

Constructing Soft Masculinity: The Practices of Urban Young Men in Mediating the “Little Fresh Meat” Image in China

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Abstract:

This study examines how urban young men construct their soft masculinity through the circulation and popularization of the "Little Fresh Meat" image in the Chinese media. In recent years, the "Little Fresh Meat" archetype, represented by young male celebrities with effeminate appearances, formed a distinct aesthetic—and has gained significant popularity among the younger generation. This phenomenon has set an example of soft masculinity for Chinese men. Through interviews with 20 young urban men in Chengdu, China, who adopt the "Little Fresh Meat" identity, this study explores how urban men construct and practice soft masculinity through their interactions with the circulating soft masculinity image in the media. This study found that urban men borrow the qualities of "Little Fresh Meat" in the media to shape their ideal masculinity. However, conflicting messages in the media make the 'ideal' model for masculinity ambiguous. This study highlights the fluidity and complexity of gender practices among a younger generation of Chinese urban men.