

In this book, a wide range of intersectional factors, including gender, age, socioeconomic status (class and urban or rural residence) and educational background have been brought into the analysis of Chinese women's experiences. These intersectional factors are put in changing historical, sociocultural, political and economic contexts in Chinese society. As a sociologist with research interests in childhood studies, especially children's everyday personal lives and relationships, I find this book's interdisciplinary contributions remarkable. It will benefit not only Chinese studies but also relevant disciplines, including history, literature, sociology, childhood studies, women studies and education. It is a helpful reference for a wide range of audiences – not only undergraduate and postgraduate students but also the public who are interested in family lives in China, especially in modern Chinese history.

doi:10.1017/S0305741023001248

Mastery of Words and Swords: Negotiating Intellectual Masculinities in Modern China, 1890s–1930s

Jun Lei. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2022. x + 221 pp. HK\$580.00; £60.00 (hbk). ISBN 9789888528745

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That the nation-building project of the late Qing and early Republican era was distinctly male-centred is a fact often acknowledged, but the implications of this fact in terms of concepts of masculinity are rarely explored. Jun Lei's monograph seeks to address this with a focus on male intellectual discourse on masculinity from the 1890s to the 1930s, a period when stereotypes of the effeminate Chinese man developed into a source of consternation for many. This book explores how intellectuals utilized "violence" in various forms in order to grapple with both a national crisis and a perceived crisis of masculinity.

The book is divided into two parts. Part one, "Texts and Contexts," lays out how the "Man Question" emerged in the late-19th and early-20th centuries against the background of a crisis of national identity brought about by the influx of Western modernity, imperialist encroachment, war and civil war, as well as a crisis of status for intellectuals. Having established the broader context, Jun Lei proposes a series of paradigms through which to examine masculinity in this period. As well as referring to Kam Louie's highly influential paradigm of *wen* and *wu* or literary attainment and martial valour, she draws on theorists such as Goffman, emphasizing that masculinity is performative and plural. At the same time, she highlights the vital backdrop of uneven transcultural exchange between East and West that continued to play out as these new modes of masculinity were negotiated locally. Several new frameworks and paradigms are then developed as a means of tracing intellectuals' shifting performances of masculinity, ranging from "differentiation," "negation," "affirmation" and the "reappropriation of a feminine space" to the "brutalization of scholars." This latter term points us back to the author's particular focus on violence and gender.

The four chapters of part two follow a chronological path, examining various instances of intellectual masculine discourse. Chapter three explores how intellectuals in the late Qing and early

Republican era conducted “creative reinterpretation” (p. 60) of the racist stereotypes that developed out of colonial incursions: the figure of the effeminate Confucian literati; the “sick man” of East Asia; and the concept of “yellow peril.” These reinterpretations involved enthusiastic calls for aggressive, martialized masculinity. Chapter four considers the way in which violence was rejected by male writers of the May Fourth generation who instead turned to a “neo-romantic masculinity” (p. 90). With reference to writers such as Lu Xun and Hu Shi, and with a particularly illuminating analysis of the “love rescue” romance genre (p. 104), Lei examines the ways Western Enlightenment ideals, romanticism and Chinese tradition were combined to form a novel image of the feeling man. Chapter five focuses on the work of Liu Na’ou and Mu Shiyong. Jun Lei’s innovation within the familiar topic of gender and colonialism in Shanghai lies in highlighting what she calls a “middlebrow masculinity” and a “surrogate violence” (p. 119) rooted in the texts which, through various textual tactics, create a masculinity that consists both of *wen* intellectual masculinity but also the brutalization that comes with *wu*. Chapter six explores how male editors of and contributors to women’s journals in Shanghai repeatedly turned towards the image of the “monstrous” female (p. 147) as a means of regulating and critiquing the bodies of transgressive women.

Lei’s book contributes much to recent conversations about masculinity in modern China, both in terms of reinforcing themes that have emerged in the field, and in providing crucial additional detail. There has been little sustained exploration of literary masculinity in the late Qing and early Republican period, but, as Lei reveals, this was precisely a time when Chinese masculinities came under both international and domestic scrutiny. In detailing how the “Man Question” emerged out of growing interactions with other countries, be it through exposure to advances in Western science or imperialistic aggression, *Mastery of Words and Swords* adds weight to the argument that debates about masculinity have long been an important feature of urgent questions about nation and identity. It also reiterates the importance of considering masculinity in terms of hybridity; modern Chinese concepts of manliness were assembled out of a range of pre-existing images from other nations and from other time periods or, as Lei puts it, “elsewhere” and “elsewhen.” Connected to this, Lei’s findings also remind us of another truth of gender: the dynamism, the ambivalence and the paradoxes at work as ideas about masculinity shifted and reshaped over time and in response to other stimuli. On a theoretical level, although Kam Louie’s *wen-wu* paradigm suggests that constructions of masculinity in China have at times simultaneously balanced both literary attainment and martial valour, most studies tend to focus on either *wen* or *wu*. Lei provides illuminating examples of how *wen* and *wu* interacted with each other over time and across different contexts.

In the process of tracing such hybrid, complex and paradoxical imaginings of gender over this immensely tumultuous historical period, Lei’s study occasionally loses focus. It is not abundantly clear, for example, how the chapter on “new men of feelings” (p. 88) or that on the depictions of monstrous women in print journalism relates to the book’s professed interest in the brutalization of scholars. As well as connecting the dots more explicitly for the reader, this ambiguity might have been solved by a more thorough theorization of violence, surprisingly absent in the abundance of paradigms discussed in part one. To my mind, this work is at its strongest, and its argument most convincing, when the author conducts close readings of specific texts; more of this would have been welcome and would have avoided the occasionally frustrating feeling that there were further in-depth discussions possible.

Overall, however, *Mastery of Words and Swords* is an important contribution not just to the field of masculinity studies but cultural studies of modern China overall, reminding us that masculinity, as much as femininity, is a lens for viewing the state of the nation and its potential future.