an opportunity for different social sectors to examine the prevalence of homosexuality and evaluate the appropriateness of pre-existing laws governing homosexual conduct (Wong 2004, 200).

The debate on the decriminalization of male homosexual conduct involved three main issues: whether homosexuality was scientifically proved to be normal; whether it was a 'Western' disease not found in traditional Chinese (family) culture; and whether homosexual activity was a human rights issue. The debate involved many parties. Among the most visible was the Joint Committee on Homosexual Law, an anti-decriminalization alliance formed in 1983 by Choi Yuen-wan, an evangelical medical doctor, and made up of thirty-one pressure groups consisting mainly of social workers, teachers, and church leaders. A loosely structured alliance arguing for decriminalization was also formed, consisting of a pool of academics, journalists, progressive thinkers, the Hong Kong Human Rights Commission, and a few gay men (Ho 1997, 61–93). Religion (particularly Protestantism and Catholicism) and Chinese tradition (in the name of the Chinese family) were two major weapons used by members of the anti-decriminalization coalition to present their arguments, while the pro-decriminalization alliance used the language of democracy and human rights to advance their own arguments. After a decade-long debate, a law decriminalizing male homosexual conduct was passed in 1991. Decriminalization, however, did not mean legalization. The colonial government only agreed to decriminalize male homosexual acts under certain conditions—two men aged 21 or above who engaged in consensual sex 'in private'. The colonial government had no interest in endorsing gay rights or even in recognizing a gay lifestyle. Sir David Ford, then Chief Secretary, summarized the debate in the Legislative Council as follows:

A vote in favour simply signifies recognition that personal moral codes may differ and can co-exist in a society. Nor does a vote in favour signify a state of approval, it signifies only recognition of an individual's rights to personal choice in his private sexual matters. A vote in favour does not signify personal acceptance of the rightness or wrongness of such acts, but only suggests whether such acts committed between consenting adults and in private merit mobilisation of the full machinery of law enforcement. (quoted in Ho 1997, 84)

The final move to decriminalization was believed to have been a response to the newly introduced Bill of Rights and the urgent need to speed up legal and democratic reforms in the aftermath of the 1989 Democratic Movement in China (or known as the June Fourth Incident in Hong Kong), rather than an endorsement of gay rights or recognition of gay lifestyles by the government (Ho 1997, 75–80; Chan 2007, 39).

The 1980s thus marked the first wave of the Hong Kong *tongzhi* movement. It should be noted that very few gay men came out and fought for their own

rights during the debate. The coming-out of *tongzhi* identity was almost absent and the right for gay men to engage in consensual sex in private was the primary concern. The first wave of the Hong Kong *tongzhi* movement was therefore a movement without *tongzhi* identity; it symbolized the politics of privatization that confined *tongzhi* rights to the sphere of ‘private individual rights’ rather than conceiving of them as ‘human rights’ (Kong 2011, 50).

Once the long debate over the decriminalization of male homosexuality (or, rather, male homosexual conduct) was over, the original legal debate was transformed into arguments about various social and moral disputes. Different parties, including the government, church people, social workers, teachers, lawyers, doctors, cultural workers, journalists, and more, whether pro- or anti-gay, contributed to policing a range of binary divisions: normality versus abnormality; heterosexuality versus homosexuality; masculinity versus femininity; Chinese tradition versus Western culture; and so on. The result was a separation between the straight-dominant culture and the *tongzhi* subculture, in the context of which a distinctive social type of ‘homosexual’ was subsequently generated. It is this ‘homosexual’ type that led to the development of homosexual identities in Hong Kong, including: *kei* (‘gay’); *keilo* (‘gay man’); *memba*;³ *les* (‘lesbian’); TB (‘tomboy’); TBG (‘tomboy girl’); pure; no label; *tungzi/tongzhi*; and others (Ho 1997; Kong 2011; Tang 2011).

Decriminalization had numerous effects in the 1990s. It not only protected gay men who engaged in private sexual acts, but also triggered the emergence of a range of ‘*tongzhi*-scapes’ (c.f. Parker 1999, 218–21 on the notion of the ‘homoscape’) in Hong Kong. These included the emergence of *tongzhi* groups such as Hong Kong Ten Percent Club (formed in 1986 but officially registered in 1992), the Association for the Welfare of Gays and Lesbians (1989), Horizons (1991), 97 Tongzhi Forum (1992), Satsanga (1993), Isvara (1994), XX Gathering (1994), Queer Sisters (1995), the Blessed Minority Christian Fellowship (1995), Lui Tung Yuen (1996), Freeman (1996), Joint Universities Queer Union (1997) (later named as Joint College Queer Union), and the Hong Kong Tongzhi Conference (1996, 1997, 1998). The rise of a pink economy was also enabled and ‘scenes’ such as bars, discos, saunas, fitness centres, shops, and guest houses proliferated. Among them, the gay bar Dateline and the dance club Disco Disco (D.D.), both opened in the mid-1980s and closed in the early 1990s, were frequently mentioned by interviewees.

The colonial government took a guarded approach to political development, and the *tongzhi* movement was no exception. As a result, the movement has largely been framed around economic development (e.g., the burgeoning of commercial and consumption *tongzhi* venues such as bars, clubs, and saunas) and cultural expression (Kong 2011, 47–72). Before the 1980s, homosexuality was

3. ‘Memba’ is local parlance used exclusively by Hong Kong gay men for self-identification. It is a Cantonese derivative of the English term ‘member’.

only hinted at, or was pathologized, in popular culture and mainstream media (Kong 2005). In the 1990s, there was an increase in the visibility of representations of *tongzhi* in mainstream media, including in films featuring gay stories such as *Oh! My Three Guys* (dir. Derek Chiu, 1994), *Boy's?* (dir. Hau Wing-Choi, 1996), *A Queer Story* (dir. Shu Kei, 1997), *Happy Together* (dir. Wong Kar-wai, 1997) and *Bishônen* (dir. Yonfan, 1998). Specific *tongzhi* media also spread, such as the Hong Kong Lesbian and Gay Film Festival (1989–); *tongzhi* magazines and newsletters such as *Tongzhi New Wave* (1988) and *Contact Magazine* (1992); gay plays directed by Edward Lam; books and novels written by gay writers Edward Lam, Michael Lam, Julian Lee, and Jimmy Ngai; and more academic texts including writings by Samshasha, Chou Wah-shan, Anson Mak, Yau Ching, and Ho Sik-ying. Last but not the least, *tongzhi* cyberspace such as websites and chatrooms (e.g., <http://www.gaystation.com.hk> and <http://www.gayhk.com>) emerged, which provided an important means for *tongzhi* to identify one another through sexuality, language, and values.

The *tongzhi* movement in Hong Kong began to be more progressive in the 1990s with the building of the *tongzhi* identity as the major concern. *Tongzhi* groups in the 1990s were mainly self-help, service oriented, and community based in nature, with the aim of developing a positive self-identity. They tried hard to dissociate homosexuality from pathology, to downplay the 'sexual' aspect of the *tongzhi* identity, and to stress the similarities between heterosexuals and homosexuals (Kong 2011, 52–53).

Post-colonial Hong Kong and Older Gay Men

Hong Kong was handed over to China in 1997 and the new HKSAR (Special Administrative Region) government has actively promoted the heterosexual nuclear family as a core value, emphasizing close and mutually supportive relationships between the married couple and their parents and siblings as an essential part of 'Chinese culture' in its policy addresses in 2001, 2006 and 2011 (<http://www.policyaddress.gov.hk>). The government set up the Family Council in late 2007 to consolidate core family values and harmonious relationships among family members, thereby further institutionalizing familial heteronormativity.

