

Transnational Asian Masculinities

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Making National Heroes

The Exemplarist Production of Masculinities
in Contemporary China

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Introduction

Searching for the National Hero in the Shadow of Chinese History

There is waiting: a meantime haunted by unresolved legacies of violence and dispossessions, by unimaginable loss, by longing for transformation. (Biehl and Locke 2017, 2)

An encounter with a lonely Chinese veteran in his late eighties who made a living by collecting firewood in a Burmese village convinced a journalist who worked for the Party-state news agency to become a historical redress activist. This meeting was recorded and publicised by the activist, who initiated campaigns to reclaim the glory of a group of forgotten veterans. By seeking justice for these marginalised men in Chinese history, this activist and other key male leaders of redress initiatives have become much-admired role models whose campaigns have propelled local and transnational commemorative movements, not only for the living, but also for the fallen soldiers whose remains have been left unattended for more than seven decades, following the end of the war. Among these activities, the following two hero-making events marked the climax of the redress movement.

Homecoming of the Coolest Man

On the evening of 19 October 2008, hundreds of citizens spontaneously congregated in the provincial train station in Hunan, South-Central China. For more than five hours, they stared earnestly at the arrival gate, waiting for the arrival of eighty-nine-year-old Li Quan, a Hunanese Second World War veteran who had returned to his native place after living in Myanmar for more than six decades. Media experts and grassroots charities promoted Li's return as the homecoming of a national hero through local newspapers and online platforms. Mobilised by these campaigns, students, local volunteers, non-governmental organisation (NGO) advocacy, and members of online patriotic communities voluntarily organised a welcoming ceremony for Li.

The excited crowd prepared bunches of flowers and a series of banners. Unlike the standardised red and white ones used in government-held events, the hand-made banners varied in forms and materials, showing the participants' creativity. A grey-haired man waved a pink hand-made slogan, 'Long live hero Li Quan'; several middle-aged women held another that stated, 'Hunanese hero Li Quan, people thank you!' The most eye-catching one was a 5-metre long red one, made by a group of netizens, that stated 'Li Quan, a hero in the War of Resistance against Japan: of all the "real men" in the world, you really are the coolest!'

Embodying this praise, blending national glory and virtuous manhood, Li stepped through the gate holding the arm of his Burmese son-in-law. 'Welcome home, Chinese warrior Li Quan!' Loud cheers rang out as the crowd jostled to catch a glimpse of the returnee. Wearing a loose coat and a pair of dark cotton shoes, Li was taken by the crowd towards the 'the coolest man' banner. The long journey had exhausted him, and his son-in-law helped him sit in front of the banner. People lined up to take photos with this celebrity whom they revered as a Chinese exemplar. After getting a photo with Li, a volunteer who had joined the ceremony from another city felt he had been rewarded for all his efforts. He said, 'It took me a three-hour drive and five hours waiting with my son to show respect to Grandpa Li, a true man we Chinese should never forget!'

Bringing the Chinese Forefathers Home

In the 1940s, the then Chinese government led by the Nationalist Party sent out more than 400,000 Chinese soldiers to support the Allied forces on the Eastern Front. For decades, the remains of more than 100,000 soldiers were forgotten by the Nationalist Party in Taiwan and the Communist Party in mainland China (CCP), which became the new ruling authority in 1949. In response to this 'forgetting', in the summer of 2015, continuing their mission to bring the Myanmar-based Chinese heroes home, the enthusiastic activists who had celebrated Li's return launched another commemorative event for his fallen brothers in arms who had died on the battlefields of the China-Burma-India (CBI) theatre in Myanmar.

This activism means that over seventy years after the war's end, the forgotten remains are remembered by many as national forerunners in bottom-up commemoration activities. Images of destroyed graves and stories of residents' haunting experiences nearby have been widely circulated on the Chinese internet. The circulation of this material has evoked feelings of historical responsibility among online communities. When asked about her motivation for being a volunteer who exhumed more than two hundred human bones with her own hands in the summer of 2015, Ms Jiang, a twenty-three-year-old undergraduate, explained: 'These young men laid down their lives for the motherland, and we

left their loyal souls wandering in the wild. It is a national shame for all Chinese people! To venerate them as heroic martyrs is a self-redemption for us.'

