

Masculinities in China

Derek Hird

This chapter surveys masculinities in China chronologically through the pre-modern (referring in this chapter to pre-1912), Republican, high socialist, and reform eras. Discourses, forms and practices of masculinities have seen significant transformations throughout Chinese history, yet enduring patterns and themes can be picked out, as this chapter shows. Embedded premodern notions of masculinities have shown great flexibility, and have ensured their survival by taking on new meanings in the different contexts of the modern world. In studies of Chinese culture, perhaps more so than other cultures, a strong grasp of this living history is essential. It is hoped that the long view of this chapter will help readers better understand some of the textures and tones of contemporary Chinese masculinities. The two most enduring concepts in Chinese masculinities, *wen* and *wu*, form the departure point of this study.

Masculinities in pre-modern China

The *wen* 文 (cultural accomplishment) and *wu* 武 (martial prowess) dyad has become the pre-eminent conceptual framework for making sense of premodern masculinities and beyond (Louie and Edwards, 1994; Louie 2002 & 2014). The scholar-philosopher Confucius (551–479 BCE) and the renowned general Guan Yu (c.160–220 CE) serve as respective icons of *wen* and *wu* masculinity. The qualities associated with *wen* were displayed through the refined pursuits of the scholar, such as poetry-writing and calligraphy; *wu* qualities included physical strength and military acumen, and were cultivated among elite men as well as the masses (Louie 2002, 14). Both *wen* and *wu* were regarded as masculine qualities, and either

or both attributes were expected to be found in men of standing, although during most periods of imperial China *wen* enjoyed primacy over *wu*. Women and non-Chinese men were excluded from being interpreted in *wen-wu* terms. The former were excluded from the official social life in which *wen* and *wu* were enacted; the latter had not attained the same civilizational level as Chinese men. By contrast, *yin* and *yang* were used to make sense of the lives of both men and women (Louie 2002, 11–12).

The concept of *yi* 义 (“righteousness”) provided men with a central principle around which to demonstrate their masculine honour (Hinsch 2013, 43). At the core of *yi* was the idea of mutual bonds of loyalty and obligation, and it came to be expressed as a function of hierarchical relationships (Louie 2002, 36). Adhering to the standards of righteousness in daily life rendered men honourable in the eyes of the population (Hinsch 2013, 33). The Confucian thinker Mencius (372–289 BCE) tried to channel masculine honour through the concept of *ren* 仁 (“benevolence”), but its enactment through violent revenge was widespread in an early “honour culture” that saw vengeance as a filial duty and condoned murder when aligned with normative rites (Hinsch 2013, 31–8). After the fall of the Han Dynasty (202 BCE–220 CE), elite men looked increasingly to non-violent means of demonstrating honour such as displays of cultural distinction and their wives’ fidelity and submission (Hinsch 2013, 72–81, 92–107). Lower-class men remained associated with the violent defence of their individual and collective honour (Hinsch 2013: 111–24; Huang 2006, 109–11).

Influential premodern literary models of masculinity included the *wen*-identified *caizi* 才子 (talented scholar) and *junzi* 君子 (cultivated gentleman) and the *wu* figures of the *yingxiong* 英雄 (hero), *haohan* 好汉 (good man) and *xiake* 侠客 (knight-errant). The *caizi* was the romantic male protagonist in the *caizi-jiaren* 才子佳人 (“scholar-beauty”) romances that became popular during the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368 CE), although his antecedents go back to the Han (Louie 2002, 59). Femininely beautiful, frail, and emotionally vulnerable, the

caizi was nonetheless seen as the ideal male lover (Song 2004, vii). The *junzi*, by contrast, was a model of self-cultivation, self-containment, and respectability: he embodied the *wen* path of “control and restraint”, including the containment of sexual passion (Louie 2015, 113; McMahon 1988, 50). He was the exemplary Confucian gentleman into which the *caizi* was expected to mature (Louie 2002, 64–8). Disdainful of the pursuit of profit (*li* 利) typified by the *xiaoren* 小人 (“inferior man”), the *junzi*’s status derived from his moral embodiment of Confucian virtue, observance of the rites, high level of learning, and devotion to the nation through political participation (Louie 2002, 44–5; Song 2004, 88–97).

The notion of the *yingxiong* came to prominence in the Three Kingdoms period (220–80 CE). The term was reserved for ambitious men who used their superior martial abilities and wisdom to establish themselves as rulers, and to bring peace and order out of social and political chaos (Huang 2006, 90-1; Louie 2002, 26-7). Part of their strength was their ability to resist the sexual lures of women (Huang 2006, 92–3). The *haohan* are portrayed most famously in the 16th-century novel *Water Margin* (*Shuihu zhuan* 水浒传). From marginal, low-class backgrounds, these “good fellows” proved their *wu* credentials through bravery, brutality, physical strength and fitness, endurance of pain, boundless generosity to friends, and copious consumption of wine and meat. As with *yingxiong*, they made a point of resisting women’s charms, spending most of their time with other men (Huang 2006, 103-9; Song 2004, 163-5). A precursor to the *haohan*, the *xiake* was a “virtuous outlaw” who first appeared in the Warring States era. Ideally, the *xiake* righted social wrongs, through violence if necessary, and thereby gained masculine status as a popular hero in the eyes of the local community (Hinsch 2013, 114). During the Qing Dynasty (1644–1912 CE), a hybrid literary hero emerged who combined the talents of a *caizi* and a *xiake* in the form of “an energetic, hypermasculine Confucian scholar who redeems the male kind, if not the whole empire” (Vitiello 2011, 133).

