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MALE FASHION MAGAZINES AND  
WESTERN CAPITALIST EXPANSION IN  
A POST-COLONIAL STATE

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EXPANSION IN A POST-COLONIAL STATE

**Male Fashion Magazines and Western Capitalist**

**Expansion in a Post-Colonial State**

Jin Cao, Xiaoshuang Zhao

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### Abstract

Adopting an ethnographic approach, this paper uses the Chinese fashion magazine, *Esquire* (under the American *Esquire* copyright), as a case study of indigenous media in the context of a globalized market economy. The paper connects to critical theories of the political economy of communication to offer insights on the commodification of Chinese male fashion magazines. Exposing a dependent economy model, I attempt to demonstrate how the male fashion media in China tries to re-construct Chinese males' masculinity in a post- socialist state, and how it tries to re-map spheres of class and commodity as manipulated by an international copyright system which serves to change the traditional gender order and to fuel Western Capitalism's global expansion.

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## **Male Fashion Magazines and Western Capitalist Expansion in a Post-Colonial State<sup>1</sup>**

Jin Cao, Xiaoshuang Zhao

### **I. Research Purpose, Research Questions and Methods**

Since 1980s and 1990s, various types of Western transnational corporations, World Bank, and International Monetary Fund have been advocating that the economic development of non-Western world should focus on the adjustment of local economic structure. By promoting Reaganism and Thatcherism, which emphasize the free-market policy, from the first world to developing countries, these corporations and institutions constantly encourage developing countries to merge into the global market, so that the latter can contribute to the stability of global politics and economy defined by Western countries. During the process, media remain an effective means of fostering the globalization of market economy. Entering the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the transnational expansion of Western media industry, as well as the high centralization of its ownership, have not been weakened by a variety of media reform movements. On the contrary, such trend is more

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is one of the series results of a 2012 major project named “New Technologies of Communication, Gender Politics and the Transformation of Modern China’s Urban Culture”, which belongs to the Humanities and Social Sciences Base of Chinese Ministry of Education, as well as one of the third 985 Projects of Fudan University, named “New Media, New Rhetoric and the Transformation of Popular Culture”; both of the projects are conducted by Jin Cao, a professor of Journalism School at Fudan University.

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and more intensified, resulting in the transition of non-Western world to internalize the neoliberal economic policies and free-market ideology advocated by Western countries. In the globalization of market economy, transnational media corporations have had considerable impact on Chinese media industry. On the one hand, they have given rise to the reorganization of the latter; on the other hand, they have reconstructed the gender conventions about femininity and masculinity in China. For instance, China's male fashion magazines tend to model the new male authority on the transnational masculinity, which is even more closely connected with the global economic power. Just as Leslie Sklair (1995) pointed out in "Cultural Imperialism and the Ideology of Consumerism in the Third World", the values needed by capitalistic modernization are the cultural ideology of consumerism. Fashion magazines precisely represent the ways in which Western media corporations create global product lines, capital circulation and commercial market in China. Moreover, they are also the channels to construct Western consumerism and gender ideologies. Advertising is the key source of income for such type of media products, which indicates that these magazines tend to represent market economy as the irresistible and crucial factor for globalization. In the domain of political economy of communication, scholars such as Sut Jhally, Eileen R. Meehan and Oscar H. Gandy Jr. have further developed and enriched theories concerning the role of advertising in the capitalist reproduction and the constructed relations among audience, commodities, class, gender and race (Jin Cao & Yuezhi Zhao, 2007). Thus the globalization of market economy is an inevitable process in the global reorganization that capitalism initiates for

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the sake of higher profits. The rise and development of local fashion magazines expose the conspiracy between the governments and the international capitals. Hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity, as proposed by Connell (1987)<sup>2</sup>, have become the prevalent elements in the post-socialist China, the construction of which completely relies on the copyright trade of fashion magazines between China and the West, as well as the allocation of the advertising resources of international brands.

In the above mentioned context, many international feminist scholars have discussed, from the perspectives of gender and class, the crucial effects of the operation of capital and state, global economy and international financial institutions on women's poverty and gender inequality. Others have focused on the gender antagonism, the incompatible and decentralized organizations, and the various alienated identities, all of which are reflected by the global semiotic representations and the global knowledge production (Valentine Moghadam, 2005). As for Chinese feminist thoughts, the main goal in the 21<sup>st</sup> century still concentrates on enlightening heterosexual women to struggle for gender equality in the domain of marriage, family, career, education, and political participation, and to fight against heteropatriarchy as well as various other forms of oppression. Therefore, numerous studies have examined how female fashion magazines objectify female bodies and desires through consumerism and gender ideologies. Just as the international feminist scholars mentioned before, contemporary feminist researchers in China center their discussion on women involved in the globalization of market economy. However, they have not paid sufficient attention to the male population who has also been placed in the

internationalization of capital operation.