This sentiment, blending ancestor worship with national remembrance, has inspired local male elites, such as businessmen and media experts, to participate in the repatriation projects. One of the key sponsors of the exhumation event, Xin Jue, a Hunanese native businessman, decided to reallocate the donation he had intended to give to unschooled children to this 'more meaningful' philanthropy. Utilising his social networks, he established the largest foundation that sponsors grassroots commemorative activities. In our first interview, he proudly shared with me his new calling: 'A nation that abandons its own ancestors has no roots! To properly commemorate these fearless and upright soldiers is to guard the manly spirit of our country.' Resonating with male intellectuals' quest for Chinese maleness in the literary sphere (Zhong 2000), the search for the gendered essence of the national community has become a mass movement.

These vignettes are from my fieldwork from 2013 to 2019 on a historical redress movement initiated by non-state actors, including local activists, grassroots charities, entrepreneurs, NGOs, online platforms, and mass media in the People's Republic of China (PRC). As noted earlier, the goal of this movement is to find and glorify those whom these actors consider 'national heroes'. Unlike exemplary patriots in the state-led nationalist propaganda, the men who embodied this glorious title have been stigmatised and marginalised for decades in PRC history. Through two kinds of commemorative activities, the participants of this redress movement attempt to seek justice for two groups of men: the living and the dead. The living refers to the Kuomintang (KMT) veterans who fought against the Japanese during the Second World War and did not retreat to Taiwan with the KMT government in 1949. The dead refers to the fallen KMT soldiers whose remains have been left unattended on overseas battlefields, particularly the CBI theatre.

This book is an ethnography on the making of national heroes in the commemoration of the Second World War in contemporary China. Foregrounding the actors' experience with reference to the craze for male heroism, it examines how masculinity and nationalism entangle in recollecting war memories. Careful examination of the gendering process of nationalism embedded in this search for and celebration of exemplary men directs our attention to the social imaginary of gendered nationhood at a local level, to the operations of masculine fantasy in the media, to the lived experience of social actors in this movement, and the institutional infrastructure of civic engagement in China, which is inspired by Bonnie Mann's four-dimensional approach to the phenomenon of gender/nation (2013, 12). In her inspiring work on sovereign masculinity in post-9/11 America, Mann (2013) urges feminist scholars to ask whose notions of manhood manage to grip individual lives and the nation.

The Exemplarist Production of Masculinities: The Real Man Is *That*

Taking this line of feminist inquiry, this anthropological study develops an approach to capture the centrality of making exemplars in the realisation of hegemonic masculinities. It adds a gender perspective to studies on the exemplarist moral theory and theorises exemplary men's cross-cultural significance in defining masculinities. Scholars in the fields of philosophy, history, and anthropology have articulated the exemplar-based morality in Confucianism and its vital role in moral education in Chinese society (Bakken 2000; Cottine 2016; Humphrey 1997; Jeffreys 2012; Olberding 2007, 2008, 2013; Tan 2005; Zagzebski 2010, 2013, 2017), which differs from concept- and rule-oriented ethics. As these inspiring studies demonstrate, an elaboration of moral good is sourced through direct reference to exemplars, or people like that, instead of offering concepts and rules. The case of Confucius has been examined as the archetype of exemplarism in Olberding's study of the *Analects* (2012) and as the earliest exemplar traced by Zagzebski (2017) in her moral theory. In other words, the exemplars, usually narrative figures or 'paradigmatic characters' (Tan 2005), constitute a lens through which researchers 'can infer the wider logic of the text and construct a robust moral theory' (Olberding 2012, 10). In Confucian texts, these narrative figures and role models have been presented as male figures for other men to imitate. In contrast, women have been portrayed as dangerous forces who pose a risk to the reputation of these male exemplars (Louie 2016; Song 2004). This gender divide in the production of exemplars in Confucianism supports the patriarchal structure evident in Chinese society.

