Historical Analysis of the Changing Nature of Masculinity in China

by
Xiao Luo

B.A., Sichuan Normal University, Sichuan, 2015

Extended Essay Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts

in the
School of Communication (Dual Degree Program in Global Communication)
Faculty of Communication, Art and Technology

© Xiao Luo 2018
SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
Summer 2018

Copyright in this work rests with the author. Please ensure that any reproduction or re-use is done in accordance with the relevant national copyright legislation.
Approval

Name: Xiao Luo
Degree: Master of Arts
Title: Historical Analysis of the Changing Nature of Masculinity in China
Program Co-Directors: Yuezhi Zhao, Adel Iskandar

Stuart Poyntz
Senior Supervisor
Associate Professor

Adel Iskandar
Program Director
Assistant Professor

Date Approved: August 24, 2018
Abstract

This essay approaches the issue of masculinity through a historical analysis grounded in the Chinese context. It focuses on how the concept of masculinity has been negotiated in prominent examples of popular culture in contemporary China over the last three decades. To unpack these examples, this essay first traces conceptions of masculinity in both the west and China and the rise of a crisis of masculinity produced by social, economic and political changes in the West. The essay then analyzes contemporary representations of masculinity in China drawing on political economy to examine how the struggle over power is reflected in the struggle over masculinities as constructed within the contemporary Chinese media system. The essay concludes by suggesting that changing conceptions of masculinity reflect the dynamic mechanisms of power between the state, society and media in the context of contemporary China.

Keywords: masculinity; Asian masculinity; popular culture; historical analysis
Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to all those who helped me during the writing of this paper.

Firstly, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Stuart Poyntz, for his constant encouragement and guidance. He has walked me through all the stages of the writing of this paper and has spent much time reading through each draft and provided me with inspiring advice. Without his consistent and illuminating instruction, this paper could not have reached its present form.

Secondly, I feel grateful to all the professors in Dual Degree Program in Global Communication at SFU. My gratitude goes to Dr. Yuezhi Zhao, who has created such an amazing program. I would also like to express my warmest gratitude to Dr. Adel Iskandar, Dr. Kirsten McAllister and Dr. Milena Droumeva, from whose devoted teaching and enlightening lectures I have benefited. My gratitude also goes to our TA, Xiaoxing Zhang who has helped me both in academic learning and daily life, and Program Coordinator, Dora Lau who organized everything efficiently and smoothly.

Thirdly, I wish to thank my cohort for their encouragement and valuable suggestions, which are of help and importance in making the paper a reality.

Last but not least, my gratitude extends to my family who have been assisting, supporting and caring for me all of my life.
# Table of Contents

Approval ................................................................. ii  
Abstract ................................................................. iii  
Acknowledgements ................................................... iv  
Table of Contents ...................................................... v  
List of Acronyms ....................................................... vi  
Preface ................................................................. vii

**Chapter 1 Conceptions of Masculinity** ........................................ 1  
Masculinity as a Research Tradition in the West and Its Crisis ............. 1  
Masculinity as an Emerging Research Topic in China ......................... 6

**Chapter 2 Contemporary Representations of Masculinity in China** .......... 9  
Masculinity in the Restoration of National Dignity ............................ 10  
Masculinity in Excessive Development of Individual ....................... 15  
Masculinity in the Era of Consumerism ....................................... 20

**Chapter 3 Conclusion** ......................................................... 26

References ................................................................. 27
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CCTV</td>
<td>China Central Television</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCP</td>
<td>Communist Party of China</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Preface

I want to begin the research project with a personal story. I arrived in Vancouver in the fall of 2017. I was surprised to see so many Asian signs and symbols on the street, including bilingual signs and advertisements prominently displayed in Chinese and English; and Asian cuisines from Ramen, Sushi to Hot-pot. Some of them remain close to authentic Asian styles, while some foods have absorbed Western elements and have become examples of the global mixing of cultures. There are also many “inter-cultural” couples. Among those, I gradually noticed that certain combinations seemed to appear more often. I regularly see Asian girls with Caucasian guys, but it is rare to see an Asian man with a white woman or other non-Asian women. According to the study of “Mixed unions in Canada” conducted by Statistics Canada (2011), among the minority groups in Canada, 79% of people of Japanese descent are likely to be in mixed unions, while the portion of Latin Americans who are in the same situation is 48%, followed by blacks (40%) and Filipinos (30%). When it comes to Asian, the report indicates “The two visible minority groups least likely to enter into mixed unions are the largest ones in Canada and Metro Vancouver. Of the 352,000 couples involving Chinese people in Canada, 19 percent were in mixed unions, and of the 407,000 involving South Asians, 13 percent were in mixed unions.” The number of Chinese couples and South Asian couples are the largest among all the minority groups, but the percentage of mixed couples compared to other groups is the lowest.

According to an Insights West poll of 658 ethnic Chinese and South Asian British Columbians, a quarter of them reported that they have experienced moderate or significant amounts of different types of discrimination such as verbal harassment, poor customer service, workplace unfairness, and exclusion from dating in B.C., as a result of their ethnicity. In total, four in five report experiencing at least a small amount of such discrimination (Todd, 2014).

In Metro Vancouver, racist graffiti targeting different Asian ethnicities were found in the city (Takeuchi, 2017). The Vancouver Courier reported that the messages “Curse the Chinese greed and disrespect” and “unforgiveable” were written in red paint next to the front door and the garage door of the historic “Electric Home” at 1550 West 29th

---

Avenue (Connor, 2017). An anti-Chinese slur which included the phrase “deserve to die” was found spray-painted on the West Vancouver Community Centre on July 27 (Shepherd, 2017). In Richmond, there were two waves of distribution of anti-Chinese pamphlets in 2016 (Takeuchi, 2016).

This anti-Asian sentiment illustrates what is going on in this city towards Asians, especially Chinese. These examples of racist graffiti and pamphlets targeting Chinese are not uncommon in the history of Chinese experience in British Columbia. Since the period of the gold rush in the late 1850s and 1860s and the construction of Canadian Pacific Railway from 1880 to 1885, when Chinese immigration to British Columbia expanded, there has been a history of racist violence against the community. In the 1880s, the influx of Chinese labourer coincided with a period of slow economic activity and increased unemployment resulted in a tumultuous outcry against Chinese immigration. In response, in 1885, the Canadian government adopted monetary measures intended to restrict Chinese migration to Canada. As these measures failed to curb immigration, the government decided to close its door to Chinese immigrants in 1923, a policy which lasted for 23 years. Although the policy of restriction and exclusion no longer exists today, discrimination and anti-Chinese sentiment can still be found in present-day Vancouver.

