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Blogging Chinese new masculinities: An analysis of a Chinese A-list personal blog

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The discourse of Chinese new men and masculinities in the social media sphere has become visible in the past ten odd years but has largely remained unexplored. The analysis reported in this article presents a case of masculine performances in Chinese personal blogs. The data were collected from Acosta's blogsite and blog entries published between March and June 2006. Acosta's blog was the third most visited blog on the Xinlang blog service provider in 2006 and a well-regarded grassroots blog in contrast with celebrity blogs in Mainland China. The analysis revealed that Acosta's blogging, seemingly irrelevant to gender and sexuality, orchestrates various lifestyle resources to enact particular Chinese masculine performances in response to the mainstream/official ideological construct of Mainland China. It is argued in this article that Acosta's young man, ostentatiously a revival and remix of traditional Confucius male images and norms with the globalized imagination of men, may help establish a new masculine order for the younger generations in China.

Key words: Personal blogs, lifestyle, masculinity, gender, performance.

INTRODUCTION

This article provides an analysis of an A-list Chinese personal blogs for unpacking the emergent discourse of "new Chinese young men" in digital media spaces. Unpacking such a discourse is important for understanding the changing gender structures in Mainland China as well as its social dynamics, especially in times of rapid globalisation and digitisation. Personal blogs are identified as a new media space that suits this purpose as blogging has become the mainstream of social participatory media as well as the Internet.

As such, an A-list personal blog hosted on a main Chinese blog service provider was located as the case. A-list personal bogs (Keshelashvili, 2005) are defined differently in this article to include the most famous or popular personal blogs which appear to be authored only by grassroots or average bloggers other than by celebrities. The choice was made in response to the so-called flattened structure of the web (Dhamdhere and Dovrolis, 2010; Towsley, 2008) and augmented social (mass) participation (Nel and Westlund, 2013). From a performative perspective (Cameron and Kulick, 2003), the authenticity of authorship and identity are no longer critical-only what are performed, how they are performed, and why they are performed are pertinent.

The following sections of this article first discuss the relation between personal blogs and Chinese masculinities and their concurrence with the authoritative ideologies, values, beliefs, norms, and conventions. It is then followed by an introduction to a virtual ethnographic approach used for examining the chosen blog as well as

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by an analysis of the data. The section that follows provides a close discussion of masculine features and patterns drawing upon the analysis. It is argued at the end of this article that the A-list blog, seemingly irrelevant to gender and sexuality, entails critical elements in enacting particular Chinese masculine performances and may help in constructing Chinese young men and their masculinities.

Performativity and Chinese masculinities

Research on Chinese men and masculinities has been emergent in the past decade with diverse concentrations, theories, and applications. Some studies have explored the Chinese phenomenon of men using borrowed concepts and paradigms that are not commonly used in Chinese language and academic works (Evans, 2008; Rofel, 2007) whilst other research attempts to remodel Chinese traditional terms and concepts for describing masculinities (Louie, 2002; Qian et al., 2008). So far, the greater attention has concentrated on masculine representations in traditional media texts such as newspapers, books, magazines, radio, and television (Song and Lee, 2012) where mass participation, media access, and media representations are carefully controlled and crafted. Many researchers are either worried about the dominance of the Western men and masculinity or entrenched in the Chinese dyadic traditions such as Yin and Yang, Wen and Wu, or simply, Nan and Nü (Evans, 2008; Louie, 2008; Zhong, 2000). On one side, other feminist and post feminist notions such as patriarchy and hegemony are used as theoretical others and have shed some lights on the analysis of patriarchy and masculinity in China (known in Chinese as nanxingyangjiu) (Song and Lee, 2012; Zhang, 2011). For instance, Fang (2007), an advocate of a Chinese version of "Men's Liberation", employed life history interviews and the hegemonic masculinity theory (Connell, 1998; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005) to demonstrate the power relations between male sex service providers and consumers.

However, solely applying the Western notion of manliness to Chinese context is problematic as the conception of what constitutes 'masculinity' in Chinese tradition is often in opposition to the current gender theories. For the majority of Chinese, the Western concept of masculinity seems foreign and distant, with little relevance to the male practice in China. It is understood that Chinese men do not necessarily conform to the stereotypes that are dominant in Western popular discourses of masculinity given their linguistic, cultural, and socio-political differences. Recent publications with a focus on mainstream masculinity describe Chinese men as feeling psychologically besieged (Zhong, 2000) b y the institutional power and Western ideology-led modernization and globalization.

