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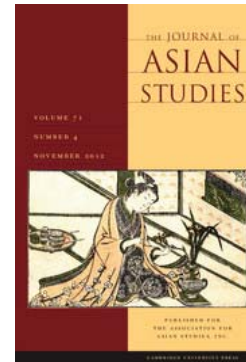
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## Popular Culture and Masculinity Ideals in East Asia, with Special Reference to China

KAM LOUIE

THIS PAPER ARGUES THAT the new forms of communication have had a major impact on gender and sexual ideologies and practices across East Asia. In particular, it focuses on the impact that the new media had on Chinese masculinities in the post-Mao years, a period that coincided with the “Asian economic miracle” and the rise of China. This was also the time when women’s studies became well established in the West and men’s studies was becoming increasingly prominent in the academic arena.<sup>1</sup> But throughout this time, research into Asian men has been very limited, although Asian women have been voluminously described, analyzed, and publicized. Men’s studies scholars such as R. W. Connell were well aware that a large proportion of the world’s men did not receive any attention in gender studies and that this neglect was a serious problem in the field. In the first article in the inaugural issue of *Men and Masculinities*, he called for a more global understanding of the world gender order (Connell 1998).

In many ways, it was inevitable that gender studies outside the Euro-American domain would come to be noticed as the center of economic and political weight shifted further towards East Asia. For example, the journal *Culture, Society and Masculinities*, launched in 2009, was specifically designed to foreground different cultures and societies. However, both Asian and Western scholars on the whole were still stuck in the mold of East-West comparisons. In Chinese studies, for example, the China-West paradigm was primarily used as the template through which ideas were considered. Almost as soon as I published *Theorising Chinese Masculinity* in 2002 (Louie 2002), I became aware that even though I had proposed the indigenous *wen-wu* 文武 (cultural attainment – martial valor) paradigm as a way to understand Chinese masculinity ideals, my motivation was still beholden to the China-West matrix. I was also conscious that the impact of intra-Asian notions of gender on Chinese masculinity and sexuality was powerful but under-studied.<sup>2</sup> As I stated in my 2003 book *Asian Masculinities*, the most

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<sup>1</sup>For example, the journal *Men’s Studies* was only launched in 1992.

<sup>2</sup>Inter-Asia dialogue was clearly an area others felt needed to be supported, as evidenced by the launch of the journal *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* in 2000.

exciting transformations in Chinese masculinity and sexuality were coming from intra-Asian interactions (Louie 2003, 14), especially those between China, Japan, and Korea (CJK), and these interactions needed urgent attention.

In the ten years since I expressed that sentiment, excellent studies have appeared that look at the emergence of “pan-East Asian soft masculinity” and how it flows across the Asian region (Jung 2009). These studies show that unlike East-West frameworks that often lead to an “overemphasis of heterosexuality and relations between Western men, typically, and Asian women [and] occlude[s] other forms of eroticism and sexuality” (Loos 2009), gender considerations of intraregional “Asian” interactions describe not only a more common occurrence, but a relationship that is less power-laden in racial and national terms. Along with the growing interest in gender relations in the region, increasing numbers of articles and monographs dedicated to the study of men have appeared, shedding considerable light on gender relations in Asia. This is especially the case in new developments in queer studies, which not only paved the way in alternative approaches to researching men and women, but continue to deconstruct accepted but often misconceived notions of sex and gender in the “mainstream.”

By showing how these different groups and perspectives converge in CJK gender practices in online social networks and other Internet mechanisms, boy and girl bands, and women’s song contests, I will show in this essay that youth culture and the electronic media have generated a new ideal of Chinese masculinity that departs subtly but significantly from “traditional” and “modern” norms. This restructured ideal still exhibits essential features of *wen-wu*, but is more mindful of women and as a consequence has “softened” and become more “feminine.”

