Junzi Masculinity and Woman in *Half of Man Is Woman*

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ABSTRACT

Through a reading of Zhang Xianliang's *Half of Man Is Woman*, this article argues that the ideal of "masculinity" defined two thousand years ago in Chinese culture is still alive today, and serves as a major paradigm for modern Chinese intellectuals. But it also suggests that women are programmed into the author's step-by-step project of reconstructing a lost masculinity for his protagonist. Since its publication in 1986, *Half of Man Is Woman* has prompted a large number of critiques, mostly static analyses focusing on the relationship between sexuality and politics. Adopting a feminist perspective, I will analyze the roles women play in the construction of the emasculation crisis faced by the protagonist and in restoring his lost masculinity. A close reading of the text reveals that (1) the ideal masculinity of the male protagonist derives from Confucianism, rather than Marxist Materialism as the author claims; (2) the central theme of the narrative is "family oppression" (or women's oppression), rather than "political oppression" as many critics contend; and (3) instead of achieving a triumph over women as some critics claim, the protagonist fails to reconstruct his masculinity which has been continuously challenged. He was emasculated not once but twice, first by the state and then by himself. Here I suggest that the masculine ideal of male Chinese intellectuals is structured by a matrix of constant elements: hierarchical power and the state, intellectuals and women, and the philosophical past.

KEY WORDS

gender
emasculation
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hierarchy

Any discussion of Chinese masculinity in the 1980s must include Zhang Xianliang 張賢亮, the first writer of the post-Mao era to deal with impotency and problematic masculinity in his controversial novella, *Half of Man Is Woman* (*Nanren de yiban shi nüren* 男人的一半是女人) (1986. Hereafter *Half of Man*). This paper attempts to read *Half of Man* from a feminist perspective and focuses on the misogynist discourse in the construction (or restoration) of masculinity.

1. Nostalgia for *Junzi* 君子 Masculinity

Half of Man is narrated by the semi-autobiographical persona, Zhang Yonglin 章永璘. Here, a brief reminder of the principal events of the novel lays the groundwork for my analysis. The story describes that Zhang Yonglin marries and finally divorces the passionate Huang Xiangjiu 黃香久, a peasant woman. Zhang's first encounter with Huang Xiangjiu, an inmate charged with a "crime" related to extramarital sex, took place in a labor reform camp in 1966, on the eve of the Cultural Revolution. Due to his tragic fate of being sent in and out of labor reform camps and prisons for most of his adult life, Zhang Yonglin, then age 31, had never had first-hand experience with women. His first encounter with Huang Xiangjiu was a dumfounding, dreamlike scene—she was naked, bathing in a secluded irrigation canal. Eight years later he met Huang Xiangjiu again on a state farm during the peak of the Cultural Revolution. Zhang courted and later married her. Immediately after their marriage, Zhang was in panic because he found out that he was impotent. Huang, unable to live a normal life as a wife, became increasingly frustrated and commited

adultery with Cao Xueyi 曹學義, the Party Secretary of the state farm. In fighting a flood that threatened to inundate the whole village and the state farm, Zhang, the only person able to swim, jumped into the water to plug a hole in the bank—a crucial act that stopped the flood. When Zhang returned home, his body damp and frozen, his wife tried hard to help him avoid getting sick. She intensively massaged his body all over and buried his freezing face between her breasts. Her magical touch eventually revived Zhang's potency. At the age of thirty nine, he became "a real man" and for the first time was able to fulfill his obligations to his wife as a husband. While passionate Huang Xiangjiu was still immersed in happiness for being with a real man she herself had created, Zhang decided to divorce her both because of her secret liaisons with Cao and because of his own ambition to participate in political struggles in the outside world.

Half of Man blames political oppression under the Communist regime not only for physical brutality, but also and most importantly for psychologically "castrating" Chinese intellectuals, and thus entirely depriving them of their creativity. It is interesting to ask why the protagonist Zhang Yonglin 章永璘 is so obsessed with politics, and/or why the author has chosen politics as the context for a discussion of man's potency. We also must inquire into the nature of the ideal of masculinity that the narrative wants to reassert and restore for emasculated Chinese intellectuals. Here Confucius's teachings about the *junzi* provide answers, as the narrative consistently identifies the protagonist with a *junzi* in the tradition of Confucianism.

1.1 Junzi in The Analects

Jun 君 in Chinese refers to "a king," "a lord" or "a monarch," while *zi* 子 means "son"; therefore the original meaning of *junzi* is "son of a king" or a "son of a ruler." Before Confucius's time, *junzi* merely indicated a man's social status by birth. However, in *The Analects* Confucius gives the term a special meaning. A *junzi* must be a person who possesses both profound knowledge and a high level of morality. He "is bound to a particular code of morals and manners; so that the word *chün-tzu* [*junzi*] implies not merely superiority of birth

but also superiority of character and behaviors. Finally the requisite of birth is waived." (Waley 1938, 34) In this sense, "*junzi*" may be used colloquially to refer to a "really good person." Translators variously render the term as "gentleman," "exemplary person," "superior man," "man of honor," "Ideal Man," and "true philosopher." Early Confucian education was in effect the education of a *junzi* (gentlemen). *The Analects*, for example, contain 20 chapters and 503 verses. The term "*junzi*" is used 103 times in 63 verses.[1] The rest of the verses, though not explicitly employing the term "*junzi*", are still direct teachings related to becoming a *junzi*.

