



Dual Narratives, Shared Radiance: A Tropical Asian Queer Collaborative Autoethnography


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Abstract

Employing a tropical Asian queer collaborative autoethnographic approach, this article explores the unique narratives of two diasporic researchers hailing from the Philippines and Taiwan. The paper elucidates the voices, perceptions, and lived experiences of the authors and shows how these align with Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory of human development, which asserts that individuals are influenced by their socio-cultural environment comprised of the macrosystem, exosystem, mesosystem, and microsystem. The relationship of these overlapping systems is explored through the lives of the two researcher-authors through personal narratives. These narratives accentuate the methodological queering aspect, employing personal vignettes as pivotal focal points. By intertwining subjective experiences within the socio-ecological systems model, the article seeks to vividly depict the knottiness of tropical Asian queer identity and experience. Through this exploration, the discourse not only enquires into the intricacies of the researcher-authors' stories but also contributes to a broader understanding of how queer socio-cultural factors shape the diverse narratives within the queer community in tropical Asia.

Keywords: collaborative autoethnography, tropical queer researchers, tropical queer Asia, queer methods, tropical queer experiences

Prelude

This article underscores the significance of collaborative autoethnography (Chang, Ngunjiri, & Hernandez, 2012) as an empowering approach to reframe queer tropical Asian lived experiences, thereby reinforcing the diverse and enriching facets of queerness in every dimension of our lives (Meer & Müller, 2023). Co-authored by two queer doctoral researchers in the broad field of education, this article endeavours to subvert conventional tropes in tropical narratives by means of subjective experiential exploration, therefore imbuing the discourse with a queer Asian perspective.

Collaborative autoethnography serves as a powerful tool for individuals to explore and redefine their personal narratives in the context of a shared experience (Chang et al., 2012). By engaging in this collaborative method, we not only gain insights into our own stories but also contribute to a collective understanding of our tropical Asian queerness. This approach allows us to examine the intersections of our identities, acknowledging the complexities and nuances that arise from our diverse backgrounds and lived experiences in neighbouring regions of the Asian tropics and subtropics. We embrace the understanding that “self is a subject to look into and a lens to look through to gain an understanding of a societal culture” (Chang, 2016, p. 49). As we explore the collaborative process, we uncover the threads that connect us, fostering a sense of unity and shared resilience within our queer communities.

Through the utilisation of collaborative autoethnography, we actively challenge traditional narratives and amplify the richness of queer experiences across various facets of our lives, from our tropical Asian origins to our current research positions, and temperate places of habitation. This method not only enables individuals to embrace the diversity inherent in the queer community but also fosters a more extensive societal acknowledgment of the multifaceted nature of queerness and what tropical queerness brings to this understanding (Sarce, 2023). By doing so, we contribute to a narrative that celebrates the strength derived from diversity and unity as we collectively navigate the dynamic landscape of our pasts, presents, and futures. Grundy (2021) emphasises the concept of “gay presence” within this context, exploring the life and works of John Weiner and how “queer collaboration” has promised to revolutionise queer publishing. As Lind (2014) highlights, “queer visibility in global arenas has brought with it a series of paradoxes that involve the legitimisation of a ‘new gay normal’ (read: Western, middle class, white, masculine, gender normative) over all else” (p. 603), thus, we are also dedicated in this piece to showcasing tropical Asian storytelling and critiquing the new Western-centric gay normal.

The queer tropics has a growing presence in research. Pereira's *Queer in the Tropics* (2019) examines gender and sexuality from the perspective of Latin America, while research in anthropology and Asian studies journals has indicated the vibrant state of studies of gender and sexual diversity in the Asian tropics (Boellstorff, 2007; Sinnott, 2010). These assessments collectively highlight the dynamic condition of academic examinations concerning the nuances of gender and sexual diversity across various tropical regions and among both Indigenous and non-indigenous peoples.

Within this research, it is essential to acknowledge that the experience of queer diaspora is a recurring theme shared by queer individuals globally (Fitzpatrick, 2022). This diasporic phenomenon can be triggered by various factors, including educational pursuits, employment opportunities, conflicts, persecution, and other diverse reasons. It is crucial to accentuate that tropical Asian queer diaspora plays a pivotal role in this collaborative autoethnography, serving as the contextual backdrop and vantage point for a self-reflective narrative structured through vignettes drawn from personal encounters with "belonging and un-belonging in queer spaces" (Dima & Dumitriu, 2023). The exploration extends to themes of migration and community-building in new environments, offering a comparative perspective rooted in the authors' experiences in both their tropical Asian origins and their current temperate life and workspaces.

Autoethnography and Tropical Decoloniality

This study employs autoethnography as its research method, viewing personal experiences as valuable sources of knowledge and insights into cultural phenomena (Lapadat, 2017; Adams, Jones, & Ellis, 2015; Butz & Besio, 2009). Autoethnography combines autobiography and ethnography, treating personal experiences as both the process and product of research (Lapadat, 2017; Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). The method is chosen for its ability to fill gaps in conventional research methods, provide insider perspectives on cultural experiences, and create accessible texts for a broader audience (Adams, Ellis, & Jones, 2017). An emphasis on tropicity and decoloniality (Lundberg et al., 2023) is adopted to further contextualise the research.

The Philippines and Taiwan, although neighbouring island regions, have distinct and diverse tropical features. The Philippines archipelago sits above the Equator in maritime southeast Asia. The islands characteristically have relatively high temperatures, humidity, and rainfall. The monsoon seasons are comprised of the dry and the wet, and tropical storms (typhoons) are prevalent. The island of Taiwan is bisected by the Tropic of Cancer. The southern part of Taiwan is tropical, while the northern part is humid subtropical. The island is affected by the East Asian Monsoon. Tropical storms are common, with several typhoons striking annually.

