

# “I Don’t Like Watching Japanese Adult Videos Because You Like It”: The Politics of Pornography Consumption in Taiwan

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## Abstract

This article focuses on women’s use of pornography in modern Taiwan, with an eye to making sense their “claimed” preference for American pornography. Our research shows that men and women display vast differences in pornography use and pornography preference with men tending to identify with Japanese adult videos and women with American pornography. Such gendered use of pornography has been substantially documented and examined through multiple disciplinary lenses. While illuminating, these studies tend not to examine further how such gender differences come about. It fosters an impression that gender can be used to explain away the reasons that men and women will differ in pornography use and sex. Gender is thus seen as universally applicable and able to explain everything without providing any concrete explanations. From this vantage, the specific, concrete gender norms that gave rise to the differences in pornography use in different cultures are dismissed as just manifestations of their genders. This article therefore aims to recover the specific gender norms and politics in Taiwan, which are often lumped together and explained away as gender inclinations and see how these specific contents gave rise to gender differences in pornography use. To understand how these gender differences ultimately come about, one needs to first explore how and why men and women consume pornography, respectively. Elsewhere, we have explored Taiwanese men’s use of, and preference for, pornography. This article therefore aims to examine Taiwanese women’s use of pornography with reference to gender norms in Taiwan.

## Keywords

women’s pornography preference, Taiwanese women, local gender norms, sexual script, and configuration of sexual being

## Introduction

This article focuses on women’s use of pornography in modern Taiwan, with an eye to making sense their “claimed preference” for American pornography. As many scholars have pointed out (Attwood, 2002; Keith, 2001; Paasonen, 2007), early studies of pornography tended either to frame pornography in terms of an effects tradition or a feminist tradition that has focused on articulation of personal “affect” (e.g., Allen, d’Alessio, & Brezgel, 1995; Fisher & Grenier, 1994; Malamuth & Check, 1981; Padgett, Brislin-Slutz, & Neal, 1989; Zillman, 2000). As a result, most work is “dislocated” (Juffer, 1998, p. 8) from the production, circulation, and consumption of pornography. The academic dislocation from pornography consumption is particularly salient because, as Alan McKee (2005) points out, while consumers of pornography are often objects of research, they are “rarely presented as subjects in the sense of being the thinking agents who could offer an insight into the reasons for consuming pornography and the effects it could have on them” (p. 71).

Such an absence of consumers’ voices is filled by a collection of work that explores specifically either the gender differences in pornography use (Brown & L’Engle, 2009; S.

J. Carroll et al., 2008; Diamond & Dannemiller, 1989; Hald, 2006; Janghorbani, Lam, & The Youth Sexuality Study Task Force, 2003; Lo & Wei, 2005; Pan, 1993) or the impact of romantic partners’ use of pornography on women (Bergner & Bridges, 2002; Bridges, Bergner, & Hesson-Micniss, 2003; Schneider, 2002). All of these studies point to an important observation: Men and women differ greatly in the use of, and taste for, pornography.

Informative as they might be, these studies however fail to explore the more fundamental issue as to *how* and *why* these gender differences in pornography use and consumption pattern come about. We do not mean to deny other studies on pornography use that took a broader view rather than just focused on gender, but the failure of the abovementioned studies to explore the issue suggests that porn studies as a

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field is *still* generally underlined by a general tendency that sees gender as universal, essentialized, primordial, bounded, unchanging, and homogeneous. The universal gender in turn is used to *explain away* the reasons that men and women will differ in pornography use and perhaps sex. In the event, specific, concrete gender norms that gave rise to the differences in pornography use in different cultures are dismissed as just manifestations of their genders. Sartre's criticism of the Marxist views on class seems point-for-point appropriate to the essentializing use of gender in the studies of pornography use:

Marxists formalism is a project of elimination. The method is identical with the Terror in its inflexible refusal to differentiate; its goal is total assimilation at the least possible effort. The aim is not to integrate what is different as such, while preserving for it a relative autonomy, but rather to suppress it . . . The Marxist would believe that he was wasting his time if, for example, he tried to understand the originality of a bourgeois thought. In his eyes the only thing that matters is to show that the thought is a mode of idealism . . . The Marxist is therefore impelled to take as an appearance the real content of behaviour or of a thought; when he dissolves the particular in the Universal, he has the satisfaction of believing that he is reducing appearance to truth. (Sartre, 1963/1968, pp. 48-49)

In the same way, the abovementioned studies of pornography use dissolve the particular content in the universal concept of gender. The usage of gender as a universal concept is thus no different from what Sartre called "the Terror," which "purged cultural forms of their specific properties by dissolving them in generic inclinations of class standing and class interest" (Sahlins, 1999, pp. 406-407). The aim of this article is to recover the *specific* gender norms and politics in Taiwan that are often lumped together and explained away as gender inclinations and see how these specific contents gave rise to gender differences in pornography use.

