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# CHANGES IN GENDER AND INTIMATE RELATIONS IN HONG KONG

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The shift from conventional dating to hooking up in college campus culture in the US occurred in the context of significant changes in gender relations. Continuous efforts to advance women's position in society, as well as enhanced career possibilities, have given young women unprecedented autonomy over their lives and bodies. Concomitantly, a stringent development imperative has amassed weight for young women and men alike, suggesting that they should put off commitments until later in life.

On the surface, Hong Kong experienced many similar changes in gender and intimate relations as seen in the United States, and youth grow up under similar socioeconomic conditions. Women's labor force participation ranks amongst the highest in the world in Hong Kong, and an increasingly large number of young, ambitious women gain access to tertiary education to the extent that women outnumber men in most colleges. At the same time, the age of marriage has risen dramatically, resulting in a prolonged period in which youth can experiment with sex, intimacy and relationships. Furthermore, the acceptance and prevalence of premarital sex among youth has risen dramatically in recent decades (Chow and Lum, 2008:21; TFPAHK, 2011:48), suggesting that youths' sexual norms and behavior increasingly diverge from adults'. Although social scientists have started to document changes in intimate relationships in East Asia (Davis and Friedman, 2014; Jackson et al., 2008), very little is known about the implications of these changes for youth sexual cultures in this region. Have dating and hooking up become part of the sexual repertoire of young adults in Hong Kong? And, how is sex connected to identity formation of youth? These questions will be empirically explored in the following chapters. First, a more thorough look is taken of the changes in gender and intimate relations in the city-state.

Hong Kong is a complex society, often described as a hybrid of 'east' meets 'west'. It has been a British crown colony for an extensive period, governed by a small colonial bureaucracy. At the turn of the century, the Chinese government took over

the rule of the city-state but left much of its bureaucratic infrastructure intact. It has seen an extraordinary rapid economic development, evolving into a complex and innovative service economy by the end of the 20th century. It has experienced an astonishing influx of people, mainly ethnically Han Chinese, who brought with them their own traditions and their own norms and values. As most local denizens will point out, Hong Kong is part of China, but it is not like other parts of China. It has a unique cultural history and socioeconomic development, while at the same time, it shares many cultural similarities with mainland China. In this chapter, I try to do justice to this complex intersection of history, culture and socioeconomic change, which has made Hong Kong into this unique melting pot.

## THE REGULATION OF SEX IN HONG KONG

When Chief Superintendent of British Trade Charles Eliot claimed Hong Kong Island in the name of Queen Victoria, in 1841, the isle was a backwater to the Chinese Empire, hosting a population of fewer than 7500 residents, predominantly fishermen and farmers (Tsang, 2004:16). Hong Kong became the entrepôt for British trade with China, and its success as a commercial hub attracted an array of migrants. These included Chinese laborers seeking employment in the colony, British businessmen hoping to exploit the opportunities of burgeoning Chinese-British trade, British middle-class men employed as cadres in the colonial government, Parsee traders from India, and Sikh and Punjabi regiments employed by the British state and stationed in the colony. Despite the settling of a variety of different ethnic groups, the population of Hong Kong maintained a rather homogenous ethnic composure. From its onset, Hong Kong's population consisted of mainly ethnically Han Chinese. For instance, at the end of the 19th century, the population of Hong Kong had grown to 221,400 people, of which 211,000 were Han Chinese (Tsang, 2004:27). In the 20th century, Hong Kong's population grew rapidly, attracting mainly migrants from mainland China, who sought economic opportunities in the city-state and were fleeing from the gulfs of social upheavals that washed over China throughout that era. In later periods, when Hong Kong was developing into a post-industrial society, another stream of migrants flowed into the city. This included young women from the Philippines and Indonesia, who were employed as domestic helpers. Hong Kong society today hosts a large variety of ethnic groups but remains a rather ethnically homogeneous society, with around 94% Chinese, 5.2% non-Chinese Asians and 0.8% Whites –of whom only a small fraction (10%) were born in the city (C&SD, 2011:13,40). While I by no

means want to disclaim the cultural diversity of Hong Kong, my main focus in this chapter is on gender and sexual changes among the dominant Chinese population. For studies on sex and gender relations of other ethnic groups in Hong Kong, I refer to the compelling work of, amongst others, Chang and McAllister Groves (2000); Constable (1997); Tang (2011).

