

Negotiating Rebellion: Obscene Poems of Chinese University Orientation Camp

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Introduction

In the late August of 2002, students of Chinese University went on headlines of Hong Kong newspapers and shocked the society. In overlarge writing, the headlines read, “university students shouting obscene slogans in Orientation Camp”. The coverage reported two thousand university students gathered at the central campus of Chinese University to engage in an event called “four college battle” (四院會師), which involved students screaming slogans for their colleges to express solidarity. The slogans featured explicit and erotic descriptions of sexual behaviors and language of pornography. In a university with long tradition of excellence and a strong background of Chinese culture, no one would ever expect this kind of words to come from students, not to mention shouting them in public. The incident had sparked a public discussion on the morality of university student (Ming Pao 2002).

The Student Council severely condemned the use of obscene slogans as an act of denigrating women and sexual harassment and requested a formal apology from the organizer. University authority was extremely concerned about the incident and established a committee to conduct an investigation. Participants had shown different attitudes toward the incident. While some students expressed their discomforts of the obscene language to the press, some students felt the slogans were only meant to be a joke and should not be taken literally. Scholars and councilors were disappointed with students' behavior and attributed the cause to the indecent culture permeating in the society and the failure of moral education. Arthur Kwok Chueng Li, the president of the Chinese University at the time expressed his concerns on newspapers (Sing Dao 2002). He did not penalize the students for using the obscene language. He noted that education is not simply about knowledge on textbooks and should include morality. In addition to importance of moral education, the president of Lingnan University, Edward Kwan Yiu Chen also pointed out it was the bubble economy that allowed indecent culture to permeate (Sing Dao 2002). Chi-Keung Ivan Choi, a lecturer in sociology department of City University believed the media was responsible for the spreading of obscene culture (Sing Dao 2002). The president of Hong Kong Federation of Education Worker, Yew Chung Yueng, pointed out the incident reflected the low morality of university students and suggested that university should have provided more counseling to students. Sociologist Danny Kwok Lueng Ho described students as ignorant and had no understanding of sexual workers and no respect to ladies (Apple Daily 2002).

Summarizing the comments of scholars, they attributed the root of the problem to the indecent contents in the pop culture that made students immoral. In part, they provided reasonable explanations to newspaper readers. To more careful readers, they did not explain why a large number of university students were shouting obscene language. What did they mean by students are immoral? Are they immoral because they used this language to cause social disturbance or are they immoral because the obscene contents reflect their ideology? In either case, their reasons are inadequate as students have said that obscene slogans were only meant to be jokes and should not be understood literally. Based on my ethnographic findings, the students were, in fact, trying to enhance social harmony.

Nevertheless, the incident does reflect a difference in conception of sex. Edward Chen told the press about the time when he was in university, there were crazy activities in Orientation camp (‘O Camp’) such as requiring freshmen to run on the streets with their pajamas, but there were certainly nothing related to sex. Today, students are using sex as a subject in O camp, which is really unacceptable. (Sing Dao 2002) In his generation, sex was a taboo in society. Yet with the rapid development of communication technology over the past two decades, images and language associated with sexuality have proliferated in different mediums of pop culture - such as magazines, advertisements, TV shows, movies, comics etc. - blurring the moral line that defines sex as a taboo. What is appropriate and not appropriate do not have a clear definition.

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To understand why 2000 students were using obscene language in an organized way requires different areas of investigation. Firstly, O camp is an annual student event sponsored by university to assimilate freshmen into a new environment. In 2002, O camp became a serious scandal but it continues to exist in the following years. This suggests the importance of O camp to the university and the mutually dependent relationship between students and administrators. However, they have different conceptions and hold conflicting interests. In this clash of interests, how does O camp serve as a balanced system that allows two conflicting ideas to coexist and interact?

Second area of investigation involves in the obscene language used in O camp slogans. Indeed as scholars had mentioned, media is responsible for spreading sexual content to young people's culture, but to what extent does it influence behavior of students? Does the language attest to their moral views? Today, what does sex mean to students? Why do they use obscene language, more specifically, why do they use it in such a large and organized scale in O camp? Combing the above areas of investigation, through O camp we shall see how a tradition is repackaged in an ever fast changing world and how it is readjusted to respond and to maintain a system containing conflicting ideologies.

Orientation in Hong Kong

Being a student in Hong Kong is never easy. After five years of secondary education leading to the first public examination (HKCEE), there are two more years of matriculation preparing students for university entry examination (A-Level). Students compete for limited university entries based on their HKCEE and A-Level examination results. Going to university marks out the end of the struggle in the examination system, and a promising future seems to lie ahead.

Every year, between early and middle of August, every campus of universities is thrown into total nosiness. In their colorful shirts, students are screaming and cheering as if they are totally out of control. By first glance, they may seem like a group of manic children who have just been unleashed from their parents. Ask a local student, they would tell you it's the university O camp, where O is the short form for orientation.

Unlike many university orientations around the world, the name "orientation" does not speak itself. While in general the name suggests its function as helping you to find your bearing on campus, O camp in Hong Kong implies meanings of having fun and going wild. This difference become obvious when asked a foreign student about how his orientation is like:

Basically each student given a huge ass booklet with tons of events that go on for a week, different events for different purposes at differing times and we just go to what we think are appropriate. A few are "mandatory" but no one checks.. people go because they make friends.

I further asked what kind of events are in the orientation. My informant said,

There are dorm events - senior volunteers lead small groups (maybe 10 students per group) and play games, show the dorm around, and let people get to know each other and then there are events for major, college, and then university as a whole (president speech) some events to show library, some events to show dining halls and then events to show extracurricular activities. They usually just give you time and place when the event takes place, and all I need to do (if i feel like it) is to just turn up and then there is a rush week where frat and sororities hold parties to attract members.

Other exchange students tend to give similar answers too. Orientation itself has a very clear meaning associating to its function. They were surprised why I would even ask this question as there is really nothing special about it. But if you ask a similar question to local students, they would either say they didn't "play" O camp (玩 Ocamp) or give you a list of games they played. Then the question becomes clear: why is orientation so different in Hong Kong?

To many local students, O camp is a big thing. There is a saying among students that there are five things you must do in university to graduate without regret: dating, skipping lectures, finding a part time, studying and joining O camp. Indeed, O camp is a major event of the year. Students devote their summer holidays into organizing a camp that involves 2000 students. Thousands of man-hours of preparation are used in designing of T-shirt and flags and organizing of activities, all on a massive scale. Many nights of rehearsals are dedicated to collective dances and rhythmic slogans which will be performed during the camp. Certainly, O camp in Hong Kong has a lot of meanings that cannot be found elsewhere.

History of O camp

O camp today has its historical origin that dates back to at least 20 years ago. Records found in the archive of New Asia College reveal the form of O camp in the past. The records include detailed minutes of meetings of the organizers at the time, articles discussing the roles of university students, invitation letters to scholars, reflection of students and newspaper articles related to politics. Although we are not able to know how exactly the activities were like at that time, the records give us a picture of O camp in the past.

The minutes, detailing the blueprint of O camp, give us a glimpse of why Hong Kong universities have O camp. The purposes of O camp were stated very clearly: O camp is to define the role of university students, to know the purposes of university education, to build up friendships and to help freshmen adapt into university life. Activities were designed on the basis of the above principals. The academic forums and discussions were the essence of O camp. Renowned scholars were invited to give seminars. Led by senior students, freshmen were divided into groups and debated issues regarding to politics and society. Group leaders underwent research to prepare for topics of discussion, as newspaper articles were put with the O camp records. Guidelines for leaders, consisting of several pages, explain in details of how to control and hold discussions. In heart of these activities was to ensure certain values of university students were passed on to the freshmen.

