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Hird, D.

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Moral Masculinities: Ethical Self-fashionings of Professional Chinese Men in London

Derek Hird

University of Westminster

d.hird@westminster.ac.uk

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Abstract

Through qualitative interviews and examination of textual sources, this essay investigates the gendered, class and cultural subjectivities of transnational, highly-educated Chinese men living and working in London. Narrative analysis of the interviews of two participants suggests that they exhibit hybrid “bricolage masculinities,” which incorporate elements from Western educational and corporate cultures, and also appropriate concepts and practices from the Confucian tradition of moral self-cultivation. A discussion of contemporary texts that support the revival of Confucian masculinities illuminates the discursive context in which the participants’ ethical self-fashionings take place. The study argues that the cosmopolitan yet culturally embedded masculinities of the participants are suggestive of how professional Chinese men, as they step onto the world stage, seek to insert themselves more advantageously into local and global power relations of gender, class and nation.

Keywords

transnational Chinese men – hybrid masculinities – *junzi* – Confucian morality – ethical self-fashioning

Introduction

In 1924, the Chinese novelist Lao She (1899-1966) arrived in London as a young man of twenty-five to teach Chinese at the School of Oriental Studies (now known as the School of Oriental and African Studies). His experiences of life there fed into his 1929 novel *Mr Ma and Son* (*Er Ma* 二馬), which centres on fifty-year old widower Ma Zeren and his twenty-one-year-old son Ma Wei’s coming to London from China to run the antiques business of Mr Ma’s deceased elder brother. The other major Chinese character, Li Zirong, is a relatively impoverished overseas student who works as an assistant in the antiques shop. Ma Zeren has nothing but disdain for the business world: in the mode of the scholar class he identifies with, he aspires still to become a

government mandarin. Ma Wei, however, condemns him as an unsuitable model of manhood for the modern world, and is inspired instead by the pragmatic Li Zirong's commercial prowess and devotion to the patriotic cause of rebuilding China as a great nation. Ma Wei wants to focus on making the antiques shop a success, and yet he is ultimately unable to wrench his mind away from the attractive English daughter of his landlady. At the end of the story, he slips off into the foggy night, perhaps to France, to escape from the pain of his unrequited love. The future is left open: could Ma Wei one day get his feelings under control and pursue his dream of commercial success for the sake of China's prosperity?

That was Lao She's hope for young Chinese men, as along with many young reformist Chinese intellectuals at the time he believed that the strength of China as a modern nation was contingent on developing the business capabilities of its men, and the abandonment of its stifling Confucian traditions. As Tu Weiming puts it, this "coexistence of political nationalism and cultural iconoclasm among the most articulate intellectual elite" was driven by the sentiment that Confucian dogma had "nurtured a 'national character' (*guominxing* [國民性]) detrimental to China's modernization."¹ National salvation was held to depend in no small measure on the rejection of Confucian "scholar-official" (*shi da fu* 士大夫) masculinity—as "the scholar of old was considered unsuited to the modern world"²—and the adoption of Western business and lifestyle practices. As Bret Hinsch states: "The Confucian gentleman was a completely inappropriate role model for the new middle class that flourished in Shanghai during the 1930s. Ambitious businessmen rejected many aspects of traditional Chinese manhood, embracing westernized ideals amenable to commerce and middle-class life."³

Today's successors to Ma Wei and Li Zirong appear to have followed Li Zirong's career-focused pragmatism, rather than succumbing to Ma Wei's paralysing romanticism. China's version of "marketplace manhood", to borrow Michael Kimmel's term,⁴ was largely shaped by Deng Xiaoping's acceleration of his "reform and openness" (*gaige kaifang* 改革開放) policies, and spurred by his pro-market "Southern Tour" (*nanxun* 南巡) in early 1992. Since then, it is arguably the model of the middle-class white-collar professional that has become most dominant in shaping the gendered aspirations of ambitious, well-educated young urban men who seek to be associated with prosperity and success.⁵

White-collar professional men are seen as the vanguard of the Chinese middle class, embodying the reform era project of producing prosperous, "civilized" (*wenming* 文明), "high-quality" (*suzhi gao* 素質高) individuals replete with material and career aspirations and the skills to compete in the transnational economy.⁶ Academic and media depictions converge in portraying them as well-groomed, well-educated, and worldly;⁷ honest, hard-working, socially

¹ Wei-ming Tu, "Cultural China," in Wei-Ming Tu, ed., *The Living Tree: The Changing Meaning of Being Chinese Today* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 1-34, see p. 27.

² Kam Louie, *Chinese Masculinities in a Globalizing World* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2015), 116.

³ Bret Hinsch, *Masculinities in Chinese History* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), 9.

⁴ Michael Kimmel, "Consuming Manhood: The Feminization of American Culture and the Recreation of the Male Body, 1832-1920," in Laurence Goldstein, ed., *The Male Body: Features, Destinies, Exposures* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 12-42.

⁵ Geng Song and Derek Hird, *Men and Masculinities in Contemporary China* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 150-7.

⁶ Stanley Rosen, "The Victory of Materialism: Aspirations to Join China's Urban Moneyed Classes and the Commercialization of Education," *The China Journal* 51 (2004): 27-51.

⁷ Zhou Xiaohong 周曉虹, "Zhongguo zhongchan jieceng de lishi yu xianzhuang" 中國中產階層的歷史與現狀, in Zhou Xiaohong, ed., *Zhongguo zhongchan jieceng diaocha* 中國中產階層調查 (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2005), 1-28, see p. 18.

responsible and not reliant on corrupt or nepotistic practices;⁸ and democratic- and egalitarian-minded.⁹ The middle classes are typically held to outshine other social strata in terms of their “dedication to work” (*jingye jingshen* 敬業精神), “occupational morals” (*zhiye daode* 職業道德), “commercial honesty and good faith” (*shangye chengxin* 商業誠信), “motivation for success” (*chengjiu dongji* 成就動機), “family ethics” (*jiating lunli* 家庭倫理), “raising quality” (*suzhi tisheng* 素質提升), “cultural taste” (*wenhua pinwei* 文化品味), and “children’s education” (*ziniu jiaoyu* 子女教育).¹⁰ “[V]iewed as an economic and easily assimilable asset” in the West,¹¹ they appear to fulfil modernisation theory’s prediction that the non-Western world will develop along the lines of Western societies.

Many contemporary Westerners believe China’s rapid economic development will lead to Chinese people becoming more and more like Westerners.¹² In this paper, however, I argue that the emergence of the postsocialist Chinese white-collar subject and the development of the Chinese middle-class should not be read as an inevitable trend towards the wholesale endorsement of Western identities and subjectivities. While a certain neoliberal logic underlies the constitution of self-interested, self-reliant, globally oriented “desiring subjects” under China’s reform-era policies,¹³ nonetheless, the afterlives of Mao-era ideologies, policies and practices interact with reappropriations of Confucian and other historically embedded practices and notions of selfhood in contemporary China.¹⁴ The resulting middle-class subjectivities often exhibit attempts to reconcile a global cosmopolitanism identity with recognisably Chinese cultural characteristics;¹⁵ in this way, professional Chinese men are making their own distinctive contributions to emerging “transnational business masculinities.”¹⁶

By analysing data generated in my interviews with professional Chinese men from mainland China living and working in London, in this article I discuss principally how they draw significantly on historically embedded notions of masculinity as well as contemporary business

⁸ Pang Qinghui 龐清輝, “‘Piaoliuzhe’ zhongchan” 「漂流者」中產, *Zhongguo xinwen zhoukan* 中國新聞周刊 453 (2010), 30–34, see p. 31; Zhou, “Zhongguo zhongchan jiecheng”, 17–20.

⁹ Li Cheng, “Chinese scholarship on the middle class: From social stratification to political potential”, in Li Cheng, ed., *China’s emerging middle class: Beyond economic transformation* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2010), 55–83, see pp. 74–6; Li Chunling, “Characterizing China’s middle class: Heterogeneous composition and multiple identities”, in Li Cheng, ed., *China’s emerging middle class*, 135–56, see p. 145.

¹⁰ Zhou, “Zhongguo zhongchan jiecheng”, 20.

¹¹ Gregor Benton and E. T. Gomez, *Chinese in Britain, 1800–Present: Economy, Transnationalism, Identity* (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 50.

¹² Daniel F. Vukovich, *China and Orientalism: Western Knowledge Production and the PRC* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2012).

¹³ Lisa Rofel, *Desiring China: Experiments in Neoliberalism, Sexuality, and Public Culture* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007).

¹⁴ Colin Hawes, “Representing Corporate Culture in China: Official, Academic and Corporate Perspectives,” *The China Journal* 59 (2008): 33–61; Andrew B. Kipnis, “Audit Cultures: Neoliberal governmentality, socialist legacy, or technologies of governing?” *American Ethnologist* 35.2 (2008): 275–89; Donald M. Nonini, “Is China Becoming Neoliberal?” *Critique of Anthropology* 28.2 (2008): 145–76; Elizabeth J. Perry, “Chinese Conceptions of ‘Rights’: From Mencius to Mao—and Now,” *Perspectives on Politics* 6.1 (2008): 37–50.

¹⁵ Geng Song and Tracy K. Lee, “‘New Man’ and ‘New Lad’ with Chinese Characteristics? Cosmopolitanism, Cultural Hybridity and Men’s Lifestyle Magazines in China,” *Asian Studies Review* 36.3 (2012): 345–67.