Meanwhile, in the mainstream media, Asians tend to face unfair treatment. In Hollywood, for instance, the whitewashing of Asian characters continues to this day. We see, for instance, Caucasian actors cast in roles based on Asian characters. For example, in the movie *Aloha*, instead of having someone who is originally of Hawaiian and Asian heritage cast as Alison Ng, Emma Stone was cast in this role. This practice adds to the invisibility of Asian people on screen and carries on an unjust and harmful tradition of under-representing Asian actors in Hollywood productions. More specific in relation to the study to follow, Asian men are typically cast as weird nerds, business owners or karate masters. For instance, in *2 Broke Girls*, produced by CBS, while the character, Han Lee, is represented as a Korean American who owns the restaurant the main characters work in, he is mocked by others in the show based on old stereotypes of height, accent and so on. His image in the series represents the most regressive stereotypes of Asian men, who have a long history of being portrayed as “short, undesirable and geeky” (Goodman, 2001, p 7). These media representations help to maintain the dominance of western white notions of masculinity, while confirming the emasculation of Asian men.
Such discriminations are also apparent in professional sports. For example, Jeremy Lin – the first American of Han-Chinese descent to play in the National Basketball Association (NBA) – ignited “Linsanity” on the court; yet, he has been attacked using crass and inappropriate stereotypes about Asian athletes. While identified as smart, he has been thought not athletic enough to play in the league, facing accusations that Asians are too small and too slow to compete at the highest level of sports (Whang, 2005). The results of this kind of thinking have had a direct impact on Lin’s career. For instance, in the 2010 NBA draft, Lin was left undrafted while John Wall became the No.1 draft pick. Lin later said, “Me and John Wall were the fastest people in the draft, but he was ‘athletic’ and I was ‘deceptively athletic.’” Lin went on to say: “I’ve been deceptively ‘whatever’ my whole life.” He argued that, “Asian-American masculinity is one of the issues that … should be talked about way more … [because] Asian-American males are viewed differently” (Herreria, 2017).

The feeling of being viewed differently as an Asian man proved to be true in a study conducted by several researchers at Columbia University, in which over four hundred students took part in “speed dating” sessions. The results suggest Asian men are less desirable than men of other races:

- African-American women said yes about 30 percent less often to Hispanic men; about 45 percent less often to white men; about 65 percent less often to Asian men.

- White women said yes about 30 percent less often to black or Hispanic men, and about 65 percent less often to Asian men.

- Hispanic women said yes about 20 percent less often to black or white men, and 50 percent less often to Asian men (Tierney, 2007).

The trend exemplified by these data is a key context for understanding my own non-research-based observations about heterosexual couples in Vancouver.

There appear to be fewer partnerships between Asian men and non-Asian women in Vancouver. This situation follows a pattern wherein Asian men are underrepresented as leads in mainstream media industries in North America and as star athletes in major sports leagues. Given this context, the following study attempts to unpack how the concept of masculinity has operated with regard to Asian men. To examine this issue, I have focused my research on the construction of Asian masculinity in the context of contemporary China. My research question is: how has the concept of masculinity being shaped and reshaped in contemporary China. To answer this question, I draw on recent
work examining conceptions of masculinity and contemporary representations of masculinity in China, with a particular focus on how social, political and cultural forces have shaped and are reshaping the meaning of heterosexual masculinity in key examples of popular culture in contemporary China. These examples include: the so-called “Search for the Real Man” in the 1970s in China, in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution; the representation of masculinity in the 1980s as evidenced by the “Godfather of Rock,” Cui Jian in China; and the negotiation of masculinity through Chinese K-pop stars in the 2000s, as the grip of consumer culture fully took hold in the country.
Chapter 1
Conceptions of Masculinity

Masculinity as a Research Tradition in the West and Its Crisis

Masculinity has a long history. Key notions can be traced back to Ancient Greece, where we find early expressions of the belief that men are superior to women in western philosophy. It was believed that men can rule women, so it was reasonable to rule society through physical strength and social authority. Aristotle claimed that men had a superior mentality and physical ability compared to women. Therefore, men’s social authority and dominance were reasonable. These ideas shaped western philosophy and consecrated men as legitimate rulers of private and public spheres (Hoven, 2005).

By the end of the 17th and 18th centuries, these ideas shaped the Enlightenment and led to an era of imperial masculinity. We can regard the masculinity of this period as an ideology, in which the concept of masculinity is taken for granted in the context of daily life. The key to this phenomenon was a transformation of the leading areas in the Western world from an agricultural economy to an industrial economy. The shift promoted a new work structure that affected western family structures as well as gender conditions and experiences. For example, through newly developed wage and labour relationships, it became normal for men to leave the space of the home to find jobs through newly developing wage labour relationships. On the other hand, at least among bourgeois women, it became increasingly common for women to remain at home where they were to take on the task of minding the house and caring for children. As a consequence, a gendered division of labor emerged during this period, wherein men increasingly came to exchange their labor power for wages, to provide for their families. In the public space of work, men were given the opportunity to prove key attributes related to masculinity, which included physical tenacity, technicality, strength, control, and authority (Willis, 1979).

We see here a key historical period in which history that established the dominance of masculinity dominant and often taken for granted notions of ideological masculinity were established.
“Being hard, physically powerful and mentally strong, competitive, aggressive dominantly rational, unemotional and objective are often advanced as typical indexical markers of the masculine” (Ochs, 1992). But these marks are also defined as “avoiding femininity”, which includes the limitation on emotions, the choice of separating sex from intimacy, pursuing achievement and status and being independent, powerful, aggressive, and homophobic (Levant 72).

Such dominant masculinity is still influential in our own time. However, in the 20th century, various controversies had arisen, aiming to challenge and overturn the status of men and women in society. Most importantly, from the 1960s to the 1970s, after the first wave of feminist activism associated with the suffrage movement, there came the second wave of feminist activism. In the pursuit of gender equality and justice, the second wave of feminist activism aimed to challenge and subvert men authority by revealing the superiority of men as a rational subject. And the goal was to deconstruct patriarchy (Connell, 2005). With the emergence of critical feminist discourses, male and male authority became key sites for the struggle. The study of masculinity can develop in such a context and become a concern, largely due to the influence of the feminist movement.

Before the 1970s, the early research of male was focused on the concept of "male sex role", which helped to reveal that it was incompatible of male gender identity between social norms and personal identity and prove that it was only related to physiological perspectives of men. However, the weaknesses of gender role theory were becoming more and more recognized (Kimmel 1987; Pleck 1981), which covered the vagueness of behavior and norms, the homogeneity effect of the concept of role, and the difficulties in explaining the power. Since the 1980s, under the influence of the feminism and social constructivism theory, theorists began to regard masculinity more and more as a product of social relations, while influenced by various factors such as sex, class, race, and religion (Kessler et al., 1982). The notion of hegemonic masculinity was first proposed in a field study on social inequality in high schools of Australia(Kessler et al., 1982). This project proved the existence of multiple hierarchies which was intertwined with active gender building projects such as the hierarchy in gender and in class (Connell et al. 1982). From this perspective, masculinity was defined as the structure of attitudes and behaviors within the system of the sex relations. And to examine the diversity and changeability of gender identity, a dynamic test of masculinity was advocated(Connell, 2005).
Connell’s theory holds that masculinity is constantly changing, which in turn changes gender relationships in response to changing historical contexts. Rather than regarding masculinity as a single pattern of subjectivity and power, he thought it would be more helpful to imagine multiple forms of masculinity. That is to say, masculinity is a not a single concept, but has a variety of forms. He has provided a series of key examples, including: hegemonic masculinity, subordinated masculinity, complicit masculinity and marginalized masculinity. According to Connell (2000), “hegemonic masculinity is on a world scale—that is to say, [it is] a dominant form of masculinity that embodies, organizes, and legitimates men’s domination in the world gender order as a whole” (p.46). “Subordinated masculinity” refers to the subordination of homosexual men to heterosexual men. Connell considers this relationship to be an essential feature of hegemonic masculinity, which sustains its power in part through the subordination and exclusion of homosexuality. Men who received the benefit from the patriarchy society, if they don’t show a strong male dominance, are seen as having “Complicit masculinity”. Due to this group and the compliance of heterosexual women, “Hegemonic masculinity” was the most powerful masculinity. Although it can be backed up by force, hegemony does not refer to violence but refers to gaining an edge through culture, systems, and persuasion. Being excluded from the hegemonic group, people of color, including Asian men are considered having this type of masculinity. Connell’s fourth category, “Marginalized masculinity” is the fourth masculinity according to Connell’s theory, which indicates the relation between dominant masculinity and marginalized expressions of masculinity. The privilege of masculinity refers to the fact that men enjoyed unearned welfare, rights and superiorities in society. Due to these privileges are normal, it is difficult for men to notice or be aware of them. For marginalized men, these privileges operate differently because they have at least one downtrodden identity despite being privileged as men. For example, one of the men’s privileges is to occupy the social space of a room. Whereas, men of color (mainly in the white area), men with disabilities (mainly in the area of healthy people), working-class men (mainly among upper-middle class), and homosexual men (mainly among heterosexual men) may not be able to enjoy this privilege (while this kind of situation does occur occasionally).

