

# **From Spice Girls to *Enjo-Kosai*: Formations of Teenage Girls' Sexualities in Taiwan<sup>1</sup>**

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Impressions of teenage girls' sexuality in Taiwan have long been enveloped in stock descriptions of emerging social problems: unexpected and unwanted pregnancies by careless girls, brutal rapes or molestations of innocent girls by ruthless men or impulsive youths, or the selling of unfortunate girls into prostitution by heartless parents and traffickers. Within such a social context, the few girls who dared to demonstrate some degree of sexual adventurism or self-determination usually ended up being labeled as problem girls treading on dangerous grounds who were doomed for tragedy. Still, in the past few years a much more pervasive trend and a much wider range of teenage sexual expressions and activities have forced their way unto the Taiwanese scene. In fact, such demonstrations of teenage girls' sexualities have become so clearly in sight and so blatantly "in your face" that adult concerns are raging to rein in such energies.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The first draft of this paper was written for and delivered at the International Conference on "Teenage Girls' Sexualities and Sex Work in East Asia," held by Yonsei University, Korea on Nov. 2, 2001.

The paper now appears in its moderately modified form. Photos of the celebrities mentioned in this paper can be found at [http://sex.ncu.edu.tw/members/ho/teen\\_girl/photo\\_togo\\_with.htm](http://sex.ncu.edu.tw/members/ho/teen_girl/photo_togo_with.htm)

<sup>2</sup> For example, women's groups have publicized reports on the rampant "commodification" and "objectification" of teenage girls so as to call on the society to "save" these young girls. Educators and social workers likewise have warned parents to "pay more attention" to their teenage daughters and monitor the latter's activities and acquaintances. The easy association between teenage girls' sexuality and teenage sex work further invigorates the sense of urgency that may activate all kinds of social prejudice in relation to age, sexuality, sex work, etc. before the full scope of teenage sexuality had a chance to be discussed.

A detailed analysis of the historico-socio-economic conditions of possibility for such developments in female teenage sexuality would be a much larger project than the scope of the present paper. Instead, I would like to trace out some of the most visible formations of teenage girls' sexualities in present-day Taiwan that have sparked intense debates among feminists. Rather than adopting the usual exploitation and victim discourse that surrounds such phenomena, I am proposing that it is through these formations that teenage girls are exploring and thus forging their own sexualities out of limited social means, not to mention groping with the construction of their own reflexive project of the self (Giddens 1991: 52-55). In other words, the increasing visibility of teenage sexuality reflects not necessary a decay in moral values but the changing reality of sexuality in history. My analysis will examine (1) the popular entertainment/commodity culture in which teenage girls have found materials for the construction of their own sexual selves, (2) the changing sex culture that they are helping to build as they forge new sexual values, identities, and practices, and (3) the increasingly individualized sex work industry that they are creating in their effort to find new forms of economic possibilities and social intercourse.

### **Sexual Construction of the Self**

In recent years educators and women's groups in Taiwan are all gladly adopting the feminist vocabulary of "objectification" to criticize media images of teenage girls—or to be more precise, media representations of teenage girls as sexual subjects who actively desire and pursue their targets—claiming that the false consciousness thus produced would only serve to sustain existing gender stereotypes and long-standing gender inequality. While such images do stem mostly from profit-making motives, I believe teenage girls' encounters as well as fascination with such images and the commodities that embody them may have done much more than mesmerizing the girls into blind followers of whatever the newest fads may be. In fact, Michel Foucault's observation may be more insightful: it was through placing ourselves "under the sign of sex" that we emerged as modern subjects (1980: 78). In other words, it may very well be that by organizing/manipulating such media images and commodities and becoming themselves subjects of desire, teenage girls are beginning to arrive at a new self-consciousness, a new sense of subjectivity, that may prove instrumental for their overall growth and development.

The first inkling of a new image of teenage girls' sexuality hit the Taiwanese

popular market in 1996 when Vivian Hsu (徐若瑄) published her first photo album titled “Venus.” Though packaged as adult material, the album was widely read and discussed by the public for it is the first time a teenage girl was featured in a photo album geared specifically toward the adult market yet displayed and sold in regular bookstores.<sup>3</sup> The producer of the photo album explains in an interview that Vivian was chosen as the model because “she represented a perfect mixture of teenage innocence and subtle but sophisticated sexual desire.” While such a design may be targeting the market of adult males in East Asia, Vivian’s special blend of innocence and sexuality unwittingly opened a new door to self-expression for teenage girls. Henceforth, innocence need not be divorced from sexuality; you can have the cake and eat it too. Nice teenage girls flocked to the studios to have their own photo albums made--“Youth should not leave any page blank” (青春不要留白), read the most popular ad slogan of the time. In one proud photo album after another, young teenage girls in the most ordinary jeans and T-shirts peered into the cameras with their own formulation of seductive looks. The more brave ones donned the most exposing lingerie and experimented with the various seductive postures they had long dreamed of trying. The booming personal photo album industry became the playground where numerous teenage girls fashioned their own dream story of stardom out of limited means but unlimited fantasies.

