

Representations of Chinese Masculinities: A Case Study of Jackie Chan

PatipatAuprasert

Abstract

Are the patterns of masculinity dependent upon culture? Masculinity appears distorted through cultural misrepresentations. To validate or discard this hypothesis, the researcher draws upon selected works of Jackie Chan who is a veteran of three moviemaking cultures. The research method uses the interplay between hegemonic masculinity, ethnic masculinity and social masculinity, explicated in accordance with a model of masculinity by combining a theoretical framework put forth by Connell and Foucault. The findings are not surprising, as in the context of dominant cultures, hegemonic masculinity appears to be superior to ethnic masculinity. In movies where ethnic masculinity does not appear, a show of masculinity from competition among males in differing social classes is utilized. Those with higher social class are shown to be not always superior to those with a lower social class. Additionally, movies have portrayed equal masculinity power, irrespective of different social classes.

Keywords: Jackie Chan, hegemonic masculinity, ethnic masculinity

รูปแบบของการแสดงภาพความเป็นชายจีนอยู่กับวัฒนธรรมไหนหรือไม่? รูปแบบความเป็นชายจะถูกบิดเบือนในวัฒนธรรมที่แตกต่าง เพื่อที่จะทดสอบแนวคิดนี้ผู้วิจัยคัดสรร

ภาพยนตร์นำแสดงโดยแจ็กกี้ ชาน. แจ็กกี้ ชานเป็นนักแสดงชายที่เป็นตัวแทนในสามวัฒนธรรมของ อเมริกัน ฮองกง และ จีนแผ่นดินใหญ่ โดยที่ในงานวิจัยนี้จะทำการตรวจสอบใน 5 ภาพยนตร์ เดอะทักซิโด้, ช่างไม้, เดอะเมเดลลอน, เดอะโพลีสสตอรี และ 1911 แนวทางการวิจัยจะใช้ทฤษฎีหลักโดยคอลแนลโดยมีทฤษฎีรองโดยฟอคอลล์ และนักทฤษฎีอื่นๆ. วิธีการอธิบายจะใช้หลัก ความเป็นชายผู้นำ ความเป็นชายเชื้อชาติ และความเป็นชายตามสังคมบรรยายคู่กับทฤษฎีหลัก. ผลการวิจัยปรากฏว่าในวัฒนธรรมหลักงานความเป็นชายของวัฒนธรรมหลักดูเหมือนจะเหนือกว่าความเป็นชายเชื้อชาติ แต่ในภาพยนตร์ที่ไม่ปรากฏตัวละครของชายต่างชาติในเรื่องก็แสดงให้เห็นว่าผู้ชายที่มีฐานะในสังคมสูงกว่าไม่จำเป็นต้องเหนือกว่าผู้ชายที่มีฐานะสังคมต่ำกว่าในทุกเรื่อง

Introduction

Masculinity is a field of study which focuses on studying the elements of manhood in a specific society. However, masculinity itself is not related to biological sex. Priola (2009: 546) states that “masculinity refers to values, meanings, and behaviors culturally associated with men. It represents concepts associated with gender identities and practices and does not necessarily coincide with the categories of men.”

There is a clear conclusion that a man is valued by his behaviors which create meaning in a specific society. The concept of men also varies due to cultural differences. In recent years, masculinity in the plural form (i.e. masculinities) is widely used in the recognition that the forms of masculinity are varying from one culture to another. This concept is strengthened by gender theorists. Brod (1987) and Kaufman (1994) (qtd. in Hearn and Kimmel 2006: 56) state that: “the concept of masculinities in the plural has been extremely important over the last twenty years in widening the analysis of men and masculinities within the gender order.” This statement confirms that there are many patterns of masculinity. Also, by using this

plural form, the analysis of men can be researched deeply by dividing it into small cultural units.

Dividing the analysis of men into a small unit is challenging in terms of intercultural knowledge. Said (1978:3) states, “a Western style [is] for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.” The Western cultures have an influence over the Asian ones, leading to problematic representations. It is interesting that masculinity study is a field where the gender concept, originally derived from the Western academics, can be distorted if applied to the Asian discourse.

