

# Conflicting masculinities in Ha Jin's *Waiting*: talented scholars and ruthless men of action in China's Mao and post-Mao eras

## Abstract

As a highly acclaimed novel for which Ha Jin won the U.S. National Book Award in 1999, *Waiting* covers the period from the early 1960s to the early 1980s, encompassing the Cultural Revolution. Its oft-noted central concern is the suppression of emotional life, and by extension humanity, in the totalitarian climate of Mao's regime. This article offers a new reading, which foregrounds the novel's use of masculinities as a central theme and driver of the plot. Through the prism of Kam Louie's *wen-wu* (literary accomplishment – military prowess) dyad, the article focuses on Ha Jin's critique of the socialist-era trajectories of two historically prominent Chinese male character types: the intellectually oriented man of book learning and the physically oriented man of action. It shows how *Waiting* illuminates the conditions underlying a pervasive social and psychological paralysis of male intellectuals and the contrasting empowerment of a predatory class of nouveau riche entrepreneurs.

## Keywords

masculinities, *Waiting*, Ha Jin, *wen-wu*, intellectuals

## Introduction

*Waiting* is a highly acclaimed novel for which Ha Jin won the U.S. National Book Award in 1999. Covering the period from the early 1960s to the early 1980s, it encompasses the Cultural Revolution—the most turbulent period under Communist rule. It is Ha Jin's best-selling work,

which the author attributes to its being a love story and winning two awards.<sup>1</sup> Never directly political, it is also the only one of Ha Jin's early novels not to have been banned in China.<sup>2</sup> The plot centers on the attempts by Lin Kong, a doctor working at a military hospital, to divorce Shuyu, his wife from an arranged marriage in their home village, in order to marry Manna, a nurse and colleague. The hospital regulations require that the divorce can only take place after an 18-year period, unless it is consensual. However, consent is not forthcoming from Shuyu, and much anxiety and strife is experienced by the main characters during the 18 years of waiting. Reviews of *Waiting* often highlight this suppression of emotional life, and by extension humanity, in the totalitarian climate of Mao's regime. Beyond that, critics have offered a multitude of interpretations of the novel: a condemnation of the oppression of individualism;<sup>3</sup> a subversion of frameworks of national literature;<sup>4</sup> a revelation of the possibilities for romance paradoxically created under conditions of political oppression;<sup>5</sup> a deterritorialization of language through literalness;<sup>6</sup> and a demonstration of silence as a

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<sup>1</sup> Jerry A. Varsava, "An Interview with Ha Jin," *Contemporary Literature* 51.1 (2010): 1–26, see page 11.

<sup>2</sup> Te-hsing Shan, "In the Ocean of Words: An Interview with Ha Jin," *Tamkang Review* 38.2 (2008): 135–57, see page 153.

<sup>3</sup> Robert D. Sturr, "The Presence of Walt Whitman in Ha Jin's *Waiting*," *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 20 (2002): 1–18. DOI 10.13008/2153-3695.1692

<sup>4</sup> Kwai Cheung Lo, "The Myth of 'Chinese' Literature: Ha Jin and the Globalization of 'National' Literary Writing." LEWI Working Paper Series 23 (2004),

<[http://lewi.hkbu.edu.hk/publications/WPS/23\\_LoKwaiCheung.pdf](http://lewi.hkbu.edu.hk/publications/WPS/23_LoKwaiCheung.pdf)>

<sup>5</sup> Lo, "The Myth of 'Chinese' Literature."

<sup>6</sup> Haomin Gong, "Language, Migrancy, and the Literal: Ha Jin's Translation Literature," *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies* 40.1 (2014): 147–67. DOI 10.6240/concentric.lit.2014.40.1.08

conflict-avoidance strategy.<sup>7</sup> This article offers a new reading, placing masculinities as a central theme of the novel and driver of its plot.

Born into a military, and fiction-loving, family in Liaoning in 1956, Ha Jin served as a teenage soldier in China in the 1970s. He studied English in Harbin and at Shandong University in the early 1980s before moving to the US in 1985 for doctoral studies. Disillusioned by the bloody crackdown on the Tiananmen Square demonstrators in 1989, he decided to remain in the US for three reasons: to protect his child from what he and his wife saw as omnipresent, purposeless violence in China; to avoid possible censorship of his work if he returned to China; and to escape the power of the Chinese state over his life – which also led to him deciding to write in English.<sup>8</sup> Hired by Emory University to teach poetry writing, he developed his own writing career under the pen name Ha Jin: Ha from his favourite city of Harbin, and Jin from his real name, Jin Xuefei.

The function of literature for Ha Jin is to preserve a true record of the past, autonomously and with integrity, in defiance of “historical amnesia.”<sup>9</sup> Consequently, his novels draw inspiration from his own experiences from his childhood and early adulthood in China to his immigrant life in the US. His early novels reflect his sense of intellectual stultification in China and his view of himself as a spokesperson for the downtrodden in China.<sup>10</sup> According to Haomin Gong, in *In the Pond* (1998), Ha Jin’s first novel, the

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<sup>7</sup> Agatha Frischmuth, “Being Silent, Doing Nothing: Silence as a Symbol of Peace in Ivan Goncharov’s *Obломov* and Ha Jin’s *Waiting*,” *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas* (2017) 15.1: 99–115. DOI 10.1353/pan.2017.0006

<sup>8</sup> Ha Jin, “Exiled to English,” in Shu-mei Shih, Chien-hsin Tsai, and Brian Bernard, eds., *Sinophone Studies: A Critical Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 117–24, see page 119.

<sup>9</sup> Ha Jin, *The Writer as Migrant* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 30.

<sup>10</sup> Jin, *The Writer as Migrant*, 3–4.

protagonist Bin's struggles with local Party leaders may reflect Ha Jin's own sense of confinement within Chinese society.<sup>11</sup> The plot of *Waiting* is based on his wife's account of the experiences of a man who worked in the same hospital as her parents.<sup>12</sup> *The Crazy* (2002), first drafted in 1988, evokes the claustrophobic and paranoid world of an elderly academic who has suffered a stroke. Ha Jin's father's role as a low-ranking commissar and returnee from the Korean War prompted Ha Jin to write *War Trash* (2004). The themes of these three novels exemplify Ha Jin's view of literature as a way to record social realities familiar to the author, and established his identity as a writer. The novels inevitably have connections with the literary and philosophical trends in China from that time, previously not permitted under socialist realism, such as love and morality; and Ha Jin has maintained personal connections with some of the most celebrated Chinese writers active throughout and after the 1980s, such as Yu Hua and Mo Yan.

During this early period of his life as writer, Ha Jin longed to return to China one day; later, through contemplating Alexander Solzhenitsyn's exile in America, he came to feel the "fragility" of a writer's identity as spokesman for a people and decided it was folly to pursue that ambition.<sup>13</sup> He realized his heart was no longer in China, and as a result he chose to forge a new individual path as a writer.<sup>14</sup> He shifted from the subject of China to that of Chinese migrant life in the United States. In his 2007 novel, *A Free Life*, he explored the masculinity crisis of his male intellectual protagonist, drawing on his own feelings of marginalization when he first arrived in the United States. This novel also addresses the notion that leaving the

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<sup>11</sup> Gong, "Language, Migrancy, and the Literal," 163.

<sup>12</sup> Michelle Caswell, "An Interview with Ha Jin," Asia Society (2000), available online at <<https://asiasociety.org/interview-ha-jin>> (last accessed 13 March 2021).

<sup>13</sup> Jin, *The Writer as Migrant*, 4, 11, 27.

<sup>14</sup> Jin, *The Writer as Migrant*, 28.

motherland is a betrayal, and that writing in English is a further betrayal. Elsewhere, he flips that proposition around, to argue that a country can also betray its citizens.<sup>15</sup> His concern about personal and national identity issues results in the role and identity of the Chinese intellectual, whether inside or outside of China, playing a central recurring theme of his fiction.

