

## Performing Masculinity and the Self: Love, Body, and Privacy in Hu Shih

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### Abstract

Hu Shih is at once the quintessential public man and private person in modern China. Not only was he under constant public gaze for being the nation's most influential intellectual leader during the first half of the twentieth century, but he was also a most prolific producer of autobiographical records that he selected for publication, circulated among close friends, and duplicated for safekeeping in multiple locations. At the same time, he was a private person who vigilantly guarded the innermost secrets of his private life. The voluminous diaries, memoirs, and correspondence he assembled and preserved were a testimony to a lifelong effort on his part to set the parameters for how his private life was to be constructed and how it was to be gazed, interpreted, and appreciated. It is as though he had inscribed his own life to provide a bare bone master narrative for biographers of him, thereby purging from the source anything that was not already scripted by him, and to foreclose unwanted prying — voyeuristic and otherwise — into his private life.

Inspired by Judith Butler's notion of performativity and drawing on the insights from the auto/biographical studies, this paper situates Hu Shih in the discursive processes through which emerged his notions of the self, body, and gender as well as his handling of privacy and love. It argues that the dichotomy between the public and private in Hu Shih was socially shaped and historically conditioned, and was

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therefore contingent upon each other and provisional in nature. It follows that his sense of privacy, together with his decisions on disclosure and concealment, was constituted within the discursive matrix in China of the time that was less than inhibitive to certain exhibitionist displays of the self. Finally, where Hu Shih was reticent or where he suppressed outright — with regard to his marriage and love affairs— he has been thwarted by the recent proliferation of memoir literature on him and, particularly, the newly opened correspondence between Edith Williams and him. Not only do these new sources shed new light on his conduct in marriage and love, but they also bring into sharp relief his flirtation with disclosure and concealment about his love secrets.