¹⁶ Raewyn Connell proposes that the increasingly global scope of economic relations has produced new patterns of hegemonic masculinity performed by globally mobile managers, which still commoditize and disempower women, despite the assertions in neoliberal discourses of gender-neutral markets and individual choice. Connell suggests that a Confucian variant of transnational business masculinity is emerging. See Raewyn Connell, “Masculinities and Globalization,” *Men and Masculinities* 1.1 (1998): 3–23, and in particular, pages 15–18.

masculinities to constitute themselves in distinctive cultural, class, and gender terms. The limited aspects of masculinities I discuss here cannot possibly cover the wide variety of existing constructions of transnational Chinese masculinities. Nevertheless, their characteristics in common and resonances with wider social, cultural and political discourses enable my participants' understandings of themselves as gendered subjects to illuminate more generally contemporary ideas and practices of Chinese masculinity, class and nationhood. Thus, while the gendered male subject lies at the heart of my analysis, the scope of this article ranges beyond masculinity *per se*. By considering these young men's search for sociocultural identity in wider perspective, it shows not only how and when gender is foregrounded in their identities, but also when gender is overshadowed or even elided by their emphases on cultural and classed characteristics.¹⁷

Methodology, Methods and Concepts

Narrative inquiry was my choice of methodology for this research, as it is particularly suited to relating the experiences of a single person or a small number of people.¹⁸ It can be used to investigate personal experiences of a particular event or phenomenon, such as this article's focus on gendered subjectivity and transnational mobility. A narrative approach accommodates the social constructionist position that the accounts of personal experiences elicited in interviews are not pre-formed, but are co-created in the "social encounter" between the interviewer and research participant.¹⁹ In this sense, interviews generate "narrative improvisations" informed by multiple contingent elements, including "dominant and changing discourses, [...] biography, perspective, interests, and the immediate pertinences of the process".²⁰

Although the co-creation of the interview may be unavoidable, the interviewer can seek to allow participants to express themselves as unconstrainedly as possible, while still bringing the discussion towards certain areas of interest. To achieve this, I started the interviews with a single initial narrative question: without specifying starting and finishing points, I asked the participant to tell the story of his migration to and subsequent life in the United Kingdom (hereafter, UK), with particular attention to recounting specific episodes that he perceived as key formative experiences.²¹ This "narration phase" allowed the participant to speak without interruption. Once the participant had said as much as he wanted, I entered into a semi-structured

¹⁷ Ingunn Moser, "Sociotechnical Practices and Difference on the Interferences between Disability, Gender, and Class," *Science, Technology & Human Values* 31.5 (2006): 537–64.

¹⁸ John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2012), 73–4; Jeong-Hee Kim, *Understanding Narrative Inquiry: The Crafting and Analysis of Stories as Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2015), 161.

¹⁹ Cigdem Esin, Mastoureh Fathi and Corinne Squire, "Narrative Analysis: The Constructionist Approach," in Uwe Flick, ed., *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis*, (London: Sage, 2014), 203–17, see pp. 204–5; Kenneth J. Gergen, "The Social Construction of Self," in Shaun Gallagher, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of the Self*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 633–53, see pp. 644–50.

²⁰ Jaber F. Gubrium and James A. Holstein, "Narrative Practice and the Transformation of Interview Subjectivity," in Jaber F. Gubrium, James A. Holstein, Amir B. Marvasti and Karyn D. McKinney, eds., *The SAGE Handbook of Interview Research: The Complexity of the Craft* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2012), 27–45, see p. 40.

²¹ Sandra Jovchelovitch and Martin W. Bauer, "Narrative Interviewing," in Martin W. Bauer and George Gaskell, eds., *Qualitative Researching with Text, Image and Sound: A Practical Handbook for Social Research* (London: Sage, 2000), 57–74, see pp. 62–4; Tom Wengraf, *Qualitative Research Interviewing: Biographic Narrative and Semi-structured Methods* (London: Sage, 2001), 121–5.

conversation with him, with reference to his initial narrative and to how the process of migration had transformed his relationship to issues of gender, class, ethnicity and other identity markers. This semi-structured approach maintained the focus of the interview yet also allowed the participant room to take the discussion in unanticipated directions.²² Sometimes participants would introduce a new topic of their own volition, initiating another “narration phase”. Narration and conversation phases were thus not necessarily ordered in linear fashion.²³

Through bilingual adverts in Chinese and English circulated by community organisations, friends and associates, I recruited ten research participants. Their ages ranged from mid-twenties to mid-fifties, and they had lived in the UK for between three and twenty-six years. Most had come to the UK to study and were educated to at least Master’s level. They were variously married (four, all to Chinese women, all had children), partnered (three, including one civil partner), and single (three); eight identified as straight and two as gay. They worked in media (three), architecture (two), finance, design, computing, commodities research and academia, mostly in large British private-sector companies. I interviewed each of them once between October 2014 and March 2015, and subsequently had additional follow-up discussions with five participants in informal social situations over coffee or meals. The more formal interviews lasted between one and two hours, and took place in different locations, according to each informant’s preference, including cafés, participants’ offices, and my own office. Nine of the interviews were recorded, and I made detailed notes immediately after the non-recorded interview. I told my participants they could move between Mandarin and English during the interview as they wished, but asked them to provide the Mandarin terms for any concepts or phrases that they thought were particularly key to the discussion. Consequently, seven of the interviews were conducted mostly in English with some Mandarin, and three were conducted solely in Mandarin.

Agreeing with Paul Ricoeur that human lives are more “readable” when interpreted through narrative models from history and fiction, I used Michael Murray and Anneke Sools’s adaptation of the literary theorist Kenneth Burke’s pentad model to analyse the interview data.²⁴ Murray and Sools position their work within hermeneutic and phenomenological traditions, and, in line with the narrative approach discussed above, view the interview as “a communal attempt to bridge different worlds of meaning, in response to the research question” (Murray and Sools 2015, 141).²⁵ The strength of their analytical model lies in its focus on the points of tension or imbalance in participants’ stories (called points of “breach” by Murray and Sools), often found between the aims of participants and the means available to them to reach these aims, or between participants’ characteristics and the cultural settings they find themselves in.²⁶ It is the tension within the story that counts here, Murray and Sools emphasise, not whether it exists in lived reality. This method aims not to make generalisable claims about the representativeness of participants’ accounts, but to produce “contextualized results” that reveal commonalities with the

²² Kim, *Understanding Narrative Inquiry*, 163-4; Steinar Kvale and Svend Brinkmann, *InterViews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing* (Los Angeles; London: Sage, 2009), 26-32; Wengraf, *Qualitative Research Interviewing*, 15.

²³ Kim, *Understanding Narrative Inquiry*, 167; Edna Lomsky-Feder and Tamar Rapoport, “Juggling Models of Masculinity: Russian-Jewish Immigrants in the Israeli Army,” *Sociological inquiry* 73.1 (2003): 114-37, see p. 118.

²⁴ Paul Ricoeur, “Narrative Identity,” *Philosophy Today* 35.1 (1991): 73-81; see p. 73.

²⁵ Michael Murray and Anneke Sools, “Narrative Research,” in Poul Rohleder and Antonia C. Lyons, eds., *Qualitative Research in Clinical and Health Psychology* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 133-54, see pp. 133-4 and p. 141.

²⁶ Jerome S. Bruner, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 20; Murray and Sools, “Narrative Research,” 141-2.

situations of other individuals and groups, while respecting the particularity of each person's story.²⁷

Michel Foucault's late-career work on the "hermeneutics of the subject," in which he examines how individuals shape themselves as subjects, has inspired my conceptual approach in this article. As Judith Butler points out, in Foucault's earlier work "he treats the subject as an 'effect' of discourse, [but] in his later writings [...] [t]he subject forms itself in relation to a set of codes, prescriptions, or norms" in a process of ethical self-making, which delimits the part of the self to be morally worked on.²⁸ Foucault uses the term "technologies of the self" to describe the acts and thoughts of self-transformation that concern the relationship subjects ought to have with themselves: "to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality."²⁹ In this way, the individual "constitute[s] himself as a moral subject of his own actions."³⁰

Such ethical self-fashionings require individuals to know, master, and care for themselves, yet they cannot escape the constraints of discursive "regimes of truth" and flows of power in people's interactions. Hence, for Foucault, we constitute ourselves as subjects in three intertwined ways: as subjects of knowledge in relation to truth, as subjects acting on others in relation to a field of power, and as moral agents in relation to ethics.³¹ Although this self-making cannot take place outside the social norms that make subjecthood possible, thus exposing the limits of subjectivities at any given historical moment, it is nevertheless a creative process.³²

Chinese Migration to the UK

Before I turn to my participants' accounts, it is necessary to set the scene with a brief overview of Chinese migration to the UK. As a result of maritime trade, Chinese sailors started settling near British docks in the early 1800s. In 1855 the first student from China studied at a British university, and was followed by others from China, Malaya and Hong Kong. By the end of the century, the sailors' settlement in London's Limehouse had developed into a small Chinatown. Students continued to arrive: some of the Republic of China's young writers went to Britain to study (and in Lao She's case to teach); but it was not until the decades after the Second World War that large-scale migration occurred, principally from Hong Kong and Malaya, spurred by the 1948 Nationality Act which conferred British citizenship upon Commonwealth citizens.³³

From the 1980s, China's "opening up", combined with increasing transnational mobility, has contributed to the most diverse wave of Chinese immigration to the UK in history, "ranging

²⁷ Murray and Sools, "Narrative Research," 149.

²⁸ Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 17.

²⁹ Michel Foucault, "Technologies Of The Self," in Martin H. Luther, Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton, eds., *Technologies Of The Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 16–49, see p. 18.

³⁰ Michel Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress," in Paul Rabinow, ed., *The Foucault Reader* (London: Penguin, 1991), 340–72, see p. 352.

³¹ Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics", 352.

³² Butler, *Giving an Account*, 17–22.

³³ Benton and Gomez, *Chinese in Britain*, 37–41, 49.

from political refugees to scholars, well-connected business people, and an underworld.”³⁴ China’s emphasis on economic development in the 1990s facilitated a rapid rise in immigration from China to the UK, primarily for higher education and legitimate employment, but significant numbers of undocumented migrants also found ways to enter the country.³⁵ Between 2008 and 2012, as the Chinese economy continued to enjoy high growth rates, the numbers of Chinese migrants to the UK went from the eight largest to the largest among different immigrant nationalities, mainly due to large numbers of students.³⁶ Census returns suggest there are currently around half a million people of Chinese ethnicity in the UK, forming about 0.8% of the UK population, a third of whom live in London.

Clear divisions exist within the UK’s Chinese population. A degree of mutual antipathy exists between the recent mainland arrivals and the established Cantonese-speaking populations from Hong Kong and southeast Asia.³⁷ The current influx of wealthy mainland students do not like to label themselves as overseas Chinese, an identity they look down on,³⁸ often seeing themselves as globally mobile rather than permanent diasporans; the “British Born Chinese”, for their part, are often culturally energised by China’s rise and yet keen to mark their different status and identity from China’s reform-era migrants.³⁹ This division is not new: in *Mr Ma and Son*, Lao She remarks on the “two factions” (*liang pai* 兩派) of Chinese students in 1920s London: those from the mainland (*neidi lai de* 內地來的) and the offspring of overseas Chinese (*huaqiao de zisun* 華僑的子孫).⁴⁰ Another notable division is within the recent arrivals themselves: the highly-educated and well-resourced Chinese students and professionals have little meaningful interaction with the less well-educated, poorer migrants in the catering, food processing, garment and other sectors.⁴¹ This class division, alongside other gendered and ethnic distinctions, is illuminated in the accounts of the two participants that I turn to examine now. I have given them the names Xianyang and Bradley and disguised aspects of their backgrounds to preserve their anonymity.

Xianyang

Xianyang was in his mid-twenties, from east China, tall and athletically built. He had come to the UK for his undergraduate education, then completed a master’s degree, and had just started working for a large British computing company when I met him. Early in the interview Xianyang

³⁴ Benton and Gomez, *Chinese in Britain*, 61.

³⁵ Yiu Man Chan and Christine Chan, “The Chinese in Britain,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 23.1 (1997): 123–31, see p.126; Frank N. Pieke and Biao Xiang, *Legality and Labour: Chinese Migration, Neoliberalism and the State* (BICC Working Paper Series no. 5, 2007), 8–9.

³⁶ Peter Dominiczak, “Most Immigrants to the UK Now Come from China, Figures Show,” *Daily Telegraph*, November 28, 2013, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/immigration/10480785/Most-immigrants-to-the-UK-now-come-from-China-figures-show.html>; Office of National Statistics, *Migration Statistics Quarterly Report November 2014*, 30, <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/migration1/migration-statistics-quarterly-report/november-2014/stb-msqr-nov-2014.html>.

³⁷ Walter Fung, “The UK Chinese Community,” *China Eye* 18 (2008), <http://www.sacu.org/ukchinese.html>.

³⁸ Benton and Gomez, *Chinese in Britain*, 50.

³⁹ David Parker and Miri Song, “Inclusion, Participation and the Emergence of British Chinese Websites,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 33.7 (2007): 1043–61, see pp. 1050–2.

⁴⁰ Lao She 老舍, *Er ma* 二馬 (Wuhan: Changjiang wenyi chubanshe, 2004), 255.

⁴¹ Pieke and Xiang, *Legality and Labour*.

told me about his desire to find a white girlfriend in the UK. At university, he had noticed that the good-looking, smart and sophisticated white girls seemed to go after a certain kind of confident, suave British middle-class male student. If he were to succeed in his objective, he felt he had to learn the polished manners and dress sense of these young men.

Expressed in this way, Xianyang's motivation for a white girlfriend seemed bound up with a desire to present himself as a desirable, cosmopolitan subject alongside his white-middle class peers, rather than to assert the attractiveness and virility of Chinese masculinity in competition with Western men, as in the depictions of transnational Chinese entrepreneurial masculinities in 1990s Chinese soap operas examined by Sheldon Lu.⁴² In this context, it is fitting that Xianyang told me of his admiration for the writer Feng Tang's (馮唐, born 1971) transnational careers as businessman and novelist, especially praising Feng Tang's controversial penchant for writing racily about sex.⁴³ As Pamela Hunt points out, the cosmopolitan intertextuality of Feng Tang's writing presents a confident masculine sexuality drawn from a multitude of sources from across the globe.⁴⁴ Yet Xianyang told me of his difficulties building trustful relationships with white English middle-class students in his classes, saying:

They were all very polite, very gentlemanly, but I sometimes wondered if what they said was deep down what they really thought.

Xianyang's suspicions about the integrity of white British middle-class men extended to misgivings about their sexual behaviour that he found difficult to articulate and could not accept, despite his desire to emulate them, and which contrasted with the behaviour of a Chinese gentlemen:

Appearance-wise, I want to be an English gentleman, but internally I prefer to be a Chinese gentleman. British guys dress well and are very polite, but internally I don't think [pause], the way they treat girls [pause], and some of the things [pause]. I talked with my girlfriend [pause]; she doesn't actually like British guys. She thinks some of them are playboys; I don't know if it's true. But I want to become a Chinese gentleman.

Xianyang's account thus far reveals a "breach", or imbalance, in that his goal was to have a white girlfriend but he lacked the means—in this case effective social skills and sartorial knowledge—to do so. To remedy this deficiency, Xianyang told me he had sought the help of a book recommended on a Chinese-language blog, called *Mr Jones's Rules for the Modern Man*, written by Dylan Jones, cultural commentator and editor of GQ's British edition.⁴⁵ The book proved to be the perfect guide to developing the sartorial elegance and refined manner required

⁴² Sheldon H. Lu, "Soap Opera in China: The Transnational Politics of Visuality, Sexuality, and Masculinity," *Cinema Journal* 40.1 (2000): 25–47.

⁴³ Feng Tang is a prolific and widely popular Beijing-based author and former consultant at McKinsey & Company, whose semi-autobiographical Beijing trilogy of novels vividly depicts 1990s' Beijing. The bold sexual content of his novels and poetry has attracted criticism. His most sexually explicit work, *Oneness*, relates the unorthodox means to spiritual enlightenment undertaken by Tang Dynasty (618–907) Buddhist monks and nuns, and is not available in mainland China.

⁴⁴ Pamela Hunt, "Global and local phallic creativity: Intertextuality in Feng Tang's construction of masculinity," in Derek Hird and Geng Song, eds., *Between China and the world: transnational Chinese men and masculinities* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, forthcoming).

⁴⁵ Dylan Jones, *Mr Jones' Rules for the Modern Man* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2006).

for the enactment of polished English middle-class masculinity, the kind of masculine appearance and demeanour that Xianyang observed in his university peers, and sought to master for himself. Despite his reservations about the moral values associated with this kind of masculinity, Xianyang recognized that acculturating himself to the standards of English middle-class men—in distinction to, for example, those of English working-class men—would enhance his romantic and career prospects in UK professional circles. Greatly inspired, Xianyang even set up his own blog to describe his experiences.

In telling me why he found the book so useful, Xianyang yet again underlined his commitment to a deeper underlying morality in remarks that equated English middle-class masculinity with a normative sophisticated business masculinity, and betrayed a sense of inferiority at what he perceived to be Chinese men's shortcomings in relation to this standard:

Two years ago I came across this book introduced by a Chinese writer. It tells you everything about being a gentleman, how to wear a tie, how to wear a suit. That was something I didn't require or didn't know before. I needed to know about these things because as you grow up and enter into society you need to take care of yourself, your dress, the way you behave, give people a good impression. If you chase a girl or a job or you want to meet people, you want to give them a good impression. Sometimes Chinese people lack a bit in these things. The book is very useful: if I go after a girl I now have an 80% probability of success [laughs]. I know how to do things that make girls remark: 'Oh! You're a gentleman'. But I think dressing is a very superficial thing: what matters more is how you think—your 'internal content' (*neihan* 内涵)."

When I asked Xianyang if his newfound gentlemanly charms had worked on Western girl, his face clouded; he paused for a few seconds, and then replied in subdued tones:

I don't have a Western girlfriend, but I have Western female friends. My girlfriend now was born in the Philippines, her parents were from China, and she moved to Britain. So she's practically a British person. She doesn't speak Chinese very well and doesn't know very much about China and its history. She's more like a British person.

Xianyang had not, after all, completely resolved the "breach" that he outlined at the start of his story, and which had afflicted Ma Wei in *Mr Ma and Son* almost one hundred years before him. Ma Wei crumbled and fled the country when he failed to win the heart of a white British girl, despite the exhortations of the practical-minded Li Zirong, who believed that China's youth must "sacrifice the luxury of falling in love, setting these things aside for a later stage in the development of China."⁴⁶ Much to the romantic Ma Wei's incomprehension, Li Zirong's pragmatic outlook led him to becoming engaged with a poorly educated girl he had met in childhood, to whom he looked only for cooking, cleaning and other domestic matters, not for intellectual sustenance.

Our twenty-first century protagonist Xianyang, however, had avoided these two polarities by combining romance with pragmatism to get as near as possible to his goal of a cosmopolitan relationship, although he revealed his lingering unhappiness in his demeanour and words when discussing this issue. Failing to get a white British girlfriend, he had doggedly persisted in finding the next best thing. However, his quest for a cosmopolitan partner lays him open to the

⁴⁶ Anne Witchard, *Lao She in London* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012), 123.

feminist critique that his choice of partner is largely motivated by a desire to demonstrate and enhance his own social prestige. As Susan Glosser writes of men in the early twentieth century New Culture Movement: “Like the Qing elite before them, Republican men believed that choosing the right wife was essential to their social position, a harmonious family, and worthy children.”⁴⁷ Xianyang’s desire for a wife who behaves nothing like a Chinese person relocates this tendency to the British context, and once again frames Chineseness, in its external behavioural forms, as unsophisticated and a potential embarrassment.

I asked Xianyang why he thought it was apparently so difficult for Chinese men to find white female partners, but not difficult for Chinese women to find white male partners. He replied:

I’ve been thinking about this a lot. First of all, Chinese girls, Asian girls, are appealing to Westerners in terms of body shape, and they’re cute. Some of them are tanned, some of them are submissive. Those are all things that come naturally from Asian girls, Chinese girls, and that attract Western males.

As for Chinese men, they have a lot of pressure to offer a decent life to their partner, so we generally consider we need to work hard and give up some of the joys and activities that we could do to have more fun. We need to study and work hard. No money to live. We’re always told to do it this way when we are young, so we give up all our personal interests and hobbies. So that’s one reason that leads us to being not entirely attractive. Always working. We need to work hard to survive in society.

There’s also a cultural perspective. Chinese guys are considered to be responsible and loyal, responsible for taking care of others. And sometimes we give up some masculine activities, like building our bodies. And if you are a playboy, then sometimes you are attractive to those girls. But that’s not considered to be a good thing for us—we’re supposed to be studious and hardworking. Western girls like men who are sporty and communicative. The culture is slightly different: we Chinese men are not that type.

Research into the construction of Chinese masculinities in contemporary Canadian schools found a similar categorising of Chinese men as studious and white men as sporty, and correspondence in the day-to-day activities of the boys, especially as they got older:

[...] the junior rowing teams were entirely dominated by Chinese-Canadian students but by grades 10 and 11 they had become the exception rather than the rule. [T]hese senior boys [...] no longer had time for competitive rowing. [Their ambitions] centred primarily on non-athletic pursuits and they identified a strong work and academic ethic as key ingredients to being a man. By contrast, all the white boys were involved in competitive school sports such as soccer, hockey, basketball and football.⁴⁸

Clearly influenced by similar deep-rooted discourses of culturally determined masculinities, Xianyang constitutes himself as a certain type of moral subject: the hard-working,

⁴⁷ Susan L. Glosser, “‘The Truths I Have Learned’: Nationalism, Family Reform, and Male Identity in China’s New Culture Movement, 1915-1923,” in Susan Brownell and Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, eds., *Chinese Femininities/Chinese Masculinities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 120–44, see p. 140.

⁴⁸ Brad Millington, Patricia Vertinsky, Ellexis Boyle, and Brian Wilson, “Making Chinese-Canadian Masculinities in Vancouver’s Physical Education Curriculum,” *Sport, Education and Society* 13.2 (2008): 195–214, see pp. 206-7.

sober-minded, responsible, loyal, caring Chinese man.⁴⁹ The “breach” in his account here is the imbalance between these characteristics and the regime of masculinity that shapes Western men. In saying that Chinese men have to “give up some masculine activities”, Xianyang sets up Western men as genuinely masculine, and Chinese men and masculinity as deviant from this norm, presupposing a racial hierarchy in which the Chinese or Asian man has relatively little agency when it comes to dating Western women. Nevertheless, under these circumstances, the proposed moral wholesomeness of elite Chinese masculinity becomes a characteristic that educated Chinese men can use to redeem their masculinity vis-à-vis Western men and even assert its superiority.

Besides Xianyang and Bradley, four other research participants also claimed Chinese men’s moral superiority over British men. The areas they cited included Chinese men’s taking responsibility for their families, especially their children and parents; their not engaging in sexually lewd behaviour towards women in public; their relative lack of public drunkenness and related aggressiveness; their refraining from football hooliganism; and their relative self-control in tense situations so that violence is avoided. In all of these areas, British men were deemed to exhibit the immoral behaviour that Chinese men avoided. My participants did not distinguish between British middle and working class masculinities in their condemnations; one went to far as to say that he believed that true British gentlemen could only be found in the rarefied upper classes, and were probably very few in number. Their criticisms cohere clearly around the notion of self-control: as educated, responsible Chinese men they have it; British men do not. This perspective chimes with a historical Confucian sexuality that emphasized the containment of sexual passion,⁵⁰ and, more generally, “the control and restraint of individuals [on the] *wen* path of learning.”⁵¹

In order to further explore Xianyang’s sense of himself as a moral subject, I asked if by “Chinese gentleman”, which he had hitherto said in English during our conversation, he meant the *junzi* 君子, the archetypal moral exemplar in Confucian texts. He replied: “Yes, a *junzi*, a gentleman, more internally,” and continued:

Like in more ancient times, Tang, Song: the scholars of the Confucian school (*rujia* 儒家) were polite, they took care of their family, they cared about society’s problems, they took care of the whole universe. I think that’s the most important thing—they always considered the wellbeing of the whole people, regardless of nation. I don’t really like the notion of nation, government, party, Chinese Communist Party [CCP]. *Junzi* care more about the people, and focus on internal cultivation.⁵² A good definition of the *junzi* is that they do not do immoral things that they could do when they are alone; they could benefit from doing them, but they decide not to do them.

I think the basic idea combining external and internal gentlemanly characteristics works regardless of country. If you’re a good man, you have these good characteristics,

⁴⁹ Ray Hibbins found similar self-characterisations of Chinese men as studious and hardworking and depictions of Western men as sporty and sexually open among first-generation Chinese skilled male migrants in Australia. Ray Hibbins, “Migration and Gender Identity among Chinese Skilled Male Migrants to Australia,” *Geoforum* 36.2 (2005): 167–80, see p. 177.

⁵⁰ Keith McMahon, “A Case for Confucian Sexuality: The Eighteenth Century Novel *Yesou Puyan*,” *Late Imperial China* 9.2 (1988): 32-53, cited in Louie, *Globalizing World*, 113.

⁵¹ Louie, *Globalizing World*, 113.

⁵² Hereon I retain the term *junzi* in pinyin, so as to avoid any ambiguity that might occur by using “Chinese gentleman” or “Confucian gentleman” in English.

and if you treat people that way, people will like you. I don't just see myself as Chinese, I like to be a global citizen. In high school I wrote an article and developed a theory to prioritise things in my mind – the first thing I wrote was I would die for was “all under heaven” (*tianxia* 天下), then parents, then country (*guojia* 國家), then my woman, then myself.

The “breach” that Xianyang sets out here is between, on the one hand, what he implies are the narrowly nationalist concerns of the CCP/Chinese government, and on the other hand, his aspiration for a more cosmopolitan identity, which he attempts to resolve by embracing a universalist notion of the *junzi* for whom “all under heaven” truly refers to the whole world. His construction of the *junzi* as a globally relevant figure echoes the historical Confucian conviction that the foreign can change to the Chinese way,⁵³ yet this “cultural nationalism” is balanced by his non-nationalist focus on the welfare of the world's people. His contemporary appropriation of *junzi* masculinity forges a Chinese male cultural identity in the context of globalization.

Xianyang's depiction of the *junzi* staying true to his moral code even when alone was famously expressed in the Confucian text *Li ji* 禮記 (Records of ritual), and is currently enjoying renewed circulation, as, just five months before I interviewed Xianyang, it was highlighted in a May 2014 *People's Daily* article promoting an anthology of classical aphorisms used in Xi Jinping's speeches:

There is nothing more visible than what is secret, and nothing more manifest than what is minute. Therefore the superior man is watchful over himself, when he is alone (*mo jian yu yin, mo xian yu wei, gu jun zi shen qi du ye* 莫見乎隱，莫顯乎微，故君子慎其獨也).⁵⁴

Finally, in rounding off his interpretation of the *junzi*, Xianyang prioritises his parents before country, and both of these before his wife. His phrase “my woman” and her low priority suggest a relative inattention to spousal relations in his notion of *junzi* masculinity.

A cosmopolitan citizen in the modern world yet still patriotic, Xianyang's hybrid or “bricolage masculinity”⁵⁵ fits the “cosmopatriot” category that Jeroen de Kloet suggests typifies contemporary Chinese popular culture; and which, he argues, destabilizes essentialist discourses, yet at the same time contains “ambivalences and contradictions”.⁵⁶ Xianyang's cosmopolitan, yet still implicitly masculinist vision is one of male responsibility, duty, and service across the board: for Xianyang, the cultivated “good man” is the provider and guarantor of peace, stability and prosperity at global, national, and family levels. Yet in valuing being a filial son more highly than being a devoted husband, Xianyang's globally oriented *junzi* masculinity still echoes

⁵³ Yingjie Guo, *Cultural Nationalism in Contemporary China: The Search for National Identity under Reform* (London: Routledge, 2004), 85.

⁵⁴ Zhang Yuanqing 张远晴 “Xide xiushen pian: Xi Jinping yinyong de gudian mingju” 習得修身篇——習近平引用的古典名句, *Renmin ribao haiwaiban* 人民日報海外版 May 8, 2014, 5, http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrhwb/html/2014-05/08/content_1424711.htm. The translation is James Legge's, cited in Benjamin Penny's discussion of the same *People's Daily* article at: Benjamin Penny, “Classic Xi Jinping: On Acquiring Moral Character,” in Geremie R. Barmé, ed., *Shared Destiny: China story yearbook 2014* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 2015), 5-12, see p. 8.

⁵⁵ Sofia Aboim, *Plural Masculinities: The Remaking of the Self in Private Life* (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2010).

⁵⁶ Jeroen de Kloet, “Cosmopatriot Contaminations,” in Jeroen de Kloet and Edwin Jurriens, eds., *Cosmopatriots: On Distant Belongings and Close Encounters* (Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2007), 133-53, see p. 150.

Confucian hierarchies in its roles and relationships. At its heart lies the self-cultivation of a moral integrity that sits superior to non-Chinese masculinities. And as I was to find out during my interview with Bradley, Xianyang was not the only one of my participants deeply interested in cultivating a *junzi* masculinity for the contemporary world.

Bradley

The son of officials, in his mid-twenties and now a design professional, Bradley had moved to the UK from north China for his high school education. When we met for the interview, he told me his relocation to the UK had forced him to reconsider his relationship with China and Chinese culture:

When I came here it was a bit of a culture shock: I didn't go with the flow, I looked back to reflect. All through high school to the start of university, I spent all my spare time looking at Chinese history, looking at where I come from.

The techniques he was learning at school and in society in Britain provided the means for his reappraisal of Chinese history:

What British society taught me is science, empirical thinking, and an empirical scientific approach to history, which is a very important skill. In China they give you a big broad-brush stroke of narrativity; here they teach you to analyse sources, you know, who wrote it, look at the facts bit by bit, and so on.

Bradley's newly gained "empirical scientific" approach led him to pinpoint what he saw as a major problem with contemporary Chinese culture:

Mencius put it clearly: life is about self-cultivation. Confucianism puts it as cultivation of personal morals, and Buddhism is more interested in personal happiness in general, which I also feel attracted to. Even with computers and whatnot, it still comes down to cultivation of personal happiness, I think that doesn't change. Yu Qiuyu says the *junzi* is the cultural ideal of Chinese culture,⁵⁷ like the samurai is for the Japanese. China needs more self-cultivation to be taught; the attention paid to creams, designer clothes, hairstyles, doesn't make for interesting character.

What's missing is that self-cultivation is not being taught. I realised the importance of that after I came out here, and started using the empirical thinking device that the Western world taught me. I think self-cultivation is a natural thing. The way you explore knowledge, change your views, have an ideal that you want to become. You want to become good at this and that—you are cultivating already.

The "breach" that Bradley lays out here is between the promotion of consumerist lifestyles and his desire for the teaching of cultivation of moral subjecthood. For Bradley, the CCP's tight

⁵⁷ Yu Qiuyu 余秋雨 (born 1946), whose notion of the *junzi* I discuss below, is a well-known scholar and writer. He argues that the key to Chinese culture lies in the "way of the *junzi*" (*junzi zhi dao* 君子之道), the title of his book published two months before my interview with Bradley.

shaping of patriotic education has neglected the latter:

I feel that Chinese education misses out a whole chunk. It obviously teaches people to be ready for modern society, but it doesn't really tell you who you are and why you should love this country, or this civilisation. They will tell you to be patriotic but the reasons they supply are never good enough. The deeper you look into the Communist narrative the more you find it problematic. So I started to build up a different understanding of why I should love China. I started to realise that China deserved the love of its citizens, not because of the Communist success and the kinds of things they tell you, but because it's a very long culture—its true success lies in its longevity.

As with Xianyang, Bradley expressed in his comments a tension between a narrow, insufficient Communist Party patriotism and his desire to for a more fulfilling engagement with Chinese cultural identity.

Moreover, for Bradley, the promotion of a masculinity founded on Confucian self-cultivation was not simply desirable, but was vital for China's political system, as it does not have the checks and balances of Western political systems:

I guess the Chinese way is harsher, more strict. Because Confucian self-cultivation cultivates one towards power, like a man who can hold so much power without being corrupt—that's a much higher standard. I don't think Western men need to, because you have factions in government, you have independent trade unions, you will never give a man that much power, therefore there is no need for one single character to have such high moral standards as Xi Jinping 習近平 (born 1953) or Wen Jiabao 溫家寶 (born 1942). Wen Jiabao is considered a man of strong morals. And no Western man will ever be equal to him in the amount of power he can amass.

Nevertheless, despite Bradley's rejection of CCP historical narratives, he did not reject the Party itself, the survival of which he argued depended precisely on the moral self-cultivation of its officials. Exhilarated by Xi Jinping's anti-corruption drive, he talked of the Party staying in power for two or three hundred years, like a dynasty of old, if its leaders successfully fostered a *junzi* mentality.

The qualities that Bradley wished to see in elite Chinese men came together in the figure of the nineteenth-century general Zeng Guofan (曾國藩) (1811-1872), who, according to Bradley, successfully incorporated both Confucian and Daoist principles into his performance of cultivated masculinity. Zeng's reputation has taken an upturn in the reform era. A hero of Chiang Kai-Shek's, Zeng became a taboo figure during the Mao years, but since the 1980s has been trumpeted by cultural nationalists as “an exemplary Confucian man of literary and professional achievements and moral excellence”, and at the same time a seminal modernizer of industry and education.⁵⁸ Besides admiring Zeng as the saviour of the nation from the chaos of the Taiping rebellion (1850–1864), Bradley most appreciated Zeng's strength of moral character, summed up by Yingjie Guo as encapsulating “the four principal ideals of the Confucian man (achieving self-perfection, managing the family, governing the empire, and bringing order to all under heaven).”⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Guo, *Cultural Nationalism*, 53, 55.

⁵⁹ Guo, *Cultural Nationalism*, 62.

Much of what Bradley and Xianyang espoused in terms of an educated Chinese masculinity might well have been welcomed by Lao She's fictional Ma Zeren, who saw himself as belonging to an elite tradition of morally upstanding Confucian gentleman. Old Mr Ma would have recognised the association of the Chinese nation with its elite men and the near eclipse of Chinese women from its politics. But one major difference is clear: Ma Zeren despised those who willingly engaged in business; he believed government office to be the sole occupation befitting educated men. Bradley and Xianyang, however, had willingly "gone out to sea" (*xia hai* 下海).

Bradley's linking of the political strength and stability of the nation to the moral fibre of its elite men shows that the argument about manhood and nationhood has come full circle: for Bradley, China's elite men no longer need exhortations to become commercially minded, as in Lao She's day; instead, it is their Confucian self-cultivation of moral substance that will save the nation. Intrigued by this reconciliation of Confucian masculinity with commerce, I asked Bradley about his thoughts on the historically embedded conflict between the scholar (*shi* 士) and merchant (*shang* 商) classes.⁶⁰ He replied:

There's no doubt that most Chinese people have been educated to become a *shi*, but when they enter society, it's the *shang* that's the mainstream, everyone has this entrepreneurial streak. Conversation with *shi* does not actually fit the *shang*—that has always been the case. The *shi* has always been academic. I come out of a family with a strong tradition, so I was educated very strongly towards the *shi*. I realise in China the *shi* are esteemed very highly, but in most Western cultures not necessarily so. Western cultures are very happy to embrace the creativity of the *shang*, and the Western *shangren* (businessmen) are also morally very strong: for example, Bill Gates, Warren Buffett, Steve Jobs, these people. They are the level of *shi* in China. So for me to embrace the Chinese *shang* is no longer a problem.

My family background, if I'm to say it not so nicely, is pretentiously aristocratic, descendants of a hero, they still follow these old moral values. But, you know, I think it's more important to be down-to-earth. And the creativity of the *shang*, to combine with the morals of the *shi*, would be better, would be a better change for me. So I'm embracing the *shang* a lot more now. This is influenced by Western society.

Yet Bradley did not only look to the West for examples of bringing morality into business to resolve the breach between *shi* ideals and the exigencies of a market economy. He also approvingly mentioned Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) *Jin shang* (晋商), morally minded "Confucian merchants" (*ru shang* 儒商) from Shanxi, whose extensive trading in the required the development of more sophisticated financial institutions:

Within the banking system, the business system, you had the low and high ranks, and that was very clear, and the actual place you do your own things, that was very clear, and you worked your way very very slowly upwards. So there were capitalist devices at that time, and there were Confucian values within the capitalist devices, a lot like how big Japanese corporations are run.

⁶⁰ I retain the pinyin for *shi* and *shang* in the passage that follows, because of their salience in historical categorisations of the Chinese social order.

Contemporary scholarship shows that a stratum of Confucian merchants had in fact emerged during the latter years of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), when there was substantial population and economic growth but no increase in the number of officials, causing Confucian scholars to turn to commerce as a means of supporting themselves.⁶¹ In an early anticipation of current trends, these Confucian merchants reinterpreted the relationship of “righteousness” (*yi* 義) and “profitability” (*li* 利) from one of opposition to one of duality, although this revision never supplanted mainstream Confucian ideology, which continued to value scholarly morality above mercantile greed.

The production of films, TV dramas and documentaries about the Confucian merchants since the 1990s, intensifying since the turn of the millennium, has helped cement the idea of a late-imperial, morally sound “Confucian business culture” (*rushang wenhua* 儒商文化) that created wealth and generated taxes in responsible ways and helped the less well-off.⁶² Informed by this recently popularised understanding of Confucian-infused historical business practices in China, and an estimation of various Western businessmen as morally outstanding, Bradley legitimised his sense of himself as a moral marketplace man.

Contexts

Xianyang’s and Bradley’s ethical self-makings via the appropriation of the *junzi* ideal are creative and transformative responses to the circumstances they encounter as transnational, well-educated Chinese men; at the same time, their thoughts and actions are necessarily delimited by contemporary discourses and power relations. As educated Chinese men living and working in a Western environment they strive to enact a hegemonic Chinese masculinity against a historical background in which Chinese masculinity has been undermined, challenged and erased. Their reworking of their identity seeks to link their masculinity with Chinese nationhood and culture in ways that thwart the ever-present potential undoing of their manhood.

In their own ways, they enfold ideas of *junzi*-hood into their own subjectivities, invoking the *junzi* in inventive ways to resolve the “breaches” in their stories: in Xianyang’s case, to rationalise why the morally responsible and studious Chinese man is not attractive to Western women, and to alleviate the tension between the national and the global in his perspectives of himself and China; for Bradley, to imagine a more moral, less consumerist China, to promulgate a patriotism rooted in historical culture rather than CCP interests, and to reconcile Chinese intellectuals with marketplace economics. Internet blogs, current affairs magazines, TV programmes and recently published books show that many other individuals are also currently invoking the *junzi* and Confucian principles in their own particular trajectories of self-crafting. These myriad efforts are shaped by and contribute to discursive practices concerning *junzi* principles and Confucianism generally. To understand the ethical self-making of individuals thus requires an attention to the wider discursive regimes and relational flows of power that they are responding to; or, to use Kam Louie’s words: “To understand how Chinese or Japanese masculinities have evolved in the modern world, we must examine the archaeology of

⁶¹ Tak Sing Cheung and Ambrose Yeo-chi King, “Righteousness and Profitableness: The Moral Choices of Contemporary Confucian Entrepreneurs,” *Journal of Business Ethics* 54.3 (2004): 245-60, see p. 247.

⁶² Shuyu Kong, “Cultural Propaganda in the Age of Economic Reform: Popular Media and the Social Construction of Shanxi Merchants in Contemporary China,” *The China Journal* 63 (2010): 79–99.

indigenous East Asian masculinities.”⁶³ I begin with contemporary understandings of the *junzi*’s place in history.

Prominent in recent writings on imperial era Chinese masculinity is the dyad “cultural attainment–martial valour” (*wen-wu* 文武), “one of the single most important Chinese paradigms explaining the performance of gendered identities—in particular masculinity”, albeit a paradigm from which women were historically excluded.⁶⁴ For most of China’s history, scholars were deemed no less masculine than soldiers; indeed, “cerebral” *wen* characteristics were generally held in higher esteem than “macho” *wu* abilities.⁶⁵ *Wen* qualities are foremost in characterisations of the *junzi*, the highly educated, refined, “cultured man” (*wenren* 文人) of exemplary moral cultivation, who for several millennia has been held as the apogee of masculinity in Chinese culture, defined in opposition to the profit-seeking “inferior man” (*xiaoren* 小人).⁶⁶ Signifying the “ideal man in the officially sanctioned discourse”,⁶⁷ *junzi* masculinity in the imperial era fitted Raewyn Connell’s definition of hegemonic masculinity, in that it “embodied the currently most honored way of being a man, it required all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men.”⁶⁸

However, finessing the conventional view of the *junzi* as a “model of emulation”, in Donald Munro’s phrase, Antonio Cua argues that a key but overlooked function of the idea of the *junzi* is to provide “standards of inspiration rather than aspiration”, enabling a degree of “moral creativity” for individuals when attempting to “bridg[e] the gap between moral knowledge of a tradition and personal moral action.”⁶⁹ Cua’s insight sheds light onto the concept’s appropriations across different eras: in this view, seekers of *junzi* masculinity are always involved in an inventive process of adaptation, as similarly laid out in Foucault’s schema of ethical self-making.

In contrast to their *wen* counterparts, *wu* traits were predominant in depictions of tough, uneducated and somewhat brutal *haohan* 好漢 (lit. “good fellow”), who nevertheless embodied values of brotherly loyalty, generosity, justice and honour. Well known for indulging their appetites for food and drink, such heroes were expected typically to control their sexual desire and thus avoid the temptations of women.⁷⁰ The *junzi* too was expected to control his sexual desire, in his case through a path of “single-minded self-cultivation.”⁷¹ Important to note is that in principle *junzi* self-cultivation “has nothing to do with egocentrism or egotism” in the sense of pursuing selfish goals,⁷² which cultured men disparagingly associated with the base behaviour of

⁶³ Louie, *Globalizing World*, 109.

⁶⁴ Kam Louie, *Theorising Chinese Masculinity: Society and Gender in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 4, 11.

⁶⁵ Louie, *Chinese Masculinity*, 8-11; Geng Song, *The Fragile Scholar: Power and Masculinity in Chinese Culture* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004), 80-5.

⁶⁶ Louie, *Chinese Masculinity*, 44-5.

⁶⁷ Song, *Fragile Scholar*, 97.

⁶⁸ Raewyn Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,” *Gender & Society* 19.6 (2005): 829–59, see p. 832.

⁶⁹ Antonio S. Cua, “Problems of Chinese Moral Philosophy,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 27.3 (2000): 269-85, see p. 272.

⁷⁰ Hinsch, *Masculinities*, 116-21; Song, *Fragile Scholar*, 163-8.

⁷¹ Louie, *Chinese Masculinity*, 63.

⁷² Thomas Alexander, “The Music in the Heart, the Way of Water, and the Light of a Thousand Suns; A Response to Richard Shusterman, Crispin Sartwell, and Scott Stroud,” *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 43.1(2009): 41–58, see p. 47.

the *haohan*.⁷³ Instead, it is concerned with cultivating within oneself ever deeper “moral maturity” and “social responsibility.”⁷⁴

The post-imperial era fortunes of the *junzi* have been far from smooth, but the appeal of the concept has proven remarkably resilient. In the early twentieth century, although Confucianism came under attack from many young intellectuals as a cause of China’s weakness at that time, for others the appeal of the *junzi* persisted. Even under socialism, before the Cultural Revolution, there was public praise for Confucius as an educator, as well as exhortations to practice “self-cultivation” (*xiuyang* 修養) and to follow the “way of the *junzi*” in caring for the masses.⁷⁵ The mushrooming of “hybrid” masculinities in the postmodern consumer capitalism of recent decades may have weakened the influence of *wen-wu* as an ordering principle of masculinities in contemporary Chinese societies,⁷⁶ yet *wen-wu*-informed re-characterisations of historical Chinese masculinities still jostle with other ways of framing manhood in the postsocialist marketplace of masculinities.

Since the 1980s a growing Confucian revival has seen the emergence of the “new *junzi*”: well-educated, cosmopolitan professionals and businessmen who accrue social prestige from identifying with a reinvented Confucianism that advocates “moral management”, and, in common with the Ming and Qing Confucian merchants, an interpretation of Confucian righteousness and profit as equals in harmony with one another.⁷⁷ In the contemporary context, the infusion of morally elevated elements into the business sphere legitimises profit-making in the eyes of a Chinese cultural elite traditionally hostile to commerce, and has become a salient feature of pro-business discourse in the post-Mao era.⁷⁸ Yet, in a global context, it is just one manifestation, albeit a very distinctive one, of the reconciliation of the material and the moral that currently preoccupies the emerging middle classes in developing economies.⁷⁹

The revitalisation of the *junzi* ideal and Confucianism generally in recent years has manifested across different spheres of life in China. Prominent examples include the popular TV programmes and best-selling books of Beijing academic Yu Dan 于丹 (born 1965), in which she promotes the apolitical use of Confucian concepts as psychological aids for attaining happiness in a stressful world; the proliferation of Confucian-text focused “national studies” (*guoxue* 國學) curricula across all stages of state education; and the establishment of thousands of private schools across China teaching Confucian classics, ethics and associated activities like calligraphy to all ages of students.⁸⁰

The resurgence of “traditional” Chinese cultural pursuits and identities, supported and shaped by the state, fits a global trend towards the expression of identity in cultural and religious terms, due in part to increasing doubts across the world as to whether secular liberal or socialist

⁷³ Hinsch, *Masculinities*, 124.

⁷⁴ Chung-Ying Cheng, “Confucian Onto-Hermeneutics: Morality and Ontology,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 27.1 (2000): 33–68, see p. 35.

⁷⁵ Louie, *Chinese Masculinity*, 50.

⁷⁶ Louie, *Chinese Masculinity*, 161.

⁷⁷ Louie, *Chinese Masculinity*, 53-7; Kam Louie, “Confucius the Chameleon: Dubious Envoy for ‘Brand China.’” *Boundary 2* 38.1 (2011): 77–100, see pp. 90-3.

⁷⁸ Louie, *Chinese Masculinity*, 53-7.

⁷⁹ Mark Liechty, “Middle-class Déjà Vu: Conditions of Possibility, from Victorian England to Contemporary Kathmandu,” in Rachel Heiman, Carla Freeman, and Mark Liechty, eds., *The Global Middle Classes: Theorizing through Ethnography* (Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press, 2012), 271–99, see p. 280.

⁸⁰ Daniel A. Bell, *China’s New Confucianism: Politics and Everyday Life in a Changing Society* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 163-74; Louie, “Confucius”, 96-7; Wang Yan, “National Studies,” *China Report* 27 (2015), 16-25.

approaches are necessarily the only possibilities for building well-grounded and stable modern societies.⁸¹ Prominent scholars such as Yu Dan, Yi Zhongtian 易中天 (born 1947), Yu Qiuyu and Yao Zhongqiu 姚中秋 (born 1966), and political leaders such as Wen Jiabao and Xi Jinping have all contributed their own takes on why Confucianism and *junzi* subjectivity are relevant for contemporary China. While it is not something that Lao She and the New Culture Movement intellectuals anticipated or desired, it is not surprising that in this current political and cultural climate that young, well-educated men like Xianyang and Bradley are incorporating aspects of Confucianism to help make sense of themselves as modern, Chinese men.

Yu Qiuyu, whom Bradley cited as an influence, has made the figure of the *junzi* the cornerstone of his recent writing on Chinese culture identity; Yao Zhongqiu, another publicly prominent academic proponent of the *junzi* ideal, likewise asserts its significance for contemporary Chinese culture. Yu considers the “the way of the *junzi*” (*junzi zhi dao* 君子之道) Confucianism’s most direct encapsulation and the “key to Chinese culture” (*Zhongguo wenhua de yaoshi* 中國文化的鑰匙).⁸² Unsurprisingly, Yu highlights the *junzi-xiaoren* dichotomy that is at the heart of efforts to define the *junzi*. However, rather than discussing righteousness and profit-seeking, Yu draws on glosses from historical Confucian commentaries that distinguish these two figures on the basis of “moral integrity” (*renge* 人格). In Yu’s words, “the divide between the *junzi* and the *xiaoren*, makes the *junzi*, this ideal of moral integrity, more solid” (*junzi he xiaoren de huafen, shi junzi zhe yi renga lixiang geng jianyingle* 君子和小人的劃分，使君子這一人格理想更堅硬了); and he cites in support the Tang dynasty historian Wu Jing’s 吳兢 (670–749) concise formulation: “the *junzi* does good deeds; the *xiaoren* does evil deeds” (*xing shanshi ze wei junzi, xing eshi ze wei xiaoren* 行善事則為君子，行惡事則為小人).⁸³ Yu’s reverence for the traditional Confucian canon leads him to join other contemporary Confucians in attacking the Westernising intellectuals of the New Culture Movement.⁸⁴ For instance, Yu rubbishes Hu Shi’s 胡適 (1891–1962) reported sceptical description of the *Yijing* 易經 (*Book of Changes*) as a form of magic and amulet, claiming that Hu’s comments were “sloppy” (*caoshuai* 草率) and an inappropriate application of “Western modern scientific thinking” (*xifang jindai kexue siwei* 西方近代科學思維).⁸⁵

Similarly, Yao Zhongqiu harbours no doubts about the benefits of the *junzi* for Chinese culture and society: “China today desires to rebuild a superior social order, to undertake her global historical mission, and must take cultivating a *junzi* community as a pressing task” (*jinri Zhongguo yu chongjian youliang zhixu, bing chengdan qi shijie lishi zhi shiming, yi bi yi junzi qunti zhi yang chengwei xianwu* 今日中國欲重建優良秩序，並承擔其世界歷史之使命，亦必以君子群體之養成為先務).⁸⁶ Yao goes as far as to claim that “China’s civilisation and might depend ultimately on the cultivation of a certain scale of *junzi* community” (*Zhongguo zhi wenming yu weida, duanlai yu yiding guimo junzi qunti zhi yangcheng* 中國之文明與偉大，端

⁸¹ Scott Thomas, *The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Relations: The Struggle for the Soul of the Twenty-First Century* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

⁸² Yu Qiuyu 余秋雨, *Junzi zhi dao* 君子之道 (Beijing: Beijing lianhe chuban gongsi, 2014), 9.

⁸³ Yu, *Junzi*, 11.

⁸⁴ Guo, *Cultural Nationalism*, 88.

⁸⁵ Yu, *Junzi*, 5–6.

⁸⁶ Yao Zhongqiu 姚中秋, *Meide, junzi, fengsu* 美德·君子·風俗 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang daxue chubanshe, 2012), 77.

賴於一定規模君子群體之養成).⁸⁷ Without *junzi*, Yao claims, there can be no “governance” (*zhili* 治理), as the words and actions of the *junzi* are the fundamental mechanisms for shaping the moral, rational and good behaviour of the citizenry.⁸⁸ The *junzi*’s role is summed up in one word, for Yao: “scholar-official”,⁸⁹ the very figure that the New Culture Movement intellectuals were so keen to eradicate.

Class distinction predicated on moral quality lies at the heart of Yao’s conceptualisation of the contemporary *junzi*: even if contemporary society aims for gender, education and wage equality, Yao argues, there are still differences in people’s natural capacities, which can be physical, mental and moral. People can therefore be categorised as possessing either high or low “moral conduct” (*dexing* 德行), hence the division between the *junzi* and *xiaoren*.⁹⁰ As with Yu, Yao stresses this division in terms of moral character and self-cultivation, rather than the historical dichotomy of righteousness-profitability. He argues that as with the aristocracies of Western countries an emphasis on equality does not render the *junzi* superfluous, but merely transforms the justification of his role as guardian of the social order from birthright to recognition of his personal “quality” (*pinzhi* 品質).⁹¹ A morally elevated *junzi* stratum must therefore govern the *xiaoren*, Yao argues, as the latter are captives of their material desires. There is public appetite for the society-wide promulgation of *junzi* attributes, Yao claims, citing a 2012 opinion poll in the *China Youth Daily* in which 71% of respondents believed that *junzi* moral integrity could help rebuild Chinese citizens’ morality and values, and 87% hoped that *junzi* education would be strengthened.⁹² Yao even envisages China becoming a “*junzi* nation” (*junzi zhi bang* 君子之邦), in which “*junzi*-style” (*junzi shi* 君子式) businessmen, lawyers, politicians and scholars will utilise “the way of the *junzi*” to enable China to “harmonise relations with all nations” (*hehe wanguo* 合和萬國) and “display a world leading role appropriate to China’s size” (*fahui yu Zhongguo guimo xiangying de shijie lingdao zuoyong* 發揮與中國規模相應的世界領導作用).⁹³

As the writings of Yu and Yao demonstrate, contemporary appropriations do not simply associate the *junzi* with moral purity and a distinctly Chinese masculine identity, but also with refinement and class status. This is understandable in the context of the fervent social stratification in recent years, in which middle-class professionals have not only wished to distinguish themselves from the peasantry and the urban working classes, but also from “nouveau riche” entrepreneurs (*baofahu* 暴發戶). The latter may be very wealthy but their relatively low level of education and apparently unrefined behaviour incites the disdain of the middle classes. White-collars are also keen to distinguish themselves from the “black collars” (黑領 *heiling*), another very rich grouping in the popular imagination, whose secretive dealings in elite circles bring them much profit but also the accusation of corruption.⁹⁴

Today’s middle-class men position themselves, in contrast, as genuinely deserving of their wealth and status. Among leading sociologist Zhou Xiaohong’s list of characteristics typically associated with the middle class that I listed above, no less than three are concerned

⁸⁷ Yao, *Meide*, 93.

⁸⁸ Yao, *Meide*, 85.

⁸⁹ Yao, *Meide*, 84.

⁹⁰ Yao, *Meide*, 86.

⁹¹ Yao, *Meide*, 86-9.

⁹² Yao, *Meide*, 93.

⁹³ Yao, *Meide*, 93.

⁹⁴ Song and Hird, *Men and Masculinities*, 125 note 1.

with morality: “occupational morals”, “commercial honesty and good faith”, and “family ethics”. This kind of rhetoric fits a global pattern of middle-class self-portrayal as morally respectable subjects who “attempt to naturalize and protect their class privileges through discourses of moral distancing from their class Others.”⁹⁵ In the context of Chinese society, claiming the moral high ground through Confucian values and so-called “high quality” (*suzhi gao* 素質高) behaviour helps reproduce and justify a social hierarchy that recognises contemporary well-educated men as heirs to the long historical Chinese cultural tradition of elite, refined masculinity. This class division replicates itself overseas, as Lao She noted in *Mr Ma and Son*.⁹⁶ All of my participants told me they had little or no social interaction with Chinese in manual jobs, and other research on the Chinese in Britain is also suggestive of this divide.⁹⁷ In this light, Xianyang’s wish for a white girlfriend can be interpreted as the desire of the Chinese middle classes to appear cosmopolitan not only in comparison with white men but also in distinction to other classes of Chinese men.

Given the *junzi*’s strongly gendered dimensions, a word must also be said about contemporary gender contexts. As noted above, *junzi* identity historically has only been ascribed to men. In terms of sexual ethics, association of the *junzi* with morally appropriate treatment of women, such as in Xianyang’s view, should not necessarily be read as an endorsement of monogamy: elite men in China’s past often had multiple wives without any loss of moral standing, and the current trend for wealthy and powerful married men, including officials, to have second wives (*ernai* 二奶) and girlfriends (*xiaosan* 小三), echoes historical relationship patterns.⁹⁸ Such men construct their masculinity partly through their relationship with women, as parading a second wife or girlfriend displays their economic success and desirability, and brings them status.⁹⁹ Some wealthy women use their money to keep male lovers, but generally women’s sexuality is policed much more strictly than men’s. Professional women find themselves frequently frustrated at not being able to network as freely as men: if they do not guard their sexual reputation through carefully limiting their socialising they are quickly labelled as immoral.¹⁰⁰

In his analysis of an internet novel written by a highly educated returnee from the reform-era diaspora, Kam Louie shows how women are commoditized and exchanged among elite local and returnee men.¹⁰¹ My research participants told me that men’s sexual dalliances with women

⁹⁵ Liechty, “Middle-class Déjà Vu”, 296.

⁹⁶ Kam Louie, “Constructing Chinese Masculinity for the Modern World: With Particular Reference to Lao She’s *The Two Mas*,” *The China Quarterly* 164 (2000): 1062–78, see p. 1072; Anne Witchard, *Lao She in London* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012), 118.

⁹⁷ e.g. Pieke and Xiang, *Legality and Labour*.

⁹⁸ See Harriet Zurndorfer, “Polygamy and Masculinity in China: Past and Present,” in KamLouie, ed., *Changing Chinese Masculinities: From Imperial Pillars of State to Global Real Men* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2016), 13–33.

⁹⁹ Suowei Xiao, “The ‘second-wife’ phenomenon and the relational construction of class-coded masculinities in contemporary China,” *Men and Masculinities* 14.5 (2011): 607–27; Harriet Zurndorfer, “Men, Women, Money, and Morality: The Development of China’s Sexual Economy,” *Feminist Economics* 22.2 (2016): 1–23.

¹⁰⁰ Jieyu Liu, “Sexualized Labour? ‘White-Collar Beauties’ in Provincial China,” in Stevi Jackson, Liu Jieyu and Woo Juhyun, eds., *East Asian Sexualities: Modernity, Gender and New Sexual Cultures* (London: Zed Books, 2008), 85–103, see p. 97.

¹⁰¹ Louie, *Globalizing World*, 95–7. The title of the novel is *Hui guo xun huo ji* 回國馴火記 (the English translation provided is “Taming the Chinese Fire”). Its author goes by the name of An Puruo (安普若), a transliteration of “Emperor.” The author’s true identity is unconfirmed, but it is known that he studied for a business degree in the US and became a successful venture capitalist before returning to China in 2003. The novel is

in saunas and massage parlours were an unavoidable part of their business socializing (*yingchou* 应酬) when they returned to China on business trips. A media professional in his early thirties, a married father of two, told me during my interview with him: “People think that those who do this kind of *yingchou* are successful, so they all want to do these things.” He claimed a personal lack of enthusiasm for it, saying he just “did it for his job” or to “support a friend.”

As monogamy was not a requirement of historical *junzi* practices, some contemporary Confucian scholars argue that businessmen’s multiple sexual liaisons are not ethically problematic as long as these liaisons do not disrupt social harmony. Daniel A. Bell, an influential Canadian enthusiast for Confucianism who teaches political theory at Tsinghua University, said in a discussion about the widespread sexual practices in karaoke clubs that he “no longer view[s] monogamy as the only desirable way of organizing sexual relations [...]. Confucians are much more open in that respect.”¹⁰² Bell’s justification for karaoke-style prostitution is that it leads to a form of light emotional bonding between male clients and female hostesses, which reduces the temptation for married men to have affairs with colleagues and friends. In addition, he suggests that women can go to their own karaoke clubs with male prostitutes. He argues that the ritualised sexual relationships of the karaoke clubs thus encourage social harmony in a way that transactional prostitution privately carried out in secret does not.¹⁰³ In contrast to conventional Christian morality, Bell’s Confucianism does not demand the repression of illicit sexual desire, but rather that “desires are expressed in forms that are compatible with cooperative social interaction.”¹⁰⁴ In this line of thinking, *junzi* masculinity is not incompatible with extramarital sexual liaisons as long as they do not disrupt a man’s responsibilities to his family and society.

A final thought on gender contexts involves the hitherto unmentioned figure of the *caizi* 才子 (“talented scholar”). Dedicated to study and literary creativity, often physically and emotionally somewhat delicate, committed to romantic love, throughout Chinese history he has been a figure of great allure to women.¹⁰⁵ Ostensibly somewhat marginally positioned and subversive of conventional behavioural codes, the *caizi* reveals his normative elite male status through an inevitable social maturation into the “official” *junzi* masculinity.¹⁰⁶ His reinvention in postsocialist China is epitomised in the figure of the suave cosmopolitan Feng Tang—Xianyang’s favourite author—in the view of Pamela Hunt, who calls him a “postsocialist *caizi*.”¹⁰⁷ She suggests that Feng Tang’s apparently subversive sexual openness combines with a deeply masculinist and heteronormative stance that objectifies women and denies them agency. Feng Tang’s writing, character and business success suggest a twenty-first century cosmopolitan *caizi* masculinity that combines the literary and business abilities of the *shi* and the *shang*, and yet also reproduces gender and class hierarchies that privilege elite men. Xianyang associates himself with these processes in his admiration for Feng Tang’s wealth and the themes in his writing.

serialized on Haiguinet (www.haiguinet.com), a returnee website that is popular with Chinese professionals and academics in America and China. For more information, see Louie, *Globalizing World*, 105 n. 1 and n. 5.

¹⁰² Émilie Frenkiel, “Choosing Confucianism: Departing from the Liberal Framework: An Interview with Daniel A. Bell,” *books & ideas.net*, 2012, <http://www.booksandideas.net/Choosing-Confucianism-Departing.html>.

¹⁰³ Bell, *Confucianism*, 59-74.

¹⁰⁴ Bell, *Confucianism*, 68.

¹⁰⁵ Song, *Fragile Scholar*.

¹⁰⁶ Song, *Fragile Scholar*, 118.

¹⁰⁷ Hunt, “Phallic creativity.”

Conclusion

The accounts of Xianyang and Bradley paint a picture of what Sophia Aboim has termed the hybrid, or bricolage masculinities of late modernity. The gendered subjectivities of these two young professional men manifest a constellation of diverse influences from East and West, despite their positioning of Chinese *junzi* masculinity in part as “other” to Western masculinity. Xianyang’s modelling of the manners and clothing of young white British middle-class men and Bradley’s embrace of British empiricist analytical frameworks show the appeal to them of some elements of British masculinities. Aboim posits that bricolage masculinities come about when men appropriate diverse social and cultural referents to better compete in struggles for domination.¹⁰⁸ In similar vein, Demetrakis Demetriou argues: “It is its constant hybridization, its constant appropriation of diverse elements from various masculinities that makes the hegemonic bloc capable of reconfiguring itself and adapting to the specificities of new historical conjunctures.” Hegemonic masculinities, then, he continues, realise themselves through “an attempt to articulate, appropriate, and incorporate rather than negate, marginalize, and eliminate different or even apparently oppositional elements.”¹⁰⁹

None of what I have written above is intended to suggest that *junzi* masculinity is the only ghost from China’s past that haunts contemporary transnational Chinese masculinities. Elenah Uretsky, for instance, provides a different example of historical influence in her study of businessmen and the sexual economy in southwest China, in which she argues that the age-old concept of *nanzihan* 男子漢 (“manly man” or “real man”) is a crucial ingredient in normative assumptions about successful masculinity in China today.¹¹⁰ Nor is it the case that models from the past necessarily heavily influence all Chinese men. As Kam Louie states, there is “a great variety of diasporic Chinese masculinities”, ranging from the “reconstituted *wenren* ideal” to foreign-brand-worshipping businessmen.¹¹¹ Nor indeed have I intended to suggest that all Chinese men engage in and seek to justify extramarital sexual relations through appeals to historical Confucian masculine identities and practices. There are multiple competing masculinities across the Chinese world today.

Nevertheless, it is clear that a bricolage masculinity of transnational, cosmopolitan, and *junzi* elements is one of the masculinities to have emerged as a response to the particular political, social, and economic conditions of a postmodern, postsocialist era. Educated Chinese men’s “cosmopatriotic” incorporation of aspects of Western business masculinities and historical Chinese Confucian masculinities demonstrates their attempt to insert themselves more advantageously into local and global power relations of gender, class and nation.¹¹² In this light,

¹⁰⁸ Aboim, *Plural Masculinities*, 39.

¹⁰⁹ Demetrakis Z. Demetriou, “Connell’s Concept of Hegemonic Masculinity: A Critique,” *Theory and Society* 30.3 (2001): 337–61, see p. 348.

¹¹⁰ Elenah Uretsky, *Occupational Hazards: Sex, Business, and HIV in Post-Mao China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), 54–85.

¹¹¹ Louie, *Globalizing World*, 102.

¹¹² For a discussion of Chinese TV drama depictions of masculinist and ethnically chauvinist Chinese transnational business masculinities, see Geng Song, “Cosmopolitanism with Chinese Characteristics: Transnational Male Images in Chinese TV Dramas”, in Derek Hird and Geng Song, eds., *Between China and the world: transnational Chinese men and masculinities* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, forthcoming). After interviewing Chinese male migrants in Australia, Ray Hibbins concluded that they exhibited “a Confucian variant of business masculinity with a stronger commitment to hierarchy and social consensus” than Western business masculinities, which he sees as “a partial guarantee of a continuation of the traditional Chinese patriarchy.” Hibbins, “Migration and Gender Identity”,

espousals of *junzi* masculinity, no matter how principled its portrayal in the accounts through which individuals like Xianyang and Bradley constitute themselves as moral subjects, reflect and contribute to discursive practices and power relations that effect classed, gendered and sexual privileges for a wealthy and powerful male elite. As Yingjie Guo argues, while some contemporary proponents of Confucianism may genuinely believe in its “magic power” to solve the world’s problems, it is also possible that theirs is “primarily a hegemonic practice calculated to reinforce the discursive formation of Confucian values and thereby empower themselves in the contest for influence and control over national identity and the future directions of the nation.”¹¹³

There is much, then, about the “new” *junzi* that is decidedly old. The exclusion of women, poorly educated men, non-married men and non-Han men from the *junzi* category persists, thereby delimiting it in gendered, classed, heteronormative and ethnocentric ways. China’s white-collar professionals’ appropriation of the *junzi* thus complicates their reputation for being egalitarian and democratically minded, undermines the idea that the middle-class is ever-increasingly progressive, and challenges theories that posit sociocultural convergence between East and West as the inevitable result of economic development. My qualitative research points to the same conclusion as Kam Louie’s investigation of online literature: “even for diasporic Chinese men who revel in being modern and Westernized, traditional *wen* attributes still form the fundamental belief system according to which they operate.”¹¹⁴

If Lao She were alive today, his satirical urge might have targeted the dark effects of the convenient reconciliation between Confucian principles and marketplace ambitions. Yet, perhaps he too might have been beguiled by the *junzi*’s post-Mao transformation into a mechanism for resolving social, cultural and political tensions felt by the Chinese middle class in their engagement with the wider world. Whichever it might be, the fact that young, educated, confident, transnational, marketplace Chinese men in London are embracing *junzi* principles to fashion moral, middle-class masculinities in the twenty-first century surely begs not only a sequel to his classic novel, but also deeper consideration of the impact of the “Confucian turn” upon contemporary Chinese gendered subjectivities.

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177.

¹¹³ Guo, *Cultural Nationalism*, 88.

¹¹⁴ Louie, *Globalizing World*, 103.