Women and Taiwanese Society
女性與台灣社會

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Women and Taiwanese Society

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Introduction

The year 2000 marks as a significant turning point in Taiwanese history. In the presidential election that year, Mr. Chen Shui-bian and Miss Annette Lu, representing the Democratic Progressive Party, won the campaign and suspended the KMT government that had ruled Taiwan since 1945. The more historic significance of this campaign was the emergence of Ms. Lu onto the vice presidency. It was not the first time a woman served in leadership in national politics, but it was certainly the first time a woman came to serve as Taiwan’s vice president.

Ms. Lu’s accomplishment in national politics is even more remarkable, considering that she was also one of the first advocates in organized feminist movements in Taiwanese history. During the early 1970s, Ms. Lu helped propose “New Feminism” and founded a publishing house exclusively for feminist purposes, with which she drew public attention to issues on the promotion of women’s rights, including domestic
violence, equal employment, and even the taboo topic of the time, abortion. Even though the publishing house she helped establish no longer exists, and she has turned her immediate attention from organized feminist movements, Ms. Lu’s legacy in feminist social politics lives on in Taiwan. It is undeniable that Ms. Lu is the pioneer of feminist discourses as well as activism in Taiwan.

What Lu’s life and career embodies can be seen as the rise of women as independent social agents in modern Taiwanese history. Since the mid-twentieth century, Taiwanese women began to work outside the household as wage earners; they might serve as domestic helper for affordable families or as waitress, but most found jobs at the newly established industrial districts as laborers. By that time, to work outside the household for wages was not exactly something a Taiwanese woman would be proud of, since it meant that she had to share the burden of earning income for the family. The typical and ideal path of a woman’s life in Taiwan at that time largely remained within the limits of household
defined by marriage and family networks.

Soon, however, such a life pattern became less and less favorable among Taiwanese women. Even though they had to work hard to support themselves as well as their families, more Taiwanese women began to find values in their labor; the wages they earned gave them economic independence, a sense of accomplishment and thus empowerment. Inspired by the feminist discourses from the West, and due to the lightening of national politics, Taiwanese women began to discuss issues related to the promotion of their social and political rights, including opportunities for education and employment, equal payment, and domestic abuse. And Ms. Annette Lu was among the first very few women brave enough to address those issues in the public. Slowly but increasingly, the life pattern of women in Taiwan becomes more diverse and liberal; college and higher education become a common experience, and going out of the family and making a career of one’s own an acceptable option. Also, multiple forms of social oppressions against women, including sexual
harassment, domestic abuse, and violence against lesbians, come to be critical issues of public attention and discussion in Taiwanese society. The decades that lead to the abolishment of martial law in Taiwan not only saw the democratization of the social politics; they also witnessed the growth of feminist consciousness as well as the improvement of women’s overall living conditions in this society.

With all sorts of breakthrough on promoting women’s socio-political conditions and exploring possibilities of personal life among Taiwanese women, the nation sees yet newly formed questions regarding women in Taiwanese society. Over the past decade or two, we find the following issues increasingly in need of attention: teenage sex and pregnancy, acceptance of female international spouses, and questions regarding female international migrant workers. To confront and examine those issues not only involves notions of gender and sexuality; it also concerns the much more complex interlocking relations of gender and sexuality with other notions such as nation, class, race and ethnicity, and
globalization.

In this regard, the term “women in Taiwan” indicates an array of subjects more inclusive and diverse and thus more complicated than “Taiwanese women,” a term that appears to be narrow, unsophisticated, and likely simplistic. And it is the lives of women of various backgrounds in Taiwan that concerns the discussions in this book. This book is a project to explore the multiple issues concerning women in Taiwan, including the historical development of their socio-cultural conditions, the feminist awareness and activism, and their current diversities and contemporary challenges. This project is aimed to present a general idea of women’s social lives in Taiwan over the past half century, and it is expected to provide an extent of knowledge on women in Taiwanese society these days. Ideas like gender, ethnicity, race, class, sexuality, and social justice, will be of primary importance for the project. That said, I do not intend for this project to be a compilation of information alone; I also aspire to present this project as an invitation to
the reader to think on various issues regarding women in Taiwan in a critical light. With this ambition, the project “Woman and Taiwanese Society” may not offer all the knowledge there is to learn of the subject, but hopefully it motivates the reader to rethink all the relevant topics on women in Taiwan, including the accomplishments, the historical and social transformations, the current challenges, the philosophical and political questions, and the emerging new issues.

It is generally agreed that, despite the diversity of the female populations in Taiwan, the gender culture in Taiwan regarding women is rooted in Chinese women’s traditions; women in Taiwan share a socio-historical, ethical, and philosophical lineage with their Chinese sisters. There can be no discussion on Taiwanese women’s traditions without referring to the legacy of Chinese female virtues, and rarely is there a criticism on socio-cultural oppressions against Taiwanese women that is not related to Chinese women’s traditions as a burden of a sort. Whether Chinese women’s traditions are the source of most problems for
Taiwanese women is to be determined, but it is certain that they largely shaped the ways in which Taiwanese women used to be, to think and to live. Some of the cosmological and ethical understandings in Chinese women’s traditions are so rooted in Taiwanese society that their impacts even remain fairly strong. An introductory discussion on the relations between Taiwanese culture and Chinese women’s traditions is the departure point of this project.
When speaking of female virtues or women’s traditions in Taiwan, Chinese culture is almost always agreed as the common legacy. What is more, many traditional virtues regarding women in Chinese culture are perceived in negative lights these days, that they are the opposite of ethical guidelines for modern Taiwanese women. Despite the separate socio-political and historical developments between Taiwan and mainland China over the past century, since Japanese colonialism in the late 1890s, there is no doubt that the two societies generally share the same cultural and cosmological origin when it comes to the questions of female virtues and women’s traditions. To have an initial idea of women’s traditions in Taiwan it is necessary to understand their ethical and cosmological origin in Chinese culture.
1.1 Female Virtues in Chinese Traditions

When women’s traditions in Chinese culture are referred to in negative lights it is normally understood that women live a restricted and oppressed life in such traditions. There are tremendous demands from family networks as well as moral teachings, and there are very few possibilities regarding life career. Besides the patriarchal social system that serve the primary interests of men, almost all women in Chinese traditions believe the following ethics to be the roots of their particular conditions: the three obediences and the four virtues (三從四德). In Chinese traditions, a woman is expected to be filial to her father before marriage, dutiful to her husband upon marriage, and deferential to her son if widowed; by observing the three forms of obedience this woman is deemed virtuous and thus respectable. On the other hand, according to the principle of the four virtues, a woman is bound to care for her demeanors, verbal expressions, appearances, and embroidery skills to be considered decent. The three obediences and the four virtues are
perceived to be the essential ethical principles for women in traditional Chinese culture.

In this context, all the various ethical codes appear to underline one vital criterion for women: virtue is valued above all talents. It is believed that a woman in this tradition is virtuous when not trained with any skill, and this may be an ideal condition for such a woman. A woman in Chinese tradition is expected to specialize in skills related to household works only; when she professes cooking, cleaning, needlecrafts, and serving the elders and men in the family in appropriate ways, it would be the only condition that she is recognized as virtuous and respectable. That is also to say that being a wise wife and virtuous mother is the only accomplishment she could possibly have; any other success is not only ignored but also rendered inappropriate of a decent woman. Indeed, education is helpful to establish an ideal woman, but under conditions that such education allows her to help with home economy, household management, and instructing the children.
In short, in Chinese traditions that emphasize female virtues in making a woman into a filial daughter, a submissive wife, and a respectful (widowed) mother, there is virtually no other possible and socially acceptable future for her. It appears certain that women in Chinese culture live under restrictions and oppressions, but that is not the only way we can understand such traditions. A more flexible perspective may represent such traditions as a source of symbolic power and a sense of superiority for women when they abide by those female virtues and employ them toward their social advantages. For instance, Chinese women are believed to be confined by strictly observed female virtues; however, by being recognized as filial, chaste, and/or prudent, that is, ethically appropriate, such a woman would be publicly acclaimed and occasionally officially announced as morally virtuous, discreet and thus respectful. Recognition like this could allow this woman to have authority, political or symbolic, as she could serve as a role model for other family or community members. She may even be able to enjoy
some decision power over family subjects or property matters. It is in this understanding that, despite confining conditions, a woman of established recognition in virtues in Chinese culture could earn a sense of superiority and authority.

In spite of more moderate views, women’s traditions in Chinese social culture and cosmology are considered backward, biased, bigoted, and thus unfavorable in modern days. Such traditions are believed to further no woman’s happiness; they only harm her welfare and obstruct the development of feminist consciousness. Also, women’s traditions in Chinese culture are understood to serve mostly men’s interests, and that is how social mechanisms like traditional Chinese female virtues are normally linked to, if not thought as a part of, patriarchy. The initial relations between women’s traditions and patriarchal mechanisms in Chinese culture are the discussions for next section.

1.2 Patriarchy in Chinese Roots and Taiwanese
Traditions

The idea “patriarchy” conventionally refers to a social mechanism and a system of values that place men in the position of ultimate authority, serving their interests as the exclusive purpose. The practices of patriarchy, however, may vary among social systems, depending on their specific history, geography, religious belief, political economy, and socio-cultural conditions. To say that Chinese society is patriarchal by no means suggests that it is the world’s only or its most patriarchal social system; rather, it often indicates that Chinese patriarchy has a long and deep-rooted historical legacy and that it in many ways remains dominant in our social lives.

One attribute particular to Chinese patriarchal tradition is the senior man in the household as the head and center of his family network. Of course men in general enjoy most privileges and authority in this tradition; however, what may be specific to Chinese culture here is that it is the senior man, usually the grandfather or the father, who is in charge. The
senior man possesses the power over nearly all personal and communal matters as well as all individuals within the limits of his family network; in other words, the entire household socio-politically revolves around this senior man. Centralized toward the senior man is not only the authority but also the aggregation of the families of his sons and plausibly grandsons. Because of such particular practices, many have argued that traditional Chinese society is not only patriarchal but also patrilocal, which together help consolidate and reproduce this tradition.

