

**Selling Body / Selling Pleasure:  
Women Negotiating Poverty, Work, and Sexuality**

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## Abstract

Feminist debates regarding prostitution, both in the West and in Taiwan, have been polarized. Some radical feminists tend to think of prostitution as embodying male-dominated sexuality, in which women's bodies and sexuality are appropriated by men, while some pro-sex-work feminists argue that engaging in commercial sex is performing sexual services. Accordingly, sex workers are just like ordinary workers in other economic sectors. The debates thus generate a series of polarized oppositions: e.g. prostitutes are either 'sexual victims' or 'sexual agents', prostitution is either sex or work, and prostitution becomes a gender or a sexual issue.

Based on in-depth interviews with eighteen female Taiwanese sex workers and six Taiwanese male clients, the thesis seeks to break this stalemate. Locating commercial sex in Taiwanese working women's daily lives, I show that prostitution is not only firmly supported by the ideology of the 'male sexual urge', but highly related to a gendered labour market, and the social and cultural practices of gender hierarchy in Taiwanese society. Most of all, the 'miserable prostitutes' are mainly (re)produced by the criminalization of prostitution, rather than the nature of prostitution. Taking all of this into account, prostitution is thus a complex social issue in which gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class, and age are intertwined together. Drawing on interview data, I also argue that the either-victim-or-agent debate is misleading. In fact, interviewees' working conditions are highly related to the ways in which their work is organized and to their different employment statuses in the sex industry. Moreover, I will argue that performing sex work involves multi-layered boundary negotiation. Many interviewees exercise 'role distance' to perform sex as 'work', and differentiate work sex from their personal sexual intimacy. However, the effort in managing the boundary between sex and work in fact signifies the danger of blurring the boundary. Hence, it opens up the possibility for sex workers to enjoy some specific sexual encounters with clients and/or fall in love with clients.

Key work: sex work, prostitution, gender, sexuality, femininity, masculinity

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## **Author's Declaration**

Although all the research and writing in this thesis are original, the main argument of the Chapter 7 have been published as 'Les désirs sexuels masculins et leurs contradictions: Masculinité, style de vie et sexualité Le cas des clients de prostituées à Taiwan', *Travail, Genre et Societes*, No. 10, pp 107-128, Nov 2003, Paris: L'Harmatan & the CNRS

# Table of Contents

<b>Abstract</b>	2
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	3
<b>Author's Declaration</b>	6
<b>Introduction</b>	13
Multi-layered conflicts in prostitution debates	16
Researching prostitution in Taiwan	21
<b>Chapter 1 Historical transformation of Taiwanese commercial sex</b>	
Introduction	26
I. Policing prostitution in Taiwan	27
i) 'Yi-dan' and 'tu-chang'	27
ii) Comfort women in WWII	28
iii) Back and forth between prohibition and regulation regimes	30
1) The prohibition regime and its social effects (1946-1955)	30
2) Re-established regulation regime in 1956	31
3) The vicious circle of the government crack downs	33
Summary	36
<b>Chapter 2 Approaches to Prostitution</b>	
Introduction	38
I. The construction of prostitutes as sexual victims	39

i) Contesting the ‘male sexual urge’	39
ii) Feminists theorizing prostitution	42
1) Prostitution and the intersection of gender and class	42
2) Prostitution and female sexuality	43
II. Pro-sex-work feminists theorizing prostitutes as sexual agents	48
i) The dichotomy of ‘madonna/whore’	48
ii) A vindication of the rights of whores	49
iii) Theorizing prostitution in terms of labour	51
iv) Bring the sex back in	53
v) What’s wrong with queering prostitution?	56
Summary	59

### **Chapter 3 The ‘whore’ gazes back: reflections on knowledge, power and sexuality**

Introduction	61
I. Research Process	62
i) Research methods	62
ii) Sampling	70
iii) The field	73
1) Teenage girls in halfway centres	73
2) Former Taipei licensed brothels workers	75
3) Special bars	76
4) Tearooms and their settings	79
5) Observations on the streets	81
iv) Transcribing, analyzing data and writing up	86
II. Reflection on conducting interviews with female prostitutes	91
i) Thinking from prostitutes’ standpoint	91
ii) Sexuality in the field	95

## Chapter 4 Exploitation, autonomy and the organization of sex work

Introduction	99
I. Structural violence against sex workers	104
i) gendered legislation and abusive execution	104
II. Forms of Taiwanese commercial sex	109
i) ‘Body-selling’ sectors	109
1) Independent streetwalkers	109
2) Internet <i>yuan juh jiau jih</i>	114
3) Employed call-girls	120
4) Employed licensed brothel workers	126
5) Just ‘doing that thing’	129
6) Sounds sexy; acts high	131
ii) ‘Pleasure-selling’ sectors	134
1) Partnership between workers and the third party in loosely-organized tearooms and small-scale bars	134
2) Hierarchical and profit-orientated special bars	136
3) It’s all about ‘ <i>shoou wan</i> ’	139
III. The sexual hierarchy of Taiwanese commercial sex	149
Summary	155

## Chapter 5 ‘It’s my way of survival’—making sense of being ‘working women’

Introduction	157
I. The inter-dependence between the sex industry and gendered labour market	161
i) From factories to prostitution	163
ii) Drifting among low-paid service jobs	169
II. The obligation and resentment toward families of origin	173

i) Pursuing independence	174
ii) In the name of filial piety	177
iii) Whore/(m)others speak out	184
III. Money, fun, and power	189
i) Sexual secrets between little girls and elderly men	191
ii) Survival strategy for runaways	195
iii) 'Easy money' and 'having fun' ?!	197
Summary	202

## **Chapter 6 'I gritted my teeth to do it'—being a professional sex worker**

Introduction	204
I. Dressing like a whore	208
II. The first trick: shock, fears, and nerves	218
i) lacking a job description	218
ii) Bodily contact with male strangers	223
III. Negotiating the boundaries	230
i) Managing the sense of self—working self v. non-working self	230
ii) Managing the boundary between the clean self and the dirty other	239
iii) Managing intimacy	246
1) Afraid of being revealed to lovers	246
2) Desexualization of love	248
3) Falling in love with 'real human beings'	249
Summary	251

## **Chapter 7 Contradictory male sexual desires: masculinity, lifestyles and sexuality among prostitutes' clients in Taiwan**

Introduction	254	
I. Feminists theorizing on client's uses of prostitutes	258	
II. Vocabularies of motive of using prostitution	263	
i) Using prostitutes as social ritual to build manhood	263	
ii) Prostitute-using as ' <i>playing women</i> '	268	
III. ' <i>He hua jeou</i> ' –the collective consumption of prostitution	272	
i) Exchanging women among affluent men	273	
ii) ' <i>He hua jeou</i> ' as working-class men's social life	277	
IV. Emotional demands and sexual tastes	283	
i) Falling in love with prostitutes as 'seasickness'	284	
ii) Not just 'sex' but 'good sex'	286	
Summary	292	
<b>Conclusion</b>	294	
Research findings and limitations	295	
<b>Appendix</b>		
Appendix I	Informed Consent Letter	304
Appendix II	Interview Guides	306
Appendix III	Sketch of the Interviewees	311
Appendix IV	Romanization of Terms	323
<b>Bibliography</b>		324

## **List of Tables**

Table 1. Percentages of Infection of STDs among Sex Workers in Teipei	128
Table 2. Earnings and Working Hours by Economic Sector and Gender	165
Table 3. Working Experiences of Interviewees	167
Table 4. Unemployment Rates by Education and Sex	169
Table 5. Educational Level and Monthly Income of Indigenous People	194

## **List of Figures**

Figure 1. Sex-work Dynamics	102
Figure 2. A Scene of Police Raid in a Club	147
Figure 3. Former Taipei Licensed Brothel Worker	209



## Introduction

Prostitution is an issue that serious feminists cannot and should not avoid confronting. In 1995, I spent some time searching on a library computer for a research topic for my MA thesis that would affirm my commitment to feminism; yet the result was discouraging. It produced books and articles mainly related to prostitution, abortion, and motherhood. After quickly scanning the table of contents of some of the books, I felt it would be too stressful to conduct a research project on prostitution, for many of the studies focused on the relations between prostitution and (sexual) violence or trafficking in women and girls. The books were put back on the shelves, and the issue seldom came to my mind until the abolition of Taipei's formerly licensed prostitution in late 1997, when 128 licensed brothel workers took to the streets to demand their 'right to work' (see Chapter 1).

Like many Taiwanese people, I was quite shocked by this campaign, since it was so contradictory to my former 'feminist' understanding of prostitution as a patriarchal institution in which women are degraded by men and reduced to 'sexual objects'. What Xiao-fen said in a press interview is a classic piece that challenges the mainstream 'feminist' understanding of prostitution. She reported that:

*I definitely would not have had the opportunity to know the word 'objectified', if there were not so many feminists who 'care' about our work...Actually I really admire those women who promote women's*

*rights. I also think that if those feminists had tried to help us when we were suffering from poverty, maybe I would have more choices now. Participating in fighting for sex workers' rights was the first time that I met feminists and the women's movement, but I feel that they really hurt me* ([Xiao-fen] quoted in Cheng, 1997, my translation).

It is a shame that the first encounter between licensed brothel workers and Taiwanese feminists appeared to be disappointing and stressful. Xiao-fen's narrative revealed the class bias of mainstream Taiwanese feminist politics, which focuses on gender while seldom dealing with class, ethnicity, sexuality, and age. It is as if gender functions in a vacuum. The coming out of the Taipei licensed prostitutes poses for the feminists the question of heterogeneity among women, and how far and in what specific ways gender determines the oppression and exploitation of Taiwanese working women. The priority of gender in tackling *all* women's issues is thus problematized. Facing this challenge, a few women's organizations (Awakening Foundation, Solidarity Front of Women Workers and the Pink Collar) started to make an effort to locate prostitution at the intersection of gender and class. This research project is, in fact, inspired by this political and intellectual challenge. Most importantly, it is a manifestation of my discontent with the polarized prostitution debates that neglect the varied forms of commercial sex and heterogeneous working conditions among Taiwanese sex workers.

It might be that because people have invested so much in 'sex', then everything relating to 'sex' appears to be extremely significant. The abolition of Taipei's licensed prostitution caused sharp opposition and a bitter confrontation among Taiwanese feminists. It has been said that the debate disrupted many years'

solidarity and co-operation among Taiwanese women's organizations (Lee, 1998:11-16). Lin Fung-mei (1998a) characterized the opposing positions as two different attitudes toward sexuality—'sexual liberation' vs. 'sexual critics'. The pro-sexual-liberation camp, headed by Josephine Ho, advocated breaking down all sexual taboos and encouraging a diversity of sexual practices. The abolition of licensed prostitution is considered a repression of women who dare to transgress sexual taboos. Moreover, the anti- and pro-abolition debates have been identified as an antagonism between the politics of 'good women' and 'bad women' (Ho, 1998). On the other hand, the major figures among sexual critics are Liu Yu-xiu, Lin Fung-mei and Hwang Shu-ling. According to Lin (1998a), the 'sexual critics' think that sexuality should be located within the gender system as a whole. Prostitution is thus not an issue of whether women should have the right to do sex work, but 'how the sex industry produces and reproduces sexuality and allocates men and women to different positions in the sex industry' (1998a:63, my translation). Moreover, based on Hwang's (1996) research on Taiwanese working women, they stress the linkage between trafficking and commercial sex. Nonetheless, using the two labels to refer to people on each side of the debate in fact ignores the heterogeneous and even contradictory voices in both camps. Indeed, it is ironic that feminists who see themselves as 'sexual critics' find themselves co-operating or collaborating with sexually conservative right wing and/or religious organizations. On the other hand, people who support former licensed sex workers are also different from each other. There are radical academics who advocate sexual liberation, former licensed sex workers who demand their right to do sex work based on economic hardship, and some functionalists who claim that prostitution serves as a 'safety valve' in preventing

women and girls from being raped.

### **Multi-layered conflicts in prostitution debates**

Framed as a dichotomy of positions – of ‘sexual liberation’ vs. ‘sexual critics’ – and/or antagonism between the politics of ‘bad women’ and ‘good women’, the feminist debates were dramatically polarized and soon reached a stalemate. The stalemate could be identified in a series of issues regarding commercial sex. For example, prostitution is generalized either as work or as sex, and prostitutes either as sexual agents or sexual victims. It seems that if prostitution is ‘work’, working women are automatically treated as free-contract workers who engage in commercial sex by choice, just like other ordinary labourers. On the other hand, if prostitution is ‘sex’, it seems impossible for women to enter this profession with consent, and all the labour dimensions involved in commercial sex are strongly denied. According to these ‘work’ or ‘sex’ debates, the third parties in the sex industry are either considered as ordinary service providers or cruel sexual exploiters. Similarly, prostitutes’ clients are represented as either ordinary consumers or sexual abusers.

Obviously, both camps universalize diverse forms of commercial sex, sex workers and clients. Both camps wrongly assume that commercial sex is organized either to the satisfaction of all sides or for the benefit of one party at the expense of others; sex workers are either seriously exploited by the third parties or are just like ordinary workers. However, sex workers’ working conditions vary in terms of the ways in which their work is organized and/or in their employee statuses (Lim, 1998; O’Connell Davidson, 1998).

In addition, the distinction between ‘body selling’ and ‘pleasure selling’<sup>1</sup> offers a reference framework for workers’ daily work routines, and marks out the different legal statuses of working women. As the ‘body selling’ sector directly challenges prostitution laws (which outlaw commercial sex), workers in this sector are the major targets of police raids and harassment. In theorizing Taiwanese sex workers’ daily lives it is thus important to take the distinction between ‘body selling’ and ‘pleasure selling’ into account, and consider the different employee and legal statuses of working women at the same time. Therefore, we might be able to identify diverse forms of prostitution settings and different working conditions among working women. For example, in the ‘body-selling’ sector, self-employed streetwalkers and independent call-girls organize their businesses differently. While the streetwalkers are frequently harassed by the police, the (former) licensed brothel workers were protected by police power. In the ‘pleasure-selling’ sector, women who work in large-scale sexual establishments are more likely to be protected in police raids, while women in small karaoke bars are frequently threatened by abusive police power (see Chapter 4).

Most importantly, the same social practice in many cases does not guarantee the same social meaning for the actors. It is a mistake to assume that both working women and punters perceive the situation of the prostitutes identically. For that matter, hardly two working women or two punters think alike. There is more than one way for them to practise, experience, and understand commercial sex. Punters

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Body selling’ refers to commercial sex in which workers provide explicit sex to clients. In ‘pleasure selling’, sex workers have to accompany clients. Workers do not necessarily offer sex to clients (see Chapter 4).

might consider sexual encounters with sex workers as ‘sex’, while sex workers might be able to exercise ‘role distance’ (Goffman, 1961) and perform such sex acts as ‘work’. Hence, sex workers (both in this study and in the Western literature) introduce some specific rituals to differentiate commercial sex from their personal sexual activities. Clearly, the effort to maintain the boundary between ‘sex’ and ‘work’ signals the danger of blurring this boundary. It opens up the possibility for sex workers of befriending their clients and even falling in love with them (see Chapter 6). Indeed, diverse (sexual) services are provided and more complex power relationships between prostitutes and clients are involved in different prostitution settings (see Chapter 7).

It is time for us to turn to a more complex politics of contextualizing commercial sex, rather than simplifying heterogeneous commercial sex either as an institution against women or a simple labour market free from any power struggles. In a way, we should give up the either-A-or-B approach, and turn to a more complex both-A-and-B approach. For example, prostitution can be imagined as a seesaw on which one side is ‘sex’ and the other side is ‘work’, and sometimes it inclines to ‘sex’ and at other times it inclines to ‘work’. Even more complicated, sometimes it could be both ‘sex’ and ‘work’! The task of feminist researchers is to identify what variations make prostitution incline to either ‘sex’ or ‘work’; and when it can be identified as both.

Theorizing prostitution thus requires a framework that refuses to reduce prostitution to either ‘sex’ or ‘work’, and thereby avoids regarding women in prostitution either as sexual victims or agents. Indeed, the dichotomy of sexual

agent and victim is misleading; it causes more problems than it can solve. These two categories are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Although victim claims reinforce women's gendered stereotypes of passivity, purity, and protectiveness (Schneider, 1993), they also function to construct solidarity and identity. Moreover, subjectivity does not come from heaven; it is generated by an authoritative appellation that puts the questioned subject into a historical moment (Hennessy, 2000). In many cases, the ways the subject reacts to the appellation are varied in terms of available resources. Judging prostitutes as agents or victims therefore requires researchers to locate women's daily lives in contexts, and then go further to examine the ways in which they make sense of their daily lives, and how they deal with their 'victimhood'.

Avoiding the 'either-or' approach, we should locate prostitution in a dynamic power struggle among sex workers, punters, the third parties, and the state apparatus. Hence, I will join those feminists who critically argue that both extremes wrongly generalize prostitution, prostitutes and clients. They take a more balanced view in recognizing prostitution as work, but they critically examine the nature of the work, and how prostitution is socially constructed on the intersection of gender, class, sexuality, age and ethnicity (for example O'Connell Davidson, 1995a, 1998; Jackson and Scott, 1998; Phoenix, 1999; O'Neill, 2001).

It is important to note that this scholarship is frequently taunted for ‘losing political focus’ by both sides in this bloody political combat<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, the effort to theorize commercial sex in terms of a ‘both-A-and-B’ approach is always prone to simplification in order to synthesize the antagonistic arguments of each side. However, as Haraway (1988) argues, in many cases, we understand and theorize the social world from a specific position and/or angle leading to bias. It is therefore very important to compare one’s different vision of the social world with others’, and try to produce a better understanding. It is right that winning media attention and/or political interest frequently pulls both sides back to the ‘either-or’ approach. However, as far as feminist theory is concerned, the ‘either-or’ approach fails to unpack the complex relations between the ways gender and sexuality are intertwined with other social categories. In terms of feminist politics, it runs the risk of silencing diverse voices as well as sacrificing disadvantaged women’s interests. Indeed, the 128 former licensed brothel workers in Taipei opened up the opportunity for feminists to re-think prostitution. Ironically, they are the biggest losers in the debate! The majority of feminists on each side of the debate have stable jobs, either within academia or in the government, while these 128 women have had to suffer from unemployment for nearly two years (see Chapter 1).

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<sup>2</sup> I write from my personal experience of working in the Awakening Foundation. Indeed, during the abolition debates, the Awakening was frequently warned and/or criticized by each side, both in public and private, that if a women’s organization wanted to keep its political influence it should choose a clear position on the matter. I have to say that it is this attitude that makes the abolition debates appear to be an ideological war between feminists.



## **Researching prostitution in Taiwan**

With this understanding, this study poses its research questions slightly unusually. Firstly, in what ways do the sex workers understand their (sexual) encounters with clients as work (sex)? If it is ‘work’, what kinds of labour are demanded and/or involved? How does ‘sex work’ relate to other paid and unpaid work in the gendered labour market? How is their work organized? Who benefits from commercial sex? To what extent are sex workers exploited by third parties? How far can sex workers control their work? On the other hand, if sex work is understood as ‘sex’, how does it relate to non-commercial sex? More specifically, how do the sexual encounters with clients relate to sex workers’ personal sexual intimacy? How far do those sexual encounters represent sex workers’ sexuality?

Secondly, in what specific contexts and at what specific level are prostitutes sexual agents or victims? The question is raised because many Taiwanese radical feminists argued that they were criticizing prostitution as an institution rather than the individual prostitute. On the other hand, many advocates of sex workers’ rights locate prostitution at the experiential level of being ex-Taipei licensed prostitutes. The former position, however, ignores the subjectivity of the individuals, while the latter romanticizes the autonomy of the individuals. Indeed, feminists theorizing prostitution should be able to differentiate prostitution as an institution and as personal experience to see how prostitutes experience their work, and how they negotiate with patriarchal institutions. Nonetheless, women’s experiences of social institutions and social practices always intersect with each other. We cannot imagine working women practising sex work without involving conventional gender norms and discourses of sexuality. On the other hand, it

seems impossible to argue that prostitution is a universal institution transcending time and place that is never penetrated by the workers' personal needs and emotions.

This research is thus designed as a feminist ethnographic study in order to reveal Taiwanese sex workers' everyday lives. In-depth interviews with Taiwanese sex workers and clients are the major means of data collection. Moreover, I also observed streetwalkers on the job, interactions between men and women in tearooms and in a karaoke bar, conversation with bar-girls during off-duty hours, and how police organize raids on the sex industry in Taipei. In addition I used secondary data collected from newspapers, government statistics and related prostitution research (see Chapter 3). One of the advantages of drawing on different sources of data is to increase the validity and reliability of my claims.

I begin my investigation in Chapter 1 by describing the diverse shapes the Taiwanese sex industry has taken from the late nineteenth century up till the present time. I will critically survey feminist prostitution debates both in the West and in Taiwan, and argue for the importance of contextualizing commercial sex in Chapter 2.

In Chapter 3 I will explain how I sought to achieve the contextualization in my study and address the research methods of this research. I will begin with the ways in which the research was designed and the process of interviewing the informants, and then discuss the methodological concerns of feminist research. Like feminist standpoint theorists, I will argue that the insiders' points of view are

very important resources for feminist research, and explain the dynamic of the power relationship between insider and outsider, the researched and the researcher. Moreover, I will show how reflexive research is thus possible by carefully examining the different points of view and dynamic power relationships between insiders and outsiders.

The fourth chapter will map out the general landscape of the Taiwanese sex industry, discussing how the distinction between ‘body selling’ and ‘pleasure selling’, and working women’s different employee statuses, intertwine with each other to shape diverse forms of prostitution settings. I will then analyze how far the different organizations of commercial sex shape working women’s daily working conditions. Drawing on interview data, I will argue that it is criminalized prostitution that makes the majority of sex workers work in an extremely dangerous situation. In many cases, violence and danger do not come from the punters and/or the ‘pimps’, but rather from abusive police power.

The fifth chapter will focus on examining the ways in which prostitution became possible for my interviewees. Contesting the views which claim that prostitutes mainly come from ‘dysfunctional families’, and/or are victims of (sexual) violence, I will argue that the way to prostitution is far from straightforward but full of twists and turns. Many interviewees were working-class women. Poverty, however, was not a good enough reason for some of them to engage in commercial sex. Many interviewees had been drifting among low-paid and low-status (service) occupations for a few years before entering the sex industry. Moreover, the ways women and girls become involved in

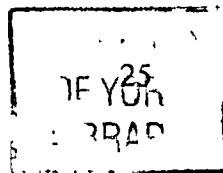
commercial sex are also related to Taiwanese daily cultural practices of privileging men and boys while degrading women and girls.

The sixth chapter will focus on analyzing what it means to be a sex worker. Rather than claiming that prostitution *is* work, the chapter critically examines the diverse forms of labour entailed in commercial sex. In many cases, it not only demands sexual labour, but also embodied emotional labour: performing aesthetic labour to dress like a whore, performing femininity, playing ‘falling-in-love’ games with the client, and faking orgasm to massage the client’s ego and so on. Sex workers, therefore, have to manage their hearts and feelings, and bring their bodies under control in order to perform embodied emotional labour adequately. Moreover, I will argue that being able to perform sex work means that sex workers should be able to exercise ‘role distance’ to differentiate their work role as sex workers from their sense of the ‘real self’. The exercise of ‘role distance’ indeed shapes sex workers’ professionalism.

The final chapter will problematize Taiwanese sexual consumers. I will argue that the ‘male sexual urge’ is the most frequently used ‘vocabulary of motive’ among my male interviewees. However, I will dig beneath the surface to argue that the ideology is intertwined with the gendered social and cultural practices of ‘*he hua jeou*’ (i.e. drinking flower wine, see Chapter 7), which perpetuate the practices of ‘playing women’. Moreover, male interviewees frequently claimed that sometimes ‘emotional feelings’ were more important than sex in their (sexual) encounters with working women. However, I will draw on interview data to show how the so-called ‘emotional demands’ in commercial sex are sexualized, to the

extent that they are closely related to clients' conceptions of 'good sex'.

This thesis is an effort to unpack the stalemate of prostitution debates by placing Taiwanese commercial sex in its complex social and economic contexts. This study will conclude with a summary of the findings of the investigation, pointing to areas of future exploration.



# Chapter 1

## Historical transformation of Taiwanese commercial sex

### Introduction

Prostitution has always been claimed to be the ‘world’s oldest profession’, as if it were a universal phenomenon that transcended time and space. The aim of this chapter is to contest this assumption and point out the importance of seeing commercial sex as a dynamic social production that is always embedded in a specific social, economic and political context. Indeed, tracking Taiwanese commercial sex back to the nineteenth century, we are able to see the continuities and discontinuities between the modern and traditional Taiwanese sex industry. In this chapter I will briefly discuss Taiwanese prostitution since the late nineteenth century to show how it is perceived and shaped differently within specific historical and social contexts. Since Taiwan was once a part of China, and was later colonized by Japan before the end of WWII, Taiwan’s prostitution policies are greatly influenced by Chinese and Japanese culture. The cultural practice of differentiating ‘pleasure selling’ from ‘body selling’ in the modern Taiwanese sex industry is very much a hybrid of Chinese and Japanese prostitution. In what follows I will discuss how the Taiwanese government has struggled to police prostitution, moving back and forth between adopting prohibition and regulation regimes since 1945. I will conclude the chapter by introducing the heated debates of 1997 in relation to the abolition of Taipei licensed prostitution in Taiwan.

## **I. Policing prostitution in Taiwan**

### **i) ‘*Yi-dan*’ and ‘*Tu-chang*’**

Prostitution is very much a social organization rather than a ‘natural’ human activity. In order to understand current Taiwanese commercial sex, it is very important to trace its historical background to see the ways in which it is shaped by different political, social and economic factors at specific historical moments.

Much research points out that the current Taiwanese sex industry can be traced back to the colonial period from 1896 to 1946, when Taiwan was colonized by Japan (Huang, 1999; Lin, 1995a, 1995b, 1997; Lee, 1997). During the colonial period (1896-1946), Taiwan had two different prostitution systems: one was traditional Taiwanese prostitution, which provided sexual services for Taiwanese men, and the other was traditional Japanese prostitution, which served the Japanese only. Both systems were further divided into hierarchical systems in terms of services provided and the social classes of clients. Although clients came from different social classes, it is believed that prostituted women almost always came from poor families (Lin 1995a). Moreover, as many Taiwanese were Chinese immigrants, Taiwanese prostitution was also greatly influenced by traditional Chinese prostitution.

Hershatter’s (1997) research suggests that there has been a hierarchy of prostitution in Shanghai, China, since the mid-nineteenth century. Moreover, the hierarchy ‘was structured by the class background of the customers, the native place of both customers and prostitutes, and appearance and age of the prostitutes’ (Hershatter, 1997:34). According to Lin (1995a, 1997), as an extension of this tradition, Taiwanese sex workers have been labeled as ‘*yi-dan*’ (courtesan) and

*'tu-chang'* (prostitute) since the late nineteenth century. The former refers to female prostitutes who possessed better physical and cultural capital (e.g. those who can play traditional Chinese instruments and sing Taiwanese opera), and usually worked in restaurants or drinking places to serve upper-class men or businessmen. On the other hand, those known as *'tu-chang'* offered explicit sex to clients. They worked in the licensed brothels set up by the Japanese government, and most of their customers were lower or working class men (e.g. farmers and labourers).

The dichotomy of *'yi-dan'* and *'tu-chang'* was blurred when Western sexual entertainment spread across Shanghai, China, and was subsequently brought into Taiwan in the 1930s. Many dance halls, bars, clubs and cafés were set up in Taipei, Taiwan. In the name of entertainment, prostitution was covered by these new businesses. Many *yi-dans* therefore turned to work in dance halls as dancers (*wu neu*) or café attendants (*neu shyh* or *neu jau dai*), and continued to run their businesses. These changes not only meant a shift in prostitution style but also contributed to eliminating the stigma of being a prostitute. The distinction between 'pleasure selling' and 'body selling' in modern Taiwan (Chapter 4) is an extension of this tradition.

## **ii) Comfort women in WWII**

Another important historical factor that shaped people's (feminists', in particular) understanding of prostitution is the sexual slavery in World War Two (WWII). The huge scale military actions during WWII created the most



widespread sexual slavery in human history. According to the investigation of the Taipei Women's Rescue Foundation (1995:15), Japan recruited comfort women in Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, Indonesia, China and Japan by deceit, fraud, intimidation and kidnapping. For example, in Korea and Taiwan comfort women were recruited in the name of 'Women Guardians' and 'Nationalist Women' and were told to cook, clean and nurse for the army. It is estimated that 2,000 Taiwanese women were sent to comfort-women stations spread over China, the Philippines and Indonesia. As, during that time, Taiwan was still a pre-industrial society, there was almost no paid work available for women, especially during wartime, hence working for the army was a means of survival. Instead of working in the army, however, they became the sexual slaves of Japanese soldiers. Comfort women were not only reduced to sexual objects, but also recorded in the official documents of the Japanese army as 'bullets', i.e. they were necessarily consumable for the war effort. The inhuman experience of sexual slavery in WWII was revealed by Taiwanese comfort women during the mid-1990s. Many comfort women in South Korea and South East Asia came out to demand the Japanese government apologize for the launching of sexual slavery in wartime, and to compensate the survivors. However, the Japanese government still does not want to face this issue honestly. With the rise of the anti-sexual-violence movement in the 1990s, the coming out of Taiwanese comfort women created a dense social atmosphere of anti-sexual slavery and sexual violence of all kinds in Taiwan. This, of course, affects how feminists and others think about prostitution in the debates about prostitution today and also shapes current political debates.

### **iii) Back and forth between prohibition and regulation regimes**

#### **1) The prohibition regime and its social effects (1946-1955)**

Although state regulations on prostitution vary from one country to another, these regulations and/or laws fall into three categories: prohibition, regulation, and abolition (Barry, 1995:220). The prohibition regime treats prostitution as a moral offence and makes it a crime. Prostitutes, customers, pimps and third parties involved in prostitution are criminalized. The regulation regime legalizes prostitution to control social order and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. Only those brothels and prostitutes that are licensed by the government can run their businesses legally. In the abolition regime prostitution is decriminalized, and regulated by ordinary business laws just like any other business. However, the state enacts sexual laws to make pimps, brothels and soliciting on the street a crime (Barry, 1995). Tracking the history of Taiwanese prostitution policies shows the government has been shifting between prohibition and regulation regimes for decades.

After WWII, the Chiang Kai-Shek government<sup>3</sup> took over all the social, economic and political resources from the Japanese, and sent part of the army and its officers to govern Taiwan. Chiang Kai-Shek's government adopted the prohibition regime in 1946 and began to advocate his 'moral purifying missions' (*jeng swu gong tzuoh*) in order to correct the 'improper social atmosphere' which was brought about by Japanese colonists (Lin, 1997:11). The 'moral purifying missions' targeted prostitutes, who were scapegoated as symbols of moral

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<sup>3</sup> After being repeatedly defeated by the Chinese Communist Party on the mainland, the Nationalist Party led by Chiang Kai-Shek thus retreated to Taiwan in 1949.

corruption. Prostitution of all kinds was outlawed, while clients were tolerated. The government tended to think that this policy would successfully reduce the number of female café attendants and dancers; however, the fact is that more and more cafés and bars were set up, streetwalking was also prevalent, and legal ‘waitressing’ became a job to cover up illegal commercial sex.

Prohibition regimes are frequently undermined by the ideology of the ‘male sexual urge’. As many young soldiers, coming from Mainland China after WWII, were not allowed to get married in Taiwan, the Taiwan Province Council passed a body of laws<sup>4</sup> in 1951 to decriminalize ‘special bars’ to serve their sexual interests. *Special bars* were indeed licensed brothels of another kind, and the *special-bar waitresses* were licensed prostitutes. Hence, many researchers and feminists think that the prohibition regime totally failed, and that Taiwan was reverting to a regulated regime (Shen, 1980; Hwang, 1996; Lin, 1997; Huang, 1999).

## **2) Re-established regulation regime in 1956**

The special-bar system did not function as well as expected, because it was more expensive than ordinary bars and illegal brothels. Therefore, illegal brothels and streetwalkers were still popular. In 1956 the government thus passed *The Act of Management of Prostitution in Taiwan Province* to set up licensed prostitution in order to tighten up prostitution policy.

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<sup>4</sup> These laws are: ‘*The Act of Management of Special-bars in Taiwan Province*’, ‘*The Act of Management of Special-bar Waitresses in Taiwan Province*’, and ‘*The Act of Medical Inspection of Special-bar Waitresses in Taiwan Province*’.

At the outset, licensing prostitution was treated as a temporary strategy to control STDs and eliminate ‘pleasure-selling’ establishments. Hence, *The Act of Management of Prostitution in Taiwan Province (1956)* was only valid from 1956 to 1958. However, not only did ‘pleasure-selling’ establishments not disappear, but also *The Regulation of Management of Special Business* was passed in 1962 to justify the existence of diverse ‘pleasure-selling’ sectors. It decriminalized four different kinds of businesses – dance halls, bars, special tearooms, and special coffee shops – to allow the hiring of women for chatting, drinking, singing, and dancing with customers. Officially, these women were not allowed to be involved in commercial sex or perform obscene behaviour. However, such behaviour permeated these businesses.

The decriminalization of these special businesses turned Taiwan into a sexual haven for Japanese and Western tourists during the 1960s and 1970s. The saying was: ‘[G]o shopping in Hong Kong, gambling in Macau, and go-whoring in Taiwan’ (Jiang, 1987, quoted in Du, 1998:45, my translation). Jiang also pointed out on the official tour guides that the Tourism Bureau even suggested tourists could have a sex tour in Bei-tour<sup>5</sup>, Taipei. Yu (1991, in Tarng, 2000:8) also suggested that the sex industry on the Chung-san North Road in Taipei functioned as the American soldiers’ ‘R&R’ during the Korean and Vietnam Wars.

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<sup>5</sup> In 1956 the Taipei City Government issued licensed brothels in two specific areas: Jiang-shan-lou and Bao-doou-li. Bei-tour, a red-light area since the colonial period, was re-designed as ‘New Bei-tour Special Waitresses Houses’ in 1956. These waitresses were licensed prostitutes of another kind. Usually prostitutes stayed in specific houses, run by the third parties who were licensed by the city government, and were sent to hotels or bathing places by motorcycle to prostitute themselves. Usually they bathed with customers and then had commercial sex. Japanese men enjoyed this kind of prostitution very much.

As these sexual establishments brought Taiwan a great deal of foreign exchange, the government amended the regulation to permit four other special businesses, i.e. massage parlours, singing halls, barber salons, and saunas, to run their businesses legally. Hence, there are now the so-called ‘Eight Special Businesses’ (*ba da harng yeh*), and women working in these businesses are named ‘special business women’ (*te joong harng yeh fu neu*) or ‘working women’ (*shang ban sheau jiee*). Thereafter, the dual systems of ‘pleasure selling’ and ‘body selling’ were not only perpetuated by the male-centred culture of *he hua jeou* (i.e. drinking flower wine, see Chapter 7), but also by laws.

### **3) The vicious circle of the government crack downs**

State economic and political interests probably made the government turn a blind eye to the sex industry. However, this position could not be maintained when the visibility of prostitution caused public resentment. In 1967 *Time* published an article to describe the sex industry in Bei-tour with a photo showing naked young Taiwanese women bathing with American soldiers. As the public considered this shameful, the government abolished the ‘New Bei-tour Special Waitresses Houses’ in 1979 (Shiah et. al, 2002). Nonetheless, the 641 Bei-tour former special waitresses did not stop prostituting themselves, but went to work in either the ‘pleasure-selling’ sectors or illegal brothels (Laio, 1986, in Tarng, 2000:8).

Cracking down on the sex industry is an easy way for the government to tackle sexual establishments. However, it usually turns out to be a vicious circle: a

flood of 'pleasure-selling' sectors promote public anger and the government starts a purge project, prostitution goes underground, and illegal commercial sex mushrooms again. Nonetheless, these actions are also approved by women's organizations. In 1985, the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan sponsored a conference entitled 'Tourism and prostitution' to campaign against the trafficking of women and children. Afterwards, child prostitution became a public issue in Taiwan. According to Ku (1997a) a demonstration against the trafficking of children was organized by the Awakening Foundation and the Church in January 1987. Although recourse to people's compassion to rescue 'unfortunate girls' set the tone of this campaign, campaigners also claimed that prostitution was based on the idea that 'women are men's property in patriarchy' and on the understanding of 'gender inequality in the labour market'. The campaign identified punters, traffickers, brothel owners, pimps, corrupt police, and the inappropriate policies of indigenous tribes as the abusers of child prostitutes. Subsequently, the Taipei Women's Rescue Foundation (TWRP) was founded in July 1987 to monitor progress on issues surrounding the trafficking of children and women. 'Unfortunate girls' and 'child prostitutes' became new social categories to describe children who were involved in commercial sex and/or 'bad girls' (Chang, 1997). Meanwhile, the anti-trafficking campaign was quickly linked to pornography, because TWRP identified 'porn posters' as the major tool to lure children into prostitution. The legacy of anti-trafficking and anti-pornography thus paved the way for some women's organizations to launch a crusade against pornography after the mid-1990s (see Chapter 4).

Moreover, cracking down on the sex industry is also carried out with the

biases of gender and class. Ho (1998) estimates that there are more than 200,000 workers hired in the Eight Special Businesses and illegal sex industries. The majority of workers are middle-aged women excluded from the labour market. They are hired to pick up the phones, wash dishes, and/or clean and cook in the sex businesses. Cracking down on the sex industry means unemployment for these working-class women. Moreover, the 'abnormal', 'deviant', and 'sick' sexual activities of sexual minorities are always treated as soft targets. One police officer, in an interview for a TV programme, said that transvestite bars are sick, and male prostitutes are more obscene than female. Therefore transvestite bars were listed as the first targets, male prostitution the second, and heterosexual sex businesses the third. However, as Chen (1997, in Lee, 1998:7) pointed out, these actions never impeded the high-class sex industry that served upper-class men, businessmen, and politicians. Hence, the politics of cracking down on the sex industry not only reproduces the given class and gender biases, but also contributes to shaping specific middle-class heterosexual values—i.e. treating 'sex' as full of shame and danger, moral corruption, something which can only be justified in marriage and for reproduction (Ho, 1998:202-205). The abolition of the Taipei licensed prostitution in September 1997 provides an example.

Chen Shui-bian was mayor of Taipei from 1995 to 1998. He set up a Women's Rights Committee to include women's organizations and scholars as consultants for women's social policies. Shen Mei-chen, the delegate of TWRF, proposed that the police should investigate whether the licensed brothels were involved in the trafficking of women and children. Hence, the city government started its investigation. On 30<sup>th</sup> October 1996, the Taipei City Police Department

held a public hearing regarding prostitution and invited prosecutors, scholars, and delegates of women's organizations to attend the meeting. The majority thought that prostitution degraded women's dignity, and that licensed prostitution made 'pleasure-selling' sectors more prevalent. Therefore, the abolition of licensed prostitution became a consensus in the meeting. In January 1997, eight city councillors attacked Chen Shui-bian for playing two-handed politics with prostitution: cracking down on the sex industry on the one hand, while keeping licensed brothels that made the city government a pimp on the other. Chen Shui-bian thus decided to abolish licensed prostitution; however, the licensed brothel workers were not well-informed. The abolition law was enacted on 6th September 1997. In the name of the 'right to work', the 128 formerly licensed brothel workers took to the streets to demand a two-year extension<sup>6</sup> which did not come into effect until the current mayor Ma Ying-jeou came to power in 1999. The abolition caused heated debates regarding prostitution. Similar to Western debates since the 1970s, prostitution is generalized either as sex or work; meanwhile, prostitutes are either considered as 'poor victims' or 'happy hookers'.

## **Summary**

In this chapter, I have briefly reviewed Taiwanese prostitution policies since the late-nineteenth century to show how prostitution is a complex issue which is always related to other social issues, such as employment, urban planning, disease control etc. Above all, the formation of prostitution policies and how people think

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<sup>6</sup> The city government headed by Ma Ying-jeou announced the two-year extension on 26 January 1999. However, it did not come into force until 28 March 1999.



about prostitution are always embedded in a specific political, social, economic and cultural context. For example, *yi-dan* enjoyed a high social status before the 1930s. In the 1960s and 1970s, the government even turned a blind eye to the sex industry, which brought Taiwan huge amounts of foreign money. Currently, building up a modern 'metropolitan image' is the key issue, hence cracking down on the sex industry is the mainstream way to deal with prostitution. Locating prostitution in its social context, we therefore de-construct the myth that prostitution is a universal phenomenon which transcends time and place.

## Chapter 2

### Approaches to prostitution

#### Introduction

This chapter aims to offer a critical literature review of different approaches to theorizing prostitution, in particular of the fairly polarized debates which have taken place among feminists. Contesting the functionalist perspective that sees prostitution as based on human nature, feminists tend to see prostitution as a gendered social construction. There has, however, been a series of debates regarding prostitution among feminists since the 1970s.

In this chapter, I will review the ways in which radical feminists attempt to analyze gender and class as factors shaping the daily power struggle in which prostitutes engage. I will point out how certain theorists among this group ground their analysis on how women's bodies and sexuality are appropriated in prostitution, and show that they then go further, claiming that prostitution is a male-dominated system that operates against women as a whole. I will then review how pro-sex-work feminists theorize prostitutes as sexual agents and justify prostitution as sex work. Bell (1994) even suggests that prostitution is simply a 'symbolic construction' which does not have any social meaning. However, I will argue that both camps fail to account for sex workers' daily lives adequately, because both tend to generalize prostitution as a static social phenomenon and treat prostitutes as a homogeneous category. Hence, prostitution is either collapsed into a patriarchal system which oppresses women, or is simply

envisioned as a part of the labour market. As a corollary, prostitutes are thus often reduced to being either 'poor sexual victims' or 'happy hookers' who enjoy their jobs.

However, prostitution, as I pointed out in Chapter 1, presents itself in different shapes dependent upon social, political and economic contexts. I will suggest, therefore, that it is very important for feminists to contextualize commercial sex in order to see the ways in which prostitution is variously shaped by gender hierarchy, social class, age, and ethnicity, at different social, political and economic moments. I will then suggest that this contextualization will enable us to avoid simplistic views of working women as either sexual victims or liberated sexual agents, and thus to move beyond the impasse apparent in most public discussions of the topic.

## **I. The construction of prostitutes as sexual victims**

### **i) Contesting the 'male sexual urge'**

Prostitution is frequently justified as a 'necessary evil' to serve men's desire and as a 'safety valve' which prevents 'good women' from being sexually attacked by men. According to this view, the only one thing a state should do is control the spread of STDs (Järvinen, 1993:17-18). This old-fashioned discourse was widely presented during the disputes on the abolition of Taipei licensed prostitution. For example, Wang (1997) asserts that '*[W]omen prostitutes themselves are the most primitive phenomenon....It is impossible to eliminate [prostitution]*' (my translation). Prostitution is represented as a universal phenomenon that we seem

to be unable to do much about.

However, prostitution is organized in a variety of ways and it conveys diverse social meanings in different social and cultural contexts. Above all, the same sex act does not even guarantee the same social meaning. For example, temple prostitution was a religious ritual rather than sex in ancient Babylon (Shrage, 1994:100-106). Being a traditional Chinese *ming-chi* (i.e. famous courtesan) did involve commercial sex, but they maintained a high social status by servicing the nobles and upper-class men (Hershatter, 1997). Locating prostitution in the modern western world, we cannot ignore the fact that economic disparity between developing countries and industrialized countries has dramatically drawn South-east Asian women to work for the sex industry in Euro-America (Jeffreys, 1997:310). Currently, sex tourism goes further to mark out the racial dimension of prostitution. In Thailand prostitution is an issue in which gender interweaves with class and ethnicity; for example in the Thai government's foreign exchange policies, and the racialized sexual demands of American military bases and/or Western tourism (Truong, 1990; Barry, 1995:141-143; Lim, 1998:10).

The 'male sexual urge' is used to justify prostitution. Ericsson states that men seeking sex is as natural as 'our craving for food and drink' (1980:335). In Taiwan, Cheng Tsuen-chyi (quoted in Hong, 1997) argues, working-class men are not always able to enjoy sexual intimacy with women; call-girl services are too expensive to enjoy, and, most of all, 'masturbation is not always enough'. The cheaper licensed prostitution is thus a possible outlet for these disadvantaged workers.

Contesting the idea of the ‘male sexual urge’, many feminists argue that the so-called uncontrollable male sexual desire is in fact a gendered social construction. The earliest feminist to do this was McIntosh (1978), who criticized the idea of the ‘male sexual urge’ as being over-exaggerated to justify prostitution as men’s sexual ‘outlet’. Furthermore, according to McIntosh, modern empirical sex researchers reinforce the myth by claiming that male sexuality is:

*more imperious, more spontaneous, more specifically genital in goal, but also [as being] aroused by objects and fantasies. The female urge is weaker, responds to approaches from a punter, is more dependent on the entire relationship with the partner, yet the woman requires more direct physical stimulation to reach orgasm (1978:55).*

Thus, men are sex-driven animals, while women are not even counted as sexual beings. McIntosh notes that the myth ‘both supports and is supported by the structures of male dominance, male privilege and monogamy’ (1978:65). In other words, the ideology of the ‘male sexual urge’ and/or sexuality is interdependent with gender hierarchy, which not only justifies prostitution, but also supports double moral and sexual standards. Indeed, the myth of the ‘male sexual urge’ is so deep-seated that all the men I interviewed reported that they sought working women to dissipate their sexual ‘needs’. Nonetheless, we will later find that men’s desires in commercial sex are far more complex than this supposed ‘need’ implies (Chapter 7).

## **ii) Feminists theorizing prostitution**

### **1) Prostitution and the intersection of gender and class**

Although feminist debates and the politics of prostitution have become polarized into two extremes, both sides do more or less agree that women choose this stigmatized profession for economic reasons. Jaggar (1980:360) argued that '*[I]t is the economic coercion underlying prostitution, ... that provides the basic feminist objection to prostitution*'. Sex work advocates argue that gender inequality in the labour market makes prostitution a reasonable and available choice under very limited material conditions. Compared with other female jobs, the flexibility of work time and reasonable pay in prostitution are the major reasons that lead women into this profession (Alexander, 1988; O'Neill, 1997; Lim, 1998; Phoenix, 1999). Working-class backgrounds are common among working women in Taiwan (Hwang, 1996:124-126; Ji, 1998; Shiah et al, 1998:11; Chapter 5). I would add that women's social roles of daughter and mother, and the bonds of affection with their families of origin also play an important role in leading women into the sex industry.

Feminist literature shows that South-east Asian sex workers often work in urban areas, while most of their earnings are sent back to rural areas to help their families. Most importantly, being involved in commercial sex empowers these rural women as the main economic resources of their families (Lim, 1998; Truong, 1990; Boonchalaksi & Guest, 1998; Watenabe, 1998). Similarly, Taiwanese working women proudly reported that they support their families regularly. Indeed, supporting their families justifies their involvement in commercial sex (Ji, 1998:158-161). Some Taipei licensed brothel workers also reported that they were

sold out to brothels by their parents, and drifted among different sex businesses (Wang and Wang, 2000:80; Huang and Huang, 2000:93). Some reported that they would do anything to help their families to get away from poverty (Tang, 1998:21). It seems that ‘sacrificing a girl and/or a woman to rescue a family’ is sometimes the only way for a working-class family to survive. Nonetheless, hidden forces leading women to sacrifice themselves are highly connected to the gender hierarchy in Taiwanese society, and the exchange value of women-commodities. In fact, we will find that it is the daughters who have to be sacrificed to rescue the family by entering the sex industry, rather than sons, who are so privileged by the Taiwanese cultural practices of *privileging boys and condemning girls* (Chapter 5).

## **2) Prostitution and female sexuality**

Poverty and gender hierarchy in the labour market and the household combine to draw women into prostitution; however, the consistent demands of prostitution are not yet well explained. Radical feminists who ground women’s oppression in gendered sexuality try to offer a solution.

Mackinnon argues that ‘[S]exuality is to feminism what work is to Marxism: which is most one’s own, yet most taken away’ (1989:3). In MacKinnon’s work, prostitution is treated as a metaphor or the archetype of the male-dominated/female-subordinated sexuality; therefore, she has written: ‘the stigma of prostitution is the stigma of sexuality is the stigma of the female gender’ (1989:168). In her analysis, female sexuality is suppressed by male sexuality, and

the latter determines and interprets what sexuality is, and what it means. Moreover sexuality is 'a social construct of male power: defined by men, forced on women, and constitutive of the meaning of gender' (1989:128). Hence, 'dominance eroticized defines the imperatives of its masculinity, submission eroticized defines its femininity' (1989:130), and pornography is considered as the major means of constructing male-dominated sexuality. 'No pornography, no male sexuality' (1989:139). Men learn how to reduce women to sexual objects and the 'truth about sex' from pornography and brothels, and the mark of the sexuality of prostitution and pornography is that '[Y]ou (woman) do what I (man) want'!

MacKinnon's analysis is shared and endorsed by many radical feminists both in academia and in the anti-trafficking movement, in the West and in Taiwan. Prostitution is treated as a patriarchal institution that serves to degrade women as a whole (Barry, 1979, 1995; Pateman, 1988; Dworkin, 1997; Jeffreys, 1997; Ku, 1997b; Lin, 1998a, 1998b; Tarng and Hwang, 1999). Barry, Tarng and Hwang place more (but not exclusive) emphasis on the fact that prostitution is always controlled by male-organized crime and/or third parties, always involves trafficking women and children, and is used to justify men's rights to purchase commercial sex. In this way, these writers mainly conclude that prostitution is a gendered social practice against women. Moreover, they foreclose the possibility for adults to be involved in commercial sex that is based on 'free consent'. All the third parties involved in commercial sex are labelled as 'pimps' who 'live on prostitutes' earnings'.

According to Barry, prostitution is 'the model of sexual exploitation of



women' (1995:298), and 'prostitution makes all women vulnerable, exposed to danger, open to attack. To be vulnerable is, by definition, to be "able to be hurt or wounded or injured". Such vulnerability is publicly institutionalized sexual exploitation (1995:317). Therefore, the discourse of 'free consent' is meaningless, because 'consent to violation is a fact of oppression' (1995:65). If prostitution is understood in this way, prostitutes are nothing but pieces of meat on abusers' chopping boards. It forecloses any possibility of dealing with prostitutes' agency and subjectivity.

Lin Fung-mei (1998b), drawing many ideas from MacKinnon, argues that in Taiwan the public sphere is filled with all sorts of commercial sex that provides fresh female bodies for men's penetration. The public sphere is more like a 'public toilet' rather than a space for rational communication. Commercial sex collapses both public and private spheres to the extent that:

*[t]he men are unable to build up their sexual subjectivity, and are used to purchasing the so-called 'fei liang jia fwu neu' (indecent women) as consumers, while when facing liang jia fwu neu (decent women), men are unable to perform sexually, unable to love, and unable to have social lives with them (Lin, 1998b, my translation).*

Here, Lin's view departs radically from MacKinnon. For MacKinnon, men are the problem, while for Lin women are also suspected. In addition, the social roles of clients and prostitutes are reversed. Clients are blamed as spoiled sexual victims who could not resist whores' seduction, while prostitutes are abusers who transgress femininity and morality to lure these men. Prostitutes are thus evil women, and clients suffer from a biological condition. Moreover, prostitutes, like

public toilets, are reproduced as polluters due to their being very easy to access. In other words, the sexual beings who are open to the public are the problem, while those who are only confined to a specific person are desirable. Sex is desirable, but only allowed in a one-to-one heterosexual relationship. Lin's call for a cracking down on the sex industry is obviously nothing to do with prostitutes' oppression, but, rather, a method to consolidate heterosexual monogamy—winning back *liang jia fwu neus*' men.

Pateman theorizes prostitution by focusing on the relationship between the body and the self. She argues that the problem of prostitution is the social construction of men's sexual urge, which can only be satisfied by accessing women's bodies (1988:199). It makes 'women's bodies sexually used by men', and the 'law of male sex-right is publicly affirmed' (1988:209) in the capitalist market. As the body constitutes the formation of one's self and identity, the problem of 'women's bodies [being] sexually used by men' is that it makes prostitutes internalize the binary gender and *male-dominated sexuality*, which leads to the deconstruction of the prostitutes' self.

Contesting Pateman's 'self-destruction' argument, McIntosh argues that Pateman wrongly narrows down commercial sex to selling the body, and reduces the complicated relationships between the body and the self into a linear development. Moreover, she argues that men seek prostitutes not only for sex or bodies, but also for emotional services (1996:196-198). This account is strongly supported by empirical research. Rather than seeking physical sexual pleasure, many punters tend to look for emotional comfort from sex workers (Walkowitz,

1980; Høigård and Finstad, 1992; O'Connell Davison, 1995a, 1998; Chapkis, 1997; Plumridge et al., 1997). The clients' emotional demands identified by these writers range from having a talk with sex workers, feeling warmer (O'Connell Davidson, 1995a:48-51), playing big lovers, and demanding the workers' orgasm, to treating prostitution as a 'reserve marriage' (Høigård and Finstad, 1992:52-62). However, it is important to note that most sex workers think that 'it is not sexual; it is work' (Morgan, 1987:25). The point is that most workers make a distinction between 'sex as fun' and 'sex as work'. The popular ways to differentiate between these two concepts include not using condoms in their personal sexual relationships, not allowing clients to kiss their mouths, and using different beds to make a distinction. Hence, Chapkis argues that sex workers could maintain their sense of self through 'the performance of emotional labour' (1997:75).

Emotional labour, however, is not a new invention. In the name of love, it is carried out through the care and nurturing of family members by housewives, daughters or other female members in private households. Heterosexual couples, particularly the female partner, are required to perform emotional work and/or 'sex work'<sup>7</sup> to please their partners (Duncombe and Marsden, 1996). In the public spheres, the service occupations maximize the exchange value of female workers' emotional labour. Female workers are expected to manage their feelings and emotions to perform work adequately (Hochschild, 1979, 1983; Adkins, 1995). Nonetheless, in these 'high-heeled low-status' jobs (Mackinnon, 1989:95),

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<sup>7</sup> 'Authentic sex' is problematic in Duncombe and Marsden's research. They think heterosexual couples are programmed, or forced, to have sex. Above all, marital sex in long-term heterosexual relationships is based upon the social construction of heterosexuality, which defines how sex 'ought' to be and what it should be. Therefore, marital sex is a kind of alien work—sex work—performed by women and men.

both emotional and sexual labour are highly demanded but unpaid. Recently, Warhurst et al. (2000) and Witz et al. (2003) have gone further to develop the concept of 'aesthetic labour' to emphasize the deep embodied self and/or somatic dimension in interactive service work. I will suggest that sex work adds something to the debates on these *face-to-face* and *voice-to-voice* jobs; i.e. not only are the feeling self and the embodied self put to work, but, inevitably, the sexual self also comes into play (Chapter 6).

## **II. Pro-sex-work feminists theorizing prostitutes as sexual agents**

### **i) The dichotomy of 'madonna/whore'**

As has been argued, the whore stigma is one of the important apparatuses in maintaining prostitution as an institution against women. It portrays prostitutes as being powerless, promiscuous, sexual perverts, the transmitters of sexual diseases, drug/alcohol addicts, victims of sexual abuse, frigid, and men-hating. Moreover, it also functions to punish those who dare to transgress gender and sexual norms (St. James 1987; Pheterson, 1996:37-64). Pheterson writes:

*[g]ood women (wives and other women assumed to be possessed by individual men) are legitimized by the patriarchal system; their function is to model subservience. Bad women (whores and other women assumed to be 'loose' or for hire) are stigmatized; their function is to serve as an example of the ostracism awaiting any woman who strays. Perverse women (dykes and other celibates of patriarchy) are ignored; their function is to demonstrate that a woman who rejects men loses her status as a woman (Pheterson, 1989:21).*

Above all, 'the whore stigma is attached to women and only to women' (St. James,

1987:82). ‘Whore means “unchaste”, “defiled”, and “diseased”...A woman who has many male lovers is regarded as a whore, whether she’s getting paid or not. A man in the same situation is exalted’ (1987:84).