#### THE METROSEXUAL AND THE WHITE-COLLAR BEAUTIFUL MAN

Before exploring the more innovative strains of masculinity that have resulted from popular culture and its impact in CJK, I will present the more standard version of modern Chinese masculinity that so seamlessly integrates the Japanese salaryman and Western metrosexual images of recent years. The emergence of the Chinese metrosexual is especially evident in countries such as America, Australia, and Canada, where the last few decades have witnessed a radical change in the types of Chinese immigrants arriving on their shores. Migrants are no longer village laborers but urban professionals, many of them students taking degrees such as MBAs so that they can benefit from the economic growth within China. Furthermore, the postgraduate business degree students have also become more “international” and “modern” in their outlook and friendship groups. For example, Connell and Wood’s (2005, 359–60) study on globalization and business masculinities (based on interviews with entrepreneurs in Australia)

shows that MBA graduates value their degrees as a means to more global connections.

The flow of money and cultural capital is a two-way process. What was once perceived as a brain drain of Asian talent to the West (especially America) is now discussed as brain gain or brain circulation for both the home and host countries (Zweig, Fung, and Han 2008). The global financial crisis of the late 1990s and the concomitant growth of the Chinese economy meant that Chinese students were returning to China in rapidly growing numbers. According to the Chinese Ministry of Education, more than 1.39 million Chinese studied abroad from 1978 to 2008, and 390,000 of these returned home (People's Daily Online 2009). These professionals join the hundreds of thousands who are educated in China, and who are rapidly becoming part of the new middle class that is growing larger and wealthier each year.

As I have shown elsewhere, the entrepreneurs who travel to and from China for their MBA degrees in America seem to have become obsessed with displays of conspicuous wealth and brand names such as Armani suits and Rolex watches. Furthermore, in order to show that they are "international" and "modern," they publicly perform activities such as speaking English, drinking French wine, and driving American limousines (Louie 2011). Most interesting for the purpose of the current paper is that the members of this new super class have established numerous blogs and social networks to communicate with each other in cyberspace. In my earlier article, I analyzed the story "Taming the Chinese Fire" (An Puruo 2003 – ongoing) which is serialized in haiguinet, an online forum that is meant to serve returnees, which has tens of thousands of registered users from around the world, most notably America and China. Haiguinet is not just for readers in China, but for all readers of Chinese globally. It is thus a truly international community, united by familiarity with the Chinese language. And the Chinese online community is huge.

In 2000, China had 22.5 million Internet users, or 1.7 percent of its total population. This number grew exponentially (CNNIC 2010), and by 2006 China had surpassed America as number one in terms of the number of Internet users (Pace 2006). According to the China Internet Network Information Center, by the end of 2011, China had 513 million Internet users. The fact that most users access the Internet through mobile phones rather than desktop computers means if anything that this number will continue to grow (Kan 2012). For both the Chinese who live in China and those overseas, websites provide virtual communities that enable them to follow the latest global as well as local trends. In this way, the flow of people across continents has been rapidly superseded by flows of information across cyberspace. Thus, the Internet has become a tool for transmitting instant transnational sentiments and concerns (Yang 2009). Throughout the 1990s and early in this millennium, international online forums and Internet traffic served as vehicles for those with Western degrees and expertise to show off their acquisitions, as exemplified by the story "Taming the Chinese Fire"

mentioned above. Many of the attributes associated with the successful businessman in this story are similar to those of the white-collar metrosexual described below.

Indeed, this new class continues to have aspirations and tastes that seem to be American imitations. In their study of the formation of this class through an analysis of fashion magazines, Song Geng and Tracy K. Lee (2010, 165) observe that the consuming habit of this class “usually involves a superficial ‘copying’ of the Western lifestyle, or an imagined lifestyle.” And the value placed on such aspects of appearance as a chiseled body that comes from workouts and trendy attire seems to be in direct and sharp contrast to the traditional Chinese “fragile scholar.” Given that many of the lifestyle magazines that Song and Lee investigate, such as *FHM* and *Men’s Health*, have direct counterparts in America, this is not surprising. Because these magazines are very expensive in the Chinese context, their readership tends to be the rapidly expanding middle class that aspires to high culture, and this is different from the situation in Western countries. The Chinese men and women who hanker after the luxurious lifestyle on show in these magazines are in fact akin to the recent phenomenon of the so-called metrosexual, defined as largely constituting urban males who spend a lot of time and money cultivating their appearance (Simpson 1994).