The morals of a *junzi* include at least *ren* 仁 (kindness, benevolence, humanity, human perfection), *de* 德 (virtue, integrity, excellence, the radiation of moral power, leading by example), *zhong* 忠 (loyalty, faithfulness, sincerity), *xiao* 孝 (filial piety, respectfulness towards parents and the elderly), *xin* 信 (truthfulness and trustworthiness), and *yi* 義 (righteousness and justice). Among these elements, the most important quality for a *junzi* is *ren*; this is the core of the *junzi* personality and "one of the foundational concepts on which to base his [Confucius's] whole system of philosophy" (Hu 1996, 25). All the other attributes of a *junzi* are an extension of *ren*. The abilities of a *junzi* include his *zhi* 智 (intelligence, knowledge, and erudition), *xing* 行 (action), and *yong* 勇 (courage). The proper behavior or manners of a *junzi* are acquired through training and manifested in *li* 禮—propriety, adherence to rituals, courtesy, decorum, good taste, "being civilized."

The elements summarized above far from exhaust the contents of Confucius' teachings about the *junzi*. However, by following these and other indicators mentioned in *The Analects*, a portrait of the *junzi* emerges by which we can recognize him:

a. Independence of personality (1.1, 15.21, 17.6);
b. Compassion (1.2, 4.4, 8.2, 12.16, 17.3);
c. Self-sacrifice in pursuing the Way (*Dao*, the ultimate reality: 1.14, 4.5, 4.9, 4.10, 4.16, 9.14, 14.2, 14.5, 14.23, 17.3);
d. Self-discipline (1.8, 4.2, 6.27, 12.1, 15.15, 15.19, 16.7);

e. Sense of mission (3.24, 12.20);
f. Sense of justice (2.14, 4.10, 7.31);
g. Sense of loyalty (16.6);
h. Being a man of action (4.24, 7.25, 13.3);
i. Being knowledgeable and keen to learn (1.1, 1.6, 1.14, 2.11, 6.27, 13.3, 16.9, 19.6);
j. Modesty (3.7, 13.3, 13.26, 14.26);
k. Being unselfish, considerate and forgiving (4.15, 6.30, 12.2, 15.24);
l. Being simple and honest (11.19);
m. Ambition in both personal and social achievement (14.2, 8.9, 15.11);
n. Readiness to shoulder great responsibilities (1.8, 8.6, 15.9);
o. Good manner in speech (eschews vulgarity and nonsense, 8.4).[2]

This portrait suggests that a *junzi* is one who reaches a high level in pursuing the Way (*Dao* 道) of self-cultivation. The complex training of a *junzi* prepares men of high quality in both morality and intellect, making them ready to assume the heavy responsibility of assisting the country's rulers. (1.8, 8.7) In reality, this program of education (or self-cultivation) was so stringent that attaining the status of *junzi* seemed quite beyond the reach of most men. "It is not to be expected that a man can become a gentleman without a great deal of hard work or cultivation," as D. C. Lau points out (14).

Song Geng argues that "The *junzi*, who exemplifies the ideal personality in Confucian discourse, is seldom gendered in Confucian classics; the ungendered 'men' thus practically becomes the synonym for 'people'" (214). In Confucian discourse, women are unambiguously categorized as equivalent to "inferior men" (*xiaoren* 小人, "little people") (17.25). Even a woman with high moral standards could still not be regarded as a *junzi*. For example, the mother of the Emperor Wu (the founder of the Zhou Dynasty, roughly 1100–221 B.C.) was a capable woman who assisted her son in overthrowing the Shang Dynasty (roughly 1600–1100 B.C.), but Confucius excluded her from the list of capable ministers just because she was a woman (8.20). In analyzing the conception of gender in *The*

Analects and *The Mencius*, Chan Sin Yee concludes that "The Confucian conception of gender therefore implies the three-fold exclusion of women from political participation, and thus from the ideal of *chün-tzu* [*junzi*, gentlemen] and, consequently, from a Confucian education" (Chan 2000, 120).

1.2 The Ideal Traits of Masculinity in *Half of Man*

In Kam Louie's words, the fictional construction of *wen*-masculinity (where *wen* is cultural attainment) in Zhang Xiangliang's semi-autobiographical *Mimosa* (*Lühuashu* 綠化樹), *Half of Man*, and *Getting Used to Dying* (*Xiguan siwang* 習慣死亡) "reveals how Confucian teachings are supposedly embedded in real individual lives" (59). In particular, the protagonist in *Half of Man*, Zhang Yonglin, wants to possess the masculine traits of a Confucian *junzi*.

First, as many critics have noticed, Zhang Yonglin is obsessed with politics. Simon Leys points out that "Politics . . . was Confucius's first and foremost concern" because "politics is an extension of ethics." (1997, xxiv-xxv) Dawson also states that in general, *The Analects* aims at guiding individuals toward the self-cultivation required to make them fit for government (Dawson 1993, xiii). Here Confucius says: "*Xue er you ze shi* 學而優則仕," "Leisure from politics should be devoted to learning. Leisure from learning should be devoted to politics" [19.13]. This aphorism is known to every Chinese intellectual. A man who is apolitical can never become a *junzi* in the Confucian sense.

But engaging in politics, according to the Confucian *junzi* teachings, means that self-sacrifice and social responsibility must prevail over our personal desires. A scholar should always be ready to sacrifice his personal needs (14.2), even his life (15.9), for the fulfillment of his obligations and pledge of loyalty to his lord. When Zhang Yonglin decides to divorce his wife on the pretext that politics might victimize her, he views his marriage as a minor personal matter to be sacrificed for the lofty cause of political struggle, one in which the fate of his country and people is at stake. Zhang believes an intellectual should be a martyr for his country, just as his *junzi*

predecessors were for their lords. He should not be afraid of losing his life, let alone suffering a radical change in his personal affairs—for instance, losing wife and family.

