Since the onset of tongzhi (literally, “comrade,” denoting approximately lesbian and gay or queer) movement in 1990s Taiwan, Pai Hsien-yung’s Crystal Boys (1990), best known as Taiwan’s first gay novel, has come to be endowed with immense cultural significance with regard to the meaning of homosexuality. First published in 1983 in Chinese as Niezi (Evil Sons), Crystal Boys has not only been reclaimed as a writing of gay history for its depiction of the 1970s underground male homosexual prostitution subculture based in the New Park in downtown Taipei, but has also become, as the following instance illustrates, a site of identification for a new mode of tongzhi consciousness. This article intends to investigate the production of tongzhi identity politics vis-à-vis the cultural (re)signification of this particular text. In 1995, the Taipei city government, under Mayor Chen Shui-bian (former president) announced that it was to undertake an urban replanning scheme
called the Capital’s Nucleus Project. Through spatial preservation and the rewriting of historical memories, the scheme aimed to displace the authoritarian ambience of the central government administration district shaped under martial law, thus embodying Chen’s populist slogan to transform Taipei into a “happy, hopeful city for the citizens.” Included in the plan was the historic site of the New Park next to the presidential palace, yet the park’s historical significance as Taiwan’s most famous gay male cruising ground was completely neglected. To oppose such exclusionary municipal engineering, a coalition of nascent university-based lesbian and gay activist groups was formed under the banner of “Tongzhi Space Action Network” (TSAN). Significantly, as the notion of tongzhi citizenship was enunciated for the first time in the Taiwan public sphere, Crystal Boys came to be deployed as a medium of articulation and became highly politicized during the course of this political contestation.\(^1\) In a petition entitled “Tongzhi Looking for Tongzhi,” TSAN especially evoked the following passage from the novel, using this “sorrowful” 1970s writing to highlight the social predicament of homosexuals in 1990s Taiwan: “There are no days in our kingdom, only nights. As soon as the sun comes up, our kingdom goes into hiding, for it is an unlawful nation. We have no government and no constitution, we are neither recognized nor respected by anyone, our citizenry is little more than rabble.”\(^2\) TSAN went on to urge people with same-sex desire to leave behind the sorrowful past linked to the pathologized label tongxinglian (homosexual) by taking on the new identity-name tongzhi. Significantly, in its attempt to recruit the homosexual subjects into the interpellated tongzhi subject-position, TSAN rewrote the above passage as follows:

In tongzhi’s kingdom, we are no longer afraid of daylight, are not forced to remain invisible, for it is no longer an unlawful nation:

we have reasonable distribution of resources from the government,
we are fully protected by the laws of the country,
we are recognized and blessed by the multitude,
we are being respected by History, which also inscribes us.\(^3\)

What is the significance of this rearticulation of Crystal Boys? And in what sense does the “we” as tongzhi articulating agents diverge from the
unnamed “we” enunciated in Pai’s narrative? Lastly, if the taking on of the new identity tongzhi signals a collective rejection of the past of homosexual oppression, to what extent does the call for social recognition fail to challenge the existing norms by which “we” are spawned and adjudicated in the first place?

This article seeks to conduct a critique of Taiwan tongzhi politics through a rearticulation of Crystal Boys. It argues that tongzhi politics and subjectivity as articulated through Crystal Boys is founded upon the normative exclusion of the gendered prostitute subject and that such repudiation is complicit with the dominant moral-sexual order upheld by Taiwan’s state culture, including the emergent Taiwan state feminism. As the novel was taken up as a signifier in the new tongzhi politics, the article shows, its legacy as a historical representation of the “glass clique” (boliquan), an epithet attributed to male (homosexual) prostitutes from the 1960s through the 1980s, was left out entirely. This limiting continuity is examined through the problematic of shame. Through a contextualized reading of Crystal Boys, this essay argues that the novel represents a particular “state affect” of gendered sexual shame linked to prostitution, a shame that later came to be displaced by the emerging tongzhi movement through its political praxis of “coming out.” With Crystal Boys thus rearticulated, the article concludes by arguing for a refiguring of tongzhi politics that critically engages the normative condition of that gendered sexual shame to articulate dissident sexual citizenship.

This critique of tongzhi politics is thus necessitated by a historically contextualized reading of Crystal Boys. In fact, a critical return to the novel is all the more necessary given the overall humanist interpretation that the novel has received since its publication. Generally speaking, this dominant mode of interpretation celebrates the novelist’s profound compassion for the plight of the human condition and indeed concurs with his plea for greater social tolerance of the oppressed such as homosexuals. My historicized reading of the novel explicitly counters this interpretation, and in so doing, I draw on two historicizing arguments made by Liu Jen-peng and Ding Naifei.

In her important study of the late Qing and early republican Chinese nationalist discourse of women’s rights, Liu makes the case that the gender equality ideology of that period was articulated through the positionality of the “sage-king” drawn from the tradition of Confucian morality. Drawing
on Louis Dumont’s work on hierarchy, Liu shows how the “sage-king” positionality is constituted through a hierarchical disposition predicated upon a presupposed totality subsuming two levels of binary relation: on a higher level, there exists a complementary relation between the “sage-king” and his opposite, as both share the same identity under the totality; yet on a lower level, the “sage-king” contains yet simultaneously excludes the other to assert his superiority. In the case of the late Qing discourse, Liu shows that a new hierarchy differentiating women in accordance with norms of that totality arose at a specific historical juncture, where China’s wish for modernity was (en)gendered through complex and contradictory identifications with the colonizing West. With the category of woman subsumed under the totality of moral perfection, those considered morally questionable, such as prostitutes and maid-servants, failed to be qualified to enter the modern womanhood, thus becoming “the penumbræ of the shadow of the modern woman who believes in gender equality.”

