

The Cosmopolitan Dream

Transnational Asian Masculinities

Series Editors: Derek Hird (Lancaster University) and Geng Song (University of Hong Kong)

The first book series in the world on this topic, *Transnational Asian Masculinities* explores the representations and lived realities of Asian masculinities in their transnational dimensions. Books in this series use interdisciplinary perspectives and interrogate diverse textual, visual, and ethnographic materials. They illuminate the specificities of Asian masculinities in global contexts and question some of the assumptions of Euro-American theorizing on masculinities. By approaching Asianness through ethnicity, nationality, and location—encompassing men’s, women’s, queer, and trans masculinities—this series unpacks the tangled assemblages of local and transnational circulations of people, ideas, and objects that have shaped Asian masculinities in all eras.

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The Cosmopolitan Dream: Transnational Chinese Masculinities in a Global Age

Edited by Derek Hird and Geng Song

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Transnational Chinese Masculinities in a
Global Age

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Hong Kong University Press
The University of Hong Kong
Pokfulam Road
Hong Kong
www.hkupress.hku.hk

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ISBN 978-988-8455-85-0 (*Hardback*)

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed and bound by China Translation & Printing Services Ltd., Hong Kong, China

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Introduction

Transnational Chinese Masculinities in a Global Age

Derek Hird and Geng Song

Why is it important to study contemporary Chinese men and masculinities from a transnational perspective? One good reason is that in today's globalizing world concepts of Chinese masculinity and Chinese men themselves are increasingly part of transnational circulations of people, ideas, images, and objects. Another is that the ongoing integration of post-Mao China into global capitalist markets has led in turn to the increasing influence of Chinese men and masculinities across the world. The impetus of globalization inflects the configurations of masculinities in China's postsocialist era with transnational dimensions: the resulting hybrid masculinities of Chinese men in China and elsewhere cannot be ignored. This volume addresses these issues with the following aims: to highlight some of the most significant transnational aspects of contemporary Chinese men and masculinities; to show how these aspects are imbricated with other more locally embedded notions and practices of masculinity; and to explore the significance of these shifts for the Chinese gender order.¹

The essays in this book are united through three key principles: a truly global perspective on Chinese masculinities, an openness to multiple disciplinary approaches across the humanities and social sciences, and a keen awareness of the imprint of historical models of Chinese masculinities on current formulations. These principles provide a solid foundation for the study of representations and lived realities of transnational Chinese masculinities, and the interplay between these two realms. Geographically, the essays in this book cover four continents: Africa, Asia, Europe, and North America. They garner their source materials variously from interviews, everyday life interactions, films, internet sites, books (fiction and nonfiction), and television (drama series and reality shows). With an eye on history, they show how Confucian masculinities and elite practices, reworked and hybridized, echo across the discourses and everyday lives of contemporary Chinese men and masculinities.

1. We are very grateful for the financial support of the British Academy's International Partnership and Mobility Scheme (2014/15).

We have tried to cover as wide a range of contemporary transnational Chinese masculinities as possible, but there are inevitably some limitations and lacunae. One self-imposed editorial restriction was to concentrate on men born and bred in the People's Republic of China (PRC), so as to provide a coherent national background for the masculinities under analysis in diverse contexts. This focus precludes attention to transnational Chinese men from Sinophone nations and populations beyond the PRC, including earlier established overseas Chinese communities (e.g., immediate postwar migrants and overseas-born Chinese), but we made a partial exception in the case of the Singapore-born gourmet Cai Lan 蔡瀾 (born 1941) who has become a naturalized Chinese citizen. Businessmen, white-collar men, blue-collar men, as well as male authors, entertainment stars, and students feature across the chapters, representing a wide range of urban socioeconomic backgrounds. Ethnically, the men and masculinities in the essays are all Han Chinese, which partly reflects Han dominance of China's population (92 percent) and the prevailing focus on Han masculinities in Chinese masculinities studies. As for sexuality, the focus of one chapter is gay identities and practices; the other essays cover heterosexual discourses and the experiences of heterosexual-identified men. But we do regret the resulting lacunae: men from rural areas and smaller towns, men from non-Han ethnicities, men with nonnormative sexualities other than gay, and masculinities enacted by women. We hope that future research will build on existing relevant scholarly work (e.g., Boretz 2010; Dautcher 2009; Hillman and Henfry 2006; Uretsky 2016) to explore further the transnational dimensions of these topics.

Nonetheless, this volume addresses several weaknesses and blind spots in Chinese studies, masculinities studies, and migration studies. It joins a growing number of recent works (e.g., Louie 2015; 2016; Song and Hird 2014) that seek to develop masculinities scholarship in contemporary Chinese gender studies, which in keeping with the wider field of gender studies has had a historical bias towards research on women. It also seeks to redress the humanities bias in existing Chinese masculinities scholarship: its attention to social science approaches adds to recent anthropological investigations of Chinese men (e.g., Osburg 2013; Uretsky 2016). Through the range and depth of the essays within, it makes a case for the importance of Chinese masculinities in the wider global field of masculinity studies. By virtue of China's population (20 percent of the world total) and its GDP (second only to the United States), Chinese masculinities deserve significant scholarly attention, yet research on Chinese and many other "minority" masculinities continues to be marginalized in an academy still heavily oriented towards Euro-American issues. Last but not least, the volume seeks to remedy migration studies' relative lack of focus on recent mainland Chinese migration. Studies of Sinophone migrant populations have tended either to bundle recent mainland migrants together with non-PRC Sinophone migrants (e.g., those from Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, and pre-1997 Hong Kong), or to

focus on Sinophone populations established by earlier waves of migration from mainland China. Our PRC focus therefore helps redress the lack of analysis on the specific conditions of PRC reform-era migration.

Transnational Masculinities as a Field of Study

The backdrop for the chapters in this volume and other recent research on transnational masculinities is the acceleration of transborder flows and interactions of people, objects, ideas, practices, technologies, and money that has accompanied the spread of consumer capitalism across much of the globe, particularly since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. It is perhaps unsurprising that much of the research on transnational masculinities has come from social science scholars concerned with the effects of transnational migration on everyday lives (e.g., Ahmad 2013; Batnitzky, McDowell and Dyer 2009; Boehm 2008; Charsley 2005; Datta et al. 2009; Donaldson et al. 2009; Hearn, Blagojević and Harrison 2013; Kilkey, Plomien, and Perrons 2014; Lomsky-Feder and Rapoport 2003; McKay 2007; Montes 2013; Osella and Osella 2000; Vasquez del Aguila 2014). These researchers show that migrant men negotiate the complex challenges they face in their host countries in multiple ways; and that notions of culture, nationality, ethnicity, and class are highly influential in how migrant men relate and adjust their previous understandings of masculinity to the gendered norms of their new home. As Datta et al. (2009, 854) advise, the study of migrant men requires a careful consideration of how transnational masculinities “travel” and are “remade” in different regimes of gender.

Movements across borders often notably alter the contours of interrelationships between masculinities and nation. Jeff Hearn and Marina Blagojević (2013) argue that contemporary transnational masculinities are produced through processes of transnationalization that simultaneously deconstruct, blur, reaffirm, and reconfigure national boundaries. For instance, transnational migration causes national boundaries to be reaffirmed amid debates about migrant numbers, yet at the same time breaks down national boundaries through the creation of transnational communities, and leads to new linkages such as those between different migrant populations (Hearn and Blagojević 2013, 9–10). From this perspective, transnationalization reinforces national and even nationalistic models of masculinity, while concurrently making possible more pluralistic, bricolage-type masculinities that are less rigidly defined in national terms, and which incorporate influences from diverse cultural and national backgrounds. Furthermore, in an era of transnationalized media discourses, everyday enactments of hybrid transnational masculinities need not even require crossing a national border, as masculinities studies are increasingly showing (e.g., Aboim 2010; Inhorn 2012; Song and Hird 2014).

The new border-crossing transnational business masculine identities and practices that have emerged from the increasing global interconnectivity of trade and finance markets at first glance appear less deeply rooted in local gender regimes; yet, it is argued, they remain largely masculinist and power-oriented (Connell 1998; 2000; 2014; Elias and Beasley 2009). Raewyn Connell describes a globally mobile “transnational business masculinity” that professes equal opportunities for women through a “gender-neutral language of ‘markets,’ ‘individuals,’ and ‘choice,’” but which in practice commodifies and hierarchizes relations with women and is characterized by self-centered careerist and sexually permissive traits (Connell 1998, 15–16). Adding a Foucauldian perspective, Elias and Beasley (2009) recommend understanding transnational business masculinities as constituted through discursive formations, so as better to understand the different ways that individuals enact them. The influence of cultural histories is producing regional variants, such as Confucian-inflected transnational business masculinities in East Asia and secularized Christian versions in North America (Connell 2000, 54). Hence older, explicitly chauvinist forms of “national” masculinities continue to inform the emerging transnational forms (Connell 2010; Connell and Wood 2005).

For Connell, transnational business masculinities are the hegemonic form of masculinity in the world gender order, in that they are the most “honored or desired” form of masculinity in today’s globalizing context (1998, 5, 16). In this light, it is therefore appropriate that a theoretical focus is brought to them. However, masculinities studies theorists have paid less attention to conceptualizing the transnational blue-collar/working-class/rural masculinities that globalizing processes have enabled, besides some excellent studies that have examined the lives of low-skilled and/or marginalized transnational male migrants (e.g., Boehm 2008; Datta et al. 2009; Guest 2003; McKay 2007). For example, no theorist has yet extended Connell’s notion of “marginalized masculinities” (2005, 80–81) to produce a more general theory of “transnational marginalized masculinities.”

Nonetheless, with a global context in mind, Christine Beasley (2008) has developed a more nuanced reading of the category of hegemonic masculinity that recognizes the presence and role of working-class masculinities in the enactment of transnational hegemonic masculinities. She does this by “demasculinizing” hegemonic masculinities into “supra-” and “sub-” categories, in which “sub-hegemonic” masculinities are typically working-class masculine models that work to invoke a kind of masculinist ideal that may be different from business masculinity, but still legitimate gendered hierarchies. Beasley thus problematizes Connell’s formulation of transnational business masculinity as the singular hegemonic masculinity operating transnationally in today’s world. In this volume, Jamie Coates utilizes Beasley’s sub/supra distinction to show

how transnational male subjects can move between hegemonic masculine identities, which we discuss further below.

The increasing number of transnationally mobile Chinese citizens from diverse backgrounds has inspired scholarly investigations into their lived experiences beyond China's borders (e.g., Chang and Rucker-Chang 2013; Guest 2003; Nyíri 1999; Pieke 2004; Wu and Liu 2014). Studies focusing on contemporary Chinese masculinity and migration, however, remain relatively rare and small-scale. Notable research on contemporary Sinophone male migration includes studies of highly educated Chinese male migrants from China and other East Asian countries living and working in Australia (Hibbins 2005; 2009), Chinese Singaporean businessmen's experiences of living in China (Yeoh and Willis 2004), and gay male Hong Kong Chinese migrants in London (Kong 2011, 121–42). Hibbins's works usefully show the presence of Confucian ideals in the men's notions of Chineseness, and shifting attitudes to work and family among younger migrant entrepreneurs, but do not address in detail the particularities of the masculinities of mainland Chinese men.