It is also in this tradition that women marries into the husband’s family and thus has to move to where this family is located and to serve the members of the family, especially her parents-in-law. The relations between the married woman and her mother-in-law (婆媳問題), including all the potential tensions and conflicts, become the essential and vital question inside virtually all families in Chinese society. It is argued that the persistence of this question comes from the mother-in-law passing over the tasks and duties of the mistress of the household, through harsh
disciplining, to the married woman. From a more political and critical position, it may also be argued that the two women are in a constant power struggle due to their competition for the management position in the household or for the attention and recognition of the man, usually the married woman’s husband, that is, the son of her mother-in-law. What the complicated relations between the married woman and her mother-in-law bring to light here is certainly not the matter of characters; rather, they help to reconsider the question regarding Chinese patriarchy and women. That is, Chinese patriarchal mechanism does not produce oppressions of men against women alone; it may also engender opposition among women themselves, and sometimes it is women who serve as the advocates of patriarchal interests and come to oppress against other women.

That women more than often find themselves in a powerless place does not mean that there is no mechanism to in some way balance such gender difference in Chinese society. *Niangjia* (娘家), or the natal
family of the married woman, serves such a function in particularly Taiwan. By marrying into her husband’s family, traditionally and conventionally, the wife is to move over and live with her parents-in-law; since marriage, the wife is also expected to maintain minimum contact with her natal family. However, according to Taiwanese Niangjia tradition, the wife’s natal family preserves considerable authority when it is necessary to negotiate or intervene in possible arguments. To settle crucial family matters or arguments for the children, for instance, the uncle on the mother’s side could stand in and perform paternal duties on the father’s behalf.\(^1\)

\(^1\) In Taiwanese custom, the second day of the year in the lunar calendar, or the day after Chinese New Year’s Day, also marks the day when every married woman is to return to and visit her natal family. At least for one day in every year, the married woman could spend a day with her own parents and other family members, to not have to serve her

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This custom, as it is normally referred to in Chinese as “長舅如父”, primarily serves its symbolic purpose better than its practical function these days. Even though this custom is for reference today, one should note that it shows how rooted the custom is in Taiwanese society.
in-laws, and to disregard all the duties she has to attend to as a wife and a
daughter-in-law. Customs like these may not make fundamental change
in women’s conditions in Taiwanese society after all, but it is an indication
that there is a support mechanism to alleviate the pressures upon them in
social life.

With women’s traditions rooted in Chinese culture, nonetheless,
Taiwanese society has modernized in this respect like most of the societies
in the world. In many ways, the socio-cultural scene regarding women in
Taiwan during the twentieth century has changed substantially from
Chinese women’s traditions introduced above. Even though women in
twentieth-century Taiwan remain largely conditioned by social practices of
patriarchal interests, life trajectories and possibilities begin to vary. A
look at the social lives of women in Taiwan during the mid-twentieth
century is the subject of next session.

Discussion points:
1. According to your experiences/impressions, what should a Taiwanese woman ideally be, that is, what are the ethical guidelines for a Taiwanese woman?

2. Following the previous question, what ethical guidelines for Taiwanese women do you think are traditional yet persistent today? And are there guidelines that are modern?

**Reading suggestions:**

Female virtues and Chinese women’s traditions are not new topics in the discussion of Chinese women’s lives anywhere. Historian Susan Mann’s *Precious Records: Women in China’s Long Eighteenth Century* (Stanford University Press, 1997), among her other works, should make a nice beginning for curious readers, both English and Chinese ones: this volume is also translated into Chinese, titled 《蘭閨寶錄：晩明至盛清時的中國婦女》(左岸文化，2005).
Session 2. Taiwanese Women in the Mid-twentieth Century

The mid-twentieth century brought historic changes to Taiwanese society. Taiwan’s return to China by the end of the eight-year Sino-Japanese War was soon followed by another period of socio-political suppression under the martial law, or the so-called White Terror. Socially and culturally restrained notwithstanding, this period also saw the takeoff of national economy, evidenced in the establishment of industrial districts near the ports, the emergence of export-oriented industries, and the population flow toward urban areas. By the 1960s, urbanization and rapid economic growth already became the most notable social phenomena in Taiwan.

One effect of these social changes was Taiwanese women entering the job market. Unlike their sisters in the past, whose workplace was in the household, Taiwanese women in the modern day began to walk out of the family and find jobs to be financially independent. Of course, there
had been women that worked as wage earners, but it was not until the mid-twentieth century that women in Taiwan became an essential part of labor force for the society as well as national economy. When Taiwanese women began to work outside the household and earn income mostly for the family, they generally served as caretakers, jobs similar to their roles as wife and mother in the household. In this regard, as they took jobs like nurse, waitress, secretary, and domestic helper, what they did at work was normally the extension of their labor at home; the only difference was that they received payment for their labor outside the household. It was certainly not all that they could perform professionally, but it was likely the very limited career choices available to them at that time.

Among the emergent jobs for Taiwanese women were factory girls at the industrial parks. By the mid-1960s, the government in Taiwan began to launch export processing zones (EPZ) in major ports to boost the investment of overseas capital, to increase job opportunities for fellow
Taiwanese and, overall, to expand the national economy. The first EPZ was established in Kaohsiung, and the enormous demand of labor force immediately drew many young girls there to begin their careers. The working condition might be harsh, and they usually had to work long, arduous hours with insignificant wages, but young Taiwanese women were willing to commute every day and spent their youth in the factories, since it was probably the first time they lived not as a daughter or a wife, but an employee as well as an individual. Social expectation might still lead a Taiwanese woman toward the life of a wife, but before it happened, she could for some time live a modern life: emancipated from domestic space, socialized outside the family and in touch with the larger society, and financially independent.

2.1 The Graveyard of the Twenty-five Ladies in Kaohsiung
With their participation into the domestic labor force, Taiwanese women flew into the city, earned money to support themselves and, thus, increasingly became consumers. Their surfacing onto the social scene in this respect changed Taiwan’s socio-cultural landscape from the 1970s on. The transformation was similarly reflected in Taiwanese popular culture, as we find more movies, novels, and songs portraying experiences of young Taiwanese women moving to the city, living away from parents and enduring solitude, working hard and saving money for a better life, and ultimately, the bittersweet mixture of harsh reality and optimistic prospect.

However, that Taiwanese women started to have a taste of empowerment did not immediately lead to a feminist consciousness among them. Moreover, incidents every once in a while reminded the society that Taiwanese women remained in living and working conditions less than ideal. One most unforgettable as well as the most shocking tragic event that marks women’s labor history in Taiwan was the one that took place in Ci Jin, Kaohsiung in 1973. Ci Jin, a tiny and slender peninsula composed
of a sandbar right outside Kaohsiung City, was home to no more than twenty thousand people by the 1970s; among them were a few hundred residents who commuted, by poorly equipped ferry, to the industrial park in Cianjhen (前鎮), Kaohsiung, every day.

In the morning of September 3rd, 1973, a couple hundred commuters rushed into the ferry station, ready to board the ferry to Cianjhen. It was mostly young girls in the crowd, who worked very hard at the industrial parks to make ends meet for the family, at the same time trying to save some money for themselves. The first ferry departed at ten to seven; this tiny, old and shabby ferry, built to allow no more than 13 passengers, was jammed with over 80 people. Even though the ferry service was under awful management, no one really ever filed complaint regarding the obvious violation of regulation: this transportation was the only option available to local residents. Sometimes a ferry could be packed up to more than one hundred passengers but, since no accident ever happened and it was a time when everyone was only trying to make do with life, this
unpleasant condition remained the daily routine of the passengers. 2  

But something was different this day. Not long after the ferry left the dock, passengers noticed some tremble from the ferry body, and water began to seep into the cabin. Panic soon broke out among the passengers. Some started to cry for help, while others asked the operator to stop the ferry immediately. However, the operator believed that they were reaching the destination and decided to continue, only to find minutes later that the situation was worse than he thought; the operator now decided to change course and dock the ferry to the nearest port. The minute when the ferry was docked, the passengers began to rush onto the ground, but because all the other passengers were pushed to one side of the ferry it started to slope; worse even, those in the cabin were trapped and could not find an escape. Within seconds the ferryboat began to drown, and it was chaos all-over. This incident ended up as a tragic event, as twenty-five of the passengers that were caught in the cabin, all young women, did not escape in time; 

2 The story of this accident is referenced and translated into English from the chapter 〈勞動女性紀念公園—高雄廿五淑女之墓〉 in 《女人屐痕：台灣女性文化地標》, p.p. 214-227.
they drowned and died.

This horrific event was the result of wrongful administration and a series of poor judgments. It was the gravest accident that had ever occurred in the area of the Port of Kaohsiung, and both the ferry company and the local administration were responsible. In the wake of this incident, a shared graveyard was established in Ci Jin to accommodate and commemorate the bodies of the twenty-five young women; in 2004, a memorial park was launched at the site to forever remind Taiwanese people of this history and how Taiwanese women used to—and still do—sacrifice their youth and dedicate their life to their own future, their families, and their country.

2.2 The Women of the Hsu Family in Chiayi

During the mid-twentieth century, the flow of Taiwanese women from the household to the division of waged labor indicates their socio-economic empowerment, but it does not necessarily suggest their
coming to a feminist consciousness, or an overall development of their social status. Just because Taiwanese women became breadwinners for the family and grew economically independent does not mean that they enjoyed more socio-political rights. Still, among the economically empowered yet socio-politically contained women in Taiwan, a very small number managed to come to the position of social, cultural, and political leadership. Their efforts slowly but powerfully inspired more and more sisters with ambitions to pursue their ideals.

