**1. After “sissees” appear on TV, China debates the definition of masculinity**

*By* [*Anna Fifield*](https://www.washingtonpost.com/people/anna-fifield/)

BEIJING — What makes a man a man? The notion of masculinity is under fierce debate in China after a back-to-school television show, mandatory viewing for returning students, showed men with appearances deemed by some to be too effeminate or “sissy.”

Intense grooming has become a requirement in China’s entertainment industry, following the trend in South Korea for men with perfect skin and impeccable hair. Chinese movies and pop videos are now full of men who have embraced their natural slenderness and have clearly spent a lot of time on their looks.

But Chinese netizens, many of them writing comments with homophobic overtones, think the trend has gone too far and that androgynous men — derided as “little fresh meats” — are “poisoning China’s youth.”

This latest round of chest thumping began earlier this month after the broadcast of a program called “First Class for the New Semester,” jointly produced by China Central Television and the Ministry of Education. Parents and students are required to watch the program together on the Saturday night before the fall semester begins. China has more than 200 million students from elementary grades through high school, according to a 2013 report by the China Youth Research Center.

The show provoked fierce reactions, including from parents objecting that the show’s opening act featured the four-man group New F4, with the male celebrities wearing makeup. The show also included movie star Jackie Chan as well as an entrepreneur, an artist and an aircraft designer.

But detractors seized on the four singers, calling them “pretty girls that cannot have babies,” and asked authorities to take them off the air. One father of a 5-year-old boy, identified as Mr. Feng, [told the Communist Party-controlled Global Times](http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1119191.shtml) that he was worried that the stars would influence his son to behave in a feminine way at school.

Xinhua, the powerful state news agency, lambasted the singers as “sissy pants” and said they were “not men, but not women.”

“They look androgynous and wear makeup. They are slender and weak,” the influential opinion columnist using the pen name Xinshiping wrote. “The impact this sick culture will have on our young generation is immeasurable. The youth are the future of the country. … What a country’s pop culture embraces, refuses and conveys is something that matters to the future of a country.”

With men like these, China will never become the strong and prosperous country it hopes to be, the commentator wrote. “To nurture those who will shoulder the job of helping our nation reach its renaissance,” the article said, according to a translation by [the Sixth Tone website,](https://www.sixthtone.com/news/1002883/xinhua-mocks-sissy-pants-male-idols) “we must shield them from undesirable cultures.”

The state-run 21st Century newspaper then [posted an article](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/KQvIYdka6ZxhzGfIJu80YA) called “If a teenager is sissy, then the country is sissy.”

It noted that a WeChat post titled “Let’s get rid of male stars with female appearances” had gone viral. The post blamed overly feminine males for “weakening the spirit of the society” and “swallowing the courage of the nation,” and ignited a raging debate on WeChat, the dominant Chinese social media platform.

Then another state paper, the Beijing Youth Daily, weighed in with a similar view. “Some children are loyal fans of these effeminate idols and they will copy whatever their idols say or do. … If we set no limit to this trend, more people will be proud of this effeminacy and our society and our country’s masculinity will be in crisis,” the paper said, according to the Global Times.

But others have urged tolerance and understanding of different ways of being.

Sun Jiashan, a researcher at Chinese National Academy of Arts, does not think these “feminine” male stars have a negative effect on society.

“They are still far from becoming the mainstream cultural trend in society,” he said, according the 21st Century magazine. “Besides, we should not set male and female aesthetic standards against each other.”

Another popular commentator, Yang Yi, said he didn’t like these men’s styles but that it was wrong to try to get them off the screens. “I’ve stopped watching TV because there are so many men with female appearances on the screen. But I think that is their choice and their right,” he said.

One mother said she would respect her son’s choices.

“It is important to stay true to your heart,” Zhang Yukun, mother of a 4-year-old boy, told the Global Times, adding, “I will give my son all my support as long as he chooses a path he likes.”

Even China’s usually relatively homogeneous state media have offered a wide range of views on the issue.

The China Women’s Daily, the paper of the Communist Party’s Women’s Federation, agreed that people should not be defined by appearances. "No matter what kind of persona style or quality he or she chooses to present, whether it is strong-willed or gentle, that doesn’t stop them from being an excellent person,” the article said, according to a [translation by the South China Morning Post.](https://www.scmp.com/news/china/society/article/2163479/are-chinas-young-celebrities-facing-masculinity-crisis-or-just)

Elsewhere, commentators said that the emergence of the Chinese “metrosexual” was the result of China’s rapid economic growth and stable social environment.

