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Beyond Right and Wrong: Doing Queer Theology in Hong Kong



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in God's image

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A Proposal for Catholic Lesbian Feminist Theology in Hong Kong

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Introduction

Since the decolonization of Hong Kong in the 1980s, Hong Kong people have been worrying about their freedom and basic human rights, democracy and the rule of law following the handover of Hong Kong to China on 1 July 1997. Despite its efforts to address these concerns, the government passed anti-discrimination legislation in 1996 to cover only areas of sex, disability and family responsibility.¹ In the 1980s when the government initiated the decriminalization of male-male private sex between consenting adults, the Hong Kong Catholic Church supported such a position. The Catholic Church, together with other Christian organizations, also advocated for the inclusion of sexual orientation under the anti-discrimination legislation and the extension of coverage to harassment and harmful speeches.²

However, some local Catholic groups have reservations about the anti-discrimination legislation regarding sexual orientation after a group disrupted a Sunday Mass at the Cathedral on 17 August 2003. The protest was against the

2003 Vatican document rejecting the legal status of same-sex unions and against the Hong Kong Catholic Church whose weekly herald, *Kung Kiao Pao*, published the Vatican document on its front page.³ Despite its appropriation of the justice tradition in its anti-discrimination efforts and



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¹ Wahshan Chou, *Tongzhi: Politics of Same-Sex Eroticism in Chinese Societies* (New York: Haworth Press, 2000), 78, 272-4, Kwok-wah Shaw, "The Meaning of Legislation on Discrimination against Sexual Orientation for Hong Kong," in *Xing Zheng Zhi*, ed. Ching Yau (Xianggang: Tian di tu shu you xian gong si, 2006).

² A statement on anti-discrimination legislation submitted to the Hong Kong Government jointly by Justice and Peace Commission of the Hong Kong Catholic Diocese, Hong Kong Christian Council, Hong Kong Women Christian Council and Hong Kong Student Christian Movement in March 1996.

³ Union of Catholic Asian News, Cathedral Denies Gay Activists Entry during Sunday Mass after Previous Disruption, HK4618.1251 (2003, accessed August 25, 2003); available from <http://www.ucanews.com/2003/08/25/cathedral-denies-gay-activists-entry-during-sunday-mass-after-previous-disruption/>.

commitment towards human rights and democracy, the Hong Kong Catholic Church has been unaware of the impact of its teachings on its own flock, i.e. condemnation of homosexual acts and treating homosexual orientation as intrinsically disordered, though claiming to accept the sinner.⁴ The justice tradition seems, in the end, not to be meant for Catholic tongzhi to claim their own dignity and empowerment within the church.⁵ This may be one reason why no Catholic tongzhi group has been formed within the Catholic Church yet.⁶

Under such context, I see the need for Hong Kong Catholic tongzhi to develop their own theology based on their experience and cultural context in order to counter heterosexist church teachings and claim their own empowerment and spirituality. Since local Catholic theology has

rarely dealt with this sensitive issue of tongzhi, can only find the pioneering effort of an Asian Catholic feminist religious studies scholar Sharon A. Bong, in taking the challenge to theologize from the life experiences of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) people in Malaysia and Singapore from religiously culturally and ethnically diverse backgrounds. After the "storming" at the Cathedral, a Hong Kong Catholic ethicist, Thomas Kwan, reviewed the historical development of the official teachings on homosexuality and pointed to revised positions and resulting attitudinal change since 1975.⁸ Rose Wu, a Protestant feminist activist and theologian, is the only one who has produced a rich theological work based on her ministry with local Protestant tongzhi.⁹ She also draws on theological materials from local Protestant circles as well as the experiences of

⁴ Mary E. Hunt, "Eradicating the Sin of Heterosexism," in *Heterosexism in Contemporary World Religion: Problem and Prospect*, ed. Marvin Mahan Ellison and Judith Plaskow (Cleveland: Cleveland Press, 2007).

