

En/gendering New Subjectivities

Politics of Vulnerability:

Troubling Empire, Whiteness, and Masculinity in Postcolonial Hong Kong

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Established as an area of Rest and Recreation for the US Navy within a former British settler colony, Wan Chai's bar district epitomizes a western hypermasculine space that operates under the slogan of 'If you're white, you're right.' While this site ultimately caters to male expatriates and tourists, the influx of Southeast Asian female migrant workers to Hong Kong alongside China's recent global economic ascendance began altering Wan Chai's demography as well as the self-perceptions among the male bar regulars. Six months of ethnographic research revealed heightened sentiments of economic precarity among these men who often attributed the recent closures of western-owned venues and failed personal businesses to the economic rise of East Asia (Hoang 2015). Circulating among the bars are cautionary tales of tactical cons deployed by Southeast Asian migrant women and narratives of intrusive Chinese and Nepalese capital upending the area's historically western hegemony. These accounts signal the men's view of their formerly championed status (i.e. western/white masculinity) and the possibility of its imminent decline. How does Hong Kong's postcoloniality coupled with shifts in the global economic ordering factor into the men's understanding of their masculinity and claimed volatile status? This paper examines how the expatriate men residing in Hong Kong negotiate their purported hegemonic masculinity through their intimate encounters with Southeast Asian female migrants and other non-local male bar regulars during their habitual visits to Wan Chai's drinking district.

Labor in the Garment Industry of Bangladesh:

Rhetoric of Emancipation Versus Reality of Subjugation

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The readymade garment industry in Bangladesh employs around 3.2 million workers in nearly 5000 garment factories; more than 70 percent of the workers are women. Thus, it is widely argued that employment in this sector has created avenues for women towards economic and social empowerment and freedom. Therefore, through ethnographic fieldwork at the garment industries and in surrounding areas where the workers live, I explore whether factory work in the garment industries in Bangladesh emancipate the women workers from gender discrimination or creates another dimension of exploitation and subjugation. On the basis of ethnographic data, I argue that the experience of work in the garment factories (as in any other sector under capitalism) is complicated and socially embedded. In context of Bangladesh, I hold that the societal gender constructs and gender relations affect the working conditions for female workers; women are often supervised more strictly in the factory and receive less salary compared to male workers. Further, I argue even though the entry of women into productive workforce open up new spaces and opportunities for some of them, it basically displaces the problem of reproductive and/or domestic work to other women to whom the care of children and of the house are delegated. Thus, based on ethnographic

findings I argue that in social realities of Bangladesh, the women who work at the ferment factories are at once encouraged to be independent wage-earning individuals and discouraged from expressing the freedom and autonomy that often come with wage earning.

The Living Guan Gong: Gender and Nationalism in Post-socialist China

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This paper is part of my thesis that focuses on volunteers that have sought out whom they consider as the “authentic national heroes” for a decade in Mainland China where it is under monopolization of China Communist Party (CCP). These volunteers are seeking the remaining Kuomintang (KMT) veterans left in Mainland after the KMT party moved to Taiwan in 1949. While the CCP legitimizes its authority with the heroic achievement in the Anti-Japanese War, volunteers challenge the CCP by caring for these “authentic national heroes” stigmatized by the CCP officials, as producers of history. Volunteers, as civil society not represented by the government, are making their own authentic national history. This thesis argues that there are competing versions of history rooted in different claims to authenticity of history, which lead to the construction of a particular nationhood in post-socialist China. In the nationalist project, the KMT veterans are carriers of the ideal nationhood and authenticity from the volunteers’ point of view. With a gender lens, I will ask the following research questions: How is authenticity of the Chinese Nation presented by and embodied in the KMT veterans, and under what kinds of gender politics? How do male and female volunteers interpret the authenticity of nationhood in interacting with “authentic national heroes”? How does state and civil engagement negotiate competing ideals of nationalism in making the authenticity of the Chinese Nation? I conducted the fieldwork in Hunan for eight months from 2013 to 2015 to collect data for my M.Phil thesis. By using participant observation and interviews, I want to unveil the gendered nature of national authenticity and highlight the involvement of civil society in nationalist projects.