

Dangerous Masculinity: The Problematisation of “Johns” in Contemporary Taiwan

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After half a century of colonization by the Japanese (1895 - 1945), in 1949 Taiwan was taken over by Chinese Nationalists, known as the KMT, after they were defeated by Chinese communists in a civil war. At the same year, martial law was imposed in Taiwan with the intention of the authorities to build up a powerful and modern country to represent China and to regain the Mainland, which was highlighted as the national goal. Accordingly, the state's management of the social disorder, prostitution for example, was based on the defense of the health and strength of the nation and its society, which was illustrated by the approval of licensed prostitution for the maintenance of social steadiness and military morale under the assumption of men's imperative sexual need (The Ministry of Judicial Administration, 1967:236; Chen, 2006:11).

Two decades after the stabilization of the KMT regime in Taiwan, an increasingly formed civil society appeared to strengthen its vigor through rapid economic and social transformations. In her work about the transformation of bodily concepts in contemporary Taiwan, Liou (2003:52) noticed that accompanied with the expansion of urbanization and industrialization in the late 1960s, Elias' (1978, 1982) concepts of a civilized atmosphere began to spread across Taiwan through the highlighting and interventions in environmental sanitation, personal hygiene and bodily conduct. An independent and autonomous self-awareness was also inspired, helping to develop the ideas of the protection and the assertion of privacy, self expression and action by free will, not only separating individuals from the strong binding with the nation promoted by the KMT regime in the postwar years but also changing the public's perceptions of the social problems. Liou's studies provide us with useful groundwork to observe and understand how prostitution became an issue in Taiwanese society after the 1970s as it involved the perception of bodily management in the modern society, the awareness of individuals' sexual rights and autonomy, and the expectations of interventions in sexual violations.

The looseness of political coercion was also reflected by the active involvement in debates on prostitution by civil agents of various interests, such as residents, citizens, journalists, medical experts, women's groups and academic personnel, to express their understanding of and exert their influence upon this issue. In their debates on this subject, an obvious trend was revealed—men's sexual consumption was no longer viewed as 'natural' and 'normal' but gradually viewed as dangerous and needed to be regulated. As sexologists have demonstrated, sex is a highly scripted and culturally conditioned activity (Plummer 1975; Weeks 2003). If men's

certain sexual performances became disliked or problematic, we wonder what kind of cultural knowledge of sex could be gained. Therefore this work aims to look at the discussions of men's participation in commercial sex to examine how their acting as sexual consumers was seen and constructed as problematic. By doing so, I will briefly highlight the status of clients in the debates of prostitution within the two decades of postwar years and then turn to those after the 1970s to observe the shifting perceptions toward their pleasure seeking. As this work focuses on the civil agents' involvements in the definition, discussion, actions and regulations of those in prostitution, I will use newspapers of the time as the main source. The reasons for this is because they were the influential platform of information exchange for the public when access to the media was extremely restricted during martial law and also to a certain extent they could reflect the public's interests when the publisher had to take sales volume into account.

BECOMING DANGEROUS: RE-ORIENTATING MEN'S SEXUAL PLEASURE SEEKING

As the maintenance of the military strength and masculinity was an essential part in the nation-building project during the period of martial law, the prostitution system was accordingly sanctioned by the Taiwanese authorities in the 1950s to conform to this goal. In an official publication concerning military prostitution, it clearly stated the reason for its establishment was "to maintain servicemen's physical and sexual health, to solve their sexual need and to protect young soldiers from officials' sodomy" (Chen, 2006:19, 35). In this sense, looking for a sexual outlet from prostitutes' bodies was recognized by the authorities as 'natural' and 'healthy' for single men and particularly servicemen. Married men's visits to brothels were relatively intolerant for its potential threat to their familial steadiness and the men's moral health, which were required ethics during the semi-wartime period. As a critic remarked, if men indulged themselves in sensual desire, "how could those married ones face their wives and children?...The loss of money and reason due to their infatuation with prostitutes could also lead them to do evil and create more social problems" (Hsueh, 1977: 46). It appeared that the blame men would take mainly focused on their cause of familial and personal crisis via sexual purchase rather than on the sexual behaviour itself. In various medical descriptions and statistics, men were also given warnings of prostitutes' morbid status, such as 'diseases spreading amongst flowering shrubs', 'be wary of picking wild flowers as the germs counteract their fragrance', and 'sexual diseases were horrible! A cautious advisement for men frequenting disorderly houses' (United Daily News, 23/12/1953, 07/03/1959, 10/05/1959). Seen in this way, men became potential victims of the sex trade for its risk to their family, economics, morality and health. Clearly, under the shelter of the state's sexual policy and the justification of men's sexual outlet, men rarely stayed as the focal point of social condemnation for participating in the sex trade.