⁵ *Tongzhi* is the English pronunciation of a Chinese term for LGBTQ people, originally translated from the communist Soviet term, "comrade" -- a title for the revolutionaries. It first appeared in the Republic of China in the early 20th century. In the inaugural Lesbian and Gay Film Festival in Hong Kong in 1989, a local gay activist was the first to appropriate the term for same-sex eroticism. This appropriation soon gained popularity in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Mainland China as it was regarded as gender-neutral, desexualized, fluid yet relational, transcendent from the homo-hetero binarism, culturally compatible in its integration of the sexual into the social and free from medical and cultural stigmatization. With the approach of 1997, the adoption of the most respectable title in China by *tongzhi* rendered them the subversiveness of indigenizing sexual politics in the reclamation of their cultural identity; Chou, 1-3, 78-84.

⁶ The Diocese organized three seminars in June 2006 on ministry to homosexuals and announced its plan to start such a specific ministry; Up till now, no group or ministry is established. From my knowledge, the Blessed Minority Christian Fellowship of a Protestant tradition and the cell group at Rainbow Hong Kong (a local *tongzhi* association) each has a few Catholic members.

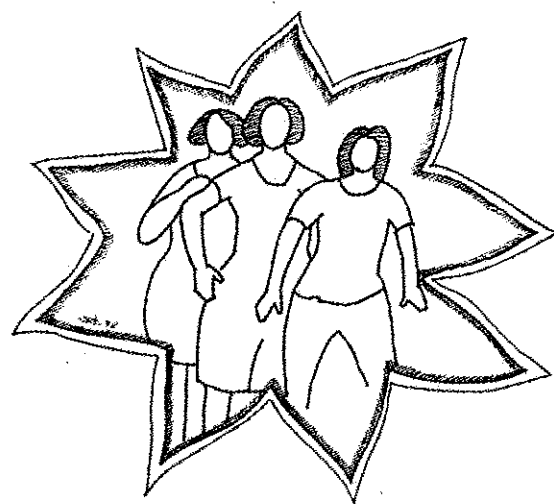
⁷ Her first article reflected on lesbian experiences within the Catholic tradition. It was presented at the Second Biennial Conference of the Ecclesia of Women in Asia held at Yogyakarta, Indonesia on November 16-19, 2004. Most Asian feminist theologians in the same conference have reflected on the issue of women's sexuality from their specific cultural contexts in their theological articulation, and, at the same time, drawn largely on western feminist theologies; ; Sharon A. Bong, "Not 'For the Sake of Peace': Towards an Epistemology of the Sacred Body," *Asian Christian Review* 3, no. 1 (Spr 2009); "Queer Revisions of Christianity," in *Body and Sexuality*, ed. Agnes M. Brazal and Andrea Lizares Si (Quezon City, Philippines: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2007).

⁸ Thomas Chun-tong Kwan, "Catholicism and Homosexuality," *Justice & Peace Newsletter* (Dec 2003).

⁹ Rose Wu worked previously at Hong Kong Women Christian Council. In 1994, the Council and the "Ten Percent" (the first local *tongzhi* group) co-organized the first tongzhi theology course. Some of the lecture materials were published in the Council's "Liberation" magazine in Issue no. 13 in 1995.

North American churches and their LGBTQ theologies.¹⁰

I agree with Rose Wu that most Asian Christians have adopted the traditional interpretations and heterosexist teachings from the Western church in understanding the issue of homosexuality under colonial influence in the past and neo-colonialism in the current globalization. Hence, we can and need to draw on both Western and Eastern experiences for theological reflections as the differences are all shared within the same global ecumenical community.¹¹ Therefore, in this paper, I attempt to propose a Catholic lesbian feminist theology by building on available local feminist theological resources. Moreover, as noted by Mary Hunt, the institutional Catholic Church has been shaped by kyriarchy, an interlocking system of various oppressive lordship structures, so that eradicating heterosexism is a parallel and concerted effort of other oppressions.¹² North American feminist and lesbian feminist theologies have been able to extend beyond concern for gay rights in addressing the complex system of oppression, which is also critical for engaging the whole Hong Kong Catholic Church in such an initiative. Owing to the limited length of this paper, I will select some important North American feminist and lesbian feminist theologies for discussion with the experiences of local Catholic nu-tongzhi (female tongzhi) and with Rose Wu's work. Then,