Such dreams of stardom via the route of often X-rated photo shoots are in fact not all fantasy. Plenty of famous success stories—including those of Marilyn Monroe and Madonna in the West—have proven the channel both feasible and profitable. Local exemplars were not in short supply either. Vivian Hsu, now no longer posing semi-nude, has become not only a popular singer, a TV show host, but also a movie star who enjoys international fame even in the enviable Japanese entertainment business. More recently, Shu-Qi (舒淇), who had made her debut in a Hong-Kong made X-rated movie, is now a well-known movie star who is both award-winning and widely sought after by world-class directors such as Xiao-Xian Ho (侯孝賢). Although not all who tried this route proved successful, still, the increasing likelihood, as well as the wide publicity of notable cases, has worked to erode the age-old belief that a girl’s reputation and her future would be completely ruined if she becomes “spoiled” by association with anything sexual.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> To avoid violating the age limit set by the law, the producer of the album made sure that Vivian was already 18 before embarking on the shooting. Still, Vivian was packaged as a 13-15 year old girl in all the pictures taken.

<sup>4</sup> In the meantime, Taiwan’s highly competitive entertainment industry, boosted by a thriving and fluctuating cable TV market, is ever looking for new stars and new idols. Various contests are held all year round to find the most promising faces, voices, bodies, and personalities. The drive to

A subtle combination of innocence and sexuality in looks is further animated by the sexy dance moves of today's popular performers in Asia, from Korea's S.E.S and Park Ji-Yoon, to Japan's Namie Amuro and Hamasaki Ayumi, to Taiwan's A-Mei and Coco Lee. One immensely popular Japanese star Nami Amuro (安室奈美惠) had been known to have sparked off a wave of cosmetic surgeries in 1997 as droves of Taiwanese teenage girls rushed to reproduce her child-like facial features on their own faces.<sup>5</sup> Yet, to that child-likeness, Nami Amuro added 5-inch platform shoes and super short mini-skirts, not to mention a very sensual and energetic song and dance performance that seemed totally incongruent with her otherwise girly features. The sexual potency and suggestiveness of her swaying body thus provided another tangible form of sexual expression to the budding teenage girl population.<sup>6</sup> As a lateral development, super tight jeans, jeans that reveal the seductive contours of the girls' buttocks and thighs, have also become quite popular in Taiwan in these past few years—another style of clothing that mediates between a social context highly suspicious and disdainful of girls wearing over-revealing outfits, and the teenage girls' own growing desire for sexual expression. (I might add here that such tight jeans are also becoming popular among young males, signaling perhaps an increasingly visible concern with sexiness that goes beyond macho manhood.) If tight jeans prove to be too challenging for those schoolgirls who lack confidence in their lower body figures, many of them have chosen instead to wear colorful bras inside their white uniform shirts so that the blurry colorful insinuations could highlight their own upper-body figure and announce their sexual restlessness.<sup>7</sup>

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continuously come up with new cultural products has thus opened up more doors for the new generation of teenage girls who are no longer content to be trapped in a life of anonymity. The fever has gotten so hot that in one contest for the title of "Healthy Teenage Beauties," targeting 14 to 16 year-old girls, 1,200 teenage girls registered for the contest. (<一閃一閃亮晶晶·星河湧進小星星> 1999年4月6日中國時報 26版)

<sup>5</sup> Part of the surgery procedure consists of wearing infra-red facial masks that allegedly shape the contours of the face. (<訂作安室臉? 愛美請三思> 1997年10月12日中國時報 5版) In addition, Nami Amuro's rather dark complexion also revolutionized Taiwanese girls' aversion to the sun, leading many of them to leave the shades and lead a much more active life outdoors.

<sup>6</sup> Nami Amuro's impact on the teenage girl population in Taiwan has been so strong that when she suddenly announced her marriage in 1997 at the age of 20 and her prenuptial pregnancy, parents and teachers in Taiwan worried that the news would trigger off a wave of early marriages and pregnancies among local teenage girls. Again, teenage girls proved themselves smarter than what the adults expected.

<sup>7</sup> <少女少女看內衣好色> 1999年5月8日中國時報 8版。The explosion in Taiwanese lingerie business in recent years attests to the progress of the erotic revolution in which women are becoming more and more concerned about the aesthetic and erotic connotations of their intimate wear rather than the latter's practical use. And in response to the trend of increasingly colorful bras under white school uniforms, top-ranked Sun Yet-Sen Girls High School made a formal request in October 2003 asking that students avoid such clothing practices. <高中女生內在美顏色深淺學問大> , 2003年11月3日中國時報 A10版。

