

## **Re-placing queer studies: reflections on the Queer Matters conference (King's College, London, May 2004)**

### **AsiaPacifiQueer: An introduction**

Peter A. JACKSON, Fran MARTIN and Mark MCLELLAND

The AsiaPacifiQueer (APQ) Network developed from a common sense of disciplinary exclusion and professional alienation within the academy by a number of scholars researching Asian same-sex and transgender cultures and histories. Established Asian area studies departments are often unsympathetic, if not hostile, towards critical theory and research on homosexuality and transgenderism. And until comparatively recently, Anglophone queer studies has focused on the study of Western societies, with the issues of linguistic, discursive and theoretical translation at the heart of the practices of Asian queer studies tending to be overlooked. These issues are more than matters of intellectual debate. Difficulties in finding sympathetic MA and PhD supervisors, limited access to research funds, the failure of Asian studies collections at major libraries to archive, acquire or source relevant research materials, and restricted job opportunities together reflect the imbricated networks of professional homophobia and Eurocentrism that students of Asian queer studies confront.

Since it was established in 2000, the aim of APQ has been to intervene strategically to confront these multiple exclusions, bringing together academics and research students in a collective attempt to inscribe queer studies within Asian studies and to locate Asia, and the non-West, within queer studies. We have used a variety of approaches. To build networks amongst often isolated Asian queer studies researchers we have organized dedicated APQ conferences, and we have convened APQ streams of panels within Asian studies, cultural studies and Western queer studies conferences. Reports

of APQ activities are listed on the Network's website (<http://apq.anu.edu.au/>).

We have been both surprised and delighted by the extent of international interest in APQ. At the Third International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS 3) held in Singapore in August 2003, APQ convened a stream of six highly successful panels, comprising 24 papers, bringing together Asian and Western scholars working on a diverse range of Asian queer studies topics. An impromptu meeting of almost 40 ICAS-3 participants revealed that Asian queer studies researchers across the region suffer from institutional marginalization and professional exclusion. The meeting recommended unanimously that the APQ initiatives begun in Australia be extended internationally and work towards convening an international Asian queer studies conference in Asia in the near future. Following up this recommendation, the APQ Network secured the cooperation and support of the Office of Human Rights Studies at Mahidol University in Bangkok in co-convening the international conference 'Sexualities, Genders and Rights in Asia: The First International Conference of Asian Queer Studies', to be held in Bangkok 8–10 July 2005. For full details please see the conference website (<http://bangkok2005.anu.edu.au/>). This conference will be a transnational dialogue and strategic imbrication that not only attempts to challenge the disciplinary isolation of Asian queer studies by the structures of the Western academy but seeks to build linkages with emerging Asian queer studies in Asia. The conference is an attempt to build horizontal networks within our region.

Conference contact groups have now been established in Japan, Korea, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Philippines, Indochina, Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and South Asia.

### *Re-placing the current queer studies*

What follows is a series of reflections from six scholars researching Asian cultures of gender and sexuality who attended the recent Queer Matters conference at Kings College, London in May 2004. Following on from APQ's successful intervention in the August 2003 International Convention of Asia Scholars in Singapore, and responding to a warm welcome extended by the conference organisers, APQ organized a series of five panels at Queer Matters, interrogating the use of queer theory in Asian contexts. However, it soon became apparent that the range of problems facing researchers of queer culture at Asian Studies conferences was paralleled by similar problems facing those pursuing research into Asian cultures at a queer studies conference.

As the responses below testify, the sense of the positive value of an event such as Queer Matters was unanimous. The conference presented an all-too-rare rare opportunity to get together with other queer studies researchers from all over the world in a large-scale event (over 500 people attended), and to take stock of the current state of sexuality studies a decade after the height of the buzz around queer theory in the early-to-mid-1990s. In the parallel-panel sessions, the conference certainly lived up to its promise to showcase the enormous and invigorating diversity of work currently being produced in the field. However, as well as these generally positive responses, informal discussions over the three days of the conference revealed that the event also raised for us a series of persistent anxieties and unresolved questions about the *placing* of queer studies in the current world order, both academic and, more broadly, geo-political. These anxieties relate most directly to the ongoing dominance of US-based research and researchers within the field

and the general indifference that this scholarly centre still seems to show toward queer cultures and queer studies elsewhere. Several aspects of the conference sparked such reflections. These included: the lack of any non-England/US-based speakers in the conference's plenary sessions (indeed, even British voices were a rarity amid the massive dominance of US-based scholars); the casual disregard – despite well-meaning declarations of American 'humility' – that was shown by most of the US-based plenary speakers for sexual cultures anywhere outside of the United States; and the tendency for questions about cultural difference to turn inevitably into questions about ethnic difference *within* the US nation-state, while the issue of differential national-cultural positioning was all but ignored. Problems also arose as a result of the streaming of papers according to geographic area, which produced an unfortunate 'ghetto-ization' of Asian queer issues (a problem for which APQ itself must take some responsibility, given our initial support for area-based panels). Finally – and very forcefully – a central problem was brought home to us by the statement made by one plenary speaker who, defending the US-based journal *GLQ*'s apparent lack of interest in publishing translations of non-English-language queer studies work, flatly asserted that the 'default' language of queer studies today is, in any case, English.

