THE CRISIS OF EMASCULATION AND THE RESTORATION OF PATRIARCHY IN THE FICTION OF CHINESE CONTEMPORARY MALE WRITERS ZHANG XIANLIANG, MO YAN AND JIA PINGWA

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is about Chinese masculinity. It will raise the issue of Chinese masculinity as it became problematic in the mid-1980s, the first time in the two-thousand-year history of Chinese literature, that problems such as male identity, sexuality, and masculinity were seriously formulated and discussed. This study adopts the methods of a feminist reading and a close reading to reexamine works of three well-known contemporary male writers: Zhang Xianliang, Mo Yan and Jia Pingwa in the ideological/cultural context of the resurgence of Confucian patriarchy during the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s in China. I will provide a detailed and dynamic analysis of how the contemporary male enterprise of reconstructing masculinity heavily relies on women—either by programming women into the author's step-by-step process of reconstructing lost masculinity for the protagonist or by putting women back to their old place prescribed by Confucian patriarchy. By deepening our understanding of Chinese men and women historically, culturally, ideologically and psychologically, and by constructing a dialogue between the past and the present, this study attempts to demonstrate that ideal masculinity in China as defined two thousand years ago is still alive, and serves as a major paradigm of masculinity for modern Chinese intellectuals.

The re-examinations of each of the three works will be structured around the following three topics: (1) the major source of men's feelings of powerlessness and feminization (2) the ideological framework from which their ideal concept of masculinity is reconstructed; and (3) how these frameworks establish their gendered position and
affect their views and feelings toward women; and thus how they program women's roles into the construction or restoration of their masculinity. My research reveals a stable structure to authors' ideals of masculinity consisting of four constant elements: power is the key attribute in defining Chinese masculinity; hierarchy is the structure within which ideal masculinity is constructed and consolidated; the state, (including politics and nationalism), male intellectuals and women are three indispensable, intertwined dimensions within which male intellectuals maneuver to bargain for their masculinity; and the philosophical/ideological past is the inexhaustible source of inspiration and justification for restoring lost masculinity.
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Chapter I  Introduction

1.1 Justification for this Study: The Problem of Masculinity in Chinese Culture

During the mid-1980s, the “search for real men” became one of the predominant concerns in both intellectual discourse and popular culture in Mainland China. In 1985, a female youth, pen-named Shuizhu 水竹 (water bamboo), wrote an article in Zhongguo qingnian 中国青年 (China Youth), issue 2 entitled “Dao na’er qu zhao Gaocang Jian? 到哪儿去找高仓建?” (Where Can We Find Takakura Ken?) Takakura Ken (1931-) is a Japanese movie star very popular among Chinese movie viewers during the 1980s. His performances soon made him an idol with the image of a “real man” among young Chinese females (Two other borrowed “real man” images from America and France were Sylvester Stallone and Alain Delon). The implication of searching for “Takakura Ken” is apparent—there were no real men in China, as Chinese men had become feminized or emasculated. The author, Shui Zhu, raised this issue with one of her female friends. “She replied in a strong and stirring tone: ‘Chinese men have degenerated!’” (Shui Zhu 1985, 21). In the mid-1980s while Chinese female writers searched for “real men”, a female friend of Li Xiaojiang 李小江  decided to go abroad for further education. She

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1 Takakura Ken’s real name is Oda Goichi. His given name means ‘tough one’—a typical masculine name in many cultures.
2 Li Xiaojiang (1951-) is among a few famous scholars of women studies in China now. Her major publications include: Xiawa de Tansuo 夏娃的探索 (Eve’s Exploration), Hunan renmin chubanshe, 1988; Guanyu nüren de wenda 关于女人的问答 (Questions and Answers about Women), Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 1997; Jiedu nüren 解读女人 (Decoding women), Gaoxiong: Hongwenguan tushu gongsi, 2002.
concluded that there was no a real man in China and wanted to find one in the West (Li Xiaojiang 1997, 198-199).

Social awareness of the problem of manhood in China first became evident at the beginning of the 1980s after the Chinese Women's Volleyball Team won the final match of the 1981 World Cup. This achievement marked China's entry into the world scene after the long-term isolation of the Cultural Revolution (1966-76). It was the result of performance by Chinese athletics rather than diplomatic efforts made during the 1970s. The point is that it was women, not men who pioneered this entry into the world by winning a championship on the sports field—one of the most masculine domains of social life according to the traditional viewpoint in many cultures. In addition there were numerous victories by Chinese sportswomen in other international sports events and great achievements by Chinese women from all walks of life. During those times media reports of the successes of Chinese women frequently brought complex feelings to Chinese men. On the one hand they were thrilled by and proud of their fellow countrywomen; on the other hand they felt uneasy and worried. In Tani Barlow’s terms: “men panicked” (1994, 350). Lu Tonglin also points out: “…men who used to monopolize every social profession except for prostitution feel threatened by the competition of the other ‘half of the sky’ which was invisible in society for thousands years of Chinese history” (1993a, 7). Yinsheng yangshui (the yin waxes and yang wanes, or the feminine rises

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3 President Nixon of the United States visited China during February 21 to 28, 1972. After Twenty-three years of no communication, Nixon became the first American president in history to set foot on Chinese soil and the communications between China and Western countries commenced.


5 This comes from Mao Zedong’s well-know slogan: “Women can hold half of the sky.”
and the masculine declines) became a common phrase known to everybody and heard everywhere in Mainland China.

Along with this debate a strong “Northwestern Wind” (xibeifeng 西北风) blew onto the music scene in China. In contrast to the “soft, effeminate music” (mimizhiyin 模靡之音) represented by songs imported from Hong Kong and Taiwan which had dominated the post-Cultural Revolution music scene, the songs of the “Northwestern Wind” focused on the landscape of northwest of China and promoted the spirit of roughness, toughness and virility. In filmmaking, a number of popular movies labeled “Chinese Cowboy Movies” (zhongguo niuzaipian 中国牛仔片) or “Chinese Western Movies” (zhongguo xibupian 中国西部片), such as “Yellow Earth” (Huang Tudi 黄土地), and “Old Well” (Lao Jing 老井), exemplified the same trend. These stories were set against the background of physically rugged landscape of Western part of China, and demonstrated the arduous lives of peasants, their strong will and steadfast struggle for existence from generation to generation. Zhang Yimou 张艺谋, the most famous Fifth Generation filmmaker and the most representative director of “Chinese Western Movies” won the Golden Bear Prize at the 1988 Berlin International Film Festival for his Chinese-Western style film “Red Sorghum” (Honggaoliang 红高粱). The very theme of this film celebrates the “true masculinuty of the Chinese male.” Critics find in the

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6 “China’s college entrance examination system had been suspended during the ‘cultural revolution’ (1966-76) until 1978. Once colleges re-opened, a group of educated urban youths who had been working in the countryside were admitted to the Beijing Film Academy. After four years’ study, the new graduates unleashed their innovative powers and went on to create movies famous not only in China, but throughout the world. Movie critics and theorists have named these award-winning film school graduates of the early 1980s ‘fifth-generation film makers.’ Among the most famous are Zhang Yimou, Chen Kaige 陈凯歌, Tian Zhuangzhuang 田壮壮 and Wu Ziniu 吴子牛.” (Tang Yuankai: “The Fifth-Generation Film Makers.” China Today, Vol. 49, No. 1 January, 2000, pp. 58-61.)

7 Zhang Yimou also dealt with the theme of dysfunctional masculine sexuality in his film Judou 菊豆.
celebration of the male body in the film Red Sorghum a life-affirming remasculinization of language and ethos (Yang 1999, 52). Actors such as Tang Guoqiang 唐国强 labeled by audiences as naiyou xiaosheng 奶油小生 (lit. a creamy young man, meaning a young man having a smooth face and behaving softly) previously popular with a great number of Chinese girls, rapidly lost their appeal and suffered tremendously from being marginalized from the center of the screen as ideal men.

In literature, the responses to this discursive theme of masculinity were various. Some male writers, such as Liu Heng 刘恒, Gu Hua 古华, Wang Shuo 王朔, were obsessed with male impotency, emasculation and anti-heroic and good-for-nothing characterization of men; others such as Zhang Xianliang 张贤亮, Jia Pingwa 贾平凹, Gu Hua 祝华 endeavored to reassert or restore masculinity understood in and promoted by traditional gender discourse; some “roots-seeking” writers traced the origin of Chinese masculinity back to primitive cultures; a few such as Mo Yan 莫言 and Wang Xiaobo 王小波 experimented with avant-garde approaches to transcend the traditional patriarchal framework in their reconstruction of a new masculinity. The anxiety among male writers and literary critics about their male identity is indicative of the problematic nature of the Chinese discourse on masculinity and sexuality. For the first time in the two-thousand-

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8 Tang Guoqiang is a Chinese movie star. Because of his handsome appearance and many effeminate roles he played in movies before the mid-1980s, such as “Xiaohua, 小花” (Little Flower, 1979) and “Kongque Gongzhu, 孔雀公主” (Princesses Peacock, 1982), he became a well-known “naiyou xiaosheng” (handsome young man as soft as cream) in China. Under the heavy pressure of a nationwide call for “real” and “tough” men, Tang struggled doggedly to get rid of this notorious badge of “naiyou xiaosheng”. He insisted on playing the role of a young political instructor in the army sent to the China-Vietnam war in “Gaoshan xia de huahuan, 高山下的花环” (Garlands at the Foot of the Mountain, 1984) directed by Xie Jin 谢晋, a most famous director in China before Zhang Yimou came to prominence. This movie became a turning point for Tang Guoqiang’s movie image. From then onward, audiences have accepted Tang as a “tough man”. Now he is still active and popular on the screen.
year history of Chinese literature, problems such as male identity, sexuality, and masculinity were seriously formulated and discussed. Michael A. Messner has an interesting observation on similar male anxieties in the 1980s’ in American society. He notes that a slogan of “No Fear” seemingly appeared everywhere—on baseball caps, T-shirts, and bumper stickers displayed by boys and young men.

...that you don’t see hundreds of thousands of people massed in the streets chanting for peace unless you already have war. And you don’t have a whole generation of young males publicly proclaiming that they have ‘No Fear’ unless there’s something actually scaring the crap out of them (Messner 1997, xiii).

Borrowing from his inference to characterize male anxieties in the mid-1980s in China, we may conclude that Chinese males would not be preoccupied with reclaiming their masculinity unless their masculinity had already been lost.

Male feelings of emasculation were intensified by the sudden arrival of a wave of commercialism and rapid modernization in the 1990s, which I will describe more thoroughly in the following chapter. Etymologically, the English word “emasculance” is related to castration in that “it also means to ‘out’—that is, to cut out—the male member: ‘to castrate, to move the testicles of’” (Ross 2002, 311). Gary Taylor traces the evolution of “emasculance” back to the seventeenth century. The English word “emasculance” (and related forms) is from Latin “emasculare”, derived from the noun for “diminutive male” and later transferred into English. “The verb unman, in the medical sense ‘castrate,’ is first recorded in 1610” and “emasculance” was first recorded in 1623 with the meaning “gelding of a man”. The most common English word related to “emasculance” until the twentieth century would have been “geld” (Taylor 2000, 12). At
the present, Ross contends: "...emasculcation becomes a metaphor for itself, as it comes to signify any practice that diminishes the potency of men in the family or in society more generally." Such practice is "to deprive of masculine strength or vigor; to weaken; to make effeminate" (2002, 311). To summarize the scholarly definitions, the word "emasculate" has at least three different but interrelated meanings: 1. Remove the testicles of a male; its synonyms in this sense include: castrate, geld, demasculinize. 2. Having unsuitable feminine qualities; its adjective synonyms in this sense include: effeminate, sissy, etc.; similar words include unmanly, unmanful and unmanlike. 3. Deprive of strength or vigor. "Emasculation" used in this dissertation will contain all three meanings. I will not elaborate on the subtle distinction between emasculated and feminized, or between feminized and unmanful, etc.

While I collected data on this topic, many questions came across my mind: Why did the emasculation crisis and male anxiety become predominant themes during the 1980s and '90s? What distinguishes masculinity and the emasculation crisis in Chinese modernist discourse and why? What do male fictional writers who deal with emasculation, castration, or manliness want to tell us? If emasculation is real, then what are factors causing it? The question of most interest to me is: what are the ideal paradigms of masculinity for these literary men as they try to restore their lost masculinity?

While I focus on these questions, I have discovered that it does not matter what formal positions male intellectuals take in terms of their gender views, these elite have one thing in common: rather than alienating themselves from or rebelling against patriarchal ideology, their "new" male discourse on masculinity/sexuality in the 1980s
and '90s has intimate links to Confucian patriarchal discourse. Rather than seeking new paradigms in order to adjust themselves to a changing situation as Mo Yan attempted in *Red Sorghum* and Wang Xiaobo in *The Golden Age* (*Huangjin Shidai* 黃金時代), resistance to change among male intellectuals is evident. This shared resistance is clearly revealed in their casual daily conversations, essays, speeches and articles written about women and gender (I will give examples in the following chapter), and in their representation of female characters as they elaborate on their problematic manhood and seek to restore their ideal masculinity. Yi-tsi Mei Feuerwerker, in examining the assertion of “brutal masculine power” in post-Mao fiction, draws this conclusion:

In the process of rejecting their own ‘feminization’ by the Party and reasserting themselves as masculine subjects, male writers in the past two decades have fallen back on misogyny, returning women to their old status as inferior ‘others’” (1998, 217).

This is not a phenomenon that emerged in China only. Some anthropologists of the United States who went to Tajikistan found “a disturbing trend emerging where women are being pushed back into ‘traditional’ roles.” “Women during Soviet times were... amazingly well educated.” They “could become lawyers, doctors, whatever their aptitude dictated.” “Since the Soviet Union has gone away, we’re finding the patriarchal society emerging quite strongly in the family and leaking out into educational systems and government for sure.” (Demyan 2003, 7)

Michael A. Messner observes that there was a similar trend in the US in the 1980s and 1990s for male organizations to express their need for “empowerment” by putting
women down. He raises the possibility that all gains made by feminism might be lost. He points out:

The result, I fear, might be that as men organize to assuage their own fears, they collectively position women, especially feminists, as convenient scapegoats. In restoring men to their own ‘rightful place,’ they put women back in theirs. In the process, the impressive (though partial) gains made by the women’s movement in the past 30 years are at risk of being turned back (Messner 1997, xiv).

Messner’s insight helps to justify my study. In China the crisis of masculinity evoked a less obvious response. Chinese men did not organize themselves publicly in a quest for “empowerment”, but their obsession with empowerment is clearly expressed in male literature.

I have chosen this topic because I feel that something vital was missing from the works of many influential male writers in post-Mao literature in the decade between the mid-1980s and the mid-1990s regarding men, masculinity, sexuality, gender relations and social changes. There was apparently no continuous legacy from the May Fourth Movement where male writers such as Lu Xun 鲁迅, Mao Dun 茅盾, Ba Jin 巴金 and Rou Shi 柔石 made collective and conscious efforts in attacking patriarchal ideology, and where “The sympathetic portrayal of female suffering, of course, constitutes a major subject of May 4th writing” (Brown 1988, 63). In the past two decades male writers

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10 Many feminist scholars question the nature of women’s liberation during the May Fourth Movement. For example, Lu Tonglin believes that Chinese women “have been used as signifiers for one type of revolution or another” starting with the May Fourth Movement (1993a, 10). Carolyn Brown shares a similar view: “In
made no sincere attempt to accord equal treatment to women as human beings. They did not acknowledge the fruits of women’s liberation in China, a century-long struggle by both intellectuals and commoners, by both the Party-government and civil society, and by both men and women. My argument is that gender roles in China have changed economically and socially, but remain fundamentally unchanged ideologically and psychologically in the mindset of male writers. The power to control the public discourse is still firmly held by this patriarchy-oriented elite, and their treatment of a man’s inner life and his perspective on how to be a man remains psychologically and ideologically stunted. I will provide evidence in my studies on works by male writers where women are not recognized as men’s equals, and still occupy or are expected to revert back to a subordinate position. I will also provide evidence in the following chapter to show that the critics of these works ignore the psychology of women to the extent that it remains completely unexamined. This is by no means a rare phenomenon existing only in literary circles. “...the glorious and splendid history of China is a record of Father, and a history of Son inheriting Father’s cause.” (Meng & Dai 1993, 27) “Women are missing” (nüren diushi le 女人丢失了) in Chinese historiography and philosophy, and women are rarely portrayed as agents of social change (Li Xiaojiang 1997, 240).

What interests me the most is not merely identifying and commenting on a number of male issues, but rather examining the dominant perspectives on masculinity and femininity in works of male writers. I will explore what has become of the relations

the May Fourth era as in earlier times, sympathetic male depictions of female suffering did not necessarily imply male willingness to give up gendered hegemony” (1988, 63). Dorothy Ko argues “the victimized woman became the symbol of the Chinese nation itself”, meaning the issue of women’s liberation was integrated as a part of nationalism. (Ko 1994, 1-2). My argument is that although the nature of women’s liberation during the May Fourth era is problematic, it is the first time in China’s history that the issue of the victimization of women was brought to light and seriously discussed. It is doubtless an important and
of Chinese male intellectuals with women, what kinds of images of men and women they consciously seek to portray as they cope with the problems of masculinity, sex, sexuality and potency, and how the legacy of Confucian patriarchy is at work as they elaborate their ideal masculinities and femininities. I will examine the gender ideology of these writers horizontally and vertically. By horizontal examination, I mean I will explore the links between their gender perspectives and patriarchal gender concepts in popular culture and intellectual discourses of the same time period. By vertical examination, I mean I will explore the links between the gender ideologies of these writers and the patriarchal tradition of China. For analytic purposes, the past and the present, and the elite culture and the popular culture sometimes have to be dichotomized. In reality, they are intertwined; they overlap, and even merge in many ways.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

As outlined above, this study is about Chinese men—their emasculation complex and their ideal masculinities—and about Chinese women—the women depicted in male fiction. My primary objective is to make my own contribution to studies of Chinese masculinity, simply because this is a newly opened academic field—a field that is burgeoning and needs pioneering work. I hope that my study can make an insightful contribution.

Contrary to the hubbub generated about problematic masculinity in the intellectual and popular discourses of the mid-1980s, scholarly work devoted exclusively

significant step to formulate a feminist discourse. In this sense, I advocate the continuation of the May Fourth legacy with its feminist concern in the direction of women's real equality with men.
to Chinese masculinity was conspicuously absent. Brownell and Wasserstrom observe, “The major monographs and surveys on gender, as well as document collections pertaining to gender, that appeared prior to the 1990s tended as well to pay little attention to masculinity” (2002, 3). Social awareness in both intellectual and popular discourses of the problem of manhood during the 1980s therefore did not lead to theoretical enthusiasm for the same subject. Therefore, Chinese masculinity has remained as “the much-discussed, but little researched” topic. Only recently a few researchers, most of whom are Western-educated ethnic Chinese, have started opening up this new field of feminist studies in Chinese context and publishing their works in English. By 2002, there existed only three scholarly books on Chinese masculinity published in English. When I started working on this subject in 2000, I found no comprehensive survey or substantial case analysis on Chinese masculinity either in Western or in Mainland Chinese scholarship. Some writers in Taiwan started scrutinizing the problems of Chinese masculinity before 2000. For example, Sun Longji’s 孙隆基* *Wei duannai de minzu* 未断奶的民族 (A People not yet Weaned) is a scholarly work in Chinese published in Taiwan in 1995. He focuses on cultural psychology and applies a cross-cultural approach to contrast Chinese masculinity and American masculinity, providing many insights on this subject. However he attributes the problematic nature of Chinese masculinity exclusively to “Motherism”,

11 Wendy Larson, personal communication while doing this research (Jan. 2004).
or a mama’s boy complex in the mindset of Chinese men, a kind of reductionist interpretation.

In 2000 not too long after I started my research, Zhong Xueping’s *Masculinity Besieged* was published—the first scholarly work in English that stimulated my interest in this subject. Zhong interweaves the problematic nature of Chinese masculinity with issues of modernity and modernization, and she analyzes several fictional works by Chinese male writers. Kam Louie observes, “This book concentrates on the psychological state of men who feel ‘besieged’ in post-Mao China” (2002, 3). However, this book lacks sense of history because the author does not attempt to connect men’s anxieties to past tradition, which might help account for their feelings of besieged masculinity. Two years later, Kam Louie dealt with this issue in his breakthrough book, *Theorising Chinese Masculinity* (2002). He turned to Chinese history and conducted a broad survey on both orthodox and unorthodox traditions, formulating a “wen-wu (cultural attainment-martial valor) paradigm that underpins Chinese masculinity. His paradigm revises most Western analyses of Asian masculinity that heavily rely on the *yin-yang* dichotomy. In his theorizing about Chinese masculinity, Kam Louie does take women into account by dedicating one chapter to “Women’s Voice”. His focus on how women view men as objects of desire (Louie 2002, 98-118) in women’s literature is different than mine. Susan Browness and Jeffrey Wasserstrom’s book, as the title *Chinese Femininities/Chinese Masculinities* (2002) suggests, is not dedicated exclusively to the subject of Chinese masculinity. The most distinctive characteristic of this book is its organization. “Its structure takes the form of a series of two-chapter parts, each of which

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13 The *yin-yang* dialectic is an ontological model of cosmology, a cornerstone for the whole complex of ancient Chinese philosophy. I will discuss Confucianized *yin-yang* dichotomy in the following chapter.
begins with an essay that focuses on women and ends with one that focuses on men” (Brownell and Wasserstrom 2002, 22). The editors purposely elaborate on how understandings of masculinity changed whenever a shift occurred in understandings of femininity, or vice versa. The two parts in each chapter provide a comparison, or contrast by indirect relationship. All the above authors/editors have done an extraordinary job of exploring Chinese masculinity from different perspectives that will build a solid foundation for the continued examination of Chinese masculinity.

Where is my position in this burgeoning field? As I mentioned previously, my study will examine men’s emasculation complex horizontally (high culture versus popular culture and individual writer versus collective consciousness), and vertically (past versus present). Instead of working out a paradigm to underpin Chinese masculinity as Kam Louie did successfully, I attempt to analyze variations in contemporary male writings using a traditional paradigm of masculinity, and particularly to identify constant elements that Chinese male intellectuals habitually embrace to reconstruct their masculinity within different ideological frameworks. In addition, my close reading of post-Mao fiction will provide a detailed and dynamic analysis of how men and women are inseparably intertwined, not indirectly related as in Brownell and Wasserstrom’s book, and not as mutual objects of desire in Kam Louie’s sense. I will demonstrate how the contemporary male enterprise of reconstructing masculinity heavily relies on women—a conspicuous difference from traditional paradigms such as junzi 君子 (refined man) masculinity and haohan 好汉 (good fellow) masculinity in Kam Louie’s paradigm. I show how one particular author programs a woman (the female character) in his step-by-step project of reconstructing the lost masculinity of his protagonist, and for all authors I
analyze, how women are placed as gatekeepers in a horizontal zone between the two fundamentally different worlds of men.

To achieve this goal, a close reading and detailed analysis of the texts are required. It is impossible to examine in close detail a great number of works written by members of the contemporary Chinese male intellectual elite in this dissertation. I must choose representative writers. My analysis will focus on three novels: Nanren de yiban shi nüren 男人的一半是女人 (Half of Man is Woman) by Zhang Xianliang, Hong gaoliang jiazu 红高粱家族 (Red Sorghum) by Mo Yan and Feidu 废都 (The Abandoned Capital) by Jia Pingwa. My reasons for selecting these three as representative of contemporary male writers are: (1) All three writers are regarded as successful icons in contemporary Chinese literature and have earned an international reputation for their works. As successful writers, they are influential “cultural producers” who “hold a specific power, the properly symbolic power of showing things and making people believe in them…” (Thakur 1997, 24) (2) All have dealt with issues of masculinity, sex, sexuality, and emasculation in their works; (3) All have stirred up national controversy and created hot debates about their ways of depicting sex and sexuality. In these debates the supremacy of the male voice remains unchallenged, regardless whether critiques of these novels are favorable or unfavorable; (4) All depict heterosexuality and reveal attitudes toward the objects (women) of their male protagonists’ sexuality; and (5) Most importantly all three male writers subconsciously, or consciously, embraced a patriarchal framework while they endeavored to reconstruct their male potency and masculinity. Mo Yan tried to be the exception by using an avant-garde approach to transcend the traditional paradigm of masculinity and femininity, but he partially failed. I include Mo Yan in my dissertation
not simply to provide another example parallel to Zhang Xianliang and Jia Pingwa. My primary purpose is to provide a contrast. Although he failed in some respects to transcend patriarchy, Mo Yan inveighed against the social hierarchy that continuously kept peasants at the bottom of society, and conducted an unconventional exploration of ideal masculinities and femininities to reshape the social images of peasants.

The differences among the three writers are revealed in their concepts of ideal masculinity. Zhang Xianliang's protagonist identifies himself with the intellectual elite, as a descendant of the *shi* 学 (scholar-official) class in Chinese history, and is obsessed with the *junzi* 君子 (gentlemen) masculinity promoted by Confucianism. Jia Piangwa's protagonist shows a close affiliation to both Daoism and Confucianism. However he illustrates his ideal masculinity in a *caizi jiaren* 才子佳人 (gifted scholar and beautiful ladies) paradigm, which is a subcategory of the Confucian *junzi* discourse. Mo Yan challenges the very notion of masculinity associated with intellectuals, demonstrating a strong anti-intellectual sentiment. He celebrates a savage, or brutal machismo exhibited in “primitive” peasant society. His ideal masculinity bears a clear mark of *haohan* (real good men) tradition in Chinese folklore and traditional literature of outlaws.

This dissertation is divided into six chapters. Chapter Two sets out the cultural and ideological context for examining three male writers. It will reveal a dynamic and chaotic picture of ideological/cultural transformation in the mid-1980s and mid-1990s from which I will attempt to show that the revival of Confucianism, and its accompanying Confucian patriarchy, in academic circles, social practice and popular culture provided a suitable political/cultural climate in which Chinese male intellectuals could attempt to reclaim their lost masculinity by embracing Confucian patriarchy. The
following three chapters will consist of three case studies structured around the following three topics: (1) the major source of men's feelings of powerlessness and emasculation; (2) the ideological framework from which their ideal concept of masculinity is reconstructed; and (3) how these frameworks establish their gendered position and affect their views and feelings toward women; and thus how they program women's roles into the construction or restoration of their masculinity. Chapter Six will present and discuss major findings in this study. Readers will be briefly informed about these findings at the end of Chapter Two.

1.3 Methodology and Limitations of the Study

In this study, I will adopt two "readings"—feminist reading and close reading. A feminist reading is the platform I choose for examining the three novels. I chose this method based on the question frequently raised by contemporary feminists, and by myself too, "What if women were to read male texts through the experiences of women, not of men?" (Brown 1988, 62) However, I have no intention to involve myself in the debate seeking for answers to this question. My concern is how to take advantage of feminist literary criticism to bring to light the missing parts in male-centered discourse. I understand feminism as women's quest for equal rights with men in all aspects of social and domestic life—economic, political, social, and personal spheres. Feminism starts from the premise that inequalities exist between the sexes and demands a shift in power relations between the sexes. Thus, feminism has shown "a sensitivity to oppression in all of its forms", "a strong egalitarian and anti-elitist element", and "an exploration
of ...hierarchical, authoritarian, elitist, patriarchal, and exploitative elements in society” (Lowe & Benston 1992, 49). In my feminist reading, I will tightly focus on these basic but very crucial issues of feminism. Feminism in the West has already experienced three waves of change and has been integrated partially with postmodernism and post-colonialism. Readers who are enthusiastic about using postmodernist and post-colonialist terminology might not be satisfied in reading this dissertation for they will find little of it here. But readers should keep in mind that the concept of post-colonialism is founded on social, political, economic and cultural practices that arise in response and resistance to colonialism. The core value of post-colonialism, as I understand it, is to listen carefully to real voices from developing, so-called “Third World” countries and marginalized social groups. Post-colonialism should not ironically turn into a new “colonialism” and a new universalized discipline to monopolize an enormous and remarkably disparate critical territory. I raise this issue not only to defend my critical method, but also because of my concern about the tendency of “colonization” and “self-colonization” in Sinology. On the one hand, Western scholarship becomes the standard (including the currently prevailing postmodernism and post-colonialism) by which research on Chinese culture should be judged and evaluated. As Brownell and Wasserstrom state, “Although excellent and influential scholarship by native Chinese has been produced in the areas of literary and film criticism, and insightful novels and films have been produced by Chinese artists, European and American voices still seem to predominate in social and cultural history and cultural anthropology” (2002, 23). On the other hand, Western-educated Chinese researchers try their best to be westernized, or to allow themselves to be colonized. Following their predecessors at the beginning of the last century, they use their colonized
approaches to re-examine cultures in which they used to live. “In other words, they made native tradition an internal other within a localized ‘Western’ discourse” (Barlow 1991, 213). Tani Barlow terms this trend as “self-colonization” (ibid, 224).

I am not suggesting that theories and disciplines developed in the West are not meaningful in examining Chinese culture. My position is that as a researcher, I must choose a theory (or theories) and critical method judicially to facilitate my presentation of the existential condition of the culture I study, rather than going in the opposite direction to examine cultural and literary phenomena in order to prove an existing theory and justify a critical method. I will emphasize two important points about Chinese culture and Chinese feminism. First, although China was colonized for a period of time, it has never had a history where foreign (let alone colonial) influence became the dominant ideology in its mainstream discourse. The power of the traditional ideology represented by Confucianism goes far beyond normal expectations. It not only survived, but also conquered the cultures of the ruling class under two minority regimes during the Yuan Mongolian (1279-1368) and Qing Manchu (1644-1911) dynasties. It also survived radical revolutionary attacks in the May Fourth movement and the communist movement. This reality is the basis for Chinese scholar Jin Guantao 金观涛 in developing the concept of “deep structure” and his theory of “the ultrastable system” of Chinese culture. For example, the traditional concept of Western Sinology about Chinese masculinity is that Chinese men are feminized. However, in Mainland China, men and women were not concerned with this Western gaze on Chinese men. They have their own

definition of masculinity. Conforming to the ideal of a “real man” in the West by being physically strong, sexually aggressive, brave, and straightforward might be seen as inexcusable bravado in China. Li Kui 李逵 in *The Water Margin* (*Shuihuzhuan* 水浒传) possesses many attributes that resonate with that of a “real man” in the West. However, he is not the type of ideal man that Chinese girls want to marry. Chinese tradition emphasizes the inner power of a man, mainly his intellect and wisdom associated with a high level of education. Chinese men experienced panic during the crisis challenging their masculinity in the mid-1980s not because of the influence of colonialism, but because of *yin-sheng-yang-shuai* (the feminine rises and the masculine declines), a threat of a reversal in the *yin-yang* hierarchy. Second, unlike the feminist movement in the West which rose up from a grassroots’ level, Chinese women’s liberation, launched by the Communist Party, was directed from above, or top-down. There exists a huge disparity between practice and discourse in women’s liberation in Mainland China. Practice is impressively advanced in many aspects of life compared to women’s liberation in other Asian countries and even in Western societies whereas the dominant discourse is unbelievably stagnant. Feminist practitioners in China (since they do not want to be labeled as feminists) are still struggling for the legitimacy of Chinese feminism by squeezing into the dominant discourse basic concerns and issues raised long ago in the initial stages of Western feminism. The pressing matter of the moment for Chinese feminism is not to deconstruct the authority of colonialism, but to deconstruct the...
authority/hegemony of patriarchal discourse. This is why I have chosen to focus tightly on these basic but very crucial concerns and issues of feminism in the context of Chinese culture. I see my research as a part of the feminist struggle in Mainland China.

For the feminist reader, "the practice of reading is one of the sites in the struggle for change" (Belsey & Moore 1989, 1). Individual literary reading is a biased activity because every reader will bring personal interests, concepts, values and commitments to the task of reading. "There is no innocent or neutral approach to literature: all interpretation is political" (ibid, 1). In this sense, I am not exceptional. I cannot claim that I will provide an impartial analysis that includes all dimensions of the texts to satisfy everybody in every discipline. However, I will support my analysis with clear evidence. On the other hand, any discourse has its own boundaries and limitations. Male literary discourse in China is no exception. Discursive boundaries and limitations confine their visions and restrict them from a multi-dimensional framework of thought that would encourage them to question male-centeredness. The reality in China was, and still is that the supremacy of the male voice rules, and gender-unawareness prevails. This is true, too, in debates on popular works of fiction. Feminist readings that identify the confinement of male-centered discourse will definitely be good for the creation of more enlightened and penetrating literary discourse, and for greater mutual understanding between men and women.

Close reading is a fundamental skill for systematic textual analysis. It allows critics to discover solid evidence for their interpretations of the text and to build their understanding of the text without being distracted by secondary commentaries. This method is appropriate for doing original work. I choose this method because the
publication of these three novels has stimulated voluminous critiques using different approaches focusing on different subjects, and thus without a close reading, I would have no solid ground to add to, or challenge earlier critiques and contribute my original insights. In my close reading, I will not only scrutinize surface-level meanings, but also the meanings between the lines including the subtexts underneath the surface. In other words, I will examine not only what the author says or shows, but also what he does not say or show that might be the indicator of an unconscious attitude, or a conscious strategy to remain silent on a certain issue. Since what is left out can be just as significant as what is included, it is imperative to “read” these gaps and either bring them to light or find a logical interpretation with the help of external materials.

Keeping the methodology and the subject matter of this research in mind, I want to discourage two likely misinterpretations by setting up clear limitations for this dissertation.

First, although my dissertation is an attempt to discover and contemplate the links between past and present, the emphasis is on the present with respect to the past-present relationship. This is not a study that provides an omniscient view of history. I set up a very clear context within which men’s emasculation complex and, related to that, their representation of women will be discussed. In short, I will stress three “particularities”: (1) The issue of masculinity arose during a particular time period (the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s); (2) it affected a particular social group of male intellectuals; and (3) these intellectuals were under a particular kind of psychological pressure resulting from a sense of insecurity about their masculinity. I will include historical elements that remain alive in the present in my analysis. Nonetheless, I will not survey these elements
comprehensively in terms of their social, intellectual and ideological evolution through
different time periods of history and various/nuanced critiques and commentaries. I will
focus on deeply rooted elements of the past that influence the works of contemporary
male writers and are still evident in the present elite and public consciousness. I establish
this limitation specifically to discourage a possible misinterpretation of my study as
reductionist account of certain historical events or philosophies.

The second limitation is that this study is about men. By men, I do not mean all
men in China. I will focus primarily on male intellectuals, or “Chinese high culture” in
Wang Yiyan’s terms (1995-96). I link male intellectuals with patriarchal authors who
dominate literary discourses and are not conscious of their male-centeredness. By male
literary discourse, I mean the literary discourse of male-centeredness. I discourage the
reader from overgeneralization to all Chinese men or all Chinese male intellectuals
whenever I use the phrases such as “male intellectuals”, “male writers”, or “male
discourse” for the convenience of discussion. Not all male writers, critics and theorists
participate in this discourse and not all participants are males. Some female writers and
critics adopt a male-centered perspective and their works play a part in male discourse. In
fact, there exists a counter-patriarchal discourse formulated in the early twentieth-century
by both male and female writers such as Lu Xun, Mao Dun, Ba Jin, Rou Shi, Ding Ling
丁玲, Bing Xin 冰心, Lu Yin 卢隐, Bai Wei 白薇, Xiao Hong 萧红 and Zhang Ailing 张
爱玲. This discourse was continued and quickly developed in the post-Mao era by
woman writers such as Zhang Jie 张洁, Wang Anyi 王安忆, Shen Rong 谌容, Zhang
Kangkang 张抗抗, Tie Ning 铁凝, Chen Ran 陈染, Lin Bai 林白, and Can Xue 残雪. I
also include in this discourse recent female writers Wei Hui 卫慧, Mian Mian 棉棉, and
the most controversial Mu Zimei 木子美 who are labeled as “writers who write with their bodies”. Some male writers, such as Wang Xiaobo, and male critics, such as Zhang Zhizhong 张志忠, participate in this counter-patriarchal feminist discourse. This discourse is founded on the solid ground where after the May Fourth Movement, Chinese women “emerged as a gender from obscurity and through great adversity onto the horizon of history,” where finally they shared with men the same expansive possibilities (Dai Jinhua 2002, 100). However, compared to the supremacy of patriarchal discourse, the voices of this feminist discourse are still weak and there is strong resistance within the patriarchal discourse to interaction/permeation between the two discourses.

In this dissertation, I deal primarily with the dominant patriarchal discourse. The reader should keep in mind these exceptions to the rule when I refer to “male intellectuals” and “male discourses.” These phrases designate ideological orientation rather than biological differences.

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17 Wei Hui’s Shanghai Baobei 上海宝贝 (Shanghai Babe), Mian Mian’s Tang 糖 (Candy) and Mu Zimei’s Yiqingshu 邀请书 (Love Letters) opened a new episode in Chinese literature of young female writers depicting sexual experience audaciously rather than being depicted by male writers. Mu Zimei’s Yiqingshu—her online diary—set a new record for website hits and caused an earthquake-like sensation among Chinese internet subscribers. She was criticized as a shameless, immoral woman because she openly claimed, “I am not a writer who writes with her body, but with fluid.” Some critics and readers believe that Mu Zimei is the female writer most subversive to the patriarchal tradition.

18 The presentation of gender relations and masculinity/femininity in Wang Xiaobo’s trilogy, The Golden Age, The Silver Age, and The Bronze Age, is completely new to Chinese readers. Wang is the writer who experimented with avant-garde approaches to transcend traditional patriarchy and rewrite Chinese masculinity/femininity.

19 I will quote some of Zhang’s feminist commentaries to support my argument in Chapter Four.
Chapter II  Past in the Present: The Ideological/Cultural Context of the Resurgence of Confucian Patriarchy during the 1980s And 90s

In this chapter, I will use a social-political perspective to lay out the framework of cultural and ideological dynamics during the 1980s and 90s in Mainland China and establish the context for the following three chapters containing my analysis of the emasculation crisis faced by male writers. The distinguishing phases of this crisis are that emasculated Chinese intellectuals experienced a journey of revival, a fight for power, and re-emasculcation. The context for the power struggles of Chinese intellectuals lies in two parallel fields: a sharply defined and intensive field of the Party-state and a nebulous and seemingly tranquil field of non-elite women. These struggles are framed in three related dimensions: ideological/cultural transformation, revival of Confucianism and its patriarchy and challenge to the masculinity of Chinese intellectuals.

2.1  Ideological/cultural Transformation

The 1980s marked the first decade after the Cultural Revolution (1966-76) and the economic reform policies launched by Deng Xiaoping 邓小平 at the end of the 1970s. This was an extremely lively, rapidly changing and chaotic period in China. It is distinguished not only by economic transition but also by ideological/cultural transformation.
2.1.1 Ideological vacuum

After the Communist Party took over China in 1949, Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong’s Thought was designated and constitutionalized\(^1\) as a national ideology that all people in China must follow. There are at least three historical events, among other factors, that fundamentally shook the foundation of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong’s Thought as a designated national ideology.

First, in his report at the Eleventh National Congress of Communist Party of China in Beijing (August 12-18, 1977), Hua Guofeng 华国锋, the successor of Mao Zedong 毛泽东, officially announced the end of the Cultural Revolution. This announcement concluded a ten-year national nightmare that pushed the country toward the verge of collapse. For most Chinese listening to this announcement, the significance was like an amnesty that released all prisoners from a nationwide jail. They took a deep breath as ten years of mental and psychological pressure were officially removed. The Cultural Revolution was carried out in the name of following

\(^1\) In his opening address at the First Session of the First National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China (September 15, 1954), Mao Zedong states, “The force at the core leading our cause forward is the Chinese Communist Party. The theoretical basis guiding our thinking is Marxism-Leninism.” Because this statement appears as the first entry in *Quotations From Chairman Mao Tse-Tung*, during the Cultural Revolution, every Chinese student/adult could recite it.

Under Chapter One— General Principles, Article 2 of the two editions of the Constitution of the People’s Republic of China adopted on January 17, 1975 by the Fourth National People’s Congress of the People's Republic of China at its First Session, and on March 5, 1978 by the Fifth National People’s Congress of the People’s Republic of China at its First Session, the same designation with little variation appeared as follow:

**ARTICLE 2**

The Communist Party of China is the core of leadership of the whole Chinese people. The working class exercises leadership over the state through its vanguard, the Communist Party of China.

Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought is the theoretical basis guiding the thinking of our nation. (“The guiding thought of the People's Republic of China is Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought” was in 1978’s edition.)
the line of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong’s Thought. Even after the Cultural Revolution, Chinese people remained haunted by its ghastly consequences and could not help questioning the legitimacy of its underlying ideology.

Second, Deng Xiaoping’s economic reform policies introduced substantial capitalist elements and integrated them into the Chinese economic system. This inevitably problematized China’s political system as socialism. Realizing the potentially dangerous contradiction between theory and practice — between the claimed socialist nature of the country and the influx of capitalist elements into its economic system, Deng revised socialist “theory”—“To built socialism with Chinese characteristics,” which then became the national principle. The problem is that this new “theory” has not yet been systematically rationalized. It is no more than a political slogan in eyes of most Chinese people, who were overwhelmed and fed up with slogans during the Cultural Revolution.

Third, the disintegration of the Soviet Union in the middle of the 1980s, followed by the collapse of other communist countries in Eastern Europe, virtually certified the failure of communism. These historical events undoubtedly struck a fatal blow to the communist theory elsewhere in the world. For Chinese, the collapse of the communist countries in Europe justified and intensified their feeling of being deceived by communist theory.

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2 At the 12th National Congress of CPC (September 1-11, 1982) in Beijing, Deng Xiaoping stated in the opening speech: “In our modernization program, we must proceed from realities. To integrate universal truth of Marxism with concrete realities of China, take our own road and build socialism with Chinese characteristics.”
The undercurrent of uneasiness, disquiet, doubt, distrust, disappointment, disillusionment and anger that emerged at the end of the 1970s, rapidly grew and permeated the whole country. These sentiments were succinctly condensed into four Chinese characters—"Wo—bu—xiang—xin!" (I don’t believe!) represented by the young poet Bei Dao 北岛. In his famous poem, “Answers” (Huida 回答), published in the official poetry journal Shi Kan 诗刊 (Poetry Monthly) in 1980, Bei Dao proclaims: “Just let me say, world/ I—do—not—believe!/... I don’t believe the sky is always blue;/ I don’t believe it was thunder echoing;/ I don’t believe all dreaming is false;/ I don’t believe the dead cannot bring judgment.” Here Bei Dao made a clear break from the official, orthodox and hegemonic ideology, and thus he was seen by Chinese readers as a spokesman for this nationwide protest and defiance. His poem strongly touched the national nerve and “Wo—bu—xiang—xin!” became a favorite aphorism particularly among Bei Dao’s generation.

This distrust in hegemonic ideology can also be confirmed indirectly in the 1982 revision of the constitution. In this revised constitution, “the National People's Congress and the local people's congresses at various levels” replaced the Communist

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3 The pseudonym of Zhao Zhenkai 赵振开 (1949-).

4 The revision made to the Constitution of the People’s Republic of China was adopted at the Fifth Session of the Fifth National People’s Congress and Promulgated for Implementation by the Proclamation of the National People’s Congress on December 4, 1982. The revised article 2 under Chapter One—General Principles is as follows:

Article 2

All power in the People’s Republic of China belongs to the people.

The National People’s Congress and the local people’s congresses at various levels are the organs through which the people exercise state power.

The people administer state affairs and manage economic, cultural and social affairs through various channels and in various ways in accordance with the law.
Party in leadership, and law became the legitimate means by which Chinese people “administer state affairs and manage economic, cultural and social affairs.” The phrases, “Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought is the theoretical basis guiding the thinking of our nation” in the 1975 edition, and “The guiding thought of the People’s Republic of China is Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought” in the 1978 edition, were taken out of the 1982 revised constitution.

From a historical perspective, one could state that Confucianism dominated China for more than two thousand years and Sinocized-Marxism for less than forty years. Confucianism was severely attacked during the May Fourth movement at the beginning of the twentieth-century and was continuously criticized during the communist regime. When Marxist communism failed, there was no new ideology to substitute for the previous two. People found nowhere to go. Their souls became restless, homeless, and rootless. This sense of loss grew so strong that it led to an epidemic of nihilism, spreading panic among intellectuals. They declared, “China faces an ‘ideological vacuum’ (or ‘spiritual vacuum’, or ‘moral vacuum’)”. 5 “Everywhere in China you hear talk of a spiritual vacuum, an echoing nihilism that quiets this hyperkinetic nation.”6

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5 My personal experience. I heard this frequently at the department meetings, academic conferences and personal conversations.

2.1.2 Ideological and cultural pluralism

As people sought ointment for their wounded hearts and new homes for their restless and wandering souls, Chinese intellectuals saw themselves being urgently needed. In response to this “ideological vacuum”, a period of ideological/cultural exploration emerged and rapidly brought an ideological/cultural transformation. Taking advantage of the climate of political relaxation initiated by the CCP at the end of 1970s, this trend of seeking a new ideology erupted simultaneously in political, ideological, literary and religious arenas, and soon led to a Culture Fever (wenhuare 文化热), a phenomenon of ideological/cultural pluralism, which was unparalleled in the contemporary Chinese history.

In the political/ideological arena, this pluralistic tendency started with sixiang jiefang yundong 思想解放运动 (the movement of thought emancipation), which was initiated by an article discussing the criterion of truth and enhanced by a sudden explosion of the Xidan minzhuqiang yundong 西单民主墙运动 (Democracy Wall movement on Xidan Street) in Beijing.

On May 11, 1978, Guangming Ribao 光明日報 (Guangming Daily) published an article written by a “Specially Invited Commentator”, entitled Shijian shi jinya zhenli de weiyi biaozhun 实践是检验真理的唯一标准 (Practice is the Sole Criterion...
for Testing Truth). This article initiated a nationwide debate over the question: What is the criterion for truth—whatever Mao said or practice and fact? To raise this question was unimaginable during the Cultural Revolution as it would be interpreted as anti-Maoism. The consequence for the questioner could be ending up in the jail or being executed like Zhang Zhixin. Calling for seeking the truth from facts and systematically correcting past leftist mistakes as the “sole criterion” for discussion was also directly aimed at Hua Guofeng’s “two whatevers” (liangge fenshi 两个凡是). Therefore this reformulation was warmly welcomed and encouraged by Deng Xiaoping. In the discussion of the “sole criterion” Chinese intellectuals and the Party-state worked together cooperatively for achieving their own ends respectively: unfledged intellectuals needed the new leadership of the Party both to fight an orthodox and oppressive ideological system and to accelerate their revival. Deng needed intellectual discourse to help oust Hua Guofeng. During December 18-22, 1978, the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Party Central Committee was held in Beijing. The meeting praised the discussion on “sole criterion”, criticized “two

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9 Zhang Zhixin was a young female Communist Party member in Liaoning Province who expressed her dissenting views to a colleague during the Cultural Revolution. She was imprisoned for her different faiths and then executed. On the day before her execution, the authorities cut her throat, lest she shout further "counterrevolutionary" slogans to onlookers on the way to the execution ground.

10 On February 7, 1977, less than a half year after the death of Mao Zedong, an editorial by the three Party organs, *Renmin Ribao* (People’s Daily), *Jiefangjun Bao* (Liberation Army Daily) and *Hongqi zazhi* (Red Flag Monthly) entitled “Study Documents Well and Grasp the Key Link” came out with Hua Guofeng’s approval. It contained the slogan, “We must resolutely support whatever decision Chairman Mao made and consistently follow whatever directives Chairman Mao issued.” The principle of “two whatevers” was aimed at perpetuating Mao’s leftist mistakes committed during his later years. It was also most likely aimed at preventing the second rehabilitation of Deng.
whateverism” advocated by Hua and affirmed the necessity of correctly understanding Mao Zedong’s Thought.\(^1\)

The Democracy Wall movement began “in late 1978, but it reached its climax and ended in late 1979.”\(^2\) The “sole criterion” debate involved intellectuals’ seeking ideological alternatives through official channels, such as journals, magazines and media, whereas the Democracy Wall movement involved citizens of Beijing and people all over the country\(^3\) voicing their unorthodox opinions and ideas about the problems of Marxist-maoism, the freedom of speech, modernization and democracy, etc. through an unorthodox channel—posting “dazibao 大字报” (big-character posters) on the wall on Xidan Street.

Many of the posters dealt with personal problems, particularly wrongs suffered during the Cultural Revolution by people all over the country... Other posters were comments on Mao, Marshal Peng, and other leaders and events, and gradually turned into discussions of political principles and demands for constitutional rights, particularly the right of free expression and association. (Chen & Jin 1997, 61)

As in the discussion of the “sole criterion”, Deng found the public forum helpful to besiege the Hua Guofeng camp, and he deliberately encouraged young people to participate in the movement of the Xidan Democracy Wall. However, those who refused to think and speak in the language that Deng expected were shown no

\(^1\) In May, 1977, Deng Xiaoping had labeled the principle of “watereverism” as un-Marxist on several occasions. The discussion on the criterion of truth was initiated by intellectuals and appeared as a prelude to the emancipating mind movement. It was launched in the political battle between Deng’s faction and Hua Guofeng’s faction. For the details of this discussion, see Chen Fong-Ching and Jin Guantao, 1977.

mercy. The most famous dissident in China, Wei Jingshen 魏京生 was the leading figure of the Democracy Wall movement. "Calling for a 'Fifth modernization — Democracy' to accompany the party's four economic modernizations," he "was one of the few not to sing Deng's praises." He was arrested on March 29, 1979, and six months later, on October 16, sentenced to fifteen years in prison for his political dissent.

The harbingers of the movement of emancipating the mind were literary figures. "Literature had always been a powerful weapon in traditional China, and both the ruler and the ruled understood this" (Chen & Jin 1997, 93). Literature frozen during the Cultural Revolution started its defreeze and resurrection as early as 1977 when Liu Xinwu 刘心武 (1942-) published his ice-breaking short story, "Ban Zhuren 班主任" (The Supervisor of Class), in which he vividly depicts a female student, Xie Huimin 谢慧敏, who was kind and honest, but brainwashed by the leftist line during the Cultural Revolution to the extent that her mind was completely paralyzed and dysfunctional. This was the first time such a mind-wounded image appeared in the Contemporary Chinese literature. Soon after that Lu Xinhua 卢新华 (1954-), a young female writer from Shanghai, published a short story, "Shanghen 伤痕" (The Scar, or

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14 At the time of the Democracy Wall Movement, Wei Jingsheng was an electrician at the Beijing Zoo and the editor of the magazine Exploration.
15 The Four Modernizations refer to: the modernization of China's industry, agriculture, national defense, and science and technology.
17 In Renmin wenxue 人民文学 (People's Literature) 11 (1977), pp. 16-29.
The Wounded.\textsuperscript{18} This story also is soul-disturbing because it portrays a daughter who abandons her “counter-revolutionary” mother during the Cultural Revolution, and is in turn abandoned by the young man she loves because of her “counter-revolutionary” family background. These two short stories heralded the literary thaw of the 1980s, marked the emergence of a new literature — \textit{shanghen wenxue} 伤痕文学 (scar literature, or the literature of the wounded).\textsuperscript{19} This literature boldly exhibits the wounds suffered in the Cultural Revolution by critics of leftist oppression during the darkest days of modern Chinese history. Following this literary breakthrough, works of fiction flourished marking the revival and rise of Chinese intellectuals. Fiction writers became the first group of intellectuals to stand up and voice their long-suppressed feelings on behalf of the people. Scar literature soon evolved into “towering wall literature” (\textit{daqiang wenxue} 大墙文学)\textsuperscript{20}, “educated youth literature” (\textit{zhiqing wenxue} 知青文学)\textsuperscript{21}, “obscure poetry” (or misty poetry, \textit{menglongshi} 蒙胧诗

\textsuperscript{18} In \textit{Wenhuibao} 文汇报, August 11, 1978.

\textsuperscript{19} “Scar literature” (\textit{shanghen wenxue} 伤痕文学) is named after the short story “Scar.” Scar literature emerged almost immediately after the Cultural Revolution. Stories detailed agonies, traumas, tragedies and the horrors of the Cultural Revolution.

\textsuperscript{20} “Towering Wall literature” (\textit{daqiang wenxue}) was named after Cong Weixi’s novel, \textit{Daqiang xia de hongyulan} 大墙下的红玉兰 (Red Magnolias under the Towering Wall). Cong Wenxi 丛维熙 (1933-) was labeled a “rightist” in 1957 and spent 22 years in prison or a gulag. After he was rehabilitated in 1979, he wrote a series of fictional works with his remembrance of life in prison. Zhang Xianliang is another writer of “Towering wall literature,” known for his fiction of Chinese gulag life.

\textsuperscript{21} “The literature of educated youth” (\textit{zhiqing wenxue}) is written by and/or about urban youth sent down to the countryside to be reeducated by the peasants during the Cultural Revolution. The literature of educated youth was a derivation of scar literature. The setting was shifted to the countryside with the theme of exploring the lives of urban youth altered by the Cultural Revolution. Authors drew upon their memories and personal experiences in the countryside. The leading writers include: Zhang Chengzhì 张承志, Liang Xiaosheng 梁晓声, Lao Gui 老鬼, Ah Cheng 阿城 and Han Shaogong 韩少功.
“Obscure Poetry” (menglóngshī, or Misty poetry) was invented by Bei Dao. Obscure poetry is part of scar literature. Poets of this school grew up during and after the Cultural Revolution and bear clear marks of that disastrous era. They experimented with obscure language to subvert the orthodox hegemony. These poets include: Bei Dao, Shu Ting, and Gu Cheng.

“Exposure literature” (baolu wenxue) and “New Realism Literature” (xin xianshizhuyi wenxue) were virtually merged into one as the same genre bearing different terms. New realism literature included fictional writings, dramas and reportages. The major theme of this genre is to expose social abuses by the privileged class, the vices and injustice of the society, ill treatment and deprivation of human rights. Representative works include: Sha Yexin, Li Shoucheng, and Yao Minde’s “Jiaru Wo shi Zhende” (If I were Real), a special issue of Xijuyishu (Art of Drama) and Shanghai xiju (Shanghai Drama), Shanghai, 1979; Wang Jing’s film script, “Zai shehui dang’an li” (In the Archives of the Society), Dianying Chuangzuo (Film Creation), no. 10, 1979. Reportage was written in a literary style based on real events. Liu Binyan is the founder of this genre and his “Renyao zhijia” (Between Monsters and Men”, published in Renmin Wenxue (People’s Literature), no. 9, 1979, pp. 83-102, is representative of this genre.

“Reform literature” was created by Jiang Zilong (1941-). In 1979 while Chinese literature was immersed deeply in recalling and reflecting on the wounds and sadness of the Cultural Revolution, Jiang Zilong published a short story “Qiaochangzhang shangren ji” (Manager Qiao Assumes Office) (Renmin wenxue (People’s Literature) 1979: 7). This story depicts a reformist Manager Qiao who is an affirmative actor rather than a sad armchair thinker. He takes bold and resolute action to advance reform of his factory. Like thunder, this story woke people up from sad and angry retrospect and changed the trend of literary writing.

“Root-seeking literature” (xuegen wenxue) is kind of elite literature that emerged in the mid-1980s. The name “xuegen” (searching for roots) was taken from Han Shaogong’s article, “Wenxue de gen” (The roots of literature), published in Wenyi Bao (The Literary Gazette) in July 1985. Critics see this article as the start of the existence of the school of root-seeking (xuegenpai), or the nativist school. Ah
with its echo of remote Chinese history. Under the influence of deconstructionism, post-colonialism and anti-Orientalism from the outside world, writers of avant-garde fiction (xianfengpai xiaoshuo 先锋派小说)\textsuperscript{26} depicted the chaos of contemporary Chinese society from multiple perspectives and stances. The audacious and impudent "hooligan literature" (liumang wenxue 流氓文学 or pizi wenxue 痞子文学)\textsuperscript{27} could only come into existence during this most liberal and pluralistic time period of contemporary Chinese history. Yellow peril (huang huo 黄祸)\textsuperscript{28} became the best signifier of a national state of "spiritual/moral vacuum". In the field of literary criticism, critics became familiar with and started modeling their works after the Freudian "Oedipal Complex", stream of consciousness, structuralism, formalism, deconstructuralism, neo-historicism, Latin-American Magical realism, etc.

Cheng wrote "Wenhua Zhiyue zhe renlei" (Culture Conditions Human Beings), Wenyi Bao (The Literary Gazette), July 6, 1985. Writers of "roots" attempted to find a historical context and narrative to interpret China's present state. They went beyond the confines of modern Chinese literature and with their exploration of history to gain new literary awareness. Leading writers in this school include: Han Shaogong, Ah Cheng, Jia Pingwa, Li Hangyu 李杭育, Wang Anyi 王安忆, etc.

\textsuperscript{26} "Avant-garde fiction" represents a genre of experimental fiction which gained prominence in the late 1980s. Filled with mirages, hallucinations, myths, and mental puzzles, stories of "avant-garde" fiction reveal a fantastic, outlandish and bizarre picture of whatever they depict. Representative writers are Su Tong 苏童, Yu Hua 余华, Ge Fei 格非, Can Xue 残雪, etc.

\textsuperscript{27} "Hooligan literature" (liumang wenxue) is the label exclusively attributed to Wang Shuo (1958-), because his characters are like a group of social scum who indulge themselves in drinking, gambling, swearing and promiscuity. Chinese authorities described him as a "spiritual pollutant."

\textsuperscript{28} "Yellow" in China is the color referring to pornography. "Yellow peril" is the descriptive term given by Zha Jianyin to Jia Pingwa's The Abandoned Capital (Feidu), published in 1993. This genre also includes pornographic videotapes and tabloids that flooded the market in the mid-1980s. Jia Pingwa's porn-like novel swept the country and intensified the trend toward yellow peril. See Zha Jianyin, 1995.
Readers of 1980s Chinese fiction were bombarded with the rapid creation of new names and terms that came out one after another without enough time to absorb the meanings of the previous new creations. Helen F. Siu summarizes, “The literary scene in China during the 1980’s was, at least until June 1989, lively, and puzzling” (1990, 1). That unprecedented dazzling time was challenging for readers as well.

In religion, a crisis of faith was the immediate result of the “ideological/spiritual vacuum”. “Fifty years ago on an overcast day, Mao and his cadres had gathered in Tian’anmen and stared at a nothing future—no food, no remnants of a healthy economy, no allies. All they had was faith.”29 Communism served as a factual religion for Chinese people during Mao’s time, because “it was revelation and a prophecy that engaged their entire beings and was expounded in sacred texts.”30 However, that faith became “the only thing missing from Jiang Zemin’s party.”31 To fill that vacuum, Chinese people turned to religion that seemed to transform this self-proclaimed atheist country into a polytheist one overnight. “Beijing does say that since the 1980s, more than 600 Protestant churches have opened each year in China. More than 18 million Bibles have been printed, some on the presses of the People’s Liberation Army.”32 The old beliefs of the masses in Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Shamanism, and various local or regional gods/goddesses are also rebounding.33

32 Ibid.
Economic, political, ideological, literary, and religious revival emerged, thrived and merged into a melting pot of 1980s China that eventually formed Culture Fever (wenhuare). Culture Fever was initiated by the intellectual elite and later spread to mass culture. It started with Cultural Discussion that can be seen as a continuum of the movement of emancipating the thought at the end of the 1970s. It reached its peak in 1985 and “was kindled anew with the outbreak of controversy over the popular TV documentary series *Heshang* (Yellow River Elegy)"\(^{34}\) (Wang Jing 1996, 48 & 53). According to Chen Fong-ching and Jin Guantao, 1984 was the breakthrough year for Culture Fever; 1985 was the year of gathering momentum; and 1986 was its high tide, for this was the year of all sorts of cultural activities that even attracted taciturn government officials and previously suppressed dissidents to participate (1997, 171). The subjects of Cultural Discussion were so various that they are very hard to summarize in a couple of sentences. However, the central theme was about modernization and the direction of Chinese culture. Every intellectual movement since the end of the nineteenth century, including Culture Fever, tried to reconcile the modern and the traditional (*xiandai yu chuantong* 现代与传统). Some who were obsessed with fears of lagging behind the outside world, in terms of economy and intellectual discourse, advocated imposing Western ideologies on China; others were preoccupied with Chinese indigenous traditions that might vanish under the combined

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\(^{34}\) *Heshang* (Yellow River Elegy) is a six-part television documentary broadcasted in 1988 on China Central Television. In re-examining the state of Chinese culture, it divides world cultures into two types: “yellow civilization” or “inland culture” focusing on the images of the Yellow River and loess plateau in China, and “blue civilization” or “ocean culture” symbolizing Western cultures. The major theme of the documentary is that the yellow culture is declining and “Old China can only revive its dying culture by modernization and Westernization.” (Wang 1996, 118-119) *Heshang* places a confidence in the Western cultures, as it shows the final image of the Yellow River meeting the sea and dissolving into the great ocean.
Communist attack and wave of westernization. Both sides tried to conceptualize their own new theories/ideologies by integrating Western ideas and conventional value systems. “Between January 1985 and June 1986, newspapers across the nation published approximately two hundred essays on the subject of Chinese culture. Special columns were created in major papers to facilitate the voicing of views on such issues as whether China was experiencing a genuine cultural renaissance” (Wang Jing 1996, 50).

Echoing Cultural Discussion among Chinese intellectual elite, Culture Fever took other forms in livening up masses. Rock music, “Northwest Wind” music, fashion, dianda/yada/handa 夜大 / 夜大 / 函大 (TV university/evening university/correspondence university) fever, qigong 气功 (meditation) fever, Yijing 易经 (The Changes of Classics) fever, Qiongyao 琼瑶35 fever, Jin Yong 金庸36 fever, and jietow yangge 街头秧歌 (folk dances on the street) fever37 all found their space in social and community life.38

35 Qiongyao (1938-) is a female writer of romance fiction from Taiwan. She published more than 50 fictional works of love stories. Qiongyao fever broke out in Mainland China. The majority of Qiongyao fans were young girls and female college students, for whom Qiongyao built up a dreamland of ideal life. Qiongyao's romance fiction was criticized as a “spiritual poison”. For critiques of Qiongyao, see Leo Ou-fan Lee, Modern Fiction from Taiwan, Critical Perspectives, Indiana University Press, 1980. See also Lin Fangmei’s Social Change and Romantic Ideology: The Impact of the Publishing industry, family organization, and gender roles on the reception and interpretation of romance fiction in Taiwan, 1960-1990, Ph. D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1992.

36 Jin Yong (Louis Cha, 1924-) born in Haining, Zhejiang province is a most famous novelist of Martial Arts Fiction (wuxia xiaoshuo 武侠小说) in China. He created a fantasy wuxia gongfu (martial arts) world with his works written between 1955 and 1972 that attracted numerous young readers in Mainland China. Dozens of Hong Kong films are directly based on or inspired by Jin Yong stories. There was a craze for wuxia films in the early 1990s.

37 Yangge is a collective folk dance. In the early 1990s, Old people in Changchun, Jilin province started to dance yangge on the street for self-entertainment and physical exercise. This voluntary, collective activity, was called by researchers jietow yangge re (fever of folk dance on the street) or jietou yangge
What was the CCP's reaction to this ideological and cultural divergence? The CCP deliberately loosened its political and ideological control immediately after the Cultural Revolution. There were at least two reasons for this relaxation: first, to mobilize the spirit of initiative among people whose minds had become numb from a long period of hegemonic politics. CCP leaders were afraid that long-oppressed people might hold strong resentment against the communist regime. Political relaxation would allow people to release their anger by channeling it away from the CCP to the Gang of Four who were the scapegoats for all mistakes made by the CCP in the past; it would also encourage people to criticize the factional opponents of Deng Xiaoping who successfully dethroned Hua Guofeng by taking advantage of the discussion of the "sole criterion" and the movement of Democracy Wall.

"Although party leaders have tolerated more divergent political views since the early 1980's, they continue to expect unquestioning commitment to the country" (Siu 1990, 1). However, Party leaders found intellectuals reluctant to cooperate with this objective, which "poses a unique problem for the Party. Ideological engineers find it difficult to mold opinion when the subject refuses to think or speak in the required language" (ibid, 1). The movement of emancipating the thought put the Party-state in jeopardy of loosing their ideological control over the country. Leaders at high levels became worried and decided to take action. In the Second Plenary Session of the Twelfth Part Central Committee in 1983, Deng Xiaoping initiated the first political campaign after the Cultural Revolution to "purge spiritual pollution" (qingchu

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wenhua (culture of folk dance on the street), added a unique aspect to city culture that spread to other cities in China.

38 For Culture Fever, also see my article (1992).
This campaign targeted “decadent, moribund ideas of the bourgeoisie” that threatened the socialist system or questioned the legitimacy of the Party’s leadership. The CCP wanted to achieve ideological unity, strengthen discipline and pull the country back to the “right” path. However, this political campaign failed to stop the trend of political/ideological pluralism, which continued its expansion. The CCP decided to wage another political campaign. Unlike “purge spiritual pollution” which primarily depended on political propaganda, the 1986 campaign of “anti-bourgeois liberalization” (fan zichenjie ji ziyouhua 反对资产阶级自由化) came with a series of very resolute and hawkish actions. On January 16, 1987, Hu Yaobang 胡耀邦 was ousted from his post as General Secretary of the Party Central Committee. Within one week following the Hu Yaobang’s event, the CCP expelled another three influential dissidents from the party for their activities in bourgeois liberalization.39 The CCP also took a series of measures to suppress student on-campus and off-campus demonstrations that took place frequently between 1983 and 1988 all over the country. Idealistic and naïve intellectuals and students were not aware that these political campaigns and resolute actions were actually a prelude to the June 4, 1989 crackdown on the Tian’anmen Square demonstration that finally closed the episode of ideological divergence in the 1980s.

What China presented in the 1980s was a very dynamic, fascinating, complex, puzzling, unstable and even chaotic picture. Reformism, conservatism, modernism,
neo-Marxism, socialism, capitalism, traditionalism, nihilism, cynicism, nationalism, humanism, neo-Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism, student demonstrations, Tibetan separatists, folk superstitions ... all mushroomed, revived, overlapped and entangled with each other in competing for spheres of influence. From the fact that so many "-isms" appeared, we can see the 1980s was a remarkable decade of ideological exploration. Wang Ruoshui 王若水 issued a theory of "alienation"; Liu Zaifu 刘再复 raised the idea of subjectivity in literature; Li Zehou 李泽厚 proposed *xiti zhongyong* 西体中用 (Western substance, Chinese application); Fang Lizhi 反右 called for the elite to be the only legitimate guardian of China’s spiritual civilization; Su Xiaokang 苏晓康 stirred the nation with his “blue culture” (Western culture) and “yellow culture” (Chinese culture) in *Heshang* (The River Elegy); Jin Guantao 贾国涛 created a concept of “deep structure” and a theory of the “ultrastable system”; Han Shaogong 韩少功 pioneered the “seeking for roots” movement in literature; Jia Pingwa 贾平娃 created “Shangzhou culture” based on his hometown in writing the *Shangzhou* 畿州 series; and Wang Shuo 王朔 gained the patent on “hooligan literature” by bringing in innumerous rascals, and rogues, and allowing them to occupy the center of the scene... All of these prominent writers gained influence and reached the top during this period time. The trend of political and ideological divergence was transformed into ideological/cultural pluralism, and was in full swing until 1989. The self-enlarged role of the intellectual elite in controlling a national discourse of liberalization reached an unprecedented level during this period of time. Revived Chinese intellectuals, having experienced several years of self-promotion and several rounds of subtle negotiations with the Party-state, believed that they were in a position of strength in political negotiations with the Party for their
independence from Party control, maintaining their freedom of speech, and holding onto their power in managing and modernizing the ideology of the nation.

The crackdown on the Tian’anmen Square demonstration in 1989 was a watershed between the two decades of the 1980s and 1990s. Chinese researchers refer to the first decade (starting in the late 1970s) as the “new-period culture” and the second decade (after the June Fourth incident in 1989) as the “post-new-period culture”. The most striking characteristic of the “post-new-period culture” of the 1990s was cultural suppression from 1989-1992, followed by the commercialization of culture and the blending of elite and popular culture. “The idealism and cultural enthusiasm of the 1980s waned,” and the country “ushered in a new era of economic development.” The irresistible wave of modernization rapidly commercialized China and focused all divergent attention, concerns and pursuits in one direction — money making. Chinese intellectuals, seen as spokesmen of the country’s consciousness and morality, and as agents of the country’s enlightenment, soon were pushed away from the center stage to the periphery. I will discuss this topic more in Chapter V in my analysis on *The Abandoned Capital*.

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2.2 The Revitalization of Confucianism and the Resurgence of Confucian Patriarchy

Within the very dynamic, complex and even chaotic picture of the 1980s, one phenomenon that ran parallel to the westernization of Chinese ideology was the revival of Confucianism and the resurgence of the Confucian patriarchy.

"Confucianism, a generic Western term that has no counterpart in Chinese, is a worldview, a social ethic, a political ideology, a scholarly tradition, and a way of life" (Tu 1998, 3). Although Confucius was just one among many Chinese philosophers, and Confucianism was just one among many Chinese philosophies, “often grouped together with Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and Taoism as a major historical religion” (ibid, 3), it is undeniable that Confucianism dominated China's history more than 2000 years.

During the May Fourth Movement led by Chinese intellectuals at the beginning of the twentieth-century, Confucianism became the number one target of this political/ideological/cultural revolution. The Communist Party, after being founded in 1921, persistently carried on the May Fourth legacy and its passionate battle to eradicate Confucianism and uproot its influence from the mindset of Chinese people. Mao Zedong understood clearly that it is much easier to deconstruct and destroy an old system than to reconstruct a new one. The key to the victory of Communism over traditional ideology was to find an appropriate theory, which Mao borrowed from Europe. He claims,
Communism is at once a complete system of proletarian ideology and a new social system. It is different from any other ideological and social system, and is the most complete, progressive, revolutionary and rational system in human history. The ideological and social system of feudalism has a place only in the museum of history (Mao Zedong 1966 [1940], 23).

Sixty years after the May Fourth movement, Confucianism (what Mao called feudalism) seemed all but dead. During the 1980s, a revival of Confucianism was evident in both mass culture and intellectual high culture.

Chinese intellectuals view Confucianism as the most influential philosophy (rujia 儒家) in China’s history, while Chinese masses, more often than not, treat Confucianism as a religion (rujiao 儒教) and worship Confucius as a God. It is interesting to witness how history repeats the deification of an intellectual icon. Little red books of Mao Zedong’s quotations, often printed and reprinted during the Cultural Revolution, were also called “zuigao zhishi 最高指示” (Instructions from the highest). These books flooded into every household and everyone’s pocket. Ten years later at Qufu 曲阜, the birthplace of Confucius, little red books are for sale. They have plastic covers with the title Lunyu 论语 (The Analects), and they look just like the little red books of Mao’s sayings that were so ubiquitous during the Cultural Revolution.41

During the Cultural Revolution, the only type of mass ceremonies allowed were related to Mao, to celebrate Mao’s birthday, Mao’s latest instructions, or victories achieved under Mao’s revolutionary line. Ten years after Mao’s death, large ceremonies to celebrate Confucius’ birthday appeared in China. Such mass ceremonies have continued on through the 1990s and into the twenty first century. It is ironic to

see how Mao Zedong tried his best to uproot the influence of Confucianism, and two decades later in 1994, how his successor, President Jiang Zeming 江泽民 “praised the great man’s [Confucius’] contributions to Chinese society on the occasion of his 2,550th birthday.”