As Ha Jin writes in a transnational context, it is from a transnational perspective that his works are often studied, including their cultural transplantation and use of western literature. Ha Jin's "translation" style of rendering Chinese "cultural metaphors" literally into English produces a foreignizing effect and undermines the boundaries of national literature.<sup>16</sup> He succeeds in universalizing humanistic value and emotion in Chinese settings.<sup>17</sup> The visibility of Walt Whitman and his poems in Ha Jin's works presents a voice of individualism and highlights the suffering of individuals under conditions of continuous political revolution.<sup>18</sup> Comparisons of *Waiting* with Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* point out their shared focus on the existential absurdity of waiting for the sake of waiting.<sup>19</sup> *Waiting's* portrayal of love and sex in a totalitarian society has led to comparisons with George Orwell's *1984*.<sup>20</sup> *A Free Life* conveys the pioneering and individualistic values associated with the

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<sup>15</sup> Jin, *The Writer as Migrant*, 31. Ha Jin devotes an entire chapter of this work to "The Language of Betrayal."

<sup>16</sup> Gong, "Language, Migrancy, and the Literal," 163.

<sup>17</sup> Timothy Wong, "War Trash: A Novel," *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture Resource Center* (2006), available online at <<http://u.osu.edu/mclc/book-reviews/war-wash>> (last accessed 29 July 2020).

<sup>18</sup> Sturr, "The Presence of Walt Whitman," 3.

<sup>19</sup> Yang Jianguo 楊建國 and Tong Jing 童靖. 2005. "Dengdai wunai" 等待無奈, *Xi'an dianzi keji daxue xuebao (shehui kexue ban)* 西安電子科技大學學報 (社會科學版) 15.3 (2005): 133–6, see page 136.

<sup>20</sup> Louis J. Parascandola, "Love and Sex in a Totalitarian Society: An Exploration of Ha Jin and George Orwell," *Studies in the Humanities* 32.1 (2005): 38–49.

American spirit; and the remoteness and solitude of its protagonist conjures up images of mythic American heroes.<sup>21</sup>

The visibility of foreign literature, such as Whitman's poetry, is a feature of Ha Jin's transnational writing. Ha Jin's academic training in English literature enables him to make powerful of Western literary materials as sites where cross-cultural values are presented and worked over. In some cases, the texts represent universal values that Ha Jin wants the reader to reflect on. In *Waiting*, Lin builds close bonds with other well-educated male colleagues through sharing his personal collection of foreign books; yet these books become a dangerous liability during the Cultural Revolution due to their non-socialist content. In *The Crazy*, a professor at a university in China specializes in the *Divine Comedy*, through which he expresses his pains and desires. The presence of Western literature in Ha Jin's works allows the reader to see how Chinese characters react to the values that clash with the ones prevalent in the Chinese context where the story is set. In *Waiting*, Lin cautiously approaches Walt Whitman's eulogy to American individualism, *Leaves of Grass*, which serves to indirectly criticize the uniformity of Chinese society<sup>22</sup>—and the suppression of masculinity.

### Masculinities in Ha Jin's works

Ha Jin's novels are frequently dominated by issues of masculinity, in particular masculinity crises in which Chinese men are trapped. Ha Jin's first four novels represent the most sustained English-language fictional exploration of relationships among men in post-1949 China. *In the Pond* (1998) relates an artistically gifted young man's struggle with corrupt

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<sup>21</sup> Lezhou Su, "A Free Life: Transnational Reconstruction of Chinese Wen Masculinity," in Derek Hird and Geng Song, eds., *The Cosmopolitan Dream: Transnational Chinese Masculinities in a Global Age* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2018), 87–101, see page 91.

<sup>22</sup> Sturr, "The Presence of Walt Whitman," 2.

local male leaders to obtain the apartment he wants. *Waiting* (1999) centres on the contrasting characters of Lin Kong and his nemesis Geng Yang: the first, indecisive, emotionally inhibited, and bookish; the second, coarse, violent and opportunistic. *The Crazy* (2002) focuses on the relationship between a professor, who is in hospital after suffering a stroke, and his graduate student, who tries to decipher the ramblings of his incapacitated mentor. *War Trash* (2004) tells the story of a Chinese army officer's perilous journey through prisoner-of-war camps during the Korean War.

Of all his literary works, *Waiting* presents the widest reaching examination of masculinities during Mao's regime and its aftermath. From a masculinities studies perspective, it offers Ha Jin's most fully worked through critique of the socialist-era trajectories of two historically prominent Chinese male character types: the intellectually oriented man of book learning and the physically oriented man of action. *Waiting* suggests the social and psychological paralysis of China's (traditionally all-male) intellectual class and the contrasting empowerment of a predatory, rapacious class of (mostly male) nouveau riche. During the Republican era, psychological or spiritual paralysis in sensitive well-educated Chinese men, reflecting ennui and marginalisation of intellectuals, was captured in Lu Xun's fiction, drawing comparison with the spiritual paralysis of early 20<sup>th</sup> century Irish society expressed in James Joyce's *Dubliners*.<sup>23</sup> Lu Xun was concerned that overbearing Confucian tradition was causing national mental paralysis. *Waiting* suggests that under socialism, at least during the period covered in the novel, a form of spiritual paralysis still haunted the nation's intellectuals. Yet Ha Jin's emasculated protagonists do sometimes find ways to redeem themselves. In *Waiting*,

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<sup>23</sup> Xiaoling Yin, "The Paralyzed and the Dead: A Comparative Reading of 'The Dead' and 'In a Tavern,'" *Comparative Literature Studies* 29.3 (1992): 276–95. Pablo Tsoi Sze Pang, "Paralysis and Paranoia: Comparing Lu Xun and Joyce: Two Contrasted Modes of Modernism," LEWI Working Paper Series 109 (2011), <[http://lewi.hkbu.edu.hk/publications/WPS/109\\_Tsoi.pdf](http://lewi.hkbu.edu.hk/publications/WPS/109_Tsoi.pdf)>.

Lin belatedly seems to realise that faithfully engaging with the roles of husband and father may provide a deeper level of emotional sustenance than he had previously imagined.

The suffering of men who act on their moral conscience is a theme also found in Ha Jin's short stories, where men who try to stay true to a moral code or simply exhibit non-mainstream masculinity are picked on, made to suffer, or are marginalised. In the short story "Man to Be," the sensitive young protagonist Hao Nan ("Good Man"), stops himself from participating in a gang rape, for which he is ostracised; and he descends into impotence and depression. In "Miss Jee," a young army recruit is bullied due to his relative femininity and lack of physical strength. In "A Lecture," a veteran who speaks openly about the atrocities and hardships experienced by soldiers on the Long March becomes a problematic figure whose words the young recruits in the audience are told to erase from their minds. Through these and other stories, Ha Jin points to the emasculation and marginalisation of men who follow a moral code and/or who stay true to themselves.

### Conceptual approach

For its analytical lens on masculinities in *Waiting*, this article draws on Kam Louie's conceptualisation of the historically prominent *wen* 文 (literary accomplishment) / *wu* 武 (military prowess) dyad. Louie argues that an ideal Chinese man is one who has both *wen* and *wu* in good balance; a less ideal man is the one with virtues of only *wen* or *wu*. Louie analyzes the representations and personification of historical and contemporary *wen* ideals in a variety of Chinese literary works. A particular focus are the *caizi-jiaren* 才子佳人 (talented scholars and beauties) romantic stories<sup>24</sup>—a traditional genre that "revolves around the theme of [*caizi*]

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<sup>24</sup> The *caizi-jiaren* genre reached its peak in the late Ming early Qing period (16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries); its prototypes extend back to the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE).

winning the woman and passing the examinations.”<sup>25</sup> In this genre, the *caizi* is talented in creating literary works such as poetry and possesses genteel, refined qualities associated with literary and artistic pursuits; by contrast, tales of outlaw heroes celebrate *wu* qualities such as physical strength, drinking ability and brutal treatment of women.<sup>26</sup>

However, a *caizi* does not represent the ideal *wen*: according to Louie, ideal *wen* masculinity is represented by the *junzi* 君子 (noble man or gentleman). A *caizi* is a “not-yet-realized *junzi*.”<sup>27</sup> Compared to a *junzi*, a *caizi* lacks Confucian education and self-cultivation, which is at the core of *wen* masculinity. By contrast, a *junzi* uses Confucian texts as his moral compass for his day-to-day activities. Unlike a *caizi*, a *junzi* guards against sentiment, especially the sexual kind, suppressing his love for a woman to demonstrate his success in moving along the path to scholarly self-control. It is often through self-control over his own desires, especially sexual desires, that a *junzi* demonstrates the strong moral fiber essential to *wen* masculinity.<sup>28</sup> As will become clear below, these archetypes are active constituents of Ha Jin’s depictions of masculinities in Chinese socialism.

