

## Imagined Family Trajectories and Risk Dispositions among Young Gay Men in Hong Kong: Intersections of Class and Sexuality

Henry H. S. Kan (University of Hong Kong)

Family lives outside the bounds of heteronormativity have been increasingly common among homosexuals of the young generation in Hong Kong. This imminent shift takes place due to a heightened degree of self-acceptance and individuation, wider public endorsement of homosexuality, growth of civil society, and piecemeal legal victories. These developments notwithstanding, the heterosexual nuclear family model remains the primary and ideal unit of welfare provision for its members, because not only of the insufficient expansion of social spending over the past decades, but also of a deep-seated ethos of self-care in this growth-oriented society. Within this context, it remains unexplored as to how Hong Kong young homosexuals make sense of their future as they reject the script of heterosexuality, and how they cope with the perceived life uncertainties, if any, incurred thereof.

Using in-depth interviews, this study explores the future perceptions among 30 Hong Kong young gay men, aged between 18 and 35, in the light of their imagined family trajectories, and their dispositions in facing associated uncertainties. The notion of compressed modernity, coined by Chang Kyung-sup to capture the dynamic co-existence of often conflicting social and historical elements brought together by the rapid modernization projects, is instrumental in understanding the persistent family-centredness in East Asia, although it has yet come to terms with domains beyond heterosexuality. By stretching the analytical scope of compressed modernity, the study aims to shed light on the sense of uncertainty in the respondents as they pursue a non-heterosexual life course. This was manifested in the respondents' desire for long-term same-sex intimate relationships, which was accompanied by their unease with the likelihood of involuntary singlehood, widowhood, and childlessness, due to a combination of fledging post-materialism, thin dating market, institutional constraints, and practical concerns. In addition, the study illustrates that the availability of class capital shapes respondents' temporal consciousness, hence their risk dispositions. Respondents from a middle-class background were inclined to adhere to the self-care ethos by having a future-oriented financial habit to manage biographical risks, whilst those from a working-class background were more present-oriented, if not fatalistic about the future.

The implication of this study is threefold. First, it questions the relevance of the notion of homonormativity in analyzing homosexuals' family lives in Hong Kong and, more broadly, East Asia. Popularized by Lisa Duggan, homonormativity has become a conceptual straitjacket to critically examine the rise of a privatized and deradicalized gay culture, which accentuates domesticity and consumption, in contexts beyond its origin (i.e., neoliberal America), including Hong Kong. While useful for understanding the costs of normalization under assimilationist sexual politics, the notion falls short of steering more contextually grounded discussions of ordinary lesbian and gay lives that are irreducible to the binary of assimilation/transgression. The findings in the study suggest, in line with Jeffrey Weeks and Brian Heaphy, the need to consider the conceptual value of "the ordinary" in sexualities studies. Second, it contributes to the discussion of the impacts of ideological changes on family trends in the region through a consideration of the growing visibility of homosexuality. The study illustrates the resilience of familism among Hong Kong young homosexuals, despite their rejection of the script of heterosexuality. It is conducive for rethinking the de/reinstitutionalization of the family in East Asia, which often, in scholarly discussions, distinguishes itself from other regions by its heteronormative family-centredness. Third, in tandem with oft-noted demographic trends such as rising singlehood and childlessness, homosexuality raises questions for the future of care provision in East Asia, which is, to date, grounded on the heterosexual nuclear family model.

Key words: Compressed modernity, homosexuality, imagined future