On reflection, it seems to us that the questions and dissatisfactions that were raised by the experience of attending Queer Matters in fact reflect very broad questions about the current state and future prospects of queer studies vis-à-vis the current world dominance of US-based humanities and social science research more generally. Clearly, these are far-reaching, structural issues. While it is not surprising that their effects should have been felt at an event like Queer Matters, given its aim of providing an overview of the current state of the field internationally, nonetheless the conference organizers cannot be held personally responsible for the conference's manifestation of these broad structural inequalities.

The conference was initially planned as a forum in which to address the state of 'Anglo-American queer studies'; the focus on wider 'international exchange' was added later on, and so it is not surprising that the organizers proved unable single-handedly to resolve the plethora of complex issues inevitably raised by extending the purview of queer studies from the narrow axis of England and the USA to include the rest of the world. Given this, the responses that follow are not intended primarily as criticisms of the conference organizers, who did a really exemplary job on a shoestring budget and, clearly, have successfully provoked us into thinking through some productive if thorny issues. Instead, what follows is best framed as a collective meditation on how we might continue to interrogate and confront these difficult questions in our future trans-national queer collaborations.

**The catch in indigenouness, or what is wrong with 'Asian Queers'**

SHIMIZU Akiko

There is no question that Queer Matters was an impressive and ultimately successful event. The sheer number of participants and sessions, the variety of the topics of papers and panels, and the vigour and enthusiasm that accompanied the discussions at each session all combined to create a stimulating and vibrant tone for this unique, long-awaited international conference. However, excited as I was to participate in such a conference, I nevertheless found myself left with a certain uneasiness and concern. In this critique I would like to point out some of these concerns in the hope that through constructive criticism we will be better prepared for the upcoming APQ Bangkok conference.

Arguably the most disturbing aspect of Queer Matters lay in the way the conference organized and divided the sessions according to rigidly but sometimes hardly justifiably constructed 'areas', which seemed to exist almost exclusively outside of the UK

and the US. These 'areas' could refer either to the geographical location that your research is dealing with, or to where you are from, or to where you are based: if you are from one of the 'Asian' countries, you are first and foremost an 'Asian queer', and therefore your work would most likely be thrown into the 'Asian pot', no matter what your research actually concerns.

Setting aside the Anglo-US-centric presupposition that was clearly at work, this 'area ghetto' also caused some practical problems at the conference. For example, I read a paper that did not concern any specifically Japanese cultural practices in a session entitled 'Queer Approaches to Hong Kong and Japan'. As observed in most of the 'Asian' sessions, the three papers presented at this particular session did not have much in common apart from a completely arbitrary construction, namely geographical 'area'. Although I very much enjoyed the other excellent papers presented in the session, I unfortunately did not have an opportunity to receive feedback from scholars working on topics close to my own, and I suspect that this feeling was shared by my two co-presenters. I find it difficult to understand this concept of grouping three papers into the same session when they are not dealing with the same, or at least similar, topics. The 'area' division did not work successfully as the connecting theme, for even within the fairly limited 'area' of East Asia, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea and Japan have very different cultural, political, and historical backgrounds, which makes the easy assumption of commonality difficult: we do not even share the same language. Moreover, what is the point of having an 'international' conference if it is not structurally possible for the researchers working in/on different cultures and societies to share their problems, compare their views, or help one another question their own theoretical assumptions and restructure their own theoretical frameworks?

Not only was such grouping unhelpful to researchers in practical terms, but the 'ghetto structure' of the conference also denied us full access to all the other

detailed, 'sophisticated', or nuanced discussions on diverse aspects of queer experiences other than those centring on our specific 'area'. By now, one would have hoped that we had passed the historical point when we had to keep pointing out that not all non-Western, or 'Asian', queers are dealing with one and the same issue, but unfortunately the conference sent out a different message. In other words, if you want to discuss queer cultural representations or queer icons, lesbian identities, or AIDS activism, then you will only be able to do so within the confines of your Asian circle, for the only difference that matters is your Asian difference. The prioritization of the 'area' difference over any other possible differences encourages us to become 'Asian' queers without ever letting us question or claim precisely *how* or *in what forms* we are queers in 'Asia'. Instead of making 'Asian' queers politically or academically visible, the 'area' label actually rendered us invisible.