Secondly, the Confucian principle of self-discipline is seen in Zhang Yonglin's pursuit of proper manners and male sexual abstinence. Confucius set up a series of restrictions for *junzi* which keep them on the narrow path of *li*-propriety. "The Master said: 'Observe the rites in this way: don't look at anything improper; don't listen to anything improper; don't say anything improper; don't do anything improper'" (12.1). Zhang Yonglin identifies himself as a well-educated intellectual and he is very aware of the need for a proper manner in speaking. No matter how hungry he is for sex, he never allows himself to join in his inmates' vulgar banter. Through such self-discipline he maintains his status as a *qianqian junzi* 謙謙君子 (self-disciplined gentleman) and is thus respected by others.

Maintaining a regimen of abstinence from sex means, especially for men (assuming their desire is greater than that of women), gaining power over one's sexual desire. In *The Analects* we hear this story: "The people of Qi sent to Lu a present of singing and dancing girls, Lord Ji Huan accepted them and, for three days, he did not attend court. Confucius left" (18.4). Obviously Confucius saw that Lord Ji Huan was not a self-disciplined ruler and did not deserve his assistance. As Kam Louie rightly points out, self-control is at the center of *junzi* masculinity:

> The answer lies in the Confucian quest for "self-control and returning to righteousness" (*keji fuli*). This precept was meant to be the key to entering the class of gentleman (*junzi*), whose role is to rule over women and other men. Self-control is thus a fundamental prerequisite to control over others.
>
> The most kingly man was king of himself. [Foucault] (Louie 1991, 9)

Zhang Yonglin lays out several excuses for divorcing his wife.

One of these "reasons" which the narrative does not explicitly articulate is Zhang Yonglin's attempt to be self-disciplined. There is no doubt that his wife's young and sexually tempting body attracts him—a man who has just regained his potency at the age of thirty-nine. But he must leave her because he knows clearly that he is experiencing a struggle between soul and flesh (*ling yu rou* 靈與肉). If he fails to overcome his sexual desire, he will not be qualified to be a real gentleman (*junzi*), and thus he will not be able to accomplish great deeds in politics.

Third, Zhang Yonglin, following the example of Confucius, is a man of action. Simon Leys points out that "Confucius was a man of action—audacious and heroic—but ultimately he was also a tragic figure" (1997, xxii). When Zhang Yonglin risks his life by plunging into the water to stop a flood, he feels that his selfless action has fulfilled an intellectual's moral obligation to secure the wellbeing of the people, exactly what a *junzi* (or a *shi*) was supposed to do. He receives the gratitude of the villagers and state farm workers who treat him as a hero; "The time-honored sense of mission peculiar to the Chinese intelligentsia has revived him" (Ngai 1994, 94). Although Zhang is uncertain whether or not, and if so when, he should take action—he makes no attempt to confront his adulterous wife and her sexual partner Cao Xueyi 曹學義—his intention to be a man of action, to do something for the country rather than merely say something, is very clear.

The following table rates Zhang Yonglin as a proper Confucian *junzi* (or *shi*).

Junzi in *The Analects*	Zhang Yonglin
Independence of personality	Yes.
Compassion	Not obvious
Self-sacrifice	Yes.
Self-discipline	Yes.
Sense of mission	Yes.

Sense of justice	Yes and No.
Sense of loyalty	Yes and No.
Man of action	Yes.
Being knowledgeable and keen to learn	Yes.
Modesty	No.
Being unselfish, considerate and forgiving	Yes and No.
Being simple and honest	Yes and No.
Ambition in both personal and social achievement	Yes.
Readiness to shoulder great responsibilities	Yes.
Good manner in speech (eschews vulgarity and nonsense)	Yes.

The "Yes and No" answers refer to Zhang Yonglin's double-standard in his attitude toward the nation, its people and his woman. He shows a strong sense of justice and loyalty to the country and its people, but his misogynous treatment of his wife shows no justice or loyalty; he is honest with his country, but he is cunning in laying out excuses to divorce his wife. (I will elaborate on this point later.) His wife Huang Xiangjiu 黃香久 sees through the insincerity of his "*shua huaying* 耍花樣," "playing around" or "pretending" (282). The critic Zhou Weibo 周惟波 labels him as *weijunzi* 偽君子 (a fake *junzi* or a hypocrite).[3] However, in this particular context a fake *junzi* is still a *junzi*: the focus here is not on the true value of a *junzi* but on the "idea" of being a *junzi*, on the author's attempt to identify his protagonist as a *junzi*. From the above table we can see how many attributes of a *junzi* have been used in the characterization of Zhang Yonglin. Nor is this the end of the author's analogy between Zhang and the Confucian "ideal man." The essence of Zhang Yonglin's self-identification as a *junzi* is his clear demarcation between cultured and uncultured people, and his clear sense of himself as one of the former.

1.3 The *Junzi/Xiaoren* Hierarchy

In *The Analects* there is consistent contrast between the conduct of the *junzi* and that of *xiaoren* (inferior man, "small man"). In 63 of the 103 verses in which the term "*junzi*" appears, we are given a contrast between the conduct of the *junzi* and that of the *xiaoren*. Confucius said: "Those who have innate knowledge are the highest. Next come those who acquire knowledge through learning. Next again come those who learn through the trials of life. Lowest are the common people who go through the trials of life without learning anything" (16.9). And Confucius taught his student Zixia, "Be a noble scholar (*junzi ru* 君子儒), not a vulgar pedant (*xiaoren ru* 小人儒)" (6.13). He also told his students not to make any friends who were moral inferiors (1.8).