"It is reported that each July, when the national college entry examinations are held, Confucian temples are filled with parents asking Confucius to bless their children."

This revival of Confucianism continues to flourish and has shown no sign yet of subsiding.

A total of 800,000 teenagers have read the great Chinese classics, including the *Analects* of Confucius, across the country in the past two years, and the number of students to take part in the project of reading the Chinese classics, launched by China Youth Foundation, is expected to reach 3 million in the coming 10 years.

What did Chinese intellectuals contribute to the revival of Confucianism in the 1980s and 90s? The role of intellectuals in revitalizing Confucianism can be traced back to 1978 when the first symposium on the study of Confucianism was held at Shandong University, the home province of Confucius' birthplace (Wang Jing 1996, 68). During the heat of Culture Fever in 1984, The Chinese Foundation of Confucius was established in Qufu; the following year, The Chinese Research Institute on Confucius was founded in Beijing. Numerous conferences, meetings, symposiums, workshops, lecture sessions were held during the period of Culture Fever, focusing on Chinese culture and comparative studies of China and the West. The relationship between Confucianism and modernization was the frequent focus of these academic conferences.

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43 Ibid.
events. For example, "In April [1986], the Chinese Foundation of Confucius and the journal Kongzi yanjiu 孔子研究 [Studies of Confucius] held a joint meeting in Qufu, Confucius’ birthplace, to examine the relationship between socialism and Confucian traditionalism” (Wang Jing 1996, 51). New journals, magazines, books and dissertations on studies of Confucius and Confucianism mushroomed in China and still keep coming out in ever greater numbers. In typing “Kongzi 孔子” (Confucius) to browse online in the catalog of the National Library of China, I found twenty titles of books published between 1980 and 1984, 142 books and dissertations published between 1985 and 1989, 414 books and dissertations published between 1990 and 1999, and 160 already (including eight dissertations) between 2000 and 2003. I roughly counted that at least 80 percent of these books were published in Mainland China.

This ideological (re)construction of Chinese tradition in the context of modernization, turns out to be political again. The Party-state officially and unambivalently supported the revival of Confucianism both to resist foreign influence and “bourgeois spiritual pollution”. Intellectuals utilized Confucianism to resist rapid Westernization that might undermine indigenous Chinese culture and to oppose the Party’s totalitarianism. Ironically, collaboration between the Party-state and conservatism (or neo-Confucianism as critics say) was established for satisfying the purposes of both sides. The key is that neither side tried to distinguish the quintessence (jinghua 精华) from the dregs (zaopo 槽粕) of Confucianism. “...the neo-Confucianists did not adequately address the intriguing theoretical question of how

44 Ibid.
one can critique but at the same time inherit tradition” (Wang Jing 1996, 65). No
emphases or warnings were given to masses on the proper understanding of
Confucianism either in terms of the detrimental impact of its link with hierarchical
social organization or its viewpoint on gender. Consequently, women and peasants
became victims of this revival of Confucianism. I will discuss the status of Chinese
peasants under Confucian patriarchy in my case study of Mo Yan in Chapter Four.

Coupled with the revival of Confucianism in both mass culture and high
culture came the resurgence of Confucian patriarchy. Two points need to be clarified
here. First, although as its name suggests, Confucian patriarchy is a component of
Confucianism, the revival of Confucianism and the resurgence of Confucian patriarchy
did not appear in the 1980s and 90s in a cause-effect relationship. First the resurgence
of Confucian patriarchy in the 1980s and 90s was both a direct social response to the
phenomenon of yinsheng yangshuai (the yin waxes and yang wanes, or the feminine
rises and the masculine declines) and a product of economic reforms rather than a
direct result from the revitalization of Confucianism. Second, the revitalization of
Confucianism was primarily the result of a conscious effort made by Chinese
intellectual elite, while the resurgence of Confucian patriarchy consisted of
subconscious and conscious folk responses to changes in economy and gender
relations, as I mentioned in the Introduction. However, I am not suggesting that these
two levels of intellectual discourse and folk belief do not intersect. Popular culture,
folk belief and social practices always provide a reservoir from which intellectual
inspirations and products are generated. It is also true that any publicized intellectual
movement will exert influence on the mindset of commoners, either constructive or

destructive. This is particularly true in the Chinese context, as Chinese intellectuals have a tradition of viewing themselves as a special social group who bear the responsibility for the enlightenment of the people, and the people embrace the notion that "our scholars are developing the Confucian philosophical system so that it can play a bigger role in contemporary China."^46

The resurgence of patriarchal ideology and the practice of patriarchy in popular culture proceed unabated. Here I will present evidence on the resurgence of Confucian patriarchy in popular culture and social practice.

2.2.1 Discrimination against women in the job market

Mao’s Communist Party made big effort to free women from domesticity. The original motive of the CCP was to strengthen the productive work that was urgently needed for socialist construction after the CCP took over China in 1949. ^47 Encouraging women to work outside the home was made a significant and key step in women’s liberation. The state also initiated a series of measures to guarantee equal rights between the sexes and equal opportunity in employment and wages: first, to constitutionalize equal rights for women; second, to apply the principle *nannü tonggong tongchou* 男女同工同酬 (men and women enjoy equal pay for equal

^47 Out of seven quotations under the category of "women" in Mao’s quotations, six emphasize women’s role in the labor force.
work.) and third, to put into practice jihua jingji (a planned economy) rather than shichang jingji (a market economy). Under the protection of the planned economy, women's equal rights to employment and wages were guaranteed. The United Nations reports,

...with the help of the Constitution and legislation. Women entered into almost all walks of life and created one of the highest female employment rates in the world. Women accounted for 8% of the total work force in 1949, rising to 31% in 1978, and reaching 46% in 1995.  

However, thirty-years of achievement in employment, wages, and economic/social status for women was threatened by the tide of economic reform, even though women's employment rates kept rising. The first element that the market economy introduced into the economic system was competition. Women, particularly urban women, became the first social group to be marginalized by competition. During the 1980s and 90s, Chinese women continued to participate actively in social life and seek a greater achievements in their careers. At the same time, strong resistance arose against women's desire to achieve equality with men. This tendency drew public attention to the job market where women were in an unfavorable position. The United Nations reports, “Since the start of the economic reforms in 1978, however, women began to encounter increasing discrimination as the contradiction between gender equality, as provisioned by law, and the differential treatment in practice

49 "The state protects the rights and interests of women, applies the principle of equal pay for equal work for men and women alike and trains and selects cadres from among women.” (Article 48, Equal Rights for Women, The Constitution of the People’s Republic of China. [1982])

"Enable every woman who can work to take her place on the labor front, under the principle of equal pay for equal work. This should be done as quickly as possible.” (Mao Zedong 1966, 298)

became more prevalent.”51 “Women face more difficulties than men in gaining promotion as, for instance, they are obliged to retire at age of fifty-five, five years earlier than men.”52 Many employers set up a double standard for male and female employment. A survey in 1987 by the Women’s Department in the Federation of Trade Unions of China shows that the average aptitude score of employees recruited among seventy seven units in private businesses and state enterprises was 115 points for men and 127 points for women. Employers adopt a double standard: men compete with men and women compete with women. If the points of the top male applicant are much lower than those of the lowest female applicant, the male applicant would still get the job as the top male (Meng Xianfan 1995, 63).

Many female university graduates were rejected by employers who openly claimed that women caused more trouble than men because they would take maternity leave after they married. Some employers stated that their jobs required frequent business travel and that women were not as suitable for these jobs because they caused more trouble such as getting sick, menstruating and taking care of their children.

Statistics show that in 1987, 1419 employees in thirty seven enterprises in Jiangshu province were laid off, and seventy five percent were women; 3089 employees in thirty five enterprises in Heilongjiang province were laid off and 79.9 % were women; 1075 employees in seven enterprises in Guangxi province were laid off and 79.4 % were women (Meng Xianfan 1995, 49).

This tendency of discrimination against women is so ubiquitous that senior leaders of Fulian, the Women’s Federation, were critical of Deng Xiaoping’s reforms.

51 Ibid.
52 Ibid.
“They argued that one undesirable effect was the resurgence of feudal misogyny and its expression in outright official bias.” (Barlow 1994, 342)

Updated information shows that this trend of job discrimination against women continues up to the present. Some employers invent rules, regulations and restrictions especially imposed on women. For example, a bank in Nanjing City recently hired a female university graduate. As a condition of employment, she was required to sign a “huaiyun xieyi 怀孕协议” (An Agreement on Pregnancy), which prohibited her from getting pregnant for three years.53

2.2.2 A call to go back home.

Change in the employment market based on gender difference caused social concern about whether or not women should go back to the kitchen. A debate on this subject was even evident in academic circles. Both Dai Qing 戴晴 (a famous female journalist and writer) and Chang Leren 常乐人 called for women to go back home because that is the right place for women in a country whose productive level is still primitively low, and because that is the optimized distribution of manpower.54 Many female voices strongly opposed the call to go-home, including those in academic circles and among ordinary people. A survey of women conducted by the Journal of Chinese Women included the question, “Should women work or should they go home


54 Cited in Meng Xianfan, p.90-91.
to take care of children and do housework?” Eighty five percent responded “should work” and only ten percent chose the answer “go home” (Meng Xianfan 1995, 94). I know of no similar survey of male respondents, but personally I heard many conversations among male intellectuals pointing out the advantages of women going home. Li Xiaojiang found, “those who hope for a reversal are not women, but rather some Chinese men; most strangely, more than half of them are sensible male intellectuals” (1997, 125).

Tani Barlow examines the phenomenon of calling women to go back to the kitchen from the perspective of gender psychology. Women were put into an unfavorable position in the job market, but also benefited from new economic policies, which provided them unprecedented opportunities to give free rein to their talent and creativity. She observes that rapid change in gender roles and female personality after Deng Xiaoping’s economic reform policy was launched, made men feel panicky. “They reacted by seeking to force nüxing [females] back into the demeaning, emotionally laborious, traditional female role categories such as wife, housekeeper, and child care nurse.” (Barlow 1994, 350)

This call for women to go home was continuously heard in China until it was suppressed temporarily by the SARS epidemic in the spring of 2003. An insightful article by Xiong Lei says the nagging discussion on “letting women go home” that was heard ceaselessly in past years disappeared in the mainstream of the media during the SARS epidemic. Although there were no accurate statistics available, the author estimated that more than half of those who worked on the frontline of fighting

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55 Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome.
SARS and assumed heaviest burden of nursing patients were women. It is clear, without women, there would be no victory in the fight against SARS. Those who went home were men because they constitute the vast majority of those doing “business” in restaurants and attending “negotiation” banquets paid for by taxpayer’s money. Xiong Lei adds that men who advocated that women should voluntarily go home were quiet during the SARS epidemic. This voluntary principle created by men did not work at all during this life-and-death period of crisis. A woman working on the frontlines in a hospital who went home voluntarily would be labeled as a deserter and be penalized. Someone might say, this only applies to a specific time period. However, the author argues,

Our question is why women cannot go home when the nation experiences a crisis, but when calm is reestablished in the country, women should go home to make room for men’s employment. Any responsible and moral government cannot adopt this utilitarian attitude towards half of the labor force and manipulate women back and forth. Only good-for-nothing [men] sing women’s praises and call upon them to stand up to sacrifice during the crisis and chase them back home when the crisis passes (Xiong July 8, 2003).

2.2.3 The resurgence of “de facto” bigamy/polygamy/concubinage and prostitution

Article 2 of the 1950 Marriage Law stipulates that: “Bigamy and concubinage shall be prohibited.” However, how to define bigamy was left for the Chinese Criminal Law, and the relevant judicial interpretation of the Supreme People’s Court (Zuigao Renmin Fayuan 最高人民法院). There are two types of bigamy.
The first type of bigamy is where a married person undertakes a marriage registration with a third party, and the third party knowingly enters into the marriage. The other form of bigamy defined by the judicial interpretation, is where the parties live together as husband and wife without a marriage registration, but at least one of them is already legally married. Chinese legal experts normally call the former "de jure" bigamy, because one of the parties has two registered marriages. And the second kind of bigamy is called "de facto" bigamy because of the lack of marriage registration.

There were only a few "de jure" bigamy cases in Mainland China after the economic reform. Most cases of bigamy, even polygamy were "de facto" ones. Bigamy came back with the practice of "bao er nai 抱二奶 / 包二奶" (embracing/contracting to a second wife or a concubine), initiated by businessmen from Hong Kong. In the mid-1980s, economic and business related events/activities increased. Businessmen from Hong Kong visited Mainland China frequently and stayed there for a quite long time. Some took advantages of their business trips to visit prostitutes, but others who were already married cohabited in the Mainland with a third party in a husband and wife/concubine pattern. People call the Mainland third party "er nai 二奶" (second wife, or a concubine). Bao er nai has become a serious problem in big cities in China, particularly in Guangdong province, which has been in the forefront of the economic reform and the open-door policy. Some local men began to imitate Hong Kong businessmen. A folk expression sprang up, "If a man doesn't keep a concubine, he's not successful."

56 See Article 258 of the Chinese Criminal Law and an advisory opinion of the Supreme People's Court in 1994. The Supreme People's Court said that after 1 February 1994, if a married person or a person who knows the other party is married and lives together with a third party as husband and wife, they still commit bigamy. (Cited in Ninglan Xue's "Revision of the Chinese Marriage Law in 2001." http://www.humanrights.uio.no/forsknin/publ/wp/2002/01/working_paper-Key.html#Heading53, accessed on July 6, 2003)
Well, there are a lot of successful men in Guangdong. So successful, in fact, some men have acquired not only a second ‘wife,’ they even have a third or a fourth. And like the concubines of traditional China, she gets money, gifts and usually even a house to live in from her married lover. She often even bears him children.57

These men purchase an apartment and support their er nai by paying them a “yearly salary” of tens of even hundreds of thousands of yuan. They enjoy “creature comforts” of having both “a wife and a concubine” (A Ling 2002, 39).

The phenomenon of bao er nai presented problems for legislation on both sides. On the Mainland side, the legislators’ major concern is to curb the crimes and protect the rights of legal wives. However the types and cases of bao er nai are too complicated to define which type should belong to Civil Law and which to Criminal Law. On the Hong Kong side, legislators had a hard time determining the citizenship and rights of children produced by Hong Kong men and their Mainland wives/concubines.

Tan Weiping 譚卫平 wrote in his article, Wu Changzhen 吳昌禎, the head of a group of law-makers appointed to revise the Chinese Marriage Law, reported in 2001 that more than 60 % of all recent cases of corrupt officials were related to bao er nai and that 95 % of corrupt officials being investigated had qingfu 情婦 (mistresses). More and more cases are filed where officials started embezzling funds, and taking (demanding) bribery in order to support their mistresses. According to Wu, a survey shows that, of 200 cases of family violence, seventy percent involving facial mutilation and murder were caused by extra-marital relationships. “Er nai qu 二奶區”

(er nai neighborhoods) have appeared in some places in Guangdong, tremendously disrupting the stability of families and society (Tan 01/09/ 2001)

Prostitution, along with drugs, is one of the official evils in Chinese society. It was outlawed and firmly wiped out by the Chinese Communists after 1949. It re-emerged, along with drugs, openly in the new freewheeling market economy.

The United Nations reports that for rural Chinese women, “Limited employment opportunities and pressure to send money back home can lead to risky occupations such as prostitution, rates of which have increased dramatically over the last 20 years.”

A report in the July 12 issue of Beijing Evening News mentioned the fact that, in 1984, public security organs nationwide uncovered only 5,000 cases of prostitution and whoring, and investigated and prosecuted no more than 6,000 persons for such crimes. In 1999, however, nearly 220,000 such cases were uncovered, and as many as 450,000 persons were investigated and prosecuted, representing forty-four-fold and seventy-five-fold increases, respectively, as compared to 1984. This is a shocking rate of increase (A Ling 2002, 38-39).

Some young women working in offices chose to become the mistresses of wealthy businessmen and officials, rather than fighting it out in an increasingly discriminatory work place.” This is what people call the “xiaomi 小蜜” phenomenon. “Xiao” is “small” in Chinese and “mi” is the first syllable of “mishu 秘书” (secretary). It also refers to “honey” (“mi 蜜”, or “fengmi 蜂蜜”). Therefore, “xiaomi” is an affectionate term exclusively for females, meaning “small honey secretary”. If a

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woman is called “xiaomi”, it not only refers to her occupation, but most importantly also implies her mistress status to her boss.

2.2.4 Resurrection of patriarchy in popular culture

The resurgence of patriarchy in popular culture reached its peak at the beginning of the 1990s, in a popular TV soap opera, Kewang 渴望 (Yearning or Anticipation.). Kewang is a serial melodrama with 50 episodes aired in 1990. The heroine of the story Liu Huifang 刘慧芳, leads a miserable life and ends up with paralysis in bed. Liu is depicted in this drama as a bearer of the values of Confucian patriarchy imposed on women. She is always submissive, docile, loyal, and self-sacrificing for her lover. By any reasoning, she is a typical xianqi liangmu 贤妻良母 (a virtuous wife and a good mother), a symbol of high-level morality. When this TV drama was aired, Liu Huifang became a household favorite in Beijing overnight, and the drama soon created a Yearning craze nationwide. “People talked about Yearning everywhere—in the crowded commuter buses, on the streets, in the factories, offices, stores, and at family dinner tables” (Zha 1995, 27). “According to one report, the crew received such a spectacular welcome in Nanjing that the only other comparable turnout in the history of the city was when Chairman Mao first visited there decades ago” (Zha 1995, 27). Another excellent TV drama Weicheng 围城 (Fortress Besieged), which was aired at the same time, was adapted from Qian Zhongshu 钱钟书’s masterpiece novel with the same title—a truly intellectual piece of work. It was armed with a very strong crew of famous actors/actresses such as Chen Daoming 陈道明, Ying Ruocheng 英若诚, Ge You 葛优, Ying Da 英达 and Lü Liping 吕丽萍.
However, *Yearning* surpassed *Fortress Besieged* by a huge margin in audience ratings. The *Yearning* craze captured the attention of the high-ranking leaders of the Party. On January 8, 1991, Politburo member Li Ruihuan 李瑞环, who controlled ideology and propaganda after the 1989 Tian'anmen Square incident, met with the *Yearning* crew in a reception room inside Zhongnanhai 中南海, a big honor to the crew. “He congratulated the crew on its success and called it ‘a worthy model for our literary and artistic workers.’” (Zha 1995, 28)

This mass frenzy over *Yearning* generated debate in academic circles. Both *Chinese Women Gazette* (Zhongguo Funü Bao) and *Mass Movie* magazine (Dazhong Dianying大众电影) opened special columns to accommodate the debate. However, the supremacy of masculine voices almost drowned feminist voices. Most critics, same as in any other debates, focused on the implications for morality and ignored the gendered position of the debate. Again woman’s virtue was used as standard of morality. The director of the drama, Lu Xiaowei 鲁晓威 states, “Liu Huifang is not a strong woman, but we need Liu Huifang.” Tong Daoming 童道明 says, “We need a kind heart and tender feelings that are only embodied in extremely gentle and soft women.” Zha Jianying summarizes:

Male viewers said that they yearned for a wife like Huifang; female viewers said that she was like a lovely sister to them. Everybody said that *Yearning* had brought out the best in them and made them understand

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59 *Zhongnanhai* (Central and South Seas), immediately to the west of the Forbidden City, refers to the two large lakes in the compound. Since the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, *Zhongnanhai* has become the symbol of power because it has been home to the highest-ranking leaders of the CCP, including Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai and Liu Shaoqi. Offices of the Central Committee of the CCP, the State Council, the Central People’s Government and Military Commission of the Party Central Committee are also located in *Zhongnanhai*.

60 Cited in Meng Xianlan, p. 105.
better what is meant to be Chinese and how deeply rooted they all were in
the Chinese values of family and human relations—and how all of this
made them yearn for Yearning every night.” (1995, 27)

This obviously is an uncritical summary, as the author deliberately leaves out
intellectual female voices in the debate. Wang Xiaoshan 王小珊’s article, “Rang Liu
Huifang liu zai pingmu shang, hao bu hao?” (How about Leaving Liu Huifang on the
Screen?) criticizes Liu Huifang’s willingness to endure humiliation and accept false
blame. This kind of willingness can only encourage immorality and misconduct.61 Liu
Yangti 刘扬体 argues that the characterization of Liu Huifang is not the epitome of
morality, but instead, is the epitome of decayed “morality” because Liu Huifang lacks
a sense of self and fails to pursue a meaningful social role. She gives up her own will
out of consideration for the interests of others, meekly submitting herself to abuses and
bulling. She has no fighting spirit in her. She is capable only of sobbing. This is the
1990s’ version of Sancong Side 三从四德 (Three Submissions and Four Virtues).62

In “Nanquan wenhua yunyu chulai de Liu Huifang男权文化孕育出来的
刘慧芳” (“Liu Huifang—a Product made of Patriarchy”), critics Zhang Zhiying and
Wang Hong contend that the image of Liu Huifang is produced from the evil
intentions of men. Zhang sees men hanging Liu Huifang up firmly on the cross with
nails of beauty, decorum, kindness, endurance, virtue, and gentleness. Wang Hong
questions whether men are willing to do for women all that Liu Huifang did for men?
The answer is clear: No! But men still want women to do everything for them.63

Yearning was made by a group of male writers and a male director. It is the first work

in the past forty years to entirely reassert women’s roles and virtues as prescribed by Confucian patriarchy. “The effect was indeed shocking. So much so that the Women’s Federation publicly complained, ‘This television serial has pushed back the liberation of Chinese women by fifteen years.’” (Dai Jinhua 1999, 197)

While “de facto” polygamy was practiced by wealthy men in real life, it appeared frequently as a theme in TV dramas in what Sun Longji 孙隆基 called “the one-man and two-women” pattern (1995, 128). In these “one-man and two-women” stories, at-most only one of these women qualifies as an intellectual. In 2002, I viewed two TV dramas made in Mainland China. *Zhenqing Nanwang* 真情难忘 (True Love Forever), made by the Dalian TV station, is a love story between a fiction writer Tang Kaiyuan 汤开元 and two women — his ex-wife and his current wife. Tang’s ex-wife is a clerk in a family-planning office. She is kind-hearted, straightforward, a hard-worker and a good mother. But she was not a good wife mainly because she lacks education and thus the ability to distinguish literary life her husband fictionalized from real life. A young female poet wrote a love poem and sent it to her literary teacher Tang Kaiyuan for correction. Tang’s ex-wife believed that her husband had an affair with this young woman. Tang had no choice but to sign the documents of divorce initiated by his wife. The young poet then proposed a marriage with Tang and he accepted. Tang’s ex-wife experienced difficulty after the divorce because of her second daughter’s illness. In trying his best to help his ex-wife, Tang provoked his second wife’s jealousy and put his second marriage in jeopardy. Under heavy physical and psychological pressure, Tang became seriously ill. His ex-wife and his current

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wife made a truce to work together whole-heartedly to save his life. Although the story is touching, the inveterate theme of an innocent, superior, noble man served by self-sacrificing women is problematic. Legally Tang was living a monogamous life, but the last part of the drama shows a typical picture of “yiqi yiqie—一妻一妾” (one wife and one concubine).

Doushi Tianshi Rede Huo 都是天使惹的祸 (All Troubles are caused by Angels), made by the Beijing TV station, is a male-centered story of a young male doctor chased by a group of women. He is a handsome graduate from a well-known medicine university. Upon arriving to work at a hospital, he immediately became prey for young female hunters. The daughter of the president of the hospital, a Ph D holder returned from the United States, joined these hunters. The victor was a plain girl who loved the protagonist but showed the least zeal for courting him.

The majority of creators of TV dramas and other forms of popular culture are male intellectuals. The gendered position of these cultural producers is either intentional or their unconsciousness of male-centeredness is constantly at work. I will examine this issue below.

2.2.5 Ever-lasting image—women, yin and water

Popular sayings and idioms are a mirror reflecting an ever-lasting image of women in the mindset of men. The most popular and time-enduring folk saying known to every household is “Nüren shi huoshui 女人是祸水” (Women are sources of disasters), or “Hongyan huoshui 红颜祸水” (Pretty women are the cause of chaos and disasters). There is no evidence to show when this saying started. However the women
who are accused of being the cause of chaos and disasters have existed since the dawn of Chinese civilization. In his Confucianizing yin-yang dichotomy, Dong Zhongshu (179-104 B.C.) in the Han Dynasty (206 B.C. – 220 A.D.) unequivocally aligned the female with the cosmic force of yin and the male with yang, arbitrarily asserting, “yin is mean and evil” and “yang is noble and virtuous”. He clarified his assertion with examples: “Though a husband is low (in social status), he is still yang; though a wife is in the noble class, she is still yin.” He repeated, “All in the evil category is yin, and all in the good category is yang.”

*Nüren* in Chinese is “women”; *shi* means “is”; *huo* is “disaster”; and *shui* is “water”, which belongs to yin category and it flows down to lower places—symbolizing lower-being. Therefore, “Nüren shi huoshui” perfectly fits the Confucianized yin-yang concept where fire is yang and water is yin; men are yang and women are yin; men are above and women are below. This folk saying as a concept deeply rooted in the mindset of Chinese men and women. It does not need to be resurrected because it has always existed.

One of the examples reflecting this ever-lasting image of women recently came out from the Party-authorities in Sichuan Province. In order to keep corruption within limits, the General Office of the Sichuan Provincial Committee of the Communist Party stipulated regulations in two documents and promulgated them on July 15, 2003. One of these regulations was “a male leader is prohibited from having a female

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64 Dong Zhongshu: *Chunqiufanlu: Yangzun Yinbei* 春秋繁露: 阳尊阴卑. (Luxuriant Dew of the Spring and Autumn Annals: Yang is Noble and Yin is Abased.)

65 See Ren Zhengying 任正英, “Benmo daozhi de guiding 本末倒置的规定.” (A Prescript that put the cart before the horse). *Zhongguo Funu Bao*, July 16, 2003. These two documents are: (1) Interim Provisions on Reinforcing the Administration and Superintending of Staff Working around Leaders (Guanyu jiaqiang dui lingdao ganbu shenbian gongzuo renyuan guanli jiandu de zanxing guiding 关于
secretary.” This new promulgation immediately became controversial and was debated in articles published in many major newspapers, such as *People’s Daily*, *Guangming Daily*, and *Chinese Women’s Gazatte*. *People’s Daily* and *Guanming Daily* also opened columns for *wangyou* 网友 (internet friends) in their websites allowing them to voice their opinions. Some *wangyou* support this new prohibition as the efficient way to prevent male leaders from having affairs with their female secretaries by removing the source of the temptation. Other *wangyou* strongly oppose the prohibition believing that it is male-centered and places false blame on women. From this controversial prohibition we can see, on the one hand, how the phenomenon of keeping “de facto” mistresses is prevalent among the Party leaders, and on the other hand, how patriarchal subconsciousness is at work in fighting corruption. Ai Xiaoming 艾小明 criticizes the prohibition on hiring female secretaries as a manifestation of traditional sexism, “Women are sources of disasters.”66 One website debater observes, “Women are falsely blamed for more than two thousands years. When can women get rid of this notorious badge of ‘huoshui 祸水’?” *Guangming Daily* posted a survey question on its website, “Recently Sichuan Province promulgated a provision: ‘Male officials are prohibited from having female secretaries.’ Do you think this provision should be popularized in the whole country?” On July 31, 2003, the tally showed that 264 (42.31%) respondents said, “yes”, 279 (44.72%) said, “no”, and 81 (12.99) said, “Don’t know.”

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The Party-state and male intellectuals made no effort to retract the false blame on women as sources of disasters. Instead, they reinforced the ever-lasting image of women in the mindset of Chinese people.

2.3 Challenges to Masculinity and Responses of the Male Intellectual Elite

The theory of power and discourse developed by French philosopher Michel Foucault can help us understand the relationship of Chinese intellectuals to the Party-state and to women. Foucault believes that “power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with.” Instead, power is something “exercised” (1978, 93), is something forming “a complex interplay of elements that counterbalance and correct one another” (1985, 25). The power exercise in China during mid-1980s and mid-90s illustrates how the interplay of elements was made and counterbalanced in the two battlefields mentioned earlier and how the counterbalance was tilted and even broken.

Wang Jing points out, “Future historians will remember the 1980s in China as a period of utopian vision on the one hand and an era of emergent crises on the other” (1991, 1). One of these crises faced by Chinese intellectuals is the crisis of emasculation, or to put it another way: all of these crises converge into one psychological crisis—emasculaion. The issue of the emasculation crisis surfaced in a variety of ways through the 1990s, but central to this issue was the concern with and the quest for power and control. Chinese male intellectuals were obsessed with this crisis.\footnote{Kam Louie, 1991, p. 2 on the online version.}
concern because they understood that “Men cannot be men, only eunuchs, if they are not in control.” (Taylor 2000, 9)

In the struggle for power and control, Chinese male intellectuals were on two battlefields: one was the struggle with the Party-state and the other was the struggle with women. They failed on the first battlefield. The Party-state caused their emasculation a second time after their initial emasculation during the Cultural Revolution. The struggle for power on the second battlefield is still going on.

2.3.1 The power struggle with the Party-state

During the early 1980s, the political climate encouraged previously suppressed intellectuals to speak out. Intellectual discourse was filled with the indictment of the Cultural Revolution and critical introspection of what went wrong. Most intellectuals were still cautious, trying not to show their direct defiance against the Party. Having learned a lesson from their previous-painful encounters with the Party-state, they preferred “staying within legal limits in their activities and avoiding direct confrontation” (Chen & Jin 1997, 171). They protected themselves by claiming their Marxist-Maoist allegiance and expressing their patriotism. For example, Bai Hua’s film manuscript, Bitter Love (Kulian苦恋), echoed the feelings of his countrymen with a big question: “I love my motherland, but does my motherland love me?” The question conveys the intended message, but first, he must clearly claim, “I love my motherland” to justify his critical position. Zhang Xianliang’s ambitious nine-volume series was entitled: The Revelations of A Materialist (Weiwuzhuyi Zhe de Qishilu唯物主义者的启示录). In the preface of Mimosa (Lühuashu绿化树), the first work in this
series published in 1984, the author states his regret for having “indiscriminately absorbed feudal and bourgeois culture.” He characterizes the subject of the series as “a young Chinese from a bourgeois family, brought up on hazy notions of humanism and democracy, who after a long ‘ordeal’ finally becomes a Marxist.” (Zhang Xianliang 1985)

From the mid-1980s to the end of the 1980s, intellectuals shed their theoretical/ideological disguises and demonstrated their free thoughts and their true positions. This period (1984-1989) turns out to be the most divergent and most pluralistic in the past four decades in terms of freedom of speech. The primary factor contributing to it was the seeming first round victory of intellectuals over the Party. They had cautiously tested the Party and the response from the Party was the “purge spiritual pollution” campaign of 1983-84. Compared to the persecution of intellectuals in the 1957 anti-rightist campaign and the Cultural Revolution, this political campaign was perceived as mild and undamaging. Their interpretation (proven wrong in 1989) encouraged intellectuals to get rid of the yoke of Party control and openly bargain with the Party for an independence from the Party line. Liu Zaifu’s thesis on subjectivity in literature was based on the ontological nature of literature, or its inner system, implying a separation of literature from the external forces of politics. “His analysis of subjectivity in literature and human character brought him under heavy criticism from the authorities and he was placed under house arrest for several months in 1985” (Lee, 1996, 104-105). The struggle for power between the Party and intellectuals seeking their autonomy became intensified in 1987 as the Party launched the “anti-bourgeois liberalization” campaign. Intellectuals held their ground as Su Xiaokang’s TV
documentary — *Heshang* (the Yellow River Elegy) marked the peak of this period of free speech.

During this period, intellectuals “were manifest to themselves as a powerful collective agent of change, and this self-representation was affirmed through well-publicized projects, appointments at leading government sponsored think tanks, and favorable media attention.” (Davies 2001, 19)

The core of the struggle was for independence from Party control, or for the right to be ‘apolitical’, in Rey Chow’s terms (1993, 39). However, Chow argues, the aspiration to be ‘apolitical’ is nothing but an illusion.

As long as Chinese intellectuals harbor the illusion that what they do can be “apolitical,” the authoritarianism which throughout Chinese history has put intellectual work at the mercy of official political power will never be checked. In this light, even the undoubtedly ideological humanism in Fang [Lizhi]’s defense of the “independence of knowledge” is itself a form of political intervention, because it represents a major opposition against the officializing of knowledge that either makes it subservient to the state or reduces it to ineffective metaphysical inquiry of a “scholarly” nature. “Independence” as such is not an ontological autonomy but a freedom from political determination, and as such it is a radical challenge to the basic “legal” conditions that currently secure the stability of the Chinese state. (1993, 39)

I will provide more historical and philosophical evidence in Chapter Three that causes Chinese intellectuals unlikely to be “apolitical”.

The third period in the struggle between the Party-state and intellectuals is post 1989. The Tian’anmen Square demonstration was the largest and the final challenge of intellectuals to the party line. It was a risky and radical action that ended with failure. The Party took back all political power and ideological control, wasting no time in
steering the country in the direction of deepening economic reforms and commercialization. The result was that the Party disempowered intellectuals without bearing the mark of a persecution, as commercialization appears to follow an objective law independent of man’s will.

Wang Jing regards the decade of the 1980s as one during which the state and the intellectual elite tried to reconstruct their own utopian projects: a socialist utopia for the state and a utopian discourse of enlightenment for the intellectual elite (1996, 2). However, “the June Fourth crackdown accentuated the irreconcilability of the state utopian project with that of the intellectuals.” (ibid, 3) Therefore, this decade’s effort in promoting ideological/cultural pluralism, in struggling for power, and in pursuing ideological negotiations with the Party had an abortive closure. Defeated Chinese intellectuals, the majority of them males, were emasculated again in the sense that they were deprived of their elite role in the spotlight on the national stage. They reverted to a position of powerlessness.

Regarding the literary works discussed in the following three chapters, Zhang Xianliang’s *Half of Man is Woman* is the product of the first period, or to be more precise, it is a transitional product between the first and the second periods; Mo Yan’s *Red Sorghum* demonstrates the liberal spirit of the second period, and Jia Pingwa’s *Abandoned Capital* is the perfect signifier of the third period.

2.3.2 The power struggle with women

Defeated on the first battlefield by the state, male intellectuals were by no means powerless on the second battlefield with women. In fact, they were and still are
in a dominant position. This battle is not over yet, and perhaps can never be over. Powerless and anxious males sought to prove their manliness through affirmation from women. As a result, the relationship between the state, male intellectuals and women appeared as a construction of social class. The state with unchallengeable power was on the top, defeated male intellectuals were in the middle, and women were at the bottom still fighting for more space and “still fighting to be recognized as equals” (Larson 2002, 176). While the state emasculated the intellectuals, the resurgent folk practice of patriarchy and the revitalization of Confucianism reinforced male power over women. Male struggle for power over women in the social domain is manifested in various phenomena, such as men’s persistent indifference to women’s issues; men’s resistant interpretation of women’s liberation; men’s insistence on the division of labor based on gender, and male intellectuals’ openly voiced sexism.

a. Indifferent and gender-blind authors/critics

It is not so difficult to find chapters or sections dedicated to gender analysis in books written by Western historians, political scientists, anthropologists and literary critics in the past ten years. The discursive denial of gender equality in China during the 1980s up to the present is evident in the gender-blind perspective dominating almost all debates, discussions and publications that are not directly related to gender issues, and in the indifferent attitude of men toward the debates, discussions, and

68 The CCP showed its tolerance for the resurgence of patriarchy and revitalization of Confucianism for at least two reasons: first, after long political campaigns in China, the Party learned its lessons. If they leave no space for people, it would be difficult to raise the morale of the nation. Second, China experienced an ideological crisis and the Party was not able to create a new ideology that could substitute for Confucianism or communism. Following rulers of the past, the Party adopted a policy of control through mollification. The key boundary the Party seeks to maintain is that nobody is allowed to challenge the communist regime.
publications that explicitly focus on gender issues. I have examined a large number of reference books for this research. About half of these books are authored in the past decade either by Chinese scholars from Mainland China or by Western-educated Chinese. I hoped to find a book that does not directly focus on gender issues but contains gender consciousness. Unfortunately I found none. One example to illustrate my search is Zhuxi yu Zhongguo Wenhua (Zhuxi and Chinese Culture) authored by Cai Fanglu蔡方鹿. It was published by Guizhou Renmin Chubanshe (Guiyang) in 2000. It has often been argued that Zhuxi's neo-Confucianism exerted a significant influence on gender roles and gender relations and should be responsible for the oppression of women after the Song Dynasty. This book looks very ambitious as it contains 505 pages, twelve chapters and a bibliography, but not one of the twelve chapters, or even a single paragraph mentions Zhuxi’s sexist philosophy. This is not a surprising discovery because the absence of gender consciousness is too common to attract attention. Zha Jianying’s China Pop, which I quoted previously, was written in English and published in New York. Out of the seven chapters, one (Chapter Two) analyzes the TV drama Yearning. As discussed above, this popular drama revived patriarchy as a topic of discussion and debate in post-Mao popular culture. The author, instead of reflecting on a holistic picture of positive and negative feedback, selected male and female voices that support patriarchal bias, and all the responses reported in this book are one-sided.

Several literary critiques published during the 1980s and 90s are important to mention. In 1980, Shen Rong 谌容 published a short story, Ren dao Zhongnian 人到中年(At Middle Age). It questions the double role imposed on middle-aged female
intellectuals. The female protagonist Lu Wenting 陆文婷 became exhausted trying to fulfill her double role as a “virtuous wife and good mother” (xianqi liangmu) and a successful oculist. She fails and suffers a heart attack from over-work and harassment by a Marxist Old Lady. Male-centered critics interpreted the theme of this story as “the problem of middle-age intellectuals”, rather than “the difficulties of middle-age female intellectuals.”

After Zhang Xianling published Half of Man is Woman, which I will analyze in the following chapter, Ningxia People’s House compiled 44 critiques written between October 1985 and September 1986 into one book, On Half of Man is Woman 《男人的一半是女人》，published in 1987. Although the eye-catching title tells readers that this is the story about men and women, only two critics, Lu Rongchun 陆荣椿 and Zhu Yijun 朱毅君, show gender consciousness. A third article by Wei Junyi 韦君宜 merely expresses the author’s uncomfortable feelings when she read the story as a woman reader. There is no critical analysis from a gender perspective in this collection, and forty one of the forty four critics, regardless of whether or not they support or oppose Zhang’s characterization, are completely gender-blind.

Numerous collections of critiques were published about Feidu and Jia Pingwa. The one that sounds most academic is Feidu Daping 《废都》大评 (Grand Commentaries on The Abandoned Capital) edited by Fei Bingxun 费秉勋. It includes

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69 Also see Li Xiaojiang 1997, 95-96.
twenty two powerful articles from renowned contemporary critics, such as Lei Da 雷达, He Xilai 何西来, Wang Furen 王富仁, Ding Fan 丁帆, and Zeng Zhennan 曾镇南. Out of the twenty two articles, plus the postscript by the editor, only one by Zhang Zhizhong 张志忠 analyzes the novel from a gender perspective. This case is particularly unusual as Zhang Zhizhong is a male critic.\footnote{See Zhang Zhizhong 1998, pp. 61-82.}

Unconscious gender-blindness and indifference are derived from male superiority and arrogance, though the holders of these traits might not be well aware of them. Men are too used to andocentrism in all discourses to feel its existence. For men conscious indifference toward gender issues is a way to keep cool and thus maintain manliness. As the folk saying goes, “Hao nan bu he nu dou 好男不跟女斗.” (A good man never fights women.)

b. The controlling power of male intellectual elite over women’s liberation

In her Introduction to Gender and Sexuality, Lu Tonglini provides an insightful discussion on the phenomenon of “the persistence of salvation-thinking” within the new socialist discourse. “Women’s salvation has been an obsession with Chinese intellectuals since the turn of the twentieth century.” (Lu 1993a, 3) This obsession was carried on by the socialist revolutionaries and appeared overtly in the socialist-realism literature and art. She mentions two famous plays as examples. One is Tian Han’s The White-Haired Girl.\footnote{“The White-Haired Girl (Baimao Nü), a play written by a communist playwright, Tian Han, during the 1940s. A peasant girl, Xi’er, is raised by her widowed father, Yang Bailao, who works as a long-term hired hand for a rich landlord, Huang Shiren. Unable to pay the usury of his landlord, Yang is forced to commit suicide. After his death, Huang takes his daughter as payment for her father’s debt. Whether or not Xi’er has been raped by her father’s creditor has been an important issue in the}
symbolizes not only “the liberation of the labor class in the socialist revolution” (ibid, 4), but also “the salvation of the oppressed peasant woman by the Communist Party” (ibid, 3). However, she argues, “Salvation, be it Christian, socialist, or revolutionary, implies a hierarchy” because “Women, after being saved symbolically and glamorously, finally always return to the bottom rung of a new hierarchy, which is patriarchal in yet another way” (ibid, 3). Dai Jinhua gives another example where a CCP male member is the true savior and leader of Chinese women. In The Red Detachment of Women,73 “Hong Changqing provides the ransom to rescue the bondmaid Wu Qionghua from the dungeon; he subsequently instructs her to head for the Revolution, steering her each step of the way as she becomes a revolutionary heroine.” (Dai 2002, 113)

Two parties are needed to establish this new hierarchical “salvation theory”: one is the savior and the other is the saved. In Lu’s terms: “Who is the subject of, or the subject to, salvation?” (1993a, 6). From the above examples, we can see clearly subsequent adaptations of this play. Originally, she gives birth to a child and even has illusions about her future with the old landlord. When the play successively became a film, a ballet, and finally a film version of the revolutionary ballet during the Cultural Revolution (it was one of the only eight films to which one billion Chinese people had access during the decade of the Cultural Revolution), Xi’er is gradually turned into a brave rebel, who protects her virginity at the risk of her life. The rest of the story is less controversial than the heroine’s problematic virginity. She takes refuge on a mountain top and eats wild fruits in order to survive. For want of salt, her hair turns completely white. In the end, she is saved by her run-away lover, Dachun, who has by then become a communist soldier. All ends well. The evil landlord is righteously punished, and her revolutionary lover saves her through marriage.” (Lu 1993a, 19)

73 The Red Detachment of Women (Hongse niangzijun 红色娘子军), a film directed by Xie Jin in 1961, was adapted into a ballet and premiered in 1964. The story comes from the 1930s. Wu Qionghua 吴琼花 was a slave girl of Nanbatian 南霸天. Hong Changqing 洪常清, a rich businessman from Southern Asia in disguise and a true CCP member, visited Nanbatian and found Wu imprisoned in a dungeon. He paid the ransom and freed her. Finding no means to live, Wu decided to join the Red Detachment of Women. Unexpectedly, she found out that Hong is the political instructor and the only man in this women’s army. Under Hong’s leadership, Wu becomes a revolutionary heroine. Hong becomes a martyr at the end of the play.
that Communist men and oppressed women form these two parties. This theory implies questions: "Do Chinese male intellectuals accept 'salvation hypothesis' conceptualized from a feminist perspective?" "Do Chinese men openly claim that they are saviors of women?" Merely by consulting scholarly books/articles or attending conferences and meetings, one might not be able to find answers to these two questions. Here my personal experience and observations illustrate the existence and persistence of the salvation theory.

About a couple of years ago I had a dinner with two male anthropologists in a town in Oregon. At the dining table we talked about women’s status in China—a casual but academic conversation. One anthropologist, originally from Beijing, taught an anthropology class with a gender focus at an American university. He said that Chinese women’s liberation was different from that in the United States. “Chinese women did not make any effort but were given liberation by generous Chinese men. They gained a lot that used to belong to men. Men sacrificed a lot that now goes to women, but women are still not satisfied. They are abusing the rights to them given by men.” This statement confirms that Lu’s summary is on solid ground: “Women’s emancipation is a gift imposed by the Communist Party, which used this gesture as a marker of its progressive stance” (Lu 1993a, 7). My interlocutor equates Chinese men to the Communist Party for the reason mentioned above as he needs to oscillate (or

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74 Lu equates men to women in the sense that both sexes had to become obedient instruments of the party who set up the new hierarchy (1993a, 8). Here I equate Chinese male intellectuals to the party who saved oppressed women. These two approaches are not contradictory. In Foucault’s sense, power is established from innumerable exercises. Lu’s emphasis is on the outcome of the power exercise on the first battlefield, whereas I focus on the process of the going-on power exercise—the ideological preference of men who are on the second battlefield fighting women. Fighting on two battlefields, Chinese intellectual men constantly reposition themselves within the context containing three parties: the Party-state, men and women, and oscillate to the Party side or to women’s side based on the circumstances. I will discuss more thoroughly on this topic in the conclusion of Chapter VI.
reposition) to the Party line to deal with women. His argument, however, fails to consider two points of logic: (1) If women were given rights by men, then who gave men so many privileges? (2) Men enjoyed these privileges for more than 2000 years. Why can they not tolerate women enjoying their basic rights for twenty years?

My reason for using my personal experience in discussing this scholarly topic is that Chinese male intellectuals do not print out their overtly androcentric statements in their publications or voice them in conferences. A frank viewpoint like this and its implications can more easily be heard in casual conversations. I have plenty of evidence from real life to prove the existence and persistence of this sort of male understanding of women’s liberation.

I would like to use my male interlocutor’s frank talk as a key to understanding contemporary Chinese male intellectuals and to continuing the exploration within this salvation framework. Why are they reluctant to carry on the legacy of male writers of the May Fourth Movement to help Chinese women advance toward liberation, while being content to reposition them into another hierarchical social structure? They believe that Chinese women have already obtained more than they deserve; that Chinese men, compared to men in other societies, have already contributed greatly to women’s liberation; that Chinese women should not be continuously spoiled to the point where they show the tendency to prevail over men, and most importantly, that they perceive the real power holders of Chinese women’s liberation within this salvation discourse to be the male intellectual elite, the male cream of crop who are the

75 Nowadays, the development of internet has provided more channels for people to voice/exchange their opinions. These online forums are less academic and less scholarly. However, one can hear true voices from these forums as we do from casual conversations. Recently, as the internet debates on
leaders of women’s liberation. If they can generously grant freedom, rights and equality to women, they can take them back by rolling back gender roles according to the prescription of Confucian hierarchy. I have to remind readers again that I am not saying all Chinese male intellectuals hold such opinions, but they are not rare. Their perspective is coded in phrases heard in casual conversations, for example, “Shikeerzhi 适可而止” (Stop before going too far, or don’t overdo it), “Buyao tai tan 不要太贪” (Don’t be too greedy), “Buyao qizai nanren toushang 不要骑在男人头上” (Don’t ride on man’s neck; don’t prevail over men). These are phrases my male intellectual friends and professors frequently used in their casual talk about women’s issues.

c. Rectification of women’s liberation by male elite.

Since they believe that controlling power of women’s liberation rests in the hands of men, male intellectual elite can show their sense of responsibility by rectifying any wayward tendency in women’s liberation. My research reveals that male intellectuals carried out their rectification by (1) insisting on the division of labor by gender, (2) sexual reductionism and (3) reifying models for women as prescribed by Confucian patriarchy.

To highlight the problem, Li Xiaojiang uses an elite man’s question as the title of the introduction to her book, “Have you gone in the wrong direction?” In the book Li Xiaojiang tells how she checked into a four-star hotel in Sanya City, Hainan changes in gender relationship in Mainland China have escalated, similar viewpoints to those of male intellectuals are voiced often.

76 For the overall viewpoint of Chinese male intellectuals on gender, women’s role and women’s liberation, see Peng Guoliang’s (ed.) two books: Yibaige nanren tan niren 一百个男人谈女人 (One Hundred Men Talk about Women), Changsha: Hunan renmin chubanshe, 1994; Yibeige nanren tan
province. Recognizing Li Xiaojing as a prominent scholar on women studies, the General Manager of the hotel could not wait to ask a question that had bothered him for a long time. Before they sat comfortably, he asked, “Have you gone in the wrong direction?” “I mean you women. I am wondering if Chinese women’s liberation sets foot on the wrong path.” Li observes, “He believes that Chinese women’s liberation ‘had gone too far.’” For him, the consequence of this “overdone” liberation is that “women are not like women and men are not like men—he said that his opinion represents that of many men. It is based on love from ‘real men’ who sympathize with women” (Li Xiaojing 1997, 1). (I will inform readers here that Jia Pingwa voiced exactly same opinion as the General Manager of the hotel. I will discuss Jia Pingwa in Chapter Five.) The General Manager concluded that women should go home, the right place for them, because a warm family is not only good for family members, but also for cultivating a real woman who is mild, kind and virtuous (Li Xiaojing 1997, 1-2).

Liu Zaifu might be the best spokesman on woman’s liberation for male power holders who use discursive power to rectify women’s wrong direction. Liu is a prominent literary theorist in China. In his article, “Jiefang’ de Kunhuo ‘解放’ 的困惑” (The Perplexity of “Liberation”), he problematizes what he called “the paradox” (beilun 悖论) of the women’s liberation and justifies the resurgence of Confucian patriarchy (in his terms, “conservatism”) with his theory on the balance between individual choice and limited social and natural space. He argues that the paradox of the women’s liberation derives from women’s higher social status and the glorification

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of women, which has multiplied psychological pressure in women’s minds. In addition, competition in society has become more intensified due to the rapid development of science and technology. Resurgent conservatism opposes the notion that more pressure imposed on women’s minds is a good thing. Liu believes that calling attention to the paradox of women’s liberation should not be treated as “reactionary”. He claims that he is perplexed with (actually highly thinks of) the Japanese solution to intensified competition and increased psychological pressure on women.

... many [Japanese] companies adopt the policies of lifetime employment and seniority. The management of a company bears many marks of running a family. All Japanese women, including intellectuals, stay at home. It seems as if society does not welcome these capable and sensible women and does not give full rein to their potential. Probably Japanese society possesses a magical power to find balance, which guides the designers of modern civilization in Japan not to allow women to participate excessively in the competitive world of men. Our limited social and natural space does not need that many capable and intelligent organisms. Japanese society has created such an existential pattern for women. Does it mean suppressing talent on purpose, or is it a result of a natural coordination between the individual choice and the space for a social development? I have been perplexed by this question (1991, 136).

This is a misreading of trends in Japan where young women are entering the workforce and are reluctant to marry and bear children. Liu questions which criterion we should adopt for judging women’s liberation. Should women pursue greatness and wage a desperate struggle as men do, or should they be satisfied with ordinariness and enjoy feminine happiness? Which is the way of women’s liberation? His opinion is that we should totally respect women’s choices. If women choose to stay at home to take care of their husbands and children, to do housework, and read books, we should

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77 During the 1980s, Liu Zaifu was Director of the Literature Research Unit of the Academy of Social
respect their choice and not regard them as good-for-nothing. If some women choose to go out into society, to struggle, to compete with men and to show their strong masculine dispositions, we should respect their choice too (Liu Zaifu 1991, 137).

Liu’s perspective sounds very logical, understanding, and supportive of women’s liberation. However, his view is typical of men’s condescending attitude toward women. In his mind, the traditional notion of domains based on gender and the division of labor by gender is at work. He takes for granted that the balance between individual choice and limited social and natural space is a women’s issue; he takes for granted that the choice between work outside and staying at home is a women’s issue. In other words, struggle and competition in society is a men’s domain. If a woman wants to work outside the family, men would condescendingly say, “Welcome to join US. Welcome to come into OUR domain”. He takes for granted that to go home is women’s choice but not men’s choice. The subtext is clear: housework is a women’s domain. Li Xiaojiang raises the critical question, “For men, ‘employment’ is something taken for granted. ‘Unemployment’ is a problem. On the contrary, for women, employment has become a ‘problem’—whose theory is this?” (1997, 125).

Wendy Larson also points out:

In term of social practice, it is difficult to ignore that a man could unquestionably engage in a wide range of non-kin and nonfamilial activities, while a woman who tried to do likewise would be criticized, barred, or symbolically enveloped within a debate about the propriety of her behavior.” (1998, 37)
As for sexual reductionism, some male critics of Jia Pingwa take for granted that men represent the mainstream of humanity and that women's quest for equality is questionable because men and women are fundamentally different. In a discussion on Mother's Day between Jia Pingwa and his critics, Sun Jianxi 孙见喜, Jia's biographer and spokesman, states:

Just as Jia Pingwa said in his essay On Women, today's society is male-centered. If you don't acknowledge this social reality, and don't acknowledge the differences between women and men in their physical strength, energy and intelligence, you would possess no universal significance. Some women are successful in their careers, such as Margaret Thatcher, Song Qingling, and even some female writers in China. However, their success has no instructive significance to ordinary working class women. What proportion of the whole female population are successful women? One out of ten thousand? Or one out of a hundred million? Therefore, this quest [for equality with men] is biased and unrealistic. We should discuss the happiness and the values of life that most working class women pursue on the coordinate axis of those women themselves.

To keep their lives peaceful and their love sustainable, ordinary women should find a way to get along with their husbands harmoniously and try to pass through periods of conflict as quickly as possible (Hua, Qing: 1993, 53).

The experience of male creators of the TV drama, Yearning, in mapping out its plot is the best example of how male elite reified Confucian patriarchy and turned a popular form of entertainment into a vivid modern text book of Admonitions for Women79, and Women's Analects80. The cast of schemers consisted of five men.81

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78 Also see the example of and analysis on sexual reductionism presented by Lu Tonglin (1993a, 8-9).
79 "The Women's Admonitions was a textbook written by the Eastern Han female historiographer and educationalist Ban Zhao for the instruction of her daughters. The entire book has seven chapters: "Humble Yielding," "Husband and Wife," "Reverent Submission," "The Actions of a Woman,"..."
They decided, for example, that their show must be about the family and moral values with which the majority of its audience could identify. They also decided that the central character must be a virtuous, filial woman, who would appeal to the sentiments of the elderly, a considerable portion of TV's regular audience in China—and they wanted her to be a woman in the prime of her beauty, with qualities that would fulfill the desires of all Chinese men. (Zha Jianying 1995, 38)

In this case the conscious effort of male elite intellectuals is evident in controlling ideological reconstruction by controlling discourse.

d. Openly articulated sexism

Li Xiaojiang states, “In today’s society, there are few men opposing ‘equality between men and women’ openly” (1997, 4). Generally speaking, this statement is true. However, coupled with the resurgence of patriarchy in mass practice, some male intellectuals openly voice their sexist attitudes towards women. Sun Longji observers,


The Women's Analects was written by the Tang [618 - 907] dynasty female scholar Song Ruoxin for the main purpose of instructing her daughter how to become a 'wise and worthy woman.' Its form imitated the Analects, with the pre-Qin female classics scholar Xuan Wenjun replacing Confucius, and Cao Dajia (that is, Ban Zhao) replacing the disciples, exchanging questions and answers to expound the feudal standards for the proper behavior of women, in particular proposing many concrete norms of behavior. Her younger sister Ruozhao made an exposition of Song Ruoxin's work. The Women's Analects that is presently preserved bears the attribution 'written by Cao Dajia' and has twelve sections in all: 'Establishing Oneself,' 'Study and Action,' 'Study and Ritual,' 'Early Rising,' 'Serving Father and Mother,' 'Serving Uncles and Aunts,' 'Serving the Husband,' 'Training Sons and Daughters,' 'Managing the House,' 'Waiting on Guests,' 'Yielding in Harmony,' and 'Being Faithful to the Dead.' The sentences are all four-word rhymed texts, not cast in question-and-answer form. It does not appear that this is the original work of Song Ruoxin, and it may perhaps be Song Ruozhao's expository text." (ibid.)

The famous novelists Zheng Wanlong and Wang Shuo, script editor Li Xiaoming, the deputy director at the Beijing Television Art Center, Zheng Xiaolong, and the head of the Beijing Broadcasting Enterprise Bureau, Chen Changben.
More than once I have heard Chinese high-ranking intellectuals quoting an aphorism from the hero of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, Liu Bei: “For men, women are just a cloth. You can change or take it off at any time.” Sometimes, they even speak these brave words in the presence of their wives. Today in the United States, such a talk may lead to a divorce. However in China, it seems both sides of a couple perceive that “a big husband” should be this way (Sun Longji 1995, 35).

A male literary critic openly proclaims that men are higher beings who “have a higher life goal.” He implies that women are no more than biological beings and declares, “‘men’ must transcend ‘women’, because ‘men’ are not merely equivalent to biological human skin” (Shi 1987, 312). The implication of this statement is obvious in that it equates women to animals who have only biological significance. The same critic uses “nanren 男人” (male), “nüren 女人” (female) and “ren 人” (neutral term for “human being”) several times in the same article. Whenever he talks about “ren de jiazhi 人的价值” (the value of a human being), or “ren de zunyan 人的尊严” (the dignity of a human being), he really means “the value of man” and “the dignity of man”, even though he is using the unmarked term, “ren 人”. He takes it for granted that women should be excluded from this unmarked category of “human being”. His discussion of Zhang Xianliang’s humanness occurs in the context of the polarization of men and women as human beings versus animals. Let us examine the following statement by Shi Tianhe 石天河,

...Under this circumstance, you, Zhang Yonglin, are still infatuated with having food, drinks and women, the lower-level life of a farm-worker. You are heartless. Are you counted as a ren [a human being]? [You are a] Beast! (Shi 1987, 311)
Here man, as represented by the male protagonist Zhang Yonglin 章永璘, symbolizes a whole human being, while woman, as represented by female protagonist Huang Xiangjiu 黄香久, is equated to food and animals. Shi Tianhe feels no guilt at all when he degrades half of humanity to the level of animals. If polarization of this sort is accepted as the major premise of the discussion on humanness, then Shi Tianhe's bias makes sense: “man must transcend woman” because transcending women means transcending one’s animal’s nature to become human.

2.4 Summary

In the Chinese context power is the key to the construction of masculinity. As Kam Louie points out,

Just as sexual dominance can be transferred into the political realm, political and economic power can also be perceived as sexual prowess. When powerful men such as Henry Kissinger observe that power is an aphrodisiac, they are merely reinforcing an ideology perpetrated by those with political and economic might (2002, 95).

During the 1980s and 1990s, power struggles between Chinese intellectual elite and the Party-state and between male intellectuals and women occurred within a hierarchical structure of class and gender. Having disempowered intellectuals, the Party-state remained standing on the top of the hierarchy. Intellectuals who struggled hard to shed the yoke of state control remained in the middle and women who had least ideological and discursive resources to use in their struggle remain at the bottom.

The paradigm was of the masculine state versus feminine intellectuals; masculine
intellectuals versus feminine women (and masculine urbanite versus feminine peasants [I will discuss this paradigm in my case analysis on Mo Yan's *Red Sorghum*]). Power relationships are analogous in the two parallel relationships between the state and intellectuals and between male intellectuals and women. In the first relationship, the state is the power holder and intellectuals are controlled; in the second relationship, male intellectuals are power holders and women are controlled. The state once practiced a policy of control over intellectuals through political relaxation; male intellectuals once generously granted freedom, rights and equality to women and condescendingly accepted women into male's domains. The state felt that intellectuals had strayed too far from its prescribed direction and that there was a tendency for them to be out of control of the state; male intellectuals felt that women liberation had strayed too far from the "right" direction and that there was a tendency for women to reject the paradigm of femininity preferred by men. The state disempowered intellectuals by launching the country on a path of economic reforms and commercialization; male intellectuals then tried to disempower women by rolling back gender roles and division of labor by gender according to Confucian hierarchy. The state controls the media to maintain its power; male intellectuals control discourses on gender to maintain the supremacy of male subjectivity. The state relies on military force to crack down on rebellious intellectuals; male intellectuals rely on the force of mass communication in popular culture to resurrect Confucian patriarchy and suppress presumptuous women. While male intellectuals single-mindedly resisted and rebelled against the hegemonic control of the state, they were not aware that what they did to women was the same as what the state did to them.
Although economic reform and commercialism threatened women's established social status and toughened their lives, it simultaneously provided opportunities for women to explore new spheres where they would play more significant roles in social and economic life. Many urban “nuqiangren 女强人” (strong women) assumed the leading roles in companies and enterprises, and many “dagongmei 打工妹” (rural migrant female workers in cities) established new lives in cities. However, disempowered intellectuals have not yet taken back their central position in society. From the interactions, negotiations and struggles within the hierarchical social structure of the state, intellectuals and women, we can see that the masculine structure of the state is the real power holder. When male intellectuals held certain power (granted by the state), they felt they were spokesmen for the country, thus a masculine elite; when they were disempowered, they felt emasculated. They experienced pressures from both sides — top and bottom — seriously trying to resolve a crisis in their losing masculinity by embracing Confucian patriarchy and rolling back gender relations and gender roles. Can they resolve their crisis of emasculation by resurrecting Confucian patriarchy? Can they release psychological pressures caused by their emasculation complex? Or will they proceed only to bring more agony upon themselves? My studies of three male writers will provide a clear and decisive answer.

Through my examination of three representative works and of the social/cultural context in which these works were created, I have found that Chinese male writers habitually embrace certain elements to reclaim their lost masculinity. No matter what kind of ideology they espouse to, these elements frequently appear in their novels and thus become indispensable building blocks (or constancies) of a stable
paradigm. The more research, the clearer is this stable structure gradually emerging to the surface. I will frame the remainder of this dissertation here with this stable paradigm which contains four constancies: (1) Power is the key attribute in defining Chinese masculinity. (2) Hierarchy is the structure within which ideal masculinity is constructed and consolidated; (3) the state (including politics, nationalism, and patriotism), male intellectuals and women are three indispensable, intertwined dimensions within which male intellectuals maneuver to bargain for their masculinity; and (4) the philosophical/ideological past is the inexhaustible source of inspiration and justification for restoring lost masculinity. The key element that links these four constancies is the sense of position that forms an obsession for Chinese intellectuals. In asking two fundamental questions, “Where am I?” and “Who am I?”, Chinese intellectuals, more often than not, address the “where” question first when they are in an uncertain social environment. They must find out “Where I am” in order to define “Who I am.” How does this obsession with position link the four constancies: power, hierarchy, three dimensions and past? (1) A position reveals if a person (or a social group) occupying this position is powerful or not; (2) A meaningful position must be a part of a vertical (hierarchical) structure, rather than a location within a horizontal layout; (3) Without knowing “where I am”, one cannot maneuver in the context containing three parties: the Party-state, male intellectuals and women. One would not know what attitude to take and what behavior would be correct; and (4) A position must be justified and thus backed up by a canonically or traditionally accepted ideology. After establishing “Where I am”, the Self and Others are repositioned in a hierarchical social structure to reconstruct “Who I am” and “Who they are”, especially
in terms of ideal masculinity. Among those Others, almost no exception in all three
novels, women are "(re)positioned" as gatekeepers in a horizontal zone, no higher, no
lower, that divides two fundamentally different worlds of men. Keeping in mind this
sense of position/reposition and the four constancies, readers can understand the
similar masculine structures of the three novels, which will be discussed in the
conclusion in Chapter VI.

The discourse on manhood in China is new, but the paradigms of the three
authors containing four constancies for constructing manhood are not new; they
emerged from China's history and tradition. Within this ideological/cultural context
and focusing on these constancies, I will examine three fictional works by Zhang
Xianliang, Mo Yan and Jia Pingwa.
Chapter III  Zhang Xiangliang and *Half of Man is Woman*

Any discussion of Chinese masculinity in the 1980s must include Zhang Xianliang 张贤亮, best known to Western readers for his *Half of Man Is Woman* 男人的—一半是女人 (hereafter *Half of Man*). Zhang is one of the most popular and controversial writers in the Post-Mao China. His popularity and the surrounding controversy are associated with the fact that he was the first writer in post-Mao era to stir up nationwide sensationalism through his explicit writing on sex, sexuality and impotency, which was then a forbidden topic in China.

Zhang was born in 1936 in Nanjing into a middle-class family. His father was a Kuomintang official and industrialist who managed a number of large enterprises. Because he wrote a poem that the Communist Party considered politically improper, Zhang, at the age of twenty one, was labeled as Rightist and sent to a labor camp in northwestern China. For the next twenty-two years, he was sent in and out of prisons, labor-reform camps and state farms, doing hard labor under supervision. In 1979, under the Communist Party’s new policy of rehabilitating wrongly labeled Rightists, he was released from a labor-reform camp and started a new episode of his life as a full-time writer (Li Jun 1991, 327-332). He was arrested again in 1993 and sentenced to three years of “re-education through labor” for his attempt to commemorate the Chinese army crackdown that crushed the 1989 Tiananmen protest. He was released on June 1996.

He began to write fiction in 1979, the same year Scar Literature began to flourish. His fictional works “are chiefly autobiographical, based on his twenty years banishment to the countryside in northeast China, after having been labeled a Rightist” (Li Jun 1991,
327). He joined Cong Weixi to become a leading writer of Daqiang wenxue (Towering Wall Literature), a genre of Scar Literature exposing life in the Chinese gulag, indicting ultraleftist oppression during the Cultural Revolution. Before Half of Man, one of his autobiographical novels, published in 1985, Zhang had already attracted public attention by his novels, such as Ling yu Rou (Body and Soul, 1981), Tulao Qinghua (Passionate Words from a Village Gulag, 1981) and Lühuashu (Mimosa, 1984).

*Half of Man* is the second in Zhang’s ambitious nine-volume series entitled: The Revelations of A Materialist (*Weiwuzhuyi zhe de qishilu* 唯物主义者的启示录). *Mimosa*, the first novel in this series, tells of Zhang Yonglin’s (the protagonist) experiences of starvation and a love affair with a countrywoman named Ma Yinghua (Mimosa) in 1961. The story of *Half of Man* is narrated by the same semi-autobiographical persona, Zhang Yonglin. Here, a brief reminder of the principal events of the novel lays the groundwork for my analysis.

The story of *Half of Man* takes place five years after Zhang left Mimosa and describes another episode of his life—he marries and finally divorces the passionate Huang Xiangjiu 黄香久, a peasant woman. Zhang Yonglin’s first encounter with Huang Xiangjiu, an inmate charged with a “crime” related to extramarital sex, takes place in a labor reform camp in 1966, on the Eve of the Cultural Revolution. Due to his tragic fate of being sent in and out of labor reform camps and prisons for most of his adult life, Zhang Yonglin, then age 31, had never had first-hand experience with women. His first encounter with Huang Xiangjiu is a dumfounding, dreamlike scene—she is naked, bathing in a secluded irrigation canal. Eight years later he met Huang Xiangjiu again on a
state farm during the peak of the Cultural Revolution. Zhang courts and later marries her. Immediately after their marriage, Zhang is in panic because he finds out that he is impotent. Huang, unable to live a normal life as a wife, becomes increasingly frustrated and commits adultery with Cao Xueyi, the Party Secretary of the state farm. In fighting a flood that threatens to inundate the whole village and the state farm, Zhang, the only person able to swim, jumps into the water to plug a hole in the bank—a crucial act that stops the flood. When Zhang goes home, his body damp and frozen, his wife tries hard to help him avoid getting sick. She intensively massages his body all over and buries his freezing face between her breasts. Her magical touch eventually revives Zhang’s potency. At the age of thirty nine, he becomes “a real man” and for the first time is able to fulfill his obligations to his wife as a husband. While passionate Huang Xiangjiu is still immersed in happiness for being with a real man she herself has created, Zhang decides to divorce her both because of her secret liaisons with Cao and because of his own ambition to participate in political struggles in the outside world.

In the preface of *Half of Man*, the narrator confesses and seeks to atone for his behavior of *shi luan zhong qi* (initiating an abnormal relationship with a woman and later abandoning her). *Shi luan zhong qi* is a recurrent motif of traditional Chinese literature constantly criticized by moralists. As a result of *Half of Man*, Zhang was acknowledged to be among the most controversial writers in China, exalted by some as a spokesman for liberalization and condemned by others, both as an immoral hypocrite who abandons his loving wife after using her for his own selfish purposes and as a pornographer due to the eroticism in his novel.
Many critics agree that this novel on a superficial level deals with the subject of sex and sexuality. On a deeper level, it is a political novel, not only because of the author’s subversive motives and guts, but also because of the text he constructs. Zhang Xianliang is one of the writers in the early 1980s who rebelled against totalitarian restrictions on literature and the first to break the forbidden zone in literature by openly addressing sex and sexuality and boldly intertwining sex with politics. He offended readers and Party-state authorities with his explicit and detailed description of sexual intercourse, which is considered by many critics as intended merely for gratifying the vulgar taste of the reader. However, many critics both at home and abroad celebrated his rebellion. Marsha L. Wagner states: “Though the passages describing sex will not shock a Western reader, they were very significant in the history of serious contemporary Chinese literature for breaking a long-established taboo” (1990, 138). There is no doubt that Zhang Xiangliang is one of the pioneers who brought sex and sexuality into Chinese serious literature and legitimized it as a serious literary subject. *Half of Man*, among works by other writers, became one of the transitional works expressing the core value of Scar Literature in the first period of the 1980s, and heralding the second period of flourishing thought emancipation in intellectual discourse.

In *Half of Man*, the narrative blames political oppression under the Communist regime not only for physical brutality, but also and most importantly, for psychologically castrating Chinese intellectuals, and thus entirely depriving them of their creativity. The interweaving of politics and sex centers more on the author’s thematic concern with politics than on sex and sexuality. In other words, the indictment of political persecution,

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and later compliance with women’s oppression, is carried forward by the vehicle of sex, particularly the dysfunctional sex of the impotent protagonist, in a mixture of metaphors, symbols, and frequent crude descriptions. My major concern in this article is about men’s issues, or to be more exact, how the issues of emasculation and gender relations are intertwined and presented in the narrative. In this section, I will examine this political novel from the following three correlated points: (1) the source of emasculation identified by the narrative; (2) the ideological framework from which the author’s ideal concept of masculinity is reconstructed; and (3) how this framework establishes the protagonist’s gendered position and affect his views and feelings toward women; and thus how the narrative programs women’s roles into the restoration of masculinity for the protagonist.

3.1 Emasculation and Politics

Dehumanization in Chinese politics is a recurrent theme in Zhang Xiangliang’s fiction. In his Mimosa, the narrative vividly depicts how the oppressive political system deprives people of the very basic human need for food. Half of Man again vividly illustrates how the vicious power of the political system relentlessly deprives people of very basic sexual needs. However, in this work sex and sexuality cannot be understood as mere physical needs of human beings. An allegorical reading is crucial to understand the implications of the narrative because it is full of metaphors, symbols and allegories. Dehumanization resulting from political oppression is exposed layer by layer in the following dimensions: men have been deprived of sex; women have been desexualized;
intellectuals have been mentally castrated and in turn their creativity has been destroyed, and consequently, the whole country has turned into a big jail.