A very early example in this regard was Ms. Hsu Shih-Hsien (許世賢) and her families. Born into a respectable family in 1908, Ms. Hsu was already allowed certain advantages compared with other Taiwanese in the colonial time. After high school she went to Japan, twice, for medical studies, at the same time developing an interest in politics; when she finished her degree in the late 1930s, Ms. Hsu became the first Taiwanese female medical doctor. Soon after Taiwan was returned to the Republic of China by the end of the eight-year Sino-Japanese War, the
KMT government appointed Ms. Hsu to run Chia-yi Girls’ High School, making her the first female high school principal in Taiwan.\(^3\)

Ms. Hsu’s career as well as accomplishment did not just stop there. Since the late 1940s, Ms. Hsu made use of her socio-political influence to advocate women’s rights, most notably the opposition and petition for eradicating licensed prostitution. This marked her first step of engaging in national politics. For the rest of her life Ms. Hsu went on to become a full-time politician and helped rewrite Taiwanese political history, including the first elected female mayor in Taiwan, for Chiayi City, in 1969. In 1973 she won the election for membership at the Legislative Yuan with the highest vote; after she served two terms as Legislator, Ms. Hsu returned to Chiayi and won the mayoral election for the second time, at the age of seventy-five.

Ms. Hsu left behind her a profound legacy in local and national politics. In her entire political career, Ms. Hsu had been known for being

\(^3\) The life story of Hsu Shih-Hsien is reference and translated into English from the chapter 〈中央噴水池與嘉義媽祖婆—許世賢之許家班〉 in 《女人屐痕：台灣女性文化地標》, p.p. 92-107.
fair yet considerate, unbiased yet flexible, practical yet honest and upright.

She was so beloved by the people of Chiayi that when two of her daughters, Ms. Chang Wen-ying (張文英) and Ms. Chang Po-ya (張博雅), also devoted in politics, they were both elected as the mayor of Chiayi City. Today, a road in Chiayi City is named after Ms. Hsu Shih-Hsien.

But what Ms. Hsu contributed to Taiwanese society and the gender culture in Taiwan, more than anything else, was her own example. She inspired an entire generation of Taiwanese women with political ambitions that women could enter national politics and did a job as good as, sometimes even better than, men. At a time when the social culture maintained the belief that women were incapable of tough decisions or it was inappropriate of them to involve in public affairs, Ms. Hsu was already encouraging Taiwanese women to participate in social and national politics by making her own life as an example. If feminist consciousness and feminist movement require multiple struggles toward women’s socio-political rights and more social space as well as more
opportunities of political participation for women, Ms. Hsu Shih-Hsien may be the first woman in Taiwan whose lifelong committed perfectly lived up to those aims.

And indeed, since the latter half of the twentieth century, more and more women in Taiwan began to express their ambitions and made attempts in various social, political, economic, and cultural pursuits. Some vented anger at oppressions against women in Taiwanese society, while others explored multiple possibilities of life and career. But it was not until Annette Lu that the term “feminism” was openly and intensively discussed. A primary discussion of feminism, including the emergence of feminist movement and feminist consciousness since the mid-twentieth century, is the subject of next session.

Discussion points:

1. Find a woman who were born or grew up in the mid-twentieth century in Taiwan, most preferably one of your family members or someone
you know well. Talk to her, learn of her general life stories, and ask her to tell you what specific experiences she remembers best working or living as a young Taiwanese woman at that time.

Reading Suggestions:

Since the late twentieth century, life stories and particular accomplishments of Taiwanese women have become a much invested and explored topic in Taiwan, and there have been a great volume published. A really good reference is 《女人屐痕: 台灣女性文化地標》 (女書文化, 2006), a book I rely heavily on for initial ideas of the early life, achievements and struggles of women in Taiwan. For those interested in the legendary life of Ms. Hsu Shih-Hsien, her biography 《許世賢傳奇: 嘉義媽祖婆》 (三民, 2007) shall be a very helpful reading.
Session 3. Feminism in Taiwan: Emergence and Development

This project primarily follows the chronicle order of Taiwanese women’s social status, conditions, and various forms of empowerment; it presents the historical movement in which women in Taiwan struggle toward a more emancipated and independent social life. That Taiwan, like other places in the world, generally progresses and transforms into a liberal and equal society can be a myth that belongs to a much larger question demanding a complex and complicated discussion; however, it is agreed that feminist consciousness, manifested in feminist discursive, organizing and petitioning efforts, took root and prospered in Taiwanese social culture in the second half of the twentieth century. This session introduces the inception of discourses, movements, and organizations in Taiwan that were publicly and formally addressed in the name of feminism.
Provided that feminism concerns the fight for women’s rights, any form of thought and any socio-political struggle related to this idea should qualify as feminism of a sort. However, nearly all feminist references trace back to the West, that is, Europe and North America, as their intellectual and theoretical origins. And Taiwan is no exception. Still, feminism in Taiwan has dedicated its energies to issues and problems particular to the gender culture and socio-politics on this island. Returned scholars who studied overseas, local organizers, and immigrant countrywomen may bring ideas back from the West, but they also work to make those ideas in conversation with social interests indigenous to the context in Taiwan and so inspire the following generations to develop Taiwanese feminism.

What we identify as Taiwanese feminism owes most of its accomplishments and inspirations to Ms. Annette Lu. The pioneering career of Lu in the 1970s and her political struggles are the discussion of next section.
3.1 Annette Lu the Trailblazer

Born in Taoyuan in the year before Taiwan was returned to the KMT government, Annette Lu Hsiu-lien (呂秀蓮) came from a mildly comfortable family. In her youth Lu remained untouched by politics until she finished college, and it was in the 1970s when she became intensively involved in and provocative of feminist issues in Taiwan. One point of departure was 1970, the year the United Nations celebrated the sixtieth anniversary of International Women’s Day, when Lu attended the event in New York City. At the event she observed the overall development of women’s rights, and that of America in particular; Lu realized that the gender culture and specifically women’s conditions in Taiwan needed thorough reconsideration and radical transformation.  

Upon returning to Taiwan, Lu began to write and speak extensively on what she would call “New Feminism (新女性主義”)”. As proposed,

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4 The accounts on Ms. Annette Lu are referenced and translated into English from the chapter 〈拓荒者與呂秀蓮—拓荒者出版社〉 in 《女人屐痕：台灣女性文化地標》, p.p. 158-171.
the New Feminism Movement had three essential principles: first, one should be a human being and then a man or a woman; second, act as one is supposed to be; and third, anyone should be able to exploit his/her talents. What she aspired to promote was for all women to speak and do as they wish; that is, Lu meant for Taiwanese women to fulfill themselves in all possible ways. Yet this simple contention met numerous malicious verbal abuses and harshs as well as insensitive criticism, from both men and conservative women. Lu’s wild ideas were mistaken for being hostile, militant, antisocial, and individual in an excessive and thus dangerous manner.

Despite the mostly groundless attacks, the New Feminism Movement drew supports from liberal minds and soon became an unstoppable social trend. In 1974, Lu published the feminist classic *New Feminism*; two years later, she helped launch the Pioneer Press, arguably the first attempt in Asia to combine feminist movement and publishing;

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5 The three principles of Lu’s new feminism are my own rough translation from original Chinese. Originally they are: 先做人，再做男人或女人；是什麼、像什麼；人盡其才.
she also helped establish a center where women could meet, socialize and organize for feminist causes.\(^6\) Despite their short lives—neither stayed longer than three years, the center and the press, along with all Lu’s efforts, shook Taiwanese society. More ambitious than most accomplished women of the time, Lu did not simply propose that Taiwanese women enter the job market or participate in the politics; she also encouraged women’s or feminist studies, helped initiate a survey on the conditions of housewives as well as organize social services for abused women. Within a decade, feminist movement in Taiwan triggered the social attention to as many issues on women and gender equality as possible. Compared to what women can do and what the society can do for them in Taiwan these days, the New Feminism Movement in the 1970s may not be as critical, radical and extensive, yet it indeed planted a seed in the society, and Ms. Annette Lu was the superstar heroine in the process.

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\(^6\) I hereby attach the titles of Lu’s book and the Pioneer Press in their original Chinese: 《新女性主義》 and 拓荒者出版社, respectively.
3.2 Since Awakening: The Feminist Movement in the 1980s

Ms. Annette Lu’s pioneer works in the 1970s inspired a great many Taiwanese women to continue what she started. After the shutdown of the Pioneer Press, the feminist movement that Lu triggered did not diminish but proliferated, as many of her coworkers pursued their respective and particular feminist interests. The 1980s was the decade in when Taiwanese society was moving toward the abolishment of martial law. It was a historic time, in which an incredible mobilization of social energies was invested in socio-politics, and feminist organizing and activism certainly took its due part. This section introduces several crucial contributions to the feminist discourse, scholarship, and social practice in Taiwan during the 1980s.

The first attempt that marked a breakthrough in the history of feminist movement in Taiwan was the foundation of the *Awakening Magazine* (婦女新知雜誌社) in 1982. Even to say that it is the first
feminist magazine in Taiwan is to underrate its contributions and accomplishments; in its prosperous and enduring career to this day, Awakening has called attention to critical issues, mobilized countless social movements, and provided myriad services on behalves of women in Taiwan, as it has also undergone multiple transformations. Launched by a group of women intellectuals, including Li Yuan-Chen (李元貞), Tsao Ai-Lan (曹愛蘭), and Zheng Zhihui (鄭至慧), Awakening examined controversial issues from the right to one’s own body, sexual harassment, legalize abortion, sexual assault, prostitution and children prostitutes, pornography, to domestic abuse. Since the early 1980s was a period when the martial law remained in force, Awakening members were careful to bypass sensitive political issues, yet raised enough social attention to the subject matters they rendered urgent and in relation to gender equality and women’s development.

