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# White-collar men and masculinities in contemporary urban China.

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# WHITE-COLLAR MEN AND MASCULINITIES IN CONTEMPORARY URBAN CHINA

DEREK HIRD

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of Westminster for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

September 2009

## Declaration

I certify that the thesis I have presented for examination for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the University of Westminster is solely my own work

# Abstract

This work investigates the characteristics of masculinity that are at the symbolic heart of China's economic success, and of which the figure of the white-collar man is emblematic. Based on fieldwork observations, interview and media publications, it examines the gendered practices, aspirations and attitudes of men who identify with or aspire to white-collar status alongside discursive representations of the Chinese white-collar man, interrogating the links between practice and discourse. Drawing on various approaches to theorizing subjectivity, it argues that white-collar masculinity is performed in ways that suggest both radical shifts and continuities in understandings of gender, which challenge the prevalent teleological narrative of China's modernization.

The first chapter sets the scene for white-collar masculinity in the reform era and discusses fieldwork methodologies. Chapter two sets out the theoretical framework adopted to analyse the gendered white-collar subject, and examines academic literature on masculinities in China. Chapter three examines the 'body culture' of informants, and how they 'bring themselves' to white-collar discourse through attention to their bodies in areas of daily life such as dress, movement and hygiene. Chapters four and five look respectively at the production of corporate masculinity both inside and outside the office, through an exploration of business and leisure practices, and their overlap. Chapter six takes a close look at the young white-collar man as (heterosexual) boyfriend and husband and the final chapter investigates sexualisations of young urban middle-class males, and comments on their transformative possibilities.

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# Chapter One
# Introduction

The sleek and smartly-suited young man is an omnipresent figure in twenty-first century China. In magazines, television adverts, on billboards, walking in the streets of business districts, and seen through the windows of the plush coffee shops which have mushroomed in the upmarket retail and business areas in recent years,[1] his sophisticated, prosperous and charming looks are emblematic of the global success of the economic reforms of the last three decades. His cool, metropolitan, appearance is associated with the location and look of the outlets he frequents, and the cost and conspicuous brand label foreignness of his clothes and accessories give him the symbolic, spatial and material attributes of fashionable, urban status. His clothing, hairstyle, bodily mannerisms, displays of knowledge (when ordering a latte, for example) and relative wealth (using his laptop) – give him a globally recognisable urbane 'look', which, in China, is synonymous with a '*bailing*' (white-collar) identity. Unmistakably, the Chinese 'white-collar man' (*bailing nanren*) has arrived, and is stepping on to the global corporate stage with confidence as the model of middle class status to which young urbanites aspire. Men want to identify with and possess his attributes, parents urge their sons to attain the values and opportunities his image suggests, and women want to marry someone who exemplifies his achievements. Reflecting this popularity, numerous magazines catering to white-collar men – particularly as consumers intent on constructing a particular image of masculinity – have sprung up since the turn of the millennium.[2] The contemporary prominence

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[1] This is such a popular activity for the urban middle-class that Starbucks has become one of the most well-known brands among 25 to 40-year-old white-collar workers, spawning many look-alike competitors. It opened its first outlet in China in 2000 and now has over 200 branches in 21 cities. The affluent young men who can afford to patronize Starbucks enjoy an exclusive atmosphere: the price of a coffee in Starbucks China is beyond the reach of most urbanites. See 'Starbucks Soars in China', *Asia Times,* June 15, 2006, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/China_Business/HF15Cb06.html (accessed June 30, 2008).

[2] These magazines include the Chinese editions of foreign titles, which I discuss in more detail in my methodologies section below. I briefly summarise them here: *Nanren zhuang* (For Him Magazine), claimed print run 556,000: '*Nanren Zhuang*' (For Him Magazine), Liulan wang (gotoread.com), http://www.gotoread.com/mag/12286/ (accessed October 7, 2008); *Shishang jiankang* (Men's health), claimed print run 450,320: '*Shishang jiankang*' (Men's Health), Mediasearch.cn, http://www.mediasearch.cn/mediumPage.aspx?mediumID=501ef552-0e52-42d2-8f48-5dda05097f12&login=no (accessed October 7, 2008); *Shishang xiansheng* (Esquire), claimed print run 625,000 copies: '*Shishang xiansheng* (Esquire)', Liulanwang (gotoread.com), http://www.gotoread.com/mag/594/ (accessed October 7, 2008); and home-grown titles such as *Mingpai* (Mangazine), claimed print run 215,000: '*Mingpai*' (Mangazine), Liulanwang (gotoread.com), http://www.gotoread.com/mag/12089/ (accessed October 7, 2008); and *Meili xiansheng* (Men's style), claimed print run 334,500: 'Meili xiansheng (Men's Style)', Liulan wang (gotoread.com), http://www.gotoread.com/mag/12822/ (accessed October 7, 2008).

of the 'white-collar man' thus plays a highly significant part in shaping not only contemporary ideas of status and 'class', but also of conceptions of the 'modern man'.[3]

Based on interview data and a wide range of popular media materials, this thesis offers an analysis of the white-collar man as a gendered subject. At first glance, this figure suggests a radical re-formation of the masculine subject driving China's social and economic transformation, far removed from the drab political correctness of the ideal man of the Mao era.[4] It inflects the assumptions, processes and practices of China's global modernity with a range of gendered characteristics which derive largely from global circulations of meaning. Yet, as my interview data reveals, individual identification with the global attributes of the 'white-collar' image is not inconsistent with simultaneous identification with other locally and culturally embedded notions of gender that interrupt the neat outlines of the global image. This thesis therefore interrogates the possibilities of masculinity – the multiple masculinities – represented by the discursive figure and subjectivity of the white-collar man as a lens on to the contemporary ideals of masculinity associated with China's economic success. Fundamentally, therefore, my aim is to analyse the understandings of gender – specifically of masculinity – that underpin both subjective and discursive commitment to the ideological trajectory of China's global success.

This project is particularly significant now, at a time when gender inequities in China are increasing, most notably in employment, and yet when the government and popular discourse give little more than rhetorical attention to issues of hierarchy and injustice in gendered practices and social relations.[5] My analysis of contemporary urban masculinities therefore contributes new perspectives to the debate about the discursive and subjective production of gender difference and hierarchy in China. While, as I summarise in following sections, there are a number of works that cover, to varying extents, the reform era gendering of Chinese society in general, and the gendering of women, there have been no significant

[3] I am aware of the debates about modernity and postmodernity in China in such works as Zhang Xudong's *Postsocialism and Cultural Politics: China in the Last Decade of the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008) Many dimensions of these debates remain to be explored, such as their implications for queer perspectives. However, my focus in this work is predominantly ethnographic and discursive, and I will leave discussion of these implications for another occasion.

[4] As Dorothy Hodgson has pointed out: 'the assumptions, component processes, and consequences of Modernity are inherently gendered.' See her 'Of Modernity/Modernities, Gender and Ethnography', in *Gendered Modernities: Ethnographic Perspectives*, ed. Dorothy L. Hodgson (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 8. Hodgson's comment is based on the ethnographic evidence from various global sites presented in the book's chapters.

[5] For comments on rising gender inequalities see: Liu Jieyu, 'Gender Dynamics and Redundancy in Urban China', *Feminist Economics* 13, no. 3 (2007): 128; Harriet Evans, 'Sexed Bodies, Sexualized Identities, and the Limits of Gender', China Information 22, no. 2 (2008): 364-5; and Zhong Xueping, 'Hou funü jiefang yu ziwo xiangxiang' (Post-women's liberation and self-reflections), *Dushu* (Reading) no. 11 (2005): 16-17. For comments about resistance to critical gender analysis see Evans, ibid., 365; and Zhong, ibid., 16.

academic works that focus on the masculine gendering of the emerging middle class.[6] Through analysis of diverse sources, including texts, images, and practices, I elucidate the disjunctures and similarities between discursive and popular depictions – or 'subject positions' - of white-collar men, and the complex, lived realities of masculinities experienced by men who identify themselves as 'white-collar'.

In so doing, I argue that mainstream media discourses posit the white-collar man within a narrative of progress, emblematic of China's 'joining tracks'[7] with the (imagined) developed world, depicting him variously as the consummate consumer, hard-working corporate employee, sports and leisure enthusiast, ideal, emotionally literate husband, and even metrosexual icon, although careful consideration of these media discourses reveals many implicit assumptions about a naturalised gender hierarchy. This chapter goes beyond media discourses and through fieldwork-based accounts of white-collar men's lived experiences uncovers how media images interact with day-to-day practices , and argues that the mostly sanitised, globally-inflected depictions of white-collar men in mainstream media encapsulate only a limited range of the subjective positions with which white-collar men like my informants identify. The disjunctures between discourse and lived experiences reveal not an apparently 'seamless' to-ing and fro-ing between written discourse and subject formation, but rather white-collar male subjects' simultaneous insertion in other discourses and practices of masculinities, deeply embedded in cultural and social custom, such as networks of *guanxi* (relationships) and *yingchou* (business socialising) activities which construct white-collar masculinities through the exclusion of the feminine 'Other'.

Based on this fieldwork, I argue that white-collar men's subjectivities are a messy composite of jostling positions, belying the glossy mainstream modernization narrative of

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[6] Works covering gender and women include: Harriet Evans, *The Subject of Gender: Daughters and Mothers in Urban China* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008); Lisa Rofel, *Desiring China: Experiments in Neoliberalism, Sexuality, and Public Culture*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007); Liu Jieyu, *Gender and Work in Urban China: Women Workers of the Unlucky Generation* (London: Routledge, 2007); Wang Zheng, 'Gender, Employment and Women's Resistance,' in *Chinese Society: Change, Conflict and Resistance*, ed. Elizabeth J. Perry and Mark Selden (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 158-182; Susan Brownell and Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, eds, *Chinese Femininities/Chinese Masculinities: A Reader* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Lisa Rofel, *Other Modernities: Gendered Yearnings in China After Socialism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999); Li Xiaojiang, 'With What Discourse Do We Reflect on Chinese Women? Thoughts on Transnational Feminism in China', in *Spaces of their Own: Women's Public Sphere in Transnational China*, trans. Zhang Yajie with editorial assistance by Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, ed. Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 261–77; Harriet Evans, *Women and Sexuality in China: Dominant Discourses of Female Sexuality and Gender since 1949* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997); and Tani Barlow, 'Theorizing Woman: Funü, Guojia, Jiating', in *Body, Subject & Power in China*, ed. Angela Zito and Tani Barlow (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 253-289.

[7] I borrow this phrase from Rebecca Karl's discussion on the narrative of modernisation in China: Rebecca E. Karl, ''Joining Tracks with the World': The Impossibility of Politics in China', *Radical Philosophy* no. 131 (May/June, 2005): 20-27.

them as standard bearers of a progressive, post-millennial society, that the change represented by the figure of the white-collar man does not necessarily equate to progress in lived realities. In the competitive and fast-changing social climate of today's China white-collar men fall back on tried and tested models of masculinities when they feel under pressure, or for example, in their homosocial activities, yet this goes largely unremarked in media narratives oriented to hailing the benefits of consumer society rather than pointing to its gender inequities.

**Setting the Scene: Fieldwork**

The conceptual categories and ideas around which I structure this dissertation are based first of all on the key themes that emerged from my interview subjects' accounts, and that give shape to my chapters. My research interests, the issues I addressed and the encounters I had during my fieldwork in Beijing established the boundaries and limits to the aspects of white-collar men's lives that I discuss. For now, therefore, I want to set the scene by describing my fieldwork and the methods I used.

I spent eleven months in Beijing, where I used three main methods to build up a picture of white-collar men's sense of themselves as men: participant observation, conducting informal conversations and more formal interviews, and collecting relevant media publications and articles. As my approach was primarily ethnographically-framed, I undertook my interviews and participant observation interviews before turning to analyse the media articles I gathered during my time in Beijing. In adopting this approach, I drew on Everett Zhang's instructive ethnographic study of entrepreneurial activity, in which he contends that 'the gap between law in texts and law in practice with regard to people's everyday lives is considerably larger in China than in the West', and, quoting Paul Rabinow, that 'more attention needs to be given to "minor practices," which escape the dominant discursive trends.'[8] Such an approach requires analysis both of 'discursive trends' and 'real life' experiences which do not feature prominently in the mainstream media. Both these inform my understanding of the production of masculine subjectivities, but I approach them in different ways. I treat the interviews as 'texts' which reveal how my informants make sense of themselves as gendered subjects, and use the main themes that emerged from my analysis of the interview material to structure the thesis. As for the media materials, I have taken them as discursive expressions of regimes of white-collar masculinity that produce the possibility of white-collar male subjects. They

[8] Zhang, ibid., 237; quoting Paul Rabinow, *Essays on the Anthropology of Reason* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 7.

clearly show a large overlap with the self-understandings of my informants, but I do not take the media materials in any way as 'representative' of white-collar 'realities', as I explain in more detail in the theoretical section of chapter two.

My day-to-day activities during the months I lived in Beijing gave me ample chance to talk to people, and their views, as recorded in my notes, form the substantive data for this thesis. I held countless conversations and observed a multitude of everyday practices in many diverse environments, from gleaming corporate offices, classrooms of enthusiastic young white-collar workers, staffrooms of middle-class teachers, shopping malls teeming with fashionable urban consumers, street corners in the business and IT districts, foreign and local fast food restaurants, upmarket hairdressing salons, to the living rooms and kitchens in the condominium apartments of the new middle class. Most of my participant observation and conversations with informants came from two major and very rich sources: working with colleagues and students in schools, and spending leisure time with friends and occasionally colleagues and students. I worked at three schools as a teacher of English: the Beijing branch of a large Taiwanese-owned chain catering for mainly kindergarten and some primary school age children in the suburb of Wangjing; a small school cum consultancy in Sanyuanqiao that focussed on one-to-one tuition with business people – usually in their late twenties or thirties – on and off site; and the Haidian branch of a medium-sized Chinese chain that taught mostly white-collar employees in their twenties, in small group classes. These schools offered plenty of rich opportunities for observing and participating in the lives of the middle class, and in particular white-collar men, such as the corporate marketing men in their twenties and thirties at the Taiwanese-owned school, the affluent private-sector executives in their thirties who were my one-on-one students at Sanyuanqiao, and the smartly turned out young office workers in the media and IT industries who were the mainstay of the Haidian student body.

I spent much of my out-of-school time with white-collar male friends in their twenties and thirties, shopping in the glitzy malls of Wangfujing, eating out in the increasing number of fashionable and not inexpensive 'ethnic' or themed (Yunnanese, Tibetan, Buddhist vegetarian) restaurants in the business districts, having haircuts in upmarket hair salons in Sanlitun. Sometimes we went to superior quality foot massages in spas catering to corporate customers, or to work out in a well-appointed 'white-collar' gym in Zhongguancun. I also spent quite a lot of time in the homes and parental homes of my informants, watching widescreen TV from IKEA sofas (rosewood in their parents' apartments).

Altogether, I spoke with around thirty-five Chinese people directly about my research topic, two thirds of whom were men. I had many general conversations with several others,

and I noted down their comments that interested me. I met my informants mainly through work or socialising: they were colleagues, students, friends, colleagues of friends and friends of friends. Not all could be described as white collar, but most were; and they could all be described as middle class. Almost all were in their twenties and thirties. Out of this group of informants with whom I had informal, unscripted and often spontaneous conversations about my research, I further conducted eleven rather more formal and loosely-planned interviews of ten individual sessions with eight men and two women, and one group session with three women. I found this number of more formal interviews sufficient, since I accumulated so much material from my day-to-day chats. These interviews were 'semi-structured', in that I had in mind some issues around masculinity that I wanted to raise.[9] I found that both formal and informal discussions provided fruitful data. The more formal interviews yielded detailed verbatim accounts, most of which I recorded, and yet the causal chats yielded perhaps more unguarded and spontaneous comments and opinions.

In addition to observing the social manifestations of white-collar masculinity, and finding ways to talk about it with my informants, I devoted huge energy to gathering primary textual and internet-based material on the topic. The emergence in recent years of lifestyle magazines targeted specifically at white-collar men provided me with ready sources of relevant material. These sources include *Nanren zhuang* (For Him Magazine), the Chinese edition of a well-known UK-founded men's magazine, which with a print run of 556,000,[10] carries discussions about sex, and highly sexualized images of women, as well as being a clothing and consumer item guide for young urban men. *Nanren zhuang*'s relatively high price of 20 yuan, its adverts for upmarket cars, imported spirits and foreign brand-name office wear, casual clothing, and watches, and its substantial attention to Western and youth cultures, indicate its main target audience as aspiring and already achieving young white-collar men. Another Chinese edition of a foreign title aimed at young men is *Shishang xiansheng* (Esquire), which concentrates particularly on sophisticated brands of clothing, accessories and electronic gadgets. Its pages contain a large number of male models demonstrating a very sophisticated look and lifestyle taste, as well as carries articles on men thought to be style

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[9] I used Jennifer Mason's step-by-step guide to assembling interview questions. I listed several 'big' research questions relating to my topic then selected one: 'What choices might a man make in how he conducts his daily life that mark him as a man?' which I then broke down into mini-questions. See Jennifer Mason, *Qualitative Researching* (London: Sage, 2002), 69-70. In formulating ideas for these interviews, I also drew from my experience and knowledge gained on a qualitative research training course which provided practice in applying qualitative research theory to practical situations.

[10] *Nanren zhuang* (*For Him Magazine*), Liulan wang (gotoread.com). http://www.gotoread.com/mag/12286/ (accessed October 7, 2008).

leaders. It also retails at 20 yuan, and at 625,000 copies per issue, has an even higher print run than *Nanren zhuang*.[11] *Shishang jiankang* (Men's Health), yet another Chinese edition of a well-known foreign title, is a health and lifestyle magazine aimed at affluent young white-collar men, with an emphasis on fitness, sports, the outdoor life, travel, food, and general physical and mental well-being. It retails at 20 yuan, which suggests it is targeted at the same group of affluent urban men as the two previous magazines. According to the *gotoread.com* introduction, it emphasises the healthy development of the individual: '*Men's Health* guides readers to care deeply about the health of their own body and mind (*ziwo shenxin jiankang*), and comprehensively raises the self-improvement of individuals in society (*geren zai shehui zhong ziwo wanshan*) and self-development ability (*ziwo fazhan de nengli*).'[12]

There are also homegrown men's magazines, like *Mingpai* (Mangazine), which caters to a slightly older bracket of managers in their thirties and early forties. It carries adverts and features about more big-ticket items such as cars and property, and articles which celebrate the lifestyle of a global elite. Its relatively high cover price of 28 yuan indicates the affluence of it target audience, and its smaller print run of 215,000 speaks of its exclusiveness.[13] *Meili xiansheng* (Men's style) is a local magazine which mixes a style guide for young men with articles on topical foreign news stories, health and fitness and popular youth culture. Priced at 20 yuan, it has a print run of 334,500.[14] *Shishang junzi* (Menbox) is a ground-breaking gay (in all but name) magazine, widely available from magazine vendors in Beijing, Shanghai and other major cities. In common with many other men's magazines, it carries articles on fashion, skincare and other aspects of a young, relatively affluent, urban male consumer lifestyle. Unlike most other men's magazines, however, it also carries lots of highly sexualised pictures of young men, as well as some articles on gay topics. It has been described as 'China's first real gay magazine', although it does not advertise itself as such.[15]

Alongside men's magazines, the Internet is an extremely influential medium circulating the image of the white-collar man. I used the Internet as a follow-up source of

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[11] 'Shishang Xiansheng' (Esquire), Liulanwang (gotoread.com), http://www.gotoread.com/mag/594/ (accessed October 7, 2008).
[12] 'Shishang nanshi jiankang: kanwu jieshao' (Fashionable Men's Health: publication introduction), *Liulanwang* (gotoread.com), http://3355.gotoread.com/mag/12040/ (accessed August 18, 2008). There is no print run figure given.
[13] *Mingpai* (Mangazine), Liulanwang (gotoread.com). http://www.gotoread.com/mag/12089/ (accessed October 7, 2008).
[14] *Meili xiansheng* (Men's Style), Liulan wang (gotoread.com). http://www.gotoread.com/mag/12822/ (accessed October 7, 2008).
[15] Jeremy Goldkorn, 'Menbox: China's First Real Gay Magazine', Danwei, http://www.danwei.org/magazines/menbox_chinas_first_real_gay_m.php (accessed September 16, 2008).

further information and views on issues that I first encountered in discussions, in magazines or on television; this was try to ensure that my Internet sources as much as possible were relevant to mainstream social debates. Almost all of them were from large, well-known websites, such as *Xinlang* (Sina), the largest and most used Chinese web portal; *Guoji zaixian* (China Radio International Online), the website of the state-owned external radio broadcaster; and CCTV.com, the website of the domestic television giant CCTV. The articles in the magazines, foreign and local, and on the websites, often encapsulated the themes that run through this thesis. They offered advice and instruction on how to dress and act as a white-collar man, promoting consumerism and the fulfillment of individual desire, not least through pervasive advertising of luxury brands. Perhaps most noticeably, these magazines converged in positioning white-collar masculinities as *the* most desirable 'models' of masculinities in China today.

Any methodology necessarily has its own limitations, and my choice of fieldwork methods limited the themes I discuss, restricting them by factors such as what I discussed with whom, the kind of questions I thought were relevant, and the nature of the answers I received in return. I generally chose to interview the kind of young, urban, affluent men and women I spent most time with, at work or at leisure, since it was their lives I was observing on a daily basis. The themes which I drew out of the interview material prompted me to look for textual material – in magazines and online – which displayed images of and discussed white-collar masculinities within these themes. I could then begin to get a clearer picture of how my informants took up certain subject positions in various places and at various times, or resisted them, or were complicit with them, or all of these. Inevitably, though, these themes were not and could not offer encyclopaedic coverage of all the subject positions that white-collar men may take up in multiple and diverse ways. Two such obvious areas would be how notions of masculinities are interwoven with notions about being fathers and sons, but because most of my informants were unmarried and, not being Beijingers, lived far from their parents, these issues did not come up much in conversation, and I made a decision not to pursue inquiries in these areas. Some of my informants have now married, subsequent to my fieldwork period, and others, though not all, are facing increasing pressure to get married from their parents, so these would undoubtedly be fruitful topics for future research.

I now give a brief outline of the themes around which I have structured the chapters before discussing the key theoretical and analytical perspectives I adopt.

**The Chapters**

Chapter two sets out the theoretical concepts which I bring to bear on my ethnographic data under three main themes: the formation of white-collar subjects in discourse in non-discursive fields the practices through which white-collar men habituate themselves to performing white-collar masculinity; and the hegemonic dominance of a particular model of white-collar masculinity amongst the multiple masculinities of contemporary Chinese society. Following this theoretical discussion, I turn my attention to academic studies of Chinese masculinities, which reveal a variety of analytical approaches to the study of this field in terms of the types of concepts and materials utilised. Chapter three examines the constitution of a white-collar body culture of informants through practices of consumption, and how my informants attempt to habituate themselves to discursive white-collar subject positions through attention to their bodies in areas of their daily lives such as dress, movement and hygiene. It looks at popular media images of white-collar men and discusses the kinds of bodies and lifestyles on display. In chapter four, I bring a particular focus to the places, sites and assemblages in which corporate masculinities are formed, taking an in-depth look at white-collar male practices in a private language school for the children of middle-class professionals. I investigate the intersections between these and the discursive formation of figures of corporate men in media depictions examining key popular formulations of the advantages and disadvantages of their hard-working lifestyles. Throughout the chapter, I highlight the intricate intermingling of local and global notions and practices of masculinity in corporate contexts. Chapter five examines the non-workplace activities of white-collar men, including the key practices of business entertainment, showing clearly that depictions of 'honest' and above-board white-collar men are complicated, if not dispelled, through their everyday involvement with political and economic realities, and the construction of their masculinity through the subjection of the feminine 'Other'. It further investigates the consumerised leisure pursuits undertaken for individual pleasure for which white-collar men are well known. In all these areas, a key conceptual focus is on the newly-emerged 'desiring subject', and its inscription as the hegemonic model of the white-collar man. In chapter six, I take a close look at young white-collar men as (heterosexual) boyfriends and husbands, through the experiences and opinions of informants and through an analysis of the spousal ideal in the popular media, investigating in particular how breadwinning pressures on corporate men play are constituted in and constitute widening gender inequalities in Chinese society. Chapter seven investigates mainstream discourses about young urban middle class males as sexual subjects, showing how new possibilities for remaking sexual male bodies – as desiring and desired – have come to the fore in recent years, which both challenge and retain conventional notions of masculine

identity. It examines the emergence of heteronormative middle-class romantic ideals, and explores how gay white-collar men manage the tensions of maintaining ‘regular’ white-collar lives while discreetly fulfilling individual sexual desires.

# Chapter Two
## Terms of analysis: concepts and themes

The theoretical terms I have chosen to analyse my field data can be grouped under three main themes: the formation of the white-collar subject in mainstream discourses; the lessons in performing white-collar masculinity that my informants learnt from this discourse; and the question of the hegemony, or apparent dominance of a particular version of white-collar masculinity amongst multiple types of masculinities in contemporary Chinese society. I set out the way in which I approach these issues in the first part of this chapter.

In the second part, I examine academic writings about Chinese masculinities in recognition of the contribution they make to the constitution of ideas about masculinities and gender in China, and particularly for their elucidation of historical notions and ideals. I finish this section with a brief discussion about, the 'rise' of the middle class and its attributes, for, above all else, the figure of the white-collar man is currently seen as the standard bearer of the middle classes and China's 'joining tracks' with the developed world.

**Theorising the subject of white-collar masculinities**

The conceptual themes around which I have structured this narrative derive in the first place from the key themes that arose in my fieldwork, and that came to form core elements of my analysis as I was formulating my initial responses to my fieldwork data. These are subject and subjectivity, concerning principally the formation of the masculine white-collar subject and how these subjects make sense of themselves; assemblages, the interwoven combinations of discourses, bodies, objects, practices and places through which subjectivities are produced; habituation – the synthesis of performativity and habitus through which the white-collar man ingrains certain routines and performances into his bodily practices; and the hegemonic model of white-collar masculinity which currently prevails amongst multiple white-collar masculinities, all of which draw in varying extents from global, regional and local influences and practices.

But first a brief word to explain my selection of themes and theorists below. All these topics are now covered in an extensive and sophisticated literature, and involve ongoing, often heated debates in academic and other circles. In the choices I have made, there is one notable

exclusion, made on the grounds of the disciplinary and empirical parameters of this work, and my training: the psychoanalytic concepts and theories deriving from Freud and Lacan.[16] I draw on these very indirectly, in so far as they inform the views of the theorists whose work I use more explicitly. But beyond the limitations in my knowledge and training which dissuade me from employing such concepts, I also believe that there is a danger in ascribing 'foundational' status to psychoanalytic theories of subject formation, taking these theories as undisputed categories (such as Lacan's 'mirror-stage'). If we follow Foucault, then the 'psy disciplines' (to borrow Nikolas Rose's term) are discursive practices, and we can 'decentre' them from their often taken-for-granted status as foundational truths of subject formation. In my opinion, rigorous academic work must adopt the same kind of critical stance towards psychoanalytic concepts and related ideas as it does with religious and other 'truth'-producing discursive formations. In other words, I do not accept at face value the Freudian and Lacanian accounts of subjectivity formation, but take them as possibilities amongst many others, which need rigorous examination before being employed. Furthermore, as I stated above, I am not qualified, and it is beyond the scope of this thesis, to do so. Nonetheless, this is not to deny their usefulness, insightfulness, and the strong contribution they have made to many areas of knowledge, not least in notions of the fragmented subject; it is simply not to privilege them.

My conceptual and theoretical approach hinges on a view of the masculine subject which is neither unitary nor easily readable from discursive texts and images. In line both with the evidence from my fieldwork, as well as a wide range of well known theoretical positions, the subject of the chapters that follow is not the universal, stable coherent and founding subject of Enlightenment philosophy, but the decentred, inconsistent, fluid, historically and culturally specific entity theorised by a wide range of scholars spanning the disciplines of the social sciences and humanities. It is to this that I now turn.

*The subject and discourse*

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault discusses the 'different positions' that the subject occupies and the 'various enunciative modalities' through which the subject emerges not as a unified entity but as a dispersal of effects of discourse and discursive formations, groupings of

[16] I have also decided not to employ Michel De Certeau's conceptual framework for understanding the constitution of subjectivity, presented in works such as *The Practice of Everyday Life*, since I feel that its emphasis on the subversive practices of the 'ordinary man' and the 'wanderer' renders it less useful than the ones I have chosen for examining the more nuanced and ambiguous relationship white-collar men have with hegemonic discourses.

discourses with common characteristics.[17] In his subsequent work, he examined how subject positions play out in the practices of institutions and individual lives.[18] For Foucault, discursive practices set out the boundaries of norms, although these are always historically and geographically contingent: one definition he gives is that they are 'a body of anonymous, historical rules, always determined in the time and space that have defined a given period, and for a given social, economic, geographical, or linguistic area, the conditions of operation of the enunciative function';[19] on another occasion he writes they are a 'delimitation of a field of objects, the definition of a legitimate perspective for the age of knowledge, and the fixing of norms for the elaboration of concepts and theories'.[20] Foucault understands 'a discourse [as] always embedded within non-discursive practices';[21] and stresses that the 'play of dependencies' between discursive and non-discursive practices is crucial:[22] 'Discursive practices are not purely and simply ways of producing discourse. They are embodied in technical processes, in institutions, in patterns for general behaviour, in forms of transmission and diffusion, and in pedagogical forms which, at once, impose and maintain them.'[23] It is important to make clear at this point that although I am referring to discursive and non-discursive realms here as two distinct conceptual categories for the purposes of this discussion, in the very material processes of everyday life they come together to produce subjects and

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[17] Margaret A. McLaren, *Feminism, Foucault, and Embodied Subjectivity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 57; citing Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, tr. Alan Sheridan (New York, Pantheon, 1972), 73 and 54.

[18] R. Keith Sawyer, 'A Discourse on Discourse: An Archeological History of an Intellectual Concept', *Cultural Studies* 16, no. 3 (2002): 447.

[19] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, tr. A. M. Sheridan Smith (London: Tavistock, 1986), 117.

[20] Michel Foucault, 'History of Systems of Thought', in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Oxford: Blackwell, 1977), 199.

[21] Sawyer, ibid., 441.

[22] Barry Smart outlines three levels of relations that intersect: '(i)'real' relations independent of all discourse, e.g. between 'institutions, techniques, social forms, etc', (ii) 'reflexive' relations formulated in discourse itself, e.g. what may be said about 'relations between the family and criminality', (iii) 'discursive' relations that make possible and sustain the objects of discourse.' For Foucault, 'the interplay between these discursive relations with the other two kinds' establishes the conditions for the production of the subject. Barry Smart, *Michel Foucault* (Chichester: Ellis Horwood Limited, 1985), 41; citing Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (London: Tavistock, 1977), 46. Mark Olssen also discusses these three levels, in the reverse order: firstly, 'the *intradiscursive*, which concerns relations between objects, operations and concepts within the discursive formation; secondly, the *interdiscursive*, which concerns relations between different discursive formations; and, thirdly, the *extradiscursive*, concerning the relations between a discourse and the whole play of economic, political and social practices.' Mark Olssen, 'Foucault and Marxism: Rewriting the Theory of Historical Materialism', *Policy Futures in Education* 2, no. 3 & 4 (2004): 461-2; referring to Michel Foucault, 'Politics and the Study of Discourse', *Ideology and Consciousness* 3, (Spring, 1978): 13.

[23] Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, tr. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 200; cited in Carl G. Herndl, 'Writing Ethnography: Representation, Rhetoric, and Institutional Practices', *College English* 53, no. 3 (March, 1991): 328. For a discussion of Foucault's preference of the concept of a 'play of dependencies' to linear causality, see Mark Olssen, 'Foucault and Marxism: Rewriting the Theory of Historical Materialism', *Policy Futures in Education* 2, no. 3 & 4 (2004): 461-2.

their subjectivities in intricate, complicated and often not clear cut nor analytically distinct ways. As is evident from the phrase 'play of dependencies', the interrelationship between the discursive and non-discursive realms in Foucault's is complex, fluid and difficult to conceptualise in exact terms.[24] Steven Brown elaborates:

> The discursive depends upon the non-discursive, without which it cannot form a complete whole. Yet this non-discursive on which discourse depends is not raw material that is simply 'just there', but is instead a series of elements that have been arranged and composed in a manner no less rigorous than discursive statements. In this way Foucault breaks up the assumption that it is language that predominantly expresses human agency and powers. Discourse is not *applied* to a pre-formed world, like paint daubed across a canvas, but is rather one aspect of an active process of composition where discursive and non-discursive elements are arranged together.[25]

Although the exact workings of this interrelationship are still keenly debated, and certainly beyond the scope of this thesis, in the view of Mark Cousins and Athar Hussain, Foucault's refusal to allow the primacy of either realm is perhaps his major contribution. In their view, he analyses discursive/non-discursive relations 'without a recourse to a general schema of causation where the non-discursive always holds the power of determination over the discursive, as in materialist or sociological analyses of knowledge. Nor does he resort to the general categories of signification or representation in which the discursive has a logical primacy over the non-discursive.'[26]

The intersections, interactions and 'plays of dependency' of the discursive/non-discursive practices which produce the white-collar subject are manifested in, as I show in subsequent chapters, the complex and formative interaction between individual subjects and institutions and social practices, such as the school, the workplace, leisure sites and the home; the ways in which white-collar men talk about themselves and are talked about in relation to topics such as social ethics, emotions, economic modernization and body aesthetics; and the emergence of discourses concerned with the formation of the figure of the white-collar man himself. Another way of framing this is that the discursive realm refers to the texts and their institutional and social articulation which I examine in media sources and through informant interviews, whereas non-discursive practices refer to the disjunctures between these and

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[24] Deleuze has attempted a general theory of the discursive/nondiscursive through his concept of territorialization. For a discussion of the concept in relation to Foucault's work and its application to an empirical example, see Steven D. Brown, 'Psychology and the Art of Living.' *Theory & Psychology* 11, no. 2 (2001): 184-8.

[25] Brown, ibid., 179-80.

[26] Mark Cousins and Athar Hussain, *Michel Foucault* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984), 258. The former hypothesis is famously expressed in Marx's base/superstructure relationship, which Foucault was keen to move beyond, but he also criticized the latter, seen notably in the exclusively textual focus of Derrida and Saussure.

individual performance and attitude in relation to places, objects, bodies and the relations between them. Subjectivities are formed through the mutual interplay between all these factors.

Another way of conceptualizing the distinction and relationship between the discursive and non-discursive is through Deleuze's work on Foucault.

> According to Deleuze, what Foucault does with the distinction is to show how knowledge can be cracked open into two distinct components. One of these is a field of discursive relations that defines what is *articulable* at a given historical moment. That is, the conditions that reasonable speech draws upon to formulate its truthful statements. The other is a space of *visibility*, where relationships between persons and objects are arranged in such a way as to make them the formal object of a particular kind of knowledge. Visibility is something of a misnomer, though. Deleuze has in mind not only seeing, but also hearing, touching. This is a space of perception in its broadest sense. Foucault's genius, for Deleuze, is showing by means of empirical examples just how the discursive and the non-discursive are brought together […].[27]

This distinction emphasizes, in my view, the linguistic and spoken on the one hand, in other words the use of language in texts and speech to articulate statements productive of knowledge and 'truth statements', and the field of perceptual meaning and sensual practices and feelings on the other.

The discursive domain was very important in the lives of my white-collar informants, particularly through vehicles such as men's magazines as I detail throughout this work, and my informants incorporated the ideas expressed through these discursive texts and images into their habits and daily routines in varying ways. It is in that process that the discursive and the non-discursive come together to construct stylized subjectivities, a process which Foucault conceived of as an aesthetic composition. Steven Brown's research shows how this process takes place with the example of the appearance of symptoms in a sufferer, Jack, of a medical condition called MCS [Multiple Chemical Sensitivity]:

> MCS is a discursive phenomenon, to be sure. It involves an awful lot of words, long descriptions of sensations and experiences. Such discourse is trafficked amongst large numbers of fellow sufferers organized in support networks. The statements that make up MCS take shape in innumerable conversations between patients, doctors, insurance companies and, indeed, academics […]. But that is not all there is. Jack's illness is given form by a series of practical activities. He puts a cover on the TV screen. Lets certain things into his house, and excludes others. Adopts a regimen for washing and keeping healthy. He follows a highly stylized routine for meeting and relating to other people. In other words, Jack is engaged in a work of composition. He is making the illness real by selecting and moving around materials. He is stylizing his illness into being. There are, then, two distinct sets of activities being accomplished

[27] Brown, ibid., 184.

> simultaneously – the discursive and the non-discursive – that together make up the whole that is multiple chemical sensitivity.[28]

Space does not permit me to do justice to the various aspects of the debate about the distinction between the discursive and non-discursive, but it is worth pointing out some of the major lines of criticism, formulated most notably by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. They assert that 'any distinction between what are usually called the linguistic and behavioural aspects of a social practice, is either an incorrect distinction or ought to find its place as a differentiation within the social production of meaning, which is structured under the form of discursive totalities.'[29] In their view, what Foucault identified as non-discursive practices can be shown to possess the features of discursive practices; if 'the so-called non-discursive practices – institutions, techniques, productive organization, and so on – are analysed, we will only find more or less complex forms of differential positions among objects, which do not arise from a necessity external to the system structuring them and which can only therefore be conceived as discursive articulations.'[30] For Laclau and Mouffe, discourse therefore has a deeply material, relational as well as linguistic and cognitive character,[31] the subject is the effect not therefore of the interplay between discursive and non-discursive forces but of the dispersion of 'diverse *subject positions*' that run through 'the entire material density of the multifarious institutions, rituals and practices through which a discursive formation is structured.'[32] However, there is no 'fixity of meaning' in these subject positions, only a partial fixation, which allows for the subversion of meaning through a flow of differences in what Laclau and Mouffe term the 'field of discursivity'.[33] This is an important point, sinceit renders all subject positions unstable, fragmented, and provisional, limiting any attempt to pin down a definition of an 'identity', such as the 'Chinese white-collar man'. For Laclau and Mouffe, since every subject position is an effect of discourse, the subject 'cannot […] be the origin of social relations'.[34] However, these positions are not separate entities of equal legitimacy, but are articulated in contingent ways necessitating the 'overdetermination of some positions by others'.[35]

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[28] Brown, ibid., 179-80.
[29] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 2001), 107.
[30] Laclau and Mouffe, ibid., 107.
[31] Laclau and Mouffe, ibid., 108.
[32] Laclau and Mouffe, ibid., 109.
[33] Laclau and Mouffe, ibid., 111.
[34] Laclau and Mouffe, ibid., 115.
[35] Laclau and Mouffe, ibid., 116.

Although Laclau and Mouffe's discursive totality is helpful in pushing understandings of the workings of discourse, I agree with Purvis and Hunt that ultimately their use of Althusser's concept of overdetermination is unsatisfactory in explaining the conditions that limit the formation of discourses.[36] To argue for the non-discursive does not mean an acknowledgment of an originary subject. Based on my fieldwork analyses and observations I would suggest that a much more fruitful line of inquiry, as has been pursued by most theorists, is to observe how non-discursive practices operate to shape, condition and limit the discursive realm, at the same time as discursive practices similarly operate on the non-discursive realm; in short, how the two realms constitute each other. Deleuze and others call the combination of discursive and non-discursive elements an 'assemblage', a notion which Nicholas Rose utilises together with the Deleuzian 'fold', to put forward his theory of self-formation, important and useful as a means of theorising how maintaining the distinction between the discursive and the non-discursive does not, in itself, necessarily lead to an a priori existence of the pre-existing self or identity, which I now examine.

Assemblages, for Rose, are 'the localization and connecting together of routines, habits and techniques within specific domains of actions and value', hybrid entities of 'knowledges, instruments, vocabularies, systems of judgment and technical devices'.[37] As I understand them in this thesis, they are open, fluid combinations (*not* fixed, enclosed systems) of many differing elements, which come together contingently at specific temporal moments and spatial coordinates, encompass discursive and non-discursive elements; in short, they are productive of subjectivities yet also transformed by the action of subjects. Using this schema, I examine discursive formations of techniques and practices across domains such as bedrooms, schools, offices, gyms, and saunas, using data from media sources, interviews and participant observation. It is the practices, techniques, forces, connections, and relations in these assemblages that produce, amongst other capacities, the effect of the 'inner psychological world' by means of which many contemporary humans understand themselves; these 'various relations and linkages […] give rise to all the phenomena through which, in our own times, human beings relate to themselves in terms of a psychological interior: as desiring selves, sexed selves, labouring selves, thinking selves, intending selves capable of acting as subjects […].'[38]

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[36] Trevor Purvis and Alan Hunt, 'Discourse, Ideology, Discourse, Ideology, Discourse, Ideology...', *British Journal of Sociology* 44, no. 3 (September, 1993): 493

[37] Nikolas Rose, *Inventing Ourselves: Psychology, Power and Personhood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 38.

[38] Rose, ibid., 172.

Rose proposes the 'fold' as a metaphor in conceptualising how within subjects – produced through assemblages – multiple and diverse practices come together, break away, have gaps, flow, mix, transform, and so on in what can seem surprising ways. 'Folds incorporate without totalizing, internalize without unifying, collect together discontinuously in the form of pleats making surfaces, spaces, flows and relations'; and 'that which would be infolded would be anything that can acquire authority: injunctions, advice, techniques, little habits of thought and emotion, an array of routines and norms of being human – the instruments through which being constitutes itself in different practices and relations.'[39] Rose posits his model of the fold as an alternative to psychological theories:

> The concept of the fold or the pleat suggests a way in which we might think of an internality being brought into existence in the human being without postulating any prior interiority, and thus without binding ourselves to a particular version of the law of this interiority whose history we are seeking to diagnose and disturb. The fold indicates a relation without an essential interior, one in which what is 'inside' is merely an infolding of an exterior.[40]

In this thesis, I show the multiplicity of diverse and sometimes conflicting practices constituting various subject positions – linked to the figure of the white-collar man – that individual men take up differently and are thus 'infolded' in different ways. In the context of my analysis, such subject positions including, among others, fashionable, consumer-driven urbanites (chapter three), honest, hard-working office-workers and business strategists (chapter four), entertainers of clients in karaoke bars and saunas (chapter five), tender boyfriends and nervous husbands (chapter six), and androgynous metrosexuals (chapter seven). Each subjectivity is the result of unique infoldings of multiple and non-enduring subject positions: but through certain techniques of memory, and particular vocabularies, the individual constructs an imagined persona or 'biography' through which he understands himself.[41]

The interlinking of elements in assemblages entail that the lines of the fold do not end at the 'fleshy bounds' of the body but are produced amongst other things through 'regimes of bureaucracy [that] are not merely ethical procedures infolded into the soul, but occupy a matrix of offices, files, typewriters, habits of timekeeping, conversational repertoires,

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[39] Rose, ibid., *Inventing Ourselves: Psychology, Power and Personhood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 37. I follow Rose's spelling of infold with an 'i' (not an 'e') throughout the thesis.

[40] Rose, ibid., 37; referring to Elspeth Probyn's discussion in her book *Sexing the Self: Gendered Positions in Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1993), 128-34; and to three works by Gilles Deleuze: *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992); *Pourparlers* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1990); and *Foucault*, tr. Sean Hand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

[41] Rose, ibid., 37-8.

techniques of notation',[42] as I document in the figure of the disciplined, time-keeping, hard-pressed young white-collar man in chapter four. Affective and emotional folds are played out in time and space, through material equipment such as beds, routines of dressing, sensory stimulae: 'regimes of passion are not merely affective folds in the soul, but are enacted in certain secluded or valorized spaces, through sensualized equipment of beds, drapes and silks, routines of dressing and undressing, aestheticized devices for providing music and light, regimes of partitioning of time, and so forth',[43] as one might reasonably imagine the 'tender boyfriend' of chapter six engaging in. Regimes of seduction of women are practiced through bodily postures in meetings, manners of moving, ways of dressing and displaying the male body, displays of knowledge, in offices, in the streets, in coffee shops (as I discuss in chapter three), shows of tenderness in the marital bedroom (chapter six) and romantic performances in restaurants (chapter seven); and regimes demanding women's subjection to and service of white-collar men are performed through women nursing sick male bodies in offices and in hospitals (chapter three), commercially offering their bodies in business entertainment rituals in karaoke bars, massage parlours (chapter five), and giving up of their careers to raise children and carry out domestic duties in the family home (chapter six). It is clear from these examples that '[f]olding being is not a matter of bodies', but of what Rose calls 'assembled locales':[44] in other words, assemblages. It is assemblages that render human being 'a hybrid of flesh, artifact, knowledge, passion and technique.'[45] It is the practices, techniques, forces, connections, and relations in these assemblages—in domains such as bedrooms, schools, offices, gyms, and saunas—that produce, amongst other capacities, 'the phenomena through which, in our own times, human beings relate to themselves, as desiring sexed selves, labouring selves, thinking selves, intending selves capable of acting as subjects […].'[46]

It is important to underline a fundamental point about the notion of subjectification through assemblages. As should be very clear by now, it is not purely a linguistic process, but involves the interrelationship of discursive and non-discursive practices: assemblages locate discursive practices 'in particular sites and procedures', and structure them through relations of power, which privilege some and limit others;[47] although these relations are themselves

[42] They are also produced through memories organised 'through rituals of storytelling, supported by artifacts such as photograph albums and so forth'. Rose, ibid.,38.
[43] Rose, ibid., 37-8.
[44] Rose, ibid., 38.
[45] Rose, ibid., 38.
[46] Rose, ibid., 172.
[47] Rose, ibid., 175.

always shifting and contested. Indeed, the very constitutions of masculinities, through hybrids of techniques of text, speech, acts, devices, bodies, locales, and so on, are part of a large-scale, ongoing, power struggle among different ways of being men and women, manifested on planes such as the nation, society, the family and the individual, and in multiples sites across these planes.

Individuals move between the regimes of these various often conflicting and inconsistent assemblages with differing techniques, producing differently imagined white-collar 'bodies'. For example, the body of the soberly but expensively besuited office worker who moves smartly through the offices and spaces of the central business district, checking his emails on his 3G mobile phone, whom I describe as 'Jianguomen man' in chapter four, is a very different body in a very different site from that of the androgynously dressed, metrosexual, alluring body of young talent show hopefuls, who sing, cry, plead and profess filial piety to win votes from studio and viewing audiences, whom I describe in chapter seven. These bodily identities are variously performed, adapted, altered and rejected by individuals in conjunction with and contingent on their inscription in different discursive practices and through different bodily appropriate to both transnational business offices and the dark, noisy and sexually-charged atmospheres of Beijing's gays bars. Questions about how individual men acquire the techniques through cultivation of the self in performances that become routines, are addressed in the section that follows.

*From performance to habituation*

One of the most intriguing aspects of my fieldwork was attempting to discover how men lived across these different worlds, spaces and practices. How, for example, men who dressed and appeared to behave in very 'modern', sophisticated ways, could hold some views about women and gays which seemed astonishingly prejudiced to me. As my fieldwork progressed, it became clear that they were drawing these opinions – and indeed their behaviours, which were not as 'pure' as I naïvely first thought – from many different discourses and practices. They exhibited fragmentary and non-cohesive subjectivities, which were not recognisable as the coherent, modern subjects depicted in the glossy men's magazines. I could only conceive of their contradictory enactments of different masculinities as culturally produced performances, not expressions of essential identities, and so I turned to Judith Butler's theory of performativity to further analyse my observations.

In his influential book on 'discerning the subject', Paul Smith has contended that '[a] praxis of resistance […] demands a theory of the 'subject' which allows for gaps and fissures

in the agent's experience of interpellative messages.'[48] In other words that permits us to theorise the co-existence of the inconsistence subject positions, of the above. This, I believe, is exactly what Judith Butler has done in her theory of performativity, which, drawing from Austin and Derrida, emphasises the reiterative, citational and therefore unstable character of the subject, particularly the gendered subject through gender performance, and the attendant possibilities for contestation: 'the fact that [the norms producing gender] must be repeated, […] creates the space for them to be repeated differently and thus is also the condition of possibility for action.'[49]

> Butler's concept of performativity brings attention to the fluidity of gender identities, challenging the notion that they are fixed and unchanging, by collapsing the distinction between a biologically determined 'sex' and a culturally determined 'gender'.[50] Butler cautions that 'performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate 'act', but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names', arguing that the 'regulatory norms of 'sex' work in a performative fashion to constitute the materiality of bodies and, more specifically, to materialize the body's sex, to materialize sexual difference in the service of the consolidation of the heterosexual imperative.'[51] Butler emphasizes that gender identity is constituted through discourse, and not individual will: 'For a performative to work, it must draw upon and recite a set of linguistic conventions which have traditionally worked to bind or engage certain kinds of effects. […] This power of recitation is not a function of an individual's *intention*, but is an effect of historically sedimented linguistic conventions.'[52]

The performative construction of gender offers the possibility of change, Butler contends: '[t]hat this is a repeated process, an iterable process, is precisely the condition of agency within discourse. If a subject were constituted once and for all, there would be no possibility of a reiteration of those constituting conventions or norms. That the subject is that which must be constituted again and again implies that it is open to formations that are not fully

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[48] Paul Smith, *Discerning the Subject*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 39.

[49] Moya Lloyd, Judith Butler, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 65.

[50] Ann J. Cahill, 'Introduction [to Judith Butler Section]: The Politics of Sexual Identity', in *Continental Feminism Reader*, ed. Ann J. Cahill and Jennifer Hansen (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 23.

[51] Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 2.

[52] Judith Butler, 'For a Careful Reading', in *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange* (New York: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1995), 134; quoted in Alecia Youngblood Jackson, 'Performativity Identified', *Qualitative Inquiry* 10, no. 5 (2004): 680. Commenting on this quotation, Alecia Youngblood Jackson, a specialist in language education, writes: '[…] these compulsory repetitions construct illusory origins of gender that function as regulatory regimes to keep people within a particular grid of intelligibility by governing and punishing nonnormative behavior. These linguistic conventions interpellate people back into the normative discourse. Butler referred to this as 'sedimented iterability', where language engages us to perform (repeat) an action (gender) that conforms to an established model within a discourse. Language, then, does not *reflect* the intention (or action) of the individual; language, as social practice, *produces* the discursive possibilities of performance and therefore 'the doer' becomes an effect of that language.' Alecia Youngblood Jackson, ibid., 680; Judith Butler quotation from Judith Butler, ibid., 134.

constrained in advance.'[53] As with gender identity in general, white-collar masculinities are likewise formed through a performative process, constituted within a regime of heteronormativity, which means that they too are open to reformation.

How, though, does the individual acquire the techniques, skills and bodily practices that enable him to perform a particular identity? And to what extent might, for example, the performance of white-collar identity in China be conceptualised as a conscious process, moulded by discourse? Through what processes are certain subject positions rejected while others are taken up?

When I talked with my white-collar informants, I quickly realised that, unlike many of their peers in Britain, most of them did not come from white-collar backgrounds: their mothers and fathers did not and had not held white-collar jobs. One would not expect otherwise, given that white-collar discourses only emerged in the reform period. It raised the question, however, that if these young white-collar men were not learning a white-collar subjectivity through emulating their parents, then how did they acquire the skills and aptitudes necessary for performing it? Where were they acquiring it from? Clearly there was some sort of habituation process at work, and I found a lively culture of 'how to' self-help information (through magazines, books and websites) to be a rich source of guidance, amongst others, for young white-collar men, including my informants, who took up discursive ideas in their own daily practices and made them habitual.

Bringing together Bourdieu's notion of habitus and Butler's theory of performativity, the process of 'habituation' is a useful way of conceptualizing how young men take up the subject positions of white-collar masculinities in daily life,[54] since it throws a particular spotlight on bodily techniques which, do not just end at the skin, but stylise the body with clothing, connect the body with devices and implements, and alter the posture and movements of the body in different places and sites in habitual routines. In other words, it permits an understanding of the 'body' as fluidly linked into diverse assemblages. I adopt Bourdieu's focus on material subjectivity to 'embody' Butler's linguisticly-led performativity, specifically through the Noble and Watkins' conceptualisation of habituation, which I examine now.

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[53] Judith Butler ibid., 135; quoted in Alecia Youngblood Jackson, ibid., 682.

[54] A focus on habituation is particularly relevant in contemporary China, where the 'subject positions' of white-collar masculinities have only recently come to prominence, and there seems to be a noticeably didactic tendency to explicitly 'teach' young men how to train themselves into appropriate white-collar habits, through a variety of discursive practices and techniques such as 'self-help' guides, company training courses, gentlemen's etiquette classes and so on.

Noble and Watkins work from the perspective that Bourdieu's concept of habitus and Butler's concept of performativity are both powerful tools for understanding the formation of subjectivities, although they have different foci: Bourdieu on bodily dispositions and somatic reproduction and Butler on linguistic discourse and agentic possibilities.

> The strength of [Bourdieu's] approach is its insistence on the materiality of subjectivity. […] Bourdieu's analysis of cognition and symbolism is not one that floats free from the conditions under which people actually live. This emphasis on the materiality of subjectivity allows Bourdieu to transcend, to a degree, the antimony between the subjective and the objective, between the individual and the world. His subject is one born of a world of objects, where schemes of perception and thought are inculcated through the activities performed in symbolically structured space and time (1990c: 76). The subject is never separated from the material conditions of its existence, and the world is never free of the representations that construct it […]. Bourdieu sees social structures and cognitive structures as recursively linked, and it is the correspondence between them that provides the foundation for social domination.[55]

In this insightful summary, Moore outlines a material theory of the subject in Bourdieu's work that is not so far from the materiality of assemblages in Rose's schema, and that could be integrated into Laclau and Mouffe's insistence on the physicality of discursive formations. Butler has criticized habitus, Noble and Watkins point out, for overemphasizing 'the spatial dimensions of social practice, such that temporality – and with it change – disappears.'[56] For his part, Bourdieu has been critical of those who hold that solely linguistic discourse constitutes gender. Nevertheless, Noble and Watkins have fashioned a notion of habitus which encompasses temporality and performativity, and which attempts to explain how consciously learned actions – over time – become unconscious habits embedded in the body, and are therefore seen as 'natural'. For them, the 'dispositions that internalize our social location and which orient our actions'.[57] become second nature through habituation, a performative process 'based on iteration; to be able to do something reliably and 'naturally', one has had to do it again and again.'[58] Habituation, in their words, 'allows us to account for how conscious behaviour can become unconscious':[59] in what appear as naturalized processes learned

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[55] Henrietta L. Moore, *A Passion for Difference: Essays in Anthropology and Gender* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), 79-80, referring to Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, tr. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), 76.
[56] Greg Noble and Megan Watkins, 'So, how did Bourdieu Learn to Play Tennis? Habitus, Consciousness and Habituation', *Cultural Studies* 17, no. 3 (2003): 525.
[57] Noble and Watkins, ibid., 522.
[58] Noble and Watkins, ibid., 535.
[59] Noble and Watkins, ibid., 535.

through 'mimetic suggestion' 'mimicry, repetition, experimentation, appropriation and so on in the formation of habituated capacities',[60] and unvocalised bodily performances.

This approach, moreover, allows us to combine Rose's assemblages of discursive and non-discursive practices which I discussed above. On the one hand, the process involves a degree of 'agentic reflection', in other words, 'that discursive practice in which we consider our behaviour and its principles, which involves the monitoring of conduct which can be brought to discourse'.[61] Echoing elements of Foucault's techniques of the self, moreover, '[s]uch acts of reflection are not to be judged in terms of veracity or social awareness; rather, they are about putting daily conduct into discourse',[62] just as my informants experimented with and appropriated discourse, images in fashion and lifestyle magazines, into their day-to-day practice as white collar men. On the other hand, the performative processes of '[i]nculcation, emulation, mimesis, performance, habituation and other rituals of self-formation' are key techniques in the self-reflexive constitution of the subject that incorporate non-discursive as well as discursive practices.[63] It is also worth noting in this context that Rose endorses Michael Taussig's view of mimesis as infolding 'ways of being' as a material and cognitive as well as inner and psychological process that works through 'such devices as manuals of advice on self-improvement, self-esteem, and self-advancement […]; the models and simulacra of desirable selves […]; the pictures of normal selfhood […]; the connections established with oneself through cultural technologies of photography, film and advertising: a multiplicity of mimetic machines.'[64]

Rose also makes another point, in relation to mimesis, that '[t]o be the self *one is* one must be the self *one is not* – not that depised, rejected, or abjected soul. Thus becoming oneself is a recurrent copying that both emulates and differs from other selves.'[65] To become habituated in a white-collar subject position, then, is as much about rejecting and resisting identities and practices associated with blue-collar workers, entrepreneurs, government officials, peasants, soldiers, backwardness, the provinces, coarseness, dishonesty, laziness, poverty, which are the inverse of some of the values prominently associated with white-collar masculinities, as this thesis shows. The concept of 'body culture' is also useful here, which the

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[60] Noble and Watkins, ibid., 536.
[61] Noble and Watkins, ibid., 531.
[62] Noble and Watkins, ibid., 531.
[63] Rose, ibid., 191.
[64] Rose, ibid., 191; referring to Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 1993).
[65] Rose, ibid., 192.

anthropologist Susan Brownell formulates as 'a broad term that includes daily practices of health, hygiene, fitness, beauty, dress, and decoration as well as gestures, postures, manners, ways of speaking and eating, and so on. It also describes the way these practices are trained into the body, the way the body is publicly displayed, and the lifestyle that is expressed in that display.'[66] Thinking of a particular *culture* of white-collar men's bodies is useful analytically, because it encompasses social manifestations as well as individual cultivations of white-collar masculinity, both of which encompass the assemblages which constitute the practices, attributes and other elements acquired through habituation.

In this section I have analysed how young men learn to perform white-collar masculinities, but I still have not examined why a particular model of white-collar masculinity has become most prominent amongst multiple white-collar masculinities, and it is through the concept of hegemony that I wish to explore this question.

*Hegemony and multiple masculinities*

My discussion in the last two sections has set out the main theoretical concepts I use to analyse the formation of multiple, contradictory white-collar subjectivities through a process of habituation, integrating discursive and non-discursive practices in multi-element assemblages linking bodies, objects and sites. But why do some subjectivities become more powerful than others, more prominent in popular media and men's discussions? Is white-collar masculinity a particularly dominating masculinity amongst the many masculinities enacted in contemporary China? And what particular model of white-collar masculinity is most prominent? For instance, why is it that my informants described white-collar men in terms of the well-groomed, well-spoken, romantic young urban man, and not the fat-bellied, misogynistic, massage-parlour frequenting manager? To put it another way, if we accept that the subject is not unitary, how do we explain the repeated reproduction of dominant forms and expectations? Does the notion of white-collar masculinity itself obscure other intersecting discursive and non-discursive notions of other masculine subjectivities? To answer these questions, we can turn to the concept of hegemony, which has become commonly used in cultural studies and beyond in recent years. My concern here is not to address the broad question of the hegemonic domination of what Butler calls the system of heteronormativity in

[66] Susan Brownell, 'Making Dream Bodies in Beijing: Athletes, Fashion Models, and Urban Mystique in China', in *China Urban: Ethnographies of Contemporary Culture*, ed. Nancy N. Chen, Constance D. Clark, Suzanne Z. Gottschang and Lyn Jeffery (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001), 124.

the historically and cultural shaped forms in which it is articulated in contemporary China.[67] It is not to interrogate how individual subjectivities are, despite their ambiguity, incompleteness and polysemy, overdetermined by historically and cultural associations attached to the masculine and the feminine (as Laclau and Mouffe outline). My interest, rather, is to think about how to conceptualise the processes involved in producing certain versions of masculinity in the more socially and culturally delimited field of discursivity of the white-collar masculine subject.