3.1.1 Deprivation of men’s sex

One of the characteristics of gulag life is deprivation of the basic needs of human beings. The reality illuminated in Mimosa is that there never is enough food to eat, and in Half of Man it is that there is no provision made for inmates’ sexual needs. Everything in the immediate environment apparently works to reduce the humanity of prisoners to the two most basic animals instincts—“food” and “sex.” In Half of Man the deprivation of sex causes constant sexual anxieties in the prisoners. They have to exhaust every possible means to gratify or partially gratify their sexual urges. Set in a prison, the first part of the narrative vividly depicts the prisoners’ hunger for sex. The prisoners have no access to any kind of real women; no matter whether they are good or bad, young or old, pretty or ugly. The whole camp is a world of men.

They have no sexual access to men either. The narrative does not describe any homosexual activities in this world of men as readers might expect, nor does it mention masturbation. Compared to sex/sexuality which was “associated with sin for such a long time” (Foucault 1978, 9), masturbation and homosexuality were even more taboo topics in China. Masturbation was criticized as immoral behavior. The Chinese word for “masturbation” is “shou-yin 手淫”. “Shou” refers to “hand” while “yin” is the word “traditionally used to mean things or behavior of a sexual nature as decadent, sinful, and even dirty” (Zhong Xueping 2000, 54). Those who had a sense of integrity should not masturbate at all. All text books for youngsters by doctors or health specialists
emphasized that masturbation was not only immoral and sinful, but also harmful to one’s health. This example illustrates Foucaudian theory: discourse is power. “A policing of sex: that is...the necessity of regulating sex through useful and public discourses.” (Foucault 1978, 25)

Taking a historical perspective and making a comparison to Western societies, Li Yinhe 李银河^{2} says that China tended to be more tolerant to homosexuality. She found no record to show systematic persecution or execution of homosexuals as in Christian cultures. But this does not mean that homosexuality was not discriminated against in China. Within Chinese society, homosexuality was culturally and thus discursively denied for such a long time that no homosexuals dared to admit their sexual preference, and nobody wanted to raise this topic in a casual conversation. Homosexuality was not only unfilial^{3}, sexually perverse and sinful, but also was seen as a crime. During the Cultural Revolution, the most frantic time in China’s recent history, there was no social tolerance and no space for homosexuality at all. Li Yinhe states:

...[The Cultural Revolution] should be understood as an exception, the same as the exceptional time of Nazi Germany. During that time, even an innocent person could be charged with a trumped-up charge, let alone homosexuals who were not understood by and had no sympathy from common people. Known homosexuals received very cruel treatment: the lightest penalty was being interrogated and criticized while the severest penalty was being beaten to death.^{4}

^{2} Li Yinhe (1952-) is a well-known sociologist and the founder of (homo)sexology in Mainland China. She is well-known also because she was the wife of the famous fiction writer Wang Xiaobo 王小波 (1952-1997). Li did thorough research and a very impressive survey on homosexuality both within the Chinese cultural context and the global context. In 1998, she published the first scholarly book in China on homosexuality, *Tongxinglianyawenhua* 同性恋亚文化 (The Subculture—Homosexuality).

^{3} Confucianism places a strong emphasis on filial couple’s responsibility to carry on the family line by giving birth to sons. I will discuss this point later.

^{4} In the Chapter: *Fulü diwei* 法律地位 (The Legal Status), Li Yinhe, 1998, the online version.
As the critic Zhong Xueping points out: "...the CCP's discursive regulations of sexuality, has also shaped Chinese sexuality" (2000, 59). Similar to Foucault's observation about Western societies before seventeenth-century, Chinese people came to "affirm that sex is negated", "sex is something we hide, to say it is something we silence" (Foucault 1978, 9). Thus, even "normal" sex is denied access to discourse, let alone "sexual sin" like masturbation and "sexual perversity" like homosexuality can be openly accepted.

Today this forbidden zone has been entered by scholars and fiction writers. They have discussed masturbation and homosexuality in a more reasonable and scientific way. However, it is understandable why Zhang did not touch these then sensitive and negative subjects when he recounts a story that occurred during a repressive time, although we may assume that there were underground homosexual/masturbation activities in the camp. This understanding is based on the following two points. (1) Although *Half of Man* was written in the mid-1980s, we should understand that breaking a forbidden zone of sex/sexuality required tremendous audaciousness at that time. One cannot expect Zhang to advance too far ahead of his time. (2) Zhang separates his protagonist from the inmates to highlight the difference between the social elite and commoners, which I will discuss more thoroughly later. Nonetheless he does not regard the inmates as criminals or social scum, but as persecuted victims by the ultraleftist line. Thus the author would subvert his purpose by depicting them as "sinful" people engaging in the "sinful" sexual behaviors of masturbation and homosexuality.

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5 The first scholarly work on homosexuality in Mainland China by Li Yinhe, *The Subculture—Homosexuality*, was published in 1998, thirteen years after the publication of *Half of Man*. 
I will now return to the topic of the accessibility to heterosexual outlets in the camp. Female inmates are segregated and not accessible to male inmates. In order to assuage their sexual anxieties, male prisoners flirt with village girls and women who form curious audiences for this “black (the color of the uniform for prisoners) troop” passing by their village. The prisoners act like animals in oestrus trying to smell every sign that might indicate the existence of female (animals).

Male prisoners were completely separated from female. We were separated to the point that we could almost forget the women’s existence....How we watched for the tiny footprints of the “Small Brigade,” those narrow imprints like a child’s pressed into the mud. We even enjoyed the bean skins that they left behind. All these become small paths in the grounds of an elegant garden, trails leading to the meeting of two sexes. Needless to say, the meeting was only in the mind. Unless both parties were “free prisoners,” a meeting would never become reality (p.34-35).

Vulgar banter and dreams about women and sex become major releases for prisoners’ sexual anxieties and a solace for their sexless lives. The only topic that can excite prisoners is sex and women. They recall (or imagine) their sexual experiences with as much obscene language as they can muster. The ribaldry becomes their indispensable sexual and “spiritual” food. “Out there, love did not exist. What did exist, …was physical lust.” (p. 50)

3.1.2 Desexualized women

The female inmates’ situation is even worse, as they became conspicuously desexualized. Similar to their male counterparts, they are completely deprived of rights for sex. They exhibit desexualization not only in their physical appearance but also in
their insensibility. After being desexualized, what is left in them are sheer animal instincts. The female prisoners “even flirt with guards through iron bars. ‘Captain, is your little mouse thirsty? Want to suck sweet water?’… Give them a chance and they would positively leap into a man’s arms” (p. 35). They sing songs from the revolutionary model plays (yangbanxi 样板戏) that are associated with masculine roles. Their coarse voices scratch and are uneven (p. 41). The protagonist once has a chance to observe these animal-like female inmates:

...Sexless, these women had descended to a state even lower than ours. The term “woman” was used only by habit. They had no waists, no chests, no buttocks, as one after another their dark red faces passed by. Although they lacked the ‘snake wrinkles’ of the men, they had the boorishness of female animals. (p. 36)

The portrayal of female animals in the gulag is completely uncharacteristic of sexual/sexy women in non-Mao times or in Western societies where women use make-ups and wear beautiful clothes and jewellery to highlight their femininity in order to appeal to the opposite sex. This portrayal of female animals is the epitome of nationwide desexualization during the Cultural Revolution when the only fabric appropriate for women to wear was “green army uniforms,” (Wang Ban 1997, 208) — a gender-neutral type of clothing. The only “jewellery” appropriate for women was “the wearing of Mao badges” (ibid, 208) — also a gender-neutral decoration. There were few cosmetics for women sold in stores, women were not allowed to keep long hair or display stylish
hairdos, and stylish clothes were labeled as qizhuang yifu 奇装异服 (outlandish clothes/bizarre dress). A woman who wore qizhuang yifu would be criticized as showing off her bourgeois sentiment. The absurdity of this desexualization was rationalized by the official line that beauty and romance were decadent traces of bourgeois political ideology that must be denounced and eradicated. The desexualization campaign was aimed at extinguishing any individual desires and hopes that might nourish or potentially mobilize opposition to Communist ideological control.

3.1.3 Deprivation of intellectuals' creativity

The protagonist, as one of the prisoners, is no different from others in his sexual needs. What is different about him is that his cultural upbringing does not allow him to join uneducated prisoners in vulgar banter. His dreams serve as a major source from which he can gratify his sexual urges without sacrificing his intellectual decorum. He dreams of a “ghost girl” who had been confined to this prisoners’ room for rejecting a marriage arranged for her by her parents. Due to his lack of the first-hand sexual experience with women, (his only image of women came from an abstract picture by Picasso) his interaction with the female ghost in his dream tends to be nebulous. In the normal life of a poet and fictional writer, sexual performance and intimate interaction with women should not conflict with his intellectual creativity. His sexual drives should nourish and spur his spiritual and intellectual well-being. However, in Zhang's case, like

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6 I personally witnessed several times Red Guards standing in the streets with scissors in their hands to forcibly cut the long hair of female pedestrians.

7 During my visit to my home city in 1979, already three years after the Cultural Revolution, I noticed a big billboard set in front of a big department store on which eight to ten “donts” reminded customers of “proper” behavior. Two of these “donts” were: “Do not wear thick make-up” and “Do not wear outlandish clothes.”
the action of eating in *Mimosa*, sex becomes the objective of survival, rather than a means for survival. As result, erotic daydreaming replaces intellectual thinking. The constant torture and punishment suffered by the prisoners, both physically and psychologically, entirely destroys individual thoughts. "At that particular time the adjective ‘stupid’ had taken on a complimentary character, and was used as a term of commendation" (p. 74). A previous hydraulic engineer, having overcome the appellation of “intellectual” with some difficulty, eventually earned the “glorious status of ‘stupid’,” and was allowed to join the Party (p. 74). The novel conveys the message that Chinese intellectuals are mentally crippled. Even worse, the protagonist suffers from impotence immediately after he gets married. He believes that years of solitude and sexual inactivity have made him incapable of having sexual intercourse. The cause of his long-term solitude and sexual inactivity is very clear: the ceaseless political campaigns that put him into jail and the labor reform camps, thus depriving him of his normal life and sexual ability as a man. The author politicizes the protagonist’s physical impotence so that it extends to mental and psychological emasculation of Chinese intellectuals: “...you became mentally traumatized, ending up being just like me. The end result has been the same: like me, your life is not in your own hands. You are forced to allow others to order you about, to beat you, to control you, to ride you” (p.145). Utterly cynical, a gelding horse urges Zhang to give up any hope of creativity: “You know as well as I do why people have castrated us: it’s to remove our creative force, make us tractable. If they didn’t we would have our own free-will, and our superior intelligence could never be kept in the traces.” (p. 147)
3.1.4 The whole country is a jail

The author addresses the ubiquitous shadow of totalitarianism that not only suffocates Chinese intellectuals, but also extends over all Chinese lives. Society as a whole is the object of the terrorism and punishment. "Class struggle" is the only business for Chinese (p. 7), and people are put into jail "for nothing" (p. 20). Many are killed just like a "bedbug being pinched in two" (p. 234). Compared to the chaotic outside world, labor reform camps and jails ironically become "a kind of independent kingdom" (p. 6), even "a haven of peace" (p. 12). Labor Gang Leader Wang, after having witnessed a humiliating parade of former cadres with paper hats on their heads down the middle of the street in town, considers Zhang Yonglin a really lucky for having been a prisoner. "Man, you whore; the one who put you into this labor camp must have been your own Creator. Otherwise you'd be out there too with those bastards, letting people 'rectify' you to death" (p. 11). All Chinese are politically castrated to the extent that they dare not to speak, even dare not to think. "Dumbo [the nick name of a male character in the novel] was not really a mute" (p. 71). Just because he tells the truth that is contradictory to the propaganda, delegation leaders "called him in and proceeded to give him a lesson. If he went on babbling like that, they would have to classify him as a 'class enemy'" (p. 74). "From that day on, Dumbo was silent" (p. 74), because, as everyone knew, silence is the best way to protect oneself from the precarious trends of politics. Even when released from custody, Zhàng Yonglin asserts that he and his fellow Chinese "never got out of jail" (p. 263). As a result, the whole of China turns into a big amorphous jail. Zhang Yonglin in frustration issues a call to action.
If the Chinese people don’t stand up and speak, if they don’t move to the front line of struggle themselves, then one billion people will no longer have the right to live on this globe. We will have been the most stupid, good for nothing, weak, despicable race on earth. (p. 264)

The narrator’s desperate expression echoes Lu Xun’s crying out in his Iron House.⁸ Lu Xun’s legacy is even more conspicuously emphasized when the protagonist Zhang Yonglin says:

The world is cast of iron, without feelings or consciousness. If you want to influence it, push it, mould it, the least you must do is shout—never mind that it is a muffled shout from under a blanket of repression. (p.76)

3.1.5 Sexualization of politics and politicization of sex

The ubiquitous power of totalitarianism and terrorism pervades to every aspect of life, forming a huge blanket over the whole of China and suffocating its victims to the verge of death. However, everyday resistance to oppression still exists, as Hei-tz 黑子 (Zhang’s male friend in the novel) says: “People in Beijing all say that the leaders are carrying out a ‘policy for duping the people’, and so we down below are also carrying out a ‘policy for duping the monarch’. It’s the bosses fooling us and us fooling the bosses—no one speaking the truth.” (p. 223)

The novel contains another interesting aspect of the interaction between politics and sex—sexualized politics and politicized sex, which is similar to the travesty that Wang Ban has observed in the relationship between politics and aesthetics during the

⁸ See Lu Xun (1881-1936)’s well-know Preface to Calls of Arms (Nahan Zixu 問哉自序, 1923), Hongkong: Shenghuo, Dushu, Xinzhi Sanlian Shudian, 1958, p.5. Lu Xun used “an iron house” as a metaphor to described Chinese culture. People in this “iron house” are suffocated, weak, sleeping and dying, indicating.
Cultural Revolution. "...politics and aesthetics played themselves out as partners and rivals and as an aesthetic experience." (1997, 196)

As for sexualized politics, the critic of *Half of Man*, Zhong Xueping points out: "One of the ways the male prisoners resist such repression is to talk constantly about women, dwelling on crude descriptions of sexual relationships and cracking jokes about female sexuality" (1994, 179). They obtain thrills from their obscene language describing a woman's body and the process of sexual intercourse. Apparently this outlet is not enough. They extend their excitement by sexualizing everything in their lives, including politics. In this clever way they mock the policies of "reform". The film *Lenin in October*, which served as a popular visual text for a revolutionary education at that time, was shown to the prisoners and ironically struck them as being highly erotic, in particular the scene in which Vasily, Lenin's bodyguard, must say goodbye to his wife and kiss her (p. 25). The prisoners seize any chance to sexualized Mao's quotations with subtlety in tacit communications among themselves. They are allowed to sing songs of Mao's quotations at that time. One of Mao's quotations is worded:

We...men of the Communist Party,
Are just like...seeds!

When they reached the word 'seeds', the younger prisoners would stand on the banks of the canal and make eyes at the young women [village audiences] (p. 16).

The prisoners craftily shift the meaning of “seeds” as a metaphor for revolutionary enlightenment to the seeds of male reproduction.

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that the spirit of the Chinese was corrupted by the "sick" culture. The most important thing, therefore, was to change their spirit and to wake them up by crying out loudly and by destroying this "iron house".

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On the other hand, regarding the politicization of sex, the novel demonstrates how endless political campaigns effectively brainwashed Chinese people and installed propaganda into their minds as the only framework to condition “their thinking”. Zhang observes: “Our lives may be hard, but they also have their small conveniences: everything has been arranged for us, we don’t even have to use our brains” (p. 224). Consequently, people turn out to be puppets of politics who do not know any way other than “their own thinking” and do not possess their own framework of language even when dealing with their own marriage and sex. The caricatures of politicized sexuality and marriage appear throughout the novel. The reason for Zhang to get married, according to Luo Zongqi’s (Zhang’s friend) advice, is to give Zhang a safe place (home) to read and write political articles without the immediate danger of being witnessed by others and thus reported to the authorities (p. 102). Old Lady Ma persuades Zhang not to divorce so that, if he were sent into jail again, his wife could send food and clothes to him (p. 255). In the interrogators’ eyes, the reason why Zhang is over thirty years old and has not yet married is that he is “hanging on for a change of dynasties.” They yell at him: “You think everything will change with a change in power, and then you’ll find a wife!” (p. 108). The protagonist sees marriage as something that would tie him to “the shattering life of reality” and thus prevent him from pursuing his political ideals (p. 104-105).

Huang’s adultery with Cao is discovered by her husband who cannot forgive her. She, too, uses political jargon “Tanbai congkuan, kangju congyan 坦白从宽, 抗拒从严” (Come out with it and we will be lenient, resist and it will be tough), a jargon frequently used by interrogators of criminals, to entreat her husband to let her go. (p. 208)
The most serious side of the politicized sex shown in this novel is power struggles in gender relations. In another words, the protagonist’s losing potency and regaining potency are depicted in the narrative as a power struggle between the sexes. The novel is well structured on two parallel levels: one is visible sexual interplay on the surface and the other is invisible political persecution and power struggle underneath. Almost all episodes carry symbolic meanings if we view them from a political perspective. “The relationship between Zhang and Huang thus involves wrangles for power that somewhat resembles political power struggles” (Wu 1992, 5). The power struggle between the sexes reveals the gender view of the narrative. I will give a thorough analysis on this topic later.

3.2 Confucianism: Nostalgia for Junzi Masculinity

The narrative clearly shows that Zhang Yonglin is obsessed with politics. It is interesting to pose the questions why the author has chosen politics as a setting to discuss man’s potency, and what the ideal masculinity is that the narrative wants to reassert and restore for emasculated Chinese intellectuals. Here Confucius’s teachings about junzi provide answers, as the narrative consistently identifies the protagonist with a junzi, or a shi, in the tradition of Confucianism.

3.2.1 “Junzi” and his descendant shi

For an understanding of the definition of junzi, jun 君 in Chinese refers to “a king”, “a lord”, or “a monarch”. Zi 子 means “son”. Therefore the original meaning of a junzi is a “son of a king”, or a “son of a ruler”. “The term was applied to descendants of
the ruling house in any State, and so came to mean ‘gentleman,’ ‘member of the upper classes.’” (Waley, A. 1938, 34). Before Confucius time, junzi merely indicated a man’s social status. In Lunyu 论语 (The Analects), Confucius imbues the term with a special meaning. A junzi must be a person who possesses both profound knowledge and a high-level of morality. He “is bound to a particular code of morals and manners; so that the word chün-tzu [junzi] implies not merely superiority of birth but also superiority of character and behaviors. Finally the requisite of birth is waived” (Waley, A. 1938, 34). Confucius believed a man should strive to be a junzi by receiving education and by self-cultivation. His goal for educating junzi was to set up tangible models for human beings to follow. The task of education (or self-cultivation) was so difficult that the status of junzi seems quite out of the reach for most men. “It is not to be expected that a man can become a gentleman without a great deal of hard work or cultivation”, as D. C. Lau points out (1979, 14). In this sense, “junzi” may be used colloquially to refer to a “really good person.” Translators use the term “gentleman”9, “true gentleman”10, “exemplary person”11, “noble-minded”12, “living-nobly”13, “a man of complete virtue”14, “an accomplished scholar”15, “a superior man”16, “a man of honor”17, “the Ideal Man”18, “a

10 Waley 1938.
13 Leys 1997, (7.33).
15 Ibid.
wise man”19, and “a true philosopher”20 for junzi. There are still more terms such as “admired person [people]”, “noble man”, “Super Man”, “the higher type of man”, used in referring to junzi.

The early Confucian education was virtually the education for junzi. In The Analects, for example, which is considered by scholars as the most reliable source of the doctrine of Confucius (Jin 1995, 2), contains 20 chapters and 503 verses. The term, “junzi” is used 103 times in 63 verses.21 The rest of the verses, though not explicitly employing the term “junzi”, are still direct teachings related to becoming a junzi.

The Confucian teachings about junzi were complex, with elements interrelated, intertwined, overlapped, and conditioned on each other. According to The Analects, the education for, or quality of a junzi roughly includes, but is not limited to, the following attributes pertaining to his morals, his ability and his manner.

The morals of a junzi include at least ren (kindness, benevolence, humanity, humane, goodness, human perfection, virtue, being considerate, etc.), de (virtue, integrity, excellence, the radiation of his moral power, or leading by example), zhong (be loyal, faithful, and sincere), xiao (filial piety, to respect parents and elders), xin (truthful, standing by your words, and trustworthy), and yi (be righteous, just, and do what is right). Among these elements, the most important quality for a junzi is ren, which is the core of the junzi personality and “one of the foundational concepts on which to base

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16 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
21 D. C. Lau says that junzi “is discussed in more than eighty chapters in the Analects.” (1979, 14)
his [Confucius's] whole system of philosophy” (Xin Hu 1996, 25). All other attributes of junzi are an extension of ren.

The ability of a junzi is comprised of his zhi 智 (understanding, intelligence, knowledge, and erudition), xing 行 (action), and yong 勇 (courage). In Confucius’ mind, a junzi must be intellectual. Without knowledge, a man cannot accomplish his ren (humanity) and de (virtue). Knowledge and understanding come from learning (xue). A junzi must make a commitment to learning, love learning (The Analects: 1.1, 1.6, 1.14, 2.11, 6.27, 13.3) and be willing to become a learned man (19.6). A junzi should be one who takes action, rather than an arm-chair talker (2.13, 4.24, 7.25, 13.3). He should talk little, but with good faith (1.6). He always should do what is right (4.10), and his actions must do justice to his words (4.22). Courage flows out of ren (humanity) as “A ren man is always brave; a brave man is not always ren” (14.4). Courage also makes a junzi to face the truth. When he makes a mistake in action, he does not hesitate to correct it (1.8).

The manner of a junzi is trained and thus manifested in li 礼, referring to propriety, ritual, courtesy, decorum, good taste, and being civilized. If he learns, he will become a virtuous man who is always “cordial, upright, courteous, temperate and complaisant” (温, 良, 恭, 俭, 让 1.10) Li, the same as other attributes, is also the extension of ren (humanity). Without ren, a man cannot have a good manner (3.3).

The elements summarized above far from exhaust the contents of Confucius teachings about junzi. However, by following these and other indicators mentioned in The Analects, a portrait of a junzi emerges by which we can recognize him:

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22 All translations of The Analects quoted in this dissertation come from Simon Leys (1997) with minor modifications in a few verses by me.
a. Independence of personality (1.1, 15.21, 17.6);
b. Compassion (1.2, 4.4, 8.2, 12.16, 17.3);
c. Self-sacrifice for pursuing the Way (Dao, the ultimate reality: 1.14, 4.5, 4.9, 4.10, 4.16, 9.14, 14.2, 14.5, 14.23, 17.3);
d. Self-discipline (1.8, 4.2, 6.27, 12.1, 15.15, 15.19, 16.7);
e. Sense of mission (3.24, 12.20);
f. Sense of justice (2.14, 4.10, 7.31);
g. Sense of loyalty (16.6);
h. Man of action (4.24, 7.25, 13.3);
i. Loving to learn and knowledgeable (1:1; 1:6; 1:14; 2:11; 6:27, 13.3, 16.9, 19.6);
j. Modesty (3.7, 13.3, 13.26, 14.26);
k. Unselfish, considerate and forgiving (4.15, 6.30, 12.2, 15.24);
l. Being simple and honest (11.19);
m. Ambition in both personal and social achievement (14.2, 8.9, 15.11);
n. Readiness to shoulder great responsibilities (1.8, 8.6, 15.9);
o. Good manner in speech (eschews vulgarity and nonsense, 8.4).23

This portrait suggests that a junzi is the one who reaches a high level in pursuing the Way (道, Dao) of self-cultivation. The complex training for junzi is to prepare men of high quality in both morality and intellect who are ready for assuming the heavier responsibilities of assisting the rulers to lead the country (1.8, 8.7).

Shi 士 in Chinese before the Confucius’s time had multiple meanings. Sometimes it referred to man, the opposite sex of women;24 and sometimes it referred to officials.25 According to Waley, A, this term was a military one meaning “knight.” “A Shih was a person entitled to go to battle in a war-chariot, in contrast with the common soldiers who followed on foot” (Waley, A 1938, 33-34). In Confucius’s time, shi overlapped with

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23 This portrait of a junzi is based on Xin Hu’s summary (1996, 34-35) with some modifications.


25 “济济多士，秉文之德.” (Great was the number of officials;--[All] assiduous followers of the virtue of [King] Wen.) See Shijing. Zhousong. Qingmiao (诗经，周颂，清庙， Book of Odes/ Sacrificial Odes of Zhou/ Decade of Qing Miao. Ibid)
junzi. Confucius used junzi most of the time in The Analects, and sometimes used shi instead (4.9, 7.12, 8.7, 14.2, 18.11). After Confucius's time, shi became a distinctive social class during the Warring States Period (475-221 B.C.) in China. But the social status of shi was low. Shi depended on other higher-ranking aristocrats and led their lives by providing services—as servants in peacetime and as military officers in wartime—to their masters (Feng 1990, 340). It was prevailing among aristocrats to “xushi 荫士” (keep shi) or “yangshi 养士” (support shi). “During the Warring States Period, each of four renowned Dukes: Duke Pingyuan, Duke Xinling, Duke Mengchang and Duke Chunshen, recruited and maintained more than one thousand shi.” (Feng 1990, 342). However, during that time, shi did not have a strong consciousness recognizing that they actually formed a special social group (Lei Haizong 1989, 138). The significant change in their social status and their corresponding consciousness started in the Han Dynasty (206 B.C. – A.D. 220). Two political events occurred that historically tied Chinese shi to politics. First, Confucianism was firmly established and became the canonical bedrock of the Chinese feudal ideology. Second, the examination system was adopted as a complementary means to the system of recommendation, the primary system by which to find capable officials (Shen Jianshi 1960, 20-22). “The system of civil service examination [as a primary means to selecting officials] started in the Sui Dynasty [581-618] and completed in the Tang Dynasty [618-907]” (ibid, 68). It was an attempt to

26 “周有八士：...” (Zhou you ba shi:...) (18.11) Both Waley, A (1938) and Simon Leys (1997) translated ba shi as “eight knights.” D. C. Lau (1979) translated as “eight gentlemen.”
27 Dong Zhongshu (179-104 B.C.), the most eminent Confucian scholar of the Han dynasty, well known for dismissing all non-Confucian scholars from the government in favor of Confucian ethicists, advocated, “dismissing a hundred schools of thought and privileging Confucianism exclusively” (Bachu bai jia, du zun rushu 罢黜百家，独尊儒术). His agenda was adopted by the Emperor Wu, Liu Che 刘彻, the most ambitious and capable emperor in the Han dynasty.
recruit men on the basis of merit and their knowledge of Confucianism. The Tang was the first dynasty in which the civil service examination came to play an important role in selecting men for office. Scholars who passed the examinations were granted posts in government offices. They and their entire families entered the shidafu (scholar-gentry) class and received prestige and privilege. Along with the institutionalization of the civil service examination system, scholar-officials became an increasingly important class. They read the same books (Confucian classics then became a fixture for the civil service examination), harbored the same political aspirations, and held the same attitude toward current events. Economically, most of them were rich landlords. Politically they worked between emperors and commoners as liaisons and controlled the gigantic political machine and discourse of China. Although they did not form a political party, they were bound to the same interests and well-being and functioned as a monomorphic Party (Lei Haizong 1989, 138). Their primary responsibility was to assist the ruling class to lead the country and rule its people. Confucianism was the exclusive ideology for this shi scholar-official class, and Confucius teachings about junzi became their indispensable moral text with a heavy emphasis on politics. From then on, junzi become shi, or shidafu 士大夫 (scholar-officials). To be more exact, shi had to follow the Confucian teachings and were expected to become junzi. This class created a unique “political culture” in Chinese history. In reflecting on how Chinese political history was affected by the civil service examination, Lin Tongji 林同济 observers that there was a transition from dafu-shi 大夫

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28 Civil service examinations were “a male-only...system” (Wendy Larson 2002, p.175). “Girls...could not take the examinations and become officials...” (Miyazaki, Ichisada, 1963, p. 13)  
29 For the concept of “zhengzhi wenhua 政治文化” (political culture), see Yan Buke 卿步克 Shidafu Zhengzhi Yansheng Shigao 士大夫政治演生史稿 (The Manuscript of History of Scholar-Officials in the Development of Politics), 1996, Beijing: Beijing University Press.
士 (Lobe-knight) to *shi-dafu* 士大夫 (Scribe-official) in China's history. "...*dafa-shi* were aristocrat knights, and *shi-dafu* were literati bureaucrats; the former were products of the feudal hierarchy while the latter were a necessity for a unified imperial monarchy." (Lin 1989, 117). This system of civil service examinations was abolished in 1905. However the strong consciousness of participation in politics, the strong sense of responsibility for the country and its people and the strong feeling of being superior to others are still deeply rooted in the mindset of Chinese intellectuals who are regarded as descendants of this *shi* (scholar-official) class. Zhang Yonglin's obsession with participation in politics derives from the *shi* tradition.

### 3.2.2 The ideal traits of masculinity in *Half of Man* versus moral code for *junzi*

Confucius's teachings for *junzi* can also be understood as the foundation on which ideal masculinity is constructed, and all the attributes listed above can be regarded as attributes of ideal masculinity, because the category of *junzi* is exclusively for men. Kam Louie observes, "Confucius is never presented in the company of women" (2002, 46). Song Geng argues, "The *junzi*, who exemplifies the ideal personality in Confucian discourse is seldom gendered in Confucian classics; the ungendered 'men' thus practically becomes the synonym for 'people'" (1999, 214). The concept of ungendered "men" can be established in Confucian discourse based on the fact that women do not exist in the discourse as subjectivity. Women are unambiguously categorized as equivalent to "inferior men" (*xiaoren* 小人) (17.25). Even women who achieved these qualities still could not be regarded as a *junzi*. For example, the mother of Emperor Wu (the founder of the Zhou Dynasty [approximately 1100-221 B.C.]) was a capable woman
who assisted her son in overthrowing the Shang Dynasty (about 1600-1100 B.C.).

"Emperor Wu said: 'I have ten ministers.' Confucius said, 'Able people are hard to find...as for Emperor Wu, since one of his ministers was a woman, in fact he merely found nine' (8:20). Confucius excluded the mother of Emperor Wu from the list of those with talents just because she was a woman. In analyzing the conception of gender in *The Analects* and *The Mencius*, Chan Sin Yee draws a conclusion that "The Confucian conception of gender therefore implies the three-fold exclusion of women from political participation, and thus from the ideal of chun-tzu [junzi, gentlemen] and, consequently, from a Confucian education" (Chan 2000, 120). She also observes, "Among the thousands of students of Confucius and Mencius, none was a female. We learn how Confucius educated his own son [16:13], but there is no hint that he also educated his daughter." (Chan 2000, 120)

In *Half of Man*, Zhang Yonglin, though he claimed that he had turned to Marxism, is nothing but a typical Confucian shi-scholar living in contemporary times. In Kam Louie's words, the fictional constructions of wen (cultural attainment) masculinity in Zhang Xiangliang's semi-autobiographical *Mimosa*, *Half of Man is Woman* and *Getting Used to Dying* "reveals how Confucian teachings are supposedly embedded in real individual lives" (2002, 59). The narrative identifies the protagonist with the ideal of an intellectual in Confucianism. The ideal masculine traits he wants to possess are identical to those of junzi masculinity. The following four aspects

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31 Kam Louie identifies Zhang Yonglin with caizi (talent scholar), the Scholar Zhang of the Tang Dynasty, and his comparison between two is convincing (2002, 68). However, I categorize Zhang Yonglin as a pursuant of the junzi masculinity, rather than a caizi for three reasons: (1) The Scholar Zhang of the Tang Dynasty by Yuan Zhen is not typical caizi-jiaren romance though it contains many story lines of caizi-jiaren romance. (2) A caizi in Chinese tradition refers to a talent, particularly a talent in literature. Though
embedded in Zhang Yonglin are the most conspicuous identifying him with the moral code of a *junzi*.

First, as all critics notice, Zhang Yonglin is obsessed with politics. Simon Leys points out, “Politics … was Confucius’s first and foremost concern” because “politics is an extension of ethics” (1997, xxiv-xxv). Dawson also states that in general, *The Analects* aims to assist individuals with the self-cultivation required to make them fit to take part in government (Dawson, R. 1993, xiii). “*Xue er you ze shi* 學而優則仕”, originated from *The Analects* (Leisure from politics should be devoted to learning. Leisure from learning should be devoted to politics. [19.13]), has become an aphorism known to every Chinese intellectual. A man who is apolitical can never become a *junzi* in the Confucian sense. According to Confucius, the *junzi* is most needed during these critical times of turmoil, as his skills and morality are exactly what is required for the fate of the country and the people.

Second, related to the consciousness of politics, Zhang shows a strong sense of mission in the enlightenment of ordinary people and the salvation of the country. The most conspicuous trait that reflects his Confucian moral character is his spirit of self-sacrifice. The Confucian teachings about *junzi* emphasize that self-sacrifice and social responsibility should prevail over the private desires of scholars. They should always be ready to sacrifice their personal needs (14.2), even their lives (15.9), for the fulfillment of their obligations and pledge of loyalty to their lords. When he decides to divorce his wife

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Zhang Yonglin was a talent poet before he was put into a gulag, the characterization of him is focused more on his philosophical and political pursuit than literary refinement. (3) *Caizi* as an image is mostly bound to the literary genre of *caizi-jiren* Romance. Therefore a *caizi* is very often bound to *fengliu* (romantic) and called *fengliu caizi* (a romantic scholar). Zhang Yonglin is a *caizi* but he is not *fengliu*. He is not a womanizer. Instead, he actually is a misogynist. See more detailed discussion in Chapter Five.
with the pretext that politics might victimize her, he views his marriage as a minor personal matter to be sacrificed for the lofty of political struggle he is going to join, with the fate of the country and people at stake. A real intellectual should be a martyr for his country just as his junzi-shi predecessors did for their lords. He should not be afraid of losing his life, let alone becoming enmeshed in his own personal affairs.

Third, the principle of self-discipline in Confucius teachings about junzi is a part of self-cultivation exhibited in Zhang Yonglin in two respects: proper manner and male sexual abstinence. A good manner is one of the codes from which we recognize a civilized junzi. Without self-discipline, a man can never be fully civilized and thus exhibit a good manner. Confucius set up a series of restrictions for junzi preventing them from straying away from propriety. “The Master said: ‘Observe the rites in this way: don’t look at anything improper; don’t listen to anything improper; don’t say anything improper; don’t do anything improper.’” (12.1). Zhang Yonglin identifies himself as a well-educated intellectual and he is well aware of his proper manner in speech. No matter how hungry he is for sex, he never allows himself to join the inmates’ vulgar banters. By self-discipline in his speech, he maintains his prestigious status (position) as a qianqian junzi (self-disciplined gentleman) and receives respect from his inmates.

Gaining self-discipline in male sexual abstinence means to gain power over one’s sexual desire. “Those men who lacked the facilities to put this self-control into practice can only be seen as objects of pity and scorn.” 32 “The people of Qi sent to Lu a present of singing and dancing girls, Lord Ji Huan accepted them and, for three days, he did not attend court. Confucius left.” (18.4). Obviously Confucius saw that Lord Ji Huan was not

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32 Louie’s 1991 article, p. 8 on the online version.
a self-disciplined ruler and did not deserve Confucius assistance. Why is this self-control over sexual desires so important?

The answer lies in the Confucian quest for ‘self-control and returning to righteousness’ (*kejifulin*). This precept was meant to be the key to entering the class of gentleman (*junzi*), whose role is to rule over women and other men. Self-control is thus a fundamental prerequisite to control over others.

The most kingly man was king of himself. [Foucault]33

Zhang Yonglin lays out several excuses for divorcing his wife, which I will analyze later in this chapter. One of these “reasons” the narrative does not explicitly articulate is Zhang Yonglin’s attempt to be self-disciplined. There is no doubt that his wife’s young body, which is full of sexual temptation, attracts him—a man who has just regained his potency at the age of thirty-nine. But he must leave her because he knows clearly he is experiencing the struggle between spirit and flesh (*ling yu rou*). If he fails to overcome his sexual desire, he will not be qualified to be a real gentleman (*junzi*), and thus he will not be able to accomplish great deeds in politics.

Fourth, Zhang Yonglin, following the example of Confucius, is a man of action. Simon Leys points out: “Confucius was a man of action—audacious and heroic—but ultimately he was also a tragic figure.” (1997, xxii). When Zhang Yonglin risks his life by plunging into water to stop a flood, he feels that his selfless action has fulfilled an intellectual’s moral obligation to secure the well being of the people, exactly what a *junzi* (or a *shi*) was supposed to do. He receives gratitude from villagers and state farm workers who treat him as a hero, “The time-honored sense of mission peculiar to the Chinese intelligentsia has revived him” (Ngai 1994, 94). Zhang also sees himself as a tragic figure,
which I will discuss in the following section. Although Zhang shows ambiguity and confusion in his decision-making about whether or not and when he should take action (for example, he takes no action to catch his adulterous wife and her sexual partner Cao Xueyi, and he takes no action to confront Cao Xueyi afterwards), his intention to be a man of action, to do something for the country, rather than to say something, is very clear.

In addition to the four points listed above, a list (see below) of comparisons between the moral codes about *junzi* listed above and the corresponding attributes embedded in Zhang Yonglin proves that, in my reading of the text, Zhang was identified as a *junzi* or a *shi*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Junzi in <em>The Analects</em></th>
<th>Zhang Yonglin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Independence of personality</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compassion</td>
<td>Not obvious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-sacrifice</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-discipline</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of mission</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of justice</td>
<td>Yes and No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of loyalty</td>
<td>Yes and No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man of action</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loving to learn and knowledgeable</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modesty</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unselfish, considerate and forgiving</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being simple and honest</td>
<td>Yes and No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambition in both personal and social achievement</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Readiness to shoulder great responsibilities</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good manner in speech (eschews vulgarity and nonsense)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The "Yes and No" answer in the above table refers to Zhang Yonglin's double-standard in his attitude toward the nation, its people and his woman. He shows a strong sense of justice and loyalty to the country and its people, but his misogynist treatment to

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33 Ibid, p.9.
his wife shows no justice and no loyalty; he is honest to his country, but he is cunning in laying out excuses to divorce his wife. I will provide more detailed analysis on these points below. Huang Xiangjiu sees through his insincerity of "shua huaying 耍花样" ("playing around", "pretending", p. 282). The critic Zhou Weibo 周惟波 labels him as waited 虛君子 (a fake junzi, hypocrite) (Zhou 1987, 4). However, a fake junzi is still a junzi. The focus here is not on the authenticity of a junzi, but on the textual attempt to identify the protagonist as a junzi. From the above table, we can see how many attributes of a junzi have been embedded into the characterization of Zhang Yonglin. This is not the end of the analogy between Zhang Yonglin and Confucian teachings. The hierarchical separation between cultured and uncultured people highlights more of Zhang Yonglin’s identification as a junzi, or a shi-scholar.

3.2.3 Junzi/xiaoren hierarchy and yin-yang hierarchy

In Confucius mind, the social order is very important for keeping harmony in society. His five relationships34 were constructed based on this hierarchical ideology with the emphasis that everyone in society should find a right position for him/her in these five relationships. No exception, in The Analects there is consistent contrast between the conduct of junzi and that of xiaoren (inferior man, or small man). As mentioned, the term, "junzi" is used 103 times in 63 verses. Among those 63 verses, 16 refer to the contrast between the conduct of junzi and that of xiaoren. Obviously, Confucius used xiaoren as "jiānmian jiàocài 反面教材" (negative examples which may serve as a lesson) to make

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34 They are the relationships of Parent/Child, Older Sibling/Younger Sibling, Husband/Wife, Elder/Junior, Ruler/Subject.
his teachings for junzi more effective. Appreciating their philosophical insights and aesthetic attraction, Chinese intellectuals are taught many of Confucius's antitheses contrasting junzi to xiaoren juxtaposed in a parallel phrase, and until today many of them, including myself, can recite these. For example, in contrast between their ways of thinking, Confucius says, “The gentleman considers the whole rather than the parts. The small man considers the parts rather than the whole.” (2.14). In contrasting their different pursuits, “A gentleman seeks virtue; a small man seeks land. A gentleman seeks justice; a small man seeks favors.” (4.11). “A gentleman considers what is just; a small man considers what is expedient.” (4.16). In contrasting their personalities, “A gentleman is easygoing and free; a vulgar man is always tense and fretful.” (7.37). “A gentleman seeks harmony, but not conformity. A vulgar man seeks conformity, but not harmony.” (13.23).

In The Analects, not only “Chün tzu [junzi] and hsiao jen [xiaoren] (small man) are correlative and contrasted terms” (D. C. Lau 1979, 14), but also they are hierarchical in social status, as Confucius said: “Those who have innate knowledge are the highest. Next come those who acquire knowledge through learning. Next again come those who learn through the trials of life. Lowest are the common people who go through the trials of life without learning anything.” (16.9) Therefore, Confucius taught his student Zixia, “Be a noble scholar (junzi ru 君子儒), not a vulgar pedant (xiaoren ru 小人儒).” (6.13). He also alarmed his students not to make any friends who were moral inferiors (1.8). His advice for leaders of society is that “You can make the people follow the Way, you cannot make them understand it.” (8.9)

Confucian scholars in ancient China believed in “wanban jie xiapin, wei you dushu gao 万般皆下品，唯有读书高” (literally meaning everything is inferior but
reading; to be a scholar is to be the top of society). Therefore, in the past, “xue 学”, learning or education, was the ladder through which a man climbed up to the top of society. A position at the top answered the question of “Where I am” and thus automatically defined the identity of the occupant in terms of “Who I am.” This was particularly true after the Tang Dynasty when the civil service examination system was significantly improved and institutionalized. Those who succeeded in the examinations and became scholar-officials considered themselves to be laoxinzhe 劳心者 (those who work with their brains), superior to the laolizhe 劳力者 (those who work with their muscles). Based on the hierarchy between junzi and xiaoren, the Confucian philosopher Mencius claimed in the fourth century B.C. that “There are those who used their minds and there are those who use their muscles. The former rule; the latter are ruled. Those who rule are supported by those who are ruled.” (Mencius: III. Part A, 4. p.101) In this formulation, Mencius added one more classic distinction between scholar-officials and commoners. “The power and authority of the ruling elite was therefore legitimated by their intrinsic worth, their highly developed heart-mind, their moral as well as intellectual superiority, which anyway were supposed to coincide.” (Feuerwerker 1998, 11)

In this junzi/xiaoren hierarchy, women were categorized as equivalent to xiaoren, as “The Master said, ‘it is the women and the small men that are especially difficult to deal with. If you are friendly with them, they become insolent. If you keep them at a distance, they resent it.’” (17.25) This is the only verse in The Analects that explicitly reveals Confucius’ unambiguous position on women. The interpretation of this verse

35 See Xunmeng youxue shi 训蒙幼学诗, (Instructions and Enlightenments for Children to Learn Poetry).
36 This is my translation with references of translations by Waley, A. (1938), D. C. Lau (1979) and Leys (1997).
became controversial. Some critics attempt to justify Confucius’ prejudice against women. For example, Simon Leys argues: (1) Confucius’ statement did not lump all women in to the same category as *xiaoren* (inferior men), as he was referring to women within the narrow and specific context of the household.\(^{37}\) (2) There are no other clues to be found about Confucius’ attitude toward women in *The Analects*. (3) It is unfair to accuse Confucius of prejudice on the basis of this single statement.\(^{38}\)

Arguments of this sort have several problems. First, the verse in *The Analects* explicitly categorizes women with *xiaoren* (inferior men). There is no reason to believe that Confucius intended to put *xiaoren* in a household context by lumping them with women. Second, there are other clues to be found in *The Analects* pertaining to Confucius’s attitude toward women. In addition to the explicit statement about women quoted above, *The Analects* includes women in at least six other verses: (1) Confucius excluded the mother of Emperor Wu from talented and able people as mentioned previously (8.20); (2) Although Gongye Chang was in jail, Confucius considered him innocent and gave him his daughter in marriage (5.1); (3) Confucius gave Nan Rong his niece in marriage (5.2); (4) Confucius rectified titles for the consort of a ruler (16.14); (5) Confucius left the state of Qi because Lord Ji Huan indulged himself with singing and dancing girls for three days (18.4); (6) “The Master went to see Nanzi, the concubine of Duke Ling. Zilu was not pleased. The Master swore: ‘If I have done wrong, may Heaven confound me! May Heaven confound me!’” (6.28). Women are mentioned seven times in *The Analects*. One represents a neutral position on *zhengming* 正名 (rectifying names, or ensuring that names are used

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\(^{37}\) See Simon Leys, 1979, 204. Simon Leys based his argument on the word, *yang* (translated as “to handle” by himself and “to deal with” by others), which literally means “to educate,” “to feed,” “to keep,” “to raise,” and “to nourish”.

\(^{38}\) Ibid.
properly). Women were given in marriage twice as a reward. Women appeared twice as concubines/singing girls, with the implication that a good man should stay away from these immoral-beings. Women were categorized once with xiaoren, inferior men who are hard to deal with. One talented woman remained purposefully unacknowledged and excluded from men’s world. Sin Yee Chan finds in both Analects and Mencius that “… none of the Confucian sages or role-models is female. Indeed, not one woman is praised in the texts. But this is not due to a lack of praise-worthy women before or during the time of Confucius and Mencius, as evidence in the historical texts and the Biographies of Virtuous Women” (Chan 2000, 121). The most important evidence about his viewpoint on women is what Confucius did not say in The Analects. “The Master never talked of: miracles; violence; disorders; spirits” (7.21). We should add one more: the Master never talked about women in The Analects by treating them as the same subjectivity as men. Many critics/translators/readers believe that Confucius avoided talking of miracles, violence, disorders and spirits because they contain ill influence on men’s morals. One can infer the same with regard to women. Ironically, Simon Leys emphasizes: “He [Elias Canetti] observed that the Analects is a book which is important not only for what it says, but also for what it does not say. This remark is illuminating” (1997, xxx). In this respect, how could he miss the point that Confucius did not say anything about women’s subjectivity, treating them as being extremely insignificant? My discovery is that, within this junzi/xiaoren(women) hierarchy, there is a clear matrix: men are sons to their parents\(^\text{39}\) on the one hand and potential gentlemen or inferior men on the other hand.

\(^{39}\) Many times Confucius talked about men’s proper attitude (xiao, filial piety) toward their families. However the definition of family summarized from The Analects should be the family of parents/son, rather than the family of husband/wife.
while women are wives/reproductive tools and concubines or singing/dancing girls in the relation to men, and “inferior beings” in comparison to “gentlemen”.

In the Han Dynasty, Confucian scholars applied the yin-yang principle to the framework of Confucianism by linking it into their ideals of social organization. From then onward, Confucius junzi/xiaoren hierarchy changed into yin-yang hierarchy, which carries more philosophical weight as it is related in a firm cosmological principle.

In an etymological sense, yin and yang are opposite images associated with sunlight. Yin is the cloudy or overcast, and yang is radiant, or bright. Before the Western Zhou Dynasty (1111 BC – 771 BC), “yin” and “yang” had already evolved from separate concepts of physical entities into a pair of interdependent forces with both physical and metaphysical implications. Yin refers to the force representing everything about the world that is dark, cold, cool, soft, hidden, feminine, descent, yielding, passive, receptive, negative and absorbing. It is present in even numbers, earth, moon, female, water, winter, night, valleys and streams, and is represented by a broken line “—”. Yang refers to the force representing everything about the world that is illuminated, hot, warm, hard, evident, masculine, ascent, aggressive, controlling, active, dynamic, positive, and penetrating; it is present in odd numbers, heaven, sun, male, fire, summer, daylight, and mountains and peaks, and is represented by an unbroken line “—”.

Lao Zi 老子, the Daoist master who lived in the sixth century BC, defined yin and yang as two complementary principles of the universe, yang being active and yin being receptive. He believed that harmony results from the natural balance of these active and receptive qualities. Nonetheless, neither Lao Zi nor Zhuang Zi 庄子 (399 – 295 B.C.) aligned male and female with yin and yang categories. Confucius himself did not teach
his students about the \textit{yin-yang} theory.\textsuperscript{40} Dong Zhongshu in the Han dynasty was the most significant interpreter, reformer and disseminator of Confucian principles. He advocated, “Dismissing a hundred schools of thought and privileging Confucianism exclusively” \textit{(Bachu bai jia, du zun rushu)}. He also led a philosophical reformation. Dong Zhongshu brought a theological dimension to Confucianism by merging the cosmological \textit{yin-yang} concept into Confucian ethics in his “Theory on the sentiments and responses between heaven and human beings” \textit{(tian ren ganying shuo 天人感应说)}.

The implication of the relationships between ruler and subject, between father and son, between husband and wife is derived from the Way of \textit{yin-yang}. Ruler is \textit{yang} and subject is \textit{yin}; father is \textit{yang} and son is \textit{yin}; husband is \textit{yang} and wife is \textit{yin}.” \textit{(Chunqiu fanlu: Jiyi)}

Not only was everyone situated in the “right” position in this set of social relations and aligned with \textit{yin} and \textit{yang}, but also those identified with \textit{yang} and those with \textit{yin} were put into a hierarchical order, that is “\textit{yang-zun-yinbei 阳尊阴卑}” or “\textit{yang} is noble and \textit{yin} is abased/mean”. According to Dong, the hierarchical order was determined by the will of Heaven. \textit{Chunqiu Fanlu} devotes a whole chapter to Dong’s theorization of “\textit{Yangzun yinbei}”. The quotes below help us understand Confucianized \textit{yin-yang} hierarchy, or \textit{yin-yang} Confucianism, and the rationalization for discrimination against women during the 1980s up to present.

\textsuperscript{40} Confucius did not discuss \textit{yin-yang} cosmic forces in \textit{Lun Yu} (The Analects), \textit{Da Xue} (The Great Learning), or \textit{Zhong Yong} (The Doctrine of the Mean), which are the main sources of the teachings of early Confucianism. In \textit{Si-shu}, or Four Books (including one by his disciple Meng Zi, or Mencius, 372 –289 BC), there is no mention of the \textit{yin-yang} doctrine.
Though a husband is low (in social status), he is still *yang*; though a wife is in the noble class, she is still *yin*. There is also relativity within the *yang* category and relativity within the *yin* category. All those who are in the upper positions are *yang* compared to those in the lower positions. All those who are in the lower positions are *yin* compared to those who are above them. *Yin* contains the meaning of hiding, or concealment. So how could it obtain a title and what could it possess? All its title and possession are combined with *yang*. Therefore *yin* should work hard but reject merits [meaning not to seek awards]... Those in the upper positions are good and those in the lower positions are evil...All in the evil category is *yin*, and all in the good category is *yang*... *Yang* goes with the Way (Dao) while *yin* goes against the Way (Dao).... *Yang* is warm and *yin* is cold; *yang* is giving and *yin* is depriving; *yang* is kind and *yin* is cruel; *yang* is lenient and *yin* is radical; *yang* is loving and *yin* is loathing; *yang* is (re)producing and *yin* is killing.” (*Chunqiufanlu: Yangzun yinbei*)

In reforming Confucianism, Dong explicitly redefined gender roles. He replaced gender separation and the exclusion of women from Confucian education and social participation with the inclusion of women hierarchically, placing them in their “right and fixed position” in the name of Heaven. He achieved this by dichotomizing *yin* and *yang* and introducing this concept into a moral spectrum where “*yang* is noble and *yin* is mean.” His argument can be put in the form of a syllogism: The major premise is “*yang* is noble and *yin* is mean; *yang* is good and *yin* is evil”, and the minor premise is “all women are *yin*”. By logical inference, the conclusion is “women are mean and evil.”

Dong twisted the nature of the original *yin-yang* dialectic principle in Lao Zi’s *Daode Jing* that placed a strong emphasis on harmony, balance, interaction and transformation between *yin* and *yang*. In Dong’s re-interpretation, *yin* and *yang* were polarized and thus became two contradictory forces. He converted the complementary and equal relationship of *yin* and *yang* as portrayed in the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing* 易经) to a hierarchical relationship of *yang* presiding over *yin*. *Yin* and *yang* in Lao Zi and the
Book of Changes are fluid concepts that constantly change. However, in Dong Zhongshu’s interpretation, the fluid conception of yin and yang was frozen. The complementary and counterbalancing elements became a clear-cut dichotomy. A dialectical notion turned out to be an absolute one. The concept of yin and yang attached to female and male was purified and fixed. A horizontal tandem became vertical or linear line: yang (male) is high (noble) and yin (female) is low (base). The constantly turning and interchanging dynamic became a constant set in tension and opposition. A fundamental dialectic of a bipolar and non-homogeneous synergy of being became a homogeneous and hegemonic-subordinate pair. The most profound impact of Dong’s yin-yang dichotomy on the construction of masculinity/femininity is that he mixed up biological identity with culturally constructed masculinity by granting men an unchangeable privilege over women.

In Confucius’s time, it was difficult to be “a good man”. Confucius set up standards that seem too high for most men to reach. If a man wanted to become “a real and a good man”, he must devote a lifetime of effort to pursue that goal. Otherwise he would fall into the category of xiaoren (inferior men) and women. However, in Dong Zhongshu’s gender theory, all men were born to be good because of their yang identity and all women were born to be evil because of their yin identity. In this light, masculinity/femininity were no different from and confirmed automatically by one’s sex. “This is a situation in which a biological criterion is being used to determine whether or not a person’s life is valued, and in the process women are oppressed.” (Brownell 2002, 5). If a man desired to be highly cultivated and developed, thus respected, he could achieve this goal by following the Confucian line and competing with other men. If he
did not do this, he still did not have to worry much about being feminized because the
line between \textit{yang} (male) and \textit{yin} (female) was clear-cut.

The implication of Dong’s hierarchical \textit{yin-yang} dichotomy, or \textit{yin-yang} Confucianism, exerted a long-range and subtle impact on both men and women, thus profoundly affecting their concept of what it means to be a man or a woman. Dong Zhongshu’s gendered position provided the foundation upon which to establish a feudalistic hierarchy and morality. After the Han Dynasty, the Three Bonds became a canon of Confucian ethics that legitimized the supremacy of ruler, father and husband. In the Song Dynasty, the Neo-Confucians exacerbated this trend by heavily emphasizing the male-female, good-evil, \textit{yin-yang} principle and regularizing “proper” behaviors of women. Cheng Yi (1033-1107) believed that for women to die from starvation was a trivial matter in comparison to the serious matter of loosing their chastity (\textit{E si shi xiao, shijie shi da} 饿死是小, 失节是大).\textsuperscript{41} The implication of this viewpoint is that a woman’s death by starvation was her own matter, and that her chastity was a matter that would seriously affect her real owner—her husband. Zhu Xi (1130-1200), one of the most influential philosophers in Chinese history put a great emphasis on morality and logic in his elaboration of \textit{yin-yang} doctrine. He commented, “Good and evil can be applied to describe \textit{yin} and \textit{yang}. It can also be applied to describe the male and the female.”\textsuperscript{42} The old Chinese saying, “Women are the sources of disasters”, was therefore cosmologically verified by the Confucian \textit{yin-yang} dichotomy. It has penetrated deeply into the mindset

\textsuperscript{41} In Er Cheng Yishu (The Posthumous Paper of the Cheng Brothers), Vol. 22. Cited in Feng Tianyu, 1990, 657)

\textsuperscript{42} Cited in both Chan, Sin Yee, 2000, p.115 and Wendy Larson 1998, p.34. Wendy Larson says: While he did not explicitly construct a \textit{yin}/female/negative versus \textit{yang}/male/positive dichotomy, the famous philosopher Zhu Xi did imply that in theory, \textit{yin} and \textit{yang} are complementary, good, and equal, but in social practice, ‘good and evil can be called \textit{yang} and \textit{yin}, and can be called male and female.’"
of both elites and commoners. If you ask peasants in China at any time and any place if they know Confucius’s comment on junzi/xiaoren hierarchy, or the relationship between women and inferior men, they might answer “No”. However, if the question is, “are women yin?”, or “Have you ever heard that women are the sources of disasters?”, I have plenty of evidence to show the answer is “Yes”.

In *Half of Man*, the concept of a “gap”, the gap between culture and nature, or between educated highbrows and uneducated lowbrows is deeply rooted in Zhang Yonglin’s mindset pertaining to junzi/xiaoren hierarchy and yin-yang hierarchy. This gap is clearly illustrated by what Carolyn Brown terms, an “elite narrative voice” of the protagonist. “This tendency of the elite narrative voice to be controlling or even condescending towards the unfortunates of the narrative is not limited to fictions about women. Lower-class characters may receive similar treatment.” (Brown 1988, 64) As a prisoner, Zhang Yonglin still maintains his identity as a poet-scholar and always draws a clear line between himself and uneducated prisoners. In this unambiguous social context, his sense of “Who I am” persists despite his physical incarceration because of his right position in the social hierarchy “Where I am.” He is elated to hear other prisoners respectfully talk about him as a “bookworm” (p. 19). Thus he maintains a clear demarcation between the superiority of intellectual elite and the inferiority of commoners. Superior intellectuals definitely belong to the category of junzi, while uneducated males are xiaoren. “They looked on me as someone elevated and apart” (p. 19), boasts the protagonist. After seeing Zhang’s poems exhibited as evidences of his counterrevolutionary crime, Labor Gang Leader Wang, a peasant cadre who supervises the prisoners, comments with admiration:
"Zhang, you damn whore! Those damn let-it-all-hang-out poems of yours! They’re up there on the wall, in letters big as walnuts....Those words were gigantic! Man, you can write!"

... Listening to Wang, the other prisoners shot me sidelong glances of respect. (p. 7-8)

In this situation Zhang cannot forget that he has committed himself to be a poet. Not only does the narrative characterize Zhang Yonglin as a superior man, but also it lets his protagonist articulate his superiority several times. After contemplating his failure to approach naked Huang Xiangjiu, the protagonist summarizes:

It was education that distinguished me from an animal that gave me self-control and the power, in a critical moment, to be ‘human’. It was the force of education that gave me free-will and the power to choose, the power to exhibit the kind of superior behaviors that only humans could show. It was also education that made me realize I was responsible for my own behavior. (p. 46)

Throughout this novel, the emphasis on the gap between educated and uneducated is a repeated motif. Yenna Wu observes that Zhang Xianliang’s works “...exhibit remarkable similarity in plot design, characterization, motifs, and narrative voice” (1991, 115). In both *Mimosa* and *Half of Man*, Zhang Yonglin is a poet, well-educated intellectual, representing culture, rationality, mind, thus superiority, while his lover Ma Yinhua is an illiterate country woman; his wife Huang Xiangjiu is another country woman, junior high school graduate, symbolizing nature, sensuality and flesh, thus inferiority. He eventually divorces Huang Xiangjiu because he sees himself “as too good for her, he was easily able to rationalize the break, on behalf of ‘higher ideals.’” (Kinkley 1991, 100)
In portraying the emasculation of Chinese intellectuals under political persecution, many dichotomies are laid out in the novel, included those between culture and nature; spirit and flesh; body and soul; human and bestial; educated and uncivilized; social and domestic, men and women, etc. The former term in each dichotomous pair indicates superiority, and the latter indicates inferiority. The demarcations within these pairs are clearly drawn. In each pair with no exception, women are configured as inferior lower beings. We can take Zhang Yonglin and Huang Xiangjiu as an example. Both are victims, and both suffer from the persecution of the leftist regime during the Cultural Revolution. However, in this man-woman relationship, the hierarchical stereotype of man-dominant/women-subordinate and man-yang/women-yin is clearly at work. (See my detailed analysis on women’s position in the narrative below.) Consequently, “Zhang [Yonglin] simultaneously occupies the positions of both object of oppression and subject of patriarchal relations.” (Zhong 1994, 178). And Huang Xiangjiu becomes an absolutely hopeless object of both kinds of oppression.

The story of Half of Man takes place against the backdrop of the Cultural Revolution. During this disastrous period of time, Chinese intellectuals were abusively treated according to the ultraleftist-line of the Communist regime as “the Stinking Ninth” (choulaojiu 臭老九), the lowest class of society. Zhang Yonglin was not only thrust into this lowest class, but also was labeled a “thought criminal” and put into the jail. Still he cannot help maintaining the cultural gap between superior educated intellectuals like himself and inferior uneducated people like his wife and fellow prisoners. This psychological phenomenon would be difficult to explain in the absence of its association with Confucian junzi/xiaoren hierarchy and the concept of shi scholars, where “To be a
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scholar is to be at the top of society”, and where “Workers with their brains rule while workers with their labor are ruled”. Zhang Yonglin was a prisoner and now (in the narrative) is a “laogai renyuan 劳改人员” (person reformed by doing hard labor). This tragic experience changed his life tremendously, but can never reverse the level of his education. In this world everything can come and go or be gained and lost, such as property, fortune, jobs and women, except for education. One could be a millionaire today and penniless tomorrow, but an educated person will never be able to reverse to an illiterate. That is why Chinese intellectuals who were sent to the countryside before and during the Cultural Revolution to work and live with local peasants never identified themselves as peasants. The sense of superiority obtained from philosophical tradition and from their higher education had already melted into their blood and exhibited itself as their second instinct. Though Zhang Yonglin’s situation is much worse than that of others, including his wife, he cannot help gazing at others and the external world from above—from his superior position as a scholar; the “right” position as he sees. The irony of being labeled a “Stinking Ninth” at the bottom of society and still regarding himself superior to all others is a kind of everyday resistance to oppression, and hence exhibits the failure of so-called “reform” and brainwashing of intellectuals by the ultraleftist line.

3.3 Woman’s Position in Man’s Upward Journey to a Higher Social Order

*Half of Man* describes the journey of a politically oppressed and marginalized man who is obsessed with the idea of climbing back up the social ladder from the bottom, and thus regaining his rightful social position. The direction of this journey is of course
upwards. It does not matter how much the narrative focuses on politics, the basic focus of the story is on a man’s sexuality and impotence. Although *Half of Man* bestows on its protagonist the personality of a *junzi*, the conspicuous difference between the Confucian *junzi* masculinity and the ideal masculinity in the novel is that women were absent from the Confucian construction of masculinity, while the latter heavily relies on woman to reclaim or reconstruct the manhood of its protagonist. The title, *Half of Man is Woman*, implies an inseparable relationship between man and woman. The question is why a man’s impotence is problematic in his re-entering the social order? Why is his re-masculisation the essential passport for him to re-enter the social order? Why are women always chosen to represent a man’s emasculation, and where are women positioned in his upward journey? Although *Half of Man* has received voluminous commentaries and critiques on its presentations of gender, I have found that some points are still unmentioned. In this section I will present the major findings of my research about the relationship between the sexes that go beyond the previous critiques on this novel: (1) The central theme according to the textual presentation is “family oppression” (or women’s oppression), rather than “political oppression” as many critics contend; (2) Women are placed as gatekeepers in the horizontal zone (the second battlefield of men), or “the bottom rung of a new hierarchy” in Lu Tonglin’s terms (1993a, 3), no higher, no lower; and (3) Instead of achieving a victory over women as some critics claim, the protagonist overall fails to reconstruct his masculinity which is continuously challenged. He was emasculated not once, but twice, starting with emasculation by the state and ending with the emasculation he imposes upon himself.
Wagner notices the novel contains two dimensions. On the political dimension, the author successfully conveys the message of how Chinese "society and politics can dehumanize man" (Wagner 1990, 143). However on the gender dimension, the author's misogyny is evident. "The combination of sexist stereotyping and misogynist distrust is pervasive in Half of Man Is Woman." (ibid, 141) Zhong Xueping also analyzes the interaction between these two dimensions:

When Zhang Xianliang constructs 'human nature' around issues of sexual desire to show how political repression twists human nature, the way he represents that desire is gendered and linked to patriarchal relations of power." (1994:177)

There are no male writers in China nowadays who like to be labeled as patriarchal, which is synonymous to being labeled as "feudalistic," thus backward and morally depraved. Zhang Xianliang, having unconventional thoughts in many respects, does not intend to overtly identify himself with feudalistic patriarchy. However, it is easy for a male writer like Zhang Xianliang to slide into the patriarchal framework when he presents his ideas about sex and gender. This is an illustration of the power of entrenched patriarchal discourse. In dealing with issue of manhood, I have identified five points that reveal Zhang Xianliang's patriarchal stance on gender in this text.

3.3.1 Woman, I cannot go without you before I become a "real man"

The author projects a step-by-step restoration for his protagonist—sexual desire and sexual ability must be regained and fulfilled in order to restore his manhood, which in turn is a passport for him into the political arena. This step-by-step process of a
heterosexual man searching for his masculinity cannot be carried out without a woman. Then the narrative starts with male prisoners’ sexual hunger. The woman desired for this process should be and turns out to be in accordance with the stereotype of patriarchy, both in her appearance and behavior. She should also serve to facilitate man’s recovery and thus restore his masculinity.

The protagonist needs a woman (or women) to be his sexual object(s). What kind of women is required? Since there are no real women available in the labor reform camp, prisoners expect female ghosts to visit them in their dreams and become their sexual partners. Zhang Yonglin is not essentially different from other inmates in this respect. One night while all of his fellow prisoners have gone out to watch a film, Zhang stays behind in the inmate room, formerly a storeroom where a young girl hung herself several years before as a protest against a marriage arranged by her parents. According to his wish, this ghost-girl appears in front of him. The two become intimate and romantic. The image of the ghost girl fits completely with a typical man’s preferences—a beautiful girl with “two gleaming thick plaits, long eyelashes over bright, moist eyes, and in the dim light of the oil lamp her skin showed pinkish under translucent white” (p. 22). Her body is “soft”, and her waist is “slim” and her voice is “low” (p. 22). Not only is her appearance beautiful, but also she behaves like a dedicated, virtuous wife, and a caring lover for the protagonist. She is not concerned about her own well-being, but rather expresses concern for the protagonist, who is “ruining” his “health” by reading every night. “Her voice had a mildly scolding tone”, which obviously makes the poet feel very warm and comfortable as if “entering a dream” (p. 22).
Nonetheless, in spite of his fantasies and desire for women, he would turn away women who fail to meet his male standard. He describes a rare encounter with female prisoners from the women’s brigade mentioned above. As he watched these “no waists, no chests, no buttocks”, “sexless”, and boorish “female beasts” passing by, he lamented,

My stomach suddenly turned and a stream of acid came up my throat. I looked away, I couldn’t go on looking. They would destroy my hope for life itself. To think that the femininity I had enjoyed before, women I had loved before, had come to this. To imagine that they had been arrested and brought to this end—what was there left outside that was still worth longing for?

I turned my back on the canal, and began to cough.
My god! Oh, my mother! (p. 36)

Zhang Yonglin feels terribly hurt not because of these women’s tragic fate, but because of his ideal of femininity being destroyed by their appearance. Though he expresses a general (or maybe hypocritical) sympathy for these women having been repressed and desexualized, it is evident that his disgust directly derives from the appearance of these “female animals”. In other words, their appearance is too far away from man’s desire and thus from being able to gratify man’s sexual needs. It is their “sexless” appearance rather than their victimized lives that directly offends and pollutes his eyes, and thus “rapes” his virgin belief in ideal femininity.

Although, as a poet, he has an abundance of romantic and poetic imagination regarding women, his knowledge about women is quite abstract due to his dearth of first hand experience. The woman in his imagined lovemaking is, “the formless line of a soft body, undulating...the colors of Picasso in his later period, moving uncertainly in a cloud of smoke” (p. 27-28). The nightmare of his encountering “female animals” not only causes him squeamish discomfort, but also gives a stunning blow to his abstract
imagination about beautiful women. At this moment of despair, he witnesses an astonishing scene that suddenly wakes his identity as a man. By chance he sees a woman prisoner bathing herself by an irrigation canal. The author lyrically describes this scene.

Her whole body rose and fell as she splashed, sporting like a dolphin. Curving in an arc in the air, it would unfold in a beautiful motion. The skin was milky ivory, and glowed with a natural beauty. She vigorously rubbed wherever the water fell on her, until her whole body was exuding life.

At each shock of the cold water, her face would flash with pleasure. It was a face that invited, a face of happy vitality. Her short wet hair was smoothed back on her head, giving the soldierly look of a boy to what were feminine features. Her eyebrows gave a grace to the boyishness, narrow and long over deep eyes. They were indescribably lively, shooting up as the cold water hit.

She seemed to have forgotten everything... She bathed intently, completely. She bathed as if wanting to wash her very soul and make it clean (p. 43-44).

The protagonist is dumbfounded by this unexpected, unimaginable and irresistible scene. The woman standing right in front of his eyes is no longer sexless and has nothing to do with a “female beast”. She is young, beautiful, and most importantly a substantial “woman”. At this moment, he cannot move, neither can he approach her, nor run away from her; he just “stood quietly watching” (p. 44). He has difficulty in swallowing down saliva, “I tried repeatedly to swallow, conscious of terror, hope and cowardice” (p. 45). He lacks courage at that moment to approach her. His silent, close observation of a bathing woman, of the beautiful lines of her naked body, shows that she is quite different from the imagined women in his dreams. She excites his sexual desire and reminds him of his manhood. He is experiencing sexual and masculine anxiety. Facing this naked and beautiful woman, he realizes that his long-term sexual needs, which were suppressed, have been corporeal and that his identity as a man has become a physical urge first time
at the age of thirty-one (but he realizes his sexual practice eight years later at the age of thirty-nine, which I will discuss later). The protagonist repeatedly recalls this encounter later in the work.

My heart had hardened from the lack of lubrication, yet that sight of her had left an indelible mark on me. To this day, I was moved by that image, the beautiful lines of a naked body. It had excited me countless times, aroused a lust in me, made me realize that despite my outer husk of prison black, or blue, or now, laboring green, I was still a man inside.

Although we were living in a society that strangled individuality, at least I maintained the distinction of sex. That powerful gesture of hers, that brave and soundless call, had had the effect of raping me. I had not had the courage to meet it, but its effect was to stay with me and in me: although at the age of thirty-nine I was still a virgin, I had lost my virginity at that moment (p. 77).

