

# A Study of Marginal Masculinity in Men's Fashion Magazine *Gentlemen's Quarterly*

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**Abstract**—Media criticism research shows that the pursuit of symbols such as "elite" and "taste" in men's fashion magazines essentially belongs to the maintenance of "hegemonic masculinity". China's men's fashion magazine's understanding of "taste" "is not equal to 'good tasted' English. It's more about social class." In Cornell's theory of masculinity, two groups of concepts of masculinity with class as the core show that "hegemonic masculinity" as the dominant social status always systematically repels "marginal masculinity" through various ways. However, through the analysis of the content of the marginal masculine group in *Gentlemen's Quarterly*, it can be found that *Gentlemen's Quarterly* pays great attention to this group, and among these groups, *Gentlemen's Quarterly* puts forward criticism on the system problems.

**Keywords**—text research; masculinity; men's fashion magazine; communication

## I. INTRODUCTION

In Cornell's masculinity theory, "hegemonic masculinity" and "marginal masculinity" are the types of masculinity in Cornell's male gender structure with "social class" as the reference item. "Hegemonic masculinity" refers to the historical period in which "the cultural dynamics by which a group claims and holds leadership positions in social life. At any given time, there is a certain masculinity that is celebrated by the culture. Dominant masculinity can be defined as the form of gender practice, which is the concrete manifestation of the legalization of the widely accepted patriarchal system, which guarantees (or is used to guarantee) male dominance."<sup>1</sup> "Marginal masculinity" can be used to describe a variety of "proletarians," such as "working class, urban poor, and farmers." Some scholars believe that China's men's fashion magazine's understanding of "taste" "is not equal to 'good tasted' English. It's more about social class."<sup>2</sup> Therefore, if this logic can be deduced, there are only two ways for the "marginal masculinity" group to exist in men's fashion magazines. Either, the male of the marginal masculinity group as a class is completely excluded from the text content. Or, marginal masculine groups are consumed in

the text. With this assumption in mind, the author will conduct a textual analysis of the reports of the marginal male class published in *Gentlemen's Quarterly* for a decade (2009-2018) to test the validity of this hypothesis.

## II. REPORT ON THE WORKING CLASS IN GENTLEMEN'S QUARTERLY

"Searching for gold on the prairie", published in November 2009, was the first report on the working class in *Gentlemen's Quarterly*. *Gentlemen's Quarterly* gives a detailed description of the lives of coal miners in Inner Mongolia: they live in cloth tents in the mountains and eat steamed bread and eggplant between jobs. As one of the miners put it, "There are three major types of work in the country. One is seafarers, whose lives are not guaranteed when they go to sea for two or three months. The second is to pull coal out of the well with your head on your waistband. And number three is our business."<sup>3</sup>

The April 2011 edition of *Crazy Jade* starts with a graphic power deal. "As usual, the hetian jade merchant You Sanbao was asked to visit a five-star hotel in Wu (Rumuqi), and the meeting was very important to him. An official planned to commission him to go to Beijing to give a piece of hetian jade as a gift to one of his friends, which is the official's regular practice."<sup>4</sup>

The report stringed up the hierarchy of Chinese jade players through the narration of the jade merchant: You Sanbao. At the bottom are the so-called celebrities, and at the second are China's new rich. Jade has been a symbol of power and class since ancient times. In the accounts of jade merchants such as You Sanbao and Hou Wenbo, the so-called jade play by the newly rich pales in comparison with China's powerful class. Hou Wenbo once witnessed an important personage of hetian region who hired three trucks to transport away the jade accumulated over the years when he left hetian. "If he bought the jade with money, it would take him hundreds of years of time, energy and almost astronomical wealth," he said. This is simply not possible."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [US] R.W. Cornell, masculinities, translated by Liu Li, Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press (China), 2003: 92.

<sup>2</sup> Geng Song. Consumption, Class Formation and Sexuality, Reading Men's Lifestyle Magazines in China. *The China Journal*, Vol.64: 63.

<sup>3</sup> Wen Jin, Searching for gold on the prairie, *Gentlemen's Quarterly*, 2009(11): 325.

<sup>4</sup> Jiang Qianchen, *Crazy Jade*, *Gentlemen's Quarterly*, 2011(4): 204.

<sup>5</sup> Jiang Qianchen, *Crazy Jade*, *Gentlemen's Quarterly*, 2011(4): 204.

The blood and sweat of the jade diggers were the opposite of these new favorites.