This harmonious family model has the monogamous heterosexual nuclear family as its prototype, which is not so much the continuation of traditional Chinese culture (as polygyny was the norm) but more of a Christian (especially evangelical) ideal. As a continuation of the anti-decriminalization alliance of the 1980s, a new generation of evangelical Christians has taken up the mission to revive a strong Christian presence and monitor social and moral development through the establishment of organizations such as The Society of Truth and Light (1997), Hong Kong Sex Culture Society (2001), Hong Kong Alliance for Family (2003), New Creation Association (2003), and Family Value Foundation

of Hong Kong Limited (2007). These groups, which Wong (2013) claims engage in 'evangelical activism', have a strong resemblance to the American Christian Right movement. They focus on sexuality as the central issue to advance their political agenda and emphasize the necessity to protect the dominance of the monogamous heterosexual nuclear family to restore social order and public morality. About ten per cent of the population is Protestant Christian (480,000) and Catholic (353,000) in Hong Kong, but they have significant presence in education, medical, and social services, as well as inside the government bureaucracy. Seventy-five per cent of the top administrative positions in the government are held by Christians (Wong 2013, 344). Hence, it can be argued that Protestantism and Catholicism have a certain influence over Hong Kong policy making.

It is in this context that we are witnessing a few battles between evangelical activism and the *tongzhi* movement. For example, the government planned to propose a Sexual Orientation Discrimination Ordinance (SODO) in 2004, but discussion was dropped due to strong opposition from the Hong Kong Alliance for Family as they gathered 10,000 signatures to show their worries that the law would promote an 'unhealthy' lifestyle and erode 'family values'. This incident also triggered the first IDAHO event in 2005. The second Chief Executive Donald Tsang, himself a Catholic, publicly opposed the court's decision for the equalization of the age of consent between homosexuals and heterosexuals and made an appeal in 2006. However, the Court of Appeal confirmed the High Court's decision in 2006. In 2009, the original 'Domestic Violence Ordinance' was changed to the 'Domestic and Cohabitation Relationship Violence Ordinance' following strong lobbying from evangelical groups to make the distinction that cohabitation does not equal marriage. In this way, they indirectly disqualified same-sex couples and relationships as valid family forms and valid intimate relationships.

New *tongzhi* groups have been formed such as Rainbow of Hong Kong (1998), Rainbow Action (1998), Civil Rights for Sexual Diversities (1999), F' Union (1999), *Tongzhi* Community Joint Meeting (1999) (later called Pink Alliance), Women's Coalition of HKSAR (2003), Fruits in Suits (2004), Nutong Xueshe (2005), Midnight Blue (2005), For My Colours (2008), Queer Straight Alliance (2008), Gay Harmony (2009), Big Love Alliance (2012), Hong Kong Scholars Alliance for Gender and Sexual Diversity (2013), Q action (2014), and many more. They have been more vocal and proactive in fighting for various *tongzhi* sexual citizenship rights. *Tongzhi* identity has become even more political and the movement has advocated a full notion of sexual citizenship, which ranges from conduct-based claims ('rights to various forms of sexual practices in personal relationships') to identity-based claims ('rights through self-definition and the development of individual identities') and to relationship claims ('rights within social institutions: public validation of various forms of sexual relations') (Richardson 2000, 107-8). They have sought the right to disclose sexual identity without being

penalized, the right not to have to hide their sexual identity, the right to same-sex marriage or domestic relationship, and the right to accessing social and legal benefits (Wong 2004, 201–2). The pink economy has even further expanded. Local free gay magazine *Dim Sum*, for example, publishes a long list of venues and places (<http://dimsum-hk.com/>). The visibility of *tongzhi* in popular culture is increasing, including in gay-specific films such as Scud's trilogy *City without Baseball* (2008), *Permanent Residence* (2009) and *Amphetamine* (2010); gay plays such as *Queer Show* by Wong Chi-lung and Leung Cho-yiu; gay works by novelists such as Yip Chi-Wai; and various community online television channels such as G-spot TV, internet radio programmes and *tongzhi* websites (<http://www.tt1069.com>, <http://blur-f.freebbs.tw/index.php>) (Kong 2011, 64–66; Tang 2011).

Perhaps the most visible events are the IDAHO (Hong Kong Parade), the Hong Kong Pride Parade, and Pink Dot Hong Kong. Started in 2005, IDAHO (Hong Kong Parade), later renamed IDAHOT, International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia in 2012, aims to eliminate discrimination based on sexual orientation. Pride Parade started in 2008. It aims to celebrate *tongzhi* identity and pride, seek inclusion and justice, and challenge heteronormativity. Pink Dot Hong Kong, which started in 2014, includes many *tongzhi*-friendly straight participants. Participants range from few to tens of thousands. All these events tend to focus less on identity politics but more on the politics of difference to celebrate diversity and draw a wider audience in society.

Under such different social, political, and cultural circumstances, how do my interviewees live as older gay men in post-colonial Hong Kong?

The home of one's own

With the population of the small territory (1095 square kilometres) growing from three million in 1960 to seven million in 2010, housing has always been a big and thorny problem for the government. Since the 1960s, the government has taken an active role in developing public housing estates (including resettlement estates and low-cost public estates), establishing an infrastructure of new towns, and providing home ownership schemes and loans to the emerging lower middle class. The 1997 Asian financial crisis led to a collapse in property prices and prevented the first Chief Executive of the new HKSAR government from carrying out his pledge of 85,000 new flats a year. The government's public housing and high land-price policies have restricted the living space of most Hong Kong residents. By 31 March 2010, about 2.06 million people, or 30 per cent of the population, were living in public rental housing estates (<http://www.censtatd.gov.hk>). Although Hong Kong people have changed from homeless immigrants to public housing tenants or home-owning citizens, most are still subject to limited choices and conditions in choosing living environments and the financial burden of securing permanent homes.

Compared with the past, the living conditions of most interviewees are much improved. My working-class informants have moved from tenement buildings or squatter homes to public estates. Few could afford private flats, even with government assistance. They were manual workers or low-skilled clerks and all are now retired, some receiving social security allowances (such as from the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme). Their family homes are now more spacious and possess basic facilities such as a bedroom, living room with basic furniture, private toilet, bathroom, and kitchen. The communal living space has gone and family life has permitted more privacy. This new familial environment serves as both a site of resistance and surveillance.

Half of my interviewees are now living alone due to widowhood, separation, or divorce from their wives, or having never married. The other half live with their family members—wives, children, and/or siblings. For those who are living alone, their homes tend to be a place of security, free from surveillance, where they may resist heterosexual norms. However, they feel quite lonely and isolated after retirement and some may hang out with friends, do *tongzhi* volunteer work, and watch television. They are still closeted and do not participate in any open *tongzhi* events. The only exceptions are Shmily and May Wu, who have both gone to the Pride Parade. In 2011, they were holding banners, which made older gay men visible for the first time: ‘Our hard lives have been full of discrimination. Can you see us, the older *tongzhi*?’ and ‘Set up a residential care home for elderly *tongzhi*, let us live our lives with dignity.’ (See photos below.)



Hong Kong Pride Parade 2011. Source: Author.