The protagonist considers it a “rape” incident; that is Huang Xiangjiu, the name of that naked woman, has “raped” a thirty-one-year old “tongnanzi” (male virgin) by the ditch by doing nothing but displaying her nudity. Completely unaware of her role, Huang Xiangjiu has entered the process of recovering his manhood and has accomplished the first step — the protagonist has biologically and sexually rediscovered his male identity. “Without knowing what ‘woman’ means, Zhang could never know himself ‘sexually.’” (Tam 1989, 58)

Now Zhang has acquired concrete knowledge about a particular woman and feels a strong desire to start a real sexual adventure. To complete the process of recovering his manhood, he courts Huang Xiangjiu and proposes marriage to her eight years after they first met. Unfortunately, their marriage turns out to be an unhappy one. First, Zhang feels that his wife leaves him no space of his own. Second, she does not understand why he likes to read books, the works of Marx and Engels. Third, he panics right after the marriage and in the succeeding months because he finds out that he is impotent. The
Party Secretary Cao takes advantage of this situation and commits adultery with his wife. Huang Xiangjiu, increasingly frustrated with her husband’s impotency, scorns him as “half a man” and a “crippled” man, (p. 137) likening him to a castrated eunuch. She complains:

...Oh, I hoped so much, and look what has happened! What kind of man are you? Old Lady Ma told me you were at least honest and kind. But you have no manliness to you at all. *I heard that that thing of a eunuch is as soft as yours.* If you were a real man, I wouldn’t mind if you beat me all day... (p. 152-153)

Zhang understands the implication that “a eunuch” is woman as “In many instances, eunuchs are equated with women”—an inferior being equivalent to “xiaoren” in Confucianism, as Confucianism always structures the social order by gender images. Up to this point, his problematic masculine identity, the fulfillment of his political ambition, his intellectual’s creativity, and his enthusiasm for writing that serves as a prelude to his political engagement, all are subordinate to one element—impotency! His impotency suddenly makes his identity as “Who I am” ambiguous. In other words, if he is impotent, he is not a man. His previous elevation as a superior poet among his inmates is completely flattened. He has to reshape his identity and reposition himself in the power structure of the sexes. His unmanly identity is shaped by feelings of humiliation that come to him from the outside world. He hears humiliating words “crippled”, “eunuch”, from his wife, and witnesses directly the humiliating adultery between his wife and

43 The line in italics is my translation because it is missing from the English edition. For the original Chinese text of this paragraph, see Zhang Xianliang: “Nanren de Yiban shi Nüren.” In Zhang Xianliang *Aiqing Sanbuqu.* Beijing: Huayi chubanshe, 1992, p. 279.
44 Louie’s article, 1991, p. 8 on the online version.
Secretary Cao. What wells up from his internal world is the feeling of inferiority. A shrinking space of his own at home pinned him into a small corner large enough only for a mouse and suffocation for a man. The pressure of his castration complex eventually has reduced his mentality to that of a mouse shuddering in a small corner—the right place for him. The following vivid depiction reveals the suffering of the impotent protagonist:

I should move to comfort her, should stroke her and caress her...But I was no longer able to do any of those things, twice before when she was crying I had tried to hold her. Each time, she forcefully pushed me away...I understood then that I was not to touch her again. I was to stay to one side, to hide in the corners if possible. It would be best if I could become a mouse. She had slowly expanded, in our so-called “home,” until she filled all the empty space. She had taken over the store-rooms until there was no room for me. Before, when I lived in the bachelor dormitory, I had still felt that my space was my own. It was small, but mentally I had felt there were no bounds. Now our space was larger, but my mental space had shrunk. I knew now what people meant when they said their minds were being suffocated. (p. 153)

Here, the narrative conveys Zhang’s feelings about his sexual dysfunction, and symbolizes in a political sense his marginalization to a corner of society. Thus, the sexual dimension is explicit and the political dimension is implicit in establishing sexual/political equivalency echoing Confucian yin-yang based hierarchy. Then a matrix of equivalencies within the sexual dimension and across the political dimensions appears as the follow:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sexual dimension</th>
<th>=</th>
<th>Political dimension</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emasculated husband</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>half a man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>woman</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>xiaoren (inferior man)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gelding horse</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>mouse</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
His Confucian ideology tells him that his insignificant and marginalized social position rightly belongs to women and animals, and that this fate is a great misfortune for him, a well-educated junzi (gentleman).

What an absurd and ludicrous picture it would be for a castrated mouse to cherish the great ambition to save the whole country! Nonetheless it is the very picture drawn in Half of Man. The inferior castrated man suffers greatly not only from his own humiliation, but also from that of his country and its people. Therefore instead of appearing absurd and ludicrous, the color of the picture becomes solemn and sublime because his castration complex is an intellectual’s castration complex interpreted from the point of view of the social elite. He understands that the thoughts, ideas, norms, psyches and feelings of the social elite should be lofty and decent ones. Thus, the protagonist identifies himself with Christ, Hamlet, and Sima Qian 司马迁 (ca. 145-85 B.C., a renowned historian in the Han Dynasty)—all tragic heroes and martyrs in their respective times. Prior to his realization of his impotency, the protagonist had already become intoxicated with the atmosphere of martyrdom.

When I next straightened up to throw another bundle of weeds on the bank, I exploded with a feeling of tallness, as though I were the hero in a tragedy. All the prisoners bending over around me were like the robbers with Christ at Golgotha. I felt myself the “Son of God”, and first a feeling of superiority and then a sense of compassion welled up within me...A prisoner, confined and humiliated must survive by making himself fell bigger (p. 8-9).

He suffers dreadfully from his impotency and repeats Hamlet’s famous question, “To be or not to be?” (p. 155). Like Hamlet, he ponders the serious question of “death”, and then naturally recalls his predecessor Sima Qian who received the punishment of castration. In ancient China for a male criminal, particularly for a male intellectual,
gongxing 宫刑, (castration) was the most humiliating among all possible penalties. Sima Qian regarded his intellect work as the only outlet through which his sufferings from extreme, unbearable humiliation were released. The gelding horse believes that if Sima Qian had not been castrated, his great work, *The Annals of History* (Shiji 史记), would not have been written. “The world lost one reproductive organ, but gained a great piece of literature”, comments the gelding horse (p. 144).

In contemplating Hamlet’s question and in associating his tragedy with that of Sima Qian while imagining himself as Christ, the protagonist elevates himself from an insignificant castrated man to a great tragic hero or a martyr. His feeling of inferiority is converted into a superior feeling, because he knows clearly that his tragedy lies in years of persecution, and that his impotency is not merely a personal tragedy. The castrated protagonist is a projection of the castration mentality of Chinese intellectuals. The gelding horse philosopher ponders “if your entire intellectual community isn’t emasculated. If even ten per cent among you were virile men, our country would never have come to this sorry state” (p. 145). This is the tragedy of Chinese intellectuals, as well as the tragedy of the whole of China. The traditional perception in China is that anything connected to the welfare of the country will be viewed as greatness. This way of perception is the result of the Confucian discourse of Chinese male *shi* scholars throughout the history.

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Before the Sui dynasty (AD 581-617), there were five kinds of penalties for criminals: (1) *Moxing* (the ink penalty, also called *qingxing*) was to tattoo signs or characters with black ink (*mo*) on the face of a criminal. (2) *Bixing* (the nose penalty) was to cut off the nose of the criminal. (3) *Feixing* (the foot penalty, also called *yuexing*) was to cut off one or both feet of the criminal. (4) *Gongxing* was castration. (5) *Dapi* (The big split of the body into pieces) was a death penalty (Wang Jianhui & Xuejin Yi 1991, 238).
A rainstorm that threatens the lives of villagers and state farm workers then brings a turning point in Zhang's life as a man. In the fight against the flood, thanks to his intellect and knowledge, he becomes a decisive leader on the spot as he organizes, strategizes, supervises, and commands others including his supervisor and rival, Party Secretary Cao.

Whoever worked hardest was given authority over others. Distinctions among Troop Leaders, Secretary and ordinary workers had disappeared—at this point people were listening to whoever was most capable. We were in a life-and-death situation, and the customary hierarchy had broken down (p. 194).

As the only person who could swim, and considering himself crippled and half dead, Zhang cares little about his own life and bravely jumps into the swirl without any hesitation to fill up the break in the canal—the crucial action that eventually stops the flood. It is the first time in his life that he has become a hero by playing the most significant role in a life-threatening event. The natural disaster releases and gives full play to his knowledge, skills, leadership ability, and virility—in sum, his intellectual masculinity that had been suppressed for decades by totalitarianism. The process of regaining his masculinity is complete that evening when he unexpectedly regains his potency. He goes home, his body wet, freezing and shivering. There his wife waits for him with hot ginger soup which, according to Chinese folk medicine, has the herbal effect of revitalizing a man’s sexual ability.

...She dropped the work in her hands and sprang towards me, and I felt the strength in her body as she half carried me into the inner room. Setting me on the bed, she deftly removed my clothes, and then tucked me under the tractors [the pattern design of their comforter].

...
She ran quickly to the outer room and returned with a steaming bowl of ginger soup. 

...Kneeling by the bed, she began to massage my arms and chest. She worked them as though they were noodle dough in her hands (p. 200-201).

She then opens her blouse to bury his freezing face between her breasts.

I felt something I had never felt in my life before. Was this love? My arm reached out to wrap around her body... (p. 202)

The day of the flood is designed by the author as his protagonist's rebirth as a real man. In contrast to the natural birthday of a new baby that requires a biological mother, the rebirth-day of a man requires a sexual “mother”—woman. Huang Xiangjiu, unconsciously again, plays the role of Zhang Yonglin's sexual “mother”. She only realizes that later as she proclaims, “Don’t forget, I’m the one who made you into a real man...” (p. 285)

As “half a man” becomes “a whole man”, and “a crippled man” becomes “a strong and masculine man”, the power relationships between the sexes inevitably changes. Before he regains his potency, his wife is superior in her natural endowments in almost every way, except for level of education. She is healthy, good-looking, sexy, hard working and a good manager in running a household, whereas Zhang is inferior mainly because of his impotence. In addition, his political status as a “thought criminal” at that time ironically is lower than his wife’s status as a licentious criminal having problems in “shenghuo zuofeng” (lit. the style of life, implying “sexual promiscuity”). Now, it is time for Zhang Yonglin to solve the problem of “Where I am” after he re-established “Who I am”. As he repositions his Self in relation to Others, the power balance immediately reverses. The traditional pattern of patriarchy is restored. Zhang takes back
all superior roles in the household and prevails over his wife. The obvious and naturally superior endowments of Huang Xiangjiu shrink against her husband’s power endowed by patriarchy after he becomes a “real man”. Therefore, the playing out of sexual desires is a power game and the winning or losing of this game is mainly determined by the potency (or impotence) of the husband, not the natural endowments or capabilities of the wife. Therefore the (im)potence makes a clear demarcation between two completely different power structures, including the power practiced in their sexual intercourse. Huang Xiangjiu assumed that Zhang Yonglin was inexperienced in sexual intercourse (actually he was impotent). She took the initiative and controlled their sexual performance. Holding his hands, she teaches and guides her husband to go through the procedure of the intercourse step by step (p. 135). After he recovers his potency, he is no longer “a small boat” navigated by his wife, but the master of the expedition, the winner in the sexual struggle. He “laughed a convulsive laugh” after he has made love with his wife successfully for the first time. When his wife asks him if he can do it again, he answers “savagely”: “I can!” (p. 202)

The roles of domination and submission are reversed not only in the couple’s sexual relationships, but also in many other aspects of their life. Zhang assumed total control over their mood, the family atmosphere, the decision-making and the future of this family. If he is moody, his wife cannot be happy. Before regaining his potency, it was his wife who rudely pushed him away when he tried to hold her, and he understood then that he was not to touch her again (p. 153). After becoming a real man, it is he who brutally pushes his wife away when troubled by her infidelity.
'Get away.' Sometimes I would push her outside the covers and wrap myself up in them, trying to be alone. 'I can smell those other men on you right now.' (p. 207)

His wife gets the jitters, nervously suggesting to him that he should have sex with other women to achieve a fair balance (p. 207). When his wife proposes the adoption of a child in order to secure her marriage, Zhang dominates the conversation and asserts his will: "All right, let's not argue. When it's possible to have a child, I'll tell you" (p. 216). He sometimes vents feelings of frustration and anger on his wife; she can do nothing but sob (p. 209). When he decides to divorce, his wife has no say at all about the future of their relationship, and she is doomed to be a three-time divorcée. Their marriage and their future are totally under his control.

3.3.2 Woman, I cannot go with you any longer after I become a "real man"—Pretexts for divorce

Up to this point, the protagonist has gone through almost all the steps necessary for recovering his potency and regaining his masculine power at home and in the local community. Even the gelding horse observes that his "grip on the reins has strength", and his "thighs are strong" (p. 206). Now he is ready to continue his upward journey and venture out "to see the wide open world" (p. 206). "I'm aching for action, aching to throw off all that binds me" (p. 206). The woman who has transformed him from half a man to a real man now is among the constraints holding him back as he repositions himself to facilitate his political ambition. At this moment, the protagonist's ambivalent and paradoxical attitude toward women is thoroughly exposed. The protagonist reveals a
perspective quite different from his previous feelings toward women. He recalls his first
counter with Huang Xiangjiu bathing in a ditch:

She forgot herself, and I also forgot myself. At the start, I couldn’t help
looking, indeed my eyes kept returning to that most secret of female places.
Then from it, and from the entire picture, began to emanate a feeling, the aura
of a powerful force. Here was something magical, that escaped all that man
abhorred. Here, almost, was a myth, an archetype that transcended the world
itself. Because of her, the world now had color. Because of her, I now knew
grace (p. 44).

But now his feeling toward her changes greatly.

My love for her was a mixture of emotions, polluted by impurities. Attraction
and repulsion were mixed together. I wanted both to comfort her and torment
her, to love and hate her. Contradictions were coiled together, as hard to
separate as they were to understand. My love was like a two-headed snake,
eating out my heart (p. 207).

Actually he tends to feel more repulsed than attracted by his wife. He criticizes
her in a manner infused with Confucian patriarchal morality, and treats her somewhat
sadomasochistically (Wu 1992, 126). He comments: “Love was something that made a
person both want and despise it. One could not live without it, and could not live with too
much of it” (p. 245). I can hear a strong voice chattering in the protagonist’s mind but not
being articulated: “Condemned woman, I cannot go without you before I become a real
man. I cannot go with you any longer after I become a real man.”

After she arouses Zhang’s sexual desire and ultimately transforms “half a man”
into “a real man”, Huang’s mission in recovering the sexual identity of her husband is
concluded and she becomes redundant, even a barrier. But Zhang Yonglin cannot
abandon her as garbage, because he is an intellectual, a member of the social elite. Elite
ethics require him to justify his abandonment. The difference between an intellectual and an uneducated person who do the same thing is that the latter does it instinctively whereas the former must rationalize and legitimize his action for the purpose of avoiding public criticism and assuaging his own sense of guilt. For this purpose, Huang Xiangjiu is still needed. Now it is her turn to be transformed and thus to be repositioned. As I mentioned at the beginning of this section, this is a step-by-step process of recovering masculinity. Huang has played her role in creating a man sexually, but not yet psychologically and politically, which is beyond her capability. The protagonist has just obtained a passport (certifying his identity as a potent man) for entering a higher social order in the outside world where he can restore or reconstruct his psychological and political persona as an “intellectual man”. In this next step, Huang Xiangjiu must be transformed into the object of an intellectual man’s condemnation.

Zhang Yonglin has collected four pretexts for divorce: (1) Huang’s adultery; (2) His lofty pursuit of politics, which may cause trouble to Huang Xiangjiu. (The best way to protect her is to free her by divorcing her); (3) Her potential role as an informer who may reveal his political activities; and (4) His belief that Huang is knitting a web to trap him into domesticity.

Only the second pretext indicates concern for his wife, showing that he is a loving, caring and protecting husband. However, without any supportive evidence, his concern with his wife’s future tends to be empty, insincere, superficial and hypocritical.

Zhang Yonglin’s impotency is a part of his life tragedy that wins over readers to sympathize with him. Huang Xiangjiu’s adultery with Cao is also understandable and worthy of the readers’ sympathy, because Zhang’s impotence is a direct consequence of
the political persecution, and Huang in turn is a direct victim of his impotency, and thus an indirect victim of political persecution. The critique of oppressive political power would be much stronger if the narrative held to this logic. Instead, Huang Xiangjiu is characterized as an adulteress. The implication is clear—even if her husband were not impotent, she might have committed secret adultery with Cao anyway, because she is a veteran of sexual promiscuity. In this way, the author underhandedly allows his protagonist to escape from being blamed for not being able to bring a normal life to his wife. This sort of characterization creates sympathy for him and disrespect for her, and also justifies abandonment of his wife. According to Confucian patriarchy, adultery committed by a wife was a heinous crime, and the adulterous wife was cast out or even punished with death by elder leaders of the kinship group. In modern China the punishment of death for an adulterous wife has been outlawed. However, the attitude of patriarchal men toward unfaithful wives has not yet changed. Zhang Yonglin is so obsessed with his wife’s adultery that he mentions it openly and hints it at least ten times in the narrative. This is one of the two real reasons why he must divorce her, despite the fact that he elaborates other lofty reasons for his divorce.

In the conflict between the couple that dooms Huang Xiangjiu is her threat of blackmail. Frustrated by her husband constantly holding her adultery against her, Huang threatens to submit his diary to the authorities. This is the diary in which he has secretly written his political ideas, opinions and criticism to express his political dissent. She coerces him into not mentioning her stigma by threatening to report his “secret agent activities” (written in his political diary) to the authorities. While Zhang Youglin is hunting for more justification for abandoning his wife, Huang, ignorant of politics,
provides an easy target. This diary blackmail event is inserted into the narrative because everyone in China knows the serious consequences if such a diary falls into the hands of the authorities—going back to jail or even being sentenced to death for "counterrevolutionary thoughts", as in the death of Zhang Zhixin mentioned in Chapter One. Knowing that his wife did not have the will to turn over the diary, Zhang Yonglin intensifies the conflict by pushing her into the corner with sharp words to goad her into action. Zhang Yonglin boasts: "I knew she could not do it, but at the same time I wished she would. I needed her perverse behavior to salve my conscience. When you’re thinking of leaving a person it’s best to let that person do something to hurt you first" (p. 246).

While the two are physically fighting to grab the diary, Zhang’s friend Heizi comes into the scene and stops the fight (p. 247). Obviously the narrative strategy is to use Heizi as a witness to justify Zhang’s intention to abandon his wife. Afterwards he admonishes Zhang Yonglin:

Lao Zhang, it doesn’t matter if a woman’s lazy or if she’s greedy. But God help you if she’s KGB. Just think, every night you’re hugging a time-bomb. I told you a long time ago, that woman of yours needs a good beating. And I also told you the bitch is on good terms with that bastard [Secretary Cao]. I remember I was pretty annoyed with you then, but I figured she must be holding something over you. So this is what it was! Lao Zhang, how can you still want that woman? She’ll send you into the camps again any time she wants. You have to think of a way to get rid of her...” (p. 248)

Up to this point, Huang has been successfully transformed from a lovely woman and sexual mother who gave birth to a real man into the condemned woman who must be discarded. Without disturbing too much of the reader’s consciousness, Zhang has been transformed too, from the blamed to the blamer, and from an active abandoner to a
passive abandoner, that is, his decision to divorce derives from the pressure of consensus articulated eloquently by Heizi. After these transformations, the result comes—Zhang has to comply with common sense, and follow the opinion of his associates to discard his wife if he wants to maintain his integrity. His wife has strayed from morality, but the cold-hearted Zhang has not. The expression that articulates the innermost voice of the protagonist can be summarized as: “The condemned woman, I could not go without you before I become a real man. I cannot go with you any longer after I have become a real man. But I cannot let you go before you are fully condemned.”

Another detail is worth noting. The protagonist has regained his sexual power, but his wife does not get pregnant. Confucianism highly emphasized a couple’s responsibility in producing children to carry on the patrilineal family. Having no heir was placed at the top of three unfilial acts by Mencius. In the narrative, Huang Xiangjiu again is guilty as charged for this offense. The author speaks through Heizi’s wife telling the protagonist (and readers) that it is Huang who is incapable of carrying a baby (p. 126). The message here is that the protagonist’s reproductive function is normal—one of the criteria to judge manhood by Confucian standards.

From the perspective of politics in gender relations, the real factor that has caused the couple to split apart is that Huang does not meet the standards of a patriarchal man. What might have been beyond the author’s expectation is that Huang Xiangjiu actually is his great achievement in characterization, especially in the sense of illustrating women’s agency. Huang Xiangjiu is a tough young woman full of desire, impulse and vitality. “‘Reality’ had destroyed her life. Yet she still made anything that tried to counter ‘fate’”

46 Mencius said, “There are three ways of being a bad son. The most serious is to have no heir.” (Mencius: IV. Part A, 26. 1970, 127)
Driven by her strong survival instinct and enduring spirit, she exhausted every possibility to live the life she desired. She did not like Zhang Yonglin’s idea of having Old Lady Ma as a matchmaker. She insisted “... it’s something we should talk about ourselves” (p. 113). Discussing their marriage, Zhang was intoxicated with romantic sentiment and expected something romantic to take place between them, while Huang Xiangjiu kept a clear and cool mind focusing on her practical blueprint for their future life. She investigated Zhang’s savings and monthly salary (it turns out that her savings were much more than his), and quickly worked out a manageable plan to manage their future finances (p. 115-116). With very limited resources, she “exhibited an extraordinary ability to manage the decor of our living quarters” (p. 126). Using her magical hands, she turned two shabby storage rooms into a cozy and pleasant wedding house (p. 126-128). During the whole process of preparing their “new house,” Zhang appeared to be a completely useless bookworm who became a laborer supervised by his talented wife. Zhang failed to have sex with his wife. Huang did not want to accept this failure passively. Instead, she offered step-by-step teachings of love-making to her husband (p. 135). Only with a clear awareness of the “irreversible” reality of her husband’s impotency, did she commit adultery with Secretary Cao. After she reconstructed her husband as a “real man”, she felt urgency to secure her marriage when he showed no forgiveness for her wrongdoing with Cao. Then she suggested adopting a child to tie her husband to their marriage (p. 215). She blackmailed her husband with his diary for the reason discussed above (p. 241-247). The most touching scene regarding Huang Xiangjiu comes at the end of the novel. Realizing that all her efforts had failed and that she was doomed to be a divorcée again, she accepted her fate clear-mindedly (though emotionally)
but not submissively. She divided their property and gave two hundred dollars to her husband, a big surprise to him because the amount of their savings was far beyond his imagination. It was given to him despite the fact that he had bitterly hurt his wife (p. 281-282). Finally "...she said in a hot, commanding voice, 'On the bed! Tonight I want you to play till you’re satisfied. Take me so you’ll never forget me’" (p. 284). She offered a last chance for sex not for the purpose of keeping her husband from leaving, but for establishing an eternal memory between two of them. She prepared for a life without men, saying: "Old Lady Ma lived her life alone and she’s still happy. I figure I can be the same as she is." (p. 284)

In my feminist reading of the text, the most important point about Huang Xiangjiu is that her female agency is not based upon dependence on men. In the following two chapters, I will show how this is not the case for the female protagonists of two other novels. In other words, Huang Xiangjiu is still Huang Xiangjiu, regardless of the presence or the absence of men. Her identity as "Who I am" does not change either with or without her husband. I do not see any evidence in the narrative to show that women’s agency is included into the author's agenda, but this literary image of Huang Xiangjiu does not collapse and vanish after she is abandoned. Huang Xiangjiu persistently demonstrates her strong desire to live the life she wants. Although she fails in her effort to maintain autonomy and control over her life, she is impressively characterized. I perceive Huang Xiangjiu growing out of a crevice of stones and thriving against an overtly hostile discourse within an environment where very limited resources are reserved for her. In this misogynist discourse, there is little space for female subjectivity and few female voices are heard. Huang becomes a woman of action. She is the only
female character in the three novels who seems to successfully escape the author’s original plan and gains an independent life.

From a misogynist perspective, which is the real underlying current in the narrative, Huang possesses qualities that men expect, such as loving, caring, nurturing, sacrificing. She also possesses abilities that men do not like. She is practical-minded, sometimes calculating, good at managing the household and assertive. These attributes indicate that she appears to possess too much desire of her own. She is not a docile wife whom a patriarchal husband would ideally hope for in his imagination. The following narration reveals the male psychology vividly:

“I think it might be best if you took charge of the household affairs.”
“Fine!” she said, seeming happy to have got the upper hand. All this seemed remote and slightly bizarre to me. While she had been a figment of my imagination, she had done whatever I told her to, been whatever I wanted her to be. Now the dream seemed to have floated out of my brain, escaped my control and become an independent being. What it did had surprisingly little relation to what had been in my head. I had thought somehow I knew her well, yet here I encountered a stranger (p. 116).

This sense of disappointment and disillusionment shows a man with a patriarchal ideology who has not yet learned how to deal with women who do not perfectly fit roles prescribed by the doctrine of Confucianism. Although Huang Xiangjiu possesses much desire of her own, she is not very far out of line in that she is not completely subversive to the Confucian doctrine. Shi is caring, loving, selfless, and sacrificing, a good woman according to the Confucian doctrine. However her traits of semi-independence and personal desire make the highly educated Zhang Yonglin feel that she is threatening and hard to deal with. This is a good example to show how Confucian patriarchy mentally crippled men while granting them absolute privilege over women. Zhang Yonglin
bravadoes: “Women will never possess the men they have created” (p. 285). This statement cannot conceal his crippled and pathetic mental state. Such crippled men will stay away from constructing their masculinity by interacting with women like Huang Xiangjiu. This is the real reason why Zhang must divorce his wife. She is a woman not easy to control. While Margaret Hillenbrand views Zhang Yonglin as a victor from marital gender conflict (1999, 129), I see him an escapist indeed who has no ability to deal with women who have their own strong desires and are too independent to be accepted as his wife. Women of this sort are far from the familiar images idealized by Confucian *yin-yang* doctrine.

3.3.3 A covert shift of the theme from “political oppression” to “family/women oppression”

In constructing the interaction between the political dimension and the gender dimension, the tendency of misogyny is even more conspicuous. “The novel is a fascinating psychological study in misogyny. More specifically, it illuminates how a woman can become the scapegoat for much broader political dissatisfactions.” (Wagner 1990, 142)

The most serious problem in the novel lies in the fact that Zhang Xianliang mistakenly blames his dehumanization on women. The misogynist attitude toward women in *Half of Man* confirms Lu Tonglin’s observation about the male preoccupation with searching for masculinity in the mid-1980. She points out: “...the Chinese people’s resentment of the communist regime is very often rearticulated by men as their resentment of women’s equal rights, as if Chinese men had been disempowered by
women’s empowerment.” Therefore “...the debasement of the ‘weaker’ sex, women, were all it took to empower men” (1993a, 8). Zhang Yonglin feels no qualms about venting his anger about his being politically persecuted on the woman who loves him, cares for him and has transformed him into a whole man. It seems as if he regards her as one who conspires with and acts on behalf of a totalitarian power to persecute him. This judgment is totally wrong because she, instead of being a persecutor, is actually being persecuted as well. In this sense, this political novel remains quite abstract (or vague) in its political indictment, but very concrete and substantial in its gendered attack. Many critics praise the novel for its success in depicting the interaction between politics and sexuality, in other words, successfully conveying meanings of politics via the symbolism of sex. Generally speaking, this is true. However what has been neglected in this commentary is the cultural and historical experience of the readers. To comprehend the symbolic meaning of politics, the novel requires a reader either to have personal experience with or knowledge about the Cultural Revolution. The English translator of this novel, Martha Avery, clearly understands the nature of the Chinese readership of this novel. She states in the Translator’s Introduction:

The interweaving of politics and poetry in this book may strike a non-Chinese reader as contrived, but to a contemporary audience in China it is only natural. Personal lives and decisions are unavoidably tied to politics... Chinese know this, and have found Zhang’s work powerful. It has hit a very deep nerve in China today. (p. xiv)

The readers’ own knowledge and experience fill the gaps in the plot and decode the symbolic meanings associated with the political persecution described in the novel. If we were to ignore the nature of the readership, and just focus on the text, what would we
see? There would be "sexless female beasts" in the women prisoners brigade who have destroyed the protagonist's desire for life, and there would be Huang Xiangjiu who has "raped" him with her nudity, taken away his virginity, suffocated him with a marriage, woven a web of control, taunted and insulted him as "half a man", betrayed and thus cuckolded him, and threatened to report his political diary to the authorities. The characters who are supposed to be the representatives of political persecution are described in a totally different way and a different narrative tone. For instance, Labor Gang Leader Wang, the immediate boss of Zhang and other prisoners is, "a figure of paternal authority representing the whole system of the bureaucracy" (Tam 1989, 56), and is actually "a good man at heart" (p. 7). He cares for Zhang and the other prisoners. His pet phrase, "You whore(s)!" bears no ill will at all. On the contrary Zhang says, "We prisoners felt a kind of familial acceptance when we heard the word used on us" (p. 7). In Zhang's eyes, Gang Leader Wang is "his benefactor" and he "looks upon" Wang (Tam 1989, 56). Party Secretary Cao, the primary authority at the state farm, not only has a handle on politics, but also is Zhang's rival. Nonetheless, he seems to be a good-natured person too. Rather than bullying prisoners, he always warns prison guards who enjoy hitting others with clubs or their fists, "Don't push dogs into a corner" (p. 63). Hei-tz comments: "he [Cao] hates being a petty official...he hasn't really joined in with that gang of 'rectifiers'" (p. 157). Xiao Li-tz is the precious son of the Vice-Chairman of the Political Section. His secure status qualifies him to be among the privileged ruling class. However, he is on very good terms with the prisoners, as Zhang states, "he never lorded it over me and even tried to make my life easy" (p. 163). Even the guards treat the prisoners with understanding and kindness. When two groups of the prisoner meet on the
road, one side playfully throws cucumbers and tomatoes to the other side like an American football team. The guards “took no stiffer action”. The protagonist comments: it is “hard to use guns to prod and beat laughing men” (p. 32). The narrative does not show evidence of how political persecution materializes. It leads us to ponder that the oppressive power might be the political system itself, but not the people who run and maintain the system. In this kind of depiction, the labor reform camp and the state farms change into “paradise”, not only because they are isolated from the chaotic outside, but also because prisoners and their authorities are getting along with each other like a warm family. The authorities, instead of running an oppressive system, care for prisoners, kindly protect them, provide help whenever they need it and affably create a warm atmosphere for them. Whenever the protagonist carries too heavy a load on his shoulders, Gang Leader Wang comes to give him a hand and show his concern: “Don’t kill yourself ... You push too hard, you spit blood and that’s it for life” (p. 11). When Zhang and Huang apply for marriage, Secretary Cao not only approves their paper work without any problem, but also assigns two store-rooms for them to live in (p. 126). All relationships between authorities and subordinates tend to be harmonious and warm. All indictments against the system fall on women. Zhang Yonglin not only feels but also articulates that he and his wife are always on the battlefield:

The first struggle of mankind was not between man and man, or man and beast. The earliest struggle was that between man and woman. It was a struggle that was unceasing and still continued. (p. 133)
The protagonist discovers after his troubling marital life that "I finally realized that there was a more terrible oppression than that of society—family oppression"\(^{47}\) (p. 137). This statement indicates that Huang is a direct source from which all the haplessness of the protagonist derives. Huang becomes a persecutor directly oppressing the protagonist. In this light, the configuration of political symbolism with a misogynist attitude is very problematic, because there is a covert shift in theme without diverting the attention of the readers. This echoes a Chinese saying: "ming xiu zhandao, an du chencang 明修栈道，暗渡陈仓" (Pretend to prepare to advance along one path while secretly going along another, meaning to attain one's end by clandestine means). In this secret thematic shift from political oppression to family oppression (or wife's oppression, or women's oppression), the narrative expresses sexism under the cover of political indictment. The way of retaliating against Huang for her adultery is a good example of this thematic shift. Zhong Xueping contends that Huang Xiangjiu is constructed as a setting (her body), or "the battlefield" in which the fight "between the power structure and an oppressed man" is carried on (2000, 74). In this way, Zhong Xueping problemizes Zhang Xianliang's way of representing his double struggle in sex and politics. However, her analysis has gone only half way. This is just partially or superficially true, because the protagonist's feeling is not just against the man who took his position, but also the woman, his wife, for her infidelity. In this light, Huang is constructed not only as a setting, but also as one of his enemies, to be more precise, a major enemy, since the

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\(^{47}\) This line in italics is my translation because it is missing from the English edition. For the original Chinese text of this paragraph, see Zhang Xianliang: "Nanren de Yiban shi Nüren", in Zhang Xianliang Aiqing Sanbuqu. Beijing: Huayi chubanshe, 1992, p. 280.
revenge he dishes out to his wife is much more severe than that which he inflicts on Party Secretary Cao.

After marriage, Zhang finds out that he is impotent. Party secretary Cao takes advantage of opportunities to visit Huang when he assigns Zhang to spend the night away from the village. By sheer coincidence (also by narratorial necessity), Zhang witnesses Cao's visit in the middle of night, and he ponders how he should act. Should he enter his house to kill Cao? Though he is impotent, it does not mean that he is physically feeble. He could kill Cao if he really wanted to. But instead of rushing into the house to kill his rival, he sits outside to indulge himself in fantasies imagining conversations with historical figures such as Song Jiang 宋江, Zhuang Zi 庄子, and Marx. As an impotent man, he cannot compete with his rival Cao; and as a "thought criminal", he cannot take any action against his immediate superior Cao either. He is a coward in terms of both sexual and political dimensions. His biggest victory in vanquishing his rival is in the fight against the flood, during which he can openly show his contempt for Cao, even command and give orders to Cao as if Cao were his subordinate. Cao acts submissively and feels inferior to Zhang at that moment, but this is just a temporary triumph for Zhang. After regaining his potency, Zhang Younglin still cowers under the controlling power of Party Secretary Cao. Standing in front of Cao for the approval of his divorce papers, Zhang reflected: "I found that at some time or other my posture had slipped into being bowed and bent. A self-demeaning attitude had become my second nature" (p. 276). He does not feel confident enough to be on equal terms with Cao, still less to be reconciled with him. However, his attitude toward his wife, one of the parties to adultery, is totally different. "Despite his outward passivity, Zhang has become more aggressive and brutal inwardly.
If he dares not oppose his superiors directly, he feels no qualms about venting his frustrations on his wife" (Wu 1992, 5). Huang commits adultery with Cao primarily out of sexual frustration. Even though Zhang can see clearly that her heart always belongs to him, he displays no mercy toward her. After he finds out about her secret act, Huang obviously feels guilty and looks after Zhang even more assiduously and deferentially, hoping to win back his love. He keeps ridiculing her with the sharpest words, and warning her about divorce several times. Thus, in this seemingly masculine struggle, all revenge is imposed on a woman. Huang Xiangjiu turns out to be the scapegoat in the subtle but tense struggle for political and sexual power between two men. Secretary Cao merely experienced the temporary discomfort of being thrust into an inferior position by a temporary hero, who later was not brave enough to face Cao. It is clear that the immediate goal of Zhang’s retaliation was not for the freedom from the political oppression, and not from being humiliated by his rival, but rather from “family [women] oppression”.

The misogynist treatment of women is even more conspicuous in Zhang Xianliang’s other novel, Getting Used to Dying (Xiguan Siwang 习惯死亡), which I have room in this dissertation to refer to only briefly. In this novel, the unnamed protagonist, who is split into two voices—“I” and “he”—is a middle-aged man who pursues sex with women one after another. He treats women as the object of revenge. As the dominant “I”—the assumed superego of “he”—criticizes “he”, “He had always been trampled on by others but he had, in turn, trampled on women” (Zhang Xianliang 1991, 12). “The truth was that his heart could no longer accommodate love...In fact, he had betrayed the heart of any woman before he ever began making love.” (ibid, 21) In analyzing the
protagonist in *Dying*, Jonathan Mirsky sums up: "It is his habit to make up for 30 years of
virginity by attracting and mistreating women" (01/27/1991). However, Jeffrey Kinkley
contends, "To feminist critics, then, it should be clear that Chang Hsien-liang [Zhang
Xianliang], now if not before, is aware that his heroes are male chauvinists; he is not
unknowingly parading his own unexamined prejudices before the reader." (1991, 113)

3.3.4 Silencing female voices

Male subjectivity in the narrative can be easily seen in the strategic transformation
of Huang Xiangjiu from a lovely woman to a condemned object. In the whole process of
this transformation, female voices are silenced—another narrative feature demonstrating
male subjectivity and hegemonic male discourse.

Zhang Yonglin remains loyal to his early political idealism, and, as an
intellectual, he demands the freedom to participate in politics that affect the fate of the
country. He reaches the point where he is prepared to sacrifice the cozy happiness of
married life for his spiritual freedom and political idealism.

It does not matter how Zhang Yonglin is oppressed and marginalized, as long as
he can articulate his political idealism, he remains masculine. His wife is taken for
granted. She must sacrifice her personal happiness in marriage for the sake of the country
without being given any chance to articulate her own will. The implication is quite
clear—since a man can devote his life to lofty pursuits for the good of the country, why
can a woman not sacrifice her happiness for the same goal? The Confucian *yin-yang*
hierarchy works in this way—*yang* prevails over *yin* and therefore *yang*'s will, notions
and values, etc., are automatically taken for granted as universally right for both *yin*
group and yang group. As long as females and lower positioned males are in the yin category, they have little or no say in opposing the universal rightness of yang’s will. In the case of the male and female protagonists, the analogy between a master and his servant might be applied to help decode this logical implication: “Since I, the master, decide to fight for the country at the expense of my life, it is ridiculous for you, my servant or my property, to hesitate to do the same thing.” The major premise of the syllogism is that a real man must devote his private property and his life to a noble cause. The minor premise is that, a wife is man’s private property. The conclusion is that wives must be sacrificed. This syllogism is problematic in two ways: first, it is assumed heroic idealism and patriotism exempt the hierarchy of patriarchal masculinity from moral questioning and critical scrutiny, as if to be taken for granted according to a sublime principle of the truth of the universe. Second, women are assumed to be objects and treated as disposable property. Zhang marries Huang just as a man purchases useful goods. Though he is not consciously aware of it, Zhang actually uses Huang as a tool in regaining his masculine strength. Then Zhang disposes of her as if disposing of his own private property under the umbrella of the patriotic idealism. These patriarchal principles are put into practice subconsciously in the context of Chinese culture without being questioned. Both men and women take it for granted that wives must unconditionally support their men’s noble idealism by sacrificing their own happiness. The narrative does not transcend this patriarchal ideology. On the contrary, by emphasizing patriotic idealism, it not only covers up the true nature of the protagonist’s patriarchal mentality, but also excuses him from being publicly criticized for his immoral conduct.
It is true that Zhang Yonglin is a victim of totalitarianism and that his life is tragic. However, as the male subject of the narrative, he can at least express his anger in writing, and blame totalitarianism and political persecution for his impotence. However, who will speak out for his wife’s haplessness and hopelessness? She marries a person who cannot fulfill his obligations as a husband. Whom should Huang Xiangjiu blame? Instead of voicing her suffering, the text characterizes her as a veteran adulteress. In this way, it gags her complaints. She has no right to blame, nor does she have anybody to blame but herself. In the Chinese cultural context, an adulteress does not deserve a normal and happy life. Her immoral conduct justifies such a result. Zhang feels that he is oppressed not only by society, but also by domesticity. He may fight for his freedom because he knows clearly the source of his tragedy. Huang should feel oppressed too. But by whom and by what is Huang oppressed? Where is the source of her tragedy? How should she fight for her freedom? There is no way to find answers to these questions in the text. To be more exact, the text does not leave any space for female subjectivity, nor does it give evidence that shows the author’s willingness to represent the interests of the other half of humanity.

Zhang Yonglin distrusts women’s schemes and yearns to break free of the web they weave:

Women had a capacity for doing these things. They excelled in using a needle and thread to sew you to themselves. Wearing what they made, you would naturally think of them: their heads under the light as their thumbs and forefingers pinched the needle, as their little finger twisted the thread in that particular motion that only women have. Each stitch sewed in her warmth, her smell, her gentleness, her sexuality. In the end it was not the cloth that wrapped around your body, it was her hot little hands, holding on to you.” (239)
This monologue exemplifies typical male subjectivity and reveals the extreme overbearing nature of patriarchal male discourse. If a little bit of space could be given to female subjectivity, or shifting this monologue into a dialogue between the husband and wife, the following could be Huang Xiangjiu's response: Under Confucian ideology women were constrained to the domestic sphere only. They were expected “not to step out of the gate or even touch the door” (damen bu chu, ermen bu mai 大门不出，二门步迈). In their narrow province of domesticity, they were trained from their childhood to master skills of nügong 女红 (women’s skills, such as cloth making, knitting, crocheting, sewing, and embroidery). Women who did not have a good grasp of these skills were not wanted by men. However, when women master these skills that demand endless time and energy, they still are unable to please men. Instead, they are criticized by men for exactly what they are expected to do by men and are trained to do for men.

Unfortunately, no female subjectivity appears in the novel. However, the postulated completion of a dialogue can help readers understand better the capricious nature of patriarchal male discourse.

Huang Xiangjiu is a helpless female in the narrative, despite the fact that she strives hard to control her life. If she does indeed possess a reflective consciousness of her own, she seems to lack the ability to articulate it due to her lower education, of which Zhang Yonglin is always aware. We see clearly in the text that Huang is full of anger, but cannot quite articulate the sources of or resolution to her feelings. Nevertheless, Zhang Yonglin definitely possesses the ability to articulate Huang’s hurt for her. Why did it not happen in this novel, and why is her protesting voice so weak? Is the protagonist insensitive to others’ feeling of hurt? The irony is apparent if we transfer Zhang
Yonglin’s emotional statement on people’s feeling of hurt from its original political context to the context of gender relations. I quote Zhang’s statement below to see how we will feel if we bear Huang’s sufferings in mind.

We’ve been played with for almost twenty years, used like a guinea pig in an experiment—we’ve been cheated and tricked. Can it be that when the experiment has utterly failed and we are on the verge of death, we don’t even have the guts to shout out, “It hurts”? People who are so numb they can’t even yell “It hurts” are people who are really better off dead. (264)

In its original context of indicting the political oppression, this statement is very articulate and eloquent. It reveals the true feelings of the protagonist, because he himself is one of the guinea pigs, one of those cheated and tricked, and one of those being terribly hurt. He feels that he has the responsibility for waking up the guinea pigs, and he wants to act as a spokesman for them and of course for himself as well.

In the context of sexual politics, Zhang participates in an experiment of regaining manhood where the other participant is Huang Xiangjiu. She is the one who becomes a guinea pig, being used and then abandoned, and the one who is cheated, tricked and hurt. Who will give voice to her pain on her behalf, and allow her to cry out: “It hurts!” In China, writers are regarded not only as spokesmen for humanity, but also as “the engineers of the human’s spirits” (renlei linghun de gongchenshi 人类灵魂的工程师). However, it is clear from the contrast I made above that the protagonist acts out as a spokesman for only half of humanity. Or to put it in another way, he represents all of humanity from which, in his perception, women are excluded. The irony is that the excluded women, or lower beings must be included as a tool in man’s project of recovering and restoring masculinity. It is also ironic that Zhang Yonglin begins his
pursuit of political idealism to wake up and liberate “hurt” people by hurting and trampling on a woman who has already been hurt just as much as he. The hypocritical nature of his political enthusiasm revealed by his indifference to Huang Xiangjiu’s feelings and the selfishness of his subjectivity seems clear to the reader too. In this light, Zhang Yonglin’s statement at the beginning of the novel sounds both prophetic and hypocritical. In his rendezvous with the beautiful ghost girl, Zhang states: “We still haven’t achieved a real equality of the sexes, still haven’t arrived at a stage of marriage through free choice. That’s why I read. To find out how to have equality between one person and another.” (p. 23)

3.3.5 Women—water—*yin*

As mentioned in Chapter Two, the ever-lasting image of Chinese women is *huoshui* (water of disasters). Zhang Xianliang, like most Chinese male writers, does not explicitly identify women’s *yin* attributes. (Chinese male intellectuals nowadays always dodge explicit recognition of this universally accepted principle of women being *yin* and men being *yang*.) It is evident that water, the traditional *yin* element known to every Chinese person, is the metaphor for women symbolizing their *yin* attributes in the novel. The narrative repeatedly reminds readers of her watery or *yin* identity. Whenever the female protagonist appears, she is associated water in different forms.

The debut of Huang Xiangjiu is associated with water as she is bathing in water. The second time that Huang Xiangjiu is directly connected to water is during the failed sexual exploration by the newlywed couple. She is not only in water, but good at playing with water. Her expertise in handling water indicates that water is her home, her
indispensable environment that nurtures and enhances her watery attributes. By contrast, the male protagonist is so awkward in water that he must be carefully guided by his expert wife in sexual navigation of the ocean.

Several nights later, her hand took hold of mine as we lay in bed, and slowly began to guide it through strange waters. She took charge of it like a small boat on stormy seas, navigating by the shores of her own territory. Warm waves rose and fell, as I felt a quivering from the depths of the ocean. (p. 135)

A frequent metaphor for sexual desire is fire—a yang element. Yuhuozhongshao 欲火中烧 (the sexual fire is blazing inside) is a commonly used phrase to describe someone overwhelmed by strong sexual desire. The author purposefully has changed the metaphor of sexual desire from fire to water that goes beyond innovative writing. The implication is obvious. In the sexual struggle between man and woman, the yang is dysfunctional and defeated by yin, and the latter takes her captive home.

The third time that Huang Xiangjiu is in water, she helps her husband regain his potency.

“You're well.” Her voice floated up from the depths of deep water. “Yes, I am. I didn’t know myself...” and I started to laugh, I laughed a convulsive laugh... “Can you... still?” Again the indistinct voice floated up to me from the depths of water. “I can!...” I said savagely. (p. 202, italics is my emphasis.)

This time the couple is no longer in the same boat cooperatively exploring the sexual ocean. The ocean scene has become the battlefield of the sexes. The male protagonist is on the surface of the ocean and the female protagonist is in the deep water, symbolizing three things: first, yang has conquered yin, even in his unfamiliar battlefield.
of water, indicating that the power of yang ultimately is stronger and thus prevails over yin, and that the protagonist has taken one significant step up in climbing the social ladder—transcending women first. Second, the locations of the male Self and female Others are repositioned and the distance between the couple has increased, not horizontally, but vertically. Their separation not only foreshadows their inevitable divorce, but also symbolizes the hierarchical order of the sexes in society. Third, Huang Xiangjiu’s position in deep water is consistent with the traditionally repeated conception: women are the source of disasters! A woman in deep water must be attempting to pull her man down to the same level, and a man who has just achieved a great victory of transcending a woman is still in jeopardy, on the verge of being pulled back down and corrupted.

Apart from these three major scenes associating water with the female protagonist, Huang is also depicted working in a steamy kitchen, walking in a marshy swamp, etc. After she is dismissed for good from Zhang Yonglin’s life, their living environment which used to be wet has dried up. All these references to water demonstrate the author’s belief in the hierarchically dichotomized yin-yang system of gender.

The most representative example is in fighting the flood. One can read the flood water as symbolizing the womb. Zhang’s diving into the water becomes the metaphor of returning to the womb. When he comes out of the amniotic fluid, he is reborn as a “real man”. In this sense, the destructive life-taking water transforms its symbolic meaning into constructive life-giving water. Fighting the flood can also be interpreted as sexual intercourse. Zhang’s filling the hole in the canal is the metaphor of successful penetration. Without this penetration, the water/woman would not be eventually conquered and thus
the villagers’/his (male) security would not be established. This interpretation also resonates with the Chinese yin-yang perspective. In Chinese, hong-shui 洪水—a flood—particularly when it is powerful, overwhelming, destructive and life-threatening—is also called yin-shui 淫水. This yin (the second tone) should not be mixed up with the yin (the first tone)—the antonym of yang. It is the same “yin” as in “shou-yin” (masturbation) which, as mentioned earlier, is traditionally associated with sexual nature of decadence, sin, and filth. Promiscuity is yinluan 淫乱; a licentious woman is a yinfu 淫妇; and the fluid in a licentious woman’s vagina is also called yinshui, the same word used in referring to a flood. Both vaginal fluid and flood belong to the category of yin in the yin-yang dichotomy because both are water. Whatever or whoever was associated with decadent, sinful and dirty “yin”, “was considered contaminated” and “therefore had to be controlled, regulated, and, if possible, rendered silent” (Zhong 2000, 55). Zhang Yonglin’s heroic deeds in fighting against yinshui (dirty water [flood]) and thus completely recovering his potency, symbolize a great victory of yang over yin.

3.4 Summary

Using sex/sexuality as a political weapon to challenge the hegemonic orthodox discourse is not something new in the West, as Foucault states: “If sex is repressed, that is, condemned to prohibition, nonexistence, and silence, then the mere fact that one is speaking about it has the appearance of a deliberate transgression” (1978, 6). However, in China, the undeniable fact is that Zhang Xianliang is the first writer who used sex as weapon. Hence, credit should be given to him for his unusual courage in breaking
through one of the forbidden zones established by the leftist-line of the Party, as he explicitly discusses and legitimates sex and sexuality as topics in serious literature. This bold action itself heralded the advent of the golden time of thought emancipation in the intellectual discourse started in the mid-1980s. More than a decade has passed since the publication of this novel, and we now have no hesitation in stating that Zhang Xianliang is the precursor in exploring sex and sexuality in contemporary Chinese literature.

Credit should also be given to the author’s success in characterizing the female protagonist. This characterization is consistent with Foucault’s point of view that “it [writing] now attains the right to kill, to become the murderer of its author” (1977, 117). That is, Huang Xiangjiu in the process of being characterized has gained her own literary life and female agency that go against the narrative scheme.

However, as Wagner points out: “it is regrettable that he chose to use the rhetoric of gender differentiation, to make ‘woman’ represent the reduced, emasculated, suffocated ‘half of man’ resulting from this dehumanization” (1990, 143). As a result, sexism tremendously “undercut the force of the novel’s tragic insights.” (ibid, 143)

A close examination of the novel suggests that the protagonist is nothing more than a contemporary shi, a living throwback to Confucian ideology. It is also clear that the author tends to identify closely with this ideology. In the upward journey to restore manhood, the protagonist encounters women first and demonstrates his double identity: an emasculated “Stinking Ninth” in the political arena and recovered masculine husband in the domestic arena; a marginalized coward on the first battlefield with authorities and a domineering master on the second battlefield with women. He also shows a double standard in his attitude toward the country and toward women—loyalty to the former and
cunning manipulation to the latter; a potential *junzi* to the former and a fake *junzi* (hypocrite) to the latter.

The narrative calls for the restoration of masculinity that was brutally trampled and destroyed by totalitarianism. However the underlying themes are more revealing. First, the text makes a covert shift of theme from “political oppression” to “family/women oppression”. Second, the dominant message conveyed in this novel contains the ideology of Confucian hierarchy manifested in such a way as to be taken for granted. The intellectual elite is taken for granted as the model of Chinese masculinity. A strong focus on the hierarchical gap between elites and commoners and between men and women echoes the same notions taught by Confucius and his followers—intellectuals (or *junzi* in Confucius terms) are cultured, well-educated and thus superior to others. Because of these qualities, they are *yang* elements and their masculinity should without question represent the ideal of masculinity in society. In contrast, commoners (or *xiaoren* in Confucius terms) are uneducated and thus inferior to the intellectual elite. Without question they belong to *yin* category. Women depicted in the novel are assigned even lower status than in Confucianism. They are definitely *yin* elements equivalent to uncultured male commoners, and at times equivalent to animals.

From the perspective of gender relations and sexuality, it is interesting to note that the narrative starts with the emasculated man who is anxious to restore his masculine identity and ends up at the same point after the long journey of restoration—an emasculated man who is determined to devote his life to political struggles for his country. This ironic twist shows that Zhang Yonglin is no different from what Louie
terms, a "macho eunuch" or a "functional eunuch". The first occurrence of emasculation is the result of totalitarianism. But the second castration is by his own will consistent with Confucian ethics of intellectuals for the sake of the country. My reading of the text suggests that the protagonist does not complete his journey of restoring his masculine identity because he does not become a complete man after his second experience of emasculation—his own self-emascula­tion.

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48 Kam Louie, 1991, p. 9 on the online version.
Chapter IV  Mo Yan and Red Sorghum

Among the talented novelists in the new era of Chinese literature in the past two decades, Mo Yan 莫言 is unique. Emerging at a time in the mid-1980s when the movement to “seek cultural roots” gained momentum, Mo Yan, labeled as a “root-seeking” writer by many critics, has created a body of work that appeals to readers far beyond the shores of Mainland China. Now he is acknowledged as one of the most innovative and creative novelists in contemporary China. His novels and short stories contain multifaceted dimensions that have “created among critics a swirl of discussion, debate and polemics” (Ng 1997, 344). His fiction seems to have become an inexhaustible source of academic inspiration and exploration for literary researchers. Articles and books on his works take various perspectives, including feminism, national discourse, new historical narrative, realism, modernism and postmodernism. The themes of nostalgia, homeland, sexuality, gender relations, violence, surrealism, and cannibalism in his fiction have been investigated by students of literature in many theses and dissertations. There seems to be no end for Mo Yan in bringing surprises to readers. His creations are so original and unpredictable that they go far beyond the imagination of readers and prove over and again that he is a versatile and resourceful writer. I borrow words from David Der-Wei Wang: “Mo Yan’s creation is far too complex to be dismissed by such facile labels as ‘root-seeking’ or ‘avant-garde.’”

1  David Der-wei Wang, 2000, p. 1 of the online version.
Mo Yan 莫言 is the pen name of Guan Moye 管谟业, which translated in English means “Don’t speak!” He was born in 1955 to an extended peasant family in Gaomi County, Shandong Province (Mo Yan 1998, 230-231). As the son of peasants, bitter poverty and constant hunger characterized his childhood. (ibid, 86-89, 99-100) “While city kids were drinking milk and eating bread, pampered by their mothers, my friends and I were fighting to overcome hunger.”² At the age of eleven when he was in the fifth grade, his formal education tragically ended and he returned home due to the eruption of the Cultural Revolution in 1966. From then to the age of seventeen, he worked in his hometown as a farmer, herding cows and cutting grass. In 1976 he joined the People’s Liberation Army, where he served until October 1997. During his army service he graduated from the Literature Department of the PLA Academy of Art and Literature, where he received a Master’s degree in literature.

Mo Yan began writing in 1980. In 1987, he published his debut novel, Honggaoliang jiazu 红高粱家族 (Red Sorghum). The novel began as a short story published in 1986. It was so well received that it later was expanded into five chapters and published as a family saga in 1987. This novel immediately appealed to readers in its unconventional perspective, imaginary narration, innovative structure and bold sexual depiction. It also inspired China’s most renowned director, Zhang Yimou, the most successful figure of the fifth generation directors to adapt the novel and make it into a movie with the same title. It not only won the Golden Bear (Best Picture) Prize in the 1988 Berlin International Film Festival, but also was honored with a closing-night award at the 1988 New York Film Festival. The film launched the careers of

²Mo Yan, 2000, p. 2 on the online version.
the director, Zhang Yimou, the star, Gong Li 巩俐 and the author. In Mo Yan’s words, “The novel became famous because of the movie....but, as a matter of fact, Red Sorghum evoked strong reactions in China before it was made into a movie. So Zhang Yimou benefited from my novel; then my novel benefited from his movie.”

Set in his Shangdong hometown of Northeast Gaomi Township, and narrated in the first person, this novel retells the legends of the narrator’s grandparents and the heroic deeds of local people in the Anti-Japanese War. The narrative starts as 16-year-old “My Grandma” Dai Fenglian 戴风莲 (her infant name is Jiuer 九儿, meaning the Ninth), is being married off by her father to a rich leper thirty years her senior in exchange for a black mule. When carried by sedan chair to her husband’s home, she was kidnapped by a bandit, a potential rapist who later was killed by the sedan bearers led by Yu Zhan’ao 余占鳌. On her nuptial night, My Grandmother successfully defended her virginity and health by threatening her leprous husband with a pair of scissors. He was never able to touch his wife. The local custom required a bride to visit her parents on the third day after the wedding. The second kidnapping took place on the journey back to her home. This time the kidnapper was the same man who had killed the first kidnapper and rescued her, the head of the sedan bearers, Yu Zhan’ao. Yu Zhan’ao became “My Grandfather” after he kidnapped My Grandmother and “raped” her in the field of red sorghum. When Grandmother returned to her husband’s home, she was greeted with the news that both her leprous husband and her father-in-law had been mysteriously murdered. As a widow, she took over her dead husband’s distillery, a prosperous wine business in the local community,
and became the sole owner. The “rapist” Yu Zhan’ao came to “look for a job” after the distillery was in full operation, and later publicly claimed My Grandmother as his wife. When their son, My Father (his name is Douguan 豆官), the product of romance in the sorghum field, reached the age of fourteen years, Japanese soldiers occupied Northeast Gaomi Township and killed Uncle Arhat 罗汉大叔, Grandmother’s manager and possibly her lover. Grandmother, full of indignation, decided to seek vengeance against the Japanese. Grandfather, erstwhile head of the sedan bearers, meanwhile assumed the title of Commander Yu, led a group of villager guerillas to ambush a Japanese convoy on the Jiao-Ping Highway. Japanese bullets killed Grandmother while she was delivering food to her lover’s guerilla unit. The ambush, though achieving a “great victory” in killing a Japanese major general, resulted in the massacre of villagers by the Japanese six days later. Grandfather, Father and Mother were among the few to survive the massacre.

This novel “on the surface,” as Mo Yan said, “seems to be about the war against Japan. But in reality, it’s about the folklore and legends told by my kin.”\(^4\) The author glorifies his ancestors on a larger-than-life scale and exalts the golden time of the past by creating a masculine “fatherland”\(^5\) and singing the praises of masculine beauty in the fictional Northeast Gaomi Township of Shangdong Province on the one hand and ridiculing his “bastard” ancestors on the other hand. The author does not explicitly deal with the theme of emasculation. However, the author’s anxiety and fear of emasculation is evident throughout the novel, and unequivocally present at the beginning and the end of the novel. To be more precise, the glorification of ancestors

\(^4\) Ibid. p. 3.
and the family history emanates from Mo Yan's emasculation complex. In deciphering Mo Yan's emasculation complex, I will focus on the same three aspects covered in the previous chapter—the source of his emasculation anxieties, the framework of his ideal masculinity, and his representation of women in dealing with the issue of emasculation.

4.1 Emasculation and Civilization

Many critics have discussed the motif of the degeneration of the human species in Red Sorghum. From its opening the narrative contrasts heroic ancestors with their unworthy descendants and is suggestive of a partly ironic exercise of self-atonement by an unfilial, worthless son/grandson (bu xiao zisun 不肖子孙).

With this book I respectfully invoke the heroic, aggrieved souls wandering in the boundless bright-red sorghum fields of my hometown. As your unfilial son, I am prepared to carve out my heart, marinate it in soy sauce, have it minced and placed in three bowls, and lay it out as an offering in a field of sorghum. Partake of it in good health! (Front matter, no page number)

Mo Yan makes it clear at the beginning of the novel that this story is about "my own" (the narrator's) family. His purpose is to glorify his ancestors by erecting a monument for them and writing biographies about them (shu bei li zhuàn 树碑立传).

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3 Shelley W. Chan, 2000, p. 1 on the online version.
4 The English translation of all quotations in Red Sorghum is from the English edition of Red Sorghum translated by Howard Goldblatt.
(In fact, he expresses his mixed feelings toward his “most heroic and most bastardly” ancestors both by singing high praise of them and mocking them mercilessly.) He makes it even clearer at the end of the novel that the unworthy descendants represented by “I”-narrator have been hopelessly corrupted by urban elite society. They have changed into another species analogous to “rabbits” that emit “a foul stench” from their pores. Mo Yan does not use animal metaphors for his heroic ancestors as he does for the generation of the “I”-narrator. He does not use lions or tigers, which are common metaphors in Chinese narrative used to describe bravery, aggressiveness, and the masculine power of human beings. Only twice the narrator describes Yu Zhan’ao, the leader of the sedan chair bearers, as a leader of dogs (pp. 61/49, 109/88). Based on the analogy between “my ancestor” peasants and dogs revealed in the chapter three: Goudao 狗道 (Dog Ways), I am persuaded that “dogs” and “rabbits” are the most appropriate metaphors for primitive ancestors and urbanized intellectuals. I will elaborate on this point later in this section.

In the beginning part and the ending part of the narrative, the author sets up clear dichotomies: the dichotomy between heroic ancestors and unworthy descendants; the dichotomy between dogs and rabbits; the dichotomy between the rural and urban; the dichotomy between savage and civilization; the dichotomy between peasants and intellectuals; and collectively, the dichotomy between nature and culture. Except at the beginning and the end, Mo Yan also allows the unworthy “I”-narrator to alternately appear as a child and as an adult, sporadically expressing

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7 “(p. No.)” refers to the page number from the Chinese version only. That means Howard Goldblatt does not translate the phrase(s) or paragraph into English. In the pattern of “(pp. No./No.)”, the first page number before “/” is the one from the Chinese version while the one after “/” is from the English version.
personal responses and commenting on the unfolding events, obviously as a reminder to readers of the sharp contrast between the two generations.

The dichotomy or polarization in Mo Yan's text between rural primitivity and urban high culture, and the products of these two societies—the "wild dogs" race and "pet-rabbits" race—are the keys to understanding Mo Yan's ideal of masculinity and his anxiety about emasculation. Grounded in polarization Mo Yan reveals a picture of an imaginary peasant world. This picture is semi-historic, semi-mythological, and full of power, and the beauty of masculinity.

To build up his dichotomies, Mo Yan manipulates various elements in his story telling. First, in constructing the dichotomy between savage and civilization, he must deconstruct boundaries. He deliberately obscures the boundaries between the myth and history, between the past and the present, between truth and lies, between good and bad, even between men and women. Shelley W. Chan states: "Mo Yan reconstructs history by subverting the binary opposition commonly found in the writings of the Maoist period." Second, in his thematic concerns, he highlights and exaggerates the opposition between urban and rural, between the peasant and intellectuals and between the past and the present by fantasizing about the peasant past and by mocking the civilized present. Third, in the structure of the text, he constructs two layers: the peasant life of the past is described explicitly and occupies the bulk of the text, while the urban life of the present is referred to implicitly and takes very little space in the story, giving readers no details at all. The technique of space-saving is undoubtedly significant in deciphering the thematic intentions of the author. If we go under the surface of myth-making, we see a disguise in the form of a
fantasized masculine hymn and marvelous landscape concealing Mo Yan’s enormous anxiety over an inevitable trend toward his own emasculation, and his deep sorrow over the degeneration of the human race. Mo Yan confesses,

People will miss the past because they are not content with the present-day reality. They will admire their ancestors when they are dissatisfied with themselves. In fact, this (way of thinking) is very like Ah Q’s…

For me, the homeland is synonymous with a faraway dream, a pensive mood, a refuge for one’s soul, as well as a place where one can escape from real life. (1993b, 39)

His sorrow and hopelessness can also be seen clearly when he confesses:

The Gaomi Northeast Township has changed greatly. The sorghum field I described existed when my grandfather and his peers were young. I never saw it. The raging-fire-like red sorghums are my myth, my dreamland, and the splendid grave of my soul (Mo Yan 1998, 249-250).

Next I will examine the author’s emasculation complex caused by civilization and imbedded in his dichotomization of wild dogs and corrupted rabbits.

4.1.1 Heroic and bastard dogs

In the first chapter of the novel, a monologue of My Father decries:

I had learned to love Northeast Gaomi Township with all my heart, and to hate it with unbridled fury. I didn’t realize until I’d grown up that

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8 Shelley W. Chan, 2000, p. 1 on the online version.
9 Ah Q is the protagonist in Lu Xun’s well known short story, Ah Q Zhengzhuang 阿 Q 正传 (The True Story of Ah Q, 1918). The most conspicuous aspect of Ah Q’s personalization is his peculiar way of making sense of “victory” out of humiliation. He can always transform the humiliation he receives into a psychological “victory”. In this way he can keep his self-respect from falling apart.
10 Characters in Red Sorghum are not often referred to by names; instead, they are referred to by kinship terms, such as My Grandfather, Grandmother, or Father. I will explain the significance of this technique later.
Northeast Gaomi township is easily the most beautiful and most repulsive, most unusual and most common, most sacred and most corrupt, most heroic and most bastardly, hardest-drinking and hardest-loving place in the world. (pp. 2/4)

This statement also shows Mo Yan’s mixed feelings and ambivalent attitude, a combination of extreme love and extreme hate, toward his homeland and his ancestors. The label of “the most heroic and most bastardly” reveals the author’s feelings toward and understanding of his homeland, his ancestors, and thus primitive masculinity. It becomes the cornerstone on which his social image of peasants is carefully crafted, and on which wild masculine beauty is constructed and exalted.

“If in terms of his vegetable nature man is identified with sorghum, man’s animal nature must be identified with the dog” (Chou Ying-hsiung 1989, 39). Mo Yan uses one whole chapter to vividly depict a horrible and fantasized fight between human beings and dogs, drawing analogies between two species. The meaning of dogs in this novel is more complicated than we assume. Japanese invaders are cursed by Chinese peasants as “dogs”, or “bastard dogs”. In the chapter three—Goudao 狗道 (“Dog Ways”), as opposed to rendao 人道, “the way of man”—Mo Yan portrays vividly the bad habits of dogs. Although they have a collective consciousness in attacking human beings, they do not trust each other, and do not cooperate; they conspire together; they act in collusion with each other, but they betray their masters, and they foment discord. All these deep-rooted bad habits (liegenxing 劣根性) can be found correspondingly in human beings (Zhou Yingxiong 1988, 514). “The dogs are invested with the same strategic intelligence for warfare as the humans, the story being a sort of allegory on the debasement of man involved in war and self-
destruction.” Nonetheless, dogs have their own heroic history—they are brave; they are tough; they are adamant about fighting even if it costs them their lives. Again we can find the counterparts of these attributes in human beings. The narrator’s words in *Honghuang* 红蝗 (*The Plague of the Red Locusts*), another of Mo Yan’s novels, is the best illustration of Mo Yan’s view on the ranking of species:

Humans, don’t be bumptious and regard yourselves as the most intelligent species. Human beings do not differ in any essential way from dogs, cats, maggots in the cesspits, and bugs in the crevices in a wall. The most remarkable difference between humans and animals is man’s hypocrisy!” (1987, 46)

Mo Yan labels his ancestors as “the most heroic and the most bastardly”, and the critic of *Red Sorghum*, Zhou Yingxiong labels these dogs as “the abominable dogs, the admirable dogs, the horrifying dogs, and the miserable dogs!” (1988, 515). Mo Yan views human beings the same way as Zhou Yingxiong views dogs as “hateful ancestors and the respected ancestors”, and as “wild ancestors and poor ancestors”. In this light, “the line between what is human and what is bestial becomes increasingly blurred” (Feuerwerker 1998, 222). The way Grandfather and Father are dressed in dog fur reminds us that they look thirty per cent like human beings and seventy per cent like dogs (*sanfen xiangren, qifen xianggou* 三分象人七分象狗) (p.366).

Regardless of whether they (ancestors, dogs, and pure red sorghum) are good or bad, heroic or bastardly, these creatures have one thing in common—they are natural, wild, dynamic, vigorous and full of vitality. *Red Sorghum* explores how the essence of this vitality, defined as individual instinct and desire or “natural force and

\[\text{注}^1\text{M. Thomas. Inge, 2000, p. 3 on the online version.}\]
primitive energy" in Lu Tonglin’s terms (1993b, 196), expands to a collective level and becomes “peasant collective unconsciousness” and “peasant ideology”. The nature of this dynamism, conceptualized as “peasant masculinity”, is raised to an unprecedented level of prominence.

4.1.2 Corrupted “pet-rabbits”

A combination of extreme love and extreme hatred is Mo Yan’s feeling toward his “heroic and bastardly” ancestors. A combination of disgust, scorn, and mockery is his attitude toward the unworthy descendants of his own generation. Distinguished from “heroic and bastardly” dogs, “rabbits” and “shriveled insects” are animals that Mo Yan uses to identify unworthy descendants, including the “I” narrator who is essentially the fictional version of the author himself. Within one page of the end of the narrative, Mo Yan uses “pet rabbits” four times to express his self-loathing and self-criticism as a member of the corrupted generation.

Comparisons are always risky, but when I approach them logically, I discover to my horror that in my ten years away from the village I have seen eyes like that only in the fragile heads of pet rabbits, turned red by boundless desire. There are, it appears, two separate human races, each evolving in accordance with its own value system. What frightens me is that my eyes, too, have taken on that crafty look...(pp. 493/357)

I look at my reflection in Second Grandma’s brass mirror. As I’d feared, the clever look of a pet rabbit shines in my eyes;... (pp. 494/357)

“Grandson!” she says magnanimously. “Come home! You’re lost if you don’t. I know you don’t want to. I know you’re scared of all the flies, of the clouds of mosquitoes, of snakes slithering across the damp sorghum soil. You revere heroes and loathe bastards; but who among us is not the most heroic and most bastardly? As you stand before me now, I can smell the pet-rabbit odor you brought with you from the city. Quick,
jump into the Black Water River and soak there for three days and
nights—I only hope that when the catfish in the river drink the stench that
washes off your body then won't grow rabbit ears!” (pp. 494/357-358)

In Chinese culture, a rabbit is synonymous with being weak, timid, cute,
lovely, and thus feminine. Due to these traits, rabbits are favorite pets of humans. If it
is used to describe a man, this term indicates a cowardly, weak, thus womanly man.
By contrasting feminized “pet-rabbits” with “masculine dogs”, which signify virile
ancestors, Mo Yan purges the positive features of rabbits and highlights their negative
features. He also subverts the meaning of their red eyes, which are considered to be of
the cute features of rabbits. He refers to them as indicators of cleverness and
greediness reflecting the hypocrisy of high culture. Urban rabbits’ “filthy”, “odorous”,
and full of “foul stench” become a symbol of alienation, emasculation, corruption,
and thus degeneration of the human race.

Mo Yan is lamenting the degeneration of the species, which is evident in the
reconstruction of his family genealogy. There is a clear lineal decline in masculinity
among three male generations covered in the novel. Grandfather is a bandit as well as
a patriotic hero, full of vigor and vitality, and thus is praised as a real man. Douguan,
the narrator’s father is “a bandit’s offspring” (pp. 1/3) who still retains masculine
traits inherited and learned from his father. While still in his teens, he becomes “a
little man of iron,” but his glory is heavily overshadowed by that of Grandfather.
Grandfather displays his masculinity by commanding hundreds of soldiers to fight the
Japanese invaders and rival bandits whereas the most glorious achievement of Father
comes from a fight with dogs. However, this fight between human beings and animals
turns out to be one of “the most surreal yet powerful” episodes in the novel
At the age of fourteen, Father leads a few survivors of the village massacre in desperate warfare on the edge of a graveyard to protect several hundred corpses against six to seven hundred well-organized and hungry dogs. During this soul-stirring fight, one of Father's testicles was bitten off by a red dog, which had previously been the family dog of Grandparents. This dog betrayed his masters and become one of three leaders of a crazy dog army. Father's lost testicle symbolizes the beginning point of emasculation. Father was physically semi-emasculated (his other testicle still functioned well and successfully reproduced the "I"-narrator). The third generation represented by the "I"-narrator, is emasculated not only physically, but also mentally and psychologically. The third generation is weak, ugly, and has no energy at all. Like castrated small beings, they have completely lost their heroic ethos and virility. The narrator cries: "Grandma, compared with you, I am like a shriveled insect that has gone hungry for three long years." (pp. 166/132) In contrast to their ancestors who dare to think, dare to speak, and dare to act, the "I"-narrator admits that he is a coward because he does not dare to speak. "What frightens me is that... I have begun to utter only the words that others have spoken themselves repeating the words of still others. Have I no voice of my own?" (p. 493/357) There is no such term as "brave", "daring", "audacious", or "chivalrous" in the dictionary of this generation. Instead, this generation has become clever and crafty (p. 493/357), sophisticated, insincere, and pretentious in comparison to their straightforward ancestors. David Der-wei Wang puts it this way:

In contrast to the glorious days of his grandparents, the present "realism" in which Mo Yan and his narrator live is dreadfully boring and petty. The
immense red sorghum fields that used to nourish heroes and heroines now feed inhabitants whose greatest dream is to leave their homeland forever (1993, 125).