The 40-year-old Uygur man jade founder Yi Mingjiang climbed the Karakoram Range alone for a month. The long-time wandering alone made him not only gets the nickname of "savage", but also makes him tired. A Uighur youth borrowed money from relatives and friends to buy a digger to dig jade. A year later, he told all his relatives and friends to pay back the money the next morning at a place along the river in Yurungqash River. When relatives and friends arrived, they found the Uighur youth hanging from an excavator that was unable to operate due to a lack of oil. Because of the huge economic risks to be borne by digging jade, excavators are generally rented, with a monthly rent of 20,000-36,000 yuan and self-financing diesel fuel (basically 1,000 yuan of fuel consumption per vehicle per day). If workers' salaries are included, the cost of each car is between 100,000 and 120,000 yuan per month. Most of this money is borrowed, and once no decent jade is dug, it is basically ruined.

In the August 2013 issue of "The Golden Dream of African Dreams", the Shanglin people in the sensational Ghana gold rush event of the year were highlighted. Farmers in Shanglin County, Guangxi Province, are the largest source of gold seekers in China. In this report, Gentlemen's Quarterly objectively reviews and reflects on the gold panning events in Ghana through interviews with Shanglin Gold Rushers and interviews with Ghanaian students Nabil Nuhu. In the report, Gentlemen's Quarterly reveals the institutional problems that cause these people to leave their hometown, such as the duality of urban and rural structure, the empty nest problem and rural fund-raising.

In addition to Crazy Jade, Gentlemen's Quarterly describes the similar mineral economy with the theme of "crazy", such as Crazy Hand Strings (April 2016), Crazy Meteor (January 2018). It also reflects Gentlemen's Quarterly's negative attitude towards the "original sin" inherent in the energy economy. At the same time, it is always critical of the institutional problems that affect the living conditions of these workers in the energy economy.

The author also thinks repeatedly about whether the police belong to the marginal masculinity. On the one hand, as Cornell pointed out, the violent organs of the government are the important organs for the maintenance of hegemonic males, especially the police organs. Police men are the typical male images of symbols such as "masculine" and "tough" in hegemonic male culture. On the other hand, the concept of police in China is different from that in other countries, and there is a social metaphor of "using power for personal gain". For example, in the next section, people will see an in-depth report on the political career of Wang Lijun in Gentlemen's Quarterly, then deputy police chief of Chongqing municipality. However, the concept of official standard actually conceals the fact that the salary of the grassroots police in the domestic police system is generally low and the degree of work danger is high. As Gentlemen's Quarterly puts it, "The most dangerous profession in peacetime is the police". Therefore, the police group

represented in Gentlemen's Quarterly is classified as "working class".

In several reports about the police force published by Gentlemen's Quarterly, it can be seen that these front-line police have to face the harsh working environment, bear great psychological and physical pressure, and face the temptation of corruption.

### III. REPORTS ON THE URBAN POOR IN GENTLEMEN'S QUARTERLY

The drug tester, published in April 2014, entered the "drug testing circle" in Beijing from the perspective of Jiang Hanyu, a senior intellectual from Beijing. In this huge gray industrial chain consisting of "testers-intermediary-hospital/pharmaceutical companies", how these "generally uneducated drug testers" were harvested by the power system to the point that their bodies were slaughtered at will: Wang Liying, 55, died of a cerebral hemorrhage after taking an experimental drug and was returned 300,000 yuan after four years of lengthy litigation. One of the test subjects, Yuan Shenghu, developed a severe arrhythmia during the trial, and the hospital refused to take any responsibility. The lives of test takers are often shadowed by death. "A drug testers who have taken part in countless trials, fearing that the repeated accumulation of multiple drugs will suddenly lead to unpredictable adverse reactions, always tells people that I feel I have a time bomb strapped to my body that could explode at any moment." <sup>6</sup>

Gentlemen's Quarterly does not evade the class limitations of these drug testers. Unlike Jiang Hanyu, who initially saw testing as a noble form of self-sacrifice, these drug testers were only trying to get as much money as possible. According to the relevant regulations, after taking the last test, the test subjects need to take the test again after a considerable period of time and ensure their health. But to cover up their history and condition, the test subjects faked their body information in various ways, such as carefully covering pinpricks in their arms with foundation, dropping white vinegar in their urine from smokers, and donating platelets to lower the number of white blood cells in their blood.

As for the causes of this phenomenon, Gentlemen's Quarterly still points the contradiction to the establishment of power. Gentlemen's Quarterly pointed out that the pharmaceutical companies and hospitals have been aware of these situations for a long time. "In a way, the two sides reached a tacit agreement that no one wanted to break." This kind of ambiguous one-eyed approach, in addition to the few professional volunteer drug testers unable to support the thousands of drug trials conducted across the country each year, is also due to the huge benefits of the absence of regulations. In a trial, Jiang Hanyu accidentally found that the reward for the test of 30,000 yuan was reduced to 2,500 yuan by the hospital.

