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Effeminate men in China

The attitudes of Chinese young-adults towards effeminate men.

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1. Introduction

On September 2nd 2021 the Chinese government banned the appearance of ‘sissy men’ on television and video streaming sites (Wang, 2021). The government believes that these ‘sissy men’ are too effeminate and carry out abnormal aesthetics (Associated press, 2021). The males are often celebrities or TV-personalities with a massive fanbase. For example, the male participants in Chinese talent shows wear heavy make-up, jewelry and unisex clothes (Wang 2021). In November 2021 the Chinese government also banned the online profiles of effeminate celebrities and their fan groups (Gao 2021). Effeminate men are generally defined as young men who embody feminine beauty, they are often characterized by their trim physique, a flawless skin, stylish look and make-up on their face (Song 2021, 3). According to the Chinese government, the effeminate men aren’t strong and fail to encourage Chinese boys to be masculine (Associated press, 2021). The Chinese government fears a ‘crisis of masculinity’ and the Chinese authorities now try to stop the phenomenon of effeminate men. Therefore, on September 2nd 2021 China’s TV regulator sent a message to broadcasters that they must “resolutely put an end to sissy men and other abnormal aesthetics to vigorously promote excellent Chinese traditional culture, revolutionary culture and advanced socialist culture” (Gu 2021). The ban on these effeminate stars is part of Xi Jinping’s ‘national rejuvenation’, his plan for the People’s Republic of China to regain its standing as a great power (Gao, 2021). In this plan the Chinese youth is very important. Xi Jinping believes that “if the youth is prosperous, the country is prosperous, if the youth is strong, the country is strong” (Bo, 2017).

This ban on effeminate stars led to a lot of discussion in Chinese media and on Chinese social media. Hongwei Bao, an expert in gender, sexuality and identity, argues that this ban can have a negative impact on the mental health of people, especially on people from gender and sexual minorities (Burton-Bradley 2022). Zhou Peng, a 26-year-old Chinese man committed suicide in November 2021 (Burton-Bradley 2022). Before his suicide, he posted a message on his Weibo account, this is a Chinese social media platform. In the message he wrote he was being bullied at high school. He wrote: “Boys are supposed to be naughty, fight and swear, and boys who are too quiet and polite are effeminate. I was called ‘sissy’ at school” (Burton-Bradley 2022). His message on Weibo got a lot of responses from other Chinese young people who spoke out their concerns that more Chinese young people might not feel accepted if the Chinese government keeps on banning effeminate men (Burton-

Bradley 2022). These news articles address the actions the Chinese government takes against the phenomenon of effeminate men. The Chinese government banned effeminate stars from television because they want a strong Chinese manhood and the effeminate men are not seen as strong enough (Gu 2021, Associated press, 2021).

In this thesis I will delve deeper into the phenomenon of effeminate men and try to investigate what the opinion of Chinese people towards it is. I will focus on Chinese young adults because they are most in touch with this phenomenon through social media. I want to find out if effeminate men are popular in China, if young adults think they are accepted in Chinese society and what their opinion is about effeminate men. Therefore I will try to answer the question: ‘What kind of attitude do Chinese young adults hold towards effeminate men in China?’ To answer this question, I will first give an overview of the studies that have been performed on Chinese effeminacy to make clear what this phenomenon contains. Then I will elaborate on Chinese masculinity and explain an old Chinese masculinity ideal called *wen-wu* because this ideal involves some effeminate characteristics.

My own research consists of two parts. I first did some preliminary research to existing attitudes regarding effeminate men in China based on research articles and news articles. There are three main attitudes with regards to effeminate men in China. The first attitude is about the fear that China’s manhood will be weak if men are acting effeminate, related to this is the hatred against effeminate men. The second attitude is adoring effeminate men, this attitude is mainly shown by females because they think effeminate men are attractive. Lastly, there is a neutral attitude towards effeminate men, people who don’t have a strong opinion about it and just accept it. Based on these attitudes I made questions that I asked in a survey which I shared with fifteen native Chinese people to find out whether these attitudes are known by Chinese people.

In the second part of my research I elaborated on the results of the survey and interviewed ten Chinese young adults. In these interviews I asked questions about how they think effeminate men are perceived in China and how they themselves perceive effeminate men. Based on the answers of my respondents, I will make clear in the conclusion what the attitude of Chinese young adults towards effeminate men is.

2. Studies on effeminate men in China

There exist several TV shows in China that feature effeminate men. For example the Chinese television drama series ‘Meteor Garden’ (2018) is about a Chinese girl who goes to an elite high school where she is being bullied by four handsome male students called the Flower Boys (F4) (Song 2021, 5). The F4 embody effeminate beauty, they take care of their appearance, have stylish hair, stylish clothing and a soft skin. In the series the boys are very popular among the girls in high school (Song 2021, 5). The series is a remake from the Korean series where it is called ‘Boys over Flowers’ which was adapted from Japanese manga and anime also including flower boys. These flower boys first appeared in Korean and Japanese television and anime, and later became popular in China and other Asian countries (Wen 2021, 6-7). Meteor Garden has remakes in India, Indonesia and Thailand (Song 2021, 6). Thus, the effeminate male ideal does not only appear in China, but in more Asian countries, especially Korea and Japan. Accordingly, scholars speak of the emergence of a ‘pan-East Asian soft masculinity’ (Louie 2012, 930). To illustrate the ‘pan-East-Asian soft masculinity’ further, since the 1970s, the image of a ‘girlie man’ has been popular in Japanese manga, anime and television series. A popular sub-genre in Japanese manga is called ‘Boys Love’ (BL). This genre is written by women and for women. The stories are about a romantic and erotic relation between two young men. The genre spread to Taiwan and China where it is called *danmei* (Louie 2012, 933). Another example is the Japanese television series *Otomen* (2006) which is also available in Korean and Chinese. The series is about a boy who likes girlish things like cooking and sewing. ‘Otomen’ consists of the Japanese word *otome* which means ‘young girl’ and the English word *men*, so it’s a ‘girlie man’. In the series a young boy is struggling to prove to his family that he is a real man, and at the same time he is trying to be his true feminine self (Louie 2012, 934).

Ugly Wudi, another Chinese television drama, includes an effeminate character called Chen Jiaming. This show is originated in Columbia, and in the original Columbian version, Chen Jiaming was a gay person (Zhang 2019, 256). But in China homosexuality isn’t allowed on television, so in the Chinese version, the gay character is portrayed as a heterosexual, effeminate person instead (Zhang 2019, 257). Zhang interviewed Chinese people of different ages who watch the television drama *Ugly Wudi*, to investigate their attitude towards the effeminate character Chen Jiaming. Among the respondents, the older respondents (aged 45 years and older) had a mostly negative/conservative attitude towards the effeminate character, the young respondents (between the age of 18-29) and middle-aged respondents (between the

age of 30-45) had a mostly positive/liberal attitude (Zhang 2019, 260). Zhang argued the results were quite oppressive and stigmatizing, the younger as well as the older respondents often used the term ‘sissy’ to describe Chen Jiaming, which is a derogatory term (Zhang 2019, 264-266).

