Ageing as Emasculation?
Rethinking the Father Image in Ang Lee's "Father Trilogy"

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1. Introduction

The father image has attracted significant interest among film scholars in a rich body of research on Ang Lee's works. Due to Ang Lee's Chinese heritage, scholars always consider the father image in his movies as a symbol of Chinese patriarchy. Therefore, the ageing and physically deteriorating father image is interpreted as Lee's intention to shatter the symbolic father in Chinese culture, despite his occasional sympathy and respect towards the Chinese father (Yu 2004; Fu 2006; Chen 2006; Sun 2007). My paper draws on an interdisciplinary methodology from ageing, gender, and postcolonial studies to reexamine the Chinese father image.

Age scholars have long argued that ageing "affects us all, and affects us all differently" (Lynne Segal 2013, 13). And it seems that most gendered studies of ageing have centered on women while ageing males have seldom been portrayed or discussed. This has contributed to the cultural "invisibility" of older men and, even more, "the inverse correlation" between masculinity and ageing (Saxton and Cole 2012, 98). The study of ageing masculinity thus remains largely unexplored. As feminist scholar Lynne Segal reminds us, "the scholarly material available for describing men's experiences of ageing remains more limited, far sparser for men than for women" (2013, 83).

My paper sets out to investigate the representation of the ageing Chinese father image in Ang Lee's "Father Knows Best" Trilogy: *Pushing Hands* (1991), *The Wedding Banquet* (1993), and *Eat Drink Man Woman* (1994). These three films demonstrate Lee's portrayal of the ageing fathers' experiences in transcultural spaces, in which generation gaps and cultural conflicts are intertwined. Lee's depiction of the Chinese father images demonstrates different forms of ageing masculinities in and between cultures, exploring the complex intersections among age, masculinity, and ethnicity. More specifically, by representing Master Chu in the *wen-wu* model in *Pushing Hands*, Lee dismantles the stereotypes of emasculated Chinese men in American mainstream culture and introduces a different perspective on perceptions of Chinese masculinities. By discussing the conflicts between Wai-tung's homosexuality and Mr. Gao's Confucian fatherhood in *The Wedding Banquet*, Lee explores both the suppression and wisdom of Confucianism, reflecting the positive values of Chinese ethics and traditions in defining flexible masculinities. By depicting Chef Chu's caring work and sexuality in *Eat Drink Man Woman*, Lee discusses the father's pursuit of a new life in his old age, dealing with issues of ageing, sexuality, and values of care in constructing masculinities. In other words, Lee's portrayal of the ageing Chinese fathers demonstrates that men's ageing experiences are anything but monolithic, and men's ageing is inflected by the particularities of race, culture, and sexuality respectively.

2. Master Chu in *Pushing Hands*: the *wen-wu* father[1]

Pushing Hands is Lee's first screenplay. It was first released in Taiwan in 1992 and later received a U.S. release after the success of *The Wedding Banquet*. *Pushing Hands* tells the story of a traditional Chinese father trapped by great changes in American society. A retired Chinese Tai Chi

1 This part relies on one chapter of my doctoral dissertation "Masculinities in Transcultural Spaces — Negotiations of Masculinities in Ang Lee's Films". https://edoc.hu-berlin.de/handle/18452/19713.

master, Mr. Chu (Sihung Lung), emigrates from Beijing to live with his son Alex (Bo Z. Wang), American daughter-in-law Martha (Deb Snyder), and grandson Jeremy (Haan Lee) in New York. The cultural differences cause misunderstandings and emotional conflicts among all the family members. Alex arranges a matchmaking picnic between Mr. Chu and Mrs. Chang (Wang Lai) to be absolved from his filial obligations. Feeling humiliated, Mr. Chu leaves home and washes dishes in a Chinese restaurant. Offended by his ruthless Chinese boss, Master Chu defeats the gangsters by turning their strength against them. Following his arrest, Mr. Chu's reputation as a Tai Chi master increases, and he later teaches Tai Chi to both Chinese and American residents in Chinatown. The film ends with Master Chu's accidental encounter with Mrs. Chang and hints at a possible union between them.