Our data for this article are culled from the anthropological fieldwork one of the authors conducted in Taipei between October 2002 and August 2005. As part of our larger ongoing study exploring Asian sexualities, 22 Taiwanese female informants ranging in age between 21 and 52 were approached for in-depth interviews. These informants were recruited through snowballing with socioeconomic and educational backgrounds as diverse as possible. During the interviews, we invited them to talk about their ideas and perceptions of sex and sexual behaviors *as* women in Taiwan. In addition, we asked them to describe extensively their use of, and preference for, pornography over the years.

Three important discoveries are identified. Out of our 22 female informants, 18 of them expressed patent distaste for pornography. As we pushed them further, these female informants elaborated the reasons for their "disinterest" in pornography. Some women explained that they have never had a chance to watch pornography; some others confessed that they were curious about pornography but they dared not

watch it by themselves. There were also female informants who had watched pornography but could not find it interesting because they could not find the female and male characters portrayed "real." Still others lamented that they could not enjoy watching pornography because they were usually interrupted and therefore could not even finish watching the whole movie.

Second, despite their relative disinterest in pornography, most of them tended to have experiences with pornography especially within their dating and marital relationships. They reported that they watched pornography mainly because of the request of their husbands or boyfriends. Finally, despite their overt distaste for pornography, they tended to choose "American" rather than "Japanese" pornography when we further asked them which type of pornography they preferred more. We do not mean that there is a monolithic notion of American pornography or Japanese pornography. As is widely known, Japanese adult video (AV) is renowned for its wide array of genres and styles (Wong & Yau, 2014), and so is the American pornography, not to mention the fact that the content of the genres has undergone numerous changes over the years. On the other hand, Taiwanese people must *essentialize* both types of pornography to make sense and integrate them into their sexual lives. Within the Taiwanese porn market, one should not be surprised to find out that Japanese pornography, as well as American pornography, is often seen as monolithic with all the styles and genres being lumped together. Elsewhere, we showed that Taiwanese men had tended to conflate all Japanese AVs as *bishōjo* (beautiful young women) AVs, the prototypical genre of Japanese AVs (Wong & Yau, 2014). Similarly, American pornography is typically seen as brutal, physical, vulgar, and perhaps mechanical vis-à-vis the mosaicked (i.e., pixelated) Japanese AV because it is by and large hard core. More importantly, although Taiwanese, men and women alike, acknowledge the existence of American pornography wherein the female characters portrayed are as sexually innocent as those in Japanese AVs, the idea that American porn actresses are sexually autonomous and thus aggressive is so established and taken-for-granted in Taiwan so much so that no one would challenge. It must be clear that essentialization of pornography is not only unproblematic to the Taiwanese users but also essential for them to make sense and understand it.

As such, the objective of this article is to explore why Taiwanese female informants lacked interest in pornography; why they would view pornography despite lacking interest in it and why such access was often mediated by their male partners; and ultimately why they would "claim" that they preferred American pornography to Japanese AVs, if they were asked to choose.

We shall begin by exploring why women lacked interest in pornography. We argue that women's lack of interest in pornography is due to their failures to appreciate it, to find the female/male characters "real," and to enjoy it. As we shall try to show, all these have to be understood in terms of

the local gender norms and the local configuration of sexual beings. The same gender norms, however, require Taiwanese women to watch pornography with their men. Yet women are often unable to enjoy pornography in such joint viewing because under the norms they are supposed to accompany their men watching rather than watch with them. The frustrations arising from their simultaneous failure to reject such pornography viewing and failure to enjoy pornography made them see American pornography as a weapon to express their resentment toward the male domination in sex.

## A Brief History of Pornography in Postwar Taiwan

The history of pornography in postwar Taiwan is underlined by three important changes: a change in the types of pornography available in Taiwan, a change in the media of pornography, and a change in the meaning of pornography.

Despite the severe regulation of pornography under the authoritarian Kuomintang (KMT) rule in postwar Taiwan (Wong & Yau, 2010), it does not mean that pornography would not exist there. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Danish and Dutch pornographies were the box office guarantee of cinemas in Taiwan (Yeh, 1997). This was followed by American pornography which made its inroads into Taiwan in the early 1970s, and soon it became the dominant form of pornography there. However, it lost its momentum when Japanese AVs began to take root in Taiwan in the early 1980s. In contrast to the early Euro-American pornographies that have clearly showed genitalia, Japanese AVs are instead understood as “softcore” because their portrayal of the whole genital region including pubic hair and acts of sexual penetration is airbrushed and hidden behind a so-called ‘mosaic’ (a form of pixelization). More importantly, Japanese AVs are renowned for their sophisticated presentations of female facial expression and their different genres satisfying a wide range of deviant desires (Chang, 2004; Yeh, 1997). By the late 1980s, Japanese AVs have gained a strong foothold in Taiwan, finding favor mainly with the younger generation. Although less popular than before, American pornography remains the dominant “Other” in modern Taiwan.