Both the Philippines and Taiwan have undergone extensive and complicated waves of colonisation and the legacy of colonialisms continue to have pronounced effects on queer communities. The Philippines was under various colonial missionary and military rule for 400 years. Firstly, by the Spanish, then by the US, later by the Japanese during WWII, and again by the US until independence. In its post-colonial period, the country remained under neocolonial US influence (Wiss, 2023). The island of Taiwan, formerly named 'Formosa', was colonised by the Dutch, the Spanish (northern Taiwan), two waves of colonisation from China, and occupation by the Japanese during WWII. After the war, Taiwan was considered part of a One China, and is still not recognised internationally as an independent country.

We assert that a decolonial tropical stance is essential to our project of collaborative queer autoethnography. Taking up Pereira's *Queering the Tropics*, Sarce outlines how tropical queer theory is particularly productive:

First, it is a possible moment of localization and decolonization; and second, it is also a chance to break away from Western/temporale theories as master frameworks of queer epistemology. The reinvention and reconstruction of queer genealogy happens when analysis centers the local experiences of queer folks, understanding the intersectionality of queer experience with people of color, and challenging the Western notion of queer construction of bodies through the available tools and concepts of the locals in the tropics. (2023, p.5)

Unveiling Tropical Queer Collaborative Autoethnography

There exist two approaches to autoethnography: scholars writing about the research process after substantive research publications and authors using personal experiences to shed light on the nature of their educational experiences (Walford, 2020). This article combines both approaches, utilising a tropical queer narrative approach (Lim, 2016; Sarce, 2023) to share stories about the authors as the subjects of study, drawing from research publications from diverse fields and their educational experiences (Lapadat, 2017; Ellis et al., 2011; Walford, 2020). The challenge of conducting a study of the self with two authors is addressed through collaborative autoethnography, where researchers pool their experiences to uncover commonalities and particularities in relation to their socio-cultural contexts (Chang et al., 2013).

However, critics, including positivists, argue that autoethnography is self-indulgent, individualised, and lacks reliability, validity, and generalisability (Méndez, 2013) while traditional ethnographers, like Walford (2020), contend that autoethnography's self-

indulgence hinders its contribution to knowledge. We counter these criticisms, asserting that the personal narratives presented reflect credible experiences, similar to trusting participants' views in other research. While acknowledging the fallibility of memory, we argue that our tropical queer experiences, shared through an autoethnographic lens, are coherent, plausible, and valid.

Despite not being trained autoethnographers, we emphasise the absence of strict rules in autoethnography, allowing us to share our lived experiences and queer tropical perceptions (Méndez, 2013). Pertaining to reliability, Ellis and colleagues (2011, p. 282) note:

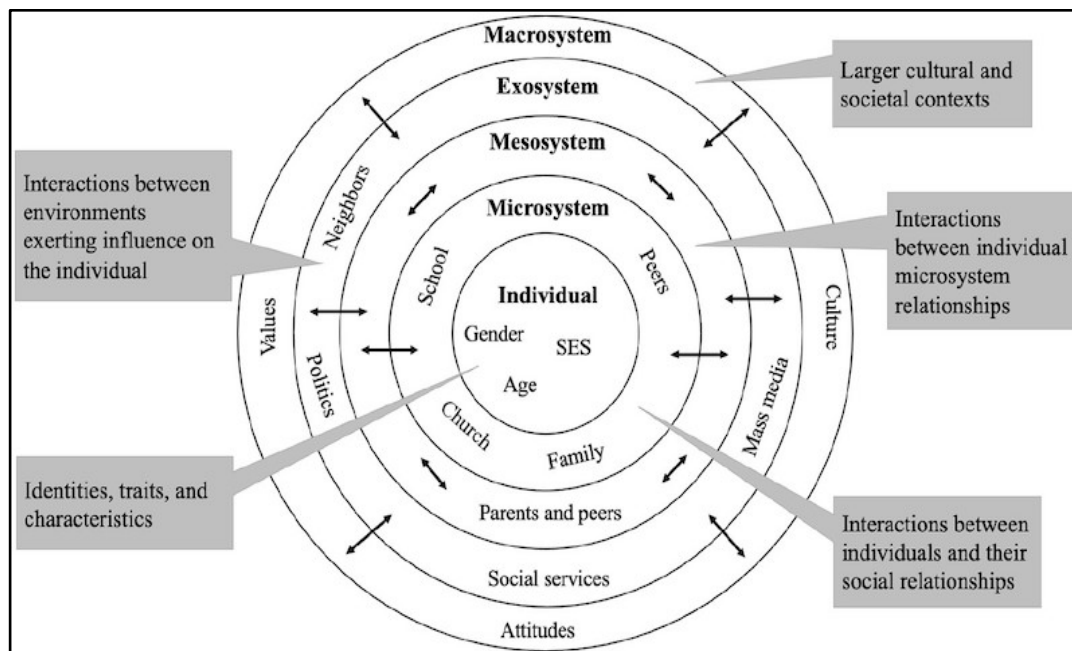
For autoethnographers, validity means that a work seeks verisimilitude; it evokes in readers a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable, and possible, a feeling that what has been represented could be true. The story is coherent. It connects readers to writers and provides continuity in their lives. What matters is the way in which the story enables the reader to enter the subjective world of the teller—to see the world from her or his point of view, even if this world does not “match reality”.

We believe that autoethnography offers a valid and appropriate approach for exploring the potential of tropical queer identity and intimacy, while also fostering collaboration and adopting an empowering perspective to reshape and queer our tropical experiences (Meer & Müller, 2023). Through this method, our narratives aim to forge connections between readers and writers, providing a sense of continuity in their lives and inviting them to step into the subjective world of the narrator. By embracing autoethnography, we have the opportunity to genuinely portray valid tropical queer identity and intimacy, encouraging cooperation and enabling individuals to redefine their experiences within the context of the tropics.

Navigating Queer Social Ecosystems

Furthermore, we align the article with Bronfenbrenner's framework (2005) which provides a perspective on comprehending the diverse facets of human development (see Figure 1). The significance of development is underscored by the model, emphasising how socio-environmental factors, personal traits, and contextual elements collectively influence one's growth. It aims to pinpoint essential mechanisms elucidating the reciprocal interaction between individuals and their socio-cultural environment (Lindsay et al., 2018).