### Contextualization of *Waiting*

Political class struggle, the building of socialist society and cultural homogenization is the understated but ever-present setting to *Waiting*. The Cultural Revolution (1966–1976)—

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<sup>25</sup> Kam Louie, *Theorising Chinese Masculinity: Society and Gender in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 15.

<sup>26</sup> Geng Song, *The Fragile Scholar: Power and Masculinity in Chinese Culture* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004), 162–8.

<sup>27</sup> Louie, *Theorising Chinese Masculinity*, 61.

<sup>28</sup> Louie, *Theorising Chinese Masculinity*.

launched by Mao mainly to outmaneuver his rivals within the Party—saw class conflict at its peak. As chaos increased across the nation, intellectual elites were subjected to struggle sessions for alleged bourgeois values. In *Waiting*, the hospital library’s small collection of novels and plays was “surrendered to the bonfires built by the Red Guards before the city hall.”<sup>29</sup> Lin disguised the foreign books in his personal library, as they were a particular target of the authorities due to their alleged bourgeois nature. In this sense, class struggle is more than a war against proletariat enemies; it is also about nationalism and anti-imperialism. *Waiting* depicts a landscape that has largely given way to homogenization shaped by Communist party doctrine.

*Waiting* ends in the early 1980s, when the Party had adopted a more pragmatic approach towards economic development. People with connections, access to resources, and a thirst to make money were able to take advantage of the opportunities arising in the fast-changing economic environment; before the 1980s this way of making money was illegal. As Ha Jin writes in *Waiting*, during the post-Mao era, nouveau riche entrepreneurs “were held up as examples for the masses to follow.”<sup>30</sup> They were the model citizens of a new era whose leitmotif was “to get rich is glorious.” At the same time, a search for “*nanzihan*” 男子漢 (rough, tough and masculine men) was initiated as a cultural movement in elite and popular discourses as a response to the sense of male inadequateness resulting from exposure to the macho male leads of Hollywood and Japanese films.<sup>31</sup> The film *Red Sorghum* (*Hong gaoliang* 红高粱) (1987), directed by Zhang Yimou and based on a novel by Mo Yan, is an example of a 1980s’ “root-seeking” (尋根 *xungen*) work that revels in portrayals of male domination and

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<sup>29</sup> Ha Jin, *Waiting* (London: Vintage, 2000), 33.

<sup>30</sup> Jin, *Waiting*, 283.

<sup>31</sup> Yuejin Wang, “Mixing Memory and Desire: Red Sorghum: A Chinese Version of Masculinity and Femininity,” *Public Culture* 2.1 (1989): 31–53, see pages 36–7. DOI 10.1215/08992363-2-1-31.

debauchery. As *Waiting* suggests, these conditions enabled brutal opportunists to be venerated, while those interested in intellectual matters were left more marginalized than ever. For male writers, the unprecedented entanglement with the “masculinity crisis” in their works was the projection of their own identity crisis in the face of the rapid shift to a commodified and non-egalitarian market economy where the Party still exercised power.<sup>32</sup>

### Plotline and main characters in *Waiting*

Lin Kong is a doctor working at a military hospital located in the fictional city of Muji in northeastern China. His wife, Shuyu, and daughter, Hua, have remained in their rural village home. Every year he returns to see them only during his twelve-day vacation. Lin's is an arranged marriage. His wife Shuyu is obedient, devoted, selflessly serving Lin's family on the one hand, and ignorant, illiterate and awkward looking on the other. Lin seems to be emotionally paralyzed in this relationship: their first and only sexual intercourse produced their daughter Hua. At the hospital, Lin find himself gradually involved in a relationship with Manna. As the relationship flourishes, Lin begins to think of the possibility of re-marriage. However, divorce was by no means easy at that time. “According to the army hospital's rule, ... it was only after eighteen years' separation that an officer could end his marriage without his wife's consent”.<sup>33</sup> Lin's attempts to obtain Shuyu's consent are thwarted by Shuyu's brother, Bensheng, who is strongly opposed to the divorce. In the city, Lin and Mann's relations are tested by the hypermasculine and dangerous Geng Yang, a soldier with no conscience. After 18 years of waiting, Lin and Manna eventually do marry. Yet, ironically, the new marriage turns out to be far from happy. It eventually dawns on Lin that he has never loved a

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<sup>32</sup> Kang Liu, “Subjectivity, Marxism, and Cultural Theory in China,” in Liu and Tang, eds., *Politics, Ideology, and Literary Discourse in Modern China*, 23–55, see page 31.

<sup>33</sup> Jin, *Waiting*, 14.

woman wholeheartedly and that he has always been the one who was loved.

### *Wen* masculinity in *Waiting* and the wider sociopolitical setting

In the first half of the novel, Lin evokes an image of a *junzi*, aligning well with *wen* masculinity. Lin's surname Kong is the same as that of Confucius, alluding to Lin's scholarliness and strong moral character. Lin received a higher education and loves reading; but unlike his historical, cultural and literary predecessors, who were interested in sentimental poetry and writing, Lin reads books mainly on medicine, politics, and wars: "On his shelves were about two hundred books — *Song of Youth*, *Cement*, *The History of International Communism*, *War and Peace*, *The Guerrilla Detachment on the Railroad*, *White Nights*, *Lenin: World's First Nuclear-Powered Ice-Breaker*, and so forth."<sup>34</sup> These books suggest his politicized orientation as a talented communist scholar with an outlook and knowledge structure different from traditional scholars. Yet his physical features are reminiscent of the image of a traditional fragile scholar. In his girlfriend Manna's eyes, Lin "looked quite young for his age [and] [h]is face was smooth and handsome with a pair of black-rimmed glasses on his straight nose,"<sup>35</sup> while "[h]is glasses made him look urbane and knowledgeable."<sup>36</sup> He "often ate in a fussy manner like a woman doing needlework"<sup>37</sup> and he "had long-boned hands, the fingers lean and apparently dexterous [and] always spoke amiably to everybody."<sup>38</sup>

Lin's personality is characterized as quiet, encapsulated in the tranquil scene that Manna discovered on his favorite bookplate: the woodcut plate "was an engraving of a thatched

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<sup>34</sup> Jin, *Waiting*, 32.

<sup>35</sup> Jin, *Waiting*, 6.

<sup>36</sup> Jin, *Waiting*, 31.

<sup>37</sup> Jin, *Waiting*, 32.

<sup>38</sup> Jin, *Waiting*, 33.

cottage, partly surrounded by a railing and shaded by two trees with luxuriant crowns, five birds soaring in the distance by the peak of a hill, and the setting sun casting down its last rays.”<sup>39</sup> Lin’s self-restraint finds its expression in his life of sexual abstinence. A major reason behind his abstinence is that his wife does not attract him sexually at all, to say nothing of the fact that the couple live apart. Lin’s colleagues construe his abstinence as a virtue, for which he is called “model monk.” This label valorizes Lin’s self-control over sexual desires, the mark of traditional Confucian rectitude, and is indicative of *junzi* masculinity.