It seems that both madonnas and whores are serving men’s interests. However, many sex workers consider that they are serving their own interests, e.g. seeking economic security, more sex, adventure, rebellion, and power (for example, Morgan, 1987:25-27; Queen, 1997:132; Highleyman, 1997:150; Leigh, 1997:228). In addition, money makes a difference. Indeed, it is charging for sex and separating sex from love and reproduction that makes commercial sex a crime and prostitutes criminals (St. James, 1987:82-83). Charging money for sex is not only considered to be powerful (Lopez-Jones, 1988:273; Chapkis, 1997:22), but it also subverts the male-dominated heterosexual norms where men can freely access women’s bodies (Pendleton, 1997:79). Good women are ‘respectable’ because they have subjected their sexuality to the compulsory norm of heterosexual monogamy, while prostitutes’ sex disturbs the compulsory trinity—marriage/sex/reproduction.

## **ii) A vindication of the rights of whores**

Pro-sex-work feminists tend to treat prostitution as a women-centered but gender neutral profession; i.e. prostitution is a ‘woman’s work’ (Leigh, 1997:228); however, it is not essentially oppressive to women. They argue that the emiseration of prostitutes and the related crimes surrounding prostitution are generated by the criminalization of prostitution, state regulations, and the

discriminatory enforcement of laws (for example, St. James, 1987:82; Scott, 1987:101; Alexander, 1988:194-206; Peterson, 1989:8-17, 53-102; Chapter 3).

With this acknowledgment, the First World Whores' Congress set up the International Committee for Prostitutes' Rights (ICPR) to campaign for prostitutes' rights; and later the ICPR adopted the World Charter for Prostitutes' Rights to demand the decriminalization of prostitution and guarantee to prostitutes all human rights and civil liberties (Peterson, 1989:39-42). Paraphrasing Mary Wollstonecraft, Gail Pheterson wrote that 'those whores are standing publicly with their sisters and demanding inclusion in the Vindication of the Rights of Women' (Pheterson, 1989:28-29).

Nonetheless, although the rights discourse includes prostitutes as citizens, it does not recognize prostitution as work and prostitutes as sex workers. The prostitution laws recommended by the Report of the Wolfenden Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution in 1957 in the UK offer an example. As Jeffrey Weeks sees it, in accordance with the liberal ideology of the dichotomy of public and private, the Wolfenden Report achieves a contradictory conclusion regarding prostitution: 'restrictive in one direction, liberal in the other' (1989:243). Prostitution is decriminalized in private, but those related activities that make prostitution open and visible are not allowed by law: i.e. running brothels, soliciting, and working with some other prostitutes. Therefore, most British sex workers are forced to work alone and to seek pimps for protection. In the name of the 'right to privacy', prostitutes are swept into the private sphere to avoid disturbing 'public order'. Prostitutes, therefore, can only enjoy their work by

being lucky and meeting nice clients. This explains why most liberal states criminalized soliciting on the streets (Barry, 1995:220), and those states which adopt regulation regimes prefer to incorporate prostitution policies into urban planning projects, as in Australia (Gorjanicyn, 1998) and Holland (Verbeek and Zijden, 1988:297).

### **iii) Theorizing prostitution in terms of labour**

Some western advocates offer another justification for sex work by marking out the labour dimension of sex work, and comparing the labour involved in prostitution to other work. Valerie Scott, for example, differentiates ‘sex for work’ and ‘sex for fun’ to justify sex work (Bell, 1994:110). Lopez-Jones (1988) also argues that:

*[t]he sex industry is not the only industry which is male-dominated and degrades women, but it is the industry where the workers are illegal and can least defend publicly our right to our jobs*  
(Lopez-Jones, 1998:273).

In Taiwan, the Pink Collar and Solidarity Front of Women Workers (Wang and Ku, 1998) claimed that former licensed brothels were just like ordinary factories, and licensed prostitutes like any other workers.

This approach recognizes prostitution as work, and prostitutes as workers. However, this argument, focusing on ‘work’ rather than ‘sex’, is desexualized to

the extent that, as Wang Fang-ping (in Huang, 1997) asserts, by ‘getting rid of “sex”, “sex work” is just like other work’. Desexualizing sex work might relate to the mainstream conservative atmosphere of Taiwanese society, which might feel pity for poor women for turning to prostitution for survival, while condemning ‘gold diggers’ in prostitution. Nonetheless, it is important to note that commercial sex is organized in a variety of ways; meanwhile, punters are seeking a range of services in commercial sex. Sex workers thus face diverse working conditions that may be sexual or asexual. Moreover, it is precisely the stigma of sex that makes sex work a special profession. Failing to consider the sexual dimension of sex work and/or assimilating sex work with other labour will not enable us adequately to address sex workers’ daily lives.

On the other hand, Ho (1998:222) tries to offer a justification for sex work in the light of the historical transformation of labour in a capitalist market. She explains how productive and reproductive labour that was once carried out in private is now integrated into the capitalist market through the commodification of labour. Sexual labour was once provided by housewives but has been transferred into the market. Moreover, this historical change, she claims, not only serves the interests of the capitalists, but also functions to liberate women’s labour and diversify women’s lives. According to Ho:

*[a]s work in public, sex work implies a possible future of sexuality, where sex will not be involved with unacceptable manipulation of affection, and it will not be the only criterion for love and intimacy. Most of all, since sex is a form of work, sex will not function as the only criterion to measure women (Ho, 1998:223, my translation).*



This is a very optimistic attitude towards the commodification of sex. The commodification of domestic labour does indeed liberate upper- and middle-class women from daily domestic reproduction; however, it is achieved by exploiting working-class women's cheap labour. Ho points out a possibility for women's sexual liberation by freeing sex from intimacy. Nonetheless, whether the sexual liberation is exchanged for working-class women's involvement in commercial sex is left unconsidered. In addition, Ho tries to theorize sex work in terms of labour; however, she does not clarify how sex workers understand those 'sexual services' provided in commercial sex. Are they labour or sex? The sense in which the sexual services are work and how sex work is different from other jobs are questions and are left unanswered.

#### **iv) Bring the sex back in**

Since the early 1990s there has been a trend to bring sex back into the prostitution debate. More and more pro-sex-work feminists legitimize sex work by resorting to sexual libertarianism and/or queer theory. By locating the battle in sexuality, the discourses of justifying sex work have dramatically shifted from gender and labour to sexuality. Radical feminists' concerns - how women's bodies and sexuality are appropriated by men - have shifted to which specific sexual practices are repressed by criminalizing prostitution.

Gayle Rubin's 'Thinking Sex' is the most important resource to justify sex work from this point of view. Although she notes that '[P]rostitutes and other sex workers differ from homosexuals and other sexual minorities' ([1984]1993:18),

she always lumps together sex workers with other 'sexual minorities' in her famous diagram of sexual hierarchy (1993[1984]:12). As for Jeffrey Weeks, prostitution is a kind of sexual taste or aptitude:

*[t]ransvestites, transsexuals, paedophiles, sado-masochists, fetishists, bisexuals, prostitutes and others—each group marked by specific sexual tastes, or aptitudes, subdivided and demarcated often into specific styles, morals and communities, each with specific histories of self-expression—have all appeared on the world's stage to claim their space and 'rights' (Weeks, 1985:187).*

Similarly, Ning (1998:264-310) claims that former licensed prostitutes and gays and lesbians are all 'sexual minorities' which have been suffering from sexual stigma, police harassment, and sexual violence, as well as being pathologized as sexual perverts, scapegoated for the dissemination of AIDS, and deprived of basic civil rights.

Thinking of prostitution in terms of sexual minorities, there is a tendency to reduce prostitution to sexuality, rather than seeing it as a complex issue in which sexuality interweaves with the given social division of gender, class, age, and race. Carol Queen (1997:133-134), for example, claims that poverty is not a good reason to do sex work; in fact, a sex-positive attitude is the most important qualification for this job. Only when both sex workers and customers do not despise all sorts of diverse sexual practices and appetites can sex workers be respectable. Hence, she asserts that the prostitutes' rights movement should include radical sexual politics and join the campaign to defend sex.

Some queer sex workers drawing on post-structuralism try to theorize prostitution as performance art. Shannon Bell (1994:141-142) argues that many porn stars use their bodies as carnival to displace, rewrite, and re-interpret the dominated representation of female bodies and prostitution. The body is thus a site of resistance. Moreover, the artists are many things at once: artist/actress, erotic/sexual being, intellectual/critic and political/social commentator. Prostitutes are simultaneously represented as active sex experts, safe-sex educators, social workers, sex therapists, and sex performers, rather than sexual victims.

Eva Pendleton's (1997:76-79) studies of lesbian prostitutes also point out that prostitution is performing heterosexuality and femininity. Nonetheless, performing heterosexuality neither damages lesbian identity, nor degrades women. In addition, sexual performance plays a more important role in professional dominance, where sex workers receive money to engage in S/M, D&S (dominance and submission) and B&D (bondage and discipline). According to Liz Highleyman, some professional dominatrixes reported that their work was about 'power, education, therapy, ritual—almost anything except sex' (1997:146). Professional dominance is exercising control and power over male clients, while simultaneously making them feel that desirable sexual services are being provided. Thus, professional dominatrixes sell their time and skills for sexual pleasure, rather than selling their bodies (1997:147-150), and what the clients experience is a sexual illusion created by sex workers, rather than just having sex with those prostitutes.

### **v) What's wrong with queering prostitution?**

Treating prostitution as sexual performance and prostitutes as a sort of sexual minority creates space to discuss sex workers as agents, but it also causes several theoretical problems. In many cases, it mis-represents prostitutes. Prestage and Perkins (1994:14-17) argue that the fashionable category 'queer' has no resonance with prostitutes. Moreover, they question whether punters, whose sexual practices also challenge mainstream sexual norms, could be renamed as 'queer'. In Taiwan, the majority of former licensed prostitutes felt embarrassed and/or shamed when they found out that gays and lesbians had joined their demonstration (Ning, 1998:265).

Moreover, seeing prostitutes as a sexual minority marks out the transgressive sexual practices in prostitution, but fails to examine why prostitutes and queers get involved in transgressive sexual practices, how they experience those 'sexual' encounters, and what they want to achieve through these sexual practices. It therefore neglects the difference that the majority of sex workers practise these transgressive sexual practices to be free from poverty (Lopez-Jones, 1988:272), while queers fashion out sexual politics for sexual pleasure. It neglects the fact that the majority of sex workers claim that those 'sexual encounters' are 'work' rather than 'sex'.

Most of all, using a single concept – 'sexual minority' or 'queer' – to represent diverse sexual dissidents ignores the diversity of prostitutes themselves. It is misleading to lump together successful porn stars and high-class call-girls with streetwalkers who do prostitution to escape poverty (Jackson, 1996:25).

Even in those cases where sex workers carry out their sexual desire by practising commercial sex, it is also important to identify those different power relationships, sexual desires and pleasures involved in commercial sex and some other sexual appetites respectively. After all, a professional dominatrix who is erotically aroused by seeing herself arrayed in fetish wear (Highleyman, 1997:152) is very different from a middle-aged man who demands sexual pleasure by having sex with a child.

In a sense, some pro-sex-work feminists narrow down prostitution to ‘sex acts’, i.e. innocent bodily activities. Prostitution is abstracted from its social context as if prostitution is practised in a vacuum and has nothing to do with gender, class, race, and age. Just as some radical feminists reduce women’s oppression to heterosexual sex and are thus unable to deal with sex as work, these libertarians are too naïve about ‘sex acts’ to deal with them as social issues. Most importantly, ‘sex’ is represented as natural and sacred. Therefore, what these pro-sex feminists are doing is destabilizing heterosexual norms on the one hand, while celebrating sex in another way on the other. According to Veronica Vera, spokesperson of PONY,

*[s]ex is a nourishing, life-giving force and as a consequence sex work is of benefit to humanity...Sex workers are providing a very valuable service to be honoured. Sex work...is a good service, it is the best service that one individual can do for another individual (quoted in Bell, 1994:108).*

Not only is sex treated as natural and valorised, ‘desire’ and ‘pleasure’ are also treated in the same way. For these sexual or Foucauldian libertarians, what is

wrong with heterosexuality is that it is privileged and legitimated as the only way to have sex in mainstream society, rather than that women are oppressed in that institution. Using Jackson's (1999:163) analytical framework, they do challenge heteronormativity at the institutional level, but not gender division and hierarchy in heterosexuality. Above all, they demand that all sorts of sexual desires and pleasures should be treated as equal and natural, and no judgement or evaluative analyses are allowed (Alcoff, 1996:113). The basic sexual principle or ethic here is that 'if I want it then I automatically have a right to do it' (1996:116). Nonetheless, treating desires, pleasures and sexualities as givens brings us back to the repressive hypothesis (Sawicki, 1991:35; Jackson, 1996:26) which Foucault critiqued.

In a gendered society, it seems impossible to desire or experience some specific sexual pleasures without taking gender into account. As Jackson (1999:175) argues, we learn gender patterns long before we become aware of ourselves as sexual. Sexuality is thus always interwoven with gender. This partly explains the ways in which men's use of female prostitutes is considered as 'normal', while women using male prostitutes is disgusting. Moreover, women's inferior material power also explains the ways in which many male prostitutes are used to serve men (Jeffreys, 1997:103). The debates on privileging sexuality are too complex to deal with adequately here; however, abstracting prostitution from its social contexts clearly fails to uncover the majority of working women's daily lives both in the West and in Taiwan.

## Summary

In this chapter, I have reviewed the polarized debates regarding prostitution. There is a tendency for some radical feminists to analyze prostitution in terms of gender, and to ground women's oppression solely in the ways in which women's sexuality is appropriated and exploited by men. In their analysis, prostitution is nothing but sexual exploitation. Some of them deny any possibility for women to perform commercial sex willingly. Prostitutes are thus represented as victims who suffer from male sexual desire and exploitation. On the other hand, there is a tendency to theorize sex work in terms of labour or in the domain of sexuality. Some sex radicals even go so far as to link prostitution with the sexual liberation movement, claiming that prostitutes are a sexual minority. Thus, sex workers are represented as liberated sexual subjects who dare to engage in transgressive sexual practices. In a way, (commercial) sex is such a special domain that neither side can discuss it calmly. They are either too eager to condemn all kinds of commercial sex, or too naïve to analyze it in a complex social context.

However, neither queering nor victimizing prostitution can adequately uncover sex workers' daily lives. In conclusion, we need a more complex framework that links gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity and other social divisions properly to tackle prostitution both at the levels of institution and experience, rather than reducing prostitution to merely a gender or sexuality issue. Locating commercial sex in the context of Taiwan, I will suggest that it is important to re-think how the distinction between 'body selling' and 'pleasure selling' intertwines with women's varied employee statuses to shape heterogeneous working conditions among working women. By identifying the diversity of

commercial sex and revealing these heterogeneous working conditions among working women, we might be able to break down the polarized prostitution debates. In any case, we will thus be able to produce a better account of prostitution as lived experience.



## **Chapter 3**

### **The ‘whore’ gazes back: reflections on knowledge, power and sexuality**

#### **Introduction**

In the past three decades feminist scholars have continued to argue that feminist research aims to reveal women’s experiences and to enable the silenced to speak. In particular, feminist standpoint theorists have argued that situated knowledge starting from women’s standpoints could produce a better understanding of the social world (Smith, 1987; Stanley and Wise, 1990, 1993; Harding, 1986, 1991; Collins, 1990). On the level of methodology, feminist scholars also argue that ‘women interviewing women’ creates more equal dialogue and interaction between researchers and researched. Feminist researchers, sharing common oppressed experiences as women, are not simply ‘data-collecting machines’ and/or ‘objective’ researchers (Oakley, 1999[1982]; Mies, 1999[1983]). Finch (1984), however, argues that the common experiences of being women make it more possible for the interviewers unwittingly to exploit female interviewees.

Bearing this feminist legacy in mind, I see my fieldwork with Taiwanese sex workers both as exploring a different social world and an inter-subjective dialogue between the insider and the outsider. Nonetheless, when a feminist conducts an interview with stigmatized ‘prostitutes’, the power encounters between the feminist researcher and the researched are much more complicated and dynamic. The boundary between insider and outsider was always shifting and blurring,

because women who transgress social norms of ‘good women’ or enter ‘disreputable’ social space are quickly labeled ‘whores’. Thus, I found that I was gazed at as a whore on the streets, and experienced a little of how it felt to be perceived as a whore. These experiences appear to be very helpful in producing a critical understanding of the Taiwanese female interviewees’ daily lives.

One of the most remarkable power dimensions is that participants in this study were engaging in transgressive sexual practices that are stigmatized, marginalized and criminalized by the mainstream society. Therefore, as an outsider, the I/eye more or less used the mainstream perspective to ‘gaze at’ interviewees. Nonetheless, the mainstream gaze was frequently challenged in the field. In other words, interviewees exercised their insider knowledge to contest my outsider perspective. Therefore, when ‘whores’ gazed back, taken-for-granted assumptions regarding prostitution were put under scrutiny, and the hierarchical power relationships between the researcher and the researched were subverted and de-stabilized. Dialogues between a feminist researcher and female interviewees are thus possible, in turn creating the possibility of reflexive research. The chapter will start by discussing how I used different research methods to collect data and how I located my sample. I will then discuss how feminist ethnography generates a site of dynamic power struggles that makes reflexive research possible.

## **I. Research Process**

### **i) Research methods**

Doing research on prostitution is very much a gender and class issue. Many female researchers either access the sex industry and/or sex workers by working

part-time in sexual establishments (for example, Allison, 1994; Ji, 1998), or hire male assistants to gain access (Nencel, 2001). Some mixed-sex research teams work with public health services and/or institutions to circulate condoms to sex workers in order to gain access (McKeganey and Barnard, 1996). Male researchers have directly approached sex workers and/or experience sexual encounters with them (Stewart 2002[1972]; Lee, 1998). Although, at the outset, Stewart (2002[1972]) tried to 'pass' as a client, he quickly found that the idea is doomed to fail, and had to completely re-think his strategy. Lan's (2002) research team, which earns a huge grant (NT\$ 1,500,000) from the Taiwanese government, pay to see sex workers. Lacking either a huge grant or a glamorous enough figure to work in sexual establishments, the only way I could possibly 'experience' prostitution is by 'passing' as a streetwalker. However, most data is collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews. In addition, ethnographic observations of streetwalking in Taichung and of the police raids were useful to collect background data on the context of commercial sex. Secondary resources from daily newspapers, government issued reports and statistics, and related prostitution research are used to supplement my own data.

The purpose of in-depth interviews 'is to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena' (Kvale, 1996:6). As Høigård and Finstad (1992: 26) assert, the in-depth interview provides an opportunity for 'penetrating deeply into the content and meaning of the phenomenon'. Using the in-depth interviews I tried to understand what 'prostitution' means for sex workers through their self-accounts. Hence, the aim of the research is to examine those social meanings invested in

interviewees' self-accounts, rather than to claim and/or discover the social reality 'out there'.

The interview questions are constructed on four themes<sup>8</sup>: life stories, women's self-accounts of their daily jobs, the relationships between working women and clients, the relationships between working women and third parties.

Problematizing the discourse that claims prostitutes mainly come from 'dysfunctional families', the research tries to use interviewees' life stories to examine the relationships between interviewees and their families of origin. Tracing the trajectories of the female interviewees' lives, we can identify their complex emotional feelings toward their families of origin. Moreover, we can carefully examine the relationships between prostitution and other social institutions or cultural practices.

The second theme is trying to understand interviewees' daily work. Interviewees were asked to describe their routine jobs done every working day. Looking at these details serves to identify diverse forms of labour under the general rubric of 'prostitution'. Moreover, as Aptheker argues:

[t]he search for dailiness is a method of work that allows us to take the patterns women create and the meaning women invest and learn from them. If we map what we learn, connecting one meaning or invention to another, we begin to lay out a different way of seeing reality. (*quoted in Harding, 1991:129*)

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<sup>8</sup> Please see Appendix II for the Interview Guides.

Therefore, studying interviewees' working details we are able to reveal the social meanings of those sexual services provided daily, and how interviewees make sense of their daily involvement in prostitution. Most importantly, locating knowledge production in interviewees' daily life is indeed a way to recognize interviewees as social actors or agents who are able to change their lives, and contribute to knowledge production.

The third theme is trying to examine the diverse relationships between sex workers and their clients. Interviewees were asked to describe what kinds of sexual services their clients expected from them, and the ways in which interviewees negotiated with those sexual demands. The last theme tries to examine the relationships between the organization of commercial sex and interviewees' working conditions, and the diverse relationships between interviewees and third parties. Therefore, we might be able to locate working women's exploitation and autonomy in its specific social context.

Kelly et al. (1994:33) argue that it is important for feminist research to include male participants and examine 'the extent or the content of the deliberate strategies men and male-dominated institutions use to maintain their power'. The study problematizes male clients who make prostitution a constant male-dominated institution possible. The interview questions for clients are structured by two themes: the motivation for visiting prostitutes and the specific (sexual) expectations that punters demand in commercial sex. Problematizing clients' motivation serves to examine the taken-for-granted ideology of male sexual urges, and puts those constant sexual demands into question. The latter

attempts to present the diverse (sexual) demands and/or expectation of clients in commercial sex, and then goes further to examine the way in which clients understand their (sexual) encounters with prostitutes.

Although the majority of the interview questions were structured by these themes, they were subject to change according to interviewees' different interests and perspectives. In order to avoid asking leading questions, most questions were asked in an open-ended way. Kvale (1996) uses the metaphors of the 'tourist' and the 'miner' to refer to researchers' different attitudes toward the interview. I found that sometimes I was a 'tourist' travelling around the social world of the researched. Sometimes I had to be a 'miner' in order to clarify those ambiguous and/or exaggerated narratives, because

*[o]ur life is essentially a set of stories we tell ourselves about our past, present and future. These stories are far from fixed, direct accounts of what happens in our lives but products of the inveterate fictionalizing of our memory and imagination. That is, we 'story' our lives. Moreover, we re-story them too. In fact, restorying continually goes on within us.*  
(Kenyon and Randall [1997] quoted in Plummer, 2001:187)

There is a gap between interviewees' narratives and 'what happens' in their lives. For example, Sue-lian reported that she was forced to see '*more than one hundred clients in an evening*' when she was trafficked in an illegal brothel. However, since each client was guaranteed fifteen minutes in the illegal brothel, we could figure out that Sue-lian's memory of the experiences in the illegal brothel is

problematic<sup>9</sup>. A male interviewee even boasted that his sperm ‘penetrated two pieces of toilet paper’ in a sexual encounter. Thus, in these cases, I am more like a ‘filter’ screening the unreliable data reported by the respondents (Gubrium and Holstein, 1997).

As far as democratising the feminist research process is concerned (Kelly et al., 1994), interviewees were informed that they could refuse to answer any question that they felt uncomfortable with or did not want to talk about. They also had the right to end the interview whenever they wanted. Each interviewee was fully informed of the research purposes and how the interview data would be used in the future. In addition, the informed consent letter<sup>10</sup> also guarantees anonymity. All the names of the interviewees and bars are pseudonymous. Most of all, the typed records, field notes and details of work places definitely will not be open to the police and the public. Moreover, each interviewee was invited to comment on the interview at the end. Many interviewees were appreciative of this invitation, and two male interviewees gave their suggestions<sup>11</sup>.

Methodological textbooks stress that interviews should be conducted in a quiet and private room, so that interviewees and interviewers can concentrate on the conversations, and produce good quality tape recordings. However, it is not always possible in actual fieldwork situations. In this study, as prostitution is

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<sup>9</sup> It is important to note that the ‘problematic memory’ might relate to a 13-year-old’s awful experiences in the illegal brothel. In other words, it is the experience of being forced to see ‘too many clients’ than she could manage that the extreme report provided.

<sup>10</sup> Please see Appendix I for the Informed Consent Letter.

<sup>11</sup> They were the doctor and the salesman. The doctor gave his comment on the government’s actions on cracking down on the sex industry. The salesman suggested that I should pay attention to the frequency of men’s prostitution use. Somehow, I felt that he spoke as an experienced insider, while I was an outsider who should be taught.

criminalized and stigmatized in Taiwan, both female and male interviewees were afraid of being interviewed in their private houses or offices. Some teenage girls in halfway centres<sup>12</sup> did not want to be tape-recorded. On these occasions, I just took notes. One interview with a male client was conducted by telephone in order to protect his 'right to privacy'. The interviewees with two truck drivers were conducted in one of the driver's houses. However, as the conversation was so sexually explicit, the interviewee consciously stopped talking a few times when his daughters walked through the living room. Lee was the only male interviewee who was interviewed in his office.

The other interviews were conducted in public spaces. Mei-yun and Lili took me to Yang-Ming Mountain (on the outskirts of Taipei), where they hike every morning, to conduct interviews. Sue-lian was interviewed in a small park near her flat. Two interviews with male interviewees (Lian and Soong) were conducted in coffee shops in order to prevent their families and colleagues knowing that they are punters. Nonetheless, as coffee shops are public areas, these conversations were easily overheard by other customers. As talking about sex in public is considered a

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<sup>12</sup> Halfway centres are government-funded shelters for women and girls who have suffered from violence or who are potentially involved in prostitution. In Taiwan there are long-term and short-term shelters. The former care for women and girls for up to two years, while the latter only provide shelter for one to two months. In this study I was only able to access short-term halfway centres for under-age girls who were considered to possibly be involved in prostitution. According to *The Act of Prevention Child and Juveniles Involvement in Commercial Sex*, those who are under 18 years old (both male and female) are not allowed to be involved in commercial sex. In the name of 'protection', those teenagers who violate the law will be sent to a short-term halfway centre no less than 24 hours after they are reported. They will stay in a halfway centre to wait for the judge's decision, which usually takes two months. They are thus a kind of remand home. The judge's decision is based on social workers' reports and the testimonies of the centre's staff. Those 'protected' teenagers are then usually sent back to their parents or guardians. However, if social workers think that they need to be protected from violence or from an 'inadequate' environment, they might be sent to another government-funded long-term halfway centre. It is important to note that these girls are subjected to a series of regulations in the halfway centres during their stay. The purpose of these regulations, according to the staff of these halfway centres, is to cultivate the girls' abilities to live a 'normal life'.



sexual taboo in Taiwan, it is quite challenging to conduct interviews in this setting. Thus, both the interviewees and I were pushing the limit of such boundaries and transgressing social norms. In Taiwan, it is not a good idea for a woman to talk about sex with a male stranger, let alone in public. Moreover, (commercial) sex is reckoned to be a private issue that is usually locked in bedrooms and/or only open to lovers. Now, it was brought into coffee shops with a stranger. I found that I had to keep 'calm', no matter what I heard from these male interviewees. (Indeed, it demanded emotional performances.) On the other hand, their flushed faces, when asked 'why don't you masturbate', also showed me that they were also negotiating the sexual taboo. There is no doubt that the interview data would be different, if the interviewer were a man or the interviews were conducted in a private place.

Apart from in-depth interviews, ethnographic observations also provided a vivid picture of the social world of the researched. Observations in this study included using personal access to observe in a special bar, and directly carried out observation on the streets where streetwalkers walk around. Moreover, two male clients took me to a family-style karaoke bar in order to show me that their visits to sexual establishments were 'simply entertainment' after work. Therefore, I was able to observe the interaction between working women and their clients in person. As far as police power is concerned, I persuaded a police officer, a vice-director of a police precinct headquarter in Taipei, to let me observe their action on raiding three different licensed special sexual establishments: one large-scale special bar, one large-scale sauna, and one small karaoke bar.

The data used in this study comes from very different sources. One of the

most remarkable benefits of drawing on different sources is making triangulation possible. Therefore, the study is more likely to achieve validity and reliability. Moreover, prostitution always involves many different social actors. By interviewing both female sex workers and male punters, the study is able to see the ways in which different social actors understand the same social encounter, and how they invest varied social meanings in the encounter. The length of interviews varied. The shortest interviews (three) only lasted for forty-five minutes, while the longest (two) interviews took four hours. The majority of the interviews lasted between ninety minutes and two hours. Moreover, four girls in a halfway centre were interviewed twice. I was also allowed to stay in a halfway centre with girls for a weekend.

## **ii) Sampling**

Sampling in qualitative research is not as controllable as in quantitative research, especially when dealing with prostitution. There is always an uncertainty about the population of both working women and clients in the first place. Secondly, what counts as prostitution is also a disputed issue in prostitution research. Some researchers define prostitution as ‘an exchange of sex for money’, yet what counts as ‘sex’ and what counts as ‘money’ transactions are unlikely to have clear-cut answers. Hence, some quantitative research is considered to fail to achieve a generalizable result (Høigård and Finstad, 1992:26). This research neither offers a generalizing theory on the Taiwanese sex industry, nor intends to achieve a statistical conclusion. Instead my intention is to offer a deeper understanding of sex workers’ daily life. Therefore, representativeness is not the

major concern of my sampling, but seeking informants who can offer 'rich data'. Although there is a debate regarding the definitions of prostitution and prostitutes, the study follows the given Taiwanese cultural practices of 'pleasure selling' and 'body selling' in order to recruit 'potential' interviewees. Nonetheless, the research leaves the definitions of 'prostitution' and of 'prostitute' open to the interviewees. However, the sampling is also highly constrained by the availability and accessibility of interviewees due to limited time and resources.

In order to capture the diversity of commercial sex in Taiwan, I approached various sex workers in varied ways. As former Taipei licensed brothel workers were constantly in the media, reaching them was easier. Streetwalkers are openly visible to the public, but harassment by the police and people's hostility toward prostitutes make them much more difficult to access. It was also difficult to gain access to sex workers who work in sexual establishments. Even though I had a personal contact to access bar-girls, it took nearly forty-five days to negotiate interviews with them. Lacking any connection with a traditional tearoom, I paid NT\$ 600 to interview a woman working in a tearoom in Wan-hwa. In addition, I interviewed teenage girls who were sent to halfway centres due to their involvement in offering sex for payment. In the end, I interviewed ten teenage girls in three centres, who worked in (karaoke) bars, call-girl services, or solicited independently on the Internet. Eight adult women were interviewed: three of them were former Taipei licensed brothel workers, three bar-girls, one tearoom worker, and one streetwalker. Among these eighteen female interviewees<sup>13</sup>, only one was a lesbian, and the others were heterosexual. In terms of ethnicity, three were

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<sup>13</sup> See Appendix III for a Sketch of the Interviewees.

indigenous girls and the others were all Han<sup>14</sup>.

Sampling among clients was much easier. The major concern of sampling clients was their socio-economic status, as it is argued that working-class men and middle-class men consume in different sexual businesses in Taipei. Most of all, the different models of consuming in the sex market constitute the geographic politics of the city (Ho, 1998). As far as social class is concerned, I interviewed clients who come from different socio-economic backgrounds. I ended up conducting six interviews with clients: two of them were truck drivers, one lower-middle-class, two middle class and one lower upper class.

Compared to the difficulty of accessing female interviewees, it was much easier to convince men to be interviewed. Most clients were contacted through my friends, except for the doctor. As the Internet *yuan juh jiau jih* (mutual sex aid) is rising as the most fashionable way for young people (both women and men) to engage in commercial sex, there are many small ads on the Internet. One day I used the term '*yuan juh jiau jih*' to search on Yahoo! Taiwan; there were four hundred and fifty-three items on that page. Most of them were small ads of solicitation. I decided to seek both sellers and buyers to be interviewed through the Internet. I briefly described my project and left a phone number on the Internet.

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<sup>14</sup> In terms of ethnicity, the Han, who immigrated from China, are the majority in Taiwan. Aborigines are an ethnic minority. Currently, the total population in Taiwan is 22,368,502. Although there are eleven aboriginal tribes in Taiwan, the population of aborigines is 418,062 (less than 1.9% of the total population). According to the Council of Aboriginal Affairs, Executive Yuan, the aborigines of Taiwan speak languages belonging to the Austronesian language family. Currently, there are two major theories concerning the origin of the Taiwanese aborigines. The first theory proposes that the aborigines originated in some other area, the second asserts that Taiwan is the ancestral homeland of the Austronesian peoples. See [http://www.tacp.gov.tw/english/intro\\_fmintro.htm](http://www.tacp.gov.tw/english/intro_fmintro.htm)

The doctor responded to my ad three hours later. His eagerness to be interviewed interested me. I agreed to interview him by telephone. In the middle of the interview he revealed that he and his colleagues visited bar-girls regularly but they ‘*didn’t* talk about it’!

### **iii) The field**

#### **1) Teenage girls in halfway centres**

In Taiwan, there is a methodological debate regarding interviewing child and female prostitutes in halfway centres. Chu (1998) criticized Hwang (1996) and some other studies for reproducing the stereotype of miserable child prostitutes, because their research samples, mostly from halfway centres, were too homogenous. He argued that the biased sampling not only functions to reproduce miserable child prostitutes, but also consolidates the power structures of police and social institutions.

Chu offered a critical argument. However, I found that interviewing institutionalized girls made it possible to uncover how abusive police power, the judiciary and social institutions operate hand-in-hand to (re)produce miserable child prostitutes. Since Chu claims that we should be ‘sensitive’ to institutionalized social powers that previous research failed to reveal, it seems to me that it is necessary to put those powers under scrutiny. I see it as impossible to stop (re)producing miserable child prostitutes unless we analyze how social powers operate in these institutions. Moreover, interviewing girls in halfway centres, I found that the girls were not as docile as the government and/or some

radical scholars expected that they would be, subjected to the discipline of these institutions. On the contrary, the social discipline in some cases appears to produce more rebellious girls. As Ling-ling (now working as a bar-girl) reported, 'I was put into a halfway centre for 52 days. *So, I made up my mind to go back to work as a bar-girl! That's it! Exactly, that's it!*' (emphasis in the original).

Contacting and negotiating with halfway centres was also difficult. I tried to contact long-term halfway centres run by the government for almost one month, but I never reached the 'right' person. Hence, I approached short-term centres and finally got permission to conduct interviews in three halfway centres. One halfway centre is located in Taichung city. Most teenage girls who were reported in middle and south Taiwan would be sent there. The other two centres are located in the more under-developed east of Taiwan: Hwa-lian and Taitung. Actually the majority of indigenous tribes are gathered in Hwa-lian and Taitung. As indigenous tribes have been documented as selling their young daughters to brothels for decades (Senfleben, 1986; Hwang, 2000), interviewing teenage girls in Hwa-lian and Taitung served to examine how child prostitution is constituted at the intersection of gender, sexuality and ethnicity.

The girls I interviewed in the three halfway centres were aged from thirteen to eighteen years old. The majority of these girls were recorded as involved in commercial sex, and two of them are recorded both as involved in commercial sex and as victims of sexual assault (Pei-peï and Chiou-chiou). Moreover, interviews in halfway centres were carried out under the surveillance of the centres' staff. The staff in these centres picked out 'suitable interviewees' for me and mostly

decided the interview settings: where, when and how to conduct the interviews. According to the staff, picking out 'suitable interviewees' was important to keep the centres in order. They did not want any chaos and/or trouble after the interviews. The 'suitable interviewees' were girls who were considered to be 'calm' and were 'more likely to talk about their experiences'. Moreover, as my research was dealing with commercial sex, these 'suitable interviewees', according to the staff, were girls who had 'strong police records' to prove that they were involved in commercial sex. However, according to interviewees' self-accounts, most 'strong police records' are based on very poor evidence. Above all, girls in the halfway centres are a far less homogenous group than is commonly thought. They were different from each other in terms of how and why they came to be involved in commercial sex and the mode of prostitution in which they had engaged (Chapter 5).

## **2) Former Taipei licensed brothel workers**

Many empirical investigations into prostitution point out that it is very difficult to approach female prostitutes (Høiguard and Finstad, 1992; Ji, 1998; Necel, 2001). Therefore, researchers tend to work with support groups or drop-in services for prostitutes (Sharpe, 1998; O'Neill, 2001). I contacted the Collective of Sex Workers and Supporters (COSWAS) in July 2001 and got the contact information of some former licensed brothel workers.

Mei-yun has been very active since the beginning of the anti-abolition campaign. She was invited to give speeches in universities, to be interviewed by

journalists, and to give her testimonies at the city council many times. She proved herself to be a major figure of the anti-abolition movement in the interview. The encounter between former Taipei licensed prostitutes and the anti-abolition campaign indeed produced empowered sexual subjects. Only former Taipei licensed brothel workers use the term 'sex worker' to identify themselves. They are also very good at mocking mainstream society. For example, when I asked Lili if there were any bodyguards where she worked, she plainly answered 'No', while Mei-yun chipped in, saying, '*[O]h, we did have bodyguards. The police are our bodyguards!*' That was very sarcastic given the fact that prostitution is always stigmatized as being controlled by gangs and equated to violence. Women in prostitution are thus labeled 'victims'. I felt ashamed that my question was indeed a representation of this kind of mainstream gaze. Mei-yun gazed back. The gazing back not only implies a sexual subject who resists being gazed at, but also de-stabilizes the power relationship between the researched and the researcher. Indeed, through this kind of power struggle, I was able to re-examine my deep-seated perception of prostitution, and recognize the importance of the local knowledge of insiders. In this sense, reflexive research is possible and meaningful.

### **3) Special bars**

Working in a special bar is a popular way for young (usually eighteen to twenty-five) and beautiful women to engage in commercial sex. I had a personal contact through which to meet some bar-girls in the special bar *Pretty Girls*. The bar is located in an expensive and busy down-town area in east Taipei. It is on the



ninth floor of a business building. At the entrance on the ground floor there are four parking boys to help customers to park and show them directions. In front of the building there are taxis lining up to wait for clients.

When I told the parking boys that I had an appointment with a waiter, they looked surprised and phoned the waiter to make sure. I was taken to wait for an elevator. There were some office men already standing in front of the elevator and they chatted with each other. According to their conversation, after they left the office, visiting the bar was their 'second party' (*dih ell tan*)<sup>15</sup> after dinner. When we arrived, there were four waiters standing in a line in front of the elevator, who yelled 'Welcome, Sir.' There were four beautiful young girls who worked as 'leading princesses' (*ling tai*)<sup>16</sup> standing behind these waiters.

My friend recognized me immediately as I was the only woman and it is unusual for a woman to visit a special bar. He took me to a small air-conditioned cabin, in which there was a karaoke set, two small square tables, a comfortable sofa and a toilet. After sitting me down, he gave me a cup of tea, and brought five bar girls and a 'mammy'<sup>17</sup> into the cabin. Although it was the first time I had met

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<sup>15</sup> This is part of party culture in Taiwan. Usually business and/or office men have a dinner party together to have fun or to deal with business matters, even though in the latter cases, the major decision is not achieved in the dinner party as it is too 'formal' and too 'serious'. Therefore, these men will go to have, *dih ell taned*, a second party; visiting a special bar is the most popular way. They tend to think that the relaxed and sexual atmosphere in bars and the alcohol are very helpful in dealing with their business.

<sup>16</sup> The 'leading princess' usually stands in the lobby or near the entrance. Usually the bars will offer uniforms, similar to the cartoon Snow White's dress, for their leading princesses. Their jobs are taking bar-girls into cabins and introducing girls to clients. They do not need to stay in cabins to accompany clients, except when the bar is too busy.

<sup>17</sup> 'Mammy' is the managerial class in bars. Most Mammies are women who have worked as bar-girls for a few years and know clients very well. When they have enough clients and money, they promote themselves to work as a Mammy. Usually the majority of regular clients are introduced to the bars by Mammies. Mammies' jobs are arranging everything to please clients, including arranging commercial sex. Since mammies know the clients very well, they are quite powerful in the bars.

these girls, somehow they made me feel that we had known each other for a while. I also got the impression that I was being treated as a popular client in the cabin. Suddenly, I realized why Taiwanese men feel ‘mentally masturbated’ in special bars.

My first visit was during the women’s working hours, so the girls had to leave when customers came. Only one young girl, who had flu and asked to work as a ‘leading princess’ that evening, was able to talk to me for nearly forty-five minutes. The bar was quite busy, so all the girls in my cabin were called to see clients at around ten thirty in the evening. As most conversations were interrupted, I made appointments to interview them outside their workplace and working hours. The idea sounded very reasonable but it didn’t work.

Many girls agreed to be interviewed and gave me phone numbers without hesitation. There were so many different reasons that, however, made them fail to show up. I was informed that one was too drunk to attend the interview; one had to be with her family; one had to take her grandmother to see a doctor; one had dates with clients or friends. One young woman did not contact me to cancel the interview, so I was waiting for her at Shi-men-ding for one hour on a windy and heavy shower typhoon evening. My friend (the waiter) told me that ‘bar girls are very busy in the daytime, because they need to “date” clients’ in order to have clients visit bars regularly. Eventually, I was advised to visit bar-girls on a Sunday evening, because men usually have to spend time with their families and are not able to visit bar-girls on a Sunday. The strategy worked very well. Indeed, after interviewing Fung-fung and Ling-ling, I was invited to sit with the girls in their

common room. Therefore, I was able to observe girls' 'back stage' activities, and listen to their vivid conversations regarding their work.

#### **4) Tearooms and their settings**

Visiting female prostitutes in a tearoom is an old-fashioned form of visiting prostitution in Taiwan. It can be traced back to the late Ching Dynasty in the nineteenth century. Currently tearooms are concentrated in rural areas and/or old communities in cities to serve the working class and/or the elderly. Wan-hwa, west Taipei, is one of the most famous areas in which to find tearooms.

Although I knew there were many tearooms in Shan-shui Street in Wan-hwa, I had seldom been there before. (A reflection of geographic politics of the dichotomy of 'madonna/whore'.) One afternoon, between three and four, I went there and was surprised to see that soliciting was so open and visible. The scene made the city government's actions on cracking down on the sex industry ridiculous. The tiny street, probably one and a half metres wide and thirty metres long, looked quite busy in the afternoon. Some women were standing or sitting in front of tearooms waiting for clients. Men walked alone or in a group of two to three people, looking for women. Some men were soliciting on the street and kept their eyes on people who looked suspicious (like me). There were some people running small food stalls, such as noodle soup, sausages, fruits, and Chinese medicine that functions to cure impotence or strengthen men's sexual ability. I was a little nervous and scared when I walked alone on the street. Women and men stared at me as if I was an alien entering a place where I was not supposed to

be. I tried to make myself look at 'ease' and 'calm'; however, I was too nervous to build up a 'rapport' that afternoon.

I contacted the Association of Wan-hwa Tearooms and Restaurants<sup>18</sup> (AWHTR) to look for help. The office hours of AWHTR are from eight to eleven thirty in the evening, so I had a female friend to accompany me to meet the staff one evening. The association is surrounded by tearooms, so we had to pass three or four of them. When we entered the street again, women and men looked at us. The office was smaller than an academic office in the UK and there was only one door to it. Two men in their late fifties talked to us and both of them were much stronger and taller than my friend and I. We felt nervous, as it seemed impossible for us to escape if they shut the door and did something horrible to us. Indeed, it is the stigma of prostitution that made me see them as potential criminals, whereas they turned out to be very helpful.

One senior staff member of the association took us to see the tearoom owner of *Spring Flowers*. I explained my project to the woman and expected to conduct interviews there. She was probably busy answering phones and was not able to explain the details to the women. She just turned to the women saying, 'She wants to do some interviews. Help her. "Don't worry! <sup>19</sup>"'. I tried to explain the project to the women, but they kept saying 'No, no', and walked out. It reminded me of

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<sup>18</sup> The association was set up in 1997 against the city government's unreasonable regulations and license control. There were one hundred and fifty-three tearooms or restaurants which were members of the association at the time my friend and I visited. The staff told me that each tearoom has fifteen to twenty working women.

<sup>19</sup> During the time I conducted interviews, the Taipei city government was carrying out a project to crack down on sex businesses due to some police officers kidnapping Chinese migrant sex workers. 'Don't worry' means that I was not a spy sent by the police or TV program producers.

the advice of the association's staff: 'time is money for women'. Therefore, I paid to interview a tearoom worker. However, the interviewee was fully informed before I met her in a small cabin.

After the interview, we walked down the street again. I saw one woman smiling at us, so I explained that I was conducting interviews with 'working women'. She was offended and yelled at me '[C]ome on, I am not a streetwalker! Get out of here!' The yell caught some other women's and men's attention, and then people walked towards us. We had no other choice but to give up. A few minutes later, we stopped at a sausage station to have some sausage. I asked the man who ran the station whether the working women were his ordinary customers. He was annoyed, and asked without any hesitation '[A]re you not a working woman? Women who have jobs are working women, aren't they?' His straightforward answer embarrassed me. At that moment, I realized that there is a strong sense of community that guarded against any unfriendly gaze, and resists hostility towards working women in the street. Again, I was gazed back at.

### **5) Observations on the streets**

Approaching streetwalkers was both an exciting and frustrating experience. At first I tried to interview streetwalkers in Wan-hwa. But the cracking-down on sex businesses by police and the uninvited cameras of television programmes make it more difficult to find streetwalkers. My friend and I stood at the end of Goang-jou Street, five to eight minutes to Shan-Shui Street on foot, observing streetwalking between ten twenty and eleven thirty on a chilly evening. To our

surprise, there were just three women leaning on a wall and we were not sure whether they were streetwalkers. We did not see any business done during that hour however. We were surprised because both the staff of AWHTR and local police officers alleged that ‘there are a lot of streetwalkers in Goang-jou Street after ten in the evening’. I did not go back to Goang-jou Street, because I thought it was too dark and too late to conduct interviews there.

My sister-in-law suggested that I visit streetwalkers around the Taichung Municipal Park (TMP), because there are ‘many’ streetwalkers twenty-four hours a day. She alleged, with irritation, that many citizens, especially middle-aged mothers, phoned the Managerial Office of TMP complaining that streetwalkers were not only soliciting but also forcing their young boys to buy sex after dark. Men complained that streetwalkers ran after them; some elderly people even reported that streetwalkers robbed and/or beat them up. I was also informed that there was a tradition of streetwalking around the park. Usually a streetwalker, whether it is raining or not, holds an umbrella in her hand, so clients can recognize her easily. My sister-in-law had been mistaken for streetwalkers when passing the park with an umbrella on a drizzly afternoon. The way people talked about streetwalkers and the umbrella really interested me. In addition, the word ‘many’ seemed to be used frequently when people talked about streetwalking. As Chu (1998:19) argues, both ‘prevalent’ and ‘many’ are used sloppily in describing prostitution. Above all, these terms reflect a ‘moral panic’ of the public. It is a ‘deployment of power and sexual discourses’.

Bearing this understanding in mind, I decided to visit streetwalkers around

the park. One afternoon, I walked along Park Road. I saw a woman, probably in her early fifties, sitting on a corner to eat her packed lunch. At first, I thought she had simply come to visit the park. The cheap pink umbrella near her ankle caught my eye because it was a warm and sunny afternoon. Although holding an umbrella is said to be a symbol, it was the first time I had seen it.

I kept walking and saw a woman slightly touching an old man's arm and talking to him. The old man then walked away and muttered to himself. The woman then sat on the steps of a building. There was an empty juice can and pieces of tissue near her ankle. I was always anxious about how to start the conversation with streetwalkers because most researchers have problems defining the total population of prostitutes and difficulty identifying individual prostitutes. Nonetheless, I sat next to her and said hello and she smiled. She wore make-up and there were some lines around her eyes. I asked her 'how is your business?' She smiled and answered 'I am waiting for friends'. I briefly introduced myself to her, saying that I was collecting data for my Ph.D. dissertation and asked 'whether you knew anything about streetwalking in the area.' She waved her hands and kept saying 'No, no, no, I don't know.' Probably it was because call-girls and streetwalkers are frequently filmed by television crews without any consent; I was suspected as a reporter. Although I tried to convince her by showing my ID and university card, she refused to talk. Eventually, I was told '[D]on't bother me!'

I came to Ping-Deng Street to negotiate for interviews with another two women. One of them said '[Y]ou know, for us, time is money. We do not have time to talk to you.' Since money was concerned, I proposed to pay NT\$ 2,000 an

hour for an interview. The women waved their hands and left. I went down the street and negotiated with another two women, but I got the same answer. Although I was told that ‘time is money’ a couple of times, money does not seem to be the prime concern. The women on these streets were usually paid between NT\$ 800 to NT\$ 1,000 for each trick (including the hotel fee). Moreover, it was not peak hours on the street. Most women failed to pick up clients as it was near the end of January, while the majority of waged workers receive paychecks in the first week of each month. Hence, if money is the major concern, being interviewed is a ‘reasonable’ choice. However, women on the streets did not accept my offer. The most frustrating thing was that I turned around and looked down the street, and suddenly found that the whole street was empty and quiet. The women had gone away, and I was the only woman standing on the street. I felt very embarrassed because what I was doing turned out to be similar to police raids.

A few days later, I went to the intersection of Park road and Shyh-fu Road. There is a 7-11 (i.e. a shop) there. Three women, probably in their mid-fifties, sat on motorcycles that were parked in front of the 7-11. On the left-hand side of the 7-11, there were two young women leaning on the door of a building. The seventh floor of the building is a hotel. Compared to some other women on the streets, these two women looked much younger, more fashionable, and cool. Both of them wore expensive black leather jackets, blue jeans, and high-heels. They were quite skinny. One woman wore glasses and a little make-up, and the other wore fashionable make-up. I talked to the latter and she turned me down immediately, while the other woman angrily said ‘*[D]on’t just think about cracking down on*



*the sex industry everyday. You need to think about people who are making a living in the street.*' The narrative obviously was a reaction to a series of police raids, however, it also signaled that she wanted to talk about it. We kept talking for forty-five minutes until they were too tired to stand on the street.

It is said that prostitutes always dress gaudily, but it was not the case around the park. Some women dressed like ordinary housewives, some did not pay attention to it, while some younger women were more fashionable. However, I found that every woman has a small bag hanging on her shoulder. Therefore I put on my casual wear, a white T-shirt and jeans, and a small bag on my shoulder. I arrived at the park at about midday, there were only two women leaning on the wall of the 7-11.

I bought a copy of a newspaper in the 7-11 and went to the opposite side of it to read the newspaper. At this corner there were another two middle-aged women standing nearby. I noticed that some men were staring at me, but I just ignored it and pretended not to see them. I had decided that if men approached me, I would tell them 'Sorry, I am not working' and see what would happen next. Although I practised the scene a couple of times in my mind, I felt nervous standing alone. It reminded me of how Sue-lian told me that she felt 'too weird to stand on the street'.

A few minutes later, a man parked his motorcycle next to the place where I stood. After parking, he left. He came back later and stood in front of me; he stared at me, face to face, but did not say anything. He was probably also worried

about mistaking a ‘good woman’ for a ‘whore’. I felt scared, because he was quite strong. I did not want to get into trouble, so I walked away. I stopped at a traffic light, a taxi stopped in front of me. The driver smiled and stretched his forefinger to me. At first I thought he was asking me whether I wanted a taxi or not, so I waved my hand to him. He said that ‘All right, how about NT\$ 1,500.’ I then understood that he was ‘bargaining’ the price. I waved my hand again. He left. Hence, I got to know that I was worth NT\$ 1,500 on the street.

#### **iv) Transcribing, analyzing data and writing up**

As an in-depth interview is considered to be conversation between the research and the researcher (Kavle, 1996; Mishler, 1996), language appears to be a very important element. Moreover, feminist research claims to *enable the silenced to speak*; nonetheless, how far the written academic thesis represents the spoken *interviewees’ voices* is always a question. As Edwards and Ribbens (1998) argue, researchers should be aware that they are transforming interviewees’ spoken ‘private lives’ into acceptable written ‘public knowledge’ for academic audiences. Moreover, in many cases, the researcher and the researched are using different languages and/or speaking styles that represent one’s cultural, ethnic and social background. In many cases, researchers edit interviewees’ talk (deleting those ums, ers, and ohs, and adding commas, full stops etc.) in order to let them look tidy and understandable (Standing, 1998); while sometimes we keep part of the interviewees’ languages in order to make them more ‘authentic’ (Skeggs, 1994). Nonetheless, as Standing (1998) argues, using the researcher’s language to replace those languages of the researched not only signals the power of the researchers, but also erases the interviewees’ different social origins, different

cultures and different lifestyles. In a way, the more researchers tidy up the talk of the researched, the more we lose interviewees' voices.

In this study, I transcribed all the words, and the majority of the sounds and gestures on the tapes. However, the language 'problems' are much more complicated and multi-layered. Some interviews were conducted in Taiwanese, which does not have a written language. Hence, those conversations were transcribed into Chinese (i.e. Mandarin), and then translated into English. I always found that I was struggling in 'gaining conceptual equivalence or comparability of meaning' (Birbili, 2000) between Taiwanese and Chinese, and between Chinese and English. It should be noted that after translation into Chinese and/or English, some terms in fact do not make sense at all<sup>20</sup>. Moreover, the interviewees' (who were different in terms of age, gender, class, educational levels, ethnicity) diversity of languages were all reduced into my ways of writing English. In order to avoid '[taking] away their own distinctive ways of speaking' and making 'them all sound (or read) the same' (Standing, 1998:191), I carefully translated the interviewees' words into appropriate colloquial English. The study is thus a co-operative production of the interviewees and me. Interviewees used language and/or discursive constructions available for them to describe their experiences and social world, and I used the academic language and/or discourses available for me to analyze the interviewees' narratives. Hence, the women's 'experiences' (re)presented in the thesis are far from transparent, but always mediated by vague

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<sup>20</sup> For example, female interviewees frequently reported the experiences of '*pa-ching*' (i.e. being dismissed by clients). The term '*pa-ching*' is pronounced in Taiwanese, and is, indeed, only meaningful for Taiwanese sex workers, punters, and organizers of commercial sex. If it is translated into Chinese, it should be pronounced '*da chiang*'. Literally, it could be translated as firing the gun. However, this does not make any sense in Chinese.

and ambiguous language, particularly speech about sexual experiences.

Clearly, sex is one of the key issues in the field. Although talking about and performing sex acts is not a big deal for my interviewees, it appeared to be difficult for female interviewees to talk about those sexual encounters. The ways women described what happened in commercial sex was very vague and disembodied. In addition, some interviewees shyly used phrases such as '*what ordinary lovers did to each other*', or very vague terms such as '*doing that thing*' and/or '*being together*' to refer to the process of offering sexual services to clients. Moreover, bar-girls and young girls in halfway centres tend to use 'doing "S"' <sup>21</sup> to refer to their involvement of commercial sex. In fact, '*doing that thing*' and/or '*being together*' is commonly used by Taiwanese women to talk about having sex with their husbands or lovers. Only Sue-lian plainly used the term '*da pao*' (i.e. fuck) to refer to the things she did in the transaction. At the outset, it seems that there is not any difference between having sex with clients and doing it in non-commercial sex contexts. However, once we trace the details of '*doing that thing*', we find that there were different meanings and feelings hidden behind the same term (Chapter 6). It might be the lack of vocabulary to express our different sexual feelings and experiences (Plummer, 1995) that makes it difficult for interviewees to name the sex acts performed in commercial sex.