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from this dialogue, I shall offer my proposal for a local Catholic lesbian feminist theology.¹³

Experience of Catholic nu-tongzhi (female tongzhi) in Hong Kong

In order to discuss the relevance of the insights from North American feminist and lesbian feminist theologies, I will explore the experiences of the Catholic nu-tongzhi before going into the dialogue. There is no research

¹⁰ Rose Wu, *Liberating the Church from Fear: The Story of Hong Kong's Sexual Minorities* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Women Christian Council, 2000), 64-5. In view of the negativity towards sexuality, in particular women's sexuality, and the dichotomy between sexuality and spirituality, Asian Women's Resource Center for Culture and Theology, based in Malaysia, also conducted a workshop on sexuality in July 2001 and published workshop papers in its journal, *In God's Image*, vol. 20, issue no. 3 (September 2001). The title of this issue was "Sexuality and Spirituality." Most papers analyzed the systemic factors that affect women's sexuality and some also dealt with LGBTQ issues. It has been a good start for theologizing the issue of sexuality in the multi-cultural and multi-faith Asian context, but still needs deeper and more elaborate theological reflections.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Mary E. Hunt, "The Heart of the Matter: A Feminist Perspective (Part 2: A New Framework)," *Catholic New Times* (Dec 15, 2002).

¹³ I have to note that my proposal indeed incorporates an ecumenical dimension, drawing from both Catholic and Protestant theologians. It is Catholic only in the sense that I will draw on more resources from the Catholic tradition to dialogue with Wu's work.

primarily on the Hong Kong Catholic Church's attitude on nu-tongzhi. From my internet search, I have found only a few stories of nu-tongzhi who have self-identified as Catholic or post-Catholic:¹⁴ a short description of a nu-tongzhi, Bik-kei,¹⁵ two stories of a nu-tongzhi, Stargazer (nickname)¹⁶ and a father having a nu-tongzhi daughter¹⁷ in two separate issues of a tongzhi association newsletter, and, a nu-tongzhi activist, Wai-wai¹⁸. From a local female oral history project, there is Catholic nu-tongzhi, Ho-lok, a 27-year-old teacher in a Catholic high school.¹⁹ Acknowledging the scarcity of information on Catholic nu-tongzhi, I will attempt to give a generalized picture for discussion here.

The above four Catholic nu-tongzhi do not find the Catholic faith contradicting their own sexual orientation. They also show a queer expression of Catholic faith. I use the term "queer" to mean there is no normative expression of their faith. While distancing herself from parish life, Bik-kei involves herself in queer advocacy in university campus life and cultivates her faith with feminist theologies. Stargazer has a strong affiliation with a parish group. Wai-wai is a gay-rights activist who challenges the Christian sanction to heterosexism. Ho-lok has a supportive Catholic nu-tongzhi circle since college years. All four of them seem to be quite educated in that they are able to articulate arguments against heterosexist church teachings. Two of the four are involved in

some forms of social activism such as feminist and gay-rights movements.

During the early development of tongzhi movement in the 1980s, the nu-tongzhi groups have tended to identify with the gay-male dominated movement, instead of the feminist movement. The feminist movement at that time did not address the issue of sexual identities. After the establishment of Queer Sisters in 1990, the nu-tongzhi started to address the double marginalization and shape a more inclusive movement.²⁰ Since 2000, two major queer women's and nu-tongzhi groups became organized – F-Union in 2001 and Women's Coalition in 2003 – with strong feminist consciousness and political participation.²¹ This may show that nu-tongzhi groups have broadened the local feminist movement where feminist consciousness has shaped nu-tongzhi political consciousness. While acknowledging the different socio-political contexts of North American feminist and lesbian feminist movements, I think both local nu-tongzhi and feminist movements and the North American ones move towards a similar direction of building a more inclusive vision and political agendas as that North American feminist and lesbian feminist theologies will provide relevant insights for the articulation of local Catholic nu-tongzhi theology.

¹⁴ When I refer to Catholic *tongzhi*, I mean both Catholic and post-Catholic ones because despite the difference in acceptance of the Catholic tradition, they basically share the Catholic faith in God.

