

ZI TENG NEWSLETTER NO. 2, JUNE 1997

Teachers sell their knowledge. Technicians sell their skills. Coolies sell their labor force... In a capitalist and commercial society, fair transaction and reasonable trading relationships are the rules of game. Everything can be sold, provided that the transactions are fair and reasonable.

In this connection, can sex be sold as well? Why?

The society recognizes the selling of knowledge, skills and labor, but not sex. Why?

Selling knowledge is a job, as well as skills and labor. Why can't the sale of sex be counted as a job?

One day, a group of people gathered to answer the above questions. They are friends of Zi Teng and those who are concerned about sex workers.

We have listed here some of their striking insights.

(Note: "Jie Jie" and "Ah Jie" are local synonyms of sex workers)

Can sex be commercialized?

*People who are strongly against commercial sex consider this as commercializing women's body and it seems to encourage the young generation to follow, thus leading to the collapse of morality.

*The sex industry exists for a long time and is not prohibited. People buy what others sell. It's the reality of the capitalistic society.

*A long-established industry is not meant to be reasonable. If sex cannot be commercialized, then we should first ask, what is the harmful effect of commercializing sex? Are we challenging the capitalist economy as Marxism did before? Or is classism a result of capitalism? Modern Marxist theorists think that if something is allowed to be exchanged in the market, to that extent, why would sex be an exception?

*This issue cannot have an absolute answer for the questions. The situation in the Netherlands is very different from the one in Taiwan. The sex workers association can fight for their rights and prostitution is only a job. But the sex workers in Hong Kong and Taiwan who join the industry may do so because of complicated factors, like immaturity, peer group influence, economic reason, etc.

(Note: child prostitution is not included in the discussion since it is against the labor law and against the will of the girls.)

*It is not the question of "should or "should not". As the sex industry already exists and no one can stop it happening.

*If we accept the reality of capitalism, then we should be aware of the fairness of sex transaction and enable sex workers to gain legal protection. From the perspective of human rights, sex is what we own basically. We have the right to sell what we have.

*The above rights of commercialization are too idealistic. The Police, as I have encountered, think that the best solution to prostitution is to stem away their existence. If not so, they will consider the issue and the social problems arising from it as uncontrollable.

*Our viewpoints are more or less parallel with our assumption. For example, sex can be sold, but under the condition that it is sold in a fair context. Then we come to the point that if sex is sold under the control of Triads or pimps, or if women are stared by the policemen, it is unacceptable. It is good that we can make this industry become fairer in its operation. People have the freedom to leave and enter this industry. If we assume that sex cannot be sold, then we have a different interpretation.

*For me, it is not a matter of choice. I know there is a lot of exploitation in that field. But we are holding a double standard in objecting this job. If we blame other jobs with the same reasons, we can discover that the reasons are unjustifiable. For example, for one thing it subjects women under control by others, for another it degrades women. A woman who cleans the street may also feel degraded. But we will not penalize her and classify her job as a crime. We can only try to improve their working condition. Also, women who have to working the factory suffer from poor working conditions, we will organize trade unions to fight for their rights.

*Are sex workers being dehumanized?

*Factory workers are also dehumanized.

We regard all intercourse as sexual behavior. The sex workers, whether having sex with their clients or partners, are considered as having sex. It is because of their identity as a prostitute that we deplore their bought and sold relationship. Then we come to the conclusion that sex cannot be sold.

*I agree that sex is treated differently than other goods. We talked about fairness, free choice. But shall we be a sex worker? I will not. I can sell my brain, labor force in a capitalist society, but not sex.

*Dealing with sex, I have certain borderline. Of course it is good that no things should be commercialized. But sex is different.

*We still have not touched upon the moral issues. Sex workers face the most challenge from the morality discourse. The pressure from the police is only secondary. The people around them are the largest pressure.

*My classmates have many taboos about sex. The moral standard of sex in the society affects this industry.

Moral or Immoral

*What is moral? People should have a place to live. But a small minority monopolizes land. Is this immoral?

*We should lay our moral judgement not in terms of transaction process. If women are forced to sell their sex, it is immoral. If they do it willingly, but are exploited in the process of selling. It is also immoral.

*I query whether their so-called "choice" is really a real one. If everyone in the society has reasonable salary, the basic needs are fulfilled. Shall we still encourage this kind of transaction, which encroaches upon the dignity of women?

*Why has the society given them such a stigma?

