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Contributions to The Editor, *East Asian History*
Division of Pacific & Asian History, Research School of Pacific & Asian Studies
Australian National University, Canberra ACT 0200, Australia
Phone +61 6 249 3140 Fax +61 6 249 5525

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Cover calligraphy Yan Zhenqing 顏真卿, Tang calligrapher and statesman

Cover picture The walled city of Shanghai (*Shanghai xianzhi*, 1872)

CHINESE MASCULINITY: THEORIZING WEN AND WU

 Kam Louie and Louise Edwards

The rising importance of gender as an analytic category in Asian studies has become evident in the last few years with the publication of several important works on the position of women in a broad variety of Asian countries. However, despite the attested interest in gender there is an important lacuna in this work: masculinity. In effect 'gender' has become synonymous with 'women's studies' because of the failure to examine masculinity. It is the intention of the present article to redress this imbalance by developing broad paradigms within which the theorizing of Chinese masculinity may be possible. Bret Hinsch has addressed one important aspect of masculinity—the male homosexual tradition—in his *Passions of the Cut Sleeve*.¹ Several books in the Chinese language have also appeared recently which talk about 'Chinese men' and sexual relations.² These publications, however, either present specific issues relating to masculinity or collections of anecdotal phenomena in Chinese culture which illustrate the many facets of Chinese maleness. In this article, we will attempt to develop a general conception of masculinity in China by characterizing it as an expression of the dyad *wen-wu* 文武 (literary-martial).³ There are two interrelated points that require explication from the outset. The first concerns the importance of including masculinity in so-called 'gender' studies, and the second, the reasons why we need to conceptualize Chinese masculinities differently from those of the West.

Sexual Difference

The importance of including studies of masculinity in the valuable work that is being carried out on sexual difference in Asia is paramount.⁴ Masculinity and femininity are mutually informing discourses: they define each other. Scholars primarily motivated by a concern about the status of women necessarily compare each set of relevant criteria (for instance, literacy, health,

We would like to thank the following people for their advice: the editors, readers and staff of *East Asian History*, Bonnie McDougall, Anders Hanson, David Graff and staff at UQ's Department of Asian Languages and Studies where an earlier version of this article was presented as a seminar in 1994.

¹ Bret Hinsch, *Passions of the cut sleeve: the male homosexual tradition in China* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1990).

² See, for example, Li Bihua, *Zhongguo nanren* [Chinese men] (Hong Kong: Tiandi Tushu, 1993); and Xie Pengxiong, *Wenxue zhong de nanren* [Men in literature] (Taipei: Jiuge Chubanshe, 1992).

³ Liu Dalin's mammoth *Zhongguo gudai xing wenhua* [The sex culture of ancient China] (Yinchuan: Ningxia Renmin Chubanshe, 1993) deals with sexuality and men ranging from eunuchs to male prostitutes, but there is no discussion of masculinity as 'wen-wu'.

⁴ This article deals specifically with Chinese masculinity but the *wen-wu* paradigm could be applied to other parts of Asia as well. For example the Japanese author Mishima Yukio aimed to achieve an idealised balance between the literary and the martial in his regimen of building bodily strength before committing *barakiri*. Japanese militarism prior to World War II also explicitly built upon notions of strength in both culture and military prowess.

⁵ See chapters 3 and 5 in Louise Edwards, *Men and women in Qing China: gender in the "Red Chamber Dream"* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), and Kam Louie, "The macho eunuch: the politics of masculinity in Jia Pingwa's 'Human Extremities,'" *Modern China* 17.2 (Apr. 1991): 163–87.

⁶ See Ann Oakley's pioneering work *Sex, gender and society* (London: Temple Smith, 1972).

⁷ For a brief survey of this debate see *Australian Feminist Studies* 10 (1989). More detail is provided in Elizabeth Grosz's book *Volatile bodies: towards a corporeal feminism* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1994).

degree of participation in politics) directly with their male equivalents. However, by invoking men merely as referents, without examining masculinity as a discourse, the subtle and ambiguous manner in which male dominance is perpetuated remains obscure. Until masculinity is problematised in a manner similar to the feminist project to problematise femininity, maleness will remain the universal and unstated norm against which women and other marginalised groups are judged.

While previous histories of the world—including those of China—have been described as being dominated by the narration of events that were primarily of male concern, in effect the 'maleness' of these events remains undisclosed. Because the writing of these histories has always portrayed 'man' as the universal, normative subject, the effect has been a neat deflection of any analysis of male dominance by having the man as 'male' evade the spotlight. It is the intention of the present exercise to remove the normality of 'maleness' as subject. To problematise the notion of masculinity within patriarchal society is to bifurcate the two concepts: that masculinity is not patriarchy but rather part of the discourse of a gender order that has been constructed within a patriarchal society. In this respect masculinity requires closer examination. By focussing on masculinity we can 'sexualise' men in the same way that androcentric scholarship and some feminist-inspired writing has sexualised women.

In this paper, we look at an ideal or model of manhood rather than at something that was manifested in tangible entities. In previous work we have examined examples of individual manifestations of masculine behaviour within notions of bisexuality, machismo, and the 'masculine woman';⁵ we aim here to provide a model that captures the Chinese masculine ideal. It is important to propose such a construct because, while at this stage it is only a preliminary attempt at theorizing Chinese masculinity, it may encourage further research into actual cases based on this ideal.