An important factor that consolidates the phenomenon of effeminate men in East-Asia is K-pop (Korean pop). K-pop bands gained a lot of popularity in the past years. They are popular for their hybrid masculinities, they can perform feminine, queer, androgynous and masculine expressions. (Kim and Lopez 2021, 1). On the one hand, they can sing sweet love songs, blow kisses, and wear make-up, on the other hand, they can show tough and manly characteristics by performing hip-hop songs and showing strong and explosive dance moves (Song and Velding 2020, 5). However, the hybrid masculinity is very different from the western masculinity and the western boybands. But because of this difference, it challenges the masculine stereotypes in the west, and is gaining popularity in Western countries too, for example in the United States (Lee, Lee and Park 2020, 5904). Young American individuals answered questions regarding their attitudes towards these feminine styles. Results show that the biggest part of the respondents think the effeminate style is strange because it’s very different from the hegemonic masculinity in the United States. However, some respondents also liked the feminine style, but these were mostly female respondents (Lee, Lee, Park 2020 and Song and Velding 2020).

Women play an important role in the effeminate male trend because they define what they think is an attractive and desirable man, and many Chinese young women like that men aren’t very manly but embody a soft masculinity (Louie 2012, 937). On the internet effeminate men are labeled as *xiao xian rou* which means ‘little fresh meat’. ‘Fresh meat’ stands for the attractive bodies of Chinese men and ‘little’ stands for the young age of these men. It describes a young attractive man with a good body but without much social and work experience (Li 2020, 59). Men labeled as ‘little fresh meat’ are playing a big role in the consumer market because they seem an effective way to attract female consumers. Consequently, effeminate men are seen more and more in Chinese advertisements, lifestyle magazines and campaigns to sell female cosmetic products like skin care products or make-up. They even become brand ambassadors for cosmetic brands like L’Oréal Paris or Lancôme (Song 2021, 4). For example Li Jiaqi, he is the most popular lipstick salesperson in China (Wen 2021, 260). He earned more than 10 million yuan (~ 1,4 million euro) in one year by livestreaming lipstick on Alibaba’s e-commerce platform ‘Tmall’. Li calls it the ‘consumption of sexualized men’ because male bodies are used to sell female products (Wen 2021, 260).

The findings above show that there are several studies about the phenomenon of effeminate men in China. Researchers studied when the phenomenon of effeminate men emerged and that it not only appears in China but in several other East-Asian countries. They further give examples in what kinds of stories and television shows effeminate men appear. They also discuss the role of the internet, the fandom of women and the success of effeminate men in the consumption industry. Little research has been done on what the opinions of Chinese people are towards effeminate men in the Chinese society. Therefore, in the second part of this thesis, I will focus on Chinese young adults and investigate what their attitudes towards effeminate men are.

3. Ancient Chinese masculinity ideal *wen-wu*

In this chapter I will explain the old Chinese masculinity ideal *wen-wu* which has feminine characteristics, the ideal *wen-wu* has been a masculinity ideal throughout Chinese history. *Wen-wu* literally means ‘literary-martial’. *Wen* stands for cultural accomplishments and mental attainments. *Wu* stands for martial accomplishments and physical attainments. So *wen-wu* captures the mental and physical attainments of an ideal man, as the ideal man should have both *wen* and *wu* (Louie 2003, 4).

However, throughout Chinese history *wen* has long been superior to *wu*, except during the revolutionary Maoist era from the 1950s till the 1970s, when *wu* was more important (Wen 2021, 257). Chinese men obtained *wen* achievements if they passed the civil service examinations. Being civilized and educated symbolizes the ‘right to power’ because if you passed the examinations, you could get a leadership role and achieve political power. In this way, scholars often had a higher social status than soldiers and were thus seen as more important (Louie 2003, 5). Masculinity displayed through *wen* is ‘soft’ masculinity, the masculinity is displayed through cultural and literary engagement in contrast to martial and physical attainments (Louie 2003, 41). During late imperial China, the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasty, the most prevalent male images were anti-masculine. Men were young, weak, slim and beardless, a feminized appearance was a male beauty ideal during that time (Louie 2005, 19). Stories in Chinese literature and theatre were often about a love story between a talented scholar and a beautiful woman. The ideal man was represented as a talented scholar who is delicate, sensitive and has a fair skin and elegant physique. These are characteristics that are associated with softness and femininity. The masculinity of these talented scholars doesn’t lie in their physical strength, but in their intellectual ability and literary success. The tough guys were often represented as men with a lower social status, such as farmers or servants (Louie 2003, 42-43).

To illustrate, I shall mention a few stories from China’s late imperial period that are about feminized men. In the late Ming dynasty erotic tales were popular, and the main character was often a man with a feminized appearance. For example in the erotic novel *Langshi* you follow the life of the hero ‘Langzi’, a man that women can’t resist because of his beautiful feminized appearance (Louie 2003, 22). Another example is ‘Silent operas’ from Li Yu. This is a collection of short stories about the hero Lü Xu. Lü Xu also was irresistible to women because of his feminine appearance, he had a white, fair skin and a charming figure (Li 1990). During the Qing dynasty, a frequently written type of novel was the *caizijiaoren*

novel. In these stories *caizi* are young male heroes with a soft masculinity and feminine personalities. They study hard for their civil examinations to achieve political success. The *jiaren* are young female heroes who support their *caizi* on his path to success (Louie 2003, 24). Another example of a famous story is *Honglou Meng*, the story about the feminized man Jia Baoyu, written by Cao Xueqin (Cao 2010). Jia Baoyu had no wealth, work or literary achievements but because of his soft and beautiful appearance he was admired by women. He wore make-up and was not masculine at all, he even detested the male life. He felt at his best in the company of women and admired the female life (Louie 2003, 29). These examples show that a feminized man in the Ming and Qing dynasty was a frequently seen male beauty aesthetic. It was what women and readers at that time demanded and thought was beautiful.

The other part of the *wen-wu* ideal is *wu*. *Wu* represents itself through battles, the ability to fight and show strength. During the twentieth century, China lost almost every battle with foreign countries and was seen as ‘the sick man of East Asia’ (Louie 2003, 9). The Chinese scholar Zheng argues that this humiliating military past is one of the reasons why the Chinese government doesn’t want men to become effeminate because they do not want to relive the past (Zheng 2015, 349). She states that the Chinese government fears a crisis of masculinity which I will further explain in the next chapter.

4. Crisis of masculinity

The physical and military weakness of Chinese men during the twentieth century was humiliating for China, Chinese men lacked *wu* masculinity. According to Zheng, the Chinese government thinks effeminate men also lack *wu* masculinity, they reflect powerlessness and inferiority and are thus not able to win a war (Zheng 2015, 349). Yuan Luo, the General of the Chinese Military Council, published an article that China as a strong nation should be supported by a strong military (Zheng 2015, 353). In this article Luo stated that for China to become a strong nation, men with a heroic, militaristic and fearless spirit are needed. According to Luo, the phenomenon of effeminate men is a disaster to the nation state (Zheng 2015, 353-354). The Chinese government and many Chinese people who read his article agree with him. They believe a strong nation needs strong men and that men should behave like men and not like women. They see a lack of manhood as a crisis of the nation state (Zheng 2015, 354).