Portrayed as the "Yellow peril" and bachelor "Chinamen", Chinese men have long been depicted as "vile, womanly, cowardly and cunning" in American popular discourse (Pon 2000, 142). Such stereotypes are products of colonial and Orientalist discourse, resulting from American/Eurocentric writings. Analysing Ang Lee, Dariotis and Fung assert, "he presents his audience with alternative cultural histories that attempt to challenge the hegemonic views of the 'West'" (1997, 192). Following their line, I argue that Lee's depiction of Master Chu is culturally specific, providing an alternative understanding of masculinity in the *wen-wu* paradigm.

Kam Louie develops a *wen-wu* dyad to capture the Chinese masculine ideal over time in a broad spectrum, extending to contemporary China. According to Louie, "*wen* is generally understood to refer to those genteel, refined qualities associated with the literary and artistic pursuits of the classical scholars" (2002, 14). *Wu*, however, is a concept that embodies "attributes of physical strength and military prowess," as well as "the wisdom to know when and when not to deploy it" in the *wu* philosophy (2002, 14). "All ambitious males strive for both *wen* and *wu*", and those who achieve both are the great ones" (2002, 17).

Mr. Chu incarnates the traditional masculine ideal in terms of both *wen-wu* attributes. The opening shot of the film introduces him as a Tai Chi master: the camera casts an extreme close-up of hands pushing

in the air, and then moves to a facial close-up of an old Chinese man. Fluid and dramatic camera movements portray his gestures with a diversity of shots, depicting Tai Chi visually as an emancipating, leisurely activity. Master Chu's physical prowess in Tai Chi is further displayed in the Chinese restaurant scene. After leaving his son's house, Master Chu finds a job as a dishwasher in a Chinese restaurant. The Chinese boss treats him disrespectfully, impatiently forcing him to leave the kitchen. Humiliated by his rudeness, Master Chu refuses to go. He stands rooted in place, summoning energy from Tai Chi, and resists the efforts of the Chinese gangsters to remove him. Whitney Crothers Dilley remarks that the father's "heroic action" requires "a distracting cultural shift" for the Western audience, which may be confused about Master Chu's "warding off the employer who has fired him and ordered him to leave the premises" (2007, 56). From the perspective of Chinese *wen-wu* masculinity, this fighting scene is a marvelous display of Master Chu's *wu* virility, which demonstrates not only physical strength but also the *wu* virtue. In Chinese culture, *wu* centers on but is not restricted to, martial and military force. *Wu* also embodies seven virtues: "suppressed violence, gathered in arms, protected what was great, established merit, gave peace to the people, harmonized the masses, and propagate wealth" (Louie and Edwards 1994, 142), which together means "the degree of military authority sufficient to make further engagement unnecessary" (142). In this sense, *wu* masculinity contains the Confucian notion of benevolence [仁] and self-restraints [忍] in deploying physical strength. The fighting scene embodies this *wu* philosophy. Master Chu behaves quite humbly and remains calm towards his ruthless boss until he is infuriated by his insulting words. Master Chu still remains calm and confident in the fight, displaying a Confucian concept of masculine honor in terms of benevolence and tolerance. Compared to the young gangster's bluff manners, he pushes them over leisurely with self-discipline and elegance. Such a scene may be read as a metaphor for Master Chu's remasculinization, symbolically transforming him from an emasculated Chinese man to a virile hero.

Master Chu strikes a balance of *wen-wu* attributes. Besides his prowess in Tai Chi, Mr. Chu exhibits other refined cultural practices

such as writing calligraphy, reading poems, and playing chess. The camera casts several meaningful shots of the scroll on the wall and captures detailed moments of his practicing calligraphy, demonstrating his refined cultural taste in *wen*. Therefore, Lee's representation of Master Chu in *wen-wu* attributes provides an alternative interpretation to understand Chinese manhood, and thus dismantles the Orientalist stereotypes of Chinese men as emasculated.

Although Master Chu's masculinity is asserted in such a *wen-wu* model, his manliness is inevitably diminishing in the ageing process. The camera casts shots of Master Chu spending most of his time watching television at home. He takes a walk outside but then gets lost in the city. His *wen-wu* masculinity is also dwarfed in relation to his son Alex, who embodies the transformed *wen* man.

> *(01:12:15)*
> **Mrs. Chang**: "Mr. Chu, your Kung Fu is so powerful. How do you manage to have such elegant calligraphy?"[2]
> **Mr. Chu**: "I am ashamed to talk about it. My grandfather was a scholar in the Qing Dynasty. My father was one of the Nation Founders, who is in charge of the Nationalist government. My son has a Ph.D. in computer science. In a family of scholars for generations, there is worthless me. I have practiced Tai Chi for life, but still cannot overcome the (pathetic) fate and circumstances."