The novel is replete with Lin’s Confucian attributes: his actions epitomize filial piety (*xiao* 孝), loyalty (*zhong* 忠) and appropriateness/ righteousness (*yi* 義). For instance, it is out of filial piety that Lin takes a bride. With his mother pleading on her deathbed, Lin reluctantly agrees to marry Shuyu. Similarly, his loyalty to the Party is signified when he is “so engrossed in completing an article on the topic of becoming ‘Red and Expert’” that he forgets to buy Tower Candy for his nephew.<sup>40</sup> Writing absorbedly on this topic suggests he is preoccupied with devoting his body and mind to the Party. Besides his filial piety and loyalty, Lin also abides by the Confucian code of appropriateness, which is best illustrated in his dealings with Ran Su, his superior as well as his friend. When Ran asks Lin to promise not to have an adulterous affair with Manna, Lin dutifully does so; and later keeps this promise by declining Manna’s advances in a rendezvous. When Haiyan, the best friend of Manna, learns this, she is surprised: “Hmm, I didn’t know Lin Kong was such a loyal friend.” Lin’s refusal of Manna’s advances demonstrates his loyalty as a subordinate and trustworthiness as a friend; in

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<sup>39</sup> Jin, *Waiting*, 33.

<sup>40</sup> Jin, *Waiting*, 127. Tower Candy is the name of a pill for getting rid of roundworms.

Confucian terms, he manifests the two virtues of loyalty-appropriateness (*zhongyi* 忠義) and trustworthiness-appropriateness (*xinyi* 信義).<sup>41</sup>

Lin's emotional attachment to Manna and his attempts to divorce Shuyu meet with strong opposition and condemnation in his home village, placing him under huge pressure and inculcating a strong sense of guilt. As Lin's marriage to Shuyu was arranged by his parents, to terminate the marital bond is to disrespect his parents, a non-filial act. Lin's brother Ren says, "But our parents chose Shuyu for you. Shouldn't you respect their wish?"<sup>42</sup> Ren's words imply that the divorce would bring dishonor and disgrace to all family members including the children. Ren reminds Lin that "[a] man ought to have a conscience."<sup>43</sup> In Ren's eyes, Lin's attempt to divorce would erase all the sacrifices that Shuyu made for their family, a non-righteous act against Confucian ethics. This rhetoric is echoed in the divorce court by Shuyu's brother, Bensheng: "He can't treat a human being, his wife, like an overcoat—once he has worn it out, he dumps it."<sup>44</sup> The judge condemns Lin's request for divorce as an act far short of the standard of a model revolutionary soldier, asking, "Tell me, do you have a conscience or not? Do you deserve your green uniform and the red star on your cap?"<sup>45</sup> The judge's reproach seamlessly incorporates Confucian ethics into the political discourse of the Communist Party.

Such opposition and condemnation cause Lin's determination to waver. During 18 years of waiting, Lin struggles between duty and personal desire. More than once he wants to

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<sup>41</sup> Jiyuan Yu, "The Notion of Appropriateness (*Yi*) in Three Kingdoms," in Kimberly A. Besio and Constantine Tung, eds., *Three Kingdoms and Chinese Culture* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2007), 32.

<sup>42</sup> Jin, *Waiting*, 128.

<sup>43</sup> Jin, *Waiting*, 128.

<sup>44</sup> Jin, *Waiting*, 12.

<sup>45</sup> Jin, *Waiting*, 12.

give up waiting. When Commissar Wei, a high-ranking official and personification of the Party, asks the hospital administration to find a suitable candidate to be his new wife, the administration considers recommending Manna. Asked privately by his superior, Ran Su, if he would be fine with the decision, Lin replies: “Perhaps this will do her good. If Commissar Wei agrees to marry her, that will be fine with me.”<sup>46</sup> Although Lin’s readiness to give Manna up is related to his sense of filial guilt, Ran interprets his consent as an act of political loyalty, saying, “You’re a kindhearted man, Lin. Few men would give up their woman so willingly. Some would go berserk if such a thing happened to them.”<sup>47</sup> Besides guilt, Lin consents to relinquish Manna upon Commissar Wei’s demand due to his pessimistic attitude about the relationship and his sense of powerlessness vis-à-vis the high-ranking Wei: Lin is aware of the impossibility of competing for Manna with him.

On the surface, Lin takes self-control over his passion for Manna, avoiding any sexual contact with her and living in sexual abstinence throughout those years. Behind the surface is hidden his passiveness and lack of passion as a lover. Similarly, his sexual abstinence envelops his inner confusion about his sexuality. As the narrator describes, “For many years he had often heard other men talk about having a wet dream and wondered what it was like. Before his marriage, he had even doubted his manhood, because unlike other men who were crazy about women, he had never fallen in love with a woman.”<sup>48</sup> He is ill at ease whenever other men brag about their virility and desires for women in front of him. To a large extent, it is through Manna’s initiatives that their relationship began to develop. Their first date is made possible

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<sup>46</sup> Jin, *Waiting*, 136.

<sup>47</sup> Jin, *Waiting*, 136.

<sup>48</sup> Jin, *Waiting*, 73.

by Manna inviting him to a movie. After their marriage, “Manna’s passion often unnerved Lin. He was afraid of being unable to meet her expectation.”<sup>49</sup>

In addition to passivity, lack of passion, and powerlessness, fear also lurks in Lin. In the totalitarian society of the Mao era, the threat of punishment contributed to the self-control of individuals. In the Chinese political realm, “Self-control is thus a fundamental prerequisite for control over others... it is a necessary criterion for gaining political power, as well as moral and spiritual superiority. Self-control seems to be universally hailed as a leadership quality.”<sup>50</sup> However, in *Waiting* there is no sign that Lin’s self-control is driven by a desire to control others, to gain political influence, or moral or spiritual superiority. It seems that Louie’s view of the self-control embodied in noble men in premodern China does not apply in Lin’s case. If we examine it closely, the difference between Lin’s self-control and that of a *junzi*’s self-control in imperial China lies in the incentives that contribute to the formation of self-disciplinary behaviors. For *junzi* in imperial China, the incentive is positive, as Song puts it:

[...] the predominant instruments used to achieve discipline were not punishment, but the prestige and privileges of the gentry class bestowed upon the students when they passed the examinations and the repetition of Confucian education for those who failed. The dignified identity of the educated elite thus created an incentive for being disciplined. It was through the “civilized” education and examination systems that power had control over both the men's mind and body.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Jin, *Waiting*, 245.

<sup>50</sup> Louie, *Theorising Chinese Masculinity*, 92.

<sup>51</sup> Song, *The Fragile Scholar*, 84.

In the case of Lin, however, the incentive to be self-disciplined is the threat posed by forms of punishment. He is extremely cautious about his actions for fear of serious punishment that will ruin his life. When Manna initiates a rendezvous, he turns it down, warning, “Don’t lose your head, Manna. Think about this: just a moment’s pleasure will ruin our lives for good.”<sup>52</sup> Lin’s everyday life is subjugated to the deterrent effects of Maoist governance, which are internalized into a form of self-control. When any ideas that might breach norms and laws flash into his mind, his self-control restrains him. As Sturr rightly points out:

Mao had achieved strict ideological control and ordinary citizens remained fearful. This paranoia, self-doubt, and self-censorship lurks on the edge of Ha Jin’s novel. Lin’s decision to avoid a sexual affair with Manna is not a matter of prudishness, but is in fact, a reasonable and potentially life-saving choice.<sup>53</sup>

The important role of books in maintaining homosocial bonds between the intellectual male characters in the novel also warrants discussion. Literati friendship thrived historically in China through literati associations such as the *shishe* 詩社 (poem society), *wenshe* 文社 (literary club), and *jianghui* 講會 (assemblies of philosophical debate), where scholars shared thoughts and books for spiritual enlightenment.<sup>54</sup> This tradition seems to have its shadow in the novel where books serve as a conduit of communication shaping homosocial bonds and desires. The relationship between Lin and Ran Su, the vice-director of the hospital’s Political Department, is a case in point. The narrator states: “Ran Su had been on good terms with Lin,

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<sup>52</sup> Jin, *Waiting*, 68.