This research is, accordingly, implemented to validate or discard the hypothesis that the representation of masculinity is different in various cultures. It aims to answer the research question: How is the masculinity of Jackie Chan’s character represented by the different film cultures in the US (Hollywood), Hong Kong and mainland China?

Jackie Chan is a Hong Kong film star who has a distinct masculinity. The researcher analyzes movies through Jackie Chan’s films. Remarkably, there are many forms of masculinity of Jackie Chan, a leading actor represented in Hollywood, Hong Kong and mainland Chinese film traditions. Chan is, hence, a fitting subject of the research to test the hypothesis.

Theoretical Framework and Criteria for Scene Selection

To study the representation of manliness, there are some important theories stated by Connell (2005: 74) in the *three-model approach* which covers its outer part (masculinities and power), social part (masculinities and production) and inner part (masculinities and emotional attachment). Nevertheless, to strengthen the notion by Connell, the researcher applies other important theories, such as those by Foucault (1982: 68) in the

support of masculinity and power. Consider the details of the model below:

Masculinities and Power is divided into four main types.

Physicality: Connell (2006: 45) claims that “true masculinities are always thought to proceed from men’s bodies that men are supposed to be muscular.” Being muscular is a point which makes men more attractive. This element is adopted in representation of men in the media. This phenomenon can be observed in visual media as movies, magazines. This type is categorized in fitness and muscularity. Neuendorf’s study (2002: 85) further reveals that the perpetrator or the victim of physical aggression should be incorporated in observation of a man’s physicality.

Economics discusses the notion that a rich man is more masculine than a poor one. Remarkably, there is a close relationship with the concept of a model of modern Chinese masculinities. Song (2010: 425) points out that “as a result of the redistribution of wealth and power and the emergence of the nouveau riche in post socialist society, masculinity is now primarily defined in terms of wealth. New images of successful businessmen pervade Chinese popular culture. As a collective imagination and projection, they express fundamental male anxiety engendered by a profound change of power relations in society.” The nouveau riche emerges in this period, resulting in the changing of ideologies of citizen. They always respect those with wealth. Consequently, those with wealth are perceived as more masculine.

Structural power, also so-called political power or social power, is power relevant to a position of a society. Those who are in a higher position have the advantages of using the power to govern on those with a lower position. The structural power is always related to social class. Mu (2005: 8) states that “*wen* officials came to enjoy

higher positions than *wu* officials did. The *wen* officials are more masculine than those with the *wu*.” Mu also indicates *wen* is a model of hegemonic masculinity in terms of intellectual man, while *wu* is in terms of warrior (5). This ideology is derived from Confucianism. In Chinese perspective, it is believed that those with higher position are more masculine. They have more coercive power and the ability to govern others as well. Neuendorf (2002: 85) adds that in the relation on structural power, men can be both a perpetrator and a victim of such power.

Morality: Mangan (2011:15) supports that “the middle-class hero is moral messenger.” This idea introduces that heroic masculinity must have morality as standard especially the middle-class hero. (The middle-class hero is one who strives for another social class and to overcome the conflicts by having morality as a basis.) Regardless of cultures, morality is an important element for being heroes.

Masculinities and Production isto compare maleness to the social unit in which there is an inequality in terms of rights since this model believes that rights are determined by social construction; in others words, it is social class. Owing to the difference of social class, the masculinities are varying. Those with a higher position can exploit their powers on those with lower one. Race is a factor affecting the social status. This will be illustrated in some movies discussed in this research of in Hollywood and Hong Kong film culture. This ideology is a comparison of social class of Chan’s character to the other men.

Masculinities and Emotional Attachment introduces dominance and non-dominance emotion. The dominance emotion is able to manipulate other characters, whereas non-dominance one cannot.

Along with the explication on the model above, there are two terminologies involved, which are *hegemonic masculinity* and *ethnic masculinity*. Connell (2006: 21) states that “the forms of

masculinity which are culturally dominant in a given setting are called hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic signifies a position of cultural authority and leadership, not total dominance; other forms of masculinity persist alongside.” The term, *hegemonic masculinity*, is used to determine a model of a man with power to govern others in a particular society; in other words, *hegemonic masculinity* is considered as leadership, including cultural leadership. Cultural hegemony also adopts hegemonic masculinity in the representations. Abele (2003: 151) states that “masculinities are different within ethnic groups such as Asian-American masculinity, black-American masculinity, etc. Ethnic differences within a society lead both to direct competition between men and to competing standards of masculinity. Ethnic masculinities, therefore, contribute to and challenge a society’s construction of masculinity.” *Ethnic masculinity* is competing with the masculinity in the dominant culture. For example, in US American culture, Chinese masculinity which is considered as ethnic has to compete with the standard of Western masculinity. However, “in the dominant culture, ethnic masculinity can be hegemonic”, as is stated by (Patell 2003: 152).