## A Change in the Cultural Meaning of Pornography

As Liechty (2001) perceptively points out, the meaning of pornography is immensely unstable, often depending on the sociopolitical context of a given society. In the 1980s, pornography was seen as a symbolic protest against martial law imposed by the KMT regime under which freedom of expression was strictly prohibited (Yeh, 1997). However, the meaning of pornography underwent changes as Taiwan was transformed into a democratic state in the 1990s. A group of female students from the Feminist Club of National Taiwan

University, for example, attempted to challenge male domination and patriarchy through hosting a 3-day public pornography screening at a female dormitory in 1995 (T.-y. Luo, 1997). The screening, which aimed to “provide young women sexual imaginations that are different from the traditional romantic love,” “help women understand male gaze and attitudes,” and “stimulate the dialogue of women’s sexual autonomy” (T.-y. Luo, 1997, p. 192), was an overnight sensation in Taiwan. While the members of Feminist Club became target of criticism for holding the screening, their screening came as a wake-up call to the issue of gender inequality among the public. As a matter of fact, feminism gained wider currency in Taiwan than it was in other parts of Asia, which can be seen through the large number of academic departments, both undergraduate and postgraduate, devoted to women’s/gender studies in Taiwan. One might say that pornography has now become one of the very means for Taiwanese women to resist patriarchy.

## A Change in the Form of Media Technology

Pornographies have been available to Taiwanese customers at cinemas since the 1950s. Yet pornographies only became popular in the 1980s when they emerged as illegal “programs” screened on cable TV. In the early years, subscribers of illegal adult programs could watch pornographies especially Japanese AVs once they turned on their TV sets. With no encryption, pornographies were made accessible to anyone insofar as they subscribed to the relevant illegal cable operators.

In 1993, the KMT government passed the *Cable Radio and Television Law* that officially legalized both the broadcast and use of pornography in Taiwan (H.-w. Luo, 1996). Cable TV became the prime means through which pornographies were obtained in the 1990s. However, pornography use over the cable TV soon lost its momentum as the state announced in 1999 that the traditional encryption would be replaced with the “addressable encryption” that greatly increased the cost of accessing to adult channels on cable TV. By the early 2000s, many pornography users switched to pornographic VCD as an alternative.

In Taiwan, pirated pornographic VCDs are mainly sold through VCD retailers. However, VCD retailers are susceptible to state prosecution precisely because they are fixed in location. Moreover, VCDs are by and large to be obtained through physical buying. The problems and inconvenience caused by state prosecution and physical buying soon made many Taiwanese users, especially young men, turn to the Internet.

By the early 2000s, pornographic VCDs had given way to an even newer form of pornography: Internet pornography, whose popularity can be attributed to its “accessibility,” “affordability,” and “anonymity” (Cooper, 1998, p. 187). The two major ways through which Taiwanese users obtain free pornographies over the Internet are FTP technology

(File Transfer Protocol) and P2P technology (Peer to Peer). Although the exact operations of these technologies are different, both require a high level of technological skills: to set up the software, configure the system, optimize the port number, and solve various problems one might encounter during file transfers.

Three points can be identified in light of the above brief history of pornography in postwar Taiwan. First, although Japanese AVs are recognized as the most popular type of pornography among Taiwanese men (Bih & Hong, 2006; Chang, 2004), it will be incorrect to ignore the presence of American pornography that remains as the dominant “Other” in postwar Taiwan. As we shall see, our women informants precisely “claimed” to prefer American pornography, which is often seen as more respectful to women because the female characters portrayed are sexually autonomous.

Second, the cultural meaning of pornography has changed from a sign of democracy to a way of challenging gender inequality in Taiwan. Since the late 1980s when Taiwan has been transformed into a democratic state, pornography becomes to be seen as a weapon to challenge male domination in sex in Taiwan. Our women informants, as we shall see shortly, precisely manipulated pornography to express their frustration about men’s sexual domination in Taiwan.

Finally and more importantly, technological advances substantially affected the way Taiwanese obtained pornography. Pornography was first viewed as movies at cinemas. Then, it emerged as cable program and finally became pornographic VCD and Internet file. It must be stressed that technological changes had profound impact on women’s access to pornography. While most of our female informants were frequent computer users, not many of them were familiar with FTP and P2P applications. In fact, none of our female informants used either FTP or P2P to download pornographies over the Internet. If they do need material or information via FTP or P2P, they would likely ask their *boyfriends* or *brothers* to do so for them. One can see that Internet use in Taiwan remains rather *gendered*; it is by and large dominated by men. However, the problem is even if Taiwanese women are technologically equipped, they will still encounter problems instigated by the local gender norms and the local configurations of sexual beings.