Official media outlets published articles about the fear of a crisis of manhood, for example as stated in the 'Xinhua News Agency': "Our youth are the future of our nation. What the popular culture of a country embraces, resists, and spreads is a matter significant for the future of the country. To cultivate the new generation of our times, who shoulder the mission of national rejuvenation, we need to resist the erosion of bad culture and embrace the nutrition of superb culture" (Song 2021, 13-14).

According Yunxiao Sun, the board director of the Chinese Family and Education Council, the root causes of effeminate men are school and family. Sun explains this in his book called 'Saving boys' (2009) (Zheng 2015, 355). In this book he states that schools lack outdoor and sports activities for boys. He states that boys have a natural advantage in sports and have higher testosterone levels than girls and therefore need to play outside. But at school they didn't get the opportunity to play, they had to study books and sit still because it was more important to be a good student. According to Sun, this lack of sports opportunities repressed boys and hindered the development of masculinity (Zheng 2015, 355-356).

Another factor is family. As a result of the one-child policy, many boys were the only child in the family so they got all the love and care from their parents and grandparents. The parents were mostly very protective of their child and would rather let their child focus on studying than doing dangerous things like climbing trees (Zheng 2015, 356). Besides, the fathers were at work most of the time instead of being at home and teaching their son how to be a man. Because of this, the mothers were dominant in the upbringing and the father role

was missing. Sun argues that this lack of a father role also led to a lack of manhood (Zheng 2015, 357). These examples show that encouraging boys to be good at school is more important than developing their athletic side, which hinders the development of masculinity. This corresponds to the superiority of *wen* over *wu*.

To prevent a crisis of the nation state, the Chinese government is changing the education system. Si Zefu, a top delegate of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference Standing Committee, made a plan called 'Proposal to Prevent the Feminization of Male Youths'. In this plan he stated that more men should be hired as physical education teachers to exert a more masculine influence in schools (May 2021). So instead of an exam-oriented program, boys get a sports-oriented program. Educators carried out gender-difference education and established men's junior high schools in the past few years. At these men's junior high schools, boys can cultivate their masculinity and learn how to be a real man. This includes personality training and lots of sports classes including football and boxing (Zheng 2015, 360-361). Furthermore, special schools exist in China which are purely focused on training Chinese boys to become real men. Tang Haiyan runs such a school which he calls 'the Real Boys Club'. He believes that in the current Chinese society, androgynous pop idols, overprotective mothers and mostly female teachers are turning the Chinese boys into effeminate crybabies (Wee 2018). At his school he teaches boys to be 'real men', he learns them to be gallant, strong, courageous, and how to be able to distinguish what is right and what is wrong. He learns them this by teaching a lot of different sports classes and lessons of manhood are taught in slogans, the boys have to shout "I am a real man! The main bearer of the family and social responsibility in the future! The backbone of the Chinese people!" (Wee 2018). Based on the information in these articles, the Chinese government and a part of the Chinese population perceive effeminate men as men who lack masculinity, which they think is a peril to the strength of the Chinese nation.

5. Preliminary research

Before I conduct my own research to investigate how Chinese young adults perceive effeminate men, I did some preliminary research to get an overview of what attitudes towards effeminate men exist in China. The information is based on news articles and academic articles. The first attitude is the one I described in the previous chapter about the perception that effeminate men lack masculinity. This attitude mainly comes from the anxiety that China's manhood will be weak because the effeminacy of young men today, means an effeminate China tomorrow (Song 2021, 12).

Another attitude is the so-called 'sissyphobia', the hatred towards effeminate men. This hatred comes primarily from heterosexual 'manly' men as a way to justify and empower their masculinity (Eguchi 2011, 38). An insulting term that is frequently used in the Chinese media and on Chinese social media platforms such as 'Zhihu' and 'Weibo' to describe effeminate men is 'sissy' or *niangpao*. These terms refer to being inferior, weak and soft (Wen 2021, 258). *Niangpao* means 'sissy pants', this term comes from a 2007 Taiwan television drama. It was used to describe a male character who was considered weak and emotional like a woman (Gu 2021).

Contrarily, young Chinese women see effeminate men as 'little fresh meat', which refers to desirable, good-looking men. Many Chinese young adults argue on social media that an effeminate man doesn't have to be less manly than the macho man. A man can look soft on the outside, but can still be strong on the inside. A man who wears make-up and cares about his appearance can still work hard, be strong and protect women, they believe masculinity is unrelated to appearance (Wen 2021, 260-261). For example Li Jiaqi, the successful lipstick salesperson, got a lot of critique but also a lot of love. For example a Chinese woman wrote on Zhihu: "He wears lipstick, so what? His job is to sell lipstick. He works harder than anyone can imagine. He is tender and sincere, as well as being responsible, courageous, with plenty of will to succeed. In my view, he is a real gentleman!" (Wen 2021, 261). Besides, by taking so much care of their appearance, effeminate men dare to challenge the gender stereotypes. Seen this way, a man can be soft and tough at the same time, embody both *wen* and *wu*, like the ideal man (Wen 2021, 262).

I did not research these attitudes myself, so based on these different attitudes, I made a short survey to see whether these different attitudes are known by Chinese people. The survey consists of 15 questions, part of the questions were multiple choice, part were open ended. I asked the questions in Chinese. To collect respondents, I posted the link of my survey with a

request to fill it in on a social platform called ‘Hello Talk’, this is a platform where you can come into contact with people from all over the world. With the link of the survey, I added that I only needed Chinese respondents to fill in the survey. There was a total of 15 respondents of whom 10 are female and 5 are male. The respondents are all between the 20 and 38 years old. Eight of the respondents are in their twenties, seven are in their thirties. The respondents live in China as well as in The Netherlands. Three of the respondents are Chinese exchange students who are currently living in Leiden, six of them are Chinese residents living in Shanghai and the rest are Chinese residents living in different places in China. The survey is fully anonymous. I collected the answers during the week of April 18th 2022. I asked questions regarding the attitudes I outlined above, the survey questions can be found in appendix 1.

6. Results of the survey

The first three questions I asked were if and when the respondents became familiar with the phenomenon of effeminate men and at what places they see these men. I asked these questions to get an overview in what way the respondents are familiar with effeminate men in China. The most respondents, ten out of fifteen, said they only know a little about it. Two of the respondents said they know it well and three didn't know the trend. When they became familiar with effeminacy is very diverse, starting from the 1990's till 2020. Five of them mentioned they first heard of it during high school, two of them became familiar with it through online videos and one person mentioned he became familiar with effeminacy because of the Korean wave. I asked where they mostly see effeminate men nowadays and the majority sees it on social media, followed by on television and in advertisements.