Based on the theories about political economy of communication and gender, this paper examines the case of *Esquire*<sup>3</sup>, the earliest male fashion magazine in China to conduct international copyright trade and the one with the highest advertising revenues nowadays. Using an ethnographic approach, the researchers worked for *Esquire* as interns, collected data, participated in the magazine production, and conducted in-depth observation. By analyzing all the editions of *Esquire* from 2005 to 2007 and the relevant data about their publishing and advertising, we intend to reveal, from the perspective of gender and copyright trade, how masculinity is reconstructed in China, by the globalization of market economy.

## II. Literature Review and theoretical discussion

There is rich literature in the international studies of female fashion magazines. Just as Jin Cao (2006) pointed out, most researchers have interpreted those texts from the theoretical perspective of Encoding/Decoding which emphasizes on the subjectivity of the readers (Hall, 1980). These studies are primarily theory-oriented rather than empirical ethnographies of the readers, editors and circulation markets (Jin Cao, 2006). The very few existing researches on male fashion magazines focus on how consumerism constructs the visual texts, finding that the “masculine crisis” represented by those magazines is closely related with social changes. For example, Frank Mort (1996) thought such male fashion magazines as *Arena*, *I-D* and *The Face* emerged from the consuming upsurge in

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1980s. According to Mort (1996), the fashion-related content in male fashion magazines was designed as narratives that were expected to be “cruised”. Compared with the traditional clothes advertisements, such contents opened up new space for visual encoding to attract more and more heterosexuals, homosexuals, and bi-sexuals. In addition, apart from his analysis of male clothes masculinity and consumerism society, Tim Edwards (1997) found that magazines had nothing to do with gender politics, but have everything to do with the new market that reproduces masculinity through consumption. Similar to Mort and Nixon, Edwards (1997) realized that men had accepted themselves as the consumers of various fashion products and saw other men as well as themselves as the objects of desires. Although it extended the reflection on the increasingly prevalent commodification and the aestheticization of daily life, this study was still based on the attention to the expansion of male fashion industry in 1980s and the subsequent development of the marketing and advertising institutions. On the other hand, Sharples (1999) explored the reasons for the prosperity of such comprehensive male fashion magazines as *FMH*, *GQ*, and *Esquire* during 1990s. He pointed out that with broader themes in comparison with the previously single-focused automobile or sports magazines, comprehensive magazines tended to attract wider ranges of readers. While the masculinity stressed in the content of such magazines was a form of opposition to the advancement of women’s social status, its motivation did not come from ethics or politics but from commercial mechanism. The new concepts and life styles reflected in male fashion magazines are all connected with the market through what was called the appeals

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of masculinity. As a result, entertainment and commercial sales compose the core of male fashion magazines. Focusing on the pornographic content in American male fashion magazines, Rodger Streitmatter (2004) analyzed the urban sexual culture in the U.S. Moreover, Gauntlett (2002) examined several popular male fashion magazines including *FHM*, *Loaded*, and *Maxim*. Rather than seeing male fashion magazines as having reinvented traditional masculinity or resisting feminism, he demonstrated that male magazines expose men's anxiety and insecurity. Co-authored by Peter Jackson, Nick Stevenson, and Kate Brooks (2001), *Making sense of Men's Magazines* is a comprehensive study of male magazines. Based on the analysis of the debate in media about the market expansion of male magazines, the authors probed into the content and editing of male fashion magazines, and examined masculinities as constructed discourses. They drew from Bourdieu's conceptualization of "cultural capital" to distinguish distinct ways of meaning construction of male magazines. By empirical studies, the authors pointed out that men's gender anxiety is related to health, career, sex, and consumption culture. This approach reflects the issue of "masculinity crisis" widely discussed by Western scholars. One decisive drive for such crisis certainly pertains to the transformation in women's economic and educational status. However, despite the fact that gender evolves along with broader social transformation, it is always regulated by conventions. However, while most current studies of male fashion magazines still focus on explaining how Western fashion magazines construct masculinity through textual encoding in the context of consumerism in the Western world, there are few researches

discussing how transnational fashion media and the market economy in non-Western societies conspire to represent local masculinity.

Focusing on Chinese male fashion magazines, this study aims to show how Western media corporations reconstruct the gender order in Chinese society through copyright trade and cooperation. In contemporary China, those who used to hold strategic advantages in Mao's era, like workers from state-owned enterprises and peasants with sacred political identity, have lost the resources and reputation they once possessed in the socialist system. It is the high-income male class ~~male~~ emerging from the post-socialist market economy that the local male fashion magazines try to attract and unite. With their high income and welfare benefits, these men acquire power from the neoliberal economic expansion. The hegemonic masculinity of this up-flowing male class contributes to the formation of masculinities that are lately oppressed and abandoned by the globalization of market economy. Transnational capital and market economy have excluded workers, peasants, and those hi-tech proletarians through impoverishment.