This leads to another major concern I had at the Queer Matters conference, or more precisely at some of the sessions organized by APQ: who is it that talks about 'Asian' queers, from what position, and for whose interest? Although mostly in the form of passing comments, we did sometimes hear people argue for *'the* Asian queer' or *indigenous* queerness as not falling within the theoretical framework of Anglo-US queer studies, thus questioning the legitimacy of Anglo-US hegemony in this field of research. While the Anglo-US hegemony in the academic field of queer studies needs thorough critical reflection, it is of the utmost importance that we should not misappropriate 'Asia' or its 'indigenouness' simply for the purpose of undermining Anglo-US hegemony.

In the post-colonial world we live in, it is not always clear what can be called 'indigenous' and what cannot. Indeed, we might only be able to regard as truly 'indigenous' to Japanese culture the precise way in which we have repeatedly and selectively 'Westernized' ourselves and reconstructed a so-called 'tradition'. Apart from that, however,

it would be extremely difficult to distinguish what is 'indigenous' and what is 'imported', and I suspect the situation is more or less shared in many other Asian countries. In Japan, both queer theories and activism have developed through the support of, and contribution from, the works of academics and activists who introduced Anglo-US or European cultural, feminist, or queer theories, as well as the pioneering works of gay and lesbian writers, artists and activists. For example, the fight for legal rights of gays and lesbians, who became visibly active in the 1990s, has not only accomplished satisfactory legal results, but has also widely demonstrated one possible way to construct gay/lesbian subjectivity in Japan, where the 'Western' principle of democracy has at least been adopted officially. If both the type of gay/lesbian subjectivity they stood for, and the socio-political discourse of identity and civil rights they had recourse to, may have been what we might call 'Westernized' or 'imported', to simply criticize them as being opposed to, or in favour of, 'indigenouness' would not only cause a setback in the political fight for gay/lesbian legal rights, but would also disregard the forms of LGBT identities that have been constructed among the younger generation under the influence of the 'imported' models that the activism has demonstrated.

Moreover, some of the queer discursive practices in Japan during the past 15 years or so, such as the protests against misogyny, trans-phobia, or bi-phobia in gay/lesbian communities, or the criticism from Asexuals of sex-centrism in both LGB and heterosexual communities, have grounded their claims on Anglo-US theories as well as their own experiences, using the 'imported' theories for their own political ends. Regarding how these minorities within minorities have appropriated 'imported' ideas and concepts as discursive instruments of objection, I believe that the call for 'indigenouness' should be accompanied by especially serious consideration for the politics and historicity of the 'indigenous' itself. Hasty recourse to 'indigenouness' or 'tradition'

has quite often served reactionary ends, especially when it comes to politics of gender and sexualities, as we in Japan have (again!) been made increasingly aware during the last few years through the attack by conservatives on 'imported' feminisms as 'not based on or suitable to Japanese cultural background'.

It goes without saying that this is not a call for the universalization of Anglo-US based queer theories or their uncritical application to Asian situations. Dislocating or criticizing the Anglo-US hegemony in queer studies is, as I argued above, certainly an important task, and the claim of 'indigenous' queerness or 'Asian' particularities might be a powerful tool to achieve it. We should also keep in mind, however, that our political/ theoretical goals are not simply to criticize the Anglo-US hegemony in the academic field of queer studies, nor simply to diversify and thus contribute to enriching the Anglo-US based queer studies. Certainly it will be satisfying if Anglo-US queer studies can learn something from 'Asian' queer situations or theories, but our *primary* question should always be what each of the 'Asian' queer communities (or hegemonic hetero-normative societies) can learn or acquire from queer studies of other 'areas', including the UK, the US and Europe, as well as from each other. We can use Anglo-US based theories, we can lay claim to different or 'indigenous' forms of queerness, or we can criticize and try to restructure the Anglo-US hegemony in queer studies. We should not, however, let our dissatisfaction with Anglo-US-centricism in the field distract us from asking ourselves what our theoretical/political positions are and whose interests our work can best serve.

### Queer matters, what else matters?

Helen Hok-Sze LEUNG

#### *Our Queer profession*

Never having been a fan of large professional conferences, I have always enjoyed the intimate intellectual spaces that queer

work, owing to its relatively marginalized and under-funded status, has often inspired. I recall fondly the many small workshops and symposiums I had been to where emergent work was received with openness and encouragement, where professional hierarchies easily dissolved in the camaraderie forged over thoughtful conversations spiced with gossip and the inevitable sex talk. Anticipating such queer spaces as I headed for the *Queer Matters* conference in London, I was not quite prepared for the size and structure of the event: plenary sessions of star scholars, eight paper panels running simultaneously, the cliques and the anonymity ... it felt more like an MLA or AAS conference, with just as few opportunities for participants to engage in unlikely dialogues and adventurous exchanges. Yet, the sheer *amount* of queer work present was impressive and it opened my eyes to the vibrancy and richness of what has become the field – even, god forbid, the *profession* – of 'queer studies'. As with any kind of professionalization, there are attendant opportunities as well as losses. The *Queer Matters* conference, in both its accomplishments and failings, signals the challenge we now face: how to navigate an exponentially expanding field without sacrificing the sense of community that was fuelled by queer work when it was less prolific, less professional. To that end, I would like to revisit some difficult moments at the conference and reflect on the lessons they offer.