### The Six Binary Pairs of Sex in Taiwan

In our recent joint-article (Wong & Yau, 2012), we applied Simon Hardy’s (2009) notion of “pornographic realism” to explore the preference of Taiwanese men for Japanese AV, especially its prototypical genre of *bishōjo*. Hardy argues that pornographic realism is the defining characteristic of pornography as a representational genre. The smaller the gap between pornographic representations of sexuality and real sex, the more attractive the pornographic movie is. We showed that Taiwanese men would prefer Japanese *bishōjo*

**Table 1.** The Six Binary Pairs of Sex in Taiwan.

Biological	vs.	Cultural
Physical	vs.	Spiritual
Ordinary	vs.	Non-ordinary
Necessary	vs.	Unnecessary
Uncontrollable	vs.	Controllable
Animal	vs.	Human
Men	vs.	Women

AVs to American variety because the narrative structure of the former resembles *their* “real” sex more than the latter.

We first demonstrated that the so-called “real” sex is culturally constituted. Taiwanese, men and women alike, tended to talk about sex in terms of six binaries, and most crucially paralleled the binaries with gender contrasts such that the male sexual being is considered as biological, physical, ordinary, necessary, uncontrollable, and thus “animal-like”; whereas the female sexual being is seen as cultural, spiritual, non-ordinary, unnecessary, controllable, and finally “human-like” (Table 1).

### Sexual Being and Sexual Script

We then moved to examine how the “proper” sex act of Taiwanese men and women is discursively constituted through Simon and Gagnon’s (1986) notion of “sexual script.” We demonstrated that the sexual script of Taiwanese men is made up of five imperatives: to initiate sex, lead women throughout sex, use several positions in sex, perform sex for a period of time, and most importantly bring the woman to orgasm. The sexual script of Taiwanese women is also made up of five imperatives: to be initiated, led, penetrated, caressed, and brought to orgasm.

Taking closer look at these scripts, one can immediately realize that although initial female sexual passivity is culturally correct and vital to the male sexual pleasure because it enables men to assume initiative in sex, what men ultimately want is not female unresponsiveness but sexual engagement as exemplified by the imperative of bringing women to orgasm. The crucial point here lies in the male *tiaojiao* (train) through which man transforms his woman from being sexually passive to active. Putting this back into the binary oppositions outlined above, one can at once realize that the sexual pleasure of Taiwanese men is meant to “transcend” the binary oppositions between the male sex and the female sex by transforming the “human”-woman into an “animal”-man so that she will desire and enjoy sex as much as a man will. We concluded that Taiwanese men preferred Japanese AV because its narrative structure was precisely made up of an “animal”-like male character attempting to transform a “human”-like female character into “animal”-like and that they could not identify with American pornography because

its narrative structure was made up of an “animal”-like male character and an “animal”-like female character, leaving no room for men to assume sexual initiative. Of course, Taiwanese men would identify more with Japanese AV rather than American variety also because of the unique historical backgrounds. Elsewhere, we showed that the 50 years of Japanese colonialism cultivated among the older generation of Taiwanese a form of Japanese subjectivity (Wong & Yau, 2014). This made them develop a specific desire for, and a complex attachment to, things from Japan including AVs, even though they were prohibited by the KMT government over the past century. The strong attachment of the older generation to Japanese AVs in turn made the latter the dominant type of pornography in modern Taiwan. The younger generation of Taiwanese also embraced Japanese AVs. But they did so not because they were historically attached to things from Japan, but because they grew up watching Japanese AVs, which had been habitualized as part of their daily life.

But still, this habitualized viewing of Japanese AVs could not explain why our young Taiwanese male informants would opt for the *bishōjo*, the sweet and languid beautiful young women. It is here where the configuration of “animal”-man became an important conceptual tool to make sense their choice of *bishōjo* AVs over other genres or styles.

### Women’s Hesitation to Watch Pornography

As we can see, central to the women’s script is female passivity in sex. As passive recipients of sex, women do not need to consume pornography because doing so must mean that they actively desire sex. The sexual script of woman in Taiwan thus serves to prescribe women’s use of pornography through immense social stigma attached to a woman who actively desires, and luxuriates in, pornography. The embarrassment and shame evoked by the social stigma make women reluctant to access pornography *by themselves*.

All this, coupled by their lack of technological skills, suggests that Taiwanese women are often deprived of opportunity to develop an interest, let alone the relevant literacy, in consuming pornography. They therefore will have difficulty in *appreciating* pornography.

### Unreal Female and Male Characters

The way Taiwanese women understand their own sexual being has profound impact on their pornography use. Recall that the discursively constituted female sexual being is “human”-like, whereas the sexual script of women in Taiwan emphasized female passivity. The sexual script of Taiwanese women is not the logical consequence of the female sexual being; and the female sexual being is not the premise of the Taiwanese women’s sexual script either. To say that the female sexual being is “human”-like does not necessarily imply female passivity in sex. Equally, to say that women should be passive in sex does not necessarily mean that their sexual being has to be “human”-like. There is an

**Table 2.** The Sexual Pleasure for Taiwanese Women.

Biological → Cultural	=	Cultural
Physical → Spiritual	=	Spiritual
Ordinary → Non-ordinary	=	Non-ordinary
Necessary → Non-necessary	=	Non-necessary
Uncontainable → Containable	=	Containable
Animal → Human	=	Human
Men	:	Women

epistemological break between female sexual being and the Taiwanese women’s sexual script. This epistemological break, we argue, further leads to an ontological break because if Taiwanese women perceive their sexual being and sexual script differently, they tend to believe that they are two different things. The female sexual being here appears to Taiwanese women as their “real” sex, while the sexual script represents the sexual norms imposed by the society; the former is what Taiwanese women’s sex *is*, whereas the latter is what their sexual behaviours *should* be. That is to say, Taiwanese women do not see sexual passivity as their “real” sex. They therefore tend not to be able to identify with the sexually passive female character in Japanese AVs in general and *bishōjo* AVs in particular.