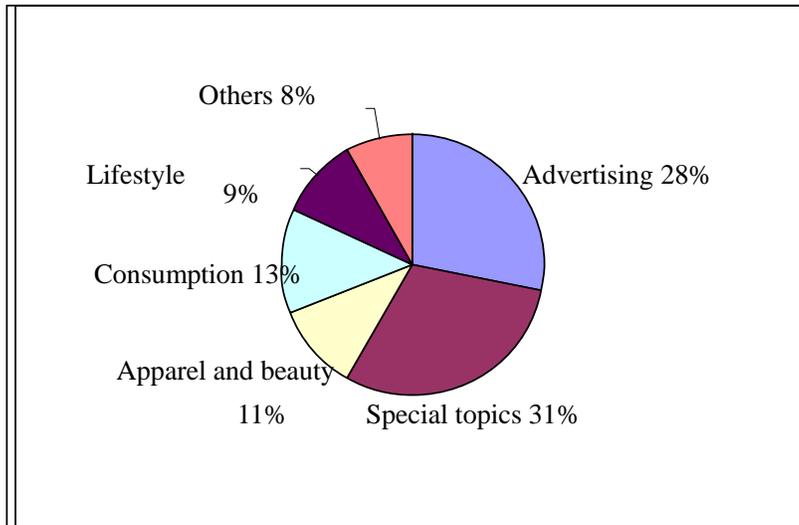
### **III. Empirical Study of Chinese Male Magazine *Esquire***

First published in January 1997, *Esquire* is the first male fashion magazine to participate in international copyright cooperation; it also performs extraordinarily in the local market at present.

The Chinese *Esquire* acquired the copyright from its American umbrella cooperation in 1999. The American *Esquire* started its publication in the U.S. in 1933 and now its

global circulation has exceeded 3,000,000. Its Hong Kong version is called *Junzi* while its Taiwanese version is *Fengshang*. The average age of *Esquire*'s readers is 41.7. Over 44% of the readers hold management positions---they belong to the male elites in the society with decent education and successful career. The new chief editor of the Chinese *Esquire* has summarized the magazine's goals and appeals as "three represents". First, *Esquire* represents the advanced productive force---humans are the most powerful productive forces, therefore the figures in *Esquire* must be the most powerful, influential, and up-flowing group of this era. Second, it also represents the advanced culture which not only embraces openness, vigor, innovation, harmony, luxury and classics, but also reflects masculinity and power. Finally, the magazine represents the life aspiration of Chinese new wealthy class which entails a comprehensive guide to the latest products and consuming activities both in and outside China. Accordingly, the content of *Esquire* is mainly comprised of four parts: special topics (31% of the total content, including feature stories, topics on consumption, thoughts and culture), advertising (28%), apparels and beauty (11%), and personal consumption (22%). For details, see table 1. The goal of the magazine is to offer the high-income male group practical consumption advices and tips with international standard.

Table 1: Content Proportion of *Esquire*



According to a survey in 2007, the average age of Esquire's readers is 30.29; male accounts for 75% of the readers while female composes merely 25%; 71% of the readers are between the age of 24 and 34. Moreover, 80% have a bachelor's degree or above; 70% earn an annual income between ¥80,000-120,000 or above. These readers have explicit intentions for luxury products consumption, 86% show a strong loyalty to the brands they like, 70% consider luxury products to be an indispensable part in life, and 73% are willing to spend more money on brand products. Before 2005, Esquire's selection of cover figures, just as most female magazines that tend to put Western stars and models on their covers, largely focused on Hollywood stars and male models. After the magazine's face-lift in April of 2005, the selective range of cover figures has expanded to include sports-stars, top business men, celebrities and so on, all of who are Chinese males who enjoy news values and social influence across mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. There were only three exceptions: in June 2006 issue, because of the World Cup, the cover figure was Shevchenko; in February 2006, Ziyi Zhang was the

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cover figure as part of her campaign for returning; and in 2007, one issue had Beckham on the cover because of his visit to China. It is obvious that *Esquire* strictly sticks to three principles in its selection of the cover figures: Chinese, news values and social influence, and the disposition of gentility. These principles highly emphasize the fame and economic competence of the cover figures as well as the magazine's strategies of localization. The circulation of fashion magazines is always a controversial sensitive issue in the industry: due to lack of supervision, such data usually come from the magazine publishers. In general, for a mature magazine as *Esquire* that has been published for more than 3 years, the selling rate of its every issue stays steadily between 85% and 95% while that of the relatively newly-published ones (less than 1 year) falls to somewhere between 50% and 60%. Based on major cities as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Nanjing, the actual circulation of Chinese *Esquire* stands between 260,000 and 290,000.