Recent PRC migrants to Western countries have to negotiate their differences not just with established host-culture identities, but also with identities enacted in Chinese communities, both first-generation and already established second-or-more-generation Chinese diasporic communities (Chua and Fujino 1999). The more advanced assimilation of the latter into the host culture may produce conflicts with the recent arrivals about cultural identity (Parker and Song 2007). First-generation male migrants may even turn to Chinese culturalist renderings of privileged masculinity as a means to distinguish themselves from both these more assimilated Chinese diasporic masculinities and dominant white masculinities (Hibbins 2005, 177–78). For middle-class migrants, transnational migration clearly carries a risk of downward class mobility (see, e.g., Batnitzky, McDowell, and Dyer 2009). To distinguish themselves from their less well-educated migrant compatriots, first-generation middle-class migrants also may actively seek to reproduce forms of class privilege from China, as has been noted with historical Chinese male migrants to Britain (Louie 2000, 1072–73) and with contemporary white-collar Chinese migrants working in manual jobs in California's birth tourism industry (Tingyu Kang, this volume). Vasquez del Aguila (2014) has similarly described how Peruvian middle-class male migrants to New York constantly try to reproduce class patterns prevalent in Peru.

While transnational mobility and migration is undoubtedly a key factor in the enactment of transnational masculinities, the transnational masculinities produced and circulated in contemporary images and texts are equally important as objects of study, since masculinities take shape through protean and often conflicted to-ings and fro-ings between discourse and action. Transnational dimensions to Arab masculinities appear in emerging transnational Muslim masculinities screened on Middle Eastern Islamic satellite television (Echchaibi

2011) and in post-9/11 depictions of Arab men by Arab-American woman writers (Bosch-Vilarrubia 2016). Transnational configurations of masculinities from across the Americas are embodied by actor and director Gael García Bernal, “symbol of a transnational, post-national, and diasporic new Mexican cinema” (Mora 2006, 20); in recent South American fiction in the form of neoliberal transnational business masculinities and other local and regional masculinities, whose engagement with globalizing forces disenfranchises and shapes them in different ways (Venkatesh 2015, 109–56); and in the troubled transnational masculinities of young Dominican immigrants to the United States that form the thematic crux of Junot Díaz’s award-winning 2008 novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (Jay 2010, 176–94). The most prominent Asian transnational masculinities in popular culture in recent years have been those of South Korean male singers and actors: key to the transnational popularity of the “Korean Wave,” their “soft” hybrid masculinities incorporate global and postmodern dimensions (Jung 2011).

The mediated transnationalization of postsocialist Chinese masculinities has been depicted in transnational romances in Chinese film and TV, in which Chinese men regain masculinity through their “domestication” of white women (Lu 2000), and is notably embodied in the figure of Beijing-born Jet Li, who has succeeded Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan as the most successful transborder kung fu superstar (Yu 2012). The fictional writings of Chinese men living abroad are rich in diverse delineations of transnational Chinese masculinities, as is shown in the Chinese-Australian masculinities in Brian Castro’s novels, the “angry” sentiments expressed by Chinese-Australian poet Ouyang Lu, and the online writing of an elite US-educated Chinese financier; Chinese films such as *Hero* (2002) reconfigure Chinese masculinities with local and global audiences in mind (Louie 2015).

At the same time, Chinese masculinity is increasingly defined and constructed through its Other, non-Chinese men, in a global setting in media and entertainment. For instance, foreign men are commonly seen on the small screen in China, in both TV dramas and reality shows such as popular dating shows. These foreign images include Western businessmen, Japanese “devils” (officers and soldiers during World War II), and Korean male lovers. The foreign masculinities reflect popular imagination of the Self and Other/s and reveal the ambition and anxiety produced when China faces the world.

Transnational Chinese Masculinities

The field of Chinese masculinities studies has developed greatly since the seminal work of Louie (2002) established the theoretical dyad of *wen* 文 (literary) and *wu* 武 (martial), which simultaneously emphasized the distinctive historical pattern of Chinese masculinities and provided a lens on their multiplicity in

terms of such identity markers as class, educational status, and bodily habitus. Yet this paradigm has continued to inform research on Chinese masculinities, in monographs that explore contemporary queer masculinities (Kong 2011), historical masculinities (Hinsch 2013), Weiqi-playing masculinities (Moskowitz 2013), and mediated and everyday masculinities (Song and Hird 2014); and in multidisciplinary edited collections such as Louie (2016) and this one. Louie points out that the meaning and relative influence of *wen* and *wu* have fluctuated throughout the centuries, and argues that they have not disappeared in the contemporary era but are taking new forms as they become globalized through current transnational processes (Louie 2015, 4–6). The *wen-wu* dyad thus remains relevant both as an analytical tool and as a discursive paradigm that contributes to fashioning Chinese masculinities in everyday life.

The expanding field of Chinese masculinities research mobilizes multiple methodologies and topics, including critique of homosexualities in historical fiction (Vitiello 2011), audience reception of film stardom (Yu 2012), qualitative interviews of migrant workers (Lin 2013), and ethnographies of working-class brotherhoods (Boretz 2011), wealthy *nouveau riche* (Osburg 2013), and impotence sufferers (Zhang 2015). Building on earlier key texts that examine Chinese masculinities in modern literature and film (Zhong 2000) and late imperial literature (Song 2004; Huang 2006), the recent blossoming of scholarship has enriched and added to the vibrancy of this nascent field.

In Song and Hird (2014, 3–13) we provided a comprehensive review of the field of Chinese masculinities scholarship (and so do not do so here) and set out the following five key characteristics of Chinese masculinities in the context of globalization: anxiety about the quality of Chinese men vis-à-vis Western men; the interactions of discourses of masculinity and nationalism; the role of consumerism in the construction of masculinities; the increasing association of masculine success with money; and the turn to men's needs in society spurred by the influence of men's movements in the West. All of these characteristics are relevant to transnational Chinese masculinities; here, we draw attention to a further three related points, which we also revisit below in our discussion of the essays in this volume.

First, the concept of cosmopolitanism is being increasingly used to explore the localization of globally circulating ideas and images in Chinese masculinities. Geng Song and Tracy K. Lee explore the cosmopolitan desires of a consumerist elite by building on Lisa Rofel's notion of "cosmopolitanism with Chinese characteristics" as "a self-conscious transcendence of locality, posited as a universal transcendence, accomplished through the formation of a consumer identity; and a domestication of cosmopolitanism by way of renegotiating China's place in the world" (Rofel 2007, 111). Song and Lee show that while the lifeworlds of privileged Chinese men are suffused with the "cultural competition and cultural hybridity associated with the imagination of globality and the flow of global

capital in today's China" (Song and Lee 2012, 346), cosmopolitan consumerist masculinities are localized through engagement with nationalist and historically embedded discourses (2012, 353–54, 357–64). Cosmopolitanism's interplay between the local and the global also manifests in Chinese men's switching back and forth between Western and Chinese medical treatments for impotence, according to Everett Zhang, who utilizes Paul Rabinow's (1996, 56) notion of cosmopolitanism as a "twin valorization" of local situatedness and worldwide interconnectedness. Zhang sums up the dual nature of aspirations towards cosmopolitanism as "[t]he willingness to try new ways of life while still remaining in touch with one's habitual way of life" (Zhang 2015, 196).

Second, China's integration with global financial and trading systems, which has been particularly pronounced since the 1990s, has forced the historically dominant intellectual or scholar-official (*shi* 士) class to reconcile itself with the business activities traditionally carried out by the merchant (*shang* 商) class. In imperial times, the scholar-officials were considered socially superior to merchants, and held the latter's profit-seeking behavior in disdain. However, as a result of the postsocialist transformation of China's market-oriented socioeconomic policies, the highly educated stratum in today's China has embraced the pursuit of materialism. Yet the simultaneous "cultural turn" in the post-Mao era has created conditions in which highly educated men gain prestige through imbuing their business practices with an aura of Confucian morality. The infusion of morally elevated elements into the business sphere legitimizes profit-making in the eyes of the intellectual class, and has become a salient feature of pro-business discourse in the post-Mao era (Louie 2002, 53–57). In an investigation of the transnational masculinities of middle-class Chinese men living and working in London, Hird (2016) found that his participants were keen to embrace global business practices but also to identify with Confucian notions of the proper conduct of Chinese gentlemen. Transnational Chinese men's invocation of a localized ethical business identity fits the "domestication of cosmopolitan" framework discussed above; and, in a wider context, serves to illustrate the desire of emerging middle classes from developing economies to morally justify their newfound material wealth (Liechty 2012, 280).

Third, the transnational circulation of models of emotionally expressive and caring fatherhood is significantly influencing Chinese discourses and practices of fathering. Chinese parenting magazines celebrate fathers who encourage their children to explore their own identities, and Chinese fathers from across the socioeconomic spectrum spend significant time at weekends accompanying their children to private classes in music, dance, and other activities (Song and Hird 2014, 224–33). While acknowledging that the emotional reorientation of fathering in China dates back to before the 1980s, Xuan Li and William Jankowiak argue that there has been a clear acceleration in this trend in recent years due in part to state-sanctioned media campaigns (Li and Jankowiak 2016, 192–93). They

argue that the stigma attached to men's performance of "feminine" roles in the family is fading, with the result that providing care and emotional involvement to their children is no longer seen as "unmanly"; and in interviews found that many Chinese fathers now desire to be the trusted "friends" of their children (ibid., 193–94). From these studies, it is evident that the figure of the emotionally expressive, heterosexual family man is linked with discourses of consumer-driven "soft" masculinity, "high-quality" (*gao suzhi* 高素質) habits and behavior, individual realization, and, in wider developmental perspective, China's "joining tracks with the world" (*yu shijie jiegui* 與世界接軌).

The Chapters

We have arranged this book in two parts, which speak with different emphases to the multiple dimensions of emerging transnational Chinese masculinities, as well as to the broader political and socioeconomic trends into which these masculinities are interwoven. The essays in Part I, *Representing Chinese Men Transnationally*, analyze various imagined representations of transnational Chinese masculinities: in television dramas made in China (Song Geng) and central Europe (Hoefle); in films by Hong Kong directors (Lu); and in fiction by Chinese authors that are queer and online (Bao) and that are heteronormative and in print (Hunt, Su). The chapters in Part II, *Enacting Transnational Chinese Masculinities*, examine the transnational masculinities of living Chinese men: one of Japan's most well-known immigrants (Coates); a Hong Kong-based food critic and restaurateur (Feng); celebrity fathers and their children in a Chinese adaptation of a Korean reality show (Song Lin); fathers and domestic male helpers involved with US "birth tourism" (Kang); offshore Chinese fathers in Ethiopia (Driessen); and US-based highly educated Chinese overseas male students from non-elite backgrounds (Zhang).

Dividing the chapters in this way allows readers to get a sense, in Part I, of how transnational Chinese masculinities are creatively constructed in the influential twenty-first century media formats of TV drama series, film, and online and print fiction; and, in Part II, of how individual men with varied backgrounds negotiate discourses and everyday life circumstances to produce their own enactments of transnational Chinese masculinity. Admittedly, this is a rather artificial division, which does not conceal (and does not seek to conceal) the movements back and forth between representations and realities that produce discursive and everyday masculinities. Some of the chapters illustrate this point particularly well: for example, Pamela Hunt's analysis shows how the masculinities of Feng Tang's 馮唐 (born 1971) fictional figures are bound together with the transnational masculine persona that Feng Tang the author constructs for himself. Similarly, Xia Zhang demonstrates that the ways in which thrifty male Chinese postgraduates in North America live their everyday lives shape and are shaped

by the satirical representations of them circulated by wealthy Chinese female undergraduates. Lin Song's chapter shows how reality shows blur the differences between representations and lived realities: the fathering masculinities of the celebrity dads in the show are inevitably formed to an extent by the desire of the documentary makers to cater to the tastes of their audience. Thus although the book's nominal partition between representations and lived behavior may be useful in terms of academic categorization, the chapters themselves prove the incompleteness of exploring masculinities from only one of these perspectives.