Taiwanese women do not find a sexually aggressive woman “real” to them either. Taiwanese female informants often described the American actresses as fake and unreal. Inasmuch as their sexual being is neither sexually passive nor aggressive but “human”-like, which is cultural, spiritual, extraordinary, unnecessary, and controllable. They will not find the sexually aggressive female character in American pornographic movies attractive because this type of female character simply does not appear to be “real” to them.

Neither could Taiwanese women identify with the male character portrayed in American and Japanese pornographies. Because Taiwanese women perceive their sexual being as cultural, spiritual, extraordinary, unnecessary, controllable, and thus “human”-like, it follows that they dislike, if not detest, male advances with clear sexual implications. Nor do women like straightforward sex. Overwhelmed by the spirituality of sex, they instead emphasize mood and atmosphere, enjoy flirting and romance, and would love to be sweet-talked to. Sex can only come after all these “spiritual” things, but still it is unnecessary and containable. That is to say, they tend to prefer a male partner with the same sexual being with her. The “real” and “ideal” sexual partner for Taiwanese women is a man whose sexual being is also “human”-like (Table 2).

### The Sexual Pleasure for Taiwanese Women

If the sexual pleasure of Taiwanese women is derived from dating and having sex with a “human”-like partner, it follows that they could not find both Japanese AVs and American

pornography sexually pleasurable because the male character portrayed in both types of pornography is not “human”-like but “animal”-like. It should be clear by now that Taiwanese women could not identify with the female and male characters portrayed in pornography, both Japanese AVs and American pornography alike, because they could not find them “real.” This explains why some of our other female informants told us that despite having ample opportunity to view pornography by themselves, they *still* could not find it interesting, either.

### Pornography Viewing With Men

Notwithstanding their lack of interest in pornography, many of our female informants reported that as they entered into romance or marriage, they were often asked by their male partners to watch pornography together as a kind of foreplay and accommodate the sexual needs of the latter afterward. In what follows, we shall focus on the stories of Wen-chien, Little Yun, and Mei-fung to see how they accommodate the sexual requests made by their men. We do not mean that these three women can represent *the* Taiwanese women. But we would like to focus intensively on them so that we can “. . . pick up on the complexity of meanings that sexuality has for individuals and groups, and on the importance of *context* in the construction of these meanings” (Attwood, 2005, p. 68).

Wen-chien was 37 years old when we first met her in 2002. She held no interest in pornography. However, she came across pornography throughout her past two marriages. Married in 1989, her first husband offered to watch pornography together during their brief marriage. However, Wen-chien could not recall any detail of the movies she had watched as their marriage began to have problem. In 1990, the couple divorced after an incident of physical abuse. In 1991, Wen-chien married her second husband, with whom she had been married for 10 years. During her 10-year marriage with him, Wen-chien often came across pornography because her husband held a strong taste for it. As indifferent to pornography as Wen-chien might be, she often accompanied her husband in watching pornography. As our conversation goes,

Researcher: Would you watch pornography with your [second ex] husband?

Wen-chien: Yes, we did . . .

Researcher: Did he invite you to watch or was it a sort of mutual understanding?

Wen-chien: Um . . . he wouldn't ask me directly . . . We were married for 10 years. Everything came very natural. Usually, he would watch it by himself first during the time I was taking a shower or doing skincare. Then I would join him to watch together. We usually had sex afterwards . . .

Researcher: So you mean he would come to you for sex after watching?

Wen-chien: Yes . . . he would come to touch me, kiss me, and caress me in the midst of viewing pornography . . . because he got excited . . . haha . . .

Researcher: So you were not really watching the movie, right?

Wen-chien: No I don't. As I said, I don't like pornography.

Researcher: How often did you watch pornography with him then?

Wen-chien: It depended on situations . . . but maybe once a week or so . . .

Researcher: I see.

One can observe that pornography viewing appeared to be part of Wen-chien's marital life even though she found it unattractive. This is also the case in Mei-fung's life. Mei-fung was a 27-year-old working mother of two daughters when we first met her in early 2003. In 2007, under intense family pressure, Mei-fung gave birth to a son and thereafter she quit her job and became a full-time housewife. Mei-fung described her husband as a very “conservative” person who never talked about sex but would make her watch pornographic VCDs with him at home.

