

Compare the Influence of Masculinity on Gender Equality in Thailand and China

Ziyan Zhang *

College of Foreign Language, Nantong University, Nantong, Jiangsu, 226019, China

* Corresponding Author: elaine@stmail.ntu.edu.cn

Abstract. The academic definition of masculinity is a concept that encompasses men's gender temperament, gender roles, gender norms, power order, and other related aspects. The persistent presence of unequal gender regimes can be explained by the concept of hegemonic masculinity, in particular. The paper compares the masculinity of Chinese and Thai men, examining how differing societal status and national cultures influence masculinity. Both countries exhibit a lack of value for domestic work and father absence in child-rearing, reflecting a dominance of male-centric masculinity. However, China shows progress in women's economic and social status, with gender equality being a state policy. In Thailand, Brahmanism influences the perception of male superiority, leading to a feminine transformation among men. Thailand exhibits more sexual liberty, particularly accepting of transsexuality, unlike China where LGBTQ+ students face gender-based bullying. Suggestions for improvement include enhancing the educational role of fathers, promoting gender equality in Thai education and homes, and respecting children's gender expression in China. The study acknowledges limitations, notably the lack of recent data on masculinity changes in Thailand, suggesting further research in the future.

Keywords: Masculinity; Gender equality; Boy education; Comparative analysis of two countries; Lady-boy.

1. Introduction

According to Debbi Ging, masculinity refers to a set of learned behaviors and characteristics that are accepted by a given age and society as embodying manly ideals [1]. The academic concept of masculinity not only refers to men's gender temperament, but also involves men's gender roles, gender norms, power order and other connotations. It has profound social, cultural, political, economic, physiological and psychological characteristics. It is a comprehensive gender concept, and all factors closely related to men can be included in it [2]. In addition to diversity and the multiplicity of masculinities, power and inequality associated with males and masculinities were also taken into consideration when developing a theory of gender. In particular, the concept of hegemonic masculinity has been employed to explain the persistence of unequal gender regimes [3].

Nowadays, Thailand is famous for its lady-boy tourism [4]. Lady-boys are people who were originally biologically male, but psychologically believe that they are female, have male physical characteristics, or have completely transitioned into female. Their sexual partners are male. In their perception, their partners belong to the opposite sex [5]. Therefore, although their sexual orientation may appear to be homosexual to outsiders, to themselves, they are heterosexual. This is also the difference between lady-boys and gay men. Gay men's physical characteristics and psychological cognition are all male. In their view, their partners are the same gender as them [6]. While the definition of being a man in Thailand is often based on not being effeminate, gay, or transgender, as noted by scholars, this article will study the masculinity from a biological and comprehensive angle [7].

The study of masculinity originated abroad and can be roughly divided into three stages. The first stage was before the late 1970s, when the discussion of masculinity was mainly based on biological sex. The second stage began in the early 1980s, when the understanding of masculinity changed from a single to a pluralistic one. During this period, the famous masculinity researcher Raewyn Connell proposed the theory of masculinity, believing that masculinity refers to a "position in gender

relations" and is a practical activity for men and women to determine this position. and the impact these practices have on the body's experience, personality, and culture [8]. Cornell explores masculinity from a dynamic perspective. In his book "Masculinity", Cornell divides masculinity into four categories, namely "dominant" masculinity (a configuration of gender practice, which is currently widely considered the specific manifestation of the legitimation of accepted patriarchy), "Subordinate" masculinity (such as heterosexual men in a dominant position and gay men in a subordinate position), "Collaborative" masculinity (Some people seek the benefits of power while avoiding the risks experienced by those who promote patriarchy), and "marginal" masculinity (the authority of the dominant masculinity of the ruling group) Sex-related, such as the masculinity of blacks and other ethnic minorities under white rule), emphasizing the diversity and change of gender identity [9]. In Cornell's research system, masculinity is a gender power mechanism that is opposite to femininity and is based on domination and dominance over others. The third stage began with the rise of diversified masculinity research in the 1990s. Chinese research on masculinity originated in the 1980s, and research on masculinity is mainly concentrated in the field of literature and media [9].