The “I”-narrator’s persistent reference to the story’s characters using kinship terms, such as “my granddad”, “my grandma”, and “my second grandma”, “Uncle Arhat”, “Uncle Mute”, etc., instead of refering to them by name, functions as a reminder to readers that his glorious family history was created by his forefathers. However, the descendent of this heroic family serves only as a history-recorder and story-teller by using his cultured writing skills learned from urban intellectual rabbits. He does not assume the role of a successor to heroism or as an actor in this family saga.

Mo Yan’s point is unambiguous, that is, the Chinese as a race have gone through a process of degeneration due to urbanization, and this “draws a distinction between the ancestors and their descendants. While Granddad and red sorghum represent the glorious past, with masculine beauty and charisma, the I-narrator and hybrid sorghum characterize the shameful present.” Mo Yan seems to suggest that the civilization or urbanization is contradictory to the nature of human beings, and should be held accountable for the degeneration of men. The primary symptom of this degeneration is that men have become unmanly. “In Mo Yan’s vision, civilization and social progress frustrate instinctive liberties, diminish vitality and as a result lead to a total retrogression of the human species.” (Ngai 1998, 22)

This thematic concern is illustrated more clearly in other works by Mo Yan, such as his favorite short story “Baigou Qiuqian Jia 白狗秋千架” (White Dog and the

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12 Shelley W. Chan, 2000, p. 5 on the online version.
Swings, 1985), the novel Hong Huang 红蝗 ([The Plagues of] Red Locusts, 1987) and Feng Lu Fei Tun 丰乳肥臀 (Big Breasts and Full Hips, 1995). If we compare these works, we can better understand this thematic discourse. For example, Ling Tun Ngai points out, "The narrator’s contempt for false urbanity and urban intellectuals is also expressed in somatic and scatological terms" in the novel The Plagues of Red Locusts (1998, 13). Taking readers by surprise, the narrator proudly praises his hometown,

I should say that Gaomi Township is a special place of distinctive characters; it has nourished a family or clan both outstanding and ordinary which is capable of excreting odorless feces. Now, living in a malodorous city, I suffer the tremendous pain of constipation, which is as excruciating as a blade scraping my bowels. Like the run-down ditches that fail to carry off sewage, the urbanites—men and women alike—are unable to pass a movement through their assholes. I miss a smooth and gaping anus...and I miss my odorless ordure the way I have missed my lovely hometown...(Mo Yan 1987, 15)

The allegories that Mo Yan employs in the above narration are obvious. Urbanization/civilization is going in the wrong direction against human nature, and its consequences are dysfunctional, just like unrepaired ditches and the constipation of an urbanite’s intestines.

As a major figure among “search-for-roots” writers, Mo Yan feels the cultural urge to “return to things themselves” (huidao shiwu zishen 回到事物本身). The ideal masculinity, Mo Yan implies, is not culturally constructed; it is an innate trait imbedded in human nature that can be found only in a primitive, uncivilized, thus unpolluted and uncorrupted peasant society.
4.2 Anti-Intellectualism: Nostalgia for Primitive Peasant Masculinity

By “anti-intellectualism”, I do not refer to the trends in four basic fields: religion, politics, business, and education that Richard Hofstadter discussed in his famous classic book, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life.* Nonetheless the trend toward anti-intellectualism in the past two decades in American life and the anti-intellectual sentiment demonstrated consistently in Mo Yan's works share similarities on one psychological dimension—they are “opposed or hostile to intellectuals or intellectual views.” The difference between the two is that while Hofstadter is concerned with a fundamental hostility to the life of mind and ways of thinking, Mo Yan is preoccupied with power struggle and social order. He acts as a spokesman for peasants in fighting power holders of discourse—the intellectual elite. He mercilessly ridicules arrogant, hypocritical and cowardly nature of the intellectual elite, whose self-centered attitude permanently disqualifies other social groups, including peasants and women, from being their equals. It is Mo Yan's turn to disqualify the intellectual elite from staying at a higher social level and controlling public discourse with their fake voices. In this light, Mo Yan's merciless attack on Chinese intellectuals is no less than that of the popular novelist Wang Shuo. Wang is so offensive to the intellectual elite and so profane in violating the decorum of serious literature that he is treated with disgust by many Chinese critics. He acquired the label of “hooligan writer” (*liumang zuojia* 流氓作家), and his work is referred to as “hooligan literature” (*liumang wenxue* 流氓文学). Although Mo Yan is not labeled as a

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“hooligan writer”, his way of subverting the well-established social order, turning it upside down, taking a firm stance on the side of peasants, and aligning himself with nature rather than culture is very impressive.

Regarding the dichotomy between rural and urban, or between nature and culture, Mo Yan unequivocally takes a stance opposite to that of Zhang Xianliang. In this light, the two writers represent the well-being of two distinct social classes—Zhang as a representative of the intellectual elite and Mo as a spokesman for peasants. In the sense of postmodernism, Mo Yan identifies Self as a peasant and “otherizes” urban intellectual elite who have continuously “otherized” peasants as subordinate social groups and “normalized” themselves as the center of the civilization. John Flower argues in his Ph. D. dissertation that the concept of an abstracted “peasant consciousness” in China is constructed by intellectuals. It serves as a posited stereotype of ‘others,’ who are *nongmin* (peasants), *mixin* (superstitious) *fengjian* (feudalistic) *yumei* (ignorant) *luohou* (backward) and *zisi* (selfish), a negative typology against which intellectuals measure and define themselves. In fact, “modern Chinese intellectuals promote their own elite identity at the expense of the peasants.” Nowadays, “*nongmin*” (peasant) has become almost a curse word in China; it is most humiliating to intellectuals and urbanites. Mo Yan, indignant at such a discursively constructed concept, attempts to subvert it by reconstructing the social image of peasantry, and to turn the power system upside down by strongly emphasizing “the importance of the ‘lower’ strata of culture as opposed to the uniform, official ‘high culture.’” (Pomorska 1984, ix) An overall
impression of his works suggests that Mo Yan is very critical of civilization, including urbanization and modernization. However, in *Red Sorghum*, his direct target is the urban intellectual elite. It is interesting to observe that *Half of Man* elevates superior intellectuals and contrasts their elite identity against the background of discursively constructed images of inferior, uncultured commoners, most of whom are peasants. *Red Sorghum* takes the exactly same course of action but in an opposite direction. Mo Yan elevates superior rural peasants at the expense of intellectuals who are inferior, urbanized, week, hypocritical, and cowardly. Grandfather, Grandmother and Father represent superior heroic peasants, the masculine generation, while the “I”-narrator is a representative of urbanized alienated intellectuals, the feminized generation. Both Zhang and Mo rely on a hierarchical social structure within which to reposition Self and Others and to construct their preferred identity and manhood.

In order to fight the hegemonic orthodox tradition of intellectuals, Mo Yan must rely on unorthodox resources, clearly demonstrated in the cultural setting in *Red Sorghum*—celebrating uncivilized culture (unorthodoxy) and negating civilized culture (orthodoxy). Comparing Ah Cheng, Jia Pingwa and Mo Yan, Zhang Zhizhong comments:

> In his Three Kings, Ah Cheng is pursuing an ‘elegant culture’ [*ya wenhua* 雅文化] ... while Jia Pingwa illustrates a ‘vulgar culture’ [*su wenhua* 俗文化] in his Shangzhou series.... Mo Yan’s work hunts for a ‘wild culture’ [*ye wenhua* 野文化]. He demonstrates the nature of human beings and their instinctual desire for existence. Eating and sex are the nature of human beings, as well as the essential premise for existence. Therefore, it [the instinctual desire] is naturally and reasonably posited by

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15 John Flower 1997, p. 1-3 on the online version.
Mo Yan in a position above all canons created by culture afterwards (1990, 59).

The Chinese word *ye* 野 can be translated into various English equivalences. It means wild, uncultivated, uncivilized, undomesticated, untamed, savage, barbarous, rough, boorish, rude, cruel, brutal, unrestrained, abandoned, unorthodox, and unruly, etc. The compound word *yexing* 野性 (wild nature) indicates an uncivilized state of human existence. Associated with vitality, freedom, stamina, etc., *yexing* romanticizes an essentially imaginary state of human existence. When *ye* is related to sexual behavior of human beings, it means illegal or illicit. For example, *yeji* 野鸡 (pheasant) is a folk term for whores; *yenanren* 野男人 (wild man) is a man with whom a woman has an illicit relationship; *yezhong* 野种 (wild seeds) is a synonym of bastard, an illegitimate child. It is interesting to note that *Red Sorghum* carries all these meanings in the dispositions of its characters. The primary sense that Mo Yan tries to convey is that of a wild world of primitive and unrestrained people with an unorthodox way of thinking and behaving. Mo Yan reveals the power of life in primitive peasant society, regardless of whether it is constructive or destructive, moral or immoral. As a matter of fact, Mo Yan celebrates the destructive power of peasants more than their constructive power in what Ling Tun Ngai calls “the upside-down movement” (1998, 12)—that is “an assault on the established hierarchy of moral values by turning their dominative modes of representation upside down.” (1998, 9) Mo Yan’s “upside-down movement” is quite similar to what Bakhtin emphasized in *Rabelais and His World*—“the carnival principle” in folk culture. “The carnival principle” can also be understood as “the material bodily principles”. That is,
images of the human body with its food, drink, defecation, and sexual life, play a predominant role. Mo Yan believes in primitive peasant culture, just like Bakhtin believes in folk culture, which “represents the very essence of life, it includes the carnivalesque in its properly transformed shape” (Pomorska 1984, x).

In this section, I will focus on resources and techniques that Mo Yan utilizes to construct his ideal masculinity in the context of primitive peasant society. My close reading of Red Sorghum reveals that Mo Yan has successfully established his ideal masculinity in male characterizations by endowing them with a tripod of attributes: violence, sublimation of death and fighting the Japanese. For female characterizations, he uses the technique of “crossing gender boundaries” to masculinize female characters, which I will analyze later.

4.2.1 Violent and brutal haohan: subversion of the orthodox paradigm of masculinity

In his male characterizations, Mo Yan relies on unorthodox resources: (1) his male characters are not among the docile masses and are not law-abiding peasants—the weakest social group as defined by the orthodox discourse. They are rebels and bandits, a further marginalized subgroup of marginalized peasants. They are marginalized but they are not weak like other peasants; they possess enormous power of violence; (2) His male characters carry a clear mark of haohan masculinity from folktales and the unorthodox literature of outlaws. Now I will elaborate on these two points below.
The orthodoxy and hegemony of the intellectual discourse developed from traditional Confucian ideology has been firmly established in China’s history for more than two millennia. It by no means easily subverted by the pen of an individual writer. It is even more difficult to replace the discourse holders, the intellectual elite, with peasants. Both Zhao Shuli 赵树理⁶ and Hao Ran 浩然⁷ tried to refashion the social image of peasants by following the socialist-realism line and Mao’s creed that literature and art must serve workers, peasants and soldiers.⁸ They failed to subvert the dominant intellectual discourse. (I will provide more discussion on this topic later.) Mo Yan realizes that ordinary peasants in previously published fiction are not powerful enough to establish a new language/discourse and a lasting new social order. He must open a new approach to understanding peasants if he still focuses on the same hopes to reverse the social order and replace urbanites with peasants. He needs a powerful army strong enough to challenge and thus overthrow the hegemonic subordination of peasants. Mo Yan started zhaobing maima 招兵买马 (recruiting men and buying horses) to organize his peasant army and construct his literary

⁶ Zhao Shuli 赵树理 (1906-1970) was a Chinese novelist and short-story writer. He is best remembered for his novels and short stories depicting rural life in North China, and his special contribution to a new “proletarian” literature supported by Mao. He was one of the leading figures of shan-yao-dan-pai 山药蛋派 (the school of potatoes in Shanxi Province. Others include Ma Feng, Xi Rong, Hu Zheng, and Li Suwei). These writers exerted an extensive impact on Chinese literature with their novels on the countryside. Zhao was persecuted to death during the Cultural Revolution.

⁷ Hao Ran 浩然 (1932-) was the most popular and revolutionary writer in China during the Cultural Revolution. In his novel, Jinguang Dadao The Broad Road in Golden Light (1972) he romanticizes peasant life and values within the setting of class struggle. His works remained popular until Scar Literature began to appear at the end of the 1970s.

⁸ In his talks at the Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art in 1942, Mao Zedong points out: “All our literature and art are for the masses of the people, and in the first place for the workers, peasants and soldiers; they are created for the workers, peasants and soldiers and are for their use.” (“Talk at the Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art”, May 1942, Selected Works of Mao Zedong, Vol. III, p. 84, included into Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-Tung, p. 300) The Yan’an talks served as the basic guide to literary writing after the Chinese Communism ruled China in 1949.
kingdom, of which he himself is a King. What surprises readers is that his peasant army includes murderers, rapists, bandits, traitors and collaborators—rebels against Confucian society. David Ownby states:

Rebels and bandits are hardly the masculine equivalent of prostitutes, but they occupy similar positions at the margins of mainstream Chinese society and sometimes also figure in comparable ways in elite and popular discourses about exciting or dangerous forms of behavior. Like prostitutes, rebels and bandits are threatening precisely because they are liminal rather than excluded groups, and because to some degree they speak to genuine needs frequently neglected by Confucian society (Ownby 2002, 226).

According to Ownby, these rebels and bandits are marginalized but powerful. Their power comes from their “dangerous forms of behavior.” In *Red Sorghum*, the power of these male murderers and bandits is in their predisposition toward violence and brutality. With this power, the most eye-catching characteristic of these peasants is “daring”. Most characters in *Red Sorghum*, including both men and women dare to think, to speak, to act, to love, to hate, to fight, and to die. The peasants in Northeast Gaomi Township are men and women of action. “They killed, they looted, and they defended their country in a valiant, stirring ballet that makes us unfilial descendants who now occupy the land pale by comparison.” (pp. 2/4) The narrator misses “their outrageous and uncivil actions, which, moral or not, are signs of a vital engagement with life and death” (Inge, M. Thomas, 2000). “Daring” is the term that represents the spirit of both Northeast Gaomi Township and its people. There are no such terms as “fearful”, “cowardly” and “intimidated” in the dictionary of the Northeast Gaomi Township peasants. Any references to them using such terms or phrases as “not

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19 See Mo Yan’s 1999 speech.
tough”, “spineless” “cowardly” convey extreme humiliation and shame. To demonstrate the “daring” spirit of his homeland and ancestors, the author designs many quarrels, battles, gunfights, duels and even wars as settings for his characters. Thus, brutality, violence, bloodshed and death are inevitable. Mo Yan overwhelmingly uses terms or phrases like xingtian wei 腥甜味 (sickly-sweet odor), xuexing wei 血腥味 (odor of blood), and xuexing qixi 血腥气息 (air and odor of blood). On page 3 (the Chinese version) alone, Mo Yan uses xingtian wei (sickly-sweet odor) six times. It seems as if his ancestor peasants are so brutal and bloodthirsty that the whole book from the cover to cover is saturated with blood.

Mo Yan indiscriminately mixes up the heroic deeds of peasants with their violence/brutality and puts the mixture into one basket of honor. His unprecedented mixture alerts readers to the most important characteristic of “peasant primitive masculinity”. In other words, aggressiveness, violence and brutality become indispensable components of primitive peasant masculinity that Mo Yan tries to integrate into the characterization of his most “heroic and bastard” ancestors. As Feuerwerker points out: “Red Sorghum’s graphic descriptions of battles, duels, and gunfights appear to celebrate such ‘uncivilized virtues’ as bravado, physical prowess, and the savage thirst for vengeance, especially when one’s personal honor is at stake” (1998, 217). His objective is unequivocally to celebrate “the dynamism of vitality”, the hallmark of which is “powerful and irresistible masculinity” that we can find only in these dog-like ancestors of the past. Lu Tonglin insightfully comments: “To a large extent, paradox in Mo Yan’s fiction is turned into a symbol of strength, energy, and freedom, since it leads to dynamism, tension, and movement.” (1993b, 198)
Ideal masculinity has always been related to heroic deeds in both traditional Chinese literature and folktales. A “real man” must carry out some heroic deeds, and heroes are definitely seen as “real men”. Any connection of heroism to femininity is not only unacceptable, but also regarded as profane in so far as heroes are the cream of yang beings. Consistent with Confucian junzi masculinity, two tendencies appear in traditional Chinese fiction. The first tendency is to purify heroes. These purified heroes are brave, self-sacrificing, and intelligent, but also have a high standard of morality, strong sense of responsibility, and loyalty to their lords and people. For example, Zhuge Liang 艋肱亮, Guan Yu 关羽 and Zhao Yun 赵云 in Sanguo yanyi 三国演义 (The Romance of the Three Kingdoms) are heroes having perfect personalities. They do not possess any flaws to disappoint their admirers. They are actually quasi-Gods, or deified to the level of Gods. (Zhuge Liang and Guan Yu later are regarded as Gods in folk religion. Temples dedicated to Zhuge Liang and Guan Yu spread all over China, and they have been worshipped by their admirers for many generations.) Cao Cao 曹操 in The Romance of the Three Kingdoms possesses qualities such as intelligence, bravery, excellent leadership, and the ability to withstand hardship, all of which would make him a hero, except that he lacks moral integrity, and for this reason is considered evil and a jianchen 奸臣 (treacherous court official), instead of a hero. Zhu Bajie 猪八戒 (the pig) in Xiyou Ji 西游记 (The Journey to the West), has shortcomings typical of a commoner, such as selfishness, being narrow-minded, and strong sexual desire. He is not a hero. Although he possesses many good qualities, a hero should be perfect in all aspects of his life.
The second tendency in traditional Chinese literature and literature of outlaws is that the qualities of intelligence, bright leadership, and wisdom are absolutely superior characteristics compared to bravery, aggressiveness and physical strength. The former are attributes of the intellectual elite whose central position in civilized society is unquestioned and whose masculinity is taken for granted as the ideal type. Lu Zhishen 鲁智深 and Li Kui 李逵 in *The Water Margin*, and Zhang Fei 张飞 in *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* are brave but not resourceful and scholarly characters. Their lack of resourcefulness, intelligence, and talents disqualify them as ideal men for others to emulate. Intelligent and cultured men always prevail over the brave and aggressive but uncultured men. In traditional literature as well as folklore, *Wen* (cultural attainment) always overrides *wu* (martial valor), according to Kam Louie's dichotomized paradigm (2002). Wu Yong 吴用, the military counselor of the peasant army in *The Water Margin*, is the most clever of the strategists and an anchor of the Liang-shan Marsh gang. He is regarded as manlier than Lu Zhishen and Li Kui because he possesses many qualities of a scholar. Zhuge Liang, the Prime Minister of the Shu state in *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, is manlier than Zhang Fei because he is a great scholar of both Confucianism and Daoism and a perfect model of a *junzi*.

This traditional paradigm of masculinity exerts its influence on modern writers as well. The fiction of socialist-realism under the Communist regime carried on these two tendencies. Those not from the social intellectual elite must be
characterized with at least possessing the same attributes of intellectual masculinity,\(^{20}\) and/or be sanitized to reach the level of hero. “Zhao Shuli’s peasants had been sanitized into revolutionary heroic models” (Feuerwerker 1998, 212). Gao Daquan (the name is the homophony of “tall, big, perfect”), the peasant protagonist in Hao Ran’s *Jinguan dadao* 金光大道 (The Broad Road in Golden Light), was purged of physical desires and earthly infirmities to match his name. However, in comparison to Mo Yan’s peasants in *Red Sorghum*, Hao Ran’s peasant characters tend to be flat, pale, and pretentious. Their existence is mainly for interpreting Communist ideology. *Jia, da, kong* 假，大，空 (fake, big, empty) is the counter-phrase to Gao Daquan that critics use to satirize these pretentious characteristics.

Characterization in *Red Sorghum* demolishes the traditional masculine norms. Mo Yan seeks resources from the unorthodox tradition of folktales about outlaws. His collective image of peasantry bears a clear mark of *haohan* 好汉 notions in Chinese legends and sagas.

*Hao* 好 in Chinese means “good” while *han* 汉 is “man”. W. J. F. Jenner elaborates on the translation of the word, *haohan*, into English and he finds it difficult to find an equivalent. “In English we can try tough guy, good bloke, hero, real man, even ‘a gallant, a stout-hearted plucky fellow’ of Lin Yutang as lexicographer\(^{21}\), but no version quite works.” (Jenner 1993, 10) Kam Louie translates *haohan* as “good fellow” (2002, 8). David Ownby refers to *haohan* as “rough-and-ready ‘good

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\(^{20}\) Following Mao Zedong’s talks at the Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art, the literature of socialist-realism was required to place workers, peasants and soldiers in the center of the scene. Ironically, more often than not, these heroes/heroines were characterized with attributes very close to those of the intellectual elite.
fellows," who succeeded in embodying *yiqi* or in honoring their vows of fraternity*, and were "more straightforward versions of their counterparts in elite image, the wandering knights (*wuxia*)" (2002, 232). W. J. F. Jenner also associates *haohan* to chivalrous knights. According to him, the word, *haohan*, does not appear before the Tang Dynasty. However "an earlier notion of a man of supposedly honorable violence, the *xia* [chivalrous men], *youxia* [errant chivalrous men], or *xiake* [chivalrous expert swordsmen], the so-called knight-errant" informs the values associated with *haohan* (Jenner 1993, 11). Good examples of men of honorable violence were assassins Jing Ke 荆轲 and Nie Zheng 聂政, recorded in *Cike Liezhuang* 剣客列传 (biographies of assassins) in *Shi Ji* (The Annals of History) by Sima Qian.

According to these scholars and my own understanding, the defining values of *haohan* include: a) tough and heroic guy; b) personal prowess; c) strong sense of justice; d) eager to honor brotherhood; e) being loyal to friends; f) skilled in martial arts; g) man of action and responsible for what he did; h) man of violence.

Because *haohan* carry out heroic deeds, sometime they are called *yingxiong* 萬雄 (heroic good fellow). An individual *haohan* who is wandering,
around is called *jianghu haohan* 江湖好汉 (a good man of rivers and lakes). A group of bandit *haohan* is called *lulin haohan* 绿林好汉 (good men inhabiting the “greenwoods”).

“Shui *hu* is the classic repository of *haohan* myths…” (Jenner 1993, 18). *Shui hu* [zhuan] or *The Water Margin* is one of the four greatest Chinese novels\(^{24}\) in history. It is a story about outlaws (heroes indeed) of the marsh, 105 men and three women, most of whom originally were farmers, set at the time of the Song Dynasty (960-1279). They were oppressed and forced by corrupt and unjust officials to become outlaws and were driven to live in the water margins of Liang Shan Po (lit. the lake of the Mountain Liang). There, they bonded into a fraternity and rose up under the leadership of Song Jiang 宋江 in the name of carrying out the Way (Dao) on behalf of Heaven (*ti tian xing dao* 天行道). They *dajia jieshe* 打家劫舍 (loot and plunder), *shafu jipin* 杀富济贫 (kill the rich and aid the poor), doing lots of good deeds in pursuit of justice.

Mo Yan, strongly influenced by *haohan* values and (bellicose) military spirit, embedded these values and this spirit into his characterization. While creating his own *haohan* characters, Mo Yan unambiguously implements the principle of his characterization: to portray “most heroic and most bastard” peasants to distinguish himself from all other writers of *haohan* stories and the socialist-realism literature in Mao’s era. His collective image of peasantry bears a clear mark of *haohan* tradition, but it is different from a typical *haohan* image, mainly on the moral dimension as

\(^{23}\) Ibid. The translation of Nie Zheng’s story, see W. J. F. Jenner, 1993, pp. 11-12.

\(^{24}\) The other three are: *Xiyou Ji* 西游记 (Journey to the West), *Hongloumeng* 红楼梦 (The Dream of the Red Chamber), and *Sanguo Yanyi* 三国演义 (The Romance of the Three Kingdoms).
defined by Confucian discourse. In other words, *haohan* in traditional literature and folktales can be brutal and violent, but they are perfect in their moral behavior according to the Confucian moral code. They stay away from sex and sexual women, like Song Jiang and Yan Qing in *The Water Margin*. They always do good things for ordinary people and are regarded as *jiuxing* 救星 (stars of rescue, liberators), but not *zaixing* 灾星 (stars of disaster, calamities) for ordinary people. In the list of *haohan* in traditional literature and folktales, we cannot find a rapist like Big Tooth Yu in *Red Sorghum*, and we cannot find traitors and collaborators like Pocky Cheng who guided Japanese soldiers to his village and slaughtered his fellow villagers. Mo Yan’s characterization can be summarized in the words of My Second Grandmother, “You revere heroes and loathe bastards, but who among us is not the ‘most heroic and most bastardly’?” (pp. 494/357)

Yu, Zhan’ao, the protagonist and the most masculine man in the novel, is actually a mixture of a bandit, murderer, “rapist”, patriotic peasant, and an anti-Japanese hero. As a commander, he does not have as much talent and cleverness as Confucian scholar Zhuge Liang in *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* or Wu Yong in *The Water Margin*. His mistakes in decision-making and strategy sometimes cause disaster for his troops, or even extermination of a whole village. As an individual, he is unbridled either by law or by any sense of morality. He does whatever he likes or he thinks right, and whatever he does is his law. He abhors his widowed mother having affairs with a monk, and then he kills the monk; when My Grandmother is kidnapped by a potential rapist; he acts like a chivalrous knight to save her by killing the kidnapper; he is attracted to My Grandmother, and then he kidnaps her and
“rapes” her in the sorghum field; he hates the arrangement in which a beautiful girl, My Grandmother, is forced to marry a rich leper in exchange for a black mule, and then, acting like a chivalrous swordsman again, he murders the leprous husband and his father to clear the way for the bride to take over the family business and for himself to take over the bride. When the Japanese invaded in Northeast Gaomi Township, like Song Jiang in *The Water Margin* who organizes a powerful army of outlaws to fight the corrupted court, Yu Zhan’ao recruits peasant soldiers, most of whom are his bandit brothers, to fight the Japanese. Father (Douguan) shows great sympathy with a wounded Japanese cavalryman who begs Father not to kill him while holding a torn photo of his wife and son in his bloody fingers. Moved by sympathy, Father refuses to accept Grandfather’s order to kill him. Grandfather angrily slices the Japanese cavalryman in half with his merciless sword after cursing Father as a “Fucking coward!” (pp. 223/174). In Father’s eyes, Grandfather’s heart “had been hardened so much that killing had become commonplace” (pp. 222/173). Evidently, Yu Zhan’ao’s *haohan* image relies heavily on violence and brutality to highlight “the most bastardly” side of his male characters. This raises a question of how Mo Yan can integrate “the most bastardly” side of his characters with “the most heroic side”. What technique does he use convert “a bastard” into “a hero”?

4.2.2 The sublimation of death

Big Tooth Yu, the quartermaster and the uncle of Yu Zhan’ao, rapes a local girl when he is drunk. Adjutant Ren insists on executing this “bastardly” rapist. To strengthen the discipline of his troops, Yu, Zhan’ao reluctantly gives his approval for
the execution. The scene for carrying out the execution turns out to be one of the most
impressive, splendid and heroic episodes in the novel. Big Tooth Yu does not display
even a tiny bit fear, nor does he show any nervousness. He smiles, “To Father’s eyes,
it was a kindly, heartfelt smile” (pp. 71/56); he sings a song learned from Adjutant
Ren, “The sorghum is red, the sorghum is red, the Japs are coming, the Japs are
coming ...” (pp. 72/57); he even says to the executor named Mute, “Shoot, Mute,
Aim for my temple. Don’t make me suffer!” (pp. 72/57). When Mute and other
soldiers feel sympathetic and reluctant to kill him, he screams, “Go ahead and shoot!
You’re not going to make me do it myself, are you?” (pp. 72/57). Big Tooth Yu, at
the time of deflowering the innocent girl, is a detestable criminal, a devil; but at the
moment of the execution, he becomes a respected hero, a real man.

The characterization of Big Tooth Yu exemplifies Mo Yan’s technique—the
sublimation of death—an obvious device that Mo Yan employs for converting a
bastard man into a hero. However, his sublimation of death is gendered. His crystal-
clear attitude toward men’s deaths disappears when he describes the death of
Grandmother. Instead he brings ambiguity and paradox into play (I will analyze this
point later). Mo Yan describes numerous deaths of his characters in the narrative—
deaths of Grandmother, Uncle Arhat, Big Tooth Yu, Second Grandmother, Uncle
Mute, Uncle Wang Wenyi and Wang’s wife, and Pocky Cheng, and Spotted Neck.
Regardless of whether they are common peasants, rapists or bandits, and regardless of
whether they are men or women, they die heroically and nobly, but men die free-
mindedly while Grandmother dies with a heavy psychological burden, not being
certain of the morality or immorality of her earthly conduct. They show no fear of
death as they are dying. The sublimation of an individual death serves as an ending point for constructing a heroic image for an individual, while sublimation of the deaths of many characters collectively fossilizes the heroic image of peasants. The relationship between violence, brutality and death, and the sublimation of death has an overtly psychological effect. It is one of Mo Yan’s manipulations to distract readers’ attention from the dark and repulsive side of his characters, and to guide it toward their heroic qualities. The sublimation of death also is a technique that permits Mo Yan to write whatever is on his mind—positive or negative, noble or vulgar, respected or repulsive, bright or dark. He releases his characters like releasing unbridled spirit horses, allowing them to behave wildly, aggressively, violently, and even viciously. He seems never to worry about the moral or ideological implications of his characters, because he knows the reins of these horses are in his control, and he can draw the reins and guide these wild horses to conform to his ideological line preventing them from offending readers too much. Giving them a noble death effectively tips the balance away from their negative side. In this light, Mo Yan has a tendency to manipulate his characters as if they are puppets. In a speech at the Kyoto University, Japan, Mo Yan talked about his literary writing:

Like a greenwood haohan (hero), I hold high the banner of “Northeast Gaomi Township” and start recruiting men and buying horses to construct my kingdom. Of course, this is a kingdom of literature and I am the King of this kingdom. In this literary kingdom, I issue orders; I order people about by gestures; I hold power over people’s lives and deaths. I have fully enjoyed the happiness of junlin tianxia 君临天下 (the sovereign descending into the world.)

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25 Mo Yan, 1999, p. 2 of the online version.
By “killing” his characters, the author can pull them back to moral rectitude or the right ideological line as mentioned above. Then what happens to these characters “killed” by the “King” of this literature kingdom? There is a trade-off between death and immortality carried on by the “King” and the “killed” characters as in the Greek conception described by Foucault:

...the age-old conception of Greek narrative or epic...was designed to guarantee the immortality of a hero. The hero accepted an early death because his life, consecrated and magnified by death, passed into immortality; and the narrative redeemed his acceptance of death.” (Foucault 1977, 117)

Father betrays Mo Yan’s secret after he observes the death of Big Tooth Yu:

To Father’s mind, a man at the point of death suddenly commands the respect of all other men. Big Tooth Yu was, after all, the seed of Northeast Gaomi Township. He had committed a grave offense that even death would not expiate, yet, as he prepared to die, he displayed the airs of a true hero; Father was so moved at that moment that he felt like leaping in the air. (pp. 72/57)

In this sense, the sublimation of death by the narrative also resonates with an old Chinese saying that accords with the Foucauldian concept of death and immortality—fangxia tudao, lidi cheng fo 放下屠刀，立地成佛 (A butcher becomes a Buddha immediately after he drops his knife). Big Tooth Yu is this kind of butcher-Buddha. Spotted Neck, a notorious bandit leader in the 1920s—“a golden days of banditry in Northeast Gaomi Township” (pp. 371/274)—also acquires the halo of butcher-Buddha just before he dies.
Spotted Neck’s gang kidnapped Grandma and demanded a ransom of one thousand silver dollars from Grandfather who responded “courteously” and paid double, plus a crock of good wine (pp. 201/157). Afterwards, Grandfather schemed and plotted his revenge step by step until Spotted Neck was completely hoodwinked. He pretended not to know how to shoot, and then not to know how to swim. Spotted Neck ordered his gang to jump into the river to rescue Grandfather. After being saved from “drowning”, Grandfather stood besides a mule, picked up a pistol, “fired seven shots in perfect cadence” and killed seven bandits swimming in the water. (pp. 210/163)

By then Spotted Neck had crawled up onto the shore. The Black Water River had washed his skin as clean as a snowflake. Standing fearlessly in a clump of yellowing grass at the river’s edge, he commented with considerable admiration, “Nice shooting!”

The blazing, golden sun lit up the drops of water rolling down his naked body.

“Spotty,” Granddad asked him, “did you touch my woman?”

“What a rotten shame!”

“What got you into this business, anyway?”

“You won’t die in bed,” Spotted Neck replied.

“Aren’t you going back in the water?”

Spotted Neck backed up until he was standing in the shallow water. “Shoot me here,” he said, pointing to his heart. “The head is so messy!”

“All right,” Granddad agreed.

The seven bullets Granddad fired surely turned Spotted Necks heart into a honeycomb. He merely moaned once as he fell backward. His legs sticking out of the water like fins for a moment before he sank to the bottom like a fish. (pp. 210-211/163-164, italics is my emphasis.)

In the last moment of his life Spotted Neck admires the way Grandfather shoots down at his men as if he were a connoisseur appreciating a remarkable work of art. These two bandits talk about the method of death as if they were two businessmen
negotiating the price of goods and reaching a happy agreement. The Chinese idiom that applies here is *shi si ru gui* (look upon death as going home, meaning to look death calmly in the face). This is the attitude frequently displayed in *haohan* stories. This is also a phrase describing dying heroes commonly found in the writings of the Maoist period, and now ironically it fits the attitudes of bandits facing their death. Spotted Neck, a crooked man and a ruffian is transformed into a Buddha after being baptized and purified with blood just as “his skin” is washed by The Black Water River and becomes “as clean as a snowflake” (pp. 210/163).

Using the device of sublimation of death, Mo Yan has successfully transferred “purification”, commonly used to construct a perfect *haohan* in the conventional paradigm of masculinity and to construct the heroes in Maoist literature, to his bandit and rapist characters who represent his preference for “the most heroic and the most bastardly” masculinity.

4.2.3 Fighting the Japanese

Another device Mo Yan uses simultaneously with the combination of violence and the sublimation of death is “fighting the Japanese”, which proves further that Mo Yan represents a continuum, instead of subversion, of the traditional construction of heroes. However, what makes Mo Yan’s writing different from most war novels in the Maoist period is that the latter have sanitized characters who exhibit the revolutionary ideals of a just war. Guided by revolutionary ideology, most such characters are usually devoted, selfless soldiers who sacrifice their lives on the battlefield. Although many novelists in the socialist mold often use clichés like *xue yu*
huo de xili 血与火的洗礼 (being baptized by blood and fire), or zhanhuo de kaoyan 战火的考验 (being tested by the fires of war) to describe their revolutionary soldiers, war actually does not have the function of baptizing, because they are already perfect, ideal men. The battlefield merely provides a stage on which these sanitized and perfect soldiers perform. In Red Sorghum, Mo Yan restores the function of baptizing to his soldiers in the anti-Japanese war. Mo Yan senses clearly that the sublimation of death is not sufficient alone to transform a bastard into a respected hero. He must resort to another powerful device through which he can “turn iron into gold” (dian tie cheng jin 点铁成金). If qualities defining a hero in Red Sorghum can be ranked, the attitude toward death and the attitude toward the Japanese rank as the top two. At that particular time in Chinese history, the latter overrides the former because “To be a hero is to fight the Japanese” (Li, Peter 1997, 12). Commander Yu says: “Who’s a bandit? Who isn’t a bandit? Anyone who fights the Japanese is a national hero” (pp. 32/27). Being engaged in this life-and-death struggle to fight the Japanese is the urgent need and is the top criterion by which a hero or a coward is measured. Under the circumstances where there are “no organized troops in this remote Gaomi village, no generals to lead the troops into battle, even a local bandit can become a hero” (Li, Peter 1997, 12). That is why “local home-grown ruffians like Commander Yu and Detachment Leader Leng...become the heroes of Red Sorghum” (Li, Peter 1997, 12). And this is why Uncle Arhat, Grandma, Second Grandma, Wang Wenyi and his wife, Uncle Mute and Pocky Cheng are regarded as heroes, because they all fight the Japanese in their own ways to the point of sacrificing their lives. The battlefield serves as a furnace, and a worthless stone becomes gold after smelting in the furnace.
It is the first time since 1949 that Chinese readers encounter so many ruffians, hooligans, adulterers, murderers, rapists, bandits, traitors and collaborators. Readers are dumfounded when these characters are sent into the furnace and magically molded into heroes when they come out. Violence, death and fighting the Japanese become a tripod for Mo Yan's construction of masculinity, which is fully embodied in the most bastardly, most heroic, larger-than-life peasants. His male characters vary within this framework. Big Tooth Yu and Spotted Neck combine violence and the sublimation of death. Had Spotted Neck survived Grandfather's gunshots and lived up to the 1930s, he might have been the hero of the novel. Yu Zhan'ao is a combination of violence and fighting the Japanese; Uncle Arhat and Uncle Mute (Uncle Arhat is a kind person, but his behavior of cutting off mules' legs is brutal; Uncle Mute was a bandit friend of Grandfather) are combinations of all three—violence, fighting the Japanese and heroic death. Wang Wenyi is the man in the novel who shows the least virility. He is so afraid of death that he thinks he has lost his head when Mute discharges his gun accidentally and the bullet grazes his ear (pp. 10/10). However, encouraged by Commander Yu and influenced by heroic deeds of his teammates, he never shows his inclination to desert the battlefield and eventually becomes a martyr. The death of Pocky Cheng is not as heroic and noble as the deaths of Uncle Arhat, Big Tooth Yu and Spotted Neck. Cheng committed suicide silently by hanging himself on a tree, still wearing dog fur. From behind, his corpse looks like a hanged dog, and from the front, he looks like a human (pp. 485/352). The metaphorical implication is clear—Cheng is another of the dog-like men in the novel. Cheng tends to be more like a dog, a running dog of the Japanese, than a human.
endowed with dignity and patriotism. He would definitely be labeled as a *hanjian* 汉奸 (traitor to China), and *maiguozai* 卖国贼 (traitor and collaborator) had he appeared in a revolutionary novel during Mao’s time. He guides the Japanese soldiers as they blow up twelve village sandal workshops where three-quarters of the village men made straw sandals (pp. 476/345). Without his help to the Japanese, his fellow villagers might have survived. Suffering from an overwhelming sense of guilt, Cheng joins the Jiao-Gao Regiment led by Little Foot Jiang. He changes into another person. He fights the Japanese bravely, adamantly and crazily and becomes the “most fearless fighter” and a “lionhearted man” (pp. 479/347), a well-known hero in Northeast Gaomi Township. However, Mo Yan does not bestow on him a noble death as he does generously for others, because Cheng has already been successfully baptized and purified on the battlefield through experiencing the flames of the anti-Japanese war. Pocky Cheng had opportunities to expiate his crime by his heroic deeds (*jiang gong shu zui* 将功赎罪), but his mind is constantly haunted by the nightmare for which he is partially responsible. He realizes that his guilt stems from a heinous crime for which even death is insufficient punishment. Finally he chooses self-punishment and commits suicide. His death is quiet. It is not on a grand and spectacular scale, but its soul-stirring effect on readers is no less powerful than that of other deaths. Shelley Chan states: “Mo Yan’s conflicting image of Granddad was completely new to the Chinese reader of the 1980s.”  

The only character in the novel who entirely fits the traditional image of hero is Adjutant Ren. This character is described as: “a pale face and long black hair,

26 Shelley Chan, 2000, p. 2 of the online version.
dressed in black except for a pair of white shoes.” “He spoke with a beautiful Beijing dialect, and never smiled” (pp. 65-66/53). His appearance fits the ideal type of a prince with a white horse (baima wangzi 白马王子) whom most girls dream of. But Adjutant Ren is far more than that. He is brave, intelligent, knowledgeable, has a strong sense of justice and integrity. “Father told me that Adjutant Ren was a rarity, a true hero” (pp. 75/59). Although Mo Yan gives Adjutant Ren limited space in the novel, the portrayal of this flawless hero is unforgettable. He is stern in his manner, and awe-inspiring in his righteousness. He is the only character who fits the conventional paradigm of masculinity. However, compared to the well-rounded, fully embodied and “the most heroic and most bastardly” characters like Yu, Zhan’ao and Big Tooth Yu, this perfect image of Adjutant Ren seems flat and pale.

4.2.4 Historical/cultural/geographical attributes for nourishing big men of Shandong Dahan.

A folk saying goes: “Shandong chu mei nanzi 山东出美男子” (Shandong Province produces handsome/beautiful men). However, men from Shandong are not called Shandong mei nanzi 山东美男子 (Handsome men of Shandong). They are called Shandong dahan 山东大汉 (Big men of Shandong). From the above information, we know men from Shandong are handsome/beautiful because they are dahan. “Da 大” in Chinese is “big”, “large” or “great”, and “han 汉” means man/men. Many terms in Chinese refer to man, such as nanxing 男性, nanren 男人, nanzi 男子, fuzi 夫子, hanzi 汉子, nanzihan 男子汉, dahan 大汉, etc. Among these terms, “han” is the most masculine one. “Dahan” (big man) is even more masculine, particularly
referring to physical appearance. In his study of cultural/geographical identities in China, Richard Smith points out: “Each of these areas has a stereotype, which is widely shared within China.” In his chart comparing physical and non-physical traits of people in seventeen provinces in China, the physical traits of “tall and strong” are shared by Hebei and Henan; Shanxi people are “tall”; Gansu, “tall to medium”. Only people from Shandong are “tall and heaviest.” 27 (Men from Shandong are usually tall and have wider shoulders). Among all the provinces in China, only men from Shandong are honored with a title as Shandong dahan (Shandong big men) or Shandong Haojie (Shandong Heroes) in ancient times, not only because of their physical manliness, but also because of their disposition of straightforwardness, heroic spirit, generosity, roughness, bellicosity, boldness and unconstraint, etc. In Red Sorghum, Yu, Zhan’ao, Big Tooth Yu, Spotted Neck, Uncle Arhat and Uncle Mute all are typical Shandong dahan. The question is why Shandong Province is different in its cultural presentation of masculinity, and why only Mo Yan, and not other male writers in China, can create the most masculine men in the contemporary literature. The following historical/cultural/geographical evidence might help understand these questions.

First, regarding the handsome attributes of their physical appearance, Li Liyan 李力研 believes that the mixture of foreign blood contributed to “tall and heavy” Shandong big men. (Li Liyan 2001, 5) His conclusion is based on the research by Anthropologist Li Jixian 李济先 and the renowned historian Chen Yinke 陈寅恪. The geographic area of Shandong in the Tang dynasty was different from that of

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27 Richard J. Smith, 1998a, the online publication. No page number is available since, knowing that I
Shandong Province now. It was the area east of Hua Mountain (Huashan 华山), including today’s Henan, Shandong, Shanxi and Hebei provinces. From the Qin dynasty (221-207 B.C.) to 1644 A.D. (the first year of the Qing dynasty), at least three significant immigrations from the North to Central China took place respectively from the third century to the sixth century in “the Xiongnu-Xianbei period”, from 936 to 1125 in “the Qidan-Nüzhen period” and from 1279 to 1367 in “the Mongolian period”. In addition, the court since the Han dynasty (206 BC - 220 A.D.) several times arranged for marriages between the Han Chinese in Central China and the minorities such as Xiongnu and Xianbei in the North. This long-term blood mixture contributed to the physical change among Shandong (both ancient Shandong and today’s Shandong) people.

In his article, “On ‘Shandong Heroes’ during the End of the Sui and the Beginning of the Tang”, Chen Yinke points out:

The phrase “Shandong heroes” frequently appeared during the end of the Sui and the beginning of the Tang referring to people with mixed blood of the Han and the Hu who were skillful in warfare and engaged in agriculture. They often became targets to win over by politically opposing parties. (Chen 1952, 1)

The first Emperor of Tang, Li Yuan 李渊 (r. 618-26) and his son, Emperor Li Shimin 李世民 (r. 627-49) won over Qin Qiong 秦琼 (?-638) and Cheng Yaojin 程咬金 (?-665), two famous Shandong heroes and leading figures of the Wagangzhai Uprising in the Sui dynasty (581-618). Two emperors trusted them and put them into

failed to open the web page in which his article published, Professor Smith kindly forwarded his two online articles to me as a Word format.

28 The Xiongnu, Xianbei, Qidan, Nüzhen and Mongolian tribes were nomadic minorities inhabiting the North.

29 Li Liyan, 2001, p. 4 of the online version.

30 Hu is the general term referring to all non-Han people in the North.
important positions and these Shandong heroes became two of the founding fathers of the Tang dynasty (618-907).

Second, from a historical and cultural perspective, Shandong is a unique province in China. Shandong is the birthplace of many great Chinese philosophers, such as Confucius, Mencius 孟子 (371-289 B.C.) and Mo Zi 孟子 (Mocius, 470-391 B.C.). Shandong was divided into Qi 齊 and Lu 魯 States during the Warring States Period (475-221 B.C.). Gaomi County, the birthplace of Mo Yan geographically belonged to Qi, but was located very close to Lu State. Lu (the birthplace of Confucius) culture was dominated by Confucianism. Although strongly influenced by Confucianism, Qi culture was quite different from the Lu culture in some respects.

"The most flourishing industry in Qi was military strategy. Almost all military strategists during the Warring States period were from Qi, such as Sima Rangju 司马穰苴, Sun Wu 孙武, Su Bin 孙膑, Meng Tian 蒙恬" (Li Changzhi 1984, 6).

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31 Sima Rangju (4th Century, B.C.), whose original surname was Tian, got this name because he was a Great Sima (official title) of the state of Qi. He was a strategist in the Spring and Autumn Period. His book, Law of Sima (Sima Fa 司马法) proposes his important strategic ideas. According to Records of Literature of Books of Han (Hanshu yiwen zhi, 汉书艺文志), Law of Sima contained 150 chapters, but now only five are left.

32 Sun Wu (Also Sunzi, Master Sun, 544-496 BC), born in the northern state of Qi during the Spring and Autumn Period, was the most famous military strategist in China labeled by historians as "the originator of military strategists in the East (dongfang bingjia bizu 东方兵家鼻祖)." His Sunzi's Art of War (Sunzi bingfa 孙子兵法) is the oldest and most influential military treatise in Chinese history. The text was preserved in China for over 2,000 years, even through the famous book-burning by the first Emperor of Qin around 200 BC.

33 Sun Bin (380-316 BC), another famous military strategist in Chinese history, was a direct descendant of Sun Wu. His The Art of War (Sun Bin bingfa 孙膑兵法) was another ancient Chinese classic dealing with military science, written during the Warring States Period (475-221 B.C.). The Art of War lost for about 1,000 years, until 1972, when a copy of the work written on strips of bamboo was found in a tomb dating from the Han Dynasty (206 B.C. – A.D. 220) at Yinqueshan, near Linyi in Shandong province.

34 Meng Tian was a well-known general in the Qin Dynasty. During the 3rd Century when the First Emperor of Qin (Qinshihuang 秦始皇) was busy securing control of the empire, the Huns seized the opportunity to occupy large areas of territory in the north, from where they made frequent military forays to south. In the fifth year (217 B.C.) of his new empire, the First Emperor sent his crown prince, Fu Su and the senior general Meng Tian, to attack the Huns. They recaptured a vast region south of the
During the Three Kingdoms (220-280), the greatest military strategist, the most capable prime minister (of the Shu 蜀 State) and excellent thinker in China’s history Zhuge Liang (181-234), whose nickname was Mr. Wolong 卧龙 (the hidden dragon, or the sleeping dragon) was born in Yangdu 阳都郡, Langya 琅玡县 (previously belonging to Qi and Lu during the Warring States Period and presently Yishui 沂水 in Shandong Province). He was depicted as the hero in the classic novel The Romance of the Three Kingdoms. These examples show how encouraging a military spirit has been a regional tradition of Shandong. Liu Dezeng 刘德增 points out:

If Lu people could be described as gentle and suave, then Qi people impressed others by their roughness and spiritedness. They could be killed but not be humiliated. Facing challenge, they spared no effort and competed to win without considering the possibility of death. In China’s history, most of the typical events showing roughness and spiritedness either took place in Qi, or were led by men born in Qi. 35

Shandong has often spawned peasant uprisings, such as the Chen Sheng and Wu Guang Uprising 陈胜吴广起义 at the end of the Qin Dynasty, the Chimeijun Uprising 赤眉军起义 led by Fan Chong 樊崇 at the end of Western Han Dynasty, the Wang Bo Uprising 王薄起义 and Wagangzhai Uprising 瓦岗寨起义 at the end of the Sui Dynasty, the Huang Chao Uprising 黄巢起义 at the end of the Tang Dynasty and the Boxer Movement 义和团运动 at the end of the Qing Dynasty. Liang Shan Po (the marsh of Liang Mountain) in the novel The Water Margin where the gang of outlaws

Yellow River. The Emperor further ordered a major program of the wall construction for defense. Meng Tian was the general ordered to oversee the construction of the Great Wall.
inhabited was also located in Shandong Province. All leaders of these peasant uprisings were regarded as *tufei* 土匪 (bandits) by the ruling classes and as *haohan* by ordinary people.

Third, the creation of real big men in literature like *Red Sorghum* requires tremendous imagination, free thoughts and romanticism. Mo Yan’s hometown is the place extraordinarily rich in legends, folktales, strange stories of ghosts and monsters. Pu Songling 蒲松龄 (1640-1715), a great novelist in the Qing Dynasty and the author of *Liaozhai Zhiyi* 聊斋志异 (*Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio*), was born in Zibo 淄博, Shandong Province, less than one hundred miles from where Mo Yan was born (Mo Yan 1998, 241).

To sum up, Shandong is distinguished by a mixture of foreign blood that created “tall and heavy” Shandong big men who displayed a mixture of various influences from Confucianism, military strategists (featuring militarism and a bellicose spirit), legends, sagas, folktales (featuring imaginary power and liberal though; Po Songling’s *Liaozhai Zhiyi* is the best example of such power), and the *haohan* (banditry/outlawry) tradition.\(^{37}\)

\(^{35}\) Liu Dezeng, 2003, p. 1 of the online article.

\(^{36}\) Pu Songling was a poor scholar in the period of Emperor Kangxi of the Qing Dynasty, called struggled for all his life to pass the imperial examination but ended up in failure. So he expressed his sorrows and dissatisfaction using “Stories of Ghosts and Foxes.” This book, *Liao Zhai Zhi Yi* (*Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio*), has depicted all kinds of charming love stories and portrayed a series of vivid female figures who are transformed from ghosts and foxes, vividly displaying the cultural mentality and folk customs of the Chinese nation.

\(^{37}\) For the historical/cultural/geographical traits of Shandong Province and Gaomi County, also see Zhang Zhizhong’s *Mo Yan Lun* 莫言论 (1990), He Lihua and Yang Shousen’s *Guicai Mo Yan* (1992), Li Changzhi’s *Sima Qian zhi Renge yu Fengge* (1984), Shao Xianfeng’s “Qi wenhua de daibiao renwu ji lishi yingxiang” (*Guangming Daily*, 03/05/1999), Susan Naquin’s *Shantung Rebellion: the Wang Lun Uprising of 1774*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981; and Li Xintai’s *Qi wenhua daguan* 齐文化大观 (*The Grand View on Qi Culture*), Beijing: Zhongyang dangxiao chubanshe, 1992.
Mo Yan fully makes use of knowledge he learned in the unorthodox “folk university” (minban daxue 民办大学) in his hometown where he heard legends, sagas, folktales and fantastic stories about uprisings, rebellions, vulgar sex, extraordinary affairs, ghosts, foxes, strange news and secret anecdotes as told by senior villagers while they braided together straw shoes (Zhang Zhizhong 1990, 14). Yu Zhan’ao is characterized based on the combination of true stories about Cao Keming 曹克明, his brother Cao Zhengzhi 曹正直, and Liu Lianren 刘连仁 in Gaomi County. On March 15, 1938, a peasant guerrilla led by the Cao brothers assaulted the Japanese at Sunjiakou village, and killed thirty nine Japanese soldiers including a lieutenant general who was one of the survivors from The Battle of Pingxing Pass commanded by Li Biao 林彪. During the Sunjiakou assault, three members in Cao’s family sacrificed their lives. Liu Lianren was a farmer in Caopo Village 草坡村, Gaomi County, with a strong sense of honor and loyalty. He was captured and put into a camp in Japan in 1944. He escaped and spent thirteen years hiding in a cave in Japan. In 1958, he was found by a Japanese Hunter and sent back to China. Mo Yan even uses a real name, Cao Mengjiu 曹梦九, for the character of the Magistrate. From 1912 to 1937, Gaomi County had seventeen magistrates. Cao Mengjiu and Wang Da

38 The first major Chinese Communist victory during the anti-Japanese war was fought at Pingxing Pass, or Pingxingguan, located in Shanxi Province. The battle was led by Lin Biao (1907-1971), then the division commander of 115th in the Eighth Route, and the designated Mao’s heir during the Cultural Revolution. In 1971, he was charged of overthrowing Mao and tried to flee to the USSR but his plane was crashed down in Mongolia.

39 Liu Lianren filed his lawsuit in a Japanese court against the Japanese government in March, 1996. He died on September 2, 2000. Following his will, his family continued this lawsuit. On July 12, 2001, the verdict by the district court of Tokyo decided that the Japanese government must pay twenty million Japanese yuan to Liu’s family. This lawsuit created a sensation throughout China and Japan. When I googled “Liu Lianren” in Chinese (accessed on Jan. 8, 2004), about 260 related items popped up.
were two of the most popular and their achievements are still orally passed down from generation to generation in Gaomi County (He and Yang 1992, 25).

4.3 Woman's Position in Man's Return from Culture to Nature

*Red Sorghum* is the exploration of man's journey returning from culture to nature. *Fanpu guizhen* 返璞归真 (return to simplicity and reality) is the phrase frequently used by critics to label the root-seeking writers, including Mo Yan. He attempts to subvert the well-established canons of Confucianism and socialist-realism in the literature of the Communist regime. His mentality is crystal-clear—civilization goes against human nature. Men should go back to nature to look for and restore their lost sense of self. In his literary journey from culture to nature, he inevitably encounters the issue of gender in the relationship between man and woman. In this respect, *Red Sorghum* appears to be quite different from the tradition of *haohan* stories. Similar to *junzi* masculinity, *haohan* masculinity was constructed without the presence of women. In *Red Sorghum*, masculinity cannot be constructed without women. *Red Sorghum* is also different from the fiction of many Chinese male writers who try to reclaim their lost masculinity in the context of the traditional ideology of gender relations. In his attack against a Confucian social hierarchy that has oppressed peasants and women, Mo Yan tries his best to shake off the stereotype of the hierarchical *yin-yang* paradigm and present a completely new approach to interpreting gender relations. However, due to deep and ubiquitous Confucian influence, he also exhibits an unavoidable attachment to the Confucian patriarchy. I will discuss his
overall gender views revealed in the journey from culture to nature, focusing on two aspects below: masculinizing female characters and failure to transcend patriarchy.

4.3.1 Masculinizing female characters.

Another conspicuous device that Mo Yan uses for characterization is crossing over gender boundaries. By this I mean either that a character possesses traits culturally associated with the opposite sex, or that a character plays a role that is traditionally and culturally expected of the opposite sex.

Mo Yan does not have a patent on crossing over gender boundaries. The Dream of the Red Chamber is a well-known example where the author makes use of this device. However, The Dream of the Red Chamber \(^{40}\) "allows more of the man crossing into woman but a less spectacular form of the woman crossing into man" (McMahon 1995, 177). The central male character, Jia Baoyu 贾宝玉 is allowed to play with girls, live with girls and dress and behave like girls. Several times in The Dream of the Red Chamber, Jia is described by others as a "girl-like person". However, "no woman dresses as a man to go out of the house and achieve supreme public success." (ibid, 177)

Red Sorghum provides readers a picture opposite to that of The Dream of the Red Chamber. It describes Grandmother behaving like a man (but this does not sacrifice her charming femininity), to be more precise, being bestowed with attributes

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\(^{40}\) The Dream of the Red Chamber (Honglou meng 红楼梦), also titled The Story of the Stone (石头记, Shitou Ji), was written by Cao Xueqin (1724-1746). Handwritten copies were available in literary circles before Cao Xueqin’s death, but it did not get printed until 1791. Jia Baoyu is the male protagonist in the novel. He is a feminized boy who has intimate relationships with many beautiful girls. This character is also a carrier of Daoist philosophy.
culturally preserved for men. In other words, Grandmother in this novel tends to be more masculinized than men are feminized.

Mo Yan adheres to conventional social constructs in defining certain attributes as feminine and others as masculine, but he departs from convention in presenting the androgynous combination of the two. He employs a combination of masculinity and femininity in characterizing Grandmother. Thus, the line between what is man and what is woman is blurred in his characterization of Grandmother, but not in his male characterizations. In other words, the author deliberately masculinizes his female protagonist.

There is no doubt that among the female characters in *Red Sorghum*, Grandmother is the most successful. She is the most interesting and colorful character in the novel and she is the female protagonist who links the entire story together. Her character demonstrates Mo Yan's subversion of the traditional paradigm of masculinity and femininity. To make my point clear, I find Zhu Ling's analyses of Grandmother helpful and I want to use some of her statements as references.

In the patriarchal traditions of both Chinese and Western literatures, there has always been a dichotomization in the characterization of women into two stereotypes: the refined, beautiful but domesticated woman, and the alluring but terrible seductress. They are, respectively, the angelic and the monstrous women in Western literature and the “gentle lady” (*shunü*) and the “fox spirit” (*hulijing*) in Chinese literature. (1993, 129)

Zhu Ling observes that Mo Yan's female characters fit into this dichotomy as well: Grandmother “with her delicate beauty, her exchange as well as use value to her man, is close to the angelic or gentle lady stereotype,” and Lian'er, “my second grandmother”, “is closer to the stereotype of the fox spirit” (Zhu 1993, 129). Zhu’s
argument goes like this: from a male perspective, Grandmother is portrayed as the picture of passive beauty. She has a full face, rosy cheeks, long and bright eyes, thick and black hair, and a gracefully long neck. She has a slightly sad, but tranquil goddesslike expression, and looks like "a beauty sculpted out of wax". All depictions like this render into language a painting of a classic Chinese beauty (shinü 淑女). To top it all, she has smallest feet in the village, which is a great attraction for men, including her father-in-law and Yu Zhan’ao. (Zhu 1993, 127)

Zhu’s analysis of Grandmother’s femininity is persuasive. Grandmother possesses feminine beauty—small feet, long and delicate neck, and white-jade-like skin. As for her desire for a marriage, she is no different from traditional girls who long for “a good husband, handsome and well educated, a man who would treat her gently” (p. 50). She also yearns to “lose her anxieties and loneliness in the arms of a strong and noble young man” (p. 51). She also tends to be submissive to Grandfather on many occasions. However, Zhu Ling’s analysis has covered only half the picture of Grandmother. In my reading of the novel, I have found that the other half of the picture challenges Zhu’s conclusion about Grandmother as a shinü (a fair maiden or a virtuous woman), because Grandmother is a rebel who actually shuns qualities of a shinü; she is a rebel challenging and defying all conventional behavioral norms imposed on Chinese women. The narrator proudly claims that “my grandma” “was a hero of resistance, a trailblazer for sexual liberation, a model of women’s independence” (pp. 14/14) because “she could have done anything she desired” (pp. 14/14). Grandmother hates her parents trading her off to a leper three times her age merely in exchange for a big black mule. After gaining control of the distillery, she
decides to desert her father. This bold move to denounce the virtue of filial piety and refute her father is the worst offense to the social hierarchy. Her sense of morality is questionable too. She has a possible affair with the foreman Uncle Arhat (pp. 8/9, 14/14); she runs away from Grandfather to Black Eye, a rival bandit of Yu Zhan’ao, to seek revenge against Yu’s polygamous practice of consorting with Lian’er, Grandma’s servant girl, as his concubine (pp. 397-401/290-293). Her adultery with Yu in the sorghum field (pp. 88-89/70-71) is so sensual and so immoral that it disqualifies her from being a virtuous woman according to Confucian norms.

Her daily behavior reveals her defiance against Confucian other restrictions imposed on women too. She drinks with men, and her drinking capacity is equal to that of men “...the men and women in my family had enormous capacities for wine” (pp. 371/273). When riding a donkey, “She swung her leg over the donkey’s back and straddled it, unlike most women” (pp. 111/90). As a bride, she overtly removed the red cloth covering her head, and “ripped the curtain from the front of the carriage and stuffed it behind the seat” (pp. 62/50). As she breathed the free air she audaciously stared at Yu Zhan’ao’s “broad shoulders and narrow waist” with her sensuous eyes (pp. 62/50). Her grandson, the narrator, employs a masculine phrase “núzhòng háojié 女中豪杰” (a hero among women), rather than “jīnguó yìngxióng 巾幗英雄”,41 to praise her (p. 166); the laborers in the family distillery call her “a spirited girl” (pp. 185/145); and Yu Zhan’ao realizes, “She might be young, but she had teeth in her belly and could scheme with the best of them. A woman to be reckoned with, certainly no economy lantern. (búshì shēngyóu de dēng 不是省油的灯)” (pp. 176/139)
In Chinese folk terms, if a woman is no economy lantern, the implication is clear to everyone—she must be capable, formidable, and unreasonable, and she might even be a trouble-maker and a shrew, but she is not a submissive and passive *shunü*.

There is an old Chinese saying, “*San cong si de zhen shunü; 三从四德真淑女*”, meaning “three obediences and four virtues make a true fair maiden”. “Three obediences” refers to the obedience of a woman to her father before marriage, to her husband after marriage and to her son after the death of her husband. “Four virtues” refer to a woman’s morality, proper speech, modest manner and diligent work. These Confucian codes of behavior have spiritually shackled Chinese women for centuries. Nonetheless, Grandmother is unshackled at all. As a daughter, she is not obedient to her father, as she rejects an arranged marriage. She rides in the red sedan chair as a bride going to her husband’s home not because she is obedient, but because of the hope she harbors to unite with a “good husband, handsome and well educated, a man who would treat her gently” (p. 50). The pair of scissors with which she arms herself surreptitiously will speak for her if her husband proves to be a leper as gossip indicates. She prepares herself for both eventualities, but neither of them shows her to be obedient. As a wife, she is not obedient to her husband. On the contrary, she prohibits her husband from touching her by threatening him with a pair of scissors (pp. 86/68). Her adultery with Yu Zhan’ao, a *yenanren* 野男人, or *yehanzi* 野汉子 (lit. a wild man, meaning a man with whom a married woman has an illicit relationship) in the “feudal” context is a crime heinous enough to deserve the death-penalty. To sum up, Grandma is far from qualified as a *shunü* (gentle lady, or fair maiden).

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41 *Haojie* (hero) is the exclusively masculine term to endorse male heroes in Chinese tradition. The
Grandmother is not only a rebel, but also behaves like a masculinized woman in many respects. Of course, she is simultaneously a very charming and feminine beauty too, as Zhu Ling observes. When she rebels against the social hierarchy and must make a decision, she is brave, affirmative, decisive, uncompromising, and stern—attributes traditionally assigned to men. These traits are evident in the following examples.

The first example is how Grandmother defies her father:

Grandma then placed the twenty buns in front of Great-Granddad and said, “You can eat these on the road.”

“Little Nine,” he protested, “you’re my very own daughter!”

“Go on,” she demanded, “I’ve heard enough!”

“But I’m your dad!” he rebuked her angrily.

“You’re no father of mine, and I forbid you ever to enter my door again!”

“I am your father!”

“Magistrate Cao is my father. Weren’t you listening?”

“Not so fast. You can’t just throw one father away because you found yourself a new one. Don’t think having you was easy on your mother and me!”...

Grandma flung the buns in his face. They hit like exploding grenades. (pp. 161-162/129)

Another example is the issue of Adjutant Ren’s resignation. As a commander, Yu encounters the problem of upholding a just order among his troops when his uncle and foster father Big Tooth Yu rapes a country girl. As a protest against Yu for defying the law and refusing to send his uncle to the firing squad, Adjutant Ren decides to resign. In a quarrel with Grandfather, Grandmother shows her clear-mindedness, unbending will and manlike prowess that not only humiliates Yu, but also would have embarrassed most men.

corresponding term referring heroines is jinguo yingxiong.
Commander Yu, pistol in hand, stared at Adjutant Ren's retreating back and growled through clenched teeth, "Go on, get the fuck out of here! No damned schoolboy is going to tell me what to do! In the ten years I ate fistcakes, nobody was that insolent to me."

"Zhan’ao," Grandma said, "You can’t let Adjutant Ren go. Soldiers are easy to recruit, but generals are worth their weight in gold."

"Women don’t understand these things!" Commander Yu said in frustration.

"I always thought you were tough, not spineless!"

Commander Yu aimed the pistol at her, "Have you lived long enough?" he snarled.

She tore open her shirt, exposing two tender mounds of flesh, and challenged him: "Go ahead, shoot!"

With a shout of "Mom!" Father rushed in and buried his head between her breasts.

As he looked at Father’s neat, round head and Grandma’s beautiful face, a torrent of memories flooded Granddad’s mind. With a sigh, he lowered the pistol. "Button up," he said as he walked outside. (pp. 69-70/55)

At this moment, she is not “tranquil”, not “sad”, and not “submissive” at all, in Zhu Ling’s terms.

As the third example, we see that the most eye-catching attribute of her masculinization is that she has been involved, as an equal to men, in strategy and decision making in many important events and moments, and demonstrates dajiang fengdu 大将风度 (the manner of great general or admiral).

When she quarrels with Yu Zhan’ao about whether to keep Adjutant Ren, as mentioned above, it is Grandmother who knows clearly the right thing to do and the principles to follow, thus playing a key role in persuading Yu to chase after Ren and keep him. Though it is hard for Yu to face this reality, what happened is exactly what Grandmother insisted upon. (pp. 71/56)
Grandmother instigates and plans the ambush against the Japanese convoy in 1937, the most important event in the novel. The real decision-maker in this event is Grandmother. She helps Commander Yu lobby and negotiate with Pocky Leng to join the action. Finally she settles the issue at the dining table. The negotiation comes to a deadlock, as both Grandfather and Pocky Leng may trigger their guns at any moment. During this explosive situation, it is Grandmother who pulls the two men back in the right direction. Standing “between them, her left hand resting on Leng’s revolver, her right hand on Commander Yu’s Browning pistol”, she says: “even if you can’t agree, you mustn’t abandon justice and honor. This isn’t the time or place to fight. Take your fury out on the Japanese.” (pp. 32/27) Then she asks her son to bring in three cups of wine.

“Uncle Arhat’s blood is in this wine,” she said. “If you’re honorable men you’ll drink it, then go out and destroy the Jap convoy. After that, chickens can go their own way, dogs can go theirs. Well water and river water don’t mix.”

She picked up her cup and drank the wine down noisily. (pp. 33/28)

Without Grandmother’s clear-mind, great efforts and manly courage, it would be difficult to imagine that a final agreement could have been reached between these two rivals and the ambush carried out. On this occasion, Grandmother actually plays the role of a real commander who commands two “bastardly and heroic” men. She encourages her men to fight, to go to the battlefield for revenge against Japanese who skinned alive and killed Uncle Arhat. Another woman worth mentioning in this respect is Wang Wenyi’s wife. After their three sons were killed by a Japanese bombing, Wang Wenyi’s wife escorts her husband personally to Commander Yu to
join his guerillas to fight the Japanese (pp. 76/60). Consequently, both she and her husband become martyrs during the ambush of the Japanese convoy (pp. 80/64, 83/66).

The fourth example shows that Grandma’s decision-making and excellent leadership are so impressive that they dumfound male workers and readers. Her leprous husband and father-in-law were murdered by Yu Zhan’ao while she visited her own parents after her wedding. When she returns, she faces a radically different situation: the authority figures of the Shan family—the father and his leprous son—are dead; their bodies are picked up from the river and exposed in the open air; the family winery is in jeopardy of bankruptcy; the laborers, in a state of disunity, feel threatened and worried about their means of livelihood. This chaotic situation requires an outstanding leader who will make wise decisions. Grandma is only sixteen years old and has become the sole owner of this family distillery. She restores order with a series of decisions made on the spot. Since Uncle Arhat has served the family faithfully for a long time, she puts him in charge of the distillery. She gives the previously employed laborers of the Shan family the choice to stay or to go home. She orders Uncle Arhat and the laborers to bury the corpses of the Shan father and son, and to burn their belongings. She also orders the laborers to turn the family compound upside down for disinfecting, cleaning, wall whitening, and door painting. She has the household thoroughly cleansed and redecorated. “Three days later, a new world has been created, top to bottom.” (pp. 162-164/129-132)

While I argue that Mo Yan masculinizes Grandmother, there exists an alternative interpretation of women’s masculinity. According to this interpretation,
the character of Grandmother provides us an example where the conception of traditional masculinity is challenged by and in competition with what Judith Halberstam defines as “female masculinity”—“new masculinities without men” (1998, 1& 267). Halberstam notices that there has been a long history where “female masculinities are framed as the rejected scraps of dominant masculinity in order that male masculinity may appear to be the real thing. But what we understand as heroic masculinity has been produced by and across both male and female bodies” (1998, 1-2). In her study of female masculinities, she provides numerous examples to prove that masculinity is present in both male and female bodies, but it has been ideologically attributed to people with male bodies only. Therefore what she calls “new masculinities” actually should be recognized “both as part of the history of masculinity and as its future” (1998, 268).

Mo Yan holds the similar concept in that, through the mouth of the narrator, he feels the source from which Grandmother gains her endless courage and manlike wisdom seems to be an enigma.