On the other hand, revising a traditional Chinese masculinity model such as Louie's (2002) revival of Wen and Wu is equally problematic within a modern theoretical framework, especially when such traditions have been radically reshaped during Mao's reign of the new China. Under such paradigms as Yin and Yang, Wen and Wu, and Gang and Rou, femininity and masculinity are placed in a dichotomous relationship. The Yin-Yang dyad prevalent in Chinese people's conception of masculinity and femininity maintains that femaleness and maleness possesses and interact with each other constantly and relatively, thereby manifesting the complexity and even fragmentation of gender construct in Chinese society (Brownell and Wasserstrom, 2002). In terms of masculinity, a real man is supposed to have more *Yang* (or *Gang/Wu*) character than Yin character (or *Rou/Wu*). Every man and woman is a mixed composition of both characters at any given moment. An entire composition of either character is not just undesirable but harmful. This is to some extent resonant of Chinese plurality thinking of being moderate rather than radical. As a social projection of such, in Louie's (2002) model of Wen and Wu, a man with the Wen characters is possibly a member of high culture, with some feminine characters and highly developed literary skills while a man with Wu character is usually physically strong and has expertise in the martial arts. This model, nevertheless, over-simplifies the complexity of Chinese masculinities particularly given the context of globalization and the disruption of the tradition caused by the rule of the Chinese Communist regime in the first thirty years before the reintroduction of the market system and capitalism. Although these dyads seem neat and simple, their encompassing nature invalidates their position as useful explanatory and descriptive tools for Chinese masculinities and creates theoretical tautology.

Furthermore, the notion of Chinese masculinity has spatial and temporal variations and is conditioned by the landscape of race and ethnicity in China. 'Chinese' as a concept encompasses many ethnic groups spread over a wide geographical area in China and other regions and countries due to its population size (Louie, 2008). For instance, ethnic minorities such as Mongolian, Miao, Tibetan, and Uyghur may have different conceptions of what a man should be. For this reason, this analysis takes Chinese to refer mostly to the Han nationality, the dominant ethnic group in China. Even within this group, the ideals of masculinity have changed over time, space, and inter-racial and cultural interactions. Physical strength and body hair which were popular manly features in the Tang Dynasty were otherwise disrespected during the Ming and Qing periods, especially among the social elites. In the wake of globalization, the dominance of American media in the past century has help channel the Western values into Chinese culture and society. For instance, in contrast to the traditional Chinese contempt

of men with financial wealth but little *Wen and Wu* achievement, businessmen (shangren) and entrepreneurs (qiyejia) are becoming new members of Chinese men.

In terms of mediation, most of the studies on Chinese masculinities have given attention to masculinities on traditional media usually represented in the printed documents (Brownell and Wasserstrom, 2002; Louie, 2002; Lu, 1993; Song and Lee, 2012; Zhong, 2000) and television and movies (Hiramoto, 2012; Song, 2010). There are scarcely any studies on Chinese men and masculinity representation in the digital medium apart from some media reports and debates. Such inadequacy is not necessarily caused by new media's later arrival in the Chinese virtual territory but rather by Chinese scholars' reluctance to take men and masculinity as a serious research subject. The lapse of time between new media projections of men and their sediment into patterns and materialization in the society may also be a cause but in reality the infiltration of mass media and the Internet has extended the frontier of the modern metrosexuality (in which physical beauty, having brand-named accessories such as tablets, going shopping, and practising regular workouts are typical features) into Chinese people, especially among the younger generations. The present analysis on personal blogs in this regard is a timely response to this research scarcity.

Blogging as a virtual site for studying men and masculinities

It is clear that there should be, in the first place, an overall understanding of the blog in order to use it as the space, medium, and data for analysing masculinity representations. A personal blog, as the earliest and most common type of blog, can be conceived of as an expressive space that enables a body of representations (Bruns, 2008; Davies and Merchant, 2009; Miller and Shepherd, 2009). These representations are constructed by the author (one or many) of a blog for a particular audience in a particular social situation, either purposefully or voluntarily. A blogger as a person is embodied in the formation of the personal blog as an instance of genre, and performed by means of blogging. A range of daily activities (from sleeping, dreaming, walking, eating, writing, listening, to music), views, emotions, and interactions are intertwined in personal blogging and may be vicariously and virtually consumed by the audience. In other words, a personal blog can be seen as a site for representing and performing lifestyles as its content mostly concentrates on personal details, life experiences, personal relations and relationships, emotions, opinions, comments, and even gossip and rumours.