I think it is a vicious cycle. The society tells us that sex is sacred and cannot be touched and one should not take off their clothes easily. Selling sex is meant to be cheap. The policemen in Mongkok Police Station told me that when a girl is raped, she would have no remorse in turning into a sex worker. I will ask, "who tells them that they are now worthless?" In fact, everyone has a price. But the social workers and their parents blame the raped victims. The policemen will call them "public toilets". They will feel worthless. We cannot ask them if they want to be a sex worker or not. They have already been stigmatized. I agree that we have to respect our body. But not only sex workers, it is we who deteriorate our body everyday. For example, we eat a lot of rubbish, we breath polluted air. Why should we think that only sex could harm our bodies?

*We should also think about why the society discriminates JieJie. The society mystifies sex and regards sex outside of marriage is dirty. WE can breakthrough this taboo and propose that sex can be discussed and are not mysterious.

*We can have sex without love. Morality makes us lose our freedom.

Sex is being objectified. Women is being "sexualized"

Feminists think that the sex industry make women become sex objects. I do not know how to continue this discussion.

*Feminists criticisms focus on the autonomy of women. They object any kind of objectifying women. The beauty contest is also an issue about autonomy. Autonomy means you can choose and express yourself. You are the subject. In a marital relationship, wives can also be sex objects.

*Feminists emphasize that the commercialization of sex makes women unfree. But the sex industry is not prohibited. We do not encourage it but neither shall we prohibit it. It is quite Fascist in nature.

*Who can interpret autonomy? For example, Jie Jie say that they have orgasm when making love with their clients. They want to do it with their clients. Do they have autonomy? Or does the society or economy influence them?

*Someone rebukes the feminists that sex workers have their own choice. Of course, it is not the case of everyone.

*We once met a sex worker. She said would provide sex service only when she is happy. But when we chatted with her further, we discovered that she had another story. There are two sides of it. It is both the objective reality and social atmosphere. The society pressure on her made her feel inferior. Once you have worked as a sex worker, you can never clear yourself of the label. Therefore, no matter how much she enjoys working as a sex worker, she does not dare to tell you.

*I claim myself as a feminist. I don't think that sex cannot be commercialized. Probably it's because I was raised in a capitalistic society. Why can't I be rewarded for providing sex services? What matters is whether the reward is reasonable and whether the relationship is on one of exploitation. This is what I always term as the question of equality. Another question is "what is morality" Most people would agree with me that morality is a set of values. Those generally use

it as a tool in power to control the people.

*In the sex trade, women are traded. In the US, a female sex worker took me to watch a stripper's show. She told me she liked it. She is bisexual. I had thought the only men were consumers of women. Now I know that women can also be consumers of women.

*I have been to a bar in Thailand. The owner was a woman. From the perspective of labor relationship, the female owner is exploiting other women.

Work Report

March

Yim and Au Mei Bo attended an international prostitution conference in the USA, which lasted for five days. The conference consisted of two parts. Sex workers' associations organized the first part. It allowed sex workers from all over the world to discuss problems they face in their work and to exchange their organization experience. The main agenda of concern groups on prostitution from Europe and trade unions of sex workers were to appeal to the UN to pass a bill, which protects sex workers' rights.

The second part of the conference was organized by academics. It consisted of several divisions: research, sharing of experience, legal matter, policies, etc.

In this conference, Zi Teng members learned about a few concern groups on prostitution from different countries and established connections with them. En route, they visited red light districts of LA and the local prostitution groups.

April

*Yim visited Taiwanese women pastors' delegation

*Yim visited Rainbow (a concern group on child prostitution) from Taiwan

*Yim and Ann audited a case in the North Cowling Magistrate

*Yim and Chewing Hung accompanied a client to attend the Winch Court

May

*Yim, Chewing Hung and Ann visited sex workers in Shamshuipo and Yuen Long four times

*Yim attended a seminar organized by Hong Kong Women Christian Council on "Review and prospect of Women's Movement in Hong Kong"

*Zi Teng held an internal seminar entitled "Can sex be commercialized?"

Yim attended a seminar on AIDS in Beijing and Hong Kong from May21 to 24.

June

*Zi Teng, represented by ten volunteers, started visiting a women's prison in Chi May Wan prison twice every month in June

*On June 23, Yim attended a seminar for freshmen and sophomores in Social Work in Baptist University introducing Zi Teng's Work

*On June 30, Zi Teng attended the alternative handover functions in Central. With exhibitions, we introduced Zi Teng and the laborious works of its members. We also distributed condoms printed with fabulous slogans. Thanks to our friends who gave us a hand for the function.