In sharp contrast to these latter examples of reticence, there are many girls who are much less shy and quite straight-forward with their own sexuality. For them, world-renowned bad-girl Madonna and the UK Spice Girls after her, provided images of a female sexuality that is no longer contained within or geared toward a desire to please men, but instead, is highly energetic as well as obnoxiously provocative (Stoller 46). The songs of Madonna and the Spice Girls may still dwell upon the traditional themes of romance,<sup>8</sup> but their rhythm and dancing and, most important of all--“attitude,” certainly exemplify alternative ways for teenage girls to imagine how their own sexual feelings and attitudes could be conveyed, aside from the usual tame representations in *Cosmopolitan* or *Vogue*. The self-confidence of the almost lewd Madonna and the scantily dressed Spice Girls has also helped change Taiwanese teenage girls’ images of their own body as well as the way they carry their sexual markings. Twenty years ago, teenage girls were constantly reprimanded for not straightening their backs; they were slouching in order to hide their growing breasts. Yet now girls are highly conscious of their breasts, so much that the latest news is that a 17-year-old girl has already spent US\$30,000 on two breast implants, upgrading her size from A-cup to C-cup, with a target size of F-cup.<sup>9</sup> Local mainstream feminists have criticized this fascination with full-size breasts but have not yet come up with any positive messages to radicalize such a sexualization of teenage girls’ body consciousness. Lately, the fashion industries are expanding their market by producing special fashion designs for girls in their early teens so that they can also have choices other than the usual school uniforms or sexless athletic wear. Department stores are likewise in the process of designating special floors for this newly created age grouping.<sup>10</sup> It remains to be seen how this trend may help create a new sexual subjectivity and sexual self-consciousness in this younger population.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> One classic study of rock music’s relationship to sexuality, conducted within the framework advanced by scholars at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), believes that “The dominant mode of control in popular music...is the ideology of romance, which is itself the icing on the harsh ideology of domesticity” (Frith, 1991, 2001: 156). A similar reading can be found in McRobbie and Garber, 1993: 221.

<sup>9</sup> <星夢少女三次隆乳>2001年3月7日中時晚報3版。

<sup>10</sup> New fashion floors are being created in major department stores in Taiwan to target the 11-15 year-olds so that these junior high school girls could have other fashion choices beyond the usual school uniforms or sexless casual wear. (<小小少女流行上身>1998年2月26日中國時報34版)

<sup>11</sup> <高中女生，日本的救星：流行發動機，產業搖錢樹>1998年3月14日中時晚報10版。It has been noticed that since 1993, high school girls have replaced college students to become the most important force in consumer spending in Japan. Having been born into a culture of affluence and consumption, these high school girls are now dominating the lucrative paraphernalia market, and all manufacturers are using these girls to test possible markets for new products. With the teenage consumption power set at a monthly total of US\$15 billion dollars in Taiwan, it is most likely that more and more new merchandises and new services will explore and take advantage of such new teenage subjectivities. (<輕鬆賺青少年五千億>1998年10月錢雜誌，142-176)。

Of course such tangible signs of teenage girls' sexuality will not go unnoticed; the morally righteous are always on hand to deliver the rant. Yet it is here too that two unexpected factors entered to complicate the scene: notably, nationalist politics and class politics. Encountering formidable difficulties in the official diplomatic circles, Taiwan's desire for international recognition has often hinged upon other means of cultural representation. Ironically, two scantily dressed and sexily animated young female performers lead the way. Quite symbolically, one singer of aborigine descent, A-Mei (張惠妹), who had held unprecedented massive concerts in both Taiwan and mainland China, acquired international fame when she sang the ROC national anthem at independence-oriented Taiwanese president Chen Shui-Bian's inauguration in 2000 and was consequently barred from representing products or giving performances in Mainland China for almost a year. In response, the Taiwanese government conferred an almost heroic status upon A-Mei, thus discouraging any local complaints about her exposing costumes and sexy dance moves on stage.<sup>12</sup> Another singer, Coco Lee (李玟), won a place in the US top 40 for her English album (albeit for a very brief moment), a first for any singer of Chinese descent, and later caught the eye of the world as she sang the theme song for the Oscar-winning movie "Crouching Tigers and Hidden Dragons" at the 2001 Academy Awards ceremony. She is perhaps better known among the local crowd as the sexiest body in the sexiest outfits, on top of her Rickie-Martin-style butt movements. The national as well as international fame of A-Mei and Coco Lee may have helped legitimate their extremely scanty dresses and seductive dance moves on stage geared mostly toward a teenage audience, but public outcry against such open displays of (teenage) female sexuality still needed an outlet. Here, the equally scantily dressed (but perhaps of a lower taste and class in style) betel nut girls, who sell betel nuts and stimulating beverages to passing truck-drivers and other blue-collar workers near freeway exits, ended up receiving the blunt of the blow. In other words, open displays of teenage girls' sexuality are permissible if they are seen as serving the noble cause of the nation-state building project, but displays of lower class teenage girls' sexuality will be read as obscene and disgraceful and thus have to face up to police fine and public humiliation.