¹⁵ Wing Huen Lee, *Sexual Orientation Forum* (Feb 6, 2006 accessed Jun 9, 2008); available from <http://lesgay.info/viewtopic.php?t=356>.

¹⁶ Stargazer, "Come out Guerilla," *Lesbo* (June 15, 2005).

¹⁷ Father of Star, "My Daughter Is a Homosexual," *Lesbo* (April 15, 2005).

¹⁸ Wai-wai has claimed herself as post-Catholic; "Seeing Both Sides of Storming the Cathedral," *Apple Daily News* (19 Aug 2003); Wai-wai, *An Anti-Gay Movement in the Name of Christ Faith* (accessed 19 Feb 2010) available from <http://www.wchk.org/equality/waiwai.html>; "Their Tongzhi Movement," in *I Love Women: Oral History of Hong Kong Women*, eds. Siu-yin et al. (Hong Kong: FLY Publication, 2008).

¹⁹ Siu-kwui & Wai-wai Law, "The Same-Sex Love of a Religion and Ethics Teacher: Ho-Lok," in *I Love Women: Oral History of Hong Kong Women Who Love Women*, eds. Siu-yin et al. (Hong Kong: FLY Media Limited, 2008).

²⁰ Wu, 32-3.

²¹ Women Coalition website: http://www.wchk.org/index_news.html; F-Union website: <http://hk.geocities.com/funionhk/>.

While Catholic nu-tongzhi share similar difficulties in coming out, their stories show that acceptance of nu-tongzhi in church simply cannot be taken for granted, despite the official teachings on love and friendship for homosexuals. Bik-kei stays away from parish life. Stargazer chooses to come out only to close friends from childhood in her parish group, but has to tackle a serious challenge from a friend in this group. Only through her updated information on sexual orientation can she pass the challenge. She gradually gains more acceptance from these friends, one of whom later comes out to her privately. Despite her active involvement in the Catholic Society in her school days, Wai-wai has come out in the tongzhi movement and then changed to participate enthusiastically in it. Ho-lok has to hide her sexual orientation and her opposition to official church teachings on homosexuality in school. She also avoids any intimate behaviour with her partner in the busy districts lest her colleagues and students will discover her same-sex love. She has been harassed by some colleagues due to her boyish appearance. Yet, during her college years, she socialized with other Catholic nu-tongzhi in the Catholic Society without being stigmatized. She will also come out to friends after each break-up. The Catholic father (male parent) of a lesbian daughter has exhausted all means to forbid his daughter's same-sex love. Like other tongzhi who cannot come out to their own families and have to find other living spaces for their partnership, Ho-lok and her partner maintain a half-cohabitation—they rent a room and live there only on weekends. Living a nu-tongzhi partnership seems to be a class privilege in the sense that only middle- and upper-class people can afford to rent an apartment.

Since local Catholic nu-tongzhi face heterosexism from the church and society as their North American sisters do, they will benefit from

insights from North American feminist and lesbian feminist theologies. Yet, Catholic nu-tongzhi may face stricter sexual codes and less tolerance due to mutual mal-formation of Catholicism and Confucianism. Most of the above cases do not have much struggle with official church teachings on homosexuality. I find this kind of flexibility in the compliance of ethical requirement reflecting the non-absolutization in the Chinese yin-yang cosmology; whereas Catholicism tends to equate its moral wisdom with absolute moral truth and therefore lacks such flexibility. Moral teachings on good or bad become absolutized. Moreover, the diverse sexual expressions in Chinese history, together with cultural wisdom, support diverse sexual expressions and various forms of committed love and caring relationships, which should not be regarded as western cultural products only.²² Furthermore, as a founder of Queer Sister suggested, coming out as political activists, instead of nu-tongzhi, can be a local strategy of resistance and survival that can avoid adopting a universal LGBTQ movement and broaden the pursuit of justice.²³ I also find this helpful in strengthening the awareness of the interlocking factors of oppressions and a holistic struggle of human rights of all. The experience of Catholic nu-tongzhi echo what Sharon Bong identifies in the life experiences of LGBT people in Malaysia and Singapore of reconciling the binary between their religious identity and their sexuality imposed by their respective religious traditions.²⁴

In sum, educational background and income seem to belong to the class factor for the Catholic nu-tongzhi to claim their identity and pursue their partnerships. Knowledge in feminism, queer theory and feminist theologies seems to facilitate their political participation to combat not only sexual and gender oppressions, but also engage in a holistic struggle of human rights for all. In addition to North American feminist and lesbian

²² Chou, 20-41.

