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# The Real Chinese Man: Review Essay

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1. Kam Louie. *Theorising Chinese Masculinity: Society and Gender in China*. Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 2002. viii + 239 pp.
2. Kam Louie and Morris Low, eds. *Asian Masculinities: The Meaning and Practice of Manhood in China and Japan*. London: Routledge Curzon, 2003. xi + 247 pp.

Considerable research has appeared in the last couple of decades on the history and culture of Chinese women. Little research has appeared on Chinese men, and virtually nothing on masculinity.[1] A decade ago this might have seemed reasonable on the assumption that most discussions of China were in fact about Chinese men, explicitly or implicitly. However, feminist research has

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1 Though see Susan Brownell and Jeffrey Wasserstrom, eds., *Chinese Femininities, Chinese Masculinities; A Reader* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); W.J.F. Jenner, "A Knife in My Ribs for a Mate: Reflections on Another Chinese Tradition," Australian National University, Canberra, 1993; Xueping Zong, *Masculinity Besieged? Issues of Modernity and Male Subjectivity in Chinese Literature of the Late Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000). A few studies have examined elite homosociality, which will be discussed further below.


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problematized earlier assumptions about gender. We now need to ask, what is a Chinese man? What makes him *fully* a man? What, thus, is the essence of masculinity?

Essentially, Louie [雷金慶] argues that masculinity in China has been conceptualized in terms of *wen* and *wu* (文武). The ideal male should possess both the martial attributes of the hero (英雄, 好漢) and also the "softer, cerebral" masculinity of the scholar (文人, 才子). *Wu* attributes included physical strength, bravery, and loyalty, while *wen* attributes included literacy, culture, and sensitivity. *Wen* was more highly valued, but to have *either* attribute marked a man as acceptably masculine. Only a few exceptional males could claim both attributes.

Louie points to the *wen-wu* paradigm as native to China; perhaps it is applicable to other cultures but not to the same degree. He rejects the more common *yin-yang* (陰陽) paradigm on the grounds that both of these attributes are applicable to both men and women. Women (and foreigners), on the other hand, are never *wen* or *wu*; these are uniquely male attributes, and thus we can look here for the essence of Chinese masculinity. Louie grants that a few women have been martial and perhaps more than a few were talented scholars and writers, but femininity had no room for *wen-wu* and *in public, as women*, women were not conceived in these terms. Hua Mulan, for example, masqueraded as a man, so in a sense she was never a woman warrior; and when she took off her soldier's disguise, she became more feminine than ever.

Louie's monograph is a pioneering exploration of Chinese masculinity. Its argument about the centrality of *wen-wu* is convincing up to a point, and it offers particularly strong readings of a number of classic texts and folktales. Throughout, Louie offers thought-provoking comments on how race, class, nationalism, and historical change affect ideas about gender. However, the book neglects some critical historical changes and tends to reduce pre-modern beliefs into a single, coherent system. Louie's treatment of modern forms of

masculinity is confusing: they are different in some ways but similar in others, but he never explores the precise nature of such continuities and discontinuities. The coverage of Overseas Chinese illuminates a useful topic, often neglected in studies of China, but it also acts to reify "China." In a word, the book suffers from over-generalization.

Some of these problems are no doubt inevitable, given the pioneering nature of the research. Other problems stem from a scattered approach to sources and the remarkably different foci of the chapters, ranging from broad overviews of folk literature to close readings of individual novels. This results in an argument-through-impression. Louie notes that he is interested in images of masculinity, not its actual practice. But why these images and not others? A more systematic approach might have been to explore the *discourse* of masculinity, including morality texts (Confucian and Buddhist in particular) and educational texts (which after all were geared toward boys), as well as literal images of exemplary males in art and iconography.

Louie thus does not present a systematic argument. Rather, the chapters, several of which were previously published independently, offer reflections on the *wen-wu* theme in different contexts, and unfortunately, this leads to a certain amount of repetition. I would say the methodology is a mix of close textual readings and broader generalizations about particular texts, historical observation, and perhaps generally "cultural studies." One problem with this methodology is that Louie claims his findings are generally true for China, but we do not know if a look at different sources would yield different results. There is extensive discussion of *Water Margin* (*Shuihujuan* 水滸傳) but not *Story of the Stone* (*Hongloumeng* 紅樓夢); of Guangong (Guanyu 關羽) but not the Jade Emperor (玉皇大帝); of Hong Kong films but not Chinese films.

We are left with an argument that claims to be about an apparently single nature of Chinese masculinity, which is by implication different from the masculinity of other cultures. But the diverse sources offer different images of

ideal male behavior, suggesting that Louie would have done better to speak of masculinities in the plural. At the same time, the strengths of this book are many. The chapters effectively confirm Louie's basic argument. Yet if we agree on the centrality of *wen-wu*, Louie does not work out exactly what *wen-wu* signifies in terms of the past, present, and future of Chinese masculinity. Below, I briefly discuss the individual chapters and then return to some theoretical considerations.