“Gone are the days of tough guys like Hong Kong martial arts movie stars Jackie Chan and Jet Li as the audience is losing interest in their machismo-laden acts,” [wrote Shen Si](http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1119350.shtml), a cultural commentator for The Global Times. Instead, audiences — especially female audiences — loved “tender” male stars.

“In the last 30 years, Chinese people have enjoyed a lot material benefits due to the achievements of the reform and opening-up,” he wrote. “Relatively low threat of war and terrorism also bring about peaceful life for citizens. Thus, masculinity becoming less admirable in contemporary China is quite reasonable.”

Social diversity should be respected, he said.

Surprisingly, a military newspaper also defended the stars’ rights to look they way they chose.

A commentary in the People’s Liberation Daily said that it was an “objective fact” that more men were paying more attention to their appearances.

But it said that it wasn’t what was outside that determined the measure of a man. “The masculinity required to nurture the modern society does not lie in appearance,” it wrote in the commentary. “The key is to create a kind of inner character with courage and responsibility.”

**2. How China became the land of disastrous corner-cutting**

C*habuduo*, or ‘close enough’ is a phrase you’ll hear with grating regularity, one that speaks to a job 70 per cent done, a plan sketched out but never completed, a gauge [ɡeɪdʒ] 测量仪器（或仪表）unchecked or a socket插座put in the wrong size. *Chabuduo*is the corrosive腐蚀性的，侵蚀性的opposite of the impulse towards craftmanship, the desire ‘to reject muddling through蒙混过关;胡乱应付, to reject the job just good enough’. *Chabuduo* implies that to put any more time or effort into a piece of work would be the act of a fool. China is the land of the cut corner, of ‘good enough for government work’.

Yet sometimes there’s a brilliance to *chabuduo*. One of the daily necessities of life under Maoism was improvisation即席创作，临时凑合的东西; finding ways to keep irreplaceable luxuries such as tractors or machine tools going, despite missing parts or broken supply chains. On occasion, it was applauded as ‘peasant’ science or Stakhanovite virtue. Improvisation was a vitally needed talent, and a particular genius developed among some of the senior generation, now in their 60s and older: an ability to go beyond make-do-and-mend修修补补将就to the kind of skills displayed by the A-Team. More usually, *chabuduo* is the domain of a village uncle who grew up with nothing and can whip up匆匆做，当场完成a solution to anything out of two bits of wire and some tape.

But behind China’s disasters, *chabuduo,* or ‘good enough’ squats more often than actual malice恶: compromises that are mere annoyances in daily life become fatal when undertaken on an industrial scale. Problems that a keen eye or a daily routine can circumvent transform into deadly rifts裂缝 when reproduced millions of times nationwide.

Take the last year alone. You don’t have a proper cold-storage chain to send vaccines? Well, stick some ice in the parcels and put them in the post. *Chabuduo*, and children cough to death. Why take the sludge淤泥; 工业淤渣to a disposal site? Just pile it up here, where everyone else has been putting it. *Chabuduo,*and 91 people are crushed by a landslide in Guangdong.

In a 1924 [article](http://www.readchinese.net/chabuduoxiansheng), the critic Hu Shih turned *chabuduo* into an eponymous（主人公与标题）同名的parable. ‘Mr Cha Buduo’, his protagonist主人公, lives his life by the principle of ‘Close enough’. ‘Certainly you’ve heard people talk about him,’ wrote Hu. ‘So many people say his name every day.’

For Hu, the cure for this hazy  朦胧的malaise [mə'leɪz] （影响某个情况或某群人的）难以捉摸的问题was modernity. But the flood of modernity didn’t bring care and precision; it destroyed it.

To some extent, this is a normal historical process. In 19th-century Paris, Hamburg and New York, writers complained of builders who didn’t know one end of a trowel泥刀from another. Rural migrants flooded the cities, looking for any day labour they could find, their own local skills useless in a new environment. In a generation or less, the rush of modernity invalidated talents developed over centuries.

But in much of the developed world, the sense of craftsmanship soon returned. There was the pleasure of invention, of the cutting edge最前沿, of developing new standards for a new trade. In late 18th-century England, brickmakers crafted their own rich metaphors, where, as Sennett notes, the invention of ‘honest’ brick (without any artificial colour added) reflected the manufacturers’ own pride. In contrast, Chinese workers have been stranded for four decades in a dead zone, where the old skills have been lost, but a new professionalism hasn’t evolved.

