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**The Cultural Legacy of Oscar
Wilde in Modern China and
Beyond (1909–2019)**

By

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
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Declaration

The material covered in the section “A Short History of the Translation and Reception of Oscar Wilde,” “The Chinese *Salomé* — *Pan Jinlian* (1928)” in Chapter 1 and “A Symbol of Capitalist Sin: The Silence Years (1949–1976)” in Chapter 2 are vaguely based on the Chapter Two of my MA dissertation *The Exotic Image in the Other’s Eyes* (2015). Aforementioned sections all have been significantly revised for inclusion in this thesis.

The material about YE Lingfeng covered in “The Decadent Shanghai Dandies” is based on an article published under the title “Oscar Wilde in Sinophone World,” which appeared in *Global Encyclopedia of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) History* (2019). The article has been significantly revised for inclusion in this thesis.

I hereby confirm that this thesis is my own work, and that it has not been submitted for a degree at another university. I acknowledge the University of Warwick regulations on plagiarism and confirm that all sources used to support my research are made explicit in references.

Aurelia D. Wu

Signed:

Date:

Abstract

My PhD project discuss Oscar Wilde's literary as well as cultural reception in Modern China from 1909 when his work was translated for the first time to 2019 when this thesis is done. I also study his cultural influence in popular media sphere in the Confucian Cultural Circle (China, Japan, and South Korea). After examining his literary reception history in China in Part One, my thesis focuses on his persona as a glamorous dandy appropriated by fashion and popular cultural industry such as facemasks, perfume, male fashion magazines that appeal to the Anglophile Chinese middle-class younger generation in Part Two. They consider him as a fashion guide to a Western (British) and refined lifestyle that they wish to adopt. In the last section I study his influence in popular cultural industry in the form of *danmei* (boys' love) fanfictions (Mainland China), manga and video games (Japan), and a Korean musical (South Korea).

My project is in the areas of reception studies within the subfield of World Literatures and Cultural Studies more broadly. It juxtaposes literature with material culture, gender studies, big data analysis and luxury marketing. By examining the reception of British queer icon Oscar Wilde's works and the uses of his persona in China as well as Japan and Korea, I attempt to reveal aspects of China's interpretation of modernity within the wider East Asian context, influenced by the British Aestheticism.

Keywords: Oscar Wilde, Aestheticism, Male Fashion, Masculinity, Popular Culture, Cultural appropriation in global queer media flows, Censorship and queer media, Queer Fandom and translation, Neoliberalism and the commodification of queer culture, Mainland China, East Asia

Notes on Translation and Transliteration

All of the translations from Chinese to English in this section are mine unless otherwise listed.

I use the *Hanyu Pinyin* system of transliteration for Chinese words, names, and phrases, except in cases where a different conventional or preferred spelling or pronunciation exists. Place and personal names in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, and Korea are romanised according to local conventions. In romanised Japanese, macrons are put on long Japanese vowels except in the case of place names (e.g., Tokyo) and author names (e.g., Kuzuko Suzuki), excluding quotations.

In the Chinese, Japanese, and Korean languages, surnames precede given names. In this thesis, apart from Japanese names, I stick to their conventional order, namely family names (in capital letters) followed by given names, except in quotations where other scholars may apply a different order. Some Japanese names I could not find their romanised version and hence will leave them in their Kanji form such as 中島梓, 吉田真由美.

Notes on Definitions and Abbreviations

- **“Weeaboo” “weeboo” “weeb”**

Weeaboo/ weeboo / weeb is a derogatory slang for a white person who is obsessed with Japanese culture, especially anime. They are also called “Wapanese—wannabe Japanese” who are mostly white young men addicted to anime culture and are generally introverted and socially awkward, hence are slurred as the beta (Stryker; “Weeaboo—What Does Weeaboo Mean?”; “Difference Between ‘Otaku’ and ‘Weeaboo’”) While they are looked down upon by the “alpha male,” some of them simultaneously subscribe to alt-right beliefs that oppress them, engaging in anti-SJW activism at notorious forums such as 4Chan and Reddit. These groups of people are usually homophobic, transphobic, misogynistic, and racist. Meanwhile some of them claimed to have “yellow fever”—“East-Asian-women fetish,” meaning they *exclusively* dated, are dating, and married East Asian women (A.Lim; “Can I Still Fuck East Asian Girls and Be A WN?”). This fetish is usually developed from watching Japanese anime, pornography, K-pop girl bands, and is influenced by the stereotypical representation of East Asian women in mass (Western) media where these women and their coded equivalent—Western female characters in Oriental costume and makeup and have a docile temperament—are depicted as small, submissive, and sexually insatiable (Sevakis; Ren; Winsor; Wong; “Can I Still Fuck East Asian Girls... ?”).¹

- **“Douban”**

Douban, pronounced as “doe-ban,” is a hybrid of interest-based social networking platforms, which has become the preferred online social network for scholars, academics and writers in China. It is the third most popular social media platform in China, following Weibo (similar to Twitter) and Wechat (similar to WhatsApp). It is also known as China’s cultural hub or hipsters’ gathering. Douban functions as a combination of IMDB, Goodreads, Spotify, Pinterest, Medium, Twitter and Reddit all rolled up into one channel for Chinese users. Launched in 2005 by Dr. YANG Bo (杨勃), before WeChat (2006) and Weibo (2009), establishing itself as a social network with a reputation for high-quality content. Despite its rising popularity, Douban kept its minimalist UI design and chronological order for all posts—an interface that’s become emblematic of its endurance in the world of Chinese social media (S. Guo).

Compared to other relationship-based social media apps in China, Douban is more focused on lifestyle and cultural activities. Such focus makes it very popular among well-educated white-collar users. Douban has over 2 billion registered users (data collected by 2018; Tuilikong); by December 2019, the total website visits are 176.53 millions 86.54% are from China, followed 4.82% from the US and 1.96% from Taiwan (Similarweb). Most of them are degree holders who live in major cities

¹ The most recent examples of such coded characters are Joi played by Ana de Armas in *Blade Runner 2049* (2017); Vanessa played by Morena Baccarin in *Deadpool* (2016); Padmé Amidala played by Natalie Portman in *Star Wars* prequel trilogy (1999–2005).

and lead a middle-class lifestyle. Those who use the platform are called Douban-ers, and they are usually considered to be new lifestyle drivers or urban trendsetters. According to Dr. Yang, the founder, most of the users live in one of China's main cities. They are office workers, artists, freelancers, and students who share common interests in arts, culture, and lifestyle ([creative-union](#); [S. Guo](#)). This group of people are what I referred to in my thesis as the Chinese BOBOs.

- **The “New Culture Movement” and The “May Fourth Movement”**

The New Culture Movement of the mid 1910s and 1920s, around 1915-1919 to be more definitive although the years are still disputable, sprang from the disillusionment with traditional Chinese culture to address China's social and economic problems. Scholars such as CHEN Duxiu, CAI Yuanpei, LI Dazhao, Lu Xun, ZHOU Zuoren, and HU Shih, had classical educations but began to lead a revolt against Confucianism. They called for the creation of a new Chinese culture based on global and western standards, especially democracy and science.

The May Fourth Movement was an anti-imperialist, cultural, and political movement growing out of student protest participants in Beijing on May 4, 1919, protesting against the Chinese government's weak representatives in the Paris Peace Conference, especially allowing Japan to receive territories in Shandong which had been surrendered by Germany after the Siege of Tsingtao. These demonstrations sparked national protests and marked an upsurge in Chinese nationalism, a shift towards political mobilisation and away from cultural activities, and a move towards a populist political base rather than intellectual elites. Many of the political and social leaders of the next decades emerged at this time (Chow; Forster; Fang; Y.Gao et. al.).

In this thesis I use the Enlightenment Era to indicate the era of New Cultural Movement and the May Fourth Movement.

- **“Kuomintang” (KMT) and “Communist Party of China” (CCP)**

The Kuomintang of China (KMT), also spelled as Guomindang and often alternatively translated as the Nationalist Party of China (NPC) or the Chinese Nationalist Party (CNP) and founded in 1911 is a major political party in the Republic of China (1912-1949). The predecessor of the Kuomintang, the Revolutionary Alliance (Tongmenghui), was one of the major advocates of the overthrow of the Qing Dynasty and the subsequent declaration of independence in 1911 that resulted in the establishment of the Republic of China. The KMT was founded by SONG Jiaoren and SUN Yat-sen shortly after the Xinhai Revolution of 1911. Sun was the provisional President, but he later ceded the presidency to YUAN Shikai. Later led by CHIANG Kai-shek, the KMT formed the National Revolutionary Army and

succeeded in its Northern Expedition to unify much of Mainland China in 1928, ending the chaos of the Warlord Era (1916 - 1928). It was the ruling party in Mainland China until 1949, when it lost the Chinese Civil War (1945 -1949) to the rival Communist Party of China.

The Communist Party of China (CPC), also referred to as the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), is the founding and ruling political party of the People's Republic of China. It was founded in 1921, chiefly by CHEN Duxiu and LI Dazhao. The party grew quickly, and by 1949 it had driven the nationalist Kuomintang (KMT) government from Mainland China after the Chinese Civil War, leading to the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949.

- **“ACG” and “MAG”**

ACG is an abbreviation of “Anime, Comic, and Games,” used in some subcultures of Greater China (a term used to refer to mainland China, Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, and sometimes Singapore as well). ACG is not used in English speaking regions and thus is not popular among Chinese diaspora community. MAG is the Japanese equivalent to ACG, an abbreviation of “manga, anime, and games.” The English equivalent for both acronyms is Anime and Manga culture or *Otaku* culture. Throughout the dissertation, I use ACG in Sinophone context while MAG in Japanese context.

- **“BL (boys’ love),” “Shōnen Ai,” “Tanbi,” and “YAOI”**

These terms all refer to a media genre that originated in Japan featuring male-male romantic or sexual relationships, initially created by females for a female audience.

Boys love (BL; also written “boys’ love” and “boy’s love”), briefly speaking, first emerged in Japan in commercially published shōjo manga (girls' comics) magazines at the beginning of the 1970s according to James Welker’s entry on “Boys Love (Yaoi) Manga,” Global Encyclopedia of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) History). However, Welker’s entry is a shorthand definition. The origin of BL is “Tanbi” or “耽美” (lit. addicted to beauty), which is a literary genre inherited the ideals from the British Aestheticism that stresses beauty, romanticism, and tragic love as opposed to Naturalism and Realism. Its influence in manga starts from the 1950s and did not develop its homoerotic undertone until manga master Tezuka Osamu published *Ribon no Kishi* or *Princess Knight* (1953). It features a crossdressing princess who is a love interest of a prince; and the story is not clear whether he falls in love with her knowing her real gender or not (Yinyinsang “The Rise of Tongrenzhi Part 3”). In the 1960s, literary works that feature same-sex love are extremely romantic, unrealistic, and beautiful, therefore people start to label same-sex romance with “tanbi”. During the 1960-70s, “tanbi” manga is famous for its

highbrow literary connotation and its “Shōnen Ai” (lit. love between teen boys) theme. This genre’s representative – the “Year 24 Group” is a group of famous leftist female manga artists who played a significant role in shaping Japanese BL genre with their innovative drawing skills, literary accomplishment, and a strong political agenda in fighting against the misogynist ideal of the 1960s Japanese society, normalising same-sex romance, and de-ritualise marriage and sex. After entering into the 1970s – 80s, BL starts to develop three parallel subgenres:

1. *Shōnen Ai* that emphasizes highbrow literary accomplishment and the “soulmate ideal” instead of homosexuality *per se*.
2. Erotic BL that targets gays in real life with a famous manga magazine *Barazoku* (1971-2008) as its representative. It is famous for its explicit sexual content. This genre sometimes is also called “men’s love” as opposed to “boys’ love”.
3. Commercial BL is widely known today. Welker’s entry of BL is also based on this subcategory. It was populated by *JUNE* magazine (1978-2013) and grew to be the most influential genre during the 1990s-2000s and has influenced fans around the globe. The Sinophone world’s understanding of BL is based on this commercial BL. Another term for this genre is YAOI, that is developed from a magazine named 「RAPPORI らっぽりやおい特集号」 (YAOI Special Anthology). YAOI is the Romanisation of [やおい]. The editor of *RAPPORI* created this acronym to name this genre in a self-deprecating way. YAOI is short for Yamanashi, Ochinashi, Iminashi (lit. no peak, no climax, no meaning)

Therefore, while Yaoi and BL is usually used interchangeably, there are some nuances we need to distinguish. BL works in contemporary definition are commercial homoerotic works and are mostly original, whereas *yaoi* is a form of fan fiction and fanart focused on “coupling” [kappuringu or “CP”] presumably heterosexual male characters from mainstream manga and anime, similar to the Western “slash” fictions (Nagaike 103; Takahashi 128; Yinyinsang; Schodt; Suzuki; McLelland 61–77; Shamoon 77–103; Thorn 169–188; Lunsing; Welker 262–268; McHarry 183–196; Levi, McHarry, and Pagliassotti; Bauer and Katharina; Chao 65–76).

- **“Fujoshi” and “Fundanshi”**

Fujoshi and *Fundanshi* are Japanese terms that originally stemmed from the MAG (manga, anime, and games) fandoms in Japan, and are generally cisgender girls (*fujoshi*) and sometimes cisgender boys (*fundanshi*) who fetishise sexual or romantic relationship between boys. They are the major audience of BL or *yaoi*.

Notes on Data

From the second part of the thesis, the research focuses on the reception of Oscar Wilde's cultural influences in contemporary China's popular culture sphere in which the audiences are coined by me as China's "Gen '90s BOBOs (bourgeois bohemians)". This demographic is to be distinguished from "Generation 2 (G2) Middle-Class (born after mid 1980s; [Barton](#))," "Millennials/Gen Y (born between 1984–1995)", and "Gen Z (1995–2012)".

The Gen '90s BOBOs are a demographic born between 1990–2000, born and lived/living in Alpha–Beta cities of China, namely,

{ α +: Beijing, Shanghai} { α : Guangzhou} { α -: Shenzhen}
 { β +: Chengdu, Hangzhou} { β : Nanjing, Wuhan}
 { β -: Chongqing, Suzhou, Dalian, Xiamen, Changsha, Shenyang, Qingdao, Jinan} ([GaWC 2018 World Cities](#))

They are from middle-class family background and are educated in the West or in highly Westernised countries and regions, namely, Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong, and Singapore. They are mostly active on Chinese social media Douban.

Chinese population by regions ("[China Statistical Yearbook 2018](#)")

Chinese Population: 1,396,380, 000 (2019)

- Chinese Urban Population: 831,370,000 (2019) Urban population percentage 59.58%,
- α - β zone population: 200,429,300 (2018), thus 14% of the total population.

Chinese Middle Class (middle-strata)

- Size of Chinese middle-class: 32,200,000 (2015), will be 700,000,000 (2022; [Barton](#)). The media usually states the size as 4 billion ([Cyrill](#); [Iskryan](#)), so will this thesis. Middle-class Chinese is around 29% of the total population.
- Size of G2 middle-class: 200,000,000 (2012; Barton), will be 400,000,000 (2022; Barton). Hence G2 is 50% the total middle class in China.

The Generation '90s

- In 2018 report, the Gen '90s is 17% of the total population, thus Chinese Gen '90s are $1,396,380, 000 * 17\% = 237,384,600$ (2 billion; [Sina Finance](#))

Gen '90s BOBOs

Due to Douban's characteristics as a hub of cultured youth and there is no other social media platform that has the similar functions and characteristics; thus, we could almost equate Douban users to the Chinese BOBOs.

- Registered Douban users are 200,000,000 (2 billion; 2018; [Tuilikong](#))
- Douban users' characteristics:
 1. 66.13% from α - β zone, 132,260,000

2. 70% received bachelor's degree in universities 140,000,000
3. 32.25% are upper-middle tier consumers 64,500,000
4. 27.46% (aged 25-30) Gen '90 54,920,000

Douban users are mostly “spiritual oriented,” or “bohemian,” therefore, economic index is the most important determinate to this demographic being called “bourgeois bohemians,” hence, the estimated size of Gen '90s BOBOs are

$64,500,000 * 66.13% * 70% * 27.46% \approx 8,198,923$

[due to lack of data, the number of this demographic could only be deduced]

Therefore, the demographic I study in this thesis are around **8 million**

Other data:

- Chinese LGBTs community population 70,000,000 (**70 million**, 2017; [Jennings](#)) 60% aged 18-24 (**42 million**) and 34% aged 25-34 (**23.8 million**; “[China: LGBT Community Breakdown By Age 2014](#)”)
- Chinese ACG (or Otaku culture) fandom population 300,000,000 (**3 billion**) (2018; [China Industry & Planning Consulting Leader](#))
- Chinese Danmei fandom population 5,200,000 (**5.2 million**; 2019; Weibo followers of a major BL account @[腐女大本营](#))
- Chinese Danmei fandom with a focus on Anglophone works: **45,047** (Weibo followers of the only Anglophone BL account @[英耽文学组](#))
- #王尔德# (Wilde)'s topic' total views are 111,020,000 (**1 billion**; 2020) according to Weibo hashtag data analysis.

Men and Cosmetic Surgery Industry

Number of customers in the medical aesthetics industry in China are **22 million**

(“[China: Aesthetic Medicine Client Number 2018](#)” see Fig.1)

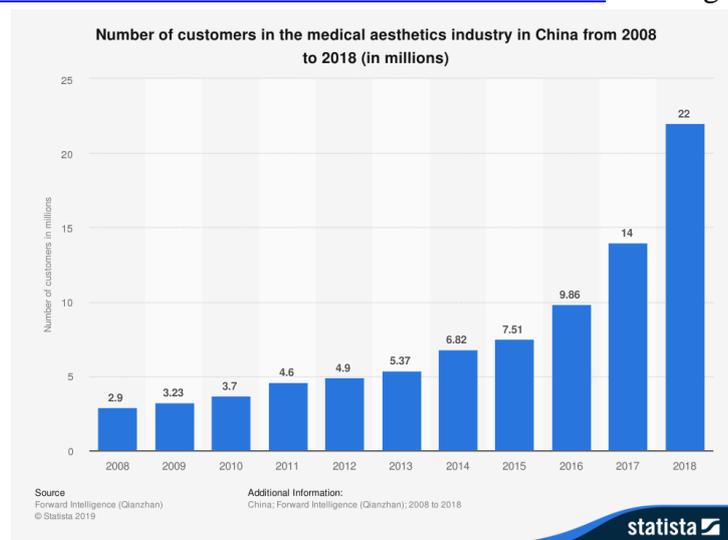


Figure 1

In 2018, the market for aesthetic medicine in China was worth more than 495 billion yuan, with males accounting for around 15 per cent of customers, according to a

report by cosmetic surgery social networking app Gengmei, whose name means “more beautiful” in Chinese (“[Male Cosmetic Surgery In China](#)”).

Combine the above data together, male patients of cosmetic surgery in China in 2018 are 22 million *15% = **3.3 million**

GQ readership highlights ([Condé Nast](#))

Print readership 1.7 million; digital readership 6.1 million. Audience average age is 30. 81% percent are male (**6.3 million**), 87% of readers have high level of education (bachelor’s degree and above)

Global male cosmetic industry data

As a commanding \$13.4 billion business, the global male grooming market posted nearly 4% growth and is expected to reach \$15.5 billion at the manufacturers’ level by 2017. However, the category’s performance has not been regionally uniform. Western Europe, the largest male grooming market, revealing low single-digit tumescence, while in Asia, the highly advanced male grooming markets in South Korea and Japan, coupled with the newer vigorous markets of India and China, are driving the growth of the industry ([Team](#)).

- Men’s personal care market is expected to hit \$166 billion in 2022, according to Allied Market Research.
- Nearly 40% of adults aged 18-22 have shown interest in gender-neutral beauty products, according to NPD’s iGen Beauty Consumer report.
- Male-targeted skin-care product sales have jumped 7% in the past year. ([Warfield](#))

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Introduction—The Defiance of Death is Beauty!

1. The “Degeneracy” Problem and World politics

I want a society where people like me are simply allowed to exist—and this is the important part—where people who are not like me are also allowed to exist. Fascists want a society where only people like them are allowed to exist. The queer quest is to survive. The Fascist’s quest is to be the only survivor [...]. If your goal in life is to create as many white babies as possible, you know what? It’s fine! Just go make white babies. But I must insist upon my right and the right of all “degenerates” to co-exist alongside you in our own decadent communities.

— Natalie Wynn, “Oscar Wilde on YouTube”

In a sunny spring afternoon on my way home, two extremely handsome boys in their early twenties waved at me on the street. One boy had piercing blue eyes, natural blonde curly hair, and a sharp jawline. His tall and muscular physique immediately reminded me of the Greek deity Apollo. The other boy seemed a bit shy in comparison to his LA-born companion but was equally attractive. The brown-haired British boy was tall, slender, and aesthetically muscular, with a strikingly beautiful face: sparkling hazel eyes, flirty long eyelashes, and well-proportioned cheeks, still tinged with teenage boy rosy hue. I “wow-ed” silently and somewhere in my head a ballerina-shaped figure named vanity started a *pas de deux* with an imaginary boyfriend, suspiciously looking like both of them. So I stopped on my way. The American boy flashed me his Hollywood smile and said, “Thank you for your time Miss; would you like to know about the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints?” The ballerina in my head crossed her elbows. I stepped back a bit, “Well, I’m not religious anymore. I was a Catholic, but my faith has fallen short. So, no, thank you very much.” I spoke nonchalantly and was about to continue on my way. The blonde boy stepped forward with his sapphire-like eyes wide open, “Oh wow you speak fantastic English!”—I sighed inwardly—“but don’t worry we won’t press you! In fact, I have had a similar experience!” I tried not to look at his breathtakingly handsome face, but failed, so I inquired, “Have you?” and my eyes glanced at his quiet companion who was looking at me earnestly with a smile. The ballerina did a *pirouette*. The golden-haired boy continued, “Ah yes! I’m from L.A. and I once went for an audition of a blockbuster, like a really amazing chance, and I thought I’d get that role, like all my friends and family thought I’d get it. But then I didn’t. I was so depressed that I abandoned my faith. But later I was convinced that God had better plans for me instead . . .” His enthusiasm was infectious, and more importantly, he and his companions were really handsome. So, instead of immediately dismissing them I listened to his story. Since then we became friends and I came to know that they are Mormon missionaries. Back then my knowledge of Mormons was very limited. I thought Mormons were a bunch of rednecks and

“weeaboos.” The two boys were absolutely different. Therefore, I wanted to find out what this famous cult was about and how people think from the other side of the political spectrum.

Over the next four weeks, I met them regularly on a Thursday afternoon in a cafe. I wanted to know the Mormon agenda and an idea of the political views of such conservative religious group. Everyone was nice and friendly. However, after a few meetings, I realised that their worldviews were archaic. The Christian moral preaching was nothing unfamiliar to an ex-Catholic girl, but my tolerance for homophobic, anti-intellectual, and misogynist views has decreased dramatically since I started my master’s degree. After they insisted on persuading me to join their church, I decided to confront them with my political views. I am a feminist and I support LGBTQ+ people; even if I were to join their church I would be excommunicated later. They noted they would not condemn LGBTQ+ people, but that queer persons could not join “God’s world,” because God’s way included only heterosexual procreation. To this I ordered a cup of coffee while smiling at them. Then I questioned the *Book of Mormon*’s inaccurate narrative of the history of Native Americans, to which they replied, in “reading the *Book of Mormon* you should use your heart to feel it instead of reading it intellectually. You need to switch off your intellectual mode to really understand the book.” My eyebrows arched. Since childhood, my dad had always told me that a good book enlightened people and guided their spirits in understanding different, foreign parts of the world. If reading a book cannot teach and inform, why read it in the first place? The American boy adjusted his tie and cleared his throat. He shifted our discussion away from his companion’s weak point on reading “un-intellectually,” explaining that the reason their church did not support LGBTQ+ nor approve of “harmful substances” (i.e., coffee, alcohol, tea) was because the human species would be in danger if we let unchecked desires rule our lives. They argued, “animals have basic desires and will exploit them, whereas human beings are able to abstain from unhealthy desires and obsessions. Otherwise we will become subhumans.”

At this point, their wonderfully handsome faces converged with those scholars who invented and perpetrated scientific racism (Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, Arthur de Gobineau, Max Nordau, Edward Gibbon), Neo-Confucian (Cheng–Zhu School) moralists during the late Qing dynasty in China, as well as modern right-wing Internet influencers.² The word they did not use but were implying was “degenerate”—the fear that queerness and indulgence of pleasures would damage the moral fiber of our society, and a decadent and grotesque species would emerge. This decadent race would be vulnerable to attacks and eventually become extinct. Their rationale on abstinence sounds innocently reasonable. After all, moderation and healthy lifestyles are indeed virtues. However, while using these moral regulations to

² The Cheng–Zhu School is one of the major philosophical schools of Neo-Confucianism, based on the ideas of the Neo-Confucian philosophers CHENG Yi, CHENG Hao, and ZHU Xi. It is also referred to as the Rationalistic School. “To preserve Heaven’s laws and eliminate human desires” was the core of ZHU Xi’s ethical thoughts (Chan).

preserve “the graceful state of humans,” the alarming result so often is intolerance for people who do not obey such regulations, or are simply different.

My research on the British Aesthetic Movement’s icon Oscar Wilde introduced me to the “degeneracy” discourse and its actuality as intolerant beliefs stemming from racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, and the like. Wilde’s conviction of “gross indecency”—a Victorian term for criminal homosexual act—led to sentencing of two years hard labour in Reading gaol. His trial constituted not just an individual case of Victorian homophobia, but announced the on-going ideological war between the conservative establishment and progressive liberal dissidents to this day. Joseph Bristow, in *Effeminate England* (1995), discussed Wilde’s fatal effeminacy during the late Victorian era, observing that Wilde’s effeminacy and “pervert” sexuality were deemed “degenerate,” a Darwinist term contending that human races could devolve into ape-like animals if a society allowed the existence of effeminate men (including aesthetes, transvestites, drag queens), “masculine” women (including feminist, career women, women who refuse to marry and procreate), transgenders and transexuals, homosexuals, immigrants, and even hedonists; and that the moral fibre of society would be irreparably damaged and human beings would fall from the “state of grace” (16–19). Wilde, a queer Irish hedonist, was deemed pernicious, a threat to the continuation and stability of the Victorian society, and should be punished in the eyes of Victorians (and the Mormon boys).

Such believers are not alone in staking this dangerous territory. During the 1930s and 1940s, the intolerance of “others” and “degeneracy” led to the Holocaust of World War II, the most notorious in human history. The ultimate fear was that the human race, and especially the white race, is a biological organism susceptible to infection and decay.³ Accordingly, foreigners, ethnic minorities, gender-nonconformists, fat, ugly, and disabled people were considered degenerates who contributed to the decay of a race or civilisation. Thus, they must be purged in order to secure the health and the existence of this organism. In the West, we might trace the scholarly lineage of the degeneracy discourse back to *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776). During the 18th and 19th centuries, when archaeological and paleontological discoveries developed substantially, Western scholars started intensive research on why civilizations collapse. They concluded that the collapse usually starts from within, particularly when a society is infatuated with effeminate hedonist and miscegenation. They usually blamed decadent Roman emperors, such as Caligula (12–41 AD), Nero (37–68 AD), and Elagabalus (204–222 AD), for effeminising and otherwise causing the degeneration of Roman Civilisation, thus inviting invasion from the “purer” and more masculine Germanic

³ In making this point, I am not suggesting that other races are immune to this fear or eugenics. For instance, honour killings from extreme religious groups and clans usually in South Asian and Arabic countries. Political persecutions and anti-intellect violence found in East Asia and Southeast Asian countries, namely Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), Tiananmen Massacre (1989), Cambodian genocide (1975); and the most recent ethnic cleanse is Rwandan genocide (1994) which happened in Africa.

tribes. (Although these Roman emperors lived some 200 years prior to the collapse of the Western Roman Empire in 476 AD). Similar claims also appear in Chinese history books, in which almost every last emperor of a dynasty is heavily criticised by Chinese historians and Confucian scholars for their “unmanly” behaviours and hedonistic lifestyles.⁴ Many Chinese people today believe that dynasties collapsed because of rulers’ effeminate hobbies and indulgence in sensual pleasures.⁵

In Western academia, “anti-feminist” feminist Camille Paglia has promoted such degeneracy discourse specifically attacking the queers. She announced her observation that Western civilisation has a suicidal tendency towards androgyny in the late phases of civilisation, as it starts to unravel (Paglia). She also argues that ancient Greek sculptures demonstrate her claim that this period provides sculptures of robust athletes, whereas in the decadent era statues became effeminate (Paglia). She claims queers make civilization defenseless to outsider’s invasion. Paglia even attributes the rise of ISIS to the feminisation of Western men in school, where boys are encouraged to break traditional gender stereotypes (Paglia; McCarthy).

Without inserting whiteness, Paglia’s argument amounts to basic social conservatism one finds around the world today. For instance, an article published on Chinese Xinhua Net (Chinese official news) in 2018 attacked the popularity of “niang-pao” (lit. effeminate men) in media, calling them “sick plum trees.”⁶ Conservative social commentators expressed their worries that the high-profile representation of effeminate men in mass media has a bad influence on Chinese boys, which will put China in danger of defenselessness in the future.⁷ It is noteworthy that children and teenagers are the major worry to conservatives worldwide. This belief reveals conservative hostility as not directed at an individual case. In reality, some conservatives or alt-right members even have token LGBTQ+ or non-white friend(s) to distance themselves from blatant homophobia and racism. Here, the queerness or “gay agenda” is targeted instead of queer individuals. Their basic point is that the high-profile “social justice” activities, such as the Pride

⁴ Among them, the most famous decadent rulers are ZI Dixin—King Zhou of the Shang Dynasty (1105–1046 BC), YANG Guang—Emperor Yang of the Sui Dynasty (569–618 AD), and LI Yu—the last ruler of the Southern Tang Kingdom (937–978 AD). The three Chinese rulers are famous “party animals” and were either indulgent in entertainment and sex (and even “worse,” listening to women’s ideas), or they were indulgent in the pursuit of art and literature instead of military trainings that rulers should be interested. For instance, Li and Yang could make their names in history simply by their excellence in art, but they were not successful in military strategies.

⁵ Chinese idiom “jiuchi roulin” (lit. alcohol lake and meat forest) came from the ultra indulgence King Zhou had enjoyed. Allegedly, he filled an artificial lake with rice wine so people could boat while drinking simultaneously. Alongside the lake he ordered servants hanging up preserved meat and doing BBQ, so people in the court would never feel hungry and such banquets usually lead to orgies. Emperor Yang made a huge dragon boat, equivalent to a floating palace, where he engaged in decadent but also artistic parties.

⁶ In Chinese classical culture, the plum tree is one of the four symbols of “Junzi,” equivalent to Western concept of the gentleman. The others are orchids, bamboo, and chrysanthemums.

⁷ Refer to [“Niangpao Phenomenon Should be Stopped”](#); [“Niaopao is Destroying Our Next Generation”](#); [“Heartbroken! When will the Niangpao Phenomenon Stop”](#); [“Official Media Criticising the Niangpao Sick Culture Poisoning Teenagers”](#)

Parade, Women’s March, Black Lives Matter, influence their children negatively and that they may degenerate into the people they adamantly oppose and aim to purge.

The attack on effeminacy and the worship of military masculinity in our modern society are reminiscent the renowned transgender Youtuber, Natalie Wynn. In her video essay on “degeneracy” Wynn deliberately compares her makeup footage with bodybuilding footage of Marcus Follin, better known as “The Golden One” (see Fig.1).⁸ This comparison is a perfect parody of the malicious prejudice that queer “sissy” boys are physically frail and will be beaten to pulp by a muscular warrior, revealing society’s glorification of military masculinity and the entrenched prejudice against queerness.



Figure 1. Natalie Wynn doing makeup (left) while Marcus Follin boxing (Right). Screenshots from her video essay “The Degeneracy” (2017), *ContraPoints/Youtube*.

Marcus Follin represents and encourages the current alt-right activism epidemic on Western cyberspace and also in real life (i.e., the Charlottesville rally), where straight young white men gather under the banners of anti-PC, anti-globalization, anti-multiculturalism, anti-feminist, anti-LGBTQ+, anti-SJW, to reclaim a white ethnostate and promote the traditional heterosexual nuclear family. Those who fall outside their category of “wholesome people” are all degenerates, who should be killed.

What is alarming about the alt-right contingent, apart from their pernicious ideology, is that their representatives are influential and charismatic. They may not come across as problematic at first and are usually physically attractive (e.g., the Mormon boys, Milo Yiannopoulos, Marcus Follin, Jordan Peterson, Ben Shapiro, Dave Rubin, to name few).

Wilde’s Aestheticism also treads a thin line between Dorian Gray and Wilde himself. Beauty completely devoid of moral concern is dangerous; Wilde warned us.

⁸ “The Golden One,” Marcus Follin, is a Swedish political and body-building Youtube personality who promotes the image of the white, super-muscular, self-proclaimed alpha-male, pure-blooded Norse warrior, and “the Son of Odin,” as he self-fashioned it.

When beauty is introduced to politics, it is the beginning of fascism: “fascism is the introduction of aesthetics into political life” Walter Benjamin noted (647–664).⁹ In addition, their ideology is usually sugar-coated as promoting healthy lifestyle and self-help advice, e.g., “clean your room,” exercise regularly, temperance, loyalty, self-regulation (Peterson; Follin); and they even ask followers to respect other cultures (they deem worthy). For instance, Follin spoke highly of Chinese civilisation when he posted a gift he received from a Chinese fan on social media, which confused me at the beginning. However, the comments area revealed that white nationalists think highly of a communist nation because they admire China’s mono-race population. Hence, white nationalists are often misinformed and ignorant, because China has fifty-six different ethnic groups and some of them are of Indo-European race, e.g. (ethnic) Russians, Tajiks, Uhghurs, Kazakhs, Sogdians and more.¹⁰ White nationalists also consider this gifting a fine example of exchanges of great foreign cultures, for example, those of ancient times, through trading and diplomatic gifting, not “through tons of them coming over here” (@[thegloriouslion](#)). This statement interestingly discloses what I call a delayed “Globalisation PTSD” for the West, appearing since the 19th century in the process of modernisation, i.e., the local culture is threatened by the presence of the Other (cultures) in their native space, which had already been experienced by previously colonised countries on a much more atrocious level. The Western imperial powers forcefully dragged colonised countries into the modern *world system*, which now starts to affect Western civilisation: foreigners “pour” into Western “native” territory to compete with them for limited resources, and “breed” non-native babies to compete with the native’s descendants.

Following such logic, homosexuals who cannot breed children, or women who refuse to marry and have children, are deemed hateful degenerates giving away limited resources to non-native babies bred by foreigners. One could also argue that limited resources actualised as limited job opportunities are caused by the technology revolution, as jobs that require low intelligence have been automated away by artificial intelligence. Small drug stores around the corner of your neighborhood are replaced by online shopping corporations like Amazon, supermarkets and fast-food restaurants cashiers are gradually replaced by self-check-out kiosks; delivery services are soon to be replaced by drones and automatic cars, and so forth.

However, it is easier to blame the material presence of foreign people, who look different or who have different religious beliefs than venting rage on invisible technology and machines. The current living conditions are, of course, “shitty” in comparison to “the good old times,” when the West (the white race) was the dominating power, when there were more job opportunities, cheaper houses, women

⁹ The military parades, pageantry, and dashing Nazi uniforms designed by Hugo Boss are potent evidence.

¹⁰ Thus, the racial category “Chinese” in Western official documentation is erroneous and ridiculous, in that China is by no means a mono-race country, nor could we say that “American” is a race.

were less feminist and easier to “acquire,” racist and sexist jokes tolerated, and money was growing and flowing. The current younger generation (at least white, straight working-class men) deals with a new tech-reformed economic structure while simultaneously facing the culture shock of changing social norms. They are confused, depressed, isolated, and sexually frustrated. They latch onto idea groups who emphasise a collective identity—straight whiteness—associated with something much greater and deeper than their mundane existence and ordinariness, namely, a sense of belonging to a long and glorious civilisation, called the Western Civilisation.

A similar pressure is also challenging young Chinese men as it challenges men around the world, because the technology and ideological changes are actually universal. The alt-right’s identity politics, propelled by current American president Donald J. Trump who promises to bring the glorious past back instead of moving forward.¹¹ This idea lines up with the colonial mentality of Asians who worship the Western Civilisation in Edward Said’s and Frantz Fanon’s discourse, especially in areas like Hong Kong, India, and some South-East Asian countries, where nostalgia for the British Empire is growing increasingly strong (Sheridan; Chen et al.; Malik; Falser 8–9). In addition, such ideas also appeal to the nationalist sentiment in rejuvenating Chinese civilisation, which also has a long glorious history. Therefore, white nationalists and extreme hate groups have supporters from non-white countries.

During the past four years, three major political events have had a deep effect on the politically concerned, namely, the 2016 American Presidential Election, the 2016 Brexit Referendum, and the on-going Sino-US Trade War. Those events reveal a strong nationalist sentiment, to the point of tribalism and intolerance of the *Other*. I leave the complex reasons and conditions contributing to our current political environment for scholars of international politics to decipher and focus on how Oscar Wilde’s contemplation on aesthetics and his reception in China can effectively address the aforementioned social issues plaguing our confused youth. Against the backdrop of an increasingly politically divided environment, Wilde’s humour and glamour will make a more understanding world.

2. Why Study Oscar Wilde in the 21st Century: Liberals Should Reclaim Popular Culture

Wilde, the leader of the British Aesthetic movement, and an effeminate man who went against the grain to oppose the British imperial military masculinity, was an exemplary “degenerate” icon who valued beauty more than anything, but who was also a righteous man at heart. He balanced the two sides of his life principles between aesthetics and morality, hence created an inspiring philosophy that shows young people how to respect different voices and understand the meanings of democracy, freedom, and equality without feeling force-fed by political correctness.

¹¹ His slogan “make America great again” is inherently biased against racially and sexually others whose well-being were horrible in the past.

In our “age of spectacle,” Wilde’s works inspire people with humour, style, and glamour, while progressive academia and the liberal preach in a dull, unappealing (aesthetically), and inaccessible manner. Progressive liberals usually drive away ordinary audiences with jargon-laden speeches that require college degrees to understand (academics have to begrudgingly own the label of “privileged and detached elites”). Although not on purpose, they distance themselves from the general public and average voters within democratic political systems. Wilde insightfully plays the charisma card that is vital in persuasion. Criticising academia and liberal public speakers as dull and joyless may be dismissed as a frivolous objection, because to persuade with glamor unapologetically emphasises the spectacle—to be seen—which is conventionally associated with femininity and hence cannot be “taken seriously.” However, in this age where social media, especially YouTube and Instagram, have transformed our lives into enviable spectacles, being seen becomes the prerequisite of being heard (Debord). Wilde’s self-fashioning, thus, has never been so relatable and useful. In my encounter with the Mormon boys, it is clear that humans enjoy beautiful company, and are less on guard in being approached by visually pleasant people. After all, we do not live in a purely philosophical world but a visual world.

Judith Butler’s gender performance theory, Jean Baudrillard’s simulacrum discourse, and Guy Debord’s spectacle theory have become most relevant. Self-fashioning has become prevalent in the public sphere and has turned into a weapon for the right-wing influencers to recruit hundreds and thousands of misinformed young people via YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, Reddit, 4Chan, Instagram, Snapchat. Progressive academia, *per contra*, has limited its voice within the ivory tower, conforming to a somewhat patriarchal mindset—looking down on fashion and style, traditionally labeled as effeminate and frivolous, worrying that engaging too much with popular and visual culture will reduce academic merit (Gregg; Lamming; Adonis). Those in academia must contemplate the fact that outspoken and strategically self-fashioned right-wing voices are dominating the popular cultural sphere. It is imperative that the progressive Left should reclaim popular culture as they did in the 1960s and 70s, with rock n’roll, hippie fashion, musicals, cartoons—perhaps especially cartoons and anime, for the majority of such misled young people are addicted to watching anime and video gaming.

Unlike charismatic Rightists who uphold Benjamin’s argument on Aestheticism’s slippage into Fascism, Wilde’s Aestheticism is not completely decadent. Bristow points out that the moral concerns in Wilde’s works make his aesthetic theories sometimes paradoxical (24–25). However, it is Wilde’s very paradoxical nature that balances the principles of the aesthetic and the moral that contribute to a good and joyful life. It makes him a relatable and a charismatic icon who can make good, progressive ideas more accessible and appealing to the general public. Why do iconic and popular academics usually speak for the conservative authoritarian contingent, like Jordan Peterson, misleading hundreds of thousands of

young men going down the alt-right rabbit hole?¹² Academia need not dumb itself down to appeal to the public, but instead learn the strategy and rhetoric of Wilde, to better speak to all walks of life. Reclaiming the popular culture is to attract the general public first and then gradually and subtly impart the more serious knowledge, theories, and wholesome values. Natalie Wynn’s visually stunning, rhetorically hilarious, and intellectually inspiring channel has been “making nuanced and controversial political debates both sexy and engaging” (Cross; Hall). The comments area on her YouTube channel shows that many young people who used to be white nationalists have changed their minds (Reeve; Hall). “One thing the right wing has done pretty effectively in the last few years is, they’ve managed to frame the discussion as a kind of puritan, moralistic, sermonizing Left versus a kind of edgy, rebellious, punk-rock Right,” says Wynn, “and I refuse to allow them to get away with that” (Reeve; Hall).

Leaning on Nietzsche’s perception of morality and aesthetics (*The Birth of Tragedy*), one’s life overly dominated by moral principles make for a dry, lifeless, and negative Puritan moralist, critiquing everything in society—as those Far-right young men argued that Anita Sarkeesian is robbing their little solace in video-gaming after a long day.¹³ Wildean Aestheticism encourages people to have fun, be relaxed and indulgent in beauty and art; simultaneously he warns readers through the tale of *Dorian Gray*, whose life is dominated by aesthetics, making him shallow and self-centred. Our global community benefits from reading Wilde’s well-balanced philosophy. His Aestheticism aims to entertain, but not at the cost of basic morality—more often this happens in Western cultural industry, while it also aims to enlighten people without heavily moralising and regulating ideas that kill joy and creativity—as China is doing.¹⁴

Historically *Dorian Gray* has overshadowed Wilde himself, creating the false impression that Wilde was a debauched hedonist without morality. In addition, Wilde’s effeminacy and his “deviant” sexual taste put him at a disadvantageous position. He has been seen as the degenerate who posits a threat to the

¹² After the New Zealand mosque shooting happened in March 2019, a young white man named Caleb Cain made a very emotional video on YouTube that went viral. He talked about how he was lured into the right-wing camp when he was battling depression. He randomly searched self-help advice on Youtube and clicked a video that talks about the objective racial and sexual differences. Youtube’s algorithm recommends similar but gradually more radical and pernicious content that made him an angry racist and sexist. He confessed that the New Zealand shooting became a wake-up call to him. He was all in tears confessing the shame and guilt he felt after he realised he was misled. This is not an individual case. Under Natalie Wynn’s every video post, many comments told a similar story about how they were misguided by right-wing propaganda videos and now are awakened ([Cain; CNN; Roose](#); “How Youtube “Radicalizes” The Alt-Right”).

¹³ Anita Sarkeesian is a Canadian-American feminist media critic, blogger, and public speaker. She is the founder of *Feminist Frequency*, a website that hosts videos and commentary analyzing portrayals of women in popular culture. She has received particular attention for her video series *Tropes vs. Women in Video Games*, which examines tropes in the depiction of female video game characters. I agree with Sarkeesian that “it is both possible and even necessary to simultaneously enjoy media while also being critical of its more problematic or pernicious aspects” (“Tropes vs Women in Video Games”).

¹⁴ The Western case is referring to Neil Postman’s *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (1985).

heteronormative establishment's existence. His voice is accordingly marginalised and twisted.

3. Why Read Oscar Wilde in a Chinese Context

The cultural struggle between the Right and the Left forms a part of the rationale for my study on Wilde in the Chinese context.

First, the study of a “foreigner” in a national literary context, through which the national consciousness is staged, is always subjective, and thus a good vantage point to probe the mores. Images of foreigners are always simulacra of their original. French Sinologist Jacques Gernet points out:

Every society's view of the other is racial-centric ... In fact each society imagines the other based on its own social, political, religious and ethical traditions, based on its own spiritual paradigms and perspectives on humanity and the world. Therefore, the description of foreigners is no small matter. It touches on the things that are most intrinsic and most fundamental to any society or culture. However, we can also say that this perspective is multi-faceted, because it changes with the mores and issues of concern of every age. Therefore, a society's view of foreigners may at times be one of disinterest, or curiosity, or rapturous approval, or unjust condescension or hatred. But the reasons for this infatuation or repulsion are in themselves always enlightening. (143)

Indeed, to Western society in general, China is an old and strange country, located far away in the East. Although modern technology has largely decreased the geographical distance, the ideological distance remains. Additionally, China's self-imposed isolation from global cyber-community further mystifies this country to Westerners, and allows for both “rapturous approval” and “unjust condescension” of China in Western virtual space, where the underprivileged young adults—especially those who have not received higher education—extract information nowadays. After China achieved its great economic success in contemporary global context, the country began to gain Western academic attention. In recent decades, Wildean scholars, such as Colin Cavendish-Jones, CHEN Qi, Jerusha McCormack, have contributed comparatively objective and thorough research on the image of the “Chinaman” and Chinese philosophy in Wilde and Western (con) texts. However, Western Wildean scholars usually limit themselves to a Eurocentric scope, as in the work of Bristow and Michael Gillespie. On the other side, Chinese scholars, such as ZHOU Xiaoyi, Zhang Longxi, Hou Jingjing, and Gao Fanfan have focused primarily on textual analysis. Their great contribution caused Chinese scholars repeatedly to study the image of Dorian Gray from purely theoretical approaches, such as psychoanalysis. Often times, instead of applying theoretical lens to analyse Wilde's characters, Chinese scholars have used these characters to verify theories, rigidly fitting their interpretations into the prescriptive theoretical mould, and thus lost their own voices. As such, not only is the general research on Wilde clichéd in Sinophone academia, it also remains under the radar of young Western readers. To be fair, why would a Western young adult be interested in a completely different culture from a

country generally considered “less developed” or “evil”? Moreover, why has China’s international image maintained such negative stereotypes in Western media, when Confucius Institutes aiming to break cultural barriers are mushrooming all over the world? The political force-feeding method of those institutes may attract people who have already had an interest to learn about Chinese culture, but ordinary non-Chinese people may easily avoid it and retain their prejudice and stereotypes all their lives. But then how can cultural barriers, misunderstandings, and conflicts be resolved if we do not even want to listen to each other?

Moreover, Wilde Studies in Chinese higher education remain marginal, largely due to his queer identity, although he is very popular among the younger generation, which correlates with the rising LGBTQ+ activism and Anglophile sentiment in China.¹⁵ My research aims to address this gap in Wilde Studies, arguing that his works and performance as a dandy have particular relevance to countries like China, who struggle with neo-liberal globalisation (Westernization).

Second, Wilde and Aestheticism are important in this time as enlightening and uniting people of different backgrounds when ideological differences divide us into Left and Right camps, and factions (even though relatively small, such as the Neo-Nazis or the Antifas) on both sides seem to prefer people with different opinions to be dead.

For example, Wilde extolled the power of beauty as one that can unite people. Wilde articulates that beauty will make better people and a better society. Not just a specific society but the global society, he argues, “[a]rt would create a new brotherhood among men by furnishing a universal language. I said that under its beneficent influences war might pass away” (“House Decoration” 157). Indeed, in Chapter 6, I discuss the “grand unity” of the “Aesthetic 同志” from China, Japan, and South Korea, three nations united in their shared interest in Aestheticism and its legacy in modern boy’s love (BL) subculture.¹⁶ They actively translate and share each other’s creative works—fiction, manga, anime, music, and video games. What is even more amazing is that the frequent cultural interchanges between Japan and China online have created a new language, “Pseudo-Chinese,” which enables people from both countries to communicate without learning each other’s language.¹⁷ During the 1930 and 40s, fascist Japan wanted to create a Greater East Asia Co-

¹⁵ In 2012 I conducted a survey on Oscar Wilde’s reception in Chinese higher education institutes for my BA degree. My research shows that Wilde was usually ignored in (English and Chinese) literature class because of his queer identity. Chinese educators still consider homosexuality an embarrassing topic to explain to students in college level class (Wu 8–9). My research result is published in “Subtle Morals in Wilde’s Works for Chinese Young Adults,” *Literary Education*. Mid 6 (2013): 8–12.

¹⁶ “Grand unity” is a term appropriated from the Confucian “ideal world” of “datong”

¹⁷ Pseudo-Chinese (偽中国語) is a form of Japanese Internet slang, which first appeared around 2009. It involves taking sentences that are grammatically Japanese and stripping away the hiragana and katakana, leaving only the kanji behind, which causes the resultant sentence to appear Chinese. The phenomenon has spread to China, where Chinese speakers can understand the meaning of the sentences despite not knowing Japanese (Pseudo-Chinese Research Association; Pseudo-Chinese—Moe Wiki; “[Pseudo-Chinese is Japan’s New Trend](#)”; “[Kevin 英语情报局](#)”)

Prosperity Sphere, by invading China and colonising Korea, which resulted in terrible holocausts and lasting hatred among the three countries. The harmonious virtual community of the “Aesthetic 同志” is, therefore, a precious body committed to achieving a cultural cosmopolitan utopia where people overcome their entrenched prejudice against each other. Thus, what violent military actions and diplomatic negotiations failed to accomplish is achieved by a similar love for beauty and art.

Third, studying Wilde’s legacy in popular culture can propels young people to acquire liberal and progressive values *unconsciously*, eventually resolve conflicts in global politics. In the lectures “The Decorative Arts” and “House Beautiful” Wilde reveals his experience in San Francisco’s China quarter, which made him realise that beauty refines people’s lives regardless of nationality, class, and age. He contended that one should not wait until one is wealthy enough to use beautiful objects, tucking them away because they are considered more valuable as art. “There is nothing so absurd as having good china stuck up in cabinet merely for show,” he argues (921). Beautiful handicrafts should be used in even the most mundane occasions, and children especially should be exposed to exquisite beautiful artifacts. “If these men [Chinese navvies] could use cups with that tenderness, your children will learn the influence of beauty and example to act in like manner” (935). He continues,

... if children grow up among all fair and lovely things, they will grow to love beauty and detest ugliness before they know the reason why. If you go into a house where everything is coarse, you find things chipped and broken and unsightly. Nobody exercises any care. If everything is dainty and delicate, gentleness and refinement of manner are unconsciously acquired. (“House Decoration” 157)

Wilde is most beloved of British writers among the Chinese younger generation, largely thanks to his proposal that wholesome manners and virtues be “unconsciously” acquired through appreciating beauty in ordinary objects. He never preaches, but enlightens people with his beautiful fairy tales and poems, hilarious comedies, and his glamorous dandy persona. I will also study his works in line with modern popular culture, thus to appeal to wider audiences, rather than producing another textual analysis. I wish to make positive changes in our increasingly intense global political context, and hope to interest not only academics but also the general public—especially younger people who have just heard of Wilde, but never imagined his relation to China, or have never imagined that the queer icon still lives on in their lives as a fashion guide, aesthetician, an inspiration for BL fanfictions, video games, and K-pop. In addition, I hope to specifically attract those aforementioned confused young nationalists to consume “fun” Wilde in popular culture, where they could *unconsciously* acquire a liberal attitude towards queer community, racial minorities, respect women, and overcome their prejudice against *other* cultures.

These objectives may be too optimistic. However, and this may seem a remote motivation, the transformation of Tirana, the capital city of Albania, has

given me hope in humanity. The city's fate as the poorest European city, with a typical Soviet drab facade, changed overnight to a colorful and lively city with decreased crime rate, simply because their mayor Edi Rama, a former professional artist, painted the whole city colourful and artistic (TEDxThessaloniki; Farago; May et al.). Humans yearn for beauty unconsciously, and it makes them better as people. The rainbow colours on those drab facades and ugly ruins from their previous era under a dictator are a modern fable, which demonstrates that the defiance of death is beauty.

4. Thesis Structure

This thesis is divided into three major parts, each constituted of two interlinking chapters.

In Part I (Chapters 1 and 2) I give a reception history in China, from 1909 to the present, of Wilde's works (with a focus on his dramas and children's stories). The Chinese reception of Wilde's works is generally divided into three major eras: 1909–1949 is the “Wilde mania” period, in which all his works were introduced, translated, and staged by Chinese overseas students from Japan, Britain, and the US. These students became influential early revolutionists and cultural celebrities who shaped the early 20th-century Chinese cultural landscape. Not only did Wilde's works become popular, his persona as a rebellious individualist and cosmopolitan freedom fighter also took hold. Shanghai dandies marked this era with their bold fashion and audacious creative writings.

In Chapter 1, I discuss Wilde's influences through analysing two Chinese dramatic adaptations of his plays, *Pan Jinlian* (1926), based on *Salomé* (1891), and *The Young Mistress's Fan* (1924), based on *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1893). I also discuss SHAO Xunmei's decadent poems and YE Lingfeng's unfinished “Jindi,” the first modern Chinese homoerotic story. The popularity of Wilde's Aestheticism was also contemporaneous with Socialist Realism. The two genres in China caused a great debate to develop between their representative schools—the Creation Society (CS) and the Literary Research Association (LRA). The CS lost the debate to the LRA when the Chinese communist party won the civil war and established the People's Republic of China, in 1949.

In Chapter 2, I discuss the “silent period,” and “the revival period” coming after 1949. In his commercialisation of high art and his personal branding, Wilde attempted to involve the Victorian public in his idealistic reformation of their taste in art. Such commercial strategy, however, runs the risk of being discarded and subjects Aestheticism to the volatility of the consumer market (Gagnier). Worse, Wilde's self-commercialisation strategy was misunderstood and taken for granted as his core intention by the Chinese academe during the Mao Era (1949–1976); Wilde's sexual orientation and flamboyant personality were condemned during this period. The introduction and translation of Wilde's works came to a halt between 1949 and 1966.

During the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) all Western literary works were banned in China. This “silent period” reflected the ideologically charged national consciousness. I explore why Ba Jin's translation of “The Happy Prince” was still

included in textbooks for Chinese Literature as well as English language during the 1950s. The silent period was followed by a backlash of the Cultural Renaissance period (1978–1989), in which Western cultural products flooded into Mainland China and a generation of young cultured people accessed Western culture and ideology and began to rethink China’s cultural and political development. The study and adaptation of Wilde’s works has revived since then and continued to influence today’s generation. The 1980s radio drama “The Happy Prince” spread Wilde’s influence across China and his followers garnered support outside of Shanghai, which paved the way for the Wildean materialism hit since the 2000s. The radio drama also reveals China’s confusion and exploration after its old values were challenged. The 1989 Tiananmen tragedy forced the younger generation to shift their focus on Wilde’s less serious or frivolous side, which perfectly suited China’s rocketing economic development and the rising awareness of consumerism and epidemic materialism. Zhou Liming’s stage production *Buke Erxi* (2015) based on *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) thus came at a perfect moment, when Mainland China’s social milieu had grown to some extent similar to late Victorian society, according to Zhou (Zhu). *Buke Erxi* is the first Wildean adaptation in the new China, but unsurprisingly became a commercial success, reflecting the boisterous materialism and pretentiousness among the Chinese urban middle class.

In Part II (Chapters 3 and 4) of the thesis, I examine China’s commercial appropriation of Wilde’s personas, those resonating with Zhou’s observation of modern China’s obsession with conspicuous (cultural) consumption, indicating a “superior” social status. This topic has been explored neither in 19th-century studies nor in comparative literary studies in general.

In Chapter 3, I approach Wilde’s fashionable persona, which the British cosmetic company Perfectace has used as a “spokesperson” for a facial collagen mask, and which the French niche perfume house, Jardins d’Écrivains, borrowed for a cologne branded “Oscar Wilde.” The former even replaced their original model with a photo of Wilde to specifically appeal to Chinese overseas students in the UK. The advertisement’s high algorithm makes it a fair representation of Wilde’s popularity among young Chinese elites, the Chinese bourgeois bohemians (BOBOs) in particular. They are attracted to Wilde mostly because of his glamorous style, handsome face, and his humour, thus the “frivolous” simulacra of Wilde. Wilde’s “wholesome” influence on them is significant although in a subtle and unconscious manner. The beauty industry in China, strictly guarded by traditional gender norms, started to loosen up when Wilde, as queer icon, became the spokesperson for appealing to metrosexual and queer customers. I draw on Lacan’s theory of the mirror and spectatorship; on Karl Marx’s theory of commodity fetishism; Mark Simpson’s argument on the reciprocal link between modern advertising and narcissism; Jean Baudrillard’s simulacra discourse; Judith Williamson’s reading and decoding of advertising pictures; and Thomas Richards’s exploration of Victorian commodity culture.

In Chapter 4, I further explore the commercial and cultural appropriation of Wilde in China’s male fashion industry, and the shaping of a new national male

image influenced by Wilde represented masculinity. Beyond Wilde's different personas, as a gay martyr and a women's friend, all appropriated in the Chinese beauty market, in this chapter I focus on Wilde's dandy persona in the fashion industry and China's fetish for the British Dandy or Gentleman image. I examine the making of a consumerist middle-class Chinese masculinity, inspired by Wilde's stylish persona, popularised by Western fashion houses' commercial campaigns and male lifestyle magazines in recent decades. The reintroduction of capitalism in Post-Mao China has accelerated the rise of consumerism and spurred a rethinking of a new Chinese (masculine) national image, especially in terms of standing up against the "old imperial powers" in global issues. I discuss that BOBOs have a strong interest in changing China's negative international image by constructing a Chinese dandyism. I present case studies using male fashion lifestyle magazines to probe Chinese elite class's search for a modern, sophisticated, and cultured national image, born out of a nostalgia of the virtuous Confucian "junzi," and a cosmopolitan urban dandy rooted in the image of the British gentleman.

Finally, in Part III (Chapters 5 and 6) I focus on Wilde's cultural legacy in popular mediasphere in Mainland China, Japan, and South Korea. Although I originally decided to study Wilde's reception and influence only in Mainland China, researching Chinese young people's interest in Wilde's legacy in popular culture introduced me to the "grand unity" of the BL utopia, where young people from the three East Asian countries gather together from an interest in *danmei* or *yaoi* fandom. And, since China's popular culture industry has been influenced by Japanese MAG culture and the "Korean wave," it is impossible to study Wilde's cultural legacy in contemporary China as an isolated case. Therefore, I include Wilde's influence on Japanese and Korean youth cultures as comparative references.

In Chapter 5, I discuss the social economic background of Wilde's Chinese fans through analysis of a series Coca-Cola poster, featuring Wilde in solidarity with LGBTQ+ community on International Anti-Homophobia Day ([Coke China](#)). I used big-data analysis on this influential Weibo post to reveal the socio-economic background of those Wildean followers, whom I named "Aesthetic 同志." I also focus on two creative *danmei* fictions, pairing Wilde with Eric the "Phantom," from the musical *Phantom of the Opera*, and Dorian Gray with Eric. These two cases might help readers to understand the special features of *danmei*, a popular literature genre created by liberal-minded Chinese millennials who grow up in the "global queering" age. While the main purpose for these individuals is earning money, they also form political voices of the queer community (especially for transgenders who are prohibited to be represented in Chinese mainstream media) and feminist movement in China. The commercialisation of Wilde's queer characters ironically functions as a shield for these "unorthodox" works, in escaping censorship from China's Confucian and patriarchal judges and the political authoritarian cultural ministry.

In Chapter 6 I introduce the cultural bond between China, Japan, and South Korea, from the period of Imperial China's cultural domination in the long pre-

modern era, which creates a similar Confucian cultural memory of the three countries, to modern Japan's strong global cultural influence and the rising Korean soft power. Chinese and Korean scholars of the early modern period learned about Oscar Wilde and Aestheticism mainly through Japan. This "second-hand" Aestheticism inspired the Chinese "Neo-Sensualism" and inaugurated Korean modern literature defined by the "father of Modern Korean literature," YI Kwang-su.

I also discuss the contemporary Japanese MAG culture and the "Korean wave," which together have contributed to the Chinese *danmei* subculture among BOBOs. I first construct a cultural background for the "grand unity" of "Aesthetic 同志," then make a literary analysis of the Japanese video game *Ozmafia!!* (2016), featuring characters from *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and "The Happy Prince." *Ozmafia!!* may appear morally dubious for featuring decadent sexual content for teen girls, but actually decriminalises female sexual desire and de-villainises queer identity in video games. This is followed by my analysis of a cursed "Prince Charming" type of Dorian Gray on the Korean musical stage. The "moralised" Gray perfectly reveals the neoliberal hyper-commodification, in which the queer subject is heteronormalised under the heterosexual gaze powered by the economic capital of urban middle-class women.

Wilde's multi-faceted characteristics necessitate that my project be interdisciplinary, juxtaposing literary studies with material culture and gender studies, as well as big-data analysis and luxury marketing. My topic examines the critical and popular reception of Wilde's works and the uses of his persona in China from the early 20th century to the present. But it reveals many aspects of China's interpretation of modernity and contributes to both Victorian Studies and East-West cross-cultural studies, where to date no research on Wilde's contemporary relevance to the formation of a Chinese elite class has appeared, thus might play an important role in China's current and future participation in global affairs.

Part I. Wilde's Symbolic Meaning in Modern China's Ideological Trajectory

Chapter 1. Wilde as Anti-Traditionalism Symbol in the Chinese Enlightenment Era (1909–1949)

Unlike in the West, the study of comparative literature in China did not originate in academic institutions; instead, it was closely related to political and social reform movements and an integral part of those activities, which YANG Zhouhan has argued in *Jingzi yu Qiqiaoban* (1–2). Therefore, Wilde’s influence in China has never been simply literary or aesthetic. Rather, it has been entangled with China’s reconfiguration of the modern world. YUE Daiyun notes that the birth of Chinese comparative literature is inseparable from the desire to revive the nation and to renew and develop its literature. She argues, “it started with the introduction of foreign literature, and strove for a rediscovery of the *Self* in the light of foreign literature, seeking a new path for development,” which was the main agenda of the era’s cultural movements (4). Against this backdrop, from the beginning Wilde was not simply a literary figure to China. Before the establishment of the People’s Republic of China, in 1949, he was an icon of individualism and cosmopolitanism, and admired by Chinese intellectuals. They believed China should become “a nation that commits to cosmopolitanism,” absorb new knowledge, new lifestyles, and new mentality from the West, shake off the outmoded Confucian conventions, as well as the blind patriotism championed by “100-Day Reformists” (J.Xu; D. Chen 130; Liang 2448).

In the Enlightenment Era social ambience geared towards cosmopolitanism. The intelligentsia of the New Cultural Movement largely introduced, translated, and adapted Western literature, social critiques, and philosophies in China, beginning in 1909. They wished to modernise China into a nation that embraced cosmopolitanism, as opposed to a nation-state that championed “cosmopolitan nationalism,” an ideology popular during the late Qing period, i.e. the Self-Strengthening Movement (1861–1895), and the short-lived “Wuxu Reformation” (1898). The two ideologies look similar but, in fact, move in different directions: one leads to an idealistic cosmopolitan “grand unity” of the world, and the other to a narrow-minded nationalism, unbridled jingoism, and even fascism. The 1910s and 20s witnessed a soaring cosmopolitan sentiment embracing Wilde’s philosophy and his non-conforming lifestyle. Dandyism and individualism were encouraged and glorified by liberal students, in search of a direction most suitable and beneficial to China. To understand Wilde’s importance in China’s modernisation we must first understand the difference between the two ideologies in question.

1. From “Cosmopolitan Nationalism” to a “Nation Committed to Cosmopolitanism”—A Socio-political Background

The New Culture Movement ushered in a period in which the general sentiment of Chinese people embraced Western cultural trends in every way. Leading this ideological trend were scholars who received Western education either through directly studying in the West, e.g., CAI Yuanpei (Leipzig), HU Shi (Cornell,

Columbia), HONG Shen (Harvard), SHAO Xunmei (Cambridge), XU Zhimo (Columbia, Cambridge), LIN Huiyin (UPenn, Yale); or through studying in Japan, e.g., CHEN Duxiu (Waseda), Lu Xun (Tohoku), LI Dazhao (Waseda), YU Dafu (Tokyo Imperial), OU-YANG Yuqian (Meiji, Waseda). In other words, the early two decades of the 20th century was a period of Chinese social norms favouring cosmopolitanism, aiming to end China's Qing isolation policy and parochialism. Scholars attempted to position China as a nation among nations within a global political, as well as trade network, trying to remove the jingoistic idea that "Zhongguo" (the middle kingdom) was a "tianchao shangguo" (lit. heavenly state) in the centre of the world (J. Xu; Dikötter). Their agenda to modernise China stemmed from three major aspects: namely, studying advanced Western technology, applying democracy in China, and translating new literature from the West to modernise the Chinese mind. I focus on the literary aspects of this process, while also contextualising within a macro social environment. The modernisation in the culture sphere did not—as Chinese people nowadays mistakenly believe—start immediately after the establishment of the Republic of China, in 1912. It was a long and slow process, beginning in 1842, but developed only since the 1920s.

The greatest impact of the First Opium War (1842) was not in opening up China's market, but in opening up China's eyes—closed in complacency for centuries before 1842. Industrial technology and modern capitalist economy were not so shocking, albeit indeed "magic" to ordinary people of the Qing dynasty. Yet these phenomena did not impress emperor Qianlong and his successors.¹⁸ Instead, the concept of China as one nation among many others in a global system shook the worldview of the Qing establishment and scholars, the notion that some nations were equally or more powerful than the Chinese Empire. For thousands of years, the ancient Chinese Empire was indeed one of the most influential empires in the world, and undoubtedly the most powerful nation of Greater Asia in Pre-Modern history. China's neighboring countries had long been its tributary states, while equally powerful entities, such as the Roman Empire, the Persian Empire, and the Ottoman Empire, had good diplomatic relations with the Chinese rulers, but were situated so far away as to have very few interactions, in general, with them.¹⁹ Hence, over these

¹⁸ In response to the Macartney Embassy to Qing China, emperor Qianlong wrote a letter to King George III, explaining in greater depth the reasons for his refusal to grant the several requests presented by Macartney. "Our Celestial Empire possesses all things in prolific abundance and lacks no product within its borders. There is therefore no need to import the manufacturers of outside barbarians in exchange for our own produce" ("[Qianlong, Letter To George III \(1792\)](#)").

¹⁹ Tributary relations [officially] emerged during the Tang dynasty as Chinese rulers started perceiving foreign envoys bearing tribute as a "token of conformity to the Chinese world order" (J. Lee 18). In fact, since the Wa period (108 BCE), Japan started its tributary missions to China (*Book of Later Han* vol. 85; *Records of Three Kingdoms* vol.30; *Book of Jin* vol.97; *Book of Sui* vol. 81; *Old Book of Tang* vol.199; Fogel 102-107; Goodrich, Luther Carrington et al. 1316; Mote, Twitchett, and Fairbank 491-2). In 1404, Ashikaga Yoshimitsu accepted the Chinese title "king of Japan," and for a brief period until his death in 1408, Japan was an official tributary state of the Ming dynasty (J. Lee 19). Korea also started its tributary missions to China—altogether around 1126 missions excluding the Goryeo period (918–1392)—in its earliest Goguryeo period (37 BC– 668 AD) to the Joseon period (1392–1897 AD) until Korea was colonised by Japan, in 1897 (Pratt 482; Kang 59). More

thousands of years as a sort of “boss” country in the east, part of Eurasian continent, China developed a false and racist Sinocentrism, namely, the Confucian moral order with its Mandate of Heaven (*tianming*), its Way of Heaven (*tian dao*), and its Principles of Heaven (*tianli*), which positioned China as the cultural, political, and economic centre of Territory under the Heaven (*tianxia*). China boasted itself as a heavenly state with a huge territory, abundant resources, rich population, and high civilisation, admired by “barbarians” (Liang 2488, D. Yang; J. Xu).

In 1842, this ideological bubble China lived in for centuries suddenly broke. The Chinese intelligentsia realised that the world had changed dramatically and if China failed to adapt to this new system as soon as possible, there would no longer be a China (LIN Zexu; WEI Yuan; KANG Youwei; LIANG Qichao). Hence, the Qing ruling class swallowed their pride (or arrogance), and began reforms, chanting that “learning from the barbarian merits on technology to restrict barbarian powers (*shiyi changji yi zhi yi*).” China seemingly entered an age of cosmopolitanism, and some Chinese domestic scholarly works, even the junior-high history textbooks defined it as such (Wei *Illustrated Treatise on the Maritime Kingdoms*).

However, instead of cosmopolitanism, this late Qing Westernisation derived from a cosmopolitan nationalism. The cosmopolitan approach to foreign cultures was just a tactic to adapt to the perilous circumstances China was in, a strategy for survival when Chinese intellectuals started to understand that China was no longer the center of a rather metaphysical *tianxia*, but part of “a materialistic world that operated according to the principles of the struggle for existence” (J. Xu). Hence, they adopted social Darwinist principles underpinning international relations of the time, “the survival of the fittest” being the first lesson Qing China learnt about modernity.

In such a bleak political climate the modern Chinese concept of nation-state was born. The intelligentsia especially encouraged the strengthening of China with ideas from Western capitalist economies and industrial technology, which Yang Du called Gold-and-Ironism. Additionally, education for military citizenship (*jun guomin jiaoyu*) was proposed and practiced, following Japan. The period between 1895 and the early years of the Republic of China proved to be an age of extreme jingoism (Liang; J. Xu), the “cosmopolitan” in the “cosmopolitan nationalism,” actually connoting the world as “jungle,” where extreme patriotism and collectivism were born to unite people through their identity of Chineseness, especially Han Chineseness. The Republican revolutionists’ agenda to overthrow the Qing dynasty stemmed from a strong objective to restore the Han culture after Manchu had enslaved China for over two centuries (1644–1911). This anti-Manchu sentiment is reflected in “The Principle of Mǐnzú,” the first principle in SUN Yat-sen’s “Three Principles of the People,” with the famous slogan “drive away the barbarians and

information please refers to Lee, Ji-Young, *China’s Hegemony: Four Hundred Years of East Asian Domination* (2017), Columbia UP.

restore (Han) Chinese culture.” Against such a social milieu, the Chinese intelligentsia began the ideological reformation in the New Cultural Movement in 1915, a romantic new epoch embracing individualism and the modernisation of the mind. They aimed to construct a country committed to cosmopolitanism and the “grand unity” of the world.

Several decades of jingoism successfully overthrew the Qing dynasty and achieved the establishment of the Republic of China (1912), and yet the result was far from the ideal world envisaged by progressive intellectuals of the time. XU Jilin argues that the polity of early Republican China required that the individual be sacrificed at the altar of the nation, only to be rewarded with YUAN Shikai’s intent on proclaiming himself emperor and signing in secret the Twenty-one Demands with Japan (1914).²⁰ The first person to openly express doubts about patriotism was CHEN Duxiu, arguing, in “Patriotism and Self Consciousness (*Aiguoxin yu zijuexin*),” that the Chinese regarded patriotism as akin to religious loyalty to the sacred sovereignty, whereas Europeans and Americans saw the nation as the guarantor of the peoples’ rights, as a collective entity devoted to the pursuit of their welfare. “The nation,” Chen declaimed,

. . . is that which protects the rights of the people and which devotes itself to their wellbeing. The continued existence of a nation that does not devote itself to such tasks is without glory, its death occasions no regret . . .

Appropriate it is, then, to love a nation that safeguards its people—nothing is to be gained from loving a nation that mistreats its people. (*Chen Duxiu Zhuzuo Xuan* 113-8; qtd. in J. Xu)

Of course, such a “traitor’s words” provoked a storm. Today we can discern a strong sense of cosmopolitanism and critical rethinking of collectivism in Chen’s argument; however, readers of *Tiger Magazine* (*Jiayin zazhi*), where Chen’s article was published, sent angry letters accusing Chen of being a madman who “misunderstands patriotism” (J. Xu; S. Zhang).

Soon, however, Yuan’s betrayal shifted the public’s opinion and they realised that Chen had been prescient in his warnings about the perils of blind patriotism (J. Xu). Even Liang Qichao, the most influential advocate of “cosmopolitan nationalism,” admitted the error of his belief in blind nationalism:

²⁰ Yuan Shikai was a Chinese military and government official who rose to power during the late Qing dynasty. Through negotiation, he became the first official president of the Republic of China in 1912 and attempted to restore monarchy in China, with himself as the Hongxian Emperor. In 1914, Japan captured the German colony at Qingdao. In January 1915, Japan sent a secret ultimatum, known as the Twenty-one Demands, to Beijing. Japan demanded an extension of extraterritoriality, the sale of businesses in debt to Japan and the cession of Qingdao to Japan. When these demands were made public, hostility within China was expressed in nationwide anti-Japanese demonstrations and an effective national boycott of Japanese goods. Yuan’s eventual decision to agree to nearly all of the demands led to a decline in the popularity of Yuan’s government among contemporary Chinese. (Spence 281; Shan)

The present government encourages the people to love their country but how is this different from others? The people will say: If the nation is to be loved then the authorities should be the ones who initiate such love. Whether or not the authorities of the present age share weal and woe of the nation with the people is a moot point, but nonetheless they point an accusing finger at the people. How are we to know, however, whether our people lack patriotism or that the authorities are exploiting patriotism for their selfish ends? (Liang “Tongding zuiyan,” translated by Duncan M. Campbell; qtd. in Xu)

After the hypocrisy of “cosmopolitan nationalism,” revealed in the Paris Peace Conference, and in Yuan’s betrayal, scholars shifted towards a new concept of a “nation committed to cosmopolitanism,” in which the “cosmopolitanism” referred to an ideal world of “datong” and mutual aid for all mankind. “Cosmopolitan” in cosmopolitan nationalism is a physical entity, without either value or morality, whereas *cosmopolitanism* is a humanistic and evaluative orientation, supported by universal properties and the rule of justice (J.Xu).

This critical rethinking of blind patriotism also encouraged the Chinese public to critically review collectivism—the foundation of nationalism—that extolled an idea of the nation as an organism (and the same concept fascists of the 1940s used in their propaganda). Within this organism every individual’s fate is entwined with another’s and every citizen’s identity is merged with that of the nation. Thus, the concept of loving one’s country unconditionally, even at the cost of individuals’ well being could prevail, especially where the minority must obey the rules defined by the majority, allowing little to no ground for individualism or individuality. On this view, everyone is simply a cell of a superior biological organism.²¹ By the time of the New Culture Movement, however, intellectuals reconfigured a concept of the individual at odds with nationalism and even nation.

. . . the moment that the interests of the individual and the nation diverged, with the former becoming a notion of a separate, self-aware entity with its own internally generated sense of importance, the idea of the nation as an organism lost its basis for existence. If the citizens and the nation were no longer part of an indivisible organism, then the relationship between the two became one of ends and means. The nation was no longer a supernatural entity, imbued with sacred or heavenly-given properties, nor was it the historical product of a natural process of evolution; the nation was simply a man-made structure, a tool established in order to protect individual freedoms and innate human rights. (J. Xu)

The term “nation” is a constructed concept defined to *protect* individuals rather than to order them around. This utilitarian view of nation became extremely

²¹ The concept that a nation is a biological organism is evident in the Chinese idiom “pizhibucun, maojiangyanfu 皮之不存，毛將焉附” literally means “with the skin gone where would hairs adhere,” connoting those small beings are dependent on the large organism.

prevalent during the New Culture Movement and, in turn, articulated the new mainstream concept of a nation respecting individuality if not individualism. Only in such an environment, embracing both cosmopolitanism and individualism, could Wilde's works become popular and celebrated.