Researcher: Have you ever watched pornography?

Mei-fung: Yes . . . recently . . . with my husband . . .

Researcher: So you are suggesting that you did not watch pornography on cable TV or pornographic VCDs before?

Mei-fung: No . . .

Researcher: How could it be possible? Given that adult channels on cable TV were so popular and pornographic VCDs are just about everywhere in Taiwan . . .

Mei-fung: Um . . . my [natal] family did not subscribe to adult channels. My family is quite strict on sex matters. If a bedroom scene came up on the TV, my mother and later I myself would switch channels . . . And we did not buy VCDs . . .

Researcher: I see . . . so you watched with your husband? Under what situations?

Mei-fung: In fact, my husband intentionally brought home some Japanese pornographic VCDs, because he thought that I was getting more and more disinterested in sex . . . I think he has uncontainably strong sexual desires, because he often woke up with an “erected” penis and attempted to have sex with me, though our children were by the side. But, I rarely have the desire, so sometimes I even escape from his amorous advances. Well . . . these VCDs were expected to arouse my sexual desires. But I did not find those VCDs sexually rewarding . . .

One can observe from the cases of Wen-chien and Mei-fung that while Taiwanese women were by and large not interested in pornography, many of them were made to watch pornography by their men in the course of their lives. None of our female informants told us that they were “forced” by their men to watch pornography, but some reported that they

*felt obliged* to do so and some others said that they did it out of the fear that their men would be angry or unhappy. An obvious case in point is Little Yun.

Little Yun was a 26-year-old single woman when we first met her in late 2002. Little Yun came from an extremely troubled family where her birth parents were not married to each other but others. Her birth father finally deserted the family for another woman when she was 3. Traumatized by this, she embarked her life project by finding fatherly love in romance. She had been dating since 16. Her first lover was her senior by 7 years. If she could sacrifice her own health by undergoing four abortions at a backstreet hospital just because she felt awkward to ask her first boyfriend to wear a condom in the first place, perhaps we should be not surprised that Little Yun would accompany him to watch pornography even though she was not interested in it. As our conversation goes,

Researcher: So you were always watching Japanese AVs on cable TV with your first boyfriend?

Little Yun: Yes . . .

Researchers: But you said you were not really interested in pornography, right? Then why watching it with him?

Little Yun: Yes, I am not interested in pornography. But he wanted to watch . . .

Researcher: But you could always refuse to do so, right?

Little Yun: No . . . I won't refuse . . . umm . . .

Researcher: You won't refuse? Why was that?

Little Yun: Um . . . you would worry that he might be upset or angry if I refused . . .

Researcher: So you mean that you ultimately fear that he would dump you . . .

Little Yun: Um . . . right . . . you might say so.

Indifferent to pornography as Little Yun might be, she *felt obliged* to accompany her man to watch pornography. For she was afraid that her boyfriend would be displeased with her, if she refused to do so.

Four points can be made in light of the above stories concerning Taiwanese women's experiences of pornography viewing. First of all, these women could not refuse men's demand of viewing pornography together as they felt obliged to do so. Second, as these women were supposed to accompany their men to watch pornography rather than to watch pornography *with* men, they had no choice on the content of the movies they watched. Equally and third, these women had no say as to when to start and when to finish, let alone where to start and where to finish. Recall that Mei-fung's husband brought home some pornographic VCDs for her to watch so that she might be "more" interested in sex. However, these pornographic VCDs were brought home and played by her husband at his own will. Mei-fung was never consulted about the content of the VCDs, not to mention whether she really liked to watch pornography, or when to do so. In other words, Mei-fung was deprived of a say on either the content or the timing in her viewing of pornography.

Finally, just when these women might have been starting to "get into" the movies, more often than not their viewing would be interrupted as their men began to approach their bodies for sex. Recall that Wen-chien would only join her husband's viewing after doing her skincare or taking a shower. In the course of watching pornography with her husband, he might approach her body for sex. No wonder Wen-chien said that she had never finished watching a pornographic movie.

Central to these four points is that women have no say in their use of pornography with men. Women are never equal partners in such joint viewing of pornography. Their role is simply to accompany men to watch pornography and subsequently accommodate their sexual needs when arise. In other words, men dominate the whole process of joint viewing of pornography, whereas women are at best sexual subordinate.

### **Claimed Preference to American Pornography: Taiwanese Women's Protest**

When we pushed further and asked our Taiwanese female informants if they had to choose between American and Japanese pornographies, which one they would prefer, surprisingly almost all of them claimed that they preferred the former to the latter. Mei-fung, for example, was not interested in watching pornography, but she claimed that she preferred American to Japanese pornographies when she was pushed to choose between them. In the following excerpts from our interview with her, we shall see how she compared Japanese AVs with the American variety.

Researcher: So those you guys watched are American? Or Japanese?