As a result of its seizure by the British crown, Hong Kong became a commercial hub, first connecting trade flows from the British colonial empire and China and later as a manufacturing base, producing consumer goods for mainly western markets. Recently, it has emerged as a financial center, linking the savings and investments of China and the rest of the world. From its onset, the British colonial government was primarily interested in the commercial potentialities of Hong Kong. It focused on facilitating trade, governing the colony with a small bureaucracy, imposing low taxation, maintaining a rule of law, and retaining a policy of minimal interference towards society (Kong, 2011:96; Tsang, 2004:171-172). While many European and Anglo-Saxon nations developed a concept of citizenship as comprising political and social rights, citizenship in Hong Kong revolved around economic rights (Ho, 2004). The small indigenous population as well as the large number of migrants from mainland China were allowed to live in the crown colony and could participate on the free market; however, they were not granted political rights and could not count on the government for social welfare. This policy of minimal interference in society became the hallmark of colonial rule. The bureaucracy only reacted ad hoc to social challenges. For instance, the government started supplying social housing when it became apparent that refugees from mainland China were there to stay and after a massive fire in a shantytown rendered tens of thousands of people homeless. Similarly, educational provisions were extended largely in reaction to social upheavals in the city-state of the late sixties, with the aim of increasing support from the local population for the colonial government (Tsang, 2004:205).

The lack of social provisions by the colonial state meant that the people of Hong Kong looked towards informal kin networks for basic welfare needs, and material interests took precedence over all other concerns in the family (Lau, 1982: 68-71).

The family became the locus of material provisions and economic decisions, individual members contributed to the family income, resources were shared, property was owned collectively, and investments and business operations drew on family networks. Drawing on Foucault, Ong (1999) argues that governmentality and biopolitics within the context of Hong Kong happen predominantly within the family. She denotes this as 'family governmentality', 'the rational, normative practices that regulate healthy, productive, and successful bodies within the family and their deployment in economic activities for economic well-being' (1999:118). The

living arrangements in Hong Kong amplify the strength of this specific form of bio-politics. Land is particularly scarce within Hong Kong, and real estate prices range among the highest in the world. As a result, children continue to live in their parents' homes to a high age, often remaining after marriage, under the direct controlling gaze of parents.

At the same time that the political economic environment in Hong Kong gave rise to a bio-politics rooted within the family, patriarchy and Confucian as well as Christian discourses continued to structure and inform the specific practices of family governmentality. This is visible in the regulation of sexuality within the family. In Confucianism, the continuation of the family lineage is of utmost importance, and in the patrilineal kinship structure this is the responsibility of sons. This translates into what Kong (2004:43) calls the 'iron law' within Hong Kong Chinese families that obliges children, and especially sons, to get married and continue the bloodline of the family. At the same time, filial piety in Confucianism defines a good son and daughter as those who are obedient to parents (Kong, 2011:100), and particularly to the father, who in the patriarchal family structure is the undisputed head of the household.