#### *'Queer Approaches to \_\_\_\_' a.k.a. the Area Studies Ghetto*

One of the most serious problems of the conference was, for me, summed up in a remark I heard from an Asian scholar after she had presented a remarkable paper on lesbian identities. She mentioned it was her first time attending an international conference and that she had been looking forward to feedback from scholars doing work on lesbian issues in other parts of the world. To her surprise and disappointment, her audience comprised almost exclusively of Asianists, without a *single* scholar doing



lesbian-related research from any other areas present. This, I believe, is the result of a rigid 'area studies' model of organizing knowledge: individual papers, especially those dealing with issues outside of Europe and America, were organized as 'Queer Approaches To \_\_\_\_' (fill in the blank with national categories such as Uganda and Israel, or a hotchpotch rubric of apparently 'comparable' or 'similar' regions such as 'Japan and Hong Kong' or 'Taiwan and China'). Such division of knowledge, in effect, ghettoizes areas of research that do not fall within the conventional purview of queer theory. Many of us have had to familiarize ourselves with the referential framework of queer theory even when it falls outside of our own areas of research (such as knowing Freud and Lacan in order to read Judith Butler, or Henry James and Jane Austin to read Eve Sedgwick). While such 'extra-curricular' efforts have provided us with the ease and interest to circulate amongst scholars whose works deal with the West, the same does not hold true vice versa. A *queerer* approach to organizing papers – one that creatively transgresses (rather than replicates) existent national and cultural boundaries – would forge (or *force*) more inspired dialogues amongst participants working in different worlds. More importantly, such commingling would expose the cultural specificity of queer theory's foundational framework and in so doing contribute to its diversification.

### *Hegemony and humility*

The problem of cultural hegemony in the field is by no means a blind spot for everyone at the conference. In fact, it was thoughtfully and forcefully addressed at the plenary session on 'Queer Cultures' by Judith Halberstam, who self-reflexively called attention to the star power of American academics and the mobility and dominance of American subject matter. Halberstam made the provocative injunction to American scholars to replace the discursive model of pride (or the recent counter discourse of shame) with that of

*humility*. However, Halberstam's laudable efforts to de-centre US dominance was met with a surprising degree of cynicism. One audience member quipped: 'We don't want your humility, just your resources'. Another, in response to Halberstam's subsequent discussion of the queer undertone in animation, tautly reminded her that *Shrek 2* has not yet been released outside of the US and should not be assumed to be a common cultural reference. Halberstam, true to her word, responded to these charges with humility. Yet, she could not have deflected the audience's resentment on her own because the source of the problem was the composition of the plenary sessions, *all* of which were comprised exclusively of well-known scholars based in the US and the UK. As the *only* sites where all of the conference's participants could gather at the same time, these plenary sessions replicated the false (and not so humble) assumption that Anglo-US references would be sufficient and relevant to all. Had these plenary sessions included scholars from outside of the US and UK, not to mention outside of North America and Europe, perspectives on issues from animation and glamour, to gay marriage and neo-liberalism, to race, class, and the diaspora, would be significantly reoriented, likely to the point where the parameters of some issues would be queered beyond recognition. Of course, such panels would have to include faces that are not familiar to those working outside of the particular areas of research. Plenary sessions without an all-star line-up ...? What a queer idea!

### *The Elephant in the Room*

Finally, there were the really tough questions, the kind that inspired the most emotions and the least discussion. One such elephant in the room at this conference was race. At a spoken word performance, artist Del LaGrace Volcano recounted a hideous incident of violence on a London bus where, on account of his queer gender presentation, he was beaten up severely by a gang of young men. One member of the audience,

who clearly had prior knowledge that the attackers in question were black, wondered aloud why Volcano did not specify the race of his attackers. Volcano explained that he did not want to perpetuate the stereotype of the violent black youth and thus deliberately withheld the information. Volcano went on to speak astutely about the history of racialized oppression and the layered complexity of the dynamics behind the violence inflicted on him. Yet, almost as an afterthought, he wondered aloud whether such dynamics, however complex, made the act of violence any more forgivable, any less open to criticism. Silence – even from the audience member who initially challenged Volcano to ‘out’ the racial dynamics of the incident – greeted what seemed to me a worthwhile, if difficult, question to ponder. Such silences recurred throughout the conference around other, less obvious, references to race. Even those with the courage (or compunction) to raise the spectre of race did not seem to have the recourse to pursue the subject while the rest of us seemed paralysed by fear, or reluctance, or an inability to push the discussion beyond the pious reiteration that in queer discussions race ... *matters*. But how? Finding a way around that discussion, a way that would truly get under our skin, should be a priority for any future gathering of this kind.