Figure 1. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory.

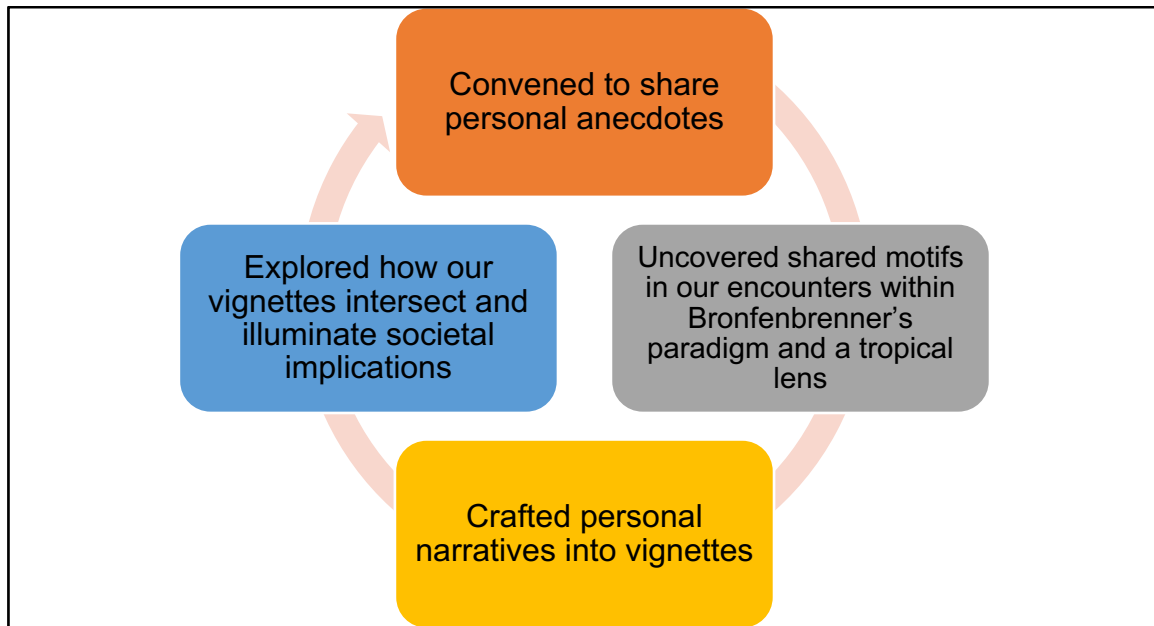


Source: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model, by P. Main, 2023.

This theory posits that human development is influenced by multiple interconnected systems, categorised into: microsystems (individual's immediate environment), mesosystems (interaction between microsystems), exosystems (external settings indirectly affecting the individual), and macrosystems (cultural values and societal norms). The model underscores the significance of examining socio-environmental factors, personal characteristics, and contextual elements in shaping an individual's growth (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Bronfenbrenner's approach has evolved into a bioecological model, acknowledging the dynamic relationships among biological, psychological, and socio-environmental factors in influencing development (Lindsay et al., 2018).

In this piece, we used an autoethnographic approach (see Figure 2), discussing our experiences broadly and randomly while observing the influence of various socio-cultural systems on our tropical identities and our academic journeys. We examined factors such as gender identity, socioeconomic status, and families, exploring their impact on us as researchers and individuals within the macrosystem, exosystem, mesosystem, and microsystem. Following this, we individually wrote vignettes and then reconvened to explore their intersections and societal implications.

Figure 2. Framework presenting Bronfenbrenner’s Paradigm with Authors’ Narratives



The framework represents our approach to identifying collectively shared experiences, integrating Bronfenbrenner’s paradigm with our individual narratives. Ultimately, this process yielded five overarching themes and ten vignettes.

It is important to clarify that Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory refers to the complex ecology of socio-cultural systems. In order to further explicate the non-human with the human environment, we call on queer ecology which integrates queer theory with ecological studies, challenging normative assumptions about nature and promoting inclusivity in biodiversity and environmental interactions (Denisoff, 2020). According to queer ecology, societal views of gender and sexuality influence ecological understanding. Queer ecology advocates for recognising diversity beyond the predominant heterosexual binary of male/female genders and heteronormative sexual practice (Seymour, 2020). This approach not only guides queer ecological research by acknowledging complex natural systems, but also supports environmental justice by promoting inclusivity and interdependency in human-ecological relationships, aligning with sustainable and equitable environmental practices.

Our aim through this process is to spotlight the array of challenges and opportunities we have encountered as queer researchers. Guided by Bronfenbrenner’s socio-environmental systems model, along with queer ecology and examined through a tropical lens, we collaboratively present and synthesise our personal vignettes to construct a unified representation of our shared tropical Asian beliefs and experiences.

The Tales of Two Tropical Asian Thinkers

Radel (he/him), the first author, is presently pursuing a PhD at the University of Stavanger in Norway. He earned his Bachelor's degree from the Polytechnic University of the Philippines in Manila, and completed his Master's degree at the Université Côte d'Azur in Nice, France. His ongoing doctoral research focuses on examining the advantages of integrating multiple senses into digital book reading for children, with a particular emphasis on critical literacy and diversity. Additionally, his research pursuits encompass areas such as queer literature, children's literature, gender and education, literacy, and educational technology.

Lance (he/him), the second author, is currently a PhD candidate at the University of Cambridge in England. He holds a Bachelor's degree from the National Changhua University of Education, Taiwan, and a Master's degree from the University of Warwick in Coventry, England. His doctoral research project lies at the intersection of education and social work, focusing on justice-involved girls' gendered experiences and empowerment within out-of-home placement institutions. Using hauntology, a perspective rooted in acknowledging past histories, he explores the layers of these young women's lives. Beyond his primary research, he also looks into broader themes such as girls' education and social work insights and pens articles from hauntological and monstrous perspectives.