The Chinese University is organized under a college system and each college organizes its own O camp. The youngest of the four colleges, Shaw College, was established in 1990. In order to show the integrity of the University, "Four College Battle" is a yearly competitive tradition in which freshmen from each college take part in. Each year, around 1500 - 2000 students take part in the event at the huge walkway located in the central campus. Every college vies to show off their solidarity by chanting poems to praise themselves or to make fun of other colleges. The poems follow a specific Chinese poetry structure in order to manifest the cultural background of the University. The original idea was for the four colleges to exchange friendly teases meanwhile demonstrating the demeanor of intellectuals through the use of elegant language. Told by an informant who joined the O camp as a freshman in 1998, the poems still praised about students' obligations to the society. Nevertheless, the lines became hollowed in meanings as O camp proceeds in the following years, and finally burst out of control in 2002 as mentioned at the introduction page.

Despite of the latter development of O camp, it began with the statements that define roles of university students. O camp was like a passage that gave meanings to freshmen. Proposed by Arnold Van Gennep a century ago, rite of passage is a concept that describes a channel bringing an individual from one stage to another (Turner 2001: 357). It is necessary because in a society's perspective, an individual in transitional state is dangerous as he cannot be mobilized in the way expected by the society. Rite of passage is a series of rituals that help to move individuals from one social state to another smoothly through transforming a set of perceptions and values to them. Ending a stage of life and entering into a new one, freshmen are in a transitional stage of ambiguity that does not give them a definition in society. By going to O camp, freshmen learned how to be university students.

O camp today takes the shape of O camp in the past and has undergone years of transformation. Many activities today are the adjustments of traditions to fit current cultural and social contexts. In this process of change, traditional meanings seemed unnecessary and disappeared rapidly. In the following sections, we will look at how O camp is like today.

O camp today

The first week of May marks out the end of academic year. The hot days of summer are approaching, examinations have ended and students are getting ready for the long summer holiday. While many students are looking for part-time work and internships, a group of students gather to prepare for O camp.

Featuring 2000 students, O camp in Chinese University inherits the organized structure in the past. Each constituent college is a congenial community with their own hostels and dining halls. As well as an introduction to University, O camp is a ceremony that welcomes freshmen to the new college community.

Although college authorities provide funding to O camp, it is a student activity that they try to have limited interferences. Students taking part in O camp are divided into two groups to perform different functions. The OCs (organizing committee) are organizers responsible for administrations, including planning and coordinating of major activities, accommodation and catering services.

The other group is leaders bringing freshmen to take part in activities designed by OCs. Among these leaders, they are

organized into clans. Within each clan, they are equally divided into smaller groups consisting of six leaders and ten freshmen. The student leaders are known as group fathers and mothers to the freshmen. The clan leader (大組長) is the leader of the student leaders. He has several functions to perform. On the administrative level, he acts on behalf of his clan members, he communicates with the OCs, negotiating what kind of activities students will like to play. But more importantly is the meanings he holds. Like a bond holding every member together, he is the center of solidarity of his clan. When participating in group activities such as dancing, cheering and chanting of slogans, he serves as an icon of the group, being worshiped by his members. His reputation is directly linked to the group; therefore it is everyone's interest to make sure he is strong and presentable in front of other clans. To create a united group, it is clan leaders' responsibility to make sure that every member is in good relationship with other members and to encourage everyone acts for the interest of the group.

Activities today are designed to help create group identities through group interactions. Clans compete in games and shout their cheers to show their difference from others. This form of interactions comes with different scales. On a smaller level, it is the interactions between groups that make up a clan. On a much larger level, the college interacts in a similar way.

The structure of clans and groups are the inheritance of O camp in the past, which were not created for the purpose of pursuing group identities as is the case today. The groups formed on various scales were designed for academic discussions. Although "four college battle" was to create college belonging, it still had very strong academic elements. While the purpose of O camp in the past was very clear, it is quite hard to tell why students bother so much to create group identities today. Why would a student bother to form a group attachment for himself, provided that it does not help him economically or academically?

When I asked most students why they took part in O camp, many said they joined to make friends and to have fun. A few students even added that their best friends were known through O camp. Agreeing in part that they joined because of the above reason, several student leaders said that they wanted to do something for the college. The answers to the question may seem very natural but they do deserve further questioning. What do friends mean to student? Why would O camp be a good way of forming friendship?

Meanings of friend

According to Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2009), a friend is someone who you know and like very much and enjoy spending time with. The concise Oxford Dictionary (1990) definition for friend is a person whom one enjoys mutual affection and regard. I believe most people have similar understanding of the word. However, when we actually use the word friend to describe a person, it does not always imply the positive relationship you have with the person because very often it also refers to an acquaintance, someone we do not know very well of, which is more neutral than the feeling of liking. The word friend has been there since the emergence of humankind, as we have been working cooperatively together for thousands of years to survive in nature. Yet perhaps it is only until recent years that the word begins to lose its meaning. The rapid advancement of technology has altered our way of social interactions, which is radically different from the way that human race evolved.

We are living in an era of advanced technology with newly emerged communication method, such as Facebook, MSN and texting. Communication has become very convenient with a price. When telephone was invented and proliferated, face-to-face interactions became less and less required. And now, with the proliferation of internet technology, even voice communication seems unnecessary. The convenience brought by technology helps us to connect with more and more people, and ironically, also helps us to disconnect from people. It is very easy to make friend nowadays. Searching your name on Facebook, and with a click, we become friends. Twenty years ago, it was really hard to imagine a person can make more than 150 friends in two years time. But how many of these friends do we really understand? It is simply impossible to spend time to find out what everyone is up to, leave it alone to liking everyone of them. What we understand of convenience today is the lesser requirement of direct interactions.

In real life, making friends does not seem that easy or natural. It is not about walking up to a stranger and asking for a friendship. Friendship, these connections between individuals have to be derived from a group because individual as an entity is not encouraged in the culture.

Among young people, the Cantonese slang "poison man" (毒男) is a term referring to people who are not very sociable. The term originated from the Japanese word "otaku" (literally means geek), which is a neutral term that describes male individuals who are obsessed with comics and computer games. And since these people spend so much time on com-

puters, they don't socialize with other people a lot or they are not very good at socializing, especially with girls. Although these people are not looked up by the general public in Japan, they deserved society's sympathy as reflected in films, novels and TV dramas surrounding their stories. When it was introduced in Hong Kong, not only the term is equated with negative connotations, but also earned a stereotype that describes male individuals who are obsessed with pornographic comics. Certainly, no one would ever want to be called a *duk nam*. I would attribute the reasons behind this phenomenon to the clash between "otaku's" ideologies and Hong Kong's social and cultural values. As a society flourished with capitalism, monetary values always come above any other values. "Otaku's" obsession with comics will not lead to higher social status or monetary reward, which does not make any sense in the local context. What is more, their behavior of acting alone is a violation to the Chinese cultural belief that a man is not meaningful on his own. In a system with strict moral codes, what would serve better deterrent than a moral condemnation to stop people acting against the cultural norm?

Lonji Sun (1985) looked at and explained Chinese perceptions of various topics, such as country, society, human relationship, politics. In heart, he mentioned how a man is defined in Chinese culture. According to him, a man by himself is meaningless, since a man can only be defined through the relationship between two or more men. In Chinese culture, individuality is not being valued and everyone is afraid of being standing out in a group. They feel much more comfortable to stay in a group. This characteristic becomes prominent when compared with Americans. He used his own experience in America as an example. When he and a group of Chinese went downtown for shopping, they tended to stay together no matter where they went because if anyone left alone, he would look like as if he was abandoned and pitied by the group. On the contrary, if the situation was changed to a group of Americans, they would go shopping on their own and gather up at a place when everyone is done. Similar trends can also be observed in Chinese University Campus. In a lecture, while exchange students will spread out to have more space, local students have affinity for cramping together in small space.

Besides, having a dinner alone in a canteen is viewed as unfortunate by peers. It is quite common to hear conversations such as, "Eating alone?" "Ya, I have no company today." "Oh, that is unfortunate." Some students rather not eat if they have no one to eat with and some will choose to cook by themselves in their dorms or buy take away just to avoid being seen alone in the canteens. The primary assumption of a person being alone is such person has no friends. When one does have to dine alone, he or she will probably choose a place at a corner to avoid being seen.