The masculine ideal is constructed both biologically and culturally since the body is already a cultural construct. Clearly our position here is one which rejects the early feminist theorists' division of sex and gender in which the former was regarded as referring to the biological aspects of masculinity and femininity and the latter to their cultural aspects.⁶ Where these theories developed from the need for feminists to counteract biological reductionism, they have over the past few years been called into question for their inability to incorporate the mutual interaction between the biological body and culture. Just as our biological status affects the development of our culture, so does culture have marked effects on the physical development of our biological body.⁷ It is the interaction between the previous 'poles' of biology and culture that is stressed in an analysis such as ours which regards masculinity as being something which men generally strive for *and* something which—in another, but complementary, sense—men necessarily possess from birth. For men, a notion of self draws upon and interacts with the ideals and models of masculinity circulating in their society but it is also

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developed from a man's experience of how his sexual pleasure is obtained and then perceived. Our bodies do more than passively accept the culture inscribed upon them: they alter and transform themselves in response to, and generate patterns of change within, cultural trends.

This mutuality of influence is evident in the effect of reproductive technologies upon women's bodies. If we look to the masculine realm we can see the effect of the technologies and cultures of body-building and weight-lifting on the male form. This concept of mutual referencing also explains changes in 'manliness' and 'the manly physique' across the vast Chinese past. Van Gulik notes the changing ideals of masculine beauty over the dynasties and relates them to the fluctuating importance of physical activities. Men of the Tang period "cultivated a virile, even martial appearance. They liked thick beards, whiskers and long moustaches, and admired bodily strength. Both civilian and military officials practised archery, riding, sword fighting and boxing, and proficiency in these arts was highly praised."⁸ Van Gulik continues by contrasting the Ming and Qing with previous eras:

Instead of the middle-aged, bearded men of the Tang and Sung periods, ardent lovers are now preferably depicted as younger men without beard, moustache or whiskers. At that time athletics were still admired, young students practised boxing, fencing and archery, and riding and hunting were favourite pastimes. Thus bodily strength was one of the recognised attributes of a handsome man. They are depicted as tall and broad shouldered, and the nudes of the erotic albums show them with heavy chests and muscular arms and legs Under the Manchu occupation the martial arts were monopolised by the conquerors, and as a reaction the Chinese, and more especially the members of the literary class, began to consider physical exercise as vulgar and athletic prowess as suited only to the "Ch'ing barbarians," and Chinese professional boxers and acrobats The ideal lover is described as a delicate, hyper-sensitive youngster with pale face and narrow shoulders, passing the greater part of his time dreaming among his books and flowers, and who falls ill at the slightest disappointment.⁹

The male body, then, is formed in terms of the culturally created concepts of masculinity and as such is much more than a product of any ascribed 'essential' biological differences.

Cultural Difference

Studies of masculinity are burgeoning in Western universities, but so far they deal exclusively with European and American cultures and primarily adopt a contemporary vision.¹⁰ It is our goal to broaden this discussion to include Chinese masculinity. 'Subaltern' studies have demonstrated the partiality and even the redundancy of many Western feminist conceptual formulations by revealing their inapplicability to women of Africa or Asia.¹¹ Similarly, we can show that male dominance is manifested and perpetuated

⁸ R. H. Van Gulik, *Sexual life in ancient China* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974), p.188.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.294–6.

¹⁰ See, for example, R. W. Connell's recent book *Masculinities* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1995).

¹¹ See Chilla Bulbeck's discussion of this in her *One world women's movement* (London: Pluto Press, 1988).

¹² See the studies of M. S. Kimmel, ed., *Changing men: new directions in research on men and masculinity* (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1987); Gregory M. Herek, "On heterosexual masculinity: some physical consequences of the social construction of gender and sexuality," in *ibid.*, pp.68–82; M. Kaufman, *Beyond patriarchy: essays by men on pleasure, power, and change* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1987); J. L. Dubbert, *A man's place: masculinity in transition* (London: Prentice Hall, 1979).

¹³ See Kam Louie's discussion of *yingxiong* in the *Sanguo zhi yanyi* in "Homoeroticism in the *Sanguo*: The case of Guanyu," paper presented to the conference of the Chinese Studies Association of Australia, Brisbane, July 1993, and W. J. F. Jenner's discussion of the *baoban* in *The tyranny of history: the roots of China's crisis* (London: Allen Lane, 1992), pp.203–6.

¹⁴ Sun Longji, *Zhongguo wenhua de 'shen-ceng jiegou'* [The 'deep structure' of Chinese culture] (Hong Kong: Jixianshe, 1983), p.210.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.206.

¹⁶ Both Zhang Xianliang's stories are in *Zhang Xianliang xuanji: san* [Selected works of Zhang Xianliang] (Tianjin: Baihua Wenyi Chubanshe, 1986), pp.161–338, 399–618. *Mimosa* was translated by Gladys Yang and appeared in *Chinese Literature* (Spring 1985): 3–77. *Half of man is woman* has been translated by Martha Avery (London: Viking, 1987).

in a multitude of ways that differ from Western models. Indeed, if female subordination has a multiplicity of forms then male domination must necessarily be capable of similar variance.