The first chapter in Part I, on transnational male images in Chinese television dramas, introduces one of the major recurring themes of this volume: the interweaving of cosmopolitan and locally embedded aspects in transnational Chinese masculinities. Geng Song points out that the young elite men portrayed in the dramas evince cosmopolitan masculinities that nevertheless contain "Chinese characteristics," which highlights the role of states in disturbing the putative dominance of a monolithic, top-down "transnational business masculinity" (Elias and Beasley 2009). Song's comparative study of the film and TV drama versions (both 2010) of the hit novel *Go Lala Go!* (*Du Lala shengzhi ji* 杜拉拉升職記) reveals the relative conservatism of the TV drama version. The film's more internationalized production team and target audience result in its emphasizing China's global success and individual materialism, whereas the TV drama's more didactic bent promotes the "positive energy" of more socially and socialist oriented subjectivities. In the 2015 drama series *Love Me, If You Dare* (*Ta lai le, qing bi yan* 他來了，請閉眼), Song argues that the hero exemplifies a transnational Chinese masculinity that radiates cosmopolitan confidence yet at the same time reinforces a commonly depicted gendered hierarchy in which the female protagonist is subservient. Cosmopolitan yet conspicuously Chinese, the sharp intelligence and capabilities of the globe-trotting Chinese male hero outshine the men from all other ethnic, cultural, and national backgrounds, thus reimagining and redeeming the status of Chinese men in the world, and by extension that of the Chinese nation.

Since 1991, this very figure of a globally mobile, virile, and highly skilled Chinese man has appeared from time to time in *Tatort*, the hugely popular, long-running German/Austrian/Swiss TV police detective drama series; only in these manifestations, the focus is on how this dominant transnational Chinese masculinity threatens to break the social European order and the bodies of the police detectives who seek to safeguard it. Arnhilt Johanna Hoefle shows that in the four episodes of *Tatort* in which Chinese figures have featured most prominently, representations of Chinese men often take the form of globe-trotting Chinese businessmen who exhibit a highly intelligent and athletic (*wen* and *wu* combined, so to speak), internationalized, hybrid supra-hegemonic masculinity, leaving the overweight and sluggish German detectives floundering in their wake. This abrupt shift from the more familiar Orientalist depictions of Chinese

men in Western culture as feminine does not, however, prevent these episodes from reinforcing Orientalist portrayals of Chinese women as exotic, and giving voice to dehumanizing stereotypes and racist discourse. Hoefle argues that in the first episode (1991) she examines, the German detectives are unable to pin anything on the Chinese protagonist, who escapes scot-free; whereas, in the fourth episode (2013) she analyses, the virility and competence of the German detectives are redeemed, and European sovereignty is thereby restored. Hoefle suggests that it is the very regularity and conventionality of the serial form that opens up a safe space for the exposing and then resolving of the destabilizing threats to the social order that powerful transnational Chinese masculinities are deemed to present.

The evolving trajectory of Chinese masculinities on film that Sheldon Lu traces ends again with the figure of the confident, successful, globally mobile Chinese businessman, and the association of triumphant Chinese manhood with the resurrection of China's national status in the global arena. Lu charts the depictions of Chinese masculinities in three seminal films by Hong Kong directors that tell the stories of men from China and their journeys to America, from the perspective of the thoroughly transnational, yet increasingly mainland China-oriented Hong Kong film industry. The films have as their backdrops three distinct key historical contexts of reform-era China: the 1989 Tiananmen Incident, Hong Kong's return to China in 1997, and the emergence of China as an economic superpower in the 2010s. This temporal framework highlights the speed and magnitude of transformations in images of Chinese masculinity, reflecting the dominant concerns and tropes of the periods in which the films were made: the tragic fate of the suffering exile in Clara Law's 羅卓瑤 (born 1957) bleak post-Tiananmen film, *Farewell China* (*Ai zai bie xiang de jijie* 愛在別鄉的季節) (1990); the open-ended hopes and expectations of the entrepreneurial protagonist in Peter Chan's 陳可辛 (born 1962) *Comrades: Almost a Love Story* (*Tian mimi* 甜蜜蜜) (1996); and the eventual global success of the hardworking rural boy turned multimillionaire transnational businessman in Peter Chan's *American Dreams in China* (*Zhongguo hehuoren* 中國合夥人) (2013). Lu argues that these and other recent film narratives display a recuperation of Chinese masculinity and nationhood through the figures of confident, cosmopolitan, and yet fundamentally Chinese, entrepreneurial and white-collar men.

The nonnormative sexual practices and identities of transnational Chinese men is the focus of *Beijing Story*, the 1996 online novel that Stanley Kwan, another Hong Kong director deeply interested in China's reform-era transformations, adapted for his 2001 film, *Lan Yu*. Anonymously written, *Beijing Story* describes a tragic love story between two men in Beijing in the 1980s and early 1990s. In his study of the novel, Hongwei Bao shows how sexuality, masculinity, class and culture intersect in the characters of the two male lovers, which produces a historically informed Chinese gay identity in response to China's post-Mao

engagement with global capitalism. Handong, a Western-brand obsessed son of a high-ranking official, becomes a rich businessman in the 1980s through international trade; at the same time, he starts to “play” with young men in addition to his affairs with women. Lan Yu, a young architecture student from an intellectual family, is planning to study in the US; he enters the world of same-sex sexual relations as a means of supplementing his meagre income. The shock of the brutal crackdown on protestors at Tiananmen Square in June 1989 forces a rearticulation of Handong’s deep attachment to Lan Yu, and in this way, Bao argues, they come to a realization of themselves as “gay.”

And yet theirs is no simple adoption of a Western/global gay identity: Bao shows that specters from China’s premodern past haunt the identities of Handong and Lan Yu. Handong reassures his mother that sex with men is simply a hobby that upper-class males in China have indulged in over many centuries, while Lan Yu is portrayed as the embodiment of Confucian virtue in his loyalty and honesty to Handong. Thus, Bao demonstrates that a novel that could easily be superficially misread as an unproblematic celebration of the “opening up” of China to Western gay identities has a deeper context of homosocial bonding and sexual practices imbued with premodern Chinese social values.

In apparent contrast to the hybrid Western and Chinese identities of the protagonists in *Beijing Story*, Nan Wu, the hero of US-based Ha Jin’s 哈金 (born 1956) unambiguously titled English-language novel, *A Free Life* (2007), eventually develops a “free-spirited” American masculinity after much suffering as a post-Tiananmen migrant in exile. Lezhou Su maps the crisis in *wen* masculinity felt by scholars and writers in the immediate post-Mao years, disillusioned with their marginalization in a society increasingly fixated on market reforms and economic growth. Studying for a PhD in the United States at the time of the Tiananmen Incident, Nan Wu decides to stay despite also feeling disempowered and feminized there. He takes on menial jobs to support his family, a shameful step for a Chinese literatus, yet it is through such work and a restaurant business that he develops self-reliance and a sense of pioneering individuality. Eventually, Nan returns to literary pursuits, becoming a poet, but with a fearless, independent-minded subjectivity like his white American poet friends. Su argues that Nan’s transformation is symbolic of a remasculinization process that results in a self-sufficient, “neo-*wen*” masculinity. America is the site of spiritual redemption in which Nan Wu reclaims his manhood; by contrast, his fellow Chinese classmates at the time of the Tiananmen Incident who subsequently choose to return to China sink into lives of moral degradation and emasculation in the highly corrupt, permissive, and depoliticized society of post-Tiananmen China. In some ways, Nan Wu’s journey from the nadir of failed exile masculinity to entrepreneurial self-actualization parallels Sheldon Lu’s description of the shifting imageries of masculinities from *Farewell China* to *Comrades: Almost a Love Story*.

Nan Wu's mid-1990s exiled masculinity that turns its back on China is nowhere to be seen in Pamela Hunt's chapter on the controversial China-based author Feng Tang and his fiction. Feng Tang's works and his own self-fashioning speak more to the confident, cosmopolitan, transnational masculinity with distinct Chinese characteristics described by Geng Song, Hoefle, and Lu's analysis of *American Dreams in China*. With a twin focus on Feng Tang's intertextual references in his semi-autobiographical Beijing trilogy and his marketing of himself as a cultural translator, Hunt describes how Feng Tang enacts a testosterone-infused "marginal, virile, and writerly" heterosexual masculinity which embodies what she describes as "phallic creativity." Medically trained, possessing an American MBA, and ex-consultant for an American management consulting firm, Feng Tang takes up a stance of cosmopolitan appreciation of the sexual openness of Western writers such as D. H. Lawrence and Henry Miller; and yet, just as with the gay identities of the protagonists in *Beijing Story*, Hunt makes clear that this does not entail a simple binary of the "free" West against a repressed China. Indeed, Hunt argues that Feng Tang's "phallic creativity" lies in his amalgamation of global and local literary personae and themes. Hunt shows that while Feng Tang's characters are formed through enthusiastic exposure to Western brands and popular culture in the 1980s and 1990s, and, like their author, often take up subversive, libidinal positions on the margins of respectability, the historical figure of the talented and sexually appealing young male *caizi* (才子) haunts (to use Bao's term) Feng Tang and his fiction. This age-old Chinese evocation of male literary production and sexual attractiveness problematically marginalizes women and locates the cosmopolitan Feng Tang within a pattern of male privilege and elite masculinity.

The ongoing production of male privilege through interactions of class, gender, and ethnicity amid changing social and economic conditions is also a central concern of the chapters in Part II, which focus on how Chinese men negotiate their masculinities in various transnational contexts. This process inevitably involves engaging with prevailing discursive depictions of Chinese masculinities, which are by no means static or uniform, as all the essays in the volume make clear. In the first essay in Part II, Jamie Coates examines the intriguing life of Li Xiaomu 李小牧 (born 1960), one of Japan's most prominent Chinese immigrants. Li moved to Japan as a student in 1998, and soon became involved in the sex industry economy in Tokyo's Kabukicho district. A prolific writer and an increasingly well-known public figure, over the years Li has tried to transform his image from mafia-connected sex industry entrepreneur to respectable politician and democracy advocate, while maintaining his business interests. Coates argues that Li's complex masculine persona "poaches" from widespread Japanese perceptions about Chinese men, including the association of Chinese immigrants with the criminal underworld, vitality, business savvy, and a masculine confidence that Japanese men are feared to have lost. Yet in seeking to shift

his image, Li has also drawn on tropes such as the “consumerist cosmopolitan,” the salaryman, the transnational entrepreneur, and even scholarly *wen* masculinity. As Coates points out, in moving from sub- to supra-hegemonic masculine status, Li has used hegemonies of class and gender to his advantage, and in doing so, has reproduced them.