By adding a gender perspective to these important moral theories, this book theorises masculinities with a focus on the social construction of real men as exemplars. To adapt Olberding's phrase, I would suggest that the drive among men to emulate masculine exemplars is captured by the phrase 'the real man (*zhen nanren*) is *that*'. This book examines this gender emulation in rituals and everyday lives. It identifies intellectual connections between the studies of exemplary-based morality in Confucianism and Kam Louie's dyad paradigm of Chinese masculinity, centred around the construction of exemplary men (2002, 2016a, 2016b). In his ground-breaking framework, Louie outlines how *wen* (cultural attainment) and *wu* (physical prowess) masculinities have been amplified in icons and images of exemplary men (2002). This book does not merely identify the most obvious connection between the exemplarist moral theory and of literature of Chinese masculinity, which is their shared central figure—Confucius. It also reveals the interrelated production of moral and gender hierarchies. Therefore, as the chapters will demonstrate, the exemplarist morality that inspires the imagination and imitation of good men should be conceptualised as a patriarchal domain in which women are marginalised.

In the famous dyad *wen-wu* framework, it is not merely the *wen* masculinity that Confucius amplifies; the *wu* masculinity represented by another admirable character Guan Yu is also disseminated and reproduced under a similar exemplar-based mechanism. In ancient China, verifying the two archetypal masculinities was specifically for men and excluded women in all domains (Louie 2002). In contemporary China, as the following chapters show, the dissemination of elite and grassroots masculinities collude in strengthening the patriarchal fantasy and producing male-dominant intuitions in NGOs. These understudied connections that are unveiled in this book transcend the elite–grassroots dichotomy in understanding the production of ideal manhood in Chinese society, and also offer insights into understanding the relationality between hegemonic masculinities in other contexts.

Hegemonic masculinity, as gender practice, defines privileged manhood and materialises in making male exemplars, including saints, sages, heroes, and role models. In Connell's pioneering study, she illuminates that the manifestation of exemplary men defines hegemonic masculinity in multiple spheres of our lives (2005 20, 78, 126, 214). Moreover, she identifies the promotion of male heroism as one of the pillar-like mechanisms in masculinity politics implemented by authorities, including the state, churches, media, and consumerism (Connell 1987, 2005, 2016). In the Chinese context, role modelling sets the foundation of Confucianism in dynastic periods (Creel 1949; Cottine 2016; Olberding 2012, 2007, 2008, 2012; Tan 2005; Yu 2007; Zagzebski 2006, 2010, 2017) and socialist emulation in all sorts of campaigns orchestrated by the Party-state (Chen 2003; Funari and Bernard 2013; Huang 2014). This historical continuity has been identified in the thought-provoking studies on neoliberalism in Chinese society (Cody 2019, 52; Edward 2012; Jefferey 2012; Robert 2014). Historical figures in fiction repeatedly shape people's imagination of real men. Therefore, examining masculine exemplarism in images, stories, and other forms of cultural representation has become a major approach to studies on hegemonic masculinities and their transformations throughout different historical periods.

Building on these insights, this book theorises the diffusion mechanism of 'the real man is *that*' as the exemplarist production of masculinities. It contextualises the making of national heroes in war commemoration as the realisation of hegemonic masculinities. Doing so enriches our understanding of masculinity and nationalism by exploring the construction, circulation, and appreciation of male exemplars and the contestations and competitions surrounding these dynamic processes. In this historical redress movement, the Chinese forefathers, as exemplary male figures in historical narratives, have been embodied by two unconventional subjects: actual men and dead bodies. A close examination of the embodiment reveals how masculine exemplars inspire people to learn to be great men in reconstructing national history.

There are three theoretical contributions and practical implications in this critical study on gender issues in the veneration of heroic figures. By listening to the voices of the men and women who make national heroes, this book delineates how the investment in the new relationship between the living and the dead creates male-oriented nationalist discourses and practices. I coin the term ‘necromantic nationalism’ to encapsulate a competition between nation-states on worshipping their forefathers to claim their moral authority. This book also conceptualises the alliances among multiple hegemonic masculinities in institutional formations, which stabilise and reproduce patriarchal systems in different domains in contemporary China. This finding unpacks dialectic tensions and oppositions between male-oriented hegemonic discourses and practices, which I describe as a *dialogic mechanism*. Furthermore, investigating the institutional setting in which these discourses and practices are embedded bridges critical studies of masculinities and civil society in the Chinese context. By doing so, this feminist research reveals how the collusion between multiple hegemonic masculinities relates to the outbreak of the #MeToo movement in the NGO sector. However, before examining the complex making, unmaking, and remaking processes of male archetypes, we need to identify the historical context in which national heroes are constructed.