In a similar vein, Ding’s work on “base femininity” also demonstrates the exclusionary process effected through gender modernization. In a trenchant critique of contemporary Taiwan dominant state feminism, Ding takes issue with mainstream feminist politics’ negation of sex workers’ agency and its reticence regarding the abuse of migrant domestic workers in Taiwanese society. This classist gender politics is, Ding discerns, animated by a profound sense of gendered shame surrounding modern sex/domestic work, and she traces the formation of this particular affect to the lingering cultural memory of the “bondmaid-concubine” (beiqié), a base figure sold to provide in-house sex and domestic services in “traditional” Chinese society. Through examining the representation of that particular figure in feminist socioanthropological and fictional discourses, Ding interrogates the delimited figurations of the bondmaid-concubine’s agential subjectivity in feminist imaginaries, underscoring how the figure’s base status, symbolically feared as polluting, precludes her from being fully integrated into supposedly egalitarian societies, even after the abolishment of bondservitude in twentieth-century Hong Kong and Taiwan. Further, Ding shows how the “woman-of-respectable-family” (liangjia funü) subject-position as assumed by modern professional women intellectuals is formed vis-à-vis the figure of bondmaid-concubine. Significantly, Ding notes that as a caste-like “premodern” social
hierarchy, having undergone repression in modern egalitarian ideology, is reconfigured through class inequality, the baseness associated with the figure of “bondmaid-concubine” is transformed structurally into an individualizing sense of gendered sexual shame that comes to be attached to modern forms of professionalized sex and domestic work. Taiwan state feminists, inattentive to their own becoming vis-à-vis the bondmaid-concubine trajectory in the course of modernization, thus project that sense of shame onto those doing sex and/or domestic work and compel them to inhabit the symbolic position of base femininity.7

Liu and Ding’s historicizing work thus provides a useful model delineating a sociosymbolic that is historically evolving and linguistically Chinese, one wherein gendered sexual positions are hierarchically differentiated and assumed in accordance with the virtue of the father named Sage-King. Operating within this historicizing framework, my reading of Crystal Boys challenges the compassionate reading of the novel, for the latter is predicated ultimately upon the “sage-king” moral subject-position. Devoid of history and politics of gender and sexuality, the humanist (and its corollary, the redemptive) interpretation can induce, at best, a feel-good sentiment of being able to sympathize with the sufferings of the destitute and, at worst, comply with the very oppressive system that abjectifies the rent boys. My reading thus admits no affect of sympathy or compassion. Rather, it draws out and adheres to the affect of shame. Specifically, it historicizes that shame as a “state affect” configured within a particular normative context established by my previous work, a context that pertains to state regulation of sexualities in postwar Taiwan. Through examining the journalistic and official discourse of sex between the 1950s and 1980s, I traced a historical process whereby a particular segment-line of contemporary Taiwan dominant social/sexual order came to be established under the now defunct Police Offence Law. Specifically, I demonstrated how a particular Taiwan “sage-king” nationalist subject-position came into formation through the Kuomintang government’s forceful maintenance of the pregiven totality called “virtuous customs”: While those working in the burgeoning sex industry were disciplined and punished as the shameful class, nonmarital sexualities including homosexuality came to be policed by the state through its banning of prostitution.8 Within this normative context of “virtuous customs,” I
shall read against the novel’s narrative grain, so as to elucidate the historical specificity of that particular sense of gendered sexual shame.

**Reading Along and Against the Narrative Grain**

If one reads along with the narrative grain, the novel tells of how a group of dispossessed male adolescents “fall” into prostitution and how they redeem themselves by striving to leave behind that defiled way of life. Such a redemptive reading is most clearly exemplified in the mainstream critics’ interpretation of narrator A-qing’s transformation in the novel. Typically, it takes the sexual encounter between A-qing and his high school janitor, which leads to his expulsion from school and family, as a descent towards the debasement of prostitution. According to this line of reading, however, A-qing is not totally corrupted, as he is led by the spirit of his beloved deceased brother to redeem himself gradually. An episode in the second half of the novel, where A-qing cannot help but burst into tears when Mr. Yu, a middle-aged man of whom A-qing is very fond, reaches out to hold him in bed, is generally read as a turning point, at which A-qing’s “greasy soul” is cleansed. After this cathartic experience, A-qing wanders into a lotus pond in a botanic garden, a playground where he and his brother Buddy grew up. With the imagery of lotus connoting moral purity and with the garden construed as Eden, A-qing’s soul is shown to triumph over his sinful flesh: he is, by the end of this novel, redeemed.

This kind of redemptive reading has been forcefully challenged by Jonathan Te-hsuan Yeh, who argues succinctly that such reading takes the family and its value as the “transcendental signified.” To show that homosexual desire is precisely what is at issue in the articulation of the conflicts between father and son, soul and flesh, Yeh reads the shame illustrated in the cathartic scene as, following Lee Edelman, “homographesis.” I would like to supplement this insightful reading by further specifying the nature of that sexual shame, for it does not merely pertain to the negative meaning of homosexual desire in Taiwanese society: it is specifically related to A-qing’s practice of prostitution. Most significantly, it is configured through A-qing’s identification with his unvirtuous mother.

A-qing’s mother elopes when A-qing is eight, and the young A-qing is
never loved by her. Indeed, he feels only fear of her because she is convinced, after his breech birth, that he “was retribution for her sins in the past life.”\textsuperscript{13} As Buddy is her favored child, A-qing does not feel sorry at her departure. In fact, his relationship with her is so distant that he is even embarrassed by the idea of paying her a visit to tell her about Buddy’s death. But when A-qing finally visits his dying mother and reveals to her that he has left home too, he suddenly realizes that they, as outcasts of the family, have a lot in common: “She’d spent most of her life running away, roaming, searching, only to wind up battered and broken in this bed under a mountain of sweat-soaked bedding and a filthy mosquito net, her body invaded by disease, just waiting to die. And me, I’m part of that same sinful flesh that has seen so much evil. I’ve followed in her footsteps, always running away, roaming, searching. At the moment I felt very close to my mother.”\textsuperscript{14} It is important to stress this identification. No sooner does this realization dawn on him than it gives rise to a strong emotional bond with her, an intimacy that A-qing never experienced as a child.