There are three main foci on representations of masculinities:

1. *Masculinities and power* consists of four points in physicality, economics, structural power and morality.
2. *Masculinities and production* is a theory which relates maleness to the production of a society. This paper will collapse this entity into structural power in masculinities and power since it is closely related to social class/status.
3. *Masculinities and emotional attachment* is an issue relevant to maleness and emotion. The emotion of the character on the changing environment is a factor to be observed.

It is noted that the main model is derived from by Connell’s. The researcher adjusts this model by raising some theories for additional

support, such as the theories of power by Foucault, and adjusts some elements to apply them to Asian contexts. In order to examine, validate or discard the hypothesis, the researcher applies the concepts of masculinity and representations of masculinity to the films *The Tuxedo* (Hollywood, 2002), *Shanghai Noon* (Hollywood, 2000), *The Medallion* (Hong Kong, 2003), *The Police Story* (Hong Kong, 1984) and *1911* (mainland China, 2011).

Based on these five movies, the researcher focuses on ten to fifteen crucial scenes in which Jackie Chan appears in a prominent role, and with the observation of these elements:

1. **The masculinity in the dominant culture:** Western men in Hollywood films and Jackie Chan's character in Hong Kong film culture.
2. **Ethnic masculinity culture:** Jackie Chan's character in Hollywood film and Western men in Hong Kong film culture.
3. **Social masculinity:** Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children (2005:8) writes that "men are aggressive and competitive". This statement confirms the idea of strong competition among men of the same race. The scene emphasizes the interaction among the characters, regardless of race, to best explain the elements according to *three-model* method.

Analysis of Selected Scenes

For Hollywood film practice, the dominant masculinity seems to belong to Western masculinity, while Jackie Chan showcases ethnic masculinity. Below is how this film tradition presents his masculinity.

The Tuxedo (US, 2002): Jackie Chan in the character of Jimmy Tong. Tong is a spy who performs the task instead of his

commander, Devlin. He has to stop the illegal experimental lab in the cooperation with a scientist, Blanie.

Physicality: Fitness and Muscularity: The scene at 01:12:00 – 01:12:24 indicates that Blanie forces Tong to take the tuxedo off because she finds out that Tong is not Devlin. Jimmy Tong has almost taken off all the clothes except for his vest and shorts. The complete muscles in which triceps and biceps have shown are noted. His muscles are vivid when Tong moves. His masculinity is portrayed as a strong man through his muscles. Compared to Western masculinity, Tong looks a bit superior since there is no obvious scene showing Western man with the muscles.

Showing Physical Strength: Tong shows great physical strength mostly through fighting criminals. He has been proving his superiority against criminals in many ways. Tong is a winner in majority of fighting. In an American context, Tong who is considered to portray Chinese ethnic masculinity has to compete with the American masculinity. It seems that in terms of martial arts skills, ethnic masculinity has superiority over American masculinity. Patell (2003: 152) states that “Jackie Chan is an example of original ethnic masculinity where his martial arts talent is outstanding enough to be his advantage over hegemonic or transplanted ethnic masculinities.”

Perpetrator and Victim of Economic Power: The scene at 00:10:10-00:10:50 shows that the female passenger tries to offer him a job but at the beginning, Tong refuses by raising the excuse that he has a high paid job already. Right away after that woman proposes a better one, Tong changes his mind to get her offer. Chinese ethnic masculinity in this case is lessened by the dominant culture where there is another theory to support. This idea is supported by Baranovitch (2003: 132): “The return of the more traditional, soft type of male images to the fact that capitalism has empowered women with an unprecedented ability to directly

influence not only culture but also the construction of manhood.” The dominant culture takes the emergence of women to dwindle Chinese ethnic masculinity in the context of American culture.