Through representing individual experiences, emotions, interest, and opinions in the blogging interface, personal blogs are able to index multiplicities of lifestyle in relation to location (rural and urban), time (child, teenager, and adult), space (online and offline), and gender (male, female, and other), and sexuality (heterosexual and homosexual). Such characteristics make personal blogs perfect sites for virtual ethnography research. Unlike researchers in traditional ethnography who have to immerse themselves in the community that they wish to study, virtual ethnography researchers take the virtual, online environment as the site of the research supplanting interviews and survey with existing information that is automatically archived and abundant online environments (Hine, 2008). In virtual ethnography, the notion of the field is now text on a screen and the group of people involved in the community can be scattered worldwide in physical geography while sharing the same space as one another. Hine's contention that virtual ethnography is a process of intermittent engagement, rather than long term immersion, further indicates a greater flexibility in the ethnography process (Evans, 2010). As such, the present analysis takes Acosta's blog hosted on Xinlang BSP (http://blog.sina.com.cn), China's second largest blog service provider, as the site of virtual ethnography. Xinlang BSP provides a user-friendly inter-face for bloggers to manage their entries, pages, archives, templates, messages and comments, photos, videos, friends, communities, and administration. The data, collected from Acosta's blog between March and June 2006 including his blogsite and the entries of his first three months blogging, comprised three parts: 1) media reports on Acosta's blog, 2) 79 blog entries during Acosta's three month blogging, and 3) 10 blogs selected for detailed analysis. The 79 entries were numbered from Acosta 01 to Acosta 79; and the 10 selected entries were numbered from Acosta e01 to Acosta e10.

The virtual ethnographic data were read between lines for identifying salient themes and patterns. In addition, considering personal blogging as a de facto lifestyle media, the analysis presented in Section 4 and 5 follows Wei's (2006, p. 993) framework to examine four dimensions of the blogger's lifestyle presentations: 1) activities, 2) interests, 3) opinions, and 4) demographics. The activities dimension focuses on activities that a blog may present about the blogger and others. The analysis focuses on deeds, experiences, and actions. Activities such as going shopping, participating in charity groups, or doing sports for leisure are all taken into account. The opinions dimension focuses on views and attitudes a blogger expresses regarding social, economic, political, and cultural issues, events, phenomena, institutions, and people. The interests dimension refers to the blogger's preference for particular phenomena, institutions, relations, events, and people. The demographics dimension relates to spatial and institutional aspects that bloggers or other people were involved with or were affiliated with geographically, culturally, and institutionally. Where

bloggers were born, raised, have worked, or have travelled helps construct and represent bloggers' course of being, becoming, and belonging, persistently contributing to their identification and position in the blogosphere. The findings resulting from this analysis are discussed in the last section.

THE MEDIA PROJECTIONS OF THE "NEW MAN" IN ACOSTA'S BLOGGING

This section describes the mediation projections on the emergence of Acosta's blog, the influence of the blog, and public (or media) responses to the blog's meteoric rise to fame as well as its style. Acosta's blog, also widely known as Jidiyangguang; literally meaning *polar sunlight*), hit the Chinese blogosphere with 40 million visits between March and June 2006. This number has continued to increase ever since. According to Xinlang BSP's A-list ranking at that time, Acosta's blog was the third most visited blog in China, marginally behind two celebrity blogs, Laoxu's blog (a movie star and singer) and Han Hai's blog (a famous writer). Acosta was depicted, by contrast, as an ordinary person who was only known by a handful of people before he started blogging and his blog was touted as a victory for the grassroots over the elite and the powerful. Virtual China (www.virtual-china.org, a blog-format China research website funded by the Institute for the Future) pointed out that Acosta's blog represents a nascent lifestyle that has drawn attention from the public and the media. This kind of lifestyle seems to appeal to many young people in Mainland China, especially to those city residents who are yearning for alternative lifestyles (Louie, 2008). The lifestyle the blog presents may also live up to the expectations of some emerging middle social groups in China. Hong Huang, a reputable writer, blogger, and political elite, regards Acosta as such a representative of a new generation that she named Acosta's way of blogging as Aozaoxing, literally translated as *twisted posing* (http://honghuang.blog.sohu.com/ 3683302.html). In her view, *Aozaoxing* is associated with young men born in the 1980s ready to establish their characters via body performances through ways of dressing, make-up, body language, and the use of language.

However, there were many other and varied reactions to the blog. Some Chinese social groups saw the appearance of *aozaoxing* among Chinese young men as a sign of the increasing awareness of individualism arising from the impact of the free market and Westernization in Chinese society. In an interview with the Youth Digest (*Qingnianwenzhan*), Acosta was praised as a candid, sympathetic, humble, and sometimes, solitary young man. Acosta's charm was derived from "his physical appearance, sympathetic writing, and care for the socially disadvantaged" (from http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/

blog_483c11a6010003 wx.html). These characteristics were lamented to have been lost among many Chinese young men. Other people were suspicious of Acosta's sophisticated use of self-promotion. They argued that Acosta could not be authored by a real person but by a group of people. It could be a media strategy for enlarging the market share of Xinlang BSP. Indeed, it is unlikely that the first entry (a fuzzy photo of the blogger with an English title as Figure 1 shows) of the blog could have invited thousands of hits and comments from an online audience in just one day.