Masculinity is not a static or stable concept (Connell,2005, p.67). On the contrary, masculinity comes in multiple forms, and these forms are marked by class, age, race and other social forces. According to Reeser, once the most basic hypothesis about masculinity is taken away, that masculinity is only men’s privilege, the concept is less
stable (p3). At the same time, masculinity also changes over time and space, because different periods and different cultures produce highly different forms of masculinity.

Although masculinity is dynamic and changing, the form of hegemonic masculinity is still powerful and universal in contemporary society. Masculinity is a cultural, social and political phenomenon that changes due to a variety of factors, including the rising of women status and the liberation of homosexuality, and so on. Although it is a matter of context both in the West and the East, however, it is still reasonable to convince that dominant model of masculinity is still powerful today.

Under this background, the "crisis of masculinity" first attracted the attention of Western countries in the 20th century. "Crisis" is often used when it comes to moments when men are insecure, unstable, and uncertain, suggesting that the hegemonic form of masculinity has collapsed (Peberdy, 2011, p.8). According to Connell (2005), "crisis" is not directly related to the rise of women's movement, but related to large-scale system changes of patriarchy transformation. Those institutional changes include changes in work patterns of men and women, for example, the structural male unemployment and female employment growth, rising separations and divorce rates, and changes in cultural concepts of sex, family, and sexuality (Hearn, 1999). Due to constant changes in Western society, culture, and politics, the crisis of masculinity is reflected in every aspect of life, such as unemployment, family divorce, education and crime problems and so on.

It can be deduced from Connell's analysis of masculinity under the gender structure that the crisis of masculinity is manifested in three dimensions of relations: power, production, and cathexis. To put it in a nutshell, a brief summarization on the crisis of masculinity can be briefly summarized as "economic exploitation, political struggle and emotional contradiction" (Connell, 71).

First of all, with regard to the relation of power, the power of men was challenged by the women's liberation movement all over the world in the late 1960s. Since then, an increasing number of women have participated in the previous all-male-dominated masculine arenas, challenging men's authorities at home and workplace. Since a majority of women started working at workplace, very few men are the only people who earn money to support the family and both husbands and wives are providers in most families. According to the study report of the Families and Work Institutes (1995), 55% of working women contribute half or more than half of the family income. Men started losing their roles of good providers in the family, which has brought them closer to the experience of
men of color and the lower class; therefore they have been hindered from being the breadwinner for their families historically. “The concept of men as breadwinners is not credible anymore; the work relying on muscle power has decreased; and there has been a great increase of part-time and female workforce in the western economy” (Beynon, 84). The loss of men’s roles of good providers has been the core factor for the development of masculinity crisis.

Secondly, changes to the relation of production lead to a tendency of masculinity crisis. In a traditional patriarchal social context, the expectations of work expectations has been playing a major role in the construction of men’s roles as economic providers in their families and the society (Leung & Chen, 2014). Since new technologies were introduced and more opportunities were provided to women, the labor market has been transformed and featured by de-industrialization and loss of job opportunities. The unemployment of men not only brings economic hardships to their families but also forces them to face a crisis of identity. In a work-centered society, men’s working status builds their images of family supporter in society, and reflects their personal values and contributions; therefore, good working status help them earn respect from others. Moreover, the occupation of a paid job stands for a man’s willingness to shoulder his responsibility as a family supporter or breadwinner (Choi, 2018). If a man fails to support his family with an adequate income and satisfy the financial needs of his families because of unemployment caused by the transformation in the labor market, his sense of manhood will be undermined.

Thirdly, the changing relation of cathexis (or sexuality) also brings a threat to hegemonic or ideological masculinity. According to Connell, “Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy” (1995a: 77). To treat hegemonic masculinity, the purpose of social prescription is to keep the legitimacy of patriarchy; therefore it consists of elements such as homophobia, heterosexism and male-dominant gender roles. As Tanya Rose Allen (1998, p5) wrote:

Increased acceptance of gay and lesbian sexuality along with other alternatives to mainstream Western heterosexuality, increased acknowledgement and acceptance of women’s sexual desires, and women’s demands for control over their own bodies have all served to open up discussion regarding the traditional patriarchal order.

On the whole, all the three relations have brought difficulties to the maintenance of patriarchal and hegemonic masculinity; therefore, the authority of heterosexual
hegemonic masculinity is threatened. In conclusion, the study in the thesis was conducted based on the historical and conceptual analysis of masculinity in the West. Definitions and discourses of masculinity and traditional male images in the West, such as the hegemonic concept of men as breadwinners, and the patriarchal system threatened by the rising critical feminist discourses, were examined. The thesis also places its emphasis on the concept of hegemonic masculinity proposed by Connell, in which the concept of masculinity from a stable and static point is transferred to a concept characterized by multiple patterns and formations. After the concept of masculinity is clarified, it is important to know that the tremendous economic, social and cultural changes, such as the rising status of women at workplace, the transformation of economy, and the changing relation of sexuality put the traditional patriarchal and hegemonic masculinity in crisis. It is of great importance to understand and identify the so-called “crisis of masculinity” so as to further investigate how and to what extent men are affected by the historical, economic, and cultural pressures outlined above. Masculinity is viewed as a traditional research topic in the West and the study on the concept and crisis of masculinity in the West has laid a foundation for the related study in China. By revealing the western ideas of masculinity, we can better compare and understand the concept of masculinity in China.

Masculinity as an Emerging Research Topic in China

The study on Chinese masculinity started in the 1990s and it has been deeply influenced by western theories of masculinity. By introducing and importing western theories, Chinese scholars have found conceptual resources to examine local cases that contest and enrich this research tradition. Connell’s work on multiple masculinities theory has been especially influential. Chinese studies of masculinity can be divided into three categories: (1) tracing the connotation and construction of masculinity in history; (2) analyzing the impact of hegemonic masculinity in China; and, (3) revealing the construction path and changing characteristics of masculinities in contemporary China. While critical of the lack of attention to China in western theories of masculinity, scholars have aimed to construct localized analysis of masculinity based on traditional philosophy and cultural values, in which, yin-yang theory and wen-wu theory are the most representative.

If we look back in Chinese tradition, we find that harmony, even between two opposites, is a dominant cultural framework. In yin/yang theory, yin represents a kind of
essence/force which is feminine, cold, passive, downward; yang represents the masculine, and is often characterized as hot, aggressive and upward essence/force. There is a universal dichotomy between yin and yang. Everything contains both yin and yang essences/forces in its body and things go awry if the two types of essences/force are unbalanced. In this context, masculinity and femininity are a special case of yin-yang theory, such that yin is understood to refer to women and yang is understood to refer to men (Humana & Wu, 1972). Yang "covers a wide range of material from sexual etiquette to fatherhood" (Louie, 2002, p.9), and includes qualities of strength, braveness and determination. Just as with the demand for harmoniousness and congruity between yin and yang, both men and women are supposed to embody yang essence, as well as yin essence.