Clients' privileged positions faced challenges after the 1970s when individual and the public sensibilities and perceptions toward disorder were enhanced and shifting as mentioned above. Therefore, the following part I will focus on the public

discussion of prostitution to examine how clients and their buying sex came to be seen as problematic in various aspects.

Misconduct

In the 1980s city residents in Taiwan commonly experienced disturbances by expansion of the various disguised sex industries into residential areas. According to a phone poll conducted by a well-circulated newspaper, more than half of the residents of Taipei City were dissatisfied with the quality of their surroundings because of the invasion of the sex industries in their neighbourhoods (United Daily News, 24/01/1986). When the sexual activities or sexual establishments became more 'visible' and 'perceptible', clients' behaviour was correspondingly scrutinized. Apart from being seen patronizing the sex industries for entertainment, many 'Johns' were viewed as unwelcomed due to the mental pressure and harassment they brought to the residents. For example, inhabitants of a modern mansion on the Chunghsiao East Road expressed their unpleasant experience after a hotel was set up on the top floor: "Every time when we walked into the lift, we were really sick of those men's enquiring expressions and dirty looks" (United Daily News, 20/01/1986). Also, clients were accused of threatening the public order by their misconduct. In the Apollo mansion in Taipei City, disguised brothels and massage parlors were set up amongst 150 households, which caused a sense of fear to residents for their inability to control the entrance to this building from those who were improperly dressed or intoxicated. Complaints were also made that the security staff in this building often suffered oral abuse or physical violence from clients refused entrance (United Daily News, 01/10/1986). The clients' dangerous image was not only reflected in their unruly behaviour to those outside the sex industries but also in their infliction of abusive treatment on prostitutes. In an article in a feminist magazine, clients' violent acts were described:

"when those men who spent money on prostitutes became angry, they would burn those women's bodies with cigarettes and beat them...sometimes prostitutes even died without clear reasons when they were with their clients" (Li Yuan-Chen, 1986, p.3).

Communities' complaints and feminists' concerns over clients' misconduct may not be able to be mentioned in the same breath, as the former targeted the sense of threat those men imposed on personal emotion or the public order while the later focused on men's violence toward vulnerable women. However, everything highlighted a common tendency: the public tolerance toward unmanageable and unruly deeds was gradually decreasing as it did not conform to the expectations of civilized manners and individual wellbeing.

Unhealthy bodies and minds

Another noticeable tendency toward the cognition of prostitution was that men's sexual consumption was recognized as a physical and mental unsoundness in medical discourses. Apart from the traditional assumption of prostitutes' unhealthy

