

# Asian Masculinity Studies in the West: From Minority Status to Soft Power

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It is well-known that “man” as a gendered being had for a long time escaped scrutiny because the generic man as representing humanity was so normalized that history was assumed to be “his-story.” This only changed in the 1980s when, inspired by the civil rights movements of the 1960s and 70s and the productive research and popularity of women’s (gender) studies, “man” was at last put under the spotlight as a distinct category for consideration. Pioneers of masculinity studies like Michael Kimmel and Michael Messner argued almost from the inception of the concept that “the meaning of masculinity is neither transhistorical nor culturally universal, but varies from culture to culture and within any culture over time.”<sup>1</sup> Yet, despite the recognition that masculinity is to a large extent culture-bound, analyses of men – whether in scholarly works, popular magazines or social media – were almost exclusively focused on men in Western societies, particularly those of North America.

By the turn of the new millennium, a number of authoritative scholars in men studies were already well aware that a large proportion of the world’s men – those away from the Euro-American orbits – received only scant attention in gender studies, and that this neglect was a serious problem in the field. In the first article in the inaugural issue of *Men and Masculinities*, for example, R.W. Connell called for a more comprehensive understanding of the world’s gender

order.<sup>2</sup> Increasingly, more studies of non-white men have been produced. Studies of men from non-Western regions such as Asia or Africa were usually researched in the context of “men of color” or “minorities” in predominantly white cultures. This is not surprising given that most of the researchers are based in Europe or America.

Nonetheless, a large number of the researchers who are interested in Asian men are themselves Asian. They are more familiar with and understandably do research on what personally interests them and what they know best: that is, the Asian diaspora. So, for research into Asian men, from early on there was more intense research into how Asian men fared outside Asia, mostly in America. Excellent books and journal articles have been appearing since the 1990s. Some researchers explore how Asian American males have had to manage what amounted to “racial castration” in white America, often using psychoanalytic theory and literary sources.<sup>3</sup> And many others use fictional but iconic images of Asian men in the West such as Fu Manchu and Charlie Chan as archetypal Chinese men “in order to provide a discursive foundation from which the construction of Chinese American masculinities can be critiqued.”<sup>4</sup> Such studies indicate that along with the growing interest in being an Asian man in a Western country, many Asian men have become increasingly unhappy with their minority status. This discontent is not purely academic, and it is even more pronounced in the popular realm. Blogs such as the Reddit forum r/AsianMasculinity<sup>5</sup> or “Angry Asian Man,”<sup>6</sup> and YouTube videos such as those by Wang Fu Productions show the frustrations and irritation often felt by Asian men living in America. Most are produced by younger men, so themes such as dating, sex and cultural adjustments feature predominantly.

Academic discourse and social media are not the only avenues where notions of Asian masculinity have experienced major transformations. The film industry is a major source of how people perceive others, so how it presents an Asian man is vital to interpretations of Asian masculinity. And here, diasporic movements in the second half of the 20th century have changed the way the general population perceive and interpret the Asian male figure. In the American film industry of the early 20th century, for example, white actors were usually called upon to play non-white characters. This changed towards the last few decades of the century. Asian actors, both male and female, increasingly took on major roles in films. The Asian diaspora has produced a host of actors such as Bruce Lee, who was born in San Francisco, and Dev Patel, who was born in London. As they have become internationally famous, these actors have provided new models of Asian masculinity. The flow of positive Asian male images into the movie industry increasingly has had a high impact on cinema in the West, and insightful studies have begun to be published in this area.<sup>7</sup> Though not as obvious as the internet blogs mentioned above, the new images have been partly a result of the rapid growth of the Asian diaspora in the West.