A crucial point for the purposes of my discussion here is that in this *junzi/xiaoren* hierarchy, women were categorized as belonging to the class of *xiaoren*, or as being their moral equivalent. "The Master said, 'it is the women and the small men that are especially difficult to deal with. If you are friendly with them, they become insolent. If you keep them at a distance, they resent it" (17.25). This is the only verse in *The Analects* that explicitly reveals attitude toward women, and there have been differing interpretations of the lines. Pointing out that it is unfair to accuse Confucius of gender prejudice on the basis of this single statement,[4] Simon Leys argues that this verse does not lump all women into the same category as *xiaoren* (inferior men); rather, the Master is referring to women within the narrow and specific context of the household.[5]

However, I find Leys's interpretation not very convincing. First, there is no textual evidence to suggest that Confucius is only talking about certain women here, and not about all women. Secondly, the more general category of *xiaoren,* as we derive this from the many uses of the term, seems to have no connection to the "household" context. Finally, "women" seem to have a clearly inferior status in at least six other verses of *The Analects*: (1) Confucius excluded the mother of Emperor Wu from the class of talented and able people

(8.20); (2) Although Gongye Chang was in jail, Confucius considered him innocent and gave him his own daughter in marriage (5.1); (3) Confucius gave Nan Rong his niece in marriage (5.2); (4) Confucius rectified titles for the consort of a ruler (16.14); (5) Confucius left the state of Qi because Lord Ji Huan indulged himself with singing and dancing girls for three days (18.4); (6) "The Master went to see Nanzi, the concubine of Duke Ling. Zilu was not pleased. The Master swore: 'If I have done wrong, may Heaven confound me! May Heaven confound me!'" (6.26). Sin Yee Chan finds in both *The Analects* and *Mencius* that " . . . none of the Confucian sages or role-models is female. Indeed, not one woman is praised in the texts. But this is not due to a lack of praise-worthy women before or during the time of Confucius and Mencius, as evidence in the historical texts and the Biographies of Virtuous Women" (Chan 2000, 121).

In *Half of Man*, the gap between culture and nature, educated highbrows and uneducated lowbrows, *junzi* and *xiaoren* is deeply rooted in Zhang Yonglin's mind; it is clearly illustrated by what Carolyn Brown terms the "elite narrative voice" of the protagonist. "This tendency of the elite narrative voice to be controlling or even condescending towards the unfortunates of the narrative is not limited to fictions about women. Lower-class characters may receive similar treatment" (Brown 1988, 64). As a prisoner, Zhang Yonglin still maintains his identity as a poet-scholar and always draws a clear line between himself and uneducated prisoners. He is elated to hear other prisoners respectfully talk about him as a "bookworm" (19). After seeing Zhang's poems exhibited as evidence of his counterrevolutionary crime, Labor Gang Leader Wang, a peasant cadre who supervises the prisoners, comments with admiration:

> "Zhang, you damn whore! Those damn let-it-all-hang-out poems of yours! They're up there on the wall, in letters big as walnuts. . . . Those words were gigantic! Man, you can write!" . . . Listening to Wang, the other prisoners shot me sidelong glances of respect. (7–8)

Zhang also explicitly articulates his superiority several times in the novel. After contemplating his failure to approach the naked Huang Xiangjiu, the protagonist reflects:

> It was education that distinguished me from an animal, that gave me self-control and the power, in a critical moment, to be "human." It was the force of education that gave me free-will and the power to choose, the power to exhibit the kind of superior behavior that only humans could show. It was also education that made me realize I was responsible for my own behavior. (46)

The gap between educated and uneducated is a continuing theme through the novel. Yenna Wu observes that Zhang Xianliang's works ". . . exhibit remarkable similarity in plot design, characterization, motifs, and narrative voice" (115). In both *Mimosa* and *Half of Man*, Zhang Yonglin is a poet, a well-educated intellectual who represents culture and rationality; his lover Ma Yinghua is an illiterate country woman, and his wife Huang Xiangjiu is another country woman embodying nature, sensuality and flesh. He eventually divorces Huang Xiangjiu; because he sees himself "as too good for her, he was easily able to rationalize the break, on behalf of 'higher ideals'" (Kinkley 100).

In portraying the emasculation of Chinese intellectuals who suffer political persecution, the novel sets up many dichotomies, including those between culture and nature, spirit and flesh, soul and body, human and bestial, educated and uncivilized, social and domestic, men and women. The first term in each pair indicates superiority, the second inferiority; in each case women are configured as inferior beings. We can take Zhang Yonglin and Huang Xiangjiu as examples. Both are victims of persecution by the leftist regime during the Cultural Revolution. However, in this man-woman relationship the traditional hierarchy of dominant man/subordinate woman is clearly at work. Consequently, as Zhong Xueping points out, "Zhang simultaneously occupies the positions of both object of oppression and subject of patriarchal relations." (Zhong "Male Suffering" 178). And

Huang Xiangjiu becomes a hopeless object of both kinds of oppression.

2. Woman's Role in the Restoration of Lost Masculinity

Half of Man describes a journey of a politically oppressed and marginalized man who is obsessed with the idea of climbing back up the social ladder from the bottom, and thus regaining his rightful social position. The basic focus of the story is on a man's sexuality and also impotence. The title, *Half of Man Is Woman*, implies an indispensable relationship between man and woman. But why is impotence problematic for a man who wants to re-enter the social order? How is the female protagonist brought into the author's step-by-step project of reconstructing his male protagonist's lost masculinity?

2.1 "Woman, I cannot be without you until I become a 'real man'"

As a heterosexual man, the protagonist needs a woman (or women) to be his sexual object(s). Nonetheless, the prisoners have no access to any kind of real women. Female inmates are segregated and not accessible to the male inmates. The whole prison camp is a world of men.