Louie's chapter on Guan Yu offers a psychologically sophisticated, complex, and convincing reading of Guan Yu himself (that is, as a fictional character). Guan Yu is arguably the most ubiquitous and powerful of the gods; his character appealed to various segments of Chinese, from imperial rulers to ordinary folk to Overseas Chinese today. He personifies several key masculine traits: self-control, loyalty, brotherhood, and righteousness (義). These are linked in ways Louie could have done more to point out, which might support the notion of a singular masculinity. Louie does usefully demonstrate that as a model of the highest form of masculinity Guan Yu also represented *wen*—he is often pictured with books. Louie also explores sexual issues surrounding Guan Yu. Several scenes in *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (三國演義) can be seen as sexual, and Guan Yu's famous self-control clearly comes at a price. On the one hand, the hero's resistance to women's temptations is a form of self-repression that the novel shows in political terms (usurpation of women = usurpation of power); on the other, his misogyny is a reaction to threats to his self-control.

Erotic attachment between the heroes is only implied in the novel but sometimes made explicit in folk tales. Louie argues that if we put aside modern prejudice, we can better appreciate that "love between men, whether it be erotic or otherwise, is the only noble emotion. Heterosexuality [which modern readers take for granted] is at best a distraction" (35). Whether or not modern readers will (or traditional literati readers did) accept that "sharing a bed" (同榻) let alone more metaphorical references like "peach blossoms" (桃花) necessarily

imply sexual relations, this remains a possible reading. In any case, as Louie notes, the homosocial masculine ideal is also hierarchical, decorous in terms of righteousness, and always self-controlled.

The *wen* counterpart of the *wu* Guan Yu is Confucius. As Guan Yu possesses secondary *wen* characteristics, so Confucius praised archery and other *wu* pursuits, but Confucius was primarily an archetype of *wen* characteristics. Unfortunately, Louie says little about the exact nature of these characteristics. He emphasizes, again, the homosocial context and Confucius's valuation of ethical norms above worldly success. But although Louie mostly discussed Guan Yu in terms of the Chinese tradition, he mostly discusses Confucius's role in contemporary society.[2] He thus ignores the discontinuities that mark the Confucian tradition and, even more misleadingly, implies that the *wen-wu* contrast parallels a breach between modernity and tradition. The chapter is nonetheless interesting in itself. As Louie says, the Maoist period demystified Confucius (I would argue this occurred earlier in the late Qing) and attacked the entire *wen* ideal (this probably occurred earlier in a revaluation of military ideals as well).

The main lacuna in Louie's argument lies in his argument that the revival of Confucius in the wake of the Cultural Revolution marked a renewed claim to masculinity on the part of intellectuals. Readers need to know how. In what ways do *wen* ideals represent masculinity in a transformed, post-Mao social and cultural context? Confusingly, Louie argues that since Confucius is now used as an image of the capitalist entrepreneur, masculine identity is no longer associated with the traditional *wen-wu* paradigm—yet at the same time, somehow, *wen* masculinity "can now be measured by the acquisition and

2 Louie builds here on his earlier work, *Critiques of Confucius in Contemporary China* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1980) and *Inheriting Tradition: Interpretations of the Classical Philosophers in Communist China, 1949-1966* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1986).

flaunting of trappings such as the size and power of mobile phones and laptop computers...the image of young executives" (43). Since, as Louie admits, this is an image that women may also seek, we may ask how it exemplifies masculinity. Arguably, modern Chinese women are becoming masculine, but this is an interesting point Louie does not explicitly broach. It is probably true, nonetheless, that the broader "Asian" revival of Confucius as a symbol of progress has encouraged Chinese to see making money as manly. The Maoist emphasis on physical strength and serving the people has become irrelevant to Chinese masculinity (at least, one must caution, in regard to the new urban middle-class Louie here focuses on).

Louie discusses the traditional *wen* ideal less in terms of Confucius, then, and more in the ideal scholars of fiction and drama. In countless "scholar-beauty" (才子佳人) stories, finally, masculinity is related to heterosexuality. Unlike their *wu* counterpart, the ideal *wen* male could have women as long as they did not interfere with important things like taking the exams. Here, Louie treats the Yuan dynasty as a turning point. The powerful magnates (士大夫) of the Tang dynasty lost most of their power, becoming the literati (文人) of later generations. But, strangely, Louie argues that fundamental constructions of masculinity were little changed.[3] At any rate, in the Tang "Story of Yingying," Scholar Zhang and Yingying have a premarital affair; both then marry other people. In Louie's reading, Zhang proved his masculinity both by his conquest of Yingying and by his later rejection of her; Tang period (male) readers would

3 Louie would have done well to consult Patrica Ebrey's "Women, Marriage, and the Family in Chinese History," pp. 197-233 in Paul S. Ropp, ed., *Heritage of China: Contemporary Perspectives on Chinese Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990). Ebrey does not explore masculinity, but her demonstration of fundamental changes in women's status by the Song dynasty suggests that insofar as masculinity and femininity are defined relative to one another, masculine ideals must also have changed. It is possible that what Louie has essentialized as a *wen* male ideal was in fact forged only in the Song, was constituitive of class rather than contingent, and marked a discourse ranging from abstract ethical philosophy to bodily practices.

have admired his self-control in rejecting Yingying to marry another, even though he had lost his self-control by having premarital relations with her. But Louie does not ask how these themes meshed: how exactly do the standards of self-control (*wen* or *wu*?) and heterosexuality within a patriarchal discourse relate to one another?