We share a common interest in exploring the intricacies of gender and queerness, embracing our identities as tropical Asian queer individuals, and advocating for the empowerment and representation of queer researchers. Our conversations primarily revolve around these key themes, where we look into the examination of how our personal experiences, both in our tropical-subtropical home countries of the Philippines and Taiwan, and new environments in temperate Western academic settings, contribute to the dense intermingling of dissonance and harmony within our academic journeys. Queer sexualities serve as a conduit in this context, bridging the gap between "homes", diasporas, and nation-states (Dima & Dumitriu, 2023). They provide an opportunity for connecting diverse scholars and their discourses in endeavours to challenge and reinterpret nationalism and identity construction in various contexts (Cruz-Malavé & Manalansan, 2002). The interplay between local tropical, regional tropical, and global queer communities is crucial when discussing how solidarity takes shape both within and beyond predetermined borders.

Two Voices, One Echo: Personal Vignettes

The subsequent narratives serve as our personal vignettes, providing concise illustrations and/or comparisons of the diverse systems and spheres that exert influence on us.

Table 1. *Macrosystems*

	Radel	Lance
Macrosystem (values, attitudes, culture)	In general, the Philippines, a conservative tropical nation, is undergoing constant transformation. I am of the opinion that the newer generation of Filipinos is notably more open-minded and accepting than their predecessors. This has resulted in a noticeable generation gap, and it will be fascinating to observe how the dynamics between these generations unfold.	Despite Taiwan’s milestones such as hosting the largest annual LGBTQ+ pride parade in Asia and being the first in the region to legalise same-sex marriage, there are areas needing improvement. As someone currently based in Western contexts, I (as an insider in Taiwan) see societal attitudes, legal protections, and visibility for diverse experiences within the queer spectrum as ongoing concerns in Taiwan. Further progress is essential to ensure full inclusion and equity.

National values, culture, and attitudes significantly influence the experiences of queer individuals, particularly in the context of Asian tropical regions where traditional norms may dominate societal views. Here, we recognise and stress that conservative heteronormative views are themselves the product of colonialisms and their different trajectories in the Philippines and Taiwan. The cultural landscape of these regions often results in resistance to the acceptance of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, impacting tropical queer identities (Chan, Tan, & Cassidy, 2023). Such environments can foster discrimination, stigma, and marginalisation, compelling queer individuals to conceal their identities to conform to societal expectations, thus affecting their mental and emotional health (Kim, 2015). Moreover, these cultural attitudes shape the legal and institutional frameworks that determine the rights and protections available to tropical queer people. While progressive societies might advocate for inclusive policies and equal rights, conservative values in many tropical regions can obstruct the advancement of LGBTQ+ rights, influencing everything from legal recognition to access to healthcare and education (Hudak & Bates, 2019; Souleymanov et al., 2022). Consequently, the to-and-fro of national values, culture, and tropical societal norms profoundly shapes the lived experiences and well-being of queer individuals in these social environments.

Reviewing Radel's observations on the shifting attitudes in the Philippines alongside Lance's insights into LGBTQ+ issues in Taiwan provides a nuanced understanding of how cultural frameworks intersect with societal dynamics within the macrosystem. Radel highlights a generational shift towards more progressive values in the Philippines, which suggests a departure from the colonial legacy that has impacted Filipino norms, possibly influenced by global discourse, but also queer Philippines studies (Rainbow Research Hub). In contrast, despite Taiwan's advanced stance on issues like same-sex marriage, Lance's account underscores the ongoing challenges faced by LGBTQ+ individuals, highlighting a dichotomy where progressive policies coexist with persistent anti-queer societal attitudes and legal inadequacies, as well as problems of neocolonialism of Western queer theory (Kao, 2024).

This examination reflects on national values deeply embedded within each country's macrosystem. In the Philippines, the shift towards inclusivity and acceptance still grapples with the tension between conservative and progressive cultural schemas. This is somewhat aligned with the national ethos of tropical *bayanihan* (Sarabia-Panol & Sison, 2012), which traditionally emphasises solidarity and cooperation among community members. Conversely, Taiwan's commitment to progressiveness and innovation, essential values for its recognition on the global stage, has not entirely eradicated the societal attitudes and legal discrepancies affecting LGBTQ+ individuals, pointing to the ongoing challenges within its macrosystem.

Here we aim to probe deeper into the application of cultural relativism, emphasising the necessity of understanding cultural practices and beliefs within the local context, free from external moral assessments. Cultural relativism posits that the moral, ethical, and social norms prevalent in a given culture are innately valid within that context and thus warrant evaluation within those parameters (Marcus, 2020; Zechenter, 1997). When applied to the juxtaposition of the macrosystem dynamics between the Philippines and Taiwan, cultural relativism unveils observations regarding queerness within these societies. In the Philippines, there exists discernible evidence of a paradigmatic shift towards more progressive values, indicative of a divergence from entrenched mores of colonialism. This shift, perhaps catalysed by a heightened exposure to diverse worldviews, both Indigenous and Western, denotes the fluidity in the evolution of Filipino cultural ethos. Conversely, notwithstanding Taiwan's laudable strides in advocating for LGBTQ+ rights, persistent anti-queer societal attitudes and legal disparities persist, accentuating a disjunction between legislative progressivism and societal prejudices (Fineman, 2010), including prejudices towards Indigenous queer communities.

Cultural relativism, in the context of this paper, needs to be analysed further through a decolonial tropical lens. Pereira (2019) argues that Western queer theory imported to

the tropics does not take into account the local subjective experiences of tropicality and its diverse cultures. A case in point in both countries is the need to recognize Indigenous queer communities. In the Philippines the *babaylan* – transgender shaman – has become one of the traditional emblems of the contemporary LGBTQIA+ movement (Pagulayan, 2022), while in Taiwan, Indigenous queer communities do not accept the term LGBTQ and advocate for indigenous queer vocabularies (Mavaliv, 2022).

Table 2. Exosystems

	Radel	Lance
Exosystem (politics, social services, mass media)	These shifts are evident in the portrayal of tropical queer individuals in mass media. While complete acceptance may not be widespread, the prevailing atmosphere is one of tolerance, particularly shaped by those in positions of power and influence. A robust political effort raises hope for the enactment of a law on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Expression (SOGIE).	My academic environment, rich in diversity and varied identities, has been instrumental in my journey of embracing my queer identity. Interacting with individuals amidst Western academia from different backgrounds who navigate challenges has broadened my understanding of queer experiences, fostering acceptance and a sense of belonging.