It is clear from even the briefest visit to China that contemporary Chinese sexuality is physical constructed differently from that of the West. This is particularly evident when one looks at the construction of masculinity. Recent Western work on masculinity has described the Occidental male as forming his notion of the male self in terms of images of toughness, courage, and decisiveness. Having an adventuresome spirit, a proclivity to violence, a tendency towards a physical rather than oral expression of thoughts and a callous attitude to sexual relations, are often important components of a Western male's self image.¹² This is not to say that Western notions of masculinity are clear-cut or static but rather that this is now the dominant model within which Western men currently develop a notion of self. It is over-whelmingly a middle-class vision in keeping with the strength of that class in late twentieth-century Western societies. The application of the contemporary Western notion of this 'macho man', whose power is made manifest in brute physical strength and unerring silence, to the Chinese case is largely inappropriate, because while there is a macho tradition in China it is not the predominant one. Thus, the Chinese tradition of machismo represented in terms such as *yingxiong* 英雄 (hero) and *baoban* 好汉 (good bloke)¹³ will be seen to be counterbalanced by a softer, cerebral male tradition that is not found to the same degree in the secular West. Moreover, it will become apparent that in China, the cerebral male model dominates that of the macho, brawny male.

Western paradigms of masculinity are therefore inappropriate to the Chinese case and their application could only serve to prove that Chinese men are "not quite real men" because they fail the Western test of masculinity. In a cross-cultural survey where Western visions are adopted as the ideal, Asian men are described as being inadequate. Sun Longji's 孙隆基 study of masculinity concludes that Chinese men are eunuchs and proposes that the ideal masculine form is that of the Latin American and Mediterranean male.¹⁴ This analytical path is misleading. The point should rather be to develop conceptual formulations that are generated from within the Asian context rather than to mimic work designed for the West a decade earlier and conclude that Chinese men are feminised or neutered.¹⁵

This is the conclusion that many contemporary Chinese writers seem to have arrived at in the last decade and a half. Sha Yexin's 沙叶新 play *Xunzbao nanzi han* (Looking for a Real Man), Zhang Xianliang's 张贤亮 *Lu bua shu* (Mimosa) and *Nanren de yiban shi nüren* (Half of Man is Woman) all point to the increasing anxiety of Chinese men when faced with the supposed 'real masculinity' of the West.¹⁶ It is as if the opposite of 'masculinity' is not 'femininity' but 'impotence' in cross-cultural comparisons in which the West possesses the 'normal' and 'natural' standard of masculinity against which all other cultures are judged.

Towards Conceptualizing Chinese Masculinity

When discussing Asian sexuality the most obvious and most commonly-invoked 'Chinese' paradigm is that of the ubiquitous 'yin-yang' 阴阳 philosophy. Male and female, femininity and masculinity are placed in a dichotomous relationship in which *yin*, among other attributes, is female and *yang* male.¹⁷ This binary operation is similar to the Pythagorean opposition between light and dark, male and female, right and left, and so on. The difference between these seemingly identical paradigms is that in *yin-yang* theory both essences are regarded as being in constant interaction, *yin* merging with *yang* and *yang* with *yin* in endless dynamism. This suggests that every man and woman embodies both *yin* and *yang* essences at any given moment, and during sexual intercourse the two exchange sexual essences. For the male, the ideal situation is one where he absorbs *yin* essence from the woman, without losing his precious *yang* essence to her. For the woman the reverse is true. This sexual vampirism implies some form of expanding capabilities wherein an individual maintains his or her original essence (*yang* in men and *yin* in women) and yet has the potential to absorb additional essences that expand vitality and natural powers.¹⁸ This renders the reductionist understanding of *yang* as male and *yin* as female only partially accurate. Indeed, since both sexes can be either or both, sexual difference is not readily explained by *yin-yang* theory. However, in a cross-cultural analysis one could propose that Chinese masculinity is ultimately more all-encompassing than Western masculinity as a result of this acceptance of the merger of *yin* and *yang* essences in one corporeal form.

By asserting that both men and women embrace both *yin* and *yang* at any particular point in time, this paradigm has proved to be so all-encompassing that, in a sense, it maps the universe onto a sexual male-female grid. In this study, we hope to isolate the general categories that serve as coordinates for maleness only. Discarding *yin* and *yang* is crucial because the potential for interminable interactiveness implicit within them prohibits such a specificity of focus. Incisive theorizing of masculinity is inhibited by the fluidity of the *yin-yang* binary combinations because each statement could equally be applied to femininity. However, the gender order implied by the Confucian stipulations relating to social organisation, clearly placing male above female, implies that the mutuality of *yin* and *yang*, *qua* sexually defined forces, must have been counteracted by an alternative sex-specific discourse legitimizing and naturalizing the imbalance in power between the sexes.¹⁹

The Chinese paradigm that prompts further analysis of masculinity alone is the binary opposition between *wen*, the cultural or civil, and *wu*, the physical or martial. This polarity invokes the authority of both the scholar and the soldier, and avoids the tendency towards placing the emphasis on both sexes found in the *yin-yang* pair. Chinese masculinity, it will be shown,

¹⁷ See, for example, Charles Humana and Wang Wu, *The ying-yang: the Chinese way of love* (London: Tandem, 1971).

¹⁸ Van Gulik gives several examples of this, including explanations, in *Sexual life*, pp.158–60.

¹⁹ Charlotte Furth's work on androgyny points out this split between *yin-yang* cosmology and Confucian ideas in her article "Androgynous males and deficient females: biology in sixteenth and seventeenth century China," *Late Imperial China* 9.2 (Dec. 1988): 1. She also reveals the relatively flexible perceptions of male and female essences and corporeal sex.

Figure 1

Symbol of yin and yang surrounded by the eight trigrams. It reflects the mutual interactiveness of yin and yang. That is, when yin is at its strongest, yang is at its weakest, and vice versa.



²⁰ 在人 ... 莫不有文武之道焉, *Analects*, XIX.22. The translation is D. C. Lau's from his *Confucius: the Analects* (Harmondsworth, Middx.: Penguin, 1979), p.156.

