

WRITING SEXUAL POLITICS FROM THE MARGINS: EVELYN LAU AND WU HE

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330 INTRODUCTION

A century after Freud began publishing his theories of human psycho-sexual development,¹ the public discussion of sexual behaviour is hardly a novel or remarkable activity. However, there are authors who still have the ability to write about sex in a manner that challenges even the most jaded of readers. Two such individuals are the Chinese-Canadian writer Evelyn Lau and the Taiwanese nativist author Wu He. Each in their own way, these writers have explored human sexuality from rather extreme vantage points. Due to cultural differences between Canada and Taiwan, response to their work has also varied. What unites the two as objects worthy of academic interest is their mutual preference for writing about sexuality from socially and psychologically marginal positions. It is for that reason that I have chosen to investigate Evelyn Lau and Wu He together and in comparative perspective.

In any comparative literary study one must question the potential for arriving at useful conclusions that could not be ascertained from non-comparative study. After a reasonably thorough reading of Lau and Wu He, it was my sense that such potential did indeed exist in bringing their work together. This was so because there was congruence in both the apparent origins of their marginalized vision of human sexuality and also in the uses to which they put their vision. On the other hand, the two authors do proceed in their work with very different sets of psychosocial givens. Not only is there the obvious difference in their gender (Wu He being a man), but the worlds to which they refer are of strongly contrasting depth and structure. These differences can only partially be explained away by geography.

The objective of this paper is then, two fold. In the first instance it will be necessary to deal with the origins of our writers' particular perspective on society and sexuality.

In this regard I hope to show that we cannot fully understand either Evelyn Lau or Wu He without reference to certain aspects of Chinese traditional culture as they are played out in the context of the family and the individual psychology, in particular the image of the Father. The second project is to look at the strategies of both Lau and Wu He in critiquing the normative structures of Canadian and Taiwanese society respectively, especially with regard to the functioning of the patriarchal order. What we shall find is that the two issues; one, the psychological relationship to the Father; and two, the hypocrisies and contradictions of patriarchal society, are inextricably linked. My contention will be that it is in the image of the Father, as understood from the perspective of Western psychology as well as traditional Chinese cultural models, that Evelyn Lau's and Wu He's engagement with the social order both find their most important disconnection and which consequently lays the basis for their critique of that order.

WRITING SEX FROM THE MARGINS

Evelyn Lau achieved overnight notoriety with the publication of her first book, *Runaway: Diary of a Street Kid*, which appeared when she was just eighteen years old. The book was a collection of diary entries, which she made during a three-year period when she lived as a teenaged prostitute and drug addict on or close to the streets of Vancouver. Unvarnished depictions of commercial sex and compulsive drug use continued to be the central theme in several collections of poetry and short stories published subsequent to *Runaway*. The vision of the urban sexual underground that Lau provides is unapologetic and in many respects, nonjudgmental. It is the vision of one who feels entirely justified (by necessity) in habituating that world. There is, however, a fundamental tension underlying the texts. Many scenes of what might be referred to as aberrant sexual behaviour take place in the context of "respectable," middle, and upper middle-class settings. Although Lau herself is clearly part of the marginal underclass of drug addicts and sex workers, she often finds herself riding in expensive cars and performing sado-masochistic rituals in suburban houses or sumptuous West End penthouses. This irony unsettles her and is one of the factors giving rise to her deep cynicism about the foundations of bourgeois capitalist society. In her poem "My Tragic Opera" she writes:

...
But to fuck you in your nuptial bed while your wife
and children toss in hammocks in the tropics!
Upstairs, evidence of your daughters everywhere
in Doc Martens, denim and Beverly Hills 90210 pinups.
The eldest has starved herself beyond menstruation,
the middle one is the compulsive liar,
only the youngest remains a virgin in her white party dress... (Lau 1994, 47)

The hypocrisy of the situation, combined no doubt with feelings of resentment about the “normal” adolescence she was denied, moves Lau to defile, or to imagine she defiles, the daughters’ room, stealing their lunch money and breaking their trinkets.