Heroes to Enemies, Enemies to Heroes

In other countries, whether Allied or Axis forces, the servicemen who survived the Second World War or died in battle became masculine icons in state-led commemorations and popular culture. In sharp contrast, the Chinese veterans who fought against the Japanese on the Eastern Front during the Second World War—or the War of Resistance against Japan (*kangri zhanzheng*) as it is known in China, did not receive recognition for their military service for more than half a century. Instead, before they were glorified as ‘national heroes’ in the commemorative activities initiated by local activists, charitable NGOs, and Chinese netizens over the last two decades, they were stigmatised as ‘counter-revolutionaries’, ‘enemies of the people’, and ‘remnants of the old China’ in post-1949 China. Arthur Waldron has observed that a collective and national commemoration of the war dead has never been orchestrated in China, either during or after the war (cited in Diamant 2010, 14).

To understand the complicated political identity of Chinese soldiers in the Second World War, we need to turn back the clock to the war’s end in 1945. After fighting with the Allies against Japan in 1945, the KMT soldiers resumed their decades-long battle with the armies of the CCP, embarking on a conflict known today as the Chinese Civil War (1946–1949). Following the victory of the CCP in 1949, the KMT fled to Taiwan. This retreat from the Chinese mainland determined the fate of many KMT veterans who failed to make the journey across the

The moral aura of charitable men within the organisation further strengthens the patriarchal practice that exploits and marginalises women. In the #MeToo movement within the third sector in China, we can witness the moral burden carried by the victims who blame themselves for exposing the sexual harassment they face. The NGO staff I interviewed on the issue of sexual harassment within the sector, both men and women, explained the ‘harm’ of #MeToo similarly: the victims’ accusations destroy the ‘doing good’ spirit of Chinese society by destroying the most important male figures whose moral aura crucially support online giving and charity campaigns.

Outline of the Book

Focusing on the intersection between masculinity and nationalism in this redress movement, this book examines the exemplarist production of masculinities from different aspects. The chapters are arranged chronologically, showing how hero-making grew from a local grassroots charity to a nationwide movement organised by a private foundation and a transnational programme connecting veteran communities in Taiwan and Myanmar. Foregrounding the interaction between the veterans, local activists, NGO leaders, media experts, and government agents, the chapters reveal the relationship between ‘the hero’ and the ‘hero makers’ in organising rituals and daily interaction. Moreover, the analysis identifies various forms of male bonding in Chinese nationalism and details the impact of the homosociality between men in activism on memorialisation and NGO development in China.

Chapter 1 traces the calling of the devoted activists in this redress movement by examining a transnational campaign titled ‘Bringing Home Chinese Veterans [from Myanmar]’. This unconventional transnational mobility of dead bodies, which has not been explored in the existing literature, was initiated by Chinese men who experienced post-war Myanmar as a competing site where states could worship their forefathers and martyrs who died in the Second World War. After witnessing how the Chinese cemeteries have been left unattended, these men considered the failure of the Chinese government to mourn and commemorate the fallen soldiers in Myanmar to signify the country’s backwardness in the global memorial landscape. NGO leaders in all promotional materials claim this hero-making attempt that reacted to what pioneers described as ‘the shame of the Chinese people’. With the concept of necromantic nationalism, my analysis encapsulates the entanglement between the commemoration of the fallen soldiers as Chinese forefathers and the revived worshipping of patrilineal ancestors in post-Mao China. I argue war commemoration has been a site for ‘ritual competition’ (Nedostop 2010) between different state fatherhood(s) manifested in worshipping the fallen soldiers.