It is also highly significant that Mr. Yu is the only person in the novel to whom A-qing partially discloses his past and family background. Shortly before the cathartic scene, A-qing has told Mr. Yu about his broken family. And yet, there are things that remain unspeakable for A-qing, for he cannot bring himself to tell Mr. Yu about his prostitution activities, nor about the ravaged ashes of his mother’s sexual sins, with which he painfully identifies. That this particular sense of sexual shame “floods into” A-qing, to borrow a phrase used by Eve Sedgwick in her formulation of shame in relation to queer performativity,\textsuperscript{15} at the precise moment when the most “decent” (most normal perhaps?) male homosexual character in the novel makes a move to have sex with him, and that this particular sense of sexual shame is induced in what appears to be a nontransactional situation where sexual intimacy is about to take place, is highly significant. The unspeakable represents for A-qing the excruciating self-recognition of his difference from Mr. Yu as a prostitute and as the child of his mother’s sinful flesh wasted by syphilis. A-qing’s sense of self is made and interrupted simultaneously at that “disruptive” moment, when the sense of sexual shame attached to the stigma of prostitution “floods into” him.\textsuperscript{16}

Here one can explicate that particular sense of homosexual shame as
figured through A-qing’s identification with his unvirtuous mother, that is, through his citing and assuming what Ding Naifei has historicized as the discursive positionality of base femininity constituted in the Chinese sociosymbolic. In the novel, A-qing’s mother’s life trajectory is characterized precisely by the coupling of sex and domestic work. After escaping from her abusive foster family, she makes her living by firstly working as a hostess in a “low-class” tearoom. After her licentious behavior earns her a bad name during her first employment, she then turns into a maidservant before marrying A-qing’s father. As a housewife, she is constantly “buried by mounds of dirty laundry,” “the never-ending pile of dirty bedding and clothes she took in to earn extra money.” Having eloped, she then becomes an erotic dancer before ending up dying of syphilis in a squalid slum. Of particular significance here is the identity of A-qing’s mother, that of “foster daughter” (yangnu), a figure engendered within the context of agrarian society in Taiwan during the first half of the twentieth century, when the custom of “minor marriage” was prevalent. Under this patrilineal custom, young daughters were given/sold to other families as “small-daughters-in-law” (sim-pua) under the guise of adoption and were, in some cases, resold as bondmaids (zabogan) or prostitutes: “Baseness prescribes their employment and condones their abuse in the families.”

The base femininity that A-qing’s mother assumes can be further understood within the normative context of “virtuous customs,” wherein “foster daughters” were constructed by the Kuomintang government during the 1950s and 1960s as a particular class of women that made up most of the imagined prostitute population. Accordingly, protecting the ill-fated “foster daughters” from “falling” into prostitution became part of the state’s campaigns to eliminate prostitution. For example, apart from setting up the “Protection of Foster Daughters Campaign Committee” in 1951, the KMT government also promulgated, in conjunction with the implementation of licensed prostitution in 1956, “Procedures for Improving the Current Foster Daughter Custom in Taiwan,” which assigned local police to see to the well-being of foster daughters, primarily to prevent abuse, trafficking, and forced prostitution. It is of particular interest to note that during its most active period in the 1950s, on the anniversary of its founding, the committee staged an annual group wedding ceremony for rescued foster daughters in
order to mark its achievement. This ritual, mediated through the state-controlled press, served as a spectacular cover-up for an otherwise poorly resourced and executed campaign that in actual fact reached less than 0.4 percent of the very population that it purported to help out. But its ideological message was clear: marriage was paramount and women’s sexuality must be sanctioned by the state.

In one sense then, the agential subjectivity accorded to A-qing’s unvirtuous mother falls squarely within the cultural script of “foster daughter,” who is predestined to inhabit a sexually debased womanhood if not “successfully” redeemed through marriage: “What difference does it make if a woman like me lives or not?” A-qing’s mother is heard murmuring as she ponders her imminent death. Her fatalism can and must be read as an abiding sense of gendered sexual shame with which a base woman like her must live or even die. To read A-qing’s transformation as a tale of redemption, then, is to condone the violence that the narrative grain exerts in punishing “fallen” women like A-qing’s mother and in “symbolically blaming the bad mother for the son’s ill-fatedness.”

**Naming the Homosexual Oppression**

I turn now to consider how sexual shame pertaining to male homosexual prostitution is produced in the novel. And here I focus on a scene of injury that occurs in the second half of the novel. Following their arrest and release from police detention, the boys’ lives undergo a significant change as they stop plying their trade in New Park and begin to work in The Cozy Nest, a newly open gay bar run by their backer, the New Park guru Chief Yang. However, their security is soon compromised when the bar is exposed by a tabloid journalist, which eventually brings about its closure. Interestingly, while the bar appears to be a decent place that offers college students born into respectable families a space to “seek a bit of romance,” it is nevertheless represented by the tabloid news report as “the watering hole of male beauty (nanse)” inhabited by renyao (literally “human-chimera”), a feminizing epithet for male homosexuals, transsexuals, and the transgendered. No sooner has the bar been exposed than it is invaded by a group of people coming to watch the spectacle of renyao, and the intrusion ends with a scene
of subjugation where the boys are abused and hailed as “renyao,” “glass” (boli), and “rabbit.” What are we to make of the forces unleashed by all these epithets for male homosexual prostitutes?

I would like to evoke one particular context of what can be seen as imbricated in the sedimentary process that gives rise to the historicity of male homosexual epithets in Taiwanese culture. The context concerns the history of the gay bar in Taiwan as told by the legendary Ta-K, who ran many gay bars, including the very first one in Taiwan between the 1970s and 1980s.

At that time [in the late 1960s], I ... gradually got to know many other people like me ... We often would find time to get together. We had also been to those tearooms in the Three-River Street [located in Taipei’s longstanding red-light district]. But we did not like them at all and we looked down on them as those who “prostituted” themselves looking like hus-sies! Although we also cross-dressed, I taught my “daughters” [his “girls”!] that they must behave like ladies, like un-married girls of respectable families. Most important of all, “prostitution” was absolutely forbidden. Our group eventually became larger and larger. You could not talk about this sort of thing in public, you know. Two guys I know of once got beaten up, and called “renyao” and “rabbit,” because they got so carried away with themselves as to openly talk about their love-affair in a restaurant. That was what got me into running the bar business in the first place.