²³ Wu, 20-1.

²⁴ Bong, "Not 'For the Sake of peace': Towards an Epistemology of the Sacred Body."

feminist theologies, cultural wisdom on non-absolutization for ethical issues and tolerance of diverse sexual expressions seems to be an additional important dimension for articulating local Catholic nu-tongzhi theology.

North American Feminist and Lesbian Feminist Theologies

In this section, I will briefly discuss North American feminist and lesbian feminist theologies and use them to dialogue with the experiences of local Catholic nu-tongzhi. The contributions of feminist theologies in the 1970's have precipitated in later lesbian feminist theologies. These feminist theologies from Mary Daly, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and others have started to examine the interacting oppressive factors of sex, class and race both in theological and societal realms. During the LGBT liberation movement which rose in late 1960's and the early 1970's, early gay theological and pastoral work focused primarily on gay male experiences, which concerned individual identity and coming out in the public arena. Sally Miller Gearhart, however, from her lesbian experience identifying with women, highlighted the political implications of LGBT issues and the patriarchal evils of Christianity, thus rejecting individualistic discourses.²⁵ Later during the 1980's, feminist theologians reclaimed the feminist erotic for theological articulation countering the masculine, phallogocentric and individualistic discourses on sexuality and continued the

feminist critique on structural oppression countering the privatizing of sexual discourses. Carter Heyward, an Episcopalian priest and theologian, and Mary Hunt, a Catholic lay theologian, both integrated feminist consciousness with lesbian experience in their theologies. The former developed a theology of power in right relation whereas the latter developed a theology of friendship.²⁷ Both works were representative of lesbian feminist theologies that countered heterosexist theological discourses and offered new relational discourses linking the personal with the political.

1. Carter Heyward: Theology of Power and Right Relation

While basing her work on Audre Lorde's reclamation of the erotic as a deep bodily knowledge, the deepest passion and a yearning for joy and self-fulfilment, Carter Heyward, in *Touching Our Strength*, highlights the erotic as power in relation and identifies this erotic power with God. God will become our relational power when we are letting the Spirit dwell in "the quality of our lives in relation, the authenticity of our mutuality and the strength of our relational matrix."²⁸ We are called to live in right relations with others in mutuality. While equality means the same status of two parties, mutuality is different from equality in the way that it calls people of unequal relations into a vision of justice, relational growth and working together for a liberative future.²⁹ "Our erotic power is sacred power because it is transcendent."³⁰

²⁵ Mary E. Hunt, "Lesbian and Bisexual Issues in Religion," in *The encyclopedia of women and religion in North America*, eds. Rosemary Skinner Keller, Rosemary Radford Ruether, and Marie Cantlon (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 1215-6; Elizabeth Stuart, *Gay and Lesbian Theologies: Repetitions with Critical Difference* (Aldershot, Hants, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002), 15-31.

²⁶ Alexander C. Irwin, *Eros toward the World: Paul Tillich and the Theology of the Erotic* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 123-33.

²⁷ Hunt, "Lesbian and Bisexual Issues in Religion," 1216-7; Stuart, 51-63.

²⁸ Carter Heyward, *Touching Our Strength: The Erotic as Power and the Love of God*, 1st edn (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), 24.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 34.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 130.

Using the Marxist critique on global capitalism, she finds that we are not valued as non-monetary human beings and thus lose our capacity to love ourselves and our bodies, and others. Eventually, we lose ourselves as a people, surrendering to alienation. The erotic power helps us to sense and challenge the alienating power.³¹ Heyward's emphasis on mutuality and the sex-affirming, body-affirming and relational ethics of sex and her Marxist critique on alienation created by capitalism are helpful in countering the compulsory heterosexuality and the co-modification of women's bodies and sexualities.