and diseased status, male sex buyers were now increasingly viewed with suspicion because of the high risk of deadly diseases. When AIDS/HIV frightened Taiwanese society after the 1980s concerning its incurable and malignant nature, along with homosexuals, prostitutes, sexual disease transmitters, servicemen, prisoners, foreign labourers and sailors, sexual buyers were also included in the list for compulsory check-ups by the Health Department due to their potential for the transmission of such a fatal disease via dangerous sexual performances (United Daily News, 24/12/1991). Although prostitutes were still assumed to be the significant diseases carriers, the censure for their endangering public health was proportional to different (male) groups. The inclusion of clients into a supervised classification was specifically worth noting as prostitutes no longer took the exclusive blame for the cause of sexual and social unhealthiness in the area of commercial sex. In addition, clients' sexual irresponsibility was also condemned to highlight the risk of sexual diseases. In a medical investigation of the public's sexual safety, it was argued by Professor Ge of Kaohsiung Medical University that, of 133 sexual buyers, only 29 percent of all used condoms during commercial sex, which raised the AIDS infection rate by ten times. Ge therefore appealed to men's sexual responsibility to reduce the spread of AIDS (United Daily News, 13/06/1992). Moreover, medical experts ^{^^^} criticised clients' mistaken medical knowledge, putting themselves in dangerous positions. At an international conference held on the problem of juvenile prostitution, an officer of UNESCO¹ remarked: there were different reasons for clients to participate in the sex trade with juvenile prostitutes. The fear of AIDS was not the exclusive, but a significant reason to encourage the demand for juvenile prostitutes as young girls were recognized as cleaner and less sexually active (United Daily News, 13/11/1988). Dr. Chiang of Taipei Medical University refuted clients' ignorant ideas of safe sex with juveniles, as in Taiwan young girls lacked medical and hygienic knowledge and also compulsorily regular checkups due to their illegal prostitute status, which increased their vulnerability to deadly diseases (United Daily News, 07/05/1993).

Other than their unsafe physical conditions, within the modern medical narratives, clients were also portrayed as mental or sexual deviants. Interviewed about men's sexual behaviour, Dr. Chiang commented that:

"Having commercial sex itself was abnormal enough but it was even more sexually deviate to have sex with juvenile prostitutes".

"From the viewpoints of psychosomatic medicine, buying sex from child prostitutes was a typical psychosexual aberration because at times clients would use young girls to recover their self esteem due to the dysfunction of their sexual organs or to regain the sexual excitement, which could worsen their psychosexual disorder" (United Daily News, 07/05/1993).

¹ UNESCO is the abbreviation of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

Those medical standards of normality/ abnormality and order/disorder further separated clients from a healthy and respectable society by their sexual practices. Buying sex from young girls particularly symbolized men's incapability or failure in the proper performance of the sexual act. More than the deficiency of moral integrity, indulging in commercial sex could be viewed as a symptom of insanity and disorder under the modern medical gaze, which subverted the traditional recognition of male's sexual consumption as healthy and normal.

Violating the modern intimacy

The shifting recognition of gender roles and gender relationship of the modern society also solidified the unacceptability of men's sexual purchases. As Giddens (1992:130) indicated, intimacy was a modern invention, which emphasized the interpersonal emotional communication based on equality. The increase of economic strength enabled women to demand emotional equality, which founded intimacy in the field of modernity. Therefore, sex without the involvement of emotion and equality appears to be sharply at odds with the 'special' and 'pure' forms of intimacy that modernity upholds as the ultimate goal in personal relationships. This idea of modern intimacy could also be found in the Taiwanese feminists' arguments. In an article referring to prostitution problems, Li, Yuan-Chen made an appeal:

"We would like men to treat women as human beings not sexual objects, as sexual interactions would not be wonderful unless sexual pleasure and emotion were equal between both sexes. We are willing to enjoy equal sexual pleasure and emotion with men and refuse to believe that sex was designed for women to please and serve men" (Li, 1987, p.1).

A critic also argued:

"If there was any rank of sexual intercourses, the sex act without love was an apparent low-grade sexual expression. Such a sexual practice was characterized as short time consuming, low cost and animal like and was structured by the purchase of sexual satisfactions."(United Daily News, 15/05/1992)

Buying sex manifested men's dominance and gender inequality within the sexual relationship, which was viewed as men's violation of the idea of intimacy without considering of women's pleasure and giving affectional devotion. Sexual consumption therefore reduced the qualification of men in the understanding and the performance of the expected masculine behaviour within the modern intimacy.