For those who live with family members, the private family home is a challenge. On the one hand, living without their wives is easier. For example, Brother Ming, who died in 2010, at age 75, separated from his wife and lived with his boyfriend and his son for four years. He never made explicit his relationship with his boyfriend to his son and his son never asked. On the other hand, living with their wives is more difficult. Couple intimacy is avoided as much as possible, by making excuses such as exhaustion from work, coming home late, or swapping rooms with the children and leaving their wives with their daughters. Uncle Lee and Old Chan both maintained a good relationship with their wives and children. For them, to have a good wife was important for the family, and they had had only fleeting sexual encounters with men. It was at the age of 60, having fulfilled their family duties—conjugal duty to their wives, fatherly duty to their children—that they decided to explore gay romance. Salaff (1981) has aptly described the dutiful ‘working daughter’ of the 1970s, who sacrificed her own self-development, gave up secondary education, and worked in a factory to contribute to the family economy. Likewise, these men sacrificed their own self-development by suppressing their same-sex desire and marrying to contribute to the heterosexual family economy. Like the working daughters, they did not really regret their decisions, beginning to explore the gay world later in life. Uncle Lee’s ‘puppy love’, sounding like he was a 16-year-old boy, happened when he met his first boyfriend at the age of 60! However, he refused to leave his family, and chose familial intimacy over gay romance.

Coming out is always a difficult and lifelong process. The notion of individuality, as well as the implicit economic and material affluence of ‘moving out’ to live on one’s own or with one’s same-sex partner, sometimes clashes with the notion of the relational self in the biopolitics of Hong Kong Chinese families (Kong 2011, 94–119). Whether single or married, my interviewees negotiated their gay identities in the closet under the parameters of familial heteronormativity. The real opposition is sometimes not so much between homosexuality and heterosexuality, but ‘between those who are willing and able to play traditional family roles and those who are not’ (Berry 2001, 219).

The new tongzhi space and homonormativity

Most public toilets in Hong Kong have been renovated in accordance with urban renewal and redevelopment, which was stepped up after the SARS crisis in 2003. A traditional public toilet usually consisted of two parts: the ‘open’ part with several urinals or a urinal wall and trough; and the more ‘private’ part, which consisted of squat toilets in two parallel rows over long gutters, partitioned into five or six cubicles with metal doors. If someone stood up, his head would be above the partition. Public toilets are now equipped with individually partitioned urinals and fully partitioned cubicles with walls from floor to ceiling. Most

have attendants who clean them. The 'garden', or the 'fishpond' (for cruising) has disappeared. Most of my interviewees occasionally go to public toilets, but they now run a higher risk of being arrested by the police or blackmailed by male sex workers.

After the decriminalization of homosexuality in 1991, sites exclusively for *tongzhi* consumption have burgeoned in Hong Kong. This apparently successful 'territorialization' of *tongzhi* spaces and the pink economy have nurtured the new *tongzhi* image of the 'good consumer citizen', in contrast with the older image of the 'citizen-pervert', and this has provided a significant and positive cultural sense of belonging for *tongzhi* (Kong 2011, 73–93). This new *tongzhi* identity, closely associated with consumption, is cosmopolitan in outlook, commercially driven, and conspicuously consumed on the body—it might be considered derivative of a 'global queer identity' (Altman 1997). However, rather than promoting solidarity and identification, it also divides those who can access this ideal from those who cannot. The emerging gay world discriminates along the lines of class, age, gender, sexuality, race, and body type. Most interviewees have had extreme difficulty accessing this exclusive gay space, and complain about its high prices and obsession with youthfulness. If bars and clubs marginalize gay men in terms of class and age, gay saunas discriminate in terms of age and body shape. Shmily, May Wu, and Brother Shing have all experienced ageism inside the gay community.

If heteronormativity functions to create a hierarchy of 'good' and 'bad' citizens by privileging heterosexuals and stigmatizing homosexuals, the new homonormativity not only endorses a depoliticized gay culture anchored in privatized domesticity and consumption (Duggan 2002, 179), but also creates a hierarchy of queer identities and places. In Hong Kong, this hierarchy of identities and bodies has transnational middle-class Chinese gay men and gay Caucasian expatriates at the top; local-born Hong Kong gay male denizens in the middle; and new mainland Chinese migrants, male sex workers, and other gay subordinates at the bottom, defined according to age, class, gender performance, ethnicity, and body type. *Tongzhi* space is thus stratified—bars and clubs in Central Hong Kong attract predominately middle-class, hip, cool, and 'in' young male professionals, whilst Kowloon caters more to working-class gays. Most gay saunas privilege muscular athletic and/or youthful bodies; very few welcome the elderly. Very few *tongzhi* NGOs have put older gay men on their service agendas except Hong Kong Rainbow and Midnight Blue. Within this new homonormative logic, 'fishing' is regarded as cheap, irresponsible, unrespectable, and undesirable, and older gay men are alleged to be self-loathing, closeted, and sad creatures who only 'fish' in a seedy underworld. A few of them 'quit' the gay scene and only socialize with close friends (e.g., David, Brother Shing). Most still hang out in saunas that tolerate them, and pursue sex tourism in mainland China or other Asian countries, such as Taiwan, Thailand, and Malaysia (e.g., Shmily, May Wu,

Tommy, Tony). Some of them participate in *tongzhi* volunteer work (e.g., Shmily, May Wu).

Conclusion

I have traced a brief *tongzhi* history in Hong Kong and have highlighted certain key sites governing homosexuality in Hong Kong: the government, family, and religion. Homosexuality was first made a crime when Britain took over Hong Kong in 1842. The colonial government and the HKSAR government both confine Hong Kong people with limited civil, political, and social rights. *Tongzhi* or not, Hong Kong people have only been able to attain partial citizenship. For *tongzhi*, the situation is even worse. Hong Kong's anti-discrimination laws do not cover sexual orientation. There is no same-sex marriage. Discrimination cases against *tongzhi* have been widely reported (Chung, Pang, and Lee 2012; Suen, Wong, Barrow, Wong, Mak, Choi, Lam, and Lau 2016). In contrast with the welfare state in Britain, the colonial government treated social welfare as a residual concept. The family became a self-regulating self-reliance mechanism which turned people away from the government for welfare needs. The family could be seen as a tool of state governance and served as a powerful site enforcing heteronormativity. This was especially true in the past. The close-knit family network defined people's social roles, provided career possibilities, arranged marriage for them, and gave them social belonging. This encompassing network was safe and comforting but at the same time suppressed people's self-expression and individual development. Religion (especially Protestantism and Catholicism) has been providing education, medical, and social services and thus has been significant in shaping sexual morality in Hong Kong since early colonial days. The rise of evangelical activism in the late 1990s took a particularly conservative stand and saw homosexuality as a deviant and sinful act, and an unhealthy lifestyle. The substantial presence of Christians in the top administrative positions in the government, including two Chief Executives, should be noted. These three sites of governance sometimes establish an implicit alliance, and have produced a heteronormative culture of intimacy in Hong Kong that constrains and confines (homo-)sexual identities, desires, and practices.

However, the site of governance is also the site of resistance. It is evident that the emergence of the *tongzhi* movement since the 1990s—the mushrooming of *tongzhi* social and political groups, the burgeoning of *tongzhi* commercial and consumption venues, the emergence of *tongzhi* representation and other cultural productions in mainstream and alternative media, and the rise of annual *tongzhi* public events such as IDAHO/IDAHOT, Pride Parade, Pink Dot, and the Hong Kong Lesbian and Gay Film Festival, has helped identity and community building among *tongzhi*, bolstered the fight for *tongzhi* rights, and increased

tongzhi visibility and public recognition under the government's surveillance, family control and religious backlash.