In terms of the social order, masculinities in imperial China were shaped within a patriarchal, hierarchical, Confucian-Mencian framework of the five “relations” (*renlun* 人伦)—ruler and subject, father and son, husband and wife, elder and younger brothers, and friends; and the “four peoples/occupations” (*simin* 四民)—gentry/scholars (*shi* 士), farmers (*nong* 农), craftsmen (*gong* 工) and merchants (*shang* 商). The *shi* formed the top of the occupational hierarchy, which was ordered according to level of service to the state rather than family or self alone (Stevenson 2016, 56). The five relations and four occupations present a male-gendered ontology that discounted women, who are only mentioned once in the five relationships, as wives. Early Confucian texts such as the Analects, Mencius, and *Xunzi* barely discussed women and did not refer to women’s relationships, including mother-son relations, but frequently referred to father-son relations. The kinds of work and activities associated with the four occupations were assumed to be practised by men, not women (Birdwhistell 2007, 12, 24).

As officials, the *shi* governed the other three classes, reflected in the discursive division between elite gentlemen (*ren* 人 or *junzi* 君子) and common men (*min* 民) (Birdwhistell 2007, 25–6). During the Song Dynasty (960–1279 CE) increasing numbers of men passing the expanded civil service examinations could not fall back on hereditary status or family wealth to distinguish themselves as gentry. They turned to refined performances of classical learning, tea connoisseurship, calligraphy and peony cultivation to display their distinct cultural capital. This brought about a new form of hegemonic masculinity: the “educated and tasteful connoisseur” (Hinsch 2013, 94, 91–107 *passim*). From the latter years of the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644 CE), due to the insufficient number of official positions some Confucian scholars turned to commerce to support themselves. These morally minded “Confucian merchants” (*rushang* 儒商) sought to resolve the conflict between righteousness and profit-making, but this revisionism never supplanted mainstream premodern Confucian

ideology (Cheung and King 2004, 247).

The male gendering of the four occupations reflected a spatially gendered society in which men dominated public space and women were intended to be rarely seen outside the home, rendering male homosocial relations highly important in the construction of masculinities. In reality, the spatial boundaries of gender were more fluid than the orthodox Confucian division between *nei* 内 (inner) and *wai* 外 (outer) suggested (Evans 2008b, 102). Nevertheless, many men spent much of their lives interacting and bonding with other men in friendship circles, sworn brotherhoods, and when travelling, studying, and doing business (Mann 2000). Fictive kinship bonds in underworld gangs provided a framework for recognition of masculine status (Hinsch 2013, 7). Despite some idealism surrounding non-hierarchical friendships, most literati sought out friendships with those of higher position or learning, with the aim of career advancement or self-improvement. The possibility of a truly equal affection-based literati friendship was potentially dangerous given its disregard for “the accepted notion that one should focus on advancement by hierarchy” (Kutcher 2000, 1619). Confucian thinkers thus viewed intimate, equal male friendships with suspicion and associated them with the *xiaoren* (Kutcher 2000, 1620–1).

Discursively, male/female biological distinctions were relatively underemphasized in the premodern era. Social roles—such as being a daughter, wife, and mother, or son, husband, and father—were primary in shaping understandings of gender (Barlow 2004, 41–2). Ancient medical texts depicted the premodern body as containing a relatively androgynous balancing of *yin* and *yang* forces (Furth 1999, 46). Nonetheless, in the Confucian worldview, only men were free to aspire to full moral personhood; in the absence of women, this comprised attaining a fully harmonious range of dispositions through an androgynous personality (Hall and Ames 1998, 81). The relatively “ungendered” Confucian model of moral personhood enabled subordinate men to take up the subject position of wife

or concubine in relation to their superiors, as a means of demonstrating their virtue (Huang 2006, 2; Song 2004, 12). In these instances, *yin* and *yang* served to demarcate positionality in a fluid power hierarchy, not as fixed gender signifiers (Song 2004, 13). Ideal male beauty was often described in feminine terms (Huang 2006, 135–54).

Performing the roles of husband and father demonstrated one's worth as a filial son, and were deemed necessary aspects of manhood: an unmarried man was not a fully manly man (Hinsch 2013, 54). Confucian orthodoxy required the maintenance of the patriarchal family and political structure, and marriage was a sign of acceptance of the wider social order (Sommer 2000, 30). A son's marriage enabled the continuation of the patrilineal family and worship of its ancestors; it also delivered a wife who could undertake the gendered tasks allocated her, such as caring for her husband's parents (Hinsch 2013, 54; Sommer 2000, 31). For married men, taking concubines, having affairs with servants, and visiting prostitutes were permissible and valorised activities; by contrast, married women were expected to be virgins until marriage and to remain chaste even if widowed (Hinsch 2013, 82). However, a significant number of men did not marry (Mann 2011, 4). These unmarried men or "bare sticks" (*guanggun* 光棍) were viewed as potential disruptors of social order and Qing Dynasty legal codes increasingly constructed them as sexual predators (Sommer 2000, 97–101). Concern about *guanggun* extended to the figure of the homosexual rapist, who became the target of stringent legal measures. This reflected mounting worries at the time about "vulnerable masculinity", and a broader impulse of the Qing rulers to subject Chinese of any class background to the same legal and moral standards of sexuality (Sommer 2000, 10).

Notwithstanding the late Qing legal sanctions, homosexual relations in premodern China were widespread and even celebrated, including relationships between rulers and their catamites and eunuchs, opera connoisseurs and boy actors, and wealthy men and male concubines (Hinsch 1990; Wu 2004). Sources from as early as the 4th century BCE contain

references to homoerotic attraction and homosexual love affairs (Wu and Stevenson 2013, 9–12). By the 12th century CE, there is evidence of substantial male prostitution and the earliest known law against it (Hinsch 1990, 89-97; Sommer 2000, 119). The late Qing period maintained a lively culture of homoerotic relationships between opera patrons (officials, literati, and merchants) and *dan* 旦, boy actors who played female roles on stage (Wu 2004, 3–4). Women were prohibited from theatre-going by statute (Wu and Stevenson 2006). The qualities of leading *dan* were discussed in ornately composed “flower guides” (*huapu* 花谱) that circulated among literati opera aficionados (Wu 2004, 16–17). The guides created a “literary space” accessible only to highly educated literati, distinguish them from merchants seeking to build a *wen* profile by attending the opera (Stevenson 2016).