The Taiwanese author who now writes under the pen name of Wu He (Dancing Crane) (original name, Chen Guocheng) is also concerned with the interrelationship of tradition, family and psychology. Wu He is one of the most controversial figures to have emerged on the Taiwanese literary scene in recent years. Rather like Li Ang, who stirred much debate with her explorations of sexual politics in Taiwan during the 1980’s, Wu He has raised the ante, so to speak, with his explicit and provocative critique of sexuality and its integration into the socio-political power structure. Just as the marginal status of the sex worker allows Evelyn Lau a privileged and unique vision of Canadian middle-class society and its sexual mores, Wu He’s writing is much influenced by the upside-down view of post-industrial Taiwan that he was afforded during a long period of reclusion and self-exile, a time during which he
332 lived very much outside of the limits of society, leading a bohemian life of indigence, drug abuse and sexual indulgence. Wu He’s motives for fleeing middle-class society were more complex than those of Lau, being the product of ideological convictions as well as emotional and psychological factors. The end result of extreme marginality is, however, fundamentally similar, as is Wu He’s critical positioning in relation to bourgeois society.

Despite belonging to a family with a history of scholastic and economic success, Wu He chose to live for ten years as an impoverished hermit in the seaside town of Tamshui. The move to Tamshui seems to have been related to a series of events including his failure in graduate school and the death of his mother, but it was the experience of his compulsory military service that provided the final impetus (Zeng 2002). He recalls that serving in the army left him feeling emasculated:

When I left the army in 1981 I felt an acute sense of “having been castrated by the military.” I didn’t choose to enter the raging fire of the Opposition Party Political Movement, but quietly withdrew to live in reclusion in Tamshui, a small town on the outskirts of this island nation. I devoted myself to reading about history and philosophy, hoping to understand the origins of “nation” and “military” and their meaning. (Wu He 2002, 43)

Wu He had published three short stories during his time in university and graduate school under different pen names. It wasn’t until 1992 that he began publishing again, this time under the name of Wu He. However, it would be another three years before he finally emerged from obscurity and allowed his whereabouts to be more generally known (Zeng 2002). According to Zeng Yueqing, this period of self-imposed exile to the geographical and social margins has proved to be one of the most important influences on his work (Zeng 2002). During that time he lived a life that was “decadent and empty,” relying mostly on the support of women friends to maintain himself (Xie 2003, 225). His stated objective was to “work hard at being a useless man” (*nuli zuo ge wuyong de ren*) (Wu He 1995, 3). This quest of “uselessness”

was to no small extent a Taoistic response to the normative demands of capitalist/consumerist society with which he had become entirely disillusioned. It was also an opportunity to experiment with ideas and writing techniques without having to answer to anything or anyone.

Wu He’s disillusionment with the values of post-industrial Taiwanese society, his broad familiarity with history and philosophy, along with his decadent, often debauched lifestyle, all combine in his writing to produce a critique of Taiwanese culture that ranges through issues of nationalism, racism, colonialism, traditional patriarchy and political control. But there is a metaphor that pervades his writing on all subjects, and this is the metaphor of sex. Not only has Wu He devoted considerable attention directly to the issue of sexual behaviour and the social values associated with it in Taiwan, as, for example, in *Queers and Vamps* (*Guier yu ayao*) (2000), “Secret Diary of a Homosexual” (*Yiwei tongxinglian zhe de mimi shouji*) (1997, 153-204) and “The Spring of the Year I was Fifteen” (*Shiwusui nianian chuntian*) (1997, 51-56), he constantly weaves sexual imagery into his writing.

For Wu He, sex constitutes a metaphor, **the** metaphor for all human activity. With Foucault he recognizes that one of the consequences of the modern scientific investigation of sex is that sex has come to represent virtually the “privileged locus or secret of our being—our truth” (Smart 1985, 98). To recognize this is also to acknowledge the profound irony of sex in the modern world. For while enormous effort is expended by the intellectual establishment in rescuing sex from a past of supposed repression (a concept brought severely into question by Foucault) and uncovering its natural “truth,” the end result is that sex becomes encumbered with yet deeper layers of signification, signification that may be manipulated within the social, political and economic power structures.

