

MANLY VICE AND *VIRTÙ*:  
STATE SPECTERS, SECULAR RITUALS, AND PUBLIC CULTURE IN TAIWAN

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This dissertation is an ethnographic study of male sociality and public culture in Taiwan. I examine the poetics and politics of disreputable social activities in which cohorts of male friends engage regularly and extensively, including hunting, drinking, and gambling. My analytical point of departure is the concept of “cultural intimacy,” which recognizes how shadowy public practices whose social efficacy derives from contravening official norms actually constitute the state as well as national and other identities. This approach departs from the orthodoxy of Taiwan (and China) studies by locating the political basis of society in the public realm rather than in the family and work. This study addresses three overarching questions: What are the micropolitics of disreputable social activities through which men negotiate status and identity and construct homosocial bonds of intimacy? How are mainstream gender values and norms perpetuated and reworked through these activities, and how do subversive forms become incorporated into everyday social repertoires? In what ways do these activities instantiate, resist, and reinforce state power and nationalist ideologies?

Ethnographically, my research focuses on three social activities: deep-sea spearfishing, carousing at hostess clubs, and high-stakes gambling at mahjong, each of which my informants understood to be subversive of societal norms. Methodologically, I structure my examination of each activity around an adaptation of classic ritual analysis--namely totemism, sacrifice, and *ludus*--and interpret each ritual activity in the respective mass-mediated context of public culture. In so doing, I

explore the production of male sociality in relation to nature and environmental discourses, gender and sexuality, fate/luck and military training, as well as state ideology and global capitalism. Based on my findings, I argue that disreputable male social activities are key sites for the production of values and communities that reconfigure the contours of public culture, capitalism, and democratization in Taiwan, and that both contest and legitimate state power. By integrating ritual analysis and cultural studies approaches, I make an original contribution to gender studies in Taiwan/China and to anthropological studies of public culture and the nation-state.