After the ban from the Chinese government of effeminate men appearing on television, I asked if the respondents think effeminate men are still gaining popularity in China, the results are mixed. Six of the respondents thought it's not gaining popularity, five of them think it is, three of them said they didn't know. One respondent mentioned it is only gaining popularity among the Chinese youth.

The next three questions are regarding their definition of effeminacy and masculinity. I asked what characteristics they define as effeminate and what characteristics they define as masculine and let them choose from several options. The options they could choose from regarding the characteristics of effeminacy were: wearing make-up, wearing jewelry, having a smooth skin, having dyed hair, being skinny, being weak, being strong, being brave, being fashionable, being sentimental, being caring and being gentle. They could choose more than one answer. Wearing make-up was chosen the most, eleven times. Having dyed hair, wearing jewelry, having a smooth skin, being skinny and being weak were all chosen four times. Being sentimental was chosen three times, being fashionable two times and being gentle one time. Brave, strong and caring weren't chosen. So wearing make-up is seen as the most prominent characteristic of an effeminate man.

I divided the question regarding masculine characteristics in two, one about the outward characteristics, and one about the inward characteristics. They could again choose more than one answer from several options. Regarding the appearance, being tall was with nine votes the most chosen option. Being fashionable, being muscular and having a beard were only chosen one time. Wearing make-up, wearing jewelry and being skinny weren't chosen. Regarding the inner characteristics, being brave and being self-confident were chosen

the most, eleven times and ten times respectively. Being ambitious and being intelligent were chosen five times. Being caring was chosen three times, being funny two times, having a leadership role and being gentle were chosen one time. Being sociable and sentimental weren't chosen once. According to this, the most common masculine characteristics are being tall, being self-confident and being brave.

Because the Chinese government wants to bring back 'real men', I wanted to know how the respondents think the Chinese government defines this man and how they themselves define an ideal man to see if these definitions differ. These two questions were open ended questions and the answers are diverse. The answers being successful in his career, being responsible and being considerate for his family were mentioned the most to the question how they think the government defines an ideal man. Three respondents wrote 'a man versed in both literature and military affairs' which is in correspondence with the *wen-wu* ideal. Being strong and brave were also mentioned a few times and one person wrote 'loving our country'. Being successful in your career as well as in your family were clearly seen as most important.

How the respondents themselves define an ideal man has similarities as well as differences with how they think the government defines the ideal man. Being responsible and caring for your family were again mentioned the most but being successful in his career was mentioned only one time. Being honest, ambitious and having a moral standing were mentioned a few times. Two people mentioned 'a man who fights for his dreams'. Two other respondents said that the ideal man doesn't exist because everyone has its own preferences, it can be any kind.

In news articles I read that the Chinese government fears a 'masculinity crisis' in China so I asked the respondents if they think this crisis is happening. Thirteen respondents said they don't think there is a masculinity crisis, two said there is. Two persons mentioned that there indeed are effeminate men in China, but that they are in the minority, the 'traditional men' are still in the majority. One respondent mentioned that he thinks most effeminate men will not obviously act as an effeminate man because they want to avoid prejudices. This answer ties in to the next question relating to if they think effeminate men are accepted in Chinese society. Three people think they are getting accepted, the rest of the respondents thinks they aren't. Seven of them mentioned that part of the Chinese people accept effeminate men, namely young people, high educated people and people who live in big cities because they are more open-minded. They believe elder people and people who live in the country side don't accept effeminate men. Two people mentioned that Chinese people think effeminate men have a bad influence on children.

The twelfth question was another open-ended question to get to know if the respondents think effeminate men can still have manly characteristics. Only two respondents said this isn't possible, the rest of the respondents think it is possible. The respondents almost all said that being manly has more to do with the inner characteristics than with the appearance. One respondent for example said that an effeminate man can look like what we normally see on a woman, but that he can still be manly. Three respondents mentioned that they know many effeminate men who stand up for other people, which they think is very manly. They almost all agreed that it is not the outward, but the inner characteristics that matter.

One question was only for the male respondents. One of the main characteristics of an effeminate man is that they put make-up on their face. Therefore, I wanted to know how many of the male respondents would like to, or already puts make-up on to see if it is common to wear make-up for boys. Only one of the male respondents said he would, the majority, the other four, would not like to put make-up on.

The last question refers to the label 'little fresh meat'. Mostly young Chinese women like effeminate men, so I asked my respondents if they think effeminate men are attractive. One person said they aren't and one person said they are attractive. Three persons answered that they think effeminate men are more gentle and careful than the average man. But the most respondents said that they can be attractive, but that it depends on their personality.

These results show that the respondents are familiar with the phenomenon of effeminate men and that these men differ from the type of man that is preferred in Chinese society. Therefore, they may not be accepted, primarily by elder people. Younger generations may be more accepting and that's what I will further investigate during the interviews.

7. Interview method

To expand further on the results of the survey, I interviewed a total of 10 persons. I asked some of the same questions as I asked in the survey, as well as follow up questions based on their answers. The persons are all native Chinese and lived for the most part of their childhood in different places in China. I know two fellow students who have Chinese friends and I asked them if they could give me the contact details of these native Chinese friends, they both gave me the contact details of one friend. I also asked a person I met in a fitness class to participate in my interview. I asked these three respondents if they know other native Chinese people who would like to participate in my interview. They all sent me the contact details of one or two persons and eventually, I got a total of ten respondents. They are all highly educated people who are doing a bachelor studies, a master or a PhD. One of them is studying in America, one in the United Kingdom and one lives in Shanghai. One person moved to the Netherlands together with his parents when he was eleven years old. The rest temporarily lives in the Netherlands for their studies. Three respondents were female, seven were male and they are all between the 22 and 28 years old. I chose this age group because I think young adults are most familiar with effeminate men through social media. I wanted the respondents to be native Chinese who grew up in China and know the Chinese culture because I am focusing on the attitudes towards effeminate men in Chinese culture. They all are high educated, but this was not necessary. I interviewed them all individually, the interviews averaged approximately 40 minutes each. I interviewed nine of them online through Teams, this was the most convenient because we all live in different places. I interviewed one person face to face in a university canteen in Leiden. I recorded the interviews and transcribed them afterwards for analysis, the interviews were in English. The interviews took place between the 24th of May and the 11th of June 2022. I asked questions with the aim to find out how they think effeminate men are perceived in China and what their own opinion about effeminate men is. I will analyze their answers divided into different subjects and by using direct quotes of what they told me. The interview guide can be found in appendix 2.