Stuart Hall's 'post-Gramscian' use of the concept of hegemony has had widespread influence in cultural studies approaches to the analysis of particularly race and class identities in post-war Britain. Writing about youth subcultures in Britain, Hall, with co-author Tony Jefferson, explain Gramsci's understanding of hegemony as involving the winning and shaping of consent, 'so that the granting of legitimacy to the dominant classes appears not only 'spontaneous' but natural and normal.'[68] The hegemonic order does this by restricting the range of definitions available with which to debate ideas, and obscuring/concealing those which compete with it: '[i]t provides the horizon of thought and action'.[69] It does this not by the 'unending and unproblematic exercise of class power' by the ruling class, through its 'permanent incorporation of the subordinate class',[70] but through 'insert[ing] the subordinate class into the key institutions and structures which support the power and social authority of the dominant order', ensuring that the 'subordinate class *lives its subordination*'. The importance of Hall and Jefferson's formulation lies in its understanding of hegemony not as something imposed from above in a static, unchanging relationship, but rather something which insinuates itself amongst those which it continues to dominate.

Bringing an understanding of hegemony to gender, Raewyn Connell's notion of hegemonic masculinity has been one of the most influential attempts – if not *the* most influential attempt – to conceptualise masculine subjectivity in recent years. Borrowing the term from Gramsci, she describes it as 'a social ascendancy achieved in a play of social forces that extends beyond contests of brute power into the organization of private life and cultural

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[67] If one thinks about the kinds of masculinities which appear to be dominant in contemporary China under the neoliberal hegemonic order, then the picture becomes more complex, because a strong argument could be made that the most powerful masculinities are those associated with officials and 'bosses', or entrepreneurs and the question arises whether white-collar masculinities are hegemonic in the face of these two other very powerful groupings of masculinities.

[68] Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, *Resistance through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Postwar Britain* (London: Routledge, 1989), 38.

[69] Hall and Jefferson, ibid., 39.

[70] Hall and Jefferson, ibid., 39.

processes.'[71] One of its key aspects, developed in the 1980s, is its recognition of an 'interplay between different forms of masculinity' and the construction of the hegemonic masculinity of the 'patriarchal social order' in relation to various subordinated masculinities as well as in relation to women'.[72] At that time, she argued that 'models of masculinity' sustained the 'public face of hegemonic masculinity' in, for example, fantasy figures depicted in films, even though she noted that many men's behaviour in practice is at odds with the role models.[73] In these terms, Connell's understanding of hegemony is not as clearly articulated as Hall and Jefferson's. Connell recognises that force need not be, but often is, part of the hegemonic order; and she attests that '[o]ther [i.e. non-hegemonic] patterns and groups are subordinated rather than eliminated', which allows for 'everyday contestation' and 'historical changes', but this is not as insightful as Hall and Jefferson's formulation that subordinated groups are inserted *into* the hegemonic formation, itself made of up clashing and shifting relationships and collations, nor Laclau and Mouffe's articulation of the discursive formation of multiple subject positions of the hegemonic formation; although in Connell's defence, she does stress that many men are complicit (such as through their support of role models, as mentioned above) in the reproduction of hegemonic masculinity.[74] Again, however, on this point, Wetherell and Edley argue that Connell's distinction between complicit and resistant masculinities is too discrete, suggesting that '[i]t is probably more useful to reposition complicity or resistance as labels to describe the effects of discursive strategies mobilized in contexts as opposed to labels for types of individual men'.[75] They reject the idea that 'hegemonic masculinity is just one style or there is just one set of ruling ideas'[76] even though they accept the notion in hegemonic masculinity that 'men's conduct is regulated by shared forms of sense making which are consensual although contested, which maintain male privilege, which are largely taken for granted, and which are highly invested'. They make the important point that hegemonic masculinity interacts with other hegemonic cultural notions, such as 'demonstrating individuality and autonomy from social forces', and cannot be 'sealed off' from them,[77] and call for a recognition that discursive formations of masculinities produce

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[71] Raewyn Connell, *Gender and Power: Society, the Person, and Sexual Politics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 184.
[72] Connell, ibid., 183.
[73] Connell, ibid., 184-5.
[74] Connell, ibid., 184-5.
[75] Margaret Wetherell and Nigel Edley, 'Negotiating Hegemonic Masculinity: Imaginary Positions and Psycho-Discursive Practices', *Feminism & Psychology* 9, no. 3 (1999): 352.
[76] Wetherell and Edley, ibid., 351.
[77] Wetherell and Edley, ibid., 351.

'multiple and inconsistent' resources 'for constructing hegemonic gender identities'. Finally, reminiscent of Butler's performativity, they stress the reiterative, contested, fragmented characteristics of any form of hegemony, and implicitly the importance of this concept for highlighting the possibilities of change and contestation in the gaps between the iterations.

> Hegemony is a version of the world which is reality defining. Such versions are plural, inconsistent, achieved through discursive work, constantly needing to be brought into being over and over again. That is the chief character of hegemony rather than its definition as an already known and fixed set of ruling ideas. It is a relative position in a struggle for taken-for-grantedness.'[78]

On this important point of the multiplicity of masculinities, I conclude this section on the theoretical concepts and themes which I bring to bear on the ethnographic data presented throughout this thesis. Before moving on to discussions of my fieldwork material, which I begin in the next chapter, I first examine, in the following section, the ways in which multiple masculinities have been written about, and shaped, in academic writing on Chinese men and masculinities, which reveal the ways and means by which notions of masculinities – past and present – circulate in contemporary debates.

**Modelling Chinese masculinities in academic writing**

*Contemporary uses of 'traditional' masculinities*

Discussions in popular magazines targeted at the affluent middle class frequently allude to imagined models of 'traditional' Chinese masculinity to legitimize contemporary practices that may not bear much resemblance to historical practice. In chapter seven, for example, I examine how the recently invented and potentially transgressive 'metrosexual' has been linked with the firmly established tradition of the *xiaobailian* (little white face). In this, there are both similarities and departures from the main features of Chinese masculinity identified by scholars writing on the topic. In this section, therefore, I outline the main themes that have emerged in recent scholarly writing on the multiple and diverse masculinities in Chinese tradition, as a basis for discussing the contemporary appropriations of history that appear in renderings of the gender characteristics of 'white-collar man.' I finish the section with an examination of recent Chinese language academic writing on the attributes of the middle class, within which the white-collar man is positioned as a vanguard figure.

Prominent in recent writings on the theme is the 'the dyad *wen-wu* (cultural attainment–martial valour),' discussed by Kam Louie as a defining feature of Chinese

[78] Wetherell and Edley, ibid., 352.

masculinity, which he describes as ‘one of the single most important Chinese paradigms explaining the performance of gendered identities – in particular masculinity’.[79] Louie argues the relevance of *wen-wu* to famous Chinese historical figures like Confucius and Guan Yu, fictional creations such as Wu Song and the protagonists of novels by Lao She and Zhang Xianliang, as well as the modern movie characters portrayed by Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan and Chow Yun Fat. In ‘Chinese masculinity’, Louie asserts, ‘a scholar is considered to be no less masculine than a soldier’, and ‘at certain points in history, the ideal man would be expected to embody a balance of *wen* and *wu*.’[80]

Undoubtedly, Louie’s highlighting of the *wen-wu* dyad sheds light on a particular conceptualization of masculinity current in literary genres across time. Echoes of it are also present in contemporary renderings as I discuss below. However, any attempt to define a particular ‘Chinese masculinity’ through a single framework and in contrast to ‘Western masculinity’ runs the risk of creating a culturalist, essentialising model that, even if it is not intended, would better be repositioned as one possible theoretical ’take’ on a range of possible masculinities. Constructions of gender are necessarily composites, particularly in today's globalised world. Louie himself shies away from using *wen-wu* to explain contemporary consumer masculinity:

> With the advent of the consumer society in the late twentieth century, the traditional predominance of the *wen* over *wu* within the *wen-wu* model is further destabilized. Capitalism is concerned with production and profits. Male ideals are increasingly imbued with buying power. The result is that images of masculinity are moving away from their traditional core attributes of literary and cultural learning and martial expertise.[81]

It is tempting to enter further into the debate about how much influence *wen-wu* had or has on conceptions of masculinity. However, the more important point is that Louie’s analysis helps explain the conceptions of masculinities circulating in contemporary popular culture that draw on particular historical notions, including the *yin-yang* formulations, and specific models of masculinities such as the *hao han* (‘brave man’ or ‘real man’) and the *caizi* (‘Confucian scholar’). They can be understood as discursive masculine identities that white-collar men may take up in specific places and at specific times, as part of their understanding of themselves as Chinese white-collar men.

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[79] Kam Louie, *Theorising Chinese Masculinity: Society and Gender in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 4.
[80] Louie, ibid., 11.
[81] Louie, ibid., 161.

The *hao han*, clearly linked to *wu* values, depicts a historical model of masculinity still adulated in contemporary discourse, and not infrequently used in conversation. To call someone a *hao han* calls up the image of a heroic, brave, blunt, tough, even patriotic epitome of manhood. In his study of masculine images in late imperial literature, Song Geng argues that the *hao han* resembles what he terms the 'dominant notion of masculinity in the West', because *hao han* for the most part 'are physically strong and powerful and display masculine qualities such as courage, fortitude, endurance, and stoicism', yet they are also 'often uneducated, brutal and straightforward.'[82] Song highlights the well-known *hao han* characterizations in *Water Margin* (*Shuihu zhuan*), which demonstrate 'a man's dedication to the code of brotherhood, ability and interest in gymnastic arts, generosity to friends, and appetite for food and wine.'[83] Generosity is a key component of *hao han* masculinity (and I found it to be still a much admired 'manly' virtue amongst contemporary men), according to Martin Huang, also writing about late imperial masculine images: '[t]he ultimate paragons of *yi* [personal honour] unanimously admired by *haohan* heroes are apparently those who have demonstrated their virtue by constantly helping others with money and other material goods.'[84]

Yet they have a suspicion of women and try to avoid sexual desire, Song contends, unlike knights in the West.[85] Film scholar Chen Shan, in his history of Chinese 'chivalrous swordsmen' (*wuxia*) has also articulated this view, as Kam Louie points out: 'Chen Shan contrasts the *wuxia* with the European knights and the Japanese samurai. He believes that the adherents of *wu* fight for righteousness (*yi*) and are loyal to men in their group and eschew women.'[86] Martin Huang similarly argues that the *hao han* in *Water Margin* are often cheery and heavy drinkers, but they are mostly wary of women, adding that women are depicted very negatively as adulteresses and troublemakers.[87] Yan Qing, a character in *Water Margin*, in Song Geng's view, 'is praised as a real man because of his self-mastery of sexual desire and immunity to the temptation of female charms.'[88] This repudiation of women by fictional heroes corresponded with a social and cultural world characterized by a high degree of gender

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[82] Song Geng, *The Fragile Scholar: Power and Masculinity in Chinese Culture* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004), 163.
[83] Song, ibid., 164.
[84] Huang translates *yi* as 'personal honour'; it is also often translated as 'righteousness'. Martin W. Huang, *Negotiating Masculinities in Late Imperial China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006), 104.
[85] Song Geng, ibid., 158.
[86] Kam Louie, op. cit., 10; referring to Chen Shan, *Zhongguo wuxia shi* (History of the Chinese chivalrous swordsmen) (Shanghai: Sanlian shudian, 1992), 298-310.
[87] Martin W. Huang, op. cit., 107-8.
[88] Song Geng, op. cit., 170.

segregation, in which men spent most of their social time with other men.[89] The primacy of the Confucian model of manhood, which emphasised publically fulfilling social obligations to family and state, Song argues, explains why sexuality did not feature historically in the heroic construction of masculinity:

> In the Chinese cultural tradition […] masculinity or gender refers mainly to a position in the political structure. The Confucian prescriptions for a real man include filial piety to his parents, obligations to family (among them the most important one is the ability to carry on the family line), and above all, loyalty and contribution to the sovereign and state. In other words, masculinity is not defined by a man's relations with his woman, but by his relations with the political mechanism. For Chinese men, manhood is the ability to honor their family name and achieve fame in serving the state. This is to be accomplished in the public world. It is therefore not difficult to understand why sexuality was absent in the construction of masculinity in the heroic discourse.[90]

Although sexuality is clearly very much part of the construction of contemporary masculinity, as I discuss in chapter seven, the characteristics of the *hao han* are undoubtedly part of the jumble of historical ideas (*wen-wu*, *yin-yang* and so on) informing contemporary popular conceptions of masculinity. For example, in terms of gender segregation often associated with the *hao han*, the judging of men's valiance and skills separately from women's can be seen in the TV talent shows on ideal husbands and 'good men' which I analyse in chapters five and six respectively.

The *caizi* (Confucian scholar) plays another part in contemporary discussions. Echoing Kam Louie's ranking of the *caizi/wenren* above the *yingxiong/haohan,* Song Geng contends that the masculinity of the Confucian scholar was historically portrayed as superior to that of the martial hero, whose 'role is to assist the ruler or scholar'.[91] The Song dynasty marked the emergence of a clear preference for a scholarly masculinity.[92] In the Yuan Dynasty drama *The Story of the Western Wing* (*Xixiang ji)*, the character of Student Zhang epitomises the *caizi*: 'physically he is frail, delicate and handsome with feminine beauty. Although he is dedicated to love emotionally, he can also be vulnerable and easily frustrated.'[93] However, by the late Ming and early Qing period, there were concerns among the literati that 'all men have turned

[89] Song, ibid., 157-8; referring to Susan Mann, 'The Male Bond in Chinese History and Culture', *The American Historical Review* 105, no. 5 (December 2000): 1606.
[90] Song, ibid., 171-2.
[91] Song, ibid., 165. Louie argues that the '*caizi* (the talented scholar) and the *wenren* (the cultured man)' achieved higher status than the physical accomplishments of the '*yingxiong* (outstanding male) and *haohan* (good fellow).' See Kam Louie, op. cit., 8.
[92] Song, ibid., 83. Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters: Marriage and the Lives of Chinese Women in the Sung Period* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 32-3.
[93] Song, ibid., viii.

into women.'[94] Kam Louie also refers to this narrative of emasculation, with reference to R. H. Van Gulik's claims that ideals of masculine beauty changed from the virile, martial look of the Tang and Song dynasties to the delicate dreamer of the Qing dynasty.[95] However, Huang has pointed out that there is a text documenting the desire of young women for soft, feminine youths astheir husbands as early as the 4th century BC, although the text comments that most men looked on these girlish youths with shame.[96] Due to a process of syncretism, perhaps begun in the late Ming, *wen* and *wu* models of masculinities were increasingly brought together in the figure of the *caizi*.[97] By the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Huang argues, there was a 'new focus on military achievement', a 'shift in emphasis in military talent as a defining quality of *caizi*', in a trend toward the 'fiction of chivalry [*xiayi xiaoshuo*].'[98] The Neo-Confucian hero in Qing dynasty fiction was also a creation of synthesis, according to Huang, combining the attributes of a romantic *caizi*, a chivalrous *hao han*, and a Confucian sage.[99]

The effeminate *caizi* was not directly associated with homosexuality, Song argues, unlike 'the representation of effeminacy in Western homoerotic literature'.[100] Song argues that it was 'the relatively tolerant atmosphere for homosexuality and the remarkable lack of homophobic discourse in traditional China'[101] that made this kind of representation possible. This tolerant atmosphere permitted 'male-male intimacy' to be 'a fashion among the upper-class men' at different times in Chinese history, according to Song, and indirectly contributed to 'the shaping of the cliché aesthetics of the male body characterized by […] 'rosy lips, sparkling white teeth, jasper-like face' in the *caizi-jiaren* [scholar-beauty] romances.'[102] These ideas continue to be replicated in contemporary images, accounts and practices, such as in the depictions and performances of the young male beauties who star in TV talent shows, as I explore in chapter seven.

*Gendering the modern man: twentieth century perspectives*

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[94] Martin W. Huang, op. cit, 85-6.
[95] Kam Louie, op. cit, 6-7; referring to R. H. Van Gulik, *Sexual Life in Ancient China*. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974), 295-6.
[96] Martin W. Huang, op. cit, 150.
[97] Song Geng, op. cit., 35; referring to Giovanni Vitiello, 'Exemplary Sodomites: Chivalry and Love in Late Ming Culture', *Nan Nü* 2, no. 2 (2000): 211.
[98] Martin W. Huang, op. cit, 155-6, 182.
[99] Huang, ibid., 7.
[100] Song Geng, op. cit., 125.
[101] Song, ibid., 125.
[102] Song, ibid., 126.

All in all, the *caizi* is a well-known model of romantic hero to contemporary Chinese audiences, and the level of recent academic attention it has received alone denotes its relevance to contemporary debates. However, conceptions of masculinities which emerged in the Republican period exert a much stronger and more defined influence in contemporary China, particularly with regard to images of urban middle-class men. As Susan Glosser points out in her study of male identity in the early Republican period, the 'young, educated, urban man was deeply concerned about his own economic future and passionately involved in redefining himself as a member of an industrializing economy and a modernizing state.'[103] This is very similar to how young middle-class men are publicly viewed today. From the late Qing on, due to reformists' attempts to 'remasculinise' the so-called sick man of Asia, masculinity became part of the rhetoric of modernization and nationalism.[104] The arrival of a new 'scientific' discourse of gender originating in the West, which espoused 'male/female binary categories' contributed to radical reevaluations of the *caizi* and other historical models of masculinities.[105] Discourses on sex were transformed, as Frank Dikötter points out: '[h]uman biology replaced Confucian philosophy as the epistemological foundation for social order.'[106] Dikötter describes the shift from a conception of gender as a social function to a scientific biological perspective:

> Cut adrift from analogies with a metaphysical order, characteristic of discussions about gender hierarchy in imperial China, social roles of women and men were now thought to be grounded in nature […]. Biological distinctions between male and female, which rarely assumed a primary function in imperial China, became essential.[107]

These biological distinctions have remained strongly influential in mainstream conceptions of gender in contemporary China throughout the Mao and post-Mao eras.[108]

This new focus on the physical attributes of gender foregrounded the male body in what one might call a new kind of Chinese national manliness. Anthropologist Tiantian Zheng argues that 'the experiences of Dalian-Chinese men under Japanese colonialism from 1905 to

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[103] Susan L. Glosser, ''The Truths I Have Learned': Nationalism, Family Reform, and Male Identity in China's New Culture Movement, 1915-1923', in *Chinese Femininities/Chinese Masculinities*, ed. Susan Brownell and Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 121.
[104] Martin W. Huang, op. cit., 202.
[105] Song Geng, op. cit., 11.
[106] Frank Dikötter, *Sex, Culture and Modernity in China: Medical Science and the Construction of Sexual Identities in the Early Republican Period* (London: Hurst & Co., 1995), 9.
[107] Dikötter, ibid., 20.
[108] See Harriet Evans (1997), op. cit.; and Emily Honig and Gail Hershatter, *Personal Voices: Chinese Women in the 1980's* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1988).

1945 established a model of masculine identity based on bodily resistance.'[109] She contends that whereas 'military callisthenics [in Japanese run schools] impressed Chinese schoolboys with a sense of subjugation focused on the body […], [o]n the other hand, street soccer emerged as a popular and potentially creative activity among Chinese schoolboys.'[110] Zheng maintains that because of the challenges from the West and Japan, '[b]y the beginning of the 20th century it had become clear to many in China that its survival depended upon a changed cultural identity, one that gave precedence to masculine violence.' Zheng goes so far as to claim that 'Dalian's adoption and transformation of soccer is the primary basis for a new masculinity'.[111] At the very least, it is a manifestation of how the new discourses of gender, with their emphasis on the physicality of the male body, became intertwined with discourses of nation-building, and how they imbued everyday practices with particular meanings.[112]

Meanwhile, leading reformers of the time condemned the Confucian model of masculinity as too feminine and too soft, and hence as part of the problem of China's decline. Huang recounts that in Hu Shi's essay 'Shuo ru' (On *Ru*), Hu 'cited the *Shuowen jiezi* definition of *ru* to support his argument that people identified as *ru* were usually considered soft and feminine. In that dictionary, *ru* is glossed as 'being soft' (*rou*). Hu Shi argued that the graph *xu* had the connotation of being mild and soft.'[113] The attack on Confucianism accelerated after the Communists took power in 1949, and government policy aimed to develop both strong male and female bodies for nation-building, based on the existing 'scientific' understanding of gender. Many unequal assumptions about masculinity and femininity underlay this biological discourse, which, coupled with the persistence of gender-discriminatory ideas and practices, meant that the male body remained privileged over the female body in the Mao years, despite government rhetoric that women could do anything men could.[114] These ideas are inscribed in contemporary discourses emphasising strong, healthy male bodies, such as the fit and toned white-collar male body image in media features and advertising about upmarket gyms, which I discuss in chapters two and five.

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[109] Tiantian Zheng, 'Embodied Masculinity: Sex and Sport in a (Post) Colonial Chinese City', *The China Quarterly* 190, (2007): 432.

[110] Zheng, ibid., 432.

[111] Zheng, ibid., 433.

[112] For discussions on gender in nationalist discourse, see, for example, Meng Yue, 'Female Images and National Myth', in *Gender Politics in Modern China*, ed. Tani E. Barlow (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 118-136.

[113] Martin W. Huang, op. cit., 18.

[114] For a detailed analysis of discursive depictions of women during the Mao years and beyond, see Harriet Evans (1997), op. cit.

Propaganda posters from the Cultural Revolution period depicted idealized males as politicized, muscular workers and peasants in images so far removed from today's white-collar figure that they are now mostly parodied and derided.[115] The archetypal model man of that era was the heroic peasant Lei Feng, who epitomized obedient devotion to the revolution: Lei 'compared a person's role in society to that of one screw in a large machine.'[116] As Stefan Landsberger points out, Lei's image is still used for propaganda purposes, but re-styled and re-interpreted to fit in with contemporary aspirations, such as extolling a private entrepreneur for his Lei-like 'lofty spirit'.[117] Contemporary corporate men are unlikely to spend much time 'learning from Lei Feng': their preferred model men fill the pages of magazines in which Cultural Revolution images are only likely to appear very occasionally as designer chic parodies, reappropriated with humorous slogans and thoroughly commoditised.[118]

The essentialist biologising discourse never disappeared in the Mao era, as Harriet Evans has shown,[119] but it was obscured by policies promoting 'equality between men and women' (*nan nü pingdeng*), encapsulated in Mao's well-known slogan 'the times have changed, men and women are all the same' (*shidai butongle, nan nü dou yiyang*).[120] However, early on in the reform era such apparently homogenizing policies were roundly repudiated, and an essentialist discourse came to the fore as the basis upon which women could recover their 'natural' femininity.[121] As Emily Honig and Gail Hershatter put it: '[i]n contrast to the message their older sisters had received from the Iron Girls [groups of young women who carried out tough tasks in the 1960s and70s], young women in the 1980's were told, in both direct and indirect ways, that biology *is* destiny. Their gender, the message ran, would place

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[115] Stefan R. Landsberger, 'Learning by what Example? Educational Propaganda in Twenty-First-Century China', *Critical Asian Studies* 33, no. 4 (2001): 555. A strong masculine physicality in the service of Chinese nationalism also emerged in Hong Kong films of the 1960s and 1970s (but not framed by socialist terminology), where was a clear trend away from soft male leads to tough kung fu heroes such as Bruce Lee, who fought back against foreign aggressors. See Agnes S. M. Ku, 'Masculinities in Self-Invention: Critics' Discourses on Kung Fu-Action Movies and Comedies', in *Masculinities and Hong Kong Cinema*, ed. Laikwan Pang and Day Wong (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005), 223-4.

[116] Landsberger, ibid., 550.

[117] Landsberger, ibid., 557.

[118] For an analysis of how youth culture has reappropriated images from the Cultural Revolution, see Natalie Siu-Lam Wong, 'Old Images in New Spaces: The Recycling of Chinese Cultural Revolution Imagery (1998-2008)', PhD Thesis, University of Westminster, 2008.

[119] See Harriet Evans (1997), op. cit., 33.

[120] Naihua Zhang, 'In a World Together, Yet Apart: Urban and Rural Women Coming of Age in the Seventies', in *Some of Us: Chinese Women Growing Up in the Mao Era*, ed. Xueping Zhong, Wang Zheng and Bai Di, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 14-15.

[121] Harriet Evans (1997), op. cit., 26-7.

certain limitations on their development. […] certain crucial limitations were assumed to be biologically determined'.[122]

In the twenty-first century, women and men, including white-collar men, are commonly associated with the naturalized characteristics noted above and attributed to gender difference since the early Republican era. However, while this biologist discourse has gained a new lease of life since the end of the Mao era, images of men and women have at the same time become increasingly diverse.[123] Sha Yexin's 1986 play, *Searching for a real man* (*Xunzhao nanzihan*), explored a range of masculinities in 1980s urban China through the story of a young woman's unsuccessful search for her ideal man. The protagonist believes her ideal man 'should be one of paramount virtues of manhood, one of virility and manly physiques. He should not only be an ideal man but most importantly the backbone of the nation, a role model for others to follow. He should by implication be an embodiment of accepted social values.'[124] However, she fails to find a man like this. Instead, she comes across an array of masculinities, none of which meet her requirements, such as 'men of unmanly temperament, men of [the] 'Woody Allen syndrome', who are likable losers in life, or men of sissy stuff and the stigma of anything vaguely feminine, or men of the lost generation, engaged in a blind pursuit of Western crazes.'[125] The philosopher and writer Ding Zijiang colourfully describes the various men the protagonist meets as: 'rich playboys' (*yangzun-chuyou de gongzige*); 'effeminate pretty boys' (*niangniang qiang de naiyou xiaosheng*); 'slippery rascals' (*guitou-guinao de xiao hunhun*); 'mediocre officials' (*yongyong-lulu de gongwuyuan*); 'pompous prattlers' (*ziming-bufan de kongtan ke*); 'effete, pendantic scholars' (*yuchou-suanfu de ruo shusheng*), and 'opportunistic businessmen seeking personal gain' (*touji-zuanying de shengyiren*).[126] The proliferation of images of masculinities in the reform era indicates a key contrast with the much more uniform representation of men during the radical socialism of the Maoist period.

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122 Emily Honig and Gail Hershatter, op. cit., 30-1.

123 Harriet Evans, 'Sexed Bodies', op. cit., 371.

124 Jianguo Chen, 'The Problematic of the Remasculinization of Chinese Culture: A Reading of Red Sorghum, Judou, and Farewell My Concubine', 2 (paper presented to the panel '(Re)Construction of Masculinity and Femininity' at the Fifth International Conference of the American Association for Chinese Comparative Literature at the University of Georgia, 19-21 April 1996), available at http://www.doe.state.de.us/files/pdf/asia_remascchina.pdf.

125 Chen, ibid., 1.

126 Ding Zijiang, *Zhongmei Hun Lian De Xingxue Fenxi* [Sexological Analysis of Sino-American Marriage and Love] (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin chubanshe, 2006), http://book.sina.com.cn/nzt/sex/zhongmeihunlian/59.shtml.

Sha Yexin's play was just one manifestation in the 1980s of the search for a tough, 'genuine' (*zhenzheng*) Chinese cultural masculinity.[127] Seekers of tough masculinity derided the soft, 'feminisation' (*nüxinghua*) of the pop stars, who were emerging in the increasingly market-driven entertainment world, as *naiyou xiaosheng* ('creamy boys').[128] In the mid to late 1980s the 'root-seeking movement' (*xungen yundong*), a cultural movement manifested in various artistic forms, sought to capture the mythological Chinese characteristics that could be used as the building blocks of an imagined 'Chinese modernity'. According to Nimrod Baranovitch, '[t]he Root-Seeking cultural movement was closely tied to China's opening to the world, especially to the West, and the disappointing realization that China was not the strong, rich nation that people had been made to believe it was during the revolutionary period.'[129] The sense of backwardness and characterisation as 'metaphorically feminine' to the West, contends Baranovitch, pushed the quest for a new masculinity.[130]

The root-seeking movement contributed to the growing diversity of images of masculinities in the reform era. It clearly reflected, too, the influence of the biologising discourse's idea of a naturally occurring masculinity, which the root-seekers believed had been perverted in modern times. Zhang Yimou's 1987 film *Red Sorghum* (*Hong gaoliang*), based on Mo Yan's 'root-seeking' novel of the same name, 'shocked the public with its bold expression of unrestrained sexuality and outrageous description of tough masculinity.'[131] The film was apparently very influential, and soon after the film was screened, the country witnessed a so-called 'Red Sorghum Phenomenon' praising the film for reimposing an ideal of a raw, physical, masculinity: 'with provocative visual images of uninhibited manners of masculinity extolled in drinking, brawl, banditry, and other masculine activities, the film seem[ed] to be pandering to male fantasies of domination and potency.'[132] The age-old natural masculine qualities constructed in *Red Sorghum* were purportedly found in the harsh environment of the northeast of China, the area which, along with the northwest, is popularly considered to produce the most manly men in China. It is not surprising that a musical

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[127] For a comprehensive analysis of masculinity in this period focussing on film and literature, see Zhong Xueping, *Masculinity Besieged? Issues of Modernity and Male Subjectivity in Chinese Literature of the Late Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

[128] The *xiaosheng* was a traditional role in Chinese opera representing a young refined romantic scholar. See Song Geng, *The Fragile Scholar: Power and Masculinity in Chinese Culture* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004), vii.

[129] Nimrod Baranovitch, *China's New Voices: Popular Music, Ethnicity, Gender, and Politics, 1978-1997* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 128.

[130] Baranovitch, ibid., 128.

[131] Chen, op. cit., 7.

[132] Chen, ibid., 8.

manifestation of the ‘root-seeking’ movement’s quest for masculinity, according to Baranovitch, was the very ‘manly’ ‘northwest wind’ (*xibeifeng*) music craze of 1986-1989.[133]

As market reforms gathered speed after Deng Xiaoping’s tour of southern China in 1992 and the expanding urban middle class concentrated on consumption, economic influences on ideals of masculinity became more pronounced and the explicit ‘root-seeking’ search to recover an ancient Chinese masculinity faded from prominence. But even as Chinese middle-class men are mostly now engaged with the serious business of making money, stories of heroes from the Chinese past are still a significant source of idealized models of Chinese masculinity, such as the ‘chivalrous swordsman’ (*wuxia*) novels of Jin Yong (the pen name of writer Louis Cha). Jin Yong is credited with evolving a new style of fiction, which combines core elements of Chinese traditions with compelling storytelling to create a kind of ‘cultural euphoria’.[134] His heroes manifest a model of masculinity fêted in Chinese history for upholding ‘justice’ (*zhengyi*), ‘boldness’ (*haoshuang*), and ‘personal loyalty’ (*yiqi*). This same masculinity is also protective of lovers, families, friends and subordinates, and seems to appeal to the imagination of many Chinese men today. The Nobel prize-winning novelist Gao Xingjian, for example, has described the strength of this sort of ‘myth of masculinity’ as a defining feature of modernity in China. Indicating the pervasiveness of the biologising discourse of gender, he argues that this myth is founded on ‘a human nature that takes the male sex as its given’.[135]

One of the features of contemporary debates about masculinity is an emphasis on the decline of male authority and even the outright emasculation of men. A prominent early example is Zhang Xianliang’s novel *Half of Man is Woman* (*Nanren de yiban shi nüren*), published in 1985, which dealt with concerns about Chinese men’s masculinity through the experiences of its sexually dysfunctional protagonist, a male intellectual, during the Cultural Revolution. According to the novel’s English translator Martha Avery, ‘[o]ne of [Zhang’s] main themes is that China's political system has desexed its population. It has not only instilled in its people profound distrust, which ranges from distrust of the Government to distrust of one's own relatives, it has castrated the will of people to stand up for themselves. They have been made both mentally and physically impotent. In *Half of Man is Woman*,

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[133] Nimrod Baranovitch, op. cit., 128.

[134] Simon Elegant, ‘The Storyteller: What Makes Louis Cha's Martial Arts Novels so Wildly Popular in Asia?’ *Far Eastern Economic Review* (5 September, 1996): 38-44, http://www.geocities.com/Tokyo/Pagoda/2331/biography.html (accessed 28 December 2007).

[135] Wang Jing, *High Culture Fever: Politics, Aesthetics, and Ideology in Deng's China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 169-70.

Zhang wonders if China's entire intellectual community has not been emasculated.'[136] Song Geng has similarly noted that '[p]ost-Mao Chinese society has been marked by the prosperity of the feminine and the decline of the masculine (*yinsheng yang shuai*).'[137] Geng points out that 'Chinese men have been disappointingly described as weak, immature, selfish and impotent, while the real masculinity is embodied by 'Rambo, Takakura Ken [a 'tough guy' Japanese actor] and the rural men from China's northwest'.'[138]

Adding his voice to the narrative of emasculation, Nimrod Baranovitch argues that the quashing of the Tiananmen Square protests in June 1989 was 'an act of castration whose purpose was to place China's intellectuals back in their traditional position of women-like state subjects.'[139] And the 1990s play, *The Wife from America*, by Shanghai playwright Zhang Xian, shows that men are still considered emasculated in the consumer society which developed rapidly post-Tiananmen. The play's theme, as sociologist James Farrer explains, is that '[w]hile men have 'become useless' through their political failure, women find power and possibilities in the global consumer economy represented by America.'[140] In Farrer's view, the play amounts to 'a gendered allegory of an emasculated civil society and a prostituted consumer society.'[141]

And yet, countering the narrative of emasculation to an extent, the image of the corporate, globalised male has been re-sexualised in recent years. This can be seen in Chinese soap operas in the 1990s, according to Sheldon Lu, which contributed to a 'transnational male imaginary' in which the figure of the white woman emerges as an object of sexual fantasy for Chinese male viewers.[142] In this new imaginary, Chinese men themselves are sexualized and made desirable to white women. For example, in her discussion of the 1995 TV movie *Sunset at Long Chao Li*, Lisa Rofel quoted Kathleen Erwin's argument about the 'reimagining' of the Chinese nation 'as masculine and (sexually) desirable'.[143] Rofel contends that this reimagining

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136 Martha Avery, introduction to *Half of Man is Woman* (*Nanren de yiban shi nüren*), by Zhang Xianliang (London: Viking, 1988), http://www.comp.nus.edu.sg/~tanhw/chinese/literature/zhang-xianliang/halfman-intro.txt.

137 Song Geng, op cit., 8.

138 Song, ibid., 8-9.

139 Nimrod Baranovitch, op. cit., 141-2.

140 James Farrer, *Opening Up: Youth Sex Culture and Market Reform in Shanghai* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 97.

141 Farrer, ibid., 97.

142 Sheldon H. Lu, 'Soap Opera in China: The Transnational Politics of Visuality, Sexuality, and Masculinity', *Cinema Journal* 40, no. 1 (2000): 29.

143 Quoted in Lisa Rofel (2007), op. cit., 130. The original source is Kathleen Erwin, 'White Women, Male Desires: A Televisual Fantasy of the Transnational Chinese Family', in *Spaces of their Own: Women's Public Sphere in Transnational China*, ed. Mayfair Mei-hui Yang (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 238. Kathleen Erwin acted in the movie.

'entails representing white women rather than Chinese women as the object of Chinese male desire', which, in Erwin's words, 'eclipses Chinese women'.[144] Through this bypassing of Chinese women and possession of white women, Chinese white-collar masculinities attempt to demonstrate their desirability on a global scale, and to quash the doubts about virility so fully aired in the emasculation narrative, and I examine how this all plays out in the setting of an upscale nightclub in chapter five.

*Middle-class masculinities*

The aspirational image of today's white-collar man owes its popularity to the rise of the middle class in the post-Mao era, and to the associations of the middle class with prosperity and success.[145] Many academics and popular commentators assume the automatic result of modernization is a more educated and more equal society. Official analyses and popular opinion alike see the emergence of the middle class and white-collar stratum as a natural consequence of the opening up of the economy in a formulation of the classic modernization argument. It has been summarized thus by two of its proponents, the political scientist Ronald Inglehart and the economic sociologist Wayne E. Baker:

> The central claim of modernization theory is that economic development is linked with coherent and, to some extent, predictable changes in culture and social and political life. Evidence from around the world indicates that economic development tends to propel societies in a roughly predictable direction: industrialization leads to occupational specialization, rising educational levels, rising income levels, and eventually brings unforeseen changes—changes in gender roles, attitudes toward authority and sexual norms; declining fertility rates; broader political participation; and less easily led publics. Determined elites in control of the state and the military can resist these changes, but in the long run, it becomes increasingly costly to do so and the

[144] Rofel, ibid., 130; Erwin, ibid., 238.

[145] A survey by Li Chunling of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences defined the middle class using four criteria: working in a 'white-collar profession' (*bailing zhiye*); having a 'mid-level income or higher' (*shouru shuiping zai zhongdeng yishang*); being a 'mid-level consumer' (*xiaofei zhongchan*); and 'self-identifying as middle class' (*zhuguan rentong zhongchan*). Only 4.1 percent of people surveyed could be defined as middle-class by these criteria. Widening the self-identification criterion to include those who identified as 'small-scale entrepreneurs' (*geti gongshanghu*) raised the figure to 7 percent. See Shen Hui, 'Zhongchan jieceng de rentong ji qi jiangou' (Middle-class identity and its construction), in *Zhongguo zhongchan jieceng diaocha* (Survey of the Chinese middle class), ed. Zhou Xiaohong (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2005), 47. The number of white-collar workers has grown as the service sector has expanded (from 12.2% of the economy in 1978 to 28.6% in 2002), but relatively slow urbanisation and the service sector's insufficient 'informationisation' (*xinxihua*) are allegedly hampering growth in white-collar jobs. Zhou Xiaohong, 'Zhongguo zhongchan jieceng de lishi yu xianzhuang' (The history and current situation of the Chinese middle class, in *Zhongguo zhongchan jieceng diaocha* (Survey of the Chinese middle class), ed. Zhou Xiaohong, (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2005), 25.

probability of change rises.[146]

While, as I argue in throughout this work, there is no teleology to this story, it is worth noting its main points since it underlies the values associated with white-collar masculinity and its success. The current middle class, in its growth and characteristics, is associated with a number of key features including cultural pluralism, foreign travel, honesty, social stability and strong consumerism. The combination of these factors produces repeated generalisations in relevant academic literature, such as the argument that the middle class's economic interests promote an interest in social stability, cooperative relationships with officials, and the pursuit of success through an ethic of hard work rather than family connections. In other words, the interests of China's middle class are defined in ways that correspond to many of the key features in Deng Xiaoping's rhetoric of allowing a segment of society to get rich first, a key element in his reform process.[147] The defining features of middle-class man encapsulate many official policies and policy orientations concerning the Chinese government's engagement with global capital.

Supporters of these strategies cite increasing cultural pluralism and the expansion of higher education as two key processes fuelling middle-class growth. Zhou points out that China has become increasingly culturally pluralistic under the more relaxed political environment since 1978, allowing the development of taste as a middle-class phenomenon.[148] Before then art and culture were entirely used for political purposes and everyone participated in the same orthodox culture, preventing the formation of a middle class with its own tastes. The expansion of higher education has contributed to increasing cultural pluralism, and has also enabled its beneficiaries to command higher salaries. Zhou notes that those 'few people who have received elite educations' (*wei shubuduo de nengguo jieshou jingying jiaoyu de ren*) since 1978 have been able to get 'respectable and relatively well-paid white-collar jobs' (*timian er shouru jiao gao de bailing gongzuo*).[149] Reinforcing this viewpoint, sociologist Shen Hui argues that an extra year's education adds six to seven percent to salaries, helping

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[146] Ronald Inglehart and Wayne E. Baker, 'Modernization, Cultural Change, and the Persistence of Traditional Values', *American Sociological Review* 65, no. 1 (February, 2000): 21.

[147] Deng first raised the concept of 'letting some people get rich first' (*rang yibufen ren xian fuqilai*) at a meeting with a high-level American business delegation in 1985. Ai Lin, 'Zhengque lijie Xiaoping tongzhi de 'rang yibufen ren xian fuqilai' (Correctly Understanding Comrade Xiaoping's 'Let Some People Get Rich First'), in *Xinhua wang* (Xinhua Net) [database online], July 21, 2006. [cited 2008]. Available from http://news.xinhuanet.com/comments/2006-07/21/content_4863377.htm.

[148] Zhou Xiaohong, op. cit., 13. Zhou refers to Pierre Bourdieu's research on taste as a class differentiator, citing Bourdieu's *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, tr. Richard Nice (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984), 65.

[149] Zhou, ibid., 15.

top professionals, especially those in IT, surpass expected white-collar income.[150] And white-collar language skills also boost their earning capacity. Xu Rong points out that white-collar jobs 'require relatively high foreign language proficiency, which itself requires a relatively high level of education.'[151] The rewards of white-collar work are high, according to Xu, in terms of salary and status: '[t]his kind of work's high salary brings them both comparatively high economic standing and professional prestige. In just a few short years, 'white collar' has rapidly become an admired professional appellation.'[152]

With regard to the middle class's association with social stability, academics such as Zhou contend that its economic interests cause them to favour gradual democratisation over sudden upheaval; and he agrees with the widespread consensus that they are not particularly interested in politics.[153] Researchers have concluded that the middle class cultivates close connections with officials for economic benefit: research conducted by the political scientist David Goodman claims that managers of private and state enterprises all have good relationships with local party and state officials.[154] The potential for conflict between the middle class and the state is low, Zhou argues, because these links made to support economic interests contribute to a desire from both parties for stability between them and in wider society.[155] The middle class's desire to continuously improve their living and working conditions, raising their income and social status, is another often cited contributory factor to their privileging of stability and comfort over political interests.[156]

There is a tendency amongst academic commentators to portray the middle class as honest, hard-working and not reliant on corrupt practices. Emphasising this, Zhou argues that its success does not depend on 'family status' (*mendi*), 'nepotism' (*qundai*), 'shady transactions' (*touji quqiao*) or other illegal means; rather, it depends on 'individual hard work' (*geren de qinfen nuli*), a 'good education' (*lianghao jiaoyu*) and 'accumulated cultural capital' (*jilei de wenhua ziben*).[157] Zhou claims that if everyone were to aspire to this hard-working, honest, middle-class model, then society would become more 'healthy' (*jiankang*) and

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[150] Shen Hui, op. cit., 55.
[151] Xu Rong, 'Pinwei: zhongchan de fuhao shenghuo' (Taste: The Symbolic Lifestyle of the Middle Class), in *Zhongguo zhongchan jieceng diaocha* (Survey of the Chinese middle class), ed. Zhou Xiaohong, (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2005), 261.
[152] Xu, ibid., 261.
[153] Zhou Xiaohong, op. cit., 15.
[154] Zhou, ibid., 15; citing David Goodman, 'The New Middle Class', in *The Paradox of China's Post-Mao Reforms*, ed. Merle Goldman and Roderick MacFarquhar, (London: Harvard University Press, 1999), 241-261.
[155] Zhou, ibid., 15.
[156] Zhou, ibid., 15-16.
[157] Zhou, ibid., 17.

‘harmonious’ (*hexie*).[158] Citing the middle class as the example that Deng Xiaoping wanted when he said that development depends on letting ‘some people get rich first’ (*yi bufen ren xian fuqilai*), Zhou believes they generally encourage more civilised behaviour through their example, especially amongst lower income classes, in such areas as ‘enthusiasm for work’ (*jingye jingshen*), ‘occupational morals’ (*zhiye daode*), ‘commercial honesty and good faith’ (*shangye chengxin*), ‘motivation for success’ (*chengjiu dongji*), ‘family ethics’ (*jiating lunli*), ‘raising standards’ (*suzhi tisheng*), ‘cultural taste’ (*wenhua pinwei*), and their ‘children’s education’ (*zinü jiaoyu*).[159] Additionally, the middle class focus on developing exemplary social capital, in sociologist Hu Yiqing’s opinion, referring to C. Wright Mills’ argument that ‘social connections’ (*shejiao*) serve to raise the ‘prestige’ (*mingwang*) of white-collar workers.[160] Reinforcing his argument, Hu also cites U.S.-based sociologist Yanjie Bian’s comment that ‘social networks’ (*shehui wangluo*) are ‘just like a person’s diplomas and certificates, a kind of ‘capital’ (*ziben*)’.[161]

While the middle classes may be at the ‘rear’ (*houwei*) of the political world, they are at the ‘vanguard’ (*qianwei*) of consumerism.[162] When the first issue of the consumer magazine *Shishang* (Fashion) was published in 1990, most people still had lingering suspicions that excessive consumption was ‘wrong’, but now tens of magazines encourage white-collar workers to ‘consume, consume, and consume some more’ (*xiaofei, xiaofei, zai xiaofei*), and to ‘spend tomorrow’s money on today’s things’ (*hua mingtian de qian, ban jintian de shi*).[163] Middle-class consumption started with domestic appliances and now extends to spacious houses and cars; consequently, demand for property in Shanghai, for example, has put average prices up from 3026 yuan per square metre in 1998 to 8124 yuan per square metre in 2004, and the number of cars in China had already reached 206 million in 2003, 70% owned by individual consumers.[164]

The media and advertising industries have been an integral part of the construction of the middle-class consumer image. ‘The high consumption ability of this high-income group

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[158] Zhou, ibid., 17-18.

[159] Zhou, ibid., 20.

[160] Hu Yiqing, ‘Shehui jiaowang: bianjie yu quge’ (Social Contacts: Boundaries and Divisions), in *Zhongguo zhongchan jieceng diaocha* (Survey of the Chinese Middle Class), ed. Zhou Xiaohong (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2005), 174; C. Wright Mills, *Bailing: Meiguo de zhongchan jieji* (White collar: the American middle classes) (Hangzhou: Zhejiang renmin chubanshe, 1987), 278.

[161] Hu, ibid., 174; Bian Yanjie, ‘Chengshi jumin shehui ziben de laiyuan ji zuoyong: wangluo guandian yu diaocha faxian’ (Origin and function of urban residents’ social capital: network perspectives and survey discoveries), *Zhongguo shehui kexue* (China social science) no. 3 (2004): 138.

[162] Zhou Xiaohong, op. cit., 18.

[163] Zhou, ibid., 18.

[164] Zhou, ibid., 18-19.

attracted the gaze of business people'[165] and 'starting in the 1990s, 'white-collar magazines' ('*bailing zazhi*') targeting white-collar workers appeared one after another', with periodicals such as the *Shen jiang fuwu daobao* [known in English as the *Shanghai Times*] running regular columns on 'white-collar preoccupations' ('*bailing xinshi*').'[166] Adverts for Guangzhou's high-level consumer goods (*gao xiaofei pin*) (especially residential apartment buildings (*zhuzhai loupan*)), also constantly use white-collar identities, images and lifestyle (*bailing shenfen, xingxiang ji shenghuo fangshi*) to solicit sales.'[167]

However, of course the middle-class man in China is not a new phenomenon. My discussion focuses on the reconstruction of China's middle class in the post-Mao era.[168] Current academic analyses of today's middle class phenomenon constantly refer back to the Republican period, when the middle class grew particularly rapidly in Shanghai, where the development of all sectors (finance, commerce, transport, education, banking, legal services, customs, telecommunications, post office, rail network, etc) was shaped by semi-colonial capitalism.[169] During the revolutionary socialist period from 1949 to 1978, the capitalist conditions that had nurtured the growth of the middle class and white-collar workers disappeared, yet, Zhou argues, it is possible to identify their equivalents. He believes that during this period the 'middle stratum' (*zhongjian jieceng*) of Chinese society was composed of 'ordinary cadres and intellectuals who were analogous to white-collar workers' (*leisi bailing de putong ganbu he zhishifenzi*); and he adds that according to sociologist Li Qiang it also included 'staff in state-run enterprises' (*guoying qiye de zhigong*).[170] However, Zhou

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[165] Xu Rong, op. cit., 261.

[166] Xu, ibid., 261. Lü Dale, 'Bailing: xinxing de zhongchan jieji' (White collar: a newly emerging middle class), in *Zhongguo shehui yu Zhongguo yanjiu* (Chinese society and Chinese research), ed. Zhou Xiaohong (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2004), np.

[167] Xu ibid., 261. Lü Dale, ibid., np.

[168] According to sociologists working on the issues, the Chinese middle class first emerged in the late 19th century and early 20th century. Amidst the different segments of the middle class which Zhou Xiaohong identifies are what he believes to be China's first 'foreign enterprise white-collar workers' (*waiqi bailing*): the young bilingual intellectuals who worked for foreign merchants (who appeared from as early as 1840, Zhou claims); other elements included members of the gentry who moved to the cities to involve themselves in industry and commerce and were renamed the 'new gentry' (*xin shishen*); managers in industry and commerce; government officials in the expanding government sector; and professors, lawyers, authors and artists in the developing liberal professions. Zhou Xiaohong, op. cit., 3. This original association of white-collar workers with foreign enterprises, and by implication, a relatively prosperous Western-influenced lifestyle, is a connection which is routinely emphasized in contemporary discussions about China's middle class.

[169] Zhou Xiaohong, op. cit., 4.

[170] Zhou, ibid., 4; referring to Li Qiang, 'Shichang zhuanxing yu Zhongguo zhongchan jieceng de daiji gengti' (Market transformation and Chinese middle class generational change), *Zhanlüe yu guanli* (Strategy and management) no. 3 (1999): 38. It is also worth noting that starting in the 1950s and through the 60s and 70s, Mao urged continual class struggle against the re-emergence of what were variously labelled as, for example, 'capitalist roaders' (*zou ziben zhuyi luxian pai*) and 'figures representing the bourgeois' (*zichan jieji daibiao renwu*). For a detailed look at the context of this struggle, see Jack Gray, 'The Two Roads: Alternative Strategies

cautions, this was more a 'mid-level income class or stratum' (*zhongdeng shouru de jieji huo zhongdeng shouru jieceng*) than a middle class, because in the Mao era everything produced from the land and all personal property was either nationalised or collectivised, and the political status and social prestige of this mid-level income group was uneven.[171]

Despite the references of these accounts to historical roots, the concept of the white-collar worker (*bailing*) started to achieve more widespread recognition in China only from 1987, in sociologist Xu Rong's opinion, when a Chinese language edition of American sociologist C. Wright Mills' classic 1951 work, *White collar: The American Middle Classes*, was published.[172] However, the initial entry of the term *bailing* into reform era discourse was as early as 1980, according to Chen Guanren and Yi Yang in their survey of 'middle class people' (*zhongchanzhe*), which was 'the second year of the reform and opening up (*gaige kaifang*) process, when there was more of an atmosphere of a commodity economy (*shangpin jingji qifen jiaowei nongzhong*), and foreign enterprises (*waiqi*) started setting up offices in China.'[173] The white-collar label 'provided a ready-made status reference point' (*xiancheng de shenfen zuobiao*) for some of the new social groups emerging in the reform period, according to Xu, but 'it differed significantly from Mills' original meaning':

> for Mills, the 'white-collar' class (*'bailing' jieceng*) has a very broad range: white-collar professionals in modern American society, from high to low, are almost ubiquitous (*wuchu buzai*), and most of them have average or below-average incomes. School teachers, sales staff and every kind of office employee constitute the three biggest professional groupings in the American white-collar class.'[174]

For Xu, there was initially a much narrower understanding of the white-collar class in China, where it was understood as a stratum of relatively well-paid positions in foreign enterprises: 'in mainland China, with the rapid development of various kinds of foreign investment ventures, the term 'white collar' has been bestowed on those people who undertake administrative, management and technological work in these enterprises.'[175] Here again we can see the emphasis on the foreign connections of white-collar workers. However, as the numbers of white-collar workers have proliferated in the twenty-first century, working for a

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of Social Change and Economic Growth in China', in *Authority, Participation and Cultural Change in China*, ed. Stuart R. Schram, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 109-57.

[171] Zhou, ibid., 4-5.

[172] Xu Rong, op. cit., 261; C. Wright Mills, *Bailing: Meiguo de Zhongchan jieji* (White collar: The American middle classes) (Hangzhou: Zhejiang renmin chubanshe, 1987).

[173] Chen Guanren and Yi Yang, *Zhongguo zhongchanzhe diaocha* (Survey of Chinese middle-class people) (Beijing: Tuanjie chubanshe, 2004), 62.

[174] Xu Rong, op. cit., 261.

[175] Xu ibid., 261.

foreign firm is no longer a prerequisite for white-collar status, and the application of the term is broadening to cover a greater range of workers.

Although there may be debates about who is or is not white-collar, the hegemonic model of white-collar masculinity of media discourse and public discussion emphasises a particular look, a particular embodiment: the sleek, smart, besuited, well-groomed, manicured, soft-skinned, gleaming-teethed, fashionable young man. And so to start my analysis of the interrelations between white-collar male discursive identities and everyday practices, in the following chapter I set out a thorough, theoretically informed understanding of the formative processes of white-collar male body culture.

## Chapter Three
## Looking the part: fashioning white-collar masculinities

The Chinese media depiction of the well-dressed, cosmopolitan young white-collar man signals the emergence of an arguably 'hegemonic' masculinity overlapping with Connell's 'transnational business masculinity', shaped by the market economic policies and global consumer culture embraced by Deng Xiaoping and his successors.[176] In its immediate appearance, this masculinity bears little resemblance to the robust macho lines of the 'model man'—the worker or the peasant— of the Mao era. It derives as much from global images of the corporate man as from more locally recognizable versions of 'Chinese men'. Moreover, the gender attributes of the image's appearance defy simple binary boundaries, bringing a range of potential meanings and subject positions to the notion of gender that had no place in Maoist discourse. However, most of the textual narrative accompanying such images is relentlessly conventional in its heteronormative principles, suggesting a continuing attachment to deeply engrained assumptions about 'natural' masculine behaviour and desire.

The consumer practices of white-collar men suggest attempts to become outwardly identified with the dominant lifestyle images promoted in the media through what Chen Guanren and Yi Yang in their survey of the middle class call 'fashionable consumption' (*shishang xiaofei*).[177] This consists of certain 'external group characteristics', such as a desire for credit cards, VIP cards, membership cards, even ordinary department store discount cards, which help purchase the objects that confer white-collar status.[178] Recognising the interaction of local and global influences in the growth of consumer culture in China, Chen and Yi call this process the 'sinicisation of white-collar connotations' (*bailing neihan de zhongguohua*). Providing more evidence of the close association of white-collar workers with consumerism,

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[176] Raewyn Connell has proposed the concept of a 'transnational business masculinity' as 'a new pattern of hegemonic masculinity, found particularly among globally mobile managers' in the 'global corporate economy', but qualifies it by pointing out that 'a spectrum of gender patterns must be recognized in an increasingly complex business environment.' R.W. Connell and Julian Wood, 'Globalization and Business Masculinities', *Men and Masculinities* 7, no. 4 (2005): 347.

[177] Chen Guanren and Yi Yang, op. cit., 64.

[178] These objects include 'mobile phone pouches' (*shouji bao*), 'backpacks with chain straps' (*dailian beibao*), 'multimedia mobile phones' (*caixin shouji*), and 'digital cameras' (*shuma xiangji*), 'expensive clothing magazines' (*jiage bufei de shizhuang zazhi*), 'fashion publications' (*shishang kanwu*), 'notebook computers' (*diannao jishibu*), and 'portable computers' (*bianxieshi diannao*). See Chen Guanren and Yi Yang, *Zhongguo zhongchanzhe diaocha* (Survey of Chinese middle-class people) (Beijing: Tuanjie chubanshe, 2004), 65.

the 2007 MSN online survey's section on 'fashionable consumer goods' (*shishang xiaofei pin*) showed that white-collar 'netizens' (*wangmin*) consume more 'luxury goods' than other online users; more notebook computers, more 'famous brands of cosmetics' (*mingpai huazhuang pin*) and more 'famous brands of perfume' (*mingpai xiangshui*).[179] Highlighting the appeal of global brands, the survey also noted that white-collar netizens' favourite mobile phone brands were all global names.[180] Furthermore, pervasive print advertising and broadcast and online media[181] encourage white-collar men to indulge in fashionable consumption. On CCTV Channel Five, the national broadcaster's sports channel, cars, clothes, and alcohol adverts aimed at men are particularly numerous. Glossy men's magazines are full of adverts for foreign as well as local clothing brands; and for those who cannot afford foreign brands, there is a huge market in affordable fake foreign designer wear, much of which is indistinguishable to the genuine article in appearance. Many of my informants wore well-made fakes (and occasionally the real thing), which enabled them to perform a globally-styled white-collar masculinity at a price they could afford.[182]

It is in these practices that the discursive meets the non-discursive to produce white-collar subjectivities. Based on my fieldwork interviews and observations as well as media texts, this chapter investigates how young men mold themselves as subjects of media discourses of 'fashionable consumption' through the acquisition and display of particular objects. It looks at how these objects are worn, applied or are otherwise linked with young white-collar male bodies, in what kinds of settings, and for what purposes. It is through this 'assemblage' of discursive and non-discursive elements that the process of habituation takes

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[179] 'Weiruan MSN shoudu 'jiema' Zhongguo bailing xiaofei shengtai' (Microsoft MSN's First 'Decoding' of China White-Collar Consumer Ecology), Tianjiwang (yesky.com), http://soft.yesky.com/info/55/3063555.shtml (accessed July 30, 2008). MSN itself is widely regarded as a more 'white-collar' instant messenger programme than QQ, because it is used internationally much more than QQ.

[180] Such as Nokia, Samsung, and Sony Ericsson. 'Weiruan MSN shoudu 'jiema' Zhongguo bailing xiaofei shengtai' (Microsoft MSN's First 'Decoding' of China White-Collar Consumer Ecology), Tianjiwang (yesky.com), http://soft.yesky.com/info/55/3063555.shtml (accessed July 30, 2008).

[181] See, for example, Sina's section on cars at http://auto.sina.com.cn; or Sohu.com's men's section homepage which carries adverts for premium residential real estate, and foreign brands of alcohol and cars: http://men.sohu.com.

[182] The main status indicators for the middle class are not clothes, however, according to anthropologist Elisabeth Croll, who cites a *Far Eastern Economic Review* survey of 'some 1,000 to 1,500 top corporate managers, senior level cadres, entrepreneurs and educators living in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou', earning between 4000 and 8000 yuan in 2002, which found that '[l]ess than 10 per cent cited good–quality clothes or accessories, club membership and expensive jewellery as essential components of the 'good life''; in comparison, 50 per cent cited 'leisure, a high-paying job, owning a car, travelling abroad and a college education'. Nevertheless, clothing and accessories are a very important part of the body culture of white-collar men. Elisabeth Croll. 2006. *China's New Consumers: Social development and domestic demand*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, pp. 86-7. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 26 November 1998; *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 7 October 1999.

place, and in which the conscious performance of a white-collar masculinity becomes routinised, even ingrained into the body as 'second nature'.

This chapter paints a composite picture of the white-collar man's key characteristics, the core of which is a particular application of body work to habituate himself to the style and movements of a particular image. A focus on the bodily meanings and activities that individual men habitually engage in to acquire this image gives us, as Susan Brownell put it, 'insight into how an orientation toward the world becomes habitual because the body as a mnemonic device reinforces it.'[183] Grooming and fashioning the body in a particular look, the possibility of which depends on consumer capacity, also displays acquisition of the material culture of the global consumer market. In sum, white-collar status is a habituated performance of certain attributes, the value of which resides not in any explicit political qualities, but in the social and cultural status/capital acquired through the capacity to buy objects deemed to be commensurate with that status.

In sketching an impression of the white-collar man that emerges from these kinds of images and narratives, this chapter examines the gender dimensions of meaning that emerge from the intersection between personal and discursive accounts of white-collar subjectivity. In the first section, titled 'Three Portraits', I present the views of three white-collar men I knew in Beijing, examining how they brought themselves to white-collar discourse in their daily activities. Their accounts are not uniform, but converge in certain values that are epitomised, perhaps, by the shirt, suit and tie, a theme I return to further on. I then examine textual descriptions in men's magazines of what has been called the 'new century man' (*xin shiji de nanren*). Partially echoed in the lives of my informants, this slim and smartly-dressed figure uses creams, colognes, haircuts and suchlike to construct an image that contrasts with other more conventional models of masculinity. Following this, I return to the main sartorial marker of corporate masculinity, the suit. Asking, 'what's in a suit', I take a closer look at the moral connotations – primarily of dependability and purity – encapsulated in the corporate suit. Also covering suit 'demeanor' (and much more besides), are a men's magazine's lessons in self-help concerning behaviour and deportment in and out of the office. The extraordinary attention to the details of movements, postures and clothing of white-collar masculinity in this article are indicative that young urban men are looking to such sources for significant guidance on

[183] Brownell argues that the display of the body in daily life is significant in this regard: 'In studying body culture, it is important to look at both mundane, everyday behaviours and at cultural performances in which the 'legitimate body' is publicly displayed, emphasising that '[b]ody culture also includes an important performative dimension.' Susan Brownell, 'Making Dream Bodies in Beijing: Athletes, Fashion Models, and Urban Mystique in China', in *China Urban: Ethnographies of Contemporary Culture*, ed. by Nancy N. Chen, Constance D. Clark, Suzanne Z. Gottschang and Lyn Jeffery, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001), 124.

how they should look and act as white-collar men, perhaps because of uncertainty about 'appropriate' white-collar dress and behaviour. Further, this feature unequivocally orients white-collar masculine behaviour towards impressing women, and confirms the heterosexist character of this version of 'new century man'. Finally, moving beyond body work, suits and perfumes, I examine the material capital of white-collar man displayed through large-scale purchases such as cars, apartments and holidays abroad, all of which are key components of the successful white-collar life.