But the Chinese metrosexual, though urbanized, is quite different from his Western counterpart. There are several translations of the term in Chinese, two of the most common and standard being “*bailing li’nan*” 白领丽男 and “*dushili’nan*” 都市丽男, literally “white-collar beautiful man” and “city beautiful man.” The notion of “beautiful man” (*li-nan*) refers to one who looks after his appearance and has healthy habits and all of the qualities usually attributed to the metrosexual; these are also the attributes of the reconstituted “cool” salaryman in Japan, men who have abandoned the “salaryman warrior” image and imbibed recent transnational corporate ideologies and practices (Dasgupta 2010; Miller 2006). In many ways, this image of the self-indulgent metrosexual can also describe the entrepreneurs who feature in “Taming the Chinese Fire”; though new to China and therefore of interest in that sense, this phenomenon is an almost inevitable consequence of global capitalism and of little intrinsic interest for the purposes of this essay. Certainly, the images that are promoted in “Taming the Chinese Fire” do not go beyond those found in modern patriarchal ideologies encompassed in the “cool” Japanese salaryman or the global business masculinity described above.

In fact, the concept of the metrosexual by its very nature defines a masculinity ideal that can only be attained by the moneyed classes. While it can be said to be a “softer” image than the macho male, it nevertheless encompasses a very “hard” and competitive core, one that is more aligned with the traditional “*wen*” part of the *wen-wu* dyad that I put forward as a conventional Chinese ideal and the “salaryman warrior” icon in Japan. Unsurprisingly, both metrosexuality and *wen-wu* masculinity are created and embraced by men who are

“winners” in the patriarchal framework. For more interesting and innovative developments in Chinese masculinity, we need to go to creations conceived by women and consumed by young people, groups that have traditionally been powerless.

In East Asia, the “beautiful man” has in recent years covered much territory in terms of multiplicity of meaning and expression in CJK popular culture. Whereas metrosexuals, particularly those in China, tend to equate modernity with the “West”—and America in particular—younger groups tend to identify much more strongly with popular cultural icons coming out of Japan and Korea. Furthermore, by using some well-known examples from popular electronic media such as anime, television series, and *American Idol*-style television contests, I will show below that the emergence of a “soft” male ideal in CJK culture coincides with the increased buying power of women and the young, groups that use the Internet most effectively. I will choose several well-known and extremely influential celebrity groups and individuals in East Asia to illustrate the kinds of “beautiful man” that have permeated gender and sexual ideals among younger people in East Asia. These young people are not yet metrosexuals. While the model depicted in “Taming the Chinese Fire” may appeal to the consumerist, self-centered men who aspire to business success, the models discussed below are beautiful men who also appeal to young women.

#### FEMININE BOYS AND MASCULINE GIRLS

The idea of a beautiful man, or pretty boy, existed in both China and Japan in traditional times, with both Beijing Opera and Kabuki theatre having young, effeminate males singing and acting female parts. Such young men are often the objects of homoerotic desire by “connoisseurs” from the moneyed classes (Wu 2004). Since the 1970s, however, the “pretty boy” (*bishōnen*) image has been popularized in the Japanese manga. Moreover, an important sub-genre of manga known as Boys’ Love (or simply BL) developed in Japan from the early 1970s; within a decade, it had spread to Hong Kong and Taiwan, where it often goes by the name of *danmei* (Dasgupta 2006; Liu 2011, 7–13). BL is literature or manga generally created by young women for other young women. Most histories of BL date its beginnings to the 1960s stories of Mori Mari, who at that time was not writing exclusively for women or a popular audience. Nevertheless, stories about love between boys grew rapidly in popularity and BL as a genre developed and spread (McLelland forthcoming). By the 1990s, BL had a following in China, first in Taiwan and Hong Kong and then in the mainland (Liu 2009). While BL/*danmei* could be said to cater to a niche market, it does have a devoted following, and its uses by this following are worth mentioning.