²¹ 文王以文治, 武王以武功, *Li ji: jifa* in *Gu jin Hanyu bingyu cidian* [Dictionary of classical and modern Chinese proverbs] (Taiyuan: Shanxi Renmin Chubanshe, 1986), p.176. Legge has translated this as "King Wen, who by his peaceful rule, and King Wu who by his martial achievements, delivered the people from their afflictions." James Legge, trans., *The texts of Confucianism, part IV, The Li Ki, XI-XLVI*, in *The sacred books of the East*, vol. 28, ed. F. Max Muller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1885), p.209. This translation does not quite give the full flavour of the term 'wen'.

can comprise both *wen* and *wu*, with the result that a scholar is considered to be no less masculine than a soldier. Indeed, at certain points in history the ideal man was expected to embody a balance of *wen* and *wu*. At other times only the one or the other was expected, but importantly *either* was considered acceptably manly. The *Analects* presents this dichotomy to us in the phrase: "There is no man who does not have something of the way of *wen* and *wu* in him."²⁰ *Wen* and *wu* refer specifically to the ancient Kings of the Zhou—King Wen and King Wu. Their personality traits and governing techniques were later developed into models signifying the way of culture and the way of force. The '*ji fa*' section of the *Book of Rites* describes their differences thus: "King Wen used culture to rule and King Wu used military power."²¹ Their relationship has long been perceived as dichotomous and ubiquitous (within the Chinese domain) and has consistently been referred to in relation to national government and personal self-cultivation.

Figure 2

Confucius—icon of the wen principle representing literary and scholarly pursuits



The sexual specificity—the unique maleness of the dichotomy *wen-wu*—becomes even more apparent when juxtaposed with *yin-yang*. Where men and women can both be discussed in terms of *yin* and *yang*, the *wen-wu* dichotomy is applied to women only after they have transformed themselves into men. Women cannot be appropriately discussed in terms of *wen* or *wu*, for both these aspects of official and social life were denied them with varying degrees of rigidity over the broad sweep of the Chinese past. While in their private residences women could engage in scholarly activities, or swordplay and archery, it is primarily in fantasy novels such as *Jinghua yuan* (Flowers in the Mirror) that such skills were publicly recognised. Here we read of young women warriors who avenge wrongs and talented female scholars who achieve official recognition through participation in examinations for women held under the auspices of Empress Wu.²² In practice, the construction of femininity for Chinese women used such Amazons and female scholars only as part of an unachievable fantasy realm that ultimately confirmed their own space in the 'inner' private world.²³ Those who stepped beyond these limits were still contained within the notion of the 'exemplary woman' whose adoption of manly traits only served to reinforce the 'superiority' and 'normality' of masculine ideals. The public corporealisation of *wen* and *wu* necessarily occurred in the male sex, the scholar and the soldier being the primary signifiers of a masculine world and, importantly, signifiers that encompassed a broader range of notions of self than would be available to a Western male. Women, however, like animals,

ghosts and spirits, remain outside this classification system. Their temporary forays into the male arena are preceded by the donning of male attire. This is the case with the *Jinghua yuan* Amazons who are repeatedly assumed to be boys, as well as with Hua Mulan who dressed as a man for over ten years during her military escapades. The romanticised tragedy of Zhu Yingtai, who dons the manly robes of a scholar to enter the halls of learning, is a further example. *Wen* and *wu* realms are the public preserve of men, and women who dare to venture in must do so appropriately disguised.

While women are not part of the *wen-wu* paradigm, neither are men of non-Chinese race. This does not imply that such men were not considered masculine but rather that their masculinity was sexualised to reveal their animal barbarism. Western men were perceived as civilised man stripped of his civilisation—men of animal instincts and animal sexual drives. Dikötter describes some early Chinese perceptions of Western men as having four testicles and an excess of body hair. Both characteristics imply a highly sexualised notion of masculinity.²⁴ This sexualisation of 'the other' is similar to certain Victorian-era portrayals of colonised peoples, some 1960s white portrayals of blacks as being highly sexed, or certain current visions of homosexual men.²⁵ Indeed, much of the feminist project has been concerned with elucidating the manner in which men sexualised women as 'other'. Thus, *wen-wu* was not perceived as applicable to men outside the Chinese cultural realm because it contained within its matrix a masculine component of self-affirming, civilizing difference.

In the dual aspects of national government and personal self-cultivation, *wen-wu* can be applied to a broad range of social classes as a paradigm for conceptualising maleness. It does not exclusively refer to the maleness of the élite man, since in him masculinity is conflated with social power. Such a conflation establishes all men as powerful and all women as powerless, and is therefore over-simplistic. Even men whose social power relative to upper-class women is weaker are still clearly masculine. Masculinity is therefore something more than social power because it signifies a potentiality for ultimate power in a way that femininity does not.²⁶ Gender should not be conceived in terms of a rigid 'oppressor-oppressed' dichotomy. It does, however, imply a different potentiality for power and social control: masculinity incorporates the right to 'the final say' while femininity incorporates 'the final confirmation of assent'. In the untangling of class from gender, *wen-wu* can serve as a useful paradigm since it is equally applicable to the male élite and the male masses, as will become evident below.