**Three portraits**

Shortly after I first arrived in Beijing to conduct my fieldwork in 2004, an acquaintance I had already known for some time introduced me to Johnny, a single man in his late twenties who was working as a website developer for a global information technology company, headquartered in North America. Johnny was born and brought up in a small city in the south of China, famous for Buddhist statues. His father had been a foreman in a factory, before setting up a small manufacturing business. I first met Johnny near his office in Sanlitun, an area famous for its bars and restaurants catering to foreigners and young Chinese white-collar workers. Johnny deliberated over a choice of restaurant before selecting a self-styled 'ethnic' Tibetan restaurant in a quiet, more exclusive corner of the area, away from the rowdiness of the main bar-lined street. It was furnished and decorated in Tibetan style and dancers in local costume performed between the tables. The customers were all Chinese, mostly male, and looked mostly like office workers. Dressed smartly in suit and tie, and possessing impeccable manners, Johnny had an urbane air of sophistication that seemed straight out of the pages of the men's magazine *Shishang xiansheng*. He seemed to epitomize the well-dressed, stylish male models in the features on office workers. As I got to know him better over the following year, through numerous shared meals and evenings out, I had many opportunities to observe the 'body work' he did to bring his body into line with the discursive models of white-collar masculinity found in the glossy men's fashion and lifestyle magazines—the in-house bibles of many white-collar men I met—that ran the length of the IKEA bookshelf in his apartment's living room. These magazines were his guide to office wear, colognes and skincare products, among other items. He patronised an expensive hairdressing salon near his office, whose barbers claimed to have been trained at a Toni and Guy salon in Shanghai. He applied many Western and Japanese brand-name skin care products, especially on his face, as he was convinced he had bad skin. But all this effort was for the office: he dressed casually when not at work, and was certainly not a fashion victim. His priorities lay elsewhere, such as home

furnishings. His 'body work' also extended to his teeth, which he regularly had professionally cleaned, and even to attempting to eradicate his snoring through an operation to drill tiny holes in his nose, which he claimed had been a success.[184] Here, in very clear terms, we can see the habituated performance of Johnny as 'white-collar man as consumer' produced through the interpellation of his body into an assemblage of discursive and non-discursive elements. His purpose was to enhance his performance of the slick, fashionable metropolitan masculinity that he admired in his magazines through acquiring and applying its products and practices (creams, suits,), body-changing tools (drills), and globally-recognised appliances (furnishings). Such is the production of Johnny as a white-collar consumer, in an assemblage of practices and habits, through strategies and techniques of subjectification, promulgated through magazines, hospitals, hair salons, furniture shops and restaurants. The more Johnny works on himself, on changing his body (he was an avid gym-goer, as I discuss in chapter five), on bringing himself to the 'subject position' of the consummate, consuming, urban male, and the better he emulates those around him and already ahead of him, the easier it is for him to claim that he really *is* this subjectivity that he has constructed; that, in fact, to use Rose's terms, it is his 'inner reality'. But Johnny could not always 'hold' the performance of this subject position, since it jostled with the multiple infoldings of habits and techniques signifying other subject positions, as we shall see in subsequent chapters.

While Johnny fitted the classic Chinese white-collar criterion of working for a foreign company, many young white-collar men work for Chinese companies. This was the case for Colin, a graphic designer for a local travel firm, single and in his mid-twenties when I met him. I got to know him fairly well over the eleven months I lived in Beijing, eating out with him regularly or simply hanging out in coffee shops. He was introduced to me through a mutual friend, an English expatriate. Colin did not earn as much as Johnny, but, coming from Chongqing, he was much more of a big city boy, born and bred. We first met in Wudaokou, a thriving business, retail, entertainment and student area on the fringes of Zhongguancun, Beijing's 'Silicon Valley', which has a large expatriate presence. Wudaokou contains Tsinghua University's recently built hi-tech business park of gleaming tower blocks, which hosts offices of Google, Microsoft and other big transnational IT companies. Colin had chosen to live in this area because he liked its cosmopolitan atmosphere, although his work was in another part of Beijing. He chose a moderately priced Chinese restaurant for our meal on the evening we first met. He dressed more casually than Johnny for work, since he did not need to

[184] Apparently as one of the first people in Beijing to improve his nocturnal nasal airflow in this way, he was even interviewed on TV about it.

wear a suit to work, but he wore trendier clothes out of the office. His stylish hair and attention to his skin showed an attentive care of the body. He sometimes wore t-shirts bearing slogans in English, which signalled his most salient characteristic, namely a knowledgeable love of Western popular culture, acquired from watching countless Western movies, listening to Western music, and hanging out with his American and European friends in cafes, bars and clubs. Colin worked at projecting a sophisticated, 'Westernised' persona, not just in appearance but also in attitude. He took delight in assuming the political views of Western rather than Chinese youth, voicing support for Taiwan's continued independence and for Tibetans to regain theirs. Colin, therefore, adopted a slightly different 'consuming masculinity' to Johnny, and a more overtly politicized stance which may have been influenced by connections with American and European men. As a Chinese man, this seemed a radical, more rebellious position to take, which Colin seemed to enjoy; he grinned broadly when he told me his views, almost challenging me to comment on his daring and difference—on how he marked himself off from the crowd.

In a semi-structured interview in a café one evening, I asked Colin to describe his idea of the typical masculine man. The picture he painted was of a hard-drinking, chain-smoking, rugged, bearded, and aggressively heterosexual man, who could have stepped out of some of the Western movies that he enjoyed watching.[185] However, Colin's own body culture seemed to contrast with this 'macho' image. Indeed, he admitted he did not regard himself as masculine, because he did not measure up to this imagined ideal of rugged masculinity. Colin's interpretation of masculinity, although different from Johnny's, also reflected the complex mix of the global and local, and the past and the present, which informs notions of masculinities – including white-collar masculinities – in contemporary Chinese society. Colin's rejection of a certain image of masculinity reflected the standards of the exaggerated, tough, 'in-yer-face' heterosexuality of the masculinity performed in mainstream American movies; yet our mutual friends commented on his comparatively 'softer' ways of walking, talking, and moving as typically 'southern' – he was from south China – where men are said to be much less 'manly' than the generally taller, more ruggedly-built northern guys.

Neither Johnny nor Colin seemed particular self-conscious in the masculinity their displayed. However, Johnny introduced me to one of his friends, Jason, in his early thirties, looking to get married, who did have a very keen sense of his own masculinity. As a northerner, it is possible that Jason felt the need to 'take up' the characteristics of 'tough,

[185] Colin had an extensive DVD collection of Western movies, and also drama series, about which he displayed a thorough knowledge, mentioning male characters, their actions and 'catch-phrases' in casual conversation.

manly' northern men of mainstream discourse, in contrast to the two southerners, Johnny and Colin. And yet, as we shall discover below, Jason also performed a consuming masculinity of attention to the body in contrast to the image of the unkempt northern man, who gives not a fig for his appearance or what others think of it. Jason was working in his mother's and uncle's very successful medium-sized industrial components sourcing company when I first met him, using his IT degree knowledge to improve the company website. Prior to going overseas, he had worked for local firms, in marketing and IT departments. He had recently returned to China after spending several years studying and working in Europe and North America, and was nearing the end of the process to become a Canadian citizen. Although he did not need to wear a suit to work, he was very fastidious in his choice of clothes, both at work and at leisure, and he always seemed to wear colour-coordinated, brand-name shirts and trousers. He was equally fastidious about skincare products and toiletries, which he insisted had to be global brand names. Like Johnny, he had his teeth professionally cleaned and polished, when in China, and when in the West, where dentists were cheaper, he bought teeth whitening kits from chemists and applied them himself.

Jason was six foot tall, and had a deep voice, which he was proud of, and he openly admired the same in other men. At times I suspected he deliberately spoke very slowly so he could modulate his voice to a lower pitch. He equated muscles and heavier body weight with masculinity, so he took weight-gain supplements and worked out in a gym; and he took up tennis (a growing pastime amongst China's middle class), as he deemed it sufficiently masculine, unlike badminton, which he had played as a child. He also told me he was not afraid of a fight, and that he disliked effeminacy, childishness and young children; he spoke of men he disliked as pure and innocent. Like Colin, he associated beards with manliness; but when he grew one, someone said he looked Japanese, so he shaved it off. He also complained to me about barbers cutting his hair too short, making him look Japanese. As a proud Chinese man, he could not countenance being mistaken for Japanese. Jason's performance of masculinity – a very physical activity for him – required constant attention to his body, and seemed to be driven in part by a fear of not being masculine enough: although tall, he was naturally quite slim, which seemed to bother him. He acknowledged that his years in the West had shaped his behaviour. He said that abroad, he had learnt to stand up for himself by becoming more assertive because he was not prepared to be pushed around. Jason thus performed – sometimes simultaneously – these two masculinities of northern macho man and new, metropolitan consuming man. The contradiction here between these two subject positions was so evident that after a bout of Jason's attempted macho ranting, a friend

commented to him, 'but you're hardly an alpha male, are you', to which Jason had no reply.

**Grooming the 'new century man'**

Many of the gendered attributes that emerge from the accounts of Johnny, Colin and Jason converge with mainstream media depictions of the model 'new century man', whose physical qualities are carefully sculpted and styled. This beardless fresh-faced figure contrasts with the widespread view (which Colin and Jason both put forward) that, facial hair connotes masculinity, yet should not, so media commentaries on white collar fashion insist, be conflated with the 'femininity' conventionally associated with soft appearance. This highlights the new gender territory white-collar men occupy: their association with global corporate codes, their disciplined shapes, and their clean-shaven, well-coiffured, soft-skinned 'spick and spanness' denote gendered subject positions that confuse the distinction between the conventionally masculine and the conventionally feminine.[186] Such competing masculine subject positions circulate across institutions and media, including the online and magazine articles which young men like Johnny consult to construct their ideas about themselves. I now turn to look at some of these.

In a recent article about the fashion for facial hair amongst Chinese celebrities, the so-called 'handsome bearded guy' (*shuaiqi huxu lao*) is described as unwaveringly 'masculine' (*yanggang*), in contrast with which the beardless 'metrosexual' (*dushi meixing nan*)[187] is characterised as 'feminine' (*yinrou*).[188] The author of this article warns that facial hair is not appropriate for 'nine-to-five white-collar workers' (*zhaojiu-wanwu de bailing*) or 'role models' (*shibiaozhe*) because their 'work environment and status are incongruous with it' (*zhiye huangjing, shenfen gege-buru*), but he allows that people such as the 'self-employed' (*ziyou zhiyezhe*) and 'artists' (*yishujia*) can try it out.[189] On the one hand this seems to 'feminise' white-collar men to a degree, yet on the other hand it positions white-collar men as a desirable stratum above groups like the self-employed and artists. By providing seemingly

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[186] Conservative opinion criticizes blurring of the conventional understanding of men as, unlike women, not being interested in their appearance. I explore this further in chapter seven.

[187] Metrosexual man is known for his androgynity and narcissisism, and I will return to him in chapter seven.

[188] Jing Si, 'Nanren cong huxu shuaiqi' (Guys get gorgeous with beards), *Jin yang wang* (Golden ram net), http://www.ycwb.com/gb/content/2006-01/09/content_1051077.htm (accessed March 29, 2006). Golden Ram Net is a large news website, run by the company that publishes the *Ram City Evening News* (*Yang cheng wanbao*). The biggest websites in China (sohu, sina etc) carry its Guangdong stories. Half of the website's readership is 'high level white collar' (*gaoji bailing*), mostly aged between 23 and 35, university educated and earning over 5000 RMB a month, according to their website: see 'Guanyu women' (About Us), *Jin yang wang* (Golden Ram Net), http://www.ycwb.com/adv/2007_jynetcompany/ycwb_com.htm (accessed July 20, 2008).

[189] Jing Si, ibid., http://www.ycwb.com/gb/content/2006-01/09/content_1051077.htm.

objective justifications for white-collar men's non-beardedness (work environment, status), the author also tries o distinguishes them from feminine, non-white-collar metrosexual, who are not subject to these requirements, but prefer a soft, beardless look, the author implies, simply for vanity's sake; as if, perhaps, to rescue white-collar men from charges of femininity. White-collar masculinities involve the attention to the body more usually associated with women, yet in projecting financial and intellectual power they command respect as symbols of sophistication and objects of desire. Though his comments ostensibly reinforce beardedness with masculinity in general, the author thus defends the body work required of white-collar men. This delicate discursive regulation to claim the conventionally feminised realm of attention to appearance for white collar masculinity complicates the task of achieving it, and hence implicitly asserts importance of knowledge to know how to spend one's money to construct the veneer of a white-collar man (hairstyle, brand-name outfits, sparkling white teeth), that Johnny, Colin and Jason put into practice every day.

Other articles in the mainstream media similarly try to defend the 'new century' white-collar man from derogatory accusations of effeminacy. One documents the personal grooming and clothing obsessions of two young white-collar men, contrasting their attitude with previous norms: 'the aesthetic perspective of 'men putting on make-up' (*nan wei ji rong*) has gradually replaced the traditional idea that 'men should focus on self-restraint, not their appearance' (*nanren bugai zhuzhong waibiao, ying jiangjiu neihan*)' (see figure 1).[190] Becoming a 'new century man' (*xin shiji de nanren*), according to the author, is a conscious process of habituation: 'the new century male without exception has discovered that he ought to raise his quality of life; and through dressing with care and living elegantly (*chuanzhuo jiangjiu, shenghuo xizhi*) hopes to make himself more accomplished.'[191] Moreover, this process relies fundamentally on consumer power and expertise, prompting the author to advise the reader not to be surprised if 'a man lets slip to your face which brand of face cleanser is good, which hairdresser has superb skill, which clothing label is for sale on which floor of a

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[190] Huang Junying, 'Bailing linan: shishang cuisheng de huayang nanzi' (The white-collar male beauty: fashion hastens the birth of the beautiful man), *Guancha yu sikao* (Observations and considerations) no. 8 (April 16, 2006): 50. I have chosen to translate 'bailing linan' here as 'white-collar male beauty' (the literal translation is 'white-collar beautiful man'), to emphasise my focus here on white-collar men's interest in looking beautiful, but this term can also be translated as 'metrosexual', which I discuss in chapter seven in the context of the white-collar man and sexuality. *Guancha yu sikao* is a nationally available weekly magazine, published under the auspices of the Zhejiang Academy of Social Science, with a current print run of 365,000: see *Guancha yu sikao* banyue kan (*Observations and Considerations* Bi-Monthly)', Liulanwang (gotoread.com), http://www.gotoread.com/mag/8739/ (accessed October 27, 2008).
[191] Huang, ibid., 50.

certain mall, or which perfume has the longest lasting scent'.[192] In similar vein to the article justifying the white-collar man's

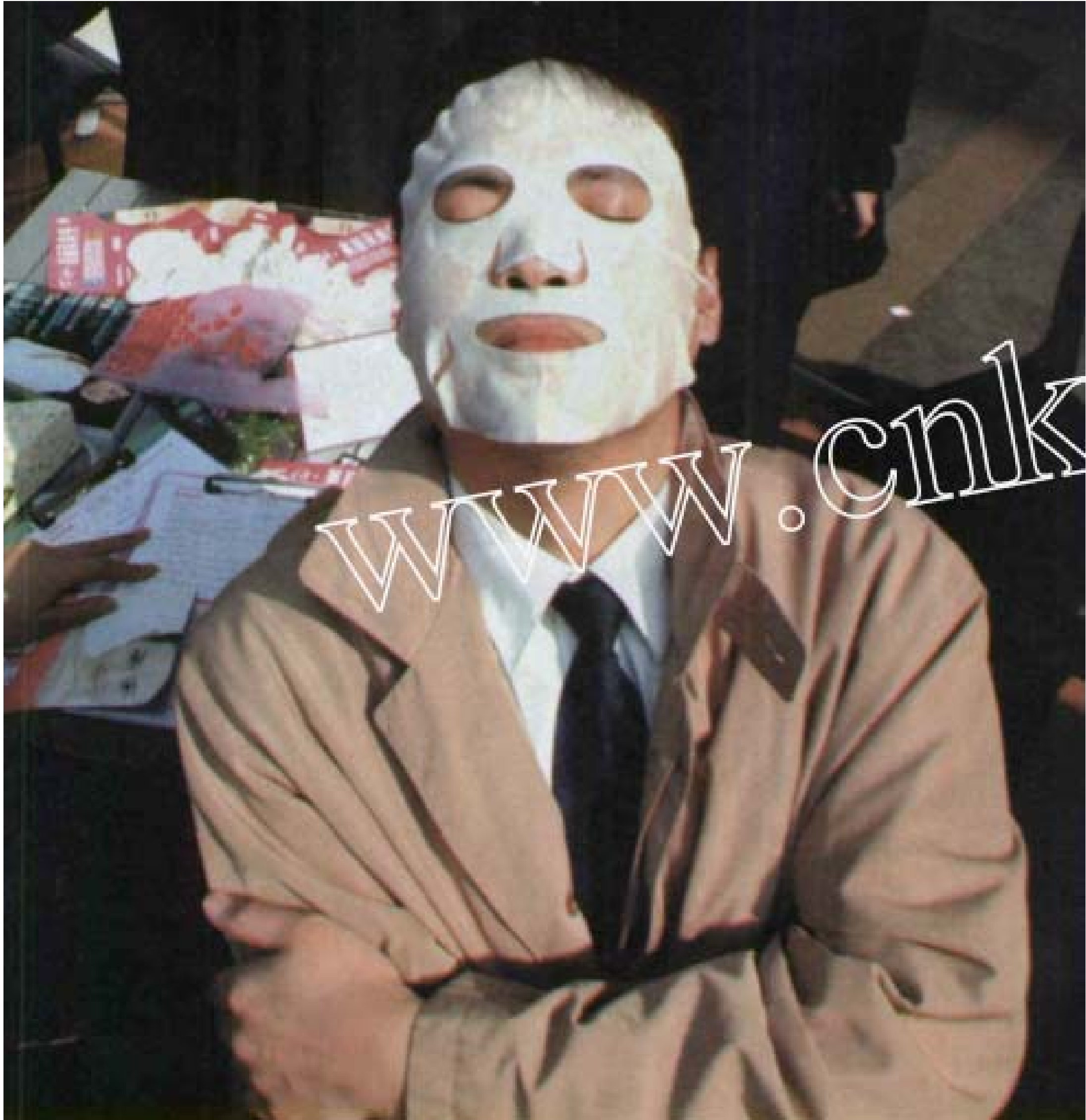

**Figure 1** The 'white-collar male beauty'. Huang Junying, op. cit., 50.

beardless look, the author here urges readers not to ' say this is very 'sissy' (*buyao shuo zhe hen 'niangniang qiang'*).[193]

As an example of his argument, the author documents the consumption-based body work of Bai Yang and Liu Kang, two young white-collar men. Before Bai Yang leaves for work 'he must spend an hour making himself look good (*dali ziji*)'. He has a thorough thirty minute shower, then puts three skincare products on his face: 'toner' (*shuangfushui*), 'essential

[192] Huang, ibid., 50.
[193] Huang, ibid., 50.

elements' (*jinghuasu*), and 'moisturising milk' (*baoshiru*).[194] He applies mousse to his hair and sprays on cologne before stepping outside. Such details are included not just for entertainment, in my view, but, following Rose's account of how 'strategies' of (self-)government from 'authorities' prescribe particular body techniques, also fulfill an 'educational' role for young male readers who want to foster a white-collar masculinity, although it would seem to be mostly an education in increased consumerism to satisfy individual desire and fulfilment. Moreover, in a clear depiction of the process whereby the habituated behaviour becomes a 'natural' routine, the author explains that daily practice soon becomes habitual: 'although Bai Yang needs to spend half an hour every day doing himself up, this has become a habit (*zhe yijing chengle Bai Yang de xiguan*).'[195] Bai's justification for taking so much care over his face, according to the article, is that 'as far as he is concerned, a clean face (*ganjing de mianrong*) shows the utmost respect for himself and other people'.[196] It seems perfectly natural to him, as a white-collar man, that he should spend large amounts of time and money on personal grooming.

Bai reportedly spends over 30,000 yuan every year on Dior, Clinique and other brand-name products,[197] which is two and half times the average total annual income of urban workers.[198] He also owns over ten brands of cologne, including Dunhill, Boss and Dior, the article reveals, which he 'applies daily according to his mood' (*yizhao xinqing shiyong*).[199] This is the promise of the white-collar consumer dream: choice and status, achieved through money and the right 'taste'. This power of choice extends to clothes: the author reveals that Bai owns 'eight well-tailored suits in muted colours and matching ties, six or seven other sets of clothes for non-work use, two leather belts – one for jeans and one for suits – and six pairs of shoes.'[200] Predictably, these items are from famous brands: Dior shirts, Sisly suits, and Lee, CK and Levi's jeans. Just to add to his caché, they were not bought in China: the shirts and suits were bought in sales at the Printemps department store in Paris, and the jeans at the Harbour City shopping mall in Hong Kong. Bai's rationale for not buying in China is that he might end up wearing the same as somebody else. Foreign travel for consumer purposes is thereby added as another defining feature of white-collar masculinities, heightening their aura

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[194] Huang, ibid., 50
[195] Huang, ibid., 50
[196] Huang, ibid., 50
[197] Huang, ibid., 50
[198] The national average urban wage was almost 12,000 yuan in 2006: 'Report: Average Income in Beijing Hit US$4,660 in 2006', sina, http://english.sina.com/china/1/2007/0327/107816.html (accessed July 22, 2008).
[199] Huang Junying, op. cit., 50.
[200] Huang, ibid., 50.

of exclusivity. The consistent underlying message running throughout the article is that white-collar men differentiate themselves from other men through informed consumer choices which demonstrate their knowledge of 'luxury' global brands, positioning themselves within a sophisticated, wealthy global class of white-collar men. Such behaviour is also a growing trend: 'these days, the number of white-collar men like Bai Yang and Liu Kang, who live in big cities, have impressive salaries and want to spend large amounts of time and money on their clothing and looks, is increasing'.[201] For the author, there is no doubt that the 'new century man', the man who is discursively positioned at the forefront of changing notions of manhood in contemporary China, is none other than the 'beautiful white-collar man' (*bailing linan*).

**What's in a suit?**

The suit is arguably the dominant sartorial emblem of white-collar identity in China, as elsewhere. But what is the connection between suits and white-collar men in China? I have found that the suit is a marker not only of respectability, but of honesty, integrity, reliability and cleanliness. Johnny wore suits to work every day, as do white-collar workers in transnational corporations throughout Beijing. The model new century man, Bai Yang, reportedly owned eight well-tailored ones. However, China's governing bureaucrats also wear suits, as do many entrepreneurs, and even blue-collar men wear suits for certain occasions. When cultural studies scholar Andrew Ross was carrying out ethnographic research into the IT industry in Shanghai, he noted the pervasiveness of suit-wearing in a comment on the clothing of IT workers in the Pudong Software Park cafeteria: 'Clothing styles ran the spectrum from student scruffy to business casual. Quite a few of the young men wear suits, though this fashion decision is not necessarily a mark of corporate belonging – it is a common wardrobe choice among all of Shanghai's classes.'[202]

Nevertheless, though not in itself a mark of white-collar status, when placed within an assemblage of ethical practices, body regimes and corporate spaces, the suit confers an aura of respectability, honesty, integrity and ultimately cleanliness all of which are inseparably associated with the notion of corporate white collar status, as became clear in a discussion I had with two students of mine in the private English-language school in Zhongguancun where I worked. Henry was a computer software expert in his mid-thirties, and was a senior manager

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[201] Huang, ibid., 51.

[202] Andrew Ross, 'Outsourcing as a Way of Life? Knowledge Transfer in the Yangtze Delta', in *Working in China: Ethnographies of Labor and Workplace Transformation*, edited by Ching Kwan Lee (London and New York: Routledge, 2007): 192.

for a large Chinese software company; Karen was an affluent accountant in a local firm, also in her mid-thirties. The discussion in question concerned the etiquette of door opening, but it led to an interesting exchange about the values and attitudes suit wearing produces. Henry noted a distinction in the way women responded to him, depending on whether he was wearing a suit or not. He said that 'whenever I hold open my office block's main door for women, and I am wearing a suit, they say 'thank you', but when I am casually dressed they never thank me.' Karen's response was direct and clear: 'If a man is wearing a suit, I know he is hardworking, but if he is wearing, say, sandals and a T-shirt, then who knows what his intentions are? If I were to say one word [to him], then who knows what he might do?'[203]

Leaving aside the possibly discriminatory attitudes conveyed in these comments (Henry for example never opened a door to men, and Karen's disdain for someone whose dress did not denote a particular social status was evident), both Henry's and Karen's comments echoed the almost idealised moral qualities associated with the besuited corporate man, noted in mainstream sociological discourse. Indeed, Karen's belief that a suit conveyed trustworthiness, honesty, responsibility, purity of intentions and so on, rehearsed views identical to those in Zhou Xiaohong's characterisation of the middle class as a model for society as a whole, which I outlined in chapter two. In a further gloss on the moral qualities of the middle class, Chen and Yi's survey further suggests that as 'the only segment of the middle class that relies simply on salary to rise to higher positions' *(weiyi jinjin kao gongzi jishen zhongchan zhi lie de qunti*), white collar workers are as 'pure white' (*jiebai*) as the colour of their collars, creating a 'fresh' (*qingxin*) and 'favourable' (*youyue*) impression that many 'petty bourgeois' (*xiaozi*) would dearly love to emulate.[204]

Linked to Bai Yang's pursuit of super-clean skin, it seems that such moral and physical characterisations of white-collar men sustain a recurring motif of purity and cleanliness, and regardless of the 'reality' of white-collar man's corruptibility, the white-collar man, and more broadly the middle-class, seem to offer an untarnished prospect of honest, clean behaviour when all around is debased. Magazines targeted at white-collar women sometimes also indulge in the same ideals of morally pure and trustworthy white-collar masculinities, in the

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[203] Karen here clearly has in mind the smart, well-fitted suit as part of the ensemble uniform of white-collar men, which includes appropriate footwear, as she points out; and, I would add, the level of grooming as depicted in the 'new century man' article, among many other characteristics. Suit-wearing migrant labourers, for example, are easily distinguished from white-collar men in a multitude of ways; these two subject positions are discursively constructed in different ways, including gait, hairstyle, face care, manner of speaking, bodily habits, facial expressions, clothing, footwear, jewellery, technological tools etc.

[204] Chen Guanren and Yi Yang, op. cit., 64-5. The 'petty bourgeois' (*xiaozi*) is a term which has increased in usage in China since the 1990s to describe urbanites who aspire to the white-collar lifestyle, but do not quite earn enough to pursue it to the same extent as their white-collar brethren.

romanticised form of perfect boyfriends or husbands.[205] Informants of mine have also suggested that the key features women look for in prospective marriage partners are those associated with contemporary white-collar status — a good education, high income and 'respectability' (*timian*). When I raised this issue as I sat chatting one day in a cafe with Mark, the owner of a small computer company in his late twenties and a friend of one of my teaching colleagues, he further argued that white-collar men are most likely to possess these attributes in today's China, whereas in the 1980s it was employees of government 'bodies' (*jiguan*). The besuited, clean-cut figure of the corporate man is generally seen as more 'respectable' (*timian*) and 'moral' (*daode*), he believed, than other kinds of men. His words point to the reputation of the white-collar man as one of the premier models of the 'ideal man' in contemporary urban imaginaries in China, and indicate a shift to a valorisation of new forms of masculinities.

**Seven lessons in being 'man enough'**

The purity of the suited man is by no means the only or even main virtue of the corporate individual. More macho characteristics attribute the success of the image to his heterosexual appeal. Whereas magazines aimed at white-collar women may tend to focus on the warm-heartedness of white-collar men, magazines targeting white-collar men themselves have a different focus. An example is a feature in *Nanren zhuang,* (For Him Magazine), which explicitly sets out to teach its readers how to be 'man enough' (*gou nanren*) by describing in fine detail the actions, postures, movements, gestures and similar body work required of a 'real white-collar man' across various sites.[206] Like many other similar articles, it is part of a discursive regime which produces a particular subject position. Viewed in this way, it is not a 'representation' of white-collar life; rather, it is one of many discursive techniques which subjectify white-collar men. But the ways in which individuals understand, adopt, modify or reject the various instructions in this article and others like it are not uniform, as the differing enactments of white-collar masculinity of my informants demonstrate.

The feature is a self-styled guide to manly behaviour, and just to remind the reader what kind of 'manly behaviour' is implied, the English word 'macho' is printed underneath

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[205] For instance, in an article in the magazine *How* (*Hao*) about women's quest for a caring, reliable husband, the prospective partners featured were all high-flying, rich, corporate figures. San Qian, Ya Ya, and Young Candy, 'Xunzhao wennuanpai nanren' (Looking for a warmhearted man), *Hao* (How) 80 (December 2005): 122-131. *Hao* is a fashion magazine aimed at white-collar women between 23 and 35 years old who are seeking a high quality life, according to its profile at: '*How* zazhi shiyiyue xinkan tuijian' (*How*'s New November Recommendations) *Changjiang wang* (Yangtze web), http://www.cjn.cn/fashion/fmx/200611/t230504.htm (accessed November 28, 2007).

[206] Lin Lin, 'Gou nanren!' (Man enough!), *Nanren zhuang* (For him magazine) no. 3 (March, 2007): 80-83.

the title in huge letters. The subheading of the article reads: 'How to read the newspaper, carry one's jacket, answer the phone and doze more elegantly: *Nanren zhuang* teaches you to grasp the details, to be a real man (*zuo zhen yemenr*)!'[207] More specifically, this is a guide to becoming a manly white-collar worker and without having to deal with the delicate boundaries between masculinity and femininity represented by the 'new century man' that I discussed above. In a stylistic device to emphasise its popular educational appeal, the article's formatting and design suggests that is printed as a 'handwritten' book (*shouchaoben*), a term that usually refers to the samisdat like handwritten books that used to circulate amongst the educated youth during the Cultural Revolution, either because the book was banned or because people could not afford to buy it. By displaying the feature in this way, *Nanren zhuang* seems to suggest that the subject matter holds huge mass appeal, and also a kind of subversive popular appeal, perhaps because it is revealing the 'secret' techniques that young men can use to 'pull' the girl(s) they desire, without revealing them to the girl.

The article is divided into seven 'lessons', covering very common situations and activities in the daily life of a young corporate man (the target readership of *Nanren zhuang*), inside and outside of the office. Moreover, the underlying theme of heterosexual desire fits firmly within the general editorial slant of *Nanren zhuang*, which features highly sexualised images of young women in every issue. This article, then, addresses the core readership of the magazine with its core editorial theme. As I noted in chapter one, *Nanren zhuang* claims a print run of over half a million copies, and so a feature such as this will enjoy significant readership figures.

'Would you like to get informed and simultaneously attract the gaze of others?' (*xiangyao rang ziji zai huode zixun de tongshi xiyin bieren de muguang*) is the question that starts Lesson One. [208] The author contends that the moment when a man is absorbed in reading a newspaper is 'the moment [he] embodies the height of masculinity' (*tixian nanrenwei he*

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[207] Lin, ibid., 80.
[208] Lin, ibid., 80.

*qizhi de juejia shiji*) and an unbridled opportunity for women to observe this.[209]

**Figure 2** Lesson One: 'How to read a paper without wind resistance'. Lin Lin, op. cit., 80.

Beneath the text for this 'lesson', there are three diagrams of a young white-collar man in suit and tie holding different sizes of folded newspapers (see figure 2).[210] The very detailed prescriptions of particular physical movements in the text and images highlight that performances of this specifically young, cool, metropolitan, sexually attractive white-collar masculinity is as much about specific, habitual actions, as it is about wearing suits. Indeed, these refined movements may be seen as key in distinguishing oneself from one's older, less

[209] Lin, ibid., 80.

[210] The first diagram shows the man reading a newspaper folded to a quarter of its size, with one hand holding the newspaper in front of him, and the other hand resting on his chin, as if contemplating what he is reading. The caption for the diagram promises that the 'masculinity' (*nanzi qigai*) of reading the political news in this kind of unaffected manner will attract the gaze of many beautiful girls. The second diagram shows the same man reading a newspaper folded to an eighth of its original size, and the accompanying caption claims that nodding his head from time to time as he reads will look 'very elegant and natural' (*xiaosa ziran*). The third diagram shows the same man intently studying a newspaper folded to a sixteenth of its original size, with the caption: 'a look of incomparable absorption will move even female bosses (*nü shangsi kanle ye hui dongxin*)'.

fashionable, less svelte and perhaps therefore less desirable colleagues, who perform different shades of white-collar masculinities, drawing from other discourses. Three further points stand out from Lesson One. Firstly, this white-collar man's consideration of those around him, who may not want to be wafted by his newspaper, which exemplifies the feature's overall tone of self-reflexivity; secondly the use of engineering and design metaphors, as if this is the kind of language the male reader understands; and thirdly the goal of charming women, either pretty girls or female superiors, which brings to the fore the heteronormative sexual aspect of the 'desiring' white-collar man.

Lesson Two is on dozing – stylishly – during meetings to impress the ladies (see figure 3).[211] The author posits the choice of the 'single arm style' (*danbi shi*)

手抄本

Lesson 2 会议室打盹赢芳心法

Lesson 3 深度接拿电话法

**Figure 3** Lesson Two: 'How to win a lady's heart by dozing in the meeting room'; and Lesson Three: 'How to answer the phone in a sophisticated way'. Lin Lin, op. cit., 81.

best used on 'pure and innocent women' (*chunzhenxing nüxing*), the author argues, to let them see the 'cute side under [the young white-collar man's] tough exterior' (*qiangying waibiao-xia ke'ai de yimian*); and the 'Rodin style' (*luodan shi*), which should be used on 'mature women' (*chengshuxing nüxing*), the author recommends, to let them know that the 'immaculately besuited' (*xizhuang biting*) man dozing next to them is still a 'very deep thinking' (*shensi-*

211 Lin Lin, op. cit., 81.

*shulü*) and 'fully masculine tough guy' (*chongman nanrenwei de qiangshi nanxing*).[212] This 'lesson' underlines the notion of the young white-collar man as attractive and charming, but it does so in a way that reduces women to foils for his charm. There is no mention of how to impress other men in the company, so there is no escape from the (hetero)sexual undertones.

Answering the office phone in a sophisticated way is the topic of Lesson Three. In the humdrum office environment people become dull and stupid, so answering the phone is just the occasion for the young office worker to show some 'manly style' (*nanren zuofeng*).[213] The article suggests that if the reader is under thirty, he can use the 'energetic leap method' (*feishen fa*): within three rings of the phone leap energetically to the phone, put it between ear and shoulder, turn round 180 degrees, and swiftly half-sit on the table.[214] If he is over thirty, he can use the 'gentleman's method' (*shenshi fa*): answer the phone within three rings, put it between ear and shoulder, casually answer, and consummately turn motion into stillness.[215] Two diagrams accompany the text (see figure 3), with further phone use etiquette advice not to tangle the telephone cord, nor to 'doodle indiscriminately on the paper [next to the phone]' (*suiyi zai zhishang xie hua*).[216] Here, the different suggested actions for different ages, and the labelling of the second method as the 'gentleman's', indicates the production of multiple subject positions even within this 'model' of sexually desirable white-collar masculinity, underlining the important point that the dominant or hegemonic image is always intersected with alternative positions disrupting its apparently unitary meaning.

Lesson Four teaches the reader how to court sympathy through sickness: it stipulates that the reader's target is the 'thousands of millions of sympathy-filled female compatriots' (*qianqianwan chongman tongqingxin de nüxing tongbaomen*).[217] If he 'makes his eyes blurry' (*jiashang mimeng de shuangyan*), puts on a 'magnetic voice' (*cixing kouyin*) and a 'faltering, hoarse voice' (*siyou siwu de huxi sheng*), the author is convinced that all the nearby 'aunties' (*dama*) will rush over to feed him congee, not to mention the 'young girl' (*xiaomei*) next to him;[218] Adopting an appropriate breathing rate might be difficult, as 'normal feverish breathing' (*fashao zhengchang de huxi*) should not be too fast or too slow, and 'male charm is perfectly embodied in the instant between breaths' (*tu-xi zhijian nanxing meili wanmei tixian*).

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[212] Lin, ibid., 81.
[213] Lin, ibid., 81.
[214] Lin, ibid., 81.
[215] Lin, ibid., 81.
[216] Lin, ibid., 81.
[217] Lin, ibid., 82.
[218] Lin, ibid., 82.

Even if he has pneumonia, the author urges, he must still 'mount an offensive' (*zhankai gongshi*) against a young female nurse at the hospital. The accompanying diagram

**Figure 4** Lesson Four: 'How to court sympathy through sickness'; and Lesson Five: 'How to carry one's jacket'. Lin Lin, op. cit., 82.

(see figure 4) shows two young white-collar men demonstrating imaginative techniques to make their voices husky, 'rap singing in a suit' (*chuanzhe xizhuang chang RAP*) and speaking with the 'elegance of a Frenchman's low-toned murmur' (*Faguoren dichen ninan de youya*). This lesson is infused with the pervasive notion that women should look after men through feeding them amongst other things; and when they are sick they should nurse them, and show sympathy for them. It suggests that women even find men's weakness appealing.

Lesson Five is concerned with the 'manliest' way of carrying one's 'suit jacket' (*xizhuang waitao*), the 'must-have for men at work' (*gongzuo zhong de nanren bi bei wupin*).[219] Seeking a 'manly' (*nanrenwei*) method of holding one's suit jacket, the author lays out four possibilities, with accompanying diagrams of white-collar men in relevant poses in

[219] Lin, ibid., 82.

the park (see figure 4)[220] The author suggests the reader can select the style that best suits his likes and character; and advises putting his free hand into his pocket to 'keep the body at a normal temperature' (*baochi renti zhengchang tiwen*), and 'demonstrates an outstanding ability to look handsome' (*biaoxianchulai shua shuai de kanjia benling*).[221] This lesson underlines the importance of not only the suit, yet again, but also related and multiple styles of body work: a style is to be chosen, and every single action must be prepared for, practised, and all for the sake of, yet again, looking desirable; not simply in a sexual sense, but also for peer group status and standing in wider society.

How to hold a cup in a café is the focus of the penultimate lesson, which notes that women 'with a bit of taste' (*shaowei youxie pinwei*) like to gather in cafes for a cappuccino or a mocha and sit there for an afternoon, providing an excellent opportunity for ayoung man to 'set about catching his prey' (*xiashou buhuo liewu*). [222] Experience proves that as long as the young man's 'conversational style and actions are sufficiently elegant and witty' (*tantu he dongzuo gou youya fengqu*), sitting with these beautiful women for an hour will not be a problem.[223] 'Moving one's mouth' (*dongzui*), in other words talking, is crucial to 'attract their [women's] attention' (*xiyin tamen zhuyili*) and 'establish oneself in a leading position' (*shuli ziji zhudao diwei*).[224] When discussing some popular topic together, the author advises, a man must also crack some jokes and riddles, and at this time he can sit down beside his target.[225] 'Moving one's hand' (*dongshou*) refers to the way a man holds his coffee cup: holding the main body of the coffee mug and not the handle is the fundamental hunting method, and if the handle is pointing towards his target it signals an 'offensive' (*gong*), if pointing towards himself it shows he is on the 'defensive' (*shou*).[226] Accompanying the text is a diagram (see figure 5) which shows three young white-collar men in suits and ties drinking in a café, with captions commenting on the way they are holding their cups.[227] Perhaps the most salient

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[220] Lin, ibid., 82.
[221] Lin, ibid., 82.
[222] Lin, ibid., 83.
[223] Lin, ibid., 83.
[224] Lin, ibid., 83.
[225] Lin, ibid., 83.
[226] Lin, ibid., 83.
[227] One man is drinking beer from a mug, and the caption reads: 'Even when you are drinking beer, hold the mug handle lightly with three fingers, to show your sufficiently strong physique and wrist power (*biaoxian ni zugou qiangjian de tipo yu wanli*).' Another man is holding a teacup in one hand and a saucer underneath in the other, and the caption for him reads: ''Earl style' posture ('*bojue shi*' *zitai*): this is a steady and neutral (*pingwen er zhongli*) way of holding a cup, which gives off an elegant aristocratic air (*youya de guizu qixi*).' The third man is holding the body of a mug, and the caption reads: 'holding a cup firmly is very attractive to passive girls' (*qiangyouli de wo bei fangshi dui beidong de nühai hen you xiyinli*).

aspect of this lesson is the 'assembled locale' of the coffee shop, where body positionings, movements, tools, vocabularies and intentions all play a part in constructing a particular masculinity.

The final lesson teaches the reader how to appear manly even from behind. A shirt stretched tight by back muscles has a 'hint of sex' (*xing anshi*), according to one 'expert psychologist' (*xinlixue zhuanjia*), which 'excites women' (*dui nüren ciji*) and gives them the impression of 'arms they can rely on' (*keyi yikao de bibang*).[228] The author claims that if a man wears a thin shirt, then exerts his back, his back muscles will protrude; or if his shirt is tight, then the outline of his muscles will also be prominent, and a strongly-built male body will be visible. If, however, a man's muscles have not developed to being able to take part in a boxing match, as the author puts it, then it is best to choose a shirt one size smaller than usual. If none of these suggestions work for him, then he can try the 'cosmetic muscles technique' (*jirou huazhuang shu*) (see figure 5), which involves the man hugging his chest with his arms and exerting his back muscles, or pulling his shirt tightly together at his chest, which also produces a strong-looking back.[229] As a last resort, suggests the author, if a man has no muscles to speak of, and is simply too lazy to go to the gym, then he should just open up the top three buttons of his shirt. The overriding message is that no matter what kind of male body you have, the fact that it is a male body is enough: there will always be a way to use it to demonstrate your masculine credentials.

The language and ideas in this guide to being a 'real man', regardless of how seriously one takes its 'lessons', provide evidence that discursively constructed masculinity in China is predicated on assumptions about distinct 'naturalised' male and female characteristics,

[228] Lin, ibid., 83.
[229] Lin, ibid., 83.

privileging the male in the public sphere, as I argued

**Figure 5** Lesson Six: ‘How to hold a cup in a café’; and Lesson Seven: ‘How to show manliness from behind’. Lin Lin, op. cit., p. 83.

in chapter two. The article implicitly assigns an active guile to men, and a naïve passivity to ‘pure and innocent’ young women, although older women – portrayed as instinctive mothers – are also ripe for duping. Men project physical strength, which women like and rely on, and men are interested in politics, cars and engineering. The article also offers illustrations of the arguments I made in chapter two about how white-collar masculinities are constituted through habituation processes, situated within assemblages of places, practices, techniques and devices, which are themselves the products of global and locally embedded discursive formations emphasising consumerist desire, and white-collar men’s own desirability. Firstly, the structure of the feature as a series of detailed lessons on how to acquire the body language appropriate to white-collar employees is an obvious template for habituation; the prescribed

actions – from holding a newspaper, phone, cup, or oneself at a meeting to hamming illness or wearing a shirt – are meant to be practised and mastered so that they look natural. Secondly, there are several explicit references to 'global' culture which signal the cultural capital of the white-collar man: Italian racing cars, Greek gods, rap singers, gravelly-voiced Frenchmen, Rodin, wine-tasting, cappuccino, mocha and tea-sipping earls. The main 'global' signifiers of white-collar masculinity are the transnational spaces he inhabits, including corporate offices and Starbucks style cafes. Locally-embedded signifiers, in contrast, might include the way he is described manipulating older female colleagues to take pity on his 'illness' and cook him congee, or how he is portrayed appealing to 'pure', 'innocent' and 'passive' young women with his elegant masculinity. In this way, the performance of masculinity as a reiterated process, as in Butler's account, is not a unitary process, but one in which offers various subject positions across which the 'global' and 'local' mix together with other ideas and practices creating new lived subjectivities—the kinds of masculinities that my informants performed in their everyday lives. Thirdly, the coffee, tea and beer drinking, shown taking place in a sketch of a Western-style café, displays the consumer lifestyles of white-collar men, and the potential sex appeal to women that their acquisition of such symbolic and cultural capital denotes. Finally, the accomplished white-collar men are unequivocally desirable: follow these instructions, young men, runs the subtext of the feature, and you shall never want for women's

**Figure 6** Hu Jun on the cover of *Shishang xiansheng* (Esquire) no. 18 (February, 2007) (see note 55).

attention, specifically white-collar women's attention, because you will be the epitome of masculinity to them.[230] The desirability of white-collar masculinities reflects their high status in the social order of contemporary China: white-collar men are seen as winners in China's integration with 'global modernity'. That is why, at least on paper, they always get the girls.

**Cars, apartments and travel**

This section turns to the *materia* associated with the white-collar man, regardless of the specific gender inflections of his image. It highlights Rose's point that we must go beyond the body to see how material objects, tools, devices, technological innovations and so on are linked to form diverse embodied subjectivities across different locales, and how they are related to routines, practices, habits, emulations, and so on, to produce different meanings and subject positions. Advertising, TV programmes and lifestyle magazines play major roles here. Purchasing big-ticket consumer items such as a car, an apartment and foreign holidays demonstrates– besides accomplished white-collar body work – that Chinese white-collar workers they have really 'made it', thereby increasing their status and desirability. The familiar white-collar theme of manifesting one's participation in a globally-recognised middle class runs through these purchases. The sought-after apartments are almost invariably North American-style condominium developments, furnished Ikea-style; the most desired cars are imported foreign models, and the most prestigious travel is to Europe and America. The media is instrumental in shaping particular conceptions of middle-class status and taste regarding these and other items and activities. As Kevin Latham argues, using the example of car magazines, media images have a direct impact on the formation of social class:

> Automobile magazines do more than simply advertise or picture cars […]. They depict

[230] The epitome of masculinity for many white-collar men may well be Hu Jun, a film star and icon of masculinity. Since the early 1990s Hu has starred in numerous Chinese soap operas and movies, including two pioneering gay movies, *East Palace West Palace* (*Donggong xigong*) (1996), *Lanyu* (2001). He embodies the sexual desirability that white-collar men seek to emulate, according to Colin, who called him an 'extremely representative man' (*feichang dianxing nanren*). In a cover feature for *Shishang xiansheng* (*Esquire*), he was pictured in several different photographs wearing an office shirt with the top button undone and a loosely-tied tie, a fat cigar in his hand in some of the photographs, looking like a young investment banker who has gone to a bar straight from the office (Yu Lei, 'Hu Jun: yiqie keyi chong lai' (Hu Jun: It can all come again), *Shishang xiansheng* (Esquire) no. 18 (February, 2007): 92-7) (see figure 6). Hu is also the 'face' of many consumer brands, endorsing stylish cars, clothing and jewellery on TV and city billboards. According to the article (which also mentions his prominence in adverts), he has his own accountant, personal assistant, a large house, drinks vintage Western wine, wears sunglasses when shopping, and has slept with many famous actresses (Yu Lei, op. cit., 94). This nutshell summary of Hu's life encapsulates the defining aspects of white-collar masculinity: the global sophistication, high-level consumerism, and (sexual) desirability. Of course Hu is not a white-collar man: he has not gone through a white-collar habituation process to achieve this lifestyle, but the article seems to holds out the allure that his lifestyle – and ultra-masculinity – might just be possible for white-collar men too.

certain lifestyles and write for particular audiences with a whole range of assumptions about houses, tastes, children, families, social values, attitudes and personal aspirations. In this way, automobile magazines identify and demarcate a particular social group as envisaged by the editors. This is in turn feeds back into readers' conceptualizations of themselves and others. Hence, through their imagery, depicted lifestyles, and glossy, aspirational advertisements, automobile magazines have come to play a role in the social imagination and self-definition of China's new middle classes.[231]

Alongside car magazines, in recent years there has been a dramatic increase in the number of interior decoration and household furniture magazines, as well as travel magazines featuring far-flung destinations. These topics, alongside the promotion of other consumer items and middle-class lifestyles, are now also highly popular on television shows.[232]

Owning an apartment – or even a villa – is perhaps the most important purchase to which white-collar men aspire, either as an investment or as a home to live in. According to Elisabeth Croll in her study of contemporary consumption, ''owning your own home' has become the most important material pre-requisite for a good life or successful lifestyle' in the high-income groups of China's cities.[233] After buying a home, the next step is to furnish it:

> Among the newly-rich and aspiring, property purchase is one of the main dinner-table subjects of conversation and certainly sales figures confirm that both home ownership and home furnishing are indeed 'hot topics' among this relatively privileged younger generation – perhaps the first to have an opportunity to both live separately from their parents and express their independence and individuality in their own separate 'life-spaces'.[234]

The car has become a significant status symbol in recent years, as Croll again points out: 'In many consumer surveys in the late twentieth century including those of China's elite, it was ownership of or access to a car which constituted the most potent symbol of the 'good life.''[235] She argues that:

> For the young [i.e. twenties and thirties], an automobile perhaps more than any other object signified a fast-moving lifestyle and a new-found sense of freedom. Toyota attempted to appeal to this age-group by using an advertising slogan, 'even further, even freer'. […] In numerous glossy car magazines such as *Trends Gentlemen*, a lifestyle magazine targeted at young professional men or middle-ranking Chinese male

[231] Kevin Latham, *Pop Culture China! Media, Arts, and Lifestyle* (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 2007), 151.
[232] Janice Hua Xu discusses how such programmes influence the constitution of middle class identities in: 'Brand-New Lifestyle: Consumer-Oriented Programmes on Chinese Television', *Media, Culture & Society* 29, no. 3 (2007): 363-376.
[233] Croll, 2006, op. cit., 87-8.
[234] Croll, ibid., 88.
[235] Croll, ibid., 91.

employees in foreign companies with high disposable incomes of between Y3,000 and Y10,000, car ownership along with sport and after-shave was associated with sportsmanship, celebrity, success and speed.[236]

As for expressing individual identity through choice of car, the Volkswagen 'Jetta' (*jieda*) has become the 'standard car' (*biaozhun che*) of Beijing white-collar workers aged between 25 and 40, according to an article in an edited compilation of *Xin Zhoukan* (New Weekly)[237] stories on the middle class. The revealing subheading is: 'brand of car [gives] face in the city' (*qiche de paizi, chengshi de mianzi*).[238] More upmarket is the BMW, for which some branded accessories are custom-made: Liu Kang, a white-collar 'pin-up' discussed in the journal *Guancha yu sikao*, bought some Boss audio equipment for his BMW costing 10,000 yuan.[239] The 2008 MSN online survey found that European cars were most popular amongst white-collar men because of their 'speed and handling pleasure' (*dongneng he caokong lequ*).[240]

Holidaying abroad has become 'the middle class's most enjoyable activity' (*zhongchan jieceng zui le de huodong*), according to Chen Guanren and Yi Yang. They relate that the deputy head of the country's tourism bureau has described foreign travel as 'already an indispensable new lifestyle for many citizens' (*yi shi bushao jumin buke-huoque de xin shenghuo fangshi*).[241] Commenting on its effect on the middle class, Chen and Yi argue that '[…] going abroad has not only increased their understanding of the world (*zengjiale tamen dui shijie de liaojie*), but has also accelerated the middle class's sense of openness and the global (*cujinle zhongchan jieceng de kaifang yishi he quanqiu guannian*).'[242] Highlighting how one's holiday destination denotes status and class identity, an article in the *Xinzhoukan* compilation states that Europe is the 'middle class's paradise' (*zhongchan de tiantang*), and that even the choice of destination within Europe is a way to demonstrate one's 'taste and

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[236] Croll, ibid., 91.

[237] *Xin Zhoukan* is a magazine 'oriented towards the urban white-collar class and classes with relatively good taste' (*dingwei yu chengshi bailing jieceng ji shenghuo pinwei jiaogao de jieceng*): 'Xin zhoukan: kanwu jieshao' (New Weekly: Publication Introduction), *Liulanwang* (gotoread.com). http://www.gotoread.com/mag/86/ (accessed July 29, 2008).

[238] He Shuqing, 'Qiche jiushi women de shenti yuyan' (Cars actually are our body language), in *Xiang zhongchan kanqi* (Keeping up with the middle class), ed. Xinzhoukan zazhishe (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 2004), 187. Equating cars with 'body language' invites seeing them as an extension of 'body work', in the sense that cars are often advertised as a lifestyle choice which manifests the characteristics of the owner.

[239] Huang Junying, op. cit., 51.

[240] 'Zhongguo bailing qiche xiaofei diaocha baogao fabu' (China white-collar car consumption survey report release), Xinhuawang (Xinhua net), http://news.xinhuanet.com/auto/2008-03/28/content_7872212.htm (accessed July 30, 2008).

[241] Chen Guanren and Yi Yang, op. cit., 281.

[242] Chen and Yi, ibid., 283.

social standing' (*pinwei ji shehui diwei*.[243]

Several of my white-collar informants, who, in their own ways and according to their own circumstances performed variants of white-collar masculinities, incorporated two or even three of these status symbols into their performances, including Beijinger Wen, 40, married, with a six-year-old son, and my student at the Sanyuanqiao school. He was the sales manager for a large European transnational electrical equipment company. Wen's main investments – aided by family money – had been in property: he told me that besides his own house he owned several properties, including a 'villa' (*bieshu*), which he rented out to foreigners for two and a half thousand US dollars per month. Wen, always smartly turned out in a well-tailored suit, drove a large, comfortable company car. He had travelled extensively in the world, for business and pleasure, and had stayed in Australia for several months while attending an English course. Gansu-born Andrew, in his early thirties, introduced by a mutual friend, an ex-state dance troupe dancer turned bureaucrat in the culture ministry, had purchased a brand-new apartment in the booming Chongwenmen commercial and entertainment area near the city centre. The last time I talked with him, he was pondering whether he should buy a car; his sister had just bought one and had been extolling its benefits. His job with the culture ministry had taken him abroad for years at a time to Europe and the Middle East, and he also took holiday breaks in southeast Asia. Additionally, he told me he had a substantial portfolio of stocks which was making him considerable amounts of money. Mike, in his late twenties, was the very fluent English-speaking assistant manager of a European brand-name luxury goods store (the manager was a European), the son of a regional official, and nephew of a very successful entrepreneur, who had helped fund his overseas study. I had first met him before going to China when he was studying one of his two masters degrees in the UK. He lived in a stylish two-bedroom apartment he had bought for himself, did not own a car, but took business and pleasure trips to Europe.

Johnny, Colin and Jason, the subjects of my three portraits, also aspired to – and had achieved, to varying extents – this lifestyle. Johnny, the website developer, owned an apartment in central Beijing, which he had bought with some financial help from his brother, an architect in Fujian. His efforts to express his individuality in his own 'life-space' were greatly facilitated by Ikea's affordable and well-designed furniture, which gave his apartment a clean, sleek and contemporary feel in contrast to those apartments, such as that of Jason's

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243 Zhang Zhen, 'Shenme ren qu shenme difang' (Which people go to which place), in *Xiang zhongchan kanqi* (Keeping up with the middle class), ed. Xinzhoukan zazhishe, (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 2004), 237.

sixty-something parents, which were furnished with predominantly locally designed and produced furniture. Johnny made regular trips to Ikea at the weekend, by taxi, just to stroll around, perhaps having Swedish meatballs in the onsite restaurant for lunch then picking up some small items for the kitchen. He did not own a car because he was a fitness fanatic, and preferred to ride his bike when possible, otherwise he would take taxis, although he travelled to work by bus and underground. As for foreign travel, he had been to southeast Asia for short breaks, and to Germany and France for a longer period to visit European friends he had made in Beijing through work and through renting out a room in his apartment. Colin, the graphic designer, rented a two-bedroom apartment (because he could not afford to buy one) just around the corner from a fashionable commercial area near the CBD, and sublet one room to a foreign couple so he could practise his English. But Colin could not afford to buy Ikea furniture, so had to make do with the apartment's existing furniture, which was local and older.[244] Johnny's higher social standing was demonstrated through his purchases of Ikea furniture. Jason owned an apartment, which his parents helped him buy, and used his mother's chauffeur-driven car or taxis to travel around the city. Besides having lived overseas for years, he also took frequent overseas holidays to North America, Europe, and southeast Asia.

The significance of these select 'big-ticket' items is that without them, white-collar men might feel they have not really 'made it'. Placed in an assemblage of white-collar practices, they are an obvious indication to the world of white-collar status; moreover, their purchase represents the consummation of why men choose to take the demanding, tiring white-collar path in the first place. If not for the sake of owning a flash, expensive car, an apartment better than the next man's and the chance to travel in style to fashionable overseas destinations, then why become a white-collar man at all? Imported cars, condominium apartments and luxury foreign travel are depicted as natural objects of desire in the discourse of consumerism prevalent in China today. White-collar men are expected to aspire to them, and the careful acquisition, deployment and display of them through an array of techniques marks these men out as the representatives of successful, sophisticated, upward mobility; it distinguishes them not just from those who cannot afford them, but also from other affluent men (officials, entrepreneurs) whose subjectivities are played out through differing tastes and

[244] On a subsequent trip to Beijing, after the first submission of this thesis, I found out that Colin had found a new job with a very high salary (reputed to be 10,000 yuan per month, according to his friends), through his *guanxi* networks (see chapter four for a discussion of *guanxi*). On the two occasions I met him, he arrived and departed by taxi, and he told me he paid for his own 'personal trainer' at a gym he was going to, at a cost of 150 yuan an hour, several times per week, since he wanted to develop a more muscular body. He told me he thought that a more attractive body as part of an overall carefully-groomed appearance would help his career. He had also moved house, renting a room in a more stylish flat in a more upmarket location.

styles of masculinities. These items are the prizes of modernity, available to those who work hard, and possession of them ensures happiness, or at least that is what the adverts promise.

In this chapter, I have shown that the body culture and material environment of white-collar men are constituted through an aspirational consumerism, which manifests a mix of global and local tastes. The emphasis in this chapter is evidently on the global side of the global/local conundrum, suggesting that white-collar masculinities, at least in terms of fashioning the young male body in the contemporary Chinese context draw from versions of a 'hegemonic' neoliberal model of masculinity, propelled by the forces of the global market's economic capital, and therefore, fundamentally by the state, but also from other, more locally-embedded notions about what it means to be a man. It has been apparent throughout this chapter that despite the clean-cut, relatively 'effeminate' looks in media images of China's white-collar men, despite the invitation these images give to thinking about a spectrum of gender meanings, and despite anxieties about the possible gender inflections of this version of the image, the main standard they convey is persistently heteronormative. Furthermore, though white-collar men's desirability includes their reputation for relative probity and fairmindedness, and even as we shall see in chapter six, equal treatment of women, their gendered positioning in heteronormative discourse necessarily sustains their 'naturalised' advantage over women.

Media articles and advertising converge in publicising the desirability of white-collar masculinities. Indeed, it could be argued that white-collar status epitomises the goals to which young men who seek public and sexual success should strive; the white-collar man has replaced the hero of the Daqing oilfields as the number one role model favoured by the state and economy. The rewards of white-collar masculinities confirm the legitimacy and benefits of the consumerist dynamic encouraged by the market; and they are won through bringing the body to discourse in a dedicated habituation process, participation in which requires knowledge and money, as does purchasing the big-ticket consumer items that demonstrate white-collar status. In this, this chapter also validates a particular social (and even ethical) orientation, by indicating the approval given to those who put effort into maximising individual competitiveness and working hard to accumulate economic and cultural capital.