It is under this context that we can understand, through the stories of the older gay men, the micro forms of struggling (or sometimes even resistance) of Hong Kong *tongzhi*. These older gay men are part of the first generation of Hong Kong people and they have succeeded in surviving, living through the various major transformations of Hong Kong. They lived in the period when homosexuality was a criminal offence, homosexual identity had yet to develop, and the only possible identity available was a heterosexual male identity in which one had to fulfil the roles of being a hardworking labourer, a filial son, a dutiful husband, or a stern father. They struggled for a suitable male role without a clear heterosexual/homosexual identity binary, created secretive pleasures in the communal family, negotiated with familial heteronormativity by using different tactics (e.g., getting married, being single, postponing same-sex desires, or having heterosexual marriage with a secretive homosexual romance), and radically challenged the rigid distinction between private and public by developing a cruising or 'fish pond (public toilet)' subculture.

Since the 1990s, they have slowly developed a "gay" identity but have found it difficult to come out as there is a great contradiction between their social roles and their sexuality. Jonathon's only wish is to come out to his two sons before his death, and David insists that his family members will not know even after his death. Apart from their coming out difficulties with their close family members and relatives, they still long for stable, long-term, and intimate same-sex relationships, they still feel frustrated that the gay community is youth-oriented and consumption-based, and they still hope that the government would care about them and offer any social services for older *tongzhi*. Health is a major problem for these men. They all have different degrees of illness, and frequent the hospital. It is unfortunate that I have a few interviewees who have passed away (Old Chan, Brother Ming, and Uncle Lee) and others' health have gone downhill rapidly in these few years (Jonathan, May Wu, Brother Shing).

The stories of these older gay men demonstrate how they realize same-sex desires and negotiate same-sex intimacy in everyday lives over time. Their narratives help us rethink what is meant by being gay, the significance of coming out, the intricate relationship between individuals and the family, the government and other social institutions, and the changing meaning of (homo-)sexuality from colonial to post-colonial Hong Kong. These men are marginalized individuals who live under a complex web of dominations—hetero/homonormativities—embedded in the social, cultural, economic, and political transformations of Hong Kong. They create a *tongzhi* heterotopia, a counter-public that is 'represented, contested, and inverted' (Foucault 1986, 24)—no matter how fleeting and ephemeral—for love, sex, and intimacy.

4

David

A Charming Liar (1946–)

Born into a large family in Hong Kong in 1946, David is the youngest of many siblings. Some were killed during the war. His father died when he was very young. After graduating from college, he worked as a social welfare professional for over thirty years before retiring. He realized his sexual attraction towards men in secondary school. When he watched movies, he was attracted to the male lead. He realized his orientation after an ambiguous same-sex experience he had in his teens.

I tried it with a friend. His father was a friend of my dad's. We hung out at his place. We were just playing and then we started wrestling. It was my fault, because I started caressing him. He was turned on. It was exciting for young men. But nothing happened in the end and he wasn't mad at me. It was because of these fragments that I finally realized my sexuality.

As he grew older, David further explored his sexuality with his male cousin.

I tried to seduce my younger cousin . . . I lived in a big house. We held a banquet one evening and all the adults went to the restaurant beforehand to play *mahjong*. I stayed at home with him, but we had nothing to do, so we went into a room. We didn't really make love though we both took our pants off. He didn't refuse. It was probably exciting for young men who were curious. We did it several times. That's how it began. We never talked about it after that. Now his daughter has even got married.

People (mainly middle class) often held house parties in the 1960s and 1970s. One of his secondary schoolmates who was also gay invited him to an all-male party in Sham Shui Po.

I told him I had never gone to one of those parties before. He said, 'It doesn't matter, just do whatever I do.' So, I watched him the whole time. I then learnt that all of them hugged and kissed each other. If you liked someone, you just dragged him to a corner and did whatever you wanted . . . maybe kiss a little. If you wanted to do something more intimate, you had to go to the bedroom or the toilet.

The host of that party lived alone. His parties usually had twenty to thirty guests and the apartment was filled with soda, peanuts, chips, and so on. There was no alcohol in those days. They would start off with slow dancing most of the time, so people could hug and kiss.

It was awesome! Everyone was [gay]. As they say, 'People become braver when they have company.' When a group of people who spoke the same language got together behind closed doors, they really let go.

Young, Cocky, and Surrounded by Admirers

David said he felt like a kid in a candy shop and it was an eye-opener for him, but he felt safe at the same time. He started exploring the gay community after that.

'Young', 'wild', and 'free' are probably the best words to describe David in his youth. Cheating on one's boyfriend was a cardinal sin back then. However, David dated six or even seven men at the same time. Looking back on his wild youth, David is 'somewhat proud' of himself. He thinks 'it's fine as long as you have great time management skills . . . And don't mess things up.'

But in fact, he once went to a movie with two boyfriends, making both of them miserable.

I went to a movie with two boyfriends, one sitting on each side. We were all friends. In the middle of the movie, one of them put his hand on mine, so I held his hand. Then the other one did the same, so I held his, too. I was holding both of their hands. One of them suddenly noticed and became absolutely furious.

David dated for a while before settling down with one of the men. They moved in together and started a sort of a family. Like many other couples, passion slowly turned into attachment and the separation of love and lust. His partner started going to public toilets in 1989.

He hid it from me in the beginning, but you know, you can't keep it a secret. So, I went ballistic. I wrote on a piece of paper what he should do—what rules he had to obey, what else he shouldn't do—and he had to tell me before doing certain things. Of course, he agreed to it at first, but he couldn't keep his promise in the end. So, I was really upset. I knew it was human nature. We were together for a long time, so it was only natural that he lost interest in sex with me . . . It was fine for me that he did those things. I wrote on another piece of paper that I didn't mind what he did outside, as long as he didn't bring anything home; as long as he didn't bring his affairs home. I also told him that I did things outside too. To be fair, you couldn't treat me like nothing, so I went out, too. I thought then, he was screwing around, so we might as well break up, but he kept begging me. I was okay with it in the end. To be honest, it's human nature . . . I was actually very sensible. I didn't even care when he brought someone home later on . . . Then he kept a 'steady friend'. I couldn't care less, as long as he didn't bring this man home.

They were together for a few years. By that time, I had met another man, so a couple eventually turned into a foursome.

Home, the Fortress of the Couple

Most people might have difficulty understanding this kind of relationship. However, the people involved were perfectly fine with it.

When we went out or had dim sum, there were always four of us. So, we became quite close, but I kept my promise and I never let my boyfriend stay overnight.

As far as David was concerned, home was a fortress for the couple. They were having a foursome, but he wanted his home for the two of them. Even though his partner sometimes took his boyfriend home to stay the night, David kept his promise all along. He never brought anyone home to sleep over.

It didn't matter to me that he didn't keep his promise, but I had to, because I saw him as the best person for me.

To everyone they knew, they were a couple. When David described their relationship, he said, 'We were like brothers.'

We went everywhere together as a couple.

His partner's parents were open-minded and accepting of their relationship without problems. David treated them like his own parents as well.