The watermark, ACOSTA, in the photos of Acosta's blog entries further indicates that they could be taken by professional photographers rather than by amateurs and that Acosta may have a group of people or a blogging team behind him. One report indicated that Acosta's real life profession might be as a fashion model or film actor. His family may enjoy high social standing with wide social connections. The rocketing fame of Acosta's blog was then alleged to be '2006's worst scandal in the Chinese media' (http://www.redmag.cn/?p=166) initiated by Xinlang blog service provider and its media associates.

Life-styling the "new man" in Acosta's blogging

This section on life-styling the "new man" includes an analysis of Acosta's blogsite and blog entries as well as a close read of the selected blog entries based on topic (what is covered in each blog entry) and readership (the number of the visitors to a selected blog entry). Some semiotic features (language and non-language) of the blog are also considered in the analysis.

Overall, Acosta's performance of the "new man" lifestyle can be approached in four dimensions: activity, opinion, demographics, and interest. Activity looks at what the blog may present about the blogger and others, focusing on deeds, experiences, and actions. Activities such as going shopping, participating in charity groups, or doing sports for leisure are all taken into account. Opinion focuses on views and attitudes the blog expresses regarding social, economic, political, and cultural issues, events, phenomena, institutions, and people. Interest refers to the blogger's preference for particular phenolmena, institutions, relations, events, and people. Demographics relate to spatial and institutional aspects that bloggers or other people were involved with or were affiliated with geographically, culturally, and institutionally. Where the bloggers were born, raised, have worked, or have travelled helps construct and represent the bloggers' course of being, becoming, and belonging, persistently contributing to his identification and position in the blogosphere.

Figure 2 is a photo collage of Acosta from his three-month blogging. These photos are all portrait-like photos in which vectors that show the direction of movement are
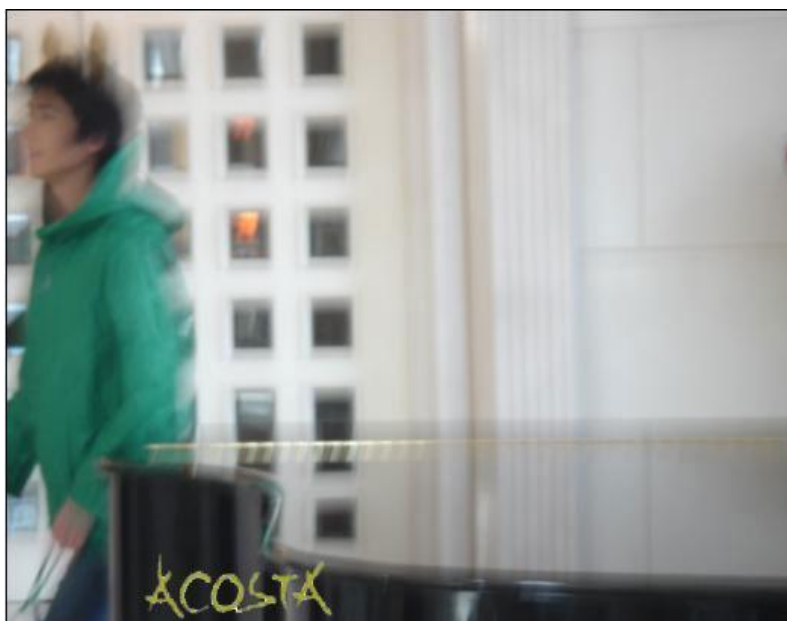
Figure 1. Acosta's first blog entry. The first day...... (2006-03-07 01:49:44).

Figure 2. Acosta's photo collage.

not attainable. The venues for three of the photos (01, 02, and 04) are indoors and the other three are outdoors. It is not, however, possible to figure out the exact location where they were taken. It may be inferred that two of the outdoor photos (03, and 05) were taken in some other countries because of the background behind the blogger.

In photo 03, Acosta seems to be sitting at a table in an English restaurant; in photo 05, the building behind Acosta is very foreign in architectural style. The location of the three photos taken indoors may be Acosta's home, especially the two photos (02, 04) in which Acosta is reading and playing. The interior design, the carpet, the furniture, and the decoration indicate that Acosta is affiliated with well-off social groups and enjoys strong

financial support.