The mobilization of *wen* masculinity, class distinction and cosmopolitanism is also key to the masculine persona of another prominent transnational Chinese man: Cai Lan, the Hong Kong-based restaurateur, food critic, TV host, and author, whose early-career globe-trotting took him to multiple cities in Europe, North America, and Asia. In her essay, Jin Feng argues that Cai’s “culinary masculinity” is a strategic response to identity formation in the face of economic and cultural globalization. Feng shows how Cai retrieves culinary writing from its marginal position in historical literati texts and places it in the mainstream of today’s consumer culture. Through his writing, broadcasting and food tours, Cai promotes “authentic” home-style cooking in a commodified way to middle-class consumers nostalgic for the reassuring foodstuffs of their childhood. Yet he also infuses his down-to-earth gastronomy with traditional Chinese literati sentiments and values that suggest happiness lies in a spiritually and morally inflected approach to seeking better quality food and drink. Feng suggests that Cai’s masculinity is thereby premised on both his display of cultural capital as a latter-day Confucian gastronome, and his contribution to the notions of individual taste and middle-class distinction as a cosmopolitan entrepreneur. The centrality of class in this construction of masculinity, Feng argues, sidelines the biological binary at the heart of most modern renderings of gender.

The chapters described so far have not touched on one hotly debated aspect of contemporary masculinities: fatherhood. The next three chapters in the volume investigate different modes of fatherhood, starting with Lin Song’s analysis of the top-rated Chinese adaptation, launched in 2013, of the Korean reality show *Dad! Where Are We Going* (*Baba qu na’r* 爸爸去哪兒). Song’s account of five celebrity fathers and their children on the show describes multiple styles of fathering, yet also highlights some underlying commonalities that emerge among the fathers. Three sets of father-son relationships presented three different models of fathering, in Song’s analysis, and engendered distinctive audience responses. The conventionally strict and distant “pure man” fathering style of one contestant was challenged by his young son as well as by audience feedback, to the extent that the contestant reconfigured his approach to include more emotionally articulate and affectionate behavior. Towards the other end of the spectrum of masculinity, the somewhat androgynous “metrosexual masculinity” of another contestant was blamed for his son’s overdependency and shyness. In response to pressure this father regained his own masculinity through homosocial bonding with the other fathers and becoming sterner towards his son. The expressive and affectionate “sunshine boy” model of “brotherly love” between the third pairing

of father and son was the clear audience favorite: Song shows that this relationship presented an idealized rendering of a transcultural pan-East Asian “soft” masculinity with great appeal to the young female viewers who made up the bulk of the show’s audience.

However, despite the softer, more considerate styles of fathering on display, Song argues that the show reproduces conventional gendered hierarchies in its association of the masculine with competition, achievement, and public space, and the feminine with domestic space and care. Two pairs of father-daughter relationships on the show compounded this masculine/feminine binary through an emphasis on paternal authority.

The significance of fathering in the construction of contemporary masculinities is shown in a very different light in Miriam Driessen’s chapter on blue-collar migrant Chinese fathers based in Ethiopia. Her ethnographic observations and interviews reveal the complex mix of personal, familial, and social motivations for their decisions to work abroad and leave their families behind in China. Most prominent among her research participants’ reasons to migrate, however, was the opportunity to fulfill what they saw as their obligation to provide for their families. They were paid a relatively high salary for overseas work on infrastructure projects at a time when construction positions in China were becoming increasingly insecure and scarce due to the saturation of the sector. Thus, according to the prescriptions of the normative gender order, which Driessen argues includes the Confucian concept of fatherly responsibility, their high overseas earnings redeemed their sense of masculine honor. On their trips home, these offshore fathers strove to perform a modern-style intimate fathering masculinity that working abroad usually precluded, yet this was not enough to prevent their children from viewing them as part-strangers. To compensate, Driessen’s participants redoubled their efforts to entrench their masculine identity as the family breadwinner, which, as Driessen argues, only served to exacerbate the tension and unhappiness they felt as fathers unable to realize their longing to “be with” their children in person.

Just as the Ethiopia-based fathers’ inability to be with their children destabilizes their sense of masculinity, so does the inability of China-based husbands to be “physically there” for their wives as they prepare to give birth and then recuperate in Chinese-run maternity hotels in California, as Tingyu Kang shows in her ethnographic study of the growing phenomenon of birth tourism. The husbands adopt two strategies to compensate for their absence: providing their wives with ample money, and hiring Chinese male employees of the maternity hotels to undertake the “emotional labor” of acting as surrogate companions for their wives. The former strategy reaffirms the husbands’ masculinity, but the contracting out of emotional labor renders them anxious about their home-building status in the family. Thus Kang argues that the masculinities of the two groups of men are relationally constructed. As for the masculinity of the

hotel employees, it too is challenged because they are working in a “feminized industry,” and in smaller institutions they take on female-coded cleaning and cooking tasks in addition to their usual driving and handyman roles. To recover their masculinity, the employees attempt to redefine their work in ways that downplay their involvement with feminized labor processes. Kang concludes that the interplay of gender relations between the husbands, wives, and male employees thus reiteratively defines, challenges yet also reaffirms the masculinities of both sets of men.

The “double emasculation” of a particular group of Chinese men in North America is the topic of the final essay in Part II, in which Xia Zhang describes how male Chinese postgraduate students at US universities are feminized and marginalized not only in the dominant gender and racial discourses of US society, but also through their reputation as “North American despicable men” (*Bei Mei weisuonan* 北美猥瑣男). Zhang’s research on internet forums and through conventional ethnography shows how affluent female Chinese undergraduates in the United States use this derogatory term to ridicule Chinese male postgraduates from less well-off backgrounds as cheapskate, skinny, socially awkward, unhygienic, and thoroughly unmasculine. Zhang locates the roots of this phenomenon in the rapid economic rise of postmillennial China. Increasingly large numbers of female *fu’erdai* 富二代 (rich second generation) students are studying for undergraduate degrees in US, many of whom espouse a conception of ideal masculinity as a combination of conspicuous wealth, muscularity and whiteness. At the same time, an overseas degree is losing its value in the Chinese job market, which hurts the less well-connected non-elite students hardest. Some of the male postgraduates have fought back against their diminished status, labeling the young women as gold diggers and traitors. However, as Zhang points out, these men still often view a Chinese man marrying a white woman as a positive symbol of Chinese masculinity’s international desirability. Zhang therefore espouses the notion of diasporic masculinity as an assemblage of interacting local and transnational discursive practices, through which ideas about successful masculinity are negotiated and contested.

We have identified five prominent themes that emerge in multiple chapters. Perhaps the most salient recurring theme is the combination of the aspirations of many—but not all—transnational Chinese men to a form of cosmopolitanism that does not preclude identification with Chineseness: this is one of the trends we identified earlier in this introduction. While some of the essays describe a kind of cosmopolitanism without explicitly mentioning the term (e.g., Hoefle, Bao), others tackle it explicitly, making a strong contribution to debates about emerging forms of cosmopolitanism.

Geng Song highlights the associations of Chinese men’s cosmopolitanism with wealth, personal “quality” (*suzhi* 素質) and consumerist, class-making practices that seek to transcend parochialism, yet are also often accompanied

by nationalist and culturalist sentiment. Song points out that while both men's and women's status is often linked to national ambition, this is done in different ways: masculinity is considered as the fundamental bedrock of the nation and Chinese culture. For Lu, Chinese cosmopolitan masculinity likewise brings together global mobility with a simultaneous rootedness in Chinese culture in the characters of well-educated urban men. Hunt's evaluation of Feng Tang as a reinvigorated modern-day *caizi* encompasses his openness to and appreciation of other cultures while placing him within a long-standing gendered tradition. Feng emphasizes that Cai Lan's cosmopolitanism paradoxically integrates the modern, the traditional, the global, the local, and the personal. This cosmopolitan assemblage is a mix of identity politics and business strategy, Feng argues, which enables Cai to enact both open-mindedness and authenticity. Coates discusses the notion of "consumerist cosmopolitanism" as a form of hegemonic masculinity that exhibits class distinction and is particularly prevalent in China. Yet he emphasizes that the Japan-based Li Xiaomu's cosmopolitanism has increasingly moved beyond the consumerist towards a more abstract rendering, motivated by Li's political ambitions in Japan, that seeks to demonstrate Li's capacity to transcend his "Chineseness." Thus it is only Li who approaches what could be considered a truly transnational cosmopolitan ideal that professes to have left behind cultural nationalism.

The infusion of transnational Chinese men's cosmopolitanism with "Chinese characteristics" may not seem particularly problematic at first glance, but there are significant gendered and classed consequences to be considered. As Geng Song points out, *Love Me, If You Dare* reproduces "a stereotypical pattern of sexual relationship in post-Mao Chinese films" through the hierarchical relationship between the male protagonist and his girlfriend: the former possesses far more cultural and economic capital, and dominates their relationship, all of which the latter acquiesces with uncomplainingly. In her analysis of Feng Tang's elite male-centric, women-objectifying world, Hunt similarly concludes that the "cultural cosmopolitanism" of highly educated Chinese men is concomitant with, and even serves to exacerbate, socioeconomic inequalities. In Coates' study, tellingly, Li's renouncing of his Chinese citizenship to become a Japanese national is part of a process that includes his espousal of democratic principles, campaigning for the rights of sex workers, hosting meetings of Chinese democracy activists, and openly criticizing China's nondemocratic political system. It seems that "Chinese characteristics," in their current formulations in transnational Chinese masculinities, often come hand-in-hand with a hierarchical espousal of educated men's class and gender privileges.

A second theme to emerge is the mixed blessings brought by what could be called transnational blue-collar masculinities. Unlike the highly educated and elite males discussed above, the accumulation and display of cosmopolitan Euro-American cultural capital is not a major concern of less well-educated male

migrants; rather, it is a lack of access to upward socioeconomic mobility in China and its accompanying effects on the migrants own sense of gendered self-worth that drive their decision to migrate. Driessen's blue-collar participants took up work in Ethiopia because migration offered them a better opportunity to enact the male breadwinner ideal. Their families remained in China, however, in contrast to the "astronaut" families of wealthy Chinese in which the children migrate to North America for education, often together with their mother, while the father stays mostly in China to carry out his breadwinning role. In a prevailing Chinese social context where a high-earning wife undermines a man's masculinity, Driessen's participants' improved overseas income brought them increased "masculine respect." These favorable outcomes kept them working overseas, despite the painful distancing from their families.

Menial work undertaken by Chinese migrant men in the United States, not necessarily from lower socioeconomic status backgrounds, is depicted in the essays variously as a route to liberation from stifling aspects of Chinese culture and identity in the 1990s, and, conversely, as a downwardly mobile, status-threatening pathway for contemporary middle-class migrants. Migrant mainland Xiaojun in *Comrades: Almost a Love Story* acts as a delivery boy in Hong Kong, a role that he reprises later in New York. As Lu's analysis makes clear, Xiaojun's characterization is concerned with economic aspiration and a gradual loosening of national identity: issues of cultural capital and gender hierarchy are eclipsed by a relentless focus on the possibilities that migration opens up for those determined enough to take them. Similarly, as Su describes, the intellectual Nan Wu's taking on menial jobs when he remains in the United States in 1989 is an early and necessary stage of a trajectory in which he seeks to free himself from the inhibiting strictures and limitations of Chinese society. Yet, Kang's investigation of the realities of working as a driver and handyman in Californian maternity hotels shows how well-educated, previously white-collar, first-generation Chinese, male, recent immigrants undertaking these jobs try anxiously to recuperate their social status in class and gender terms. This point serves to underline educated transnational Chinese men's drive to retain a form of "Chinese characteristics" that delivers privilege to them.