Wilde's queer identity and effeminacy were deemed degenerate elements that contributed to the decay of the race or civilisation in the late Victorian period. Following that logic, the degenerate elements were to be purged in order to secure the health and the existence of the organism. In the British Empire where nationalism and imperialism went hand in hand, British explorers' macho masculinity, for example, or the urban gentleman's stable, heterosexual virtue (as "family man") were major stabilising elements for this British organism to keep functioning and existing (*Empire Boys*). Wilde's individuality threatened the existence of this organism. Additionally, due to his strategically self-fashioned charisma, Wilde was influential among young people across classes and countries, making his individuality an "individualism," his aesthetic ideal "Aestheticism," and his personal queer taste a queer agenda — "the worst" and most feared. In collectivism discourse, one individual's personal life and choices influence or harm the rest of the organism, and are especially toxic, to their horror, to their children, the future of the organism. The conflict between individualism and collectivism ended Wilde's success, and his life eventually. However, the Chinese intelligentsia of the "new epoch" admired Wilde's courageous anti-establishment individualism, and actively translated and adapted his works.

2. A Short History of the Translation and Reception of Wilde's Works

In 1909, nine years after Wilde's death in Paris, Lu Xun and his brother ZHOU Zuoren together published *Collected Foreign Short Stories (Yuwai Xiaoshuoji)*, in Tokyo and Shanghai. "The Happy Prince" was translated into classical Chinese (Z. Zhou "The Happy Prince"). This is the earliest translation of Wilde's work. ZHOU Zuoren, one of the most important figures of Wildean criticism in China, was also the first Chinese scholar who noted that Wilde's Aestheticism meant, in essence, to "transform life into art" (X. Zhou 1). Additionally, Zhou writes, "we had a hazy concept when we were studying in Japan that literature and art could better people's temperament and minds so as to better society. Naturally we thought to introduce modern Western literature into China" (D. Song 15). Clearly, from the beginning, China's exposure to Wilde and Aestheticism bore intellectual's idealistic propaganda to "better society."

The initial reception of this *Collected Foreign Short Stories*, however, was very unfavorable, with only twenty-one copies sold in Tokyo and twenty (or so) copies in Shanghai, according to the "Preface" in its reprinted version (1920). ZHOU Zuoren laments that back in the 1900s Chinese people could not relate well to foreign mentalities and lifestyles depicted in these stories. Yet, 1920 was different; he notes that Chinese people started to become interested in reading Western stories (Z. Zhou "Preface"). His account demonstrates the ideological change in the 1910s

ushering in a new age embracing cosmopolitanism; hence Western literature and writers started to gain readership in China. In the 1920s, Wilde became increasingly popular, not only as a member of the British Aesthetic Movement; he was also admired as the very symbol of beauty, art and, above all, individual freedom.

The Zhou brothers' translation of Wilde was an overture of the "Wilde wave," starting in the late 1900s. Wilde and Aestheticism attracted a large number of scholars who sought to imitate him in an attempt to obtain a mood of Aestheticism. They also intended to propagandise a rebellious lifestyle in Chinese intellectual circles, so as to accelerate the modernisation of China's social sensibilities. As British Library's official summary of Wilde's early influence in Republican China writes, "Wilde's bold, outlandish public persona—his long hair, his flamboyant fashion statements, his quick wit and outspokenness, a mix of performance and expressions of personal philosophy perhaps—proved particularly refreshing for a young generation of college-educated Chinese who found the traditional Chinese cultural norms unbearably repressive" (S.Qi). These young people produced works imitating Wilde's style and some scholars even copied his fashion and behaviours, so as to emphasis their modern features.

XUE Qiyong's translation of *An Ideal Husband*, which was serialised on *Xin qingnian* (*New Youth*), from 15 October 1915 to 1 October 1916, officially announced this craze for Wilde, which lasted over two decades in China's intellectual circles, until the late 1940s (D. Song 12). *New Youth Magazine*—a radical monthly magazine published in Beijing—was a leading periodical of the New Culture Movement. Its founder and chief editor, CHEN Duxiu, was Wilde's major admirer in China. In his essay "A Brief History of Modern European Literature and Art" ("Xiandai Ouzhou Wenyi Shitan"; 1915) and "On Literary Revolution" ("Wenxue Geminglun"; 1917), Chen argued that Wilde was one of the "four greatest modern writers in European literature" (157).²² In addition, he called for the emergence of "a Chinese Hugo, Zola, . . . Dickens and Wilde," encouraging young Chinese scholars to imitate and develop diverse and even contrasting literary genres in this era of cosmopolitanism (263).

Chen's opinion on Wilde represents a popular perception of Wilde among Chinese men of letters. HU Yuzhi translated Wilde's "The Nightingale and the Rose," and published it in *Orient Magazine* (*Dongfang Zazhi*) in 1920. He argued that Wilde's poems and fairy tales reveal Aestheticism's highest accomplishment; hence Hu calls for scholars to study these two genres of Wilde's works closely. To this point, he explains that "only in his poems and fairy tales, his vivid imagination of beauty, his rare gift for art, and his works' wonderful attractiveness are given full play" (qtd. in X. Zhou 97).

Chen saw in Wilde's plays subversive social criticism whereas members of the Creation Society and New Moon Society found the Wildean "art for art's sake"

²² The others are Ibsen, Turgenev, and Maurice Maeterlinck.

aesthetics liberating. Wilde, thus, became an incarnation of art as expression of rebellion and individualism, connoting a higher artistic value to Republican scholars. Wilde's understanding of art was refreshing for its considerable difference from Realism and Naturalism, both popular during the early Republican period thanks to their revolutionary connotation and concern for social issues, such as class polarisation. Instead of seeing art as a passive media and realistic mirror of human life, Wilde celebrates art as an active being, as if it has its own life, to guide humanity and beautify this mundane world; thus, life should imitate art. This new perception of art also caused Chinese intellectuals to discuss and revisit the binary relationship of art and life, among whom YU Dafu and Mao Dun are the most renowned scholars, whose approaches contradict with each other. Respectively, they developed different Chinese understandings of Wilde's Aestheticism, which had a deep impact on Wilde's reception in China, especially during the Mao Era.

The period from 1919 to 1922 represents the peak of translating Wilde's works. Elite scholars, as noted above, repeatedly translated almost all his works. His four society comedies and religious play *Salomé* (1894), the collections of fairy tales, his only novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), the long letter *De Profundis* (1897), the prose poem *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* (1898), along with his essays and other prose poems, sparked intense interest among intellectuals (X. Zhou 90; D. Song 12–13; F. Gao; Hou). It is well documented that by the end of the 1940s, there were at least seven translators of Wilde's fairy tales, including "The Nightingale and the Rose," by LIN Huiyin, one of the most accomplished female scholars then. Seven translations of *Salomé* appeared, seven of *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1893), four of *An Ideal Husband* (1895), two of *Dorian Gray* and translations of *A Woman of No Importance* (1893), *De Profundis*, *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), and *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, respectively (X. Zhou 90; D. Song 12–3; F. Gao; Hou). These figures clearly demonstrate Wilde's popularity in China of the time.

3. Dramatic Adaptations of Wilde's Major Plays

Among all of his works, Wilde's dramas were the most popular. China Central Television's cultural column on early Chinese dramas records the popularity of the imported Western theatre genre,

. . . [t]hese schools include, among other things, Aesthetic dramas represented by Oscar Wilde; the symbolist drama represented by Maurice Maeterlinck, Gerhart Hauptmann, and Leonid Nikolayevich Andreyev; expressionist dramas represented by August Strindberg and Eugene O'Neill; and also, the Italian futurist plays. ("May Fourth Movement and the Becoming of Spoken Drama").

The newly awakened Chinese youth was especially receptive to modern Western dramas. May Fourth scholars welcomed ideas on liberating the "body and soul," represented in Western dramas (X. Zhou 20). The early Chinese modern plays inspired by or adapted from Western dramas displayed unprecedented boldness in

expressing ordinary people's private longings and pleasures for a liberation of the "body" and the "desire hidden deeply inside" (20). Scholars adored Wilde's audacious expression of sensual pleasures and strong emotions in *Salomé* (1891), which resonated with their own longings to free body and soul from the Confucian moral constraints, namely, the *Sangang Wuchang*—the three cardinal guides (the ruler guides his subject, the father guides his son and the husband guides his wife) and the five constant virtues (benevolence; righteousness, propriety, wisdom and fidelity) as specified in the feudal ethical code, which first appeared in *Chunqiu Fanlu* (*Luxuriant Dew of the Spring and Autumn Annals*) in the 4th century.

To say that Oscar Wilde was a household name in 1920s China would be to exaggerate, but going to theaters to watch Chinese adaptations of his works was the most "modern" thing to do in Shanghai from 1924 to 1929 (Zhou 1–2; Yue 4; D. Song).²³ During this period, *Salomé* and *Lady Windermere's Fan* were the most popular. Shi Jihan described the first night of the performance of *Salomé* as such: "[t]here are only three hundred seats in the theatre, yet the people who came to see the play numbered more than four hundred" (X. Zhou 93). *Salomé's* passion and courage to pursue her love at all costs accorded with the New Cultural Movement's political agenda to free women from the oppressive Confucian moral yoke. This play inspired several Chinese playwrights to imitate it in arousing the awareness of women's liberation among (female) audiences. Wilde's *Salomé* depicts the Biblical story of a lovelorn woman who kills her love interest and decapitates him in order to kiss him. The image of *Salomé* was appropriated as a pioneer feminist text in some Chinese dramatic works. OU-YANG Yuqian's play *Pan Jinlian* (1928) is the most famous in Chinese comparative theatre studies. This play recreates PAN Jinlian, a household name of a femme fatale in traditional Chinese literature, as a free-spirited woman who dares to pursue her love regardless of the Confucian moral constraints, and boldly points out the double-standard in patriarchal societies.

3.1. The Chinese *Salomé*—*Pan Jinlian* (1928)

The story of PAN Jinlian is from the famous classical Chinese novel *Water Margin* (c 1524–1530), written by SHI Nai-an or LUO Guanzhong.²⁴ Pan is a beautiful lady's maid, working in councillor Zhang's mansion, in Yanggu County. Zhang is a lascivious old man who wants to acquire Pan as his concubine but is

²³ "Modern" or 摩登 connotes "fashionable" in Chinese context.

²⁴ Chinese academia until now still cannot confirm who is the author and the exact time when this novel is finished and published. Many scholars believe that the first 70 chapters are written by Shi Nai'an; however the authorship of the final 30 chapters is often questioned, with some speculating that it is instead written by Luo Guanzhong, who may have been a student of Shi. Another theory, which first appeared in Gao Ru's *Baichuan Shuzhi* during the Ming dynasty, suggests that the whole novel is written and compiled by Shi, and then edited by Luo. (Idema, Wilt L., and Lloyd Haft. *A guide to Chinese literature*. No. 74. University of Michigan Press, 1997. 203) The first English translation—*All Men are Brothers*—to this novel is made by Pearl Sydenstricker Buck in the 1920s, which is criticised by Lu Xun for many errors in characters' names and a wrong understanding of the brotherhood in the novel (Lu Xun, "一九三三年十一月十五日致姚克信.[A Letter to Yao Kexin on 15th Nov 1933]").

firmly rejected by her. Enraged, he forces her to marry the ugliest and a dwarf-like man named WU Da the peddler. Within the strict ancient Chinese social hierarchy, where women of lower class have no human rights, Pan has to accept her tragic fate and becomes Da's wife. She is a virtuous wife until WU Song, Da's younger brother, returns to Yanggu. Appointed by the local government as a police officer, Song settles down in his brother's house. Song is a tall, upright, and very handsome man. Pan falls madly in love with him at the first sight. Yet, constrained by the traditional moral codes, Song not only rejects her but also angrily threatens to beat her for her immoral behaviour, then moves out of the household and runs government errands to a far-away place. Wounded by Song's words, Pan decides to take revenge on the Wu brothers by bringing shame to their family name. She commits adultery with a rich businessman named XI-MEN Qing, who physically resembles Song. Da quickly finds out about their affair and attempts to beat Xi-men, but instead he is seriously injured by Xi-men, and bedridden. Both Xi-men and Pan are afraid of the repercussions, and Xi-men forces Pan to poison her husband to silence him. A few months later Song returns, only to be shocked by his brother's sudden death. In the end he finds out the truth and kills both Xi-men and Pan.

In traditional Chinese moral judgment, PAN Jinlian is the quintessential Chinese femme fatale, who capitalises on her sexuality to lure men to commit crimes, and destroys men who reject her. She has been despised by Chinese people for centuries, while they have sympathised with Da and admired Song. Yet, in Ouyang's play, Pan becomes a victim of the "man-eating" and misogynistic Confucian moral constraints.²⁵ The rebellious and aesthetic spirit of the tragic heroine is fully played out in Acts 3 and 4, where Song interrogates her. She cries out in a statement that has resonated with millions of female victims across time, oppressed by the patriarchal system:

PAN. When a man tortures a woman, many other men come to help. If the woman submissively accepts to be tortured till death, she becomes a chaste role model. If she fights back, she becomes a wanton woman. A woman who refuses men's torture becomes a sinner. You are a government official, after all, only seeing things from one side.

SONG. You are a mad woman! I don't understand your words!

PAN. It's better for you to not understand. Otherwise you can't be a saint.

²⁵ To describe the Confucian moral orders as "man-eating" (吃人的礼教) is a very common figurative speech used during this period to attack the bad side of traditional Chinese culture, and is made famous by Lu Xun's internationally acclaimed "A Madman's Diary" (1918). The "cannibalism" shouted by the madman is a powerful and horrific metaphor for the hypocritical, inhumane, and unfair Confucian obligations forced on people and especially on lower-class people in the traditional hierarchy.

SONG. The Confucian ethic has always been like this and will always be. Can't you understand that?

PAN. Oh I understand it too well. If I were ignorant I could live a long and rich life. I wish I could be so ignorant that I could forget myself at all. But I could not be ignorant in this life now... (Ouyang Act 3)

Compared to Salomé's monotonous demand to kiss Jokanaan, out of sexual desire, Pan's statement is more political. She accuses the patriarchal society's double standard and the persecution of women who try to resist the misogynistic regulation. Her awakened modern spirit is a myth to Song, hence he immediately denounces her as a hysterical mad woman. Pan's statement that women who refuse to abide by the moral constraints constitutes a feminist call for compassion, if not gender equality.

In the 1950s, Ouyang revealed his motivation to clear Pan's name, "In 1924, when I was writing this play, I saw so many Chinese women suffering under the Confucian moral constraints. I was sad and angry and decided that I must write something for them to reveal the darkness of the old society" ("Called-off Performance of Pan Jinlian"). Not only did he write for women, Ouyang also played the part of Pan; he usually played *huadan* (lit. a young female role) in Chinese classical opera ("Xiqu"; "Called-off"; see Figs. 2 and 3). As a cross-dressing performer, Ouyang literally stepped into the female characters' shoes, and experienced their misfortunes, recorded throughout Chinese history in classical opera. Ouyang's acting experience, to some extent, contributed to his compassion for a long-maligned female villain, which encourages him to interpret the old tale with an anti-tradition and individualist spirit. Ouyang's gender transgressive performance indeed helped him to understand women's misery better.

Nevertheless, it would be too short-handed to conclude that this feminist play was born of Ouyang's transgender identity. Female roles in Chinese classical operas are played by good-looking, young male actors, but male actors need not identify themselves as transgender or female. There is no direct evidence showing that Ouyang himself ever questioned his gender identity. More likely, the feminist awareness in Ouyang's adaptation is a progressive creation, born out of the anti-tradition May Fourth spirit, not his own awakened gender identity.

In comparison, Wilde's feminist awareness is not very pronounced in *Salomé*, although he does give Salomé agency to openly express her love and sexual desire, pioneering within the sexually oppressed Victorian society where female sexual desire was demonised.

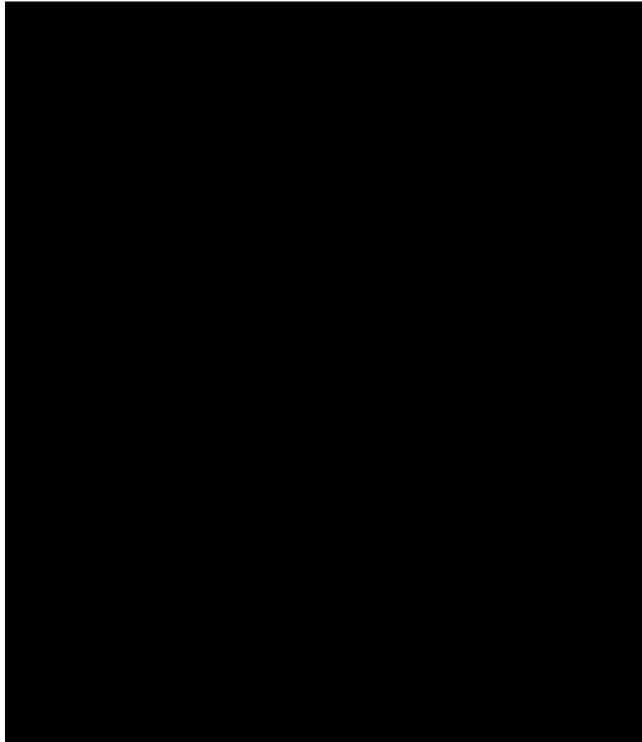


Figure 2. OU-YANG Yuqian as PAN Jinlian on the right. Picture acquired from “How Many PAN Jinlian Do You Know?” 2016, <https://kknews.cc/culture/qe5e3vb.html>.

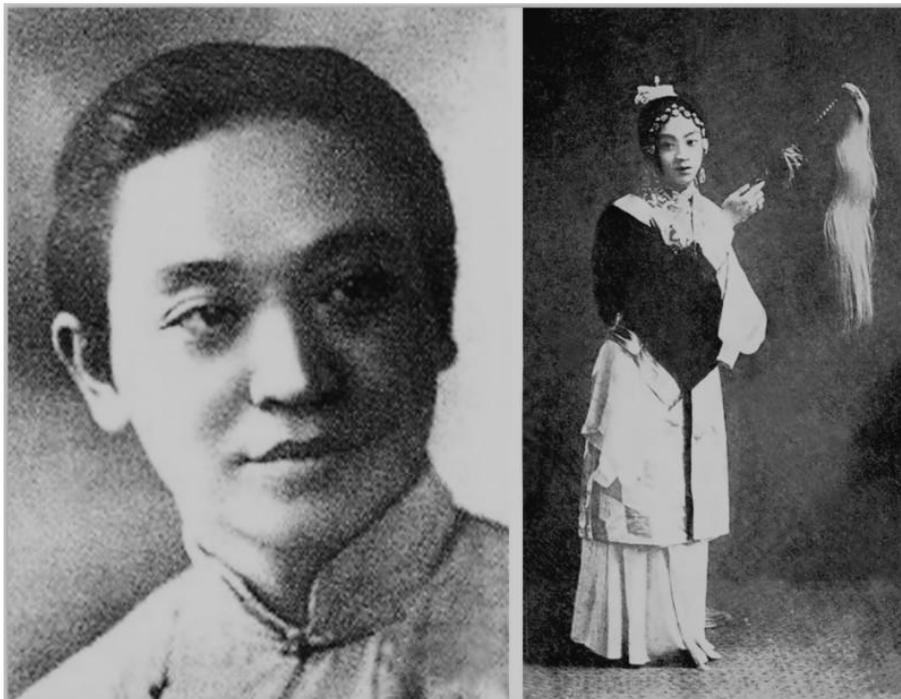


Figure 3. OU-YANG Yuqian (left) playing a female *dan* role in a Peking opera (right)

Ouyang imitates Wilde’s writing style, namely in poetic and expressive words charged with raw emotion and sensual quality, but sadly, this beauty is lost in the translation here. This feature is most obvious in the final act, where Song is about to kill Pan. Pan’s conversation with Wu simultaneously expresses her love, hatred, hope, despair, and a strong sense of sadistic love:

PAN. Everybody is going to die anyway. Compared to being tortured and dying a little everyday in this mundane and hopeless world. I'd rather commit a crime! A foolish but magnificent crime! I'm happy to die in the hands of my love! Come on, Er'lang, kill me! Do you want my head or my heart?²⁶

SONG. I will gouge out your heart!

PAN. Oh joy! You want my heart! That's marvelous! My heart has been yours ever since I met you. But you didn't take it! Er'lang, come to see my snow-white chest, in which lies a red, blazing, and earnest heart. Take it!

SONG. I will hear you no more! All I want is to avenge my brother! Tell you what! I already killed Xi-men! [He grabs a parcel from his soldier and throws it at Pan. A human head rolls out.] My brother will not even look at a woman like you in the underworld! You should just follow Xi-men! [Raises his knife].

PAN. Ah, you killed Xi-men! See, I have good taste in men! But, Er'lang, you said, "Follow Xi-men," which really hurts me! I cannot share this life with you but in the next turn of my life, I'd be your ox and my hide will make your boots. I'd be your silkworm and my silk will weave your clothes. You can kill me but you can't stop me loving you! (Raises her arms trying to hug Song and looks at him with zealous eyes).

SONG. [steps back, and grabs her right arm with his left hand, and glares at her.] You love me? Me... [Song slashes the knife down at Pan. Pan falls to the ground. He glares at the body]. (Ouyang Act 5)

The theme that love is something much greater and more powerful than death in *Pan Jinlian* is almost identical to Salomé's monologue, when she kisses Jokanaan's severed head and declares that "the mystery of love is greater than the mystery of death" (CW 424). Pan's emotional expression, coupled with a sense of violence and morbidity, is also similar to Salomé's desire to kiss a severed head. Pan's expression is similar to that of Salomé: direct, explicit, and powerful, a rare combination for traditional female roles in *xiqu* (Chinese classical opera). Markedly, there is even a similar fetish for the mutilated human body parts—the severed head

²⁶ Wu Song is the second son in the Wu family. Therefore, he is addressed as "Er'lang (lit. the second brother or the second guy)" by his peers. In pre-modern China, only in very formal occasions such as Keju examination, wedding, funerals etc. would a person's name be addressed by people of higher social status or senior in age. In daily life, ordinary people are addressed with their family name plus their ranks in the family. For instance, WU Da literally means "the elder brother of the Wu family." Educated Chinese people have their courtesy names. Take Chairman Mao for example. His name is MAO Zedong and his courtesy name is Runzhi. His peers call him Runzhi or MAO Runzhi. Only his parents and his teachers could call him MAO Zedong in formal occasions. This tradition has been abandoned since 1949. Modern Chinese usually do not have courtesy names, but some would still have them for fun. Names are given by parents, while courtesy names are created by oneself after one becomes an adult (Fu et al.; [Theobald](#); "Qu Li I, "*Liji* [Book of Rites]. [Line 44.](#)).

and the human heart. Literary critic WANG Meng observed the recurring imagery in Western literature, which is charged with morbid sexual desire, namely, an obsession with the severed head (3). Indeed, the depiction of the decapitated head as an object of desire is also found in works like Giovanni Boccaccio's *The Decameron* (1353), Stendhal's novel *The Red and the Black* (*Le Rouge et le Noir*, 1830), Hans C. Andersen's fairytale *The Elf of the Rose* (1839) and others across centuries.²⁷

The obsession with the human heart is prevalent in Classical Chinese literature.²⁸ Gouging out people's hearts is a common trope for revenge or for revealing the truest feelings in classical literature.²⁹ The trope is preserved in modern vernacular Chinese.³⁰ This similar literary trope provided a convenient cultural referent for Ouyang, in which to translate the Salomé image in a Chinese context. Additionally, the sexualised mutilation is a feature worth noting in Chinese Decadent poems of the 1920s. SHAO Xunmei, the most famous Shanghai dandy composes many decadent poems, imaging sexualised women's body parts, which attracted criticism that I discuss in section 3.2.

Salomé and Pan are both traditional femme fatales, while in Wilde's and Ouyang's texts they are no longer flat villains, evil for no reason. They are both victimised by the patriarchy, strong-headed and fearless schemers. They both harm other people while fighting back the patriarchal oppression, which makes them complicated characters with flaws. Wilde's Salomé is harassed and threatened by King Herod, but also takes advantage of his power, which hangs on her beauty, to impose her own sexual advancement on the unfortunate priest. Salomé capitalises on her sexuality for her own desires, which from a modern feminist perspective still perpetrates the femme fatale image, fully charged with misogyny. That said, other scholars, such as Carmen Skaggs, argue that Wilde "enters the chasm of human emotion and reveals both the savage and noble heights to which humanity ascends. He explores the deeply ingrained gender ideologies of modernity and the sexual perversities of modern culture," and "by focusing the narrative upon the dancing daughter and empowering her sexuality, Wilde brings a new dimension to her

²⁷ Archaeologist Frances Larson published *Severed: A History of Heads Lost and Heads Found* in 2014, which made insightful scholarly research on human society's obsession with decapitation and severed head as decorative artifacts. However, there does not seem to be a scholarly work specifically working on the imagery of female sexual desires in severed lovers' head in literary studies yet.

²⁸ The earliest and most famous "heart - gauging" trope is in a story about King Zhou of Shang gauging out Bi Gan's heart under the influence of his extremely beautiful concubine Da Ji in the mythological novel *Investiture of the Gods* (c.16th century). Da Ji is a huli jing (fox spirit) who wants to eat Bi Gan's heart to cure her heartache.

²⁹ In Mandarin "taoxintaofei," literally means "to gouge out one's heart and lungs," to describe a person as earnest and loyal to another. This phrase could also be used as an adjective, as in "taoxintaofei de pengyou" (a friend who gouges out his or her heart and lungs for you), meaning a bosom friend who displays feelings openly and habitually, the equivalent to the English idiom, "to wear one's heart on one's sleeve."

³⁰ However, there is no comparative study between Western and Chinese literature on the fetish of mutilated human bodies so far, nor is there any study on this literary trope of the gouged heart in Chinese or Sinophone literature. I would develop this topic in future comparative literature research.

character” (124–139). Perhaps Wilde empowered Salomé’s sexuality, but her power to take other’s lives comes from the very patriarchal oppression that reduces women to an object of male sexual desire, and thus her seemingly empowered sexuality is the means not the end. Admittedly, Wilde reveals the morbidity in modern culture. He makes a morally questionable Biblical story poetic and romantic, introducing aesthetics in Salomé’s villainy, which is truly decadent and lives up to the core value of Aestheticism.

PAN Jinlian, on the other hand, is at the receiving end of patriarchal oppression and violence against women throughout the story, which makes the character more likeable than Salomé, and arouses audiences’ sympathy and understanding of women’s unfair treatment in the old society. As a maiden Pan desires a peaceful, simple life with a person she loves, and yet Councillor Zhang mercilessly deprives this dream. When she is forced to marry Da, she submissively accepts her fate and for a long time lives as a virtuous wife to Da, before Song appears. Her love for Song enlightens her, and she fights for her long-forgotten dream.

PAN. I was a person living in hell but you, you came in my life like the glorious sunlight! I thought if a couple were not suited, what’s the harm to part the way and find a more suitable partner? If you and I were a couple, it would be such a wonderful marriage and we could live a long and happy life!
(Act 5)

This dream is again crushed by Confucian moral oppression of women. Song rejects her and threatens to beat her for her immoral behaviour and Da refuses to let her go after she has begged for a peaceful divorce (Act 3). She is trapped in a loveless marriage with a man she loathes. Her adultery with Xi-men and her murder of her husband are the final strike of a desperate woman. As she says, to commit “a magnificent crime,” unimaginable in her time, is to shock society, also reflected in Ouyang’s inheritance of the idea of *Épater la bourgeoisie* from the British Decadent movement.

Thus, Pan is a character who carries out the Decadent Movement’s rebellious spirit and May Fourth Movement’s calls for the individual freedom. Aesthetes may see this story as too political to be considered purely artistic, but Ouyang’s decision to make a long-standing villain into a victim is truly decadent, and shocking to his contemporaries all entrenched in moral condemnation of women who express their sexual desires. The modern spirit put forward by the May Fourth scholars appears in Pan’s courage to challenge the traditional moral bounds. Admittedly, the traditional Chinese woman’s virtue of self-sacrifice remains crystal clear in her final statement, somewhat less revolutionary, and yet also a method of making Pan more acceptable in the Chinese context. Unlike Salomé’s possessive love, Pan’s love for Song is selfless, albeit morbid. Ouyang adopts Wilde’s emotionally charged expression and sensual language to tell a Chinese proto-feminist’s tragic tale. This sinicisation of

Salomé re-creates Pan as a pioneering character out of old text. Her Salomé-like statement is a powerful *cri de coeur*, reflecting the May Fourth agenda to overthrow Confucian moral code imposed on women. OU-YANG Yuqian's audacious reinterpretation of a Chinese female villain illuminates the women's liberation agenda in May Fourth, and calls for individualism, an ideal that Chinese scholars celebrated during this historical period.³¹

3.2 HONG Shen and *The Young Mistress' Fan* (1924)

Another representative drama in the May Fourth's sinicisation of Wilde's plays is the Chinese version of *Lady Windermere's Fan*, titled *Shaonainai de Shanzi* (1924; see Fig. 4). It is the earliest Chinese adaptation of Wilde's play, whose popularity went unmatched by other Chinese dramatic adaptations of Western plays, including *Pan Jinlian*. After opening on May 4th, in 1924, at the auditorium of the society's base, the Chinese Vocational School, enthusiastic critical reviews and word of mouth helped to sell out four other scheduled performances (May 10, 11, 17, and 18; J. Gu; S. Liu 114). A large audience at the final matinee forced an added performance (J. Gu; S. Liu 114). Its highly anticipated restaging at the Olympic Theater, a grand movie house, occurred between June 30 and July 2. The play earned more than 2,000 yuan (S. Liu 114). Such unprecedented success for an amateur theater production pushed HONG Shen the dramatist, Wilde's play, and the adaptation as dramaturgy, to the forefront of the *aimeiju* (amateur theatre) movement.³² Students formed amateur acting groups in Shanghai, Beijing, Tianjin, and elsewhere, rushed to stage the play (S. Liu 114).³³

³¹ Further scholarly works that take on different angles and are worth reading are HONG Xiu-yun's "Evil Flowers—On Salomé and PAN Jin-lian," *Journal of Jiangxi Institute of Education* 2 (2006); and 王蒙 [Wang Meng], titled "莎乐美, 潘金莲和巴别尔的骑兵军 [Salomé, Pan Jinlian, and Babel's Chevaliers]" 读书[Reading] 3 (2005). Hong compares Salomé to Pan in *Jin Ping Mei* (c. 1610), instead of Ouyang's drama.

³² Aimeiju [爱美剧] movement's "aimeij" is a transliteration of the English word "amateur" that defines this movement as non-profit oriented and led by students—especially those who had professional theatre training from the US—who are passionate about drama and theatre but are not professional actors themselves (Sell 96). The "aimeij" also means "loving beauty" or "Aestheticism" as well.

³³ The late 1910s straddled the decline of *wen ming xi* ("Civilized drama," an early form of Western-style theatre in China, the precursor of *huaju*) and the rise of the more formalised *huaju* (spoken drama), the Western-theatre form as it is known today, which started in the early 1920s when Chinese students with professional theatre training returned from the United States and Europe. Disillusioned by *wenmingxi*'s commercialism and the lack of intellectual and ideological rigor, many young theatrical and political activists advocated the Amateur Theatre (*aimeiju*) movement, which had been part and parcel of the new Western-style theatre long before it became a movement (Sell 96).

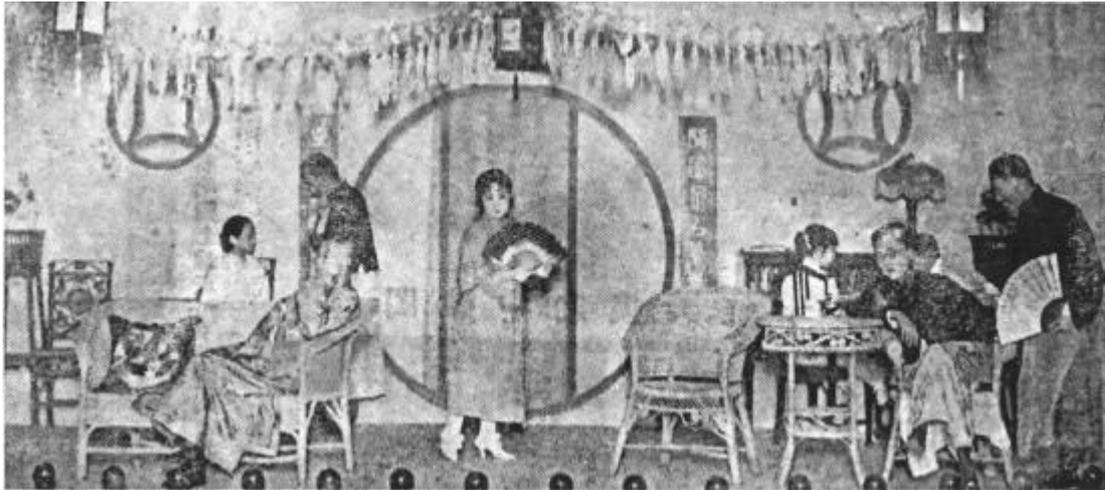


Figure 4. Act 2 of *The Young Mistress's Fan*, directed by HONG Shen, Shanghai, May 1924.

Though several translations of this play had appeared before, the renowned modern Chinese director, playwright, and founding father of *huaju* (spoken drama), HONG Shen decided to translate it himself; he directed its stage production (1924) as well as a film, *Shao Nainai de Shanzi* (1928). Eleven years later, another film adaptation based on his script, became the most famous film adaptation of Wilde's play in China. LI Pingqian directed this 1939 film during the Second Sino-Japanese War (1931–1945). Later Chinese *xiqu* genres such as *Huju* (Shanghai opera) based on Hong Shen's translation. It has remained in the *Huju* repertoire ever since (S. Qi).

The sinicisation of *Lady Windermere's Fan* was less sensational than *Pan Jinlian*. That said, Hong's approach is loyal to the original, and avoids the pedantic. HONG Shen studied theatre and performing arts with George Pierce Baker at Harvard (1919–1920) before he moved to New York for two years, to experience Broadway productions firsthand (Liu 113–14). There is no direct evidence showing that Hong watched the most famous US stage rendition of *Lady Windermere's Fan*, by Margaret Anglin (premiered in 1914; S. Liu 114). However, the US adaptation was also staged in Boston's Copley Theater in 1917 two years prior to Hong's arrival. Copley Theatre was one of the outstanding regional centers of America's Little Theater Movement, and known for its productions of Wilde, Barrie, and Shaw (S. Liu 114). Hong spent half of his Boston year at Copley's School of Theater learning as much as he could about theater, "lingering for days and weeks from its storage room in the attic to the bathroom in the basement" (Hong 485-86; Liu 114). Therefore, it is safe to say that Hong was strongly encouraged to make the Chinese version by the huge success of this American adaptation of *Lady Windermere's Fan*.

Hong admitted that he believed a Chinese adaptation of this play was a guaranteed success, and he was right.³⁴ *Shao Nainai de Shanzi* constitutes the first

³⁴ Hong "firmly declared that it was impossible for the play to fail" and pushed for the investment of hundreds of yuan on the production, which the Stage Society had recently collected through fundraising, an unprecedented amount for an *aimeiju* production (GU Jianchen 1926; S. Liu 114)

successful attempt to adapt a Western play into a Chinese context. Hong's adaptation is extraordinary for its profound intercultural transformation. Liu argues that Hong's extensive introduction explains modern drama, the play, and the efficacy of adaptation (122). The play's transformation of Mrs. Erlynne's image is creative and reflective of China's modernising polity. The major changes in *Shao Nainai de Shanzi* include two aspects. First, localising the Victorian upper-class society into a modern Shanghai society. All of the characters' names and locations are changed into Chinese style and the characters' lifestyles also change accordingly. Second, the changed image of Mrs. Erlynne is used as a vantage point to discuss the "freedom of love (*ziyou lianai*)" and arranged marriage, the tenet of the New Cultural Movement.

These changes have been thoroughly studied by theatre studies scholars in China and Japan; thus I will approach this drama through textual analysis to understand its broader social impact within the New Cultural Movement.³⁵

In the original play the opening scene is as follows:

Morning-room of Lord Windermere's house in Carlton House Terrace. Doors C and R. Bureau with books and papers R. Sofa with small tea-table L. Window opening on to terrace. Table R. Lady Windermere is at table R, arranging roses in a blue bowl. (Wilde 487)

Hong does not rigidly translate the above text into Chinese. Instead, he cleverly changes the whole setting into a modern, 1920s Shanghai upper-middle class household:

Inside the living room, apart from the usual furniture and decorations, there hang national flags of all countries. Flowers of all seasons are placed everywhere in the room as well. Although they are made of paper, they are quite magnificent.

...

In the middle of the room placed an oval shaped sofa. On its left side sits a small cigar set. Close to the wall are some chairs with randomly placed embroidered cushions. On a desk at the rear of the room lies brush pens, ink stick, ink slab, paper, envelopes, and invitations.

³⁵ See Chinese scholarly articles for further reading on HONG Shen's adaptation and approach, and *Shao Nainai de Shanzi*'s significance in founding China's *huaju*: Liu, Siyuan, "HONG Shen and Adaptation of Western Plays in Modern Chinese Theater." *MCLC Resource Center*, 2015, <https://u.osu.edu/mclc/journal/abstracts/siyuanliu/>; Zhou, Wei [周炜]. "《少奶奶的扇子》:跨文化戏剧的经典之作 [Young Mistress's Fan: A Classic Cross-Cultural Drama]." *Fanyizhongguo.Com*, 2018, <http://www.fanyizhongguo.com/2018/0618/9405.html>, and Japanese scholarship, 白井啓介. "洪深の扇: Lady Windermere's Fan から『少奶奶的扇子』へ." *文学部紀要* 11.2 (1998): 74–93.

The decorations of this room are all very exquisite and expensive, which are telltale signs of a family with hereditary emoluments at its prime.

The beautiful Lady Xu, in her early 20s wears a purple dress made of Indian silk. Her behaviour is lively but composed. Her aura is friendly but solemn. She, who just graduated from the best school in town, is now writing a letter next to the desk. (Hong 107)

In Hong's setting a strong sense of cosmopolitan atmosphere is created through his depiction of small daily objects. Flags of all nations and Lady Xu's Indian-silk dress reveal the bustling world trade system in Shanghai and the Chinese Republican's awareness of "the world" and "world citizen" in the metropolis. This cosmopolitan awareness also appears in Wilde's original play, where Duchess of Berwick wishes to marry her daughter off to a rich young man from Australia, whose family fortune is newly made through canned food. Australia was the country where less privileged British set off to make a fortune. As a result, the young Aussie's social status in Wilde's play is self-evident as a "newly rich." Wilde's audience immediately get the physical jokes, thanks to established understandings of the Australian nouveau riche; however, Australia was an obscure country to Chinese people and Hong cleverly adjusts to make this character an overseas Chinese student who has just finished his degree in the US ("newly cultured"), and is returning to become an entrepreneur in Shanghai. America has always been a hot spot for Chinese students to study, and "Haigui" (lit. people who have studied overseas) the most sought after on the Chinese marriage market since the 1920s. Hong's change makes the play more relatable to Republican Chinese, Wilde's jokes to the Chinese context. Hong's audiences were mostly from middle-class families with overseas experience, and hence could understand the connotation more easily after his adjustment to the character's origins.

Hong has made Lady Xu a "new woman," a student with a Western education. Instead of arranging flowers in the original opening scene, which is a perceived traditional women's hobby that perpetrates women's domestic role, Lady Xu is writing a letter with a brush pen instead. The brush pen she uses brings a sense of Chineseness to the play, and the amalgamation of two cultures is harmoniously played out, a synecdoche of Shanghai's multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism. This change makes her a modern woman with her own social circle, actively engaging with the outside world. Later, Hong also reveals that Lady Xu studied in a Puritan school in Shanghai, which is again reflective of the metropolis' inclusiveness and multicultural lifestyle. Since Chinese theatre-goers in the 1920s were mainly from the middle class, well-educated and with a Westernised background similar to Lady Xu, this remaking of Lady Windermere's background effectively endeared the character to audiences.

Hong also changed the names of characters and locations into relatable Chinese names and landmarks in Shanghai (see Fig 6).

Lady Windermere	徐少奶奶 (瑜貞)
Mrs. Erlynne	金女士
Lord Windermere	徐子明
Lord Darlington	劉伯英
Lord Augustus Lorton	吳八大人
Mr. Dumby	李不魯
Mr. Cecil Graham	張亦公
Mr. Hopper	王昭
The Duchess of Berwick	陳太太
Lady Agatha Carlisle	秀雲

Figure 6. The sinicisation of *Lady Windermere's Fan* character names (screenshot from 白井啓's essay; 80)

Thus Lady Windermere becomes Lady Xu (Yu-zhen), Mrs Erlynne becomes Madame Jin, Lord Windermere is Xu Ziming, Lord Darlington Liu Boying, and Lord Augustus Lorton is Lord Wu Ba. These Chinese names are not randomly created, but reflect each character's personality and temperament. For instance, Lady Xu's, Yu-zhen (瑜貞), *yu* (瑜), means "beautiful jade," and *zhen* (貞) means "chastity," connoting Lady Xu's beauty and innocence. Madam Jin's last name *Jin* (金) means "gold," symbolizing the character as a gold-digger, but also a woman with a heart of gold. Lord Augustus, a conservative Tory in Wilde's play, is named accordingly with the title "Lord" (大人; *daren*), the male character for whom Hong retains the title, and depicted as a supporter of the late Qing government (W. Zhou).

Finally, the changed image of Madame Jin reflects the May Fourth women's liberation movement. Not only is she a selfless mother, as she was in the original play, Hong's version creates a "new woman (*xin nvxing*)" who left her husband and family, like Ibsen's Nora, breaking the shackles of arranged marriage to pursue the freedom of love by divorce. However, Madame Jin is fooled by the playboy she eloped with, who abandons her later with a tarnished reputation. In the original story, she was still a vain and a morally dubious gold digger, albeit one with many good qualities as well. In Hong's version Jin is a tragic and "heartbroken" woman, who is selfless, kind, and progressive (白井 87). This sinicisation or politicisation of Wilde's Mrs. Erlynne is cleverly done by selective translation, rephrasing, and the translator's re-creation. For example, Hong's version reveals the May Fourth spirit in this play.

XU. . . . I don't want Yuzhen to know that her beloved mother is a fallen woman who abandoned her husband to elope with another man.

MADAM JIN. Ziming, a woman who left her husband was quite scandalous 20 years ago. But isn't divorce very common now?

Hong makes a bold statement using Madame Jin as a mouthpiece, that "divorce is common now," to refute Mr. Xu's attempt to insult her as "a divorced woman." A divorced woman is gradually accepted by 1920 and the moral judgment of divorce as shameful on the wane. "20 years ago" in this drama is late Qing dynasty, which is confirmed by Madame Jin's nostalgic comments on a photo she took before her arranged marriage.

I remember that was Guangxu-Year 28 (A.D. 1902). Women's most fashionable hairstyle was straight bang on the forehead. Women then were not expected to socialise openly but were supposed to be shy and composed" (Hong; 白井 87).

Hong's decision to morph Madame Jin into a "modern woman" in the May Fourth context nevertheless does not deviate too much from Wilde's original text. This symbolic figure thrives from the original character's charisma and humour, making an anti-hero of female character to Chinese audiences. Even her original criminal blackmail adds a layer of complexity to her character. Madame Jin is a progressive New Culture activist, a loving mother, a witty socialite, a smart and beautiful woman, and simultaneously a gold-digging schemer and tragic victim of the patriarchal systematic oppression of women—from arranged marriage to abandonment by irresponsible men. Hong's adaptation of *Lady Windermere's Fan* is thus perhaps even more political than Wilde's original play. Admittedly, Wilde's play is not completely devoid of critical rethinking of hypocrisy and double standards in Victorian society, and he vociferously criticises his contemporary society with humour and style. Whereas HONG Shen's play employs Wilde's literature as a means to express the May Fourth political agenda, as a means to "heal" and modernise Chinese society in a boisterous ideologically shifting era. Hong, one of the leading scholars of the New Cultural Movement in theatre circles, thus defines Chinese awareness and shapes Chinese modern identity through imitating and recreating the Other to improve the Self.

These changes he made have a significant impact on the play as a whole, giving the play an accessible and lively Chinese soul that enabled its huge success in Shanghai. Before *Shao nainai de Shanzi*, adaptations of Western plays had all been failures, and as such were lessons to the May Fourth dramatists to avoid in their own adaptation.³⁶ They realised that word-to-word translations were not welcomed by

³⁶ In 1920, modern drama activist WANG Zhongxian invested considerable money to adapt George Bernard Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession* (1902), as true to the original as possible. Sadly, the

audiences because of their lack of cultural experience in Western countries. To achieve success, they must cater to Chinese audience's cultural identity and consider their limited knowledge of Western literature. Hong's sinicisation of Wilde's play was a milestone in this way. The play's warm reception in Shanghai meant that, as novelist and literary critic Mao Dun noted, "[p]ersonages of various circles in Shanghai strongly demanded extra performances. The play was given three extra shows at 8:30 in the evening on June 30, July 1 and 2" (Mao Dun 388). He also noticed that the Chinese adaptation of Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879) was less popular than Hong's play, but did not give an explanation (388). Hong's adaptation was also the first to introduce Western stage settings in China with realistic costumes, real furniture, and other stage properties. The script had very detailed stage instructions, which created an immersive experience for audiences. As such it is widely acknowledged as the beginning of modern Chinese drama (L. Chen 82; D. Song 12). Despite its social satire, the play is light-hearted, suspenseful, and ends happily: suspicion cleared, love reconfirmed, and "bad" woman redeemed through a selfless, sacrificial act of love. In addition, the play's extravagant décor and fashion would appeal to the Shanghai bourgeois theater-goers in no small measure (S. Qi).

4. The Decadent Shanghai Dandies

The New Cultural Movement was, however, not a monolithic movement. While the mainstream reformist voice was politically oriented, a few scholars remained uninterested in using literature as a propaganda tool for political purposes. Rather, they were interested in literature *per se*, as well as the lifestyle of flaneurs and dandies. These types roam around concert halls, cafés, and the city's most sumptuous literary salons day after day, and then wrote about their artistic lives, and the romances between urbanites and dancing girls in the metropolis. The most representative dandies are SHAO Xunmei and writers of the Neo-Sensualist School, such as MU Shiyong, LIU Na-ou, SHI Zhecun, and YE Lingfeng. They are now obscure names in literary studies and unknown to the Chinese public.

The major reasons for their marginalisation in Chinese literature are threefold: first, since they were apolitical writers ardently against using literature for political propaganda, they contributed little to nothing in terms of writing patriotic and socially critical works, those to rally people against Japanese invaders; nor did they side with the Kuomintang (KMT) or the Communist Party of China (CCP) in the civil war (1945–1949), which is not entirely true, but is perceived as such.³⁷ Second, some have dubious reputations for working in the notorious pro-Japanese

Chinese adaptation flopped (W. Zhou). Hong's first sinicisation play *Yama Zhao* (1922), based on Eugene O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* (1920), was also a box office disaster (W. Zhou).

³⁷ SHAO Xunmei, for instance, as a celebrity poet and socialite not only was a close friend of the non-leftist writers and high officials in the KMT, he simultaneously financially helped communistic writers as well. However, due to his personal feud with Lu Xun and his aristocratic family background, all his achievements and contributions were destroyed completely in the Mao period (Hutt "[Monstre Sacré: The Decadent World of Sinmay Zau](#)").

Wang Jingwei puppet regime during WWII, for example, Liu and Mu both worked in the Wang regime and both were assassinated by secret agents from KMT's Bureau of Investigation and Statistics (NBIS). Although in 1972, JI Kangyi, a former NBIS senior agent, published an article to clean Mu's name, revealing that he was actually KMT's undercover agent,³⁸ the Neo-Sensualist school's reputation had already become irredeemable, for Liu was indeed pro-Japanese imperial invasion of China and, to some extent understandably so, inasmuch as he was born and grew up in Japanese-occupied Taiwan and his cultural identity was as a Japanese citizen. The two major figures' tainted reputations and their untimely deaths ended Neo-Sensualist development in China once and for all. Finally, their personal conflicts with the league of left-wing writers in the "mud-slinging" Republican scholarly circle further exclude them in the communist China's academia (Hutt *Monstre Sacré*; "*La Maison d'Or*—the Sumptuous World of Shao Xunmei" 132).

Shao was the quintessential incarnation of Aestheticism and Decadence in terms of literary style and lifestyle. His poems slavishly imitate the styles of Sappho, Swinburne, Verlaine, Baudlaire, and Wilde, and thus are sometimes categorised as Western poems by Chinese scholars ("*Monstre Sacré*").³⁹ Born into an aristocratic family and married to the granddaughter of the wealthiest industrialist in China, Shao's early life was unquestionably privileged.⁴⁰ He traveled widely in Europe, beginning at seventeen, before he studied at Cambridge University, and later in Paris. During his Cambridge years, Shao's passion for Sappho introduced him to writers of Decadence and Aestheticism. He took a special interest in Swinburne and Verlaine. XU Zhimo, Shao's best friend and the founder of the Crescent Moon Society (1923–1931), commented that Shao's style was very similar to that of Verlaine, and thus called him "China's Verlaine" (Hutt; "*Monstre Sacré*"). Therefore, while an Anglophile scholar, Shao's foremost literary model nevertheless originates on the other side of the English Channel. However, he himself still identified more with British Aestheticism:

"The route my poetry has taken is truly peculiar. From Sappho I uncovered her acolyte, Swinburne; and through Swinburne I became aware of the works of the

³⁸ Ji claims that, as Mu's supervisor in NBIS, he appointed Mu to work as an undercover agent in Wang's regime, and Mu was mistakenly assassinated by patriotic underground resistance group of NBIS in occupied Shanghai (H. Zhang, "Mu Shiyong's Mysterious Death").

³⁹ The works of Sappho kindled Shao's life-long passion for Western literature when the 17-year-old young master encountered this Ancient Greek poet during his journey in Naples. "Coming ashore at Napoli, I went to the museum where I was stopped in my tracks by the mystic beauty of a fresco depicting the Greek poetess Sappho. I searched and searched until I found a copy of her poems in English, and reading them I felt that in many respects they were similar to classical Chinese poems. For someone of such a weak spirit, this was truly an amazing discovery" ("self-Preface" 6–7).

⁴⁰ Shao's grandfather SHAO Youlian was an important statesman and diplomat to Russia and Japan in the late Qing court. Shao's aunt was the heiress of LI Hongzhang. He married his cousin SHENG Peiyu, who was the granddaughter of SHENG Xuanhuai, a Chinese tycoon, politician, and educator who garnered a huge fortune through actively modernising China during the Self-strengthening Movement.

Pre-Raphaelite school. From there I came in contact with the works of Baudelaire and Verlaine” (“self-preface” in *Twenty-Five Poems* 7).

LEE Ou-fan observes that Shao’s reading list provides a case study of a cultural encounter between China and the West.

From a Western perspective, the genealogy he traces reflects a common line of English decadence that began with Swinburne and culminated in the group of Pater, Symons, and Oscar Wilde—the writers of the so-called Yellow Nineties, so named after the famous journal *The Yellow Book*, which inspired Shao’s own journal *La Maison d’or* in both its color design and aesthetic content. (L. Lee 248)

However, Wilde was not Shao’s major interest. Lee accounts “in an essay on Verlaine, Shao attempts to distinguish between two styles — ‘decadent’ (Oscar Wilde) and ‘hedonist’ (George Moore)—and clearly favors the latter” (249). Shao’s poems indeed lack Wilde’s depth. Lee also comments that Shao is incapable of probing the depths of “a moral or spiritual order, or examining the forbidden, the tainted, in a realm of injured or arrested souls and of voluptuous blasphemy, as Gilman writes of Baudelaire” (Gilman 91; L. Lee 249). Wilde’s best quality lay in his balance between aesthetics and morality. Too much morality in art is dull preaching, but too much aesthetics without a sense of morality is emptiness, even fascism. Shao’s literary works rely too much on the Aestheticism, thus become “Dorian Gray,” possessing the beautiful shell without meaningful content. The following examples, from his collection *Hua yiyang de zui’ e* (*Flower-like Evil*)—nodding to Baudelaire’s *Les Fleurs du mal* (1857):

A peony also dies
 but her virgin-like redness,
 Shaking like a harlot
 Is enough to make you and me go crazy in a day
 And have wider dreams at night
 She may lack fragrance,
 Though she has added a sweet taste in poetry,
 And some deceit in tears.
 But I can never forget her wet soft flesh,
 Her clear red skin
 And that squeezed feeling of inebriation.

— “Mudan” [peony] in *Twenty-Five Poems* (39-40)

The Dew on the grass mattress of a tree tent,
 Is like this with tears of a virgin on her wedding night,
 Or the hot sweat on a seductress's lower body,
 That makes so many souls drunk with her spell.

— *Hua yiban de zui 'e* (49)

The romantic images, created by turning clichéd Chinese tropes of flowers and trees into shocking sensual imageries to express raw emotion and desires, were much needed in modern Chinese literature. At a time when China had just awakened from the Neo-Confucian moral ideal to “Uphold Justice, Annihilate Human Desires,” Shao’s audacious and explicit expression of sexual desires are liberating and refreshing.⁴¹ His style is anti-traditionalism, modern, and hedonistic. However, the tropes of virgin, harlot, and lewd women, kisses, love-making, seductress as serpent remain bogged down in the ancient archetype of the “feminine,” and widely used in most of his poems. In the first example, he uses the peony to represent the vagina and objectifies it as if it is detached from a woman’s body, making his explicit and sensual “deflowering” experience not only pornographic but also morbid. Shao’s eroticism is derived from objectifying metaphors of the flesh and, as Lee also argues, “an assumed position of male gaze or fantasy. Shao’s erotic evocations are still male-centred; one searches in vain for a woman’s voice inspired by Sappho’s poetry” (251). Shao’s shocking metaphors are created for an artistic effect, but also dehumanise women as fragmented objects of straight male desire, essentially, a fetish.

Shao particularly fetishizes harlot and wanton women in his poems, which attracted heavy criticisms from his contemporary overly moral left-wing writers. Their criticism centered on Shao’s personal moral fibre, attacking his poetry as “nothing but a pile of sensual words: fire, flesh, kiss, poison, rose, virgin, which has no clear clue to its overall meaning” (Shao 203; L. Lee 254). To such criticism, Shao responded that his critics’ preoccupation with moral attitude hindered them from understanding his poetry and that they mistook his eroticism for self-confession. “We can be sympathetic to a bandit or a harlot but it does not mean that we approve the conduct of a bandit or a harlot . . . or become bandits or harlots ourselves” (*Shihou* 2–3).

⁴¹ “To preserve Heaven’s laws and eliminate human desires” is a motto of the Cheng–Zhu School belonging to the Neo-Confucianism.

Scholars familiar with Wilde's trials would immediately recognise the similar attack on Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) when it was first published. Similarly, Wilde also defended his work, saying that attacks on his novel were ridiculous, based on a purely ethical ground ("Mr. Oscar Wilde's Defense"). The novel, sadly, is used against him during his trials, as his self-confession of a depraved life. Shao's poems may not be immoral but potent evidence of his objectifying male gaze, exploiting hyper-sexualised females.

As a follower of Aestheticism, I see the validity of Shao's frustration, when most of the criticisms are from a moral perspective, and yet his critics' attacks on his artistic prowess are reasonable. His poems have a tendency to stack up sexual euphemisms and women's sexual body parts together, revealing nothing deeper than sexual libertinism for straight men. He argues that "Weimei pai (lit. The Aesthetic school)" is not what its Chinese name suggests but has its own set of aesthetic principles drawn from distinguished pedigree, referring to Swinburne, Ruskin, and Rossetti (L. Lee 254).

By and large, Shao's major counterargument is that his works are purely aesthetic without any moral concern. He backs up this argument using an analogy, "We cannot say that Jesus' virgin mother can be called beautiful whereas the seductive Salomé cannot be called beautiful" (*Shihou* 3). Salomé in Shao's argument is that of Wilde and of Baudelaire, to be more accurate. His argument, however, is based on his personal preference for hyper-sexualised women, and thus is not validated. Morality maybe noble, but it is not always aesthetically appealing; while immorality is decadent but can be extremely beautiful. That said, Shao's comparison of Salomé and the Virgin Mary is rather weak, as an arbitrary attempt to use his own beauty standard—beauty itself is a subjective concept after all—to back up his argument that a moral perspective is irrelevant in art, and also as a male-centered argument de-humanising women as innate objects of the sexual gaze, whose only value is to be looked at, and that women's appearances define their value in the eyes of male artists. Hence, Shao's argument fails to convince, although his contribution to Chinese Aestheticism should be acknowledged. Both Ouyang and Shao adore Wilde's *Salomé*, and yet Ouyang's sympathetic and eye-opening *Pan Jinlian* renders Shao's poems rather like a teenage boy's sentimental twaddle in comparison. Considering the May Fourth political environment, it is no surprise that his poems were unpopular and that scholars like Lu Xun mock his lack of literary talent. However, his failed career as a poet did not stop him rising to be a cultural celebrity and socialite.

Shao's most notable influence in Chinese cultural circles was his life as a Chinese **dandy** (wankuzi 纨绔子). From an aristocratic family, Shao was tall and handsome, and particularly proud of his Greek nose. He lived a flamboyant and dramatic life in his younger years. His romantic adventures began in Paris' Latin quarter, where he enjoyed sumptuous, high-class bordellos, which likely contributed to Shao's kindred spirit with French flaneurs and Bohemian writers. When he

returned to Shanghai and married his wealthy childhood sweetheart, SHENG Peiyu, his life remained full of scandal.⁴² Shao's name became internationally famous for his three-year "marriage" with the legendary American journalist, Emily Hahn, who wrote *The Soong Sisters* (1941).⁴³

Along with his activities as a decadent dandy, attending parties and exploring sex, Shao was active in translating foreign Aesthetic and Decadent works, as well as publishing them in his own magazines. He was also a generous sponsor of new writers. His magazines were either shut down by the KMT government or a commercial failure, but thanks to his meticulous taste in art and literature, those magazines now provide precious evidence of the short-lived Chinese Aesthetic Movement. This fashionable young dandy was a true connoisseur of art and a darling of the salon circuit, according to accounts from his contemporaries, collected by LEE Ou-fan and John Hutt. Apart from these scholars, Shao, along with XU Zhimo, YU Dafu, TIAN Han (the first Chinese translator of Wilde's *Salomé*), YE Lingfeng, and other non-leftist members of the Creation Society, was a vocal advocate of Aestheticism (although not particularly of Wilde) in the 1920s. However, his foppish and scandalous lifestyle has remained a target of the League of Left-Wing Writers and revolutionists, especially Lu Xun (L. Lee; Hutt).

Another dandy who enraged Lu Xun, and shared the "decadent" imagination with Shao, was YE Lingfeng (1905–1975), of the Neo-Sensualist School. Compared to MU Shiyong, LIU Na-ou, and SHI Zecun, Ye was less famous in this school, his major achievement was in fine art instead of literature. However, I focus on Ye because of his contribution to modern Chinese queer literature. Ye was the only scholar in the New Cultural Movement who attempted to write on male homosexuality. According to Eve Sedgwick's definition of Gothic horror, in which male homosexuality is an integral feature of Decadence, Ye might be the most Decadent writer of his time (Halberstam 65).⁴⁴ Ye was an aspiring trendsetter, painter, collector, decadent writer, and sexologist. After he fell in love with Wilde's *Salomé*, Ye actively promoted and imitated the illustrator of *Salomé*, Aubrey Beardsley (1872–1898), earning himself the sobriquet of "China's Beardsley" (L. Lee 255). The social ethos of the time was to rebel against traditions and Ye certainly pushed the boundaries further by daring to write a homoerotic love story,

⁴² Once Shao was arrested for murdering a rival in courting a renowned actress. He was released later as mistakenly identified (Hutt).

⁴³ Their love story is romantic, dramatic, and passionate, interrupted by the Second World War. Hahn could not return to Shanghai after she traveled to Hong Kong and had to return to the US where she remarried. Allegedly Hahn admitted that she never stopped loving Shao, according to Taras Grescoe's research *Shanghai Grand* (2016). Despite being frowned upon, this couple was not low-key about their relationship and attended high-society salons together frequently. Through Shao, Hahn was able to meet the Chinese elites of the time, including the Soong sisters.

⁴⁴ Sedgwick calls attention to the paranoid Gothic as a genre fraught with tension between "normal" relations between men and perverse sexual relations between men. In Gothic, slippage occurs between these two already unstable categories and the monster, or the agent of fear, becomes easily recognisable as queer (*Skin Show* 65).

“Jindi (The Forbidden Zone; 1931),” collected in his *Anthology of Lingfeng’s Stories* (1931; see Fig. 7).



Figure 7. Ye’s *Anthology of Lingfeng’s Stories* (1931).

The male protagonist, evidently modeled on Dorian Gray, is a gorgeous college boy who starts to lose interest in women while he develops a blazing passion for literature, and becomes attracted to a like-minded male friend. This ambitious work is unfinished, however, and ends just when the male friend bashfully praises the hero’s effeminate and beautiful looks:

“It’s not flattery. If I were a woman I would have been crazy for you. Even now I am...” Juxuan suddenly blushed with shyness.

“Ju, I’m just joking. Don’t be angry. Tonight’s movie at the Feilington is very good, let’s go out.” Pinqiu quickly changed his tone. (Ye 474, trans. L. Lee 260–61).

The reason for this sudden end of the narrative remains a mystery. Some scholars conjecture that Ye lacked fictional techniques to proceed, but Lee suggests the reason for the Ye’s failure to end may have more to do with his “cultural memory” of the androgynous hero from classical Chinese literature, namely, JIA Baoyu from *Dream of the Red Chamber* (1791; L. Lee 261). The Baoyu character has bequeathed the aesthetic ideal of a Chinese dandy in the image of a young,

handsome, and extremely sensitive, “pale-faced” scholar (*baimian shusheng*), who is “neither defiant of social convention nor debauched in pursuit of wanton depravity” (L.Lee 261). The Chinese dandy is thus ultimately very different from Dorian Gray in terms of ideology. Ye, perhaps, could not proceed further into the “forbidden zone” to create a homoerotic narrative suggested by the story’s title. Apart from Lee’s reasoning, I would add that Ye, although a sexiologist who understood homosexuality scientifically, was a straight man after all, thus may have had difficulty to create credible and complicated homosexual characters in his story. Even though the writer need not be homosexual himself, the lack of exposure and research on real-life homosexual couples would highly likely make his characters flat and strange. Ye may have also worried about the risk, which could explain why the story ends as the two queer characters start to reveal their feelings to each other. And Ye may not have considered himself up to writing natural dialogue between homosexual lovers without making it crude. Had Ye finished this work, a more decadent character might have emerged, and the mania for the *fin de siècle* Decadent movement might have had a deeper impact in China’s modern literary history.

5. Conclusion: A Review of the “Wilde Craze”

The Decadents were also interested in Wilde’s fashion and style. A journalist from *The Daily Examiner* pointed out that “Mr. Wilde was dressed in a style that would attract general attention anywhere outside of an artist’s studio or chambers, and there was no need for any one to point in order to identify him” (qtd. in X. Zhou 100). Wilde’s costume was a performance of his aesthetic identity, observed and imitated by Chinese scholars and rich young men. Almost all praise heaped upon Wilde during this period mentioned his attractive appearance. For instance, even Lu Xun, known for his frugal lifestyle and criticism of these Shanghai dandies, states, “. . . look at his pictures. Wilde wears a carnation in his buttonhole, carrying a cane inlaid with ivory. How handsome he is! Everybody would love him, not to mention women” (*Lu Xun quanji* 275). Lu Xun’s slightly queer account of his admiring gaze at Wilde’s appearance describes Wilde’s clothing as an “aesthetic costume” (186). Lu Xun obviously linked Wilde’s appearance to his artistic principles and spoke highly of them, regardless of being critical of Wilde’s lifestyle. ZHANG Wentian, SHAO Xunmei, TENG Gu and many self-described Chinese aesthetes, however, were not low-key about their admiration of Wildean fashion. ZHANG Kebiao wrote about this about the era:

All of us were “partly neurotic,” indulging ourselves in Aestheticism, which was then one of the most popular schools in literature and art. We spoke in an eccentric, paradoxical style, aiming to surprise society and to transcend the worldly life. This is what Baudelaire, Verlaine, Wilde and Maeterlinck advocated in Europe. (68)

Wilde’s appearance was a direct expression of his idea of life imitating art, therefore a convenient mechanism of aesthetic performance, according to Judith Butler’s theory of performative identity. Butler argues that gender identity is in fact a

situational act of performance, in a certain way that conforms to prescribed gender signifiers (*Norton Anthology* 2486). In China the New Culture Movement scholars cited Wilde's performance of an aesthete in order to develop their own identity as free-spirited Chinese aesthetes. From the start, then, Chinese scholars' translation, adaptation, and imitation of Wilde had a performative dimension. Their performance of the aesthetic identity served the same purpose as Wilde's self-fashioning to popularise his philosophy. Wilde's was to guide the Victorian public away from the vulgar influence of consumerism, while Chinese scholars aimed to import Western, pioneering artistic images to accelerate the modernisation of China's social sensibilities to cosmopolitanism. Scholars of the time utilised Wilde as an ideological symbol to apply to reform social norms rather than merely as a playwright or philosopher.

Yet, this view of Wilde is rather subjective, for Chinese scholars' reception of Wilde was in many ways too simplified and selective. Scholars focused on his touching fairytales, hilarious comedies, the mysterious novel, and other works accounting for his exciting personal life. His serious examination of social problems was mostly neglected during this period. Admittedly, Wilde's earlier theory of art, which developed during the 1880s, was indeed noticed and emphasised by his Chinese audience (X. Zhou 102). His idea that art has an edifying power to improve societies, his dandy persona and the critique of the social establishment, were regarded as basic principles of Aestheticism and the symbol of individual freedom. However, Wilde's most radical idea on the binary relation between life and art was ignored. From the 1920s to the 1930s, he was better known for his more light-hearted works and fashionable lifestyle than for his critical essays. Wilde's aesthetic theory and practice were transfigured into a symbolic image that conformed to the social reality and cultural dynamics of China.

During this period, modernist scholars tended to romanticise Western artists, writers and philosophers. This tendency is compellingly discussed by LEE Ou-fan in his influential work *The Romantic Generation of Modern Chinese Writers* (1973). He points out that scholars of the New Culture Movement idealised Western artists, in aid of their own social and political interests. SU Man-shu, the first translator of Byron's poetry, for instance, was more attracted to Byron's legendary life than to Byron's actual literary works (L. Lee 74). Su constructs a romantic image of Byron as a rebellious hero against the social order, rather than as a Romantic poet. Apart from Byron, Shelly, Whiteman, Hardy, Ibsen, Hugo, are all romanticised by Chinese modernist scholars, to create a glittering image of Western artists with anti-establishment tendencies and cosmopolitan undertones, with which rebellious Chinese scholars could identify (L. Lee 275).

Similarly, it is the self-fashioning and commodified dandy image of Wilde that attracted scholarly attention. Chinese modernists were fascinated by his flamboyant appearance, which represented a non-conforming lifestyle and a new approach to art. They were captivated by the aesthetic performance without paying

much attention to the ideas behind it. They took advantage of this constructed ideal image to attract their Chinese audience's attention. ZHOU Xiaoyi notes that "Wilde as the eccentric aesthete was . . . partly a Chinese re-creation which in many ways reinforced Chinese writer's own critical and political positions" (104). Zhou also explains this Wilde-mania through a Lacanian lens, arguing that the materialisation of Wilde and his ideas, in essence, constructed an "other" that functions as a form of identification in the construction of the subject. According to Lacan, "selfhood is initially a far cry from the coherent and self-contained being. It comes into existence when it identifies itself with the 'other'. The 'other' maybe anything: the mirror image, linguistic signs, artistic ideals, ideological positions or whatsoever" (104-5). The *self* initially identifies itself in the mirror before further identifying with the social and ideological positions that assist the process of identification. In short, the *self* obtains its own existence from the existence of an "other." Thus, Wilde's artistic image functioned as the "other" that paved the way for Chinese scholars to achieve their own self-identification. With the help of this attractive image of Wilde, the Chinese scholars' political agenda to better the society could be widely accepted by the public.

To conclude, "Wilde is used by Chinese scholars of the early half of the twentieth century to support their own critical positions in literary debates on art and its functions in society" (105). One of literary critics of the day, WANG Gulu, argues:

In fact there were quite a lot of aesthetes as we read works from the West, Wilde was not the only one who advocated such philosophy, and yet after our unbiased examination, we found out he was indeed the best among the others. We are saying this not because we prefer Wilde, it is indeed because of his special merits that we admire . . . the great many others, indeed they talked about beauty but they also combined other topics such as religion, morality, and philosophy. There were none among the so many who really lived up to "art for art's sake." Wilde was the only one who put beauty above everything. He was the best aesthete among them all . . . We should know that if people are satisfied with the status quo, they would never come up with ideas that transcend the nature and the reality. Wilde was not satisfied with his social reality; and it was the dissatisfaction that created his essential principle of Aestheticism. (1-2; 64)

Clearly, these scholars attempted to project their own dissatisfaction with Chinese society onto the image of Wilde. From this mirroring of themselves, they tried to create a subtle connection with late Victorian society to justify their revolutionary proposal.

In *De Profundis*, Wilde asserts "I was a man who stood in symbolic relation to the art and Culture of my age" (CW 912). This is true when we consider his reception in early-twentieth-century China. He was regarded and admired as an artistic symbol, similar to the beautiful white and blue china vases that held flowers

— ideals of the May Fourth.⁴⁵ His legendary life, his appearance, and his thoughts on beauty and art were heatedly debated and quoted, blending in with Chinese scholars’ political voices.

In the following chapter, I will explore the abandonment of Wilde as the Chinese social context changed dramatically in Communist China. To communistic scholars Wilde symbolically becomes a dustbin filled with debauchery and filth of capitalism.

⁴⁵ Wilde’s famous line, “I find it harder and harder every day to live up to my blue china,” presents the notion of aesthetics as existing in perfect proportion, creating entities that possess a pristine sense of balance beyond that which humans could hope to attain.

Chapter 2 Wilde's Literary Reception in the People's Republic (1949–2019)

1. Introduction

The translation of Wilde works in China had two peaks: between the 1910s and 1940s, and from the 1980s to the present day. Wilde's works completely disappeared from the public eye in the period from 1949 to late 1966, and maintained a marginal position until the late 1970s. In this chapter, I examine the reception and influence of Wilde in China, from 1949 to the 2019, including the "silent period" and what I call the second climax of his reception. I present a reception history of Wilde in the People's Republic of China and, by examining cases of Chinese adaptations of Wilde's work at different historical moments, provide readers an introduction to the modernisation of the mind in line with Wilde's Aestheticism in Mainland China.

The admiration of Wilde during the Chinese Enlightenment Period was followed by a politically charged exclusion in the Mao era (1949–1976), in which perceptions of Wilde and his works represented the debauchery of capitalism. I begin with the social background and the guiding principles of translation, and analyse the reasons that account for his "absence" during this period. To understand Wilde's absence, I review the literary and ideological debate prior to the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. This influential debate occurred between two schools of scholars who subscribed to artistic principles from completely opposite viewpoints. The wrestling between these viewpoints directly impacted Wilde's reception in the "new China." One perception supported socialist realism and "art for life's sake," and became mainstream, thus Wilde's influences soon disappeared from the public eye.

Zealously following the Soviet Union's cultural tastes in the 1950s, Chinese scholars began to be critical of Wilde's works and Aestheticism, for influential Soviet literary critics had denounced them as reactionary. In the gradually hostile environment for Western writers who failed to fit into the Socialist revolutionary ethos, the renowned anarchist writer Ba Jin managed to publish his translation of "The Happy Prince," along with Wilde's other fairy tales and some poems, all of which marked the end of the translation of Wilde's works before 1976. The character of the Happy Prince was sympathetic towards the poor, as was Wilde's poignant critique of the hypocritical mayor, but both were conveniently interpreted as a communist polemic against the "blood sucking" capitalists. Hence this specific fairy tale was still included in textbooks for both English and Chinese classes in the 1950s. Yet during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), the extreme politics of the cultural environment actively demonised Wilde and his works, and the lifestyle and ideology he represented were seen as the "poisonous grass" in China's wholesome socialist garden. Thus he and his works were removed from public access entirely. Aestheticism became reactionary right-wing "bad element."

However, the veneration for Wilde was revived in the last two decades of the 20th century, and he remains admired to this day. After suffering decades of self-isolation from the rest of the world and oppression of dissident voices, Chinese “wenyi qingnian” (lit. cultured youth) embraced a Cultural Renaissance (roughly 1978–1989), in which all kinds of foreign cultural products were welcomed. Literature, films, music, for example, from fellow Socialist countries, third-world “brother and sister” countries, as well as from previously “evil” Western capitalist countries, became hugely popular. The diversity of multicultural entertainment opened up a completely new and lively world to young students in the 1980s. Because of the large-scale importation of foreign cultural works, China’s translation and dubbing industry grew immensely during this period, and the legendary Shanghai Dubbing Studio (SDS) left a triumphant mark on China’s history of intercultural communication. The SDS produced the radio drama of “The Happy Prince” in the early 1980s, which introduced Chinese people across the country to Wilde. From then on, Wilde’s cultural influences were no longer limited to the elite class in Shanghai. The adjustments SDS made in the radio drama had self-contradictory characteristics, which, I argue, perfectly reflect the polity of the late 1980s; that is, the confused Chinese intelligentsias attempt to figure out China’s future, after becoming disillusioned with their old ideals and values, was challenged by the inundation of Western values. Reflection, contemplation, and exploration of a possible political reformation ended sadly with the Tiananmen tragedy, in 1989. Thus cultural exploration was defeated by the authoritarian iron-fist of persecution, and an almost self-numbing hedonistic sentiment gradually came into being, which accorded with China’s economic growth at a break-neck speed, beginning in 1978. This hedonistic sentiment further developed into a materialistic fetish for luxury lifestyle and conspicuous consumption.

In 2015, playwright ZHOU Liming rewrote Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), to contemplate China’s materialistic social milieu as a reaction to the epidemic materialism. However, his critique was lighthearted and humorous, and his major objective was to mock the materialism rather than to attack it, which is a progress in steering cultural creation away from ideological influence. Pure amusement in a humorous but meaningful play was the true luxury in the Chinese cultural industry, for China’s cultural productions had long been either too political or pathetically philistine.