### **Coalition politics, or, queer matters today** Chris BERRY

What a difference a decade makes. Say ‘coalition politics’ ten years ago and you meant linking the excluded against the dominant liberal capitalist order: say ‘coalition politics’ now and you mean the total war policy of that same order. Ten years ago, queer culture, queer politics, and queer studies thought they were part of the old coalition politics, and everything queer and Asian only enhanced the coalition’s rainbow image. But what now, under the conditions of the new coalition politics?

Plenary speakers at the Spring 2004 Queer Matters Conference in London waxed

nostalgic about the good old days of radical queer. But they were all American or British and English-speaking. Of course, that can be explained by appealing to the original design of Queer Matters as an Anglo-American affair, only expanded in response to demand. But, then again, the original design betrays an original – and persistent – Anglo-centric misconception.

At Queer Matters, I found myself wondering how radical queer ever was and what kind of a difference it has really made. I also found myself wondering where queer stands in relation to the new coalition politics, whether it really wants to be radical anymore, and what that might mean today. After all, in the new world order of the American Empire, the most radical resistance to it sees queer as part of the problem and stands for values no queer organization could support. And finally, I found myself wondering where ‘Asian queer’ fits into all this. I don’t think I have any answers, but here’s what I’m thinking.

First, it must be affirmed that Queer Matters was a wonderful thing. It was the international conference we have long needed in queer studies. The organizers did the right thing by expanding it to include participants from all over the world with a wide range of papers. It should happen again. But in terms of the first coalition politics, old problems persisted. A decade ago, queer was often attacked as hypocritical: many people claimed it spoke about radicalism, but was as elitist as ever. The plenary sessions at Queer Matters seemed to confirm that. All the speakers were either from the United Kingdom or from the United States. For me, the second day’s plenary on ‘cultures’ was most glaringly symptomatic. Not only were all three speakers and the chair from the United States, but also despite their calls to ‘de-centre’ and hear ‘non-American voices’, it turned out ‘cultures’ meant American culture, and ‘non-American’ meant ‘non-white’. The entire panel was devoted to a Disney film then unreleased in the UK, the politics of colour in Manhattan, and an alcoholic drag act in lower Manhattan. *Plus la change* ... I

guess it's hard to be inclusive if you are living in a blind spot.

Of course, I want to see non-English speaking and non-Western plenary speakers included in events like *Queer Matters*. I don't want to see Americans of colour standing in for foreigners. And the self-satisfied hypocrisy of the self-anointed radical elite infuriates me, as I'm sure it infuriated many of my colleagues and most of the audience. But I also wondered what kind of a difference including non-Western speakers would make. Would it restore that sought-after radical edge that everyone was so nostalgic about? And what is that edge in today's coalition politics?

Not only the old but also the new coalition politics made itself felt at *Queer Matters*. A number of panellists were missing because they had been unable to get visas to enter the UK. These were not panellists from the non-Islamic and relatively wealthy countries of East and South-east Asia. Rather, they came from those parts of the world regarded as post-9/11 'security risks' and 'visa overstay' risks. This itself is symptomatic of a shift of the new order of global capitalism. The old European colonial logic has been modified as new centres of capital have sprung up, and some of the formerly colonized have been recruited into the elite of this new order. Furthermore, some would argue that the queer elite has also been recruited into this system, not only in the West but elsewhere too.

In my own area – film – I have noticed what I think of as 'the *Wedding Banquet* effect'. In various 'Asian gay films', 'gay' and to a lesser extent also 'lesbian' are inscribed along with everything from megamalls to democracy as Western, upper middle-class, signs of Asian modernization, meaning active participation in the liberal capitalist elite. For example, *Arisan* (Nia Dianata, 2003) was shown in the 2004 San Francisco Frameline International Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Film Festival, soon after *Queer Matters*, where it was introduced as 'the first gay film from Indonesia'. An *arisan* is a kind of banquet – a

lunch club where the members pool their funds and hold a draw. The winner gets all the money, but also hosts the next meeting of the club.

Almost the entire film takes place in what could be Beverly Hills. The main characters pepper their conversation with American English terms, bake brownies for their co-workers, drive SUVs, and work in advertising, design, film, and so on. Also like *Wedding Banquet*, the main plot is a gay coming out story. The protagonist is encouraged to take up his position as a gay man by his psychiatrist as well as his friends, and even his own mother is willing to accept his partner into the larger family. Having a gay man around seems to be like having the right clothes, the right car, and so on – another sign of the successful attainment of modernity. There was no poverty in the Indonesia of *Arisan*, no local *waria* transgender cultures, no working-class same-sex culture, and no Islam, either.