The phenomenon of Chinese tend to form groups has a cultural root in language. Comparing the words to describe a man being alone in English and Chinese, English has two words, lonely and solitude, containing a negative and a positive connotation respectively. While in Chinese nearly every word implies negative or pitiable feelings.

In Chinese perception, an individual as a separate entity from a group is not desired and will not be acknowledged. Exchange students find it difficult to be friend with local students as western cultures have a very clear boundary of self. Individuality is more valued than group. An individual is defined by his uniqueness rather than the sameness of a group. Exchange students greet strangers because it is a courtesy in their cultures. It is an acknowledgement of an individual's existence and also a way to affirm another's worth. Local students don't often greet a stranger because his existence is not significant when he is not defined by a group that defined them. Exchange students gained a perception that they are not welcomed or local students do not like them. But in fact, it is simply that greeting someone you don't know is not an appropriate or comfortable thing to do.

It is now understandable why making friends is so hard: friendship supposedly is a matter between individuals requires a group as an agent. Friendship is the connection between two or more individuals. Before friendship can be formed, individuals must be first defined through a group. A group is formed when people come together because they share common goals or situations. People become friends because they study in the same class or they join the same society. Groups give the condition for making friends to be possible, otherwise approaching someone to make friend is extremely odd.

O camp itself has a very clear structure of groups, and students specifically join it to make friends. What is so special about O camp is the extreme glorification of groups, and members have strong sense of obligation to their residing groups. This strengthens the connections between the individuals. We will now look into details of O camp today and what it means to student taking part in it.

Forming a Clan

Clans in O camp are formed four months before the actual camp begins. A clan is formed by a clan leader. A clan can only be formed if the leader recruits enough students to be his members. Among the student circle, he will declare his

wish to form a clan. He first gains the support from his closest friends and they form the core members in his clan. Other members joined through a referral system; they are either clan leaders' friends or his closest friends' friends. The success of winning enough supports to form a clan depends on the leader's charisma and popularity.

Popularity is gained through the participation of student activities over the year. One usually becomes popular through holding an important position in a large event of student activities, as one would have the chance of knowing students from other departments. One also has to demonstrate the quality of being fun and playful in order to be liked by everyone. Among the students, there is this typical stereotype that hard-working students and fun playing students specialized in different areas of student life. While the formers are geeks who do very well in academics, the latter are specialists of fun and games. And indeed, clan leaders do have reputations of having low GPAs and swearing a lot. Thomas, the clan leader that I support is certainly one of them.

Before I know him personally, I've heard his name mentioned several times in my friends' conversation. He is well known for his extensive use of swear language and many students find his style very funny. In the dormitory we live in, he is a dominant member who brings up a lot of color to student life.

The members of his clan joined by his invitation or through referral of his friends. He tends to look for fun and playful people like him who are the specialist in bringing up atmosphere. One thing he has always stressed when asking for recommendations for clan members, "they should not be bothered by swear language." I am only an acquaintance of his when he invited me to join and I don't consider myself similar to his style. But he still asks me to join because of the special bonding we have after living together in the same dorm for a whole year.

After recruiting enough leaders, his clan is formally recognized by the OCs, and it is time to unite his members. Only a few members are closed friends of his. Among the members, they are either strangers to each other or friends with limited acquaintance. The challenge for Thomas is to help members to gain familiarity with each other and create solidarity in the clan.

The atmosphere of the clan, or how successful the clan is, greatly depends on the bonding between each member. In Chinese, a person you know very well of is called "cooked" (熟) and a person that you don't know well of is considered "raw" (生). It is always preferably to work with a "cooked" person rather than a "raw" person. With "cooked" people, they can crack jokes more often to achieve hilarious effects. For the benefit of the group, one is obliged to make friends with everyone. One should have an open heart to anyone in the clan and enjoy the entire socializing process. If someone shows no effort to socialize, he or she will be stigmatized or being talked of behind the back. After all, one of your main purposes in here is to make friends. There is this member of the clan who had not showed up in any gatherings intended to familiarize among themselves. After several times of absences, there were people talking about her not being properly socialized and she was on the edge of being expelled. Fortunately, she was informed by her friends about the situation and she started to make efforts to be friend with other group members. In O camp, one is committed to socialize with everyone, even those you find it hard to go along.

This kind of socialization is good training for interpersonal skills, as you need to learn how to communicate with different people. These are some of the skills that actually help us to survive in the world we are living in; where we are required to meet different faces every day. You cannot simply be a person of what you like; you have to negotiate in order to be friend with others. Goffman (1959) asserted that social interactions in everyday life is like carrying out performances, that we all have a "front stage" and a "backstage". This front stage is constructed by the "abstract stereotyped expectation" of others. What kind of person we choose to be is not totally under our control, as we are all playing a social role defined by the social environment. Friendship is the result of negotiation between individuals that should not be taken for granted.

However, it should not be mistaken that friendship in O camp is purely a social performance, for there could be genuine relationships formed. After all, if one never spends the effort to understand or negotiate, how could he/she know a stranger could turn out to be a life-long friend? Once a genuine social relationship is formed, the social role can be aligned with the inner self and one does not need to perform accordingly to the social environment. It is very common that some clan members become life-long friend after joining O camp. Yet it is hardly possible for everyone to forge intimate friendship in such a short time. No matter their relationship is intimate or stays in acquaintance, on the day of O camp, they are all dependent on the clan.

Ethnography on the four days and three nights' camp

O camp begins a week before the school starts. My role in O camp is a group leader, known as a group father by freshmen. On the morning of the camp, they arrive at the university train station where they are escorted by student leaders to their college. Gathered at the gymnasium, they find their residing clan and group, which are represented by the flags hanging on the walls. They are told to wear the colored T-shirt of the clan. While still waiting for other freshmen to arrive, group fathers and mothers teach them the beat (the cheer of the clan). When most freshmen have arrived, the opening ceremony starts with the singing of school hymn followed by the college dean's speech. But the real prologue of O camp begins with "dem beat" (demonstration of beat) of each clan. Wearing the colored T-shirts, they scream out lines in a coherent voice that follows a rhythm combined with clapping and thumping, and their body movements synchronize with the pounding beats. When all of these noises finally fall into silence, the clan leaders come out to introduce themselves and provoke new waves of shouting and cheering. After a moment of exhilaration, the freshmen are brought to their clan base to put down their bags.

At lunch, each group sits in a round table. Groups of the same clan cluster together in a region. The lunch only begins when every group is settled. While waiting, group fathers and mothers lead freshmen to play games. These games usually involve chanting of slogans accompanying with body gesture. When finally everyone is ready to eat, we perform a ritual to signal we are prepared to eat. As a small group we shout out together, "xxxx (group's name) is asking everyone to eat." (Inviting everyone on a table to eat is a way of showing hospitality, something they learn from Korean and Japanese TV dramas.) Upon eating, group fathers and mothers distribute drinks and rice to freshmen. Like a family dinner, dishes are shared among the table. Occasionally, group fathers and mothers pick up food for their children. The clan leader tours around the tables to interact with various groups. Sometime, the entire group shouts together to invite the clan leader to their table to share food with them. The clan leader signals for attention when food on every table is finished. Standing at the center of the clan, he starts off a cheer called "satisfied". Everyone joins in, clapping and thumping the table to generate thundering rhythm. Meanwhile, the clan next to us decides to join in. Together, we perform the cheer with magnificent sound of cohesion.

After lunch, our clan retires back to our base and there are more games awaiting freshmen to play. The games are played as units of small groups in which they contest against each other. They win and lose as a team. The group that comes last will be punished, requiring them to perform embarrassing behaviors in front of other groups. When a group wins, the members perform cheers to heighten their spirit. The whole afternoon is then spent in the noises of cheering and laughing.