Same-sex male relationships were largely shaped by age, social status, and gender enactment. Older, higher-status, men took the masculine penetrating role in relationships with younger, lower-status, and usually more feminine-looking and -acting men (Hinsch 1990, 9–13; Huang 2006, 149; Song 2004, 134). *Yin* and *yang* served to mark these unequal subject positions. Upon public exposure of the relationships, stigma attached to the penetrated male, not the penetrant (Sommer 1997 & 2000, 148–54; Song 2004, 134). Egalitarian same-sex sexual relationships are said to have occurred in some literati friendships (Hinsch 1990, 13); however, such relationships were frowned upon and were likely rare because of the strong social forces directing homoerotic literati desire towards lower status youths (Song 2004, 134; Wu 2004, 9). In contrast, the existence of same-sex unions among unmarried men on the margins of society, such as soldiers, sailors and clergy, is revealed in Qing legal records (Sommer 1997, 165).

Although Confucian principles were undoubtedly the dominant force shaping imperial-era masculinities, other traditions have made significant contributions to imaginings and practices of manhood in China. Buddhist monks’ renunciation of marriage and shaven

heads set them at odds with the obligations of Confucian ideals of filial piety and bodily appearance. Yet in other regards, Buddhists sought to align their practice with societal norms: hagiographies from the Jin Dynasty (265–420 CE) show the transplantation of power structures from mainstream society into the temple, including the construction of fictive kinship relationships such as the demonstration of “filial” deference towards superiors (Hinsch 2013, 63–4). Over time, these and other transformations and appropriations, combined with the gradual growth of state-managed monastic posts, brought Buddhist masculinity into line with conventional relationships among men, and rendered it less threatening to the mainstream Confucian social order (Hinsch 2013, 56–65).

Modernising masculinities in the late Qing and Republican eras (1895–1949)

From the 1840s, Chinese male honour had been challenged by the presence of foreign powers in China; defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–5) prompted national humiliation and despair. The ill-treatment of girls through footbinding, the disempowerment of women in arranged marriages, and the thin and unathletic bodies of Chinese men were the targets of scathing Western disapproval and seen as indicative of China’s backwardness. Elite Chinese men’s desire to address these sore points may have had more to do with redeeming their sense of male honour than righting social wrongs (Hinsch 2013, 131–4). As with elsewhere in the world, concern about the masculinity of the country’s men was closely linked with a growing sense of nationalism. The perceived quality of China’s men—in how they treated women, their physical fitness and general deportment—became a bellwether of China’s strength and development as a modern nation. This view was influenced by the translation of key Western academic works on society and capitalism by reformers such as Yan Fu 严复 (1854–1921), whose perspective had been shaped by his studies in London in the late 1870s (Zhou 2012, 52). Among the concepts introduced through translation was social Darwinism,

which helped instil the belief that the rebuilding of Chinese men's masculinity was crucial to the survival of the nation (Hinsch 2013, 133; Xu 2008, 18).

Meanwhile, reformers condemned the Confucian *wen* model of masculinity as too feminine and soft, and hence part of the problem of China's decline. However, some reformers held on to the relevance of the *junzi* ideal: the prominent scholar and journalist, Liang Qichao 梁启超 (1873–1929), argued that the *junzi* could play the same role as the gentlemanly ideal in Britain and America (“Junzi”). Viewing China as the “sick man of East Asia” (*DongYa bingfu* 东亚病夫), Yan and other elite men promoted sport as the best way of cultivating the physical strength and moral character of Chinese men, which they believed in turn would strengthen the nation (Xu 2008, 19; Zhou 2012, 46–7). Besides promoting physical strength, reformist thinkers sought to reinvigorate what they saw as the long-neglected Chinese culture of “martial spirit” (*shangwu* 尚武, literally “valuing *wu*”). The idea of the “way of the warrior” (*wushidao* 武士道), a key component of Japan's rejuvenation, was enthusiastically propounded as the salvation of Chinese national character until Japanese aggression in the early 1930s rendered it less popular (Benesch 2014, 142–9; Xu 2008, 26–7).

Contributing to the radical reevaluation of historical masculinities was a new “scientific” discourse of sex, originating in late-nineteenth century European sexology, which espoused binary categories of male and female (Barlow 2004, 53–4). Due to the language and cultural reforms propelled by the New Culture Movement from the mid 1910s and the May Fourth Movement from 1919, the neologisms *nanxing* (male) and *nüxing* (female), emphasizing sexual difference, became widely used in literature and popular writing (Barlow 2004, 52; Rocha 2010, 606). Discourses on sex were transformed, in that “[h]uman biology replaced Confucian philosophy as the epistemological foundation for social order”; consequently, “social roles of women and men were now thought to be grounded in nature”

(Dikötter 1995, 9, 20). However, the biologically based universal categories of *nanxing* and *nüxing* were not considered to be of equal valence. Expressions of women's innate intellectual, social and biological inferiority to men, justified through recourse to European sexology discourse, appeared widely in Republican era renderings of *nanxing* and *nüxing* (Barlow 2004, 53–4).