**Advertising Brands:** *Esquire*, *FMH*, and *Fashion Health* account for 87% of the Chinese male magazine market. In China's fashion magazine market, *Esquire* is the only male fashion magazine that ranks among top-ten in terms of advertising revenue. It includes all the international first-line brands that have entered mainland China, as shown in Table 2. According to the marketing research conducted by *Esquire*'s editorial office, those who earn a monthly income between 20,000 and 50,000 RMB are the typical consumers of luxury products. It is estimated that the number of this group of people will rise to 250 million by 2010. Obviously, with such a huge potential market, the current

number of male fashion magazine is far from being adequate and the prospects for the industry is optimistic. Meanwhile, the anti-luxury movement is gaining momentum in the West and the market of luxury brands is constantly diminishing there. The East-bound expansion of capital, together with the strategies taken by luxury brands to accumulate profits in the emerging market of China, happen to converge with the reform and opening-up policy of China and its needs for sustainable development, thus laying the foundations for the copyright cooperation of fashion magazines. As for the overall market of Chinese male fashion magazines, those magazines with good profits such as *Esquire*, *FHM*, *Fashion and Health*, all depend on copyright cooperation to attract commercial ads from international brands. Copyright cooperation, or copyright trade, is on the one hand, a convenient channel for Chinese male fashion magazines to survive at the early stage of development and raise publicity, and on the other, a powerful means through which Western companies achieve capital expansion and profit accumulation in China as well as gain the legitimacy under China's media and publication system. Although Chinese government always advocates that magazines and periodicals should follow the policy of "Going out, Bringing in", the unidirectional copyright trade with solely "bringing in" is still the only cooperative channel for Chinese fashion magazines. At the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century, many local magazines, including *MUYU*, *SHIJUE21*, *PINWEI*, *GEDIAO*, attempted to make accomplishments in the arena of male fashion magazines, but all failed because of the shortage of commercial advertisements from international brands and the absence of copyright cooperation.

**Table2: Chinese Esquire's ADS Brands**

Salvatore Ferragamo	GUCCI	Tag Heuer
Cartier	DUNHILL	Giorgio Armani
LV	GIVENCHY	BURBERRY
Montblanc	Hermes	Cadillac CTS
PRADA	Air France	Grey Goose
Marlboro Classics	NAVIGARE	FRAWSITION
AUTASON	Y3	Aimer
Canali	DAKS	Honda
LACOSTE	Kaiser	PIOMBO
HUGO BOSS	Satchi	Paul&shark
FLORINTENO	Robertadi Camerino	PARKER
Bilancioni	Lenovo	HOPTAHE
FERRE	Samsonite	Benetton
Tod's	ECCO	Sisley
Acura	Macallan	Bruno banani
DIKENI	Remy Martin	DIDIBOY

Hart Schaffner Marx	L'OREAL	MENHARDUM (HK)
JODOLL	PUMA	ALFIERI&JOHN
MOTO V8	Montagut	Kyron
SWATCH	OMEGA	Huicai(HK)
Docle&Gabbana	Corneliani	CK
Rado	GF	Thelebre(HK)
V.E.DELURE	Testantin	J.BENATO
Toyota	Ford	VERSACE
Baoxiniao	SKODA	REDA
Fruit of the Room	Swellfun	MAGOTAN
Goldlion	BRAUNBUFFEL	CHANEL
DFS	DANIL CREMIEUX	Ruibeida
Rockport	Audi	Canon
Fapai	Victorinox	Polo Ralph Lauren
S.T.Dupont	VOLVO	Red Dragonfly
Holiland	VERTU	DISCOVERY

Florsheim	Baoxiniao	Longines
Kwun Kee Tailor (HK)	Patek Philippe	Bang&Olufsen
Vitale Barberis Canonico	Jissbon	PARKER

As Table 2 indicates, among more than 100 brands that appeared in *Esquire* in 2007, there were only 14 Chinese local brands, accounting for approximately 10% of all brands. Nearly 90% of the advertising in the magazines were held by foreign brands, which reflected the dependency of the local media economy on the transnational fashion industry. According to the data of media studies by AC Nelson, the advertising industry in mainland China continues to increase. As for the proportion of advertisement, in comparison with female fashion magazines in which advertisements usually account for 50% of the content, *Esquire* only has 30%, which shows the potential for advertising in male fashion magazines. More specifically, the advertising of male consumption products has increased remarkably. AC Nelson predicted the trend for advertisement in China in the year 2008: the ad expenditure for male cosmetics would surge by 60%. In contrast, ad expenditure for female products would only see a 10% increase. The manufacturers consequently started to pay attention to the male market with the great potential that was once ignored. Male advertisement used to focus solely on apparel and automobiles, but

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this market has gradually entered a phase of rapid development after 2005. For example, the ad expenditure by international brands of alcoholic drinks showed drastic increase in 2005; among which that of whisky and brandy increased by 240% and 90% respectively (data from the internal monthly report from some fashion corporation). So far, almost all the world's top brands have opened branches or even flagship stores in China. According to a survey conducted by the Association of Swiss Watch Industry, China is now the tenth largest exporting destination of Switzerland and has 3,000,000 to 5,000,000 consumers of luxurious watches. The major retailers of such brands as Benetton and Paul, Dickson Concepts open 390 stores all over the world and 140 of these are located in mainland China. After entering China, these foreign brands immediately put advertisements in fashion magazines so as to establish their brand publicity in Chinese market. Nowadays, the price for a single-page advertisement remains the same for male and female fashion magazines in China. However, the advertising price in male fashion magazines is much higher than in female fashion magazines in Western countries.