<sup>53</sup> Sturr, “The Presence of Walt Whitman,” 5.

<sup>54</sup> Martin W. Huang, “Male Friendship in Ming China: An Introduction,” *NAN NÜ* 9.1 (2007): 2–33.

because they both loved books and often talked about novels.”<sup>55</sup> Lin and Ran Su trust each other: Ran Su gives Lin private support in various forms throughout the novel, warning Lin in timely fashion about the book confiscating movement and privately writing a divorce recommendation letter for him. The strength of the bond has much to do with the fact that Lin had discreetly shared with Ran Su and a few other colleagues some foreign novels in his private library banned by the government at the time. Possessing and reading the forbidden books was a risk amid the spiritual purification movement launched by the Party to confiscate and burn books deemed as heretical, including foreign novels. The books thus served as conduits of the men’s bonding and distinguishes them from less well-educated men.

Through his interest in books, Lin has indirect communication with another avid reader, Commissar Wei. When Wei meets Manna, to see if Manna is an appropriate candidate to be his wife, he asks her to read and report to him her understanding of Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*. This book is a forbidden one, for the City Library has no copy. Later in a talk with Lin, Manna confesses the book makes no sense to her and asks if he can help, effectively relinquishing her fate to the literary transactioning between the two men. Writing an analysis of the novel for Manna, Lin “decided to avoid dealing with the subjects of sexuality and self-celebration, and instead focus on the symbol of grass and on those poems praising the working class.”<sup>56</sup> As foreign literature is a symbol of disloyalty to the Party’s thought, Wei’s passion for it suggests trouble for him ahead: and indeed, he ends up dying in prison. Lin’s cautious response may have saved him from the same fate.

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<sup>55</sup> Jin, *Waiting*, 58.

<sup>56</sup> Jin, *Waiting*, 153.

## The relationship between Lin and Bensheng

Seemingly fragile and quiet, Lin has the capability of controlling and concealing negative feelings within himself, which is a strong assertion of his *wen* masculinity. His self-control over negative feelings is best illustrated in his dealings with Bensheng, the brother of his wife, Shuyu. Lin knows that Bensheng is using various tricks to prevent him from getting divorced successfully. Bensheng persuades Shuyu to change her mind about agreeing to the divorce in court and employs someone to publish a newspaper article denouncing and defaming Lin for attempting divorce. Bensheng even organizes a gang of villagers to stand outside the courthouse and make a scene in the event of Lin being granted a divorce. His tricks annoy Lin, but Lin never shows animosity towards Bensheng:

[Lin] had decided not to speak to Bensheng again, but somehow he had forgotten his decision. Now he and Bensheng seemed to have remained in-laws. If only he could have put on a hard face. If only he could have cut all his ties with that crafty man.<sup>57</sup>

His constraint does not signify fear of Bensheng. Rather, it can be attributed to his soft-hearted benevolence and rational judgment at an intellectual level. Lin knows that open animosity to Bensheng will exacerbate, not resolve the issue. When Bensheng threatens to talk with Lin's army superiors personally about Lin's divorce attempts, Lin immediately gives up pressing for a divorce because he knows that would cause trouble for Ran, Lin's superior and friend.

The triangular relationship between Lin, Bensheng and Shuyu is illuminated by Gayle Rubin's theory of "the traffic in women,"<sup>58</sup> through which Shuyu can be understood as a

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<sup>57</sup> Jin, *Waiting*, 133.

<sup>58</sup> Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," in Rayna R. Reiter, ed., *Toward an Anthropology of Women* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), 157–210.

commodity of exchange between the two men that shapes their relationship. When Lin and Bensheng deal with each other, Shuyu's presence can always be felt, whether visible or invisible. Shuyu serves Lin's family well as a faithful wife, leading Bensheng to the view that Lin owes favor and gratitude to him as Shuyu's brother. In Bensheng's eyes, it is Lin's obligation to help him. "Reciprocity, which was always an important component in Chinese conceptualization of friendship, is largely an act of fulfilling one's social obligations."<sup>59</sup> Bensheng asks Lin to lend him some money as if he were asking his own sister Shuyu. "Without looking at the money, Bensheng put it into his pants pocket. 'I'll pay it back to Shuyu, all right?'"<sup>60</sup> Since Bensheng still regards his sister Shuyu and his niece Hua as partly his property, he expects to receive compensation from Lin, such as Lin's house in the village when Lin decides to sell it. When Lin does not do as he expected, he is so outraged that he denounces Lin as "an ungrateful worm!"<sup>61</sup> Bensheng treats the divorce as if it were his own, as if he were in the position of Shuyu. He threatens to retaliate if the divorce is granted and speaks in court on behalf of Shuyu, turning "the whole village against [Lin] and spread[ing] the rumor that Lin had committed bigamy, taking a concubine in the city."<sup>62</sup>

Bensheng's demeanors show him as a typical "small man" or "mean man" (*xiaoren* 小人), depicted in opposition to the *junzi* in the Confucian *Analects*:

The contrast between a *junzi* and a *xiaoren* (a small man) is the contrast between a person of virtue and a mean or vulgar person. This contrast is manifest in all areas of life. In terms of a psychological character, the former is broad-minded while the latter

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<sup>59</sup> Huang, "Male Friendship in Ming China," 11.

<sup>60</sup> Jin, *Waiting*, 89.

<sup>61</sup> Jin, *Waiting*, 230.

<sup>62</sup> Jin, *Waiting*, 101.

is partisan (*Lunyu*, 2:14). In terms of behaviour, the former always aims at what is righteous while the latter understands only what is profitable (*Lunyu*, 4:16). Internally the former is calm and at ease while the latter is full of distress and ill at ease (*Lunyu*, 7:36). In personal relations, the former only makes demands upon oneself, while the latter makes demands upon others (*Lunyu*, 15:20).<sup>63</sup>

Bensheng fits well the description of *xiaoren*. He places profits over righteousness, to which his profession of accountant alludes. In his small business dealings, money is his only concern. To bring more cash from selling piglets, he sews up their anuses with flaxen thread to make them weigh more.<sup>64</sup> His greediness is explicitly articulated in the comments of Hua, Shuyu and Lin's daughter: "Greedy. He has nothing but money on his mind. He even adds water to soy sauce and vinegar in his store."<sup>65</sup> In Confucian texts, the *xiaoren*, who does not abide by Confucian moral codes, is often put in a feminine (陰 *yin*) or emasculated status vis-à-vis the *junzi*. Bensheng's backstabbing of Lin and his childlessness symbolize his feminization and emasculation.

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<sup>63</sup> Xinzhong Yao, *An Introduction to Confucianism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 215. Arthur Waley's translations of these references from the *Analects* are: "The Master said, 'A gentleman can see a question from all sides without bias. The small man is biased and can see a question only from one side' [2:14, p. 91]. The Master said, 'A gentleman takes as much trouble to discover what is right as lesser men take to discover what will pay' [4:16, p. 105]. The Master said, 'A true gentleman is calm and at ease; the small man is fretful and ill at ease' [7:36, p. 131]. The Master said, 'The demands that a gentleman makes are upon himself; those that a small man makes are upon others' [15:20, p. 197]." Arthur Waley, *The Analects of Confucius* (London, Allen & Unwin, 1938).

<sup>64</sup> Jin, *Waiting*, 90.

<sup>65</sup> Jin, *Waiting*, 231.