These discourses and gender structures solidify the reproduction of heterosexuality within the family, as they render homosexuality as a potential threat to the family lineage. Kong (2011), drawing on Berry (2001), discusses homosexuality in Hong Kong, noting that 'the queer problem for the family is not so much about sexual behavior itself' but is about the formation of a sexual identity that jeopardizes the conventional roles in the family and its ability to reproduce itself (2011:107). Within Confucian discourses on sexuality, non-reproductive acts are not necessarily sinful. Sexuality in ancient China was formed in relation to power structures of class: 'the upper-class adult male, could sexually dominate social inferiors like his wife, second wife or concubines' as well as young male servants (Chou, 2001:30). At the same time, Christianity is a paramount force, and this informs discourses on sexuality in the Hong Kong. The city has many educational facilities with a Christian heritage (roughly 50%), and around 10% of the population belongs to a Christian denomination, while the percentage of Hong Kongese identifying as Christian is estimated at around 22% (HAB, 2016; HKTP, 2012:27). Christian discourses about the sinfulness of homosexuality and non-reproductive sexual acts in a more general sense are omnipresent within the city. In the complex cultural environment of Hong Kong, competing discourses on sex exist.

The family often exerts stringent control over the sexuality of young women. In contrast with the different Confucian and Christian discourses on homosexuality, women's sexuality in both traditions is construed as dangerous and in need of patriarchal control (Louie, 2003). Female chastity and the imperative for women to

refrain from premarital sex are prominent in discourses on sex, and these narratives shape the family governmentality of young women's sexuality to this day. In interviews with female college students in Hong Kong, Jackson and Ho (2014) found that mothers surveilled the sexuality of their daughters severely. The virginity of daughters was highly valued within the Hong Kongese family, and some mothers were 'assiduous in policing it' (2014:394). Mothers continuously mentioned the importance of virginity to their daughters and inquired about their sexual experiences and those of their daughters' friends. Sleepovers with boyfriends were generally not allowed, except on some rare occasions and only in the context of an impending marriage. However, some young women in their research had had premarital sexual experiences, and according to the Youth Sexuality Study, 32.3% of young women aged eighteen to twenty-seven have had premarital sex, compared to 45.4% of young men in the same age bracket (TFPAHK, 2011:48). While the family unit is the prime site where the managing and negotiating of female sexuality occurs, this control is not all-encompassing, and there are other cultural repertoires besides virginity until marriage that guide the sexual choices of young women.

While the imperative to continue the family lineage falls predominantly on the shoulders of young men, there are fewer restrictions on the sexuality of men than on women. Virginity until marriage and chastity are cultural imperatives for women that are not present for men. The policing of the sexuality of daughters, noted by Jackson and Ho (2014), did not pertain to sons, whose premarital sexual relations were generally accepted by parents. These unequal norms about premarital sex resonate within the aforementioned prevalence of premarital sex among youth in Hong Kong. Additionally, the cultural evaluation of non-monogamous lifestyles is different for men and women. Extramarital sex and non-monogamous lifestyles are much less problematic for men than for women. This resonates in public opinions about mistress keeping in Hong Kong –a recurring theme in the media and allegedly a common practice-, in which male infidelity is naturalized and often assumed to be the result of innate biological drives (Ho, 2014: Tam et al., 2009). At the same time, extramarital sex and non-monogamous lifestyles are severely condemned for women, and the social consequences for women to engage in these practices are profound.

The 'eroticization of sex' –the cultural process in which sex became valued for its sensual pleasures and expressive qualities (Seidman, 1991:5)- that has become so pronounced in America today has also taken root among the younger generation in Hong Kong. Traditionally, sex in China was primed towards male needs, and the remnants of this principle are found among the older generation in Hong Kong. Among the elderly interviewed by Yan et al. (2011), the majority of female

interviewees mentioned that sex was not pleasurable but was primarily about satisfying the sexual needs of men (2011:991). Among the younger generation, however, sexual gratification is an aspirational goal for both sexes. Cheung et al. (2008) found, in a citywide survey among people aged eighteen to forty-nine, that both men and women reported to be satisfied with their sex life, with men reporting slightly more satisfaction than women (Cheung et al., 2008:133). In a different survey conducted among young women, researchers found that a majority of women (92%) deemed a good sex life central to an intimate relationship, and for many (54.6%), an orgasm was important for good sex (Chan, 2008:200-206). Among the younger generation of women in Hong Kong, the physical pleasures of sex are highly valued. In America, the emergence of this meaning of sex coincided with a gradual separation of sex from committed relationships, and the question is if a similar trend is happening in Hong Kong.