I treated them like my own father and mother. I went on a cruise with them to Xiamen. Everyone on the liner said we were great sons. Nobody knew that I wasn't their real son. He took care of his father and I took care of his mother. I literally carried her to the liner and to the car.

Unfortunately, this harmonious relationship did not last forever. In the last few years of the 1990s, David's partner ended his relationship with his boyfriend and met another man.

The new man wasn't such a nice person. He was particularly manipulative. He didn't receive a lot of education, but he was good at scheming and messing things up. He was definitely a bad person. He was trying to get rid of me.

David knew that someone new is always better. The new boyfriend was forgiven constantly in the name of love.

My partner knew that he was bad. He stole his money and tried to frame me for a lot of things. My partner was a university graduate like me, so he never lost his judgment. However, they had only known each other for two or three years then, so they were head over heels in love.

There was not only conflict between David and his partner, but also between his partner and the new boyfriend. 'They did break up. He threw his keys back

at him. They did everything. They fought. But he was a real piece of work and he always came back.'

Illness Makes Life Unpredictable

David's partner took the new boyfriend on vacations all the time, and always paid for everything. They had a fight once and David's partner went off with other friends. The new boyfriend was furious. David thought that they would not last long. Unfortunately, his partner fell ill then, and he could not move about easily. They had insisted on living together exclusively and allowing no one else to stay, but, because of David's partner's illness, the rule was broken for the first time by the new boyfriend. He made accessories, so he could work wherever he wanted as long as he had his toolkit with him.

We had four bedrooms, so the new boyfriend suggested working there so he could take care of my partner . . . Who knew that actually he was moving in? It was his office at first, but he lived there in the end, because he said he had to look after my partner. But he went home every night at 8 or 9 to massage my partner's mother's feet.

I suggested to my partner, 'Why don't I resign so I can take care of you?' But he didn't want me to. He didn't know he would be ill for such a long time, and he said my job paid really well anyway, so I didn't insist. We were like brothers. I didn't know he was going to die.

David's partner's parents were open-minded and they always knew their son was gay. They not only accepted David, but loved him a lot like their own son. 'His father was particularly good to me. He treated me better than his own son. His mother trusted me more than him.'

However, the trust and closeness was gone after the involvement of the new boyfriend and his partner's death.

The day my partner died, I went to the hospital in the morning. The new boyfriend wasn't there. After taking care of the business at the hospital, I went to my partner's mother's place. I rang the doorbell, but no one answered, though I could hear their television was on. So, I kept on ringing. I thought his parents must have collapsed in shock. No one answered the door for a long time, so I called them but still no one answered. After more than ten minutes, someone finally opened the door and it was their relative. I asked why no one had answered, but then his mother came out and yelled at me. She said I was responsible for the death of her son.

Her behaviour made David speechless.

I had intended to take care of his mother until she passed away. However, that man made things up and said I was responsible for her son's death, that I was the one who made her son sick. There was nothing I could do. She was old, and it really broke my heart.

When his partner was alive, he used to tell David, 'Don't you dare die before me. I will be the first one to die.'

That is why David always thought it was his responsibility to take care of his mother. However, as things turned out, he knew there was no way for him to do that. He knew how greedy and manipulative the new boyfriend was, so he was worried he might be slandered.

He swindled a lot of money. It was really a lot. I shared a safe deposit box with my partner. Do you know what happened when I opened the box? The staff at the bank asked me, 'Did your friend have a friend called so-and-so? You have to beware of him.' Even someone at the bank told me that! Can you imagine what he did? I asked them, but they said they couldn't say but I had to beware of him anyway.

Fortunately, David and his partner had always been financially independent. His death did not cause any financial problem for David, but it seemed to be a problem for his partner's family.

They asked me if I knew anything about his bank accounts. I think millions were gone. I told them it wasn't my problem. We were financially independent. But in fact, I know it was definitely him.

No Need to Come Out

David was born into a big family with many siblings. He had a great relationship with them, but he never revealed his sexuality to his family.

I never thought I needed to come out . . . Young people might be more liberal nowadays. As for older people, they might have a problem accepting it. Besides, people around me might not accept it anyway . . . Let me give you an example. My nephew is also gay. He came out when he was 21 or 22. His mother said she found a blusher in his drawer . . . I asked her not to take it too seriously, because young people were just trying to be fashionable. But then he came home drunk one night and called out someone's name all the time. It was a guy's name. So, his mother got suspicious and asked him. He admitted it. He was in his twenties. He was more liberal, so he didn't deny it. He admitted it, but so what? Every family member around us treated him nicely to his face. We talked and laughed together. However, everyone gossiped about him behind his back. They called him queer and they didn't really respect him. They weren't too respectful of gay people in general . . . Many people think that we should come out so that we can face society honestly, and it's brave or whatever. But I think coming out is not really important to me. I might be able to support the gay cause more openly if I came out, but it was better for me to stay in the closet.

I think it's difficult for Chinese to accept it. I have a huge family and you can't expect ten family members to support you in a family of fifty people. I don't want people to talk behind my back.

An Almost-perfect Lie about Marriage

To cover up his identity as a gay man, David had to be extremely careful to avoid exposing himself whether at home or at work. He said 99 per cent of his co-workers did not know about his sexuality. His family did not suspect anything, either. When he was in his thirties, he had already made up a perfect lie.

I'm very well-organized. I told my family and co-workers that I was married. I said my wife was in Thailand and my daughter was in Britain.

David had even faked his marriage when his mother was alive.

My mother asked me to bring a wife home all the time. But I told her I couldn't do that because I was such a playboy. I told my mother that I always fooled around. She saw one woman but then another, so I had to explain to her that it was over with the first one. And then when she saw a third woman, she might ask me why I dumped the previous one. So, I asked her why I had to take all that nonsense. I could tell her everything, but I wouldn't take any woman home, not even my wife. But, actually, there wasn't any woman.

This lie was not too convincing. However, it became almost perfect because of an unexpected misunderstanding.

I was living in Kowloon. The wife of my brother's friend told my mother one day that she saw me in Kowloon with a woman and a child. I owed her one!

Because of a friend's careless mistake, David's lie became more credible. So, he seized the chance to make the lie even stronger.

My office was in a seven-storey mixed-use building. There was a family living at the back and they had a little daughter, who liked hanging out with my co-workers. We played and sometimes we took photos. So, I made good use of a picture with her on my lap. I put it at my bedside at my housewarming party. I was bad. I was really bad. People looked around the house during the party and they checked every room. I told all kinds of lies when they stepped into my bedroom, saying I was married with a daughter, but that they weren't in Hong Kong . . . When the guests went inside my room, I waited for them to start talking about it. Then I grabbed the photo and said, 'No, no, don't look at it.' And I threw it in my drawer. That's why they totally bought it.

David posed as a playboy. He made people think he had accidentally got his girlfriend pregnant and they had a daughter, but he just did not want to get married.

Now I receive three red packets¹ from people during Chinese New Year, it's the most convincing trick.

He told people his wife was in Britain at first, because he went there to visit his friends and family that year. However, to keep his lie convincing, he moved

1. It is a Chinese tradition for married couples to hand out red packets during Chinese New Year. David received three—one for him, one for his 'wife', and one for his 'child'.

his 'wife' to Thailand, because he spent his vacations in Thailand all the time, so people thought that he was there to see his wife.