This conversation demonstrates that Master Chu not only feels inferior to his ancestors, but also considers that his *wen* attributes in cultural refinements are inferior to his son's *wen* masculinity established through his middle-class profession and economic success. In *Theorising Chinese Masculinity* (2002), Kam Louie goes beyond pre-modern China, exploring the transformation of the *wen-wu* paradigm in the late twentieth century. He observes that the positive image of *wen* men in the new era is grounded in material success under Western influences. The

2 The English subtitles here are not accurate. Mrs. Chang points out critically that Mr. Chu's calligraphy skill is not as powerful as his Kung Fung and Mr. Chu's answer implies his inadequacy in *wen* attributes.

capitalist ethos reduces the values of certain attributes in traditional *wen* masculinity. Cultural tastes in calligraphy or music are rendered as less important whereas material success becomes a significant benchmark in the measurement of masculinity. Master Chu's self-perception demonstrates such a change in *wen*, destabilizing his traditional *wen-wu* masculinity.

Furthermore, the film underlines the deteriorating health of Master Chu, depicting an emotional image of the ageing father in the prison scene.

> *(01:35:44)*
> **Alex**: "Dad, we have bought a new house. It is much bigger than the old one."
> **Mr. Chu:** "What for?"
> **Alex**: "I am here to take you home."
> **Mr. Chu**: "Home? Whose home?"
> **Alex**: "Mine is yours."
> **Mr. Chu**: "Forget it. I see clearly now. The only thing that matters is that you have a happy life. If you want to show some filial respect, rent me an apartment in Chinatown. Let me peacefully pass my days and discipline my spirit. In your free time, bring the boy to see me. By this way, when we get together, there will be some good feelings."
> **Alex**: "Dad, all these years, I have studied and worked so hard to build a family in order that one day I could bring you the States, so you could have some good days in your life."
> (Alex bursts out into crying in the arms of Mr. Chu)

Film techniques are meaningfully employed to evoke emotional resonance and sympathy for the old Chinese father. The camera shows the father sitting in the prison from a high angle shot from the perspective of Alex, who stands in front of him, towering over him, thus marking the relationship dynamics of the vulnerable father and the powerful son. Then Alex bends down to Master Chu, and the camera moves closer to show Alex's head bowing lower to his father. The frozen shots keep Master Chu's profile in the dark, avoiding exposing his face, indicating his repression of emotions. Low and somber music played on the traditional

Chinese instruments er-hu portrays the inner pain and bitterness of the old father, whose face is not cast in light until Alex ends the conversation by bursting into tears in the arms of his father. The close-up of the father's withered face highlights his aging and his deteriorating health. Finally, the camera takes a long shot of the father hugging the son in the prison, demonstrating the ultimate reconciliation.

Besides the film techniques employed to stimulate understanding for the ageing father, the conversation also demonstrates Master Chu's self-adaption for the sake of his son in American culture. When Alex tells Master Chu to take him "home", the father asks whose "home" it is. It demonstrates the conflicts between two cultures. According the Confucian culture, "while his parents are alive, a son should not dare to consider his wealth his own or hold it for his own use only" [父母在, 不敢有其身, 不敢私其财].[3] Such statements demonstrate the dominant position of father in the family over the son, who is expected to prioritize the needs of the father, providing him with material wellbeing in his old age. However, Master Chu has realized that American culture emphasizes personal boundaries and values self-reliance. He cannot take his son's home as his own. Alex's reply "mine is yours" indicates his regrets and adherence to the Confucian culture. But Master Chu finally choose to live alone. His choice is more an active self-sacrifice for his son according to Chinese culture than a forced acceptance of American cultural values. Master Chu prioritizes the happiness of Alex over his personal desire to live together with his son. In this way, Lee highlights the kindness, love and full devotion of the Chinese father to his son. Lee in this way maintains the self-esteem of the father and restores his image as a respectable father according to Chinese tradition.

