Early discussions about this roundtable informed my thoughts about it as a place where participants would discuss the distinctive issues of same-sex sexual relationships in the regions from which they—and the audience—hails. I thought of it as an opportunity for cross-cultural comparisons and intercultural sharing of experiences to give rise to new knowledge of same-sex relationships. Finally, the roundtable seemed a forum to address some of the problems that arise when same-sex partners come from different countries—problems of mobility and of cultural difference among the partners, of the choice of whether and how to reside together, for example—with the goal of recognizing these problems as political ones (with the word “political” broadly understood).

Let me begin with an anecdote. A gay man who lives in an Asian country recently said to me, “same-sex relationships and gay marriage are things that rich people can have; they’re not relevant to poor countries.” While one can understand this as reflecting cultural factors such as the importance of family ties complicated by great
A second issue for this roundtable became clear to me recently when I met some women in Amsterdam involved called Love Exiles (www.loveexiles.org). They are same-sex couples who must live in a third country because neither of the partners can take the other to live in their own home country. This brought into focus for me the problem of statism—the primacy of the nation-state in determining both people’s life
options and their aspirations. In this case, it is how the nation-state, in coercing people’s
options and aspirations for a “home,” harasses same-sex partners in their relationships of
love and caring for each other. Love exiles have to think beyond their own nationality—
putting themselves in exile due to their love—in order to create a new home, substituting
their love of each other for their national identities and the supposed political guarantees
of their respective nation-states. This eclipse of nationalism and critique of state power
arising from intercultural same-sex relations of erotic love and caring has broader
implications for politics, as well as relevance to the roundtable’s specific focus on the
political recognition of sexual relations.

Thirdly, my recent exposure to queer Filipinos in Amsterdam and to queer
migrants in my other city of residence, New York, has shaped my thinking about this
roundtable. These queer migrant communities, including other diasporic Asian queer
communities, are transforming the single-issue politics of a sexual rights-based agenda
through the influence of social justice as conceived in a global context by migrants.
From my own experience, migrant queers often make coalitions with other diasporic
communities to the extent that common experiences with interacting local and
transnational forces that produce economic inequities, cultural misrecognition, and social
inequalities that focus the police powers of the state upon them, serve as sources for
activism. This gives the national agendas of LGBTSI activism a broader perspective and
makes them more deeply based within ethnic communities in different national settings.
(To be sure, the precarious status of migrants often limits the extent to which they can
openly participate in such activism.) Further, the existence of diasporic queer
communities also brings into cross-cultural contact different conceptions of how to live in one’s body, of the relation of one’s gendered body to one’s socio-economic life options, and of non-heteronormative kinds of pleasure people can give and receive with their bodies. This potential development of enabling conditions for sexual rights and their relation to other political issues, as well as a broadening of the meaning of sexuality through cross-cultural political work, seems central what has been termed “queer globalization.”

Thus, for this roundtable, I have come to think of three types of political recognition of same-sex sexuality. One is recognition of the political economy that makes same-sex erotic relations possible in different locations in Asia. Another is recognition of the constraints of nationalism and statism on such same-sex relations and the political opportunities opened by intercultural same-sex relations between people from different Asian (and other) national cultures. A third type of political recognition involves how Asian queer diasporas within western societies are shaping LGBTSI political agendas in those societies, and how these diasporic communities may also influence agendas for the political recognition of same-sex relationships in Asia.

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