I went to Thailand two or three times a year. I told my family that my wife had gone to Thailand to help her brother's business. Her brother needed a hand because he didn't trust the Thais, so he asked his sister to help. And my 'daughter' was studying in Britain. I'll tell them that my daughter has had an accident one day. It's fine because I never had a daughter. It's just a white lie. I never hurt anyone, so what's wrong with a little lie? My family was relieved and so was I.

I prefer people to think that I'm a playboy rather than a gay man. We are in a Chinese society. Being promiscuous is better than being gay. It might not be true, but people still think that you are a playboy because you like playing around, but if you're gay, then you're a pervert. Of course, we know that we aren't perverts, but that's what people think.

Whoever reads the newspaper knows that there are people out there who beat homosexuals up. I don't want to take this risk. I'm not ready to handle it.

There were homophobic co-workers at work with him. So, whenever there was the risk of being exposed, he tried his best to cover it up, but sometimes he got really close.

David was chatting with a co-worker whom he knew very well one day. They talked about hitting on women and watching pornography. There were VHS tapes back then. David was asked if he had any porn videos to lend.

I said yes, but then I put it behind me and totally forgot about it. One day he asked me again to lend him some porn, so I said, 'Fine, I'll bring a few tapes for you tomorrow.' But after I got home, I was so careless that I didn't check. So, I ended up bringing him some gay porn. I didn't realise . . . It was a Friday. After the weekend, when I came back to the office on Monday, he said he was really mad. He asked, 'What did you give me? It was gay porn!'

There were other co-workers in the office at the time. It was a dangerous moment, and he didn't have a lot of time to think of a solution. He had to react immediately.

I picked up the phone instantly, and made a random phone call. I didn't even know who I was calling. I said, 'What's wrong with you? What kind of tapes did you give me? Those ones last Friday!' Then I pretended to laugh and said, 'Your prank wasn't on me, but on someone else.'

Fortunately, his co-worker believed it without a doubt. David got out of the bind safely.

Hiding His Sexuality Discreetly and Meticulously

David flawlessly kept his sexuality secret. Besides being smart and quick-witted, he was extremely vigilant. When he was in front of his family, relatives, and

co-workers, he had to be as meticulous as possible. He even posed as a straight man by checking out women when he had lunch with his co-workers. After his partner died, David and his boyfriend from the foursome naturally got together and became monogamous. They were not living together, but they saw each other all the time. It was impossible for them to avoid running into people they knew when they went out. To prevent people from getting suspicious, he even scripted their dialogue just in case.

I told him all the time, 'Don't stutter when you run into someone because that's a giveaway.' It was very simple. I like playing *mahjong* and I was so much older than he was. So, he had to remember that I was his brother-in-law, that's all. When he ran into his friends, he just had to tell them, 'He's my brother-in-law. We are going to play *mahjong*.' That's it.

If they ran into a relative, David could not pose as his brother-in-law, so they had another script.

I'd tell him, 'Go and find Nancy. They are expecting you.'

That comment implied they were not going out with each other, but with other friends as well, male and female included.

David probably went to such great lengths to hide his sexuality because of a friend, who was arrested in a sting operation when looking for a sex partner in a public toilet in the 1980s.

It happened to some of my friends. Two of them were arrested. One called me out of the blue one night. He asked, 'David, are you free now?' I asked him what happened. I could hear it. I could feel that something was wrong. I asked him what happened. Then he said he was at Yau Ma Tei Police Station. You could sense something. So I asked him what was going on. He asked me if I could go over. I said, 'Okay, I'll be right there.' Do you know how crazy I was? I was in my shorts. I put on my shoes without my socks. And I put on a top. It was autumn. I didn't put anything else on and I rushed there right away.

You knew something bad had happened, but you didn't know exactly what. When I got there, the police were very polite. They took me somewhere, to a cell. He broke into tears once he saw me. He was shirtless. It was quite cold during late autumn, but he was shirtless, with only a pair of jeans. I asked the cop if I could talk to him in private. It turned out he'd gone to a public toilet and hooked up with a man. They got caught *in flagrante* [Latin]. The other guy was in another cell. We talked for a while and I told him, 'You don't have to worry about anything. I'll follow up your case no matter what. But you don't have to call me.' I said that because I heard he got yelled at when he called me. I knew his situation. So I said, 'I'll follow up your case. Don't worry.' And I said to the police, I didn't know what their protocols were, but I'd like to give him my top, because he . . . [burst into tears] It was really distressing. It really was . . . In the end, my friend was bailed out. He went abroad to study afterwards.

David was still very distraught when he recounted the event.

He did not approve of 'fishing' in 'fishponds' either, in other words, looking for pick-ups in public toilets.

There were sting operations in the 1980s and you couldn't put the blame on others. It wasn't right, and those gay men crossed the line. Honestly, those were public toilets, and it wasn't only gay men in there. When those gay men got inside, they acted like they were at home. Sometimes two men went inside one stall. They just stood there, and people could see them clearly. People knew what was going on. There was no excuse, because those gay men didn't respect themselves in the first place. It was fine if they squatted down and hid themselves, but some of them even opened their doors. Some of them flashed their dicks for others to see with the doors to the stalls open. They were trying to seduce others. They touched their junk as if they were saying, 'Do you want to play with it?' So, they clearly crossed the line. When they saw someone they liked in the opposite stall, they didn't close the door. They opened it and took off their pants. So, I thought, some people just wanted to use the toilet. Even when the cops weren't there, people called the police if they didn't like it. Therefore, the police had to do something. That's why they couldn't put the blame on others. They were the ones who didn't respect themselves.

Lust, Like a Flood, Has to Be Channelled but Not Repressed

As for David's relationship with his boyfriend, now his partner, they have been together for over a decade. His partner is a teacher, and about twenty years younger than David. They get along well. Having been with different men for a great part of his life, David has his own beliefs about handling his relationship.

I learnt from my past experiences that you have to learn how to appreciate your partner. Sometimes you take your relationship for granted, so you take your temper out on him or you disrespect him. You don't appreciate him anymore because the two of you have been together for so long. You've seen everything. You've seen him trimming his toenails, taking a leak or a dump. So why do you have to be appreciative? But I think you do. People have to respect each other.

Having been together for more than a decade, it was not surprising they went through the 'seven-year itch'. David understands clearly that lust, which is like a flood, has to be channelled but not repressed. So, he made a pact with his new partner. When they leave Hong Kong together on vacations, they can each have affairs with others.

I think it's human nature. That means I'd rather both of us play around together than get cheated on. We go on vacations several times every year. During that time, we make our journey 'more delightful' and more pleasurable. We're good after we've played around. We have our fun and we have our needs satisfied. I understand human nature. I can't be in denial. I have that kind of drive myself. Of course, sex with him is good. However, sometimes

we have to have fun together. You're good enough if you can control yourself. We go on vacations a few times every year anyway, so we should take the chance to let our hair down.

They often go to gay saunas during their vacations.

We handle it sensibly even though we go to saunas. If we know that place very well, we go to different saunas . . . I totally understand it. We might have reached a 'compromise', but when you see your partner hugging and kissing someone else, you get upset. So, we have our arrangement. If we aren't too familiar with a place, such as Laos or Cambodia, we go to the same sauna. It takes time to find one, so how do you find another one? One of the agreements in our arrangement is that we don't screw around in Hong Kong, but people don't believe us.

David and his current partner have complete trust in each other, and he believes that his trust is not blind at all.