Finally, insofar as the informants whose stories appear in this chapter are concerned, this chapter also shows how the discursive power of these images and articles enter into the bodies of young men to become part of a process of habituation. 'Body work' is at the heart of white-

collar success and the acquisition of white-collar masculinities; this is not just a linguistic discourse, something out there and detached from individuals' subjectivities, but precisely because it is propelled by desire to 'become' through consumption, it also becomes a habituated part of bodily and gendered material processes, constructed through assemblages of discursive and non-discursive elements. As my ethnographic data shows, these assemblages involve a ceaseless interplay between bodies, objects, settings and discourses across global and local notions and the subjectivities they produce. My analysis of the interplay between lived subject and discourse further shows how hegemonic forces are at work in the internalised processes of habituation. The following chapter continues with these themes, and examines the effect of these forces on one of the key sites of the production and display of white-collar masculinities: the workplace.

# Chapter Four

## Learning the ropes: from school to work

A specific kind of workplace is a key setting for the production, display and definition of what could be called 'corporate' white-collar masculinities. In daily life, of course, there are no fixed boundaries between the performance of 'consumer' subjectivities, as described in the previous chapter, and 'corporate' masculinities, or indeed masculinities enacted in leisure (chapter five) and domestic (chapter six) settings. Nevertheless, it is important to look at the specificity of place within the assemblages of elements which produce subjectivities. My ethnographic data, in this chapter largely from a private school I worked in, demonstrates that the settings or spatialised sites of masculine performances – in their interrelations with discourses, bodies, objects and practices – influence the formation of white-collar masculinities in distinctive ways. Discursive regimes of the new, knowledgeable, skilled, literate and numerate white-collar subject also play a significant role in shaping corporate masculinities. Self-help guides, famous role models and salutary articles are particularly important for this first generation of white-collar men in China. Following my ethnographic account of corporate masculinities in the private school, I turn to examine the interaction of these discursive regimes with the lives of my informants and other white-collar men I observed in Beijing.

The anthropologist Xin Liu describes the significance of setting in his ethnography of a high-tech company in southern China, in the aptly titled chapter 'A Theater of Desires':

> The real sense of a setting means the physical environment in which a character is situated – that is, an environment or a place to work. In contrast, the metaphorical sense of a setting indicates a site of desire and imagination essential to the functioning of a character being told in the story. In this latter sense, it is not simply an office or a massage parlor where one works; instead, it suggests the location of an image that partially defines the content of this image as a character. This metaphorical sense of a setting means a background, an immediate background, from which the character stands out.[245]

Xin Liu is right to emphasise the importance of setting. However, the concept of assemblage as I use it pushes beyond his idea of setting as metaphor to an understanding of how corporeal

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[245] Xin Liu, *The Otherness of Self: A Genealogy of the Self in Contemporary China* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2002), 51.

materiality is moulded through situatedness in particular spaces and places. Space, in this sense, is not just a metaphorical background, as Liu suggests, but is a social, cultural, economic, and political configuration.[246]

Modern offices in gleaming tower blocks and other purpose-built developments form the physical and spatial environment of white-collar men at work. Following Liu's formulation, they are theatres where white-collar men play out their desires, and, through the concept of assemblage, the spaces within which the subjectivities of white-collar men (and women) take form. Liu also emphasises the importance of place, space and background in constructing the 'plot' of one's research topic: 'The most elementary form of plot – that is, articulating events and persons into a narrative whole – is placing a character in his or her immediate background and then situating this background in the larger picture of society.'[247] But Liu's formulation here is rather static; it does not capture the dynamic, fluid, contested relationships formed in space and constitutive of space, which the concept of assemblage allows for. In this chapter, my accounts of the practices of white-collar men in a private school, and a thorough analysis of concepts in popular business literature and how I observed them playing out in daily life, paint a very specific picture of a 'corporate' masculinity in China formed in the crucible of specific working environments. This chapter therefore argues that space and place are indispensable components of the assemblages of white-collar masculinities.

To understand white-collar men in these terms thus entails examining them in the office, a spatial and social site of meaning that occupies a central place in the assemblages producing white-collar practices. In what ways, this chapter seeks to examine, are white-collar men connected with devices, utensils, and buildings of their work places? With what practices, routines, habits and vocabularies do they negotiate the world of work, and what do these suggest for the formation of masculine subjectivities in the workplace? As we shall see, the white-collar masculinity of the workplace is a non-unitary composite, constructed through the taking up of different subject positions available in discourses and practices of 'global' and 'local' business methods and 'relationship building' for business purposes.

This chapter first examines white-collar masculinities in a private language school, contrasting the sophisticated appearance of a large successful international firm operating in a very modern and global environment with the everyday realities of the effects of global capitalism mixing with locally embedded cultural practices. It goes on to discuss the intersection between these and the typical and superficial discursive renderings of 'bodily and

[246] As Doreen Massey argues, for instance, in *For Space* (London: Sage, 2005).
[247] Liu, ibid., 51.

intellectual techniques'[248] which form the white-collar subject in the business press, which skirt over local realities concerning, for example the building of *guanxi* (relationship) networks of colleagues and customers.[249] It then turns to a particularly prominent theme in business media articles of the 'open-minded' values associated with the successful businessmen of today, which leading business figures urge white-collar men to espouse to overcome persistent local tendencies towards what are depicted as rigid, selfish, and fundamentally limiting practices. Finally, it takes a closer look at two key aspects of key 'intellectual techniques' in white-collar men's lives frequently flagged up in media discussions: their English language abilities and personal financial management skills. In sum, through an examination of the formation of corporate masculinities in the particular spaces and spatialised discourses of the private school where I worked and discursive intellectual and bodily techniques, with this chapter argues that the most prominent models of successful corporate male masculinities in China are of young ambitious men who at the start of their careers develop the ability to negotiate the complex intermingling of global and local prescriptions and practices in the particular spaces of their professional lives.

**Johnson's Language School**

For nine months over 2004-5, I worked part-time as a children's English teacher at the Beijing branch of Johnson's Language School, a large Taiwanese-owned chain with fifty schools in China run on corporate, profit-making principles.[250] This work allowed me to witness first-hand the production and performance of white-collar masculinities at work. During the first month, I taught the Johnson's curriculum to children from well-off backgrounds at a state kindergarten in western Beijing in a huge exclusive development of towering residential blocks bordered on one side by a five star hotel and on the other by what was the largest shopping centre in the world at the time, nicknamed the Great Mall of China. However, the school wanted to renegotiate the rate it paid Johnson's, and the relationship broke down, so I was sent to a state primary school in west Beijing, where I continued to teach the Johnson's

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[248] Bodily and intellectual techniques are two main modes of subjectification, according to Nikolas Rose, and I examine them in more detail below. Rose, op. cit., 30-2.

[249] The construction of *guanxi* networks is posited on the reciprocation of favours, and is a wide-ranging social practice with multiple forms performed across many sites. See Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, *Gifts, Favors, and Banquets: The Art of Social Relationships in China* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1994); and Yunxiang Yan, *The Flow of Gifts: Reciprocity and Social Networks in a Chinese Village*, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1996).

[250] Johnson's was established in Taiwan in the 1980s, and by 2009 had 500 branches, with over 20 of them in China. They claim to be the 'biggest international education group in China'. Fees for children's education for a two-month term of two hours a day are around five to six thousand yuan.

curriculum to seven and eight-year-olds for several months. I was then asked to start teaching two and three year-olds in the newly opened Beijing branch of Johnson's, housed in a smart three-storey building in a very affluent residential development in a modern, model suburb of northeast Beijing, that was noticeably popular with expatriate Korean professionals.

When Johnson's first hired me, soon after I first arrived in Beijing, they were in the process of establishing their first branch in Beijing. Their China headquarters were in Shanghai, where they had found it easier to obtain official permission to set up their business. According to Johnson's head of English, Beijing was renowned as a difficult place to obtain permission to open language schools, a complaint I heard from other people in the educational business. To accomplish the tricky and important task of opening the Beijing branch, the board of directors in Shanghai selected the manager of the thriving Dalian branch, a tall, bullish, Taiwanese man in his mid-thirties, called Knight, and known by this name to the staff. Knight dressed smartly, always in a suit, and had a gruff, overbearing manner. He brought over many staff with him from Dalian, including marketing people, teachers and administrators. His team operated from temporary offices for several months while a suitable site for the new school was found. To attract the affluent white-collar parents who formed the core of its target customers, the site and the school in general, had to encapsulate typical white-collar values. For the school to succeed, the combination of building, location, interior decoration, curriculum, staff, and atmosphere – the 'assembled locale' – had to convince middle-class parents that an expensive education at Johnson's would equip their child with the skills necessary to succeed in the global economy. Eventually, Knight and his team located an optimum site in a leafy new suburban development in east Beijing near the airport expressway.

The east side of Beijing has seen many new expensive condominium developments in recent years between the Central Business District (CBD) and the airport, placing the school within easy reach of a large number of affluent couples working for large local and transnational companies. The particular suburb that Knight had chosen boasted a mix of gated condominium developments, giant malls and glitzy office buildings, hosting many transnational corporations including the Chinese headquarters of Siemens and an enormous Ikea. As it was a planned showpiece suburb, it was more ordered and cleaner than most other parts of Beijing, which was another incentive for local and foreign white-collar workers to live in the area. Close by this suburb was another area of streets of very expensive 'villas' (*bieshu*), owned by the wealthiest of white-collar executives and other 'super-rich' elements of the new economy. It made commercial sense for Johnson's to set up here: the young aspiring white-

collar couples who populated the area were looking for schools just like Johnson's for their privileged offspring.

The school occupied the entire top floor of a brand-new three-storey building in the centre of a very affluent and sizeable gated residential 'community' (*shequ*), and overlooked the community's private lake and landscaped gardens. Private security officials prevented anyone without a valid reason from entering. There was a significant Korean population in the estate, and a sprinkling of Korean shops within the community provided them with Korean products. On the ground floor of the building was an upmarket gym, part of a well-known chain frequented by office workers, a Korean grocery store, and a Western-style café-cum-bakery. A restaurant was due to open on the first floor after I left. Upon arrival at the building a security guard doubling as doorman would open the door for visitors, revealing an impressive foyer, with a sweeping staircase leading up to the first floor, making the experience more akin to arriving at a hotel. Elevators whisked guests up to the school. Xin Liu recounts a similar experience in Beihai on entering the Star Group headquarters: 'this was a huge hall that looked more like a hotel entrance than the headquarters of a company.'[251] He elaborates:

> All the offices were located on the eighth floor. Outside the elevator was another huge reception area that looked very much like those in Hollywood movies: spacious, clean, and extremely well organized. A computer sat on a receptionist's desk, behind which sat two girls who looked like they were just out of high school and who had joined the company because someone had recommended them to [the company owner] Panton, as I later learned.[252]

These words could equally describe the experience of a visitor to Johnson's stepping out of the elevator onto the third floor to face two young girls behind a computer at a gleaming reception desk. Amidst this kind of modern office interior, Liu could find no sense of the history of the company:

> Everything was brand-new and compelled visitors to feel this brand-newness, which left no trace of anything preceding it. While standing in the middle of these offices, I could not sense anything that might help me trace a past of any sort indicating what the company would have been like before these arrangements were made. I also could not tell what sort of future this newness indicated. This feeling of being there, in the space of a business world, left a strong impression that nothing temporal existed except the presence of a present order of things.[253]

[251] Liu, ibid., 53.
[252] Liu, ibid., 53.
[253] Liu, ibid., 53-4.

I had the same sense that Johnson's existed in a timeless present, but more importantly, I found no sense of the educational: this space resembled a successful business environment rather than a school for children. The piped music in the reception area played the same pop songs on a loop, over and over again, every day I worked there. The big bright classrooms were mopped constantly; in the large library of children's books not one book was out of place; and the educational games and toys in the playroom were neatly ordered on shelves. Every day the air echoed with the same Johnson's curriculum, which was adhered to rigidly at every Johnson's branch, McDonald's style. Old children moved up a level; new children were recruited; the corporate machine kept turning, producing not just 'educated' children, but also shaping the subjectivities of those who worked there.

As well as displaying white-collar masculinities at work in a white-collar office environment, Johnson's offered the spectacle of a proto-white-collar training ground. Its young students, in the kindergarten during the day and primary-level classes in the evening and at weekends, were at the start of their journey to the successful professional careers their parents – a mix of white-collar workers, entrepreneurs and officials – desired for them. The skills Johnson's offered fitted these white-collar dreams: English language ability and knowledge about Western culture, taught by authentic Westerners, and a training of the body in global middle-class personal conduct, such as habituating the students to certain practices of hygiene and eating. Put at its most plainly, Johnson's sold the dream that its students would learn how to fit smoothly into a global middle class dominated by Western cultural ideas and practices.

The school made a strong effort to promote its global credentials. The head of the English section was Jerry, a native-English speaking white, male, ex-primary school teacher. Jerry's role was to manage the Western teachers and to present a white face when prospective customers came to visit as proof of the school's commitment to inculcating an authentic Western-ness. In its promotional materials, the school stressed that native English-speakers taught every class in English, suggesting not only would the English they were taught be first–rate, but additionally that beyond language, the students would pick up the Western body language of the teachers through a process of a habituation. The school promised frequent educational trips, and one excursion was to an 'Italian farm' on the outskirts of Beijing, where the pre-school children were led round animal enclosures before sitting down in front of a plate of spaghetti Bolognese, which we teachers demonstrated how to eat. Some parents were on the trip; they were very serious about making sure their children practised eating the spaghetti with fork and spoon. This was an example of the kind of globally-inflected cultural

capital the parents wanted their children to accumulate.

In promoting the global vision of the school, the sales and marketing strategy treated the parents as consumers. One insight into this process came from participating in a demonstration class at the west Beijing primary school where I taught the Johnson's curriculum twice a week. The purpose of the demonstration class was to encourage more parents to sign up for Johnson's classes. Some of the marketing staff, mostly men, and a male technical support staff member were present, as were many female teachers. Jerry, the head of English, and I provided the foreign presence. The marketing staff stood around, looking smart in blazers, but the local teachers, who put on a fine demonstration, were doing the hard selling with energy and enthusiasm. The marketing staff had negotiated this sales opportunity at the school in the first place, but the onus was clearly on the teachers that day. The school's focus on providing high levels of 'consumer service' made the local teachers sales people as well as educators. Who better to assure apprehensive parents that their child's education in the Johnson's curriculum would be a worthwhile investment than the very people who would deliver that curriculum in the classroom? The demonstration class and sales chat were all designed to sell the Johnson's brand. Little gifts bearing the Johnson's logo were given to prospective students; glossy handouts promised English fluency quickly and easily, and the room was festooned with the Johnson's name and logo. Multimedia equipment delivered cartoons and educational games to excited children. The chairs were Johnson's chairs. Johnson's had even laid a new floor in the classroom, and installed air-conditioning. There was an air of excitement. Johnson's were selling a dream for the future, that a child's path to career success could be guaranteed through signing up with Johnson's, with the implicit message that those children not enrolled would fall behind their classmates. Was that a risk parents were prepared to take?

In Beihai, Xin Liu noticed some literal cracks beneath the veneer. Although the offices of the Star Group looked splendid, there were actually many problems with the quality of the building: the roof leaked, the air-conditioning was badly fitted, the doors did not shut properly and the locks were askew.[254] Liu surmises that what signifies 'the power of the *laoban* [boss] is not the perfection of details but the glamour and splendidness of his work space. It does not really matter whether there are leaks; what is most important as a symbol of power and wealth is the marble, the Italian leather, the master desk – the content of what he owns.'[255] After working some time at Johnson's, I realised that the appearance of Johnson's as a slick

[254] Liu, ibid., 55.
[255] Liu, ibid., 54-5.

globally-oriented company run professionally by sophisticated white-collar men (and a few women) instilling proto-white-collar values in its young customers, belied a reality of bad planning, flawed implication and decidedly unprofessional and discriminatory gender practices, as I discuss below.

Although the Johnson's building seemed to be holding together (it was early days) its spatial politics were telling: there were no toilets for staff in the school, only for the children; staff had to use the toilets on the first floor, soon to be occupied by the restaurant. The teachers' staff room, out of sight of parents, was overcrowded and had only two computers, neither connected to the Internet. Knight's large and imposing office opened on one side of the corridor opposite the staff room; an internal window ran the length of the staff room wall, giving Knight a sweeping view of the staff room from his office. The head of English, the head of Chinese and the accounts staff were squeezed into small, shared rooms next to Knight's office, but the marketing staff had their own spacious suite of rooms off-site in nearby premises, containing several computers connected to the Internet, underlining their high status. I realised that the reason the library and playroom were so neat and tidy was because they were never used: they were not part of the curriculum. They existed purely for show, as inducements for potential customers. There was no provision in the curriculum for reading stories to the children. Jerry, the head of English, admitted to me that he despaired of the centrally-controlled teaching material, which he accused of emphasizing words associated with Western culture, such as 'hamburger', 'knife' and 'fork', at the cost of teaching basic sentence-building skills. Education, it turned out, was the last of Johnson's priorities.

Men were at the top of the pyramid in terms of ownership and management, and men carried out the technical work, whereas women carried out the teaching and administrative tasks, with the youngest women, known as 'babysitters', holding the lowest status, apart from the elderly female cleaners.[256] Although the management encouraged the idea that teachers, marketing, administration and technical staff were all of equivalent status, the marketing personnel, both men and women, were marked out by the blazers they wore which gave them a business-like air the others did not have, and seemed to symbolize their authority to talk about the school to potential customers. If the marketing staff were privileged in the hierarchy, then it was the young Chinese women teachers who were firmly at the bottom. This group of young women was further subdivided into 'babysitters' and 'teachers': the babysitters mostly

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[256] This hierarchy reflects a national picture in which only a tiny number of women rise to top positions, and on average, women earn 18% less than men. Kathleen M. Moktan and Ramesh Subramaniam, *Women in the People's Republic of China: Country Briefing Paper* (Manila: Asian Development Bank, December 1998), 13 and 55.

attended to the most menial of tasks with the children – feeding them, supervising their play and nap periods – although the teachers also had some responsibilities in these areas. The Chinese teachers were not treated well. They were paid less than 2000 yuan a month (in comparison with a foreign teacher who could make that amount with about 12 hours' work),[257] were expected to work long hours (sometimes they spent 12 hours a day at the school) and to make themselves available at the beck and call of the Chinese principal and school management. The Chinese principal in particular demonstrated her authority by frequently docking money from their salaries, 10 yuan here, 20 yuan there, for minor lapses. This constant low-level oppression by the Chinese principal was far outdone by Knight's occasional but intense outbursts directed at the female administration staff, especially the head of accounts. On one memorable occasion he shouted and screamed at her in the corridor, clearly visible and audible from the staff room. The head of accounts took it stoically but everyone was visibly shaken by this unseemly display of rage.

Knight's treatment of his staff as underlings who owed him for their livelihood, resonates with Xin Liu's transcription of a conversation he heard between two managers about their relationship with their 'boss' (*laoban*) in Beihai:

> Once, at the dinner table, two managers were chatting with each other while I was present. One said to the other, 'I don't particularly like this term of address, *laoban*, which does not sound good to my ears.'
>
> 'Because you just came out of school, and you are not used to the real world,' the other said.
>
> 'What is this? To call someone *laoban* sounds like he is the master and we are servants.'
>
> 'You think you are not?! We are servants. What do you think you are? Your salary is paid by the *laoban* – not by anyone else. Don't be naïve in thinking that you are not a servant. The sooner you realize this, the better for you.'[258]

To the casual observer, Knight was running the branch along clearly defined modern business lines, with typical white-collar codes and standards in place, but observed from the inside it functioned more a like a mini-fiefdom. Although Knight was the general manager of the Beijing branch, rather than the outright boss of the company, he was the *de facto* boss in Beijing since the Taiwanese directors were based in Shanghai. He used his position to maintain a network of patronage which undermined job titles and responsibilities. Amongst

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[257] A recent report by the Chinese Academy of Social Science argues that white-collar status in Beijing requires a salary of at least 5000 yuan per month: Xie Chuanjiao, 'Salary Size Set for White-Collar Jobs', ChinaDaily.com.cn, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2007-11/05/content_6229638.htm (accessed November 18, 2008).

[258] Xin Liu, op. cit., 43.

the team he had brought over from Dalian were two or three men in marketing and IT with whom he had a particularly close relationship; they would often go out socializing together. Jerry, the head of English, confided in me he thought that Knight treated these men preferentially, discussing and setting strategies with them, while simultaneously treating many of the women badly and keeping them out of the inner loop. Knight was a bully, and thought he was untouchable, but he was going too far in his denigration and exclusion of the female staff, and eventually the directors in Shanghai removed him, ostensibly for unsatisfactory enrolment figures, but it was widely rumoured that it was because of his persistent maltreatment of the female staff. Significantly, the new manager was a woman, with excellent people skills, brought up from Shanghai. Many of the female staff were delighted, but Knight's inner court of male staff were visibly furious at what they saw as the great injustice of his removal. They resigned, despite the difficulties they knew they would have in finding equivalent employment in the highly competitive job market. Their loyalty to Knight superseded the financial concerns they had about the consequences of resigning.[259]

Knight and his inner circle of 'henchmen' enacted different 'subject positions' in their performative practice as working white-collar men in China. On the one hand, they took up the appearance, mannerisms and vocabularies of the slick, smart, market-oriented, 'global' white-collar man I discussed in chapter two; they are, in some respects, the bright, young, tolerant, squeaky-clean products of an educated vanguard, bringing China 'into line' with glossy models of respectable and respected corporate masculinities. On the other hand, they simultaneously took up what could be called '*guanxi*' (relationship) or '*gemenr*' (best mates) masculinity, most apparent (usually but not necessarily) when men come together as friends and for mutual self-interest, often to create networks of privilege which frequently exclude women and less powerful men.[260] In the case of Knight and his supporters, this was a ring of

[259] I subsequently discovered that Knight had been sacked not for his maltreatment of female staff, but because he had demanded huge investment from the owners, citing particular difficulties in setting up in Beijing, but had failed to make any profit. Eventually deciding to cut their losses, the owners shut the school, and according to one of my informants who used to work there, they took Knight to court and accused him of embezzlement, but he claimed that any apparent irregularities were due to the sloppiness of the accountant (whom I remember him shouting at very loudly - to intimidate her?). Knight counter-sued for salary not paid, and won! Meanwhile, my informant tells me, he has bought two expensive apartments on the fashionable east side, and set up his own business, with some of his *guanxi* circle from Johnsons. He is a horrible person, added my (female) informant. The remarkable denouement to this venture bears out my original analysis: it exposed the weak foundations upon which the school precariously operated behind the surface glitz, with total power placed in the hand of Knight (see below for a critique of this 'characteristic' of Chinese businesses), and the importance of Knight's *guanxi* network of henchmen, who perhaps felt they had no choice but to leave when their patron was dismissed (were they complicit in the alleged embezzlement?), but who were rewarded with posts in his new business; perhaps all along they knew that Knight would 'see them right'.

[260] In detailed ethnographic research, Susan Greenhalgh has shown how men in Chinese firms work together to reproduce 'structures of domination' over women employees. It is this to which I am referring as workplace

*guanxi* masculinity within a company, but networks of *guanxi* masculinity can take different forms in the business world, such as those between seller and customer as we shall see in the following chapter, or between entrepreneurs and officials, as Everett Zhang documented, through what are termed *goudui* practices.[261] These conflicting masculinities were played out in the contested space of the school, which in its very architecture and spatial arrangements reflected and produced the global/local interminglings enacted in its gendered effects. The assemblage of relations between setting, objects, bodies, spatial practices and routines, together with wider social, economic and political contexts of, among other factors, growing gender inequalities and the state's apparent indifference to them, constituted specific conditions for the emergence of these fractured and discriminatory masculine subjectivities as part of the natural order of things in the school.

In the rest of this chapter, I investigate the main bodily, sartorial and intellectual techniques in discursive regimes which 'discipline' the masculine corporate subject, such as those who have been the focus of this workplace ethnography.

**Bodily and intellectual techniques of corporate masculinity**

In this section, I argue that corporate masculinity, such as I have just examined above, constituted and performed in certain workplaces, involves a particular kind of masculine subject who is subjected to various discursive bodily and intellectual techniques through, for instance, the mainstream media, educational books and university courses. The discursive attention to guides to white-collar behaviour is not surprising in an environment where the white-collar man is a very new phenomenon, and many young men aspiring to white-collar status have not had the opportunity to observe older family members and friends who have already reached it. The explosion in publishing in China in recent years has included books on business, of which bookshops have rows upon rows, many glossy magazine titles available from ubiquitous newsstands and a proliferation of websites. Their immediate audience is businessmen themselves, and young business students, including Henry, the computer software expert I introduced in chapter three, who told me in a discussion about books that he

'guanxi' or 'gemenr' practices. Susan Greenhalgh, 'De-Orientalizing the Chinese Family Firm', *American Ethnologist* 21, no. 4 (November, 1994): 746-775. Also see Mayfair Yang's account of 'guanxi capitalism': Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, 'The Resilience of Guanxi and its New Deployments: A Critique of some New Guanxi Scholarship', *The China Quarterly* 170, (2002): 459-476.

[261] 'Goudui' is a new term used to describe the practice of entrepreneurs paying for entertainment and sexual services for officials. Everett Yuehong Zhang, 'Goudui and the State: Constructing Entrepreneurial Masculinity in Two Cosmopolitan Areas of Post-Socialist China', in *Gendered Modernities: Ethnographic Perspectives*, ed. Dorothy L. Hodgson (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 235-265.

enjoyed reading the latest books on business management theories. At the schools catering to white-collar workers and university students where I taught, the magazine racks in the reception areas had well-thumbed copies of business magazines, amongst others on real estate, and fashion and consumption for young urbanites. At a time in China when many people entering the business world do not come from professional or business families, these media articles play a significant role in shaping ideas about corporate masculinities, including routines of office life, ways of dressing, expectations and values. Some of the realities of everyday white-collar masculinities, such as the gendered networks of patronage discussed above in relation to Johnson's, are not prominent in these depictions of white-collar men, which tend to offer selective accounts of the characteristics, consumer activities and pressures that conform to and uphold the 'global' status of the corporate image. They thus emphasize the subject-position of the young white-collar man at the start of his career, who through intense competition obtains a job in a sought-after company, and begins his time-pressed and disciplined corporate life wearing the 'corporate uniform' of smart suit, tie and expensive watch.

Nikolas Rose has pointed out that bodily and intellectual techniques are key modes of disciplining subjects.[262] In terms of propagating certain bodily techniques, detailed guidance on types of clothing, for white-collar men especially suits, and ways of talking and moving, are aimed at inculcating bodily routines to the extent they become part of a polished, 'natural' performance. In this section, I first look at how the media invention of the 'Jianguomen man', which renders the white-collar subject visible amongst the skyscrapers of Beijing's business district, sets out a particular guide on white-collar on suit-wearing. Intellectual techniques, for their part, involve learning skills of 'reading, memory, writing, numeracy', which, in subjects, 'establish a prudent relation to the future, to budgeting, to trade, to politics, and to life-conduct in general'.[263] Combined with bodily techniques, they form a tool for the fashioning of respectable and responsible white-collar subjectivities. After discussing the spatial constitution and the suit-wearing habits of the Jianguomen man, I move onto a focus on the discursive circulation of intellectual techniques, starting with a living model of white-collar success, Li Kaifu, headhunted by Google from Microsoft to lead its China operations, and who has written a bestseller on the type of business values he believes make for success in China. Using ethnographic material, I relate his points to practices of corporate masculinity. Following this, I pinpoint the kinds of literacy and numeracy standards that are set, through discourse, as

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[262] Rose, ibid., 32.

[263] Rose, ibid., 30-1.

requirements for the kind of white-collar subjectivity that the modernization narrative requires, with reference to how they play out in the practices, thoughts and feelings of my informants.

*Jianguomen man*

An article in the magazine *Business Watch* (*Shangwu zhoukan*) discusses 'Jianguomen man', which sets out a comprehensive assemblage of elements and locales which together form a composite 'model' of Beijing white-collar men.[264] Although several suburbs in Beijing host white-collar enterprises, the white-collar business heart of the capital is the Central Business District with its myriad dazzling skyscrapers running east of Jianguomen, hence one

**Figure 7** Jianguomen man. Feng Hua, op. cit., 68.

[264] Business Watch is 'China's most outstanding news-style business media (publication)' (*Zhongguo zui jiechu de xinwenxing shangwu meiti*); it has a cover price of 10 yuan, a circulation of 186,000, and also sells in Hong Kong. See *Shangwu Zhoukan* (Business Watch Magazine), *Liulanwang* (gotoread.com), http://www.gotoread.com/mag/5667/ (accessed August 13, 2008).

journalist's moniker of 'Jianguomen man' as Beijing's archetypal white-collar man.[265] First, he is a 'standard white-collar worker for a foreign enterprise' (*biaozhunde waiqi bailing jieceng*). He also 'knows how to play' (*hui wan*), how to 'enjoy life' (*xiangshou shenghuo*) and leads a 'happy yuppie life' (*yapi de xingfu shenghuo*). Third, he is identifiable through his association with global business space and investment. He works in 'Jianguomen's upmarket office blocks (*gaodang xiezilou*), which 'host the China area headquarters of globally renowned companies (*shijie zhiming qiye*)'. Finally, his daily routine, clothing and accessories all label him as white-collar: 'every morning thousands of the white-collar elite (*bailing jingyingmen*) in immaculate suits (*xizhuang biting*) clutching laptops and briefcases (*xiedaizhe bijiben huo jiazhe gongwenbao*) hurriedly pour into the area from all over Beijing'.[266]

As an example of the intense competition and daily demands made on a typical young Chinese white-collar man at the start of his working life, the article relates the story of 'a research student from a famous Beijing institute' called Jiefu (perhaps a transliteration of the English name Jeff), who competed with 20,000 people in five rounds of exams before winning a position in a Jianguomen firm.[267] Right from the start, it was a lesson in discipline, from the Western-style office dress code to the security arrangements: 'On the first day of work, Jiefu was informed he had to wear formal clothes (*zhengzhuang* from Monday to Thursday, a suit (*xifu*), tie (*lingdai*), leather shoes (*pixie*), and 'Badge' [the English word is used in the article], a staff ID to get into the office, all of which were essential.'[268] Furthermore, on his first day, he also 'received his first 'list' [English word used] from the human resources department', which detailed his many tasks very clearly.[269] The article outlines 'a fairly typical working day for Jeff' (*Jiefu bijiao you daibiaoxing de yige gongzuori*): 'He sets out from Jianguomen at 9 a.m., reaching Tianjin after 11 a.m. At midday he takes some clients out to talk business over lunch, at 3 p.m. he has an appointment with the agent for the Tianjin area and at 4.30 p.m. drives back to Beijing. He arrives at his office at 6.30 p.m., and still has to write the day's 'Notes' [English word used] (work report) for his boss.'[270] The article's point is that the white-collar man's day is scheduled throughout: he is not master of his own time. The use of English words – badge, list, notes – reflects the language of global capital.

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[265] Feng Hua, 'Beijing de sanzhong nanren' (Three kinds of men in Beijing), *Shangwu zhoukan* (Business watch magazine) no. 19 (1 October, 2002): 68-70.
[266] Feng, ibid., 68-9.
[267] Feng, ibid., 69.
[268] Feng, ibid., 69.
[269] Feng, ibid., 69.
[270] Feng, ibid., 69.

Jianguomen man, if he is rich enough, wears top quality bespoke suits from London. As I discussed in chapter three, suit wearing is a fundamental marker of the white-collar man. The marketing and sales personnel in Johnsons school were never seen in any other attire, and the level of attention Jianguomen man pays to his suits demonstrates their importance as markers of status, even within the white-collar world itself. The elite of the white-collar world demonstrate their position, knowledge and wealth (social, cultural and economic capital) through their choice of suit: 'Suits are representative clothing (*daibiaoxing de zhuozhuang*) of the Jianguomen man: an exquisitely tailored old brand suit (*jiancai jingmei de laopai xizhuang*), from Savile Row, for example, is a favourite of Jianguomen's high-level managers (*gaoceng guanli renshi*).'[271] In choosing Savile Row, these men position themselves globally within a certain elite, in which a Savile Row suit is appreciated as a sign of good taste. Besides the brand label, Jianguomen man picks the colours of the suits to project a certain image of himself: 'black and grey hues, in narrow stripes or extremely light checks, create a steady, calm and dignified image (*yingzaochu wenzhong de xingxiang*)'.'[272]

Jianguomen man also displays his status through his choice of watch, which I identified in chapter three as a status marker of white-collar consumers. 'A style of watch that symbolizes status and position (*xiangzheng shenfen he diwei*), like Rolex and Rado, makes it look like as if [he] has just come out of a directors' meeting (*kanqilai xiang gang cong dongshihui chulai*).'[273] In short, as the article suggests, 'it is necessary to be meticulous about every detail (*zongzhi meige xijie dou yisi-bugou*)', because this is what standard global capitalism demands. The white-collar elite derives great benefit from such selective detail, because, as the article argues, it imparts prestige and a sense of 'authority' (*zhezhong chuanzhe daban zengjia gaoji bailing de quanweigan*).[274] White-collar men invest in this sartorial performance because it demonstratively positions them at the forefront of a modernization process which proclaims the sophisticated corporate look of expensive suit and associated accessories as markers of successful participation in a global executive class. Jianguomen man in this way is set up as a model to be , aspired and worked towards into individual subjectivities. Moreover, this kind of discussion about Jianguomen man presents a highly gendered perspective of corporate life. The regimented corporate office system, stark architecture and design, and suit as 'uniform' all code this entire lifestyle as strongly

[271] Feng, ibid., 69.
[272] Feng, ibid., 69.
[273] Feng, ibid., 69.
[274] Feng, ibid., 69.

masculine, semi-militarised, highly competitive, and with little room for emotional involvement or individual creativity. In sum, this article concentrates on linking the disciplinary body techniques with the sites, spaces and time-keeping regimes that form white-collar masculinities.

*Business idols and business values between local and global*

As we have seen in the first sections to this chapter, as a young boy, the future white-collar man is inducted into the values of his future Jianguomen career through acquaintance with the cultural and bodily language of white-collar values through insertion into a particular space. The workplace shaping of 'intellectual techniques' can in many ways be seen as an extension of this. In his PhD thesis on Japanese white-collar men, Romit Dasgupta discusses the 'crafting' of white-collar identity in the Japanese workplace through training sessions designed to inculcate sets of practices and values.[275] Johnny, who worked for the transnational IT company, confirmed that he and his fellow employees underwent frequent training sessions for team-building and other such purposes. Even before obtaining a corporate job, Chinese youth who wish to become white-collar workers, in the words of an article in the magazine *Chinese Businessman* (*Zhongguo shangren*), are 'sculpting themselves' (*diaosu ziji*) through guides to working in the white-collar world, such as Li Kaifu's best-selling book, *Be Your Personal Best* (*Zuo zui hao de ziji*).[276] The notion of sculpting has parallels with habituation: both are to do with shaping the body and intellect in certain ways, with an implied goal of ingraining a certain look or way of thinking. Besides being a 'business idol of Chinese university students' (*Zhongguo daxuesheng de shangye ouxiang*),[277] Li is Google global vice-chairman and director-general of the China area.[278] Even more than being an idol, the article asserts, Li 'has emerged with the status of someone bent on achieving his aspirations' (*yi*

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[275] Romit Dasgupta, ''Crafting' Masculinity: Negotiating Masculine Identities in the Japanese Workplace', PhD thesis, Curtin University of Technology, 2004, http://adt.curtin.edu.au/theses/available/adt-WCU20061214.144338/ (accessed 6 February 2008). Dasgupta argues that Japanese salaryman masculinity is a hegemonic form of masculinity which maintains its status through constant crafting and recrafting at social and individual levels.

[276] Duan Yingfeng, 'Dang shangren kaishi cong wen' (When businessmen start to become writers), *Zhongguo shangren* (Chinese businessman) no. 127 (June, 2006): 47. According to information on the *China Businessman* magazine's website, it was founded in 1992, and its readers are successful 28 to 55-year-old 'directors' (*jingliren*), 'entrepreneurs' (*qiyejia*) and 'mid to high-level managers' (*zhonggaoceng guanlizhe*), more than 70% of whom are men. It describes itself as a 'magazine of taste catering for the leading figures and elite of China's business world' (*mianxiang Zhongguo shangjie jingying, lingxiu renwu de pinwei zazhi*): ''Zhongguo shangren' zazhi jianjie' ('Chinese Businessman' magazine introduction), *Zhongguo shangren* (Chinese businessman), http://www.zgsr.net.cn/Html/gsgk/gsjj.shtml (accessed April 7, 2008).

[277] Duan, ibid., 45.

[278] Duan, ibid., 46.

*lizhizhe de shenfen chuxian*), and 'performs the role of a life teacher' (*banyan rensheng daoshi de juese*).[279] Li is famous for abandoning a high-profile job at Microsoft for Google (which led to legal action and eventually an out-of-court settlement), which the article reports 'ignited a big discussion about professional values in China' (*zai guonei yinbaole yichang guanyu zhiye daode de da taolun*).[280]

The equivalent of a poster boy for white-collar masculinity, Li meets the defining criteria of habituation to white-collar body culture that I discussed in chapter two: the display of both global and local attributes, professional aspiration, consumer capacity, and desirability. His successful habituation is demonstrated in the picture which accompanies the article: he is immaculately dressed in a suit, and looks relaxed sitting in a plush armchair at a window looking out towards very modern-looking office blocks. He manifests the successful performance of body techniques indispensable to white-collar identity, yet a significant part his success is due to his ability to clearly set out some of the key intellectual requirements that corporate life demands. His career record with Microsoft and Google is more than enough to prove his global credentials, and the business values he puts forward in his book, which I discuss below, show a strong attachment to Western business theory. At the same time, however, the high-level positions he has held in the Chinese business world show that he is adept at manoeuvring through its *guanxi* (relationship) based local business practices, in which 'the personalistic qualities of obligation, indebtedness, and reciprocity are just as important as transactions in material benefit.'[281] Li's image is suggestive of global corporate masculinity, yet his career trajectory demonstrates his mastery of *guanxi* masculinity: in this way, the gendered subject positions Li exemplifies draw from different models of masculinity as best suits his purposes in particular situations and particular times. My main point here, in terms of the circulation of intellectual techniques, is that Li's image as a model of corporate masculinity is part of a discursive regime that shapes the subjectivities of young white-collar men, although, at the same time, the characteristics of Li's masculinity do demonstrate the imbalance between global and local aspects of that model.

Li's apparent aim in his book is to outline a set of values and attitudes, drawn from his own business experiences, as a guide for young people at the beginning of their own career path.[282] Crucially this identifies a certain interpretation of individualism which conforms to the

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[279] Duan, ibid., 46.
[280] Duan, ibid., 46.
[281] Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, 1994, op. cit., 108.
[282] Duan Yingfeng, op. cit., 46.

moral ‘standards’ of official rhetoric, namely, the constitution of a particular individualized subject/subjectivity.[283] Although this model of individualism is available to both men and women, for the purposes ofthe current discussion, it is of particular appeal to men, given that most students on business courses are male, as are most white-collar employees, and even more so in senior positions. Li puts forward the concept six core ‘life attitudes’ (*rensheng taidu*) of ‘vigour’ (*jiji*), ‘empathy’ (*tonglixin*), ‘self-confidence’ (*zixin*), ‘introspection’ (*zixing*), ‘courage’ (*yongqi*), and ‘breadth of vision’ (*xionghuai*), and six ‘ modes of behaviour’ (*xingwei fangshi*) of ‘pursuing a vision’ (*zhuixun lixiang*), ‘discovering interests’ (*faxian xingqu*), ‘effective implementation’ (*youxiao zhixing*), ‘studying hard’ (*nuli xuexi*), ‘interpersonal exchange’ (*renji jiaoliu*), and ‘cooperative communication’ (*hezuo goutong*). Such a model leads to success (*tongxiang chenggong* and can act as a reference (*zuowei canzhao*) for young students choosing their future path, as they sculpt themselves ‘to spur on society’s progress’ (*tuidong shehui jinbu*). Li's ideas are ‘very [centred on the] individual’ (*hen gexing de*): in the terminology of Western ethics, the author argues, they can be called ‘self-centred’ (*zisi*).[284] However, this ‘is not what Chinese people call ‘selfish self-interest’ (*bushi Zhongguoren suoshuo de zisi zili*), but is rather ‘for the individual’s genuine interests and work’ (*wei geti de zhenzheng xingqu er gongzuo*), ‘within the permitted scope of law and morality’ (*zai falü daode yunxu de fanwei nei*), and ‘not for some specific enterprise’ (*bushi weile mouge teding de qiye*).[285] This depiction of the white-collar worker as more concerned with genuine self-development rather than narrow self-enrichment fits the image described in chapter two, of the white-collar worker as honest and good for society, implicitly criticizing other groups (officials and entrepreneurs come to mind) as corrupt and self-serving. At its heart, it concerns the ‘ideal’ constitution of the individual subject as a key player on the global stage, but one with ‘Chinese characteristics’ and frames his ‘life’s work’ as a process of working on himself, body and mind, to achieve happiness and self-fulfilment.

Li’s concept of self-centredness ‘approves of pluralism’ (*zancheng duoyuanhua*) because it recognizes that ‘different people possess different characteristics and interests’ (*butong de ren juyou butong de texing he xihao*), as well as different talent.[286] ‘America is a typical society fostering success through pluralism’ (*Meiguo shi yige dianxing de chongshang*

[283] Yan Yunxiang gives detailed discussion ofthe emergence of ‘individualism’ in China in *Private Life Under Socialism: Love, Intimacy, and Family Change in a Chinese Village 1949-1999* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).
[284] Duan, ibid., 47.
[285] Duan, ibid., 47.
[286] Duan, ibid., 47.

*duoyuanhua chenggong de shehui*), whereas Chinese society has been deeply influenced by 'Confucian ethical values' (*rujia de lunli jiazhiguan*). Consequently many 'professional managers' (*zhiye jingliren*) seek success through a 'centralist' approach (*yiyuanhua*) and 'compromising in the general interest' (*weiqu-qiuquan*). Such tendencies, in the author's view, easily push managers to extremes in their dealings with authority, either in adopting a confrontational approach with the boss' (*gen laoban duizhegan*), which often ends with the manager being 'swept out the door' (*saodi chumen*) because the boss feels he is losing control; or, on the other hand, in'blindly obeying' (*mangmu shuncong*) the boss, though this may result in the manager losing his 'professional standing' (*zhiye lichang*) and even his 'independence of character' (*duli de renge*).[287] Whereas it could be argued that Knight fits the former category, and was eventually sacked, I saw the latter occur at another school where I taught in Zhongguancun. The Zhongguancun branch was the China headquarters of a chain with thirteen schools spread throughout the most developed cities of eastern China, aiming specifically at recruiting white-collar students. The school management structure ostensibly followed Western business practice (as had Johnson's): it had sales, marketing, accounts, human resources and other such departments. It was autocratically and ruthlessly controlled by its founder. The middle managers referred everything up to him because they were so afraid of making a decision he disapproved of and suffering the consequences of an arbitrary and heavy 'fine' or worse. It was a perfect example of extreme 'centralism' robbing the company of the benefits of managerial talent, and yet, on first impressions, it had the look and feel of a very slick, advanced, private centre of education run efficiently along the lines of pluralism that Li, for example, applauded. Like Johnson's, the school recruited students through the display of stupendous facilities – they had a waterfall in the hotel size lobby, a grand piano, and an artificial 'forest' lounge area – and vigorous and slick marketing, promising young white-collars a magical short-cut to fluent English in four months, and playing on their fears of losing out on career opportunities if they did not sign up. The teaching staff were unusually multiethnic, with white, black, and Chinese American teachers -, many of whom praised the owner for his unusual tolerance in an industry which often seemed to indicate an unstated 'whites only' policy. However the owner of this school mixed a combination of what one might describe as a switched-on, sophisticated, open-minded white-collar director and a ruthless, intolerant, central decision-making boss/entrepreneur in his gendered performance. And his mastery of the cultivation of *guanxi* networks was demonstrated conclusively when he

[287] Duan, ibid., 47. Li's views on the subject also exemplify the attribution of value to a notion of subjectivity that explicitly rejects the 'collective' values of the 'traditional' Maoist subject.

secured a work visa, through his own channels, for one of the teachers whose application had been turned down with 'no hope of success'. As for the 'cracks in the veneer', unsurprisingly, the English teaching standard and curriculum was chronically inadequate, and the building itself was flawed: none of the air-conditioning controls in each classroom worked, since the air conditioning system was centrally controlled.

This example can be thought of as an instance of the 'business centralism' that Li critiqued in the article I mention above. 'One-sidedly (*pianmian*) seeking achievement or fame and fortune, and limiting the routes to success is the typical model of centralized success (*dianxing de yiyuanhua chenggong moshi*)';[288] moreover, he argued that such a blinkered approach was at the cost of well-being and personal happiness.

> The mistake of centralised success (*yiyuanhua chenggong de wuqu*) is to forget the goals and ideals that are genuinely part of oneself (*zhenzheng shuyu ziji de mubiao he lixiang*) because of anxiety for quick results and instant profits and short-sightedness (*jigong-jinli he muguang-duandan*)...even if in the end one obtained the longed-for fame and fortune, one would not necessarily experience real happiness and well-being (*bu yiding neng tiyandao zhenzheng de kuaile he xingfu*).[289]

I am not sure if the owner of the Zhongguancun school was happy: he did not look a man at ease, and he frequently lost his temper and shouted at staff. Likewise, Knight, at Johnson's, was often tense and bad-tempered. For the many white-collar men and women working under such bosses, the unpleasant consequences of such intense centralisation of power, such as loss of individual authority and the arbitrary whims of the boss's mood swings, are simply part of everyday office life.

Li contends that a 'good manager' (*hao guanlizhe*) should know the importance of 'managing oneself' (*ziwo guanli*). He argues that: 'in this constantly changing world, to discover who one is (*faxian ziji shi shei*), and to understand what one wants to become (*liaojie ziji yao cheng shenme muyang*), are the basis for establishing dignity (*jianli zunyan de jichu*); and managing oneself […] is the basic technique for developing rational capability' (*guanli ziji…shi peiyang lixing liliang de jiben gong*).[290] This foregrounding of self-management is suggestive of the habituation processes – bodily and intellectual - individuals go through to bring themselves to their chosen goals. However, in writing his book, so Li's reviewer suggests, Li does not hope that his readers 'simply imitate the book's proposals' (*jiandan zhaoban shuzhong de jianyi*). A good book provides 'principles to guide our future study of

[288] Duan, ibid., 47.
[289] Duan, ibid., 47-8.
[290] Duan, ibid., 47.

working life (*zhidao women weilai xuexi gongzuo shenghuo de yuanze*), and some considered ways (*sikao fangfa*) of dealing with problems.'[291] In this light, Li appears as the model example of a genuinely pluralistic approach to white-collar work and life.

The foregoing discussion suggests that the white-collar identity that the Chinese business students seek to emulate is one that has already been localized. Li's book has been a best seller, and his popularity amongst aspiring young Chinese is perhaps because he exemplifies the successful adoption and adaptation of American business practices for the Chinese market. The 'white collar' principles Li represents may be similar to those of his American counterparts, but they are being applied in a different environment; the values that Li outlines in his book may appear to come straight out of an American business textbook, but because their 'effective implementation' takes place in different cultural, social, political and legal contexts, the resulting white-collar behaviour also takes on a different 'repatriated' form.[292] The white-collar man is representative of new forms of masculinity which involve picking up techniques promulgated through 'global', arguably hegemonic discursive formations, whileat the same time manifesting practices from 'local' formations, such as *guanxi* and 'centralist' management approaches. As the local globalises, the global also localizes to form historically and geographically specific forms of hegemonic masculinity.

Butler's theory of performativity is helpful in explaining how this can happen, through its denial of the pre-existence of internal masculinities, and its insistence that gender is a discursively-compelled performance. Johnson's school or Li's business training guide offer examples of how different masculinities maybe compelled in the same individual, to form what may appear, especially to an outside observer as a series of contradictory subject positions, none of which seem to sit easily together. The individual who performs them may have a sense of this, or he may live his various performances as just normal, conventional and unproblematic, both for himself and for others. For instance, Wen, the Beijinger who worked as sales manager for the European company whom I introduced in chapter three, had self-confidence, breadth of vision and an avowed openness to pluralism, all of which sit well with Li's principles. At the same time he often put his considerable charm and business intelligence to good effect in sustaining local practices, for example, when buying luxury brand-name gifts

[291] Duan, ibid., 47.

[292] Arjun Appadurai argues that the localisation of global culture is not a homogenising process, but instead produces 'heterogeneous dialogues' which manifest 'in the form of goods, signs, slogans and styles.' He calls this the 'repatriation of difference'. See his 'Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy', in *The Anthropology of Globalization: A Reader*, ed. Jonathan Xavier Inda and Renato Rosaldo, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 59.

for clients and arranging girls for them in karaoke bars and massage parlours.[293] As his French bosses knew – and they had no difficulty in sanctioning Wen's 'local' role – Wen, as a *Chinese* white-collar man, could move between the local and the global far better than they could; he was more adept than they at performing in this localised global/globalised local environment. Yet when Wen spent time in the West, he lamented the lack of sites such as saunas and foot massage centres, where he could be served by pretty young women. For him, this was why he could not live in the West, despite his liking for 'Western' values of (especially political) pluralism. His gendered subjectivity, then, was the result of an infolding of the techniques of several differing discourses. Or Kevin, one of the marketing executives at Johnson's, exhibited plenty of 'vigour', 'introspection' and 'cooperative communication' in chats with me, manifestly worked hard at his job, and clearly had a vision of himself as a professional marketing executive. Yet, he was a member of Knight's inner circle at Johnson's, protected by Knight's patronage, to the extent that he resigned in anger when Knight was removed, perhaps also feeling exposed. The wider point is that the introduction of the kind of Western ideas that Li Kaifu represented and encouraged does not, indeed cannot, replace the diverse practices associated with success in social and cultural practices esteemed in the local context, but interacts with them to create new 'hegemonic' forms which simultaneously combine the global and local.

*The 'literate self': English language skills*

Academic and popular accounts which attempt to define white-collar characteristics often pinpoint relatively high levels of education and training, which I discuss in this section. Education and training concern the inculcation of intellectual techniques and frame the white-collar subject as productive of a particular form of knowledge, inseparable from the discursive expectations of him as a global subject, adept at techniques of social exchange, communication skills and so on.

One particular intellectual technique the white-collar employee is urged to acquire is a command of English language. Despite the inspiring example of Li Kaifu and others like him, China still 'suffers from an acute shortage' of 'reasonably priced, skilled Chinese employees with a few years of industrial experience', in part, according to Andrew Ross, because of the

[293] In the same way that entrepreneurs butter up officials: see Zhang, op. cit., 235-265; and Yang, 2002, op. cit., 466. I look at Wen's leisure time activities with his clients in the next chapter.

difficulties involved in acquiring a good command of English.[294] For their part, white-collar workers were keenly aware of the benefits to their career of speaking English. At the Zhongguancun school, most of the students were young white-collar workers and teenagers from middle-class families, seeking to boost their job opportunities through speaking better English. Aware of this, the school advertised on the street, in cinemas and in magazines with images of besuited white-collar men and women, and with text that pushed the message that improving one's English would directly result in career advancement.

With such discursive framing of English as an essential white-collar skill, most of my white-collar informants clearly focused on trying to improve their English. Indeed, their English language training became as much part of the process of habituation through which they acquired the attributes associated with the status and position they sought as any other. Speaking fluent English was a skill like any other for them, like choosing and wearing the right kind of suit. It was a talent to be displayed, which set them apart from other men and demonstrated global-level sophistication. The best English speaker of them was Jason, whom I introduced in chapter three, since he had spent many years in the West studying and working, although even he was worried about his English deteriorating and asked me to correct his mistakes. Johnny, working for a North American IT company, had to use English at work sometimes, and because he harboured a dream of emigrating abroad to work, tried to practise his English at every opportunity, even renting out a room in his apartment to expatriate professionals for this reason. He also liked to watch CCTV 9, the state broadcaster's English channel, and he spent whole evenings 'chatting' on instant messenger programmes with foreign friends. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, Colin shared an apartment with foreigners too, but Colin's English was not as good as Johnny's: Colin worked for a local firm with local clients, and the only chance he had to use English was in his free time, unlike Johnny. Wen, however, was not enthusiastic about learning English. His bosses wanted him to improve, and were paying for him (and one of his colleagues) to be taught by me. However, Wen was always trying to avoid formal lessons, which were supposed to take place in his office, by suggesting we go out for dinner or some other activity. Wen's job involved selling

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[294] Ross's main argument is that if China continues to train and educate its workforce with white-collar skills, then this shortage of skilled employees will disappear, their salaries will drop, and transnational companies will outsource more skilled jobs from the West to China. Ross defines the group of employees to which he refers as 'locals who speak adequate English, who are familiar with international business practices, and whose technical and managerial talents are sufficient to meet the demands of high-value occupations in foreign companies.' Andrew Ross, 'Outsourcing as a Way of Life? Knowledge Transfer in the Yangtze Delta', in *Working in China: Ethnographies of Labor and Workplace Transformation*, ed. Ching Kwan Lee (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 190.

industrial electrical machinery to Chinese clients, so the only time he needed to use English was with his bosses. Wen, at forty, was also a little older than the others; he was already sixteen in 1980, so his childhood had not been suffused with Western pop culture. He had already established his status with his peers through his managerial position and property portfolio; he was good at his job, which required excellent local knowledge of what sort of 'gifts' and wining and dining would enhance relations with clients, and he knew that foreigners could not perform this job and that it did not require English. However, his lack of English fluency evidently frustrated his bosses, and Wen had admitted that if he wanted to climb further up the career ladder, he needed to improve his English. But he was content doing his current job. With regard to Ross's other criteria, familiarity with international business practices and managerial talent, Johnny and Wen were best positioned for the former and Wen had best demonstrated the latter, although that could be because of longer experience.[295]

The critical need to attempt to gain fluency in English is just one example of an intellectual technique brought into daily life practices through assemblages of discursive and non-discursive elements, anddrilled into young white-collar workers from a variety of sources: bosses, parents and schools, self-development books and so on. However, of course individuals take up this quest to differing degrees, and the evidence from the lives of my informants shows how they 'bought into' this discourse to varying degrees. Wen's superficial compliance with his boss's request to improve his English masked a refusal to take it seriously. His strategies for avoiding formal lessons demonstrated that he felt it unnecessary to speak fluent English to be a 'success': he was doing very nicely already. And even Johnny, for all his desire to speak better English, had acquired a surface fluency which allowed him to 'get by' in his job – but it was enough for him to be living the kind of lifestyle that many could only dream of. In other words, individuals took up the globally hegemonic discursive

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[295] However, Wen might be facing competition for his job in the near future. According to a survey Ross cites, the education system may now be producing sufficient numbers of graduates for white-collar entry-level positions, so the shortage of experienced, suitably skilled professionals may diminish as these recent recruits climb the career ladder. The survey, by 'global management consultancy Hewitt', showed that average salaries for graduates of domestic and overseas universities peaked in 2002, after climbing steadily since the mid-nineties, indicating that supply matched demand in that year: Andrew Ross, op. cit., 192-3. There may even be an oversupply. Even a degree from a Western university is no longer a passport to career success, according to Mike, the assistant manger of the luxury goods store, who had two Masters degrees from Britain. He said that several years ago a degree from a Western university would guarantee an excellent white-collar job, but not anymore, since so many people have taken this route that it is no longer so prestigious. This issue has been given considerable coverage in the press in recent years, drawing attention to the difficulties graduates find in obtaining jobs commensurate with their educational level. See, for example, 'Cong chu guo liuxue re dao gui guo jiuye nan' (From study abroad fever to employment problems on return), *Huanqiu zhiye jiaoyu zaixian* (Global careers and education online), http://www.wy21cn.com/web_news/html/2008-7/2008714163748986.html (accessed November 20, 2008).

interpellations of the English-speaking corporate subject in different ways: complying, resisting, altering and ignoring them at various times and various places.

Beyond fluency in English, for white-collar workers to gain an edge in the increasingly competitive job market requires disciplining in other intellectual techniques. White-collar men must participate in a particular kind of knowledge production, as sociologist Xu Rong points out: 'For white-collar employees across all kinds of industry, mastering specialised knowledge has become the foundation of success (*dui zhuanye zhishi de zhangwo yi chengwei lishen zhi ben*).'[296] Xu outlines two facets of this, keeping up with vital developments in their field and with general current affairs and financial news to help their career prospects and 'personal wealth accumulation' (*geren de caifu jilei*), and being able to 'display their own rich knowledge and original opinions' (*zhanxian ziji fengfu de zhishi yu dudao de jianjie*) in daily social exchange and communication on topical issues.[297] Xu argues that '[b]oth of these are extremely important aspects of middle-class groups' self-image creation (*ziwo xingxiang suzao*).'[298] He attributes white-collar workers' drive for knowledge to its indispensability in furthering their careers in a competitive environment: 'The intensity of competition has exacerbated people's work pressure (*jingzheng de jilie jiajule renmen de gongzuo yali*), and if they do not want to fall behind the times (*bei shidai taotai*) and want to continue to raise their quality of life (*tigao zishen de shenghuo zhiliang*), white-collar workers must ensure they understand what is happening around them and in the world.'[299] Xu's contribution to the list of 'must-have' skills for corporate employees, therefore, is knowledge of global affairs and its intelligent deployment: the white-collar worker uses his specialised knowledge instrumentally to aid his desire to improve his job status and material enrichment.

The cultivation, display and application of knowledge and skills, such as English language fluency, are part of the disciplining effects of the intellectual techniques designed to produce white-collar subjects. Now I look at the construction of the 'numerate self' and its inculcation of prudent personal finance management.

*The 'numerate self': financial responsibilities*

Conversations with Johnny frequently led to the topic of his expenditure. He would often complain to me about how much money he was paying out on his mortgage, on furnishings,

[296] Xu, op.cit., 283.
[297] Xu, ibid., 283-4.
[298] Xu, ibid., 284.
[299] Xu, ibid., 284-5.

on eating out, on building his business sideline, and proposed expenses on a car. He said he dare not stop working; indeed, it was these financial commitments, mostly to keep him in a style of living that he desired, that pushed him to put in long working hours, a topic I return to below. He told me it was all worth it, though, because it meant he had a pleasant place to return to every evening. Wen, too, often mentioned the financial responsibilities that came with his role as breadwinner in a family with a high-level lifestyle and high expectations. Both men clearly devoted substantial time to planning, and worrying about, their personal finances.

In their accounts, are echoes of the discursive subject position of the 'numerate self', an example of which can be found in *Touch* (*Qingnian shejiao*) magazine, which carries features on young white-collar work life, fashion, shopping, romance and suchlike.[300] An article in *Touch* recounted the growing pressures on Simon, a thirty-year-old white-collar man who works in a 'foreign investment financial organization' (*waizi jinrong jigou bailing*), in an article with the English subheading 'Concern about 'white collar''.[301] Simon's first major investment was a house, in anticipation of marriage, the article reveals, and as one might expect with a successful white-collar man, it was Western-style. After achieving the common white-collar goal of house ownership, the reality of a mortgage struck him: '[…] he very quickly discovered that the 5000 yuan bank payment every month became his nightmare; moreover, this nightmare would take at least twenty years to get out of (*yao 20 nian cai neng baituo*).' The large payments 'clearly lowered his quality [of life]' (*zhiliang mingxian xiajiangle*) as he sought to cut back on his other expenses, which were for the typically white-collar interests of travel, partying and expensive clothing. No longer with the capacity to spend large amounts of money on conspicuous demonstrations of his status, and implicitly desirability, he also worried about whether he was still desirable as a partner. 'As a result his self-confidence began to waver (*zixinxin kaishi suizhi dongyao*), and even looking for a girlfriend made him anxious (*xincun-gulü*).' He had not reckoned on the high costs of maintaining his white-collar lifestyle. The sports and entertainment facilities in his gated and guarded 'estate' (*xiaoqu*) required high membership fees, and he even felt the security guards undermined his status by only showing real respect to those residents with cars, whereas he came and went by taxi. With a high mortgage, he started to worry about his job security, and

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[300] *Touch* is aimed at fashionable young urbanites, has a monthly print run of 100,000 copies and sells for the relatively high price of 15 yuan, marking out its readers as reasonably affluent. It 'extends its readers' perspective and taste on knowledge and elegance in modern life' (*ba duzhe de shijiao he pinwei shenzhandao xiandai shenghuo de zhihui cengmian he gaoshang jingjie*): ''Qingnian sheijiao' yuekan' ('Touch' monthly), *Liulan wang* (gotoread.com), http://1756.gotoread.com/mag/6170/ (accessed September 3, 2008).

