

COMPLETION REPORT

In my study on middle aged Chinese women in Hong Kong, I have explored the cultural meaning of *si-nais* (Ho, 2007, 2008a, b) and the life of the good heterosexual women who are being described as having “good”, “normal”, “blessed” sexuality. With my earlier experiences of participating in the Asia Leadership Fellow Programme in Tokyo and contacts with Sophia University in Tokyo, I have developed this project to understand the lives of Japanese women. I recruited 13 participants with a view to gain an added dimension to my own research projects on HK women.

The two characters in the Cantonese term *si-nai* refers to "teacher" and "breasts" respectively. It was used as a term of respect to refer to the wife of a teacher or a master in the 1960s and 1970s. However, the term acquired a different significance in the 1980s and 1990s. It became a label designating housewives living in public housing estates who were seen as economically unproductive and therefore, implying a low social status. In 21st century Hong Kong, the meaning of the term *si-nai* has changed again. Now it has become a derogatory term that is reserved for middle-aged, married women who are seen to be ignorant, overweight, bargain hunters and rumour-mongers who know of no higher goal in life than to serve their husbands and children. To be called a *si-nai* is now considered almost an insult. These women are aware that they may have a socially respectable identity but they are not really respected because they have not achieved the kind of economic and social success that is expected by society.

If there is a counter part for the term *si-nai* in Japanese, it would likely to be the term *shufu*. What would be its status and cultural meaning? If *shufu* is the Japanese equivalent of *si-nai*, what are the differences and similarities in terms of social meanings and connotations? It is found that the label *shufu* does not seem to carry as many negative connotations as *si-nai*, but it does not mean that it would be easier or less urgent for married women in Japan to re-define themselves. Through the way the Japanese women narrate their understanding of love, marriage, intimacy, adventure, ecstasy, and the strategies they use to cope with the social and moral pressures related to their life decisions and sexual choices, I have developed a new way of mapping the desire of women that can capture better their aspirations, hopes, and dreams beyond their normative social roles as mothers, wives and daughters that can go beyond the narrow confines of the term “sex”. In this project, I have adopted a wider and more inclusive perspective to look at the life situations of women in different kinds of relationships as they confront challenges such as pregnancy, responsibilities after marriage, illness, extra-marital affairs, separation from husbands and children leaving home. I document and analyse the imaginative agencies they employ to cope with new social meanings given to womanhood and the forms of relationship taken in the meandering course of their desires, in the light of the limited economic and cultural resources that they possess as women in a patriarchal, capitalist society with reference to my experience of interviewing Hong Kong *si-nais*.

It is found that *si-nais* in Hong Kong and *shufus* in Japan are well aware that they are not highly valued in their society, and so they have found numerous ways of transgressing the boundaries that define good heterosexual married women. The blessings of social respectability apparently enjoyed by these Asian women often work to enable or hinder women's expression of their desires including sexual fulfillment. The most "normal" and docile of these women also have their strategies of pleasure. These so-called 'normal' married heterosexuals may also want to gain new experiences of self and relationships as they approach mid-life. Their discontent and deviations from "normality" are generally ignored in an effort to maintain the illusion that there really is a core of good married women with no sexual or life desires to achieve, who are content to reproduce the accepted social order (Ho, 2007 a, b, 2008). It is found that the erotic satisfaction of these married women is obtained in a multitude of ways, including love and care, sexual intimacy and gratification, erotic pursuits, and other desire-fulfilling that may be carried out supplementary to, or within, their roles as wives and mothers – e.g., soap operas, musicals, and extra-marital relationships, all of which are "passports" to other options, or at least making being a wife and mother more tolerable (Ho, 2007 a, b, 2008). The research experience is useful to help explore how globalization processes and social transformations shape intimacies, change masculinities and femininities of women in Hong Kong and Tokyo.

To document the research process and the results of my interviews, the following films are produced under the title Hong Kong Calling Tokyo 東都密語. A feature length documentary film called Three Wishes (莫吹打莫攀摘留芳華) was produced based on the empirical study of the lives of 12 Japanese women including:

Part 1: The Fairy Spa - Physical and Spiritual Beauty/ 神仙水疗：身心灵美容院 is about two friends, N. and S, who started the Fairy Spa which aims to promote physical and spiritual beauty. The encounter shows these Japanese women's concern for personal and social well-being and their keenness to promote fellowship and a sense of community amongst women.

Part 2: Cosmopolitan Japanese Women – educated in France, Australia, UK, US/ 日本的大都会女性：在法国澳洲英国美国留学的她们 is a story of a group of cosmopolitan Japanese women who were educated in France, Australia, UK and US. Sik Ying was invited by her friend A. and her French husband to their new house. There she ran into some modern Japanese couples in inter-racial marriages who discussed their styles of living and loving. The story revolves around these women's concerns about personal growth and development as well as their desire to serve the community, through making use of their own overseas education and experiences.

Part 3: Art in the Blood – Opera singers & Jazz dancers/ 骨子里的艺术：歌剧与爵士舞的她们 is about how Sik Ying met S. when she ate at her Thai restaurant with a Thai friend in Tokyo in 2007. S. came up to them wanting to know more about the practices of becoming a monk for a short period of time in the context of Thai culture as she was disturbed to find that her husband had left her to go back to Thailand to become a monk. S. was very much involved in the theatre but had to

take up the restaurant business after her husband's desertion. Ultimately, they got a divorce and S. has taken up opera singing alongside her restaurant business.

Part 4: Japanese Women with Alternative Sexualities/另类性别的她们 is a story of Japanese women with alternative sexualities and how they account for their life choices. Sik Ying came to know K. in 2007. When she got the news that K. had gotten married to a young English lady, L, she decided to visit them in their new home.

Part 5: Three Wishes of the rose/玫瑰三愿 is about women's dreams and aspirations, Sik Ying always asks them the same questions at every interview. First, if you were given three wishes, what would you hope for? Second, if you have a lot of money, what will you do? These women's answers to these questions reveal their strong desire for personal growth through artistic and erotic pursuits and community development rather than solely taking care of their families.

Publication of the Results of Research Project:

Verbal Presentation (Date, Venue, Name of Conference, Title of Presentation, Presenter, etc.)

Name of event: 22 Springs: Community Forums & Film Screening (香港廿二春：師奶列傳纪录短片放映及交流) on July 4th

Venue: 365-7 Hennessy Road, Foo Tak Building, Wanchai, HK. 香港灣仔軒尼詩道 365-7 號富德樓

Date: 28th July, 2011 (Thursday)

Background:

The event is organized by The Department of Social Work & Social Administration, The University of Hong Kong in collaboration with the What If Artist Group for community education purpose. We aim to bring scholarly discussion to the community by involving scholars and the artists (especially those in Fu Tat Lau) on issues related to the making of documentary films, social research and knowledge production. The dialogue helps re-define the border between the scholars and the artists. We hope that the exchanges will create new knowledge and open up new ways of making sense of personal experiences, doing research and artistic creation. We plan to make good use of the films for teaching and for academic discussions at HKU and other universities in Japan.

Thesis (Name of Journal and its Date, Title and Author of Thesis, etc.)

Book (Publisher and Date of the Book, Title and Author of the Book, etc.)