Although the ying-yang dyad is commonly used in many philosophies and cultures to describe the relationship between men and women (the more yang essence the more masculine, and the more yin essence the more feminine), Louie suggests that the challenge to understanding a Chinese concept of masculinity is identifying a pattern that referred only to men (2014, p.22). To do so, he turned to the ancient wen-wu (literary-martial) dichotomy in Chinese tradition, which is typically understood as male-only model that excludes women. Louie and Edwards (1994) noted that Confucian masculinity as a social construction, is an embodiment of the balance between wen and wu attributes, in which wen stands for men’s cerebral power in literacy and cultural attainments, and wu represents men’s bodily power comprising martial prowess and physical strength (1994). For a Chinese man, masculinity is not simply an expression of aggressive strength but a binary opposition between wen and wu.

Creel (1970) has stated that "wen" appears to have originally had the sense of "striped" or "adorned", and it may be by extension from this that wen came to mean "accomplished", "accomplishment" and even "civilization". All of those adornments of life that distinguish the civilized man from the untutored barbarian. (p.67)

As for wu, it usually related with other traditional Chinese terms, including yi and xia. Both terms refer to a dedication to rightness and justice, and thus, to some extent, men equipped with wu are more like knights in the West, or Japanese samurai.

Unlike western concepts of masculinity which emphasize attributes such as strength, aggression, physical power, and competitiveness, etc., however, the core of wu is never physical strength or power but wisdom and the ethics behind exercising power.
As Confucian culture has dominated the history of Chinese cultural civilization for thousands of years, a pursuit of moral character and the value of the “sage” in the society have been influential. “Cultivating virtue, demonstrating virtue and being able to educate people (Shen, 2013)” are widely accepted and respected by educated people and permeate throughout society. Thus, men are constructed as the bearer of Confucian moral ideas.

The relationship between wen and wu is not always equal. As mentioned above, wen was considered superior to wu, despite each having its place in the Confucian moral principles. The Confucian preference for wen over wu is then revealed by the phrase: “the master said of the Shao that it was both perfectly beautiful and perfectly good, and wu that it was perfectly beautiful but not perfectly good.” (Louie, 2002, p.18)

Though there is a preference between wen and wu which set off a series of conflicts in history, it is indisputable that both wen and wu were perceived to be essential for Chinese masculinity. This dyad is an analytical tool and theoretical construct facilitating the conceptualization of Chinese masculinities (Zheng, 2015). Comprising two opposite types, Chinese masculinity is a dynamic concept which is shaped and reshaped through diverse social forces. As Connell noted, masculinity is "not a stable object of knowledge" (1995, p. 33). To understand Chinese masculinity, it is important to put it in the historical context. In this chapter, I illustrated the most representative ideas of masculinity in traditional philosophy and cultural values of China. In the next chapter, I will turn to the contemporary representations of masculinity in popular culture in China, as this concept of masculinity prevails in popular culture of contemporary China where masculinity is contested and renegotiated.
Chapter 2 Contemporary Representations of Masculinity in China

In what follows, I contend that every social and historical turning point in recent Chinese history can be viewed through dominant masculine figures that articulate the crises, issues and concerns of specific periods. I am especially interested in the way representations of dominant masculinity articulate with key changes in social and political economic contexts in China. The construction of masculinity is a historical process and category and because it is concerned with power and power relationships it is not surprising that representations of masculinity align with significant shifts in the social and economic life of the nation. For instance, shortly after the Cultural Revolution, the tough man image altered people’s assumption about masculinity and in many ways were an articulation of expressed needs in the nation that arose as a consequence of confusion and national decline produced by the Cultural Revolution. In the late 1980s and 1990s, on the other hand, new representations of masculinity appeared on the scene and reflected broad social experiences of depression, anger and oppression that were emerging in conjunction with China’s turn to a market-based economy and globalized trade. As materialism and new concern for practicality took over in the 1990s, masculinity again took on new forms that reflected broad social engagements with consumerism and a new concern for the individual and individualism. From analyzing the representations of dominant masculinity in each historical period mentioned above, it is clear to see that masculinity in China is also shifting though time and space. However, it is not sufficient simply to recognize differences among masculinities, but that “we must also recognize the relations between the different kinds of masculinity: relations of alliance, dominance, and subordination” that are “constructed through practices that exclude and include, that intimidate and exploit” (Connell, 1995a:37). In the next chapter, the negotiation between representations of masculinity in different social and political economic contexts in China will be analyzed.
Masculinity in the Restoration of National Dignity

Several abnormal political movements happened after the founding of the People's Republic of China, among them, the "Cultural Revolution" was especially significant in hindering the normal development of the nation. In the late 1970s and 1980s, China walked out of the haze of the “cultural revolution” (1966-1976), a period in which the Communist Party of China (CPC) concentrated on "taking class struggle as the key link" (A guiding ideology brought up by Mao in 1957, which means the contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie and the contradiction between the socialist road and the capitalist road, remained the main contradiction of contemporary Chinese society). Intellectuals were classified as part of the bourgeoisie and seen as the object of transformation. Take “the anti-rightist struggle” (1957) as an example, the state strengthened surveillance and suppression of the intellectuals, which reached its peak in the "cultural revolution." This policy not only caused terrible physical injuries and lifelong psychological trauma to intellectuals, but also hindered the development of China's cultural undertakings and seriously affected the development of socialism and the economy. Being distorted as a consequence of this abnormal political movement, people were in a state of chaos and their faith in the nation and society more generally had been shattered. A famous actor named, Yang Zaibao, who is known for playing tough guys on screen at that time once pointed out in an interview in [year?] that the ten-year period of the Cultural Revolution had obliterated people's dignity: "Many people have been distorted. When something happens, the first reaction is fear. Man's strength and courage are totally distorted" (Yang, cited in Meng 2017).

By the time the Cultural Revolution finally ended in 1976, intellectuals shared the same psychological needs: to overcome the historical experience of fragility and inferiority formed in the "cultural revolution". The play “Looking for Mr.Right”[date?] captured this situation and provides a revealing portrait of the challenges faced by men and the Chinese nation in the late 1970s. Written by the famous playwright Sha Yexin, this play caused a huge sensation in China. By using the metaphor of a deficient child, the play indicated how Cultural Revolution have emasculated Chinese men. The leading man in the play is a single child raised by a mother who is similar to “Big Brother” in Orwell’s novel “1984”. She monitors and relentlessly controls her son. As a result, she suffocates his masculinity in the name of love, making him weak. The play had obvious political implications and suggested that Chinese men could overcome their historical inferiority and political anxiety
only by finding their masculinity. What we see here then, is a powerful articulation of a "crisis of masculinity" that followed in the wake of the Cultural Revolution. Importantly, however, this crisis was not attached only to the bodies of Chinese men; the crisis of masculine power was also associated during this period with a crisis of the nation-state that arose in the aftermath of China’s history during the 1960s and 1970s.