For those girls who do not dare to put their sexual expressions directly on display by sexualizing their appearances or body moves, they can always express themselves through their "fanzie" activities. In the past few years, fan clubs have risen in the

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<sup>12</sup> Her latest album released in 2001 features a song that takes very lightly the subject of "one night stands," a subject that is quite touchy at the moment as one night stands negotiated through net communication came under fire from religious groups, educators, and women's groups. Still, the album went on sale unscathed.

names of all significant pop performers in Taiwan, and their demonstrations of strong loyalty and devotion often embody the fierce emotion one only feels toward one's love object.<sup>13</sup> Historians of the American sex revolution have realized that one very prominent sign of an explosion of teenage sexuality was hundreds of girls screaming and fainting at the Beatle's public appearances in the 1960s. "Americans did not like to believe that twelve-year-old girls had any sexual feelings to repress. And no normal girl—or full-grown woman, for that matter—was supposed to have the libidinal voltage required for three hours of screaming, sobbing, incontinent, acute-phase Beatlemania" (Ehrenreich et. al. 1986: 18). Right now the same scene is being replayed at CKS International Airport near Taipei whenever foreign rock performers grace Taiwan with their presence and performance; record companies have also made it common practice to publicize their new releases by creating occasions for such demonstrations of fervor. All of these occasions have provided ample opportunity for teenage girls to practice open displays of their amazing (sexual) energies. Adult TV viewers may shake their heads at the almost hysterical behavior of teenage girls as the latter descend upon their idols, but adults are equally dumb-founded to come up with a plausible explanation for the immense power and energy and determination of these seemingly fragile teenage girls.

If teenage girls' sexual expressions have deviated from "the concept of feminine respectability" in Taiwan, the objects of their heterosexual fascination have also stretched beyond the traditional ideals of masculinity (Frith 1991, 2001: 156-157). Gender researchers in the West have long noted the androgynous affect of the Beatles, which was quickly overshadowed by the frank bisexuality of performers such as David Bowie, and then the more outrageous anti-masculinity of Boy George and Michael Jackson in the 1980s. But the situation in Taiwan went further beyond the usual gender division. In fact, the formidable attraction of Japanese Visual Shock artists Shazna, Glay, and Luna Sea for Taiwanese teenage girls can no longer be explained in terms of the muscular or masculine; for these "male" performers are both aesthetic and fragile, two qualities rarely associated with traditional males.<sup>14</sup> In the meantime, the images of other male teen idols, such as the imminently popular local singer Jay Zhou (周杰倫), are deliberately immersed in a subtle sense of self-pity and vulnerability even when he performs Chinese Kung-Fu in his latest music video. No

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<sup>13</sup> Incidentally, the girls are not really die-hard loyalists when it comes to choice of idols; many of them go to various new album releases or concerts and demonstrate the same degree of ecstasy. Whether their idols were pop singers, rhythm and blues singers, or even lyrical singers, soloists or groups, the girls respond to their performances with the same screaming, clapping, and singing-along. Such occasions seem to serve only to provide a legitimate cause for such outbursts.

<sup>14</sup> The word "male" is in parenthesis because these performers are also well-known for their transgendered looks and costumes.

one has yet studied the effect of such significant changes in gender representations, but the distinct contrast between the immense powers of the teenage girls and the somewhat fragile image of their idols poses an interesting problem for social and cultural researchers.

The world of popular culture and commodities may have provided some raw material out of which teenage girls could fashion their own sexual representations and sexual subjectivities, yet their sexual construction of the self at the present moment encompasses much more than mere images and fantasies and commodities. In fact, for this generation of Taiwanese teenage girls, hands-on experience with sexual intercourse is no longer something totally alien.

### **Changing Teenage Sex Values and Practices**

In the past, teenage girls had mostly been shielded, other than the necessity of going to school, from any contact with the outside world by over-protective parents and other adults who are more than familiar with the possible “hazards” of such contacts. But in recent years, new channels of communication that help escape parental surveillance have been created by modern technology (notably the internet and the cell phone); new opportunities for teenage gatherings have emerged out of politicians’ effort to create new constituencies through providing some forms of entertainment outlet for teenage energies; and finally, new gender/sexuality based social movements have also made possible a liberalization of sexual values and practices—all of these socio-historical forces have converged to change the lived sexual realities of Taiwanese teenage girls.

Dramatic increases in sexual activities among teenagers have been well noted in various studies in Taiwan. A 1998 survey reveals that as high as 43.5% of those who are under the age of 20 have had sexual experiences; and even more surprisingly, 11% of them are under the age of 15.<sup>15</sup> A more recent 2001 survey of young internet users further reveals that a good 40% of 15-year-olds have already had more than ten sexual partners.<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately, neither study specifies the distribution of gender among the respondents. But we may infer something from another study. In a longitudinal study, the percentage of females having pre-marital sex in 1988 was

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<sup>15</sup> <你要為孩子準備保險套嗎？>1998年12月9日中國時報38版。

<sup>16</sup> <未滿18歲網友4成有性經驗>2001年9月29日中國時報8版。



around 6.9%; by 1998 it has risen to an “alarming” 26.7%;<sup>17</sup> and since heavy petting (of the lower part of the body) is often considered to be a prelude to actual sexual intercourse and is already practiced by 42.4 % of these women, a similar four-fold increase since 1988, it is likely that premarital sex for females will continue to increase.<sup>18</sup> Although the sample population of this longitudinal study concentrates on the 20-29 age group, it is quite probable, by inference, that there may be a similar climb in sexual activities among the teenage female population, if only of a smaller magnitude.<sup>19</sup>