Wen is generally understood to refer to those genteel, refined qualities that were associated with the literary and artistic pursuits of classical scholars and can therefore be partly analyzed as a leisured-class masculine model. This type of masculinity is perhaps best typified by the image of groups of men writing poetry for mutual amusement or to mark a memorable occasion. The élite affiliations of *wen* are not exclusive, however, for scholarly attributes were aspired to by a broad range of social classes, exemplified by the Wang Mian

²² Li Ruzhen, *Jinghua yuan* (1828; reprint ed., Taipei: Xuehai Chubanshe, 1985). For an abridged English translation see Li Juchen, *Flowers in the mirror*, trans. Lin Tai-yi. (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1965).

²³ Louise Edwards has also argued that the very existence of these women in men's roles—female scholars and warriors—framed as they are within the "disruptive," "immoral" reign of Empress Wu, simply serve further to create the impression of social disorder within the text of *Jinghua yuan*. See *Men and women in Qing China*, ch.6. For a somewhat different view see M. Elvin, "The inner world of 1830," reprinted in Tu Weiming, ed., *The living tree. The changing meaning of being Chinese today* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1994), pp. 35–62.

²⁴ Frank Dikötter, *The discourse of race in modern China* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1992), pp. 44–7.

²⁵ Edward Said offered an explanation of this phenomenon in terms of 'Orientalism' in his *Orientalism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978).

²⁶ The historiography of Empress Wu's "irregular" reign and that of Jiang Qing's attempted "reign" confirm the extreme distrust of women who dare to usurp this ultimate "masculine" power.

²⁷ Wu Jingzi, *Rulin waishi* (Beijing: Zuoqia Chubanshe, 1954). For an English translation see Wu Ching-tzu, *The scholars*, trans. Gladys Yang and Yang Hsien-yi (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1957).

²⁸ D. L. McMullen, "The cult of Ch'i Tai-kung and T'ang attitudes to the military," *T'ang Studies* 7 (1989): 68.

²⁹ Edwin G. Pulleyblank, "The An Lu-Shan rebellion and the origins of chronic militarism in late T'ang China," in *Essays on T'ang society*, ed. John Curtis Perry and Bardwell L. Smith (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976), p. 33.

³⁰ See McMullen, "Cult of Ch'i Tai-kung," pp. 59–103.

Figure 3

Illustration from *Rulin waishi*: Wang Mian, the 'peasant-turned-scholar', riding a water-buffalo



王冕 ideal of the peasant-turned-scholar from the Qing novel *Rulin waishi* (The Scholars).²⁷ All Chinese men, regardless of social standing, had the right to aspire to high-ranking civil posts through the examination system.

Similarly, the *wu* attributes of physical strength and military prowess were not the sole preserve of the masses since they were cultivated by large sections of male society—from upper-class Tang polo players to Qing street acrobats; it may be noted, though, that some such acrobats were female. This breadth of scope is revealed in the ambiguity of the *wu* philosophy. *Wu* was conceived as embodying seven virtues which together “meant the degree of military authority sufficient to make further engagement unnecessary.”²⁸ The seven virtues are those qualities that “suppressed violence, gathered in arms, protected what was great, established merit, gave peace to the people, harmonised the masses and propagated wealth.”²⁹ *Wu* is a concept which embodies the power of military strength but also the wisdom to know when and when not to deploy this strength. Thus, the masculine model presented by the *wen-wu* dichotomy was one aspired to by men of all classes of society. Moreover, one could be either *wen* or *wu* or a combination of both and still fit into that model.

While Confucius is the embodiment of *wen*, both Guan Yu (or Guangong), famed general of the *Sanguo yanyi* (Romance of the Three Kingdoms), and Lu Wang (or Qi Taigong), warrior of the Western Zhou—but more commonly the former—are the *wu* gods (along with Yue Fei) revered in temples and shrines.³⁰ The dichotomy between *wen* and *wu* can incorporate a broad range of social phenomena and men. Thus, in direct contrast to the *wu* of Guan Yu is another major character from the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, Zhuge Liang (Kong Ming), who is credited with the wisdom and learning of a civil minister. In the *Shuibu zhuan* (Water Margin) we have Wu Song famed for his drunken slaughter of a tiger and Wu Yong for his strategic acumen.

However, in schemes devised by myth-makers, it is significant that between the poles of *wen* and *wu* there is usually a character who stands above both. Just as in the *yin-yang* scheme the most perfect being is he or she who has harmonised the two categories, so in the *wen-wu* scheme the man above men must possess both attributes. For example, above Zhuge Liang and Guan Yu stands Liu Bei. Above Wu Song and Wu Yong stands Song Jiang. These characters combine both *wen* and *wu* aspects in a manner that it was considered conformed to the masculine ideal.

Wen and Wu in Harmony

It was perceived that, ideally, a balance between the two styles of masculinity should be sought in order to achieve continued successful and long-term national government and self-management. Good government by rulers and good personal governance for men as well as in their management of their families was perceived as the balancing of these two forces which were often portrayed as complementary opposites. The *Zuozhuan* provides us with many examples of the aristocrat who was skilled in both the art of war and the literary and philosophical arts. For example, the archetypal Confucian good ruler, Duke Zhou (Zhou Gong), was skilled as a warrior and as a practitioner of the civilian arts. Confucius, upheld in later years as the Great Teacher and 'wen' god for his philosophical and literary skills, was also a proponent of archery and charioteering and encouraged the development of these *wu* arts in his students' education.³¹ As early as the Han dynasty, Sima Qian had already spoken of the custom of having the *wen* officials lined up on the east side of the imperial court and the *wu* officials arrayed on the west side.³² The Emperor, of course, sat in between and above the two groups. This custom survived into the twentieth century.