Although, as a poet, the protagonist has many romantic fantasies about women, his knowledge of women is quite abstract since he has spent most of his adult life in an all-male prison camp. The woman in his fantasized lovemaking is "the formless line of a soft body, undulating . . . the colors of Picasso in his later period, moving uncertainly in a cloud of smoke" (27–28). At this moment, an astonishing scene suddenly awakens Zhang's identity as a man. By chance he witnesses a woman prisoner from a female brigade bathing herself by an irrigation canal. He is dumbfounded by this unexpected, unimaginable and irresistible scene. The woman standing right in front of his eyes is young, beautiful, and most importantly a substantial "woman." The beautiful lines of her naked body show that she is quite different from the imagined women of his dreams. Facing this

beautiful naked woman, he realizes that his body's long-suppressed sexual needs, at last fully experienced at the age of thirty-one, largely constitute his identity as a man. Completely unaware of her role the woman, Huang Xiangjiu, has entered into the process of Zhang's recovery of his manhood and has accomplished the first step—the protagonist has biologically rediscovered his masculine identity. As Tam Kwok-kan points out, "[w]ithout knowing what 'woman' means, Zhang could never know himself 'sexually'" (Tam 1989, 58).

To complete this process of self-recovery Zhang courts Huang Xiangjiu, and he proposes marriage to her eight years after they first met on a state farm. Unfortunately, their marriage turns out to be an unhappy one. He begins to panic immediately after the marriage because he finds out that he is impotent. The Party Secretary Cao takes advantage of this situation and commits adultery with his wife. Huang Xiangjiu, increasingly frustrated with her husband's impotency, scorns him as "half a man" and a "crippled" man (137), likening him to a castrated eunuch. She complains:

> . . . Oh, I hoped so much, and look what has happened! What kind of man are you? Old Lady Ma (Lady Horse) told me you were at least honest and kind. But you have no manliness to you at all. *I heard that that thing of a eunuch is as soft as yours*. If you were a real man, I wouldn't mind if you beat me all day. . . . (152–53)[6]

Zhang understands the implication that "an unmanly man" equals woman—an inferior being equivalent to the "*xiaoren*" of Confucianism. Up to this point his problematic masculine identity, the fulfillment of his political ambition, his intellectual creativity, and his enthusiasm for writing that serves as a prelude to his political engagement, all are subordinate to one element—impotency. Zhang's impotency suddenly makes uncertain his newfound masculine identity. His previous reputation among his inmates as a poet is completely flattened. He now has to reshape his identity and reposition himself within the gender-based power structure. His shrinking personal space

at home is suffocating him.

> I should move to comfort her, should stroke her and caress her. . . . But I was no longer able to do any of those things, twice before when she was crying I had tried to hold her. Each time, she forcefully pushed me away. . . . I understood then that I was not to touch her again. I was to stay to one side, to hide in the corners if possible. It would be best if I could become a mouse. She had slowly expanded, in our so-called "home," until she filled all the empty space. She had taken over the store-rooms until there was no room for me. Before, when I lived in the bachelor dormitory, I had still felt that my space was my own. It was small, but mentally I had felt there were no bounds. Now our space was larger, but my mental space had shrunk. I knew now what people meant when they said their minds were being suffocated. (153)

Here the narrative conveys Zhang's feelings about his sexual dysfunction, and his marginalization into a corner of society. The sexual dimension of the protagonist's situation is explicit and the political dimension implicit, and symbolically we are given a matrix of sexual-political equivalences:

Sexual dimension		Political dimension
Emasculated husband	=	Half a man
‖		‖
woman	=	*xiaoren* (inferior man)
‖		‖
castrated horse	=	mouse

Zhang's Confucian ideology tells him that his insignificant and marginalized social position rightly belongs to women and animals, and that this fate is a great misfortune for a well-educated *junzi* (gentleman).

A rainstorm that threatens the lives of villagers and state farm workers is a turning point in Zhang's life. In the fight against the flood, thanks to his intellect and knowledge, he becomes a decisive leader; he organizes, strategizes, supervises, and commands others, including his supervisor and rival, Party Secretary Cao.

> Whoever worked hardest was given authority over others. Distinctions among Troop Leaders, Secretary and ordinary workers had disappeared—at this point people were listening to whoever was most capable. We were in a life-and-death situation, and the customary hierarchy had broken down. (194)

As the only person who could swim, Zhang jumps into the swirling waters without any hesitation to mend a break in the canal—the crucial action that eventually stops the flood. It is the first time in his life that he has become a hero by playing the most significant role in a life-threatening event. This natural disaster allows him to fully use and express his knowledge, skills, leadership ability and virility. That evening he unexpectedly regains his sexual potency. He goes home, his body wet, freezing and shivering. There his wife waits for him with a hot ginger soup which, in Chinese folk medicine, can revitalize a man, regenerate his sexual power.

> . . . She dropped the work in her hands and sprang towards me, and I felt the strength in her body as she half carried me into the inner room. Setting me on the bed, she deftly removed my clothes, and then tucked me under the tractors [the pattern design of their comforter].
>
> She ran quickly to the outer room and returned with a steaming bowl of ginger soup. . . . Kneeling by the bed, she began to massage my arms and chest. She worked them as though they were noodle dough in her hands. (200–01)

She then opens her blouse to bury his freezing face between her

breasts: "I felt something I had never felt in my life before. Was this love? My arm reached out to wrap around her body . . ." (202). The day of the flood is the day of Zhang's rebirth as a real man. In contrast to the natural birthday of a newborn baby who requires a biological mother, the rebirth-day of a man requires a sexual "mother"—a woman. Huang Xiangjiu, again unconsciously, plays the role of Zhang's sexual "mother." She only realizes this later, proclaiming: "Don't forget, I'm the one who made you into a real man . . . " (285).