While white feminist theologians have reclaimed the feminist erotic in theological discourses, Kwok Pui-Lan has warned of the difficulty for Asian women to talk about sex and the erotic because of the heavy yoke of compulsory heterosexuality – e.g. decent women are not allowed to do so in public and a lot of Asian women work as prostitutes.³² Hence, I suggest that one remedy to this is to keep a continued critical analysis on the situation of different classes of women, nu-tongzhi and Catholic nu-tongzhi, and put this as a priority concern in our theological articulation and political agenda. Another complementary remedy is to replace the term, “erotic”, with “passion” to overcome the simplistic identification of the feminist erotic desire with sex and to remind us of the tragic side of attempts to love under structural sin like the passion and suffering of Jesus.³³ I find the language of passion more suitable especially when passion in Chinese culture is applied to all relations, including the cosmic. Rita Nakashima Brock has articulated the erotic in the metaphor of

the heart that may address the difficulty of talking about the erotic among Asian women.³⁴

2. Mary Hunt: Feminist Theology of Friendship as Relational Norm

While the church and modern society have devalued friendship, Mary Hunt, in her analysis of women's friendships in *Fierce Tenderness*, finds in friendship the love and justice in many possible relational matrices and friendly connections with animals and the earth that counter heterosexism and patriarchal dualism. Treating friendship as the relational norm, she points to the constitutive qualities of right relation, namely love, power, embodiment and spirituality. Love is the attitude for one to make connections with others and the world. Power has to be kept in balance in the friendship for its continual development as friends need to be able to make choices for themselves and their significant others and with the community. Relation is a sexual expression involving the interaction of bodies. When it is consenting, caring and conducive to the well-being of the parties involved, it generates love between them and beyond them. Spirituality is the choice-making for the quality of life of one and the community. Hunt also emphasizes the need to sacramentalise friendship through public expression of celebrating its formation and commemorating its loss. People are called to be “justice-seeking friends” for liberative struggles and communal survival.³⁵ God is a divine friend, a personable yet non-intrusive image, expressed in both singular and plural forms. The generativity, attention and community in women's friendships produce justice, which reveals the divine nature.³⁶

³¹ *Ibid.*, 48-60.

³² Pui-Lan Kwok, “The Future of Feminist Theology: An Asian Perspective,” in *Feminist Theology from the Third World: A Reader*, ed. Ursula King (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1994; reprint, 1996), 72-4.

³³ Elizabeth Stuart and Adrian Thatcher, “Desire,” in *People of Passion: What the Churches Teach About Sex* (London; Herndon, VA: Mowbray, 1997), 212.

³⁴ Rita Nakashima Brock, *Journeys By Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1988), xi-xvii.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 115-64.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 165-76.

Parallel to this theology of friendship, Hunt also proposes a Catholic lesbian feminist theology based on women's experiences and wisdom on moral agency and bodily integrity, community focus, feminist erotic, justice connections and feminist relationships. This latter theology includes three dimensions. First, lesbian sexual expression, which is conducive to community, is affirmed. Second, shared motherhood is a better expression for same-sex committed relationships than same-sex marriage as it produces more social benefits in adopting children. Third, a call to holiness as every Catholic shared in the theology of Vatican II is encouraged and the pursuit for justice is practiced in an increasingly pluralistic religious context.³⁷

3. Rose Wu: Liberation Theology of Right Relation

In order to build on local theological insights and work, I draw heavily on the theological reflections of Rose Wu, which have been based on her ministry with local Christian nu-tongzhi, serving as a good supplement to the lack of documented information on Catholic nu-tongzhi. Owing to the double marginalization of nu-tongzhi in the 1980's and the eventual forming of Queer Sisters, Wu sees the need to address the oppressions of nu-tongzhi. In her review of lesbian feminism and queer theory before incorporating them into her theological proposal, she notes that lesbian feminism has identified the entangled relation of sexism and heterosexism and its value on women's erotic love and relationships. Its political expression also renders a holistic vision of liberation that matches with the call for political participation from lesbian activists. She, however, disagrees with the rejection of heterosexual relationships in lesbian separatism as she sees compulsory heterosexuality as the systemic cause for oppression, rather than heterosexual

