

The Reconstruction of Masculinity in China, 1896–1930

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Certificate of Authorship/Originality

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	i
Table of Contents	iii
Abstract.....	v
Chapter 1 Introduction	1
A Post-Structuralist View of Masculinity	2
The Gendered Nature of Western Imperialism/Colonialism.....	6
The <i>shi</i> and the Hegemonic Masculinity in Imperial China	11
The <i>shi</i>	11
The <i>wen-wu</i> Model of Confucian Manhood	18
The Textuality (<i>cai</i> 才) and Sentimentality (<i>qing</i> 情) of <i>Wen</i> Men	26
Social Changes and Chinese Male Anxiety at the Turn of the Twentieth Century	30
Chapter 2 From the “Beautiful Scholar” to the ‘Sick Man of East Asia’: The Resurgence of <i>wu</i> Masculinity.....	40
From the “Beautiful Scholar” to the “Sick man of East Asia”	41
Wu masculinity and Nationalism.....	49
The 1903-19 Military Citizenship Movement and Pure Martial Association.....	56
The Fashion for ‘A Manly Death’	65
Self-control on Sexuality	71
Wu Masculinity and Modernity	77
Conclusion	83
Chapter 3 Seeking Mr. Science and Mr. Democracy: The Modernization of <i>wen</i> Masculinity	85
Education Reform and the Construction of Mr Science	87
The Decline of <i>shi</i>	87
The Rise of Mr Science.....	92
From the “Student of Confucius” to a Mr Science	97
Literature Revolution and the Construction of Mr Democracy	103
The Import of Mr Democracy from the West	103
A Slave Does not Make a Man	105
The Construction of Mr Democracy by reformists.....	109
Mr Democracy in the Literary Realm	114
Conclusion	120
Chapter 4 From Scholar to Entrepreneur and Technician: The rise of the Men of “Strong Hands”	122
The Emergence of the Modern Scholar-Businessmen.....	123
The Challenge of the Marketplace Masculinity in Ming-Qing 明清 Time	123

The Emergence of the New “Scholar-businessmen” after 1895.....	132
The Power of the Men of “Strong Hands”.....	137
Society’s Recognition of the Men of “Strong Hands”.....	142
Technology and “Strong Hands”.....	146
The Worship of Machines.....	146
The Admiration of Technicians.....	150
“Do it Yourself” and Democracy.....	154
The Conflict between Big Mind and Strong Hands.....	157
Conclusion.....	162
Chapter 5 Fighting shoulder-by-shoulder for China: Nationalism, Democracy and Male Bonding.....	164
Rallying Under the Flag of Saving China.....	168
No Sissy Stuff.....	174
Bonding for Surviving.....	179
Growing up together and fighting shoulder-to-shoulder.....	182
Fraternity out of Democracy.....	196
Conclusion:.....	202
Chapter 6 The War between Father and Son: Filial Autonomy, Sexuality and Family Reform.....	204
Mr Democracy and Filial Autonomy.....	205
The New Ideal of Fatherhood.....	214
The Decline of the Father-son Bond and the Rise of Conjugal Union.....	217
The Promotion of Male Chastity.....	226
The Sexual Citizen through Romantic Love.....	234
Changing Expectations about Wives.....	243
Conclusion:.....	248
Chapter 7 Summary and Discussions.....	250
The Resurgence of <i>wu</i> Masculinity.....	251
The Emergence of Mr Science.....	254
The Rise of Modern “Scholar-businessmen”.....	255
The Emergence of Mr Democracy.....	258
The Changing Definition of Family Masculinity.....	263
Enhancing Masculinity through Male Bonding.....	260
Discussions Regarding Connell’s theory.....	266
Discussions Regarding the <i>wen/wu</i> Model of Masculinity.....	269
Limitations and Further Suggestions.....	273
Bibliography.....	276

Abstract

Despite the burgeoning interest in Chinese masculinity, relatively little is known about the social configuration of Chinese manhood in the late Qing and the early Republican era. The overarching purpose of this project is to fill this gap by investigating the impact of nationalism, democratization and globalization on the self-perception of a particular group of men—modern male Chinese scholars. Guided by Connell's gender theory and Louie and Edwards' *wen/wu* paradigm of Chinese masculinity, this study explores how the meaning of male identities was negotiated at a transitional and crisis time when the traditional masculinity of the elite Chinese men was gazed at, challenged, and measured by the formidable western and Japanese powers. This work contributes to empirical research in the areas of gender, identity and social change.

Findings deriving from this study show that the self-perception of this group of men changed dramatically after the defeat of China in the 1895 Sino-Japanese War. Both Nationalism and democratization became drivers for seeking better or stronger manhood among the male Chinese scholars during this time of crisis. The need for national salvation and democracy brought about an array of changes to the standards of what constituted a good man: the image of the pale-faced scholar was replaced by the brawny male ideal that plays modern sports and undertakes military drills; the textual Confucian masculinity was supplanted by a modern masculinity that stressed a connection between male cerebral power and the practical world; the exercise of male sexual power over concubines, prostitutes and catamites was substituted by a claim of male chastity through cultivating exclusive conjugal love; the traditional image of a pious son was replaced by the icon of an autonomous son who seeks economic independence and free-choice marriage from the old joint family; and so on. The findings of this study reveal the *wen/wu* model of Chinese masculinity was subject to social change yet showed flexibility to the impact of these social/historical circumstances.