The dinner ends quite quickly as we have to move on to the next activity. Gathering at the center of canteen, we begin the poetry battle, an event that requires each clan to chant poems to make fun of other clans. As mentioned previously, poetry battle originated from the unique structure of the college system. After years of modification, it is not only practiced between the constituent colleges, but also practiced between clans. Poetry Battle began with a good intention of academic purpose - students expressed their dreams through the collective chanting of poems. Not known since when, students have taken to using obscene and swear language in poetry battle. At first, the freshmen are not sure what is happening and simply follow what their group fathers and mothers are doing. Some freshmen don't seem to be comfortable with the game and hide behind the crowd. Yet some students get very excited with the game and scream on top of their voices. How do we explain students chanting obscene language in this particular activity? We will look at this question in the latter sections, where I will provide a more detailed description on Poetry Battle. In the current section, my aim is to give readers a general picture of O camp.

Following the poetry battle is an activity called Treasure Hunt. Led by group fathers and mothers, each group of freshmen go to various check points located at different places in the campus. For every completed check point, they will be given a score and the group that accumulates the highest score wins. Most of the check points are team building games that try to bond group members together. Some freshmen find it interesting running around the campus, yet some just hope it can be quickly ended. It is very tiring running around, not to mention the immense effort I have to go through to encourage my group sons and daughters to participate.

Treasure hunt ends at ten and the intense schedule doesn't stop here. After a short break of thirty minutes, we march to the central campus to fight in the water war. The purpose of this activity is purely to have fun. We are all given with a water pistol in which we can use it to shoot who ever we want. Perhaps limited by the space in Hong Kong, plus the immense academic pressure students are all growing up in, playing in open space with water pistols has never been part of our childhood memories. Once given the chance, they play as crazy as possible to unleash their once lost childhood.

The water war finishes at mid-night, and it is still not the time yet to sleep. Group leaders try to encourage freshmen

to stay up late, as it is generally believed that you should exhaust yourself with fun to have a fulfilling O camp. Group fathers or mothers who sleep early themselves are said to be 'tui' (頹) - a slang to describe someone who is sloppy), and not being responsible. Our group gathers in a room to discuss a plan for next day's visit to an elderly center. This kind of mid-night gathering is quite important in O camp as it provides an opportunity for group members to understand more on each other.

On the next morning, waking at nine, our group sets off to the elderly center located at Mong Kok. Doing voluntary service is probably the only part of O camp that has not been changed over the years. The spirit of caring the community seems to have passed down from year to year. But to speak frankly, how many O campers really enjoy doing community services when they are only here to have fun? Perhaps it still exists because of the respect we give to the tradition. We sing songs and play games with the senior citizens till lunch.

It is an unspoken rule that we have Yum Cha (飲茶) in O camp. Our predecessors had done it and it will seem odd if we don't follow. Yum Cha does have its implication in O camp. Yum Cha is a standard family activity in weekend. Every Sunday, the front doors of many Chinese restaurants are crowded with families who are waiting for their turn to sit in a table and enjoy tea and "dim sums".. Hence, Yum Cha itself has the meaning of being a family and a way of reaffirming the idea that the group is a family.

After lunch, we proceed to the evening activity called City Hunt. Our objective is to complete all the checkpoints located at various areas of the city and return back to CU campus as soon as possible. We run around on the streets and alleys of shopping malls. The O camp T-shirt that we are wearing makes us really stand out in the crowd. Such contrast visualizes our group identity and creates a feeling that we are all dependent on each other as a group. I can feel the shocking eyes of pedestrians looking at us. Yet we don't seem to care, and their gazes only make us feel more excited. After a whole day of running, in exhaustion, we returned for dinner. Then it is a session for obscene poetry battle. A bit different to yesterday, more freshmen participated this time as they become familiarized with their own groups after spending two days with them, and feel connected to the clan.

At night our group gathers up in a room to chat. This is a time called "night talk" (夜話) when we sit together on a bed to open our hearts and talk about personal side of our life such as romance history. At first, it may seem a bit awkward to tell your privacy to someone you have only met for two days. But consider the idea of family that the group has been trying to foster, it somehow justifies that between group members there should be limited privacy. It is always believed that by sharing something about yourself, you can get closer together with the people. When young people talk about romance, the conversation never seems to end. It is already 3am in the morning when we go to sleep.

The third day is supposed to be the most important part of the O camp because the poetry battle between colleges, known as "four college battle" is what everyone anticipates. Unfortunately, a typhoon arrives on the day and all activities are suspended. In the following section, I provide a description of how day three and day four of O camp is like based on my participation in the previous year.

On the third day morning, all the students of our college gather at the gymnasium. Like watching propaganda of nationalism, we sit behind a large screen watching student life footage, while the six clan leaders occasionally add some comments to praise on New Asia College or words to enumerate the bad things about other colleges. Then the clan leaders give a briefing on the "Four College Battle", telling us the dos and don'ts.

When the talk ends, we set off to central campus where "Four College Battle" will take place. Like a legion of army, we march down the main road. At front, clan leaders are holding flags. Leading at front is a large black flag featuring the name of the college written in Chinese Characters. When we arrive at the site, we are arranged into a square formation. Group leaders stand in front of the freshmen facing other colleges. The six clan leaders of our college stand on a stage so that they can be seen by everyone. Students from another college are coming too. From a distance, they are like a wave of yellow pushing towards us. Such scene reminds me of watching ancient battle fields depicted in epic films. While we are waiting, the group fathers and mothers are distributing poem papers to the freshmen. They are warned not to let the any reporters on site have it and asked to hang them back to the student leaders once the activity finishes. After the scandal reported on news papers in 2002, news press have been paying increasing attention since then. The university authority has become extremely cautious, and students are required to submit poem to them for inspection days before the event.

When students from the four colleges are ready, the drum signals the start of "Four College Battle." A person standing at the center of the crowd holds up a sign and indicates our turn to chant our poem. With a very loud voice, the clan leaders shout out the first line of a poem and we follow after they finished. When we finish our poem, it is another college's turn

to chant their poems. The event lasts for half an hour. Before it ends, all students chant the poem that praises Chinese University.

The whole afternoon is designed for freshmen to find out more about the campus. First it is a lecture organized by University Student Council. Then, there is a session for them to find out about student societies in Chinese University at the main campus.

At night, a mini concert is held at the gymnasium. Celebrities and students are invited to perform. The atmosphere is filled with shouting and exhilaration. When the clan leaders are invited onto the stage, their clan members scream like crazy and rush to the stage. By the time the concert ends, everyone is still in a state of emotionally highness and dancing in circles.

Extending the exhilaration is the time to have late supper at the night time stall in Fo Tan (食宵). To the Chinese University students, this kind of late dinner has specific meanings. As reflected by many students, food there is not actually that great. But it is a place where students go quite often in occasions of celebration and reunion. Students attend a late night dinner after a successful production of an event; old friends who were once in the same society come here to have reunions. The late night dinner is happy memories shared by group members, which reminds students of their group identities in university life.

The stall itself is a small shop but it expands its space outwards occupying the entire pavement. Some tables are even arranged on streets. This is why the stall only starts its business at night.

Our clan cluster in a region and each group sits in a round table. The food is served very quickly. However, the essence of the late night dinner is not to eat but to drink. Holding a bottle of beer of our own, we start a series of toasting. We first raise a bottle for our group. Then we toast with the groups next to us. Together as a group, we shout out, "gum yu lo (our group's name) toast with gum mo fai (other group's name)! (金魚佬同金毛飛飲杯!)" In response, they return the line to us with a coherent voice. All together, we shout out "cheers" (飲杯) The clan leaders stroll between groups and toast them one by one. After toasting with every group, he stands on a stool and toast with every member of his clan.