In summary, portraying Master Chu as the *wen-wu* masculine ideal, Ang Lee challenges the assumption of Chinese men as emasculated. Despite of being destabilized in the transforming process of *wen-wu* attributes and ageing, Master Chu's masculinity is finally restored as a

3 This statement is from *The Book of Rites* (The Li Ki). Legge, James. Trans. *The Sacred books of the East*, Vol. 27–28. Ed. Max Müller. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923.

consequence of his adherence to Chinese traditions and self-adaption to American culture.

3. Mr. Gao in *The Wedding Banquet*: The Confucian father[4]

In the film *The Wedding Banquet*, a Chinese son Wai-tung Gao (Winston Chao) and his lover Simon (Mitchell Lichtenstein) are living in Manhattan. To stop his parents from pushing him to marry, he takes Simon's suggestion of a sham marriage with Wei-wei (May Chin), who is an artist from Shanghai and faced with deportation from the U.S. since she has outstayed her visa. Wei-wei moves into the basement and everything is supposed to be fine until Wai-tung's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Gao (Sihung Lung and Ah-Leh Gua), decide to make the trip from Taiwan to attend the wedding and meet their daughter-in-law. Wai-tung's plan for a small and uncomplicated civil ceremony at City Hall is thwarted when Mr. Gao's former driver offers his restaurant for a big traditional Chinese wedding banquet. Forced to drink excessively during the banquet, Wai-tung is seduced by Wei-wei and impregnates her. Ultimately, Wai-tung reveals his homosexual secret to his mother but wishes to keep it from his father. However, Mr. Gao sees through it early and shares his secret with Simon, whom he accepts as a kind of "son-in-law". Wei-wei finally decides to keep the baby and asks Wai-tung and Simon to be its fathers. The film ends with Mr. and Mrs. Gao's departure for Taiwan, and the whole family is left in the moment of pain, relief, and ambivalent emotions.

Mr. Gao is introduced as a retired military general to the audience at the beginning of the film through the voice of Mrs. Gao. Later, when he arrives in the apartment, the camera shots show his Chinese calligraphy scrolls, emphasizing his cultural attainments. As both a military general

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with *wu* power and a calligrapher with *wen* virtue, Mr. Gao conforms to the ideal Chinese masculinity. Moreover, the film portrays Mr. Gao as an ageing father full of wisdom, challenging the inverse correlation between masculinity and ageing in Western culture. In Chinese traditions, the old group represent experience, wisdom, order and authority, playing the role of moral governor. "The old is wise" is a deeply rooted idea. In ancient China, the elder people even could be elevated to high ranks, for the stage of old age is regarded as a natural progression towards maturation and wisdom. For example, in Tang dynasty, men in their 80s could be taken as county magistrate, in their 90s as county sima, and 100s as county governor (Xiao 2001, 87). This demonstrates a positive attitude towards ageing and a tradition of respecting the elderly. Therefore, the ageing father is considered as "a veritable hero in his son's eyes, in order that he may command, and maybe worthy to command his admiration and reverence" (Dawson, 154). Fathers in this sense are governors of Confucian moral and social criteria, "ever-watchful and loving guardian, happy in his son's well-doing and grieved, rather wroth, at his misdoings (154). In *The Wedding Banquet*, Mr. Gao is portrayed as such a Confucian father, emphasizing status hierarchy, social propriety and formality in the father-son relationship. He delivers a speech for the significance of the union at the wedding.

> *(00:51:56)*
> **Mr. Gao**: Wai-tung, Wei-wei, you two grew up differently. But fate unites the two of you here so far from home. It's something you should treasure. If differences arise… opinions… habits… you must work to resolve them. Always be thoughtful of (sic) each other. That's the key to a successful marriage.

Although this speech comes across as an inappropriate platitude in its comic context of the sham marriage between Wei-wei and Wai-tung, it sounds also like an insightful suggestion for establishing a harmonious and mutually beneficial partnership. Actually Mr. Gao follows his own words to "treasure" the family and be "thoughtful" of all the family members. Although no one tells him about Wai-tung's homosexuality,

he "hears, understands and learns" and finally accepts Simon as another son: "Wai-tung is my son, and you are my son also". Shortly before his departure, the father, a typical Chinese male who makes little physical contact, holds Simon's hand tightly to bid farewell and thanks him, acknowledging him as a member of the Gao family. It demonstrates that the Confucian fatherhood does not mean a lack of love and intimacy, or psychological distance. The articulation of the soft and sentimental emotions of the old father cannot always be confined by the 'strict father' persona. Mr. Gao is portrayed far from a strict and stern father in the film. He hugs Wai-tung to express his parental love, recalling his memory when the son was a kid. He washes the dishes, an activity he regards as 'feminine' to show his comradeship with Simon: "Simon cooked, I'll wash". He leaves Wai-tung and Wei-wei a free choice whether to have the baby, though he expects a child to continue the family lineage. Lee's portrayal of Mr. Gao challenges certain stereotypes of the Chinese father with a stubborn adherence to outworn rules and ideas, indicating Lee's nostalgia for traditional Chinese fatherhood with aspect of wisdom, benevolence and love.