This, then, becomes the challenge for Wu He. Rather than accept the modern enterprise of explaining the “truth and mystery” of sex, and thereby providing new and expanded means for its control, he proposes a radical liberation of sex, a process by which it would be stripped of any meaning beyond the level of the flesh. This “liberation of the flesh” (*rou ti jiefang*) can only take place outside the normal limits of society. It is not an extension of the discourse over sexual liberation, gender politics or “queer theory.” It is a vision of a utopia wherein the very concept of gender is discarded in favour of a thoroughly promiscuous, thoroughly ecstatic indulgence in pleasures of the senses (Xie 2003, 171-175).

Since this disengendered utopia can only exist—it could only be conceived of existing—beyond the boundaries of society, Wu He’s self-imposed exile must be viewed as intimately related to his vision of this utopia. Without having personally experienced the freedom of the margins and the joys of uselessness, he might never have ventured to posit so extreme a view of sex, gender and society.

EVELYN LAU'S FATHER FIGURES

Fathers, and especially the absence of them, are a very critical element in the appreciation of the world and sexual politics in the work of both Lau and Wu He. Their vision differs widely in certain areas of concern, but there is also a significant territory of shared experience. I find both the differences and the commonalities revealing, and believe that a comparison can be productive to our understanding of the two writers.

To date, Evelyn Lau has written primarily from the perspective of a young woman who deliberately situates herself outside the perimeter of the society in which she grew up. Her particular view of gender relations and socio-economic power is determined in seemingly equal part by her experience as a child in an immigrant Chinese household, and by her struggle with life on the streets after leaving that household. Without much doubt, the central image with which she contextualizes her experience is that of the Father. Due to the dynamics of her own family, Lau grew up with a strong need to find paternal love and support. That love and support came to represent a kind of emotional salvation as well as security and affirmation. From the time that she leaves home she seeks repeatedly to establish relations with men who may fulfill her profound yearning for a strong father figure. This initially leads her to grow emotionally attached to a variety of social workers and psychologists who are assigned to help her. It later involves her in relationships of co-dependence with fellow drug users such as Larry, who appears in *Runaway*. In an entry towards the end of the diary she posits the reason that she spent so much time in a clearly damaging relationship with this manipulative, needy man:

A father figure. An unsuitable, emotionally frail father figure. Larry was just a few years younger than my father. Physically he was just as skeletal, but I had loved my father passionately as a child, with all my capacity. (288)

The reason that she loves her father so passionately is found in the emotionally dysfunctional environment of her childhood home. Lau's mother is a demanding, neurotic woman who seeks absolute control and domination over Lau. She permits her no space for independent development, forcing her to spend all of her time either studying or doing housework. Even when Lau fulfils demands for academic success and domestic service, her mother finds cause to berate and bully her. She explains to her psychiatrist:

...I mean, at home I could never please them. I could get 95 or do 6 hours of housework and never go out. Always hoping for something, you know. Some sign of love. But nothing was ever good enough. Dad left me and she, she would have a ruler, or her hand, or her mouth.

Here we see not only the craving of a child for affirmation and love, but also the sense of loss and betrayal due to her father's lack of support in face of her mother's criticism.

The sense of betrayal is a reversal of prior feelings of empathy and protectiveness towards her father. As a small child she had viewed him as an ally and someone who understood and loved her. In a number of places throughout her writing Lau evokes a scene that for her came to symbolize that early bond:

I'm in my crib, maybe four years old. It's after midnight. My parents are in their bedroom down the hall, fighting....Mom is screaming that she wished she'd married another man. I ache for my father, whose voice is lower, attempting to be rational. When I start crying he pads into the room, light from the street lamp through the window glinting off his glasses. He holds me for a while and I clutch the hand extending through the bars, huge and comforting, begging him not to go back. (1989, 83-84)

This is in many respects a classically Freudian scenario; the Oedipus Complex in its feminine manifestation, or the Electra Complex as proposed by Carl Jung. The infantile daughter has rejected the mother and wishes to seduce the father, to win his affections, and according to Freud, to become pregnant by him. Not wishing to get into a discussion of the relative merits of Freudian analysis, it is enough here to recognize that according to that analysis, Lau's affection for her father is not unusual, and her feelings of hostility towards her mother are quite understandable. That she should wish to protect her father from the aggressions of her mother is, however, clearly the product of a non-classical balance of gender roles in the Lau household. This is especially so when we turn from Western psychology to traditional Chinese views on gender in the family.