We see the changes in Yuan culture by looking at the same story in the drama *The Story of the West Wing*, which chiefly differs from its source in having Zhang and Yingying marry. Louie convincingly suggests this represents less Confucian and more popular views of morality. The broader audience for drama would not have placed the same emphasis on self-control and the examination system as seen in the earlier version. At the same time, however, Louie emphasizes the continuity in the superiority of the *wen* masculine paragon over both the *wu* male and women. Leaping to contemporary China, Louie finds further continuity. Although *wen* males were thoroughly discredited during the Cultural Revolution, *wen* ideals have recovered. Louie reads the novels of Zhang Xianliang 張賢亮 as reaffirming the victory of the educated male over lesser males and over women. Yet it is not clear to me that the character of Zhang Yonglin, for example—in its combination of misogyny, impotence, and egotism—is meant to be fully admirable. As Louie himself points out, Zhang has been damaged. Yet if Zhang also represents the traditional superiority of culture over commerce, as Louie claims, this undercuts Louie's earlier description of a new businessmen's utilitarian *wen* masculinity. Louie thus seems to imply that there are now two distinct forms of *wen* masculinity, but this is not spelled out. More importantly, he does not consider whether an apparent continuity in masculine ideals in fact reflects real change: the *wen* ideal of contemporary Chinese men may reflect the demands of modernity (rational bureaucratic norms) rather than Confucian norms.

Louie next turns to the *wu* ideal in its working class form, the heroic "good guy" (好漢). The model here is not Guan Yu, who seems too upper-class, but

the heroes of *Water Margin*: brave, strong, and also good eaters and drinkers. Following C.T. Hsia, Louie notes that sex is the one area left where they can demonstrate their self-control.[4] Louie also suggests that their misogynistic sadism masks their sexual desires. Working class heroes can claim superiority over women but not over *wen* men. Turning to contemporary China, Louie observes a widespread feeling that China lacks such earthy heroes (男子漢). Louie himself fears this may be a self-fulfilling prophecy—an interesting idea that is not, however, pursued. In any case, he cites one response in the hypermasculinity of the "searching for roots" (尋根) literature movement. Writers like Jia Pingwa 賈平凹 glorified machismo in hunters and primitive tribesmen. Louie points out that critics who complain that such righteous men are "eunuchs" miss the point that traditional heroes display sexual self-control (as well as the sublimated homosexuality of brotherhood associations). But while the new hero's powers are real, he is still subservient to *wen* men, who can reassert their powers in post-Mao China. Contemporary fiction shows gender relations, Louie usefully suggests, changing more than class relations.

Another chapter deals with women's views of masculinity. For today "men are portrayed as objects of desire" (99). Desirable qualities include youthful innocence, sexual naiveté, tenderness, and exotica. Confusingly, Louie points out that these characteristics are associated more with the feminine than either *wen* or *wu*, but then proceeds to look for *wen-wu* masculinity anyway. In Ding Ling's 丁玲 1928 "Miss Sophia's Diary" the female voice finds Weidi too sensitive and immature. The Jia Baoyu ideal, in other words, did not survive into the twentieth century. However, if Sophia prefers Ling Jishi, in the end she rejects him as well. Wang Anyi's 王安憶 depiction of an extra-marital affair in "Brocade Valley" was still shocking in the China of the 1980s, but the point here is this woman author treated both *wen* males, husband and lover, as boring.

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4 C.T. Hsia, *The Classic Chinese Novel: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968).

One point Louie does well to emphasize is that these women writers were more interested in women's subjectivity than in men.

It would seem real men are never as good as women's ideals—or fantasies. Louie notes that with the rise of women to power, men can no longer assume their old roles. This seems to imply that if men are redundant, then masculinity, at least in the traditional *wen-wu* sense, disappears as well. Louie specifically suggests that women may be assuming the power to define gender, a power long monopolized by men.[5] Strangely, however, he still concludes that masculinity is in reasonably good shape. The traditional *wen* sensitivity and elegance may not have survived the imperialism, Darwinan struggles, and Maoism of the modern age, but its *wu* counterpart has found modern expression. (So are today's capitalists updated *wen*, *wu*, or a new hybrid?)