Moreover, Mr. Gao's masculinity is further constructed in the Confucian fatherhood in tackling conflicts between Wai-tung's homosexuality and the filial obligations, maintaining a harmony in family relations. In Confucianism, the discontinuing of a family name due to the lack of an heir is considered as the biggest offense against the ideal of filial piety, which is the most important determinant in defining manhood[5]. Fathers and sons are both governed by filial piety and "failure to do so would render himself an unfilial son in the eyes of his ancestor" (Ho 2013, 228). Wai-tung's homosexuality is the obstacle to fulfilling the filial obligations to both himself and his father Mr. Gao by discontinuing the familial lineage. The film centers around the issue of homosexuality, focusing on how Mr. Gao's fatherhood is maintained in the father-son conflict.

5 According to Bret Hinsch, the elevation of filial piety to a preeminent masculine ideal marks a radical distinction between manhood in China and the west (2013:7).

Firstly, the harmonious bonds are cemented by mutual secrets kept between Mr. Gao and Wai-tung. Wai-tung keeps his secret of homosexuality to maintain Mr. Gao's authoritative power and knowledge. When Wai-tung is challenged by Simon for his obedience to his parents, "look at yourself – your parents send you a form in the mail and you practically pee in your pants. You know, you are an adult – as a matter of fact, you're practically middle-aged." Wai-tung responds: "you're right, it's kind of stupid, all these likes, but I'm used to it". Simon cannot understand Wai-tung's lack of autonomy as a middle-aged man. In many cultures, particularly in the Western culture, manhood originally means departure from boyhood to adulthood, the need for asserting independence from the parents. A true man is mature, not only physically and financially, but also emotionally and in relationships. Nevertheless, a Chinese man always remains a child in relation to his parents. In contrast to asserting individual independence aggressively, he proves his maturity by suppressing his own desire for demonstrating a manly strength of will (Hinsch 2013, 8). Therefore, Wai-tung's obedience to his father not only indicates his maturity and manliness in self-restraint and filial piety, but it significantly demonstrates his great respect towards his father Mr. Gao.

Secondly, Mr. Gao does not exert authoritative demands on Wai-tung, but rather makes the mother Mrs. Gao the translator, and thus avoids the direct conflict between them. The film literally begins with the mother's voice on tape translating and speaking for the father, giving voice to his wish that Wai-tung would marry and procreate. Even when they arrive in the United States, the mother continues to act as the bearer of Chinese customs, while the father remains mostly silent. When Mrs. Gao is finally forced to recognize Wai-tung's homosexuality, she insists that Mr. Gao should not be told. "It would kill him", she says, sobbing quietly. It is true that his father has had a series of strokes, but her concern for his health masks the systemic role of secrecy as a bond in a patriarchal structure of authority. For the father to know things that are inconvenient or inappropriate casts doubt on his disciplinary parental role and threatens his authority. The greater his power is, the greater the prohibition on any challenge to it. Therefore, the mother becomes the bearer of guilt and a secret that, on the one hand, has made

her role more significant; yet on the other hand, her agency and identity are completely disintegrated by the overwhelming importance of the connection between father and son (Dariotis and Fung 1997, 203).

But as it turns out, Mr. Gao has found out the "secret" his wife and son have tried to keep from him. Just before the Gaos depart, he gives Simon a birthday present, an envelope full of money, and reveals that he speaks English and has been aware of his son's homosexual relationship for a long time.