Late nineteenth-century European ideas about sexuality accompanied the arrival of the new discourse of gender, among them the virulent condemnation of homosexuality as immoral, effeminate and sapping of the vigour of a modern nation. Thus, “to pursue modernity in China under the self-conscious semi-colonial gaze meant to abolish same-sex relations” (Kang 2009, 146). National and male honour were seen as being at stake. A 1912 Beijing police bulletin condemning the prostitution of young *dan* opera performers to wealthy patrons complained that it attracted “the derision of foreign nations” (Kang 2009, 115–6; Wu and Stevenson 2006, 51–2). Hu Shi 胡适 (1891–1962), a vigorous advocate of Western liberal thinking, wrote letters to the New Culture Movement's vanguard magazine “New Youth” (*Xin qingnian* 新青年) in 1918 and 1919, arguing that China's tradition of male homoerotic attraction was evil and should be despised (Wu and Stevenson 2006, 53–4). In this new context, the opera icon Mei Lanfang 梅兰芳 (1894–1961) grandly refashioned *dan* costumes to conceal the male body underneath, generating “a sartorially neutral, historically abstract, and politically uncompromised male body” that had nothing to do with femininity, unlike the seductively feminised and sexualised bodies of *dan* performances in the Qing theatre (Zou 2006, 88). The concealed and detached male body of Mei's reworked *dan*, premised on a biologically essentialised and sexually sanitised imaginary of gender and sexuality, epitomized the reconfiguration of masculinity in the early Republican era.

The modernizing male thinkers of the New Culture Movement blamed China's

patriarchal, hierarchical family system for China's weakness (Glosser 2002, 120). They defined themselves through their respect for and equal treatment of women, and believed that reform of the Chinese family, and specifically the promotion of companionate monogamous marriage, was a key step towards wider social progress and hence a stronger China. However, their articles and letters suggest that their desire for an educated and well-presented wife was more to with their status anxiety and wish to live a "modern" lifestyle than a genuine commitment to gender equality (Glosser 2002, 127–39). The new emphasis on the importance of the conjugal bond led to a weakening in the father-son hierarchical relationship. Reformist intellectuals and writers advocated a new kind of affectionate, democratic fatherhood that they linked to the fate of the nation. They challenged what they saw as the suffocating imperative to practice lifelong filial deference, and promoted an ideal of a family man who put the growth of the nation as his priority (Glosser 2002, 127–31; Zhou 2012, 214–5). The rebalancing of the father-son relationship was seen as a natural process of "biological evolution" bringing Chinese families into line with their European and American counterparts (Glosser 2002, 129; Zhou 2012, 216).

Educated men's *wen* masculinities underwent reshaping. The New Culture Movement's notion of "Mr Science" (*Sai xiansheng* 赛先生) and "Mr Democracy" (德先生), formulated in 1919 by Chen Duxiu 陈独秀 (1879–1942), the Dean of the College of Humanities at Peking University and founder of the leading radical journal *New Youth*, encapsulated the feeling among many young, reform-minded, male intellectuals that China's modernisation and national strengthening required fundamental educational and political reform. The promotion of science and democracy as the salvation of the nation was not gender or class neutral: it was framed as the heroic task of elite Chinese men only, replacing their study of literature and philosophy, and not suitable for Chinese women and lower-class

Chinese men (Zhou 2012, 95). At the same time, as capitalist policies took root, a new “patriotic icon” of manhood appeared: the “brash and industrious” businessman, who upheld the nation’s honour in its competition with other nations (Hinsch 2013, 137). Some of the most prominent doyens of commerce and manufacturing were scholars who had enjoyed civil service exam success during the Qing, but then forswore the traditional trajectory of the scholar-official. Due to their educational level and elite connections, they were granted political positions and maintained strong political influence. Combining a scholarly education with a vigorous “marketplace masculinity,” these Republican Confucian merchants exemplified a practical, yet moral “scholar-businessman” masculinity that was exalted for bridging political, educational and commercial worlds (Zhou 2012, 132–46).

Masculinities in the era of high socialism (1949–79)

The “holy triumvirate” of worker–peasant–soldier (工农兵 *gong nong bing*) that strongly featured in high-socialist Communist Party iconography was often all male; if included, a woman would almost always be shown as a peasant (Chen 2003, 370; Evans 1999, 72). The standard white shirt (under blue overalls) of the male worker marked urbanity and a certain level of education, signifying gender and occupational privilege in comparison to the female peasant (Chen 2003, 370). Propaganda posters depicted idealized males as self-sacrificing, politicized, muscular workers and peasants. A typical worker hero was the selfless, macho Wang Jinxi 王进喜 (1923–70) of the Daqing oil fields, who famously used his own body to mix slurry. Chen Yonggui 陈永贵 (1915–86) was a peasant-turned-cadre celebrated for developing the exemplary agricultural commune of Dazhai in Shanxi. The archetypal Maoist soldier was the peasant-born Lei Feng 雷锋 (1940–62), who epitomized obedient devotion to the revolution. In working for the common good of socialism, these model men showed absolute loyalty to Chairman Mao Zedong 毛泽东 (1893–1976). Male honour no longer

depended on individual career and material success as in the Republican era, nor on embodying historical *wen* or *wu* traits: it now depended solely on displaying slavish devotion to the Communist Party and its leaders (Hinsch 2013, 153; Louie 2002, 48–9). However, in literary works, *wen* attributes were still privileged: “talented communist scholars” in the shape of Party Secretaries, socialist intellectuals, and educated soldiers were depicted as more desirable than ordinary workers, peasants and soldiers (Wang 2003, 45–8).