The third theme that we wish to highlight is the reconciliation of Chinese intellectual masculinity with global business masculinity in the reform era. In *Love Me, If You Dare*, the main protagonist, Bo Jinyan, is simultaneously an academic genius and a wealthy materialist. Bo represents a new hybrid role model for highly educated Chinese men: globally mobile, financially very well off, with an intellectual prowess that far outshines the mental abilities of Western men. His winning combination of *shi* and *shang* attributes forges a neo-*wen* masculinity that can triumph over Western men in the global economy, just as Bruce Lee's film characters in the 1970s brokered a neo-*wu* masculinity that could defeat challengers from all over the world in physical terms. Chris Berry (2006) argues that

Bruce Lee's bare-chested display of muscular neo-*wu* masculinity was a response to the American hegemonic masculine ideal of the strong white hero, and to the feminization of Asian men as a racial other (which precipitates self-loathing, in Berry's view) upon which the American discursive ideal is partly founded. The crucial change in context between the world of Bruce Lee's characters and that of Bo Jinyan forty years later is China's economic rise. This development has enabled elite Chinese men to accumulate and put to use financial and cultural capital, rather than their fists, in their competition with men from other countries in the global field of masculinities.

In *Beijing Story*, Handong's nonnormative sexuality does not preclude him from the trend to combine *shi* and *shang* characteristics. As Bao points out, the "pure love" of the gay protagonists delivers a rebuke to the all-consuming neo-liberal market; yet, Handong, the son of a high-ranking official who identifies with China's historical intellectual elite, still continues to take full advantage of the new economic opportunities to enrich himself. In the very different context of the United States, Nan Wu in *A Free Life* nevertheless offers a very clear example of a Chinese intellectual's embrace of the business world. Not only does Nan discover a liberating business acumen, as Su highlights, he also eventually reinvigorates his intellectual abilities by writing poetry. Even depictions of villains manifest a neo-*wen* combination of high intelligence and wealth (often on top of a lean muscularity) that leaves European and American white men trailing in its wake, as Hoefle and Geng Song show, from the triad boss Hap-man and human trafficker Tony Wang in *Tatort*, to the psychopathic killer Xie Han in *Love Me, If You Dare*. And in real life the same *shi-shang* combination is found: writer and corporate executive Feng Tang, entrepreneur and budding politician Li Xiaomu, and the enterprising gastronome Cai Lan, in the differing ways discussed by Hunt, Coates, and Feng, all reconcile scholarly *wen* masculinities from China's Confucian tradition with modern-day profit-seeking business masculinities.

The fourth cross-chapter topic we wish to discuss is transnational intimate partner identities and practices. Much research has documented how interactions between Chinese men and their female partners outside marriage—especially hostesses, extramarital girlfriends (*xiaosan* 小三), and second wives (*ernai* 二奶)—contribute significantly to the construction of heteronormative Chinese masculinities (Osburg 2013; Uretsky 2016; Xiao 2011; Zheng 2006; Zurndorfer 2016).

Many of the essays in this volume, however, deal to varying degrees with Chinese men's wives or regular girlfriends, both Chinese and foreign; and we wish to highlight the instances that concern Chinese men's relationships with foreign women. In the 2008 *Tatort* episode featuring transnational Chinese businessman Tony Wang, the fact that his wife is a white German, a successful designer, the granddaughter of a famous architect, and happy to be with him despite his numerous affairs, in Hoefle's view, underlines the appeal of Wang's

(hyper)masculinity at a global level. The male postgraduate Chinese students studying in the United States also seem to believe that a Chinese man who marries a white American woman is “supermasculine,” as Zhang puts it, because he has “domesticated” the much-desired modern and beautiful foreign other (see also Lu 2001, 213–38). However, *American Dreams in China* puts forward a conflicting view of American women, as Lu’s essay picks up. In a clear reference to his American exchange-student girlfriend from his college days who dumped him and caused him much heartache, Wang Yang, one of the three cofounders of the highly successful education business, warns his friends to avoid independent-minded women with too many of their own ideas. Similarly, Li Xiaomu, the long-time Tokyo resident and businessman, in remarks reported in the *Global Times*, has warned Chinese men against marrying Japanese women because of the “cultural differences” that emerged during his marriage with his Japanese ex-wife. Li says he prefers to marry Chinese women because they are “more understanding” (Yan 2012). These examples show Chinese men’s ambivalence about marrying the desirable foreign female other: while it may bring cosmopolitan and masculine status, it also carries the risk of conflict and emotional trauma.

The fifth and final theme we have noted in some of the essays is the anxiety that men often feel about how their masculinity is perceived, and what they do to try to shore it up. The male employees in the Californian maternity hotel constantly perform “boundary work,” in Kang’s phrase, in which they attempt to draw a distinction between their roles and tasks and the more feminized activities of the female employees. Back in China, the absent husbands fret about the closeness of their wives to the male employees; the only way they know to reaffirm their status is to provide as much financial support as possible to their wives. Meanwhile, in Ethiopia, a group of blue-collar fathers are also uncomfortably absent from their families, who remain in China. As Driessen’s interviews show, these fathers take the difficult decision to work abroad because they feel their lack of access to well-paying jobs in China undermines their masculinity. Anxiety about their prospects in the Chinese job market is also fundamental to the concerns of non-elite Chinese male postgraduates in the US. Doubly emasculated, as Zhang demonstrates, by materialistic Chinese female undergraduates and American cultural stereotyping, these men desperately seek to recover their masculinity by crudely attacking the female undergraduates as unpatriotic leeches. In the reality TV series *Dad! Where Are We Going*, as Lin Song elucidates, Zhiying Lin’s soft and caring “metrosexual” masculinity is deemed to have made his young son overdependent and shy. Lin then makes the decision to reinvigorate the masculinity of both himself and his son. At a key juncture, he walks away to join the other dads, leaving his son to fend for himself. This example, as with the others above, reproduces a pattern of masculinity under challenge followed by action to recuperate it.

In sum, through diverse methodologies and sources, the essays in this book show that Chinese men are forging new transnationally inflected identities that draw simultaneously from historical Chinese masculinities and contemporary globally circulating masculinities. The essays also present innovative perspectives for understanding the relationship between masculinity and the rapid socioeconomic transformations of postsocialist China, demonstrate the significant influence of contemporary Chinese men in discourse and everyday life in a variety of global contexts, and provide insights and approaches of use to scholars of masculinities across the world.

China's post-Mao reengagement with the global economy is, to put it in human terms, the combined stories of how Chinese men and women from all kinds of backgrounds are negotiating their ways through the many transnational challenges and opportunities this historical juncture offers. At the heart of their stories lies a complex sense of identity, in which gender interacts with culture, nation, class, ethnicity, and other identity markers in often unpredictable and seemingly contradictory ways.

Nevertheless, as the chapters in this book demonstrate, it is possible to identify broad patterns in the transformations of masculinity over recent years. These include the following key characteristics: the embrace of localized cosmopolitan masculinities that are part-founded on historical notions and practices of Chinese masculinity; the enmeshment of intellectuals in business markets; emotionally engaged styles of fathering and intimate partnership; romantic involvement with non-Chinese women; and widespread anxiety and sensitivity about perceptions of Chinese masculinity. Chinese men are not unique in having to face these issues in transnational contexts; but, as the chapters in this volume demonstrate, they negotiate them in unique—yet explainable—ways.

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“North American Despicable Man”

Race, Class, and the (Re)making of Chinese Diasporic Masculinities in the United States

Xia Zhang

Introduction

On October 14, 2010, a post on one of the major overseas Chinese social network websites MITBBS quickly gave rise to a flame war among its users.¹ Titled “A few words to Chinese undergraduate women in the US,” the post writer, a self-identified Chinese male graduate student in the United States who had been recently rejected by a Chinese overseas undergraduate woman, verbally attacked the latter.² By referring to Chinese overseas undergraduates as *xiaoliu* 小留, or literally “little overseas students,” the post-writer bitterly accused female *xiaoliu* of preferring white American men to Chinese men and of being promiscuous. He also accused them of using their rich parents’ money to buy their entrance into prestigious US universities rather than relying on outstanding academic performance. Very quickly, a group of self-identified female *xiaoliu* fired back online. Referring to Chinese overseas male graduate students as *laoliu* 老留, or literally “old overseas students” in English, they called male *laoliu* “North American Despicable Men” or *beimei weisuonan* 北美猥琐男 (NAWSN for short) in Chinese.³ In a satiric tone, one of them explained why female *xiaoliu* turn away from the

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1. MITBBS (<http://www.mitbbs.com/>) is a Chinese bulletin board system website. It was founded in 1997 at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, hence the “MIT” in its name. It is one of the major overseas Chinese websites in the United States that mainly serves recent and new Chinese immigrants from mainland China. Most MITBBS users are young Chinese who have at least a college degree and overseas education experiences.
 2. Due to the nature of internet ethnographic fieldwork, it is extremely difficult to identify the real identity of online post writers, including their gender identities. To avoid unnecessary confusion, in this chapter, I use the self-identified gender identity of the post writers as their gender identities.
 3. WSN is the popular abbreviation of the Chinese pinyin *weisuonan*, which can be roughly translated into “despicable man” in English. Here, I use “NA” to represent “North American” or *beimei* in Chinese.

male *laoliu*: he is untidy, skinny, and physically unattractive; he is stingy, constantly searching for coupons and deals in order to save money; he has few social skills and does not know how to woo a woman because he is only good at school work; and worst of all, he is vain but incongruously pragmatic—when he finally graduates and finds a job, he shows off his achievements by buying a Honda Accord, the favorite car among male *laoliu* because it is highly cost efficient! In the words of the female *xiaoliu*, such men are “not masculine at all” (*wanquan meiyou nanrenwei* 完全沒有男人味).⁴

This flame war is one of many cases in which the epithet “NAWSN” is used to refer to recent Chinese immigrant men who enter the United States via post-graduate education. Although competing and conflicting discourses regarding this group of men are simultaneously circulated in the overseas Chinese online community, NAWSN stands out as a prominent social category that has attracted lots of Net users’ attention. An online search shows that it was used in 24,500 posts on MITBBS.com, where most users are self-identified men, and in 217,000 posts on huaren.us, another major overseas Chinese website in the United States, where most users are self-identified women. There are also numerous flame wars and online discussions about “NAWSN” on various overseas Chinese social websites, such as www.wenxuecity.com and www.6park.com.

The prevalent NAWSN discussion on overseas Chinese social network websites is intriguing because Chinese men educated in the United States have generally been considered human talents and social elites in mainland China for decades. Since overseas education and American lifestyle are generally highly valued in Chinese society, people in China tend to think that these men are associated with success, wealth, power, and masculinity. Furthermore, Chinese overseas postgraduates, as important contributors to the American economy, have been highly valued in the academic, scientific, and industrial worlds. Chinese students currently comprise the largest international student body in the United States, numbering 328,547 in the 2015–2016 academic year, making up 31.5 percent of all foreign students in the United States.⁵ Over half of them are men.⁶ An SEVP (Student and Exchange Visitor Program) 2014 report finds that “more students studying in STEM fields originate from China than any other country” and that the number of male Chinese students studying in the STEM

4. The post was retrieved on October 21, 2014, from <http://blog.renren.com/share/228762083/3529192221>.

5. This statistical data comes from Open Doors Data published in 2016, retrieved on April 30, 2017, from <https://www.iie.org/Research-and-Insights/Open-Doors/Data/International-Students/Leading-Places-of-Origin/2015-16>.

6. According to an SEVP (Student and Exchange Visitor Program) 2014 report, there were 138,979 Chinese male students and 131,617 female students in the United States up to 2013.

fields is about two times greater than their female compatriots.⁷ Research has also found that in 161 US chemistry departments, Chinese students' scientific output during their thesis is significantly higher than other students. It is reported that they "perform about as well as the awardees of the NSF doctoral fellowship program—America's best and brightest in science and engineering" (Gaulé and Piacentini 2010, 698). These talented young men should be the pride of the Chinese overseas community, yet in this community's online culture, they are frequently referred to as despicable. How do we understand this phenomenon?