As Awakening increased momentum, it was expanded and changed into a foundation of multiple purposes. Since its institution in 1987, the
Awakening Foundation has been a crucial pushing hand of organized feminist activism in Taiwan; it also closely monitored the government and the policy making process. In 1989, for instance, the Foundation began to involve intensively in drafting the law that later became the Act of Gender Equality in Employment (性別平等工作法). Over the past decade, the Foundation has remained active in proposing revision on laws likely to undermine women’s rights to their body, property, and even name; it also has made attempts of coalition with indigenous Taiwanese women as well as newly arrived immigrant women primarily from Southeast Asia. Those efforts are clear indication that, after thirty years, the Awakening Foundation is still engaged in women’s issues and maintains vigorous activism on organized feminist works.

3.3 Other Feminist Attempts in and after the 1980s

If Ms. Annette Lu inspired a whole generation of feminist Taiwanese sisters, the Awakening Magazine really started the fire. The same year
when *Awakening* transformed from a magazine into a foundation, Tsao Ai-Lan worked with other fellow feminists, most of them lawyers, and established Taipei Women’s Rescue Foundation (婦女救援基金會). Other crucial social organizations of feminist politics like the Warm Life association (晚晴協會) and the Homemakers Union (主婦聯盟) were also launched in the same year. On the other hand, college campuses saw the formation of student societies and research programs on feminist politics and/or women’s studies, indicating growing interests in feminist scholarship in Taiwan. As early as 1985, a research program specifically on women’s studies was put together in National Taiwan University, setting the first example of feminist scholarship in Taiwan.

Clubs, support groups, and social organizations proliferated, and there was a blossom of movements to promote women’s rights or protest abuses against women. One of the largest demonstrations of this kind took place as early as in 1988, where the Awakening Foundation collaborated with Taipei Women’s Rescue Foundation to parade to
advocate the rescue of underage prostitutes (救援雛妓大遊行). By this event, concerned feminist organizations promoted the issue of the prostitution of children as not only a question of gender but also that of human right. With this strategic—and educational—discourse, the parade turned out successful, as the social attention was drawn to the broad feminist concern of women trafficking.

Despite its prolific career, the Awakening Foundation had its internal tension like all other organizations. During the 1990s, generational difference and the LGBT issues triggered debates and fissures within the Foundation; what tensions like those exposed was its relatively inflexible and thus conservative perspectives on more radical topics like queer politics and sexuality. As the new generation of feminist activists and intellectuals matured by the 1990s, some broke from the Awakening Foundation, while others formed organizations of their own. The organization of feminist clubs or student societies across college campuses in Taiwan since the late 1980s could be considered a sign of such
departure; the female club of National Taiwan University (台灣大學女性研究社), launched in 1988, was the first of its kind. Sociologist Wang Ya-Ko (王雅各, 1999) renders the emergence of feminist student clubs a landmark and the most significant accomplishment of the feminist movement of the 1980s in Taiwan. According to Wang, feminist intellectuals and/or activists of this generation really brought forth the critical energy in Taiwanese feminism because they were more open, radical, and directly critical of oppressions against women and patriarchal mechanism not merely in politics but also in discourse and language.

On the other hand, feminist efforts in the 1990s were increasingly invested in then controversial and/or radical subjects. Between Us (我們之間), the first lesbian social organization in Taiwan, was established in 1990; it also published Taiwan’s first lesbian magazine under the same title. In 1994, under the founding efforts of Zheng Zhihui, the fembooks (女書店), the first exclusively feminist publishing house and bookstore in

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7 Of Wang’s discussion on female student clubs in college in Taiwan since the late 1980s, see the chapter 〈校園中的純女生社團：女研社〉 in 《臺灣婦女解放運動史》, p.p. 171-194.
the Chinese world, was opened in Taipei. Even though they, among the many organizations of various forms to come, did not work closely with the Awakening Foundation; they might even take opposite positions at times. However, their very existence proved the diversity of the feminist domain in Taiwan, how discursive and organized feminist movements took root and prospered in the society.

As opposed to feminist works in the earlier generation, whose primary investment was to encourage Taiwanese women to walk out of the domestic space and seek individual career outside the family, feminist women of the younger generation directly engaged patriarchal oppressions and social injustice with critical discourses, radical agendas, and daring languages. They were likely the first generation of Taiwanese women that were self-consciously feminist as we conventionally understand the term “feminist”. The feminists in the 1990s had no fear in provoking Taiwanese mainstream society and challenging cultural assumptions; they ignited controversies, irritated conservative groups, and sometimes
met hateful confrontations. Their critical statements might be extreme at times, but all they wanted was a rejection to silence and containment.

One emphasis of the feminist efforts in Taiwan in the 1990s was gender and sexuality. Lesbianism, unrestrained expressions of sexual desires, and the uninhibited pursuit of diverse sexuality became the attention of many feminist discourses in Taiwan of the time. Next chapter turns to discuss those subjects and ideas.

Discussion points:

1. What do you think are the differences between the two terms women’s movement as feminist movement?

2. What do you consider a feminist issue or a question concerning feminism? What in your mind are the pressing social problems in Taiwan that concern women or feminist works these days?

Reading suggestions:
There are numerous references for Ms. Annette Lu, the Awakening Foundation, and feminism in Taiwan during the 1980s. Lu, Taiwan’s former vice president, has been having a prolific and ongoing political career; her published books, including the reprinted 《新女性主義》，are available in most libraries. The Awakening Foundation and the fembooks remain functional and active to this day; their information should be easily accessible. Wang Ya-Ko’s 《臺灣婦女解放運動史》 is one of the very few books that gives a comprehensive view of the feminist movements in Taiwan; the reader shall find it a helpful reference on this topic.
Session 4. Gender, Sexuality, and Women’s Autonomy

The previous chapter discusses organized feminism that emerged in Taiwan during the 1980s; it also introduces radical feminism surfacing toward the end of that decade, which turned the critical attention to issues like sexuality. The diverse and forthright expressions of sexual desire, including that of same-sex desires, became a battlefront of feminist work in Taiwan by the end of last century.

Indeed, for a woman in Taiwan to express her sexual desires without judgment or criticism of any sort was simply unthinkable in the near past. It is also for this reason that the pursuit of one’s sexuality as she pleases has increasingly become a fundamental form of women’s autonomy in Taiwan. This chapter explores several essential aspects of this vital subject.
4.1 A Living Space Free of Sexual Abuse

Since the New Feminism Movement in the 1970s, issues regarding sexual abuses against Taiwanese women have been imperative to concerned activists. The term “sexual abuse” is normally related to more severe forms of act like harassment or rape; however, other forms of abuse against women, most commonly domestic violence, could be considered sexual abuse. It is because when those acts take place, they normally accompany one another; it is all the more important when most cases of sexual abuse occur either within the home or intimate relationships.

It thus seems natural that activists took sexual abuse to be the first target of their feminist works, for there would be no autonomy of any kind to women if they cannot defend or fight for a right to their own body. Who are the ones committing sexual violence against women, in what occasions and under what circumstances? How can a married woman or a daughter live without fear in their own living place? How does a woman avoid verbal or physical harassment at work? How do we, as a
society, educate each other so that a woman makes herself clearly understood when she has no intention of further sexual contact with her partner? In what way is pornography or sex-related jokes a way of offense to women? Should we legalize sex trade and make prostitution an employment right to women, or should we outlaw it because it is nothing else than an exploitation against women? And how do we push for the government to make policies toward a better social space for women in Taiwan?

Those are among the crucial questions that are concrete, closely relevant but also public and incredibly broad. They concern all women in Taiwan and sexual abuse, and thanks to the perseverance of feminist activists, the fruition of this long struggle has been reflected in the lawmaking process as well as the social perception. Over the past two decades, some of those questions trigger huge debates and remain undetermined, as laws are passed to settle others to ensure official protection for women. In 1997, for instance, the Legislative Yuan passed
Sexual Assault Crime Prevention Act (性侵害犯罪防治法); in the following year, the Domestic Violence Prevention Act (家庭暴力防治法) was made to further protect women and minors from domestic abuse, in most cases involved in degrees of sexual violence. The latter law in particular represented a change to the tradition of legislation in Taiwan, when in the past laws conventionally concerned the public and did not intervene in domestic affairs, which was considered private matters.

With regard to promoting education on gender equality, the Ministry of Education initiated the Gender Equity Education Committee (兩性平等教育委員會) in 1997. On the other hand, the Act of Gender Equality in Employment (性別平等工作法) was passed in 2002 to prevent biases and discrimination on the basis of gender difference in the job market. All the lawful and official efforts can be considered the milestones in the progress of the feminist movement in Taiwan in the late twentieth century. Even though they have their own legal and socio-political limitations, and they do not always help abused women entirely from oppressions; it
nonetheless provides substantial institutional support to women’s autonomy.

4.2 Sexual Desires and Sexual Identity

With the institution of the laws and official units on behalves of women, radical discourses and attempts regarding sexual liberation began to surface. The liberation from traditional ideas of sex and sexuality can be understood in at least two dimensions: the outright and unrestrained expression of sexual desires, and lesbian sexuality. This section introduces the two subject matters.

Conditioned by Chinese patriarchy, women’s sexual desires are perceived to be a matter of social taboo. A morally ideal and thus virtuous woman is supposed to refrain herself from any explicit expression that may relate her with sexual lewdness; in public she should dissociate from sex under all circumstances. Today, requirements as such are deemed oppressive, as they are based on the idea that, in this tradition, a
woman’s sexuality only serves the interests of her husband. To break from this tradition, a woman’s sexual desires can and should be publicly discussed, as long as her sexuality is recognized as an expression of her identity. In this modern thought, a woman does not have to be passive or in denial with regard to her own sexuality; quite on the contrary, she can be sexually candid, aggressive, and even adventurous, just like men are always so encouraged.