Although Mao was suspicious of intellectuals, and often attacked China’s “feudal” past, his own masculine image projected both *wen* and *wu* attributes. Mao’s *wu* qualities seem most prominent. He was a great military strategist and strongly admired the conquering founder of the Qin dynasty, Qin Shihuang. Moreover, he was fascinated by tales of rebel gangs of “brothers” (Perry and Dillon 2002, 270). Mao also paid much attention to physical fitness. He particularly enjoyed swimming, recommending it to the Chinese public in a 1917 *New Youth* article, and famously swam across the Yangtze River at Wuhan in 1966 to demonstrate his vigour prior to launching the Cultural Revolution (1966-76) (Landsberger, “Chairman Mao swims across the Yangzi”). Yet, Mao’s dedicated practice of poetry and calligraphy showcased *wen* skills and powers; and as with Confucius, he wanted history to remember him as a teacher (Louie 2002, 17, 50). Post-Mao scholars have suggested that Mao’s disregard for the prosperity of individuals stemmed from Confucian dislike of mercantile self-enrichment (Louie 2002, 52–3).

The Cultural Revolution allowed marginal males to come to the forefront of the struggle to create a classless society. The leaders of the Shanghai-based rebel organization, the Workers’ General Headquarters (WGH), came from disparate backgrounds and exhibited a mix of *wu* and *wen* traits. Among their ranks were petty gangsters and disaffected youth with a proclivity to drink, gamble, and fight, and who held an adversarial attitude to authority. Others, however, were educated, cultured, and felt their individuality was

unbearably smothered in the ascetic climate after the failure of the Great Leap Forward (1958–60) (Perry and Dillon 2002, 271–5). The overwhelmingly male WGH leaders articulated their solidarity through *haohan* outlaw brotherhood tropes as well as more conventional revolutionary and military rhetoric. Referred to colloquially as *xiao xiongdi* 小兄弟 (“little brothers”), the worker rebels further echoed *Water Margin* outlaw behaviour by plundering from shopkeepers, adopting empowering Buddhist terms, and forbidding improper sexual relations (Perry and Dillon 2002, 277–80). At the end of the day, as with the outlaw heroes, the rebel workers were reigned in by a central authority father figure: in this case Mao Zedong.

As was implied by Mao’s own stance towards Confucianism, the *junzi* ideal was not entirely disregarded during the high socialist period. From the mid-1950s, the *junzi* was reworked into a model of educated socialist manhood by scholars under the patronage of top leaders such as Liu Shaoqi 刘少奇 (1898–1969) (Louie 2002, 50). By the 1960s, sports educationalists were promoting Confucius as the embodiment of the ideal combination of *wen* and *wu*, citing descriptions in the *Analects* of Confucius as tall and strong (Louie 2002, 51). Nonetheless, anti-Confucian, class-based perspectives came to dominate discourse on Confucianism during the Cultural Revolution towards the end of the Mao era (Louie 2011, 80–83).

A discussion of masculinities in the Mao era would not be complete without consideration of the “female masculinities” or “socialist androgyny” that featured in discourse and everyday practices. The prominent sloganeering of the time claimed that “women can hold up half the sky” (*funü neng ding banbian tian* 妇女能顶半边天), and the myriad depictions of women doing “men’s jobs” promoted masculinity-based gender equality. In the 1960s and ’70s energetic and muscular “iron girls” (*tie guniang* 铁姑娘) were

feted for their ability to carry out strenuous physical labour in the fields and factories. In the revolutionary Red Guards, young women did not wear any “bourgeois” clothing or accessories that marked them as female, to the extent that they almost forgot about gender difference. They cut their hair short or shaved their heads, dressed like male soldiers, and learned to curse and beat just like their male counterparts. To be revolutionary, it seemed, meant to act as a man (Evans 2008a, 76; Honig 2002, 255–60, 266). Nevertheless, to claim that women were excessively masculinized at this time is to oversimplify a complex situation in which women were still ascribed feminine traits, and plays into post-Mao gender discourses that attempt to naturalise women’s femininity (Evans 2008a, 85; Honig 2002, 255).

Market masculinities in the reform era (1979–)

A wide sense of decline of male authority and emasculation followed the period of high socialism. Anxiety about the “rise of the feminine and the decline of the masculine” (*yin sheng yang shuai* 阴盛阳衰) compounded the sense of men losing ground to women (Song 2004, 8; Zhong 2000, 5). As media and film images of Western and Japanese masculinities became more visible in the 1980s, anxieties grew about the state of Chinese masculinity and what made for a “real man” (Zhong 2000). Chinese men were depicted as weak, small-minded and immature in comparison with the tough-guy masculinities acted by Sylvester Stallone and Takakura Ken (Song 2004, 8). Critics of emerging popular culture masculinities derided the pretty-boy pop stars emerging in the increasingly market-driven entertainment world as soft and creamy *naiyou xiaosheng* 奶油小生 (“saccharine youths”) (Song 2004, vii). A sense of backwardness and the characterisation of Chinese men as relatively feminine to the West pushed the quest for a new masculinity (Baranovitch 2003, 128).

As a reaction against the perceived emasculation and feminization of men, in the

mid to late 1980s the cultural “root-seeking movement” (*xungen yundong* 寻根运动) sought to capture the mythological Chinese characteristics that could be used to build a “Chinese modernity”. The root-seeking movement reflected the idea of a naturally occurring masculinity, which the root-seekers believed had been perverted. Zhang Yimou’s (1950–) 张艺谋 hugely popular 1987 film *Red Sorghum* (*Hong gaoliang* 红高粱), based on Mo Yan’s 莫言 (1955–) root-seeking novel of the same name portrayed a male fantasy of unbridled, sexual, raw northeastern masculinity that celebrated drinking, brawling and other “masculine” exploits (Chen 1996). The purported toughness of northwestern men provided the context for the root-seeking movement’s virile “northwest wind” (*xibeifeng* 西北风) music craze from 1986 to 1989 (Baranovitch 2003, 128).