It is clear that sexual norms among youth in Hong Kong are changing rapidly, for instance their stance towards premarital sex. In 1991, 1.4% of the girls and 12.6% of boys, aged fourteen to eighteen, found intercourse acceptable in dating. In 2006, this had risen to 10.1% of girls and 29.6% of boys (TFPAHK, 2011:72). The percentage of girls and boys, aged fourteen to eighteen, who had actually had sex with a dating partner approximately doubled over the last two decades, although it remained low. In 1991, 6.1% of boys and 4.3% of girls who had dated had had intercourse with their dating partner, while in 2011, 14.8% of boys and 7.6% of girls in that same age group reported to have had sex with their dating partner. Most sexual activity among boys and girls, aged fourteen to eighteen, who had dated remained rather light. A majority reported holding hands (77.3 % of boys and 81.3% of girls) and kissing (57.1% of boys and 60.7% of girls). Petting was only engaged in by 23.2% of boys and 13.5% of girls. Although sexual attitudes among boys and girls became more permissive in the last decades in Hong Kong, the sexual activity in dating remained light.

Among the older cohort of youth in Hong Kong, a similar sexual orthodoxy, in combination with a slight trend towards a relaxation of restrictions on sexuality, is happening. 22.8% of the women and 29.3% of the men, in the age cohort eighteen to twenty-seven, had had premarital sex in 1991, while this had risen to 32.3% of women and 45.4% of men in 2011 (TFPAHK, 2001:10; TFPAHK 2011:48). The average age at which youth have their first experience of intercourse has slowly declined over the last two decades. In 1996 –the first year in which these figures are available- the mean age at which young men lost their virginity was 19.0 and was 18.9 for women. In 2011, this had dropped to 17.7 for men and 18.2 for women. While the last decades saw relatively large changes in youths' acceptance and enact-

ment of premarital sex, the vast majority of sexual experiences of Hong Kongese youth seemed to happen within a relationship context. In 2011, only 16.7% of young men and 6.5% of young women reported to have had casual sex in the past six months, where a casual partner was defined as an ‘ordinary friend, online friend, new acquaintance or ex-schoolmate’ (TFPAHK, 2011:50). Although the frequency of casual sex is low, it did increase. In 2006, only 11.1% of men and 1.1% of women reported to have had a casual sex partner in the last six months (TFPAHK, 2011:50). Sexual abstinence remains the orthodoxy among unmarried Hong Kongese youth. When they engage in premarital sex, they seem to do this within a committed relationship context. However, an increasingly larger fraction of youth experiments with sex outside of a relationship context, and the question is if this sexual experimentation happens within particular domains of youth culture. Maybe casual sex, as seen in America, is a relatively common practice among campus-going youth.

## MARRIAGE AND DATING

Marriage is still a paramount ideal in Hong Kong, although recent statistics indicate that the prominence of marriage is declining. Increasingly, people marry at a higher age. In 1981, the median age for first marriage among women was 23.9 and was 27.0 for men, but this shifted to 29.3 and 31.2, respectively, by 2016 (C&SD, 2016:46). Moreover, an increasingly larger proportion of the population seems to repudiate marriage altogether, which is indicated by the number of unmarried people in the age bracket forty-five to forty-nine, when most people would have formed their first marriage, especially in a Chinese society. In 1981, 2.3% of women and 9.2% of men had not married by their late forties (Ting, 2014:148). In 2015, this had risen to 15.4% of the women and 16.5% of the men in that age cohort (C&SD, 2016:38,41).