(01:35:45)
Mr. Gao: "Happy birthday, Simon."
Simon: "Mr. Gao? You speak English?"
Mr.Gao: "Please. Happy birthday."
Simon: "My birthday. Even I forgot. Then you know, you've known…"
Mr. Gao: "I watch, I hear, I learn. Wei-tong is my son. So you're my son, also."
Simon: "Why, you…thank you."
Mr. Gao: "Thank you."
Simon: "When Wei-tong…"
Mr. Gao: "No. Not Wei-tong, not Mother, not Wei-wei shall know. Our secret."
Simon: "Why?"
Mr. Gao: "For the family."
"If I didn't let them lie, I'd never have gotten my grandchild" (in Chinese).
Simon: "I don't understand."
Mr. Gao: "I don't understand."

Mr. Gao here reveals (though not to Simon) that the cunning is necessary to ensure a familial continuity. In concealing his knowledge, Mr. Gao successfully maintains his authority as a proper father and surmounts the 'obstacle' of Wai-tung's homosexuality. Most significantly, as Fran Martin states, his (Mr. Gao's) power increases through the surprising but welcome revelation that such an initially distant "traditional, familial" and "Chinese" authority in fact contains within it what is effectively a familiar, liberal 'tolerance' of homosexuality (2003, 159). Consequently,

Mr. Gao's epistemological privilege over his son not only reconsolidates his authority, but also constructs a plausible image of reconciliation and harmony between father and son.

Thirdly, Lee's emotional portrayal of the ageing father further stimulates sympathy and concern from the son to maintain Mr. Gao's fatherhood. The beginning of the film reveals the poor physical health of the father through Mrs. Gao, rendering his long expectation for a grandchild understandable. Later, the father is found in a death-like doze in the room. The camera shows the father dozing on the sofa, using a high angle shot from the perspective of Wai-tung, who stands in front in low angle shots, visually foregrounding the contrast between the vulnerable father and the powerful son. Suspecting that he may be dead, Wai-tung comes close and bends down to check his breath. The camera takes a close-up of the father's withered face and then moves to the son, demonstrating Wai-tung's dilemma between his filial obligations to his ageing father and his individual freedom. The father turns to be rather weak each time when the father-son relation is on the edge. Finally, it is also due to the physical weakness of the father (he has a stoke) that Wai-tung agrees to keep the secret from him, thus avoiding to explicitly challenge the father's authoritative position.

In conclusion, Lee's sensitive portrayal of the father-son relationship exhibits a complicated picture of Mr. Gao as a paragon of Confucian fatherhood. Lee exposes the father's oppression of the son's male subjectivity, but meanwhile advocates Chinese tradition in the reconciliation of the father and the son. Despite of displaying an ageing and physically deteriorating father image, Lee underlines the father's wisdom in solving family conflicts, evoking understanding, awe and respect towards Mr. Gao. In this way, Lee also reflects on the positive cultural heritage in reconsidering the inverse correlations between ageing and masculinities.

4. Chef Chu in *Eat Drink Man Woman*: The caring and sexual father

Different from *Pushing Hands* and *The Wedding Banquet*, which focus on the father-son relationship, *Eat Drink Man Woman* tells the story of the father Chef Chu (Sihung Lung) and his three daughters: Jia-zhen (Kuei-Mei Yang), Jia-qian (Chien-lien Wu) and Jia-ning (Yu-wen Wang). Chef Chu is a retired master of Chinese cuisine in Taiwan. His wife has died many years ago and he has raised the daughters alone. Chef Chu regularly makes a sumptuous dinner for the big family get-together on Sunday evening, but the family table always becomes a battlefield for generational conflicts with an ending on bad terms. As his friend Chef Wen (Shui Wang) passes away, the youngest daughter Jia-ning and the eldest daughter Jia-zhen also move out of the house respectively, leaving Chef Chu alone. He decides to sell the house and start a new life with Jin-rong (Sylvia Chang) and her daughter Shan-shan. When he declares the love relationship at the dinner table, the whole family is shocked. All his daughters disagree to such a marriage between their ageing father and a young woman. In the end, the daughters accept the father's marriage with Jin-rong, with whom Chef Chu is expecting another child. The film ends with the second daughter Jia-qian's cooking for the reunion with the ageing father in the old house.