Structural Power and Social Class: Because he is a taxi driver, he is mostly controlled by those who have the higher social status. Hollywood film tradition tries to lessen Chinese masculinity by lowering his status. On the contrary, the character in dominant culture seems to have a higher social status.

Morality: Tong is represented as a man with virtue. This notion is mentioning about helping others without anticipation of the payback. The scene shows that after Blanie finally finds that Tong is not Devlin, she expels Tong. Tong finally comes back to save her since now Tong has another special tuxedo functioning as the previous one. He has high moral standard since even though he can ignore this woman and also the mission, he does not.

Masculinities and Emotional Attachment: There are three sorts of emotions. Firstly, Tong lacks confidence to flirt with a woman. This kind is categorized as non-dominance type since Tong cannot dominate others. Secondly, in terms of fighting, he looks confident and shows his aggressiveness. This is a dominance type. Thirdly, Tong has a sense of humor and looks carefree. This is a non-dominance type. In conclusion, Tong shows a combination of dominance and non-dominance types of emotions.

***Shanghai Noon* (US, 2000): Jackie Chan in the character of Chon Wang.** Wang is an imperial guard. He has a mission to retrieve the princess Pei-Pei in the US. During the way, He meets Roy who later becomes his close friend.

Physicality: Fitness and Muscularity: The scene at 01:04:40 – 01:06:30 shows the main characters in a bath tub where Chon Wang and his American companion are shirtless. Wang is as muscular as his companion. There is no difference between American masculinity and Chinese masculinity in this issue.

Showing Physical Strength: Wang's masculinity has been portrayed in two ways. Firstly, he shows his strengths by fighting against a number of criminals and by his talents such as using his hand to hold a part of a train. Chinese masculinity is superior to American here since there is no such portrayal of his American companion.

Perpetrator and Victim of Physical Aggression: Wang is both perpetrator and victim of physical aggression. Mostly he is a perpetrator. Chinese masculinity, consequently, looks superior. However, sometimes he is a victim of physical aggression but not always. Such portrayal shows his toughness.

Structural Power and Social Class: Wang is an imperial guard. He is perceived as being low class since he is still under higher powers such as the princess and the emperor. The scene at 01:15:09– 01:25:16 takes place in a church where the enemies and the persons who are sent from the palace to get the princess back, as the head of person brings the message from the emperor and reads it aloud. Wang pays respect and has to comply with the message. Furthermore, he is discriminated in Western society in some ways. The scene shows that he dresses in a Chinese gown walking into a Western pub. Every Westerner laughs at him as if he were an alien. Moreover, he is thrown by two Western guys. Because of his lower social class in terms of race, compared to Westerners, his masculinity is declined since the scenes above explain that he is a victim according to a lower social status. In the dominant context, Chinese masculinity is lessened by American context through discrimination.

Morality: Wang has proven his morality. The scene at 00:21:49 – 00:24:50 implies that he sees a boy who has no way to fight against those men. He decides to help him, although he has no weapons. This notion is compatible with a man of virtue.

Masculinities and Emotional Attachment: Wang shows a combination of dominance and non-dominance type of emotion. Aggressiveness in fighting makes him look dominant while his funny manner looks emotional and is considered non-dominance.

In Hong Kong film tradition, Jackie Chan has changed roles from ethnic masculinity to masculinity in the dominant culture. Below is explained how dominant culture presents his masculinity.

***The Medallion* (Hong Kong, 2003): Jackie Chan in the character of Eddie Yang.** Yang is a police officer. He has to rescue the child from the criminal lord Sneakhead. Watson is his colleague to perform this mission.

Physicality: Fitness and Muscularity: The scene at 00:43:40 – 00:44:50 shows that Yang, who has died already, lying on the bed. Suddenly his naked spirit appears beside his body. It is interesting that there is not even one scene showing his companion's physique. Chinese masculinity looks superior to Western masculinity in the context of Hong-Kong Chinese culture.

Showing Physical Strength: Yang has simply shown his physical strength. Firstly, he shows his capacities to deal with many enemies. In this case, his masculinity is enhanced since he looks aggressive and finally can beat all the criminals. Secondly, he uses some equipment to show his competence. The scene shows that Yang goes down in the sewers by swiping down the pipe. This proves how strong he is since it is uncommon to do so by ordinary people.