Then we start to form different combination of toasting. Students belonging to the same society come together and toast. Old friends toast with each other. O camp predecessors come back to toast with their group children of previous year whom are now group fathers and mothers today. By the time we finish all the combination of toasting we can think of, most of us are pretty much wasted.

O camp comes to the last day. We are all very tired after the drinking from last night. Still, the schedule is there for us to follow. Waking up at ten and after a very quick breakfast, we move on to photo shooting. We pose for group pictures at iconic places in New Asia College such as The Statue of Confucius statue and New Asia Concourse. We try to make our pictures look fancy by unifying our postures or posing in a patterned way. The most common way that people pose is the iconic V made by the middle and second fingers, which is something Hong Kong people do whenever they are taking pictures. The V conveys the meaning of "yeah," showing audiences that people in the picture are happy and satisfied.

The last scheduled event is the closing ceremony. Sitting on the stage, the clan leaders express their feelings through the microphone, saying how their efforts over the past few months have paid off in the camp with the help of the people involved. Starting with a group of strangers, they have created a group of closely connected people in such a short time. Their words are genuine and sentimental. To all the people taking part, O camp means fun, friendship, commitment, sense of belonging to the college, personal growth and achievement.

The nature of O camp today

O camp today has undergone a great transformation. Social obligation and tertiary education are no longer topics of discussion in O camp. Students have become very apolitical in the recent years. Since the 80s, under the flourish of capitalism, Hong Kong is an "identity of lifestyle, a shared recognition of similar self images, real or desired, of existential choices, from food to educations" (Mathews 2003: 35). The reluctance to talk about politics today is greatly due to the helplessness in the dilemma of their political situation, in which a national identity that they are not ready to accept was imposed on them. Left with no choice, they can only pursue an identity of themselves in the world of consumerism.

Such desperation for identity is projected in O camp today. Identities are created on various levels. On the lowest, it is

the identity of a small group, which is an attachment to a larger group called the clan. The clan is then a subset of a larger group called the college. Then the colleges together constitute the university. This structure of O camp allows students to play around with their identities and develop sense of belongings in a short period of time.

But this sentiment does not come by itself and is something that needs to be taught. It all begins with the relationships between freshmen and student leaders. Group leaders are known as group fathers and mothers, this naturally suggests that they are a family, and the members all have their obligations. The group fathers and mothers have to take care of their group children, buying drinks for them, keeping them happy and entertained, in spite that they have only met their “sons” and “daughters” for the first time. In return, group children should feel obliged to listen to the orders of their group parents. This concept of being a group or a family is continually being reminded through the activities they participated in O camp such as the games they played and the way they socialize together.

The education of belonging to a clan starts with the socializing of the group leaders long before O camp begins. As revealed previously in my ethnographic data, individuals suffer from group pressure if they fail to conform to the group. Poetry battle serves as a very strong force in shaping group identity because of the concept of group can be visualized through the collective movements and cohesion of voices. The contrast with others also manifests the identity of self. Group fathers and mothers encourage freshmen to participate in these activities, teaching them how to belong to a clan.

The flags and camp T-shirts serve as powerful symbols for a group. Every camper is given two camp T-shirts, one represents the clan and one represents the college. Group members customize clan T-shirts, such as attaching adornments, to distinguish themselves from other groups in the clan. Similarly, while there is a clan flag, each small group has a flag of their own.

To the group leaders, they aim to create a unified group. They frequently organize gatherings hoping to hold the bonding in the group. Between leaders of different groups, they take pride in keeping a group longer than other groups. To the clan leader, his aim is to create a lasting clan, that his members will always have the sense of belonging to the clan. The clan has a significant meaning to him. Started with nothing, he created an identity that is shared by a hundred of people. And for those who had been through the entire process with him, this friendship that was forged by fun and painstaking experiences is unique and rare, especially in a segregated world of communication today.

The nature of O camp is to create group attachment that allows students to derive friendship and sense of belonging to this college. This process of attachment is created through a series of activities in O camp as described previously. Above all, the activity that is most powerful in creating a group identity is the poetry battle.

The Obscene poetry battle

In O camp, poetry battle is one of the major events anticipated by most students. The poetry battle is called four-seven because the structure of the poems mimics the structure of a type of traditional Chinese poetry, which consists of four lines, with seven words in each line. Chinese poems follow a set of rules for tones and rhymes. But in the case of four-seven, only the last word of each sentence has to be rhymed. To attack another group with poems is called *pin* (片). Pointed out by Bolton and Hutton (1997: 300), many of the Cantonese slangs slipped out from triad language through media. The phrase *hoi pin* (開片) has the meaning of mass scale battle between triads. Preserving its originally connotations, *pin* now refers to the act of attacking a group with poems.

The essence of Chinese poetry comes from the richness of metaphors, the conciseness in the use of language and the rhythms and the rhymes in its structure. With only a few words, a poet can tell a story and express emotions through scenery descriptions in a way that is highly rhythmical and picturesque. The four-seven poetry inherits the audio features of Chinese poetry, which explains why four seven poems are ideal for chanting. In addition to audio effect, movements are sometime added to accompany with the words. Combining with contemporary Cantonese language, four-seven poetry gives a lot of possibilities for playing around with words.

Poetry battle is a game of showing off group unity. What is most important is the coherence of a group in terms of voice and movements, and this all depends on the trust and tacit coordination between the clan leader and his clan members. In a poetry battle, clan leaders stand in front of their groups. They immediately become the center of attention. Like standing on a stage, their every movement is being watched by the crowd. At that moment, they are the projections and reputations of their clans. The clan leader directs and manipulates the clan’s sentiment while his members back him

up. Between them is a mutually dependent relationship.

Poetry battles range in different scales from 500 students to 10 students in a team. The scale of involvement is proportional to administrators' concern. The spectacular scene of 2000 students chanting has always drawn reporters' attention. Any slip of words will make the university becoming headlines of newspapers in the next morning, and administrators perceive it as a very serious threat to university's reputation. Since the university was embroiled in obscene slogan scandal in 2002, administrators have become very cautious about the handling of Four College Battle. Poems have to be inspected before they can be chanted in the event. Ever since then, obscene language has greatly been minimized.

However, on a smaller scale, with a total of only 500 students taking part, administrators do not seek any control, since it is not of reporters' concern. In this case, obscene language is unleashed in every word of poems. Why do students today enjoy using obscene language in a poetry battle? We shall first look at an account of an obscene poetry battle.

The poetry battle begins after the dinner at the New Asia Canteen. Students are getting excited as they gather at the center of the canteen. We are all standing on a chair and holding a poem list that is distributed by group fathers and mothers. Each poem is numbered. A circular space in the middle is reserved for the clan leaders to stand. As the leaders are getting ready, sounds of banging and shouting are rising even more.

The clan leaders rise up a hand and signals silence. Then the room is completely quiet. Our clan leader Thomas shouts out *gum gong pang*, (金剛棒, name of our clan) and we all respond with a roar. With a loud deep voice, Thomas starts off the first line of our poem and attacks our adjacent clan. He shouts out a line and we repeat in unison. He shouts the second line and we follow again. The poem is delivered in this pattern of chanting until the four lines of the poem are complete. It teases the clan leader Jeffery as a man without a penis because she always appears herself as a tomboy. Yet she is very cool with that and doesn't seem to give a damn. After finishing the lines, along with the clan leader, we all shout out "no cock" repeatedly. At the same time, Jeffery's clan defend themselves by screaming "bull shit" at us. All in a sudden, the voices of the two clans clash together, each competing for volume trying to overwhelm the other. After two or three times of repetition, both clans fall into silence. This marks out the finish of our turn and the next clan chants their poem. Every clan has their chances of chanting.

A few more rounds unfold. The contents in the poems fall into the following categories:

- 1) Teasing on one's private life such as his love affair
- 2) Teasing on one's physical features, such as hair style or height.
- 3) Simply speaking of nonsense such as accusation of immoral behaviors, contents that are totally irrelevant to fact.
- 4) Praising of own clan.