Chapter 2 explores the role of media agents in selecting gendered subjects for the exemplarist production of Chinese masculinities. It delineates how the patriarchal fantasy of the reunion between mainland China and Taiwan is mediated in commemorative rituals across the Taiwan Strait. From a feminist perspective, this chapter demonstrates the co-construction of man-as-nation and nation-as-father in this fantasy's gendered discourses and practices. By integrating voices from key stakeholders such as participant families, NGO organisers, official media, online platforms, and the audience of the events, I argue that only the lived experience of the men who fulfilled the ideal roles of father and son were selectively recollected according to the agenda of the parental authorities. This exclusion mechanism in memory-making erased the suffering and experience of women and men who failed to fit the gendered stereotype and patriarchal imagination of families.

Chapter 3 further explores the deployment of sexual discipline in producing exemplary men. It probes how idealised masculinity and femininity have shaped the experiences of three veterans and one woman whose first husband was a soldier died in the war. In doing so, this chapter captures the revival of asexual manhood in today's China, an 'outdated' moral code attached to the declining Confucian and Communist heroes. It scrutinises this revival in the intersection between 'the masculinity crisis' and the moral crisis in post-Mao China. Coining the term 'dialogic mechanism', the analytical framework presents the exemplarist production of hegemonic masculinities as a competing scenario that different actors create and use to disseminate an idealised representation of men and women. This term also directs our attention to the interaction between different versions of masculine exemplarity.

Chapter 4 details how the dialogic mechanism in making national heroes is exercised on the ground. It focuses on male activists who were members of the PLA, a fortress of the CCP. After their discharge, they devoted themselves to the volunteering programme that countered CCP propaganda. I argue that, from a gender perspective, the institutional shift caused a masculinity crisis in these men's lives. This group of ex-servicemen was mainly from low-income families in rural areas, which contributed to their lack of resources for further promotion in the military or getting a decent job assignment after their demobilisation. Despite their military careers, many of these men went through divorce once they lost their identity as PLA members. By emphasising that masculinity is a historical and ideological product constantly being remade and renegotiated, my analysis focuses on the private anxieties of these men's post-discharge lives.

Chapter 5 highlights the voices of female activists who are invisible in the media exposure of this redress movement. It examines the gendered division of labour among activists in the commemorative rituals and caregiving programmes for the veterans. As free labour in the border-crossing tours to Taiwan, Myanmar, and Thailand, women who contribute their time and money to this

movement are mainly single, middle-aged entrepreneurs who live in inland areas. Drawing on their gendered experience as redress activists in this nationalist movement, this chapter demonstrates the historical consciousness of women in the third sector and how female bodies have been excluded from the ceremonies for Chinese nationalism.

Chapter 6 concerns the material aspects of men's domineering power in the exemplarist production of hegemonic masculinities, such as the institutional setting and online fundraising operations within Chinese NGOs. It unpacks the making and unmaking of male bonds in the feminist wave of #MeToo in the NGO sector in China. The analysis addresses how the two groups of male elites whose masculinities have been overridden by the Party-state, which existing scholarship describes as being 'raped by the politics' (Zhang 2001), cultivate their moral superiority in redefining state fatherhood and exercising their male power over women within the NGOs. This chapter uncovers the divide between feminism and other forms of activism in Chinese civil society. The case of the hero-making movement offers insights into how nationalism as a masculine ideology creates a 'seductive regime' for female workers and volunteers within the NGO operation.

4

Rescuing Embattled Masculinity and Idealising True Love

Male Bonding between Veterans beyond Political Ideologies in Contemporary China

Chapters 1 to 3 use an anthropological approach to highlight the diversity in exalted Chinese masculinities valorised in historical redress activism. However, as Connell (2016) reminds us, recognising this diversity is not enough. To fully comprehend the construction of particular masculine exemplars in the reproduction of gender order in the nationalist context, a deeper investigation into the practice and power relations structuring them is needed. In so doing, an analysis of the making of national heroes through public acts, such as commemorative rituals and media campaigns through which media agents and NGO leaders (Chapter 1 and Chapter 2) realise their masculine fantasy by branding the men they choose as glorious figures (Chapter 3), shifts to 'behind the scenes' activism where local activists seek, identify, record, and care for the 'real men'.

