Notes

Preface

1 *Niang* is used in colloquial Chinese to describe a man who is effeminate or lacks macho masculinity.

2 *Diaosi* literally means male pubic hair, and has been roughly translated as ‘losers’ (Szablewicza, 2014). It emerged as a popular internet phrase around 2012 and was originally used to refer to a working-class figure who is ‘short, poor and ugly’ (Cao, 2017).

Chapter 1

1 I gained ethical approval from the University of York ELMPS Ethics Committee before entering the field and conducting interviews. Prior to my departure, I carefully considered the ethical implications of this study and followed the university’s guidelines on research ethics throughout the fieldwork. The discussion about my experiences in the field also demonstrates my commitment to conducting ethical research.

2 It should be noted that the ‘habitus’ (Bourdieu, 1977) I shared with the family members and friends to whom I reached out also acted as a positive factor in recruitment. As a member of the post-1990s generation and China’s rising middle class (Hird, 2009; Liu, 2008; Xie, 2020), I have accumulated a range of personal connections to help me approach ‘ordinary’ young men.

3 According to Shanghai Municipal Bureau of Statistics (2016a), the average per capita income in urban Shanghai is 52,962 CNY annually (around 4,413 CNY per month) in the year 2015. According to Shenyang Municipal Bureau of Statistics (2016), the figure is 36,643 CNY (around 3,053 CNY per month). The annual income of most of my participants with a full-time job ranged from 48,000 CNY to over 120,000 CNY (Shanghai, with one exception) or 36,000 CNY to 72,000 CNY (Shenyang, with one exception).

Chapter 2

1 I am aware of controversial issues around ‘class’ and ‘social strata’. Since the differentiated meanings of these two terms are not the focus of this research, I use these two terms in a roughly interchangeable way.

2 There are, however, few studies challenging the holistic position of mind-body unity in classical Chinese philosophy. For example, drawing on large-scale
quantitative–quantitative analyses of early Chinese texts, Slingerland (2013) argues that there is at least a ‘weak’ mind–body dualism in early Chinese thought.

Chapter 3

1 My use of ‘aesthetics’ is mainly informed by Yanhua Zhang’s (2007) discussion of ‘aesthetics of shenti’. She uses the term aesthetics to ‘indicate cultural orientations and bodily spontaneity that pattern the ways Chinese people live their lives and give meaning to their experience of shenti’ (Zhang, 2007: 42). Zhang also refers to Desjarlais’s analysis of ‘aesthetic experience’, in which aesthetics is related to ‘the tacit leitmotifs that shape cultural construction of bodily and social interactions’ (Desjarlais, 1992: 65). Zhang highlights that an aesthetics of ordinary bodily experience can provide additional insights to investigate cultural experiences as ‘embodied, spontaneous, tacit, and also patterned’ (2007: 42).

2 Shen 身 and ti 体 are both root words for ‘body’ in Chinese, literally meaning animate body/person/self/lifetime and inanimate body/ physique/flesh (Brownell, 1995; Zhang, 2007). The term shenti 身体 combines the two kinds of body. Therefore, I use shenti in a way that implies a person or self with the connotation of both body-person and physique-body.

3 Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek) was a Chinese political and military leader of the Chinese National Party from 1928 to 1975. He is acknowledged to have been a follower and practitioner of Confucianism, as shown in his enthusiasm to reinterpret Confucian classics and the New Life Movement led by Jiang’s government that aimed to rebuild the Confucian moral and social order (Dirlik, 1975).

Chapter 4

1 As Xie and Wu (2008: 561) explain, prior to economic reform, almost all urban workers were organized as part of a danwei, be it a factory, a store, a school or a government office. The danwei organization had multiple social, political and economic functions, and was a permanent ‘membership’ of life employment. Workers and their families were totally dependent on their affiliated work units for material resources and career opportunities.

2 This strong preference for a governmental or public institutional position in Shenyang is potentially a result of the city’s historical status as a prominent heavy industrial city. Before the transition to a market economy, national-owned enterprises provided the majority of work opportunities for the general public. Seen from my fieldwork experience, many participants in Shenyang work in government or public institutions. Although some men have white-collar jobs, their professional industry is often related to construction or manufacturing.

3 Kinship is certainly a crucial part of Chinese young men’s definitions of intimacy. Since I consider masculinity and kinship from another perspective in the next chapter, here I mainly focus on couple relations. But, as I show, there are also overlaps and interplays between these two spheres of intimacy.

4 In Chinese, you means ‘have’, and dandang contains meanings of responsibility, obligation and one’s socially and culturally defined role. In everyday language, you dandang (有担当) can be used as both adjective and noun. So I also use this term in both forms.
In Chinese, fangzi can refer to both housing in a collective sense, and also a house/apartment or a home for an individual or a family. Therefore, participants might comment on the importance of providing housing for marriage as men in general, and sometimes talked about their own apartment or home.

According to Shanghai Municipal Bureau of Statistics (2016a, 2016b), the average price of residential property in urban Shanghai is 20,501 CNY per square metre, while the average per capita income is 52,962 CNY annually. According to Shenyang Municipal Bureau of Statistics (2016), the average price of residential property in Shenyang is 6,415 CNY per square metre, while the average per capita income is 36,643 CNY annually.

A different perspective has been articulated among Hong Kong men from diverse backgrounds (Ho et al, 2018b). It is found that having extramarital affairs is not necessarily seen as ‘bad behaviour’ in intimate practices. Rather, the Hong Kong men regard one’s masculinity as being devalued when his misconduct is publicly discovered. Therefore, Ho and her colleagues note that participants often discussed strategies to avoid their extramarital relationships being known. See Ho (2014) and Shen (2005) for a discussion of how extramarital intimate relationships can provide men with a space to pursue romantic desires and autonomy.

Influenced by my research interests and the original interview outline, my questions did not directly address issues around the men’s sexual lives or bodily interaction with their partners. Meanwhile, although participants’ answers might have been influenced by my identity as a young female researcher, none of them referred to sexual behaviour when I invited them to talk about different aspects of intimacy. This is probably related to the hegemonic masculine ideal in post-Mao China, which puts relatively more emphasis on a man’s performance in social networks instead of sexual competency (Uretsky, 2016). Many sociologists and anthropologists (for example, Chan, 2019; Zheng, 2006; Zhang, E., 2015) have provided vivid descriptions of, and critical insights into, the domain of male sexuality in intimate relationships, both within and beyond ‘the family’. For a review of the changing contours of Chinese sexuality in general, see Ho et al (2018a).

Chapter 5

The Standard of Being a Good Student (弟子规) is usually acknowledged to have been written by Li Yuxiu in the Qing Dynasty during the reign of Kangxi (1661–1722). But no specific date of publication is available. I have translated this quote based on the original Chinese book since no published English translation can be found. The original Chinese texts read as follows: 亲爱我，孝何难，亲憎我，孝方贤。亲有过，谏使更，怡吾色，柔吾声。

According to the principle text of Daoism, Dao de jing, dao is the source of the whole of nature, the creation of things and the origin of all the process of change. At the same time, it is not possible to make a statement about the true nature of dao (Allinson, 1994). Both classical Confucian and Daoist philosophy endeavour to nurture people who can implement an ideal way of living within a given context. Realizing dao in Daoism centres on the individual, and learning from classical texts and conventions are not encouraged. In comparison, Confucians believe in transforming humanity by following dao (learning from traditional sources), which requires coordinating various virtues to engage with others in a more meaningful way (Lai, 2015).
Chapter 6

This also partly reflects Han dominance of China’s population. According to the sixth Census in 2010, Han ethnicity takes up around 92 per cent of the whole population.