1.1. The Two Opposing Literary Camps

Historically, it would seem that out of the blue Chinese scholars reversed their attitudes towards Wilde after the establishment of the People’s Republic of China. However, this shift was the result of an ideological battle between the “art for art’s sake” and the “art for life’s sake,” which directly contributed to two contrasting attitudes towards Wilde and Aestheticism. This debate divided scholars into two ideological camps, represented by two schools, namely, the “Chuangzao She” (Creation Society), which championed “art for art’s sake,” and the “Wenxue yanjiu

hui” (Literary Research Association; short for LRA), which professed “art for life’s sake.”

The Creation Society was founded by Chinese overseas students in Japan, in the 1920s. In 1920 YU Dafu and other kindred-spirited Chinese overseas students in Japan established “Chuangzao She,” which aimed to promote vernacular and modern Chinese literature (Guo; Hsia 123). Early members of this society were largely influenced by English, American, and German Romantic genre, and Yu was particularly influenced by British Aestheticism (Shih 111). Their major pursuit was to challenge the dominating Naturalism, Realism, and politically charged literature in Republican China. They want to create a literary magazine that only published pure literature. After two years of struggle and hard work, Yu managed to cooperate with *The China Times* to publish *Creation Quarterly* (Guo). The Creation Society is particularly impressed by English aesthetes, such as Walter Pater, Oscar Wilde, and Aubrey Beardsley, to name a few (Guo; Hsia 123). Members considered them “the Neo-Romantics,” and admired their Romantic conception of art as an independent expression of the self (X. Zhou 109). Among the members, Yu was the most ardent admirer of Wilde.

These Shanghai dandies and the Neo-Sensualists (discussed in Chapter 1) were close friends of Yu. Although none joined the Creation Society, all were influenced by Wilde and Baudelaire, and thus shared similar literary principles, and received similar attacks from the more leftist LRA. They form a fraternal camp chanting for art for art’s sake as a response. For instance, revolutionary literary critics who attack Shao also attack Yu from a moral perspective, arguing that Yu’s protagonists—who supposedly reflected the author— were “by turns voyeur, fetishist, homosexual, masochist, and kleptomaniac” (Hsia 109). The sexually repressed heroes could not relate to women (Kubin 60). The alleged “decadence” of YU Dafu’s novels, whether in a pejorative or in an aesthetic sense (i.e., “Decadence” as an artistic movement) was considered by some Chinese Marxist critics to be a sign of Yu’s moral corruption (Shih 111). Yu argued, “. . . what art should pursue is the formal and spiritual beauty. I maintain that the pursuit of beauty is the central aim of art” (Yu 89). Importantly, Yu also asked: “. . . because art is part of life, and life itself is the very art; why do we separate them from each other? What for? May I ask, is there a life without art? And which art works in our history can be separated from life?” (Yu 57).

Yu saw a flaw in the art-life dichotomy, pointing out that the two categories cannot be separated, which would make the debate between Realism and Aestheticism pointless (X. Zhou 109). Unlike his dandy friends, who indulged completely in hedonistic sensual exploration, or like Marxist writers who politicised and moralised any artistic expressions, Yu argued that life is transcendental and balanced, hence should be treated as a higher reality, thus similar to the creation of art.

Indeed, to live a poetic life irrespective of the hardship and the dark side of reality is not escapism, as it might appear to be at first glance. Rather, it actually follows Ruskin's proposal of using art to refine man's minds and temperament, and eventually to reform and beautify society (*On Art and Life*). Instead of escaping from reality, Yu's artistic philosophy was much concerned with the well being of people, although in a subtle manner and one requiring patience and a stable and peaceful social environment. Wilde was a social rebel indeed, but his rebellious spirit lay not just in his bold speeches, stylish peacocking, and queer identity for the sake of sensation. He was a rebel with clear socio-political ideas. Yu noticed the subtle difference between the self-promoter, in love with his own image, and the artist who tried to enhance society with the assistance of advertising strategies.

Dismayingly, many of Yu's contemporary admirers of Wilde only partially understood Wilde's works, and immediately took his fashionable persona for granted, paying little attention to the aesthete's deeper contemplation of social issues. Furthermore, his Chinese followers likely cared little for understanding Wilde's more political side in the first place. They assumed Wilde's attractive performative persona simply to display their own understanding of modernism and individualism. This blind imitation and admiration eventually led to negligence of Wilde's critical essays, and Wilde accordingly became a shallow playboy within Chinese academia. This misinterpreted Wilde consequently became a target of the Literary Research Association (LRA).

The LRA focused on the social and political function of art. LRA scholars stressed reading works of literature and art within their immediate historical and social context. To some extent, they follow Ruskin's and Matthew Arnold's proposal that art should assume the responsibility to refine people's minds, so as to refine society (*On Art and Life; Culture and Anarchy* 1869; Machann 45–61). They argue that art should disclose the dark side of society to arouse people's awareness of social problems, and to look for potential solutions. Wilde's Aestheticism, boasting its "uselessness" with a touch of aristocratic nonchalance, in fact, also follows Ruskin's proposal to reform society via art and beauty. However, like Chinese dandy scholars, who oversimplified Wilde's paradoxical ideas and took his face values for granted in the 1920s, the LRA also mistook Wilde's hedonistic performance for his real intention. Therefore, LRA's leader Mao Dun wrote scathing criticism of Wilde, and of the idea of "art for art's sake" in general. He accused Chinese aesthetes of "indulging in an Ivory Tower every day," and argued "we firmly stand in opposition to those clichés and the Chinese literary works written in an aesthetic style because they are far removed from life and social reality" (413–14). Mao Dun also regarded Wilde as "entirely a failure," "an individualist" and "a hedonist," who had the gift of invention, but only from an "airy castle" (29). On Wilde's pursuit of pure art, Mao Dun asked, "[w]hat benefits and uses of this activity can be given to mankind, . . . does this suggest any progress and advance in history?" (28-29). Evidently, Mao Dun viewed Wilde as a shallow playboy whose artistic pursuits were useless, and his comments on Wilde basically lay the foundation of a 17-year hostility towards Wilde

in the new China. Mao Dun's voice represents the general attitude of the league of leftwing writers; he was the most influential scholar in the early decades of the People's Republic of China. Consequently Wilde was branded as morally corrupt. The long-standing debate between the CS and the LRA petered out when the CCP came into power and Mao Dun the Chinese Minister of Culture Ministry (Gao; Hou; Ding).

To many Chinese Republican Marxist scholars, employing art and beauty to better society was overly idealistic, even farcical. Although it was indeed influential in the long run, such artistic reformation required a stable environment politically and economically to take effect, whereas the Republican China had neither. Hence, the Aestheticism trend and Wildean craze deteriorated fast after WWII and the Chinese Civil War. Apart from Marxist scholars' active exclusion, Chinese Aestheticism took a heavy hit from the untimely deaths of its major activists. Dandy writers like Shao went bankrupt and were isolated during the Japanese invasion, as well as during the civil war following. Crescent Moon Society's founder XU Zhimo's flight crashed on the way to Beijing. The Neo-Sensualist scholars LIU Na'ou and MU Shiyong were assassinated one after the other, and even Yu was executed by the imperial Japanese military police after his true identity—a double agent—was discovered, in Sumatra, Indonesia, in 1945. Chinese Aestheticism that had sparked like fireworks in the 1910s and 20s, lingered only a while in the early 1930s, and disappeared without a trace in the following four decades.

2. A Symbol of Capitalist Sin: The Silence Years (1940s–1970s)

According to translation theorist, Andre Lefevere, translation is a form of rewriting, produced and read with a set of ideological and political constraints within the target language's cultural system (7–9). Therefore any text produced on the basis of another necessarily adapts the original text to a certain ideology or to a certain poetics, and usually both. The early decades of Chinese translations prove to be extreme cases of Lefevere's theory: the translation of foreign literature was all done in the service of a newly established political end.

After over a century of chaos and wars, since 1842, China has finally entered a relatively peaceful period in 1949, with a new government and new political system. The newly established Chinese Communist government lacked experience in governing a vast country, with a completely new social system, never practiced in human history before the Soviet Union. The political leaders had decided to copy the Soviet model in all senses, including the cultural sphere. From economy to education, the CCP regime followed the steps of its "Big Brother." Literature, a form of cultural expression closely tied up with ideology, was thus strictly regulated by the Communist authority to prevent the propagation of subversive counter-revolutionary writings from the West. Translations of foreign literature were censored and restricted by the central government. The Soviet taste in literature dictated China's reception of Western literature.

In July of 1949, the Congress of Chinese Artists passed a decree, calling for artists to “adamantly follow the Soviet Union in the camp of peace and democracy” (Ding 173). After, Chinese literary criticisms were, to a large extent, copies of those of the Soviet Union. Socialist Realism, with its realistic art emphasising political social “realities,” critiques of social problems, and spreading communist values, was the mainstream literary movement, including both creative writing and literary criticism during this period. This movement’s renowned representative, Maximilian Gorky, became the most celebrated literary figure in China (Hou 17; F. Gao; M. Gao. X. Wu 6-10; J. Li 13-40). Gradually, translations of foreign literary works were limited to works that reflected the revolutionary communist spirit and anti-Capitalist sentiments. Soviet literary critics’ comments “determined whether a Western literary work would be introduced in China or not” (Hou 17; Gao 30). So, to understand the reception of Wilde in China during this period, it is important to first review the Soviet Union’s reception of Wilde.

In the “Preface” to *The History of British Literature* (1959), Aleksandr Anikst, in order “to give a fair socialist comment,” put Wilde on the list of Decadent writers (Anikst 2). He argued that the decline and debauchery of the *fin-de-siècle* Capitalism was illuminated by the popularity of Decadent writers in late nineteenth century Britain. He also asserted that the school of Decadence denied the hope of a democratic society and rejected the reality in art.

The Decadent writers find that capitalist society is teeming with immoral incidents, but they believe that nothing can improve this situation. They diagnose that their society is seriously sick, but their art is not created for the improvement of the society, rather, their works are more like the cry of a dying man. (517–18)

Anikst also pointed out that Decadent writers were extreme individualists advocating through the misleading slogan of “art for art’s sake” (517). To him, their creation of art by no means aroused readers’ aspiration for the “humanity and justice” (1). Anikst’s comments were published in *The Concise History of English Literature*, a Chinese textbook for literary study in universities in the 1950s. His opinions reflected the scholarly voices generally emanating from the Soviet Union. Their inclusion in a Chinese textbook for higher education also self-evidently demonstrates China’s alliance with Soviet scholarly assertion.

Against this backdrop, the binary opposition between Realism and Aestheticism was prominent. In his *On Questions about the Socialist Realism* (1956), Boris Ryurikov points out that

. . . the opposition between the Socialist Realism and Capitalist Decadent art is not only irreconcilable in the respect of ideology and morality, but also in the formality of art . . . Decadent art may uphold its Realism form with positive and upright features, it in essence, is hopeless, for it does not reveal the objectivity of art. (108–09)

Literary scholars from the Soviet Union defined Aestheticism as decadent and were critical of the Decadent approach to capitalist society's problems, while they gave credit to Wilde's acute observation of social issues, which in reality were more akin to Realism—in terms of the “Realism form” in Ryurikov's argument. Anikst admitted that Wilde was a keen observer of social problems and comments, “Wilde's artistic proposal is developed under the paradoxical influence of life. He is familiar with the stake of the capitalist society and finds his society unfair and unreasonable. This is why he is hostile to the Victorian philistinism and hypocrisy” (Anikst 519). Anikst clearly realised Wilde's works showed meaningful concern for social problems, acknowledging that Wilde was no escapist, who cared for other people's well-being. However this feature was understood as just another “Realism form” by Soviet scholars, according comments from Ryurikov.

Anikst was unbiased in his criticism of Wilde's literary achievement, but other Soviet scholars' comments were relatively more ideology-oriented. In a Chinese translation of *The History of British Literature* (1983), edited by the Gorky Research Association of World Literature, the editors comment, “as a writer, he [Wilde] fails to engage contradictions and problems of society in his art. His works are filled with love, hedonist pursuit and sensuous pleasure” (308). In addition, they summarise:

Wilde's works reveal the decline of Capitalist culture. He captures the disintegration of the humanity and the school of Decedence's indifference to social reality. As we have discussed, some of his works indeed reveal his denial of the reactionary Decadent tendency, still during the Imperial period, the decaying Capitalism entangles with Wilde's literary principles. (521)

Wilde's queer sexual orientation is subtly hinted at here. Homosexuality or homosexual desires, “the deadly sin of the late capitalism” played out in his works, especially in the “notorious” *Dorian Gray*. To guide the communists away from this “leprous sin of capitalism,” scholars of the day thus demonised Wilde (Ding; F. Gao; Y. Gao, and Guicang Li; Hou). Consequently, his image in the eyes of the Chinese communist scholars became one of the “bad influences” from the West.

In China, Chairman Mao emphasised the importance of the reformative function of art. In *The Study of Mao Zedong's Art Ideas* (1982), Mao's thoughts reveal that he was a steadfast advocate of Dialectical Materialism in art and aesthetics. He insisted on the idea that life is the fountainhead of artistic creation, thus artistic products should reproduce real life and guide people to improve their own paths (210). Mao's writings also revealed him as a supporter of “art for life's sake.” Because the debate between the CS and the LRA ended as the LRA took power in the cultural sphere, “art for art's sake,” at odds with the poetics of this period, came to be viewed as wrong on principle. Since poetics was one of three major determinants translators chose and target works, in Lefevere's translation theory, it was inevitable that Wilde's works would no longer be translated and appreciated during the Mao period (Lefevere).

Moreover, Wilde's perceived narcissistic personality and scandalous personal life contributed to his marginalisation in China. Wilde's "conceited" personality was deemed courageous and revolutionary by New Culture Movement scholars, whereas in the Communist China, his flamboyant personality and his extravagant taste for luxurious commodities were a sign of capitalist over-indulgence in materialism, inherently wrong from a communist perception. Among the earliest generation of communist leaders, some were idealists who truly appreciated simple, economical, and even a puritanical lifestyles, and some pretended to enjoy such a lifestyle as part of government propaganda. Either way, the mainstream moral code of the time touted hardworking and frugality as virtues, thus encouraging the general public to suppress their sensual and material desires.

As such, Wilde's proposal to enhance artistic taste through an aesthetic lifestyle was utterly strange and deviant in Chinese society. Moreover, Wilde's self-fashioning and high-strung personality were antithetical to modesty, a core Chinese virtue for thousands of years. After the eight-year war with Japan and four-year civil war, men of letters were no longer the most influential ideological constituents in Chinese society. The cruel environment of wars could not afford such ideas found in Romantic individualism and Aestheticism, favoured by the elites. In any event, by 1949 China's aesthetes had mostly died in these wars. Farmers and workers replaced the important social role scholars had played during the Enlightenment era (S.H.Chen 382), and manual labourers became the core supportive force behind the Communists during the Civil War (1945–1949). Therefore, after the establishment of the new China, traditional Confucian values the May Fourth scholars tried to remove but remained dear to farmers returned to the fore to some extent.

Wilde's bold behaviour and narcissistic speeches in this environment only irritated the majority of the Chinese public.⁴⁶ His "unusual" relationship with Lord "Bosie" Douglas was viewed as even more "distasteful" than his personality. The Chinese government kept his relationship with Bosie as a closely guarded secret from the public for years through censorship (F. Gao 27; Hou 130). To English-speaking Chinese scholars, Wilde's sexual orientation was an understood taboo, that no one dared to talk about in the public especially during the Cultural Revolution, as any sign of capitalist tendency would result in persecution and death. It was not until the end of the twentieth century that Wilde's history with Bosie was finally disclosed through a translation of Frank Harris's bibliography *Oscar Wilde, His Life and Confessions* (1916).⁴⁷

In order to reinforce mainstream communist ideology, in the first National Literary Translation Congress, Mao Dun proposed, "literary translation should be

⁴⁶ Wilde's epigrams like "I have nothing to report, except my genius" —supposedly said by him at Customs Control in New York in 1882—were applauded by the Enlightenment scholars as having a rebellious personality, became an obnoxious statement from a spoiled capitalist.

⁴⁷ Harris had been a friend of Wilde; the work was translated by CAI Xinle and ZHANG Ning, and published in 1996 by Henan Renmin Press.

operated step by step with a unified plan under the guidance of the Communist party and the Chinese government” (“Developing Literary Translation” 105). Mao Dun also suggested that translators across China submit a list of books they wished to translate, which would then be reviewed by the government-run translation association to grant them (or not) permission to translate (Wang 46–47). Accordingly, the government launched a series of policies reforming and regulating the translation and publishing industry. Foreign literary works were only allowed to be translated by the newly established Renmin Wenxue Press, Shanghai Literature and Art Joint Press, Chinese Drama Press, and a handful state-run publication companies (Z. Sun 158). Mao Dun’s attitude towards Wilde became even more hostile during this period. He commented that, “[A]estheticism is for blood-sucking money-lenders” (qtd. in Hou 20). Evidently this comment, no longer simply from a literary critic, constituted a political attack meant for ideological propaganda. Mao Dun’s personal preference, along with the new regulations of literary translation and censorship, thus managed to silence Oscar Wilde.

In 1942, Ba Jin finished his translation of Wilde’s children’s stories collection, *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* (1888), as well as Wilde’s six prose poems. In 1948, he published them as an anthology entitled *The Happy Prince Anthology*, the last translation of Wilde’s works until the late 1970s. Remarkably, Ba Jin’s “The Happy Prince” was selected for high-school textbooks of the English language and “Yuwen” (Chinese) in the 1950s. It was also very popular among ordinary readers and was reprinted at least four times to meet the demand (M. Gao 20; X. Zhang 102). “The Happy Prince” conveyed strong moral lessons in a communist interpretation—condemning the rich and hypocritical “capitalists,” as well as—in Marxist discourse of communist China—celebrating the title character’s kindness towards the proletariat.

The moral lesson of the fairy tale perfectly aligned with Communist ideological principles. Ba Jin commented in the epilogue of his *The Happy Prince Anthology* (1948) that

. . . the stories are very interesting both to children and adults. You can find deep philosophy played out in those simple stories, which are an accusation of the unfair society and a cry of proletariats. *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* and *The House of Pomegranates* are two indictments of the capitalist society. (Ba Jin 193)

Through the lens of modern cultural studies, translation is never simply a conversion of languages, but rather a dialogue between two different cultures. The translators are “manipulated” by the various powers in the society of the targeted language (Lefevere 9). Ba Jin’s comments reveal that he was manipulated by the social environment of the time. Nevertheless, he was imprisoned and heavily

persecuted as a counter-revolutionary during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). His writings during this period could thus not account for his true intentions.⁴⁸

Even as some Soviet critics observed that Wilde was not completely decadent, Wilde himself always denied any political or educational purpose in his works, thus many communist literary critics argued that his concern with social issues was simply a mask or “form,” to quote Ryurikov’s comment, by which to sell his capitalist ideology (108–09). But such understandings of Wilde’s works are biased and superficial for modern readers. They take Wilde’s self-fashioning tactic to attract attention and “to shock the bourgeoisie” as his essence, while mistaking—or deliberately twisting the facts—his deep concerns and political rethinking as “form.”

3. The Revival Period of Wilde’s Reception in China (Late 1970s Onward)

China’s collective sentiment towards Wilde and Aestheticism changed again after the watershed year 1978, when the Chinese government decided to reform its economic system into a comparatively liberal market economy, under the “guidance (monitoring)” of socialist principles. The pseudo-market-economy facilitated an opening-up process of ideological control after the trauma caused by the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), during which Western cultural products were restricted from the general populous.⁴⁹

Thus Wilde’s works became popular again, leading to the revival of Wilde in academic studies in the 1980s and 1990s. In the *Journal of Southwest Minzu University* ZENG Jie called for scholars to study Wilde from an unbiased poetic perspective (Zeng 69–75). The most important and influential Chinese Wildean scholar, ZHOU Xiaoyi, contributed

⁴⁸ Ba Jin was a democracy campaigner who was against establishment and bureaucracy and even “worse” he was from a wealthy landlord family in Chengdu. Therefore Ba Jin was both a member of the “*heiwulei*” (Five Black Categories) and “*choulaojiu*” (Stinking Old Ninth; “Literary Witness To Century Of Turmoil”; Peng 30). These elements were used against him to justify the Red Guards’ physical and spiritual torture of Ba Jin and his family: His wife XIAO Shan was persecuted to death, which traumatised Ba Jin for the rest of his life. Ba Jin fortunately survived and was rehabilitated in 1977, after which he was elected to many important national literary posts, including chairman of the Chinese Writers’ Association since 1983 (“Literary Witness To Century Of Turmoil”; Peng 28-105; Lang). He reflected on the Cultural Revolution in a painfully honest manner and asked specifically for a Cultural Revolution Museum to be set up as a deterrent for future generations but received no response from the government (“Literary Witness To Century Of Turmoil”). Ba Jin’s fate mirrored the fate of Wilde’s works in China, which completely disappeared during the Cultural Revolution and the previous translations and commentaries were considered degrading and abandoned but later revived in the 1980s.

⁴⁹ However, foreign films from the West were still translated and imported into China, as *neicanpian* (lit. insider’s reference films) to limited audiences. Only high-ranking officials, especially in the cultural ministry within the CCP regime, could watch such films during that period. A few contemporary art-house Chinese films reviewing critically of that period often used the trope — protagonists from ordinary social background sneaking into exclusive film theatres to watch “insiders’ films” — to reveal the protagonists’ awakened individual awareness. *In the Heat of the Sun* (1994) and *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress* (2002) are the most representative. My father (born in 1964) watched Jean Delannoy’s *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1956) as a child, long before that film was made public in China in the 1980s. He was awestruck by its beauty and thus decided to study Western literature in university. He eventually chose Russian literature instead, due to his intense love of Leo Tolstoy. He could go to university to study Russian Literature thanks to his privileged background, which gave him access to 19th-century Russian literature and film adaptations as a youth during the Cultural Revolution.

numerous valuable re-introductions and literary critiques of Wilde, especially from a cultural material approach much influenced by Regenia Gagnier's *Idylls of the Marketplace* (1986). Zhou's milestone essay, "Wilde, Dandies, and the Aesthetic Way of Living," (1994) was first in Chinese academia to consider Wilde's role in China's newly developed consumer society. His "*Salomé* in China: The Aesthetic Art of Dying" was the only essay on Wilde's overseas legacy selected in *Wilde Writings: Contextual Conditions*, (2003) edited by Joseph Bristow. Zhou, therefore, was also the first Chinese scholar who introduced Wilde's reception in China to Western academia.

In a chapter on *Salomé*, Zhou summarised Wilde's influence on the early 20th-century China, focusing on his stage adaptations (295–316). He also noted that the earliest Chinese figures to introduce Wilde and aestheticism were Shanghai writers (297), the region where Aestheticism and Decadence became most popular and influential. Although Wilde's plays were also performed in Tianjin and Chengdu, his influence has always remained more powerful in Shanghai. Ninety percent of Chinese translations of Wilde's works were published in Shanghai, by a constellation of over a dozen publishing houses; nearly all of the translations of his poems, children's stories, and critical essays appeared in magazines and papers published in that city (297–98). Other scholars who contributed to reviving Wilde in Chinese academia have been thoroughly studied and discussed by HOU Jingjing, GAO Fanfan, and DING Jingtang, respectively.

Outside of academia, the re-opening and re-introduction of foreign (Western) cultures contributed to an era called the "cultural renaissance" period (1978–1989), named by the "wenyi qingnian" (lit. cultured youth). After decades living in cultural oppression and self-imposed isolation from the West, they craved to know the outside world. They constituted a huge market for literature, fine art, music, films, TV series, musicals, dramas, radio dramas, and even opera, ballet, and fashion shows from Western countries.⁵⁰ These young people also queued, from midnight outside Xinhua Bookstores, across Chinese cities to buy Western novels translated by Shanghai Translation Publishing House (S.H. Chen; X. Tang). This re-introduction of foreign culture paved the way for Wilde's future popularity among the younger generation, those born in the 1990s.

The Wilde mania hitting in the 1980s (to the present day) surpassed that of the 1920s, thanks to information technology and China's increasingly similar social and economic milieu to that of late Victorian England, to some extent (Hou; Gao; D. Wu 125-126; Zhu). People from different areas of China became familiar with his works as a result of the emergence of new mass media such as radio and television in Chinese homes, mushrooming cinemas, and social media. Among the newly adapted Wilde works, "The Happy Prince"

⁵⁰ During the ten years of Cultural Revolution, ordinary Chinese people were not completely isolated from the rest of the world. They viewed some foreign films, imported from four fellow communist countries: North Korea, Vietnam, Albania, and Romania. The two Balkan countries had issues with Soviet Union back then, with whom China also had a relationship breakdown. Hence they became allies (数帆老人; " '文革' 时期的外国电影"). China and Soviet-Union (Russia to be more precise) split during 1956–1966. Although entering the 1970s, China and the Soviets repaired their relationship politically, China was still upset about Soviet Russia and thus did not import any their films (Lüthi).

appeared in the late 1980s, a contemporary adaptation of *The Importance of Being Earnest* (Buke Erxi; 2015) marked China's cultural modernisation.

3.1. The Shanghai Dubbing Studio's Classic —“The Happy Prince,” Radio Drama⁵¹

In the 1980s, more and more foreign films were released in cinemas for the Chinese public to enjoy.⁵² Dubbing into Chinese became a highly accomplished art during this period, and a bridge for zealous Chinese audiences to access multicultural entertainment (Su; Cao; A.Tang). The curiosity Chinese audiences showed for different cultures encouraged Shanghai Dubbing Studio (SDS) to produce their own radio dramas based on Western literature, such as Stendhal's *Vanina Vanini*, Balzac's *The Ball at Sceaux* (1830), and Frederic Dannay's *The Greek Coffin Mystery* (1980; Su; Cao). “The Happy Prince” was also produced by this highly established studio, with a star-studded cast. The drama adaptation of Wilde's play has two major features worth discussing: the story was heteronormalised by casting a female voice to play the little swallow, and the narrative emphasis on the Marxist class-struggle.

Celebrity voice actor TONG Zirong played the Prince.⁵³ The little swallow, originally a male character, was played by celebrity voice actress LIU Guangning. Tong and Liu were nicknamed “Prince” and “Princess” of dubbing industry because they always dubbed voices for good-looking young couples in Western romantic period dramas. The radio drama's producer, CAO Lei, understood the obvious sexual tension and the undercurrent homosexual theme in the original story, but sought to “de-queer” it via casting this heterosexual “voice-acting couple.” By the 1980s, Wilde Studies had started to revive in Chinese academia, as did Queer Studies, therefore, the SDS was aware of the queer overtones of the story.

⁵¹ This radio drama was uploaded by a fan of the Shanghai Dubbing Studio on Baidu Wangpan—a digital resource-sharing platform. For “The Happy Prince” all rights are still reserved by the SDS. Sadly, the SDS has no official database for academics to acquire old materials. I contacted the radio producer Mrs CAO Lei, acquiring officially this radio drama's resources. She kindly replied to me but lamented that they do not have the original radio drama resource anymore. She granted me permission to use their production from other unofficial channel such as fan-made recordings. Therefore knowing that this radio drama resource I provided here is dubious in terms of copyright issue, I have no other way to provide more official database for my readers. Thankfully the radio resource provided by the fan was a permanent link.

⁵² The popularity of Western films is unimaginable by today's standard. On the day a new foreign film was released, not a single soul on the street in major Chinese cities, for the majority of people rushed to cinemas. Some even went to cinemas consecutively over twenty times just to watch their favourite scenes (Su; Cao).

⁵³ Tong earned the title “Prince of Voice Acting” with his diamond-like tenor voice and highly accomplished voice acting skill, which “typecast” him to play the young royal, or aristocratic, handsome characters in imported Western films. He was also known as the “Chinese spokesman” for famous French actor Alain Delon, after Tong dubbed Delon's *La Tulipe Noire* (1964) and *Zorro* (1975), household names to Chinese audiences even today. The combination of Delon's appearance and Tong's voice became dreamboats to a generation of Chinese women. Interestingly, when Delon visited China in 1987, Chinese audiences were disappointed to find that his voice was coarse (Li). Celebrity voice actors in the 1980s enjoyed the same level of popularity and social status of current film stars in China, although not economically.

Had they cast a male voice-actor, the narrative would have been too homoerotic for Chinese audiences, but the queer overtone is crystal clear to adult readers of the story. The swallow's original script is saturated with sensual descriptions of the prince's handsome appearance and his desire to "pluck a kiss" and to stay by his side forever. At the very beginning the swallow straightforwardly asks him, "Shall I love you?" and, towards the end of the story, kisses the Prince on the lips after the latter confesses "[. . .] but you must kiss me on the lips, for I love you" ("The Happy Prince").

If the swallow had been voiced by another male actor, audiences would immediately discern the undercurrent homosexual theme, easily interpret the characters as "perverted," and thus a scandalous incident would ensue, considering the conservative environment of the time.⁵⁴ The swallow's altered gender was not officially addressed by the SDS, nor have there been anecdotal reasons given by the voice artists in autobiographies or interviews. Moreover, no research on this radio drama has yet appeared in Chinese academia. Hence it seems likely that the SDS producers' casting decision was made to avoid censorship from the government and controversies from the general public.

Even heterosexual intimate behaviours such as kissing were still shocking to conservative audiences in the 1980s, thus had the SDS not self-censored and adjusted the character's gender, it might well have been banned by the government. After all, the Chinese government decriminalised homosexuality only in 1997, and depathologised it in 2001. Even to this day, the LGBTQ+ community remains a marginal demographic that often encounter discrimination and are generally frowned upon by the public. Before the late 1990s, homosexuality was still a mental illness and homosexual practices were criminal acts in Mainland China (Jeffreys and Yu; J.P.; S.Chen).

The SDS switched the gender of the swallow and also deleted the opening heterosexual courtship between the (male) swallow and the (female) reed. With this opening gone, the rest of the story was easy for the SDS to de-queer, for the third-person pronouns are not gendered in Mandarin Chinese.⁵⁵ The voice actor's gender

⁵⁴ In 1979, the mainstream Chinese film magazine *Dazhong dianying* (*Popular Cinema*) Issue 5's cover photo featured a still from British film *The Slipper and the Rose* (1976), in which Cinderella and the Prince are locked in a romantic kiss. This cover photo enraged a conservative audience who wrote an angry letter to the magazine, as well as to the *People's Daily* — the CCP government's official newspaper — accusing *Dazhong Dianying* of promoting degrading capitalist manner of love, thus to poison Chinese children and teenagers. The letter's style had a strong sense of Cultural Revolution style of polemic (Wen; "Cinderella's Kiss That Started A Storm in 1979 Dazhong Dianying"). *Dazhong Dianying* published this letter in Issue 8 of the same year, which started a phenomenal social discussion. The magazine received 112,000 letters from readers, from all walks of life, between August to October 1979, and up to 3% supported the conservative reader's point of view ("Cinderella's Kiss"). This incident marked a new era where kissing and hugging scenes were accepted to appear in the public eye in Chinese cinema and media.

⁵⁵ Third-person pronouns are written differently, as 她 (she), 他 (he), and 它 (it), but all are pronounced as "ta" in Mandarin, and thus not differentiated in spoken Chinese. The only way to differentiate the gender of the referred person is within a context or specifically to reveal the person's

defines the swallow's gender. Accordingly, "her" longing gaze at the prince's handsome face and "her" confession of love together mould this story into a tragic heterosexual romance, with the classical trope of the self-sacrificing woman and glorious hero who sympathises with poor people, often used in Chinese classical literature to praise the hero's upright characteristics and the heroine's self-sacrificing virtue highly celebrated in Confucian moral system.

To an extent this trope imposes the patriarchal gender order, where the female role is soft and devoted to the male hero, to the point of losing her agency and blindly worshipping him. Wilde's original story is about two male characters, deeply in love, who both sacrifice themselves to help people in hardship. Thus Wilde breaks with the demonisation of homosexuals as selfish pervert, and with the notion that man should be "tough," or follow the masculine "empire boys" of the late Victorian era. The SDS's adaptation lost the original's pioneering feature.

In addition to removing the potential queer overtones from Wilde's "The Happy Prince," the radio drama also emphasised a communist interpretation of the story, developed from Ba Jin's translation. For instance, at around 00:10:05, in the Prince's monologue, he laments his past indulgence in luxury while his people have endured hardship. The radio drama goes into length to depict the poor where Wilde used just a few sentences to describe this. For example, the first benefactor of Happy Prince's kindness is a poor seamstress and her child, in Wilde's version:

She is embroidering passion-flowers on a satin gown for the loveliest of the Queen's maids-of-honour to wear at the next Court-ball. In a bed in the corner of the room her little boy is lying ill. He has a fever, and is asking for oranges. His mother has nothing to give him but the river water, so he is crying. (Wilde)

This four-sentence scene in the radio version is developed into an independent scene with an additional two voice-actors, and a fully developed conversation between the mother and son. The Chinese version:

CHILD: (squirringly). Mama, it's so hot . . . It's so painful.

SEAMSTRESS: Come on, drink some water my child.

(Sound of pouring water)

CHILD: Mama I want to eat oranges.

SEAMSTRESS (sobbing): What? Oranges? Mama cannot afford oranges.

CHILD (in trembling voice): My throat is so sore.

gender. Therefore, without the context in which the male swallow courted the female reed, audiences could only identify the swallow's gender by the voice of the actor.

SEAMSTRESS: My dear child. My darling. Don't cry or your throat will be in more pain. Oranges (cries), I . . . I will try my best to get them for you.

CHILD: Mama you are crying. I don't want them anymore. I don't want them.

SEAMSTRESS (sobbing): My child I'm a bad mother. It's not that I don't love you, I . . . I . . . (cries)

CHILD: Mama . . .

PRINCE (urgently): Swallow, swallow, little swallow. Please bring her the ruby out of my sword-hilt, will you? My feet are fastened to this pedestal and I cannot move.

("The Happy Prince," 00:11:54–00:14:00)

This conversation fleshes out the two characters in a familiar formula to Chinese audiences, with the trope of “mucizixiao” (kind mothers and understanding sons) to arouse audiences’ compassion, thereby more effectively rendering emotions (albeit cloyingly) than the original. Similarly, the poor writer and the little match-girl have fully developed scenes to represent “the suffering brothers and sisters”—to borrow the Happy Prince’s words in the radio drama (*The Happy Prince*). Although the radio drama never explicitly uses political (socialist) expressions, prevalent even in dubbed Western films of this time, and never features the hypocritical mayor and his followers in the original story, some lingering influences from the Cultural Revolution remain; in particular where the hero speaks in revolutionist vernacular, reviewing his past privileged life with contempt, and chanting about rallying the “suffering brothers and sisters” (the working class people).⁵⁶

That Wilde’s mayor is not featured might be attributed to the anti-radical-leftist sentiment of the 1980s, when China had just recovered from the horror of the Cultural Revolution. The SDS wanted to avoid politicising the play, making it into another artistic work serving to represent class struggle, even though the studio could not completely rid it of its communist vernacular.

In avoiding political approach to the play, by deleting the mayor’s part (Wilde satirising the hypocrisy in the Victorian society), they avoid a convenient target for a communist attack on capitalism. Simultaneously the drama’s emphasis on the misery of the poor make this version of the play a hybrid of Aestheticism and Socialist Realism, reflecting China’s conflicting social norms and confused national consciousness during this transitory period, when Western liberal values first re-entered China.

⁵⁶ David Lean’s *Great Expectations* (1946), Stanley Kubrick’s *Spartacus* (1960), Duccio Tessari’s *Zorro* (1975)

In the 1980s Chinese society was suffering heavily from trauma caused by the Cultural Revolution. The Chinese people's otherwise adamant communist values were in question. They were also reeling from disillusionment after discovering their government had lied to them, in propaganda claiming "citizens of Capitalist societies are suffering miserably," while it had been themselves who were miserable. Two paths thus lay ahead: either to completely abandon communist values that had caused so much damage and pain, and reform China into a capitalist and democratic society—as young students and scholars attempted in 1989; or to limit and censor the importation of Western cultural products, and restore the "wholesome" communist values before the Cultural Revolution.

History demonstrates the choice made by the establishment in the Tiananmen tragedy (1989). The government chose a path of utilising Western capitalist economics under the command of a highly-centralised communist political system, which created a strange amalgamation of a society chanting for working-class people's rights, while creating economic wonders at the cost of citizens' well being. After just a few decades of development, the society has become prosperous, modern, materialistic, hyper-commercialised, hedonistic, hypocritical with commodity fetishism, polarised with class problems, and the same uneven development that Wilde had witnessed a century ago.

3.2. The Importance of Being Amused—*Buke Erxi* (2015), a Modern Chinese Play

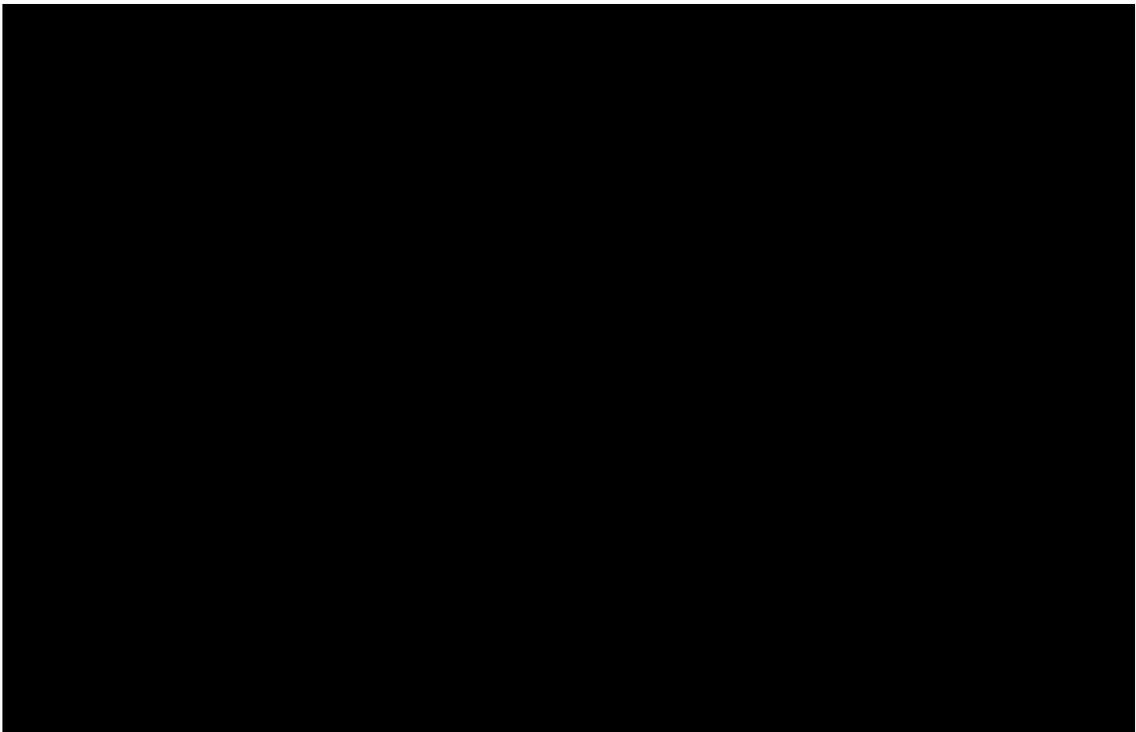


Figure 8. Posters of ZHOU Liming's Buke Erxi (2015).

List of Characters in *Buke Erxi*

Jack Worthing / Earnest—LU Huaxing/ LU Daoren

Algernon Moncriff/Banbury—MENG Yuanji/ BAN Boli

Gwendolen—GUAN Deling

Lady Bracknell—Madam Pu

Cecily Cardew—JIA Xixi

Miss Prism—PU Lishen

Mrs. Cheveley—QIAN Feili (from *An Ideal Husband*)

Entering the materialistic 21st century, *Buke Erxi* (2015), based on Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) and on *An Ideal Husband* (1899), became the first adaptation of Wilde's play staged in People's Republic of China, and very successful. It was translated, re-written, and directed by ZHOU Liming (aka. Raymond Zhou). Zhou suggested that previous translations of the play, especially that done by YU Guangzhong, had already set the best example of literary translation. Zhou had no desire to repeat and imitate Yu's translation (Zhu; 影视独舌[Yingshi Dushe]; 不是兔子), so instead recreated "an elegant comedy combined with Wilde's witty epigrams and Chinese realities" (*Buke Erxi*'s poster; see Fig. 8). This adaptation has completely localised Wilde's characters, included Chinese hot topics in society, popular cultural references, and Beijing native vernaculars.

Zhou's approach to his adaptation is somewhat similar to HONG Shen's of *Lady Windermere's Fan*, making the Victorian play into a vessel of the Chinese social reality Hong's version encouraged his audiences to think, to contemplate, and to join the May Fourth movement, which had a strong political purpose. Zhou aims to poke fun at his audiences but also to make them laugh, declaring that his *only* objective was to amuse audiences (Zhu). He promised that if audiences were not in a good mood after watching his play, they could ask him for a refund (影视独舌). Zhou's objective may sound frivolous, but it marks a significant change in creative incentives for modern Chinese playwrights. Amusing one's audiences represented a remarkable inspiration in China's all-serious political cultural sphere. Thus, Zhou single-handedly steered Chinese artistic expression back to art for art's sake.

Zhou stated in interviews that Western classic plays, including Shakespeare comedies and the like, due to their high-brow status in Chinese academia, had been too often put on a pedestal, always staged with gravitas, thus making audiences feel they were attending a lecture, not enjoying a play (影视独舌; 不是兔子). "If my audience tries to interpret something political instead of laughing when they watch Wilde's comedy, then my adaptation is a failure" (影视独舌; Sohu Media). Wilde's comedies, especially comedies of manners, are light-hearted satires of his contemporary society. They are meant for a laugh in the theatre, not as works studied

pedantically in a classroom, with a prescribed objective of finding deep political meaning between the lines (影视独舌).

Indeed, an entrenched political approach to Western literary works had infiltrated Chinese literary education and its cultural industry, inasmuch as when they first were imported in the 1909, the translation and adaptation were meant to revive the nation (Yue 4, Z. Zhou; X. Zhou 1, Z. Yang 1-2). The pure aesthetic pleasure of simply sitting down and enjoying a play had been a luxury in the chaotic century. Scholars who proposed such a purely artistic approach to literature and art had been excluded, persecuted, murdered, or died in China's wars. Zhou's proposition carried much meaningful weight, and *Buki Erxi* represents a cornerstone play announcing a new era of Chinese artistic expression whose main purpose is entertainment.

Zhou's "art for art's sake" proposal was widely accepted and his play successful at the box office, which we might attribute in part to a more mature Chinese social milieu. Contemporary (2010s) China now enjoyed a peaceful and stable international position, and a vibrant economy, although growing slower than in the 2000s. The middle-income population became the majority and the rising awareness of consumerism propelled a commercialised cultural industry into a matured system, developed from the West, Japan, and South Korea (Zuo; C. Chen and Qin 528–535; Barton et al. 54–60; Zhang; Berry et al. 119–134; 151–168).

Just as the media coverage of *Buke Erxi* suggests, its time had come when WANG Sicong became an Internet celebrity.⁵⁷ Indeed, Zhou specifically mentioned that his motivation to remake Wilde's classic play stemmed from the increasing resemblance of current Chinese society to the late Victorian England, and Wang's popularity as a sign of Chinese society's worship of materialistic achievement (Zhu). Zhou believes that only now could Chinese audiences understand Wilde's jokes in *The Importance of Being Earnest*. He insightfully summarised that "*Tiny Times* tells people that money is the only way to happiness. Wilde's attitude to money, however, is pursuing it while mocking it" (Zhu).⁵⁸ Zhou believes that Wilde's understanding of materialistic achievement is "something superior," that China has adopted this kind of attitude and thus is ready to understand Wilde's stance (Zhu). Audiences who share similar desires and pressures laugh easier at Wilde's "insider's jokes" that were a myth just a decade ago.

⁵⁷ WANG Sicong is a Chinese businessman and the only son of Chinese tycoon WANG Jianlin. WANG Sicong is often referred to as "The People's husband," "China's most eligible bachelor," and "China's Richest Son." He openly embraces his playboy celebrity persona, throwing extremely lavish parties, posting pictures to flaunt his wealth, and regularly trading barbs with A-list celebrities (Lau, Zuo, Minter).

⁵⁸ *Tiny Times* is a Chinese film series directed and written by GUO Jingming, all adapted from his novels. The series has been slammed for its overt celebration of materialism as well as the product placement of luxury brands in the films (Hu; Chau). Film critic Raymond Zhou said the film's message is "hinting to the young generation that you can do anything to win material goods because that's how your value is determined" (Brook).

Indeed, *Southern Weekly* journalist ZHU Xiaojia observed that, even ten years ago, there was not enough middle-class population in China to support an adaptation of Wilde works, that Chinese social buzz focused on the polarisation of class, and people were busy “choufu” (hating the rich). No one cared to know the conflict between “old and new money” in Wilde’s play (Zhu). Now that middle-incomers have become the majority population, they are less hostile to materialistic enjoyment. WANG Sicong, and millions of people who called him “people’s husband,” has become “the soil for a Wildean culture” (Zhu; I discuss the conflict between old and new money in detail in Chapter 3.) Apart from the tension of social status, the topics of personal appearance, fashion, gourmet, and art discussed by Wilde’s characters a century ago have become increasingly relevant to the Chinese middle-class. These features will be presented in the in the following analysis, in which I focus on several textual points between Zhou’s adaptation and Wilde’s original.

Instead of translating Wilde’s British jokes that might confuse Chinese audiences, Zhou changed the cultural and class signifiers to their Chinese equivalents. For instance, when Lady Bracknell talks about her taste in music, she compares French and German songs.

LADY BRACKNELL. . . . French songs I cannot possibly allow. People always seem to think that they are improper, and either look shocked, which is vulgar, or laugh, which is worse. But German sounds a thoroughly respectable language, and indeed, I believe is so. [...] (Wilde)

Zhou changes this in the Chinese version, where Madam Pu (Lady Bracknell) comments: “*Phoenix Legend* is too vulgar. As for Faye Wong’s songs, well, I’m always worried that Wong might become a nun someday” (qtd. in Zhu).⁵⁹ French chanson are considered refined music in China, thus audiences would not understand why French songs were vulgar and the joke thus lost had Zhou simply translated the text word by word. Zhou changes the signifiers of taste specifically to the well-known grass-roots C-pop band, *Phoenix Legend*, whose songs are widely popular among the working and lower-middle classes; the latter what the Chinese might call “country bumpkins,” are thus considered low and vulgar by the Chinese middle class (Tencent Team; Wang, Huashang Morning Post). Zhou also invokes the music of Faye Wong, a singer-songwriter and actress, often referred to as “Heavenly Queen” in the Sinophone world (Woodworth; Mitchell 215–228; X. Sun). Her fans are proud of their “superior” taste, which Pierre Bourdieu observes, indicates a rich cultural

⁵⁹ Zhou chose Pu as her last name to indicate her dubious noble background, for Pu vaguely relates to the last Qing Emperor Puyi whose last name, however, is Aisin Gioro. In reality, China does not have any aristocratic families since the establishment of the Republic of China in 1912, but many wealthy families still claimed that they were from noble bloodlines during the Republican period. Yet during the Cultural Revolution, relations with Qing aristocratic bloodlines usually lead to persecution to death. Therefore, this modern-day Madam Pu has no chance to be related to the Qing Royal family and her mistake to use Puyi’s first name as her last name makes her a caricature of ignorant and pretentious people in modern China.

capital, directly linked to higher social status (*Distinction* 282). The connotations of French songs and German songs, including the characteristics of Lady Bracknell, fit well in the Chinese context.

Many other similar small changes of cultural signifiers make the play accessible and entertaining for Chinese audiences. Zhou also uses popular cultural trends to bring the drama up to date. For instance, he changes the double personas (Earnest and Banbury) used by the two male protagonists (Jack and Algernon) into two different online avatars. Zhou, an English Literature graduate from UC Berkeley, quotes Wilde: “Man is least himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask, and he will tell you the truth,” arguing that Internet avatars and selfies are the Dorian Grays of our era (Wilde “The Critic as Artist”). Nowadays people have as many Internet avatars as needed to hide their true faces. On that note, Zhou mentions his protagonist MENG Yuanji (Algernon), who pretends to be BAN Boli (Banbury) online to pick up girls; by assuming a gay persona Zhou contemplates and critiques modern “masks”(Zhu). Additionally, in China “Boli” (lit. glass) is a euphemism for queer people, thus Meng’s avatar “BAN Boli” is a loud signal of his “queer identity” (while concealing his identity as a heterosexual “pick up artist”) who takes advantage of straight young women with his endearing mask of “gaymi” (lit. gay best friend to women).⁶⁰

On the one hand, Zhou mocks the hypocrisy of the modern double life from a moral perspective. On the other, a straight playboy assuming a gay mask to gain trust of women reveals Chinese society’s general attitude to LGBTQ+, which has improved dramatically, especially in the rising trend of BL culture from Japan that generally makes young women become friendly and welcoming to queer community. When the establishment actively persecuted LGBTQ+, heterosexuals would never pretend to be homosexual, an irony perhaps even Wilde himself would smile wryly at, for the pain and suffering he endured as a queer man, which in a adaptation of his play becomes an “advantageous” mask to approach women in China. Meng’s vile behaviours (and those PUA he represents) are outrageous, for he not only takes advantage of women emotionally and sexually, he also harms the credibility of queer people and their standing in China. That said, Zhou’s critique of Meng-like people is done in a funny and light-hearted manner, thus achieves his purpose of critiquing and amusing audiences at the same time.

The final point of *Buke Erxi* is Zhou’s change to Wilde’s ending, making the latter unprecedentedly relevant to contemporary China. In addition to its basis on

⁶⁰ Gaymi is a compound word of the English word “gay” and a Chinese word “mi” from “guimi” meaning a bossom female friend who are as close as a sister and even closer than a sister. Gaymi therefore means a a gay person who is a close friend and even like a sister to women and women feel safe to confide in them and be physically close to them as sisters, such as hugging, holding hands, and sometimes even sleep together but rather platonically. The English equivalent is the abbreviation “gay best friend” (GBF). Many Chinese believe that the perfect friendship between a woman and a man is gaymi as one side involved is homosexual and the other is heterosexual, for they do not believe there is pure platonic friendship between men and women.

The Importance of Being Earnest, Zhou's play also incorporates the storyline from *An Ideal Husband*. The original *The Importance* has a happy ending: Jack Worthing turns out to be the lost nephew of Lady Bracknell, thus Algernon is his brother by blood, and they are happily married to their love interest. In Zhou's version, however, this family reunion becomes a trap to gain Madam Pu's fortune, set up by Lu, and Lu's adopted sister JIA Xixi (Cecily), and his old classmate from Paris—QIAN Feili (based on Mrs. Cheveley from *An Ideal Husband*). They planned to trick Madam Pu to invest her entire fortune in a fraudulent project to construct an ice theme park in Africa.

Moreover, Lu's classmate Miss Qian and Meng are old flames and Qian wishes to marry Meng after she has returned to China. However, Meng is already engaged to Jia. Qian blackmails Meng, threatening to publicise the scandal of Lu, who is now the CEO of a Multinational corporation. Meng eventually agrees to marry Qian to protect his best friend's reputation. These plot changes make the comedy a realistic fable of modern China: scandalous overseas students, star-crossed long-distance lovers, corrupt executives in Multinational corporations, spoiled wealthy heirs and PUAs, unscrupulous gold-diggers, snobbish elites, and farcical projects in Africa. By adding such twist and turns, Zhou presents audiences with complicated characters that resemble those they have heard of or might know, who may walk past them in Beijing's Sanlitun CBD, or land on the doorstep of a Mayfair cafe; the scandals and plots they hear of happening in real life.

Zhou says that the ridiculous project in Africa was inspired by his experience in Xinjiang province, where he visited for inspiration. The local government officials treated him to a luxurious seafood meal, freshly transported from China's coastal cities. Zhou was dumbstruck, for he had expected desert and diverse cuisines from ethnic groups, for which Xinjiang is famous. Being treated to a Shanghainese seafood dinner seemed outlandish (and off the mark), but that was the officials' point: the seafood dinner was their idea of ultra luxurious treatment of a celebrity. Zhou later reflected on the ridiculous in this experience, making it into the *Buke Exri* incident of the fraudulent ice theme park in Africa.

Although not intending to deliver deep political meaning in his play, Zhou has also noted that he wants to reflect modern Chinese society's impetuous and heavily materialistic milieu. Based on Wilde's story, Zhou builds a modern fable with realistic Chinese characters and social topics. The Chinese economy and people's living condition have improved considerably over the past two decades, but people become complicated and treacherous in terms of human relations or commodity fetishism, as the whole society is turning into a materialistic jungle where the only marker of success is in earning lots of money.

Zhou's play mirrors 21st-century China. His audiences might look into the mirror and laugh at its ridiculous characters and hilarious scandals, but also laugh to keep from crying, for this comedy is not far from their reality. This may be Zhou's true intention, although he claims to entertain audiences without seeking for them to

understand deeper meanings. His adaptation of Wilde's plays may be hilarious and entertaining, even a bit materialistic, yet he balances well between entertainment and critiquing human relations and social problems; these distinguish this play from those such as the heavily materialistic and shallow novel series *Tiny Times*, which only aim to promote mammonism—a practice heavily criticised by Zhou.

Zhou's play underlines the distinguishing features of China's materialistic social milieu, where Wilde's glamorous appearance and the hedonistic aspect of his works are admired, even worshipped. Zhou exploits Wilde's major cultural celebrity, also used by advertising and social media, but while Wilde's literary achievements are still much admired by Chinese readers, his persona as a good-looking, fashionable, silver-tongued queer icon has gained a far larger audience. In Chapter 3, I discuss Wilde's cultural reception in China where he is widely appropriated for promoting luxurious commodities that signify high-class Western lifestyles, those pursued by the Anglophile middle-class.

4. Conclusion

In China, “the rapturous admiration” and “unjust condescension” — to borrow Jacques Gernet's comments on image of the foreinger here — of Wilde and his works reflect the complex national *subject* (143). His reception in China during the “Silence Years” reflected Lefevere's “manipulation” translation theory, as well as Lacan and Butler's Structuralist discourse of the *Self* and *Other* dichotomy. Adaptations of these two periods reflected a confused collective national consciousness that was exploring the *Self* in the reference of the *Other*.

Part II. Oscar Wilde's Charismatic Personas and China's Fascination with the British Dandy Lifestyle

Chapter 3: The Zealous Gaze: Chinese BOBOs' Fascination with Wilde's Charismatic Bodies

We are still content with the old virtues, and still timorous of the new vices. We still fear to clasp the radiant hands of folly, and drown our good impulses in the depths of her enchanted eyes. If it were my first word to you, children, I would say to you – learn to disobey. To know how to be disobedient is to know how to live (161; Hichens, *The Green Carnation* [1894])

Roman (a Chinese BOBO) loves designer products. In his wardrobe, there are five expensive suits;⁶¹ every pair of shoes is carefully selected from department stores. He believes that wallets are one of the most important indicators of a man's status and taste; hence all his wallets are purchased from famous designer studios. . . We love reading the works of Eileen Chang, Marguerite Duras, and Pai Hsien-Yung.

We love watching lengthy art-house films from Europe instead of Hollywood productions. We drink coffee without sugar, and French wine instead of Chinese beer. We always take a pile of debit or credit cards with us but have no idea how much money we really have. Call us whatever you like, BOBOs or not, all we want is to be different!

(H. Liu, "What are the Lives of Chinese BOBOs?" [2002])

1. Introduction: Dandies' Paradoxical Nature and Their Appeal to Chinese BOBOs

Why is Oscar Wilde so popular in modern-day China? What makes him stand out from other Victorian writers? My audience mostly asks these two questions when I present my project in conferences. The answer lies in Wilde's, and by his extension, the Aesthetic cohort's paradoxical nature, which aligns with contemporary Chinese BOBOs' aspiration for a materially indulgent and culturally informed lifestyle, as their name suggests, a bourgeois and bohemian lifestyle.

In this chapter I examine this fascinating cultural phenomenon from a literary and social viewpoint, analysing two advertisements that use Oscar Wilde as the spokesman for their products to appeal to young Chinese customers. The studies on Victorian consumer culture, Wilde's era of decadent dandies, and China's changing socio-economic environment respectively are numerous, yet scholars seldom incorporate these aspects together in interdisciplinary study. I address this gap in Sino-British comparative literary and cultural studies, asking three key questions:

- How are Wilde's physical body and persona inserted into advertising texts in the beauty industry?

⁶¹ BOBOS is short for Bourgeois Bohemians. David Brooks coined this acronym in his influential non-fiction book *BOBOS in Paradise: The New Upper Class and How They Got There* (2000).

- How has Wilde's persona as a cultured dandy become a desirable identity with which Chinese BOBOs are eager to identify?
- How does Wilde's charisma engage the changing ethos of Chinese society?

First, I give an introduction of the social context in which China's zeal for Wilde has become intertwined with the changing zeitgeist since the 1920s to present. This paves the way for a discussion of the origin of Chinese BOBOs, followed by an analysis of the advertisements featuring Wilde as a commercial figure. This chapter draws on Lacan's theory on the mirror and spectatorship (1281); Karl Marx's theory of commodity fetishism (74–83); Mark Simpson's argument on the reciprocal link between modern advertising and narcissism (94–31); Jean Baurillard's Simulacra discourse (1–61); Judith Williamson's reading and decoding of advertising pictures (25–6). Finally, I use Thomas Richards's exploration on the commodity culture, in terms of Queen Victoria's charismatic body also lends theoretical support throughout this essay (73–119). These theoretical discussions are embedded in my reading of the advertisements. I read Wilde's body from two perspectives: his material body, and his immaterial bodies. Advertisers have appropriated Wilde's material body to appeal to more materialistic bourgeois consumers, while his persona as a fashionable dandy, a gay icon, and a women's friend, as immaterial bodies, appeal to Chinese BOBOs in search for an outside authority to confirm their own cultural authority.

Wilde, with his romantic, rebellious, idealistic nature, wished to restore the purity of art, "art for art's sake," an ideal state of art, avoiding social, political, and moral themes, and to concentrate instead on creating pure art. The Victorian Aesthetes generally believed art's purity was lost when the First Industrialisation enabled mass-production of artistic works. The fast-growing market determined which types of artistic schools and artists become popular and rich. Additionally, the industrialisation also enabled democratisation of education, as well as increasing literacy among women and the working class, who became major consumers of the newly formed literary market. Artists no longer lived on patronage, but they had to cater to the mass population's taste.

Understandably, some artists struggled between adjusting to the market's taste and their own artistic expression. They hated being dictated to by the general (vulgar) public's taste whom they depended on and despised simultaneously.⁶² Wilde and his cohort were unhappy about the situation and lamented that the artist's spontaneous creativity was muffled by the buzz of the market as well as the overly-moral Victorians' chilling scrutiny. That said, he also wanted his works to be popular so as to earn enough money for a comfortable life. He was burdened with financial

⁶² For instance, John Everett Millais is most famous for his founding role in the innovative and rebellious Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. But Millais is also well known for subsequently selling out and painting sentimental pictures for commercial gain. His painting *Bubbles* (1886) became famous when it was used over a long period in advertisements for Pears soap company. Although Millais was one of the most popular artists in Britain at the time, initially he was apprehensive of "the prospect of his work and his grandson, being the subject of commercial exploitation." However, he soon grew to appreciate this commercial idea (Fletcher; Millais 216; Allen).

stress to keep up with his refined but extravagant taste, and hence had to compromise to the market.

People often mistake Wilde as an aristocrat, for he was the son of Sir and Lady Wilde, and his friends' circles included famous aristocrats, among them the most famous his lover Lord Alfred Douglas (Bosie). However, Sir William Wilde's title was not an aristocratic title but a knighthood, thus not inheritable and Wilde's father left him no inheritance (Ellman 63; Elfenbein). Unlike what people imagine in living in luxurious life, Wilde was broke most of his life, and complained frequently about his poverty in his letters (Small et al.). His profession as a writer was precarious; even far more prolific writers than he lived on the verge of financial ruin. In their account of Wilde's earnings, Josephine Guy and Ian Small note that he "enjoyed only two periods of sustained financial success": from the spring of 1893 to the end of the year, and from February 1895 until his first trial in April the same year (Ellman 133; Elfenbein; Small et al.). The trials bankrupted Wilde, and he died poor (Ellman 1969; Small et al.; Elfenbein). Thus, Wilde's life is a constant struggle to find a balance between artistic ideals and a comfortable life. The market reality drove him to commercialise his works and his persona.

Wilde and his Aesthetic cohorts' declarations of their bohemian lifestyle is well documented in Robert Hichens' scandalous novel, *The Green Carnation* (1894). Hichens himself was one of this cohort, and befriended both Wilde and Bosie. The main characters in the novel are closely based on the two late-Victorian celebrities.

The statement in the first epigraph above is spoken by Esmé Amarith, a character based on Wilde, and might be read as the declaration of Aesthetic dandies. We can discern a strong anti-establishment sentiment. While the 1960s rebellious hippies might resonate with the declaration above, the Aesthetes and dandies' luxurious lifestyle and their fascination with glamorous fashion would not sit comfortably with their beliefs. Richard Brooks picks up on this interesting discrepancy in his controversial book *Bobos in Paradise: The New Upper Class and How They Got There* (2000), where he describes the 1990s successors of the yuppies in the US, and dubbed them BOBOs, suggesting a fusion of two distinct social classes (the counter-cultural, hedonistic, and artistic bohemian; and the white collar, capitalist bourgeois). BOBOs are, observes Brooks, mostly the corporate upperclass: they claim highly tolerant views of others, purchase expensive and exotic items, and believe American society to be meritocratic. Brooks notes, ". . . the bourgeois admired poise and polish. The bohemians—with the exception of the Dandies, who came and went during the 19th century—admired authenticity and naturalness" (69). Thus, dandies distinguish themselves from the materialistic bourgeoisie through their taste for refined and rebellious art, along with their contempt for the middle-class virtues. Yet they also distinguish themselves from their more spiritually oriented comrades in the 60s because of their obsession with the material world.

Brooks views dandies as the precursors of BOBOs. They transgressed the dichotomy between the conformist bourgeois and the rebellious bohemians, uniting the two extreme lifestyles and ideologies during the late 19th century. Such a transgressive nature attracted criticism from both sides. The bourgeois establishment

denounced them as degenerates due to their excessive attention to the self as well as their hedonistic and sensuous attitude.⁶³

The most famous and visual attacks against the aesthete are found in cartoonist George Du Maurier's satirical depictions of "degeneration," published in the famous *Punch* magazine during the 1870s and 1880s (Klette). Rebecka Klette points out that Du Maurier emphasised the degenerate physiognomy of the Aesthetic body, as seen in the four cartoons, "Ye Aesthetic Young Geniuses" (1878), "Affiliating an Æsthete" (1880), "Perils of Aesthetic Culture" (1879), and "An Æsthetic Midday Meal" (1880). All the visual stereotypical markers of degeneration are visible: sunken cheeks, pathologically pale and delicate skin, hollow eyes, and a weak, fragile, or malformed physique (Du Maurier 122; 287; 210; 23; Klette). Klette notes that

Maurier's many anti-aesthetic cartoons, emblematised the Aesthetic ideal of male beauty: "Oh, look at his grand head, poetic face, with those flowerlike eyes, and that exquisite sad smile! Look at his slender willowy frame, as yielding and fragile as a woman's." It is the physiognomy of the degenerate, weakened by stimuli and hereditary degeneration: the fragile, feminine body of the sexually deviant. Degeneration theory thus not only encompassed physical deterioration, but also the decay of healthy sexuality and gender roles. (Klette)

This degeneration discourse has long been used to demonise Victorian Aesthetes and dandies. (Nowadays it is used by conservative politicians and alt-right hate groups to attack gender-nonconforming community.) Meanwhile, progressive and rebellious political groups also attacked the aesthetes and dandies for their hedonistic and materialistic lifestyle. The homosexual undertone of Aestheticism was the major trigger to the communists regardless of their being fellow liberals. An American communist newspaper published an article in 1976 summarising the reasons progressive leftists also attack queer-related Aestheticism:

While we Communists oppose attacks on anyone by the bourgeoisie, including homosexuals, we do not uphold homosexuality as a democratic right. Homosexuality is a form of social sickness, a form of social perversion. It is a form of bourgeois ideology which appeals especially to the petty bourgeoisie because of its appearance as sexual freedom. Homosexuality arose from class oppression and the oppression of women, "...degradation of the women was avenged on the men and degraded them also, till they fell into the abominable practice of sodomy and degraded alike their gods and themselves with the myth of Ganymede." ("Degenerate Culture & The Women's Question")

⁶³ Here I clarify that I am aware of dandies' definitions are more than just being hedonistic and effeminate, they are also famous for their disenchantment of the reality, evocative use of language, and also their perversity in subject matter. However, I am arguing the characteristics being attacked by the bourgeois establishment, rather than introducing the dandies as only defined by hedonism and sensuality.

Clearly, Aestheticism is queer not only because of its long history with homosexuality, but also because of its unique paradoxical characteristics, which does not appeal to the reactionary or the progressive. Dandies have been outcasts of both camps and they have enjoyed their liminal position. This paradoxical nature often baffles modern readers but enchants scholars. Contemporary China is increasingly becoming a paradox as well, struggling with its double identity as an ideologically communist country and a fast-growing, state-run capitalist empire. Thus, comes to our discussion of the revival of Aestheticism and its fast growth in China's current social climate. Wildean dandies have never been so relatable to the Chinese middle-class, and they have become trendsetters of taste for the cultivated Chinese BOBOs to emulate.

According to the second epigraph above, Chinese BOBOs have a taste for fine art and high-brow literature. Meanwhile, they are not subtle in expressing their materialistic fascination with high-tier French wine and designers' clothing, both resonating with charming dandies' interest in balancing spiritual and material worlds. Chinese BOBOs' desire for a cultivated and gilded Aesthetic lifestyle inevitably led them to Oscar Wilde, the man whom they believe inaugurated this lifestyle. Thus, Wilde has been rediscovered, adored, and commercialised. For Chinese Gen 90s BOBOs, Wilde's beautiful figurative wording, hilarious epigrams, and rebelliousness, are as attractive as Prada's new season handbags, the limited edition of Dior evening gowns, Christian Loubtin's shoes and are consumed in a similar manner, primarily to secure class identity and to posit as a cohort who has superior tastes.

Unlike their industrial parents, who celebrated entrepreneurial frugality or conspicuous consumption of the *baofahu* (lit. "explosive rich," a deprecating term for people who amassed a fortune through dubious methods in the economic reformation), this younger generation, born into well-to-do families and educated in good colleges and universities (usually in the West), have discovered the charm and gentility of the old European aristocracy and wish to emulate a similar lifestyle so as to accrue their cultural capital, and eventually to become the elite class (Bourdieu). They seek a perceived rise from "'Besitz Burgertum'—the property-owning bourgeoisie, always looked down upon by the clerisy for their vulgar taste and ignorance, to 'Bildungsbürgertum'—the cultivated bourgeoisie" (Brooks; Rocca). This aspiration to distinguish themselves from their peers by adopting Western tastes and lifestyles naturally views Wilde's artistic philosophy as well-suited and alluring. Other Victorian writers, such as Charles Dickens or Bram Stoker, are either too moralistic that Chinese students are already fed up with them, or not highbrow enough to gratify the arty BOBO's vanity to posit a cultivated taste.⁶⁴ When Wilde reappeared in the public eye in China, his literary talent, perceived handsome

⁶⁴ Dickens's novels, e.g. *The Great Expectations* (1861), *Oliver Twist* (1839), *David Copperfield* (1850), are included in Chinese pupil's compulsory reading list for foreign language literature. Students still study Dickens' works within Socialist Realism critique, emphasising the miserable lives of proletariats while criticising the "evil" capitalists.

features, stylish fashion, and “cool” life, were attributes that attracted Chinese BOBOs.⁶⁵

2. Contextual Information

The literary and artistic youth of the 1980s were the first group who wished to distinguish themselves as intellectuals, and also became the parents of some of the Gen 90s BOBOs. During the ensuing period of economic growth, from 1989 to 2002, a second group of people took advantage of the economic reformation and amassed enormous fortunes. They have become the *nouveau riche* in contemporary China. This group has formed a new class angled towards “entrepreneurial materialism.” They are known to be materialistic and have shocked the world with their super purchasing power. Such ostentatious wealth has been viewed as vulgar, and thus they have been called *tuhao* (lit. unsophisticated and possibly uneducated rich people) or *baofuhu*. They are parents of many of the Gen 90s BOBOs in question, and their high-profile, luxurious lifestyles have attracted the more educated demographic’s contempt. Interestingly, the offspring of both these groups have united under a passion for a polished and intellectual lifestyle they associate with Oscar Wilde and the Western lifestyle.

When Brooks coined the term BOBOs, his cultivated Chinese readers jubilantly adopted it to define their own Westernised, refined, and intellectual lifestyle, as a far cry from the ascetic communistic one. After the Chinese Economic Reform (1978) this newly emergent class found the “rawness” of the proletariat, which used to be considered an honourable quality, a nuisance. During the Mao Era (1949–76), communist asceticism to some extent worked as a spiritual method to pacify Chinese people who suffered from poverty. With a social ethos that lauded equality and solidarity, the Communist Party had claimed that capital, property, and individuality were the main causes of suffering, discrimination, and class segregation in capitalist society. This celebration of frugality changed after the economic reformation.

Nevertheless, an interesting value shared by Mao’s China and Victorian England that helps to contextualise the connection between Wilde and Chinese readers: the celebration of self-restraint and even self-annihilation in conforming to conventions. This emphatically abstract feature can be viewed in a more tangible form, namely, men’s fashion. James Eli Adams points out that, enchanted by thoughts of Thomas Carlyle and Cardinal Newman, Victorian gentlemen emerged as “respectable” with their controlled manner and puritan virtues. Their abstract charisma was materialised in their simple and pragmatic dress (189–190). Though not intending to impose the bourgeois virtues, the communists were also known to be highly self-disciplined and frugal in terms of lifestyle. The popular dress during

⁶⁵ I am aware that Oscar Wilde is never considered a handsome person in Western societies, and that at time, he was even considered quite the opposite of attractiveness. For instance, Wilde was called “a slug” and “a caterpillar” by Lady Colin Campbell, recorded in Gerge Bernard Shaw’s ‘[My Memories of Oscar Wilde](#)’, 1918 (Bernard Shaw; [Chrisp](#)). However, one should mark that such attacks on his appearance were found in narratives after he became a folk devil in 1895. Before his disgrace, Wilde was considered a very charming person, albeit effeminate.

the Mao Era for both men and women were drab green military uniforms, effacing not only individuality but also gender differences. This odd, similar dress regulation contributed to a dissident shared expression for a theatrical self-presentation among Aesthetic dandies and Chinese Gen 90s BOBOs. Their aspiration for both a bohemian spiritual life and a glamorous bourgeois material life found its perfect expression in Wilde's image in the following two advertisements for beauty products.

3. Case Studies

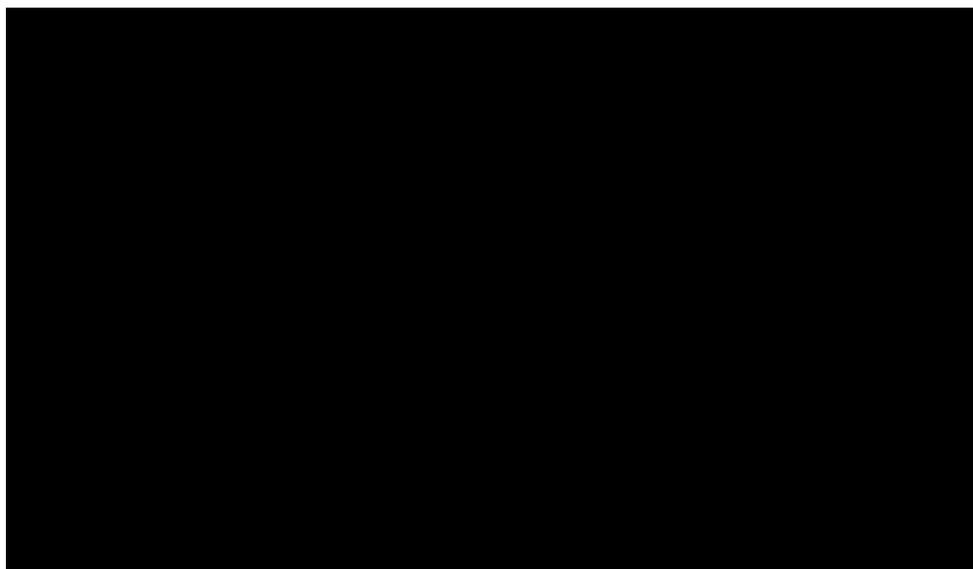
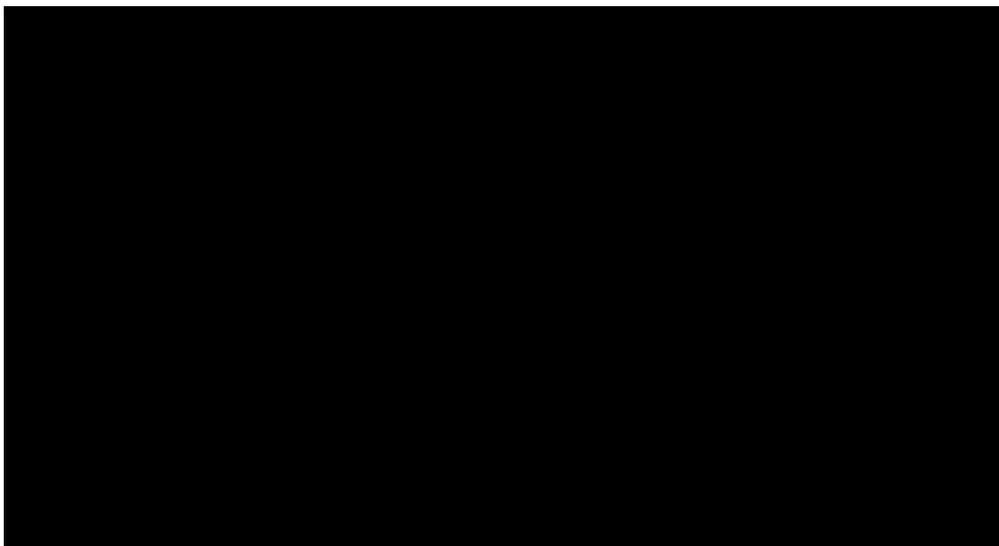


Figure 9. Screenshots of Perfectace Collagen Mask (for women) ADs from Red Scarf© WeChat Public Account news feed

WILDE SAID CRYING IS FOR PLAIN WOMEN. PRETTY WOMEN GO SHOPPING!

If you have ever heard of Oscar Wilde, you must know he is one of the greatest writers and artists in Britain. He is famous for his drama, poems, fairy tales, etc. Anyway, they are not important. What made Wilde worldwide famous was his handsome face and his witty and poignant epigrams. If you don't know how beautiful this man was, here is a picture of him for your information. Though a bit effeminate, his handsome features won women's hearts on both sides of the English Channel back then. Even now he has been dead for more than a century, women from around the world still love him. Look at those crazy lip prints on his tombstone in Père Lachaise Cemetery! [...]