*Rainbow* (2003) is a middle-class Thai coming out story featuring both a gay and a lesbian character in the country's upper middle class. The only difference from *Arisan* is a more direct display of opposition from the older generation, as a result of internalized homophobia. The film seems to stage this as a conflict between different modernities, with the production and acceptance of the 'gay' and the 'lesbian' as signs of attaining a new improved modernity.

In both these films, then, queer is equated to Western-derived and elite global capitalist culture. Sadly, that may be an accurate assessment. During the same Frameline festival where *Arisan* was screened, only one of the films I saw was booed. This was the 90-second French animation film, *Before I Was Sad* (Jean-Gabriel Périot, 2002), which satirizes gay marriage. After showing a series of vignettes from coming out through bar culture to gay coupledness, the protagonist's progress ends with him advising the audience to become truly happy by becoming heterosexual and getting married to a woman. In San Francisco, gay marriage



capital of the world where the gay press is full of the importance of gay marriage for tax breaks, insurance benefits, and property rights (including rights over adopted children), this did not go down well.

On the other side of the coin, it seems that reclaiming radicalism is not so easy, either. At Frameline, ageing bad boy Bruce La Bruce's *Raspberry Reich* claimed to fly the radical flag in queer culture today. It tells the story of a group of gay male porn actors led by a strident young woman called Gudrun who re-enact the Baader-Meinhof gang's escapades from the 1970s, but queer them. Proclaiming 'The revolution is my boyfriend!' Gudrun refuses bourgeois heterosexual monogamy and orders her partner to fuck his buddies. This funny send-up of leftist pretensions acquires an edge when it transpires the industrialist's son they have kidnapped has in fact been disowned for coming out and sympathizes with the gang. 'Our own Patty Heart!' one of them cries. While the Baader-Meinhof gang was barking up the wrong tree, the film suggests, queers face real oppression.

However, more contemporary references in this 'terrorist porn' epic sent *Raspberry Reich* badly off course. The characters proclaim, 'Join the Homosexual Intifada!' And Gudrun shouts, 'I don't care about Chechnya or Tibet! I care about my orgasm!' La Bruce seems to equate the uprisings in the Middle East and Central Asia with the deluded revolutionary capers of the German middle classes in the 1970s. But is the right to make gay porn or fuck in the streets really more significant than the effort to resist genocide in Palestine, Chechnya, and Tibet? At the beginning of the new millennium, is the rainbow coalition – including Asian queer culture – part of the coalition of the willing? I hope not. But I think we have to do more than mouth platitudes about the need to re-radicalize. We have to think through where queer stands in this new world order and what it would mean to be radical today. Otherwise, we will end up looking as crass as Bruce La Bruce.

## A condition of queerness at Queer Matters: localizing discourse at a 'global' conference

Huso Yi

A growing body of scholarship employs the rubric of global queering to explore emergent same-sex sexual scripts and the subjectivities of same-sex desire as they are represented in private and public space in diverse regions. The Queer Matters conference was one of the first events to provide a space for scholars in queer studies from all over the world to gather and exchange theories and practices. I was hoping that such a variety of international presentations on queer subjects would generate discussion aimed at deconstructing the outmoded post-colonial ethnography that posits the West as 'global' and non-Western regions as 'local', and perhaps produce a scholarly discourse that translates sexualities beyond this binary and unidirectional model. Unfortunately, the dominant discourse at the conference centred upon the queer culture of the West, in particular the United States,<sup>1</sup> and global queering remained little acknowledged by the speakers or participants. Much remains to be said about global queering after the conference, but it is not clear what has to be said in terms of the unique relationship between local queer subjects and globalization. Here, I'd like to make a few suggestions on localizing queerness in the global era, based largely on my own experience in the region of my origin, Korea.

The US-dominant essentialist view of the term 'minority', as applied to lesbian and gay social organizations, has been translated to other regions with the political tactics of identity. The common ground of the minority model is often assumed to be that of relatively dominant social positions: white, male, and middle-class. In relation to social structure, the linkage between ethnicity and 'sexual orientation' has been used in the gay rights movement of the US as if it were parallel to race, gender, and sexual orientation. The notion of a US-dominant 'quasi-ethnic identity' model is problematic, despite its value to organizational efforts,

because lesbians and gay men have to be self-labelled before entering a collectively identified space – otherwise their entering that space in itself endorses an identity. Moreover, not all of lesbian and gay history is based on the concept of community. The globalizing of a US-dominant notion of the status of minorities, including sexualities, and the accompanying ideas around identity and community that it generates, pose limitations on identity and are at root both essentialist and assimilationist.