#### **IV. Chinese Male Magazines, International Copyright Trade and Construction of Masculinities in China**

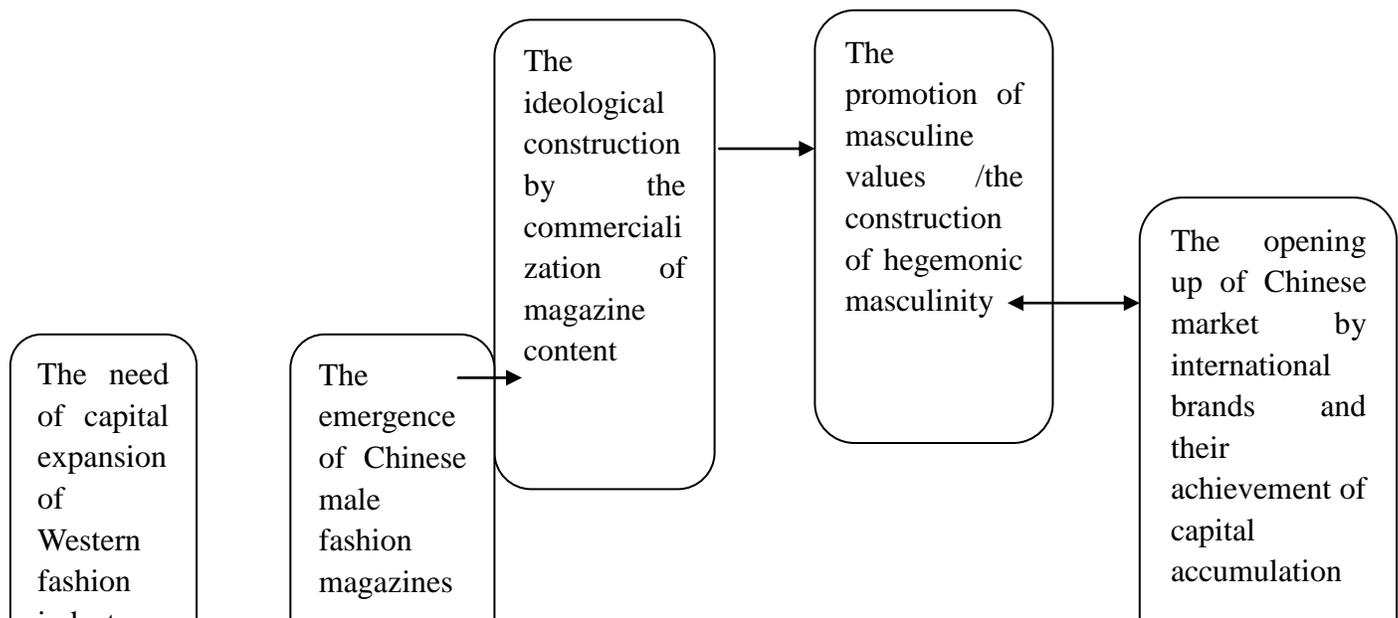
In Bettig's article "The Frankfurt School and the Political Economy of Communication" (2002), he pointed out that the central task of the political economy of culture is to examine how the logic of capital shapes the structure and content of cultural industry. He asserted that the interpretive turn of the social sciences in 1960s led to a

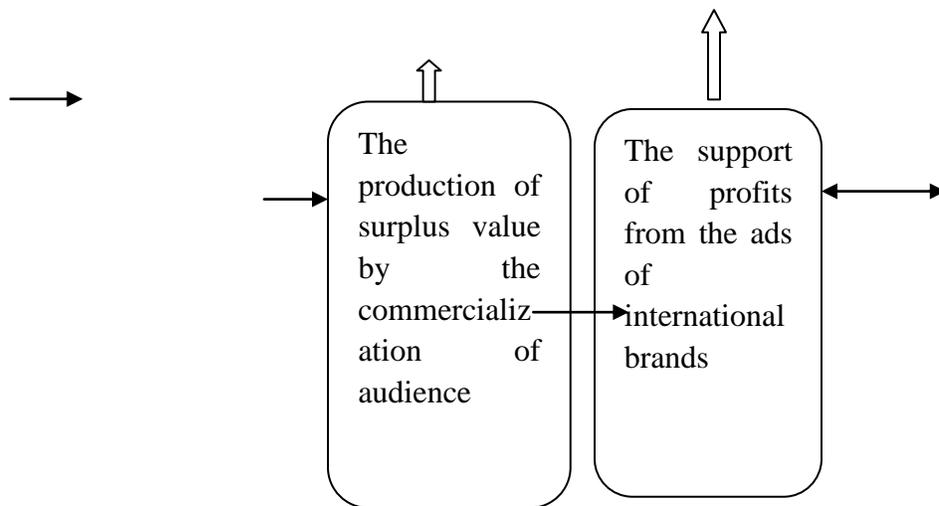
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necessity to institutionally analyze the relationships between economy, politics and communication system. The attention to such institutional analysis has resulted, to a large extent, from the increasing realization of the important role cultural industry plays in the oppression of social transformation (Bettig, 2002). Bettig is also well-known for his view that the actual power behind capitalist hegemony is not ideology but the coercive power of the capita, which is the key understanding of cultural industry by the study of political economy of communication. If we explain the commercial operation of Chinese male fashion magazine *Esquire* based on Bettig's theory, it is easy to find out that the underlying force of the market operation of local fashion magazines is closely associated with the coercive power of capital by which the Western world expand and accumulate its capital. In addition, it is via the specific mechanism of copyright trade that the capital exerts its power and reconstructs the myth of hegemonic masculinity in China, as well as the new class and gender order.