Immoral sexuality

Toward the end of martial law, demonstrations against juvenile prostitution held by various civil groups in 1987 and 1988 and their follow-up revisions of related regulations were commonly viewed as a major progress of the women's movement

in Taiwan (Chang, 1997). In their campaign, Taiwanese feminists detailed the inhumane treatment girls experienced in prostitution, such as physical abuse and confinement, mental suffering with surveillance and stigma and sexual assault, to arouse the public attention to women's human rights in the sex trade and to redefine men's sexual purchase as immoral. In a research of the prevalence of pornography in Taipei City, authorized by the Taipei City Government, the results revealed the reasons men visited sexual establishments were ranked as follows:

1. Commercial sociability (33.1%)
2. Curiosity (20%)
3. Entertainment (18.5%)
4. Looking for excitement (11.2%)
5. Sexual Needs (10.2%)
6. Sexual discontent between couples (2.2%) (Tang, 1983:52)

Also, 80 percent of male interviewees stated the reason they visited sexual establishments was invitation and in company with their mates. Such a result underpinned female campaigners' arguments against commercial sex and was applied in their actions against men's sexual immorality.

The Taipei Women's Rescue Foundation (TTWRF) used Tang's research to illustrate that clients' engagement in commercial sex was not for assumed sexual needs but mainly for the sensual excitement or by a companion's instigation. Therefore, they made an appeal in the yellow ribbon movement to arouse men's consciousness and courage to refuse their associates' enticement, similar to the public's participation in the campaign against passive smoking (United Daily News, 27/03/1990). In this campaign, men were separated into two categories as one group participated in and entice others into incorrect sexual pleasure while the other sided with the socially recognized action, like the refusal of pornography and passive smoking, by which the former were contrasted as an example of bad masculinity for its immoral and anti-social characteristics. In addition, TTWRF argued further that if 50 percent of men were able to refuse the use of sexual arrangements as sociability, half of the sex industries would collapse (Ibid). This statement indicated that the prosperity of prostitution was because of men's sexual demand instead of women's sexual supply as Lawyer Wang, the Present of TTWRF, remarked: "The rescue of juvenile prostitutes could not undo the repeated tragedies as the demand for them was high. If we want to solve the juvenile prostitution problem, the decrease in the demand of the sex trade should be prioritized" (Ibid). Men were therefore portrayed as a priority to take responsibility for the existence of social evils, which not only proportioned certain social condemnation from prostitutes to clients, but enhanced the image of women's victimisation and men's wrongdoing in the sex trade.

Men's sexual consumption was particularly perceived as unbearable and even pathological if their sexual practices were with juvenile girls. The modern idea of childhood recognized children's vulnerability and innocence which needed to be protected. Young girls' participation in the sex trade was particularly seen as abuse

of their sexual purity, physical weakness and mental innocence. In meetings across departments, female officials condemned clients' immorality in concert for their sexual intercourse with juvenile girls. The governor of the Department of Health argued that girls under sixteen would not voluntarily enter the sex trade as they did not have sexual needs at their ages. Legislator Wong commented with anger: "some girls were too physically immature to have sexual interaction with clients, subjecting them to have operations on their pubic bones by madams. Those clients who performed sex acts with child prostitutes were basically like animals". Legislator Yeh asserted that clients' names should be published in the communities where they resided because their sexual partners were not irrelative people but everybody's daughters and children of the state (United Daily News, 13/03/1993). In her research of young girls in prostitution, researcher of Academia Sinica, Yi, Ching-Chun (1992) argued that juvenile girls lacked the ability and chance of making independent and correct judgments; therefore, they should be protected while sick clients should be heavily punished. In her opinion, performing the sex act with juvenile prostitutes was sexual abuse of children, and being no different from incest.

Those narratives basically confirmed the idea of pure childhood in terms of children's physical asexuality and mental innocence, and impossible for them to desire sexual pleasure and recognize sexual danger. The ruin of children's inborn nature and rights announced clients' deviation from the values and ethics of human beings and degenerated them into animal-like status. Also, clients' lack of respectability also expressed in their disqualification of their gendered roles/ethics as men were expected to perform masculine to protect and defend females and male elder folk were supposed to show their fatherliness instead of eroticism toward their female youngsters.

CONCLUSION

In the debates on men's sexual purchase, irrespective of residents' antipathy toward clients' misconduct, medical experts' warnings of dangerous sexual practices or female campaigners' appeals for women's rights, it suggested that the concern toward the social disorder in Taiwanese society gradually moved from the emphasis of nationalized and collectivized benefits to the highlighting of individual interests at a personal level. The shifting perception of men's sexual buying also manifested the changing expectations toward sexuality/gender under a different political atmosphere.

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