The following is an example of type 1):

The clan leaders are usually the victims in a poetry battle and they have to prepare themselves for privacy being exposed in public. One of the poems reveals a clan leader's secret of his unrequited love. The poem has won a lot of applause for its good rhymes and rhythm. The literal meaning of the lines is translated as follow, though original structure and connotation cannot be preserved.

玲玲玲玲有野問 Lin Lin, Lin Lin, I have something to ask.
 問下文深桃花運 Asking about Sum's blossom fate
 Food sci講錢搵你笨 Food Sci is only fooling on you
 成世冇女唔洗恨 Never will you have a girl.

In the first line, Lin Lin is implicitly referring to the girl he loves. Blossom fate in Chinese is synonymous to fate of love. "Food sci" is the short form for food science, which is the major that the girl is studying. It is put in short form to fit in the structure of the poem. (Unlike English, a word in Chinese is represented by a character and only has one sound. Restricted by the structure of the poem, the English word science is condensed to one sound. Cantonese in Hong Kong has the characteristic of mixing English words, condensing them into a simpler form in the process.)

It seems that the poem hits his weakness. The crowds burst into laughter. The clan leader, faced by the overwhelming pressure from the crowd, could only smile in embarrassment. Seeing this sigh, his clan members start to shout out words of support, and very quickly, he is back to his coolness again.

This is a type of poem that aims to embarrass the clan leader. There are other types of poems where the emphasis is

on the play of words and content is less of an issue.

To understand how this word game works, we first have to look at how Hong Kong Cantonese language is played in everyday life. In a paper written by Hugh D.R. Baker (1991), he discussed the wide possibilities of wordplay in Cantonese language. He showed that because of the homophonous nature of Cantonese language, puns have a wide usage in Hong Kong culture. According to his quotation from an Oxford English Dictionary, a pun is “the use of a word in such a way as to suggest two or more meanings, or the use of two or more words of the same sound with different meanings so as to produce a humorous effect; a play on words.” But he then added, puns are not limited to words as an unit, a whole sentence can also be a pun. In the university, I have observed the wide usages of pun among students in their everyday lives. “words eating” (食字) is the slang we use for punning. The names of student societies often use puns to play around with words; in conversations we use puns to joke around; the words used in student activities are puns. For example, at the beginning of academic year, freshmen receive a red packet, it contains one dollar and thirty cents *gor sam* (個三), in Cantonese this puns with the term *gua sam* (過三) meaning over three, a slang that is widely used to refer GPA going over three. The term “word eating” (食字) itself can be punned too, as in ‘食治’, with the totally same pronunciation but with the meaning of eating sandwich. Since English language has its influence in Cantonese, there are much more possibilities with punning. Sometimes English words are used in language, with their pronunciations simplified and slightly altered to form a distinctive Chin-glish that can be used in punning. Engineering students are called *gin ren* (gin人), where gin is short for engineering. But in Cantonese, *gin* (賤) is also a very negative term to describe people. Hence, the fun of punning is what seemingly is a rude actually means something else.

A more complicated form of punning is the *kit hauh yuh* (歇後語). According to Baker (1991:42), a *kit hauh yuh* has three parts: “1. a head word or head phrase, 2. a link-word or link-phrase which comments on or paraphrases head, 3. a tail-word or tail phrase which puns on the sound of the link.” Using an example from Baker, African monk (*fei-jau woh seung* 非洲和尚) gives clue to a black monk (*hak-yan jang* 黑人僧) and *jang* is a more common way of saying monk. The words *hak-yan jang* then puns with *hat yan jang* (乞人憎) which means someone is awful. The tail words/phrase is never spoken but the meaning is understood by the listeners. Thus, the essence of punning and word game is making use of the cultural knowledge we commonly share and reinforcing it.

Also realized by Baker as he gave more examples, punning and *kit hauh yuh* often contain sexual implication. Some sociolinguistic scholars such as Botton and Hulton (1997) commented that Cantonese language can sometimes be naughty but nice. The fun of word is challenging the moral boundary that separates what is acceptable and unacceptable.

With the understanding of word play in Cantonese, we can then move on to their usages in obscene poems. The structure of poem requires the last word to rhyme, and since Cantonese language is homophonous by nature, they fit perfectly into the four-seven poetry structure. Here is an example of a poem that has an excellent use of puns and *kit hauh yuh*, though the content itself is quite erotic:

小李飛刀蓄氣版 Stored Xi version of Lee's flying dagger
 仲有咩版俾我揀 What other version can I choose?
 係咪小米洗衫板 Is it “Siu Mai” washing board?
 十蚊三塊任你玩洗衫板乘三 10 dollars for three and play as you like

Flying dagger is the name of the clan being teased. Every clan has their own “beat.”(a cheers for their group) Previously, the clan leader claimed that their “beat” has stored Xi version (Xi means more energy). Therefore, the clan performing the poem jokes with their “beat,” you have stored Xi version, what else do you have? Is it Siu Mai’s washing board? Siu Mai refers to the girl friend of the clan leader. The word “version” (*ban* 版) puns with the word board (*ban* 板). So although they sound the same, the meanings have jumped when the poem proceeds to line three. What is more, washing board is a *kit hauh yuh*, implying the flatness of women’s chest. And last line, despite the fact the words literally mean washing board, according to the context in line three, it has a totally new meaning.

What adds more to the possibilities of word game is the incorporation of different elements of Chinese language into it. Like a melting pot, it includes slang language, language of subcultures, swear language, pornographic language and classic poetry language. These elements, some contradicting to each other, are fitted into the rhymes and rhythms of the four-seven poetry structure as we shall see in the following example:

清明時節雨紛紛 It is raining at the Tsing Ming festival
 林立脫下護士裙 Lam takes off his nursing dress
 孔子像前打真軍 Making love in front of the Confucius Statue

誰知切下子孫根 But got his descendent root cut off

The poem is plays around with words and tradition and is meaningless by content. The first line is a direct quote from a Chinese classical poem. The word Lam in second line refers to the clan leader. He is described as a nurse taking off his dress. The intention of the second line is to rhyme the last word in such a way that it also accuses him of homosexuality. Besides, nurse wearing dress has its reference to pornographic video. The third line, the term “making love” is a Cantonese slang that refers actors and actress having sexual intercourse in filming instead of acting. Confucius statue is an icon which symbolizes the deep Chinese background of New Asia College. The whole scene depicted in third line is a ridicule of tradition. The Chinese words for descendents in last line are more commonly seen in old text rather than used in spoken language. The poem as a whole tries to mimic the style of Chinese poetry, yet it plays around with erotic words to achieve a hilarious effect.

The “poetry battle” comes to the end when every clan has several rounds of shouting of their poems. Towards the end, together we chant the New Asia College Poem. Like an anthem, it unites everyone in New Asia College and is performed after a poetry battle. This is how the poem goes:

入新亞中大四院我稱霸 Come to New Asia, for I am the greatest of four colleges
 望一下崇基逸夫在腳下 Look around, Shaw and Chung Chih are under my feet
 無有怕聯合折埋過當新亞 Fear not, United folds up and join New Asia
 氣吞天下稱王又稱霸 Powerful enough to swallow the world, I am the King
 稱王又稱霸 I am the King
 新亞新亞 New Asia New Asia

Analysis

From this section, we can see how this feeling of group attachment is being reinforced through poetry battle. The abstract concept of identity is consolidated with different ways of group glorification. The uniform and the unison of voice and actions subdue one’s individuality as he cannot distinguish himself from others. The uniformed color of a clan visualizes the clan through the contrasts with others, marking out the clear distinction between the insiders and the outsiders. In a hostile situation, one forms a dependent feeling to the group and feels the strength of the group, making him to feel proud to be part of the group. Being the only people standing out in the crowds, the clan leaders are the icons of their clans. Their pride and humiliation are shared among their members, which puts them in a mutually dependent relationship. The clan leaders are seemingly being worshipped but in fact the clans are actually worshipping themselves.

