

Book review

Kam Louie (Edt)

*Asian Masculinities:
The Meaning and Practice of Manhood in China and Japan*¹⁾

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I eagerly awaited the publication about Asian masculinities, hoping that the author could help me give some academic view points to understand in my own work. In twelve chapters, the authors draw some aspects of Chinese and Japanese masculinities in the field of sport (ch.6), novels and short story (ch.1-2, ch.9-12), magazine and cartoon (ch.7), gay media (ch.4) and life history interview (ch.8). After an introductory chapter referring to the some leading concepts of this book, eleven articles consider the Asian masculinity through the archaeology of indigenous East Asian masculinities (p.2). Kam insists that there is the insufficiency of traditional models for dealing with Chinese or Japanese men in Western context (p.1)

The main concept of this book is to introduce the wen-wu [cultural attainment - martial valour] dyad and to apply this idea to some fields around masculinity. Each author shares this idea more or less. Kam's leading paradigm comes from his understanding masculinity in the context of oriental culture such as

Confucianism, Taoism, Yin-yang idea, Bushido [the way of the elite samurai] and the Buddhism. He urges Chinese and Japanese masculinity must be examined in its own terms before its trajectory in the global scene can be analyzed (p.4) Because of the privileging of wen above wu in constructions of ideal Chinese masculinity, appropriate male sexuality in the Chinese tradition differs markedly from the Occidental tradition. For example, from the view point of comparative study, it's easy to recognize the difference of homophobia among cultures. The images of "desirable" males in the Chinese cultural context often appearing akin to the "weakling" of the Western vision (p.6). He analyzes that a militant homophobia is not a prerequisite for proof of masculinity in China (p.6). I think Kam's indication is important to understand Asian masculinity related to homoerotic sensitivities and "soft" masculinity according to the wen-wu paradigm. In addition, I need to consider how this leading concept relates to specific masculinity in the historical and social context. In other words, it's adoptable to use this paradigm as analytical method of masculinity and gender relation for localizing, however, we must not fall into a kind of determinism or essentialism which means the

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another type of binary thinking.

To avoid this binary thinking, it's important to analyze homo-social relationship and male bonding under the face of homo-erotic desire and soft masculinity. In my opinion, it is useful to understand the Asian masculinity from the view point of a cultural script of social practice. I want to point out the cultural aspect of the idea of masculinity. There are many kinds of homo-social relationships which signify some facets of around Japanese and Chinese men's social life. For example, Japan has a huge array of interesting festivals throughout the year. Most have distinct roles for men and women. Men have always had major roles in organizing and conducting holiday festivals. In this context, men often represent their company, bonding and allegiance being reinforced through friendly competition. Another example is homo-social relationships in custom. Men go out together after working time, engaging in outdoor sports on holiday with their boss. Men have to survive contradictory situations involving both friendly relationships and competitive relationships from the view point of male bonding.

We can find similar way to localize the knowledge of masculinity in the concept of "Macho" by Gutmann, M (1997) which enables us to understand Mexican men's situation. Herrdt, G (1981) opened the door to explain the men's cult and its initiation ritual in Melanesian using by the concept of homosexual like behavior. Both are the good examples for localizing our understanding about masculinity. I think the wen-wu thinking has the possibility to create new pathway to analyze Asian masculinity. It symbolizes the cognitive and behavioral standard relating to homo-social

relationship and desire. It also means the Asian version of patriarchal society. When we can combine the wen-wu paradigm with homo-social relationships and to reach to understand the patriarchy, it will vividly express our social experience.

We must try to get at the heart of the matter that how the structure of hegemonic masculinity relates to patriarchy by exploring multifaceted masculinity in Asian culture. Through developing the wen-wu paradigm into more elaborative social scientific knowledge, we will acquire the words to express different kinds of masculinity compared to western style. I think these words being anchored in the context of body practice, cultural representation about male-beauty, homo-eroticism and figurative male-bonding and homo-sociality must be combined with nationalism, geopolitics and economic structure.

This book is sure of providing the clue to promote the study of Asian masculinity and must be reading for any student of masculinity interested in the context of social science as well as cultural study. Obviously, this book also reflects also that the stereotypical male in Japan and Chinese may be disappearing.

References

- Gutmann, Matthew (1997) *The Meanings of Macho: Being a man in Mexico city*. USA: University of California Press.
- Herrdt, Gilbert H. (1981) *Guardians of the Flutes: Idioms of Masculinity*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
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