There is still a paucity of research and comparative analysis on the influence of masculinity related to gender equality. This study will comprehensively summarize the presentation of masculinity in China and Thailand, conducts a comparative analysis and makes suggestions, aiming to inspire future scholars on boys' education and realize the gender equality.

2. Analysis of the Image of Chinese Man

2.1. Image

2.1.1. Dominant masculinity.

According to Chinese scholars Chen Hongmei and Yang Fei, the image of Chinese man from 2007 to 2012 was external and one-sided [10]. Discussions of masculinity during this period were mainly from an economic perspective, focusing mostly on external conditions such as money and appearance, showing external and one-sided characteristics of male role expectations. Believing that "men are at the forefront of the outside world and women at the home level", men are always evaluated in the public sphere and their success is closely linked to their careers. What this reflects is dominant masculinity, which is widely recognized by mainstream society and is also an "ideal" masculinity that most men desire. It represents power and strength and is characterized by "active competition, possessing power, control and dominance", which ensures the dominance of men and the subordination of women [9].

2.1.2. Dissolution of air.

From 2013 to 2022, the public in China witnessed the dissolution of air. The image was internal and emotional. Masculinity in China has changed from a male-dominated image of a tough guy to something that pleases a female audience and pays more attention to the female eye. Masculinity is becoming richer with the diversification of social aesthetics. In addition to the traditional role of material provider, society has also added other new expectations for men, such as independent temperament in life, external clean temperament, physical softness, etc [10].

2.2. Impact

2.2.1. Objectified masculinity in consumerism.

Under the reflexive "gaze" of women who control the right of consumption, the male body carrying all kinds of temperament is pushed to the front, and is generally regarded as a commodity for women to examine and judge, and the worship of male appearance level is also popular [10]. This has led to a serious tendency to homogenize masculinity in the media, resulting in a bad aesthetic orientation [11].

2.2.2. Stifles and prejudices about different types of masculinity.

In today's society, which advocates gender equality and diversity of temperament, such people who do not conform to traditional gender characteristics sometimes become the object of attack. It ignores the complexity of individual temperament and makes some men with "subordinate" and "marginal" temperaments afraid to express themselves publicly, thus being limited to the temperament type recognized by most people. This is very harmful to men's physical and mental health. Regarding this point, Jung believed that through thousands of years of living together and interacting with each other, both men and women have acquired certain characteristics of the opposite sex, which ensure coordination and understanding between the two sexes [12]. To achieve a harmonious and balanced personality, one must allow the feminine aspect of the masculine personality (anima archetype) and the masculine aspect of the feminine personality (animus archetype) to manifest in the individual's consciousness and behavior [10].

2.3. Reason

The process of change in masculinity reflects, to a certain extent, the shift towards democratization, commercialization and technologicalization of gender discourse in China, and its development towards equality and harmony [6]. When masculinity tends to be diversified, it must also mean that women are bidding farewell to the traditional single role of good wives and mothers, and are increasingly moving towards free and diverse selves [10]. As the largest consumer group in China is women, it is undoubted that the increasing voice of women will make the masculinity diversified. Because whether in online media or social media, women have become the main force of consumer groups, which is also a strong proof of the rise of women's economy and the promotion of their right to speak.

3. Analysis of the Image of Thai Men

3.1. Image

3.1.1. Dandy.

An article on Chinese men in Thailand found that the typical image of Thai men is dandy who is proud of having several sexual relationships [13]. Another article referred to the sexual harassment encountered during tourism in Thailand. The research also mentioned the inequality of male civilization and patriarchal society in Thailand [14]. This shows the image of dandy in Thailand, where men are superior to women, discriminate against women, the pornography industry is developed, men in the family are irresponsible to women, and women find it difficult to find employment [15].