Lee's portrayal of Chef Chu demonstrates a refiguring of masculine identity in which age, values of care and emotional connections are intertwined. It focuses on the ageing father's experience of tenderness and complicated emotions, rather than simply portraying his sexuality in mechanical, phallocentric and ageist ways. The film opens with Chef Chu's marvelous culinary arts, exhibiting a domestic masculinity. The camera casts many close-ups of Chef Chu's cooking details, intercutting these with the daughters' reluctance in going back home, establishing him as the dominant family head. Although the three daughters are tired of the Sunday supper ritual, they dare not disobey their father. In the dinner scenes, the camera keeps casting characters in separate shots, indicating the alienation of them. The film depicts six dinner scenes, and the first four center on the daughters' escape from the

family dominated by the father. In the first scene, the second daughter Jia-qian declares that she intends to invest in real estates and will move out. Her decision is a big blow for Chef Chu. Beautiful, independent and successful, Jia-qian works as an executive in an international corporation. Her resemblance with her mother indicates Chef Chu has preference toward her. At the dinner table, Jia-qian is critical of the taste of the soup, only to be impatiently interrupted and stopped by Chef Chu, asserting his unchallenged authority. When Jia-qian questions whether it is because of Chef Chu's deteriorating taste buds, he angrily disputes: "my taste buds are extremely good." Then the camera casts Chef Chu's receiving of the call from the restaurant, where he takes an authoritative position and can solve any unexpected problems in the kitchen. But it soon becomes clear that Chef Chu has lost his taste sensibility, relying on his friend Chef Wen for cooking. In the following dinner scenes, the obedient youngest daughter Jia-ning unexpectedly tells the family that she is pregnant. The eldest daughter Jia-zhen cannot wait for the end of the dinner to introduce her boyfriend. The camera casts long and distant shots of Chef Chu standing in front of the house, looking at the daughters' leaving, indicating his no longer being the family head.

Chef Chu's taste sensibility is a metaphor for his masculinity. As the daughters are leaving home respectively, Chef Chu is losing his sense of taste. When his friend Chef Wen passes away, he asks Jia-qian to change his tea to water, acknowledging that he cannot taste the difference. It indicates that Chef Chu has lost his masculine identity based upon domination. However, at the end of the film, when Chef Chu starts a new life with Jin-rong and reconciles with his daughters, he regains his taste sensibility. It can be interpreted as a recasting of caring masculinity.

The concept of caring masculinities has been put forward by K. Elliott in 2015. She proposes that "caring masculinities are masculine identities that reject domination and its associated traits, and embrace values of care such as positive emotion, interdependence, and relationality" (1). Elliot points out that the concept is not "a homogenizing character description of the 'new man'", but rather intends to "open up debate and discussion around the concept of care in men's lives" (2). Elliot identifies two main characteristics as the core of caring masculinities. The first

is the rejection of domination. Because domination leads to inequality in a relationship, caring masculinities argue for an absence of domination in traditional masculinities to embrace gender equality. The second characteristic is recasting traditional masculine norms into affective, relational, interdependent and care-oriented qualities. For example, "respect" is not "fear" of the patriarch's authority but is coupled with "love". "Responsibility" can mean looking after a young life rather than being a breadwinner. Caring masculinities can therefore enrich men's lives emotionally, psychologically, and physically. In a word, caring masculinities can be recognized as "positive, enriching masculine identities", yielding new meanings for men (Elliot 2015, 15).

Chef Chu's masculinity is firstly reconstructed through his giving-up of domination in the father-daughter relations. After the death of his wife, Chef Chu takes the responsibility of bringing up the daughters. His caring work has left sweet memories for the daughters. Jiaqian has ever emotionally recalled her childhood with Chef Chu. However, as the daughters grow up and become independent, Chef Chu's caring work without boundaries seems to be oppressive, resulting in the daughters' rebellion and their escape from home. Chef Chu's later retreat from the daughters' lives not only brings a thawing in the father-daughter relationship but also recasts him from a dominant father to caring one. Hooks argues that "[r]ather than assuming males are born with the will to aggress, the culture would assume that males are born with the inherent will to connect" (2004, 117). Hooks' ideal of a connected, peaceful culture suggests that masculine identities do not have to include the practice of domination. With an absence of domination, Chef Chu further develops a caring masculinity in relation to his "new" daughter Shan-shan. Shan-shan is the daughter of Jin-rong, who later marries Chef Chu. Divorced and busy with her work, Jin-rong has no more time to take good care of Shan-shan. Chef Chu is much concerned with the little girl in kindergarten, preparing lunch boxes for her every day. Shan-shan exhibits her lunch boxes with great pride in front of all her classmates, which renders Chef Chu a "celebrity" in class. According to Niall Hanlon, "[c]aring was believed to offer common rewards, including feeling loved and respected for doing it, experiencing emotional intimacy

and feelings of self-esteem, respect, and competence" (2012,137). In taking care of Shanshan, Chef Chu excludes domination, embraces the affective and emotional qualities of care and regains his self-esteem as a caring father.