More and more, Hong Kongese rebuff marriage altogether, and this is especially prevalent among higher educated women. Among women with a college education, aged forty-five to forty-nine, 25% are not married, compared to 14.3% of college-educated men, and compared to 15.4% of women and 16.5% of men in that age group (Ting, 2014:150; C&SD, 2016:38,41). A number of mutually intersecting social and cultural processes play a part in this odd pattern. First, hypogamy –marrying someone of lower social class- is culturally unproblematic for men but is problematic for women. Higher educated women simply have a smaller pool of acceptable suitors than women who have received less education. Second, a prevalent trope within China largely demonizes highly educated women. In China,



there is a joke that there are three kinds of genders, men, women, and women with PhDs. This quip reveals the less humorous reality that highly educated women are stigmatized within China, labelled 'left-over women', *shengnü*, who are allegedly 'unattractive', 'aloof' and 'self-important careerist[s]' (Kuo, 2014). This demonizing discourse is actively propagated by Chinese state media (Fincher, 2014) and finds its way into the city-state. Many Hong Kongese, however, remain ambivalent towards this trope. Hong Kong has a history of working women who have contributed to the family income and remained unmarried (Salaff, 1981). Moreover, singlehood remains a relatively acceptable life path for women (Nakano, 2016). On the other hand, a dominant trope within Hong Kong frames local women as being overly materialistic, demanding and self-centered, in contrast to the supposedly 'unspoiled', accommodating, traditional mainland Chinese woman. This discourse builds on a distinction between highly educated Hong Kongese and less-educated mainland Chinese. As Ho (2014) shows, this discourse informs Hong Kongese men's intimate and sexual partner choices (2014:165). Concomitantly, increasingly more marriages in Hong Kong include a partner from outside of Hong Kong. Nearly half of the registered marriages in 2011 fell in this category, and in nearly all cases these were marriages between a Hong Kong man and a mainland woman (Ting, 2014:149). This can partly be explained by the large number of Hong Kongese men working in mainland China, but the existence of hypogamy and the adverse trope of Hong Kongese women play a part in the existence of a large group of highly educated women that remain unmarried. According to many Hong Kongese, it is especially this fraction of the female population who are interested in intimate relationships with expat men.

Traditionally, Chinese families controlled the selection of a spouse for their children. However, as Ting (2014) shows, this lessened throughout the 20th century, and with this change, dating became ingrained as a routine practice for Hong Kongese youth (2014:150). In the last decades, Hong Kong youth started to date earlier in life. Ting (2002 in Ting, 2014:150) mentions that individuals born between 1940 and 1945 had their first dates at the ages of 24.6 (men) and 20.4 (women). Men and women who were born twenty-five years later had their first dates at the ages of 18.8 and 18.7, while half of the individuals in the age cohort, born between 1965 and 1969, had their first dates in secondary school (aged twelve to seventeen). Parallel to this trend of dating at increasingly younger ages has been a gradual rise in marriage age. The period of courtship in individuals' lives has thus gradually increased, and lovers date each other for a longer period before getting married. For Hong Kongese born in the early fifties, the average period of dating prior to marriage was twenty-seven months, while it had increased to forty-four

months for those born in the late seventies (Ting, 2012 in Ting, 2014:151).

Traditionally, dating was a vestibule for marriage (Chang et al., 1997:267), but as Ting (2014:147) argues, parallel to the trend of a prolonged period of dating, there was a disconnection of courtship from seeking a marriage partner. However, very little is known about dating cultures among Hong Kongese youth. What are the norms, conventions and expectations of dating for Hong Kongese youth? Is dating a leisure practice, separated from the adult norms of finding a life-long partner? Is it a practice whereby youth can experiment relatively freely with sex, intimacy and relationships? The scholarly orthodoxy tells us that families actively govern the sexuality of youth in Hong Kong. To what extent do adult norms of sex and relationships inform the sexual culture of youth?