Lin's moral superiority vis-à-vis Bensheng helps illuminate how Louie's effort to theorize masculinity in terms of *wen-wu* equates with understanding masculinity in terms of *de* 德 (Confucian moral codes). Louie places emphasis on Confucian education and the ability to exercise self-discipline over one's desires as the mark of ideal *wen* masculinity. Similarly, Guanyu, the ideal of *wu* masculinity, fulfills his Confucian moral duties in his dealings with people surrounding him. Using these examples, Louie clearly articulates that ideal masculinity is constituted through moral excellence: a man's literary skills or physical power is at most the means whereby he fulfills his moral obligations.<sup>66</sup> *De* is therefore the central mark of noble Confucian manhood: *wen* and *wu* are not the ultimate goals but the necessary means to reaching the ideal *de*. The significance of cultivation of *wen* and *wu* lies not so much in their practice for their own sake, but more in their being the methods through which men are finally able to achieve or fulfil Confucian ethics.

### The relationship between Lin and Geng

Geng Yang, an underling of the high-ranking official Wei, is a physically and temperamentally highly "masculine" figure in the novel, even possessing a name that connotes the idea of being "more manly." He has a vice-like grip and displays a callousness to death and injury born from his military service.

Lin and Geng first meet as roommates in hospital when recovering from tuberculosis. Initially, they get on very well together, conversing about "legendary heroes, knights, swordsmen, beauties, kung fu masters."<sup>67</sup> Appreciating Geng's manhood, Lin treats Geng as a kind of elder brother, not because Geng is older than Lin, but because Lin thinks Geng can

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<sup>66</sup> Louie, *Theorising Chinese Masculinity*.

<sup>67</sup> Jin, *Waiting*, 164.

guide him in dealing with love and family. When conversing with Lin, Geng articulates his masculinity through sexual banter; and in a fateful exchange, Geng discovers from Lin that Manna is a virgin. As William Jankowiak observes, “For men, sexual banter often serves as a means to convey, however momentary, a sense of ‘brotherhood’ or male bonding.”<sup>68</sup> Geng uses crude language and likes to comment on the nurses in ways that hint of extensive sexual experience. Although Lin is uncomfortable with Geng’s unrestrained way of talking about women, he “could say little because he didn’t know how to talk about women.”<sup>69</sup>

Nevertheless, Lin admires Geng’s decisive manner, and is eager to seek advice from him about the divorce. He wishes he possessed Geng’s masculine traits: straightforward, carefree, “a man full of certainty and capable of decisive action, a real go-getter.”<sup>70</sup> Geng demonstrates his *wu* masculinity during a meal out by downing a huge mug of beer while Lin and Manna sip on their smaller mugs containing mere hot water.<sup>71</sup> As Wang observes, “drinking is closely associated in Chinese texts with the attainment of masculinity.”<sup>72</sup> Drinking represents *wu* masculinity because it leads to a kind of masculine courage and defiance that cannot possibly be evinced in the sobriety that characterizes *wen* masculinity.<sup>73</sup> In this way, Lin’s out-of-date gentle *wen* masculinity is feminised by Geng’s hypermasculine *wu* masculinity.

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<sup>68</sup> William Jankowiak, “Proper Men and Proper Women: Parental Affection in the Chinese Family,” in Brownell and Wasserstrom, eds., *Chinese Femininities, Chinese Masculinities*, 361–83, see page 366.

<sup>69</sup> Jin, *Waiting*, 164.

<sup>70</sup> Jin, *Waiting*, 165.

<sup>71</sup> Jin, *Waiting*, 170.

<sup>72</sup> Wang, “Mixing Memory and Desire,” 38.

<sup>73</sup> As is seen in the story of Wu Song 武松, the most famous *wu* hero in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century classic Chinese novel, *Outlaws of the Marsh* (水滸傳 *Shuihu zhuan*), who fearlessly takes on and kills a man-eating tiger in the mountains while drunk.

At first glance, Geng's masculine traits impress Manna. Manna notices his stern face, powerful hands, heavy build, pistol, and bullets, which can be read as symbolizing *wu* masculinity. Compared to Lin, Geng seems more attractive to Manna:

In many ways he was more like a man to her, strong, straight-forward, fearless, and even coarse. She wished that Lin could be a little more like him, or that the two men could exchange some of their traits so that both their characters would be more balanced. Lin was too much of a gentleman, good-tempered and studious, with little manly passion.<sup>74</sup>

Manna's attraction to Geng's charm coincides with her beginning to question Lin's manhood. Her appreciation of Geng over Lin also reflects the anti-intellectual and therefore anti-*wen* trend under socialism.<sup>75</sup>

Unfortunately, it is this "trusted friend" who rapes Manna just two days after their meal together, before Lin and Manna are married. Although the rape plainly reveals the vileness and maliciousness of Geng, it serves more to emphasize Lin's emasculated weakness and passivity than to denounce the perpetrator. In one sense, the rape suggests Geng's masculine triumph over Lin and a negation of Lin's masculinity, which is signified in Geng's remarks to Manna about the size of Lin's genitals. "I saw his dick when we bathed together in the bathhouse. I've wondered ever since if he's a bisexual."<sup>76</sup> By contrast, Geng's sexual organ was "huge [...] like a donkey's." Geng boasts: "[i]t's like a rolling pin, no, it's a little mortar."<sup>77</sup> Geng tells Manna he would not have raped her if Lin had not mentioned she was a virgin. Because of this,

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<sup>74</sup> Jin, *Waiting*, 176.

<sup>75</sup> Louie, *Theorising Chinese Masculinity*, 48.

<sup>76</sup> Jin, *Waiting*, 179.

<sup>77</sup> Jin, *Waiting*, 181.

Manna blames Lin for the rape, compounding Lin's humiliation and self-loathing. He despises himself for weakly delaying marriage with Manna and thus being partly to blame for the rape. His sense of emasculation is expressed in his inner monologue of self-hatred:

Obviously his indecisiveness had opened the door to the wolf. Manna was right that he was responsible for the rape too, at least partially. How he hated himself! He was a man incapable of protecting his woman and irresolute in taking action. "Such a wimp!" he cursed himself in an undertone and clutched at his hair.<sup>78</sup>

It is telling that after the rape Lin seems more concerned about his shameful castration by Geng than with Manna's emotional and physical condition. Although Geng is depicted as a callous perpetrator of rape, Ha Jin seems to hint that the *wu* qualities embodied in Geng are what Lin is lacking. Lin is thus defined through his binary oppositeness to his nemesis Geng, a self-confident opportunist who bulldozes his way over the psychologically paralysed Lin. Not for the only occasion in the novel, a female character is a foil to the construction of men's masculinities. Geng and Lin's attributes and relationship as men are illuminated through their triangular relationship with Manna. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has shown that the power dynamics of literary erotic triangles of two men and one woman cause affective bonds between men that veer between desire and hostility.<sup>79</sup> In this particular triangle, not only are patriarchal structures reinforced, but also a pecking order of masculinity that places scholarly masculinities beneath bullish men of action.

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<sup>78</sup> Jin, *Waiting*, 193.

<sup>79</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

After the rape incident, Manna, who is afraid nobody would believe her, dares not report it to the police. Neither does Lin, who continues to feel self-hatred and simply seeks Chinese medicines to help Manna physically recover. Lin and Manna marry, but their relationship sours. As the post-Mao reform-era market economy takes shape in the early 1980s, Geng reinvents himself as a fearless entrepreneur. Geng is so successful that he appears on the TV news as “the richest man in Feidong County,”<sup>80</sup> where he attributes his construction company’s vast profits to his harsh but effective military-style disciplinary control of the workers. He even features in a magazine called *Role Models*. Geng’s success might be allegorically read as expressing the character of post-Mao China, in which ruthlessness serves men well in the new market economy. On the one hand, Geng represents those who dared to make ground-breaking efforts during the economic reforms, deflowering the virginity of the economy. On the other hand, his shadiness suggests that moral decline and legally dubious behaviour are the cost of the reforms. Lin’s psychosocial paralysis is both cause and effect of his helpless failure to participate in the mainstream “masculine” behaviour of the times.