Informed by critical theories of masculinity studies, this chapter examines overseas Chinese new media representations of well-educated Chinese immigrant men in the United States who originally came from mainland China to understand how such representations reinforce or challenge the dominant narratives on Asian American masculinity. It also explores the cultural assumptions grounded in the online discussion of the so called "North American Despicable Men," especially how race, class, nationality and recent geopolitical shifts intersect in reproducing, contesting, and negotiating the cultural meaning of Chinese masculinity within overseas Chinese online communities. Furthermore, through ethnographic fieldwork among Chinese international students in the United States, I further investigate overseas Chinese students' responses to such online representations in offline situations. My research argues that the emergence and prevalence of the social concept of "North American Despicable Man" should be understood as a social process of what I call "double emasculation" that feminizes and emasculates well-educated recent Chinese immigrant men with non-elite backgrounds in the United States. A full understanding of the cultural construction and negotiation of newly emerging forms of Chinese masculinity requires us to attend to not just the gender ideological field in both China and the United States, but also to the transnational dimensions of its construction. I further argue that Chinese immigrant men's online attempts to compensate for their perceived lack or loss of masculine power in real life ironically reinforces social prejudice against Chinese men and helps perpetuate overall male dominance over Chinese women in the United States.

The Significance of Studying Overseas Chinese Men in the United States

The critical study of Chinese men and masculinities has emerged in response to burgeoning men's studies in the West, especially the "third wave" of masculinity

7. According to the SEVP 2014 report, the total number of male Chinese students in STEM fields in the United States is 67,169; the number of female Chinese students in STEM fields is 37,234. The total number of Chinese overseas students in STEM fields in the US has reached 104,403, about 38 percent of the total Chinese student population in the United States.

studies which focuses on the gendered experience of men in a global context and in non-Western cultures (Song and Hird 2014). As Yiu Fai Chow (2008) indicates, there are two major trajectories of Chinese masculinity studies. The first emerged in response to the West's ignorance of Asian masculinity studies in the 1990s. It conceptualizes Chinese masculinities as intrinsically different from the prevailing Eurocentric construct of masculinity, attempting to provide alternative paradigms of masculinity in non-Western cultural contexts. The pioneering works of Kam Louie (2002) and Geng Song (2004) are especially influential and groundbreaking. While these works break away from the hegemonic Western paradigm of masculinity studies and try to employ an indigenous approach to study Chinese men, critics contend that this framework often overemphasizes "the specificities of Chinese masculinity," and thus risks essentializing, exoticizing, and homogenizing Chinese masculinities (Chow 2008, 5).

The second trajectory, on the other hand, takes diasporic Chinese men as their primary focus of research. Within the framework of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1995), it studies how these men achieve masculinity against the negative stereotyping of Asian immigrant men in Western countries. Works by scholars such as Anthony Chen (1999) and Ray Hibbins (2011) highlight the agency of diasporic Chinese men and the gendered strategies that affirm their masculinities when they encounter the crisis of masculinity as immigrants. However, this trajectory often treats diasporic Chinese men in a host country as homogeneous, as if there were no internal differences or conflicts within this group, while in reality, diasporic Chinese men with different family backgrounds, immigration statuses and socioeconomic positions often lead vastly different lives. Bringing out the heterogeneity among Chinese immigrant men in the United States is not just important for a more nuanced and accurate understanding of these men's lives, but is also important to avoid perpetuating and reproducing the stereotypes of Asian men in the US.

Moreover, the literature on diasporic Chinese men in the West, according to Derek Hird and Geng Song, has focused on "non-mainland Sinophone cultures and earlier waves of migration from China" (Hird and Song, Introduction in this volume). However, China's recent ascendancy in the global economy has created ripples of change and influences in overseas communities, or as Julia Kuehn, Kam Louie, and David M. Pomfret so acutely summarized, "Chineseness has been refashioned in the wake of the rise of China" (Kuehn et al. 2013, 6). As Song and Hird argue, in China and abroad, Chinese men and the images of Chinese masculinity "are increasingly prominently situated in global context," and are having a "transnational turn" (Song and Hird 2014; Hird and Song, Introduction in this volume). This changing reality calls upon the study of Chinese diasporic men to respond to it and "puts a spotlight on the wave of migration occasioned by the 'rise' of China" (Hird and Song, Introduction in this volume).

It is also important to study the vernacular discourse about the educated diasporic Chinese men in connection with or in contrast to national and mainstream media portrayals of them.⁸ Michel Foucault (1978) argues that social norms, such as gender and sexuality norms, are constructed by the ways that they are spoken of or conceptualized in language. Masculinity, like gender and sexuality, is also configured in the discourse about the cultural understanding of “what it means to be a man.” Chinese masculinity is, as Geng Song points out (in his chapter in this volume), increasingly represented “in a cosmopolitan fashion” and linked with modernity in Chinese media, especially regarding educated young overseas Chinese men. The mainstream American media, on the other hand, have continued to produce and reproduce the racialized stereotypes of Asian American men, as “nerd” and “forever foreign” (Park 2015, 370; Zhang 2010). However, as Hauser points out, public opinion is formed not just by elite and mass media discourses, but also by the informal, “everyday deliberation” (2007, 336) that ordinary citizens use to seek out information, formulate arguments and respond to the arguments of others. This chapter attempts to investigate the process in which educated diasporic Chinese men are viewed, evaluated and discussed in everyday life in their own communities, and how the “vernacular rhetoric” (Hauser 2007) internalizes, articulates with, and even challenges the discourses at national and global levels.

Research Methods

In order to conduct a more nuanced examination of the discursive construct of Chinese diasporic masculinity in the United States, I provide a close reading of the online posts regarding the discussion of NAWSN from overseas Chinese social websites and complement the online research with offline ethnographic fieldwork among Chinese international students in the United States.

In his research on Dutch Chinese diasporic masculinity, Yiu Fai Chow argues for the necessity of examining overseas Chinese popular culture in order to investigate the experience of the Chinese diaspora in the West. One reason, he

8. Here I am following Gerard A. Hauser’s idea of vernacular discourse as “(T)he everyday exchanges among ordinary citizens . . . that forms and expresses public opinion. Collectively, these dialogues form a weblike structure of associations, what Habermas (2006) refers to as ‘clusters’ (417) of opinions, with respective weights of attitude drawn from various audiences” (Hauser 2007, 336). Hauser argues that vernacular discourse is different from opinion polls which are often dominated by social elites and journalistic discourse. Vernacular discourses are an “everyday form of deliberation among ordinary citizens who engage in a polyphonous conversation on issues that intersect with their lives. Their deliberations are based on desire and mirror the public sphere’s reticulate structure, in which multiple-issue public spheres touch one another and include members who belong to several, perhaps many, overlapping discursive arenas (Hauser, 1999)” (Hauser 2007, 336).

argues, is because "[Chinese men] are seldom . . . active participants of pub, sport and beach cultures, the dominant construction sites of Western versions of masculinity. Instead, they may be preoccupied with their own cultural pursuits such as watching martial arts films" (Chow 2008, 9). Following Chow, I argue that overseas Chinese social websites are one of the cultural pursuits through which we can investigate the lives of diasporic Chinese men. These websites are significant but under-researched sources for the study of Chinese masculinity beyond China's borders. Popular overseas Chinese social websites such as MITBBS attract an average of 20,000 to 30,000 registered users every day. The forum is dominated by overseas Chinese users with at least a college degree. Close to half of them have a postgraduate education. Here, Chinese men actively participate in discussions, interact with their peers and present individual experiences, emotions, and opinions on various platforms. NAWSN is one of the hottest topics among these internet users.⁹ This approach is to "take the virtual, online environment as the site of the research supplanting interviews and survey with existing information that is automatically archived in abundant online environments" (Hine, 2008; cited in Liu 2014, 34). The texts in the online environment, according to Christine Hine, should be viewed ethnographically as "culturally situated cultural artifacts," instead of "distorted accounts" or "straightforward truths" (2000, 51).

The second part of my fieldwork is ethnographic research that I have conducted among Chinese international students in the United States since 2014. The students participating in this research, five undergraduates and eight graduate students, had spent at least one year in the United States, studying in nine different academic disciplines.¹⁰ Most of them know of or use the major overseas Chinese social networking websites. I invited them to read the online posts, discuss them, and occasionally engage in debate about these posts. I also observed and participated in their social activities, and interviewed with them about their personal experience of migration and adaptation to American life. The perspectives that these students provided were invaluable, complementing the information collected from the online writings and posts.

Who Is a "North American Despicable Man?"

The epithet NAWSN was adapted from the internet slang word "*weisuonan*" or "WSN" in short. "WSN" has a wide range of meanings in Chinese context; its

9. I became a registered member of websites such as MITBBS and huaren.us in 2008. I read these websites on a daily basis and actively participated in some of the online discussions and interactions.

10. The students came from a variety of academic fields, including economics, business administration, accounting, art history, computer science, urban studies, transportation, architecture, and sociology.

meaning varies from a man with an indecent appearance to a man with (often sexually) improper behavior that causes repugnant feelings in others. However, it is not an actual, static identity attached to a particular man. Instead, WSN operates on men in a way very much like the “fag” discourse in the United States. C. J. Pascoe argues that adolescent American boys use the word “fag” not just to express homophobia. Instead, it is a slur that is associated more with masculinity than with sexuality. Becoming a “fag” means “failing at the masculine tasks of competence, prowess and strength or in any way revealing . . . weakness or femininity” (Pascoe 2005, 330). Thus, any man can temporarily become a fag in a given social context. Similarly, any Chinese man can become a WSN, depending on the context. WSN’s position, just like a “fag’s” position, is “an ‘abject’ position” (Pascoe 2005, 333) that no Chinese man wants to be associated with. In addition, by engaging in “WSN” talk online and in real life, men police their own behaviors to avoid being viewed as not masculine.

NAWSN literally means “WSN in North America.” Just like WSN, it is an abject position that serves as a disciplinary mechanism in the making of Chinese diasporic masculinities. However, while WSN can be applied to all men, NAWSN does not apply to men of any other races or ethnicities in the United States, but only Chinese men; neither can it be applied to Chinese men with a low educational level. Instead, it is popularly associated with well-educated Chinese men who come to the United States via postgraduate education, while Chinese undergraduate men in the United States have barely been portrayed in the same derogatory way on the internet. Interestingly, no similar slurs are known for Chinese overseas postgraduates in other countries. So what exactly about the United States turns a male *laoliu* “despicable”? I argue that the term has to be understood against the changing landscape of Chinese overseas education and the shifting social value associated with well-educated Chinese immigrant men due to China’s ascendancy as a global superpower.