Other material developments during the same time frame are also highlighting the emerging presence of sexuality among the very young. To begin with, sexual awakening is taking place much earlier than before. With better nutrition and the encroachment of Western diets, 80% fifth-grade girls in Taiwan have started to grow breasts; 34% sixth-grade girls have experienced their first period; and 16% sixth-grade girls admit to having had romantic relationships, according to a 2000 survey.<sup>20</sup> These new developments have alarmed sex educators to such an extent that they have finally decided to distribute newly designed sex education materials to first-year students in junior high schools, something that they had resisted for years, believing that children should be protected from any talk of sex until late puberty. And as news broke out that two sixth-graders were caught having sex inside the health clinic in their elementary school during lunch hour, health officials are now considering distributing sex education material to the fifth and sixth graders of elementary schools. All of these measures further accelerate the process which Michel Foucault has termed the “pedagogization of children’s sex” which seeks to manage, but will more than likely end up inciting, the sexual potentials of so-called underage youths (Foucault, 1980: 104).

As the tug-of-war rages on between teenage sexual practices and their pedagogization, dramatic changes in teenagers’ sexual attitudes are also becoming clear: the younger generation is developing sexual values quite different from the older generations.<sup>21</sup> In a survey with a sample size of 14,269 of 16- to 25-year-old

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<sup>17</sup> Significantly, the rise is much more dramatic than that of men of the same age group, which only rose from 35.2% to 37.5%.

<sup>18</sup> <少女婚前性行爲，10年增3倍> 1999年1月9日中國時報5版。

<sup>19</sup> My own observation is that the figures here may also be confounded by the fact that today’s youths are much more candid about their sexual values and experiences than previous generations.

<sup>20</sup> <小學生早熟，性知識跟不上> 2000年5月31日中國時報5版。

<sup>21</sup> Such changes in attitudes toward sex are partly constituted by teenage girls’ favorite kind of recreational reading: romance novels. In fact, a Feb. 2001 survey of romance novels in the market reveals that out of the four million romance novels presently circulating in bookstores, book rental places, and other channels of distribution, 90% of them included X-rated content, i.e., graphic

internet users, at least 60% find sexual relationships acceptable if both parties agree to it, to the dismay of parents and sex educators. If pregnancy resulted, 38% youths would choose abortion; nearly 40% would choose marriage as a way out of the problem. Interestingly, the study also shows that the former group consists mainly of females while the latter group consists of males, signifying that today's young women, with the help of new products such as RU486 or other improved abortion procedures, would choose freedom over marriage even when faced with the embarrassing situation of unexpected pregnancy. As to the age-old question of premarital co-habitation, those youths who would go for it make up 45% of the sample group, yet half of the remaining 55% who are against co-habitation resist living together with their lovers simply because they want to "retain some freedom for themselves" even within such intimate relationships. Those who believe it "improper" to try co-habitation make up not even 10% of the sample group.<sup>22</sup> The conclusion proposed by sex educators is that the double standard is eroding and women in Taiwan now desire to be their own masters, rather than servants, so that when they feel they can afford to have sex and have the ability to control their own bodies, premarital sex is no longer a taboo for them.<sup>23</sup>

As the post-1994 sex revolution rages on, the liberalization of sexual values among women in Taiwan has created new room for another important mode of female teenage sexuality: lesbian relationships. Although lesbianism remains mostly invisible in this reproduction-oriented society, a recent survey of high school girls, conducted in September of 2000, reports that 12% of high school girls freely admit to being lesbians, and 63% find lesbianism an acceptable form of intimate relationship.<sup>24</sup> Though taken from a rather small sample, the survey at least bespeaks an emerging self-affirmation as well as a significant change in general attitudes toward lesbianism that 10 years of struggle by the Taiwanese gay and lesbian community has been working for. Lesbian publications have gradually built up a discursive community whereby young lesbians could further constitute their identity in campus study groups. Three successive gay festivals (held between 2000 and 2002) were sponsored by a friendly Taipei city government eager to boost its own international image. The official seal of approval is a great encouragement for teenage girls to explore and even

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depictions of sexual intercourse and other perversions. One trouble-shooting female politician was shocked to find that many of these novels even included sections on incest, sex in the presence of children, techniques to seduce men, and other unbelievable and highly unacceptable deviances that she found difficult to mention.(2001年3月8日聯合報6版〈李慶安:色情小說污染女學生〉)。

<sup>22</sup> 〈六成網路族認婚前嘗禁果〉1998年3月8日中國時報。

<sup>23</sup> 〈玩禁忌遊戲爭平等?〉1999年1月8日中時晚報。

<sup>24</sup> 〈十餘校問卷調查 12%高中女生自承是同性戀〉2001年8月19日中國時報8版。

announce their own (perhaps non-heterosexual) relationships. On October 13, 2001 Taipei city lesbians held their first-ever joint dance party with 300 university lesbians attending, and the event was favorably covered by the media. On the other hand, the increasingly neutral gender culture also made it easier for lesbians to physically announce their presence and sexuality through extremely short but stylish haircuts as well as breast-binding bras. One French-brand jeans has just aired its most recent commercial on Taiwanese TV, showing two girls traveling all over Europe as lovers—and parting company gently and tenderly before they reach Paris. All of these contribute to an atmosphere in which lesbian desires and identities are becoming increasingly competitive amidst a highly heterosexual teenage culture.