Among the radical feminists who exclaim sexual liberation, Josephine Ho Chuen-juei (何春蕤) is one of the most provocative and controversial individuals. With a doctoral degree in literary studies, Ho has become intensively involved in the question of gender, sexuality, and women’s sexual liberation. According to her, women’s sexual liberation is vital and imperative, since a woman is entitled to the affirmation of her sexuality in all possible ways. In a widely popular—and equally controversial—book on feminism and sexual liberation, Ho argues for a radical position in which, in any sexual relationship, women need to
consider their sexuality as well their body *not* as something they would lose control of. Instead, women could begin to think that, in every sexual contact, their sexual desires are fulfilled, and they earn another moment of sexual pleasure for their body; it is in this logic that women’s sexuality is no longer depressed and that they can possibly enjoy sex without a sense of guilt or inferiority.

Alongside but not identical to the radical feminists above are lesbian feminists who dedicate their critical energy to the defense and promotion of lesbian as well as other queer Taiwanese. Following the pioneer works of Between Us, more efforts have been invested in creating a social world for both lesbian and non-lesbian Taiwanese and making lesbians ordinary members in the mainstream society. The coalition against discrimination and toward a queer friendly Taiwanese social culture even gave birth to a new set of terms specifically for LGBT socio-politics: it subverted the term *tongzhi* (同志), for instance, which has since conveyed not just the conventional “comrade” but also the untranslatable “queer
In the context of LGBT culture, the translation “queer folk” from the term tongzhi is mine. My point in this otherwise rough translation is that there has not been an English word that corresponds with this term and conveys the playful subversion in the meaning.

Qiu’s most important works include *Diary of a Crocodile* (鱷魚手記, 1994) and *The 89 folk*. But the path to Taiwan being a better place for lesbians has been difficult, at times devastating. Taiwan in the 1990s was largely a society with a phobia on queer issues; hate crimes or abuses were heard sometimes when lesbians suffered from various forms of violence, while, in other similarly tragic cases, lesbian young girls chose suicide as their ultimate response and final resort to this insensitive and sometimes hostile world. Qiu Miaojin (邱妙津), a well-known and established writer, made her lesbian identity public in several of her widely popular books; yet, out of undetermined reasons, she killed herself in 1995, during her stay in Paris, France. Qiu left a significant legacy among lesbian Taiwanese, including terms coined in her works for exclusively the lesbian identity that are now everyday terms and intimate callings for all lesbian tongzhi.

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8 In the context of LGBT culture, the translation “queer folk” from the term tongzhi is mine. My point in this otherwise rough translation is that there has not been an English word that corresponds with this term and conveys the playful subversion in the meaning.

9 Qiu’s most important works include *Diary of a Crocodile* (鱷魚手記, 1994) and *The
In spite of the premature departure of Qiu and other lesbian fellows, other feminist advocates persist in the struggle. A key figure in the 1990s was Chang Chuan-Fen (張娟芬), a prolific writer and committed human right advocate, wrote two books on lesbianism in Taiwan. Her works helped promote a lesbian culture in Taiwan and pushed the mainstream society to reconsider critical questions, including: What are the patriarchal and likely the homophobic thoughts hidden behind ostensibly ordinary and unprejudiced social mechanisms, cultural discourses, and state institutions? In what ways do lesbians of different characters express their particular identity, and how do they engage in romantic relationships accordingly? What can we do to have a better conversation between the lesbian world and the non-lesbian, non-queer world in Taiwan?

In other forms of cultural production, Taiwanese society also sees sincere portrayals of lesbians more than ever. In popular culture, filmmaker Zero Chou (周美玲) has come out as a lesbian and made

*Death Note of Montmartre* (蒙馬特遺書, 1996). The terms she invented in particularly *Diary of a Crocodile* like “crocodile” (鱷魚) and *la-zhi* (拉子, phonetic mimicry of “lesbian”) have become nicknames within the lesbian community in Taiwan.
several well-received movies on lesbians, including *Splendid Float* (豔光四射歌舞團, 2004), *Spider Lilies* (刺青, 2006), and *Drifting Flowers* (漂浪青春, 2008). All the efforts by Chang, Chou, and many others are meant for all lesbian tongzhi to live an ordinary life, just like any Taiwanese citizen.

**Discussion points:**

1. What are your opinions on free expressions and pursuits of women’s sexual desires? Do you think that women should have different expectations than men with regard to sexuality?

2. What do you think of lesbianism? According to you, have lesbian Taiwanese enjoyed sufficient social space and rights? Is there any critical issue that needs to be done on their behalves?

**Reading suggestions:**

Readers interested in radical feminism usually have to look for references
published by scholars or intellectuals, including the famous Chang Hsiao-Hung (張小虹) and Josephine Ho. The book referred to in the session by Ho is 豪爽女人：女性主義與女性解放》(皇冠, 1994). For the discussions on lesbianism in Taiwan, the reader shall find two of the definitive books by Chang Chuan-Fen extremely helpful. They are 《姊妹戲牆：女同志運動學》(時報, 2011) and 《愛的自由式：女同志故事書》 (時報, 2011). Both were originally published in the 1990s; the latest edition comes with updated information.
Session 5. Violation by Way of Sex

Earlier in this project it has been discussed that one aim in the feminist movement in Taiwan since the 1980s has been to criticize and prevent all forms of sexual violence against women. Activists, scholars, and politicians have worked to remind the public of the gravity of this issue, encourage abused women to step forward and fight, monitor the officials to serve their duties, and push the government to make better laws so that no more tragedy may occur.

There are several types of sexual violence; some take place inside the household or within intimate relationships, while others pervade the more abstract, social context. This session generally observes the types of sexual violence most common and thus familiar to us; the session also suggests available institutional supports for preparation and protection reasons.
5.1 Sexual Violence: the Concept and Types

Many believe sexual violence to be primarily a severe offense of a woman’s body, and the traumatic effects of the violence are both physical and psychological. Doubtless, women’s bodies are of utmost importance; when analyzing cases of sexual violence, it is almost always believed that perpetrators or sexual offenders commit a sex-related crime for reasons related to violating the victim’s body in a sexual way. Following this line of thought, one also finds it familiar when non-governmental organizations and various support groups pay most attention to the damage of a victim’s sexuality and dignity by way of the devastation of her body in sexual violence.

As invaluable as a woman’s body and sexuality is, one should not be confused that what involves virtually any circumstance of sexual violence is power. In this context, power refers to a relation of control and exploitation on a woman’s body: the compulsive desire of power; the obsession of power over another body; the display of control and the
perverse addiction of fear from another through the penetration of another body, as if the body is a woman’s limits and last fortress of defense. With this conception we can understand why sexual violence does not necessarily involve sexual act, but a form of domination is always present. Mild or less invasive—although equally offensive—types of sexual violence, such as verbal harassment and abusive sex joke, perfectly indicate how sexual violence demonstrates power but not exactly sexual acts.

Still, regardless of a person’s sex, sexual penetration is bound to be the ultimate destruction of his or her self-esteem, dignity, and pride. More severe and vicious types of sexual violence include physical sexual harassment, sexual abuse, and rape. On prevention of sexual violence, studies, support groups, and social organizations will warn women against strangers and suspicious occasions; however, they also remind that sexual abuse, rape, or forced sex of any sort more than often takes place within close or intimate relationships. Sexual harassment, by superiors or
coworkers, has troubled many women in their workplaces, and date rape or unwanted sex within marriage a primary pattern of sexual violence in reported rape cases.

However, in many other cases, victims would rather not report the rape. Reasons of unreported rape cases may be because the victims feel too ashamed and traumatized; they may fear the authority of the rapist—usually the male breadwinner or head of the family; or they do not want the family or the relationship to fall apart. All those probable worries make the victims less likely to escape from the threat they may live with every day and remedy their painful experiences. What is worse, because the victims keep quiet of the sexual violence, the rapists and their crimes are never brought to justice, which makes it extremely difficult for law enforcers or support groups to help the victims; it also makes the victims even more vulnerable to rape that is likely to return over and over.

After the persistent efforts of activists, scholars, and concerned social organizations, many laws are launched so victims of sexual violence
can seek legal as well as official help. The previous session mentioned the legislation of the Sexual Assault Crime Prevention Act (性侵害犯罪防治法) in 1997 and the Domestic Violence Prevention Act (家庭暴力防治法) in the following year. In 1999, sexual offenses against minors or those incapable of defending themselves were criminalized, allowing the law enforcers to indict the suspect even if the victims did not press any charge. In 2005, the Sexual Harassment Prevention Act (性騷擾防治法) was added to the lawful enterprise on Taiwanese women’s behalves, allowing women even more legal sources for their protection. Today, nearly every local administration, police station, and every campus has provided service offices for victims of sexual violence to report or seek counseling services. Services as such may be helpful only in certain circumstances, but the main purpose is that women suffering from sexual abuse should not remain silent and in shadow; instead, they are encouraged to face their own painful past, report their cases, and help the police bring the rapists to justice.
5.2 Controversial Types of Sexual Violence

Besides the types of direct, physical sexual violence introduced above, there are types relatively indirect but similarly abusive and oppressive against women. The more problematic forms of sexual violence in this regard include prostitution and pornography; they have triggered tremendous debates in Taiwan, although neither is legalized social practice at this point. How we perceive them in relation to women in Taiwanese society requires ongoing attention.

According to earlier discussions, we learn that prostitution has been a much disputed subject in feminist movements in Taiwan. Conventionally, prostitution is believed to be highly oppressive against women because it serves as an exploitation mechanism adherent to, if not inherent in, patriarchy. When prostitution is granted and administered by the state, women in this work are allowed certain security and welfare, even though official status as such does not guarantee moral and social validation. In recent Taiwanese history, as in many Asian societies in the
near past, “comfort women” (慰安婦) was a radically inhuman, deeply offensive, and extremely problematic form of instituted prostitution under Japanese colonial rule or military occupation.