The numerous four-character (*chengyu* 成语) expressions and idioms that have continued to be used throughout Chinese history attest to this mutual reinforcement and difference within unity. The 'jie lao' section of *Han Feizi* 韩非子, for example, states: "The country must have *wen* and *wu*; the officials ruling must have rewards and punishments."³³ Similarly, *Shiji* has the phrase: "*Wen-wu* used in concert is a long-term strategy."³⁴ These sorts of early phrases were followed by a host of sayings such as "*wen* and *wu* are complete in every respect" (*wen wu shuang quan* 文武双全); "*wen* and *wu* are all-encompassing" (*wen wu liang quan* 文武两全); "*wen* and *wu* are the all-encompassing talents" (*wen wu quan cai* 文武全才); "*wen* and *wu* combine everything" (*wen wu jian quan* 文武兼全); "the completeness of *wen* and *wu*" (*wen wu jian bei* 文武兼备); and "employ *wen* and *wu* in concert" (*wen wu bing yong* 文武并用)—all of which refer to the importance of both *wen* and *wu* in achieving the successful rule over nation, family and self.

The Tang scholar Lu Chun 陆淳, cited in McMullen's work on the cult of the Tang war god Qi Taigong 齐太公, spoke of the ideal of a balance between *wen* and *wu*. Lu Chun argues that this balance was achieved during the Spring and Autumn period but was lost during the Warring States period when the military became increasingly exclusive and professional, distancing itself from the civil bureaucracy. The situation in the Spring and Autumn period is described thus: "The officers of the armies were the same as the ministers; those who held the great levers [of administration] were the supreme commanders [of the armies]."³⁵ Lu Chun's ideal vision of an official during the Tang, then, was of a man who "goes out a general and returns a scholar" (*chu jiang ru xiang* 出将入相).³⁶

³¹ It is interesting to note that popular depictions of the *wu* god Guan Yu describe him reading the Confucian classic *The spring and autumn annals* despite the fact that he was probably illiterate. Charioteering and archery were regarded as two of the six arts to which Confucius gave priority. For a discussion of this see Kam Louie, *Inheriting tradition: interpretations of the classical philosophers in communist China* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp.86-7.

³² 刘敬叔孙通列传, *Shiji* [Book of history], vol.8, *juan* 99 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1959), p.2723.

³³ 国家必有文武 官治必有赏罚, *Han Fei-zi jishi* [The annotated Han Feizi] (Shanghai: Renmin Chubanshe, 1974), vol.1, p.377.

³⁴ 文武并用 俵久之术也, *Shiji*, vol.8, *juan* 97, p.2699.

³⁵ Lu Chun in McMullen, "Cult of Ch'i T'ai-kung," p.75.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

Figure 4

Guan Yu, icon of the wu principal, is seen reading the Spring and Autumn Annals by a junior officer whose reaction is "He's absolutely incredible!" Guan Yu is therefore depicted as bridging the literary and the martial



³⁷ Jonathan D. Spence, *Ts'ao Yin and the Kang-hsi emperor* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1966), p.157. See also p.130 where Spence again discusses the Kangxi Emperor's bids to impress both the military and literary élite.

³⁸ See Richard Kraus, *Brushes with power: modern politics and the Chinese art of calligraphy* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1991) for a penetrating study of the relationship between calligraphy and power.

Thus, while not all men would necessarily be able to incorporate high levels of skill in both *wen* and *wu* attributes, truly great men would certainly possess them. Masculinity, then, can be either *wen* or *wu*, but it is preferably both.

The display of a balance between *wen* and *wu* was, moreover, an signifier of moral and cultural attainment which served to confirm the right to rule. While public executions, the parading of prisoners, and shows of military strength could help justify and ensure a right to rule, the display of *wu* in itself was not enough. Emperors also legitimised their reigns by invoking respect for their cultural achievements—their *wen* attributes—premised on the assumption that China, to be China, had to be a culturally superior and advanced nation. In this context *wen* and *wu* became major tools for displaying and maintaining imperial power over the masses.

Thus, we see the manifestation of *wen* power on steles, scrolls and banners in the calligraphy of the society's leaders, particularly the Emperor. Contemporary China employed the calligraphy of Mao Zedong as the symbolic expression of his (masculine) *wen* power.³⁸ It is still common to hear people say that women's calligraphy never truly captures the real essence of the art. Women are regarded as lacking the inner strength required to produce powerful calligraphic forms. The famous calligraphers of traditional and contemporary China and Taiwan are predominantly men. Calligraphy, because it is part of *wen* power and closely linked to masculinity, supposedly lies beyond the grasp of non-men. Great male leaders,

During the Qing Dynasty, the Manchu rulers' need to be seen as competent in both *wen* and *wu* is described in Jonathan Spence's account of the Kangxi Emperor. To win approval from the leading Han Chinese members of society, Kangxi was concerned to present himself as versed in both *wen* and *wu* skills and respectful of the needs of both the military and the cultural sections of the élite.

The Kang-hsi Emperor thus inaugurated the first of those great literary projects for which the Ch'ing dynasty is justly famous; this was a measure of his feelings of confidence and stability: having been "*wu*", the military conqueror of Wu San-kuei and Galdan, he would now also assure his reputation as "*wen*", the literary Emperor, proving his appreciation of the Chinese poetic tradition despite his non-Chinese ancestry.³⁷

then, take care to demonstrate prowess in the domains of both *wen* and *wu*. Lesser men may achieve only one or the other, but even this partial success will bestow upon them the aura of masculinity and the right to rule over a certain domain, however small.