<sup>6</sup> He Tao, The drug tester, Gentlemen's Quarterly, 2014(4): 259, citations have been changed.

#### IV. REPORT ON RURAL PEOPLE IN GENTLEMEN'S QUARTERLY

"From the perspective of sociology, the social structure is not only statically manifested as the social status and social relationship model between social groups, but also dynamically manifested as the status, role and interaction between groups in the society.<sup>7</sup> In China, the biggest class gap is the urban-rural dual structure. In the April 2011 issue, *Gentlemen's Quarterly* presents the impact of this urban-rural dual structure on the lives of individuals in the context of the development of energy economy. In Yulin middle school of Yulin city of northern Shaanxi Province, there is an invisible boundary in class five, grade nine, dividing everyone into two completely different worlds. Any child who lives in Yulin City does not bother to play with the rural classmates. However, with the frenzied development of the coal industry in Yulin, the unbreakable class relationship between the city and the countryside seems to have been broken. Yang Hongbo from the countryside has become the richest person in class five, grade nine because of the coal industry. At that time, Liu Yanfei, the representative of the "city-town" in the class, also returned from Yu'an to Yulin. More than a decade later, the "rural" and "urban" groups that had no contact with each other before became increasingly frequent. However, is this class really broken? In the article, *Gentlemen's Quarterly* quoted Zeng Zhaoning, an economics professor at Xi'an Shiyu University, as saying, "Northern shaanxi now looks like the gulf states, like South America, where there is no growth." Along with the increase of wealth came the fall of the whole Yulin. "The cave wild river was once the lifeline here, but now it has almost stopped flowing. Coal mining has sunk entire villages and forced people to move. The groundwater is polluted and the government has to spend a lot of money to bring it in from other places."<sup>8</sup> The whole Yulin area is just the fuel bank of China's economic engine. The benefits brought by the optimization and adjustment of economic structure will hardly include Yulin, just like the rapid decline of other coal-producing areas after overnight wealth. The rise in personal wealth of people like Yang Hongbo does not change their class position in the urban-rural dualism.

In addition, *Gentlemen's Quarterly* also reports on rural children. The September 2013 issue of children focuses on a group of "orphans" suffering from AIDS. The reason why the orphans are quoted is because these children are infected with AIDS through mother-to-child transmission. Due to fear and discrimination against AIDS, these children are basically abandoned by the original family. If social discrimination has a top-down chain, then these children with AIDS can be said to be the lowest and most marginal of society. Just as the school, the red ribbon school, is cut off from the community at Dongli, a small village 15 kilometers east of Linfen city in Shanxi Province, even the most basic diet is self-sufficient and isolated from the whole society.

<sup>7</sup> Luo Feng, *Body, Space and Relationship: Everyday Life Political Studies about Urban Subaltern Group — A Case of Shanghai*, East China Normal University. 1.

<sup>8</sup> Xie Ding, *New Life in Northern Shaanxi Caused by Coal*, *Gentlemen's Quarterly*, 2011 (4): 193.

Ten years after the famous reality show *Metamorphosis* on Hunan Satellite TV, *Gentlemen's Quarterly* interviewed two of the most influential people who participated in the reality show — Shi Ningjie and Wang Honglin. In the July 2015 issue of *Metamorphosis*, *Gentlemen's Quarterly* focuses on the moral logic of this reality show. As the *Gentlemen's Quarterly* said, the show itself is based on lies. All of the conflicting scenes in "Metamorphic" are scripted to satisfy the popular stereotype of rural children. "Metamorphosis" seeks for a brief "exchange of classes" between teenagers like Shi Ningjie and Wang Honglin, who have a huge gap in class. They not only consume the hatred of the rich in the society, but also consume the miserable conditions of the children at the bottom. But as *Gentlemen's Quarterly* asks, "Suffering breeds virtue is only wishful thinking. Such a poor, suffering squeezed life, the family (Wang Honglin) is trapped in despair. How can they save a city child?"<sup>9</sup>

#### V. CONCLUSION

According to the above analysis of the marginal male group in *Gentlemen's Quarterly*, it can be seen that, first, Marginal male class groups have always appeared in the reports of *Gentlemen's Quarterly*, which did not selectively ignore the marginal male class because of the positioning of its fashion magazine. Second, when presenting these strata, *Gentlemen's Quarterly* did not observe marginal male groups with the eye of "seeking novelty". From the above analysis, it can be clearly seen that in the reports on the working class, urban poor and rural people, *Gentlemen's Quarterly* always criticizes directly or indirectly the institutional problems that affect the living space of these people.

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<sup>9</sup> Zeng Ming, *Metamorphosis*, *Gentlemen's Quarterly*, 2015 (7): 170, citations have been changed.