3.1.2. Lady-boys.

"Lady-boys" are those who were originally biologically male, but psychologically believe that they are female, have male physical characteristics, or have completely transitioned into women. Their sexual partners are male. In their perception, their partners (male) are of the opposite sex to them, so their sexual orientation may appear to be homosexual to outsiders, but to themselves, they are heterosexual [6]. This is also the difference between "lady-boys" and gay men. Gay men's physical characteristics and psychological cognition are all male. In their view, their partners are the same gender as them. In Thailand, as in many parts of the world, gender is more complicated than the binary of just men and women. Scholars have noted that what it means to be a man in Thailand is often defined in terms of not being effeminate, gay, or transgender [7]. So the status of "lady-boys" is lower than man while most of them are still biologically male. Xie Fanghao thought about the human rights protection of special vulnerable groups and found that "lady-boys" in Thailand have become an industry and play an important role in promoting the development of Thailand's tourism industry [4]. At the same time, the living conditions of "lady-boys" in Thailand are poor and there is

no standardized legal system to protect their own rights and interests. "lady-boys" advertising does not belong to the mainstream of the advertising industry for their low status.

3.2. Impact

The phenomenon of serious discrimination against women exists in Thai society, such as the developed pornography industry, men transsexual to please men and become tragic "lady-boys", men are irresponsible to women in the family, and women have difficulties in employment [15]. A 2018 World Bank survey on the economic inclusion of the LGBTQ+ community in Thailand revealed that 77% of transgender people had been denied a job application because of their gender identity, and 40% said they had experienced harassment, bullying and/or discrimination at work [16]. In addition, Thai society does not accept sex and domestic work as valuable paid labor, and the law does not give these workers equal recognition. Lack of regulation and extreme power differences between sex workers and domestic workers and their employers have led to poor working conditions [17].

3.3. Reason

Thailand is a yellow-robed Buddhist country, but the Thai people have a considerable degree of Brahmanism in their religious beliefs. Buddhism advocates the equality of all beings, while Brahmanism advocates the supremacy of men and the inferiority of women. Brahmanism has greatly influenced the formation and development of the thought of Thai men and women. Serious discrimination against women in modern Thai society [15].

4. Comparative Analysis

4.1. Similarity

4.1.1. The lack of domestic work value.

In both China and Thailand, the family division of labor is almost the same. Women are the main body of raising children and do the housework. However, it is hard for the housewives to be respected as a true worker because the society tend to refuse domestic work as valuable paid labor [17]. As the American sociologist Susan Muller Orkin points out, "Wages are paid to the employed in the labor market, but the work that women are socialized to do more than men is unpaid and often not recognized as such in the labor market [18]."

4.1.2. The absence of paternity.

In the traditional "dominant" masculinity, male status directly affects his parenting attitude and way as a father in the family, which makes men's responsibilities and obligations in the family ignored by the society. With the rapid economic development and the evolution of modern family structure, fathers simply as "breadwinners" can not meet the needs of today's society and families, and need to redefine the responsibilities of fathers [19].

4.2. Difference

4.2.1. Women's current status.

The status of women in Thailand is low while the status of women in China is gradually rising. Since the Fourth World Conference on Women, China has made the principle of gender equality a basic state policy [20]. Since then, this principle has become an important part of the socialist core values and has been highly valued by the Party and country. This principle has not only been written into the White Paper on Gender Equality and Women's Development in China, but has also been written into all the reports since the 18th CPC National Congress, demonstrating the Party's determination to resolutely implement gender equality [21].

4.2.2. The liberty of sex selection.

In Thailand, sex selection is more liberal. People are free to undergo sexual transsexuals and appear in society as transsexuals. Although it does not appear in the form of the main character in the advertisement, such a role will appear in the advertisement in Thailand, and most people can also accept contact with the ladyboy. Thai society is much more open to lady-boys than before. They believe that lady-boys are no different from ordinary people, they have their own abilities and play a greater role in various professions. Respondents also thought lady-boys were cute, with only laughter around them, and that lady-boys were funnier than men or women. Nowadays, it can be seen that some families have accepted their sons as lady-boys, and the attitude of parents is indifferent or accept, it can be said that the acceptance of lady-boys in Thai society has changed [6].

However, China still has a bias against LGBTQ+ group. A Chinese scholar conducted a nationwide online questionnaire survey exploring the relationship between campus bullying and sexual minorities. The survey found that the psychological factors resulting from such unequal treatment included doubts about sexual and gender identity, as well as a negative campus environment [22]. Similarly, scholars such as Guo Lingfeng and Hu Chunmei have also identified these risk factors, which include prejudice, stigma, and homophobia, as well as sexual preference, gender identity, and gender expression [23, 24].