As early as the Han Dynasty (206 BCE-221 CE) motherhood is particularly identified with the virtue of compassion. In Liu Xiang's (77-6 BCE) "Biographies of Exemplary Women" (*Lienü zhuan*), compassion is already identified as one of the most admirable qualities of a mother.² As history progressed, the image of the compassionate mother found embodiment in the Buddhist bodhisattva Avalokitesvra, or Guanyin, who came to be one of the most popular religious figures in China, playing the role of patron saint of women (especially mothers). This role is very similar to that of the Virgin Mary in Roman Catholic Christianity. And today, even in the highly secular world of Chinese cyberspace, a Google search reveals that the maternal virtue *par excellence* remains "compassion" (*ci*).

The corresponding virtue most often assigned to fathers in traditional China is "severity" or "strictness" (*yan*). This is severity in the sense of being disciplinarian and steadfast in maintaining accepted standards of moral behaviour. The expression "severe father" appears in the *Classic of Filial Piety* (*Xiaojing*) (early Han Dynasty?) in a passage relating to the great filial virtue of the semi-legendary figure Duke Zhou.³ Eventually "Severe Father" (*yanfu*) became associated with the expression

"Compassionate Mother" (*cimui*) to form a dyad that is today still very much part of the popular conception of good parenthood.

Obviously, the traditional Chinese balance of parental function and power did not exist in the Lau household. It was reversed, with the mother acting as the disciplinarian and the father providing compassion and comfort. But surely this is not a unique situation and does not in itself offer us a satisfactory explanation of Evelyn Lau's obsessive search for a father figure beyond the family. Clearly the true key to Lau's trauma is to be found elsewhere. And it is not far to seek. Observe the following passage from *Inside Out*:

My father adored me when I was a child. It appeared I was the centre of his universe...I loved him passionately and would spend long nights agonizing about losing him... To lose my father would be to lose not only love and attention but the shield between myself and my mother, whom I saw as a frightening force, prone to unpredictable rages and a need for humiliating dominance over me. (2001, 64)

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Here we see that, at the same time she had created a fantasy about defending her father against the cruelties of her mother, she depended upon him to protect her. In another passage in the same text she pinpoints the incident that marked her final loss of faith in her father. One day when she was thirteen years old she arrived home late from a volunteer job. Her mother flew into a rage and was in the process of berating her when her father returned home. Lau hoped that he would take her side and stand up to the mother. Instead, all he can offer is the pathetic advice that she should listen to her mother even though she may seem unreasonable. This, of course, is not what Lau had been looking for:

I wanted him to defend me. All this time, these battles between my mother and I that he missed or chose to ignore, pretended not to see—all I wanted was for him to defend me...It was true, then—he could no more protect me against my mother than I could protect him against the drunken men in the street. I continued crying for a while, but a curious numb calm had spread inside me. It was all over, and in that moment of abandonment I did not know which of my parents I hated more. (2001, 225)

This, then, was the sad end of an illusion. It was perhaps also simultaneously the beginning of Lau's search for someone to replace her lost father, a search that led her into numerous relationships with older men, most famously or infamously, with W.P. Kinsella. In one post-mortem on that relationship she explains:

This man [W.P. Kinsella], thirty-six years older than I, had come closer than anyone to mirroring my relationship with my father; I saw him as a protector, and the lawsuit devastated me. (2001, 75)

The lawsuit to which she refers is the one launched by Kinsella in response to her unflattering exposé of their relationship in a local Vancouver magazine. Ironically, the issue that probably had the most influence on Kinsella's decision to file the suit was that of Lau's unflattering depiction of his sexual performance. This is ironic

because Lau herself claims that her quest of father figures has nothing to do with sex. In fact, she sees father figures as conspicuously unsexy. With specific reference to men who might fulfill that role she comments:

Desire, for me, is often strangely divorced from sex. What I most desire—an entrance into another's life, the sudden flare of emotional contact, intellectual stimulation—is not compelled by a sexual motive...How could she [a jealous wife of a friend] believe that the driving force of my life has been to find a man who would look at me as though I were his daughter. (2001, 63)

