ABSTRACTS

Stevi Jackson, “Conceptualizing heterosexuality while contesting western theoretical hegemony: insights from research on East Asia”
Western theorists have drawn attention to the need to consider how institutionalized heterosexuality regulates the lives of heterosexual as well as LBGT individuals. While this approach had led to advances in the critical study of heterosexuality, it has remained parochially focused on ‘western’ societies and has rarely taken account of how heterosexuality is differently institutionalized or heteronormativity differentially manifested elsewhere in the world. There is now a wealth of well theorized research on diverse sexualities in East Asia that might be drawn upon to begin to develop a critical analysis that recognizes the ways in which heterosexuality is ordered by differing local political, socio-economic and cultural contexts. This paper presents a possible starting point such an analysis. Drawing on previous work (Jackson 2006) I will argue for the necessity of locating heterosexuality within the social and recognizing the complex intersections between different dimensions of sociality: structural/institutional; practice/interaction; meaning; self/subjectivity/identity. This should involve engaging critically with universalizing narratives of ‘progress’ deriving from western experiences while also being equally critical of the ways in which essentialist notions of cultural difference are mobilized to justify heteronormativity in varied local contexts.

Iris Erh-Ya Pai, “Making Lesbian Families in Taiwan”
Benefitting from social changes in the last few decades, single Taiwanese women seem to have gained greater sexual autonomy and freer lifestyle choices. Single lesbians can now more easily pass as heterosexual; however, this is not an easy choice once they form a relationship. Despite increased freedoms, it is difficult for lesbian erotic relationships to be acknowledged in patriarchal families. I argue for an understanding of lesbian relationships that takes account of families of origin and lesbians’ negotiation of the wider social context of Taiwanese Confucian patriarchy. Drawing on a qualitative study of 15 lesbian couples (aged between 28 and 40), with data from couple interviews and individual interview for each (i.e. 45 interviews in total), this research explores how lesbians form their relationships and develop their notion of family. At the time of the interviews, the length of relationships averaged at seven years. Individual interviews focused on personal sexual stories, how lesbians developed their sexual identities in various social settings and the ways they negotiated their sexuality with their families of origin. Couple interviews then focused on relationship histories, the ways they committed to and conducted their
relationships. Four main areas of analysis emerged from accounts: how lesbians recognised same sex attraction, how that differed from identifying as lesbian and the ways they built up communities and group norms; negotiating sexuality in their families of origin and their relations with their partner’s families of origin; lesbian couples’ relationship practices and their varying experiences of commitment; lesbian couples’ domestic arrangements, including differing degrees of equality that they achieved and how gender role-playing influenced these decisions. By highlighting the specific issues in Taiwan, I argue that it is possible for lesbians to make their lives outside patriarchal families and this is understandable only in their situational contexts.

Lau Hoi-Leung, “Experiencing Risky Pleasure: The Exploration of ‘Chem-Fun’ in Hong Kong Gay Community”

This qualitative study explores the prevailing phenomenon of ‘Chem-Fun’, i.e. the combination of drug use and gay sex, in the Hong Kong gay community. By pinpointing the two loopholes of epidemiological dominance and missing drug in the local drug and gay literature respectively, this study adopts a cultural approach to fill the gap in which the crucial elements of agency, pleasure, and context are examined. Drawing on the three theoretical strands of postmodern intimacies, geographies of sexuality, and Foucauldian notion of power/resistance, a four-dimensional model has been derived to explore the four aspects of ‘Chem-Fun’: contexts, spaces, intimacies, and subjectivities.

Instead of viewing ‘Chem-Fun’ as a ‘trinity of double’ but rather a ‘way of life’, this study argues that ‘Chem-Fun’ should be understood as a specific form of gay choices, gay project, gay connection, and gay mastery, which have painted an alternative picture about ‘Chem-Fun’ in contrast with the epidemiological way of understanding. The playmates are not necessarily a passive, fixed, and pathological retreatist but an arch-inventor, sensation-seeker, and edgeworker to build their own life. Without ignoring the relevant risks, this study gives pleasure an adequate space to understand ‘Chem-Fun’. As a form of queer life, ‘Chem-Fun’ is not just about personal experiences but also collectivities that imply the possible way out of local tongzhi movement from gay pride to gay shame.

Apart from filling the missing gay and missing drug in local drug and gay study respectively, this research contributes to the sociology of sexuality by connecting the individual intoxicated eroticism to the runaway world of social flows, engaging with the existing concepts on postmodern lives and geographies in the non-Western context, enriching the telling sexual stories tradition, and serving as a methodological remedy for the inadequacy of ethnography or insider perspective in examining drug-related
Denise Tse-Shang Tang, “Essential labels? Gender identity politics on Hong Kong lesbian mobile phone application Butterfly”

In this presentation, I aim to primarily investigate the social meanings of gender identities in Hong Kong lesbian mobile media culture through a case study of a lesbian-specific mobile phone application Butterfly. A user on Butterfly was obliged to select among four gender identities, as in tomboy (tb), tomboy’s girl (tbg), pure and no label, in order to gain successful registration for further participation. These terms were commonly used by Hong Kong lesbians to determine one’s gender role within a relationship and were based on both physical appearances as well as social characteristics of masculinity and femininity. Through participant observation on Butterfly and ethnographic interviews with nine participants and three core members of the software development team, this study attempts to examine how gender identity politics and gender roles are manifested and negotiated among female same-sex relations on mobile media.