The interaction between politics and mass media crucially shapes the lived experiences of queer individuals in tropical regions, where political climates and media representations heavily influence LGBTQ+ rights and societal attitudes. In nations with progressive policies, legal rights and protections for LGBTQ+ people are more robust, fostering an environment of inclusivity that supports anti-discrimination laws and accessible healthcare (Chan et al., 2023; Hudak & Bates, 2019). However, in more conservative tropical settings, political landscapes may reinforce discriminatory practices, significantly impacting queer youth who struggle to express their identities openly. The depiction of LGBTQ+ issues within political discourse and media heavily influences public perception, potentially advancing acceptance or exacerbating prejudice (Souleymanov et al., 2022).

In these tropical contexts, media portrayal plays a pivotal role. The representation of LGBTQ+ individuals across various media platforms, including television, films, and online channels, not only shapes public perceptions but also impacts the self-identity of queer individuals (Chatterjee, 2021). Positive portrayals can provide vital role models and contribute to a culture of acceptance, while negative or stereotypical media depictions may entrench stigma and marginalisation. Moreover, political narratives within the media guide the societal conversation around queer rights, affecting acceptance and understanding, particularly among the youth growing up in these media-rich, politically dynamic environments (Pullen, 2016). This interconnection

underscores the importance of nuanced media and supportive political frameworks to foster a more inclusive society for queer individuals in the tropics.

Exploring the impact of exosystems on the experiences of queer individuals in tropical environments involves considering how external factors such as mass media, politics, and academic settings influence societal attitudes and individual lives. In the Philippines, Radel notes a shift in media representation towards a more tolerant view of queer individuals, influenced by broader social and cultural dynamics (Labiste, 2013). He is optimistic about political changes, particularly policies related to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Expression (SOGIE) which aim to enhance LGBTQ+ rights. This shift underscores the significant role that mass media and political discourse play in shaping societal perceptions and policies concerning queer individuals in tropical Asian regions.

Conversely, Lance's narrative, from a diverse academic environment, reveals how interactions with people from various backgrounds promote acceptance and help him value his queer identity. Despite the challenges he faces in Western academic circles, the supportive nature of his temperate educational setting plays a crucial role in his identity development and social integration as a tropical Asian queer individual.

These narratives together highlight the influences of exosystems on queer lives in these two Asian tropical regions. While Radel's observations reflect broader societal changes driven by media representations and political advocacy, Lance's experiences illustrate the transformative power of inclusive academic environments. Together, we showcase how external forces interact with personal stories in advancing inclusiveness and justice for queer individuals in these different tropical and temperate settings.

Drawing on cultural relativism once more, Radel's narrative unveils perceivable shifts within the portrayal of tropical Asian queer personas in the socio-cultural framework, reflecting a dynamic interchange between local norms and evolving societal attitudes. While complete acceptance remains elusive, an ethos of relative tolerance permeates, fostered by influential stakeholders wielding societal influence. Notably, burgeoning political efforts signal nascent strides toward legislating protections for SOGIE, emblematic of evolving discourses on LGBTQ+ rights (Reyes et al., 2019). In contrast, Lance illuminates the transformative potential of heterogeneous academic contexts, enriched by a spectrum of identities and cultural perspectives. Interactions within these scholarly domains, imbued with cultural multiplicity, have precipitated a paradigm shift in Lance's understanding of queer experiences, spurring an embrace of pluralistic worldviews and fostering a sense of belonging within the academic community.

Table 3. Mesosystems

	Radel	Lance
Mesosystem (peers)	Encountering individuals from diverse backgrounds and sexual orientations has facilitated a deeper comprehension not only of others but also of myself. I consider myself fortunate to have formed friendships in college with individuals from my tropical home who are incredibly supportive and open-minded. Additionally, my <i>chosen family</i> in Norway has provided me with a robust support system, enabling me to navigate and withstand the challenges posed by significant cultural differences.	Pursuing my PhD in the UK provides me with a safe distance from my tropical hometown. This separation allows me to openly embrace my queer identity and write this article without hesitation. Studying abroad offers greater comfort for self-expression.

In tropical Asian regions, the psychological well-being of queer individuals is deeply influenced by the dynamics within their familial and social environments. Supportive parents, who provide acceptance and understanding, are vital for the emotional development of queer youth, creating a nurturing environment that encourages them to embrace their identities with confidence (Sachs, 2023; Gruson-Wood et al., 2022). This sense of belonging is further reinforced by positive peer relationships, which offer camaraderie and affirming social interactions that enhance self-esteem and promote a healthy self-concept (Corlin, 2022). Conversely, the lack of support from family can lead to severe emotional distress and a sense of isolation, which is exacerbated by negative peer influences such as bullying and discrimination, further impacting mental health (Haggerty, 2018). The interaction of these relationships highlights the critical need for supportive familial and social networks that foster acceptance and understanding, particularly in the unique socio-cultural settings of tropical regions.

Reading our vignettes through the lens of Halberstam’s concept of “queer time” (2005) highlights the distinctive role of peer relationships in shaping queer experiences, particularly within the tropical Asian milieu where cultural differences and safe spaces take on unique significances. Halberstam’s idea disrupts traditional, linear conceptions of time, advocating instead for a fluid understanding that accommodates the multiplicity and resistance inherent in queer lives. This perspective is particularly relevant in tropical regions where temporal and cultural shifts may align differently compared to Western contexts, emphasising the importance of flexible and supportive social networks.