Above all, I was also struck by the ways young girls talked about 'sexual assault'. Ching-ching and Ting-ting calmly and (sometimes) laughingly described

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<sup>21</sup> It is interesting to note that I found that the term 'doing "S"' is commonly used in the sex industry, and the 'S' is always pronounced in English. See Chapter 4 below for the meaning of 'doing "S"'.

the processes as if those ‘sexual assaults’ had happened to someone else. This speaking about ‘sexual assault’ not only signals the various ways girls experience and understand forced sex, but also marks out how the discourse of ‘sexual assault’ is very much a ‘deployment of sexuality’ (Foucault, 1998[1978]). Indeed, after I heard Ching-ching’s and Ting-ting’s stories, the term ‘rape’ immediately slipped out of my lips, of course, with a lot of anger. Interestingly enough, Ching-ching replied ‘*Rape? I thought it’s just “sexual assault”<sup>22</sup>.*’” The reply struck me again. She obviously does not want to be named as a raped girl. In her understanding, the term ‘rape’ refers to more terrible and bloody cases. Moreover, she was using the language and/or discursive constructions that were available to her to describe what happened to her, while she did not know that ‘rape’ and ‘sexual assault’, in the adult’s world, overlap. The gap between my surprise and her calm is, indeed, very much about the fact that we have very different interpretations and understanding of non-consensual sex, and we use different language to name similar (if not the same) social encounters. (Sexual) experience is thus not always transparent, but always mediated by the language that is available for the social actors.

As methodological textbooks point out, how to describe and interpret the ‘data’ contained in interviewees’ accounts is one of the most important issues in conducting interviews (for example, Rubin and Rubin, 1995; Mason, 1996; Kvale,

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<sup>22</sup> There is a gender equal education campaign in Taiwan. Currently, primary schools and secondary schools, at least, have to provide a four-hour gender equal educational course in each semester. Moreover, anti-sexual harassment and anti-sexual assault are identified as important issues. Therefore, many schools use the four-hour course for inviting ‘experts’ to give speeches on these issues. Currently, the term ‘sexual assault’ almost replaces the term ‘rape’ in school. In fact, the term ‘rape’ was replaced by ‘forced intercourse’ in Taiwanese criminal law after 1999 in order to de-stigmatize sexual victims.

1996). I used a thematic approach to analyze my interview data. As this study is designed around a semi-structured in-depth interview, in which interviewees were all asked similar questions, I could follow the structured interview questions to process the coding. As Rubin and Rubin (1995:230) suggest, I repeatedly read all my transcriptions and marked any 'strange words' (such as '*pa-ching*<sup>23</sup>' and '*doing "S"*'), and repeatedly recurring terms and scenes reported by the interviewees. I was then able to identify the main themes of interviewees' daily lives as they emerged from my interview data. After identifying main themes, I carefully compared the differences and similarities of interviewees' reports in order to include diverse voices of my interviewees.

A striking number of female interviewees, for example, reported that they came from poor families and had worked in low-paid and low-status service jobs for a few years (see Chapter 5). I thus identified the relationship between prostitution and the gendered labour market as one of the main preoccupations of interviewees' lived world. Similarly, as many interviewees were very concerned about how to avoid '*pa-ching*', I was led to pay attention to the theme of 'dressing like a whore' (Chapter 6). I then was able to explore the different dressing codes or styles among former Taipei licensed brothel workers, young call-girls and bar-girls in a special bar. Most importantly, I could go further to analyze how these different dressing codes or styles relate to women's diverse experiences of being a sex worker. In this way, I was able to capture women's different voices. I am aware, of course, that other researchers with different training and backgrounds might identify different themes and thus produce a

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<sup>23</sup> See Chapter 6 below for the meaning of '*pa-ching*'.

differently-nuanced picture.

It should be noted that the existing theory regarding prostitution cannot satisfactorily explain the data I collected. Hence, as Skeggs (1994) argues, I draw on 'different theories, using them when appropriate, ditching them when not, reworking them to construct explanatory frameworks' (1994:82). In this way, it opens up the possibility of creating a dialogue between the data and existing theories, and makes it possible for the voices of the silenced and disadvantaged women to be heard.

## **II. Reflection on conducting interviews with female prostitutes**

### **i) Thinking from prostitutes' standpoint**

Compared with lesbians' non-existence in ontology (Stanley and Wise, 1990:32), prostitutes are stigmatized, marginalized, and criminalized as the other ontologically. These ontological positions make the majority of prostitutes' everyday lives an endless power struggle. Sandra Harding (1991) argues that people's different material experiences shape different world-views. Since the ruler always claims their knowledge as 'truth', their knowledge is doomed to be partial, perverse, and distorted. Thus, using women's lives as grounds on which to criticize the dominant knowledge can decrease the partialities and distortions of social life (1991:121). Indeed, my fieldwork experiences showed that the insider perspective provides important resources for theorizing prostitution.

The discourses of victimized prostitution treat prostitutes as vulnerable social existences. I more or less carried this ‘understanding’ into the field. However, some interview questions turned out to be absurd for my interviewees. For example, some interviewees were asked ‘[H]ow did you manage the different roles of being a mother/daughter/wife and of being a working woman?’ This question implies that female prostitutes may live in an entirely ‘different’ world, hence they might struggle to manage the different social roles imposed on them. However, most interviewees knitted their brows and looked confused. The ways some interviewees came to be involved in commercial sex are very much related to the ways in which they think about being a ‘good mother’ and/or a ‘good daughter’ (Chapter 5). Lili directly answered ‘[I]t’s not a problem at all!’ Indeed, I was embarrassed by the straightforward answer. Nonetheless, it explains the importance of thinking of prostitution from the insiders’ points of view. Most importantly, this kind of power encounter made me revise parts of my interview questions. The study in this sense is not *my* study, but a co-operative production between the researched and the researcher (Mishler, 1996).

In addition, understanding from these ontologically stigmatized, marginalized, and criminalized prostitutes’ perspectives not only serves to produce a less distorted understanding of prostitution, but also serves to revise feminist methodology. As prostitution is criminalized, it is extremely difficult to gain access to prostitutes. I showed earlier, I was always treated as a suspicious undercover spy sent by the police or the mass media. Above all, it is well documented that ‘snow-balling’ is a very useful approach to interviewing, but this is not the case in approaching Taiwanese sex workers. It might be because I did



not ‘immerse [myself] enough’ (Lee, 1998) in their lives. However, even though former Taipei licensed prostitutes worked together every day, they did not know each other very well. Indeed, the stigma of prostitution makes working women keep their distance from each other. According to Fung-fung:

[t]ut, you could never make friends here. Indeed, most girls who leave here and go on shore<sup>24</sup> won’t keep in touch with former colleagues. Yeah, most girls I know behave in this way. They seldom try to contact people whom they knew in bars. Once you go to shore, you can’t wait to cover up that you have worked as a bar girl. (*Fung-fung, 29, 3 years as a bar girl*)

The attitude ‘let bygones be bygones’ makes it very difficult to expect snow-balling when doing research on female prostitutes.

Apart from this, I concur with Lorraine Nencel (2001:86) that some feminist methodological concerns and understandings are unlikely to be met in doing ethnographic research on prostitutes. Both of us find that it is very difficult to talk about life history with working women. Nencel thinks this is because doing a life history ‘force[s] women to recognize what they are doing’ and it is painful, while I see it as one of the ways women manage their stigmatized sexual practices and the tensions between themselves and their families of origin. Indeed, former Taipei licensed brothel workers who have participated in the campaign against the stigmatization of prostitution are more likely to talk about their life stories. Young bar-girls eloquently talk about how they came to be involved in commercial sex,

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<sup>24</sup> In Taiwan, people use the phrase ‘going to sea’ (*shiah hae*) to refer to women who prostitute themselves. On the other hand, to ‘go on shore’ is a metaphor to refer to prostitutes who leave this profession.

while they find it more difficult to talk about their families because of the tension between themselves and their families. The tension mainly came from the fact that their families demand a great deal of money from them.

Reciprocity is assumed to be a basic ethical concern of feminist methodology (Stanley and Wise, 1990, 1993), but it is difficult to achieve in doing research on prostitution (Nencel, 2001: 82). As O'Neill (2001:50) put it, researchers are sometimes more like pimps who come into the field to take data and then go back to campus to build up their career. Studying working-class young women, Skeggs (1994:81) is also aware that 'I was building my future out of these women'. Indeed, the reciprocity issue does puzzle me. I felt extremely powerless and vulnerable because of my awareness that I could not make a difference to my interviewees' lives. Interviewing Sue-lian, a former Taipei licensed brothel worker, offered an example.

After the abolition, Sue-lian received a loan from the Taipei city government, and had been running a small betel-nut station since November 2000. She was treated as an important figure because she had given up prostitution and was running a 'legitimate' business. The experience of interviewing Sue-lian was very complicated. It was full of ambiguous and contradictory emotions. We burst out laughing when she talked about the ways in which she kept knitting a sweater or reading a comic when entertaining clients. Yet, the interview was extremely sad when Sue-lian talked about how difficult it was to run a betel-nut stall. I was deeply moved by a documentary film about former Taipei licensed brothel workers. It showed the illiterate Sue-lian struggling to learn how to use a

calculator. However, the betel-nut stall was always in a deficit, no matter how much effort she put into running the new business. Eventually, she sold her betel-nut stall because she could not afford the big loss, which had occurred for nearly nine months. Both Sue-lian and her boyfriend were unemployed when she was interviewed. In fact, according to her, her boyfriend 'has been unemployed for many years.' She looked very uneasy and upset when talking about financial issues. I could not bear to ask any question about money, because I really wondered whether a feminist researcher has the legitimacy to demand so much.

The majority of the interviewees suffered from systematic economic distress, which cannot be remedied by this research. However, conducting interviews with Taiwanese sex workers, talking and standing with streetwalkers on the streets, and observing how young bar girls were treated in a midnight police raid, I was aware that I was not simply an 'objective' data-collector or an outsider. There was a lot of anger, upset, shame, frustration, bitterness but it was sometimes very enjoyable and we had fun. Many interviewees were under-educated, so I was like a legal aid worker providing legal information regarding prostitution laws. This is quite helpful for young girls in the halfway centres. I also offered some tips for them to handle the staff of the halfway centres and the judges. Moreover, as life in halfway centres was 'extremely boring', some girls told me that they were very happy to talk to me. At least, 'it kills time!'

## **ii) Sexuality in the field**

Although sexuality is always the locus of research on prostitution, it is very rare that researchers, as sexual beings, mention their sexual feelings in the field.

Anthropologist Kulick (1995) argues that the silence of sexuality in fieldwork not only involves those ambivalent sexual feelings that might discredit the 'objective' research, it also serves to maintain the researcher's sexual identity and the hierarchy of researcher and researched. Therefore, researchers go to study the other's sexuality, while consciously disguising their own sexuality. Breaking the silence of sexuality functions:

*[t]o call into question the boundaries of self, threaten[s] to upset the researcher-researched relation, blur the line between professional role and personal life, and provoke questions about power, exploitation, and racism (Kulick, 1995:12).*

Recently, the trend of problematizing sexuality in the field has also been noticed by sociologists (Plummer, 2001). My ambivalent feelings in interviewing clients puzzled me for quite a long time. Due to clients' narratives, which gave details of their sexual encounters with working women, sometimes I felt very embarrassed and guilty about those interviews. Altork (1995) discussed her sensual feelings in conducting ethnographic fieldwork with firefighters. Although she was annoyed about firemen using masculine and sexual words to talk about fighting fire, she flushed when she was sitting among firefighters to observe their conversations and motions. Similar to Altork, I felt very angry and annoyed about the sexism and masculine ways in which punters described those sexual encounters. I did not 'fancy' those male interviewees, however, I did have sensual feeling about those graphically-described sexual scenes. In addition, I hesitated to report this due to being afraid of discrediting my research and of being accused of conspiracy with the 'enemy'. It should be noted that male interviewees were indeed quite interested in these conversations. I could not help but think that speaking about

those sexual encounters made it possible for them to reminisce and/or re-experience those sexual scenes.

Above all, I noticed that I was sexualized as a desirable streetwalker by the male gaze when I was walking around the Taichung municipal park. In the park, old people, sitting alone or in a group of three to five people, looked at me from head to toe as if I was a prostitute. The male gazes and whore stigma made me feel so awful that I buttoned up my coat to cover my waist. Being gazed at from head to toe as if I was a piece of meat in a supermarket made me understand why the majority of Taiwanese women are hostile to prostitutes. It did make me feel scared, awful and cheap. Above all, I found that there was a voice in my mind saying '[C]ome on, I am not a prostitute!' Indeed, I felt ashamed at feeling like that. Although I tend to think that research is an inter-subjective dialogue between myself and female prostitutes, the self still felt shame at being mistaken for the other. The other is still the other. They are pinned down to where they should remain. Taking these sexual emotions into account, the unproblematized self was interrogated.

The field indeed is a dynamic power site in which the research and the researcher negotiate with each other in terms of different points of view toward the social world that interested both the researcher and the researched. The researcher gazes at the researched; probing them, digging into their lives and even measuring them. On the other hand, the researched frequently exercise their inside and/or local knowledge to gaze back. The gazing back immediately put the researcher's unspoken, deep-seated, and/or unconscious assumptions about the

researched under scrutiny. As Callaway argues, reflexive research is ‘a continuing mode of self analysis and political awareness’ (quoted in Plummer, 2001:208). Reflexivity research does not come from heaven, but emerges from the dynamic power struggles between the researcher and the researched. Only when the self is put on the frontline and opened up to be challenged by the other, can the self recognize its partiality in the production of knowledge.

## Chapter 4

### Exploitation, autonomy and the organization of sex work

#### Introduction

Oppression and exploitation are major issues in feminist writing on prostitution. Feminist writings on prostitution not only make an effort to contest the myth of the 'male sexual urge', but also focus on the ways in which women's sexual labour is exploited and controlled by third parties in prostitution. In particular, pimping is strongly criticized by the majority of feminist writings, because it makes prostitution a profession which is very easy to enter, yet very difficult (if not impossible) to leave. For some radical feminists, such as Barry (1995), prostitution is equal to sexual exploitation. According to Barry, prostitution involving pimping constitutes sexual slavery (1995:199), while the other modes are sexual exploitation. Barry argues that:

*...all prostitution is sexual exploitation, and so every relationship that sustains it is abusive: with a customer, with a pimp or "my man", or with a boyfriend or husband. While degrees of abuse and ranges of affection may vary in these relationships, they all promote, aid, and encourage the sexual exploitation of women through prostitution (1995:218).*

This totalizing account does not try to examine the ways in which diverse prostitution settings shape sex workers' daily lives, and fails to analyze how different relationships among sex workers and the third party create varied social meanings for these sex workers. Barry does make a distinction between prostitution with pimping and that without, but the difference she identifies is

more quantitative rather than qualitative. Since all prostitution is sexual exploitation, prostitutes are thus all sexual victims; the difference is how much these women suffer. Such accounts create an image that exploitation is the nature of prostitution, but fail to analyze the relationships between 'miserable prostitutes' and the unjust state regulations which criminalize prostitution.

Recently some research has claimed that sex workers' oppression and exploitation should be carefully located in workers' varied daily working settings. This scholarship specifically points out that the ways commercial sex is organized has a great impact on sex workers' daily working conditions. For example, the anthology edited by Lim (1998) differentiates commercial sex which is 'organized' by sexual establishments from 'unorganized' commercial sex to analyze how South-east Asian sex workers face diverse working conditions. Similarly, O'Connell Davidson (1998:10) uses the 'employment' status of prostitutes and the contractual form of prostitute-client relation as two major axes to create a typology of prostitution. In 'organized' commercial sex, sex workers usually need to share part of their earnings with third parties (e.g. the owners of sexual establishments, pimps, *mamasons*, or taxi divers), and, in some cases, are subjected to the third parties' regulations. Moreover, research suggests that self-employed sex workers, particularly high-class independent workers, usually enjoy more freedom in controlling their own work (O'Connell Davidson, 1995b, 1998). However, streetwalkers and other low-ranking independent workers who operate in bars, cafés, and hotels are very likely to suffer from harassment by clients and the police (Jones et al., 1998). Above all, feminist literature has recently started to contest the definition of 'pimp', which frequently refers to



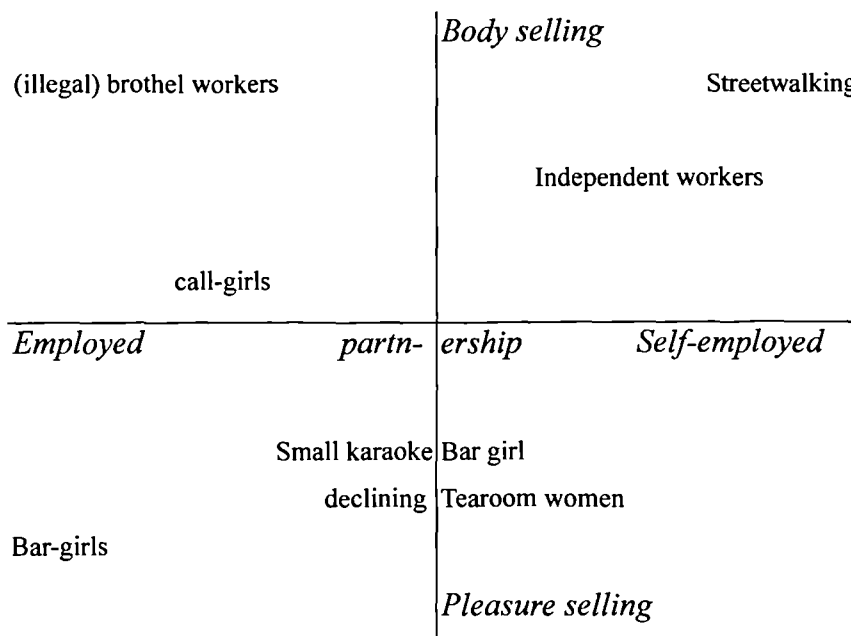
‘people who live off prostitutes’ earnings’, and pay attention to the elaborate heterogeneous social meanings behind the social practices of ‘pimping’. It is well documented that the definition of pimping usually mistakes sex workers’ boyfriends for pimps. Refusing a universal definition of ‘pimping’, O’Connell Davidson (1998) emphasizes the importance of locating ‘pimping’ in its specific social, economic, and cultural contexts. O’Neill (2001:161) even goes so far as to suggest that ‘pimping’ may reflect the ‘culture of resistance’ for ethnic-minority young men in declining urban areas.

My data, conforming to this scholarship, shows that the employment status of sex workers shapes heterogeneous working conditions among workers. Above all, it shows that there exists a middle way in which sex workers and the owners of sexual establishments are more like equal business partners, rather than having a hierarchical employee-employer relationship. In this middle way, the affiliated sexual establishments do not take any share from workers’ earnings; workers do not have any obligation towards the establishments. The declining traditional tearoom, small-scale and/or family-style karaoke bar offer examples. Most importantly, even though sex workers are employed, the shapes of employee-employer relationships are varied. Sex workers and their employers might develop different social relationships (e.g. family relationships, such as brother-sister or father-daughter) which blur the hierarchical oppression or exploitation. The relationships are far more complicated and diverse than so-called ‘pimping’.

Moreover, workers’ employment statuses in many cases are intertwined with

a very localized cultural practice in which sexual establishments are classified as ‘pleasure selling’ and ‘body selling’ in terms of the different services provided. Hence, it is very important to take this social and cultural practice into account, because the distinction between ‘pleasure selling’ and ‘body selling’ offers a referential framework of sex workers’ daily job content. Above all, as the ‘body-selling’ sector directly challenges the state regulations regarding prostitution, workers in this sector are much more vulnerable to police arrest. On the other hand, ‘pleasure-selling’ workers are covered by the affiliated sexual establishments to different degrees. Combining the distinction of ‘pleasure selling’ and ‘body selling’ and the ‘employment’ status of working women, I re-frame O’Connell Davidson’s typology of prostitution as shown in the sex-work dynamics diagram below.

Figure 1. Sex-work Dynamics



Instead of thinking of prostitution as a fixed and stable social organization of sexuality, the aim of the sex-work dynamics is to offer a framework to conceptualize heterogeneous Taiwanese prostitution settings and map out the complex relationships between workers' locations and their working conditions. For example, in many cases, brothel workers are located in body selling and usually employed by third parties. Nonetheless, the working conditions of licensed brothel workers are very different from those of illegal brothel workers. Similarly, although call-girls are usually classified in the 'body selling' sector, they are also expected to perform the emotional work demanded in 'pleasure selling' settings. Moreover, bar girls and tearoom women are all located in 'pleasure selling', but their working conditions are different in terms of the relationships between themselves and the third parties. I will discuss this later.

This chapter will also suggest that criminalized prostitution puts sex workers in extremely dangerous working conditions. The data shows that interviewees who choose to perform commercial sex independently and freely always expose themselves to highly risky situations; while those who seek protection from the third party appear to lose full control of their own work. In a way, criminalizing prostitution makes sex workers have to exchange safety for freedom. Nonetheless, not all the affiliated sexual establishments offer the same degree of protection to workers. In many cases, the bigger the sexual establishment, the stronger the protection offered. It is very likely that small-scale illegal sexual establishments usually provide very poor protection.

In order to locate the oppression and exploitation of Taiwanese sex workers

in its context, the chapter will analyze how the gendered state regulations, the cultural practice of differentiating ‘body selling’ from ‘pleasure selling’, and diverse employment statuses intertwine with each other to shape heterogeneous working conditions among the interviewees. The chapter will start by drawing on interview data, and secondary resources, to discuss the ways in which criminalized prostitution creates ‘miserable prostitutes’ and police corruption. I will then discuss how diverse forms of commercial sex are organized in the ‘body-selling’ and ‘pleasure-selling’ sectors respectively, and how sex workers face diverse power struggles in their daily lives. In the third section I will discuss the ways in which interviewees think about the distinction between ‘body selling’ and ‘pleasure selling’, and how this social practice makes sense of their involvement in Taiwanese commercial sex. Therefore, we might be able to see how the social oppression and exploitation of sex workers are embedded in a complicated web of power (which is composed of the gendered state regulations, the threat of undercover policemen, and the third parties), and to see how sex workers struggle to resist.

## **I. Structural violence against sex workers**

### **i) gendered legislation and abusive execution**

After the abolition of licensed prostitution in Taipei, it is commonly understood that Taiwan is heading for a prohibition regime in which prostitutes and those who are involved in organizing, managing, soliciting and pimping for prostitution are criminalized. Nonetheless, the prohibition regime only condemns prostitutes who sell sex to gain profit, but never criticizes men who pay for sex.

Currently, the major regulations regarding prostitution include criminal law, the *Social Order Maintenance Act* (SOM), and *The Act of Prevention Child and Juveniles Involvement in Commercial Sex*<sup>25</sup>.

Indeed, the criminal law does not criminalize prostitutes, but makes pimping, trafficking of women and children, running and managing brothels felonies (Article 231). However, the SOM criminalizes prostitutes and people who solicit for prostitution. According to Article Eighty of the SOM, '*those who intend to gain profit by having sex with people, or those who solicit, in public or areas the public could access, in order to prostitute or pimp for prostitution should be punished*' (my translation). Accordingly, prostitutes and people who solicit could be fined up to NT\$ 30,000 or detained for three days. After being booked three times in a year, prostitutes could be detained and sent to government-funded shelters for six months to one year.

The Article is infamous for its gendered ideology regarding prostitution, whereby punters are tolerated, while prostitutes are criminalized. Punters are only criminalized when buying sex from people under eighteen. In a way, seeking sex is acceptable, while offering sex in exchange for money is forbidden. Following this logic, it is no surprise that punters refuse to pay, and the police abuse prostitutes so commonly. Indeed, it is this gendered ideology that constantly produces 'miserable prostitutes'. In many cases, it makes sex workers suffer from repeated exploitation or oppression; e.g. it allows abusive punters to refuse to pay,

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<sup>25</sup> The act is used to protect children from prostitution and pornography. However, it is currently frequently used to censor all 'pornographic ads', and functions as a major instrument for the police to set up traps to 'fish' for potential targets. I will discuss this later.

tolerates the police using all kinds of unappealing strategies to arrest prostitutes, and generates police corruption (Ding, 1998; COSWAS, 1998; SFWW, 1998). Indeed, it does not matter whether the man involved in prostitution is a police officer or a punter. The prostitute is always the one who should be blamed.

The risk of being arrested by undercover police puts many sex workers in extremely terrifying working conditions. Nonetheless, the degrees to which sex workers take the risk of being harassed and/or arrested by the police vary according to their working settings. The police, for licensed sex workers, are considered as ‘bodyguards’ who protect them from being harassed by clients. Bar girls are also happy to report that ‘police raids’ are indeed very perfunctory. Conversely, sex workers who run their businesses independently or work in illegal brothels or call-girl services turn out to be soft targets for police raids.

Mei-yun had been working in an illegal brothel in Wan-hwa for a few months before applying to work as a licensed sex worker. Although ‘dodging the police’ was part of the daily routine in the illegal brothel, she was arrested twice during that period. She reported the ways undercover police set up traps to raid illegal brothels and how the women took risks to avoid being arrested:

*[w]e needed to hide indoors in an illegal brothel. The procuress would solicit for us. ...Usually policemen would pretend to be clients, so the procuress took them in. Most illegal brothels were raided in this way...Hey, they sometimes dressed like plumbers wearing slippers, shorts and even carried some tools with them. ...I usually wore shorts at that time. Umm, wearing shorts felt more convenient in case...you had to run to the roof [to avoid being arrested]. (Mei-yun, 61, ex-licensed sex worker, stayed in prostitution for 17 years)*

Dramatic hide-and-seek stories were widely reported by the interviewees who had worked in illegal brothels. Sue-lian described how she successfully *guided* a client (telling the police that ‘the woman hadn’t come in yet’) to help her to hide under the bed. According to Sue-lian, being an illegal brothel worker means ‘you should be able to adapt yourself quickly to the changing circumstances!’

Compared to other sex workers, streetwalkers who are visible on the streets are always treated as the representatives of prostitution, and thus much more vulnerable to police harassment. Ping-ping told me that streetwalkers were frequently scolded as ‘shameless women’ by police officers in public. The police would come daily to remove them when the government was cracking down on the sex industry. Ping-ping reported that she was hit by a car and was hospitalized for one month when she and other women desperately ran across the street to dodge the police. Last year several streetwalkers in Wan-hwa collectively complained to COSWAS that one local police officer had demanded a ‘protection fee’, NT\$ 5,000 per person per month, from each woman on the street (Zhan, 2002).

Recently, (trafficked) Chinese migrant sex workers have apparently become the most vulnerable group which has suffered from traffickers, pimps, and police corruption. The biggest scandal of its kind broke out when many police officers were revealed to be acting as gangsters to kidnap Chinese migrant sex workers, and then demanded a huge ransom from their affiliated sexual establishments (Chang and Hwang, 2001). Recently, Taiwanese smugglers even threw twenty-six Chinese women, destined for prostitution in Taiwan, overboard near Tunghsiao,

Miaoli County, as the smugglers tried to escape pursuing coast-guard boats. The action caused six deaths (Chang, 2003). The scandalous news shows that instead of cutting down trafficking on women, criminalizing prostitution, in fact, makes working women more vulnerable to the police and third party exploitation, and paves the way for police corruption.

In fact, it is criminalized prostitution that makes women have to seek pimps to work safely. Wei-wei explained why she gave up the opportunity of working independently, and turned to work with a couple who organize commercial sex on the Internet:

*The point was that you needed to find clients by yourself. ... There were so many undercover police. I really didn't know how to identify them. So, I thought I could go there to work with him, and let them take part of my earnings. He took 20% [cut], but he would protect my safety and screen clients. Because I also heard that some punters simply left without paying, you know...I then thought that since I wanted to make money, it would be all right. So, he was responsible for soliciting on the Internet and asking for payment from clients. He also escorted me to meet clients. It made clients understand that someone was taking care of this girl, so they wouldn't dare to hurt me. Oh, he also offered me meals and accommodation every day. (Wei-wei, 18, half a year as an [independent] call girl)*

Unfamiliar clients and the potential threat from the police highlight the danger of performing commercial sex independently. Having a man to take care of her would be a way to avoid violence from clients. After carefully calculating all the benefits and costs, she decided to work with the man. Although Wei-wei and other girls eventually found out that the third party could not offer any 'protection' at all, seeking a pimp is one of the available ways in which they react to the unjust



legislation which puts them in an extremely dangerous situation.

Nonetheless, it is important to note that the gendered legislation affects sex workers to different degrees in terms of workers' ages, and, most importantly, the legal status of their working settings. For example, in the name of 'protecting children', the instruction<sup>26</sup> for police raids documented that under-age workers are listed as 'prime targets' during police actions. In fact, Wei-wei was told by the police, '[W]e've been taking notice of you for quite a few days, because you are under-age.' In addition, as the Taiwanese sex industry is classified into 'body selling' and 'pleasure selling', workers in these two categories thus face different legal sanctions. The 'body-selling' sector is directly targeted by laws, while workers in the 'pleasure-selling' are less threatened by this legislation.

## **II. Forms of Taiwanese commercial sex**

### **i) 'Body-selling' sectors**

#### **1) Independent streetwalkers**

Streetwalking is probably one of the most well-known and oldest ways to run independent commercial sex in Taiwan. It seems that every city has a specific area where streetwalking is visible. The geographical phenomenon of streetwalking is well-known to the extent that both punters and the police know where to access streetwalkers, and women are aware of the need to avoid hanging around those areas. For example, Goang-jou Street and Kang-ding Road in Wan-hwa, Taipei,

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<sup>26</sup> The instruction was marked as a 'secret document' on the front page. I was not allowed to have a copy and/or take notes, but I was allowed to 'quick scan' it.

are (in)famous for streetwalking. In Taichung, streetwalkers stand around the streets surrounding TMP. The mayor of Tainan city government even named and shamed streetwalkers, who ‘occupied’ many streets surrounding the train station, giving a bad reputation to Tainan. The mayor, Tian-tsair Sheu, claimed that ‘in order to promote the image of Tainan as a metropolitan city, we shouldn’t allow those illegal prostitutes to roam around the streets’. He even went so far as to demand that the police should ‘disguise themselves to arrest prostitutes’ (Ling, 2002). Similarly, both the city mayors of Taipei and Taichung frequently announced that they would ‘drive pornography out of residential areas’. Removing streetwalkers efficiently is frequently considered as a means towards this political end. The Taichung city mayor, for example, claimed that streetwalking ‘disturbs the peace and order’ of the community, and demanded that the police should keenly interrogate and drive out ‘those women who stand on the streets’ (Chen, 2003). The way local governments deal with streetwalkers is just like removing rubbish: to wipe it away-- out of sight, out of mind!

McKeganey and Barnard point out that British streetwalkers tend to carry out work on street corners or in clients’ cars. Moreover, ‘because of the nature of prostitution and the fact that it is an illegal and stigmatized activity’ (1996:70) streetwalkers are regularly confronted with diverse violence on the streets, including name-calling, physical assault, rape and murder. Streetwalkers, of course, develop some strategies to avoid violence. For example, they tend to take control of the situation, use intuitive judgements to screen dangerous clients, avoid working at night, work with other women and even carry weapons etc. However, the authors consider that these self-protective strategies are flawed.

Violence therefore pervades workers' daily working conditions (1996:74-79).

Streetwalking in Taiwan is organized slightly differently. Moreover, I would argue that violence is far from the nature of prostitution, but criminalizing prostitution generates violence. According to Ping-ping's narrative, potential violence against streetwalkers mainly comes from the police rather than clients<sup>27</sup>. My observation of streetwalking was mainly carried out in the streets surrounding TMP. Two police officers who regularly patrol this area told me that the majority of streetwalkers in this area come from other towns or cities. Usually, women rent rooms in hotels and start to run '*wu ben sheng yih*' (i.e. business without any costs). Women charge NT\$ 800 to NT\$ 1,200 for each transaction. A few homeless streetwalkers even just charge between NT\$ 300 to NT\$ 500. These prices usually include hotel room rental. Therefore, according to the police, the earnings of homeless women 'only allow them to earn a rough meal and to take a shower in a hotel'. The relationships between the police and streetwalkers are always tense. Existing research shows that each side appears to tolerate the other; however, the police always let women know who is 'the boss'. Once streetwalkers cross the line, they will be arrested and charged (McKeganen and Barnard,1996:19; Sharpe, 1998:135-138; Benson and Matthews, 2000:249). In Taichung, the police station, located in the park, is directly opposite those streets where women usually hang around. Sitting in the police station, I could clearly see the women's movements by looking through the windows. It is not surprising that these police are so familiar with working women nearby to the extent that

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<sup>27</sup> Nonetheless, the phenomenon of under-reported cases regarding clients might relate to the fact that prostitution is criminalized and stigmatized. Reporting to the police only serves to reveal themselves as criminals. Therefore, the phenomenon might signal a structural silence that is socially oppressive rather than liberating.

they can easily identify which women are absent from the streets on any given day, and told me the work patterns of some specific streetwalkers.

Ping-ping, like other streetwalkers in this area, rents an en-suite room in a hotel that is located on the seventh floor of the building where she and other women wait for clients. The en-suite room was both her private accommodation and workplace. Usually she waits for clients on the ground floor of the building and then asks them to her room to do business. She normally charges clients NT\$ 800 to NT\$ 1,000 for each trick, and in most cases it can be done in fifteen to twenty minutes. The basic concern of this operation is that 'the hotel has clerks and waiters, so if there is an incident [when entertaining clients] I can yell for help. It's much safer.' Nonetheless, performing independent commercial sex is far from a '*wu ben sheng yih*'. On the contrary, Ping-ping reported that 'the rental is too expensive. It costs me NT\$ 20,000 per month. Outside this area it probably costs just NT\$ 6,000'. In addition, workers have to prepare condoms and other sanitary wares.

The Western literature widely records that streetwalkers are vulnerable to male-controlled pimping and drug abuse. The scene in which streetwalkers stand on streets and their 'men' watch from street corners to take care of them is commonly reported in western research (McKeganey and Barnard, 1996; O'Neill, 2001). However, Ping-ping and her friends told me that women in this area usually live alone and work independently. They kept shaking their heads when

asked ‘do you know anything about pimping here<sup>28</sup>?’ Ping-ping had been working as an illegal brothel worker in Wan-hwa and talked about the advantages of being an independent streetwalker in response to the question:

*[i]t's very free. No boss, and no one intervenes in [my work]. Those call-girls are extremely miserable, you know. They suffer from multi-layered exploitation. Bosses take cuts, taxi drivers take cuts, and there are a lot of regulations. We women, doing it in this way for a long time, couldn't get used to those call-girl stations again.*  
(Ping-ping, 36, one and a half years as a streetwalker)

Enjoying flexible working schedules and being free from any regulations is considered as the good side of being streetwalkers. Nonetheless, Ping-ping also reported that ‘you should take risks to run your business’. The danger however, as I showed earlier, is not from clients or gangsters, but systematic state power.

Apart from criminalizing prostitution, Article Eighty of SOM also criminalizes soliciting due to its being thought to pervert ‘social decency’. Currently, women can be charged with soliciting and/or intending to prostitute simply by standing on streets and bargaining over prices. Moreover, it is widely claimed that solicitation creates a hostile atmosphere and/or harassment against women and children in the community (for example, Tarng and Hwang, 1999; Chen, 2002). My observation on the streets found that *eye contact* is actually the major way for streetwalkers to contact clients in this area. In many cases, women

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<sup>28</sup> It is worth noting that Yenwen Peng's field notes regarding streetwalking in Wan-hwa show that some streetwalkers take care of each other on the streets. However, they also collaborate with other people who would introduce clients to them. Usually, workers charge NT\$ 1,500 for each trick and the introducers take NT\$ 500, which includes hotel room rental. However, workers are not controlled by these third parties.

even negotiate prices with clients by gestures in order to dodge undercover police. Moreover, it is usually clients who approach women on the streets rather than the other way round. Indeed, if it is not men who take the initiative to approach women, how can it be possible that ‘women and girls are harassed’. Ping-ping thus angrily asks: *‘how could we solicit along the streets, or “force” men [to buy sex]? People who yell loudly to run businesses in markets are actually soliciting!’* Ping-ping pointed out the difference between ‘waiting for clients passively’ and ‘soliciting actively’. The latter might be provocative and/or disturb ‘peace and order’; however, the former is usually operated with a low profile. As McKeganey and Barnard (1996) observe, some streetwalkers even dress like ordinary women to avoid police interrogation. Criminalizing soliciting will not diminish streetwalking, but makes streetwalkers more vulnerable while working independently. This is why more than five hundred French sex workers took to the streets to protest against the French government’s new bill which criminalized ‘passive soliciting’, i.e. touting for sex by any means, including by the use of dress or posture. As French sex workers claimed, this bill only functions to ‘expose them to dangers from unscrupulous customers or pimps’<sup>29</sup>.

## **2) Internet *yuan juh jiau jih* (i.e. mutual-sex-aid)**

The rapid development of high technology and the Internet has quickly applied itself to the social organization of commercial sex. Recently, posting small advertisements on Internet chat rooms to communicate with potential punters is

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<sup>29</sup> See, ‘French prostitutes rage against crime bill’, BBC NEWS, 5/11/2002, at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/2407817.stm>

becoming popular among young people. Indeed, checking into chat rooms on Yahoo! Taiwan, one might find many messages which read e.g. '[P]lease, give me an aid', '[L]et me undo your buttons' or as frankly as Wei-wei typed '[H]i, handsome, seeking a quick fuck?' Pan-pan even reported that:

*You don't need to solicit or say anything seductive. Punters would plainly type '[W]ant a fuck or not?' ...Tut, undercover policemen are very easy to identify. They always ask very boring questions. For example, they always start by asking you, er, '[H]ow old are you?' and then '[H]ow much do you charge' that sort of stuff. You then know he's a cop. (Pan-pan, 18, half a year as a bar-girl and [independent] casual call-girl for a few months)*

Clicking on these ads, we find that some ads are actually linked to the same e-mail address, the same mobile phone number, and the same contact person. Hughes (1999) argues that cyberspace has been one of the hottest sites for the sex industry to organize commercial sex around the world. The global sex market, moreover, is always intertwined with given gendered, racial and class inequalities, and deepens the gap and inequality between the first-world and the third-world countries. However, the anonymity of Internet users also makes it easier for (young) students and individuals to seek stigmatized one-night-stands and/or organize independent commercial sex. Apart from enjoying a flexible working schedule and being free from a third party's regulations, thanks to hightech, workers operating on the Internet usually enjoy better payment. Currently, Internet *yuan juh jiau jih* is so fashionable that a streetwalker in Wan-hwa (charging NT\$ 800 to NT\$ 1,000 for each trick) managed to learn how to use a computer and post ads on the Internet, and successfully 'raised' her price to NT\$ 2,000 or NT\$ 4,000 for each trick (Chen and Chang, 2002). In this study, Wei-wei, when

operating by herself, charged NT\$ 5,000. Pan-pan even charged NT\$ 5,000 to NT\$ 8,000. If the client 'dismissed' her, she still demanded NT\$ 1,000 for transportation fees.

With the legacy of the anti-pornography and anti-trafficking movement, the trend towards using the Internet to organize commercial sex and/or circulate pornographic pictures has been strongly condemned by some Taiwanese women's and/or religious organizations, e.g. *Taipei Women's Rescue Foundation*, *ECPAT-Taiwan*, *The Garden of Hope Foundation*, *Mennonite Good Shepherd Center* etc. The basic reasoning is that Internet porn sites are very easy for youngsters to access. These non-government organizations have successfully convinced the government to pass *The Act of Prevention Child and Juvenile Involvement in Commercial Sex*, which was enacted in 1995. The act not only criminalizes people who pimp, lure, use, or force children under eighteen to become involved in prostitution, but also criminalizes people who use any kind of media to 'circulate, broadcast, or publish that information which might lure or influence people to perform commercial sex with others' (Article 29, my translation).

The (in)famous 'anti-porn ads' clause, Article 29, is said to prevent children from accessing any pornographic materials which *might* lead youngsters to become involved in the sex industry. Nonetheless, it is so strict that posting a message reading 'looking for one-night-stand' (Tsay, 2002) could be considered as soliciting for prostitution. Thus, Ho (2002) argues that many police actions on cracking down on 'porn ads', far from preventing children's involvement in the



sex industry, constitute a concrete barrier to adults engaging in multiple sexual encounters.

Pressured by the NGOs mentioned above, local police stations keenly use the Article to hunt people who circulate similar seductive ads on the Internet. Usually, police officers sit in their air-conditioned offices checking into chat rooms, and then present themselves as 'desperate punters who crave a quick fuck' to 'fish' for potential targets (Chen, 2002). This kind of 'fishing' is much easier and safer than waiting for call-girls, who are usually escorted by a third party, in front of hotels. The police usually focus on soft targets, e.g. independent workers, underage workers, inexperienced and/or first-time casual workers, and make appointments to meet them in order to arrest them. Compared to other work performance, the police are extremely efficient and show a good record in dealing with 'anti-porn ads'. According to the statistics of the Ministry of Justice, 178 people were prosecuted under Article 29 in 1998. The number of people who were prosecuted in 1999 rose to 345. The newest statistics show that 1,344 persons were prosecuted in 2002. However, many cases were dropped due to police abuse in executing the Article and/or violating the due process of law when enforcing Article 29<sup>30</sup>. Many young girls 'protected' in halfway centres were indeed victims of this abusive enforcement.

Although soliciting on the Internet is highly risky, it is still very popular among young girls. Wei-wei, Pan-pan, Ching-ching, and Ting-ting were recorded

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<sup>30</sup> There were only 60 and 165 persons who it was decided had committed the crime in 1998 and 1999 respectively. However, there were 1,116 persons who committed the crime in 2002. It seems as if the courts are tending to tighten up the 'anti-porn ads' clause. See, [http://www.moj.gov.tw/f7\\_frame.htm](http://www.moj.gov.tw/f7_frame.htm)

by the police as committing 'Internet *yuan juh jiau jih*'. As they were all under eighteen, in the name of 'protection', they were sent to halfway centres for care after their cases were reported to their school or they were directly arrested by the police. They were all charged with 'performing Internet *yuan juh jiau jih*'. Although their narratives were very different, independent call-girls, runaways, and victims of sexual assault were put under the same rubric. Among them Ching-ching and Ting-ting (both aged 14) were more like sexual victims than child prostitutes. According to their personal accounts, they checked into the 080-chatroom on Yahoo! Taiwan seeking to 'make friends' and expected some 'romantic' encounters on the net. They later dated two young men in a primary school. Instead of having a 'romantic encounter' they found that '*that thing* [sex] *was done*' to them. However, they were also charged with 'performing Internet *yuan juh jiau jih*' due to their rapists leaving some money for them. The logic of the police officers is rather straightforward: since both money and sex were involved, it was considered to be commercial sex rather than rape. It is very important to note that Taiwanese criminal law does not recognize children under sixteen as sexual subjects who are able to 'consent' to being involved in any sexual relationship. Thus, having sex with children under fourteen is treated as rape. Parents and/or guardians of children aged between fourteen and sixteen have the right to decide whether to prosecute people who have sex with their children (Deng and Chen, 2000). Paradoxically, children under sixteen are not apparently equipped to consent to sex, but they can be considered to be engaging in commercial sex!

Apart from this, Wei-wei offered a typical story of police 'fishing' on the

Internet:

*We posted 'lovely spicy girls, only 17 years old' on the Internet. One guy responded to the ad saying that he was very busy and couldn't come up to Tao-yuan and wanted us to go down to Taichung. He would pay NT\$ 50,000 for two hours. We thought it was a good deal, so my brother [the organizer of the call-girl service] drove me down. ...The first sight I had of him [an undercover policeman] I intuitively felt something weird. He drove me in the car and looked for a cash machine to withdraw money. He asked me 'Oh, you charge NT\$ 50,000 for two hours. It's easy money, isn't it? How much do you earn per day?' I replied that 'Umm, this is my privacy. It's not necessary for me to see every client who wants me. The point is what kind of client I want to see.' He was tape-recording me at that time, but I had no idea about it. Anyhow I didn't talk too much to him. On the way to the cash machine, there was a police check-point. In fact, that was their trap! The police at the check-point told me that the man [undercover policeman] was a criminal wanted by the law! They then took me to a police station. They pretended to yell at that man and pulled him into another room. I was so scared. I had no idea what was going on. A policeman then asked me 'Did you know he is a wanted criminal?' and 'What are you up for?' I said we met each other on the Internet. He then warned me that the man had already told the truth; if I didn't tell the truth I would get into trouble. I hadn't any other choice but to admit it. I was then sent here immediately. It was really horrible, you know. (Wei-wei, 18, half a year as an [independent] call-girl)*

Being trapped, yelled at and then threatened by the police to confess to performing Internet *yuan juh jiau jih* is commonly reported among young girls in halfway centres. Young girls told me that police always *assume* those runaways (of course, only girls are targeted) who hang around the streets after 10pm are prostitutes. Girls reported that they were taken to the police station and then had '[Y]ou're doing *yuan jiau*, aren't you?!' shouted at them. Many girls, in fact, were

not arrested because they were carrying out commercial sex, but were arrested based on forced confessions. Pan-pan, for example, was stopped by the police in Taichung city centre around 10:30pm. She was quickly revealed as a runaway and was severely interrogated in a police station. After being interrogated for five to six hours, she was too tired to argue with the police. She was forced to confess that she had been performing Internet *yuan juh jiau jih* due to the police threatening, '[Y]ou won't be able to leave here, if you don't admit it!' Young girls' innocence and lack of legal knowledge were so exploited by the police that similar stories were repeated many times. Another two runaway girls, who were never involved in commercial sex, told me that the police persuaded them to 'confess to performing *yuan jiau*', therefore they could be kept in halfway centres rather than being sent back home. The abusive execution of the 'anti-porn' laws is indeed far from offering protection to these young girls, but makes them more vulnerable to abusive police power. Moreover, this clause is hardly useful for handling those organized criminals who traffick women and children, because it is exercised selectively. As girls in halfway centres report, '*[I]t's so unfair that only girls are arrested, while men [their bosses and punters] never get into trouble!*'

### **3) Employed call-girls**

Apart from workers who solicit independently on the streets and/or the Internet, organized call-girl services are very well-known in Taiwan. Recent research (Shiah et al. 2002:27) suggests that call-girl services could be traced back to 1969 when sex workers in Bei-tour were delivered to hotels by motorcycles. Wei-wei, Xin-xin, Chen-chen, and Chia-chia all had the experience of working for

call-girl services. Usually, these call-girl services are organized by the so-called 'pimps' who live on prostitutes' earnings. Call-girl services are varied in terms of scale and prices to cater to diverse clientele. In this study, the four interviewees all worked for very small-scale call-girl services where the numbers of employees varied from two to seven. However, there are well-organized and large-scale call-girls services which provide more than three hundred call-girls for upper-class clients (Kong and Lee, 2001). It is important to note that the call-girls in my study were all under eighteen, and were arrested by undercover policemen who 'fished' either on the Internet or waited for quite a long time in front of shabby hotels. Apart from Wei-wei, the other three interviewees were forced to confess due to their clients being terrified by the police and giving evidence against them.

Usually, these service organizers post small ads in newspapers to recruit workers. As running brothels and pimping are felonies, these ads are usually very simple while functioning well to communicate with potential targets. They might plainly read 'girls wanted', 'earning NT\$ 10,000 daily', and sometimes 'no experience needed' is added. Xin-xin and her friend, for example, responded to a 'girls wanted' ad that meant 'they're actually doing "S"!' Xin-xin reported that they had a job interview, with a man who was then their 'boss'. It was very straightforward. They were briefed on the job content, obligations, the ways commercial sex was organized, and how the 'boss' would make an effort to 'protect' them from arrest.

As Wei-wei's narrative earlier showed, many call-girl service providers are

responsible for soliciting, arranging taxi drivers to escort girls to hotels, collecting payment from clients, and some providers also offer meals and accommodation for workers. Being escorted by the third party does not guarantee safety; however, it gives workers a 'sense of security', as Wei-wei claimed. In addition, the collection of payment in advance by the third party increases the possibility of confining clients to a specific sexual contract. As Chen-chen put it, if a client refused to use condoms, she would just leave because 'I have no loss as the money has already been collected' (with a smile). On the other hand, call-girls are expected to perform services ranging from forty minutes to an hour. Most importantly, they have to share part of their earnings with these service providers. Among these four interviewees, their 'bosses' charged clients from NT\$ 2,500 (Chia-chia, operating in rural county Hwa-lian) to NT\$ 7,000 (Wei-wei, operating through the Internet) per trick. The percentages their 'bosses' took from their earnings also varied from 20% (Wei-wei) to 60% (Xin-xin and Chen-chen).

According to Taiwanese legislation and/or feminist anti-prostitution campaigns, people who take a cut from prostitutes' earnings are called 'pimps'. However, the ways in which call-girls considered the relationships between themselves and the third party were quite heterogeneous. Indeed, the percentages of earnings taken by the service providers are one of the major indicators by which interviewees think about their relationships with the third parties. For Wei-wei, the 20% cut is 'fair enough'. The relationship between her and the couple was far from a hierarchical employer-employee relationship, but an equal partnership. Unlike other call-girls, she called the man 'brother' rather than 'boss'. Above all, Wei-wei enjoyed the rights to choose clients, freely control her

working hours and the services provided, and ‘was not pushed to see more clients than I expected’.

Compared to Wei-wei’s ‘good luck’, the other three call-girls entered an employer-employee relationship with their third parties. They did not have free accommodation, and were required to arrive at their ‘companies’ around late afternoon (3 to 4pm) to wait for ‘cases’. Sometimes girls would hang around iced-tea bars and wait for their ‘bosses’ to ring their mobile phones to take ‘cases’. As call-girl services are illegal sexual establishments by law, workers of course are not able to enjoy any social benefits. Girls reported that long working hours on busy days were demanded by these ‘bosses’. In addition, ‘betrayal’ by the third party was also widely reported. Chen-chen and one of her colleagues were taken to a hotel to perform ‘*double play*’ (i.e. two girls serve a man) without any information in advance. Chia-chia’s story marked out another extreme in which trafficked prostitutes suffered from severe control and exploitation by the third party. As the call-girl station only had four workers, she reported that she was forced to see more clients than she could manage. Most of all, in order to keep ‘newcomers’ working for the call-girl service as long as possible, her ‘boss’ even arbitrarily deducted from her earnings. She could not bear the resentment towards her ‘boss’ reporting that:

Chia-chia: *The boss gave me NT\$ 1,700, but he usually charged clients NT\$ 2,500 to NT\$ 3,500.*

Mei-hua: *Did you think it was fair?*

Chia-chia: (shaking her head) *How can I explain, we ...tut, he deducted money from our earnings. I don’t know why. Maybe he worried that we would run away or something, so he deducted*

*half of our earnings before we turned out twenty tricks. For example, if you did it seven times a day, he only gave you the money for three tricks. ...I did 17 times and was caught by the police on the fourth day. I felt relaxed when I was arrested in a hotel.*

Under-age call-girls are usually very helpful when soliciting clientele for the call-girl services. However, young girls eventually find that their young ages, in many cases, turn against them. Xin-xin and Chen-chen, for example, only took 40% of the earnings for each trick. The rationale, quoted from Xin-xin, is that *'[H]e said we were too young, so he couldn't help. The company would take a higher share of our earnings'*. Under-age call-girls were more exploited because *'it's too risky to hire girls under eighteen'*. In a way, the strict anti-child-prostitution laws, which are supposed to protect children, make under-age girls more vulnerable to the third party's exploitation.

Apart from the low percentages of payment, the most irritating issue regarding the third party is the flawed protection that allows interviewees to be arrested and/or 'fished' for by the police. Wei-wei told me that her 'brother' would check clients' IDs and/or the National Health Insurance cards<sup>31</sup> in advance to screen clients. (Obviously, it does not work properly.) Meanwhile Xin-xin reported that her 'boss' promised that she would not be exposed to police raids:

*[During the job interview, he said]...he wouldn't ask us young girls to 'go out'. It means going to a hotel or a motel to see clients. ...He said he would arrange regular clients to see us young girls in the*

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<sup>31</sup> Indeed, punters in this study also reported that call-girl service providers demanded to check punters' ID cards or National Health Insurance cards, which recorded the occupations of card holders.



*company's en-suite rooms. And those rooms had two doors, so we could easily flee during a police raid. Yeah, but, you know, he asked me to go out to see clients after I started to do it, two or three days later. It was very rare for me to see clients in en-suite rooms. I probably just saw clients there once or twice...And, he didn't run it carefully, so I was arrested by undercover police in front of a hotel.*  
(Xin-xin, 16, casual call-girl)

The 'two doors' en-suite rooms could hardly provide protection during a police raid. Surviving safely in these circumstances, one would have to have a great deal of luck. Interviewees more or less sensed that the 'protection' was quite flawed. Therefore, apart from Chia-chia, who claimed she 'felt relaxed' after being arrested, other call-girls all moaned that they were 'out of luck in the first place!' Moreover, as pimping is a felony, interviewees eventually found that their 'business partners' and/or 'bosses' not only failed to protect them, but also left them alone to face a police inquiry. Wei-wei angrily talked about how the police selectively tolerated pimps, and how 'selfish' her 'brother' was:

*[h]e drove me down to see him [undercover policeman], but he wasn't arrested. Yeah, I was wondering why he wasn't arrested. After I came here, many girls told me that it was very rare that men were arrested. It's very unfair, you know...I was sent to a police station, while he drove back to Tao-yuan. I phoned his mobile phone, he simply asked 'Did the police know the whole thing?' I felt I was so valueless, you know! Anyhow, everyone is selfish. You couldn't blame them, could you? (Wei-wei, 18, half a year as an [independent] call-girl)*

Similarly, Xin-xin also rang her 'boss' after being taken to a police station. Her 'boss' did come to the police station, 'but he just talked to the client and then left.' 'He didn't even dare to look at me!'

#### **4) Employed licensed brothel workers**

Licensed brothel workers are the only legalized prostitutes in the 'body-selling' sector. Taking licensed prostitution in Taipei for example, according to the *Act of Management of Taipei Licensed Prostitutes (1973)*, the brothel owners applied for brothel licenses from the city government. The brothel license could not be transferred to, inherited by or rented to another person. It is valid until the owner dies, unless the brothel breaches the law. Workers applied for licenses from the Taipei City Police Department. Applicants had to be: either over 20 years old or those who are aged between 18 and 20 should have a guardian's consent; they should be without a spouse; non-disabled and without sexually transmitted diseases or contagious diseases (Shiah et al. 2002: 22). According to the statistics of the National Police Administration, after the two-year extension of Taipei licensed prostitution ended on 28 March 2001, there were 23 licensed brothels and 119 licensed brothel workers in nine other cities (or counties) (Lu, 2001). As the abolition of Taipei's licensed prostitution had been extremely controversial, these local governments decided to wait for licensed brothels to decline rather than following Taipei's footsteps. In the interviews, three former Taipei licensed sex workers were interviewed.

The regulation presents itself as a compromised social design; i.e. prostitution is a 'necessary evil', therefore only women who are outside heterosexual marriage, either refusing to enter into it or abandoned, could be licensed. The logic is that women are either 'good wives' or 'prostitutes'. This 'staying single' clause apparently creates 'inconvenience' for licensed sex workers. Both Sue-lian and Lili are single and have never been married. Although Sue-lian

had a long-term relationship with a man for twenty years, they did not get engaged until 2000, when her license was revoked. Mei-yun was abandoned by her husband, while stuck in marriage for quite a long time. She had to fight with her ex-husband to obtain a divorce, and then managed to apply for the license.

Although licensed brothel workers work in and for the brothels, the relationship between the brothel owners and the workers is far from a hierarchical employer-employee relationship. The former licensed brothel workers in this study report unanimously that no-one decided their work for them. They could freely decide their working schedule, choosing clients, the service provided etc. '*[W]e're free from control*' and '*[I]f there is any violence, we could call the police*' were frequently repeated during the interviews. The only material relation is that the brothel owner would take a 30% cut from workers' earnings. Workers' earnings were calculated by time. Each session lasts fifteen minutes, which costs a client NT\$ 1,000. Moreover, the three interviewees tended to consider the 30% cut 'to some extent is fair', because the '*[W]omen only had to prepare dresses and cosmetics. The other things were all prepared by the managers. These things included jelly, tissues, condoms, beds, sheets, water and meals*' (Quoted from Lili). In addition, the brothel owners should be responsible for hiring managers and cleaners to keep the brothels functioning well.