As sexual openness becomes the rule of the day for Taiwan in the new century, many advertisers are also capitalizing upon such a theme and the ingenious narratives presented in the ads have further lodged new sexual imaginings among teenagers. TV commercials for cell phones—a most popular teen item—have been characterizing this product as the newest means for managing multiple lovers. The commercial for one model of cell phones highlights its newest function as one in which the same romantic message could be sent to nine different receiving parties at one press of a button. Another model emphasizes its new caller-id function, which would light up the liquid crystal screen in different colors when different callers are on the line. The girl in the commercial is presented as utterly bored when the screen flashes colors denoting calls coming in from her best friend and even her own boyfriend. But when the screen flashes the color that announces the boyfriend of a best friend, the girl's face lit up. Such advertising is clearly taking advantage of the popular practice among teenagers of maintaining multiple relationships during the same period of time, but it also reflects an important change in sexual values as well as sexual practices for this age group. The cliché critique of “sexual exploitation” and “sexual objectification” seems feeble in front of such tremendous powers of attraction and management. “If advertisers and marketing men manipulated teens as consumers, they also, inadvertently, solidified teen culture against the adult world.... Defined by its own products and advertising slogans, teenhood became more than a prelude to adulthood; it was a status to be proud of—emotionally and sexually complete unto itself” (Ehrenreich et. al. 1986: 29).

If teenage girls are already living in an environment with plenty of exposure to things sexual, if they are already becoming fluent in the language of desire, if their sexual values have already diverged from puritanical morality, and most importantly, if sexual adventurism (in the form of sex with multiple partners or sex with strangers) is experienced as the latest in-thing instead of a life-and-death matter for girls—then it

is little wonder that *enjo-kosai* and other forms of teenage sex work would be taken rather lightly by teenage girls. It is simply another form of sexual exploration, and with tangible as well as sizable profits.

## **Teenage Sex Work**

As much as *enjo-kosai* (casual teen prostitution) has been interpreted as an alarming phenomenon unique among teenage girls in East Asia (thus worthy of social panic), two points need to be made here concerning the case in Taiwan. First, *enjo-kosai* has now become an umbrella term for all forms of individually-operated sex work in Taiwan, be it professional sex workers who are taking advantage of the term's amateurish connotation,<sup>25</sup> or occasional practitioners who are taking advantage of its imported cultural image.<sup>26</sup> And its practitioners are by no means limited to teenage girls. In fact, the most frequently reported cases in the past year or so in Taiwan have been young men who are offering themselves for sale out of curiosity or out of a desperate need for a quick income,<sup>27</sup> and other men who have recently become unemployed and thus forced to resort to *enjo-kosai* in this economically difficult time.<sup>28</sup> Second, *enjo-kosai* has also become a new code-word for the popular but infamous game of one-night-stands on the internet. It not only adds a taboo fantasy dimension to the pre-game negotiations as well as the actual sexual encounter, but also leaves room for post-game demands for compensation should the encounter turns out to be unpleasant or unsatisfactory. In that sense, *enjo-kosai* in the Taiwanese context is more of a space for sexual negotiations than a fixed set of sexual transactions.

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<sup>25</sup> 2001年8月15日聯合晚報23版〈應召站上網援交攬客〉；2000年10月5日東森新聞報〈網路援交女真貨知多少〉，〈應召女冒充援交女，上網後身價節節高〉。

<sup>26</sup> This wide appeal has a lot to do with the various appropriations that have been applied to the term. Whatever the original meaning may be in the Japanese language and culture, *enjo-kosai* in its Taiwanese usage—literally translated as “assisted socializing”—describes both parties involved in the transaction. While old terms in relation to sex work or prostitution carry specific references to the distinction between the buyer and the seller, *enjo-kosai* and its professional/technical sounding image can refer to both parties, and it is not always clear who is “helping” whom, or who is in need of assistance in “socializing.” This fluidity in references provides the necessary space whereby those who are involved in the transaction could maneuver the anti-sex work culture that surrounds them.

<sup>27</sup> Just to give a few examples: 〈油漆工人上網援交送辦〉2001年10月11日聯合報18版；〈籌錢想變性，男子援交被捕〉2001年10月8日聯合報18版；〈大學生刊援助交際緩刑〉2001年8月30日聯合報20版；〈十五歲男生援交〉2001年8月4日聯合報18版；〈同學道相報，高職男生援交〉2001年7月30日聯合報18版。