I know he doesn't screw around. I trust my judgment, because he has given me everything he has. From the day we met till this day, no matter who leaves Hong Kong, we talk over the phone once every day. We must call each other no matter how busy we are. It's a must. Of course, we have dinner and go to the theatre together. What do we do if we can't make a phone call? You find time if you want to, you do . . . If he hasn't called me by late at night, I feel very uneasy. Because, first of all, I worry whether he has a problem or something, or if he has an emotional issue, not with me, but with his family, that I don't know about. His mother is very feisty . . . I know his schedule, so I don't have to check on him. Call me what you will, but I can tell you, not many people can fool me.

David believes he will not have another foursome.

Up to now, it has never crossed my mind. It was my former partner who brought someone in out of the blue last time. I didn't understand it totally before doing it. But with my new friend, so far, up to now, it has never occurred to us. To tell you the truth, I have left all my properties to him in my will and he knows it. My friends say that I'm an idiot. They don't understand why I've done it, but I tell them, 'It's fine. If he doesn't treat me well or if we can't get along anymore, I'll change my will.' However, at the moment he's the one I can rely on the most. To be honest, I don't want to leave my property to my family. I don't get along with them too well. As a gay man, he's my 'other half'. He's my wife, so why can't I leave my property to my wife?

His Will, the Last Step of a Perfect Lie

Without marriage, many gay men and lesbians are not protected by the law like heterosexuals are. So, David believes he has to take care of his will while he is still alive. Some gay couples might resent not having the protection of a marriage. However, at the same time, David thinks that a genuine relationship is not defined by a marriage certificate.

I say all the time that it's fine as long as we have a great relationship. Let me give you an example. When we first knew each other, we were probably very sweet. We said, 'good morning' and we kissed when we woke up after spending the night together. After ten years, you might say, 'You have bad breath, go and rinse your mouth.' It's realistic and it's human. So why do we need a marriage certificate? If we get along fine, like we do now, I'll leave everything to him in my will. Otherwise, I'll just change it. We don't need a piece of paper to prove that we are a couple. That's what I believe.

David has already worked out a reasonable explanation of his estate distribution.

I'm going to tell another lie. I'll tell my family that I have a son [i.e., his partner]. This son is older than my daughter. He was raised by his mother . . . but his mother is dead, so I have been taking care of him . . . That's my arrangement.

Becoming Totally Immune as He Matures with Age

To summarize his life as a gay man, David thinks it has been half bitter, half sweet. He admits that his life has been joyful and fun, but, deep down, he still has his regrets.

Straight people hold hands and kiss wherever they want. Gay people can do that, but only if you are brave enough to risk everything. It's not something you can do lightly. A lot of places that you go to, like a dinner or a party, you remind yourself that you are gay, so don't be a sissy. Don't show any clues that might reveal your true identity.

If you are a playboy or a celibate, it's better than being thought of as a gay man. It may be different decades later, but people are not open enough to accept you. It depends on tolerance and open-mindedness. They have to understand human nature. I was born gay, so you have to understand that. I said earlier that most young people accept homosexuals now, but it's just a kind of peer sympathy. They think you are just a friend and so hang out with you and accept you. That's how they see it, but maybe I'm wrong.

Tongzhi have a difficult path to walk. However, if he had another chance to live again with a choice of his own, he would still rather be gay.

Because I like men, even though a lot of the guys are jerks. I'm not sure if it's because of my sexuality, I'm not emotionally attached to women at all. I've always been attached to guys.

After spending a large part of his life hiding his true orientation and dealing with the intangible pressure of society, sometimes David does not even know how much he has endured.

You've lived your life for decades. You had to roll with the punches and take things as they came when you were young. I once sneaked into the toilet to cry. I don't remember why. I've forgotten about it already. Failure teaches

success, as time goes on. I can't say that I'm totally immune to everything that happens, but at least it doesn't bother me anymore.

David looks very handsome. He is still in good shape in his sixties. He was born into a middle-class family. As a university graduate, he got a good job. Now he is retired and lives at leisure. When he has time, he plays mahjong, goes to the theatre or goes on vacations. He is living in comfort. It is the kind of life many people look forward to. However, there has always been a thorn in David's side, because he has made up lie after lie to dispel people's suspicions about his sexual orientation. Although he is very happy to see the setup of Gay & Grey and participates frequently in our monthly activities, he still does not want to come out. You can imagine how great the social pressure must be for people sometimes.

In fact, it is never easy to meet the demands of society. People say that you have no future if you are not well-educated; you are worthless if you don't make a lot of money; you will never get a girl if you look ordinary; you are not masculine enough if you do not have a six-pack; you are a loser if you do not have your own apartment to house your family. The list goes on. Society is ruthless, so you cannot take any risks when it comes to your sexual orientation. I am not sure that if you were promiscuous, you would be less stigmatized than a gay man. If you do not fit into the norms of society one way or the other, you get punished somehow. I cannot help but wonder though, is there any fun in being 'normal'? No wonder queer theory always advocates the subversion of social norms as queers just cannot stand normality.

Conclusion

Transformation of an Academic Project into Participatory Action Research

This project began life in 2009 as an academic project to fill the gap in research on Chinese ageing and sexuality, using the oral history method. It led to various forms of community engagement with a self-help group that finally formed in late 2014, where participants could take control and feel empowered. I did not expect academic research to morph into participatory action research with unintended consequences. In this short conclusion, I will briefly discuss how this research has had three stages, witnessing changes in the level of participation by both the researcher and his subjects, as well as the social transformation of the participants and the production of knowledge on Chinese homosexuality.¹

The first stage of the research comprised the collection of life stories of older gay men in Hong Kong using the oral history method. Oral history is a very powerful tool to give voice to individuals whose histories are often ignored by orthodox histories (Thompson 1978; Cockcroft 2005; Ames and Diepstra 2010). Through collecting oral testimonials and the 'documents of life' such as diaries, letters, and photographs of these men, I was able to recount their secretive pasts from birth to adulthood against the backdrop of various social, cultural, economic, and political transformations in colonial Hong Kong from the 1930s to the 1980s. We now know a bit more about how they realized same-sex desires; met others; compromised and got married or remained single; manoeuvred between marriage and same-sex romance; formed intimate same-sex relationships; created their own 'scenes', and formed their collective sexual memory through language, culture, fashion, and lifestyle. A queer voice from the past is slowly heard through their stories. Oral history also enabled me to discuss how they negotiate ageing and sexuality in their current lives—the loneliness of being old and gay, the coming out dilemma (not just to their wives or children or grandchildren, but also to their friends in social centres for the elderly), the longing for same-sex intimacy, getting sick and sensing the deterioration of their

1. Some of the material in this conclusion appeared in an earlier version in a different form as Kong (2017).

bodies mentally and physically, and the experience of ageism in the youth-oriented gay community.

Since most of them are still closeted, it was the first time that they have ever told their life story (including same-sex intimacy) to a stranger. This was in itself a coming out process. They spoke with laughter, joy, happiness, and pride, as well as tears, anger, remorse, shame, and guilt. These sexual stories (Plummer 1995) were personal and political, powerful and transformative, therapeutic and empowering, revealing narratives that challenged the hegemonic heteronormative script of Chinese masculinity in Hong Kong. It was as a result of these in-depth interviews that I decided to organize tea gatherings with the participants (and asked them to bring friends) as a way of community building in 2012. After *yum cha* at a local restaurant, we visited a volunteer's home for a focus group discussion and loosely focused on one of four themes: work, family, social services, and the gay community. I asked them to bring along objects with special meaning and to share the stories behind them. One man brought the ring his first love had given him; some brought letters from pen-pals and diaries; and several brought old photographs. These gatherings connected these neglected elderly people, and provided a space where they shared their long-buried experiences and opened up their hearts. We gradually formed a small community comprising about five core members and ten who joined us occasionally. I began to look forward to our gatherings and gradually developed a deeper relationship with the participants. It was through this that some 'suppressed' truths (e.g., HIV status) were slowly revealed once trust began to deepen between us.

