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US\$40.00

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US\$17.00

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About the Cover

Teresa Lai-San Yip titles her work "Love for Food, Fun and Variety of Intimacy." She explains: "Yin and yang in Tai Chi are the two life forces symbolizing femininity and masculinity respectively in ancient Chinese cosmology that interact to generate rich and dynamic gender

Published by

Asian Women Resources (AWRCCT) Sdn Bhd
 69 Lorong Anggor
 Taman Shanghai
 58100 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

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and bodily expressions as well as sexualities, as exemplified in the whole creation. The monkeys of various bodily forms share food and plurality of sexualities freely, sumptuously, playfully and joyfully in a world that cherishes diversity, equality and bodily pleasure."

Printed by

Vinlin Press Sdn Bhd
 2 Jalan Meranti Permai 1
 Meranti Permai Industrial Park
 Batu 15 Jalan Puchong
 47100 Puchong, Selangor, Malaysia



Queer Theologies—Playing with Theology

It seems illogical, frivolous and even irreverent to grace the cover of a special issue of *in God's image* that focuses on Christian queer theologies with images of monkeys. We could never have predicted that our artist, Asian queer theologian Lai-shan Yip would contribute such an unexpected yet delightful original painting for this special issue. In describing her artwork through an email, Yip notes how 'the monkeys of various bodily forms share food and plurality of sexualities freely, sumptuously, playfully and joyfully in a world that cherishes diversity, equality and bodily pleasure'. Thus, Yip's creative contribution depicts cherished values of sharing, plurality, freedom, lavishness, playfulness, joy, diversity, equality and physical pleasure. From this fertile litany of creative expressions, we find the notion of playfulness or play as particularly captivating symbols to enunciate the aims of this special issue.

Yet, what is play? The cultural theorist Johan Huizinga identifies play as a form of activity that is common to both animals and the *homo ludens* (the human being who plays). Psychologist J. Nina Lieberman explains playfulness among human beings as 'spontaneity, manifest joy, and sense of humor'.¹ The term 'play' also bears sexual connotations. 'Main' [play] is a colloquial term that is occasionally used by Bahasa Malaysia-speaking Malaysians to refer to sexual acts. In Hong Kong, the term 滾友 is used to describe someone who 'plays' around in a sexual sense, while the term 好滾 refers to someone who is actively involved in casual sex. Huizinga insists that 'in culture we find play as a given magnitude existing before culture itself existed, accompanying it and pervading it from the earliest beginnings right up to the phase of civilization we are now living in'.² In other words, the location of play is paramount to the development of human cultural systems, which in turn give meaning to human existence. Playfulness becomes one avenue through which human beings construct and make meaning of their 'humanness'. It is from this perspective that Lieberman interprets Huizinga's vision of play as 'the matrix of culture[,] and the play spirit [as] the civilizing factor in human development'.³ Therefore, play is the performance of pleasure on multiple levels, the recreational respite that upsets, subverts and informs the inflexible, unchanging and sullen dimensions of sense, meaning and purpose in human existence.

The dynamism with which playfulness aids in constructing the sense, meaning and purpose of 'humanness' is reminiscent of the role of theology—or 'God-talk [or] discourse on God'⁴—in the lives of billions who try to grasp sense, meaning and purpose in their lives as human beings. Notions of God may be treasured by some, but scoffed and rejected by others as a needless metaphysical conjuring that somehow eluded the scientific coercions of the Enlightenment. The mentality that believing in, relying on and engaging with God is trivial, illogical and fruitless parallels Lieberman's observation that 'play is usually regarded as a useless or, at best, inconsequential activity'.⁵

¹ J. Nina Lieberman, *Playfulness: Its Relationship to Imagination and Creativity* (New York: Academic Press, 1977), 6.

² Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1949), 4.

³ Lieberman, *Playfulness*, 11.

⁴ Wati Longchar, "Unclean and Compassionate Hand of God," *The Ecumenical Review* 63, no. 4 (December 2011): 410.

⁵ Longchar. "Unclean and Compassionate Hand of God," 14.