Legally licensed, Ta-K’s unconventional leisure business managed to steer away from undue attention until 1978, when the police, acting on a tip-off, raided two of his premises on suspicion of sleaze:

The cross-dressing stuff we did was mainly to attract business at the time. Putting on make-up was just for fun and showing-off as we sang and danced. It had absolutely nothing to do with the “renyao” business in which prostitution was involved. But once we were in the newspapers, it got totally twisted and sensationalized. We were called all the names imaginable like “pervert,” “rabbit,” “renyao.” The situation was so precarious and had it got out of control, all of us could have been banged up for days.
Crucially, Ta-K’s recollection makes clear the equation of male homosexuality with prostitution in Taiwanese society and the misrepresentation imposed on him and his peers. While two guys talking about their love affair were beaten up because they were taken for prostitutes, Ta-K’s bars came to be represented as sleaze, despite his insistence on demarcating his enterprise from the *renyao*-prostitution business. Of particular significance in Ta-K’s encoded memory is that “gay bar,” as a new social space, came into existence by defining its boundary against the establishment of the “tearoom” prostitution culture of Three-River Street. Also important to underline is the stratification of sexual behavior at work here, with “*renyao*” and “rabbit” being despised for the commercial sexual activities in which they engage. Further, this sexual stratification is configured through, and indeed isomorphic with, the normative distinction between women of good character and prostitute-like hussies. The *respectable* male homosexual subjectivity engendered within the context of the emerging gay bar culture in 1970s Taiwan can thus be seen as predicated upon the repudiation of base femininity, through which, as I have argued above, the homosexual shame in *Crystal Boys* is configured.

The scene of shaming interpellation can thus be reread as representing precisely the subjection and subjugation of male prostitutes within such a sage-king state culture. Further, given that the boys’ involvement with The Cozy Nest enterprise has been widely read within the redemptive framework as the turning point whereby they better themselves by quitting prostitution, it must be reread as marking out that indelible sense of homosexual shame linked to prostitution, one that has become structural to the new homosexual hierarchy formed within the sage-king moral-sexual order, where the boys are now elevated to occupy the respectable subject-position. Yet significantly, the shaming forces produce at the same time a space that the boys come to identify as “ours”: their community in New Park, their involvement with the venture of The Cozy Nest. Insofar as this nonfamilial space is policed by the nation-state in its defense of family values, this particular space of “ours,” formed discursively in “the habitation/nation system”—to use a phrase formulated by Eve Sedgwick—to in contemporary Taiwanese society, could perhaps be called, in a resistant reappropriation of the term, the state of *seqing* (sleaze).
outside by which the normative heterosexual society is founded, the state of seqing provides a place of “ours” where outcasts find mutual support, friendship, and the emotional sustenance denied to them by their families, as well as the commercial opportunities vital to their survival.

**Tongzhi = Children of Respectable Families?**

At the end of the novel, a group of homosexuals referred to by the narrator as “pampered college students born into respectable families” emerges from the bushes, where they used to hide like bashful kids, into the open. This move prefigures the emergence of a new form of homosexual subjectivity in the public domain in Taiwan. Indeed, one of the most prominent features of the rise of tongzhi movement in the 1990s is that it is led largely, if not exclusively, by the educated class of university students. In 1994, Taiwan’s first officially recognized gay university student group, the Study of Male Homosexual Society of National Taiwan University, also known as Gay Chat, published *The United States of Homosexuality/Homosexuals*, a book that claims to be “the first reportage about the history and culture of male homosexuality in Taiwan.” In the preface, entitled “The New Voice of Tongzhi,” the book sets out to position itself as a work of cultural observation of Taiwanese society written and published by homosexuals and for homosexuals themselves, aiming to challenge the many contemporaneous representations that “reinforce the stereotype of homosexuals as promiscuous.” Significantly, the preface makes specific reference to *Crystal Boys*, asserting that “the Dark Kingdom depicted by Pai Hsien-yung has become the past and the new era will dawn soon.” Thus, the book’s title can be seen as an attempt to rearticulate the imagined community portrayed in *Crystal Boys*.

The book contains twenty articles by the members of the society, on subjects including (a transhistorical account of) lesbian and gay history and analyses of the misrepresentations and stereotypes of the male homosexual in the media (such as AIDS as a gay disease). Of particular significance here is the article that shares the title of the book, “The United States of Homosexuality/Homosexuals: The Republic(s) of Tongzhi.” “In Taiwan,” the author Ma Lu contends, “there is a need to founded a nation of/for the
homosexuals” in order to resist the heterosexual hegemony.\textsuperscript{38} This homosexual nation as imagined here consists of twenty-one republics, classified in accordance with spaces inhabited by gays and lesbians, publications, social groups, professions, and sexual practices, with a brief account of characteristics and history given to each republic. Yet even though a mode of sexual practice is deployed in the imagining of a republic like “the Republic of SM,” and even though occupation can also become a mode through which to imagine a republic like “the Republic of the Entertainment Business,” there is no such thing in Ma’s imaginary as “the Republic of Prostitution.” Indeed, with respect to “the Republic of the New Park,” Ma especially notes that this republic is perhaps the best known because of Crystal Boys. Observing how the park has always been associated with sleaze in the public imagination, Ma argues that it may be true, as there are indeed some people who go there looking for sexual encounters. However, “if one takes out that like-minded small group of people,” Ma adds, “New Park is nothing but a place where people come to meet new friends and socialize, as it is the only public space in Taiwan for homosexuals.”\textsuperscript{39} With its long history and fame, Ma writes, “the Republic of the New Park . . . sheltered the young birds in the 1970s; it, too, fulfills the hearts of the new generation in the 1990s.”\textsuperscript{40} Crucially the homosexual nation imagined here takes Pai’s depiction of the Dark Kingdom of the 1970s New Park in his novel as a reference point from which to project a new homosexual community of comrades that is no longer shadowy and oppressed. Yet this “United States of Homosexuality/Homosexuals” excludes one particular resistance to the given heteronormative culture, that is, prostitution. This exclusion is perhaps not unintentional, given the book’s aim of countering the culture’s stereotyping of male homosexuals as promiscuous. The construction of this stereotype can be attributed to the “whorification” of the “glass clique” in the previous two decades.\textsuperscript{41} Thus, the sexual norm maintained through the policing of prostitution continues to operate even in this contemporary imaginary of the tongzhi nation.