Moreover, Ang Lee portrays a late love relationship between Jin-rong and Chef Chu, exploring the personal desires and sexuality of the ageing father. Chef Chu remains single half of his life in order to bring up his daughters and thinks little of himself. It is not until the end of the film that Lee declares that it is time for fathers to think what is best for himself. The film demonstrates the ageing father's loneliness and sexuality many times. After Chef Chu has solved the problem in the kitchen, the camera casts an emotional conversation between him and his old friend Chef Wen.

> *(0:23:01)*
> **Chef Chu**: I cannot cook any more. The tongue is getting worse. It depends on your face every time while I am cooking now.
> **Chef Wen**: No, it is all right. It's all about the chef who feels good. Cooking does not depend on your tongue. You are like a deaf man in a foreign country, Beethoven. The so-called good music is not in the ear, the good taste is not in your mouth. As for good women, I don't know where I can get.
> **Chef Chu**: You are drunk again.
> (They put arms on each other's shoulder, walking out of the kitchen)
> **Chef Chu**: Food and sex are what men and women desire. It is hard not to think about it. But I've been busy all my life only for it? It is annoying to think of it. Good taste (of food and sex), who has tasted it?

Such a conversation demonstrates the two ageing men's loneliness and desires. Chef Wen is the only one who understands and comforts Chef Chu. It is after Chef Wen's death that he determines to start a new life, pursuing the "good taste" of life. The camera casts several shots of his jogging in the park, figuring out healthy recipes, emphasizing his reconstruction of masculinity. When Jia-qian worries about her father's physical condition when seeing him in the hospital, Chef Chu is busy doing a

pre-marriage checkup. At the end of the film, the camera casts shots of Chef Chu's intimacy with pregnant Jin-rong. He regains his taste sensibility and reconciles with the daughter Jia-qian in the old house for the last dinner. Such an ending indicates Lee's support and encouragement for Chef Chu's pursuit of his personal life, demonstrating Lee's care and concern for the ageing fathers in his "Father Trilogy".

In summary, Lee's portrayal of Chef Chu reconsiders the ageing father's experience in family responsibility and individual pursuits, recasting him from a dominating father to a caring one. Chef Chu's emotional vulnerability and his individual pursuits of sexuality for a new life in his old age demonstrate that more concerns should be advocated to the ageing men and their masculinities should not be overlooked or confined to certain gender norms.

5. Conclusion

This study has concentrated on the Chinese American filmmaker Ang Lee's "Father Trilogy" in order to analyse the ageing father image. These three films were directed in the early 1990s, in which China has transformed socially, culturally and economically, facing the ambiguities of entering the global arena. Lee's "Father Trilogy" illustrates some complex and profound changes in this period. Lee's representation of the ageing fathers concerns the conflicting encounter between China and the global world, questioning Western gender norms as universal, and reflecting Chinese cultural heritage in defining masculinities. However, Lee has never advocated a simplistic and essentialist fashioning of Chinese tradition. He instead explores a complex, profound and diversified transformation in masculinities through the ageing father images. For example, Mr. Chu's final withdrawal to Chinatown is not a sheer restoration of the Chinese *wen-wu* masculine ideal but also an adaption of his masculine identity. Lee's affirmation of the Confucian fatherhood in Mr. Gao is not a simplistic flaunt of the Confucian tradition but rather demonstrates a rethinking of the positive values of Confucianism in solving crisis and maintaining harmony for a family. Chef Chu's recasting of the

caring masculinity demonstrate the practice of establishing new masculinities devoid of domination.

In this sense, Lee's depiction of the father images demonstrates the interactions between Chinese and Western cultures, pre-modern and contemporary world. In such a communicative arena, Lee advocates a flexible understanding of masculinities, which is more practice-based rather than an essentialist notion of certain cultures. In this sense, Lee's "Father Trilogy" portrays not just the variety but also the ambiguities that define men's gendered experiences of ageing.

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Acknowledgements

This paper is supported by "the Fundamental Research Funds for the Central Universities", Zhongnan University of Economics and Law (103–31512210316, YB202138).