The years following the Cultural Revolution were in fact transformative for both, both in a national context and in relation to the larger global context. In December 1978, for instance, the 11th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) held its 3rd Plenum. During this meeting, the committee decided to shift the focus of the nation from specific concerns for the development of class consciousness and politics, to a focus on economic development (Cai, 2018, p.2). In July 1979, under an initiative lead by Deng Xiaoping, the central government decided to establish “special export zones”, which were later renamed “social economic zones,” in Shenzhen, Zhuhai and Shantou in Guangdong Province and Xiamen in Fujian Province. Deng Xiaoping has since come to be known as the chief architect of China’s reform and opening-up policy, and his actions signaled the start of China’s opening up to the outside world (Cai, 2018, p.2).

At the beginning of the period of reform and opening up, while the state advocated economic construction as the key objective, it also aimed to vigorously restore the role of culture in national development. The aim of these policies was to establish a new faith in the nation for the whole of society. Toward these ends, in the late 1970s, the Party and the state held a number of scientific and educational conferences that emphasized the importance of education and intellectuals and the policy of "respecting knowledge and respecting talents". The social status of intellectuals thus improved, and we might say, the “wen” side of men was highlighted in this process. It was felt the revival of the country required the support of intellectual power, and as a consequence, intellectuals were regarded as an important force for rehabilitating national culture and promoting education across the nation.

---

2 According to Maddison’s data (2007), in 1952, China’s per capita GDP was US$538, which was 8.7 percent of the average level of the rich countries, 46.5 percent of the average level of the other countries, and 23.8 percent of the world average level. The backwardness of China’s economy put China at a disadvantage in the international arena. The search for masculinity also stands for the hope for enhancing Chinese economic strength and improve China’s status in the world.
In response to this broader context of state-lead national transformation, domestic movie screens increasingly came to be dominated by “erudite” articulations of masculinity that highlighted the “wen” side of men. In various movies, for instance, leading actors were cast as intellectuals or even school students. Most the female characters in turn were shown to prefer knowledgeable youth who were full of talent. For example, in the movie *Life* (Tianming Wu, 1984), the leading man, Jialin Gao, is a rural youth of great intelligence who abandons love for his dreams. A girl in the film is attracted to him due to his cultural achievements, which distinguished Gao’s character from other rural youth.

At the same time, with the opening up to the outside world, western films were introduced into post-revolutionary China, and the most popular of these tended to focus on a type of male character and a modern life context that was new to Chinese audiences at the time. Foreign films such as *Rambo* and *Manhunt* (Jun'ya Satô, 1976) showed a specific type of masculinity that emphasized the martial and aggressive side of men. They were especially popular in China during these years and had a strong influence on cultural ideals of masculinity. *Manhunt*, for example, was the first foreign film released in China after the Cultural Revolution in 1978. It created a huge sensation and the actor Takakura Ken became an idol for a generation in mainland China.

In the movie, Takakura Ken is a 36-year-old prosecutor who is unmarried, mature, serious, persistent, brave and responsible. He always wears a stand-up collar coat and has stern facial expressions that show his gallantry and fortitude.

Compared to the popular domestic movie “*Peacock Princess*” (Jinming Zhu, 1982), in which the leading man is a prince with a fair complexion, delicate appearance and a gentle voice, Takakura Ken’s tough man image altered people’s assumptions about masculinity. In the “China Youth” magazine, produced by the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League and aimed at young people, for instance, a woman published an article entitled “Where can I find Takakura Ken.” The article captured the attention of many women in China, and in many ways reflected the emerging interest in a new kind of tough masculinity. The author (China Youth, 1985) wrote: "I often sigh … [because finding] an ideal partner is too difficult… First, we must be like-minded; second, he must be a real man. I am particularly harsh on the latter. What kind of ideal man [do I have] in my mind? It’s hard to say in a few words. When the Japanese film *Manhunt* was released in China, I went to see it and [I] was deeply attracted by the temperament of the male protagonist: resolute, brave, persevering, and …[hesitant to show] his deep love easily."
Alongside the articulation of a tough guy masculinity in the movie, *Manhunt* also proved popular because it conveyed the modern lifestyle of a western country that until that point had been largely invisible in China. The film not only gained popularity for the new manliness it conveyed but also for the way it demonstrated material differences between China and more advanced industrial nations, including Japan. *Manhunt* takes place in Tokyo. The modern living scenes, high-rise buildings, extravagant feasting and revelry, luxurious private jets, and so on expanded the horizons of imagination available to Chinese people and allowed people living in a closed society to have a glimpse into a new and modernized life. The upshot of the film’s influence was that the comparison of Chinese men with Western and Japanese men gave birth to a new popular discussion about the “search for a real man” in China. While focused on masculinity, this discussion both reflected and articulated a broader social anxiety about the virility of China as a nation in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution.

By publishing articles like "Where can I find Takakura Ken," the “Search for the Real Man” and “Developing Chinese Masculinity” in the early 1980s, the magazine, *China Youth* (published by the Communist Youth League of China) initiated research on Chinese masculinity, which would eventually have repercussions across the nation. In many ways, these articles and the discussions they spawned represented new strands of thinking about masculinity that were emerging in public discourse during this period. Not only women at that time regarded Takakura Ken as a real man to be worshipped for his “tough guy” attributes. Many young men also wanted to be like him and tried to duplicate his dressing style. For instance, the crew cut hairstyle worn by Ken in *Manhunt* became the standard for distinguishing a real man in the early 1980s. Other characteristics associated with the ‘tough guy’ that became popular during this period included: 1) hiding deep feelings by showing an appearance of indifference; 2) displaying an unbreakable will and great resilience to stress; and, 3) showing an ability to win (Cao, 2003, p.265-267). As China was transitioning from a repressed revolutionary period to a period of economic development, these characteristics appeared symptomatic of exactly the heroic role model needed for a new economic age. Of course, this figure is deeply ideological and was tremendously important for mollifying the working class to the new conditions of urban labor emerging in the context of new market-lead economic realities. Yet, interestingly, the discourse of “Search[ing] for the real man” was largely associated with women. For instance, most magazine articles about masculinity that were widely discussed during this period were written by women. They followed a particular logic about “missing–searching–
found,” and in this way, women played an extraordinary role in the construction of popular forms of dominant masculinity. This is not surprising, given that masculinity and femininity can (and often have) operated as integrated concepts that function as mirror reflections of each other. In this sense, masculinity and femininity are mutually constructed practices that change over time (Zhang, 2006). The construction of masculinity cannot be accomplished without femininity, in other words. Rather, femininity is implicated in the construction of male subjectivities, including the historical formation and articulation of dominant masculinities.

During this period, aggressive, tough and strong images of men showing in the Western films are more likely to be adored by fans and imitated by young males. In a broader sense, the trend of “searching for the real man” also echoes the rethinking of the Communist gender ideology. Not only because those “tough guys” are seen as compensation for the inferiority and powerlessness broadly felt across China in the aftermath of the “cultural revolution,” but also as a tool to restore national esteem and establish a strong national status to supercede the image of China as the “sick man” of East Asia.

Masculinity was tightly woven into the nationalist project of invigorating the Chinese nation. Whether in literary works, dramas or journal articles, in the post-revolutionary era, masculinity came to operate as a looking glass into the struggles and challenges facing the nation. A lack of manhood was thus (repeatedly) linked to the health and future of China. Reflecting this, Yue (2012) notes: “The future of our nation is worrisome with the disappearance of manly heroism and masculine spirit” (p. 32). Yue’s comment was evident in the work of others, who also contended that a harmonious nation should have men who behave like men and women who behave like women, otherwise the nation will cease to be harmonious (Zhang 2012). To secure China’s redemption, in other words, dominant and traditional forms of physical prowess and intellectual ability were foregrounded. A code of conduct linked to fearlessness, heroism, and militarism all came to the fore and were linked to the reclamation of national spirit.