During her first sixteen years, Grandma’s days had been devoted to embroidery, needlework, paper cutouts, foot binding, the endless glossing of her hair, and all other manner of domestic things in the company of neighbor girls. What, then, was the source of her ability and courage to deal with the events she encountered in her adult years? How was she able to temper herself to the point where even in the face of danger she could conquer her fears and force herself to act heroically? I’m not sure I know.” (pp. 110/89)

Actually Mo Yan knows the answer to his enigmatic question. He has answered it before he poses it: “In some significant aspects, heroes are born, not made. Heroic qualities flow through a person’s veins like an undercurrent, ready to be
translated into action” (pp. 110/89). Mo Yan’s hypothesis seems to suggest personal attributes such as aggressiveness, bravery, prowess, and virility are properties of all human beings, but they are assigned to men only as an after thought, as Halberstam defends female masculinities and as Maurice Berger (et al.) argue: “... gender is constructed; that is, who we are is shaped by historical circumstances and social discourses, and not primarily by random biology.” (1995, 2-3).

4.3.2 Failure to transcend patriarchy

If we agree that Mo Yan has created female characters who are unconventional, independent, rebellious and masculinized, the next question naturally follows—How does he deal with the gender relations in a story that occurred in a hierarchical society during the time period when women’s liberation was unknown to ordinary Chinese people? This is a matter of debate. Zhu Ling criticizes Mo Yan for returning to a patriarchal, feudalistic pattern in his overall depiction of male-female relationship (1993, 124). She asserts:

For all the sensuality and rebellious courage allowed to the grandmother by the narrator in relation to Yu’s irresistible virile power, Dai is identified with a kind of (desirable) femininity, which consists of, among other things, both passivity and a willingness to subordinate to male power. (1993, 125)

Zhu’s problem is that her argument and her conclusion are not consistent. She notices that the irresistible sexual power of Yu has aroused female sexual desire in Grandmother and captivated her completely. This is true. However, the outcome of this “natural” desire is in accordance with the framework of social hierarchy in a male-female relationship. Here Zhu has a tendency to mix up the natural sexual
property of human beings with the social property of a hierarchical society. First, she fails to define “male power” in a clear sense. We are familiar with the terms “dominant”, “subordinate” and “male power”, commonly used to define the patriarchal order in gender relationships. Grandmother falling in love with Grandfather and becoming captivated by Grandfather’s male sexual power is not the outcome of social hierarchy, but the outcome of attraction between the opposite sexes, which means it is primarily a natural phenomenon rather than social or cultural phenomenon. Grandmother is not a prisoner of male power and privilege conferred on men by Confucian social hierarchy, but of Grandfather’s male sexual prowess. In the context of Confucian social hierarchy, the leprous son of the Shan family holds much stronger male power than does Yu Zhan’ao, because his relationship as Grandmother’s husband has social legitimacy. The Shan father and his leprous son “are the representational power of the hierarchical order in the community. The wealthy family is synonymous with the patriarchal institution that legally possesses Grandma” (Ng 1997, 359). However, what greets the leper is not Grandmother’s “passivity and a willingness to subordinate” to his legalized “male power”, but her fierce stare, plus a pair of threatening scissors.

Second, Zhu continues her conclusion as follows:

To borrow from the language of the French feminist Luce Irigaray, the author wittingly or unwittingly resorts to the patriarchal practice of ‘secularizing’ his female character(s) in order to construct a desired manhood. For it is precisely the supposed femininity of the woman, her passivity and willingness to submit herself to his power, that makes the masculine potency possible. The constructed femininity and masculinity exist in an opposition-structural relationship; the latter would collapse if not for the former, and vice versa. (1993, 125-126)
Again, she mixes up properties belonging to different domains, though they are interrelated in some ways. Women’s passivity and subordination should be examined as a part of patriarchal discourse, and the discussion of women’s passivity and subordination should emphasize the unequal social roles imposed on men and women, along with the implicit hierarchy dividing male and female. “Unequal” is a synonym for “unjust”, which means that certain social roles and social positions are imposed on women unfairly against their will. Thus “women’s will” can be used as a touchstone to test the patriarchal attitude of the author and his characters. Zhu Ling has noticed this touchstone too because she refers to the concept of “willingness” several times to emphasize that Grandmother’s subordinate and passive roles are not against her will. It is problematic to apply the concept of “willingness” to Grandmother in this way. There are two different kinds of willingness among women—one is generated from human nature, meaning human instinct or desire that drives women to act willingly and happily. This is real willingness. Another willingness is the result of Confucian ideology internalized by women, that is, women are taught to be subordinate and passive in response to men. They are expected to internalize social norms and cultural values and demonstrate them as their second nature. Women are not only trained to speak, and act properly according to patriarchal ideology, but also are trained to feel properly. The willingness that women show as the result of the inculcation and internalization of Confucian morality is a kind of pseudo-willingness built upon deprivation of women’s real willingness. This is one of the ruses of patriarchal subordination of women, that is, male desire is not
expressed by males, but by females who must give up their own desire to make full room in her instinct and her feelings to express male desire as her own “willingness”. Thus in the connection of the “willingness” of women to “subordination”, this “willingness” is false. It goes against human nature to claim that one is willing to be treated unfairly and unjustly.

After clarifying the two kinds of willingness, we are in a better position to judge what kind of willingness Grandmother displays and whether or not it is proper to connect her “willingness” to women’s “passivity and subordination.” Keeping this in mind, I will examine two episodes of Grandmother’s “subordination” as viewed by Zhu Ling.

Zhu has missed the fact that Grandmother’s “passivity” is not unconditional. If Yu Zhan’ao’s virile power had overwhelmed Grandma and made her passive, Grandma would have maintained her passivity and subordination to Yu when he had an affair with Second Grandmother. Yu’s virile power remains the same and proves it again in conquering another woman. In addition, in this historical context concubines were common and lawful, and a real passive and virtuous wife should support her husband’s polygynous practice. Instead of being submissive, Grandmother fights Grandfather desperately. She is so angry that she slaps Yu’s left cheek (pp. 385/282). She decides to throw herself into the arms of another man—Black Eye, a rival bandit leader—and she stays with him for several months. When Grandfather comes to reclaim her, he swears at her, “bitch!” Grandmother curses him back, “Ass!” “Swine!” (pp. 398/291). She stands there, “hands on hips, back bent, neck thrust forward, a trickle of bright-red blood running down her chin” (pp. 391/286). This is
the awful sight of a typical shrew (pofu 泼妇) or “tigress” (mulao hu 母老虎), according to Chinese folk perceptions. Grandfather then discovered something: “In all his years, no woman had ever cursed him as viciously as that, and certainly no woman had ever slapped him” (pp. 391/286). At this moment, we do not see Grandma’s “willingness to subordinate” to Grandpa’s virile prowess.

This is a love game, or “ruse” in Zhu Ling’s terms. Obviously Grandma is the loser of the game, but she is the winner in her dogged fight against male hegemony as she dares to defy the well-established patriarchal social order and take subversive action. My understanding of her subversion in running off to Black Eye is a manifesto of her autonomy establishing the claim that whatever men can do, women can do as well. Although the action she takes is destructive, she demonstrates that a woman, as an equal to a man, should have autonomy over her own life.

I am defending Mo Yan in this respect because any simplified accusation against Mo Yan for having patriarchal tendencies is inaccurate and thus not fair to him. However, Zhu Ling’s research has provided me an ideal platform from which I can further explore Grandmother’s characteristics. Putting together Zhu Ling’s analysis on Grandmother’s feminine attributes and my analysis on her masculine attributes, I believe that readers will obtain a full picture of Grandmother’s characteristics. Nevertheless, I do not see Mo Yan as entirely free from the patriarchal ideology. I agree with Feuerwerker’s view that he tries to shed the influence of patriarchy but fails. In Feuerwerker’s words:

*Red Sorghum*’s apparent rebellion against traditional patriarchal discourse in fact continues it; it tries, but ultimately fails, through its glorification of
masculinity and attempted representation of a “trailblazing liberated woman,” to have it both ways. (1998, 217)

In terms of the gender relationships, Mo Yan is not concerned as much about the hierarchical order as Zhang Xiangliang and Jia Pingwa, whom I will discuss in the following chapter. Neither does he show as much prejudice against women because of their yin identity. He focuses more on the exhibition of masculine power and virile ethos, which he perceives as defining the spirit of his hometown—Northeast Gaomi Township. However, Mo Yan, the son of and the writer for peasants who grew up under the influence of a male-dominated culture, dances with shackles; he dances wildly and crazily to express his aspiration for freedom from all ideological restriction and oppression, but he pays no attention to the fact that he actually dances with heavy shackles of patriarchal ideology on his feet. He has been wearing them for so long and gotten so used to them that he does not feel their presence. His patriarchal subconsciousness is evident in several respects as discussed below.

a. Ambivalence and paradox

Grandmother sacrifices her young life on the battlefield fighting against the Japanese invaders. As she lies dying in the sorghum field, she sees a flock of white doves descending upon the field: “She soars with the doves and her mind, which has now comfort and harmony...she says in true sincerity, ‘Heavens! O Heavens!’” (pp. 94/74). Readers are impressed and touched by this lyrical, mythical, even paradisal landscape of the red sorghum field and the noble picture of Grandmother. Acting the same as Mo Yan’s dying men, she shows no fear or nervousness at all about her impending death. She is sincerely content, and happy. Nonetheless, her dominant
feeling is confusion. At the last minute of her life, she asks many questions to heaven about her deeds on earth:

My heaven...you gave me a lover, you gave me a son, you gave me riches, you gave me thirty years of life as robust as red sorghum. Heaven, since you gave me all that, don't take it back now. Forgive me, let me go! Have I sinned? Would it have been right to share my pillow with a leper and produce a misshapen, putrid monster to contaminate this beautiful world? What is chastity then? What is the correct path? What is goodness? What is evil? You never told me, so I had to decide on my own. I loved happiness, I loved strength, I loved beauty, it was my body, and I used it as I thought fitting. Sin doesn't frighten me, nor does punishment. I'm not afraid of your eighteen levels of hell. I did what I had to do, I managed as I thought proper. I fear nothing. But I don't want to die. I want to live. I want to see more of this world....” (pp. 91/72)

This interior monologue by Grandmother belies her true personality. The monologue is Mo Yan’s faulty attempt to construct an unbridled heroine. Actually the author intrudes into the role of his character, borrowing the mouth of his character to express his own ideas. Superficially, Grandmother is confused and trying to justify her immoral deeds by these rhetorical questions. However, according to her pattern of behavior throughout the novel, it is unlikely that she would be bothered by these moral concerns. When she deserts her biological father, she does not try to justify her defiance of filial piety—one of the most heinous crimes in patriarchal society; when she has unlawful sex with Yu in the sorghum field, she does not try to exonerate her adultery; and when she seduces Uncle Arhat, she does not vindicate her lustfulness. She just does whatever she likes. The only time when she reveals her “pretentiousness” or “hypocrisy” is the moment when Yu comes to the distillery attempting to claim her publicly. It might be true that she tries to “keep Yu away from her for some superficial reason of morality” (Zhu 1993, 125). It might also be true
that she is playing a power game to subdue and tame this wild man, and put him under her control, since she is a woman who has “teeth in her belly and could scheme with the best of them”. I tend to believe the latter because it is consistent with all her deeds and attitudes mentioned above. She is driven by the power of nature, not Confucian doctrine. There is no reason for her to worry about the moral implications of her deeds. I understand Grandmother’s interior monologue to be the true voice of the author. It shows that Mo Yan’s ideological stance is at best ambivalent and paradoxical. On the one hand, he attempts to construct a totally new female image, a “trailblazer of women’s liberation.” On the other hand, he lacks confidence in his audacious defiance of the canons of fictional writings. Grandmother’s voice reveals his concerns (conscious or subconscious worries) about his deviation from the conventional paradigm, and he needs justification for this transgression. The author’s justification then undermines the wholeness of Grandma’s personality. It subtracts from the distinctive, bright and colorful picture of Grandmother, and strikes an unharmonious note in the beautiful music of Grandmother. If male characters, such as Big Tooth Yu, Spotted Neck, Wang Wenyi and Pocky Cheng can be transformed from bastards, bandits, cowards, and traitors to heroes through the baptism of the anti-Japanese war or the sublimation of death, why can Grandmother not achieve the same transformation? Why must Mo Yan add this redemptive scene to justify and sanitize Grandmother? Lu Tonglin’s point of view is insightful: “...sexual desire, especially expressed by a woman, must be justified by a loftier or serious cause, which is the manifestation of the author’s ideological stance.” (1993b, 203)
b. One side of crossing gender boundaries

It is unusual for Mo Yan, a male Chinese writer having grown up in a patriarchal context to proclaim that Grandmother is endowed with “heroic qualities” (masculinity) from birth. In this sense, Mo Yan presents an idea that is consistent with feminist thought. If Mo Yan firmly stood in this position as his narrator claims: “heroes are born, not made. Heroic qualities flow through a person’s veins like an undercurrent, ready to be translated into action” (pp. 110/89), it would be groundless for me to criticize Mo Yan’s patriarchal presentation in crossing over gender boundaries to characterize females. This is another example to show Mo Yan’s ambiguity and paradox, and to support my argument of Mo Yan’s semi-success and semi-failure in transcending patriarchy. He presents a feminist idea in working out the statement of the narrator and characterizing Grandmother accordingly, but he is patriarchal in constructing overall his characters. If women were born to possess masculinity, the opposite statement should logically follow—men are born to possess femininity. In Red Sorghum, Mo Yan has gone only half way. While constructing his ideal primitive masculinity, Mo Yan depicts Grandmother as a manlike woman, but he has a tight control over his male characters. He does not allow any of his major male characters, particularly the protagonist, to cross over gender boundaries to the feminine side. Here his patriarchal mentality is clear, even though it might rest in his subconscious mind. Any womanly trait will ruin the portrayal of an ideal man.

Prohibiting his major male characters to be feminized reveals the fact that Mo Yan denies that “real men” can be to some extent feminine at birth. The fact that Grandmother is celebrated as “a hero among women” (nüzhong haojie) (p. 166)
instead of "a heroine" (jinguo yingxiong) conveys "the implication that she is a manlike woman whose pursuits of freedom is rare among her sisters." It also implies that her "heroic qualities" are the property of men, rather than something that "flow[s] through a person's veins like an undercurrent" (pp. 110/89) as the narrator claims. Halberstam points out:

Gender, it seems, is reversible only in one direction, and this must surely have to do with the immense social power that accumulates around masculinity. Masculinity, one must conclude, has been reserved for people with male bodies and has been actively denied to people with female bodies. (1998, 169)

This characterization is contradictory to the statement of the narrator, "heroes are born, not made". This is the reason why I contend that Mo Yan ideologically masculinizes Grandmother. The author takes the position that masculinity and femininity are hierarchical. They are not an equally-coexistent phenomenon. Masculinity is superior and femininity is inferior, meaning that the masculinization of women amounts to upgrading women, and that the feminization of men amounts to degrading men. I draw this inference from the narrator's constant self-loathing and self-mocking of his own generation of urban men, referring to them as feminized "rabbits". In this way, the text maintains a clear-cut line between superior males and inferior females. Grandmother is highly praised and romanticized because of her manliness, because she is close to reaching the higher standard of manly men.

42 Shelley W. Chan, 2000, p. 2 on the online version.
c. An independent woman or a dependent woman?

The text presents Grandmother as a character who deserves high praise. The narrator labels Grandmother poetically: "...she was a hero of the resistance, a trailblazer for sexual liberation, a model of women's independence" (pp. 14/14). However, what I see in Red Sorghum is a contradiction between an independent woman in the labeling by the narrator and a dependent woman in the characterization by the author. In other words, Mo Yan ironically tries to construct an independent woman by presenting her as dependent on men. Grandmother's spirit of liberation is limited within the scope of finding good men. The only difference between Grandmother and other dependent women in the Confucian context is that Grandmother has allowed herself enormous freedom to switch to different men not because of her infidelity, but because of her strong desire to have control over her fate. To support my argument, I will give three examples of Grandmother switching to different men.

The first example is her switch from her husband to Grandfather. After she verified the rumors about her leprous husband, she doggedly fights against falling into his hands by first arming herself with a pair of scissors and then throwing herself into the arms of Grandfather. Critics perceive Grandfather's sexual encounter with Grandmother in the sorghum field as rape (Lu 1993b, 199; Zhu 1993, 124). Actually Yu Zhan'ao is not a rapist. The legal explanation for a rape is to have sex without consent. The sexual intercourse in the sorghum field is not in violation of Grandmother's will. Even though it is in the disguised form of a rape, it is real love making resulting from the mutual attraction between Grandfather and Grandmother.
At first Grandmother feels threatened by Yu abducting her, but she supports and encourages him after she figures out what is going on. “She even wrapped her arms around his neck to make it easier for him to carry her.” (pp. 88/70)

Another example is her switch from Grandfather to Black Eye. Having discovered Grandfather’s affair with Lian’er, Grandmother immediately gets sexually involved with another man, Black Eye, a rival bandit of Grandfather, and lives with him for several months.

The third example is her switch from her biological father to a foster father. After realizing that Magistrate Cao is a powerful figure and impressing him with her playacting as a “good woman” in the scene where Cao investigates the murder of her husband and father-in-law, Grandmother playacts another dumfounding scene in public. She boldly makes up a story and insists that Magistrate Cao is her biological father who sold her away ten years before because of the famine. Cao has much trouble trying to clarify this fact while Grandma keeps calling him “my true father!” Having no way out of this embarrassing situation, Cao has to adopt her as his foster-daughter on the spot (pp. 154-155/124). From that moment on, this man of authority is subject to Grandmother’s manipulation, and Grandmother adamantly abandons her own biological father as mentioned above.

Another important aspect of the characterization of Grandmother as being independent is her talent for running a business. The involvement of women in business blurs the division of labor by sex established in Confucian ideology, and the domain of domesticity for women has been transcended with the invasion of men’s territory. Nonetheless, we must analyze Grandmother’s business activities carefully.
First, she becomes the sole owner of a prosperous winery business because of her marriage and her status as a financial dependent, not because of her desire and independent effort to become a businesswoman. Second, without Grandfather’s clearing the way for her by murdering her leprous husband and her father-in-law, it would have been impossible for her to own this business. In other words, the property she inherits is men’s property and the way she possesses the property is dependent on another man’s scheme. She has become the biggest beneficiary of men’s life-and-death struggle. Therefore I do not agree Chan’s assertion, “Ironically, this ‘hero among women’ turns out to be a victim of men.”

Third, her confidence in running the business largely depends on another man, Uncle Arhat who worked for the family and has an abundance of experiences in administering and running the winery business. After Uncle Arhat again takes over the business, Grandmother is rarely involved in it. Under her ownership the business has become more prosperous because of a new formula for making wine that improved the quality and made it “fragrant to eighteen li” (shiba li xiang 十八里香).

This was a bizarre formula for making wine that came from a man—Grandmother’s lover, Yu Zhan’ao, who pissed into a jar of wine to create the formula.

I do not mean to discredit Grandma’s talent in business. She does show her leadership at a chaotic moment. Mo Yan tells his readers that Grandmother is born to possess such talent. He seems to imply that men and women are equally made by nature in terms of their intelligence, talent and potential abilities. Women become inferior in business or other social spheres because culture/society does not provide

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43 Shelley W. Chan, 2000, p.2 on the online version.
44 “li” is Chinese measuring unit. One li equals to 0.31 miles.
equal chances to women. This non-patriarchal idea deserves credit. However, let me go back to my argument. First, one’s talent in business or capability of being independent is not the same thing as one’s willingness to be independent. Grandmother has her talent and capabilities, but she shows no signs of willingness to become independent of men, either in her personal life, or in her social activities. Second, she maintains relationships with men who support her and secure her life in one way or another, primarily by utilizing her feminine attributes. She runs to and stays with Black Eye immediately after Yu’s affair with Lian’er because she knows that her feminine charm will not be rejected by Black Eye. The narrative hints to readers that she keeps Uncle Arhat’s loyalty by offering sex to him (pp. 8/9, 14/14). Magistrate Cao has a good impression of her also because she uses her feminine charm as “a gentle willow bent by the wind” (pp. 152/122). Actually she is labeled by the narrator as an independent woman, but characterized as a woman who heavily depends on men.

d. Family history is carried on by the patriline.

Family history in the novel is traced through male generations. There is an inconsistency of the treatment of women in this family saga. Grandmother is deprived of life at the age of thirty. Mother’s existence is merely for recovering father’s reproductive function (since he has only one testicle), and thus carrying on the male line of the family. There is almost no place for the wife of the narrator in this family story. She is mentioned only one time as narratorial necessity. Second Grandma’s existence is only for representation of the subjectivity of the male protagonist. This
family is a masculine kingdom. The glorification of their family history actually is the glorification of male members in the family. Grandmother is a fantastic and exotic embellishment to the legend of this patrilineal family. Grandmother must die in her youth for two reasons: to keep her perfect image, and to give way to the focus on male characters. Mo Yan’s manipulation of time rearrangement has another advantage that conceals his inconsistency in the treatment of women. In this time-rearranged story, that is by not telling the story chronologically, he makes it seem as if Grandma is active from cover to cover, thus occupying enormous attention. If we view the story chronologically, we see clearly that the “new” woman, represented by Grandmother constitutes a prominent part of the narrative in the beginning. However in the latter part of the story, after the death of Grandmother, women generally cease to occupy a shared central place with men. It is interesting to see how women diminish on the stage of this family saga throughout the three generations. While Grandmother plays her role as a real commander to fight the Japanese in the spotlight on center stage, the major episode in the depiction of Mother’s life is hiding in a well (underground) to protect her brother and herself from being slaughtered by the Japanese. The Wife of the narrator is completely invisible, remaining back stage behind the curtain. In addition, women after the death of Grandmother are no longer of the emancipated type, but rather presented in the context of Confucian stereotypes.

Red Sorghum underscores patrilineal line of the family. After Father—Douguan, Yu’s only son—lost one of his testicles in a deadly battle with dogs, Yu Zhan’ao is devastated because his family line might be cut off. While Dr. Zhang is concerned about Father’s life since he is bitten by a mad dog, Grandfather is worried
about the continuation of his family line. He says to Dr. Zhang: “He might as well be
dead if that thing’s useless” (pp. 292/224). He almost kills Dr. Zhang who seems not
to be confident about recovering the reproductive function of his son. When things
turn out dramatically opposite and his son can function well with only one testicle,
“Granddad fired three shots in the air, then brought his hands together in front of his
chest and screamed: ‘Heaven has eyes!’” (pp. 296/227)

4.4 Summary

To sum up this chapter, I would start by saying that peasants for a long time
have been positioned at the bottom of the social hierarchy of China. Bandit peasants,
like prostitutes, are seen as a peripheral social group that has never been allowed to
have their subjectivity represented in orthodox literature. Mo Yan, in his debut novel,
*Red Sorghum*, tries to turn the firmly built Confucian hierarchy upside-down by
redefining and thus repositioning Self and Others. He centers the peripheral and
brings into the spotlight marginalized peasants of various kinds, including bandits,
murders, and traitors. In so doing, he cynically mocks and openly challenges the
authoritative power of the discourse holders—the social and intellectual elite. His
imagination is wild and fantastic; his thought is liberal; and his transgression of
Confucian norms is audacious. All these make his novel an unmistakable mark of the
second period of the 1980s as discussed in Chapter Two. The choice of the penname
Mo Yan (“Don’t speak!”) contrasts with what the author is doing: he speaks loudly.
He repeatedly complains in the novel that “I have begun to utter only the words that
others have spoken themselves repeating the words of still others. Have I no voice of my own?” (pp. 493/357). The fact that Mo Yan speaks loudly and criticizes urban intellectuals for not having their own voices, and his audacious transgression indicate enormous changes in the political climate in China, which allow him such leeway. In terms of the courage to defy the firmly established social hierarchy and challenge the hegemonic discourse holders, Mo Yan is a rural counterpart of Wang Shuo, whose “hooligan literature” brings in endless ruffians, hooligans, and outlaws into the gallery of urban citizens. The difference between Mo Yan’s rural ruffians, bandits, murders, outlaws from their urban counterparts in Wang Shuo’s works is that they are baptized through the flame of the Anti-Japanese War and become patriotic heroes.

The ideal masculinity demonstrated in Red Sorghum reflects the attributes of haohan notion and values prevailing in Chinese folklore and the unorthodox literature of outlaws, such as The Water Margin. Mo Yan utilizes a tripod of violence, sublimation of death and fighting the Japanese to construct collective images of Shandong peasants, or real Shandong dahan (Shandong big men). Throughout the narrative, Mo Yan’s intention is crystal-clear: to present life as he sees it. These Shandong dahan must be “heroic and bastard” without any purification or embellishment.

Mo Yan tries to depict gender images and relations from a new perspective in defiance of traditional gender views constructed in the Confucian yin-yang dichotomy. His female protagonist has a yang masculine ethos equal to that of manly men. She feels neither superior nor inferior to male characters, including the male protagonist who is the epitome of a real man. Different from the haohan tradition, which does not
allow *haohan* to be involved in sex and hang around sexual women, Mo Yan’s male characters interact with women one way or another. Mo Yan fails to stay away from Confucian patriarchal ideology. When he releases his wild imagination and strays too far from the traditional Confucian line, he subconsciously reveals the ambiguity and paradoxical perspective in his ideological construction. While he depicts the image of his ideal “new” woman, he characterizes an “independent” woman largely in terms of her dependency on different men. In his family saga, he emphasizes the patriline while women’s position is inconsistently laid out. Thus Grandmother turns out to be the unique and exotic legend of an individual female rather than the representation of the collective image of “new”, or “liberal” women.

Overall, Mo Yan is complete and very successful in his “upside-down” movement to subvert the social hierarchy in urban/rural and intellectual/peasant paradigm. However his effort in subverting Confucian hierarchy in gender dimension is incomplete and thus becomes semi-success and semi-failure.
Chapter V  Jia Pingwa and *The Abandoned Capital*

*The Abandoned Capital* (Feidu, 废都, hereafter *Capital*) was published in 1993. The author Jia Pingwa 贾平凹 is one of the most successful novelists and prose writers in China. A native of Shangzhou in Shanxi province, Jia Pingwa was born in 1952 to a peasant extended family of more than twenty members. During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), he was forced to interrupt his education and live the life of a peasant for five years. In 1972 he enrolled in the Department of Chinese Literature at Northwest University, located in Xi’an, the city in which he resides today. After graduation, he was assigned a job as an assistant editor in Shaanxi People’s Press. He started his fictional writing in 1973. Before *Capital* was published, Jia had already published works of various kinds, including novels, novelettes, and collections of short stories, poetry, and essays, etc., for which he obtained various literary awards (Sun Jianxi 1991a, 99-101; 1991b, 1). He won a Mobil Oil Pegasus Prize in literature for his 1987 novel *Turbulence*,¹ and the Femina Prize in France for *Capital* in November 1997.² Recently, he was “conferred with a medal granting him the title of Knight of Arts and Literature by the French Ministry of Culture and Communication.”³ "French ambassador to China Jean Pierre Lafon said in a letter of congratulations to Jia that his works have exerted great influence in France.”⁴

It took Jia Pingwa only three or four months to write *Capital*, his first urban novel containing four hundred thousand Chinese characters. There is no fictional work in the

post-Mao era that has caused as much nationwide sensation as has *Capital*. In Zha Jianying’s terms, “The novel and its author...have taken China by storm” (1995, 129). In Sun Jianxi’s terms, the publication of the *Capital* caused “a grand earthquake” (*da dizhen* 大地震) in China’s literary and publishing circles. Critics employed phrases “*Feidu re* 《废都》热” (the fervor of *The Abandoned Capital*) and “*Feidu xianxiang* 《废都》现象” (the phenomenon of *The Abandoned Capital*) to summarize the sensation caused by publication of the novel and a well-organized strategy of advertising through the mass media before its publication. The points of view of readers and critics are impressively divergent. The opposition from the con camp was strong. Some believed this novel manifested the corruption and pathology of the author; some criticized it for its parody of pornographic fiction popular in the Ming and Qing dynasties; some pointed out that the phenomenon of *Capital* was nothing but the result of an advertising strategy designed to make money. The proponents of the novel from the pro camp glorified it as an unprecedented masterpiece containing the deepest thoughts, worth showing to the world (Lei Da 1998, 3). The fact that Jia Pingwa won the Femina Prize in France for the novel doubtlessly reinforced his supporters. There were also critics standing between these two camps. The discrepancy between the fame of the writer and his pornography-like descriptions puzzled them. They could not ignore the novel because it had touched a national nerve; they could not praise it either because the novel did not fit their notion of

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4 Ibid.
“good” literature. They were searching for criteria by which they could evaluate it properly. For the protection of their own reputations, many of them chose the strategy of “probing the depth of the river by touching pebbles at the riverbed” (mo zhe shitou guohe, 摸着石头过河), meaning to be very cautious in revealing their opinions.

In this chapter, I attempt to maintain a tight focus on the text of the narrative. I will explore first the impact of commercialization and modernization during the end of the 1980s and early 1990s on Chinese men’s feelings of emasculation. Following that, I will examine nostalgia for the ideal of masculinity that the text reveals in historical and ideological contexts. Finally, I will analyze the textual treatment of women within its framework of masculinity.

5.1 Emasculation and Commercialization

 capital is a story about a man who has relationships with several women. The protagonist Zhuang Zhidie is a famous fictional writer and one of “four cultural celebrities” in the fictional city of Xijing, presumably Xi’an, the capital for twelve dynasties in the early history of China where the author has resided since 1972. The narrative revolves around a “literary lawsuit” (wenren guansi, 文人官司), which serves as a backdrop against which a network of social relations unfolds. The plaintiff, Jing Xueyin, was one of the protagonist’s colleagues when he worked at a literary magazine and now is a government official. Two of the defendants are the protagonist Zhuang Zhidie and Zhou Min, Zhuang’s literary student and friend. Zhou has written and fictitiously embellished Zhuang’s biography, including romantic details involving
Zhuang and Jing without Zhuang's knowledge and consent. Zhuang, the second defendant, is charged by Jing with defamation for providing those details to the author. For the sake of his defense, Zhuang must join with Zhou Min, the primary defendant in this lawsuit. Through their frequent interaction, the protagonist meets Zhou's mistress Tang Wan'er, a beautiful woman from a small town, Tongguan, located east of Xijing where all three were born. Tang Wan'er leaves her crude husband and three-year-old son to elope with Zhou Min to Xijing City. Zhuang and Tang soon fall in love and have sex frequently. On the recommendation of Zhao Jingwu, one of his admirers and loyal followers, Zhuang hires Liu Yue, a country girl seeking her fortune in Xijing City, as his housemaid. Later Liu Yue becomes one of his sexual partners. Another married young woman, Ah Can, meets Zhuang Zhidie when he seeks help from her sister in sending fabricated love letters from a deceased woman to the editor-in-chief of the magazine which published his biography. The editor-in-chief, Zhong Weixian, the third defendant in the lawsuit, has loved this woman for years without knowing about her death and his secret love was his only reason for living. Ah Can admires celebrity very much and offers sex to Zhuang at their first encounter. Unlike Tang Wan'er and Liu Yue, both of whom dream of replacing Zhuang's wife someday in the future, Ah Can feels herself too inferior to harbor such a dream. She offers her body and sex twice in full contentment to the man she admires and makes sure she carries a baby from his seeds before she vanishes from his life. Towards the end of the story, Tang Wan'er is located and kidnapped by her husband and reportedly tortured by him. In exchange for the Mayor's help in the lawsuit, Zhuang trades Liu Yue away to marry the crippled son of the Mayor. Then Niu Yueqing, Zhuang's wife, becomes weary of...
the infidelity of her husband and initiates a divorce. At the end of the narrative, Zhuang has lost the court case and ends up financially dependent on the profits made by his bookshop from the publication of the details of his own private life and the anecdotes of his losing the lawsuit. He decides to abandon this “abandoned capital” Xijing. As he boards the train to head south, he suffers a stroke that leaves him in a coma.

5.1.1 Culture shock—a torrential wave of commercialization

Capital “revolves around the aimless escapades of a jaded writer against a background of urban vice and corruption.”7 By following his protagonist’s steps, the author unveils a panoramic picture of almost every aspect of Xijing City, including officialdom, cultural elites, commercial networks, enterprises, markets, entertainment, the judicial system, neighborhoods, politics in religion, folk belief, underground societies, black markets, prostitution, etc. All of these are included in his cultural, political and commercial landscape of modern life. This novel dauntlessly and stark-nakedly exposes the epidemic of corruption that pervades every corner of modern life. The sharpness and the depth of the criticism are so evident that I have not found yet another serious work of fiction in contemporary Chinese literature surpassing it.

Regarding the thematic concern of this dissertation, Capital is a lamentation on disempowered and emasculated Chinese intellectuals. It is an account of literary heroes who are experiencing a crisis in their masculinity in the process of modernization.

The late 1980s and early 1990s were a time of substantial turbulence and uncertainty among Chinese elite intellectuals. Earthshaking changes occurred in China. First, the crackdown of Tian’anmen Square demonstration officially announced the
failure of intellectual elite in their decade-long political effort and the victory of the Party-state. Second, the Party-state wasted no time to steer the country in the direction of modernization, which serves as a double-sword policy: to accelerate marketization and to disempower the intellectual elite further with the power of marketization without leaving a trace of persecution. This double-bladed policy made the Party-state a winner and intellectual elite a loser again because the sense of loss experienced by Chinese intellectuals after the 1989 Tian'anmen Square event was intensified by modernization. The onset of an irresistible wave of marketization and commercialization drew a billion people into a whirlpool and churned them up and down. It seemed that people became money-oriented and business-savvy overnight. “Xiahai 下海” (go to the sea [of business]) came into fashion. A popular saying went, “Out of a billion people, nine hundred million have become businessmen” (Shi yi renmin jiu yi shang 十亿人民九亿商). Chaos took over economy and markets in a mingling of good and bad business conduct that had never been seen or heard of before. Capital exposes the problems of business ethics in particular, and the corrupt morality of society in general as part of the wave of commercialization. We learn from the text that laundry detergent is mixed with flour pastry in order to whiten and soften steam buns (mantou 馒头) and make them more competitive in the market (p. 190). Lime powder is sprinkled on the surface of dried persimmons to trick customers into thinking they are high quality fruits (p. 108). A peddler who sells charcoal by the cart-load painstakingly arranges his goods so that a half cart of charcoal looks like a full cart (p. 194). Bean curd makers collect used dirty plaster from hospital garbage to use as a substitute ingredient to reduce production costs (p. 137).

7 Richard J. Smith, 1998 b, an online article that Professor Smith forwarded to me in a Word format.
A Shanxi noodle restaurant makes soup with opium and hooks its customers who become addicted to it (p. 525). Li Hongjiang 李洪江, the manager of the bookstore owned by the protagonist, embezzles a large sum of money and deceives Zhuang Zhidie and his wife (p. 169). After Zhuang loses the lawsuit, Li makes more profit by selling booklets entitled “The Whole Story of the Lawsuit over Zhuang Zhidie’s Romance” (p. 517). A peasant entrepreneur makes his fortune on manufacturing a fake pesticide that is incapable of killing his suicidal wife (p. 343). The author draws a picture of a chaotic commercial economy in the initial stage of capital accumulation.

Along with increasing enthusiasm for fortune-making, there was a decreasing public interest in politics, culture, education, literature, arts and other subjects in the social sciences and humanities that could not bring people easy and quick money. This trend threatened to make the intellectuals’ presumed role as spokesmen for the national conscience obsolete. “Culture is decaying” and “education is worthless”, ran popular sayings. The authority of literature and arts was challenged. A survey about readership between 1978-1998 was conducted by a team of four colleagues at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and sponsored by China Central Television.

As the diversity in the subject matter of listed books increased after 1993, the frequency with which individual writers and literary works appeared on the list decreased significantly. Interviewees named a total of 382 different books which they considered most influential since 1993, of which an increasing proportion consisted of practical books, manuals, and guides to better living. For the first time in the period under study, individual writers and fictional works were absent from the top five places on the list of most influential works (Nielsen 2000, 97).  

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Although being marginalized in the political milieu after 1989, Chinese intellectuals still occupied a central position as the agents of Chinese Enlightenment and as the brokers of culture—a continuous role they had played since the end of the Cultural Revolution. They gained the name of wenhua jingying 文化精英 (meritocracy). However, the arrival of the commercial society rushed over them like a torrential wave and relentlessly swept them off to the periphery while the powerful force of marketization swept away the values, morals, and standards of society as they understood it. They were being left out in the cold and forgotten.

Chinese intellectuals, though being oppressed, tortured and trampled during the Cultural Revolution, were still “unswerving in their loyalty to their country” (Zhang Xianliang 1985, 11). They had not given up their sense of duty to the country and its people because their role as agents of Chinese Enlightenment had not changed. However, they were now thrown into panic and confusion by the decentering of the role of literature and of writers and critics in the 1990s.

In this decade, Mainland Chinese intellectuals fall prey to a desperate anxiety as they openly accept the dollar as the criterion for cultural achievement and regard acknowledgement and rewards from Western culture as the highest standard of success (Dai Jinhua 1999, 202).

In Capital, due to the threat of the intellectuals’ social position being marginalized and meritocracy being abandoned, the already restless spirits of literary

survey was conducted with a random sample of 500 Beijing households, and 500 bookshop-browsing Beijingers during 1998, and was complemented with interviews with leading authorities in the contemporary publishing industry. (Nielsen 2000, 94)
heroes begin to wander erratically, vividly reflecting the psychological crisis experienced by the intellectual elite after 1989. Their hopeless spirits eventually become homeless.

*Feidu* 废都 is a compound word in Chinese literally meaning “abandoned capital” or “defunct capital” or “ruined capital”. While *du* 都 refers to a capital city, *fei* 废 can be used as an adjective as well as a verb referring to many different but associated meanings, such as discard, abandon, abandoned, defunct, decadent, abolish, waste (material), scrap, rejected, incurable (disease), crippled (person), invalidated (ballot), cast aside, dethrone, depose, annul, etc. According to Jia Pingwa, his fondness for such a title comes from what he terms *feidu yishi* 废都意识 (a consciousness of abandoned capital). When asked by the editor of *Capital*, Tian Zhenying 田珍颖, to explain the implication of this phrase, Jia answered:

I am fond of the word “abandoned capital”. “Fei” (abandoned), how many convulsions and vicissitudes there are in that one character! A capital is abandoned. I cannot articulate the feelings of people in this abandoned capital, but I can sense them. Xi’an could be regarded as typical of an abandoned capital in China; China then could be regarded as the abandoned capital of our planet; in turn the earth could be looked upon as the abandoned capital of the universe. Naturally people here have a glorious past, but the past glory imposes a cultural burden on them. Thus the mixed feelings of loss, awkwardness, refusing to take defeat, and helplessness emerged. Such abandoned capitals can be stifling but they also provide opportunities for new ways out of the blood and the filth (Tian 1993b, 61).

Jia realizes that Xi’an and its people are experiencing a crisis in presenting their glorious past and their sense of superiority. Xi’an, previously Chang’an, was the capital

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9 Jia Pingwa used the same title, *Feidou (The Abandoned Capital)* to name one of his novellas before the publication of his novel, *Capital*. This novella was included in *Jia Pingwa huojiang xiaoshuo ji* 贾平凹获
for twelve dynasties. Like a giant standing in China’s history, Chang’an was the symbol of power, glory, and masculinity. Unfortunately it has declined gradually from its peak in the Tang Dynasty (618-907) to an abandoned capital that is now neglected and desolate. People in this magnificent ancient capital have suffered tremendously from the displacement as first class citizens in China. They feel like a well-to-do family that has changed into a poor one. Jia Pingwa is a true genius in that we have not yet found another phrase better than “the consciousness of the abandoned capital” in expressing the feeling of Chinese intellectuals who lost favor both from above and below, and no other metaphors can be found that are more accurate than Xi’an, people in Xi’an and celebrities in Xi’an to signify the sense of lost of Chinese intellectuals and to symbolize their re-emasculcation and re-marginalization after 1989. The bearers of “consciousness of the abandoned capital” not only are aware of its existence (sub)consciously, but also are afflicted with associated feelings, emotions, memories, worries and obsessions that give rise to abnormal or pathological behavior. This consciousness can be found in The True Story of Ah Q by Lu Xun when Ah Q claimed that “we were much richer before.” It is also one of the major themes in Bai Xianyong’s 白先勇10 collection of short stories, Taibeiren 台北人 (Taipei People), in which Bai Xianyong contrasts the glorious times in Mainland China to life after the Kuomindong was forced to move to Taiwan. He expresses a strong sense of loss that preoccupies Taipei residents. In this light, Taiwanese from Mainland China, similar to people in Xi’an, can also be regarded as residents of “an


10 Bai Xianyong (Pai Hsien-yung, 1937-), a Taiwanese writer. He is the son of Bai Chongxi 白崇禧, a well-known general in the Kuomintang Army. He was born in Guilin, Guangxi and lived with his family in Chongqing, Shanghai, and Nanjing before 1948 when he moved to Hong Kong. In 1952 he moved to Taiwan. Taibeiren (1971) is one of his most important works.
abandoned capital” in China. We can also locate this consciousness among Chinese people who nowadays repeatedly recall the glorious times in China’s history and call themselves “the descendants of the Great Tang Empire.” This might be the reason for Jia Pingwa to state: “China then could be regarded as the abandoned capital of our planet”, compared to the current world superpowers. Although we can sense that the consciousness of an abandoned capital exists everywhere, its major bearers are Chinese intellectuals.

As I mentioned previously, Chinese intellectuals are historically associated with politics and thus their consciousness is bound to power. Though its status was up and down in history, this special social group of shi once played a significant role in running China’s gigantic political machine and controlling public discourse. The collective image of powerful Chinese intellectuals appeared in the central stage of politics in the Tang, Song, Ming, Qing dynasties, the May Fourth Movement, and the post-Mao Era. Their glorious history and their feelings from their glorious past are accurately described by Jia Ping in his feeling about Xi’an city. From the Tian’anmen Square event on, re-emasculated intellectuals repeatedly experienced a crisis in their social-political roles and the tremendous psychological pressure caused by this crisis. In this sense, a feidu yishi (a consciousness of abandoned capital) is a special consciousness for Chinese intellectuals in the third period of post-Mao history. It is a consciousness of deterioration, lost, hopelessness and dying. The protagonist’s personal experience can be seen as a microcosm of “the consciousness of abandoned capital”. The ‘glorious’ writer Zhuang Zhidie divulges a deep sense of loss and nostalgia which is symptomatic of Chinese writers’ crisis of confidence in their ability to represent and speak on behalf of their
countrymen beginning in the late 1980s. In Wang Yiyan's words, *Capital* is an “elegy for Chinese high culture”. “His [the protagonist's] tragic destiny may be seen as a deliberate elegiac parallel to the fate of traditional Chinese high culture.” (1996, 167)

5.1.2 The responses of intellectuals to commercialization.

In this transitional period of history, the response of Chinese intellectuals to the new conditions and problems varies. Some “emphasize the loss of ‘humanistic spirit’ (renwen jingshen 人文精神) in the environment of a rapidly developing market economy. They criticize the secularization of the masses, especially that of intellectuals, and call for “resistance against surrendering to the market.” “They demand that intellectuals stick firmly to their own elite position and their critical mission.” Others view this transitional period as providing another option for intellectuals whose traditional roles alternated between bureaucrats and hermits; they could become entrepreneurs and seize the opportunity to commercialize their production of culture. In *Capital*, Zhuang Zhidie and his male friends belong to a social group called wenren quanzi 文人圈子 (the circle of literati), and four of them are called si da wenhua mingren 四大文化名人 (four cultural celebrities). Wang Ximian 汪希眠 is a successful traditional painter who spends most of his time creating forgeries of famous Chinese paintings and selling them through a special network for a high profit. Ruan Zhifei 阮之非 is a skilled performer in a local opera (qinqiang 秦腔) in Shaanxi province. He gives up performing in this traditional opera because it has lost its appeal to modern audiences. Instead, he recruits a band, a troupe of dancers and a team of fashion models to run his own entertainment business
that becomes prosperous and brings him huge wealth. Gong Jingyuan 龚靖元 is a well-known calligrapher whose work is not only a favorite of collectors but also is found in most hotels, restaurants and shops in Xijing. He is a gourmet welcomed by all restaurants and hotels in Xijing. First class chefs cook for him just to obtain a copy of his work that might upgrade and glorify their business. Zhuang Zhidie is the number one celebrity in this group of four. He is so famous that his name contains political and commercial value. His friend Meng Yunfang helps Zhou Min find a job at a Xijing Magazine in the name of Zhuang Zhidie while Zhuang is away from the city and of course has no knowledge about this event. The peasant entrepreneur offers five thousand yuan to buy Zhuang’s brief report (actually an advertisement) on his business. Zhuang also becomes the proprietor of a bookstore run by his wife and his admirer Zhao Jingwu, where both real and counterfeit calligraphy and paintings are sold. Zhuang’s good friend Gong Jingyuan is arrested for gambling. The bail is far beyond the affordability of his son who is a hopeless drug addict and constantly sells off his father’s calligraphy and pieces of his art collection to buy drugs. Zhuang steps in, pretending to be a go-between and compels Gong’s son to sell his father’s best works and his father’s art collection to a non-existent art collector to pay the bail. Zhuang takes advantage of Gong’s misfortune to buy these works of art for only half price. After being released from the police station and finding out that his life’s work and art collection have been squandered by his worthless son, Gong commits suicide. All four cultural celebrities have made great profit by selling either their fame or the cultural products produced by themselves, others or both.

Jia Pingwa has fictionalized the corrupt conduct of cultural elites who are focused only on profit making. In demonstrating how the dynamics of the marketplace affected

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China's literary circles and intellectuals, the best example is the marketing of *Capital* itself. The publishing of *Capital* was a marketing event unprecedented in the history of Chinese literature. In Richard J. Smith's opinion, *Capital* was a popular work of literature written "purely for entertainment—and for substantial profit."\(^{12}\) There was a well-organized advertising strategy through the mass media before its publication—a strategy of "packaging and marketing" (*baozhuang he tuixiao* 包装和推销). Newspapers and journals spread rumors claiming that several influential publishers in China were struggling against each other for the copyright to *Capital*, and that the author had been offered one million yuan as remuneration (Chen Liao 1993b, 77). The media even claimed that *Capital* was a "contemporary version of The Dream of the Red Chamber" (*dangdai Hongloumen* 当代红楼梦), "a masterpiece of the world" (*chuan shi zhi zuo* 传世之作), and "is the best novel on Chinese intellectuals since The Besieged Fortress." (Xu Caishi 1993, 80)

Jia Pingwa himself played an important role in commercializing the novel, though it is hard to tell if he did it consciously or unconsciously. He employed two techniques to tantalize readers. First, the novel is full of detailed erotic descriptions rarely seen after the publication of *The Golden Lotus* \(^{13}\) four hundreds years ago. The second and most conspicuous aspect of this novel is the author's invention of blank squares which indicate bowdlerism showing how many words the author has expurgated when describing the process of sexual intercourse. Ngai, Ling Tun views this invention as "a deliberate

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\(^{13}\) *The Golden Lotus* (*Jin Ping Mei* 金瓶梅) was written at the end of the sixteenth century and was printed in 1617. Because of the controversial nature of erotic literature, it was published under pseudonym Lan Ling Xiao Xiao Sheng. It depicts men's fascination with women's sexuality. Due to its detailed erotic description which had never been seen before its publication, it became popular in China in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.
irony” attacking censorship in China. “This novel is the author’s self-censorship of the supposed pornographic passages” (1994, 386). However, many critics believe that these blank squares serve as an audacious means to incite the reader’s carnal interest. These blank squares are so eye-catching that they function as guideposts for erotic reading. Readers who are interested in sensuality, particularly young readers who are curious to learn about intercourse, can easily follow the blank square cues to find the episodes they want.

For the reasons mentioned above, in 1993, Capital became “the best-selling” book in China (Zha Jianying 1995, 129; Richard Smith 1998b). According to approximate statistics, over a million copies of this novel were sold less than one year after its publication; and pirated copies came out everywhere (Lei Da 1998, 3). This is a remarkable literary achievement in the post-Mao era, even in all of contemporary Chinese literature.

However, readers’ reaction to Capital varies greatly. According to the survey mentioned above, Capital is on the top of the list of four most detested books and Jia Pingwa is third on the readers’ top-ten list of the writers they most detest. He is also on the reader’s top-ten list of the best modern Chinese writers (Nielsen 2000, 98-100).

Similar to the fate of Half of Man is Woman, the popularity of Capital quickly drew government attention. As usual, the highhanded restrictions imposed by the Communist Party served as an effective advertisement which greatly stimulated readers’ curiosity and hence increased the popularity of the novel. Publishers realized this was a rare opportunity. Various newspapers, magazines and tabloids were soon full of articles, critiques, interviews, reports, and biographies about the writer and his book (Chen Liao
Both Jia Pingwa and his *Capital* became labeled as enigmas. Many books and articles attempted to decipher the enigmas, such as "The Enigma of Abandoned Capital"; "The Enigma of Jia Pingwa", "The Enigma among Jia Pingwa's Enigmas", etc. Undoubtedly the publication of *Capital* was supported by the most successful marketing campaign of a cultural product in new China's fifty-year history.

I will now return to the major concern about intellectuals' responses to the powerful force of commercialization. Apart from those who were strongly against the tendency to secularize intellectuals and those who went into business and became writer-entrepreneurs surfing on the wave of marketization, there were many intellectuals who felt that they were being neglected, forgotten and abandoned. They had a strong sense of confusion, loss and nostalgia that caused them to be worried, anxious, and frustrated, vacillating between narcissism and self-contempt. The protagonist in *Capital* is portrayed in dual roles as a writer-entrepreneur who accumulates a fortune and a marginalized individual with self-contempt who indulges in and suffers from his own corruption and lost masculinity.

5.1.3 The complex of emasculation

Generally speaking, the complex of emasculation is the kind of anxiety that most Chinese intellectuals felt at this historical turning point. However, the intellectual anxiety and crisis of confidence depicted in *Capital* is gendered and sexualized. In other words, it is the anxiety of Chinese male intellectuals, and it is also elaborated in the context of gender, sex and sexuality. As Kam Louie insightfully points out: "Just as sexual dominance can be transferred into the political realm, political and economic power can
also be perceived as sexual prowess...power is an aphrodisiac" (2002, 95). People who are attracted to such powerful images “believe that it is a sexual and not a political and economic essence which they hanker after.”14 Since Chinese male intellectuals were raised in a patriarchal society, their feelings of being marginalized and thus disempowered are easily evoked and intensify their feelings of emasculation. Capital can be viewed as a journey of Chinese male intellectuals searching for their lost masculinity. This effort fails at the end of the narrative, and Capital turns out to be a lamentation on the emasculation of Chinese intellectuals.

The hotel rendezvous between Zhuang Zhidie and his mistress Tang Wan’er is the key to understanding the anxiety and panic of male intellectuals over losing their masculinity. While Zhuang Zhidie is attending the Municipal People’s Congress, Tang Wan’er seizes the chance to visit Zhuang in his hotel room. After having clandestine sex, they have a long conversation that highlights the protagonist’s inner tension and psychological pressure. Zhuang remarks:

... I came to this city more than ten years ago. In my first glance at the Golden Clock Tower, I vowed to myself that I must become somebody there. I took great pains to struggle until I became outstanding. Who knows now that I am living rather uneasily. I always contemplate what this big Xijing city has to do with me. What is here that really belongs to me? Probably the three characters in my name—Zhuang-Zhi-Die [belong to me]. Although the name is mine, it is used mostly often by others! Whenever I go out, people show their respect to me and flatter me. I really don’t understand what I have done to make people like this? Maybe something has gone wrong somewhere? Is it just because I wrote those articles? They are worthless! I know clearly that I have fame but no success. I want to write articles I am satisfied with, but I cannot achieve that immediately, so I feel ashamed. However my shame is interpreted by others as modesty. What the hell do I have to be modest about? Such pain tortures me constantly but to whom can I tell it? Even if I do tell it, who is going to understand?...I suspect that I will become another Mr. Jiang

14 Kam Louie, 1991, p. 12 on the online version.
whose talents ended. I am doomed! In the past few years, I have deteriorated physically as well. I have serious neurasthenia. My sexual ability is almost gone. Just at this time, I have met you... You are a real woman. Something that makes me more grateful is that you have accepted my love. When we are together, I feel that I have become a real man again. (p. 126-127)

"Fame-but-not-success" is the kernel of Zhuang's marginality complex. At the beginning of the narrative, Zhuang Zhidie is already a successful fictional writer. Gongcheng mingjiu 功成名就 (success is accomplished and fame is approached) is the common phrase used to describe a successful person like him. However, his life is far from satisfactory, and he feels that he is far from perfect. The story starts with the male protagonist's life crisis. He occupies a comparatively high social position and has important social connections. His fame, his social position and his influence are his intangible fortune that is more worthwhile and more powerful than money. If he were ambitious and manipulative about gaining more political and financial power in the way other men do it, he could take full advantage of his success and invest it as capital for a greater gain. Obviously he is not good at playing politics to amplify his fortune and success. On the contrary, he notices that his fame and his influence are constantly borrowed and utilized by others. He is not the real owner and beneficiary of his success. Others who know how to manipulate and maximize their social connections capitalize on his fame and success. He realizes that he is being used. But the users do not let him go. His fame and the corrupt society have entrapped him in ceaseless troubles that force him to devote his time to alteration of interpersonal relationships. As a famous writer, he is busy everyday not with his fictional creations, but with attending conferences, meetings; banquets and gatherings of friends, and exchanging gifts to establish or consolidate his

15 All translations from Capital are mine, or otherwise indicated.
social networks; he writes news as a hack writer to flatter the Mayor. He also writes advertisements for the fake pesticide. He is preoccupied with collecting artifacts and cultural relics, and of course he has to deal with the nagging lawsuit. He is surrounded by a noisy and boisterous world. He wishes he could write serious fiction as he did before, but he claims that he has no time and no quiet place to write. Most importantly he finds that he has no more inspiration, no more talent in literary writing, and that gives him a sense of panic. He has many literary admirers who respect him and even worship him. Some of his admirers have become his literary disciples. As a writer who is regarded as an “engineer of the human soul” (renlei linghun de gongchengshi 人类灵魂的工程师), he is supposed to be able to teach his disciples and readers how to understand life and thus live a good life. Ironically in real life he is incapable even of communicating with his own wife. There is absence of understanding and intimacy between Zhuang and his wife that leads to Zhuang’s impotence. The impotency of Zhang Yonglin in Half of Man comes from political oppression. Zhuang’s impotence results ostensibly from his wife who does not understand his thought, but actually it derives from the invisible nonetheless ubiquitous social pressure. His impotence in turn embarrasses, and thus depresses him constantly. Lovemaking has long ago become an unattainable, extravagant desire for this literary celebrity who is known in public as an expert on human love. The function of sex has been reduced to its primal level—reproduction. Several times, Zhuang and his wife try to make a child to carry on his family line and his personal glory, but they always fail. The phrase qian wu guren, hou wu laizhe 前无古人，后无来者 (There is no ancestor, nor is there any descendant) becomes a self-mockery that the protagonist

16 The phrase, “Qian wu guren, hou wu laizhe” comes from the well-known poem, Deng Yuzhoutai ge (登
uses to express his disappointment and great loneliness (p. 62). He cannot understand that the more he becomes successful, the narrower his personal space. The more he struggles to get out of his entrapment, the deeper he gets immersed in it. He strongly feels that he has totally lost control over his own life. Indeed, he feels that he has been cornered (or "besieged" in Zhong Xueping's terms) in the transitional process of modernization and has no way out. After he encounters the prostitute-like woman, Tang Wan'er, who stimulates his sexual desires and helps him regain his sexual ability and status as a real man, he feels changes inside of himself. Both Zhang Yonglin and Zhuang Zhidie become "real men" sexually because of the actions of their women. However, he is not sure if these changes are signs of his adjustment to society or of his corruption. He tends to believe that he is becoming corrupt. He becomes even more confused, anxious, and depressed. In terms of cause and effect, he does not know if his impotency is the cause that drains out his literary talent or vice versa. Anxious to succeed but not be able to get out of his impasse and suffering from persistent inner tension, he undertakes an aimless journey of self-discovery. The exploration of his sexuality becomes the first priority of his journey through which he hopes to restore his masculinity thus regain his political, cultural, and personal identity. 17 Unfortunately, the consequence of this exploration is

9州台歌, Ballad on Climbing Youzhou Tower) by Chen Zi'ang 陈子昂 (661-700) in the Tang Dynasty. The Poem goes: "Qian bujian guren,/ Hou bujian laizhe./ Nian tiandi zhi youyou,/ Du chuangren er leixia." (前不见古人，后不见来者。念天地之悠悠，独怆然而泪下。Witness not the sages of the past, Perceive not the wise of the future. Reflecting on heaven and earth eternal, Tears flowing down I lament in loneliness.)

17 "Identity" is a debatable and even a troubling term since it has multilayered meanings, such as individual identity, collective identities, male identity, female identity, political identity, cultural identity, etc. The problem is that these layers of meanings are not clear-cut; they are intertwined and entangled with each other. Neither are they fixed and unchangeable entities; they change and shift under varying conditions. In this dissertation, I will not elaborate on the concept of identity. I prefer to keep the definition vague, roughly referring to the condition or character that distinguishes who a person is or what a thing is.
that the supposed upward journey of self-discovery uncontrollably becomes a downward journey of self-destruction and self-abandonment.

In Capital, sex and sexuality constitute an important motif of the whole narrative. It becomes the only perspective from which this world is viewed, screened out and interpreted. Sexual oppression is depicted as a universal phenomenon. Zhuang is sexually oppressed in his marital life, and he becomes obsessed with sex and is portrayed as a sexual pervert. The rapist Wang, the head of the neighborhood committee, is so sexually oppressed that he has to punch a sandbag at home everyday. However his oppression-releasing routine does not prevent him from raping Ah Can’s sister and becoming a criminal. Director Huang of the pesticide factory openly brings a woman home and sleeps with her in the presence of his wife because he feels sexually oppressed by his ugly, dirty and ill-educated wife. This ubiquitous sexual oppression permeates the subconscious level of characters and is released uncontrollably in various ways. Gong Jingyuan’s son Gong Xiaoyi is a hopeless drug user. After his craving for drugs is fully gratified, he becomes excited and itchy for retaliation against the world. His soul is out of his body, hovering in the air above the city. He sees every bed in every house where simultaneously man and woman are copulating in a variety of postures. He imagines that he has become a mayor who has firmly destroyed the sexual ability of all men in the city, then raped all the women. He is perfectly content with this retaliation (p. 396-397). On one occasion, Zhuang comes to the South Gate of the city where lovers are lying on the grassy space in a grove outside the city wall. A man sitting alone quietly has caught Zhuang’s attention. This man earns Zhuang’s respect because he can keep his peace of mind in a chaotic world. As he approaches the man with the intention to greet to
him, Zhuang discovers that he is masturbating. So astonished that he is speechless, Zhuang stares at the man blankly before running away. He becomes so confused that he is unable to tell if the man is somebody else or the shadow of himself. (p. 269-270) Even the philosopher cow that is brought into the city frequently by its master Liu Sao to deliver its fresh milk to Zhuang, wants to “invade into every house in the city and rape all the women to energize and barbarize the deteriorating human beings.” (p. 259) At the end of the narrative, the protagonist glances at the mass of advertisements on the street as he leaves the city. Amid various the advertisements and tabloids, what catches his eye is a piece of sexually bizarre news in Xijing City. A woman died of masturbating with a pile of corncobs (p. 527).

The natural world is also sexualized. Tang Wan’er and Xia Jie (the wife of Meng Yunfang) go to the park. They see a big stone bar sandwiched in the crotch of a tree. This is the artistic design of the gardeners. However in Tang Wan’er’s hallucination, the stone bar is transformed into a male penis in the vagina. After their first encounter, Tang Wan’er cannot help thinking of Zhuang everyday and masturbates frequently (p. 118, 120). One night she fantasizes that the bright moon is Zhuang’s face and that a pear tree in the yard is Zhuang’s body, and she masturbates wildly with the pear tree (p. 118). She sees this pear tree as the incarnation of Zhuang Zhidie who had moved into the yard and waited for her before she came (p. 146). Zhao Jingwu, a student and admirer of Zhuang Zhidie, grows beautiful flowers in his office. He tells Zhuang that plants differ from human beings because the genitals of plants are located at their heads. Flowers are actually genitals of plants that attract bees with their beauty. Zhuang then
makes fun of his absurd argument, "No wonder you don't get married. You are surrounded by so many genitals."

The sexualized world depicted in the narrative is the manifestation of chaotic disorder and bewilderment and lost humanity in this chaotic disorder. What *Capital* reveals is "a tract of modern wildness, a heap of cultural ruins" (Qin Jiaqi 秦家琪 1993, 139). "‘Everything-is-sex’ highlights the emptiness of the human soul and the loss of humanistic spirit. Men and women in *Capital* are idlers who have lost their idealism and goals and have been wandering in the cultural ruins" (ibid, 141). According to Guo Chunlin's 郭春林 commentary, Zhuang Zhidie indulges himself in excessive sex because he can find no way out of this tremendously oppressive reality. He has nobody and nowhere to turn to. Sex and women have become the only path for him. The significance of writing from this perspective is that sex and women have indeed become the destination of the protagonist’s journey, by which he refuses to yield to the oppressive social reality (1999, 33).

5.2 **Daoism and Confucianism: Nostalgia for the *Caizi jiaren* Masculinity**

Ideologically, the narrative emits a mixture of Buddhism, Daoism, mysticism and folk belief. But it is more suggestive of the protagonist’s inclination toward Daoism. Zhuang Zhidie, the name of the male protagonist, comes from the classic allusion to Daoist thought—"Zhuangzhou meng die 庄周梦蝶" (Zhuangzhou dreams of a butterfly). In this story, philosopher Zhuang Zi dreamed that he was a butterfly. After he woke up, he was quite confused not knowing whether he had been transformed into the butterfly or
the butterfly had been transformed into this person named Zhuang Zi.\(^1\) Jia Pingwa naming of his protagonist as Zhuang Zhidie (literally meaning, Zhuang's butterfly) suggests his protagonist's confusion and anxiety over his identity. "Zhuang experiences harsh social alienation in the process, because he cannot cope with the transition ideologically and psychologically." His name implies "Zhuang's choice of a Taoist journey towards self-rediscovery." (Wang Yiyan 1996, 192)

"Search for Imperfection Studio" (qiuquewu 求缺屋), the name of an apartment given to Zhuang by the Mayor for his special contribution to the mayor's reelection, is another inkling of the attachment of the protagonist to Daoism. This apartment is expected to be a literary salon for Zhuang and his literary fellows. Actually it turns out to be a secret place for Zhuang to rendezvous with his women. Ironically he names the apartment "Qiuquewu" (Search for Imperfection Studio) to echo Lao Zi's notion of "imperfection". Lao Zi asserts:

Great accomplishment seems imperfect,  
yet it does not outlive its usefulness.  
Great fullness seems empty,  
yet it cannot be exhausted.  
Great straightness seems twisted,  
Great intelligence seems stupid,  
Great eloquence seems awkward. (*Daode Jing* 45)\(^{19}\)

Daoism, along with Buddhism and Confucianism, became one of the three most influential philosophical and religious systems in China, having shaped the primary ideology, mentality, morality, and behavior/life patterns of Chinese people. For Chinese intellectuals, two most influential philosophies are Daoism and Confucianism. They have

served as two philosophical as well as psychological poles dividing Chinese intellectuals. *Qiong ze du shan qi shen, Da ze jian ji tianxia* 穷则独善其身，达则兼济天下 (*Mencius*: Jinxin shang, 13.9) is the best portrayal of the moral pursuits of Chinese intellectuals. “Da 达” in Chinese refers to the situation of achieving (one’s ambition), of becoming successful, influential, eminent or distinguished. If an intellectual is in this situation of “da”, he should “jian ji tianxia”, or be able to benefit all people under heaven. “Qiong 穷” is the situation opposite to “da”, or the situation of being out of favor, or being driven into an impasse. If one is stuck in such a situation, he should “du shan qi shen”, or pay attention to uplifting his own moral spirit without thought of others. “In history, members of Chinese literati always had to constantly reposition themselves politically. The choices were mostly between being a bureaucrat or a hermit.” (Wang Yiyan 1996, 191) In terms of the social roles, being a bureaucrat meant embracing Confucianism while being a hermit meant embracing Daoism. In terms of psychological disposition, it was common for a scholar to favor Confucianism when he was ambitious and eager to succeed and to favor Daoism when he felt frustrated, thwarted and loss of confidence. Here, I merely summarize the tendency of their philosophical preferences. There by no means existed such a clear-cut separation between these two philosophies. In addition, each school of thought constantly evolves, and terms like “Daoism” or “Confucianism” connote meanings and principles that are quite different from those in the past. There are many overlapping aspects between these two philosophies, particularly in their moral perspectives. Confucianism is a philosophy of self-cultivation, so is Daoism. However, their ways of self-cultivation, their conception of yin-yang, and their attitudes towards the

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19 All translations of *Dao De Jing* used in this dissertation are from *Tao Te Ching*, trans. by Gia-fu Feng,
world are quite different. These differences provide space for Chinese intellectuals to maneuver their psychological urges by switching back and forth between these two poles.

The protagonist in *Capital* is under the psychological pressure and overwhelmed with feelings of frustration and failure. Enveloped by this pressure, the narrative appears to be a pathological record of the protagonist. Superficially Zhuang gets caught in the crevice between modern commercial reality and his ideal life. His inner conflict in responding to this embarrassing situation reflects his oscillation between Confucianism and Daoism, like other Chinese intellectuals in history and at present.

The inclination of the protagonist toward Daoism is quite different from the essence of Daoism. Daoism interpreted by Lao Zi’s *Daode Jing* believes that internal stillness, emptiness, weakness and pliability are quintessential attributes of all things and human beings that ultimately conquer the external strength and firmness. To be more exact, as the side of solidity and strength becomes exhausted, the side of weakness and softness will transmute into solidity and strength. Regarding the *yin-yang* dichotomy, *Daode Jing* unequivocally postulates the power of *yin* over that of *yang*. In choosing between the binary symbols of mountain and valley, rocks and water, masculine and feminine, *Daode Jing* clearly advocates the latter. Lao Zi praised the nature of water for its easiness and goodness. “The highest good is like water./ Water gives life to the ten thousand things and does not strive./ It flows in places men reject and so is like the Tao.” (8). He also exalts the “valley spirit”, which “never dies”. (6) Lao Zi encourages people not to be aggressive or offensive, but to be defensive, to withdraw from struggle, and from the mundane world. Facing the enticement of success, fame, wealth and material gain, he advocates that people strengthen their courage to withdraw, to eliminate desires,
to be selfless and to be willing to live a simple and peaceful life. This is the positive way to appropriate external reality. “No fight: No blame.” (8) “If I have no self, how could I experience misfortune?”

(13) According to his point of view “An oversharpened sword cannot last long./ A room filled with gold and jewels cannot be protected./ Boasting of wealth and virtue brings your demise./ After finishing the work, withdraw./ This is the Way of Heaven.”

(9) Daode Jing strongly emphasizes self-cultivation, fully complying with nature and taking no actions. It is not surprising that Daoism has earned the reputation of Chinese feminine philosophy. Nonetheless, both Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi did not simply equate yin with women, either in a positive or a negative way.

What distinguishes the protagonist’s Daoism from Daoism prescribed in Daode Jing is that the former regards Daoism as passive and escapist, while the latter stresses the voluntary practice and positive results of self-cultivation; the protagonist is incapable of getting rid of his desires while Daoism in Daode Jing transcends human desires and seeks spiritual development. In other words, the protagonist’s withdrawal from outside world is involuntarily and forced, while the Daoist withdrawal is voluntary and positive, thus a happy and healthy choice. This difference determines not only the psychological state of the practitioners but also their life styles. Zhuang is constantly disturbed and depressed by external forces and his internal conflicts and tensions while he withdraws from social interaction and family life. A devoted Daoist following Lao‘Zi’s doctrines always keeps tranquility in his mind no matter whether he acts or does not act. Zhuang indulges himself in excessive sex, while Daoist intellectuals historically always chose to be hermits as an ideal life style to maintain their integrity. Zhuang’s withdrawal is not

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20 This is C. Muller’s translation. “Without a body, how could there be misfortune?” is Feng-English’s translation.
complete. He is a deserter from the frontline of the world of men and opens another battlefield, which is termed by critics as "the last defensive line"—women and sex. In his previous frontline battles, he had developed his masculinity without working on it directly, but by climbing the social ladders ("Where I am") and becoming a "cultural hero" ("Who I am") in the world of men. Now in this newly opened battlefield with women, he must work specifically on his masculinity by interacting with women to return ultimately to the center of the social stage with men. At this point—women and sex, the protagonist Zhuang Zhidie in Capital meets the protagonist Zhang Yonglin in Half of Man. The former plunges down to this point—the last defensive line—from the peak of his glorious career, while the latter climbs up from the bottom of society to this point—the entrance to the larger society. Both are Confucianists per se but in different situations of "da" and "qiong" and moving in opposite directions. Here "da" does not necessarily mean achievement, gaining influence or becoming distinguished—the results attained from one’s effort. It includes the whole process of initiating action to pursue an ambitious goal. In this sense, Zhang Yonglin in Half of Man is at this beginning point of "da" because he is determined to go into the larger world and fight for his country. The common pattern for Chinese intellectuals, no matter in ancient times or the present time, is that they unfurl the flag of wei guo wei min 为国为民 (for the sake of country and people), or wei min qing ming 为民请命 (pleading for the people), which is the core value of Confucian morality. In this situation of going into the world (rushi 入世), the Confucian ethic of da ze jian ji tianxia (To benefit all people under heaven if one is in the state of da) is sharply contradictory to the Daoist notion of getting out of the world.

21 C. Muller’s translation.
When withdrawing from the mainstream of society, Confucian intellectuals are reluctant to admit and accept the fact of their failure. Then they unfurl the flag of Daoist chushi (withdrawing), or the flag of the Confucian ethic of qiong ze du shan qi shen (If one is caught in an impasse, he should uplift his own moral character without thought of others.) because this is compatible with the Daoist notion of self-cultivation and taking no action. The protagonist in Capital seeks refuge in Daoism because Daoism can serve him as an umbrella for his failure and simultaneously as a consolation or an anesthetic for the suffering and pain of his failure. In fact, Daoism never becomes the fundamental principle of his life. Zhuang Zhidie is a Confucianist per se, despite his semblance of Daoism. Daoism is his unwilling and temporary choice. This can be further proven from his preference of ideal manhood — caizi jiaren masculinity, which is a Confucian paradigm.