## PATRIARCHY AND GENDER CHANGE

Through its governance by minimal interference in society and its cooperation with local male elites, the colonial state 'prolonged maintenance of patriarchal social institutions in the name of respecting the social customs and practices of Chinese society' (Lee, 2003a:4). These institutions are illustrated by the relatively long continuation of the *mui tsai* system in Hong Kong - which, until the late 1920s, enabled young women from poor families to be sold to wealthy households-, the legality of polygyny until the 1970s and the inability for women to inherit family wealth that persisted until the nineties (Lee 2003a:4). However, the colonial state also made provisions that affected gender relations in Hong Kong. Especially in the years preceding the handover, social policies augmenting women's rights were put on the agenda. Examples include the lifting of the aforementioned ban on female inheritance and the installment of a sex discrimination ordinance and an equal opportunity commission in the mid-nineties, which, despite fierce opposition from the local business elite, had some minor successes in fighting sex discrimination (Petersen, 2003).

Arguably, the most pronounced social policy facilitating gender change in Hong Kong was the implementation of general education for all youth. Hong Kong experienced a gradual extension of educational provisions throughout its history. While more boys initially enrolled in educational programs, especially in secondary and tertiary facilities, over the years, the gap in educational attainment narrowed and eventually reversed. In the mid-eighties, 37.1% of the students enrolled in undergraduate programs at universities in Hong Kong were women; in 2016, this stood at 55.0% (C&SD, 2001:28; 2016:71). This advancement of education for

women did a great deal to uplift women's positions on the labor market, –with labor market participation rates for people aged thirty to thirty-nine standing at 95.2% and 95.1% for never married men and women, respectively, and 97.5% and 71.4% for married men and women. Progressively, more women worked in better-paid positions, and this resulted in important inroads for extending women's autonomy (C&SD, 2016:105; 2016:249).

High labor force participation rates do not necessarily result in dramatic changes in role patterns within the family, nor in drastically changing aspirations of women of their work and family life. Particularly among the first and second-generation Chinese families, who migrated to Hong Kong in the 1940s, conventional role patterns existed. Fathers were the breadwinners in the family, authoritative and emotionally distant. Mothers also worked for income and were responsible for domestic work and for managing 'emotional life' and care in the family (Kong, 2011:99). However, despite the high percentage of women working in Hong Kong, the ideology that positions women in the reproductive sphere remains dominant up to this date. Lee (2003b), for instance, interviewed successful entrepreneurial female lawyers, most of whom construed the maternal role in the family as 'natural' and accepted without questioning the double role as career women and caregivers in the family (2003b:88). This resonates with findings of Tam (2003), who interviewed Hong Kong born mothers living in 'astronaut families' (Skeldon, 1994:229) in Australia –households dispersed over multiple geographical locations. While most of these women had successful careers in Hong Kong, in their new country of residence they were homemakers, and they understood this as an improvement since they could fulfill the ideal role of 'mother-wife' (2003:196). Dominant ideals of womanhood continue to emphasize women's responsibility for the emotional well being of the family. This also means that women carry the responsibility for maintaining satisfactory intimate relationships. Tam et al. (2009), in a study of Hong Kong men with cross border mistresses, mentioned that an interviewee, the Hong Kongese wife of an adulterous man, responded fairly typically. She was 'extremely upset', like other wives, and was unwilling to divorce because she believed that 'a divorced woman was a failed woman' and that it was her duty to 'keep the family together' (2009:347). Despite a dramatic proliferation of career options for women and increased financial autonomy, conventional role patterns and conventional ideals of womanhood remain dominant within Hong Kong today.

At the same time, new female role models emerge that stray from the conventional ideal of 'mother-wife'. Carrie Lam is likely the most renowned example, as the freshly elected Chief-Executive of Hong Kong -the highest political office within the city- making her the first female political leader within the city-state. Lam, a

mother of two, seemingly effortlessly combined the conventional mother role with an outstanding career. Like Lam, other well-known Hong Kongese women have done this in the past or continue to do so in the present. However, profoundly fewer female role models have strayed from the conventional expectations of marriage and motherhood because they prioritized a career above having a family, or because they felt uncomfortable within these role patterns. This is quite surprising since Hong Kong has a tradition of working women, who have strayed from marriage and have provided financially for their families (Salaff, 1981). This, however, seems to have been more common in working-class families than among the higher echelons of society.

