

The Spectacle of Cuckoldry and Crisis of Libidinal Economy

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The Weibo page [Green Hat Society](#) is an online society of cuckoldry as “green hat” is the symbol of victimhood afflicted by an adulterous relationship. As submissions to the account stockpile, the page (with its posts, thousands of replies per day, and avid fandom across the country) becomes a wild confessional society. In the form of (sometimes long and stitched) screenshots of chatlogs from the perspective of the protagonist (regardless of the perpetrator or the victim or a third-party witness), these stories are often morality tales where the comment section expands with hundreds of threads of internet shaming from keyboard chastity warriors. There is an inexplicably strange pleasure from reading these banal or exotic tales of cuckoldry—especially the anonymous public confessions of secretive desire, anticipation, thrills, anguish, jealousy, callousness, frenetic boredom and remorse—and equal amount of exasperation from reading the comments generated by patriarchy, nosophobia, and internet retardation. In this sense, the Green Hat Society is not only a confessional (in the sense of psychological, as supposed to religious, comfort) but also a mirror hall of reflecting gender roles, tensions, and the total dysfunctionality of patriarchal economy. I shall select two confessions to demonstrate my point (translation is my own).

“I am a virgin before marrying my husband, but he is pretty skilled in sex and knows how to make me feel good. But I become increasingly anxious and uncontrollably uneasy with the fact that he had many exes, I cannot stand the thought of him having sex with other women. I tried to suppress this emotion, but this is already affecting our relationship. Should I cuck him so I can feel a bit more balanced psychologically?”

The first confessional tale is a case of fearing cuckoldry by anticipating it in fantasy and even threatening to retaliate against an imagined past of his partner. Obviously, this sort of sentiment is more often observed among Chinese men who are inclined to (re)claim ownership (of women) in whatever means possible. The spectators in the comments quickly sided with the absent husband as the protagonist already contemplated cuckolding him. Following my previous analysis of the “[diaosi mentality](#)”, the democratised cuckold vicariously participates in the staging of “social castration” as the operation of this morality (especially in chastising the “whore”) is morally pleasurable. Personal failure in securing or maintaining a relationship is attributed to larger social structure of inequality—“we (the army of incels and cuckolds) are impotent both economically and sexually”.

The protagonist in the above story needs to retain a psychological and libidinal balance. If we dig deeper, the Green Hat Society is a miniature of the libidinal economy of Chinese society. Sex or even desire itself is economising as a currency in libidinal exchange. The other observation I had, according to Chinese women I talked to in recent years, is that many men—especially those who are perceived in the ranks of socioeconomic *diaosi*—often “gamifies” (a more repulsive term that replaces instrumental reason) courtship that is probably bordering harassments. This is also in parallel to (as the exact correlation is unclear) the popularity of dating sim videogames for both men and women. Coincidentally one of most popular subgenres of Japanese erotic dating sims is *netorare*—literally means the protagonist’s wife/husband is taken away—or the Japanese equivalent of cuckold. Waiting to drive the woman home outside his workplace without her consent, appearing outside her building with flowers and snacks late at night without prior notice, buying a box of sunflower seeds and removing the hulls (labour time directly translates to libidinal currency) before mailing it to her. All these “bombardments” of “care” are supposed to accumulate libidinal currencies that obviously expect the equal amount of return—sexual intercourse(s). Energies must be NOT wastefully spent. According to morals of *diaosi*, the libidinal thrift of many women, the

recipients of currencies, corresponds to the equal economic poverty on their side. Eroticising the economy and economising the erotic converges.

“I have been with my boyfriend for three years and I love him. I went oversea several months ago to study. I felt bored, lonely, so I started frenetically swiping on a dating app and met someone. I did confess that I had a boyfriend before meeting the dude, we also used condom, and I never felt affectionate towards him. So, I dated another person on the dating app. He visited me last week and I waited him at home. It turned out to be my boyfriend (he used a fake account to seduce me).”

The second story is an example of libidinal surplus. Dating app as a method coping with boredom is nothing new as you can find similar examples elsewhere. I will skip the discussion on how algorithm generated experiences of selecting a partner makes the process of dating too accelerating and too alienating and ultimately further exacerbating the boredom that prompted the swiping in the first place. I want to briefly talk about its implications for gender relations and libidinal economy. Seen in the Weibo posts of Green Hat Society, there are actually many cases where the protagonist finds their partners talking to strangers (and most often flirtishly) behind their backs, or like the above the case the protagonist cannot resist the momentary rush of seduction—*liaosao* (talking dirty)—and finally committing adultery. But the pleasure is often fleeting, and the vacuity comes after becomes unbearable. I am not advocating libidinal thrift, although a low affect society is likely already in the making (as Japan is an insightful example of post-reproductive society). At least I think the contemporary obsession with exhibiting and spectating cuckoldry could be indicative of a larger crisis of the libidinal economy, which definitely worths looking into.

Short Bio:

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