Mei-fung: Might be both . . . I just watched a few only. I think for the American movies, it seemed they were doing exercise! Like they were dancing! Then, I think I don't like watching Japanese AVs, it made me feel . . . a bit deviant. It made me feel that it looked down upon women! It made me feel that it didn't respect women. For the American ones, the way they took the film is that they took the film, per se. Then, you discovered that they treated sex the same way as sports or exercise. You know, like they are running or playing badminton. Since sexual scenes are displayed for quite long . . . and then, they are less disrespectful to women. But they are rather boring and unarousing, anyway.

Researcher: Why do you think that Japanese AVs are sexist?

Mei-fung: Cause they always focus on the faces of the actresses, who look painful and . . . Or else, there will be several men coming to couple with the actress. Then, the lens stays still on her face while she looks in great pain. And in the interview setting, is that called "interview" . . . the woman is often asked how many

sexual partners she ever has. She is then forced to admit that she is very lascivious, just like a nymphomaniac. My feeling is that we women are *renjin kefu* (any man can be her husband)! More importantly, I was always wondering if the Japanese AV actresses were also under sexual or physical exploitation!

To Mei-fung, American pornography appears to be a pornographic film “taken for the sake of taking,” in that sex has become a form of “exercise” or “dancing.” When asked to elaborate what she meant by exercise or dancing, she explained that the actor and actress were just machines “operating” over there. In a sense, what she has described suggests that American lovemaking is not sexual at all, but desexualized to become a sport activity or an exercise. By contrast, Japanese AVs left her an uneasy feeling that the storyline is deviant and women portrayed in the movies are denigrated and looked down on. In addition, Mei-fung thought that Japanese AV girls are always left as pained, in suffering or exhausted as a result of the physical sex in the movie. In essence, she found Japanese AVs remarkably chauvinist not only in that they disrespect women in general but also in that there is sexual and physical abuse for the women in the movies.

Given her rather negative comments on Japanese AVs, we could not but ask her whether she implied that American pornography was better than Japanese AVs. Mei-fung replied that she disliked both in general but she would suggest that American pornography was much less disgusting and giving more respect and care to women. She added that perhaps it is exactly this equal treatment of women that made Taiwanese men including her husband unable to identify with American pornography. She concluded that she would go for American pornography rather than Japanese AVs.

Unlike Mei-fung, Little Yun actively reported that she preferred American to Japanese pornographies. The reason cited is common: Japanese AVs are deviant because they tend to employ a lot of props, such as vibrators, dildos, chain of pearls, liquid, and so on. But, most crucially, they give her the feelings of “sensually violence” (*ganguan baoli*) and “superior man-inferior woman” (*nanzun nvbei*). As she noted in our interview,

The Japanese actresses are always almost forced to have sex. Even though they did not want sex in the beginning, the men would use a lot of props to stimulate her body, her breast, her vagina, her clitoris, only to make her sexually excited. I think these are always done violently as if women are second-class. They do not respect women at all. Japanese are like this!

As we can see, she detests Japanese AVs on account of their sex discrimination and their violence directed at women. By contrast, she thought that the American variety is more “natural,” or “*shenghuohua*” (sort of daily life). She added that women in American movies are positioned as “equal” partners who are free to express their sexual desires and

enjoy sex. Her positioning of the American variety as equalitarian and thus liberal was by no means novel among our informants, as Wen-chien also had similar ideas.

Well, Japanese AV is sick and misogynous; I don't like it . . . same old plots, small room, and ugly actors. American pornography is much much better, with handsome actors, beautiful actresses and more interesting stories. Most importantly, it treats women as equal partners. Women are not there to serve the men! Sex is not one-way, but mutual!

What puzzles us most was that despite their patent distaste for pornography and critical attitude toward Japanese AVs, our Taiwanese female informants tended to be fairly lenient toward American pornography. We cannot figure out in the first place why Taiwanese women especially those like Mei-fung, Little Yun, and Wen-chien, as we have seen above, did not even have a chance to finish watching a piece of pornographic movie when they were requested to watch pornography with their men could have such a vivid image of American and Japanese pornographies. Obviously, the “vivid” image these women had about American and Japanese pornographies comes from their *impression* rather than actual experience of pornography viewing. Their impression of American pornography as equalitarian and thus liberal and that of Japanese AV as sexist can partially be attributed to Taiwanese women's stereotypical image of the gender relation in the two countries. But more importantly, these Taiwanese women, we argue, have tended to project their personal and unhappy experience of sexual coercion by their men in the joint viewing of pornography onto the actresses of Japanese AVs, which further shapes their perceptions of porn actresses in Japanese AVs as victims of male sexual domination and coercion, even though they may not have much experience in watching Japanese AV. Taiwanese women's perceptions of Japanese porn actresses as victims in turn affect the way they respond to Japanese AVs: They cannot find Japanese AVs interesting. The arguments with which we conclude is that as Taiwanese women experience suffering from male domination in the joint viewing of pornography with their male partners, they project such suffering onto the porn actresses in Japanese AVs; and as they perceive Japanese AV actresses as victims of male sexual domination and coercion, they reject Japanese AVs. We take several sentences from Fareen Parvez (2006),