Perpetrator and Victim of Physical Aggression: Yang is mostly a perpetrator of physical aggression but sometimes is a victim. However, being a victim is not permanent and shows his toughness. Although almost harmed to death, he is able to counterattack and overcome those criminals. Chinese masculinity still looks superior to Western masculinity in the Hong Kong context.

Structural Power and Social Class: Because of being a police officer, his social status is middle class. This movie does not explain much how he uses the power to govern other characters. It shows how he devotes his life to his career instead. He never has a quarrel with Watson, although sometimes Watson tries to show power over him. There is no scene showing that he is a victim according to the social class. According to this category, the dominant culture does not show the superiority of his masculinity over Western masculinity.

Masculinities and Emotional Attachment: There is a combination of dominance and non-dominance type of emotion. Yang looks funny almost the entire movie and cannot dominate others. This is considered as a non-dominance type. However, Yang looks courageous and can dominate other characters. So this type of emotion is considered as a dominance type of emotion.

***The Police Story* (Hong Kong, 1984):** Jackie Chan plays the character of Kevin Chan. Chan is a police officer. He has the mission to arrest the criminal lords Tao-Chu.

Physicality: Fitness and Muscularity: The scene at 00:42:17-00:43:14 takes place in a toilet, where he is almost naked. The muscles are vividly seen and his muscle strength is confirmed, whereas none of scenes demonstrate the muscular physique of other men characters.

Showing Physical Strength: There are mainly two ways in which this film culture portrays his physical strength. Firstly, Chan is mostly exaggerated in his action; in other words, such action cannot exist in real life because it is uncommon to perform such tasks by ordinary people. The scene demonstrates that Chan is chasing the opponents by running to follow the bus where the opponents are. Secondly, the film culture tries to have a number of opponents to fight with Chan since it confirms how strong he is. Also, the professional fighting skills are sometimes shown as well.

Perpetrator and Victim of Physical Aggression: The scene at 00:11:20- 00:14:00 indicates that Chan is fighting against enemies to get the bag with important evidences. Some scenes show that he can beat them up but some show that he is a victim. No matter how difficult it is, Chan makes his effort to achieve the mission. The criminals he fights against are objects to enhance Chan's masculinity. Those criminals do not only look non-muscular but also unskillful in fighting. They can just be victims of Chan and increase Chan's masculinity since his fighting is timeless, compared to theirs.

Structural Power and Social Class: Chan is perceived as a member of the middle class. He is an inspector but his position is not high. He is pressured by those who are in the higher position. However, he can command his colleague who is in the lower position. According to the lower social class, he is almost harmed by those who have higher social class but finally he is not.

Masculinities and Emotional Attachment: There is a combination of dominance and non-dominance emotion. Slapstick is non-dominance emotion while courage and aggression are dominance emotion.

For mainland China film culture, *1911* is recognized as a propaganda tool. Consequently, the masculinity of Jackie Chan's character is different from that of the movie for commerce.

***1911* (mainland China, 2011): Jackie Chan in the character of Huang Xing.** Xing is a general commander. He helps Sun YutSen to achieve the revolution.

Physicality: Showing Physical Aggression: Like in other movies, the film culture has been representing his physical strength in terms of fighting but this movie will be mostly through aggression. The scene implies that a few enemies injure him. He starts fighting with them himself and finally can beat all of them and let the soldiers in his troop arrest them. Based on this scene, one can see how aggressive he is because he himself starts the fight, and how strong

his physique is since he is the only one fighting against them. He beats them all. The more enemies he fights against, the more physical strength he shows.

Perpetrator and Victim of Physical Aggression: Xing is both perpetrator and victim of physical aggression. The scenes in this movie which portray him as a victim are more than those in other movies. Thus, his masculinity is not as strong as in the other movies in terms of physical strength whereas his physical strength and courage are stronger.

Structural Power and Social Class: Xing's social class is relatively high since he is a leader of the revolution in military aspect. In this movie, his position is under YutSen who is the highest leader in the revolution, but the role of Xing is also obvious as a leader. The other members of the party listen to Xing too; in other words, his dominant power is high.