To be handsome is already a privilege. Wilde was also a very humorous man! What a womaniser! If he were to live in our time, he would earn money simply by writing humours. Even he didn't write those genius dramas and fairy tales, he would easily become an internet celebrity for his hilarious yet enlightening words [...] among all his witty words, those about women are always the most interesting. Wilde left women a piece of gold advice, " [C]rying is for plain women. Pretty women go shopping." Nevertheless, Wilde did not reveal the secret of becoming a pretty woman. How to become a genuine beauty? How to keep youth forever? How to make our skin as fair as Snow White? Those questions baffle modern [Chinese] women!

Don't worry! In fact, there is a very simple and affordable way to be beautiful. Buy highly effective beauty masks! Collagen hydrating masks are the best. It is widely known that collagen is the key nutrition to nourish the skin. Young skin allegedly contains 75% collagen! Recently, the most popular brand in the UK is Perfectace Facial Masks [...] Come on now! If you want to be a pretty woman praised by Wilde, you should invest money in keeping your face baby smooth. The beauty masks boast its powerful hydrating function and revitalising collagen, which will make you a piece of "little fresh meat." After applying the mask for a period, you will be as popular as Wilde [...] Let's reply to Wilde with our own slogan: "Crying is for plain women. Pretty women go applying beauty masks!"

Red Scarf WeChat Official Account, 13th July 2015.

Figure 10. Screenshot of Translated script of Red Scarf© Ad.
(Grammatical errors in the translations are intended)

3.1. Platform

Red Scarf's statement and images were published on its WeChat Official Account. The publisher Red Scarf is the most popular and trusted UK lifestyle website in Chinese ("About Us"). It targets young Mainland Chinese who are interested in coming to the UK for study, travel, or work. It is owned and managed by Red Scarf Limited, a London-based online-content marketing company that dedicates itself to helping young Chinese to "live a better life" in the UK, and to helping British companies to develop within the Sino-British market.

As of the end of 2015, Red Scarf Ltd.'s official website had more than 150,000 followers on Weibo. In 2014, the website received more than 20 million page-views

(75% from the UK, 18% from China). Apart from Weibo, this company is also on WeChat, Instagram and Facebook (“About Us”). WeChat, a counterpart of WhatsApp (but with more functions), is an extremely popular communication app in Mainland China. The “gongzhonghao” or “Official Accounts” function enables business users to push news feeds and interact with subscribers (Wechat Admin Platform). It is on this platform, boasting huge numbers of followers, that Red Scarf published its advert. The huge quantity of subscribers and followers of Red Scarf on Weibo and WeChat make my subjects fairly representative.

3.2. First Impressions and Theoretical Discussion

What might strike scholars first is that the ad appeals to observers primarily through Wilde’s physical appearance. His glamorous image, even by today’s standards, was consummately crafted by himself to speak for his theory of beauty. Whereas the British press (especially *Punch*) ridiculed Wilde’s effeminate appearance, current advertisers now use it as a selling point, who clearly lack an awareness of the ridicule. Using celebrities’ face to promote a commercial product has become common in the advertising industry, especially for beauty products. Judith Williamson discusses this strategy in *Decoding Advertisements* (1978), where she studies Catherine Deneuve’s beautiful face in Chanel No. 5’s classic advertisements. She asserts that promoting a beauty product by using a familiar face requires “referent systems” fully understood by the viewers (26). Williamson uses the term to explain systems that “provide ads with this basic ‘meaning’ material—a grist of significance for the ad mill” (19). She further explains linguistic discourse, borrowing Saussure’s notion of the word H-O-R-S-E as signifier, where the concept of horse is what is signified, that “the referent is what kicks you.” Thus the referent is the actual thing in the real world, to which a word or concept points. The referent is external to the sign, whereas the signified is part of the sign. The external “reality” referred to by the collection of signs in an advertisement is itself a mythological system, another set of signs. Here I use these mythologies as the “referent systems” to analyse ads as texts (Saussure; Williamson 20). Reading Deneuve’s face and the Chanel perfume bottle in the ads without referent systems renders their combination as random, yield no meaning. But the “referent systems” have already been established between her face, the bottle, and customers, thus we understand the meaning of her face Williamson emphasises, as what Chanel No. 5 is trying to sell to us. We immediately understand her face as an icon of beauty and elegance, which meaning we then transfer to the bottle of Chanel No. 5, and exists only in the ad (see Fig. 11).

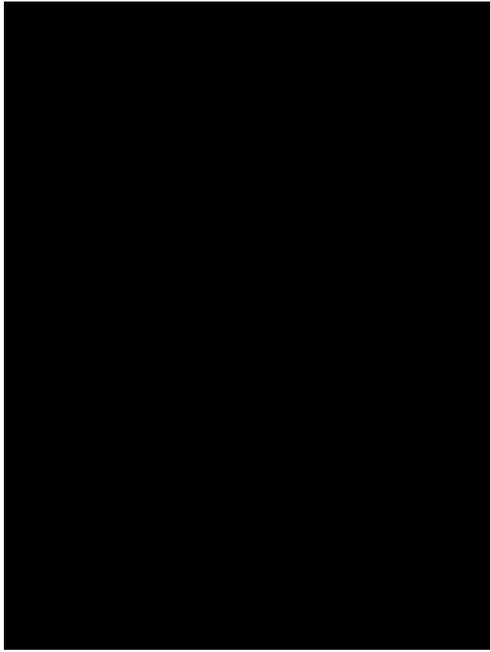


Figure 11. Catherine Deneuve in Chanel No. 5 Advert (“Vintage Ads of the 1970s: Fragrance”).

Thus, referent systems determine a successful transference of charisma or identity between a celebrity and a commercial product. Only when referent systems are understood by the viewer/reader can the meaning or charm of the face represented be transferred to the inanimate product (26). When referent systems are well established, the currency links the product, the image, and the viewer through a narcissistic identification with the image. From this perspective, using Wilde’s image to sell a commercial beauty product (a collagen mask) mainly targeted to women appears strange. Wilde’s symbolic meaning in the Chinese Enlightenment period was linked to anti-establishment rebellion and freedom, going against the grain “to defy,” as Lord Reggie declares in *The Green Carnation*. Such a revolutionary icon would hardly attract young bourgeois, female Chinese consumers to purchase facemasks. The referent system would seem lost in such an appropriation. However, the title of the advert, a “(mis)quotation” from Wilde, dilutes this sense of rebelliousness, leaving only a strong sense of consumerism. Wilde, instead of viewed as revolutionary icon, is appropriated as a fashionable, good-looking, smart, and cultured dandy figure, who gives women beauty tips. This new currency establishes a new referent system among Chinese ad viewers, and his charisma then transfers to the facemask. To buy this beauty mask, therefore, becomes to buy a piece of Wilde’s charisma.

Apart from diminishing Wilde’s achievements in literature in favour of his appearance and dandy persona, for the title misattributes the aphorism to Wilde, and reiterates it three times in the flow of information. The alleged quote is from Mike Baker’s film, *A Good Woman* (2004), a Hollywood adaptation of *Lady Windermere’s Fan* (1893). Wilde’s original quote reads as follows: “Crying is the refuge of plain women but the ruin of pretty ones” (*Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* 392), from Act One, where the Duchess of Berwick, a comically pretentious elder lady, teaches Lady Windemere how to handle a love affair smoothly. In the film,

however, set in the 1930s Amalfi Coast, this altered *bon mot* is uttered by Contessa Lucchino (Milena Vukotic), the Italian counterpart of the Duchess, to console Lady Windermere (Scarlett Johansson) when she mistakenly “realises” that her husband is having an affair with Mrs Erlynne (Helen Hunt). Contessa Lucchino’s words are immediately echoed by shots of Lady Windermere shopping in luxurious stores for dresses, perfumes, nail paints, shoes, and other glittering accessories. This clichéd cinematography is often applied in visualising the psychological metamorphosis of female characters in Hollywood films or TV series. Thus the altered quotation is a deliberate change for the sake of propagandising “feminism” or empowering female image, although it disguises consumerism as feminism to sell a materialistic lifestyle. Similarly, misquoting Wilde’s epigram is an act of borrowing his charisma to confer authority to this concept of becoming a “pretty woman” by shopping. Whether Wilde really uttered these words or not is irrelevant, for Wilde is a mere “shell” or “package” used to sell the product.

The ad appropriating Wilde as the selling point indicates that the advertiser understands his image and cultural capital within the referent system, already established among its potential Chinese customers and the products. The referent system is essentially a form of identity consumption. By appropriating Wilde’s charisma, the consumption of a facemask becomes the consumption of his identity. For the more materialistic BOBOs, Wilde’s identity is the handsome, Caucasian, international playboy with whom male viewers would be eager to identify with and female viewers would like to meet. Such identity consumption is constructed on the basis of viewers’ narcissistic misidentification of the reflected form in modern adverts.

According to Mark Simpson’s discussion on narcissism in successful ads targeting men, the misidentification of the reflection as the viewer’s own is key (94–131). Like infants in Lacan’s discussion of “The Mirror Stage” (1949), viewers jubilantly identify with the reflected form in modern ads that surround them every day, and hence forget how weak and flimsy such reflected images actually are (Lacan 1285–92). As the *self* comes into being through a fundamentally aesthetic recognition in the mirror, we construct their identity aesthetically in the mass media. In the Greek myth of Narcissus, worn out by the unattainable love with his own image, Narcissus becomes the beautiful flower named after himself. The myth is analogous to the relations between modern individuals and the advertising industry. Yet, instead of being unattainable as Narcissus’ reflection in the myth, modern ads convince consumers that the “perfect,” immortal look is attainable through purchasing their products. The gap between this ideal form, for example, of models using the advertised products, and the viewer’s own mundane and ordinary look can be filled by purchasing the advertised product and accessory (Simpson 95–96).

When Wilde posed for the photograph used in the advert, which aims to publicise his aesthetic ideas, he was a talent of self-fashioning, adopting a method exactly like that of the modern advertising industry to create an aesthetically pleasing image of himself, so as to attract followers. This glamorous and “immortal” image, which then acquired a life on its own, becomes the immortal simulacrum of Oscar

Wilde, overshadowing the real Wilde. Chinese advertising agents exploit the immortal simulacrum and its flimsiness in order to push their products. The photograph is morphed into a glittering “hyper-reality” of “Wilde the handsome Dandy aristocrat,” with which viewers or potential customers are eager to identify.

Jean Baudrillard argues in his famous simulacra and simulation discourse, the explosion of information, of events, which make our ability to understand the world nearly impossible: War is reduced to theatre, disease to a telethon, hunger to a magazine cover. Every image is possibly staged, recreated, and simulated for political end or to push a product. The line between reality, marketing, and news thus becomes nearly impossible to discern (Baudrillard; [Wisecrack|8-bit Philosophy](#)). By this view, whether Wilde really uttered the materialistic slogan or not becomes a myth, and the image of Wilde is no longer the authentic biological Wilde who existed in the past; it is a simulation of Wilde’s appearance and persona, and thus acquires different forms for appropriation to different ends. Thus Wilde’s media image proliferates. Meanwhile, consumer desires are shaped by the hyper-reality created by modern media, as Baudrillard argues, the world remade in the image of our desires (Baudrillard). The “hyper-real” image of Wilde, created to selling facial masks in this case, essentially shapes the Chinese BOBOs’ desire to be like “him” and to follow “his” lifestyle.

To better understand this identity consumption, it is necessary to understand the considerable power of a celebrity’s charisma in a consumerist society. In his essay “The Image of Victoria in the year of Jubilee,” Thomas Richards elaborates on the power of charisma in the advertising age, introducing readers to Queen Victoria’s “two bodies”; her material body and the immaterial or even “numinal” body. The magic power of advertising in her Jubilee campaign (1887) combined the two bodies of Queen Victoria or, in Baudrillard’s discourse, the simulacra of Queen Victoria. Richards terms the sentimental advertisements in the Jubilee campaign as “kitsch” (76). The appropriation of Victoria’s image endorses charm and conferred authority to emerging commercial products. Queen Victoria’s material body becomes a symbol embodying the highest authority, which conveniently slips into high quality and refined taste represented in the commodities on which her image was printed. Thus, the Jubilee campaign sold something besides commercial products to the Victorians. In Williamson’s argument on the relations between commodity and identity, the advertisements “sell ourselves” by “providing us with a structure in which we, and those goods, are interchangeable” (13). Thus, the “kitsch” of Queen Victoria sells an identity and a collective craving for that identity.

Similarly, Wilde’s different facets of charisma have been “borrowed” by this lesser known beauty product brands to sell an identity craved by Chinese customers. This craving for such an identity in turn enhances the competitiveness of the product.

The reason for its competitiveness is contributed by Wilde’s plural charisma. To some he is a materialistic dandy, and to others he is a cultural hero. How does Wilde’s image in the advert persuade customers to buy the product? Lacan argues that the psyche has three dimensions or orders: the Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real (1281). The Real is the easiest to define but hardest to discuss. The moment it

becomes an object of discourse, it ceases to be the Real because it becomes real for *someone*, and so becomes the truth (1290–1301). Thus, when viewers see Wilde’s photograph or read words attributed to him, they become *someone*, and the performed or stated truth of Wilde becomes the Real to them, regardless of whether the Real is authentic or not—the simulacrum again. The viewers’ lived experience, the socio-political context in which they exist, and their gender and racial identities form elements that will significantly “distort” the Real image in Lacan’s theory.

Yet the primary subject of this discussion is the distorted image of Wilde in the Imaginary dimension. What viewers see in the photograph is purely what they can identify with. Their recognition of the image of Wilde as part of their own reflection is what really matters. As discussed in the contextual section, the post-90s BOBOs, the main target audience of this advertisement, come not from a monolithic background but, generally speaking, three separate groups: The first group comes from an intellectual family background, their parents the 1980s “cultured youth.” This group’s zeal for Wilde is primarily literary. The second group is from emergent bourgeois families, and their interest in Wilde is more materialistic. The third group, most niched, is the very elite rich in both cultural and economic capital. The previous two groups more or less wish to become the third group—the new establishment; and I address their grappling for cultural and political superiority within the middle class in Chapter 4. The second group bears a conscious craving for changing the philistine image of the older generation. While both of the first two groups are interested in Wilde, their different backgrounds are reflected in their perceptions of Wilde’s image and divide his charisma into two aspects of Wilde, borrowing Richards’s terminology, we might view as the two “bodies” of Wilde. To the more materialistic BOBOs, the “truth,” or referent system, lies within Wilde’s “handsome face,” polished look, and fine taste in costume and decoration. To the more bohemian and spiritual BOBOs, it lies within Wilde’s critical rethinking of social conventions, his contribution to the queer community, and his effort in better human society.

4. Wilde's Aesthetic Bodies in Beauty Product Advertisements



Figure 12. Wilde, photo taken by Napoleon Sarony, in 1882. From, oscarwildeinamerica.org

Technically speaking, the advertisement is not really a poster or a billboard, yet the layout of the messages, as both linguistic and visual, functions in a similar way to the Chanel No. 5 ad in Williamson's discussion (see Fig. 9). "Someone from another culture who knew that Catherine Deneuve was a model and film star would still not understand the significance of her image here" (26). Similarly, the official introduction to Wilde in the above ad is to establish context and familiarity with Wilde's identity. Yet, even this is not enough for Chinese viewers to fully realise the significance of the ad, and the advertiser must emphasise Wilde's appearance and cultural meaning by presenting epigrams to construct the referent system. This ad is intelligent in not simply putting Wilde's face with the facemasks—if the ad were to do so, the link between the face and the masks would be a mystery to its viewers, even as Red Scarf's subscribers are mainly overseas Chinese students in the UK, thus supposedly familiar with British cultural icons.

Williamson notes that:

The ad is . . . appropriating a relationship that exists in that system between signifier (Catherine Deneuve) and signified (glamour, beauty) to speak of its products in terms of the same relationship; so that the perfume can be substituted for Deneuve's face and can also be made to signify glamour and beauty. (25)

Wilde's photo alone signifies Aestheticism and also queer effeminacy, attacked by respectable Victorian conservatives such as George Du Maurier, but the referent system would not be established between Wilde and Chinese customers had the advertiser not introduced him—after all what could be the link between a modern beauty product and a Victorian aesthete's face? In this ad, Wilde's image is embedded within a linguistic context where his biography is concisely provided. The

referent system lies in the *two bodies* of Oscar Wilde, namely, the physical body, blessed with his perceived good looks in Chinese eyes, and the immaterial body of his charisma as a gay martyr, a trendsetter, and as *funvzhiyou* (lit. women's friend).

4.1. Wilde's Material Body

The Red Scarf advert seeks to convince its readers that Wilde is handsome and worth emulating, thus presents a photograph for reader reference (See Fig. 12). This photo belongs to the series for which Wilde posed in Napoleon Sarony's American studio during his lecture tour ("Oscar Wilde in America"). In the picture, Wilde's pale complexion, a feature indicating higher class, thus highly celebrated in China (not to be confused with an aspiration for fair skin out of racially charged colonial mentality),⁶⁶ is accentuated against his thick dark long hair—a signifier of Bohemian identity to the Chinese audience.⁶⁷ His gaze is trained to some distant object, emitting the aura of a musing genius. Under the straight long nose are his full lips. When looking closely, viewers can notice Wilde's cleft chin, considered a trademark of handsome Western men in China. With his left, bejewelled hand touching his face in a pose, a rather popular attribute for modern female models, the languidly aristocratic and effeminate aura is achieved. Equally, his luxurious sable coat, shining velvet tie, large signet ring, cane in right hand, and gloves all add up to form the glittering image of a young dandy. To Chinese audiences who are not familiar with the Victorian dress code, Wilde in this picture would be mistaken for a dashing young Viscount. Bounded in the image are other material symbols: an attractive face, sumptuous hair, and sophisticated clothes that embody wealth, health, artistic taste, and aristocratic authority. The image assumes these material symbols to form a rhetoric of its own in order to voice immaterial qualities. For Roland Barthes these material commodities are not just random signs, put together as "an agglutinations of symbols," but are put here to speak for the poser's ideology ("Rhetoric of the Image"

⁶⁶ The "idea" that Chinese and other East Asian race are "yellow-skinned" is completely constructed, formed in the 19th century to justify European countries' colonial expansion. In the earliest records written in Latin by European adventurers who travelled to the Far East, the description of Chinese and Japanese people is "white". In "The Travels of Marco Polo," the people of Cathay and people of Japan are described as "white" (*bianca*; Kevak 24). "Tomé Pires, a Portuguese apothecary who stayed in Malacca between 1512 and 1515 and who compiled a long report known as the *Suma orientalis*, addressed to King Manuel I. . . . A part of the text was published (also by Ramusio), . . . including information that the Chinese were 'white like us [*bianchi, si come siamo noi*], the greater part of them dressing in cotton cloth and silk'" (Kevak 27). Records left by eighteenth century missionaries also report the skin color of Japanese and other East Asian people as clearly white ([Kang](#)). Yet in the nineteenth century, this perception quietly gave way to descriptions as "yellow" (Kang). In *Becoming Yellow* (2011), Michael Kevak gives a thorough study on this deliberate change of East Asian's skin colour for the purpose of colonisation. Fair skin is highly celebrated in Imperial China and other East Asian countries long before their exposure to the white race because of its association with higher class, since people of high social status never work outside in the field, in the sun. For the same reason ideals of Victorian beauty included very pale complexion, thus aristocratic ladies and middle-class women used arsenic powder and drank vinegar to whiten their skin, and whenever they went out they always took parasols to avoid the sun ([Zarrel](#); [Alexander](#)).

⁶⁷ Long-haired men are usually called "Gao yishu de," meaning "those who do art." Sometimes this term carries a tone of contempt if uttered by the older generation. Long-haired men are often attached to adjectives such as "irresponsible," "funny," "immoral," "lascivious." To the 1980s cultured youth and the post-90s generation, long hair instead represents a desire for freedom and individuality ([Tan](#); [Rao](#)).

152). The photograph denotes such ideology coded into Wilde's appearance. To Victorian viewers Wilde's look here was far too bold to their taste. His appearance and outfit became the inspiration for *Punch* to poke fun at his "effeminate" self-fashioning (see fig. 13).



Figure 13. *Fancy Portraits* No. 37: Oscar Wilde, in *Punch*.

According to James Eli Adams's discussion on Victorian masculinity, the Victorian's celebration of self-restraint in conforming to social norms is materialised into the simple and pragmatic male dress of gentlemen (189–90). Wilde's Aesthetic dress, on the contrary, is a flamboyant theatrical presentation of his persona. Among the uniform-like dress for gentlemen, his costume is no less than a bohemian shout of "Épater les bourgeois!" (Brooks 67), a dandy's polemic against the middle-class normality. To contemporary Chinese audience, however, especially to the more materialistic group, this dress meets with their romantic imagination of the old European aristocratic costume, occasionally seen in Disney fairy tales and Western teen dramas. The political message does not resonate with them since the referent system cannot be established without introducing the Victorian dress code to the Chinese audience in the first place. To them, Wilde is poised, rich, and handsome, like a proper young aristocrat in Disney cartoons. In the advert, the signified message—Wilde's refined taste and dandy persona—is transferred to the facemask. Though Chinese customers are mainly interested in the glamorous persona, Wilde's artistic ideals are also displayed, regardless of whether the audience receives the signal or not.

Wilde's portrait, in fact, boasts a palimpsest of messages. His picture was taken during his American lecture tour for the purposes of publicising the Aesthetic

costume and lifestyle. Though his opening lecture in New York was poorly received, Wilde's Aesthetic costume was soon adopted by his followers:

Over half a hundred young men were there. . . wore blonde and black wigs, wide floating neckties of every hue and fashion, beards and moustaches of startling dyes, knee breeches and black stockings. . . an in every hand the lily or the . . . sunflower. As the gracious youths entered they assumed all sorts of poses and held aloft or looked languishing down on the flower. (*Boston Evening Transcript*, qtd. in Blanchard 41–2)⁶⁸

The Aesthete's costume had not become a major vogue at this point in Wilde's America. Regardless, this description reveals that Wilde was able to make a successful ad out of his own image for Aestheticism. His immaterial ideology that art should be independent and free of political, moral, and commercial influence, was represented in his sleek and sophisticated look, and versed through the material objects he wore. The abstract concept of "pure art" in the advert becomes the concrete products that depict the implied artistic thoughts. Moreover, Wilde's costumes were commodities available for purchase. His advocates might easily follow his style and gradually a fashion trend appeared among young men in the US, to have a wider influence in society. According to Blanchard's quotation, this fashion trend clearly brought together like-minded people who wished to express their individual identities, thus created a new kind of masculinity, and affiliations through dress. This forms the first layer of meaning carried by Wilde's costume in the ad.

The second layer of message is the "body" currently presented in the ad for facial masks. The Chinese advertiser molds Wilde into a good-looking Caucasian model, knowing that his attractive appearance appeals to heterosexual female viewers and may as well attract homosexual male viewers. Subscribers to Red Scarf grew up during China's fastest economic growth, in which the glamour of fashion has already replaced the frugality touted by the older generation; modern social media such as Youtube and Instagram (TikTok and Weibo in China) have unprecedentedly emphasised the spectacle, thus young people put appearance above all else. To them the visible is much more important than the invisible. Their cult of beauty or lookism is evident in the popularity of a catchphrase "Beauty justifies!" in Chinese cyberspace.⁶⁹ Therefore, Red Scarf, a successful advertiser, applies simple psychological manipulation to seduce its viewers into buying the masks.

Although Wilde's popularity has very little to do with his appearance in reality, the advertiser knows what their customers are expecting, and as such Red Scarf

⁶⁸ I have endeavoured to find the primary source for this quotation, but the only available database that has the entry *Boston Evening Transcript* is the Google News archives. Unfortunately for publications in 1882, there are only papers from June to December.

⁶⁹ "Beauty justifies" or "Yanzhi Ji Zhengyi" is an extremely popular catchphrase in China especially on Chinese social-networking platforms. Young people believe a person who has a beautiful appearance must be a good person and believe good-looking people's opinions are always correct, which is particularly the case of China's celebrity culture in which the "idol" is like a demi-god to his/her fans. More information please refer to Edwards, Louise, and Elaine Jeffreys. *Celebrity in China*. Vol. 1. Hong Kong UP, 2010.

intentionally emphasises the otherwise tenuous link between his look, his fame, and his popularity. The depiction of Wilde's attractive features and his popularity among women reveal a clear message: "Look at him ladies! This is a rich and handsome guy who is also smart! He knows fashion and knows how to make you look pretty too." Wilde's charisma, and his "good looks," are exploited here to "lure" heterosexual female customers into buying products. His pale complexion, evident even though the picture is in black and white, echoes the advert's later promotional slogan: "to be as fair as snow white." His seemingly smooth skin also meets beauty standards of the celebrated "little fresh meat" (lit. a boyish-looking man with very delicate skin). Thus the main purpose in selling collagen and hydrating masks that claim to whiten skin, reduce fine lines, and keep the skin young and fresh is consummately achieved.

In addition, the advert demonstrates the link between Wilde's good looks and popularity among women as a common marketing strategy for attracting heterosexual male customers. The image of a rich, handsome man surrounded by beautiful women, a James Bond type of man, smiling at customers in every shopping mall in our global society. This image is defined by modern mass media as the image of a successful man, an alpha male. Simpson notes male models in modern advertisements are always depicted with flawless skin, flashing smiles, silky hair, muscular bodies, sharp suits, and shimmering watches. These features are paraded in commercial images to promote "the very products. . . that remind the mortal man of his imperfections by bringing him back to his own humdrum reflection and thus feeding his longing for the idealised form" (96). In the ad for facemasks, Wilde is sculpted into this type of "successful man" with the help of the exaggerated description of his appearance and its association with his popularity among women. However, the modern campaign for fashion and beauty products usually appeals to audiences with models or film stars from the same gender as their targeted groups. Customers' narcissistic identification with the perfect image in advertisements is the key to a successful campaign. It is important to clarify here that, despite the use of the term "narcissistic," audiences are not in love with their own image reflected in the bathroom mirror every morning. Instead, Simpson argues, ". . . his real affection is reserved for the idealised, immortal image of himself that is reflected back at him in the million brilliant mirrors of magazines, newspapers, advertising hoardings, TV, cinema and video" (95). Following Simpson's argument, the facemask ad should have targeted male instead of female consumers. Hence, using Wilde as the spokesman to sell cosmetic products designed mainly for women seems to be completely irregular.

Considering Wilde's queer identity, however, this appropriation of Wilde's image becomes ingenious. His constructed attractive physical body not only appeals to young women who adore a "little fresh meat," but also to *fujoshi*, metrosexual, and gay men.⁷⁰ Wilde's meticulously groomed look has a strong queer message reflected in his effeminate posture, and especially in the avoided eye contact. Usually

⁷⁰ *Fujoshi* are cis-gender women who are deeply influenced by Japanese manga/anime's BL theme and thus develop a strong interest in seeing queer pretty boys.

a prolonged gaze between two straight men has an aggressive meaning in a straight male society, very common in a hyper macho context. Wilde in the ad, on the other hand, does not posit such a menacing challenge; his effeminacy, attacked by his peers, now becomes a friendly gesture to the gender minority. The facemasks that originally targeted only women hence are appealing to the metrosexual cismen and the queer community, though the latter are not the intended target of Red Scarf, inasmuch as the linguistic message of the ad attempts to keep the queer undertone at bay. The advertiser conveniently omitted Wilde's queer identity in the introduction and manages to mould Wilde into an attractive, heterosexual womeniser to "seduce" cis-gender female customers. Nonetheless, due to Wilde's immaterial "body," i.e., that acquired charisma as a gay martyr, an established knowledge among his Chinese followers, especially, the more literary demographics among the BOBOs, the ad's attempt to make Wilde "straight" is partially contrived.

The fetish for Wilde is bound within his nominal body that transcends historical and geographical gap between the Victorian Britain and contemporary China, which leads to the next discussion of Wilde's charisma in the immaterial bodies.

4.2. Wilde's Immaterial "Bodies"



Figure 14. Original advert of Perfectace Skin Hydrating Facemasks

It is noteworthy that the Perfectface facemask advert changed the original poster for its British market. On the official website, the model of this hydrating masks is a young lady with Asian physical features peeling off the mask (see Fig. 14). Why in the Red Scarf ad targeting Chinese consumers, did the advertiser choose Oscar Wilde instead? It is because of Wilde's wider appeal to Chinese audience. To be specific, Chinese LGBTQ+ community generally consider Wilde a gay icon, literature fans adore his witty epigrams and beautiful language, and proto-feminists in China borrow Wilde's authority to justify the consumerism as feminism. Therefore, even without an image showing Wilde using the facial mask in the ad, the image still delivers more information than the original ad, for Wilde's simulacra is multi-layered and appeals to different groups of customers, especially literature fans, the queer community and their supporters, metrosexuals, feminists,

and cis-gender females, whereas the original ad could only appeal to the last demographics.

4.2.1 The Gay Martyr

Wilde's queer identity blurs the gender boundary in the beauty ad, opening the otherwise tightly policed and socially constructed barrier of gender separation in the cosmetics industry. His aesthetically pleasing physical body functions as a manifestation of a more tolerant and all-encompassing market for the beauty industry. In 2019, when the most successful beauty gurus on Youtube were mostly transexual men, the Chinese ad's appropriation of Wilde's image to sell makeup seems not so outlandish after all, as the beauty artist demographics are becoming increasingly diverse and fluid in terms of gender, racial identity, and different body shapes. Transgender and homosexual beauty vloggers and makeup artists, such as Gigi Gorgeous, Jeffree Star, GlamazonTay, Patrick Starr, Julie Vu, Aiden's Empire (Denton-Hurst), are celebrated in the beauty industry and online community.

As society increasingly becomes a spectacle, every man and woman becomes mere actors. To men, the fear of being seen as the object of desire, thus becoming a "woman," is gradually being diluted by the usage of YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook, where everyone turns their real lives into an enviable spectacle, objectifying themselves as simulacra of themselves. These beauty gurus of gender and also of ethnic minority backgrounds, are enjoying being the *object d'art*, as well as the fame, popularity, and money that come with such self-simulation or self-objectification. Should Wilde and his fellow Aesthetes live in our modern age, they would have thrived to be Internet celebrity.

Feminist scholars, like Griselda Pollock, Janet Wolff, and Mary Blanchard, argue that the Victorian female body in high arts functioned merely as a model or object for the "discerning and omnipotent male gaze," "retained for the interior" (Blanchard 21). Blanchard notes that, in the last two decades of the 19th century, and especially in America, women wore Aesthetic uncorseted dresses while travelling through public urban spaces, somewhat like the *flâneur*, to violate the boundary that confined women into domesticity. Similarly, many men of Aesthetic taste also pushed the gender boundary to encourage non-conformist fashion and behaviours. They created identities of their own through the decorative arts and posing as objects of desire, thus experimenting with Aesthetic fashion (21). Male bodies were hence "feminised" as *objets d'art* to be looked at.

The Aesthetic subculture, more of commerce than of politics in America, allowed for theatricality in personal presentation (24–5). The Aesthetic costume was, therefore, perceived as an individual expression of art and beauty, as a polemic to oppose the self-restraint bourgeois gentleman's dress. Aesthetic fashion gave male Aesthetes a channel to express their individuality through presenting their bodies as spectacles. To dress well is to make a picture of one's self . . . to express beauty in every line of the dress in the selection of colour, and in every detail. . . as if the soul of the individual was revealed. (Blanchard 23)

Indeed, Wilde was very keen on the male Aesthetic outfit, and made himself an *objet d'art* in Aesthetic spaces, such as bourgeois drawing rooms and theatre stages. It was a clever strategy to “sell” his ideology to the public. Observed by his eager audience in America: “[h]e wore a low-necked shirt with a turned-down collar and large white necktie, a black claw-hammer coat and white vest, knee-breeches, long black stockings, and low shoes with bows” (Blanchard 40). This costume made Wilde himself “an ethereal piece of human bric a brac . . . a walking work of art” (40).

This sense of male identity as an *objet d'art* is amplified in the photographs taken by Napoleon Sarony. Shortly after his arrival in New York for his 1882 lecture tour, Wilde posed for a series of photographs (“[The Sarony Photographs Of Oscar Wilde](#)”). In these pictures Wilde is attired in his iconic Aesthetic costume, standing or sitting on a chair, posing in postures deemed “effeminate” by his contemporary press. His costume, though already perceived as bold enough to make the bourgeois gentleman across the Atlantic Ocean uncomfortable, is, from a modern perspective, decently anchored within the aesthetically pleasing spectrum. His theatrical performance, though denounced and ridiculed by the press, was never seen as vulgar. Instead, the press, especially in America, were keen on calling him “womanish,” and “half man and half woman,” aiding in his gender-bending performance and sexual orientation, rather than chastising his taste and fashion sense (Blanchard 41). In fact, the criticisms attacking Wilde were unexceptionally from a political and moral perspective, policing his attempt to dismantle the heteronormative social establishment in the West. In China during the Mao Era (1949–76), the politically charged demonisation of Wilde went to the point of deleting his name from the list of Western literary masters. Moreover, even though China has now entered a quasi-neoliberal consumer society, homosexuality remains an embarrassing topic when it is brought into the public eye, which propelled Red Scarf to de-queer Wilde’s in the first place.

Nevertheless, deeply influenced by the *fujoshi* culture that has entered China from Japan in the form of manga and anime, the 90s BOBOs are not only tolerant but zealous in welcoming gender and sexual diversity. Although the *fujoshi* group represents only a fraction of the Chinese population, it is a major component of this advert’s target consumers.

This *fujoshi* phenomenon in China is largely class-based. *Fujoshi*’s BL fandom requires participants to be active in commercial events, such as cosplays, comic cons, collecting exclusive action figures, and comic books.⁷¹ All these costumes, bric-a-brac, and books are expensive and only available in specialised department stores in big cities, hence undoubtedly only those from urban bourgeois family are likely to be able to afford this otherwise “useless” hobby. Within the same general social class, Chinese students subscribing to Red Scarf overlap with the *fujoshi*

⁷¹ Cosplay (コスプレ), a contraction of the words costume play, is a performance art in which participants called cosplayers wear costumes and fashion accessories to represent a specific character from a work of fiction or film.

group. And even counting those who do not self-label as *fujoshi*, Red Scarf's subscribers are more or less influenced by a *fujoshi* youth culture that remains omnipresent in Sinophone cyberspace. The original UK version of the advert does not target homosexuals, and neither does the Chinese version, at least not intentionally. Yet the appropriation of Wilde's Aesthetic body has opened possibilities for marginalised groups to be seen in the mass media. To those who already knew of Wilde's queer identity, this ad can also be read as a welcoming gesture to LGBTQ+s. Whether intended or not, Wilde's charisma as the gay martyr is adopted by such consumers, although deliberately hidden.

The purpose of hiding Wilde's queer identity is subject to different interpretations: it could be that Red Scarf understands that homosexuality is still embarrassing for Chinese to discuss openly online; or it could be that they knowingly hide his identity to make Wilde even more alluring as taboo. The secrecy of his queer identity here could be the result of both. I specifically address the second motivation, because that strategy makes the advertiser a true follower of Wilde.

In *Dorian Gray*, Basil Howard makes Dorian a more mysterious and alluring person than he is at the beginning of the novel, by withholding Dorian's name from Lord Henry (4–5). D. A. Miller famously discussed the power of such "open secrecy" in his article "Secret Subjects, Open Secrets." He argues that Basil Hallward, "affirms the value of secrecy in virtually the same breath as he violates it, in telling Lord Henry what he didn't intend to tell him: the name of Dorian Gray" (195). Therefore the secrecy "would seem to be a mode whose ultimate meaning lies in the subject's formal insistence that he is radically inaccessible to the culture that would otherwise entirely determine him" (195). Similarly, by withholding Wilde's queerness, while knowing that the majority of audiences already knew of Wilde's queer identity, the subject (the ad) insists on the inaccessible and "unspeakable" nature of Wilde's sexual orientation, thus rendering him alluring, as both a commercial strategy and a way to avoid unnecessary censorship from an oppressive regime. The "feminised" masculinity of Wilde becomes the *object d'art* for the moment of the exhilarating gaze of understanding. Thus, the tragic aura of a fallen hero amplifies the beauty of this *objet d'art*. And while the flamboyant Aesthetic costume "hooks" viewers' attention, the immaterial charisma of this tragic queer writer immediately enhances the attractiveness of the beauty product itself. To potential customers, these beauty masks are no longer simply facemasks boasting hydrating function, as many other brands do. Instead, this brand possesses the referent of the star-crossed romance between Wilde, an artistic talent and the beautiful young aristocrat, Bosie. This feature makes it more attractive to the LGBTQ+ and BOBOs' romantic souls than the pragmatic hydrating function.

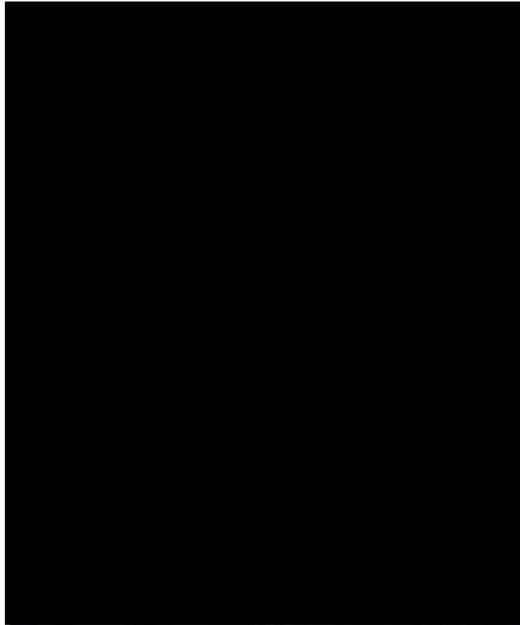


Figure 15. Original ad of Jardins D'Écrivains—Wilde

Similarly, Jardins D'Écrivains, a French fragrance house, has manufactured a perfume named after Wilde. This relatively new fragrance house was also introduced into China on a website dedicated to perfume appreciation. The perfume's original ad features the bottle with a classical bust of a Greek goddess, which stresses its European heritage dating back to the ancient Hellenic culture (see Fig. 15)—with which Wilde was so infatuated. The original ad would not speak as powerfully to Asian consumers, who may look at the Western artifact (the Greek bust) with admiring eyes, but simultaneously feel estranged by its blatant “Eurocentrism” or “white supremacy,” even though the original ad may not intend to this message. In the Introduction to the thesis, I discussed that our contemporary alt-right hate groups usually recruit confused young men with the idea of reviving the “Western Culture” that boasts glorious history of the Ancient Greeks, Romans, to the Vikings, Franks, Vandals, which is, in fact, the dog-whistle of their racist ideal—constructing a white ethno state of a pure and wholesome Europe/West, in which all non-whites, and anyone they believe to be “degenerates,” must be purged ([ContraPoints](#)). Therefore, the original ad—while elegant and associated with Wilde's passion for Greek culture—would risk being culturally insensitive to Asian consumers.

Instead, the writer of the perfume ad for Chinese market, ZHANG Hao'er, retells the story of Wilde's tragic life—as a selling point: a beloved celebrity becoming a penniless outcast exiled in Paris. Additionally, the Chinese version of this perfume ad emphasises the heart of the scent—the carnation. As stated in the perfume's official website, this “Wilde eau de parfum” boasts its olfactory pyramid in which the, “top notes are bergamot and grape; middle notes are fig, carnation, and tea; base notes are oakmoss and vetiver” (“Wilde-Eau De Parfum for Men”). The fragrance composer's selection of ingredients captures Wilde's signature identity, i.e., the tropical fruits of the top notes clearly represent Wilde's fascination with the Hellenic culture (Chislett 357–363). The middle notes including tea and fig refer to Wilde's special interest in Oriental cultures (Japan, China, and also the Middle East).

The inclusion of carnation as the middle note has the obvious reference to the mysterious green carnation Wilde adopted as his symbol. Yet this Aesthetic currency, in the form of the green carnation, had not yet been established among Chinese customers. Hence, to make this fragrance appealing, the Chinese ad introduced the meaning of the green carnation in the Victorian context, asserting that this carnation note added a strong sense of “rebellion” and “defiance” as an olfactory figure of speech. The green carnation inevitably connotes Hichens’s novel, where it adored by Esmé Amarinth (Wilde) and his close friend Lord Reggie (Bosie). The green carnation accordingly acquired a strong queer undertone after the publication of this novel (Meier), as the “unnatural” flower, invented by Esmé to state the “highest philosophy,” which is “to be afraid of nothing, to dare to live as one wishes to live, not as the middle-classes wish one to live; to have the courage of one’s desires, instead of only cowardice of other people’s” (Hichens 92). Thus, the green carnation becomes the totem of a bohemian lifestyle, encouraging defiance and contempt for social conventions. Yet in the novel, the sensual depictions of the glistening commodities and artifacts, especially in the first chapter, reflecting a bourgeois and even aristocratic lifestyle which the dandies would not give up. This amalgamation of spiritual pursuit and material indulgence comfortably, if not perfectly, fits with the life standards that current Chinese BOBOs enjoy and aspire to. In the Chinese ad, then the green carnation is interpreted as the defiance to convention—the uncompromising gesture that homosexuals hold against the heteronormative establishment, and art connoisseurs hold against the philistine market (Zhang). Wilde in the perfume advert becomes a heroic figure, conferring charisma to the beauty product. This effect echoes what advertisers using Catherine Deneuve’s face for Chanel No. 5 hope to achieve. Wilde’s identity as a gay martyr and his courageous gesture of “against the grain” are thus signified and appropriated.

The selling point of a perfume is not usually about the fragrance *per se*; Williamson asserts that perfume adverts struggle to reveal real information about their products, since no real sensory information can be given (25). Thus, the key point of a perfume advert is to represent what the fragrance represents. Glamour, beauty, sexiness, sweet temperaments, adventurous spirit, or rebelliousness are characteristics often associated with designer fragrances. Therefore, demographics who seek to express their unique non-conforming attitude, or their sympathy with Wilde, would be at least tempted to buy this perfume. The perfume has more than just a pragmatic function of making people smell good; it has a symbolic value in self-representation. In the Chinese ad, Wilde’s photograph is adopted to speak for the product. The buttonhole flower is photoshopped with green to symbolise the green carnation. Clearly the colour green, as the most distinct colour in the image, creates a link with the green liquid of the perfume bottle (see Fig. 16).

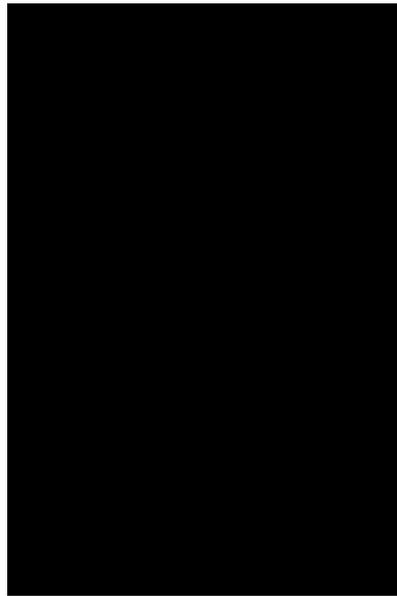


Figure 16. Oscar Wilde in Chinese ad for Wilde Perfume.

The advertiser attaches the intermediary object—Wilde’s buttonhole flower, representing intransigent attitude against social norms—to the perfume. Williamson points out that an object represents a value, and in its interchangeability with other things, gives them “value” too, is *currency* in advertisements (20). With this currency, Wilde’s immaterial charisma is securely attached to the otherwise meaningless bottle of perfume. When customers purchase the perfume, they purchase, in fact, a piece of Wilde’s identity.

Wilde’s immaterial body, perceived as the persecuted queer writer, becomes a surprisingly attractive selling point. His queer identity appeals to the LGBTQ+ group and anyone rebellious who wishes to manifest their contempt for social convention. It also appeals to those who have compassion for the unfortunate writer. Thus the tragic and yet courageous image of Wilde, moulded by the public’s imagination and advertisement rhetoric, is exploited to sell facemasks and perfume.

4.2.2. The Literature Master

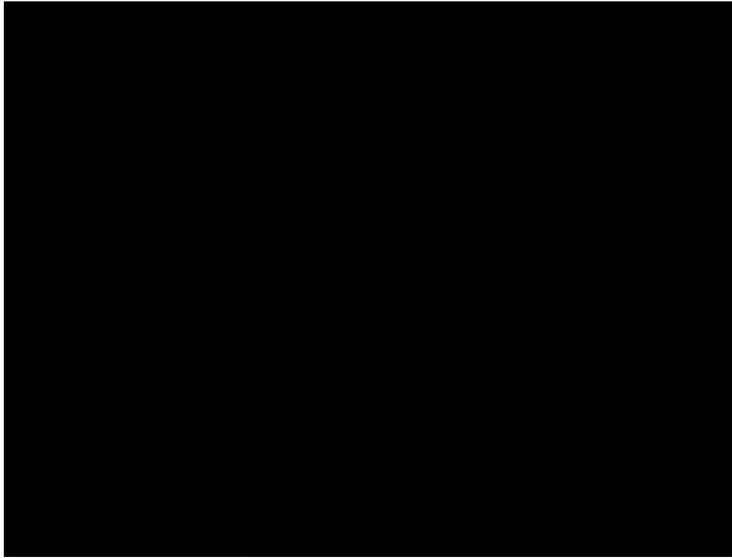


Figure 17 Wilde and his quote placed together in Red Scarf advert.

Thomas Richards notes that in the Jubilee commercial campaign in which advertisers drew charisma from Queen Victoria and the upper class, the younger the company, the more it relied on the Jubilee campaign to justify its existence (80). This is also true of drawing upon Wilde's charisma to sell comparatively unknown brands to Chinese consumers. Perfectace and Jardins D' Écrivain are both minor brand names whose names mean nothing to Chinese customers, hence must create more brand recognition to sell their products, more than a good-looking model. Something profound is needed for promoting their minor brand. Wilde's charisma abounds in his good looks, his tragic love story with Bosie, and his refined taste in art; altogether these become a powerful currency for the products.

Apart from these qualities, Wilde's reputation as an eloquent public speaker and a Master of Literature are other strong selling points. His literary achievements, as listed at the beginning of the facemasks ad, are an attempt to appeal to literature lovers. Following the introduction, Wilde's witty epigrams are quoted, and another photograph of him holding a book is included as well (see Fig. 17). The photograph accentuates Wilde's identity as a literary man, and in so doing make the beauty product cultured and classy. The ad does not rush to present the hydrating facemasks. Rather, as if to tantalise customers to engage further, it lists Wilde's quotes for the reader's entertainment. The strategy here is to construct a conversation between Wilde and the customers. Wilde's authority in literature and his humorous words are able to "trap" customers and keep them "listening to" him until the real purpose of selling the product is achieved. Here, the commercial product appropriates the charisma of Wilde's literary persona to enhance the products' taste and cultural connotation. To those who are already aware of Wilde, the presence of a literary idol on a beauty advert certainly attracts a knowing smile and a sense of belonging. Literature lovers thus are under the impression that this brand of facemasks is more cultured than other brands, and therefore may be more willing to buy for the sake of the literary reference. By capitalising on Wilde's identity as a great writer, the use-value, specifically, the anti-ageing and hydrating function

boasted by the masks, is overshadowed. The quality of the beauty products is immediately elevated to an artistic level through the reference to Wilde's authority in "highbrow" culture.

Additionally, a minor brand becomes a hidden gem when it acquires a mysterious nature and is associated with good taste. Considering Wilde perfume, its niche status and yet classy association, appeal to Chinese BOBOs who favour "Paterian Secrecy," a term to describe a delight of knowing refined but obscure cultural products not known or understood by others, and the knowledge that such cultural products are reserved for the intellectual to appreciate (Adams 202). This Paterian Secrecy takes from Walter Pater and his cohort, who celebrated a philosophy of art that asserts art as only accessible to the elite (202).

The worship of secrecy and the complexity in art was popular among members of the Aesthetic movement, Swinburne, for instance. According to Adams's study on Victorian dandies, Swinburne used his *William Blake* (1865) as a way of "looking to literature for the high and subtle luxuries of exceptional temperament, [and] urged that such bread of sweet thought and wine of delight is not broken or shed for all, but for few only. . . the sacramental elements of art and poetry, . . . reserved for the sublime profit and intense pleasure of an elected body or church" (202). Although a fragrance could hardly be categorised as high art, its close connection with literature and the increasingly porous boundary between fine and commercial art make Paterian Secrecy applicable here. The tacit elitism in Pater's philosophy is codified in this perfume brand, for the fragrance house was established out of the founder's own passion for literature, not to mention its expensive price. The humble state of the fragrance house in the market currently guarantees that its potential customers share a common interest in literature, and will associate Wilde in particular with the perfume designer. Therefore, potential customers are at least aware of Wilde's adoration of the green carnation, and thus understand the referent between the bottle of the green fragrance and the symbolic meaning—queer and rebellious—it encapsulates. What they purchase is not the fragrance but what they believe is access to an exclusive and elite identity. At this moment, the use-value of these beauty products loses its importance. Instead the totemic representation of a certain artistic lifestyle is what appeals to customers most. The ad using Wilde's image correlates with his concept of defying the bourgeois virtues, dressing beautifully, and living a life full of "gemlike moments," as Pater called for. Therefore, Wilde's Aesthetic body in the image becomes a signifier of a romanticised lifestyle, a lifestyle much celebrated by the BOBOs, and particularly wealthy young women.

4.2.3. Wilde—Women's Friend

Finally, it is of value to consider the misquotation of Wilde in the facemasks advert. While the message is extremely materialistic and risks objectifying femininity, it can also be interpreted in a more positive way.

The depiction of women going shopping in contemporary China is usually labeled as a form of hysteria, exactly the same prejudice or demonisation faced by

Victorian ladies. For instance, a popular Mandarin catchphrase describes women's perceived unquenchable desire for shopping as "Duo Shou," meaning to chop one's hands off. This alarming phrase is meant to poke fun at women's "craziness" in shopping, especially in online shopping, as it suggests they cannot be stopped from clicking the purchase button unless they have no hands at all. It is also a sexist idea that men need to control women's bodily deviance. The phrase expresses a strong sense of misogynist fear of the "demanding" woman, who has "too many" desires. According to Richards's discussion, during the Victorian period a similar fear regarding "the Angel of the House," who becomes a demon when she sets foot in department stores (101). Richards points to an illustration from Anthony Trollope's novel, depicting "consumption as hysteria as two women customers vent their anger on a male salesclerk who has just told them that the store has run out of a sale item" (101). Richards uses an adjective "far-too-familiar" to suggest the universality of this fear and demonisation of women in Victorian literature, cartoon, and dramas.

Erika Rappaport discusses this demonisation of female shoppers, pointing out that Victorians (bourgeoisie) were conflicted about the implications of shopping, because shoppers blatantly disregarded the vision of society neatly divided into separate spheres (Davidoff and Hall; Davidoff 227–76; Vickery 383–414; Kerber 9–39).⁷² Especially during this period, the highly moral Victorians' reputation and social status hung on the idea that middle-class wives and daughters remain apart from the market, politics, and public space; therefore, the female shopper was an especially disruptive figure (Rappaport 6; 29–40).

Richards, however, notes that Queen Victoria's calm and grave presence in the department store in the Jubilee ad had been adopted,

. . . to make shopping into something more than material activity. Her transcendent presence both legitimated consumption for women by offering them the queen's stamp of approval and lured even more women into department stores by leading them to believe that they, too, would be treated like royalty. (102)

Likewise, Wilde's presence in the Red Scarf ad and the quotation about pretty women going shopping, although misquoted, to some extent also legitimated Chinese female customer consumption of this particular brand of facemask, as it is "approved of" by Wilde, a cultivated man who exudes cultural authority, if not patriarchal authority.

⁷² Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasures* (2009). Rappaport warns readers that, although the 19th-century middle class did not live in neatly divided spheres, this ideal was central to the construction of their class identity (224). For other scholarly works on Victorian separate social spaces, please refer to Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (Chicago: Chicago UP 1987), Davidoff's "Regarding Some 'Old Husbands' Tales: Public and Private in Feminist History," in *Feminism, the Public and the Private* (1998): 164-194. . For a critique of the separate spheres metaphor in women's history, see Amanda Vickery, "Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of English Women's History," *The Historical Journal* 36.2 (1993): 383-414.; and Linda Kerber, "Separate Spheres Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History," *Journal of American History* 75.1 (1988): 9-39.

Max Weber argued that “charismatic figures do provide a cultural focal point around which an ideology [...] is defined and legitimated symbolically” (Weber 1111; Richards 79). Wilde’s personal charisma as an Aesthetic apostle confers authority to “[c]rying is for plain women, pretty women go shopping.” With the words from an authority in beauty and literature, female shopping desires are legitimated into an artistic social activity, and a “healthy” pursuit of a cultured and refined lifestyle.

In China, traditionally, such commercial activity is criticised by the social establishment. Chinese female customers are not only judged by the universal patriarchal fear of a mob of semi-hysterical shopping women, they are also judged by the lingering communistic frugal norm from the late 20th century, which reprimand consumerism as closely attached to the “evil” capitalism. The misquotation authorises women to buy commercial products without feeling guilty.

To the Gen ‘90s adult females, the “plain women” suggests not just homely looking women, but housewives confined in the domestic space. These housewives are both emotionally and financially dependent on their husbands. Housewives growing old and nagging are a type demonised as “Huang Lian Po” or “Yellow-faced hags” in China, and often-depicted in films and novels as failed women. This type could be the Gen ‘90s BOBOs’ grandmothers and mothers. Witnessing the misery of such virtuous traditional women, who dedicated their lives to their husband and family but lost their beauty and own social life, Gen ‘90s women are eager to avoid traditional social roles of women. The desire for a decent, if not luxurious lifestyle is pronounced and metonymically transferred into the desire for young and fair skin, which symbolises high social status and a luxurious lifestyle. The Wilde quote lends authoritative voice to young women or proto-feminists, who decided to be financially independent and embrace a high-quality life where they have their agency to enjoy whatever they like. Wilde’s personal charisma and fame encourages them to pursue an Aesthetic life. Like Lady Windermere in the Hollywood film adaptation, this commercialisation of Wilde’s charisma attempts to sell the concept of the new woman, who is confident, happy, and beautiful.

5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I examined Wilde’s reception in contemporary China, where his identity as the literary man is overshadowed by his identity as an icon of a new lifestyle. The factors contributing to his popularity among the Chinese Gen ‘90s BOBOs are closely attached to China’s changed social milieu. By close reading the images of Wilde in the two ads, it is possible to assess the phantasmagoric relation between modern advertising and consumers. Indebted to Richards’s discussion on charismatic bodies of Queen Victoria in the Jubilee Campaign, we might view Wilde’s charisma divided as material and immaterial. Yet instead of studying its passive reflection of the current youth culture in China, I study the more active influence Wilde has contributed in changing Chinese BOBOs’ lifestyle, and accordingly in modernising society into a relatively tolerant culture that welcomes difference and diversity.

With continued dramatic economic reformation since 1978, China's collective national consciousness has changed. The urban middle-class children born after 1990 as the last batch in the "only-child generation," have enjoyed their doting parents' full attention and have been pampered with material abundance. This social context paves the way for their appreciation of what was originally considered useless—the school of Aestheticism. With its languid aura and hedonistic inclinations, heavily denounced in the Mao Era, Aestheticism has been revived and developed into vogue among the Chinese BOBOs. LGBTQ+ and women's rights movements are now entangled with the increasingly materialistic ethos in China. In Chapter 4, I deepen the discussion of Wilde's immaterial bodies, particularly in terms of Chinese men's fashion. Wilde's persona has another aspect of charisma that encapsulates a British lifestyle in the Chinese imagination. Based on both textual and contextual comparative reading, we might fathom the subtle and meaningful influences of Wilde's performance as a British dandy, still vigorously worshipped by his Chinese followers.

Chapter 4: China's New Masculinity— The Wilde Inspired “Oriental Gentleman”

1. Introduction

This chapter examines the making of a consumerist middle-class Chinese masculinity, inspired by Oscar Wilde's fashionable dandy persona. The dandy image of Wilde has been populated by renowned high-tier lifestyle magazines and Western fashion designers. Their commercial campaign in recent decades has drawn inspiration from the Victorian dandyism. The most notable designers are British fashion brand Alexander McQueen's direct homage to Wilde in the Spring/Summer dandy collection. The reintroduction of capitalism in Post-Mao China (1976–present) has accelerated the rise of consumerism and spurred a collective rethinking of a new Chinese national image, by which to re-enter the international conversation, especially in terms of standing up against the “old imperial powers” in global issues.

In this chapter, I examine the Chinese middle-class millennial's interest in changing China's negative international image by constructing a new one. Case studies feature men's fashion/lifestyle magazines to probe the Chinese younger generation's search of a modern, sophisticated, and cultured national (male) image born out of Chinese cultural memory of the virtuous Confucian *junzi* (lit. gentleman) and a cosmopolitan urban dandy combined with the British masculinity rooted in both Victorian gentlemen and care-free dandies promoted by Wilde.⁷³

Within the social context of reviving traditional Chinese Confucian culture, as well as an increasing cosmopolitan society influenced by the West, there have been conflicting concepts of a new national image of China. The first image is the “new *junzi*”: professionals and businessmen who justify their quest for material wealth by reinterpreting Confucianism as an ethical system compatible with doing business.⁷⁴ Whereas under the influence of an Anglophile sentiment, the “Oriental Gentleman” as an alternative new Chinese masculinity, and expression of anti-totalitarian and anti-heteronormative establishment, is emerging and has gained popularity. This new masculinity is championed by the young elite cohort, or

⁷³ The *Junzi* (君子; lit. “Lording Master”) is a Chinese philosophical term often translated as “gentleman,” “superior person,” or “exemplary person” and employed by both the King Wen of Zhou in the *I-ching* and Confucius in his works to describe the ideal man (Ames et. al., Matthews 184). In Confucianism, the ideal personality is the *sheng* (lit. holy; 圣), translated as sage. However, sagehood is hard to attain and so Confucius created the *junzi*, gentleman, which more individuals could achieve. *Junzi* acts according to proper conduct (called *li*; 礼) to achieve *he* (和), harmony, which Confucianism maintains should rule the home, society, and the empire (Matthews 184).

⁷⁴ In his article “[In League with Gentlemen: Junzi Masculinity and the Chinese Nation in Cultural Nationalist Discourses](#)” (2017), Derek Hird discusses and analyses the Confucian ideal of masculinity—in post-Mao China in which highly educated businessman and (classical) middle-class professionals are appropriating, re-interpreting, and promoting *Junzi* or the “new *junzi*” image and ethics to justify their quest of material wealth to distinguish themselves from the vulgar *baofahu* and morally debauched *heiling* (black collar: corrupt officials working in state-owned monopoly enterprise).

millennial BOBOs. Wilde as a men's fashion icon has appeared among the demographics in question.

Against the popularity of the traditional “junzi” masculinity, the Oriental Gentleman is comparatively less known by the general public and is thought to be less serious, due to its association with fashion, because fashion has been stigmatised as frivolous and feminine, thus trivial within Chinese social norms. Ironically, thanks to its “frivolous” characteristic, this new male image, encapsulating China's awakening liberal mentality towards unorthodox masculinity, has escaped institutional censorship and is gradually developing.

2. Oscar Wilde-inspired Style in Male High-end Fashion

Beyond Jardins D' Écrivains—Wilde, from *Numéro Homme China* (2012/FW) series of a Victorian dandy to *Bazaar China* (Dec 2016)'s innovative concept of “Oriental Gentlemen, there seems to be a revival of Victorian trend and a zeal for dandyism in China.

Contemporary fashion houses drawing inspiration from Wilde is not a new phenomenon. Many established fashion magazines have written articles about how Wilde has inspired contemporary fashion designers across the globe. An article entitled “Oscar Wilde's Fashion Gene,” published on a Taiwanese fashion website, summarises the Wildean-Dandy trend in the fashion industry from 2007 to 2014. Italian designer Missoni's 2007 S/S collection was inspired by Wilde and his lover Lord Alfred Douglas (Bosie); Dolce and Gabbana's 2009 A/W menswear collection was inspired by *Dorian Gray*; Belgian designer Dries van Noten's 2011–12 collection drew inspiration from “The Happy Prince;” Japanese designer Mihara Yasuhiro's 2011 A/W collection instilled sparks of dandyism into their sport clothing, and LAD Musicians, another Japanese brand, drew inspiration from *Dorian Gray*, to name a few (H. Chang). Finally, the most dedicated follower of Wilde in the fashion world—Alexander McQueen—keeps dazzling the fashion industry with the sartorial eloquence of Aestheticism/Dandyism. The article introduces Alexander McQueen's 2013 A/W collection, along with an anecdote about people comparing the brand founder Lee McQueen to Wilde, endorsed by a *Guardian* article lamenting the untimely death of the talented McQueen (Cartner-Morley).

The McQueen brand did not stop its exploration of Dandyism after Lee's death. Their 2017 F/W collection featured a series of male models donning coats with patterns of peacock patterns and Oriental decorative pieces, paying homage to Aubrey Beardsley's illustrations for Wilde's play *Salomé* (1891). On its official website (2017 version), under the category of Menswear, three subcategories were dedicated to the dandy theme: “Dandified tailoring,” “The Style of Oscar Wilde,” and “Dandified Accessories.” The fashion house's enthusiasm for dandyism also immediately captured other fashion magazine attention. *GQ*, a leading international men's fashion magazine, observes that Alexander McQueen's 2017 F/W collection

followed Wilde's journey from Tite Street in London to Paris Saint Germain (Johnston).

The glam of Steampunk, Gothic, and Neo-Victorian styles is never really far away from designers' radar for inspiration. Most noteworthy is that when fashion magazines comment on such retro-fashion, they repeatedly apply the appellation "gentlemen" and "dandies" almost interchangeably, which links the fashion trend to the cultural memory of the British Empire and its association with the old aristocratic lifestyle, as opposed to a modern urbanite style (Johnston). "Gentleman" and "dandy" respectively indicate two opposite qualities in men, but both exude the glamour and refinement pursued by Chinese upper- and middle-class consumers.⁷⁵ Wilde's popularity among these customers is attributable to Chinese consumers' rose-tinted imagination of exotic British (aristocratic and Gothic) culture.

Alexander McQueen is the second most popular British high-end brand among Chinese consumers visiting the UK, second only to Burberry—the national brand of Britain in the eyes of Chinese consumers (Bloomberg; The Luxury Channel; Kuo). Admittedly, such zeal for Alexander McQueen might have more to do with China's fascination with the stylish Princess Kate Middleton and her personal preference for that brand, than with its reference to Wilde's dandyism. Yet the enthusiasm for dandy culture cannot be underestimated in the Chinese market, especially since dandyism is entangled with the British aristocratic tradition, attracting large numbers of Chinese consumers for its exoticism and exclusivity.

In *The Painter of Modern Life* (1862), Baudelaire contends that "[D]andyism is the last flicker of heroism in decadent ages" (11). The "decadent ages" in Baudelaire's context was the 19th-century modernising world in which traditional cultural authority was in crisis. Adams points out that, "amid the transition from aristocracy to democracy, dandyism arises in a spirit of 'opposition and revolt' to affirm a 'new kind of aristocracy' anchored in intellectual distinction rather than economic or social status" (23). Thus the connection between dandyism and aristocracy is more than just its foppish styles. Dandyism's emphasis on intellectual distinction and refined cultural tastes meets the needs of the rising Chinese new elites, who want to live a glamorous life while distinguishing themselves from the obnoxious wealth-flaunting upstarts.

The much-attacked "superficial and shallow" characteristic of dandyism is a selling point to Chinese consumers/tourists looking for luxury consumption (thought to be) associated with the British aristocracy. For instance, a survey of Chinese consumers in Shanghai, Beijing, and other cosmopolitan cities across China found

⁷⁵ James Eli Adams points out that a dandy is the opposite of a gentleman. The latter with its dark, boring, and uniform-like dress are in every way conforming to the mainstream/ middle-class cultural authority to the extent of annihilating selfhood. "Gentleman," therefore, is a very bourgeois term, whereas the "dandy" is anti-establishment. As discussed by Baudelaire, the dandy's anti-bourgeois gesture is heroic, especially in the sphere of art. Refer to *Dandies and Desert Saints* (1995).

that “Britishness” and “aristocratic culture” were important to the choice to buy brands like Aston Martin, Rolls Royce, Burberry, Alexander McQueen, etc. (Whitaker). A survey conducted by WANG Qing highlights the Royal Family as a major global marketing tool for British commerce. Carried out across 13 Chinese cities, the survey results unequivocally support all things royal. “Not only did 57% say the Royal Warrant influences their buying decisions, but 16% said they buy British goods directly because of the Queen, with 27% claiming to get style inspiration from her too” (Mogul).⁷⁶

These reports are evidence of Chinese consumers’ Anglophile sentiment. Another report from the *Telegraph*, interviewed Chinese tourists who travel thousands of miles to the UK to shop at places like Harrods, Harvey Nichols, and House of Fraser, saying “there is a long-established fascination with the pomp and ceremony of the British monarchy” (Morris). Journalist Hugh Morris notes that young Chinese tourists and students (aged 17–25) most frequently mentioned British icons, e.g., Harry Potter, the Queen, Buckingham Palace—and much emphasised by the journalist—British gentlemen, as behind their interest in British culture (Morris).

These icons all associate with the traditional British class hierarchy, public schools, and country life. That Alexander McQueen is in royal favour makes its products more attractive to Chinese consumers than other high-end brands from the US or France. Moreover, Alexander McQueen’s dandy style being niche, intricate, with a touch of British traditional culture, is particularly welcomed among BOBOs, since anyone who can discern Aesthetic elements in Alexander McQueen’s design must be a member of the literati in the first place. This love of exclusivity is characteristically Paterian. Alexander McQueen thus immediately distinguishes itself from other famous designers, such as Louis Vuitton—a brand so popular among the lower middle class as to become “vulgar” in China (Kuo). “LV is for coal mine owners’ wives” is a catchphrase in China to describe LV’s extreme popularity among tuhao or baofahu.⁷⁷ Alexander McQueen’s relation with the British monarchy accordingly attracts a large number of generally affluent Chinese consumers. Those particularly interested in collecting its dandy menswear are highly likely to be young BOBOs, who understand the artistic concept behind the design and enjoy the exclusivity of knowing the cultural reference to Victorian Dandyism.

3. Distinctions: Class and Anglophilic Taste in Modern China

Within the Chinese BOBOs’ love of secrecy and sense of cultural superiority in the choice of clothing brand, lies a more straightforward Anglophilic phenomenon in the famous cultural “*Bi-shi-lian*” or “disdain chain” (*Southern Weekly*). This term, essentially describing hierarchies of disdain between groups or classes of people, had

⁷⁶ Royal Warrant is the royal seal of approval that can only be granted by the Queen, her husband the Prince of Edinburgh and her son, the Prince of Wales. It’s given to businesses that have supplied the royal household for at least five years. ([Luxury Marketing](#))

⁷⁷ Tuhao and baofahu are derogatory terms for under-educated upstarts.

long been widely circulating on Chinese social media before the influential *Southern Weekly* officially discussed it as a social phenomenon in China. There are altogether sixteen disdain chains so far, which cover almost everything associated with culture. The following are relevant to my discussion:

- British TV Dramas > American > Japanese > Korean > Domestic > Hong Kong/Taiwanese > South-Eastern Asian
- British Rock & Rolls Bands / Domestic Indie > European/ US pop > K-pop > J-pop > C-pop
- Niche Art-house films (from Eastern Europe/South America/the Middle East) > British art-house > Continental European > Japanese/ Korean/ Domestic > HK old-school art-house > Hollywood blockbusters > Bollywood (esp. Aamir Khan's productions) > domestic commercials
- BBC/ITV > ABC/CNN > Phoenix (HK) > CCTV.⁷⁸

The first chain of TV dramas for instance, connotes fans who love British dramas looking down on folks who prefer US shows, and the latter looking down on people who enjoy Japanese and Korean soaps, and so on. It is obvious that anything associated with British culture stands at the top of the disdain chain, except the film genre chain, but even that chain ranks British art-house films only second to niche independent films from comparatively obscure countries, which exhibit the exclusivity valued by BOBOs. The consumption of British cultural products, therefore, indicates refined taste and even higher social status.

Chinese netizens and some social commentators have dismissed this social phenomenon as millennials' pretentiousness and low self-esteem. The Chinese celebrity psychiatrist HU Shenzhi argues that millennials desperately latch onto disdain chains to find a collective identity, so as to confirm their existential value by denouncing others with different tastes (*Southern Weekly*). Some Internet comments have attacked them for being "chongyang meiwai" (lit. xenophilic), perceived as a crisis of China's traditional culture, invaded by Western cultural products. This anxiety about Western cultural invasion is evident in China's increasing emphasis on and promotion of Chinese traditional culture since Xi Jinping came to power (Xi). However, the disdain chain is, in fact, a mirror of China's internal tension between different classes grappling for superiority in the changing social environment. The discourse of taste and lifestyle can be fruitfully interpreted in light of Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital:

Of all the conversion techniques designed to create and accumulate symbolic capital, the purchase of works of art, objectified evidence of 'personal taste', is the one which is closest to the most irreproachable and inimitable form of accumulation, that is, the internalization of distinctive signs and symbols of

⁷⁸ CCTV stands for China Central Television, not to be confused with closed-circuit television.

power in the form of natural ‘distinction’, personal ‘authority’ or ‘culture’. The exclusive appropriation of priceless works is not without analogy to the ostentatious destruction of wealth; the irreproachable exhibition of wealth which it permits is, simultaneously, a challenge thrown down to all those who cannot dissociate their ‘being’ from their ‘having’ and attain disinterestedness, the supreme affirmation of personal excellence. And as is shown, for example, by the primacy given to literary and artistic culture over scientific or technical culture, the exclusive possessors of a ‘vast culture’ behave no differently when they fling into the potlatch of social encounters the time they have spent without thought for immediate profit in exercises as prestigious as they are useless. (*Distinction* 282)

Evidently, the consumption of cultural products, especially literary and artistic products directly indicates distinct social status. Due to the invisible, with “no immediate profit” nature of cultural consumption, anyone who can afford such invisible consumption stands at the top of the social pyramid, inasmuch as it requires economic as well as cultural capital at the same time. China’s newly formed wealthy class has reached the tipping point, where they turn to cultural consumption to demonstrate their status, rather than flaunting wealth through designer products, although the majority still do—as I discuss in a more nuanced manner in the following section.

BBC notes that the Chinese wealthy class now is studying and also taking their children to study Western manners and lifestyles (Mangin). The locus of class competition has shifted from the shopping mall to a subtler cultural arena. Good taste in works of literature, films, songs, for example, endorses a higher social status. Britain, to be more specific, England, has become the top-notch taste indicator, which can be demonstrated with the help of *The Making of the Chinese Middle Class* (2017) by Jean-Louis Rocca, David Brooks’s *BOBOs in Paradise* (2000), and Paul Fussell’s *Class: A Guide through the American Status System* (1983).⁷⁹

Rocca’s up-to-date research on China’s middle incomers reveals an intriguing panoramic view of the well-to-do communities in Mainland China’s major cities—27 provincial capitals, plus Beijing and Shanghai. He observes that entering the 1990s, the re-launch of a series of ambitious economic and political reforms enabled educated people, officials, and businessmen to enhance their living condition to an unprecedented level. Then hyper-paced forming of a consumer society changed a whole generation’s lifestyle, life goals, and moral values (21). Nowadays, according

⁷⁹ In Chinese, the United Kingdom is 英国. 英 pronounced as “Ying” short for 英格兰 (Ying-ge-lan) is a transliteration of England, while 国 means country or kingdom. Therefore, to most Chinese people England is equivalent to Britain or the UK; and Ireland is often mistakenly included in the concept of Great Britain among the general public. So there is always an ambiguity between England/English and Britain/British in Chinese. Throughout the essay I use “English,” “British,” and “Irish” respectively to acknowledge the fact that I am aware of their differences and nuances whereas they are not actually distinguished in Chinese.

to Rocca, “[u]ndoubtedly, most Chinese people reject the lifestyle that dominated during the Mao period” (126). Indeed, since the establishment of the People’s Republic of China, egalitarianism was the dominating value. There was no clear-cut class system and, theoretically speaking, it was the goal of a communist country to create a classless society and to annihilate any prejudices that divided and discriminated against compatriots. Since 1978 (and the change has accelerated in the 1990s), when DENG Xiaoping reformed the economic system from a state-run economy to a socialist “market economy,” the proletarian uniform and austere lifestyle was disregarded as *tu* (un-modern and unstylish).⁸⁰ On the one hand, people of the 1980s and the 90s generation, with privileged backgrounds economically or culturally speaking (or in most cases both), want to get rid of the image of proletarians and desperately wish to distinguish themselves from both the poor and from their peers. They want to become people of refined taste. On the other, as Rocca points out, post-Mao China is undergoing a “civilising process,” the Chinese government and the mainstream media are promoting new morals and patterns of behaviour for the mass population to adopt, thereby transforming into “modern and respectful consumers, autonomous subjects, and conscious citizens—exactly the qualities associated with the middle class” (120). Therefore, the *habitus* (Bourdieu and Elias), the conduct of life (Weber), taste, and so on of the middle class are constructed as role model qualities.

Nevertheless, this is not to suggest that all members of the newly formed Chinese middle-class establishment think alike, any more than it is true to say that all members of any establishment think alike.

Within the Chinese middle class, a division is drawn between the “classic” or “standardized,” and the “hip” or “avant-garde,” to borrow Rocca’s terms; I use BOBOs (more a cultural study term than a sociological term) for the latter demographics (149). The former group is composed of businessmen and government officials who favour the traditional communist ideology and Confucian values, and form the major demographic keen on conspicuous consumption. They also constitute the wealthy elders who still have memories of the hard times. The cohorts who want to construct the new *junzi* masculinity in China are mostly from this “classical” middle class.

The “hip” middle class, by contrast, is mostly composed of people working in the cultural industry. They are comparatively much younger than “the classic” and have a much higher level of education. In most cases, they stand on top of the disdain chain. They despise “the classic” while sympathising with the working class, genuinely wishing to better society and help those who are suffering, according to Rocca’s interview at Tsinghua University (119). To some extent, the “hip” middle class is the new elite class if there is such a thing as an upper class in China. Most

⁸⁰*Tu* meaning “earth” and “soil,” is used as a derogatory adj. to connote backward, unstylish, and stupid. It is widely used to describe country bumpkins.

Chinese people regard this highly educated demographic role models, and their habitus or lifestyle are considered trendy and morally good.

Lifestyle is a matter of political power in governing self and others in Foucault's discipline discourse. Hence the Chinese government endorses this well-educated lifestyle to improve the whole population's sensitivity to "highbrow culture," and to strengthen its own power as well. Rocca notes that the on-going campaign of developing people's *wenming* (civilization) *suzhi* (quality) is aimed at "modernizing" Chinese people (122). "The strong emphasis on improving the overall quality of the population" is intended "to shrug off the image of China as the "sick man of Asia" and to ensure that China is never again humiliated by foreign powers" (122). Rocca argues, "China seems to be in a situation in which it has to impose itself as a superpower and demonstrate its capacity to stand up to developed nations, this capacity depending on its "quality" (122).