Returning to the archetype of the Oedipus Complex and its feminine manifestation, Lau's sentiments here would seem to challenge Freud's contention that a daughter fantasizes about having sex with and becoming pregnant by the father. Lau's separation of desire and sexual reality has far more resonance with Lacan's theory of the "Real," the "Imaginary" and the "Symbolic," wherein desire is always directed towards some imagined object. It inevitably fails when it attempts to exercise itself on some real object since the Real can never stand up to the perfection of the Imagined. This implies that eroticism is possible only within a framework of imaginary constructions which, Lacan posits, are based on narcissism: a desire to recreate an image of the self in what he refers to as the "mirror stage" of psychological development. It is evident that Lau's imagined father has been created to no small degree through the merging of her own identity with that of her real father, especially to the extent that she fantasizes that they both fear and are threatened by the mother. It is these qualities that Lau seeks in her surrogate father figures, and it is these qualities that she can never find.

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WU HE'S DISAPPEARING FATHER

The image of the father figure is also highly problematic in the work of Wu He. Despite Wu He's semi-autobiographical style, the only references to his own father are found in two short stories, one of which was published very early on in his career. In the earlier story, "A Thin Strand of Incense" (*Xiwei de yi xian xiang*) (1995), Wu He's father appears as a "ruined man" (*feiren yige*) suffering from shell shock in the aftermath of the Pacific War. In the later story, "Survey—Narrative" (*Diaocha—xushu*) his father is taken prisoner during the period of "White Terror" imposed by the Chinese Nationalist government soon after Taiwan was returned to Chinese control after World War Two. He is never seen again. Since we know that Wu He's father did not in reality die or leave the family home, we must question Wu He's motives in dealing with him in this manner.

While Wu He makes use of the first person "I" (*wo*) as well as an objectified "he" (*ta*) throughout his writing to represent his fictionalized self (Zeng 2002), he seldom indulges in the kind of auto-psychoanalysis that Evelyn Lau is much prone

to. However, as the result of personal interviews, Zeng Yueqing has ascertained that three years after his mother's death (while he was attending university), his father remarried. After that time he demonstrated no interest in his son's life and gave no support to his writing. The only contact between the two was a letter from the father every Chinese New Year telling Wu He to come home for New Year's Eve dinner (Zeng 2004). Zeng speculates that this abandonment led Wu He to merge the image of his real father with a new symbolic Father in his writing. This symbolic Father is then used to represent "patriarchal power" in the broadest sense. The absent or disappeared Father is, in a somewhat related fashion, used to allude to defunct colonial power, that of the Japanese as well as the Nationalist Chinese who succeeded them.

In his story "Disinterment," we find an example of how Wu He co-opts the images of the father and the mother to use as a metaphor for colonialism and its effects in Taiwan, while at the same time maintaining a level of direct personal emotional involvement (Zeng 2003). The story is about the disinterment and reinterment of Wu He's mother's remains after she appeared to him in a dream complaining of discomfort in her post-mortal existence. Throughout the involved process of planning and executing the reburial, it is Wu He who takes the initiative, despite his complete lack of money or social position. His financially successful older brother is pictured as constantly trying to cut corners in order to save money and time. Virtually all other members of the extended family are involved in the story, but strangely, his father appears only once and fleetingly in a remembered scene from the mother's initial funeral (1995). We know that he must have taken part in the reinterment rites, but why is he not mentioned in the story?

The answer to this question is found on two levels of meaning, and here again I make reference to Zeng Yueqing's excellent work. Zeng has demonstrated very elegantly that on one level "Disinterment" operates as a metaphor for the post-colonial recovery of Taiwan's history and culture (Zeng 2004). The corpse of the mother is taken as a symbol of Taiwan's lost history, and the disinterment process is the post-colonial enterprise of recovering that history. But on another level, the image of the mother, the emotional and psychological significance of her remains, as well as her remembered living self, are explored as a site for the convergence of Wu He's conflicted visions of motherhood, desire and death.