In the early 1980s, the people’s and the state’s fanatical worship of “macho” types of manhood articulated anxieties associated with national fears of being poor and backward as a country during the 1970s and 1980s. This isn’t surprising. As Cornell helps us to understand, during crises, social anxiety is often expressed through popular forms of fanaticism about masculinity (2003, p. 116). In the US, for example, Connell reminds
us that the rise of feminism and the legacies of national humiliation associated with the Vietnam War, gave birth to violent 'adventure' movies like *Rambo*, which proved to be very popular amongst US moviegoing publics. In like fashion, in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution, the “tough guy” image of masculinity became increasingly popular, in part because this image articulated a new kind of male subjectivity befitting a nation that aimed to reassert its place and dignity on the international stage.

**Masculinity in Excessive Development of Individual**

China's economic transformation from a planned economy to a market economy began in the late 1970s. An essential part of this process has been China's transition from a traditional, closed, agricultural society to a more open, industrial, urban society. Two aspects have been crucial to these developments. During the first stage of economic reform (in the late 1970s to early 1980s) China transformed from a traditional planned economic system to a market-driven economic system. Key elements of this process included, the de-collectivization of agricultural, the opening up of the country to foreign investment, and the promotion of entrepreneurship to develop new businesses. The second stage of economic reform included a more extensive privatization and industrialization of the economy during 1980s and 1990s, with a specific focus on contracting out many state-owned industries (Zhao, Zhang, 1998). As a consequence, the private sector grew remarkably during this period and came to account for as much as 70 percent of China's gross domestic product by 2005 (Engardio, 2005). Those who used to work in state-owned factories and companies became self-employed workers. With the transition to a market economy, people started to run their own business, thought about how much money they could make and what kind of life they wanted to live. It was in this context that individualism emerged as a new social force across Chinese life.

The development of privatization liberated individuals from the collective economy, with the consequence that individualism and individual responsibility increasingly came to dominate as forms of subjectivity across social life in China. Further fueling this development was that fact that the industrial transformation of China challenged the role of peasants and the working class as dominant popular subjectivities in the nation. Prior to the period of economic reform, the Party’s ideological stance emphasized egalitarianism across social life. This tended to produce a social situation in which disparities between rich and the poor were minimal, and the political and economic status
of workers and peasants was relatively high. With the deepening of economic reform and the opening up of China to the world in the 1980s, however, these conditions began to change, as the agricultural economy gave way to an industrialized economy in which light industry and competitive production for international markets dominate. In this new reality, peasants and the working-class emerged as a new ‘underclass’ in China, as workers increasingly lost access to life-time employment relationships and financial insecurity became a common feature across the nation (Qin, 2015, p.137).

Among other effects, these economic and social changes produced a new kind crisis of masculinity. Unlike in the era shortly after the Cultural Revolution, when discourses about the “search for the real man” related closely to the collective sense of responsibility for restoring national dignity, in this era, the crisis of masculinity was experienced most often at the level of individual anxiety. Before the end of the 1970s, the idea that “All human beings should struggle for the cause of communism” was a common spiritual sentiment across social life. By the late 1980s, however, with the awakening of individualist sentiments across Chinese society, many experienced a move away from class-based ideologies and a move toward individualistic social ethics and value standards (Wang, 1998). Concommittant with this, as Connell’s work anticipates (2003), the rise of individualism came to be associated with the development of a new gender consciousness and an increasing awareness of masculinity as a distinct subject position. We see this dynamic playing out in the 1980s in China, as the social and economic transformation of the period followed in the wake of the disintegration of the grand narrative of communism. Yet, in this context the form of gender consciousness that took hold among men was linked to a new uncertainty about the pathways available to secure future development for everyday people. The increasing power and value of money in Chinese society in the 1980s and 1990s fueled this uncertainly. The resulting anxiety for peasants and the working class rested on the fact that these massive groups were losing social status and social security. Where new struggles over the meaning of masculinity arose, these struggles typically addressed how individuals would face the brave new world before them. Among the younger generation, the crisis of masculinity addressed related if specific issues of uncertainty and bewilderment about possible futures. Revolution and war no longer provided the context for these struggles, and yet various new issues and questions arose around the problem of masculinity in China.
In traditional patriarchal society, men had the dominant power. In revolutionary times in China, men were the representation of the heroic figure who freed the country. When it comes to the construction of the country, men were seen as the main contributors. The traditional way of constructing masculinity was through war, revolution or even the feudal ideology. However, as China entered into a peaceful and stable era, defending the motherland or fighting on the battlefield has become a thing of the past. As a result, men cannot rely on traditional forms of identification to sustain a sense of masculinity. This produced a sense of confusion and the need for a new mission and a sense of responsibility to rebuild their hegemonic position and masculine subjectivity. As younger people were no longer seeing themselves as a member of a class, but as individual subjects, they need to prove their masculinity on an individual level, rather than having it assigned as part of a grand national project. In this context, Cui Jian – the “Godfather of Rock” in China, provided the younger generation with representations of self-empowerment through an alternative masculinity that tended to stray from elements of traditional Chinese culture.

Cui Jian’s portrait of youth angst, aggression and masculinity seemed especially appealing to working class men and students who were socially and economically unprivileged and yet lacked the ability to express their sense of frustration and disappointment in the face of the bitter reality before them. In this complicated situation, they needed a method to release and clarify their masculinity, and rock and roll music, smoking, drinking, and swearing etc., provided an important means for men to express their subjectivity during this period. What emerged was a form of masculinity quite distinct from a sense of the “soft and well-educated” man, and a notion of the “muscular and powerful” man as archetypes of masculinity. Against these forms, the 1990s saw the emergence of a new kind of masculinity characterized by feelings of depression, anger and even oppression.

Although other forms of music gained public attention and popularity in Mainland China, the “Godfather of Rock” in China – Cui Jian and his songs were the first attempt to tell singers’ personal experience and express their subjective perspectives. At that time, no matter the official, orthodox songs or the popular music arriving from Hong Kong and Taiwan, singers only sang songs; they did not write songs and express themselves. Even in some romance songs, singers expressed general views and feelings rather than personal and subjective views. In this context, for the first time, singers were freed from
obligations to serve as the voice of the people or the state and instead were able to express their personal experiences through song. As a consequence, “Cui Jian’s songs trivialized the state, ignored … Maoist prescriptions concerning art, and empowered the individual self” by asserting the worth of the individual (Baranovitch, 2003, p. 24). Influenced by a personalized ethos in Western rock music, Cui Jian’s songs brought in a whole new ethos that combined non-conformism, personal freedom, authenticity and individualism.

More than his music, however, the physicality of his performance also had a shocking influence on audiences in the 1980s. Many recalled how the singer came on stage with his “pants unevenly rolled up, wearing the once-fashionable loose yellow army shirt, which was completely out of date now, and with a guitar hung on his neck” (Yang Xiaolu and Zhang Zhentao 1990, 368 – 69). At the time, this was an unprecedented sight. Like Western rockers in the 1960s and 1970s, the first Chinese rocker publicly challenged dominant mainstream culture, with its highly choreographed aesthetics and ethos (Baranovitch, 2003, p.33). His music and performance were the antithesis of polished and disciplined professionalism advocated by the official communist, and the traditional Confucian aesthetics of moderation and restraint (Baranovitch, 2003, p.24).