The profile of Chinese overseas students has changed dramatically in the last few decades. During the high socialist period, studying abroad was restricted to a very small group of people sponsored by the state; self-financed overseas education was not allowed. The Chinese government set strict rules to regulate overseas students and stipulated that those who studied abroad would be punished if they did not return to China after the due term. In the 1980s, the Chinese government gradually relaxed its control over studying abroad, giving rise to a surge of overseas students. The United States became the most desired destination country, attracting the largest number of Chinese students. Since most Chinese people hardly had enough money to support themselves while studying abroad at that time, students had to receive academic scholarships from foreign universities. The earlier generations of overseas Chinese students

were predominantly men studying in STEM fields where scholarships were more abundant and the job market was stronger than in other disciplines.¹¹

These men's immigration experiences were often characterized by years of hard work and fierce competition in school. Since overseas scholarships were extremely limited, an undergraduate degree from a top Chinese university is a de facto requirement for entry into a US PhD program. However, the most prestigious Chinese universities are even more selective than the most exclusive US institutions. Thus, young Chinese men have to work extremely hard to compete for spots in the top Chinese universities, paving their way for studying abroad.¹² In China, these men are considered the best of their generation. Excellent academic performance, especially in the disciplines that are widely considered "men's fields" in China, such as mathematics and engineering, is an important source of masculine pride so much so that journalists have reported that in senior high school, boys who choose to study humanities (*wen ke* 文科) instead of science (*li ke* 理科) for their college entrance examinations are often treated with contempt. For young men with non-elite backgrounds, excellence academic performance in sciences could be their only source of pride. One post by a self-identified male postgraduate recalled: "In junior high school, we were not attractive to girls because we didn't have any money to buy good clothes. But when we worked out a few extremely difficult math questions, when girls looked at us with admiration, we felt proud . . . Thus, we thought that good academic performance was the way to be a man."¹³

Up until the early 2000s, Chinese men who made it to the United States were viewed with awe and admiration in their motherland. Due to the economic gap between China and the United States, these men generally lived materially more advanced lives than most Chinese people at that time. Those who went back to China after graduation, often referred to as *haigui* 海歸/海龜 or "sea turtles," were well respected as social elites.¹⁴ Success stories of such sea turtle

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11. The gender imbalance of international Chinese students in the United States was changed only very recently, largely due to the growth of Chinese overseas undergraduates, many of them young women.
 12. In China, around ten million high school finishers take the national college entrance exam every year, but only three thousand are admitted into the two most prestigious schools, Peking University and Tsinghua University, which are thus more selective than the most exclusive US institutions. In fact, the majority of MIT undergraduates would not have had standardized test scores high enough to be admitted into the undergraduate programs of these two universities.
 13. The post was retrieved on October 22, 2014, from http://www.mitbbs.com/article_t/Oregon/31213689.html.
 14. In Chinese, overseas returnees are referred to as *haigui*. *Hai* means overseas, while *gui* means returnees, meaning people who have returned to mainland China after studying for years in foreign universities. The Chinese pronunciation of the English word "sea turtle" is the same as "overseas returnees," thus "sea turtle" is a homophonic term that has been used in the local slang to refer to overseas returnees. Sea

entrepreneurs as Zhang Chaoyang and Li Yanhong greatly contributed to the reputation of overseas education as an important pathway to success, fame, wealth, and for young Chinese men, masculine pride.¹⁵

However, the profile of Chinese overseas students changed radically after the 2000s. Chinese economic development has result in an expanding class of rich people who have enough economic resources to send their children to study abroad. The growth of Chinese undergraduates in the United States has been phenomenal, nearly 900 percent over the last decade. These young people are referred to as *xiaoliu* among overseas Chinese, but some of them are also known as *fu'erdai* 富二代, or the rich second generation, in China.¹⁶ *Fu'erdai* receive generous amounts of money, assets, and privilege from their well-off parents and often have powerful political connections. Numerous American mainstream media have reported the luxury lifestyle of *fu'erdai* in the United States and how these Chinese international students have brought important revenue for a cash-strapped higher education economy.

China's rise in the global economy and the influx of *xiaoliu* into the United States changed the playing field of overseas education on at least two fronts: first, as the economic gap between China and the United States is shrinking, the United States is losing its attraction for many Chinese students as an ideal permanent residence place. As David Zweig et al (2008; cf. Louie 2013) have sensitively observed, there has been a shift from "brain drain" to "brain circulation," with more and more overseas-educated Chinese students choosing to return to China after graduation. According to the China Daily's report, the number of Chinese returnees in 2013 alone reached 353,500, nearly 30 times the number of

turtle is also used as a metaphor of overseas returnees because it is said that sea turtles travel great distances overseas.

15. Zhang Chaoyang 張朝陽 (b. 1964), also Charles Zhang, is a Chinese businessman, investor and the founder, chairman and current CEO of Sohu Inc. Sohu Inc is listed to trade on NASDAQ and now has around 14,200 employees worldwide. Zhang is regarded as one of China's internet pioneers and was named by *Forbes Magazine* as one of the richest men in China in 2010. Li Yanhong 李彥宏 (b. 1968), also Robin Li, is a Chinese internet entrepreneur. He co-founded the Chinese search engine Baidu 百度 and is ranked as the second richest man in mainland China (after Jack Ma 馬雲, b. 1964) with a net worth of US\$12.231 billion as of December 2013. The Hurun Report Global Rich List 2014 ranked him as the 119th richest man in the world.
16. Besides *fu'erdai*, there are also other social categories that refer to specific groups within this generation of young overseas students with wealthy family background and powerful political connections, for example, *guan'erdai* 官二代, meaning "government official second generation"; *xing'erdai* 星二代, meaning "super-star second generation," referring to the children of the super stars or celebrities in the booming entertainment industry; or *hong'erdai*, children whose families have strong roots in the Communist Party.

returnees seen at the beginning of the century (Zhang 2014).¹⁷ It is believed that China may offer more money, business opportunities, and government support to these “sea turtles.” The Chinese government, for example, launched China’s National Talent Development Plan in 2010 to address its needs for well-educated talent to help maintain the Chinese economic growth engine, aiming to increase its talent pool to 180 million people by 2020 (Miao 2016).

Second, a foreign degree is losing value in China’s domestic job market. Even worse, it can be a disadvantage. A survey by Zhaopin.com in 2012 found that 70 percent of employers in China would give no hiring preference to overseas-educated applicants;¹⁸ nearly 10 percent said they would prefer not to hire them (Fischer 2014). Returning students often find that they lack the connections needed to land a job. This can be devastating for non-elite men because in today’s China, a wealthy father can be more useful than a US doctorate degree in terms of securing a young person’s future prosperity, which has been summarized by a phrase, “*pindie shidai*” 拼爹時代 or “the era of fathers’ privilege competition.” With these radical changes, *laoliu* suddenly find that they are no longer the admirable “sea turtles”; instead, they have become “seaweed” (in Chinese, *haidai* 海帶/海待, meaning returnees waiting for employment).¹⁹ In my interviews with the Chinese graduate students in the United States, all of them expressed anxiety and a sense of uncertainty about the job market in China. Despite the Chinese government’s great effort to attract the overseas educated to return to China, these students are aware of the fact that many returnees fare poorly in the local labor market. A male graduate student described his feelings about the uncertainty of future employment as “fearful,” and that he “lost sleep at night about it.”

17. This information was retrieved on October 22, 2014, from http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/2014-03/30/content_17390667.htm.

18. A report of this survey can be found at *Beijing Morning Newspaper*, August 7, 2012, accessed on April 30, 2017, http://news.xinhuanet.com/edu/2012-08/07/c_123543216.htm.

19. There have been a series of neologisms originating from the overseas migration of Chinese students, including *hai'ou* 海鷗 (seagull), the overseas-educated who travel between China and foreign countries frequently; *haicao* 海草 (sea grass), overseas returnees who have great difficulties to find good jobs in China because of their academic or training backgrounds; *haixian* 海鮮 (sea food), freshly graduated overseas-educated people who land on important and decent jobs; *haixing* 海星 (star fish), the overseas-educated who are as outstanding as stars; *haizao* 海藻 (sargassum), the overseas-educated who keep looking for jobs but cannot find one; *haishen* 海參 (sea cucumber), the returnees (overseas-educated students) who do not have any overseas working experience; *haipao* 海泡 (sea foam), overseas students who have completed or are about to complete their studies but continue to live abroad, feeling uncertain about returning to China; *haigen* 海根 (the root of sea plants), overseas Chinese who have permanently moved to live in China; and *haipai* 海派, meaning expatriates sent by the Chinese government.

The Despicable North American Men

The discourse of NAWSN emerged exactly when these radical changes were taking place, and when *laoliu* began experiencing the loss of their social privileges and elite statuses. The insults against male *laoliu* as NAWSN focus on three overgeneralized characterizations: asexual appearance, thrifty lifestyle, and “losing” Chinese women to non-Chinese men.

Asexual appearance

Mainstream American media have presented Asian American male bodies with an “abandonment of ‘authentic masculinity’” (Park 2015, 371). While Asian American female bodies have been viewed with awe and desire in mainstream American society, Asian American men are categorized as socially “undesirable” (Fong-Torres 1995). In film and television, Asian American men are conspicuously absent or relegated to very limited and stereotypical roles. While African American and Latinos young men are stereotyped as “hypermasculine” thugs or gangsters, Asian American men are often portrayed as smart but evil, intelligent but asexual, and even effeminate. One recent example that illustrates this point can be found in the popular Hollywood movie *Hangover Part II* which represents the Asian American male character, Mr. Chow, as effeminate and asexual. One critic notes: “His naked man-handle is mistaken for a Shiitake mushroom” (Yang 2011, cited from Park 2013, 13). Even Jeremy Lin, the sensational Asian American NBA star was made fun of as lacking masculinity.²⁰ Alexander Lu and Y. Joel Wong’s research point out that “given media portrayals as short, small-penised, hairless-bodied wimps (Wilson et al. 2009) and lacking Euro-centric aesthetics (Fong-Torres 1995), Asian American men receive minimal positive body imagery” (2013, 348).

Numerous studies have pointed out that trendy hairstyles, fashionable outfits, muscular bodies, sports and physical prowess, important markers of the Anglo-Celtic construction of masculinity, do not necessarily have the same significance for diasporic Chinese men (Chen 1999; Chow 2007). However, many online posts within overseas Chinese social networking websites resonate with the mainstream white culture’s standards of masculinity, and attack male *laoliu* as asexual, physically unattractive, and effeminate. For example, a self-identified Chinese overseas woman complained in her post: “[male *laoliu*], please do not forget to take a bath every day! Please do not pretend that you don’t know your hair is filthy. Your bad body odor makes me puke, and your foul breath makes me want to kill myself . . . I am not interested in effeminate men like the Chinese

20. Some media reports attribute his quick rise and success to the “Confucian work ethic” of East Asia, saying that Lin’s culture makes him “a better passer and teammate” (Park 2015).

who are tiny and slim, no muscles at all." This accusation has been echoed by many similar online posts and some students that I interviewed.²¹ A few female students told me that in their list of men that are physically attractive, white men are at the top, or popularly held belief places them at the top, followed by African American men, with Asian men at the bottom; however, they admit that they would consider Chinese men for marriage purposes due to cultural similarity and the assumption that Chinese men are "family oriented" (*gu jia* 顧家).

Thrifty lifestyle

Male *laoliu's* thrifty lifestyle is also under attack in NAWSN discourse. For example, one online post argues that a "typical NAWSN" can be identified by ten money-saving behaviors.²² These behaviors include changing the engine oil for his car by himself; searching for deals and coupons before making any purchase; regularly searching cheap flight, hotel, and car rental deals; searching cheap goods on Craigslist; jailbreaking and repairing iPhones and iPads; using coupons in shopping; shopping for checking account and credit account bonuses; calling phone service companies to bargain small fees; scrounging around for free meals, especially from student fellowships in Chinese churches; fixing computers, reinstalling operating systems, cleaning computer viruses, spending huge amounts of time surfing online (at least three hours a day), watching pirated movies on Chinese websites; and sharing a family phone service plan with Chinese strangers in order to save monthly expenses.