[301] Mu Yu, 'Nide gongzuo kuaile ma?' (Are you happy at work?), *Qingnian shejiao* (Touch) no. 6 (June, 2005): 22.

for the first time ever, was ‘afraid of ‘losing his rice bowl’ (*kongbu diule fanwan*).[302]

Many of China’s white-collar workers, according to the same article, like Simon, do not have the skills to manage the lifestyle they have worked so hard to achieve. ‘Most white-collar workers have received a high-level education, buta high-level education does not necessarily teach you ‘life skills’ (*gaodeng jiaoyu que wei bi jiaohui ni ‘shenghuo de benshi’*).’[303] Framed in this way, white-collar employees are apparently particularly thoughtless about money management. ‘Many white-collar workers often have not seriously considered how to manage their money: some spend all their money every month (*meiyue dou huaguang*); others do not care how much spare cash is in their bank account (*bu guanxin ziji zhanghu li you duoshao xianqian*) (they always just put money in their current account); others think that depositing money and living off the interest is the only reliable way to make money; and there are still others who take their living expenditure and invest it in stocks and so on (*nazhe ziji de shenghuo fei touzi gupiao, dengdeng*).’[304] Furthermore, the article warns, not many have ‘genuinely understood (*zhenzheng qule liaojie*) the special points and mutual connections of the many financial management tools such as deposits, securities and insurance (*cunkuan, zhengjuan, baoxian deng*).’[305] The solution lies in white-collar workers adopting ‘comprehensive financial plans appropriate for their own actual circumstances’ (*shihe zishen shiji qingkuang de zonghe licai guihua*), the article contends, which should be easier than before, since ‘now many banks are pushing their personal financial management business’ (*xianzai hen duo yinhang dou tuichule geren licai de yewu*).[306] The article’s main point seems to be that China’s white-collar workers are learning that to maintain one’s status and lifestyle – keeping up with the Zhangs, in other words – requires careful, long-term planning.

This article, then, gives clear prescriptions for the creation of the kind of ‘numerate self’, which Nikolas Rose contends is a product of some of the intellectual techniques used to fashion modern mentalities. With the help of the banking industry, set up as authoritative providers of advice in this article, the white-collar worker is implored, threatened and frightened through the example of Simon, to get his personal finances into shape, and to save and spend in the responsible ways for the benefit of personal, and ultimately national economic and social stability.

[302] Mu, ibid., 22.
[303] Mu, ibid., 22.
[304] Mu, ibid., 22.
[305] Mu, ibid., 23.
[306] Mu, ibid., 23.

This discursive portrait of Simon, and the accounts of Johnny and Wen, point to the pressures that financial responsibilities bring, and contribute to the long hours and general sense of beleagueredness of white-collar men. The discursive theme of 'intense pressure' to compete on the white collar employee is widely presented. I have lost count of the occasions on which male white-collar informants talked with me about their 'intense pressure at work and at home', and how 'hard' (*xinku*) it was to be a man in China, and doubly so to be a white-collar man. They often mentioned the 'responsibilities' (*zeren*) they had towards their families as husbands and fathers (which I discuss in chapter six) and the workload their bosses heaped on them. Wang Xiaoming, one of China's foremost cultural studies scholars, believes that despite the media aggrandizement of China's white-collar workers, in reality they are a worn-down few (taking Shanghai, where he is based, as his example):

> […] advertising and the media present white-collar workers as emblems of China's modernization and vectors of its new purchasing power. So Shanghai's consumer goods, fashion and real-estate sectors target this class as their key market, without registering what it really is: exhausted young or middle-aged men and women who make up only a fraction of the population, by contrast with European or American middle classes.[307]

Wang suggests that local media and market assumptions of white-collar consumer power, imported uncritically from the West, belie local circumstances. Nevertheless, popular depictions of the pressured white-collar man resonated strongly with my informants' experiences in daily life, and for them, seemed to underline the multiple burdens of manhood. Not least of these were the very long hours they felt obliged to work. At the Zhongguancun school, the management staff started at 8 a.m. and many were still there at 9 p.m. when I finished teaching. They had only seven days leave each year, and were expected to attend the various school-organized student events, such as the parties on festival occasions. Many complained of fatigue and overwork. Johnny, who worked for a transnational IT firm, frequently arrived late for dinner with mutual friends because of overtime work.

What makes these white-collar workers the 'busiest of people' (*zui manglu de ren*), according to Chen Guanren and Yi Yang's survey of the middle class, is that they 'just cannot stop working and earning money' (*jue buneng tingzhi gongzuo he zhengqian*) because they 'want to maintain their high standard of living' (*yao baochi jiaogao de shenghuo shuiping*).[308]

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[307] Wang Xiaoming, 'A Manifesto for Cultural Studies', in *One China, Many Paths*, tr. Robin Visser, ed. Chaohua Wang (London: Verso, 2003), 276. Wang writes on cultural studies and literature.

[308] Chen Guanren and Yi Yang, op. cit., 154. Chen and Yi report that a 2003 survey of the middle class showed that out of the 94% of respondents who worked over six hours on a work day, 40% worked eight to ten hours, 25% worked more than ten hours a day, and more than half frequently worked overtime.

'If I don't work hard how can I earn a high salary?' was the question asked by one Zhao, an IT professional included in their survey. Many white-collar 'workaholics' (*gongzuokuang*) like Zhao, 'often work at night' (*jingchang zai yeli gongzuo*), and although they like time off, 'often work at the weekend' (*tongchang zai zhoumo gongzuo*).[309] Such accounts as this from Chen and Yi do not simply 'reflect the reality' of survey results; rather, what they do is add to the theme of white-collar work pressure and long hours by contributing to the image of the white-collar subject *wanting* or *needing* to work 12 hours a day in the pursuit of his material goals. This then becomes a subject position which is woven into the subjectivities of individuals like Johnny, who use it as a legitimizing explanation for the long hours and days they put in at the office.

In emphasising the work pressures of white-collar employment, the media spends much more time promoting the global aspects of the white-collar lifestyle, than revealing how interwoven it is with embedded local practices. In the context of the media's contribution to white-collar status as a new hegemonic 'transnational masculinity', as Connell put it, its attention to this aspect of white-collar status necessarily excludes consideration of the views put forward by Wang Xiaoming. However, if attention to the 'responsibilities' of white-collar life confirms its status, it is mediated by descriptions of its 'downside', in what often appear as moralistic cautions about the 'irresponsibility' of taking on too much. All in all, while these disciplining intellectual techniques may lead to complaints that contribute to the discursive construction of white-collar life as exhausting and tedious, they also reaffirm the special knowledges and skills the white-collar subject is made of, and so propagate the notion of white-collar life as the preferred model of young, intelligent, ambitious people.

In this chapter, my focus has been on the production and performance of white-collar masculinities at work, and the local 'repatriation' of the global and the demanding habituation processes that would-be white-collar men must go through to achieve and maintain his ambitions. I have shown that the sculpting, or tempering, or habituation of individual white-collar bodies, values, emotions and anxieties take place in - and also constitute - particular places and spaces, in assemblages of elements that bring together discourses and practices

[309] Chen and Yi, ibid., 155-6. Chen and Yi add that these workaholics 'become restless when they have nothing to do' (*wushi kegan shi hui zuoli-bu'an*), and, for example, feel that lying in lazily on a Sunday morning is 'very unbefitting' (*hen bu shiying*). Apparently, very few of them have time to enjoy other interests, and relatives often complain 'they spend too much time working' (*tamen gongzuo shang hua de shijian tai duo*), and friends complain they 'hardly ever see' (*hen shao jian*) them.

associated with a polished, global, 'hegemonic' masculinity and locally-embedded notions of '*guanxi*' and '*gemenr*' masculinity.

The spaces and conventions of global business practice subject white-collar men to a corporate discipline that regulates their appearance, time and activities, as the article on Jianguomen man exemplifies. They work amidst brand new, gleaming hard-edged office blocks, designed to facilitate a masculinist global corporate culture of hard-minded efficiency, intense competition and ruthless profit-making. Global business values promoted in business books and articles encourage Jianguomen men to develop certain characteristics, as they hope to become the next Li Kaifu; to this end, bodily and intellectual techniques work their way into the lives of white-collar men, including my informants, pushing the wearing of suits, and English language ability, numeracy skills and other forms of specialised knowledge, as Andrew Ross and Xu Rong point out. However, as they strive to perform white-collar masculinities in appearance and behaviour in these globally recognisable corporate spaces, they are also subject to work-based and social expectations to perform a more locally-embedded masculinity, rooted in homosocial activities oriented to building and cementing networks of patronage and 'relationships' (*guanxi*), which tend to discriminate against women in general and men outside the network. As described by my informants and in many articles, the pressures and responsibilities of maintaining a high-level lifestyle, combine with corporate discipline and tyrannical bosses who centralise power, to make white-collar men work long hours and feel extremely pressured. Despite these challenges, white-collar men outside the office are usually able to pursue their largely globally-inflected consumer desires, as I examine in the next chapter on leisure activities. Even then, however, whether they like it or not, they are often also deeply involved with pervasive business-related *guanxi* activities,[310] which are not highlighted in the media discourse, pointing to the interplay of discursive notions and practices that complicate the subjectivities of Chinese white-collar men, rendering them more complex than the glossy magazine articles on white-collar sports and leisure might suggest.

[310] Although I examine in particular locally-embedded forms of *guanxi*, it also has its global aspects. Likewise, consumerism is certainly not entirely global in form; it also contains local aspects.

# Chapter Five
# Time-out: White-Collar Men away from Work and Family

Leisure venues and the equipment, spaces and practices associated with them form part of the assemblages shaping white-collar masculinities; they contribute to the spatialised and corporeal constitution of white-collar subjectivities in specific ways, just as do the corporate spaces discussed in the previous chapter. White-collar employees' consumer capacities give them access to a wide range of leisure activities, many of which they enthusiastically participate in, in part as an outlet from work pressures, but also for their association with the status items of consumer culture identified with white-collar images. Participation in different kinds of leisure or 'out of work' activities also offers the arrived and aspiring white-collar subject the opportunity to engage in and display a range of social relationships that contribute to and consolidate the advantages and interests of white-collar status. These activities, enacted in specific places, are performative of a masculine status defined through the exclusion and objectification of women. Some of these activities, such as sports, require a process of training and familiarisation—habituation, in other words – before the practitioner becomes proficient not necessarily at playing the sport itself, but in the conventions surrounding it and in the use of specialised vocabulary. These activities, venues and cultural objects, including choice of sports, restaurants, shops, films and travel, clearly signal white-collar man's insertion in global culture and his taste and status as part of the global middle-class.

The 'desiring subject' expounded by Lisa Rofel – the 'individual who operates through sexual, material and affective self-interest', and whose self-centred desires are justified as, in Rofel's words, 'universal human nature', in contrast to the collective goals of 'socialist experimentalism' in the Mao era – offers a useful lens to reflect on the gendered character of white-collar men's activities in general, but perhaps particularly with regard to practices of leisure and consumption.[311] It positions white-collar subjects as naturally aspiring to, *inter*

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[311] Lisa Rofel, 2007, op. cit., p. 3. Rofel explains that her understanding of desire derives in part from Deluze and Guattari's emphasis that 'desire is produced not simply within the individual but through social worlds' and that 'desire's heterogeneous, productive, polyvocal, synthetic, and 'nomadic' qualities were unleashed by the 'capitalist machine'.' She agrees with their critique of psychoanalytic theories: 'As against psychoanalysis, especially the yoke of Oedipus that establishes a totalizing subjectivity, represses the multiplicity of desire, and defines desire as lack, Deleuze and Guattari stress the need to see desire as productive flows rather than unities and as excessive mobility rather than sedentary stasis. 'Lack' is not the product of an Oedipal complex but the creation of a dominant class in a market economy.' Rofel also draws from Foucault's understanding of ''desire'

*alia*, leisure practices of consumption in commercialised spaces and in the interior spaces of their homes. These relatively exclusive 'global' leisure practices, which white-collar men participate in through their consumer spending power, are significant components of the status that dominant discourse gives to white-collar men, and construct their figures as desirable 'goals' for aspiring youth.

At the same time, as different kinds of 'desiring subjects', white-collar men also enjoy spending their leisure time participating in homosocial networking practices in restaurants, karaoke clubs, massage parlours, saunas and suchlike – in other words in gendered social practices far removed from global 'models' though widely associated with 'regional' models – which have become pervasive in local business culture, and which Mayfair Mei-hui Yang and others define as part of '*guanxi* [relationships] capitalism'.[312] To gain promotion, for example, corporate employees may have to show their adeptness at negotiating these business entertainment practices, so for some white-collar men, participation in these activities may at least partly be motivated by the desire for personal career advancement. White-collar men may also develop 'expressive' connections, for example treating their '*gemenr*' (mates) on a night out.[313] However, media images tend to exclude those practices that do not easily correspond with the image of white-collar men as global consumers, such as instrumental *guanxi* practices and references to activities that might be politically sensitive, such as religious and non-Party political activities. Nevertheless, as I discuss below, evidence from my fieldwork as well as other sources suggests that white-collar employees, men and women, not uncommonly deploy their spending power in contributing to the religious revival of recent years, in which the number of followers of Buddhism and Christianity (Protestantism and Catholicism) has increased hugely, and new churches and temples have been built across China.[314] Notwithstanding white-collar men's strong identifications with the consumer values of dominant discursively-formed images, their participation in the 'religious revival' indicates

[as] that site through which individuals make themselves subjects of specific regimes of power/knowledge.' She concurs with his 'genealogical method in which he traces how, in different historical moments, various cultural epistemes led people to search for the truth of their being in desire.' Rofel, 2007, n. 43, 211-12.

[312] See Yang, 2002, op. cit., 459-476.

[313] Although one must bear in mind Yunxiang Yan's caution that these two types of *guanxi* do not exist in pure form, but rather 'co-exist in almost all activities of gift giving, but in different ratios.' Yan, 1996, op. cit., 45.

[314] See, for example, Dexter Roberts, 'China's Spiritual Awakening: Why a growing number of successful urban professionals are flocking to Buddhism', *BusinessWeek* (January 21, 2008): 50.

that the market is not enough to replace the vacuum left by the collapse of belief in political ideology.[315]

The political scientist, Shaoguang Wang has also identified 'depoliticisation' as an aspect of leisure practices in post-Mao China, which he describes as the leadership's strategy of 'keeping bad things in check', alongside the promotion of 'commercialization', 'Westernization', 'privatization', and 'diversification.'[316] The depoliticised, religious-leaning economic-minded white-collar male subject of contemporary China, who draws his masculine power and authority from wielding his spending power, clearly contrasts with the masculine subject of the Mao era whose political credentials established his authority, and were tools for him to get things done. In today's China, the apolitical, religious man's masculinity is symbolised by his economic standing. This does not mean, however, that young white-collar men do not want to join the Communist Party. Indeed, quite a few of the ambitious young office workers I knew in Beijing were members, and when I put it to them, they did not deny that many people nowadays join the party for instrumental reasons, to further their careers. They said that Party membership is helpful in getting higher-level jobs.[317] Moreover, in line with women's relatively minor participation in many areas of the public sphere, the Party is very much a man's club: only 20 percent of its members are women.[318]

The 'impossibility of politics in China', to use Rebecca Karl's phrase,[319] is a factor which has strongly shaped the lives of all Chinese people for the best part of two decades, since the post-1989 tightening of controls on political expression, and the accelerated economic marketisation. Its impact is notably seen in the growth of an educated middle class dedicated to enrichment and consumerised leisure pursuits, and is commonly explained as a 'normalization of everyday life' (after the huge upheavals of the Cultural Revolution), echoing Rofel's observation about a return to a discourse based on the premise of 'universal human nature'. Karl argues that '[t]his normalization is underpinned by an endless pursuit of the

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[315] Furthermore, Vivienne Shue argues that religions' claims to truth are contesting the Party's legitimacy, in 'Legitimacy Crisis in China?' in *State and Society in 21st-Century China: Crisis, Contention and Legitimation*, ed. Peter Hays Gries and Stanley Rosen (New York and London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), 38-41.

[316] Shaoguang Wang, 'The Politics of Private Time: Changing Leisure Patterns in Urban China', in *Urban Spaces in Contemporary China: The Potential for Autonomy and Community in Post-Mao China*, ed. Deborah S. Davis, Richard Kraus, Barry Naughton and Elizabeth J. Perry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 165-9.

[317] See also Michael Delaney, 'Chinese Flock to Join Party', *Times Higher Education*, http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storyCode=197463§ioncode=26 (accessed September 17, 2009).

[318] 'Communist Party of China', ChinaToday.com, http://www.chinatoday.com/org/cpc/ (accessed September 17, 2009).

[319] Rebecca E. Karl, ''Joining Tracks with the World': The Impossibility of Politics in China', *Radical Philosophy* (2005): 20-27.

commodification of labour-power and primitive accumulation of capital in support of the economic and juridical necessity of the state and its new class referents'; and 'is most often promoted as the urgent pursuit of the convergence between China and the world summed up in the phrase 'joining tracks with the world'.'[320] White-collar men are amongst the new class referents to which Karl refers. Their activities outside the office are better comprehended when understood as prevalently constituted through this ostensibly depoliticised, globally-inflected, socio-economic framework. The new white-collar men benefit from the polarised disparities of this framework;[321] their relatively high spending enables them to enjoy leisure practices at the vanguard of these changes and that are most often, though not necessarily discursively characterized as Westernised, privatized and diversified.[322]

The white-collar male subjectivities constructed and enacted through leisure venues, vocabularies and pursuits display the complex intermingling of global and local discourses and practices that characterise the 'consumer' and 'corporate' masculinities explored in previous chapters. In the form of the white-collar man, the 'desiring subject', born out of neoliberal policies, is suggestive of the hegemonic global masculinity of 'modernity', associated with Connell's transnational hegemonic subject, who plays in expensive, upscale 'playgounds' yet who also sees it as his natural privilege to enjoy activities undertaken with other men, premised on the exclusion and subordination of women function to sustain male advantage. Leisure activities thus add particular features to the assemblage of white-collar masculinity, naturalizing masculine privilege as part of the government's modernization narrative and its attendant values linking individual desire to 'human nature'.

### China's new discourse of leisure

With the changing nature of leisure in urban China, white-collar men's emphasis on achievement and success as key markers of the new, individualised subject propagated by Li Kaifu and others, is echoed by the privatization of leisure. The pursuit of an activity for self-satisfaction, either on one's own or with friends, has become more and more common in post-Mao China, as leisure practices are 'privatized', in Shaoguang Wang's term, moving away

[320] Karl, ibid., 21.
[321] Shaoguang Wang, op. cit., 165-6.
[322] However, even those *guanxi* practices, which are framed as local, are often infused with what are seen as modern values and practices, such as business socialising in karaoke bars and saunas, as I discuss below. White-collar men's practices in leisure sites, as elsewhere, display the influence of a mix of different discursive formations, but my point here is that very often these 'local' practices take place across an assembly of sites which have been produced through the dominant/hegemonic discursive formations advocating self-gratification and a happy life, such as expensive, glitzy resturants, karaoke bars and saunas.

from the mass activities of the Maoist era. Lisa Rofel's 'desiring subject' epitomizes this new discourse of self-fulfilment. As I mentioned above, she suggests that the individual sacrifice of personal desire for the good of the community that was encouraged during the socialist period, is now viewed as unnatural; and a discourse which promotes work and individual competition to achieve one's personal desires has been particularly prominent since the early 1990s.[323] As well as incorporating global and local aspects, these desires and the practices they inhabit are strongly inflected by gender, sexuality, class and generational referents, in which despite different gendered performances distinguishing white-collar men of different ages and backgrounds, women are systematically used as foils for displays of male prowess, assumptions of heterosexuality are largely unbroken, and money and status are passports to masculine privilege. Furthermore, the white-collar subjectivities formed in these contexts need to be read within wider societal shifts in discourses of desire, which Everett Zhang has documented through a focus on neoliberal influences on medical discourses around impotence.

In an analysis of the large rise in numbers of men seeking medical treatment for impotence, Zhang uses a similar phrase to Rofel's in the specific context of the emergence of a discourse of sexual desire, arguing that a new 'subject of desire' has recently appeared in China: '[…] I argue that a new type of subject—the subject of desire—formed in post-Mao China and that 'impotence as an epidemic' was a force that helped shape the person experiencing erectile failure into a subject of desire by encouraging him to seek medical treatment.'[324] Zhang ascribes this to changes in what he calls 'moral symptomatology', which had not previously acknowledged impediments to the fulfillment of individual sexual desire as conditions worthy of treatment:

> The production of medical knowledge, and its institutionalization in the birth of *nanke*, was not only a response to illness experiences but also an effect of power. I describe the exercise of such power through what I call 'moral symptomatology.' Moral symptomatology is a mixture of institutionalized judgment, knowledge, and practice concerning what illness symptoms qualify as disease and whether an illness deserves medical attention. I highlight the moral nature of such a mixture, showing how illnesses can be accepted or rejected as diseases by the medical system through a moral judgment consistent with both the power structure and the ethos of the larger social context. In the case of China, a moral symptomatology hostile to sexual desire was rooted in the social processes that arose under the ethos of Maoist collectivism hostile to individual desire.[325]

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[323] Rofel, op. cit, 3.
[324] Everett Yuehong Zhang, 'The Birth of Nanke (Men's Medicine) in China: The Making of the Subject of Desire,' *American Ethnologist* 34, no. 3 (August 2007): 492.
[325] Zhang, ibid., 492.

As with Rofel, Zhang draws a distinction between the Maoist, socialist, period, during which in his view men's desire for sexual self-fulfillment was not encouraged, and the post-Mao, reform period in which seeking to fulfil personal sexual desire has become discursively and morally acceptable, within culturally and socially observed limits. The shift in 'moral symptomatology' on impotency that Zhang describes reflects the moral shift in 'institutionalized judgment, knowledge, and practice' of personal desire in the broader terms that Rofel sets out.

Yunxiang Yan, similarly, has written about how consumerist ideology has replaced communist ideology in what he calls the 'postreform era', spawning the pursuit of private desire in 'new public spaces', 'sort[ing] consumers into different social groups (and sometimes different spaces as well).'[326] One such group is undoubtedly white-collar men, who define themselves through their choice of leisure activities and where they practise them.

> A significant change in public life during the postreform era has been the disappearance of frequent mass rallies, voluntary work, collective parties, and other forms of what I prefer to call 'organized sociality,' in which the state (through its agents) plays the central role. In its place are various newly emerged forms of private gatherings in public yet commercialized ventures, such as shopping malls, restaurants, cafés, bars, and clubs….. [celebrating] individuality and private desires in unofficial social/special contexts.[327]

The move from collectivism to individualism in leisure practices and spaces exemplifies a profound cultural, moral and ideological shift in expanding: consumer-driven individual freedom, distracting public attention from politically-sensitive issues, and thereby helping 'the CCP maintain political stability and regain legitimacy in post-1989 China.'[328]

In line with Rofel and Zhang's analyses, the 'new cultural values' accompanying this shift are part of the discourse of 'naturalised' desires in China, in which conceptions of social gender performance are naturalised in leisure practices as much as at work and in the family, as I demonstrate elsewhere in this thesis. Significantly, it is only the middle class which has the economic capacity to make the consumption of most imported goods and services an everyday lifestyle choice, as Yan's research on McDonald's shows:

> Consumption of imported material goods also carries social meaning. As I note elsewhere, when the fast-food giant McDonald's entered the Beijing market, local customers flooded into the restaurants to taste American cuisine. As a result of constant interaction between McDonald's management and local customers, the fast-food outlets

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[326] Yunxiang Yan, 'The Politics of Consumerism in Chinese Society', in *China Briefing 2000: The Continuing Transformation*, ed. Tyrene White (Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2000), 184.
[327] Yan, ibid., 184.
[328] Yan, ibid., 185.

> have been transformed into middle-class establishments where consumers from different social backgrounds can, in addition to dining, linger for hours, relaxing, chatting, reading, enjoying the music, or having parties. Through these activities, Chinese customers redefine the concept of fast food and use McDonald's restaurants as a bridge to bring them the experience of consuming a Chinese version of American food culture and, in a larger sense, to link them with the outside world.[329]

Here Yan demonstrates the association between middle-class elements such as white-collar workers and American, or Western, leisure practices like eating in McDonald's, though at the same time also makes clear that Chinese consumers 'redefine' these practices in a 'localisation' (*bendihua*) process They take up multiple positions in the subjectivities they perform at McDonald's, combining 'global' and 'local' values, vocabularies and practices, and link their McDonald's performances into a wider assemblage of locales and techniques, all of which come together to produce particular meanings in the Chinese context. For instance, McDonald's restaurants in the West are not usually deemed 'middle-class establishments' where people 'linger for hours'. Furthermore, Mark, the owner of the small computer firm, and I discussed the 'localisation' of Kentucky Fried Chicken menus, which he called *bendihua*. The localized menus proclaimed that they offered a healthier choice of products than the original American menu, and that they offered food more suited to the tastes of the Chinese consumer. This was framed within a larger argument that the revamped menus contributed to the development of a strong, healthy nation. Appadurai's concept of the 'repatriation of difference' to which I referred in the previous chapter is again useful here to understand the mix of the global and the local, by describing how practices are reworked to fit into broader state agendas (and then re-inserted into global discursive formations).

**Leisure consumption and white-collar homosociality**

As we have seen in the last chapter, pressure of work is commonly represented as part of the white-collar worker's 'lot'. It is therefore used to recommend a range of leisure activities and interests, both to protect the white-collar employee's health and to give him a sense of personal fulfilment.[330] The ethnographic data that I discuss in this section shows that Chinese

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[329] Yan, ibid., 190.

[330] Media articles propagate the notion of leisure pursuits as helpful ways to de-stress. For example, an article in the popular magazine *Xiandai baojian* (Modern health) advises that 'painting, calligraphy, chess, sports, entertainment and such like can add many delights to life (*neng gei ren zengtian xuduo shenghuo lequ*), can adjust the tempo of life (*tiaojie shenghuo jiezou*), and break you away from an atmosphere of monotonous tension (*dandiao jinzhang*) towards happiness and relaxation (*huankuai he qingsong*).' It warns of the dangers of working too hard because of 'excessive greed' (*tanyu guogao*): 'If one harbours excessive desire for things like money and riches (*dui jinqian, caifu zhi lei xincun guogao yuwang*), that is greed, which causes long-term mental and nervous stress (*naoshenjing changqi jinzhang*), makes one's heart and brain race faster, produces a tempo out

white-collar men's personal consumption of leisure is inflected with notions both from 'hegemonic' global discourses and local practices. I argue that Chinese white-collar professional men, while aspiring to participate in and be identified with a sophisticated global middle-class consumer culture, do so in ways that are rooted in local custom, naturalising contradictory yet mutually intersecting subjectivities. Hence, the same individual enjoys 'traditional' homosocial activities, including some predicated on the explicit subordination of women, alongside individualised leisure activities that confirm his modern credentials. As I suggest later on in this section, the contradictory subject positions established by these activities demonstrate that despite the emergence of the individualised white-collar subject, in the terms suggested by Yunxiang Yan above, many assumptions and practices surrounding gender roles and attributes remain locked in the naturalised positions of earlier times.

Media articles about the leisure pursuits of white-collar men tend to accentuate the 'global' attributes of the places they frequent, the consumer activities they enjoy and their imagined desires. For example, the article about the 'Jianguomen man' quoted in the previous chapter, argues they enjoy 'singing, clubbing, ten-pin bowling, shuffleboard…in short, they will not let anything good fun and trendy slip by (*haowan you shishang de dongxi tamen dou buhui fangguo*).'[331] Their exuberance might be because most of them are unmarried and far from home', a category into which many of my informants, including Johnny fell; and 'since most of them are single, and their families are not in Beijing, they do their utmost to look for excuses to be happy.'[332] Jianguomen men are more discerning than the average bar-goer, the article contends: they 'occasionally hang out in bars' (*ou'er ye hui qu paoba*), but much prefer more refined spots to the 'raucous Sanlitun' (*xuannao de Sanlitun*) bar district.[333] Besides this, the article relates, Jianguomen men 'have a heartfelt love of good food' (*dui meishi dou you yizhong youzhong de aihao*)[334], to the extent that they will, as my informant Wen often did, 'often drive tens of kilometres just to have seafood or game (*yewei*)' where, in contrast with his business banquets, they can really enjoy good dishes with friends. Another increasingly

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of sync with regular physiological functions (*yu zhengchang shengli jineng bu xietiao de jiepai*): it harms the brain, mind and body (*shang nao, shang xinshen, shang ti*).' 'Shudao zhongnian nanren de 'yali yuan'' (Removing middle-aged men's 'sources of pressure'), *Xiandai baojian* (Modern Health) no. 9 (2006): 41. *Xiandai baojian* (Modern health*)*, which has a circulation of 100,000 and costs 10 yuan, is principally targeted at 'metropolitan women and families' (*dushi nüxing yu jiating*), which could be because the health of the family is widely regarded as the woman's responsibility: 'Xiandai baojian: kanwu jieshao' (Modern Health: publication introduction), Liulan wang (gotoread.com), http://2797.gotoread.com/mag/12199/ (accessed August 21, 2008).

[331] Feng, op. cit., 69.

[332] Feng, ibid., 69.

[333] Bars and restaurants 'with exotic atmosphere and elegance' (*you yiyu qingdiao youya*), such as TGI Friday. Feng, ibid., 69.

[334] Feng, ibid., 69.

common white-collar male pastime is touring by car. 'Perhaps,' the article concludes, 'wandering about from place to place (*liulang-piaobo*) is a dream in everyone's hearts, and Jianguomen men are no exception.'[335]

Such media representations set out a series of white-collar subject positions that clearly intersected with the self-descriptions of many of my informants. Johnny, the web designer from Fujian, frequently participated in similar activities to those described above. He was a frequent visitor to the new public spaces that 'Jianguomen man' enjoys: the restaurants, the malls, cafes and clubs, and, I would add, airports. Johnny regularly ate out in McDonald's, KFC, and other Western restaurants, but also often ate out in Chinese restaurants, favouring the upmarket chains which had lush interiors and superior service, as he had the disposable income to patronise restaurants priced beyond the reach of working-class Beijingers. Johnny lived within walking distance of Wangfujing, the most well-known upmarket shopping street in Beijing, and often went to the shopping malls there to browse, buy and eat. The landmark 'Oriental Plaza' (*Dongfang guangchang*), which boasts large numbers of global luxury brand-name outlets, cinemas, and access to the Beijing underground system was a favourite. Alternatively, he would take a taxi to Ikea, as I mentioned in my profile of him in chapter three. Johnny enjoyed foreign travel, as I also mentioned, and regularly went to Beijing capital airport to meet foreign friends and colleagues, to go on holiday and occasionally for business trips. At home with friends, in the evenings and weekends he would sometimes sit around the TV in his IKEA-furnished lounge to watch Western movies on DVDs. When he was by himself, he told me, he often surfed the net and chatted online with friends in China and around the world, many of whom he had initially met online. Some of them, he revealed, became his sexual partners.

Jason, who was working to improve the website for his mother's manufacturing company, for the most part enjoyed similar leisure activities to Johnny's. He particularly enjoyed eating out at quite expensive restaurants, Western and Chinese, and also enjoyed Western fast food such as KFC. His favourite 'hangout' was any branch of Starbucks. He liked the clean, modern styling of China's Starbucks' branches, and he would often sit there using his laptop, or chatting with friends, drinking cappuccinos and eating blueberry muffins. As I mentioned in chapter three, he was a keen tennis fan, as a player and a spectator, and he followed the international tennis scene closely. He was even chosen to be a helper at the China Open tennis tournament, because of his good English, his experience of living abroad and his

[335] Feng, ibid., 69.

enthusiasm for tennis. His choice of tennis – seen as a rather exclusive sport – suited his affluent, urban image.[336] Jason's other huge passion was electronic gadgets: he often went to Beijing's huge computer malls to browse and purchase new items. At home, either alone or with friends, he enjoyed playing the latest video games he had bought in the malls, and was an avid reader of the technology press, pursuits which, in China as in the West, are predominantly coded as masculine. Similarly to Johnny, he used online chat programmes to keep in touch with his friends around the world, and meet potential romantic partners.

If these leisure activities denote the consuming individual's access to practices spawned by globally-inflected market interests, others suggest a much greater attachment to local custom and particularly to activities that shore up masculine status through his homosocial positioning. When eating with groups of friends, I noticed that Johnny would often subsidize less well-off friends when the bill came, in a display of 'generosity' (*dafang*), widely considered to be a manly attribute associated with historically-embedded codes of masculinity such as those of the homosocial *hao han*, which I discussed in chapter two.[337] The less well-off friends would respond to Johnny's generosity by, for example, bringing back products from their hometown as gifts for him after the Spring Festival.[338] Johnny's friends, who through eating out with Johnny signalled aspirations to pursue leisure activities in the relatively expensive sites frequented by corporate employees, at the same time practised '*guanxi* masculinity', deliberately taking steps to maintain a relationship with Johnny using culturally embedded techniques of appropriate behaviour and obligations between male friends. Jason was even more demonstrably generous than Johnny. He would sometimes foot the entire bill for large groups of friends eating together; at other times, when shopping, he would buy very expensive consumer items as gifts for friends, neatly bringing together masculinities of leisure practices, consumption and *dafang*. This deployment of 'traditional'

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[336] Xu Rong interviewed middle-class people to find out what sports they most often played: the results were tennis, swimming, badminton, table tennis, and basketball. He concluded that one can use Bourdieu's theory of 'judging class difference' (*panduan jieji chayi*) through sports categories 'to explain the current situation in China.' Xu Rong, op. cit., 289.

[337] In a semi-structured interview with me on how he conceived masculinity, Johnny outlined one kind of masculinity as manifested in the ability of leading political figures such as Deng Xiaoping to get things done and solve people's problems because of their powerful connections, suggestive of the *wen* of the Confucian 'sage-king'. Another kind manifested in a strong physique, echoing 'modern' assumptions about manliness, and also historical *wu* values predominantly emphasising physical prowess. However, for me, more importantly, Johnny's models of masculinities point to two of the most practical strategies of power for men in China today: on one level, physical strength (hence Johnny's gym going) and, on another, the cultivation of connections, or 'relationships' (*guanxi*), in homosocial activities such as treating friends in restaurants, as Johnny does here.

[338] There may be an element of 'expressive' *guanxi* in this generosity between friends – Yunxiang Yan defines 'expressive gift exchanges' as 'ends in themselves [which] often reflect a long-term relationship between a giver and a recipient' – but instrumental aims may also have been part of the motivation for the gift giving. Yan, op. cit., 1996, 45.

subject positions alongside those of the sophisticated modern consumer, demonstrates the 'composite' or 'assembled' gender subjectivity that Johnny and his friends construct through their everyday practices. In this instance, there is no conflict or contradiction between the main positions they identify with in going out to eat together; indeed, this is good example of the 'expansion' of apparently inconsistent masculine subjectivities in China, combining discursive techniques in practices that are simultaneously globalised white-collar and specifically Chinese.

Johnny also occasionally visited nightclubs. On one Saturday night, a group of us went to E-Shock, a fashionable nightclub in east Beijing because Johnny had obtained free entrance tickets. The group comprised Johnny, Kerstin, his German tenant, with whom he practised English; Bing, Kerstin's Chinese language exchange partner who worked for a transnational telecommunications firm (another young white-collar male); and me. The club was fitted with international standard lights and sound, and pounded out very loud dance music: it looked like clubs I have been to in London, Singapore and Hong Kong. The cover fee was 50 yuan and the drinks were expensive, so the clientele were relatively well off. Many of the (mostly young) men were in suits, as if they had come straight from the office. Most of the clientele were Chinese, with only a few, mostly male foreigners present. At one point, the music changed and a spotlight fell on a scantily clad Caucasian – possibly Russian[339] – woman with long blonde hair, who descended from above on a moving platform and gyrated sexily round a pole to a song with very sexual lyrics. The entire dance floor stopped to watch this performance. There were more men than women in the club and this performance was clearly for them. Johnny and Bing did not appear surprised at all, but Kerstin and I were shocked. This was outwith our expectations for an international-style dance club catering to the city's business elite; it was an instance when Kerstin and I, as the two 'outsiders' present, had to confront the disjuncture between what to us seemed to be a surprising manifestation of masculine subject positions, and what to our hosts seemed to be a 'normal' expression of masculine interest in a particular setting and space. Encapsulating Sheldon's Lu's conceptualization of the construction of a 'transnational male imaginary', which I discussed in chapter two, these Beijing white-collar men could be thought of as situating themselves as imagined sexual players at a global level, where they had the spending power to pay, for example, for the opportunity to ogle a sexually objectified blonde Caucasian woman, and therefore engage with the feminine 'West' as a dominant sexual subject. The entire scene seemed to demonstrate the acceptability of blatant

[339] Scantily clad Russian dancing girls have been a noted feature of clubs in Beijing in recent years, according to Johnny.

sexual objectification of women in the white-collar world, even to their girlfriends standing next to them in the darkness of the dance floor, literally bearing out Kathleen Erwin's point, mentioned in chapter two, that Chinese women are eclipsed in these re-imagined sexual relationships. The desiring masculine subject of this leisure activity appeared as the naturalised beneficiary of the hierarchical gender arrangements of the government's modernization narrative.

At the Sanyuanqiao school where I worked I often chatted with Peter, an English language graduate in his mid-twenties, and whom I asked to tell me about his leisure activities. He said he 'played cards and ball' with his male friends, and sometimes just took some 'exercise'. When I asked him to explain what he meant by 'playing ball', he looked momentarily surprised at my ignorance, then told me 'basketball' (*lanqiu*). Basketball (which is associated with the middle class) was almost a default leisure time activity in his life, he explained, as it was for many of his male university classmates whom he still hung out with. According to anthropologist Kevin Latham, drawing on the arguments of Andrew Morris, a historian of modern China, the huge popularity of contemporary global basketball culture reshaping the 'popular cultural identity of millions of mainly young Chinese.'[340] The 'strongly individualistic elements of contemporary global basketball culture – which include the way that stars are marketed and present themselves – have found their way into Chinese basketball fandom, whether it be through the desire to be a unique hero like Michael Jordan or Dennis Rodman or through the desire to experience the personal exhilaration of scoring a 'slam dunk' basket.'[341] One of my teenage students at the Zhongguancun school where I worked had gone so far as to take the same English name as his favourite American NBA basketball star; and he told me this was not uncommon. Yet, as Latham points out, this does not mean that young Chinese men are aspiring to be American: rather, they are 'engaging, in their own ways, with a negotiation of their own very Chinese identities.'[342] The point is 'generally to be successful, as a Chinese, *like* the top American stars, but not become one.'[343]

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[340] Kevin Latham, *Pop Culture China! Media, Arts and Lifestyle* (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 2007), 273; citing Andrew Morris, ''I Believe You can Fly': Basketball Culture in Postsocialist China', in *Popular China: Unofficial Culture in a Globalizing Society*, ed. Perry Link, Richard P. Madsen and Paul G. Pickowitz (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002), 9-38. Playing basketball was already popular before the reform era in China, but in recent years the NBA has received huge coverage in the Chinese media and interest in the very strongly marketed 'global basketball culture' in a wide sense (covering clothing, the players, the techniques and so on) has become a prominent part of many young urban men's lives.

[341] Latham, ibid., 273

[342] Latham, ibid., 273

[343] Latham, ibid., 273

Chinese white-collar men clearly take up global discourses 'in their own ways', as I argued at the start of this section. From this perspective, playing basketball appears as much as a locally embedded form of homosociality as a component of a new popular culture. Young men can be seen all over Beijing's university campuses playing basketball. Peter said that whenever he wanted to play, both when he was at university and since, he would just go along to a basketball court and join in, a practice which other informants confirmed as widespread.

Bruce, the 25-year-old confident, ambitious and hard-working Anhui-born manager of the Sanyuanqiao language school, especially enjoyed playing football. Yet, in contrast with Peter, his enjoyment of such a homosocial activity added an explicitly hierarchical element to his masculine subjectivity. I pointed out that football was largely an all-male activity and asked him if, like Peter, he mostly socialised with male friends. He said he did, and explained why:

> For me, I have many friends, these boys are real friends (*ting gemenr)*: in Beijing dialect it is '*ting gemenr'*, which means real friends (*ting pengyou*). In fact men are more magnanimous when they're together (*zai yiqi de shihou nanhaizi bijiao dadu*): they don't care so much about little things (*buhui tai zaihu xiao de shiqing*). So getting along with men is more relaxed (*gen nanren xiangchu bijiao qingsong*); whatever you chat about with men, they don't care about the details. But women are possibly more meticulous and more sensitive (*danshi nüsheng keneng bijiao jingxi, bijiao mingan*). If you chat with them about something quite detailed, they will care about it very much; so when you socialize with them or make friends, there might be a bit of a problem (*jiaowang de shihou, huozhe zuo pengyou, keneng hui you yidian wenti*).

Bruce was not alone in his view of ascribing an innate larger vision to men, here developed through the initial association with football. Many men and women I talked to told me that men were only concerned about life's big issues, not the little details, whereas women, were deemed to be naturally predisposed towards trivia and gossip indicating a gendered assumption which the arrival of the new masculine subject apparently has not shifted.[344] For Bruce and many men, in what perhaps is a contemporary rendering of the *wu* masculinity which I discussed in chapter two, spending time with their *gemenr* was simply less complicated and less hassle than when women were around: they did not have to be so careful about what they said and did. So, he would 'go out to sing in karaoke bars and have a drink' with his friends, and when still at university, would 'mostly drink and play football' with his friends. *(wo shang xue de shihou zui duo de shi he jiu he ti qiu*).'

Women did not feature in these largely homosocial leisure activities. Indeed, Bruce's view of women in general was that they should be around for a man when all his friends were

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[344] See Evans, 1997, op. cit.

otherwise occupied. 'A girlfriend is important to have by your side (*you yige nüpengyou zai ni shenbian hen zhongyao*)': to fit around the man's busy schedule, and to provide support, when required, for their male partner. This kind of assumption corresponds with the dominant gender discourse of the reform era, as discussed previously, which positions women as naturally caring and attentive, and men as more actively engaged with life's big issues, as Bruce's own words above confirm For Bruce, it signified his self-constitution in an assemblage of gendered assumptions and practices that illustrate the bewildering array of subject positions available to the white-collar man, ranging from the women-excluding and belittling *wu* masculinity, *gemenr* homosociality, the 'macho' masculinity of the 'modern' male subject who plays football and goes out drinking, to the polished, smooth-talking and ambitious white-collar subject, intent on self-fulfilment through achieving material goals.

Many of my informants' leisure interests, as I have discussed above, clearly intersect with the popular media positions attributed to the white-collar man. Noticeably absent from these are leisure activities and attitudes that denote other culturally embedded expectations of masculinity. The homosocial '*gemenr*' activities enjoyed by Johnny, for example, suggests a kind of 'traditional' masculine behaviour not associated with 'Jianguomen man', Bruce's belittling of women could be seen, in part, as an effect of his preference for homosocial company, and similarly, is absent from media descriptions of white-collar man. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to discuss the historical and cultural discourses constitutive of these activities. Suffice it to say, however, that they suggest white-collar man's insertion in a multiplicity of discursive possibilities in institutions and social structures only tenuously linked into dominant media.

Peter similarly claimed not to be particularly interested in political issues, but he was concerned that China should continue its embrace of the market and its participation in the world economy, thereby raising its global status. When hanging out with his 'gemenr' in homosocial groups they covered 'big' topics associated with men's interests. He told me they 'chatted about China's current situation (*tan Zhongguo de xianzhuang*): the economy […], also politics, and China's status (*Zhongguo de diwei*), global status (*zai shijie de diwei*).' When they tired of this, their thoughts turned to sex, he told me: 'if we had nothing to do we talked about women, a global problem (*shijie wenti*)!' Peter's concern with the economic performance of China reflected the personal dividend he stood to earn, as a member of the middle class, from growing prosperity, and showed his investment in a consumption-oriented masculinity. Moreover, his interest in China's global status reflects his participation in the new middle-class imaginary of China's affluent young male urbanites, keen to taking their place on

the global stage as equal players in neoliberal markets with young men from the global North.

**Business socialising**

My ethnographic data in this section on pervasive practices of '*yingchou*' (business socialising) point to a series of subject positions which are explicitly 'local' (and maybe regional) but which are not 'hidden' or 'excluded' as components of white-collar masculinity. Here is an instance when the global/local does not pan out into the desirable/articulated and the 'excluded/obscured'. The masculine subjectivities of white-collar men are constituted through practices of clear and sexual exploitation of a subjectified feminine other, in this case, of young female migrant workers in entertainment venues. This adds to the cases discussed above in which masculinity is constructed through the subjection of the sexy female pole dancer, or through the denigration of 'un-masculine' leisure activities such as belly dancing. These practices may appear as conflicting to 'outsiders', but to my informants they were accepted parts of life for white-collar men. This also is an instance when the corporeality of the masculine body emerges, clearly, as the site of competing discourses and desires, in terms of the differing values of bodily capital that are deployed.

White-collar leisure practices are not solely undertaken for a release from pressure of work, as I have already suggested. Many after-work activities take place as part of business socialising (*yingchou*) with clients and colleagues, and signify an inescapable 'misery' (*xinsuan*) and additional pressure in white collar men's life, according to an article originally printed in the *Guangzhou Daily* (*Guangzhou ribao*: '[Business] socialising' (*yingchou*) is something they 'cannot evade' (*tuituo budiao*).[345] The article relates the story of a 'financial securities company's trading department manager' who has at least three social engagements with clients every week.[346] He claims to get nervous if a day goes by without seeing his major client.[347] However, business socialising is not altogether an unwelcome pressure, according to the manager. On the plus side, he argues it 'boosts knowledge and experience' (*zhang jianshi*) and 'builds friendships' (*jiao pengyou*), though more negatively, he suggests that the 'wining

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[345] This article was originally published by the *Guangzhou Daily*, according to the website *Jinrong jie* (Finance World), which has republished it: 'Bailing fengguang beihou de xinsuan: tuituo budiao 'gelei' yingchou' (The Grief Behind the White-Collar Scene: 'All Kinds' of Inevitable Socialising), *Jinrong jie* (Finance World), http://news2.jrj.com.cn/news/20060217/000000060862.htm (accessed August 22, 2008).

[346] 'Bailing fengguang beihou de xinsuan: tuituo budiao 'gelei' yingchou' (The Grief Behind the White-Collar Scene: 'All Kinds' of Inevitable Socialising), *Jinrong jie* (Finance World), http://news2.jrj.com.cn/news/20060217/000000060862.htm (accessed August 22, 2008).

[347] Ibid.

and dining 'wrecks' the body' (*'cuican' shenti de chi-he*).[348] He admits that people have an ulterior motive for such socialising: 'in fact sometimes people really hope to get something out of socialising.[349] Perhaps what they get is invisible, but perhaps it helps their work and career.'[350] He admonishes those who 'overlook' what they get for themselves and 'push all the 'sins' onto 'socialising' (*ba yiqie 'zuiguo' tuidao 'yingchou' shenshang*).'[351] Socialising is half the battle in keeping clients happy, he confesses, and depends on the company's strength and quality of service (*kan gongsi de shili he fuwu de zhiliang*).'[352] Moreover, he has no doubt as to the necessity of socialising: 'If there is no socialising, people will not even know you exist (*lian nide cunzai dou buzhidao*), so how can they possibly take note of you (*zhuyi dao ni*)? Because of this, socialising is an unavoidable (*bukedang*) part of working life.'[353]

The golf course is a favourite venue for entertaining clients.[354] It has even such an essential part of life of working life that the cost has become a daily item of expenditure for some companies. 'Considering golf a 'work requirement' (*gongzuo shang de xuyao*) has already been incorporated into some domestic enterprises' list of daily expenses.'[355] Xu points out that because golf is most often played for business rather than personal purposes, companies usually bear its (high) cost. 'Indeed, for many years now there's been a saying 'chat about golf at the office, and about business at golf' (*zai bangongshi tan gao'erfu, zai gao'erfu tan shengyi*), which also illustrates how rare it is in China for someone to pay for golf out of his own pocket.'[356] Golf has also only recently grown in popularity, as political controls and rhetoric over 'bourgeois' sports have diminished, and it symbolises individualistic – and corrupt – capitalist practices, according to the sports journalist Dan Washburn: 'It's an activity loaded with political implications; there's a reason why the sport, which earned the nickname 'green opium,' was nowhere to be found during the first 35 years of the Communist regime. Golf, the belief goes, is an aristocratic, individualistic, even capitalistic pursuit linked to corruption in the minds of many.'[357] The 'corruption' most often associated with golf in the

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[348] Ibid.
[349] Ibid.
[350] Ibid.
[351] Ibid.
[352] Ibid.
[353] Ibid.
[354] According to Xu Rong, 'a phenomenon that has relatively Chinese features (*bijiao juyou Zhongguo tese de xianxiang*) is inviting clients to play [golf] (*qing kehu da*).' Xu Rong, op. cit., 288.
[355] Xu ibid., 288.
[356] Xu ibid., 288-9.
[357] Dan Washburn, op. cit.

public mind is the bribing of officials with club memberships to facilitate business deals,[358] but also includes businessmen entertaining clients and the secretive agreements they come to on the fairways, far away from the watchful eyes of those who cannot afford the club membership and green fees. The golf club and course is a site with restricted access, only available to those in the upper echelons of business and government circles.

Many of these themes were present in Wen's practice as a sales manager, who frequently participated in business socialising activities, including golf. Although, as I show below, the distinctions of value—negative and affirmative—apparent in the articles I have described above, are less prominent in Wen's own articulation. Many of his weekday evenings after work were taken up – pleasurably, he told me – with entertaining clients, which involved activities such as eating out in high quality restaurants, going for foot and all-body massages, soaking in saunas, karaoke singing[359] and playing golf, the same homosocial activities that many white-collar men – including Wen – also pursued to let their hair down with friends, purely for fun.

Several years before, Wen told me, he had gone to Australia for a few months to learn English, but he found himself bored in the evenings because he could not find the kind of leisure facilities nor the social atmosphere that he enjoyed at home. The restaurants he went to just did not have the same feel as they did in Beijing, he complained, and he could not get used to socialising in bars. He particularly missed having foot massage, and urged me to set up a Chinese-style foot massage centre upon my return to London. This became apparent one evening, when he took me to a huge, high-class leisure development in west Beijing where he often took his clients. It consisted of a collection of buildings, set in their own grounds, housing a large seafood restaurant, hotel, swimming pool and other sports facilities, and separate sauna complexes for men and women. On arrival, after Wen had parked his car (guided to the space by several attendants), we were driven in an electric golf buggy to the main entrance. Wen recommended we start with a relaxing soak in the sauna complex. The male-only area comprised large pools of different temperatures to soak in, a sauna cabin, a steam room and open-plan massage areas with vigorous male masseurs. It was very well

[358] 'Can Probes of Golf Membership Listings Help to Expose Corrupt Officials?' BeijingReview.com, http://www.bjreview.com.cn/forum/txt/2007-03/12/content_58895.htm (accessed August 25, 2008).

[359] Karaoke singing – in tune – is such an important business socialising skill that white-collar workers are flocking to pay for singing classes to gain in confidence and become better at it, according to an article originally published in the *Youth Daily* (Qingnian bao), and republished on the popular Shanghai news portal, EastDay.com (*Dongfang wang*): He Mei, 'Hu shang bailing hua qian 'xue changge': 'maiba xunlianying' zouqiao' (Shanghai white-collar workers pay to 'learn singing': 'king of the mike training camps' in high demand), *Dongfang wang* (Eastday.com). http://why.eastday.com/q/20071212/u1a382543.html (accessed August 22, 2008).

appointed and exuded an air of luxury: many male attendants were on hand to bring towels, drinks and help with the simplest of tasks, quickly and unobtrusively.

Looking round at the clientele, I noticed that a certain type of male body was on display. The clients were generally in their forties and fifties, and most were noticeably overweight, including Wen. The few younger clients seemed fairly slim. The overweight clients seemed almost to revel in their bulk: Wen said – with what seemed to me like pride – that he topped 80 kg on the scales (he was not a tall man), and suggested jokingly that I needed to put on weight. I thought of all the business dinners that these men had eaten to reach this size. Perhaps, I thought, bulk was a kind of bodily capital for these businessmen, an embodied marker of success, power, and indeed masculinity, which distinguished them from their younger, less affluent and slimmer selves and less successful counterparts. This focus on body shape clarifies distinctions between white-collar masculinities: for some young gym-going men, their bodily capital is enhanced if they develop toned, fit bodies; for older men who are already established in their careers, their *yingchou* activities have produced large bellies and overall bodily bulk which symbolizes their positioning as successful businessmen. The aging body plays a role here, as does generation, but these characteristics are not fixed, there is no inevitable process here: masculinities are fluid and contested within individuals, and some, though not all, younger men are clearly keen to resist the 'big belly' look.

After spending some time in the sauna complex, we walked through the mixed pool area and into the hotel, which were all conveniently connected. Wen led me into a room with two single beds, which it transpired he had booked as soon as we arrived. As soon as we entered the room, two young women, both about twenty years old, appeared: Wen, following a well-established pattern with his clients, had arranged a massage for us both. I was struck by how contented and relaxed Wen was: he evidently adored the attention of the young woman. There was nothing sexual in the massage, but there was plenty of banter to and fro between Walter and the young women, who teased Walter about the size of his stomach. They seemed to be seasoned in massaging overweight middle-aged men, and knew how to keep them happy.

Wen told me repeatedly how much he enjoyed these leisure activities he did with his clients — the saunas, restaurants, foot massage, karaoke, and so — often citing his disappointment that conditions were different in Australia. He could not understand why this kind of business socializing culture was not more prevalent in Western countries; he claimed that many of his French male colleagues loved this lifestyle in China. On another occasion he took me for a foot massage, where again two young women attended to us. We also visited restaurants on numerous occasions. He told me that without these activities he easily felt

bored. Though he went shopping in malls with his wife and went to restaurants with his wife and son at weekends, these more family-oriented leisure activities did not measure up to the enjoyment he found in; going out with his clients to the saunas and karaoke.[360]

Although white-collar women do go for saunas, foot massages, eat out, it seems to be mostly white-collar men who engage in business socializing activities. Furthermore, it is mostly Chinese white-collar men, not foreigners, who carry out these business socializing activities, so Wen informed me. This was not only for language reasons, he said, but also because of the need for a thorough understanding of how to behave and what to say, which requires knowledge acquired over time (which one could call a habituation process). Foreign bosses are well aware of this, according to Wen, which is why they employ locals like himself as sales managers and other similarly responsible personnel. Chinese white-collar men, along with other men, such as entrepreneurs and officials, thus dominate the spaces in which they carry out their leisure activities, whether for business socializing or fun, served largely — so it seems— by young women migrant workers from the provinces. Indeed, men's domination of the social space of Chinese food restaurants puts women off eating in them: I noticed that all-female groups are much less common than all-male groups. Women feel more comfortable eating in the less gendered atmosphere of fast-food restaurants. '[…] fast-food restaurants can offer a more socially gender-neutral and less hierarchical social space than other eating venues, and it may be not so much the food that is important in consumption but the social space associated with it.'[361]

Young women also provide sexual services to white-collar men and their clients as part of business socializing. In his study of business practices in southern China, Xin Liu recounts a story he heard from a young man who started working in Haikou in 1992. The young man's first boss emphasised to him the fundamental importance of sex with young women in business socialising: 'What moves the great men around is women – *xiaojie*', who knew how, in the boss's words, to 'fuck in right places *and* at right times'.[362] Liu found that in the practice of business life in Beihai, there was ''a golden production line of entertainment' (*huangjin liushuixian*) designed for entertaining government officials or business partners and including

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[360] Karaoke, which I do not cover here, is nevertheless a significant business socialising activity as I have indicated above.
[361] Latham, op. cit., 254-5. Latham cites Yunxiang Yan's 'McDonald's in Beijing: The Localization of Americana', in *Golden Arches East: McDonald's in East Asia*, ed. James L. Watson (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 39-76; and his 'Of Hamburger and Social Space: Consuming McDonald's in Beijing', in *The Consumer Revolution in Urban China*, ed. Deborah S. Davis (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 201-225.
[362] Liu, op. cit., 46.

three crucial steps', which were a banquet, karaoke with *xiaojie*, then a visit to a massage parlour.[363] As is clear from what I have already described, Wen's principle white-collar business socialising activities closely followed this 'golden production line.' Similarly, as Everett Yuehong Zhang has commented in writing about business socialising between entrepreneurs and officials in Sichuan, the entrepreneurs demonstrate their economic power – and masculinity – when they provide young women for the officials' sexual pleasure, and the officials demonstrate their political power – and masculinity – by delivering favours to the entrepreneurs. In this way, the masculinity of the entrepreneur and the official are constructed through the site of the girl's body.[364] This argument can also be applied to white-collar men when they engage in similar activities: for example, sales manager Wen demonstrates his (company's) economic power, by taking clients on all-expenses-paid nights out along the 'golden production line', canoodling with attractive young women throughout, and resulting in the client delivering the contract. The end result is that Wen is happy, the client is happy, and both have demonstrated their power and masculinity, through the subjugated, feminised 'Other' of the massage girls.

Wen's masculinity is multiple and conflicting. For a start, we can identify the importance of *guanxi* masculinity, although this time the *guanxi* are not being developed between male colleagues, but between Wen and his clients. The seller-buyer relationship is cemented through the *yingchou* practices, which themselves are inculcated in subjects through mimesis, emulation and so on; there are no textbooks on *yingchou*, no 'how-to' guides in the men's magazines which suggest ways of procuring prostitutes for one's clients. Wen thus simultaneously and smoothly positions himself as the sophisticated, well-educated, honest, clean-minded white-collar sales manager *and* as a Chinese man well versed and skilled in the arts and practices of leading clients through the 'delights' of the 'golden production line', a set of behaviours he also performs with his *gemenr*, and even with me, his English teacher, to an extent. Even though my relationship with Wen was supposed to be 90 minutes of English practice in his office very week, he drew me into participating in these practices, which for him, were the very essence of what it meant to be a man. Therefore, as a masculine subject, Wen displayed what might have appeared as incongruous masculinities to the views of outsiders, but which Wen revelled in: the respectable, educated corporate man, the *yingchou*-adept *guanxi* man, the *dafang* man (Wen treated me to many of these leisure activities), the fat-bellied man of wealth, and so on.

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[363] Liu, ibid., 57.
[364] Zhang, 2001, op. cit., 258.

The notion of assemblage underlines how the locales, routines, practices, gestures, mental techniques, value systems and so forth all come together in subjectification processes to produce Wen's multiple masculinities. Different assemblages produce different masculine subjectivities. That is what happened to Wen in Australia. He found himself being produced as a different kind of masculine subject there, through his relationship with and responses to the dominant discourses and practices due to the particular conditions which exist in Australia, and he did not like it. Different assemblages produce different kinds of masculine subjects. And with this last point in mind, we can see again the kind of change that 'white-collar men' represent in China. Through their taking up of models of clean, honest 'global' corporate masculinities, their simultaneous taking up of chummy, chauvinist *guanxi* masculinities and historically-inspired generous *dafang* masculinities, in a reiterative gender performance, they habituate themselves to a new composite 'Chinese white-collar' masculinity, drilled into the body over a period of time so much that it becomes a 'natural' way of being, inseparable from how they conceive of themselves.

What I want to make very clear is that I am not suggesting here an understanding of 'global' masculinities as 'good' or 'advanced' and some local masculinities as 'bad' or 'backward' Rather, I am highlighting what I found in my extensive fieldwork, that discursive formations in China invariably position globally-inflected corporate masculinities as models to be desired, and that while these glossy masculinities are clearly sometimes pitched as using devices to seduce – and exploit – women (see chapter three's 'seven lessons in being 'man enough'') they do not advocate the kind of *yingchou* activities that are founded on the sexual commercial exploitation of women's bodies. These disjunctures reveal not an apparently 'seamless' to-ing and fro-ing between written discourse and subject formation, through, for example, habituation techniques but of subjects' simultaneous insertion in diverse discourses of masculinity, deeply embedded in ideas of cultural and social custom.

Anthropologist Tiantian Zheng's research on businessmen's 'sex consumption' as part of business socialising in Dalian's karaoke bars, which she identifies as sites of consumption in the new consumer economy, throws more light on the formation of the white-collar subject of '*yingchou*'.[365] She argues that the businessmen clients of the hostesses, along with other users such as government officials, 'partake of the services offered by hostesses and at the same time engage in 'social interactions' (*yingchou*) that help cement 'relationships' (*guanxi*)

[365] Tiantian Zheng, 'Cool Masculinity: Male Clients' Sex Consumption and Business Alliance in Urban China's Sex Industry', *Journal of Contemporary China* 15, no. 46 (2006): 163.

with their business partners or their patrons in the government.'[366] These men see these sexual practices as part of a normal, Western 'modern lifestyle',[367] she contends, in contrast to the unnatural constraints of Maoism and Confucianism: '[c]lients conceive of their sex consumption as the embrace of a western-oriented model of modernity and a rejection of artificial restraint imposed by a puritanical Confucian-socialist system.'[368] To some, particularly but not only necessarily non-Chinese observers, however, the mixing of *guanxi* practices of sex consumption with notions of modernity and naturalised, morally acceptable masculine sexual behaviours may seem to signify a jumble of contradictory masculinities, defined both by an embrace of the liberatory invitations associated with the 'western-oriented model of modernity' and, at the same time, with a rootedness in local cultural custom. Men such as Wen display versions of masculinity that they imagine signify the self-fulfilment 'natural' to men in their position, and which are crucial to their notions of self-worth and success. This could be considered an instance of the split imaginary, where the subject's notion of what is going on does not coincide with the dominant other's, that is, the western/global observer's.

As with Zhang's observations about officials and entrepreneurs in Sichuan, Zheng contends that the male clients construct a masculinity through the act of sex consumption: 'I argue that the clients' 'consumption' of hostesses becomes the criterion by which clients evaluate each other's moral quality and business competence […]. Male consumers strive to demonstrate a rational, 'cool' masculinity […].'[369] Manifesting masculinity through taking part in such activities is a fundamental aspect of determining success in business in China: 'Success or failure at projecting a masculine image crucially determines participation and relative position within the elite, male-dominated circles of Chinese business and government.[370] Through participating in such activities, Chinese white-collar men are not only constructing their own individual masculine image, they are also part of the construction of a wider gendered economy of exploitation and inequality.

**Keeping fit and maintaining status**

In this section I look at how some of the assumptions, motivations and anxieties of white-

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[366] Zheng, ibid., 163.
[367] Zheng, ibid., 163.
[368] Zheng, ibid., 162.
[369] Zheng, ibid., 162.
[370] Zheng, ibid., 162.

collar subjectivities are constituted in and expressed through sports and keeping fit. Such activities brought sports and health vocabularies and practices together with male bodies in particular venues, and produced multiple and sometimes conflicting masculinities in my informants. Sports and exercise played an important part in most of my informants' lives. Some emphasized it as a body-toning exercise, others for the business networking opportunities it offered. Sports and exercise were also seen as good ways to de-stress. Whatever the particular interest and emphasis, however, sports and exercise were inseparable from social and class inflections. The types of sports and exercise, where they were practised and with whom were all important considerations for my informants. Moreover, the gendered characteristics and notions involved in their pursuit of these activities were prominent, ranging from assumptions about gender capacities through to the feminizing of some pursuits.

Most of my informants stated that at some time or other they had been to a gym, and I soon realised that going to the gym – a stylish, upmarket gym – is a popular leisure practice of white-collar men, partly because, as Xu Rong aptly noted, many companies pay for their gym membership.[371] The media also propagates white-collar men's gym usage: a page two advertorial in *Shishang jiankang* (lit. 'Fashionable Health'), the Chinese edition of the men's fitness magazine *Men's Health* catering to affluent urban men,[372] combines the white-collar passion for upscale gyms and foreign travel by extolling two 'cool' (*ku*), 'top-grade' (*gaodang*) gyms in New York, with accompanying photographs displaying their fashionably designed interiors.[373] In the affluent business districts of Beijing, such as Jianguomen and Zhongguancun, large hoardings parade the names of gym chains like 'Nirvana' (*Qingniao*) and 'Hosa' (*Haosha*), both of which have many gyms in Beijing and beyond. They are well equipped with sophisticated fitness machines and also offer many exercise classes, saunas, steam rooms, sometimes swimming pools, internet access, juice bars and so on. The monthly fees are usually several hundred yuan although an annual subscription works out cheaper. These gyms are aimed at white-collar office workers: the Nirvana gym in Zhongguancun, for example, is described in a website introduction as a '4000-square-metre white-collar exercise

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[371] Xu Rong, op. cit., 289.

[372] *Shishang jiankang* retails at 20 yuan, which suggests it is targeted at affluent urban men. According to the *gotoread.com* introduction, it emphasises the healthy development of the individual: '*Men's Health* guides readers to care deeply about the health of their own body and mind (*ziwo shenxin jiankang*), and comprehensively raises the self-improvement of individuals in society (*geren zai shehui zhong ziwo wanshan*) and self-development ability (*ziwo fazhan de nengli*).' 'Shishang nanshi jiankang: kanwu jieshao' (Fashionable Men's Health: publication introduction), *Liulanwang* (gotoread.com), http://3355.gotoread.com/mag/12040/ (accessed August 18, 2008).

[373] 'Yikuinuokesi yundongguan' (Equinox gym), *Shishang jiankang* (Men's health) no. 108 (March, 2006): 3.

area' (*4000 ping mi de bailing yundongchang*).[374]

Young white-collar workers are a key target of commercial gym chains, perhaps partly because articles in the metropolitan media encourage white-collar men to take individual responsibility for their health and fitness, and partly because they (or their companies) can afford it. In this way, an assemblage of sites, values and practices come together in 'body techniques' which discipline or fashion young white-collar males, like Johnny, Colin and Jason, who buy into the images and textual prescriptions of toned, healthy bodies as markers of 'quality' (*suzhi*) and status. Cheaper independent gyms do exist for students and those with less disposable income, but their equipment, facilities and fittings are not nearly as good as those in the upmarket gym chains. At the top-end of the scale, the top-level white-collar managers work out in the very luxurious expensive gyms in five-star hotels, which are out of the financial reach of most 'ordinary' white-collar workers. When I lived in Zhongguancun, from time to time I visited the 'Intellifitness' gym near Tsinghua University which served students and staff from the university (a wealthy Tsinghua postgraduate introduced me to it) and white-collar workers from its science park and other offices in the neighbourhood. Its name alone suggested it catered to a more discriminating clientele, who were concerned about getting smarter as well as getting fitter – in other words, who were disciplined by discursively-formed intellectual and body techniques, in their quests to be sophisticated urban subjects. And as a sign of its white-collar status, the gym had an advertising banner outside boasting of awards it had received from high-end men's magazines. The 'Intellifitness' gym was one of only several upscale gyms in the area. Even the nearby English language school where I taught contained a small but well-equipped gym and a large dance studio as a pulling factor for prospective students, most of whom were white-collar workers.  Johnny and Jason regularly attended well-appointed relatively expensive gyms which helped reinforce their white-collar status (and so did Colin as soon as he could afford it, paying for his own personal trainer as I mentioned earlier, since he believed a gym-toned body could contribute to his employment prospects);[375] and they believed keeping a trim and toned physique made them more sexually attractive in the circles they moved in.

I noticed quite a number of women were working out at Intellifitness, which made me

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[374] 'Qingniao jianshen (Zhongguancun dian): shangjia jianjie' (Nirvana gym (Zhongguancun branch): businessman's introduction)', Souzhe wang (sozhe.com), http://www.sozhe.com/youhuiquan/sjinfo.php?id=1467 (accessed August 18, 2008).

[375] A health researcher, Ta Trang, of Washington State University, told me in July 2006 that some of her white-collar informants said that maintaining their 'suzhi' (literally 'quality', meaning they were higher 'quality' people than others) was their reason for going to the gym.

wonder if white-collar gyms were relatively women-friendly, given that mainstream gender discourses, as discussed previously, seem to associate gym-going with men, corresponding with the discursive distinction between naturalised characteristics of the physically strong man and the relatively weak woman. I asked Jason and Terry, another administrative colleague of mine in his mid-twenties at the Sanyuanqiao school, for their opinions about this. Jason acknowledged that many people did still believe that women should keep their bodies slim:

> Working out, basically, everyone has their own desires (*geren yiyuan*), and most people say that Chinese women should be refined and elegant (*wenwen-erya*); with petite and nimble charms (*jiaomei xiaoqiao-linglong*); relatively small in shape (*waixing bijiao xiao yidian*); slender (*xianxi*); cute (*ke'ai*); and gentle (*wenrou*). Most women are like this, and I think most women also prefer this (*daduoshu nüsheng shi zheyang, erqie wo juede daduoshu nüsheng ye xihuan zheyang*).

But he made clear that he, personally, accepted that women could build up their bodies if they chose to, even if most people disagreed:

> In today's society, some women are tall and strong (*wuda-sancude*), or have built up their muscles (*jirou fadade*). I think individuals' tastes are different (*geren de pinwei bu yiyang*). In my opinion, there's nothing not allowed (*mei shenme bu keyi*); but most people (*daduoshu ren*) hold a somewhat different view.

Terry, in contrast, had a less stereotypical view of women's 'sporting' activities, and for him it was totally 'normal' (*hen zhengchang*) for a woman to want to work out. For him, it was simply a matter of people keeping fit: 'first of all, in China, people think working out is a way to attain good health (*yizhong weile dadao jiankang*), so I think everyone needs to work out (*meiyige ren dou xuyao jianshen*).' The media often portrays white-collar men as more open-minded in their understanding of gender behaviour (as I investigate further in chapter seven), a subject position which Terry seems to fully take up here.

Lifting weights in the gym, the main activity men did in the gym, is not the only option as a leisure practice of suitable status for white-collar men. Some white-collar men look for more exotic and interesting ways to de-stress and simultaneously get in shape, and gym chains provide an increasing array of exercise classes which reflect international middle-class fitness trends, one of which is belly-dancing. An article in the *China Daily* reports that 'a growing number of young and middle-aged men, especially white-collar workers and students in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Chengdu are signing up for belly dancing classes', as a means of 'weight loss and release from work pressure'.[376] A 'Night of Belly Dance' at a fitness club in Guangzhou, claims the article, attracted 'more than 20 male sales managers,

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[376] Ma Lie, 'China's Beer-Belly Males Giving Belly Dancing a Whirl', *China Daily,* August 9, 2007, 4.

firm owners, software engineers and government officials'.[377] Zhong Hui, a Beijing-based belly-dancing teacher, believes that the growth of white-collar male interest in belly-dancing in particular is because 'white-collar men like the dance more than exercise with dumbbells and push-ups because the latter is dull and dry.'[378] However, because belly-dancing involves wearing 'navel-exposing shirts' and 'mastering the sinuous movements of the Middle East art form associated with seductive women', many of the male belly dancers are reluctant to tell their friends about their hobby because it transgresses the boundary of conventionally publically acceptable male behaviour: it is seen as un-masculine. The more quirky new 'leisure-time belly dancer' identity available to white-collar men disrupts hegemonic masculine assumptions. These two conflicting masculinities collide within individuals, who then opt to conceal the 'transgressive' masculinity from most people in their lives.[379] These conflicting masculinities are typical of the new white-collar subject, and in this case point specifically to the association of the white-collar man (here the white-collar male belly dancer) with the so-called femininity, of the 'metrosexual' or even 'androgynous' man (terms which I examine in more detail in the final chapter). This association commonly appears as a means of reinforcing the values of an earthy, tough model of masculinity, including the *nanzihan* figure associated historically with peasants of the northwest and which became popular in the 'root-seeking' movements of the 1980s, as discussed in chapter two.

Golf, however, is a white-collar leisure practice which is not deemed unmasculine; it is a game still dominated by men, as I mentioned above, and golfing features covering the top global golfers, technique tips and useful information, make frequent appearances in elite men's magazines such as *Shisang jiankang* (Men's health) and *Shishang xiansheng* (Esquire). The high cost of playing golf, however, puts off many aspiring golfers, as Xu Rong points out: 'golf […] is already popular to some extent (*youle mouzhong chengdu de liuxing*) amongst urban white-collar workers (*chengshi bailing*) in contemporary mainland China. Many people yearn to experience this 'refined and graceful sport' (*gaoya de yundong*), but the very high outlay (*gao'ang de feiyong*) makes most of them recoil.'[380] Dan Washburn, a sports journalist specializing in golf in China, shares this view: '[…] in today's China, although it is slowly becoming more accessible, golf indeed remains a rich man's game. With virtually no public

[377] Ma, ibid., 4.
[378] Ma, ibid., 4.
[379] Ma, ibid., 4. Due to some of their non-conventional bodily practices, white-collar men are quite often accused of – and defended for – transgressing conventional masculine behaviour: I examine this topic more closely in chapter seven.
[380] Xu, op. cit., 288.

courses to choose from, 18 holes in China will cost around $60 [420 RMB] on average […].'[381] One of Xu Rong's informants described even higher costs: 'playing golf requires tens of thousands of yuan every year (*meinian jiwan kuai qian*), […] and a thousand yuan for one round; unless you are a member, altogether you must pay over a hundred thousand [yuan] (*shiji wan*).'[382] Xu Rong comments that because of this, 'many white-collar employees can only go to relatively cheap driving ranges to practise',[383] such as the one near Sanlitun in east Beijing which I frequently used to walk past in the evening, floodlit and busy.

A student of mine at the Sanyuanqiao school, Hu, a smartly-dressed salesman in his early thirties from Wen's sales team at the European electrical equipment company (I introduced Wen in chapter three), spent much of his free time enthusiastically learning golf, and each time we had a class – which was a 'one-to-one' tutorial – he wanted to learn golfing phrases. He was not particularly interested in learning general English, but in what one might call a kind of linguistic habituation process, he made an effort to learn golf jargon with the aim of using it effortlessly to impress his white-collar colleagues and clients. However, he lamented that he could not afford to join a golf club: his only experiences hitherto had been at practice ranges. He was a keen sportsman, and also played tennis. Hu's choice of golf and tennis were for reasons of status: he was a white-collar man on the make, and these were the sports that white-collar men aspired to. On the one hand, golf is attractive to high-flying white-collar men because of its sophisticated, global associations: playing golf is an effective way to display that one has 'made it' to the global middle class. On the other hand it offers its exclusive practitioners a private world of their own in which to seal business deals, which I examine in more depth below.

From the ethnographic data and media reports presented in this section, it is clear that white-collar men's sports and exercise pursuits are contested in very gendered ways, centring on debates around which pursuits are appropriate and which are not for men and women to practise, and in the noticeably gendered distributions of bodies across spaces and places, from the distinct activities that men and women carry out in gyms through to the male-dominated fairways of elite golf courses. The subjectivities fashioned in these assemblages underline that in today's China, despite his acceptance in some respects of women's 'equal rights' to pursue a fit and healthy body, in many ways the white-collar man is deeply implicated in reproducing

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[381] Dan Washburn, 'Golf in China: All Growing, all New, all Raw', ESPN.com, http://sports.espn.go.com/golf/news/story?id=3118871 (accessed August 19, 2008).
[382] Xu, op. cit., 288.
[383] Xu, ibid., 288.

gender inequalities.

**The religious economy and 'apolitical' white-collar man**

White-collar men are increasingly participating in religious practices, not as acts of political opposition or subversion, as I argue in this section, for reasons often related to consumer desire and status. Looking at how religious practices are shaped in ensembles of sites (churches, temples) discourses (state appropriation, commercialization) and practices (donations, worship, tourism) revealed another infolded position in my informant Johnny's subjectivity – as a middle-class Buddhist – which intersected with his identities as a polished corporate employee, a sophisticated consumer, a man of great *dafang* (generosity) and large *guanxi* networks, and a trim and conscientious gym-goer. The pleats and folds of these infolded exteriorities combined in their own shifting, fragmented and sometimes contradictory ways to produce a subjectivity that Johnny recognized as himself. Johnny was increasingly active in Buddhist practices, such as going to temples on holy days, and although he initially had shied away from explicitly identifying as a Buddhist, his MSN tagline is now 'almost Buddhist'. By identifying as Buddhist, Johnny projected a disinterest in politics, and inserted himself into a local religious economy of ideas and practices. This aspect of his masculine subjectivity was explicitly economic-oriented, as I explain below.

Johnny's parents were Buddhists, and his home city in Fujian was famous for its Buddhist temples and statues. In Beijing, Johnny took me to see a special display of Buddhist statues on sale, in a dimmed and peaceful museum-like room that was — incongruously (to me, at least) — part of a huge department store in the shopping Mecca of Wangfujing. This was a clear example of the intersection of religion and commercialization: customers with plenty of money – the statues cost thousands, even tens of thousands of yuan – could buy a Buddha statue to display in their home for their own private religious purposes and/or aesthetic pleasure. Johnny had a business idea at the time, to start exporting such statues from his hometown, which he proposed to do with the help of a mutual British, Buddhist friend. For Johnny, Buddhism and commercialism went hand in hand, and he saw no contradiction in the marriage of these two discursive formations; in an era in which neo-liberal doctrines in China extended to the commercialization of, it seemed, absolutely everything, why not too for religions. And so too for the state, of course, which promulgates these policies: for instance, Buddhist sites are commercialized 'parks', often run by local governments. For example, the *Badachu gongyuan* (literally 'Eight Big Places Park') in Beijing is a popular weekend leisure site, with working temples (which are so crowded on important religious dates that police have

to manage the crowds), fairground-style stalls and a cable car. Such commercialized religious sites are legion. Johnny, his German tenant Kerstin and I went on a day trip to a famous Buddhist cave near Beijing. There were many statues in the cave and a temple at the cave mouth; on a nearby hillside were the ruins of a once bustling temple complex. To enter the mountainside we had to pay an admission charge, and there were further admission charges for the temple and cave, and then a charge for the cable car to get back down the mountain. There were many day-trippers, strolling through the cave and through the woods on the hillside. Buddhist sites such as this in contemporary China occupy an uneasy middle ground between Disneyfied relics for tourist meanderings and consumer purchases, and functioning places of pilgrimage and worship, with visitors often combining the two to various extents.

Not only Buddhism is booming, but Christianity too, and even Confucianism is enjoying a revival. Jason was a Catholic who had used the religious community for support when living abroad, but who very rarely took part in any religious practices, which he found boring. His father was a Catholic, so he was baptised when he was a baby, but his mother was a Buddhist. A large new Protestant church had just been built in the heart of Zhonguancun when I was living there. Designed by a German firm, it sat prominently amongst the computer malls and office blocks, serving the area's affluent parishioners who raised 6 million yuan to fund the project, according to the *China Daily*.[384] Many of the congregation are current or future young white-collar workers: 'Up to 70 percent of the church's parishioners are young people from nearby universities and leading IT companies.'[385] The underlying pull for these people, in historian Daniel H. Bays's view, may be because '[p]sychologically, different forms of Protestantism can offer for intellectuals or the urban middle class an identification with the West and modernization.'[386] Here, too, commercialism is combined with religion: on the ground level, looking out onto the street, was a Starbucks style coffee shop. Christianity is associated with Western cosmopolitanism, and commercialism, as Duncan Hewitt, an ex-BBC China correspondent, points out. 'For some young people, particularly students, Christianity has become quite fashionable in recent years, partly because of its status as a foreign import', and he adds, because 'it offers a new commercial opportunity.'[387]

Confucianism is also witnessing a revival of interest among China's new white-collar sector. Two of my students at the Zhongguancun language school were full-time PhD students

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[384] Wu Jiao, 'Get Me to the Church on Time, Beijing Style', ChinaDaily.com.cn, http://chinadaily.cn/olympics/2008-08/10/content_6921395.htm (accessed August 20, 2008).

[385] Wu, ibid., http://chinadaily.cn/olympics/2008-08/10/content_6921395.htm.

[386] Daniel H. Bays, 'Chinese Protestant Christianity Today', *The China Quarterly* 174 (2003): 502.

[387] Duncan Hewitt, *Getting Rich First: Life in a Changing China* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2007), 405.

at a nearby university, writing theses advocating the application of Confucianism in modern life, a field they claimed was exercising a growing number of Chinese scholars, especially with regard to moral issues. Books on Confucianism were piled high in Zhongguancun's best bookstores, and according to Duncan Hewitt, 'a number of private schools offering an education in the Confucian classics have opened in several Chinese cities.'[388] At the same time as advocating Confucianism, they were also promoting the consumer health products of a Hunan-based company owned by the family of one of the students, suggesting that for them at least, there was no conflict between Confucian values and consumerism.

Has depoliticisation increased the appeal of religion for white-collar men? Both Johnny and Jason displayed a complete lack of interest in politics, and if political topics came up in conversation they usually switched to something else. Jason's favourite line when a political topic came up was 'What's the use in talking about something you can't change?' When I spoke to Johnny about the Tiananmen massacre in 1989, he said that all he knew was that some policemen and soldiers had been killed. I told him that many students had died, which spurred him to check some non-Chinese websites about the massacre. He claimed to be shocked by what he saw and that he had had no idea so many students had died. For him, as with Jason, politics was profoundly boring, providing evidence for Karl's thesis of the impossibility of politics in contemporary China.

Depoliticisation and the subsequent ideological vacuum have increased the appeal of religion, suggests political scientist Hongyi Harry Lai, as it 'meets the population's needs for psychological comfort and spiritual fulfillment, especially in confronting a variety of problems inherent in the modernization program, including increasing marketization, rapid social transition, and emerging social problems.'[389] Daniel H. Bays, writing about Protestantism, also feels that rapidly changing economic and social conditions may facilitate its growth amongst white-collar workers:

> China has finally joined the World Trade Organization. That may mean even more rapid economic and social change as, under the pressure of international competition, state-owned industries and the entire public sector shrink even more rapidly and private enterprises and economic networks grow. This might constitute an opportunity for further expansion of Protestantism in China. As a Chinese business and technocratic class in urban China becomes more like its counterparts in Singapore, Penang, Vancouver and Silicon Valley, the growth of Protestantism in all of those places outside China may constitute a model for its future religious trajectory within

[388] Hewitt, ibid., 415.

[389] Hongyi Harry Lai, 'The Religious Revival in China', *The Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies* 18 (2003): 57.

China as well, at least in urban areas.[390]

In sum, the involvement of white-collar employees in religious practices, of whatever faith, manifests the general defining characteristics of this new social sector: a mixture of global and local affiliations, consumerisation, and the necessary habituation to a set of rituals and the concepts that underlie them. These new spiritual habituations are formed through engagements with particular sites, discourses and practices that thereby encapsulate the mix of desires and interests typically embodied in white-collar men, including consumer and status aspirations, and undoubtedly also indicate what many have called a moral or ideological yearning left by the moral vacuum of the post-Mao era.

To conclude, this chapter's examination of white-collar men's leisure practices, highlights several defining features. They have at least two main underlying motivations, which may be present mixed together or singly, as outlets from pressure of work, and for business socializing purposes; and apolitical religious practices may also be motivated by a search for ideological or moral beliefs. They are strongly infused with capitalist, consumerist ideologies; they manifest global and local aspects; they require a process of habituation before they are mastered; they are depoliticized; and they justify as natural the privileging of men through the services provided by women. These features have all emerged in the context of the gendered discourse of desire that is prevalent in China now. White-collar men like Jason, Johnny, Peter and Bruce all fit within the terms of Rofel, Zhang, Yan and Wang as 'desiring subjects' and 'subjects of desire', pursuing privatised, Westernised, commercialized, and depoliticized leisure activities. Furthermore, they undertook these activities in homosocial 'gemenr' groups, echoing historical notions of masculinity. The 'overdetermining' gender discourse shaping these practices and their sites often strongly privileges their associated 'masculine' characteristics over women. It is through these, also, and through their display of authority over the feminine that the status and authority associated with the masculine subject is produced and affirmed.

Concerns are increasing about the work pressures of white-collar lifestyles, and so white-collar men are urged to take up sports and leisure pursuits; yet, unhelpfully from a personal health perspective, outside the office their unavoidable and frequent business

[390] It is also worth noting that Christianity has also been localized to an extent. Bays points out that 'Protestantism seems thoroughly rooted in Chinese society, with some aspects of it strongly reflecting affinity to traditional cultural patterns and others appealing to modernity.' Daniel H. Bays, op. cit., 501-2.

socializing also takes a heavy toll on their bodies. Through their choice of leisure sites and activities, from eating out to playing sports to working out in the gym, facilitated by their spending power and cultural sophistication, white-collar men manifest particular tastes, distinguishing themselves from other groups of men. Most notably, they demonstrate their aspiration to be part of a globally-recognised middle class. Increasingly, white-collar men are participating in China's religious revival, in mainly Buddhist and Christian circles, yet their involvement is underscored by material desire, consumerism and depoliticisation. Desire is a salient feature of business socializing practices, too, in the form of desire to advance one's career, and also desire for the young women in bars and massage parlours who are the vehicles through which white-collar men often construct and perform their multiple, diverse masculinities, as they seal their business deals.

How do young white-collar men negotiate their stressful working lives, busy leisure lives, and the demands of a relationship or marriage? The next chapter deals with these issues, as it looks at how notions of the spousal ideal play out in practice.

# Chapter Six

# White-Collar Husbands: Conjugal Ideals and Breadwinning Pressures

What kinds of husbands and partners do white-collar men make? This chapter explores the formation of white-collar conjugal masculinities, through an analysis of relationships with wives and girlfriends, the domestic spaces and objects which come together in assemblages which infold particular routines and habits into the subjectivities of husbands and partners of women. White-collar conjugal relationships depicted in the media commonly suggest an equivalence between 'middle-class' marriage, increasing prosperity, and greater gender equality. Model husbands are portrayed as more caring, understanding, and more accepting of gender between husband and wife. Yet these ideal relationships often present gender roles which hark back to deeply embedded understandings of distinctive male and female attributes and practices. My informants' opinions suggest widespread anxieties about men's declining influence and authority and reveal persistent attempts to maintain men's dominant status in relationships, for example, in avoiding having relationships with women who earn more money than them. Many white-collar boyfriends and husbands articulate profound anxieties about their personal relationships with women: a sense of being hemmed in, not being acknowledged, being denied an authority they want, and being increasingly threatened by women's rising economic and cultural leverage. A beleaguered sense of fear of disempowerment that I not infrequently noted in my informants draws on naturalised ideas of gender difference that have very little to do with the glossy media veneer of the new white-collar man, but which reveal the inheritance of a legacy of what are appropriate distinctions in gendered behaviour and practice. In the fast-changing and competitive social and economic climate of contemporary China, in which gender opportunities relationships and roles are in a constant state of change, particularly due to women's increasing economic power, men and women widely seem to resortto conventional conceptions of gender as an unchallenging certainty that provides reassurance and comfort.[391]

[391] Research by three economists on the effects of economic liberalisation on labour participation rates in urban China from 1990 to 2000 found 'evidence that many married women left the labor force in order to turn to home production, […] [and] that marriage significantly lowered women's and raised men's labor force participation when age, education, ethnicity, and location are controlled.' They comment that '[t]his pattern is consistent with a return to more traditional expectations about gendered household roles and an exit of married women from paid labor to home production.' Margaret Maurer-Fazio, James Hughes and Dandan Zhang, 'An Ocean Formed from

The discourse of modernisation frames the wider changes in Chinese society as a movement to more equality, democracy and self-fulfilment, including in the gendered aspects of personal relationships. Yet my interviews with young white-collar men suggest a very different view. Their views illuminate a dissonance between the enlightened, tolerant and confident husband portrayed in mainstream media, not least in, for example, car adverts, or TV programmes as explored further on in this chapter, and the kind of anxious conjugal subjectivities they exhibit. They complain about pressure to bring in money, to be the breadwinners, some are not keen for their wives to work, and they certainly do not want their wives to earn more than they do. When wives do earn more, they disdain them, calling them henpeckers. This is the double bind that white-collar men put themselves in: the pressurised breadwinner and henpecked husband. They retrench to what they know best: stereotypical ideas of men and women, demonstrating a profound inertia of gender attitudes. Thus in the assemblage of ideas, emotions, fear and anxieties that constitute the complex multiplicity of masculine subjectivities, lies a deep unease about equality in relationships with women, including wives, lest it lead to the tables being turned on them and their eventual loss of dominance in the home. Wider changes in Chinese society over the reform years have also shaped the employment, spatial and familial structures containing white-collar men's intimate relationships with lovers, parents, siblings, children and so on. Many of the young white-collar men I interviewed were living far from home, and were unmarried – though most planned to – and had no children, and so their most significant day-to-day relationships were with their girlfriends, wives, or boyfriends. I do not therefore deal with issues of fatherhood in this thesis, since, as I noted in chapter one, within the parameters of my field work, and in the context of discussions about what my informants considered significant in their day to day lives, fathers did not figure much. Without exception, they professed a strong sense of filial obligation, but in practice many of them did little more than call their parents occasionally and visit once a year for a few days at the Spring Festival, and some went back to their parents' home even less frequently. References to such activities did not feature prominently in our discussions so I do not examine practices of filial piety here, (though they too are unquestionably part of the wider construction of masculinities and demand future study). My fieldwork conversations about significant family and intimate relationships thus focused on relationships with wives and girlfriends, and I follow this focus in this chapter. White-collar

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One Hundred Rivers: The Effects of Ethnicity, Gender, Marriage, and Location on Labor Force Participation in Urban China', *Feminist Economics* 13, no. 3-4 (October, 2007): 181-2.

men's gay relationships and issues of sexuality also featured in such discussions but I leave these for the following chapter.

To understand how the wider societal changes have influenced the discourses and practices of these intimate relationships, I first investigate the impact of these changes on white-collar men's families generally, then look more closely at how they have affected power sharing between white-collar men and their partners. I discovered that one of the factors which 'unbalances' power sharing is the widespread attitude that men should be the main breadwinner, which many informants complained put them under heavier pressure to achieve career success than their partners. I investigate this breadwinning pressure on corporate men and end the chapter with a closer look at the contrasts between such views and the spousal ideal presented in mainstream media.

**White-collar relationships in context: changing families in reform China**

Despite the relative Westernization of the 'managerial elites', who are particularly active in promoting 'Western culture in the workplace', Yan Yunxiang argues that '[i]n their private lives, however, many of these elites remain rather traditional, especially in the way they deal with gender relationships, the education of children, and interpersonal relations.'[392] Yan's reference to 'traditional' gender relationships suggests the hierarchical, patriarchal neo-Confucian model, which has come to typify notions of the 'traditional' Chinese family, although in recent years, the idea that women often have a much stronger profile and decision-making power in family life than men has circulated with increasing strength.[393] Although I do not examine filial obligation here, it is worth noting sociologist Martin King Whyte's observation – which reinforces Yan's argument – that in urban China 'it appears that […] sentiments of filial obligation remain robustly intact', despite other transformations such as the notable 'shift from arranged to free choice marriages'.[394]

There have been changes and continuities in attitudes to sons, too, as Harriet Evans points out in her research on mothers and daughters in contemporary China. On the one hand she acknowledges large long-term social shifts away from patrilineal power: 'Urban attitudes

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[392] Yunxiang Yan, 'Managed Globalization: State Power and Cultural Transition in China', in *Many Globalizations: Cultural Diversity in the Contemporary World*, ed. Peter L. Berger and Samuel P. Huntington (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 22-3.

[393] Yan, ibid., 222-3.

[394] Martin King Whyte, 'The Fate of Filial Obligations in Urban China', *The China Journal* no. 38 (July, 1997): 31, 3. The filiality of the white-collar man is an important and relevant topic, and I mention it in passing here to suggest that there is no simple linear lessening of a sense of filial obligation. However, the key relationship for the white-collar man in media discourse is with his wife or girlfriend, so that is what I focus on here.

towards the importance of sons have been shifting since the early days of the People's Republic. Women's employment in urban areas; higher levels of education; increasing tendencies towards neolocal marriage and residence; and property, inheritance, and legal rights, as well as reduced fertility, have all contributed to undercutting traditional patrilineal biases.'[395] On the other hand, she also highlights the persistence of discriminatory attitudes with regard to the significance of sons: 'changing practices do not signify a simple rupture with beliefs and ideologies of the recent past. Urban women's descriptions of growing up in the 1980s and 1990s continued to demonstrate the cultural importance of sons; their accounts indicate the profound embeddedness of the gender hierarchy of the symbolic order that persists through and despite equal material treatment.'[396]

In their well-known work on families in the post-Mao era, sociologist Deborah Davis and anthropologist Stevan Harrell seek to explain changing patterns of family behaviour with reference to wider changes in society, arguing that behavioural shifts demonstrate 'the adaptation of cultural rules to changing and diverse political and economic circumstances.'[397] They believe that examining family adaptations in the wider context of societal change sheds light on underlying transformations in family life, contending that the 'different outcomes of adaptation to different circumstances' allows them 'on the basis of empirical case studies, to begin to make certain generalizations, not so much about outcomes as about processes.'[398] My interviewees' diverse approaches to family life – ranging from a deep identification with 'traditional' values of male authority and responsibility, to a desire to forge an independent life style with tenuous links to the family group – can be usefully analysed through this argument when understood as part of an assemblage of the discursive and non-disursive elements that produce new masculine subjectivities. All can be seen as different adaptations to the changing economic and social climate (such as economic privatisation and social atomisation), which is placing more and more emphasis on individual actions and responsibility. However, as the views of Yan, Whyte, and Evans suggest, the transformations of the private lives of individuals occurring within changed economic and political circumstances, to use Davis and Harrell's words, 'play themselves out against the background of a Chinese family culture that does change, but only slowly.'[399]

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[395] Evans, *The Subject of Gender*, op. cit, 128.
[396] Evans, ibid., 129.
[397] Deborah Davis and Stevan Harrell, 'The Impact of Post-Mao Reforms on Family Life,' in *Chinese Families in the Post-Mao Era*, ed. Deborah Davis and Stevan Harrell, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 20.
[398] Davis and Harrell, ibid., 20.
[399] Davis and Harrell, ibid., 22.

Elisabeth Croll has noted the pressure that men are put under to make a lot of money, simply to attract a girlfriend or wife: '[f]or young men too, having prospects is important when it comes to meeting girls, having a steady girlfriend and proposing marriage. […] In the cities, it is more likely to be the young men themselves who feel the pressure to increase their 'prospects' with a good match.'[400] Croll quotes a young male industrial researcher in Beijing, speaking for aspiring young men as a whole: 'We're under a lot of pressure. You've got to earn big money and get a big house – they are now standard criteria for women looking for a husband.'[401] Croll notes that this kind of pressure on men to provide materially for their partners was already present in the 1980s: 'Many of the lyrics of popular songs speak of the pressure on young men to reach the standards required for matrimony.'[402]

In line with these analyses, my research amongst young white-collar men reveals a similarly complex picture: a sense that gender hierarchies in families are diminishing, yet still persist, and that the younger generation have more independence than previous generations, yet must still heed parental desires. In a discussion with me about the different treatment of sons and daughters, Peter, whom I introduced in chapter five, initially quoted an old saying decrying the waste when a daughter marries and leaves: 'marrying off a daughter is like pouring away water' (*jiachuqu de nü'er, pochuqu de shui*), whereas 'the son can be at his parents' side' (*erzi ne, keyi zai fumu shenbian*), before suggesting that the situation is 'is slowly becoming [more] equal' (*xianzai manmande pingdeng*). But he added the caution that 'girls are still not fully affirmed' (*nühai'er haishi burong bei kending*). Likewise, from the son's perspective, he expressed the desire of aspiring young people to be more independent and live away from their parents: 'no young people nowadays, whether male or female, want to live with their parents (*dou bu xihuan zhu zai fumu shenbian*)'. But he admitted that parents still exercised a major pressure in decisions to get married, saying that he would get married and have children partly to keep his parents happy, which was a response I also heard from several other informants.

Yet young middle-class men and women are postponing marriage plans while they complete their educations and start their working lives. The average marriage age for white-collar couples is higher than that of the population at large.[403] This corresponds with the

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[400] Croll, 2006, op. cit., 226.
[401] Croll, ibid., 226.
[402] Croll, ibid., 226.
[403] Tang Meiling, 'Qingnian bailing de jiating juese yu gongzuo jiazhi quxiang guanxi fenxi' (An analysis of the relationship between white-collar workers' family roles and work values), *Xiamen daxue xuebao - zhexue shehui kexue ban* (Xiamen university journal - philosophy and social science edition) no. 5 (2007): 117.

vanguard role of the middle class in the society-wide shift in emphasis to economic development through individual enrichment, and the encouragment to aspiring young urban professionals to develop a career as a priority before settling down to married life and having children. In his book documenting social change in contemporary China, Duncan Hewitt records the example of a young white-collar couple in Shanghai taking an unhurried attitude towards marriage, suggesting that this is a widespread trend.[404] In the opinion of Bruce, the manager of the Sanyuanqiao school, white-collar men have to establish a good career before getting married and having children, which places an 'extremely big' (*feichang da*) pressure on them. The average age of marriage among such men has consequently been getting 'later and later' (*yue lai yue wan*), and is now 'very late' (*hen wan*): some men were leaving marriage until they were 'over twenty-eight or even thirty.' Terry also emphasized the extent the marriage age had already changed: 'Yes. I don't think this is a case of whether it will change or not (*bushi shifou hui gaibian*): we should say it's already changed (*yinggai shuo yijing gaibianle*). As far as I know, in China many people over thirty […] are still not married (*yiran meiyou jiehun*).' And he acknowledged that social acceptance of the thirty-plus singles was 'slowly improving' (*xianzai manmande hao*).[405]

Moreover, Tang Meiling reports that her survey showed that 'the proportion of unmarried young white-collar workers under 25 was 87.8%, only 51.7% of 26 to 30 year olds were married, and 6% of those 31 or over were not married', and that there were significant number of singles: 'of the unmarried white-collar women, 47% had no current boyfriend […], and the proportion of white-collar men without a girlfriend was 43.8%.'[406] That 94% of white-collar workers over 31 are married shows that most still eventually succumb to social expectations that 'thirty' is a normative limit. Tang proposes several reasons for the rise in white-collar marrying age, the first of which is higher levels of parental education: 'young white-collar workers with better educated parents tend to marry later, and they are more likely to have a child later especially if their mothers are better-educated.[407] Tang found that for white-collar women, the mother's age is particularly influential, whereas for men, their own educational level is more important, which she suggests 'may be related to the relatively large amount of time it takes to obtain a high educational level, and may also be related to the

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[404] Hewitt, op. cit., 216.

[405] Sociologist Tang Meiling's survey of young white-collar workers' family roles and work values backs up Bruce and Terry's statements: 'young white-collar women's average age of marriage was 25.94 years old, and men's was 26.87', which Tang points out was 'higher than the averages for the equivalent age group in the 2000 fifth general population study', which were 21.65 and 22.95 respectively. Tang Meiling, op. cit., 117.

[406] Tang, ibid., 117.

[407] Tang, ibid., 118.

relatively high desire for personal development of better-educated men, who do not want to take on the burden of a family too early on.'[408] A further reason is the influence of working in foreign and private companies: 'a higher proportion of young white-collar workers who worked in foreign investment enterprises and individually-owned private enterprises were unmarried and childless', which Tang suggests may be related to the higher economic benefits of working for this kind of organization.[409] These findings confirm that white-collar men and women are delaying marriage while they concentrate on furthering their education and career.

One reason for the very high marriage rate is the strong legal incentive to marry if one has children. For example, applying for a residence permit (*hukou*) for a child is much easier if the parents are married, according to Mark, the computer company owner. The residence permit helps children get access to local education and other services; without it, large additional fees must be paid to schools. Mark told me that despite apparent equality in the law, there is much real-life discrimination against unmarried mothers from the authorities, who require that unmarried mothers go through additional bureaucratic hurdles and pay extra fees to obtain a residence permit for their child.[410] Belinda told me that as soon as cohabiting couples had children, they would almost invariably get married. Terry concurred with this view, and thought that this would remain the case, because as soon as 'children are involved (*qianshedao haizi*), people feel it [marriage] is a responsibility (*renmen renwei shi yizhong zeren*)'. Peter believed that cohabiting couples had to get married, children or not, the sooner the better: 'If a man and a woman live together...if they first get engaged then they can live together (*dinghun yihou keyi tongju*), but they must get married within a year or as soon as possible. Although there's no time limit, they have to get married [eventually] (*suiran meiyou shijian de xianzhi danshi bixu yao jiehun*).'

While the marriage rate remains high for white-collar men there has been a noted increase in the number of professionals without children, as Terry brought to my attention. 'In Chinese society these days, there are many couples who don't want children (*you hen duo fuqi buyao haizi*); dinkies: dinky families (*dingke: dingke jiazu*).'[411] The number of dinkies is on the rise, according to a survey conducted by Sun Zhongxin, professor of sociology at Fudan

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[408] Tang, ibid., 119.

[409] Tang, ibid., 118.

[410] As evidence, Mark pointed me to the discussion on this website: 'Weihun mama zenyang gei haizi shang hukou ne?' (How can unmarried mothers get a residence permit for their children?), Zhongguo yahu (Yahoo China), http://ks.cn.yahoo.com/question/?qid=1407032804152&source=ysearch_ks_question_xg (accessed November 6, 2008).

[411] *Dingke* is the transliteration into Chinese of the 1980s English language neologism 'dinky', which is an acronym for 'dual income no kids', often used to describe affluent young couples who have decided not to have children to maximise their consumer spending power.

University: they now compose 12,4% of families in Shanghai, and Sun remarked that 'the percentage would have been even higher if we had only surveyed couples aged between 20 and 40.'[412] Another survey, conducted in Beijing by a market research firm, 'found that one in every ten households in Beijing had chosen not to have children.'[413] Terry remarked that dinkies would probably still receive pressure from their parents to have children, but he argued that 'perhaps, it's precisely only with this kind of rebellious thinking that society can change' (*yexu zheng shi zhezhong fankang de sixiang cai shi shehui fashengle gaibian*).

In Terry's eyes, the decision not to have a child might appear to be a 'rebellious' response to normative expectations and pressures, but the underlying reasons lie with the issues of core importance in white-collar life: money, quality of life and career. One of the motivations for being a dinky in China is the rising cost of paying for a middle-class education and lifestyle for one's child, according to Peter, who told me that having a child in China now was 'really expensive' (*te gui*). Dinkies are mostly concerned with their own quality of life, according to sociologist Li Yinhe, who has been quoted as describing dinkies as 'mostly hedonists who value individuality and the quality of married life more than parenthood.'[414] A majority of the married respondents in Tang Meiling's survey of white-collar workers still did not have children.[415] Tang's respondents said this was mostly because of work pressure: 'the proportion of young married childless white-collar workers who put off having a child for work reasons was the highest, at 44.7%: they thought that having a child would affect their work (*sheng haizi hui yingxiang gongzuo*). If they were busy at work they would have no time [to look after the child], or they feared they would lose their job.'[416] Furthermore, competition in the job market is so intense that losing one's job during maternity leave is a realistic fear for many women, according to one female professional, interviewed by Xinhua.[417] In sum, it is the demands and temptations of the market economy which encourage white-collar workers to focus on career development, material accumulation and satisfaction of personal desires, and is leading some of them not to have children.

## Power-sharing in the white-collar household

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[412] ''Dinkies' on the Rise in Shanghai', china.org.cn, http://www.china.org.cn/english/Life/48742.htm (accessed September 2, 2008).
[413] Ibid.
[414] Ibid.
[415] Tang Meiling, op. cit., 117.
[416] Tang, ibid., 117.
[417] ''Dinkies' on the Rise in Shanghai', op. cit.

The transformation of a particular aspect of intimate relationships which my informants often mentioned, and which often gave rise to very heated opinions, was power sharing between husband and wife. Such transformations are being effected through the linking of many elements, including historical notions of appropriate relations between husbands and wives drawing from 'traditional' precepts, more recently-established socialist viewpoints, as well as biologising 'scientific' ideas which entered China in the early 20th century, as I discussed in chapter two. Crucial to this mix are notions and practices surrounding the gendered division of space, which are of particular relevance in today's climate where increasing numbers of men – and women – are expressing the belief (and living a corresponding reality) that women are more naturally suited to and indeed ought to spend more time on domestic tasks and child-rearing than men, and that a husband's career choices should come before his wife's. All this produces very complex gendered relations between husbands and wives that do not fall into simple binary categories (as I indicate below with the story of the mother of one my informants, who 'wears the trousers' in her marital home), and also often conflict with global 'hegemonic' ideas of the gender-enlightened and 'politically correct' white-collar husband.

A survey conducted by the All-China Woman's Federation has revealed that wives have more decision-making power over daily expenses than they used to, which Chen Aihua, a professor at Nanjing's Southeast University, argues is due to '[i]mprovement of women's economic status and education'. However, the survey also showed that men are more likely to retain decision-making power over large items of expenditure.[418] My informants' views were varied: some believed unequivocally that men were the masters of the family, while others argued that many women have substantial domestic power. 'In China there is an old saying: for all to be well in a country, the first consideration is family (*yige guojia yao hao, xian xiu jiating*). First sort out the family, then sort out the nation (*jiating nong hao, ranhou nong guojia*)'. These were the words of Peter, one of the administrative assistants at the Sanyuanqiao English school, referring to a canonical item of China's Confucian tradition to stress the importance of the family in Chinese culture. And he was clear about who he thought was in charge of 'sorting out' the family – the man. However, in the current competitive climate of China's market economy, he argued that a man's ability to 'sort out' his family depended initially on 'sorting out' his career. At the heart of a successful modern Chinese family, in Peter's view, is a man who 'after getting a good job and becoming reasonably successful, looks for a wife and then gets married' (*youle ziji de gongzuo yihou, fazhan de*

[418] 'Chinese Wives have More Decision-Making Power', People's Daily Online, http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200209/10/eng20020910_102957.shtml (accessed August 30, 2008).

*bucuo yihou, zhao yige laopo, qizi, ranhou jiehun*). Having married, Peter insisted, it was the man's responsibility to ensure that his children were well educated: 'this is something that a man has to do' (*zhe shi yige nanren bixu zuo de shiqing*). Peter's view was unequivocal: family welfare depended first and foremost on the man, and for a man to be considered successful in life, he must establish both a career and run a flourishing family.

Terry, Peter's colleague, also saw the man as most important figure in the family. 'For example, traditionally in China – possibly there are also these customs in modern society – the man is considered the main figure, or the mainstay (*zhizhu*) of the family.' He mentioned a long-established saying to explain that while men attended to work outside the family, a women's lot was to take care of domestic duties. 'As for women, how to put it? In Chinese there is a saying, "men control the outside, women control the inside" (*nan zhu wai, nü zhu nei*).' In Terry's view, Chinese society would never fully rid itself of this concept: 'I think with society's constant progress (*suizhe shehui de buduan jinbu*), this kind of opinion will possibly slowly weaken but won't die out, (*zhezhong kanfa keneng hui manmande jianruo, dan buhui xiaowang*).'[419]

Such widespread and pervasive notions about the proper role of men in the family and their relationships with their wives and girlfriends inevitably inflect how white-collar men conceive of their own masculinity. Wen, the sales manager for the European electrical equipment company, concurred with these views in many respects. He felt pressurized, as the 'breadwinner' of the family, to provide for his family. This folds another 'subject position', the 'anxious breadwinner', into the complex mix of the subject positions informing Wen's sense of his own masculinity. His wife did not work – which he acknowledged was a mark of status demonstrating his financial power – and they had a son whom his wife wanted to go to an outstanding primary school she had selected, even though they did not live in its catchment area. Furthermore, he himself wished eventually to send his child to an overseas university, because he considered the Chinese education system too limited. To ensure a place for his son at his wife's choice of primary school, Walter told me he had to pay a 'holding fee' (*zhanzhu fei*) of 60,000 yuan (over four thousand pounds) to the principal of the school because they did not live in the catchment area. But this was only a temporary measure: he then had to buy a house within the catchment area. Nevertheless, he also suggested that women held

[419] In her study of daughters and mothers, Harriet Evans also pointed out the continuing relevance of the 'inner/outer' (*nei/wai*) distinction to 'women's self-positioning as gendered subjects.' Harriet Evans, *The Subject of Gender: Daughters and Mothers in Urban China* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008), 101.

considerable power in family matters.[420] He told me he did not contest his wife's decisions in many domestic issues, for the sake of domestic harmony, and gave as an example his wife insisting on choosing the decor for their houses. Even if he did not like it, he said, he still went along with it, because if he did not it would end in a quarrel or divorce. In this regard, Wen was behaving more like the tolerant, open-minded white-collar men of the narratives in women's magazines (see below). However, his wife's remit did not extend to utilities such as the electrics and the plumbing, which he handled because his wife did not know anything about them. The positions Wen adopted suggest tactical manouevring on his part, a recognition that he must in some respects 'treat' his wife kindly and respect her rights, yet at the same time display his desire to hold onto areas of control he deemed significant, or unquestionably a man's responsibility. Wen's acknowledgement of his wife's domestic influence is just as Croll suggested in her study of China's 'new consumers', where she agrees with the notion that women from affluent backgrounds have a significant degree of domestic decision-making power. She cites a survey on the spending patterns of China's super rich that 'suggested that many of the key decisions to do with family or personal daily consumption were made by wives.'[421]

In some families, it appears that the wife/mother is completely in charge at home, in terms stereotypically associated with the husband's/father's profile. Jason, who was helping out with the family firm, described his mother's dominant role in just such a way. In the 1980s, his mother had worked for a state company sourcing and selling industrial components, before setting up her own company with her brother to do exactly the same thing operating from an office in a business park. In Jason's view, she was an early version of the white-collar worker turned entrepreneur in the early reform era. Her business success had enabled Jason to pursue further education in the West, and had funded foreign holidays for the whole family as well as the purchase of a second house. Jason was not entrepreneurially minded, he happily confessed, and took no strategic role in the company, preferring to work in a normal employee's role. His mother's obvious business acumen was coupled with a strength of

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[420] This view is widespread: in his research on changes in private life in a small northeastern village, Yunxiang Yan found that 'many villagers expressed the belief that in most families it is the wife who has the final say.' Yunxiang Yan, *Private Life Under Socialism: Love, Intimacy, and Family Change in a Chinese Village 1949-1999* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 99.

[421] Elisabeth Croll, op. cit., 84-5. However, anthropologists Alan Smart and Li Zhang, in their survey of anthropologies of urban transition, suggest that non-working women from wealthy backgrounds do not have as much domestic authority as working breadwinning wives: 'among Wenzhou migrants gender inequality has increased most among wealthy households where women are pushed out of work, while in lower- and middle-income households wives are the primary producers and have more family decision-making power.' See Alan Smart and Li Zhang, 'From the Mountains and the Fields: The Urban Transition in the Anthropology of China,' *China Information* 20, (2006): 492.

character which Jason contrasted with his father, whom he described scathingly as being weak-willed, and not exhibiting, in Jason's view, the masculine qualities of determination and decisiveness. Jason was determined not to be like his father. He described his mother as a 'strong woman' (*nü qiangren*), and on the several occasions when I visited their home, it was clear that she headed the family in conventional gender terms: it was she, not her husband, who seemed to 'rule the outside' (*zhu wai*). His father shopped, cooked and cleaned, while she made business calls and chatted with guests. In Jason's words: 'It's my mother who's in charge (*wei zhu*), because she has always been considered as a strong Chinese woman (*Zhongguo nü qiangren*), the kind with a strong personality (*hen you gexing*). My father is the opposite (*fanguolai*): he's a househusband (*jiating funan*) who cooks in the kitchen (*xia chu zuo fan*) and takes care of household chores (*caoli jiashi*).' Jason believed this kind of domestic arrangement was now very common: 'Nowadays, most of this so-called henpecking (*suoweide qiguanyan*), the wife controlling the relatively passive husband (*zhangfu bei laopo guanqilai, bijiao beidong yidian*), is extremely widespread (*feichang de pubian*).'[422]

Despite Jason's assertion of the spread of the dominant and implicitly 'henpecking' wife, when I asked four young white-collar working adults – two men and two women at the Zhongguancun school – who they thought should have the final say in the family, nobody unequivocally chose the wife. Robin, who was very easygoing, laid open the possibility that it could be the wife, when he argued that stability in the family required one partner – either husband or wife – to be dominant; he claimed that research shows if power is equally shared it leads to instability. Elizabeth thought that the husband should have the final say, although she believed housework should be equally shared. Justin, who was usually very politically liberal in his opinions, also said it should be the husband. Vicky, who was often a strong advocate of women's rights in class discussions, felt that power should be shared equally between husband and wife. In another class, during a discussion I initiated about the power balance between husbands and wives, I asked Ryan, a 29-year-old police detective originally from Henan, whether he expected his wife to 'obey' (*tingcong/fucong*) him. He replied yes, he did want her to obey him, but with a long face he admitted that in reality he had to respect her wishes; this caused great laughter in class, although Ryan did not seem too amused. The women in the class – most in well-paying jobs – nodded but rolled their eyes when I asked if most Chinese husbands expected their wives to obey them, leaving me with the sense that they would not be rushing to obey their partners.

[422] Below, I discuss further male anxieties about dominant wives.

Two of my female colleagues at Johnson's believed that in contrast with women's changing role and position, men were rather slower to adapt to changing circumstances. Belinda argued passionately that many men still try to 'control' (*guan*) their wives and girlfriends, adding that this type of 'traditional thinking' was very 'deep-rooted' (*genshen-digu*) and 'serious' (*yanzhong*). However, as a young modern woman, she believed herself to be relatively independent of her boyfriend. Claire, too, thought that younger men's attitudes had not changed much from those of the older generation. In her view, Chinese men, particularly men with high salaries, generally felt that women should not go out to work nor should they go out to have fun, though she added men on lower salaries needed their wives to go out to work to bring enough money into the family home. Moreover, she noted that a wife's greater career success often caused problems at home, because of the husband's difficulties in accepting his 'inferior' status (*zibei*), which she attributed to the higher status men historically enjoyed. Most women, she suggested, were content with 'traditional' arrangements, and despite their higher educational level relatively few wanted to pursue a career. And is if echoing the 'truth' of their views from the 'man's perspective, Bruce, the manager of the Sanyuanqiao language school, made it clear that he was both unwilling and unable to countenance an inversion of conventional gender roles:

> Lots of people don't like the idea. Why? Because from a man's point of view, the traditional definition is that men go out to work, women stay at home to cook meals and such like (*chuantong de dingyi shi nande zai waimian gongzuo, nüde zai jiali zuo fan, qita zhexie dongxi*). Let me give you a personal example. Formerly I knew a woman, she was 26, 3 years older than me. She had her own career, a car, and also a house. She wanted to have a relationship with me, but I thought maybe I couldn't…couldn't really accept it (*wo keneng bu hui…bu tai jieshou*), because if she earned money (*ta zhuan qian*) and I go and spend her money (*wo qu hua tade qian*), then I'd be a 'little white face' (*xiaobailian*).[423]

I laughed when he said 'little white face' and asked, 'don't you want that?' He laughed, then looked serious, replying: 'No, it's [about] a kind of self-confidence' (*buyao, shi yizhong zixinxin*). Bruce did not want to take up the 'subject position' of *xiaobailian*, although it is an established and not uncommon male identity in China. Bruce feared association with the term *xiaobailian* because it implied reliance and dependence on women's economic wealth and favour, challenging his sense of what he saw as rightful masculine dominance in intimate relationships with women. Such fears are nurtured and magnified in the current climate of male anxiety about the rising economic independence of women. In Bruce's estimation, the

[423] A 'little white face' is a commonly used phrase in China to describe a good-looking young man, often one who goes out with and is financially supported by older, wealthier women.

dependency of 'little white faces' on women's wealth conflicted too much with his investment in his desired status as the self-sufficient, affluent, breadwinning provider; it was a step too far, a contradiction that he could not resolve in his construction of his self-image.

In her survey of conceptions of breadwinning amongst thirty-nine married couples (from various backgrounds) in Beijing, the sociologist Jiping Zuo, found that husbands and wives still generally conceptualised breadwinning and the division of domestic duties and family responsibilities along conventional gender lines. Whereas neither expected the wife to relinquish her work role, both believed that the husband should be the obligatory provider and the wife should combine work with household responsibilities.[424] However, some women do give up their careers for their husbands: an English medical researcher in Beijing informed me that some intelligent and well-qualified Chinese women she knew had given up good jobs and their career ambitions to put their husband's career first. The researcher said it was clear the women did not want to anger or disobey their husband, and subscribed to the idea that a husband puts career first and a wife puts family first. Zuo found that professional women's level of personal income was crucial in determining whether they chose to continue working or leave to raise a family. Professional women in high paying jobs 'all expressed their desire to stay in the labor force even if their husbands could support the family'; however, '[b]y contrast, professional women with low income, little intrinsic benefits, and long work hours all expressed their desire to return home provided that their husbands were able to support them.'[425]

Zuo also looked into the husbands' points of view, which she found to be very supportive of working wives if they could add significantly to family finances: 'The husbands shared similar opinions to those of the wives with respect to wives' family roles. An overwhelming majority of men firmly supported the wife's employment (37 out of 39). Men not only welcomed their wives' employment but also cherished it when their wives made significant financial contributions to the family.'[426] Zuo attributed this to state promotion of women in the labour force: 'The 40 years of gender equality education and practice have instilled in men, as well as in women, egalitarian beliefs about women's work role.'[427] Zuo even found some middle-class men who professed disappointment and regret that their wives had no career. 'One scholar, who married a staff member from a research institute, reported

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[424] Jiping Zuo, 'From Revolutionary Comrades to Gendered Partners: Marital Construction of Breadwinning in Post-Mao Urban China,' *Journal of Family Issues* 24, no. 3 (2003): 323.
[425] Zuo, ibid., 327.
[426] Zuo, ibid., 328.
[427] Zuo, ibid., 328.

that 'I thought that we would have something more in common had she had a career of her own.''[428] However, Zuo also found that although many men preferred their wives to keep working even if the man's income was enough to support the family, 'most men had no expectation of their wives' being committed breadwinners',[429] because they still expected their wives to shoulder the double burden of work and family duties. 'The data show that in spite of the fact that 90% of wives held a full-time job, 70% of them shouldered more household responsibilities than their husbands did.[430]

**Breadwinning pressure on white-collar men**

In the changing social and economic conditions of the reform period, a new subjectivity of the anxious white-collar male under pressure has emerged, as I have pointed out above, characterised by an anxiety about his status, as represented through salary, educational qualifications, in relation to his wife's. These anxieties are driven by widely circulating notions about a general rise in women's power and a decline in men's in recent years, as I mentioned in chapter two, and by a marked return to strongly-embedded notions of 'natural' gender roles and characteristics. The typical 'anxious white-collar male' believes that being a man in today's China is much more onerous than being a woman, so both my informants and media discussions would suggest. He generally holds that he has to be the dominant wage earner in the household, and finds it very difficult to accept his wife earning more than him. If she does, and she chides him, he complains of being henpecked. Indeed, if his salary is high enough, he would prefer she does not work at all. He also much prefers his educational achievements to outrank his wife's. He is content to 'allow' his wife to run domestic sphere activities, such as daily household tasks and raising children, as long as he maintains pre-eminent status in public sphere fields such as career and even leisure activities. Of course, he does expect her to bring in a salary if his is not high enough, but this causes him increased anxiety, since he does not want her salary ever to eclipse his own. The subject position of the 'anxious breadwinner', produced through gendered cultural discourses of male fears about challenges to what is seen as men's rightful position in the family is driven by increasing education levels and earning power amongst women. It was articulated by my informants in their references to 'historically' embedded ideas of men's authority over women, rooted in the biologising 'scientific' discourses of their educational backgrounds and the *nanzihan*

[428] Zuo, ibid., 328.
[429] Zuo, ibid., 329.
[430] Zuo, ibid., 329.

masculinities resurrected by the root-seeking movement in the 1980s, all of which contradict the image of the smooth, liberal, women's rights embracing 'new man' of the metropolises, as I investigate further in the following section. First, however, I look more into the formations of the 'anxious breadwinner' discourse through analysis of my informants' ideas and practices.

A key issue that comes to light through my ethnographic data here is that men's anxieties about their authority in a highly competitive society in which women are gaining increasing status, and their related anxieties about their position in the conjugal relationship, are conducive to men's denigration of their wives' position as a way of reaffirming the masculine self..[431] This was apparent in various comments my informants made. 'One can say that Chinese people are rather chauvinistic (*keyi shuo Zhongguoren dou shi feichang de bijiao da nanzizhuyi*)', Kevin argued, but suggested, as Terry had, that in recent years this attitude has 'faded and decreased (*you danhua you jianshao*).' However, it had not disappeared, he maintained, therefore '[men] feel under a bit more pressure (*hui ganjuedao yali hui da yixie*).' As professional, educated women seem to be increasingly empowered, and men feel under more and more pressure, many men resort to the comfort of gender stereotypes they already know. This is one reason why in the more open reform era some men have been so vocal in their calls for women to leave work and return to the home,[432] and some of those who can afford it, like Wen, prefer their wives to be full time housewives and mothers. Kevin had a girlfriend, and even though he said he agreed in general with the principle that men and women should be equal, he admitted that he felt under pressure to make more money than her, to be the highest achiever in the relationship. Because of this, he concluded, it was not easy being a man in contemporary China. Wen, too, felt embattled and said that Chinese men were very '*xinku*' (hard-pressed). He was particularly concerned about inflation, and complained to me with an exasperated sigh over dinner one evening that even the cost of maids was going up.

As exemplified by Bruce, white-collar men's unwillingness for their wives to become the main breadwinner means, in effect, that they bring more pressure on themselves and in my experience are very vocal in complaining about this pressure. Bruce attempted to sum up for me the pressures and responsibilities of the contemporary white-collar man as he saw them:

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[431] Cultural discourses of male anxieties in times of social and economic uncertainty and attempted reclamations of dominant masculine subjectivities through increased misogynistic notions and practices have historical antecedents in China at least as far back as the late Ming period. T'ien Ju-K'ang, *Male Anxiety and Female Chastity: A Comparative Study of Ethical Values in Ming-Ch'Ing Times* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988).
[432] Wang Zheng, 'Gender, Employment and Women's Resistance,' in *Chinese Society: Change, Conflict and Resistance*, ed. Elizabeth J. Perry and Mark Selden (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003): 160-4.

‘It’s because Chinese boys are relatively responsible minded (*Zhongguo nanhai’er bijiao zeren xinde*.) Why? You have to get married (*yao jiehun*), you have give your wife a home (*yao gei ni laopo yige jia*), a comfortable place (*anwei de difang*), you need a reliable job (*kekao de gongzuo*), you go back and forth, take care of your family (*zhaogu nide jiali ren*), and perhaps above you there are your parents (*ni keneng shangmian hai you fumu*).’ He joked that the sole purpose of white-collar men was to make money for their wife, children and parents to spend as consumers: ‘We jokingly say Chinese men are now just money-making machines (*kaiwanxiao de shuo Zhongguo nanren jiushi zhuan qian jiqi*): they make money, women spend it (*[tamen] jiushi zhuan qiande*, *nüde jiushi hua qiande*). And all the shops, sellers, clients, and women: they're all earning men's money (*dou zhuande shi nande qian*). Because who is given the money earned by men to spend (*nanren zhuande qian shi gei shei hua de*)? It's given to their wives, children and parents to spend (*gei laopo hua, gei haizi hua, gei fumu hua*). Bruce believed that money is what attracts women to men in today’s society, not looks:

> You can see lots of very ugly boys (*chou de nanhaizi*), but actually they've got money, so they can get a very pretty girlfriend or wife (*qishi you qian, you hen piaoliang de nüpengyou huozhe hen piaoliang de laopo.*); and there are some very fine-featured boys (*ting qingjun nanhai*), who don't have money (*mei qian*). The key factor here is not about whether you're handsome or good-looking (*bushi chuyu ni shuai huozhe bushuai*): it's about whether you have money (*chuyu ni you qian meiyou qian*).

In Bruce’s view, the man is the linchpin provider for the rest of Chinese society, and it is his responsibility to earn enough money to provide for his family; but Bruce spoke cynically about the chances of making money on merit, and that the desire for money led to criminal behaviour:

> If you look at young people in their 20s, in China…I can talk about the negative and positive, right (*wo buguan shuo fumian haishi zhengmian dou keyi, shi ma*)? It’s realistic (*jiushi hen shijide*). If you look at 20-something boys, driving cars or whatever, there are two possibilities, one is that their family gave it to them (*jiali geide*), the family has money (*jiali you qian*), the other is that for sure he has done something bad (*ta mei zuo haoshi*), namely cheated people (*jiushi pian ren*).

Bruce’s cynicism conflicts with the mainstream academic and popular models I discussed in chapter two of the squeaky-clean, honest, pure young white-collar men, who make their money through their own hard work, not through corruption or nepotism.

Women’s ideas about breadwinning pressures on men are of course no less constructed through these various discursive formations. For example, Belinda, my colleague at Johnson’s school, also thought that being a man was a heavier burden than being a woman in

contemporary China because of the burden to provide for his partner: ‘ the most important reason is that if a girl maybe does not work hard herself (*nühai’er*, *keneng ziji bu nuli de hua*) but marries a good husband (*jia yige hao laogong*), she will possibly still be very happy (*keneng ye hui hen xingfu*); but for a man, when he has just started maturing (*nanren gang kaishi chengshu de shihou*), he has to go and earn lots of money himself (*rang ziji qu zhuan hen duo qian*); it is the only way he can provide for his girlfriend (*zheyang cai neng yangqi ziji de nüpengyou*).’[433]

Following the logic of the Belinda’s sentiments, professional women often forgo their own career advancement to support their husband’s career, which puts even more pressure on white-collar men. In her survey on breadwinning in post-Mao urban China, Jiping Zuo, found that many of her male respondents felt pressure from their wives to be successful in their careers: ‘Many men wanted to be successful because that was what their wives wanted them to be. Many wives said that it felt right when a man had a higher achievement than did his wife.’[434] Zuo quotes the wife of a man who had reached a high-ranking position in a government agency: ‘He knows that he has to keep making progress in his career to make me happy. He is a little concerned that I might leave him if he failed to do so.’[435] Another example Zuo gives is a businessman who said that ‘men would be looked down on by their wives if they failed to provide. His wife replied to the issue by saying, ‘I can understand it if his career suffers due to uncontrollable forces, but I won’t forgive him if he has no career ambition or overly devotes himself to domestic work.’’[436] Zuo also reports that some women told her they had passed up job opportunities to ensure their husband stayed as the main breadwinner of the family: ‘[…] some other women refused to be ‘overly’ committed to career pursuit for fear of crossing the breadwinning boundary. Several women stated that they passed up a few job opportunities in support of their husbands’ career. They did so to not hurt their husbands’ feelings and to maintain the harmony of their marital relationships.[437]

An additional burden on men and their families is the requirement to pay for the couple’s housing: ‘One aspect of the cultural model of patrilocality that did not disappear by

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[433] Belinda’s acceptance of the discourse that a man’s ‘burden’ to work to provide for his wife or girlfriend, without an acknowledgement of the gendered power imbalance underlying this arrangement, can be understood through Bourdieu’s characteristion of ‘masculine domination’ as ‘imperceptible and invisible even to its victims, exerted for the most part through the purely symbolic channels of communication and cognition (more precisely, misrecognition), recognition, or even feeling.’ See Pierre Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), 1.
[434] Jiping Zuo, op. cit., 330.
[435] Zuo, ibid., 330.
[436] Zuo, ibid., 330.
[437] Zuo, ibid., 330.

the late 1990s was the expectation that grooms would provide marital housing. The ability to live up to this expectation remained an important determinant of whether a man could win a bride.'[438] This has become more difficult in the reform era, according to Fong, 'as more housing became privatized rather than provided by employers.'[439] This put more financial pressure on the parents of boys: 'Unlike sons' parents, daughters' parents could invest all their savings in their daughters' education, rather than saving part of it for the purchase of marital housing. The need to obtain housing to attract a spouse was thus a disadvantage for sons and their parents.[440] When I raised this issue with Mark, the computer company owner in his late twenties, he confirmed that it is the groom's family that is expected to provide the marital housing.

Men are also under pressure to work longer hours than their spouses because they are viewed as the main provider. 'Among dual-earner couples, husbands are found to work longer hours than wives, wives' earnings tend to be considered as secondary, and husbands are still expected to be the main providers.'[441] Zuo found considerable evidence of husbands working more and earning more than wives:

> There were far more husbands than wives entering the private sector to seek higher earnings. Husbands were more likely than wives to moonlight. Wives were more likely to sacrifice their own career in support of that of their husbands than the other way round. More wives than husbands became unemployed workers. Of the unemployed workers, husbands tended to obtain another job more often than wives. Wives were more likely than husbands to quit the job in the situation in which one spouse's income alone could sufficiently support the family. The above patterns resembled the general trend in Beijing and urban China.'[442]

Overall, the evidence suggests that generally both white-collar husbands and wives place more expectations on husbands to have successful careers, capable of providing the bulk of family support, and that many wives are content to have a secondary status to their husbands. This is occurring at a time great social and economic change from which middle-class women are benefitting in terms of educational and career opportunities, and in which many men feel doubly pressured through their 'obligation' to provide and the knowledge that their wives may well have the potential to earn as much if not more than they do. To neutralize the 'threat' that this presents to their status and self-image, white-collar men often resort to encouraging their

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[438] Vanessa L. Fong, *Only Hope: Coming of Age Under China's One-Child Policy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 113.
[439] Fong, ibid., 113.
[440] Fong, ibid., 114.
[441] Jiping Zuo, op. cit., 315.
[442] Zuo, ibid., 322.

wives to leave their careers to attend to domestic matters, further adding to their sense of pressure. Furthermore, accompanying the rise in the educational and employment opportunities for women is a cultural discourse of idealization of the good husband, associated with the better educated and cosmopolitan white-collar man, which as I have shown above, contributes to men's self identification. The white-collar husband is thus additionally 'pressured' to treat his wife with care and loving respect as an equal, conflicting with his attempts to maintain his dominant status. It is to this idealization of the good husband as an aspect of men's gendered subjectivities that I now turn.

**The spousal ideal and his discontents**

In this section, I examine how the pressure to have a happy marriage is constructed through the intertwining of discursive formations with the material settings, practices, emotions and values productive of the subject positions that white-collar husbands take up, three of which are particularly preeminent. First, the reinforcement of notions of gender difference in marriage legitimise men's view of themselves as hopelessly burdened, as mentioned above, and also reaffirm a fundamentally unchanged ideology of women's emotionality, dependence and service. Second, also discussed above, the concurrent production of male anxieties about their position in society and the family, and the performance of their manhood, as seen in the concerns about potency about which Everett Zhang has written and in my informants' comments about all aspects of their lives may reflect a kind of 'siege gender mentality' of the dominant under threat. And third, the idealisation of the good husband, which I look at in detail below. For the white-collar masculine husband/partner, these produce multiple, at times conflicting subject positions: his economic 'burden' is to provide a suitable middle-class lifestyle including condominium apartment, an appropriate brand of car and the consumer frills that the wife of a white-collar woman. However, he worries about his wife contributing too much financially lest her success detract from his status and in that respect would rather she not work, but he really needs her income. At the same time, he knows that being a 'good' husband means treating his wife as an equal, respecting her wishes, and encouraging her in her own journey of self-fulfillment, and yet he must also be tender towards her *and* a 'manly' protector if necessary, as I examine below in my discussion of the 'Happy Heroes' TV show. Furthermore, the additional competition in the marriage market from the increasing number of

foreign male white-collar professionals working in China's big cities leaves the Chinese white-collar man feeling even more under assault, beleaguered and disempowered.[443]

Three related points can be drawn out from this. First, despite men's anxieties about overwork and not wanting their wives to go out to work, they are still subject to an idealisation of conjugal contentment. They have to be the good husband, who works on himself to be more caring and understanding towards his wife. Yet this also shores up the conventional gender asymmetry of marriage: men's love of their wives is eulogised not to imply that he should not be the breadwinner but rather to keep his wife happy as the servicing dependent wife. Finally, the ideal couple are depicted as practising a unity of consumption: the house, the car, the holidays are material goals for the couple's happy life together.

The idealisation of happy companionate conjugality has been a constant feature of the reform era discourses positioning contemporary subjectivities in China. 'Since the early 1980s, the 'privatization' of matters associated with love and marriage has been accompanied by the widespread use of romantic imagery to contextualize descriptions of the ideal marital relationship.'[444] Tang Meiling implies that the idealization of family life serves as an imagined respite from intense career pressure: 'At work, young white-collar workers have a strong sense of urgency and strong pressure (*hen qiang de jinpogan he yali*) and relatively high career development demands (*jiaogao de zhiye fazhan yaoqiu*); in life, they pursue a warm, romantic and happy family life (*zhuiqiu wenxin, langman he xingfu de jiating shenghuo*).'[445] However, Tang acknowledges the practical difficulties in balancing work and family: ''Start a family and establish a career' (*chengjia-liye*) is the issue facing every young white-collar worker, but tension and pressure (*jinzhang he yali*) often mean working and family life cannot both be satisfactory' (*gongzuo he jiating shenghuo buneng liangquan*).[446] Harriet Evans argues that the wife's placing her husband's career before her own is promoted as a way to resolve this tension: 'the wife's self-sacrificing support of her husband has been reinforced as a gender-

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443 The 'China Bounder' case in 2006 encapsulates how middle-class Chinese male anxieties prompt moral criticism of women. Zhang Jiehao, a professor of psychology at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences led a patriotic charge against an 'immoral' male foreigner who blogged about his extensive sexual exploits with Chinese women, ostensibly to protect Chinese women, but the ensuing heated debate at a national level online and much talked about effectively set out a critique of Chinese women's sexual behaviour. If Chinese white-collar masculinity is constructed in part through submissive feminine others, such as potential marriage partners, when these young middle-class women exhibit independent-minded behaviour such as sleeping with foreign men, then this threatens the Chinese white-collar men's sense of masculinity, and the ensuing expression of this sense of anxiety involves a 'patriotic' policing of China's educated urban women. For a summary of the case and its aftermath, see Justin McCurry and Jonathan Watts, 'China Sex Blogger Reveals His Identity', *The Guardian*, http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2008/jul/17/blogging.internet1 (accessed September 8, 2009).

444 Evans, 1997, op. cit., 113.

445 Tang, op. cit., 115.

446 Tang, ibid., 115.

specific requirement of the harmonious ideal of conjugality.'[447] According to Evans, dominant gender discourse 'effectively biologizes the sexual and moral imperatives imposed on women in representations of wifehood'.[448] This means that the conjugal ideal of the harmonious white-collar couple, in which the wife plays the predominant domestic role while remaining subservient to her husband, is presented as the natural way of things, perpetuating an unequal, hierarchical reality at times obscured by images of equal say within the marriage.

A television show, *Huanle yingxiong* (Happy Heroes), broadcast in 2005, manifested this two-way pressure of developing a hard, corporate white-collar masculinity and a caring conjugal masculinity. It followed six men, all between twenty-five and thirty-five years old, and nearly all with white-collar professions, who were on the verge of getting married, as they went through individual and group tests in a training camp to see who was the number one 'good man' (*hao nanren*). In recognition of the mix of global and local aspects involved in contemporary relationships, the website introduction to the show states: 'In these days of cultural collision between East and West, people are no longer certain about the traditional views on family and marriage. There is no (longer a) fixed definition of a 'good man'.'[449] The eclectic activities which the men had to undergo included various 'psychological' tests; looking after young children in a kindergarten; filming an MTV style music video about 'good men''; wearing knights' armour to show how tough they were; a table tennis competition; a painting competition in which their fiancees directed them to paint something; baking a cake; cooking a savoury dish; answering questions on resolving daily life problems in the home; and they had to guess their fiancees' answer to a specific question, to see how well they knew their fiancee.

From the type of activities the programme makers selected, their assumptions about what a 'good man' should be able to do are clear: he should be domesticated and be able to look after children, yet he should also be tough and able to handle himself in public, physically if necessary. A lot of the activities pointed to the men's relationship with their partners, promulgating the message that to be a good man one needs to be a good husband. Implicitly, this marginalises all those who are not married, particularly those beyond the average marrying age band. The range of activities is indicative of how masculinities are constituted, as Rose emphasizes, not merely through linguistic interpellation, but also through bodily and

[447] Evans, 1997, op. cit., 113.
[448] Evans, ibid.,113.
[449] 'Huanle yingxiong' (Happy Heroes), *CCTV shenghuo pindao* (CCTV Living Channel), http://www.cctv.com/life/special/C13687/01/index.shtml (accessed May 9, 2005).

mental techniques concerning particular objects and issues in particular spaces. For example, the performance of the caring, tender husband and father is demonstrated through caring for children in a kindergarten setting, or baking a cake in a domestic setting, or even answering personal questions about their fiancee to show an intimate bond that 'transcends' physical place. However, in contrast, the competitive and sophisticated 'knight' is constructed in assemblages of displays of physical prowess, energy and dexterity, such as dancing, singing and using props in music videos or taking on competitors in sporting settings, such as the table tennis table, bat in hand. This is not to deny the importance of linguistic interpellation in the construction of these contrasting, sometimes conflicting, always shifting masculinities, but to draw attention to the *materiality* of discursive formations, the body connected with routines, habits, movements in assemblages that, in very complex ways, infold these practices into 'psychological interiors' which may seem perfectly natural, unchanging, and justified to individuals in the ways they live and articulate their gendered selves.

Distinguishing the winner from the other competitors was his mastery of romantic language: in his website profile he wrote that his wife 'is the most beautiful and kind-hearted woman in my mind's eye; marrying her is the most fortunate event of my life (*neng qudao ta shi wo zhe beizi zui xingyun de shiqing*). I would marry her again in my next life and the life after that (*laishi de laishi, wo haishi yao qu ta*)'[450] Loving words like these no doubt touched a chord with the younger female viewers of the show, and it was most likely their voting power which ensured his victory. Comments from Belinda, my co-teacher at Johnson's, echoed the sentiments of the wives on the programme: she stated that her ideal boyfriend would be 'responsible' (*zeren xin*), 'dedicated to his work' (*shiye xin*), and crucially, would love her very much. It is clear that in competitive and fast-changing times, men – and women – turn to those discursively-formed gendered configurations which provide them with most reassurance, infolding particular ideas, values and practices 'within' themselves, and thus developing ways of seeing themselves as gendered in particular ways; which here involves a return to an ideal of warm, companionate, yet deeply gendered conjugality.

As the winner of *Huanle yingxiong* demonstrated, the 'good man' and husband has to work on himself to be such, so that his performance of masculinity can encompass these sometimes conflicting masculinities. Through this performative process, 'global' and 'local' ideas are taken up to create new white-collar masculinities, which make complex and competing demands upon the men who take them up. This new 'model' of a white-collar

[450] 'Wang Fei', *CCTV shenghuo pindao* (CCTV Living Channel), http://www.cctv.com/life/special/C13687/20050407/101875.shtml (accessed May 9, 2005).

husband should treat his servicing, emotional wife with loving kindness. At the same time, both he and his wife expect him to be successful in his career. He has the complex task of learning a cool masculinity primarily suited for office life, to demonstrate his urban sophistication and corporate suitability; yet also develop a caring, sensitive and respectful masculinity for an idealised intimate relationship of domestic bliss, which at least palliates his wife's unequal domestic burden. Some corporate men struggle to live up to the loving ideal, James Farrer notes, instead treating marriage 'as a practical step they would take after establishing themselves in a career, substantiating the complaints of educated women […] that men treated relationships in a businesslike fashion.'[451]

An account of the tensions in the marriage of two office workers in *Qingnian shejiao* (Touch) magazine exemplifies the mainstream discursive depictions of the emotionally dependent wife, and the husband who works at being more sensitive to her needs.[452] Zhou Jing, the 28-year-old wife, a clerk (*wenyuan*), describes how dependent she was on her husband emotionally after having their daughter: 'After giving birth to our daughter I suffered from post-natal depression: everyday I lay in bed, I didn't want to keep on taking medicine, and for more than half a month my husband stayed at home to take care of me. He didn't go to work until my state of mind had got a bit better.'[453] She reinforced her emotional helplessness through her outline of her prolonged low spirits: 'My depression continued at a lesser degree, the whole day I would hold our daughter and gaze out the window; suddenly I felt that nobody cared for me, even to the extent that I lost faith in life.'[454] She was unable to break out of her unhappy state, which she visited upon her husband: 'At that time, my husband worked far way at the Outer Pudong Bridge, and whether he came home quickly or slowly, I continuously complained to him and expressed my dissatisfaction, and blamed him for not calling to see how I was. Perhaps it was due to my bad mood, what I said was always sarcastic: at that time both of us were in sullen moods, neither side yielded, blaming each other.'[455]

Her husband, Duan Ran, a 30-year-old purchasing manager (*caigou zhuguan*), revealed how he had felt under huge pressure at work and at home during this period:

At that time my state of mind was also not good. During the day I had a lot of pressure at

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[451] James Farrer, *Opening Up: Youth Sex Culture and Market Reform in Shanghai* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 220.

[452] Ai Lei, 'Yadang Xiawa ruci butong' (The differences between women and men), *Qingnian shejiao* (Touch) (June 2005): 12-19. 'Yadang Xiawa' literally means 'Adam [and] Eve', which acknowledges the familiarity of *Qingnian Shejiao*'s predominantly middle-class readership with Christian mythology.

[453] Ai, ibid., 12.

[454] Ai, ibid., 12.

[455] Ai, ibid., 12, 14.

> work, I had to suffer my boss's criticisms; and after work I was again met with my wife's insults: I couldn't bear these ongoing insults. When I got angry, I really felt like escaping to my parents' home. Why is that women can go back to their parents' home but men can't?[456]

However, in a revelatory moment, he perceived his wife's utter helplessness, weakness and reliance on him: 'Just when I was getting ready to step out and escape, I saw my wife's helpless state of mind; perhaps my stopping momentarily gave her inspiration, she said: 'Don't go, I need you too much! Hold me tight in your arms! I need your warmth, your strength. Husband, please don't go!''[457] It was then that he began to ask himself about love's 'true meaning' and to question his own actions:

> At that instant, for the first time I comprehended: what is love? What is the true meaning of love? I couldn't help think, genuine love, means having your partner's interests at heart, means no matter what happens, the two people must help one another in times of difficulty, with mutual love and respect. I had always bragged I was a qualified husband, full of love for my wife, but just as she said, I had absolutely not accompanied her through the crisis: the time when she had complained because her pain or disappointment, I had just thought of escaping.

In a happy ending to the article, Duan resolved to become a better person and to 'understand' his wife fully. His attention to himself, or 'care of the self', outlines the process of body – and mental – work he had to go through, to measure up to the ideal of a loving husband:

> Right from that day on, I reflected and weighed things up, in the end how I could get along with my wife. So that she wouldn't get hurt again, to help her through difficulties, to take her from sadness to happiness, from anger to joy, I worked hard to change myself, to understand her, to satisfy her needs, and to let her understand my thoughts and needs; in these ways, one can resolve every kind of emotional conflict.[458]

A psychologist is quoted in a commentary on the account, to lend weight to the idea that husbands must work at showing love to their wives: '[…] the wife only needs to get her husband's concern (*guanxin*), understanding (*lijie*), respect (*zunzhong*), devotion (*zhongcheng*), tenderness (*titie*) and comfort (*anwei*), even if it's just a silent embrace, a light caress and looking into each other's eyes (*yanshen de duijie*).'[459]

In the above narrative, the place where the husband, habituates himself to a more 'tender' masculinity is the matrimonial home, and he decides to leave the 'pressured

[456] Ai, ibid., 14.
[457] Ai, ibid., 14.
[458] Ai, ibid., 14.
[459] Ai, ibid., 14.

breadwinner' masculinity outside the front door. Until the husband was able to perform as a loving partner, he felt trapped, since if he fled to his parents he would be deemed irresponsible; he would not have lived up to his masculine responsibilities as head of the family. The psychologist here is the authoritative voice cajoling men into learning the emotional vocabulary, routines, and gestures of the tender, caring and sympathetic husband, played out in domestic spaces with particular arrangements of bodies and objects, such as the post-natal wife and mother at the window, or on the bed, waiting for her husband to come home. The disciplining voice of the psychologist promotes bodily and intellectual techniques which shape a new masculinity, very often discursively linked with the white-collar man. This, again, is the kind of change the white-collar man represents in China. Although 'real' life may not ever measure up to this discursive ideal, it signifies a new way of understanding the self for those men who are or aspire to be affluent, urban, sophisticated subjects, which is infolded with the many other subject positions that these men feel obligated or choose to take up and perform.

Given this demanding discursive climate, it is perhaps not surprising that many women (though not all) are not keen to take on the role of major breadwinner, as Jiping Zuo discovered in her survey of married couples:

> Men's ideal to provide was widely agreed on by their wives in the sample. The majority of wives (29 out of 39) went even further as to believe that the man should be the *main* breadwinner, although they said that they would be happy to share the financial burden. Their rationale was that women already shouldered a double burden—work and the family—and therefore had no energy left to carry on the breadwinning role. Several wives expressed their wish of not having to juggle work and household responsibilities. They would rather take on more housework and child care and be supportive of their husbands' career pursuits.

Zuo found that wives reported being praised for putting their husband's career first: 'The wives who put their husbands' career ahead of theirs tended to be praised by society. The wife of a prominent social scientist said proudly, 'When people learn about my husband's new academic achievements, they would praise me dearly for my support of his work.''[460] However, Zuo also found that 'a career woman would get admired only if she could successfully combine her career with family work', otherwise she would be seen as selfish.[461] Men were unable to escape from the burden of being the primary breadwinner, according to Zuo, because a man with a more successful wife was seen as unmasculine:

[460] Jiping Zuo, op. cit., 332.
[461] Zuo, ibid., 332.

> […] it was not quite acceptable for a husband to put his wife's career ahead of his. They would be seen as the ones who are unmasculine, not ambitious, and incapable. The men of 'failed aspirations' could not easily compensate for their failure with greater sharing of household responsibility. In the present study, when men's job/career achievements fell short of their wives' expectations, few were able to use an increased involvement in domestic tasks as a substitute for their career loss. This was because they breached the breadwinning boundary.[462]

For this reason, many ambitious white-collar men try their utmost to avoid becoming a man of 'failed aspirations', not measuring up to the ideal, as their very masculinity is at stake.

The expectation that middle-class husbands should earn more than their wives compels those men who do have high-achieving wives to defend their situation. In their survey of China's middle classes, Chen Guanren and Yi Yang report the story of Mr Dong, a white-collar man, who, although earning much less than his wife, had found a way to salvage his dignity through demonstrating that his public sector job brought many extra benefits that his wife's private sector job did not offer. His wife, in her mid-thirties, earned about 10,000 yuan a month working as a department manager for a foreign insurance company, whereas he earned around 3000 yuan at a large state-owned commercial company, likewise as a department manager.[463] According to Chen and Yi, a reporter 'asked Mr Dong with a laugh' (*xiao wen* […] *Dong xiansheng*) when Dong was standing at his wife's side, whether he thought his salary was 'much too below' (*shaode tai duo*) his wife's.[464] The reporter was perhaps trying to needle any sense of masculine dignity that Mr Dong may have had; however, Mr. Dong claimed his jobs non-monetary benefits compensated for his relatively low salary:

> You can't calculate it like that (*buneng zheyang suan*). My company provides housing, hers doesn't; mine has company cars, hers doesn't. If you came to my company to do the interview I could take you out for a meal in a restaurant on expenses, she couldn't. My monthly salary is about three thousand, and if you add in these sundry things, then there's not much of a difference (*ruguo zai ba zhexie qiqi-baba de jia jinqu, women chade ye bu suan hen duo*). Besides, you don't know how hard they have to work: the work she alone currently does would be done by three people in a state-owned enterprise (*ta xianzai yige ren gan de huo'er zai guoying qiye gai shi sange ren gan de*).'[465]

Mr Dong maintains his sense of self-worth vis-à-vis his wife by listing the extra benefits a state-employed employee gets. One major benefit of working for a state-owned organisation that Mr Dong does not mention, is the larger *guanxi* network available to those in the state

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[462] Zuo, ibid., 333.
[463] Chen and Yi, op. cit., 62.
[464] Chen and Yi, ibid., 62.
[465] Chen and Yi, 62-3.

sector, which Henry, one of my students with experience of working in both private and state sectors, had told me about.

To conclude, the idealization of a harmonious, companionate ideal of heterosexual conjugality in the white-collar household belies the real anxieties amongst contemporary white-collar men about their conjugal relationships. The responses from both men and women can be understood as entrenched grasping for what feels safe in an ideological and cultural context in which little urges them to think of gender in different ways, but in which especially women's roles and positions, and family structures are radically changing. White-collar men's relationships with their wives or girlfriends manifest a complex mix of practices reflecting deeply embedded cultural discourses in China, as well as those more recently emerging global ones. In the reform era, the 'traditional' discourse of *nan zhu wai nü zhu nei* has coalesced with the scientific 'biologising' discourse, which naturalises women's emotional and care-giving capabilities, to justify the continued overburdening of women with domestic duties in the white-collar household. Likewise, men are associated with mastery of the public sphere in both discourses, which justifies their continued position as expected main breadwinner in the family, although this puts them under more pressure than women to be successful in their careers; their status and self-respect depend on it.

Yunxiang Yan's injunction that the 'managerial elites' are relatively 'traditional' in their gender relationships is borne out by the evidence presented in this chapter. This reliance on familiar gender roles partly reflects heavier societal pressure on men to be breadwinners than women; at the same time it contributes to pressure on women to fulfil their domestic duties and to support their husband in his career. And although media articles and comments from my informants also indicate that wives have generally gained status and power within the family throughout the reform period, white-collar husbands mostly retain decision-making power over major issues. Indeed, while white-collar men often feel threatened by their increasingly better-educated wives, and complain of being henpecked, they often try to limit their wives' power in the family and maintain what they see as their rightfully dominant status. This puts increasing pressure on them to provide for their families. Consequently, widespread impetus and weight has been given to the idea that being a middle-class man in China is a heavier 'burden' than being a woman, because career success is vital to the social status of the aspiring white-collar man, and is even a crucial element in attracting a partner. To keep his wife happy, according to this discourse, the white-collar husband must learn to be attentive to

his way of caring for her; he must be loving, tender and patient of her emotional needs. Moreover, he must also be able to develop a 'corporate warrior' mentality so that he can achieve career success, and bring home enough money for the consumption requirements of their family unit, and the educational requirements of offspring, enabling them to build and maintain appropriate status in the social hierarchy. If he is unable to earn more than his wife, the white-collar man is at risk of becoming a figure of failure, unless he is able to justify it to others and himself.

In this chapter I have dealt with the emergence of the subjectivity of the anxious husband, fashioned through an assemblage of media and cultural discourses of the anxious male, some of which draw on and rework historical ideas; relationships and practices between men and women in their daily conjugal lives in the domestic environment, and the increasing gendered social and economic inequalities that have emerged on a national scale in the reform period. My informants offer little evidence to indicate a departure from conventional gender configurations in this regard. On the contrary, despite rhetoric about respecting the equal rights of women to careers and general self-fulfilment, their desires to reaffirm a masculine authority through concerns about their wife's or partner's potential challenge to their status have led to increased depictions of women as best suited to concentrating on domestic duties as wives and mothers, deferring to the career plans of their husbands. However, if these images and narratives about the cosmopolitan urban male confirm a fundamentally hierarchical view of binary gender relationships, others concerning potentially transgressive masculine subject positions suggest otherwise, as I go on to discuss in the next chapter.

# Chapter Seven
# The sexual ambiguities of white-collar masculinity

While the previous chapter suggests a partial retrenchment of conventional gender positions, some of the white-collar image's associations, whether in my informants' or media accounts, might suggest otherwise. The new 'man-enough' office worker discussed in chapter three, and Jianguomen man in chapter four are the main models of white-collar masculinity in contemporary Chinese discourse. The new century man who also appeared in chapter three, suggests an ambiguity in the gender meanings of his body; a suspicion of femininity hovers over his post-millennial attention to beautiful skin and beautiful brands. However, both my informants and media discussion explicitly refute this suspicion, while at the same time accepting the descriptor of 'slightly androgynous' as appropriate to the white-collar man.

This chapter analyses the gender implications of the white-collar man as sexual subject, examining the visual images, the accompanying texts and settings, and how my informants see themselves as sexual subjects. The media has characterized this sexual subject as the 'metrosexual'—sometimes translated as 'metropolitan jade man' (*dushi yu'nan*) or 'metropolitan beautiful man' (*dushi meinan*)—and the 'androgynous' (*zhongxing,* lit. 'middle sex man') man. Both these terms are widely associated with white-collar status.[466] For some, including my informants, these categories are positive signs of China's 'sexual revolution;' they denote the new gender attributes (and spending power) of the 'new century man' I discussed in chapter three. To others, they threaten the masculine boundaries of the moral order, particularly when associated with the extreme examples of transgressive 'androgyny' of media pop idols.[467]

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[466] Not all white-collar men are metrosexual, and not all metrosexuals are white-collar; but most of them are, according to an article in *China News Week*, which describes the 'mainstay' (*zhongjian liliang*) of 'metrosexuals' (*dushi linan*) as 'white-collar metrosexuals' (*bailing linan*). Sun Ran and Liu Lili, 'Bailing linan' (White-collar metrosexuals), *Zhongguo xinwen zhoukan* (China news week) no. 34 (2005): 57. The article explains the provenance and meaning of the English word 'metrosexual', offering *dushi linan* (literally 'metropolitan beautiful men') as a suitable Chinese translation: ibid., 58. 'Bailing linan' can also be more literally translated as 'white-collar male beauty', as I discussed in chapter three. *China News Week* has a circulation of 220,000, and is 'China's most authoritative news weekly' (*Zhongguo zui ju quanwei de xinwen zhoukan*): 'Zhongguo xinwen zhoukan (China News Week)', Liulan wang (gotoread.com), http://12297.gotoread.com/mag/80/ (accessed September 15, 2008).

[467] These pop idols might be seen as examples of the queering of contemporary sexualities and gender boundaries in China. However, my research shows that these figures are not interested in transgressing the moral

My discussion in previous chapters has largely focused on analyzing the components of hegemonic white-collar masculinity. This chapter turns to contestations within that hegemonic model with particular reference to the new sexual subjectivities inscribed in the images of the metrosexual, the androgynous and the gay man. This chapter argues that the new sexual subjectivities of white-collar men cannot be separated from the wider discourses and assemblages of social trends and practices, including those concerning the market's legitimation of consumer individualism. The newly emerging discourse producing the sexualized male subject of desire is simultaneously a discourse of consumer desire, productive of a sexualized male subjectivity attainable through cultivation of the body and style through consumer activities. The image of the metrosexual and androgynous white-collar man is produced right at the nexus of these discourses: in TV shows and in individual accounts, he is discursively chiefly defined through a consumer driven desire for success. Moreover, while the image of this figure blurs the standard look associated with manly behaviour, the words describing it reaffirm familiar masculine, heteronormative values. Both my informants and media debates disassociate the androgynous look from standard expectations of what it means to be a man.[468]

'Sexuality is one of the sites in the discourse of desire that characterises 'China's reconfiguration of its relationship to a postsocialist world';[469] the often vociferous media debates around sex and sexuality in contemporary China are an aspect of China's negotiation with global modernity. As part of today's 'modernising' ideology, these debates converge in the idea that personal fulfillment and happiness come through individual efforts and achievements. The allegory of modernity in reform China, as Lisa Rofel puts it, 'hold[s] out the promise that people can unshackle their innate gendered and sexual selves by freeing themselves from the socialist state.'[470] Satisfaction of personal sexual desire, then, according to such an ideology, is similarly a component of individual achievement. Indeed, the sexy images of prosperous white-collar men in the men's magazines appear to bestow a status on the fulfilment of personal desire that would merit talk of white-collar men's sexual capital.

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values of gender expectations; their performance of 'androgyny' is driven largely by consumer and aesthetic interests.

[468] On an anecdotal note, Western characterisations of 'oriental' masculinity as feminine in contemporary and historical eras are grounded in a failure to distinguish aesthetic values from other values of normative masculine behaviour in Chinese society.

[469] Rofel, op.cit., 2. The idea that 'talking about sex is modern' now has a long trajectory in writings on China. See, for example, Gail Hershatter, 'Sexing Modern China', in *Remapping China: Fissures in Historical Terrain*, ed. Gail Hershatter, Emily Honig, Jonathan N. Lipman and Randall Stross (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1996), 93

[470] Rofel, ibid., 13.

Seen in this light, the increased diversity of sexual expression and practice in China, which many have described as a 'sexual revolution',[471] has drawn attention away from the ongoing, and many would argue increasing gender inequity between men and women.[472] As this chapter shows, the gendered terms used to describe the figures of the metrosexual or the androgynous man, for example, frequently evoke the highly conservative assumptions about gender which underlying this inequality, and reaffirm the largely unproblematised conceptualization of masculinity and femininity that continues to inform mainstream understandings of gender. As Harriet Evans argues in a recent article: '[…] while the articulation of sexuality in popular spaces has moved from a set of closed and rigid subjective possibilities to ones that are more flexible, exploratory, and open-ended, the articulation of gender as a concept that refers to the social and cultural meanings of femininity and masculinity has not moved in the same direction.'[473]

**Mediating the metrosexual**

The term metrosexual is first and foremost a media term, and originated with the British journalist Mark Simpson who wrote that '[the metrosexual] might be officially gay, straight or bisexual, but this is utterly immaterial because he has clearly taken himself as his own love object and pleasure as his sexual preference.'[474] An editorial in the gay magazine *Menbox* (*Shishang junzi*),[475] used the term '*chengshi xin nanren*' (literally, 'urban new male') as a translation for 'metrosexual', emphasizing the 'newness' rather than the sexuality of the

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[471] That this idea is now widespread is also a common theme in journalistic writing. Duncan Hewitt for example, also warns, however, that the 'sexual revolution' has been 'uneven' and brings 'new challenges': Hewitt, op. cit., 257.

[472] This is manifested in stark material and economic terms: for example, unemployment rates for women are higher than for men, and women, especially in rural areas, receive less education than men. A report for the Asian Development Bank stated: 'Women workers in the PRC are likely to be the first laid off and have restricted access to the more secure State-sector jobs. By 1993, women accounted for approximately 60 percent of the officially unemployed. Rural households now pay for many services that were once the responsibility of the collective, in particular education and childcare. This tends to have a more negative impact on women, particularly in poorer families. About 80 percent of the two million 'new illiterates' each year are women. Women represent approximately 70 percent of all illiterates in the PRC.' Kathleen M. Moktan and Ramesh Subramaniam, *Women in the People's Republic of China: Country Briefing Paper* (Manila: Asian Development Bank, December 1998), vi.

[473] Evans, 'Sexed Bodies', ibid., 363.

[474] Mark Simpson, op. cit.

[475] *Shishang junzi* literally means 'fashionable gentleman'. *Menbox* is widely available from magazine vendors in Beijing, Shanghai and other major cities, and in common with many other men's magazines, it carries articles on fashion, skincare and other aspects of a young, relatively affluent, urban male consumer lifestyle. Unlike most other men's magazines, it also carries lots of highly sexualised pictures of young men, as well as some articles on gay topics. It has been described as 'China's first real gay magazine', although it does not advertise itself as such: Jeremy Goldkorn, 'Menbox: China's First Real Gay Magazine', Danwei, http://www.danwei.org/magazines/menbox_chinas_first_real_gay_m.php (accessed September 16, 2008).

metrosexual phenomenon. It is a term that white collar men such as Johnny and Colin have no difficult in identifying with, since it seems to encapsulate the most prominent features to which the middle-class urban man aspires: the pleasures of consumer capacity and the appeal of emotional sensitivity. The notion of the metrosexual in this sense is a point of convergence of the dominant characteristics of the China's new individualistic self. He is the 'purist' example of the consumerist achievement and physical and affective qualities of the white-collar man. As my discussion in chapter six showed, he is in this sense 'what all women want,' as long as he does not cross the boundaries of normative masculinity as a boyfriend or husband.

The *China News Week* article mentioned above defines the metrosexual as 'fashionable' (*shishang*), 'extremely narcissistic' (*jidu zilian*) and 'a bit androgynous' (*po ju zhongxing qingxiang*) (see figure 8).[476] In the context of the extreme individualism cultivated among China's urban youth, the term 'narcissism' is not a pejorative one. Describing the metrosexual as a 'bit androgynous' suggests that his appearance and attention to bodily hygiene for example shares some of the supposedly 'feminine' characteristics attributed to the androgynous man, but refuted by metrosexuals themselves. 'I'm not feminine', said Jason on one occasion in a conversation these issues, even though to many observers his clean looks would easily fit into the category of the 'unmasculine.' The *Menbox* editorial, using similar language, describes metrosexuals as 'devoted to fashion' (*re'ai shishang*) and 'narcissistic' (*zilian*).[477] The metrosexual is a product of 'consumer capitalism', someone who is 'less certain of his identity [than the old-style male] and much more interested in his image -- that's to say, one who was much more interested in being looked at [...]. A man, in other words, who is an advertiser's walking wet dream.'[478]

[476] Sun and Liu, ibid., 58.

[477] 'Miaozhun chengshi xin nanren' (Taking Aim at the New Urban Male), *Shishang junzi* (Menbox) no. 171 (October 2004), 8.

[478] Mark Simpson, 'Meet the Metrosexual', salon.com, http://dir.salon.com/story/ent/feature/2002/07/22/metrosexual/index.html (accessed February 1, 2007).

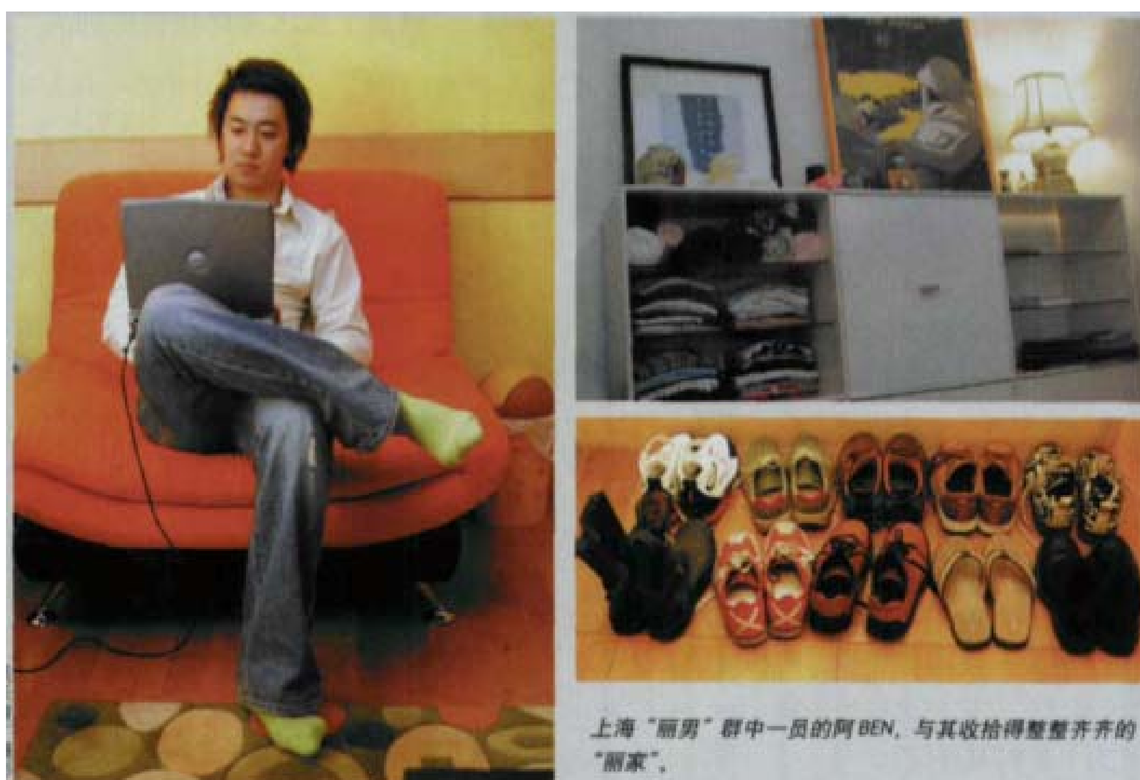


**Figure 8** A ‘metrosexual’ at home with some of his fashionable clothes and shoes. Sun Ran and Liu Lili, op. cit., 57.

With mid-level posts and salaries of around six thousand yuan after five years’ work, *China News Week* estimates, white-collar metrosexuals spend about sixty percent of their daily expenditure on clothing, ‘international brands’ (*guoji mingpai*) in particular.[479] A substantial part of the urban male workforce is already metrosexual: around thirty percent in Shanghai, *China News Week* claims, referring to Shanghai’s history as a ‘commercial city’ (*shangye chengshi*) where metrosexuals ‘dress for success’ (*weile chenggong er daban*)[480] and embrace a ‘hedonist’ (*xianglezhuyi*) lifestyle[481] of big city eating, drinking, bars and beauty salons, beautiful women and cars.[482] As I made clear in chapter five, white-collar men are renowned for their pursuit of a vigorous leisure life, and it is this combined emphasis on appearance and hedonism, in the view of *China News Week*, that has led to the creation of the figure of the white-collar metrosexual and metrosexuals in general.[483]

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[479] Sun and Liu, ibid., 57.
[480] ‘Dress for success’ is printed in English in the article, followed by the Chinese translation.
[481] Sun Ran and Liu Lili, op. cit., 57.
[482] ‘Miaozhun chengshi xin nanren’ (Taking aim at the new urban male), op. cit., 8.
[483] Sun Ran and Liu Lili, op. cit., 57.

Johnny and Colin were the most 'metrosexual' of my informants. Although Johnny could afford to buy more expensive clothing, cologne and haircuts; Colin made up for his relative lack of purchasing power by dressing more colourfully, and established his metrosexual status through his ubiquitous appearance at parties and nightclubs, where I saw him greeted by many foreign and local friends. When dressed up and ready to go out, both looked trendy and alluring. As a mutual American friend commentated, he thought they were members of a boy band, since Johnny and Colin had the well-groomed, smooth-skinned appearance often projected by young pop stars. Neither of them made a noticeable effort to look, talk or move in conventional 'manly' ways; indeed, Colin expressly told me he did not feel masculine at all, because he 'doesn't drink' (*bu he jiu*), 'doesn't smoke' (*bu chou yan*), 'doesn't have a beard' (*bu liu huzi*) and 'isn't muscular' (*meiyou jirou*). In many ways, however, this is the metrosexual/white-collar image that is most prominent in the media. Taking up a metrosexual subject position, then, as is already clear from this brief account, involves a consumerist assemblage which connects toned bodies with particular hairstyles, items of clothing, grooming tools, displays of soft skin, 'gentle' ways of moving, and places them in exclusive, sexualized locales of music, dancing and chatting, filled with other similar bodies.

The defining characteristic of the metrosexual, namely, his fastidious concern with personal appearance, does not itself associate his figure with any single sexual subject or gender position. The Chinese translation of the term makes this clear; the metrosexual is just as much an aesthetic as a sexualized term. However, he is often attributed with characteristics which are commonly deemed to be 'feminine', both by my informants and in popular media. Metrosexuals are depicted as giving fuller expression to their feelings which potentially marks them as more 'feminine' and '*wen*' than mainstream men. The metrosexual is allowed to cry, for example, and his moods mark him apart from conventional masculine behaviour. On pop idol-type shows on Chinese television, the young, androgynous metrosexuals taking part are frequently seen in tears, particularly in the drawn-out, dramatic moments when they are voted off the show. *News Week* and *Menbox* both call them 'sensitive' (*mingan*), and sometimes 'despondent' (*yiyu*).[484] Given, however, that such figures are reportedly enormously attractive to young women, the metrosexual's emotional displays could also be interpreted as a means of persuasion to men to acquire the expressive capacity that women apparently value. In this way, his emotional characteristics correspond not with feminine values but with the

[484] Sun and Liu, ibid., 58; 'Miaozhun chengshi xin nanren' (Taking aim at the new urban male), op. cit., 8.

emergence of the expressive masculine subject as a key figure of the individualization of Chinese society.[485]

The pursuit of metrosexuality belongs to a global discourse which has come to prominence in China at a particular historical juncture. The figure of the metrosexual is the apogee of affluent, hedonistic consumerist success, and represents the pinnacle of white-collar achievement in the boom atmosphere of China's post-millennial metropoles. The metrosexual is a particular, and highly desirable instance of white-collar masculinity in China. Consequently, my informants who brought their appearance and pursuits most in line with the image of the young white-collar man – such as Johnny, Colin and Jason – all fulfilled the criteria of the metrosexual man. In this sense, and in contrast to his role elsewhere, the metrosexual serves to confirm the dominant ideology of consumerist individualism.[486] As a masculine subject, therefore, the self-identifications and media representations of the metrosexual are firmly positioned within the globalised discourses of China's 'postsocialist' era. However, associated with the figure of the androgynous man, as the next section shows, the metrosexual subject is intersected with other subject positions that at first glance seem to queer gender boundaries.

**The androgynous spectrum**

Online and print media discussions suggest an obvious overlapping in descriptions of the white-collar man, the metrosexual and the androgynous man.[487] All three terms appear in the media to transgress the standard values of the 'ordinary' man who pays little attention to his appearance, and contains his emotions. '[Androgynous men] are one of the subgroups of white-collar [men]' (*tamen shi bailing yizu*)', according to the *People's Net* article, because they cultivate a neat and clean appearance, are slim and delicate, and soft spoken.[488] However, the term androgyny covers a spectrum of gender meanings and practices, ranging from the 'a

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[485] Yan, 2003, op. cit., 83

[486] Compare, for instance, Japan, where the look and behaviour of young metrosexuals are depicted as rebellions against the conservative values of the 'salaryman', the archetypal Japanese white-collar man. Yumiko Iida 'Beyond the 'feminization of Masculinity': Transforming Patriarchy with the 'feminine'in Contemporary Japanese Youth Culture', *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 6, no. 1 (2005): 56-74.

[487] Such as in 'Zhongxing Nanren' (Androgynous men), *Renmin wang* (People's net), www.people.com.cn/Gbshenghuo/79/110/20010314/416938.html (accessed February 3, 2007); and 'Na lei nanren zui yi 'zhongxinghua'' (Which type of men most easily become androgynous), Zhongguo guoji guangbo diantai (China Radio International).

[488] 'Zhongxing Nanren' (Androgynous men), op. cit.

slightly androgynous' (*you yidian zhongxing*) to the self-conscious blurring of gender boundaries in the appearance and behaviour of TV pop idols.[489]

I put the question of the conflation of the images of the white-collar man and the androgynous man to Mark, the computer company owner I discussed in chapter six.[490] He said he did not think that they were one and the same, but that being a white-collar man put one in an environment conducive to developing androgynous characteristics. In his view, the attention to appearance emphasized in office environments encourages some men to develop a strong interest in looking after their skin and hair in a way that has traditionally been thought of as feminine. However, he said there are many white-collar men who are not androgynous at all, according to his understanding of the term; wearing a suit was after all a very conventionally masculine thing to do, in his view. In one of a series of articles on its website explaining the 'androgyny' (*zhongxing*) phenomenon, China Radio International addressed Mark's point that white-collar men operate in circumstances conducive to developing so-called androgynous habits. Entitled 'Which type of men most easily become 'androgynous'?'), it claims that all men have the right and the possibility to be androgynous men, but the men who most easily become androgynous are 'expert businessmen' (*shangwu tong*) and 'high-level suits' (*gaoji hui*) because of the nature of their work.[491] This idea that white-collar men 'become androgynous' (although perhaps a relatively muted androgyny, suggestive more of improved hygiene practices and careful grooming than 'flamboyant' displays of un-masculine behaviour) is also supported by the popular appearance of the young corporate male; his lotions, hairsprays and colognes, the decorum, professionalism and civility which are supposed to prevail in office environments, his gentle bodily behaviour towards women.[492]

Other aspects of the androgynous white-collar man's character addressed in media discussions are his personal habits and refined demeanour. The androgynous man is a non-smoker - demonstrating his care for his health – and a moderate drinker of red wine, which demonstrates care for his health as well as specialist knowledge of Western drinking habits,

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[489] This apparent 'queering' of the gendered norms of *appearance* does not extend to normative assumptions about, for example, heterosexual desire and the gendered characteristics of men and women. The way TV pop idols talk about themselves and their relationships with women (e.g. girlfriends, mothers) on the TV shows reaffirms mainstream, conventional, heteronormative understandings and expectations about gender and sexuality.

[490] The androgynous look is partly inspired by Japanese anime and manga characters, according to Mark.

[491] 'Na lei nanren zui yi 'zhongxinghua'', op. cit. This article was originally published in *Beijing Qingnian Bao* (Beijing Youth) according to the CRI website.

[492] There may be historical notions intertwined in these practices, as there are in discussions of male beauty which I document below. Keith McMahon discusses historical precedents of men who powdered and preened themselves, in heterosexual or homosexual contexts, in his *Misers, Shrews, and Polygamists: Sexuality and Male-Female Relations in Eighteenth-Century Chinese Fiction*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1995, 187-8.

positioning him as sophisticated and a cut above those who drink local spirits; 'stylish' (*gediao*), 'elegant' (*youya*) and 'leisurely and carefree' (*xianqing yizhi*), as the *People's Net* depiction puts it, claiming that the 'outstanding' (*youxiu*) androgynous men can recite all one needs to know about red wine from memory.[493] 'Urbane' (*binbin you li*), is the word of choice of the CRI article, which describes a cultivated manner.[494] A spirit of equality and peace pervades the androgynous man's marriage, it is said, in the same vein that the white-collar man's relationships are ideally respectful and gentle, as I discussed in the previous chapter. CRI reports he is very mild-tempered at home, willing to divide his possessions equally between himself and his wife, and happy to sign an equitable pre-nuptial agreement; the *People's Net* contends he 'cherishes' (*aihu*) his wife and is 'modest' (*qianrang*) towards her. Interestingly, despite the normative assumption that such a man will marry, there is no mention of his relationships with children or parents, which perhaps is due to the prevalence of the romanticized idea of genuine love between husband and wife.

Finally, the androgynous man is depicted as educated and successful at work in terms similar to those attributed to the white-collar man. CRI describes him as 'very talented and learned' (*manfu jinglun*), with a 'successful career' (*shiye you cheng*), and the *People's Net* mentions his 'developed mind' (*tounao fada*).[495] Accordingly, the white-collar man would appear to be fully androgynous. Of course, in 'real life' many white-collar men do not see themselves as androgynous, variously resisting, modifying, or ignoring the androgyny discourse, and I examine this further below. However, the popular labeling of them as androgynous may be partly a result of their using their brains and not their hands to work: manual labour seems much more 'masculine' than sitting at a desk in an office. The great shibboleths of 'traditional' masculine behaviour – its physicality, messiness, dirtiness, domination of women – are all challenged by the apparent attributes of white-collar men.

The extremes of the androgynous trend in recent years have been particularly visible on TV talent shows such as Dragon TV's commercialized and very lucrative male talent show, launched in 2006, with the English title *My Hero*, and in Chinese called 'Come on, good men!' (*jia you hao nan'er*).[496] This made the very androgynous-looking Xiang Ding a star, and

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[493] 'Zhongxing Nanren' (Androgynous men), op. cit.
[494] Ibid.
[495] Ibid.
[496] The 2007 series was predicted to exceed the over 100 million yuan in estimated revenue of its main competitor, Hunan TV's *Happy Voice Boy* (*Kuaile nansheng*): Riki Hsu, 'Happy Voice Boys Generating Over 100M Yuan in Revenues.' JLM Pacific Epoch, http://www.pacificepoch.com/newsstories?id=102385_0_5_0_M (accessed September 19, 2008). The ground-breaking model for *My Hero* was Hunan TV's 2005 S*upergirl*

inspired large-scale debate about emotional expressiveness in men, such as crying.[497] The programme makers encouraged and dramatised Xiang Ding's tears during the voting off procedure through the presenter's emotionally-charged speeches and camera close-ups, engaging the mostly young female audience in a tide of emotion. In this way, these young men's emotional expressiveness, like their androgyny, is a commodified product of a commercial process promoted through commercial media; that is, these manufactured subjectivities are effects of a market discourse which propagates the construction of the model of the androgynous, emotional young man, precisely because this is an image with huge consumer appeal, especially amongst young women. As another example, one of the other very androgynous contestants, the Sichuanese Zhang Xu, was termed 'Chongqing's king of melancholy' (*Chongqing youyu wangzi*), and has appeared in very sensuously posed half-naked photographs, staring alluringly at the camera with wisps of hair framing his made-up face.[498] Xiang, Zhang and their brethren achieved the status of pop stars.

However, the subjectivity associated with these figures is far from being universally welcomed or identified as a white-collar attribute, underlining its contested status in as a hegemonic white-collar model. My informant Wen, for example, explicitly identified as white-collar, but was neither metrosexual nor androgynous, nor on the other hand was he gruff: his masculinity combined the 'successful corporate manager' with the 'caring family man', but not the creams, smooth skin and delicate gestures of the 'slight' androgyny of the typical white collar image. Claire, one of my colleagues at Johnson's school whom I mentioned in chapter six, professed disinterest in the androgynous trend, but when pushed, recoiled from the prospect of having an androgynous boyfriend. I showed her a magazine with a picture of a man which she needed no bidding to describe as androgynous. Some men I knew called it feminisation (*nüxinghua*), I said, and asked her if she could accept this. 'Accepting it or not doesn't matter because it has nothing much to do with me (*jie bu jieshou dou hai hao yinwei gen wo meiyou tai da de guanxi*)', she responded, but added 'but if I had to choose this kind of boyfriend or whatever, I definitely wouldn't like it! (*danshi ruguo rang wo xuanze zheyang de nanpengyou huozhe shenme, wo kending buhui xihuan*).' To balance this assertion, perhaps, Claire then confirmed her attitude of tolerance to the trend in general: 'As long as it doesn't

(*Chaoji nüsheng* in Chinese, more literally 'Super Voice Girl') talent contest for young women, which launched the career of the very androgynous Li Yuchun, who has remained popular, particularly amongst young women.

[497] Zhen Xiaofei, 'Dianshi guize xia de nanse xuanju' (Voting for Male Charm Under Television Rules), *Nanfang zhoumo* (Southern Weekend) (October 8, 2006): D28.

[498] ''Jia you, hao nan'er' Zhang Xu: Chongqing youyu wangzi' ('Come on, good boy' Zhang Xu: Chongqing's king of depression), Zhongguo guoji guangbo diantai (China Radio International), http://gb.cri.cn/9964/2006/06/09/114@1082562.htm (accessed September 20, 2008).

have too much to do with me, I think it's okay (*zhiyao gen wo meiyou tebie da de guanxi wo juede* 'okay').' She also had some reservations about androgynous (or 'masculine') women. When I asked what she thought of 'masculine women' (*nanxinghua de nüren*), she replied: 'I don't like them very much either (*wo ye bushi hen xihuan*).' Consumerism is a driving force of the trend of androgynous fashion, in her view. I pointed out comments in the magazine that men were paying more attention to making themselves attractive by 'dressing up' (*daban*) in sexy clothing, which she attributed it to young people having money and wanting to spend it: 'It's probably connected to the whole large-scale change (*yinggai she gen zhengge de dahuan youguan*): for example, I've started working, I've got money in my pocket, so I'll naturally go and buy clothes and dress up (*biru shuo, wo kaishi gongzuole, shenshang you qian, hui ziran qu mai yifu daban*).' She also subscribed to the view that the music industry has pushed androgynous pop stars to exploit the teenage market.