### Intellectuals, peasants and soldiers

Characterizations of intellectuals, peasants and soldiers frequently appear in Ha Jin’s other works. The intellectuals in Ha Jin’s novels are without exceptions portrayed as “soft” in one way or another. These portrayals may be read as reminiscent of the tradition of Chinese *wen* masculinity; yet they may also symbolize emasculation of intellectuals under the weight of socialist totalitarianism, and in turn as a trope for the fate of the nation as a whole. A mutual lack of trust defines the relationship between intellectuals and the Party: intellectuals distance

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<sup>80</sup> Jin, *Waiting*, 284.

themselves from politics and struggle to find significance in society. Political and social superfluity seems to be the situation intellectuals find themselves in.

Yet Ha Jin also seeks to empower and re-masculinize male intellectual characters. In *Waiting*, Lin's integrity and loyalty to Confucian values renders him a good man in the eyes of the characters and arouses readers' sympathies throughout the novel. In *The Crazy*, the professor is bed-ridden and paranoid, but his ramblings on the *Divine Comedy* and other classic works allow him to find another mode of expression, although he is as muted by the authorities as his literati peers. Beneath his ramblings, however, is a wholeness: a subject who "knows better" and who feeds a masculine imagination, enabling a redemption of masculinity similar to what Zhong Xueping finds in her analysis of paranoid protagonists in Yu Hua's novels.<sup>81</sup> In *A Free Life*, Nan finally becomes an independent poet in America and revels in the creation of his own cultural space. Nan's trajectory suggests that the recovery of masculine self-esteem in male intellectual characters in Ha Jin's fiction may draw upon Ha Jin's own life experiences, whether direct or vicarious, including his achievements as a talented writer and literary scholar.

Peasants are positioned as Other to intellectuals in Ha Jin's works. A survey of the majority of his fiction and short stories reveals that male peasants are not portrayed as "the good people" (*liang min* 良民): that is, they are not law-abiding nor innocent, but ignorant, rustic, chauvinistic and physically unappealing, whether to readers or to female acquaintances in the narrative settings. For example, the collection of stories, *Under the Red Flag*, includes depictions of peasant promiscuity, cuckolding, sexual violence, impotence and gang rape. Peasants are associated with coarseness, dishonesty, poverty and backwardness. In *The Crazy*, Banping is representative of peasants and the antihero foil of the narrator. As the narrator, a

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<sup>81</sup> Xueping Zhong, *Masculinity Besieged? Issues of Modernity and Male Subjectivity in Chinese Literature of the Late Twentieth Century* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 97–99.

doctoral student, states: “he and I by nature were different kinds of people: I was too sensitive, too introverted, and maybe too idealistic, whereas he was a paragon of peasant cunning and pragmatism.”<sup>82</sup> Banping craves material comfort, embracing hedonistic, pragmatic attitudes towards life, determined to “suck all the juice out of this life.”<sup>83</sup> He is not gifted in literary studies, nor keen on politics, but he is well aware of the importance of political power in a man’s career: he joins the Party for the privileges of a being a junior clerk in the Provincial Commerce Department.

Soldiers in Ha Jin’s works are frequently shown as cruel bullies and capable of committing barbaric acts. The short story collection, *Ocean of Words*, provides a wide range of examples. In “A Lecture,” soldiers on the Long March—true revolutionary heroes in Party propaganda—are revealed to have roasted alive and eaten a Nationalist prisoner of war because they did not like his attitude. In “My Best Soldier,” the protagonist is a serial user of prostitutes, commits bestiality with a mule, and is eventually shot in cold blood by the narrator when attempting to flee across the border. In “Miss Jee,” as mentioned above, a young recruit is mercilessly bullied by his comrades for not measuring up to their standards of masculinity. And in “Ocean of Words,” a bookish young soldier is bullied by his fellows because of his scholarly inclinations and he is denied Party Membership by the petty-minded Party Secretary. In *War Trash*, Ha Jin’s third novel, violence and killings are commonplace among Chinese soldiers of conflicting allegiances, who are cooped up in American prisoner-of-war camps on the Korean peninsula during the Korean War. The soldiers’ imprisonment is marked by their confusion and fear for their lives. Ha Jin shows them as fragile and emotional human beings, a far cry from the “tall, big, and perfect” (*gao da quan* 高大全) socialist heroes propagandized

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<sup>82</sup> Ha Jin, *The Crazy* (New York: Pantheon, 2002), 163.

<sup>83</sup> Jin, *The Crazy*, 162.

by the Party. Loyalty and betrayal are the key lens through which the soldiers' masculinity is viewed and evaluated when they eventually return to China. Instead of being lauded as heroes, they are judged to have betrayed their country for allowing themselves to become captives, rather than fighting to the death. They are treated as semi-criminals and many end up barely able to scrape a living.

The question that Ha Jin raises again here is who is betraying whom. Loyalty to the state has long been a key component of ideal Chinese masculinity, a quality that society expects a man to possess.<sup>84</sup> The Party demands loyalty from its citizens and its soldiers; those deemed to have betrayed the Party and China are disparaged as feminine, a characterization reinforced in film, literature and the arts.<sup>85</sup> The fate of male characters in Ha Jin's works exposes the stupidity and absurdity of such blind loyalty, which is manipulated by those in power, and seemingly justifies betrayal of the state; even betrayal of its language in the case of Ha Jin himself.

#### The crisis of intellectual Chinese masculinities in China's twentieth-century modernity

Perceptions of exemplary masculinity shifted in the reform-era conditions of economic pragmatism, growth of consumerism, and political de-emphasis of worker-peasant-soldier ideals. Business savviness, connections and money-making abilities became important and successful masculinity began to be identified with material and career achievements. Chinese popular culture teemed with new images of successful businessmen while the appeal of the traditional literary man was further challenged. Reflecting these changes, the intellectual protagonists in Ha Jin's works, without exception, find themselves in weak and marginalized

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<sup>84</sup> Bret Hinsch. *Masculinities in Chinese History* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013).

<sup>85</sup> Rosemary Roberts, *Maoist Model Theatre: The Semiotics of Gender and Sexuality in the Chinese Cultural Revolution (1966-1976)* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 223–58.

positions. In laying out the atrophy of the intellectual class, Ha Jin invokes the trope of the “superfluous man” in his depiction of Lin:

The thought came to him that Shuyu and Hua could live quite well without him. This realization saddened him and made him feel like a good-for-nothing. “I’m a superfluous man,” he muttered. That was a phrase he had read in a Russian novel long ago. The author’s name escaped him.<sup>86</sup>

The superfluous man as character type first appeared in Russian literature in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century to describe a class of educated men sidelined by the socio-economic and political transformations of incipient modernity. A central component of his life involves separation from a romantic interest.<sup>87</sup> The superfluous man is also defined through his doomed struggle with a nemesis: a confident, publicly acclaimed conformist to mainstream values, who bulldozes his way over the superfluous man.<sup>88</sup> In the context of China, the social superfluity of the protagonists in *Waiting* and some of Ha Jin’s other novels could be read as a crushing of the individual by socialist political structures. Yet Lin has similarities with Oblomov, the eponymous superfluous man in Ivan Goncharov’s novel of 1859.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Jin, *Waiting*, 303.

<sup>87</sup> Jehanne M. Gheith, “The Superfluous Man and the Necessary Woman: A ‘Re-Vision’,” *The Russian Review* 55.2 (1996): 226–44, see page 230.

<sup>88</sup> Ellen B. Chances, *Conformity's Children: An Approach to the Superfluous Man in Russian Literature* (Columbus, OH: Slavica, 1978), 20–21.

<sup>89</sup> Evgeniya M Butenina, “The Intext of ‘Superfluous Man’ in Contemporary American Fiction,” *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 200 (2015): 403–407, see page 404.