<sup>28</sup> 2001年8月22日聯合報18版〈失業男子搞援交，女警喬裝逮到他〉。

These new developments in no way deny the fact that there are quite a lot of teenage schoolgirls who are conducting *enjo-kosai* in their after-school hours. The absence of work opportunities for teenage schoolgirls has only been ameliorated in the past 15 years by the arrival of the fast food industries and the convenience stores. And as the service industries began to expand as part of the transformation of Taiwanese economy, more schoolgirls entered karaokes, coffee-shops, tea-houses, nightclubs, etc. to work as part-time service crew. All of these jobs pay part-timers by the hour on the basis of a fixed hourly wage, and judging from the meager going rate (US\$2 an hour), it is quite understandable why some girls would look into other lines of work, better-paying work. One 14-year-old girl who was caught by the police doing *enjo-kosai* says that she had worked in a beauty parlor as an apprentice, and what she earned standing all day long could not even compare with half of what she earned “lying down” for a brief while. She announces that she would go back to *enjo-kosai* as soon as she gets out.<sup>29</sup> While women’s groups beseech the police to rid the internet of *enjo-kosai* ads so as to “protect” the girls from exploitation by customers, perhaps women’s groups should first of all take seriously the girls’ complaints about the exploitation involved in the so-called respectable and normal jobs at McDonalds and other such business institutions.

Many have attributed the popularity of the term *enjo-kosai* to the Japanese drama 「神啊！請多給我一點時間」(「神様、もう少しだけ」, *kami sama moo sukoshi da ke*) which aired in Taiwan from July to September 1999. Yet as early as March 1999, the movie 「援助交際 24 小時」 had already caught the attention of the general public which was trying to come to grips with what some Taiwanese teenage girls were already doing then. One senior journalist describes what she saw as the convergence of *enjo-kosai* with the Taiwanese “spicy/hot sisters” (辣妹), who were “girls under the age of eighteen but radiating sexiness as well as maintaining the innocence of a little girl, full of sex appeal.”<sup>30</sup> The term, and its male counterpart “cool dude/brother” (酷哥), both captured the delicate combination of innocence/detachment (out of reach) and enticing sexuality/sophistication. The journalist worries that the emergence of a whole new generation of young people who were at ease with their own sexualities might provide fertile ground for the imported *enjo-kosai* trend. Her worries were not unfounded, for the convergence was well-anticipated.

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<sup>29</sup> <皮肉錢卡好賺，三少女墮風塵> 1999年12月4日中國時報19版。

<sup>30</sup> 「辣妹名詞從色情文化獨立出來後，因為媒體與演藝圈打出健康辣妹形象又為青少年所複製，強調的是超猛、超酷、超辣的打扮。這些未滿十八歲的女生必須表現出女人的性感，但又要有小女孩般的天真，全身充滿性的誘惑。」<辣妹向錢看，迷失性遊戲> 1999年3月22日中國時報8版。

The phenomenon now described as *enjo-kosai* is not the first time Taiwanese teenage girls have come into contact with work that makes use of their bodily image and even sexuality. Many teenage girls have already had experience working as models, not only in the traditional sense of taking the catwalk as fashion models or joining various beauty pageants or talent shows; but also posing for various businesses, selling products as wide-ranging as cars, computer hardware and software, bathroom tiles, cell phones, sashimi, laundry detergent, soft drinks, body sculpturing products and services, chewing gums, etc. Scantly dressed teenage girls have served in restaurant chains imported from the West (i.e., Hooters), car shows, software exhibitions, wine tasting, local betel nut stands, male-dominated billiard parlors, businessmen-frequented tea-houses, gas stations, car-washes, and a wide range of other businesses. When these various kinds of body-display-related work border one another in gradation, and when the legitimacy/respectability of “work” eclipses the stigma of “sex” in this age of heightened professionalism as well as sexual openness, it becomes increasingly futile to make a clear distinction between these other forms of work and *enjo-kosai*, which for many is just one more line of work—except that it is a kind of work that offers the highest degree of autonomy and flexibility, not to mention profit. In short, this convergence of teenage work and sex work (*enjo-kosai* in particular) is in fact far less a matter of “confusion of values” than a matter of “profusion of jobs.”

As much as child protection NGOs would like to describe the *enjo-kosai* girls as nothing but vulnerable, vain and lazy, the girls themselves, however, are accumulating their own hands-on wisdom in this line of business. Contrary to the guileless girls who are mostly phobic and scared witless in emergency situations, some *enjo-kosai* girls have become quite adept in reading people and handling complicated human interaction. To acquire their prospective clientele, they have learned to target only middle-aged men, not because these men are more lustful, but because these men, according to these girls, are more “chicken-hearted”; in other words, they would not make trouble for the girls should the transaction go awry—the unlawfulness of the transaction, the mainstream social status of these men, and the stigma associated with cross-generational relationships would all work to the men’s disadvantage should they make any trouble that attracts public attention. This pressure also ensures that the girls will be paid when the job is done. Significantly, statistics show that many of these girls are runaways, school drop-outs, night school students, cram school students, etc.—in other words, girls who have been repeatedly humiliated by an education system that values only good grades and good behavior. One researcher remarks: “Many girls do get a sense of achievement that they could not get from

school work or their daily life.”<sup>31</sup> Lest the prejudice against delinquents should take root, it needs to be noted that many other *enjo-kosai* girls come from perfectly functional families; their parents have good-paying jobs, and the kids have good grades in school—and the girls use computers at home to get on the internet and negotiate transactions. Whichever the case, many of the *enjo-kosai* girls prove to be by no means brainless. There was a case in which two girls in their early teens started their own *enjo-kosai* business to avoid exploitation by the telephone dating service where they once worked. While doing *enjo-kosai*, the girls kept a “desire diary” detailing individual customers, personal tastes, prices charged, merchandise purchased with the payment, calculation of transactions needed for future purchases, etc.<sup>32</sup> Professionalism in such compensated companionship is neither casual nor rare.