In the 1990s, as China and Chinese men became increasingly drawn into international business activities, a counter-narrative promulgated the image of a corporate, globalised, re-sexualised Chinese male. In Chinese soap operas, beginning with the 1993 TV drama *A Beijing Man in New York* (*Beijingren zai Niuyue* 北京人在纽约), the figure of the white woman emerged as an object of sexual fantasy for Chinese male viewers in this new “transnational male imaginary” (Lu 2000, 29). Chinese men were portrayed as economically successful, cosmopolitan, and the object of white women’s desire. Through the bypassing of Chinese women and the possession of white women, Chinese transnational business masculinities demonstrated their desirability on a global scale, and eliminated doubts about Chinese men’s virility.

China’s rise as an economic, political, and military power, together with the government’s promotion of “patriotic education”, fomented the growth of nationalist masculinities that combine Confucian, Maoist and marketplace tropes (Song and Hird 2014, 11-12). The importance of nationalism in the construction of ideal manhood is demonstrated not only by the numerous patriotic heroes in 21st

century Anti-Japanese War TV dramas, but also by the reviving of “traditional” types of masculinity in pursuit of a Chinese national identity. In the hugely popular 2005 military drama *Unsheathing the Sword* (*Liangjian* 亮剑), *wen* and *wu* attributes are clearly discernable: *haohan* characters enjoy unbreakable relations of sworn brotherhood, and Confucian moral codes of loyalty and filial piety are reenvisioned in patriotic forms. At the same time, the protagonist is more like a calculating merchant than a selfless Communist, reflecting the market economic values of the post-Mao age (Song and Hird 2014, 44–49, 256–7).

Remodellings of *junzi* masculinity updating the “Confucian merchant” identity have helped the educated elite influence cultural nationalist discourses and justify their entering the business world. The reintroduction of capitalism to China in the 1980s and ‘90s spurred the emergence of the “new *junzi*”: professionals and businessmen who legitimized their quest for material wealth by reinterpreting Confucianism as an ethical system compatible with doing business (Louie 2002, 50; Louie 2011, 80–83). Intellectuals and professionals are keen to associate themselves with a reinvigorated *junzi* masculinity in order to enhance their class and gender interests. Male, middle-class, university-educated Weiqi 围棋 players draw on historical, idealized notions of the *junzi* to perform a gentlemanly Weiqi masculinity (Moskowitz 2013). Public intellectuals such as Yu Qiuyu use the ideas of Liang Qichao to insert the *junzi* into cultural nationalist discourses. Yu’s ideas are proving attractive to some highly educated cosmopolitan young Chinese men (Hird 2016b). Discursive renderings of “Westernised” Chinese men similarly depict the continuing significance of *wen* ideals to their belief systems (Louie 2015, 103).

Growing emphasis on business acumen, professional knowledge, material gain, and self-advancement in the reform era has affected the desirability of various careers.

Mainstream role models of besuited businessmen symbolize materialistic dreams of apartments, cars, and salary increases. The media's prominent display of the urbane, white-collar man (*bailingnan* 白领男) signals the emergence of a powerful cosmopolitan model of marketplace masculinity (Hird 2009). The white-collar man's discursive "others" include the migrant peasant worker, who is himself striving to modernise his masculinity in often difficult circumstances (Choi and Peng 2016; Lin 2013; Lu 2016); the working-class hero-turned-loser, who has borne the brunt of state-industry downsizing and the end of the iron rice bowl economy (Lu 2016; Yang 2010); and the "explosive rich" (*baofahu* 暴發戶), a disdainful term for relatively poorly educated but highly wealthy nouveau riche entrepreneurs (Osburg 2013). The successful "able-responsible man" must meet the dual criteria of showing "ability" (*nengli* 能力) and "responsibility" (*zeren* 责任), particularly in regard to providing for his family (Wong 2017). Reaching the heights of government or business at the same time as establishing a family displays a powerful elite masculinity. Perhaps even more important than material wealth for social status are a high level of educational and cultural "quality" (*suzhi* 素质), and the ability to follow through on promises, which earns "face" (*mianzi* 面子) (Uretsky 2016, 73–77). Yet behind the idealized glamour of the successful man lie stresses and worries, especially in the high-pressure private sector, including social expectations that he acts as the high-earning breadwinner for his family (Song and Hird 2014, 133-39).

As an emerging form of popular culture, postmillennial white-collar men's lifestyle magazines exert a significant influence on what it means to be a man in today's China. An import from the West, they promote a cosmopolitan, consumerist masculinity of international brands, personal grooming, cars, coffee, wine, foreign holidays, gym-going, and golf. Through the concept of "taste" (*pinwei* 品味), these magazines attempt to equate the consumption of luxury items and women with the embodiment of cultural capital (Song and Hird 2014, 78). As a marker of identity, the quest for refined taste represents professionals'

anxiety to distinguish themselves not only from the poor, but also, and perhaps more importantly, from the “low-quality” nouveau riche; conversely, the nouveau riche seek to achieve status through brazen displays of well known, expensive brands of clothing and accessories (Osburg 2013, 129–33). Despite middle-class men’s pretensions to gender equality, these magazines still act as venues for patriarchal ideology through the subjugation of women as the object of sexual desire, and the construction of “small women” images and legitimation of modern-day concubinage commonly seen on TV and in other forms of popular culture (Song and Hird 2014, 257).

Many different forms of 20th century media are consumed through the internet in postmillennial China, and the masculinity most associated with this new technology is the *zhainan* 宅男. A word in vogue among Chinese youth in recent years, *zhainan* literally means “home guy,” but “nerd” or “geek” would be better renderings, as the term refers to a socially awkward young man who secludes himself in his home all day indulging in anime, computer games, and Web networking (Zhai 2010). The word originated from the Japanese term *otaku* and first came into Chinese through Taiwanese popular culture. However, its meaning has undergone significant changes in the Chinese context. Despite the association of the Japanese term with antisocial behavior, more and more young men in Chinese cities identify themselves as *zhainan*, and it has taken on the connotation of a desirable form of heterosexual masculinity (Song and Hird 2014, 79). There are Web essays on how to woo a *zhainan*, and love stories featuring high-school students and their *zhainan* teacher, in which the *zhainan* is depicted as androgynous, delicate, shy, pedantic and principled. These associations can be traced back to depictions of *wen* masculinity in scholar-beauty romances (Song and Hird 2014, 92). The *zhainan*’s aura of innocence and single-minded fixation on his geek lifestyle echoes the depictions of educated men in the late Ming, who remained true to their most heartfelt sentiments in obsessive pursuit of their hobbies (Zeitlin 1993, 96).