The BL genre was created and consumed by women. It is generally about romantic or homoerotic attraction between two men. As well as textual fiction,

it is popular in manga, anime, and online games, and is increasingly circulated widely via electronic means such as YouTube. It encompasses a wide range of genres from hardcore pornography to innocent romances in which the protagonists do no more than sigh and hold hands. The central theme, however, is the portrayal of love—whether romantic or violently and explicitly sexual—between two men, usually young men. By romanticizing the homosocial or homoerotic bonds between men, the women authors have created a fantasy world in which men are feminized and relate to each other in loving rather than competitive ways.

While these fantasies were popular, the last decade of the twentieth century and the first years of the new millennium have produced sociological studies of the emergence of young men who seem to lack the competitive and conformist streak that made the salaryman the epitome of Japanese masculinity throughout the 1970s and 1980s. In fact, at around the same time that the “girlie man” was being increasingly popularized in manga, anime, and television series, vivid descriptions of young men who departed radically from traditional manly attributes were appearing in popular books. One recent example of such a young male ideal can be seen in *Otomen* オトメン (乙男), an extremely popular Japanese television series that has aired since 2006. It is an adaptation of a Japanese romantic comedy manga by the young woman artist Aya Kanno, and is also readily available on the Internet with Korean and Chinese—as well as English and Spanish—subtitles. The title *Otomen* neatly sums up the intent of the series: *otomen* is a pun consisting of the Japanese word *otome* (乙女), meaning “young girl,” and the English word “men,” so it is about “girlie men.” Appropriately, the series is translated into Chinese as *The Pink Boy* 粉红系男孩. The prologue that introduces the first episode of the series defines *otomen* as “a type of Japanese boy, while accomplished in both the pen and the sword, hides interests like cooking, sewing, and girlish thoughts and special skills close to his heart!”<sup>3</sup>

Asuka Masamune,<sup>4</sup> the protagonist of the series, epitomizes the *otomen*. He is tall and cool, and the captain of the kendo team at his school. But right from the start of the series, the audience knows that he loves feminine things such as girls’ comics (*shōjo manga*), sparkly and cute stuff, sewing, and cooking. But Asuka is forced to hide this side of himself because, after his father left home declaring he had always wanted to be a woman, Asuka’s mother made him promise that he would always be a real man; she faints every time he shows any inclination to feminine behavior. Nonetheless, as a judo and kendo champion, he can be tough, and

<sup>3</sup>See the episode with English subtitles online at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lhjTG5O3xlU> (accessed May 18, 2012). The Chinese version is found online at <http://v.pptv.com/show/aaGeHITqWpj7eYU.html> (accessed May 18, 2012). Interestingly, the English subtitles translate *wen-wu* simply as pen and sword.

<sup>4</sup>Asuka is a girl’s name, and Masamune is the name of one of Japan’s greatest swordsmiths, so even the name echoes the feminine/masculine dichotomy.

he defends Ryo Miyakozuka, a new girl at the school and the heroine of the series, in the very first episode.