In his analysis of the system of totem, Durkheim saw the dependence of individuals upon societies which can be reflected in religion (Cuff and Sharrock; Francis 2005: 58). According to him, religion separates the two forms of life - the sacred and the profane. On the one hand, the profane of life is the ordinary and routine way of life; on the other is the way of life that is highly ritualized and requires special treatment. Among the Australian aboriginal people, there are ritualized occasions in which the totem being worshipped collectively put individuals into emotionally high states. Durkheim realized that what is being worshipped is not important as what matters is the symbolic meaning of the worshipped object. This relationship with the object is what generates solidarity in the community. Through the collective involvement in the rituals, the feelings for totem is renewed and strengthened. The sense of commonality is intensified through the same exceptional experience. Durkheim’s analysis on solidarity very much applies to the situation in poetry battle, considering that the clan leaders are just substitution of totems and chanting of obscenities is a type of ritual.

In the construction of a group, insider and outsider are defined and hostility is always a component to solidarity. The “poetry battle” helps to construct solidarity by putting them into a situation in which they are exposed to outsider. But the purpose of poetry battle is to create unity. This conflicting relationship is solved through the joking relationship suggested by Radcliffe-Brown (1952:92). The clans express their hostility through teasing each other but don’t take them literally as expression of closeness. Towards the end of the event, the shouting of the New Asia Poem stresses their unity as a college. As well as creating identity, “poetry battle” serves as an important function of creating harmony between groups.

One of the main controversies is the using of obscene language of students. While some feel excited about the language, many feel that they are inappropriate deep in heart. Nevertheless, majority of students chant obscenities in the poetry battle. Most students who are not obscene language users followed because of the group glorification nature of poetry battle. Since they were in a situation of defending their groups, they felt obliged to participate with the leaders shouting obscenities and this sense of patriotism subdues individual principle. One will feel extremely alienated if he

does not participate, given that the group has overwhelming power over individuals at the time, plus it is part of Chinese cultural character to feel uncomfortable being left out from group.

Another issue is why students created obscene poetry battle. Cantonese is a language that allows many possibilities of wordplay and this nature aligns with the joking nature of poetry battle. As discussed previously, Cantonese wordplay has a lot of connection with sex, thus it can be understandable that there is tendency to use sexual contents in poems. But what is astonishing is the explicit and erotic description of sex. The language they use has diverged away from the spirit of word play, which is to keep the sexual content implicit and not to express it directly. How can we explain why some students have to use obscene language publicly?

Language, Media and Culture

The obscene poetry battle features contents of pornography, including extreme erotic descriptions of sexual behaviors and violence, and words that objectify women as a means for sexual desires. I agree with some scholars commented in the newspaper that the popular cultures today are indeed full of sexual content (Apple Daily 2002).

Attitudes towards sexuality have changed radically over the decades, which is a revolution made possible by the spread of cultural capitalism and the rapid development of technology in media (McNair 2002: 9). With the advancement in media technology, a new form of sources of profits has emerged. TV programs are not paid directly but through advertising cost passed on to consumers when they purchase commodities. The success of this form of consumption is depended on the numbers of people who watch, read or listen to the commercials or advertisements. Hence, the focus of media based consumption is on the ability of visual content to grab audience's attention. As it turns out, in the competitive world of consumerism, advertisements and commercials contest for exposure of sexual contents. American researchers have long realized these contents on film trailers, music videos, advertisement and commercials are continually pushing the boundaries of obscenity and morality (Reichert and Lambiase 2006: 3). The introduction of new communication technologies also allows information to flow freely around the globe. However, this global media network is dominated by large corporations allowing them to broadcast formulaic movies and TV shows, disseminating a set of cultural values and shaping cultural realities around the globe (Steger 2003: 71). Among these cultural values is a set of constructed perceptions on sex. Moreover, the proliferation of internet and global media network has led to accelerating flows of sexual information within and between national boundaries, leading to the growth of a less regulated and more commercialized sexual culture in media (McNair 2009: 11). Societies which are connected to this global network are able to quickly adopt these new ideas of sex.

In the local context, sexual content can be seen in many forms of media. Hollywood movies are popular among local audiences. In major newspapers, one or two pages of pornography are included. Fashion magazine covers feature attractive models wearing swim suits. Covers of gossip magazines are consisted of candid photographs of celebrities accompanied by large headings implying sex. The internet technology has enhanced to a stage that latest movies can be downloaded for free and pornographic videos are easily accessed. It is just simply impossible to avoid any sexual content in the culture.

The sexual culture today is something that has never been encountered in previous generations. The criticism on morality leveled at the students embeds underlying concerns that traditional family values could have been destroyed. Sexual culture encourages individual pursuit of desire as opposed to the traditional family values seeing sex as a form of commitment. Whether the concerns are true or not, it cannot be judged on the basis of the obscene language they use.

The obscene language used by the students does reflect to a certain degree that sexual culture has influenced our language, but to what extent have sexual contents on media penetrate into our culture? The following section is a brief discussion on the connection between media and culture and the effect of sexual content on student's morality.

Since the advent of television, television has become a standard fixture in many families, and watching television is a common practice in everyday life. Kottak (1994) had observed a cultural habit that was developed by watching TV. He suggested that the generation growing up with TVs is so accustomed to noise that silence seems unnatural. That was the time before internet proliferated. In this era of online communication, using the internet is something we have taken to. The convenience brought by the revolution of the communication technology has made our life more and more connected to the media and developed the habit of being exposed to the abundance of unnecessary information that has great potential of manipulating our cultural beliefs. But to what extent do the media have influence on us?

Research has shown that media have powerful effects of changing people. One major impact is on the idea of socialization (Dennis 1991: 568). Modeling theory and social expectation theory show how the portrayals in media content influence the process of socialization. Modeling theory suggests that individuals acquire behaviors from media portrayals mainly on films and TVs. An individual learns new kind of actions from the model that he/she identifies as successful. The individual will reproduce the action when he/she encounters a situation that had not been met before and requires a guide for behavior. If the imitated behavior proves to be rewarding, it is very likely for the individual to adopt the behavior. The expectation theory suggests that we learn a set of social rules, norms and roles from media that tell us what to do in a particular kind of social setting before we even have to get into the situation. Modeling theory and Socialization theory suggest that behaviors can be learned from individuals or social situations on screen respectively.

Another impact of media is our perception of reality. As Dennis (1991: 573) said, "The meaning theory of the effects of mass communication sees the meanings people hold as strongly influenced by their exposure to mass communications. Those meanings, in turn, shape people's understandings of, and actions in, situations with which they must cope in the real world."

Previously, we mentioned about the sexual contents that are permeating in our culture. According to the meaning theory, students' attitude to sex should have been manipulated accordingly to their openness about sex. And by the modeling theory and the socialization theory, sex should be a norm that has been adopted by students. But this is certainly not the case among students in Hong Kong.

Theories do not seem to be always correct. At different time, research had different conclusion to how media affect audiences (Dennis 1991: 555). Early research conducted in America associated violent behaviors of children with prolonged exposure to mass media, concluding that mass media produced direct, immediate and powerful influences on all audiences. As research accumulated, and as experiments, survey, content analyses, and observational studies grew increasingly sophisticated, it became apparent that media had very selective influences on people. Some research even suggested that mass communications only have limited influence in overall sense, as they only influence a small number of children who have aggressive behaviors, which is not significant comparing to the entire population.

A local scholar Zhu Shunci (2003), pointed out research on sex and violence in media conducted in Hong Kong are limited to quantitative approach and contain significant amount of bias of researchers. After reviewing research concerning media's effect on behavior conducted by scholar around the world from past to present, he concluded that the effect of media on people vary from individual to individual, time to time and place to place. To be more precise, he meant when considering the effect of sexual or violence content in media, we should consider all the cultural and social context and variables.