Licensed prostitution is usually a way for the state to control sexually transmitted diseases. Therefore, licensed sex workers are represented as the origin of STDs and unilaterally compelled to undergo regular medical check-ups (Järvinen, 1993:62). However, the three licensed brothel workers in this study

tended to reckon this policy is good for them to monitor their own health. Mei-yun talked about the differences between working in licensed brothels and illegal brothels:

*It is much better to be a licensed prostitute. You have to worry about the police and horrible clients in an illegal brothel. You could phone the police if you got horrible clients. Neither do you have to go for medical check-ups regularly. Licensed prostitutes have to have medical check-ups every month. You get a blood test every two months and have an X-ray photo taken every six months. (Mei-yun, 61, ex-licensed sex worker, stayed in prostitution for 17 years)*

Undergoing regular medical check-ups, just like being legally protected by the police, is considered to be the good side of being a licensed brothel worker. Indeed, according to the statistics of the Taipei City STD Control Center, the percentage of infection of STDs among licensed brothel workers is much lower than among illegal sex workers (see Table 1. below). Above all, these three interviewees also proudly reported that they were registered as voluntary workers at the STD Control Center, and their work involved circulating condoms and giving advice regarding regular medical check-ups to streetwalkers in Wan-hwa.

**Table 1. Percentages of Infection of STDs among Sex Workers in Taipei**

Year	Licensed Brothel Workers						Illegal Sex Workers					
	Syphilis		HIV		Gonorrhea		Syphilis		HIV		Gonorrhea	
	Number of blood tests	% positive	Number of blood tests	% positive	Number of blood tests	% positive	Number of blood tests	% positive	Number of blood tests	% positive	Number of blood tests	% positive
1991	1073	0.8	1073	0	5756	7.3	313	31.3	Unavailable		316	12.3
1992	1038	1.3	1038	0	6851	5.3	597	27.8			561	9.4
1993	1101	4.0	1101	0	7382	4.2	1436	27.0	1436	0	1410	7.2
1994	1048	1.7	1048	0	6805	2.5	903	26.9	903	0.6	894	6.5
1995	941	2.0	941	0	5915	1.7	517	12.8	517	1.4	412	2.2
1996	949	0.8	949	0	6454	1.0	576	18.6	576	0.5	357	2.5
1997	527	0.6	527	0	3682	0.9	572	21.9	572	0.17	325	3.1
1998	Duration of abolition						628	16.4	628	0.48	448	1.3
1999	2084	0	2084	0	2084	0.3	966	19.9	962	0	396	1.5

Source: The Taipei City STD Control Center, quoted from Sheu and Chen, 2000:72.

### 5) Just 'doing that thing'

Providing sexual services in exchange for monetary reward is, of course, one of the remarkable themes of the 'body-selling' profession. In this category, providing explicit sexual services, by using hands, mouths, and intercourse etc., to clients is treated as common ground for these sex workers. As providing explicit sex underlining the 'body-selling' profession, sex workers' main concern is how to get clients to orgasm as soon as possible.

*[w]e tried to...make them come as soon as possible when we were together. If we couldn't make them come quickly, we would suffer from working more time on it. (Lili, 52, 15 years as a licensed sex worker)*

*[w]e simply did what ordinary lovers do to each other...I charged NT\$ 5,000 per hour, but clients were only allowed to do it once in an hour. Usually [we] let them come in ten minutes. After they finished it, we would just leave. (Wei-wei, 18, half a year as an [independent] call-girl)*

Similar narratives came up many times. As Xin-xin reported, '[N]o-one is so stupid to want to do it longer'. Since to 'let clients come as soon as possible' is a concern, some interviewees reported that sex workers should be equipped with some specific sexual skills to achieve this aim. These sexual skills identified by interviewees range from performing specific sex acts, presenting themselves as 'chaste' to making an effort to make noises, and, if necessary, faking orgasm. Conversely, it is a problem if clients could not 'come' in those sexual encounters. Licensed brothel workers reported that most disputes between them and clients concerned this.

Employees of call-girl services were expected to perform a set of

standardized sexual services to clients. Many young call-girls were expected by their bosses to provide a series of sexual services to clients, i.e. taking showers, (licking clients' chests,) offering oral sex, and ending up by offering intercourse. Actually, the punters (Lee and Soong) in this study also reported that some saunas conduct satisfaction surveys on clients. Clients were given a check list to see whether they were provided with a series of sexual services. The result of this survey is used to measure and control the performance of sex workers, and calculate workers' payment. Compared to this standardized sexual service, independent call-girls are allowed more flexible working processes. Wei-wei, for example, always communicated with clients on the phone and clearly told them that *'[T]here would be no taking showers [with clients], no oral sex, no anal sex, and they must use condoms.'* The extreme case of offering standardized sexual services could be found in the activities of former licensed brothel workers.

Sue-lian was one of the few interviewees who clearly described the scenes of the process of turning out a trick. Usually, she stirred Feisudemei into water to make up disinfectant to wash clients' genitals in order to avoid sexually transmitted diseases. After this preliminary job, she reported as follow:

*[u]sually a man came in and lay down on the bed. I would rub his dick. He then got a hard-on and then I let him penetrate. That's it. So, I didn't have many clients. (Sue-lian, 41, ex-licensed sex worker, stayed in prostitution for 28 years)*

Washing the penis, rubbing it, erection, and then penetration indeed is a very common narrative among former Taipei licensed brothel workers. Commercial sex here is so standardized that male sexuality here is considered as nothing but a

series of stimulate-respond bodily reflexes. Indeed, Sue-lian's description is actually identical to Stewart's (2002 [1972]) first visit to a brothel worker. However, he felt the whole thing was far more bizarre, being humiliated and manipulated, rather than sexual. Ho (2000) pointed out that this standardized service functions to de-sexualize the sexual encounter. As Sue-lian jokingly put it, '[W]e are sort of doing manual work'. These sexual services were de-sexualized to the extent that Sue-lian could ignore the existence of the clients:

*[s]ometimes I even kept knitting a sweater when a man was fucking me. (laugh) Yes, it's true. ... Sometimes I would read a comic when clients were fucking me. But, you know what, he was moving on my body all the time, so the comic would jump up-and-down in front of my eyes. That really tired my eyes. (he, he, he..) It's true. I did it. (Sue-lian, 41, ex-licensed sex worker, stayed in prostitution for 28 years)*

If it was a 'sexual' encounter, it was an alien one. The scene described above is more like a postmodern parody rather than an erotic sexual encounter. It helps us to understand why so many clients complain about sex workers' bad performances or blame them for being cool or heartless (Høigård and Finstad, 1992; O'Connell Davidson, 1995a). It is precisely the de-sexualization of these encounters that opens up a space for working women to differentiate 'sex as work' and 'sex for fun' (see Chapter 6).

## **6) Sounds sexy; acts high**

Apart from mechanical manual labour, 'body selling' is very sexual to the extent that all the interviewees in this category reported that clients demand that they fake an orgasm or make some 'sexy noises'. Moreover, most of them tend to

fake it because it ‘turns on clients’, and thus they could finish the whole thing as soon as possible. Interviewees responded to whether they faked orgasm during commercial sex:

*[c]lients prefer girls who are very...feminine. The more feminine a girl is, the more popular she is. ...I mean...when you do that thing ... some girls will be...more feminine, you know. So, we intended to make ourselves more feminine and make those very ... sexy noises (laugh). (Pan-pan, 18, half a year as a bar girl and [independent] casual call-girl for a few month)*

*[e]ven though you didn't have an orgasm, you would pretend you did. Umm, If I didn't have an orgasm, I would still pretend I had one. Making a noise like, 'A~, A~...' (smile) Umm, I mean...pretending you are extremely high. That turns men on. You just need to make an effort to make noises. (he, he, he..) Oh, you may say something like 'Yeah, come on, don't stop.' That makes them feel that they are very strong and they throw themselves into it. Men get very excited when they see it. Yes, we did it, because ... if you could satisfy him, you could then catch his purse. (laugh) (Wei-wei, 18, half a year as an [independent] call-girl)*

*Oh~ we did. ...Some sick men tended to ask you 'why didn't you have an orgasm?' 'Tell me how did you get that orgasm? Let me help you.' You needed to fake it, so you needed to be 'high'. Once you sounded high, he thought you had an orgasm. Yeah, so, sometimes I just told them 'Oh, don't bother, I had an orgasm already! You made it! Go ahead! Come on, go ahead!' (ha, ha, ha) (Xin-xin, 16, casual call-girl)*

‘Men make a mess; women make a noise’ (Jackson and Scott, 2001:107) signifies the gendered performance of orgasm in heterosexual relationships. Nonetheless, faking an orgasm is not only referring to ‘making noises’ mechanically. These noises, as Pan-pan put it, should ‘sound sexy or feminine’. Most importantly,



‘don’t make people feel it’s phoney’ (Fung-fung’s term). In order to perform a living orgasm, one should sound ‘sexy’ and look ‘high’. Moreover, as these quotations show, it involves a huge amount of ‘dirty talk’, which is mainly used to flatter and/or massage the clients’ egos and masculinity. Speaking these dirty words indeed demands that sex workers present themselves as whores who are lustful and lewd.

This performance nonetheless is very exhausting and/or annoying. In the first interview, Wei-wei repeatedly said that doing sex work is actually much more exhausting than her other jobs before, but she could not go further to explain it. She explained, in the second interview, which was conducted two weeks later, that it is the performance of the emotional work that makes the work much more exhausting than other jobs. She reported that *‘[Y]ou need to disguise yourself. Yeah, it’s quite tiring. Umm, you didn’t feel like that but you had to pretend that you were very excited, you know.’* As it is such exhausting work, some interviewees do not want to be bothered to do it. Pan-pan felt very annoyed when clients demanded it, she thus hummed in reply. A client complained to Mei-yun saying that the other woman next-door made such a loud noise, while she did not make any noise. She plainly replied *‘[O]h, since it is so loud, why don’t you just enjoy it?!’*

It is no coincidence that call-girls in this study made a great effort to ‘make noises’, while former licensed prostitutes reported that they did not want to be bothered. The point is that some call-girls’ work was controlled by their bosses, and girls depend on their bosses to solicit clients for them. Therefore, it is very

likely that clients report those bad performances to their bosses. Hence, call-girls would do it. Moreover, Wei-wei's narrative makes it clear that performing an orgasm is a way for independent call-girls to cultivate regular clients and 'catch their purses'. Conversely, licensed brothel workers reported that they could not be bothered to do it given the fact that they usually have stable clientele.

## **ii) Pleasure-selling sectors**

### **1) Partnership between workers and the third party in loosely-organized tearooms and small-scale bars**

In 'pleasure selling' working women's official job title is *fwu wuh sheng* (i.e. waitress), and the job description is *zou tai* (which literally means table-sitting). Chatting clients up, serving alcohol and singing with clients are commonly reported when 'pleasure-selling' women talk about *zou tai*. However, the ways 'pleasure-selling' workers carry out their services are varied in terms of the different degrees to which sexual establishments are organized, and the varied relationships between sex workers and (owners and managerial supervisors of) sexual establishments.

Among these interviewees, Yen-yen and Shu-chin, who worked in loosely organized sexual establishments, repeatedly emphasized that their jobs were 'very simple' or 'nothing special'. They simply 'served clients wine, chatted them up, sang with them' and 'played finger guessing-games with them'. As their sexual establishments are loosely organized, the relationship between them and the owner of these establishments is far from employer and employee, but equal business partners. For example, the tearoom owner makes a profit by selling tea,

alcohol and side dishes, while tearoom women earn money directly from charging clients *zou tai fei*<sup>32</sup> (i.e. a table-sitting fee), NT\$300 per hour, and sometimes get extra tips from clients. The tearoom wins more clients by having working women there, while women save the energy soliciting clients. The workers and the owners, in this sense, are mutually beneficial to each other. In addition to this co-operative relation, each side does not have any obligation toward each other. Working women freely decide how many days they want to work and plan daily working schedules for themselves. It is therefore claimed to be 'very flexible' and 'very free'. The unlicensed small karaoke bar where Shu-chin worked also operated in a similar way.

Although the declining tearooms function as sexual entertainment for older and/or working-class men, many tearooms in Wan-hwa are registered as eating-and-drinking houses. In *Spring Flowers*, the cabin is quite small and poorly decorated. There is only one round table (for serving dishes and drinks) and four to five chairs surround it. When my friend and I were sitting there to interview Yen-yen, I found there was not any space for other entertainment. There was not any karaoke equipment. Chatting therefore is the major event in the tearoom. However, the small space creates the possibility of frequent bodily contact. The only 'inconvenience' preventing clients from being 'obscene' is that each cabin has a tiny hole on the door. Therefore, the police and other people could 'easily' see what happened in the cabin. The tiny hole offers the tearoom the legitimacy to run their businesses. As the tearoom owner told me, it shows that 'what we do

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<sup>32</sup> If two different clients demand the same working woman accompany them, the woman could walk around the two different cabins during the same time. Therefore, the woman's *zou tai fei* would be doubled.

here is absolutely clean and honest. It's very simple.' However, commercial sex could be easily arranged in many hotels nearby. Chang and Liu's (2001:103) research even reported that commercial sex is indeed taking place 'under the table' in some tearooms. However, tearoom women in *Spring Flowers* are guaranteed full control of their working schedule, service content, and could keep all their earnings.

## **2) Hierarchical and profit-orientated special bars**

Social relations and working conditions, however, are much more complicated in well-organized and/or profit-orientated special bars. *Pretty Girls*<sup>33</sup> is located on a high street in east Taipei. The bar tends to advertise itself as a 'refined' bar which offers high-quality services to clients. Hence, the bar is well-organized and very hierarchically managed. Most importantly, this bar is a licensed special bar. This means the bar is hardly threatened by police raids.

The bar is managed by a male manager, who directly supervises the work of eight to twelve supervisors. These supervisors' job is soliciting clientele for the bar, arranging bar-girls for clients, and settling all the disputes between clients and bar-girls. Most importantly, they directly supervise the bar-girls' daily performance, ranging from teaching girls how to please clients, and deliver (sexual) performance to 'catching big fishes' and arranging commercial sex for

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<sup>33</sup> Bar-girls told me that the owner of the bar has another seven licensed special bars in Taipei city. It is not surprising that their boss told them 'the licenses cost him a fortune. So, no one is allowed to run commercial sex in the bar'. Although these eight special bars cater to different clienteles, they are organized and managed in similar ways. In addition, some bar-girls who had worked in other bars reported that many special bars are managed similarly.

clients etc. Apart from the supervisors and bar girls, there are ‘leading princesses’ who bring clients to the cabins and take girls to see clients, and a few waiters who deliver alcohol, play music, and do the cleaning etc.

*Pretty Girls* is organized to such an extent that bar-girls here are subjected to a series of regulations just like ordinary workers in other occupations. For example, bar-girls are required to attend a regular meeting every week to review how well they perform their work. Every bar-girl is only allowed four days off in a month, and the daily working hours are from 8:30pm to 6:00am the next morning. The bar pays each girl only NT\$ 15,000 basic salary per month. Bar-girls’ income mainly comes from *zou tai fei*. Currently, *Pretty Girls* charges clients NT\$ 2,000 per hour for having a bar girl to accompany them. The workers get NT\$ 900 per hour. Once a client wants to invite a bar girl to *chu chang*<sup>34</sup>, the bar will charge him the same rate stated above. Similarly, if bar girls are absent from work, they need to pay the money to the bar (e.g. a bar-girl absent for two hours will be fined NT\$ 4,000). As bar-girls work at night and sleep during the day, it is very likely that many of them could not attend work on time or would be absent from their work. Fung-fung reported that ‘it’s quite common for me to be fined NT\$ 50,000 in a month.’ The bar girls I interviewed reported that they usually earn NT\$ 140,000 to NT\$ 150,000 per month. According to these interviewees, girls who devote themselves to doing ‘S’ earn a couple of times more than their earnings.

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<sup>34</sup> Literally, ‘*chu-chang*’ might refer to an actor or a play going on the stage. It refers to bar-girls ‘going out’ with clients.

*Chu chang* is the keyword for the ‘pleasure-selling’ profession. Literally, it means ‘going out’ with clients. In some cases, the ‘going out’ is simply for having a cup of coffee, while it might indicate that commercial sex will take place somewhere outside the bar. Clients usually have to pay extra money (ranging from NT\$ 3,000 to NT\$ 10,000) for commercial sex. However, many bar girls tend to use the vagueness of the term as one of the means to earn *zou tai fei*. Indeed, it is this vagueness which creates a great deal of dispute between clients and bar girls. I will return to this point later.

Time is money. Hence, apart from doing ‘S’, one of the ways to make big money is by making clients stay with girls as long as possible. In addition, every bar girl is expected to solicit their clients to book three visits per month, so it is very important for bar-girls to build up good and stable relationships with clients. Bar girls therefore will mobilize their sexual and physical capital to let clients stay in cabins, and/or exercise ‘*shou wan*’--social skills--e.g. ranging from pretending to fall in love with clients, ‘dating’ clients in off-duty hours, to offering free sex to keep clients re-visiting them again and again. ‘Cultivating’ the clientele is so important that Ling-ling reported that ‘[I]f you don’t have regular clients, the company won’t keep you. They think you’re useless!’

Summarizing bar-girls’ descriptions of their daily work, they are expected to drink with the client, if clients want to drink. If business men are going to sign a contract, they should function like a catalyst saying something like ‘oh, come on, sign it quickly’ and so on and so forth. If it is a party, they should make it hilarious; for example, inviting clients to sing and dance. If clients come to settle disputes,

especially gangsters, girls had ‘better just shut up and serve alcohol quietly. Otherwise, you would be thrown out!’ Apart from this common daily routine, the bar-girls in *Pretty Girls* are also expected to be strippers. Usually girls are led by *leading princesses* to cabins, say hello and toast clients. Before sitting next to the clients, girls need to perform the *table show*, i.e. strip-dancing on the table. They should dance for two songs (about eight minutes) and be topless by the end of the first dance, and then move to dance on clients’ lap to ‘create a hilarious atmosphere’.

### **3) It’s all about ‘*shoou wan*’ (i.e. social skills)**

‘Pleasure selling’ in this sense is much more complicated than ‘body selling’ in terms of the varied labour and social skills demanded. Bar girls are usually expected to be able to play quite different roles at the same time, i.e. serving alcohol as waitresses, performing a table show as professional strippers, drinking and playing with clients like friends. Considering these situations to be ‘dangerous’ and ‘complicated’, the former licensed sex workers (Sue-lian, Mei-yun and Lili) unanimously reported that their work is actually ‘very simple and straightforward’, and claimed that they definitely would not be able to ‘handle those complicated situations’ in bars or tearooms. Sue-lian offers a typical answer regarding the ‘pleasure-selling’ sector:

*[g]ee, tearooms are more complicated than licensed brothels...It’s true that tearooms are very complicated. You have to make tea, drink with clients and to be touched or hugged by clients. After some drinks, they will invite you to ‘chu chang’...That is very complicated, so many women don’t want to work there. Working women in tearooms are very*

*competitive with each other. They compete for clients. [Here], we were very polite to each other. We helped and cared for each other. It's quite different from tearooms.* (Sue-lian, 41, ex-licensed sex worker, stayed in prostitution for 28 years)

The 'complexity', for licensed sex workers, mainly refers to how to 'play tricks' to deal with clients' undesirable (sexual) demands, and the potential physical and emotional violence which frequently comes along with the pressure of pushing bar-girls to do 'S'. Nonetheless, for bar-girls and tearoom women, it is precisely being able to 'handle' these complicated situations that lets them be proud of themselves. Working in loosely-organized establishments, both Shu-chin and Yen-yen reported that mobilizing excellent '*shoou wan*' to interact with clients properly is an aspect of their work. These social skills, also frequently performed and demanded by other service occupations, such as hairdressing (Black, 2002) and service workers (Adkins, 1995), are hardly considered to be a kind of profession mainly because many people are also expected to practise and exercise these skills every day. Shu-chin, for example, tended to think her job is easy, because 'you have so many friends. You more or less know how to interact with people'. Ling-ling even proudly reported, '*[W]e make money by shoou wan, rather than by lying down there and simply opening our legs*'. Former licensed sex workers use a discourse of danger and complexity to suggest that their own work, in comparison with tearoom work, is comparatively 'simple and easy'. Ironically, the two different understandings serve to construct the 'pleasure-selling' profession as dangerous, tough, and a complex job that demands sophisticated and smart workers; while 'body-selling' work is constructed as safe, easy and simple. Nonetheless, this comparative approach is commonly appropriated by 'pleasure-selling' workers to devalue other sex workers, while



body-selling workers also use it to criticize pleasure-selling workers as flighty gold-diggers.

However, as selling sex is not self-evident in this category, clients try to 'steal', if possible, or 'buy' sex from these workers. Facing clients' undesirable sexual attention and demands are part of their daily routine. How to deal with this complexity is indeed what '*shou wan*' really means for 'pleasure-selling' workers.

Although working women are not allowed to sell sex in 'pleasure-selling' sexual establishments, all six interviewees in the category reported that they were pushed or felt pressured to perform commercial sex either by clients or the third parties. The negotiation of the border between 'pleasure selling' and 'body selling' appears to be one of the most remarkable daily exercises among these interviewees.

*[t]ut, for example, some clients would try to date me privately. They would say 'I will take you to have a midnight snack or have a cup of coffee off-duty.' ...Sometimes they even say '[C]ould you do me a favour when I have sexual needs? Of course, I would pay you. (Yen-yen, 36, 4 years as a tearoom woman)*

*[t]he most exaggerated thing is that you just sit down and he...tells you '[H]ey, are you able to "handle" it? It...means...er.. [giving him a release] either by hands or by mouth. (Fung-fung, 29, 3 years as a bar girl)*

It is important to note that it is common practice that women feel forced to mobilize their bodies and sexuality to keep jobs and/or relationships working. For

example, nurses are upset by the ways in which male doctors touch and gaze upon their sexualized bodies, while eventually they ‘accommodate’ to the (hetero)sexualized working conditions to maintain the doctor-nurse relationship (Witz et al., 1996). Adkins also points out that female workers in leisure parks are expected to cope with ‘unwanted sexual attentions’ from their customers as ‘part of the job’. Similarly, female workers ‘get used to it’ sooner or later, and learn the ‘skills’ to deal with it (1995:130-131). Indeed, this also applies to all women who have to tolerate all kinds of ‘unwanted sexual attention’ or sexual harassment in the labour market.

The ways interviewees deal with undesirable sexual attention, however, are varied in terms of the ways their work is organized, and the different relations between interviewees and their employees. Yen-yen, who had been working in a very profit-orientated and hierarchical bar, compared the different degrees to which she exercised control over her own work between working in that well-organized special bar and in the loosely-organized tearoom:

[in a special bar] *you have to do it* [commercial sex] *once they* [clients] *like you. Otherwise the bar manager will ...freeze you. He will freeze you and not arrange for you to zou tai. ...I didn't want* [to do it], *so I couldn't make a living there ...*[Here] *we are free* [of control]. *...You don't necessarily go out with clients. The tearoom owner is not able to control our decisions,...but you have to protect yourself. She* [the owner] *won't do anything for you* [when you get into trouble].  
(Yen-yen, 36, 4 years as a tearoom woman)

*Zou tai* is just a fabricated cover for organizing commercial sex in this special bar. Hence, the bar manager used threats and punishments to force workers to perform

commercial sex. 'Freezing' bar girls is a widely-practised sanction to punish rebelling workers. The social oppression and control are revealed explicitly.

However, Yen-yen, like the majority of tearoom women in Wan-hwa, is actually an independent worker. She completely controls working hours, enjoys the full right to choose clients, and decides whether to cross the boundary to 'go out' with clients or not. The price she pays for working independently is that 'you have to protect yourself!' As the tearoom is a licensed eating-and-drinking establishment, Yen-yen does not need to worry about police harassment. Even the police raids appear to be nominal rather than a real threat. In fact, according to the owner of *Spring Flowers* and the staff of the AWHTR, tearooms will be informed in advance by the AWHTR whenever a police raid is taking place. Trouble mainly comes from the unwanted sexual attention of clients. After working here for four years, Yen-yen has, however, developed many strategies to dodge clients who want to 'take [her] out'. For example, 'we would encourage them to drink more and make them drunk' or 'run away through the back door stealthily (laughing)!'. Similarly, Shu-chin, working in an unlicensed small karaoke bar (in Hwa-lian) in which employees and the employer did not enter into a formal working contract, even took a very risky reaction to reject clients' sexual demands. She reported:

*[I]t was my first night in that karaoke bar. I got a very terrible client. I just sat down and he asked me to give him hand release. It was the first time I had had that kind of client since I came to work in a bar. I slapped his face and told him that 'it's impossible!' He complained to the boss. ...I was very angry so I phoned my friends (seven young men). My friends came later. The client then didn't dare to say anything. Afterwards, he [the boss] said I did a good job. (he, he..)*  
(Shu-chin, 17, karaoke bar girl)

Shu-chin's risky strategy, of course, was based on a strong personal network, which most interviewees in this study were not able to enjoy.

Again, criminalized prostitution makes working women have to exchange freedom for safety. Therefore, the relationships between employees and employers form a quasi-patron-client relationship, i.e. the (owners of) sexual establishments offer protection, while employees are subjected to a series of regulations imposed by the employers. *Pretty Girls* is just such a case.

The bar-girls in *Pretty Girls* not only suffer from unwanted sexual attention from clients, but also have to confront huge pressure from their supervisors. The supervisors and the bar manager do not take any share from the bar girls' earnings when girls perform commercial sex with clients. However, they have shares in the bar, which takes a 50% cut of girls' *zou tai fei*. Their jobs are soliciting clients for the bar. Hence, how to keep clients visiting the bar again and again is indeed the major concern of the managerial class in the bar. As far as business is concerned, the relationships between supervisors and clients are even better than the relationships between supervisors and workers. Therefore, bar girls frequently report that their supervisors would use both a stick and a carrot to force them to do 'S':

*[I]t is absolutely awful. I think most girls can't get along with supervisors, because we have different perspectives. We wish for clients not to touch us, so we could get the money simply sitting there. But they [supervisors] have to solicit clients, so they hope clients will get...whatever they want. ...So, they have totally different perspectives.*

*They hope all [bar-girls] can do it ['S']. Otherwise, it creates troubles [for them]. ...I did it once because a supervisor begged me. (Ling-ling, bar-girl, 19, two and a half years as a bar girl)*

*[t]he way supervisors ask us to do 'S' is very harmful. They don't pay any respect to you, and that makes you feel very bad. ... They always handle it roughly saying, 'Hey, he wants you to go out to do S, but, remember, don't charge him!' ...It feels bad, doesn't it? ... I felt that she doesn't even treat us as human beings. It seems that their clients spend some money here, so they are the bosses. Anyhow, we had to be highly co-operative; otherwise they would blame us in our regular meeting. (Fung-fung, 29, 3 years as a bar-girl)*

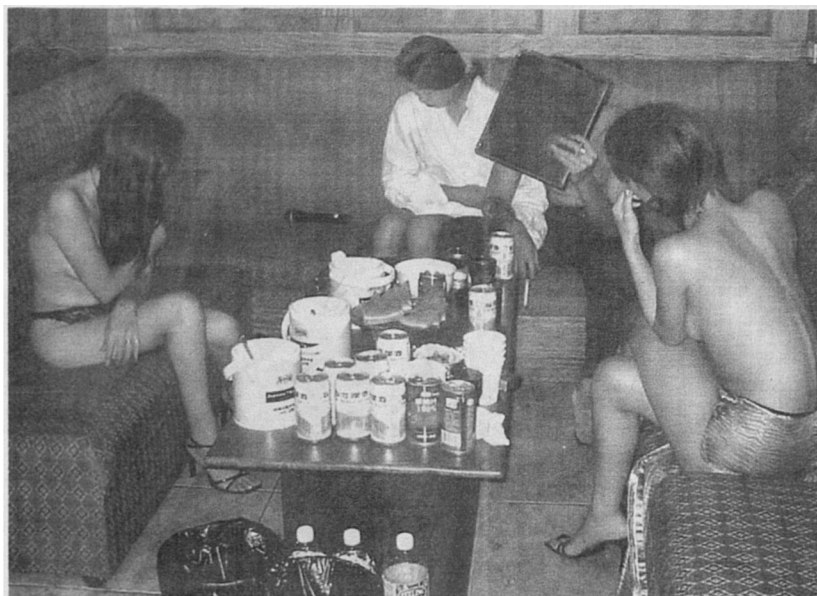
Bar-girls were usually quite upset by this kind of nasty situation and hostile atmosphere. Nonetheless, 'going out' with clients to do 'S' is not a popular resolution. In many cases, I was told that they would make an effort to convince clients to stay in the cabins as long as possible. Once they could not keep the clients, they would have supervisors arrange girls who provide 'S' to the clients. Therefore, girls could top up *zou tai fei* until they could not keep clients. Other girls adopt a more risky strategy to play the word game with clients. Since many clients simply invited girls to 'go out to have a cup of coffee', bar-girls thus stick to the word to earn the sessions for accompanying clients. The vagueness of 'going out' thus creates many disputes between girls and clients. Fung-fung reported that she once 'went out' with a client to have a snack, but her client drove her directly to a hotel. She suddenly realized that she had been cheated and '[I]t's kind of abduction. It's very dangerous'. She then had the client take a shower and fled. The client was extremely angry and rang a supervisor the next day. The final resolution was asking Fung-fung to return 50% of *zou tai fei* to the client.

Girls proudly told me that the bar is licensed and they are quite respected during police raids. For example, they ‘just need to put on robes and show ID. We aren’t like the girls in unlicensed bars, who have to get out of cabins, squat on the ground, and assemble together as criminals’. Indeed, the atmosphere of the police raid at the large-scale licensed special bar was very different from small licensed bars. The licensed bar, *The Boss*, is considered the biggest special bar in the Chung-shan area. The vice-director of the police precinct told me that the bar had fifty cabins and hundreds of bar girls. Indeed, I counted ten women sitting behind the front desk to collect clients’ payment. It is important to note that the police action has a differential impact on these sexual establishments. In many cases, it is just a routine for the (large-scale) licensed sexual establishments, but a real threat to small bars. Indeed, the manager of *The Boss*, smiling, accompanied police officers to look around each cabin during the whole action. Somehow, I felt that the manager knew the vice-director of the police precinct very well.

However, bar-girls’ description of police raids indicate that they do take place in unlicensed and/or smaller (karaoke) bars. My observation of a police raid on a smaller bar is such a case. The clients remained in cabins, but all the bar-girls (twenty-two young girls) were called to assemble in a small cabin, which was just as big as two British academic offices. The girls were fingerprinted. Their IDs were carefully checked by the police, and they were required to write down their ages and nicknames in the bars. As media reporters and cameras were also present in the raid, the girls used available material to cover up their faces. Nonetheless, the more they tried to cover them, the more cameras tried to reveal them. It seems to be suggested that looking through cameras we might find some ‘truths’ about

prostitutes. For example, the picture below was taken by a press reporter during a police raid, and the heading of the story is ‘when we strip together’ (Chang, 2001).

Figure 2. *A Scene of a Police Raid in a Club*



Source: *China Times*, 21/11/2001, p. 9.

The bar girls in *Pretty Girls* were privileged in that they were never humiliated by the police or the media in this way. The bar, as a licensed bar, offers strong ‘protection’ to the extent that Ling-ling reported that ‘clients won’t dare to [beat us up]. Working here means we’re the people of the company. If one dares to do it, he probably ...couldn’t leave here safely!’ In addition, the parking boys would record the reference numbers of taxis to make sure that the girls would arrive home safely. However, this ‘protection’ could not work properly whenever girls were ‘going out’ with clients. Above all, bar-girls reported that the betrayal of supervisors put them in much more hostile and/or humiliating working conditions. Jo-jo reported that she was sarcastically scolded as a ‘handicapped’

woman who could not move her body to please clients. Lu-lu reported that one night a supervisor conspired with clients by continuing to play pop music; she was therefore forced to keep dancing on a client's lap. The client then started to take off her G-string<sup>35</sup> and tried to put his penis into her body. She could not do anything except run away from the cabin. Using Fung-fung's word to sum up the complicated relationships in the bar: *'[A]ll the relationships and/or friendships here are illusion. The only one truth is money!'*

Moreover, using the carrot to build up conciliatory relationships with workers works quite well to the extent that it blurs the hierarchical power structure of employer-employee. Pan-pan, working in a different bar, spoke about the ways in which her boss taught her to perform commercial sex with clients and how she was treated 'differently' in the bar:

Pan-pan: *He [bar owner] told us ...He taught us that we should try our best to take clients to do 'S', because it made more money...We charged NT\$ 1,500 for each trick, and he could get NT\$ 300. But, I still earn much more than he does (smile).*

Mei-hua: *Do you think it is reasonable?*

Pan-pan: *Umm, it is. Why isn't it reasonable? Because I took a greater share than other women in the bar. They only got NT\$ 800, but I could get NT\$ 1,200.*

Mei-hua: *Do you know why?*

Pan-pan: *Umm, maybe because I'm good [at doing it] and I'm young, he, he, he...So, the boss would take more care of me.*

The narrative is indeed very disturbing. Pan-pan's boss directly took 20% to 50% of women's earnings in each trick. According to Taiwanese criminal law, he would

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<sup>35</sup> G-strings are the uniform of bar-girls in *Pretty Girls*.



be named as a pimp, and/or be charged for running a brothel. However, the 'exploitation' is obscured by the 'father-daughter' relationship. Similar to the way Wei-wei drew on 'brother-sister' discourse to describe her relationship with a third party, Pan-pan felt she was being 'looked after' by the boss 'as a daughter', rather than being exploited by a pimp. The bar not only functioned as a place in which her work was organized, but also gave her a sense of 'living in a family'. According to Pan-pan, '[M]y dad [the boss] takes care of everything for me'. 'My brother [son of the boss] fought with a client who slapped my face'. The relationships in the bar, for Pan-pan, turned out to be a 'family'. This family atmosphere made Pan-pan feel that working in that bar was fun, while independently soliciting on the Internet was for making money.

### **III. The sexual hierarchy of Taiwanese commercial sex**

The distinction between 'body selling' and 'pleasure selling' claims to differentiate immoral prostitution from urban sexual entertainment. However, the boundary between 'body selling' and 'pleasure selling' is always blurred as the latter frequently involves commercial sex.

Hwang points out that these two categories are indeed porous, rather than fixed or static. Many sex workers move between them. Above all, the label of 'pleasure selling' functions to 'de-prostitutionalize' many sexual establishments, and serves to 'de-prostitute' working women because women in this category tend to think that their jobs are *different* from those prostitutes in (licensed) brothels (1996:121-122). She goes further to argue that 'pleasure-selling' women '*could*

*not deny that ...they are bought "sexual objects" and wait for the right price before performing commercial sex'* (1996: 122, my translation). The distinction between 'pleasure selling' and 'body selling', for Hwang, is actually redundant. Nonetheless, what concerns me is the ways in which interviewees understand the distinction, how the distinction shapes interviewees' daily work, and how they make sense of 'prostitution' in this framework.

The distinction between 'body selling' and 'pleasure selling' does, more or less, offer a referential framework to define working women's daily duties or service content toward clients and affiliated sexual establishments. In other words, selling sex is the *core* element in 'body selling', while it *might* constitute part of the work of sex workers in 'pleasure selling'. Bar-girls report that they do have the right to decide whether to do 'S' or not. Moreover, for 'pleasure-selling' interviewees, how to exercise *shou wan* to maintain the boundary between performing 'body selling' and 'pleasure selling' appears to be part of their profession. Conforming to the literature (Hwang, 1996; Chang and Liu, 2001), interviewees who work in 'pleasure selling' stress the importance of differentiating 'pleasure selling' from 'body selling'. Yet, this distinction is hardly mentioned by interviewees who work in the 'body-selling' category. The distinction is one of the ways 'pleasure-selling' workers make sense of doing sex work; it nonetheless simultaneously creates tension and/or a hierarchy among sex workers. The way Yen-yen justifies her job offers an example:

*[p]eople tend to think that working women are bitches and whores, but that's not true. They say we are doing something 'underground', but it's not true. Some women here don't do it, you know. It's very*

*different among women. Some women dare to earn that kind of money, but some women just don't do it. (Yen-yen, 36, 4 years as a tearoom woman)*

This narrative more or less indicates that those *who dare to earn that kind of money*, are real whores, while some working women make an effort to do decent business in this profession. In this study, six interviewees had worked in 'pleasure-selling' establishments, i.e. Fung-fung, Jo-jo, Ling-ling, Pan-pan, Shu-chin, and Yen-yen. Apart from Pan-pan, who directly reported that she ran commercial sex in the bar, the other five all denied that they did 'S', while subsequently revealing that they did it 'once', 'twice' or 'a few times' due to clients 'begging me' or supervisors' demands. The phenomenon only makes sense when we take the 'whore stigma' into account, and consider the ways in which 'pleasure-selling' interviewees understand 'prostitution'.

These interviewees not only made an effort to disguise their practice of doing 'S' from me, but also from their clients and colleagues. The basic concern is that:

*I am afraid of being identified as a girl who could do 'S'. If you are fixed in that position, you're finished. ...It can't be helped. I can't accept that I would be located in that position. (quieting down her voice) People tend to think that you are...cheap. Yeah, girls would see you in a strange way, although everyone...It turns out that everyone does it, but you can't talk about it, you know. (Fung-fung, 29, 3 years as a bar-girl)*

The 'whore stigma' is reproduced endlessly here. Not only is there a hierarchy of 'pleasure selling' and 'body selling' among working women, but also a hierarchy of 'doing S' and 'not doing S' among 'pleasure-selling' women. The 'fear' of

being labeled a 'whore' thus pulls these working women back to comply with the ideology of 'madonna/whore'. Far from contesting and revealing the oppression of the whore stigma, working women actually try to manage the whore stigma by controlling information that might discriminate against them (c.f. Goffman, 1963).

This practice undoubtedly creates an asphyxiating atmosphere in which working women watch each other, and monitor every detail of each other's behaviour. Paradoxically, *everyone does it 'secretly'* indicates that the ideology of 'madonna/whore' fails to regulate or to guide people's lives. Conversely, it is these *secret* social practices that are turned over to re-shape the social meanings of 'whore' or 'prostitute'. Indeed, every interviewee has her own image of a 'whore'. Older licensed prostitutes, for example, tend to criticize other working women who spend money on alcohol, gambling, and keeping men. Young bar-girls who spend their money visiting male prostitutes are severely criticized, taunted and/or self-reported as 'stupid women' (e.g. Jo-jo). Moreover, the whore image is highly related to the ways in which *working women are treated as women who are 'indiscriminate' and would do anything in exchange for money*. Sue-lian, working in a body-selling setting, also reported that a rich man wanted to redeem her life by paying back her debts to the brothel, but she turned down the offer because '*he seemed to want to buy me like buying a commodity, you know. I didn't think it was good for me.*' Fung-fung also reported:

*I'm not saying that I insist on refusing to do 'S'. I have done it before. In those cases I had some feelings for the client and usually we had seen each other a couple of times. ...It's simply about how you feel, you know. ...I would feel bad, if I simply went out to do it and then charged. That ...usually makes me feel that I really came here to*

*prostitute myself, you know. To be honest, I would look down upon myself in that case. That's how I feel. ...A client offered NT\$ 100,000 asking me to have sex with him. I didn't accept his offer, because I felt...I felt the way he talked to me was as if I was a whore.*  
(Fung-fung, 29, 3 years as a bar girl)

In a way, for both Sue-lian and Fung-fung, doing 'S' to make a living does not make one a whore. A 'whore' is someone who could be symbolically bought as a commodity and who would do anything in order to earn money. It is commonly said that prostitutes have low self-esteem and run their businesses 'indiscriminately'. Pheterson (1996:38) points out that Dutch sex workers are not 'indiscriminate', but do enjoy different degrees of right to choose clientele (e.g. rejecting clients who are drunk, unwilling to use condoms, rude, unwilling to pay in advance, suspected of being violent etc). Similarly, many 'body-selling' interviewees also reported that they did not do everything for clients, and enjoyed the right to choose what kinds of services would be provided (see Chapter 6). It is not a coincidence that rejecting those 'big offers' appears to be a way sex workers defend their dignity and self-esteem. Working women are commonly perceived by mainstream society as 'sexual objects', as Hwang claimed, waiting for the right price to sell in a fresh market. Hence turning down those 'big offers' shows clients' cheapness, and simultaneously marks out working women's honour, pride and subjectivity.

Moreover, the interviewees de-stabilize the social meaning of 'prostitution' and thereby make sense of their daily involvement in the sex industry. Indeed, many sexual practices between bar-girls and clients are not counted as 'commercial sex', but as business 'investment' to 'cultivate' the clientele. Jo-jo

talked about the economics of performing sex as an investment and running big business:

*...I once had a sugar daddy. Every time he visited [the bar], he would stay with me for the whole night. I thought then he was an excellent client. One day, we got drunk and I then did it with him. [Did you charge him?] No, I didn't. I didn't charge the first time. If I charged him, he would feel that's business. No charge, he would feel we're lovers. But afterwards, if I said I'd run out of money, he would give me money. Eventually, I cheated him out of more than NT\$ 100,000 (he, he, he...) This is the so-called 'fanq chang shiann diaw da yu'<sup>36</sup>'! (smile) (Jo-jo, 19, 2 years as a bar girl)*

Thinking from a different direction, Fung-fung reported that having sex with clients is indeed a way of *rewarding* regular clients:

*[s]ometimes a man likes you and you have some feelings about him, and he spends quite a lot of money on you ...You would sometimes think 'Well, I could repay him or give him a reward.' You know very well about his purpose. He wants your...body. Well, I then reward him. ...But the word 'reward' is very dangerous. Once you had repaid him, he would expect a second time. So, don't take that step rashly. It's horrible. It could ruin your business. (Fung-fung, 29, 3 years as a bar girl)*

Prostitution is always defined as the 'exchange of money for sex—use value for exchange value' (O'Neill, 1997:10), however, bar-girls tend to turn this use value into capital to generate more profit. Therefore, as Järvinen reported (1993), it is common for a man to pay for a woman's rental, another pay for meals, and

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<sup>36</sup> Literally this phrase means to catch a big fish, one must cast a long line. It refers to the way one makes a big investment with a view to gaining a bigger reward.

another pay for transportation fees and clothes etc. Moreover, Järvinen also reported that some sex workers do have difficulty distinguishing commercial and non-commercial contacts with their regular clients. Fung-fung's narrative shows that sex is performed in terms of free gifts for those regular clients. Although sex as a 'reward' is based on a long-term business relationship, the narrative more or less shows that it is more than *just* business. Understanding those sexual encounters in this way, Fung-fung is not a 'sexual object' waiting for the right price to sell, but a sexual subject who is able to give out sex as a reward.

### **Summary**

Refusing to offer a general account of prostitutes' oppression and/or exploitation, this chapter has analyzed Taiwanese sex workers' oppression in its specific social, economic, political and cultural context. The chapter has identified gendered prostitution policies, abusive police actions, the employment status of sex workers, and the cultural practice of differentiating 'pleasure selling' from 'body selling' as the major issues shaping interviewees' working conditions; these ensure that interviewees have to face danger and risk to different degrees.

In this chapter, I showed that gendered prostitution policies put Taiwanese sex workers in an extremely dangerous working situation. Although interviewees suffer from criminalizing prostitution to different degrees in terms of their working settings, they all suffer from the 'whore stigma'-- particularly those 'body-selling' interviewees. Moreover, as the 'body-selling' sector directly challenges the state laws, they are the prime target of police raids. Among these

'body-selling' interviewees, streetwalkers as the representatives of prostitution are frequently abused by the police; (independent) call-girls and illegal brothel workers suffer from police entrapment. Only licensed brothel workers are protected by the police. Moreover, the data shows that it is the criminalizing of prostitution that makes these 'body-selling' interviewees turn to seek 'protection' from a third party. Nonetheless, the data shows that the relationships between sex workers and their third parties are varied. It could be an equal partnership or a hierarchical employee-employer relationship. However, *the third party will share* interviewees' earnings. The cut ranges from 20% to 60% of each trick.

On the other hand, interviewees in the 'pleasure-selling' sectors are usually better protected than the 'body-selling' workers. However, different sexual establishments provide different protection. Usually, the bigger the establishment is, the stronger the protection. In some cases, sex workers and the third party even form a *quasi-patron-client relationship; i.e. workers are subjected to many regulations, while the establishments provide strong 'protection'*. As selling sex is not the core element in this category, many interviewees reported that they are forced by the affiliated sexual establishments and/or clients to be involved in performing commercial sex. Hence, how to exercise *shoou wan* to deal with undesirable sexual attention appears to be these workers' daily routine.



## **Chapter 5**

### **‘It’s my way of survival’— making sense of being ‘working women’**

#### **Introduction**

Although feminists do not intend to problematize and/or pathologize (female) prostitutes, the question of ‘why women and girls prostitute’ is always at the centre of prostitution debates. Theorizing prostitution as a patriarchal system, some radical feminists have struggled to seek a theoretical solution to deal with the disturbing voices that claim that women and girls involve themselves in commercial sex through choice. At the other extreme, some pro-sex-work feminists analyses of ‘consent’ only look at the surface, and fail to examine the social and economic contexts that make involvement in prostitution a possible ‘choice’. Both sides tend to use homogenous narratives to represent all prostitutes, and produce a general account of commercial sex. Thus, for some radical feminists, prostitutes (child prostitutes in particular) are either seduced, cheated, or trafficked into this job, or blamed for ‘false consciousness’. On the other hand, doing sex work, for some pro-sex-work feminists, is presented as a sexual expression and liberation, and thus it does away with the social and economic contexts which make prostitution a choice. Recently, there has been a growing voice claiming the necessity to contextualize women’s and girls’ choices in prostitution (for example, O’Connell Davidson, 1998; Phoenix, 1999; O’Neill, 2001). Following these writers, this chapter will contextualize workers’ ‘consent’ or ‘choice’ in order to reveal the social contexts that make prostitution possible,

and examine the ways in which interviewees make sense of their involvement in prostitution.

Some radical feminists devote themselves to analyzing the gendered power structures of prostitution, e.g. the power struggle that underlines 'choice' and 'consent', the power relationships between prostitutes and pimps etc. The basic rationale is that it is ironic to claim that women, who have no other alternative, do enjoy the 'right to choose'. Accordingly, the 'free choice' argument, at best, is always treated as either a 'strategy' or 'rhetoric' to disguise the dark sides of prostitution. MacKinnon (1989), for example, argues that:

*[w]omen who are compromised, cajoled, pressured, tricked, blackmailed, or outright forced into sex...often respond to the unspeakable humiliation ...by claiming that sexuality is their own. Faced with no alternative, the strategy to acquire self-respect and pride is: I chose it (149).*

Avoiding the risk of accusing prostituted women of bearing 'false consciousness', Jeffreys's (1997) attitude toward 'free choice' is more ambiguous. She prefers the term '*decision to choice*' (Jeffreys, 1997:155) to indicate women's hard task in making a choice when facing few alternatives; perhaps all these choices are undesirable. However, citing feminist standpoint theorists she argues that not all women's experiences are reliable because the oppressed might adopt the oppressors' points of view. The argument thus slips into a 'false consciousness' argument. In addition, she concurs with MacKinnon, adding that the rhetoric of 'free choice' is probably deployed because 'the only alternative available may be the painful one of self-contempt' (Jeffreys, 1997:137). The introduction of the

*'decision to choice'* therefore turns out to be insincere.

Pushing this anti- 'choice' and/or 'consent' argument to its extreme, Barry (1995) generalizes prostitution, of all kinds, as sexual violence against women. She criticizes the 'consent' claim as *useless* (my emphasis) because 'consent to violation is a fact of oppression' (1995:65). In addition, the 'free choice' argument disguises the sexual exploitation and harm in prostitution. Hence, it is apolitical and 'shifts oppression from a class condition of sexual exploitation to individual experiences of it' (Barry, 1995:84). It paves the way for a global capitalist sex industry and justifies men's sexual rights to access women's bodies and sexuality.

These radical feminists' argument is quite straightforward. Firstly, prostitution is identified as a class oppression in which men oppress women. It then forecloses the possibility for women 'consenting' to be involved in commercial sex. However, forced prostitution gets its meanings and signifies its social coercion plainly because people choose or do not choose prostitution to mean something. If there were no such possibility as 'consent' to prostitution, it would be meaningless to argue that one is 'forced' to prostitute or 'trafficked' into prostitution. Moreover, it is wrong to lump together diverse sex workers (e.g. from millionaire porn stars to young girls who prostitute themselves for survival on the streets) under the rubric of the poor sexual victims (Jackson and Scott, 1998). As O'Connell Davidson's (1995b) ethnographic research of a self-employed prostitute shows, even a woman who chooses this profession by her own determination has to face various power struggles in a single working day. Free choice, of course, is not the end of the story. 'False consciousness' is not a proper

explanation of prostitution. In most cases the individual, facing specific social circumstances, evaluates the availability of the social and economic resources she or he has, and then takes appropriate and/or available action at a specific moment. It is therefore important to contextualize 'choice' and see what it means for the individual.

In this chapter I will draw on interview data to show that women and girls' decision to enter prostitution usually involves many different social factors rather than being a straightforward conclusion. The data shows that the majority of interviewees came from working-class backgrounds. In some cases, some young girls and runaways were involved in sexual transactions for pocket money and/or survival. However, for some interviewees, poverty was not a good reason to become involved in commercial sex. Therefore, these interviewees tried hard to work in low-paid and low-status jobs to support themselves until they found that they could not live on their inadequate pay cheques. Turning to prostitution thus turned out to be a reasonable solution. Indeed, tracking interviewees' working experiences, I will argue that it might be the gendered labour market that helps to produce a labour force for the Taiwanese sex industry.

Apart from the social and economic factors, I will argue that working-class women and girls entering prostitution also correlates significantly to the cultural practice of *jonq nan ching neu* (i.e. privileging men and boys while condemning women and girls) in Taiwan. Using Gates's (1987) concept of 'double hierarchy', I will show how the gender hierarchy in Taiwanese families and the 'principle of filial piety' leads poor women and girls either to consent to, or (feel) forced into,

prostitution in order to help their families get out of poverty. Above all, contesting the dichotomy of 'mother/whore', this study found that being a working woman is, in fact, one of the ways working-class women and unmarried single mothers manage to be a 'good mother'. Being a whore and being a 'good mother' thus appear to be two sides of the same coin. To sum up, there is no single reason leading women and girls into prostitution. The ways to prostitution are indeed full of twists and turns. In many cases, it involves class, employment, gendered cultural practices, ethnicity and different lifestyles. Most importantly, it is the deprivation of sexual and economic power that makes women and girls sense that their bodies and sex are a valued commodity in the male-dominated society.

## **I. The inter-dependence between the sex industry and the gendered labour market**

Although radical feminists and pro-sex-work feminists have very different interpretations regarding prostitution, they do agree, more or less, that female prostitutes choose this stigmatized profession due to poverty. Jaggar (1980) points out that '[I]t is the economic coercion underlying prostitution, ...that provides the basic feminist objection to prostitution' (360). Nonetheless, each camp has different explanations for the social and economic phenomenon and this leads to different solutions regarding prostitution.

The pro-sex-work camp tends to link women's poverty with the gendered labour market, arguing that doing sex work is women's choice under limited material conditions. Walkowitz (1980), for example, analyzes how British

working-class women in the nineteenth century usually worked as low-paid maids and/or factory workers in urban areas. As the payment was barely enough to live on many working-class women had to work as casual prostitutes on the streets or rented a room in a lodging house to run their businesses. Prostitution was, she suggested, one of the available ways that working-class women operated for survival. Since 1975, sex work advocates have argued that gender inequality in the labour market makes prostitution a reasonable and available choice. They point out that compared with the other traditional female jobs, the flexibility of work time and high pay in prostitution are the major reasons that lead women to choose this profession (for example, Alexander, 1988; English Collective of Prostitutes, 1997; O'Neill, 1997). The English Collective of Prostitutes, as an autonomous organization within the International Wages for Housework Campaign, strongly endorses this point of view. They cite the 1980 United Nations figures, arguing that the fact that 'women do two-thirds of the world's work and receive ten percent of the world's income and own one percent of the world's assets, spells out the basic truth about prostitution, both in the Third World and in Europe and other metropolitan countries' (quoted in Lopez-Jones, 1988:272). Thus, they assert that laws that criminalize prostitution are actually 'punish[ing] women for refusing poverty' (272).

This perspective is also adopted by the ILO backed report, *The Sex Sector* (Lim, 1998), which focuses on prostitution in four Southeast Asian countries: Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, and Thailand. Apart from seeing child prostitution as 'a serious human rights violation and an intolerable form of child labour' (v), it sees the sex industry as part of the labour market and as constituting

a huge economic sector in contemporary states. As shown in the literature (for example, Adams et al., 1997; Phoenix, 1999; Melrose et. al. 1999; O'Neill, 1997, 2000), the relationship between poverty and prostitution constitutes the main theme that is reiterated in the report many times. Moreover, women's inferior economic situation is quickly linked to the gendered labour market. Jones et al. (1998:35) plainly suggest that the low wages of the Indonesian labour market provide the incentive for female workers to become sex actors to earn instant money. The report points out that economics plays a very subtle part in prostitution. On the one hand, poverty leads women and girls to the sex industry, while doing sex work makes sex workers become breadwinners to support their families. In addition, sex work also produces several job opportunities, such as receptionists, cashiers, cleaners, waitresses, hairdressers, clothing designers, catering services, hotel services, parking services etc. Hence, the relationships between prostitution and the labour market are no longer unilateral, but interact with each other in a very complex way. Taiwanese feminist literature also identifies poverty as being one of the remarkable indicators of Taiwanese prostitution (Hwuang, 1996; Ji, 1998; Shiah et al., 1998). Nonetheless, this literature fails to identify the close relationship between the Taiwanese sex industry and the gendered labour market. Tracking interviewees' working experiences, I would argue that it is the gendered labour market that produces the reserve sexual labour force for the Taiwanese sex industry.

### **i) From factories to prostitution**

It is strongly argued that a working class background underlines Taiwanese

prostitution (Hwang, 1996; Ji, 1998; Shiah et al., 1998). One thing in common among my interviewees was that they mostly came from poor families or a working class background. Respondents' fathers and mothers were mostly farmers, workers in informal sectors, factory and/or construction workers, miners, tearoom women etc. Only one bar-girl, Jo-jo, reported that her father was a prosecutor and her mother a public servant. Most interviewees were junior high school educated; two were illiterate and only one interviewee, Fung-fung, graduated from a five-year business college. A poor educational background severely constrains interviewees' job choices.

*I didn't have any skills. I am illiterate. I worked as a cleaner that was paid NT\$ 9,000 per month. It's hardly enough to support three of us [two children and herself]. (Mei-yun, 61, 17-years as licensed prostitute)*

*I am just junior high school educated. If I work as a factory worker, I will probably just get NT\$ 20,000 something per month. I won't be able to cover their [her two sisters'] tuition fees and living costs. (Ling-ling, 19, 2 and a half years as bar-girl)*

Similar narratives came up repeatedly. As Phoenix (1999) showed in her study on twenty-one British prostitutes, a low educational background keeps women in low-paid and low-status jobs. A stable income, moreover, is one of the major factors that prevents people from falling into poverty (Glendinning and Millar, 1987). According to the official statistics of the Ministry of Interior among the Taiwanese low-income households, 81.5% of the heads of low-income households



are only (or less than) junior high school educated<sup>37</sup>. In addition, Chang's (1996) research showed that Taiwanese women's earnings were mainly decided by their different education levels, marital statuses, and occupations. Less educated women usually earn less. Bian's (1985) research goes further to point out that the earning gap between men and women is wider among poorly educated groups. In 1982 female workers who were primary school educated earned only 50% of their male counterparts. The situation has not changed that much in the past two decades. According to the *Manpower Utilization Survey (1996-1997)* issued by the Director-General of Budget, Accounting and Statistics, women's average pay reached 65.8% of men's, and slightly improved to 71.6% in 1997<sup>38</sup>. Nonetheless, women's average earnings differ from each other in terms of the economic sectors which they belong to. Table 2. shows that in 1980 women's earnings in the industry sector were 78.4% of men's, and dropped another 12% two decades later. In 1980 women in the service sector earned 60.9% of men's wages, increasing to 77.3% in 2000. The biggest loss is in the manufacturing sector in which women's average payment was 79.7% of men's in 1980 and dropped to 65.8% in 2000.