Asuka's father declares in the first episode that one must be true to oneself, and this sets the main theme of the series. In this way, we are reminded of the most well-known of effeminate men in traditional Chinese literature, Jia Baoyu, the protagonist of the Qing novel *Dream of the Red Chamber* (Edwards 1990). The novel is about Baoyu's quest to be true to himself while observing his family's and society's expectations that he will be a socially responsible man. In Baoyu's case, being a real man entails passing the civil service examinations (*wen* accomplishments) and having a family. Likewise, an *otomen*, as the theme song indicates, must treasure what he really wants but at the same time aspire to *wen-wu* attainments. If we see *wen-wu* as a masculine ideal that needs to be sought on the one hand, and being feminine as the real true self of the *otomen* on the other, the series revolves around the resolution of these demands in a young man. As this is a comedy with a happy ending, Asuka does find a resolution with the help of his friends, and *Otomen* has become so popular that manuals and scholarly works have been spawned by its success (Gosselin 2010). The fact that Asuka must actively resolve his feminine self with his social duty to acquire *wen-wu* skills episode after episode does indeed show that the perceived "feminization of masculinity" is only valid up to a point. These young men may at first appear to be passive players, but in fact they can also be seen as active agents who must find ways to redefine masculinity (Iida 2005).

Erin Michele Gosselin (2010) uses this series as a case study to illustrate an important trend that has emerged in Japan in the last few years: the "herbivorous men" (literally "grass-eating men," 草食男子). According to Maki Fukasawa, who first introduced and popularized this term in 2007, an herbivore refers to a man who is gentle, quiet, and soft. He typically does not have traditional "manly" characteristics such as aggressiveness and sexual dominance. Instead, he treats women not as sex objects but as friends. He does not care whether he has a girlfriend or not, and he likes the same things women like, such as cooking and eating cake. One of the most popular idols in Japanese youth culture, Tsuyoshi Kusanagi 草彅剛, is often seen as a classic example of an herbivore. A willowy figure, he is said to be gentle and kind-hearted. His fans play up his sensitive nature so that even having the kanji 草 in his surname helps his image as an herbivore. However, despite the fact that they are "herbivores," these young men are not just models who graze quietly all day without going anywhere.

Tsuyoshi Kusanagi, who sings as well as acts in variety shows and movies in Korean, is an important member of the hugely popular pop group, SMAP. His skill with Korean makes him a truly transnational icon in East Asia. The boy band SMAP began in the 1990s and became increasingly popular throughout the region, their boyish looks giving the impression that they are non-threatening, nice guys, in contrast to rock bands in the West such as the early Rolling Stones.



Moreover, as well as being popular in Korea, they visited Beijing in September 2011 and Shanghai in January 2012, creating an absolute sensation on both occasions. Almost as part of a conscious push for greater unity in East Asia, in 2011 they sang songs such as “Keep It Up Japan, Thank You China, Asia Is One Family,” in appreciation of the assistance China gave to Japan during the 2011 earthquake (SMAP 2011), as well as singing songs in Chinese as part of the Shanghai Chinese New Year celebrations (Huanqiuwang 2011). Even political leaders cashed in on their popularity, as is evidenced by Wen Jiabao meeting them when he visited Tokyo and sending them a congratulatory message during their Beijing tour with the stated intention of furthering relations between the two countries (Huanqiuwang 2011).

Japanese boy bands whose members have girlish looks and demeanors have been popular in Asia for some time, and have influenced the way in which young Asian women perceive desirable masculinity. Over the last decade, however, Korean artists have attracted perhaps an even greater following in Asia, and the Korean wave is showing no signs of subsiding (Shin 2009). Again, Korean boy bands generally feature cute boys who are in stark contrast to bands in the West such as the Backstreet Boys and Westlife. The boy band Super Junior is one such example. This K-pop band was launched only in 2005, but has already toured Asia several times. Not only is the band resoundingly successful in East Asia, it is also hugely popular in other Asian countries such as the Philippines, to the extent that “in the Philippines, talent manager Chris Cahilig said he was ‘deeply concerned’ that ‘many of our youth have lost their Filipino identity and psyche due to their exposure and preference’ for Korean entertainment” (SCMP Young Post Sunday 2012). Again, the band not only sings in Korean and Japanese, but also performs in Chinese (Hanxingwang 2012). One band member (who left the band in 2011), Han Geng, was even ethnically Chinese. Such bands have thus achieved some sort of CJK identity. In discussing the popularity of the Korean boy band DBSK in Korea and Japan in particular, Sun Jung refers to “pan-East Asian soft masculinity,” pointing out that “[d]ue to the fact that the feminized masculine images of these pretty boys possess very similar characteristics, it is almost impossible to recognize their nationalities by their appearance” (Jung 2009).