Lin's superfluity, and by extension the marginalisation of scholarly masculinity, is therefore better understood as the alienation of *wen* masculinity in China's engagement with modernity in the longer term. According to noted scholar Chen Fangzheng 陳方正, the role of the *zhishifenzi* 知識分子 (intellectuals; lit. "knowledgeable elements")—a class created under the conditions of a Chinese modernity in which initially most people were uneducated—could only be temporary.<sup>90</sup> Once mass education had spread, the *zhishifenzi* would be superfluous. Frank Seely draws from A. J. Toynbee the term "intelligentsia" to describe the educated class or classes that act as localising conduits of foreign cultures, often under the unequal terms of colonialism and imperialism.<sup>91</sup> As such, the intelligentsia are caught between two cultures and alienated from both. The marginalisation and powerlessness of "superfluous men" under conditions of partial Western modernity, reworked by local political elites, has engendered in them a deep malaise.<sup>92</sup>

The first appearance in Chinese literature of the conflicted and unhappy superfluous man came in the works of early Republican era (1911–1949) writers such as Cao Juren 曹聚仁 (1900–72), Qu Qiubai 瞿秋白 (1899–1935), and Guo Moruo 郭沫若 (1892–1978), who identified with the half-hearted heroes in the works of Turgenev and other 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian authors (Ng 1988, 66–7). Turgenev's "The Diary of a Superfluous Man" was one of the favorite works of Yu Dafu 郁達夫 (1896–1945), a writer often characterised as a romantic but troubled

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<sup>90</sup> Vera Schwarz, "Memory, Commemoration, and the Plight of China's Intellectuals," *The Wilson Quarterly* 13.4 (1989): 120–29, see page 123.

<sup>91</sup> Frank Seeley, "The Heyday of the 'Superfluous Man' in Russia," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 31.76 (1952): 92–112, see pages 92–4.

<sup>92</sup> Pankaj Mishra, "The Crisis in Modern Masculinity," *The Guardian*, 17 March, 2018, <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/mar/17/the-crisis-in-modern-masculinity>>.

outsider.<sup>93</sup> The frail psychological state of the protagonist in Yu's *Sinking* (1921) reflects "a modern mind, alienated from society", in which sexual frustration and anguish at the plight of China are inseparably bound together.<sup>94</sup> Yu himself acknowledged that the protagonist's despair at his inability to make a meaningful contribution to China's development conveyed his own humiliation and sense of ineffectiveness.<sup>95</sup>

While the superfluous man is the typical protagonist in Yu's oeuvre, he addresses the concept most directly in "The Superfluous Man" (零餘者 *Lingyuzhe*). In this short story, the protagonist returns from eight years of study in Japan determined to save China through literature, but gradually loses faith in himself and his ability to change the country for the better: "I am a superfluous man and nothing more. I am entirely useless to mankind and society. A superfluous man! A useless man! Superfluous! Superfluous..." Yu frames the Chinese superfluous man as a mixture of highly cultivated literatus and young talented scholar: "in Yu's hero are mingled elements of what might be termed the 'profligate litterateur' *caizi*, and the high-mindedness and frustrations characteristic of the morally sensitive *mingshi* literati Tao Qian, Ruan Ji and Du Fu."<sup>96</sup>

While this notion of the superfluous man, "castrated by higher education,"<sup>97</sup> first gained traction among classically educated Republican-era intellectuals as they struggled to find meaning in their lives in the chaotic conditions of a weak and semi-colonised China, its

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<sup>93</sup> Mau-sang Ng, *The Russian Hero in Modern Chinese Fiction* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1988), 107.

<sup>94</sup> Kirk A Denton, "The Distant Shore: Nationalism in Yu Dafu's 'Sinking'," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 14 (1992): 107–23, see page 107.

<sup>95</sup> Ng, *The Russian Hero*, 85.

<sup>96</sup> Ng, *The Russian Hero*, 121

<sup>97</sup> Ng, *The Russian Hero*, 98.

relevance for authors across Republican, Mao and post-Mao eras underlines the sense of marginalisation felt by China's scholarly class under the conditions of capitalist, socialist and postsocialist modernities. *Waiting* concludes in the early reform era. At that moment, intellectuals' marginalized position in the power structure, the redundancy of *wen* qualities in conditions of economic pragmatism and consumerism, and awareness of China's sidelined status in the world, combined to amplify the sense of crisis of masculine identity on the part of Chinese intellectuals.

## Conclusion

*Waiting* paints a bleak picture of Chinese masculinities in socialist and postsocialist China: the bookish and unambitious army doctor Lin Kong is emotionally and socially paralysed; the materially successful, soldier-turned-entrepreneur Geng Yang is a ruthless, brutish rapist; the peasant-farmer Bensheng, Lin's brother-in-law, is petty, resentful, and grasping. Minor male characters also possess unattractive character aspects: Mai Dong, Manna's first love interest, is portrayed as weak and unreliable. Liang Meng, Lin Kong's cousin, is rather strange and has unappealing personal habits. Vice-Commissar Wei and Political Director Ran Su appear on the surface to be decent, educated men, but nevertheless actively maintain the patriarchal social order and have unsavoury characteristics: Wei turns out to have been dating half a dozen women at the same time (and moreover to have been connected to the Gang of Four), while Su can barely look at Manna after he learns of her rape.

This article's reading of *wen-wu* and by extension the *de* morality represented by the protagonist demonstrates that Lin's masculinity has irreconcilably contradictory meanings. On the one hand, Lin can be read as a noble man who uses Confucian teachings as his moral compass. Towards the end of the novel, he appears to glimpse the possibilities of masculine redemption offered through accepting and fulfilling *de* masculinity in his family relations with

Shuyu and Hua. On the other hand, it is the same teachings that disempower him, cause his self-denial, self-doubt, sense of guilt, and inhibit him from taking firm and decisive actions; above all, they emasculate him. Behind his morally appropriate actions are his powerlessness, impotence, fear and helplessness as a man. Lin's self-control, his obedience to the Party's order, and his attempt to live with social expectations towards such a "revolutionary soldier" as himself cause his indecisiveness in his relationship with Manna. His individual desires are smothered and displaced by "traditional" morality and the will of authority. He is "a victim of both the new Maoist-tinged rules and the vestiges of the old Confucian system, being caught in the war between these often disparate worlds."<sup>98</sup>

As a representative of Confucian *wen* masculinity (i.e. the noble *junzi*), Lin has two antitheses in the novel: Bensheng, a peasant and "small man" in the Confucian sense, who puts profit before everything else; and Geng, Lin's nemesis, who possesses and wields the *wu* qualities that Lin lacks. The novel thus presents some cultural continuities between the temporal setting of the novel and China's past, including how the Party saw the use of incorporating Confucian values into radical socialist discourse, despite its overt attacks on Confucianism during the Cultural Revolution. *Waiting*—in concert with Ha Jin's other works—implicitly mocks the Party and its hypocrisy by deconstructing two key categories of Party propaganda: peasants and soldiers.

The hopelessness evinced in the novel suggests that Ha Jin may think that the only way to escape psychological paralysis, moral abjection, or any other compromised/tainted masculinity under Chinese (post)socialism, is not to wait with false hope but to follow his lead in leaving the country to make a life elsewhere. He justifies a move into exile by suggesting that it is the Chinese state that has betrayed its people, countering the accusation that leaving

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<sup>98</sup> Parascandola, "Love and Sex in a Totalitarian Society," 40.

the country is itself an act of betrayal. Ha Jin's fiction and non-fiction both seek to justify "betrayal" of the state when the state is the first to betray; in this way, Ha Jin seeks masculine redemption for himself and his characters. In global perspective, *Waiting* offers a critique of authoritarian political cultures in which masculinities that do not involve self-enrichment and ambition for power are disparaged. *Waiting* warns that patriarchal politics rewards a minority of male aggressors and causes psychological paralysis and marginalisation among other men. At the same time, *Waiting* seems to align with the historical Confucian standpoint that extremes are bad for individuals and society alike: the ideal man—when allowed to flourish—is a tempered combination of moral conscience and skilful activity, both *wen* and *wu*.