The Asian diaspora has produced actors performing heroic roles as well as large audiences that appreciate them. For example, the 2016 Oscar-nominated film *Lion* (for which Dev Patel won the BAFTA Award for Best Supporting Actor) is set partly in Hobart, Tasmania and Melbourne, Australia. It is about a young Indian boy who is separated from his family in Calcutta, eventually adopted by a white family in Tasmania, who later finds his family back in India. It projects an image of an Indian boy who grows up to be a successful young man in Australia. The movie was popular and received six Oscar nominations. Moreover, while the

Indian diaspora does appear on the screen, the Indian movie industry is so popular in India and abroad that the word “Bollywood” is used to designate it. According to Rohit Dasgupta, the co-editor of *Popular Masculine Cultures in India: Critical Essays*, “Masculinity in Bollywood has seen a sea change from the sensitivity of Dev Anand; we are now confronted with the hypermasculinity of John Abraham, Salman Khan and others.”<sup>8</sup> We can therefore expect to see more South Asian film productions that emphasize the “masculine,” and we can expect to see the macho notions of manhood as well as the usual “good and/or goofy” boy to catch on in diasporic South Asian communities.

The tendency to define being masculine as being strong and tough is widespread among film critics and viewers. This is ironic because, as indicated above, there is a strong feeling within the Asian diasporic community that Asian men are not happy to be merely a minority, and to be seen as nerdy and effeminate. In a blog that asks “What Is Asian Masculinity,” for example, Natalie Ng argues that in traditional China, the “real” men were warrior gods like Guan Yu, and that traditional Chinese masculinity “had its roots deep within Asian culture for centuries, long upheld by our ancient East Asian warriors and ancestors. If anything, [the practices] that defined true traditional Asian masculinity centuries ago few, if any, would dare to carry out today. Consequently, for the greater good of our community, Asian men have every right to reclaim their original masculinity without fear of conforming to so-called ‘western’ standards, because it is *not* ‘western’ standards.”<sup>9</sup> In the social media popular among younger diasporic Asians in the Western world, then, there has been a yearning to find true Asian masculinity in Asia itself, perhaps back in the distant past, when macho men that could counterbalance those commonly seen in the Western mass media were common.

However, “Asian” is not an easy term to define as it encompasses a huge variety of different races and cultures, and it can be confusing and frustrating when its meaning is not made clear. This problem is often alluded to in social media platforms. In the tremendously popular Wang Fu Productions video “Yellow Fever,”<sup>10</sup> two Asian friends talk about dating. The Chinese character Philip Wang bemoans the fact that Asian women date white guys but white women do not date Asian men, to which his Indian friend Richard Sarvate responds by saying that “at least you [Asians] have a chance to get girls... but how often do you see an Indian guy with a white girl?” In addition to its intra-Asian comparisons, this exchange is telling because Sarvate does not see Indians as Asian. Several contributors in the comments column of this blog remark upon this. It highlights one of the conundrums of studying Asian masculinity. From the exchange related above, and the essays in this volume, it is clear that there are a great variety of masculinities in Asia and among Asians who live abroad. This is in keeping with the many diverse Asian races, cultures and terrains. In many ways, it is absurd to lump all these masculinities together as if they form a homogenous whole. While both popular and academic discourse often talk of “the East” and “Asia,” these terms and others such as “the West” often make little sense if used to refer to people or ideas.

The reaction against being labelled simply as Asian is understandable when we know that the referent for this term is too broad and could include traits one Asian detests in another. The trend to take a more Asia-centric approach and to be more specific about the Asian culture referred to has also intensified in academic research on Asian masculinities. A conscious effort to reconfigure masculinity studies away from examining masculinities exclusively in the Anglo-

American sphere was in evidence by the end of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. For example, the 2014 book *Reimagining Masculinities: Beyond Masculinist Epistemology* is a collection of ten chapters by scholars most of whom are from outside America and Europe, and “each chapter sheds new light on the differences and complexities that constitute the making of masculinities in particular locales.”<sup>11</sup> Of more lasting significance, the regional scope of masculinity studies has been broadened via the founding of journals such as *NORMA: Nordic Journal of Masculinity Studies*,<sup>12</sup> *Masculinities and Social Change*<sup>13</sup> and *Masculinities: A Journal of Identity and Culture*.<sup>14</sup>

European in their inspiration and interest in “other” masculinities while moving away from the metropolitan centers of Europe and America, scholars continue to be fascinated by the effects that such centers have exerted in the non-Western world. For example, Raewyn Connell, who earlier sounded the call for global thinking about men and masculinities, since the early 21<sup>st</sup> century has begun to link the study of gender with her interest in the “Global South,” and rallied for more work on “gender and masculinities in Southern perspective.”<sup>15</sup> This is a timely and salutary proposal, and Connell is so keen on this issue that she published an article specifically advocating for Southern perspectives to be taken on board in masculinity studies.<sup>16</sup>

Yet, Southern theory is still intimately bound to the colonized world and ideas of postcoloniality. Also, while combining Southern theory with gender is productive for the purposes of, for instance, analyzing past European colonies like India and Malaysia during their colonial periods and their impacts on these regions, the problem with focusing on Asian countries premised on their status as ex-colonies is that masculinity studies becomes almost an offshoot of postcolonial studies. That is to say, the European empires still provide the backdrop to contemporary times, and research on the indigenous people becomes a way to reflect back onto the “mother country,” mainly those in Europe. The study of Asian masculinities in Asian regions per se is therefore still limited by such colonial points of reference, especially since the significant “men” in the colonies were mostly white men, and heterosexual relations generally led to an “overemphasis of heterosexuality and relations between Western men, typically, and Asian women [that] occlude other forms of eroticism and sexuality.”<sup>17</sup>

In the 1970s Edward Said pointed out how knowledge about the relationship between the West and the Orient was constructed as a result of the European colonial expansion in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In gender terms, the West was metaphorically seen as masculine and the East sexualized into a passive feminine.<sup>18</sup> This characterization inspired many studies of gender in colonial times. For example, Mrinalini Sinha makes this binary explicit in her characterisation of the gender relations in the title of her book itself: *Colonial Masculinity: The ‘manly Englishman’ and the ‘effeminate Bengali’ in the late nineteenth century*. She specifically argues “that the late nineteenth-century notions of English/British masculinity or Bengali/Indian effeminacy cannot be understood simply from the framework of discrete “national cultures; instead, they must be understood in relation to one another, and as constitutive of each other.”<sup>19</sup> While the study of colonial periods is necessarily about understanding these frameworks in relationship, colonial masculinities has the problem of focusing more on colonialist men than indigenous masculinity as such. Indigenous men again escape the spotlight.

The impact of British colonialism on South Asia is so powerful and pervasive that in resisting that impact, Indian men developed a trope Sikata Banerjee calls “masculine Hinduism,” an amalgam of the Hindu soldier and the warrior monk. Banerjee argues that masculine Hinduism is a reaction against the way the British had categorized Indian men as the “effeminate other” and that this concept of masculinity has had an immense influence on Hindu nationalism. As in other nationalisms, Hindu nationalism adheres to a rigid notion of “us versus them.” Its make-up therefore needs to be revealed and critiqued for an understanding of gender relations not just in India but other societies. Even when historical figures were examined as representing a more assertive and positive masculinity, it could not avoid being seen as a reaction against the colonialists as well as indigenous local men. For example, Gandhi’s argument to make men “closer to women” was intended not to improve women, but rather “...served to present the masculinities of British imperialist patriarchy as crude, rapaciously materialist, violent, hypocritical, and profoundly lacking in self-control and discipline, in contrast to the spiritually stronger, scrupulously nonviolent, disciplined Indian patriarchy that Gandhi sought to forge.”<sup>20</sup>

In recent years, there has been much media coverage of sexual violence against women committed by men in South Asia. But in both public media and official policies, much of the attention is directed at women in terms of their modesty and victimhood. While the actions of the men are roundly and rightfully condemned, the men themselves have remained largely under-investigated, and the role masculinity plays in their actions again escapes attention. This is so striking that researchers of masculinity have felt the need to make “men and masculinities visible.”<sup>21</sup> Indeed, it is unfortunate that in gender studies of South Asia, much of the attention has been focused on women in this part of the world. This fact is not surprising given this is also true of rest of the world, but it is especially conspicuous in South and Southeast Asia.

Indeed, in a review essay on masculinities in Asia, Chie Ikeya observes that “only a small number of works produced in South and Southeast Asian studies address the historical construction and evolution of masculinities in the regions and even fewer offer in-depth inquiries into the extent to which historical forms of masculinity governed social relations.”<sup>22</sup> Thus, the paucity of material on masculinities is not just found in South Asia, but also evident in Southeast Asia. It seems researchers tended not to look at the common man, but extraordinary figures, such as the idealized classical spiritual man or the violent wrongdoer (particularly those of a sexual nature). Up until the 21<sup>st</sup> century, little was written about ordinary men performing mundane everyday masculinity. Michael Peletz observed in 2012 that there was a “conspicuous absence in the anthropological and other literature on gender and sexuality in Southeast Asia — indeed, the deafening silence with respect to empirical and theoretical perspectives on normative masculinities (which should not be confused with masculine or masculinist perspectives) especially those that prevail among ordinary folks outside arenas of colonial warfare, militarization, and ethno-nationalistic, religious, or racial strife.”<sup>23</sup>

As if in response to this concern, a collection of essays edited by Ford and Lyons appeared the same year examining the lives of men who can be said to have “normative” masculinities, such as seafarers and low-wage workers in Southeast Asia. This collection is interesting in that while the ethnographies it presents are about ordinary men, and the emphasis is no longer one of gender relationships as in colonial or postcolonial times; most of the essays describe masculinity in a state of flux: about men who travel to other lands for work or leisure,



men who interact with men of other races and so on. As Southeast Asia is so ethnically, culturally and politically heterogeneous, and so many waves of migrants have moved across the region, it is inevitable that there would be many and close encounters with the “other” in terms of masculinity. The key difference now is that the “other” is no longer the white colonialist or the local colonial. In contemporary times, hegemonic relationships occurred not only in the opposition between European and Asian. Many inequities and exploitative behaviors are exhibited within Asia, between Asians. By the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, some excellent studies of Chinese men in Asian regions began to appear, such as Ulf Mellström’s (2003) study of the impact of technology on Chinese diasporic men in Penang.<sup>24</sup>

While research on South and Southeast Asian masculinities are making significant headway, it is Chinese masculinity studies that have experienced phenomenal growth, with research books and papers mushrooming in the first two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Of these, my *Theorising Chinese Masculinity* (2002) has become influential.<sup>25</sup> My work utilizes the ancient Chinese paradigm *wen-wu* (literary-martial; mental-physical; mind-body etc.) to show how Chinese masculinity ideals have unique features specific to Chinese society. For example, *wen-wu* was traditionally a male-only quality that completely excluded women. This is because to gain social recognition as someone having these attributes, people had to pass the official *wen* or *wu* examinations and women were prohibited from sitting these examinations. Moreover, even the expression *wen-wu* shows how the Chinese prioritizes the mind more than most Western cultures, and certainly more than the Euro-American one as discussed by Christopher Forth, who uses “arms and letters” to frame the discussion of the body-mind dichotomy in European masculinity.<sup>26</sup> Of course, since the abolition of the imperial civil service examinations in 1905, the meaning of the *wen-wu* dyad has undergone many transformations. For example, whereas previously women could not pass examinations simply because they were barred from them, they now not only participate but excel.

Clearly, the relationship between Chinese men and women has changed a great deal in the modern era, and the rise of the white-collar workforce since the reform period of the 1980s has also generated an interest in the masculinity of the urban men. Scholars like Derek Hird and Geng Song have looked at the everyday lives of these men, from their fashion sense to their leisure activities,<sup>27</sup> while others such as John Osburg and Avron Boretz chart the lives of businessmen and lower-class men to demonstrate how their masculinity is anchored sometimes in traditional concepts of brotherhood and other times in imitation of gangster behavior from Hong Kong movies.<sup>28</sup> Many scholars have also researched Chinese men focusing specifically on masculinity and its role in different historical contexts. For example, Bret Hinsch writes on masculinities in the whole span of Chinese history,<sup>29</sup> Geng Song on the fragile masculinity of traditional China,<sup>30</sup> Matthew Sommer on aspects of law and gender in Qing China,<sup>31</sup> Martin W. Huang on the masculinity of the elite in late imperial China<sup>32</sup> and Nicolas Schillinger on masculinity and the military in late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>33</sup>

The new millennium has therefore seen an abundant and growing research on men in China. This rapidly growing field is fueled partly by the number of diasporic Chinese researchers who have turned their attention to looking at masculinity in China. It is also a result of the general attention being paid to China as well, especially since China is now catching up to America as the top economy in the world. Economically, Japan had occupied the number two

spot until recently, and it too has seen increased interest from gender studies researchers. Japan was the first Asian country to modernize, and there has been intense speculation on how and why this happened – and what sort of population, particularly the male portion, made it possible. Among the men who made the post-war recovery possible, the figure of the salaryman came under some scrutiny. The word “salaryman” has since taken on special connotations. It is often taken to denote a Japanese man (and not woman) who joins a business immediately after he graduates from college and works there until his retirement, and who spends long hours in the office often doing mindless clerical work, while socializing outside working hours exclusively with his co-workers.

This idea of the salaryman has been widely used outside Japan as well. In terms of masculinity, salarymen have been described as “corporate warriors,”<sup>34</sup> and the various manifestations of their make-up appear in popular media as well as detailed academic discussions.<sup>35</sup> He is often described as living in a stressful state and, as a creature of the industrialized and bureaucratized society, his fulfillment is forever elusive. In any case, as a symbol of masculinity, he cannot be said to be an ideal that most people aspire to, though it seems most Japanese men in the modern era aspire to join the ranks of the salaryman. While white-collared workers in Chinese business enterprises or government offices have been studied by researchers such as Osburg and Hird, the ways that modernization and bureaucratization works in these two Asian countries provide much material for comparative research.

In this way, while “Asian masculinity” may be too general to contain more than limited tangible meaning, there are good reasons for looking at the East Asian region, especially China, Japan and Korea, as suitably similar in cultural make-up for analysis. These nations have a Confucian heritage, and they have had strong bonds with each other for centuries, sometimes as tributary states or colonies. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with the ease of travel and the rise of the internet, they have become even more enmeshed. The cultural interactions between countries in Asia became so significant and warrant so much scholarly attention that in 2000 the journal *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* was launched. Similarly, masculinity studies in Asia was deemed important enough that Hong Kong University Press launched a book series entitled “Transnational Asian Masculinities” in 2016. This is because since the final decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the rise of Asia – especially China, Japan and the “Four Asian Tigers (Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan),” – has not only given these countries economic and political clout, but also a desire to promote their cultures as part of a “soft power” strategy.

Interestingly, the “soft power” idea has parallels in the gender sphere. As early as 2009, Sun Jung pointed to the rise of a “pan East-Asian soft masculinity” and its flows across the Asian region.<sup>36</sup> In China, the “soft masculinity” concept has even been interpreted to mean more subtle and gentler ways of treating other people. Thus, in conflict situations between bosses and workers, the “soft power” method of dealing with one’s subordinates has been interpreted as a “kindly” tactic used by the Communist Party in everyday practice to soothe masculine egos in order to avoid unpleasant or even violent confrontations at work.<sup>37</sup> Politically, the “soft” approach is also a way for the government to promote family and social harmony. Derek Hird’s description of Xi Jinping as a leader who, while reaffirming gender equality also reasserts the central role of the husband/father in the family, is interesting.<sup>38</sup> Hird interprets Xi’s message of family values and intimacy between parent and child as reflecting on his performing a new style

of masculinity: a strong but fatherly figure who can be both strict and nurturing. This image of the traditional disciplinary father who is also softened into a modern nurturing one is found in current empirical research by anthropologists as well.<sup>39</sup>

A perception of Asian men as becoming more family-oriented and more caring as fathers has also gained traction. For example, Ayami Nakatani specifically points to the emergence of “nurturing fathers” in Japan.<sup>40</sup> However, urbanization and industrialization in East Asia also means the middle classes spend a lot more time in the office. Romit Dasgupta in his essay for this volume points to the “absent father syndrome,” whereby a father’s being away from home for extended periods effects their loss of authority within the household. This is a much more serious situation in China, where in recent decades literally hundreds of millions of men (and women) have left their parents and children behind in rural areas to become migrant workers in cities. This entails men leaving behind many traditional customs, such as the gendered division of labor within the family, and abandoning some patriarchal privileges they might otherwise have expected. While they may not like it, such “masculine compromise” was necessary because of their lives as migrant workers, which require them to spend years away from home.<sup>41</sup> Some sociologists thus have interpreted social changes in Asia as having taken some traditional patriarchal power away from men, however reluctantly.

Certainly, with the interactions between Asian countries intensifying and their concerted attempts at projecting a more positive profile internationally, the image of the Asian man has undergone a makeover in the West. This is nowhere better seen than in the discussions of aspects of youth culture from Asia, such as those associated with J-pop and K-pop. While to Western eyes musicians and boy bands from East Asia can be very effeminate, they have become immensely influential and popular, even in the Western world. The most conspicuous example is Psy’s “Gangnam Style,” which quickly became the most watched video on YouTube following its release in 2012, with over 2.8 billion views.<sup>42</sup>

Psy’s phenomenal success shows most clearly the worldwide consumption of an Asian pop icon through the internet. This demonstrates two aspects of the Japanese and Korean pop “waves”: they are spread through technology such as mobile phones, laptops and tablets – gadgets that are popular with the young. Young women in particular have a big voice in determining trends in what is considered ideal masculinity, and many prefer the cute and cuddly.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, the speed and spread of the internet means crossing cultural and national boundaries is becoming easier and faster. K-pop’s ascendancy spells the rise of a “soft masculinity” that is hybrid as well as Asian,<sup>44</sup> for which “binaries [are used] to describe the members as either cute and pretty, or beastly and aggressive.”<sup>45</sup> However, Psy’s persona has also been criticized as he is said to conform to the stereotypical and racialized construction of Asian men as being emasculated.<sup>46</sup> Whether Asian masculinity is trendy or effeminate, at least it has been mainstreamed, and it has become extremely popular globally.

Furthermore, Psy’s is a Korean masculinity that is both hybrid and global, as Sun Jung indicated in her 2009 article, and she discusses this phenomenon in greater depth in *Korean Masculinities and Transcultural Consumption*.<sup>47</sup> Others in the field have taken on the phenomenon of transcultural and border-crossing masculinities. For example, following *Theorising Chinese Masculinity*, I published another book on the globalization of the *wen-wu*



construct,<sup>48</sup> which examines wealthy diasporic Chinese men on the China mainland as well as what might be termed “metrosexuals” in the West. Similar to the metrosexual, this new breed of young man is pampered and self-indulgent, and happy to invest money and time in his appearance, so much so that there is a new word now widely used in China: “flower-like men” (*huayang nanzi*). It is a term that originated from the title of an extremely popular Japanese manga series *Hana-yori Dango*, often translated into English as “Boys Over Flowers” by the young woman writer/artist Yoko Kamio, which was serialized from 1992 to 2004.<sup>49</sup>