As "half a man" becomes "a whole man," and "a crippled man" becomes "a strong and masculine man," the power relationship between the sexes inevitably changes. Before he regains his potency, Zhang's wife is superior in her natural endowments in almost every way; she is only inferior in terms of social class and level of education. She is healthy, good-looking, sexy, hard working and a good manager of a household, whereas Zhang is inferior mainly because of his impotence. Now the power balance is reversed. The traditional pattern of patriarchy is restored. Zhang takes back all the "superior" roles in the household and prevails over his wife. Therefore, the winning or losing of this power game is mainly determined by the (im)potency of the husband, not the natural endowments or capabilities of the wife. There is a clear demarcation here between two completely different power structures. Huang Xiangjiu assumed that Zhang Yonglin was inexperienced in sexual intercourse (though actually he was impotent). She took the initiative and controlled their sexual performance. Holding his hands she taught her husband, guiding him through the act of intercourse step by step (135). However, after he recovered his potency he was no longer "a small boat" navigated by his wife but the master of the expedition, the winner in the sexual struggle. He "laughed a convulsive laugher" after he had made love successfully with his wife for the first time. When his wife asked him if he could do it again, he answered "savagely: 'I can!'" (202).

The dominant and submissive roles now are reversed in many other aspects of their lives as well. Zhang assumes total control over their "mood," the family atmosphere, the decision-making and the

future of this family. If he is moody, his wife cannot be happy. When he decides to get divorced, his wife has no say at all about the future of their relationship; she is doomed to be a three-time divorcee. Their marriage and their future are totally under his control.

2.2 "Woman, I cannot be with you any longer after I become a 'real man'"

After she arouses Zhang's sexual desire and ultimately transforms "half a man" into "a real man," Huang's mission is concluded. Huang has played her role in creating a man sexually, but not yet psychologically and politically—this lies beyond her power. Thus she becomes redundant, even a barrier. But Zhang Yonglin cannot simply abandon her, cannot throw her away like garbage because he is an intellectual, a member of the social and political elite. Elitist ethics require him to justify his abandonment of a wife. For this purpose, Huang Xiangjiu is still needed. Now it is her turn to be transformed.

Zhang Yonglin now has four pretexts for divorce: (1) Huang's adultery; (2) his lofty pursuit of politics, which may bring trouble to Huang (the best way to protect her is to free her by divorcing her); (3) her potential role as an informer who may reveal his political activities; and (4) his belief that Huang is knitting a web to trap him into domesticity. Only the second pretext suggests genuine concern for his wife, showing that he is a loving, caring, protecting husband. However, without any further evidence to the contrary, his concern about his wife's future is apparently empty, insincere, superficial and hypocritical.

Zhang's impotence is a direct consequence of political persecution, and Huang in turn is a direct victim of his impotency, thus an indirect victim of political persecution. The implied critique of oppressive political power would be much stronger if the narrative held to this logic. Instead, Huang Xiangjiu is characterized as an adulteress. The implication is clear—even if her husband were not impotent, she might have committed secret adultery with Cao anyway, because she is by nature sexually promiscuous. Zhang Yonglin is so

obsessed with his wife's adultery that he mentions it openly and hints at it at least ten times in the narrative. This is one of the two real reasons why he must divorce her, despite the fact that he fabricates other more lofty reasons.

Pushed into her own corner by her husband, who now constantly accuses her of adultery, Huang Xiangjiu resorts to blackmail: she threatens to submit his diary to the authorities. This is a book in which he has secretly written his dissenting political opinions, ideas and criticisms, what Huang calls his "secret agent activities." The novel's readers all know the serious consequences if such a diary falls into the hands of the authorities—going back to jail or even being sentenced to death for "counterrevolutionary thoughts." However, knowing that his wife would never actually turn over the diary, Zhang intensifies the conflict by daring her to do it. While they are both trying to grab the diary, Zhang's friend Heizi stops the fight (247).Now Heizi can be a witness and can support Zhang's right to divorce his wife. Afterwards he admonishes Zhang Yonglin:

> Lao Zhang, it doesn't matter if a woman's lazy or if she's greedy. But God help you if she's KGB. Just think, every night you're hugging a time-bomb. I told you a long time ago, that woman of yours needs a good beating. And I also told you the bitch is on good terms with that bastard [Secretary Cao]. I remember I was pretty annoyed with you then, but I figured she must be holding something over you. So this is what it was! Lao Zhang, how can you still want that woman? She'll send you into the camps again any time she wants. You have to think of a way to get rid of her. . . . (248)

Huang, then, has been transformed from a beautiful woman, and the "mother" of a real man, into a condemned woman who is to be discarded. Zhang has been transformed too, from the blamed to the blamer—the author allows his protagonist to escape blame for not giving his wife a normal life—and from an active abandoner to a passive one, since his decision to get divorced is prompted by Heizi.

After these transformations Zhang has to comply with common sense, and the opinion of his associates, and discard his wife if he wants to maintain his male integrity. His wife has strayed from the moral path, but the cold-hearted Zhang has not. We most clearly hear the innermost voice of the protagonist in these lines: "Condemned woman, I could not be without you before I became a real man. I cannot be with you any longer now that I have become a real man. But I cannot let you go before you are fully condemned."