Nationality is not the only confusing aspect of this new kind of East Asian male ideal. Their cute looks confound twentieth-century Euro-American conceptions of what is male and what is female. When discussing the highly popular Korean film star Bae Yong-Joon, who is as popular with Japanese women as with their Korean counterparts and is known for his gentle ways and feminized looks, Sun Jung (2006) describes him as having a “hybrid masculinity.” Indeed, in reporting on this general phenomenon of herbivores and gentle young men, some Western commentators depict them as “metrosexuals without testosterone” (cited in Gosselin 2010, 5). Yet, these pretty young men are what women throughout Asia seem to fancy, and although the nature of that fancy could simply

be a matter of young girls liking pretty things, there may be other ways to view this major social phenomenon, and we may need to reorient our perspectives on masculinity.

As mentioned above, BL literature and manga were originally and are still mostly created by women for women. That is to say, women define what it is to be a “sexy man.” There are also other, more significant, ramifications of the increasing buying power of Chinese women. For example, while the above discussion indicates that the attributes that constitute masculine ideals may have changed somewhat, what do these women regard as desirable features in other women? To answer this question, it is instructive to look at the Chinese Super Girl phenomenon. The *Super Girl Contest* 超级女声 is the English name given to a Hunan television program similar to the *American Idol* contest, in which young women performed and audiences cast their votes by sending text messages on their mobile phones. The contest started in 2004 and immediately gained immense popularity. By 2006, it had attracted criticism from a former cultural minister, Liu Zhongde, and despite changing its name and format it ceased airing in 2011.

Thus, even though critics have claimed that the communist regime manipulated this reality television show for its own ends and to give the appearance of “democratic entertainment” (Jian and Liu 2009), in the end it was terminated. There are many reasons why such a popular show was unable to continue in its original form, including hostile pressures from rival networks that had more financial and political clout.<sup>5</sup> In any event, the ostensible reason is that the programs ran overtime. That is clearly an excuse, and, for the purposes of this essay, the ideological reasons are the most interesting and relevant. For this, we need to look for clues to its demise in Liu Zhongde’s earlier criticisms. Liu claimed that the series did not lift the morale and morals of the young, and that entertainment should be “socially responsible” (China Daily 2006). Such a moralistic and didactic attitude of the political leadership towards mass media was reflected in a series of directives from the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television a year later. Among other things, “the contestants’ stage manner, language, hairstyle and attire must conform with the aesthetic outlook of the masses” and they should also have high moral and ethical qualities (SARFT 2007). The assumption here is that entertainment, whether or not it appeals to the masses, must be morally uplifting. In this case, the fact that so many millions of viewers were prepared to spend time and money to cast their votes suggests that this was a popular democratic exercise, and conservative political leaders may not have liked the enthusiasm with which the young took to this activity. In terms of gender and sexuality, however, there is a more direct reason why the guardians of morality

<sup>5</sup>For a discussion of the interplay between government reaction to “vulgar tendencies” in television broadcasts and financial rivalries between networks, see the report on *If You Are the One* [Feicheng wurao], the most popular and talked-about reality television show in 2011–12 (Wong 2011).

may have objected to this show. The outcome of the 2005 contest provides a very good illustration of this point.

In the 2005 season, around 400 million viewers tuned into the show's finale, one of the largest ever television audience for a single event. That year, there were 120,000 applicants for the title of Super Girl, and the winner, Li Yuchun, received 3,528,308 votes. She went on to tour China, including Taiwan, and was chosen to be on the cover of *Time Asia* for its special issue on Asian heroes of 2005. As many commentators have pointed out, her instant stardom and celebrity status surprised the nation because she is not considered pretty, sexy, or sweet-sounding. It seems then that the Chinese audience, when given the choice to vote for a "super girl," chose someone who appears in public wearing unisex clothes and does not behave in a flirtatious manner (the runner-up in the same contest, Zhou Bichang, also dressed in an androgynous way and was not at all "girlie" like many popular singers).