*Esquire* does not generate revenue merely by circulation. Instead, it is a commercial medium that relies on the ad expenditure of international brands to make profits. The marketing strategies of *Esquire* include limiting its circulation only to the target readers with high income, and more importantly, motivating the readers to engage in the consumption of the products the magazine has advertised. *Esquire* sells the fashion information to the audience, but ultimately it sells the audience to the advertisers. Smythe (1977)'s theory of Audience Commodity proposes that in the capitalist media system, the primary economic source of media comes from the advertising revenue; therefore, what

media produce is not the programs but a special commodity---the audience. Programs merely provide the audience with free lunch so as to attract their attention and then sell the attention to the advertisers. Accordingly, media, advertising, and audience are inseparably interrelated. As Mosco pointed out, “the media serve to tie the home, particularly through the activities of women, to the system of production and consumption by replenishing the energies of workers and connecting people to networks of consumption that thicken with each wave of new media and information technology. To complete the cycle, needs, interests, and desires emerging from the process of social reproduction become the source of entertainment and information programming which are used as direct and indirect vehicles for promoting consumption” (2009, p.370). The commercialization of *Esquire* is a process which commercializes both magazine content and audience. The advertising of international brands is the central economic support for this commercialization process. If we examine the magazine within the general framework of media, advertising, and audience, we can identify the following operational mode of Chinese male fashion magazines:





For most fashion magazines, the ratio of texts to graphics is approximately 4:6 (the count of graphics includes the illustration in the texts). We roughly calculated the ratio of texts to graphics in *Esquire* as 3:7, which is closely related to the fact that Chinese male fashion magazines primarily make profits by advertising. When circulation alone cannot generate adequate revenue, fashion magazines have to resort to advertising to make up for the loss in circulation. In this sense, the magazines survive mainly by the profits they acquire from advertisements of international brands. “The process of commodification thoroughly integrates the media industries into the total capitalist economy not primarily by creating ideologically saturated products but by producing audiences, en masse *and* in specific demographically desirable forms, for advertisers. Smythe thereby aimed to rescue the materialist analysis of the media by demonstrating that it is the production of audiences for the general capitalist economy that is central to the commodification process rather than the production of ideology.” (Mosco, 2009, p.263) Furthermore, under

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the circumstance of neoliberal economy, Western countries have emphasized “de-regulation” in its market system and communication policies, which turns the media’s focus from audience’s interest to business profits. As a result, commercial media gain overwhelming advantages in their competition with public media. Since media industry is incorporated into the broader international advertising market, the pursuit of maximum profits has become the only goal of the media. Central to the existence of media industry is advertising that in turn eliminates the essential role media ought to play in safeguarding Western democracy and defending public interests (Cao & Zhao, 2007).

An Expert of copyright studies, Ronald Bettig (1996) kept reminding readers in his work *Copyright Culture: the Political Economy of Intellectual Property* that in the contemporary world, copyright protects the interests of copyright industry rather than human creativity. Through World Trade Organization, Western countries, particularly the U.S., with highly commercialized cultural industry, have tried to institutionalize their copyright policies in the world community, thus forcing the global copyright system that used to be beneficial for developing countries to be subject to the commercial interests of transnational corporations (Bettig, 1996). The copyright cooperation of fashion magazines is not only an effective way for Western transnational media corporations to promote their media products to developing countries and make profits, but also the pioneer of international brands to gain surplus values from the developing world. Bettig further pointed out that “Third World nations argued that international intellectual property system served as pillar of the global economic structure that helped maintain