In the wake of tongzhi activism, more symbolic meanings were accrued to Crystal Boys as the newly formed TSAN employed the novel to stake their claim over New Park in their assertion of tongzhi citizenship—the historical moment with which I began this article. I now want to turn to look at TSAN’s interventions, drawing specific attention to the question of
identity politics raised therein, and the discursive limits of such politics as articulated by the prominent feminist theorist Chang Hsiao-hung, arguably the most influential critic in shaping the emergent field of *tongzhi* studies in 1990s Taiwan. Chang’s discursive practices interest me especially, not merely because of the importance of her work, but because her understanding of *tongzhi* subjectivity is deeply implicated within the terrains of both gender studies and the women’s movement. My purpose here is to use Chang’s case to map out a milieu wherein sexual and gender politics is played out in a mutually constitutive yet irreducible way, a context in which the imaginary of a *tongzhi* nation as configured through *Crystal Boys* must be situated.

### Politics of Ambiguity and Its Discursive Limits

Between January and February 1996, TSAN held a series of events under the banner of “Researching for the New Culture in New Park.” The first event was the “Top Ten *Tongzhi* Valentines,” which invited *tongzhi* nationwide to vote for their idols (such as film/pop stars, politicians, etc.), while the second one was a garden party in New Park. This carnival-like occasion, held deliberately in broad daylight, appeared to signal that *tongzhi* had left the sorrowful past by “coming out collectively” to celebrate their new subjectivity. Significantly, this “coming out collectively” (*jiti xianshen*), namely, appearing in public either under the sign of *tongzhi* in a crowd with progay straight liberals, or wearing masks, is a strategy designed by *tongzhi* activists to extend gay visibility while protecting individuals from being framed by the supposedly voyeuristic mass media. Both events received wide and even positive media coverage.

In her essay “Queer Politics of Desire,” Chang Hsiao-hung lauds the valentine vote event as a “beautiful and successful cultural intervention,” seeing it as “the coming-out of queer desire.” She asks a highly significant question, that is, given the notoriety of New Park as the cesspool of gay sex, why did TSAN, in their very first attempt to reclaim New Park, choose to hold an event like “Top Ten *Tongzhi* Valentines” rather than “debating head-on the justifiability of ‘homosexuality’ and ‘public sex’”? Chang suggests that this strategic displacement be understood in a specific local media context, where homosexuality was predominantly represented through two polar-
ized figures, as either the promiscuous homosexual or, more recently, as the desexualized human rights fighter. Given this representational predicament, TSAN chose instead, Chang argues, to employ the idol voting event to create a wider “space of desire” within the discursive terrain in/through which to “bring out” tongzhi/queer desire. Chang further elaborates this strategic move as follows:

This strategy adopts the “universalising” view of desire but speaks from an anti-discriminational, anti-oppressive “minoritising” position. . . . 45 queer activists’ intervention in the Capital’s Nucleus Project aims not only to preserve the queer space of the New Park, but also to preserve the space of a collective memory of queer desire. It takes New Park as a site of desire that expands as it flows, thus turning anywhere the flow of desire goes into a New Park.46

Reading the voting result, which shows cross-gender identification as the manifestation of queer desire whose “flows,” in Chang’s rendition, “are not confined by any boundary”47 and which “repudiates any binarism” (such as that of the exclusionary relation between desire and identification figured in the orthodox psychoanalytic account),48 Chang further designates the ambiguity rendered by the instability and fluidity of desire as that which constitutes tongzhi identity politics: “wherever desire flows, tongzhi’s desire will be there; the revolutionary seduction of the politics of desire is always so ambiguous [aimei] and beautiful.”49

Of particular significance is that Chang notes especially two concurrent movement contexts that conditioned such politics of ambiguity. While the sexual emancipation movement, spearheaded by the then—newly founded Centre for the Study of Sexualities (coordinated by the sex radical Josephine Ho) at National Central University, acted as a friendly ally for the tongzhi movement, it was the women’s movement, in Chang’s view, that created an “ambiguous space for manoeuvring” for the lesbian-led TSAN: unlike their male comrades, the lesbian TSAN members could operate ambiguously under the sign of feminist identity in public as and when necessary.50

I would like to problematize below Chang’s figuration of “bringing out queer desire” and “collective coming out.” Firstly, by formulating tongzhi identity politics in terms of the labile flow of desire that engenders nothing
but ambiguity, Chang appears to overlook the power relations by which desire is constructed and constrained in contemporary Taiwanese society. Such a dehistoricizing tendency can be further evinced in an instance where Chang came out as “heterosexual at present” in a national newspaper article. There Chang set out to introduce the emergent Taiwan tongzhi culture to the “general” reader, thus forging precisely the discursive space of desire through which to construct tongzhi subjectivity. When replying to a reader inquisitive about her sexual orientation, Chang explained how her encounter with Anglo-American queer theory had led her to “rediscover” herself as a feminist, further formulating her “current” heterosexual identity as follows:

Many years ago, the lesbian poet I admire [alluding perhaps to the American writer Adrienne Rich] was still in a heterosexual marriage rearing children; many years later, the gay theorist I worship [alluding perhaps to the British literary critic Jonathan Dollimore], it turns out, made up his mind to get married and to have children. After glimpsing the transience of the labile flow of desire, my “status quo” [as a heterosexual woman] may perhaps be a self-recognition that is the most conservative and yet most radical at the same time.51

In citing these Euro-American critics’ changes of sexual practices as the exemplary modality of the “transience of the labile flow of desire” to account for her “present” heterosexual identity (implying that it is yet to change), Chang appears to render desire as something ahistorical: in effacing her particularity as a Taiwanese woman intellectual, she inadvertently naturalizes the historical constitution of her (present) heterosexuality. As I have shown above, the construction of female sexuality in Taiwan has its cultural specificity, and female desires, far from being labile and fluid, have been strictly regulated within the sage-king Taiwan state culture through the regulation of prostitution.