Table 2. Earnings and Working Hours by Economic Sectors and Gender (NT\$)

Year	Industry sector			Service sector			Manufacturing in Industry Sector		
	Average monthly earning			Average monthly earning			Average monthly earning		
	Men(a)	Women(b)	% (b/a)	Men(a1)	Women(b1)	% (b1/a1)	Men(am)	Women(bm)	% (bm/am)
1980	9061	7108	78.4	11922	7269	60.9	8938	7130	79.7
1990	27011	16494	61.1	30688	22166	77.3	26779	16295	60.8
2000	45065	29952	66.4	50088	38733	77.3	45211	29751	65.8

Source: *Earnings and Working Hours Statistics*, Census Bureau, Directorate-General of Budget, Accounting and Statistics, Executive Yuan, R.O.C. See, <http://www.dgbas.gov.tw/earning/ht456e.asp>

<sup>37</sup> See the web sites of Department of Statistics, Ministry of Interior, Taiwan. [Http://www.moi.gov.tw/W3/stat/home.asp](http://www.moi.gov.tw/W3/stat/home.asp) (in Chinese)

<sup>38</sup> See the *Taiwan Women Web, Yam* at [http://taiwan.yam.org.tw/womenweb/st/98e\\_e\\_table16.htm](http://taiwan.yam.org.tw/womenweb/st/98e_e_table16.htm)

Manufacturing is indeed the most important sector in creating the Taiwanese 'economic miracle'. In the 1960s the Taiwanese government adopted an export-oriented economic policy to develop Taiwanese light industries, such as textiles, garments, and later electronic industries. The labour-intensive light industries attracted many rural young girls away from home to work in factories. Citing many development theories, Chou et al. (1990:41) argued that the 'economic miracle' 'makes women entering into desirable jobs' possible, and brings Taiwan into a 'middle class' society. However, as far as making a profit is concerned, Chang (1996) argued that factory women suffered from low and unequal payment, long working hours, and unprotected working conditions. Hsiung's (1996) research also pointed out how the housework policy of 'living rooms as factories' in the 1970s made unemployed young girls and housewives part of low skilled assembly lines in the export sector. Using a cheap and flexible labour force the enterprises were thus able to avoid hiring full-time workers and offering other work-related social benefits. The Taiwanese 'economic miracle', or the 'middle class society', is based on this kind of exploitation of the cheap labour of female workers who work in formal and informal sectors.

Although lack of education keeps interviewees in low-paid jobs, poverty, for many respondents, was not a good reason to become involved in commercial sex. Many respondents spent quite a few years working as factory women or stayed among low-paid service occupations until they realized that they could not survive on inadequate pay cheques (see, Table 3). The path to prostitution is thus far from straightforward. Yen-yen's story offered a typical case in which we might see how prostitution is considered possible for factory women.

Table 3. Work Experiences of Interviewees

Name	Age	Work experiences
Mei-yun	61	Cleaner, maid
Lili	52	Factory woman
Sue-lian	41	Agricultural labourer (i.e. picking vegetables)
Ping-ping	36	Factory woman, waitress, self-employed worker of a small eating place
Yen-yen	36	Garment and electronic factories, waitress, assistant in beauty salon, self-employed worker of a small gambling shop, bar girl
Fung-fung	29	Independent broker of international trade, agent of models
Jo-jo	20	not available
Ling-ling	19	Selling vegetables, assistant in beauty salon, waitress, receptionist in a gambling shop, phone secretary in bars
Wei-wei	18	Assistant in beauty salon, waitress in bars and iced-tea houses, worker in a flower shop, phone secretary, betel-nut beauty
Pan-pan	18	Worker in gas station, movable vendor at night markets, bar girl
Chia-chia	17	Cleaner, betel-nut beauty, shop worker
Shu-chin	17	Factory woman, waitress, assistant in beauty salon, betel-nut beauty
Chen-chen	17	Assistant in beauty salon, betel-nut beauty
Pei-pei	17	None (due to learning difficulty)
Xin-xin	16	Waitress
Ching-ching	14	None
Ting-ting	14	None
Chiou-chiou	13	None

Yen-yen came from Yun-lin county, where people's income is mainly dependent on agriculture. Since it is one of the poorer counties, many young people in Yun-lin live away from home to work in Taipei or other urban areas. Yen-yen, junior high school educated, came to work in Taipei county when she was 25. She started as a sewing machinist in a garment factory for three to four years, and then transferred to a restaurant as a waitress for another two years. Like other unmarried female workers she sent back most of her income to her parents. As her life in Taipei was considered stable, her sisters and brothers (four of them)

came to live with her and started to work in Taipei. Like the majority of the Taiwanese working class, she wished to buy a house in order to avoid a bad housing situation and endless moving. Nonetheless, her dream would definitely not have come true if she had continued to work in factories or restaurants. She then struggled to save some money and invested in a small gambling business. Since it is an illegal business it was shut down by the Taipei city government a few months later. She therefore had to re-organize her life:

*I tried to find a job, but it wasn't so easy, you know. You should equip yourself with some skills or degrees, and then you could work in a company. It's very difficult for me to get a job. What I could get is either going back to garment or electronic factories. The payment is really limited in electronic factories. I am very good at doing sewing work, but there is not so much work now. (Yen-yen, 36, 4-years as a tearoom woman)*

Many factory women, like Yen-yen, spent most of their youth in factories doing low-paid, low-status and unskilled work. After leaving these factories it is very difficult for them to find a proper job in their mid-30s or early 40s. Even worse, Taiwanese light industries could not compete with China and Southeast Asia, which currently offer a much cheaper labour force, and this has caused large scale lay-offs since the late 1980s (Chen, 1993). Female workers, of course, are the main targets as men are still considered the breadwinners. The trend of closing manufacturing factories since the early 1990s makes returning to work in factories a mission impossible. Even though Yen-yen could grin and bear the unreasonable treatment in factories, *there is not so much work now*. Indeed, the Taiwanese working class is suffering from a rising unemployment rate in the new millennium. Again, workers who are less educated are more likely to be unemployed.

Moreover, Table 4 shows that in the past fifteen years the unemployment rates among those less educated workers increased more rapidly than other more educated workers. Although Table 4 shows that the unemployment rate among female workers is a bit lower, this might be partly caused by the disproportional female labour participation rate.

Table 4. Unemployment Rates<sup>39</sup> by Education and Sex %

Year	Average	Junior high school and under	Senior high school / Vocational school	College, University and above	Female	Male
1987(a)	1.97	1.19	3.28	2.73	1.97	1.96
1992	1.51	1.51	2.13	2.15	1.57	1.47
1997	2.72	2.72	3.02	2.76	2.37	2.94
2001(b)	4.57	4.71	5.12	3.72	3.71	5.16
%increase (b-a)	2.60	3.52	1.84	0.99	1.74	3.2

Source: Unemployment rates by education attainment and sex, Committee of Labor Bureau, Executive Yuan, R.O.C., See, <http://www.csb.gov.tw/acd/cpt/month/tab0205.xls>

## ii) Drifting among low-paid service jobs

Since the 1980s, Taiwanese exports have lost their advantage due to the two oil crises in the 1970s (Chang and Wu, 2003). Hence many women have turned to work in the service sector. In 1998 sixty-five percent of female employees worked in the service sector. Nonetheless, female workers in the service sector are poorly protected by *The Standard Labour Law*. Women in the service sector usually

<sup>39</sup> The unemployment rates shown in Table 4 are the results of the *Manpower Utilization Survey*, which is issued monthly by the Director-General of Budget, Accounting and Statistics, Executive Yuan. This survey is quantitative research, which was mainly processed by telephone interviews and some face-to-face interviews. According to the *Manpower Utilization Survey*, the unemployed are defined as people who are 15 years old and fit into the following conditions: 1) do not have a job; 2) are always available for work; 3) are looking for a job or waiting for the result of a job interview. Moreover, the unemployed also include people who already have a job but have not yet taken it up. The unemployment rate is thus defined as the ratio of unemployed to the whole labour force (i.e. people who are between 15 to 64 years old).

suffer from, again, long working hours, arbitrary lay-offs, pregnancy discrimination, and 'the article of staying single'<sup>40</sup> (Chen, 2000). According to the *1998 General Survey of Labour Conditions of Workplaces in Taiwan* issued by the Council of Labour Affairs, although female workers constituted the majority of the service sector, only 18.2% of service sector employers offered eight-weeks' paid maternity leave for female workers in 1998 (cited in Chen, 2000).

This turn to service sector employment is clearly shown in the work experiences of the different generations of female interviewees in this study. Respondents who were above thirty years old had usually been working as factory women for a couple of years, while younger interviewees drifted among various service jobs after leaving school. As these young girls bear double disadvantages (i.e. poor education and lack of proper work experience), they were usually kept in low-paid and unskilled (and sometimes informal) service occupations in which working conditions were poorly protected by Taiwanese labour laws. Therefore, young girls are confined to a limited choice of jobs. Most of all, these jobs in many cases are labelled 'female jobs'.

Ling-ling, a 19-year-old, reported that she came from a very poor family and had two younger sisters. She had done several part-time jobs when studying in junior high school, such as selling vegetables in markets, working in small factories and in restaurants etc. After graduating from junior high school she

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<sup>40</sup> In many service occupations, female workers are asked to sign a contract with the enterprises. 'The article of staying single' is usually listed in the contract. So, once female workers get married, they should resign from their jobs or they will be laid-off according to the contract. This has been very commonly practised in banks, department stores, and even public museums since the early 1980s. It is one of the ways in which employers avoid paying maternity leave, and always have young and charming women working for the companies.

started to work full-time in the service sector. Her work experience included being a hairdresser's assistant (mainly washing clients' hair and cleaning jobs), a waitress in restaurants, a receptionist in a gambling-related shop, and had become a 'phone secretary' for a special bar. The job of a 'phone secretary' is to call and invite sexual consumers to visit the special bar in the afternoon.

Many young girls had similar work experiences, but added 'betel-nut beauties'<sup>41</sup> to the list. The phenomenon of 'betel-nut beauties' has created heated debate in Taiwan. There are a few feminists who argue that the phenomenon of 'betel-nut beauties' is part of Taiwanese working-class men's sub-culture, and who see these 'betel-nut beauties' as working-class sex workers who dress in sexually revealing clothes to attract clients (Ho, 2000, 2001). Some feminists tend to see it as representative of 'objectifying women's bodies'. As Lou Tsann-yin argues, the phenomenon of 'betel-nut beauty' is indeed 'using female bodies to promote a commodity'. 'Once the society gets used to it, women are objectified' (in Min Sheng Bao, 2002, my translation). The majority of Taiwanese people consider it immoral and obscene. Some local governments have therefore decided to crack down on betel-nut stalls in order to maintain a 'clean and tidy' community (Chen, 2003). Meanwhile, 'betel-nut beauties' are represented as girls who are shameless in dressing like prostitutes, lazy, fond of playing and making easy money etc. The social representation of 'betel-nut beauties' is in fact very similar to that of (young) prostitutes.

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<sup>41</sup> Betel-nut (i.e. areca nut) is a form of Taiwanese chewing gum. It is very commonly chewed among indigenous people and working-class men. Betel-nut stalls are prevalent to the extent that one could find them easily on the streets in Taiwan. As there are many betel-nut stalls, it is a very competitive business. Thus many betel-nut stall owners hire young girls, dressed in bikinis, to prepare betel-nuts to attract male clients. The term 'betel-nut beauties' refers to these young girls.

Nonetheless, some respondents reported that the so-called ‘easy money’ of being a ‘betel-nut beauty’ is not ‘easy’ at all. Wei-wei, a teenaged, unmarried single mother, reported that she worked from midnight to eight o’clock in the morning. Although her working hours were during the nighttime, her regular salary was only NT\$ 15,000 per month. If she was never absent from her job, she could get another NT\$ 5,000 per month. Hence, even in good circumstances her monthly income was still much less than the average earnings of women in manufacturing (see Table 2). Wei-wei’s job description was packing betel-nuts; however, the stall owner asked every betel-nut beauty to ‘catch’ clients to create good sales records. Thus, the trifling regular payment turned out to be very uncertain.

*That betel-nut owner was extremely cold-hearted, you know. He deducted from our payment arbitrarily. For example, if you didn’t have a good record, your payment would be reduced. You then wouldn’t have much money to get. In my case, the first month I got less than NT\$15,000. The second month I got NT\$17,000 or so. I needed to pay NT\$10,000 to my sister for child care and pay for rent. It’s not enough...(Wei-wei, 18, call-girl, half a year as an [independent] call-girl)*

Working long hours and earning little money is not the whole story of ‘betel-nut beauties’. Selling betel-nuts is labelled as a sex-related and/or a pornographic job; betel-nut beauties are also prevalently stigmatized as promiscuous. It is claimed that the experiences of working in sex-related service work (e.g. betel-nut beauties, phone secretary, and waitresses in bars) ‘polluted’ these young girls and thus prostitution became possible. Nonetheless, the relationships between working in sex-related jobs and prostitution are always much more complex than a simple



linear development. Apart from the gendered labour market, respondents' relationships with their families of origin also play an important part in producing a labour force for the sex industry.

## **II. The obligation and resentment toward families of origin**

It is well-documented that Southeast Asian women prostitute themselves to help their families of origin get out of poverty (for example, Truong, 1990; Boonchalaksi & Guest, 1998; Watenabe, 1998). The ILO report, *The Sex Sector*, goes further to estimate that the money sex workers send back to the rural countryside in four Southeast Asian countries is much more than these states' development budget spending in rural areas (Lim, 1998). Contesting the discourses of 'family disaffiliation' that stigmatized prostitutes mainly come from dysfunctional families, McCaghy and Hou (1994), using a questionnaire and in-depth interview, argued that many Taiwanese prostitutes have good or very good relationships with their families of origin. Moreover, they found that one third of their 89 interviewees entered this profession due to a sense of 'filial obligation' toward their families of origin. In addition, 'sacrificing a person to rescue the whole family' (Hong and Tasi, 1998:25) is said to be the best footnote of former Taipei licensed brothel workers' lives. In this study, however, I found that the relationships between Taiwanese sex workers and their families of origin are much more complex than what has been shown in the existing literature. Some interviewees, in the name of 'filial piety', entered prostitution to support their families of origin; while some saw prostitution as a way to pursue personal independence from their families of origin and/or a particular man. In addition,

the relationships between interviewees and their families of origin were sometimes very complex. Supporting the family, for some interviewees, justified prostitution, but it turned out to be very annoying and emotionally taxing when their families took their contributions and/or 'sacrifices' for granted. Therefore, some interviewees reported complex and ambivalent emotions (e.g. anger, resentment, annoyance) towards their families of origin.

### **i) Pursuing independence**

Phoenix (1999) pointed out that British prostitutes negotiated the risks and benefits of being dependent on state welfare systems, dependent on a particular man, or becoming independent by earning incomes through involvement in illegal or illegitimate activities. Writing on child prostitution, Adams et al. (1997) and Pitts (1997) also stressed that a lack of social benefits, independent housing and income and the criminalization of prostitutes made British child prostitutes more vulnerable to the abuse of the police and pimps. Although the British social welfare system is under attack, it is identified as an important mechanism in dealing with child prostitution. However, the language of social welfare is very much a western concept. Traditional Chinese virtue demands parents should be affectionate and children filial. Hence, in Taiwan, the social bond<sup>42</sup> is maintained through the family, rather than the social welfare system. Children living under the poverty line usually have to depend on their families of origin; while poor

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<sup>42</sup> By saying this, I am not denying that the cultural practice of family bonding in Taiwan is declining. Indeed, as Taiwan is transforming from an agriculturally dominated society to an industrialized society, the structure of Taiwanese households is also changing. Currently, the numbers of the elderly who are dependent on children is declining. Many of the elderly are even being abandoned by their children. As the function of the traditional family is passing away, scholars are advocating the urgency of building up the social welfare system.

adults and/or the elderly have to wait for their children to grow up to make money.

Lacking support from the government, Shu-chin, an unmarried teenaged single mother, came to work as a karaoke bar girl in order to raise her baby. Indeed, she reported that the Taipei city government not only failed to offer enough support, but also tried to convince her to give her baby up for adoption. She replied “‘It’s impossible!’” ...I was so angry with her [social worker]. Why didn’t she try to convince the government to help us, but asked us to send away our babies? What’s wrong with being an unmarried mother?’ As Wallbank (2001) argued, British unmarried teenage mothers have been wrongly labelled as ‘social problems’ and/or a ‘public burden’ for a long time. What the Taiwanese government does for teenage mothers is nothing but punishment, keeping them in isolation, and bringing them shame and guilt. It might be difficult for a 14-year-old to claim financial independence, nonetheless, for Shu-chin, it seems much better than dependence on her parents.

Shu-chin reported that she had worked in many service occupations after completing primary school. In the beginning she reported that she ‘was fond of playing’ and ‘felt that it was very interesting to be a betel-nut beauty’. However, leaving school and having a job for her is actually a way to pursue individual independence in a poor family. She responded smilingly to why she did not finish the compulsory education (i.e. junior high school).

*That’s because... I like to be independent of my parents. I don’t like to stay at home. I like to go outside. I like to be independent. So, I didn’t*

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*go to junior high school. (Shu-chin, 17, unmarried single mother, indigenous people, karaoke bar girl)*

When asked how she entered prostitution, Shu-chin replied:

*It was a bad time for making money, you know... We [her parents and herself] were short of money and were out of diapers and milk powder. We also needed to pay for the daily living costs, you know. I didn't want to burden my parents, so I went to work in a karaoke bar. (Shu-chin)*

The quest for independence among child prostitutes is also visible in Hwang's research. However, she concluded that it was mainly a symptom of 'traumas that were caused by poverty, dysfunctional families, sexual assault, abuse by parents, teachers etc., rather than an indicator of sexual liberation' (1996:125, my translation). Hwang might be right in that the majority of young girls seeking independence and survival through prostitution do not necessarily relate to 'sexual liberation'. Nonetheless, the ways young girls escape, rebel and/or resist those undesirable situations, which are said to be 'causing a series of traumas', are precisely the few ways available to young girls to show off their autonomy. Wei-wei came from a so-called 'dysfunctional family'. Her father was imprisoned as a result of him committing fraud and raping her younger sister. Wei-wei's mother suffered from domestic violence and came to be a tearoom woman in order to raise three dependent children. As Wei-wei reported, when her boyfriend slapped her face, she moved out of his house immediately even though she was pregnant. 'Because when I saw my mum was beaten up by my dad, I made up my mind that I would definitely run away if it happened to me. I don't want to grin and bear it'. Here, it is not clear what kinds of 'traums' were caused by domestic

violence and the 'dysfunctional family' for Wei-wei. One thing we can be sure of is that it made her understand the importance of being an independent individual! Fung-fung put it more clearly in that she refuses to depend on men:

*I am not that kind of woman who likes to marry a man and be a dependant. I am not one of them. I don't want to be dependent on a man. Men are not reliable. Most of them tend to think that wives are exchanged for money, and wives are supposed to obey their husbands. I don't want to put myself in that situation. (Fung-fung, 29, 3 years as a bar girl)*

Adams et al. (1997) argue that child prostitution is a way for children who escape rape and/or violence in the home to obtain financial independence and exercise control over their lives. Here, prostitution might not be a good job, though it offers an opportunity for these interviewees to be independent rather than depend on families and/or be possessed by men. It is very interesting that none of the interviewees identified themselves as feminists, yet the ideas of being independent of parents and men are in keeping with the spirit of feminism. Perhaps what is 'wrong' with prostitution is not the job itself, but that it opens up the opportunity for women and girls to seek financial independence from men and undermine male domination.

## **ii) In the name of filial piety**

Supporting their families of origin is another major concern for many respondents in this study. Lili had lived on her salary as a factory woman and suffered from poverty for many years. Although a friend tried to introduce her into

prostitution, she hesitated to take it up due to worries about ‘whether my body could stand it or not’ (laughs shyly). She ‘had to do it’ when her father was very ill. The decision, nonetheless, was made deliberately because it took her four to five years to make the decision.

*I started to work in a licensed brothel when my father was ill. He was a miner. That's an occupational disease. He got black lungs. ...That's my decision. It's not based on her [her mother] demand. I was the eldest child in our family. My parents have five children. When my father was ill, he couldn't make money any more. I came out to make money to support my family because I am the oldest child. (Lili, 52, 15 years as a licensed prostitute)*

The narrative shows that the relationships between poverty and prostitution are full of twists and turns rather than a linear development. Here, prostitution is possible not only because of economic hardship, but also because of the moral sense of being the first daughter. The sense of filial obligation towards parents, as shown in this quotation, is considered a ‘good’ Chinese virtue. In the name of the principle of filial piety, paternal authority is treated as the supreme power in the private sphere. Children should obey their parents and be responsible for taking care of them after growing up. The Taiwanese household is in fact a social and economic unit; nonetheless, this social organization of households is double-edged. On the one hand, it more or less compensates for the poorly developed social welfare system; whilst, on the other, as has been argued, as an economic unit it also makes possible the selling of children’s labour if necessary (Stichter, 1990). Moreover, in Taiwan the first child is treated as representative of his or her parents. Therefore, the first child takes up the paternal authority and should be responsible for the whole family when their parents die and/or fail to

take care of the family properly. Thinking of the obligation towards the family in this way, many interviewees (especially those who were the first daughter) reported a similar sense of responsibility toward taking care of their young sisters and brothers.

*My sisters and brothers are living with me. I am the eldest child in my family. So I need to help my parents to take care of my younger sisters and brothers. (Yen-yen, 36, 4-years as a tearoom woman)*

*At the beginning, my family didn't know I was working in a bar. But you would feel that you are an elder sister and you would try to pay for them [her two younger sisters]. (Ling-ling, 19, 2 and a half years as a bar-girl)*

Gates (1987) used the term 'double hierarchy' to refer to the double disadvantages of girls and women in Chinese society. Children should obey the absolutely paternal authority. Moreover, girls suffer from the prevalent gender hierarchy within Chinese society. Indeed, the cultural practices of '*nan neu yeou bie*' (i.e. men and women are different) and '*nan tzuen neu bei*' (i.e. men are superior and women inferior) are still very common in Taiwanese society. *Nan neu yeou bie* and *nan tzuen neu bei* indeed constitute the gender system (i.e. gender division and gender hierarchy) in Taiwanese society. People are classified into men and women in terms of biological sex. Moreover, *nan tzuen neu bei* makes it clear that men are the measure and women the second sex. In this way, Taiwanese society builds up a series of gender norms that constrain women in private and men in public. Moreover, the gender hierarchy goes further to demand women obey their fathers, husbands, and even sons.

Within this gendered social structure, married women, argues Wu (2000), suffer from a social pressure to give birth to boys. The practices of screening the sex of a fetus are extremely prevalent to the extent that the ratio of male to female infants reached 110.3:100 in 1990. Daughters are considered a parent's loss because they cost dowries and do not bear family names after marriage. Parents therefore prefer to invest economic and social capital in boys rather than girls. As Fung-fung reported, '[M]y younger brother continues to study in a two-year college in order to avoid his duty. So, all financial burden is put on my shoulders.' Combining the daily gendered cultural practices (i.e. 'nan neu yeou bie' and 'nan tzuen neu bei') and the power hierarchy between parents and children in Taiwan, it is not surprising that it is always the women and girls who have to make 'sacrifices' for their families rather than the men and boys.

It is very important to differentiate daughters who are dutiful by choice from those who are coerced into being filial by duty. Lili chose to support her family after deliberate consideration at 27, while Sue-lian was trafficked into prostitution in the name of filial piety at 13. Sue-lian's father died when she was only eight years old. She started to work as a child labourer, picking vegetables for farmers, when she was only seven. Her aunt, pimping in Hwa-shi Street, Wan-hwa, conspired with her mother to abduct her to Taipei by promising her a job cleaning or babysitting. She felt the whole thing was 'a bit weird', but she could not resist and was then taken to a brothel. She kept saying '[N]o, no, no, I didn't want to do it', but the whole decision had already been made by her mother.

*I was just 13. I was undergrown. It was flat here (pointing to her breasts). I said no! My mum kept accusing me of not being filial to her.*



*She forced me [to do it] by using carrot and stick. I acquiesced to sign a two-year contract. Oh~ that period was extremely painful and horrible. It was much more painful than being sent to a prison (emphasized by Sue-lian). I injected hormones every day and was forced to eat a lot of Chinese medicine in order to grow up quickly. ...After my breasts had a bit of protuberance, the brothel owner took me to buy clothes, dressed me up, and then had a man to have sex with me. I really hated it. (Sue-lian, 41, trafficked for 10 years, and 18 years as a licensed prostitute)*

Nonetheless, after the two-year contract ended, her mother ‘took the money from the brothel owner again and again’. She was therefore confined to endless contracts that lasted for ten years. In the name of ‘the principle of filial piety’ Sue-lian’s mother contracted her out in order to support the family. Sue-lian, of course, had become the major breadwinner of her family of origin. However, it brought her more and more economic burden rather than honour, respect and/or authority. She struggled to make money under the inhuman trafficked conditions in illegal brothels, while her mother used her ‘flesh money’ mainly to invest in her brothers’ businesses:

*My mum is extremely jonq nan ching neu (i.e. privileges boys and condemns girls)...She sold me to the brothel. She gave money to my elder brother to run small businesses. But his businesses always failed and ended up with huge debts. I paid for his and my sister’s wedding. I paid for my father’s funeral, and the betterment of our house. I almost paid for everything, but I didn’t complain about it. (Sue-lian, 41, trafficked for 10 years, and 18 years as a licensed prostitute)*

The cultural practices of ‘jonq nan ching neu’ not only make Sue-lian’s ‘sacrifices’ possible, but also create an asymmetrical political economic worth among daughters and sons. Much research has pointed out that Southeast Asian

prostitutes send back money from urban to rural areas thereby creating a flow of money, but the research seldom informs us of the ways in which this money is distributed in these rural households. Sue-lian's narratives showed that the way money is distributed follows the given gendered cultural practices of '*jonq nan ching neu*', and thus serves to consolidate the gender hierarchy in the household. Thereby, it produces a vicious circle, i.e. men keep taking and women keep making sacrifices in which they are subjected to endless exploitation. Working women thus find that it is difficult for them to leave prostitution. Guillaumin (1995:181) lists four different ways in which women's labour is appropriated by men in households. They are: the appropriation of time, of the products of the body, of sexual obligation, and of the physical charge of disabled members of the group, as well as the healthy members of the group of the male sex. The ways Sue-lian's sexual labour was appropriated by her family (especially her brothers) identically matches the list. Even though Sue-lian reported '*I didn't complain about it*', we can sense that the relationship between Sue-lian and her family was very complex and should not, nor could it, be reduced to 'self-sacrifice'.

Indeed, the ways interviewees talked about their contributions and/or the 'sacrifices' they made for their families of origin were actually very subtle, ambiguous and contradictory. Some interviewees seemed very depressed due to their contributions and/or 'sacrifices' being 'taken for granted'.

*It was my fresh money. ...Anyhow, they [her family] seemed to feel that ...I mean they took it for granted.* (Sue-lian, 41, trafficked for 10 years, and 18 years as a licensed prostitute)

*...Later on, it seems that everyone is getting to be used to it. It turns out to be your responsibility. ...For example, my younger sister is the first person to know it. I performed badly after I got drunk. I cried after I went back home. My sister knows that I am very hard working. I talked to them about how toilsome it was to work in a bar. But, they seem to get numb. (Ling-ling, 19, 2 and a half years as a bar-girl)*

Again, becoming the breadwinner does not necessarily guarantee a higher status in the household. Instead, it usually brings more and more economic burden and is extremely emotionally taxing. Most importantly, for Ling-ling, it was the way her family take her contributions for granted that she found extremely sad and disappointing. They were initially sympathetic and appreciative but then they became 'numb'. Indeed, it is the shift of attitude of their families of origin that generates some interviewees' resentment towards them. Fung-fung's coming out story offered an example.

*(he, he, he...) [O]ne day I was very drunk. I came back from the bar. It's around 6am in the morning. Suddenly I felt very grievous. Why my mum always comes to me when she needs money...The more I thought of it, the more grievous I was. So, I ...phoned her. I complained about her and cried on the phone. I even had a quarrel with her, and then I told her I am working in a bar. I just wanted to know whether she would feel sorry for me or not, you know. But, she didn't! Oh~suddenly ...I felt regret about telling her (emphasized original). Gradually she expects more and more money from me. She takes it for granted. It's very unfair. I even feel resentful. (Fung-fung, 29, 3 years as a bar girl)*

It is no coincidence that both Ling-ling and Fung-fung reported that they came out to their families when they were 'very drunk' and/or 'losing control' (Ling-ling's term), and 'suddenly felt' that they could not bear it any more. The

coming out stories are represented more like an ‘accident’ which was caused by drunkenness rather than a deliberately planned project, because, as a ‘good daughter’, sharing the economic burden of the household is taken for granted. Above all, similar to Jones et al.’s (1998:43) findings, many interviewees tried to keep their work a secret due to the whore stigma. Thus, Mei-yun’s children were informed that she worked as a cleaner by Mei-yun’s relatives. Yen-yen’s parents were told that she worked in restaurants. Most young teenage girls were very worried about their families knowing about it, because ‘it will upset my parents!’ Some young girls reported: ‘[W]ho would be so silly to tell this to someone else?’ Commercial sex, therefore, in many cases, is handled as a (public) secret in the families of origin. The secrecy, and the contributions and/or ‘sacrifices’ which women made to their families of origin, paved the way for these dramatic coming out stories. To Fung-fung and Ling-ling’s surprise, the most heartbreaking part was that their mothers did not ‘feel sorry’ for them or ‘say anything’. On the contrary, what they had done for their families was simply taken for granted. Their coming out only made their mothers expect more and more money from them. It therefore turned out to be a ‘regrettable’ admission.

### **iii) Whore/(m)others speak out**

Apart from ‘filial piety’ toward families of origin, being a ‘good mother’ was also very important for some interviewees in this study. Being a prostitute ‘definitely brings your family a bad reputation’, but supporting the family and/or being a ‘good mother’ or a ‘good daughter’ justified the legitimacy of entering into prostitution.

*My family...I meant I was making money to support the family. I was trying to help, wasn't I...At that time I thought that...I would make more money, if I worked as a working woman. (laugh) My family's lives would be a bit...easier. (Lili, 52, 15 years as a licensed prostitute)*

*He [her father] didn't say anything. How could they [her relatives] say anything about it? No one gave me any financial support, and no one helped me to pay the children's tuition fees. ...I didn't waste any money. Neither did I spend any money on dating with men. I didn't. (Mei-yun, 61, 17 years as a licensed prostitute)*

Both quotations show that supporting the family justifies prostitution. In Mei-yun's case, the indifference of her relatives and poor social support made prostitution the only way available for her survival. In addition, following the social norm of being a 'good woman' (see, '*I didn't waste any money. Neither did I spend any money on dating with men*') also offers Mei-yun the legitimacy of being a working woman. Ironically, being a 'good woman' (either mother or daughter) turns out to be one of the major ways that they make sense of prostitution—i.e. in order to be a 'good woman', poor working-class women have to be prostitutes first! After all, the dichotomy of 'madonna/whore', in which 'good women' are legitimized by the patriarchal system and 'bad women' are stigmatized as whores (Pheterson, 1989), is both gendered and class divided. As being a 'good woman' and being a 'whore' are two sides of one coin, Lili responded that there was not any conflict between the social roles of whore and mother.

*I didn't feel that there was any difference. I felt that ...It's right that I was a working woman when I was in the brothel, but according to my*

*personality I felt they [being a mother and a prostitute] were the same. I didn't try to play with these two roles. I wouldn't try to act differently according to where I was. ...To be serious, I heard some clients saying (he, he, he...) that '[Y]ou look like an ordinary woman. I can't tell that you are a working woman.' ...It's not like what you said that I played a role when I was working, and shifted to another role when I went back home. I didn't think that I had to shift between them. (Lili, 52, 15 years as licensed a prostitute)*

Being 'working women' is still very stigmatized in Taiwanese society, therefore how these women dealt with the whore stigma (especially when facing their families) was always an issue for the interviewees. The question, 'how do you cope with the different social roles of being a mother and a working woman at the same time?', was very offensive to Lili. In fact, she existed exactly as a whore/(m)other--who has been made invisible and marginalized for a long time simply because her daily sexual practices are contradictory to the 'normal' social images of a mother, i.e. nursing, caring, and, most importantly, asexual. It is, in particular, the social construction of the heterosexual nuclear family that marginalizes diversity in family settings and varied mothering experiences (Wallbank, 2001). Studying British lesbian mothers, Gabb (2002) strongly criticized the dichotomy of whore/mother in which mothers are defined as maternal rather than sexual beings. Many lesbian couples thus usually 'tone down' their sexuality in front of their children. The dichotomy of whore/mother, she argued, undoubtedly serves the economy of gendered sexuality that views men as sexual and women as maternal. It thus makes it difficult for women to see sexual exploration as valuable, and justifies men's appropriation of women's (re)productive labour.

Conversely, the dichotomy of whore/mother makes it so difficult for people to accept that whores' mothering experiences are similar to other 'normal mothers' (if there are any!). As Mei-yun reported, 'I went to work in the morning and came back to cook dinner [for the children] in the evening. There wasn't any difference. The only difference is the job'. Exactly, the job makes the difference! Whore/(m)others, by charging for offering sexual services to men, are the masters of their sexual labour and are refusing to be sexually exploited and/or appropriated by men. In fact, Pan-pan, raped by her uncle when she was thirteen, reported:

*[p]eople will rebel, you know. It's very annoying. I mean, I would think...negatively that since you've been raped and...forced to do it [sex]...so, [I] feel it's all right to do this [commercial sex]. (Pan-pan, 18, a half year as a bar girl and [independent] call-girl)*

There is a strong tendency to link child sexual abuse and prostitution, particularly in the literature on child prostitution (for example, Silbert and Pines, 1982; Barry, 1995; Hwang, 1996; Jeffreys, 1997). Silbert and Pines argue that there is a 'cycle of victimization of prostitution': child prostitutes suffer from (sexual) violence and thus take to the streets; they then suffer from more brutal violence both on-the-job and off-the-job. Eventually, they feel very depressed and powerless (Silbert and Pines, 1982).

For these writers, Pan-pan might be represented as a poor sexual victim who could not bear the 'sexual traumas' and thus degenerated into prostitution. However, Pan-pan was aware of herself being involved in commercial sex with her father's friend when she was twelve years old. McMullen (1987) argues that

young children experience prostitution as a 'power game' in which the 'streetwise' could manipulate adult clients, achieve economic power, and do away with their under-developed sense of personal power. I will add sexual power to the list. Indeed, Pan-pan's account is an attack on the gendered economics of women's appropriated sexuality--since it is appropriated by men daily, what's wrong with making them pay for it?! Ironically, prostitution appears to be a way for women and girls to reclaim their sexual sovereignty, and a way to control their own bodies. As we will see in Chapter 6, Pan-pan has a strong sense of her own sexuality .

Indeed, thinking from the perspective of whore/(m)others, Wei-wei came to better understand her mother, a tearoom woman, and is proud of her. The tense mother-daughter relationship dramatically turned out to be easy and smooth after Wei-wei also became a whore/(m)other in order to raise her baby. She talked about the different ways she treated her mother before and after she prostituted herself:

*They [people] think we are whores who make money with our bodies because they don't have hard lives. My mum looked down on prostitutes before, too. She said that it's shameless to accompany men to dance and sing. But, apart from working in a tearoom, what else could she do? My father, how to say it, is extremely useless. My mum needs to pay for rent and our living costs. Look, a woman with three children in Taipei... Is it possible for her to live by an ordinary job? ...During that time, ...I really hated her. I thought that '[O]h, shame on you to work in that kind of place.' I was very annoyed whenever she talked to me. Sometimes I scolded her as a promiscuous woman or something like that. After my father was imprisoned, we went to live with my mum for quite a long time. I then felt that she is a really great mother! (with a big lovely smile) (Wei-wei, 18, unmarried single mother, half a year as an [independent] call-girl)*



It is precisely the job that makes these shameless great whore/(m)others socially excluded. I have already shown that many interviewees take up this job for survival. As far as survival is concerned, they develop a different social and moral standard regarding prostitution—i.e. you have your judgement but ‘I’m doing the right thing’. As Sue-lian put it, ‘[E]veryone has a different life situation. You shouldn’t judge people by your own standard. You have your ways for survival, and it’s my way of survival. Don’t interfere with each other!’ Social morality in a way is a luxury for working class women.

### **III. Money, fun, and power**

‘The need for money’, of course, is one of the most common themes in prostitution. Money nonetheless is also one of the most controversial and tricky issues in prostitution. Some research goes through details to examine how much money prostitutes earn and the ways in which they spend the money. It is well documented in the western literature that many prostitutes use this ‘easy money’ to feed their drug addiction (for example, Høigård and Finstad, 1992; McKeganey and Barnard, 1992; Melrose et. al. 1999). Høigård and Finstad even argue that many prostitutes take up the role of consumer in order to compensate for the ‘robbed... central roles in life’, such as career role and the role of family member or lover. Therefore, ‘[M]oney becomes a drug. Spending takes on an intense, feverish character’ (Høigård and Finstad, 1992:50). There are some flaws in this argument. Instead of problematizing the dominated life experiences and/or social roles, Høigård and Finstad obviously take them for granted. In addition, they wrongly argue that prostitution is ‘a job [that] provides no positive identity for “the whore”’ (Høigård and Finstad, 1992:50). Sex work, again, is described as a

job that destroys workers due to a failure to consider sex workers' abilities and diverse strategies to manage the social boundaries between themselves and clients, and how workers can benefit from the job. Finally, Høigård and Finstad fail to inform us why excessive consumption among non-prostitutes (both men and women) is also prevalent.

Compared to the western literature, the linkage between money and drugs in this study is not so evident. Among the adult interviewees, only Ping-ping reported that she had to take sleeping pills to avoid suffering from insomnia, which was very rare before she took to the streets. The teenage interviewees in this study could not control their anger when they talked about the ways in which they were assumed to be drug users in police stations. Only Pan-pan reported that she used amphetamines offered by a son of her boss. However, the discourse of 'easy money' is very popular. Taiwanese prostitutes in general, teenage and/or young workers in particular, are represented as 'greedy', 'fond of easy money and playing', and/or people who 'squander money like dirt'. This social representation is prevalent in the media, in the narratives of prostitutes' clients, in governments, and even among some interviewees. The former Taipei city government, for example, made former licensed sex workers' property information public to indicate that some of them not only made 'easy money', but also were much 'richer' than ordinary citizens. Thus, using 'easy money' to get rich causes moral condemnation. Facing this kind of moral condemnation initiated by a passerby, Mei-yun angrily responded '[E]asy money? How easy is it? One [clients' weight] could be 200 pounds!'

Reviewing the literature, we find that sex workers inevitably face a dilemma in which social oppression works against 'whores'. Spending the 'easy money' causes public attention (e.g. she must have some psychological problems and have to take up the role of consumer); while saving it, the 'easy money' turns out to be 'immoral money' which is used to humiliate, and degrade prostitutes. Facing these dominant social representations, as Jesson (1993) argued, we need to know more about (young) people's lives in order to offer a meaningful interpretation.

#### **i) Sexual secrets between little girls and elderly men**

'The need for money' is common ground for the interviewees entering prostitution, but there are some differences behind it. Adult sex workers, as I have shown earlier, seek money for survival and/or supporting their families of origin. Casual prostitution is taken up as a survival strategy for young girls who run away and/or who have dropped out of school. Many young girls reported that they did it casually; it is not a long-term job and they will leave it 'when the time's up'. However, one 17-year-old indigenous girl, Chia-chia, reported that she was forced by her boyfriend to work in a call-girl station, because her boyfriend (also an indigenous person) was unemployed and both of them ran out of money.

Apart from doing prostitution in sexual establishments, some young girls were involved in sexual transactions in a much more vague and/or informal way. Pan-pan reported the ways in which she was 'tempted' by money and involved in 'commercial sex' with a male friend of her father:

*It's the temptation...[of] money. I love money very much. It's weird (he, he, he...)...He said 'if you lack money or you need anything, you could come to see me' ...So, I went to his house, did it, and then he gave me some money. [Do you think it was commercial sex?] Yes, it is. And, once I needed money, I went to see him. Every time I saw him, [we] absolutely did it. So, I came to know doing commercial sex when I was very young [at 12-year-old]. (Pan-pan, 18, half a year as a bar-girl and [independent] call-girl)*

Similar stories, which I found most depressing and/or disturbing, came from two poor indigenous girls who offered sex to elderly men for survival and/or pocket money. Chiou-chiou's parents had been divorced for a few years. Like many other indigenous children, she was raised mainly by her grandparents due to her parents' absence from the home in order to work in other urban areas. Her grandparents were poor farmers who lived off a tiny piece of farm which was only able to produce cheap sweet potato. She was sent to the halfway centre, because 'my sixth uncle did something bad to me....and [before that] I asked for money from a *bai bai* (i.e. an old man)'. Chiou-chiou had no idea about commercial sex, asking for money from a nearly 70-year-old man simply because 'I was starving and I wanted some money to buy things to eat'. It happened four or five times. She reported that she never mentioned the prices, it is the man who decided how much to give her. Usually it was around NT\$ 500 to NT\$ 600. However, this was 'big money' for her. She used the money to buy notebooks, pencils, and little things for herself. Did 'asking for money from *bai bai*' upset her? Yes, it did. But 'once I think I could have some money, I then I felt very happy!' Fen-fen, another 13-year-old from the same indigenous tribe, had a similar experience. The difference is that she got more money from another elderly man. According to Chiou-chiou, Fen-fen's younger sister also 'asked for money from another *bai*

*bai*'.

'Asking for money from a *bai bai*' seems to be a familiar affair in Chiou-chiou's village. Indeed, among ten younger girls I met in three halfway centres, Chiou-chiou and Fen-fen were the only two girls who *preferred* to stay in the centre rather than return home. Because, according to Chiou-chiou, 'I could have enough food for every meal. I won't be starving here.' Fen-fen kept nodding her head saying '[H]ere, we have a sandwich and milk every morning. I didn't have it at home. My mum usually gives me NT\$ 20 per day'. These stories are depressing not because such young girls are involved in sexual transactions, but because the social organization of sexuality is so identical to the given social divisions of age, gender, class, and ethnicity: young girls sell sex to old men; indigenous peoples sell sex to the Han; the 'have-nots' offer sex to the 'haves'. This sexual practice is firmly based on a country severely against indigenous people's autonomy or severely prejudiced against indigenous people. According to the statistics of the Council of Indigenous Peoples, 40.5% of female indigenous peoples are only (or less than) primary school educated (see Table 5).

Table 5 Educational Levels and Monthly Income of Indigenous Peoples

%

		Female	Male
Educational level	primary school and under	40.5	28.4
	junior high school	18.6	23.2
	senior high school and vocational	28.7	37.6
	5 and/or 3-year college	8.2	6.8
	University	4.1	4.0
Monthly income of individual	Without regular income	39.3	21.7
	Less than NT\$20,000	38.1	30.5
	NT\$20,000 to 40,000	19.1	33.6
	NT\$ 40,000 to 60,000	3	11.1
	More than NT\$ 60,000	0.6	3.1
Unemployment rate		15.02	14.76
Total population (person)		213,263	220,030

Source: Statistics of Indigenous Peoples, 2001, see [http://www.apc.gov.tw/02\\_convin/nt05\\_tttic/ta\\_02.a.p](http://www.apc.gov.tw/02_convin/nt05_tttic/ta_02.a.p)

Although indigenous men enjoy better education than indigenous women, the percentage of male indigenous peoples who are only (or less than) primary school educated is still as high as 28.4%. Only 4% of indigenous peoples complete higher education (i.e. university). With this poor educational background, it is no surprise that 39.3% of indigenous women do not have a regular income, and 38.1% of indigenous women earn less than NT\$20,000 per month. The difficulty of entering the Han-dominated labour market also shows in the unemployment rates among indigenous peoples. Table 5 shows that female unemployment rates reach 15.02%, and male 14.76%. Both figures are many times the average unemployment rates of men and women in Taiwan (see Table 4). The disturbing sexual transaction between young (indigenous) girls and elderly men *might* not be a 'big deal' for the actors, but the socio-economic structures, the unequal power

between men and girls, adults and children, haves and have-nots, majority Han and minority indigenous, highlight these daily social practices.

## **ii) Survival strategy for runaways**

It is well-documented that many runaways, who lack stable housing and income, prostitute themselves for survival (for example, Høigård and Finstad, 1992; Hwuang, 1996; Melrose et. al. 1999; O'Neill, 2001). Pan-pan's self-account offered a detailed runaway life in which prostitution started from peer-group behaviour and was taken up as a survival strategy.

After studying in a senior high school for a few months, Pan-pan dropped out of school. She left home and moved to another city because she could not get along with her stepfather. In the city, she met one girl whose sister and friends worked as independent call-girls by soliciting on the Internet. Pan-pan and the girl became a lesbian couple later. She started to solicit on the Internet because *'they are all doing it. Also because I ran away from home. Firstly, I don't have any money. The life is very difficult. Secondly, this profession is quite easy for making money.'* Runaway life was difficult to the extent that Pan-pan had to steal food and drinks from the shops. Under this hardship, she started to work with her girlfriend's sister and friends. Nonetheless, she 'could not bear to see her [girlfriend] do it'. Identifying herself as a tomboy since 14, Pan-pan reported that doing heterosexual commercial sex was quite easy for her:

*For me it's quite easy, because I don't have any feeling about men at all. Yeah, without any feeling...commercial sex becomes very easy.*

*Umm, it's easy to do! Usually I go there, do it, take the money, and then leave.* (Pan-pan, 18, half a year as a bar girl and independent call-girl)

It is exactly Pan-pan's sexuality that makes prostitution a way of earning 'easy money' because this sexual practice does not involve her personal sexual identity. For her, doing heterosexual commercial sex simply means 'pretending you're feminine'; and 'I'm very good at doing it!' In this way, prostitution 'is a work at hand', and it 'lets you have a way to get money!' Therefore, Pan-pan usually sold pirate DVDs and VCDs in the night market till midnight, and then hung out with her girlfriend and other runaways in Internet cafés. They checked into chat rooms and waited for punters. Running commercial sex is therefore highly interwoven with teenagers' urban entertainment—hanging around Internet cafés and chatting on the Internet. If they got 'cases', they went to turn tricks and then came back to the Internet cafés till three or four o'clock in the morning.

Apart from doing prostitution for survival during her runaway days, Xin-xin's narrative shows the importance of being loyal to friends. Xin-xin reported 'I love money and I spent a lot of money'. Nonetheless, when asked why she spent so much money (NT\$ 10,000 to NT\$ 20,000 per week), she replied 'I had some runaway friends (two girls) at that time. So, I lent them money, otherwise they had no idea where to go.' So, usually Xin-xin found an iced tea bar to wait for the 'cases' during the daytime, and hung out with other runaways till midnight and then checked into a hotel. She took care of her runaway friends, brought clothes for them and paid for their daily living costs. Being a call-girl was not her first job in the sex industry. She had worked as a karaoke bar girl at 14,



because:

*I was very loyal to my friends. A friend said she suffered from being short of money, and asked me to go to do [karaoke bar girls] together. So, I accompanied her to do it. (Xin-xin, 16, casual call-girl)*

Entering prostitution as a result of being ‘loyal to friends’ may seem a little bizarre to adults. It was very important to Xin-xin, however. She reported that she was just like a ‘big sister’ during her junior high school days. She liked to help other female classmates who were much weaker. Once her friends were in trouble, she would try her best to help them. Being a karaoke bar girl and taking care of runaway friends was therefore treated as a way to make friends and as being loyal to friends.

### **iii) ‘Easy money’ and ‘having fun’ ?!**

The social representations of prostitution as ‘making easy money’ and ‘having fun’ reinforce the strong linkage between big money and prostitution. Thus, prostitution becomes a possibility and/or an attraction for money-needing women and girls. How interviewees responded to whether they liked their jobs shows the importance of making money in prostitution.

*...How to say it. There was no other alternative. It's making money. It was for making money. (Lili, 52, 15 years as a licensed prostitute)*

*It's useless to say you're not happy, because you are used to making money in this way. My sister is over 18 now. Hey, I won't oppose her working in a bar. Although I think it's very toilsome, I think it's the*

*best way to get rich in the short term.* (emphasized by Ling-ling) *If you, tut, are smart enough and are able to save money, I then think it's all right.* (Ling-ling, 19, 2 and a half years as a bar-girl)

Prostitution is considered '*the best way to get rich in the short term*'. Hence, when Fung-fung and Ping-ping's business failed, they fell into huge debt and they then entered into prostitution; even though, as Fung-fung reported, she did not understand the sex industry, '[T]here were only two words in my mind—*jeou dian* (i.e. special bar)!' Nonetheless, some interviewees actually did not make big money at all. The chilly and windy day I met Ping-ping, she had been standing on the street for three hours but had not turned any tricks. As her friend put it, '[W]e spend more time waiting for clients than working'. At bad times, Yen-yen only earned NT\$ 30,000 to NT\$ 40,000 in a month.

Apart from Fung-fung, who directly visited the bar and had a job interview without any mediation, most interviewees reported that they entered prostitution through friends who worked in the sex industry. The ways Ling-ling talked about her experience of entering prostitution were very interesting. It is worth quoting her at length:

*My classmate, her mother and sister are working in bars. It seems quite natural for me to work in bars. Umm, it's not that natural* (my emphasis)...*I was a phone secretary at that time. I went to drink in a pub every day due to breaking up with a former boyfriend. My colleagues said 'Why don't you come to work in the bar since you are so fond of drinking?' 'You could just do it as a part time job.'* *In this way, I came to work in a bar. Anyhow, I thought it's fun. I thought [Y]eah, I get free drinks every day. I could sing, laugh, and chat to people every day. Moreover I could make money at the same time.*

*It's great, isn't it? (my emphasis) At that time I was under 18, so I didn't need to wear a uniform. I wear casual wear. It felt very different. I was happy because I could make money. I was then caught by the police. I was put into a halfway centre for 52 days. So, I made up my mind to go back to work as a bar girl! That's it! Exactly, that's it! But I think friends are also very important. (emphasized by Ling-ling) If you have friends working in bars, it is very easy for you ...to be influenced. Even though everyone knows you would make big money in bars; it is unlikely that you would have the courage to get involved in this job if you didn't have any friend working in a bar. Umm, so, I think, if you have a friend, especially a good friend, it then ...is very easy. (Ling-ling, 19, 2 and a half years as a bar-girl)*

The quotation shows that the decision to enter into prostitution could hardly be summed up in one specific reason and/or one particular personality of a prostitute. Moreover, the difficulty of giving a clear-cut answer shows that prostitution is contingent.

Ling-ling's self-account moves among peer-group behaviour, emotional breakdown, seduction, the influential discourses of 'fun' and 'easy money', and the rebellion against state discipline. The quotation shows that peer-group behaviour is important in shaping prostitution. Nonetheless, by saying that, it does not follow that young girls are empty-headed and have no idea about their personal interests, or that young girls are 'inexperienced' and are therefore easy to be seduced into prostitution. Wei-wei, for example, repeated that she 'asked [her friend] all kinds of questions' about commercial sex before she started to solicit on the Internet. Xin-xin, sophisticatedly reported '[I]t's easier to make money in *ba dah harng yeh* (i.e. eight special businesses), especially doing "S" (i.e. commercial sex)'. Adopting the social representation of prostitution, Ling-ling

also *thought* that having fun and money at the same time was great! However, once it became a routine job, ‘it’s not fun at all’.

*You know, you have to do the same thing every day. It then turned out to be work. It’s very ...annoying. You simply do the same thing every day. It’s lucky, if you get very funny clients. They are very good at playing with you, and the interaction between you and them is quite good. You then feel it’s fun. Yeah, but it’s very rare. Exactly, it’s very rare.* (Ling-ling, 19, 2 and a half years as a bar-girl)

*At the beginning, I thought it was quite fun. Now I don’t think so. We simply do the same thing every day. Even clients complain ‘[O]h, come on, could you girls show us something new?’* (Jo-jo, 19, 2 years as a bar girl)

*[he, he...] Of course it was fun. You could know many boys and friends...Yeah, it was fun, but it then was not the case. ...Once you worked there for a while, you wouldn’t think of it in that way. You would think that it was for making money. Some people may be simply having fun. I don’t know.* (Shu-chin, 17, unmarried single mother, indigenous people)

Pan-pan, however, reported that she did ‘have fun’ when she was working in a bar. According to Pan-pan, she was very popular in the bar and the bar owner was very ‘nice’ to her. She reported that he took care of her life just like her father—brought her food, drinks and cigarettes, cooked for her and dealt with those obnoxious clients. She called him ‘dad’ because, ‘I didn’t have father-love’. Indeed, ‘having fun or not’ is also one of the indicators to differentiate engaging in commercial sex for fun from doing it for survival. Although she ran commercial sex in the bar, she repeated a few times that working in the bar ‘is just for fun’.

*Working as a bar girl is just for fun. ...Like, sitting next to clients and befriending them and chatting with them. Seeing clients [in the bar] are...for making a little pocket money. Yeah, it's for making pocket money. ...Doing yuan jiau (i.e. Internet mutual sex aid) is because life is [hard]. [I] lack money to live by. (Pan-pan, 18, a half year as a bar girl and independent call-girl)*

Here, we find that commercial sex has different social meanings for Pan-pan. In a better situation, (e.g. the bar owner is 'nice', and life is not so hard) commercial sex is treated as making extra pocket money; while during the hard times, it is practised for survival.

Above all, being a prostitute, for Ling-ling, also makes her feel powerful. Firstly, it is treated as rebellion against state discipline (*So, I made up my mind to go back to work as a bar girl! That's it! Exactly, that's it!*) Secondly, the literature points out that sex workers feel powerful as they are in control and clients have to pay for sex (Høigård and Finstad, 1992:82; Melrose et. al. 1999:32). Money does matter! Ling-ling was happy she could make money. Jo-jo went further to claim that:

*I am proud of my work. Look, I am just 19 years old, but I make so much money! Each time I hang out with my former classmates...They are all studying in universities, but I'm very rich, you know. It makes me feel satisfied! (Jo-jo, 19, 2 years as a bar girl)*

These self-accounts show that young girls are not 'inexperienced' and/or 'easily influenced by "bad friends"'; quite the opposite, it is the adults who refused to recognize the young girls as sexual agents who have sexual autonomy. As Jackson (1982) argued, childhood is a social construction and in many cases

children are raised as a different species rather than as human beings. Children are assumed to be too vulnerable to deal with sex, hence they should be 'protected' by the adults and prevented from involvement in sexual issues. Looking at my data, I could not help but think that it is not the young girls who have no idea about sex and are unable to deal with sex. To be honest, it is precisely the ways they think about and do sex that worries the adults.

