Title
Becoming a Better Man: Masculinity and Domesticity in Republican China, 1925-1937

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Introduction

What were men's roles in the family in Republican China (1911-1949)? Did ideologues ever discuss the management of the domestic space? This project studies the descriptions and portrayals of men in the management of domesticity in printed media such as magazines, comics, op-eds, and social news. In Shanghai and Guangzhou, two cities that were at the forefront of a gender and family revolution, how was masculinity envisioned by the cultural elite discourse directed at different classes? How was masculinity envisioned by the masses in both cities? How was a man who helped out with household management perceived by the cultural elite, the masses, and intellectuals? How were all these class discourses of masculinity, since they had different priorities and expectations?

Men's roles in the family? Did printed media represented different class discourses of masculinity, since they had different priorities and expectations?

Class is another approach: Did class play a role in determining men's roles in the family? Did printed media represented different class discourses of masculinity, since they had different priorities and expectations?

Methods: Textual analysis of available newspapers, journals, pictorials, and visual re-interpretations of comics and their meaning.

Key Sources:
- Banjiao Manhua (Nickel Comics, Guangzhou)
- Guohua (The Clarion, Guangdong)
- Guangzhou Minguo Ribao (Guangzhou)
- Nationalist News
- Yuehua Bao (Yuehua Daily, Guangzhou)
- Guohua Bao (Guohua Daily, Guangzhou)
- Linglong Women's Magazine, Shanghai
- Nanpengyou (Boyfriends), Shanghai
- Ober women's and family magazines from Shanghai

Findings Class Discourse on Masculinity

Regarding men's involvement in the domestic sphere, the cultural elite in family and women's magazines suggested:
1. "The henpecked husband took the pill to become a better husband" (Source: Nanpengyou Bao no. 6, 1929)
2. "A cup of strong liquor to restore family order" (Source: Nationalist News, 1926)

Ideal masculinity of the petty bourgeois, as described in op-eds, pictorials, and general magazines, the ideal men embodied qualities or had the following characteristics:
1. Monogamous
2. Dominant in the decision-making in his family
3. Retained Sexual Freedom to other women besides his wife

Findings, Continued: The Masses

The discourse directed at the masses in comics and social news suggested the opposite of the cultural elite's definition of an ideal man; instead, the ideal man in the masses vision was:
1. Patriarchal and had complete dominance in the family
2. Retained Sexual Freedom to other women besides his wife

Comics were satirical, mocked the cultural elite's ideal husband or housework-performing husbands as weak and feminine.

Concluslions

The public discourse on masculinity and the ideal man directed at different class suggested varying degrees of men's involvement in the domestic space in Republican China. Class background, especially education level and wealth, was related to the acceptance of companionate marriage and men's domestic participation in housework.

The studying of men in their domestic space open a possibility of masculinity outside of the binary of scholarly versus martial, but as the other halves in their family that were often neglected in scholarly studies of gender and family in China. Men as historical subjects need to be treated not simply as scholars or soldiers, but as husbands and fathers who constituted people's family and had significant in the history of family, marriage, and gender in China, especially from the 19th century and onward.

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