My second point concerns the feminist identity that serves as an “ambiguous space for manoeuvring.” My question is, what sort of female sexual agency is presumed in enabling that particular feminist subjecthood and to what extent does this imaging conform to the given gendered sexual norm, such that lesbians and even gays could come out collectively under
the auspices of feminism? Here, it is instructive to examine another article by Chang. In an article entitled “Seeing Each Other Through the Tension,” published in a “Women-Identified Women” special issue of the now-defunct feminist magazine *Awakening*, Chang addresses the entanglement between the mid-1990s lesbian and women’s movements in Taiwan by offering a highly self-reflexive account of her own anxiety as a heterosexual feminist “speaking for” gay people and “appropriating” queer theory under the banner of “gender theory” in the university classroom. With regard to the latter in particular, such anxiety is partially resolved (if not overcome) as she decides to take a strategic antiessentialist stance while implicitly acknowledging at the same time some kind of link between women’s studies and queer studies (even though the latter is still subsumed by the former). Committed politically to empowering gay people through representation and appropriation, Chang admits that, while she is adamant about her feminist contentions, she hesitates to take on “tongzhi” as another kind of political identity because of her theoretical doubts over the endless fragmentation of sexual identity politics, as well as its essentializing/exclusionary tendency. Importantly, Chang ends her article by reminding her reader that if “seeing each other through the tension” is not just an “inevitable and easy” theoretical reminder, then it must be “situated in actual points of confrontation” for it to effect a “political” and “materialist” analysis: “seeing each other does not merely aim to get rid of blind spots; once inaugurated, it is a non-stop process that enables seeing each other more critically.”

Given this political/theoretical context, a point of confrontation can perhaps be analyzed here to illustrate the dialectical process where the politics of gender and sexuality intersect in feminist praxes and where the question of “respectability” is at stake. This instance took place within the context of the female sexuality debate sparked by the publication of Josephine Chuenjuei Ho’s highly controversial *The Gallant Woman: Feminism and Sexual Liberation* in 1994. Passionately urging Taiwanese women to act “gallantly” in search of sexual pleasure and to free themselves from the shackles of patriarchal repression, Ho’s book prompted not only a moral backlash from the mainstream media but also attracted criticism from within the women’s movement. To distinguish themselves from Ho’s call for sexual liberation of women and other sexual minorities, some feminists, including Chang
herself, proposed the position of upholding “erotic autonomy,” a position which is most aptly entailed in Chang’s rendition: “women want neither the Monument of Chastity nor sexual liberation . . . what women want is a very wide feminine space ‘where one can maintain erotic autonomy.’”  

Curiously, when it comes to the question of feminist sexual practice, desire for Chang suddenly ceases to be “fluid and labile” and appears indeed not to be “queer” at all. To the extent that desire is in this instance unambiguously conceded as conditioned by power relations, and to the extent that this “very wide feminine space” is foreclosed upon “the promiscuous ruins” — to borrow Adam Phillips’s phrase — and indicatively not to be tainted with the stigma of promiscuity, the constraining force by which this feminist imaginary is materialized appears to emanate not from the radical sexual politics Chang seems to espouse elsewhere, but from the Taiwan sage-king antiprostitution culture itself.  

When juxtaposing this feminist imaginary with Chang’s formulation of New Park as the site of flowing desire, one discerns that the production of tongzhi agential subjectivity through the politics of ambiguity fails to address the power relations that produce the sexual stigma attached to New Park. For if it is this “very wide feminine space” that provides the “ambiguous space for manoeuvring” for collective coming out, then tongzhis’ anonymity in public appears to be assured by their collective association with the respectable femininity produced in the given state culture. In other words, the collective coming-out praxis as articulated by Chang paradoxically deindividualizes tongzhi as it normalizes it through respectable femininity and in effect displaces that historical sense of sexual shame represented in Crystal Boys.  

The above analysis by no means intends to lessen TSAN’s important contribution to the tongzhi movement, nor is it meant to devalue Chang’s sustained political commitment to gender and sexual justice. Rather, it simply purports to bring into relief the normative constraints that condition the sexual practices of all gendered subjects in Taiwan, and the normative condition in question here is precisely the Taiwan sage-king antiprostitution state culture. Crucially, the political imperative to challenge this moral regime is made all the more urgent as it has become even more hegemonic due to the rise of antiprostitution state feminism and its intervention in legal reforms since the 1990s. State feminists and the then-nascent women NGOs
succeeded in lobbying parliament in 1995 to pass the “Law to Suppress Sexual Transaction Involving Children and Juveniles” (LSSTICJ), the operation of which in recent years has turned into what Josephine Ho has called an “intricate web of social discipline” through which teenage sexuality and especially cyber sex have come to be increasingly regulated.\(^57\) Meanwhile, as I have argued elsewhere, despite their avowal to eliminate the sexual difference between women, state feminists have come to encompass the “woman-of-respectable-family” subject-position that is historically constituted under the sage-king sexual-moral order. In their claim to represent “all” women and in identifying with the patriarchal civility ordained by the “sage-king,” the state feminists, or the “sage-queens” as I shall call them,\(^58\) have envisioned a new sexual order, free of commercial sex, by imposing the norm of respectable femininity on women inhabiting erotic cultures outside the domain of the family.\(^59\)