Morality: Xing is considered as having high moral standard. There are many scenes to show that he is injured in the battle field. Although his members are taking him off the field, he insists on fighting. Even if losing some fingers due to being attacked, he still leads the troop until the end. He has never been discouraged, even though his troop is defeated sometimes. He, on the contrary, encourages his members and is always a good leader who has never abandoned the team.

Masculinities and Emotional Attachment: Xing looks courageous and strong. These emotions are regarded as dominance type. There is no scene to portray him as funny or humorous. The majority of scenes accentuate his aggressiveness to fight against his enemies, showing his mission orientation.

Conclusion

The study confirms the hypothesis that the representation of masculinity portrayed by Jackie Chan is different in various film cultures.

The central question is: How is masculinity of Jackie Chan's character represented by the different film cultures in US (Hollywood), Hong Kong and mainland China? To answer this question in short: Jackie Chan's characters are represented differently by these three film cultures. Below is the detailed answer. It is based the model put forth in the first part of the article.

Physicality: Fitness and Muscularity: Hollywood and Hong Kong films have been representing Chan as a muscle macho. In terms of ethnic masculinity and dominant masculinity, there is insignificant difference between Chinese and Western manliness in the aspect of power in American context, whereas Chinese masculinity is superior to Western masculinity in the Hong Kong context. Mainland China films, however, have not been representing him a muscular man.

Showing physical strength: Jackie Chan is portrayed as having physical strength through fighting. There are some elements to make him more masculine. Firstly, he himself has a capability to fight against many criminals. Many times, he has proven his self-strength through using or dealing with some equipment. In terms of ethnic masculinity and dominant masculinity, both in Hong Kong and American contexts, Chinese masculinity is superior to Western masculinity. Mainland film practice, on the contrary, shows that he is strong because of the high tolerance in the battle.

Being a perpetrator and/or victim of physical aggression: Chan is, apparently, represented as a perpetrator of physical aggression but he has never been initiating. There must be someone provoking him. Sometimes he is also a victim of physical aggression. Many times, he is shown as almost being defeated by criminals but for a while he

himself is able to counterattack and prevail. By portraying Jackie Chan as being a perpetrator and victim of physical aggression, his masculinity is strengthened since this practice shows his high tolerance. Such portrayal is adopted by three film practices. In Hollywood and Hong Kong film tradition, the criminals who fight against Chan are objects to enhance Chan's masculinity.

Economics: This element is not obvious regardless of film cultures. However, Hollywood sometimes has adopted this element as a way to emasculate his masculinity, as is seen in *The Tuxedo* (2002).

Structural power and social class: This power is related to social status. Jackie Chan's character is quite low in terms of social class. In Hollywood film, his masculinity has been lessened by discrimination in Chinese ethnic or his low-end jobs. His character has low structural power but is harmed by such power instead, considered as victim of structural power. In Hong Kong film practice, his character is perceived as middle class while he has power. He is not completely a victim and perpetrator of structural power. In mainland China film, Chan has been starring as a general commander. The character is considered as a perpetrator of structural power. Chan's character has a high social status while he has never used such power in a wrong way but only in the military.

In accordance with the theory of *wen-wu* stated by Mu (2008:5), all three film practices portray Chan as having as the idealistic masculinity in the *wen-wu* aspect. He is represented as smart in solving a number of strategies. This confirms a model of an intellectual man or *wen*. He is portrayed as a master of fighting. This strengthens a model of the warrior, or *wu*. However, if emphasizing the social power and position where *wen* is higher than *wu*, only, the portrayal by mainland film culture shows *wen*.

Morality: These three film cultures have represented him as having high moral standard. Chan's character in almost every movie has

capability to nurture or help others from the criminals. Mangan (2011) states that “the middle-class hero is a moral messenger.” This idea introduces that heroic masculinity must have morality as standard. Regardless of cultures, morality is an important element for being a hero.

Masculinities and Emotional Attachment: Jackie Chan is portrayed as being aggressive in fighting. He looks confident and mission-oriented. No obstacles can stop him towards his aims. Also, in Hollywood and Hong Kong film cultures, Jackie Chan is represented as funny in terms of acting or thoughts. In Hollywood film practice, his slapstick makes his masculinity inferior to Western men. In mainland film culture, Chan’s character is portrayed solely as aggressive. This film practice consequently shows just his dominance type of emotion.

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