Teenage girls who had been protected and restrained by their parents had little chance of coming into contact with such forbidden information and practice, yet now with the advent of the internet, information and experiences about *enjo-kosai* could be passed on easily and quickly. Consequently, values toward the hitherto little known world of sex work are also changing. A September 2001 survey of 16-26-year-olds reveals that 8% of them have looked for *enjo-kosai* on the net, the most often given reasons being curiosity, desire to make friends, and seeking sexual partners. The same survey reports that sex work has become an acceptable form of work for 70% of the youths polled. And the younger the interviewees, the more strongly they side with the new sexual values.<sup>33</sup> Such changes in sexual values were highly visible when Japanese porn star Ai Iijima (飯島愛) came to Taiwan to publicize her biography *Platonic Sex* in 2000. As much as adults warned about her profession as a porn actress and one time sex worker, teenagers flocked to the book exhibition to catch a glimpse of the sex goddess they have seen so much of in the adult TV channels; many bought her biography and read her life story diligently as a story of courage and honesty.<sup>34</sup>

Many adults continue to lament this “confusion of values.” But the real confusion that the arrival of *enjo-kosai* brought forth has to be the following. In the

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<sup>31</sup> <我現在缺錢用，來去援助交際> 1999年10月22日勁報3版。

<sup>32</sup> <食髓知味少女搞援助交際> 1999年11月7日中時晚報4版。

<sup>33</sup> <六成網友不認同援交> 2001年9月6日中國時報6版。

<sup>34</sup> Another Japanese porn star Madoka Ozawa (小澤圓) has made quite a few visits to Taiwan since 2002 and has been featured in car shows, wedding shows, and furniture shows among other non-profit oriented appearances. Some parents and teachers are worrying that Ozawa’s image is now being white-washed to such a degree that being a porn star, a sex worker, would no longer carry the usual social stigma.

past, the “good women” were always dressed in nice and decent clothes while the sex workers dress lewdly; but now the “nice girls” are donning all the hot and sexy dresses for their albeit limited sexual self-expression, while the *enjo-kosai* girls, the new generation of sex workers, carry on their business in their school uniforms with student id cards in their pockets. Whichever the case, teenage girls are actively striving to manage the delicate multiplicities and complexities of sexual desires, which most adults, born and raised in completely different social-sexual contexts, have little knowledge, much less experience, about.

## **Final Words**

In the above discussion, we have seen how Taiwanese teenage girls have fashioned their sexual selves out of media images and commodities, how their sexual values and practices are changing because of other profound changes in the social milieu surrounding them, and how sex work has become an acceptable and ordinary part of their lives—at least for some of them. In view of all these concomitant happenings, to raise public outcry against the phenomenon known as *enjo-kosai* serves only to flare up moral panic and to displace the wider issue of the continued suppression of teenage girls’ sexuality in a world of allegedly increasing sexual openness.

Casual teen sex work may have another layer of social significance that most people are not aware of. As the world we live in becomes “a society of strangers,” the art of socializing becomes more and more important for it provides the necessary means through which strangers (or acquaintances) may come together and develop further contacts and relationships. Historically, socializing in the public sphere in the Chinese society had been the exclusive activity of men. It was the prostitutes and other sex workers who first dared to challenge social decorum by entering public space in their own fashion. In fact, the first generation of women who enjoyed financial independence, who divorced freely, who roamed public sites freely, who dressed in the most glaring way, who smoked in public to express their characters and independence, who dated men freely, etc. were none other than the prostitutes. Their revolutionary move has made it possible for other women (non-sex-workers) to also enter the public space and negotiate their own social intercourse, maybe even sexual intercourse.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Therein lies part of the buried story of the sex revolution in China.



Like women, teenagers have also suffered immense restrictions and repressions in relation to their entry and activities in public space. Under the triple bind of gender inequality, ageism, and sex negativism, *enjo-kosai* functions as a form of “social intercourse” that could open up opportunities for youths to explore themselves, to get to know members of other social groups, as well as to get to know the society of which they make up a very important part. Such social intercourse may very well amount to a nice afternoon of company, a passing one night stand, a short-term friendships, a romantic attachment, or even marriage—and perhaps all in connection with some form of monetary gift. To reduce such multiplicities in *enjo-kosai* to simple notions of lop-sided exploitation or commodification is to overlook the efforts of teenage girls to forge new possibilities out of limited space and means.

Social intercourse and sexual intercourse are simply different forms of modern intercourse. In that sense, *enjo-kosai* is a new form of social/sexual intercourse in a sexually open society; and new modes of relations, emotions, and work are being created in this process by, first and foremost, our teenage *enjo-kosai* girls.

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