relationships. She also disagrees with lesbian separatism in its claim for representation of women and its call for all women becoming lesbians in order to be feminists.³⁸ Regarding queer theory, Wu asserts its usefulness in deconstructing the binaries on identity labels and unfolding the plurality and fluidity of identity in rendering creativity for resistance strategies in its queer politics. However, she highlights the erasure of identity as risking the depoliticalization and the loss of critique of privilege. She calls for exploration on difference under a critical social analysis so as to render the struggle of negotiation and build solidarity with the marginalized. She suggests shifting from the politics of identity to the politics of identification.³⁹ I agree with Wu's evaluation of lesbian feminism and queer theory and will model her critical appropriation of lessons learned from them in my theological proposal.

Wu adds that the sole use of nu-tongzhi experiences for analysis is insufficient, so she expands the analysis with feminist notions of liberation. Thus, in order to tackle heterosexism in the Christian tradition, she emphasizes the use of liberation theology. In her theology of Right Relation, she does not only draw on Heyward's erotic theology of right relation, but also Leonardo Boff's theology of the Trinitarian God, in which the Trinitarian communion points to the social and integral liberation of both the church and society. Wu also incorporates Elizabeth Johnson's work to reclaim the female imagery of the Divine to counter the masculine and patriarchal understanding of relationships and to recover radical equality and community in diversity, as shown in Johnson's trinitarian theology. I find the work of these two Catholic theologians as strengthening the tenets of a Catholic lesbian feminist theology. The recovery of diversity as a characteristic of trinitarian theology is important in affirming the diversity of

³⁷ Mary E. Hunt, *Fierce Tenderness: A Feminist Theology of Friendship* (New York: Crossroad, 1995), 14, 100-6, 113-4.

³⁸ Wu, 51-2.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 52-5.

sexual expressions and the variety of human relationships.⁴⁰ The queer expression of faith among the Catholic nu-tongzhi is supported by a trinitarian theology of valuing diversity in union.

However, Marcella Althaus-Reid has pointed to the failure of liberation theology in Latin America and the basic ecclesial communities to change the society from the grassroots. She has criticized the unexamined heterosexual idealist ideology in religious symbols and the safe and decent location of these theologians who produce decent theology and ethics, but who are irrelevant to the lives of poor women. She emphasizes the use of a women's gaze, "a penetration by what we call the female phallus into the sexualisation of the enterprise confronted it... (and) erotic desires" to do theology.⁴¹ She also contests that the realization of women's sexual story-telling is the power efficacy in socio-political changes.⁴² I agree with Althaus-Reid's critique of liberation theology and the importance of women's sexual story-telling in socio-political transformation. While I find her use of sexual and fetish language to articulate a sexual theology in *Indecent Theology* as liberating our theological imagination, such language renders similar difficulty posed by the language of the erotic. In traditional Chinese society, same-sex activities were termed socially and non-sexually. For example, there were homosocial roles such as *xiang gong* (male prostitute), *duan xiu* (cut sleeve), *fen tao* (shared peach), and homosocial relations such as *jinlan zimei* (golden orchid sisters), *qidi* and *qixiong* (adopted brothers), *hanlu yingxiong* (stranded heroes). Terms for sexual acts were poetic without any

condemnation such as *mou dou fu* (grinding bean-curd), *hou ting hwa* (the backyard flower), *dui si* (paired eating) and *chui xiao* (playing a vertical flute).⁴³ Hence, I think it is necessary to see what language nu-tongzhi use in their sexual story-telling before we can propose a sexual theology using relevant language.

To re-unite sexuality and spirituality, Wu includes an incarnational theology that sees God's incarnation commencing in a relational manner, countering the hierarchal dualism in theological and philosophical discourses and the divine impassivity in human life. She also includes the integration of spirit and body as one totality of human experience. Moreover, in order to counter homophobia, she proposes a sexual theology that connects sexual relations with justice-making and tackles the interlocking system of oppressions. This part of Wu's theological proposal also echoes with the above Catholic lesbian feminist theology as well.⁴⁴ Although we do not see in these Catholic nu-tongzhi the linking of sexuality with spirituality, Asian women's spirituality of no distinction between the sacred and the profane may indicate the absence of duality between sexuality and spirituality.⁴⁵ The Catholic nu-tongzhi have not shown too big a problem in integrating their faith with sexuality, so Wu's work is compatible with their understanding of the Catholic faith.