Sanctioned and instituted by the Japanese military force, “comfort women” was initiated as a sexual service during the eight-year Sino-Japanese War. In spite of its initial design as waged labor, “comfort women” was largely forced labor, as most cases of recruitment were by trade, abduction or false advertisement, and, with no exception, the working conditions were simply horrendous. Across the lands under Japanese occupation, including Korea, the Philippines, Indonesia, Taiwan and—none other, Japan itself, women, mostly young girls, were traded, seduced, sometimes even kidnapped, to be shipped to camps or brothel houses near Japanese military bases. The term of service ranged from a year to two years; the hygienic conditions of the work place were less than ideal, and there was nearly no personal time for rest, socialization, or leisure. It is believed that, in the span of five to six years, over two
thousand Taiwanese women—Han Chinese and aboriginal—were sent to serve as comfort women; because some of the camps were set in colonial Taiwan, there were even Taiwanese women that were made to sexually “comfort” Japanese officers and soldiers away from home at home, in their own land.

Sadly and more atrociously even, the historical injustice done against the comfort women in Taiwan or in almost all other places has not been overturned. Since the start of the controversy in the 1990s, Japan has been reluctant to admit their wrongful and immoral conducts regarding the “comfort women” policy during wartime. Japanese government has constantly ignored the request of previous comfort women as well as concerned social organizations to provide material compensation, not to mention political apology, to those whom it forced into prostitution half a century ago. “Comfort women” victims and feminist activists in Taiwan organize and petition to both continue pressing Japan and push Taiwanese government to recognize the historical atrocity. Again, Taipei Women’s
Rescue Foundation is among the most committed to make this past heard and documented.

“Comfort women” being the most outrageous example, virtually no woman goes into prostitution under voluntary conditions. Women are forced into this practice primarily for the purpose of men’s sexual pleasure, more than often under circumstances when women or young girls were sold into the profession for economic reasons. It is on this basis that feminists remain unyielding on opposing prostitution, given its impossibility to allow room for women’s rights and gender equality in Taiwan. Since prostitution would not help women to become economically independent, it is believed that the practice does not promise a sense of empowerment to women, either. In other words, in as many ways possible, prostitution is nothing but an abusive practice originated in patriarchal societies, as far as feminism is concerned; it is by nature exploitative and discriminative, and it needs to be removed from human culture altogether.
On the other hand, however, feminists of other concerns consider prostitution in the vein of employment, not social oppression. They venture that women are exposed to danger under prostitution not because the practice itself is abusive but because it lacks official regulation and supervision. In this vein, prostitution can be an employment right, as promised by the Constitution, and it should be a socially legitimate profession as any other career. Prostitution can serve as a lawful and secure line of work for women under a careful design of social policies and responsible administration. Today prostitution remains a highly sensitive and controversial subject matter in Taiwan, and there will still be numerous animated debates whether we legalize this profession.

The other similarly controversial and problematic subject is pornography. Like prostitution, pornography has been considered a form of exploitation against women for its explicit, blatant presentation of women as objects and playthings in service of men. In additions, moralists as well as feminists have suspected that, as entertainment,
pornography usually contains stories that inspire fantasies or misleading perceptions regarding women. In those fantasies or perceptions, women appear seductive and inclined to please men in sexual ways, and men would find sexual pleasure anywhere, anytime, with any woman they desire. It is in this perspective that pornography represents women no other than sexual objects and so shows no respect for women as human beings. Today mild forms of pornography are legalized but under strict regulation and close inspection in Taiwan.

5.3 Further Notes on Sexual Violence as a Social Problem

Somewhat ironic is the reality that, despite the disapproval at levels of social discourse and state policy, sex-related industries like night club have been common social presence in Taiwan. Women working at night clubs as well as call girls belong to professions outside official regulation and thus are associated with underground activities, for which women in
this line of work are vulnerable to exploitation.

Today, Taichung City is famous for being the haven of most night clubs in Taiwan; related business in this city is so rooted and well developed that it is believed to have infiltrated local law enforcements as well as administrations, enjoyed backups from underground organizations, and even recruited highly educated women to expand the customer base. Regardless of women of college graduates, with professional trainings, the sex-related industry like the night clubs provides less-than-ideal working environments for women in Taiwan. Because commercial activities as such are not listed as legitimate occupations and thus do not fall under official regulation, women in related business are left in darkness, whose overall working conditions are unknown to the public and therefore exposed to abuse from the underground. Information regarding women in the sex-related industries is unofficial, scarce, or unreliable, and studies on this subject matter are even less available.

As sexual violence is closely linked to sex-related commercial
activities like night club, pornography and prostitution, strategies of illegalization and ignorance may no longer help to make our society better living and working places for women. Perhaps they never have. And if strategies as such are of limited use, to directly confront the issues, openly discuss them and initiate considerate policies to regulate those activities appear to be wiser moves.

**Discussion points:**

1. In your opinions, what forms of sexual violence are immediate social problems in Taiwan, and what can we do to prevent them?

2. Do you think we should make prostitution and/or pornography legal in Taiwan? Why?

**Reading suggestions:**

In one way or another, our readers should find questions of sexual violence, including prostitution and pornography, fairly familiar. There are
references available, but studies are falling short. Comprehensive and in-depth studies on comfort women in Taiwan did not arrive until Taipei Women’s Rescue Foundation’s investigation report《台灣慰安婦報告》(台灣商務, 1999), followed by the work of historian Chu Te-lan (朱德蘭),《台灣慰安婦》(五南, 2009). Another worthy mention is a very rare study of close observation, unusual spirit, but also considerable controversy, by 紀慧文. Her《12位上班小姐的生涯故事》(唐山, 1998) is an anthropological work, for which the author worked in the night club to conduct a credible and truthful study. For female readers, it may be crucial and more helpful to learn of all the laws and official
resources related to the prevention of sexual violence. It may be remedial measures when they are called for; nonetheless, it is highly recommended that one browse over the law codes and know what one can do to protect him/herself. Those codes are accessible online on the national Laws & Regulations Database website: http://law.moj.gov.tw/.
Since the emergence of feminist consciousness and movements over the past half century, all struggles Taiwanese women are likely to have been through appear to surface to social discourse and organized activism in the society. But new questions and challenges regarding women confront Taiwanese social culture along with constantly changing social practices and conditions. To those changes, Taiwanese feminist thoughts, frames of thinking, and strategies of activism also need to adapt accordingly to remain engaged.

So far in this project we have learned of the general social history of Taiwanese women as well as the development of discursive and organized feminism. One may discern through the sessions that the subject of discussion is “Taiwanese women”, and the ideas at issue include gender, sex and power. This session critically reflects on the frame of thoughts in
which we usually discuss issues on “Taiwanese women” as a subject as well as ideas like sex and gender. With this reflection the session shall moves to introduce the newly emerged social phenomena in relation to women in Taiwan over the past decade or two.

6.1 “Taiwanese Women” the Subject and the Question of Nation

Today, “Taiwanese women” appears to indicate none other than, namely, Taiwanese women. All Taiwanese women are assumed to belong to the same homogenous group, with one common identity and one shared cultural and socio-political destiny. Such an assumption reflects the fact that most women in Taiwan are of Han Chinese ethno-cultural origins; by the late twentieth century, according to national statistics, people of Han Chinese origins consisted of more than 90% of the entire population in Taiwan.

The term “Taiwanese women” also reflects a vision of union and
solidarity. During the final years of the twentieth century, “Taiwanese women” began to convey a subject for which all women born and raised in Taiwanese society can identify with. While the term only referred to Han Chinese women who had resided in Taiwan for generation and who spoke Taiwanese, “Taiwanese women” was employed as opposed to mainlander Chinese women, Hakka women, and indigenous Taiwanese women. However, the refashioned articulation of the term “Taiwanese women” since the late twentieth century presented the possibility of a more comprehensive idea of Taiwanese women as a subject. With this transformed idea, women of all diverse origins but with a strong socio-political, cultural, and emotional attachment to Taiwan would now set aside their respective backgrounds, concerns, interests and all the differences and accept each other as “Taiwanese women”.

This assumption is largely in favor of nationalist sentiments, a form of identity and affection engineered by the recognition that there rests an inherent and coherent sense of community called “Taiwan”. As strongly
felt as it is, “Taiwan” here refers to an idea by social, psychological, and historical construction rather than the geographic location or political designation. As a nation or a society, “Taiwan” summons a community of a sort, for which “Taiwanese women” share a bond in addition to being female. “Taiwanese women” as a subject is in many ways foregrounded upon an identification of homogeneity that women of aboriginal Taiwanese origin and of Han Chinese backgrounds, including, Hakka, indigenous Taiwanese, and mainlander Chinese, are joined. It is also on this basis that the term “Taiwanese women” can call for solidarity when desired.

If it is agreed that nation is an identity form constructed under specific historical, cultural, and socio-political conditions, with and for which citizens are united, one needs also to understand that the same idea could be exclusive. National or social membership could be considered a means of rejection by citizens to those not considered one of their own. In this manner, nation and nationalism always involve an idea of boundary,
and thus are limited in a hidden agenda of preference. In this case, according to the context of discourse, “Taiwanese women” can be employed to imply less desirable members, or those ineligible for this community who may be discriminated, sequestered, or excluded. Discourses regarding socio-cultural membership as such were done to indigenous Taiwanese women during the last decades of the twentieth century.

6.2 “Taiwanese Women”: Recent Arrivals

Over the past quarter century, the arrival of a new group of women once more challenges the idea “Taiwanese women” that becomes familiar to this society: migrant brides primarily from China and Southeast Asia.