In terms of the new globalized world, then, Louie first looks at Lao She's 老舍 *The Two Mas*. This chapter highlights an attempt to create a new *wen* model in the wake of the damage to Chinese masculinity caused by imperialism. Set in the heart of that imperialism, London, the novel is usually interpreted as an attack on British racism. But it is also critical of China. The elder Ma, an old-style scholar, is contemptible: lazy, arrogant, self-deluded, even a thief. The younger Ma is better. Sentimental, patriotic, and impetuous, he embodies fairly traditional *wen* attributes. He is more masculine than Lao She's lower-class sailors, who are neither *wen* nor *wu*. Yet even the younger Ma is weak in comparison to the Western *women* that he and his father are interested in—and these are women of the lower middle class! I wonder whether Lao She is

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5 This chapter thus suffers from a perhaps inevitable imbalance. Women should certainly be heard on the subject of masculinity. Louie points out that before the twentieth century it was difficult to discern an independent woman's voice (although he might have made a greater effort from the seventeenth century), and thus this chapter concentrates on modern literature. But when Louie concludes that, "women [authors] manipulate their male characters in order to control them" (118), it sounds very odd without a corresponding view of men writing on women.

offering new visions of Chinese masculinity, as Louie suggests, or deliberately emasculated his characters in a kind of self-critique of the Chinese "national character" similar to Lu Xun's.[6]

The next chapter then turns overseas Chinese men. In Australia, at least, it appears that formal education is "the key criterion for *wen-wu* accomplishments," and "creating an acceptable *wen-wu* in the host country is tantamount to recovering a lost manhood" (134-35). Louie implies that marriage to non-Chinese may also be an element in claims to masculinity, at least for some Chinese immigrant men. Other Chinese men fear that foreign women are assertive and promiscuous. This section is based on anecdotes, and Louie himself seems to realize they illuminate neither reality nor images of masculinity. It seems logical that contemporary Overseas Chinese men have a stronger sense of their masculinity today than in previous generations (if only given the decline of overt racial prejudice in the West), at least if we are considering the educated minority. The masculinity of the "illegals" is not mentioned.

They could have provided a test for Louie's thesis. Presumably they would tend toward *wu*-style traits (brotherhood, righteousness, physical strength). Yet when Louie turns to contemporary *wu* phenomena, he emphasizes the internationalization of kung-fu (功夫) through martial-arts movies (武俠片). The Hong Kong film industry has influenced Hollywood, and directly and indirectly Chinese masculine ideals are thus influencing the world, Louie concludes. This assertion remains to be proved. The sly evil Chinaman of the old Hollywood "Fu Manchu" has not disappeared as completely as Louie seems to think, but it is no longer the dominant image.[7] Certainly, international

6 Lung-kee Sun [孫隆基], *The Chinese National Character: From Nationhood to Individuality* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2002).

7 Evil Chinese gang leaders still play a major role in American television and films at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Curiously, Louie casts Fu Manchu, as a Western

stereotypes of the Chinese were forever changed by Bruce Lee 李小龍. As Louie points out, Bruce Lee appeals to dispossesed males around the world: lower-class whites, African-Americans, New Zealand Maoris. His films displayed righteousness, loyalty, and resistance to racial repression. Pointing to Bruce Lee's hard body, romantic attachments, and the traditional *wu* distrust of women, Louie convincingly dismisses critics who find Bruce Lee insufficiently masculine on the grounds he is not shown covered by women like James Bond.[8] Less convincing is Louie's attempt to include Jackie Chan (成龍) in the pantheon of new *wu* models. On the one hand, Louie claims he demonstrates "another kind of masculinity" but on the other admits he dilutes the *wu* image and even represents Hong Kong's loss of power. Louie wants to use Jackie Chan's Hollywood success to argue for the internationalization of Chinese masculinity, but it seems to me difficult to argue that he is particularly masculine. Unlike Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan, paired with a Caucasian or Afro-American partner, represents no threat to Western audiences. A better example of a contemporary *wu* hero is Yun-fat Chow 周潤發, who displays both sex appeal and homosociality. Still, one wonders if Chow's Hollywood success represents the spread of Chinese masculine ideals or a more complex global circulation of masculine images—for example, the influence of the young Marlon Brando on Hong Kong cool, which is then reimported back to the West.

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construction, entirely outside of the *wen-wu* framework; however, he seems to me to have many *wen* characteristics. So does "Charlie Chan." Nonetheless, Louie is right to note: "Early Hollywood representations of Chinese masculinity were therefore a mixture of fear and loathing as well as a fascination with its imputed sexual perversity" (143).

8 Louie argues that the relative a-sexuality of modern film heroes reflects the traditional *wu* hero's attributes. However, Lung-kee Sun insists on a continuum from Charlie Chan to Bruce Lee. Lung-kee Sun, *The Chinese National Character*, pp. 226-227. Pushed in a Freudian direction, the question would be not whether modern Chinese film heroes represent Chinese masculinity but whether this was a mature, healthy masculinity. Of course, this raises questions of culture-specific standards of pathology and how to conduct cross-cultural research.