As one journalist explained, "during her audition, Li dressed in jeans and a button-down shirt, lacking makeup, and sang the song 'In My Heart There's Only You, Never Her,' a tune originally sung by Taiwan's Liu Wenzhen, a man. During the course of the competition, Li continued to sing songs written for male performers, dressed in male clothing, and exuded a masculine charisma on stage that clearly struck a chord with the show's audience of teenage girls," and Li Yuchun's win is unambiguously hailed by this commentator as a win for acceptance of same-sex desire in China (Lo 2006). This may be overly optimistic, as the millions who voted and the tens of millions who turned out at Li's performances probably wanted to be like her rather than desiring her, but the popularity of the Li Yuchun model certainly overturns traditional and orthodox understandings of what women want. And it seems that this provoked such a strong reaction from conservative elements of the Chinese Communist Party, who see themselves as the moral guardians of the young, that the show was eventually shut down. Some in the scholarly community also deplore the new images that are consumed so readily by the young. For example, Sun Yunxiao, a professor at China's Teenager Research Center, and two of his colleagues wrote a highly acclaimed but controversial book entitled *Save the Boys [Zhengjiu nanhai]* in 2010. In this book, Sun claimed that "the pop culture industry, especially TV talent shows, has produced icons (Li Yuchun, for example) that blur the man/woman divide . . . [so that] when Chinese boys grow up they imitate these gender-ambiguous pop culture influences instead of trying to take on more traditional male roles" (Zhao 2010).

#### MEN, WOMEN, AND CHILDREN

Without doubt, consumer power—whether it is expressed through the mindless acquisition of foreign labels as in "Taming the Chinese Fire" or the capacity

to vote for what one believes to be beautiful as in the *Super Girl Contest*—can have a negative social effect. Nevertheless, the key here is that power rests with the consumer. And in Asia, women and the young are increasingly expressing that power, and in the process are transforming notions of sexual desirability in both men and women. This is helped by the astronomical rise in Internet usage throughout the East Asian region, which means that images are literally available to tens of millions immediately and simultaneously. Equally importantly, the means of accessing cyberspace has become cheaper, so that gadgets such as mobile phones are increasingly within the reach of the young and not so wealthy. Where information was once the preserve of the urban middle classes or the political elite, the increasing affordability and availability of electronic gadgets ensure the rapid spread of popular culture to most people in most parts of China. In particular, the young are much more adept with the new technology, making it easier for them to cross national boundaries to access new sites. They are thus very much in the forefront of the global sexual revolution in changing perceptions of models of sexuality, and certainly do not have any problems with the male look of Super Girl Li Yuchun, the feminine looks of the “pink boys” in manga, or the herbivores in boy bands. On the contrary, they welcome these gender benders.

In the last few decades, the CJK economies have been among the most vibrant in the world. Cultural exchanges follow trade, so that CJK cultural products are permeating the Western consciousness as never before. This is especially true of China since there has been a concerted effort by both political leaders and image-makers to seek inspiration from traditional virtues and try to convince the world that Chinese “characteristics” matter and are worth eulogizing—and, in the case of the many Confucius Institutes springing up all over the world, worth promoting. Ten years ago when I published *Theorising Chinese Masculinity*, my intention was to use *wen-wu* to demonstrate that Chinese gender ideals had major differences from the dominant Eurocentric ones. I also wanted to show that *wen-wu* was a changing construct, but that in most contexts it enabled educated men to dominate others. Ironically, I may have unintentionally been part of this nationalist “soft power” push to assert that Chinese masculinity ideals are different from existing hegemonic ones, even though my intention was to say that while the *wen-wu* mechanism was clever, it was still a tool used by the powerful to dominate.