To achieve such a goal, a positive national image of China is demanded. Members of the well-educated demographics are aware of and uncomfortable with the negative international image of Mainland Chinese individuals, especially formed by package tourists from the "classic" middle class—rich but ill-mannered—in recent decades. With more than 100 million Chinese traveling in 2014, misbehaviour has gripped headlines worldwide (Taylor; Guilford; Wan). Over the past few years, the behavior of some Chinese citizens when abroad has become a source of ire for the nation. Online, many stories of Chinese tourists showing a lack of civility or behaving selfishly have become viral sensations: China's state media branded a group of mainland airline passengers "barbarians" after they scalded a Thai stewardess with hot water and noodles and threatened to blow up the plane during a flight from Bangkok to Nanjing in 2015 (Wan). There was the Chinese teenager who defaced a 3,500-year-old temple in Luxor, Egypt in 2013, and the group of Chinese tourists who washed their feet at the Louvre in Paris the same year. In October 2014, China's National Tourism Administration even issued strict guidelines on how to behave while traveling (Taylor; Guilford). Chinese president XI Jinping has also been critical of how some Chinese travelers have behaved on trips (T. Chen). Xi asked that Chinese citizens should be "more civilised when traveling abroad" (T. Chen). This is by no means to say that the negative image of Chinese people only emerged from group tourism. However, we should not underestimate that the negative stereotype is largely formed by tourism, inasmuch as it is the most direct, present, and frequent mode of international interaction between countries. Package tourism is the most common mode of travelling among the "classic" middle class, due to their lack of education in English language.

Constructing a role model class is essential in constructing a decent national image. In the case of role models for manners, Norbert Elias insists on the importance of the French court under Louis XIV in the establishment of "good manners," the bourgeois imitating the noble (qtd. in Rocca 121). However, unlike European civilizations in the 18th century, contemporary China has no class

universally considered honorable to be imitated. Nevertheless, the Chinese community generally respects well-educated people due to the Confucian celebration of studiousness and bookishness. Interestingly, the absence of aristocracy makes American social hierarchy and its upward socio-economic mobilisation relatable to Chinese, for both systems are dependent on university hierarchy. As Paul Fussell observes:

In the absence of a system of hereditary ranks and titles, without a tradition of honors conferred by a monarch, and with no well-known status ladder even of high-class regiments to confer various degrees of cachet, Americans have had to depend on their college and university hierarchy. (128)

This could also explain the Chinese BOBOs, who are mostly graduates from Tsinghua, Peking, and other elite universities standing on the top of the social strata. This demographic generally wishes to cast a good influence on society as a whole, according to Rocca's survey at Tsinghua (121). However, American society still has a pseudo-upper class—Ivy League graduates of the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) establishment according to Brooks' discussion (13). Their privilege is to some extent hereditary, and people from other tiers look up to them (Brooks 13–54). The highly educated Chinese younger generation, on the other hand, is not as secure about their cultural authority, especially when the “classic” middle class is still in the dominant position. “Good manners and etiquette are resources the upper classes mobilize to impose their domination,” argued by Rocca (122). However, the majority's economic capital is newly acquired so everyone is an upstart within the middle class. Hence, no one has the absolute authority over another to impose his or her habitus.

In search of a role model class for China to construct a new national image and reinforce their cultural superiority, “the classic” middle class digs into China's Confucian tradition and uses junzi as the moral paragon, while the younger generation looks outside of China, finding the British gentleman as their guide, which may be due to their overseas education background. The changed perception of the ideal role model for masculinity is directly reflected in their changed fashion. Fashion scholar Colin Mcdowell points out that, “We dress to reinforce how we see ourselves, and also very importantly in this case, help us to belong. The signals we send to others are reflections of our visions of ourselves” (9). In the next part, I study Chinese male students reviewing themselves in comparison to different masculine images from other countries. By adopting the local men's fashion, they reveal a deeply troubled but diverse exploration of a new Chinese masculinity.

4. Chinese Men's Transformation in the Age of Metrosexual-Cosmopolitanism

Much as the cultural disdain chain reveals, a ranking of social status based on one's cultural capital remains omnipresent in contemporary Chinese society. This is

also reflected in the ranking of the countries in which Chinese students study. In an article published by *Shishang Xiansheng (Esquire China 2017)*, this social hierarchy is visualised in men's fashion trends adopted by overseas Chinese students. British men's fashion, and those who have adopted the British fashion, sit on the top of the fashion disdain chain, looking down on styles from Continental European countries, America, Japan, and South Korea, while China's domestic men's fashion lies at the bottom to be taunted.

The article entitled “Studying Overseas Changes Your Appearance Dramatically” summarises different men's fashion trends from representative countries that host a large number of Chinese overseas students. The article begins with a critique of Chinese male students' sloppy and scruffy appearance before they study abroad (*Esquire*). Their almost zero awareness of men's fashion and even personal hygiene are attacked. The “high-school-kid” sporty style is mocked in the article and so are the clothing brands popular among Chinese boys who care nothing for their appearance. The article argues that once they study abroad, however, their appearances change fundamentally according to local fashion. It also notices that male students who have already finished their undergraduate degree at home will not change as drastically as students who study overseas from high school. This is stated to be because teenagers have not yet formed their stable habitus and values, thus more likely to be influenced by the environment they live in under peer pressure. However, a sociological study or psychological analysis goes beyond the scope of my study, thus I omit explanations of the difference between teenagers and young adults. In this chapter I use teenagers as the sample demographic who transform themselves to fit in the host country's standard for male beauty.

4.1. South Korea: Androgynous Looks of K-pop Boybands

Following the initial discussion of Chinese boys' scruffy appearance, the *Esquire* article reviews in a hierarchical order students who study in different countries. First, Korean men's fashion is represented by the “K-pop-boy-band style (nantuan xi)” The style, as the title suggests, is inspired and populated through South Korea's successful K-pop boy bands, whose genre is a mix of hip-hop and R&B, deeply influenced by the American counterparts. They usually wear oversized hoodies or baggy T-shirts, with ripped jeans, flashy snapback caps, and a lot of jewellery—bold rings for all fingers and gold chain necklaces (*Esquire*). Their fashion draws inspiration from American hood boys and rappers, while deviating from the macho “gangsters” stereotype, for boy-band style also includes bold makeup, such as eyeliner, foundations and bright-coloured hairdo, which add up a gender-neutral look. Interestingly, despite their appearance often being ridiculed as effeminate, K-pop idols are growing increasingly influential among teenagers all over the world. Chinese boys studying in South Korea have adopted this style, and it continues to influence Chinese teen fashion back in Mainland China.

The popularity of K-pop style, apart from their eye-catching dancing skills, also comes from a craving for a provocative image that rebellious teenagers can identify with. The '90s generation grew up in a relatively more liberal and materially abundant environment than their parents' generation. Benefiting from the on-going "liberal education" campaign in China, they are able to develop their individuality on the one hand, and to battle the entrenched traditional values, gender-related discriminations, and academic pressures on the other. The provocative androgynous looks of K-pop boys, just as those extravagantly dressed Victorian "effeminate" dandies a century ago, encapsulate "going against grain" and "be yourself," always resonate with rebellious teenagers.

Not only do male students follow this iconic image, even queer females are donning such style to express their unique identity and challenge the entrenched socially constructed gender expectations. For instance, China's new boy band Acrush (A for Adonis, the astonishingly beautiful Greek god) gripped international attention, but actually this is a group of five girls dressed as teen boys. Their fashion is clearly influenced by K-pop style. Just by the glimpse of their picture (fig. 18), viewers could hardly tell the difference between this group and other K-pop boy bands. As *The Guardian* puts it, ". . .their country's gender conservatism has not stopped Acrush acquiring 750,000 followers before even releasing a single" (Haas). Clearly, the androgynous looks are much in vogue in China at the moment; thus, K-pop fashion sometimes becomes a gender statement that challenges China's traditional masculinity.



Figure 18. China's "Boy-Band" Acrush of Five Androgynous Girls

4.2. Japan: The Cool Japanese Men

Japanese style is comparatively "more refined and implicit," according to the *Esquire* article. The particular looks discussed are the "Shiogao" or "salt face" style

(see fig 19).⁸¹ The “salt face” is an ordinary looking face, but considered the typical “Oriental” looks.⁸²

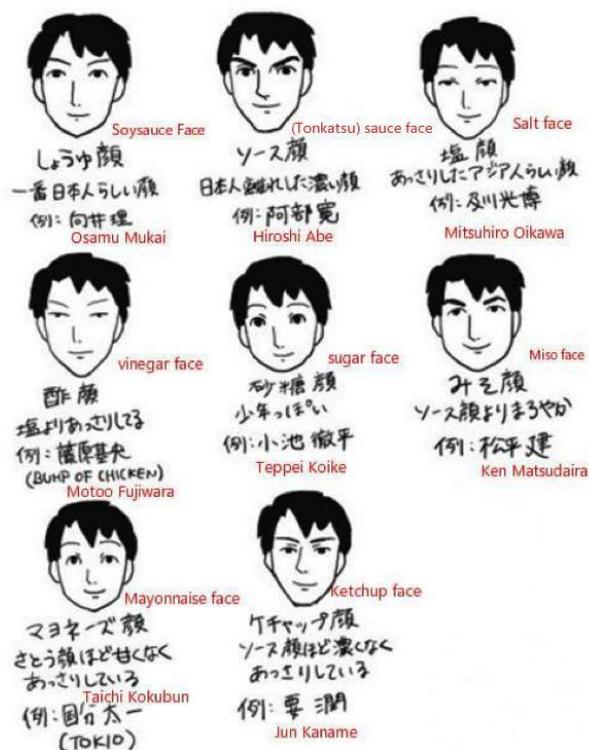


Figure 19. Different types of facial features of Japanese men

As opposed to their extremely gaudy *kawaii* (cute) fashion for young women, Japanese male fashion’s signature look has a low saturation in colour and loose cut in design. Interestingly, while the mainstream male clothing is casual and comfortable instead of stylish, Japanese men are meticulous about their faces.

The (Chinese) boy who sat next to you in high school used to be too lazy to wash his hair, now starts to keep neat beards, grooms his hair into stylish

⁸¹ Japanese community in cyberspace has categorised Japanese men into 8 types of facial features. There are faces of soy sauce, (tonkatsu) sauce, salt, vinegar, sugar, miso, mayonnaise, and ketchup. They represent different types of facial features found in Japanese males i.e. someone with a “sauce-face” looks like a Caucasian or an Eurasian person, while “salt face” in comparison is less defined.

⁸² It is important to acknowledge that East Asia has a wide variety of different ethnic groups who have very different facial features. Just within the Japanese archipelago, there are two major ethnic groups who have distinctly different looks, namely, Jōmon and Yayoi. People of Jōmon heritage are those “sauce face” people whose facial structures resemble Indo-Europeans. Whereas the Yayoi decedents are those who have “typical” East Asian face in Western stereotypes—slit slanted eyes and a flat face, which belongs to the Manchu-Korea ethnic group in ethnography term. The “salt face” has the facial features of Yayoi. For more information about different East Asian Phenotype please refer to <http://humanphenotypes.net/ManchuKorean.html>

braids or man-buns, and even trimmed his eyebrows after he stayed in Japan for a while (*Esquire*).

As the metrosexual culture began to take off in East Asia, the male eyebrow-grooming industry grew prosperous in Japan, especially in fashionable Tokyo. It is rather interesting that body hair management and body odour control are two important factors contributing to a new masculinity in Japan noticed by sociologists. *Cool Japanese Men* (2017) examined a range of self-help literature for Japanese businessmen of the younger generation, seeking to distance themselves from the outdated and “decidedly uncool image of the colourless and somewhat shabby salaryman,” which explores the need for men to become better listeners, as well as grooming rituals for Japanese businessmen, including eyebrow plucking and facials, as well as hair removal, face slimming, and aromatherapy—in direct contrast to the old guard of salarymen, described as “hairy-bodied, shitty old geezers” (Steger and Koch 96–97).

Similar to the Japanese “salaryman,” Chinese men are often fiercely criticised by media and mocked by Chinese middle-class women for their shabby looks, greasy hair and body odours. While Chinese women have grown increasingly stylish and attentive to their appearances, most Chinese men still celebrate the traditional macho and steely masculinity that values scruffy looks as an honourable badge of manliness. This appearance gap between the women and the men in China has already sparked heated discussion over the topic “Chinese men (’s appearance) do not deserve Chinese women” in online discussion and even in academic studies (Geng and Song 285; “中国男人外表配不上中国女人？”). The reason for this gap, contemplated by scholars on *Daily Zhihu*, is that “traditionally Chinese women are generally lenient to men’s appearance in the marriage market” (“中国男人外表配不上中国女人？”).

However, when Chinese students study in Japan alongside Japanese boys, the new Japanese masculinity starts to influence their own, especially under the strict Japanese female gaze. Indeed, these young men are aware of being observed by women, who often wield power as judges of what constitutes “cool” and “successful” masculinity (Steger and Koch). The changing Japanese masculinity is under the modern Japanese female gaze and the pressure of marriage. Personal facial hair management is an important indicator of a man’s personal hygiene and social status to Japanese women. According to research done by the ST Booking platform, “some Japanese equate looking good with success in life and thus they try to remove as much facial hair as possible in order to improve their facial appearances.” (ST Booking Blog). A well-groomed face becomes a class signifier that plays a significant role in dating and marriage market. Chinese students in such a context must change their perception of the “ideal man,” from the scruffy macho man to the refined urban metrosexual.

4.3. The US: American Sporty Masculinity vs. Chinese “Wen” Masculinity

In the previous two cases, male students’ changes are played out only in the dressing and grooming styles due to a similar Confucianism-based cultural aesthetics shared among China, Japan, and Korea. More fundamental changes are found in a totally different society, such as the United States. Chinese students in American society not only change their appearance sartorially, they also change their physicality by going to the gym, literally re-sculpting a new body to fit in American aesthetic standard for male attractiveness. The *Esquire* article notes that after living and studying in America for a while, male Chinese students start to train intensively in gyms. The more socially active will even post their well-trained and tanned body on social media to attract attention, as opposed to their previously pale, smooth face at home (*Esquire*). This interesting change might be attributed to the entirely different aesthetic standards for male beauty between China and America. Instead of connoting sexual virility and health in general, in China bulging muscles and tanned bodies are culturally associated with lower class and even barbarity, especially that in Pre-modern Chinese literary works.

Chinese traditional aesthetics for an ideal man was never the muscular type for most of its pre-modern years—apart from Tang and Yuan Dynasty, since the ruling class of these two periods were not heavily influenced by Confucianism, nor were they Han Chinese.⁸³ JIA Baoyu, for instance, from *The Dream of the Red Chamber* (1791), as argued by Lee Oufan, bequeathed the aesthetic ideal of a Chinese dandy in the image of a young, handsome, and extremely sensitive “pale-faced” scholar (*baimian shusheng*) (261).

Further back in history, WEI Jie from the idiom “kansha WEI Jie” (appeared in official document around AD 648), ZHANG Sheng from *The Story of the Western Wing* (14th century), and ZHU-GE Liang from *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (14th century) all endorsing a scholarly masculinity over physical masculinity, or Wen (literary) masculinity over Wu (martial) masculinity, or mind over body in Chinese culture.⁸⁴ Scholars such as Kam Louise, Derek Hird, SONG Geng, and YU

⁸³ Rulers of the Tang dynasty are descendants of the nobilities of Northern Wei Kingdom (北魏) whose rulers are of Xianbei (鲜卑) ethnicity. To know more information of Xianbei and its integration with Han Chinese culture, please refer to *The Legend of Xianbei Empire* (2008). Rulers of Yuan dynasty are Mongolians.

⁸⁴ WEI Jie (卫玠), who died at age 27, is famous for his jade-like beautiful face. He is described as pretty, soft, and frail. He died from “being looked at too much,” which formed the idiom “Kansha Wei Jie (看杀卫玠)” recorded in *Jin Shu* (《晋书》AD 648). *Jin Shu* notes that large crowds of people expected to take a look at Wei’s beautiful face, making Wei rather stressed and eventually dead. His beauty and fragility were even mentioned in a famous chronological history book *Zi Zhi Tong Jian* (《资治通鉴》AD 1084), compiled by SI-MA Guang in Song Dynasty.

Junwei have done thorough study on China's preference for *wen* over *wu* masculinity in its long pre-modern years.⁸⁵ In particular, in Pre-Modern China, the ideal male image was representative of a *wen* version of masculinity. Pre-modern Chinese rulers used Confucianism and the civil service examination (*keju*) to rule the country, and thus created a scholarly class of sedentary gentlemen whose studiousness was worshiped by the public (Yu 1).

Furthermore, the political institution of *keju* played a crucial role in disciplining the body. Behaviors that did not conform to the Confucian standards, which stressed civility and education, were considered barbaric. Thus was an anti-physical culture that strengthened "the gross contempt towards those who choose to engage in physical labor" constructed (Yu 1). Ideal male figures in classical literary works, therefore, are mostly described as pale-faced or "jade-faced," and frail scholars, well educated in liberal arts. They are tall and light in build. They might even be military officers but never big-muscled warriors. ZHU-GE Liang is a stark contrast to General ZHANG Fei in *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* for instance. Both are household names of military officers not only in China but also the whole Confucian cultural circle. Zhu-ge is depicted as a pale-faced, handsome, tall, and light-built young man, who uses his brain to win battles; whereas Zhang is a muscular, hairy, dark-skinned warrior, famous for his physical strength but often criticised for his short temper and recklessness. Zhang Fei-like characters appear in almost every classical Chinese novel, and always serve as a foil to make the scholarly male characters stand out. In public stereotypes, they are labeled "shallow mind with a strong body" (*tounao jiandan sizhi fada*). Even after China entered the modern era, the cultural memory of and the fantasy of scholarly gentleman masculinity has remained the most ideal Chinese masculinity.

Contrarily, physical fitness plays a huge part in constructing the ideal masculinity or manhood in American society, especially on the American campus. Inheriting the concept of "muscular Christianity" and frontier "Empire builders" from the British Victorians, by the 1880s American Protestant churches endorsed the movement of "muscular Christianity" inspired by Charles Kingsley and Thomas Hughes, and promoted the culture of physical vigor (Putney). During the 1920s, The Golden Age of Sports in America, displays of male physicality were celebrated especially in elite universities (Nurik 11). President Lowell, with Harvard's personal record, acknowledged a growing interest in and stress on college athleticism during this period. Through football, masculinity was publically contested and proven.

⁸⁵ Kam Louie's *Theorising Chinese Masculinity* (2002) is widely cited for his conceptualization of the historically hegemonic models of masculinity in Chinese culture through the *wen/wu* (literary/martial) dichotomy. The *wen* masculinity has been criticised in YU Junwei's work on imperial China's sedentary culture, while the masculinity dyad has been explored further in relation to contemporary China's popular culture in Derek Hird and Geng Song's *Men and Masculinity in Contemporary China* (2017).

People who played football were glorified and even deified, as *Harvard Crimson* remarked: “[the athletes] cease to be mortal”; and as a professor exclaimed: “Who are the college gods? They are the athletes And they are worshipped, bowed down to, cheered, and adored,” in Percy Marks novel, *The Plastic Age* (1924; Nurik 12).⁸⁶ In his short story “The Bowl,” F. Scott Fitzgerald also captured such rapturous worship of college football players, and manhood constructed through collective sports in the pursuit of personal glory, physical vanity, but also honourable conduct (such as loyalty and hard work; Fitzgerald). Football heroes, therefore, epitomised the ideal man in the US.

In modern pop culture, especially in teen dramas, sports team captains are usually the most popular and admirable “alpha male” on the American campus. Such celebration of physical culture has encouraged muscle-building as a practice to enhance sexual attractiveness to potential partners, as well as bonding occasions between young men for future career partnership. The *Esquire* article comments that although Europeans have often criticised American men for their bad taste in fashion, their perfectly trained bodies make even casual generic clothes look stylish on them (*Esquire*).

Chinese boys on American campuses, although not completely rid of the cultural glorification of the sedentary gentility, go to the gym and join sports teams more in this changed social context. The wen masculinity is not revered in American society at all; instead, studiousness is often poked fun at in the form of malicious racial slurs by their American classmates. The traditional wen masculinity also results in emasculating stereotypes of Chinese men, and by its cultural extension, East Asian men in popular culture.

It is not rare that men of East Asian (mostly of Chinese heritage) background are depicted as socially awkward, geeky sidekicks of protagonists in Hollywood blockbusters or teen dramas. While the white muscular hero is saving the world, and saving the girl (of course), his bookish, technologically proficient, “naturally” subordinate and physically inept Asian sidekick(s) is a constant comedy trope to make the white protagonist stand out. They are nerds who could “never in a thousand millenniums be a threat to steal your girl,” as *Fresh Off the Boat* creator Eddie Huang puts it in a *New York Times* piece (Wong).

Indeed, rarely are Asian-American and East Asian men in general seen/represented as attractive leading men, or depicted as romantic options in mainstream media in the West. This is problematic, for representations are not only symbolic of deeper societal sentiments—they are reflective of society’s power relations, noticed by media scholars such as Steffi Lau (3). “Inextricable from ideology, representations are a form of hegemonic power,” argues Lau (3). Stuart

⁸⁶ “A Chimera to Kill,” *The Harvard Crimson*, October 13, 1923, 2.

Hall also writes, “Stereotyping tends to occur where there are gross inequalities of power” (258). Such effeminisation of Asian men results from the entrenched racial hierarchy in America, at least since the mid-1800s, when the establishment launched xenophobic immigration laws, including the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. Asian immigrants were seen as “human oddities in the minds of whites,” Chiung Hwang Chen wrote in a 1996 academic paper (qtd in Wong).⁸⁷ Apart from the deliberate racial exclusion and demonization, the Confucian anti-physical culture, as a completely different cultural system at odds with the Western muscular culture, has further “othered” Chinese students, and even confirmed such racial stereotypes.

Therefore while Chinese overseas students have hardly integrated into local communities in American campus life, their lifestyles and their perceptions of an ideal masculinity have nonetheless changed under the omnipresent racial and sexual gaze.⁸⁸ When it comes to the aesthetic standard for “hot guys,” societies around the world almost all tend to default to traditional Caucasian standard (a narrow nose, large, round eyes, fair skin, and muscular, tall build)—proven in the booming plastic surgery industry in South Korea, to make people look more like Eurasians, or even completely Caucasians.⁸⁹ Influenced by such a beauty standard, even within the East Asian community, people prefer “Occidental” to “Oriental” looking persons as potential partners, let alone non-Asians (particularly females; [Rudder](#)).⁹⁰ This

⁸⁷ Since the 1880s, Chinese men arrived in the U.S. *en masse*, fulfilling a need for cheap labour (Shek). Fearing intermarriage, the U.S. government passed anti-migration laws threatening to revoke the citizenship of white women who out-married. Reinforcing these fears was the circulation of Yellow Peril propaganda portraying Asian men as “sexually deviant, asexual, effeminate” predators (Shek 381). Furthermore, job opportunities were limited to traditionally female work such as laundry and cooking, which further exacerbating their effeminate image (Takaki). Essentially, early conceptions of Asian-American masculinity were constructed to be disempowering in relations with employers and white society (Chua & Fujino; Wong)

⁸⁸ Many studies made on Chinese students’ cross-cultural integration have shown that Chinese international students have been frustrated by the difficulty of assimilating into the local culture. The persistence of stereotypes of Chinese internationals by American students ranged from favourable (i.e. nice/friendly, smart/hardworking) to highly unfavourable (i.e. oblivious/annoying, bad at English/not assimilated, shy/not social). For more detailed analysis please refer Heng, Tang T. “Voices of Chinese International Students in USA Colleges: ‘I Want to Tell Them That ...’”. *Studies in Higher Education*, vol 42, no. 5, 2017, pp. 833–850. Informa UK Limited,

⁸⁹ The beauty ideal in East Asia has been largely Westernised in recent decades and not only limited to females. According to “Asia’s ideal beauty: Looking Caucasian” written by a Korean plastic surgeon Dr Anthony Youn, “while Asian plastic surgeons claim that these procedures are meant to retain their patients’ ethnicities and make them generally more attractive, I don’t buy it. To put it bluntly: Facial plastic surgery on Asians [the Korean-Manchu phenotype to be accurate] is about making a person look as Caucasian as possible” ([Youn](#)) many more journalism, including CNN, the Guardian, the Independent and more, have contemplated the Asian craze for Caucasian looks.

⁹⁰ A blog post from [OkCupid](#) co-founder Christian Rudder in 2014 wrote that user data showed that Asian men fell at the bottom of the preference list for most women. Shown in its 2009 data, even Asian women rated Asian men (10%) 6% less attractive than White men (16%); not to mention

preference for Caucasian seems directly reflected in online dating profiles' casual racism—"sorry, no Asians (men)," where Asian men are ranked "the least desirable" (Wong; Rudder). In such a dire situation, building a muscular body is, to a large extent, a prerequisite for Chinese students to have a healthy life and a stable mental state, since dating failure is often a traumatic experience.

Moreover, among Chinese boys studying in America there have been strong aspirations to change the stereotypical image of the physically weak, "sick man of Asia" out of a patriotic sentiment. They "force" themselves to metamorphose their bodies to challenge the stereotype. This is closely related to the Chinese state's agenda of building a new national masculine image for participating in international affairs. As Rocca mentioned, this agenda seeks to change the inferior status China has held in the political as well as racial strata in Global affairs since the Opium War (1842). Through these elite Chinese males' hard work in the gym, China is trying to build a strong masculine body to demonstrate its modern and "strong" masculinity. It amounts to a statement that Chinese men can also be physically attractive and powerful, and will never be humiliated again by foreign powers.

4.4. Continental (Southern) Europe: Flamboyant Fashion and Cultured Males Going "Home"

The most fascinating finding in the *Esquire* article was that students who study in Europe do not change as dramatically as students in my previously discussed countries. It is not that they fail to follow the local fashion as other students do. Rather, the article finds that those who choose Europe as their destination have already had a strong interest in or have been influenced by European cultures at home. Their fashion and lifestyles have already been following European trends before they travel. "At home they watch British TV dramas, attend French art exhibitions, and listen to Elton John to be spiritual Europeans, hence studying in Europe to them is their bodies finally united with their souls that have long been living in Europe" (*Esquire*). The aspiration to take on European tastes or to be a "spiritual European" is matched with their immediate adoption of the flamboyant (Southern) European fashion. Indeed, we dress in order to clothe whatever perception we have of ourselves and to shape how we wish the world to perceive us.

Art students studying in countries like Italy and France, those famous for fashion and art, as well as liberal attitudes towards male peacocking, especially are no longer held back by judgment or fear of effeminacy. They become free-spirited and even flirtatious. "They start to wear bespoke suits or capri pants showing off their colorful gaudy socks while laughing confidently under the Mediterranean sun" (*Esquire*). Fashion scholar Colin McDowell points out that "[c]lothes are like the decorative and often concealing masks that liberate revelers from the responsibilities

women of other races all rated Asian men negatively (- 11%, -16% and -12% respectively from Black, Latina, and White women). The data focused on straight users.

and repressions of daily life. They allow a new spirit to take over. We can be bold where we are normally shy, flirtatious when usually modest, provocative instead of correct” (2). Those Chinese students, apart from those forced by their parents to earn an overseas degree, have already become stylish fashionistas and metrosexuals before they travel, but they may not be courageous in sartorial expression for fear of judgment back home—Chinese society is still a collective culture and generally frowns upon loud individual expressions, such as wearing “bold” clothing. Their abundant economic capital enables these young men to afford extravagant tastes, while their rich cultural capital keeps them away from the vulgar taste usually found in the notorious *baofahu*, “a disdainful term for those who were not well educated in their youth but made a great fortune overnight under the reformist state,” even though the *baofahu* could be their parents (Song and Hird 64). Their higher social status within the societal structure correlates with the phenomenon that European cultures are seen as more refined and more highbrow than the rest of the world, thus enabling BOBOs to stand on top of the disdain chain in China.

Admittedly, from a post-colonial lens the term “spiritual Europeans,” used to describe those young elite students, alarmingly reveals the colonial mentality, attacked by Frantz Fanon and Edward Said, in which the Western or “blue oceanic” civilization is seen as superior to Chinese or “yellow earth” civilization. Yet from a cosmopolitan perspective, this case is much more class-based than racially charged. In a globalised modern world, trendsetters and taste indicators are gradually standardised. The good tastes of Paris, London, Milan, and New York are very similar to those in Shanghai, Moscow, Mumbai, Cape Town, São Paulo. Florence art, Shakespeare plays, Tagore and Rumi’s poems, Ming vases, Hokusai’s prints, Russian ballet are equally valued as masterpieces, regardless of their geopolitical backgrounds. Therefore, a Chinese BOBO’s interest in European high art should not directly result in a post-colonial discussion of the uneven development, inasmuch as the love of beauty is universal and hence should not always be boxed by national, racial, and religious pigeonholes.

Simply because Chinese BOBOs are from a non-white racial background, we immediately jump on the conclusion that their interest in European cultures must result from their colonial past, is racism. People who hold such views assume that only Westerners appreciate European art, while non-Western audiences cannot unless “brainwashed” by the ideological power wielded by the West, in Edward Said’s account of *Orientalism*. The term “spiritual Europeans” connotes the pretentiousness of the BOBOs aspiring to a modern and cosmopolitan version of “wen” masculinity, but should not be understood as colonial mentality.

Chinese boys want to become cultured, urban cosmopolitan gentlemen, with knowledge of highbrow culture from around the world, and good etiquette. This also includes not being coy or expressing taste and identity through fashionable garments. When these boys were home, however, there was always an anxiety about fashionable men, essentially a form of homophobia and the fear of effeminacy.

The universal prejudice against effeminacy (degeneracy) is combined with China's proletarian culture, which celebrates frugality, making Chinese young metrosexuals rather hesitant to fully explore this flamboyant masculinity when in China. Whereas the European countries mentioned in *Esquire* are comparatively more encouraging. For BOBOs, studying in Europe, immersed in European cultures, and donning trendy local clothes, they are finally going "home."

Homeland in the age of globalisation is a constructed idea, especially for people who migrate to study and work. As Avtar Brah rightfully points out, "'home' is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination" (Brah 192). Young Chinese BOBOs have developed a European taste and flamboyant dandy masculinity. However they are frowned on in their geographical home, whereas they feel more welcomed in the foreign land.

4.5. Britain: The Role Model Masculinity

When it comes to the image of an ideal man, the suave, stylish, attractive, and, most importantly polite man, the stereotypical image will immediately appear in a Chinese mind—a tall, slender, and debonair man in a top hat, dressed in perfectly tailored double-breasted suits with a black umbrella in hand, and possibly wearing a monocle and smoking a pipe—the British (mostly English) gentleman. This image has been entangled with the history of the British Empire and its cultural influences in the Far East. The ideal masculine image of the British used to be a cultural model pursued by elite scholars during the Chinese Enlightenment era, and later became a politically charged synecdoche for Western democracy to liberal-minded Chinese scholars.

British fashion is the last but most important mentioned in the *Esquire* article, that standing at the top of the fashion hierarchy. They write: "Chinese male students who study in Europe have an outstanding fashion sense, but it is those who study in Britain has the most exquisite taste" (*Esquire*).

Yinglun (Eng-lon) style has always been much-admired in China.⁹¹ Even those not following fashion will immediately recognise it from the signature look of plaid shirts and bowties (*Esquire*). The article notes that after the box office hit *Kingsman* (2014) was released in Chinese cinema, British style became the most popular high-tier fashion there. "Unlike those 'Florence peacocks' borderline on gaudy style, Prince of Wales's tweed jackets, trench coats, Chelsea boots, Oxford shoes, and so forth represents a gentleman's extraordinary taste" (*Esquire*). The deliberate mention of "Prince of Wales" reveals the fascination with the pomp of the British aristocratic

⁹¹ Chinese like to refer to the UK as 英伦 (ying lun), which literally is a word contraction of England and London (伦敦) and could be translated as "Eng-lon." It was very widely used before the appellation "gentleman," even though the gentleman himself may not come from London.

tradition, discussed previously. Tweed jackets suggested by the article are a royal favour; trench coats are populated by the British “national brand” Burberry, adored by Chinese customers; and Chelsea boots remind them of the rich district in Western London, which boasts the world-renowned Savile Row, bespoke suits tailored only for male members of the leisure class. Oxford shoes remind them immediately of Oxford University, of its first-class education and its elite class connotation, and particularly its (in)famous and exclusive elite club introduced in China via a close interaction with ex-prime minister David Cameron (Eton, Oxford) since 2015, the inaugural year of the UK-China Year of Cultural Exchange, and a controversial film, *The Riot Club* (2014). The film spotlights an exclusive all-male club of wealthy, attractive, and decadent young bachelors, often dressed in traditional uniforms to dine out, and based on the Bullingdon Club at Oxford, of which Cameron is an ex-member (see Fig. 20).

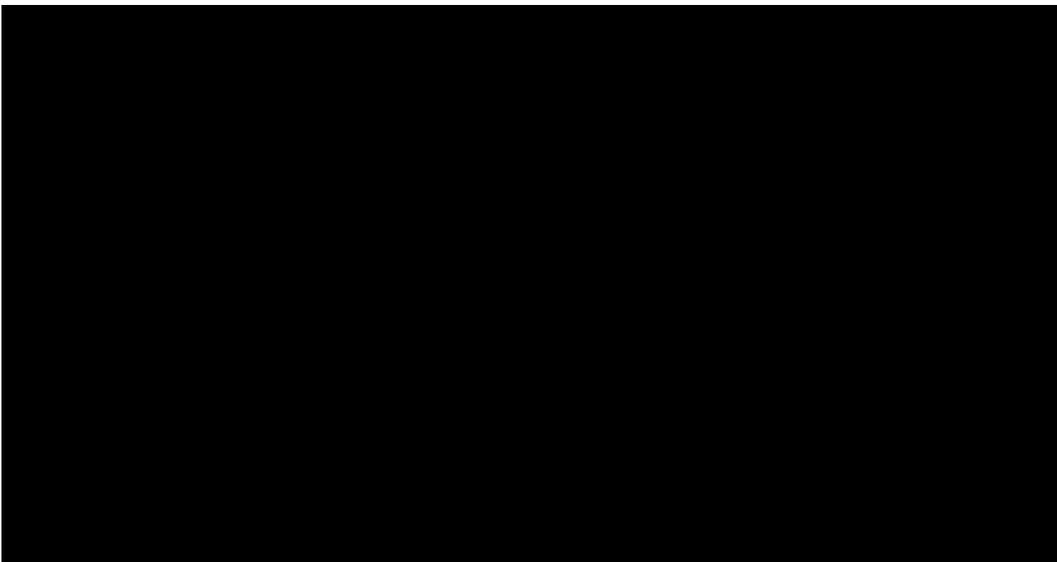


Figure 20 Posh boys of the *Riot Club*.

The classic garments of the boys of elite universities are the establishment “non-uniform” uniforms. These clothes betoken power, shorthand for showing authority:

The governors of tomorrow dress for formal occasions in subfusc: black or dark grey suits [...], white shirts, white bowties [...] academic gown (its length reflects the student’s academic prowess) and mortar board [...]. Such formality may appear vaguely ridiculous, but it marks the students out as special; it reminds everyone that these young people are part of an exclusive club. The occasions at which it is worn—entering college and graduation—are the rites of passage they must clear to claim their place in the Establishment (McDowell 165).

Even though class systems everywhere have become less rigid, the desire to preserve some kind of hierarchy lives on. In the West, even the egalitarian US

invented the WASP establishment and so come the fashions of East Coast “old money.” “The Ivy League has produced generations dressed to ape the British aristocracy, including blazers, striped ties, and country tweed” (189). In China, the otherwise ideologically egalitarian country is painstakingly trying to modernise into a society of a clear-cut hierarchy that has been manifested clearly in the disdain chain. “Men craved not a feeling of democracy when buying clothes, but the thrill of membership of the privileged elite club of the past” insightfully pointed out by McDowell (189). Hence, Chinese BOBOs despise the “too accessible” Louis Vuitton, but adore Burberry, Alexander McQueen, Tom Ford, and those who “regularly reference the elegant past of the dress of the English and European upper classes” (173). The suave gentleman’s symbolic meaning, apart from the political meaning behind, also indicates a craved lifestyle in China: wealthy, privileged, established, and Cosmopolitan (in British style).

4.5.1. China’s Interpretation of British Gentlemen

The image of British gentlemen constructed as the admirable *Other* is deeply entwined with the hope of Chinese intelligentsia, to revive China by imitating the late 19th-century British gentleman, ever since the New Cultural Movement. The British gentlemen image is youthful, vigorous, scientific, and even aggressive. The controversial documentary, titled *He Shang (River Elegy)*; 1988), which triggered the 1989 tragic Tiananmen incident, argues that the Oceanic civilization is an admirable Occidental *Other*, whose advanced technology, open-mindedness, and explorer's mindset form a good model for the Chinese or “yellow earth civilisation” to emulate (*River Elegy*).

Of course, this celebration of the Western image and civilisation is criticised as a potent example of “colonial mentality,” as Fanon argued, and Western “cultural imperialism” as that term is now defined in postcolonial and Said’s Orientalism discourses (X. Chen 51; Fanon; Said). Yet CHEN Xiaomei points out that when we consider *He Shang* within the cultural and historical context of post-Mao society, “it can be best understood neither as an example of Chinese naiveté nor of Western imperialism, but as a potent anti-official discourse employed by the Chinese intelligentsia to express what was otherwise politically inconceivable and ideologically impossible” (51–2). She coins “anti-official Occidentalism” in summarising this specific attitude towards Western civilisation, in which the Occidental other is constructed to express an anti-establishment sentiment.

In 2006, another influential documentary, *Daguo Jueqi (The Rise of the Great Powers)*, traced the rise of Western powers back to their marine force, their fearless explorers, as well as innovative thinkers—including Walter Raleigh, Francis Drake, Shakespeare, and later Isaac Newton, James Watt, and Adam Smith. These historical figures are particularly noted as men with the “best” qualities. But this time, instead of tapping so much into the Western political system, the documentary focuses on the economic success and military strength of the United Kingdom. This state-

endorsed TV series, made by CCTV-1, to some extent affirmed China's admiration of Western naval exploration and economic expansion in *He Shang*, but carefully avoided sensitive topics such as democracy. Therefore, the ideologically charged admiration of the West has morphed into an economic-driven appreciation of the Occidental Other, approved by the current regime.

The trope of the British gentlemen, then, encapsulates a rather complicated Chinese aspiration. First, the emerging elite class looks up to the well-mannered British lifestyle in the hope of acquiring a cultural superiority within the Chinese class hierarchy, which is endorsed by the government's agenda to enhance the *suzhi* (quality) of people, in terms of decorum and national image.⁹² Second, it is also a cultural memory of the glorified Occidental Other—both as a politically charged metaphor of modern democracy opposed by the totalitarian regime, and as a paragon of entrepreneurial spirit endorsed by the GDP-oriented government.

4.5.2. China's Interpretation of Dandies

Esquire China notes,

. . . your desk mate who used to roll in mud with you now becomes such a fashionable man who would rather lose his head than lose his hairstyle. After studying in the UK, he starts to have different hair-gels for different weather, classy watches, high-quality sunglasses, and hundreds of handkerchiefs for different occasions. He is indeed a dandy now (*Esquire*).

This dandy image adopted by Chinese male students conflicts with the “rough macho man” praised by current Chinese mainstream media. It is, however, reminiscent of the elegant Shanghai dandies of the Republican China, such as SHAO Xunmei, YE Lingfeng, MU Shiyong, XU Zhimo and so forth. In Ye's decadent, homoerotic love story, “Jin Di” (1931), the male protagonist modelled on Dorian Gray, is also meticulous about his appearance. The array of a male grooming kit, face powder, perfume, hair lotion, nail trimming kit is described at the beginning of the story to impress readers with a voyeuristic gaze into a Shanghai dandy's luxurious bedroom (trans. in L. Lee 258–9). This fictional Chinese dandy correlated with the Wildean mania of the early 20th century, when Chinese scholars graduated from British and Japanese elite universities and brought Aestheticism back with them. It is not a coincidence that when the total number of Chinese students in the UK started to soar, the idolisation of the suave elegant British dandy came back. The fascination and imitation of the “posh” gentleman/dandy and their attire is changing China's class-based masculinity. With its strong emphasis on the British aristocratic heritage, this new masculinity is easily criticised for its conservatism. But the British

⁹² The term *suzhi* in *He Shang* and Chen's argument, though previously translated as the “civilization quality” of a person by Rocca, I propose an alternative multi-layered meaning within the documentary's context. *Suzhi* is an open-minded attitude to new things; a courageous mind to challenge the status quo; an adventurous spirit; and a desire for constant self-development, which are absent from the Chinese masculinity depicted in the TV series.

gentleman tradition, be it in fashion or mannerism, is deeply rooted in the medieval chivalry and virtue, much admired by all cultures and actually is similar to classical Chinese ideal man—*junzi*.⁹³ Also, as McDowell argues, every modern person has a soft spot for nostalgia and throwback, and these throwbacks keep appearing not because the vast majority of people have a strong conservative attitude, but because most people like dressing up to recall an earlier, more formal age, and imagining themselves as part of that time and culture—a childhood memory of the romanticised fairytale past. One could argue that the return to the Shanghai dandies reflects a Chinese national nostalgia for 19th-century Wildean dandies.

The fetish for the Western style, the *Esquire* magazine suggested, includes the know-how of dress, behaviour, dining, and traveling “like a gentleman,” thus a superficial copying of this British lifestyle. The men’s fashion hierarchy discussed by *Esquire* reflects class stratification within Chinese society. This may be attributable to the long-standing association, conscious or unconscious, between Westernisation and modernisation in modern China. South Korea and Japan are the two closest Westernised countries, while sharing similar cultural background with China, hence two less challenging (economically and culturally) destinations for the lower middle-class Chinese students who seek to be “modernised.”

The US, to most Chinese families, is “the most advanced country in the world” and hence has been a hotspot to study for middle-class families since the Republic of China (1912–1949). Yet its huge popularity makes America neither niche nor exclusive enough for the BOBOs. By contrast, Europe’s smaller popularity among the Chinese international students, topped with its long history and various cultural traditions, is attractive specifically to those who have already had access to Western classical culture, usually indicating their higher cultural capital within the middle class. They are—what Geng and Hird observed in Chinese fashion and lifestyle magazine—“people who have *pinwei* (good taste)” (63). Cultural capital is “a social relation within a system of exchange that includes the accumulated cultural knowledge that confers power and status” (Barker 37). Thus, the construction of an ideal Chinese national masculinity primarily constitutes the newly formed BOBOs grappling for the dominating status in Chinese society.

5. The Oriental Dandified Gentleman—China’s New Masculinity

5.1. *Bazaar China*’s “Oriental Gentleman” Series

China’s imitations and explorations of its new masculinity are also reflected in its domestic men’s fashion and lifestyle magazines. The late 1990s to the present is often referred to as an important period within the consumer culture and the fashion industry because of the increasing media and cultural attention on the male body in

⁹³ About the Medievalism in Victorian culture and literature and its impact in East Asia, please refer to Oleg Benesch’s research on Victorian Japan and the “Global Medievalist Movement” and specifically his research strand [Medievalism and Imperial Modernity](#).

China. The mass media even dubbed this era *nanse shidai* (the era of male beauty), and the beauty standard is also increasingly lenient towards “effeminate,” delicate-skinned young males, or “little fresh meat,” who were condemned in the public eye, especially during the Mao era.⁹⁴

This era also witnessed the reintroduction of men’s fashion in China. The first day of 1997 witnessed the birth of the first men’s fashion magazine *Shishang Xiansheng* (*Esquire China*) in Mainland China (Renminwang.com). This magazine targeted new well-off and well-educated Chinese men. Not long after their initial issue, *Shishang Xiansheng* captured the attention of *Esquire* and started their copyright cooperation (Renmingwang.com).

Yet the magazine made no profit towards the end of the 20th century and *Esquire* even had to sponsor its Chinese version for a period, with a strong belief that after the 1990s economic reformation, the market would embrace men’s fashion magazines with the coming of Chinese middle class. They were right. During the 2000s, suddenly there was a huge demand for high-end men’s fashion guide in the market. Dozens of different new men’s fashion magazines emerged, and many have been in copyright cooperation with internationally renowned magazines, such as *GQ*, *L’Officiel Hommes*, *Vogue*, ever since.

The booming market for men’s fashion announced the trend of middle-class Chinese men defining a new masculinity that challenged the conventional perception of fashion as an exclusively feminine practice. Their interest in fashion and self-presentation characterised them as Chinese metrosexuals, if not yet dandies. Tracing this trend in fashion history, Chinese metrosexuals echo the 1980s American “New Man,” a movement encouraging men to consume fashion items and beauty products. Tim Edwards argues that the emergence of the men’s magazine was essential in constructing and perpetuating positive images of the “new man” and contributed to the legitimation of consumer-based masculine identities (qtd. in Warner 127). Similarly, current men’s fashion magazines in China constitute a beginners’ guide to a stylish lifestyle, encouraging Chinese men to take care of their appearance without feeling awkward or ashamed, and encouraging the positive image of a sophisticated urban dandy.

To some extent, this metrosexual movement is diversifying the Chinese masculinity. Admittedly, making a profit is the main incentive to this trend, but this consumerist drive indeed has ushered in a more liberal and welcoming era for men, in general and particularly for queer and metrosexual men. Chinese men, since the communist period, have been expected to be steely and macho, like war heroes, and so men who show interest in their appearance and show emotions are taunted as “niangpao” (Hird, and Geng). Ever since the age of *nase shidai*, that is contemporaneous with the issuing of Chinese domestic fashion magazines, men

⁹⁴ “Little Fresh Meat” is a common nickname for young good-looking people, especially male, in Mainland China.

who consume cosmetics and wear fashion-statement clothing have been gradually accepted and encouraged to have their voice in society. The change of their physical appearance then begins to have an effect on the Chinese men's mentality. Essentially a man styling his appearance is in fact expressing his identity through decorating the "surface." To tie this in historically, Wilde argued in his famous two lectures on decorative art—"House Beautiful" and "The Decorative Art"—that a beautifully decorated environment teaches people to appreciate beauty and developing wholesome values. So I would argue, that a decently styled and fashionably attired man could gain positive energy and confidence from his stylish reflection in the mirror and in other people's eyes—after all, appearance is an inevitable factor in constructing the psyche, a point supported by abundant research from sociologists and psychologists (Gruys; Johnson; Little et al.; Wong et al.). As fashion is also a manner of self-expression and a shield of our true identity, these men have more freedom than before to express their creative identity; the queer community, accordingly, has had a more positive representation on mainstream (social) media in China by sharing their knowledge in fashion and cosmetics.⁹⁵

The recent promotion of the "Oriental Gentleman" and "New Chinese Gentleman" in *Bazaar China* (fig. 22, 23) and in *GQ*'s initial issue (fig. 24) again reveals the aspiration to create a new national (male) image, both reminiscent of China's traditional ideal man and an imitation of the British dandies.

Bazaar China's "Oriental Gentleman" series features Taiwanese actor CHANG Chen (fig. 22) and Chinese-American actor Daniel Wu (fig. 23), both photographed by renowned photographer SUN Jun. Both actors are widely lauded for their junzi quality and widely acknowledged as perfect incarnations of the "Oriental Gentleman," young, well-off, well educated, especially in liberal arts, with a strong sense of fashion, yet not blindly following a trend. The cultural memory of Junzi, which values scholarly quality, is reflected in the emphasis on their education. CHANG Chen's knowledge in Chinese classical literature is admired in the Sinophone entertainment industry while Daniel Wu's scholarly family background and his hard-earned degree in architecture at the University of Oregon are also oft-lauded by his fans. Their cultured background singles out them from the majority of Chinese actors, who although are very good-looking, receive a relatively poor education and thus are often associated with vulgarity.

The zealous admiration of *caizi* (handsome and knowledgeable male scholars, sometimes used interchangeably with junzi but with an emphasis on appearance) in China could date back to the Wei and Jin dynasties (AD 220–589). This period is known for its liberal social ethos toward homosexuality and "effeminate" aesthetic standards—ideal men were supposed to be as beautiful, clean, wearing flowers,

⁹⁵ Just like Jeffre Star—a pansexual transgender internet cosmetic celebrity—in the West, China's most influential beauty guru is not a woman but [LI Jiaqi](#) (李佳琦), a "little fresh meat" whose beauty is praised by media as more delicate than a woman and is allegedly gay.

fragrant as women (see fig 21).⁹⁶ They were also required to master the “six skills (六艺)” i.e., Mannerism (礼), Music and Poetry (乐), Archery (射), Charioteering and Equestrian (御), Literature and Calligraphy (书), and Mathematics (数; “Rites of Zhou”; J. Zhang; T. Zhang; Qian).



Figure 21. A flower worn junzi/caizi in Song-dynasty style costume

This cultural memory of and craving for caizi is reflected in the Chinese remake of a successful teen drama, *Meteor Garden 2018* (2018), in which the handsome and “posh” male leads all excel in academic performance, not usually the case for their Western counterparts, as male leads in American teen dramas such as the *Gossip Girls* (2007–2012). However the ideal junzi image is hardly visible in Chinese real-life mass media, inasmuch as good-looking actors are mostly poorly educated—mostly college dropouts and high school graduates, while cultured “celebrity scholars,” such as YI Zhongtian, YU Dan, LIU Xinwu, are for the most part not visually appealing to the younger generation. Therefore, the aspiration for a junzi or “perfect gentleman” who can combine good looks with intelligence is rather pronounced in China’s teen dramas, and this Bazaar China’s “Oriental Gentleman” series.

The attraction to the British gentlemen and dandy in contemporary China, closely linked to China’s fascination with the British elite education, in particular,

⁹⁶ Men wearing flowers is a fashion statement since Wei and Jin dynasty and becomes popular in the Song and Ming dynasty. The Six Arts were practiced by scholars existed before Confucius but became a part of Confucian philosophy. Men who excelled in these six arts were thought to have reached the state of perfection, a “perfect gentleman” (Modern Chinese Religion I (2 vol.set) 816; “Rites of Zhou”; J. Zhang; T. Zhang).

following the huge success of *Downton Abbey* (2010–15), *Thor* (2011), *Les Misérables* (2012), *Sherlock* (2010–17), in Mainland China. The league of “gentlemen actors,” such as Dan Stevens, Tom Hiddleston, and Eddie Redmayne, became household names and dazzled Chinese viewers with their elite educational background. In fact, these actors are responsible for the recent Anglophilia in China’s cyberspace to a large extent.⁹⁷ Their physical attractiveness is amplified by their admirable educational background. On many social media portals, fans have gone on to research British actors’ education background, summarised reports listing all the British actors and actresses with an Oxbridge background, and concluded that British celebrities in the acting industry are the most admirable because they are “not as shallow as their Hollywood and Chinese counterparts” (镜中猫|51neko; Fa; Addison; Ren). These “gentleman” actors are highly educated while physically attractive, hence meet the Chinese classic standard for a caizi. Chinese audiences admire them zealously and consider them Britain’s “treasure boys” (Ren; “Why British Actors are Mostly Oxbridge Graduates...?”). They set the example of model masculinity in the eyes of the Chinese public. To some extent, they are the “charismatic leaders” of Max Weber’s discourse (1111–13) and Chinese elites’ imitation of such masculinity emphasises that well-educated BOBOs are looking for a cultural authority confirmed by a universally acknowledged role model.

⁹⁷ Tom Hiddleston, nicknamed 抖森 (Dousen) in Chinese, has 637k + followers on Weibo with only 8 posts. A recent ads he did for Centrum’s Chinese market sparked controversy among his international audiences but proven to be very successful in Chinese market with 17.6K retweets, 7.9K comments, and 35.5K likes on Weibo and many commented that they went to buy Centrum at once after seeing Hiddleston is the spokesperson. The negative reaction from the international market (mostly Western audiences) is triggered by the video’s girlfriend first-person perspective narrative showing Hiddleston as a loving boyfriend or husband making breakfast for “you”. While international audiences find this narrative creepy and intrusive, his Chinese fans are thrilled at Centrum’s correct understanding of the unique relationship between celebrities and fans in China. Such relationship is quasi-romantic, as most of his fans consider Hiddleston as their boyfriend and husband. It is self-evident as under the Centrum weibo post, many commented “I’m not just his fan, I’m his wife.” (Tom Hiddleston’s Weibo).

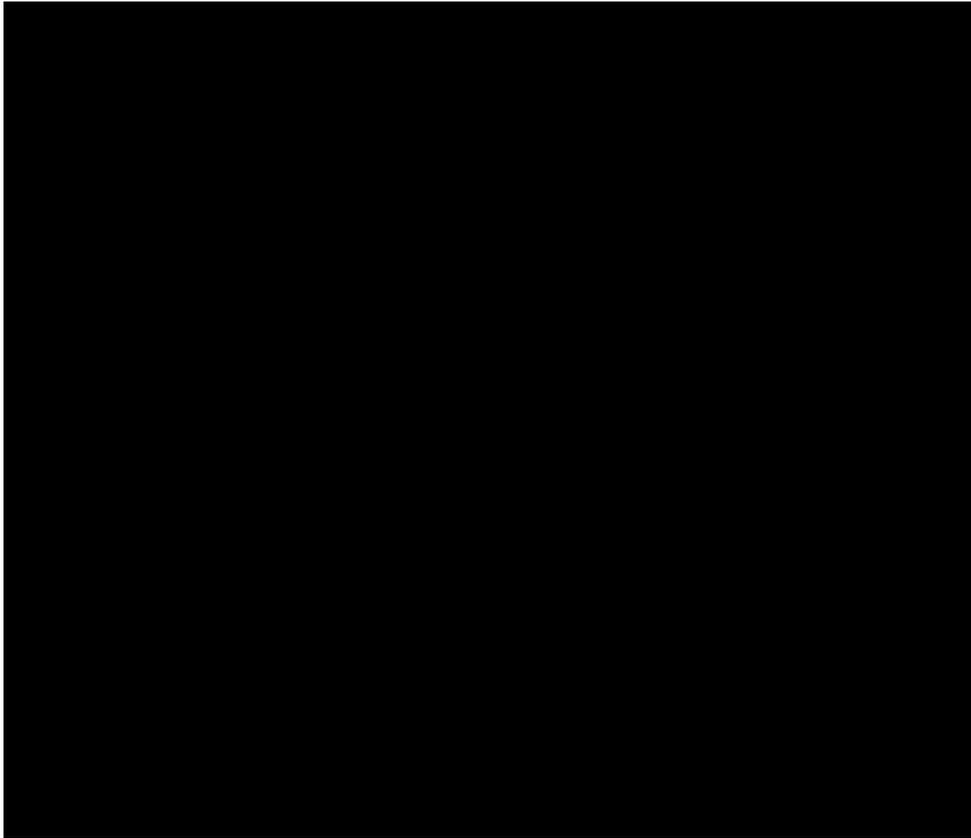


Fig 22 Actor CHANG Chen for *Harper's Bazaar China* 2016 photographed by SUN Jun, remade by me

Such models are found in CHANG Chen's photographic series, entitled *Dongfang Shenshi* (Oriental Gentleman), the background uncannily similar to Whistler's "Peacock Room," with the typical chinoiserie noticeable just from a glance at the picture (see fig. 22). The gilded red-screen-background reminds well-read BOBOs of the opening paragraph of *Dorian Gray*, where Wilde describes the beautiful fleeting effect created by the flying birds on a Japanese screen (*DG* 2).



Figure 23. Actor Daniel Wu in the “Oriental Gentleman” series, *Bazaar China*, photographed by SUN Jun.

The last picture of Daniel Wu’s series features lotuses, white peacocks, and a long wooden chair on which Wu is half reclining, a typical depiction of Orientalism in western art (See fig 23). The background of Wu’s pictures all might be described as typical Oriental aesthetic scenes, with the birdy screens and red-crowned cranes

associated with Taoism's pursuit of eternal life in Chinese traditional paintings. These objects, appearing in the background in both actors' photographs, are also symbols closely associated with the 19th-century Aestheticism, not a coincidence since Wilde had a strong interest in Oriental art and Taoism (McCormack 73–105). Not to mention the Aestheticism and the Decadence were both deeply influenced by Japonisme and Chinoiserie.⁹⁸ Wu, dressed in Alexander McQueen's S/S 2016 collection with the dragonfly pattern, is an even more obvious homage to Wilde's flamboyant style, let alone the brand itself is an ardent follower of Wilde's style and artistic ideas in design.

Additionally, the "Oriental Gentlemen" series was shot at the Royal Pavilion in Brighton, England. The interior design of the Pavilion is a famous representation of Chinoiserie—the imagined exotic China that became the ideal artistic form in the 18th century, and pursued by activists of the Aesthetic Movement (Walter Pater, James Whistler, Oscar Wilde, and the Pre-Raphaelites Brotherhood and so forth) towards the end of the 19th century. Additionally, Wilde once delivered a public speech in the famous Chinese music room with a Chinese dragon decoration ("Discover Oscar Wilde"; "Oscar Wilde in The Royal Pavilion").

Thus, the whole "Oriental Gentleman" concept becomes a fascinating composite between the 19th-century Aesthete idea of China and a modern Chinese photographer's innovation—creating an ideal Chinese gentleman image by juxtaposing both cultures. The photographer Sun Jun is reputed to be the "Chinese poet of photography" ("Poet of Photography—Sun Jun"; Yeliu). He studied Chinese traditional painting from an early age and graduated from the eminent China Academy of Art. Sun's signature is in combining modern-day photograph technology with the brushwork of Chinese traditional paintings, which aims to apply modern techniques in classical Chinese Gongbi drawing and to restore the glory of classical Chinese aesthetics in this age of globalisation (sunjunphoto.com).

Considering his background in Classical Chinese Painting and his intense interest in Chinese classical culture, shooting the "Oriental Gentlemen" series in England seems off the mark. However, just as the BTS footage states, "seeking the East in the West," the photographer wants to show readers that the lost Chinese traditional grace and beauty—largely due to wars and political movements—can be rediscovered in the West where 18th-century Chinoiserie and 19th-century Aestheticism have preserved its classical beauty although a twisted Western version (Harper's Bazaar).

⁹⁸ Further information about how Wilde and the aesthetic cohort are interested in chinoiserie please refer to Qi Chen's article "Aristocracy for the Common People: Chinese Commodities in Oscar Wilde's Aestheticism" and Elizabeth H Chang's *Britain's Chinese Eye: Literature, Empire, and Aesthetics in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (2010).

To rediscover Chinese traditional aesthetics in the late Victorian context reflects the Occidental Other image as essentially modern Chinese artists constructing the Self, rather than being subjected to Western cultural imperialism. The fascination with the British Gentlemen, therefore, is China's reminiscence of its *caizi*, demolished and demonised by the Anti-Confucianism and Anti-Federalism movements of the past. However, this is not to say that the "Oriental Gentlemen" is a complete copy of the past *caizi*. Because of its Western origins, this new Chinese masculinity has also incorporated the British dandy's cosmopolitan sophistication. This is a good balance between the East and West in which the young Chinese modern and artsy men might develop their cultural identity. They would not like the "classic" middle-class model, who have archaic moral values and nationalistic parochialism; neither would they like those of the "white-washed" Chinese diaspora, who desperately wish to assimilate into the white community at the cost of their cultural identity, and demonise their Chinese identity out of a racially charged self-hatred (Neff; Chang; Guillermo).

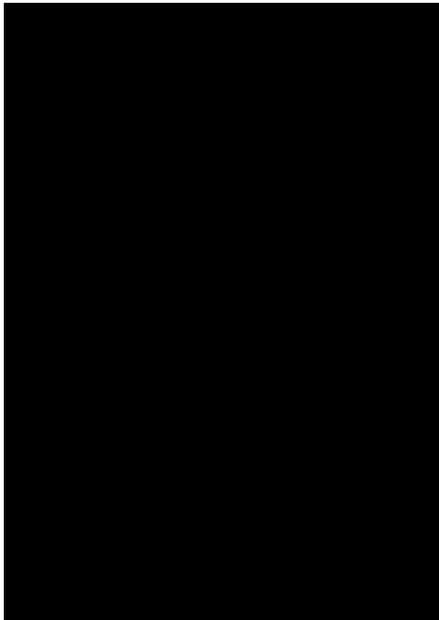


Figure 24. The cover of *GQ China's* Initial Issue 2009.

5.2. The New Chinese Gentlemen

In the business world, on the other hand, Derek Hird argues, the reintroduction of capitalism in post-Mao China has spurred the emergence of the "new *junzi*" (Hird). Therefore, the new Chinese masculinity echoes the collective craving for the entrepreneurial spirit, imaged in *GQ's* cover where the three celebrities (actors SUN Honglei, Andy Lau, and China's first internationally famous director —ZHANG Yimou) are all dressed in sleek modern business suits (see fig. 24). Their standard suits are in clear contrast to *Bazaar China's* dandified and flamboyant design, echoing the two perception of new Chinese masculinities in the beginning of this chapter: one image is dandified and bohemian, welcomed by the younger and rebellious "hip" middle class; the other is traditional and industrial

represented by middle-aged businessmen and government officials. Regenia Gagnier argues that “the bourgeois beauty, [is actually] the beauty of order and civility [...] of stable hierarchical relations... (144). The bourgeois beauty here attributable to the Chinese middle-class demographic’s Anglophilia, especially inspired by Victorian Gentlemen. The desire for order and civility are, to some extent, a desire for becoming the establishment and for restructuring China’s social hierarchy based on elitism, after decades of communism that claimed to eradicate the class system. The “classic” middle-class demographics enjoying such bourgeois beauty come as no surprise as they form the establishment at the moment. The BOBO mantra is anti-establishment, and yet these men currently battle with the classic middle-class for cultural authority, if not political authority. To achieve their goals, the BOBOs must first become the establishment and thus, their paradoxical interest in and desire to be the rebellious Victorian dandy parallels their interest in the self-restraint British gentlemen.

6. Conclusion

Even as Hichens’ opening of *The Green Carnation* summaries Wilde’s influence in London’s upper-scale society as an arbiter of taste,⁹⁹ Wilde (through his Dorian Gray mouthpiece) tried to resist being reduced to simply a fashion guide (an “*arbiter elegantiarum*” in the Chapter 11 of *Dorian Gray*). He wanted his audiences to be more interested in what lay beneath the flamboyant dandy persona, hoping that they would invest in his idea of art and social critique. Ironically, his modern Chinese readers remain more attracted to the “Dorian”/dandy side than to the “Basil”/ artist side of Wilde. Departing from the visually exciting dandy fashion, I investigated the national psyche of modern China’s aspiring young bourgeois demographics, and specifically in this chapter, who see Wilde as a class and taste indicator rather than an artist. I discussed Chinese BOBOs’ fascination with Wilde-inspired Retro/ Neo-Victorian style populated by modern high-end fashion houses that encapsulate BOBOs’ fascination with British gentlemanliness and dandyism. I analysed Chinese male students’ fashion makeover in different countries, which directly investigates Chinese masculinity in comparison to those of other countries from South Korea to Great Britain in a bottom-up hierarchical order that supposedly reflects taste and class. The fact that the British “gentleman fashion” sits on the top of the hierarchy upholds that the Chinese BOBOs’ Anglophile sentiment. Modeled on the British traditional class system, the Chinese BOBOs are painstakingly constructing a new social order in which class boundaries are demarcated by taste and cultural capital instead of pure monetary wealth owned (questionably) by the “classical” middle class—the current establishment. The millennial BOBOs wish to be the model class and become the new establishment themselves.

⁹⁹ I discussed this novel in Chapter 3. Wilde and his aesthetic cohorts’ declaration of their bohemian lifestyle is well preserved in. The writer himself was one of this cohort, and befriended with both Wilde and Bosie. The main characters in the novel are known to be closely based on the two celebrities.

After the Industrial Revolution in England, in came the celebration of industrial middle class virtues and code of behaviour, in which “Gentleman,” a bourgeois term became widely used during the 19th century Britain. However, the ideal masculinity is not a monolithic concept dominated by Victorian gentlemen. “Gentlemen” were attacked by the Aesthetes to promote the image of the Dandy (although, as we discussed, these two appellations eventually could be interchangeable). Yet in China’s imagination, gentleman mixed up with Victorian dandies, are shorthanded for the romanticised image of British gentility in general, connoted elite education, refined taste, moral goodness, but also adventurous and care-free personality. The stereotype of the gentleman is perpetuated by “posh boys” in films and dramas, highly educated actors, and of course, fashion magazines. While “gentleman” is an imported term from the West, gentlemen remind modern Chinese of the highly respected Confucian Junzi in their long pre-modern era. Therefore, the British gentleman is an image both exotic and familiar that holds Chinese audiences’ fetishistic gaze and aspiration. The image of the British gentleman also encourages the younger generation to explore cosmopolitanism and thus to be neither obsequious nor arrogant when interacting with different cultures. As China is increasingly participating in international affairs, the lesson of the 1842 Opium War—a direct result of Qing China’s arrogance towards foreign cultures—has always been a warning sign embedded in Chinese elites’ minds.

Post-Deng China has fundamentally morphed into a consumer society where the younger generations desperately wish to exhibit their individuality and distinguish themselves from their peers. Just a few years ago, this goal was achieved through conspicuous consumption of luxurious brands. Recently, the consumption of refined cultural products that symbolise cultural privilege and exclusivity has become the golden fleece. Against this backdrop, Alexander McQueen’s Wildean suits seem to perfectly summarise Chinese BOBO aspirations: a famous designer brand that enables them to exhibit monetary capital and simultaneously show off their cultural sophistication through the exclusive reference to Wilde-led dandyism. The dandy’s cross-over quality or paradoxical nature—to borrow from Bristow—thus comfortably sets dandy on the pedestal constructed by Chinese elites.

**Part III. Our Aesthetic *Tongzhi*
(Comrades): Oscar Wilde's Legacy
in East-Asian Queer Popular
Culture**

Chapter 5: “Aesthetic 同志” and Wilde-inspired *Danmei* Fiction

1. Introduction

In this chapter I focus on Chinese millennials from middle-class backgrounds, who revere Oscar Wilde and create queer subjects in *danmei* literature, a popular literary genre, influenced by Japanese *shōjo* culture. I analyse an influential Weibo post, exploring this demographic’s social-economic background through examining a paid, big-data service. I also focus on two *danmei* fictional works, one pairing Wilde with the “Phantom” Erik, from Andrew Lloyd Webber’s West End success—*Phantom of the Opera* (1986), the other pairing Dorian Gray with Erik (played by Gerard Butler) from the 2004 musical film. The case study aims to understand special features of *danmei* created by the liberal-minded Chinese millennials, those growing up in the “global queering” age, and seeking a living from queer activism, but who also want to develop political voices in China’s relatively conservative society, where Confucian morals and authoritarian censorship control China’s cultural expression especially on gay and transgender subjects.

2. Background Analysis of the “Aesthetic 同志 (Comrades)”

I employed a big-data analysis service provided by Sina Weibo¹⁰⁰ to sketch out the socio-economic and cultural background of the “Aesthetic 同志” in the Sinophone world.

On 17 May 2018, Coca-Cola China’s official Weibo account published a post comprising nine pictures of famous queer, or allegedly queer, celebrities, photoshopped into Edward Munch’s painting *The Scream* (1893). The post included the English hashtag #Fearless and #InternationalDayAgainstHomophobia in Chinese. The caption reads, “Don’t be afraid of the rainbow. Everyone is born to be different. Thank you for existing and making this world diverse and colourful.” (CokeChina [Weibo](#)). The nine well-known celebrities include Wilde, David Bowie, Vincent Van Gogh, the ancient Chinese poet QU Yuan, Alan Turing, Leonardo Da Vinci, Marilyn Monroe, Andy Warhol, and Hong Kong singer and actor Leslie Cheung. Wilde is the icon leading the whole group. The caption on his poster runs, “Oscar Wilde was not afraid of never growing up—Coca-Cola China, We Care” (Fig. 24).

¹⁰⁰ Sina Weibo is the most influential and popular social media in Sinophone world.

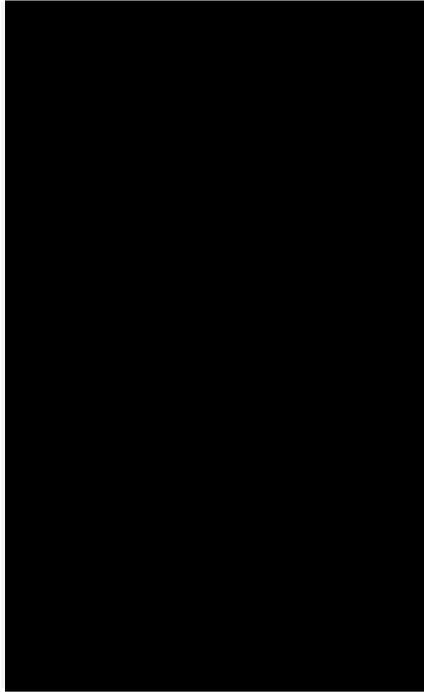


Figure 24. Oscar Wilde in Coca Cola China's Poster

Thus Wilde's image again appears in a Chinese commercial, represents a big step for a foreign company in Mainland China: to use queer celebrities to both promote products and also to publicly demonstrate their solidarity in the LGBTQ+ movement.

While the relatively conservative government neither officially incriminates nor persecutes those of the LGBTQ+ community, liberal attitudes are mostly felt in China's metropolitan areas (as far as Weibo's service could reach).¹⁰¹ A heteronormative social norm still dominates and the public generally frowns upon the LGBTQ+ community.¹⁰² Chinese society still considers homosexuality something "dark" and the government generally holds a "Four Nos" strategy towards this community: "no inquiry (bu wen), no mentioning (bu ti), no talking (bu shuo), and no response (bu li)".¹⁰³ Queer and especially gay and lesbian demographics in Mainland Chinese's mainstream media remain marginal. For instance, two famous queer films, *East Palace, West Palace* (1996) and *Lan Yu* (2001), are known internationally but have never been released in Mainland Chinese domestic cinemas.

¹⁰¹ China decriminalised homosexuality in 1997 and depathologised it in 2001.

¹⁰² China has a very uneven development across its vast territory. China's metropolitan cities are highly modernised and are very liberal to LGBTQ+ community, while its less developed areas still practice gender discrimination against women (e.g. Fujian and Shandong provinces) and hold serious homophobia towards LGBTQ+ people. However, citizens of metropolitan areas like Shanghai, Beijing, Chengdu, Hangzhou, Guangzhou generally have a very tolerant and welcoming attitude towards LGBTQ+ community. Among them Chengdu is the most liberal city and thus earned its nickname —"Gaydu" for its sizable high-profiled LGBTQ+ community. Further reading about Chengdu as "Chinese gays' paradise," please refer to "[How Chengdu Became China's Most Inclusive City](#)" and "[Why Chengdu is China's Most Fashionable City.](#)"

¹⁰³ These slogans collected in DING Runze's conference paper at the Oxford Chinese Studies Summit 2018 (DING)

Nevertheless, China’s cyberspace is generally rather liberal and friendly to LGBTQ+ demographics, even to the point of holding prejudice against heterosexuals in some ACG (anime, comics, and games) fandoms. Some extreme fujoshi and fudanshi believe that only people of the same gender can truly understand and love each other. Such prejudice is reflected in a Chinese Internet catchphrase “*xingbie butong zeme tanlianai*,” meaning “how is it possible to have a romantic relationship with people of a different gender” (*moegirl.org*). However, such online friendliness towards queer demographics is barely visible in Chinese daily life, excluding the metropolises. As such, Ding argues that the Chinese Internet has simply “created” the gay community, which would otherwise be invisible in “ordinary” Chinese lives (DING). Also, the online liberal attitude towards queer people and especially toward the gay community is very much an age- and class-based Internet phenomenon.

According to the statistic “Breakdown of internet users in China from December 2014 to December 2017, by age,” published on *Statista*, the internet culture in China is equivalent to youth/young adult culture (see Fig. 25). Thirty percent of Chinese internet users are aged 20–29, followed by a 24% cohort aged 30–39, born in the 1980s. The two groups of people form the generation Y of China, or commonly known as the Chinese millennials. Considering that the cohort born in the 1990s are the major users, this study focuses on the ‘90s millennials (“90 hou”), growing up in a period of China’s soaring economy.

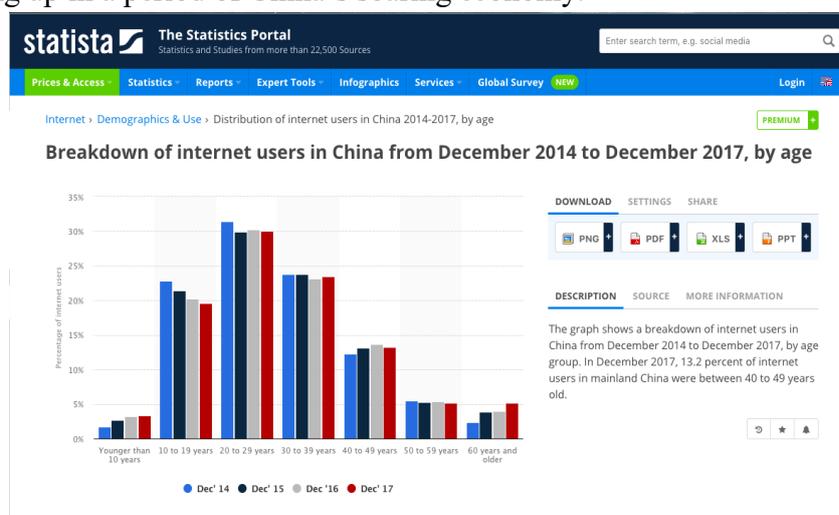


Figure 25. Flow chart of “Breakdown of internet users in China from December 2014 to December 2017, by age.”

China’s fast economic growth facilitated a prosperous and comparatively open social environment. The “90 hou” have received a much more cosmopolitan and liberal education than their parents. Meanwhile, they have seen a proliferation and acceleration of transnational queer cultural flows unprecedentedly.

On entering the 2000s, the world witnessed a growing “global queering” trend, noticed by scholars (such as Lim Eng-beng, *Brown Boys and Rice Queens*, 2014; and Fran Martin, “Queer Pop Culture in the Sinophone Mediasphere,” 2016). The latter points out,

“[in East Asia as] a regional microcosm of the wider processes of cultural globalization, [the queer cultural flow] is linked to the twin forces of the transnationalisation of sexual imaginaries and identities, and the transnationalization of media, due largely to the spread of Internet connectivity” (191).

Indeed, during the early decades of the 21st century, cultural products around the world have flooded into China without too much censorship from the government. Young people have been exposed to films, TV series from Western countries, manga (comics), anime, and video games from Japan, and (since 2005) the phenomenal *Hallyu* or “Korean Wave,” featuring K-pop and K-drama from South Korea. The Manga, Anima Gaming (MAG) or ACG culture from Japan is the most omnipresent subculture both online and offline. Even people not actively interested in anime and manga have been exposed to famous anime characters such as *Pokémon* through commercial products and the collective campus lifestyle. Therefore, this generation of young Chinese people has been consciously and unconsciously influenced by the Japanese MAG culture, in which the *yaoi* or BL element plays an important role in shaping their liberal attitude towards the queer community. In *Boys’ Love, Cosplay, and Androgynous Idols* (2017), YANG Ling comments, “Chinese-speaking popular cultures have never been so queer as in this digital globalist age” (Jing, Ling, et al. XI). The high visibility of ACG products directly affects Chinese young adult perception of the queer community, which is supported by the following data.