The absence of the image of the father in this convergence of symbols may also be viewed at two levels. On the most obvious level, as we have noted already, the disappeared father represents disappeared colonial power. Only once colonialism has ended can the re-writing of history begin. But even here the situation is not so straightforward, since we know that despite his non-appearance, the father still lurks somewhere in the background, his presence felt in a variety of ways. If we then delve deeper to the level of psychological symbolism we must speculate that Wu He's exclusion of his father from this story and elsewhere is an act of filial rebellion related to Freud's conception of the Oedipus complex. Wu He needs to dispense with his father in order to make love with his mother. He cannot do so in reality, so he acts out

the fantasy in his writing (Zeng 2004). Towards the end of "Disinterment," after the reburial has been completed, Wu He acts out the sexual conquest of his mother by seeking out a middle-aged prostitute (his mother was in her forties when she died). In a disturbing scene he makes use of a golden tooth, which he recovered from his mother's remains, as a metonymic link between his mother and the prostitute:

I hid myself in the tangled bushes of her pubic hair, furtively placed Mother's gold tooth between my lips and teeth, then began to tear at her, my face buried deeply in her thighs. A deathly vapour rose from the pit of her crotch as if from sewerage in a swamp.—Afterwards, as I licked at the flesh of her belly she said that she had never had a child—today she felt as though I was her son who, for no predestined reason, had been born into the world. I said that I wanted to enter her through her navel. She said that she would let me if only she could. ... (1995, 88-89)

There could be no more stark or striking evocation than this of the desire to make sexual conquest of the mother and return to the womb. The merging of the image of the mother with that of the prostitute is highly charged with psychological meaning. The passage can also be understood to refer to a desire to reenter the maternal body of Taiwan, a body now likened to that of a prostitute due to the ravages inflicted by rapid industrial development. The entire scenario cannot assume any of this metaphoric burden if the symbolic father is not removed to the background.

FATHER FIGURES AND THE PATRIARCHY

With respect to the psychological significance of the father figure, it is extremely difficult to draw direct lines of comparison between Evelyn Lau and Wu He. To begin with, the two are of the opposite sex, and this places them in a very different initial orientation to their real fathers and any constructions of imaginary fathers. However, we can say that both writers have assumed highly problematic relationships with their fathers and choose to expel them from the created world of their fiction. Lau seeks a substitute for her lost father as a means of fulfilling her sense of loss. Wu He, on the other hand, seems deliberately to exile his father, or to symbolically castrate him, in order to recover his relationship with his mother. Considering these basic differences, what benefit is there in bringing the two writers together for comparison? To answer this question we must examine the matter of the symbolic patriarchal order, and especially the functioning of that order in traditional Chinese culture. Here, each in their own way, Evelyn Lau and Wu He do share a common vision.

From their respective positions outside the bourgeois hegemonic structure both Evelyn Lau and Wu He are free to discredit the normative values and gender roles that prevail within that structure. They are able to posit alternative visions wherein bourgeois, primarily patriarchal power arrangements, are inverted or discarded altogether. It is less easy to see how this is the case with Lau, since her writing is superficially more naïve and less politically directed than that of Wu He. However,

if we follow Gunew's suggestion to read Lau allegorically (Gunew 2000), we enter a world of more complex possibilities, one in which descriptions of aberrant or transgressive sexual behaviour invite us to identify with the transgressors and to take their values as normative. We may take Lau's poem "Crack" as an example:

Today you are wearing a white body marked vertically and horizontally with underwear, garter belt, stockings. You move unsteadily on the two black bars of your heels. A bald man sits on the side of the bed and plays with spoons and baking soda and cocaine... You know that out there is a familiar neighbourhood, full of faces you see every day lining up at the bank, posting letters, buying café au lait or a chef's salad from the bakery across the street. (1994, 23)

340 In this bland juxtaposition of two scenes, one inside an apartment, the other outside the same apartment, we are presented a choice of locations wherein to place our identification. The choice may at first seem obvious, for who are we if not those habitués of the "familiar neighbourhood?" Then we take a step further and realize that the transgressors inside the apartment are also just "normal" citizens of the neighbourhood temporarily engaging in activities not accepted as normal. Ultimately, the very blandness of the juxtaposition leads us to question where we are really to locate our identity. Is there any absolute reason why a prostitute in fetish garb or a recreational cocaine user should not be taken as "normal" and the patrons at the post office viewed as the transgressors? The answer, I believe, is no. However, if we are to ask, which of the two scenes is endorsed by the values of heteronormal power structure, the answer is clearly; "only the latter."