Far removed from the secluded *zhainan* lifestyle, business socializing (*yingchou* 应酬) culture has emerged in the reform-era market economy in sites such as teahouses, restaurants, karaoke clubs, discos, saunas, and massage parlors (Osburg 2013; Uretsky 2008 & 2016). “A golden production line of entertainment” designed for entertaining government officials or business partners, *yingchou* typically consists of a banquet, karaoke with young women, then a visit to a massage parlor (Liu 2002, 57). Although *yingchou* activities are clearly shaped by the the market economy, homosocial practices of “carousing men” can be traced back over several millennia (Boretz 2011, 176–7). In reform-era China, *yingchou* with officials is crucial for businessmen seeking permits and for sales executives building relationships with clients (Hird 2009, 130; Osburg 2013, 43). Thus *yingchou* is seen as a “form of work...and not simply entertainment” (Uretsky 2008, 807). As such, it is often deemed a chore that is detrimental to a man’s health and marriage; yet for many men, it may be mitigated but cannot be ignored (Song and Hird 2014, 187–8).

More than just a casual leisure activity, *yingchou* serves a vital role in building bonds between men that facilitate mutual trust, cooperation and obligation. A successful night of *yingchou* leaves the clients or patron of the host not only feeling indebted but also “with an embodied memory of shared pleasure and a latent sense of fondness (*ganqing* 感情)” (Osburg 2013, 43). Businesswomen find it difficult to engage in *yingchou*, as they are judged by a different set of moral standards from men: engaging in business socializing will lead to them becoming “the butt of sexual gossip” that will damage their reputation and affect their work (Chen 2011, 161; Liu 2008, 98). These double standards put businesswomen at a great disadvantage compared to men in constructing and maintaining business relations. As a core part of *yingchou*, attractive young women from the provinces provide deferential and sexual services to men in karaokes and saunas, leading scholars to define *yingchou* as a masculinist practice that “consumes women” in order to build affective ties between men (Zhang 2001;

Zheng 2006). Some men see these sexual practices as part of a normal, natural “modern lifestyle” in contrast to the “unnatural” constraints of Maoism and Confucianism (Zheng 2006, 162–3).

Yingchou obligations that take men away from their families conflict with new models of familial masculinity. Reflecting global trends, the new family man is a caring, kind and sensitive figure “in touch” with his emotions. In media models, he is portrayed as a gender progressive: at home, he “cherishes” and is “humble” towards his wife, and is willing to divide his possessions with her equally (“Zhongxing nanren”). Nevertheless, in everyday life the most difficult role for the new family man is the “good husband”, precisely because it requires major ideological change to move on from the previous hierarchical conjugal model (Wong 2017, 110–31). Tensions arise as this new model is negotiated. Women want their husbands to be romantic but also to perform the traditional duties of a family man; husbands feel their wives are too pushy, and do not necessarily wish to be so romantically expressive (Wong 2017, 130–1). Simultaneously, in an echo of historical practices, a powerful trend has emerged of wealthy married men earning peer admiration by taking “second wives” (*ernai* 二奶) (Xiao 2011; Zurndorfer 2016).

As with husbands, fathers are shifting away from the old model of the aloof and stern patriarch (Li and Jankowiak 2016). The emerging gentler model displays “a refined, hybrid synthesis of traditional masculine (particularly *wen*) traits and newly emerging behavioral patterns such as assertiveness, confidence, passion, and emotional demonstrativeness” (Li and Jankowiak 2016, 199). Amid this change, filial obligations continue for sons after they marry, who may even be getting increasingly involved in caring for elderly parents (Wong 2017, 125). At the same time, changes in kinship structure and practices have led to the empowerment of fathers- and brothers-in-law, causing uncomfortable and tense relationships between men and their affinal kin (Wong 2017, 137–42, 146–8).

The pluralization of gender and sexual identities in the reform era has enabled a “a conscious queering of conventional gender boundaries” (Evans 2008c, 372). Since the mid-2000s, androgynous-looking young men have become ubiquitous in pop idol television shows and boy bands, their style informed by East Asian transregional aesthetic trends (Louie 2014, 24–5). Although their sexuality may seem ambiguous to some viewers, the media depictions are typically framed by heteronormative assumptions and characterisations (Hird 2012). Despite the de facto decriminalization of homosexuality in 1997 and its deletion from the list of psychological disorders in 2001, there has been no legal affirmation of homosexual relationships in China (Mountford 2009, 3). Nevertheless, the characterisation of *tongzhi* 同志 (gay) identity has moved medicalized deviancy to one that emphasizes a cultured, individualistic urbanity (Kong 2010). Gay websites, bars, and activities are now blossoming, although gay magazines remain marginal and even semi-legal. However, the migrant “money boys” who sell their bodies in the new urban sexual marketplaces are subject to disapproval from other *tongzhi* for monetizing gay relationships (Kong 2010; Rofel 2010). Powerful heteronormative discourses compel many *tongzhi* to marry, have a child, and condemn the the *tongzhi* world; as a result, many *tongzhi* lead double lives (Zheng 2015). *Tongzhi* often identify either as “1s” (*yi hao* 一号) or “0s” (*ling hao* 零号), referring to masculine and feminine roles respectively; and, in accordance with normative gender discourses, expect “1s” to be active and promiscuous and ‘0s’ to be passive and faithful. Yet, *tongzhi* also creatively recast dominant gender identifications by appropriating and disavowing particular aspects of gendered identities (Zheng 2015, 75–95).