Since the late 1980s, the introduction of women into Taiwanese society via international marriage became an emergent social phenomenon. It began as Taiwanese men turned toward places outside Taiwan in search for candidates for wife. Most of the Taiwanese men who sought
marriage partners overseas were of rural backgrounds or less socio-economically privileged, and they found it increasingly difficult to marry Taiwanese women. Suspected reasons for such difficulties include Taiwanese women’s higher social and economic capital at their disposal, their growing reluctance to work long hours and hard labor around the household, and their rising ambitions to accomplish in their own terms. Slowly, Taiwanese women found marriage less desirable in this society, if the married life would lead to the end of her career and all possible dreams as well as the beginning of all wifely duties. Upon this prospect, many of the young women in Taiwan opted to remain unmarried before their found an ideal candidate.

As a consequence, marriage agencies are launched in response to the dilemma of Taiwanese men in the marriage market. Agents reached countries like China, Thailand, the Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, and other Southeast Asian nations and introduce women there to come marry into Taiwanese households. The nature of international marriage makes
them migrant brides. They come to Taiwan under minimal assistance, marry to Taiwanese men, and a great many have served as significant helping hands for their newly adopted households. Many have to work long hours both in the field and under the roof, while some have to run small business to have more income for the family. They have contributed not only to running their family, improving home economy, but also making Taiwan a culturally diverse and socially prosper place than it already is.

Despite their constant dedication and sacrifice, for many years those women were not considered Taiwanese women per se. Mainstream socio-cultural discourses in Taiwan would coin terms like wai-ji-hsin-niang (外籍新娘) or da-lu-hsin-niang (大陸新娘) for them, alluding to dehumanizing ideas that their marriage to Taiwanese men is likely for illicit or immoral purposes. Aside from unfounded suspicion as such, the most hurtful notion within those terms is that they do not belong in Taiwanese society and therefore do not qualify as “Taiwanese women”.
Because of defects within national policy, they are also subject to harassment from the government regarding their employment, permanent residency, and citizenship. Within the household, their uncertain identification and the slow process of their adaptation make them further vulnerable to all sorts of domestic abuse.

According to national statistics, there are at least a half million international spouses in Taiwan; many of them are migrant brides, who have lived here for years and borne children. With assistance and support from language and culture classes, service agencies from the government, and social organizations like TransAsia Sisters Association, Taiwan (TASAT, 南洋台灣姐妹會), Taiwanese women of international spouse backgrounds are in better conditions. In cultural production, television and the filmmaking business also begin to pay attention to them; documentaries like Let’s Not Be Afraid! (姊妹，賣冬瓜！, 2010) and fiction movies like My Little Honey Moon (野蓮香, 2012) are all meant for Taiwanese mainstream society to know of their struggles as well as
The migrant brides, or all women in Taiwan of international marriage, are the new addition to the subject “Taiwanese women”. They deserve respect from this society and to be called Taiwanese women just like any other ordinary Taiwanese women.

6.3 Discourses on Migrant Brides in Taiwan and the Question of Race

In fields like scholarship and politics in Taiwan, experts are quick to observe cultural phenomena and social problems associated with the emergence of international marriage in the society. They collect data, study and conduct extensive research, work with related service agencies or social organizations, and initiate national policies to accommodate such rapid change. Some enthusiastic and/or activist individuals like scholars 夏曉鵑 would go so far as to work tirelessly with and advocate for the migrant brides, with hopes that Taiwanese mainstream society can
understand them better, know more of their conditions, help them adapt, and make policies that better match their needs.

What they call our attention to, among all the attempts, is also to rethink oppressions against women and the frames in which one analyzes the oppressions. Borrowing mainly from feminism in the West, feminist discourse in Taiwan has accomplished remarkably in criticizing Chinese patriarchal mechanism, including the unequal power relations of gender in social practice, the narrow and repressive perceptions of sexuality, and the function of the nation state to reinforce or at least substantiate all the biases and unequal powers.

As distinguished as it is, nonetheless, Taiwanese feminism did not attend to the interlaced relations between gender and race until the introduction of migrant brides as an emergent social practice since the last decade of the twentieth century. Critical analysis on the interlocking, twofold oppressive power relations of gender and race, including developing strategies to respond, becomes a vital task for both feminist
activists and scholars in Taiwan.

**Discussion points:**

1. What would you think it is that an unmarried woman in Taiwan finds it less favorable to marry today? Would you agree that marriage is obstructive of a woman’s pursuit of her career and dreams in this society?

2. What do you know about migrant brides in Taiwan, or as they are conventionally called, *wai-ji-hsin-niang* (外籍新娘) or *da-lu-hsin-niang* (大陸新娘)? Do you happen to know any? If so, to your observation, what is her life about?

**Reading suggestions:**

In spite of its relatively longer history, the subject of migrant brides in Taiwan did not come to the attention of the mass reading market until the past decade. Most published works on this topic are of academic interests.
One of the more accessible books is 《不要叫我外籍新娘》(左岸, 2005), a work of collaboration of scholars and migrant brides themselves, and edited by sociologist 夏曉鵲. Interested readers should also find the other book useful: 《性別與移動》(巨流, 2005), by sociologist 邱琡雯.
Session 7. From “Taiwanese Women” to “Women in Taiwan”

In previous sessions one should notice two terms ostensibly referring to the same group, “Taiwanese women” and “women in Taiwan”. Provided “Women and Taiwanese Society” being the title of this project, it so appears the two terms describe the same subject; however, depending on the discursive, historical, and socio-political context, they can carry distinctive meanings and suggest very different insights. The previous sessions discuss the variety of subject to which the term “Taiwanese women” indicate as well as how it can become inclusive and call for a sentiment of union. This session explores and distinguishes the term “women in Taiwan” that this project proposes from “Taiwanese women”, clarifies the specific reference of “women in Taiwan” as a subject, relates it with an emergent social practice in Taiwan, and attempts an understanding of its significance.
7.1 Transnational Migrant Worker in Taiwan: An Emergent Social Practice

The arrival of transnational migrant workers in Taiwan is quite similar to that of migrant brides: they started coming to the island by the late 1980s under the arrangement of middlemen or agencies of the sort, when Taiwanese society began to find it difficult to meet the demand in the labor or marriage market. In the case of labor market, it was the lower division of labor in Taiwan that suffered the shortage of workers, professions that require hard work in manual labor, such as construction, caretaking service, and house cleaning. It is argued that labor was in short supply in those fields because, as a society in general, Taiwan became so materially comfortable that people began to find working in those careers less appealing and unfulfilling. Taiwanese people, particularly the younger generation, preferred employment in air-conditioned offices or more fashionable industries like the restaurant or
the department store.

In response to this situation, corporations began to seek affordable labor force outside Taiwan and pushed the government to legalize the import of laborers as well as establish state offices for administration purposes. Like what happens of migrant brides, most transnational migrant workers have come from Southeast Asia, where the wage is considerably lower than that in Taiwan. They primarily come from Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam, and the Philippines, and women are the majority population. When they come to Taiwan, the migrant workers are relocated in regions where factories are concentrated, including New Taipei City, Taoyuan County, Taichung City, and Kaohsiung City.

In spite of, or precisely because of, their status as contract workers intended for temporary living in Taiwan, transnational migrant workers have suffered enormously during their stay. Coming from Southeast Asian countries and entering lower divisions of labor in Taiwan trigger misconceptions in the mainstream society that they appear to be less
knowledgeable or somehow short of intelligence, that their racial as well as materially underprivileged backgrounds imply their disregard of hygiene, and that they rush into Taiwan to compete with Taiwanese people for job opportunities. All the stereotypes and prejudices reproduce and reinforce one another when the language barrier of the workers is perceived as a sign of unintelligence, when the indecent working settings of the workers are attributed to their low sanitary standards, when the workers’ complaints are interpreted as an indication of their greed and lack of work ethics. All the unfounded suspicion is but foregrounded upon the bias that the socio-economic upbringings of the migrant workers predetermine their personality. It is also with this problematic perception that the ostensibly technical term *wai-ji-lao-gong* (外籍勞工) or *wai-lao* (外勞), literally translated as foreign or non-citizen laborers, has carried racializing and dehumanizing implications.

Worse still, the state policy and administration units in Taiwan have not worked hard enough to improve the general conditions of the migrant
workers, which helps very little on reversing the biased social perceptions against them. In effect, some scholars and activists have argued that the harsh regulations of the government on the migrant workers are themselves a form of racialized mechanism to sustain coded prejudice against the workers. Although such regulations and state administration involve all non-citizen laborers in Taiwan, which today number some four hundred thousand people, it is the migrant workers from Southeast Asia, the overwhelming majority, that are burdened with the most negative impacts.

7.2 Transnational Migrant Worker Women: Caretakers

With all the difficulties working and living in Taiwan, migrant worker women have yet a somewhat different story. Coming to Taiwan under contract, most of the female migrant workers also come from Southeast Asia; unlike their male counterparts, however, transnational
migrant worker women are largely from the Philippines, and most enter vocations in the social service business.

Today, it is no longer a strange view to find Filipina migrant workers caring for Taiwanese elders in private households and nursing homes. In many families with a Filipina migrant worker, the elders—sometimes the young children, too—tend to spend so much time with the caretaker that they are likely to have more emotional attachment with her than with other family members. Such emotional bond is often mutual, but it also creates tension between the caretaker and her employers, virtually the breadwinners of the household. She may be suspected, with no evidence, to win over the heart of the elder and/or the children for profitable purposes. Similar to her fellow male workers at the factory, she would have no Chinese proficiency to defend herself and, when she doesn’t, it justifies the suspicion of her illicit intent and unethical conduct.