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In sum, Louie's study raises more questions than answers. Overall, the "*wen-wu*" paradigm works to define a field of masculinity. Even if one does not accept Louie's contention that women were entirely excluded from its scope, it serves as a dual marker of masculinity. It explains how masculinity differed according to class.[9] The *wen* ideal, which easily shades into the "feminine" or "decadent" to modern eyes, was linked to elite pursuits like scholarship and poetry. Here, Louie could have done more to explore the roots of *wen* masculinity, both in terms of patriarchalism and in terms of the anthropology of gender roles. The association of physical strength with masculinity is nearly universal. Presumably, the Chinese association of *wen* with power explains why it was conceived as masculine—uniquely masculine, according to Louie.

Yet Louie actually has little to say about relationship between power and masculinity. He thus misses the chance to frame the problem terms of a discourse of patriarchy and political order. The question of power could also illuminate his somewhat contradictory account of capitalist *wen*. This is to say that Chinese masculinity needs to be further "unpacked." Differentiating *wen* and *wu* is not enough. Louie leaves us with the impression that masculinity is defined everywhere the same and has scarcely changed over time. Thus we jump from Guan Yu and Confucius to Jet Li 李連杰 and the Emperor Kangxi 康熙 and back again. To be fair, Louie notes some differences over time, especially in the twentieth century, but two major problems remain. First, the premodern period remains largely undifferentiated.[10] Second, Louie never

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9 However, the problem of mapping cultural generalizations onto social reality offers an example of Louie's failure to work out precisely how the theory fits the data. On the one hand, he insists that both *wen* and *wu* could apply to ordinary men as well as elite men—in which case it actually does *not* have class implications. On the other, he acknowledges that the former tends to apply to elites and the latter to commoners.

10 As we have seen, Louie acknowledges a shift in the Yuan, but still emphasizes

makes clear whether he regards the changes of the twentieth century as fundamental or trivial. Louie thus offers suggestive comments on the Maoist period, but never tells us why the profound changes in images of Chinese masculinity were important or why, as he seems to believe in places, they proved so ephemeral.

Part of the problem may also lie in Louie's methodology. He deliberately focuses on cultural representations—ideas and symbols about masculinity as seen in folktales, religion, philosophy, and film—and not the "lived experience" or realities of being male in China. This is perfectly acceptable as far as it goes; it would not be fair to ask Louie to provide a genealogy when he wants to illuminate a field. But the price of a-historical (or trans-historical?) essentialism is high. The symbolism of masculinity changed dramatically over time, and it is especially this sense of real turning points that is lacking. The creation of the non-aristocratic, examination-defined "gentry" class during the Song dynasty, along with a renewed emphasis of Chinese *wen* versus barbarian *wu*, could support Louie's paradigm, but the question needs methodical investigation.

Conversely, the *wen-wu* field may be too limiting in a sense raised by Patricia Ebrey among others: masculinity must in practice be defined in terms of femininity and vice versa.[11] If *wen-wu* paradigmatically applies only to males, we must see it as an entity in a larger discursive system. In other words, while Louie discusses the relationship between *wen* and *wu*, what of the relationship between masculinity and the equivalent field of feminity? In fact, I was not

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"continuity." More historically-grounded but also more limited studies on homosociality in the late imperial period include Joseph P. McDermott's pioneering "Friendship and Its Friends in the Late Ming," pp. 67-96 in 《近世家族與政治比較歷史論文集》（台北：中央研究院近代史研究所，1992）; Susan Mann, "The Male Bond in Chinese History and Culture," and Norman Kutcher, "The Fifth Relationship: Dangerous Friendships in the Confucian Context," both in *American Historical Review* 105:5 (2002), pp. 1600-1614 and 1615-1629.

11 Patrica Ebrey, "Women, Marriage, and the Family."

convinced that women played no role in the *wen-wu* complex. Granted that women were supposed to stay out of masculine domains, there are too many stories (powerful cultural icons) of martial and cultured women to treat them all as sort of honorary men. These stories depend for their point not only on the de-feminization of such women (wearing men's clothing) but also on their real *wen* and *wu* capabilities, which are interesting precisely because we know they are in biological fact women. Their eventual return to a womanly lifestyle accentuates their earlier transgressive behavior as much as it confirms patriarchal values.

This is a rather personal book: Louie makes clear his subject-position as an Overseas Chinese male. He seems to worry that Chinese are adopting Western attitudes without a proper understanding of existing Chinese masculinity. And: "If those who denigrate Chinese male sexuality would only look at studies of the 'real men' in the West itself, they would see 'that beneath the macho posing and the bedroom performance, many [Western] men have unsure and conflicting feelings about their sexuality.'"[12] This is true, but it could also be added that Western feminisms (I use the plural deliberately) are in conflict and often uncertain as well. Louie's point is that an excessively macho attitude is unfortunate; but whether it is a product of cultural imperialism (American cigarette advertisements and the like) is another question. If Louie is arguing that Chinese men are unnecessarily self-critical (and Chinese women overly critical of men)—he is perhaps pointing to a universal condition of the zeitgeist.