8. Interview analysis

8.1. Definition

To find out what the attitude of Chinese young adults towards effeminate men is, it's first important to know how to define an effeminate man. The respondents mentioned primarily characteristics regarding the appearance of effeminate men, frequently mentioned characteristics were for example: wearing make-up, having a pale skin, being skinny, being fashionable, wearing earrings and having dyed hair. Many also mentioned that they don't act as a traditional man, but tend to be more like a traditional woman. One respondent said this: "I think it's a biological men who dresses or shows an image to the public that's more like a traditional woman, or how the society usually used to picture a woman, the image effeminate men show is more like what a woman would usually do" (male, 28). Also their body language, their gestures or how they talk is more feminine, one respondent explained: "They talk in a feminine way. Like they use a lot of adjectives like 'super', this has an association with being feminine" (male, 22). But the definition of an effeminate man is not only about the outward appearance, they have also inward characteristics that can be defined as effeminate. Inward characteristics of an effeminate man are for example being emotional and being more understanding towards women. One respondents said this: "They are more emotional, delicate, they understand more about girls than the general guys. They have a lot of patience to listen to others, they are more understanding" (female, 28). Another respondent explained why he thinks effeminate men are more emotional: "They are more emotional. Boys are taught to be tough, to hide their emotions. If they suffer from emotions, they are not allowed to show their emotions because society expects them to be more tough. If you are not tough enough, you may be considered effeminate" (male, 24). It's still hard to define an effeminate man because the outward appearance does not always have to be related to the inner characteristics, like one respondent mentioned: "Some people look very strong but there is a girl living in their heart. I think a strong body and a feminine heart can live together. Also feminine men could be very manly people, just look at their inner, not only the outer." (female, 27). In short, according to most respondents, the stereotype of an effeminate man is a man who differs from a traditional masculine man, he often wears make-up and jewelry and he is more emotional and more understanding towards women.

8.2. Make-up

Wearing make-up is thus one of the main characteristics of an effeminate man and therefore I wanted to get some more information about how common it is if a man wears make-up in China and what Chinese young adults think about it when men wear make-up. There are for example advertisements in which men sell women's make-up, or video tutorials in which men try out different kinds of make-up. A female respondent said she frequently sees these advertisements: "I see that a lot. I also bought some make-up from a guy. Before, a lot of lipstick advertisements used girls. It was quite ordinary like, if you use this lipstick you will be beautiful and a boy will like you and fancy you. Now it changed. And also if you use a girl image it seems the products are only for girls. Using a male image in advertisements is also to show that make-up is not only for girls but also for boys" (female, 23). A famous and successful example of a man who sells make-up is Li Jiaqi: "There is this very famous guy who does this, Li Jiaqi. He sells all kinds of make-up on the internet. It's a video livestream, then he tries everything out and you can directly click and order what he uses in the video. He has the most followers. He basically tries out everything and sells it to women. He also knows all the details of different kinds of make-up, he not only tries make-up but also analyses the ingredients, knows which make-up is suitable for which skin. He knows everything" (male, 28). But there are not that many men who sell make-up, mostly it are still girls who sell make-up, only a few men become successful like Li Jiaqi: "He is special I think, he sells it online. But if you go to any mall in China, I think you mostly see women who sell make-up" (male, 23).

According to what the male respondents told me, most male young adults don't think it's a problem if they see another man who wears make-up, one respondent said this: "It's fine. If boys want to wear make-up that's okay. I often say that you have to think everything is normal nowadays. I notice it when a man wears make-up because it is different comparing to what I'm used to. But I will not say anything about it, you can better not do that. I think a person must be happy with what he does, let people be and do what they want" (male, 22). It's very common that most male celebrities in China wear make-up because they want to look good for their fans: "In China, if you are a male movie star and you for example take the airplane from one city to another city to attend some activity, you know there will be some fans or followers who want to welcome you at the airport. I think they will wear make-up on the airport so they can have a good look. It's not only about the camera thing on television, in real life they also want to look good" (male, 28). Besides of celebrities, wearing subtle make-up like foundation which gives you a smooth skin, is also quite common for average Chinese

boys to use. This is because the skin is an important beauty standard in China, people want to have a fair skin: “I think using foundation is quite common in Asia. We like a bright skin color, a smooth skin, we like to look young. Because of this a lot of males wear foundation” (female, 23). As long as the make-up is not too obvious but gives a man a natural look, it is accepted. So wearing foundation isn’t only something females do to look good, men also use it because they want to look good too: “I think make-up is a good thing. Females wear also make-up, they want to be pretty. The men also want to be cool and be pretty” (male, 26). One respondent told me a story about a male friend of her who wears make-up and pays more attention to it than she does: “One of my friends wears foundation. We were in Australia and it was superhot in Melbourne so we got sweaty. When we were close to our home my friend said: “Would you mind to wait here for ten minutes? I need to redo my make-up.” I was like, seriously? But I said okay, no problem. I will sit here in the cafe, have an americano and you can do your make-up. When we hang out he also often shows me new products he bought and then I can try it out” (female, 23). On the other hand, you may not see a lot of men wearing obvious make-up like lipstick, eyeliner or eyeshadow because that is not so accepted: “Most people who wear obvious make up, people will give them looks on the street. It is not very accepted. It depends, if you have a very low profile, very natural make-up, than a lot of people won’t look at it (male, 25).”

Despite that it is not uncommon for boys to wear make-up, I mean here primarily foundation, many men don’t want to put on make-up and they have several reasons for it. One respondent thinks he will attract women if he wears make-up, but not in the right way: “Women will only like me because I wear make-up. You are attracted by me because of my make-up, but that is not the real me, you are attracted to my make-up skills” (male, 24). Another person thinks it is about peer pressure: “I feel like I don’t need it so I wouldn’t wear it. But if I have to I would definitely wear it. I feel like a lot of girls wear make-up just because of the peer pressure, everyone is wearing make-up, you kind of have to. So I guess if there is a day that every guy wears make-up, I would definitely wear make-up” (male, 26). Some men don’t use it because it isn’t their taste but most men think putting on make-up takes a lot of effort and is a time consuming thing to do. They would like to wear make-up, but only for special occasions like job interviews or when they are being filmed: “I think if I must be interviewed with a camera, then I would do it. Because of the light, and some professional told me you should do it, then I would accept it. But in daily life I don’t think I will use make-up. Not that I don’t like it, I think it’s too much work” (male, 28). Another respondent said this: “I wanted to learn it but it is too complicated. You have to research all those kinds of

tools, skills, brands. Maybe I should. Sometimes it could be necessary. At some kinds of work you need a good appearance” (male, 24). So regarding make-up for men in China, wearing foundation is accepted and something a lot of men use to make sure they have a fair skin and look good. Foundation is more accepted than wearing eye shadow, eyeliner and lipstick, you won’t see a lot of men using these kinds of make-up. There are some exceptions like Li Jiaqi, who wears these kinds of make-up to show how he uses it and to sell it. This is something females like a lot which shows a difference in attitude between men and women.

8.3.Differences in attitude between men and women

Most women really like effeminate men, more than men like it, most men just accept it. For instance, none of the men I interviewed said they watch or like the videos in which men show their make-up. Women really like these videos because they think these men are talented and they can learn make-up skills from them: “In China there are a lot of male influencers who wear make-up. They have make-up skills, know how to wear make-up very well, better than an average woman. For women, when a man has better make-up skills than herself, they admire this kind of man because they must have put a lot of effort in that and they want to learn something from him. They will not think it is weird, they think it is admirable” (male, 24). A female respondent agreed with this, she gave an example about a man who makes dresses: “I follow one guy, he is a supermodel. He likes to wear dresses and he makes the dresses by himself. He uses plastic bags and very normal materials to make very fashionable dresses of it. He has a lot of fans. He is very creative. There are more like him, I think they have a lot of fans. It depends on the quality of their videos. I really respect them. Especially in traditional China they are super brave to do what they really want. And I can learn something from them. To learn their make-up and learn to dress. They are really nice tutors” (female, 27).