The tension between universalizing and minoritizing sexual subjectivities resembles the conflict between globalizing and localizing queerness. Caution must be used both in attempts to globalize US-dominant concepts of minority, and attempts to project modern, western notions of homosexuality into regions where these notions are inappropriate. Unlike other identities (e.g. national and ethnic), queerness is affected by a local and quotidian embedded discourse of morality. Whether the sexual order is presented with the labels 'national' or 'social', a wide range of institutions and ideologies produces it, and to confront the sexual order is, sooner or later, to problematize those institutions. Queer people often connect themselves to broader and deeper demands for social justice and change more than members of other minorities. As a consequence, pioneering networks centred on queer concerns have pointed out new directions for social structures and contributed to the reformation of institutions to further the recognition of diversity.

One must avoid defining the lesbian and gay culture of a non-Western region solely in terms of how it has been mobilized and represented by Western (i.e. global) forces. Understanding the globalizing of queerness in a local culture requires the careful examination of specific domains that are not yet theorized and/or recognized as constraints on idiosyncratic heteronormativity unless one interprets beyond the realm of pre-existing Western discourse. Local struggles may give rise to epic and emic questions, which may then be re-framed in global terms. Both the localization of

discourse and the universalizing of queer subjects should extend internationalism (or transnationalism) into new cultural contexts. Western scholars should be more alert to the globalizing and localizing tendencies of gay/queer languages; scholars/activists from non-Western contexts should continue the trend of deepening involvement in queer studies. Well-balanced queer studies will explore new possibilities and pursue new problems in relation to both the West and the East, and reflect on the conditions that make the current queer structures – global and local – possible.

### **Queer theory in Japan**

Mark MCLELLAND

The Queer Matters conference was a disorienting event for me. My original debut on the gay scene was not in Cambridge (where I went to university and which had only one gay pub), but Tokyo, where I went to live after graduating in 1988 when I was just 22. Having lived in Japan on and off for five years and having visited the country almost every year since, I have more queer Japanese friends than I do queer friends from an Anglo background, and I am more familiar with Japan's queer culture than I am with the queer culture of Australia where I presently live. I found it odd, then, to be informed at a plenary session of the conference that the absence of queer theory translated from other languages into English in a leading sexuality studies journal was not really a lack, since 'English is the default language of queer studies'. This was news to me since I have been reading, discussing and arguing about queer theory in Japanese with Japanese people for over 15 years. I think some specific examples of local appropriation of 'queer' in Japan will be sufficient to problematize this assumption.

Firstly, Japanese already has a Sino-Japanese compound term '*hentai*' (odd, queer, sexually perverse) which translates the English term 'queer' very well and which has been in mass circulation (via

popular sexology magazines) since the early 1920s. In the early 1950s, a whole genre of *hentai zasshi* or 'queer magazines' such as *Fūzoku kagaku* (Sex-customs science) and *Fūzoku kitan* (Strange talk about sex customs) developed, whose topic of investigation was not homosexuality per se but *hentai seiyoku* (queer sexual desires) including a wide range of both homo- and hetero-oriented 'sexual perversions'. Due to comparatively lax censorship, these magazines were able to represent a wide range of queer positions – often reproducing actual voices of queer people – and even offered the opportunity for the vocalization of political agency based on queer desire. Japan's first queer rights campaigner, Tōgō Ken, emerged from this background in the early 1970s and his organization, the *Zatsumin no Kai* or 'Organization for Miscellaneous People' was a very queer mix of homosexuals, sex workers, cross-dressers and others disadvantaged by Japan's patriarchal family system, such as the mistresses of rich men, 'illegitimate' children and single parents. Tōgō's radical approach – he is in-your-face effeminate and reclaimed the indigenous term *okama* (fairy or faggot) as part of his election platform to national government – anticipated in many ways the reclamation of queer and the political stance of ACT UP in the late 1980s.

Although *hentai* has had a largely pejorative nuance, there are recent examples of it being deployed in a more playful sense as in the journal *Bessatsu Takarajima*'s (1991) collection of interviews and investigative reports on Japanese sexual subcultures entitled '*Hentai-san ga iku*' (There goes Mr/Ms Queer). More recently it was appropriated by Fushimi Noriaki, Japan's leading gay writer and critic, for the title of a collection on gay salarymen – '*Hentai suru sarariiman*' – 'salarymen doing queer' (Fushimi 2000). Indeed, Fushimi himself has pointed out how close both 'queer' and '*hentai*' are in meaning and, in 2003, he went on to release a collection of interviews with a wide range of sex and gender non-conformists entitled *Hentai (kuia) nyūmon* (A *hentai* [queer]

introduction) where he uses the terms interchangeably. In so doing, Fushimi is gesturing toward the synchronicity of the English queer and the Japanese *hentai* – despite their different histories in different geographical and cultural locations, both traditions have similarities. 'Queer' is nothing new in Japan (arguably queer approaches in Japan predate those in the US) and 'queer theory' is something that was already being worked out in the Japanese context before the advent of the English term.