Huang Xiangjiu is arguably the author's greatest achievement in characterization, especially in the sense of illustrating women's agency. Huang is a tough, vital, impulsive young woman full of desire. "'Reality' had destroyed her life. Yet she still made anything that tried to counter 'fate'" (281). Driven by her strong survival instinct and enduring spirit, she exhausted every possibility to live the life she desired. She did not like Zhang Yonglin's idea of having Old Lady Ma as a matchmaker. She insisted: ". . . it's something we should talk about ourselves" (113). Zhang was intoxicated by romantic sentiment, while Huang kept a clear, cool mind, focusing on her practical blueprint for their future life. She investigated Zhang's savings and monthly salary (it turns out that she had much more money saved than he did), and quickly worked out a manageable plan to manage their future finances (115–16). With very limited resources, she "exhibited an extraordinary ability to manage the decor of our living quarters" (126). Using her magic hand, she turned two shabby storage rooms into a cozy house (126–28).

During the whole process of preparing their "new house" Zhang, on the other hand, appeared to be a completely useless bookworm who had to be supervised by his talented wife. (Chinese men and women agree that this is an accurate image of an intellectual man). When Zhang failed to have sex with his wife, Huang did not want to accept this failure passively. Instead, she offered step-by-step lessons in love-making to her husband (135). Only when she realized her husband's impotency might be irreversible did she commit adultery with Secretary Cao. She was eager to secure her marriage when Zhang showed no signs of forgiving her, and suggested that they adopt a

child (215). She also tried to blackmail her husband (241–47). And toward the end, realizing that all her efforts had failed and that she was doomed to be a divorcee again, she accepted her fate clear-mindedly but not submissively. She divided their property and gave two hundred dollars to Zhang, a big surprise to him because the amount of her savings was far greater than he had imagined (281–82). Finally "[. . .] she said in a hot, commanding voice, 'On the bed! Tonight I want you to play till you're satisfied. Take me so you'll never forget me'" (284). She offered him a last chance for sex not to keep him from leaving, but for the sake of a lasting memory. She prepared for a life without men, saying: "Old Lady Ma lived her life alone and she's still happy. I figure I can be the same as she is" (284).

From a male chauvinistic or even misogynous perspective—and misogyny may be the underlying current in the narrative—Huang possesses qualities that men expect, such as the capacity for loving, caring, nurturing, and self-sacrifice, but also some that men do not like: she is practical, sometimes calculating, good at managing the household and very assertive. These attributes suggest that (from the patriarchal point of view) she is too strong-willed. She is not the sort of docile wife that a traditional husband would dream of.

> "I think it might be best if you took charge of the household affairs."
> "Fine!" she said, seeming happy to have got the upper hand. All this seemed remote and slightly bizarre to me. While she had been a figment of my imagination, she had done whatever I told her to, been whatever I wanted her to be. Now the dream seemed to have floated out of my brain, escaped my control and become an independent being. What it did had surprisingly little relation to what had been in my head. I had thought somehow I knew her well, yet here I encountered a stranger. (116)

2.3 From Political Oppression to Oppression by Women

According to Marsha Wagner, *Half of Man* "is a fascinating

psychological study in misogyny. More specifically, it illuminates how a woman can become the scapegoat for much broader political dissatisfactions" (Wagner 142). The misogyny in the novel bolsters Lu Tonglin's observation that ". . . the Chinese people's resentment of the communist regime is very often rearticulated by men as their resentment of women's equal rights, as if Chinese men had been disempowered by women's empowerment" (8). The protagonist feels no qualms about venting his anger about his being politically persecuted on the woman loves him, cares for him and has transformed him into a whole man. It is as if he thinks she has conspired with and acted on behalf of the state's totalitarian power to persecute him. Thus this political novel remains quite abstract (if not vague) in its political indictment, but very concrete and substantial in its attack on the female gender. Many critics praise the novel for its success in depicting the interaction between politics and sexuality, in other words, successfully conveying political meanings *via* the symbolism of sex. But it is the novel's Chinese readers who can best understand and appreciate this particular dynamic. To fully comprehend the symbolic meaning of politics as presented here, a reader would really need to have lived in the China of the Cultural Revolution or at least in the China that emerged from it. Martha Avery states in her Translator's Introduction:

> The interweaving of politics and poetry in this book may strike a non-Chinese reader as contrived, but to a contemporary audience in China it is only natural. Personal lives and decisions are unavoidably tied to politics . . . Chinese know this, and have found Zhang's work powerful. It has hit a very deep nerve in China today. (xiv)

Thus the readers' own knowledge and experience fill the gaps in the plot and decode the symbolic meanings associated with the political persecution described in the novel. If we were to ignore the nature of the readership and just focus on the text, it would perhaps seem to crude, too black-and-white. There would be "sexless female

beasts" in the women prisoners' brigade who destroy the protagonist's desire for women, and there would be Huang Xiangjiu, a woman who "rapes" him, suffocates him with marriage, weaves a controlling web around him, taunts and insults him as "half a man," cuckolds him, and threatens to give his political diary to the authorities. On the other hand, the characters who are supposed to be the representatives of political persecution are described in a totally different way and with a different narrative tone.