Indeed, authenticity is necessary to their [women's] enjoyment [of pornography]. But what the women perceive as authentic depends in part on their own experiences. Specifically, I showed how experiences with sexual violence and economic struggle led many of the women I interviewed to perceive porn acting as self-destructive and in some cases coercive. As a result, these women sometimes found pornography emotionally upsetting despite the arousal they generally obtained from it. Stated differently, they experienced emotional dissonance, as they perceive such dissonance in the porn actresses. (p. 625)



Our Taiwanese women, however, tried to do more than their American counterparts who participated in Fareen Parvez's research did. They rejected Japanese AVs also to undermine, though symbolically, the male sexual domination and coercion. As we have seen, these women vehemently detested Japanese AVs, which were their men's favorite, on grounds of their sexual discrimination against women. Here, one should grasp the operation of equivalence that links "Japanese AVs" with their male partners. As women detested their male partners forcing them to watch Japanese AVs, they naturally detested Japanese AVs, the kind of pornography *with which* their men identified. The equivalence between Japanese AVs and Taiwanese men is reinforced at the experiential level. As Japanese AVs are *the kind of pornography* women were required by their men to watch and follow, Japanese AVs are simply their men—Japanese AVs *for* their men. To these Taiwanese women then, Japanese AVs in general have metaphorically become the *symbol* of their dominating male partners who forced pornography alongside sex upon them. If women vehemently detested Japanese AVs even though they had very thin idea about it, it is not unreasonable to say that they actually detested their male partners, at least, for their domination in sex.

If Taiwanese women detested male domination through vehemently denying Japanese AVs, perhaps we should not be surprised that they resisted male domination through a claimed preference with American pornography. Recall that most of their men preferred Japanese to American pornographies. Taiwanese women's totally opposite, though claimed, preference for pornography, we argue, can be seen as their attempt to undermine Taiwanese men's sexual hegemony. Stated differently, women's claimed preference points exactly to their attempt to undermine patriarchy. As noted, most Taiwanese men regarded American porn actresses as sexually aggressive and thus emasculating. However, Taiwanese women we interviewed tended to think that the American variety is more "natural," "artless," "*shenghuohua* (sort of daily life)," "less misogynistic," "more liberal," and thus better than Japanese AVs. By claiming that they preferred American pornography with which they were unfamiliar and to which their male partners showed disdain, our women informants expressed their frustration and distaste as a woman in the male-dominant Taiwanese society. Just like their predecessors in using pornography screening to launch a public protest to the patriarchy, these women likewise manipulated their "claimed" preference for American pornography to launch a protest against male domination in sex.

## Conclusion

This article examined the pornography use of Taiwanese women and especially their "claimed" preference for American pornography. It started with the premise that although the lack of technological skills barred Taiwanese women from accessing pornography, what seem more crucial are the local gender norms and configurations

of sexual beings. We showed that under the sexual script women showing an interest in pornography still carried a stigma that worked very well to stop women from accessing pornography. Taken together, their lack of technological skill and hesitation to access pornography explain why Taiwanese women rarely came into contact with pornography and thus deprived of the interest in appreciating pornography.

Women's unique understanding of their sexual being as "human"-like departed tremendously from the images of the female characters portrayed in pornographies. They thus could not identify with the female characters portrayed in either Japanese AVs or American pornography. Likewise, their understanding of their sexual being as "human"-like also constrained the kind of men with whom they could sexually identify: must also be "human"-like. As the male characters in both Japanese AVs and American pornography were not "human"-like, but "animal"-like, both types of pornography could not find favor with women.

However, many of the Taiwanese women we interviewed watched pornography with their male partners. They were often demanded by their men to watch pornography and submitted to the demands under the intense social pressure generated by sexual script. Under the same script, women were supposed to accompany their men to watch pornography rather than watch pornography with men. These women lacked any sense of autonomy with regard to pornography viewing.

Of course that women did not refuse pornography viewing initiated by their male partners does not necessarily mean that they were happy to do. Their frustrations arising from their simultaneous failures to reject such pornography viewing and to enjoy pornography made them detest Japanese AVs. As women detested their male partners forcing Japanese pornographies upon them, they could not but transpose this sense of hatred onto Japanese AVs with which their men identified. Japanese AVs and Taiwanese men were rendered equivalent to each other. That is to say, Taiwanese women detested Japanese AVs as detest for male domination in sex. If these women detested male domination through vehemently denying Japanese AVs, perhaps we should not be surprised that they resisted male domination through claiming to prefer American pornography. It is especially true if we take into account of the fact that Taiwanese men disliked American pornography. By claiming that they preferred American pornography to which their men showed disdain, these women expressed their frustrations as a woman in the male-dominant society.

## Author's Note

The authors contributed equally to the article and therefore their names are arranged in an alphabetical order.

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