The *demographics* dimension depicts Acosta as a young person in his 20s through his photographs and his writing. Acosta' recollection of a lonely childhood, though lack of details such as his age, schools, locations, and friends, implies that his childhood was not very different from others; instead, he was an ordinary Chinese boy struggling for his future. This shared memory of a lonely childhood may have resulted from the one-child family planning policy, which prohibits employees in public service sections from having more than one child (Chen et al., 2000). The state of 'lonely childhood' without brothers and sisters as playmates, or other family members as company has probably greatly affected the shared experiences and memories of this generation, and differentiates their identifications from their parent generations. In some entries, Acosta uses the third personal pronoun "he" intermingled with "I" to emphasize such loneliness as a child and teenager as the following chronological recollection of his life experiences reveals:

At that time he was singing Tomorrow will be better (mingtianhuigenghao) standing in the choir. In the morning, his mum took him to the youth activity centre on her bicycle when the cold wind was soaring and the moon hanging over the blue sky (Acosta 62).

The distance created between "he" and "I" demarcates a discrepancy between Acosta's childhood and his adulthood, which is to some extent a result of the rapid social and institutional changes of Chinese society during the 1980s and 1990s. Such social changes can sometimes drastically affect individuals' lives and their life trajectories. Moreover, participating in extracurricular activities such as singing was a common practice among children living in cities at that time. Venues such as the youth activity centre, transportation tools such as bicycles, and going to school early were regular social entities and occurrences in the early 1990s. This membership categorization may align Acosta as one of "us" to those young men who had similar experiences. It is, however, too hasty to conclude here that Acosta was raised in an average family and was naturally a grassroots blogger given that at that time, factors that determined personal social status and tastes were not economic but rather social connections, ties, and ranks in the government and the Party system (*tizhi*). In fact, Acosta's social standing may be quite high as the following excerpt reveals:

In the afternoon, I moved my study to the second floor, which is not too close to my bedroom (Acosta 37)

A seemingly insignificant description of Acosta's accommodation conditions as such can evidence Acosta's social position. Not many Chinese citizens are able to afford such a multi-storied complex as their home, especially in metropolitan cities such as Beijing where housing prices are skyrocketing. Living in this kind of accommodation not just indexes wealth; it implicates Acosta's social standing in which power is hard currency in contemporary China.

The activity dimension depicts Acosta's life routines as mostly revolving around travelling, blogging, reading, hanging out with friends, and sometime staying at home. Travelling is probably the most conspicuous as Acosta blogged as follows:

I travel almost every month and mostly alone. Sometimes, there is only one person at the destination. … I like humid and warm wind at sea. (Acosta 36)

Los Angeles is ruled by Chinese. Even waiters in Japanese restaurants can speak Chinese. … I ordered salmon but had no appetite. … Then, as always, it was a 12-hour flight with the same grandma-like stewardess (Acosta 16).

It is not rare to find personal blogs in China extensively blogging about travelling in that the tourism industry has boomed in the wake of economic prosperity since the mid 1990s. However, what makes Acosta's blog particular is his extensive overseas travel. Similarly, being able to travel overseas frequently and freely in Chinese society is not only an indicator of wealth and resources for mobility but may also imply Acosta's social affiliations. Even Acosta's nationality at the time of blogging may be questioned in that frequent overseas travels are not readily attainable for Chinese passport holders.

Apart from travelling, Acosta's life routine centres around several things: writing and reading (blogging), hanging out with friends, walking his pet dog, seeing movies, and sometimes, cooking. Reading and writing, instead of activities such as playing games or shopping, create an image of a well-educated and self-disciplined person; in addition, it may invoke an image of a traditional young scholar who is keen to intake knowledge rather than passing time or idling about. As a young man, he loves socializing with others and values friendship. Partying, drinking, and playing karaoke at bars are parts of their lifestyle. These kinds of activities, however, instead of creating an image of being ill-disciplined, connect Acosta to the communities of urban young men. In another way, they also reveal that Acosta has adequate financial resources to support his active involvement in this kind of lifestyle; venues such as Qiangui (the Party World) are simply not affordable for many local residents.

Alongside hanging out with friends, going to the cinema, and walking his pet, Acosta also describes his activities at home. Interestingly, it seems that part of his daily routine is also related to household chores. In many

parts of China, especially villages and towns, it may be disgraceful for men to help with dinner preparation and other household chores; however, a defining character of a so-called 'new good man' (新好男人 *xinhaonanren*) in metropolitan areas such as Shanghai is willingness to share with women in doing housework (Wai-ming, 2013).