Influenced by Western rock music, Chinese rockers used rock music as a tool to express criticism of society and dissatisfaction with social reality through violent, bloody, direct words that aimed to change the dark side of society. Cui Jian believes that intellectuals are generally considered to be the spokesperson for the lower-class but he also believed sensitive artists have a similar role (Cui & Zhou, 2001, p.37). In a concert held in 1986, for instance, Cui’s “Having Nothing”, symbolized China’s new revolution of the reform era, by arousing tremendous attention and enthusiasm among audiences. The song implies multiple metaphors. In the process of the transformation of society, the “underclass” faced a situation in which there were no fixed values or life goals to follow; no “iron bowls” (secure jobs in Communist China) provided by the government; no institutional supplies or material resources to provide for the means of survival. In the song, Cui Jian’s emphasis on the words “having nothing” again and again, expressed “the sense of spiritual and material impoverishment” present among many sectors of Chinese society (Baranovitch, 2003, p.33)”. In direct and bold lyrics, Cui Jian reminded people to reflect on the fact that in the wake of the Cultural Revolution, people faced a new context of material deprevation, a lack of spiritual direction, and a resulting grief of the soul. In this context, it
was fair to ask, what is left for people? As the enthusiasm and passion provoked by the reform and opening up gradually declined, it seems that Chinese people still did not have access to an abundant and carefree life. On the contrary, the problems of corruption, rising prices and increasing forms of social differentiation were evident across society.

“Having nothing” is a satire about the social circumstances in that period. It is also a statement that many people have on their minds but have never dared to say in public, especially those working men who lost their jobs and became part of an emergine underclass in China. By repeating the direct and bold expression “I have nothing” over and over again in the song, Cui Jian publicly expressed the truth in the most direct way after decades during which the idealized official discourse silenced all other voices (Baranovitch, 2003, p.23). His music satisfied the needs of working-class men to “release their feelings of frustration and depression”, since they experienced the rapid change in social values and the transition from the old to the new.

Rock and roll music not only reflected the atmosphere of dissatisfaction that permeated China in the late 1980s, and not only helped Chinese youth to express their desire for change. It also had the power to inspire youth to take actions, providing them with a strong sense of self-empowerment and introducing a whole new ethos of personal freedom and rebellion (Baranovitch, 2003, p.32). Cui Jian’s audience consisted mainly of students, students like those who only a few weeks later stormed Tiananmen Square (Jones 1992b, 83). In the Tiananmen movement, Cui Jian’s songs were sung by students in the square during the demonstrations, and his “Having Nothing” became one of the anthems of the protesting students all over China (Jones 1992b, 83).

However, together with Cui Jian’s physicality in performance, the antithesis of everything that the mainland audience had been familiar with, and the direct and bold expressions in his songs, he posed an unprecedented challenge to the official discourse and thus also to the legitimacy of the Communist Party. After hearing the song “Having Nothing”, a high official left the concert hall angrily, saying: “What does ‘having nothing’ mean? Isn’t it a slander directed at our socialist homeland?” (Zhao, cited in Baranovitch 2003, p.33) The disapproval of rock and roll music on the mainland was manifest in the reaction from the high official. Shortly after the first large-scale public performance, Cui Jian was not allowed to give another large-scale live performance until 1989 (Jones 1992b, 83). Thereafter Chinese rock music was officially banned on state-run television and has
been subjected to official restrictions where live concerts are concerned since its first large-scale public appearance (Baranovitch, 2003, p.20).

During the 1980s and early 1990s, unemployed working-class men and confused young men were regarded rock and roll music as a way to express their disappointment and frustration with social reality. Since it was disapproved of in official quarters, there was concern that those performing rock and roll music will be labeled as a marginalized group. However, if they followed the mainstream official culture, they would have the fear of losing their true self. There was a contradiction between personal identification and social identity and exited identity and anxiety among male youth. As a consequence, dominant ideas about masculinity at this time were not characterized by “soft and well-educated” notions of manhood, nor by “muscular and powerful” representations of virility. Rather, representations of depressive, aggrieved and oppressed masculinity were dominant across social life.

Common expressions of masculinity were also linked with political resistance. After the Tiananmen movement, rock became another fad and part and parcel of the general urban youth culture in China (ibid, p.36). Rock songs in this period expressed a strong sense of helplessness and disappointment among youngsters who experienced the failure of the democracy movement. Examples can be found in song titles and lyrics, including, “Give me the courage of lightning” (from “Let Me Stand Up” [Rang wo zhanliqi] by Breathing), and “Sun god, I need you to give me unlimited power” (from “God of Light” [Guangmang zhi shen] by Black Panther). Whether people should remain loyal to tradition or whether people should search for another path, young people in the 1980s were living through conflicts between progressive and conservative forces, and claims to realism and fantasy in China. Living in this kind of complicated situation, youth needed a method to release and clarify their masculinity, and rock and roll music, smoking, drinking, swearing etc., became important means for men to express their manhood during an otherwise complicated and fast-changing era.

**Masculinity in the Era of Consumerism**

As materialism and practicality took over in the 1990s, masculinity found a new and powerful context for expression through consumerism. The emphasis of the state and the interests of individuals were both changing, from politics to economics. Instead of negotiating via politics, in this period, masculinity took shape through the resources and
practices of a burgeoning commercialism. New figures and new ideas of masculinity developed in this context.

In this period, the Chinese state attempted to alter the public's attention and emphasis from politics to economics, making the latter increasingly important in China. In 1989, facing rising social problems, students studying in Beijing started a student movement, which was in all likelihood the largest student movement in the history of humanity (Zhao, 2004, p.1). Between April 15 and early June of 1989, the majority of said students participated in several demonstrations, including the occupancy of Tiananmen Square and a massive hunger strike. The movement ended with suppression by military forces, but unquestionably, it was one of the most influential events in contemporary China (Zhao, 2004, p.2), considering the duration, scale and on-going impact it would have on Chinese politics.

The high point of the violent crackdown on the movement took place on June 3, a night which became a significant turning point in China's post-revolutionary history. The crackdown redefined and reduced the negotiated space of politics in China, and signaled that the government would no longer put up with excessive overt and direct challenges to state power. The crackdown also led to a dramatic cultural transformation, which became manifest in post-1989 popular music culture and featured, among other things, the disappearance of ideas and overt criticisms once articulated in rock music. Since the 1990s, Chinese rock music has been in obvious decline (Baranovitch, 2003, p.42), partly because of continuous harsh policies toward rock music. As one example, the state placed more restrictions on rock music performances and strictly prohibited rock music from being performed on TVs, the most powerful official media of China.