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their dependency on imports of media products and technology .Fernando Cardoso, a leading writer on the ‘dependency approach ’identified an emergent form of economic dependence for semi-peripheral and peripheral nations where surplus value is increasingly extracted in the form of licenses and royalties on patents and copyrights and of interest payments on national debt.”(1996, p.197) Through the export of copyright, Western countries take control of capital expansion and cultural export, which enables them to see their own ideology as the dominant and universal values. Western culture and media encode the logic and ideology of commercialization into cultural apparatus. As a result, the importers of copyright tend not to passively accept the imposition of Western ideology. In contrast, these countries actively cater to the Western world’s expansion of copyright trade and the subsequent permeation of values through transnational cooperation or excellent performance in keeping up with the most advanced global standard. If we understand the “hegemonic masculinity” as a part of the Western cultural hegemonies, the way in which China accepts and embraces it cannot be simply explained by the expansion of Western capitalist consumerism to Asia. Drawing upon the concept of “dominance” to analyze cultural hegemony, Said pointed out that the West is usually seen as the driving force behind the global cultural process while the East as the passive receivers. However, cultural hegemony never works merely through passive acceptance; it only works when the passive acceptors are transformed into conscious actors. This is the fundamental idea in Gramsci’s definition of hegemony (Wang Mingming, 1998) While Chinese media industry is in the predicament of decreases in both ad expenditure

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and profits, fashion magazines with international copyright cooperation still enjoy continuous increase in advertising and revenue. Its market potential and prospects have been officially regarded as the symbol of creative operation and economic power of Chinese media. However, the administrators of China's media industry do not rationally realize that the profit growth of such magazines is subject to its complex power relations with the advertising of Western brands, behind which is the operational mode of transnational corporations and manufacturers. They also ignore the threat and control of transnational capital over the local media. The mainstream media discourse in mainland China emphasizes the significance of conglomeration and the economic pursuit of media organizations, echoing the capital expansion from the Western world. *Esquire* is a representative local case in this historical context.

The expansion of capitalism leads to the opening- up of the market and the elimination of capital boundaries. Nevertheless, the boundaries of human subjects are still delimited by class, gender, race, location, and nation. It is important to note that media industry has reconstructed human subjectivity as consuming capacity. International scholars have realized that men do not escape from the influence of capitalist consumption culture. For instance, Susan Faludi (1999) offered insights on how the materialistic pursuit driven by consumerism and capitalist economy form objectified and sexy femininity and vigorous, authoritative and muscular masculinity in media representation. Her study found that the traditional male gender role as a "bread-winner" harms those unemployed men. Our society seems to have kept promises to men by giving

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them happiness derived from the traditional male gender roles. However, men are already “betrayed” in this sense. She also suggested that feminists have been wrong to assert that traditional male role empowers men, endows them with a better way of living while leaving women to trivial and boring chores. Faludi’s main point is that modern society oppresses and constrains a man even more than a woman. Just as what she sharply pointed out, both men and women were enslaved by consumption culture, appearance, and charm. This is exactly what happens in China during the economic transition: human subjectivity is being constructed in fashion magazines as consumption capacity. The emphasized femininities represented in Chinese female fashion magazines are obviously permeated with elements of sexualization and commercialization. Approved by market economy and consumerism, these emphasized femininities have become the symbol of urban women’s modernity and competency. Such objectified gender roles are a radical response and rebounding to the de-sexualized and masculinized femininities prevailing in Mao’s era and the moral principles they carried. As a classic example of male fashion magazines, *Esquire* constructs a version of masculinity which emphasizes on professional reputation, social influence, business competence and consumption capacity, which combine together to give prominence to the dignity of civilized gentlemen. The new chief editor of the Chinese *Esquire* has summarized the magazine’s goals and appeals as “three represents”. First, *Esquire* represents the advanced productive forces---humans are the most powerful productive forces, therefore the figures in *Esquire* must be the most powerful, influential, and up-flowing group of this era. Second, it also represents the

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advanced culture which not only embraces openness, vigor, innovation, harmony, luxury, and classics but also reflects masculinity and power. Finally, the magazine represents the life aspiration of Chinese new wealthy class by entailing a comprehensive guide to the latest consumption products and activities both in and outside China, as well as the broadest horizons of international consumption. The first goal indicates that the figures in *Esquire* all belong to the upward class in the social stratification who are the new beneficiaries in the wave of market economy. The second goal regarding advanced culture reflects all the distinguished accomplishments of the hegemonic masculinities, ie the respectable qualities of gentlemen. The third goal refers to the gentlemen's capacity for consuming international brands, which is central to the subjectivity of gentlemen. For instance, as cover figures of *Esquire*, the Six Brother in real estate and the elite members of other industries are not only successful in their career, but more importantly, showing the competent of consuming international brands. In contrast, once as the main group of revolution in Mao's era, the workers in state-owned enterprises and the vast peasantry, whose employment opportunities have been extremely reduced since China began to embrace market economy, embody a backward group with scarce modern skills and inefficient productivity. This group has become the burden of market economy and the obstacle to modernization. Like all the other factors of planned economy that hinder the economic development, this group is obviously incompatible with the globalization that focuses on efficiency and profits. If the cover girls of fashion magazines are seen as being objectified for men's gaze, so are the handsome men on the covers of *Esquire*. In fact,