## **Summary**

In this chapter, I have suggested that there does not exist a single social and/or economic reason which leads women and/or young girls into prostitution. In many cases, the decision to enter prostitution combines complex socio-economic situations that are always embedded in the daily gendered cultural practices in Taiwan. In this study, the working class and low educational background underlie Taiwanese prostitution. In the name of 'filial piety' young daughters either consent or (feel) forced to prostitute themselves. On the other hand, whore/(m)others have to prostitute in order to be good mothers! Nonetheless, these social practices are also closely related to the gendered labour market in Taiwan. Indeed, it is the gendered labour market that (re)produces the sexual labour force of the sex industry. Apart from working in formal sexual establishments, some young (indigenous) girls and/or runaways are involved in vague and ambiguous sexual transactions with elderly men for pocket money and/or survival. These young girls might not take these sexual practices seriously; nonetheless, these sexual practices are possible due to the multiple given social divisions, i.e. gender, class, ethnicity, and the hierarchy between adults and

children.

## Chapter 6

### ‘I gritted my teeth to do it’— Being a professional sex worker

#### Introduction

In the past three decades, feminist literature regarding prostitution has concentrated on analyzing the nature of prostitution and the gendered sexuality in prostitution. Little attention has been paid to the ways in which girls and women learn to become sex workers. Performing sex work, in a sense, is considered as not a big deal, as merely offering sex. Hence, the commonsense view that *everyone* could do it properly is taken for granted. This widely believed commonsense understanding, however, runs the risk of assuming that sex is ‘natural’ or ‘pre-social’. Feminists, nonetheless, cannot afford to take this risk. This chapter addresses the omission of seeing *becoming a whore* as a social process in which (good) women and girls have to learn how to be prostitutes. Going through those details regarding *becoming a whore*, we might be able to identify those diverse forms of labour (e.g. aesthetic labour and embodied emotional labour) carried out by sex workers.

My field data suggests that it is important to see ‘being a whore’ as a gendered social process in which (good) women and girls have to learn how to ‘be a whore’ (e.g. learning how to dress up, how to interact with clients, how to perform sex as work) to become a professional sex worker, rather than naïvely assuming that every woman knows how to perform commercial sex. It is, in fact, this naïve assumption that discredits the professionalism of sex workers. Only



when we carefully look at those daily routines demanded in performing sex work, are we able to appreciate sex work as a profession. I would argue that sex work is hardly considered as professional work, not because of its nature, but because women's performances of emotional work and of sexual labour have been taken for granted in heteronormativity.

In addition, I would suggest that sex workers are expected to perform emotional work to different degrees, which mainly depend on the ways sex work is organized. Hochschild (1979, 1983) argues that people's feelings and/or emotions are indeed 'social' rather than located in a mythical psyche and/or in biological response. Moreover, she argues that people's feelings and emotions are always regulated by 'feeling rules', which function in relation to a specific social structure and/or ideology. It is precisely these 'feeling rules' that guide people's emotional lives. Nonetheless, if individuals' feelings are not identical to these 'feeling rules', it is likely that they might try to 'work on' and/or 'manage' their feelings. The effort of trying to work on one's feelings is named 'emotional work', no matter whether the result is successful (1979:561). Hochschild uses the term 'emotional labour' to refer to the management of feelings in the labour market. Performing 'emotional labour' is alien labour that makes workers lose their 'authenticity' and/or sense of their 'true self'. The job of prostitution, for Hochschild (1979:570), is understood as one of the few working-class jobs which involves meaning-making and/or feeling management. I would add that it indeed offers rich resources for theorizing emotional labour.

Warhurst et al. (2000) and Witz et al. (2003) have begun to develop the

concept of ‘aesthetic labour’, which emphasizes the deep embodied self and/or somatic dimension in interactive service work, to enrich the ‘emotional work’ which emphasizes the deep ‘feeling self’. Taking sex work seriously, we might find that sex work adds something to the debates on these *face-to-face* and *voice-to-voice* jobs i.e. not only are the feeling self and the embodied self put to work, but, inevitably, the sexual self also comes into play. Indeed, it is the discrepancy between the sexual self and the sexualized body that demands an intensive performance of embodied emotional labour. Recently, feminist scholars have argued that it is important to differentiate the ‘objectified body’ (i.e. the observable body in the social space) from the ‘living body’ (i.e. the body in which one is able to see, to feel, and to experience the world) (Lindemann, 1997), because the ways women experience and perceive their bodies are different from how their bodies are perceived. Most of all, the ways we experience our bodies should always be contextualized (Jackson and Scott, 2001). In many cases, sex workers’ bodies were indeed presented and perceived as sexualized bodies, nonetheless they did not feel and experience themselves as sexual at all. The ability of differentiating sexual self from sexualized body signifies sex workers’ engagement with negotiating the boundary between personal sexuality and commercial sex.

Contesting Hochschild’s emphasis on the alienation of performing emotional labour, I would show that ‘training’ to be able to perform emotional labour turns out to be one of the ways in which sex workers shape their professionalism, and maintain their sense of self. Moreover, the emotional work demanded in sex work, *face-to-face*, *voice-to-voice*, and *body-to-body interactive work*, is very much

embodied and sexualized. In many cases, sex workers are not only expected to manage their feelings to please clients, but also need to learn how to carry out a variety of forms of 'body work' and most importantly, control their bodies properly to perform sex work. Indeed, it is the ability to perform embodied emotional labour and/or to exercise the technique of 'role distance' (Goffman, 1961) that makes sex workers able to differentiate the situated role they perform from their sense of self. Therefore, sex workers might be able to do commercial sex on the one hand, while enjoying personal intimacy on the other. In other words, the exercise of 'role distance' makes it possible for sex workers to see the different social meanings of the same (or a similar) sex act. Above all, it is important to note that embodied emotional labour is always embedded in the diverse settings of sex work, e.g. independent call-girls might have more freedom about how to perform emotional labour, while bar-girls are constrained to specific regulations imposed by sexual establishments.

In conceptualizing becoming a whore as a social process, this chapter will start from the ways in which girls and women learn to dress like a whore. I will discuss the ways in which girls and women experience this dressing like a whore. I will then analyze the ways in which sex workers manage to turn out their first trick. In many cases, sex workers needed some time to 'mentally adjust' themselves to becoming professional sex workers. Being a professional sex worker, I would suggest, means that there is a transformation of the sexual self. The transformation, of course, is always full of tears and bitterness. However, through this transformation terrified workers turning their first trick become confident sex workers.

## **I. Dressing like a whore**

Prostitutes have been pathologized as deviant others for a long time. Earlier writers, for example, Alexandre Parent-Duchatelet (in Bell, 1994), wrote about prostitutes as if they were a different kind of woman (who had some essential characteristics), or even a different species. In addition, prostitutes are always represented and marked as promiscuous, greedy, and pathological women, and transmitters of contagious diseases. The dichotomy of ‘madonna/whore’ not only creates the different species of ‘whores’, but also produces a hierarchy of ‘good women’ and ‘whores’. The stigma surrounding ‘whores’ means that they are labelled as cheap, inferior, and bad. Therefore, ‘good women’ make an effort to police themselves regarding their ways of dressing, their manners, and their sexuality, in order to differentiate themselves from ‘whores’. Conversely, the dichotomy of ‘madonna/whore’ means ‘good women’ have to act like whores or perform as whores in order to engage in commercial sex. In this study, I found that ‘dressing like a whore’ is the first step to performing the role of whore and/or becoming a ‘whore’. Xin-xin, a 16-year-old, reported ‘*[P]eople in this job probably know that they should dress like that...I knew it before I did it [call-girl service]. I think I got the impression from TV.*’ Whores, indeed, are not born by nature, but (re)produced from our daily social representations. The ways people learn about whores, however, are very much gendered: men obtain images of whores by visiting brothels and/or using pornography, women from daily social representations of whores in popular culture. These stereotyped social representations stigmatize whores and police ordinary women on the one hand, while they also appear to be resources for newcomers to mimic whores on the other. It is interesting to note that western sex workers watch movies about

strippers to learn strip dancing (Gunn, 2002). My interviewees, however, reported that they did not try to learn anything from pornography<sup>43</sup>.

Many interviewees reported that they dressed differently during working hours and off-duty times. Only Sue-lian reported that she dressed the same and did not prepare any special dresses for working as a licensed prostitute. Nonetheless, earlier in her life as a child prostitute, she was forced to put on ‘ghost-like make-up’ and dress up when she was trafficked into an illegal brothel. The ways interviewees dress up differ in terms of age, notions of beauty and sexiness, and the different ways commercial sex are organized. Older former licensed workers tended to have tailors to make formal dresses for them. These formal dresses, it seemed to me, were not so different from housewives’ dresses. However, some former licensed brothel workers do dress in a sexy and fashionable style (see Figure 3)

Figure 3. Former Taipei licensed brothel worker



Photo: Lin Bor-liang Source: COSWAS

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<sup>43</sup> The interviewees seemed to take this for granted. Sue-lian explained ‘[I]t’ll spoil clients, and make them more demanding!’

The basic logic behind this behaviour is as follows:

*Umm, to be serious, we needed to think about it. I thought that...It seemed that I was the second eldest woman in the brothel. I thought that my white skin was an advantage. I prefer dresses that were backless. I thought I wanted to be different from other women, and gave a good impression for clients. It's all right to dress like that there, because we went there to make money. I didn't dress in those clothes after I walked out of the brothel. (Mei-yun, 61, ex-licensed sex worker, stayed in prostitution for 17 years)*

Young girls, mainly casual call-girls, reported that they usually wore mini-skirts, tiny tight vests, and high-heels to see clients. As it was very similar to popular fashion, some young girls got used to it quickly, if 'it was not too revealing'.

*We definitely wore mini-skirts and tight tops in order to make people think that we have good figures. They [those clothes] could present female beauty. ...My colleague taught me. She said dressing like that was unlikely to be 'pa-ching' by clients. Pa-ching means...OK, if I was a client, and you dress like that to see me. I would tend to think 'Oh, she's really pretty.' I then wouldn't say 'Oh, I don't want you. Get out of here!'* (Wei-wei, 18, half a year as an independent call-girl)

The basic concern of dressing sexily or as sexually desirable is to try to avoid *pa-ching*, i.e. being dismissed by clients. *Pa-ching* is one of the ways in which clients show off their consumer sovereignty and/or the 'right to choose'. Clients are guaranteed different degrees of 'right to choose'<sup>44</sup>, in terms of the different

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<sup>44</sup> In (licensed) brothels clients could see all the women and then pick whomever they liked. Many organizers of call-girl services usually arrange two to three women to let a client choose. In special bars, a client could use his rights to dismiss many girls until he was satisfied.

prostitution settings. Clients' 'right to choose' demands sex workers be displayed and be chosen as sexual commodities (see Chapter 7). Being dismissed by clients therefore always upsets sex workers. Moreover, as far as making money is concerned, the majority of sex workers make an effort to give clients a good first impression (i.e. looking 'pretty' or 'having a good figure') in order to avoid *pa-ching* and to win the sexual contract. Both quotations clearly show that dressing like a whore is a way to attract clients. Mei-yun 'needed to think about it' mainly due to her older age. However, for Wei-wei, 'dressing like a whore' is also a part of showing the professionalism of being a sex worker. Because '*I tended to think that I was working, so I would...show off my best sides* [to clients]'. However, performing femininity highlights this professionalism. As Wei-wei put it, those clothes 'present female beauty'. Presenting women as sexy and feminine are the major themes in fashion (Lury, 1996). Hence, many (heterosexual) interviewees were more concerned with how revealing the clothes were, rather than being aware of the performance of femininity itself. Pan-pan, the only lesbian interviewee, always bound her breasts and wore jeans when she was not working, reporting that, '[I] would pay attention to my clothes...Because clients would be scared, if I looked more masculine.' 'Dressing like a whore' became a task of negotiating the boundary between maintaining her gendered sexual identity of being a 'very masculine tomboy' and being a feminine and sexually desirable whore. Hence, she tried to 'fake it a bit', e.g. putting on long skirts when working but not making herself feel so 'girlish'.

Performing femininity is rarely considered or appreciated as a kind of labour, mainly because women are expected to be feminine and sexually desirable both in

private and in public. Adkins points out that in service work it is only female workers who are subjected to severe regulations regarding their appearances. Indeed, she suggests that to 'look right', both in recruitment and their daily work, is the key for women to get and keep their jobs. In her study, female workers were even dismissed by managers due to the fact that they were 'too butch' and/or 'too manly' (1995:106). Indeed, it is because performing femininity is seen as natural to women that sex workers can feel powerful by charging for doing it. As Pendleton (1997) argues, using femininity as an economic tool in a way destabilizes the heteronormativity in which men are entitled to unlimited access to women's bodies.

Adkins suggests that service work creates 'a new sovereignty of appearance, image, and style at work' (2002: 61) and thus excludes some specific workers. Witz et al. (2003) also argue that interactive service work involves aesthetic labour in which workers' embodied dispositions are mobilized, developed, and commercialized. Moreover, employers are very aware that workers' physical capital could be well-developed by training and then be transferred into the economic capital of organizations. Therefore, many employers tend to recruit the 'right' people, who have specific attributes which suit these *face-to-face* and *voice-to-voice* jobs. It is no surprise that the performance of aesthetic labour is strongly demanded in sex work. Both Law (1997) and Chapkis (2000) describe how having the 'right-sized breasts' is so important for bar women in the Philippines, and for strippers in the United States. Sex work is not only *face-to-face* and *voice-to-voice interactive* work, but also a *body-to-body* job. Both employers and sex workers are aware of the ways in which good appearance



plays an essential role in sex work. In many cases, the employers (in special bars, brothels and call-girl services), if possible, tend to recruit young, beautiful, and sexy girls and women. Many interviewees reported that the job is hardly to be considered as a permanent job, due to the fact that one 'couldn't stay in this job when you are old'. The sexual hierarchies in the Taiwanese sex industry are thus not only stratified in terms of 'body selling' and 'pleasure selling', but also in terms of workers' ages. The older a worker is, the lower status she occupies in the industry.

In many occupations, senior workers win more respect and higher salaries, however, it is very likely that 'senior' and/or older sex workers tend to lose their clientele. Ping-ping reflected: 'I'm too old to work as a bar girl, so I came to the street.' Women's appearances and/or physical capital, in a way, underpin the hierarchical sex industry. For example, the youngest (usually between 18 to 25 years old) and the most beautiful girls go to work in bar or call-girl services, and the older women can only survive in underground brothels and saunas. Women who are more than 40 years old can probably only survive in tearooms and/or on the streets.

Even in the same call-girl service, girls and women are classified into hierarchical categories in terms of their physical capital, e.g. height, skin, size of breasts etc. Currently, the organizers of call-girl services tend to classify women into *'flight attendants'*, *'college girls'*, *'shop girls'*, *'nurses'* and ordinary call-girls. (It is interesting to note that female workers in service work are so sexualized and eroticized in Taiwan that call-girl services use their job titles to

attract clients.) Each category has its own price. Usually *flight attendants* are the most expensive category and then *college girls*. The hierarchy among sex workers, of course, creates tension or competition. Xin-xin reported that her boss charged a client NT\$ 8,000 for seeing a *flight attendant*. However, she argued '[H]ey, they are not so beautiful, you know. They are simply just 36B (the size of breasts)!'

The ways sex workers perform aesthetic labour are very much embedded in various working settings. Independent sex workers usually enjoy more freedom to carry out aesthetic labour, while employees of call-girl services and special bars are constrained by serial regulations. For example, Wei-wei and former licensed brothel workers, in a sense, run their businesses independently and no-one is in charge of their work. They thus enjoy more freedom in deciding whether and how to dress up, whilst some interviewees had to follow a specific dress code, particularly those interviewees who worked for call-girl services and special bars. Xin-xin complained about her boss's request:

*He said '[Y]ou had better dress in something to expose your chest and back. You definitely need to wear a skirt because it makes you look better so on and so forth'. ...I usually wore a skirt and a low V-shaped top. It was very easy to see my breasts. I hate people controlling my clothes and make-up... He was very harsh to my friend. He always told her '[D]id you know that you are very dark and you are very likely to be pa-ching? It's very difficult for you to turn out a trick, you know?' That's very hurtful, you know. (Xin-xin, 16, casual call-girl)*

Although Xin-xin did expect to dress up, she nonetheless 'hate[s] people controlling my clothes and make-up'. The way her friend was treated by the boss reminded me that one bar-tender reported '[N]o matter how ugly a girl is, we

would try to help her out. She could wear a wig, make-up and put on sexy clothes.’ The point is how to use women’s physical capital and/or sexualized bodies to make a profit. Uniformed bar girls offer an excellent example.

*Pretty Girls* is a uniformed bar (i.e. *jyh fwu diann*<sup>45</sup>). In so-called uniformed bars, bar-girls have to wear uniforms. In *Pretty Girls* the uniform includes three pieces (cost NT\$ 4,000 and all in light purple): a well-decorated bra that clearly shows the girls’ ‘big breasts’, a tiny piece of mini-skirt which opens in a slit to the waist, and a silk robe which has to be taken-off when seeing clients. Moreover, each bar-girl is *required* to wear G-strings. I still remember that I blushed when seeing Fung-fung jumping up on a table to turn on the light and there was almost nothing on her hips. In addition, unlike most Taiwanese women, many bar girls I met in *Pretty Girls* had ‘big breasts’. I could not help but ask whether having a good body shape was one of the standards that bar managers looked for when they recruited girls. The girls replied unanimously ‘[N]o, absolutely not!’ Lu-lu burst out laughing and said ‘[I]t (the bra) is padded! Many clients were so excited when they saw our cleavages, and then grasped our breasts. They then complained that ‘[O]h, they [girls’ breasts] look big, but there is nothing to touch!’ All the girls in the room laughed aloud again; it seemed that they were satisfied by the trick.

Apart from a few streetwalkers I observed in the streets, who did not even

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<sup>45</sup> In Taiwan, the special bars can be roughly classified into two categories: *jyh fwu diann* and *biann fwu diann*. Literally, *biann fwu* means casual clothes. Whereas *jyh fwu diann* demands bar girls to wear uniforms, bar girls in *biann fwu diann* do not need to wear uniform. However, there is still a dress code in *biann fwu diann*. In one famous *biann fwu diann* I observed, during a police raid, that most bar girls wear very sexy tops and fashionable mini-skirts. The ways they dress themselves are very similar to the interviewees who work as call-girls. However, their clothes were much more expensive than those of the call-girls in this study.

wear make-up, doing 'body work' in fact is one of the important daily jobs among sex workers. This 'body work' (like many women do in their daily life) includes putting on (light) make-up, using lotion to make the skin look smoother, wearing designer perfume and fashionable hair styles. Mei-yun reported that she started to learn how to wear make-up after entering into prostitution. She also tattooed her eyebrows for this job. Most of all, many interviewees made an effort to monitor their weight. The majority of the interviewees were smaller than size ten and weighed between forty and forty-five kilograms. Yet, many interviewees complained that they were 'too fat'. Echoing Witz et al. (2003), the uniform and girls' 'body work' signify the bar, i.e. they embodied the image of the bar and presented it as a more 'stylish' or 'refined' sexual establishment. As the girls kept emphasizing: '*[W]e are more stylish. We don't dress gaudily and don't wear heavy make-up like girls in other bars.*' '*Umm, also the way we talk is not vulgar*'. Here, the girls' light make-up and manner signify and embody the style and the refinement of *Pretty Girls*. In this way, the workers' embodied dispositions are successfully mobilized by the bar, put on sale, and transferred into economic capital for the bar. Moreover, the emphasis on the 'refinement' of the bar also serves the girls' interests, i.e. it means that girls work in a unique bar that makes them different from other working women (who dress gaudily and speak vulgarly).

The uniform is obviously designed to satisfy clients' sexual fantasies and pleasures; i.e. clients could easily touch bar girls' body parts and enjoy playing with the women. Thus bar girls could not disguise their anger when they reported that the uniform was 'too revealing' and this usually created extreme tensions

between clients and bar girls. Fung-fung reported:

*Umm, I felt so uncomfortable from head to toe...At the beginning, I used my hands to cover my breasts when I was topless. I tried to cover here and there, but I just have two hands I couldn't cover that much. Some clients were very horrible. They blamed you when you tried to cover your body. They said 'Don't cover it. Don't you see that no-one covers her body?' (Fung-fung, 29, 3 years as a bar girl)*

In another conversation with a group of five girls, Ling-ling and Fung-fung reported:

*Ling-ling: I simply wasn't used to it. I mean, you [as] a normal person, couldn't stand wearing this kind of uniform. (my emphasis) I think we are too exposed. You couldn't stand it. It's true.*

*Fung-fung: he, he... Yeah, I told her. It's very horrible.*

*Ling-ling: Yes, it's very terrible. Because you are a normal girl and you wear so...(my emphasis) You wear like this...and walk around in front of people, of course you would be scared.*

Here, feeling 'uncomfortable from head to toe' and 'scared' may not only because the uniform was too revealing and attracted the 'male gaze', but also because offering clients exposed sexual bodies (which could be played with and touched) was also part of the bar-girls' work. Not only were their hearts put to work (Hochschild, 1983) to manage those 'male gazes', but their sexualized bodies were put on the front line to engage in hand-to-hand combat. Moreover, Ling-ling could not stand the uniform because she was 'a normal girl'. The narrative shows that she was trying to manage the social boundary between a 'normal girl' and a 'whore'. Here, sex workers' emotional labour refers to two different levels: managing emotions to deal with the conflict between the sexual self and the

sexualized body, and negotiating the boundary between a 'normal girl' and a 'whore'. (I will return to this point later.) Xin-xin also reported that she was 'afraid of bumping into acquaintances' when dressed up:

*Umm, I felt a bit afraid of it. I wondered whether I could respond properly and quickly, if I met some friends on the streets....Sometimes I thought that I dressed too exposed, but sometimes I thought it didn't matter. Because I always put on causal clothes after I came back from work.* (my emphasis) (Xin-xin, 16, casual call-girl)

Paradoxically, we might find that 'dressing like a whore' is the first step to becoming a whore, while it also offers a space to 'de-whore' whores. Therefore, as many interviewees reported, 'putting on causal clothes' and taking off those special dresses and/or uniforms turn out to be the ways in which sex workers maintain their sense of self, and mark the boundary between work and ordinary lives. See, '*It's all right to dress like that there...I didn't dress in those clothes after I walked out the brothel*'. Ho (2001) reported that Taiwanese nude models change their clothes before exposing themselves in public in order to mark the time-and-space of performing their work. Here, 'dressing like a whore' serves the same function. Indeed, it is the dichotomy of 'madonna/whore' that means women can be labelled as 'whore' by wearing lewd dresses, while the 'whores' could easily look like ordinary women by dressing differently.

## **II. The first trick: shock, fears, and nerves**

### **i) Lacking a job description**

Crossing the threshold of dressing like whores, women need to turn their first

trick to become sex workers. Many interviewees reported that they were extremely 'nervous', 'shocked' and 'scared' during the first trick. Interviewees reported:

*I was very nervous because I didn't know how to do it. (Xin-xin, 16, casual call-girl)*

*I wasn't afraid of it, but I was very nervous. Because I had no idea what should I do, and I didn't dare to talk to clients. That's it. (Shu-chin, 17, karaoke-bar girl)*

*How to say it, I didn't have a clue. (he, he, he...) I didn't know anything at that time. I was a bit silly, you know....My feeling...umm, I think I was a bit silly and I didn't know how to do it...After you have worked for a while, you tend to be more familiar with your work. I think it also applies to some other jobs. (Lili, 52, ex-licensed sex worker, stayed in prostitution for 15 years)*

This common experience mainly connects to the specificity of sex work. Chapkis (1997) precisely points out that part of the remarkable phenomenon of sex work is that it does not have a clear and detailed job description. It seems that every woman is supposed to know how to perform the 'oldest profession'. This assumption, in a way, wrongly treats heterosexual sex as 'natural' or 'pre-social'. Sex, nonetheless, is far from a natural act (Tiefer, 1995, quoted in Jackson and Scott, 2001:102). Even in the most 'private' sex, e.g. masturbation, the social has already slipped stealthily into our bedrooms before we shut the doors. Moreover, the commodification of sex results in the rational management of sexuality and thus there are many heterosexual sex manuals from the nineteenth century onward teaching people how to perform 'good sex' (Jackson and Scott, 1997). The

phenomenon of the commodification of sex, in fact, contradicts the idea of seeing sex as 'natural' or 'pre-social'.

Some sexual establishments gradually develop sexual scripts for prostitute-client encounters (Chapter 4); however, commercial sex, extremely commodified, seems to allow more fluid and unstable sexual practices which are out of the control of the trend of this rational management. Commercial sex is thus attractive for punters. As Mei-yun put it, '[I]f we offer the same thing [as his wife to him], why would he bother to come here?' Nonetheless, this odd phenomenon is also highly related to the illegitimate status of Taiwanese prostitution. As prostitution is criminalized and widely considered to be immoral, similar rational management or commercial sexual scripts can only be circulated informally among the working women themselves.

The ways interviewees accessed this information regarding their jobs, nonetheless, was highly related to the ways in which their work was organized. In former Taipei licensed brothels, this information circulated among women informally, and women tended to teach each other verbally, e.g. how to dress up, how to handle obnoxious clients, which and/or what kind of clients should be avoided, how to convince clients to use condoms etc. Independent call-girls and streetwalkers mainly depended on their friends who had already worked in this profession. As in the literature (McKeganey and Barnard, 1996; O'Neill, 2001), the streetwalkers told me that they would take care of each other in the streets by paying attention to whether a trick took much longer than usual. Girls who worked for call-girl services obtained this information either from their colleagues



or their bosses.

However, many interviewees were put on the front-line for their first trick without being fully informed. Many young call-girls, for example, reported that their bosses had them seek advice from other female colleagues, but they were only told '*[D]on't be nervous*' and '*[Y]ou'll get used to it later*'. Although Yen-yen worked in a 'quite simple' tearoom, she was quite scared the first time. She was scolded by other colleagues because she was not able to serve tea perfectly. Only Shu-chin reported that she was not afraid. Nonetheless, Shu-chin also 'didn't dare to talk to clients'. Only Wei-wei and Chen-chen reported that they were well-informed before turning out the first trick. Wei-wei was informed by her friend, but her feelings about this information were very complex and contradictory after she was arrested:

*It was [the information] very helpful when I was doing it. But now I'm not doing it, and I would feel that it was harmful. If she [her friend] hadn't told me all that information, maybe I ...wouldn't understand this job, and wouldn't want to do it. (Wei-wei, 18, half a year as an independent call-girl)*

The contradictory feelings about the information provided are highly related to the social discipline and punishment of prostitutes in the halfway houses in which they learned that they were 'deviants', 'unfortunate girls' or 'bad girls' (Chu, 1998). It was helpful that the information (e.g. how to dress up, what kind of services should/not be provided, how to charge, and how to protect oneself etc.) made her understand this job and thus she felt that being a sex worker was both desirable and possible. Thus Wei-wei's narrative more or less implies that many

women do not dare to come to this job due to a lack of detailed information. Moreover, it also aids understanding of the ways in which many sex workers come into this profession through friends' introductions. Indeed, it is seeing sex work as an 'underground' and/or unspeakably dirty job that causes information only to be circulated informally and among specific inner circles. Thus, newcomers and/or junior sex workers usually get information either from other senior sex workers or from the men who run brothels and/or call-girl services. Chen-chen reported that she was *taught* the details regarding how to turn out a trick by her boss (i.e. the organizer of the call-girl service).

*Oh, [my job is] to accompany clients to take a shower, lick their chest, perform oral sex and then put on condoms, and then intercourse. The boss asked us to provide those services. At the beginning, each woman should do it with the boss, and he would teach women how to provide services. (M: teach?) (nodding) Umm, because he just did it for a few minutes (my emphasis). (Chen-chen, 17, casual call-girl)*

It is very interesting that Chen-chen kept complaining that '[I]t's so unfair that he [the boss] always earns more money than me' by taking 55% of the earnings of each trick. Nonetheless, she tended to see that her boss was training her rather than taking sexual advantage. The sentence '*Umm, because he just did it for a few minutes*' is indeed one of the ways Chen-chen differentiated her sexuality from her job training, i.e. learning how to perform sex as work and getting a picture of doing sex work. This implies that sex and personal intimacy might involve a longer time; while what happened between the boss and her was not identical with her sexuality. Moreover, this (sexual) training process, *just lasting a few minutes*, was also different from those sexual encounters, *usually taking an hour*, with

clients. Here, the sexual self differentiates job-training sex, work sex, and private sex. Similar sexual practices or the same sex act were endowed with different social meanings, i.e. doing sex acts for job-training, for making money, and for fun and/or intimacy. The boss and clients did have access to Chen-chen's (sexualized) body; however, they could not reach her sexuality, in which she experienced sex as erotic, desirable and pleasurable. In addition, crossing the boundary of 'madonna/whore', here, is not only transgressing the social morality imposed on women's bodies and sexuality, but also crossing the social meanings of performing sex acts.

## **ii) Bodily contact with male strangers**

Apart from being nervous and scared due to lacking a detailed job description, the threat of police raids (Chapter 4) and of having sex or bodily contact with male strangers also intensified the interviewees' fears during the first trick. Interviewees who worked in different work settings and were of different generations commonly reported the phenomenon. This is not only commonly reported by former licensed sex workers who grew up in more sexually conservative climates, but also found among younger interviewees who were sexually experienced. Impersonal sex is one of the attractions of men seeking commercial sex. However, many respondents reported that it is particularly being nude, being watched, and being touched by *male strangers* that causes the horror:

*Hey, you need to be touched by male strangers, you know. And those people are all old enough to be your dad, you know. [You'll be] scared to death! (Jo-jo, 20, 2 years as a bar girl)*

*I wasn't used to it. I couldn't accept it. ...You might have body contact with friends or boyfriends, but suddenly you've got a male stranger held your arms...That made me feel extremely scared. I was trembling immediately. I could not adjust to it mentally. That's horrible.*

(Ling-ling, 19, 2 and a half years as a bar girl)

*My first client was a ...I cannot remember now. Anyhow, I felt very scared. It was very horrible. I was terribly scared. ...How to say it...I am not that kind of ...I think I am quite a sexually conservative person. ...How to say it...I don't like to be touched by people.*

(Chia-chia, 17, casual call-girl)

*I was afraid of it. (laugh) I was quite worried about it, because he was not my boyfriend after all. (laugh..) Umm, because it was the first time doing that thing with a stranger who I had never met before, you know.*

(Wei-wei, 18, half a year as an [independent] call-girl)

Similar 'male strangers' narratives could also be found in western sex workers' accounts. Gunn, a British stripper from a middle-class background, wrote that even though she rehearsed all the details in her mind before she carried out the audition, nonetheless, all the 'thoughtful preparation and choreography was for naught' (2002:3). Moreover, the respondents' experiences shown above are actually very similar to many (Taiwanese) women's first sexual experience; i.e. we have no idea what to do, how to react to our partners' bodily activities, and how to express our desire and sexuality through our bodies. These quotations show that respondents were terrified sexual objects who were gazed at, touched, and penetrated by male strangers. Holland et al. (1996) argue that the only way for women to claim agency in the 'first sex' is by making the choice to lose their virginity to men. This remark, however, fits very well for women who turn out their first trick. Clients are active subjects; first-time sex workers are passive objects.

Our bodies, of course, are not only containers that are passively loaded and/or waiting to be inscribed with the product of our minds and feelings. In some cases, we find that our bodies are stiff, to the extent that they are *out of our control*. Many Taiwanese women, for example, have similar experiences of feeling their bodies are stiff and therefore fail to respond properly when unexpectedly facing sexual harassment. However, the diverse ways women respond to (sexual harassment and/or) the environment do relate to the various ways women think about bodies, and different bodily practices and/or training that women invest in their bodies (Young, 1990; Davis, 1997). Prendergast and Forrest's (1998) empirical research also argues that emotions are indeed social acts which we learn from childhood. In many cases, we use diverse bodily activities (e.g. crying, laughing, throwing things, and waving fists etc.) to express our feelings. Therefore, the relations between the fleshy body and emotions/feelings are more dialectical and dynamic, rather than linear or unidirectional. These embodied emotions, argued Prendergast and Forrest, are always embedded in the gendered social structures, particularly in the workplace and school. For example, girls feel too scared to climb through windows, while boys occupy the centre of the playground and beat up small boys to show off their masculinity.

Feeling scared of being touched by male strangers is nonetheless very social. The social is both discursively and materially constructed. Locating these narratives in Taiwan's context, it is indeed highly related to the atmosphere of asceticism in Taiwanese society, and the ways in which femininity is constructed in Taiwan. Most importantly, this ascetic atmosphere generates very gendered cultural practices that shape women's bodies and sexuality in Taiwan. One of the

most remarkable dogmas of asceticism is that women are demanded to *shoou shen ru yuh* unilaterally. Literally, the phrase means that people should cherish their bodies in the same way that they would take care of jade. However, it usually uses this notion to demand that women stay chaste or preserve their virginity. In other words, unmarried women should be kept pure and chaste, while widows ought not to remarry. Currently, college girls are still commonly admonished by parents; '[D]on't stay over night with boyfriends!' What 'good men' could contribute to this gendered social project is that they do-not-ruin-women's-chastity. Therefore, before 1999, rape, according to Taiwanese criminal laws, was considered to be a crime which 'ruined' women's chastity, reputation and honour, rather than a crime against women's right to control their own bodies and sexuality. As honour, reputation and chastity were concerned, many raped women were persuaded and/or forced by their families of origin to marry their rapists<sup>46</sup>. As Huang (1991) critically argues, raped women are always blamed for bringing a bad reputation upon their families, while rapists turn out to be saviours who save their good reputation!

Above all, *shoou shen ru yuh* and/or staying chaste signifies the ways femininity is socially constructed in Taiwan. People's manners are regulated by the ideology to the extent that men show off their masculinity by saying dirty words (e.g. fuck), while women are widely admonished to avoid using similar

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<sup>46</sup> The most famous case is Deng Ru-wen's case. Deng was raped by her husband, and then forced to marry him. She suffered from domestic violence for many years. She could not bear it and thus used a knife to kill her husband. She definitely was not the first woman to kill her husband in Taiwan. The case is famous due to it being the first case of its kind where the woman was not sentenced to death, but given five years' imprisonment instead. The basic rationale of this decision is that her lawyers successfully convinced the Court that she had 'lost her mind' after suffering from domestic violence for many years (Deng and Chen, 2000).

words. Women cross their legs when they are sitting mainly to avoid the image of widely opened legs that *might* link to their vaginas or sexuality; while sitting with legs open is a way for men to express masculinity. *Shoou shen ru yuh* regulates women's behaviour to the extent that sex workers are even expected to perform this *sexless* femininity. Young girls reported that:

*Clients would be more fond of you, if you didn't have much sexual skill. Because he could teach you and that turns him on. (Xin-xin, 16, casual call-girl)*

*How to say it...if you looked very (sexually) experienced, he would feel that 'Oh, you are a...' So, it's better to make yourself look not so experienced. For example, you could shyly ask 'Is it all right?' (smile) before he did something to you. Umm, pretending to be pure...Tut, I don't know...Because if you looked too pure, they knew that you was faking, ha, ha, ha...(Wei-wei, 18, half a year as an [independent] call-girl)*

Performing femininity here is very much embodied, i.e. *shyly ask* '[I]s it all right?' and *smile* at the same time. The same sentence spoken in different ways (e.g. with different tones, different facial expressions, and bodily postures) might produce a totally different effect. This embodied femininity presented Wei-wei as a sexually inexperienced young girl; however, it sounded sexually seductive on the other hand. The performance turns on clients mainly because buying sex from 'inexperienced working women' opens up the possibility that clients are more 'familiar' with the whole thing, and will be able to lead the sexual encounters. Paradoxically, the phrase '*Oh, you are a ...*' highlights this embodied performance of femininity demanded here. The missing word in the phrase is, no doubt, 'whore'. As Taiwanese clients tend to eroticize sexually inexperienced young girls,

the performance of embodied femininity therefore is a balancing act in which 'professional' working women should present themselves as not 'real whores' to turn on clients!

The gendered ideology of *shoou-shen-ru-yuh* is still quite dominant in Taiwan, and signifies the daily gendered sexual practice of keeping one's virginity. Theorizing sexual scripts, Jackson (1999[1978]) argues that women objectify their sexuality in utilizing it as an object of barter, and expect the highest price, marriage, in exchange; while men tend to expect a bargain. This analysis is very helpful in explaining the economics of Taiwanese women's daily cultural practices of *shoou-shen-ru-yuh*. As women's bodies and sexuality are always waiting for the right price to sell in the heterosexual marital market, Ho (1994) argues that it generates the 'logic of gain and loss' in which women do their best to hide their sexual bodies and avoid being seen and touched by men. Women feel upset and 'lose' something when they are seen and/or touched, while men feel great and 'gain' when they manage to see and touch women. This thus shapes women as objects to be gazed upon, while men are subjects who gaze. The ways Taiwanese women present themselves as objects to be gazed upon could be easily observed in women-only saunas.

Nowadays, women-only saunas have become a fashionable urban leisure space for Taiwanese women and girls. Nonetheless, many women still feel uncomfortable or uneasy being nude in women-only saunas, particularly those first-time visitors. Many saunas advise visitors not to wear towels after leaving the changing rooms for hygienic reasons. However, many women still cover



themselves with towels till they can slip into the bath pools. Once they get out of the pools, towels will be immediately put on again. In a way, Taiwanese women's bodies are not only forbidden to be on display to male strangers, but also to female strangers. Indeed, the majority of Taiwanese women still feel unease when not wearing a bra in their living rooms, let alone to be nude in public in front of male strangers.

Barbalet (1998) argues that the feeling of 'fear' usually relates to the asymmetry of the power structure in which individuals noticed that they were vulnerable and helpless. Ling-ling's narrative of the bad sides of her work reflects the asymmetry of the power structure between sex workers and their clients:

*At least, working in other jobs...people should respect you. Once your boss, supervisors, and colleagues touch you in this way, they then violate your rights. Working in bars, it is very reasonable when you are touched. You couldn't ...Do you know what I mean? I mean you can't defend yourself. (Ling-ling, 19, 2 and a half years as a bar girl)*

Taking the account seriously, it suggests that the common experience of 'feeling scared' is indeed deeply grounded in the material reality in which 'customers are supreme' while bar girls are sexual objects for clients' sexual pleasures. The asymmetrical power structure between clients and bar girls is not only reflected in the gender hierarchy between men and women as I discussed above, but also in the power relations between consumers and service providers. The gendered power structure symbolically constitutes the 'fear climate', while the latter precisely constrains bar-girls' activities, i.e. *you can't defend yourself*. Fear is therefore summoned.

The ways we think and feel about our bodies do have a strong impact on how we carry out embodied sexual activities. Ling-ling could not mentally accept this and failed to act like a bar-girl, because her body was ‘trembling immediately’. Although this phenomenon is not purely biological, the feelings of being nervous and horrified, showed in the quotations above, do make it difficult for sex workers to manage their bodies properly to perform strip dancing and/or sex work. Hence, the emotional work demanded is very much embodied. Sex workers should manage their feelings and then make an effort to bring their bodies under control. Most of all, it calls for the transformation of the sexual self. It usually takes sex workers some time to obtain the technique to cope with the mind, feelings, and body properly, and maintain the boundary between personal sex and commercial sex.

### **III. Negotiating the boundaries**

#### **i) Managing the sense of self—working self vs. non-working self**

The common experiences of being nervous, scared and shocked in the first trick makes many adult interviewees report that they took some time to adjust to commercial sex. The period of adjustment, I would suggest, is indeed a period for sex workers to learn how to perform embodied emotional labour and/or to exercise the technique of ‘role distance’. Moreover, this adjustment is so difficult for many respondents mainly because performing sex work is so related to respondents’ (hetero)sexual intimacy and their sense of self. Indeed, only Pan-pan, a young lesbian, reported that doing commercial sex with men ‘isn’t a big deal, because I have no feeling about men!’ Conversely, she felt very ‘shy’ when seeing female clients, because:

*It's a bit similar to a male and a female [encounter]. Yeah, like, I'm a boy, and she's a girl. You more or less would feel a bit...shy...Umm, [I] felt a bit shy. I mean, she's a girl after all, and it's the first time to do it [sex] with her. If you have that kind of [sexual] contact for two or three times [with her], you would feel ...natural or at ease. (Pan-pan, 18, a half year as a bar girl and independent call-girl)*

Performing sex work is very much a gender performance for Pan-pan. She carefully managed her gender identity when providing commercial sex to male clients; but shifted back to her 'true colours'—her tomboy identity—when seeing female clients. Feeling shy signifies the fact that Pan-pan noticed that the sexual encounters were identical to her sexuality. As Morgan (1988:27), a lesbian sex worker, describes, performing a strip show for lesbians is both 'performing and *playing* with parts of our sexualities' (*emphasis is original*). Pan-pan enjoyed sexual encounters with female clients, rather than making an effort to differentiate commercial sex and personal pleasure. In fact, she only met two female clients and eventually both of them turned out to be her girlfriends. Nestle (1988) argues that prostitution offers a rich resource for understanding lesbians' lives, and suggests that many lesbians turn to prostitutes for sexual comfort and/or prostitute themselves. However, I am not suggesting that it is easier for lesbians to perform sex work. Indeed, Summer (1987) (an ex-prostitute and a lesbian) speaks out against buying women for sex, and argues that prostitution lets her learn that heterosexual sex is grounded in sexualized inequality. My point here is to stress the ways in which workers' sexual and gender identities shape their different understandings and experiences of commercial sex.

It is no coincidence that respondents reported that controlling their tempers

was a feature of their daily work. Fung-fung and Mei-yun responded to the question, '[I]s there any professional skill in doing sex work?':

*No, I didn't think so. You simply need a good-temper. (Mei-yun, 61, ex-licensed sex worker, stayed in prostitution for 17 years)*

*Professional [skills]...No, I don't think so. You just need to be able to please clients and...be able to drink. And ...you should be highly co-operative. There is nothing professional. Anyhow, you need to please clients and ...Umm, don't show a bad temper. (Fung-fung, 29, 3 years as a bar girl)*

These quotations suggest that there is nothing professional in sex work. However, it is more precise to argue that these narratives mark out the ways in which women's emotional work is neglected and devalued both in public and in private. For example, apart from doing physical care, nurses are expected to control their emotions and offer greetings to doctors (Meerabeau and Page, 1998). Feminist literature also documents the fact that women's emotional labour in marriage includes offering comfort to their husbands and children when they are bullied, offering greetings to husbands to keep relations working, and repressing their own desire to avoid pressuring their partners. Above all, the most commonly reported emotional work is smiling and faking orgasm (Duncombe and Marsden, 1998). The emotional labour stated above, deeply interwoven with femininity, is both invisible and unpaid. Similar to feminist debates regarding housework (Walby, 1980), the invisible and unpaid emotional work does have an impact on the ways in which emotional labour is treated in the labour market. Not only is sex workers' emotional labour not taken seriously; neither are those emotional labours performed in other service occupations, such as the widely documented

devaluation of flight attendants, nurses and clerks.

Many interviewees reported that negative emotions mainly came from the (sexual) encounters with clients. Mei-yun reported that she 'had to endure' at the beginning because she was much older and had not built up her own clientele yet. Ping-ping also reported that she 'was not able to adjust herself to the job, because many clients held an attitude of seeing themselves as the boss'. Nonetheless, after working in this job for a period, she concluded positively that she had been 'trained' to be able to do this job. The most dramatic stories, again, came from bar girls who repeated that they were 'scared to death' and 'trembling immediately'. Jo-jo reported that she was crying all the time on the first night in the bar, and the bar manager promised to arrange 'good clients' for her; but every time the clients were more similar rather than different, and the whole scene in the cabins turned out to be the same. After the first week, she reported, 'you then got used to it'. Fung-fung offered a more detailed account about the process of *adjustment*. It is worth quoting it at length:

*At the beginning, I wasn't really used to it...I simply couldn't accept it. (my emphasis) I would remember the experience of my first table-sitting (zou tai) forever...You know, bar girls directly jumped on to tables and then started table shows till they were topless. ...I was so unable to accept it, and wanted to give it up. I thought about forgetting the job, but I really needed money, (my emphasis) you know. I needed to pay...lots of bills every month. So, I gritted my teeth to do it (my emphasis) during that period. In the first week, after I went home, I always ended up crying every day...It was very horrible. The supervisor had already told my first client that I had never done it before. He then ...probably thought that I was simple and was easier to insult because I had never done it before.*

*Moreover...our uniform was very revealing. He then started to touch me. Oh, I really couldn't stand it ...In the first two weeks I was scolded every day by supervisors. The company even wanted to fire me, but the manager wanted me to stay. I then mentally adjusted myself. Gradually I felt that it is not a big deal to take off clothes. I thought what a client could do to me is simply watching and touching. You cannot really do something on me (my emphasis). At that time, I changed my point of view. Anyhow I just wanted to make money. You have to force yourself: 'Oh, you have to be used to it. You have to...because you want to make money. Make money.'* (my emphasis) (Fung-fung, 29, 3 years as a bar girl)

This kind of sad 'mental adjustment' is quite typical among bar girls' accounts. Fung-fung's narrative is indeed an effort to try to manage her own feelings about her body, sexuality and, most of all, the ways in which she sees herself. Performing emotional labour, for Hochschild (1983), is actually alien labour that lets workers lose their 'authenticity' and/or true 'feelings of self'. However, being 'trained' to be able to perform emotional labour turns out to be one of the ways sex workers can shape their professionalism, and maintain their sense of self.

Here, Fung-fung's 'emotional labour' involved stopping herself from feeling she '*simply couldn't accept it*', '*you have to force yourself*', '*gritted my teeth to do it*', and then eventually '*mentally adjusted*' herself and thought '*what a client could do to me is simply watching and touching*'. Firstly, monetary needs make sense of this emotional labour. Secondly, the emotional work required here, again, is very much embodied. Not only is the heart put to work, but also the sex worker needs to bring her body under control. Here, Fung-fung (like many bar-girls) has to remove the terrible feelings of being touched, control the trembling limbs, and

always smile instead of cry. Moreover, in many cases, this embodied emotional labour is very sexualized to the extent that sex workers, similar to ordinary women, have to fake orgasms and/or make some 'sexy noises' in carrying out commercial sex (Chapter 4). As Jackson and Scott (2001) point out, faking orgasms is not only about making some noises, but very much relates to how we, as sexual beings, learn to use and control our bodies to express our sexual feelings. Thus, doing all this embodied emotional work not only involves a surface bodily performance, but also involves intensive border negotiations in which sex workers always *try* to differentiate their sexual self from those sex acts performed. Hence, the mind, feelings, and the body are put to work, negotiating with each other and *trying* to perform the sex work. Replying to the bad sides of being a bar-girl, Ling-ling directly points out the struggle of performing the embodied emotional labour and maintaining her sense of self:

*The most remarkable shortcoming probably is that...you can't be yourself. Even though you hate that client very much, you still need to pretend that ...You still need to speak to him with a smile. (Ling-ling, 19, 2 and a half years as a bar girl)*

Indeed, the 'need-to-pretend' is the most frequently used phrase to explain these performances of emotional work among the interviewees. Here, Goffman's performance theory and 'role distance' are helpful to explain the complex situation. He argued that the social world is just like a stage in which *everyone* is expected to wear a mask and carry out his or her performance properly (Goffman, 1990[1959]). Moreover, the self is far from being singular but is rather multiple. Hence, everyone is able to learn how to exercise 'role distance' in order to differentiate his or her self from his or her work self. As Goffman argued:

*one can afford to try to fit into the situation is an act that can be styled to show that one is somewhat out of place. One enters the situation to the degree that one can demonstrate that one does not belong (1961:109).*

The paradox here is that this notion that you ‘can’t-be-yourself’ appears to signify that Ling-ling (who once was a ‘normal girl’ who was so scared and ran away from the cabin, currently was able to speak to clients with a smile) had been ‘trained’ to be able to see the work role she played as not the ‘real her’. Here, doing is not being. However, neither the self is pushed into deeper, as Hochschild argues, nor, as poststructuralists claimed, does there exist ‘a doer behind the deed’ (Butler, 1990). Indeed, the gendered/sexual/feeling self always co-exists with the work self. Moreover, the performance is the product of a series of tugs of war between the gendered/sexual/feeling self and the work role. In many cases, the actor mobilizes a different self to fit into and/or work out the situated role demanded in a specific context.

Treating performing emotional labour as an alien labour, Hochschild argues that it means workers lose ‘authenticity’. However, as workers consciously notice that they are *performing* femininity and/or emotional work, they are clearly able to differentiate the ‘back stage’ from the ‘front stage’ (in Goffman’s terms). For example, many interviewees reported: ‘*I’m a totally different person when I’m not working*’. Sitting in the common room (i.e. the back stage) of *Pretty Girls*, I found girls put their legs on tables, made ungraceful noises when eating noodle soup, chatted and yelled loudly when playing cards. Neither were they sexy, nor feminine. Replying to a question about what they looked like in the cabin, they said ‘[O]h, you should be very meek’ or ‘lean on a client’s shoulder with a smile



and listen to him'. The self is not pushed into deeper, but co-exists with the work self (which demands bar-girls should *always* smile even though they are scolded as 'shameless women' by clients), and negotiate with the work self. The common room is the right place to show their 'real self'; however, sometimes sarcasm and/or humour are ways to exercise 'role distance'. For example, some clients tended to dig at bar-girls saying '[O]ooh, you are making easy money. It's a good job, isn't it?' At the outset, Ling-ling was quite angry and did not know how to reply. Currently, she could *smile* at clients replying: '[Y]eah, why don't you suggest your sisters work here?!' Above all, it should be noted that since the self and the work self always co-exist, there does exist a self that is more 'real' for the actor, rather than as poststructuralists suggest, that there is not 'a doer behind the deed'. Ling-ling's struggle in being a 'normal girl' and a 'whore', who has to wear a very sexually revealing uniform, is indeed a reflection of her defending her sense of a self which is meaningful to her.

Moreover, it is the transformation of the sexual self that makes 'taking off clothes' turn out to be 'not a big deal', and makes it possible to differentiate 'sex for fun' from 'sex for work'. Fung-fung once felt 'very disgusted' when seeing a female supervisor offering oral sex to a client. Afterwards, she 'prefers to take the initiative to *play* on him [client], rather than let him play on me!' A similar transformation is also reported in Ho's (2000) research on Taiwanese betel-nut beauties who disrupt the 'male gaze' by taking the initiative to flirt with male customers. From feeling 'very disgusted' to being able to take the initiative to 'handle' clients shows that Fung-fung has obtained the technique and/or ability to differentiate sex as intimacy from sex as work. This ability is not difficult to

understand. It is very similar to people who are able to make a distinction between having sex on a one-night-stand and doing it in a daily intimate relationship. In other words, offering oral sex to clients is 'disgusting' not because of the nature of the sexual act, but because of the different social and economic contexts in which it is performed, and how the sexual self experiences those different sexual encounters. Many interviewees, in fact, reported that they felt very differently between having sex with clients and with lovers. (I will return to this point in the next section.) However, this transformation suggests that sex workers are thus neither 'happy hookers' nor 'sexually liberated' women who gaze upon and play with clients to achieve sexual pleasure, nor that prostitution is simply a 'symbolic construction' which does not have any social meaning (Bell, 1994). Quite the opposite, this transformation is very much intertwined with the material reality confronting bar girls daily. Fung-fung explained:

*If you don't [take the initiative], you will probably get two circumstances. One is that you will be dismissed. The other is that he will...come to touch you. He will then ...touch you all over, kiss you, suck [your tits], and even dig [your vagina]. He will do everything! In that case, we would prefer to... 'handle' him than to be insulted.*  
(Fung-fung, 29, 3 years as a bar girl)

The actor here obviously does not see offering sex to clients as her sex(uality), but practices it to avoid those undesirable body-to-body sexual encounters. Offering sex is exactly understood as one of the ways bar girls avoid the bodily and/or sexual transgression of clients. It is one of the available techniques or strategies that bar girls use to manage the integrity of their bodies, sexuality, and sense of self. For example, Jo-jo and Ling-ling reported that they would invite clients to drink, sing, and play games to keep clients' hands busy. Thus, the clients would

not be able to touch them. Nonetheless, the scenario is frequently used by the media to misrepresent bar girls as young women who are 'fond of playing' and/or are alcohol abusers.

In this sense, professional sex workers, as sexual subjects, cross the border (of madonna/whore) on the one hand, while they always *manage* to maintain the boundary between their sexual self and their work self. See, '*Gradually I felt that it is not a big deal to take off clothes. I thought all a client could do to me is simply watch and touch.*' By managing her feelings, Fung-fung presented herself as an agent and a 'boundary maker' (Giddens, 1997), rather than a (sexual) victim. Although clothes were removed, Fung-fung set up other clear and/or implicit boundaries between herself and clients, i.e. '*all client could to do me is simply restricted to watching and touching*'. Some body parts could be touched in some specific ways, while some specific parts could not be touched. Indeed, each interviewee had her own map of boundary maintenance. Once clients try to cross the boundary, they will face severe resistance. The border war is therefore an endless battle in which the boundary might be clearly maintained, while it is also likely to be blurred.

## **ii) Managing the boundary between the clean self and the dirty other**

Performing sex acts is different from other performances due mainly to their body-to-body performance in which exchanging bodily fluid is considered as polluting or dangerous in many cultures (Douglas, 2002[1966]). Dirt management, maintaining the boundary between the clean self and the dirty other, therefore

appears to be a major concern in sex workers' daily routine.

Interviewees who reported being seduced and forced into this job (e.g. Chen-chen and Chia-chia) repeatedly emphasized that they were not 'willing to do it'. Moreover, the lack of 'free consent' makes Chia-chia and Chen-chen frequently report '[I]t's dirty!' and they felt 'spoiled' by clients.

*...I felt that I don't want my body to be touched...It's very dirty. It made me feel very dirty...I felt I was very dirty because...too many people touch me. (Chia-chia, 17, casual call-girl)*

Similarly, Chen-chen also reported '*[I]f you put it in a more positive way, you are doing sex. But, it's dirty!*' Mary Douglas (2002[1966]) argues that the dirt is not essentially dirty in itself, but dirty because it transgresses social order and upsets the system. Douglas's analysis of dirt is quite helpful in understanding the dirt reported by interviewees at the symbolic level. Having sex with a boyfriend is pleasurable because it is celebrated by heteronormativity. Moreover, it also relates to the ways in which lovers tend to invest huge amounts of emotional feeling in each other. As 'really being in love means wanting to live in a different world' (Goodson, 1983), the 'disgusting' sex acts turn out to be valid, desirable, and even pleasurable. On the other hand, doing commercial sex is prohibited and stigmatized. Many interviewees reported that having sex with clients and their lovers was very different. Most importantly, the differences are very much related to the ways in which prostitution is criminalized and stigmatized in Taiwan:

*Of course, it's pleasurable to do it with a boyfriend. How to say it, because you like him and he likes you. Of course, it's likely you will have fun and feel good. With a client...usually you did it in a rush and*

*then left. ...Oh, the primary concern was worry about a police raid. ...That's all. (Xin-xin, 16, casual call-girl)*

*You have more ...sensual feeling. Having sex with clients...it's simply doing work. Job done after you finished it. You have more sensual feeling when you are with your boyfriend. You did it with feeling, so it's much more comfortable. You willingly did it with your boyfriend. **The other is that you feel a bit like you go to make money, you know. Yeah, tan xia zha mou (i.e. whore), you feel like that** (my emphasis). (Chen-chen, 17, casual call-girl)*

The dirt, nonetheless, is very much related to hygiene. Many interviewees did not allow clients to kiss their mouths, breasts, genitals etc., and refused to offer specific sexual services; e.g. refusals of oral sex, anal sex, and cunnilingus, in fact, were based on hygienic concerns, rather than investing some symbolic meanings on 'kissing' or some specific sex acts.