For instance, Radel's experiences in the diverse cultural setting of subarctic Norway illustrate the strength of peer relationships and chosen family in navigating his queer identity. His narrative underscores how these bonds provide robust support, enabling him to defy conventional time constraints and cultural expectations. Similarly, Lance's journey to the temperate UK for his studies represents a deliberate time-space dislocation that facilitates a safer environment for exploring his queer identity, free from the still restrictive norms of his tropical home country. These narratives collectively suggest that queer time in tropical regions not only challenges traditional timelines but also offers a transformative space for growth and acceptance, allowing individuals to construct personal and communal identities that resist and reshape normative structures. Here it is also important to think about the notion of 'queer time' within the context of 'tropical time' or "the vicissitudes of time and the turns of the tropical climate" (Benitez, 2021, p. 214). Here we encounter an intersection of queer time, tropical time, and queer ecology, recognising that the tropical climate, and its monsoon seasons, has a profound effect on humans and their experience of time. Yet this time is also cultural. Jacobo (2012, p.67) defined the *homo tropicus* as an "epiphany in time" (p.67) immersed in a temporal flux and non-individuated shared suffering. In this way we may think of tropical time as significant to understanding the queer experience in the tropics, one that is particularly communal.

Radel's mention of "chosen family" serves as a focal point for our further conversation. Chosen family emerges as a significant concept within queer and transgender communities, embodying familial constructs cultivated through voluntary association rather than bio-legal ties. This conceptual framework challenges conventional notions of kinship by presenting an alternative paradigm that diverges from the presumed hegemony of bio-legal classifications. Originating from anthropologist Weston (1997), the term gained ascendancy as Weston explored the pivotal role of intimate friendships in the lives of sexual minorities, where societal norms may exacerbate feelings of estrangement or ostracism from biological families.

Within the discourse of cultural relativism, the interpretation of chosen family amid the context of tropical Asian queerness in the Philippines and Taiwan is predicated on an appreciation of the cultural mores and norms that shape kinship dynamics. Rather than imposing ethnocentric judgments, cultural relativism underscores the necessity of comprehending and respecting the interdependence of cultural practices and beliefs surrounding the formation and sustenance of chosen family networks among tropical queers in these regions. This framework advocates for a refined understanding of how socio-cultural factors, imbued with power dynamics, influence the construction of familial bonds within Philippine and Taiwanese societal milieus.

Scholars employing ethnographic and autoethnographic methodologies, such as Weston’s, elucidate the negotiations and identity formations of queers amidst cultural landscapes. By redefining family as a fluid and contested construct enmeshed in broader power structures, cultural relativism prompts a critical interrogation of conventional Western paradigms of kinship, urging a more holistic examination of familial relationships across diverse cultural terrains (Jackson Levin et al., 2020). Thus, within the purview of cultural relativism, chosen family emerges as a manifestation of socio-cultural context, underscoring the imperative of acknowledging and respecting diverse kinship practices within tropical queer communities in the Philippines and Taiwan.

Table 4. Microsystems

	Radel	Lance
Microsystem (church and family)	I grew up in a devout Christian upbringing within a denomination originating from a tropical region, surrounded by <i>strong</i> and <i>unwelcoming</i> convictions regarding LGBTQ individuals. Navigating and harmonising my identity—the authenticity of self—with my faith has bestowed upon me profound distress. Literature, especially that which portrays gay love as a “ <i>normal</i> ” and “ <i>acceptable</i> ” form of affection, has served as my sanctuary. The weight of words is undeniable, and they bear a significant impact on my journey.	Taiwan’s 2019 legalisation of same-sex marriage has a deep personal impact on me. It allows me to proudly claim my hometown as a contributor to the queer narrative in Asia, particularly within LGBT literature. This milestone reaffirms my identity as a queer Asian researcher. Despite Taiwan’s challenges in gaining global recognition, I never anticipated feeling proud of my hometown’s stance on gender until I ventured to Western locales.

In tropical Asian countries, the influence of educational institutions, religious bodies like the church, and peer connections profoundly mould queer lives (Yue & Leung, 2017). Within the realm of education, the inclusivity and awareness ingrained in the curriculum and policies play a pivotal role. Forward-thinking educational institutions may cultivate an environment that celebrates diversity, granting queer students a sanctuary of acceptance and comprehension (Gorse et al., 2021). Nonetheless, the prevailing cultural and societal norms within the broader Asian tapestry may still shift the level of openness and embrace within these educational domains (Yue & Leung, 2017).

The sway of religious bodies, particularly the church, can prove both a beacon and a hurdle for queer souls in the tropics where religion remains a strong communal structure. While certain religious factions may champion acceptance and empathy, others may clutch onto old, colonial, viewpoints that perceive queerness through a

conservative prism (Kaunda & Alubafi, 2022; Varnado, 2020). Navigating these currents can compile an amalgamation of intersections between personal faith and sexual identity. Moreover, peer bonds within this realm can offer companionship and unity. Affirmative peer encounters may contribute to a supportive social fabric, yet adverse experiences, such as prejudice or discrimination, can still cast long shadows over the health and well-being of queer individuals (Corlin, 2022).

Our stories illuminate the profound influence of Christian socialisation and hometown milieus on our personal journeys. Radel's account unveils the weight of his religious upbringing within his microsystem, where entrenched beliefs against LGBTQ identities create a tangible rift between his sense of self and his faith. This internal conflict highlights the significance of socialisation mechanisms in shaping one's identity and strategies for coping. Despite the challenges posed by his religious environment, Radel finds solace and validation in literature, serving as a vital coping mechanism within his tropical microsystem.

Similarly, Lance's narrative reflects on the impact of Taiwan's landmark 2019 legalisation of same-sex marriage on his sense of identity and pride in his hometown. This historic milestone reaffirms his identity as a queer Asian individual and elevates Taiwan's position in the global LGBTQ narrative. Within his tropical microsystem, Lance's admiration for his hometown's progressive stance on gender serves as a source of personal validation and empowerment. This underscores the pivotal role of local contexts in shaping individual identity and fostering a sense of belonging within the microsystem.

In essence, our narratives offer insight into the interrelatedness between socialisation mechanisms and local tropical contextual dynamics within our respective microsystems. While Radel grapples with the inner conflict stemming from the divergence between identity and faith, Lance discovers validation and unwavering pride in his hometown's progressive approach to gender. These stories underscore the importance of examining microsystemic factors in understanding the complex process of identity formation and self-affirmation within queer individual lived experiences.