A study of Chinese masculinity cannot avoid the conundrums of Orientalism. Louie notes that nineteenth-century Westerners feminized China, thus treating the Chinese male as effeminate compared with his racial Others.

12 P. 95; citing Andy Metcalf and Martin Humphries, eds., *The Sexuality of Men* (London: Pluto Press, 1985), p. 1. Indeed, the "crisis of masculinity" in the West has been a staple of the popular and scholarly media for at least thirty years now (since the beginning of the modern feminist movement).

The apparent asexuality of the Chinese hero played into this stereotype; we might add that the British disdain for the militarily-incompetent Chinese was based on Western notions of masculinity. Indeed, this is another point Louie could explore further. Given his interest in contemporary and Overseas Chinese constructions of masculinity, some discussion of self-orientalizing would have sharpened his arguments. As well, if Orientalism allowed the West to masculinize itself vis-à-vis China, does China today masculinize itself vis-à-vis its minority groups?[13]

Louie devotes considerable attention to sexuality; if the *wu* hero was required to sublimate his sexuality, the *wen* paragon was allowed women as long as he did not let them deter his studies and career. In both cases self-control was the key, as Louie convincingly shows. More difficult is the relationship between homosociality, which is undeniable, and homoeroticism. Louie carefully proposes that modern assumptions about sexuality mislead us, for "if we read the texts from a perspective where bisexuality is taken as the norm and where homo-eroticism is privileged over the hetero" (24), then the romantic affection and sexual intensity of male-male relations can be seen as inherent to traditional Chinese masculinity. Louie is here speaking specifically of the *wu* hero, but his comments seem to me to apply equally to the (bisexual) *wen* man as well. However, again, this raises issues that Louie draws back from exploring. What is the relationship between masculinity and a specifically gay tradition?[14] Can we speak of a gay masculinity? More broadly speaking, if *wen-wu* was essentially "a power tool to consolidate the interests of certain classes of people and to exclude others" (162), will it dissipate in the future or continue to

13 See Luisa Schein, *Minorities Rules: The Miao and the Feminine in China's Cultural Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).

14 小明雄，《中國同性愛史錄》（香港：粉紅三角，1984）; Bret Hinsch, *Passions of the Cut Sleeve: The Homosexual Tradition in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

evolve? And if, through the magic of egalitarian progress, *wen-wu* does disappear, would there still be such a thing as (Chinese) masculinity? Capitalist consumption seems to me an unreliable basis on which to build a new masculinity. Both masculinity and femininity imply set gender roles that postmodern play and inter-cultural hybridity, if they ever came to fruition, would leave little room for. Or does masculinity always cleave to power, so that we might speak of new forms of female masculinity in a brave new world?

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I do not mean to imply that the concepts of the masculine and the feminine must be regarded as binary opposites. Louie and several of the authors in the second volume reviewed here emphasize that the strong gender polarity central to the West's cultural system was not found in China. Both genders were expected, for example, to contain a mix of *yin* and *yang* attributes, and masculinity was not linked so closely to heterosexuality. Nonetheless, again, I would define masculinity *in relation to* femininity; each forms the context of the other. Attempts to study them in isolation will prove problematic.[15] The essays in *Asian Masculinities* tend to suffer from this problem. They do, however, probe in greater detail some of the questions Louie raises in his monograph.

These examinations of "Asian masculinities" suggest even wider and more historically contingent ways of being male, though they deal only with China and Japan rather than any other Asian places. This review will concentrate on the Chinese essays, which deal with "soft" masculine identities and the diaspora. In an unfortunate but possibly revealing imbalance, all the essays in the section

15 No doubt, various forms of transgendering challenge any attempt to treat masculine and feminine as binary oppositions. I am grateful to an anonymous reader for pointing this out. However, even transgendering only works in a context where masculine and feminine play off of one another, albeit in unstable ways.

on "martial valor" are on Japan.[16] Chinese masculinity is discussed in what Louie would call its *wen* form. Cuncun Wu 吳存存 emphasizes the aesthetic and moral importance of a feminized male appearance in the late imperial era, while Yiyan Wang 王一燕 and Simon Patton highlight new sorts of literary masculinity produced in the post-Mao era.

Cuncun Wu shows how men depicted in the Tang dynasty as hearty, bearded, and rotund had by the late imperial era become "weak, slim and beardless....a feminised male appearance" (19). Critically, to regard this shift as feminization is not to impose Western or modern standards but was so regarded by people of the late Ming and Qing themselves. And according to this mainstream opinion, an explicitly feminized appearance was aesthetically pleasing and morally superior. The tough man (Louie's *wu* hero) was regarded with suspicion. Wu traces this shift in literary taste, seen in different ways in both the scholar-beauty romances and in *Story of the Stone*, as well as in real-life behavior of literati. Effeminate males were desired by both male and female lovers. Young literati—and even officials and military men—wanted a feminized appearance that had nothing (directly, at least) to do with sexuality. Many literati desired the boy-actors (旦) of Peking opera, while they also functioned as husbands and family heads. Wu essentially concludes that men who emphasized their ivory skins and sensitive dispositions did not challenge the patriarchal order.[17] Nor was their goal the confused state of androgeny,