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during the process of the global expansion of capital, both men and women are utilized by the capital as means of profit accumulation. With the continuous growth of fashion magazines' market profits, the "Hegemonic masculinity" and the "Emphasized femininity" are further legitimized in the globalization of the market economy. The objectification of gender adopted by fashion magazines is constantly used by capital to conceal class differentiation and gender inequality. Thanks to the reconstruction of Chinese masculinities and femininities, Western capital has successfully veiled the serious issues of class differentiation and inequality caused by the globalization of market economy. Jacqui True (2000) has also found that socialist system once endowed its male employees with certain advantages and a sense of security that have been undermined in many ways by the neo-liberalistic reform destroyed. What the latter is doing is to create flexible subjects for regional and global market, disregarding gender difference.<sup>i</sup> Socialist nations once promised urban workers job security and superior status through stable employment and welfare; they also guaranteed peasants sacred identity and political trust. However, these resources have been replaced by the competition of market economy and various other flexible policies. Only those gentlemen with economic competence can possess the status, masculinity, and prestige of a modern man.

Sue Curry Jansen, an American critical scholar of communication, advocates (2002) Connell's definitions of masculinities, femininities, and gender power relations that are based on the gender order. She thinks that the definitions of masculinities and the dominant masculinity are ideologies that serve the interests of men who dominate the

society. The hegemonic masculinity reflects, supports and actively cultivates gender inequality (patriarchy). Meanwhile, it also allows male elite to extend their influence and control over men with lower social status through the “hierarchy of domination among men”. Esquire not only offers latest information about the fashion products promoted by the Western fashion industry, which is an indispensable part in the surplus value accumulation of Western transnational capital, but also disseminates the symbols and notions of gender and class from Western societies, which gives prominence to the consumption competence of local urban male elite who dominate market economy. Just as the transnational capital guided by neo-liberalism, the commercialized masculinity represented by fashion magazines holds dominant status and market competence, and embodies modernity as well. As a result, such hegemonic masculinity depreciates the social status of those men and women who do not have competence in market economy and consumption, and excludes their voice from media.

**Notes:**

<sup>2</sup> “Hegemonic masculinity” is the key term discussed by Robert W. Connell in his work *Gender and Power* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1987, p.183-190).

Borrowing the concept of class and cultural hegemony from Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci, Connell proposed the theory of “Hegemonic masculinity”, which refers to the dominant masculinity in the culture instead of any individual physical characteristics.

Hegemonic masculinity does not indicate how powerful men are, but focuses on the maintenance of male power by the hegemonic masculinity which is actively imitated and supported by a large male population. Particularly, “Hegemony” suggests large extent of agreement. Hegemonic masculinity is a dominant and exclusive gender system situated in its relations to various subordinated masculinities as well as emphasized femininity. Hegemonic masculinity is a key word coined by Rober W. Connell in his work *Gender and Power* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1987, p.183-190). Drawing on Marxist theorist Gramsci’s concept of “hegemony”, he argues that a hegemonic masculinity is not an individual and personal feature, but the masculinity of those who occupy a dominant position on top of hierarchy of power. It does not necessarily indicate the actual power, but it does help maintain the power enjoyed by men and is being supported and emulated by the majority of men. Hegemony here indicates a wide extent of consensus and approval. Hegemonic masculinity is an exclusive domination system, constructed with a variety of masculinities and in its relationship with emphasized femininities.

<sup>3</sup> All data we draw in this paper come from the field notes that members of this research team made during a field trip in *Esquire* from June 2007 to January 2008. The fashion group was established in 1993, and has become one of the most successful consumption magazine groups nowadays. Western fashion magazines started around 1950s and 1960s, yet the first fashion magazine in China did not appear till 1997; the gap is about 4 decades. Since January 1997, *Fashion* magazine has started to publish with two lines, one for male titled *Mr. Fashion*, and the other for female titled *Ms. Fashion*, both of which are fortnightly. It occupied the market dominantly until the *Fashion and Health* male version was brought into being by Fashion group in 2003 and in the same year, another fashion male magazine named *Mangazine* was published by the Southern Daily Group. In China, the three male magazines published by Fashion group, *Esquire*, *FHM* and *Fashion and Health* now combine to account for 87% of the market. In September 1999, the Chinese *Esquire* started a copyright cooperation with American *Esquire*, becoming the first male magazine in China to ever have copyright trade. By January 2008, there are mainly ten male fashion magazines published in mainland China, namely, *Esquire*, *FHM*, *Fashion and Health*, *Mangazine*, *Maxim*(Chinese version), *Prestige*, *The Outlook Magazine*,

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*Men's Uno*, *Metropolis* (Male Version) and *Trendsette*. We chose *Esquire* as our sample because it is the first to have started a copyright cooperation and also because it ranks high in terms of ads revenue among all the magazines. In 2006, its ads revenue amounted to 0.12 billion, ranking 7<sup>th</sup>, the same with 2007.

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