Despite his conventionally masculine demeanour, Jason professed to be more accepting of white-collar androgyny, though his comments in a discussion we had about the topic quickly moved from androgyny to men's 'femininity.' For him, although there were undoubtedly some men more 'feminine' (*nüxinghua*) than others, this was no reason to discriminate against them. He used the word 'sissy' (*niangniang qiang*) to refer to 'unmasculine' men, and went on to comment that 'in terms of their behaviour (*xingwei*), or for some people in terms of their physiology (*shengli*) and voices (*shengyin*), all have some feminine characteristics (*nüxinghua tezheng*).' He clarified that he did not mean they were born like that, explaining that 'it's in terms of their personal behaviour, or tastes, that they are possibly a bit feminine (*nüxinghua*). I think there's no need to discriminate against them.' However, he admitted feminine boys at school do receive ridicule from other boys, implying that this hostile treatment was inevitable because 'society considers minorities as abnormal (*shaoshuren ne, shehuishang jiu hui renwei shi buzhengchang de*).' He also linked contemporary male femininity with examples from the past, implying that it was nothing new in China. I think that he, and others, perhaps employ this argument to explain the presence of male femininity/androgyny in China, and claim it as their own through inventing a historical narrative for it, and to defend against an anticipated accusation that it is purely an import from the West. I discuss this in the following section.

Some aspects of the attribution of 'femininity' to the androgynous white-collar man derive not so much from any particular bodily gesture or demeanour but from popular conventions about regional distinctions. Colin, for example, the most 'androgynous' looking of my informants was often characterised as a southern man. His appearance was explained

within a locally circulating discourse which posits men from the south of China as feminine, and men from the north as masculine. In particular, Shanghai men are positioned as henpecked, and Shanghai women as domineering. *China News Week* (*Zhongguo xinwen zhoukan*) reinforces this popular image through associating Shanghai with a 'tradition of tending towards androgynisation (*pian zhongxinghua de chuantong*)', but the 'androgynistic' characteristics with which the article depicts white-collar metrosexuals in Shanghai would apply equally to those in Beijing and elsewhere.[499]

The greatest controversy surrounding the debate about androgyny has not, in fact, concerned its associations with white-collar man, but rather the popularity of androgynous fashions and practices amongst urban youth. The more overt and flamboyant displays of androgyny on TV shows have been subject to repeated reprimands and restrictions from the broadcasting authorities. While Xiang Ding's adoring female fans voted him the winner of the contest, the national regulator for broadcasting, the 'State Administration of Radio, Film and Television' (*Guojia guangbo dianying dianshì zongju*) (SARFT) criticised the appearance and demeanour of the contestants, saying that they transgressed acceptable moral norms. They ordered the makers of TV talent contests to ensure that 'hairstyles, clothes, fashion accessories, language and manners must be in line with mainstream values', and to avoid 'gossip' about the contestants, and 'refrain from showing scenes of fans screaming and wailing, or vanquished contestants in tears.'[500] SARFT showed here its instinctive understanding that gendered and sexualized subjectivities are constructed through the bringing together of an assemblage of bodies, objects, practices, routines, in this case performed (by contestants and audience) in the frenzied, tense, hormonal excitement of a packed TV studio, and mimicked, emulated, contested, resisted, altered, refused by viewers in myriad ways. As arbiters of the nation's taste, SARFT demonstrated its determination and authority to police the boundaries of the sexualized subjectivities thrown up by the market, although at the same time, its participating in shaping *zhongxing* discourse marks a strategic acceptance of changing gender and sexual behaviour, particularly on the part of young people.

The foregoing discussion suggests that what one might call the androgynous 'turn' in the formation of masculine subjectivities in contemporary China amounts to an awareness and care of the self as sexually desirable and an emotional expressivity which includes wearing

[499] Sun and Liu, op. cit., 57.

[500] These quotations are from the 2008 China Media Yearbook, a publication of the Beijing consultancy China Media Monitor Intelligence. Excerpts from the Yearbook were posted on Danwei, a website covering Chinese media and advertising: see Jeremy Goldkorn, 'Reality TV Woes and the 2008 China Media Yearbook', Danwei, http://www.danwei.org/media_business/reality_tv_woes_and_the_2008_c.php (accessed September 20, 2008).

emotional pain, sadness and vulnerability on one's sleeve. The delicate lines of the physical self are the corporeal as well as consumer expression of the sensitive qualities of emotional man. The androgynous white-collar man is presented as appealing and sexually desirable to young women; yet he does not challenge the boundaries of conventionally gendered behaviour in the way that some of the young 'extremely' androgynous TV idols do. And as the comments of my informants show, what is tolerated as a social phenomenon is not necessarily what young men and women wish for themselves, their intimate others and people around them to adopt in everyday life. The supposedly 'androgynous' qualities of the new white-collar man definitely contribute to the new masculine subject positions which are emerging in China, yet, as Claire suggested, contribute mainly to sustaining the consumerist practices through which the contemporary individual is defined.

**Legitimating contemporary narratives**

The possibility of a transgressive sexual orientation/identity associated with the androgynous looks of white-collar man further recedes (despite his sexual practices, which may include same-sex desire and activities) when narratives about white-collar man invoke history. As I will show in this section, the androgynous looks of the white-collar man are claimed as the latest incarnation of male beauty in Chinese history, marking him off from foreign-inspired gay and queer identities, and positioning him as the contemporary manifestation of a 'Chinese tradition'.

The historical narrative of the 'male beauty' (*nanse*) in China is commonly used to describe the soft looks of the androgynous metrosexual white-collar man as the contemporary rendering of a long tradition of '*wen*' masculinity.[501] The term 'male beauty' (*nanse*) refers to the sexual allure of young men because of its resonance with the more common phrase 'female beauty' (*nüse*), also translated as 'feminine charms'. The four members of the Taiwanese boyband F4 ('F' for 'Flower') are often cited as examples of contemporary male beauties, who emerged with great success and some controversy in the 1990s.[502] I wanted to hear what an 'ordinary' white-collar man might think about F4, so I asked Bruce, the manager of the Sanyuanqiao language school, for his thoughts. He described F4 as 'little white faces' (*xiaobailian*), which he explained was a term used for young men who 'look relatively pretty' (*zhangde bijiao piaoliang*), with 'quite distinct features' (*wuguan bijao fenming*), and who are

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[501] Such as Keith McMahon describes in *Misers, Shrews, and Polygamists: Sexuality and Male-Female Relations in Eighteenth-Century Chinese Fiction*, op. cit.

[502] Zhang Ying. 'Zhongguo nanse pu' (A chronology of Chinese male beauty), *Mingpai shijie le Beijing* (TimeOut Beijing) no. 61 (March 2005): 10.

‘generally provided for by women’ (*yiban shi nüde yangde*). In using the term ‘little white face’, Bruce positioned F4 and their androgynous brethren within a historical Chinese tradition of good-looking young heterosexual men with wealthy female patrons, sometimes derided, sometimes joked about, and a common feature of Chinese culture.[503] However, Bruce did not consider the famously androgynous TV star and beauty parlour entrepreneur Jimi a ‘little white face’ and begrudged him a place in his imagined cultural history of China, saying that ‘in the past there were very few people like this in China’. I asked him what the difference was between Jimi and little white faces. ‘Women like little white faces’, he explained, alluding to their supposed heterosexuality, but ‘[Jimi] seems a bit like these foreign gays’ (*waiguo* ‘gay’). Little white faces like women, they don’t like men: they dress up very prettily (*daban de hen piaoliang*) to attract women, not men.’

Whereas men with an androgynous look and even behaviour can be ‘filed under’ existing historical concepts such as ‘little white faces’, thereby affirming their heterosexualities, explicit gay identity is more difficult to appropriate because there is no obvious historical antecedent. There is certainly a recognized history of male same sex sexual activity, but the gay identity goes much further than same sex sexual behaviour: firstly, it suggests something of core importance to an individual’s sexuality, and secondly, it disrupts assumptions about marriage and procreation. In this way, it is potentially deeply threatening to mainstream mores concerning these issues. Indeed, if simply not getting married or not having children are viewed as daring and transgressive, then assuming a gay identity poses much more of a challenge to some. Bruce mused that there seemed to be more and more gays in recent times, which displeased him. He associated gay men with Western culture. He told me that he had inadvertently attended a gay party some time before, invited by one of the Western teachers at the school. The party had been organised by foreigners, he said, and many of the party-goers were foreign, as well from Hong Kong and mainland Chinese. He was shocked, so he said, that they were all gay. Bruce conflated being gay with femininity. He argued that ‘in Chinese culture, most people can accept women who look like men, for example those women who are like men, those 'strong women' (*nü qiangren*). But men who are like women, that's not right (*nanren xiang nüde, na jiu bu dui*).’ He said they made him feel ‘uncomfortable’ (*bushufu*), and believed it went against the idea that men should be ‘decisive’ (*guoduan*),

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[503] The *xiaobailian* can be viewed in the context of the tradition of *wen* masculinity that I discussed in chapter two. He shares some similarities with the ‘feminine’ young male lover (*xiaosheng*) in Chinese opera, who in turn, is the stage representation of the delicate and pretty ‘fragile scholar’. As I point out in chapter two, the *xiaosheng*’s name reappears in the description of androgynous-looking pop stars as *naiyou xiaosheng* (‘creamy boys’). See Song Geng, op. cit., vii-viii.

‘magnanimous’ (*te dadu*), and ‘do things on a large scale’ (*zuo shi hen daxing*), adding that he did not like their ‘disposition’ (*xingqing*).

When discussing family and relationships with Peter, I asked how he felt about gays. His starting point was an imagined millennia-old Chinese history, which as far as he was concerned had no place for gays. A gay identity was not commensurate with the Chinese tradition, in other words, with Chinese people’s understanding of what it means to be Chinese. He argued:

> I feel that in China, taking homosexuals for example, it won’t change in one or two hundred years (*xiang tongxinglian zheyang, yi, liang bai nian bu hui gaibian*)! Because this tradition has already got a history of more than 5000 years (*wuqian duo nian lishi*). Do you think that 5000 years of tradition can be brought to an end, changed, in a year or two, ten or so years or a hundred years (*yi, liang nian huozhe shiji nian yibai nian, dazhi wuqian nian de chuantong, gaibian*)? That's impossible (*bu keneng de shi*)!

What about gay cohabitation, I asked Peter, suggesting that it was already happening. He gave a blunt response: ‘If the family members find out they will immediately stop it’ (*jiaren zhidao de hua tamen hui mashang zuzhi*). Peter and Bruce, both young white-collar men, were aware of the increasing presence and activities of gay people in metropolitan China, but could not reconcile this with their own ideas of what being Chinese meant.

The appropriation and legitimation of the metrosexual is evident in a cover feature in *TimeOut Beijing* (*Mingpai shijie le Bejing*), which constructs a historical link between historical male beauties from the Spring and Autumn period and the pop stars of China, Hong Kong and Taiwan today.[504] The front cover bears just the two words ‘*Nanse•zhongxing*’ (Male beauty•androgyny) in large characters, behind which is a full-page stylized representation of a naked and headless male torso, which seemed to be hanging on a clothes hanger. The bottom half of the torso is decorated with an old-style Chinese floral print in red and white, and there is a white business shirt also on the hanger, just behind the torso, and a sober business tie is draped across the torso’s shoulder. The graphic suggests a link between aesthetic traditions relating to men established long ago in China’s past (the floral print) and the much more recent emergence of the aesthetics of the white-collar man (the white shirt and tie on a clothes hanger). It also suggests that behind the smart-looking Western-style shirt and tie of the contemporary white-collar Chinese man lies a sensibility founded in a conception of male beauty which has its own distinctive history, and which still informs the appreciation of male beauty in China today.

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[504] Zhang, ibid., 10-17.

The two words on the front cover refer to two articles in the magazine: one article is titled 'A chronology of Chinese male beauty' (*Zhongguo nanse pu*), referring to '77 beautiful men from pre-Qin China to the 21st century'; the other is titled 'Androgyny' (*zhongxing*), and is an interview with Jimi, the celebrity beautician whom Bruce had associated with gays. The chronology of Chinese male beauty is prefaced by an introduction which discusses the emergence of the term 'metrosexual', and considers how to translate it into Chinese, before finally settling on 'male beauty' (*nanse*) as the best option,[505] since it encompasses the long-standing appreciation of beautiful young men in China.[506] In this way, the concept of the metrosexual becomes a subset of this larger tradition. As Zhang Ying, the author, explained, 'in fact several thousand years before the emergence of the 'metrosexual', China had its own fine tradition (*youliang chuantong*) of enjoying and recording pretty young men (*xinshang bing jizai piaoliang nanhai*).'[507] As for Jimi's opinions, in contrast to Bruce's attempt to place the 'male beauty trend' within a Chinese historical narrative, he argued that it is more associated with 'Western' influences, ascribing it to the influence of boybands from America and Europe, and then to popular attention in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, and Korea to 'made-up and dressed-up male stars' (*xiushi nanxing*). In his opinion China is playing a rather belated game of catch-up.[508]

Despite the more 'open' stance of Jimi, the appropriation of the metrosexual/androgynous man is generally discussed in heteronormative terms. Indeed, heterosexist assumptions underlie most mainstream discussions about sex, relationships and romance. And it is to the romantic ideal that I now turn, because of its salient position in white-collar images and subjectivities.

## The romantic white-collar ideal

In line with depictions of the white-collar man as caring and attentive, and echoing the tender *wen* lover of classical literature, the relatively androgynous white-collar metrosexual as sexual subject is idealised as a romantic young lover, an amorous and gentle beau who knows how to treat his girlfriend well, in contrast to the less romantic overtones associated with conventional masculinity. Yunxiang Yan puts this down to the one of the effects of the 'trend of

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[505] Among the other translations the author considered were 'metropolitan jade man' (*dushi yu'nan*), 'post-yuppie' (*hou yapi*) and 'metropolitan androgynous man' *dushi zhongxing nan*.
[506] Zhang, ibid., 10.
[507] Zhang, ibid., 10.
[508] Cha Jianying, 'Zhongxing: wusuo weiju, wusuo buneng de Jimi' (Androgynous: fearless and all-capable Jimi), *Mingpai shijie le Beijing* (TimeOut Beijing) no. 61 (March 2005): 21.

westernization' in reform China as 'exhibited in changes of everyday life' which he argues include 'rising demands for romantic love and sexual freedom, the escalating divorce rate and the emergence of single-parent families, the triumph of consumerism and commodity fetishism, the fever for MBA degrees and the English language, the popularity of American fast food chains, and the competition among urban youth to be 'cool'.'[509] From Yan's list, I am most concerned in this section with 'demands for romantic love', but it is useful to bear in mind that it is part of a much larger change in intimate relationships (and beyond): the first few items on Yan's list of topics, covering romantic love, sexual freedom, divorce and single-parent families, indicate some of the large-scale changes in private life occurring in contemporary China.

As previous discussion has shown, the newly constructed self of the white-collar man is firmly embedded within a normative and naturalised heteronormative gender and sexual framework, despite the potentially transgressive attributes associated with his ambiguous sexual image. Moreover, as we have also seen, the heteronormative attributes of the white-collar man are widely inflected with consumerist aspirations and capacities.[510] Romance and the romantic ideal currently appear in the popular media as major vehicles for the production of white-collar heterosexual identities, and reiterate the consumerist components of white-collar masculinity in contemporary China. St. Valentine's Day, for example, has become a major commercial event in China in recent years. It is framed in overwhelmingly heteronormative terms in the media and retail outlets, which encourage relatively affluent young urban men to demonstrate their love for their girlfriend/wife by buying her flowers, chocolates, and meals in Western restaurants. My white-collar students at the Zhongguancun school were very interested in marking St. Valentine's Day: many of the men said they would take their girlfriends or wives out for a meal, or would buy give them a small present; the women confirmed that this was what they expected. This heterosexual, romantic subjectivity is constructed through an assemblage of specified consumer objects (flowers, chocolates), softly-lit, quiet, 'Western' spaces, romanticized vocabularies, 'chivalrous' routines, mythologised narratives and so on. Through this commodified 'romanticism', the white-collar man marks

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[509] Yunxiang Yan, 'Managed Globalization: State Power and Cultural Transition in China', in *Many Globalizations: Cultural Diversity in the Contemporary World*, ed. Peter L. Berger and Samuel P. Huntington (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 33.

[510] The 'Man Enough' article which I analysed in chapter three is a case in point: cool, fashionable consumerism is presented as central to that the fulfilment of heterosexual desire, in terms of the clothing the young man should wear and the cafes where he should hang out. Men's magazines blatantly sexualise women with features recommending the kinds of underwear, for example, that the assumed heterosexual male viewer should buy for them to fulfil his 'romantic' dream.

himself off as a new kind of man, a globally-informed sophisticated economically powerful consumer, within a heteronormative framework that attributes status to those men who engage in exactly this kind of conspicuously cool consumption.

'Romance' is a very effective tool with which young men distinguish themselves from other men, as Peter Redman has argued in his research on the concept of heterosexual romance amongst a group of high school boys in England:

> […] romance provided the boys in the study with a means of locating themselves (and thereby constructing a heterosexual masculine identity) in relation to a cast of hierarchically arranged social others. More particularly, I argue that this process had a disciplinary function. Romance, I will suggest, was one way in which the boundaries of gender, class, ethnicity, and sexuality were policed within the pupils' culture. It served to assert and validate a particular and socially powerful kind of masculinity—white, heteronormative, and professional or middle class—that simultaneously contested (and in some cases, punished) those forms of masculinity and femininity that failed to complement it.[511]

Redman argued that romance 'provided a cultural repertoire – that is, a narrative resource or set of discursive practices – through which the boys performatively enacted a particular version of heterosexual masculinity',[512] and that it also 'may be seen as a resource through which the boys worked themselves into the dispositions of a middle-class or professional habitus.'[513] Redman's realization that repeated performative enactment leads to the development of a habitus is precisely the insight that led to Noble and Watkin's concept of habituation. Young Chinese white-collar men respond to media exhortations to buy their partners little presents from time to time,[514] and take them out for candlelit dinners and so on because these are performative practices that help construct a white-collar identity. This identity is conspicuously heterosexual: each consumer action of boy buying for girl produces the 'effect' of heterosexuality, thereby reinforcing the heteronormative social framework: it is a playing out, or taking up of the 'romantic heterosexual' subject position. Simultaneously, it connotes heterosexual white-collar men with the conventionally 'masculine' attributes of power, choice, decisiveness and generosity that I have identified earlier. Over and over again, their behaviour shaped though discursive techniques, their sense of a result of the infolding of this and multiple other subject positions, young men learn to act and conceive of themselves as

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[511] Peter Redman, 'The Discipline of Love: Negotiation and Regulation in Boys' Performance of a Romance-Based Heterosexual Masculinity', *Men and Masculinities* 4, no. 2 (October 2001): 189.
[512] Redman, ibid., 198.
[513] Redman, ibid., 198-9.
[514] For example, see San Qian, Ya Ya and Young Candy, 'Xunzhao wennuanpai nanren' (Looking for a warmhearted man), *Hao* (How) 80 (December 2005): 124.

a new breed of men, marked out, for example, from coarse manual workers, and blunt, unpolished entrepreneurs; through conscious 'care of the self', careful mimicry, attention to gestures, actions, emotional performance, displays of romantic attention, solicitous concern, they learn bodily and mental habits which become 'naturalised', justifiable as part of a caring, romantic, sophisticated, urbane masculinity, closely linked to and sometimes overlapping with the subject position of the 'tender husband' – this is another aspect of the change in masculine performances pre-eminently signified by notions about white-collar men.

**The hidden homosexual**

The qualities associated with the image of the desirable, heterosexual white-collar man are similarly revered when the white-collar man is imagined as an object of same-sex desire. Furthermore, the sexual ambiguities of the image of the white-collar man render it able to incorporate gay subjectivity when it is not situated within assemblages of elements that include texts or settings with heteronormative characteristics or assumptions. The gay white-collar subject has emerged, but its performance is restricted to very few and specific real (e.g. gay clubs) and virtual (e.g. gay personals and community websites) venues.

As I have discussed above, magazines oriented towards gay readerships such as *Menbox* (and its sister publication *Shijue zhinan* 'Visual man') eulogise the metrosexual, especially his consumer-related aspects, thereby 'interpellating' the possible identity of the gay white-collar metrosexual, and creating possibilities for the performative emergence of gay white-collar subjectivities. They carry adverts and features about brand name clothing, cologne, skincare and other such products, which are depicted as 'must-haves' for cool young metrosexual men. Additionally, they provide social information of interest to educated urban men negotiating gay lives, on health and hygiene topics, gay social support groups, gay-themed movies, foreign gay news and so on. All in all, they offer a rendering of an unpoliticised consumer-oriented gay lifestyle, placing centrestage the figure of the androgynous metrosexual male, thereby catering to the needs of a readership which is likely to aspire to an imagined transnational gay identity, while simultaneously dealing with the very real and tricky everyday issues of family, work, health and so on.

Through my many conversations with young, relatively affluent, gay men in Beijing I gained the impression that the ideal man – the object of desire – for many gay men is someone with a good job, a good body, dressed in fashionable attire. In other words, it is the gym-fit

and fashionable young white-collar man, whose image corresponds with the descriptions I have set out in previous chapters. This desire for white-collar men is not limited to mainland China. Travis Kong found that in Hong Kong his gay respondents were attracted to characteristics often associated with the white-collar man:

> Most of my respondents preferred a man who is smart, bright, well-built, manly, straight-acting, macho, career-minded and emotionally in control. These attributes are all very typical cultural definitions of being a man. That is why nearly all of my respondents have all had the experience of being in love with a straight man.[515]

It is perhaps understandable that gay men, subject to the same discursive portrayals of white-collar men as sexually desirable, should profess desire for them, as one of my informants, himself a white-collar man suggested.

I found out on our first meeting that Johnny was gay. Apparently heterosexual to his family, work colleagues and ex-classmates, he simultaneously moved in gay circles, had networks of gay friends, local and foreign, went to gay bars, and consumed gay-interest media products (magazines, movies, TV series and so on).[516] Afraid to ‘come out’ in certain areas of his life, for reasons which I will discuss below, he revealed his sexuality to me since he already knew I too was gay and was in any case not in a position where I could use it against him.

To anyone who did not know about his sexual orientation, Johnny led the typical life of a young, single ambitious white-collar man from the provinces on his way up the career ladder in Beijing. Moreover, his white-collar subjectivity enabled him to participate in both straight and gay elite spaces. Good-looking, impeccably dressed, often accompanied by his matching ‘girlfriend’ on company social occasions, to the casual observer there was nothing to mark him out from any of the many other ‘androgynous’ ‘metrosexual’ white-collar men in Beijing’s business districts. He was softly spoken, moved gracefully and clearly took care over his hair, skin and clothing, and he did nothing to dissuade his family colleagues and many friends from assuming he was attracted to women. But he had sex with other men, and exploited the opportunities that his global network of gay friends offered him.

Johnny liked to socialise with gay friends, local and foreign, occasionally visiting venues such as Beijing’s most cosmopolitan gay bar, but he still worried about his sexual

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[515] Travis Kong Shiu-Ki, ‘Queer at Your Own Risk: Marginality, Community and Hong Kong Gay Male Bodies’, *Sexualities* 7, no. 1 (2004): 19. Most of these epithets came up in my discussions with informants, apart from ‘macho’.

[516] Many gay men and women lead ostensibly ‘straight’ lives, even to the extent of getting married, as investigated in Elisabeth Engebretsen, ‘Love in a Big City: Sexuality, Kinship, and Citizenship Amongst Lala (‘lesbian’) Women in Beijing’, (PhD thesis, London School of Economics and Political Science, 2008).

orientation coming to the knowledge of family and colleagues. He did not want his Beijing colleagues to find out he was gay because of the possibly negative repercussions for his career. This was a view I heard often, including from Rob, a gay American working for a large Chinese Internet company. Rob was afraid that due to the factional struggles within his company, based on rival *guanxi* networks, his boss's 'enemies' would use his sexuality, if known, against his boss. Arbitrary forms of discrimination again gays, including arbitrary administrative sanctions that have no legal foundation are commonplace in China. Li Yinhe has described how some work units, on finding out that a worker is gay, may take various actions such as withholding wages or lowering wages, reconsidering promotions, housing allocations and bonuses; and even transferring or sacking the employee.[517]

Perhaps as a kind of strategy for dealing with 'real life' constraints and discrimination, Johnny spent considerable time using the Internet in the privacy of his own home, engaging in virtual socialising with gay contacts throughout China and the world. He was developing a large network of online gay friends spanning the globe while I was in Beijing. Although initially worried about creating 'profiles' on gay websites, he soon realised the benefit of knowing people around the world to his long-term plan to leave China to live in a Western country. He was fortunate in that the U.S. based transnational company he worked for had a strong record of pro-gay action. It had promoted an internal network of gay employees, which Johnny used assiduously to cultivate friends and contacts, without having to reveal his sexual orientation to any of his immediate colleagues in Beijing. Sometimes these overseas gay colleagues would come to Beijing on business trips, which gave Johnny the opportunity to take them out for dinner and establish a closer acquaintanceship. In this way, Johnny was using his white-collar connections to help him achieve his ambition, as well as his white-collar access to online technology. Johnny's taking up of a gay 'subject position', in particular assemblages of locales, technologies, relationships, sometimes gelled with but often conflicted with the multiple masculinities he performed in other contexts, demonstrating the non-unitary composition of his 'self'. His well-manicured neatly groomed look – the 'fashionable consumer' subject position – transferred smoothly and successfully between office buildings and gay nightclubs, and his performance of a generous *dafang* masculinity worked with gay and straight friends, but his online identification as gay and nightclub performances of a gay subjectivity jarred with powerful mainstream discursive formulations of the naturally heterosexual male, romantic, anxious, tender, gruff or otherwise, and Johnny felt he could not

[517] Li Yinhe, 'Regulating Male Same-Sex Relationships in the People's Republic of China', in *Sex and Sexuality in China*, ed. Elaine Jeffreys (Abingdon, Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2006), 93.

extend them into all spheres of his life. But Johnny, as with other gay men, conformed to and yet simultaneously resisted, got round, and dealt with the heteronormatising disciplinary techniques, in ways that did not compromise his sense of self-integrity. In other words, Johnny learnt to perform, or take up an overtly heterosexual masculinity in those situations which he deemed it advantageous to his various goals (such as career advancement, family harmony), such as when working at the office and in his public 'love life', as I turn to look at now.

Although Johnny's actions suggest a significant investment in the transnational practices of white-collar gay men, he also had to negotiate expectations embedded in local discourses and practices. One such expectation was marriage. Johnny did not return to his parents' home in south China for the Spring Festival when I was in Beijing. He told me he did not want to face questions from his parents, extended family, neighbours and friends about marriage. He did not want to get married, and had an agreement with a white-collar lesbian of the same age that they would present themselves as boyfriend and girlfriend at office social occasions in Beijing. Pretend relationships between gay men and lesbian are not uncommon, even extending to formal marriage and living together. The motivations for this cannot be reduced to any single formula, such as 'external' pressure from parents: they may include the participants' own ideas about the propriety of marriage and desire for career advancement as well as satisfying familial and social hopes and expectations. One of Johnny's gay friends told me that he wanted to get married and have a child because his mother was very anxious to have a grandchild. For Johnny, presenting a 'girlfriend' at some office socials was partly to prevent any damage to his career prospects, but also involved maintaining his relationships with co-workers and the image he wanted to present to mainstream society. In her study of 'lala' (lesbian) women in Beijing, Elisabeth Engebretsen relates that a middle-class gay man who entered into a gay-lesbian 'contract' marriage with one of her lesbian informants, admitted to marrying her not only to end his 'parents' nagging', but also because '[h]e was then in the process of applying to work abroad, in North America, and he knew that his visa application was more likely to be approved if he could prove close familial ties in China.'[518]

Johnny's love life manifested a complex mix of desire on global and local levels. Johnny told me that he had previously had local boyfriends, and that he still had brief flings with local men; indeed, his sexual interest was predominantly youthful, good-looking (and apparently all professional) Chinese men with athletic physiques. However, his sexual dalliances with Caucasian men (also apparently all professional) revealed wider-ranging ages

[518] Engebretsen, op. cit., 211-2.

and physical types. His motivation for sleeping with them, I suspect, may also have been to help his ambition to leave China (a not uncommon strategy amongst Chinese gay men wishing to emigrate, in my experience). Johnny had a particularly romanticized notion of German culture, and so he specifically sought out German men. Yet something prevented him from cohabiting with any foreign men living in Beijing. He had two unsuccessful relationships with local men while I was living in Beijing. Both his partners were white-collar men, and they cohabited for part of the relationships. After splitting up with his most recent local boyfriend, I heard that he was now committed to finding a Caucasian partner.

For gay white-collar men who believe they have a responsibility to get married and have children, but who also want to sleep with men, one possibility is to buy an apartment and install a gay lover there. After all, this is exactly what some well-off married men do with their mistresses. In research on gay men in Chengdu, Wei Wei, a sociologist, tells the story of a successful career man who 'managed a five-year relationship with his 20-year younger boyfriend outside his heterosexual marriage.'[519] The man explained to Wei how he did this: 'The three persons in my family live far away from each other – my wife is running her own business on the east coast, my son goes to college in Britain, and I am in Chengdu. People may think it is a broken family. They don't understand. All of us are working towards self-actualization. I think we are living in a happy family.'[520] The man tries to justify his choices by employing the notion of individual self-fulfilment. Yet the reason he has not divorced is because he believes he has certain familial and social duties: 'Living in the society a man has many responsibilities – as a husband, as a son, as a father, how could I take one responsibility and give up others?'[521] His behaviour is an attempt to reconcile his need to perform locally embedded practices, with his desire to carve out a life of individual achievement.

Although some gay men, like Johnny, or married men who sleep with men as in the above example, do not wish or see no need to 'come out', others do, and there are emerging media models of 'out' men for them to emulate, although notably extremely few from mainland China, where being an 'out' homosexual is generally seen as the kiss of death to career success. Although the white-collar sexual image is ambiguous, it is almost unremittingly framed in heteronormative terms in the mainstream media, as I have discussed above. However, one very well known out gay man in China from a Chinese cultural

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[519] Wei Wei, ''Wandering Men' No Longer Wander Around: The Production and Transformation of Local Homosexual Identities in Contemporary Chengdu, China', *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 8, no. 4 (2007): 579.
[520] Wei, ibid., 579.
[521] Wei, ibid., 580.

background is the Taiwan-born TV presenter Cai Kangyong, a middle-class, foreign-educated success story, host of the popular Taiwanese youth TV show '*Kangxi laile*' (*Kangxi has arrived*) which many young Chinese people watch on the Internet. He discussed his homosexuality in a fairly matter of fact, non-judgmental manner in a sympathetic cover feature in the mainstream men's magazine, *Shishang xiansheng* (*Esquire*), a magazine targeted at white-collar men.

The front cover sports a large upbeat, dynamic image of Cai in a velvet dinner jacket, white wing collar and thickly knotted tie, with a black bird perched curiously on his shoulder, giving the impression of an eccentric or slightly maverick white-collar man. The feature engages at length with Cai's background, career, and love life. However, at times the author perhaps unwittingly reinforces certain stereotypes about gay men, such as describing Cai as an 'open homosexual' (*gongkai tongxinglianzhe*) who 'scarcely covers up his sissiness' (*niangniangqiang hao bu yanshi*).[522] Reflecting some of the tensions between coming out as gay and family and societal expectations and demands, the author depicts Cai as: 'a penniless prince who brought honour to his family but received no applause' (*yige guangyaole menting dan mei tingdao zhangsheng de meilao gongzi*) and 'a homosexual who bears a rebel flag but has signed enough mainstream society cheques' (*yige jiankang panni qizhi dan qiangoule zhuliu shehui zhipiao de tongxinglianzhe*).[523] Perhaps significantly, Cai only came out publically (on a television programme) after both his parents had died.[524] The author casts Cai as someone who refreshingly challenges convention on youth TV programmes, where he discusses such 'taboo topics' (*jinji huati*) as 'kept mistresses' (*baoyang*) and 'running away from home' (*lijia chuzou*).[525]

The article reports that Cai, a star student in Taiwan and the United States before becoming a television presenter, was even asked to give a speech at Peking University. In keeping with his image as an individual who dares to challenge the status quo and follow his own path, and perhaps also capturing the mood of the age, Cai's speech was entitled 'Free Spirits and Roving Quests' (*ziyou jingshen yu liulang de tanxun*). Cai has somehow captured the spirit of reform era youth, by being an example of someone who has dared to do things his own way but has still achieved mainstream success. He speaks to the aspirational side of contemporary urban youth, and, significantly, this is the aspect that *Shishang xiansheng*

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[522] Tang Xiaosong, 'Cai Kangyong: shengming zhi qing' (Cai Kangyong: the lightness of life), *Shishang xiansheng* (Esquire) no. 19 (March 2007): 119.
[523] Tang, ibid., 124.
[524] Tang, ibid., 124.
[525] Tang, ibid., 119.

emphasizes. Although a Cai Kangyong could not emerge in the more restricted broadcast media climate of contemporary China, the article's relatively even-handed treatment of his homosexuality signifies the shifting discursive portrayals of gay men, towards a more tolerant, understanding stance in some, perhaps very limited, regards, at least it indicates an acceptance of gay TV entertainers who themselves reinforce the dominant consumerist, aspirational discourses, and thereby provides a new subject position – the popular, successful, lauded, fashionable, metrosexual *gay* star.

White-collar men adopt various strategies to negotiate the different demands of a society which promotes desire and self-fulfilment, yet at the same time has requirements about the performance of an assumed heterosexuality. Homosexuality in the white-collar world reflects many of that world's defining characteristics: desire, desire to be desired, consumerisation, depoliticisation, and a mixing of global and local influences. The accounts I have outlined above, in Lisa Rofel's words, manifest some of the connections between 'Chinese gay men's desires for cultural belonging in China and transcultural gay identifications'.[526]

In conclusion, the sexual and gender subject positions inscribed in the image of the white-collar man are associated with the diversification of contemporary Chinese society and with the ideological emphasis on individual aspiration and fulfilment through consumer activities focused on the beautification of the self. As metrosexual or androgynous, the white-collar man is represented as reshaping existing notions of masculinity. The overlap between the androgynous, metrosexual and white-collar subjectivities converges in an emphasis on attention to personal appearance and emotional expressivity that challenge conventional notions of masculine looks and behaviour. Conservative reaction in labelling the androgynous/metrosexual man as feminine is yet another attempt to reaffirm conventional notions of masculinity through a subjectified feminine 'Other', driven by feelings of fear and anxiety about feminizing trends in society undermining men's status and authority. Yet he is also understood, by some people, as a continuation of a long-running historical trajectory of attention to male beauty, which legitimates the notion of the metrosexual and situates him within an imagined Chinese tradition. In this light, the ambiguous sexual 'looks' of white-collar man incorporate both heterosexual and gay identities, allowing space for white-collar men's performance of different sexual subjectivities, although these are contested when

[526] Rofel, op. cit., 94.

deemed to cross normative gender boundaries. Whether depicted as blurring conventional demarcations, or as part of an established cultural narrative, in mainstream media he is overwhelmingly depicted in line with heteronormative assumptions. A prominent vehicle for this heterosexist conceptual framework is the ideal of the tender, thoughtful middle-class romantic husband or boyfriend, whose romantic behaviour sets him apart from other, less cultivated men.

The hegemonic model of the white-collar sexual subject is depicted almost exclusively in heteronormative terms, notwithstanding its incorporation of different sexual subjectivities. The pressure to perform heterosexual romance is such that some gay men construct 'fake' heterosexual relationships to ensure smooth relations with their family and at work, while simultaneously enjoying a parallel but discreet world of gay friendships, relationships and activities. Whether gay or straight, the vast majority of white-collar men eventually conform to heteronormative requirements to get married and have children. Explicit gay identities are controversial, and unacceptable to many, as they cannot easily be reconciled with conventional notions of Chineseness, although there appears to be some tolerance and interest among white-collar men for information about homosexuality.

Overall, both my interviewees and media narratives suggest that shifting practices and performances have undeniably disturbed the conventional distinction between oppositional gender identities. The dominant image of the white-collar man as sexual subject is ambiguous, encapsulating multiple sexual subjectivities. However, the potentially exploratory – even transgressive in the Chinese context – gender possibilities of these new sexual identifications are contested, and repeatedly limited by pervasive attachments to notions of naturalized gender difference. Fundamentally, patriarchal assumptions about natural gender difference still underpin the mainstream conceptions of even these emerging possibilities for white-collar men.

# Conclusions

The image of the white-collar man pervades contemporary Chinese media and comes to life in metropolitan business districts. He is the symbol of middle-class success in the reform era, and a spectacular symbol of China's post-millenial modernity. Within the framework of my discussion in this thesis, his presence and appearance suggest a range of meanings and formulations of gender, such that the new middle class, and the white-collar sector in particular, signify changing conceptualizations and practices of masculinity. The contemporary gendering of the male middle class and especially of 'white-collar man' is, moreover, highly influential. Encompassing global imagery, the contemporary image of the white-collar man is highly appealing to young urban men. Inscribed with the notions of masculinity I have discussed in the foregoing chapters, white-collar status becomes an inseparable component of contemporary identifications of and with masculinity.

White-collar subject positions are produced through discursive regimes, which are embedded in everyday practices, institutions and relationships in particular sites, forming 'assemblages'. All the elements within these assemblages play a part in constituting white-collar subjectivities and in how white-collar men conceive of themselves. In a spatial and corporeal process which I analyse through the concept of habituation, white-collar men – inspired by media guides – self-reflexively 'bring themselves into discourse' through the inculcation of bodily routines which become part of a 'natural' performance of white-collar masculinity. A hegemonic modality of white-collar masculinity has emerged through these processes, associated with the look and values of an imagined transnational business masculinity, but the multiplicity of white-collar masculinities which have emerged in contemporary China are testimony to the varied ways in which the hegemonic model interacts with other notions and practices of diverse historic and geographical origins. White-collar masculinity, then, is not a single, coherent, stable, 'essential' identity that is clearly understood from media depictions. Instead, white-collar masculinities cover a range of diverse subject positions that are multiple, fluid, non-unitary, incoherent and conflicting, and that have emerged in the specific historical and cultural conditions of contemporary China.

This work has demonstrated that the rise of the middle class is often explained through the figure of the white-collar man, and has explored the representations and concepts through

which white-collar masculinity is rendered, with particular emphasis on the ideas, aspirations and desire men associate with it. In doing so, it has suggested new angles to understandings of gender and class formation in the reform era, which position the gendered white-collar man centre stage in the processes of contemporary social change. In contrast to the general use of the 'white-collar' label in the United States to denote a transcending of social class boundaries, Chinese media and academic discourse point to a specifically Chinese corporate white-collar sector, working for large transnational companies. Global corporate masculine characteristics in discourse intermingle with popular ideas of Chinese masculinities from history to construct an alluring image of manhood for aspiring young urban men. Throughout this work, I have examined the connections between hegemonic images in the media discourse of white-collar masculinity and the gendered practices and understandings of men who aspire to them. The notion of habituation illuminates the bodily and social processes these men adopt on their quest to perform a fluent and effortless white-collar masculinity. However, the non-unitary and contradictory subjectivities that my white-collar informants demonstrate show that their performances of masculinity are 'interpellated' through multiple discourses, a situation which produces progressive, transformative possibilities, as Butler emphasizes. But, at the same time, this process produces the possibility of habituation to aspects of older, conservative, chauvinistic models of masculinity, which is a core argument of this thesis.

In mainstream media discourse, the white-collar man, in his role as most prominent emblem of middle-class prosperity, is glamorously portrayed as someone who wears designer clothing, drives an expensive car, lives in a newly built condominium complex, and pursues a cosmopolitan lifestyle of exclusive gyms, fine-dining and overseas holidays. Depicted as an ideal spouse, caring and financially well off, he apparently offers a happy and stylish home to his prospective wife. In this way, white-collar masculinity symbolizes the sophisticated way of life of a prosperous professional class which has emerged through the spread of global capital and underscores the death of socialism as a meaningful alternative modernity.

Although often placed in this global perspective, the professional Chinese man must necessarily engage with a contemporary Chinese society that exhibits elements of historical culture, socialism and capitalism. His quest for individual self-improvement and career development involves not only the high status material trappings and sophisticated living and working spaces associated with the global professional class, but also engagement in activities associated with locally-embedded notions of masculinity, including business entertaining and relationship building. To this end, he is sometimes linked with popular ideas of historical masculinity; his gendered identity is both an effect of his engagement with the new global

world, but is also grounded in China's cultural and national specificity.

Popular and academic discourse suggests that the key definers of middle-class man are global consumer items. He is frequently described as being at the forefront of consumer behaviour. Indeed, consumption is inseparably intertwined with media depictions of his work and family success. Underlying these images is the conception of the desiring subject, the seeker of individual achievement who, according to the widely-circulating 'narrative' of desire, is merely acting on his natural human instincts, which he was unable to express during the collective-oriented Mao era prior to the reforms starting in 1978. The white-collar man is the epitome of the desiring subject: his identity is built on consumption and its display.

For some, the reemergence of the middle class is part of a linear process of China's modernization promoting progressively more individual freedom and democracy. This viewpoint sees the practice of consumerism as opening up public spaces removed from the direct controls of the state, where people – especially the strongly-consuming middle classes – are freer to interact in more creative ways. However, this thesis rejects this as an imagined teleology which discards the 'socialist' alternatives as yesterday's choices and precludes open political discussion about the meaning of modernization, arguing that increasing consumption is not synonymous with more personal freedom. China's consumer culture gives the white-collar man, alongside other social sectors, new – though circumscribed – spaces for the exercise of individual choice, experimentation and expression. However, a focus on consumerism and away from politics, simultaneously serves the interests of the CCP as it contributes to political stability and provides the Party with legitimacy.

Gender inequalities have widened throughout the reform period, but their discussion is positioned at the margins of mainstream debate, which is primarily preoccupied with issues concerning economic development. The gendering of the middle class and white-collar man attract only minimal attention from the media and academia. Unless there is critical interrogation of the gendered practices, representations and assumptions that both contribute to and are produced by ongoing social change — including the gendering of contemporary society's white-collar flag-bearer — then gender inequities and injustices will continue to be seen as the 'naturalised' effect of socio-economic processes. This work has attempted to identify the deep-seated gendered presumptions about the white-collar man which contribute to social gender inequities.

Without doubt, however, there are also liberating and transgressive aspects to new post-Mao era gender formulations and subjectivities, and this thesis has investigated many prominent features of changing gender practices and relationships. It has done this through

focusing in particular on the connections between discourse and practice in relation to white-collar men; not through adopting the teleological perspective of modernization theory, nor through a chronological account of masculinities, but through the analysis of contemporary notions of the white-collar man from a variety of sources. Despite those aspects of his current identity that might challenge naturalized understandings of heterosexual masculinity – such as his apparently soft, somewhat androgynous appearance – this work has shown how the media continues to depict the young white-collar man in profoundly heteronormative terms. As such, his version of masculinity represents only a cosmetic departure from those associated with the masculine figures of the Mao era.

Moreover, as I have shown in chapter three, this discussion has highlighted how at his core, white-collar man is defined by a certain kind of body work that inscribes appearances as well as ways of moving and behaving in everyday activities. This integration of the young male body into white-collar body culture is achieved through a process of 'learning to perform' as a white-collar man, requiring the guidance of detailed discursive expositions, as in the texts I have analysed. As with other aspects of life, sculpting the young male body with the goal of acquiring white-collar cultural status relies on the ability to consume, as I have shown with my accounts of white-collar men I knew in Beijing discussing their suits and toiletries. The corporate suit in particular encapsulates a sense of reliability on a moral level. Throughout the media features on such issues, the corporate man's assumed heterosexuality is never questioned.

As I pointed out in chapter four, a central theatre for the performance of white-collar masculinity is the corporate office, usually within one of the shiny skyscrapers which provide the urban architecture symbolic of China's aspirations to be a major player in global capitalism. Herein, corporate man pursues his desires; his performance of a modern masculinity is inseparable from the spaces framing it. Within this iconic globalised setting, local realities such as personal network building amongst colleagues and homosocial business entertaining occupy his time. Business media, through detailed prescriptions of standards of bodily appearance and intellectual attainment, urge young corporate recruits to follow the pluralistic values associated with global business methods, and to forgo local historical tendencies. The young white-collar male, fresh out of intensive education, moves straight into a strongly competitive job market in a narrative of burden and heavy pressure. To be successful, he must learn to negotiate all aspects of his job, global and local.

The leisure pursuits of professional men, which I explored in chapter five, are again dependent on their consumer capacity, and which they take part in not only for recreational

purposes but also for the status cachet of global sophistication it brings them. Furthermore, these activities – to become proficient in some of which requires dedicated body work and learning – deliver opportunities to build homosocial relationships that enhance their interests as white-collar men. The narrative of the desiring subject suggests that the middle-class man is incomplete without participation in these mostly consumer-oriented activities. Even the religious practices of the middle class are often interwoven with a desire to cultivate status and certain moral values, and to display spending power, for example through financing the construction of new churches and temples. Women are often either excluded from or provide service in these homosocial activities, including sexual services in some of the pervasive business socialising sites where masculinity is tested and demonstrated.

The idea of the middle-class man as the harbinger of democracy extends into private life, in which, as I demonstrated in chapter six, the media portrays the white-collar husband as cognisant of and sensitive to his wife's needs, treating her as an equal. However, underlying these idealised relationships are gender roles inscribed with strongly naturalised conceptions of male and female attributes. Furthermore, male concern about a perceived lessening of influence has brought about determined efforts to sustain it. Conventional ascriptions of gender provide comfort for both sexes as they seek to negotiate the challenging and fluid social and economic times. Falling back on inherited notions of gender propriety, white-collar men fall back from the hegemonic media ideal on to more deeply embedded assumptions, including the declared desire to be the main breadwinner and a dislike of their working wives, which is justified through an appeal to women's 'natural' propensity to look after her family. This new subjectivity is afraid of conjugal equality, not supportive of it.

Although there are not many signs of transgressive gender formulations in conjugal relationships, as I discussed in chapter seven, the fashionable young white-collar male is associated with new sexual images. Prominent among these is the 'slightly androgynous' metrosexual white-collar man, but his potentially trangressive characteristics are driven mostly by his consumer capacity and are circumscribed by mainstream gender distinctions. This occludes any potential queering of moral expectations around gender. He is depicted as a romantic ideal, desired by women; he is also sexualized and objectified in men's magazines. Although such images could be read as either straight or gay, they are for the most part termed androgynous, associated with a 'feminine' attention to body, fashion and appearance, and emotional expressivity and fragility, especially manifested through his willingness to cry. However, despite such potentially transgressive features, he is firmly placed within a heteronormative discourse, and supported with historical allusions to an imagined continuity

of beautiful Chinese men. The overwhelmingly heteronormative configuration of society discourages white-collar gay men from being open about their sexuality, and for many, marriage – whether real or 'fake' – is an unavoidable part of maintaining an appearance of middle-class respectability and protecting their career interests. Ultimately, the transgressive possibilities of new masculine subjectivities are consistently curtailed by the widespread privileging of naturalized and unequal heteronormative norms.

The mainstream media discourse of the figure of the white-collar man accords him an emblematic role in the imagined teleological narrative of China's modernization, at the vanguard of consumerism. Yet despite this, the gendered meanings ascribed to his character and figure, and the gendered performances of my informants in their daily activities at home, work and play, show that in many respects white-collar men continue to uphold familiar and conventional masculine roles, belying the surface appearance of hegemonic media images and confounding any mapping of him as society's most progressive element. He is neither the beacon of enlightened gender awareness nor the confounder of sexual boundaries he is often made out to be. In the final analysis, he reveals himself in many regards as a rather forlorn figure – insecure, socially conservative, misogynistic and obsessively materialistic– far from the glossy model man his propagators depict him as.

The subjectivities of white-collar men thus may not be what they appear to be from media images, particularly to the 'Western' eye. To many outside China, China appears to be, or is assumed to be becoming westernised. This is not to suggest that these images do not signify change; they do, but the important question is what kind of change they signify, a question that this thesis has sought to answer through its focus on ethnographic material. Change, which may be transgressive, does not require the teleology of the modernisation argument. Many men undoubtedly can explore a greater range of sexualities and gender positions than when in the 'straitjacket' of the Mao era, but this does not mean that the new gender images are more just or egalitarian. Investigation of men's subjectivities through what they say and do, as I have done in this thesis, shows that what their performances mean to them can be very different from what the observer thinks. Any understanding of the performativity of white-collar masculinities thus must be located within the political, cultural and socio-economic environment of contemporary China, with the recognition that the transformative possibilities inherent in the reiterative process of performativity inevitably draw from locally embedded notions of masculinity as well as those circulating globally. In

this light, I have endeavoured to show that a culturally-specific situating of Butler's theory of performativity is needed to analyse the political and social effects of the transformative possibilities of performativity.[527]

In the final instance, the figure of the white-collar man is a further component of the 'impossibility of gender' as a critical category in contemporary China. Nowhere is gender thoroughly interrogated, not even in the academy. There are severe constraints, therefore, on how people conceptualise gender, and they very often fall back on routinely unjust and discriminatory stereotypes about men and women. The gay white-collar man is also caught in this apparently closed web of gender assumptions; he too is the subject of discrimination and injustice. And as this work demonstrates, in the absence of critical discussion about gender, change is interpreted and lived – reproduced – in mostly familiar ways.

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[527] This is a point perhaps often overshadowed or overlooked in the enthusiastic expectations of progressive change often elicited by Butler's formulation, though Butler herself, perhaps aware of this, clearly disavows any teleological implication of her work. See, for example, her comment that 'it would be a mistake to subscribe to a progressive notion of history in which various frameworks are understood to succeed and supplant one another', in Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender*, (New York: Routledge, 2004), 4.

## Select Character List

| | |
|---|---|
| bailing | 白领 |
| bailing jieceng | 白领阶层 |
| bailing jingyingmen | 白领精英们 |
| bailing nanren | 白领男人 |
| bailing neihan de Zhongguohua | 白领内涵的中国化 |
| bailing shenfen, xingxiang ji shenghuo fangshi | 白领身份,形象及生活方式 |
| bailing xinshi | 白领心事 |
| bailing zazhi | 白领杂志 |
| bailing zhiye | 白领职业 |
| beiying shi nanrenwei biaoxian fa | 背影式男人味表现法 |
| biaomian | 表面 |
| biaozhunde waiqi bailing jieceng | 标准的外企白领阶层 |
| caizi | 才子 |
| caizi-jiaren | 才子佳人 |
| chenggong tongxinyuan | 成功同心圆 |
| chengjiu dongji | 成就动机 |
| chuanzhe jiangjiu, shenghuo xizhi | 穿着讲究,生活细致 |
| dali ziji | 打理自己 |
| diaosu ziji | 雕塑自己 |
| dingke jiazu | 丁克家族 |
| dushi linan | 都市丽男 |
| dushi meinan | 都市美男 |
| dushi meixing nan | 都市美型男 |
| dushi yu’nan | 都市玉男 |
| fucong | 服从 |
| gaige kaifang | 改革开放 |
| gao xiaofei pin | 高消费品 |
| gaoji hui | 高级灰 |
| gediao | 格调 |

| | |
|---|---|
| gemenr | 哥们儿 |
| geren de qinfen nuli | 个人的勤奋努力 |
| geren zai shehui zhong ziwo wanshan | 个人在社会中自我完善 |
| geti gongshanghu | 个体工商户 |
| getihu | 个体户 |
| gongkai tongxinglianzhe | 公开同性恋者 |
| gou nanren | 够男人 |
| gou jian da bi waitao nafa | 勾肩搭臂外套拿法 |
| guanxi | 关系 |
| guitou-guinao de xiao hunhun | 鬼头鬼脑的小混混 |
| *Guoji zaixian* | 国际在线 |
| guoying qiye de zhigong | 国营企业的职工 |
| haohan | 好汉 |
| haoshuang | 豪爽 |
| hexie | 和谐 |
| houwei | 后卫 |
| *Hong gaoliang* | 红高粱 |
| *Huanle yingxiong* | 欢乐英雄 |
| hua mingtian de qian, ban jintian de shi | 花明天的钱,办今天的事 |
| huangjin liushuixian | 黄金流水线 |
| huiyishi dadun ying fangxin fa | 会议室打盹赢芳心法 |
| jiachuqu de nü'er, pochuqu de shui | 嫁出去的女儿,泼出去的水 |
| jiankang | 健康 |
| jiashang mimeng de shuangyan | 加上迷蒙的双眼 |
| jiating funan | 家庭妇男 |
| jiating lunli | 家庭伦理 |
| jilei de wenhua ziben | 积累的文化资本 |
| jingye jingshen | 敬业精神 |
| kafeiting duanbei fa | 咖啡厅端杯法 |
| laoban | 老板 |
| lianghao jiaoyu | 良好教育 |
| lei zhongchan jieceng | 类中产阶层 |
| leisi bailing de putong ganbu he zhishifenzi | 类似白领的普通干部和知识分子 |

| | |
|---|---|
| *Meili xiansheng* | 魅力先生 |
| mendi | 门第 |
| *Mingpai* | 名牌 |
| mingpai huazhuang pin | 名牌化妆品 |
| mingpai xiangshui | 名牌香水 |
| mingwang | 名望 |
| nan nü pingdeng | 男女平等 |
| nan wei ji rong | 男为己容 |
| nan zhu wai, nü zhu nei | 男主外,女主内 |
| nanren bugai zhuzhong waibiao, ying jiangjiu neihan | 男人不该注重外表,应讲究内涵 |
| nanren de jingzhi shidai | 男人的精致时代 |
| *Nanren de yiban shi nüren* | 男人的一半是女人 |
| *Nanren zhuang* | 男人装 |
| nanse | 男色 |
| nanzi qigai | 男子气概 |
| niangniang qiang de naiyou xiaosheng | 娘娘腔的奶油小生 |
| nüxinghua | 女性化 |
| pinwei | 品味 |
| qianshedao haizi | 牵涉到孩子 |
| qianwei | 前卫 |
| *Qingnian shejiao* | 青年社交 |
| quanfangwei de guanzhao | 全方位的关照 |
| qundai | 裙带 |
| rang yibufen ren xian fuqilai | 让一部分人先富起来 |
| rou | 柔 |
| ru | 儒 |
| shangpin jingji qifen jiaowei nongzhong | 商品经济气氛较为浓重 |
| shangwu tong | 商务通 |
| shangye chengxin | 商业诚信 |
| shehui wangluo | 社会网络 |
| shejiao | 社交 |
| shengbing boqu tongqing fa | 生病博取同情法 |
| shendu jie na dianhua fa | 深度接拿电话法 |

| | |
|---|---|
| *Shenjiang fuwu daobao* | 申江服务导报 |
| shibiaozhe | 师表者 |
| shidai butongle, nan nü dou yiyang | 时代不同了,男女都一样 |
| *Shishang* | 时尚 |
| *Shishang jiankang* | 时尚健康 |
| *Shishang junzi* | 时尚君子 |
| *Shishang xiansheng* | 时尚先生 |
| shishang xiaofei pin | 时尚消费品 |
| shouchaoben | 手抄本 |
| shouru shuiping zai zhongdeng yishang | 收入水平在中等以上 |
| shuaiqi huxu lao | 帅气胡须佬 |
| *Shuihu zhuan* | 水浒传 |
| Shuo ru | 说儒 |
| *Shuowen jiezi* | 说文解字 |
| sixiang | 思想 |
| siying qiyejia | 私营企业家 |
| siyou siwu de huxi sheng | 似有似无的呼吸声 |
| suizhe shehui de buduan jinbu | 随着社会的不断进步 |
| suzhi | 素质 |
| suzhi tisheng | 素质提升 |
| timian er shouru jiao gao de bailing gongzuo | 体面而收入教高的白领工作 |
| tingcong | 听从 |
| titie | 体贴 |
| touji quqiao | 投机取巧 |
| touji-zuanying de shengyiren | 投机钻营的生意人 |
| waiqi | 外企 |
| waiqi bailing | 外企白领 |
| wangmin | 网民 |
| wei shubuduo de nengguo jieshou jingying jiaoyu de ren | 为数不多的能够接受经营教育的人 |
| weiyi jinjin kao gongzi jishen zhongchan zhi lie de qunti | 惟一仅仅靠工资跻身中产之列的群体 |
| wen-wu | 文武 |

| | |
|---|---|
| wenhua pinwei | 文化品味 |
| wu fengzu du bao fa | 无风阻读报法 |
| wuchu buzai | 无处不在 |
| wuxia | 武侠 |
| xiancheng de shenfen zuobiao | 现成的身份坐标 |
| xiangzhen qiyejia | 乡镇企业家 |
| xiao shangfan | 小商贩 |
| xiao yezhu | 小业主 |
| xiaobailian | 小白脸 |
| xiaofei jiqing | 消费激情 |
| xiaofei lingyu | 消费领域 |
| xiaofei qianwei | 消费前卫 |
| xiaofei xingwei | 消费行为 |
| xiaofei, xiaofei, zai xiaofei | 消费,消费,再消费 |
| xiaofei zhongchan | 消费中产 |
| xiaojie | 小姐 |
| xiaosheng | 小生 |
| xiaozi | 小资 |
| xiayi xiaoshuo | 侠义小说 |
| xibeifeng | 西北风 |
| xin shiji de nanren | 新世纪的男人 |
| xin shishen | 新士绅 |
| Xinlang | 新浪 |
| xinxihua | 信息化 |
| *Xixiang ji* | 西厢记 |
| xizhuang biting | 西装笔挺 |
| xu | 需 |
| xungen yundong | 寻根运动 |
| *Xunzhao nanzihan* | 寻找男子汉 |
| yanggang | 阳刚 |
| yangzun-chuyou de gongzige | 养尊处优的公子哥 |
| yanshen de duijie | 眼神的对接 |
| yi | 义 |

| | |
|---|---|
| yin-yang | 阴阳 |
| yingchou | 应酬 |
| yinggxiong | 英雄 |
| yingzaochu wenzhong de xingxiang | 营造出稳重的形象 |
| yinrou | 阴柔 |
| yinsheng yang shuai | 阴盛阳衰 |
| yiqi | 义气 |
| yishujia | 艺术家 |
| yizhao xinqing shiyong | 依照心情使用 |
| yongyong-lulu de gongwuyuan | 庸庸碌碌的公务员 |
| yuchou-suanfu de ruo shusheng | 迂臭酸腐的弱书生 |
| zhaojiu-wanwu de bailing | 朝九晚五的白领 |
| zhengyi | 正义 |
| zhenzheng de nanren | 真正的男人 |
| zhiye daode | 职业道德 |
| zhiye huangjing, shenfen gege-buru | 职业环境,身份格格不入 |
| zhizhu | 支柱 |
| zhongchan jieceng | 中产阶层 |
| zhongchanzhe | 中产者 |
| zhongdeng shouru de jieji huo zhongdeng shouru jieceng | 中等收入的阶级或中等收入阶层 |
| zhongjian jieceng | 中间阶层 |
| zhongxing | 中性 |
| zhongxing nanren | 中性男人 |
| zhuguan rentong zhongchan | 主观认同中产 |
| zhuzhai loupan | 住宅楼盘 |
| ziben | 资本 |
| zichan jieji daibiao renwu | 资产阶级代表人物 |
| ziming-bufan de kongtan ke | 自命不凡的空谈客 |
| zinü jiaoyu | 子女教育 |
| ziwo fazhan de nengli | 自我发展的能力 |
| ziwo shenxin jiankang | 自我身心健康 |
| ziyou zhiyezhe | 自由职业者 |
| zou ziben zhuyi luxian pai | 走资本主义路线派 |

zuo zhen yemenr 做真爷们儿

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