The concept of queer diasporas evokes the dispersal of LGBTQ+ individuals across diverse tropical and temperate terrains, often spurred by migration, displacement, or the quest for sanctuary away from oppressive social climates. Eng's exploration of queer diasporas (2005) enquires into the different experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals navigating layers of identity and belonging across transnational landscapes.

Table 5. Individuals

	Radel	Lance
Individual (gender, socioeconomic status, age)	While this article might come across as a “coming out”, I feel a responsibility to myself, my younger self, and fellow queer individuals who, like me, were compelled to conceal their true selves (before). I am convinced that I now possess a voice and a platform to advocate for discussions that promote the rights and well-being of underprivileged and vulnerable members of the queer community in the tropics and other parts of the world.	At first, I worried that revealing my sexual orientation could cause problems. Yet, as I got to know more beautiful queer individuals during my time at Warwick and Cambridge, and as I looked into cultural-sociological studies, I found myself caring less and less. Life is tough already, so why add unnecessary worries about this?

Viewing our vignettes through the lens of Eng’s research (2005) offers illumination into our encounters of identity negotiation and sexual orientation. Radel’s tale mirrors the trials of concealing one’s genuine self within environments where LGBTQ+ identities may encounter stigma or exclusion. Describing this narrative as a potential “*coming out*” signifies a move towards visibility and self-assertion within a diasporic setting. Radel’s recognition of a duty to champion the rights and welfare of marginalised LGBTQ+ individuals resonates with the concept of tropical queer diasporas (Eng, 2005), spotlighting the intersectionality and solidarity within dispersed queer enclaves.

Similarly, Lance’s journey illustrates a passage towards self-acceptance and fortitude amidst the backdrop of queer diasporas. Despite initial trepidations about disclosing his sexual orientation and fears of potential repercussions in various social spheres, Lance has arrived at a place of detachment from such concerns. This newfound indifference marks a transition towards a more liberated and empowered sense of self within transnational domains. Lance’s unabashed embrace of his tropical Asian queer identity and his focus on personal growth and empowerment echo themes of agency and resilience within queer diasporas.

In unison, our narratives exemplify the knottiness of identity navigation and resilience within tropical queer diasporas (Eng, 2005). Our experiences of coping with sexual orientation and embracing authentic selves underscore the significance of visibility, advocacy, and solidarity within dispersed LGBTQ+ communities across tropical and geographical expanses.

Our individual lived experiences wield influence in shaping the identity of tropical Asian queer individuals, constructing a network of unique narratives that enrich the broader

spectrum of LGBTQ+ identities. The convergence of cultural, familial, and societal influences sculpts our self-understanding and informs the journey of reconciling with one's queer identity (Den Berg, 2017) and tropical queerness (Sarce, 2023). Personal odysseys of self-discovery, acceptance, and resilience serve as pivotal themes in these tropical narratives, each contributing to the mosaic that defines our individuality (Dima & Dumitriu, 2023).

The hurdles and triumphs encountered as tropical Asian queer individuals offer a lens through which we engage within our tropical regions, the temperate west, the global world, and our various communities. Lived experiences of acceptance or rejection, love or discrimination, and the negotiation of societal expectations add to the kaleidoscopic nature of tropical Asian queer identity. These personal chronicles not only mirror the diversity within the LGBTQ+ collective but also underscore the importance of acknowledging and celebrating the richness of each individual's odyssey (Dima & Dumitriu, 2023). Ultimately, it is through the entanglement of our personal lived experiences that our identity as tropical Asian queer individuals emerge, a dynamic and evolving expression shaped by the unique amalgamation of our stories from the tropics and our journey to unknown and non-tropical spaces.

Navigating Tropical Queerness: A Kaleidoscope of Existence

The Power of Tropical Queer Collaborative Autoethnography

Collaborative autoethnography, as championed by Chang et al. (2012), emerges as a powerful tool for individuals, particularly those from the diverse tropical regions, to explore and redefine their personal narratives within a shared experiential context. This approach not only deepens personal insights but also enriches a collective understanding of queerness, recognising identities shaped by the tropical milieu. It facilitates an exploration of the interaction between assorted cultural and experiential backgrounds, highlighting commonalities and distinctions within the socio-cultural contexts of regions like the Philippines and Taiwan, where traditional Indigenous lifeways, and a legacy colonialism, intersect dynamically with modern queer identities (Ellis et al., 2011; Chang et al., 2013; Lapadat, 2017; Walford, 2020).

Navigating queer identities from these tropical locales, researchers like us, Lance from Taiwan and Radel from the Philippines, encounter fusions of queer diasporic experiences, which challenge the cultivation of a political discourse that fully acknowledges the intertwining of personal, societal, cultural, and economic dimensions. This blending of identities in diverse settings underscores the unpredictable nature of gender and sexual identity regulation within cultural politics (Rouse, 1995; Wesling, 2008). Our tropical Asian narratives reflect the ongoing

negotiation of our queer desires against a backdrop of local expectations and globalised identities. Such experiences highlight the futility of attempting to definitively predict gender identity consolidation, underscoring the fluidity and evolving nature of queer identities within tropical environments (Villarejo, 2003).

Also, the term 'tropics' transcends the confines of a mere geographical delineation, encompassing a myriad of historical trajectories, and counter trajectories, that have permeated the various regions of the tropics (Velho, 2016). Our dialogues exemplify this sense of tropicality by going into the fluidity of gender and sexuality in the flow of queer life. Through conversations, we navigate the multifaceted layers of identity, shedding light on queer experiences within different landscapes. By engaging with these discussions, we cultivate a comprehension of how epistemological frameworks shape queer identities and observe how these factors engender unique manifestations across the tropics, illuminating the ever-morphing character of LGBTQ+ existence in these regions. Through our colloquies, we discern the constellations of experience of queer lives, amidst a panorama of cultures and tropical and temperate geographical markers. The narratives underscore how queer identities are in a state of perpetual flux and metamorphosis, particularly within the socio-ecological landscapes of the tropics (Worthen, 2023).