Wen and Wu in Opposition

While the ideal masculine image achieves a harmony between *wen* and *wu*, this is not to say that the relationship between *wen* and *wu* is, or always was, one of equality. Indeed, the relationship between the two forces has been one of dynamic opposition as well as harmony. The following passage in the *Analects* shows that *wen* was considered superior to *wu*, despite each having their place in the ordered Confucian state. In his discussions of music and virtue Confucius clearly shows a preference for the non-*wu* path. As D. C. Lau has stated, the connection between music and poetry (*wen*) was intimate because although not all music has words, all poetry can be sung. Lau argues that this connection makes Confucius' statements on music equivalent to his statements on *wenxue* as a whole. "Confucius required of music, and, by implication, of literature, not only perfect beauty but perfect goodness as well."³⁹ The Confucian preference for *wen* over *wu* is revealed by the phrase "The master said of the *shao* 韶 that it was both perfectly beautiful and perfectly good, and of the *wu* that it was perfectly beautiful but not perfectly good."⁴⁰ *Shao* refers to the music of Shun who ascended the throne after the abdication of Yao and was chosen for his virtue. On the other hand, the King of Wu ascended the throne through brute military force and his music was known as *wu*, or military force. Thus *wu* was disdained by *wen* for representing the need to resort to force to achieve goals, as reflected in the phrase: "The virtues of *wen* are superior, the greatness of *wu* is lower, and this has always and will always be the case."⁴¹

Huang Kuanzhong's 黄宽重 work on the military in the Song dynasty clearly reveals the dialectics of these two fundamental elements of masculinity. In tracing the dynamics of the balance between *wen* and *wu* from classical times, Huang found that in the early period both *wen* and *wu* had equal value, with *wu* losing favour in the Warring States and Eastern Jin and recovering it in the Tang, only to lose it again in the Song.⁴² The denigration of *wu* and the elevation of *wen* may be seen in the phrase: "Place greater value on *wen* than *wu*" (*zhong wen qing wu* 重文轻武).⁴³

Throughout history, the relationship between the two masculine ways is fraught with tension and Huang describes how, by the later Tang, civil ministers sneered at the illiteracy and brute strength of their military counter-parts.⁴⁴ The supremacy of the *wen* during this period may also be observed in canonisation titles, discussed by McMullen, which, with their single and double-character designations, reflect the *wen-wu* dichotomy.

³⁹ Lau, *Analects*, "Introduction," p.39.

⁴⁰ Ibid., III.25, p.71.

⁴¹ Cited in Huang Kuanzhong, *Nan Song junzheng yu wenxian tansuo* [An investigation into the military administration and texts of the Southern Song] (Taipei: Xinwen Feng Chubanshe, 1980), p.389.

⁴² Ibid., pp.387-99.

⁴³ Luo Zhufeng et al, eds, *Hanyu da cidian* [Complete Chinese dictionary] (Shanghai: Hanyu Da Cidian Chubanshe, 1992), p.374.

⁴⁴ Huang Kuanzhong, *Nan Song junzheng*, p.391.

⁴⁵ McMullen, "Cult of Ch'i Tai-kung," p.83.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p.68.

⁴⁷ Huang Kuanzhong, *Nan Song junzheng*, p.397.

Figure 5

During the Cultural Revolution attempts were made to overturn the traditional conceptions of female roles in society and, as this 1974 poster depicts, attempts were made to co-opt wen-wu, as paradigms usually associated with masculinity, to the cause. Note the gun held by one woman and the scroll held up by another. The caption to the poster reads "Good at both wen and wu."



The assumption that in general *wen* had priority over *wu* was also emphasised in T'ang exegesis of the Confucian canon. The T'ang commentarial scholar K'ung Ying-ta 孔颖达 (574–648), commenting on a passage in the *Shang shu* in which *wu* was mentioned before *wen*, argued that *wen* was the more important and that the inversion of order was due to the rhyme-scheme of the passage.⁴⁵ McMullen also notes, however, that scholars would have a preference towards the elevation of *wen* over *wu* in their writings.

This hierarchy of talents, then, meant that *wu* became associated with non-élite masculinity at various times in China's past, while *wen* was often a more élite masculine form. This was not always the case, as McMullen has pointed out. In the Spring and Autumn period, warfare was the preserve of the Zhou nobility.⁴⁶ This may account for the unity between *wen* and *wu* in the one official, a unity whose scarcity has been lamented by scholars since—from Lu Chun to Huang Kuanzhong. Huang mentions that in the Eastern Jin soldiers were of the same class as slaves, while in the Song the phrase "A good piece of metal does not become nails and a good man does not become a soldier" (*hao tie bu da ding, hao nan bu dang bing* 好铁不打钉, 好男不当兵) was prevalent.⁴⁷ *Wu* was, then, related more to men who had less social power, while *wen* was more clearly the masculinity of the powerholders. But both were theoretically equally achievable and ordinary men could aspire to *wen* attributes just as élite men could aspire to *wu* ones, as the Manchu rulers did in the Qing.

The differences between *wen* and *wu* males are also apparent when one considers the kind of relationship each has with women. While romances between scholars and beauties are a common theme, suggesting the closeness of *wen* to women, the *wu* hero shows his strength and masculinity by resisting the lure of feminine charm. A *wu* hero must contain his sexual and romantic desires. The readers of *Shuihu zhuan* and *Jin ping mei*⁴⁸ recognise Wu Song to be a 'real man' when he is desired by the amorous Golden Lotus. This recognition is amplified, indeed Wu Song becomes a *real* 'real man', when he rejects his lustful sister-in-law's advances. Containment of sexual and romantic desire is an integral part of *wu* virtue. In contrast to the *wu* male's necessary rejection of women, the *wen* male must fulfil his obligations to women.