Such observations complicate the gender politics in nationalism and manhood. Existing studies in Chinese masculinities and nationalism deploy a linear timeline to understand their evolution and categorise icons and symbols created in films, literature, and other cultural representations of Chinese manhood with a framework shaped by political ideologies. Influential typologies of Chinese nationalism, such as cultural nationalism, primitive nationalism, and nativist nationalism, foreground the dichotomy between authoritarianism and democracy. This ideological typology is observed in studies of the cultural representation of Chinese men in the entertainment industries. For example, Song's (2017) study argues that KMT and CCP heroes represent completely different ideals of manhood. This ideological framework to understand the diversity of masculinities may be useful in analysing symbols and icons of masculine exemplarity. To understand the dynamic relations behind the making of these symbols and icons, this chapter tells the stories of two groups of veterans from oppositional political camps who connect in this movement.

Before participating in the justice-seeking movement and extending my fieldwork to non-urban settings in Hunan province, I naively imagined the bottom-up redress phenomenon to be an attempt to oppose the 'memory regime'

(Yang 2005) of the Party-state. However, a conflict between the redress activists within the largest WeChat group, We Love War of Resistance Veterans (WLW), an online platform gathering 130 leaders of local activist groups across Hunan province, complicates the oppositional imagination of the power dynamics of memory-making.

It was 1 August 2015, the eighty-eighth anniversary of the founding of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Day, which is celebrated as the Eight One Army Day (*bayi jian jun jie*) in the PRC. This anniversary dates back to 1927 when the Nanchang Uprising occurred, and the CCP turned to armed resistance against its primary opponent: the KMT government (Guillermaz 1962). On a day that recalls the rivalry between the CCP and the KMT, one would not expect a celebratory message circulated in the largest online community for activists who have devoted themselves to seeking justice for the defeated KMT and its veterans in mainland China. However, as a participant-observer within the group, I received a joke sent to all in the WeChat group about a dead-drunk husband:

A demobilised PLA soldier was hammered after drinking with his friends. His wife used all means to wake him up to no avail. Helpless and worried, the poor wife called her husband's comrade-in-arms. The comrade asked her to buy a whistle and blow it fast and short [a signal in the military for an emergency gathering]. The wife did not completely understand this instruction but still followed the suggestion. Surprisingly, the husband jumped up and got quickly dressed. He ran around and asked, 'What is happening? Field training or spot check? Full or half-armoured? War patrol number one or two?' This man's true loyalty to the military moved the wife to tears.

The story ended with the following comment: 'This is our PLA soldier. The task is always on his mind. The enemy is always in his sight. Responsibility is always on his shoulders. Passion is always in his heart. Happy Army Day to all PLA members! You will always be the Great Wall of China!' The sender of the message, who goes by the name Tie Jun (which translates as iron soldier), was a core member of an activist group in a remote county in the southern part of Hunan province. He was a quiet figure online; this was the first time I noticed him after being in the group for six months. Surprisingly, more than ten members responded enthusiastically with messages such as 'Salute to all men who sacrificed for the nation!' and 'We should wish our national heroes [the KMT veterans] happy Army Day as well.' After these positive comments, a wave of criticism ensued. At the time, I was in the capital city of Hunan province, working with a group of female activists who grew up in urban areas. One of my key informants, Miss Si Yu, a sales manager in an insurance company in her late forties, expressed her hostility in the chat room:

What a terrifying story! Women should never marry these kinds of ex-PLA members; they are poorly educated and know nothing about love, and the Communist Party has 'poisoned' them. The poor wife has an inhumane [*mei*

renxing] riffraff [*bin pi*] army husband. Our [KMT] veterans have nothing to do with this celebratory day which the CCP sets to brainwash the people!