According to *Weibo*’s big data analysis service, people who retweeted and commented positively on the Coca-Cola post were mostly “90 hou,” those from urban middle-class, based overseas or in China’s metropolises, and are interested in ACG culture.



Figure 26. The Overview of Coca Cola China’s Post’s Big Data Analysis.

博文概况



Figure 27. Big Data Analysis of Retweetings and Coverage

发布设备分布

Users' devices analysis

- iPhone: 42.74%
- PC: 7.09%
- 华为: 6.23% Huawei
- 小米: 2.87% Xiaomi
- OPPO: 2.57%
- VIVO: 2.14%
- 三星: 1.09% Samsung
- 魅族: 0.99% MEIZU
- 坚果: 0.40% Smartisan
- 其它: 33.86% Others

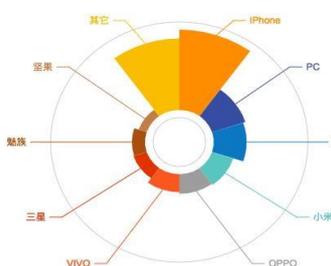


Figure 28

转发者地域分析 Retweeters' location analysis

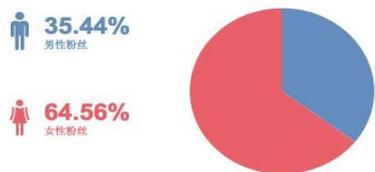


评论者地域分析 Commentators' location analysis



该条微博转评用户在地域分布上较为集中，转发者主要分布于海外、北京、广东，评论者主要分布于海外、北京、广东。

转发者性别分析 Retweeters' gender



评论者性别分析 Commentators' gender

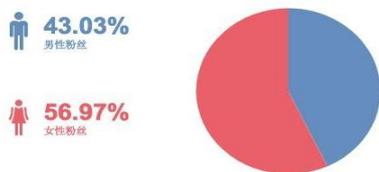


Figure 29 Users' Location and Gender Pie Charts

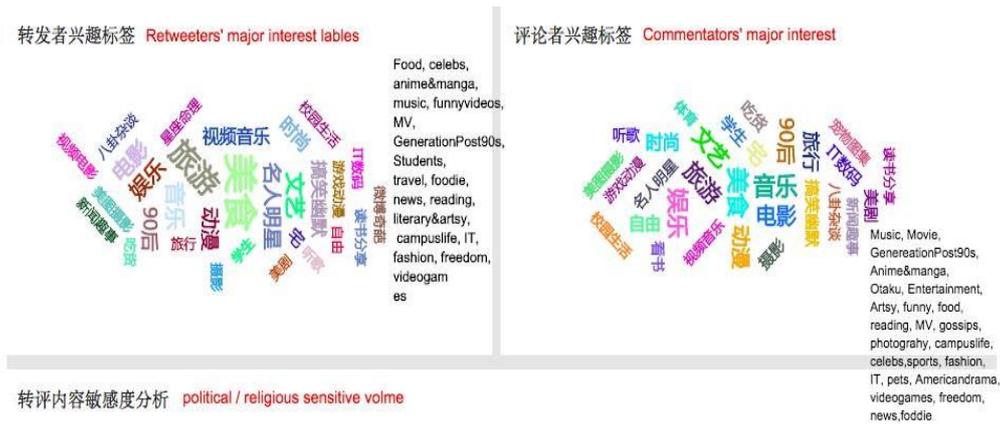


Figure 30 Users' Interest Keywords

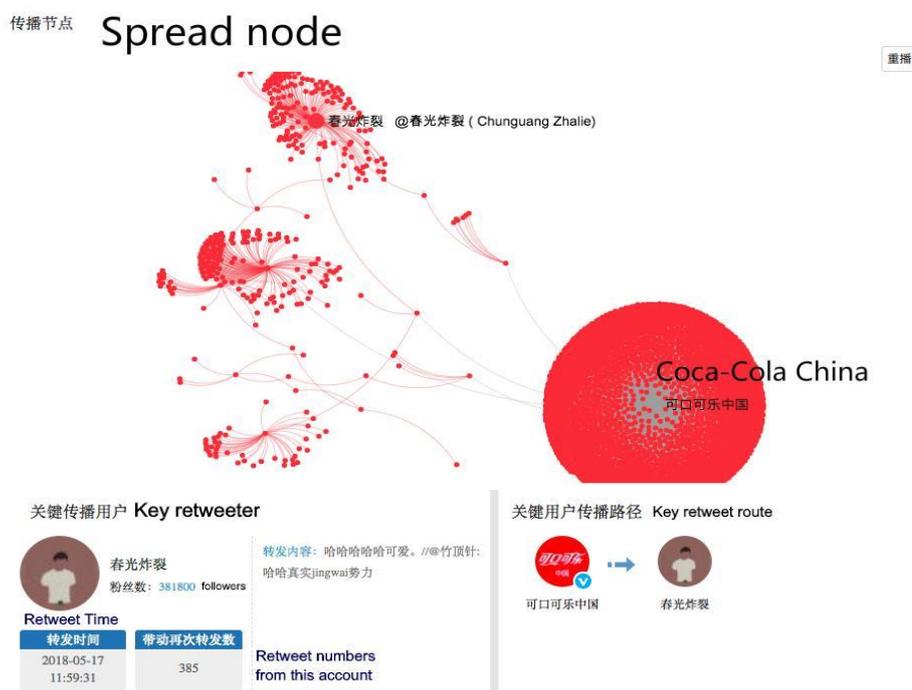


Figure 31. Analysis of Spread nodes

This influential post (see Fig. 26) reached over 20 million Internet users, and among the 11,729 retweets (8,262 effective retweets; Fig. 27), 40% have been published via iPhone devices, highlighting users' privileged socio-economic background (Fig. 28). According to Figure 29, they are also mostly based overseas and in highly modernised regions. The gender pie charts demonstrate that female users are the majority audience (Fig. 29). According to the interest label, these females were born in the 1990s (“90后”) and are interested in anime, manga, video games, gourmet, traveling, reading, fashion, film, and music. The chart also clearly reveals that the audience of this post overlaps with the “artsy” BOBOs discussed in previous chapters—well educated, well-to-do, and well-acquainted with foreign cultures, including a strong interest in “动漫” (ACG/MAG) culture (see Fig. 30).

In addition, the most influential retweeter @春光炸裂 has an account with over 30k followers, based in Hong Kong, and whose content is curated for art-house

films and queer activism (see Fig. 31). Its alias “春光炸裂” (*Chunguang Zhalie*) amounts to a tribute to Hong Kong’s most famous queer art-house film 《春光乍泄》 (*Chunguang Zhaxie*, or *Happy Together*; 1997), directed by Wong Kar-wai. From this account another 385 retweets have been generated by its followers, spreading the post to broader audiences interested in art-house cinemas and gender issues. Thus, safe to say that the receptive audience for the post are supporters of Chinese LGBTQ+ activism and possibly (some of them) members of the LGBTQ+ community. The combining of all the data together, demonstrates that people of the ACG fandoms, especially those fujoshi/fudanshi from the yaoi (BL) fandom, correspond with the LGBTQ+ community. Both cohorts are most likely coming from a BOBO background.

Yaoi fandom is but one component of the ACG subculture but steadily has become popular and influential among young adults—particularly young women and teen girls. *The Economist* noticed “websites devoted to it [yaoi] have large followings (Jacobs). Katrien Jacobs estimates that in every high school or university class, at least one fan of *danmei* [a Chinese term for yaoi genre] is enrolled: that could mean a readership in the hundreds of thousands” (Jacobs). Such a huge fan-base allows Chinese young people access to queer culture from an early age, making for a trendy topic among peer groups, which has created a friendly environment to the queer community online.

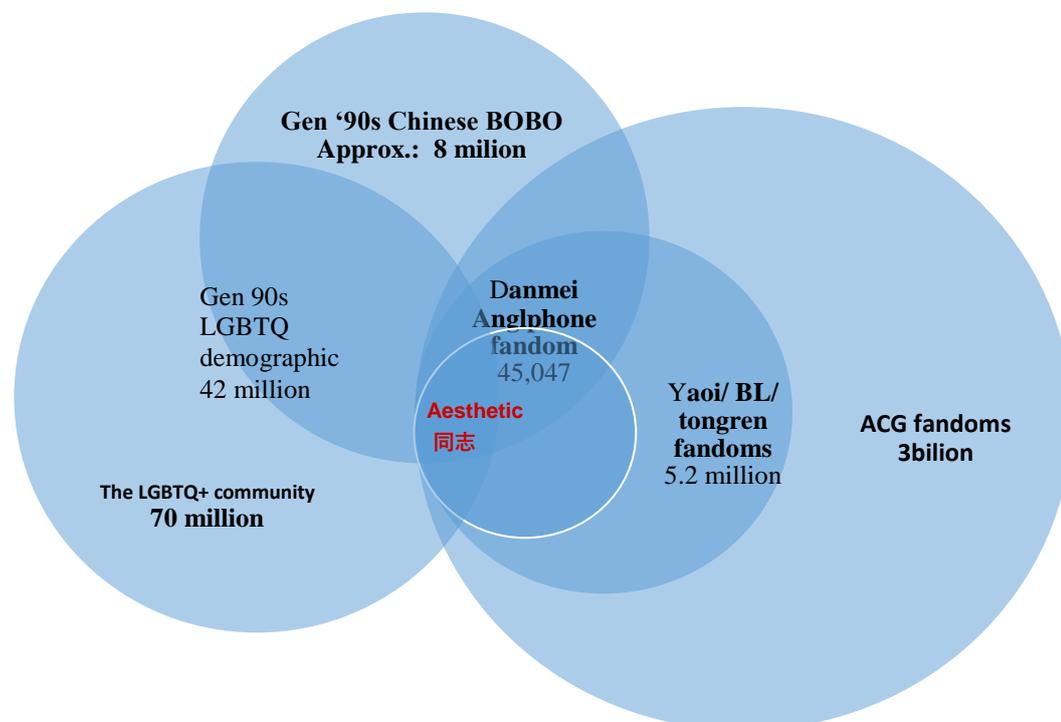


Figure 32 The Aesthetic 同志 cohort’s relationship with the ACG Fandoms and LGBTQ+ Community. It is impossible to give a definitive data for the size of the Aesthetic 同志, they will not exceed the number of the Anglophone danmei fandom for sure, which is around 45,000.

3. Aesthetically Queer Terminology

3.1. From Aestheticism to *Danmei*

In this section, I examine the term “Aesthetic 同志” to show the transnational cultural flow among the three major East Asian countries and the connection between the contemporary queer trend in East Asia and the 19th-century Aesthetic Movement in the West.

First, Chinese cyberspace has different terms for narratives featuring love and sexual relationships between two male protagonists (see fig 32). They are “BL (boys’love),” “Yaoi,” and “Tongren.”¹⁰⁴ They are borrowed from Japanese and demonstrate a strong presence of Japanese BL culture in Chinese cyberspace, since no Chinese words existed for this cultural phenomenon. (Feng 1–7; T. Liu; Jacobs; Xu and Yang; Chao 65–76).

Second, the queer activism in pop mediasphere—the BL culture—has a deep connection to 19th-century Aestheticism. The BL genre targeting female audiences and largely produced by female authors, has attracted academic attention since the late 1990s (Schodt; Suzuki; McLelland 61–77; Shamoan 77–103; Thorn 169–188; Lunsing; Welker 262–268; McHarry 183–196; Levi, McHarry, and Pagliassotti; Nagaike 103; Bauer and Katharina; Chao 65–76). When the Internet became universalised in the 1990s, many female users found it a convenient platform to produce and consume fiction featuring a homosexual subject (Chao 65). This genre was called *danmei* in China, a loan term from the Japanese kanji word *tanbi*, meaning “addicted to beauty.” *Danmei* and *tanbi* share identical Chinese characters “耽美.” *Danmei* is also interchangeable with the Chinese phrase *weimei* and the Japanese phrase *yuibi*. They also share the same Chinese characters “唯美,” meaning “the worship and pursuit of beauty,” directly linked to the Wilde’s school of Aestheticism (“唯美主义”). According to Japanese scholar Kuzuko Suzuki’s research:

The word [*tanbi*] is [...] linked to *tanbi shugi* (aestheticism), which is also called *yuibi shugi* [唯美主義] in Japanese. . . . In Japan, aestheticism is frequently represented by figures such as Charles Baudelaire, Walter Pater, Oscar Wilde, and Edgar Allan Poe. This movement was introduced to Japan around the end of the Meiji period by writers such as Mori Ōgai and Ueda Bin and continued in later literary works by Tanizaki Jun’ichirō and Nagai Kafū. Some *tanbi* works—such as *The Dancing Girl* (*Maihime*), by Mori, and *A Portrait of Shunkin* (*Shunkinshō*), by Tanizaki—are regarded as canonical literature in Japan and appear in state-endorsed Japanese textbooks for secondary education. At the same time, Pre-Raphaelite fine arts, which

¹⁰⁴ “Tongren” is borrowed from the Japanese phrase *Dōjin*, translated as a literary group or clique.

aimed at *l'art pour l'art* or “art for art’s sake” and made “beauty” the main theme, are very popular among Japanese girls and women. (99)

Suzuki’s research highlights *tanbi*’s decadent yet “highbrow” connotation—its canonical status in the Japanese formal education system. Suzuki observes that before the burgeoning of the yaoi/ BL genre—around the 1970s—professional Japanese BL writers turned to *tanbi* literature as a rebellious delight in reading male-male romance, inasmuch as the Aestheticism/Decadence is understood as “notorious” for its queer connotation, and has been “tainted” with its reputation for “gross indecency” since Wilde’s trials in 1895.

Suzuki also clarifies that Japanese BL writers are aware that *tanbi* literature “does not necessarily depict male-male relationships,” and *tanbi* as a school of pure literature dedicated to appreciating beauty (99). Another point stressed by Suzuki is that *tanbi* in the Japanese context connotes highbrow *bungaku* (literature), whereas *Yaoi* is *entaateimento* (entertainment) for the general public, even though the boundary between high and low literature is blurring and debatable nowadays (99). *Tanbi* has become an outdated signifier for male-male romances in Japan nowadays, while its signification for Aestheticism and high literature stands. In Japan, currently, the term *Yaoi* designates male-male romance in popular culture.

Since the mid-1990s, when *tanbi* grew into *Yaoi*, then was translated to *danmei* by the Taiwanese, this trend has spread to Mainland China. The connotation of the phrase “addicted to beauty” has been preserved in Chinese fandom, even though many *danmei* fans no longer associate *danmei* with 19th-century Aestheticism. However, another popular catchphrase has appeared in Chinese cyberspace—“only handsome men’s romance is *danmei*, ugly dudes are just gay stories”—and marks *danmei*’s root in Aestheticism, especially in Wilde’s worship of handsome young men.¹⁰⁵ Therefore, *danmei* no longer merely refers to a literature or art genre featuring a homosexual theme; they must be stories or art featuring good-looking young men and their romantic relationship, to live up to the term *mei* (beauty), which correlates with the rising lookism and obsession with cosmetic surgeries in East Asia (which I address later in this chapter).

While queer demographics and ACG fans in China need not necessarily know the connection between *danmei* and *weimei* (Aestheticism), BOBOs who follow the Aesthetic lifestyle ideologically or materialistically most likely dabble with both cohorts. Their niche interest positions them in the core of the three cohorts, all of which demographics I call Aesthetic 同志 (see Fig. 32).

3.2. Queering and Aestheticising *Tongzhi*

The Chinese characters “同志” is used Pan-Asia, i.e., the two Chinese characters are also used in Japanese Kanji, Korean Hanja, and the Vietnamese Hán tự, with the same meaning. However, in the Sinophone world, 同志 has two added

¹⁰⁵ “*zhangdeshuai caijiao danmei, zhangdechou jiao gaoji.*” *Gaoji* could be translated as “being gay” or “becoming gay.” “The word *ji* is the Cantonese transliteration of the English word “gay” and is now widely used in Mandarin-speaking regions to refer to homosociality and homoeroticism.” (Zhao, Yang, and Lavin xii)

connotations—one refers to queers and the other refers to revolutionists, or simply communists.

3.2.1. The Queered Tongzhi: A Literature Review

The gay community in the Chinese-speaking circles (including Cantonese) uses *tongzhi* and *tongzi* (Cantonese pronunciation) to refer themselves, and also as a euphemism to be referred to by heteronormative Chinese.¹⁰⁶ Almost every scholar in Queer Studies (Ku'er lilun 酷儿理论) in the Sinophone world dedicates at least a section on the terminology of *tongzhi* in their monographs. CHOU Wah-shan's *Tongzhi* (2000), the earliest scholarly publication in this area of study, explains the meaning, history, and politics of the term *tongzhi*. Travis S. K. Kong's *Chinese Male Homosexualities* (2012) includes the term *membra* (Cantonese transliteration of “member”), developed from queer activism in Cantonese-speaking communities; Kong's work, *Queer Sinophone Cultures* (2017), co-authored by Howard Chiang and Ari Larissa Heinrich, directly quotes from both Chou and Kong on the meaning and history of *tongzhi*. These scholars, including Chiang, mainly study queer subjects within the Chinese diasporic community outside of Mainland China.

ZHENG Tiantian's work *Tongzhi Living* (2015) traces Chinese male homosexual interactions from Imperial China to the Post-socialist China, in which he explains that the terms *tongxinglian* and *tongxingai*, two direct translations of the Western terms—“homosexuality” and “same-sex love”—are only used in Chinese scholarly writings. Due to their clinical and pathological connotations, the queer community has resisted them and use *tongzhi* instead (3–6; Lim). The most recent work on *tongzhi* is BAO Hongwei's *Queer Comrades* (2017), in which Bao traces *tongzhi*'s lineage from the 4th century BCE China up to post-socialist contemporary China.

Tong (same or similar) and *zhi* (ideal or aspiration) appeared together for the first time in a Chinese script *Discourses of the States* (*Guoyu*) in the 4th century BCE. *Tongzhi* became a compound word in 445AD, in *History of the Later Han* (*Hou Hanshu*), meaning “the people with the same ethics and ideals” (Bao 69). *Tongzhi* did not acquire its commonly known revolutionary meaning until the late Qing period (1840–1912), during which it became prevalent in polemics rallying people for anti-feudal, anti-colonial, and anti-imperial causes. *Tongzhi* was officially constructed as an egalitarian identity during that period. After the establishment of the People's Republic of China (1949), the term *tongzhi* evolved to a general form of address in everyday discourse, and some scholars believe that *tongzhi* developed from the Russian term “Товарищ” (Zheng 5; Bao 79). Since the citizens of China were preconditioned to support the communist party, *tongzhi* from then on acquired a strong sense of communistic meaning beyond the original word.

The queering of the term is often attributed to Maike and Edward Lam (a.k.a. LIN Yihua), who used *tongzhi* as the Chinese equivalent of “homosexuals” for the Hong Kong Gay and Lesbian Film Festival of 1989 (W.S. Chou; Y.H. Li; Bao 76).

¹⁰⁶ *Tongzhi* is an umbrella word for homosexuals as a whole in Sinophone world, but sometimes it specifically indicates male homosexuality while the term *Lala* is used for lesbians.

While the longing for an indigenous name for Chinese LGBTQ+ is strong, ordinary queer people in Hong Kong have been reluctant to adopt this term due to its strong “communist connotation” (Bao 76). The term *tongzhi* has never been as popular as *gei-lou* (“gay,” in Cantonese) in Hong Kong. Regardless, it has gained popularity in Taiwan and among diasporic Chinese communities before activists introduced it to Mainland China in the mid-1990s (Bao 76; Zheng 5). With the development of queer activism and the universalisation of the Internet, the term *tongzhi* soon spread to all Chinese societies.

Additionally, since the 1990s Mainland Chinese gradually stopped using *tongzhi* to address another citizen, hence the term *tongzhi* has almost completely lost its communist connotation. The term has since gained its queer connotation in the Sinophone world. In Mainland China nowadays, some people feel offended if called *tongzhi*, either because of its queer connotation or because of its *tu* (unsophisticated) proletarian connotation, or both (Wong 277–301)

3.2.2. The Aesthetic 同志 (*tongzhi/ dōshi/ dongji*)

However, in both Japanese and Korean languages, deeply influenced by Confucian Chinese culture in their pre-modern periods, the Chinese phrase *tongzhi*’s original meaning “people with the same ethics and ideals” is preserved and still used in their modern languages. Moreover, it is written in the same Chinese characters “同志,” in Japanese kanji and Korean hanjia; and also pronounced similarly to *tongzhi*—*dōshi* in Japanese and *dongji* in Korean, respectively. Therefore there is trans-Asian solidarity in this cultural identity of “comrades” in these Chinese, Japanese, and Korean communities already.¹⁰⁷

Tongzhi is often used in political contexts and yet from the perspective of *l’art pour l’art*, I propose a shared appreciation 19th-century Aestheticism in both *yaoi* subculture and the LGBTQ+ activism in East Asia. The term *tongzhi* uniting the three East Asian countries thus acknowledges a shared interest in queer popular culture in their cyberspace. The term should be used to denote artistic “同志” rather than political *tongzhi*. The Chinese characters 同志 are deliberately used here for a unified artistic identity, whereas its different romanised forms are deeply entangled with these countries’ different historical processes and geopolitical differences, hence are not suitable.

In addition, as argued by many scholars in queer popular cultural studies, Sinophone pop culture is structured within the broader East Asian popular culture

¹⁰⁷ The reason why instead of using “Trans-East-Asian” I use “Trans-Asian” is that in Vietnam and some diasporic Chinese societies in South-East Asian countries, the Chinese written form of *tongzhi* is used as well. For instance, *đồng chí* is the Vietnamese version of *tongzhi*, and it is also written as 同志 in Vietnamese Hán tự. Even though Vietnam is not included in the main discussion of this chapter, it is important to mark its nuance. Considering Vietnam’s communist past, the Vietnamese word *đồng chí* also has a strong revolutionary communist connotation, but it is not relevant in this chapter, and therefore I will not go into details.

economy. CHUA Beng Huat observes that the transnational flow of popular media to ethnically Chinese communities across Asia has been in motion for nearly a century. He reminds readers that since the 1930s, the Chinese-language commercial cinema industry, centred in Hong Kong, has been exporting films across Asia (qtd. in Martin 193). Japanese and Korean pop cultures have also influenced China since the 1990s. Therefore, it is impossible to study Chinese (queer) popular media works without a comparative study of the other two countries. Furthermore, the three countries are deeply connected through Confucianism, as is self-evident in the appropriation of Chinese characters in written languages in Japan and Korea. All deeply influenced by the Confucian ideology have together created a similar cultural landscape with diverse characteristics in their long pre-modern histories.

In fact, upon entering the 20th century, the flow of British Aestheticism spread to China and Korea via Japan, invoking a similar revolutionary expression to sever their ties with the archaic Confucian mentality, through which Japan and Korea were also politically bound with Imperial China as tributary states.¹⁰⁸ Western literature, especially Wilde's radical and flamboyant practice of dandyism were appropriated in China, Japan, and Korea as a cry for modernity among the literati. Thus the "Aesthete 同志" connects the three East Asian countries through centuries of transnational cultural flows, queerly, aesthetically, and politically.¹⁰⁹

4. Chinese Wildean *Danmei* Fictions

4.1. The Euro-American *Danmei* Circle

Chinese scholars YANG Ling, XU Yanrui, and CHAO Shih-Chen have already done thorough research on Chinese *danmei* fandom. From their work Chinese *danmei* fandom can be divided into three prominent circles: the original *danmei* circle, which focuses on the production, consumption, and adaptation of original Sinophone *danmei* novels; the Japanese circle, dedicated to the translation of Japanese BL works and the re-creation of Japanese MAG series; and the Euro-American circle, devoted to the production and translation of slash fanfic of Euro-American media products (Yang and Xu 8). Each circle has its unique features, but

¹⁰⁸ Tributary relations [officially] emerged during the Tang dynasty as Chinese rulers started perceiving foreign envoys bearing tribute as a "token of conformity to the Chinese world order" (Lee 18). However, since Japanese Wa period (108 BCE), Japan started its tributary missions to China (*Book of Later Han* vol. 85; *Records of Three Kingdoms* vol.30; *Book of Jin* vol.97; *Book of Sui* vol. 81; *Old Book of Tang* vol.199; Fogel 102-107; Goodrich, Luther Carrington et al. 1316; Mote, Twitchett, and Fairbank 491-2). In 1404, Ashikaga Yoshimitsu accepted the Chinese title "king of Japan," and for a brief period until his death in 1408, Japan was an official tributary of the Ming dynasty (Lee 19). Korea also started its tributary missions—altogether around 1126 missions excluding the Goryeo period (918–1392)—to China since its earliest Goguryeo period (37 BC–668 AD) until Joseon period (1392–1897) when Korea was colonised by Japan in 1897 (Pratt 482; Kang 59). More information please refer to Lee, Ji-Young, *China's Hegemony: Four Hundred Years of East Asian Domination* (2017), Columbia UP.

¹⁰⁹ In chapter 6 I will give a more nuanced and detailed study on the Confucius cultural connections as well as a shared modernising experience among CJK, which is entangled with the Aestheticism and paved a foundation for modern queer popular culture flows among these three countries without cultural barriers.

my focus is the Euro-American circle where Wilde is featured and often referred to. It is also the most recently formed and fastest growing group.

The Euro-American circle has two major sources of creative inspiration. One correlates with China's phenomenal passion for the FIFA World Cup and the Euro Cup, regardless of the absence of a Chinese national football team. These international matches provide a large quantity of handsome footballers around the world, for fujoshi to create *danmei* stories online.¹¹⁰ The other source is Hollywood's movie franchise, e.g., *Interview with the Vampire* (1994), *Harry Potter* (2001–2011), *Lord of the Rings* (2001–2003).¹¹¹ The most unprecedented growth of this circle, however, thanks to the successful marketing of BBC's detective series *Sherlock* (2010–), *Merlin* (2008–2012), the Marvel Universe's *The Avengers* franchise (2008–) and *X-men* franchises (2000–) in China.¹¹² These series have inspired an enormous quantity of *danmei* fictions, with full Western characters, with such pairings as Sherlock/Watson, Loki/Thor, Captain America/ Winter Soldier, Merlin/Arthur, among others.

Still, the size of the Euro-American circle is comparatively much smaller than the other two. Therefore, while BL fictions in Chinese are prevalent, works directly related to Wilde or the Aestheticism/Decadence, in general, are not as popular; nor are they as popular as love stories set in various Chinese dynasties, or *Wuxia* (martial arts fantasy). Apart from the language barrier, another reason contributing to Wildean *danmei*'s niche status could be its requirement for a general knowledge of Western high culture, i.e., classical literature, Classics, fine art, classical music, Western philosophies. Readers of Wildean *danmei* are generally highly educated, not only from the Chinese domestic education system but also exposure to Western highbrow culture, which selects people of higher cultural and economic capital in China. Naturally, the total number in the readership and works of the genre is quite small.

4.2. General Traits of Chinese Wildean Danmei

Such BOBO characteristics of the genre have been demonstrated by a few online Wildean *danmei* fictions published at China's most successful online fiction website, *Jingjiang Literature City* (<http://jjwxc.net/>).¹¹³ They are an unfinished, hard-core (R-18) decadent fiction: *Penny Dreadful: Four-Hundred Years of Love* (2015–)

¹¹⁰ Famous CPs include David Beckham/Iker Casillas, Ricardo Kaka/Cristano Ronaldo, Fernando Torres/ David Villa.

¹¹¹ Famous CP includes Louis/Lestat, Harry/Draco, Aragorn/Legolas, etc.

¹¹² Those Euro-American (Anglophone to be more precise) media productions also has inspired the Anglophilia in China because of elite British actors with Tom Hiddleston (a.k.a. Loki) as the leading figure. They have recruited a considerable fan base in China.

¹¹³ Apart from Jinjiang Literature City (2003-), there are Liancheng Read (lcread.com, 2007-) and Danmei Chinese Web (52blgl.com, 2008-) big commercial websites for *danmei* authors to publish their works. Among them, Jinjiang is the most influential. With 12.8 million registered users and 1.6 million contracted writers, and the website has published 29 million titles, covering a large variety of literary genres, such as original heterosexual romance, BL, GL (standing for girl's love), and all types of fan fiction, but it is mostly known for its high-quality original *danmei* works. For more and up-to-date information about this website, please also refer to "Gunayu Jinjiang"[About Jinjiang], Jinjiang Literature City, accessed 10 November 2018

by 哥德斯尔摩, pairing Dorian Gray with Count Dracula while featuring an opium-addicted detective, beautiful male prostitutes, threesomes and an orgy inspired by the Hollywood film *Dorian Gray* (2009);¹¹⁴ *Robbie Ross and His Wilde* (2014) by Envier, a mock-memoir narrated by Robbie Ross—Wilde’s most devoted friend and lover; *Soul Transaction* (2011–) by 海里珍珠, in which Dorian travels back in time to repent his crimes (murder and blackmailing), but falls in love with new male characters conjured up by the author; *Kei’s Memory* (2004) by 紫皇, pairing Dorian with a character named Kei from a Japanese manga; *Everlasting Confession* (2010) by 糖果脚丫, a fanfic based on the film *Dorian Gray* (2009); and, finally, the two most well-established works in the Wildean *danmei* circle—a published novella *Fatal Aestheticism* (2018), by 寒菽 and featuring Dorian Gray and Erik from *The Phantom of the Opera* (2004), and a serialising novel *Dear Wilde* (2015–) by 上篮若水, pairing Wilde and Erik from the *The Phantom of the Opera at Royal Albert Hall* (2011).

Those authors are quite knowledgeable about Western historical figures. They are also familiar with Western cities as natives. They possess a gothic imagination of Victorian England, and a fetishistic gaze at Western luxurious commodities associated with aristocratic taste. Finally, they all use a Chinese heterosexual female perspective while writing male-male romantic relationships. Authors of this genre are mostly well-educated and Westernised (to some extent) Chinese young elites (mostly women). They seek to express their awakening feminist awareness and concern for the marginalised LGBTQ+ groups through *danmei*, although such political expression remain overshadowed by their internalised heteronormative mentality. These Wildean *danmei* works share a few traits.

First, these authors, coming from the Euro-American circle—sometimes also categorised as *Xifang yansheng* (lit. Western derivative)—have demonstrated their familiarity with Western culture. Their readers have also shown a good knowledge of these cultural elements in the comments section. Writers paying tribute to Wilde often quote his noted epigrams and quote from and feature canonic authors such as Shakespeare, Aristotle, Plato, Goethe, Baudelaire, Huysmans, Victor Hugo, Charlotte Brontë, George Sand, Jules Verne, Hans Anderson. Similarly, they place Western artists and political figures in interactions with protagonists like Frédéric Chopin, Giuseppe Verdi, Johann Strauss II, Dante, or Napoleon III and Empress Eugénie de Montijo. Interestingly and most noteworthy, the protagonist—usually Dorian Gray—often befriends a famous scientist, inventor, or entrepreneur, such as

¹¹⁴ The author announced that although she was inspired by the TV drama *Penny Dreadful* (2014) and the film *Bram Stoker’s Dracula* (1992), her story only used the name of that TV drama, as she wrote, “I love this title and its ring of Victorian nostalgia to it”, and the story is an alternative universe to the *Dracula*.

Isaac Singer, Alfred Nobel, Louis Pasteur, Louis Vuitton.¹¹⁵ Stories revolve around these characters providing, for example, business collaboration opportunities with protagonists to sustain their extravagant dandy lifestyle, which leads to the second unique characteristics of Wildean *danmei* fictions.

The Wildean *danmei* authors' concern for economic capital grounds their imaginations in reality. They have shown their concern for accumulating wealth, previously overlooked or looked down upon by dandies and Wilde himself. This aspect demonstrates the Chinese BOBOs' bourgeois side. They understand that artistic indulgence must be funded by cold cash. Without aristocratic patronage, the 19th-century artist had to cater to market demand and adjusted to the general public's tastes accordingly. This form of commercialisation of art understandably disgusted artists who believed that art should be pure and independent, i.e., "art for art's sake." Nevertheless, young Chinese millennials in China's stunning economic growth, in an age of rising consumerism, understand and learn the Marxist discourse through Chinese formal education system, that "without the base there is no superstructure" (Marx).¹¹⁶

Simultaneously, from these novels we also see their struggle to keep up with Wilde's concept of pure art. For instance, in *Dear Wilde*, Wilde and Erik co-created an opera, *The Minotaur*, based on the Greek myth of Theseus. They angrily rejected a theatre manager's suggestion to give the opera a more melodramatic title—*Man-eating Bull Monster*—in order to make more profit with a larger audience base (Chapter 124). The theatre manager eventually changed the title without informing them while the opera toured in Venice. Ironically, it indeed made a larger fortune, as predicted by the manager. The theatre manager represents a symbolic figure of the transformative and sometimes damaging power of industrial commercialisation over art. Meanwhile, the fictional Wilde argues that he would rather die of poverty than to reduce the quality of his artistic creation to appeal to the "philistine" masses. However, later Wilde relents when the theatre manager rewards him a large amount of money (Chapter 124).

Similarly, in *Fatal Aestheticism*, when Dorian becomes a good person and settles down in New York City as a philanthropist, his picture is put on auction at the Met Gala. He uses the money gained from the auction to sponsor poor but talented artists (Chapters 59–63). The recurring struggle between commercial and pure art is a unique characteristic of Wildean *danmei* works, which is attributable to these authors' interpretations of Wilde's dilemma a century ago, in conjunction with their

¹¹⁵ Isaac Singer is an American entrepreneur and the inventor of the sewing machine. Louis Pasteur is a French biologist whose fermentation theory is used in French wine industry thanks to Dorian Gray in *Fatal Aestheticism*.

¹¹⁶ According to Marxist theory, the base determines society's other relationships and ideas to comprise its superstructure, including its culture, institutions, political power structures, rituals, and state (Marx). Marxist concept of base and superstructure relation is compulsory knowledge in Chinese junior high school and senior high school as well when students choose Humanities route for their college entrance examination (Gaokao)

background as BOBOs, the artistic, romantic, and rebellious, while hardworking, down-to-earth, and profit-oriented characteristics they uphold.

Thus, these works cannot avoid the neoliberal “hyper-commodification” of culture (Kang Nae-hui; Kang Inkyu). While commodification of culture often connotes a negative sense of butchering the innovation and seriousness of culture (i.e., “McDonaldisation” as George Ritzer calls it in *The McDonaldisation of Society* [2018]), Chinese *danmei* thrives, thanks to such commercialisation, which offsets the pressure from the imagination-killing censorship system. Because *danmei*’s seriousness in cultural and political expressions is downplayed by the commercialisation, the authoritarian government does not take this genre of writing serious enough to be threatened, as long as such writings do not feature overly explicit or grotesque eroticism.

This commercialisation process is also played out as Chinese *danmei*’s heterosexual narrative of gay relationships (i.e., the fixed *gong* and *shou* relationship) that cater to the dominating cisgender female readers/consumers in the Chinese online literature market.

Third, these Wildean *danmei* authors and readers are mostly from a privileged class in China. They have demonstrated their remarkable familiarity with the landscapes of London, Paris, Vienne, San Francisco, and New York City. The list of shops, lively descriptions of passersby, and even the smell of specific locations in their stories could only be written by people who have lived or at least sojourned in those cities. Their familiarity with Western cities is self-evident in the case of *Penny Dreadful*, in which the author effortlessly navigates characters from Knightsbridge to St. James Street, from Fleet Street to Hampstead Heath; her characters even know obscure alleys and shortcuts in London as they exist in real life. This author must have lived in London for a considerable time to guide her characters around London’s obscure streets.

Such familiarity with foreign metropolises reflects the big-data-generated geographical chart, which shows the majority of *danmei* writers/fans are based overseas or at least have studied overseas (Fig. 29).¹¹⁷ Many are studying in Europe and the US, with not only tuition fees for Chinese overseas students—twice the amount local students pay—but also general living expenditures, language training, admission test fees (e.g. IELTS, TOEFL, GRE, GMAT).¹¹⁸ Therefore, *danmei* authors’ wealthy background is reflected in their familiarity with overseas education hotspots. Wildean *danmei* works are possibly the most class-based genre within the

¹¹⁷ Unfortunately I could not investigate further into *Penny Dreadful* author’s background as she did not leave any links to her social media and has not replied to my interview request. Just based on her familiarity with London, she is by no means just a tourist. She could be working (or have worked) or studying (or have studied) in London.

¹¹⁸ Application agencies are also expensive, as 80% Chinese students relying on application agencies to apply for overseas universities. A Chinese student studies a Master degree in the UK (outside of London) usually pays around 300,000 CNY/year, roughly about 30,000 pounds, and the average yearly wages in China are only 74,318 CNY/year in 2017 ([Honglingjin](#); [Tradingeconomics](#)).

danmei circle, due to its requirements of monetary investment in understanding and appropriating Western culture.

Furthermore, Wildean danmei tends to feature a voyeuristic description of luxurious objects and decorations in aristocratic salons and dandy's rooms. This feature is perhaps inherited from Chapter 11 of *The Picture Dorian Gray* (1890), where Wilde lists rare or luxurious commodities and artefacts collected by Dorian. In *Penny Dreadful* the author describes Lady Agatha's house party, "Turkish spice are burnt for a touch of exotic aroma, Chinese tea, Egyptian cigarettes, Toulouse wine are imported via the East India Company and served in the salon to yield a cosmopolitan and sophisticated taste of the host" (Chapter 2). Moreover, "An Invitation from Dracula" features Lord Liszt's magnificent manor with an emphasis on its exquisite English garden where "well trimmed trees and rose bushes yield an elegant sense of old money" (Chapter 3). Additionally, "a cupboard full of blue and white chinoiserie porcelains" also stresses dandy's signature taste in collecting Oriental artefacts (Chapter 3). Through these descriptions grows an aspiration to acquire an aristocratic taste that exhibits the rich cultural capital of Chinese BOBOs, pronounced in the fetishistic descriptions of antiques available only at Sotheby's auctions nowadays.

Finally, and most importantly, Chinese danmei works use primarily a heterosexual female perspective on male-male romantic relationships, in that there is usually a clear dyad of *gong* (attacker) and *shou* (receiver).¹¹⁹ This feature is not just limited to the niche Wildean *danmei* circle, but is shared among the three danmei circles.

The *shou* character is usually physically weaker and shorter than the *gong* character or simply effeminate compared to his masculine and aggressive partner, *gong*. The *shou* often takes up the female role, constructed by the traditional heterosexual mentality, such as that of caretaker, housemaid, or being coy and reserved. Chao argues that "using the terms of attacker and receiver in Danmei narratives suggests sex positions and emotional relationships that work in a binary fashion—top and bottom, attacker and receiver, dominant and submissive, and penetrating and penetrated" (67).

Moreover, this quasi-heterosexual relationship in danmei cannot be reversed, inasmuch as—according to fujoshi—it will completely change the power dynamics in a CP and the character will become "OOC" (out of character). For instance, a heated internet fight occurred in 2017, in the Euro-American circle, when some fujoshi wrote stories pairing Winter Soldier (Bucky)/Captain America (Steve) instead of the "canonical" Steve/ Bucky, which means that Bucky becomes the *gong* and Steve the *shou*. Many danmei fans were furious at this reversed pairing. Similarly, Thor/ Loki (162k people following this topic on Weibo) is far more popular than Loki/Thor (only 2458 followers). The canonical depiction of Thor is

¹¹⁹ In Japanese terms, they are "Seime" (the stem root of the Japanese verb *semeru* meaning "attack" in a sexual relationship) and "Uke" (the stem root of the Japanese verb *ukeru* meaning "receive" Chao "Grotesque Eroticism" 67)

aggressive, muscular, alpha-male, while Loki with a slender build and a mastermind is comparatively effeminate.¹²⁰

A Chinese fan-made poster mistakenly exhibited in a Shanghai cinema further confirmed this fixed *gong-shou* dyad in danmei (see fig 33). In the poster, Thor (Chris Hemsworth)'s love interest Jane Foster (Natalie Portman) is replaced by Loki (Tom Hiddleston), who leans against Thor's chest as the sheltered "damsel" (Child Guardian). Both scholarly articles and popular blogs analysed this phenomenon, arguing that some fujoshi were provoked by "reversed CP," in that deep down they identify themselves with the effeminate *shou* character in romantic/sexual relationship in danmei fiction; and they internalise them through Chinese patriarchal ideal that men must be the dominating predators who take initiative in courting and sex, whereas women are the passive receiver. They could not or do not want to imagine a more active "female" role ("Who says gay = effeminate?"; "Do Chinese Fujoshi have a professed love for what they actually fear?").



Figure 33 Shanghai cinema's poster (left) showing Loki and Thor as a couple

In addition, Weibo ACG influencer, Yinyinsang, points out that a lot of fujoshi do not really understand real-life gay relationship. They still assume that "gays = effeminate men," and that men could only find feminine features attractive. Therefore they imagine that gay couples function similarly as heterosexual couples, with a fixed female (*shou*) and male (*gong*) dyad; moreover, effeminate men are not necessarily gay (Is Danmei Born Nobel or Lowly; "Who says gay = effeminate?"). With such a heterosexual perspective on gay relationships, some Wildean *danmei* authors have created feminine Dorian Grays with long, blond hair, large sparkling "doe eyes," slender willowy build and smooth alabaster skin, sweet-temper, and therefore always the *shou* (*Penny Dreadful*; *Soul Transaction*; *Kei's Memory*, *Everlasting Confession*).

In addition, sometimes the *Shou* even gives birth to babies in a specific genre called *shengziwen* meaning "giving-birth" genre, the Anglophone equivalent of

¹²⁰ Loki's intelligence easily reminds Chinese of the ideal Confucian "Wen" masculinity, which enables Loki to be more popular than Thor.

“Mpreg,” short for male pregnancy, a common plot device used in slash fiction (fanlore.com).¹²¹ *Shengziwen* genre features the *shou* in a stable relationship with (mostly married to) the *gong* giving birth to babies via medicine, genetic modification, magic, and other supernatural powers, but rarely through realistic gender reassignment surgeries. I view their avoidance of more realistic procedures as a result of many danmei authors not really wanting to address the issue, or lacking experience in addressing serious gender issues. They do not want to know the suffering of gender reassignment operations, as it is far too heavy a topic for danmei fans who read/write danmei for entertainment. After all, danmei writers are predominantly teen girls and young women in their early twenties, most wanting to read only light-hearted love stories. Additionally, the authors’ knowledge of sex and family planning are likely very limited due to Chinese society’s conservative attitude towards sex education.

Apart from the commercial consideration, the popularity of this “birth-giving” trope also reveals that both readers and authors of this genre conform to conservative Neo-Confucianists’ values like filial piety in the form of procreation, which developed from the Ming and Qing dynasty, and homophobia formed in China’s modernisation during the 20th century.¹²² The Confucian ideal of *chuanzong jiedai* (lit. to continue the husband’s family bloodline) is understood as a duty and a way for a wife to express love. This procreation-oriented perspective on marriage still dominates in China, even though the social environment towards homosexuality is increasingly friendly and welcoming (Lin and Zhe 89–93).¹²³ Bryan Norden notes

¹²¹ Further readings about unconventional erotic tropes in Chinese danmei please refer to Shih-Chen Chao’s “Grotesque eroticism in the Danmei genre: the case of *Lucifer’s Club* in Chinese cyberspace,” *Porn Studies* 3:1, 65-76 (2016), and Madill, A., Zhao, Y., & Fan, L. (2018). “Male-male marriage in Sinophone and Anglophone Harry Potter danmei and slash.” *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics*, 9:5, 418–434.

¹²² Ancient Chinese culture was comparatively tolerant of homosexuality especially during the Six Dynasties. Foucault may find fault with my usage of “homosexuality” here, but I disagree with him. Homosexuality does exist in ancient China instead of what he argues as merely “homoerotic acts”. Sexual desires and practices between men was an identity acknowledged by Chinese scholars and historians as *longyang* (a homosexual person) who enjoys *duanxiu* (homosexual act) and this queer trend is named *nanfeng* (homosexuality). In Chapter *Longyang* in *Collection of Classical Chinese Jokes* (18th Century), people who enjoy sexual acts with men are named *longyang* as an identity, which is named after the lover of King An’ling — Longyang Jun (Mr. Longyang) from Wei Kingdom during the Warring States period (481–403 BC). The record of homosexuality is throughout Chinese history. As early as pre-dynastic period (1050 BC–206 BC), legalist philosopher HAN Feizi recounts the tale of MIZI Xia, who shared a sweet peach with his beloved, Duke Ling of Wei, an act which made the term *fentao* or “bitten peach,” a longstanding euphemism for same-sex love. One of the few historical references to lesbian relationships is also from around this time — historian YING Shao records “marriages” between palace women. Even Confucius himself holds intimate male friendships as an example of supremely virtuous attachment. The tendency to treat homosexuality as a perversion only developed as part of Chinese efforts to emulate the West after the Opium Wars. It is under the Qianlong Emperor that the first statute outlawing non-commercial same-sex sex was introduced. Same-sex sexuality increasingly became viewed as an unsavoury predilection of the demi-monde — the fear among conservatives is that moral degradation will doom the nation, and thus homosexual affairs are risky for all but the most powerful. Writers such as PU Songling initially satirise exclusive homosexuality that is later condemned by the ultra-conservative neo-Confucianists.

¹²³ A 2014 poll by the *Chinese Journal of Human Sexuality* suggests that 85 percent of Chinese people support same-sex marriage, with only 2 percent opposing it, and 13 percent undecided. Please refer to

that Chinese parents and society as a whole still put intense pressure on young people to marry and produce offspring (Borden *The Diplomat*). Therefore *shenziwen* may be shocking and rebellious at first glance, but actually reveals an internalised patriarchal and heteronormative mentality completely the opposite of both the feminist and queer causes.

In general, Chinese danmei fans are predominantly heterosexual young women who want to read love stories for fun and to release pressure from marriage obligations. This situation is very similar to the Japanese shōjo culture. After all, danmei, or *Yaoi*, is a branch of the shōjo culture that constructs an exclusive space in which Japanese girls and young women take refuge from the disempowerment they face in their romantic relationships with men. In “Opening the Closed World of Shōjo Manga” (2008), Takahashi argues that shōjo culture has created a “closed world” for Japanese women, who are discouraged from satisfying their desire for an idealised heterosexual relationship, which may or may not be denied in their real life experience (Nagaike 103; Takahashi 128; “Do Most Chinese Fujoshi...”). Indeed, yaoi focuses on same-sex romances between boys, and yet “it is never a literature about gay men in real life” (“Is Danmei born to be Noble or Lowly?”). Male-male love is actually a trope for women in East Asia to express their aspiration for equal rights and decriminalising of female sexual desires observed in both Chinese and Japanese scholarship (Nagaike 103; Takahashi 128; Yinyinsang; Schodt; Suzuki; McLelland 61–77; Shamoon 77–103; Thorn 169–188; Lunsing; Welker 262–268; McHarry 183–196; Levi, McHarry, and Pagliassotti; Bauer and Katharina; Chao 65–76).

Some scholars argue that while women are objectified and sexualised in mainstream media, fujoshi is doing the same thing to gay men, subjecting (good-looking) gay individuals as symbolic vessels to hold fujoshi’s own sexual and romantic desires, no less disrespectful than cis-gender men lusting over hyper-sexualised female images (“Do Chinese Fujoshi...”; Zhihu Question; J. Yang). I partially agree with their argument. The commercial BL works are indeed about consuming the male bodies and appropriating gay love, without really investigating into real-life gay men and their issues. Therefore, such criticisms seem reasonable.

Nevertheless, the BL genre and fujoshi groups are not monolithic entities. First, the BL/ *yaoi* genre they criticise is already a commercialised subcategory targeting female consumers, while the highbrow “Shōnen Ai” subcategory, developed from Tanbi, focuses on the political cause and “soulmate” ideal of teen boys, as well as the “Erotic BL” dedicated to gay community in real life. Second, even within the commercialised BL genre and danmei, the majority of the same-sex romances ultimately are about de-ritualising marriage and sex; about pursuing love that resists conventional social expectations. Admittedly gays are used for their symbolic value in danmei, but the symbolic value is not merely satisfying fujoshi’s sexual desires. They are also appropriated in fighting against the patriarchal system

“Investigation and analysis of the current situation of college students with homosexual orientation” published on *The Chinese Journal of Human Sexuality* issue 12 (89-93).

and heteronormative establishment's suppression of both women and marginalised LGBTQ+ groups, which I demonstrate in the case studies of *Dear Wilde* and *Fatal Aestheticism*. Thus the analogy that *danmei* is fujoshi's objectification of gays similar to cisgender men's objectification of women seems hardly convincing; women bear burdens of thwarted sexual desires and patriarchal domination.

In addition, *danmei* is not an escapism literature as is usually labeled, but an active polemic disguised as entertainment literature against gender inequality in East Asia. Some scholars and BL writers contend that the idealised “Shōnen Ai” in both Chinese *danmei* and Japanese BL is an anti-establishment exploration for equal rights in a suffocating patriarchal society (Yinyinsang; *Miyako*). This is also why they call the genre “boys' love” instead of “men's love” in the first place. The mature men and their masculine features—Adam's apple, beards, muscles, not to mention male genitals—all associate with the suppressing image of the patriarch, while teen boys are androgynous and therefore Other, with whom BL writers and manga artists feel both relatable and distant enough for exploiting through literary imagination at the same time.

BL blogger Yinyinsang, Chinese sexologist LI Yinhe, and Japanese manga scholar Takeuchi Osamu have similar arguments that *danmei* is born out of the general unfriendly living conditions for women in East Asia. Women in post-war Japan not only suffered misogynist social norms but also economic stress from the recession. Many highly educated Japanese women reacted to such oppression by creating unrealistic, romantic, and beautiful BL works featuring teen boys who have not yet transformed into the horrific patriarch, therefore could transgress the gender boundary and live without the burden imposed on women. “They will not be easily harmed or persecuted thanks to their male gender,” BL manga artists Keiko Takemiya and Toshie Kihara revealed as why they chose teen boys as their protagonists (Y.Y. Li; W. Yang, 中島梓). Androgynous boys were perfect mouthpieces to express their political ideals and pursue what they perceived as the purest form of love—a love without the purpose of settling down, helping the husband to continue his family line, and serving the husbands' family. Indeed, during the 1960s and 70s Japan (and still in East Asia and many parts of the world), once a girl becomes a woman and gets married, she has very limited social roles as a wife or a mother. These stifling social expectations put women in a passive position to serve men. As the Other, boys in the BL genre have both feminine features, which female readers might relate to, and men's freedom and opportunities in society. They enable BL creators to express their aspirations to rebel against social norms.

Furthermore, from a pure literary perspective, Takemiya and Kihara revealed in the interview, they create BL manga “to avoid the easily settled-down life trajectory in a heterosexual relationship, for a stable heterosexual relationship does not have the *tension* for exciting stories.” (Yinyinsang; Y. Y. Li; W. Yang, 中島梓; Takeuchi). The Japanese film critic 吉田真由美 also argues that heterosexual love has a strong sense of social responsibility and follows a stable and fixed pattern: meetup—fall in love—marriage—raise children, thus great for social stability but

unbearable for free-willed individuals and especially for highly educated people (women) who do not want to follow a prescribed lifestyle. Similarly, Chinese danmei, especially Wildean danmei, somewhat more of a Shōnen Ai than the commercial BL, are following this creative incentive featuring the queer icon Wilde in their works. Among the aforementioned Wildean *danmei* works, only two pieces seem not to have internalised heteronormative mentality as much. They have sparkling traits that push the boundary for Chinese queer activism.

5. Case Studies of *Dear Wilde* (2015–) and *Fatal Aestheticism* (2018) ¹²⁴

Dear Wilde is an ongoing novel set in the 1870s, where Oscar Wilde's soul travels as a young man, and lives in the body of Erik, while the latter lives in the body of Wilde. The two acquaint each other at the Wilde's when Wilde/Erik decides to undergo plastic surgery to correct the deformity on Erik's face; they gradually fall in love with each other because of their similar passion for beauty and art. Their swapped souls change their life trajectories accordingly. Erik in Wilde's body (Erik>Wilde) becomes a talented composer who earns a scholarship to study at Oxford, and later in Vienna, and earns the royal patronage of Queen Victoria. Wilde in Erik's body (Wilde>Duke), meanwhile, inherits an aristocratic title from Erik's biological mother, the Duchess de Carter who cold-heartedly arranged the kidnap of her own son due to his deformity, but repented on her deathbed. Thus, Wilde>Duke becomes the richest man in France and also an established playwright, whose *Salomé* is adapted by Erik>Wilde into an opera. The opera becomes a huge success in Europe and catches the attention of Napoleon III and his wife Eugénie de Montijo, who are about to be exiled to England. They entrust their son Prince Eugène to Wilde>Duke. Wilde>Duke's plan to keep Prince Eugène away from France leads him first to San Francisco and then to Greece, where he is inspired by the story of the discovery of the Knossos to write another play, titled *The Minotaur*, which is also adapted by Erik>Wilde into another opera. The story is not yet finished.

Fatal Aestheticism, on the other hand, has already been published (see Fig. 34). This story is the most famous Wildean danmei in the Euro-American circle. Unlike *Dear Wilde*, this story is clearly influenced by rom com shōjo manga/anime. It is a fast-paced narrative of love and adventure between a beautiful woman-like Dorian Gray.

The story begins after Dorian's death in the novel, an angel and a demon make a wager that Dorian would choose a different path if he were to be given another chance. They send Dorian's soul back to the 1840s, when he was still a boy. Raised up by his tyrant grandfather who forces him to wear dresses in remembrance of his untimely dead daughter, little Dorian meets Erik, the first time at a circus. Dorian encourages abused Erik to become a musician. Touched by Dorian's kindness, Erik swears to become an established musician, and finds this angelic "girl" when he grows up. After escaping from the circus, homeless Erik is saved by a vampire living

¹²⁴ Both authors are aware of Gaston Leroux's original novel *Le Fantôme de l'Opéra* (or *The Phantom of the Opera*; 1909–1910) but chose musical versions instead.

underneath the Paris opera house whose name is Chevalier d'Éon, a legendary French cross-dressing diplomat and spy, who becomes Erik's teacher and life-long friend (see fig 35). Later Erik studies with Chopin, through whom he meets Dorian Gray again years later at the Great Exhibition of 1851. The demon has told Dorian Gray that he could be redeemed after his death if he can make Erik a "scapegoat." With this purpose in mind, Dorian seduces Erik with his great beauty. However, Dorian finds himself falling in love with Erik, and regrets. Towards the end, when Dorian is dying due to an accident, he wants to cancel his pact with the demon but instead, is informed that Erik has already sacrificed his life for him. To his joy, Erik defeats the demon and comes back to life with his face fixed. The two beautiful boys happily reunite. They are married by Chevalier d'Éon and start a new life in New York City. Time goes by, the Gray family (Dorian and Erik adopted Christian's children as their heirs) becomes the richest family in the Upper East Side, with a lasting business collaboration with Louis Vuitton and Singer Sewing Co.



Figure 34. *Fatal Aestheticism* book cover Figure 35. Caricature of d'Éon

Both stories have Wildean *danmei*'s general features summarised, while they have a few unique characteristics important to my analysis.

5.1. Class-Based Audiences and Superficial Copying of Gothic Literature

First, in general, both authors demonstrate considerable knowledge of classical music, literature, fine art, history, and archaeology, a BOBO feature.¹²⁵ Their readers are also familiar with Western culture as well and are able to afford reading their works. Both works of fiction charge readers to read beyond Chapter 37 and Chapter 23, respectively (altogether there are 126 chapters in *Dear Wilde* so far, and 64 chapters in *Fatal Aestheticism*). In addition, the latter has already been published at the price of ¥110 or £13, not cheap for a novella, as the average book

¹²⁵ *Dear Wilde*'s author is a cisgender Millennial Shanghai local, currently working in a Fortune 500 company in Shanghai (“上籃若水” [Weibo](#)). Unfortunately I could not contact the author of *Fatal Aestheticism* who has just left Weibo and emptied the account because of Internet trolls. Nevertheless, from her Weibo profile picture and her following list, she is clearly a manga/anime fan (“寒菽” [Weibo](#)).

price in China is around ¥30–60 (around £4–7). Their readers are thus highly likely also from well-to-do families and able to spend money on a frivolous hobby.

Second, these two Wildean danmei are Gothic tales at a glance, featuring a scary and ominous environment like rainy London, workhouses, opium dens, subterranean chambers, and big mansions with hidden tunnels and trap doors; and otherworldly creatures such as vampires, ghouls, demons, Jack the Ripper. As for literary devices, time-traveling, body-swapping, cross-dressing, a play within a play, and contractions with demons are also common in classical gothic tales.

However, their gothic style is only a superficial mimic of Western Gothic stories. Those symbolic tropes are borrowed to create an exotic cultural spectacle to appeal to readers who have an interest in European culture. Gothic novels' serious social and political exploration is ignored. Although Chinese scholars, for example, LI Weifang the leading academic, have made comparative literary studies on the similarities between Western Gothic literature and Chinese *zhiguai xiaoshuo* (supernatural stories), the Chinese *zhiguai* genre remains far from Gothic literature and actually more like *Aesop's Fables* and Biblical stories, which focus on moral edification.¹²⁶

Wildean danmei fictions use Gothic imageries but actually center on a Chinese *zhiguai* in which supernatural creatures interact with human beings in order to moralise and guide them to become better people. Therefore, protagonists in Chinese danmei fiction follow the “hero’s journey” of *A Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), where Chinese supernatural creatures (ghosts, fox spirits, fairies) function as the “mentor” to help the hero overcome “ordeals” and gain “rewards” (Campbell). Most of Gothic works do not have moral preaching and are created out of a dark curiosity and a fascination with death—a topic by all means avoided in Chinese culture—and a relatively objective representation of humanity and human relations. *Dear Wilde* and *Fatal Aestheticism* have some traces of Gothic influences, but their cores remain moral fables following *Zhiguai* genre—protagonists finding love and success with the help of supernatural mentors and moral lessons learnt. Gothic works written by Mary Shelley, Oscar Wilde, Robert Louis Stevenson, Edgar Allan Poe, William Faulkner, and even those less serious and entertainment-oriented sensation novelists Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Wilkie Collins, H. Rider Haggard, all created horrifying images, be they supernatural creatures or deformed humans, to probe the depth of humanity, the complexity of identity, and the omnipresence of inequality. They painted a dystopia to trigger horror and remind people of the dark

¹²⁶ Li Weifang’s doctoral thesis, *Comparative Studies on British Gothic Fiction and Chinese Supernatural Tales in Six Dynasties* (2004) won him China’s National Excellent Doctoral Dissertation in 2007. He argues that British Gothic Literature and Chinese *Zhiguai* share at least five similar characteristics, namely, similar historical and social background for its creation; stories usually develop in strange environments—caves, deserted houses, graveyards; stories usually have symbolic meanings; featuring four types of characters — tyrants, pilgrims, unfortunate women, and supernatural beings; and finally a similar method of narrative, i.e. repeated narrative. However, these superficial similarities cannot offset the fundamental difference in their different creative motivation in my opinion.

side of ever-advancing science, as well as the repercussions of colonial expansion. Wildean danmei do not explore the themes above.

On the note of gothic horror, in *Skin Shows* (1995), Jack Halberstam compares Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) and Wilde's *Dorian Gray*. He summarises that Gothic horror works are usually three folds: first, the fear of losing power over one's own body because of the discovery of a secret self; second, fear that the tightly policed bodily boundary between men could be porous; and finally, fear that the masculine body could be "reduced" to the object of sexual and artistic gaze and thus is effeminate (80). Therefore, the horror in Victorian Gothic novel is essentially a form of homophobia, a fear that "normal" human relations could be queered, and the fear of unstable identities played out as the discrepancy between the surface and the depth of a person, which reveals the hypocritical nature of human beings.

Dear Wilde and *Fatal Aestheticism* seemingly match these features, and yet their "depth"—the atonement theme essentially is different from Western Gothic and queer novels. Below I examine their plot devices, namely, body-swap, plastic surgery, and cross-dressing to reveal the moral theme usually found in Chinese *Zhiguai*. I also discuss the commercialisation of queerness in danmei as an ironic advantage under the authoritarian censorship.

5.2. The Body-swap: The "Soulmate" and the Confucian Moralism

The most interesting plot device in *Dear Wilde* is the body-swap. It breaks the dyad of *gong* and *shou*, which perpetrates a quasi-heterosexual relationship between a masculine and a feminine role. There is no Wilde/Eric or Eric/Wilde, but a Wilde+Eric CP, as they are equal in this relationship, as a realistic gay relationship ideally is. It is a leap from the Confucian patriarchal internalised danmei works. Wilde introduces Eric to Aestheticism and Eric introduces Wilde to the amazing power of music. Especially when he adapts Wilde's *Salomé* and *The Minotaur* into operas, their talent in literature and music are combined to make both better versions of themselves. This change also "saves" them from their downfall in their previous lives: their love causes Erik to give up his hatred of society and Wilde learns modesty.

While thus far Erik and Wilde have a platonic love, the body-swap trope makes it physical otherwise, and much more intimate and profound than merely penetrating a body for a short period during sex. The other person's body reveals its physical traits completely to the "depth"—of the person inside. Especially for Erik>Wilde: the moment Erik looks at his new face he is shocked but deeply attracted to that "young and handsome face. . . . His cheeks are turning red after the fight. It gives his pale complexion a healthy rosy hue. That pair of large light-blue eyes are wide in bewilderment, and his full red lips part open in shock as cherries on

top of a milky cake. Thanks to his high nose and the square drawlines, this beautiful face is not too effeminate but handsome and masculine” (Chapter 2).

Erik often looks into the mirror to appreciate his new handsome face. He is also delighted by teenage Wilde’s tall build (Chapter 2).¹²⁷ The description of Wilde’s appearance is charged with sexual desire, although the author gives no explicit physical descriptions. Erik’s fascination with Wilde’s appearance thus is physical and even autosexual at this point. What is most laudable about this description is its emphasis on Wilde’s masculine beauty. The ubiquitous featuring of feminine pretty boys in Chinese danmei and Japanese yaoi has attracted much criticism from the gay community and caused scholarly debate on its heteronormative mentality, that gays are equivalent to effeminate men, and men can only be attracted to feminine features.

Erik, on the other hand, is attracted to Wilde’s masculine beauty, which differentiates the story from other danmei that disguise heterosexual desire as homosexual one. Similarly, while Wilde finds Erik’s face repulsive initially, he still praises Erik’s muscular and tall stature (187cm) when he persuades himself to accept this new body, “...at least it is really fit. I will treasure these six packs in this life. I should not have eaten so many cakes last life” (Chapter 1). After his plastic surgery he finds the newly constructed face very attractive. “His icy-blue eyes are always sparkling like stars burning in a wintery night. There is a sense of rebellious spirit in this handsome man’s face” (Chapter 57).

More importantly, their attraction to each other is not just on the surface. Their swapped bodies enable them to literally “step in someone else’s shoes.” This immersing experience of a loved one’s perspective plays out the human ultimate goal in finding the soulmate and being united with a love in both flesh and soul. They live inside each other’s bodies and thus, epistemologically, have already been united with the flesh. Their similar passion for art and beauty leads them to co-create operas that combine their talents in literature and music.

The romantic relationship between Wilde and Erik in *Dear Wilde* resembles the “soulmate” ideal much emphasised in *shōnen ai*, a state of relationship Plato defines as “divine eros” (*Symposium*). This story is a far cry of the *shengziwen* BL and ordinary heterosexual love stories, perceived as “polluted” or with the purpose of reproduction in the eyes of extreme *fujoshi*. An ACG blogger 真基友无双 observed that the “pure love” theme is prevalent in the *shōnen ai*’ universe. This is a world without the burden of procreation, social obligations, and betrayals. Gender ambiguous protagonists are absolutely loyal to each other and are both courageous and persistent in fighting for their love against social pressures (“Love and Lust Entangled”). In the novel, Erik is a shy person who does not socialise much and has no interest in other people apart from Wilde. The fictional Wilde, on the other hand, is still the social butterfly he was, but tries his best to be a loyal lover, who often

¹²⁷ Adult Wilde is 191cm tall in real life.

does self-discipline when sexual temptations come too close (Chapter 22).¹²⁸ Erik's and Wilde's passion for each other's talent thus becomes a strong bond and, ironically, even works as a monogamous marriage. As such, *Dear Wilde* has imagined a utopia for the queer. It may be limited by the author's own heterosexual experience, but yet her attempt to feature an equal relationship with a strong emphasis on spiritual compatibility, not making either Wilde or Erik woman-like, add up to distinguishing this story from the "McDonalised" (by cisgender female market) danmei/BL, which only focuses on beautiful teen boys in a heterosexual relationship.

The doubling of surface and depth in Gothic tales is often used to trigger horror about unstable identities and perverse desires. In *Dear Wilde* it is used for atonement. Usually in Gothic tales, something in the monstrous depth comes out to override "outward respectability," such as the cases of Hyde and Dorian (Halberstam 55). But in *Dear Wilde*, the beautiful surface that betters the depth (in Erik's case) and the beautiful depth comes out to rectify the deformed surface (in Wilde's case). Erik's soul lives in the beautiful body of the fictional Wilde, with whom he can finally develop a normal life. Beauty is a privilege deprived of him in his previous life. Erik yearns for beauty and is fascinated with the power of beauty bestowed upon him now. He is thrilled that "the surface" of Wilde visualises his musical talent as to equivalent physical beauty. With both assets he even achieves class mobilisation within the Victorian social hierarchy (Chapter 20).

The lonely soul of Erik longs for a "comrade" who shares a passion in pursuing beauty. That comrade is Wilde, whose body he currently possesses and whose soul he is in love with. Therefore, the Chinese term *tongzhi* (comrade) for homosexual identity could not be more fitting for such a romantic bond. Erik's love starts from physical attraction and thrives from a kindred spirit. This helps Erik to pursue his passion in music and helps him grow into a better man. He forgives people who have wronged him, the beautiful surface of Wilde enhancing his depth.

While the Euro-American circle of danmei is indebted to the Western Gothic novels' writing technique and imageries, its major theme is atonement rather than horror.

The atonement theme is even more evident in the case of Wilde's storyline. Wilde>Duke is trapped inside the deformed surface of Erik at the beginning. He is in denial for a long time, actually never comes to terms with this extremely ugly surface and eventually risks his life for plastic surgeries. Through these circumstances his love for beauty emerges to change the deformed surface. Erik's ugly surface also gives more depth to Wilde>Duke character. It teaches him modesty and true beauty. After his plastic surgeries, Wilde>Duke spends time in recovering and contemplating his flaws and mistakes in his ex-life while writing "The Star Child" (1891). The author uses this fairy tale as a mirror of Wilde's ex-life and

¹²⁸ Apart from his two disciples who have been in love with him, many young ladies and a few decadent French aristocrats also show their romantic interest in Wilde>Duke but all of them are rejected by Wilde (Chapter 23).

current life. Wilde the writer was a glorious person with both good looks and fame, thus a narcissist. 上籃若水 the author of *Dear Wilde*, argues that she believes Wilde's affair with Bosie did not cause his downfall; instead, she believes that Wilde's biggest flaw is his conceited ego, as the Star Child is full of himself and inconsiderate of other people's feelings.

The obsession with surface beauty runs throughout in Wilde's works and life. The surface is everything to Dorian Gray and the surface defines Dorian's very existence in the original novel, of which 上籃若水 is very critical. In her undergraduate thesis on Aestheticism, 上籃若水 found flaws with Wilde's ideas (Chapter 40). She explains that she wants to "mess with" Wilde with an ugly face and tease out his obsession with beauty (Chapter 3). By giving Wilde the ugly surface, she wants Wilde to repent for his vanity (*Dear Wilde*). Indeed, this fictional Wilde learns a lesson from the harsh treatment he received from people when he was ugly, as well as Erik's unfortunate life. Vanity is a grave sin in Christianity and *Dear Wilde* focuses on the atonement for vanity, which plays out in his writing of the *Minotaur* inspired by Erik's unfortunate life. In the play, Minotaur is a deformed prince who must wear a bull-head shaped helmet to cover his face. Like Erik's mother, who was disgusted and ashamed of her own child, the King of Minos imprisoned the prince in the labyrinth and used Minotaur as a weapon. Wilde>Duke uses Prince Minotaur's monologue to condemn the cruelty of humanity and the shallow nature of human beings (Chapter 112–119). Had 上籃若水 kept the plot point of Wilde's ugly face, this fiction would have more gravitas. However, as 上籃若水 was much complained to by her readers, who believe Wilde "too miserable in the novel," she makes Wilde undergo plastic surgeries to improve his looks, which to some extent, refutes the atonement theme (Chapters 2–4).

The atonement theme and the discrepancy between surface and depth of character are also used in 寒菽's *Fatal Aestheticism*. For example, William Gray, the great great grandson of Dorian's adopted son, wants to be as beautiful as Dorian. William has just been left by his boyfriend, so in one scene he calls the demon to grant him eternal beauty, with a broken heart. The demon is angry at being woken up by a shallow request and replies, "the person in the painting [Dorian] is so ugly. Why do you even want to look like him?!" The young man is perplexed by the demon's different aesthetic standard (Chapter 62).

The dark humour of this chapter levels up this novella with a touch of philosophical contemplation of beauty and a sense of Swiftian irony. The demon explains later that he cannot see human flesh but only souls. Dorian's soul is boring and ugly to him whereas Erik's soul is beautiful and alluring, which is why he urges Dorian to seduce Erik in the first place. This explanation breaks the dyad of surface and depth. What mortal eyes fail to see is what the demon can only see; and the beauty standard changes accordingly. Dorian's surface beauty that grants him fame, fortune, power, and sensual pleasures in the mortal world has no beauty in the demon's eyes. Dorian is but a surface and the demon cannot see the surface. The moral message is clear and delivered in a comedic way. However, like *Dear Wilde*,

the atonement theme in this story is again refuted. After Dorian and Erik have both sacrificed their lives for their loved ones, they are rewarded by the angel: Dorian's picture (soul) recovers its beauty while Erik's deformed face is fixed. Yet again, Erik's ugly "surface" is beautified by other forces, at the request of readers. After reading this danmei story, saturated with its moral message that inner beauty is more important than outward attractiveness, readers still cannot accept a deformed lover. After all, we now live in Debord's society of spectacle.

5.3. The Neoliberal Shelter for Queer Subjects to Develop

5.3.1. Plastic Surgery under Cis-Women's Gaze

In both works of Wildean *danmei*, the ugly character (Erik) receives a makeover thus to develop a romantic relationship with the extremely handsome protagonist: *Fatal Aestheticism* features Erik defeating the demon and rewarded with a handsome face (Chapter 55). Strongly requested by the readers of *Dear Wilde*, the author 上篮若水 changed her original plan to keep Wilde>Erik ugly (Chapter 3). She makes Wilde undergo three extremely painful facial reconstruction surgeries to finally become good looking, which almost costs his life (Chapter 17). Nevertheless, this fixed face enables him to "confidently" stand up in court to inherit the title against a handsome imposter (Chapter 27–8). Wilde> Duke contemplates in court,

"... ugliness is a sin and deformity is a punishment from God. To an ordinary family, deformed children are seen as the incarnation of demon, hence are usually abandoned. Within the upper class, however, there is not a single case of deformity, for those born deformed have never had a chance to even open their eyes. People will pity an aristocrat who ruined his face by accident but they will drive Erik to hell if they know he was born deformed." (Chapter 17)

These terrible, cruel words, however, reflect the inhumane attitude towards deformity and ugliness in the 19th century. To Chinese danmei readers ugliness is a "sin" and cannot be tolerated in either danmei or in real life (see fig 36). This cruel and intolerable attitude correlates with East Asia's obsession with pretty boys and its burgeoning cosmetic surgery industry for men.

No.4 网友: 琼楼弄影 评论: 《亲爱的王尔德》
发表时间: 2018-09-15 20:35:06
所评章节: 2 “长太丑真的会绝望的”
No. 4 琼楼弄影 comments: *Dear Wilde*
Published Time: 20:35:06, 15th Sep 2018, Commented Chapter: 2
“A person who is ugly will be in constant despair.”

Figure 36. Comments on Dear Wilde about Wilde's Appearance

Danmei reader's priorities are for love stories about pretty boys. After all, danmei literally means "addicted to beauty" and the "Shōnen Ai" genre focuses romance between beautiful boys. But the fujoshi's slogan, that "only pretty boys' romance is danmei," has understandably attracted heavy criticism from gay community and gender scholars ("Do Chinese Fujoshi..."; Zhihu Question; J.Yang).

The *fujoshi* gaze has transformed Erik's ugly appearance; just as the female-dominated media market is changing Chinese male celebrities' looks and influencing

Chinese men's appearance in general. The popularity of "little fresh meats" has changed the media portrayal of men. Only a decade ago, male leads in Chinese film and television were tough, authoritative, and patriarchal characters (Song & Hird; H.Wu). If a male character appeared meticulously groomed, he was normally portrayed as a sissy, a eunuch, or gay—intended to be objects of contempt. Not anymore. "Little fresh meats" have inspired the media to create new representations of male beauty, often characterized by well-built, topless torsos, and delicate, feminine facial features. They signify Chinese cisgender female desire. In fact, the popularity of "little fresh meats" announces the age of "female gaze." Against this backdrop, more and more Chinese men find beauty under the knife. According to *Sixth Tone*, "male clients accounted for 21 percent of Chinese cosmetic procedure consumers last year [2016], compared to 17 percent in 2015, according to cosmetic surgery social networking app Gengmei, which boasts 18 million users" (Ni; Xiaofeng). Accordingly, danmei works cater to female audiences' love for pretty boys. Their gaze propels Wilde's Erik to get plastic surgeries in *Dear Wilde* and Erik is rewarded with a handsome face in *Fatal Aestheticism*. The emphasis on characters' appearance is also attributable to the rise of "female economy." Middle-class office ladies and teen girls have become major consumers in Chinese society. Their significant economic contribution to the entertainment industry secures women's say in constructing the male beauty standard, and eventually influencing the performance and perception of masculinity. For instance, doctor LI Yufei, a Chinese cosmetic surgeon reveals, " 'men should focus more on their work than appearances,' I thought then [2005], but 12 years later, 'after I met and spoke to more of them [male clients], I started to understand that people are born with this fondness for beauty, and no matter whether they're men or women, all of us have the right to make this choice as long as it is reasonable'" (Ni). Therefore, Chinese women's growing economic capital allows an alternative masculinity to be presented in mainstream media. Predominantly conservative, cisgender macho men are replaced by heterosexual female customers who are deeply influenced by the "pretty boy" aesthetics from Japanese BL manga/anime; thus the objects of desire accordingly have shifted from beautiful women to beautiful men, and heterosexual love stories are replaced by danmei literature and bromance films in mass media. The objectification of men and especially metrosexual gay men seems inevitable, especially under the governmental surveillance, which does not allow epistemological exploration of queer subjects, but is fine with commercial appropriation.