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16 The articles on Japan are: Mark McLelland, "Gay Men, Masculinity and the Media in Japan;" Morris Low, "The Emperor's Sons Go to War: Competing Masculinities in Modern Japan;" Richard Light, "Sport and the Construction of Masculinity in the Japanese Education System;" Romit Dasgupta, "Creating Corporate Warriors: The 'Salaryman' and Masculinity in Japan;" Futoshi Taga, "Rethinking Male Socialisation: Life Histories of Japanese Male Youth;" and Tomoko Aoyama, "The Cooking Man in Modern Japanese Literature."

17 As Wu emphasizes, the effeminate carried very different meanings when applied to literati and actors; the question of class is considered below. See also Sophie Volpp, "The Literary Circulation of Actors in Seventeenth-Century China," *Journal of Asian*

which was seen as a medical condition.[18] Rather, they reified and enforced gender difference by playing with "either/or" categories. Even Baoyu never considered identifying himself as female, for all his distaste for masculine qualities and contempt for the examination system. Men continued to set the standards.

Beyond this, Wu does not further explore the question of how masculine was this self-perceived feminized masculinity. At one point she refers to the "anti-masculine" and intriguingly mentions that it possessed both orthodox and transgressive aspects. But even an anti-masculine masculinity has to be defined, it seems to me, relationally in terms of femininity. Even if male feminization did not challenge the patriarchy, one wonders if new concepts of desire and gender relations in the Qing were more transformative than even Wu suggests.[19] On the other hand, as Wu correctly stresses, these changes may have only affected a small, urbanized elite.

The *wen* ideal of masculinity persisted well into the twentieth century, according to Yiyan Wang. Even with the Communists' emphasis on workers and peasants, it was the scholar-like communist leader who personified the ideal male, illustrating what she calls "soft masculinity." Tracing this trend back to scholar-beauty romances, Wang suggests its enduring appeal lay in three factors: 1) writers themselves, who naturally portrayed cultural pursuits in a favorable light; 2) the influence of Daoism and Buddhism, which valued calmness and

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*Studies* 61:3 (August 2002), pp. 949-984.

18 Charlotte Furth, "Androgynous Males and Deficient Females: Biology and Gender Boundaries in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century China," *Late Imperial China* 9:2 (December 1988), pp. 1-31.

19 In this sense, studies of gender more broadly conceived are as necessary to women's studies as to masculinity. For recent work on the Qing, see 李孝悌，《戀戀紅塵：中國的城市、欲望與生活》(台北：一方出版，2002), Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994); and Susan Mann, *Precious Records: Women in China's Long Eighteenth Century* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

passivity; and 3) Han antipathy to non-Han invaders, thus the equation of martial attributes with barbarism. To this, I would add two factors, the masculine-feminine binary discussed above and, equally important, an elite-popular dichotomy. That is to say, the historical development of what Louie calls *wen* masculinity was, as Cuncun Wu shows, intimately related to feminization by the late Ming. It seems generally indisputable that this feminization was an elite (male) marker. True, boy-actors were feminized, but as objects of desire and consumption; literati men, by way of contrast, feminized themselves as conscious agents—and portrayed un-feminized men as brutal and coarse. These feminine or "soft masculine" attributes were not merely aesthetic and moral markers but simultaneously class markers. As such, they were not only symbols of (patriarchal) power, but also symbols of leisure, cultivation, and even decadence, as opposed to the peasant's realm of economic necessity.

In her discussion of Jia Pingwa's *Defunct Capital*, Yiyan Wang emphasizes that this best-selling, banned novel revived the ideal of "soft masculinity" in the face of the more macho trends of the 1980s, while it also challenged soft masculinity in its ambiguous portrayal of the protagonist, Zhuang Zhidie. Zhuang was unpopular with many readers, critics, and the government, since he clearly did not meet women's demand for a "real man" nor could he represent the new patriotism's demand for "national potency." Yet when Wang calls him an anti-hero, I am not convinced she is representing Jia's intention. Perhaps Zhuang, who is a writer, represents the author's self-hate, and perhaps his ability to attract women in the novel represents Jia's sense of Chinese decadence—but perhaps, as well, there are other layers of ambiguity and irony. If we judge Zhuang harshly according to modern standards of "hard masculinity," then we may neglect what Wang points out is the way Zhuang serves as a critique of modern capitalism in China. This, in turn, brings us back to the problem suggested by Louie: what function is left for masculinity if everything is commodified?