The term 'riffraff' (*bin pi*) insulted Tie Jun. He threatened to quit the group if Si Yu did not apologise. However, those other members who had praised Tie Jun's story sank into silence to avoid the conflict as more and more members sent messages explaining the history of Army Day. The group host clarified his feelings: 'If you [referring to Tie Jun] have a basic knowledge of history, you will know that what you are celebrating is why our heroes are suffering. It is a tragedy that the KMT soldiers were defeated and then forgotten!' The head of Tie Jun's team, Yan Bing, attempted to resolve the conflict: 'Tie Jun and our team have helped many veterans like the demobilised PLA members who contributed greatly to the nation. Let's focus more on our caregiving activities and put away these meaningless quarrels.' When Si Yu refused to apologise, Tie Jun left the group. The next day, when sending materials to a KMT veteran with Si Yu, I asked who these people were who celebrated the PLA Army Day. 'They are also volunteers who help the KMT veterans in rural areas. The leading figure, Mr Yan Bing, is well-known for his excellent veteran photography. Tie Jun is another member of his team; maybe he used to be a PLA soldier. Otherwise, he wouldn't be so brain-damaged [*nao can*].'

It was not until the third month of my fieldwork that this group of ex-servicemen in the PLA, the pillar-like institution for the authoritarian regime of the Party-state, raised their voices publicly. Like other outsiders within the activist community, I was not aware of their existence for a long time. Even my urban peers, who had been cooperating with them for a long time, were unaware of their ex-PLA identity. The invisibility of these male ex-PLA activists in rural areas contradicts their significant contribution to the redress movement by extending the scale of the hero-seeking mission to rural China, where the largest number of veterans live.

It is worth noting that most of the conscripted members of the modern military in China, either during the Republican or the PRC era, come from rural China (Diamant 2010; Van de Ven 2003). While many of the KMT veterans who have been glorified as national heroes in the redress movement live in rural areas, the former PLA members' labour has been marginalised in the activist community's public channels and rendered invisible. I later learned that this invisibility is an intentional strategy to avoid hostility from activist peers such as Si Yu, who hold opposing political views and belong to different socio-economic groups.

Following up on the conflict, I texted Yan Bing through WeChat that evening and mentioned my plan to join their volunteering activities as a researcher. When he replied, he invited me to visit him at any time, even on workdays. This struck me as unusual as the volunteers usually organised their caregiving activities for

Conclusion

The Exemplarist Production of Chinese Masculinities

[G]ender is a kind of doing, but not simply in the reductive sense of a subject performing gender. Gender textures the lifeworld, produces the imagistic context of our intersubjective belonging, taxes our inheritance of language in often brutal ways, and is a structuring element in the material relations that shape lives and possibilities.

—Bonnie Mann (2013, 12)

This book offers an ethnographical account of the making of national heroes in a historical redress movement aiming to glorify a group of forgotten men in Chinese history through commemorative rituals and volunteering activities. It theorises the co-production of nationhood and manhood in this movement that involves local activist volunteers, NGO leaders, entrepreneurs, online platforms, and governments using a framework that I term the exemplarist production of masculinities. This framework explores the intersection between gender and nationalism in cultural representation and social practice. Instead of focusing on the construction of masculinities as ideal gendered traits, it directs our attention to the actual making of real men through interpersonal interactions, the production of media events, and social structures, by raising the voices of men and women who actively participate in the competing and contesting construction of national heroes. Each chapter of this book details the selection, representation, and appreciation of male subjects as exemplary men of the Chinese nation and the power relation behind these dynamic processes.

The first chapter traces the motivation of participants who explain their calling and devotion to this movement as a consequence of the shame and guilt they feel towards those whom they consider authentic Chinese founding fathers. It also introduces the concept of necromantic nationalism to describe the entanglement of these emotions with the obligation they feel to worship their patrilineal ancestry and the nationalist competition. This nationalism unites elite men who possess economic resources and media expertise with grassroots activists who contribute labour and time to the transnational veneration of a group of fallen

Chinese soldiers whose remains are unattended in foreign lands. Extending this focus on father-centred commemoration, Chapter 2 turns to the ritualised family reunions between the Taiwan Strait that have been initiated by media agents, NGOs, and families separated by the Chinese civil war. In these rituals, competition between the two polities on patriarchal orthodoxy is realised in the construction of exemplary men, where the suffering and experiences that fail to fit the patriarchal exemplarity have been eliminated.

Chapter 3 closely analyses those men who embodied the masculine exemplarity imagined by the actors of this redress movement. It contextualises the revival of desexualised heroes in contemporary China as a dialogic response to business and entrepreneur masculinities. The dialogic mechanism in making exemplary men highlights the dynamics between hegemonic and marginal masculinities. In other words, the hegemonic and the marginal are conditional and fluid according to the changes in social situations. I argue thus that the oppositional dichotomy of ideal men should be discussed in a dialectic framework.