Another thing that shows women like effeminate men more than men do, is the term *xiao xian rou*. The term *xiao xian rou* is only used by women and not by men. It is a term to describe a man who is young and attractive and looks not very tough. “*Xiao xian rou* is like a really young man, you have to be young to be *xiao xian rou*. You have to have a very good skin, kind of more white than average. And you can have muscles, but not look very tough, but you can have visible muscles. It is more a term that women use” (male, 28). What I noticed is that this term can be used by younger as well as by middle-aged women, for example a mother of one of the respondents also uses the word *xiao xian rou*: “My mom said it. Middle aged women like my mother, they think effeminate men are really eye catching. They appreciate how a man can be so perfect in his look and be so young. It made her think of

when she was that young and energetic” (male, 25). One female respondent said it is empowering to use this term because it is a sort of feminist term: “I like this word. It is from the perspective of a woman. You say it when you think a guy is superhot or super cute. These days Chinese women are fighting for their own power. Feminist activities are really hot these days. We are kind of tired from the perspective of men and this is a word from the perspective of women” (female, 23). Additionally, I interviewed three women and they all liked the *xiao xian rou* type of man, one of the female respondents said this: “I like *xiao xian rou*. From my perspective I can see more people appreciate *xiao xian rou*. My mom always said you don’t need to focus on the appearance of boys, you have to focus on their good personalities and abilities. She also likes watching movies and tv series with *xiao xian rou*” (female, 28). The other female respondent said she doesn’t think it is necessary that a boy is very strong, she prefers a less masculine man: “I don’t like that tough movie star type. I hope my friends can be a mixture of male and female. We are not in the jungle, we don’t need our men to hunt for us. You don’t need to be so strong” (female, 27). The other female respondent has some effeminate friends with whom she is very close because they understand and support her: “I have like three kind of effeminate friends. They do a lot of make-up and they have a very good fashion taste. They are straight but they look a little bit gay, but that’s fine. They know more about girls and they take care of me, so I really appreciate them. If I have some personal questions I can discuss it with them and they are super nice. They can think in different perspectives, from the man’s perspective and from the girl’s perspective. They are super close to me, I really appreciate this kind of man” (female, 23). That women like effeminate men a lot and prefer less masculine men, may also be the reason why men like effeminate men less because they are jealous of effeminate men: “Masculine men think effeminate men are not good looking, they are proud of their masculinity, think that girls must like their masculinity, but girls are more attracted by *xiao xian rou*, they are jealous why girls like effeminate men more” (female, 28). In sum, most male young adults don’t have a negative attitude towards effeminate men, but they are not as positive as female young adults are. Women like effeminate men because of their make-up skills and their softer personality.

8.4. Traditional Chinese society

China has a traditional society and many Chinese people have a traditional image of what a man should look like and how a man must behave. “Traditionally we have strict standards for what qualities are suitable for men and what qualities are not, and the same for women. There is not much inclusivity in terms of this” (male, 25). A traditional man in China must be responsible, masculine, care for his family and be able to fight for his country: “Traditionally

speaking a man should be looking after his family, supporting them, feeding them, shoulder responsibilities, be hard-working, be diligent and be masculine” (male, 25). Three respondents mentioned an actor called Wu Jing, he is an example of a traditional Chinese man. Wu Jing is a famous Chinese actor who plays in many patriotic movies and war movies, for example the film ‘Wolf Warrior’. In these movies he is the hero who protects the Chinese people and the Chinese nation. The respondents said that being patriotic and being a strong soldier who can protect the country, are the main masculine characteristics the Chinese government wants for a man. One respondent said: “Chinese people worry if our country will be invaded, that all those effeminate men won’t defend our country. My dad will definitely think that. Middle aged men will be very insecure about this, they worry about the society, they are very patriotic. It is a very culturally specific way of logic” (male, 23). One respondent mentioned the importance of the Confucian values: “There exists a male-female division in Chinese society that needs to be lived by. It’s still a patriarchal society, the man mostly has the upper hand. It’s also a Confucian thing. You must fulfill the role assigned to you. So a man must be a man, if men are going to act feminine, the social hierarchy will be disturbed” (male, 22). The effeminate man differs from the traditional image of how a man should be in China, which makes it difficult for effeminate men to be accepted by the majority of the society, sometimes even by their parents. “In general, China is a traditional society, especially older generations. Most parents ask their daughters they have to act like a daughter, act like a female. Boys have to play basketball and football, please do not make-up and dress up like a woman. They definitely need to deal with some social stigma if they go outside of the box that the mainstream media has defined about what is okay and what is not” (female, 27).

The government plays a big role in promoting the image of a good Chinese man, they are for example trying to teach boys at school how to become a real man: “Lots of people and official media say the boys are too effeminate, too girly. We have to stop that trend, we need more male teachers in schools. We have to teach boys how to be real men. There is a class in Shenzhen for boys where they learn how to be real men” (female, 28). Besides, they banned effeminate stars from appearing in television shows: “The government released some laws or some regulations because they don’t want these effeminate men and K-pop culture get into Chinese entertainment industry” (male, 26). Most of the respondents heard or read about the ban and they understand why the government banned effeminate men from appearing on television but they don’t think the ban is a good thing, it is “nonsense” (male, 22), “ridiculous” (male, 24) or “not very fair” (male, 24). Only one person thought it was a good thing that the effeminate stars were banned from television because he thought there were too

much of them: “To be honest, I think it is a good thing. To some extent. It was really like too much. Every time I opened the Chinese version of YouTube or something else, we do have a lot of platforms for videos, every time you opened it the head title is some kind of K-pop idol performance. I feel like these kind of things occupied all the social media and video platforms. It was just too much” (male, 26). It is not unusual for Chinese people that the government bans something, it is a way to promote values they think are good for the Chinese society: “I think it’s more like propaganda. China wants to kind of reprofile the image of what is a cool man. They want to promote more manhood. Like what values they want to promote for the teenagers, I think it’s not necessarily a bad thing. Sometimes they think an image is not healthy, they want to promote that a little bit. They think, or at least they don’t want the whole society, the whole next generation to grow up like effeminate men, that the majority will look like effeminate men. I know that in the general western culture it’s very bad if you judge someone on personal level. But I think in China most people think it’s not necessarily bad to judge. I mean, of course sometimes you cannot judge. Let’s say we have a different definition when we are judging. The other thing is that, I don’t think they are wrong, the government can promote anything they think is right. As long as they do not cross the line, as long as they don’t violate any rules. But most people including me don’t like that. It is not that they only ban feminine men, that institute in China bans a lot of things. Once they do not like something, they just ban it, than the audience is not happy. We think those people who make these decisions are generally older than average. Once they don’t like something they always say it is about the propaganda, about promoting the right value. This kind of entertainment industry is regulated everywhere I think, in China it’s more explicit” (male, 28). In sum, there are many traditional people in China, mainly the elder generations. They would like to see men who are strong, responsible and masculine. They don’t really like effeminate men because they are too feminine and may not be able to fight for the country. The Chinese government tries to promote the image of strong men and weaken the image of effeminate men.