The relationships between mastery, masculinity, and writing are further explored in Simon Patton's study of Gu Cheng 顧誠. Beginning with Tonglin Lu's argument that avant-garde misogyny exploits the feminine to shore up masculine preoccupation with potency generally (not just in terms of the nation), Patton never makes it clear if he thinks Gu Cheng's masculinity depended on asserting power over the female.[20] Rather, he emphasizes Gu's fluid approach to masculinity, concluding that Gu treated masculinity "as a set of relationships (with desire, with a structure of gender, with unreal femininities) rather than as a collection of 'interior', self-defining qualities" (192). Patton shows that in his posthumous *Ying'er*, which foreshadowed Gu Cheng's murder of his wife and his suicide in New Zealand in 1993, Gu's sense of mastery was linked to his writing. But what does this have to do with Gu's interpretation of masculinity? Patton's answer depends on a psychoanalytical reading of *Ying'er* that may convince followers of Gilles Deleuze but leave most of us simply bemused. It seems true that Gu Cheng's various masculinities were all opposed to a kind of impossible feminine ideal. But, again, what does this have to do mastery and potency?

Finally, Ray Hibbins and Tseen Khoo examine Chinese men in the diaspora. Hibbins takes a social-survey approach to Chinese immigrants in Australia, while Khoo examines representations of diasporic men in Australia and Canada. Based on interview data, Hibbens concludes that Chinese migrants to Australia tend to regard masculinity in quite different terms than do Anglo-Celtic Australians. The latter emphasize sports, pub life, and the beach, while the Chinese seek educational success and wealth, and to serve as providers for their families. Chinese men, according to Hibbens, downplay sexual potency, sporting prowess, and alcohol consumption, which they may see as part of the dominant Australian masculinity. However, while there are real differences

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20 Tonglin Lu, *Misogyny, Cultural Nihilism, and Oppositional Politics: Contemporary Chinese Experimental Fiction* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).

between Australian men and Chinese immigrant men—and certainly the perception of difference—this contrast seems to me to be exaggerated. Hibbens offers fairly nuanced surveys of Chinese men but only crude stereotypes of Australian men. In fact, of course, Australian men also pursue wealth, social prestige, and dominance in the family, even though childhood pursuits (sports, leisure, and "mate-ship") may extend into adulthood. And, of course, real life behaviors differ, as do attitudes and ideals, within each community as well as between them; Hibbens does not seem to have systematically taken into account class differences (as in attitudes toward unemployment, for example).

Khoo's study of fiction, histories, and photographs created by Asians in Australia and Canada in the 1990s highlights the themes of emasculation, victimization, and struggle. She emphasizes the complex variety of masculinities thus produced. They often challenge more mainstream images of masculinity and identity, yet perhaps their biggest challenge to the hierarchies of nation and race is the claim to be both diasporic and, say, Canadian at the same time. Standard national representations such as the White Australian soldier are inevitably undermined. Khoo's subtle readings illustrate the complex meanings of her texts, but it is sometimes difficult to distinguish what constitutes a masculine voice and what is more broadly an Asian voice. Khoo's preliminary discussion of the "gender wars" among contemporary diasporic writers raises an issue that she fails to follow through. It seems that the assertion of Asian identity (by men) has something to do with masculinity, but is this a necessary or a contingent relationship?

Such limitations are inevitable in pioneering studies of an emerging field. Louie's monograph and the articles in *Asian Masculinities* will form the basis of further work in Chinese studies, diasporic studies, and cultural studies. The latter's attempt to understand masculinity without a full appreciation of non-Western cultures will particularly benefit from the work reviewed here. Western particularism can no longer masquerade as the universal. Whether these

studies challenge received methodologies is another question. They illustrate two trends in the social sciences: the study of representations dominates, while several authors also display some interest in lived experience.[21] Neither approach is problem-free, but both have the advantage of suggesting further avenues for research.[22]

Such research might benefit from more precise attention to the level of analysis. The works considered here sometimes jump between cultural systems, experience, behavior, values and ideology, and so forth. The result is that sometimes masculinity appears to be an impossible ideal; real men are masculine only to a degree. At other times it appears to be whatever males actually do, thus devoid of specific content and value. There is, of course, no single version of "the real Chinese man," but rather a historically contingent matrix, today embedded in a global framework, within which gender choices are given and made.

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21 My point is not to deny that all experience is mediated through representation nor to oppose reality and representation. However, there are methodological and substantive differences between attempts to understand the production and reception of cultural artifacts on the one hand, and attempts to understand how ordinary people perceive their lives on the other. I find "experience," then, a useful concept in spite of its dangers, for which see Joan W. Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," *Critical Inquiry* 17:4 (summer 1991), pp. 773-97.

22 "Popular" as opposed to elite masculinities is an obvious topic for further research, as are ethnic and regional variations, and greater historical specificity. Studies of representation sometimes (though not inevitably) tend to focus on elites, and articulate minorities of elites. Broader historiographical trends may be moving away from the "linguistic turn" and the "cultural turn" toward a "return to the social," which would now be a useful corrective in Chinese studies (see note 21 above). See Joan W. Scott and Debra Keates, eds., *Schools of Thought: Twenty-five Years of Interpretive Social Science* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Victoria E. Bonnell and Lynn Hunt, eds., *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).