Most research on Chinese masculinities in the reform era has focused on Han masculinities, although there has been some research on Tibetan and Uyghur masculinities. *Olturash* drinking parties serve as sites for the performance of Uyghur masculinities, and ultimately individual masculinities are subsumed within a group identity of a local, close-knit

community of men (Dautcher 2009, 143–67, 307). Widespread use of nicknames in the Uyghur population (where only men have nicknames) also serves to cement a strongly gendered sense of male bonding and community (Dautcher 2009, 168–97, 307). In normative Chinese discourses, Tibetan men are presented as hypermasculinized in comparison to Han men through association with “danger”, “fighting”, and “sexual conquest” (Hillman and Henfry 2006, 261). In Tibetan discourses, Han men are said to be Tibetan men’s “other” due to purported Han small-mindedness (for example, over money matters), participation in housework, open affection for their wives, and relative lack of physical toughness (Hillman and Henfry 2006, 261–7). Tibetan’s men willingness to embrace violence fits Raewynn Connell’s argument that marginalized ethnic minority men perform a potency-inflating “protest masculinity” (Hillman and Henfry 2006, 267).

The religious revival in the reform era has significantly contributed to the reshaping of masculinities. Two new groups of Christian followers have emerged: “boss Christians” (*laoye jidutu* 老爷基督徒), comprised of owners and directors of private enterprises; and big city white-collar employees, such as teachers, university students, doctors, lawyers, and artists (Yao 2012, 186). Boss Christians use their wealth to establish churches and for charitable purposes in an attempt to raise their moral and social status in the eyes of the public (Cao 2008, Yao 2012, 186). Nouveau riche Buddhists establish Buddhist temples for the same reason. At the same time, many businessmen are turning to Buddhism and Daoism for spiritual comfort, finding solace in being able to leave materialism and their inner binds behind (Yao 2012, 186). For Yu Qiuyu 余秋雨 (1946–), a prominent cultural commentator, Buddhist tenets complement the way of the *junzi*, by preventing him from becoming too self-centred during self-cultivation (2014, 133–49). Yao Zhongqiu 姚中秋 (1966–), a Confucian revivalist, claims that only traditional religion or quasi-traditional religion can deter entrepreneurs and officials from corrupt practices (2012, 185). Yao argues that Buddhist and

Daoist businessmen are less likely to engage in immoral and illegal behaviour, and more likely to be concerned about the interests of their staff, customers, and vulnerable social groups (Yao 2012, 186).

Conclusion

Despite the epistemic changes throughout the 20th century, the *wen-wu* dyad has remained a relevant, if diluted perspective from which to interpret masculinities in contemporary China. The market economy now exerts its considerable influence upon all vestiges of historical masculinities. Echoes of the *caizi* can be seen in today's androgynous pop stars, and the *junzi* is promoted by commercialised media as China's civilizational archetype. Confucian merchants have become Confucian entrepreneurs and businessmen: making money has finally become respectable. The postmillennial middle-class adopt *wen* aspirations and display sophisticated consumer taste to distinguish themselves from less well educated men. The affective relations of *haohan* brotherhoods, at the fore among rebel workers during the Cultural Revolution, are echoed in post-Mao men's carousing during *yingchou* socialising, where consumption of women's bodies bonds men together. The male protagonists of contemporary TV dramas display compound masculinities of Confucian morality, brotherly loyalty and calculating market logic. The nerdy *zhainan* is a modern-day rendering of obsessive scholarly masculinity.

Forms and understandings of gender practices may change, yet sometimes their functions seem stubbornly persistent. Male honour is still a key component of masculinities in postmillennial China, albeit expressed through wealth and concepts such as "face", "ability", and "responsibility", rather than "righteousness" or slavish devotion to China's political leader. Nonetheless, achieving honour through one's wife, in one way or the other—whether through her fidelity, submission, education, presentation, or state of leisure—is a

long-enduring practice of educated Chinese men. Gender as biological fact underlies modern day masculinities, yet the importance of familial and social roles and relations in defining identity remains strong.

Some of the shifts in the gender realm seem conflicting. Despite spiralling divorce rates, marriage is still almost universal, and remains a sign of filial devotion and acceptance of the wider social order. Husbands and fathers have been thinking of themselves as gentler and more caring since the Republican era, yet concubines are making a post-Mao comeback in the shape of “second wives”. A lively gay culture is blooming without legal or political affirmation.

The linking of masculinity with the fate of the nation has emerged as a defining feature of political discourse since the late 19th century. Developing national strength through modernised *wu* bodies and *wen* obsession with educational, political and economic reform became the hallmarks of modern Chinese masculinities. The Mao era configurations of these factors were particularly politicised and socialised. The obvious relative weakness of China when the country opened its doors once more under Deng Xiaoping found itself articulated through narratives of men’s emasculation and quest for masculinity, as class consciousness melted away. Yet class differentiation has returned with a vengeance in post-Tiananmen China: through the concepts of “quality” and “taste” middle-class men have delineated hierarchical categories that privilege their own refinement and cosmopolitanism.

The story of masculinities in China is the story of power and its contestation, as it is anywhere. As this chapter demonstrates, masculinities in China have served men’s struggles to retain power over women, and the interests of certain groups of men as they have sought to exercise power over other men. Shifts in masculinities have occurred when changes in external circumstances have threatened men’s interests, and their “honour”, prompting men

to adapt or reinvent their masculinities. In China, as elsewhere, men continue to enjoy many privileges in what remains a man's world.

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