In consequence, I wanted to find out if the image of effeminate men is already weakened or if they are still frequently seen in China and maybe are becoming more popular. What I noticed is that effeminate men are popular in the pop industry, for example the K-pop boybands are very popular by the younger generation: “Now you see a lot of K-pop, it is getting bigger and bigger in China. Although the government, the whole society is trying to prevent the mainstream being like that. But still the younger generation is really into K-pop” (male, 26). More people mentioned the influence from K-pop, K-pop male stars first gained a

lot of popularity in China, but it's getting more popular now in Western countries too: "The people in K-pop bands are typical embodiments of effeminate men. They are also gaining popularity in Germany, I read in some news articles. They are advocated to be a new trend in other countries, so I think it is a global trend" (male, 25). But the majority of the Chinese young adults think effeminate men aren't that popular anymore in China, they said things like "I think the trend is going the reversed way" (male, 28) or "The peak was a few years before" (male, 23). One person explained it further, he believes that there is already a new beauty ideal for men: "When I was in my middle school ten to fifteen years ago, I think China was more influenced by the pop culture, like K-pop. There you of course see a difference between those pop groups and the movie star in the US, who is more muscular. Back then, people and the whole society also think that it is very handsome, very nice for a man to look more like a K-pop star instead of the muscle man movie star. But I think in recent years K-pop is becoming less popular in China. I'm not sure, maybe the new generation also likes it. But I got this feelings on social media. I got the feeling that more people on the social medias like to do fitness, like to do gym. But back then when I was in middle school people were on social media more dancing and singing. But I think recently there is this trend that values that you should exercise more, you should have muscles" (male, 28). The respondent who currently lives in Shanghai also doesn't think effeminate men are that popular in China because he doesn't see a lot of effeminate men in daily life: "It's not that common. I can see some but I don't think it is that popular. In pop culture there are comparatively more effeminate men as pop stars. It's the influence from Japanese and Korean pop culture. There it's more popular, but in daily life it's just okay, not that popular" (male, 24). In accordance to this, effeminate men are popular in the pop industry, but not that popular in Chinese daily life. This may be because of the rejection of the Chinese government and the Chinese traditional society.

8.5.Divided

As has been noted, there are different kinds of attitudes towards effeminate men. I wanted to know if Chinese young adults think effeminate men are accepted in Chinese society and if they believe there is a difference in attitude between age groups and places of living. The most common assumption is that the younger generation and inhabitants of big cities might be more accepting: "I think they are accepted by most of young people. In Chengdu most people are super openminded. In other cities, like Xi'an, they are maybe too traditional. People may think they are super weird and don't allow them to walk freely on the streets" (female, 27). But also the younger generation can be very negative towards effeminate men because they

post a lot of hate comments on social media: “It is not about generations. Also the younger generation can be very divided. I noticed on the internet some people are quite offensive, on social media you can see a lot of negative comments to effeminate men” (male, 24). One person explained why he think this happens: “It’s still a minority group in China, and then you always stand out. Then you can be more easily targeted” (male, 28). There was only one respondent who thinks the older generation will be more accepting than the younger generation: “I feel like the older generation is more kind, less critical. If a little kid acts soft or feminine, I think other kids will be very critical and start calling him *niangpao*. I do feel elder generations are more kind, they wouldn’t say this, they just think it is fine” (male, 26)

One of the respondents was a 24 year old male who lives in Shanghai and identified himself as queer and likes to be addressed with the pronoun ‘ze/zir’, this is a Chinese pronoun. Ze explained to me that ze doesn’t have much affinity with zir male body, but that ze is okay with it. Sometimes ze wants to be more masculine, and sometimes more feminine. I talked with ze if ze feels accepted in Chinese society and ze said this: “My hair is not very short, not the boy hair. It will be a concern for me if I seek a job, the conservative industries will be a no for me. In daily life, if you are going to state owned companies, they are conservative. If you are effeminate, you may be not accepted. The government expects you to be a traditional masculine man. I work in an art museum. Art industry is more open to all kinds of personalities so it’s fine. If I go to other industries, like public relations, or advertisements, I can make the decision to cut it short. I have not got tough criticism, things against me because of my hair. On the streets people definitely look at me because of my hair, but they don’t say something. They are not brave enough to say something. I am very lucky, my colleagues recognize me as a queer but I am not treated badly.” I further asked if ze feels free to come out as being queer, ze answered: “I am lucky because I can pretend to say I am a man. I will decide dependent on the environment. If the environment is open, I will come out as a queer. Queer is not that common, not that known in China. If the environment is very toxic, very masculine, I will not say it and pretend to be normal.” Because ze lives in China I asked ze what ze thinks is the general attitude towards effeminate men in China, ze answered: “Generally speaking, I believe it could be negative. On Weibo there are lots of negative voices. The gender norms have not been established that much, people may not be that open towards effeminate men. There exists a very prominent gender division. I believe the government is trying to build up some kind of traditional image.” I further asked if ze thinks the people in Shanghai are more openminded, but ze thought they aren’t: “No, not really. The city is very divided. It varies a lot. It is not that open minded.”

Given these points, not all young adults are positive about effeminate men and can act very negatively towards effeminate men. The term *niangpao* is used to insult effeminate men, it is a negative and offensive term. The respondents defined this term as “it is a male who is very female, in a very offensive sense” (male, 24) or “it is used to shame effeminate men” (male, 23). Most Chinese young adults don’t like this word and also don’t use it: “I don’t like it. It’s a term that not only describes something but also judges something. So it’s already a judgement. If you see someone and you don’t like his look and he also shows feminine characteristics, you think it’s a weakness you can attack him on, that’s the situation someone will use this word. So it’s a bad word, like a swear word” (male, 25). However, the term is still used a lot to describe effeminate men, it is used by the older as well as by the younger generation: “That’s a very insulting term, really insulting. But it has become a normal term, everybody uses it” (male, 22). Another respondent described a situation he experienced during middle school when someone was using this word: “I heard that term a lot when I was in middle school and high school. There were a few effeminate boys in our class. Some of the other students called them *niangpao*, they thought they were acting like a girl. This was because the boys were pretty shy, they talked soft, had a very low voice. They barely looked into your eyes when they were talking, they just looked at the ground. They were shy” (male, 26). But primarily on social media this term is used a lot. On Chinese social media you can see a division between people who support effeminate men, and people who hate effeminate men. “It happens on social media. There is this group of people who don’t like effeminate men, that group will always use this word” (male, 28).