A Dialogue with Zi Teng

We would like to share with you the following conversation with "Young Sister"

Yim (Y): "Young Sister", how old are you? How long have you joined this trade?

Young Sister (S): I'm 17. I have been working as a bargirl in karaoke since 14.

Y: How did you join this trade?

S: A fellow sister introduced me into it. Anyway, I had a lot of friends who had joined this trade. It's easy to find this job.

Y: Why did you work in this trade?

S: I needed money to buy drugs. Most of my friends worked in this trade, so I joined too. In the beginning, it was quite nice. I could play and drink, I was quite happy.

Y: Did anyone teach you about the regulations in the trade?

S: Yes. The sisters told me what to do. For example, how to avoid the bad customers. How to avoid being drunk. Some customers were really disgusting. They came not to sing but to molest. The older they were, the more disgusting. But I dared not resist because they paid. I could only protect myself. Sometimes they requested to go out. It's fine to go out with those I liked, but with the disgusting ones, I was very happy.

Y: What would you do if you dislike them?

S: I would tell them I have my period. Sometimes the "daddy" helped out.

Y: Why did you quit?

S: The job-drinking and singing every night bored me. I couldn't make a face when I was not happy. You have to be social whether you like your customers or not.

My Story

The police caught me three times in February, I was sitting on the stairway, and I did nothing that violated the laws. After I was released from the prison, I was caught again on April 24. I was just waiting for someone on the street.

On that day, I was standing in front of a restaurant waiting for a friend. Suddenly, a car drove by. I recognized from the license plate that it belonged to the cops. When I was going to leave for fear that I would be caught again, one of the cops blocked me and asked for my identity card. He suspected that I seduced someone for "immoral acts". I intentionally withdrew my identity card and argued with him for a long time. I just gave them my entry permit (for entering Mainland China). Still they charged me.

I think this was an unreasonable accusation. The police are too powerful. I would not argue if I did what I was charged for. But I was just waiting for woman on the street.

I think the judge sided with the police. If you accuse me of arson, you have to find matches from my belongings. In the court, the police lied and the judge believed them. The copy that caught me said he saw me soliciting to four men and said I stroked my breast to seduce the last one.

The cop set me up. I am my lawyer questioned why the copy did not videotaped or took photos of the process. He said there was no suck need. I also questioned why he did not catch the fourth man. Any one of them could have witnessed against me. In fact, we do not need to solicit on the street. The customers know where to find us. They know how to ask the price. Once both my customer and I got caught. The customer said I had not solicited to her but it was he who approached me. I was thus acquitted. But that time in April, the judge on believed the cops' testimonies and sentenced me to imprisonment. There are loopholes in the laws. The laws allow the cops to calumniate. I was put into jail for 33 days. I could not work for my living nor take care of my son.

No matter how downgraded we are, in the Chines tradition we paid our effort. It is reasonable to get a reward for it. But we are not protected at all. We are afraid of being robbed. But it's no use reporting to the police. Not only do they ignore us, they set us up.

Of course I hope the situation will be improve. I hope there is an absolutely impartial judge.

Financial Situation of Zi Teng

>From February to June twenty friends have supported/financed the work of Zi Teng. The financial report is as follows:

Income from Donations:

Employment Scheme 30,830.97

Tony Fung 500

Chan Yu Cheong 1700

Cheung Hung	600
Cheng Mei Kuen	4500
Mak Chiu Ling	1000
Ma Lai Wah	2000
Women Pastors	738

Of Taiwan Pres. Church

Lau Ngar See	100
Rose Wu	1000
Yeung Shau Cheuk	105
Choi Po King	1100
Lam Chi Chung	160
Chow Yim Chun	2300

*fees for conference in Thailand

Leung Yiu Chung	500
Au Mei Po	3000
Liu Yuen Man	1000
Tsang Ka Yin	1000
Yim Kit Sum	1500
Ho Lai Han	1000
Li Ching Man	300
Li Yan Lan	2000
Li Lim Sin	200
Chan Wai Fong	6000
Chow Wang Ngai	US90

Total Income	64,133.97
	US90

Expenditure

Conference	3357
Postage	405
Printing	2168.5
Fax	100
Sounding system	538
IDD	100
Paging	684
Stationery	195.8
Rent	120

Banner	67.2
Salary	25,000
Total expenditure	32,743.20