

Erotic Subversions: Male Masochism, Power, and the Politics of Desire in Hong Kong's BDSM Landscape

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Abstract : This research critically engages with the erotic and political entanglements of male clientele of Dominatrices who identify as submissives (hereafter referred to as submissives) within Hong Kong's BDSM scene. Employing masochism as an analytical framework, it interrogates the intersections of capitalism, heteropatriarchy, postcolonialism, and commodified desire. BDSM (Bondage and Discipline, Dominance and Submission, Sadism and Masochism) encompasses practices that explore power, control, and subordination through both physical and psychological role-play, predicated on consent, negotiation, and boundary delineation. This makes BDSM a fertile site for examining how dominance and submission are mobilized, challenged, and reiterated. This study focuses on the dynamics between thirty male submissives and three professional Dominatrices active in Hong Kong since 2019. The predominance of male interviewees reflects the demographic reality that most clients engaging with professional Dominatrices are male. These submissives—men who willfully relinquish control—offer a critical lens for exploring how BDSM, as both practice and market, mirrors and destabilizes dominant power structures. BDSM relationships occasionally replicate the hierarchical logics of heterosexual marriage, particularly in the expectation that submissives engage exclusively with a single Dominatrix, reflecting a dynamic of devotion and fidelity akin to traditional marital structures. However, these relationships also function as counter-normative spaces where care and control are reconfigured, enabling the negotiation of alternative power configurations. By centering BDSM work rather than broader kink practices, this study foregrounds the commodification of intimacy as a key site where suppressed desires, economic forces, and political tensions converge. The submissives in this study are predominantly affluent, cisgender men, underscoring the socio-economic asymmetries in the BDSM market. Furthermore, the research examines how Hong Kong's political turbulence—particularly the 2019 Yellow Umbrella Movement and the COVID-19 pandemic—has reverberated through the BDSM scene, reshaping the contours of desire, trust, and power in these intimate transactions. The increasing tensions with mainland China, alongside the erosion of public trust in state institutions, form a critical backdrop to this evolving landscape. Grounded in gender and sexuality theories, this research interrogates how the desires of male submissives are constructed within and resist heteronormative frameworks. BDSM practices, far from existing outside capitalist and colonial logics, often act as both a mirror and critique of these systems, revealing complex ways in which power is commodified, enacted, and contested. In their pursuit of emotional care and alternative forms of control, male submissives navigate a paradoxical terrain where their masochistic desires both subvert and perpetuate the socio-political status quo. By examining the intersections of desire, commodification, and the shifting socio-political landscape, this research provides a nuanced understanding of how BDSM functions as a site of negotiation for those navigating the turbulent crosscurrents of capitalist and colonial legacies. Ultimately, it uncovers the complex interplay between erotic practices and the structures of power and identity in a city undergoing profound transformation.

Keywords : masochism, Hong Kong, identity, BDSM, dominatrix, masculinity, gender studies

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