5.2.1 Caizi-jiaren romance and Capital

Caizi-jiaren 才子佳人 fiction (Scholar-beauty Romance), “China’s popular literature of the past” (Hessney 1979, 30), is a genre that flourished from the mid-seventeenth century to the nineteenth century in China. As a model of romantic stories between “caizi 才子” and “jiaren 佳人”, it had become popular even before the Qing...
dynasty. Hessney traces the archetype of this model back to the story of Sima Xiangru 司马相如 and Zhuo Wenjun 卓文君 23 in the Han Dynasty and Cui Ying-ying in Yuan Chen’s (779-831) The Story of Ying-ying (Ying-ying zhuan 鹧鸪传) in the Tang Chuanqi fiction24 (Hessney 1979, 39-62). These two stories contain many story lines of caizi jiaren romances. The type of scholar-beauty romance was created in the Sung Dynasty by Master Dong (Dong Jieyuan 董解元, ca. 1160-1210) in his Set of Musical Modes of The Romance of the Western Chamber (Dong Xixiang zhu-gong-diao 董西厢诸宫调 or Tung hsi-hsiang zhu-kung-tiao) (Hessney 1979, 65). Master Dong transformed the love story in Yuan Zhen’s The Story of Ying-ying, and changed the ending from Ying-ying being abandoned by her lover, Zhang Sheng, to a happy ending. “However, the caizi-jiaren model came to prominence only with the flourishing of the zaju drama in the Yuan dynasty” (Song Geng 1999, 211). What Song Geng refers to is the masterpiece of Chinese drama, Xixiang Ji 西厢记 (The Romance of the Western Chamber) by Wang Shifu 王实甫 (ca. 1250-1300). This play dramatizes the romance between Zhang Sheng 张生 and Cui Ying-ying 崔莺莺 who fall in love at first sight but later encounter amusing setbacks in their relationship.

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23 The Story of Sima Xiang-ru and Zhuo Wenjun was recorded by Sima Qian 司马迁 (135? B.C.-?) in his Shi Ji 史记 (Historical Records, Chapter 117) and Ban Gu 班固 in his Han Shu 汉书 (The History of the Han). Sima Xiangru (179-113 BCE) was a famous court poet first serving Liangxiaowang 梁孝王 (King Xiao of Liang). After the death of King Xiao of Liang, he returned Linqiong, his native town of Chengdu and lived an impoverished life. Zhuo Wenjun was the widowed daughter of a wealthy man of Linqiong. One day during a party in the wealthy man's home, Wenjun peered in through the door to watch Sima Xiangru and heard him playing lute and singing a love song. She fell in love with him immediately. They eloped that night, running a wine shop and living in poverty until her father finally forgave them and gave them money. Later, Sima Xiangru was summoned by Emperor Wu and enjoyed a long career at court.

24 Chuanqi (传奇) was a literary genre of the short fictional romances in the Tang Dynasty.
“Caizi” in Chinese refers to a talented scholar, or a man with great literary gift. However, the qualities of a caizi are different from the qualities of one who can write excellent poems, verses or fictional works by working slowly and taking pains in revising and choosing words. A caizi is able to write literary work very fast and effortlessly by virtue of his talent. Cao Zhi 曹植 was a renowned caizi poet who could write an excellent poem within the time it takes to walk seven steps.  

“Jiaren” refers to a beautiful girl or a beautiful woman. However, the meaning of “jiaren” is more complicated than that of “caizi”. Many researchers contend that physical beauty is not good enough to determine whether or not a girl, or a woman as a “jiaren” in caizi jiaren romance. Zhou Jianyu argues that the quality of a “jiaren” in late Ming drama consists of three essentials: passion, beauty and literary ability. Among these three, passion is the most striking characteristic of the jiaren (1995, 16). However, during the Qing Dynasty, literary talent overrode the other two and became the most conspicuous trait of the jiaren, who “were also known as ‘women of literary talent.’” (ibid, 16-20) Song Geng points out, “for the sine qua non of a jiaren also includes chastity, virtue,

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25 Cao Zhi (Ts’ai Chih, 192-232) was the third son of Cao Cao 曹操 (Ts’ai Ts’ao, 155-220), King of Wei at the time of the Three Kingdoms (220-265). He was a genius in poetry and the leading figure in the literary movement of the Jian’an period. Cao Cao favored particularly Cao Zhi and tried several times to appoint him crown prince without success, as according to the traditional rules only the eldest son could have that privilege. Cao Cao’s first son Can Ang was killed. That made Cao Pi 曹丕 (Ts’ai P’i, 187-226), the second son, the legitimate heir of Cao Cao. He was a famous writer at that time too. In 220, after Cao Cao’s death, Cao Pi came to the throne becoming Emperor Wen of Wei. He could not get rid of the fear haunting his mind—the possibility of his throne to be usurped by his talented brother Cao Zhi. One day the two brothers were eating peas together, Cao Pi suddenly hit upon a scheme. He said to his younger brother, “My dear brother, you are well-known for your promptness in writing poems. Now I’ll test it. You must work out a poem within the time it takes to walk seven steps, or you’ll meet your death here.” Surprising everyone on the spot, Cao Zhi’s famous poem, “Burn Peastalks to Cook Peas”, came out before his seventh step was completed: “Zhu dou ran douqi/ Dou zai fu zhong qi;/ Ben shi tong gen sheng,/ Xiang jian he tai ji!” (煮豆燃豆萁，豆在釜中泣，本是同根生，相煎何太急！Peastalks are burned to cook peas./ The peas in the cauldron cry/ "We both came from the same root. Why must one be so cruel to the other?") (See English translation of this poem in Best Chinese Idioms, compiled by Situ Tan. Trans. Into English by Zhao Shuhan & Tang Bowen, Hongkong: Haifeng Publishing Co. 1984, 216-217)
noble birth, and above all, extraordinary literary talent” (Song 1999, 213). Nonetheless, in public consciousness now, beauty is still the most important quality for a jiaren. “Langcai nümao (man’s talent and woman’s beauty) is another phrase that ordinary Chinese use to define “caizi jiaren” or a perfect match between a talented man and a beautiful woman.

A common theme of a caizi jiaren story is “the brilliant man and the beautiful woman.”

The typical story recounts how a virtuous and beautiful young woman yields her sexual favors to a handsome and brilliant young scholar; they swear eternal fidelity, often through an exchange of elegant poems. The woman may come from a good family or she may have been sold into prostitution. The young man inevitably earns success in the imperial exams. Their passion may result in marriage or permanent separation. Most frequently the woman is steadier and more faithful to the alliance than the man. Her behavior sets the standard of true morality. (Brown 1988, 59)

As far as we know, the caizi jiaren romance fell into a notorious stereotype at least before the middle of the Qing dynasty as illustrated in a famous scene in The Dream of Red Chamber (Hongloumeng), chapter fifty four where Jiamu (Grandmother Jia) harshly criticizes the caizi jiaren stories for all having the same convention. Because of the popularity of The Dream of Red Chamber in China, Jiamu’s criticism became very influential both on critics and common readers after the Qing Dynasty in downplaying and thus degradation of the caizi jiaren romances.

In summarizing the commentaries of critics on this genre, the stereotype of the caizi jiaren romance consistently appears with almost all of its major attributes, such as
its theme, characterization, plot, structure and end. (1) Theme: *caizi-jiaren* fiction is about idealized love and/or marriage between a young man and woman (women). (2) Characterization: the male protagonist of the story is a young, handsome literary man or scholar, a *baimian shusheng* (a smooth-faced scholar) who “must be a man with feminine beauty, in other words, ‘a *caizi* must be a *jia-ren*’” (Hu Wanchu 1994, 209). He must succeed in the civil service examination and gain a scholar-official status. The female protagonist is a young beautiful girl or woman who is talented in her literary attainment. The male protagonist usually comes from a *shijia* (an illustrious family) or an old and well-known family that lost its previous prestige and power and “now” became a poor family. Most authors of *caizi-jiaren* fiction describe the background of their male protagonist as having lost their fathers in their childhood (*zaonian sangfu* 早年丧父). In contrast, the female protagonist usually comes from a very prestigious and well-known family. *Dajia guixiu* (lit. big family daughter beauty, a beautiful girl from a decent family) is the term to label such a girl, indicating her glorious and powerful family background, her peaceful, stable disposition and graceful and elegant demeanor. In some cases, the female protagonist is a high-class prostitute with literary talent. The typical relationship is between a man and a woman, or between one man and more than one woman, but not the vice verse. (3) Plotting: the most conspicuous plot design in *Caizi-jiaren* romance is the way of meeting of the two male and female characters. “*Yijian zhongqing* 一见钟情” (fall in love at first sight) is the stereotype with which Chinese are familiar. Three stages of union, separation and reunion (合, 离, 合) between two lovers are frequently repeated in the plot of the *caizi jiaren* romance. That is, they

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26 See note 40 in Chapter IV.
start with an unexpected meeting, fall in love at first sight, and have romantic time together. Then for various reasons they must endure separation. Then they are reunified again at the end of the story. (5) The end: da tuanyuan 大团圆 (a big reunion) is a typical end for almost all caizi-jiaren romances. Usually this da tuanyuan takes place at the moment of jinbang timing shi, dongfang huazhu ye 金榜题名时，洞房花烛夜, (success in a government examination followed by wedding festivities) and/or the emperor being moved by the love story and interfering to legalize the illicit union.27

These stereotypes can be seen clearly in Capital with some variants. I will present the analogue/difference between caizi-jiaren romance and Capital with regard to theme, the characterization, the circumstances of the first meeting between the male and female protagonists, and the end of the story.

First, Capital is a story about a male celebrity having a love affair, or sexual relations with five to six women. Like the caizi-jiaren romances, the love stories depicted in Capital reveal not only men’s ideals, but also men’s fantasies.

Second, the characterization in Capital is slightly different from that of a typical caizi-jiaren romance. Unlike the common caizi images, most of whom are poor young literary men seeking success in the imperial examinations at the beginning of the story, Zhuang Zhidie, at the beginning of the story, already had achieved the goal of “becoming somebody” as he swore to do ten years earlier when he first came to Xijing City. He is a more successful figure, and older than a young talented literary man or scholar in a typical caizi-jiaren story. He is an overqualified caizi.

The stereotype of the *caizi-jiaren* romance prescribes that "jiaren" must be beautiful, have literary talent and came from a well-to-do family. All of Zhuang's women are exceptionally beautiful. This is true of the young servant girl, Liu Yue, the young mistress, Tang, Wan'er, and the middle-age women Ah Can, the wife of Wang, Ximin, and the wife of the protagonist, Niu Yueqing. Although most of Zhuang's women are *xiaojia biyu* (lit. small family’s jade, a girl from a common family, in contrast to *dajia guixiu*, a big family’s beauty.), his major mistress, Tang Wan'er is bestowed with a remarkable literary gift that even goes above the level of some literary critics. The text several times shows off her unusual talent in her perfect perception and deep understanding of literature and art. In one scene set in an informal literary salon in *Qiuquewu* (Search for Imperfection Studio), five men—a fictional writer, literary editors and critics—and a woman participate in discussion of literature and art. Tang Wan'er's criticism turns out to be the sharpest and most insightful, and her talent is the most impressive in her singing of *Qinqiang*. (p. 220-226)

Third, in terms of the circumstances of the first meeting between the male protagonist and his women, *yijian-zhongqing* (fall in love at first sight) applies to Zhuang-Tang (Wan'er) as well as Zhuang-Ah (Can). Although the narrative does not explicitly indicate *yijian-zhongqing* between Zhuang and Liu Yue, the protagonist’s interest is immediately aroused by her beauty at first sight and his immediate desire to have her to be his housemaid is unconcealed.

Fourth, the most conspicuous change made by Jia Pingwa is the end of the story, which is completely different from the usual "great reunion" end of the *caizi jiaren* romance. Instead of happily reunifying with his women, *Capital* ends with the tragic
separation of Zhuang Zhidie from his women one after another, or "deprivation of his 
women" in critics' terms (Kuang, Xinnian 1996, 17). There are two reasons for this 
change: first, the pattern of "a great reunion" has long been a notorious banality in public 
consciousness that aims at entertaining readers'/audiences' cheap taste and shallow-
minded satisfaction. No contemporary writer wants to run the risk of being labeled a 
banal writer by repeating such an ending. Second, a tragic end is imperative for Jia Pinwa 
to deepen the major theme of the novel, which is the exposition of the endemic corruption 
and vices in modern city life that drives individuals to a hopeless dead end.

The most striking evidence to link Capital to caizi-jiaren romance comes from the 
textual self-identification. The text explicitly identifies Zhuang Zhidie as a celebrity who 
is not only a caizi, but also far more than a caizi. It also identifies Tang Wan'er with a 
jiaren. I will now give evidence in the narrative below.

What is different from a conventional caizi-jiaren story is that the narrative 
exaggerates the talent of the male protagonist to the extent of narcissism. Originating 
from the Greek mythological figure Narcissus who falls in love with his own image 
reflected in the water, narcissism means the love of the self. In Capital, Zhuang Zhidie is 
a hero in the minds of city dwellers just because he is a genius in literature. His talent 
transforms him into a symbol of power, which is rarely seen in caizi-jiaren romance. 
Every citizen in this city, even one who does not read his works, knows his name. He 
always attracts great public attention and respect from everyone. From the Mayor of the 
city to illiterate old women; from young beautiful women to old nuns, his influence is 
 omnipresent and powerful. The Mayor of the city states that Zhuang is a treasure of 
Xijing city (p. 131). The superstitious mother-in-law of the protagonist uses his name to
exorcise ghosts, because, according to her reasoning, “you are a celebrity, and you have strong power. Everyone is afraid of you.” (p. 284) Even mosquitoes and gadflies are fond of chasing him and stinging him because he is a celebrity. Tang Wan’er fawns on him that the mosquito would be transformed into an “intellectual mosquito” after sucking his blood (p. 94). Zhuang is bothered by gadflies all the time, and he thinks, “If the gadfly is not a literature lover, it might be a factory director” (p. 137), because they chase him more than gadflies. The following narration is from Aunt Liu, a country woman who frequently delivers fresh milk to the protagonist, walking all the way from her village to Zhuang’s home in Xijing City.

A couple of days ago, I came to the city. East Street was closed off. The siren from a vehicle was noisy. It is said that a high-ranking official from Beijing had arrived. Nobody was allowed to cross the street before his car passed through. I pulled my cow, intending to across the street. A pox-faced policeman rebuked me: “People are prohibited from crossing the street. You even wanted the cow to go across?!” I responded, “Comrade, I am delivering fresh milk to Zhuang Zhidie.” That pocky policeman asked: “Which Zhuang Zhidie? Is he the writer Zhuang Zhidie?” I said, “Of course the writer Zhuang Zhidie.” The pocky policeman suddenly saluted me, saying: “Please pass! Please tell Mr. Zhuang, my surname is Su. I am his admirer!” Pulling my cow I crossed the street. At that moment, I was so privileged that I felt I had a face as big as a wash basin. (p. 137)

This story is embellished by Aunt Liu for the purpose of flattering the protagonist. The reader can see clearly that both the policeman and Aunt Liu serve as mirrors reflecting well on the respectable figure of Zhuang Zhidie. As Virginia Woolf has pointed out: “Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size” (1967, 53). However, this story is exaggerated to the extent that it turns into a sheer absurdity and
becomes ludicrous. Cults of personality have arisen in China, but the objects of the cults are rarely living persons. Mao Zedong is an exception. He made himself into a God and mobilized a billion followers when he was still alive. After Mao’s death, there have been no personality cults formed around any celebrity, and certainly not a writer. The cult phenomenon does not appear in fictional works after Mao’s era. Capital might be the first novel in post-Mao literature to create such a cult phenomenon merely with an empty name of caizi. By an empty name of caizi, I mean the text is not showing, but telling readers that Zhuang is a caizi. The text adopted the method, hongyun tuoyue (paint clouds to set off the moon), to provide a foil to set off a caizi. We do not see how Zhuang Zhidie is talented in his literary performance. Instead, we hear from others over and over that he is a caizi. However, from this fabricated cult phenomenon, we do not see people loving the protagonist, but rather the protagonist loving himself, or the author loving his protagonist.

The text identifies Tang Wan’er with a jiaren, and via Tang Wan’er, it identifies the romance between the protagonist and Tang Wan’er with a caizi-jiare relationship. As mentioned above, Tang Wan’er is bestowed with qualities of tremendous literary talent. The question is where and how Tang Wan’er, a beauty from a small town with unknown family and educational background, has attained literary talent. Only once, the narrative mentions that Tang Wan’er is reading a book, indicating her self-cultivation in literature (p. 146). The book she reads is a collection of fine classical works, including Shen Fu’s Fusheng liuji (Six Chapters of a Floating Life)28, Mao

28 Fusheng liuji (浮生六记, Six Chapters of a Floating Life) was written by Shen Fu, styled Shen Sanbo (1763-1808). Born to a well-to-do family, Shen was skilled at calligraphy and painting. Fusheng liuji is an autobiography about the love and married life of Shen Fu and his wife Chen Yun (1763-1803) —a remarkably appealing woman described by her husband. Among “six chapters”, only four remain, which
Pijiang’s 冒辟疆 Cuixiao’an Ji 翠潇庵记, (The Record of the Cuixiao Nunnery)\(^{29}\) and Li Yu’s 李渔 essay Xiangqing ouji 闲情偶记 (Casual Expressions of Idle Feeling)\(^{30}\).

Though the first two are not caizi jiaren fiction, they are real love stories (autobiographies by Shen and Mao) between caizi and jiaren. Tang is deeply touched by the story in *The Record of the Cuixiao Nunnery* that describes the love between Mao Pijiang 冒辟疆 and Dong Xiaowan 董小宛 (p. 146). Tang Wan’er cannot help connecting Zhuang Zhidie to Mao Pijiang and herself to Dong Xiaowan.

Mao Pijiang is a caizi; Zhuang Zhidie is a caizi too. Mao Pijiang is a touching seed of affection; not that Zhuang Zhidie isn’t? I myself am virtually Dong Xiaowan. Is there such a marvelous thing under the heaven? There is also a same “wan” character in my name. Thereupon turning her head vigorously, she feels Dong Xiaowan half-walking and half-floating toward her. She can’t help giving a winsome smile. (p. 146)

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\(^{29}\) *Cuixiao’an ji* is an autobiography written by Mao Xiang 冒襄 (styled Mao Pijiang, 1611-93) about the love story between him and Dong Xiaowan 董小宛 (1625-51). Mao Xiang, born into a Jiangsu gentry family and best known today as a poet, calligrapher, noble political reformer and romantic, ranks among the most colorful characters in seventeenth-century China. His teacher Dong Qichang (1555-1636), the most important artist and art theorist in China at that point, was so impressed with the young Mao’s genius that he compared him to the great Tang dynasty poet Wang Wei (699-751 A.D.). He is renowned as a romantic and lover of beautiful women. He had a celebrated affair with the famous courtesan and painter Dong Xiaowan, and two of his other concubines—Cai Han (1647-1686) and Qin Yue (ca. 1660-1690)—were also known for their combination of physical beauty and artistic talent. Shortly after his death, Mao was immortalized as one of the main characters in Kong Shangren’s 孔尚任 (1648-1718) play, *The Peach Blossom Fan*.

Dong Xiaowan was one of the best-known social butterflies at River Qinhuai, Nanjing during the last years of Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). She had been closely connected with Mao Pijiang, one of the four best-known gentlemen of the time. After the collapse of the Ming in 1644, Dong, brought into the court by Hong Chengchou 洪承畴 (1593-1665), a Han-Chinese general who had surrendered to the Manchus, became a favorite and highest ranking concubine of the Emperor Shuzhi. She was killed by the Empress Dowager, Xiaozhuang 萧后, in 1651 for using poisonous wine to murder Dorgan, the Regent to and the uncle of the Emperor Shuzhi and the secret lover of the Empress Dowager.

\(^{30}\) Li Yu (1610-1680)’s Xiangqing ouji 闲情偶记 (Casual Expressions of Idle Feeling, 1671) is one of the most popular works among Chinese intellectuals. The first part of the book talks about poetry and music (*ci*qu, 词曲). The second part is about the art of life (*shenghuo yishu*, 生活艺术) teaching women skills/ways, in order to please men, to beautify their outward appearance, design room decorations, display furnitures, cook and nurture life.
This is not simply to make a comparison between two look-alikes. Here Tang Wan'er merges two into one—an unmistakable link between caizi-jiaren tradition and Capital. It is safe to say that the author not only identifies his narrative with caizi jiaren romance, but also consciously imitates caizi-jiaren stories to characterize his male and female protagonists because, from the paragraph quoted above, he did not pick the name for Tang Wan'er randomly.

5.2.2 Masculinity in the caizi-jiaren framework

In terms of the ideal masculinity in caizi jiaren romance, Cyril Birch points out, the caizi is “a figure far removed from the swashbuckling Romeos and Tom Joneses of the Western world” (1988, 134). Compared with attributes of masculinity preferred in many Western cultures, such as toughness, courage, bravery, aggressiveness, rationality, physical strength and sexiness, etc., caizi scholars appear to be weak, soft, sexless, cowardly, and in short, effeminate. The image of such attributes is not only contradictory to masculinity understood in the western sense, but also quite different from the masculinity discussed in the previous chapter—junzi masculinity as presented in Confucian classics.

In his study of The Romance of the Western Chamber, the first work by Wang Shifu that popularized the caizi jiaren genre in the Yuan drama (yuanzaju 元杂剧), Song Geng summarizes five major deviations of caizi masculinity from the junzi masculinity of Confucian classics. According to Song, Confucian discourse on integrated personality is characterized by “the absence of gender and the lack of distinction between the public
and private." Therefore, the *junzi* is seldom "gendered" and "ungendered men" become the synonym of "people" (1999, 214). In order to achieve the state of being "ungendered", a *junzi* must follow the Confucian conception of "propriety". However, Student Zhang (Zhangsheng, the male protagonist in *The Romance of the Western Chamber*) (1) falls in love with Yingying at first sight (*yijian zhongqing*); (2) abandons his original plan to take the imperial examination after he encounters Yingying; (3) is hypocritical in his "filial piety" for his true reason for honoring his own dead parents is for meeting Yingying again at the ceremony; (4) is frivolous in lusting after Yingying; (5) is lovesick almost to death; and (6) kneels down to a woman, the servant girl of Yingying (Song 1999, 215-220).

However, both Kam Louie and Song Geng contend that, though *caizi jiaren* romances demonstrate deviations to a certain extent from the Confucian line, masculinity in these stories is constructed within the paradigm of Confucianism. Song Geng believes both *junzi* and *caizi* are actually in the same category, because (1) the unconventional heroes in *caizi-jiaren* romance never go beyond the limits which the ruling ideology can tolerate. A *junzi* must have a sense of duty and loyalty to his lord and the country, as do talented scholars in *caizi-jiaren* romance. (2) The ideal masculinity and femininity in *caizi-jiaren* romance are constructed using the Confucian framework and conforming to Confucian prescriptions. In other words, the image of *caizi* still belongs to the category of *junzi* in the *junzi/xiaoren* dichotomy in Confucian ideology, and the quality of *jiaren* still belongs to that of *shu ‘nü*淑女 (virtuous women) prescribed by Confucian ideology (Song 1999, 223-225).
These deviations or subversions overall do not sacrifice Confucian principles too much, for Student Zhang's "transgression of moral code is tolerated as a temporary misbehavior due to the young scholar's confidence in his talents and eventual success" in the imperial examination. As long as he passes the imperial examination and is posted with a scholar-official position, "he will return to 'the right course'" for a junzi (Song 1999, 223).

Kam Louie, elaborating on Song's insights, discusses caizi masculinity within the Confucian junzi discourse and concludes that a caizi is a not-yet-realized junzi (2002, 64). Their arguments are convincing in interpreting the relationship between the junzi framework and the caizi-jiaren framework. My point of view is that the caizi masculinity indeed is the subcategory of the Confucian junzi masculinity. It belongs to the principal discourse of Confucianism, and has its own attributes, which endow the caizi-jiaren masculinity with attachment to as well as independence from the Confucian junzi paradigm.

In order to distinguish Capital from Half of Man in the pursuit of ideal masculinity, I will focus more on the differences, rather than the similarities between Confucian junzi masculinity and caizi masculinity.

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31 See Kam Louie's note 29 on the page 182 (2002).
32 Richard Hessney also believes that the scholar-beauty romances were constructed within the framework of Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism. In analyzing the typicality of the protagonists in The Fortunate Union (Hao-qiu chuan 好逑传), a popular scholar-beauty romance in the seventeenth century, Hessney concludes that the novel "embrace[s] the Confucian ideal of 仁, a broad ethical concept including selfless friendship, duty, chivalry, and righteousness." The male protagonist "is an outstanding exemplar of the heroic young scholar who combines literary talent, physical strength, and a handsome face with an unshakable devotion to Confucian principles and propriety." (Richard C. Hessney, 1985, 250).
Four attributes differentiate *caizi jiaren* masculinity from *junzi* masculinity: a heavy emphasis on *gongming*; being romantic; being effeminate; and polygyny, or the pattern of one man consorting with more than one woman.

a. *Gongming*

The concept of *gongming* (success and fame, or scholarly honor or official rank) derived from the establishment of the civil service examination system, and later became firmly rooted complex in the mindset of Confucian scholars. Then emphasis on *gongming* overriding moral codes in *junzi* discourse became evident. The early Confucian teachings about *junzi* emphasize self-moral-cultivation that places the individual man’s responsibility for the country and its people as primacy, rather than personal success and fame. D. C. Lau comments:

> Behind Confucius’ pursuit of the ideal moral character lies the unspoken, and therefore, unquestioned, assumption that the only purpose a man can have and also the only worthwhile thing a man can do is to become as good a man as possible. This is something that has to be pursued for its own sake and with complete indifference to success or failure. (D. C. Lau 1979, 12)

However after the Sui and Tang dynasties and through the Qing Dynasty, Confucian scholars became more and more obsessed with success in imperial examinations. Taking examinations at three levels became similar to life-and-death struggles. The moment of publishing the list of successful candidates for degrees became the moment of blood freezing. Failures suddenly felt *tianxuan dizhuan* (the sky and earth were spinning round, very dizzy); the veterans of failure who succeeded this time *beixi jiaojia* (mixed feelings of grief and joy); and young successful
candidates *chouchu manzhi* 超著滿志 (enormously proud of one's success; complacent). Those who failed were dejected, packed their luggage and left Chan'an. Those who succeeded, proud and happy, were busy with meeting the Prime Minister, thanking their teachers, attending banquets, etc. Families of high-ranking officials were also busy that day with selecting their future son-in-laws from among the successful candidates. The courtyards of the successful candidates and the high-ranking officials were thronged with incessant stream of horses and carriages. Everywhere in Chang'an was boisterous.33

*Rulin Waishi* 儒林外史 (The Unofficial History of the Scholars) by Wu Jingzi 吳敬梓 (1701-1754) sarcastically portrays literati life as fundamentally destroyed by the civil service examination system and by the concept of *gongming*. Overwhelmed by the strong desire to succeed in the examinations and thus obtain *gongming*, Fan Jin 范进 went mad when the good news eventually came.34 The novel ridicules Confucian scholars and seriously questions the role of Chinese intellectuals.

A real *junzi* never focuses on *gongming*. Confucius was preoccupied with *Dao* (the Way). He claimed that if he heard the Way in the morning, he could die content in the evening (4.8). Du Fu 杜甫 (712-777) was a great Confucian poet in the Tang Dynasty. His Confucian character is clearly illustrated in his constant preoccupation on the fate of his people and his country. His profound studies of history and literature enabled him to understand the strength and frailties of human nature, the bright and sordid possibilities of politics. Du Fu’s personal voice represents the voice of ordinary people in his time.

33 See Feng Tianyu 1990, p.572-573.
34 Fan Jin is a poor and old Confucian scholar who spent most of his adult life taking civil service examinations. Finally he passed the examination and obtained a *juren* (舉人) degree that qualifies him for an official appointment, that in turn will enrich his family. When the good news came to his village, Fan Jin was selling a hen in the local market to supply his family with next meal. He did not believe the news at first and went mad suddenly after he realized the news was true.
Many of his poems describe the momentous events of political history with a far greater engagement than the work of most of his contemporaries. This engagement with political history, particularly with the events surrounding the An Lu-shan Rebellion,\(^{35}\) earned Du Fu the title of shi-shi 诗史, the “poet-historian”, or “the poet of history”. Du Fu was also a master and innovator of all kinds of poetic forms. However, throughout his life, he never achieved fame as a poet, let alone the title of a “poet-historian”, but he never thought himself a failure in his worldly career. He did take the imperial examination and failed. His focus was not on the degree, but on an official position in which he could serve his country more effectively. His poems appear in no anthology earlier than one dated 130 years after his death, and it was not until the eleventh century that he was recognized as a preeminent poet.

Therefore, the lack of focus on gongming distinguishes paradigm of masculinity in Half of Man from that in Capital. The message conveyed in Half of Man is that Zhang Xianliang is preoccupied with the fate of the country, while Zhuang Zhidie in Capital suffers from his fame-but-not-success complex; the former identifies its protagonist with the junzi masculinity and the latter with the caizi-jiaren framework. Gong 功 (success) and ming 名 (fame) in caizi-jiaren romance always come as a pair. As long as gong is achieved in the examinations, ming is automatically granted to the successful candidate. What is different in Capital from the common understanding of gong and ming as a pair

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\(^{35}\) The An Lushan 安禄山 Rebellion (755-763) initiated a civil war that lasted eight years and marked the beginning of the end of the Tang Dynasty. The Emperor Xuanzong 康玄宗 was forced to flee the capital Chan'an with his favorite concubine, Yang Guifei 杨贵妃. On the way, the imperial guards forced the Emperor to kill Yang. The guards believed Yang had infatuated the Emperor with her extraordinary beauty and let him ignore the administration of the country while placing her cronies in high positions. They believed this was the source of all the disasters that had occurred in the country.
is that Zhuang Zhidie separates gong (success) from ming (fame). He believes that he has fame as a celebrity but has not yet succeeded.

b. Being romantic

As mentioned above, women do not exist in the junzi discourse, indicating a junzi is discouraged from having romance. However, as Kam Louie asserts, “All the caizi-jiaren stories revolve around the theme of winning the woman and passing the examinations, though not necessarily in that order” (2002, 61). In Chinese, very often an adjective is attached to caizi to make a new and similar phrase: fengliu caizi (a romantic and talented scholar), in contrast to yufu rusheng (pedantic Confucians who stubbornly adhere to outworn rules and ideas). The attributes of a fengliu caizi usually entail a combination of eccentricity, being a drinker, and being connoisseur of courtesans. Today’s Chinese readers gain their impression about romantic scholars primarily from caizi-jiaren stories or caizi-related stories. Scholars typically and habitually rationalize anything that deviates from Confucian doctrine by guiding public attention in the direction they want. In other words, they overemphasize the importance of Confucian scholarship and ignore questionable romantic escapades. Lu Qi (1614-?) in Xin Fu Pu 新妇谱 (The Instruction for Brides) asserts:

As a person of refined tastes and full of vigor and vitality, [a husband] might often visit prostitutes or buy concubines. Provided he can be devoted to study and knows how to write, visiting prostitutes and taking concubines can be understood as activities of a gifted scholar. Therefore, it is not necessary for others to worry about it.36

From the above statement, we can see clearly the privilege of men over women in Confucian discourse. Confucian scholars were allowed to transgress moral precepts but women were not. Lu Qi’ Xin Fu Pu shows how Confucian scholars controlled and manipulated the discourse so that they could easily justify their deeds which definitely violated Confucius’s teachings about junzi.

Womanizing, or in eulogistic terms, loving women became a fashion among the upper class men and an indispensable badge of a caizi in caizi-jia ren romance. Song Gong simply translates caizi into English as “the student-lover”, or “the male lover” (2002, 78). A folk saying goes: “Wu fengliu, bu caizi 无风流，不才子.” (Without romance, a man cannot be qualified as a talented scholar.)

In Half of Man, we see no evidence that Zhang Yonglin is a male lover or a womanizer. Indeed, he is a misogynist. However, as I mentioned previously, although his misogyny disqualifies him as a real junzi, the ideal masculinity reasserted in Half of Man should be still examined in the context of junzi discourse, rather than caizi-jia ren discourse, because, as mentioned before, a fake junzi wants to identify him as a junzi.

In Capital, four cultural celebrities are mingren because they are caizi (talented scholars). All four have sexual relations with more than one woman at the same time. They hang around with women for sexual pleasure. Zhuang Zhidie has sexual relations with four women—his wife, Tang Wan’er, Ah Can and Liu Yue, and a platonic relationship with Mrs. Wang. Without womanizing, their status as caizi (or mingren as the author prefers) cannot be completely established.
c. Being effeminate

The physical appearance of a caizi in caizi-jiaren romance should be beautiful. Hu Wanchun points out: "No matter whether those scholars possess wencai (talent in literature) or wenwu jianzi (talent in both literature and martial arts), everyone must be a beautiful man" (1994, 209). There is a stereotype phrase in almost every caizi-jiaren novel—a man who is "as beautiful as Pan An," and "as gifted as Cao Zhi" (maosi Pan An, cai bi Cao Zhi). Song Gong adopts phrases from The Story of the Western Wing, “jasper-like face and rosy lips” (chunhong chibai, mian ruo guanyu), to characterize the rhetorical stereotype of “male beauty” (2002, 79).

Zhuang Zhidie in Capital does not fit this convention. Zhuang Zhidie is neither young nor good-looking. There are two reasons for this different appearance of the male protagonist: first, as mentioned in the Introduction, naiyou xiaosheng (creamy-faced young men) lost their popularity in the mid-1980s. Females called for tough men. If Jia Pingwa wanted to make his novel popular, he must not run the risk of providing his readers with a smooth and creamy face to offend popular taste. Second, this novel is seen by many Chinese critics as Jia’s semi-autobiography. Zhuang Zhidie is characterized based on the author’s appearance and experience. In the narrative Zhuang is middle-aged and has a pitiful appearance, summarized in one phrase, “short and skinny.” (p. 25)

In addition, caizi are frail, both physically and psychologically. All caizi are from shusheng, students of [Confucianism]), and the typical image of a shusheng is

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37 "This refers to P’an Yüeh (潘岳 also called P’an An 潘安 or P’an An-jen 潘安仁), a man of legendary physical beauty and literary talent who lived during the Jin (Tsin 縣) dynasty. His beauty is not easily visualized, but his name evokes his legend with all its romantic implications.” (Crawford 1972, p. 30)
wenruò 文弱 (gentle and frail-looking). Thus a shusheng is also called wenruo shusheng 文弱书生 (a frail scholar). They lack the strength to truss up a chicken (shou wu fu ji zhi lì 手无缚鸡之力). Most of them are yinyang la qiangtou 银样蜡枪头 (a spear-head that looks like silver but is really wax) indicating they are good-looking but useless in practical life.39

Zhuang Zhidie in Capital is also a useless “spear-head that looks silver but is really wax.” He is useless in preventing his bookstore from bankruptcy. Then he puts his wife in charge. His wife Niu Yueqing borrows eighty thousands yuan from Wang Ximin’s wife and nervously carries back home a bag full of cash while Liu Yue acts as her bodyguard (p. 108). His worthlessness and cowardliness are exposed thoroughly in the action of rescuing his favorite mistress. When Tang Wan’er is kidnapped and reportedly abused by her husband, Zhuang is very anxious, but dares not do anything to rescue her. Instead, he urges Zhou Min, the previous lover of Tang Wan’er, who does not know about the affair between his respectful teacher Zhuang and his mistress: “Zhou Min, you immediately go to the railway station to by a ticket for Tongguan [where Tang is confined]. You save her and get her out. You must rescue her!” (p. 487) When Zhou is hesitant to go, Zhuang scolds him, “Nonsense! Why did you elope with her? Are you a man who cannot even protect a woman? Tang Wan’er is blind to the futility of loving you!” (p. 488). When he scolds Zhou for not being a real man, Zhuang forgets that he is a man too and Tang Wan’er loves him more than loving Zhou Min. Zhuang is worse

38 See note 25.
39 The phrase, “Yinyang la qiangtou” (a spear-head that looks like silver but is really wax) comes from The Story of the Western Wring (Ch. IV). Hong Niang, Ying Ying’s maid, uses this phrase to ridicule Zhang Sheng who dares not to face Ying Ying’s mother.
because Zhou eventually took action to rescue Tang, which turned out to be abortive (p. 508-510). Zhuang does nothing about rescuing Tang.

The only thing caizi can do is wuwen nongmo 舞文弄墨 (engage in phrase-mongering). They have refined and delicate taste about literature and arts. Feng Tianyu’s summary about the refined artistic tastes of the shi class in the Tang and Song dynasties. These shi literati deliberately pursued elitism in their elegant writing style and romantic life style. They hung around with women for sexual pleasure, physical cultivation and spiritual transformation. They appreciated femininity more than masculinity in both their writings and their lives. They frequently visited brothels and enjoyed themselves drinking, writing poems, listening to music, and watching dances with the companionship of prostitutes (1990, 670-692).

All these characteristics are applicable to the tastes of modern caizi in Capital. Wendy Larson terms these characteristics as “Connoisseurship”. She points out:

Because it is a category open only to well-educated and generally powerful men, connoisseurship can function as a complex indicator of many things: traditional masculinity in the modern world, social power and the relationship between its “haves” and “have-nots,” Chinese cultural models in the face of imperialism, and ritual forms and performances within high culture. (2002, 178)

Zhuang Zhidie and his male friends have much in common. They became connoisseurs able to appreciate works of art and cultural relics; they have the same interest in discussing the discovery of Han-dynasty bricks in a garbage pile, or making an appraisal of an ink slab, or collecting modern antiques, such as the calligraphy of Mao Zedong and Kang Sheng 康生. They bribe officials with cultural products such as
calligraphy or paintings rather than the worldly goods such as cigarettes and wine. They exchange wenfangsibao 文房四宝 as gifts. Like wenfangsibao, they were indoor beings too. They gather in their salon, The Search for Imperfection Studio, to talk about literature and religion accompanied by the prostitute-like Tang Wan’er.

In contrast, junzi masculinity does not apply to effeminate men. Although a junzi is expected to be wen, liang, gong, jian, rang 溫，良，恭，儉，讓 (cordial, kind, courteous, temperate, and deferential) (1.10), and to possess propriety, he is also expected to be heroic and adventurous, rather then being effeminate. Confucius himself sets a good model for a real man according to junzi masculinity. Simon Leys points out:

In contrast with the idealized image of the traditional scholar, frail and delicate, living among books, the Analects shows that Confucius was adept at outdoor activities: he was an accomplished sportsman, he was expert at handling horses, he practiced archery, he was fond of hunting and fishing. He was a bold and tireless traveler in a time when travel was a difficult and hazardous adventure; he was constantly moving from country to country (pre-imperial China was a mosaic of autonomous states, speaking different dialects but sharing a common culture—a situation somewhat comparable with that of modern Europe). At times, he was in great physical danger, and narrowly escaped ambushes set by his political enemies. Once, in despair at his lack of success in trying to convert the civilized world to his ways, he contemplated going abroad and settling among the barbarians. On another occasion, he toyed with the idea of sailing away on a seagoing raft, such as were used in his time for ocean voyages (this daring plan was to puzzle to no end the less adventurous scholars of later ages).

Confucius was a man of action—audacious and heroic—but ultimately he was also a tragic figure. This has perhaps not been sufficiently perceived (Leys 1997, xxii).

The heroic and adventurous spirit of junzi is absent from caizi-jiaren masculinity. Zhou Jianyu has found an exception to this generally pattern, “In the mid-eighteenth

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40 The four treasures of the study: writing brush, ink stick, ink slab and paper.
century, the image of a *caizi* in *caizi-jiaren* novels changed gradually from a talented poet to a hero possessed of both literary and military talent" (Zhou Jianyu 1995, 13). However, two points are worth noting as Zhou points out. First, "A *caizi's* military talent was not primarily based on physical training or martial arts, but rather upon his activity in military strategy and tactics", something "like his literary talent...appears to have been innate", rather than the result of military training (ibid, 121). That leads to the conclusion that such military ability is the extension of innate talent in literature and other intellectual pursuits. Second, the *shangwu jingshen* 尚武精神 (the spirit of favoring of military affairs) had much to do with the Manchu influence under the Manchu rule of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912) (ibid, 132). It does not represent the natural evolution of Han Chinese culture.

d. Polygyny and the pattern of "a man to two women"

Zhou Jianyu points out that many *caizi-jiaren* novels contain polygyny, that is "One *caizi* marries two or more than two *jiaren*" (1997, 171). Each of the *caizi*-protagonists in *Fei Hua Yan Xiang* 飞花艳想 (A Romantic Imagination of Flying Flowers), *He Pu Zhu* 合浦珠 (The Pearl at the Hepu Margin) and *Sai Hua Ling* 赛花铃 (*Flower Bell Race*) has four wives/concubines. They refer to it by the fine-sounding name of *si mei gong shi yi fu* 四美共侍一夫 (four beauties wait on one husband). Zhou found that, out of twenty-four earlier Qing *caizi jiaren* works before Emperor Qianlong (1736-96), thirteen ended with a talented scholar marrying multiple-wives/concubines. Most of these wives/concubines encounter their *caizi*-protagonist before he succeeds in the civil service examinations and fall in love with him at first sight. Some of them provide
sincere and whole-hearted help to the caizi-protagonist when he is in trouble, which consolidates their love relationship. These multiple jiaren waiting on one husband harbor no jealousy of each other at all; their parents are also content with such relationships (Zhou Jianyu 1997, 171).

Fitting the formula of caizi jiaren, the protagonist in Capital seeks an appropriate family structure. The author would be reprimanded for openly providing him with a family structure that was outlawed by The Marriage Law of the People’s Republic of China promulgated on May 1, 1950. However, characters in Capital still participate in a completely “feudalistic” culture where the ideal family structure is polygynous.

Polygyny, one of three forms of polygamy, is defined as “the condition or practice of having more than one wife at one time.” Having multiple wives was one of the main badges of male privilege in feudalistic China. This kind of polygamous family was not only legalized by patriarchy, but also most importantly, appealed to Chinese men because polygyny could prove a man’s sexual ability, financial ability and his social status. A sexually inadequate man could not accommodate multiple wives. Eunuchs in old China who married several concubines were exceptional cases. They were not showing off their extraordinary sexual ability, but rather their political and financial power. Having multiple wives also showed a man’s financial ability. Only a financially well-established man could afford for supporting several women. A man who had a successful career could easily attract women. Caizi, celebrities and high-ranking officials had easier access to women than did commoners. Polygyny, or polygamy in general, is different from promiscuity; the latter focuses more on sexual pleasure, while the former implies the

possessiveness and power. In this light, masculinity can also be constructed through the practice of polygyny, as Zhou Jianyu concludes:

Once successful in the civil service examination, a wenren 文人 (a literary man) could obtain an official rank. An official rank was the symbol of power, representing the social acknowledgement and the realization of his own values. If a caizi 大士 failed in the civil service examinations and thus failed in obtaining an official position and income, he remained as a hansi 寒士 (poor and shabby scholar). Thus, “multiple beauties waiting on one husband” would be his pipe dream forever (Zhou 1997, 171).

The ideal family form for the male protagonist in Capital is male-centered and de facto polygyny. Zhuang Zhidie is entangled with several women—Niu Yueqing, Zhuang’s wife, Tang Wan’er, Zhuang’s mistress, and Liu Yue, Zhuang’s servant girl. The text clearly puts them in the position of direct descendants of Wu Yueniang 吳月娘, Pan Jinlian 潘金蓮 and Chunmei 春梅 in The Golden Lotus. Although The Golden Lotus is not a caizi-jiaren 大士江人 novel, there are no other novels fictionalizing the nature of the polygynous family structure in old China better than this novel. Both Zhuang Zhidie and Ximen Qing 西門慶 in The Golden Lotus enjoy the lifestyle of being with a wife, concubine(s) and maid(s). Tang Wan’er is an exact replica of Pan Jinlian in The Golden Lotus; both in terms of appearance and of the insatiate sexual desire.

The polygynous family is consistently and more clearly revealed in Gao Lao Zhuang 高老庄 (The Old Village of Gao), another novel of Jia Pingwa. The protagonist, 

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42 Ximen Qing’s wife.
43 Pan Jinlian is one of Ximen Qing’s concubines. She is depicted as a monstrous woman whose sexual desire is insatiable. Because she is jealous of her husband’s other women, she spares no efforts to get his attention, and causes his other women to suffer.
44 Ximen Qing’s maid, also his sexual partner.
Professor Zilu 子路 (named after one of Confucius' students), divorced his country wife and remarried one of his urban students. When he takes his new wife to visit his home village, he still retains subtle feelings for his ex-wife Juwa 菊娃. They make love behind the back of his new wife. Juwa still performs her wifely duties for Zilu when he returns home from the city, and takes good care of Zilu's mother and their crippled son while Zilu lives in the city with his new wife. Xixia 西夏, Zilu's new wife seems to be happy with this triangular relationship and behaves like a "qie 妾" (concubine) who respects her "sister" (the first wife) and shows no jealousy at all. This is a perfect picture of an ideal polygynous family in the past. A scene where villagers are chatting after attending memorial services for Zilu's father gives insight into the modern de facto polygynous family structure:

Zilu: "Xixia, did you cry for Dad?"
Xixia: "Of course."
Zilu: "How did you cry?"
Xixia changes the topic: "Zilu, this is your fault. Sister Juwa came, but you did not introduce her to me, and we did not know each other when we met."
Zilu: "Now you two have known each other anyway... I am wondering who spoke to the other party first, you or Juwa?"
The mother of Twin Fish: "You Zilu! After all Xixia is small and Juwa is big!"

45 Ximen Qing 西門慶 is the protagonist in The Golden Lotus (Jin Ping Mei). He has a wife, five concubines, and maid girls.
46 The social hierarchy was also present in polygamous families in China. Wives were always acknowledged as "big" (da 大) regardless of whether they were older or younger than the concubine(s) of their husbands, and concubines were always "small" (xiao 小). The custom was that a "small concubine(s)" (xiao qie) must always greet "big wife", but not vice versa. On their first meeting, the "small concubine" usually addressed the wife of her husband as "big sister" and knelt down in front of the wife. The famous Chinese female painter Zhang Yuliang 張玉良, or Pan-Zhang Yuliang 潘張玉良 (1899-1977) was originally a prostitute and later the concubine of Pan Zanhua 潘赞化, who bought her home from the whorehouse and sponsored her to study painting in France. When she came back to China as a successful painter and a professor, her husband's illiterate wife insisted on Yuliang's kneeling down in front of her during their first meeting. Pan's wife said: "A country has its law and a family has its rules. Big master..."
Xixia: “In other words, Sister Juwa is a wife and I am a concubine, and should the concubine greet the wife?”

Her question gags the old woman.

Zilu says: “What I mean is if..., I am saying suppose there were a wife and a concubine, which role would you like to be?”

“Zilu, Zilu!”, the mother of Jilin tries to stop him.

But Xixia responds, “I wouldn’t like to be a wife. Concubines in the movies don’t have to worry about eating and clothing, but they eat the best food, wear the best cloths, and stroll around with their men! Isn’t this answer gratifying you? [Then she turns to her listeners] Aunts, Zilu likes to show off. Did I show enough respect for his feelings?”

The mother of Jilin says, “Zhuqing has just told me that Zilu’s new wife seems to be simpleminded. I don’t see that at all.”

Xixia, “Am I not silly enough? My body keeps growing taller but never does my brain [get smarter].”

The mother of Twin Fish: “It is our Zilu who is capable. He can conquer women.”  (Jia Pingwa 1999, 75-76)

When discussing de facto polygynous practice in China, Keith McMahon contends, in contrast to keeping mistresses, visiting prostitutes, having greater freedom in divorce, “polygamy represents a particularly unabashed version of the fantasy of male sexual and reproductive freedom.” Although polygamy has been outlawed, “the surreptitious counterparts to polygamy, its resistant alter-versions in monogamous cultures...are everywhere” (1995, 9). After reading Capital and The Old Village of Gao, and connecting them to the social practice of bao ernai 抱二奶 (embracing concubines) prevailing in the mid-1980s up to present, I believe Keith McMahon’s argument has merit. Although polygamy was outlawed a long time ago, it has never been eliminated from the mindset of some male elitists. Instead of criticizing the resurgence of polygyny

[meaning the first wife] and small servant-girl [a concubine], this is the convention for myriad years. Don’t think that she is a professor now so that she could sit as equals at the same table with me.” For the sake of her husband, Professor Zhang had to kneel down in front of the first wife of her husband. See Shi Nan’s Huahun—Zhang Yuliang Zhuan 画魂—张玉良传 (The Soul of Painting—Biography of Zhang Yuliang), Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1983, p. 146.
in society, *Capital* actually perpetuates such practices in the literary world and merges high culture with popular culture.

Another point is worth noting. In terms of the man-woman relationship in *Capital*, it was not Zhuang Zhidie who initiated affairs with women. In contrast to aggressive sex-seeking men and passive women, the relationships always involved women who acted like man-chasers. *Tou huai song bao* (voluntarily throwing her own body into a man’s arms) is the phrase describing this kind of woman-initiated relationship. Again, this is not Jia Pingwa’s innovation. In her study on the pre-modern fictional works, Sun Qiuqiu discovered that the motif of “men-initiated love relationships” predominated in writings about male-female relationships for many centuries. However, the motif of “women-initiated love relationships” occurred repeatedly among women of different social status during the Ming and Qing Dynasties, the same time period when *caizi-jiaren* fiction was flourishing (Sun Qiuqiu, 1998). Sun Longji found that women as chasers in the relationship of one male to two females became a dominant pattern in novels about intellectuals in the twentieth century. Mo Dun’s *Dongyao* (Vacillation, 1928), Rou Shi’s *Eryue* 二月 (February, 1929), Qian Zhongshu’s *Weicheng* 围城 (Fortress Besieged) and Lu Yao’s *Rensheng* 人生 (Life, 1982) contain this pattern of one man and two (or multiple) women, and with no exception there is at least one woman (usually a modern one) who chases the male protagonist (Sun Longji 1995, 128-139).

From a feminist perspective, these are good examples to show women’s agency, that is women acting as agents to express their desires and control over their lives. However, in male-centered discourse, women’s agency is confined within a very limited space where women establish control over their lives by finding an ideal man only. Using
women's agency in this limited sense turns out to be a good technique to reflect male subjectivity. Zhang Zhizhong analyzes this phenomenon from historical and psychological perspectives. There are two causes for this woman-initiated and man-passive pattern—(1) the contradiction between moral principle and sexual desire, and (2) men's irresponsibility and fantasies. Confucianism prescribed that intellectual men should have a high standard of knowledge and morality. To become a junzi, or a member of shi class, a man had to pass several strict examinations testing his knowledge and meets a high standard of morality by constant self-cultivation and restraint, even to the point of eliminating sexual desire. As a result, a peculiar phenomenon appeared that became a unique Chinese way of pursuing sex. Zhang Zhizhong terms it as male "osteomalacia" (1998, 67). He explains:

Males who occupied higher-ranking social positions and were psychologically and physiologically stronger, lacked virility in sexual relationships. They did not take any initiative, or show either a spirit of enterprise or an adventurous spirit. They did not show any strength in their hearts or in their behavior. To the contrary, they "had a thief's mind but no thief's courage". They dared not even run a risk of being rejected [by women]. Instead, they just waited to receive women's favor and self-sacrifice (1998, 66).

The osteomalacia that the protagonist inherited from his shi ancestors has to do not only with the weak virility of male intellectuals, but also with their psychological tendency to evade their responsibilities. "They have lopsided psyches wanting their need for sex and love to be gratified and simultaneously not having to bear any responsibilities of morality or conscience" (Zhang 1998, 67). In addition, the majority of writers of the caizi jiaren romances were male. This pattern of woman-initiated and man-passive sex perfectly fits male fantasies of their ideal relationship to women. In this fantasized
formula, a man did not have to lift a finger to make things happen. Beautiful and virtuous women would compete with each other for winning his heart and falling into his lap. In Capital, the male protagonist is constantly surrounded and chased by exceptionally beautiful and attractive women. Since the protagonist is a celebrity who is overqualified as a male protagonist in caizi jiaren romances, all relationships between him and his women are actually provoked by women. Tang Wan'er seduces Zhuang; Ah Can offers sex to him twice; the wife of Wang Ximin, though she stops Zhuang's pipe dream of having sex with her, brings up the topic of secret love she has harbored for Zhuang for years. Without her encouragement, cowardly Zhuang would not have the courage to take their relationship to another level. Even the prostitute taken-home by Meng Yunfang (Zhuang's male friend) for the purpose of entertaining Zhuang, expresses her "true feelings" for this "unusually touching man" after merely a couple of minutes contact (p. 322). Liu Yue does not offer sex to Zhuang, but she knocks on Zhuang’s door to self-recommend being his housekeeper after she figures out who he really is. Zhuang opens the door letting her into his house, and then Liu Yue opens the door to Zhuang to step into her private life.

5.2.3 Where does Zhuang Zhidie’s masculinity come from?

Bearing these four attributes of caizi-jiaren romance in mind, I will elaborate on the answer to the question "Where does Zhuang Zhidie’s masculinity come from?" This was the first question that came into my mind after I finished the last page of this novel.

As mentioned above, Zhuang Zhidie is neither as young nor as good-looking as a typical caizi who is supposed to be a refined young man of great beauty (Hessney 1979,
52). In the debut of Zhuang in the narrative, he appears with disheveled hair, strolling about with the backs of his shoes trodden down (p. 20) —a typical image of a sloven wenren 文人 (literati) and an eccentric caizi who does not care about his appearance and trivial matters (bu xiu bianfu 不修边幅). 

The following is a personal impression of Zhuang Zhidie through the eyes of Tang Wan’er at their first encounter.

Tang Wan’er sees a “Mulan” [the brand of the motorcycle] stop right in front of the entrance. A small and slim man in an iron-red cotton shirt and a pair of gray-white pants dismounts the motorcycle. His bare feet in a pair of soft gray sandals have no socks. [She] is a little bit surprised: is it Zhuang Zhidie? His fame is trembling the heaven and shaking the earth, but why is he not tall and big? He is even riding a Mulan—a motorcycle customarily used by women. Something more surprising is that, upon dismounting from the motorcycle, instead of taking out a comb to comb his hair, he tangles his hair deliberately with his hands. (p. 25)

Not only is his appearance far from masculine, but also his habits and behavior suggest feminization. It is folk belief that only pregnant women like to eat sour food. Zhuang likes sour green grapes (p. 28) and sour plum juice (p. 136). Tang Wan’er laughs: “People say you like eating sour food, but I did not believe it. How come a big man who is not pregnant likes sour taste? [Now I know] you do like it.” (p. 28) Moreover, his eccentric way of drinking milk—sucking directly from the udder of the cow (p. 21) like a baby sucks his mother’s breasts—hints at his feminized personality. 

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47 In modern time, bu xiu bianfu is another badge of a talented scholar/artist.
48 In Western cultures, the male behavior of sucking directly from udder of the cow might be interpreted as infantile and sexualized as men who suck women’s breasts as part of their love-making. It is true in China that such a behavior would remind people of infantile and male sexual activities. However, traditional Chinese culture was a sexually repressed culture. Men were not supposed to show their affection/passion to women openly, let alone engage in sexualized behavior in front of others. Men who were affectionate to women were considered feminized men (niangniangqiang 娘娘腔). In addition, from the past up to the
feel embarrassed about crying, resembling a little boy crying in his mother’s arms. He cries at least seven times in the narrative (p. 87, 126, 248, 308, 407, 420, 426). Six times he cries either after having sex with or for the unfortunate fate of his women. Once he cries for Gong Jingyuan’s death. (p. 420)

Zhuang also shares many similarities with the protagonist in *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, Jia Baoyu whose problematic masculinity was criticized by Lin Daiyu 林黛玉 as *yinyang la qiangtou* (a spear-head that looks like silver but is really wax), one of the effeminate attributes discussed above. Both Jia Baoyu and Zhuang Zhidie are *caizi*, sentimental, effeminate, loving (or lusting) women, and both are kings in their respective kingdoms surrounded by women.

What explains the appeal of this emasculated and marginalized man to so many women and what indeed qualifies Zhuang as a man in a female world? What is the source of his masculine power? There are two major factors behind his appeal to women. The first is his knowledge and cultural upbringing. He is “a cultural celebrity” (*wenhuan mingren* 文化名人), a scholar of broad and profound knowledge. His image against the halo of this laurel has been mystified and thus becomes hazy and attractive, particularly to women like Tang Wan’er, Ah Can and Liu Yue whose educational attainment, knowledge, and social status are far below his. For these women, his life is “foreign, mysterious, sacred and desirable” (Hu Xing 1998, 48). To walk into his life and become a part of his life enriches their experience, realizes their dreams, and upgrades their social status. Upon entering and looking at his house for the first time, Liu Yue finds his rooms

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49 The female protagonist and the lover of Jia Baoyu in *The Dream of the Red Chamber*. Present, women have been categorized with children. Party-state documents frequently call for measures to protect and guarantee the rights of “women and children”. Any childish behavior is seen as feminized.
are tastefully furnished and decorated. The calligraphy of the master on the front wall—No Messages from God (Shangdi wu yan 上帝无言)—particularly attracts her gaze. Liu Yue says to herself: "Writers are truly out of the ordinary." "After all, an erudite has refined tastes." (p. 92) Tang Wan’er feels privileged because she has just carried on a clandestine affair with Zhuang in his hotel room before he is scheduled to appear on televised news as a celebrity attending the Municipal People’s Congress. She is privileged in that she knows far more about him than others do. "Who would expect you, a serious speaker on the rostrum in a short while to do this (adultery) with me right now? Many people who watch you on television news this evening will certainly say: ‘Look! Here is Zhuang Zhidie, my idol!’ I will know for sure how sizable ‘that thing’ is in his pants," says Tang Wan’er to Zhuang Zhidie (p. 128). In this light, Tang is proud of herself for being accepted and included into his private life and thus becoming an insider while many others are excluded and therefore still outsiders. French and Raven list six different types of power that people use in their interpersonal relations: reward, coercive, referent, legitimate, expert, and informational. Zhuang’s case perfectly fits referent power. Doyle and Paludi summarize as the follow:

A person who is admired or liked by others has what is called referent power. In other words, if a person likes you or admires you, they are more likely to comply with your wishes than if they didn’t like or respect you. According to French and Raven, people with referent power oftentimes don’t even know they exercise such power over others. One with referent power normally enjoys a positive relationship with the target person, and the target person’s compliance with the powerholder’s wishes may last for a considerable time even in the absence of the powerholder. (Doyle & Paludi 1991, 181)
The second factor explaining his appeal to women is his potency which not only can impregnate women but also can bring sexual pleasure to women. *Capital* describes a phenomenon of penis-worshipping rarely seen before. In the past, Confucianism put a far greater emphasis on male reproductive power than on male sexual power, as it demanded that a male fulfill his responsibility for carrying on his family line. A man’s sexual pleasure and his will to bring sexual pleasure to his partner were not on the patriarchal agenda. Therefore he did not have to worry about his masculine appearance or mannerisms in order to captivate women. As long as he could make children, he would be regarded as “a real man”, regardless of whether he was physically weak or behaviorally feminized, because, as explained in the preceding chapter, *yin-yang* Confucianism draws a clear-cut line between men and women. Men are always *yang* elements compared to women as long as they can reproduce offspring. If a man could squeeze into the *shi* class, his masculinity would be greatly enhanced. The dual attributes of his scholarship and his ability to reproduce were regarded as the perfect form of masculinity in old China. Such a man was the top *yang* (elite man) in the category of *yang*. His masculinity would then be secured, automatically feminizing other males and degrading them to *yin* elements in this *yang* category. That is why scholars who lacked the strength to truss up a chicken (*shou* *wu* *fuji* *zhi* *li*) in *caizi-jiaren* stories and other fictional genres were still highly wanted by women, and particularly those from well-to-do families. That is why men were willing to devote a lifetime of effort trying to pass the imperial examinations, as illustrated by the old male protagonist in Lu Xun’s short story, *Kong Yiji* 孔乙几.⁵⁰ In this sense, patriarchal culture not only guaranteed men’s privilege

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⁵⁰ Kong Yiji is an old male protagonist in Lu Xun’s short story, *Kong Yiji*, published in 1919. He is a corrupted scholar who has spent his whole life taking the examinations in order to become a *shi* (scholar-
over women, but also defined the preferential form of masculinity for both men and women. In other words, the Chinese male’s masculinity, particularly the masculinity of Chinese male intellectuals was not tied directly to their mannerisms and behavior or in their interaction with the other sex, but was tied to their social position. What they were supposed to do was to climb up the social ladder to occupy a “high and right” position (“Where I am”). As long as they occupied a high position by passing civil service examinations, their identity as scholars or real men (“Who I am”) would be guaranteed by the patriarchal system and discourse. That is why Chinese male intellectuals never worried about their masculinity until the mid-1980s when young females seriously called for “real men.” Considering this traditional view of masculinity, there is no doubt that Zhuang Zhidie, though he is physically pitiful and cries frequently, is not only “a real man”, but also a man with perfect masculinity in that he has impregnated two women, and he is a worshipped as a scholarly celebrity, more than a mere caizi.

Although Zhuang is a writer with a strong attachment to Chinese tradition, he is living in a modern society where male sexual power, rather than reproductive ability, has emerged as a focus of attention for both men and women. Peter Lehman identifies the preferred feature of masculinity in Western cultures: “A man’s appearance does not matter if he is overly endowed with substitute phallic powers” (1993, 13). The preference for male sexual power under the changing circumstances in 1980s and 90s’ China comes from three sources: (1) Women’s liberation has freed women from their traditional role as a reproductive tool only; (2) The one child policy has substantially altered patriarchal lineage system that emphasized giving birth to as many sons as possible; and (3) The official). He never makes it, but he always identifies himself as a scholar. The other customers in the bar where he goes often taunt him about his claim to having a higher education. Due to his failure to become a
forbidden zone of sex has been opened up in modern discourse. Under these circumstances, both men and women are less likely to see themselves only as instruments of child-making, and are more concerned about the sexual pleasure in their marital life and their intimate relationships. Tang Wan’er falls for Zhuang because he is a celebrity. Beyond that, she is gratified by his sizeable penis and his sexual skills. “You are terrific!” says Tang Wan’er after their first intercourse. “I have never been made as comfortable as this. You are an expert at doing women!” (p. 87) Just as cultural factors can be converted into individual masculine appeal, the individual’s sexual performance can also be attributed to his cultural upbringing. Tang Wan’er recalls the details of their first clandestine meeting and interprets Zhuang’s sexual performance in a cultural sense. “(After having sex with him), she realized the difference—between cities and the countryside, between the learned and the uneducated, and between real men and real women.” (p. 118)

The answer to the question, “What is the source of Zhuang’s masculinity?” is that it derives from a combination of the status of a successful scholar and male reproductive power according to Confucian doctrine, and it is enhanced by extraordinary sexual performance in modern sense. The phrase chuanshang gongfu (skills in bed) is in vogue in modern life and shows increasing concern with the sexual ability of partners of both sexes.51 This also indicates that the guarantee of masculinity through scholar-official, he leads a miserable life that extends into his old age until he dies.

51 Mu Zimei, the most controversial female writer mentioned in Chapter One, openly challenged a male journalist who wanted to interview her. She replied: “If you want to interview me, you must get in bed with me. The duration of the interview will be limited within the duration of the intercourse.” This statement is not only most subversive to patriarchal tradition, but also directly challenges man’s sexual ability. (See http://muzimei.feiwon.com/, accessed on Jan. 10, 2004.)
patriarchy is being shaken. Men have to make efforts in various ways to affirm their sexual power and masculinity to attract women.

5.3 Woman's Position in Man's Downward Journey of Marginalization

Various critiques criticize *Capital* for its porn-like eroticism, its imitation of classical masterpieces of fiction, and its preoccupation with superstition. I take a different position. The major problem of *Capital* is its treatment of women and gender relations. Women are expected or assigned to play several roles in *Capital*. However all these roles are for the purpose of supporting male subjectivity in resorting lost manhood.

5.3.1 The representation of women in *Capital*

Before analyzing the author's gender stance, I will cite several quotations from Chinese male critics who comment favorably on Jia Pingwa's works.

Pingwa is a master of writing about women, love and even sex (Dong Zizhu 1998, 195).

Critics unanimously agree that Jia Pingwa, among all Chinese fictional writers, is the one who possesses the deepest thoughts in depicting women (Hu Jinsheng 1993, 59).

Male critics think highly of Jia's attitude toward and capability to understand women. Obviously Jia Pingwa is elated to be understood in this way. In *Capital*, the protagonist is labeled woman-friendly, and even a feminist through the perceptions of the female characters.
Liu Yue says: "I have read all the books he wrote. He is best at writing about women." Niu Yueqing replies: "Everyone says he is good at writing about women. Every woman [in his books] is like a bodhisattva. Last year, a female editor who came from Beijing asking about his writings said the same thing. She thought your teacher Zhuang was a feminist." (p. 139)

Every Chinese reader, however, realizes how much the protagonist is actually constructed with the author's experiences and ideology. After its publication, *Capital* received criticism from female writers and feminist critics. Compared to the supremacy of male voices, these voices from feminist criticism were weak, but Jia Pingwa was not happy with these criticisms and recently he defended himself:

*The Abandoned Capital* won the Femina Prize in France. This award was granted by French female writers. Nonetheless, those who criticized *Capital* most seriously were also female writers and feminists. They criticized me for disrespecting women. As a matter of fact, I am the one who respects women most. One cannot criticize me for disrespecting women just because I wrote about sex with women in the novel. ⁵²

From the above quotations, we can see Chinese male critics (and the author) and Chinese feminist critics debating in opposite terms their interpretations of gender representations in *Capital*. In my own reading, I have found that (1) the overall gender views presented in *Capital* are problematically patriarchal, (2) the author actively presents his gender views through his characterizations. He even turns his female characters into his mouthpieces. To support my argument, I summarize the evidence derived from the narrative as well as non-narrative materials as follows.
a. Femininity by man’s standards.

All female characters in the novel who have a relationship with Zhuang Zhidie are beautiful according to men’s imaginations and standards, regardless of whether they are young girls or married women. Defining feminine beauty from a male point of view is common in male fictional writings in Chinese literature.

In the long tradition of Chinese culture, it is always men who set up the standards of female beauty. They create their ideal female image according to their fantasies and expectations of femininity (Shen Yichin 1992, 51).

In the female characters of Capital we clearly see this culturally inherited pattern. The author several times brings these beautiful women into the story to catch the readers’ fancy. For example, a group of people had gathered at Zhuang’s house, including Tang Wan’er and Xia Jie (Meng Yunfang’s beautiful wife). When hostess Niu Yueqing saw Liu Yue, another beautiful girl, enter the house, she cheerfully exclaimed: “What day is today? Are we having a meeting of beauties?” (p. 91) In another scene the same four beautiful women are found together on the street, attracting public attention with their eye-catching beauty (p. 252). The reader naturally assumes these four beauties on the street are Zhuang Zhidie’s women (actually three of them are Zhuang’s women). Plain-looking or ugly women have no place at all in the novel. Capital creates a myth of feminine beauty. The textual focus of femininity is on sensual and physical attributes.

However, physical appearance is not sufficient. The ideal femininity in Capital cannot be constructed without women’s willingness to sacrifice themselves to please the

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52 Jia Pingwa, 2003, p. 2 on the online version.
man they want. In answering the question, “What are major characteristics of ideal femininity in Chinese culture?” several adjectives very familiar to all generations of Chinese people come immediately to mind: wenrou 温柔 (gentle and soft), xianhui 贤惠 (virtuous), shanliang 善良 (kind, good-hearted), shan-jie-ren-yi 善解人意 (perceptive and understanding). However, I have found that this easy-to-answer question has never been seriously contemplated. In other words, the way people decode these characteristics in real life is different from their face value. A married woman who is very gentle, soft, kind and understanding to her kin and network but not to her husband and her husband’s family would not be regarded as feminine. The key to deciphering the attributes of femininity is that they must be applied to men and the network around men. Furthermore, the perfect femininity in men’s minds should also be conditioned with selflessness (the correct term actually is “no Self” [meiyou ziwo 没有自我]). Therefore, all feminine attributes are encapsulated in two aspects: caring for men (serving men) and sacrificing for men. Women who can meet these two standards but are not gentle or soft enough can still be regarded as feminine. The ideal femininity in this sense is thoroughly illustrated in Capital. All women of the protagonist are willing to sacrifice unconditionally for the well being of the protagonist. The beautiful servant girl, Liu Yue, is married away by the protagonist to the handicapped son of the Mayor. Liu Yue, even though feeling miserable about her fate, is still driven by her vanity and greediness for material gain and by her “real love” for her master. She does not hesitate to accept the arranged marriage. The night before her wedding, she took a shower and then went into Zhuang’s office at home, asking Zhuang Laoshi 庄老师 (Teacher Zhuang) to love her one more time. “Could you make me the same as Tang Wan’er on this last night?” After they finished, Liu Yue told
him, “I am very happy, Teacher Zhuang. Tomorrow at this time, my body will be put in
the bed of that cripple, but my heart will come to this office.” (p. 470) Zhuang Zhidie
impregnates both Tang Wan’er and Ah Can. The two women deal with this issue
differently, but their motives are same. Tang Wan’er persistently waits for the day when
she will replace Zhuang’s wife and knows clearly that she cannot have his baby before
her dream comes true. She decides to put the burden on her own shoulders and undergo
an abortion without Zhuang’s knowledge. Only in this way can she protect Zhuang’s
reputation as a celebrity and prevent him from suffering a sense of guilt. Ah Can never
dreams of becoming Zhuang’s wife. She feels greatly honored if she can have an affair
with this celebrity and carry his baby. After she makes sure that she has become
pregnant, she vanishes from his life suddenly so that she will not damage his reputation.
Niu Yueqing, Zhuang’s wife, has dedicated her entire life to her husband, which I will
discuss below.