The victory achieved by the state in 1989, over ideas challenging the state's hegemony, lead to the related triumph of materialism in China in the later 1990s and 2000s. Facing the violent crackdown and the failure of democracy movements, youth and others were encouraged to abandon ideas that challenged the state through political ideas and action; in the face of an engaged politics, young people and others were encouraged to focus on earning money in the pursuit of material comfort and a so-called standard life. A famous vocal critic well described this new period when he said:

Culture flourished [between] 1984 and 1989, bringing in misty poems [obscure or hazy], and people read Freud and Nietzsche. Nowadays bookstalls sell only future-telling books, and all that [is on] people's minds
is how to earn money. (Words from Wang Xiaofeng, in the interview with Baranovitch on 15 April 1996)

In broad terms we might say the new period witnessed a turn away from the concerns of production, to concern for consumption, as the basis for driving social life and development. Consumers came to be seen as the driving force for the production of commercial goods. In such a society, the various and unstable mass consumers gave rise to diverse forms of commodity production. In this context, diverse ideas about masculinity would become part of social life. Consumerism promised Chinese people certain kinds of consumer’ rights, including the ability to choose commodities according to their own preferences. While historically, women in China have achieved some power and influence through consumer actions, as Baranovitch (2003:143) pointed out, during the 1990s for the first time in … China’s history, men became [a] commodity for females to consume.” In this context, women’s desires were reoriented as they increasingly gained access to spaces outside the home, including more seductive environments, such as department stores or the cinema (Lasch, 1979, p79). Women’s authority and expertise as consumers meant that they could choose commodities, or types of heterosexual masculinity, according to their own aesthetic tastes. For instance, most young male stars active on screens came to be known colloquially as “Fresh Meat”, with exquisite and handsome appearances, soft and friendly smiles and well-shaped figures. The image of such stars tended to be gender-neutral, and replaced the image of the “unyielding man,” until then popular across mainstream culture, with representations designed to satisfy female audiences. As a result, unlike in other eras, the pursuit of a “muscular” type of men was challenged by the pursuit of “literary” type of male image.

As globalized trade and cultural exchange became more and more common in China in the late 1990s and early 2000s, external forces also reshaped traditional ideas of masculinity in China. Foreign cultures, including Japanese anime, Korean romantic dramas and K-pop, and Hollywood movies, spread at high speed achieved tremendous influence in China. Meanwhile, market economic integration and mass media created space where foreign consumer products and experiences could develop and gain influences on the mainland. The debut of Korean K-pop groups, for instance, represented by BIGBANG, overwhelmed traditional ideas of masculinity in China, as they did in other regions and nations around the world. In China, however, the influence of K-pop would lead to male singers joining famous Korean K-pop teams, including figures like Super
Junior and EXO, whose soft male images became increasingly acceptable and popular in domestic markets.

As noted above, traditionally in China men who were famous shared both “wen” (literary grace) and “wu” (warlike exploits) qualities. More recently, however, as consumer culture has expanded and cultural influences from around the world have come to China, more attention is focused on ‘wen’ characteristics alongside specific kinds of physically attractive looks. The figure of the, “Metrosexual,” with its emphasis on outer appearance and a happy life, for instance, has become hugely influential in Chinese cities. As a consequence, we now see men using beauty salons and gymnasiums as well as caring more about fashion, all of which were activities once considered predominantly female affairs. Lei Jingqing (2012, p929 - 943) believed that “Metrosexual” was a gentler male image than a “Macho” image, meaning that “Metrosexual” included the idea of wen and the connotation of strength or competitive power. Jiang (2012) analyzed male images in fashion magazines of Taiwan, and found that advertisers tried to link male physical-strength with wen, to promote a new kind of male charm that referred to a gentle and fashion-conscious man who nonetheless loved sports. “Metrosexual” masculinity became an ideal male type in Taiwan, reflecting the richness and characteristics of the multiple-dimensional masculinity in the new era.

In the 1990s, in other words, we might say a new kind of the subjectivity long dormant in China, awakened, as average people engaged with buying power and consumerism as a way to negotiate personal identity (Baranovitch, 2003, p.43). Correspondingly, consumption concepts and patterns, and consumer behaviors underwent revolutionary changes. In traditional society, consumption was viewed only as a means for survival, and frugality was part of the mainstream attitude toward consumption. Extravagant and wasteful consumption was regarded as immoral. But as China’s engagement with globalization developed, luxury consumption. Mass consumption and the pursuit of commodity values and the symbolic meaning and identity associated with commodities became much more common.

The rise of consumerism plays a vital role in the masculinity crisis. In the era of consumerism, masculinity is defined primarily in terms of wealth. The image of a successful businessman, named as dakuan in Chinese (literally, “a man with much money”), is increasingly popular in China pop culture (Song, 2010, p.410). If a man fails to earn adequate money or is unable to meet material needs of his family, he may feel to
be subject to emasculation (Nixon, 2006). In Micheal Kimmel’s opinion (1994:125), “the hegemonic definition of masculinity is a man in power, with power, and of power.” However, commercialism brings said power profound changes, and male anxieties in a new context of manhood. As James Farrer (2002:16) illustrates, “given the identification of masculinity with earnings and career success, men experience tremendous dislocation through the segmentation of the labor market into high-paying and low-paying sectors.”

To grasp how masculinity undergoes changes and negotiations, it is necessary to understand the role of media in this process. Under globalization and local urbanization, mass communication develops rapidly, and China societies form a value meeting both the need of consumerism and the extreme admiration for material enjoyment. To please and entertain audiences, reality shows, talk shows and other TV programs came into being. Disseminated through mass media, certain values are actualized, with influences on the public’s opinions. The idea of masculinity is under negotiation in a consumer-leading place, namely a place of consumerism, rather than traditional Confucianism or other ideas.

At the same time, commercialization ends the government’s monopoly on mainstream TV production. Because of the increasing reliance on private investments, producers give priority to audience attraction and popular taste satisfaction, so as to generate, through commercials, as much money as they can. But relevant operations must be subject to the guideline of official documents, to avoid prohibition. As a result, TV programs have become an important site of power negotiation, competition, and complicity.

Dating shows are very popular throughout mainland China. Yin Hong (2006), the Professor of School of Journalism and Communication, Tsinghua University, describes the dating show as a paired reality TV show based on gender relations, referring to a program subject to the relationship selection, based on dialogues and performances expressing the criteria and choice of a man or a woman against each other. He interprets dating programs as follows: television is used as the communication medium, while marriage and love are two major themes, which usually take place in certain scenes, with the help of various forms of communication and interaction. Because of their features, dating shows become the place directly performing the way to negotiate masculinity; in other words, through the struggle over relationship, family and the selection of Mr. Right, masculinity is clearly defined.

In the dating program “You Are the One”, which occupies the highest audience rating among all dating shows of China, a female guest expressed such a concept: “better
to cry in a BMW car than to laugh on a bicycle”, which reflects the money worship by a great number of people who redefines the modern idea of masculinity. Taking more material wealth and higher social status as the essential appeal, guests in those shows construct male images in terms of specific description of lifestyle, particular occupation, and physical appearance. Said images, taken as the standard of a successful man, spread rapidly and widely in the public, through mass media. However, most males are hard to meet said standard. Therefore, social anxiety is triggered among men with the fear of failure and being marginalized.
Chapter 3  Conclusion

To conclude, the examples I mentioned above are indicating how the struggle over masculinity is playing out in contemporary China. Masculinity gets shaped and reshaped in popular culture. In the early 1970s, the “tough guy” type of masculinity was seen as not only the compensation for the inferiority and powerlessness carried on from the “cultural revolution”, but also a tool to restore national esteem and establish a strong national status; In the late 1980s, with the rise of individualism, masculinity was no longer related closely to national dignity but regarded as a way of self-empowerment; When it comes to the 1990s and the 21st century, there is no single dominating concept of masculinity exist. The concept of masculinity is fluid and divers in the commercial society. The definition of “the real man” sometimes can be totally different, due to different gender, age groups, education background. Thus, the pursuit of one particular type of masculinity in consumer society has been taken over by the coexistence of a variety of competing discourses over masculinity.

The changing conception of masculinity reflects the dynamic mechanism of power between the state, society and media in the context of contemporary China.

However, there is a need for more research that problematizes the representations of masculinity in popular culture. Though the male images I included in my study are prominent examples in Chinese popular culture in each era, due to the complexity of masculinity, those examples may not include all the male representations in each era.
References