Under this circumstance, the plastic surgery of Wilde may be also read symbolically as the Chinese danmei creators resisting the authoritative government through a neoliberal commercialisation. The Chinese administration has direct control over cultural expression, therefore explicit discussion and exploration in queer subjects find difficulty in publication, circulation, and yet danmei that objectify same-sex love making a profit, thanks to its internalised heterosexual perspective on gay relationship. Queer topics must commercialise themselves first to make unconventional subjects less threatening to avoid censorship. But such

neoliberal domestication of queer materials is subject to market demands. It should be reiterated that *Jingjiang Literature City* is a commercial platform where fiction works are created for economic profit. *Danmei* authors write, specifically catering to readers' tastes—imagining themselves as the *shou* in *danmei*.

5.3.2. From Crossdressing to “Crossplaying”

Cross-dressing appears in *Fatal Aestheticism* and also commercialises queerness in response to censorship. The story features the iconic, crossdressing queer Chevalier d'Éon and yet compromises them (chosen pronoun) as a *weiniang* (lit. fake girl) and dehumanises them as a supernatural vampire (Other), to appeal to a wider audiences who may have never been exposed to the concept of LGBTQ+, or care little about queer activism but are familiar with the “weiniang” and “cross-play” culture within the ACG fandom. *Gaystarnews* reported in 2012 that “...most [danmei] fans do not care much about LGBT people in real life. Some barely know what each letter in ‘LGBT’ means. The fans we spoke to do not particularly care about improving LGBT rights” (Leach “The truth about Danmei”). While this report is now somewhat outdated, and may not truthfully reflect the current situation in danmei fandom, it does show that danmei fandom did not crossover with the real-life LGBTQ+ community in its early years, and confirms that the reason danmei works attract criticism from the queer community is largely due to its negligence of LGBTQ+ rights in reality.

Weiniang are boys and men who cross-dress to cosplay female fictional characters in anime they love or identify with, which is known as “cross-play” in the realm of cosplay. This popular subculture is deeply indebted to Japanese MAG fandom's *otoko no ko* (male daughter) phenomenon of male cosplayers cross-dressing as female MAG characters (Chao 21). *Weiniang* do not identify as transgender/ transsexual people and feel uncomfortable being assigned to a trans category by mass media (Chao 33). For instance, the most famous *weiniang* performing group in China, the Alice Cos Group, is formed of eight young men in their early twenties who perform as Japanese anime characters, K-pop girl bands, and (rarely) Chinese period drama characters. When asked if they are trying to change people's stereotypes on trans people, Xiaohua, the founder of this group, immediately dismissed this assumption and complained that the media assumed they practiced crossdressing in their daily life, and some jumped on the opportunity to criticise them for being “morally corrupt” (Xiaohua's Weibo post on 11st April 2012). He explains that they do such crossdressing purely out of their love for anime characters and cosplay activities. In an interview the members of this group stressed that they intentionally dress up like a girl only as a theatrical performance in ACG culture. They also revealed that some members have girlfriends and are “normal” people off stage (Chao 33; *V Fashion Show*). Therefore, *weiniang* crossdress as specific characters only in ACG conventions, and on social media to attract followers and to develop a potential career in the entertainment business. Their motivation has nothing to do with political intention to negotiate with heteronormative establishment for gender fluidity. In a word, *weiniang*'s

crossdressing is a purely commercial performance of femininity. They are not transgender/transsexual or even transvestite.

Whereas LIU Zhu (female alter ego Xiao Can), the truly queer crossdresser Internet celebrity, made a statement of their (chosen pronoun) ability to transgress the gender boundary. LIU Zhu's political practice of crossdressing attracted Chinese State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television (SAPPRFT)'s attention. The bureau prohibited their future performance in public spaces. Liu gained celebrity status after participating in a talent show *Kuaile nasheng* (lit. *Happy Male Voice*) in 2010, in which they performed as an androgynous character (23). The SAPPRFT found that their ambiguous gender identity hardly sat well within the state-promulgated gender norms and thus denied them further success on the talent show (Chao 22). Therefore, it is understandable that the *weiniang* group do not want to be associated with politically charged gender-bending practices as Liu did. They are rightfully concerned that the government's disapproval and interference in the culture industry may kill off their future career. In a word, the *weiniang* group performs a gender that is inconsistent with their biological sex, but they constantly emphasise in mainstream media that they are cis men, none of them confused about their gender identity and not interested in radically challenging heteronormativity.

The attempt to reduce queerness to avoid government censorship is played out in *Fatal Aestheticism*, which features a *weiniang* Chevalier d'Éon, apparently the first transgender person recorded in history.¹²⁹ This *weiniang* character is secure about his masculinity and introduced to audiences as a handsome violinist and vampire. He does crossdressing out of boredom and often uses his female alter ego to gain access to pretty women's boudoirs, to steal important information from men, or valuable jewelry to sustain his luxurious tastes (Chapter 7). He adopts Erik as a son and trains him intensively to be a swordmaster and constantly reminds him of growing muscles "like a man." When Chevalier dresses as a woman, it is just a "crossplay," for fun and for other monetary purposes. Interestingly, the author comments that she knows of this rather obscure historical figure (in China) through a Japanese anime *Le Chevalier d'Éon* (2006). In this anime d'Éon begins as a "normal" man. After his spy sister, Lia was murdered, her soul transferred into his body through dark magic, hence he sometimes dresses as a woman. In the whole anime series (24 episodes, 25 mins/episode), however, the total screen time for d'Éon dressing as a woman is only 12 mins and the female disguise is used for non-sexual purpose. The anime d'Éon also has a heterosexual interest in women, thus is by all means a cis man (Douban).

It is clear both the novella and the anime attempted to normalise d'Éon as a cisman and to justify d'Éon's crossdressing as a man's body possessed by a woman's soul in the anime; and a hedonistic vampire's outlandish cross-playing adventure in the novella. The fictional d'Éon is not interested in radically

¹²⁹ J. M. J. Rogister, *D'Éon de Beaumont, Charles Geneviève Louis Auguste André Timothée, Chevalier D'Éon in the French nobility (1728–1810)*, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Oxford UP, 2004.

challenging the heteronormativity either. The author may not even have had a transgender subject in mind at all in writing this novella, for Stella and Fanny, the pioneer transvestites who fought against the Victorian anti-gay laws in England, would be better characters featured in a Wildean danmei work (“[The Trial of Bolton and Park](#)”).¹³⁰ Considering the author knows so many famous and even less famous Western historical figures, if she really wants to feature pioneering crossdressing figures, it should not be difficult for her to research transgender history to discover two queer icons. I would conclude that d’Éon is featured for crossdressing’s entertaining novelty, to attract anime fans familiar with (or outsiders who are curious about) *weiniang* phenomenon, and make a profit.

In addition, this danmei, along with the other Wildean danmei works, is often inspired by Japanese anime works, whose queerness have already been filtered through Japanese BL manga/anime market’s demands and thus have already been commercialised and hetero-normalised (to a certain degree) by shōjo readers. In this particular case, as opposed to the anime’s attempt to pathologise d’Éon’s transgender identity as a result of spirit possession, *Fatal Aestheticism* made progress in terms of partially accepting real d’Éon’s transgender identity by making him a *weiniang*, which at least gives him agency to publicly perform femininity on a biological male body at his own will, regardless of its comedic tease. The character still asserts himself as a heterosexual man who encourages Erik to do traditionally manly activities to attract Dorian, whom Erik thought was a girl (Chapter 16).

The d’Éon character does not dress up as a lady daily and supports certain gender norms and conventional ideal—when he dresses as a woman he simply transforms into an incredibly beautiful lady without a trace of masculine features, and when he dresses as a man he is by all means masculine and manly (Chapter 7, 16; Chapter 5). This emphasis on the verisimilitude of gender performance abides by heteronormative conventions. Therefore the queer subject has compromised to consumerism, especially in the case of the male-to-female (MTF) transgender. The biological male has to purchase all kinds of womanly accessories, makeup, dresses, wigs, to look like a woman and some eventually accepts sex reassignment operations, largely because femininity today is riddled with consumerism; and human (female) identity is increasingly constructed by spectacles via social media and video-sharing websites, where people turn their lives into spectacles and desires lie thereof. In turn, the glamorous spectacle drives people to simulate a hyperality that is carefully performed by celebrities. Eventually, life becomes pageantry and a performance.

Gender identity is a performance and a habitual drag (*Gender Trouble*). Gender is presented to the public eye through behaviours and fashion which Beauvoir argues as the “second nature,” and identity is acknowledged by the gaze

¹³⁰ Ernest Boulton and William Park were middle-class males who enjoyed strolling among London prostitutes while dressed as women. They attended music hall performances dressed as women and called themselves “Stella” and “Fanny,” respectively. Early reports about Boulton and Park accentuated the scandal of Park violating the sanctity of the ladies room at the Strand. (“[The Trial of Bolton and Park](#)”)

(Debord; Butler; Baudrillard; de Beauvoir). When gender performance leads to active participation in consuming commodities that support entrenched gender stereotypes, the seemingly radical activists are no longer a threat to the heteronormativity, inasmuch as they are trying to fit in the gender stereotypes. This is why *weiniang* and transsexuals are generally “safe” topics in China, while transgenders are not. Jin Xing, China’s transsexual (MTF) mainstream TV celebrity has her own talk show; *Weiniang* groups like Alice Cos Group are widely popular within the anime fandom, whereas LIU Zhu (Xiao Can) has been prohibited to perform on public shows.¹³¹ As such, radical transgressive gender performances significantly damage a career and related creative expressions are censored and “locked” if perceived as inappropriate by the government. The compromise with the heteronormativity is negotiated through this novella’s attempt to *weiniangise* d’Éon’s transgender identity. The author also supernaturalises him as a vampire, a gothic symbol of decadence and beauty, populated by contemporary teen dramas, and perceived by Asian audiences as an exotic Western spectacle reserved for fantasy. In so doing, this d’Éon no longer posits any threat to the current heteronormative establishment.

The plastic surgery trope and the *weiniang* d’Éon are products of the neoliberal queer trend, adapting into the Chinese market under the surveillance of the conservative government. Unlike the neoliberal McDonaldization in Japan and South Korea, largely dictated by its market and conventions, danmei writers may or may not expect or realize that their works, saturated with commercialised subcultural symbols, have created a sanctuary for the nascent queer activism, and have grown and spread in China without directly confronting the powerful and omnipresent censorship system. China’s special political climate has resulted in danmei works’ paradoxical nature—challenging the gender norms while also abiding by social expectations/regulations prescribed by Confucian traditions. Nevertheless, what danmei works showcase, Chao comments,

“ . . . is an intricate, self-contradictory queer performative possibility through which both normative and nonnormative gender identities can be perfectly reified, theatrically performed. . . their sophisticated gendered negotiations with queer theatricality and daily heteronormativity open up promising spaces for the sustained existence and survival of nonnormativity gendered expressions, performances, and groups within mainstream, heterocentric Chinese media and cultural environments” (34).

Therefore, admittedly danmei works are created for a predominately cis-women’s market, and limited by their normative heterosexual perspective, their

¹³¹ An earlier and similar case to Liu is LI Yuchun, China’s first grossroot celebrity who is voted to be the champion of Chaoji Nvsheng (Super Girls), a reality singing contest in 2005, whose bold tomboy looks won her huge popularity among young people at the time but attracted heavy criticism from the government and scholars. Eventually the TV show was halted after 2006, returned in 2009, and then permanently halted by the government since 2011 (Lavin 159). Although luckily Li maintains her celebrity status, she no longer dresses in baggy jeans anymore. Instead, she starts to wear feminine makeup, dresses, and allegedly has had plastic surgery to make her look less masculine, in a word, hetero-normalised.

light-hearted, sensational, and aesthetically appealing content, albeit commercialised, attract increasing mainstream media coverage for the LGBTQ+ activism. More and more young people know about queer demographics and care about marginalised social groups in their real lives. Homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia, and all kinds of social phobias, all emerge from the fear of the unknown and the fear of difference. Those danmei works are trailblazing by humanising the gender minorities in popular literature with a familiar setting recognizable to all. They draw readers to understand that gender minorities are not monsters from “strangeland.” Instead, they might be their friends, family, classmates, colleagues, who are living similar lives and deserve fair treatment in society. As a cis-woman, I am assuredly limited by my heterosexual perspective to claim that I fully understand the sufferings and oppression that my non-heteronormative friends experience in daily life. However, had I never read a touching danmei novel, pairing my favorite footballers in my high school, and had not become curious and watched *My Own Private Idaho* (1991), I might still think fujoshi, BL anime/manga fans, and LGBTQ+ people were all faceless weirdo in the news, simply because I lacked exposure to these individuals in my daily life. Thus, despite commercialised overtones, which downplay the seriousness of LGBTQ+ causes to some extent, danmei fictions indeed have helped queer activism to develop in China.

6. Conclusion

The cultural legacy of Oscar Wilde in Chinese danmei literature is deeply indebted to Japanese BL cultural commodities, which feature beautiful teen boys having romantic or sexual relationships, but written from a heterosexual perspective, inasmuch as created for shōjo manga/anime audiences who are predominantly young cis-women. Wilde-inspired danmei works in China are popular among middle-class, well-educated young people interested in anime culture and Western (European to be more precise) culture. These Aesthetic 同志 demonstrate their understanding of and identification with 19th-century Aestheticism. The Chinese character 同志 indicates their comradeship with Japanese and Korean counterparts who share their ideal of improving the lives of LGBTQ+ community.

The three major circles within the Chinese danmei fandom include the Wildean danmei, a subcategory of the Euro-American circle. The fans and authors of this danmei school have a good general understanding of Western culture and are familiar with Western cities, which reflect their privileged social standing in Chinese societies. Their BOBO tastes are reflected in fictional characters' struggle between a pursuing pure artistic ideal or a realistic concern of earning money. Most importantly, danmei works still hold a heterosexual female perspective on gay relationships, such as the fixed *gong-shou* binary and male pregnancy. Such characteristics show danmei as conforming to the heteronormative establishment and Confucian patriarchal ideal. Thus danmei and BL are susceptible to criticism from gay community and scholars. However while the commercialisation and objectification of queer subjects is indeed problematic, the male-male love as a trope

for an ideal relationship values spiritual compatibility largely denied in Chinese couples' lives regardless of their gender and orientation. Its value also lies in the attempt to de-ritualise marriage and decriminalise sexual desire, especially female sexual desire.

My analysis of the two Wildean danmei works demonstrates them as truly pushing the boundaries of queer subjects in popular literature. *Dear Wilde's* body-swap plot device presents a redemption fable: The ugly surface going inside to redeem the depth of the character, while the beautiful surface drives away its inner devil, a reversed surface-depth dyad, traditionally used in Gothic tales. Moreover, the body-swap device renders the bonding between the two male characters more than simply sexual partnering, and deepens their relationship as the pursuit of "soulmates," creating equal power dynamics in the relationship. Thus both parties have agency without being pigeonholed as *gong* or *shou*. By freeing them of the fixed *gong-shou* sexual relationship, and adding the device of their living inside each other's bodies, the author depicts a Platonic love rarely seen in danmei, a bold attempt to address the criticism that danmei works objectify male bodies and homosexual relationships.

Further, both works feature makeover scenes: the transformation of Erik and the "weiniangised" Chevalier d'Éon reveal Wildean danmei's neoliberal aspects that cater to market demands. Globalisation has brought China into an age of consumerism, inseparable from a fixation with visual stimuli. The queer subjects thus undergo plastic surgeries to appeal to straight female audiences, the dominating demographic that spend money on reading online danmei literature. Erik's ugly, queer body thus must transform into a pretty boy under the cis-women gaze. Similarly, the transgender icon Chevalier d'Éon is also commercialised and heteronormalised as a *weiniang*, who practices harmless cross-play for fun instead of crossdress for political statement. This commercialisation of Chevalier d'Éon is not dictated by the market's demand for works from the female gaze, but to avoid government censorship, which does not allow representation of a community perceived as deviant or degenerate. Under such a circumstance, a certain degree of commercialisation of queer subjects actually helps queer activists to develop and to be known by mainstream Chinese. Thus the neoliberal commercialisation of queer subjects ironically has become a shelter for China's nascent LGBTQ+ movements.

Chapter 6: The Grand Unity of the “Aesthetic 同志” in East Asia: Wilde’s Legacy in Japan and South Korea

1. Introduction

1.1. The Cultural Entanglement of East Asians with Aestheticism

Japan and Korea (both North and South) were deeply influenced by Imperial China in the long pre-modern years before Western imperial expansion forced trading with the three countries.¹³² This bond with China was not just ideological, but a thorough appropriation and recreation of Chinese culture, ranging from lifestyle and food—such as flower arrangement, tea ceremony, matcha (mocha in Chinese), gyoza (jiaozi), sashimi (kuai), wagashi (tangguozi) and so forth, to artistic expression in such fine arts as calligraphy and brush painting. It also included religion and political systems, such as in Kūkai’s expedition to China to import Vajrayana Buddhism to Japan, and the adoption of the *Keju* system (“June” from *Classic of Poetry*, Hsiao; *Book of Rites*; *Book of Later Han* vol. 85; *Records of Three Kingdoms* vol.30; *Book of Jin* vol. 97; *Book of Sui* vol. 81; *Old Book of Tang* vol.199; Fogel 102–107; Goodrich, Luther Carrington et al. 1316; Mote, Twitchett, and Fairbank 491–2; Hakeda; Abe; Matsuda; J. Lee).¹³³ Thus, Japan, Korea, and China share similar cultural mentalities and modes of life shaped by Buddhism and Confucianism (Ruism).¹³⁴ While sharing a similar traditional culture in pre-modern era, the countries reacted differently to modernisation and Western imperial powers, resulting in differing historical developments, accounting for why I avoided the romanised versions of 同志.

Japan was the first East Asian country to discover the Western world had developed into an industrial age, and voluntarily began to reform every aspect of their society from top down, eventually successfully modernising into a powerful imperial country from the Meiji Restoration on (cr.1850–1889). The Iwakura Mission (1871–1873) to the West marks the beginning of Japanese exploration of Western technology; simultaneously Western curiosity of Japanese traditional culture gradually grew into an obsession with Japanese classical art, or *Japonisme*. Aestheticism absorbed both Japonisme and the lingering 18th-century chinoiserie,

¹³² In 1852 Perry’s Expedition to Japan announces the beginning of US-Japan’s “gunboat diplomacy,” which propels Japan to modernise and eventually starts the Meiji Restoration in 1868. *Shinmiyangyo* is the Korean name for the US expedition to Korea in 1871, which marks the first American military action in Korea.

¹³³ Japan used the *Keju* system as a model in the Heian period (794–1185 AD). Similarly, it was used as a model by both the Goryeo (918–1392) and Joseon (1392–1894) dynasties in Korea until 1894 (Japanese colonisation). The Chinese system also provided the framework for the Confucian examination system in Vietnam from the reign of the Lý dynasty Emperor Lý Nhân Tông (1075) until that of the Nguyễn dynasty Emperor Khải Định (1919; 493–512; “Influence of China’s Imperial Examinations on Japan, Korea and Vietnam” 493–512).

¹³⁴ Ruism is a school of philosophy and also a religion emerged from the teachings of Chinese philosopher Confucius (551–479 BCE) during the Spring and Autumn period (approximately 771 to 476 BCE), and then is made an official ideology for governing by LIU Che—Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty (202 BC–220 AD).

and began to influence Japanese literature and art towards the end of the Meiji Restoration.

Aestheticism entered China and Korea through Japan in the early days of 20th century. Both countries sent students to Japan to study Western technology and culture, so as to modernise themselves and catch up with the West. Aestheticism became a movement for young scholars from both China and Korea to use as a conduit of their anti-Confucianism and anti-federalist expression.

In China, writers, poets, and artists, such as SHAO Xunmei, ZHANG Kebiao, YE Lingfeng, ZHU Weiji, XU Zhimo, made great contributions to Chinese Aesthetic Movement during the early decades of the 20th century, employing Aestheticism as an ideological guide for their anti-Confucianism cause. Indeed, the study of comparative literature in China did not originate in academic institutions, but was closely related to political and social reform movements. YUE Daiyun notes the birth of Chinese comparative literature as inseparable from the desire to revive the nation and to renew and develop modern literature (4).

Korean scholars also underwent a similar political agenda to modernise Korea (Joseon). Such progressive political ideals are mostly found among writers of *sinsosŏl* (lit. “new novel”), such as YI Injik, KWI ūi sŏng’s “A Demon’s Voice” (1907); YI Haejo, CHA yujong’s “Liberty Bell” (1910); CHOE Ch’ansik, Ch’uwŏlsaek’s “Colour of the Autumn Moon” (1912); as well as historian CHOE Nam-seon (McLeod, Russell, et al 129–139; P. Lee).

During the “Transitional literature (1894–1910)” period, Korean writers and political activists fought against—as did Chinese scholars—threats from both Western and Japanese imperial powers, and simultaneously dealt with internal tension between the reformers and the feudal conservatives. YI Kwang-su (1892–1950), “father of modern Korean literature,” argued that writing (literature) was nothing less than personal and national salvation (Sylvian; O. Lee). “His constant and unstinting [sic] devotion to absorbing literature had cultivated Yi’s own natural genius (and rid him, as he said, of ‘the Korean stink’ [=the Confucian value system]); Yi simultaneously nurtured a hope that literature would help Korea attain cultural evolution via enlightenment progress,” through the emotional elements” (情의成分) found in Western and modern Japanese literature (Sylvian; A. Lee 81–137).

HWANG Jong-yon argued that the Chinese Confucianism was perceived by Yi as the major obstacle to Korea’s modernisation; whereas Aestheticism represented liberation from the stifling confines of Confucianism, which did not allow expression of “raw” emotions, sensual pleasures, and individualism (5–35). Yi contended that the backward mentality in Korea was mostly caused by Confucianism and the feudal hierarchy, both borrowed from China. Japan, Yi controversially argued, was much less influenced by Confucianism by comparison, hence was the most advanced country in East Asia.¹³⁵

¹³⁵Yi Kwangsu is a controversial figure in Korean literary history for his pro-Japanese attitude and his collaboration with Japanese government. In Anne Lee’s article “Yi Kwangsu and Korean Literature: The Novel “Mujŏng” (1917),” she points out that Yi participated in the Korean

While studying in Tokyo, Yi developed an intense interest in Aestheticism, and viewed it as the genre that could modernise Korean literature and culture. In fact, Yi's first work is the homoerotic story, "Maybe Love" ("Ai ka"; 1909), written in Japanese. The story is about a Korean student in a Japanese boarding school who develops an obsession with a Japanese *bishounen* (beautiful boy) who does not return his feelings. The Korean student later commits suicide because of his unrequited love. This bold story, although criticised by Korean academia as mere "dabblings" and "immature efforts at writing," to a large extent gave Korean literature a modern touch, featuring the rebellious queer theme mostly absent from his contemporary domestic and Chinese counterpart (Sylvian; Textor 65–94).

Yi blames Confucianism as the major obstacle to Korea's modernisation, and Chinese scholars of the time would not disagree. Chinese reformists and enlightened students also considered Confucianism as the hindrance to China's overcoming a backward mentality. This anti-Confucianism sentiment was especially strong during the May Fourth Movement (1919). Like Yi, "China's Beardsley"—YE Lingfeng also produced a homoerotic story, titled "Forbidden Zone (Jindi)," as a way to dismantle traditional Confucian values. This unfinished story and the short-lived Chinese Aestheticism are thoroughly discussed in Chapter 1. In general, Aestheticism made little impact in modern Chinese literature as it did in Japan and Korea.

Japan, the cradle of Oriental Aestheticism has been most accomplished in developing this Western artistic genre, especially in art and literature. Japanese Aesthete and Decadent writer, Yukio Mishima, wrote a story featuring a "Dorian Gray" type in his novel *Forbidden Colors* (*Kinjiki*; 1951–1953). The story tells Shunsuke, an old man who lures a stunning young gay man—Yuichi—into marrying a wealthy heiress, while also encouraging him to have as many affairs as possible, and—for his own twisted psychological experiment—to toy with women's emotions. The story contains repellent themes and wallows in narcissism and misogyny. Yet like Wilde's *Dorian Gray*, there is more going on below its decadent surface. Mishima provides readers a Dostoevskian insight into the human condition and offers a window into extraordinarily evil lives. He represents—as Lu Xun comments—"like a decaying wound blooming out dangerously beautiful flowers" (*Hot Wind* No. 39). This work is arguably the quintessential representation of Japanese Aestheticism, which incorporates Buddhist fatalism with Decadence, played out in Shunsuke's suicide out of his pre-destined failure to contain the beauty—the ravishingly beautiful Yuichi.

Independence student movement when he was studying in Japan, served in the exiled Korean Provisional Government in Shanghai, and was a central figure in the nationalist organizations the Hungsadan (Corps for the advancement of scholars). The Japanese colonial government often censored, confiscated, or banned Yi's works from publication or sale. Yi advocated gradual attainment of Korean national independence through cultural, social, and economic reform. His vision of gradual independence, however seems to have entailed acquiescence with Japanese colonial rule during the process of reform. The implications of Yi's thought became perhaps most evident when Yi began actively collaborating with the Japanese government in 1939.

It is different from Wilde's moral ending, however, for the corrupted Yuichi lives his decadent life without any sense of repentance or guilty. To a certain degree, this Japanese Dorian-Gray story is more decadent and bleaker than Wilde's original. The philosophical exploration of "pure" art, stretches the "art for art's sake" to another level to challenge society's moral system. While this story's aestheticism theme is similar to that of Marco Evaristti's notorious *Helena* (2000),¹³⁶ which seems to be totally devoid of morality, the Aestheticism ideal that art should be independent of any outside influences is highly accomplished in Mishima's novel, if not taking the mantra too fundamentally. Mishima's work is more on the Decadent side than the Aesthetic side, and borderline Nihilism, not what Wilde would appreciate. Yet to completely denounce a masterpiece that captures the essence of Japanese Aestheticism is not my intention, as we will see its influence later in their pop culture.

Aestheticism was highly influential in East Asia from the end of the 19th century through the first four decades of the 20th century. It circulated among the three East Asian countries following its immediate popularity in Europe and the US, towards the end of the 19th century. Generally speaking, Japanese Aestheticism's key feature rests on its daring artistic exploration of *art pour l'art*, while Aestheticism in China and Korea is more or less entangled with both countries' geopolitics and anti-Confucianist political agenda. In Korea and China, Aestheticism was employed as a revolutionary expression.

1.2. The Grand Unity of Cosmopolitan Queer Utopia in Popular Culture

Entering the third decade of the 20th century, the Imperial Japan propagandised to create a "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere," a grand unity of countries sharing a similar Confucian culture and customs, and claimed to "emancipate" East Asia from the Western imperial powers (Swan 139–149; Bary and Theodore; Toland 447–448). However, this claim just cloaked their colonial agenda to create a Pacific Empire under their Fascist regime. This "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere" was used to justify their invasion of China, colonisation of Korea, as well as other military occupations in South-East Asia and Pacific islands (Swan 139–149; Bary and Theodore).

Ironically, what military activities failed to achieve for a united East Asia has been fulfilled by cultural bonding through popular culture, in response to modernisation. Japanese manga, anime, and video games (MAG) culture, or *otaku* culture, as it is more widely used by Japanese themselves, has successfully influenced generations of Chinese, Korean, and South East Asians since the last two decades of the 20th century.

¹³⁶ In 2000, the Danish-Chilean artist made headlines with his art "Helena & El Pescador." The piece debuted at the Trapholt museum in Kolding, Denmark, and consisted of goldfish swimming in ten Moulinex blenders. Visitors were given a choice: hit the ON button and kill the fish or leave the button alone as a way of granting pardon. The director of the gallery, Peter Meyer, was sued for the work because he would not unplug the blenders after police demanded it. But the court decided not to convict Meyer.

Japanese popular cultural products, often bodily portray non-binary characters and unorthodox sexuality, especially in the *Shōjo* manga/anime subgenre—BL or *Shōnen Ai*, which glorifies romantic and sexual relationships between young and beautiful boys as the purest form of love. The representation of gender-minorities are widely circulated among teenagers in these countries, which has contributed to Asian millennials' compassionate attitude to the non-heteronormative community after being exposed to and growing up with manga/anime characters of gender minority backgrounds. The more politically active millennials have begun to join feminist and LGBTQ+ activism in their own countries, even though they may not identify as a member of the LGBTQ+ demographics. Therefore, young people from different countries and areas, especially from Sinophone world and Korea, are to a large extent united with Japanese young people who enjoy similar media and subscribe to a similar aesthetic standard for *hua mei nan* (lit. flower-like boys). They are similarly motivated by the queer culture flow and involved in LGBTQ+ activism in their reality. Chinese scholar YANG Ling concludes, a “cosmopolitan homosexual utopia” has formed among the *fujoshi* (Japanese term) or the *tongrennü* (Chinese term). Yang notes that enthusiastic *tongrennü* have borrowed the Confucian idea of “datong” from *The Book of Rites (Liji)*, in which Confucius envisions a utopian world of “grand unity” (*datong*), where people live in permanent peace, justice, and harmony—to articulate their political ideals—a peaceful world conceptualised and interpreted through the same-sex relationship (“The World of Grand Union” 45). Such idealistic vision of queer transnationalism is analysed through the Japanese anime *Hetalia: Axis Powers* (2006–) in Yang’s research (45). In the anime, countries are personified as cute guys, which provides space for *fujoshi* to pair up countries into homosexual couples, e.g., UK and France, Russia and China, Germany and Japan, and US and UK (see fig 37).

This anime’s immense international popularity has also inspired fan girls (sometimes boys) from all over the world—Yang focuses on Chinese fan girls in her essay, but the anime itself is very popular in the whole of Asia, as well as in the US and Europe—to re-create BL fanfictions and fanart (45–60). They introduced and translated each other’s works and thus began global queer flow in popular culture, becoming a harmonious union of a multicultural *Hetalia* fandom, or a “queer nation.”

In this chapter, I follow Yang’s approach to explore Oscar Wilde’s legacy appropriated and recreated by Japanese and Korean cultural industry to reveal what happens when Wilde and queerness meet popular culture and the neoliberalism in Japan and Korea; and what happens when gender politics intersects with geopolitics. Yang argues that the *Hetalia* boom in China shows that BL not only can function as a tool to reshape configurations of gender and sexuality, it can also be employed by young women and others as a vehicle for political expression (45). Similarly, I argue that Wildean works in popular culture that directly address the queer issue in Japan and South Korea also play an important role in humanising the gender minorities, despite works that inevitably have been commercialised in the market. Wilde-inspired popular media functions as a political expression for both women and

gender minorities.

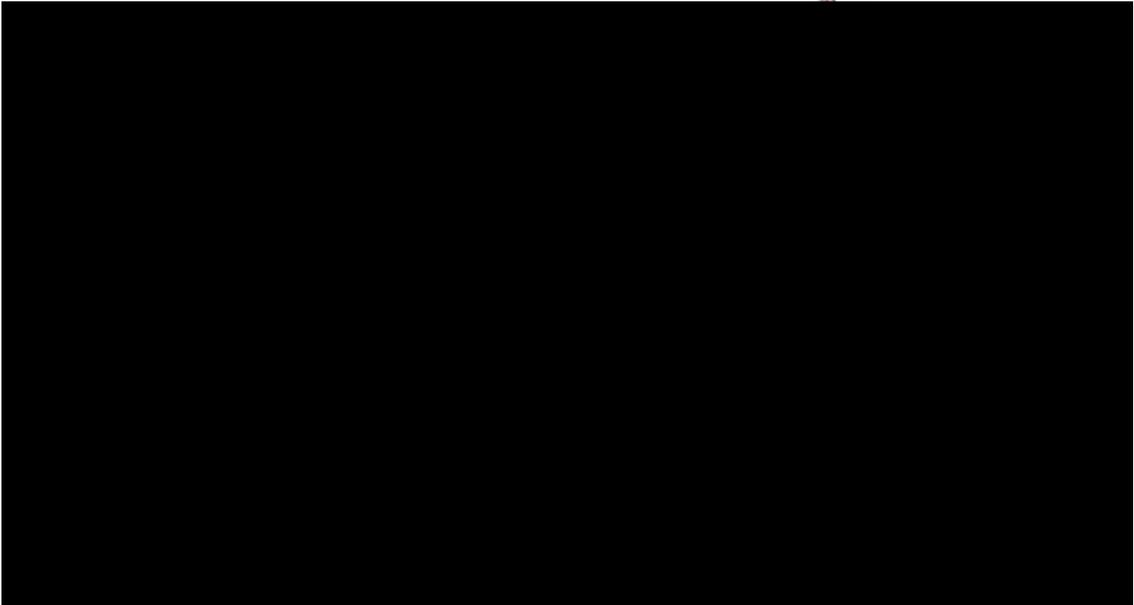


Fig 37 Personified countries in Japanese anime *Hetalia: Axis Power*, countries' names noted by me. Acquired from <https://www.deviantart.com/>

In the following section I first analyse a rebellious Japanese video game for teen girls and young women that features Wilde's characters in the most decadent way. I argue that the video game seems morally questionable but actually decriminalises female sexual desire and de-villainise queer identity in video games. This case is followed by an analysis of Dorian Gray's moralised image on the South Korean musical stage. I argue that it reflects the hyper-commodification of culture in which the queer subject is heteronomralised under the heterosexual female gaze.

2. Inside the "Oscar Wilde Brothel": The Representation of Female Sexual Desires and Queer Villains in the Japanese Video Game *Ozmafia!!*

Highbrow adaptations of Wilde's works and works inspired by his philosophy are numerous in Japan. Summarised in Kuzuko Suzuki's article, Aestheticism has influenced prominent Japanese literary masters such as Mori Ōgai, Jun'ichirō Tanizaki, Edogawa Ranpo, Yukio Mishima ("Perceptions of *tanbi*" 99). Aestheticism's impact has been deeply embedded in modern Japanese culture. Wilde's influence in highbrow literature has been thoroughly studied by scholars both in and outside Japan. The most notable and carefully discussed work is *Yuubi Shugi to Japanizumu (Aestheticism to Japanism; 2004)*, written by Hiroyuki Tanita. Hence I will not focus on the scholarly reception of Wilde in Japan.

Aestheticism's palimpsest influence on Japanese youth culture also started around the Meiji period. Meiji Aesthete Edogawa Ranpo's detective stories directly inspired Japanese detective anime/manga series *Detective Conan* (1994–), created by Aoyama Gōshō, in which the protagonist's alias is "Edogawa Conan," an homage to both Edogawa Ranpo and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. While Aesthetic and dandy figures are popular theme and icons in manga/anime set in the 19th century Europe

or an alternative universe with Victorian style (i.e. *Emma*, *Black Butler*), direct adaptations of Wilde's works are comparatively rare. Considering Japan as the cradle of MAG culture and so profoundly influenced by Aestheticism, it is quite odd that the quantity of pop culture works directly linked to him is so small. Japanese scholars have not yet covered this interesting phenomenon in academia. During my research, I found that the most famous and widely received manga version of *Dorian Gray* is in the *World Literary Cartoon Complete Collection* (1968) illustrated by Suzuki Yoshiko, and a horror suspense manga titled *Jenny's Smile* 『ジエニーの微笑』(1981), by Zeno Masako (see fig 38). However, both works were published years ago.

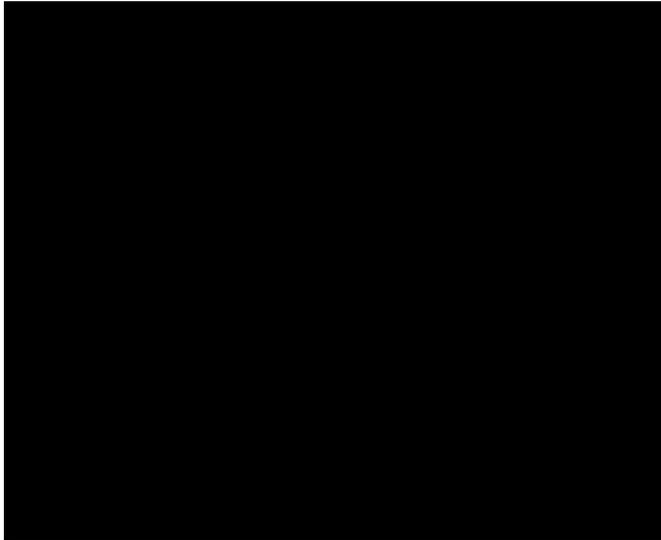


Fig 38 *Jenny's Smile* (left) and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (right).

2.1. Otome Video Game—*Ozmafia!!*

Wilde's influence remains active in the gaming industry on the other hand. The well-received Japanese video game *Ozmafia!!* (2016), developed by Poni-Pachet SY and published by MangaGamer and on Steam, a platform for purchasing and playing video games, *Ozmafia!!* is rated 9/10. This game is labeled “otome game”—a story-based video game that specifically targets heterosexual women. Generally, the pleasure of such game is to develop a romantic relationship(s) between the female avatar and several male characters. This genre is most established in Japan and typically made up of visual novels and simulation games, particularly dating sims and life simulation games (H.S. Kim 165).

2.1.1. Specifics

In *Ozmafia!!* gamers simulate with an innocent young girl named Fuka (name changeable), adventuring into Emerald City, inspired by *The Wizard of Oz* (1939). Along the way she makes the Oz-ian unusual friends—a Lion, a Tinman, and Scarecrow, all personified as handsome young men. Caramia (the lion) is the first pretty boy Fuka encounters, with whom she can develop a potential romantic

relationship if gamers choose this main route. Caramia is the don (headman of a mafia) of “famiglia Oz” (a gang inspired by Italian mafia) who takes Fuka under his wing because she is amnesic and lost. Other members of this famiglia include Kyrie (Tinman) and Axel (Scarecrow), who are also possible romantic interests to Fuka depending on different routes chosen by gamers.

2.1.2 The “Sinister” Brothel Route

The most unusual part of this game is the “Oscar Wilde Salon” (see figure 39). “Lord Dorian Gray” is the manager of the Salon, actually a high-class brothel boasting beautiful male prostitutes. “The Happy Masochistic Prince” Alfani is the most popular male prostitute, and “The Devoted Swallow” Manboy is the concierge (*Ozmafia!!* Characters).

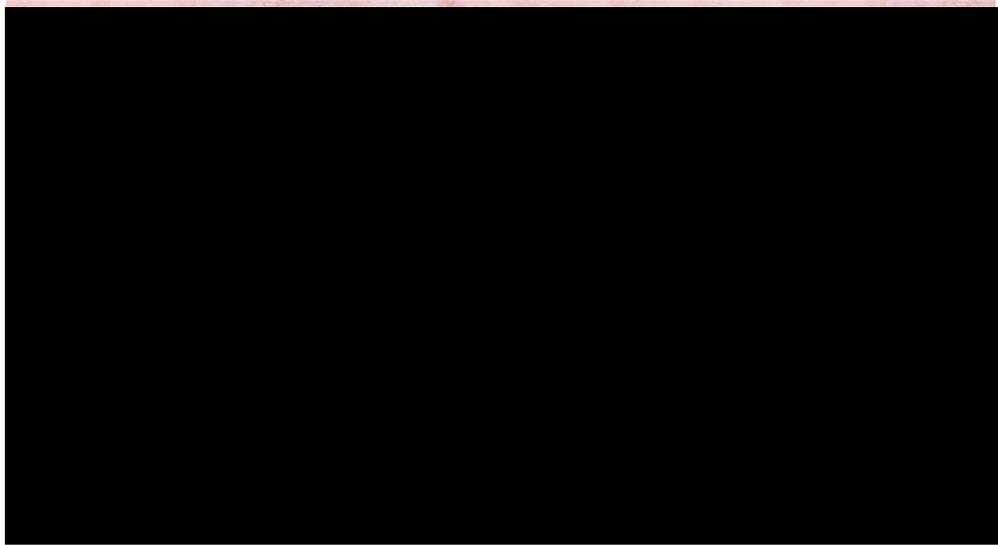


Figure 39 Members of the Oscar Wilde Salon, *Ozmafia!!* (2016), screenshot from <http://mangagamer.org/ozmafia/>

Gamers can choose different routes by clicking different characters’ images on the home interface. Options are provided for gamers to choose from time to time, which will result in different endings. The brothel route boasts pleasures of unadulterated coitus and BDSM. After choosing to meet Manboy and Alfani consecutively, gamers will finally meet Dorian Gray, an elegant and decidedly “adult” man (see fig. 40).

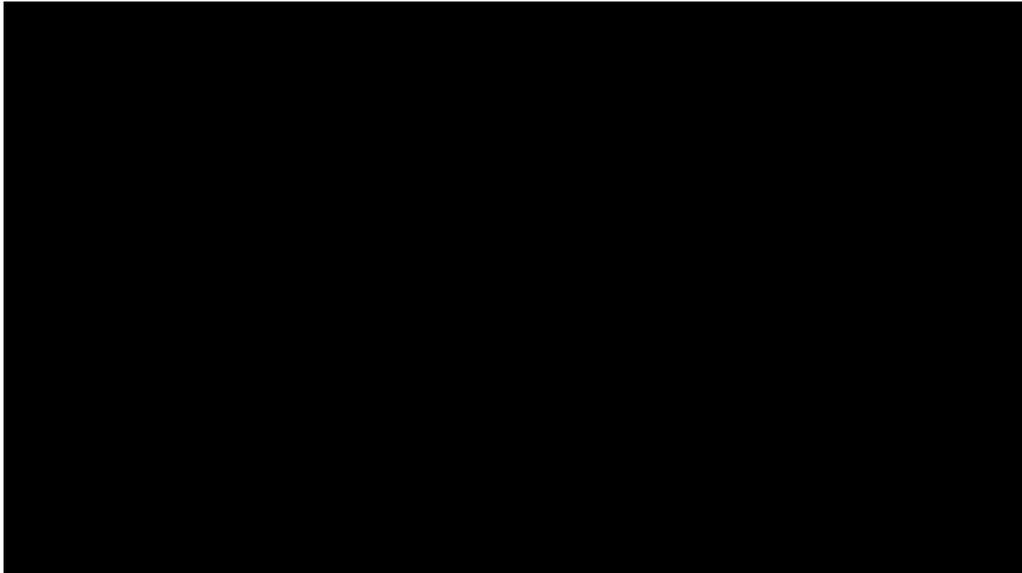


Figure 40 Dorian Gray in *Ozmafia!!* (2016), screenshot from <http://mangagamer.org/ozmafia/>

Dorian invites gamers into the Wilde mansion and reveals the true nature of this salon. He then hypnotises Fuka and lures her into decadent desires. This scenario will repeat a few times until Fuka stops being shy and then Alfani teaches her about BDSM, making her the dominatrix (see fig. 41). Alfani gives her a whip and tells her, “I will call you master, treat me as your pet, mess me real good” (*Ozmafia!!* script).

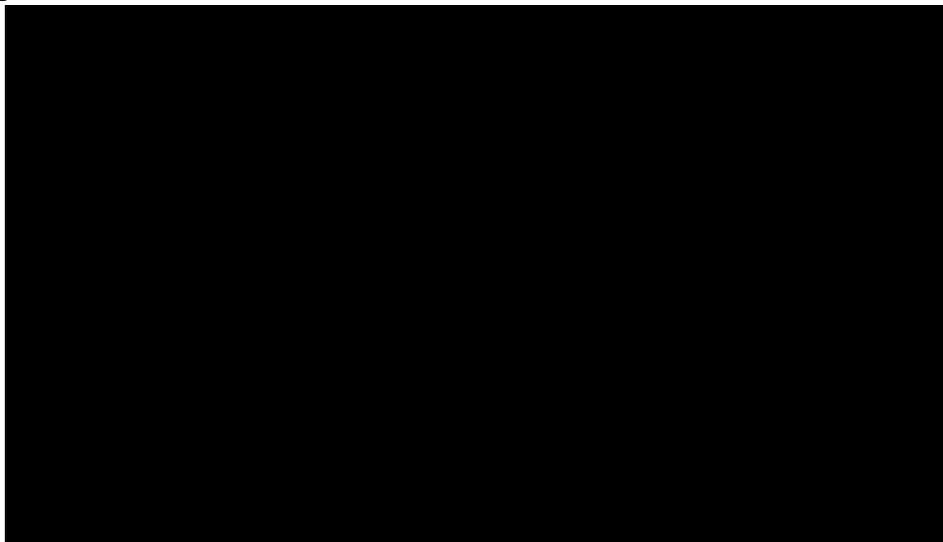


Figure 41 Alfani teaching Fuka about BDSM, screenshot from *Ozmafia!!* (2016)

After gamers visiting the brothel in consecutive rounds, Gray starts to offer Fuka aphrodisiac drugs to make her a sex addict. The next round Fuka confesses that she is not satisfied, Gray then orders Manboy to join for a threesome. The threesome is drawn in a very subtle manner but with very explicit descriptions (see fig. 42).

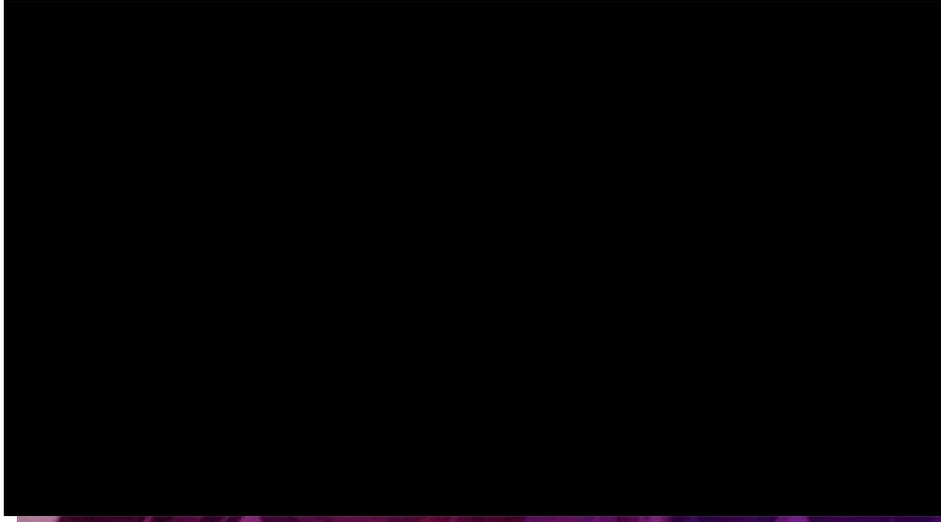


Figure 42. Dorian, Manboy, and Fuka in a threesome, screenshot from *Ozmafia!!* (2016), screenshot from <http://mangagamer.org/ozmafia/>

After the sex party, Gray declares Fuka dead. She becomes his sex slave for the rest of her life and is chained and branded with the mark of the Wilde Salon. Dorian declares, “You are dead to the world. I have killed the concept of you as a person. [...] I like beautiful things, I decided that I wanted your body from the first day I met you. [...] If you desire pleasure, don’t try to fly out of my cage. I’m going to make you mine, all right, Fuka?” (*Ozmafia!!*). Gray also orders Fuka to address him as “Lord.”

The first ending of this route is that Manboy helps Fuka to take over the brothel. Dorian Gray is amused by the situation, hands over his power to her, and becomes her servant instead. Gamers at this stage can change Gray’s name (see fig 43).

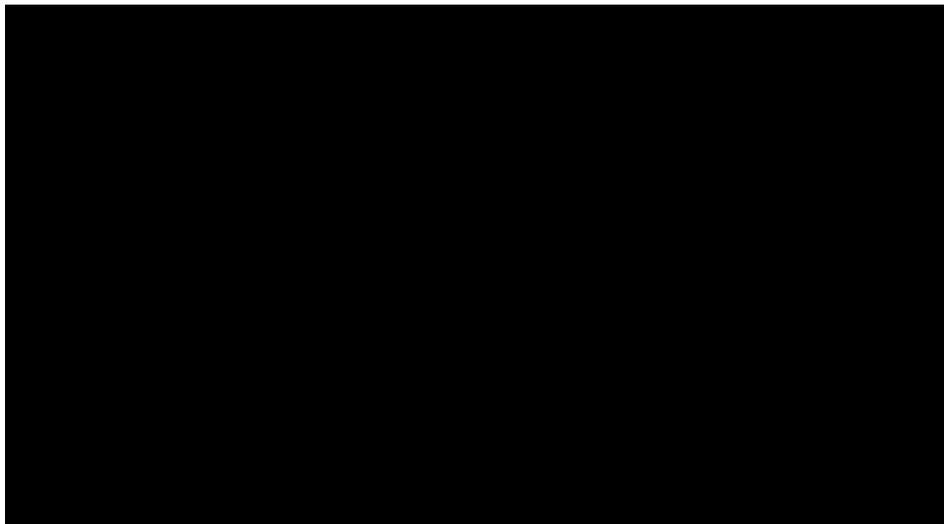


Figure 43 Ending 1 of the Brothel route where Dorian becomes Fuka’s sexual servant, screenshot from *Ozmafia!!* (2016), screenshot from <http://mangagamer.org/ozmafia/>

The second ending is much darker. Fuka tries to escape from the brothel, but Alfani captures her and physically abuses her. However, later on, when Manboy tries

to help Fuka to escape, she refuses to go, maybe due to a Stockholm syndrome. She ends up as a soulless pet to Gray and even curls up like a cat on his lap (see fig. 44).

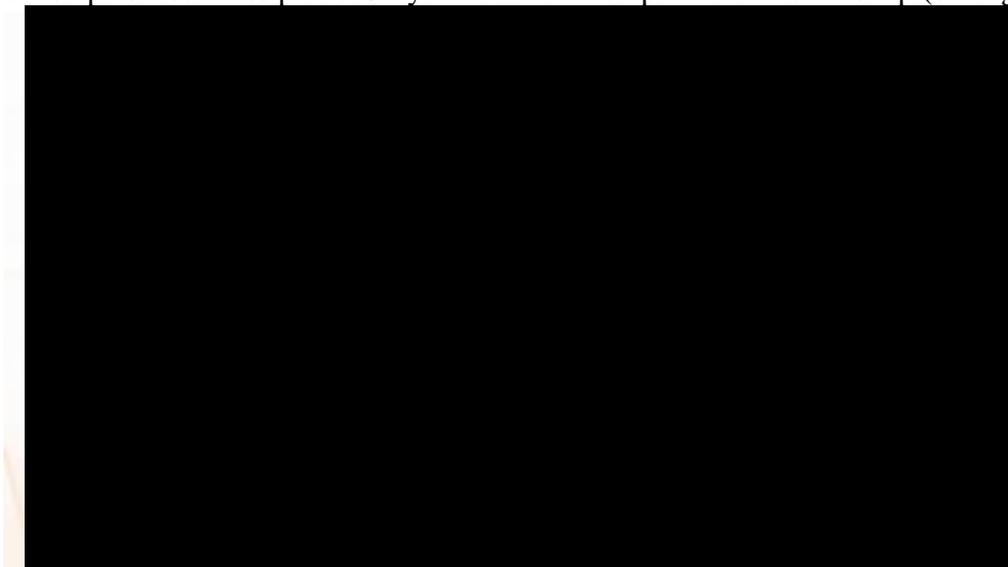


Figure 44 Ending 2 of the Brothel Route, screenshot from *Ozmafia!!* (2016), screenshot from <http://mangagamer.org/ozmafia/>

2.1.3. Gamers' Reviews

Reviews of this game are mixed. While the majority rates this game positively, some gamers express their worries that such a sexual and dark game is harmful to teen girls. They believe that the female avatar in Otome games should empower women, instead of making the heroine humiliated and debased like Fuka in the second ending. Some gamers are angry at and afraid of Gray and Alfani in the second ending. For example, gamer Marvelle comments, "This guy [Dorian] is such a huge jerkoff I want to punch that smug grin off his freaking face! [...] want him to die in a fire. I want to watch him burn for what he did to Manboy and Alfani and Fuka" (cutensteamy.com). Another gamer CHARIBO writes a long review about this brothel route with strong language: "I hope there's a route where I can kill Dorian Gray. [...] I've developed some kind of allergic reaction to him and Alfani. Whenever I see them in other routes, my body becomes tense, and I can feel the hate overflowing me." (angryanimebitches.com). Many reviewers find the brothel route sinister and sick, and they warn other gamers to stay away from Manboy at the beginning to save time and energy getting to such a horrible ending.

2.2. "Wilde Salon" Decriminalising Female Sexual Desires

However, after exploring different routes in the game myself, I noted *Ozmafia!!*'s brothel route, although admittedly decadent, was also liberating and queer. Conventional otome games' sole purpose is dating and marriage, while this decadent route explores deviant sexual desire specifically designed for (East Asian) women and those who identify as women in a conservative and patriarchal environment. This game is, in fact, liberating, and decriminalises the suppressed female sexual desires considered "dirty" or "taboo" in conservative cultures.

Subjects include homosexuality, creative sexual taste (e.g. BDSM), along with the second vile ending in *Ozmafia!!* are altogether shocking to gamers used to conventional otome games. Accordingly, they think the game is dark, strange, but simultaneously are intrigued and curious. For instance, a gamer notes that the brothel route “[...] was so different from the rest of the game, it made me want to see the ending” (Noiz~Yume). The weirdness and the decadent theme inherit the *Dorian Gray* “degeneracy” and the rebellious spirit that Wilde symbolically holds. If Fuka starts to date Dorian Gray or Manyboy and ends up getting married, as she does in other routes, featuring Wilde’s dandy characters would be meaningless in this game. The “Wildeness” is impossible to be heteronormalised into a traditional marriage-oriented otome game, and the game designer is creative in exploiting the decadent theme instead of heteronormalising Dorian Gray.

Featuring a queer subject in an otome game announces a very good beginning, encouraging ordinary cisgender players to explore the “taboo” topic by themselves. Whether they are shocked, disgusted, or intrigued should not be regulated. They could either choose to leave and write reviews to criticise the game or keep playing and to find more academic information about these unusual sexual subjects later. Representing the minority in popular media is a much more effective way to engender compassion and understanding among mainstream audiences than preaching “political correctness” without letting audiences to be exposed to or experience the lives of the Other. Thus this particular Japanese otome game’s decision to include Wilde and the queer theme is rather laudable.

In KIM Hyeshin’s research on women’s games in Japan, three typical features of otome games emerge. First, they contain “dating features;” second, the game control and game system tend to be simple and the flow of the game is static, and completely different from male-oriented games with fast-camera and jerky or violent character movements; and finally, such women’s games usually develop other multimedia merchandise, such as Shōjo manga and anime series (170). In this sense, *Ozmafia!!* is a typical women’s game, standing apart only from the “sick” brothel route. However, it is the dark brothel route that makes this game outstanding, but also makes some gamers feel uncomfortable.

Video games have a deep impact on human psyche and, therefore, are an important battleground for different social norms, so as to influence players politically and psychologically. The representation of gender, and especially women (gender-nonconforming community is in the next section), has been usually problematic and pernicious in video games, as they were either depicted as “damsel in distress,” the background women, or the overly sexualised “reward” for the male protagonist (players). Feminist media critic Anita Sarkeesian did a series of video essays to study women’s images in video games pandering to the straight male gaze. She observes that traditional gaming industry has been influencing young people’s perceptions of gender construction. In mainstream video games, women characters who are kidnapped by all kinds of monsters from the beginning of the game are weak and frail (literally as well as figuratively), trapped in cages, refrigerators, or the

claw of a huge monsters. They either wait to be rescued by the male protagonist or to be killed violently by the kidnapper/monster (“Damsel in Distress”).

Sarkeesian also notes that women are usually victims of extreme violence in video games, which to some extent, indeed contributes to young straight men’s stereotyping women as weak and disposable, and inspire killing methods for murderers and domestic violence (Sarkeesian). Her study on women’s images in gaming is slightly limited by her scope, which focuses only on male-oriented games. I tackle the subtler pernicious side of the Otome game here, which has escaped Sarkeesian’s observation so far.

According to scholarly discussion on women’s games, the otome game intends to create female characters that can empower women and present femininity unfiltered through the male sexual gaze, and also challenge and break stereotypical gender roles in patriarchal society (H. Kim 166). In addition, gender-specific games were engendered from the “games for girls” movement in the US of the 1990s. It also reflects Third Wave feminist activism in the Japanese gaming industry (166). Kim notes:

Japanese women's games are significant for their history, influence, and function as a site for female gamers to play out various female identities and fantasies within various generic structures. Women's games act as a medium for women and girls to acquire pleasure from identification and gratification as women, at least women's games are more likely to provide a specific type of pleasure than games targeting a general or dominantly male audience (166).

Avatars in gaming are an externalised Lacanian “mirror image” of the subject, which the medium of gaming induces, as the gamer not only controls the avatar but through the process is also encouraged to see through the eyes of the avatar. Therefore, while gamers are in control of the avatar, the avatar is influencing the gamer’s psyche and identity simultaneously. How the avatar (the surface) looks, talks, and moves in different gaming settings impacts gamers (the depth)’s perceptions and identity during the synching/gaming process. In other words, the pleasure of gaming comes from the identification with the avatar; therefore, the fact that otome games capitalise on “dating features” is problematic, especially since otome games’ target audiences are teenage girls. Since gaming pleasure comes from a sense of identification, that avatar’s only purpose in otome games is to date handsome guys misleads its young female gamers to the false impression that women’s only existential value lies in dating and marriage. Instead of empowering young girls, traditional otome games are, in fact, causing teen girls to internalise and conform to the conservative patriarchal order, to be submissive and hope only to be married off or rescued by a handsome prince.

Video games provide an escapist delight away from the mundane life, channeling an other-worldly experience to live through the physical and emotional adventures of the avatar without suffering the consequences (e.g., getting killed). To some degree, gaming is modernity’s “picture of Dorian Gray.” It grants players the freedom of accruing some extreme experiences without suffering repercussions. This feature is exemplified in Fuka’s exploration in the Wilde brothel route, for instance,

what truly makes *Ozmafia!!* unique and queer as a valuable legacy of Wilde's cultural impact.

As an otome game, *Ozmafia!!* inevitably has problematic features, such as its exclusive focus on dating and its representation of female avatars. Proponents of Third Wave feminism embraced the idea that women can decide what to wear by themselves and specifically encouraged women to embrace traditionally feminine characteristics criticised by previous feminist activism. Therefore, this wave of feminism is also called "girly" or "lipstick" feminism. It has attracted criticism from scholars and feminists who believe that traditional feminine traits are imposed on women by patriarchal society (Newman et al. 246). Those traditional female traits are pronounced in *Ozmafia!!* where the female avatar is "innocent," and "pure," and whose appearance is girly and "kawaii" (cute): the long blond curly hair, huge anime eyes, small V-shaped face, petite nose and mouth.¹³⁷ In a word, the appearance of Fuka indeed encapsulates the entrenched "Pygmalion Complex," coined by Jane O' Sullivan, of an angelic "virgin" figure that was ridiculed and criticised by the Second Wave feminists (1).

Such stereotypical female roles are analysed by Luce Irigaray in "Women on the Market," where she notes that women are categorised by our society into "virgin," "mother," and "prostitute" (170–191). Drawing upon the Marxist theory of capital and commodities, she also argues that the "virgin" only has the exchange value (determined by society) but has no use value (her natural qualities), and is exchangeable between men (170–191). The virgin thus has no agency whatsoever and becomes a fetish. Combined with a Freudian discourse on sexual fetishism, scholars conclude that the "virgin" figure fetishises women as a chaste, submissive, and malleable doll-like creature just as Pygmalion's Galatea, who functions as the absent "phallus" that men search for in women from childhood (Freud 152–157).

In *Metamorphosis*, Ovid prefaces the story of Pygmalion by stating "loathsome Propoetides women" are "the first women to lose their good names by prostituting themselves in public" (Ovid 231–2). Thus the Pygmalion story is the prototype of the patriarchal attempt to demonise women's sexuality to justify the creation of an ideal substitute for a real woman. Such is "a process by which a concurrently feared and desired object—in this case, a woman—is refashioned to conform to idealised notions of femininity in a bid to render her a compliant and familiar substitute for that unruly object and, in so doing, to tame her" (O'Sullivan 134). Worse, such angelic "virgin" figure has been prevalent in literature, films, and now in video games where they function as an educating role model figure for young females to imitate.

¹³⁷ The culture of *kawaii* (cuteness) and its impact in popular culture abounds research and discussion. Please refer to Ngai, Sianne. *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (2015) Harvard UP for academic discussion. For popular discussion on why we love cuteness, please see Goldhill, Olivia. "The "Awww!" Response to Cuteness Isn't Just Biological, It's Philosophical". *Quartz*, 2018, https://qz.com/544098/the-awww-response-to-cuteness-isnt-just-biological-its-philosophical/?fbclid=IwAR3cf9gz1NmTfpys-DFJbMg2zY8F4lx-jiE_j_STmR77il8zrNWB15h4po4. Accessed 21 Nov 2018.

The opposite of the virgin figure are the horny, available “whores” created just for male sexual desire. Fuka’s girly appearance is different and laudable, for while she has an extremely girly figure, she has realistic breasts and is fully clothed in elegant dress. Fuka’s appearance marks her difference from barely clothed and hypersexualised female characters in mainstream male-oriented video games. These female characters are either naked or semi-naked in sexually provocative clothing, with an unrealistically tiny waist, giant breasts, and huge butts—an exaggerated hourglass body shape—fully charged for male sexual desire (see fig. 45). The representation of Fuka’s femininity does not objectify her into a sex doll. Instead, it embraces her femininity as dignified beauty. Her manners are polite and considerate; her personality is warm, sweet, and courageous. However, she is physically fragile and unable to stand up for herself in times of danger. Without the brothel route, Fuka would still be no more than other innocent cute damsels in distress in otome games, those who have no agency whatsoever.

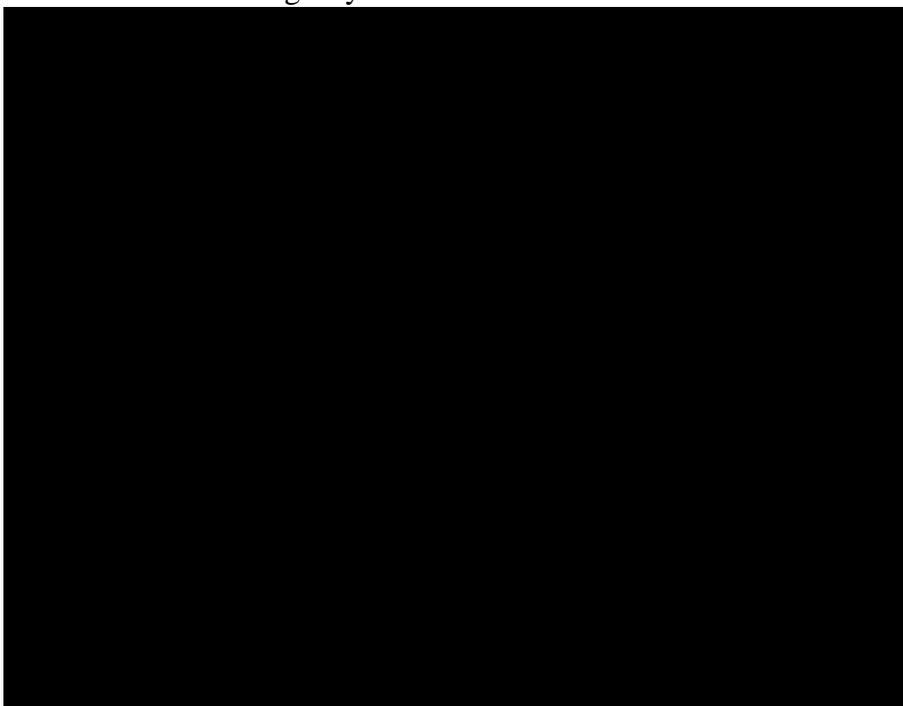


Figure 45. Left: Fuka in Ozmafia!! Targeting female gamers. Right: Mai Shiranui from The King of Fighters: Maximum Impact 2 targeting male players.

In the brothel route, Fuka is encouraged by Dorian Gray to embrace female sexual desire. She is not shy to express her passion and demands sex from other male characters, which is significantly meaningful to female gamers (including those who identify as female even though their biological sex is otherwise), gay players, and straight male gamers who enjoy playing cross-dressing games. Female sexual desires are considered “dirty” in conservative societies, and slut-shaming is prevalent in every modern society nowadays, particularly severe in misogynistic East Asian nations where the conservative attitude generally condemns female sexual desires and female expression of sexuality. “Decent” women should not dress to be sexy, should not openly discuss their sex life or express their sexual desires. Yet the decent women have a responsibility to cater to their male partners’ sexual desires,

sometimes even against their wills. Those who break such norms are considered “sluts” and thus deserve any form of hostility they receive, such as domestic violence, rape, disfigurement, and even murder.

In cases collected in Me Too movement recently in South Korea, Japan, and China, female victims of domestic violence and rape are often blamed for their “slutty” behaviors, which has triggered a large-scale societal discussion, street protests, and petitions.¹³⁸ However, female victims of violence are often slut-shamed by media, social media, and even family and friends, because they do not conform to the traditional “pure” and “chaste” behaviours for women.

Therefore, Fuka frequently visiting a brothel and enjoying unproductive and unorthodox sexual intercourses with male prostitutes is by no means acceptable in East Asian society. She even asks Alfani to teach her BDSM and takes aphrodisiac drugs to participate in a threesome party. Such decadent sexual exploration is by all means “degrading” and “shameful” in the eyes of normative male gamers and anyone who subscribes to misogynist views or conventional moral attitudes against women. Since otome games are created for female gamers, and the identification and gratification all comes from the “mirror stage,” I argue that instead of humiliating, Fuka’s sexual adventure, the brothel route is empowering and liberating to gamers who may shy away from even talking about sex in real life. The piling pressures on women to be “pure” and faithful in East Asian society have propelled the need for otome games to create an imaginary liberal space for women. The game provides a channel to release their sexual energy and satisfy their sexual fantasy, without risking their offline reputations.

Particularly empowering is the first ending where Fuka takes over the Oscar Wilde brothel. Fuka becomes the Mistress of the establishment, makes Dorian her servant and changes his name—imposing ownership over a subject in Foucault’s “Power and Subject,” especially meaningful to female gamers. The total control over “Lord” Dorian grants them pleasure in the overturned power dynamics sexually, economically, and politically. In Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality*, one of his

¹³⁸ For instance, a young Chinese female driver was assaulted and hospitalised in Chengdu by the male driver involved in a car accident. Many comments on social media platform such as Weibo cheered for such violence and many netizens even exposed her personal information that reveals her casual sex in hotels. Chinese netizens immediately jumped on the conclusion that she deserves to be beaten and even should be killed because she is a slut. This reasoning is highlighted in China’s #MeToo movement as a strong case of Chinese patriarchal misogynist views against women (Zhang et al.). In South Korea, actress Goo Hara’s ex-boyfriend threatens to release their sex videos filmed via spycam. He beat her till her ovary is bleeding for lying about having dinner with a male friend. Some Korean media and social media tried to justify his behaviour by calling Goo Hara a “slut.” This incident has enraged a large number of South Korean women, and they marched on the street to protest and sign petitions for spycam ban (Zhang “#MeToo for Goo Hara”). In Japan, model Haruka Nakaura also experienced domestic violence from her actor boyfriend and was trolled by his fans on social media for her frequent visits to nightclubs and her complicated relationships with her exs (Cai asiaone). The list of slut shaming goes on. The three women in question are actually all from high social status in East Asian societies. There are thousands of female victims who are from less privileged background cannot be seen and heard in mass media. In China’s Anti-Domestic Violence Documentary (2014), among 2.7 billion Chinese married women, 30% has suffered domestic violence; 94,000 women committed suicide after domestic violence; and every 7.4 seconds a woman is enduring domestic violence.

major argument is that sexual relation is a power struggle. To be more precise, in *Part IV: The Deployment of Sexuality*, Foucault argues that we need to develop “analytics” of power through which to understand sex. He highlights that power controls sex by laying down rules for it to follow, he discusses how power demands obedience through domination, submission, and subjugation, and also how power masks its true intentions by disguising itself as beneficial (Foucault, and Hurley, 77–91). Therefore, BDSM is a form of actualization of such power dynamics in sex. Radical feminist Gail Dines argues that BDSM is just a type of torture in the name of pleasure (*PornLand: How Porn Has Hijacked Our Sexuality*). I disagree. There is a major difference between consensual masochism and involuntary suffering; and feminism gives women the freedom to choose what they feel comfortable and enjoyable. But Dines and Marjorie Garber are right that women who enjoy submitting to male domination are, at least to some extent, internalising the cultural environment where women’s submissiveness is omnipresent in mass media (“Why are Women Devouring Fifty Shades of Grey?”; *PornLand; Sex and Real Estate*).

The omnipresence of female submissives is clear in video games as pointed out by Sakeesian. Moreover, human desires are shaped by the “hyper-reality” created by the mass media, as Baudrillard has noted (“The Precession of Simulacra,” *Simulacra and Simulation*). The roles of S&M in today’s mass media, whether in the East or the West, remain reserved for the traditional dyad of masculine as Sadist and the feminine as Masochist, perpetuating the male dominating status. The sadists are always aggressive males or the “masculine” partner of a homosexual relationship, virile, aggressive, and economically superfluous.

Such traits are also evident in the erotic novel, *Fifty Shades of Gray* (2012) and its film adaptations, where a pure, innocent girl is “educated” by and legally bound in a BDSM relationship with an experienced, aggressive, macho billionaire. Her submission to him is “rewarded” later by marrying into a higher class and having the handsome, potent, and loving husband himself. This is our cultural glorification of female submission that shape female sexual desires.

Such a Cinderella-prototyped theme has been the core of Otome games. *Ozmaffa!!*’s unique decadent route provides an option where Fuka reverses the power relation completely. She is the dominatrix from the beginning of her BDSM lesson and she later becomes the mistress of the brothel, in the first ending. Lord Dorian Gray in that ending observes the situation and, to some extent, also encourages her to take over the brothel by voluntarily submitting himself to be her servant. Such a powerful status is usually absent from (female) gamers’ real-life experience, and even absent from video games in general, thus *Ozmaffa!* stands out as a pioneer in catering to female players’ fantasies.

2.3. De-villainising Queer Characters in Video Games

That said, the fact that Fuka could reverse the power dynamic without obstacles is also due to an entrenched stereotype that Wildean dandies are effeminate, thus do not guard their masculinity so strictly, and can surrender to femininity more easily. To some extent, the game is indeed depicting Wilde Salon boys as effeminate as possible, especially in the case of Alfani. Alfani is the Number 1 male prostitute in

the brothel, described by Fuka as “beautiful enough to be a woman” (“Ozmafia!!” *tvtropes.org*). He is a bishōnen (pretty boy), with long blond hair and bright blue eyes, “a depraved bisexual” and “a submissive masochist, but can play any role his clients want him to” (*tvtropes.org*). Alfani is based on Wilde’s dandies the 19th century media used to ridicule and demonise because they failed to fit in the Victorian moral scheme and the expectation of “proper” masculinity—the “Empire Boys” (Bristow). They were also a far cry from the British gentleman who encapsulated urban, middle-class virtue. They only cared about “useless” art, sensuality, and their own appearance, voluntarily “reducing” themselves to pieces of *object’d art*, which is associated with effeminacy, debauchery, and degeneracy. The boys in the Wilde Salon are all decadent dandies, rather “different” and “weird” from traditionally manly characters in other routes of this game, as many heterosexual female gamers observe.

Some gamers feel they cannot fully enjoy this brothel route because these dandy boys are not to their taste, and “creepy” besides (Marvelle). Alfani and Manboy are both inspired by Wilde’s “The Happy Prince.” In the original story, the prince is a self-sacrificing saint who helps others at the cost of his own life. In this game, his “self-sacrifice” quality slips to “self-harming” masochism. Moreover, the original story already yields a sense of masochist pleasure when the Happy Prince asks the swallow to peak out his sapphire-made eyes for the poor and is delighted by the swallow’s feedback. Manboy as the Swallow is loyal to the Wilde Salon and, to some extent, loyal to Alfani and Dorian. The three characters seem to be lovers, based on their intimate banter. Manboy is programmed to be a love interest to Fuka and indeed helps her all the time, but meanwhile he seems to be torn between Fuka and the other two male characters.

Since Alfani, Manboy, and Dorian Gray’s sexual orientations are fluid, the sexuality in this Wildean route is also fluid. Although the avatar is female, the gamers’ gender does not have to be the same. Homosexual players could also use Fuka’s avatar to have fun in the game, as proven by some walk-through videos posted by gay players (i.e., YouTuber “Solonface”). Therefore the possible homosexual relations in this game could have been developed in many ways, for gender itself is fluid and constructed (Butler). A biological male player using a female avatar in the game is empirically doing drag performance in the game, thus upholding Butler’s argument that gender is created by behaviors instead of biological sex (Butler). Since gender becomes fluid, sexual orientation accordingly becomes flexible. A straight male player who plays this game could be perceived as gay for a while in the game; a transgender (MTF) player can also be a heterosexual; or a transvestite whose sexual pleasure lies in assuming Fuka’s avatar is autosexual.

Therefore, the game’s human relation dynamics, in their queerness in the Wilde Salon, form homage to Wilde. “The Wilde Salon” concept is also inspired by Wilde’s personal scandal with telegraph boys and male prostitutes involved in the Cleveland Street Scandal (1889). They are ready to be queered and paired up by the game designers. The pairing of Manboy and Alfani tips their hat to the homoerotic

desires between the Happy Prince and the little swallow.¹³⁹ A gamer notes that the threesome between Dorian, Fuka, and Manboy is “almost *netorare* (lit. cuckold) from Manboy’s perspective,” and the couple in the threesome is actually Manboy and Dorian instead of Manboy and Fuka (Marvelle *cutensteamy*). This feeling comes from the script that Dorian tells Manboy “she is here in my arms, crying in delight, her moist loins waiting in anticipation for you,” during the threesome (*Ozmafia!!*). Instead of directly addressing to the female avatar (gamers), Dorian interacts intimately with Manboy instead.

The narration during this threesome is also more focused on Manboy, who is reluctant to join the threesome. Therefore, the homoerotic desires among male characters overshadow the heterosexual desires. Accordingly, some female heterosexual gamers complained that this route is not engaging, for male characters in this salon seem to be more interested in interacting with each other than with the avatar. “It’s not like the other routes where you’re emotionally invested and get upset at the results. It’s so bizarre that you’re watching in a sort of trainwreck way, detached and cold.” (“*Ozmafia!!* Manboy, Dorian Gray, and Alfani Review”). The detachment here is the identity simulation failure caused by this brothel route’s characterisation of queerness being unrecognizable to heterosexual female gamers.

From a pure marketing perspective, the fact that *Ozmafia!!* includes a route not catering to straight females is not wise, because otome games are made specifically for straight female players in the gaming industry. The excitement of meeting different types of pretty boys and dating them is the main purpose, which however is, to some extent, frustrated in the brothel route. However, within the context of BL culture, especially in Japan, homoerotic interactions among male characters are valued as rich resources for fujoshi to pair CPs. Instead of feeling frustrated as comments collected above (mostly international players), Japanese fujoshi gamers have made this game one of the most popular dating games on Steam.com. The homosexual theme not only brings commercial success but also earns the game a good name for its inclusiveness. Following its success in the gaming community, the Wilde salon route develops its own independent manga book *Ozmafia!! 淫美なるオスカー・ワイルドの館* (*Decadent Oscar Wilde Brothel*) as a response to fujoshi’s enthusiasm (see fig. 46). The homosexual theme in this brothel route forms a welcoming gesture to LGBTQ+ community while also a successful marketing strategy to appeal to fujoshi.