The significance of the feminine depictions in Capital goes beyond the point
where the author is expressing his appreciation and love for a certain kind of women.
First, the text shows how these women appreciate and love the male protagonist. Second,
the mother of Twin Fish in The Old Village of Gao remarks: “It is our Zilu who is
capable. He can conquer women.” This comment is perfectly applicable to Capital as
well. The existence of femininity in Capital is not for the sake of appreciating women,
but for the construction of masculine subjects. It purposely shows that Zhuang Zhidie
does not only “conquer women”, but, without lifting his fingers, conquers the cream of
women who are judged by men by their physical appearances and their caring attitude
toward men. All these beautiful female characters prostrate themselves before Zhuang
Zhidie as they would before the Buddha (or God). They long for loosening their pomegranate skirts (*shi-liu-qun* 石榴裙) for him and feel honored to have sex with him. Hence, female identity in *Capital* is defined only in terms of physical appearance and their attribute of caring for men and sacrificing for men, not in terms of their psychological, intellectual make-ups. What needs to be pointed out is that this female identity in male discourse is too far from present reality where, as the title of their book indicates (Meng & Dai, 1993), women have already “emerging [ed] into the foreground of history”, walked out of domesticity and gained identities more and more in terms of their own capability, desire and hope. The women in *Capital* are portrayed as living in a kingdom of male fantasies.

b. The objectification of women

The text several times uses “*youwu* 尤物” to describe Tang Wan’er (p. 26), the mistress of the protagonist. This phrase is not the invention of the author; it comes from a cliché for describing beautiful and docile women in classical Chinese literature. “*You*” means “good” and “*wu*” refers to “thing”. It can designate both physical objects and human beings. When it is used for describing human beings, *youwu* is exclusively used by men to describe young, beautiful and attractive women, meaning “a very lovely and cute thing”. This is a manifestation of patriarchal ideology in which desirable women are just things for men to enjoy, and to play with, like cute pets or toys. In *Capital*, Tang Wan’er is a *youwu*. The narrative utilizes various physical attributes to describe the appearance of Tang Wan’er: The first time the protagonist meets her, he is impressed by her slim, long neck, delicate and smooth like “jade” (p. 26); the second time he visits her,
she takes off her shoes to show her feet. Her toes are very tender, just like “tips of asparagus” (p. 53); the third time he sees her, she exposes her waistline which is slim and gracefully erected, and her long legs which are like “awls”; (p. 82) when Zhuang holds her and lies with her in bed, her body is as soft as “noodles” (p. 86); when Zhuang takes off her short skirt and peels off her stockings, he feels as if he was peeling off the tender spring “willows” or a “green onion” when he was a boy in his hometown (p. 86). While having sex with her, he either moves her back and forth like kneading a piece of “pastry” (p. 123), or entangles with her body like cuddling a “cat” or a “dog” (p. 435). From cover to cover in this novel, women are seen as things (wu), or the objects of sex, instead of human beings equal to man.

c. The possession and commodification of women in men’s business

Liu Yue is a “cute thing” too (p. 336), because in men’s eyes, she not only has entertainment value for men, but also value as a commodity. Zhao Jingwu, one of the admirers of Zhuang Zhidie, covets Liu Yue’s beauty. Instead of showing his feelings to Liu Yue directly, he comes to Zhuang Zhidie, Liu Yue’s master, requesting to marry Liu Yue, as if he were requesting a thing from its possessor. “Could you bestow (shang) Liu Yue on me?” is his request (p. 360). Shang in Chinese is a verb used for presenting, bestowing or awarding money/things as gifts or rewards from the older generation to the younger generation, or from authorities to subordinates to recognize good conduct and achievements. If this verb is connected to a person, definitely this person is seen as a possession of the master. Often this person is a young and “cute” female or a little child. In ancient China, emperors could shang his concubines to his meritorious male
subordinates as honorable rewards; a master of a wealthy family could *shang* his slave girls to his preferred male servants as wives. Zhuang Zhidie, a famous writer living at the end of the twentieth century, is no different from his feudal predecessors in this respect as he bestows Liu Yue on Zhao Jingwu. He hypocritically responds to Zhao’s request, “Liu Yue is independent. How could I decide her business?” (p. 360) Then Liu Yue is bestowed as a gift on Zhao, in exchange for Zhao’s loyalty to his master. Later she is traded as a commodity to the handicapped son of the Mayor, in exchange for the Mayor’s help in winning Zhuang’s lawsuit. Liu Yue’s experience of being given away twice by Zhuang reveals that the relationship between Zhuang and Liu is not only a master-housemaid and sexual partner relationship, but also an owner-chattel relationship. Liu Yue has become no more than a commodity in the urban sex market, and giving her away takes the form of trading “beautiful merchandise” (prostitutes). Sue Gronewold sharply criticizes such trading in “beautiful merchandise” as “a metaphorical cannibalism—women were forced to feed upon the young of their sex” (1982, 45).

Some critics view the relationship between the male protagonist and women the same way as the narrative presents it. In *Capital*, Zhuang Zhidie appears at the beginning of the story as a celebrity, and ends up as a complete failure. Kuang Xinnian points out: “Zhuang Zhidie, one of the four celebrities in Xijing City, is not set off by women to demonstrate his power and glory. On the contrary, his failure and destruction are illustrated through the fact that he is deprived of his women” (Kuang, Xinnian 1996, 17). Regarding Kuang’s commentary, the questions are: Who are “his women”? And who has deprived him of his women? Obviously they are Zhuang Zhidie’s women. Here I am not focusing on legality and morality, but on the gender relationship. If we connect two
phrases used by Kuang, “deprived” (boduo 剥夺) and “his women” (tade nüren 他的女人), his perspective would become clear. “His women” is a possessive term, denoting the relationship between a possessor (the protagonist) and possessed (these women). “Deprive” means to remove or withhold something from the enjoyment or possession of a person or persons. Accordingly, women are seen as personal possessions of the protagonist. They can be kept by the protagonist for his enjoyment or use, or he can be deprived of them by someone else. The question follows: who deprived the protagonist of his women? The purpose of trading away Liu Yue was to defeat the plaintiff, Jing Xueyin and eventually win the lawsuit for the protagonist. The plaintiff is a female. However, the trade does not take place between the female plaintiff and the male protagonist. In other words, it is not the plaintiff who requests or forces the protagonist to trade away “his women”. It is a trade transacted between two males—the protagonist and the Mayor—the former sells one of his women and the latter provides a crucial favor to the protagonist by selling his influence. In the case of Tang Wan’er, the protagonist is deprived of her by Tang Waner’s husband by force. His wife’s leaving does not fit the pattern of deprivation because she is unwilling to leave her husband. She has no choice because she is the loser. Therefore, the deprivation actually takes place in the world of men, either by men conspiring together, or men fighting each other. Women’s role in this men’s world is no more than to be possessions, which can be lost or gained by their owners, becoming the trophies of the victors. According to this patriarchal logic, one who obtains the trophy is a winner and one who is deprived of his possession is a loser. That is why Zhuang Zhidie is considered a failure in the men’s world.
d. A void of women's independence and subjectivity

None of Zhang's women is independent, and none of them has their own sense of self. They do not have their own desires and hope that can be realized without men as does Huang Xiangjiu in *Half of Man*. To be more precise, all their desires, and hopes are tied to their relationship to the protagonist. Their existence is meaningful only when their lives are connected and intertwined with that of the protagonist. Tang Wan'er, who is given the most space in this novel of any female character, was previously the wife of a crude worker in a small town. But this young married woman, a mother of a three-year old boy, was not content with her status and always dreamed of a better life, in which she could be free from work and still satisfy her greediness for money and material gain, and her vanity. She acts like a hunter looking for a potential prey. First, she elopes to the city with a young local man, Zhou Min, leaving her husband and her son at home without knowledge of where she has gone. Shortly afterwards she meets Zhuang Zhidie, one of four celebrities in the city, and she believes her dream will come true if she can capture this bigger prey. After she gets into Zhuang's life, her vanity is inflated. She imagines how people who knew her are jealous of her now: "If someday you know I am of Zhuang Zhidie, I will see how you flatter and toady to me. I will embarrass you blushing to the ears" (p. 117). She does not work at all, let alone pursue her own career. Her daily routine is making up her face, changing her clothes and doing different hair-dos to attract and keep her celebrity lover's attention. Sometimes she reads. However her favorite books are those written in classical Chinese teaching women to be perfectly feminine (according to men's criteria) and romantic stories of Chinese history between a gifted scholar and beautiful lady (or ladies).
Niu Yueqing, the wife of the protagonist and “a woman of abundant Chinese traditional ‘virtue’ as prescribed by Confucian decorum” (Wang Yiyan 1996, 166), regards her obligations as a wife as the most important matter. “She is good-looking but not attractive; kind-hearted but too self-righteous; caring but short of understanding; shrewd but lacking in imagination” (ibid, 166). She has her own job and career. However, compared to her desire to be a virtuous and dutiful wife, which is the only desire she expresses in the novel, her own career and her self-fulfillment are nothing. She tries only to play the role of a dutiful wife to her celebrity husband who is the center of her life. Being afraid of distracting her husband’s mind from his important writing, she aborted twice (p. 60, 89) which might have caused her barrenness. Having no child after many years of marriage, she gives her husband motherly love, care and service capabilities that a woman is supposed to be born with. For Niu Yueqing, passivity, obedience, dependence, and the desire to nurture dominate her personality. Her subjectivity has been lost completely in this marriage. Sometimes she complains and argues with her husband, which is considered by her husband to be the cause of disharmony and problems in their marriage. However, in practice, she always follows her husband’s will. Her unconditional enthusiasm for her husband’s enterprise is typical of the traditional Chinese public’s blind support for the ‘real work’ of their men in the outside world. Niu considers her husband’s life more precious than her own. She prefers to be known as Mrs. Zhuang instead of Niu Yueqing, her own maiden name, even though China stopped the custom of adopting the husband’s name for a married woman after 1949. She is elated by listening to the flattery of Tang Wan’er: “If people introduce you to others: ‘This is Mr. Zhuang.’, it is a respectful form of address and a reward to you” (p. 96). Zhuang’s long time impotence
does not cause any drastic complaint from Niu Yueqing. In this sense, Niu is a symbol of sexlessness. This is particularly true after she discovers the on-going adultery between her husband and Tang Wan'er, whom she treated as a good sister. Instead of facing reality and fighting this scandal, she tries her best to conceal the scandal from the public in order to preserve the fame of her celebrity husband. “I am all right with it. My only concern is about your teacher's [Zhuang's] reputation” is what she told Liu Yue for another case (p. 113). The result of her connivance is that her husband lives double lives with double faces; he is still a successful writer and a respected gentleman in public, but a promiscuous sexual pervert in his private life. He enjoys having sex with married women one after another and keeps sexual ties with his mistress and servant girl while he is still married.

Liu Yue is a country girl who seeks her fortune in the city and starts with babysitting for the protagonist’s neighbor. Like Tang Wan'er, she is mature enough to understand the key to her success is how to make use of her beauty and youth as resources to find a man who may help achieve her goal. After she discovers that Zhuang Zhidie is an influential figure in the city, she gives a hard time to the couple whose child she is babysitting, recommends herself to Zhuang Zhidie, and becomes his housekeeper.

The wife of Wang Ximian, one of the other four celebrities in Xijing City, is not even bestowed with her own name. Although she protests on one occasion for always being introduced as “Mrs. Wang” (p. 95), the author still does not mention her own name. Throughout the novel, the narrator calls her “the wife of Wang Ximian” (Wang Ximian Laopo 汪希眠老婆).
The only woman in the narrative given her own subjectivity is the plaintiff of Zhuang's lawsuit, Jing Xueyin. Although Jing is merely the head of a section in the Provincial Cultural Department, she has a very strong family background. Her father once was the supervisor of many high-ranking leaders in the Cultural Department (p. 16). Through the connection to her father, Jing is a symbol of power that men cast their covetous eyes on and struggle for. In this sense, Jing is genderless character, or a manly woman.

All four "cultural celebrities" in Xijing are men, and all cultural activities and major events depicted in the narrative—political, economic, commercial, cultural, religious, legal; etc.—are male-centered, except the inaugural ceremony for Huiming to become the head of Jingxu Nunnery. Huiming is a nun, but her existence is still to serve the subjectivity of men. She acts as a spokeswoman on behalf of men (I will give examples below). In her letter to the author, the editor of Capital, Tian Zhenying 田珍颐 recognizes: "After reading [Capital], my immediate impression is that men's groups (nanren de jituan 男人的集团) are powerful... In contrast, in terms of social power, women under your pen are much weaker. They possess very little advanced consciousness of modern women." (1993a, 196-197). The world in Capital is unmistakably a men's world. Women, though taking much of the narrative space, are proscribed from the narrative's subjectivity.

e. Inauthentic voices of women

One phenomenon worth noting is how women in this novel view their social status and the roles they are supposed to play in this male dominant culture that still
exists after almost a century of education about women's liberation. Are these women aware of their subordination or not? If they are aware of it, are they willing to accept it or are they struggling against it? Has their attitude changed from that of their predecessors centuries ago or do they remain the same? Answers to these questions are very apparent in the novel.

Unlike the women who lived centuries ago, women in this novel are quite aware of their subordination. However none of them makes any effort to change the reality of inequality between the sexes. Many women in China, who are aware of their subordination but feel powerless to fight, accept their fate passively and unwillingly. Women in the novel are quite different in this respect. They accept their subordination quite willingly and try to rationalize and even justify the inequality between men and women. On several occasions Jia Pingwa, different from Zhang Xianliang, lets his female protagonists voice their understanding of gender issues directly to authenticate his representation of women. However their statements need a careful examination. With the help of external materials, I have found a very interesting connection between what the author said and what female characters in Capital say. I have found that Jia Pingwa systematically uses his female characters to articulate his gender views. Jia Pingwa's viewpoint on gender, scattered in his essays and speeches, is repeated almost exclusively by the female characters in Capital, rather than his male protagonist and the male characters. The male protagonist Zhuang does not overtly express Jia's view on

53 An essay titled “Guanyu niiren 关于女人” (About Women) written in June, 1992, one year before Capital was published, is the major source through which we can track down Jia's concept of women and gender. Other essays, such as “Shuo Daban 说打扮”, (Talking about Making Up), “Shuo Fengcheng 说奉承”, (Talking about Flattery), “Shuo Meirong 说美容”, (Talking about Beautification), “Shou Huaqian 说花钱”, (Talking about Spending Money), and “Kan Ren 看人”, (Observing People), also reveal Jia
women and gender, but he acts them out in a social environment where these ideas and concepts are accepted by both men and women. I will put Jia's relevant statements in footnotes as references.

Niu Yueqing, an educated woman in the 1990s, holds notions that are no different from those of an illiterate housewife a hundred years ago. "Women depend on their men. They are fed by their husbands, and of course their lives revolve around their husbands" (p. 95). This is the notion that Niu Yueqing holds dear and repeats to other women. She also says, "It doesn't matter how fast women run forward, aren't the men she encounters still ahead?!!" (p. 136). 54 Tang Wan'er's gender view sounds more aesthetic, "The function of female existence is for her to contribute her beauty [to men]. This contribution can stimulate your [Zhuang's] inner power and develop your talent" (p. 125). 55 Tang Wan'er is not only willing to play the role of a man's toy, but also moralizes and philosophizes men's fickleness in affection. She says to Zhuang Zhidie after having sex with him, "You are a writer. You have to ceaselessly seek new resources to spark your inspiration. As a man who is doing creative work, xixin yanjiu 喜新厌旧 (a phrase usually describing men's tendency to love the new and loathe the old) is manifest of your creativity" (p. 126). 56 Huiming, a graduate from a university of Buddhism and now a chief-nun in Jingxu Buddhist nunnery, draws a conclusion which can be understood as a manifesto of morbid feminism in the midst of this powerful patriarchal setting, "This

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54 "Although a woman, as Zhang Ailing said, runs forward fast, she will encounter men ahead" (Jia 1998, 327).
55 "It is men's idea that women come to this world for the purpose of contributing their beauty" (Jia 1998, 290).
56 "If a woman wants to be a real woman, she must know men's nature: men change often (shaosan muzi 朝三暮四); and men love the new and loathe the old (xixin yanjiu )." (Jia 1998, 292).
world is still a male-dominant world!” (p. 493) She lectures Niu Yueqing, who is seeking a way out of her troublesome marriage:

In this male-dominant world, if women understand that this is a man’s world, and want to live happily, they must constantly adjust themselves, enrich themselves, and create themselves. Only by doing so, can women be in a position to take their own initiative and not be dismissed from the world.

Therefore, women should live for themselves, to live impassionately, and to live tastefully. This is the very woman who knows how to live a good life in this man’s world. (p. 494)

The following statement is almost removed from Jia Pingwa’s mouth directly to Huiming’s mouth without many changes.

Confucius says: ‘It is difficult to take care of women and inferior men.’ Indeed, it is more difficult to take care of men. If you keep him at a distance, he does not accept; if you get too close to him, he becomes vexed. Women should keep men at arm’s length, not too far and not too close. Women should be like a loach, letting a man grasp you in his hand and then slipping away. Women should be like a melon seed, letting a man eat you and making him drool, but never filling up his stomach completely. Thus, men will have a favorable impression of you and chase you as brave as a fly. (p. 494)

57 “It does not matter how people deny it or conceal it, today’s society is still a male-centered society” (Jia 1998, 327). “The slogan, ‘women’s liberation’, has been proclaimed for centuries, but this world is still a man’s world” (Jia 1998, 290).

58 “To understand that this world is still male-dominant, to understand the function of their beauty but not to throw their dignity into passivity, and to endure their beauty for ever, how should women live their lives?... A wife always keeps her husband to love her. She should not seek to possess men, neither to be possessed; she should also be possessed by men, and possess men. This conversion is equal and independent. [If a woman wants to] live for herself, to live individualistically, and to live impassionately, [she must] renew life frequently. This frequently renewed life happens to accommodate men’s changeable nature and keeps them feeling fresh and feeling attracted. Though the result of this renewed life seems to be identical with the objective she pursues by flattering men, there is a qualitative change. Unfortunately many women don’t know how to become real women in this men’s world.” (Jia 1998, 291-293).

59 “Confucius says: ‘It is difficult to take care of women and inferior men. If you let them get too close, they become insolent. If you keep them at a distance, they complain.’ It is more difficult to take care of men.... If women are like loaches always slipping away from fingers [of men], men will become as brave as flies.” (Jia 1998, 291-293).
To summarize the viewpoint of female characters on gender relations in the novel, first, women cannot go without men; second; *xixin yanjiu* (loving the new and loathing the old) is accepted as elite men’s creativity; and last, what women are supposed to do in this world is to adjust themselves in accordance with men’s needs to provide fresh tastes and fresh feelings to men. Only by doing so can they secure their lives in this male-dominant world.

However, from the evidence in the essays footnoted above, we can see clearly that these are not authentic voices of women. The female characters in this novel serve as mouthpieces to convey the ideas and notions of the author. The male critic Zhang Zhizhong observes:

In his characterization, females are characterized in accordance with the ideals of the author; they are strictly controlled and directed by him. The existence of women serves only for expressing and satisfying the ideals and needs of the male author and the male protagonist...Female characters become the mouthpieces of the author, rather than real human beings with complete personalities. (Zhang 1999, 57)

Zhang’s analysis hits the mark. What they (women) say, what they think, what they identify and what they philosophize are actually the ideas, desires, expectations and fantasies of patriarchal men, not those of women. The authentic voices of women cannot be heard in this narrative.

f. The narrative tone

It is no coincidence that Jia Pingwa’s gender view is repeated by female characters rather than male characters. These systematic occurrences can effectively
change the obviously patriarchal narrative tone. Jia Pingwa’s intention is clear—to articulate men’s understanding and desire through women’s mouths and will. As a result, what appears in *Capital* is that it is not men who are patriarchal, but it is women who prefer the ideological framework within which they practice their “preferred” (prescribed) roles, and they expect men to play their “right” roles. This kind of control over the narrative tone leads me draw a connection to Zhang Yimou’s *Raise the Red Lantern*. In this cinematographic narrative, women’s sufferings from the patriarchal system are central. Even though Zhang Yimou’s female characters are not articulate (because they are deprived of the right to express their sufferings verbally), the audiences can still feel their anger and feel their protest from their oppressed silence. On the contrary, in *Capital*, there is no hint of women’s sufferings caused by patriarchal oppression. From his female characterizations, we can feel Zhang Yimou’s indignation over the cannibalistic nature of patriarchy. In contrast, Jia Pingwa remains remarkably mute in criticizing patriarchal ideology. Instead, he fabricates inauthentic voices of women to rationalize and legitimize men’s dominance.

Obviously Jia Pingwa knows that his gender views, if projected on his male protagonist, might not be accepted by readers and critics of the novel. If he projects his views on female characters and lets women speak for him, he will not get himself in trouble. This is a subtle example conveying a message that the counter patriarchal discourse in China is growing, developing and becoming influential. Facing the reality of growing feminist consciousness, smart intellectual men like Liu Zaifu (as mentioned in Chapter Two) and Jia Pingwa must change their strategy to articulate their true position about gender relations in a round-about way. Corresponding to this systematic use of
female characters to articulate men’s voices, male characters are systematically used too to defend the male protagonist.

Although the self-criticism of the protagonist is evident throughout the narrative, most of the time, the author is reluctant to besmirch Zhuang Zhidie with too many negative attributes. Then he employs another technique to manipulate the narrative tone to win over readers’ sympathy and understanding—he uses his male characters and the narrator to justify Zhuang’s perversity.

Meng Yunfang, Zhuang’s friend, claims at the beginning of the story: “Among four celebrities, the one I respect most is Zhuang Zhidie...He is par excellence in Xijing City.” (p. 14) Li Hongwen, Zhuang’s previous colleague, comments: “Zhuang Zhidie is a genius in writing, but he is a fool in dealing with women” (p. 106), indicating that Zhuang was trapped by the plaintiff Jing Xueyin. Zhou Min says: “Both of you [Zhuang and Gong Jingyuan] are celebrities. You are the ones everybody respects. But Gong Jingyuan is quite different.” (p. 427). Knowing that Niu Yueqing wants to divorce, Meng Yunfang persuades her: “You are right. Others womanize just for the fun on that occasion. Zhuang Zhidie indeed acts on his true feelings. He is really an honest person.” (p. 490)

The narrative tone overall gives great sympathy to the protagonist and leads readers to believe that the ills of society should be held responsible for his corruption, including his perversity and his view of how to treat women.

In contrast, the narrative tone shows little sympathy to the plaintiff, Jing Xueyin, as it plays a role in distorting the facts of the case. In fact, Jing Xueyin is the number one victim of the fabricated story by Zhou Min, but the narrative tone is not empathetic to this victim at all. From cover to cover, the extremely negative tone depicts her as a very
formidable and merciless woman who destroys men. As a result, Jing Xueyin reminds readers that she is a woman in the public sense of becoming “a source of disaster” (huoshui), the ever-lasting image of women discussed in Chapter Two. The author does not let the protagonist accuse her directly of being a source of disaster, but the negative narrative tone (basically from the words of other male characters) and the development of the plot automatically leads the reader to this conclusion. For example, the haplessness of the protagonist starts with the lawsuit and his collapse comes with the failure of the lawsuit. Jing is the one who takes him to court and who victimizes a group of men and destroys their lives. Zhuang Zhidie was in a coma heading south after he lost the lawsuit; Zhou Min was dismissed from his job and forced to leave the city too. Zhong Weixian, the editor-in-chief, collapsed during the court hearing and died in the hospital aftermath.

This narrative distortion of transforming a victim into a victimizer occurs in a context where Jing is not a typical docile woman as prescribed by Confucian doctrine. Instead of sacrificing her well-being for men as do all other women depicted in this novel, she fights men adamantly and persistently for her own legal rights. For this reason, she is seen by most men in the novel as challenging their power, offensive and a dirty player. The underlying message that cannot be articulated is that if this kind of women cannot be punished, then who should be punished? In addition, Jing represents an upper-class and modern woman, whom Zhuang Zhidie desires but has no courage to deal with. Thus she becomes a woman “within Zhuang’s sight but beyond his reach” (Jiang Fan 1993, 270). This character reveals the complicated feelings of men like Zhuang Zhidie. On the one hand, they hanker for women who are different from traditional female images to gratify their various tastes for women. As Jia Pingwa confesses: “While they [men] enjoy eating
something in their bowls, their greedy eyes are looking at something else in a pot. Men who do not go off on wild flights of fancy are not men...Love is something inaccessible, something within your sight but beyond your reach.” (1998, 292). On the other hand, with Confucian patriarchy as the only ideological “software” installed in their brains, men dare not to deal with women like Jing Xueyin, who are modern, well-educated, urbanized “white-collar” ladies. Facing this kind of women, their sense of self-abashedness will be immediately at work (Jiang Fan 1993, 270).

At the end of the narrative, the protagonist accomplishes his male vengeance against Jing Xueyin in his delusion by wedding her, having sex with her and then announcing the termination of their marriage in front of all guests who attend his wedding. When this televised announcement shocks his guests and audiences, they ask him: “Haven’t you just got married?” He laughs loudly and responds: “I have finished all I am supposed to do.” (p.526). In this episode, sex, instead of love making, serves as a weapon to humiliate and retaliate against women whom men do not like.

At the beginning of the novel, the narrator states: “Even if women’s prestige and power exceeds that of their husbands, there is only one ‘Women’s Day’ per year; although an eighty-year-old man has become a groom, he is still an old man.” (p. 10) The implication of this statement is clear: no matter what is going on, women are always women. They cannot change their sex; therefore they cannot change their social status as lower beings than men. This is a more sophisticated modern version of a statement by Chen Zouqian, the master in Raise the Red Lantern, “Women can never prevail over men!”, and that of Dong Zhongshu of the Han Dynasty: “Though a husband is low (in social status), he is still yang; though a wife is in the noble class, she is still yin.”, as
quoted in Chapter Two. This statement is the fictionalized version of the author’s true position. It reveals that his understanding of gender roles and the issue of yinsheng yangshuai is still within the framework of the Confucianized yin-yang dichotomy. Jia Pingwa once responds directly to the commonly accepted phrase, yinsheng yangshuai (yin is wax and yang is wane). He denies that this phrase reflects present changing reality in gender relations and thus denies that masculinity is problematic. That is the reason why he emphasizes “This world is still a man’s world” over and over. He states:

Men are men and women are women. Men and women develop on two poles. This is the true definition of men and women. This is the original intention of God as He created humanity. If men become non-men and women become non-women, yin and yang will seemingly combine into one, but it will cause the imbalance to this yin-yang principled world (1998, 293).

In summarizing women roles in Capital, Liu, Honglin points out: women in Capital are servants who provide a cozy life (for men); they are sexual tools with which men can soothe their sexual anxiety; they are pebbles in the pavement of men’s success; they are channels through which men can complete their selfhood; they are sources from which men can obtain creative inspirations; and they are sources of disaster for men as well. Women are all of above, but not human beings. Women’s humanness has been drowned deeply by the objectification (imposed on them). The depiction of women, as “low quality, simple-minded, narrow-minded, and having insatiable appetite for sex” reflects the author’s consistent view of women as secondary beings (Liu 1993, 154). Zhang Zhizhong also argues, without males, the females would have no reason to exist in
the novel, let alone to obtain their independence and sense of self. What they demonstrate to readers is the writer’s ideals about women’s nature being suitable for the role of wife, concubine or mistress. Women’s nature also is to be a mother for protecting and consoling the male protagonist at the moment when he is very weak and down and out. (Zhang 1999, 57).

From the above comments by Chinese feminist critics, one should not conclude that Chinese readers always equate the author to his narrator/characters, or always interpret ideas, notions and ideology of the characters and narrative as those of the author. I must clarify several points about Capital. First, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, there is no fictional work in the post-Mao era that has caused as much nationwide sensation as has Capital. Second, Jia Pingwa had already become a famous writer before the publication of Capital, and he was always in the spotlight of his critics and readers. Third, for the above two reasons, there was an explosion of publishing everything related to Capital and Jia Pingwa, including his essays, speeches, details of his experience and his life. All these publications provided critics and readers with fictional and non-fictional materials to research Capital and its author. As a result, they quickly discovered that Capital is a rare novel where the author and the protagonist almost merge into one person, or one “ego” in Foucault’s terms (1977, 130), with the same ideas, experience and feelings. This narrative phenomenon, rather than Chinese readers, challenges Foucault’s claim—“the disappearance or death of the author” (1977, 117). Foucault believes “the writing of our day has freed itself from the necessity of ‘expression’; it only refers to itself.” Therefore, “the task of criticism is not to reestablish the ties between an author and his work”, because writing “now attains the right to kill, to become the murderer of its author” (1977, 116-117). I have found that Foucault’s theory on the death of the author in general is not applicable to Chinese literature and in particular is not applicable to Capital (and Half of Man). (Coincidentally I chose two [semi]autobiographical novels for examination). Chinese writers still use literature as a vehicle to “express” either their feelings or their ideologies, or both. China has a long canonical tradition of literature as an expression of one’s feelings and thoughts, known as “shi-yan-zhi 诗言志” (poetry tells of intent), “shi-yan-qing 诗言情” (poetry conveys feelings/emotions), and “wen-yi-zai-dao 文以载道” (literature is the vehicle of the Way). In addition, as mentioned in Chapter Three, Chinese intellectuals can never free themselves from politics. Writers always form an important part of the intellectual class and always use literature for political/ideological “expression”. Both Jia Pingwa and Zhang Xianling utilize their novels (Capital and Half of Man) as such a vehicle and turn their writings into (semi)-autobiographies where the author’s ego merges with the ego of his protagonist. Several critics (such as Wang Furen 1998, 21) realize that Jia Pingwa leaves too little distance between his protagonist and himself. Some criticize Jia Pingwa for mixing up the delimitation of the author’s experience and that of his protagonists (Jiang Fan 1993, 270; Zhang Zhizhong 1999, 13). Therefore, we cannot conclude overall that readers in China inevitably merge the identities of the author and the protagonist/character/narrator. Chinese readers never equate Qian Zhongshu to his protagonist Fang Hongjian in Weicheng (The Besieged Fortress), because the ego of the author (mostly merged with the narrator) is not only clearly different from the ego of his protagonist, but also constantly and mercilessly ridicules and mocks the protagonist. Chinese readers do not mix up Lu Xun with his protagonists Kong Yiji and Ah Q, because in these two short stories,
5.3.2 In man’s journey, where is woman positioned?

Many critics share the view that sex and woman become the bottom line of defense that the protagonist reaches as he retreats from the frontline of the battlefield in the world of men. Xiao Xialin states:

Encircled and suppressed by social changes, Zhuang Zhidie has nowhere to go. Women become his last spiritual sustenance. Indulging himself in carnal pursuits to forget the external environment, he makes these the last dialogues of his life. A great writer has lost all, except sex and women, which become the last existential form of his life (1993b, 4).

Addressing feminist criticism of Capital, another male critic defends Jia Pingwa:

The feminist reading of Capital criticizes patriarchal culture and its undisguised play with female sex. They [the feminists] have not seen Zhuang Zhidie’s tension and anxiety caused by his social failure and his fading power. He ... gets strong feelings of failure off his chest by describing his failure in sex. The last line of defense for his power is sex, which lays bare the celebrity Zhuang’s fatal setbacks and thorough defeat (Kuang Xinnian 1996, 17).

Some questions are interesting to ask: why have women and sex become the bottom line of defense and the last form of existence for the protagonist, and why are women positioned at the bottom line? What does life look like beyond this bottom line? What would happen to the protagonist if the last line of defense were broken? What roles do women play at the last line of defense in men’s struggle to regain power?

The protagonist of Capital is an introverted melancholic male who suffers psychological and political downturns at the peak of his career (Wang Yiyan 1996, 173). In short, the journey of Zhuang Zhidie goes in the opposite direction from that of Zhang

as Foucault states: “It is also possible to locate a third ego” (1977, 130). These three egos are: the ego of the Lu Xun, the ego of the narrator in each story and the ego of the protagonists, Kong Yiji and Ah Q.
Yonglin in *Half of Man*. As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the two meet at this point—women and sex, Zhuang Zhidie plunges down to this point, the last line of defense, from the peak of his glorious career, while Zhang Yonglin climbs up to this point, the entrance to a larger society, from the bottom of society. Overtly, women and sex serve as a demarcation line dividing two fundamentally different worlds. The world above is spiritual, pure, noble, decent, cultured and man-dominated while the world below is flesh-thirsty, impure, mean, indecent, dysfunctional, incapable, wild and mixed with marginalized people and social scum. Zhang Yonglin, a well-cultured poet, feels extremely uncomfortable and smothered in this decadent world and tries his best to climb up and obtain a passport to enter the spiritual world where he believes he belongs. In contrast, *Capital* recounts the history of the protagonist’s corruption. In Kuang Xinnian’s view, it is the journey “from celebrity status and respect in Xijing City to that of being abandoned” (from *chong’er*宠儿 [a favorite son] to *qi’er*弃儿 [an abandoned son]) (1996, 18). When Zhuang Zhidie failed at the last line of defense with women and sex, he was sent to another world where he behaves in front of a butcher’s shop like a man with mental illness, was coldly despised by the Mayor and regarded by city dwellers as scum (p. 525).

Women may seem to straddle to the two worlds in a balanced position, but in fact, they are treated more as representatives of the flesh-thirsty and dysfunctional world. The demarcation line between two worlds expands into a demarcation zone or a battlefield when men arrive, no matter from which direction. Superficially, love, passion, and sexual desires are the dominant feelings in the man-woman interactions. However the undercurrent of these interactions indicates that this is a battlefield between the sexes. To
be more precise, men set women up as their target not for loving, but for conquering. Conquering women and controlling sex means conquering the weakest side of their egos. However, the desire to conquer women and control sex leads to a paradoxical view of masculinity. The melancholic male protagonist resorts to temporary solutions, numbing himself with excessive sex to relieve social pressures (Wang Yiyan 1996, 173). Like all other male images of scholars in both classical and modern Chinese literature who have excessive sex and still retain their conscience, the more sex he has, the more Zhuang Zhidie feels that he is guilty of corruption. Similar to a theme depicted in Zhang Xianliang’s novel Getting Used to Dying, whenever Zhuang Zhidie feels strongly that he is becoming corrupted is the moment that he is having sex with a woman. The protagonist’s sexuality reveals his paradoxical view of masculinity. His masculinity has been confirmed in his sexual intercourse with women, but his promiscuity is the mark of his corruption and social failure. In this light, Zhang Yonglin is much smarter than Zhuang Zhidie. Zhang Yonglin won the battle of the sexes, gaining a solid affirmation of his masculine potency, then immediately gets rid of his wife before he is pulled down back to the water (yin) of another debased world.

Zhuang Zhidie increasingly feels that he is powerless after he has reached the peak of his career. “Others tell us that men are in power, the oppressors. But if men are in power as a group, why do individual men often feel so powerless?” ask Michael S. Kimmel & Michael A. Messner (2001, 1). In Capital, there is no doubt that men’s groups are powerful. Zhuang feels himself powerless in his fight with a society that is still dominated by men. In other words, he is powerless not because of powerful women, but

61 In Getting Used to Dying, the moment of the protagonist having sex with a woman is the moment when he feels he is being executed by a firing squad.
because of other more powerful men who override his previous power. He has to withdraw from the frontline of the battle to the last line of defense—women, with the hope of reconfirming his masculine power in the domain of this weak social group. “But a strength built only on the weakness of others hardly feels like strength at all” (ibid, 1). This is why Zhuang’s pleasure in conquering women soon plunges into a deeper pit of panic and sadness. When he indulges himself in fantasies, he feels he is the king of this lovely female domain; when his mind comes back to the reality of the battlefield of men, he feels like a failure and a coward.

In the journey of the recovering masculine power for its protagonist, the narrative positions women between two fundamentally different worlds. It mutes women’s subjective expression by excluding them from the world of the decent, functional, and spiritual world of men.

If the story of *Capital* took place a century ago in China, the reader would have no difficulty understanding women’s social position in the novel. The fact is that China has been experiencing a process of women’s liberation beginning with the May Fourth Movement early in the twentieth century. As mentioned above, women have already risen up from the horizon, crossed the boundaries of domesticity and merged themselves into the world previously reserved for men. The process of the merging, appearing as a power exercise, is still going on. More and more impressive achievements made by women in the world previously preserved for men continuously come to light. If one does not take this reality into account, any interpretations, discussions or descriptions of gender roles and gender relations in China would be out of context and thus unreliable.
5.3.3 A Men’s fantasy—about the chivalrous woman “Xianü” Ah Can

Many critics label Ah Can as a xianü 侠女 (a chivalrous woman”). “Xia” in Chinese is the initial syllable of the compound words xiake 侠客, and xiayi 狭义. Xiake is a person adept in martial arts and given to chivalrous conduct, while xiayi refers to having a strong sense of justice and readiness to help the weak.

Dong Zizhu 董子竹 comments: “Superficially, this character [Ah Can] seems to be vulgar. She is in fact very chivalrous.” (1993, 125)

Only one feminist commentator labels Ah Can and Tang Wan’er as yinfu 淫妇 (femme fatale, licentious women) (Liu Honglin 1993, 148). Many other critics unanimously praise Ah Can because she is a “xianü” (chivalrous women).

Dong Zizhu thinks highly of Ah Can. He remarks:

Ah Can is a Goddess of the New Culture. She is created based on images of chivalrous women in the traditional culture who dared to do everything and accept responsibility for it...She has undergone all kinds of hardships before her sublime realization, that is she is a red lotus created out of the mud...She comes and goes leaving no trace because she belongs to the ideal future. (1998, 195)

Ah Can participates in the most important episode in Zhuang’s psychological development. He has discovered from Ah Can that sexual life can truly sublimate human nature. At this moment, a human becomes “God”, a “chivalrous being.” (1998, 201)

As I mentioned above, there is a fundamental paradox in the protagonist’s position—without women he has no way to affirm his masculinity; with women he is afraid of being corrupted. Again, the narrative has transferred pressure caused by this paradox onto women’s shoulders. Ah Can is the solution. Ah Can perfectly fixes the
problem. She comes onto the scene like a blazing fire and vanishes like a gust of wind (lai-ru-huo, qu-ru-feng 来如火, 去如风) leaving no trace of sex that would damage the reputation of the celebrity protagonist and become his persistent psychological burden. What man could refuse such loving, romantic and sacrificing women? If all women behaved like Ah Can in their sexual relationships, men's anxiety and paradoxes would not exist. The character of Ah Can is a big boost to the egos of elite male intellectuals. While female readers might see Ah Can as a licentious and shallow-minded woman who is driven by her sensual desire and her vanity, male critics happily embrace Ah Can as the ideal future (for men). They regard her as a goddess because she is fundamentally different from Zhuang Zhidie's other women. Niu Yueqing is a virtuous and faithful wife, but she does not understand her husband in terms of male standards; Liu Yue is a beautiful, clever and sacrificing girl, but she is too worldly; Tang Wan'er is charming, loving, and sacrificing, but her understanding of men is shallow and her demand for legal status as a wife puts pressure on the protagonist. Ah Can stands out because she holds no worldly expectations from the protagonist, no requests for money, no demands for a legal status in marriage. Most importantly, she is a psychologist who understands men deeply and subtly. She knows exactly what men want, what men fear, and what men worry about. If we do not decipher the significance of the characterization of Ah Can in this way, we would fail to understand why Ah Can could offer sex to the protagonist on their first encounter after only a short exchange of words, why a stark-naked Ah Can dances in front of the protagonist during their second meeting without any sense of shame, and why she firmly rejects the request of the protagonist to meet again and then disappears from his life suddenly. Liu Honglin criticizes the characterization of Ah Can:
...the first time they meet, Zhuang Zhidie comes to her home to look for her sister. [Ah Can] soon throws her body into his arms and shows her blazing love to him. They become emotionally attached to each other. There is not even time for them to seduce each other and ‘nurture’ their passions. Even in the case of Pan Jinlian and Ximen Qing [in The Golden Lotus], there is a go-between, Old Woman Wang who subtly sounds out [Ximen Qing’s intention toward Pan Jinlian] (1993, 148).

Liu finds a problem in the lack of realism in the plot. However, the fact is that Jia Pingwa is a master at weaving a plot. Hasty development of the plot in Capital, particularly in a plot that involves the subtle psychology of characters in their man-woman relationships, is not consistent with the works of a master novelist. The only explanation for this discrepancy is that the author is showing readers that Ah Can knows the male psychology very well. To be more precise, the author hopes women possess the capability of understanding men not only overall, but also at every particular moment and in any particular situation. Ah Can knows that if she proposes sex at a certain moment, not only would she not be rejected, but also that she would be doing exactly what this man wants. She had intercourse twice with Zhuang when they were so overwhelmed with romance, passion and sensual pleasure that they forgot the existence of the oppressive outside world. Dong Zizhu comments appreciatively:

The second time of having sex is not at all about sexual intercourse, but rather it is about ‘spiritual intercourse’ [shenjiao 神交]. Ah Can does not act on a crazy impulse, but is composed in dying a heroine’s death [congrong jiuyi 从容就义] (1998, 200).

What Dong refers to with “dying a heroine’s death” is that Ah Can makes up her mind to leave the protagonist for good after the second time of having sex with him. Ah
Can knows clearly that she must leave him for three reasons: (1) protecting his reputation; (2) unloading his psychological burden; and (3) leaving him an ever-lasting romantic memory. If Ah Can does not leave Zhuang Zhidie, she knows that his mind will never be at ease about his public image because he would not be in control of keeping his secret. In addition, he would constantly feel guilty about this affair, and the beautiful, romantic "love" would fade away as time goes by. She fossilizes this short but memorable romance where their flesh and souls are perfectly and "sublimely" unified, momentarily freezing a beautiful image and transforming it into an ever-lasting beauty in the heart of the protagonist. In order to achieve this effect, Ah Can must leave the protagonist.

The question is how Ah Can, a less educated housewife with a wooden-headed and dull-witted husband living in a slum area and having little personal contact with elite male intellectuals, could understand men’s psychology so deeply, subtly and accurately. The only explanation is that Ah Can is a fabricated product of male fantasies. There is no realistic foundation for such a character. If Ah Can represents the ideal future, what would the future look like? We can safely say that this future is ideal (for patriarchal men) because it not only carries on the legacy of patriarchy which guarantees male privilege, but also adds a new icon into the “feudalistic” gallery of ideal women for men to enjoy. Xianü (a chivalrous woman) Ah Can reflects the desires, fantasies and taste of modern patriarchal men.

Before Ah Can disappears from the scene, she destroys her appearance in the presence of the protagonist using an ink fountain pen to randomly and permanently tattoo her face. This self-destruction is not the invention of Jia Pingwa. What Ah Can does echoes the stories of chaste women in old China. One of the stories tells about a chaste
wife who cut off her arm without hesitation just because her hand was accidentally touched by a man who was not her husband. By destroying her beautiful face, the modern chivalrous woman, the Goddess of the New Future, Ah Can conveys a message to the protagonist that is no different from that of the chaste woman in old China who cut off her hand: Now that I have become your woman, I will be loyal to you forever. By destroying my beautiful face, I guarantee that no other man will ever touch your woman. Jia Pingwa’s obsession with chaste women’s behavior is evident in another of his short stories, Yi dui En’ai Fuqi 一对恩爱夫妻 (The Passionate Couple). The beautiful wife of an ugly peasant upsets her husband by constantly attracting the attention of village men. The Party Secretary of the commune raped her three times after he had sent the husband to join a long-term reservoir construction ten miles away. To assuage his worries, the husband destroys her face and makes her into a terribly ugly woman by setting a fire and deliberately burning her. To show her faithfulness, as she is regaining her consciousness from a coma, she says to her husband: “This is good. This is good!”

Indeed as expected, the Party Secretary never came again. Their life becomes peaceful. He belongs to her forever and she also belongs to him forever. (1992, 154).

From both Capital and The Passionate Couple, we can see clearly that Jia Pingwa habitually seeks solutions to men’s problems from women. He heavily relies on women to relieve men’s worries and anxieties by transferring the burden onto women’s shoulders.

To sum up, the ideal kind of women in the “New Culture” for patriarchal men should be like Ah Can. She would not jeopardize men; she would not have any desires for personal gain from her relationships with elite men; whenever necessary, she would
be completely willing to sacrifice her well being for the well being of men; and most importantly she is able to understand men deeply and thoroughly.

5.4 Summary

Jia Pingwa caused a nationwide sensation by publishing his pornography-like Capital. His bold treatment of sex disappointed many critics who otherwise thought highly of his literary creativity (Wang Furen 1998, 205). He enraged readers who wanted to put the “irresponsible” writer into niupeng (the cow stable) (Xia Lin 1993, 280). It may be argued that the explicit description of sex is unnecessary and is probably commercially motivated, or the pornographic depiction of sexual behavior enormously damages the decorum of the fine art of literature. However, I agree with the critics who point out that the excess of sex in this novel is not isolated from its social and cultural contexts. In other words, it is needed for the characterization of the protagonist and the thorough exposure of a corrupt society. “In this sense, the novel is not about sex, but about sexuality. Sex here is just a metaphor and its cultural meaning needs to be deciphered.” (Hu Xing 1998, 40). Furthermore, sex was still partially a mysterious subject then but now is no longer a forbidden zone in literature. Jia Pingwa, following Zhang Xianliang, Wang Anyi and other fictional writers, has continued to explore its meanings and tried to make a breakthrough in its literary manifestation. Jia Pingwa deserves credit as one of the pioneers exploring this field, regardless of whether his efforts have ended in success or failure. I do not wish to discredit the author's

62 During the Cultural Revolution, many Chinese intellectuals were confined in cow stables to rectify their bourgeois ideology. Thus, niupeng symbolically means punishment.
praiseworthy experiment. In addition, *Capital* is a perfect representative product of the third period of intellectuals’ journey in the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s as discussed in Chapter Two, which vividly depicts the re-emasculated intellectuals. Jia Pingwa is a genius in using Xijing City (Xi’an or Chang’an as an abandoned capital of twelve dynasties), people in Xijing, who used to be first class citizens, and intellectuals enjoyed unchallenged superiority. They serve as metaphors to symbolize the political, cultural and psychological state of Chinese intellectuals during this period. Jia Pingwa’s use of “consciousness of the abandoned capital” as a signifier of intellectuals’ state of mind is really succinct, creative, original and insightful.

However, the problem with this novel is its gender view. Jia Pingwa’s position on gender roles defines masculinity and femininity according to Confucian patriarchal ideology, which thrusts gender relations into a class hierarchy. The author’s attachment to Daoism is superficial. The protagonist in Capital seeks refuge in Daoism because Daoism can serve him as an umbrella for his failure and simultaneously as a consolation or an anesthetic for the suffering and pain of his failure. His ideal masculinity and femininity in the *caizi jiaren* framework and his preference for polygynous family structure confirm that he is essentially Confucianist. His protagonist’s treatment of women reflects the attitude and manner of a noble man who condescends to inferior beings. On the surface he shows the protagonist’s easy-going disposition and love for women, but underneath the protagonist is acting out his power and superiority over women. Nancy Hartsock comments, “Domination, viewed from above, is more likely to appear as equality” (1990, 168). Liu Honglin also points out: “The author evidently holds a paradoxical attitude toward them [women]—appreciating them and having contempt for
them” (1993, 154). In regaining his lost power in the world of men and rediscovering his male elite identity, the protagonist tries to transcend the reality which has caused him stresses and anxiety. Nonetheless, the path he follows on his journey of rediscovery is libidinous and sexist. He suffers persistently from his paradoxical-self—narcissism and self-hatred. He allows his libido drive to go out of control to purge all of his stresses and anxieties. As a result he transfers his anxieties and stresses onto the shoulders of women and turns them into the bearers of his burden. While he believes that he cares for women, the narrative reveals that he objectifies and commodifies women. While he intends to show that he appreciates women, the narrative indicates that women are sources of disaster rather than saviors. While he believes that he loves women, the narrative shows he is narcissistic and self-loving.
Chapter VI Conclusion

In this study, I have presented analyses and interpretations of *Half of Man*, *Red Sorghum* and *The Abandoned Capital* by a multi-angled examination. My horizontal examination shows that the three works bear unmistakable marks of the post-Mao history reflecting the spirit of intellectuals in three successive time periods. *Half of Man* appeared toward the end of the first post-Mao period and functions as a transitional work, continuing to express the core values of Scar Literature in the first period and to herald the expression of free thought in the second period. *Red Sorghum* was produced at the peak of the second period by an author whose high spirit and unique imagination were powerful and unconstrained as expressed in the Chinese idiom “tianma xingkong” (a heavenly steed soaring across the skies). This work is a clear mark of the golden time of thought emancipation that led to “a hundred flowers blossoming, and a hundred schools of thought contending” (*baihua qifang, baijia zhengmin* 百花齐放，百家争鸣) in Chinese intellectual discourse. *Capital* reflects the irresistible tide of commercialism, a perfect signifier of the third period.

From the perspective of manhood, *Half of Man* depicts emasculated intellectuals in a struggle to restore their masculinity and return back to the center of the social stage. *Red Sorghum* represents a fully constructed masculinity that is manifest on the center of the social stage. *Capital* shows how intellectuals are emasculated again as they are pushed away from the center to the periphery. The diagram below links these three works in a symbolic journey experienced by Chinese intellectuals.
The beginning of the journey in *Half of Man* is located below the horizontal line in the world of women. Zhang Yonglin conquers his woman in the water and rises up from the surface of the sea, breaking through the horizontal line, overcoming this barrier and climbing higher in the world of men. Yu Zhan’ao in *Red Sorghum* takes over the second stage of the journey setting a high standard as a powerful man. Zhuang Zhidie in *Capital* is an emasculated celebrity positioned tenuously at the crest of his power. He takes over the third stage of the journey and struggles doggedly to climb upward. His steps, however, fall backward on a downhill curve breaking through the horizontal boundary marking the world of women and descending to the same level where Zhang Yonglin began the journey in *Half of Man*. In this symbolic journey of Chinese male intellectuals, ironically, it is the peasant Yu Zhan’ao, a big man of *Shandong dahan*, not elite intellectuals, who occupies the center of the stage and reaches the peak of Chinese masculinity. Yu Zhan’ao becomes the agent, or image of his creator, Mo Yan, who himself was the son of peasants and later a member of the Chinese intellectual elite. As such, Yu Zhan’ao reflects a high spirit, free imagination and bold subversion of orthodox discourse that is the hallmark of the masculine power of Chinese intellectuals during the second period. Mo Yan seems to imply that the egotistical but fragile Chinese elite
cannot construct their masculinity within their own discourse. They need to move away from the self-isolating discourse of elitism to seek inspiration from external resources.

In the concerns arising from popular culture, the mutual influence and interactions between intellectual high discourse and popular discourse are evident. First, *Half of Man* is the first direct literary response in China to the call for "real men" emanating from popular culture in the mid-1980s. Zhang Xianliang’s answer is unequivocal: there are no "real men" in China because all "real men" have been emasculated by vicious politics. The subtext of the narrative also hints that if there were "real men", women would suffocate them. However, his definition of men refers only to the intellectual elite. *Red Sorghum* is another response to the popular culture call for "real men". Mo Yan’s answer is unequivocal also: there are "real men" in China, but not at present and not among feminized urban intellectuals. He believes that the whole Chinese race, and especially men, will be feminized and thus degraded by civilization.

Second, both *Half of Man* and *Capital* reflect either the ever-lasting image of women and/or polygyny prevailing in popular culture. In *Half of Man*, the depiction of Huang Xiangjiu in water reflects the folk saying, "women are sources of chaos and disaster", which remains prominent in popular discourse. In *Capital*, the narrative tone about Jing Xueyin, the plaintiff in the lawsuit, also leads readers to the same conclusion about women. As social practice and popular culture called women to go home in order to support men's employment, the three male writers repositioned women back to their old place to give support to restoring men’s lost masculinity. Polygyny ("bao er nai"), "the repeated pattern of one man having two or more women" and keeping a mistress re-emerged in popular discourse and social practice. These "feudal" customs appear in Jia
Pingwa’s *Capital* without being subject to criticism. Thus Jia merges high culture and popular culture.

My vertical examination of the three works and the discourse of male intellectuals summarized in Chapter Two has revealed a stable structure to their ideals of masculinity consisting of four constant elements: power is the key attribute in defining Chinese masculinity; hierarchy is the structure within which ideal masculinity is constructed and consolidated; the state, (including politics, nationalism and patriotism), male intellectuals and women are three indispensable, intertwined dimensions within which male intellectuals maneuver to bargain for their masculinity; and the philosophical/ideological past is the inexhaustible source of inspiration and justification for restoring lost masculinity. The key element that links these four constancies is the sense of position which has been an obsession for Chinese intellectuals for centuries.

(1) Power is the key to defining Chinese masculinity

In contrast to masculinity in the West, which lies in individual attributes, such as physical appearance, sexiness, straightforwardness, bravery, aggressiveness, etc., the masculinity of Chinese intellectual elite is connected with power in the mainstream of society, rather than their individual masculine attributes. Power over women is the first but very basic and the lowest standard of masculinity, and most Chinese male intellectuals seeking power would not stop at this point. Zhong Yonglin in *Half of Man* was emasculated by politics because he was deprived of his privilege as a member of the social elite and his influence as a spokesman for the nation. This psychological castration further causes his physical impotence. After he recovers his potency and becomes a “real man”, he takes back power privileged by Confucian patriarchy from his wife and re-
establishes his superior position in this man-woman relationship. He does not stop. He proceeds to the "larger society" to regain his lost power and influence. Without repositioning himself in what he regards is the right place, and hence having this power back, he could not see himself as a "complete man" spiritually and philosophically. Zhuang Zhidie in Capital feels emasculated not because of his inability to bring sexual pleasure to his wife, but because his power in mainstream society has been usurped by others while his image in the limelight is dim and marginalized. In Red Sorghum, despite conquering strong-willed women like My Grandmother and sexy women like My Second Grandmother, Yu Zhan’ao’s masculinity could not be fully developed without his heroic influence on society and his power as a commander in fighting the Japanese and protecting the country.

However, the struggle for power in the mainstream of society must start with the first step — their absolute power over women. What distinguishes these three contemporary works from traditional paradigms of masculinity is that the male protagonists’ restoration of masculinity is heavily dependent on women, who were absent from both the orthodox paradigm of junzi masculinity and the unorthodox paradigm of haohan masculinity. All three male writers attribute emasculation to various sources but not women, and all three male protagonists start the reconstruction of their masculinity with the first step being affirmation from women. No matter what approach they take, these writers have one thing in common—women must be utilized in supporting roles for reconstructing the ideal of masculinity. More often than not, women are used as a target to conquer and are treated as a bottom line for testing manhood. In other words, ideal masculinity for fallen men cannot be attained without the trophy—women. For Zhang
Yonglin in *Half of Man*, conquering woman is the entry point for the restoration of his masculinity. The prerequisite for Zhang Yonglin to reenter a mainstream world of men is to obtain an affirmation (a passport) from his woman who certifies him as a “real and complete man”, sexually. In *Red Sorghum*, the construction of Yu Zhan’ao’s machismo begins with conquering women, the starting point for entering the spotlight on the political stage. His trophies are a “spirit woman”, My Grandmother, and “sexy women”, My Second Grandmother. These women followed by his heroic deeds grant him the highest status among all masculine men. For Zhuang Zhidie in *Capital*, conquering women is the bottom line to safeguard the remnant of his marginalized masculinity from collapse, as well as the turning point for him to reverse his downhill journey and re-enter the mainstream world of men.

(2) Hierarchy is the structure within which ideal masculinity is constructed and consolidated

Both Zhang Xianliang and Jia Pingwa construct a hierarchy of social organization in their respective works of *Half of Man* and *Capital*. Focusing on the hierarchical structure of society, the diagram shown above is elaborated below.
The world of women forms a horizontal zone dividing two worlds of men where women serve as gatekeepers between these two worlds. The men's world above the horizontal zone is more respectable than the women's world and the world below women. It functions as an extensive battlefield where men compete for power. Standing on the top of the hierarchy is always the Party-state symbolizing the most powerful masculinity. Below it are male celebrities and intellectual elites, and in the middle are male commoners, while women are at the bottom below the respectable world and at the top of the unrespectable world—a world of failure and marginalization inhabited by the scum of society. This hierarchy perfectly coincides with the Confucian hierarchical social organization. Zhang Yonglin in *Half of Man* is indignant because he was wrongly removed from his rightful place close to the top of the hierarchy and beaten down to the world below by ultraleftist politics. Zhuang Zhidie in *Capital* feels panic because his high position in the hierarchy is threatened. He is in jeopardy of being knocked off and sinking
to the bottom. In his downward journey, being around women at the bottom allows him to maintain a feeling of superiority. However, he still suffers from insecurity over an unresolved paradox — his spirit is elevated by adoring women, but he dwells in a world of lower beings. Chinese male intellectuals seem never to be aware that their sense of insecurity is caused by this paradox deriving from Confucian patriarchy functioning in a past-meet-present culture. Zhuang Zhidie needs women to prove his manhood because in the present society male potency (the basic and important mark of manhood) can be defined only in relation to contacts with the opposite sex. The more women a man conquers sexually, the stronger his male potency. However, no elite man with a good conscience and a sense of duty to his country wants to be reduced to the level of women who are categorized equally with xiaoren (inferior men) by Confucianism. With this objective in mind, Zhang Yonglin in *Half of Man* stays clearly focused. After he achieves the first step in proving his male potency, he discards his wife. Compared to Zhuang Zhidie in *Capital*, Zhang Yonglin shows cleverness at utilizing the resources of females as a mechanism to regain his male potency. Then he immediately gets out of a potential dilemma (or the source of disaster) that trapped and destroyed endless talented scholars, heroes, kings, and emperors in history. In their uncritical acceptance of the Confucian yin-yang hierarchy, Zhuang Zhidie, Zhong Yonglin and many other contemporary Chinese male intellectuals do not realize that Confucian patriarchy has not only victimized women, but also has turned privileged men into victims who can never resolve the contradiction between their need to be elevated by women and staying away from women — lower social beings and the sources of disaster. This patriarchal formula, women-yin-water-sex-
sin-disaster, not only places male elites in a Catch Twenty-Two dilemma, but also prevents them from acting respectfully and responsively toward the opposite sex.

Challenging the Confucian hierarchical social organization that invariably puts peasants at the bottom of society, and challenging elite discourse that constantly "otherizes" peasants, Mo Yan launched an "up-side-down" movement and tried to reposition lower-beings — peasants — at the center of history. He unequivocally dismisses the intellectual elite and maps out a new paradigm of masculine peasants versus feminine urbanites/intellectuals to replace the previous historical pattern of masculine urbanites/intellectuals versus feminine peasants. However, his ideal masculinity is still constructed within a hierarchical context — superior peasants and inferior urbanites/intellectuals. In addition, his "up-side-down" movement against Confucian hierarchy is not carried to completion, as it focuses on the position of peasants as a whole but not the position of women. In other words, he has created an impressive collective image of peasants who are heroic and masculine, but only one female character who is not submissive, docile, and obedient. When he constructs gender relationships, he takes it for granted that masculinity is superior to femininity. He endows one woman with many attributes of masculinity to upgrade her status. In attempting to celebrate independent and unconventional women, he gets lost and slides back into the stereotype of the Confucian yin-yang hierarchy; his "independent" woman, My Grandmother, still is characterized as heavily dependent on men. However, Red Sorghum serves as an example to show that a writer who breaks away from Confucian patriarchy, gains more freedom of thought and psychological liberation. Mo Yan's male protagonist does not suffer from the paradox that traps the protagonists in Half of Man and Capital. The peasant Yu Zhan’ao harbors no
feelings of insecurity from being around women. He is free-minded in whatever he wants
to do with women.

Related to hierarchical social context, two domains are clearly defined in *Half and
Man* and *Capital*. As in the diagram shown above, women constitute a horizontal zone
that indicates (1) the bottom line for certifying manhood, and (2) the domain designated
for women. In the social scene of the 1980s and 90s, “women emerged as a gender from
obscurity and through great adversity ‘onto the horizon of history,’ where finally they
shared with men the same expansive possibilities” (Dai Jinhua 2002, 100). However, in
*Half of Man* and *Capital*, we see no evidence of this historically realized fact. Men’s
domains and women’s domains are clearly separated in these two works, indicating that
women are not discursively welcomed on the upper side of the line between the two
worlds. Mo Yan is the only writer among the three who brought one woman across this
line. My Grandmother entered the domain previously reserved for men, to run a business,
to demonstrate her talent and leadership to men, and most impressively, to act as a real
commander instructing two male commanders in the key battle against Japanese invaders.
Mo Yan’s experiment in subversion of hegemonic intellectual discourse seems to tell us
that only in uncivilized (meaning uncorrupted) peasant culture can women merge with
men into one world. However, they enter the male world on male terms with male
characteristics to verify their worthiness.

(3) The state, (including politics, nationalism, and patriotism), male intellectuals and
women are three indispensable, intertwined dimensions within which male
intellectuals maneuver to bargain for their masculinity;
Masculinity is realized here not as a monolithic entity, but as an interplay of emotional and intellectual factors—an interplay that directly implicates women as well as men, and is mediated by other social factors, including race, sexuality, nationality, and class (Maurice Berger et al. 1995, 3).

Both *Half of Man* and *Capital* skillfully shift the subject from the level of sexual/gender identity to that of intellectuals' identity, and national identity. The authors do this so well that readers tend to be drawn into patriotic concern about the future of China, happily ignoring the fate of women in their male discourse.

The overt theme of *Half of Man* is the conflict between politics and humanity, which Zhang Xianliang illustrates by showing the consequences of how oppressive politics deprives humans of desire, and causes men physical as well as psychological impotence. However, the definition of real men in *Half of Man* equates to male intellectuals, the noble class in the social hierarchy. There is a subtle or covert shift of theme that does not catch readers' attention because it is hidden by concern with political oppression. The underlying narrative theme is "family oppression", or women's oppression, as the author covertly constructs it.

The masculinity of Zhuang Zhidie in *Capital* is assaulted by economic reform and commercialization, which threatens the values of the classic high culture, and thus the future of the nation. The narrative thrusts sympathy on the sexual perversion of the protagonist to the extent that his patriarchal attitude towards women remains unnoticed.

From these two works we can see clearly, not only that social structure is hierarchical, but also that discourse is treated in a hierarchical way. There has always existed a subtle disparity between the discourse of intellectuals related to issues of politics,
the Party, nationalism, etc., and the discourse of male intellectuals related to women. With no exception the first discourse is set in the modern context and the second in the traditional context, and the first discourse is regarded as more significant. Male writers such as Zhang Xianliang and Jia Pingwa exploit the disparity between these two discourses to justify their male protagonists' patriarchal, misogynist treatment of women. Participating in these two discourses, or fighting on two different battlefields, Zhang Yonglin in *Half of Man* and Zhuang Zhidie in *Capital* have a double identity: in the modern discourse (on the first battlefield), the protagonist is a powerless man castrated by politics/commercialism, and in the traditional discourse (on the second battlefield), he is a powerful masculine master. This double identity of male intellectuals is rationalized by the priority they place on the national/political agenda. In the case of *Half of Man*, the theme of the fate of the country is clearly more significant than the theme of the misogynist. Zhang Xianling resorts to the agenda of the Confucian intelligentsia: “*Guojia xingwang, pifu you ze* 国家兴亡，匹夫有责” (Every man has a share of responsibility for the fate of his country). In this light, *Half a Man* resonates with the positive aspects of the classic high culture, if we do not take the problematic misogynist identity into account (and the author leads us not to). It represents the perspective of contemporary members of intellectual elite who have a conscience and a strong sense of duty to their country. In the case of *Capital*, the subtext goes as follows: an intellectual elite male has been unfairly emasculated by the state's economic reforms, and there is no reason for such an elite man who assumes heavy responsibility for the country and its people to be further despoiled by women. The readers are led to understand and forgive Zhuang Zhidie's endless womanizing to find the right women to rekindle his aspirations and rebuild his manhood.
Rekindling the aspirations and rebuilding the manhood of intellectual men are right things for women to do for the sake of their country. In this way women are integrated into the national discourse and are expected to have no reason to complain about mistreatment imposed on them. Mistreatment is an insignificant and lesser matter compared to the crucial and significant future of the nation. This covert logic can be seen clearly in the fact that women in Capital understand the importance of the high-class discourse and are willing to accommodate it by supporting whatever men desire and by happily accepting their status as second-class citizens.

Mo Yan focuses on the incompatibility between human nature and civilization that causes the emasculation of men and the degeneration of Chinese people as a race. This too is an issue of superiority. In his construction of the protagonist’s masculinity, Mo Yan sets the discourse on masculinity within the context of patriotism and nationalism, which definitely belongs to the first category of discourse. It is interesting to observe how the centrality of women diminishes while his discourse on patriotism and nationalism expands. My Grandmother is in the spotlight early (chronically) in the narrative and dies at the beginning of the Anti-Japanese War. As the Anti-Japanese War proceeds, the theme of patriotism and nationalism takes over the narrative and overrides the focus on gender, and the traditional order of patriarchy is firmly re-established. Women, after the death of My Grandmother, are totally removed from the central scene to the periphery.

By maneuvering back and forth within the three dimensions (nationalism, male intellectuals and women) and constantly “positioning” and “repositioning” the Self and Others, Chinese male intellectuals try to bargain for their lost power and reconstruct their masculinity.
The philosophical/ideological past is the inexhaustible source of inspiration and justification for restoring lost masculinity.

My vertical examination shows at least three links between the present and the philosophical/ideological past. The first link is the paradigm of ideal masculinity. Emasculated Zhang Yonglin in *Half of Man* seeks to restore his lost masculinity and thus reenter the respectable world of male elite by precisely following the prescriptions of Confucian junzi (gentlemanly or refined) masculinity. Zhuang Zhidie in *Capital* seeks to recover his masculinity from his women in the context of caizi jieren (scholar-beauty) romance, a subcategory of Confucian junzi masculinity. Yu Zhan’ao in *Red Sorghum* bears many attributes of unorthodox “haohan” (a heroic man) masculinity exemplified by *The Water Margin*, one of the most popular classic novels in China. *Red Sorghum* represents a deliberate but only partially successful attempt by Mo Yan to subvert the Confucian paradigm of masculinity.

The second link between the present and the philosophical past is the dichotomy of gender. The Confucianized yin-yang dichotomy, or yin-yang Confucianism, legitimizes men’s absolute privilege over women; it assigns men to the yang category and women to the yin category, and equates yang to the upper and noble class and yin to the lower class of inferior beings. *Half of Man* does not overtly confer yin attributes on women. Nonetheless, the descriptions of Huang Xiangjiu’s association with a primary yin element water, either in deep water or surrounded by water, are an indisputable allegory of the Confucianized yin-yang doctrine imposed on women. Jia Pingwa’s understanding of gender roles is based on the Confucian yin-yang dichotomy, which he attributes to “the
original intention of God.” He unequivocally opposes “unbalancing this yin-yang principled world” which would make “men become non-men and women become non-women.” He reifies his understanding of yin-yang/female-male balance in his characterizations in Capital. He takes it for granted that women are lower beings willing to subordinate and prostrate themselves to his male protagonist. He takes it for granted that his male protagonist is the king in this female world because he is a celebrity, the cream of yang beings. His male protagonist is a star (the writer prefers “sun” as a metaphor for him) who attracts beautiful women one after another and surrounded by these women like the sun is surrounded by a myriad of planets. All female characters who have a sexual tie to the protagonist are aware of his celebrity status and try their best to approach him, and build up a relationship with him. Instead of feeling ashamed, which is a common feeling for a woman who has an illicit relationship with a married man, all of these women are very proud of having sex with the protagonist and afraid that they might lose this privilege. The protagonist’s condescending love for his women is a big honor for them because he is too good for them. The Confucianized yin-yang dichotomy is embedded in his subconscious and is always at work in his fantasized depiction of female characters. Mo Yan shows the least sign of influence from the Confucianized yin-yang dichotomy in his characterization of gender relations. Mo Yan cautiously and strategically avoids falling into the trap of Confucian orthodoxy. However, his one-sided characterization allowing women to be masculinized, but not men to be feminized, reveals clear traces of the yin-yang/female-male dichotomy and his aesthetic preference for yang-gang-zhi-mei 阳刚之美 (aesthetic beauty of masculinity) over yin-rou-zhi-mei 阴柔之美 (aesthetic beauty of femininity).
The third link between the present and the philosophical past is in the Confucian emphasis on the reproductive function of *yin* (wife and concubines) and *yang* (husband) rather than on the sexual pleasure of the couple. Mencius asserts that there are three things not in accordance with filial piety. The worst is having no posterity. Therefore, the concept of a sexual (not sexy) man is not focused on male physical and psychological pride, but on men’s biological function — reproductive ability. If a man were to lose or be in jeopardy of losing his reproductive function, he would experience panic regardless of his physical masculinity and how much he might gratify women sexually. The loss of the reproductive ability means that a man lacks “*yang*” and that he is categorized as a eunuch—a non-man. Yu Zhan’ao in *Red Sorghum* desperately cries to heaven for help, not over Father’s (Yu’s son’s) inability to have sex with women, but over Father’s possible infertility. The emasculation complex of both protagonists in *Half of Man* and *Capital* is revealed in their failure to have a normal sexual life. However, for Zhuang Zhidie in *Capital*, his suffering also derives from the fact that he cannot father a child. As a means to restore masculinity, all three writers have one thing in common—they all validate their male characters’ reproductive ability. Father in *Red Sorghum* has lost one of his testicles, but it turns out that he can impregnate Mother with only one testicle and give birth to the male narrator; Zhuang Zhidie in *Capital* proved his fertility with two mistresses — Tang Wan’er and Ah Can, although he and his wife together could never produce a child. Zhang Yonglin in *Half of Man* does not produce a child after regaining his potency, but his reproductive ability is established because it is his wife who fails biologically. In *Red Sorghum*, the reproductive ability of Father, who lived in old China in the 1930s, has substantial meaning in carrying on the family line as prescribed by Confucianism. Both
Zhang Yonglin in *Half of Man* and Zhuang Zhidie in *Capital* live in a communist regime where the concept of carrying on the family line is criticized as a backwards, “feudal” ideology. Their reproductive ability remains symbolic, but this symbolic quality has a practical significance. It is the criterion from the legacy of Confucianism that qualifies them to be real men.

Both Zhang Xianliang and Jia Pingwa look backwards to find a solution from the past and refashion the conventional stereotype of masculinity in one way or another. Mo Yan looks forward to seek new paradigm of ideal masculinity in the way of nostalgia for the past. However, as I have pointed out, he is still burdened with the past and is unaware that he is dancing a new dance with the shackles of Confucianism. This phenomenon also confirms Harry Brod’s analysis of men’s psyches. Brod notices that men are generally nostalgic for a past perceived as embodying a more stable and secure masculine identity. He believes that identifying with the past can free men’s attention to encounter present realities more directly (Brod 1987, 268). In addition, in my close reading, the “right” position that Chinese men claim in the present discourse must be justified and thus backed up by the canonically or traditionally accepted ideology of the past.

My research on the crisis of emasculation of Chinese intellectuals suggests that Chinese women still have long way to go to achieve real equality. The obstacles to women’s liberation come from various sources. However the greatest obstacle may be the control of powerful intellectuals, particularly influential writers and critics, over public discourse relevant to gender issues. There is little sign that male intellectuals who bargain harshly over the modernization of ideology with the Party-state have made same effort to
modernize discourse related to women in addressing issues of gender roles, sex, sexuality, marriage, femininity and masculinity, etc. When they feel panic about a "vacuum of morality" and blame Western influence on immoral social practices such as sexual liberalization, polygyny, concubinage, prostitution, keeping mistress, etc. they do not recognize that these are parts of the legacy of traditional "feudal" culture. They do not recognize that the stagnant discourse of male intellectuals on gender-related issues in the post-1949 period is partly responsible for the resurgence of "backward" social practices. If this elite male segment of society always remains gender-blind and resists equality between the sexes, women's liberation will not move forward. Similarly, discourse on manhood needs a break through. Rather than persistently marginalizing women and putting them down to regain their masculinity, Chinese intellectuals should reposition themselves to develop new paradigms of masculinity and femininity. As mentioned in the Introduction, there exists a counter-patriarchal discourse. Male intellectuals should open their closed discourse by interacting with this counter-patriarchal discourse, listening to women's voices and accepting women's subjectivity in their writings. In this way gender-conscious intellectuals can help turn dysfunctional hierarchy into a productive collaboration to free male intellectuals from the anxiety deriving from their historical ambivalence toward women, and to continue to walk toward the realization of equality between the sexes.
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