This mentality holds particular salience when dimensions of God and theology are deliberately introduced to and interwoven with issues of queer people. We use the term 'queer people' in this special issue in an inclusive manner. First, we use 'queer people' as a shorthand for those whose self-descriptions of gender and sexuality transgress normative expectations, notably people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ). Second, we use this term to refer to allies, or people who may not identify as LGBTIQ, but who support LGBTIQ people 'in terms of seeking a more just world with respect to sexuality and gender identity'.⁶

In the minds of many, theology can never interlace with LGBTIQ issues in any conceivable way. Such a coalition would be contradictory, outrageous and blasphemous—an insult to God! This mentality *privatises theology* as the domain of the heteronormatively respectable and decent. In response, we reject this mentality and affirm the importance of queer voices, experiences, insights and knowledge in the task of theologising. We suggest the introduction of playfulness into the task of theologising, based on Lieberman's understanding of playfulness as 'spontaneity, manifest joy, and sense of humor'.⁷ We believe that playfulness can disrupt the injustice of heteronormative and heterosexist theologising, and deliver levity and pleasure to queer people who are often theologically oppressed and excluded. We are convinced that playfulness with theology allows for greater amplifications of sense, meaning and purpose in the lives of queer persons of faith. In short, we affirm the importance of queer theologies.

Thus, in this special issue, we ask the following questions:

- How would an infusion of spontaneity, joy and light-heartedness into rigid and detached representations of God that exclude queer people impact theologies?
- What happens when the normative boundaries of gender and sexuality are played around with in theological articulations, particularly when we 'interrogate, transgress, deconstruct [and] reimagine'⁸ these boundaries?
- What do the theologies of, by and about queer people and the symbols and experiences of their beliefs look like if they were injected with the idea of play?

Our special issue showcases the works of a handful of emerging scholars and activists from Asia and Latin America who engage with socio-political and cultural issues by incorporating various LGBT and queer theological perspectives. We offer an interesting blend of articles, some of which are more theoretically-oriented while others dwell more on lived experiences. Nevertheless, each of these articles manifests interweavings of both aspects in varying degrees. We also wish to assert that we do not presume LGBT theologies and queer theologies to be identical, although they overlap and intersect on many levels. As such, we wish to explain how 'queer' is used in theology in various exciting ways throughout this issue.

First, 'queer' foregrounds the experiences and knowledge of queer people in conceptualising God and theology, based on the wealth of actual human experiences. Here, our interest lies in understanding how the intermingling of the lived realities of LGBTIQ people and their experiences

⁶ Patrick S. Cheng, *Radical Love: An Introduction to Queer Theology* (New York: Seabury Books, 2011), 3.

⁷ Lieberman, *Playfulness*, 6.

⁸ Joseph N. Goh, "Mary and the *MakNyahs*: Queer Theological Imaginings of Malaysian Male-to-Female Transsexuals," *Theology & Sexuality* 18, no. 3 (January 2012): 223.

of God spurs a clearer sense of self-identity for them as both LGBTIQ and people of faith. **Small Luk** traces her journey as an intersex person in Hong Kong who endured suffering as 'neither man nor woman' before choosing to live as a woman, and consequently becoming a testimony to the diversity and richness of God's creative power. **Pearl Wong** attempts to queer the binary notions of sexuality by challenging the heteropatriarchal Christian tradition of sexuality from the perspective of a bisexual feminist in Hong Kong. To this end, she proposes three sequential movements: resistance to heterosexism, self-affirmation, and coming out to embrace diverse sexual identities. **Joanne Leung** outlines her struggles to find her gender identity as a transgender lesbian Christian woman in Hong Kong before affirming herself as 'God's Grace'. **Rose Wu** shares insights, strategies and critical reflections on her pedagogical practice as well as her approaches in doing queer theology that serve the purpose of empowering queer voices in Hong Kong, and in reuniting their sexuality and spirituality.

Second, we show how 'queer' can be deployed as a critical theological methodology to re-read religio-historical, socio-cultural and scriptural narratives and personages, lived religion and film texts in relation to sexuality, as well as expand ideas of community, love, scripture and intra-LGBTIQ diversity. **Juswantori Ichwan** asserts that *gay* and *lesbi* categories in Indonesia may have emerged from gay and lesbian categories in the West, but they are not exactly the same as the latter. The emergence of the former relies heavily on the meaning-making of *gay* and *lesbi* lived experiences of sexuality and religion in specific Indonesian contexts. **Teguh Wijaya Mulya** starts with a case study of the sexual assault of a 'bad girl' in Indonesia, before attempting to destabilise the binary of the Virgin Mary/Whore of Babylon that has been drawn on to justify violence against women. He further argues that the virgin/whore binary may be fluid and interchangeable in various contemporary and biblical contexts. **Kristine C. Meneses** from the Philippines challenges us to question normative and familiar biblical interpretation by queering the texts of two parables—that of the prodigal son, and the widow and the judge in the gospel of Luke. Meneses claims that we can unlock the biblical texts in order for new and previously untreated approaches to come out. **Miak Siew** offers queer lessons on God's radical love, God's beloved community, encountering Scripture, and sex and sexuality. Based on pastoral ministry and theological reflection in Singapore, Siew suggests that the lived realities of queer people present an opportunity for the church to ask itself deep questions about its call and role as the Body of Christ. **Hugo Córdova Quero** looks at intersecting issues of race, politics, gender and sexuality as 'theo(ideo)logical discourses' in his investigation of *Santitos*, a film set in Mexico, Tijuana and Los Angeles. He argues that everyday experiences of faith and sexuality, as reflected in cultural artefacts such as films, often interweave in unexpectedly empowering ways.