¹³⁹ For more information about a scholarly discussion on the gay relationship between the Happy Prince and the Swallow, please refer to "Gay-Related Themes in the Fairy Tales of Oscar Wilde" by John-Charles Duffy in *Victorian Literature and Culture* Vol. 29, No. 2 (2001), pp. 327-349 and "Subversive desire in Oscar Wilde's fairy tale 'The Happy Prince'/Oscar Wilde' in 'The Happy Prince' adli peri masalinda yikici arzunun temsili.." *The Free Library*. 2011 Departments of English Language and Literature and American Culture and Literature, Ege University 29 Nov. 2018 by B. Ayca Ulker Erkan.

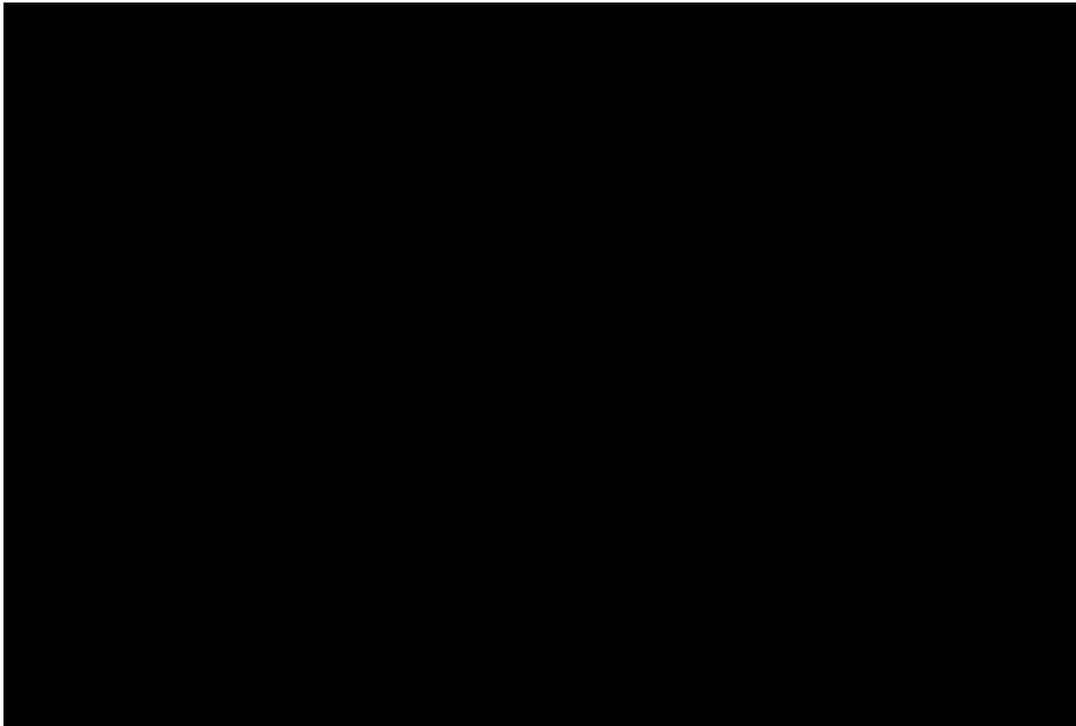


Figure 46 *Ozmafia!!* manga cover.

Homosexuality, certainly a rare theme in otome game, is most noteworthy in that the homosexual subjects in this game do not vilify queer characters, nor do they form an after-thought to be tacked on when the game design is finished. Those dandy characters are neither purely evil nor are their queer identities contributing to their deviant behaviours. Additionally, the narrative of this brothel route is well researched in terms of Wilde's works and personal life. This game's objective representation of queer characters is particularly meaningful when approached within the context of the gaming industry's long history of portraying denigrating or inaccurate images of gender non-conforming people.

Alex Law argues that the gaming industry is still very much male-dominated and that perspectives taken by creators are mostly those of the straight male gaze in game design, even though the game designer could be a woman (Law). Law categorises different types of games based on different gazes the creators take on to design. The mainstream video games assume their major audiences are young straight (white) men, hence feature manly male avatars and hypersexualised female characters as background or for a "reward." Even in games like *Tomb Raider*, where the protagonist is female, the game design takes on a male gaze, as is evident in Lara Croft's unrealistic and sexualised outfit as well as the camera's specific angle that sexualises her body parts and emphasises her desirability to straight males. Otome games, on the other hand, with a straight female gaze featuring numerous handsome men and only one or two female characters, with a main purpose of dating.

A genre with a smaller market is kids-friendly games with a gender-neutral gaze like *Pokémon*. Finally, there is also a niche genre with a multi-gender gaze, developed recently (in the 2010s; Law). All of these perspectives reveal gamers' sexual orientation, and both the male and female gaze reveals that game designers have a heterosexual audience in mind. Homosexual-themed games have recently

been added to the gaming industry, with the growing LGBTQ+ activism around the world, such as the highly rated (9/10 on Steam) and critically acclaimed *Dream Daddy: A Dad Dating Simulator* (2017). However, Law argues that usually the homosexual relationships are an addition, tacked onto a game that is in other respects heteronormative, in the same way, that female options are added into a game initially written for a male character (Law, Sarkeesian, [feministfrequency](#)).

“For example, *Star Wars: The Old Republic* added homosexual relationships as a DLC [Downloadable content]. In this case, we know that the game’s characters, designs, and interactions had all been made with a heterosexual audience in mind long before homosexual relationships were shoehorned in.” (Law)

Therefore, the homosexual theme, or even the homoerotic desires and queer characters represented in video games, remain afterthoughts, when game designers have been nudged to tick the box of diversity “under the pressure of political correctness” (Law)

Even worse, queer characters, or queer-coded characters in traditional mainstream games, always play villains and their queerness is demonised as intrinsically intertwined with their villainy.¹⁴⁰ Game designers depict queerness as “something threatening, degenerate, and vile, which [...] will be vanquished by our wholesome and righteous heroes” (“[Queer Tropes in Video Games](#)”). For instance, in *Crime Fighters 2* (1991) queer-coded enemies in leather, with exaggerated effeminate walking animation, will “dry-hump” the protagonist as an attack tactic; in *Bare Knuckle 3* (1994), the queer-coded villain is a “leather daddy” who also walks in an exaggerated effeminate way, and will be beaten up by the protagonist; in *Police Quest: Open Season* (1993), an LAPD detective investigating a series of murders sets fire on the cross-dressing serial killer instead of arresting him to be judged; again in *Resident Evil: Code Veronica* (2000), a character who assumes his twin sister’s persona and cross-dresses as a transgender woman is also depicted as the ultimate evil mastermind and insulted by the heroes as “you cross-dressing freak;” and the most horrifying example of a queer-coded villain is Jo Slade in the original *Dead Rising* (2006), a psychopath and a butch lesbian cop who captures a conventionally attractive woman, tortures and then molests her for her presumed heterosexuality and attractiveness to men.¹⁴¹ This Jo character exemplifies the demonised portrayal of queers, but the list goes on. The similarity of all these queer

¹⁴⁰ Queer coding means that a queer characters’ queer identity is not explicitly stated in the game or film, but is played out in subtle and stereotypical way such as effeminate behaviour, obsession with one’s appearance and fashion, cross-dressing etc. Queer-coding itself is not inherently a negative thing, depending on the context the queer-coding could be positive. However, the history of queer-coding is a history of problematic subtle demonisation under the “moral restriction of the Motion Picture Production Code or “Hays Code” and vilification of queer identity since 1930s Hollywood films. Queer-coded characters are always villains in those films whose queerness is represented as sick and vile as part of their villainy i.e. Peter Lorre’s character in *The Maltese Falcon* (1941); Michael Cain in *Dressed to Kill* (1980) etc. More queer coding characters in Hollywood cinema please refer to Vito Russo’s *The Celluloid Closet* (1995) and its documentary with the same name.

¹⁴¹ When these two games exported in the US the queer characters were mostly removed from the games according to “Queer Tropes in Video Games.”

and queer-coded characters is that they demonise gender-non-conforming people as mentally unstable, which makes them psychotic killers, thus deserve to be killed in the most excruciating way, or beaten up by the upstanding cis-gender heroes who use violence to destroy characters who violate masculine or feminine norms, and embody a transgressive queerness.

Thus, in traditional mainstream action games, queerness is demonised to perpetuate harmful stereotypes of queer by linking queerness to evil. In addition, these representations of queer antagonists also intrinsically assume that the protagonist and the player are not queer, positioning queerness at odds with heroism, which clearly has made queer players uncomfortable, demoralized, or angry (Contrapoint; feministfrequency). Carolyn Petit, the queer commentator from “feministfrequency,” argues that

“ . . . instead of making straight, gay, gender-conforming and gender-nonconforming characters all fighting alongside each other for some righteous causes, these games create a moral spectrum in which queerness is inherently anti-heroic, linked directly to being deviant, destructive, or chaotic, and leaving up to our wholesome cisgender, gender-conforming, presumed straight heroes to vanquish that chaos from the world” (“Queer Tropes in Video Games”).

Indeed, straight heroes in video games to this day represent order, stability, and decency, whereas queer villains represent chaos and degeneracy.

Contrary to such horrible depictions of queerness and crude “inclusivity,” the Wilde Salon route’s designer(s) have a well-researched background knowledge of Wilde and the concept of Decadence, well beyond a surface level appropriation of names. Even as it includes sensational topics, i.e., BDSM for shock (commercial) value, the game’s approach to sexuality is wholesome, explorative, and even educatory, beyond the pornographic depictions of sexual revelry or involuntary sexual violence against women and men in mainstream action games. It also has the moral lessons that Wilde warned his readers of a century ago—over-indulgence in decadent exploration leads to annihilation of the self, for example. Yukio Mishima’s decadent influence in exploring self-destructive aestheticism is also evident in Dorian’s announcement of Fuka’s death to the outside world, as well as Fuka’s total submission to pleasure in the second ending.

Additionally, the game features many complicated and multi-layered queer, dandy characters, including Kyrie, “a regular customer” of Alfani, without reducing them to a symbol of degeneracy for the homophobic or transphobic players to destroy. Manboy, particularly, a handsome and warm-hearted bisexual has tried his best to help Fuka to escape the Wilde Salon when he realises that Fuka is losing her agency. Manboy is attentive to her needs and tries to protect her from other bad influences of Gray and Alfani, even though he is also their lover. This character is fleshed out with the moral dilemma of choosing between Fuka and his old lovers and friends.

Kyrie, similarly, is also a complicated character, who is both decadent and moral at the same time. He himself enjoys sex parties and does not care about or hide

his queer identity, while he also shows strong compassion for Fuka and tries to help Fuka to leave the brothel. The route includes Alfani and Gray, who are self-centred and evil characters, but their villainy is not associated with their queer identity, for other queer characters are friendly and kind. Therefore, the game's representation of queer identity is objective, nuanced, and human. Just as straight and gender-conforming people, queer-identified people might be friendly and kind, while also nasty and selfish. Hence, Alfani's and Dorian are evil, but not evil because of their queer identity, an enormous difference in characterisation in gaming design, and progress in the representation of queerness in the gaming industry.

Finally, featuring a queer route in an otome game acts to break from the pigeonholes of manly or feminine games in the mainstream gaming market. This video game functions as a way of stepping into other's shoes, the point of view by which immersive games challenge entrenched stereotypes and prejudice against gender-nonconforming people. The heteronormative female gamers in *Ozmafia!!* may be shocked and "weirded out" by this brothel route the first time; however, they also admit that *Ozmafia!!* is so fun to play and the high ratings and large voting poll of the game on Steam.com demonstrate strong evidence for its popularity. Furthermore, the brothel route is a selling attribute to female gamers who may not know or may not allow themselves to—even once—explore the "dark" side of their sexual desire, can do so without risking their reputation in a misogynist society. It also provides straight female gamers an opportunity to know, understand, and engage with homosexuality, which they otherwise may avoid all their lives.

Otome games have been a major source for fujoshi to create deviant arts about bishōnen (pretty boys), because of the large numbers of pretty boys in a game. Wilde's direct influence in anime and manga fandom may not be obvious, and yet the game designers of *Ozmafia!!* demonstrate Japanese game designers' aesthetic and political comradeship with Wilde. Their nuanced depictions of queer characters demonstrate their compassion and understanding of the queer community. Even such homage is not a direct adaptation of Dorian Gray's story, but the spontaneity and the fluid appropriation of Wilde's works, characters, Aestheticism, and Decadence permeate the brothel route. Most importantly, Wilde's critical attitude to Dorian's sensual exploration, long mistakenly interpreted as Wilde's approval of indulgence, is well understood in this game. It is also used as a sort of sex education for teenage girls.

To conclude, this game is unique, strange, unconventional, and progressive. It is feminine to the point of appealing to the Pygmalion fetishised male gaze, and yet also empowering through its extreme femininity. It is a game aimed at straight female gamers, but features gays that compete with the heroine to appeal to homosexual players. It is such a queer product in the gaming industry that it could not sit in any gender-gaze category comfortably. Wilde's legacy is well preserved and organically absorbed in this area of Japanese popular media. Its popularity and the friendly environment, created by the fujoshi influenced by these popular media works that depict queers as attractive and diverse human beings, in fact, has created a positive cycle in Japanese youth culture, which is also subtly influencing the rest of

the world via the booming Japanese gaming industry and also via the rapidly growing MAG culture around the world.

3. *Dorian Gray*, a New Musical (2016): The Commodified Queer Bodies of K-pop Stars in Neoliberal Korean Theatre

In *Dorian Gray*, the musical, I explore how the title character, as the most decadent character, is moralised into an unfortunate and innocent pretty boy, who is cursed by the portrait to become a degenerate murderer. I also examine Wilde's cultural legacy and the queer subject under the neoliberal hypercommodification.

In East Asia, the most famous theatrical adaptation of *Dorian Gray* is Takarazuka Revue Company's 1997 musical, produced in Japan. Other than that, the stage adaptation of Wilde's only novel is scarce.¹⁴² South Korea's recent musical hit thus immediately captured my attention. Not only is it potent evidence of his transcendental cultural influence in East Asia, especially in the popular culture area, but it also perfectly reflects Korea's successful cultural branding of K-pop, with its strong flavor of neoliberal globalisation.¹⁴³ The music industry in South Korea has already become the country's national symbol. The "Hallyu" (Korean Wave) has not only conquered the Asian market since the 1990s, but also become increasingly influential globally with the proliferation of K-pop MV on YouTube. For instance, in May 2019, the musical sensation BTS became the first K-pop band to top the US album charts, and also the first time that a K-pop music group addressed the UN (Kelly *Forbes*). K-pop's explosive development is, in fact, a direct response to the financial collapse in the Asian Debt Crisis (1997–2001). The Korean president, Kim Dae-Jung, and the Korean head of global PR agency, Elan Edelman, co-authored *Korea: On Course—and Open for Business*, which aims at changing Korea's negative international image. To do so, Kim Dae-Jung's administration decided to invest hugely in Korea's cultural industry.¹⁴⁴ Korea's economy and culture were drastically impacted by the economic crisis, and the consumption of popular culture thus changed accordingly. Korean scholars, such as Kang Nae-hui and Kang Inkyu, point out that the hyper-paced modernisation of Korea, or "the compressed modernisation," has commodified and marketised Korean culture.

Kang Nae-hui notes that, "culture in today's South Korea seems to exist *in* the market, *by* the market, and *for* the market" (414). Kang Inkyu contextualises K-pop phenomenon in the theoretical framework of neoliberal globalisation, based on Max Weber's rationality and George Ritzer's notion of hyperrationalisation, arguing that since the economic crisis of the 1990s, the neoliberal globalisation has largely changed the consumption of popular culture and such transformation is referred to as

¹⁴² In 2018 there is another musical adaptation of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in Japan that has become a hit. It was directed by Kōichi Ogita and is named [Dorian Gray](#).

¹⁴³ I use "Korea" to refer to "South Korea" hereafter for convenience.

¹⁴⁴ Please refer to "Korean Wave (Hallyu) – The Rise of Korea's Cultural Economy & Pop Culture" for a very detailed introduction to Korean Wave and its economic background as well as related cultural policy launched by the Kim Dae-Jung administration of that period.

“hypercommodification and hyperrationalisation” (56). Hypercommodification is the commodification of all aspects of society that blurs the boundary of commodified and noncommodified regions; while hyperrationalisation refers to what Ritzer calls “McDonaldization,” a term that characterises neoliberal, hypermodern societies as capitalist fast-food restaurants, a model central to capitalist globalization (57–58; 62).

The transformation of consumption, Kang Inkyu argues, is in the K-pop industry, but also applicable to Korean musical market, where K-pop stars often form the major cast. Kang Inkyu’s theory is thus suitable for musical theatre studies (H.W. Kim 421-3). As *Dorian Gray* is adapted into the Korean musical, Wilde’s aesthetic legacy seems to be fittingly incorporated into Korea’s local art, and yet it is also “domesticated”—to borrow Korean musical scholar Hyewon Kim’s term—in the neoliberal Korean musical market, with a strong sense that the products actually commodify the queered body of attractive K-pop stars.

3.1. *Dorian Gray a Korean Musical (2016)*¹⁴⁵

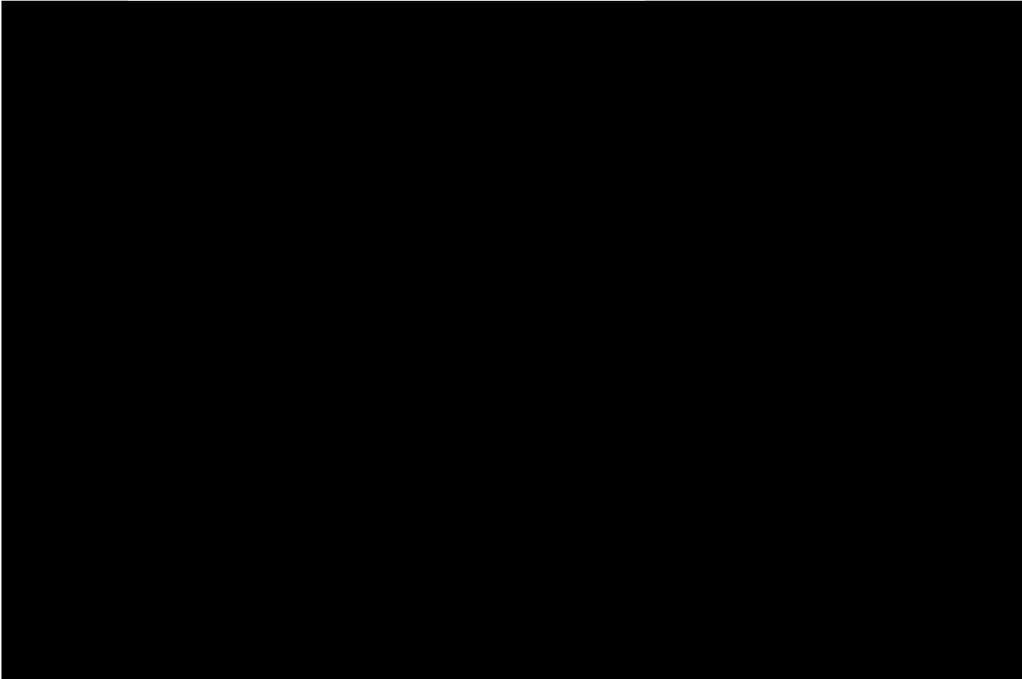


Figure 47 *Dorian Gray a New Musical* image from Kristina’s blog <http://nerdventurists.com>

¹⁴⁵ This musical only ran in Seoul from Sept. 3 to Oct. 29, 2016, at the Opera House of Seongnam Arts Center, which was long before the time when this chapter was done. Therefore, this section relies heavily on online resources from YouTube videos, press news, and online reviews by “revolving door audience,” meaning audience who has watched one musical repeatedly, sometimes even up to 100 times. The term is coined and associated with the musical *Billy Elliot* in 2010 by fans to describe their collective entrance through the revolving doors of the LG Art Centre to watch the show multiple times (H. W. Kim 432). The reviews I am heavily indebted to are “Dorian Gray: A New Musical 2016—Kim Junsu, Park Euntae” written by “ztarplay” who watched this musical 5 times; and a video review by YouTuber Kristina under the alias “The Nerdventurists” who watched this musical three times while traveling in Seoul.

3.1.1 General Information Reported by Musical Goers

The Korean musical adaptation of Wilde's novel premiered in Seongnam Arts Centre Opera House, in September 2016 (fig.47). Superstar KIM Junsu, from K-pop boy band JYJ, played Dorian Gray, along with well-known musical actor PARK Euntae, as Lord Henry, CHOI Jaeung as Basil, HONG Seoyeong as Sybil Vane and Sybil's sister Charlotte. Scripted by CHO Yong-shin, with music composed by KIM Moon-Jeong, the musical was directed by LEE Gi-na (Kwon *Korean Times*).

The plot is faithful to Wilde's original, but with a few small changes, which appear just before Sybil's death; instead of a brother, she will leave behind a sister who later attempts to avenge her by means of seduction. After Sybil's death, it also becomes clear that the painting takes on a life of its own, whose evil power possesses Dorian. This change makes him a more likeable and tragic hero, not the morally skewed of the book. JIN Taehwa plays the character of the portrait, and his voice keeps up with KIM Junsu's power, making Dorian's struggle with his alter ego more vivid and intense (see fig 48).

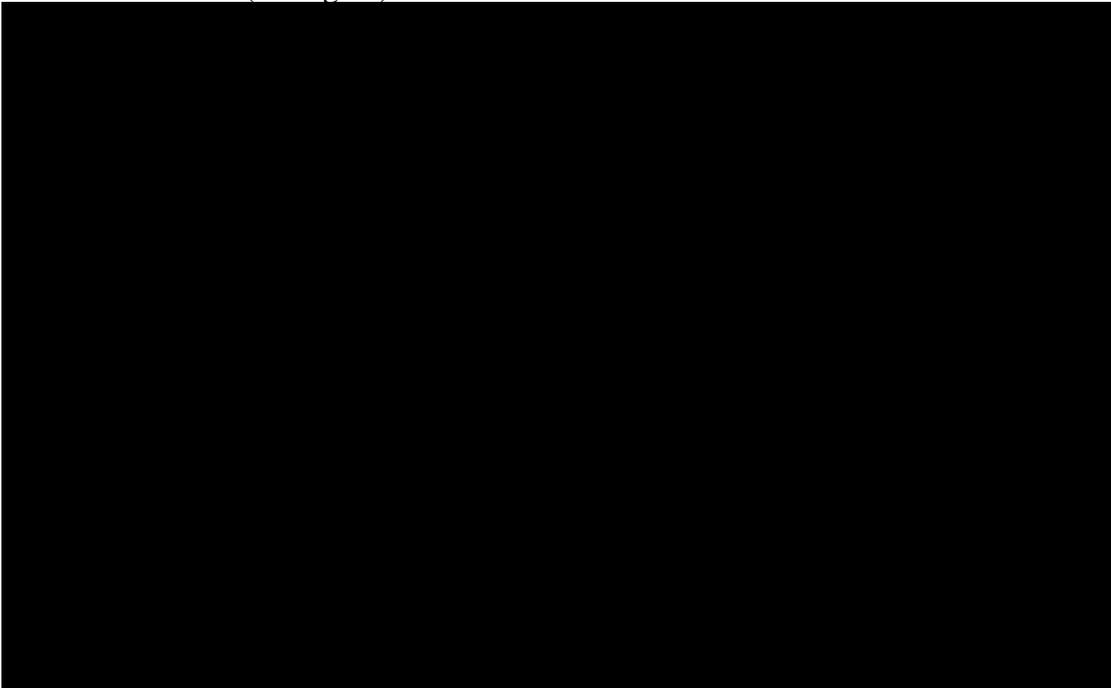


Figure 48 Dorian Gray is threatened by the Picture who has its own life. Screenshot from YouTube clip.

In Act II, a more significant deviation from the original story emerges. Basil and Dorian's attraction for each other becomes physical onstage. Dorian seduces Basil when the latter insists on seeing the portrait. Fearful that his curse will be discovered, Dorian distracts Basil by having sex with him ([ztarplay Livejournal](#)).

In the original novel, Wilde provides no explicit description demonstrating Basil and Dorian's relationship as homosexual and physical. The story is shrouded in mystery, especially in terms of what Dorian has done with Basil and his other male friends. The ambiguity makes their relationship subjective to homoerotic interpretation, thus used against Wilde in his trials. Apart from Basil's death, no other clear narrative of Dorian's immoral deeds appears. Additionally, Basil's

obsession with Dorian is one-sided and only hinted at in the novel. Dorian never reveals his feelings towards Basil. However, both the Hollywood *Dorian Gray* (2009) and the Korean musical include vivid depictions of their physical relations, on screen and on stage respectively. The Hollywood version is rated R for explicit sexual content, nudity, violence, and drug use, in which an oral sex scene between Basil and Dorian is featured. The musical features a kiss between Kim Junsu (Dorian) and Choi Jaeung (Basil) as well, also including sexually provocative dancing and strip teases. The following description from ztarplay's review reveals vivid sexual tension on stage:

Dorian is wearing almost nothing, and he intentionally reveals more skin to distract Basil with every move. When Dorian finally approaches the older man, it is to kiss him and invite him to his bed. The scene goes on when Dorian walks to his bedroom as he slowly removes his robe while the other resolves to follow him. Once in the bedroom, both men share another kiss when Dorian wraps his arms around him before the scene blacks out (ztarplay).

In addition, the musical directly addresses the feelings between these two instead of keeping them ambiguous as the novel does. In the musical, Dorian knows Basil's intense feelings for him. He responds to Basil in a half-reciprocating and half-toying way. Again, from Ztarplay's detailed review, we see that the Korean musical makes their feelings for each other explicit, especially on Basil's part:

He [Basil] finds Dorian in his home, coming down the stairs in nothing but a white silk robe, smoking a cigarette and somewhat struggling to keep himself from stumbling; it is obvious he is high on something. Basil confronts Dorian, pointing out his concerns about the portrait and Dorian's paranoid secrecy, begging him to let him take it, perhaps to relieve Dorian of the burden. But much to Basil's disappointment, Dorian laughs in refusal. Instead, he [...] lures him into confessing his innermost desire—knowing full well what it is. [...] Basil is forced to reveal his secret. That is his love for Dorian. 'Do you want me?' Dorian asks directly. Basil looks down at the handsome man who sits rather lax on the sofa, looking oddly satisfied with his question. "Yes, I love you," Basil replies (ztarplay).

Queer-themed musicals are not entirely absent in Korean theatres, and yet it is still quite rare to feature explicit sexual scenes and love between two men. What is more important is that this musical is a full Korean production apart from the story. Previously musicals that explore queer stories and representations of gender minorities in Korean theatres are all remountings of Broadway productions, such as the *Kinky Boots*, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, *La Cage aux Folles*, *Priscilla Queen of the Desert* (H. W. Kim 435). Therefore, an explicit seduction scene in a completely Korean production is phenomenon in conservative South Korea.

3.2. Reviews from Musical Goers

Kristina, an American YouTuber reviews, "many people here [South Korea] do not believe gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people exist. So it's real great to

see art in theatres in Korea exploring this. I'm really sort of proud as a fan that Junsu is doing that as an artist. So, that made me happy, and the entire show was original" ("The Nerdventurist"). It would be risky to take her personal experience as a general social phenomenon, yet it remains a valid observation of a traveller staying in Seoul. Her companion adds that they did not simply try a musical on a whim, like tourists. They commuted for an hour from where they stayed via subway simply to see Kim Junsu, and Kristina mentions that she became a fan of Korean musicals because of Kim Junsu ("The Nerdventurist"). It is clear from the quote that she is thrilled and proud that her favourite K-pop star took this controversial role, and that he is courageous to touch on a taboo topic in Korea. In her travel blog, she reiterates that she found Korean society socially very conservative, and the musical was fantastic both in terms of musical quality and its representation of gays in conservative Korean theatres ("Musical Theater in Korea: Dorian Gray"). Simply based on Kristina's review, we might believe the musical pushes the boundaries of a market not used to a high-profile queer subject and thus that the musical has trailblazed in some way. However, its employment of straight attractive K-pop stars instead of queer celebrities to attract fans suggests otherwise. Thus, I analyse another native Korean musical goer's review as a comparison, to give a better understanding of the situation of queer subjects in the Korean musical industry.

In another review from a native Korean audience named ztarplay, there was little praise towards the musical's queer theme; rather her appreciation was for the musical's high-quality performance and actors' attractive appearances. Interestingly, the blogger is a prolific BL fanfiction writer, whose articles pair K-pop stars from different boy bands and superheroes from the Marvel universe. This demonstrates that the ever-growing BL fandom is transnational, especially in the "Euro-American circle," named by Chinese danmei fans. KIM Junsu is one of ztarplay's favourite singers, seen prominently in her introduction (ztarplay). As a fujoshi herself, she is by no means one of the conservative Koreans in Kristina's review, hence unaware of the existence of LGBTQ+ demographics. She is also a supporter of gender minorities' activism, according to a link on her profile page that directs readers to the blog "Flexuality," which explores the flexibility of sexuality and sexual orientation from an academic perspective ("Flexuality"). Yet that she never mentions the musical's queer representation, in fact, reflects on the prevalent neoliberalism in the Korean musical industry.

Instead of using art to make a statement, as suggested by Kristina, the industry is more interested, and understandably so, in attracting audiences—predominantly female—by casting their beloved K-pop or K-drama idols and making them as attractive as possible to heterosexual women. They even go to the level of making their idols do drag performances to appeal to fujoshi female audience (Choi). For instance, the Broadway transgender-themed musical *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* was made with a keen awareness of speaking for gender minorities in the era of anti-gay marriage propositions during the George Bush administration (Hsu 115). Its cast and production team included gay and transgender people as well (H.W. Kim 424). In the Korean remounting titled *Hedwig: New Makeup*, however, five straight, masculine,

and attractive Korean television stars and pop singers were cast to play the transgender protagonist in turns, so as to exploit their established fanbase. Additionally the musical even cooperated with well-known cosmetic brands to sell makeup products to audiences after seeing their beloved stars' makeovers with the products (430). Gay themes and spectacular drag performances sell more tickets among the female audience who are influenced by the BL culture. Hence gay men and drag queens are included in such musicals in spite of the country's conservative social norms. (I expand this discussion further below.)

Ztarplay's review devotes a large section of fan-girling over Park Euntae and Kim Junsu. She heaps praises on their appearance instead of their musical prowess, although she does mention that they both delivered performances with beautifully touching acting and singing skills. This is followed by a compliment on Henry's elegant, black silk costume, which complimented Dorian's blue-green peacock costume. The rest of the review is on how beautiful and sexy KIM Junsu looks in the musical. Ztarplay also comments that she sat close to the stage, and thus could clearly see Kim's long legs in tight pants, abs, shoulders, back, and occasionally his "duckbutt," and she ends the review with an exclamation "Bravo Duckbutt, Bravo!" (ztarplay). Such a blatant heterosexual female gaze at the K-pop superstar's body makes Kristina's cheering for the musical's daring queer representation comparatively weak.

Both reviews demonstrate the musical's attractiveness to straight female audience, who are *fujoshi* and LGBTQ+ supporters with a commercialised concept of queerness—queer boys must be beautiful, fashionable, and innocent. A strong heteronormalising attempt to regulate this queerness is made by the conceit of Dorian's queer identity being a result of possession by evil spirit.

The tendency to associate queer identity with villainy in mass media appears again, and rather obviously in this musical. For example, before Dorian was possessed by the evil portrait, he was straight, kind, "pure," with a romantic love story involving Sybil. After he succumbs to the portrait's curse, under Lord Henry's influence, he becomes a queer, hedonistic villain who suddenly develops creative taste in sex, and the murders committed by him are all associated with his homosexuality. Therefore, the original Dorian who has his own agency and is fully aware of and responsible for his own "degeneracy" is flattened into this "symbol" of a queer villain. By associating his queerness with spirit possession, his gender-nonconforming act is linked to mental instability and villainy. This moralised Dorian on the Korean stage should be read within Korea's highly commercialised musical market, where the straight female gaze dictates the writing and casting.

3.3. The Neoliberal Staging of Queerness

The two *Dorian Gray* musical reviewers both note they went to watch this musical many times, but that their primary purpose was to support their favourite star (KIM Junsu). The Korean musical industry immediately capitalises on such taste for stars in the *kkonminam* (lit. "flower-like man"), which is heavily influenced by Japanese BL culture's worship of bishōnen. Fans' interest in bromance has become a

huge commercial incentive for the musical industry to overcome their traditionalist prejudice against queer subjects, although the type of queerness included in the musical market is usually diluted by consumerism.

For instance, pop-up stores in musical theatres have become very common on Broadway and in the West End, but most sell very basic merchandise, such as programmes and promotional souvenirs, sometimes keyrings, magnets, and T-shirts. In stark contrast, the store in Seongnam Arts Center for *Dorian Gray* could be described as luxurious in Kristina's video. Not only is there merchandise, there are also original sound track albums of the musical to collect, not yet available in any other countries in the world. There are also full-body KT boards of KIM Junsu in costume, next to which fans can take selfies, and a replica of Basil's studio where fans might spend time and money on pictures in costumes of the musical. In addition, according to a critical review of South Korea's musical industry, unofficial meet-ups are often organised by fans, where they meet their idols, give their idols gifts, ask for autographs, and take pictures with them. The following is a description of a meet-up after the show *Mama, Don't Cry*,

“It's a mini meet-up that nobody scheduled, but everyone seemed to know about [...] one actor emerged from the building. Shyly, he stood and addressed the crowd of at least 50 women. The fans chimed in, commenting on today's performance. One handed him a bouquet of flowers, another a cake. Cameras clicked incessantly. Many held their phones up to make videos. This is an everyday occurrence in South Korea, not only at the theatre in Hyehwa but wherever musicals are performed” (Choi).

This is not a common scene in West End or Broadway. As a frequent musical goer in West End and with two experiences in Broadway, I have witnessed the number of Western audiences waiting for musical actors to come out after the show as drastically smaller than their Asian counterparts.

My experience with West End introduced me to an ever-growing Asian musical fangirl group, comprised of Chinese and Koreans. But the total number of such fangirl groups is very small, and members change all the time, inasmuch as they are mostly postgraduates studying for their Master's degrees in England for a year. Usually, around five to eight fans will wait at the backstage door after the show, hardly any in comparison with the avid Korean fans of Choi's description. Choi summarises that the South Korean musical industry has experienced an explosive growth over the past two decades: ticket sales increased from \$88 million in 2010 to over \$180 million in 2017. Advertisements for musicals pop up all over the capital. “Seoul has become a boomtown for American musicals,” wrote a *New York Times* reporter back in 2013, describing how the enthusiastic South Korean public has allowed even flops on Broadway to score a measure of success here (Choi; Healy).

This enthusiasm allows the audience to virtually dictate the type of musicals to be imported to South Korea. Some critics are concerned with such hypercommodification and marketisation of musicals, according to Choi's article. They fear that the musical industry will only look for profit instead of supporting more artistic and unconventional explorations. Their worry is not unfounded. For

instance, while *Hedwig: New Makeup*, with a transgender subject, became a commercial success, a Korean original musical titled *Drag Queen* (2013), depicting the lives of transgenders and starring a famous Korean trans star Harisu, did not do well in the market. Even though it had all the elements of a successful show, according to musical scholar Hyewon Kim, its lack of straight handsome, masculine actors hardly draws “revolving door audiences” among the country’s dominating heterosexual female fanbase. “*Hedwig* demonstrated that a show addressing transgender identity is capable of commercial success but only with a star-based, multicast system,” concluded Kim rather pessimistically (438).

Therefore, the representation of gender minorities has been much commodified in the Korean musical market. Against this backdrop, the intimate sex scene in *Dorian Gray* (2016) is, in fact, catering to straight female spectators’ gaze and their interest in bromance. The industry knows that BL subjects sell well. Eng-beng Lim, in his influential work *Brown Boys and Rice Queens* (2014), has coined this concept of adopting the queer and Western trope in Korean popular culture as “global queering.”

This deliberate queering of the professional relationships of straight male actors, particularly good-looking male actors, for market’s sake is represented in the historical K-drama, *Mr. Sunshine* (2018). While the TV series’ general tone is heavy and serious, a [clip](#) posted on its official Instagram account shows two male leads accidentally crashing into each other in slow motion, with one bashfully staring at the other, a parody of the straight teen drama trope, and captioned “[w]as it just the tram, or did we see sparks fly last week” (mr sunshine netflix).

It should be stressed that such deliberate queering of straight male characters is done in a light-hearted and funny way, as a fan service. Thus, while it draws and satisfies the fujoshi fandom, it does not really threaten traditional Korean values or the representation of Korean masculinity. In particular, one character in the clip, Kim Hui-seong in sleek 19th-century Western suit, became an avid follower of Aestheticism after studying in Japan for ten years. He is a handsome “hedonist,” who seemingly cares nothing for politics and squanders money on gambling, women, and art. He is almost assuredly heterosexual, but he enjoys teasing his male friends with intimate behaviours, and always holds flowers in impeccable dress. Therefore his image is less “manly” in comparison to his other two conventionally masculine friends. When they first meet, the heroine of this drama—his ex-fiance through arranged marriage—ridicules him as “a fair-skinned, fragile, weakling. [...] what good of a man is he when flowers are all he has in his hands,” not up to her standards of a “real man” (*Mr. Sunshine* S1E4–5).

The screenwriter and the director then knowingly poke fun at dandy’s queer connotation “crashing” with the macho Japanese Bushido masculinity, represented by the samurai character in the clip.¹⁴⁶ However, this dandy character also shows

¹⁴⁶ Bushidō (武士道, “the way of warriors”) is a Japanese collective term for the many codes of honour and ideals that dictated the samurai way of life, loosely analogous to the European concept of chivalry.

marvelous courage in times of adversity when Joseon was occupied by Japan. He uses his rich and pro-Japanese family background as a masquerade to take pictures of violence Japanese troops inflict against civilians, writes articles to international press, prints anonymous newspapers to encourage the Korean public to fight against Japanese invaders, and secretly helps the Righteous Army led by his ex-fiance. He is beaten to death by Japanese soldiers for refusing to reveal the whereabouts of the Righteous Army. So, even though teased for his “unmanliness,” this dandy character is depicted as a courageous and upright idealist. His dandy masculinity is honoured in the end when a Japanese soldier tortures him for the name list of the righteous army. The dandy character’s masculinity is, in fact, heroic and romantic. His slightly queer manner does not threaten or shame Korean masculinity at all; rather, his image associates dandyism with heroism and beauty, transforming the stereotype of dandies as effeminate cowards.

In her insightful paper on Korean musical industry’s domestication of the imported queer musical *Hedwig*, KIM Hyewon points out that a “transgressive concept” during the neoliberal globalization, and in Korean’s compressed modernization, refers to an identity of practice that challenges heterosexual norms (434). In the globalising age, cultural integration is inevitable. It is particularly the case of Korea that has been influenced by the US for a few decades. The process of Americanisation surely caused conflicts between local traditional values and Western values. CHANG Kyung-sup also argues that Westernisation can adversely affect local culture and even politics. Simultaneously, indigenous efforts to resist such modernisation reinforce aspects of traditional and indigenous civilisation; ironically, the backlash itself can be utilized to further the goals of modernisation and Westernisation (K. Chang 8).

Kim notices that Korean society experienced compressed modernity and neoliberalism as a release from stifling Confucian conventions, while simultaneously domesticating Western cultural products. Homosexuality, drag performance, transgendered sexuality are all aspects of neoliberal modernity that offer viewers a glimpse into a foreign society. “Yet it is fashioned in such a way that audiences can enjoy it as an object of a transgressive thrill domesticated by the neoliberal market, without feeling threatened by the potential breakdown of gender boundaries” (434). While American musicals with LGBTQ+ theme might permeate Korean theatres, and a classic British novel known for its homosexual implication could become a major commercial success, and even overly explicit sexual scenes are featured on stage, they do not posit a threat to Korea’s fundamental patriarchal traditional values.

In the case of *Hedwig*, the transgender-themed musical is commercialised as a drag performance and even stretched to advertisements for makeup brands to entertain its straight female audiences. Similarly, Dorian Gray and Basil Howard’s homosexual relationship is used to provide the opportunity to strip KIM Junsu semi-naked, so as to fully exploit his sexual appeal to straight female audience. The female audience, especially those already fangirls of KIM Junsu before this musical, unconsciously identify with Basil as he falls in love with Dorian/Junsu’s beauty. Like Basil, they are devastated to see Dorian/Junsu corrupted under the curse of the

portrait. Making Dorian a victim of the picture is an attempt to moralise and heteronormalise him into an innocent boy who conducted homosexual acts from a possessed mind, simultaneously brushing away Dorian's other evil deeds and moralising him as a good person fallen prey to the diabolical portrait. This domestication of Dorian Gray makes his homosexuality a harmless cultural spectacle that does not threaten the gender norms of Korean's conformist society. His homosexuality is clearly pathologised in the musical. The representation of queer identity, therefore, still conforms to the mainstream stereotype of queerness as at odds with heroism and linked to turpitude. What Kristina views as a daring challenge to Korean society's conservative norms really posits no challenge. Rather, the queerness in this musical conforms, to some extent, to the conservative perception of queerness as unnatural sickness.

Global-queering describes an "epistemic shift from the interpretive paradigm of global queering" against "the politics of queer representation and encounter in trans/national context [that are] often obscured by the prominence of Western modalities of queerness" (E. Lim 26-7). *Hedwig* largely eschews its transgender identity and much emphasises not gender politics, but its multi-casting of famous TV and K-pop stars, and the glam of the gender-bending performance. Likewise, *Dorian Gray*, the musical capitalises on Kim Junsu's charisma and especially his attractive appearance, along with its exotic Gothic setting, including luxurious Victorian male costumes.

Furthermore, female audience's interest in homoerotic tension among three good-looking men also reflects the rising influence of BL and the *kkonminam* (flower-handsome man) trend in East Asia. Scholars such as Stephen Epstein, James Turnbull, Roald Maliangkay, and KIM Hyewon have researched the rising "soft masculinity" in Korean popular culture, especially in K-pop boy bands. Korean mass culture is saturated with images of young, beautiful, and effeminate boys, the *kkonminam*, which has contributed to audience receptivity of effeminate male characters. Epstein and Turnbull particularly note K-pop music's visual rather than vocal emphasis, and suggest that the gender topic is key to driving K-pop production and consumption (316).

Traditionally, women in media are required to be attractive in the straight male gaze, but gradually this has been replaced by the *kkonminam* images pandering to the female gaze (Epstein and Turnbull 57). Epstein and Turnbull explain the factors that propelled this rise of soft masculinity, particularly in Korea, arguably influenced by both Japanese *yaoi* manga's bishōnen trend as well as a result of the IMF financial crisis in the 1990s. Many Korean men lost their jobs during that period, and their wives began to see men no longer as the stable breadwinners within a heteronormative structure. The macho men who represent the traditional Confucian patriarchal authoritative figures were immediately ditched, and young and beautiful men with baby-face and porcelain skin emerged, stylishly dressed and not shying away from women's accessories and makeup. This "pretty boy" trend reflects the increasing power of women spectators. Korean music industry has heavily relied on its female "revolving door" audience. Their large economic capital directly dictates a

musical's fate and their taste in *kkonminam* influences the cast to a large extent. Whether the musical is trying to speak for LGBTQ+ is subjective to personal interpretation, and no longer matters once its female audience is enthralled by Junsu's appearance.

Wilde's work and its homosexual connotations have thus been "domesticated" and commodified to cater to a straight female audience, which provides an alternate foundation as to how homosexual subjects were able to "transgress" in Korea's still conservative and conformist society. The branding of queer cultural products is marketed as commodities in the age of neoliberal capitalism. Fangirls who queue to take pictures with KIM Junsu's full-body KT board are potent evidence of the "McDonaldization" that converts queer bodies into objects of female desire, consumed within a conservative society.

Kristina's comment that the Korean musical theatre has begun to welcome LGBTQ+ representation maybe too optimistic, and yet its positive change should be acknowledged. Even though it is a form of hypercommodification, the LGBTQ+ subject featured in the musical still represents a big step for gender minorities in media representation. With increasing visibility of queer demographics, conservative societies of Korea, Japan, and China will gradually become more open-minded towards people with gender identities and sexual orientations beyond the binary of male, female, and hetero. For example, KIM Hyewon notes that the LGBTQ+ topic is spreading throughout Korean society with the popularity of musicals like *Hedwig* and *Dorian Gray*; slowly the Korean public's awareness of gender minorities has grown (437). Festivals and important days for LGBTQ+ demographics have been made since 2014 (437).

3. Conclusion: The Grand Unity of the "Aesthetic 同志"

In response to the global queering trend in popular culture, China, Japan, and South Korea have produced three different types of cultural products, reflecting the similarity and comradeship in empathising with gender-nonconforming and the marginalised community.

Japan was first among these countries to experience the process of Westernisation and modernisation. Japan is also more profoundly influenced by the 19th-century art and philosophical movements of Aestheticism and Decadence; thus, the vast impact was already embedded in Japan's indigenous historical development and had become a part of modern Japanese culture: the presence of Victorian Britain and decadence was visible in all kinds of cultural expression from high school textbooks to popular MAG products.

Victorian Aestheticism's presence is felt in the gaming industry, particularly, that seems far away from the literary circle and is making a positive change. In the gaming industry, mainstream games are mostly designed to either cater to straight female gamers to date handsome male or to straight male gamers, to explore violent and sexual content (and even to satisfy their desire to use violence against gender-nonconforming people out of homophobia and transphobia). *Ozmafia!!* has

admirably resisted the market's toxic influence, featuring an empowered female protagonist and representing queerness more objectively. Even so, it would be too essentialist to conclude that this single positive case indicates the entire Japanese gaming industry is progressing to rid itself of pernicious elements in traditional games.

But *Ozmafia!!* deserves credit for its attempt to decriminalise female sexual desire and humanise queer identity, although the queerness is inevitably commercialised as a selling point to appeal to fujoshi; and yet the queer subject is not heteronormalised by the game designers. Their daring and fair representation of queerness is largely due to an understanding of Wilde's life and ideas. Queerness here is not included as an afterthought, to be "politically correct," nor is it represented as an antagonist theme, whose villainy is associated with queer identity. This game has made an effort to represent LGBTQ+ people as attractive, nuanced, and compassionate fellow humans. With its high ratings and popularity among players, it is a good game for newcomers in the otome industry, if not already making a good impact in the gaming industry in general. Even knowing that the otome game should capitalise on heterosexual narratives to earn straight female gamer customers, they still feature queer routes and queer characters. Thus, the game has resisted the McDonaldisation of queer subjects currently experienced in China and Korea.

As the cradle of modern MAG culture, Japan's popular cultural influence is second only to Hollywood. Their anime, manga, and video games are widely circulated around the world, and loved by generations of teenagers and young adults, whose values and perceptions are unconsciously shaped by the media. Therefore, wholesome changes in any case maybe small—even simply to give queer characters ordinary human attributes and decently dressed female characters—but they may have a butterfly effect on young players' perceptions of women and gender minorities.

Racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, and fascist right-wing groups have also harnessed the power of the internet and social media, thus to strategically insert their pernicious values into memes, self-help advice, emotional coaching, gaming, cosplay on MAG online platforms (i.e., 4Chan), even body-building and make-up YouTube channels (e.g., The Golden One, Blaire White)—primarily to lure and recruit confused and sexually frustrated young (straight, white) men to join them. In light of Sarkeesian's proposal that "it is possible and necessary to simultaneously enjoy a piece of media while being critical of its problematic and pernicious aspects" ([feministfrequency](#)), *Ozmafia*'s effort to feature decadent sexual exploration and different sexuality in an objective and critical way promotes the development of LGBTQ+ and feminist activism both domestically and globally. The popularity of video games indeed facilitates high visibility of gender issues among young adults and teenagers; hence it is possible to boost a more receptive social environment for gender minorities and women via more wholesome games like *Ozmafia!!*

In China and Korea, the queer subject is perceived as a foreign cultural spectacle, only incorporated into local culture in recent decades. Foucault argues that homosexual acts in ancient China are not a result of homosexuality the identity, but

simply spontaneous homoerotic acts (*ars erotica*; *The History of Sexuality Part III: Scientia Sexualis*), but China's modernisation since the late 19th century has completely removed the cultural memory of its long history of homosexuality, and thus homosexuality (as an identity) seems never to have existed before. Similarly, in Korea, sexuality also used to be fluid and not strictly labeled as heterosexual and homosexual in their pre-modern era, but starts to resist homosexuality in the 19th century, when Korea was Christianised and homosexuality was understood as a perversion introduced by Westerners.¹⁴⁷

Since their modernisation in the 19th century, indigenous cultures of the two countries strongly resisted the “Western” concept of homosexuality. United around their interest in Wilde's cultural legacy, in yaoi fandom, female customers of China and Korea are “wielding” their buying power to change the tenor of unfriendly attitudes towards LGBTQ+ demographics. However, a significant difference of the two lies in Korea's cultural commodification as part of the neoliberal globalisation, and seen as a major hindrance to further artistic explorations of the queer subjects, while China's danmei fans are taking advantage of such commodification to escape government's censorship.

Despite the difference in these stages of development, yaoi fans of the three countries share a similar Confucian cultural background and a deep interest in pop culture's global queering trend. They begin to translate and read each other's works, including the emergence of a new language—“pseudo-chinese”—with which the ACG/MAG fandoms have created a utopian world of BL. YANG Ling notes the grand unity of BL fans from these countries, where connections and emotions are devoid of territorial demarcations (“The World of Grand Union” 58). Those “Aesthetic comrades” share an interest in beauty, art, and Oscar Wilde. Moreover, understanding Wilde-related cultural expression and activities requires both economic and cultural capital, and highlights their similar class background across countries. This utopia has become particularly lively with the accelerating process of globalisation, and China's active integration into world economic and political systems.

¹⁴⁷ Although there is very little mention of homosexuality in Korean literature or traditional historical accounts, several members of nobility and Buddhist monks have been known to either profess their attraction to members of the same sex or else be actively involved with them (“[Korean Gay and Lesbian History](#)”). The earliest such recorded example might be that of King Hyegong, the 36th ruler of the Silla Dynasty who was killed at the age of 22 by his noblemen who revolted in protest of his “femininity” (Hyung-Ki Choi et al. “South Korea (Taehan Min'guk),” *International Encyclopedia of Sexuality*). King Mokjong (980–1009) and King Gongmin (1325–1374) of Goryeo are both on record as having kept several *wonchung* (“male lovers”) in their courts as “little-brother attendants” (*chajewhi*) who served as sexual partners. After the death of his wife, King Gongmin even went so far as to create a ministry whose sole purpose was to seek out and recruit young men from all over the country to serve in his court. By contrast, Royal Noble Consort Sun, second consort to the then Joseon crown prince, was ejected from the palace and demoted to commoner status for having had sexual relations with one of her ladies maids (朝鮮王朝實錄 [Veritable Records of Sejong] 1454,75; Y. G. Kim and Sook-Ja Hahn 59–65).

Conclusions

In *Discovering History in China* (1984), the American historian Paul Cohen argued that

“ . . . the West thinks of itself as probably the most cosmopolitan of all cultures. But it is not. In many ways, it is the most parochial; for 200 years, the West’s imperial and economic domination meant that it never needed or was forced to understand other cultures. Whereas other cultures were subject to Western expansion and influence, thereby forced to understand and live with the West. As a result, some have become more cosmopolitan in many ways than the West” (Cohen xlii; [Jacques](#)).

British journalist and author, Martin Jacques, for example, emphasises that people in East Asia: Japan, Korea, China—thus a third of the world’s population and now the largest economic region in the world—are far more knowledgeable about the West than the West about East Asia ([Jacques](#)).

While Cohen’s argument on Western-centric narrative of world affairs is outdated, there remains some truth in it. For instance, Hollywood’s global influence and popular British TV dramas have successfully intrigued Asian audiences about Western culture, but few *vice versa* cases exist. In China, from 2012–2017, Tom Hiddleston became the darling of Chinese cyberspace where hundreds of thousands of fangirls read Shakespeare’s works and watched the *Hollow Crown* series (2012–2016), with subtitles translated by volunteers because of Hiddleston’s own interest in and recommendation to read Shakespeare. Similarly, French films, chanson, and musicals, e.g., *Roméo et Juliette* (musical; 2001), *Notre-Dame de Paris* (musical; 1998), and *Mozart!* (1999), have long fascinated Chinese audiences to study French language, history, art, literature, and architecture. Moreover, because of the US pop music industry, which currently dominates worldwide, even European continental countries have been threatened by “Americanisation” (Taylor 49–70; Gueldry et al. 37–51; Kuisel 95–113). An average young Chinese person, uninterested in Western pop culture, knows Ariana Grande and Taylor Swift, and yet seldom would an average Westerner know Jolin Tsai or Kris Wu, even though they have achieved Pan-Asia popularity, or know of K-pop bands like BTS and Blackpink, who have achieved their global fame more recently (in 2018). This situation is worsened by China’s self-imposed Great Firewall, and isolation out of ideological control.¹⁴⁸

Cohen’s and Jacques’s arguments recall Qing China’s parochialism towards foreign cultures in the 19th century, which eventually resulted in the Opium Wars and the subsequent wars and chaos that lasted for a century. China continues to learn this lesson of shutting out outside influence the hard way, and such parochialism and blind nationalistic sentiments remain dangerous in its participation in global affairs.

¹⁴⁸ The Great Firewall of China (GFW) is the combination of legislative actions and technologies enforced by the People's Republic of China to regulate the Internet domestically. Its role in the Internet censorship in China is to block access to selected foreign websites and to slow down cross-border Internet traffic ([Mozur](#)).

As for the West, frustrated anti-globalisation, alt-right groups now propel tolerance dangerously towards the cliff where China fell a century ago. Globalisation and the growing economic influence of the Global South has inserted an increasingly strong non-West presence in Western society, which fires up racist sentiment towards East Asians, echoing the hatred towards foreigners in China's Boxer Rebellion (1899–1901), although the latter was far more violent and caused by the colonial invasion in the first place. In addition, the decreasing natural and social resources of the enormous world population are aggravating such hostility towards foreigners, and the ethnically and sexually different Others. This Globalisation trauma continues to fuel violent social incidents worldwide, especially pernicious in the campus shootings in the West.

Against this backdrop, Wilde's presence in academia and media has grown more meaningful for its subtle but lasting influences. Wilde's importance has been comparatively peripheral in academia, largely due to historical perceptions of his "unnatural" sexual orientation, Aestheticism considered a frivolous philosophy because of its emphasis on spectacle, and association with dandyism, thus promoting "effeminate men" as objects, which challenges the conventional concept of masculinity. Finally, racist bias against Wilde because of his Irish identity has also kept him from the forefront (Q. Chen 171–184).

Within Western academia, then, Wilde remains a more obscure figure than his contemporaries, regardless of his commercial value in the cultural industry (Gillespie). His outsized influence in East Asia, by comparison, has shaped modern East Asian cultures and politics. Even so, Eastern (specifically Chinese) academia has dedicated very few academic studies to explore his legacy in both literary spheres and in popular youth culture. CHEN Qi's *Oscar Wilde and East Asia: Empire, Nation-State, and the Globalisation of Aestheticism* (2011) stands out as a Wilde-focused comparative literary study, which traces Wilde's literary reception in both China and Japan in the early 20th century. Chen's work indeed fills a small gap in studying the transnational flow of Aestheticism between West and East, especially in terms of translations and dramatic adaptations.

I have presented a more comprehensive reception study of Wilde, from the 20th century to more recent commercial branding of his personas in East Asia's cultural industry. Thus, I contribute a complementary work to Chen's research—in particular, Wilde's reception in South Korea, which he overlooked. My study also encompasses the new field where Wilde's influence has transcended literary texts to influence East Asia's modern fashion, beauty, advertising, BL fandom, video gaming, and musical industries. By studying Wilde in these fields, I attempted to reveal his subtle but deep impacts on constructing young perceptions of gender equality and LGBTQ+ activism. Ultimately, to promote the edifying influence of beauty that has the positive power of addressing, even dissolving conflicts and uniting people of different backgrounds, eventually leading divided peoples to form a relatively harmonious unity.

Wilde's literary reception in China (1909–2019) demonstrates a clear timeline of Chinese translations and adaptations of his works, and a clear ideological

trajectory that facilitated his popularity, and absence in China. These translated works, adaptations, and his presence in modern popular culture have also subtly reformed China's collective values and perceptions, e.g., a cosmopolitan that takes on intercultural communication during the New Cultural Movement, and the increasingly liberal attitude towards gender minorities in contemporary China.

The focus on Wilde's influence in commercial advertisements and East Asian youth culture in Parts II and III of the thesis show the branding of Wilde as an intriguing development, according to Western scholars in 19th-century literary studies. Regenia Gagnier is the most significant figure, and approaches Wilde from a cultural material discourse that explores his relationship with the late-Victorian market. Gillespie's more recent monograph *Branding Oscar Wilde* (2017) brings concepts of branding into the process of literary criticism. He seeks to study Wilde's works by looking at how branding shaped his creativity (7).

In Part II, I explored how Wilde's Chinese fans of the present respond to Wilde as a brand name that specifically targets the Chinese market. Approaching 19th-century literature through fashion discourse is a budding area in Victorian Studies, for example, in *Fashion and Narrative in Victorian Popular Literature* (2017), where Madeleine C. Seys explores Victorian culture through the lens of fashion study. This area sits at the intersections of Victorian literary studies, dress, and material cultural studies, feminist literary criticism, and gender and sexuality studies. Yet little research has specifically focused on Wilde's literary influence in male fashion and its redefining power over China's new masculinity. In Chapter 4, I examined Wilde from a perspective of male fashion and masculinity criticism, and attempt to address this interdisciplinary and cross-cultural comparative cultural studies in examining Wilde-influenced dandies in China's fashion magazines, and Chinese BOBO consumption habits entangled with a class-based fetish for the British gentleman, and by its extension, a refined British lifestyle. This British dandified gentleman image demonstrates a Chinese elite cohort as constructing a national image of a wholesome, genteel, stylish, and cultured man in response to the flow of queer culture and neoliberal globalisation.

Finally, the queer global trend in popular culture led me to study the queer subcultures, BL and *danmei*, originating in Japan and thriving in China and Korea. As one of the most famous queer icons, Wilde represents a major inspiration for Asian BL creative expressions. The Wilde-inspired works of East Asia are unique, valuable examples of the "worlding" Wilde in incorporated Asian local cultures, i.e., China's *danmei* fictions, Japan's video games, and South Korea's musicals. The final section forms the most up-to-date reception study of Wilde in the East.

In Aestheticism, individualism, liberation of individuals from conventions, and cosmopolitan open-mindedness we learn from Wilde in the pronounced grand unity of the Aesthetic 同志 cohort from these countries. Academia and the general public of the West have remained woefully ignorant of Eastern culture, and might better connect to today's awareness of the power of beauty and Wilde's transcultural influence there. I seek to encourage wholesome intercultural communications,

moving out from the achievements of this grand unity, inspired by a British cultural icon.

That said, this transnational queer culture is overshadowed by neoliberal hypercommodification. The queer subject and the political demand for gender minorities are unavoidably commercialised as part of “pink capitalism,” in which political sense is diluted by consumerism. Pink capitalism is limiting, for it only represents gender minorities and their supporters from upper-middle class backgrounds, whereas working-class communities are overlooked.¹⁴⁹ “Pro-gay” companies like Coca Cola China, the facemasks brand, the perfume company only go as far as rainbow packaging, using Wilde as a gay spokesman for commodities. They remain unconcerned with understanding, researching, and fighting to end the oppression of the LGBT+ community, or avoid challenges to the establishment they themselves form a part of. The lack of real political meaning behind such neoliberalisation of the queer agenda ironically enables China’s queer subculture to escape censorship and the LGBTQ+ community to garner more media (subtle) representations.¹⁵⁰ However, to a large extent, these take advantage of the gender minority’s suffering to make money, as in the Korean musical character of Dorian Gray, “moralised” as a cursed, innocent young man, to appeal to Korean middle-class women instead of challenging the heteronormative establishment.

Wilde’s cultural influence in China forms an enormous project that includes almost every aspect of Chinese society, including fashion, cosmetic, music, Internet fandom, even food and beverages, etc. In addition, chronologically speaking, it moves from early modern textual receptions to contemporary China’s creative exploration of Wilde’s personas. Hence, the project enters a grand jigsaw puzzle of entanglements between Japan and Korea, as well as the entire British Empire network.

This project also requires interdisciplinary studies of cultural criticism, marketing theories, and behavioral economics. The worlding of Wilde requires contributions and cooperation between scholars everywhere. Future studies on Asian reception of Wilde might explore this topic within the larger context of East Asia. Several interesting aspects deserve our attention: Wilde’s influence in the gourmet industry in China i.e., the famous “cucumber sandwich” from *The Importance of Being Earnest*, and his favored absinthe. Those uncharted territories I will leave for my future research and other scholars to discover.

Studying Wilde remains crucial in our contemporary era, riddled with conflicts, divided political camps, extreme ideas and violence against people different from us. As an Oxford student influenced by Eurocentric attitudes, Wilde

¹⁴⁹ Pink Capitalism is the incorporation of the LGBT+ movement for capitalization and pinkwashing is making products or the image of a company appear gay-friendly to showcase progressiveness and tolerance of the company to get LGBT+ consumers (Branchik 86-97; Sears 92-112).

¹⁵⁰ Chinese entertainment companies start to invest in *danmei* projects adapting popular *danmei* novels into Web series. Until August 2019 a phenomenal *danmei* web series *The Untamed* (2019) officially announced the age of *danmei* web series has arrived. This Chinese web series loosely based on the BL (*danmei*) novel *Mo Dao Zu Shi* by Mo Xiang Tong Xiu. The series received a score of 7.8 on Douban; and is the most rated Mainland series on the website. It has a total of 4.7 billion views.

was not ashamed to admit his bias against Chinese civilisation (Jackson & Small ed. 3; Cavendish-Jones 923–6; Q. Chen 173). He was also courageous to admit his parochialism and drastically revised his views, even began his high-profile promotion of Chinese art after his San Francisco trip (*Complete Letters* 159; Q. Chen 173; Cavendish-Jones 923; *Complete Works* 913–938). In many ways, he remains a pioneer of modern liberal ideology, celebrating beauty, understanding, tolerance, courage, and love. Our age desperately needs such an icon.

Scholars and gay celebrities have dubbed him Saint Oscar, but Saint is riddled with piety; I envision a boring, eyebrow-furrowing moralist (Cherry; Kendall). Wilde is no Saint; he is a precious Ming vase, sitting there, seemingly useless and beautiful. Some would criticise this image as empty and fragile. However, put flowers in the vase and suddenly something of the soul trembles in its beauty. Before we realise what this beauty is, we have become a part of it and it a part of us, Wilde, as a piece of art.

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¹⁵¹ This book is one of the works attributed to [Dong Zhongshu](#) that has survived to the present, though its compilation might have continued past his lifetime into the 4th century. It bears marks of multiple authorship and is both externally contradictory with other material on Dong's thought, and inconsistent with itself.

Appendix

Glossary of Non-English Words

- A Portrait of Shunkin (Shunkinshō)* 春琴抄
- Ai ka* 愛か
- Aiguoxin yu zijuexin* 爱国心与自觉心
- Aimeiju movement* 爱美剧运动
- Aisin Gioro* 爱新觉罗 (Manchu clan)
- Analects* 论语
- Aoyama Gōshō* 青山刚昌
- Ba Jin* 巴金 (LI Yaotang 李尧棠)
- Baichuan Shuzhi* 百川書志
- baimian shusheng* 白面书生
- BAN Boli* 班勃利
- Baofahu* 暴发户
- BI Gan* 比干
- Bishōnen* 美少年
- Boli* 玻璃
- Buke erxi* 不可儿戏
- Bungaku* 文学 or ぶんがく
- CAI Yuanpei* 蔡元培
- Caizi* 才子
- CAO Lei* 曹蕾
- CHEN Duxiu* 陈独秀
- CHENG Fangwu* 成仿吾
- CHOE Nam seon* 최남선; 崔南善
- Choulaojiu* 臭老九
- Chuangzao She* 创造社
- chuanzong jiedai* 传宗接代
- Chunguang Zhali* 春光炸裂
- Chunguang Zhaxie /Happy Together*
春光乍泄
- Collection of Classical Chinese Jokes*
笑林广记
- Cosmopolitan Nationalism* 世界的国家主义
- Crescent Moon Society* 新月社
- Da Ji* 姐己
- Da* 达 (from 信达雅)
- Daguo Jueqi* 大国崛起
- Dancing Girl (Maihime)* 舞姬
- Danmei* 耽美 (Hanzi or Chinese Characters)
- Daren* 大人 (lord)
- Datong* 大同
- DENG Xiaoping* 邓小平
- Dizhu* 地主
- đồng chí* 同志 (Hán tự, Sino-Vietnamese word)
- Dongfang Zazhi* 东方杂志
- Dongji* 同志 (Hanja) ; 동지
- Dōshi* 同志 (Kanji); どうし
- Duan Xiu* 断袖
- Duke Ling of Wei* 卫灵公
- E'nv* 恶女
- East Palace, West Palace* 东宫西宫
- Edogawa Conan* 江戸川 コナン
- Edogawa Ranpo* 江戸川 乱歩
- FANG Zhouzi* 方舟子
- Fangeming* 反革命
- Fentao* 分桃
- Funan (hanyu pinyin) / fundanshi*
(Japanese Romanisation) 腐男
- Funong* 富农
- Funv (hanyu pinyin)/ fujoshi*
(Japanese Romanisation) 腐女
- Gai lou* 基佬
- GAO Qiu* 高俅
- Gao yishu de* 搞艺术的
- Gaoji* 搞基
- Gay mi gay* 蜜
- Gold-and- Ironism* 金铁主义
- Goryeo* 고려; 高麗 (Korean Dynasty)

- Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty
Sphere 大東亜共栄圏
GUANG Delin 关德琳
Guangxu-Year 28 光绪二十八年
Guimi 闺蜜
GUO Jingming 郭敬明
GUO Moruo 郭沫若
Guoyu 国语
Gyoza 餃子
Haigui 海归
Hallyu 韩流 ;한류
Han Feizi 韩非子
HAN Han 韩寒
Hanyu Da Cidian 汉语大词典
He Shang 河殇
Heian 平安 (Japanese Dynasty)
Heiwulei 黑五类
HONG Shen 洪深
Hot Wind: Anthology of Informal Essays 热风·随感录
Hou Hanshu 后汉书
HU Ge 胡歌
HU Shi 胡适
HU Yuzhi 胡愈之
Hua Dan 花旦
hua mei nan 花美男
Huaifenzi 坏分子
Huang lian po 黄脸婆
Hulijing 狐狸精
Investiture of the Gods 封神榜
Japanese MAG (Manga, Anime, and Games) = Chinese ACG (Anime, Comics, and Games) Cultures 动漫文化
Japanizumu –ジャパニズム (Japanism)
JI Kangyi 嵇康裔
Ji 基 in Gaoji (搞基), meaning gay
JIA Xixi 贾茜茜
Jiayin zazhi 甲寅杂志
Jieceng 阶层
Jieji 阶级
Jindi 禁地
Jingji jichu jue ding shangceng jianzhu 经济基础决定上层建筑
Jingjiang Literature City 晋江文学城
Jingzi yu Qiqiaoban 镜子与七巧板
Jōmon 绳文
Joseon 조선; 朝鮮 (Korean Dynasty)
Jun guomin jiaoyu 军国民教育
Junzi 君子
Kawaii かわいい
Keju 科举
KIM Junsu 김준수; 金俊秀
King An'ling 安陵君 [魏国国君]
King Zhou of Shang Dynasty 商纣王
Kinjiki 禁色
Kkonminam 꽃미남; 花美男
KMT or Kuomintang 国民党
KMT's Bureau of Investigation and Statistics (NBIS) 国民党军统
Ku'er 酷儿
Kūkai 空海 (Kanji)
La Jeunesse (or New Youth) 新青年
Lan Yu 蓝宇
Leslie Cheung 张国荣
Lesuo 勒索
LI Dazhao 李大钊
LI Hongzhang 李鸿章
LI Yu 李煜
LIANG Qichao 梁启超
Liji (Book of Rites) 礼记
LIN Huiyin 林徽因
LIU Che 刘彻
LIU Guangning 刘广宁
LIU Na'ou 刘呐鸥
Longyang 龙阳

- LU Huaxing/ LU Doren 鲁华兴/鲁道人
 Lu Xun 鲁迅 (ZHOU Shuren 周树人)
 LUO Guanzhong 罗贯中
 Mao Dun 茅盾
 MAO Zedong 毛泽东 (Runzhi 润之)
 mei 美
 Meiji 明治
 Meng Yuanji 蒙元吉
 MIZI Xia 弥子瑕
 Mori Ōgai 森 鷗外
 MU Shiyong 穆时英
 Mucizixiao 母慈子孝
 Mujǒng 무정; 无情
 Nagai Kafū –永井荷風
 Nanfeng 男风
 Nanse shidai 男色时代
 Nation Committed to
 Cosmopolitanism 世界主义的国家
 Obba 오빠
 Otome game 乙女ゲーム
 OUYANG Yuqian 欧阳予倩
 Ouzhou wenyi shitan 欧洲文艺史谈
 PAN Jinlian 潘金莲
 Park Euntae 박은태
 Principle of Mínzú 民族主义 (三民主
 义中的民族主义)
 PU furen 溥夫人
 PU Songling 蒲松龄
 Puyi 溥仪
 QIAN Feili 钱菲莉
 Qianlong 乾隆
 Qinaide Wangerde 亲爱的王尔德
 Qiqiao linglongxin 七巧玲珑心
 Qu Yuan 屈原
 Quzhu dalu, huifu zhonghua 驱逐鞑
 虏, 恢复中华
 Sashimi 刺身
 Sangang Wuchang 三纲五常
 Shangyichang 上译厂 (上海电影译制
 厂)
 Shao Nainai de Shanzi 少奶奶的扇子
 SHAO Xunmei 邵洵美
 SHAO Youlian 邵友濂
 SHENG Peiyu 盛佩玉
 SHENG Xuanhuai 盛宣怀
 Shengziwen 生子文
 SHI Jihan 施寄寒
 SHI Nai'an 施耐庵
 SHI Zhecun 施蛰存
 shiyi changji yi zhiyi 师夷长技以制
 夷
 shōjo 少女
 shōnen'ai 少男爱
 Shu Er 述而
 Sibadakesi (*Spartacus*) 斯巴达克斯
 Sina Weibo 新浪微博
 Sinsosŏl 신소설; 新小說
 SONG Jiaoren 宋教仁
 SU Man-shu 苏曼殊
 SUN Yat-sen 孙中山
 Takarazuka Revue 宝塚歌劇
 Tanbi 耽美 (Kanji) or たんび
 (Hiragana)
 Tanizaki Jun'ichirō 谷崎 潤一郎
 Taoxintaofei de pengyou 掏心掏肺的
 朋友
 Taoxintaofei 掏心掏肺
 TENG Gu 滕固
 Three Principles of the People 三民主
 义
 TIAN Han 田汉
 Tiandao 天道
 Tianli 天理
 Tianming 天命

- Tianxia 天下
To preserve Heaven's laws and
eliminate human desires 存天理，灭
人欲
- TONG Zirong 童自荣
Tongding zuiyan 痛定罪言
- Tongqi 同妻
- Tongrennü 同人女
- Tongxinglian 同性恋
- Tongzhi 同志
- Tu 土
- Tuhao 土豪
- Ueda Bin – 上田 敏
- Wagashi 和菓子
- Wallace Huo 霍建华
- WANG Gulu 王古鲁
- WANG Jingwei puppet regime 汪伪
政府
- WANG Sichong 王思聪
- Weimei pai 唯美派
- Weimei 唯美
- Wen 文
- WEN Yiduo 闻一多
- Wenxu geming lun* 文学革命论
- Wenxue yanjiu hui 文学研究会
- Wenyanwen 文言文
- Wenyi gongzuozhe 文艺工作者
- Wong Kar wai 王家卫
- WU Da 武大
- WU Song 武松 (er'lang 二郎)
- Wuxia 武侠
- Wuxu Reformation 戊戌变法
- Xianbei 鲜卑
- XIAO Shan 萧珊
- Xila Guancai zhimi* 希腊棺材之谜
- XIMEN Qing 西门庆
- Xin ganjue pai 新感觉派
- Xin nvxing 新女性
- Xin 信 (from 信达雅)
- Xingbie butong zeme tanlianai 性别不
同，怎么谈恋爱
- Xiqu 戏曲
- XU Zhimo 徐志摩
- XUE Qiyong 薛琦瑛
- Ya 雅 (from 信达雅)
- YAN Fu 严复
- YANG Du 杨度
- YANG Guang 杨广 (隋炀帝)
- YANG Zhouhan 杨周翰
- Yanggu County 阳谷县
- Yangwu Yundong 洋务运动
- Yaoi やおい
- Yayoi 弥生
- YE Lingfeng 叶灵凤
- YE Shengtao 叶圣陶
- YI Haejo 이해조
- YI Injik 이인직; 李人植
- YI Kwang su 이광수; 李光洙
- Yingguo wenxue shigang* 英国文学史
纲
- Yong Ye* 雍也
- Youpai 右派
- YU Dafu 郁达夫
- YU Guangzhong 余光中
- YUAN Shikai 袁世凯
- YUE Dai-yun 乐黛云
- Yuibi shugi 唯美主义 (Kanji)
- Yuibi 唯美 (Kanji)
- Yukio Mishima 三岛由纪夫
- Yukio Mishima 三島由紀夫
- Yuwai Xiaoshuoji* 域外小说集
- Yuzhen 瑜贞
- ZHANG Kebiao 章克标
- ZHANG Shizhao 章士钊
- ZHANG Wentian 张闻天
- ZHANG Ziping 张资平

zhangdeshuai caijiao danmei,
zhangdechou jiao gaoji 长得帅的才叫
耽美长得丑的叫搞基
ZHEN Zhengduo 郑振铎
Zhiguai xiaoshuo 志怪小说
Zhiming Meixue 致命美学
Zhongyong 中庸
ZHOU Liming 周黎明

ZHOU Xinfang 周信芳
ZHOU Zuoren 周作人
ZHU Wei-ji 朱维基
ziyou lianai 自由恋爱

Others
100 Days Reformation 百日维新
90 Hou 90后

CHINESE DYNASTIES AND HISTORICAL PERIODS

Xia 夏 ca. 2100–ca. 1600 BCE

Shang (Yin) 商（殷） ca. 1600–ca. 1028 BCE

Zhou 周 ca. 1027–ca. 256 BCE (incl. The Spring and Autumn period & The Warring States Period 含春秋战国)

Qin 秦 221–207 BCE

Han 汉 206 BCE–220 CE

Three Kingdoms period 三国 220–280

“Six Dynasties” period 魏晋南北朝 “六朝” 222–589

Sui 隋 581–618

Tang 唐 618–907

Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period 五代十国 907–979

Song 宋 960–1279

Yuan (Mongol) 元（蒙古） 1260–1368

Ming 明 1368–1644

Qing (Manchu) 清（满族） 1644–1911

Republican period 民国 1911–1949

Mao period 1949–1978

Reform period 1978–