The emerging small community that grew out of my oral history project clearly had an important story to tell, and together we decided to share it with society. I received a university knowledge exchange award in 2013, which allowed me to publish *Oral History of Older Gay Men in Hong Kong* in 2014. Each person's biography was inspiring. I was fascinated by their dramatic stories and touched by their honesty. I was saddened by their misfortunes and frustrated by their grievances. These are flesh and blood stories, full of laughter and tears. In the course of producing the book, I invited four local and international artists (Bobby K. H. Sham, Wong Kan-tai, Gyorgy Ali Palos, and Chan Ka-kei) to document the men's lives through photographs. Since most of the interviewees are still living in the closet, one of the greatest challenges for the artists was how to photograph these men without showing their faces. The other challenge was to seek ways to show these men's intimate relationships with their specific habitats. They came to our regular monthly gatherings and hung out with some of the participants. The result was four distinctive visual documentations of their lives (see pp. 95–100). The book talk and/or photo exhibition toured various locations in Hong Kong and received tremendously positive feedback from the local community, evidenced by extensive media exposure. I also extended this knowledge

referred to the book as 'our' book, which shows that they assumed ownership of what amounted to a collective project. Publishing the book could thus be seen as a second coming out, which resulted in some new experiences as reported by Shmily and May Wu.

In late 2014, the project has entered the third stage. Building on the momentum created by the book and photo exhibition, I encouraged the original oral history participants and other older gay men who had joined them after the various public events to formally register as a social group called Man Tung Hin (Gay & Grey). The Chinese name means '*tongzhi* in later life supporting each other hand in hand'. Using the concept of 'peer counselling', Gay & Grey is operated by older gay men and offers services and support to other older gay men in Hong Kong. The group has two main purposes. The first is to build a positive older gay community through activities (e.g., monthly teas, karaoke, film screenings, talks, seminars, yoga) and social services (e.g., a helpline to answer queries, delivery of condoms to gay saunas). The group has also established a WhatsApp group that is used for sharing information and sending greetings every day. The ultimate goal is to press for social services catering for elderly *tongzhi* in Hong Kong, such as residential home care or day centres and nursing homes. The second purpose is to raise awareness of the unspoken needs and problems of older gay men amongst both the *tongzhi* community and the general public. Gay & Grey co-organises activities with other *tongzhi* NGOs to enhance mutual understanding and provide public education through school talks, media interviews, and other forms of media exposure.

Participatory action research is an approach to research community that emphasises participation and transformation (Kemmis and McTaggart 2005; Reason and Bradburg 2008). Participation means the change in the participation level between the researcher and the researched, especially focusing on the power issue between the two. Transformation means the transformation of people, such as the researcher, participants, the community concerned, and society at large, and also the transformation of knowledge by producing new and local knowledge for both the academia and the community. Participatory action research thus constitutes an intervention that challenges the boundaries of participation, and thus creates conditions that foster empowerment and social transformation (Dworski-Riggs and Langhout 2010, 226).

From this three-stage process, first, there is a change of the level and scope of participation between researcher and researched. I was initially a researcher (carrying out oral history) and facilitator of a focus group, but then I became an author of the Chinese book, and now I am a friend of Gay & Grey. The participants were initially interviewees in my research project and then became 'co-authors' of the book and the main subjects of the photo exhibition, and now they are Gay & Grey spokespersons. Together, we have come to know one another across the lines of class, age, education, and religion, and have come to appreciate

the differences amongst us. It was through this process that a redistribution of power between researcher and researched occurred.

Second, transformation has occurred among these men. It has been an empowering process for them. From the 'first' coming out (talking to me) to the 'second' coming out (publishing the book, participating in the photo exhibition, giving public talks, and being interviewed by the media), most never imagined that anyone would be interested in their lives. They have been living in the shadows for many years. Although many still cannot face the public, most can at least face themselves. Through *Gay & Grey*, they feel less isolated. They have also found a new social role in being old and gay and in caring for others with similar lived experiences. The group is still in its early stages. It has had difficulty recruiting members of different social and cultural backgrounds (English- and Mandarin-speaking older gay men) and other genders and sexualities (including lesbians and transsexuals). It had also had problems obtaining funding, promoting local networks of older *tongzhi*, and raising awareness amongst service providers and policymakers. Having said that, *Gay & Grey* exemplifies the idea of building a sexual community through an articulation of identity, development of values and skills, and emergence of a collective identity to challenge the existing order (Weeks 2000, 192).

Third, the transformation that has occurred has not been about the participants alone, but also about theory. The overall research process has produced a new understanding of Chinese homosexuality. Older gay men represent a distinctive generation in Hong Kong *tongzhi* history. They share most of the characteristics of the first generation of Hong Kong people as depicted by Lui (2007). Most experienced the hardships of life in post-war Hong Kong, including extreme poverty, poor living conditions, and unemployment, under the colonial government administration, the close-knit Chinese family network and religion (especially Protestantism and Catholicism). They struggled to live their lives and put their parents or their own family as their top priority. What marks them out amongst the first generation perhaps is their same-sex desire. But unlike the first queer generation in Western countries who were at the forefront of the lesbian and gay movements in the 1960s, they were highly discreet and did not participate in the debates over the decriminalization of homosexuality in the 1980s, and most still do not participate in visible and public *tongzhi* events (e.g., IDAHO, Pride Parade, Pink Dot). They were not keen to find out what was meant by 'homosexuality' or to search for their sexual identity, but were quite anxious to find a suitable social role of being a man (e.g., a hardworking labourer, a filial son, a dutiful husband, or a stern father) under the complex web of family networks. Whether they got married and postponed their search for same-sex desires, secretly sought gay romance, or remained in singlehood, they struggled and created their own selves under familial heteronormativity. The Western coming out model, usually confessional in nature and associated

with a confrontational form of identity politics, is less relevant in the Chinese context, especially to the early generation. The real opposition is sometimes less between heterosexuality and homosexuality but more between willingness and refusal to play one's traditional family and gender role. Moreover, the stories collected include men from different social strata as well as British expatriates, thus facilitating an understanding of how class, ethnicity, and material resources affect the undercover lives these men have lived.

It is through these stories that we can have a new understanding of the notion of gayness, coming-out politics and the relationship among (homo)sexuality, space, the family, religion, and the (colonial) state in a non-Western context. This subjugated knowledge thus challenges the universal Western knowledge of homosexuality, which is based on the Western gay experience. I therefore engage with an agenda that not only calls for a need to build connections between empirical investigations in different parts of the world but also on concepts, theories, and methods produced by thinkers working from the colonized and postcolonial South (Connell 2013). This translated English book is part of this process. By bringing the kaleidoscopic life of these older gay men in the history of Hong Kong to an English-speaking world, I hope to facilitate a critical dialogue that could offer a more nuanced understanding of Chinese homosexual identities, desires, and practices stemming from local experiences but also sensitive to global parameters under the geopolitics of the world system of sexual knowledge.