The interest dimension is not clearly identifiable. Acosta does not provide much detail apart from blogging (writing) and reading. Nevertheless, similar to his activities, many of his blog entries again show that his main interests are also in travelling and charities. Most of his blog entries, as discussed above, feature places of interest that he has been to, showing the scenery of the locations in countries or regions other than Mainland China. In some of his entries, Acosta reveals his interest in charity work such as volunteering, fund-raising, and promoting charity programs. For example, three charity projects are prominently placed in his blogsite in clusters below the cluster that lists his personal information. In his entries, Acosta explores his 'conversion' into doing charity work through autobiographical accounts as the following extract shows:

I will support her proposal and make my humble effort. I will donate 300 books. This may not benefit many people. But I will feel happy somehow even if only one person benefits (Acosta 65).

As a recent social phenomenon, charity work and projects are gaining popularity in Chinese society, in many ways signalling the formation of new classes or social groups, the tensions between them, and the imperatives to ease and resolve these tensions so that social stability can be maintained.

The opinion dimension reveals that most of Acosta's blogging discusses themes such as understanding of and attitudes towards life, friendship, and interpersonal relationships, reviewing others' works, and paying respect to certain celebrities. Sometimes, Acosta may add comments on certain sensational social occasions such as the Super Voice Girl (*Chaojinǚsheng*, a female version of American Idol in China hosted by Hunan TV Channel), in consensus with the views of mainstream critics. Critical social issues and problems seem circumvented strategically. For instance, many of Acosta's entries convey his understanding of life and interpersonal relationships. Explicating his position on those issues and his relations to those events and figures, Acosta can establish his blogging community by appealing to audiences from other communities. For example, supporters of Yu Qiuyu established Chinese writer and culture commentator, would be drawn to Acosta's blog due to his support of Yu. Yu has been heavily criticized by non-governmental scholars for his misdeeds during the Great Cultural Revolution and some of his pro-Party performances on the critical social events of Fenchuan Earthquake in 2008

and Poisonous Baby Formula in 2009. However, he has the support from 'the mainstream' recognized by the Chinese Communist Party. By referring to other blogs, Acosta also advocates his own principles of life. For example, he blogs about his reading of an entry of another blog and explicates his understanding of its topics as the excerpt below shows:

I visited a blogger and read his sixteen principles of life. Everyone has their own principles of life, each of which is individual and glowing with beauty. In the past twenty years of my life, I have memorized some by heart and made a record of them (Acosta 50).

Using others' words, views, or opinions may showcase the blogger's connection with others. It may also be a strategic avoidance of imposing his personal views on the audiences and visitors to remain politically correct or neutral. Such a strategy is further displayed in Acosta's reluctance to use adverbs to express direct attitude. Rather, he chooses nouns which can function both as abstract entity and modifiers with a suffix *de* (的), which converts a noun into an adjective. Acosta's attempt to use descriptive noun phrases and figures of speech may be a sign of his literary mastery. That is, experienced writers are more likely to convey their voices using sophisticated literary devices rather than imposing on their readers by making direct statements. The avoidance of using four-lettered phrases (*sizichengyu*) in constructing his attitude also demonstrates his writing techniques, consequently creating an agentive and authorial voice in his blogging.

STRATEGICALLY BLOGGING MASCULINITIES

As the analysis in the above two section has shown, Acosta's blogging is inevitably gendered performance in response to the socially emergent desire for new men and new masculinities. In the past 30 odd years, men in post-Mao Chinese society have become very different from what they were at the time when Mao was in power. Chinese young men living in the time of digitalization and globalization enjoy greater social mobility and participation. Compared with the old generations, their lifestyles are developed with decreasing consideration of social solidarity (and/or conformity) and increasing awareness of individuality or the 'self'. In the media, however, Chinese young men are framed as being amid a so-called 'men's crisis' in which men are criticized for being overpowered by women's rise in the public sphere (Yang, 2010). In 2007, for instance, a featured news story reported that about 85% of higher education enrolment in Anhui Province consists of female students and suggested that action be taken to 'save boys' (Huang, 2007). In one way or another, young men who were born after

1970s have been demonized as irresponsible, less disciplined, and ill-mannered, showing little respect for their elders and for some moralities such as loyalty, piety, and hard work.In contrast, Acosta's male identity is positively projected as a young man born in the 1980s (*baling hou*), a generation which is becoming the mainstream of Chinese society and as a typical metropolitan young man at the intersections between globalization, internationalization, and digitalization intersect. His is a cultivated new man, young, well-educated with a literary mastery, evident awareness and understanding of cultural aspects, and a good command of foreign language and arts. His man is well off, peaceful, and calm (controlled and moderate), capable (and perhaps powerful or resourceful) of handling various complex situations.

A question that is pivotal to this article's aim thus arises from the contrast; that is, in what way has the blogger managed in remaking such desired masculinities? The following will focus on scrutinising the performative acts the have been employed in acting those masculinities.