**Reclaiming “Our” History**

If the fictional male homosexual community of 1970s Taiwan in *Crystal Boys* has been shown in my analysis to be figured through a particular sense of sexual shame linked to prostitution and base femininity, then it seems that the *tongzhi* nation formed in the shadow of *Crystal Boys* 1990s Taiwan, in distancing itself from prostitution, has come to encompass the discursive positionality of respectable femininity as far as the matter of sex is concerned. As *Crystal Boys* continues to be politicized by the *tongzhi* movement as a piece of historical writing attesting to homosexual oppression in the 1970s, the specificity of that oppression as linked to prostitution remains adumbrated in the construction of *tongzhi* history.\(^60\) Just as the rainbow flag is being raised in the making of “rainbow communities” in Taiwan, male prostitution culture past and present appears to be excluded from the rainbow vision, which purports symbolically to signify the celebration of differences within gay culture.\(^61\) As *Crystal Boys* was dramatized as a television series and aired on prime-time public television to great acclaim and popularity in 2003, the state of *seqing* of the 1970s was, just as in the 1986 film adaptation of the novel, totally written out: Whereas the film version of *Crystal Boys*, as a direct product of the moral panic around AIDS in the
mid 1980s, updated the novel’s setting from the 1970s to the mid 1980s to reflect the “social reality” of the “gay plague,” the TV version of *Crystal Boys* was safely cast back into the distant past of the 1970s when there was no such thing as AIDS. Meanwhile, the popular reception of Zeng Xiuping’s book *Lone Subjects, Evil Sons, Taipei Characters: On Pai Hsien-yung’s Tongzhi Fictions*, published amidst the *Crystal Boys* TV series fever, is also of particular interest here.62 Prefaced by the novelist himself, *Lone Subjects* is a work of sociohistorical literary criticism imbued with gay-equality consciousness. Setting out to redress the recent trend within tongzhi studies that imparts too much subversive “movement-wise spirit” into *Crystal Boys*, Zeng proposes instead to offer a reading that neither “denigrates the tongzhi image” nor “over-interprets the novel by eulogizing tongzhi.”63 Essentially, what Zeng tries to argue, in a book laden with ahistorical arguments, is that the “evil sons” portrayed in the novel are wrongfully maligned by family and society because of their homosexuality; to wit, they are simply “normal.” Such a normal tongzhi image must indeed come to terms with the novel’s prostitution theme. Thus, Zeng tells her reader “not to be anxious about whether the evil sons’ negation of their homosexual desires and their prostitution activities are politically correct or not,” as it is merely the novelist’s intention to care for those living on the margins of society through fictional representation.64 Yet at the same time, she cautions that, while one needs not be judgmental about the boys’ prostitution activities, neither should one say that they enjoy prostituting themselves in practicing ‘sexual pluralism.’”65 But from whence does this morally neutral, gay-affirmative, politically correct reading position come, if not from the sexual norm of respectability that polices its boundaries through the shame it attaches to prostitution?

In an article on postcoloniality and the predicament of “coming out” in Taiwan, prominent tongzhi scholar Chu Wei-cheng contends that the movement strategy of collective coming out, however politically expedient and culturally specific, cannot ultimately challenge the oppressive status quo: coming out is not a question of choosing how “out” one wants to be in different circumstances—a view expressed by some local tongzhi activists, who insist that tongzhi should have the autonomy not to come out—but one that concerns secrecy or “discretion” as the very means by which homophobia operates.66 Postcolonial autonomy can only be maintained, Chu rightly
argues, if *tongzhi* activism can revise its strategies by addressing the specificity of local homosexual oppression. Meanwhile, he proposes that given the difficulty of wholly embracing a gay identity/minoritizing politics, *tongzhi* activism could adopt a more “universalising” strategy in moving toward a “non-identititarian” politics. Significantly, this Sedgwickian reformulation of *tongzhi* politics is, again, translated into the politics of ambiguity:

For a *tongzhi* movement based on identity politics, coming-out is necessary and unavoidable. But if we are to imagine a *tongzhi* movement based on non-identitarian politics, ambiguity can also be politics itself. . . . Since human desires are fluid and labile, why identify with rigid and arbitrary sexual identities? . . . After all, the goal of such a movement is not to fight for the rights of certain social groups but of everyone who should have the freedoms and space to seek homosexual desire.67

Clearly, Chu’s proposition to forge a *tongzhi*-friendly environment subtends to Chang Hsiao-hung’s figuration of “space of desire,” thereby unwittingly decontextualizing the specificity of homosexual oppression in Taiwan. Within the particular Taiwan context that this article has mapped out, it must be pointed out that the project of emancipating homosexual desire (and for that matter, female desire) hinges upon actively engaging, rather than further repressing, that sense of gendered sexual shame represented in *Crystal Boys* and the normative condition that produces it, precisely because erotic spaces and sexual freedoms in Taiwan were and continue to be regulated through the interdiction on and the stigmatization of prostitution. Without radically challenging the new social/sexual order ordained by the sage-queens, the *tongzhi* movement and discourse could end up reproducing the sexual hierarchy by which male homosexuals were historically subjugated in the first place.

In conclusion, I propose to reformulate Chu’s universalizing strategy as the politics of alliance, allying with the prostitutes’ rights movement (sparked by Chen Shui-bian’s sudden abolishment of licensed prostitution in 1997) and the sexuality rights/sexual emancipation movement as enacted by nonstate feminist sexual politics.68 Indeed, when groups from the women’s movement, *tongzhi* movement, labor movement, and aborigine movement took to the streets together to join the 1998 International Women’s Day
March for Anti-Stigmatization in support of the nearly illiterate ex-licensed women prostitutes fighting for their dignity, they signaled the necessity of such alliance politics. By pushing the decriminalization of sex work and by dismantling the disciplinary web woven through the LSSTICJ, we would honor the legacy of Crystal Boys and all the outcasts from the “respectable family.” Countering the hegemonic regime of antiprostitution culture will not be an easy battle for those who disidentify with the sage-king patriarch and the new state feminists, and yet, to reiterate the Chinese nationalist motto from which the identity name tongzhi is spawned: “Since our revolution is not yet accomplished, lo, tongzhi, there is much still to be done!”