Participation or success in the imperial examinations was a respected component of the masculine image and

signified a desirability and sexual power that has led to countless 'scholar-beauty' (*cai zi jia ren* 才子佳人) romance tales. The requirement that candidates travel to imperial examination centres gave rise to opportunities for chance meetings as in the case of Scholar Zhang and Cui Yingying in *Xixiang ji* (Romance of the Western Chamber).⁴⁹ The 'talented scholar' won the girls in imperial China and, moreover, like the macho male in contemporary Westerns, had the power to relinquish them if they became inconvenient without any threat to his future desirability. However, unlike the *wu* hero whose total rejection of women reflects moral strength, the scholar who wins the woman must follow through his obligations. The abuse of this power by the careless abandonment of wives and lovers elicits disapproval and leads to possible punishment for the *wen* hero. The Chen Shimei archetype, where the scholar abandons his first wife Qin Xianglian for a princess, is a good illustration of this principle. After attempting to kill his first wife, he is condemned by Judge Bao and executed.⁵⁰ More recent literary examples which denounce scholar-husbands who abandon ever-faithful wives in search of fame and glory are also plentiful.⁵¹

The *wen-wu* divide continues today. In the People's Republic of China the *wu* ideal has achieved increased prominence through the Communist leadership's bid to promote the peasant or working class 'hero' and more recently by images of masculinity from the West. Both these trends have seen the strengthening of the *wu* type of masculinity in movies, novels and plays. Li Cunbao's 李存葆 novel, later made into a movie, *Gao shan xia de huan* (The Wreath at the Foot of the Mountain) represents an early 1980s projection of military camaraderie, loyalty and self-sacrifice.⁵² Zhang Yimou's 张艺谋 film *Hong gaoliang* (Red Sorghum) reveals the influence of the contemporary Western 'macho man' on Chinese culture. The central male figure is rude, brutal, murderous, and uncouth but also strong and decisive and invincible, surviving a daring attack on the Japanese. Similarly, the tales of "Roots" (*xungen* 寻根) writers such as Zheng Wanlong 郑万隆 and Han Shaogong 韩少功 have been aptly described as "Chinese westerns"⁵³ for their depictions of tough frontiersmen who deal out the same rough treatment to nature as they do to women, in a manner akin to the American pioneers of the west.⁵⁴

Chen Kaige's 1985 film *Huang tudi* (Yellow Earth), on the other hand, depicts the *wen-wu* dichotomy more clearly.⁵⁵ The central male figure is a soldier who has come to gather folk songs from the peasants. He puts into writing songs that would otherwise remain the sole preserve of the locals of the region. Dressed in his PLA uniform he is the embodiment of *wu*, but in his quiet and subtle persistence, his musical ability and writing skills, he is simultaneously the embodiment of *wen*.

Despite the increasing credibility of *wu* it is still possible to see that the power of the softer, more refined, intellectual, masculine form lives on in the daily expression of self by Chinese men. Generally speaking, the dynamic tension created between the poles of *wen* and *wu* permits the production

⁴⁸ David T. Roy has published a translation of *Jin ping mei* entitled *Plum in the Golden Vase* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993).

⁴⁹ Wang Shifu, *Xixiang ji*, reprint ed. (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 1978).

⁵⁰ For a description of the Chen Shimei image see Liu Lanying et al., eds, *Zhongguo gudai wenxue cidian* [Dictionary of classical Chinese literature] (Nanning: Guangxi Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 1989), vol. 2, p. 721.

⁵¹ For a post-Mao example of the same phenomenon see Chen Kexiong and Ma Ming, "Dujuantigui" [The cuckoo calls homeward], *Qingchun* (1980): 6–14.

⁵² This novel has been translated by Chen Hanming and James O. Belcher (New York: Garland, 1991).

⁵³ Zhu Hong entitled her translation of this style of tale *The Chinese western* (New York: Ballantine, 1988).

⁵⁴ A good illustration can be found in Kam Louie, ed. and introd., *Strange tales from strange lands: stories by Zheng Wanlong* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell East Asia Series, 1993).

⁵⁵ See B. S. McDougall, *The yellow earth, a film* by Chen Kaige (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1991), for a translation and discussion of the film.

of a greater number of possible expressions of the secular male self than would be possible in the contemporary West.

Chinese masculinity, then, is not a poorer, effeminate version of 'normal' (Western) masculinity. Nor is its 'difference' from the 'norm' derived from the domination of a more submissive, childlike (more easily oppressed) Chinese femininity. Chinese masculinity has evolved in a historical and cultural context that required no inspiration and gained no benefit from comparisons with the West. Moreover, current notions of the 'impotence' of Chinese men have developed within the 'Neo-Orientalism' of the late twentieth century where money represents power, and maleness without economic might signifies impotence. *Wen* and *wu*, as references for creating the male self, evolved outside the scheme of things where 'oriental' meant 'inferior', or at best 'exotic'. The right to define, describe, and name has in recent times been a Western cultural prerogative, but just as this was not the case two hundred years ago, it may not necessarily be the case a hundred years from now.

Kam Louie

Department of Asian Languages and Studies
University of Queensland
Brisbane Qld 4072

Louise Edwards

Faculty of Arts
Australian Catholic University
Brisbane Qld 4053

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