We would like to thank all our contributors for their fine work and their patience in journeying with us from beginning to end. We would also like to thank the Editorial Advisory Committee of *in God's image*—Jessica, Ting Jin and Hisako—for this collaborative opportunity. We pray that this special issue will prove to be a source of blessings for our readers, just as we have been blessed in bringing it to life.

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Joseph N. Goh and Pearl Wong
Guest Editors

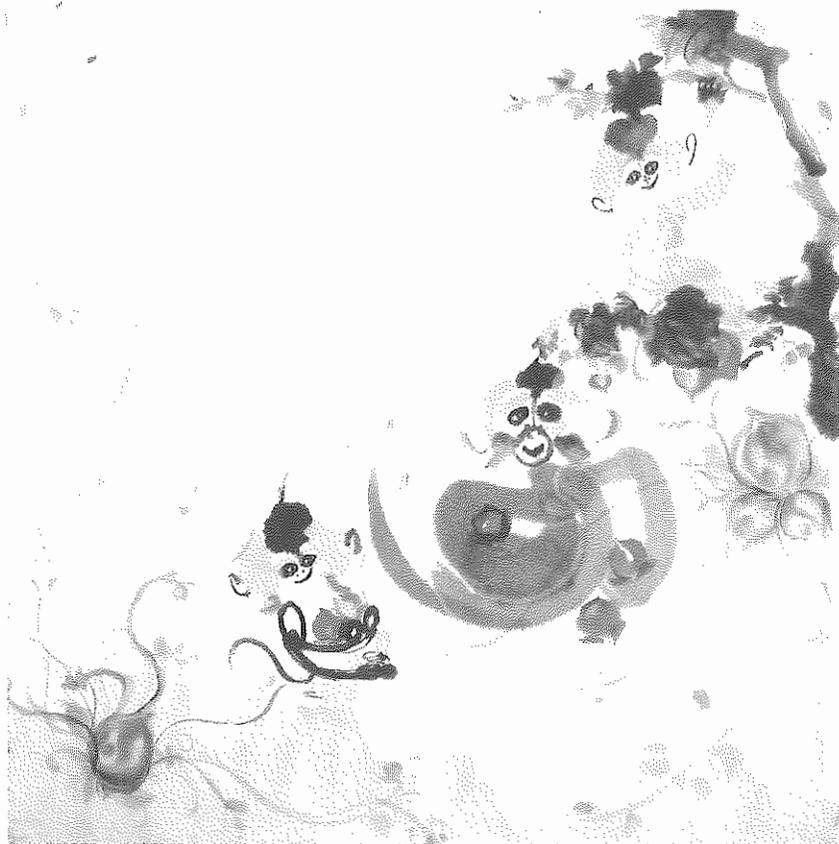
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Note of Thanks

This special issue of IGI on "Queer Theologies" would not have been possible were it not for our Guest Editors - Joseph Goh and Pearl Wong. When the EAC approached Joseph and Pearl to be guest editors for this special issue of IGI and asked them to coordinate this issue, they did not hesitate at all but willingly accepted the role. They have given of their time, energy and enormous skills in coordinating this issue of IGI, despite their own work loads and other commitments. IGI is very grateful for their tireless work, months of follow-up with authors and meticulous editing to bring this issue to publication. We wish to also thank all the authors who worked as a team with the Guest Editors and shared their reflections in this issue.

Jessica Richard
(For Editorial Advisory Committee (EAC))



Queer Theologies

in God's image

Journal of Asian Women's Resource Centre for Culture and Theology

Vol. 34, No.2, December 2015

in God's image is an Asian Christian women's effort to provide a forum for expressing our reality, our struggles, our faith reflections and aspirations for change.

AWRC stands for Asian Women's Resource Centre for Culture and Theology. It is an organisation of women and women's organisations in Asia who are engaged in promoting Asian women's theologising.

The AWRC logo depicts women as seed that is growing, flowering and blossoming - a source of life and movement. Women come together from different parts of Asia to be enriched by each other's cultures, to grow together and share responsibility in helping one another, to do theology in our living contexts.

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ISSN 1394-7931