For instance, Labor Gang Leader Wang, the immediate boss of Zhang and the other prisoners, is "a figure of paternal authority representing the whole system of the bureaucracy" (56), and is actually "a good man at heart" (7). He cares for Zhang and the other prisoners. His pet phrase, "You whore(s)!" bears no ill will at all. On the contrary Zhang says, "We prisoners felt a kind of familial acceptance when we heard the word used on us" (7). Party Secretary Cao, the primary authority at the state farm, is a political figure but also Zhang's sexual rival. Rather than bullying prisoners, he always warns prison guards who enjoy hitting the prisoners with their clubs or fists, "Don't push dogs into a corner" (63). When Zhang and Huang apply for marriage, Secretary Cao not only approves their paper work without any problem, but also assigns two store-rooms for them to live in (126). Xiao Li-tz is the son of the Vice-Chairman of the Political Section, and thus automatically a member of the privileged ruling class. However, he is on very good terms with the prisoners; as Zhang states, "he never lorded it over me and even tried to make my life easy" (163). Even the guards treat the prisoners with understanding and kindness. When two groups of prisoners meet on the road and begin tossing cucumbers and tomatoes to one another, the guards "took no . . . action." The protagonist states that it is "hard to use guns to prod and beat laughing men" (32).

The narrative does not show how political persecution materializes. It leads us to wonder whether the oppressive power might be built into the political system itself, rather than something residing in the people who run and maintain the system. The labor reform camp and state farms appear here as a kind of "paradise," not

only because they are isolated from the chaotic outside world but also because prisoners and authorities are like a big happy family. But this is in effect an all-male family. All indictments of the system are really indictments of women. Zhang Yonglin says that he and his wife are always at war:

> The first struggle of mankind was not between man and man, or man and beast. The earliest struggle was that between man and woman. It was a struggle that was unceasing and still continued. (133)

After his troubling marital life Zhang "finally realized that there was a more terrible oppression than that of society—*family oppression*" (137).[7] The statement indicates that Huang is the direct source of all the protagonist's problems. In this not-so-subtle thematic shift from political oppression to oppression by the family (or by the wife, or by women), the narrative's implicit and pervasive sexism is in effect disguised as a critique of totalitarian political power. We see this clearly in Zhang's retaliation against Huang for her adulterous behavior. Zhong Xueping contends that Huang Xiangjiu is constructed as a place (her body), a "battlefield" upon which the fight "between the power structure and an oppressed man" occurs (*Masculinity* 74). However, her analysis goes only halfway (or less than halfway), because the protagonist's anger is directed less toward the man who took his position than toward his own unfaithful wife. Thus Huang is constructed not only as a place, a setting or context, but also as Zhang's major enemy, and the protagonist punishes his wife much more severely than he does Party Secretary Cao.

By chance Zhang witnesses Cao's visit to his wife in the middle of the night, and he considers what to do. Instead of rushing into the house to kill his rival he sits outside, indulging himself in fantasies, imagining conversations with historical figures such as Song Jiang 宋江, Zhuangzi 莊子, and Karl Marx. As an impotent man he cannot compete with his rival Cao; as a "thought criminal" he cannot take any action against his immediate superior. During the flood he could

openly show his contempt for Cao, even command him as if he were his subordinate, but this was only a temporary triumph for Zhang and after regaining his potency he is still under Cao's power. Standing in front of Cao, waiting for the approval of his divorce papers, Zhang reflected: "I found that at some time or other my posture had slipped into being bowed and bent. A self-demeaning attitude had become my second nature" (276). However, his attitude toward his wife is totally different. Even though Zhang can see clearly that her heart will always belongs to him, he shows no mercy toward her. Huang Xiangjiu turns out to be the scapegoat in the subtle but tense struggle for political and sexual power between two men.

3. Conclusion

This narrative then starts with an emasculated man who is anxious to restore his masculine identity and ends up at the same point after a long journey of "restoration"—an emasculated man who is determined to devote his life to political struggles for his country. The construction of masculinity for the Chinese intellectual elite is connected with a man's inner power, particularly the power of his intellect and of the wisdom associated with a high level of education, in the tradition of the Confucian discourse on the *junzi*. In this context, that of the Chinese intellectual and political elite, power over women is the first but also the most basic and primitive, thus the lowest standard of masculinity, and most Chinese male intellectuals seeking power would not stop at this point. That is why Huang Xiangjiu is abandoned after she has created a "real man" sexually. In his journey of masculinity-reconstruction, Zhang demonstrates his double identity: he is an emasculated "Stinking Ninth" in the political arena (the political prison) and a newly-masculine husband in the domestic arena (the home); a marginalized coward on the political battlefield and a selfish, male-chauvinistic, domineering master on the domestic one—that is, in the "war of the sexes," the gender war. Thus Zhang has a double standard in his attitude toward the state and toward women—slavish loyalty to the former and cunning manipulation of the latter.

He is a potential *junzi* within the ruling male aristocracy and a fake *junzi* (a hypocrite) at home.

NOTES

[1] D. C. Lau says that *junzi* "is discussed in more than eighty chapters in the *Analects*" (14).

[2] This portrait of a *junzi* is based on Xin Hu's summary (34–35) with some modifications.

[3] Zhou Weibo, "Zhang Yonglin shi ge weijunzi 章永璘是個偽君子" (Zhang Yonglin is a hypocrite), in Ping "Nanren de yiban shi nuren" 評男人的一半是女人 (On Half of Man Is Woman), ed. Ningxia renmin chubanshe (Yinchuan: Ningxia renmin chubanshe, 1987) 4–6.

[4] See Simon Leys 204. Simon Leys based his argument on the word, *yang* (translated as "to handle" by himself and "to deal with" by others), which literally means "to educate," "to feed," "to keep," "to raise," and "to nourish."

[5] Ibid.

[6] The line in italics is my translation because it is missing from the English edition. For the original Chinese text of this paragraph, see Zhang Xianliang: "Nanren de Yiban shi Nuren." In Zhang Xianliang Aiqing Sanbuqu (Beijing: Huayi chubanshe, 1992) 279.

[7] This line in italics is my translation because it is missing from the English edition. For the original Chinese text of this paragraph, see ibid, 280.

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