Certainly, different classes in traditional times have tried to gain political advantage in different ways. But in terms of masculinity, the ideological use of *wen* and *wu* to vie for power and influence was ever-present. It followed socio-economic changes so that, for example, when the Mongols were in power, the more muscular, *wu* masculinity took precedence. In more stable times, *wen* officials dominated because of the need to provide manpower for the huge bureaucracy. Nowadays, something else is emerging. Modernity demands new skills such as computer know-how, so the “nerds” (*otaku*, *zhai-nan*, etc.) can be idealized. In

East Asia, the popularity of androgynous men, be they girlie men or pink boys, seems fairly entrenched, and they are also appearing in other cultures. For example, male models in the West are increasingly androgenized, possibly for similar reasons. Ultimately, changing material circumstances will continue to shape ideological constructs such as *wen-wu*, but the essence of these constructs themselves will remain, mostly because on the whole the core of these constructs tends to be a powerful tool for ordering human relationships, whether between people or between nations. But the emergence of consumerism and the Internet means that new groups of people—women and children—are gaining power. So new symbolism will also arise.

Many of the J-pop and K-pop lyrics are eulogies to youth, and the same is true for Canto-pop and M-pop. This was the case in the past, too, but now there is a difference. The singers are very young, or look very young. J-pop and K-pop band members are sometimes as young as ten, so that both boy and girl bands can emphasize being *kawaii*, or cute. In this way, the consumers, mostly young girls, can identify with these commercially designed images. The key here is the word “girl.” By studying changes in girls’ manga that switched from depictions of homoerotic attachments between girls to those between boys, Deborah Shamoan (2012) brilliantly demonstrates that the discrepancy in the young girl/boy image was a function of who was doing the framing. In this case, the ideal girl image that was defined and mediated by the male observer before the 1970s was dramatically different from later developments, simply because in the postwar period, it was females who were doing the image-making as well as the looking (Shamoan 2012). In the case of China, the controversies surrounding *Super Girl Contest* shows that what young women want can indeed be surprising, and many will need to reconsider their assumptions.

For example, in my *wen-wu* framework, the adolescent males who have promise but have not yet passed formal examinations cannot be refined gentlemen (*wenren*) because they have not yet gained *wen-wu* qualifications. They are the *caizi*, whose aim in life is to pass the civil service (or the present-day *gaokao*) examinations so they can obtain *wen* qualifications and achieve career and financial rewards. Indeed, even though at times there have been creations of new male models such as the *otomen* Asuka Masamune, who while striving for *wen-wu* is also very gentle to girls and likes “girlie things.” This is not just “soft masculinity”: it is explicitly stated here that boys should love “girlie things” (as well as girls). This change in the masculine ideal is possible because it is a fantasy created by a woman, in the same way that, when women are able to vote, what is considered a “super girl” need not be super cute. She may be quite “masculine.” This revamped masculinity thus incorporates traditional values, but also encompasses new elements that are more appropriate to the “modern” world.

Despite the fact that the gender ideals propagated by popular media such as anime and pop bands are generally gentler and less sexist than before, there seem

to be periodic moral panics by political leaders who believe that the young are behaving in asocial ways. The authorities cannot label the situation as a “spiritual vacuum,” because the young are probably more enthusiastic and “spiritual” about their idols than their predecessors were about Lei Feng. Perhaps young women are considered not deeply threatening to social harmony, so apart from closing down a few BL outlets and popular shows such as the *Super Girl Contest*, there have been no large-scale campaigns against the new ideals. But surely, given that the young are in many ways smarter and savvier about the world than the old, their idols warrant serious consideration. It took some persuasion for academia to see the importance of women’s studies, and the jump from women’s studies to men’s studies also needed some effort. In order to truly understand human relations and how gender and sexualities are constructed, we may need to pay more attention to the children, and, to paraphrase Lu Xun, save them from their moral guardians.

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