However, there are differences. Queer theory was developed in the context of English literature departments in the US and the UK as a result of the 'postmodern turn' away from aesthetic and semiotic analyses toward more politically invested readings. In Japanese academia, however, *bungaku* or 'literature' is still very much invested in historical paradigms (using historical and social analyses to establish 'correct' readings of canonical texts). Gender theory, let alone queer theory, has yet to have much impact on this discipline. The impetus toward more critical readings has come from largely independent scholars (of which Japan has many) who write in popular high-brow journals such as *imago*, *Gendai no esuprit* and *Gendai shisō* – all of which have shown great interest in radical sex and gender theory since the late 1980s. These magazines were the first to present selected translations from the work of people such as Foucault, Butler and Sedgwick because these radical western thinkers fit in with the radical theoretical stance already pioneered by these magazines in Japanese.

In conclusion, Japan has a much larger 'high-brow' reading population than Anglophone societies. In Japan, a comparatively large audience reads material in popular journals that in English would be resigned to a narrow niche of academic publishing. These Japanese readers are well aware of recent queer theory via translations in these magazines and are equally aware of indigenous arguments, perspectives and positions that have been developed in the 'high-brow press' since the 1950s. I will give just one example to

illustrate this point. Inagaki Taruho, a poet and fiction writer, published an influential essay entitled '*A kankaku to V kankaku*' (The A sensibility and the V sensibility) in the well known literary magazine *Gunzō* in 1954 where he developed the idea that the 'anal sensibility,' which he associated with pederasty, was superior to the 'vaginal sensibility' or heterosexuality, in relation to the creative imagination – a theme that was often taken up in the 'perverse press' which associated homosexuality with artistic genius. Inagaki was to return to this theme in 1969 when he published the book-length study *Shōnen'ai no bigaku* (The aesthetics of boy love) which won a literary prize sponsored by the Shinchōsha publishing house, leading to a boom in interest in the topic of boy love. Given the history of such arguments in Japanese, the notion that English is somehow primary in developing theory in this area strikes me as a bizarre and ultimately indefensible position. So, we *do*, in fact, need more translations from languages other than English (particularly other than European). It's not *that* hard – where there's a will there's a way.

### Reflections on the Queer Matters conference

Sharyn GRAHAM

While perhaps wary of admitting it, I was excited to be at such a conference. Speakers were there whose work I had read thoroughly and used extensively in my own research and writing. Having the chance to listen to their presentations and engage in conversation in the more informal sessions (and late night gatherings), was an amazing experience for me as a new academic. It was a conference specifically on my area of interest. Unlike most conferences I attend, which are usually either on Asian Studies or Anthropology, this one concentrated on Queer Matters. I found many of the papers thought provoking and stimulating, and often a great challenge to my cognitive abilities.

I am more critical, however, of the conference, and the deeper issues it under-scores, when it comes to representational matters and the limited appreciation, and even acknowledgement, of paradigms of knowledge produced outside Western academic institutions. Having just returned from Singapore, where I spent some time with a US-based colleague, the dismissal, or worse, ignorance, of theoretical and ethnographic developments occurring in Asia, for instance, became for me particularly striking. In Singapore, importantly in Asia itself, the disregard my colleague felt for information produced in non-US institutions was in many ways mirrored at the Queer Matters conference.

The AsiaPacifiQueer stream was, of course, a boon for the conference. Receiving enough abstracts to present a set of panels on queer issues in Asia and the Pacific attests to the fact that there is a great deal of interest in this field of study. Unfortunately, however, the APQ stream, and the topics it addressed, became sidelined and the issues associated with it ignored by a majority of conference attendees (i.e. there was no Asia-Pacific focus in any of the keynote addresses). It was ironic, then, that comments were made regarding the lack of queer theoretical developments outside the West as such a statement was clearly contradicted by the material presented in the APQ stream (cf. McLelland, above).

On a more positive note, though, there is increasing awareness of Asia-Pacific issues. At a recent gender studies postgraduate conference at the National University of Singapore, hosted by the Asia Research Institute, I was struck by the composition of presenters. Eighteen out of the 22 participants were born in Asia, and a number were PhD candidates in universities such as Monash, Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard and Melbourne. It was refreshing to attend a conference where the key speakers were Asian, addressing Asian issues, and attending an array of prestigious universities. With these students lies a potent weapon that can be used to combat Western dominance at conferences, and it is these students

who will ensure that social issues, e.g. queer matters, are no longer sidelined.

### **Notes**

1. Not surprisingly, all the keynote speakers at the conference were from either the US or the UK, and the authentic sharing of ideas on global queering across regions was rarely observed.

### **Authors' affiliation**

Peter A. Jackson, Australian National University, Australia; Fran Martin, University of Melbourne, Australia; Mark McLelland, University of Queensland, Australia; Shimizu Akiko, Chuo University, Japan; Helen Hok-Sze Leung, Simon Fraser University, Canada; Chris Berry, Goldsmiths College, UK; Huso Yi, National Development and Research Institutes, USA; Sharyn Graham, Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand.