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**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) and were men ever relevant to the management of the domestic space? This project studies the descriptions and portrayals of men in 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 discourse directed at different classes? How was a man who helped out in domestic labor described according to the elites, the petty bourgeois, and the masses in both cities?

Who were the ideal men in different class discourses of masculinity?

### Theoretical approach and methods

- While scholars have studied masculinity from the perspective of scholarly or martial masculinity, I decided to analyze men's role as boyfriends, husbands, and fathers. This approach came from the question of studying the other half in Republican (Nationalist) and public advocacy for training women to become "Good Wives, Wise Mothers" for the nation, what about men in the state and intellectual's attempt to reform the family?
- 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



### Findings Class Discourse on Masculinity

Regarding men's involvement in the domestic sphere, the cultural elite in family and women's magazines suggested:

1. A man who participated in domestic chores
2. A man who was monogamous
3. A husband who believed in gender equality in his marriage and the domestic management of the house

Several titles in the cultural elite discourse of masculinity hinted at companionate husbands that were restrained and reformed, for example:

"The ten amendments of being a husband"

"The way of spouses: The husband's responsibilities"

Consisted of those who were highly educated and most interested in self-improvement, ideal men were husbands who treated their wives well

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. Dominant in the decision-making in his family
2. Dutiful, responsible, and providing
3. Monogamous

Titles in op-eds on masculinity were more colorful than the cultural elites, and were closer to the taste of a petty bourgeoisie; consider the following:

"A cup of strong liquor to restore family order"

"The henpecked husband took the pill to become a better husband"

### Archive & Sources

Key Archive:

- Guangzhou Sun Yat-Sen Library of Guangdong Province

Key Sources:

- *Banjiao Manhua* (Nickel Comics, Guangzhou)
- *Haojiao Manhua* (The Clarion, Guangdong)
- *Guangzhou Mingguo Ribao* (Guangzhou Nationalist News)
- *Yuehua Bao* (Yuehua Daily, Guangzhou)
- *Guohua Bao* (Guohua Daily, Guangzhou)
- *Linglong Women's Magazine*, Shanghai
- *Nanpengyou* (Boyfriends), Shanghai
- Other women's and family magazines from Shanghai

### 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

Image to the Right,  
Ideal Husband: A husband who carries his wife on his back, grocery basket on one arm, and an infant on another arm. (Source: *Husheng* 1 no.3 (1936), 11)

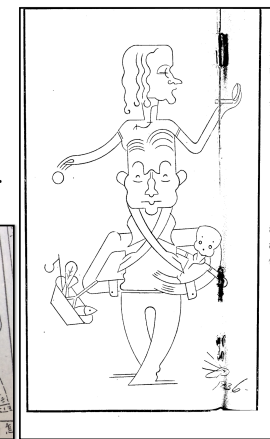


Image below: "Why is there not a Fattening Pill for Fathers?" (Source: *Haojiao manhua* no. 6, 1933)



### Conclusion and Further Implication

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 a 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 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 19<sup>th</sup> century and onward.