

Ching Yau, ed. *As Normal as Possible: Negotiating Sexuality and Gender in Mainland China and Hong Kong*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010. 320 pp. ISBN-10: 978-962-209-987-6 (paperback).

One thing that communism and religion usually have in common is that both try to dictate, mould or direct people's lives in detail. While communism has been fading away, religion has been resurging. Both have directed attention to people's intimate lives, particularly women's sex lives. Hyper-masculine societies – such as those of East and South Asia, where population figures clearly show who is allowed to be born and survive – make matters worse for women.¹ The amalgam of lingering communism, reawakened religion, and hyper-masculinity contributes further to the marginalisation of women, particularly to women who don't see marriage to a man as their main goal in life. This can affect all sorts of women including career women and/or those who prefer women instead of men. One way out of this dilemma adopted in Shanghai, also practised in the West, is to formally marry a gay man, which is the focus of an excellent article by *Lucetta Yip Lo Kam*. This volume, as editor *Yau Ching* explains in her illuminating introduction, aims to “problematize the heteronormative class-biased dichotomy of private versus public” (p. 8). This debate goes as far back as ancient Greece where homosexuality was a variation and/or supplement to heterosexuality particularly for men of the upper classes. Class and topics of sexual orientation are the focus of this book, which has four chapters on China and five on Hong Kong. One chapter is devoted to prostitution where the underprivileged serve the needs of the privileged. *Travis S.K. Kong* discusses how marginalised men, mostly poor, rural migrants in China become “money boys” serving other men. However, his interesting investigation demonstrates that the main solution to this problem would be abolition of the “Hukou-registration” system, which makes rural residency holders second class citizens and by allowing independent trade unions, in turn leading to higher wages. *Shi-Yan Chao* in his penetrating analysis on mainland film examines reactions of independent documentary filmmakers against the official discourse – similar to Eastern Europe after Soviet occupation ended – and how reflexivity and

1 Thorborg, Marina. “Where Have all the Young Girls Gone? Fatal Discrimination of Daughters – A Regional Comparison.” *China Perspectives* 57 (2005): 2-11.

queer subjectivities resurfaced in China in the 1980s and early 1990s. However, transgending and cross-dressing is not an uncommon theme in traditional Chinese literature and is therefore nothing new in China. *Yau Ching* gives a queer interpretation to a special genre of “wind and moon” (*fenyue* – soft core erotica) films in Hong Kong. Except for the Mao period, lustful women (*yinfu*) have always been part of Chinese drama, however, here in “wind and moon films” *yinfu* redress the gender balance by smartness, shrewdness and independent spirit. *Natalie Sui-hung Chan* shows in her empathic study the tragic end of a free spirit and iconic pop star in Hong Kong whose androgynous impersonations led to his rejection and suicide. *Amy Sim* depicts shame culture in her excellent article on Hong Kong whereby Indonesian maids are considered “clean” (i.e. sexually pure) by other Indonesians as long as they are/act lesbian and do not have sex with men. With over 400,000 Indonesian and Filipina domestics in Hong Kong without an equivalent number of men, this seems to confirm the old male prejudice that women turn lesbian for lack of men. At the same time they have created public spaces for themselves as anyone who has lived in Hong Kong knows. But this only demonstrates that they have neither private places for meetings nor the wherewithal to patronise restaurants. Similarly, *Denise Tse Shang Tang* focuses in her interesting examination on the need for separate free spaces for Chinese lesbians, as expressed in the upstairs café culture in overcrowded Hong Kong. The region is following a Western trend where the growth of an urban middle class with leisure time and spending power has enabled women to demand public space. In a traditionally sex-segregated culture like the Chinese, women’s demand for separate spaces should be easier to understand and comply with than in less segregated cultures. In her penetrating analysis on how to de-pathologize transsexualism *Eleanor Cheung* mentions that 33 % of transgender respondents in Philadelphia, 8 % in Hong Kong, and 85 % in China had attempted suicide, showing the extent of suffering and how inadequate all political systems still are. *Xiaopei He* in a short chapter depicts with many photographs a ménage à trois in Beijing faking marriage with two women and one man as a reaction towards what is seen as compulsory marriage in contemporary China. The sad fate of homosexuality under Communism, both in China and in the former Soviet sphere makes some sloganeering against the West and capitalism in this volume seem a bit out of place, particularly as most of the trends and gender terminology are imports from the West.

(Marina Thorborg, Sodertorn University, Huddinge, Sweden)