Moreover, this dialogic mechanism directs our attention to the cooperation between hegemonic masculinities in the exemplarist production. Instead of embodying complicit masculinity, the men who successfully promote the national heroes become 'real men' who attain moral privilege in public spheres. This gender dimension deeply influences the development of Chinese activism by reinforcing the patriarchal practice in the NGO sector; it also gives rise to the split between feminist engagements and those issues being narrated as 'national'.

Chapters 4 and 5 cast light on the men and women behind the staging of exemplary men and discuss the labour involved in the exemplarist production of masculinities. These two chapters connect the gender inequality and social injustice the male and female grassroots activists suffer when they participate in the redress movement. Continuing the focus on labour, Chapter 6 probes the institutional structure and organisational operation of the production of exemplary men. Using a timely case study of #MeToo within the NGO sector, it explains how the making of exemplary men constitutes hegemonic masculinities as a bloc that reinforce and revive the patriarchal discourse and practice against women.

Collectively, the chapters address the multifaceted aspects of the production of national heroes at individual, relational, and institutional levels. By doing so, this book addresses the power relations, relational construction, emotion, and lived experience of hegemonic masculinities in the nationalist context. It proposes a theoretical and methodological framework that integrates textual analysis and ethnographical sensorium, symbols and experience, and cultural production and social practice, which contributes to studies of the intersectionality between nationalism and masculinities in the Chinese context and beyond.

An ethnographical account of exemplary-based morality elucidates how the mechanism of 'the good man is *that*' makes sense in ordinary people's lives and how abstract concepts are realised in real life. Caroline Humphrey (1997) vividly

illustrates how exemplarism works, drawing on an example where, to justify his inter-ethnic marriage, an ethnic minority man connects himself to TSongsang Gampo, an admirable figure who also chose to marry a Han woman. From the state perspective, Bakken (2000) points out that Chinese society is an exemplary society in which the Party-state heavily invests in the social emulation of role models and exemplars; even the post-Mao era has been understood as a period of moral vacuum. This meaning-making practice works beyond morality and social emulation, and its prominence in nationalism and masculinities merits further attention.

The making of exemplary figures in the construction of masculinities is cross-cultural. In their rethink of the concept of hegemonic masculinity, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) emphasise that producing exemplars dominated by the Church, the state, and other authorities is crucial to constructing hegemonic masculinities. In this production process, the gender configuration of men who do not embody the ultimate form of manhood but engage in the hegemonic project should be theorised as complicit. In the Chinese context, *wen-wu* has also been constructed by producing two exemplars: the Confucian and Guan Yu (Louie 2005). Scholars in literary criticism, history, and media studies have shown the diverse faces of Chinese men in political propaganda and popular cultures, behind which the Party-state and various forms of capitalism play a key role. In his work on the revision of Chinese masculinities in popular culture, Song Geng (2010) has revealed that the rewriting of revolutionary history, during the most important period in the Party-state's historiography, has been an important part of producing new images of heroes. Every attempt to revise the images of male role models has projected 'post-communist values' onto the national past. However, we know little about the power relations behind the value-laden process of revising Chinese masculinities and how these role models attain (or lose) social lives through social interactions. This book details the selection of proper subjects through inclusion and exclusion, the staging of these subjects as exemplary, and how social agents negotiate the production of exemplarity. By doing so, the chapters capture the shifts and continuities in the production of exalted masculinities in Chinese society and social actors' power relations and agency in producing ethics-driven hegemonic masculinities.

Studies of nationalism highlight a similar trajectory, which involves a shift to move beyond the categorisation as ideal types and to illustrate how seemingly oppositional narratives about imaginary communities connect people. Moreover, the gender dimension in Chinese nationalism needs further theorisation. While the entanglement between cultural nationalism and Chinese masculinity has been analysed in media studies, an in-depth understanding of how Chinese nationalism manifests in digital communities and through rituals as a masculine phenomenon is necessary. This study unpacks the gender dynamic

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