Our approach in *tropical queer collaborative autoethnography* continues to be relevant, especially within the context of tropical queer experiences. This method enables us to share and validate the rich, diverse lived experiences of queer individuals in tropical Asian regions, treating these personal narratives with the same respect and credibility as those gathered in more traditional research settings (Méndez, 2013). By focusing on our unique perspectives as queer tropical researchers, we utilise our knowledge and ideas to address and benefit the queer communities within these culturally rich tropical environments.

Moreover, our conversations underscore the potential of queer identities in tropical settings to drive collaboration and empowerment through *tropical queer collaborative autoethnography*. This innovative approach not only enriches the understanding of queerness in tropical contexts but also integrates Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model to illustrate how varied socio-environmental, personal, and contextual factors interplay in shaping the growth and experiences of individuals within these settings (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Meer & Müller, 2023). The concept of "queer tropics" is not viewed merely as distinct zones of difference but as dynamic locales where normative expectations and non-normative desires constantly interact and contest each other (Lim, 2016). This perspective enriches our understanding of the complexities and challenges faced by queer communities in tropical Asian regions, advocating for a more inclusive approach to studying their unique experiences and contributions.

The Vibrancy of Queer Tropical Human Ecosystems

With the key issues from our discussion in mind, in societies with a strong legacy of colonial values, queer individuals often face significant resistance that can lead to discrimination and marginalisation, adversely affecting their mental and emotional well-being (Chan et al., 2023; Kim, 2015). These cultural attitudes not only foster stigma but also influence legal and institutional frameworks that impede the recognition and protection of queer rights, including access to healthcare and education (Hudak & Bates, 2019). Moreover, the pace of progress in LGBTQ+ rights varies significantly; while conservative values often hinder such advancements, more progressive societies may champion inclusive policies and equal rights (Souleymanov et al., 2022). The interconnectedness between national values, culture, and attitudes thus profoundly shapes the experiences and overall well-being of tropical queer individuals.

Additionally, the intersection of politics and mass media plays a pivotal role in the lives of queer individuals, especially during their formative years. Progressive policies can create an inclusive environment that supports equal rights and combats discrimination, whereas conservative politics may restrict the expression of queer identities (Chan et al., 2023; Souleymanov et al., 2022). Academic environments and the media also influence societal perceptions: positive representations of LGBTQ+ individuals can foster acceptance and counteract stigma, whereas negative portrayals might contribute to further marginalisation (Chatterjee, 2021). Moreover, the political narratives circulated through mass media significantly affect public discussions about queer rights, impacting the acceptance and understanding of queer identities among the younger generation (Pullen, 2016).

The impact of parental and peer dynamics on the psychological well-being of queer individuals in tropical regions is also a confluence of forces with significant implications. Supportive parents are crucial, providing a foundation of acceptance and understanding that greatly enhances the emotional development and sense of belonging among queer youth, allowing them to navigate their identities more authentically (Sachs, 2023; Gruson-Wood et al., 2022). Similarly, positive peer relationships contribute significantly to a sense of self and overall mental health by offering camaraderie and shared experiences (Corlin, 2022). However, the lack of support from family can lead to severe emotional distress, isolation, and reduced self-esteem (Gruson-Wood et al., 2022). Furthermore, negative peer interactions, such as bullying and discrimination, can exacerbate these issues, underlining the importance of nurturing environments that promote acceptance (Haggerty, 2018).

In tropical Asia, educational, religious, and peer influences deeply affect the lives of queer individuals within these communities. Progressive educational institutions are vital as they often lead in fostering inclusivity and raising awareness, which can buffer against broader societal prejudices (Gorse et al., 2021; Yue & Leung, 2017). The role of religious institutions varies, with some supporting queer identities while others may uphold conservative views that complicate the lives of queer individuals (Kaunda & Alubafi, 2022; Varnado, 2020). Balancing faith, sexual identity, and potentially unsupportive environments is a challenge for LGBTQ+ individuals in the tropics (Corlin, 2022). While positive peer networks offer crucial support, discrimination remains a barrier. This emphasises the need for ongoing advocacy and support tailored to their unique challenges.

Tropical environments, with their diverse cultures amidst flourishing ecosystems, evoke a spectrum of experiences for LGBTQ+ identities. Lived experiences in these regions (and their diasporas) are documented in works by Den Berg (2017), Dima & Dumitriu (2023), Denisoff (2020), and Seymour (2020), our piece adds to this growing body of knowledge and illuminates the journeys of self-acceptance and resilience. Acknowledging the impressiveness of these narratives strengthens our admiration for the resilience of LGBTQ+ individuals in the tropics.

Parting Words

In the queer community within tropical climates, each of us carries unique stories that resonate with the ecosystems that surround our regions. Yet, there's a thread of commonality that interlaces our varied lives, drawing us together. This shared queer experience acts as a unifying force, embedding a sense of familiarity that transcends our individual stories. This connection offers comfort and solidarity, reminding us that others have faced similar challenges and joys, weaving a collective identity from the threads of our shared paths.

In the queer tropics experiences unfolds to transcend mere tolerance, fostering a communal space where we embark on a journey of self-discovery. This movement outward, towards one another, becomes a movement inward, a reclamation of the fragmented selves we may have felt scattered across societal expectations. Echoing Lundberg's (2000) description of the journey to self (which is always in relation), "The desire is for wholeness, for self-presence, for a unified self. It is a desire for origins" (p. 24). The tropics become a backdrop for this exploration of an original self, not in a singular sense, but in the sense of finding our place within the supportive ecosystem of queer community. Each story, inextricably linked to this space, adds not just beauty, but a piece of the puzzle that defines who we are.



We, Radel and Lance, hope this narrative inspires more queer researchers from tropical regions to share their experiences and use their voices to create safe spaces for those in need. We aim for our collaborative work to motivate others in our community to engage in autoethnographic explorations, supporting one another as we navigate through diverse narratives and collectively spread a hope and understanding.

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