If what you’re making represents a world utterly out of reach to you, why bother to do it well?

Why is China caught in this trap? In most industries here, vital feedback loops 循环，回路，环路are severed 割断. To understand how to make things, you have to use them. Ford’s workers in the US drove their own cars. But the migrants lining factory belts in Guangdong make knick-knacks for US households thousands of miles away. The men and women who build China’s houses will never live in them.

The greatest gulf of all is between the planners in Beijing and the workers on the ground who implement their policies. Craft requires the feedback of users and the marketplace.

The quota配额，指标set for everything from wordcounts for journalists to arrests for policemen, is a powerful spur  刺激，激励to value nothing about the product except the speed of its production. *Chabuduo*: good enough for government work.

There is one glowing exception to the culture of *chabuduo*: China’s tech sector, perhaps because it developed near-simultaneously with the rest of the world’s.

After the scandal, the authorities announced that they would take hard measures. But in practice, China’s regulatory authorities are a void. Although each disaster is ritually castigated 谴责，严惩in the press, any follow-up is rapidly killed. Everyday regulation is even less efficient.

All these factors work against the Chinese developing pride in their own work.

In the West, unions (for manual labourers) and professional associations (for groups such as doctors and lawyers) played a critical role in setting national standards. They gave people an identity that depended, in part, on both mastery and morality, a group of peers to compete against, and to be held to account by. *hold...to account 使...承担责任; be held to account 是对某事负责*

But, as Adam Smith argued in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), every profession ‘ends in a conspiracy共谋against the public’ and the Chinese Communist Party tolerates no conspiracies except its own.

Under the Party umbrella, there is room for professional associations – but only at the top end of the scale. There’s a Chinese Medical Association, but no China Plumber’s Association.

In the end, what perpetuates China’s carelessness most might be sheer ubiquity遍在(性). Craft inspires. A writer can be stirred to the page by hearing a song or watching a car being repaired, a carpenter revved（使）加速up by a poem or a motorbike. But the opposite also holds true; when you’re surrounded by the cheaply done, the half-assed**杂乱的; 没有完整计划的** and the ugly, when failure is unpunished and dedication unrewarded all around, it’s hard not to think that close enough is good enough. *Chabuduo*.

**3.**   **China, Japan and S. Korea to cooperate on pollution**

*By Wang Xu in Kitakyushu, Japan | China Daily | Updated: 2019-11-25 09:21*

China, Japan and South Korea have agreed on Sunday that climate change, air pollution and plastic waste in the oceans are some of the areas they should prioritize in environmental cooperation over the next five years, as a tripartite meeting was held in western Japan's Kitakyushu, Fukuoka Prefecture.

In the two-day event, also known as the 21st Tripartite Environment Ministers Meeting, China's Minister of Ecology and Environment Li Ganjie together with his Japanese and South Korean counterparts, Shinjiro Koizumi and Cho Myung-rae, identified eight issues to focus on in the next five years. They agree to fight climate change, tackle air pollution and to better control and recycle waste as to prevent contamination in the ocean.

"We had a candid and in-depth discussion and reached favorable outcomes," Li told reporters at a news conference after the meeting, adding that as 2019 marks the conclusion of the Tripartite Joint Action Plan on Environmental Cooperation 2015-2019. The ministers are all satisfied to hear that progress has been achieved in air pollution control, prevention of dust and sandstorms, and biodiversity conservation as well as in the transition to a green economy, Li said.

"We also outlined the future direction of environmental cooperation and emphasized the importance to faithfully implement our leaders' commitment for further strengthening joint effort and collaboration in tackling issues of common interest and deepening cooperation in various fields," Li added.

Echoing Li, South Korea's Cho said close environmental cooperation is necessary between Seoul, Beijing and Tokyo and at this year's meeting "pending issues, such as fine dust, marine waste and environmental safety, were discussed and sought".

Focusing on plastic waste in the sea is a pillar policy of his agency, Japanese Environment Minister Koizumi said. He said that plastic waste could have an adverse impact on the marine ecosystem and is a global issue that is caused by waste from the land.

"It is highly meaningful that China, as a big country, clearly indicated it will take positive action on this front," Koizumi said.

In response, Li said China's economic growth has not come without negative consequences for the environment but as China had adhered to the path of giving priority to ecology and green development in recent years, solid progress had been made in curbing pollution.

Proposed in 1999 by Seoul, the ministerial meeting has been held annually to tackle regional environmental problems and has been a platform to build a clean Northeast Asia through long-standing cooperation of more than two decades.