When I asked my Hong Kongese acquaintances if they could name a well-known Hong Kongese woman that fit that profile, most remained blank, while a few mentioned Elsie Leung – an accomplished lawyer and renowned political figure in the city-state-, who never married and does not have a family. However, Leung self-reportedly never refrained from marriage and family life intentionally; she just never met a suitable partner.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the new female role models that emerged in Hong Kong, few prominent women actively propagate feminist politics. Carrie Lam, in her campaign for political leadership in Hong Kong, promised to enhance career options for women, hoping that more women would find their way to the top in politics and business, but this advocacy can hardly be called ‘radical’ (Wu, 2017). Feminist politics in Hong Kong remain a subdued voice and when it speaks, gender equality is framed in relation to enhancing women’s positions on the labor market. Seldom are feminist concerns raised in relation to the division of labor within the family, or in relation to sex in heterosexual relations. Many authors have noted the apolitical stance of Hong Kongese, and often this is explained as an outflow of the dearth of political rights under colonial rule (Ho, 2004; Kong 2011; Lee, 2003a). The absence of a feminist movement in Hong Kong could, as Lee (2003a) mentions, be related to this apolitical stance of Hong Kongese. Very few Hong Kongese support a feminist political agenda (Wong and Wan, 2009). Although the recent social upheavals of the Umbrella Revolution indicate that the apolitical orientation of many Hong Kongese is changing in favor of a more activist stance, until this day, this activism does not pertain to promoting a broad feminist agenda.

Perhaps the result of this subdued feminist voice, dominant ideals of manhood in Hong Kong resonate with longstanding models of manhood in East Asian societies (Liong, 2015; Louie, 2003). Louie (2002) proposes the dualistic concepts, *Wen-Wu*, cultural attainment versus martial valor, to understand manhood ideals in East Asia. *Wen* refers to ‘genteel, refined qualities that were associated with literary and artis-

tic pursuits of classical scholars' (Louie, 2002:14). It can mean 'accomplished' and 'civilization' (Louie, 2002:10). *Wu*, on the other hand, refers to 'physical strength and military prowess (Louie, 2002:14), the 'physical', 'marital' and 'athletic' socially cultivated competences (Liong, 2015:939). Both *Wen* and *Wu* are masculine qualities, 'so that a scholar is considered to be no less masculine than a soldier' (Louie, 2002:10), and ideally men embody both qualities.

But Louie's (2002; 2003) work seems to overemphasize the differences between histories of masculinities in the 'west' and in East Asia. In his cultural history of manhood ideals in America, Kimmel (1996) dissects a similar trend in the different discourses of masculinity that evolved throughout the centuries. Discourses of masculinity in America converge around the ideal of physical prowess, which shows, for instance, in the rugged settler of the westward expansion and the narrative of the working-class hero of a later period. Cultural refinement is a reoccurring theme in American manhood ideals, for instance in the aristocratic patriarch of the 19th century and the colorful dandy of the 20th century.