Wu then proposes four re-imaginings in articulating a prophetic vision of a liberating and inclusive Christian community for the Hong Kong Blessed Minority Christian Fellowship (HKBMCF). First, the HKBMCF needs to

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 78-83.

⁴¹ Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics* (London; New York: Routledge, 2000), 38.

⁴² Marcella Althaus-Reid, *From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology: Readings on Poverty, Sexual Identity and God* (London: SCM Press, 2004), 92-3.

⁴³ Chou, 22-4.

⁴⁴ Wu, 84-88.

⁴⁵ Agnes M. Brazal and Andrea Lizares Si, eds., *Body and Sexuality* (Quezon City, Philippines: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2007), 194.

develop from a people in exile to an exodus community, which witnesses with an alternative culture rather than a refuge and engages in collective political participation. Second, a hermeneutics of dangerous memories is practiced to re-examine Christian traditions and look for resistance and liberation. Third, a ministry of equal discipleship is practiced to break from the kyriarchal model of leadership. Fourth, celebrating the Eucharist at a table of hospitality and solidarity is to build communion across boundaries.⁴⁶ Although there is no formal tongzhi group or ministry in the Hong Kong Catholic Church at this moment, I acknowledge this vision of a liberating and inclusive Christian community as good guidelines if Catholic tongzhi organize among themselves. Indeed, I do not think it is helpful to form tongzhi groups under the hierarchal church. Creating a new space for practicing a new vision of church is more possible outside the hierarchy. Hence, I will draw from Brock about the Christa/Community witnessing the resurrection and spreading the faith of resurrection and add this as the fifth re-imaging.⁴⁷

Conclusion

Owing to the political context of Hong Kong, I affirm the need to emphasize the coming out of Catholic nu-tongzhi as political activists. While I suggest to them to create a new model of church outside the hierarchy, I will emphasize the extensive network of women existing beyond hierarchy, yet offering transgressive challenge and transformative momentum to the hierarchy.

Hence, in incorporating the insights from North American lesbian feminist theology and from the local one of Wu, my proposal of a local Catholic feminist theology includes the following tenets. First, passionate friendship of mutuality and equality is the basis for community-building and

justice-seeking and serves for creating a new church community of liberation and inclusivity outside the hierarchy. Reaching out to the poor and facilitating their organizing is an important entry point. Second, sex-affirming, body-affirming, desiring the well-being of others, and justice-doing in sexual relations link sexuality with spirituality with the freedom in erotic celibacy for one's whole-making also included in such spirituality. There is no distinction between the profane and the sacred in human life. Third, diverse sexual expression is affirmed as reflecting the triune God. Continual critical analysis on how the class factor affects the sexual expressions of various groups is conducted for theological reflection. Cultural resources and wisdom on affirming diverse sexual expressions are to be included, drawing on the language used in the sexual story-telling of nu-tongzhi in order to identify culturally appropriate language, narrative and imagery for articulating sexual theology. Fourth, various forms of committed love and caring responsibilities should be recognized. The value of extended family should be affirmed. Fifth, coming out as political activist is a calling to the pursuit of justice and building solidarity with the marginalized across cultures and faith traditions to combat all forms of oppressions, including heterosexism and class oppression of the kyriarchal church and society. Gay rights struggle is part of the holistic struggle for human rights.

My proposal is only intended as offering a momentum for deeper and more theological reflections in the articulation of a local Catholic lesbian feminist theology to counter the dominant theology. It is not meant as a finished product. Only when more and more Catholic nu-tongzhi engage as a community in such a theological conversation can we really develop a more mature Catholic lesbian feminist theology.

⁴⁶ Wu, 100-15.

⁴⁷ Brock, *Journeys By Heart*.

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