

Editorial

Welcome to the fourth volume of the Irish Journal of Asian Studies (IJAS).

This issue consists of papers which reflect the international and interdisciplinary dimensions of IJAS, drawing together a diverse range of scholars working on China, Japan, Korea, Vietnam and Nepal, while dealing with the theme of sexuality and identity in a sophisticated and intellectually engaging manner.

The first article by Lei Qin delineates how two communist women, Lily Braun (1865-1916) and Ding Ling (1904-1986), had carefully revised the class-struggle-based party-line from within by incorporating a call for liberating femininity that was otherwise ignored or overlooked. Qin depicts how both women were highly committed communists who made their way to key posts within the socialist parties of the SPD (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands) and the CCP (Chinese Communist Party) respectively. They were also both fully committed to advancing the socialist course of their country, yet both came from well-to-do families and advanced their intellectual career first as feminists. The article examines how their ideas were similar: first, their common commitment to socialism while striving to find a way to organically incorporate the role of women in socialist revolution; second, while doing so, they both pushed the boundaries of the Party's official footing on women by exploring the unique qualities of femininity.

Cristina Nualart's article attempts to analyse aspects of Vietnamese women's sense of self, examine how they have been represented in contemporary art, and lay a basic groundwork upon which a Vietnamese feminist art history can emerge. Nualart initially contextualises her study by providing an overview of the life of Actress Lê Vân, as a representation of 'Vietnamese womanhood'. She then discusses the developments and transformations of gender roles and feminist activity in Vietnam, while linking her ideas to modern artists who engage with feminist ideas, such as Nguyễn Trinh Thi, Ly Hoàng Ly and Nguyễn Thị Châu Giang. She also draws our attention to the social pressures and beliefs around gender roles, as well as addressing the issue of female role models, making this article an interesting and original read.

My own article draws on the critical theory of two francophone feminists, Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray, to critique the socio-historical constructs of gender identity shaped during the Chosŏn (朝鮮) dynasty (1392-1910), where homosexuality was denied the right to exist in either the private or public spaces due to compulsory *hetero*-normative obligations. Such critiques highlight the need to dismantle and to reassess the 'gender traditions' that are reinforced through patriarchies, which in the case of Chosŏn, commemorated ancestral rituals and recorded the genealogies of 'great' heterosexual men from the past. The paper engages with some of the main texts that influenced these biased gender traditions, especially two key texts by the Chinese master of metaphysics, Zhu Xi (朱熹, 1130-1200), who asserted that women should to adhere to the dictates of their fathers, husbands (and his parents), and even their own sons.

Amy Walker provides a study of the Japanese *ie* (家) household system in relation to her ethnographic research conducted in Takachiho, a rural town in the Miyazaki prefecture. Her findings illustrate how complex issues of gender; divorce and single parenthood; and non-heterosexual identities feature widely and are accepted by lay and clerical households. It highlights the tensions of people who are also trying to navigate their way between important traditional customs relating to the family and (post)modern developments relating to the more autonomous individual. In particular, she focuses on these complex identities in relation to the *ie* household and local temple, looking at issues relating to sexual identity and succession. She also shows how ancestor consciousness remains a prominent feature of these localities, bringing people together, while recognising the continuing relationships between the living and the dead.

Erika Hoffman-Dilloway's *Text, Signing and Belonging in Nepal* is reviewed by Marilena Frisone. This ethnographic work examines how members of the deaf community saw themselves as a separate, marginalised, ethnolinguistic group (using Nepali Sign Language - NSL) during the period of civil war in Nepal (1996-2006). The deaf community aligned itself with other ethnic minorities during this period who sought recognition from a Hindu state. This also had repercussions for women, which Frisone points out. She also highlights other ethnographic accounts of deaf people that Hoffman-Dilloway could have engaged with to enrich this work.

Finally, Chung K. Kwok has reviewed Ying Miao's *Being Middle Class in China: Identity, Attitudes and Behaviour*, a text which explores a popular topic currently for academics as well as the mass media. Kwok points out that Miao asks an important question: how does the middle-class in China see themselves? To answer this the author surveyed 439 participants. The text also reviews sociological theories on class, analyses the state policy in regards to health care, education, the pension system and so on, while also evaluating social inequality and gender issues.

This issue has been particularly original in its scope and the authors have explored various themes of sexuality and gender by employing very different approaches. It illustrates the richness of multidisciplinary engagement, which enriches our understanding and develops more complex, yet inter-related, ways of considering our own identities (this singular-plurality, to draw on Jean-Luc Nancy) and also those of others.

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