*Some troublesome clients want to kiss you, ask you to lick their penises, or let him do cunnilingus. Yeah, otherwise they asked for anal sex. ... Why should we lick him or let him lick us? I think it's very disgusting. Yeah, why should women in this job need to be licked by clients? It's fair enough to let him penetrate with a condom, isn't it? (Xin-xin, 16, casual call-girl)*

Xin-xin failed to offer a clear account against clients' sexual demands. However, former licensed sex workers clearly reported that they tried to avoid exchanging bodily fluid with clients, because it might be the origin of sexually transmitted diseases. Sue-lian articulates this:

*Men's dicks are damn foul and you have no idea whether they are healthy or not. To be honest, I was forced to do it [oral sex] when I was trafficked into the illegal brothel. I didn't do it after my graduation (i.e. freed from trafficking), no matter how much money*

*clients offered to pay for it... Neither do I want to be kissed. Some men have halitosis. They smelled awful. ...If clients wanted to do cunnilingus, you had better reject them because there were so many germs in people's mouths. (Sue-lian, 41, ex-licensed sex worker, stayed in prostitution for 28 years)*

Prostitutes are always stigmatized as the origin of sexually transmitted diseases, and clients as pure and clean victims. Ironically, clients are widely considered as the dirty other among many interviewees. Phoenix's research on British sex workers also shows that Asian punters are frequently represented as 'unclean others' (1999:179). Here, clients, and their bodily fluids (e.g. saliva and sperm), are treated as potential origins of sexually transmitted diseases that might blur the boundary between the healthy self and dirty other. Unlike call-girls, who usually carry out their businesses in hotels with shower facilities, sex workers in the licensed brothels were not able to take a shower after seeing a client. In many cases, former licensed sex workers reported that they were only able to clean their genitals after seeing clients. If their body parts were kissed or licked, clients' saliva would stay on their bodies for a whole working day. It is, therefore, not only a problem of subjective feelings or emotions about the other's bodily fluid, but very much a hygienic issue. The hygienic situation is even worse in illegal brothels, where real health problems are reported. Sue-lian reported those terrible days when she was trafficked in an illegal brothel in the late 1970s:

*Sue-lian: Hey, it's an illegal brothel, you know. ...It was very different from the licensed brothel. You couldn't wash yourself on the ground, but on the bed.*

*Mei-hua: What did you mean?*

*Sue-lian: Washing your ass and men's genitals. Sometimes some men and women made a big mess on the bed. I didn't notice it and then laid on the bed. I always wet my buttocks. It couldn't be*

*helped, you know.*

Mei-hua: *Hygiene was a big problem, wasn't it?*

Sue-lian: *Yes, it was. At that time, my ass was infected. I got a lot of papilla on my arms and buttocks. I was itching. Some clients were also worried about it. They were afraid of infection. Because you would grab yourself when you were itching, and then it would spread all over your body. If the clients didn't have a strong body, they were easily infected.*

Dirt management, in this sense, is a predominant part of sex workers' daily lives. The ways interviewees manage the dirt differ. Sue-lian was forced to perform all kinds of sex acts when she was trafficked; while she could control what kind of sex was to be provided as a licensed sex worker. Chia-chia and Chen-chen dealt with the dirt by spending 'more than an hour' taking a shower or 'using shower gel to brush [my] whole body' after turning out a trick. Deep cleaning in a way functions as a ritual to get rid of external dirt or pollution, and reclaim the integrity of the self.

Condoms, of course, create a clear boundary between sex workers and clients, and protect the clean self from the dirty other. Condom usage is widely represented as a way to differentiate sex workers' sexual intimacy from sex work. Moreover, as using condoms in commercial sex is treated as part of the sex workers' working ethic, it is frequently reported that sex workers seldom use condoms in personal sexual practices (for example, McKeganey and Barnard, 1996; Phoenix, 1999). However, for younger interviewees using condoms was based on very practical concerns. Wei-wei reported:

*We definitely would use condoms. Umm, how to say it? Today, we were doing ...business. It's commercial transactions. If I got pregnant, I*

*need to pay for an abortion, you know. In addition, you were doing business. If you got pregnant, you didn't know who the father is. Because you still had sex with your boyfriend. ... OK, if he got married to you and you then gave birth, but the baby doesn't look like him and the blood type was totally wrong. Don't you think it is very strange? (ha, ha, ha...)* (Wei-wei, 18, half a year as an independent call-girl)

Indeed, Wei-wei's narrative is quite typical among young call-girls. Condoms are not only used to differentiate private sex from work sex, but simultaneously also protect Wei-wei from getting pregnant, and ensure she avoids the possibility of giving birth to a baby whose father is unknown. Clients' sperm therefore is considered as both dirty and destructive.

Getting pregnant is an undesirable occupational hazard in commercial sex, while it might be desirable in private sexual intimacy. Chia-chia reported that she did not practise safe sex with her boyfriend, because she 'wanted to have a baby. Also because he felt uncomfortable about wearing a condom'. Similarly, Wei-wei, like the majority of Taiwanese women, did not 'force' her boyfriend to wear condoms deliberately, because '*maybe one day we would be husband and wife (smile)*'.

In a way, when sex is put on trade, interviewees tend to go through every detail to calculate gain-and-loss, because 'commercial sex' symbolically constrains the social meanings of those sex acts performed. As Lili (ex-licensed sex worker) put it, 'we got money; they got sex. It's very simple!' Conversely, many respondents (like many ordinary women) fail to do rational calculations within private sexual intimacy, mainly due to the situation simultaneously creating



the potential for many possible types of relations. Wei-wei's narrative indicates that practising unsafe sex in personal intimacy might win her a marriage. The way Mei-yun talked about the differences between having sex with her ex-husband and clients revealed the nature of the exchange of marriage:

*Of course, they are very different. Clients were clients. They were different from a husband. ... We were making money. ... Husband is husband. How could they be the same? A husband could take more than half an hour [to do it] with you without paying anything, couldn't he? How could they be the same? (Mei-yun, 61, ex-licensed sex worker, stayed in prostitution for 17 years)*

This sarcastic remark indeed highlights the sexual politics of heterosexuality. The way a wife differs from a prostitute, argued Engels (1942:63), is that the wife 'does not let out her body on piecework as a wage worker, but sells it once and for all into slavery'. Ironically, prostitutes, who are always criticized as victims of patriarchy and/or taunted as functioning to serve the maintenance of prostitution, appear to be the ones who are able to see the hypocrisy of heterosexual marriage. Indeed, both Wei-wei and Xin-xin reported that they felt 'it's all right' to hurry up their boyfriends as if they were 'handling' clients, when intimate sex turned out to be a 'daily routine'. In a way, they were reluctant to perform so much sex work in intimacy. Charging for offering sex not only opens up a possibility to subvert heteronormativity in which men are entitled to unlimited access to women's bodies, but also lets women know more about their sexual desire.

### iii) Managing intimacy

#### 1) Fear of being revealed to lovers

Respondents tended to compare the 'stranger discourse' with the 'boyfriend discourse', and tended to use various rituals and/or perform specific sex acts to differentiate commercial sex from private intimate sex. Nonetheless, the effort to manage the boundary, indeed, signifies the danger of blurring the boundary. The danger is so remarkable that Chen-chen reported that the standardized sexual services required by her boss served to function as a way to differentiate work sex from personal sexual intimacy:

*...I never confuse the different ways I treated clients and my boyfriend. Umm, I provided a set of services to clients and had sex with my boyfriend in another way (smile). (Chen-chen, 17, casual call-girl)*

Although Chen-chen was quite satisfied that she could easily maintain the boundary, she and other young call-girls unanimously reported that they were very afraid of being disclosed to their boyfriends, whom they had met before entering into prostitution. Moreover, young girls frequently reported that they would avoid having sex with their boyfriends after seeing clients in order to decrease the risk of being revealed:

*...I was afraid that he would know it ...Yeah, men know that. He will feel different when he ...penetrates you, because you do it with clients...I mean...if you were not penetrated for a while,...men will feel a bit different. It's [i.e. vagina] more tight, you know. If you were just penetrated, it is much looser. So, I never went to see him after I saw clients. There was an interval between seeing clients and visiting my boyfriend. Yeah, otherwise he might think that I had another man or something. He didn't [know it], because I was good at measuring the timing. (laugh) (Chen-chen, 17, casual call-girl)*

*It turned out to be...I was a bit afraid to do it with my boyfriend after I did it. I don't know. It might be that I worried about being revealed or something. ...Tut, how to say it, I felt that ... I didn't dare get close to him. I felt that I was very bad to do that kind of thing behind his back, (my emphasis) you know. I then gradually didn't dare to ...have sex with him. ...We still had sex but a bit less than before. (Wei-wei, 18, half a year as an independent call-girl)*

It is said that prostitutes are badly damaged by their jobs and thus become sexually frigid or indifferent to sex (Davis, 1937). However, Savitz and Rosen's (1988) research on the sexual enjoyment of 46 American prostitutes found that respondents' professional experiences did not appear to interfere with their enjoyment of private sex. Moreover, they claimed that 'the higher the sexual enjoyment in the prostitutes' private sex life, the greater the erotic pleasure reported in their professional realm' (1988:205). Young girls reported that doing commercial sex had an impact on their private sexual life, but they were far from sexually frigid. The way Chen-chen talked about her anxiety about being revealed was very much embodied and gendered, i.e. worrying that her vagina was looser and always calculating the 'timing' to see her boyfriend. Being sexually loyal to their boyfriends was still considered important, and one of the ways to present their loyalty was through monitoring their bodies. Frequent penetration is seen to produce a 'loose vagina'. Therefore, women who have baggy vaginas are considered promiscuous (see, *he might think that I had another man or something*). A baggy vagina is evidence of female promiscuity, while an impotent penis never signifies male infidelity. The myth regarding women's vaginas is unsupported by any scientific evidence; however, it shapes the ways the young girls managed intimacy and doing commercial sex at the same time.

## 2) Desexualization of love

Compared to bar-girls offering sex to clients to avoid nasty bodily contacts, young girls avoid having sex with lovers in order to maintain their intimate relationships. The ways interviewees understand the relations between intimacy and sex are far more complicated than for ordinary women. Seidman (1991) summarized how there was a 'sexualization of love' and 'eroticization of sex' from the nineteenth century onward in the West. Similarly, in Taiwan, having sex in intimacy is taken for granted to the extent that it is considered to be the *best* way to express love. 'Giving me [sex] if you love me' turns out to be a popular script circulated among heterosexual lovers. However, it is important to note that the 'me' is always a man, while the 'you' is a woman.

Under this cultural climate, where sex is considered as evidence that demonstrates women's love, it is no surprise that Wei-wei felt she *was very bad and did not dare to get close* to her boyfriend. In a way, the 'sexualization of love' singles out sex as the most important indicator of love. Yet, sex, for some sex workers, is hardly considered as an indicator for expressing love given the fact that it could be contracted out so easily. Sue-lian's boyfriend was once her client. They have been engaged in a long-term relationship for two decades. The way she talked about the similarities between having sex with clients and her boyfriend shows us a different relationship between sex and intimacy:

*Nothing different, you still got a dick. ... Gee, sometimes he [boyfriend] was fucking me, but I was sleeping. Yes, I did. (he, he, he..) I was very tired, you know. So I had him do it by himself...Of course, we love each other, but it doesn't mean that we should do that thing [sex]. Do you understand? It's not necessary to do that. It's good to respect and*

*take care of each other. It's all right for me that he seeks for a sexual outlet [outside]. Just let him have fun...I was always sloppily dressed, but men still came to see me, you know. They are cheap animals!* (Sue-lian, 41, ex-licensed brothel worker, stayed in prostitution for 28 years)

Sue-lian was the only interviewee who reported that there is not any difference between having sex with clients and boyfriends, because 'you still got a dick!' Sex, for Sue-lian, was represented as a natural drive shared by all kinds of 'cheap animals', it did not even qualify as an expression of love. Thinking in this way, Sue-lian was thus freed from the obsession of sex, and did not bother to monitor her lover's sexual activities. In contrast, mutual respect and care, for Sue-lian, are understood as love or as the cornerstone of intimacy. Love is, therefore, desexualized.

### **3) Falling in love with 'real human beings'**

The phenomenon of the desexualization of love is quite remarkable in some interviewees' narratives regarding the ways in which they felt attracted to, and even fell in love with, some specific clients. It is not difficult to understand that mutual respect and care are so important given that many interviewees reported that they were not respected at all in this job. Indeed, many respondents spent quite a long time describing how 'obnoxious clients' humiliated them, bargained for a better price, tried to take all kinds of advantages, demanded undesirable sexual services, and used verbal and physical violence on them etc. Tolerating or handling 'obnoxious clients' was a nasty daily routine for many of the interviewees. Therefore, once clients showed their respect to sex workers it was

very likely that these clients would be considered 'real human beings', rather than 'cheap animals'. It was therefore possible and/or worth it for the sex workers to invest emotions in them. In a conversation, Fung-fung and Ling-ling discussed how their clients turned out to be their lovers:

Ling-ling: *I did 'S' [i.e. commercial sex] once in the past four years. ... My feeling was ...I don't know. I felt very weird. I could like a person and accept one-night-stand, but I cannot stand to...take money.*

Fung-fung: *transaction*

Ling-ling: *Yeah, yeah...so, I didn't [take his money]. But ...some clients eventually turned out to be my boyfriends (he, he, he...)*

Fung-fung: *ha, ha, ha... Usually our boyfriends were once our clients because we didn't have the opportunity to know someone else outside... My boyfriend and I have been together for two years. Oh, he is very lucky. He didn't spend too much money on me. He only came here once. I think we fell in love at first sight. (beaming)*

Mei-hua: *Did you meet each other here?*

Fung-fung: *Yes, here! He gave me a very good impression. He is that kind of person who wouldn't touch girls. I...like that kind of person.*

Ling-ling: *Yes, me too!*

Fung-fung: *Umm, I felt he was a well-behaved person ... I like this kind of man. It is very rare to find men behave like that in a bar.*

Ling-ling: *Basically the men who turned out to be your boyfriends definitely won't touch you. You would feel that ...He is a reeeeeeeal human being. They are human beings; others are animals!*

Fung-fung: *Yeah, yeah...(ha, ha, ha...)*

Ling-ling: *Yes, at least, you need to feel that he is a human being, you know. If a man touched you all over your body, how could you think that he likes you sincerely? In addition, they make us feel that we are respectable. We then could treat them as friends.*

Phoenix's (1999) research on British sex workers also reports that punters are commonly represented as bastards and animals. Here, the metaphor of 'cheap animals' not only refers to punters' aggressive sexual drive, but, rather, indicates that interviewees are treated badly in those body-to-body sexual encounters; for example, simply as a whore. 'Cheap animals' only seek sexual satisfaction, and this forecloses other possibilities, while 'human beings' respect sex workers as persons and, therefore, open up the possibility of creating other intimate relationships, e.g. regular clients, old friends, and even lovers, which are only possible when both parties are treated as equal human beings. In a way, feeling respected as human beings, sex workers might 'feel right' to cross the boundary and fall in love with their clients.

## Summary

The aim of this chapter was to conceptualize becoming a whore as a gendered social process in which 'ordinary' women and girls have to learn how to be a whore. Considering the whole process as a social process we may appreciate and recognize the professionalism of performing sex work, and be able to analyze sex work in terms of labour, and conceptualize the diverse labour involved in sex work.

In this chapter, I have identified sex work as *face-to-face, voice-to-voice and body-to-body* interactive work that demands sex workers mobilize their physical and cultural capital to perform aesthetic labour to attract clients. Moreover, sex workers, like other female service workers, have to manage their hearts and/or

feelings in order to provide their services adequately. Above all, I add that the emotional labour demanded in sex work is very much embodied. In many cases, sex workers have to manage their minds and feelings, and simultaneously bring their bodies into control in order to perform sex work properly.

Contesting the idea that prostitution would damage one's sense of self, the chapter has drawn on interview data to show that sex workers usually exercise the technique of 'role distance' to differentiate the situated work self from their sense of self. Indeed, it is the exercise of 'role distance' that makes sex workers able to differentiate work sex from personal intimacy. The former is work to make money, while the latter, in many cases, is desirable and pleasurable. Nonetheless, the ways the interviewees differentiated work sex from personal sexual practices were very different from each other. Some interviewees did not perform specific sex acts on clients; some avoided having certain specific bodily contact with clients. It is commonly reported that condom use marks out the difference between work sex and personal sex.

To sum up, sex work is work that involves multi-layered border wars and/or boundary control. Firstly, interviewees engaged in the border war of 'madonna/whore' in which they provided an illusion of whores to clients, while considering themselves to be 'normal' girls and women. It thus demands embodied emotional labour to fill up the gap between the sexualized body and the sexual self. Secondly, there is a border war in which interviewees differentiated work sex from personal sex. Sex workers are thus agents who are able to endorse different meanings for the same sex act. Transgressing the social norms of



'madonna/whore' means simultaneously transgressing the different meanings of the same sex act. Thirdly, each encounter with a client is indeed a border war in which interviewees made an effort to prevent themselves from being polluted by the dirty others/clients.

## Chapter 7

### **Contradictory male sexual desires: masculinity, lifestyles and sexuality among prostitutes' clients in Taiwan**

#### **Introduction**

The romantic sexual encounters of a high-class client and a street prostitute in *Pretty Woman* moved so many heterosexual people to such an extent that the movie earned both Richard Gere and Julia Roberts a great deal of money. Gere played a high-class client who *randomly* picked up a prostitute on a high street and, most importantly, was so nice that he did not demand any sex. It was actually the prostitute who appreciated his gentleness and delivered the sexual services 'willingly'. However, this romantic Hollywood representation of a client-prostitute encounter is hardly realistic.

In the past decades feminist literature has concentrated more on theorizing prostitution as an institution, and the oppression of female prostitutes, than on prostitutes' clients. Therefore, feminist scholars more or less map out the power structures that constitute prostitution, but seldom question the persistent demands of men's sexual consumption. Radical feminists tend to theorize prostitution as an explicit expression of masculinity, while neglecting the differences among clients, the diverse social meanings that clients invest in their sexual encounters with prostitutes, and the various ways clients experience those sexual encounters. Based on six in-depth interviews with Taiwanese clients from different economic and educational backgrounds, I will argue that Taiwanese clients' prostitution use, underpinned by the ideology of 'male sexual urges', is carried out under social

and cultural conditions that are constituted by three factors; they are, different vocabularies of motive, lifestyles, and conceptions of 'good sex'.

Western feminists make an effort to deconstruct the discourse of 'male sexual urges', but in Taiwan it is still taken for granted among clients and sex workers. Nonetheless, it is the combination of the vocabulary of motive of the 'male sexual urge' and the widely-accepted cultural practice of 'playing women' (*wan neu ren*) that makes using prostitution much more desirable than masturbation. The Western literature indicates that the majority of western clients visit prostitutes to seek personal sexual services (see, for example McKeganey and Barnard, 1996). At the other extreme, there is a tendency for clients to demand emotional comfort from prostitution. This polarity shows to some extent that prostitution satisfies clients' physical and emotional needs. The specific social and cultural practices of '*he hua jeou*'<sup>47</sup>, visiting 'pleasure-selling' sectors, among Taiwanese men, are nonetheless located in the grey area of this polarity. I will analyze the ways in which different vocabularies of motive of prostitution relate to different expectations of client-prostitute encounters. Clients who draw on the seeking sexual release account in prostitution are more likely to be involved in a client-prostitute encounter which is more sexualized, commercialized, and depersonalized. It is more likely to be a trade-off between sex and money. On the other hand, if clients tend to seek emotional comfort in prostitution, it is more likely that the client-prostitute encounter will be personalized and romanticized.

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<sup>47</sup> '*He hua jeou*' literally means drinking flower wine. In Taiwan, flower is a very common metaphor for women. Drinking flower wine means having alcohol and being accompanied by women at the same time.

Seeing commercial sex from Taiwanese clients' perspectives, it is sexual consumption in a modern society. Although, in Taiwan, sexual consumption is strongly supported by the discourse of the 'male sexual urge', it is neither pre-social nor a mystery outside the sphere of rational analysis. Like other forms of consumption in modern society, sexual consumption is always embedded in people's everyday lives and is always related to consumers' social and economic conditions, which Bourdieu (1984) calls *habitus*. Indeed, clients' use of prostitutes signifies their lifestyles. Taiwanese clients' use of prostitutes is very class-stratified: interviewees' social origins actually influence varied behaviours of sexual consumption, such as risk management, dealing with the stigma of using prostitution, and visiting different types of commercial sex outlets etc. Above all, the client-prostitute relationship is always related to clients' consumer consciousness. As some clients are very aware of their status as consumers, some long-term client-prostitute relationships are still based on gain and loss calculations.

The Western literature points out that clients demand satisfaction of emotional needs in prostitution; however, these demands are always represented as not just sex and are very de-sexualized. Nonetheless, I would argue that these emotional demands, e.g. chat, flirtation, companionship, foreplay, and even sex workers' orgasms, are indeed very sexualized and in relation to the clients' conception of 'good sex'. The emotional demands imply that Taiwanese clients demand not just 'sex' but 'good sex'. Above all, the 'good sex' is highly gendered. It more or less involves 'conquering' working women in a masculine way, and follows a given sexual script that starts from foreplay and ends up with both

parties achieving orgasms. It is worth noting that demanding this kind of ‘good sex’ in prostitution, both clients and sex workers are expected to perform emotional work. In some extreme cases, clients in fact ‘fall in love’ with sex workers and try to ‘rescue’ working women.

It seems impossible to suggest a single model to deal with Taiwanese clients’ use of prostitutes. Indeed, even the same interviewee does not use prostitutes in a coherent way. These three factors, clients’ different vocabularies of motive, lifestyles, and conception of ‘good sex’, are the most remarkable indicators of interviewees’ prostitute use. In most cases, these three factors interact with each other. Sometimes they reinforce each other, while sometimes they weaken each other<sup>48</sup>. However, in some cases, it is possible that only one dimension is enough to explain clients’ prostitute use. Above all, ‘male sexual urges’ are always interwoven with these three indicators to shape the diverse sexual encounters of the client-prostitute.

The chapter will begin with a brief review of feminist studies on prostitutes’ clients. It will then discuss how the myth of the ‘male sexual urge’ is used to justify interviewees’ prostitute use and functions to build up male bonding. The third section will discuss how ‘*he hua jeou*’ is actually a male collective act of sexual consumption in Taiwanese men’s daily lives and how it relates to clients’ different lifestyles in terms of class and masculinity. The fourth section will

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<sup>48</sup> For example, a client might be very aware that he is a consumer, but as he expects ‘good sex’ with working women, he might decide to restrain his power of being a consumer. Of course, theoretically speaking, it is also possible that the client might use consumer power to demand ‘good sex’.

analyze how clients' emotional needs are indeed related to their conceptions of 'good sex', and thus sexualizes these emotional demands.

### **I. Feminists theorizing on clients' use of prostitutes**

Although radical feminism offers rich resources for theorizing prostitution as a male-dominated patriarchal institution, most prostitution studies focus on female prostitutes rather than the male clients. Nonetheless, many feminists strongly criticize the modern sexological construction of the 'male sexual urge' (McIntosh, 1978). It might, therefore, be more precise to argue that earlier feminist literature on prostitution over-simplified diverse clients rather than failing to problematize male clients. Barry (1979), for example, theorizes prostitution as female sexual slavery that exists to serve male sexual interests. The subordination of female sexuality to male desires, she argued, constitutes women's oppression all over the world. Paradoxically, to equate male domination to sexuality indeed confirms male sexuality as an 'overpowering instinct' (Segal, 1990:208) and collaborates with the discourse of the 'male sexual urge'.

Radical feminists theorized clients as sexual oppressors under the sex/gender system. As gender hierarchy is treated as the key element in the social organization of prostitution, almost all men are represented as potential punters and all women as prostitutes to different degrees (for example, Pateman, 1988; MacKinnon, 1989; Barry, 1995; Jeffreys, 1997). This scholarship is problematic as it simultaneously says too much and too little on prostitution. It says too much because prostitution is articulated as a coherent institution that serves men's

'sexual rights' to access women. Prostitution, to some extent, is used as a metaphor to indicate diverse sexual relations between women and men. It therefore generalizes prostitutes as sexual victims and clients as sexual abusers or exploiters. The totalizing account successfully theorizes prostitution as a patriarchal institution on the one hand, while paradoxically it dissolves the specificity of the oppression of prostitution. In this sense, it says too little about the ways in which clients exercise male power over women and fails to offer an elaborated account of how clients combine the double privileges of being consumers and men to fetishize prostitutes as sexually desirable.

Jackson and Scott (1997) argue that pursuing sexual pleasure has been treated as a rational life goal from the nineteenth century onward. In addition, the commodification of sexual pleasure results in the rational management of sex or the 'Taylorisation of sex'. This trend, however, has not shifted to 'post-Fordist' forms of sexuality; the apparent greater fluidity and flexibility in the postmodern era intensifies commodification and the association of sexuality with lifestyle. Therefore, currently having 'good sex' is just like wearing the right jeans and having 'good taste'. Some scholars go further, to analyze how capitalism and/or consumer consciousness is used to justify clients' use of prostitutes. Brewis and Linstead (2000) argued that the rise of the leisure industry and the commodification of pleasure make prostitution as a consumer industry possible. The clients therefore could follow the capitalist logic to claim that they do have the rights and freedom to pursue sexual services in the sex industry. Nonetheless, they turned to discuss how prostitutes' identities would be affected in prostitution rather than to excavate clients' personal representations of being a sexual

consumer and how consumerism comes into play in shaping gender and sexuality in prostitution.

Apart from theorizing clients from a macro social structural perspective, some empirical studies on clients offer more detailed accounts and varied meanings of clients' use of prostitutes. One remarkable phenomenon of these empirical studies is the ways in which clients' emotional demands play a central role in prostitution. Above all, the majority of clients tend to see the client-prostitute encounter as reciprocal rather than exploited (Høigård and Finstad, 1992; O'Connell Davidson, 1995, 1998; Chapkis, 1997; Plumridge et al., 1997).

O'Connell Davidson's (1998) empirical study differentiates between clients' private and public uses of prostitutes. The former refers to individuals' different ways of eroticizing prostitutes as sexual objects, and the latter refers to military and/or seamen's collective uses of prostitutes as a social ritual to build up manhood. However, her analysis is heavily grounded on Robert Stoller's research, which claims that sexual excitement has 'a tendency to debase the objects of sexual desire'. Moreover, adults' sexual fantasies provide 'erotic script[s] [that] offer the opportunity to re-enact childhood experiences of humiliation, rejection, cruelty' (quoted in O'Connell Davidson, 1998:138). Although O'Connell Davidson notes that Stoller's approach neglects the social structures that underlie prostitution (1998:139), she links the argument to the brutal process of shaping masculinity in the West to explain the ways in which prostitutes' clients eroticized their use of prostitutes:



*[c]ertainly masculinity...is a ludicrous and impossible ideal—it requires boy children to be socialized into the belief that their gender makes them only half human, for they are expected to relinquish the need for care and the capacity to give care. This, it seems to me, is both a brutal and a futile act, and the brutality and futility is reproduced in prostitution use. (1998:160)*

Theorizing men's private uses of prostitutes in this way, prostitutes' clients are represented as sexual exploiters who either fancy 'fucking dirty whores' to redeem their childhood traumas or seek 'tarts with hearts' to compensate for their lack of care in childhood. This reasoning creates a paradox in which prostitutes' users are severely condemned as sexual exploiters on the one hand, while it also suggests that these men are simply poor victims of gendered socialization. In a way, pathologizing the users of prostitutes in turn justifies the existence of the sex industry. Moreover, recent empirical research suggests that there is no 'typical client' but rather just ordinary men looking for 'ordinary sex' in prostitution (Sharpe, 1998). Indeed, it seems very unlikely that feminists could theorize sex workers' jobs as providing sexual services, while failing to consider prostitutes' clients as sexual consumers.

In Taiwan the prosperity of the sex industry is not only based on individual clients' personal use, but also depends heavily on men's collective use, whereby female sex workers serve as sexual commodities and/or rewards circulated among men. Allison's (1994) ethnographic research on Tokyo hostess clubs revealed the specific social relations between Japanese companies and the sex industry. She suggested that treating (male) employees to a visit to a hostess club, as entertainment, was considered to be an honourable reward by distinguished

employers on the one hand, and functioned as a social ritual to build up manhood, masculinity and the company identity on the other. In a sense, the sex industry becomes a mechanism of exchanging women among men. The flesh sex workers, as sexual commodities, have an exchange value and use value at the same time; they also produce surplus value for their employers. This kind of cultural practice is also very popular in Taiwan and South Korea. In Taiwan, many important political policies and business decisions are made in special bars rather than in offices. Therefore, female employees are forced to accompany their male colleagues to visit special bars, and are embarrassed to see their colleagues playing with working women. Lee's (2002) research on sexual harassment in South Korea also identifies a similar phenomenon. Thus, this cultural practice is gendered not only in terms of identifying men as consumers and women as commodities, but also in terms of gendered employment. In many cases, it is a concrete barrier for female employees' equal participation in policy making in the workplace.

Reviewing the body of feminist studies on prostitutes' clients we might find that there is a discrepancy between theorizing clients from macro-structures and from micro personal narratives. The former articulates clients as sexual exploiters and/or deviants and therefore fails to capture the different voices of clients. The latter focuses on analyzing client-prostitute encounters in terms of gender and sexuality while neglecting the client's remarkable social status as a consumer. Hence, both approaches are unable to offer an account of the ways in which prostitution is located at the intersection of gender, sexuality and the capitalist market, where men are buyers and women are sellers/workers.

Clients are not only the embodiment of gendered sexual beings, but also social beings who embody social class and ethnicity. The clients' social status, of course, is not necessarily higher than the sex workers but clients, as consumers, do occupy a privileged position in the sex industry. The non-commercial relationships between clients and prostitutes seldom guarantee reciprocity and/or equality as far as monetary and/or other material rewards are involved. It is important to take clients' consumer status into account, because consumption as cultural and social practices signifies and fashions the individual's lifestyle (or taste) and (sexual) identity (Evans, 1993; Hennessy, 2000). Indeed, clients' different social backgrounds not only become variable in prostitution use, but also differentiate diverse sex markets. Taking clients' consumer status seriously, I would like to discuss how different vocabularies of motive for using prostitution relate to different types of client-prostitute encounter. In particular, I will discuss how different client-prostitute encounters relate to consumers' daily lifestyles, specifically in terms of gendered sexualities and class.

## **II. Vocabularies of motive for using prostitution**

### **i) Using prostitutes as social ritual to build manhood**

Rejecting the idea that motivation is fixed to an inner psyche, Mills (1940) argues that it is a lingual mechanism in which a series of responses and social interactions can be expected. Thus, when an agent's action is questioned, the agent's answer is far from a transparent representation of his or her inner mind, but a struggle to seek a reasonable account that is commonly accepted by mainstream society (Scott and Lyman, 1970). Taking up the idea of theorizing the

sexual script of rape, Jackson (1999[1978]:47) argues that ‘sexual behaviour is not an expression of inner drives but is structured by an accepted vocabulary of motives pertaining to the erotic’.

Most interviewees directly pointed out that their first visits to prostitutes resulted from a kind of peer group behaviour and/or a growing-up ritual that was obviously stimulated by the fantasy of using prostitutes and by a sense of masculine competition; however, most of all, this first visit to a prostitute was characterized and instigated by the understanding that this was widely accepted as common knowledge in Taiwan. Usually they hung out with friends and alcohol was always involved. Some experienced friends would then propose to ‘*wan neu ren*’ (i.e. play women), and so their ‘hanging out’ ended with visiting prostitutes.

*Oh, at first I was curious, you know. It was sort of the curiosity of youngsters. ...We got a group of people and had a couple of drinks. I didn't have that kind of experience, so they invited me to try it. I thought 'Yeah, I could try it, why not?'* (Wang, 44, truck driver, separated)

*For me, the first time was due to friends' jeers. ...They said something like 'Ha, you don't dare to do it, do you?' ...It's a very common growing-up ritual among young men, you know. It's difficult for me to imagine that one's first visit was done alone. After that, you get to know it well and it becomes easier. It's not a big deal, is it?* (Lee, 33, Internet studio owner, married)

It is argued that the penis is overloaded as the embodiment of the western concept of masculinity (Brittan, 1989). As Person (1980) points out, ‘An impotent man always feels that his masculinity, and not just his sexuality, is threatened. In men,

gender appears to “lean” on sexuality’ (quoted in Tiefer, 1987:166). Holland et al. (1996) also argue that heterosexual ‘first sex’, the gendered moment, is an ‘introduction into adult masculinity for young men’ (1996:144). In addition, the embodiment of the ‘first sex’ is always focused on young men’s erection and visible orgasm, while young women are pressured to do it and forced to fit into the masculine sex project. Masculinity would be more powerful if it were carried out through specific collective social rituals and/or totems that shape the identities of individuals and the groups they belong to (Connell, 1995). The two quotations above indicate that using prostitutes is a way to prove men’s masculinity by conquering women sexually (‘Yeah, I could try it, why not?’), and to build up manhood and male bonding. Sheu Shin-liang’s<sup>49</sup> infamous remark obviously reflects the idea of linking manhood with visiting special bars. It was reported that he visited a special bar and then defended himself by saying ‘[I]s there any man who never visits a (special) bar?’ In other words, visiting special bars is one of the essential elements of being a man in Taiwan. In a society where using the sex industry is taken for granted among men, the experiences of visiting prostitutes are treated as one of the important indicators for men to compete with each other. One interviewee complained about how he lost his cherished virginity to a sex worker in a massage parlour, and how using prostitutes became a way to prove himself among his peer group.

*Could you believe that I kept my virginity till 29? I really cherished it [the virginity], you know. One night I got drunk and then it was done to me. I didn’t even notice what the woman looked like! (laugh)... Later, my attitudes toward [using] prostitution were a bit weird. I mean, once*

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<sup>49</sup> Sheu was once the chairman of the Democratic Progressive Party (now the ruling party in Taiwan).

*someone invited me to go-whoring, I would just go with them. It seemed to tell people 'Yeah, I can do it, too!' (Soong, 38, sales, married)*

Interviewees tended to see their first visits as a social performance and/or a ritual by which they expected to be included in their peer group. In this way, respondents presented using prostitution as a kind of 'compulsory' masculine practice, and more or less indicated that men use prostitutes under this social pressure. Nonetheless, these interviewees neither questioned the legitimacy of using prostitutes, nor challenged the sexual politics underlying prostitution. They indeed conformed to the 'complicit masculinity' identified by Connell (1995) in prostitution. Hence, they could use prostitutes without feeling any guilt about it. As an interviewee reported, 'if everyone commits the same crime, it means that no one is really guilty!'

In Taiwan, buying sex from a prostitute is still commonly considered to be a moral issue; hence, the difficulty in dealing with the social morality surrounding prostitution – such as fidelity in marriage, the stigma of being a punter and objectifying women as sexual objects – is always an issue in clients' narratives. As one interviewee put it, 'I definitely would not dare to claim that *pyau-jih* (i.e. to go whoring) is guiltless'. However, clients face different moral issues according to their social backgrounds, i.e. class and marital status. Married clients usually avoid seeing prostitutes during weekends as they have to stay at home to accompany their families. They also spent quite a long time talking about how they deal with the contradiction of using prostitutes within marriage. Some clients are therefore aware of avoiding having penetrative sex, the 'real sex', with

prostitutes and some claim that they make an effort to give their wives and children a 'strong sense of security'. Unmarried clients complain about the 'social pressure' of visiting prostitutes.

*It's the pressure of pyau-jih. It's pressure. I walked into a brothel. I saw passers-by around there and some even laughed at me. It was nasty, so later I chose some discreet and secure places. (Lian, 35, manager, engaged)*

Although clients are not criminalized by using prostitutes, it is still a covert consumption. Some interviewees did not care about the pressure, either due to the fact that they '[knew] very well about the laws' or that they reflected, 'as a consumer, I am just like ordinary consumers'. The risk management of the encounter, however, is still a core issue, especially for those middle-class 'respectable' clients. An affluent doctor went into details, talking about how he was impressed by an 'excellent' pimp who arranged everything perfectly. For example, the pimp did not 'ask for the money at the beginning because it looks bad', and his speech was not as 'vulgar' as gangsters'. Clients' security concerns always come first. The doctor could see call-girls at his house and never even meet up with the pimp. Thus pyau-jih, stigmatized behaviour, was then kept as an 'absolute secret', and, most importantly, arranged in a very 'elaborate' way that suited 'clients who have a high economic status'. Pyau-jih, therefore, is well-planned consumption rather than popping into a brothel to release sexual urges.

It is 'the fading away of the sense of morality' which drives some clients to visit prostitutes frequently. A client talked about the complex feelings that related

to his middle-class 'sense of morality' in his first visit to a special bar.

*The feelings about the first visit were very complex. I felt very shocked on the one hand, and was very nervous on the other. Er... I was not used to it at all. I mean, I was not used to interacting with women in ways that do not respect them at all. Do something like touching a woman all over her body. It seems I am getting used to it now. (laugh)*  
(Kao, 38, doctor, single)

## **ii) Prostitute-using as 'playing women'**

Apart from the fading away of a sense of morality, personal sexual interests are always considered to be the fundamental issue of prostitution. McKeganey and Barnard (1996) list five different reasons for the western use of prostitutes. They are: 1) the opportunity to pay for specific services; 2) the opportunity to have sex with many different women; 3) the opportunity to have sex with women with a specific physical character; 4) the encounter is limited to the sex act; and 5) the thrill. Interviewees in this study reported without any hesitation that they suffered from a desperate sexual life when they were servicemen, without sexual partners or because their wives or girlfriends could not offer enough, or good, sex etc. Visiting prostitutes is obviously not the only solution to dealing with the 'male sexual urge'; however, it was reiterated so many times that I could not help thinking that it is the clients' inability to face their chauvinism that makes the narrative so remarkable. Interviewees replied to why masturbation was not a solution for dissolving sexual urges:

*When you have experience of playing women, and you know that playing women...is much more interesting than masturbation...If you could afford it, you definitely would choose to play women. (Lian, 35, manager, engaged)*



*It was impossible [to masturbate] when I was young. I had many [girl]friends and was very popular when I was young, you know. I definitely wouldn't think about it. (Wang, 44, truck driver, separated)*

'*Playing women*' is precisely the keyword of Taiwanese clients' use of prostitutes. Both quotations show that physical sexual needs are not the first concern; instead, it is how to have sex in masculine ways that makes seeking prostitutes desirable.

Considering the cultural and social practices of '*playing women*' in Taiwan, it usually refers to 'othering' prostitutes as sexual objects that can be flirted with, gazed upon, played with, chatted up and fucked by men, but it does not necessarily end up with fucking prostitutes. Above all, clients are very aware that these prostitutes could be 'played' plainly because they are paid sexual commodities. One client complained how he and friends were so excited about visiting a brothel during the Lunar New Year, but '[T]here was no commodity there!' The commodification and fetishization of prostitutes' bodies was especially manifested in the process of 'picking up' prostitutes. One client laughed lasciviously when talking about how he and a friend picked up two Chinese prostitutes, who had 'big breasts, good body shape and a pretty face', among hundreds of prostitutes in Shanghai. The ways women are coded by numbers, lined up and displayed to clients, presents prostitutes as commodities and clients are entitled to have the 'right to choose'. The 'right to choose' not only signifies clients' supreme power, but is also the key that makes prostitution use pleasurable (O'Connell Davidson, 1998:153). Indeed, the client 'others' prostitutes as pure sexual commodities to the extent that he does not care about whether the women are trafficked into prostitution or not.

*I don't care. I choose women...by their physical features. It doesn't matter whether she was trafficked or not... I only think about my sexual pleasures —whether I come or not. This is their job. (Lian, 35, manager, engaged)*

Seeing prostitution in this way, the client-prostitute encounter is extremely sexualized, commercialized and depersonalized. Clients are clearly aware that they are consumers who look for specific sexual services in the sex industry. The exchange of money for sexual pleasures is the major theme in this type of sexual consumption. As seeking sexual pleasures is manifest here, brothels and/or call-girl services which explicitly provide sexual services are commonly chosen by this type of client. The social boundary between 'respectable' clients and unrespectable 'other whores' is clearly maintained by sexual contracts within which clients are consumers and prostitutes are workers.

*Oh, to be honest, somehow ...I totally treated her [the prostitute] as a whore. Yeah, I would introduce my friends to visit her. It doesn't matter because she knows she's a whore! (Soong, 38, sales, married)*

*I paid, so I could do whatever I wanted to her [prostitute]. I don't need to consider prostitutes' feelings or emotions...I pay for it. I spend money on it. ..I only think about my sexual pleasures. I go there and am eager to get...come, and I would then leave quickly. I am not doing charity! (laugh) That's their jobs. (Lian, 35, manager, engaged)*

In commercialized client-prostitute encounters, clients' sexual pleasures are put at the centre of the transaction. O'Connell Davidson (1995a) precisely pointed out that clients' visible ejaculations signified the end of clear-cut sexual contracts. Nonetheless, as far as paying for 'playing women' is concerned, going beyond the contracts to enjoy more sexual benefits is not only a way to prove clients' masculinity, but also a way to reconfirm the social boundary between the

‘respectable self’ and the ‘other whore’. An interviewee talked about how he ‘conquered’ a sex worker in a half-set skin nutrition salon<sup>50</sup> where penetrative sex is not allowed:

*Both men and women are naked in the salon. In that situation...it is working women who should be subjected to the regulations of the salon. They are not allowed to have intercourse with clients, so women have to control the situation. Eventually every man wants intercourse. ...I didn't force her [to have intercourse], but ... I used my body to ...approach her. If she didn't agree to do it, men are doomed to failure. Of course, she had her line of defence, but eventually she gave up defending it. She gave it up. It was she who gave it up! (Soong, 38, sales, married)*

It is more accurate to call this a rape rather than commercial sex. Prostitutes are expected to be responsible for their sexual attractiveness because men’s sexual urges are uncontrollable—as in, ‘[E]ventually every man wants intercourse’. Moreover, the representation of the sexual encounter is heavily dependent on the widely-accepted biological discourse in which the penis is an active weapon that embodies male sexual drives, while the vagina is a passive container that needs to be aroused. Nonetheless, it is only ‘good women’ who are confined to this gendered sexuality; the prostitutes, as ‘fallen women’, on the contrary, are considered promiscuous and/or sexual perverts. Hence, lustful dirty whores would eventually give up the line of defence because they ‘grew to like it’! In this way, clients successfully convince themselves that prostitutes are conquered by their

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<sup>50</sup> Skin-nutrition salons are currently very popular in Taichung, Taiwan. Officially speaking, these salons offer skin protection work to clients. However, everyone knows that they are another kind of massage parlour. Skin-nutrition salons can be loosely classified into two types: whole-set and half-set salons. The former offers whole body massage and penetrative sex and the latter only offers massage and hand release.

masculinity, while ignoring the reality that '[I]t is useless [for working women] to report it to the company'.

### **III. '*He hua jeou*'--The collective consumption of prostitution**

It is widely argued that Taiwanese men visit sexual establishments, where diverse sexual services are available, for business reasons. Young's survey research on Taipei citizens' attitudes towards the sex industry pointed out that 67.2% of the respondents (N=1036) backed this commonly accepted narrative. Like O'Connell Davidson (1998), Hwuang (2001) argues that it is very important to differentiate men's individual and collective uses of prostitution. She points out that '*he hua jeou*' indeed serves as a mechanism for Taiwanese men to exchange political, economic and social interests etc. Moreover, this exchange always involves bribes that affect the public sphere.

With the baggage of Chinese and Japanese colonialism, '*he hua jeou*' is actually a hybrid cultural product which blends Chinese and Japanese prostitution with a fashionable western sex industry (Chapter 1). Currently '*he hua jeou*' is actually a daily social and cultural practice in Taiwan. It is one of the remarkable hedonistic models of Taiwanese men across classes and ethnicity. Although the six interviewees are different in terms of class, they all reported that they had *he hua jeou* for business matters or simply as part of their social lives. '*He hua jeou*' is usually practised in the so-called Eight Special Businesses (ESBs), in which drinking is combined with diverse urban entertainment and/or leisure, such as massage services, barber salons, karaoke bars, dancing houses etc. As consumers are indiscriminately spread through all social classes, ESBs are very

class-stratified to cater for diverse lifestyles and/or tastes. Most bars charge a client at least NT\$ 2,000 to have a bar girl's company for one hour and very cheap 'family style' karaoke bars cost a client NT\$ 300 per hour<sup>51</sup>.

### **i) Exchanging women among affluent men**

Taiwanese society is well organized through interpersonal networks based on traditional kinship. Moreover, the Taiwanese government is always haunted by its infamous corruption. Therefore, building up 'good relations' with interest-related people is very important to get one's job done. Treating business counterparts, colleagues, clients, contractors, employees and politicians to *he hua jeou* is considered to be one of the major means of building up a 'good relationship' and to win a contract or to gain political, economic and social interests. It is so prevalent that there are many scandals surrounding this cultural practice. For example, Yan Ching-biau<sup>52</sup>, the former chairman of Taichung county council, appropriated £1m of a county budget to treat his colleagues and friends to *he hua jeou* for one and a half years. Some principals of primary schools and the officers of educational affairs in the Taipei city government were treated to *he hua jeou* by private contractors. Although there were many scandals surrounding this cultural practice, Ma Yong-cheng<sup>53</sup> was one of the few politicians who stepped down from his position due to *he hua jeou*. In Taiwan the cultural practice of *he hua*

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<sup>51</sup> These costs only refer to having a woman accompany clients; it does not include alcohol and dishes and a tip for the waiters and working women.

<sup>52</sup> Yan defended himself in court arguing that it is very common for the city and county councillors to *he hua jeou* throughout the whole country. Why did the prosecutors only point the finger at the Taichung county council? See, on-line news at <http://enews.ftv.com.tw/topnews/010517000126.htm>

<sup>53</sup> Ma Yong-cheng was once the vice-secretary of the Taipei City Government. He was one of the most important members of staff of Chen Shui-bian and was reported to *he hua jeou* in many bars during late 1998. In order to maintain the public image of Chen and the Taipei city government, he quitted the job and became the first politician to step down over this kind of scandal.

*jeou* is taken for granted. Only if it were involved in bribery and/or corruption, would it then become a public issue. To put it differently, playing women is widely tolerated as long as public affairs and public money are not involved.

Recently, some studies have focused on how Taiwanese enterprises invest budgets in treating business counterparts to *he hua jeou* in order to win contracts. Chang and Tan (1999) pointed out that many Taiwanese small- and middle-sized companies are keenly treating their business counterparts to *he hua jeou* in order to build up trusting relationships. Chen's (1999) research also showed that small- and middle-sized companies form the majority of clients of ESBs. The basic logic behind this cultural practice is that:

*You need to deal with your clients, you know. Usually they didn't demand [it], but we had to keep the business going. So, we treated clients to go there. It is a means of shortening the distance between clients and ourselves, you know... Buying [clients] a big meal is very common. If you could take him to an extra party, the relationship between you and him is definitely much closer. (Chang, 47, truck driver, married)*

As '*he hua jeou*' is usually considered to be leisure or social entertainment, it therefore avoids the seriousness of official interaction among men and helps to build up 'personal' relationships outside of offices. Nonetheless, understanding *he hua jeou* merely as a mechanism of exchanging women (Hwuang, 2001) fails to capture the picture of the gendered hedonism of this cultural practice, and fails to identify the different social meanings behind the practice in terms of class.

Bourdieu (1984) argues that modern consumption is well organized by an

individual's or a group of individuals' *habitus*. This refers to those taken-for-granted individual tastes about food, drink, holiday, hobbies, manners, gestures and many routine daily and/or bodily activities. Above all, the *habitus* is always related to a set of social and economic conditions, specifically the social classes, and to an extent demonstrates the social origin of an individual. Using *hua-jeou* culture to run businesses is not only grounded on calculated interests, but also firmly based on Taiwanese men's urban daily life, i.e. available leisure activities, the ways in which labour is organized, and how work and hedonism could be well-combined in the city.

Using *he hua jeou* as a business tool more or less means it is an extension of the workplace. Allison (1994) points out how two junior Japanese employees initially felt forced to accompany one of their senior colleagues drinking late, but eventually enjoyed themselves joking and flirting with the hostess. The hierarchy between the junior employees and their senior colleague seemed blurred when all three cut in flirting with the hostess. Nonetheless, one interviewee subtly talked about how the hierarchy in the workplace created tension in this cultural practice:

*The thing is that my boss was looking at me and waiting to see whether I dared to play [girls] or not. Did I think about clients when I played with bar girls? That's part of what business means. You need to think about how to please those clients, passing hot girls to clients and making them have a good time. For me, that's an extension of the workplace.... Usually, I would let people choose girls first and not care who accompanies me. (Lee, 33, Internet studio owner, married)*

As masculinity is not self-evident, there is always a question as to whether a man is 'man enough' and always subjected to being tested (Seidler, 1989, 1998).

Above all, Connell (1995) argues that masculinities are varied in terms of production. The technical knowledge and expertise in the workplace results in different work-related masculinities. Working-class men take pride in toughness, strength, and male-bonding, while white-collar salaried men and/or skilled technical workers value self-discipline and rationality. Lee complained about the ways in which his masculinity was put under scrutiny (*whether I dared to play or not*); however, he prided himself on demonstrating manhood and/or brotherhood by 'passing hot girls to clients', and in behaving as a well-trained and experienced employee. In other words, it is not only the power hierarchy in the workplace that burdens younger employees, but also the competition of male masculinities in the cultural practices that create the pressure. Indeed, the cultural practice usually turns out to be an Olympic Games of masculinities; i.e. competing to see who can drink the most, who is most popular among the bar girls, and who is able to show off his manners by 'passing hot girls' to someone else.

As these different dimensions of masculinities interweave together in this cultural context, clients are expected to negotiate these different meanings of masculinities. To be lustful is one of the ways to be masculine, but, paradoxically, self-control is also a core element of masculinity (Seidler, 1989). Hence, clients who are able to control and manage their 'innate sexual drives' and 'pass hot girls' to others, are considered men's men. *He hua jeou* is thus a social and cultural practice in which men compete with each other. Moreover, in the competition, male bonding and brotherhood can be built up by circulating working women around as commodified sexual objects. Nonetheless, the masculinities here are very different from those in a football match, where masculinity is highlighted by



speed and direct bodily prowess. Here, masculinities are reinforced by the performance of femininity by female hostesses. As Connell (1995) argued, there would be no masculinity if there were no such thing as femininity. I will return to this point in the next section.

## ii) *He hua jeou* as working-class men's social life

Although *he hua jeou* is widely practised as a mechanism by which middle- and upper-class men exchange women for political, economic and social interests, Taiwanese working-class men, after an eight-hour shift, hang out together and visit affordable ESBs for 'relaxation'. This is understood as part of their social lives rather than as using prostitutes.

*When visiting a bar, I would go with friends. It is sort of social life, you know. We chat to each other in the bars. You know, killing time and having someone to talk to... If I like a woman, I will chat with her and make friends with her. (Wang, 44, truck driver, separated)*

Another respondent also talked about how, when he ran a small gambling business and won some money six years ago, he almost visited a *gong dian* (i.e. a low-ranking drinking place for middle-aged or elderly men) every night and always ended up sleeping with different hostesses or massage workers. Most importantly, he was so proud of himself for having convinced his wife that his 'nightlife' was simply 'healthy entertainment'.

*I took my wife to visit there, too. Working women still came to accompany us...So, I give my wife the impression that I visit those places simply for entertainment. I sing songs and sometimes have a massage. It's very healthy. It's entertainment but not sex. (Chang, 47, truck driver, married)*

As *he hua jeou* is part of Taiwanese men's social lives, it plays a part in organizing the gendered social relationships between men and women, husbands and wives. Compared to visiting brothels or call-girl services, it more or less dissolves the conflict of using prostitutes and maintaining a heterosexual marriage at the same time. Usually Taiwanese wives are expected to 'understand' that their husbands are playing social games with working women but not betraying their marriage. In this way, ESBs conspire with compulsory heterosexual marriage against married women and consolidate the dichotomy of 'madonna/whore'. However, clients, taking advantage of gender hierarchy, benefit from both sides and enjoy the fantastic dream of having 'a housewife at home and a lustful and lewd woman in bed'!

Lifestyle, of course, is not the only variation that drives clients to visit ESBs regularly. Chang reported that he did not like 'that kind of sex based on a cash transaction' because it would not be 'good sex', i.e. sexual taste is another variation. Apart from clients' lifestyles and tastes, feminists have an interest in asking why visiting ESBs is so desirable for men as far as gendered labour and/or consumption are concerned. Allison (1994) argued that visiting a hostess club was desirable for Japanese men because the performance of femininity by hostesses reinforced clients' masculinity and manhood. Examining the environment and atmosphere of Taiwanese ESBs may be helpful in understanding why men are so fond of visiting these places.

Chang and Wang took me to a cheap family-style karaoke bar where there were three working women and one receptionist in the evening. Chang and Wang

obviously visit the bar very often; they know the bar owner, the working women and the receptionist very well. We were served drinks and side dishes and women came to accompany us. Wang is quite fond of the receptionist. He invited her to sing Taiwanese songs, which mostly talked about how a man adores and/or loves a woman. Although I was there, he still flirted with the receptionist and kept asking her to hang out with him sometimes. Chang, of course, made an effort to help Wang to convince the receptionist. Nonetheless, the receptionist always replied with a charming smile and claimed seductively that she was too busy to go out and invited Wang to visit the bar next time. Chang spent quite a long time playing finger-guessing games with a working woman and had a couple of drinks. Another client danced with another woman and tried to have some bodily contact, because the woman was almost submerged in his arms. Sex, of course, did not happen in the karaoke bar, but the flirtation, the love songs, the eye contact and all possible bodily contact converged to constitute a sensational scene that indicated that something might happen next. It is very true that one of the attractions of visiting ESBs is that it gives clients an illusion and/or fantasy of 'falling in love'. As Fung-fung put it, 'we are selling affection and love, but not necessarily selling sex'.

*We intend to give them that kind of ...illusion because we have to. Let them feel that we like them very much. We sincerely like them very much. You have to understand men. They are chauvinists. They like you taking them seriously and like to take care of vulnerable women. So it's very useful to pretend that you are soft and meek, and try to show weakness. They feel that we are falling in love with them, and there are possibilities for them to have affairs. (Fung-fung, 29, 3 years as a bar-girl).*

This quotation is indeed quite typical of young Taiwanese bar girls. Nonetheless,

this performance of emotional labour is not necessarily indicative of the victimization of bar girls. As Firth and Kitzinger (1998) argue, (young) women do invest interest in this talk of 'emotional work', and thereby construct men as emotionally vulnerable while they themselves are strong, caring, and in control. Above all, (young) women represent themselves as sophisticated enough to deal with men's feelings and knowledgeable about men. As Fung-fung reports, '[T]hey are chauvinists'; '[T]hey like you taking them seriously and like to take care of vulnerable women'. With this 'knowledge' of men it therefore is possible for bar girls to create the illusion of 'falling in love' with clients, and thus have the ability to 'cultivate' and 'keep' clients. Instead of being victims they are knowledgeable, skilled, and sophisticated workers who know how to exercise 'shou wan' to manipulate clients.

Campbell (1989) argued that modern consumerist hedonism involved seeking pleasures rather than needs. Above all, the basic motivation of consumers is a 'longing to experience in reality those pleasures created and enjoyed in imagination, a longing which results in the ceaseless consumption of novelty' (1989:205). Visiting ESBs is so desirable, not because of uncontrollable sexual urges, but, rather, because of the illusion of being loved by the working women. However, the fantasy, emerging in a daydream and/or the imagination, is doomed to collapse in reality. Therefore, clients visit ESBs repeatedly and always look for novelty in the sex industry, while frequently complaining about working women offering bad services. As one interviewee put it, '[Y]ou definitely get bored after chatting, touching and kissing bar girls for two hours...It's really boring.'