In her depictions of a sexual underground where the rules of the patriarchal social order are constantly and consistently broken, Lau challenges that order to justify itself in real, human terms. Even when presenting us with her experiences as an underage street prostitute she refuses to accede to the common view that she was being exploited in that setting. She writes of how she felt in control of the situation on the street:

...prostitution was a world with which I was completely familiar. I knew how to behave no matter what situation arose, and that was more than I could say about the other world in which I constantly struggled, trying so hard to disguise the painful shyness and awkwardness I felt. It was a way to escape, tied with the alcohol and pills that helped facilitate that escape. (2001, 15)

Elsewhere she argues that prostitution offered her a means through which to attain the affirmation and self-esteem denied her by her parents:

At fourteen, I ran away from the life I could no longer endure. I left the father I could no longer look at without pain clouding my vision, and stood on street corners so other fathers could pay attention to me for as long as it took to give them an orgasm. (2001, 66)

While our initial response may be that this is a highly negative means of getting attention, if we place ourselves outside of the hegemonic social value system it appears to be a more equal exchange.

In his writings on the sexual underworld of Taiwan's urban centers, Wu He offers us a similarly inverted vision of the heterosexual normality and the social structure that supports it. In his study of sexual politics in Wu He's writing, Xie Zhaozhen argues that Wu He manages to undermine the normative values with a variety of subversive strategies. On the one hand, Wu He leads us into a sexual world in which the controlling heterosexual norms of the patriarchy are dethroned by amoral fleshly indulgence. Such indulgence does not recognize the priority of any one form of orientation over any other. Homosexuality, between men or between women, as well as complete promiscuity (*zajiao*), is proposed as being a means of breaking the grip of patriarchal control (Xie 2003, 143 seq.). In Wu He's "Secret Diary of a Homosexual" for example, we find:

Homosexuality is a technique of altering oneself escaping fixed morality being liberated from women's crotches and then it's a kind of new life and then you can be profoundly at peace. (1997, 169)

and again:

This is the purest way to treat the flesh, and only we can do it. They, no matter whether man or woman, they take the flesh as decoration for the skeleton, the aim of sexual decoration is only to make it an incitement to sex alas and alack. These are the famous words of wisdom of the intellectual Mr. Dumb on this topic of the flesh with us flesh for the first time attains group liberation.

...

We are the flesh people long live us long live independent free flesh. (173)

The subversive valorization of the flesh and homosexuality is an inversion of the normative values of the patriarchal social system where the monogamous heterosexual couple is the fundamental unit of control and production. Wu He makes effective use of his marginalized position, the freedom of having nothing invested and nothing to lose, to challenge that social system and its power structures.

CONCLUSION

What I have tried to demonstrate in this paper is that, while Western models of psychological development may be applied to explain Evelyn Lau's continuing need to seek out father figures, there is strong reason to believe that Chinese cultural tradition may also have made an impact on her view of society and the structure of gender power relations. In her own family there was a complete and extreme inversion of the

symbolism of the “Compassionate Mother/Severe Father” duality found in popular Chinese tradition, and this situation may well have been a factor in determining her psychological disorientation with regard to the functioning of the images of fathers in the social order.

Wu He, for his part, seems to have deliberately excluded virtually all references to his father in his work. Because of the exclusion we can only speculate about what may have been a problematic relationship with his father. As I have suggested, in the cases of both Wu He and Evelyn Lau, psychological disorientation, particularly with regard to fathers, symbolic and real, may ultimately have been highly productive when it came to establishing their special positioning in relation to their respective social orders. It appears to have been a dysfunctional relationship to their real fathers, and the consequent unbalancing of their views of the symbolic order that lead to their respective decisions to flee mainstream society and live in marginal spaces where normative social values held no sway. From those marginal spaces, liberated from the patriarchal order, Lau and Wu He have launched aggressive programs of disassembly, attacking bourgeois society at one of its most vulnerable points, the realm of sexual behaviour.

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ENDNOTES

1. Freud’s *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, for example, was first published in 1905.
2. See for example, *Wei Mang ci mu* and *Lu Ji jing Jiang*, both in scroll one.
3. Verse 9.