Situating masculinities

It seems that the masculine performances on Acosta's blog closely cater to social dynamics of Chinese society, mainly, the changing positions of the youth and the urbanization caused by industrialization, commercialization, and globalization (Xia, 2007). The metaphorical association of Acosta's young man with the growing expectation and participation of the young in Chinese society is noticeable. For example, in contemporary China, the hierarchy of age in which age is more valued than youth has been reconstructed and young people are claiming more power from their elders (Frolic and Brook, 1997). Catchphrases such as 'staying young forever' (*yongbaoqingchun)* reflect growing concerns building up among the older generation over these challenges.

Acosta's young man, though still clinging to images of immaturity and irresponsibility, capitalizes on desires for power, charm, passion, and the future. Acosta's male image is also representative of the urbanizing lifestyle among Chinese young people. His physical appearance, his body language, his dress, and his residence symbolize social transitions that have been driven by the urbanization process, showing little resemblance to images of the countryside. In most of Acosta' blogging, agrarian landscapes such as villages and towns are distantly backgrounded (as exotic resorts) and pragmatically distanced (as poverty-stricken), such as in the entry in which he recounted his unsuccessful attempt to experience solitude in a mountain village. For city residents, life in the countryside may evoke idyllic imagination but is surely not liveable in reality (Sanders et al., 2007). The urbanity emanating through Acosta's blogging

then signifies a critical transition of Chinese masculinity from tradition to modernity.

Further, Acosta's masculinity is distantly related to class. For one things, Acosta seems to have connections to the upper class of Chinese society, as he did not show any concern over obtaining financial support for his travelling overseas, which for the majority of the Mainland Chinese is still a luxury and requires meticulous financial planning (Dillon, 2009; Naughton, 2007). In addition to wealth, location is also an important indicator of the blogger's "classed" body (socioeconomic status). The blogger usually lives geographically in the downtown of Beijing, the heart of Beijing as a representative of Chinese politics and cultures, and sometimes in Shanghai, the biggest city and the financial centre of Mainland China, which can be recognized through the photos as well as the written texts.

For another thing, the debate on Acosta's economic wellbeing is perhaps reflexive of Chinese society's economic progress as well as ideological shift. The longing for wealth goes hand in hand with capitalist marketization endorsed by Deng Xiaoping since 1978 that has transformed China from material deprivation to affluence (Zheng, 2005). The society's acceptance of wealth as a symbol of social status as well as power implicates the revival of the necessity of certain social classes (Goodman, 2007). Meanwhile, the lifestyle of the rising class is also constructed, represented, and disseminated, stabilized, and imitated by the mainstream of society (Dillon, 2009). This allows the assumption that the middle class or social group is the key group that maintains a society's solidarity and that the middle class is the most important force in the process of democratization.

Reconciling masculinities

Acosta's muscular performance shows compliance with particular norms of interpersonal and social relations. Relational norms refer to bloggers' social networking with other people. For example, four types of relations are represented in Acosta's blogging: peers, colleagues, elders, and supporters in his blogsite and entries. By delineating his social network, Acosta draws a relational border for the man and his performance. Wharton (2005) uses the term homophily to describe people's preference for sameness in interpersonal relations; that is, social ties tend to be between people who are similar on salient socio-demographic dimensions. Social ties reflect people's preferences and are reinforced and developed in the groups to which people belong. Homophily occurs because social ties are shaped by the opportunities presented to people in groups. According to Wharton, "[w]e do not encounter people who are seriously different enough from us frequently enough for them to become social network contacts" (2005, p. 9).

Acosta's social network outlines his positioning of himself in the community as well as others and his blogging has to respond constantly to their gaze for better survival. That is, relational content shows his awareness of his audience and his evaluation of their status. Acosta's connection to other celebrities, famous bloggers, and big names may instigate the audience's admiration for his social networks and therefore his powers. Acosta's association with social networks reworks not only the blogger as who he is but also the audiences' perception of his social reality.

Revoking masculinities

In performing his Chinese new man, Acosta revitalizes two interrelated traditional imaginations of men in his blogging. The first type is a Confucius ideal of men or gentlemen (*junzi*) which is integral of loyalty, piety, knowledge, and ability (Toader, 2010). A Confucius gentleman, as summarized in the section Daxue of Liji (a Chinese classic about social orders), acquires the aptitude of mastering knowledge, managing his family, governing a state, and maintaining world peace (*xiushenqijiazhiguo ping tianxia*). This male identification, in other words, celebrates men's moral integrity and their social responsibility which has been worshiped by Chinese men, especially male scholars as idealized masculinity in the past millenniums (Huang, 2006). Song (2004), however, through examining the historical discourse of Junzi, points out that this male ideal may be otherwise regarded as an effeminized masculinity that signifies lower-class men's submission and loyalty to higher-class men in a patriarchal or autocratic power system.