These insulting posts fails to take into consideration the disadvantaged socio-economic status of young Chinese graduates in the United States. Since their families are too poor to financially support them and because, as student visa holders, they are not allowed to work off campus, they rely on meager university scholarships for a living and do whatever they can to save money. Some of them even need to send remittances to their financially stressed parents in China. Even after they graduate and find jobs, many choose to continue to live a thrifty life, because as new immigrants, they face financial uncertainty and have to save for emergencies. These poverty- and uncertainty-driven behaviors were valued in socialist China when poor people were ideologically recognized as heroes, but not in the present time when "Chinese masculinity is increasingly being defined in terms of money, bearing remarkable similarities with the discourse of 'hegemonic masculinity' in the West" (Song and Hird 2014, 12). This

21. When I asked Chinese students in the United States to describe the images that popped into their minds when they heard the word NAWSN, a few of them told me that they thought about Chinese male graduate students, majoring in science and engineering (*ligong ke* 理工科), short, thin, wearing thick glasses, and having oily hair.

22. The post was retrieved on October 22, 2014, from http://www.mitbbs.com/article_t/Detective/120733.html.

new standard of masculinity in contemporary China has obviously taken root in the overseas Chinese online community, especially after a large number of “rich second generation” students have flocked to the United States. The striking class differences, manifested as different consumption power between *laoliu* and *xiaoliu*, can be found on American campuses nationwide.²³ When consumerism symbolizes masculinity, the male *laoliu*'s thrifty lifestyle is ridiculed as despicable and not manly.

Some students were alert to the social stratification and severe polarization between the rich and the poor that the content of these posts indicated. One male graduate student quickly pointed out that the accusations aimed at NAWSN were “purely about them being economically poor.” Another male graduate student told me that a college friend of his, a male graduate student in Australia, earned most of his income by writing final papers and theses for *fu'er dai* undergraduate students in the United States. He commented, “I don't know who is more despicable, me, my friend, or those rich clients?”

Other students, however, disagreed. A group of female undergraduate students who came from wealthy families in China did not think that the attack against NAWSN was necessarily about them being poor. “Rich men can also be despicable. It is even worse when WSN is rich,” they said. They cited the behaviors of some rich male friends of theirs as despicable, such as binge drinking, drunk driving, extravagant spending, and misogynistic attitudes toward women. They also expressed respect for self-made young men from lower-class backgrounds. However, they also said that the social status of a man's family mattered, especially in regards to issues of romance and marriage. They believe that a good marriage had to be a suitable match of the social and economic statuses of both families, what the Chinese call *mendang hudui* 門當戶對, meaning literally that “the doors and families match equally.”²⁴

23. One example is car purchases. While *laoliu* may have to save for years to purchase a new car, *xiaoliu* flock to BMWs, Maseratis, Lamborghinis, Bentleys, and other high-end auto companies to make purchases as soon as they land in the US. The phenomenon has been found in American campuses nationwide. However, it is also worth noting that *xiaoliu* should not be understood as a homogeneous group whose members come from similarly privileged familial background. The amount of wealth, the social status, and the political connections that individual *xiaoliu* have can vary widely.

24. One of the female undergraduates referred to her good friend, a young woman also from an exceptionally wealthy family in China, who divorced her husband, a young man from a lower class whom she met in college, after a marriage of only eight months. Citing this divorce as an example, she said, “Marriage is about family. My friend's ex-husband was uncomfortable with her buying luxury brand clothes and wearing them when she went out. He didn't understand that she was representing the wealth of her family; her outfit and consumption were one of the signs that important investors and clients were looking for before they would believe that their business was doing very well. She had to consume for the sake of the family business, even if

This belief is not only held by rich undergraduates; in fact, most students I met agreed that a marriage between a "phoenix man" (*fenghuang nan* 鳳凰男), a man who has grown up in the countryside, made his way through school, landed a good job in the city and is expected to change the fate of his family, and a "peacock girl" (*kongque nü* 孔雀女), one who has been born and bred in a relatively wealthy urban family, will not work, because it is assumed that the lifestyles and values of the two parties will be incompatible. Most students, when asked about whether they would consider dating or marrying people with a rural origin, firmly stated that they would not consider it, or they would say that they were taught by their parents to think negatively about such a choice.

"Losing" Chinese women to non-Chinese men

And lastly, it is said that male *laoliu* are to be blamed for "losing" Chinese women to non-Chinese men. Although this sounds like what Song and Hird (2014) have identified as the "Chinese men do not deserve Chinese women" discourse in contemporary China, the argument about NAWSN is different. In China, it is believed that Chinese men are effeminate because they were castrated by the Party's Communist gender ideology and have an "inferiority complex" when facing hegemonic Western culture. But in the case of NAWSN, the online posts argue that male *laoliu* fail to "keep" Chinese women because their education is problematic. They complain that Chinese men spend too much time on school work, and thus lack social skills around women. Additionally, because these men firmly believe that further education will pay them back with everything they want, including women, they often overrate their educational achievements, and treat women (viewed as less intelligent and competitive in school) with no respect. The students I have met generally share such opinions.

But most complaints point to the mismatch of male *laoliu*'s advanced education and their now endangered economic and career prosperity. One post explains why some women today are not attracted to Chinese male *laoliu*: "The young women are choosing good spouse[s], not PhD candidates. Would girls fall for you simply because of your outstanding academic record? Can you earn lots of money, raise your family and make your wife happy only because your academic performance is outstanding? Yes, you have excellent grades, you are well educated, and you are intelligent, but the person who will like you the most will be your employers—they are happy to find you, the one who is willing to do the most difficult and toilsome jobs that Americans would not do, with low pay, and yet you are still proud of yourself!"²⁵

the family was losing money . . . He was not brought up in this kind of family, and he simply doesn't fit in!"

25. This post was retrieved on October 22, 2014, from <http://www.vjianke.com/Y8QLM>. clip.

Comments like this suggest the changing Chinese view about well-educated immigrant men in the United States. If in the past, young men with non-elite backgrounds could rely on their outstanding academic performance to claim their masculinity and to climb up the social ladder, today such pathways are severely challenged when China's rise has brought about a growing middle class and new rich that have the resources and connections to send their children to privileged US schools for education. While international education remains valuable, especially to wealthy families in China, because it helps transfer monetary capital of these families into social capital (Xiang and Shen 2009), it can no longer guarantee the pathway to higher social positions and a better life for men from humble origins. In Biao Xiang and Wei Shen's words, such changes in the overseas education indicates that China has moved from a time of "elite circulation" (members of lower strata move up to elite positions based on technological know-how) to a time of "elite reproduction" (the same group transforms themselves from one type of elite to another based on the manipulation of various types of capital that they possess) (2009, 521). John Osburg observed in China that a new form of masculinity, what he calls "elite masculinity," embodied by the experiences and images of the new rich male entrepreneurs through their extravagant consumptions and entertainment life, "is gradually becoming institutionalized and codified by state and the market alike, and in this process, it is becoming the normative masculinity around which all urban men's practices are oriented and measured" (Osburg 2013, 10). The emergence of NAWSN discourse shows that "elite masculinity" is not just institutionalized in contemporary China, but it has been translated into the Chinese online community in the United States as a powerful notion of masculinity.

Wai F nü: The "revenge" of the NAWSN

The notion that male *laoliu* "lose" Chinese women to non-Chinese men can be especially infuriating to these men, since they are reported to have great difficulties in finding spouses in the United States. Tseen-Ling Khoo (2003) points out that in the United States, while Asian women may be viewed as victims of oriental patriarchal culture and thus are less problematic than men within Western society's discourse, Asian men are generally represented as the Other, desiring and commodifying white women, and aggressively competing for social space. The feminization and marginalization of Asian men in US mainstream culture leaves Chinese immigrant men much fewer options than Chinese women in terms of spouse selection. Knowing that their chances of having a date or finding the spouse in the United States can be very low, some male graduate students rely on their families to engage in matchmaking to meet young women, even before they migrate to the United States.

Instead of exploring how racial taboos and gender politics in mainstream US society set up obstacles for Chinese men seeking mates, the NAWSN discourse places all the blame on individual male *laoliu*, even calling them the new "sick men of East Asia." Male *laoliu* are thus doubly emasculated, found to be insufficiently masculine when measured against both Western men and the rich second generation of Chinese immigrants. Some male *laoliu* try to fight back by engaging in online attacks of Chinese women who are in cross-racial relationships, calling the latter *wai F nü* 外 F 女 (WFN in short). The Chinese word *wai* means "foreign (man)," "F" is the acronym for the English word "fuck," and *nü* means Chinese woman in this context. It is a misogynist phrase that maliciously reduces Chinese women to sex objects, and their romantic relationships to pure sex. In online interactions, the men verbally attack WFN as "gold diggers" and "traitors." Yet the same group of men views Chinese men marrying non-Chinese women, especially white women, as unproblematic, even better, supermasculine. Scholars have observed the intimate relationship between Chinese masculinity and nationalism, the cultural assumption that a "good" man brings honor to the motherland on the international stage (Song and Hird 2014, 12). Chinese immigrant men who marry white women are considered masculine because the white woman "has represented a figure of 'modernity,' 'beauty,' and most of all a trope of 'alterity' in the Chinese public culture" (Lu 2000, 42) and such a marriage is perceived to be a Chinese man's success in domesticating a Western woman, proof of heroic Chinese masculinity. However, this notion of Chinese masculinity sadly confirms and perpetuates the cultural view of women as commodities that can be earned and lost, and thus "affirms the reification of women and their circumscribed 'femininity' as icons of national values, or idealized custodians of tradition" (Khoo 2003, 123). It also perpetuates the stereotypical images of Chinese men as patriarchal oppressors and thus despicable.

Conclusion

This chapter examines the emergence and popularity of the so-called "North American Despicable Man" (NAWSN) discourse within the overseas Chinese online community and the cultural assumptions that may be grounded in new media representations of well-educated Chinese immigrant men in the United States. I argue that the NAWSN discourse should not be dismissed as the trolling of some mischievous net users, as ephemeral internet culture, or as the irresponsible online venting of "angry Chinese youth." Instead, it should be understood against the rapidly changing landscape of the overseas education of China's youth, within the dominant ideological field (Park 2014, 383) which includes the intersection of unique gender and racial politics in the United States and in relation to China's ascendancy as the world's second superpower, bringing

about enormous wealth to a small group of privileged people but also causing and increasing gap between “the haves” and the “have-nots.”

This research finds that the NAWSN discourse depicts well-educated, recent, Chinese male immigrants with non-elite backgrounds as physically unattractive, asexual, stingy, socially awkward, and lacking people skills; he is the Other that is rejected by not only mainstream American society, but also is not desired within the overseas Chinese community. Years of hard work and advanced overseas education that once led to success, wealth, higher social status, and masculinity no longer guarantee a promising future for men from humble origins. These men are further blamed for “losing” Chinese women to Western men, and thus bringing shame to their motherland. When “elite masculinity” has become the ideal and ideological standard in both China and the United States, well-educated non-elite men are doubly emasculated.

Following Song and Hird’s (2014) argument that “notions and practices of masculinities” are constituted through “assemblages,” I argue that in order to understand the social construct of Chinese diasporic masculinity, we not only need to examine the racialized gender politics that feminize Asian men in their host countries, but we must also study the transnational flow of values and ideas such as “elite masculinity” and how notions and practices of masculinity are negotiated and contested within the overseas Chinese community in the wake of the rise of China.

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