The depiction of young male characters as being girlishly beautiful as well as having homosocial/sexual tendencies is a common feature of a lot of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century Japanese literature/manga for young women readers. Which is all very interesting, but what are the implications for masculinity research? One of the most interesting offshoots of the “soft” masculinity that has emerged in popular literature and particularly manga is a genre known as BL (Boys Love) in Japanese, and *danmei* (Indulging in the Beautiful) in Chinese. While Japanese BL production and research into it are relatively established and substantial,<sup>50</sup> research into *danmei* genre is relatively recent and not as well researched as its Japanese counterpart.<sup>51</sup> But the idea of a beautiful man, or pretty boy, existed in both China and Japan in traditional times – for example, Beijing Opera and Kabuki theatre both have young effeminate males singing and acting female parts. Such young men are often objects of homoerotic desire by “connoisseurs” of the moneyed classes. And as indicated above, the beautiful man – or looking at flowers as code for desiring beautiful young men – was very common in Ming-Qing China and has been studied and documented by scholars such as Wu Cuncun and Mark Stevenson.<sup>52</sup>

Indeed, some of the earliest and most interesting work on Asian men was about gay men. And as interest in homosexuality increased and became normalized, other forms of sexuality such as bisexual and transgender also came under academic exploration. Queer Studies gained respectability. For example, Russell Leong, David Eng and Alice Hom edited books on gay, lesbian and queer experiences of Asian Americans in the late 1990s.<sup>53</sup> And scholars like Mark McLelland,<sup>54</sup> Travis S. K. Kong,<sup>55</sup> Elisabeth Engebretsen and William Schroeder have produced books that deal with country-specific concerns relating to gender.<sup>56</sup> Academic interest in lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender populations in Asia has become so widespread that in 2008, Hong Kong University Press launched the Queer Asia book series, which has produced many vibrant and innovative studies on non-normative sexual practices across the Asian region. The different sexual and gender orientations discussed in the series in cities such as Shanghai, Bangkok and Singapore testify to not only the large diversity of sexual identities in Asia, but also the research that growing out of the queer scene. And among these, the book *Boys Love, Cosplay, and Androgynous Idols*<sup>57</sup> shows the appreciation of beautiful boys has gone way beyond elite male culture as was traditionally the case. Much creativity is evidenced in young and mass culture, and social media popularizes this tendency. For example, a Facebook group called “Queer East Asian Studies” has been set up, where it features numerous announcements of workshops, conferences and new research on gay or lesbian sexualities and related themes across East Asia.

Cultural Studies, an emergent discipline at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century which has since moved to being a mainstream and popular one in the new millennium, takes pop culture items as its research targets. Not only does Cultural Studies take a serious academic interest in phenomena such as comics, movies and beauty contests, but it also opens up new avenues to

research the mundane that were previously deemed frivolous. As a result, material focusing on Asian men and sexualities which had in the past resisted analysis, has sparked original and innovative modes of analysis that have become commonplace. In this exciting period, Asian masculinity studies have attracted some adventurous minds and new territories are being explored every day. While carving out an interdisciplinary field for itself, Asian masculinity studies can look forward to attracting interest from researchers in almost all fields of inquiry. Although there may still be concerns about whether Asian masculinity studies can be meaningfully investigated given the diversity of the people and cultures, I suggest that it is also precisely this diversity that makes it a stimulating and burgeoning field.

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<sup>12</sup> Began in 2006 as *NORMA: Nordic Journal for Masculinity Studies*, this journal decided to globalise masculinity studies and reach a wider audience, changing its name to *NORMA: International Journal for Masculinity Studies* in 2014.

<sup>13</sup> Launched in 2012, this open access journal focuses on masculinity studies in Spain and Latin America, and accepts submissions in English, Spanish, Catalan, Euskera and Galician.

<sup>14</sup> Established in 2014, this is another online journal that accepts multilingual submissions, in this case English and Turkish.

<sup>15</sup> Raewyn Connell, “Gender and Masculinities in Southern Perspective,” [Raewyn Connell: Gender and Masculinities in Southern Perspectives](#), accessed 11 September 2017.

<sup>16</sup> Raewyn Connell, “Margin becoming centre: for a world-centred rethinking of masculinities,” *NORMA: Nordic Journal for Masculinity Studies*, Vol 9, Issue 4, 2014 pp. 217 – 231.

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