Acosta's adolescent romance with a girl nicknamed L is regulated by dynamics of secrecy and confession. In Fletcher's (2008) view, romance narratives take the strained relations between the knowing and the un-knowing as their impetus and force. The conjunction of secrecy and confession mobilizes certain meanings of heterosexuality. Yet, on a continuum with the image of a Confucius gentleman, Acosta's romance may also relate his man to a particular gender relation known as the scholar (caizi) and the beauty (jiaren) romance in Chinese literary classics. Prototypes of this scholar-beauty (caizi-jiaren) romance usually feature romances between young male scholars of humble origin and young women from up-class families. Their romance would always inflict pressures from the woman's family and end with a happy marriage of the couple.

Similar to a Confucius gentleman, this popular male image of scholar is also effeminized as a submission to power. In Song's (2004) view, the difference between a Confucius gentleman and a scholar lies in the emergence of women in the scholar-beauty construct. This addition allows more room for romance and sexual relations that were previously absent in the construct of a Confucius gentry masculinity; still, the underlying construct is a hierarchical power structure built upon men's dominance over women, and the control of the powerful over the powerless (Song, 2004). The custom of Chinese lower-ranked officials to compare themselves to women or concubines (*qie*/*qieshen*) in written communication with higher-ranked officials is a typical manifestation of this construct. Acosta's new man may, then, be realized through reviving and remixing these traditional male images.

Hijacking masculinities

The obsession with a grassroots identity on the Chinese blogosphere originates from the ideal widely held by early Internet researchers that the Internet was able to flatten human social structures because of its anarchic structure and interactive communication mode (Goldsmith and Wu, 2006; Thurlow et al., 2004). The scope and potential for common people to participate actively in influencing popular sentiment could be enhanced, especially with the emergence of Web 2.0 technologies such as blogs and Wikis, which seem to herald an exile of the social elites. Similar nostalgic social emotions for the grassroots power is taking shape in the society of Mainland China as the whole society has been transiting from an egalitarian socialism to a market capitalist ideology (Cai et al., 2008; Li, 2005). The economic gap among different social groups is enlarging and class differentiation deepening alongside China's fast economic growth. All these changes have been transformed into Chinese society's yearning for grassroots heroes while embarking on celebrity frenzy. These kinds of social emotions are in tandem with Chinese traditional narratives in which poor students or scholars worked hard to be selected by emperors as high officials through state examinations, and were then rewarded with power to govern people as well as marriage with a beautiful woman or several women (Song, 2004).

Acosta's strategy regarding this identification is, however, double-sided. He collaborated with the media on several occasions when he was interviewed and denied inquiries about his background insisting that he was as average as everyone was. In his blogging such as the entry jdgy e03, he claimed that he did not live elsewhere beyond China. In entry Acosta e09, he recollected his experience that his mother rode her bike to take him to choir early on cold winter mornings. The second relates to the position the blog occupied in Xinlang's (the blog service provider) marketing strategy for promoting its blog hosting service. Following its huge success of hosting celebrity blogs (*mingrenboke*) in 2005, Xinlang moved on to provide a blog service to average users that Xinlang's

team publicly defined as grassroots bloggers (*caogenboke*). Grassroots blogging enabled average Xinlang customers to open their blogs free, with limitations on using certain blog functions and features. Xinlang also encouraged the grassroots blog to pursue fame, selecting a number of the most visited blogs on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis as the recommended blog and placed these in its A-list ranking. Acosta's blog was probably one of the most successful cases of this marketing manoeuvre.

The above analysis and discussion disclose that by exploiting various masculinities (e.g., traditional, global, urban, educated, metropolitan, revolutionary), the personal blog revokes the revolutionary image of man (of being strong, massively built, loud, and unclean) from Mao's period and created new images and performances of Chinese young men. Acosta's masculine performance, genteel and feminized on the surface, may otherwise be seen as a revitalization of Chinese male power. By responding to the mainstream society, Acosta's young man is associated with traditional male images of Confucius gentlemen or scholars recurring in Chinese classics and literature as physically soft (*shouwufujizhili*), gentle (*wenwenerya*), and knowledgeable (*manfujinglun/ xuefuwuche*). Acosta's young man is then ostentatiously a revival and remix of traditional Confucius male images and norms with the globalized imagination of men in response to the dominant ideological construct in digitalising China. Such gendered performances may assist in establishing a new masculine order for the younger generations in China.

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