Media's influence on audience is not a direct relationship. For example, a five years old child and a university student watching the same violent scene, and a conservative and a liberalist watching the same sexual scene will respond in different ways. With so many factors affecting individual's perception to media's content, there is no one theory that can fully enclose all the variables and generalize a relationship between media and audiences. Theories can only reveal part of the truth and be applied in certain conditions.

Ethnographic analysis on Influence of sexual content on media

To understand the influence of media on university students, a qualitative approach is required to consider in context and attributes involved. The language in the obscene poems reveals the kind of pornographic content that students are exposed to. What does sex mean to them?

With the easy access to the internet, nearly every boy has downloaded pornography movie before. Although it is not something to be proud of, it is neither something to be ashamed of. In my dormitory, I have seen boys sharing adult videos and heard talking about it. The way they talk about pornography is like as if it is something as natural as food - something that every boy has to admit they need. This is the reason why they are quite familiar with those pornographic words or phrases.

Despite that all boys subtly admit that they watch pornography, majority of students don't talk about it. The ones who talk about it tends to be the ones with "bad boy" reputation and tend to use swear language quite often. Swearing to them seems to be a language by itself, if you take away the literal meaning of the words. It is the language they use for greet and talking among themselves. The situation is like a Middle East Muslim meeting a Chinese Muslim and greeting each other with Arabic. It seems that a kind of closeness is immediately expressed when two people use swear language to communicate with each other. Swear language serves as a way of categorization to distinguish its users from others.

Bolton and Hutton (1997) had noticed this phenomenon in their research on Cantonese swear language. They found out that secondary students with little hopes in society use swear language to show their admittance to triad membership. In university, students use swear language to mark out from nerdy students but the fundamental principle is the same.

Obscene language is similar to swear language in a sense that they are both taboo language, serving the same functions and used in the same context. Obscenity is something they use to joke around. There was a time when I was with a group of friends when a friend of ours came back to his room with his girl friend. Once the door was closed, one of us made a remark on how they will have sex and everyone just laughed out loud. Like trash talking, obscene conversations have no meanings in themselves. It's the echoing of common experience (of watching) that counts. No matter it is sharing of dirty joke or pornography video, obscenity expresses closeness in the relationship among its users. And indeed, these people call each other as brothers (兄弟) and see a lot of meanings in friendship. Despite of how much obscenity they talk or how much pornography they watch or the stimulus to sex present in the culture, most of these students do not have sex.

Sex constraints in cultural and social context

Why are students not having sex while it is practiced by their counterparts around the world? There seems to be a lot of barriers to overcome on the way to having sex.

In a cultural context, we can look at what kind of values they hold. Chinese University is one of the most difficult universities to enter with its high academic threshold. The ones who are able to pass the threshold many come from elite secondary schools. Many of these schools are organized by Churches and follow strict moral code of conduct. It is quite common for students in these schools to follow a set of religious beliefs. Besides, students who are able to enter elite schools come from middle class in which they also have faiths in religion (mostly Christians). Many religions do not agree with premarital sex because it is a commitment between couples.

Another cultural perspective is the strong believe in family values and attachment of individual to a family. In Chinese culture, sex is not a means for satisfying desire, but is a commitment to a man's parental family that should only be practiced after marriage. Virginity is expected at marriage as it symbolizes the complete possession of woman by a man. Owing to the conservative attitude to premarital sex, contraception methods are not readily available and popular when comparing to America. For example, condom vending machines are nowhere to be seen, reflecting the society still has little tolerance on premarital sex. Besides, abortion is also not being accepted as many doctors believe in Christians. Across the border, abortion in Shanzhen is very convenient but one needs to bear a high risk of health. With no contingency option for pregnancy, sex is not casual.

Pursuit of individual desire is not encouraged as students hold strong commitments to their family. Children's education from kindergarten to university is an investment in which they expected to be returned when their students are mature. Studying in university is a stage of transition to adulthood and a preparation for shouldering family responsibility. This in part explains why despite the immense workload, students still have to do part time to be less financially independent on the family. Once in work, a large proportion of income is expected to be donated to the parents. Because of this "destined debt", one has to work for the family, and looking for sexual desire is not a priority in life.

In an economic perspective, in the economy that is dominated by real estate, students live with their families due to the high rental cost. In many places, such as in Japan and Taiwan, students can find an own place to live once they study in university. The only chance to live away from family is to live in dormitory. However, on campus, authority exerts a lot of controls over students' sexual behaviors. Although sex is not explicitly forbade, university has strict rules on male and female students staying in the same room. Couples caught sleeping together will lead to sever consequence. Given the high reward of going to university, it is not rational to risk into trouble by having sex.

In contrasts to America, students have no constraints to explore their sexual desires. This was described by Michael Moffat (1989) in his book *Coming of Age in New Jersey: College and American Culture*. Unlike Hong Kong, sex is not uncommon among students. In fact, sex is a crucial part of student life and personal growth. Very different to Hong Kong, the moral constraints on sex is very limited. Sex is about a pursuit of individual desire which is totally fine in a place where individuality is highly valued. Social institutions such as family or school do not seek control over students' sexuality. Individuals do not shoulder commitments to family in which one can freely choose their priorities of life. Such freedom of individuals marks out the difference from their Hong Kong counterparts.

Because of the commitment to family, moral constraints from school and family, combining with economic factor and

overall conservative cultural environment, university students in Hong Kong do not have much chance to explore into sex.

Conclusion: Obscene Slogan Scandal

Sprouted out of a scholarly tradition and transformed through the time, the obscene poetry battle is a reflection on the shifting nature of O camp today. Partly began with the intention of expressing students' visions of contributing to the society, poetry battle now embraces elements of popular culture and loses colors of intellectual features. Students now construct other meanings and identities through O camp. This was due to Hong Kong's helpless situation in its political future that pushes young people to pursue identities in the world of consumerism. Without the original meanings of O camp, it is now an empty rite of passage with the main purposes of constructing identities and glorifying groups.

With the changing of the society that is perpetuated by globalization, media technology and forces driven by the market, sex is liberalized in the consumer culture. Hence, it is not surprising to realize that attitudes towards sex have changed over the years. Yet this does not mean students today are having sex more often than students in the past, since the constraints on sex still exist. The result is an immense psychological pressure of sexual desire building up.

The term "rituals of rebellion" was first introduced by Max Gluckman (1963) in his research on East African societies. He observed the annual obscene rituals performed by women in Zulu and concluded that instituted protests, which are ostensibly against the established order, have the effect of releasing psychological pressure and finally reaffirming order. This kind of rebellion is not aiming to cause disturbance to the system but simply to express social tension. Similarly, students shouting obscene slogan in a ritualized way is an expression of sexuality that relieves the psychological pressure of sex which is building up on them. Once a year, this is the only time they publicly express their sexuality and do it in a way that is confined within the boundary of moral constraints. Without a channel of redirecting pressure, the pressure can potentially burst out and result in undesirable outcomes.

Students do not hate the college or attempt to tip over the rules set by the authorities. In fact, they develop a sense of belonging through activities they do in O camp. The colleges and the university need students to affiliate freshmen into the institution. University administrators and students are in a mutually dependent relationship. They share common interests and common disagreements. While administrators certainly do not want students chanting obscene language in poetry battle, students feel no excitement without obscenities. O camp is a balanced system negotiated between students and authority, balancing suppressing and suppressed group to achieve unity. The administrators give students freedom in O camp, subtly agreeing with usage of obscene language, as long as they do not cause any trouble to the college or university. Then there was the obscene slogan scandal that went on press in 2002. Students should not be caught using obscene language by press. The system renegotiated itself by authorities' actions of setting rules on language being used in "four college battle" and continual freedom of students in O camp. After all, obscene language in O camp is not a question of morality but a way of rebellion that is controlled and negotiated. The obscene slogan scandal is a case of rebellion running out of control and therefore has to be renegotiated to rebalance the interests of suppressed and suppressing groups.

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