At a first sight, working in the household or at a nursing home may look pleasant and comfortable as opposed to working at the factory;
however, the domestic space can be just as unfriendly or even worse. Like their male fellow workers, migrant worker women have to withstand the poor working and living conditions prepared for them, along with all the biased perceptions and prejudiced comments from their employers. However, the migrant worker women’s worksite is within the domesticity or a familial context, which is considered a private space and not to be interfered, and it makes them even easier to be exposed to abuses like extended hours of work and no leisure time. It is not rare to hear of migrant worker women in the household or at the nursing home complaining about having no privacy, being forced to overwork without rest, to perform services against job description, and not to have time for themselves on holidays. And they are constantly under threats of losing the job, were they to refuse the service asked of them. No wonder many have paralleled their experiences living in the employer’s home with imprisonment.

Similar to transnational migrant worker men, for many years female
migrant workers are among the most vulnerable in the social margin. Their hardship in Taiwanese society may meet with sympathy and moral support, but few would render them fellow citizens and identify them as socio-political sisters. Without doubt, their working and living conditions are considered labor issues, but not many would relate questions regarding migrant worker women to feminist movements in Taiwan. Perhaps for this reason one often sees organizations like Taiwan International Workers Association (TIWA, 台灣國際勞工協會), not a feminist organization, most involved in assistance services and rescue works on behalves of female migrant workers.

Still, precisely because of the facts that they are working in this society and that they are women, their labor and living conditions concern feminist issues in Taiwan. Any feminist discussion and any organized feminist activism shall not ignore transnational migrant worker women just because they do not enjoy Taiwanese citizenship and thus are not “Taiwanese women”; in fact, many social events surrounding them
become important historical marks in modern Taiwanese history. The incident of the corporation Fastfame Technology (飛盟電子) in 2005, for instance, involved more than a hundred migrant worker women from the Philippines, and it plays a crucial role in the labor movement as well as the feminist movement in Taiwan in the recent years.

7.3 From “Taiwanese Women” to “Women in Taiwan”

It is with the introduction of transnational migrant worker women that inspires the term “women in Taiwan” in this project. The purpose is to include their presence in order for us to think on a wider horizon and also with more critical insights on what feminist works in Taiwan can entail. Their arrival since the late twentieth century has emerged as a social practice in Taiwan that pushes many concerned activists and scholars to rethink feminist criticism on questions involving the issue of border.
Like the cases of international spouse women, those of transnational migrant worker women bring to light that feminist thinking and criticism in Taiwan needs to concern more than sex, gender, and sexuality. Unlike the feminist works in the earlier decades, feminism in Taiwan today needs to involve nation, ethnicity, and race. A more dynamic, critical, and sensitive feminist analysis in contemporary Taiwan shall rest in the juncture of race and gender to expose the multiple layers of social injustice. In this case, provided that the female migrant workers are non-citizens, there is no argument that they are not Taiwanese women; however, the very fact that they are women working in Taiwan alludes to a consideration that any of their conditions in relation to social justice and human right is of feminist interests. In this regard, feminist works in Taiwan shall involve not only Taiwanese women but also women in Taiwan to be as inclusive as humanly possible; the proposal of “women in Taiwan” as a subject also allows us to reconsider the interlocking works of gender, race, and nation, of which the discussion on migrant brides has
Moreover, examining the introduction of migrant worker women in Taiwan, just as that of migrant brides, helps us explore the question of class intersecting gender, race, and nation. In the eyes of the mainstream culture, they are marginalized in Taiwanese society and subject to all possible forms of mistreatment, that is, they are not equal social members as ordinary Taiwanese, and it is because they are rendered of the vulnerable gender, an underdeveloped national origin, and, no less significantly, the lower socio-economic status, all of which produce a biased perception that they are of a lesser ethno-racial place.

To intellectually approach their conditions is to recognize that all the above factors are related in producing social prejudices and oppressions against transnational migrant worker women. In other words, oppressions against migrant women in Taiwan, via international marriage or contract labor, are of multiple layers than patriarchal alone; they involve gendered, racialized, and classed oppressions that require a more
complex and careful analysis, with sensitive and intent eyes.

**Discussion points:**

1. What are your impressions, or experiences, of and/or with transnational migrant workers? Would you consider them as competitors against Taiwanese people for job opportunities? If so, what do you propose that the government does on policies of imported labor?

2. Do you have any experience interacting with transnational migrant worker women in a household setting in Taiwan? Would you consider them an intruder of the family space or somehow a threat of a sort? To your observation or in your opinion, what impacts do they bring to the household, in terms of domestic space, family culture, and the way in which family members interact?

**Reading suggestions:**
A newly emerged topic, the introduction of transnational migrant workers slowly attracts the attention of publishers and readers but remains an understudied subject. A useful as well as highly accessible and significant reading is 《我們：移動與勞動的生命記事》 (印刻, 2008) by TIWA veteran activist 顧玉玲. In a more academic vein, sociologist Lan Pei-Chia (藍佩嘉) gives a more intellectual yet comprehensible presentation of the lives of female migrant workers in her remarkable  Global Cinderellas: Migrant Domestics and Newly Rich Employers in Taiwan  (translated into Chinese as 《跨國灰姑娘》, published in 2008 by 行人文化). They are among the essential volumes on this topic. Aside from literary production, television programs and
movies are also reflecting on this emerging social practices and human right issues concerning migrant workers. The first commercial film on this subject, also a highly entertaining one, is 《台北星期天》(Pinoy Sunday, 2010), directed by 何蔚庭, himself a person of transnational background, coming from Malaysia of Chinese origin and studying and residing in Taiwan for years.
Concluding Remarks

Throughout this project “Women and Taiwanese Society,” we have explored various topics related to Taiwanese women in modern history, including their cultural traditions and various social conditions. We learn of the relations of Taiwanese women’s ethics to Chinese gender culture, from the legacy of female virtues to patriarchal traditions. On this historical basis we examine the early manifestation of feminism in Taiwan in the 1970s, the burst of feminist activism and the blossom of women’s organizations in the 1980s, and the expansion of feminist discourses into various topics. Since the 1990s, concerns of women’s rights in Taiwan have grown from women’s rights and gender equality to even more radical socio-politics like the liberation of sexuality and lesbianism.

At the same time, the feminist criticism of patriarchal cultural values as well as social practices in Taiwan continues. In the previous sessions
we walk through pressing issues regarding contemporary oppressions against Taiwanese women, that is, various forms of sexual violence, including harassment, domestic abuse, rape, prostitution and pornography. We also see new questions that involve the arrival of women from abroad, whose presence has become a social reality and whose conditions call for an update of feminist works in Taiwan today. With the introduction of new Taiwanese women—migrant brides—and new women in Taiwan—transnational migrant worker women, it is necessary for feminist students to direct their attention to their marginalized social status as well as all their possible difficulties on daily basis, at or off the work site.

Still, we have yet to visit many other subject matters on women and Taiwanese society. For instance, we have not explored enough the issues of abortion, youth sexual culture and teenage pregnancy, and wage and career choices. We need to know better how young girls in contemporary Taiwan become conscious of their sexuality, how they learn of sex, how they make use of personal interactions to explore knowledge in sex, and
what they know to protect themselves when needed.

Fairly associated with but not directly connected to the youth sex culture is the issue of women’s representation in Taiwan. They have been haunting questions for some time, but they are still highly current: How should we assess the representation of young women as incredibly adorable yet sexy at the same time; is it an assertion of female sexuality, the portrayal of confident young women defining their own body images, or nothing more than another pattern of exploitation of women’s body and sexuality under commercial culture? How should we distinguish the sexy and assertive representation of Taiwanese women from the demeaning and abusive one, with the tremendous confusion in between? How do we define beauty, what are the criteria of beauty, who are in possession of conveying female attraction for the society, and how can we reconsider questions on beauty so we do not just follow the trend blindly? And, if the commercialized presentation of female body is somehow a part of our everyday life, how should we cope with the media so as to maintain
the difficult balance between representation and exploitation?

We also need to explore questions surrounding women and marriage: why does marriage, or the reluctance to marry, increasingly become a crucial question for Taiwanese women? If marriage is little more than a patriarchal institution in the society, why are there women who remain appealed to the practice? If marriage is still a good idea, why has Taiwan maintained one of the world’s highest divorce rates for years? What impact has the high divorce rate brought to Taiwanese women, and how do they relate the marriage issue to their career plans?

Or, in what follows, the questions of work, career, and gender equality: Why, after more than three decades of feminist movement, Taiwanese women still find it difficult to assume leadership positions or explore all the possible jobs in the society? Are all sorts of career are available to Taiwanese women if they so desire today? What could be the obstacles preventing them from all their pursuits in this society, and what do they have to negotiate and compromise for what their dreams
outside the family? Apart from men, do women also have to compete against other women at work? If so, how does it challenge feminism in Taiwan today, and how shall we reconsider feminist work so as to push it onward?

In the presidential election in 2012, Taiwan saw a woman running for the highest possible leadership position. Ms. Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文), representing the Democratic Progressive Party, became the first female candidate, in the history of Republic of China, for president. It presented another political as well as historical landmark in Taiwanese feminism; yet, like what Ms. Annette Lu confronted more than a decade ago, Ms. Tsai did not go through this campaign without criticism, mockery, or outright attack, that did not involve her identity as a woman. In the beginning of the campaign, Shih Ming-teh (施明德), Tsai’s comrade for decades, commented and teased her somewhat mannish outlook, suspected her to be a lesbian, and challenged her to come out. Upon ridicule as such, Tsai and her campaign colleagues did not respond, the society quickly
dismissed Shih’s ill-mannered and irresponsible comments, and this episode was soon forgotten.

In the end, there was no more discussion on Tsai’s sexual orientation or her way of presenting herself. If there is anything that sheds light on us in this episode, it is probably another certain indication that feminist movements in Taiwan have yet to come to the finish line; they may never do. The fight for women’s rights and against gendered oppressions is an everlasting and hard struggle, but we shall persist on.