Sexual prowess arose as a prominent marker of manhood in America around the turn of the 20th century and coincided with the advent of heterosexuality and homosexuality as distinct cultural identities (Katz, 1995). Similarly, Louie (2002) argues that signaling a masculine identity through sexual prowess was absent in ancient Chinese societies. Traditionally, *Wu* manhood rejected sexual relations with women, while *Wen* manhood implied commitment, often confirmed in marriage. While sexual prowess is quintessential to dominant ideals of manhood among youth in America, in East Asia this appears as marker of manhood in some discourses of masculinity but is absent in others. Hibbins (2006), in a study of constructions of masculinity among Chinese migrants in Australia, found that none of the men he interviewed construed sexuality as a domain to do manhood (2006:298). However, the rhetoric of sexual prowess appears in other studies of East Asian masculinities. Tam et al. (2009) interviewed mistress-keeping men in Hong Kong from working-class and middle-class backgrounds. One of their interviewees, a man named Chow, narrated the attractions of mistress keeping. He felt that his mistress allowed him 'to prove to his peers that he had financial ability as well as sexual potency' (2009:346). The discourse of masculinity that Chow draws upon shows that both economic and sexual conquest are masculine status markers in contemporary Hong Kong. Young men in the city have multiple competing discourses of masculinity to draw upon and the question is if a rhetoric of sexual conquest informs their stance on sex and relationships.

Accomplishments in the economic and familial sphere are of utmost importance in constructions of manhood in Hong Kong, personified in the male bread-

winning role (Liong, 2015:940-941). Unsurprisingly, the Asian Economic Crisis of the late nineties had a noticeable impact on men's self-images in East Asia. These concerns were captured in Hong Kong cinema of that epoch, which portrayed men's lives as filled with anxieties and male protagonists who were insecure and 'deprived of full confidence in mastering the opposite sex' (Pang, 2002:326). This contrasted the aggressiveness and confidence of male characters of earlier film (Pang, 2002:326). Masculine self-worth in dominant constructions of manhood in Hong Kong is intrinsically tied to men's abilities and potential to provide for their families.

Structural changes in Hong Kong's economy have put additional strains on young people's lives. As Hong Kong's economy integrated with mainland China, much manufacturing work moved across the border to South China. This left many factory hands redundant and looking for new job opportunities, putting downward pressure on wages in low-skilled employment. When the Chinese economy took off in the early eighties, Hong Kong rapidly developed a strong service economy, especially in the realm of finances. This new economy, however, demanded a different workforce that was highly skilled in international business operations. This economic restructuring had a direct effect on economic inequality in Hong Kong, which grew rapidly throughout the eighties, nineties and in the new millennium (Goodstadt, 2013). In that same period, real estate prices in Hong Kong surged and costs of living rose tremendously. Hong Kong became an economically divided society, with a small group of, often highly educated, winners, and a large group of people struggling to make ends meet in a society where social welfare provisions are minimal.

These new economic conditions made the male breadwinning role an increasingly unattainable ideal for many young men. However, the belief that one can improve one's social and economic situation by hard work reigns supreme within the city (Lee, 2003a:7). Interestingly, manhood ideals changed little under these new economic conditions. In a large-scale survey among men in Hong Kong, Leung and Chan (2012) found that approximately 65% of the Hong Kong men agreed that men should be the breadwinners of the family and women the caretakers. Unsurprisingly, some scholars (Leung and Chan 2012; Tam et al., 2009) talk about a crisis of masculinity, in which many men cannot attain the socially ascribed role of provider and, as a consequence, bolster a negative self-image (Leung and Chan, 2012:12). However, instead of questioning the ideology of the male-breadwinning role, many men draw on a narrative of victimization, construing women's changing position in society as a threat (Leung and Chan, 2012:13).

## CONCLUSION

Gender and intimate relations change rapidly in the complex society of Hong Kong. Increasingly, more young women find their way towards higher education and embark on outstanding career trajectories after college. Many of these women postpone marriage to a later age, after they have settled in a career. But, what is their orientation towards sex and relationships within young adulthood? Sexual mores among the younger generations in Hong Kong are changing. An increasingly large fraction finds premarital sex acceptable and more and more youth experiment with sex, dating and relationships prior to marriage. At the same time, conservative forces remain strong within Hong Kong. Female chastity is still valued, especially among the older generations who have a firm grip on youth sexuality via the bio-politics within the family. What these multiple, and at times contesting, forces mean for sexual cultures of youth will be empirically explored in the following chapter. This is first considered within the college arena and then within the urban erotic contact zone of Hong Kong.

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