However, the Chinese young adults I interviewed are more liberal, they don’t think it is a problem if a man looks effeminate, they believe he can be how he wants to be: “It is okay if you are effeminate or masculine. I think be yourself. If you find yourself comfortable with being manly or more comfortable with being effeminate. Just be yourself. As much as possible” (male, 25). Most respondents are aware that it will not be easy to be yourself because they differ from the traditional male image in China that is preferred by the majority of the Chinese society. Accordingly, Chinese young adults think effeminate men are brave because they challenge the stereotypes and dare to be different. “I think they are very brave. They look and perform super feminine. Most older generations in China are very traditional. Maybe their parents or family members don’t support them. For most of traditional Chinese parents I think. So I think they are super brave to perform like that” (female, 27). Chinese young adults know effeminate men are different, but they believe everyone is different and you must respect these differences. “Everyone is different. I think the question is not to

eliminate these kind of effeminate men, everyone is different, Effeminate appearance or personality is just another personality among lots of personalities. You have to respect it” (female, 28). To be brief, Chinese young adults respect people who dare to be different than the mainstream. They know the Chinese society is traditional and less open-minded than they are, but they hope that this eventually will change. “I hope to see more and more this kind of people because it means our society becomes more and more open. It means our society welcomes more kinds of people to show themselves. So I wish I can see more of this kind of people to walk on the street” (female, 28).

9. Conclusion

This thesis examines the phenomenon of effeminate men in China. It responds to the ban of effeminate men on Chinese television and looks at traditional Chinese masculinity ideals. The thesis contributes to the understanding of different kinds of attitudes towards effeminate men, with a focus on the attitude of Chinese young adults. Based on the answers of my respondents, Chinese young adults do have an accepting attitude towards effeminate men. They believe that effeminate men can be who they want to be because everyone is different. I am aware that this result isn't representative for the whole Chinese young adult public because of the limited number of respondents. Furthermore, I focused on young adults who usually hold a more liberal view. Besides, nine of the respondents live currently in Western countries and might therefore be influenced by the western, usually more liberal thoughts. In addition, they can't exactly know the situation around effeminate men in China because they were not there in the time of the interviews. The one person who currently lives in China, lives in Shanghai where people also might have more liberal views. Lastly, the respondents were all interested in the topic of effeminate men and would like to be interviewed about it. Because they are interested in this topic, they may also be more open-minded to it.

The research is still worth doing because it shows these ten Chinese young adults are all accepting towards effeminate men, but they made clear that this attitude does not apply to the whole Chinese group of young adults. On Chinese social media there are many young adults who act negatively towards effeminate men and insult them. Besides, the results show that there is a division in attitude between male young adults and female young adults. Most women really like effeminate men, they think effeminate men are attractive and that they are more kind and understanding towards women. Some women prefer to have an effeminate man as husband, not a masculine man or the patriotic, heroic man the Chinese government prefers. They just want a man that cares for them and their family. This preference for effeminate men is what came out of my survey and interview results, these data isn't sufficient to say to how many Chinese women this applies so this is something that can be studied in future research.

What is further made clear from the results and conforms to previous research on effeminate men, is that the older generation in China is still very traditional regarding gender divisions. They prefer the traditional gender division, a man should behave like a man, and a woman should behave like a woman. Therefore, it is hard for men to act feminine because it is not in line with the traditional manly behavior. Though, the older generation in China is not the age group I focused on in this research, so future research could further explore the

attitude of the older generation towards effeminate men.

The actions of the Chinese government, like the ban of effeminate men on television and the schools at which boys need to learn how to be real men, don't make it easy for effeminate men to be themselves. That is maybe the reason that you don't see a lot of effeminate men in Chinese daily life. Results show that effeminate men are most popular on social media and in the pop industry, and primarily the female younger generation likes them. It is unclear if effeminate men will become more common in China or that it will be a trend that will lose its popularity in a short period of time. All in all, this research confirms the assumption that Chinese young adults are open-minded towards effeminate men. Some Chinese young adults will dislike them, some will admire them, but most of Chinese young adults will accept effeminate men and let them be themselves.

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11. Appendix 1: Survey questions

1. 你几岁? What is your age?
2. 你的性别是什么? What is your gender?
3. 你住在哪里? Where do you live?
4. 你熟悉娘炮的潮流吗? Are you familiar with the effeminate male beauty trend?
5. 你什么时候开始熟悉这个娘炮潮流? When did you came familiar with this trend?
6. 你在哪里看到关于娘炮的信息? (社交媒体, 电视, 大学, 商店, 广告, 别的) Where do you see this trend? (social media, television, university, shopping centers, advertisements, other)
7. 你觉得娘炮在中国越来越流行吗? Do you think the effeminate male beauty trend is gaining popularity in China?
8. 在你看来, 娘炮有什么特点? (染色头发, 彩妆, 戴首饰, 光滑的皮肤, 关怀, 弱, 伤感, 时髦, 勇敢, 强, 斯文, 骨感, 别的) What are the characteristics of an effeminate man according to you? (dyed hair, make-up, wearing jewelry, a smooth skin, caring, weak, sentimental, fashionable, brave, strong, gentle, skinny, other)
9. 在你看来, 男性外表是什么样的? (彪壮, 高大, 胡子, 时髦, 骨感, 戴首饰, 彩妆, 别的) What outward characteristics are manly according to you? (masculine, tall, having a beard, fashionable, skinny, wear jewelry, make-up, other)
10. 在你看来, 什么是男性的品质? (自信, 聪明, 斯文, 搞笑, 勇敢, 伤感, 有志气, 主导性, 合群, 关怀, 别的) What inward characteristics are manly according to you? (confident, intelligent, gentle, funny, brave, sentimental, leadership, ambitious, sociable, caring, other)
11. 你觉得, 中国社会如何定义一个理想的男人? What do you think the Chinese society sees as the ideal man?
12. 你如何定义一个理想的男人? What do you see as the ideal man?
13. 你觉得在中国男人有女性化危机吗? Do you think there is a 'masculinity crisis' in China because of the feminization of men?

14. 你觉得娘炮被中国社会接受吗? Do you think effeminate men are being accepted in Chinese society?
15. 你觉得娘炮还能有男人气概吗? Do you think effeminate men can still be manly?
16. 为男人: 你会考虑化妆吗? For boys: Would you like to put make-up on?
17. 你觉得娘炮有魅力吗? Do you think effeminate men are attractive?

12. Appendix 2: Interview guide

1. When did you became familiar with effeminate men?
2. Where do you see effeminate men?
3. What are the characteristics of an effeminate man according to you?
4. Do you think effeminate men are gaining popularity in China?
5. Did you see the news articles about the crackdown of effeminate men in China? Why do you think this is happening? Do you agree?
6. Do you think effeminate men are being accepted in China?
7. What do you think about the term *niangpao*? Is it used a lot?
8. Do you think there will be a ‘masculinity crisis’ in China?
9. Do you think effeminate men can still be manly?
10. Have you heard about the term *xiao xian rou*? Why do you think effeminate men are called like this?
11. What do you think about men who appear in advertisements to sell make-up for women?
12. Do you like it if a man wears make-up?
13. Would you like to wear make-up?
14. What is your opinion about effeminate men?