Moreover, the ‘fall-in-love’ games between sex workers and clients create an ambiguous space that blurs client-prostitute relationships. Chang reiterated that sex always ‘happened naturally’ when both working women and he had ‘sexual needs’; hence, he proudly said: ‘I seldom pay for sex’. Wang made it even clearer that the sexual encounter between clients and prostitutes is actually an extension of this daily hedonism rather than a commercial transaction.

*It's not visiting prostitutes. It is sort of dating girlfriends... When I was young I did not have a regular job and was always hanging out with friends and looking up places to drink. ...Usually if I liked a woman there, I would chat with her and ask her out. I mean it was mutual, you know. I went there as a consumer. We liked each other, so we dated each other. It was mutual. Both of us consented to do it, you know. It was really rare for me to buy sex before. ...If we liked each other and both of us wanted sex at that time, I then took her out.  
(Wang, 44, truck driver, separated)*

It is not a coincidence that both Chang and Wang argue that they ‘seldom pay for sex’ and emphasize that sexual encounters always ‘happened naturally’ and were based on women’s ‘consent’. The phenomenon is indeed based on a conventional sexual script of the client-prostitute encounter. As working women tend to exercise ‘*shou wan*’ to cultivate clients, the client-prostitute encounter shifts to an ordinary heterosexual relationship and then blurs the boundaries of prostitution and personal heterosexual relationships (Chapter 4). Therefore, the axiom that ‘prostitution is the transaction of money and sex’ is problematic. As is widely documented, money is replaced by some other rewards and/or exchange, such as offering working women free drinks, meals, holidays, presents etc. Clients in New Zealand think that ‘paying for sex’ is a way to avoid responsibility or commitment (Plumridge et al, 1997), while Chang and Wang proudly claimed that they ‘seldom

pay for sex'. Chang 'gives' money to working women, but it is understood as a mutuality of friendship rather than a commercial transaction.

*I don't want to buy sex with money. However, sometimes I consider that she is working for survival, so I more or less give her some money... It is because I feel ashamed; otherwise, women usually do not talk about money when I take them out. ...Although it is based on her consent, but, at least, as a consumer I am prepared to spend money while she is struggling to make money. (Chang, 47, truck driver, married)*

This self-account is complicated and contradictory because heterosexual love relations interweave with sexual consumption and masculinity. 'Authentic' sexual encounters won by masculinity (women usually do not talk about money) are supposed to be pure and without money involved, while monetary reward is a basic principle of sexual consumption. As Chang is always aware of his social status as a consumer, the intimacy will not be just like any other heterosexual relationship. The working woman was, in a sense, personalized as his lover, but, she still existed as the other whore who lived by prostitution. Above all, the 'mutuality' is always subject to change according to clients' arbitrary preferences (Plumridge et al, 1997:172), especially when the clients' economic situation and the calculation of gains and losses comes into play.

Wang tends to befriend working women, so he is quite appreciative of those sexual encounters with working women. Some women were his sexual partners for one-night-stands and some became his girlfriends and/or cohabitants. These relationships lasted variously from one night, to six months, to one-and-a-half years. His wife was actually once a working woman who he met in a bar. These

relationships, even in the case of one-night-stands, could also be passed off as the meeting of heterosexual lovers in Wang's daily social life. However, his economic hardship made him understand that it is impossible to 'rescue' these working women and/or 'redeem their lives'. Therefore, the 'women still kept their jobs and we were together after both of us returned from our workplaces'. Compared to Wang's inability to deal with the women's economic hardship, the ways Chang managed his long-term relationships with several working women was greatly involved with calculation.

*I told her, 'if you forced me to do anything, I would just leave you'. I mean, since we are friends and are together, you then cannot make things difficult for me. Neither would I make things difficult for her. So, she still kept working there. She needed to survive, you know. It was impossible for me...According to my personality, it is impossible for me to raise a cow simply to want to have some milk to drink! (laugh) You did your job, and I ran my own business. That's it! (Chang, 47, truck driver, married)*

The long-term intimate relationship is hardly reciprocal and/or transgressive. It is the man/client who decides how far the working woman can cross the boundaries to have an intimate relationship; it is the woman/prostitute who should always remember her place and not transgress further!

#### **IV. Emotional demands and sexual tastes**

Recently, some empirical research on prostitutes' clients marks out the emotional dimension in client-prostitute encounters. O'Connell Davidson's research into British sex tourism pointed out that British men prefer Thai prostitutes not only because of their cheaper prices, but also because they are warmer (1995a:48-51). Høigård and Finstad's research reported that some lonely clients just want to talk (1992:52); some like to 'play big lovers' (1992:62); hence,

faking orgasms and 'enjoying' commercial sex became part of prostitutes' work. In a study of New Zealand clients of massage parlours, many respondents reported that their sexual encounters with prostitutes were highly reciprocal and deeply emotionally involved. However, the authors criticized this interpretation as self-serving because clients used a 'permissive' discourse of sexuality, identified by Hollway (1984), to engage in sex without commitment, while using a 'have/hold' discourse to expect emotional attachment from prostitutes (Plumridge et al, 1997). Recently, Lever and Dolnick (2000) have argued that the commercialization of intimacy expects employees of 'listening occupations' to perform 'emotional labour'. What call girls are really selling, they argue, is the 'illusion of intimacy' and are keeping that illusion alive.

These 'emotional services' or 'emotional labour', as stated above, include chatting with sex workers, demanding a warmer woman or sweetheart, expecting reciprocity, 'passing' and dating as heterosexual couples and even expecting prostitutes' orgasms etc. The unfinished list seems sufficient to show that prostitution is not only a field of sex, but, rather, a field that interweaves sex with emotions, such as loneliness, emptiness, being bored, longing to have heterosexual intimacy, and desiring the fantasy of 'she-enjoys-it'! Above all, these emotional demands are more or less represented as the antithesis of 'male sexual urges', and therefore fail to analyze how emotions interweave with sexuality in prostitution. Indeed, I will argue, these emotional demands are very sexualized, and are always interweaved with the discourse of 'male sexual urges'.

#### **i) Falling in love with prostitutes as 'seasickness'**

Compared to Taiwanese clients, who seek explicit sex and use the ESBs as daily hedonism, some clients claim that they use prostitutes to satisfy both



‘physical and psychological needs’. The former, again, refers to the ‘men’s sexual urge’, while the latter are varied, ambiguous, and contradictory. The affluent doctor tends to ‘seek sex without any responsibility’, i.e. ‘it is just hedonism’, and he does not have any ‘psychological burden’. One interviewee, Soong, who suffered from long-term frustration in pursuing heterosexual women, argued that using prostitutes served to fill up his ‘psychological lack’, i.e. lack of heterosexual intimacy. As Soong never had heterosexual intimacy before he used prostitutes, his encounters with prostitutes were very emotionally-invested, and were one of the ways to experience the intimacy of ‘possessing a woman of my own’.

*I visited her frequently, and I got to spend more and more time with her... It's a bit like investing something in her. I then began to miss her all the time. How can I say it, I mean, at that time I didn't have any experience of intimacy at all. So,...it was like people put it, seasickness. It's seasickness because I was inexperienced. I told her 'I want to redeem your life!' (ha, ha, ha...) (emphasized by Soong) Just like the old-fashioned lines of soap operas...It's not love, it's a feeling that I wished I could possess a woman who belonged to me...I had no idea of being depended on. The feeling of being depended on. Emotionally being depended on...Even now I feel it was a kind of lack or incompleteness. It's a bit similar to being mentally disabled. (Soong, 38, sales, married)*

Seasickness is a very commonly used metaphor among Taiwanese punters. It refers to those ‘inexperienced’ clients who ‘lose’ themselves and feel that they are ‘falling in love’ with working women. Sex workers are aware of preventing themselves from getting involved in emotional engagement within commercial sex (Chapter 6), while (inexperienced) clients, seeking sexual pleasure in those encounters, seldom make an effort to differentiate commercial sex from their

sexual intimacy. This, therefore, explains the ways in which ‘falling in love’ with a brothel girl is such a bitter experience.

The ways Soong talked about how he missed the brothel girl and how he cares about her are just like ordinary heterosexual love. However, the dream of ‘possessing a woman of my own’ was always contested by the cruel fact that ‘I stood outside her room and she was busy inside’; hence, he tries to convince himself that ‘[I]t’s not love because there was not any commitment. I didn’t even know whether she missed me or not!’ Strongly denying that it is ‘love’, claiming he was ‘seasick’ and ‘inexperienced’, indeed, are much easier to face than the stark reality that a beloved cannot love him in return. Moreover, using the language of seasickness serves to construct prostitutes as cunning and greedy women, while ‘inexperienced clients’ are presented as innocent victims. Thus, ‘*I want to redeem your life! Ha, ha, ha...*’ ended up as an ironic footnote to these sexual encounters.

## **ii) Not just ‘sex’ but ‘good sex’**

Apart from this extreme story, most interviewees did not provide a clear account of their ‘psychological needs’; however, one thing in common in their narratives was that the client-prostitute relationship was ‘*not just sex*’.

*Oh, I do not want to take a woman out only for having sex. I mean just for having sex, I don’t want it. It [sex] must be mutually enjoyable and with some feelings, then the sex could be interesting. (Chang, 48, truck driver, married)*

*I emphasized carnal desire earlier. It's a physical need, because one's dick cannot stand it. But, it would be better if there were something more than that [sex]...It might not be love. I think maybe an illusion of love or something. (Lee, 33, Internet studio owner, married)*

*I think that sex is not just about doing that thing or just about ejaculation. I need emotional attachment. That makes you feel that you are not so...It's right that it is very comfortable, but it will make you feel that you are not so... lonely. Um, it makes you feel that you are not so lonely. (Kao, 38, doctor, single)*

Feminists offer critical insight in deconstructing the gendered discourse of the 'lust balance', in which men tend toward lust-dominated sexuality or carnal desire and women toward love or intimacy-dominated sexuality (Wouters, 1998). These remarks challenge the 'lust balance'. As emotional attachment is expected, more work needs to be done (by both parties) on the client-prostitute relationship. As 'comfortable sex...doesn't mean that he just needs a woman who splits her feet and lets him do whatever he wants', *chatting up a prostitute becomes an important part of the ice-breaking process and one that brings about a 'good interaction'*.

According to a survey of streewalkers and call girls in Los Angeles, Lever and Dolnick (2000:96) point out that *talk* is considered to be a way to show clients' 'limited reciprocity' with call-girls. Respondents in this research have very different sexual expectations, however, everyone starts by chatting with the female prostitutes. The affluent doctor, who paid NT\$ 15,000 to NT\$ 25,000 per hour to see call-girls at his house, served call-girls red wine and arranged erotic music to create a 'romantic atmosphere', and, most importantly, made the encounters 'not so commercialized'. The ways clients romanticized commercial sex not only reflected when and how to deal with payment (O'Connell Davidson,

1995a), but also related to how to do the sex itself. In other words, the sex should be as similar to romantic heterosexual sex as possible. Nowadays, heterosexual encounters are seen as ‘a series of stages to be gone through before the final output: foreplay leading to coitus culminating in orgasm’ (Jackson and Scott, 1997:560). The doctor, for example, ‘needs more time to do foreplay’, because ‘it feels more pleasurable’; he usually had the call-girl sit next to him, touching and kissing his back, neck and body gently as ‘it’s more likely to turn *me* on’ and ‘then *one* could make love’ (my emphasis). Interestingly enough, the interviewee reports that the foreplay ‘turns *me* on’ to indicate the importance of foreplay for *his* sexual arousal; while using ‘then *one* could make love’ to make a general statement. In this way, he successfully constructs the general rule of the heterosexual encounter, i.e. from foreplay, to sexual arousal, to love making, to sexual orgasm. Thus, emotional demands are inevitable in both commercial and non-commercial sex.

These emotional demands might be part of the results of the ‘sexualization of love’ and ‘eroticization of sex’ identified by Seidman (1991), in which non-commercial sex was supposed to be co-operative, mutually respectful, and, most importantly, mutual sexual satisfaction is treated as the most intimate way to express love. In this sense, demanding ‘mutuality’ in client-prostitute sexual encounters serves at least to create an illusion that clients are ‘loved’ or ‘cared about’ by the prostitutes. In prostitution, the mixing-up of love with sex creates a paradox in which emotional demands (i.e. that it is mutually enjoyable, an illusion of love, and avoidance of loneliness) are presented as ‘not just sex’, while they explicitly or implicitly link to clients’ fantasies of ‘good sex’; ‘[I]t [sex] must be

mutually enjoyable and with some feelings, then the sex could be interesting'. '[I]t would be better if there were something more than that [sex]'. Even the 'good interaction' brought about by chatting is preliminary and preparatory for having 'good sex'. According to one interviewee, 'good interaction' is:

*...[S]he served me and I served her. Um, I think we treated each other equally. She made me happy and I wanted to make her happy, too. In this way, the interactions get better and better. ...[She plays with my body and] I could play with her, too. Some women don't want to be touched, but she let me play with her. That's co-operation....One of my regular women in a massage salon, she even demanded orgasm before I came. I needed to provide services to her first....Why do so many men do it? It's a psychological matter. You feel it's a kind of interaction, and feel you are turned on. Of course, you could just lie down there and let her rub or stroke you, but it's very different... Oh, it's much higher than making love, you know. Yeah, I just used my fingers and let her come two or three times. It wouldn't be possible, if the two parties didn't have a good interaction. (Soong, 38, sales, married)*

*Many punters think they are buyers, so they simply lie down there and don't do anything. I think many men do it. But, for me it would be very bad sex. ... It won't guarantee a good interaction. (Lee, 33, Internet studio owner, married).*

Here, 'good interaction' and prostitutes' 'co-operation' are keywords for carrying out 'good sex'. For the sake of 'good sex', Lee pointed out, the supreme power of consumers it is better to be restrained and for them to interact with the working women in a sense of 'partnership'. As he put it, '[I]t's like I cannot play tennis by myself, so I hire a partner to play with'. 'Good interaction' means mutual enjoyment and women being treated as active sexual subjects. However, so-called 'good interaction' and 'co-operation', as I showed earlier, are firmly based on

using consumerism to ‘conquer’ working women in a masculine way and even use force. The ‘psychological matter’ in Soong’s account, indeed, serves to undermine the image of working women as sexual subjects, because clients who ‘simply lie down there’ and passively wait to accept sexual services get a result of ‘bad sex’. ‘Good sex’ thus demands ‘good interaction’, which presents working women as ‘enjoying’ the encounter, and allows clients to ‘conquer’ these women to prove their masculinity. Most importantly, ‘good interaction’ also represents Lee and Soong as ‘good clients’, who are not arrogant, rude, and rough people thinking, ‘I spend the money, so I am the boss!’ Proudly talking about ‘good interaction’ they thus identify themselves as sexually attractive, good consumers, and, most of all, sexually skilled.

It is worth noting that Soong’s narrative shows that *giving* working women orgasms and/or being sexually ‘desired’ by working women constitutes an important part of ‘good sex’. Moreover, this demand is also widely confirmed by female interviewees (Chapter 4). The naturalization of orgasm, i.e. the ability to orgasm is natural and everyone can do it, becomes a sign of sexual competence and well-being in medical discourse at the turn of the millennium (Potts, 2000). This demand for orgasm leads to the construction of orgasm as the ‘peak’ of heterosexual encounters. Nonetheless, the discourses surrounding heterosexual orgasm are very much gendered. As feminists (Roberts et al. 1995, Potts, 2000, Jackson and Scott, 2001) have observed, men’s orgasm is always presented as self-evident due to the discourse of ‘male sexual urges’ and the visible ejaculation. On the other hand, women’s orgasm is always treated as mysterious and problematic, and requires more work and/or sexual skills. A heterosexual woman’s

orgasm, in this way, is not her own but, rather, is achieved by men's 'hard work' or 'excellent sexual skills'. In a demanding orgasm era, *giving* women orgasms becomes a criterion of whether men are good at sex or not. The economics of the gendered orgasm might partly explain the ways in which sex workers are required to perform orgasms.

Actually, only one interviewee does not care about whether working women come or not as he 'just wants to give vent'. Three interviewees reported that most working women do not have an orgasm and more or less fake it; as one interviewee put it, '[I]t is all about good or bad performance'. Chang, who had long-term relationships with working women, reported, '[W]e are not doing commercial sex, so there is no point in her faking it!' (A short sentence shows how women's [fake] orgasms are successfully performed in non-commercial sex!) Nonetheless, all interviewees reported that they could *tell* whether working women came or not. Thus working women's fake orgasms, in most cases, irritated these interviewees.

*I can tell it [orgasm]. Later on I was very annoyed when prostitutes pretended to make some noises. I told them 'Don't bother to fake it!' I said something like 'Fuck you, don't fake it! It's OK, if you don't enjoy it. You don't need to fake it!' She then replied 'Hum, I do it to please myself. Does it bother you?' (laugh) Damn! I'm not that kind of innocent punter. I know women's orgasms very well. Why should I cheat myself? (Lian, 35, manager, engaged)*

*Sometimes I felt annoyed. (he, he, he..) I got bored. I really want to slap her face and say something like 'Yeah, keep faking!' Yeah, it's very boring. I finished it rashly. ...It was really awful. I mean when you throw yourself into the sex and you find that your partner also throws herself into it, then you feel very comfortable. ...When you are*

*concentrating so much on it, while she is faking...Your thing [penis] turns soft immediately.* (Kao, 38, doctor, single)

To sum up, the sexualization of love, the eroticization of sex, and the way orgasm is constructed as the climax of heterosexual sexual encounters make commercial sex very emotionally-involved work. The clients not only demand sex, but ‘good sex’—involving flirtation, seductive verbal and body language, caresses, in-and-out intercourse, and finally both parties’ orgasms. The ‘good sex’ demanded here is highly emotionalized rather than only a carnal desire.

## **Summary**

In this chapter I have explored Taiwanese clients’ sexual consumption. Using data from in-depth interviews I find that Taiwanese clients’ prostitution use is affected by three factors: the different motivation of using prostitutes, lifestyles, and clients’ conception of ‘good sex’. Above all, prostitution is also underpinned by the ideology of ‘male sexual urges’.

To sum up, respondents who visit prostitutes to ‘give vent’ are more likely to see the client-prostitute sexual encounter as a commercial relationship. Thus, the rule of ‘the exchange of money and sex’ marks the client-prostitute relationship. On the other extreme, some respondents use prostitutes as substitutes for ‘romantic lovers’. Hence, the client-prostitute encounter is personalized and non-commercialized. Moreover, the social and cultural practice of ‘*he hua jeou*’ creates different client-prostitute relationships and complex power struggles. Firstly, ‘*he hua jeou*’, as a way of ‘playing women’, is very class-stratified.



Middle- and upper-class businessmen '*he hua jeou*' to combine their urban lifestyles and work on the one hand, while using bar girls and hostesses as sexual commodities to exchange social, political and economic interests among men on the other. '*He hua jeou*', however, is part of social life for working-class men. Apart from different lifestyles and motivation, respondents' conception of 'good sex' also has a strong impact on the client-prostitute relationship. Although 'good sex' is represented in slightly different ways, one thing in common is that most respondents demand 'emotional' comfort in prostitution. Thus, prostitutes are expected to perform varied emotional work, e.g chatting, flirting with clients, performing femininity, faking orgasm, and even 'falling in love' with clients. Nonetheless, performing this emotional work does not mean that prostitutes are therefore victims. On the contrary, bar girls tend to represent themselves as sophisticated and skilled sex workers.

## Conclusion

This thesis is very much about feminist politics: the politics of feminist ethics, and the politics of feminist representations of disadvantaged women.

It is very disturbing to see that some Taiwanese feminists and women's organizations are strongly condemnatory of all kinds of prostitution as 'violence against women' (Huang, 1998, my translation) and are 'determined to work against the sex industry' (Tzyh Lih Tzao Bao, 1998, my translation) without taking former licensed brothel workers' points of view into account. It is equally disturbing to see the abolition of Taipei licensed prostitution taken up as a representative icon of the campaign for sexual liberation. Indeed, the perspectives of sexual libertarians have gone so far that they are alien to the experiences of the majority of former Taipei licensed brothel workers. If feminist research is 'women generating knowledge *about* women and *for* women' (Jackson and Jones, 1998), in what sense could feminist scholars justify their analyses of prostitution, which are either *against* working women's interests or alien to working women's experiences? Is it in the name of 'women' or in the name of sexual liberation? Moreover, what are the relationships between feminist research and feminist activism? This thesis is an effort to de-construct a series of binary oppositions regarding prostitution (either 'sex' or 'work'), prostitutes (either 'happy hookers' or 'sexual victims'), and prostitution as a gender or a sexuality issue. The way I approach these issues is through locating commercial sex in Taiwanese working women's daily lives.

## **Research findings and limitations**

Michèle Barrett (1992) argued that there was a 'cultural turn' in which feminist research shifted from analyzing socio-economic structures and their material to focusing on symbols, performance and cultural representation. It represented a shift from 'things' (i.e. women's material lives) to 'words' (i.e. fluid symbols). One of the positive sides of this turn is that it creates more space to deal with the individual woman's agency and subjectivity. Many feminist scholars thus turn to work on contextualized and localized processes and practices (Jackson, 1999). Stigmatized, marginalized, and excluded women now find it much easier to speak out about the ways in which they make sense of their lives. However, for some materialist feminists (Jackson, 1999; Hennessy, 2000), it is 'politically necessary' (Hennessy, 2000:29) to recognize that some social relations are more fixed, stable and permanent than others. Those are, capital's extraction of surplus labor, white supremacy, and gender hierarchy. In order to avoid repeating the mistakes of binary thinking regarding prostitution, I sought to analyze how working women made sense of their daily lives, and how these localized processes and practices related to other social relations or structures.

The dynamic relationships between social agents, and the 'more fixed, stable and permanent' social relations, are clearly represented in this study. Taiwanese commercial sex is located at the intersection of gender, class, age, ethnicity, and sexuality. Poor indigenous girls, (under-age) single mothers, and abandoned (middle-aged) female labourers exchange sex for survival (Chapter 5). On the other hand, a young lesbian claims that doing commercial sex is nothing but performing femininity (Chapter 6). The former accounts show the ways in which

sexuality is intricately intertwined with the given gender, class and ethnic social hierarchies, while the latter narrative is a rebellious voice that contests, destabilizes, and deconstructs the social meanings and stigma of child prostitution. However, it does not follow that prostitution is simply an 'empty symbol' (Bell, 1994) or, as Ho (in Chang and Liu, 2001:33) suggested, that we should 'let child prostitutes go on to be happy child prostitutes! (my translation)' Indeed, the majority of my interviewees still struggle with and suffer from 'things' such as poverty, male violence, lacking job opportunities in the gendered labour market, and (feeling coerced into) making sacrifices for their families in order to be 'good mothers' and/or 'good daughters' (Chapter 5). These contradictory narratives, it seems to me, call for an elaborate account to identify the differences among women, and analyze how these differences are related to women's different locations (in terms of age, ethnic, sexuality, and social origins) in society rather than to a slip into radical relativism. Prostitution is neither simply an issue of sex, nor just an issue of gender. A simple solution which 'abstract[s] prostitution from the social and political relations in which it is embedded' (O'Connell Davidson, 1998: 198) is therefore doomed to fail. Hence, feminist theorizing of prostitution needs to be able to unpack the complex and dynamic relationships between the social relationships and social agents.

In order to overcome the stalemate within prostitution debates and to enable the silenced to speak, this thesis locates Taiwanese commercial sex in working women's daily lives and working conditions. By contextualizing commercial sex, the thesis has carefully examined the following questions: 1) how is prostitution possible for Taiwanese working women?; 2) what does it mean for women and

girls to engage in commercial sex?; 3) how do women and girls perceive and experience sexual encounters with clients?; and 4) how is prostitution so consistently desirable for men ? (Chapter 3)

Drawing on my fieldwork data, the study abandons the idea of the singular and static *illusion of 'the sex industry'*. It might be more appropriated to use the concept of the 'sex-work dynamics' to signify the heterogeneity of Taiwanese commercial sex. Moreover, I analyze the similarities and differences among diverse forms of commercial sex. Indeed, so-called 'prostitution', commonly thought to be homogeneous, is organized into a variety of forms in Taiwan. Hence, *'the sex industry'* includes independent streetwalking, cheap and declining tearooms, small and loosely organized sexual service providers, call-girl services on different scales, and expensive special bars on the high streets and so on. These different organizations of commercial sex create, in many cases, different relationships between workers and third parties. In addition, the cultural practice of differentiating 'pleasure selling' from 'body selling' intertwines with the varied organizations of commercial sex to shape complex and heterogeneous working conditions among working women. The concept of a 'sex-work dynamics' may therefore be more adequate to address the diverse forms of commercial sex and conceptualize the complex and dynamic working conditions among women and girls (Chapter 4). Moreover, the boundary between 'body selling' and 'pleasure selling' is always fluid and unstable. It is not only bar-girls who might be involved in commercial sex, call-girls and brothel workers might also have to fake orgasm to please clients. Rethinking commercial sex in terms of a 'sex-work dynamics', may therefore for us to break down the misleading debates which perceived

prostitution as either sex or work and enables the reader to see how sex and work are intertwined within commercial sex.

Instead of giving a clear-cut definition of 'prostitution' and 'prostitutes', the study leaves these issues open to the interviewees. Hence, we are able to see how women and girls understand their daily work, and to explore the different social meanings behind the same sex act. By carefully looking at interviewees' daily working routines, I found that 'being a whore' is indeed a gendered social process in which (good) women and girls have to manage to learn how to 'be a whore' (Chapter 6). As my interviewees worked in very different prostitution settings, their daily working routines were also varied. Many interviewees, however, had to perform 'aesthetic labour' – to dress like a whore, and use their hands, mouths, breasts and vaginas – to provide specific sexual labour. The performance, I have argued, is very much about how to perform embodied emotional labour. Indeed, in many cases, it demands sex workers exercise 'role distance' to differentiate their sexual self from their work role. Moreover, (good) women and girls have to conquer feelings of terror at being gazed upon and touched by male strangers, and bring their bodies under control in order to perform their work adequately (Chapter 6).

It is important to note that the ability to exercise 'role distance' is also helpful in clarifying the debate regarding whether prostitutes are 'sexual objects' or 'sexual subjects'. Although working women are frequently perceived as commodified 'sexual objects', many interviewees, in fact, did not feel sexual at all. However, neither were they sexual subjects who were liberated from all kinds of

sexual taboos and found enjoyment in performing sex acts. In many cases, some women tended to understand those encounters as merely 'mechanical' bodily activities (e.g. Sue-lian). Some of them understood commercial sex as routine work (e.g. Chen-chen and Wei-wei) like other (service) work, and some tended to take the initiative to provide sexual services in order to avoid further bodily and/or sexual contact (e.g. bar-girls), while some girls saw it as alienated or dirty sex (e.g. Xin-xin and Chen-chen). Engagement in commercial sex is thus not only involved in many different social meanings, but also challenges the either-sexual-subjects-or-sexual-objects debate.

Another achievement of this thesis is to problematize Taiwanese male clients. I found that the 'male sexual urge' is one of the most frequently used vocabularies of motive of prostitution usage. However, digging under the surface, I found that the myth of 'male sexual urges' *in many cases is intertwined with and/or well supported by the gendered cultural practices of 'playing women' and 'he hua jeou'*. It is important to note that male interviewees tended to consider *go-whoring* as sexual encounters with working women. However, as the literature shows, they also expected emotional comfort from working women. Adding to the already existing literature, I found that clients' 'emotional' demands were sexualized to the extent that they were highly related to clients' conceptions of 'good sex' (Chapter 7).

In spite of these achievements, this thesis also has its limitations, mainly related to a lack of time and resources. Doing feminist research is thus not only about how to have things done, but is very much about how to obtain enough

resources from male-dominated mainstream society and institutions. Lacking related political and social resources, I was only able to observe in police stations and always failed to reach the 'gate keeper' of government funded halfway centres. Moreover, having research funding is, for a Ph.D. student, just as important as having 'a room of one's own' (Woolf, 1989[1929]) for female writers. The research would have been done much better if I could have *afforded* to stay in the field much longer and were able to access more female interviewees. Lacking a research grant not only constrained my access to female interviewees (Chapter 3), but also impeded the progress of the research. I found that I had to do three part-time jobs to cover my living costs and transportation fees to travel around Taiwan to conduct interviews and to meet people who 'might' be helpful for building up rapport. It is important to note that during the processing of my research, two research teams led by male scholars (Lan et al. 2002; Shiah et al., 2002) were each awarded NT\$ 1,500,000 by the Commission on Women's Rights Promotion, Executive Yuan, while my research proposal was rejected without any explanation being given. Moreover, it was the first time that both Lan and Shiah had conducted research on prostitution. I could not help thinking that if there was not *any* gender bias within this decision, then it might relate to the academic hierarchy between established scholars and Ph.D. research students.

Moreover, the research would have been improved if I could have managed to interview third parties (e.g. pimps, *mamasons*, bar managers, call-girl service providers and so on). In that case, I might have been able to see how third parties make sense of taking cuts from working women, whilst seldom feeling that they are 'exploiting' working women. In addition, it might be helpful for us to clarify



the boundary between *trafficking* and *recruiting* women and girls into prostitution. Above all, the women and men interviewed in this study were not involved in commercial sex with each other. It might be interesting to interview working women and the clients who visited them. We might therefore be able to produce more interesting data to see the ways in which working women interact with clients, and to compare the similarities and differences in their understandings of sexual encounters.

As far as further research is concerned, it is very important to conduct research on Chinese migrant sex workers in Taiwan. In the past few years there have been more and more Chinese women and young girls coming to Taiwan to engage in commercial sex. Whether these Chinese women come to be involved in commercial sex by 'choice' or through being 'trafficked', they are apparently the most vulnerable sex workers given the fact that many of them are stowaways. Once they are reported to or arrested by the police, they will be confined in police stations awaiting deportation. Most of all, their human rights are frequently abused during this period of confinement. As I discussed earlier (Chapter 4), Chinese migrant sex workers frequently suffer from multi-layered exploitation from traffickers or smugglers on both sides of the Taiwan Straits, from confinement and strict surveillance by third parties, from abusive police officers and punters.

Most of all, the oppression and exploitation that Chinese migrant sex workers suffer is very different from Taiwanese sex workers. The political tension between Taiwan and China makes the issue of Chinese migrant sex workers a more

complicated issue, in which prostitution is located at the intersection of gender, class, sexuality and national identity. According to Chang (2001), Chinese migrant sex workers' accents are sexualized to the extent that they are very popular in sex-phone-call sectors in Taiwan. Moreover, Taiwanese punters tend to sexualize Chinese migrant sex workers as desirable, because they offer the 'best services' and are 'very co-operative' (reported by Soong, Lian, and Lee). This excellent performance, of course, is highly related to the fact that they are the most vulnerable groups in Taiwan. Moreover, the political tension between Taiwan and China makes the issue even more complicated. As one of my male respondent reported,

*Taiwanese sex workers are much easier to get along with, because we share a similar culture, lifestyle and language. Visiting da lu mei<sup>54</sup> [i.e. Chinese women or girls] is different...especially when the Taiwan independence issue is involved. It's during the presidential election campaign. I was totally pissed off, when a da lu mei was saying that 'hum, it's impossible [for Taiwan] to be independent. We people out there [i.e. China] won't allow you!' I was so angry. I had her shut up. I can't remember whether I fucked her hard or not (ha, ha, ha...) (Lee, 33, Internet studio owner, married)*

As the quotation shows, Chinese migrant sex workers in Taiwan appear to be scapegoats for the dictatorship of the Chinese government, while men's penises turn out to be a guarantor of Taiwanese male identity. Prostitution is far from the same, but, rather, always changing, and presents itself in different shapes in

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<sup>54</sup> In Taiwan, the term *da lu mei* literally means young girls of mainland China. However, currently it refers to all women and girls who come from China. It should be noted that the term *da lu mei* in many cases refers to the stereotype of Chinese women. For example, in the early 1990s it mainly referred to Chinese women and girls who were poor and dressed vulgarly. In the past few years, it has been used to refer to Chinese women who would do everything to make big and easy money in Taiwan.

different social, economic, and political contexts. Revealing working women's diverse voices, we have to ground their subjectivity, oppression, and exploitation in a specific historical moment.

# Appendix I

## Informed Consent Letter

I am over 18 years old. I agree to accept Miss Mei-Hua Chen's (Ph.D. student of the Centre for Women's Studies, University of York) interview. I know that the interview is part of a data collection process for Miss Chen's Ph.D. dissertation. I am informed that the major purpose of her research is in trying to reveal Taiwanese working women's everyday lives and understand the sex industry in Taiwan.

The interview usually takes one to two hours. The individual interviewee may not be benefited from the interview, however, the researcher is expected to produce knowledge that reveals working women's social situation and contributes to related prostitution policies.

I understand that I consent to be interviewed by Miss Chen, and I can end the interview whenever I like. If there are some questions that I do not want to answer, I understand that I can refuse to answer them.

I also understand that the researcher will publish a dissertation and some other essays based on the interview, however, my name and my identity will definitely be kept secret. Field notes and tape recordings produced in the interview will be placed on files anonymously, and absolutely will not be open to the public for non-academic use.

I understand that I could contact the researcher if I have any other questions regarding the interview. Both the researcher and I will keep a copy of the Informed Consent Letter.

Researcher: Mei Hua Chen

Centre for Women's Studies, University of York

Address: 8, Alley 12, Lane 227, Junehe St, Taichung

Phone: 04-22392484 Mobile phone: 0952-336-526

Email: mhc1969@ms65.hinet.net

Signature of interviewee \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

# 同 意 書

為保障受訪者與訪談者雙方之權益，雙方特立此同意書。

- 一、本人\_\_\_\_\_，已滿十八歲，同意接受英國約克大學婦女研究中心 (Centre for Women's Studies, University of York) 博士班學生陳美華針對台灣性產業研究的深度訪談。訪談進行前，我已經了解這項研究的主旨在於了解台灣上班小姐的日常生活形態，以及當前台灣的性產業。
  - 二、訪談時間約為一至兩個小時。我知道我個人可能無法直接受益於這項研究，但該研究將有助我們更加了解台灣上班小姐的社會處境，並有助於政府釐訂相關政策。
  - 三、我雖然同意接受陳美華的訪談，但是我知道我隨時可以終止這項訪談。如果有任何問題是我不願意回答的，我也可以拒絕回答。
  - 四、我知道研究者將來可能引用相關資料以出版論文，及其它相關的文章。本人同意，在他人不可辯識本人真實身份的情形下，訪談內容可於研究結束後以論文、書面或其它方式出版。為保障本人隱私權，訪談者陳美華必須付保密之義務。訪談錄音帶、田野筆記以及相關資料中，本人的名字都會以匿名方式處理，也不會提供他人作非學術性的使用或觀看。
- 三、我知道，如果我對這項訪談有任何的疑問，我可以隨時和研究者連絡。該同意書，一式兩份，由我和研究者各保留一份。

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中華民國      年      月      日

# **Appendix II**

## **Interview Guides**

### **I. Interview questions on women in prostitution**

#### **Life history**

1. Would you please tell me a little about your family?
2. Do your family know about your work?  
What do you think they think about it?
3. Is there any conflict between being a good mother / daughter / wife and being a 'working woman'?
4. Do you think your job affects your family?
5. Could you tell me about how you allocate your earnings?

#### **How do 'working women' see their jobs?**

1. Could you tell me a bit about how you came to this job?
2. Do you remember the first time you saw a client? How did you feel at that moment?
3. Could you briefly describe your daily work duties? Do you need to prepare anything before starting your work?
4. Did you have any other work experiences before becoming involved in this job? Compared to some other jobs you have done before, what are the glamorous and / or bad sides of prostitution?

### **The relationships between prostitutes and punters**

1. How did/do you find punters? How did/do the institutions find punters for you?
2. Do you have the right to choose clients? What is your standard assessment by which you choose clients?
3. What is your typical punter?
4. Will clients ask you to provide some specific sexual services or do you need to offer some suggestions for them?
5. Will you collect some materials or learn more sexual skills to please your clients?
6. What kinds of services did/do your clients expect from you?
7. Is there any service that you did/do not want to do? How did/do you explain this to your clients?
8. Did/do you have regular punters? Could you talk a bit about your relationships? Is there any difference between offering commercial sex for regular punters and for those ordinary punters?
9. Could you tell me what kind of clients are difficult to handle? How did/do you deal with them?
10. Did/do you usually ask your clients to wear condoms? What did you do if they refuse your request?
11. Did/do you need to fake an orgasm to please your clients? How did/do you do it?
12. Do you think that prostitutes need some specific sexual skills?
13. Is there any difference between having sex with your husband / boyfriend and offering sexual services to your clients?
14. Do you think that prostitution has/had any impact on your personal

sexual lives?

### **The relationship between sex workers and the sexual industry**

1. Who do you work for?

Is there any regulation on your work?

Do you need to make an effort to meet those regulations?

2. Could you tell me why you chose to work in your company?

3. Who's in charge of your work?

4. Does your company have any regulations on sex workers?

5. Does your company hold an orientation session before you start work?

6. Do sex workers have any employee benefits in your company?

7. Is there any regulation that you feel is unreasonable in your company?

Did you ever discuss those problems with your company?

8. What happened if you violated the company's regulations?

9. How is the relationship among women workers?

10. What percentage does your company take from your earnings for each transaction? Do you think it is reasonable?

11. Does, or did, the company request that you have regular medical check-ups? What did/do you think about this request?

### **Ending**

1. Do you like your job?

2. Do you ever think about getting another job? What kind of jobs are you thinking about?

3. Is there any thing or any idea you want to bring up before we end the interview?



4. Do you have any opinions or criticisms regarding the interview?

## **II. Interview Questions on Punters**

### **Why do punters seek commercial sex?**

1. Could you tell me a bit about why you buy sex from 'working women'?
2. Is it impossible for men to satisfy their sexual need by themselves, or through having sex with their wives or girlfriends?

### **The relationships between clients and working women**

1. Could you talk about when you started to purchase commercial sex?
2. How often do you approach a 'working woman'? How do you find them?  
Is there any specific reason why you find them in this way?
3. Do you have any standards by which you choose a 'working woman'?
4. Could you briefly describe the circumstance of buying sex from a 'working woman'?
5. What kind of sexual services do you expect from 'working women'?
6. Do you know that some punters will ask 'working women' to provide some specific sexual services portrayed in pornography?
7. Could you briefly talk about your most impressive experience of commercial sex with 'working women'?
8. Do 'working women' ask you to wear a condom? Did/do you wear a condom when seeing a working woman? If you refused to wear a condom, how did the working woman respond to this?
9. Do you think 'working women' enjoy their jobs? Do you think that they have sexual orgasms when they provide sexual services to you?
10. Do you have a regular woman? Could you talk about the relationship between you and her? Did you ever think about helping her to get out of the

job?

11. Do you know that some men like to see virgin prostitutes? Did you ever do that?

12. Did you ever meet any indigenous women prostitutes?

**How did punters see 'working women'?**

1. What do you think about the stereotype that portrays working women as lazy, alcoholics, drug abusers etc?

2. Could you talk a bit about your ideal 'working women'?

**Ending**

1. Is there any thing or any idea you want to bring up before we end the interview?

2. Do you have any opinions or criticisms regarding the interview?

## Appendix III

### The Sketch of Interviewees

#### **Former Taipei licensed brothel workers**

##### **Sue-lian (1)**

Time: Jul 2001 10:30~13:30pm (tape recorded)

Place: A community park near her apartment

Ban-Chao, Taipei County

Sue-lian is a former Taipei licensed brothel worker. She is 41 years old. She was born in the rural country side in east Taiwan. Her mother sold her to an illegal brothel on Hwa-Shi Street in Taipei due to the heavy debt of her family. At that point she was just thirteen years old. She cannot read or write. She worked as a trafficked girl in illegal brothels until she was 23. After she 'graduated' (women use the word to indicate that they have ended the traffic 'contract') from the illegal brothel, she applied to work in licensed brothels until the Taipei City Government abolished licensed prostitution on 6<sup>th</sup> Sep 1997. She has a long-term relationship (nearly twenty years) with her boyfriend. They actually met in a brothel and he was once her client. They were engaged in 2000.

##### **Mei-yun (2)**

Time: Aug 2001 8:30~9:45am (tape recorded)

Place: A corner at Yang-Ming Mountain

Mei-yun is a former Taipei licensed brothel worker. She is in her early 60s. She did not have the opportunity to finish her primary school education due to poverty. She applied to work in licensed brothels when she was 44. She prostituted herself because she divorced her husband and she had to take care of her two children.

She was quite active during the anti-abolition campaign. She is so proud of her ability to bring up her children and let them go to college. Currently she works with the Collective of Sex Workers and Supporters to advocate prostitutes' rights. Specifically, she talks to streetwalkers about how to use condoms in transactions to protect themselves.

**Lili (3)**

Time: Aug 2001 10:30~11:40am (tape recorded)

Place: A corner at Yang-Ming Mountain

Lili is a former Taipei licensed brothel worker. She is 52 years old. She is only primary school educated. She applied to work in a licensed brothel when she was 27. She is a single mother, but her child does not live with her. Her child's father was once her client. Currently she lives alone, but a regular client (in his 70s) will come to visit her and regularly stay a couple of days.

**Bar-girls**

**Jo-jo (4)**

Time: Sep 2001 21:00~21:50PM (was not allowed to use tape recorder)

Place: *Pretty Girls*, east Taipei

Jo-jo is 20 years old now. She dropped out of her studies at a private high school. She reported that her family is quite middle class—her father is a prosecutor, and her mother is a public servant for central government. She told her parents that she works in an internet café and that her salary is NT\$ 25,000 (1/6 of her total income) per month. When asked why she worked at *Pretty Girls*, she said that she did not like school things. On the other hand, she thinks it is fun to work as a bar-girl. She also said that she wanted to be a bar-girl when she was fifteen. Therefore, when she was 18 she came to work in the bar.

**Fung-fung (5)**

Time: 18 Nov 2001 21:30PM~ 19 Nov 1:30AM (tape recorded)

Place: *Pretty Girls*, east Taipei

Fung-fung is 29 years old now. A bit old for being a bar-girl. She has been working in the bar for three years. She graduated from a quite famous college in Taichung. After graduating, she started her international trade career and it did make her big money. The Asian economic crisis in 1998, however, damaged her career and brought her huge debts. In order to pay the debts she came to Taipei to work as a bar-girl. Currently she lives with her boyfriend, who was once her client, and they have decided to get married in one or two years.

**Ling-ling (6)**

Time: Nov 2001 8:30~9:40PM (tape recorded)

Place: *Pretty Girls*, east Taipei

Ling-ling is 19 years old. It seems that her family are not well off, because she reported that she had to do some part-time job when she was a junior high school student. She did not want to continue to study after she graduated from junior high school. She then followed her classmates to work in a bar. She was reported when she was 17, and was sent to a half-way centre for 52 days. The horrible experiences in the half-way centre made her make up her mind to 'go back to work as a bar-girl!'. She lives with her boyfriend, and the man, again, was once her client.

**Tearoom women****Yen-yen (7)**

Time: Nov 2001 8:40~10:10PM (tape recorded)

Place: *Spring Flowers*, San-shui Street, Wan-hwa

Yen-yen is 36 years old. She comes from Yun-lin. It is a rural county which does not have enough jobs. She therefore came to Taipei ten years ago and her younger brothers and sisters came to live with her. As an elder sister she thinks that it is her responsibility to take care of her family members. She had worked in many different factories and restaurants for many years, but on that salary she definitely could not buy a house in Taipei. So she started to think about working as a bar-girl. She did not like the climate of bars, and she therefore transferred to *Spring Flowers*.

#### **Streetwalker**

##### **Ping-ping (8)**

Time: Jan 2001 2:20~3:30PM

Place: Taichung Municipal Park

Ping-ping is 36 years old. She is an un-married single mother, and in the past decade she had worked in factories, restaurants, and other service sectors to raise her son. She reported that she had failed to run a restaurant two years ago, and that this had cost her huge debts. She knew that she was too old to work in bars, so she worked in a call-girl station in Wan-hwa. The crackdown on sexual businesses in Taipei City made it impossible for her to work in Taipei. Therefore, she came to Taichung. Usually she stands under the building she lives in and waits for clients. In the area I interviewed in, women usually charge NT\$ 800 to NT\$ 1,200. These rates usually include the hotel fee.

#### **Young girls in halfway centres**

##### **Chiou-chiou (9)**

Time: Oct 2001 10:30~11:50 (was not allowed to use a tape recorder)

Place: Consulting Room of a halfway centre, east Taiwan

Chiou-chiou is 13 years old. She was supposed to start her first year in junior high school when she was interviewed. Both her parents are Ameis--a tribe of indigenous people. Her parents had been divorced for many years. She was brought up by her grandparents. When asked why she was sent to the centre, she said that 'my sixth uncle did something bad to me last year', and 'I asked for money from a *bai bai* in our village recently'. She has no idea that she was involved in 'commercial sex '. For her, doing '*that thing*' to get some money (NT\$ 600), buying food, candies, pens, note books etc., is just for her own survival.

**Chia-chia (10)**

Time: Dec 2001 10:30~11:50AM (tape recorded)

Place: Common Room of a halfway centre, east Taiwan

Chia-chia is 17 years old now. She lived in an indigenous tribe. Her father (Ameis) is a construction worker, and her mother (ethnic group: Tai-ya) does not work due to her disability. Her father makes an effort to let her study in a private senior high school. Chia-chia met an Ameis young man, and he became her boyfriend last year. They lived together last September, and then dropped out of school. The man was unemployed. The pair therefore ran out of money quickly. The man checked out the small ads in newspapers and asked her to work in a call-girl station. She couldn't refuse his requests because he beat her up when she said no. She was the only interviewee who felt relaxed when caught.

**Shu-chin (11)**

Time: Oct 2001 15:15~16:30PM (tape recorded)

Place: Common Room of a halfway centre, east Taiwan

Shu-chin is 17 years old. Both her parents are indigenous people. She is an unmarried single mother. According to her, unmarried single mothers are very stigmatized in their tribe. Hence, she wants to pay for her baby by herself. There are not many jobs in Hwa-lian, therefore, she worked as a karaoke bar-girl. She was not involved in 'commercial sex'. However, according to the Act of Prevention Child and Juveniles Involvement in Commercial sex, she was considered as a girl who 'might' prostitute herself. Therefore, she was sent to the halfway centre when she was reported.

**Wei-wei (12)**

Time Round 1: Oct 2001 8:00~9:40AM (tape recorded)

Round 2: Nov 2001 10:00~10:40AM (tape recorded)

Place: Hair Beauty Classroom of a halfway centre

Wei-wei is 18 years old now. She is junior high school educated. Her father was sentenced to jail as a result of raping her younger sister. Her mother, 38 years old, has been working in a blue tearoom in Wan-hwa in order to bring up the whole family. After graduating from junior high school, Wei-wei started to work in some of the lowest ranking service industries. Wei-wei met a young man when she worked in a betel-nut stall. She then gave birth in October 1998. When she became an unmarried single mother, the salary from the tobacco station (NT\$ 15,000 to NT\$ 20,000 per month) obviously was not enough. With a female friend's help, she placed small ads on the Internet.

**Pan-pan (13)**

Time: Round 1: Oct 2001 15:00~16:30PM (tape recorded)

Round 2: Nov 2001 08:00~8:40AM (tape recorded)

Place: Hair Beauty Classroom of a halfway centre



Pan-pan is 18 years old now. She ran away last March, and dropped out of her studies in a senior high school last September. She started to work as a bar girl in Chia-yi (part of south Taiwan, one and a half hours to Taichung by bus) and posted small ads on the internet to run her sex businesses. As a tomboy, she said 'to do commercial sex is very easy for me, because you just need to perform femininity and make some 'sexy noises'. She is the only girl who wanted to continue to do commercial sex after leaving the halfway centre.

**Chen-chen (14)**

Time Round 1: Oct 2001 13:00~14:30PM (did not tape record)

Round 2: Nov 2001 11:30~12:05AM (tape recorded)

Place: Hair Beauty Classroom of a halfway centre

Chen-chen is 17 years old now. She is junior high school educated. Her parents divorced when she was a child. She was supposed to live with her father, but her father and her always end up fighting with each other. She therefore moved out to live with her mother. Last year she got several traffic bills from the police as she drove without a driving license. She did not have the money to pay these bills. A female friend told her that one company was wanting to hire an operator and that maybe she could get a job there. She had a job interview with the boss, but actually the 'company' was a call-girl station. She felt betrayed by her friend, and felt forced to do it, because she needed some money to pay those bills.

**Xin-xin (15)**

Time Round 1: Oct 2001 9:30~11:00AM (tape recorded)

Round 2: Nov 2001 13:30~14:15PM (tape recorded)

Place: Hair Beauty Classroom of a halfway centre

Xin-xin is 16 years old now. She is junior high school educated. Her parents make a living by selling fruit in Taichung City. She lived with some other

runaway friends in Chia-yi city. After graduating from school, she tried to find a job, but it was not so easy. She had been working as a bar-girl in a pub for three days when she was 14. She reported that 'I love money, and I spent quite a lot of money. Hence I think I can make big money by doing "S"'. She therefore picked a call-girl station through a newspaper's small ads, and started to work as a call-girl. According to her, 'I have such bad luck, I was caught so quickly!'

**Pei-pei (16)**

Time: Oct 2001 1:30~2:40pm (was not allowed to use a tape recorder)

Place: Children Consultative Room of a halfway centre

Pei-pei is 17 years old now. She has been officially registered as a 'slightly retarded' citizen since 1993. Her mother died in 2000. Her father needed to work, hence no one could take care of her. She met a 37-year-old man when she was 13. She reported that the man raped her on the second day they met each other. However, they lived together as 'lovers' for more than one year until Pei-pei's father sued the man as a rapist. The man was sentenced to seven months last March. The way Pei-pei was sent to the centre is another story. Last August she was reported as both a victim of child abuse and as being involved in commercial sex with an old man in his 70s. According to police records, the old man was recorded both as an abuser and a punter. The old man reported to the police that he bought sex from Pei-pei several times, and he gave her NT\$ 500 to NT\$ 1,200 for each transaction. However, Pei-pei reported that he again tried to rape her on 6th August, but she had her period and did not want to do it. Hence, the man used a knife to try to kill her. She also reported that she never took his money.

**Ting-ting and Ching-ching (17)/(18)**

Time: Dec 2001 9:15~10:30AM (tape recorded)

Place: Common Room of a halfway centre

I interviewed Ting-ting for thirty minutes first, she then asked me to interview Ching-ching at the same time, because that would make her feel more comfortable. So I invited Ching-ching to be interviewed at the same time. They were classmates in their primary school days. Both of them were 14 years old, but Ting-ting was officially registered as a 'slightly retarded' citizen. According to police records, they conspired to pose small ads on the Internet to solicit for commercial sex. However, my interview found that it was Ching-ching who chatted on the Internet and then some young men asked to meet them. Ching-ching reported that, at first, she thought it was kind of dating boys, but it turned out to be a bit like forced sex.

## **Punters**

### **Lian**

Time: July 2001 19:30~20:45PM (tape recorded)

Place: A coffee shop in the city centre of Chia-yi

Lian, 36, single, is a vice-manager of a very famous Taiwanese company. He has an M.A. degree in Economics. He is paid NT 80,000 per month. He started to buy sex from prostitutes at 17. It was during Chinese Lunar New Year that he and his friends went to a brothel and bought commercial sex for the first time. He prefers women who are good-looking and have big breasts. He thinks punters are consumers, and does not want to romanticize the relationship between the punter and the prostitute.

**Wang**

Time: Round 1: Oct 2001 10:00~10:40 (tape recorded)

Round 2: Nov 2001 21:00~ 23:30 (a trip to a Karaoke bar)

Place: Taichung (Wang's living room)

Wang, 44, single, is a truck driver hired by the Taichung City Government. Senior high school educated. He is paid NT\$ 22,000 per month. He has been separated for many years, although he and his ex-wife still live together. He started to buy sex when he was a teenager. In order to convince me, Wang and Chang took me to a karaoke bar to see how they interact with bar girls. On the way to the bar, Wang revealed that his ex-wife was once a bar-girl, and he, again, was her client.

**Kao**

Time: Oct 2001 18:40~20:10PM (telephone interview; tape recorded)

Place: My flat in Taipei

Kao, 38, single, is a doctor. He earned a Ph.D. degree from UCLA. He is paid NT\$ 4,350,000 per year. He is the only person who responded to my small ads on the internet that were looking for punters and 'working women' to be interviewed. He does not want to be bothered with dating women, hence, he usually goes to bars with his colleagues and takes women out for commercial sex. Sometimes he will ask friends to arrange a high class call-girl for him. He does not like the whole notion of sex being business-like, therefore, he will make an effort to make the climate more like a romantic sexual encounter. He also reported that, as a doctor, he could identify whether the prostitute has an orgasm or not.

**Chang**

Time: Nov 2001 19:20~20:40PM (tape recorded)

Place: Taichung (Lai's living room)

Chang, 47, is Wang's colleague. Senior high school educated. He is also a truck driver. He has been married for more than twenty years and has two children. He reported that his wife knows he sees prostitutes all the time, however, it does not disturb their marriage. He prefers to visit massage workers, as they are cheaper than bar-girls. He does not care about women's appearance or body shape, but the women should be easy to get along with. He reported that he does not want to wear condoms, but he can identify whether women have STDs or not by 'touching' their genitals.

### **Soong**

Time: Dec 2001 21:15~24:30PM

Place: Coffee shops, Taichung

Soong, 38, is a cosmetic salesman. He graduated from a university. His average income is NT\$ 40,000 to NT\$ 60,000 a month. He married two years ago. He said he was a loser in heterosexual romantic love for many years. Seeing a prostitute satisfies his sexual and emotional needs. Since he wants to maintain a 'relationship' with prostitutes he goes to visit them regularly. He even tried to save NT\$ 2,000,000 to 'rescue' a trafficked indigenous girl in Wan-hwa in the early 90s. He also reported that he could tell whether a prostitute had an orgasm or not. He knows a prostitute has STDs or not by 'touching' her genitals.

### **Lee**

Time: Dec 2001, 16:10~18:00PM

Place: Taipei County (Lee's office)

Lee, 35, married, runs a 5-staffed Internet studio in Taipei County. He has an M.A. degree. He did not want to tell me his income. The first time he approached a prostitute was 'under the pressure of friends'. After this initial encounter, he now

meets prostitutes two or three times a month. Currently he still sees prostitutes regularly because he wants sex every day and his wife can not manage this. He does not like women who are taller than him. He prefers skinny, tiny, and short women.

## Appendix IV

### Romanization of Terms

a gong dain	阿公店	skin-nutrition salons	護膚中心
ba dah harng ye	八大行業	te joong harng yeh fwu neu	特種行業婦女
bai bai	伯伯	tu chang	土娼
betel-nut beauty	檳榔西施	wan neu ren	玩女人
bian fwu dian	便服店	whole-set	全套
body selling	賣身	wu ben sheng yih	無本生意
chu chang	出場	wu neu	舞女
dih ell tan	第二攤	yi dan	藝旦
double play	雙打	yuan juh jiau jih	援助交際
fei liang-jia-fwu-neu	非良家婦女	zou tai (fei)	坐檯 (費)
fwu wuh sheng	服務生		
he hua jeou	喝花酒		
jeng swu gong tzuoh	正俗工作		
jeou dian	酒店		
jyh fwu dian	制服店		
jonq nan ching neu	重男輕女		
liang-jia-fwu-neu	良家婦女		
ling tai	領檯		
ming-chi	名妓		
mamasons	媽媽桑		
nan neu yeou bie	男女有別		
nan tzuen neu bei	男尊女卑		
neu jau dai	女招待		
neu shyh	女侍		
pa-ching	打槍		
pleasure selling	賣笑		
pyau-jih	嫖妓		
seasickness	暈船		
shang ban sheau jiee	上班小姐		
shiah hae	下海		
shoou shen ru yuh	守身如玉		
shoou wan	手腕		

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