Notes

A Chinese version of this article has been published as “Cong boliquan dao tongzhi guo: rentong xingshuo yu jiuchi de xingbie zhengzhi — yi ge niezi de lianji’ (“From Glass Clique to Tongzhi Nation: Identity Formation and Politics of Sexual Shame — an Articulation by Way of Crystal Boys”), Taiwan shehui yanjiu jikan (Taiwan: A Radical Quarterly in Social Science), no. 62 (2006): 1 – 36. I thank Chris Berry, Tim Buckfield, Ding Naifei, Liu Jen-peng, and especially Fran Martin for their invaluable comments on various drafts of this article. I also am hugely indebted to the positions reviewers and the guest editors for their critical engagements and helpful suggestions. Needless to say, all shortcomings are mine.

1. For a detailed discussion of this contestation as inscribed in the reconfiguration of New Park within the context of nation-building in 1990s Taiwan, see Fran Martin, Situating Sexualities: Queer Representation in Taiwanese Fiction, Film and Public Culture (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003), 73 – 116.


4. Space prevents me from listing the numerous references that take this dominant mode of reading. I cite only two monographs here, which both contain comprehensive references. See Liu Jun, Beimin qinghuai: Pai Hsien-yung pingzhuan (The Sentiment of Compassion: A Study of Pai Hsien-yung) (Taipei: Erya chubanshe, 1995) and Yuan Lianjun, Pai Hsien-yung lun (On Pai Hsien-yung) (Taipei: Erya chubanse, 1991).

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12. Ibid., 75.


16. Ibid.


21. This is my calculation based on the figures from Sifaxingzhengbu fanzuiziwenti yanjiuzhongxin (Centre for Crime Prevention Studies, the Ministry of Justice), *Fanghai fenghuazui wenti zhi yanjiu* (*A Study on the Problem of Offences Against Morals in Taiwan*) (Taipei: Sifayuan, 1967), 123, 167, 194–95.

22. I thank Fran Martin for reminding me that norms can fail.


24. The last quote is Fran Martin’s. I thank her for reminding me how A-qing’s agential subjectivity as “evil son” is rendered culturally intelligible through the gendered positionality of base femininity.
25. In order to bring into relief the cultural specificity of homosexual oppression, I have chosen to modify Howard Goldblatt’s translation of the novel wherever necessary using the 1992 Chinese edition of the novel. I shall give his translation in the endnotes.


29. I draw here on Judith Butler’s formulation of injurious names as dissimulation of Foucauldian power whose linguistic forces derive from the historicity of the name formed through its cultural signification. See Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (London: Routledge, 1997), 36.

30. The story is featured in an interview of Ta-K by Hu Yiyun (pseudonym of the journalist Zhang Yali of the tabloid magazine *Feicui*) in his *Toushi boliquan de mimi* (*Looking Through the Secrets of the Glass Clique*) (Taipei: Longquan, 1987), a book published amidst the moral panic triggered by the advent of AIDS in Taiwan in the mid-1980s.

31. Ibid., 67; my translation, emphasis added.

32. Ibid., 71, my translation.

33. On this equation, see Huang, “State Power,” 247–51.

34. Eve Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 147. Sedgwick uses this expression to denote the physical act of individuals inhabiting a given geographical space whose meaning is discursively produced.

35. Taida nantongxinglian yanjiushe (The Study of Male Homosexual Society, National Taiwan University, or Gay Chat), *Tongxinglian banglian* (*The United States of Homosexuality/Homosexuals*) (Taipei: Haojiao chubanshe, 1994), book cover; my translation.


37. Ibid.; my translation.


39. Ibid., 55; my translation, emphasis added.

40. Ibid., 56; my translation.


44. Ibid., 11; my translation.

45. Here desire is being construed in terms of what Eve Sedgwick has proposed as the contradictory construction of homosexuality in modern Western culture, whereby the question of homosexuality is conceived of as an issue that pertains only to the homosexual minority and yet at the same time affects all people regardless of their sexuality. Eve Sedgwick, Epistemology of the Closet (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 83–86.

46. Chang, “Taiwan Queer Valentine,” 289; Chang, “Tongzhi qingren,” 12. The last sentence of the quote, which is omitted in the English translation of the article, is my own translation; emphasis added.

47. Ibid., 15; my translation.

48. Ibid., 20; my translation.

49. Ibid., 21; my translation.

50. Ibid., 22; my translation.


54. Chang was reported to make this statement in a press conference defending the act of feminist university students watching pornography on the campus in order to critique patriarchal values. See Zhang Zhiqing, “Liucheng taida nuxuesheng kanguo A-pian” (“Sixty Percent of Female Students in National Taiwan University Have Seen Pornography”), Zhongguoshibao (China Times), May 16, 1995.


56. I thank Fran Martin for making me clarify this argument.


58. The term “sage-queen” is used here to mark out the discursive positionality of high femininity as formed in the “sage-king” sociosymbolic that I have mapped out.


63. Ibid., 41; my translation.

64. Ibid., 200; my translation.

65. Ibid., 202; my translation.


67. Ibid., 58; my translation.

68. The onset of the prostitutes’ rights movement marked a split within the women’s movement in Taiwan over the issues of sexuality and sex work. For a contextualized critique of this schism in feminist politics, see Ding Naifei, “Prostitutes, Parasites, and the House of State Feminism,” *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 1, no. 2 (2000): 305–18.

69. Significantly, state feminists and mainstream women’s groups issued a strong statement to oppose the march. See “Funü tuanti jianjue fandui xingchanye zhi xuanyan yiji dui taibei-shi feichang houxu chuli zhi jianyi” (“Women’s Groups’ Statement to Resolutely Oppose the Sex Industry and Suggestions for the Taipei City Government in the Aftermath of its Abolition of Licensed Prostitution”), in *Gongchang yu jiquan yundong* (*Licensed Prostitutes and the Prostitute Rights Movement*), ed. Taipei shi ririchun guanhuaihuzhu xiehui (Collective of Sex Workers and Supporters Association) (Taipei: Taiwan gongyun zazhishe, 2000), 36–38.