4.3. Reason

Thailand is a relatively more typical male civilized society, which is relatively free for men and relatively restrictive for women, just like the feudal period in China, where women had a low status. Under the long-term infiltration of this social culture, Thai men either become dandy or take their mothers as the object of worship and gradually become feminine [15].

In China, with the progress of civilization and the development of science and technology, women's economic and social status has been continuously improved, and they have more stages to express and show themselves, and even some women have the ability to compete with men in many fields such as politics, economy and society, which gives them the courage and strength to resist the old gender order [9].

However, deep rooted social culture of male-dominated norm may also lead to gender violence in school. Scholars generally agree that the root causes of gender-based bullying in schools lie in deeply ingrained sociocultural norms, including patriarchy, heterosexuality, and cisgender supremacy. In fulfilling their role of guiding students through the "socialization" process, schools may inadvertently reinforce these unequal gender norms by acquiescing to or explicitly endorsing the existing situation, thereby creating favorable conditions for the occurrence of gender-based violence [23].

5. Suggestion

5.1. Improving the Educational Role of Fathers in China and Thailand

In both Chinese and Thailand families, boys are generally educated by mothers, grandmothers, grandmothers, female teachers and other figures, and there is no understanding of male education. Boy's education often have the situation of "absence of father". As a result, parents should strive to improve the division of parental roles, recognize the important role played by parents in accompanying and educating their children, as well as the different roles and equal responsibilities played by both parents in this process, so as to change the current family situation of "absence of father", and let fathers gradually realize the importance of accompanying their children's growth. And the different roles and influences that both parents have on their children's character and later growth. Furthermore, we can learn scientific education methods and communication methods, improve the ability of parental education, clarify roles and responsibilities, reduce family conflicts caused by the absence of father, promote the healthy growth of minor children, make them more fully play the

important role of family education, and enhance the happiness of family life in the absence of father [19].

5.2. Teaching the Gender Equality in School and at Home in Thailand

The author suggests that educators should refer to more studies on masculinity, confirm the biological gender and gender expression of children, and then conduct relative education. What's more, the teaching contents should include the value of domestic work and how to achieve gender equity step by step in daily life. Meanwhile, family-school collaboration is vital to show children a equal and healthy home atmosphere.

5.3. Respecting children's Gender Expression in China

It is important to respect the gender expression of children, and eliminate stereotypes of masculinity. Understanding "dominant" masculinity, "complicity" masculinity, "borderline" masculinity and "subordinated" masculinity can reduce psychological disorders in children's growth. Parents need to treat the children having different gender expression in a right way. They should have a basic knowledge of the sexual orientation first then adjust the education way according to the situation of their child. School should strengthen sexual orientation education and teach students to justify their sexual orientation properly in order to decrease the discrimination of LGBTQ+ students.

6. Conclusion

This paper compares the masculinity of Chinese and Thai man, and analyzes the influence of the different status and the different national culture on masculinity then does the comparative analysis between the two countries and makes suggestions at last.

This paper found that the two countries both are lack of domestic work value and have absence of father in children education. These phenomena show the air of male-dominate masculinity. However, in China, with the progress of civilization and the development of science and technology, women's economic and social status has been continuously improved. Gender equality has been a basic state policy in China. In Thailand, Brahmanism has had a significant impact on the formation and evolution of the Thai people's perception of men as superior to women. Thai men may either become dandy or adopt their mothers as objects of worship, resulting in a gradual feminine transformation under the long-term influence of this social culture.

When it comes to gender expression. The paper found Thailand has more liberty in sexual selection than China. Transsexuality is a form of sexual transsexuality that is free for people to undergo. Although not the main character in the advertisement, this role will also be featured in advertisements in Thailand, and majority of people can also engage in conversation with a ladyboy. Thai society has become more accommodating to lady-boys than it used to be. While in China, LGBTQ+ students are still experiencing the gender-based bullying.

To improve the situation, this paper suggests that people improve the educational role of father in China and Thailand; teach the gender equality in school and at home in Thailand; respect children's gender expression in China.

However, this study still has some shortcomings, such as the lack of research data on the changes of masculinity in Thailand in recent years. It is hoped that some scholars can further develop it in the future.

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